CHAPTER 2

MASS COMMUNICATION EFFECTS

How Society and Media Interact

During 2017, attention to the issue of sexual harassment and abuse, both sensational and serious, became the major cultural story for our media. As Secret 3 points out, the stories moved this issue from the margins of society to the center. While there are many points on the timeline we could highlight as the start of the media's focus on sexual harassment and abuse, there is no doubt that it exploded when multitudes of women started coming forward and telling their stories of mistreatment at the hands of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.

On October 8, 2017, following the news that he had paid financial settlements to eight women to drop their claims, The Weinstein Company fired Weinstein from the movie production company he helped found. And while this may have been the point where most people started paying attention to the story, it certainly was not the beginning. According to the *New York Times*, the accusations and rumors about Weinstein dated back for three decades. It was not as though these stories weren't known about by reporters; they simply weren't reported.[1]

In November 2017, the *New York Times* started keeping track of the number of men who have been fired or forced to resign over accusations of sexual misconduct since Weinstein was fired.[2] As of February 8, 2018, the *Times* count had reached seventy-one. The paper also had a second list of twenty-eight men who had faced charges of sexual misconduct but who had only been suspended or received similar lesser punishment. The list was a who's who of the powerful behind and in front of the scenes in the entertainment business, industry, and politics. Among them were former *Today Show* host Matt Lauer and CBS CEO Les Moonves.[3,4]

So, this leaves us with a question:

Why, after years of neglect, did the press, in all its varied forms, suddenly start paying attention to these accusations and the women making them?

While the story of women being sexually harassed and abused by powerful men had been slowly breaking further into the media for several years, the real explosion came when actress Ashley Judd went public with her story from two decades earlier.

Judd told the *New York Times* in early October 2017 that she went to what she thought was a breakfast meeting at a hotel. She was instead sent up to Weinstein's room where

he greeted her wearing a bathrobe and suggested either he give her a massage or she "watch him shower."[5]

It is at this point that we see the basic elements of the narrative coming through. Judd had to figure out how to get out of the room without alienating one of the most powerful producers in Hollywood.

The *Times* goes on to report that Weinstein reached "at least eight settlements with women," paying them to drop their claims and keep their silence. When all of these stories started surfacing, Weinstein said in a statement to the *Times*,

> I appreciate the way I've behaved with colleagues in the past has caused a lot of pain, and I sincerely apologize for it. Though I'm trying to do better, I know I have a long way to go.[6]

Judd had previously talked about what had happened with Weinstein back in 2015 with *Variety* magazine, but she didn't name him.

Judd told *Variety* she felt bad because she didn't do anything about it at the time:

> I beat myself up for a while. This is another part of the process. We internalize the shame. It really belongs to the person who is the aggressor. And so later, when I was able to see what happened, I thought: Oh god, that's wrong. That's sexual harassment. That's illegal. I was really hard on myself because I didn't get out of it by saying, "OK motherf—er, I'm calling the police."[7]

The common theme between Judd and the other women who say Weinstein abused or harassed them was that women did not speak out because they didn't know each other; they didn't live in the same cities. But while they did not talk about it publicly, they did talk about it among themselves.

So, what kept these women's stories from getting published?

Many of the women were embarrassed that this had happened to them and sometimes wondered whether they were responsible for it.

They still wanted to work where they worked. They wanted the access the abuser gave them.

They were afraid they would get blacklisted in some form if they spoke out (something that happened with several of Weinstein's victims).

They were afraid they would not be believed.

As of this writing, Harvey Weinstein has been found guilty in New York City of two felony sex crimes but acquitted of charges that he is a sexual predator.[8] He is also facing charges in Los Angeles for rape and assault.[9]

In this chapter, we will look at various explanations of how the mass media interact with and affect audience members. We will return to the story of Harvey Weinstein and the explosion of stories about abuse by powerful men to look for explanations. It will not so much be a question of which of these explanations is correct as it will be one of what kind of understanding the theories give us. In this chapter, we look at how our understanding of media and their effects has evolved over the past century and consider several approaches to studying these effects.

The Evolution of Media Effects Research

As we discussed in Chapter 1 in the section on media literacy, media consumers often assume that the media have large, obvious, and generally negative effects on people, and they look to blame the media for complex social problems.[10] In this section, we look at media effects research and how this research has evolved over the past two hundred years.

Prior to the 1800s, most people in Europe and North America lived in rural communities where their neighbors were likely to be similar in ethnic, racial, and religious background. People knew their neighbors, and their neighbors knew them. There were only limited opportunities for people to change their station in life or to learn much about the outside world. But with the rise of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, we started to see massive migration from the rural areas into the cities and from various countries to the United States. As people moved into the cities, they started working for wages in factories with people who were quite different from them. With industrialization, people went from small, close-knit communities where they knew everyone to a mass society where they learned about the world from mass media sources, such as the new inexpensive newspapers, magazines, and paperback novels.[11]

At the end of the nineteenth century, people came to believe that the traditional ties of church, community, and family were breaking down and losing their power to influence people. The comfortable local community was being replaced by something impersonal, complex, and removed from the traditions that had previously held people together; people felt that their community was being replaced by a mysterious "they" or "them." Concerned observers noted that people seemed to be alienated, isolated, and interchangeable members of a faceless mass audience, separated by the decline of the family and the growth of technology. So, what held this new mass society together?[12] The increasingly frequent answer was that the mass media were replacing the church, family, and community in shaping public opinion.[13] This is an example of Secret 7—There is no "they." (For additional discussion of the growth of the mass media from its origins in the 1400s to the present day, see Chapter 1.)

Fears that media messages would have strong, direct effects on audience members grew out of propaganda efforts by all combatants during World War I and by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in

the 1930s. Critics worried that mass media messages would overwhelm people in the absence of the influences of family and community. With traditional social forces in decline, it was inevitable, critics feared, that the media would become the most powerful force within society.

This argument viewed audience members as passive targets who would be hit or injected with the message, which, like a vaccine, would affect most people in similar ways. But research looking for powerful, direct effects leading to opinion and behavioral changes generally came up short. In fact, in the 1940s and 1950s, researchers sometimes doubted whether media messages had any effect on individuals at all.[14] Although most scholars now focus on the media's indirect effects on society rather than their direct effects on individuals, they remain concerned about how the media influence individuals.
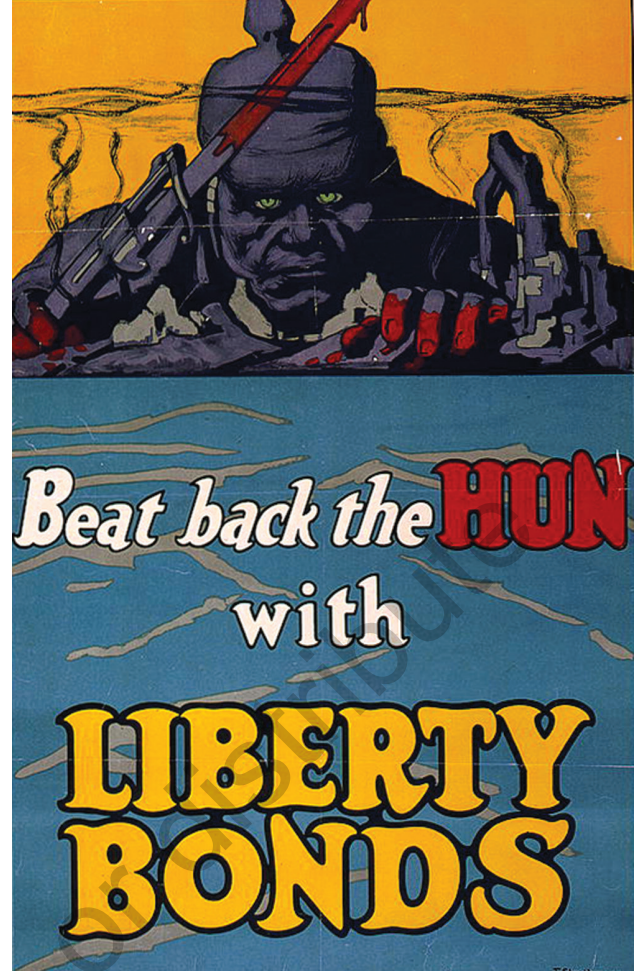
The big problem is that the direct effects approach viewed media messages as a stimulus that would lead to a predictable attitudinal or behavioral response with nothing intervening between sender and audience. But although people have a shared biological heritage, they have different backgrounds, needs, attitudes, and values. In short, everyone has been socialized differently.

