

**MASS MEDIA,  
SOCIAL CONTROL,  
AND SOCIAL  
CHANGE**  
*A Macrosocial  
Perspective*

*Edited by*

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## ***Social Control, Social Change and the Mass Media's Role in the Regulation of Protest Groups***

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*This chapter examines the role of mass media in the social regulation of protest groups that seek social change. After covering some preliminary conceptual issues, the chapter identifies a number of "mechanisms" of social control that are embedded within media coverage of protest groups. These mechanisms include story framing, reliance on official sources and official definitions, norm violations, legal violations, the invocation of public opinion, depictions of protest groups' size and effectiveness, de legitimization, marginalization, demonization and noncoverage. Two major factors that affect coverage of protest groups are identified. The greater the degree of extremism of a protest group's ideological goals and the more militant its behavior, the more likely it is to incur the "brunt of social control messages." It is also postulated that "the more radical a group is perceived to be, the more closely journalists will conform to the protest paradigm when covering the group." These propositions are tied to a macrostructural model in which media help marginalize radical protest groups and are themselves controlled by other institutions, especially the state.*

Social control is like the wind-it is easiest to appreciate when you are going against it. All social systems are characterized by complex controls that shape the behaviors of individuals, organizations and larger social units. As an integral part of the system, the mass media are shaped by systemic controls and play an important role as instruments of control. While the social control function of mass media affects all individuals and groups, it is most clearly seen when individuals and groups challenge the

system in pursuit of social change.

### *Social Control as a Primary Concept of Structural Approaches*

Gibbs (1989, 1994) maintains that "control" is the central concept of social and behavioral sciences, arguing that virtually all social phenomena can be conceptualized as issues of control. Control is certainly a central concept for communication, where most communicative acts, interpersonal as well as mass-mediated, can be viewed as attempts to exert some form of control. As Gibbs argues, social control, as a central concept, may serve both to "integrate" diverse theoretical formulations and to "innovate" new directions for theory and research.

Early sociologists concerned about industrialization and urbanization (e.g., Ross 1901) conceptualized social control as mechanisms that provide rational order to society (Janowitz 1991). They revealed that social control in urban environments was no less effective than in traditional communities, simply different in terms of forms, antecedents and consequences (Liska 1992). During the 1950s, the "Parsonian" approach emerged (Parsons 1951), which defined social control as a system of incentives and sanctions (both conscious and unconscious) that rewards conformity to, and punishes deviance from, social norms. The social unrest of the late 1960s stimulated criticism of the Parsonian approach (Liska 1992), however. One point of attack was the problematic task of defining social norms and deviance (Becker 1963). Critics also recognized that social control is situation specific (Liska 1992) and that it may take forms that benefit the interests of organizations within the system, but not necessarily the system itself (Gibbs 1994). Thus, social systems must be viewed as complex amalgamations of subsystems, each with their own set of norms and social control mechanisms.

The "effectiveness" (Gibbs 1989) and "intentionality" (Dahl 1982) of social control are two problematic issues that echo throughout the literature. In contexts such as crime control, effectiveness can be an empirical question about the success or failure of public policy. In contexts such as protest, however, normative questions about good and evil are murkier, and the term *effectiveness* is ideologically loaded. As such, the notion of effectiveness is best conceived as the power of a given form of control. Gibbs (1989, 1994) argues for conceptualizing control as intentional in order to speak of effective and ineffective control, but denying unintentional control may be an egregious error for mass communication researchers. The source of a message may have only a hazy understanding of the audience and know even less about the effects of that message. Moreover, mass-mediated messages may have different effects for different audience members (e.g., protest coverage may have a differential impact on protesters or sympathizers, on policy-makers and on the general audience). These messages may also have consequences for unintended or unrecognized audiences. Before identifying an approach to social control that will help communication researchers with these problematic issues, two additional concepts must be defined: norms and deviance.

## Allied Concepts

### *Norms*

Social norms are another primary, yet elusive, concept in macrosocial analysis. Most definitions of norms are similar to that of De Fleur, D'Antonio and DeFleur (1977,620): "shared convictions about the patterns of behavior that are appropriate or inappropriate for the members of a group." The term *shared* raises what Gibbs (1981) calls the "consensus" problem-the difficulty of determining what is shared. There is no magic percentage above which an idea or behavior is considered a shared norm. Moreover, attempts to measure the degree to which norms are shared are likely to overestimate the consensus due to the social desirability of norm-consistent responses, a phenomenon similar to the "spiral of silence" effect described by Noelle-Neumann (1974, 1984). More important, there are power and institutional dimensions to norms (Gibbs 1981). The orientations of powerful individuals within the social unit are likely to carry disproportionate weight in establishing and maintaining norms. In addition, norms that are sanctioned by institutions, official policy and ultimately social control mechanisms are likely to be relatively powerful, independent of the degree to which they are shared among the constituency of a social unit.