Library of Congress

▲ Allied propaganda posters designed to build support for World War I weren't afraid to make use of strong negative stereotypes of the Germans.

The Limited Effects Model

The research conducted on the effects of media, up to and during World War II, showed that there were not dramatic, predictable, or consistent effects of media messages on the public, and research began to focus on more limited and indirect effects of these messages. The indirect effects approach reviews the effects that messages have on individuals, but it accounts for how audience members perceive and interpret these messages selectively according to personal differences. Because people's perceptions are selective, their responses to the messages vary as well. For example, a person who is preparing to buy a car, a person who just bought a car, and a person who does not drive will each react differently to an automobile commercial.

The Payne Fund Studies. Researchers soon found an excellent source for studying the effects of media on the population in the form of a major new cultural institution—the movies. As movies grew in popularity in the 1920s, people became concerned about their effects on viewers, especially young people. The film industry claimed that movies do not shape society; they just reflect it. But that argument ignored the fact that movies were a central part of society; even mirrors have effects. Movie historian Gerald Mast notes that "movies have . . . been an immensely powerful social and cultural force. . . . They have produced social changes—in ways of dress, patterns of speech, methods of courting. And they have mirrored social changes—in fashion, sexual mores, political principles."[15]
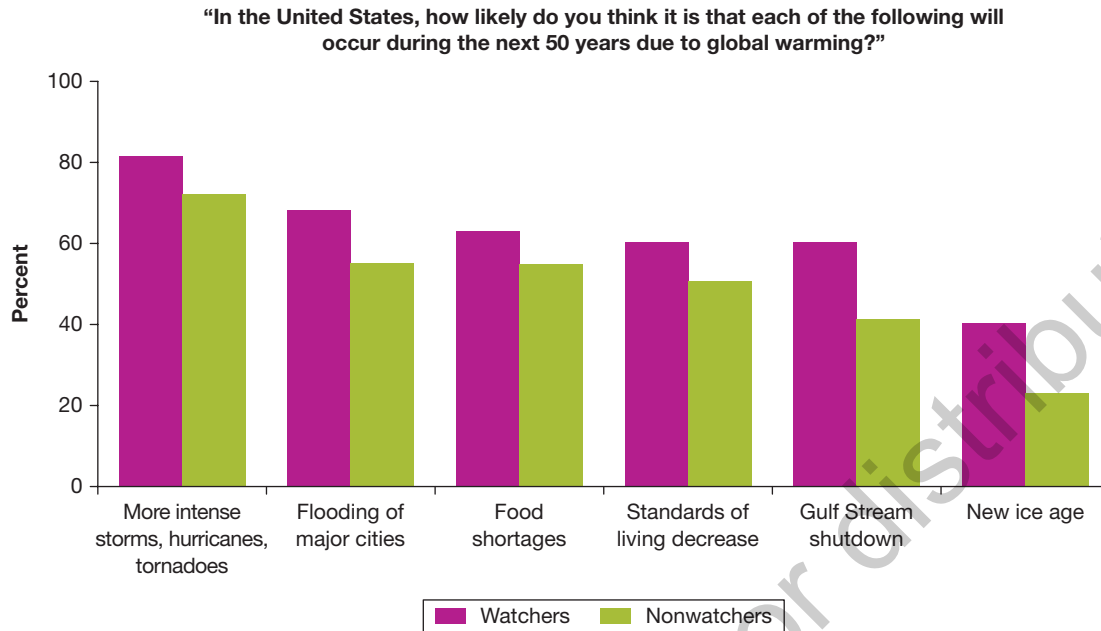
Researchers often use examples from the movies to demonstrate the purported effects that movies have on society. An example of how a movie can have a significant effect on society is the 2004 science fiction disaster feature *The Day After Tomorrow*. The movie's plot centers around two climate scientists who discover that earth is experiencing accelerating climate change and are trying to warn the public about the potential devastating effects of global warming. As the movie progresses, several (scientifically implausible) storms arise around the globe causing catastrophic floods, hail, and snowstorms proving the scientists' warnings. After several adventure and disaster sequences, the movie ends with a view from space showing the earth covered in icecaps.

Percent of watchers and nonwatchers who found each item *somewhat* or *very likely*.

"In the United States, how likely do you think it is that each of the following will occur during the next 50 years due to global warming?"

Note: Nonwatchers weighted (*n* = 390), watchers weighted (*n* = 139).

Even though the movie exaggerates the size of the storms and their devastation, the message it portrays is familiar to many of us; that increased awareness of climate change is essential to saving the planet. And those who watched it were apparently moved to act on that message. For example, researchers at Yale showed that after participants saw the movie, they appeared to be more thoughtful about the environment and began to consider how their own actions could help prevent a catastrophe, such as the one depicted. The researchers consistently found that the movie had a strong influence on all the participants they studied, and that after watching the movie, these participants better understood the risks of global warming.[16]

The Payne Fund, a private foundation studying the effects of media on the public, sponsored a series of thirteen studies, several of which analyzed the content of movies, who was going to the movies, and what, if any, effects the movies were having on the audiences. The researchers found that a small number of basic themes continuously appeared in movies: crime, sex, love, mystery, war, children, history, travel, comedy, and social propaganda. Of these themes, more than three-fourths of all movies dealt with crime, sex, or love.

A second major finding by the Payne Fund was that people could remember a surprising amount of what they had seen in movies, even six months after seeing them. Why such a high level of recall? Perhaps it was because movies were novel at the time, but another explanation was that movies gave people something to talk about, thus stimulating recall.

Some critics had suggested that movies might be responsible for moral decay, and one of the studies looked at whether the morals portrayed in movies were at odds with those of the viewing public. Not surprisingly, the moral standards of characters in movies tended to be lower than those of viewers. After all, people who behave differently from us are the most interesting to watch.

Herbert Blumer, a noted social psychologist, conducted a major study that examined the diaries of young people who recorded how they thought they had been influenced by movies. He found that participants reported imitating the behaviors they saw in movies and copying the

actions of their favorite stars in their games and play. Young people reported that they saw movies as a source of ideas about action, romance, and standards of beauty. They were using the movies to learn how to behave as an adult.[17] In short, Blumer was looking at how social interaction shaped young people's reaction to the movies, thus demonstrating Secret 5—All media are social.

The People's Choice. In addition to worrying about how movies were affecting young people, critics also feared that political media campaigns would "inject" people with ideas that would lead to the message creator's desired actions, such as supporting a particular candidate, ideology, or point of view. This model of powerful direct campaign effects was largely discredited by voter studies in the 1940s and 1950s, but it remains important because many people still believe that it is accurate.[18]

One of the first large-scale social-scientific studies of campaign influences was *The People's Choice*, a study of the 1940 U.S. presidential election contest between Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt and Republican Wendell Willkie. A team of researchers led by Paul Lazarsfeld looked at how voters in Erie County, Ohio, decided which candidate to vote for. Lazarsfeld's team found that people who were highly interested in the campaign and paid the most attention to media coverage of it were the least likely to be influenced by the campaign. Why? Because they had decided whom they supported before the campaign had even begun.[19]

In contrast, voters who decided at the last minute usually turned to friends or neighbors, rather than the media, for information about the campaign. In general, they turned to people who followed the campaign closely, the ones whom Lazarsfeld called opinion leaders. **Opinion leaders** are influential community members—friends, family members, and coworkers—who spend significant time with the media. Lazarsfeld suggested that information flows from the media to opinion leaders, and then from opinion leaders to the rest of the public. Keep in mind that the opinion leaders are ordinary people who are simply interested and involved in a topic. Although this finding was not expected, it should not be surprising that interpersonal influence is more important than the media. The idea here is simple: People in groups tend to share opinions with one another, and when they want reliable information, they go to the people they know. This serves to illustrate Secret 5—All media are social. Even decades before so-called social media (like Facebook and Twitter) existed, people were still drawn to talk about the news at length.

With the lengthy campaigns today, people find it easier to turn to interpersonal sources than the wealth of media information. Yet this trend is nothing new. Although many people believe that our election campaigns are starting earlier and earlier every election cycle, presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan started his campaign for the 1900 election one month after the election of 1896![20] Even as early as the 1830s, when the penny press was just getting started, presidential campaigns could run as long as two years.

The People's Choice, as well as other early voter studies, found that campaigns typically reinforced existing political predispositions and that few people changed their minds about whom they were going to support. There are several reasons for this:

- The voters who start off with strong opinions are unlikely to change them.

- The voters who pay the most attention to a campaign are those with the strongest political views; thus, they are the least likely to change their opinions.

- The most persuadable voters (those who are least informed) are not likely to pay attention to political communication and therefore are not strongly influenced by media coverage of the campaign.[21]

The Two-Step Flow Today. The two-step flow of information process described by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues back in the 1940s continues to be relevant in the age of twenty-first century social media influencers. A study of opinion leaders on the Chinese microblogging site Weibo

(essentially an equivalent of Twitter) found no evidence of massive persuasive effects of the messages from opinion leaders, but that these messages did reinforce people's subjective attitudes and opinions.[22] A study out of South Korea found that messages from opinion leaders were more likely to get shared than those of non-opinion leaders.[23]

The Importance of Meaning. The approaches to studying mass communication that we have looked at fall under the transmission model discussed back in Chapter 1. As media scholar James Carey wrote, the transmission model "is defined by terms such as 'imparting,' 'sending,' 'transmitting,' or 'giving information to others.'"[24] These explanations view mass communication as an extension of transportation; and indeed, before electronic media, the fastest form of transportation was also the fastest form of communication.

The transmission model focuses on the sending of messages with fixed meanings rather than on how we interact with them. Explanations that focus on the importance of meaning, on the other hand, look at who gets to decide what the messages will be, how we interact with these messages, and how we negotiate meanings for these messages. When we look at the ritual model of communication (again, looking back to Chapter 1) we think about how we use messages to interact with those around us, where the interaction is the key concept rather than the message itself.

The reception model, for example, looks at how meaning is derived and created from the message rather than treating the message within a fixed content that everyone accepts as being correct.[25]

Effects of Media in Our Lives

Media scholars throughout the twentieth century who studied the effects of the mass media on individuals and society questioned several aspects of the media, including the messages being sent, the media sending them, the owners of the media, and the audience members themselves.[26] Some of the major effects studied were as follows:

- Message Effects—How media messages might change behaviors, attitudes, or beliefs

- Attitudinal Effects—Changes in feelings about a product, an individual, or an idea based on media content

- Behavioral Effects—Media content can influence buying a product, making a phone call, and voting for a candidate

- Psychological Effects—Media content can inspire fear, joy, revulsion, happiness, or amusement, among other feelings

- Medium Effects—The particular medium being used to transmit messages

- Ownership Effects—The influence of those who own and control the media

- Active Audience Effects—Unique members who respond as individuals, not as undifferentiated members of a mass

Message Effects

Not surprisingly, the earliest concerns about the effects of mass communication focused on how messages might change people's behaviors, attitudes, or beliefs. These message effects can take a variety of forms. The types of these effects have been broken down into categories such as cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral, and psychological.

The most common and observable message effect is on the short-term learning of information. This can be as significant as learning about a new medical treatment or as trivial as remembering the lyrics to a popular song. The amount of learning that takes place from media content depends largely on the motivation level of the person consuming the media.

Political scientist Doris Graber found that people who want to be able to talk intelligently with others about media content (whether it be the news, a sporting event, or an entertainment program) learn much more from the media than people who are simply seeking entertainment. This is one more example of Secret 5—All media are social. Remember, you do not need to be using Facebook or Twitter to make media social. Research also shows that people learn more from people they identify with and pay more attention to political commentators they agree with than ones they dislike.[27] Hence the most popular political radio talk shows, such as those hosted by conservatives Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, argue a single and consistent point of view rather than providing a range of views.[28]

▲ The youth vote's biggest beneficiary has been Bernie Sanders, who won 80 percent of the youth vote in Iowa and Nevada. The candidate was the internet's darling, dominating the competition on Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, and Twitter.

Attitudinal Effects

People can develop attitudinal effects—feelings about a product, an individual, or an idea—based on media content. Viewers might decide that they like a new product, political candidate, or hairstyle because of what they have seen in a television commercial, a news broadcast, or a sitcom. Typically, it is much easier to get people to form new opinions than to get them to change existing ones.[29] For example, political advertising generally tries to change the opinions of uncommitted voters rather than those of voters who already have strong political loyalties. In the 2016 presidential election cycle, the Bernie Sanders campaign found substantial success by targeting young, uncommitted voters who value being asked directly for their support.[30]

Behavioral Effects

Behavioral effects include actions such as clipping a coupon from a newspaper, buying a product, making a phone call, and voting for a candidate. They might also include imitating attractive behaviors (for example, dressing a certain way). Behavioral effects are in many ways the most difficult to achieve because people are reluctant to change their behavior. Sometimes, however, people go to the media deliberately looking for behavior to copy, as when a child watches an episode of *Batman* and then imitates it in play, or when a teenager watches a movie to learn how to behave on a date.[31]

Psychological Effects

Media content can inspire fear, joy, revulsion, happiness, or amusement, among other feelings.[32] A major psychological effect of media content, especially violent or erotic material, is arousal. Symptoms of arousal can include a rise in heart rate, adrenaline levels, or sexual response. Seeking a psychological response is a common reason for spending time with the media, whether the response sought is relaxation, excitement, or emotional release. Arousal can come from content (action, violence, sexuality, loud music or sound) and from style (motion, use of color, the rate and speed at which new images appear). Notice that music videos, which often offer little in terms of learning, provide many of these elements.[33]

▲ Canadian media scholar Marshall McLuhan, right, is best remembered for his statement "The medium is the message." He became such a pop-culture figure in the 1970s that he had a cameo playing himself in the film Annie Hall.

Legendary film composer John Williams is known for his sweeping, emotionally memorable scores for movies like the Indiana Jones series, the Jurassic Park series, and even Kobe Bryant's Academy Award–winning animated short *Dear Basketball*. But he is undoubtedly best known for his scores for the nine core Star Wars films. From the opening fanfare played over the crawling text, to the menacing "The Imperial March (Darth Vader's Theme)," to the love theme for Han Solo and Princess Leia, these melodies are instantly recognized cultural icons. They also are a key part of how the Star Wars movies are capable of so blatantly manipulating our feelings.

Alex Ross, music critic for the *New Yorker*, writes that Williams manipulated the audience in *Episode VII: The Force Awakens* by composing vaguely menacing music for Luke Skywalker to make the audience question whether the Jedi hero has gone over to the dark side. "The new film tells us otherwise," Ross says, "but shadowy chords surround the exiled hero for much of the film, leaving us in suspense as to his intentions."[34]

Medium Effects

As mass media consumption grew in the 1950s, scholars also started paying more attention to the particular medium being used to transmit messages. Until the 1950s, most media effects research focused on the interactions among the sender, the message, and the receiver, ignoring the influence of the medium itself. But the medium used to communicate is crucial. Canadian communication researcher Marshall McLuhan argued that the medium used for transmission can be as important as the message itself, if not more so. McLuhan is best known for his statement "The medium is the message," by which he meant that the method of message transmittal is a central part of the message. For example, television does an excellent job of transmitting emotional messages because it includes both visual (explosions, luxury interiors) and audio (laugh tracks, scary music) cues along with words. And consider technology that enhances the sound of movies: Surround sound systems are designed to create a realistic experience by surrounding viewers with five distinct sound channels, as well as shaking them with a deep bass channel. The goal is not to transmit the message better, but to create a more overwhelming experience. (Think of how the impact of a summer blockbuster film would be diminished if the sound were turned down.) The same is true of large-screen high-definition television sets. Books and newspapers, in contrast, are much better at transmitting complex rational information because these media allow us to review the information and consider its meaning at our own pace.[35] The web excels at providing obscure materials that appeal to a limited, widely dispersed audience, and it makes it easy for receivers to respond to what they've seen or heard. Media scholars now recognize that communication technology is a fundamental element of society and that new technologies can lead to social change.[36] As Secret 1 points out, the media are essential components of our lives.

Media sociologist Joshua Meyrowitz, for example, argues that the existence and development of various media can lead to radical changes in society. He writes that the development of publishing and books in the sixteenth century made it easy for new ideas to spread beyond the person who originated them and that this tended to undermine the control of ideas by both the monarchy and the Roman Catholic Church.[37]

As can be seen by the Edward Snowden story discussed in this chapter's "Media Transformation," the existence of digital documents, encrypted email, and high-capacity thumb drives now allows a small group of technically skilled individuals to spread news and documents around the world, with governments powerless to stop them. Meyrowitz also identifies some social effects of particular media. In *No Sense of Place*, he argues that the major effect of print as a medium is to segregate audiences according to education, age, class, and gender. For example, a teenager needs to be able to read at a certain level to understand the content of a magazine targeted at young women or young men—content that a young child would be unable to comprehend. In contrast, electronic media such as television tend to cross the demographic boundaries. A child too young to read a magazine or book can still understand at least some of the information in a television program targeted at adults.[38] This is why parent groups and childhood educators

push to have early-evening programming on television contain more "family-friendly" programs and why parents seek to restrict certain sites and apps on a child's smartphone or tablet.

Ownership Effects

Instead of looking at the effects of media and their messages, some scholars examine the influence of those who own and control the media.[39] These critical scholars are concerned because owners of media determine which ideas will be produced and distributed by those media.

In the United States, media outlets are mostly owned by a few multinational conglomerates and newly formed media companies, such as Disney, News Corporation/Fox Corporation, WarnerMedia, ViacomCBS, Bertelsmann, Comcast/NBCUniversal, Google, and Apple. Some observers, such as German academic and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, fear that these corporations are becoming a sort of ruling class, controlling which books are published, which programs are aired, which movies are produced, and which news stories are written.[40] As we discuss in Chapters 3 and 11, Disney, News Corporation, Google, and Apple have all had to compromise at times with the Chinese government in order to keep doing business in China. For example, Google had to agree to censor its search results about sensitive topics in China for the company to be allowed to operate there.[41]

Media critic and former newspaper editor Ben Bagdikian suggests that the influence of media owners can be seen in how the news media select stories to be covered. He argues that large media organizations will kill news stories and entertainment programs that don't reflect well on the corporation. The roots of this tendency go back to when captains of industry such as J. P. Morgan and the Rockefellers bought out magazines that criticized them to silence that criticism. What we end up with, Bagdikian says, is not the feared bogeyman of government censorship, but rather "a new Private Ministry of Information and Culture" that gives corporations control over what we will see, hear, or read.[42] Increasingly, however, the new alternative media are providing channels that allow consumers to bypass Big Media controls.[43] (See the section on long-tail media in Chapter 3 for more on how these new channels are enabling anyone who wants to distribute content to do so on a large scale.) Websites such as Brietbart or Daily Kos give voice to issues from a partisan point of view with no controls at all other than those the authors choose to employ. There are also data-driven, online news sources like Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight that have an underlying political point of view but nevertheless are committed to honest reporting backed up by hard, supporting data.

Active Audience Effects

Some of the early fears about the effects of the media on audience members arose from the belief that the audience truly was a faceless, undifferentiated mass—that the characteristics of the audience en masse also applied to the audience's individual members. Early critics viewed modern people as alienated and isolated individuals who, separated by the decline of the family and the growth of a technological society, did not communicate with one another. After World War II, the concept of the mass audience began to change as scholars came to realize that the audience was made up of unique members who responded as individuals, not as undifferentiated members of a mass.[44]

Today, communicators, marketers, and scholars realize that individuals seek and respond to different messages at different times and for different reasons. Therefore, they divide audiences on the basis of **geographics**, or where people live; **demographics**, or their gender, race, ethnic background, income, education, age, educational attainment, and the like; or **psychographics**, a combination of demographics, lifestyle characteristics, and product usage. Hence, a young woman buying a small SUV to take her mountain bike out into the mountains will respond to a very different kind of advertising message than a mother seeking a small SUV so that she can safely drive her child to school during rush hour in the winter.

Audiences can also be classified by the amount of time they spend using media or by the purposes for which they use media. Each segment of the media audience will behave differently.

Take television viewing as an example. Some people tune in daily to watch their favorite soap opera or talk show and will not change the channel for the entire hour. This is known as appointment viewing. Others surf through several channels using the remote control, looking for something that will capture their interest. Still others switch back and forth between two channels.

With regard to television, the concept of a mass audience consuming the same content at the same time existed to some extent from the 1950s to the 1970s when the vast majority of viewers had access to only three broadcast networks, but that concept broke down completely with the advent of cable, satellite, multiple broadcast networks, TiVo, DVDs, and VCRs. This is an example of Secret 7—There is no "they."

In addition to recognizing that different people use the media in different ways, scholars have realized that mass communication messages are generally mediated through other levels of communication. One reason this book discusses intrapersonal, interpersonal, and group communication in addition to mass communication is that these levels all come into play in how mass communication operates. People discuss political news with one another, cheer together for their favorite teams while watching a hockey game on television, and think about how stock market information is going to affect their investment plans. A young man's reaction to a love scene in a movie will differ depending on if he watches it with a group of friends, with his sweetie, or with his parents.[45]

Media and Society

Much like most scientific research, mass communication research depends, in large part, on theory and the questions posed by these theories. It is helpful to understand these theoretical approaches and how the effects of the media are not limited to those on individuals or groups.

Researchers know that some of the media's most significant messages can have an effect on our major social functions. According to media scholar Harold Lasswell, the mass media are simply "an extension of basic functions that society has always needed. Earlier societies had priests, town criers, storytellers, bards who sang ballads, and travelers who brought news from distant lands."[46]

Researchers also know that communication can be functional or dysfunctional but, in either case, it operates within the social system.[47] For example, some people respond inappropriately to the news of approaching danger. Instead of going to the basement during a tornado warning, a functional response, they go outside with their video cameras to get footage of the storm, a dysfunctional response. In both cases, they are responding to the news of the storm.

Lasswell wrote that the media perform three major social functions:

1. Surveillance of the environment, looking for both threats and opportunities

2. Correlation of different elements of society, allowing segments of society to work together

3. Transmission of culture from one generation to the next[48]

Media sociologist Charles Wright adds a fourth—the function of entertainment—to the above list.[49]

Surveillance of the Environment

Much of what we know about the world we learn from the media through the process of **surveillance**. The media show us what is happening not only within our own culture, but in other societies as well. Our only other sources of knowledge about the world are our own direct experiences and the direct experiences that others share with us. For example, people who live in the Middle East learn much of what they know about the outside world through their use of social media and direct messaging software like WhatsApp, which allow them to bypass much of the local censorship that limits legacy media.[50]

The constant flow of information from the media allows us to survey our surroundings. It can give us warnings of approaching danger—everything from changes in the weather to earthquakes to violence in the streets. This flow of information is essential for the everyday operation of society. The stock markets depend on the business news, travelers depend on weather forecasts, and grocery shoppers depend on knowing what is on special this week.

Surveillance can also serve to undermine society. For example, when people in poor nations see media images of what life is like in the United States and other industrialized Western nations, they may become dissatisfied with the conditions of their own lives, and this may lead to social unrest and violence. News about violence may also make people more fearful for their own safety.

Surveillance is not just for the masses. Government and industry leaders worldwide watch CNN or C-SPAN or read the *New York Times* or *Financial Times* to know what other government leaders are saying and thinking.

News can also give status to individuals. Because media coverage exposes them to large audiences, they seem important. This process is known as **status conferral**. In a rather extreme example, Omarosa Manigault Newman initially became famous after being a villainous character/competitor on the first season of Donald Trump's *The Apprentice* reality TV series back in 2004. After becoming a celebrity through being on the show, she went on to be featured on a range of television shows primarily designed to feature people who had become prominent on reality TV. Then, in a strange twist of fate, Manigualt Newman became President Trump's director of communications for the White House Office of Public Liaison. After getting fired from the White House, she went on to star on the CBS series *Celebrity Big Brother*.[51] Thus Manigualt Newman became a television celebrity and a national political figure, and then used that status to return to reality TV.

▲ A striking example of status conferral, Omarosa Manigault Newman came into the public eye in 2004 as a contestant on Donald Trump's reality TV show *The Apprentice*. She later became a director of communications in Trump's White House, serving there for several months until she left and returned to reality television as a contestant on *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2018.

Correlation of Different Elements of Society

Correlation is the selection, evaluation, and interpretation of events to impose structure on the news. Correlation is accomplished by persuasive communication through editorials, commentary, advertising, and propaganda. Through media-supplied correlation, we make sense out of what we learn through surveillance. It puts news into categories and provides cues that indicate the importance of each news item. Does it appear on the front page of the newspaper? Is it the first item on the broadcast? Is there a teaser on the magazine cover promoting the story?

Although many people say that they would prefer just the facts, virtually the only news outlet that provides no interpretation of events is the public affairs network C-SPAN, which has rigid rules governing how every event is covered. Far more viewers choose to go to the broadcast networks or cable news channels, which provide some interpretation, rather than watch the relatively dry, "just the facts" C-SPAN.[52]

It is often difficult to distinguish between communication that is informative and communication that is persuasive. Editorial judgments are always being made as to which stories should be covered and which should be omitted, which picture of a politician should be published, or what kind of headline should be written. Thus, it is useful to view surveillance and correlation as two functions that can be shared by a message.

Socialization and Transmission of Culture

Socialization is the process of integrating people within society through the transmission of values, social norms, and knowledge to new members of the group.

It is through the media, as well as through our friends, family, school, and church, that we learn the values of our society. Socialization is important not only to young people as they are

growing up but also to immigrants learning about and assimilating into their new country, high school students heading off to college, and new graduates going to work.[53] Here is another example of Secret 1—The media are essential components of our lives.

The media provide socialization in a variety of ways:

- Through role models in entertainment programming

- Through goals and desires as presented in media content

- Through the citizenship values portrayed in the news

- Through advertisements for products that may be useful to us in different stages of our lives

Entertainment. **Entertainment** is communication designed primarily to amuse, even if it serves other functions as well, which it almost always does. A television medical drama would be considered entertainment, even though it might educate a person about life in a hospital or the symptoms of a major illness. In fact, a major characteristic of all television programming, including entertainment programming, is to let people know what life outside their own world is like.[54]

Agenda Setting. Although explanations of powerful direct effects did not hold up under research scrutiny, people still had a hard time accepting that the news media and political campaigns had little or no effect on the public. **Agenda-setting theory** provides an alternative explanation that does not minimize the influence of the media on society.[55] This theory holds that issues that are portrayed as important in the news media become important to the public—that is, the media set the agenda for public debate. If the media are not able to tell people what to think, as the direct effects model proposed, perhaps they can tell people what to think about. Agenda-setting theorists seek to determine whether the issues that are important to the media are also important to the public.[56]

The initial study of agenda setting was conducted in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, by Donald Shaw and Maxwell McCombs. The researchers found, among uncommitted voters in the 1968 presidential election, a strong relationship between the issues the press considered important and the issues the voters considered important. Since these voters had not already made up their minds about the upcoming election, their most likely source of cues, the researchers concluded, was the mass media. The study compared the content of the press and the attitudes of voters and found a strong correlation. Even though the researchers did not find evidence that the press persuaded people to change their opinions, they did find that the issues featured in the campaign and in the press were also the issues that voters felt were important.[57]

There are, however, some limits on the usefulness of the agenda-setting concept. If a story does not resonate with the public, neither the media nor the candidates will be able to make people care. For example, reports that Ronald and Nancy Reagan had conceived a child before they were married did not seem to do any damage to Reagan's image; nor was the Rev. Pat Robertson's campaign damaged by reports that the candidate and his wife had lied about the date of their wedding anniversary to hide the fact that their first child was conceived premaritally.

Our Interactions With Media

The media, by widening the information about the world that we are exposed to, play an important role in social learning. Students and young professionals have all been warned on numerous

▲ Journalist Ronan Farrow shared a Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 2018 for his reporting on the allegations of sexual assault brought against Harvey Weinstein. The attention that his and others' reporting brought to the issue helped put the #MeToo movement on the national agenda.

Evan Agostini/Invision/AP

occasions to be careful what they post on social media. But media coverage of a public relations practitioner named Justine's social media self-destruction has likely helped a lot of folks avoid her mistake. Just before her twelve-hour flight took off from London for Cape Town, South Africa, Justine sent out a tweet that read, "Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!"

Her tweet spawned an extended online firestorm under the hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet. Tweets ranged from mocking her insensitivity, to parody accounts, to expressions of offense

▲ In Albert Bandura's famous "Bobo" doll experiment, the social psychologist found that children who see adults "get away" with aggressive behavior were more likely to behave aggressively toward an inflatable life-size doll.

and hurt. Once Justine did land, she learned she had been fired while she was in the air. Despite having only about five hundred followers at the time she took off, her tweet rapidly spread around the world. With a case like #HasJustineLandedYet, social media users can learn from the example of one woman without having to suffer all the consequences she did.[58]

At some point in your life, you have likely been told that experience is the best teacher. While experience may be a good teacher, it is also a harsh one, forcing us to suffer from our mistakes. Fortunately, we do not have to make all these mistakes ourselves, according to social psychologist Albert Bandura's **social learning theory**. Bandura is best known for conducting an experiment that had children observing an adult beating an inflatable (life-size) "Bobo" doll. In the experiment, only some of the children saw the adult being reprimanded for behaving so aggressively, while others saw the adult suffer no consequences for their behavior.

Bandura found that children who saw the adult "get away with" the aggressive behavior, were more likely to behave aggressively when they were left in a room alone with the Bobo doll than were those who saw the adult get reprimanded. In short, what Bandura found was that children based their behavior on what they had learned from observing adult behavior. Bandura writes, "If knowledge and skills could be acquired only by direct experience, the process of human development would be greatly retarded, not to mention exceedingly tedious and hazardous."[59] Instead, he says that we are able to learn by observing what others do and the consequences they face.

Bandura says humans go through three steps to engage in social learning:

1. We extract key information from situations we observe.

2. We integrate these observations to create rules about how the world operates.

3. We put these rules into practice to regulate our own behavior and predict the behaviors of others.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and gratifications theory turns the traditional way of looking at media effects on its head. Instead of looking at the audience as a sheep-like mass of receivers of messages, uses and gratifications theory views audience members as active receivers of information of their own choosing. Uses and gratifications theory is based on the following assumptions:

- Audience members are active receivers who have wants and needs. They then make decisions about media use based on those wants and needs. For example, in this approach, video games do not do things to children; children make use of video games.

- Media compete with many sources of gratification. I might watch television in the evening to relax. Television would be competing with reading a magazine, going for a walk, and playing with my son as alternative ways of relaxing.

- Audience members are aware of these choices and make them consciously.

- Our judgments about the value of various media uses must come from the audience's perspective.[60]

The idea behind uses and gratifications theory is that individuals are constantly seeking gratifications, and the media compete to provide them. Media scholar Arthur Asa Berger says that among the gratifications that audience members might seek are to be amused, to experience the beautiful, to have shared experiences with others, to find models to imitate, and to believe in romantic love.[61] So someone who doesn't care about football might still watch a game on television and enjoy it because he wants to spend time with friends. Although he is consuming media, that is not the real point of his interaction with the television set.

Symbolic Interactionism

George Herbert Mead wrote back in 1934 that what holds us together as a culture is our common creation of society through our interactions based on language, or **symbolic interactionism**. We engage in symbolic interactions in which we continually attempt to arouse in others the feeling we have in ourselves by telling others how we feel.

If our language is understood, we are able to communicate; if, on the other hand, we do not share common meanings, we will not be understood.[62] The mass media are by far the biggest source of shared meanings in our world. This is an example of Secret 1—The media are essential components of our lives.

If you think back to our discussion of the meaning of the yellow ribbon in Chapter 1, you can see how this works. We start with an arbitrary symbol: the yellow ribbon. We assign it meaning and then propagate that meaning through portrayal through the media. Eventually, nearly everyone comes to have the same shared meaning of the looped ribbon, and the ribbon becomes a universal symbol of support—support for the troops, for disease sufferers, and for all kinds of social causes.

Sociologist W. I. Thomas provides us with one of the most quoted and understandable statements of symbolic interactionism: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."[63] If we ignore the outdated gender bias of the quote, there's a lot to analyze there. What Thomas is saying is that if people view a problem as being real, and behave as though a problem is real, it will have real consequences, even if the problem does not truly exist. Back in 1938, Orson Welles narrated a famous radio adaptation of H. G. Welles's *War of the Worlds*. The radio play was misinterpreted by some to be an actual news story, and there were many accounts at the time of people panicking and even committing suicide out of fear of the Martians invading New Jersey. Ever since then, broadcasters have been very careful to run extensive disclaimers on the air every time they run a *War of the Worlds*–style story, to make sure they don't panic their audience. There is also

▲ The panic many people think was inspired by Orson Welles made *War of the Worlds* perhaps the most notorious event in American broadcast history.

a widespread fear of powerful effects that the mass media can have on susceptible audience members. The only problem is that the research conducted at the time on the *War of the Worlds* panic was seriously flawed, and criticism of the research, which dates back to the 1940s, has largely been ignored, in part because the belief in the *War of the Worlds* effect is so strong. The truth is that there was far more perception of panic than actual panic at the time. In summary, it doesn't matter much now whether the panic took place. What matters is that people believe that it did.[64]

Cultivation Analysis

George Gerbner (1919–2005), the best-known researcher of television violence, did not believe televised violence has direct effects on people's behavior, but he was deeply concerned about its effect on society as a whole.[65] Gerbner developed an alternative to traditional message effects research called **cultivation analysis**. His argument was that watching large amounts of television cultivates a distinct view of the world that is sharply at odds with reality.[66]

Over the years, Gerbner and his colleagues analyzed thousands of network television programs for the themes they presented and the level of violence they included. In a series of studies beginning in 1967, Gerbner's team found high levels of violence on television. They defined violence as "the overt expression of force intended to hurt or kill."[67]

Network officials have been openly critical of Gerbner, saying that his studies weren't representative of television as a whole and that his definition of violence is not useful because it does not discriminate between the fantasy violence of a *Road Runner* cartoon and the more graphic gore of a *Saw* or *Hostel* movie.

Gerbner compared the rate of violence on television to the rate of it occurring in the real world. He concluded that television cultivates a view of the world that is much more violent than the world we live in. The nature of the violence is different as well, with most television violence occurring between strangers rather than between family members, as does real-life violence. Gerbner said that, because of this, people who watch a great deal of television perceive the world differently than do light viewers. Heavy television viewing cultivates a response that Gerbner calls the **mean world syndrome**.

Gerbner explained what he considered to be major misconceptions about the effects of televised violence and what his research suggested the real effects were. He argued that watching large amounts of television cultivates a distinct view of the world that is at odds with reality.

Gerbner argued that, because of televised violence, heavy television viewers are more likely to

- overestimate their chances of experiencing violence.

- believe that their neighborhoods are unsafe.

- state that fear of crime is a very serious personal problem.

- assume that the crime rate is rising, regardless of the actual crime rate.[68]

In an appearance before Congress, Gerbner testified,

> The most general and prevalent association with television viewing is a heightened sense of living in a "mean world" of violence and danger. Fearful people are more dependent, more easily manipulated and controlled, more susceptible to deceptively simple, strong, tough measures and hard-line postures. . . . They may accept and even welcome repression if it promises to relieve their insecurities. That is the deeper problem of violence-laden television.[69]

The effect of violent television, Gerbner argued, is not that it will program children to be violent; instead, the real harm is more complex. Violent programming

- pushes aside other ways of portraying conflict.

- deprives viewers of other choices.

- facilitates the victim mentality.

- discourages production of alternative programming.[70]

Gerbner's point was that the most obvious-to-imagine effects might not be the most important actual effects.

The Critical/Cultural Approach

In the decades between World War I and World War II came the rise of a revolution in social science thinking known as **critical theory**. Originated by a group of German scholars known as the Frankfurt School, these cultural critics were trying to make sense of a changing world that was leaving people alienated, exploited, and repressed with no good way of making sense of what was happening. Many of these scholars were Marxist in their political and social views, and deeply concerned by the upheavals brought about by the end of World War I. These upheavals led to the rise of fascism in some parts of Europe and communism divorced from Karl Marx's ideas in others. There are several key principles to this approach:

- There are serious problems that people suffer that come from exploitation and the division of labor.

- People are treated as "things" to be used rather than individuals who have value.

- You can't make sense out of ideas and events if you take them out of their historical context.

- Society is coming to be dominated by a culture industry (what we might call the mass media) that takes cultural ideas, turns them into commodities, and sells them in a way to make the maximum amount of money. This separates ideas from the people who produce them.

- You cannot separate facts from the values attached to them and the circumstances from which these facts emerged.

Political science scholar Stephen Bronner writes that it is out of critical theory that people saw the rise of environmentalism, racial equality, sexual equality, and the examination of privilege. While critical theory cannot always help us understand ideas themselves, it can, Bronner writes, help us understand where they come from: "To put it crudely, critical theory can offer fruitful perspectives on the historical genesis and social uses of, say, the theory of relativity introduced by Albert Einstein. But it should not attempt to make philosophical judgments about its truth character."[71]

C. Wright Mills, who was heavily influenced by critical theorists, argued that media coverage of private problems helped turn them into major public issues. Bronner writes, "Women have already turned incest and spousal abuse from private into public concerns; gay and lesbian citizens have advocated the need for legislation against 'hate crimes'; people of color are challenging institutional racism; and countless other attempts have been made . . . to render the myriad institutions of the powerful accountable to the disempowered."[72] In other words, this is Secret 3—Everything from the margin moves to the center.

Up through the 1940s, most of the research on the mass media focused on direct and indirect effects of media messages on the behaviors of groups and individuals. But another school of thought looks at how people use media to construct their view of the world rather than looking at how media change people's behaviors. Instead of using the quantitative data analysis of the voter studies, the **critical/cultural approach** takes a more qualitative examination of the social

AGENDA SETTING VERSUS CRITICAL/CULTURAL THEORY

So far in this chapter, you have seen the application of several of the Seven Secrets, and you might be thinking, which of these is most important? As you work your way through this text, you will likely suspect that the author would put forward Secret 3—Everything from the margin moves to the center.

Note the introduction to this secret:

One of the mass media's biggest effects on everyday life is to take culture from the margins of society and make it into part of the mainstream, or center. This process can move people, ideas, and even individual words from small communities into mass society.

So, if we apply this to the case study that opens this chapter, we are left with this question:

Why, after years of neglect, did the press, in all its varied forms, suddenly start paying attention to these accusations and the women making them? (Want to read more on this subject? You can find that here: www.ralphehanson.com/tag/me-too/.) Why did these stories move to the center?

Two of the theories you have read about so far could be used to answer this question. Here is a simplified summary of each:

Agenda Setting	Critical/Cultural Theory
Issues that are portrayed as important in the news media become important to the public.	There are serious problems that people suffer that come from exploitation and the division of labor.
While the media don't tell people what to think, they can tell people what to think about.	People are treated as "things" to be used rather than individuals who have value.
This theory asks whether people take their cues from the media as to what the most important stories are that they should attend to.	You can't make sense out of ideas and events if you take them out of their historical context.
	Society is coming to be dominated by a culture industry (the mass media) that takes cultural ideas, turns them into commodities, and sells them in a way to make the maximum amount of money.

WHO are the sources?

Who were the sources for the sexual harassment and abuse stories? Who was publishing the stories? Where did the information come from?

WHAT are they saying?

Read either the opening vignette or the series of blog posts linked to above. What reasons do the sources give for the sexual harassment/abuse story breaking out when it did? Whom do they say was responsible for this happening?

WHAT evidence exists?

What evidence is there for the story spreading because news organizations were interested in making the story spread? What evidence is there for the story spreading because women (and men) who had been abused were willing to speak out?

WHAT do you think explains what happened?

How would you explain the spread of the story using agenda setting? Critical/cultural theory? Which do you think does a better job of explaining what happened? Why?

structure in which communication takes place. It considers how meaning is created within society, who controls the media systems, and the roles the media play in our lives. Instead of looking at how messages affect people, it looks at how people use and construct messages.[73]

Media and Body Image

Eating disorders in girls and women are typically a result of many factors, one of which is a desire to be thin. It is no secret that in the United States, being thin is equal to being beautiful, leading a significant number of girls and young women to suffer from eating disorders to achieve thinness.

Unfortunately, this trend toward excessive thinness as a standard of beauty has become more prominent in recent decades. In 1972, 23 percent of U.S. women said that they were dissatisfied with their overall appearance. By 1996, that figure had grown to 48 percent. Critics frequently charge that the thin models in fashion magazines (both in ads and in editorial content) are at least partially responsible for promoting extreme thinness as attractive. In 1953, when Marilyn Monroe was featured in the debut issue of *Playboy*, she was a size twelve with measurements close to the then-ideal of 36-22-35, which by today's standard would make her a **plus-sized model**. Today, the much-photographed Jennifer Aniston is an impossible (for most women) size zero.[74]

Diversity and Size. Danish model Nina Agdal is not a plus-sized model; but, as she points out, she does not have a conventional model's gaunt figure. After she was dropped from a magazine cover story because, as she tells it, she wasn't able to fit into the sample sizes during the photo shoot, resulting in the magazine telling her agent it "did not reflect well on my talent" and "did not fit their market," she decided to take her anger to social media. She posted an Instagram of herself from the shoot to show how she looked and wrote, "If anyone has any interest in me, they know I am not an average model body—I have an athletic build and healthy curves. . . . Some days I'm a sample size, some days I'm a size 4, some a 6. I am not built as a runway model and have never been stick thin. Now, more than ever, I embrace my curves and work diligently in the gym to stay strong and most of all, sane."[75]
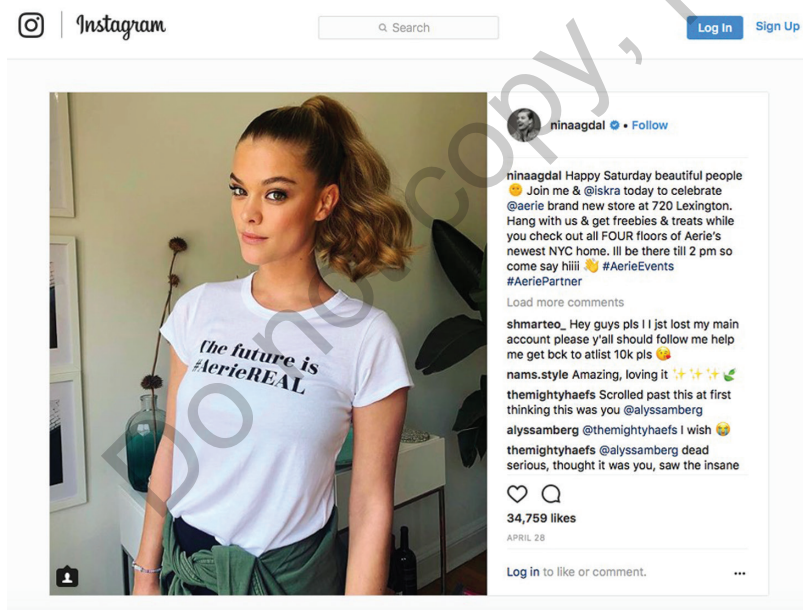
By using this negative event to promote body positivity through her photo shoots, she told *Glamour* magazine, "I feel a responsibility, since I'm one of the girls in the ads, in the magazines, in the commercial." In response to this, the former Victoria's Secret model has signed to be part of the unretouched #AerieReal campaign for American Eagle's underwear and swimwear brand.[76]

Several European countries have put regulations in place that control industry use of underweight models. France, for example, has weight minimums for fashion models while the United Kingdom requires that fashion advertisements use "a sense of responsibility to consumers." While laws have been introduced at a variety of levels to regulate the weight and health of fashion models, it appears likely that the proposed regulations could violate both the Americans with Disabilities Act and the First Amendment.[77]

Remember Secret 3—Everything from the margin moves to the center? It's possible that the willingness of women's magazines to use models of differing sizes is becoming more commonplace than it was several years ago.

It all started back in 2005 with the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty and its so-called "Lumpy Ladies." That ad campaign, featuring attractive women of a variety of sizes posing in their underwear for photographer Annie Leibovitz, helped open a dialogue about size, beauty, and magazine content. Were we going to see more images of realistic-looking women in magazine features and advertisements?[78] (That, of course, begs the question as to what constitutes "real women." Are size-two women not real? Or is it more that average-sized women are ignored by the media?)

▲ Nina Agdal took to social media to promote body positivity after having been rejected for modeling jobs due to her body size.

The Dove campaign paved the way for differently sized models. The contrast between plus-sized models and more conventionally sized magazine models was highlighted with a story in the online publication *PLUS Model Magazine* that had relatively tame naked photos of plus-sized

model Katya Zharkova next to an unnamed "straight-sized" model. *PLUS Model* editor in chief Madeline Jones explained the magazine's photo spread thusly:

> The answer to the question is this, there is nothing wrong with our bodies. We are bombarded with weight-loss ads every single day, multiple times a day because it's a multi-billion-dollar industry that preys on the fear of being fat. Not everyone is meant to be skinny, our bodies are beautiful, and we are not talking about health here because not every skinny person is healthy.
>
> What we desire is equality to shop and have fashion options just like smaller women. Small women cannot be marketed to with pictures of plus-size women, why are we expected to respond to pictures of small size 6 and 8 women? We don't! When the plus size modeling industry began, the models ranged in size from 14 to 18/20, and as customers we long for those days when we identify with the models and feel happy about shopping.[79]

The Importance of Representation. Standards of beauty are emphatically not a static thing. Journalist Nicole Spector writes that when she was a girl in the 1990s, *People* magazine's list of "The World's Most Beautiful People" was predominantly white (76 percent). An analysis using a medical scale of skin tones found that only 12 percent of the people on the list had moderate brown to dark brown skin. By 2017, that list had nearly 30 percent of the people ranked most beautiful in the darker categories. Gabriela Garcia, a Latina writer who founded the online publication *Modern Brown Girl*, told Spector that media attention to Hispanic women role models like Jennifer Lopez, who headlined the 2020 Super Bowl halftime show, has been vital for young Latina women:

> For the first time, a brown girl with curves was popular and mainstream. She didn't shy away from her Latina-ness. I think she paved the way for other types of beauty. It wasn't until the media started to show women of different colors, sizes, and cultures that I began to realize that I was beautiful. And as silly as it sounds, women like J-Lo and Kim Kardashian have really helped promote body confidence for women who are not tall, blonde, and white."[80]

Instagram/@thesunk

But while Spector, whose mother is Latina, was impressed by the greater diversity in *People*'s list, she was bothered by the fact that in 2017 only 12 percent of the list were male, while back in 1990, nearly half the individuals on People's list were male; hence, beauty and appearance are characteristics that we continue to use to judge women but not men. History and women's studies professor Dr. Catherine Kerrison tells Spector that no matter what accomplishments women have, they will still be judged on how they look. "As any woman in the public eye knows, it's crucial to her acceptance, her success that she present herself in ways that are acceptable to this standard. . . . Women will be evaluated by the standards of beauty and though those standards are expanding they are still critical to our success."[81]

Range of Beauty. As a young person, Anok Yai did not see herself reflected in the lighter-skinned models shown in most magazines, but since the image (above) taken of her by photographer Steve

▲ As a young person, Anok Yai did not see herself reflected in the lighter-skinned models shown in most magazines, but since the image (above) taken of her by photographer Steve Hall went viral in 2017, Yai has since worked steadily in the industry, becoming the first Black model in over twenty years to open for the famous fashion house Prada.

Hall went viral in 2017, Yai has since worked steadily in the industry, becoming the first Black model in over twenty years to open for the famous fashion house Prada.

As was mentioned earlier, diversity is not limited to race. Even among African Americans in media, light-skinned models are more likely to be featured in fashion than those with darker skin.

Anok Yai did not set out to be a model. She thought it might be an interesting thing to try, but that was about it. As a child, she and her sister would watch *America's Next Top Model*, hosted by Tyra Banks, but she did not think that kind of life was in her future. Yai is of Sudanese heritage, was born in Egypt, and moved to the United States with her family when she was two years old.

As she grew up, people told her she was beautiful, that she could be a model, that she could be on the cover of magazines. But the models Yai saw were always white or light-skinned Black women.[82]

"When I was younger, I was insecure about my skin because I looked up to people in the media and, though I looked up to the black women, I never saw black women that were as dark as me," Yai said.[83]

So Yai headed off to college at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire to study biochemistry with the goal of becoming a doctor. But then a friend suggested that they go to Howard University's homecoming. It would be a chance for Yai to immerse herself in the ultimate African American student experience. Yai dressed sharp for the weekend—her friend told her she had to. "My friend was like 'If I see you in a t-shirt and jeans, you're not walking with me,'" Yai said.[84]

But then Steve Hall, a Howard University graduate and a photographer for the fashion/Black culture website TheSUNK, took a picture of her. It is not the photo you would think would change a woman's life. Yai is looking straight at the camera; she says she thinks the photo makes her look like a "deer in the headlights."[85]

The next morning, Hall posted the photo to Instagram, and Yai's life was transformed. Hall's photo quickly amassed more than nineteen thousand likes, and Yai soon went from having three hundred Instagram followers to more than fifty thousand. Soon after that, the calls and emails from modeling agencies started coming in. Her childhood dream of being *America's Next Top Model* was starting to get real.

Yai eventually signed with Next Management, and in February 2018, she became the first Black model to open a runway show for the fashion house Prada since Naomi Campbell did so in 1997, more than twenty years before. "It was an honor and I'm proud that I was the one chosen to open, but this is bigger than me," she told *Vogue* about modeling at Milan Fashion Week. "Me opening for one of the top fashion houses is a statement to the world—especially for black women—that their beauty is something that deserves to be celebrated."[86]

Photo Manipulation. The level of photo manipulation going on in both magazines and social media has been an ongoing controversy, with performers such as Adele, Kelly Clarkson, and Kate Winslet being made almost unrecognizable as photographers and photo editors try to make the curvy stars' bodies comply with fashion magazine standards of beauty.

When Lena Dunham, the unconventional star of the HBO series *Girls*, posed for famed photographer Annie Leibovitz for the cover of *Vogue* magazine, questions were raised as to how authentic her images were. Dunham, in case you have missed the story, is famous for being naked in *Girls*—a lot—and her tattooed, untoned body is both celebrated and criticized for being an alternative to conventional standards of Hollywood beauty.

Dunham told *Slate* she had no problem with how Leibovitz had digitally altered her, and that she understands and appreciates the difference between reality and what is published in a fashion magazine:

A fashion magazine is like a beautiful fantasy. *Vogue* isn't the place that we go to look at realistic women, *Vogue* is the place that we go to look at beautiful clothes and fancy places and escapism and so I feel like if the story reflects me and I happen to be wearing a beautiful Prada dress and surrounded by beautiful men and dogs, what's the problem? If they want to see what I really look like go watch the show that I make every single week.[87]

Oscar-winning actress Kate Winslet specified in her contract with cosmetic company Lancôme that the company could not make digital changes to her appearance. Speaking at a Women in Hollywood event, Winslet said, "It does feel important to me, because I do think we have a responsibility to the younger generation of women . . . I would always want to be telling the truth about who I am to that generation because they've got to have strong leaders."[88]

While people have long wanted to look like their favorite celebrity, more recently there has been controversy over how young people are wanting to make themselves look in real life the way they look in their filtered social media photos. There has even been a term coined to describe this—"Snapchat dysmorphia."[89] Body dysmorphia is when a person becomes obsessed with a perceived flaw in their own appearance. Both cosmetic surgeons and psychologists are becoming concerned about people who have an obsessive interest in trying to look like either social media celebrities or their filtered self.

While Snapchat dysmorphia has gotten a fair amount of attention in popular media, the dissatisfaction people have at not looking like their filtered photos has even merited an article in the respected *Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA*).[90] Along with the built-in filters on social media apps, there is also an inexpensive app called Facetune that will let users give themselves whiter teeth or a smaller forehead, nose or waist. Neelam Vashi, a dermatologist who is one of the authors of the *JAMA* article, told the *Washington Post*, "Sometimes I have patients who say, 'I want every single spot gone, and I want it gone by this week or I want it gone tomorrow,' because that's what this filtered photograph gave them. . . . That's not realistic. I can't do that."[91]

CHAPTER REVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY ▶▶

With the rise of mass society and the rapid growth of the mass media starting in the nineteenth century, the public, media critics, and scholars have raised questions about the effects various media might have on society and individuals. These effects were viewed initially as being strong, direct, and relatively uniform on the population as a whole. After World War I, critics were concerned that media-oriented political campaigns could have powerful direct effects on voters. This view, though still widespread, was largely discredited by voter studies conducted in the 1940s and 1950s. These studies found that the voters with the strongest political opinions were those most likely to pay attention to a campaign and hence least likely to be affected by it. Other studies from the same period looked at what effects going to the movies had on young people. More recently, research has expanded to move beyond looking just at the effects that media and media content have on individuals and society to examinations of how living in a world with all-pervasive media changes the nature of our interactions and culture.

Understanding the effects of media on individuals and society requires that we examine the messages being sent, the medium transmitting these messages, the owners of the media, and the audience members themselves. The effects can be cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral, or psychological.

Media effects can also be examined in terms of several theoretical approaches, including functional analysis, agenda setting, uses and gratifications, social learning, symbolic interactionism, and cultivation analysis.

In addition to looking at how media and their messages affect people and their interactions, there has been a rise of media scholarship in the area known as critical theory. This approach looks at how meaning is created within society, who controls the media systems, and the roles that media play in our lives. Critical theory has been used to consider topics such as how media can establish acceptable standards of beauty, size, and skin color.

KEY TERMS ▶▶

REVIEW QUESTIONS ▶▶

1. Why did the number of stories of sexual harassment and abuse explode in October 2017? What are at least two theoretical explanations of what happened then?

2. What were the major problems with the direct effects model—the original theory of media effects?

3. What are the four major types of media effects? Give an example of each.

4. Compare and contrast how the direct effects model, versus the cultivation theory, would explain the effects of media violence.

5. What kind of questions can you best answer using critical theory? What kind of questions is it weakest at answering?

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