Norms enforced by social control mechanisms may emanate from different social units that overlap such that they may reinforce or even contradict each other. Social units can overlap horizontally, meaning that the two units are at roughly the same level of analysis. For instance, an individual may belong simultaneously to two community groups that have different norm structures, such as a country club and the local chapter of an environmental action organization. They may also overlap vertically from one social unit hierarchically nested within a larger social unit. For example, many individuals are simultaneously influenced by the norms of a local community group and those of the larger American society.

Lacking clearly defined quantitative indicators, the task of identifying social norms is inherently subjective and problematic. But before addressing this problem, we must consider another elusive concept: deviance.

### *Deviance*

Structural functionalists defined deviance as behaviors that violate social norms. Merton (1966, 805) proposes that "deviant behavior refers to conduct that departs significantly from the norms set for people in their social statuses." Such definitions of deviance are dependent on the definition and identification of social norms.

By the end of the 1960s, sociologists' definitions of deviance had evolved to include a "reactive" component, asserting that "a particular act is not deviant unless someone reacts to it in a distinctive way (e.g., punitively)" (Gibbs 1981, 22). Although most sociologists tend to look elsewhere for a reaction, media coverage of a particular action may comprise a reaction that demarcates deviance. Moreover, media coverage may be important in a "labeling" process in the social construction of deviance. The emergence of the reactive component to definitions of deviance is a step toward a practical approach

that reverses the traditional approach to identifying norms, deviance and social control.

### A Practical Approach to Norms, Deviance and Social Control

As mentioned earlier, the first step in traditional structural-functionalist approaches to social control is to identify social norms. Deviance is then defined as behaviors that are contrary to social norms. Finally, social control is identified as forces that reinforce conformity and punish deviance.

To study media coverage of protest, it is useful to reverse the traditional order in which norms, deviance and social control are approached. In the process, we can develop a theoretical orientation and methodological framework that locate the investigation of social control processes firmly within the boundaries of communication research. From this perspective, the primary task of the social analyst is to identify social control messages. Toward this end, we need to: (1) recognize the communicative nature of social control, and (2) define mass-mediated social control as messages that reinforce some behaviors and punish others. Social control may be seen as communicative actions, intentional or unintentional, that comment in some way on the appropriateness or value of the behaviors (including actions, expressed beliefs and appearances) of some group or individual. Such normative commentary reinforces conformity and punishes deviance to the norms of some group or society as a whole.

By focusing on "communicative acts" (such as news coverage), the problematic task of defining norms and deviance in an absolute sense are alleviated. Norms and deviance are to be found as an inherent part of the communicative act. To be sure, general definitions of norms and deviance are necessary, but the identification of specific norms and acts of deviance may be found in the content of the communicative act itself.

### Limitations of the Communicative Acts Approach

One limitation of this approach is that it focuses primarily on the message. The forces of social control that impinge upon the production of news (antecedent processes) and those that shape media messages are outside the bounds of analysis, but the research literature on news production can be brought in to help explain why messages are the way they are. In addition, social control mechanisms that intersect at various levels of social organizations that guide an individual's reception and reaction to messages are also not directly observed, at least in the initial phase of the analytical process. Ultimately, existing media effects theory and research can help us understand the potential impact of social control messages on the audience and groups involved. One important caveat is that the most powerful effects of social control messages are not usually the product of "one-shot" exposures; more realistically, they are the end result of long-term exposure to a relatively consonant symbol system (see Noelle-Neumann chapter 2 in this volume). Such long-term effects are notoriously difficult to measure within the confines of the pragmatic demands on researchers. As such, the literature on the actual impact of mass media as agents of social control is underdeveloped.

## Media as a Source of Social Control Messages

Social control messages can be transmitted through interpersonal communication channels by any agent of socialization, including parents, peers, educators, employers, politicians, religious leaders, opinion leaders and many more. While most interpersonal linkages contain social control messages, mass media have become important channels of social control. The media are linked to the social power structure, including political, business, educational and religious institutions (Tichenor, Donohue and Olien 1973; Donohue, Olien and Tichenor 1985; Paletz and Entman 1981; Altschull 1984). These ties shape the nature of mass-mediated control messages (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Hertog and McLeod 1995).

The power of the media as agents of social control is based on the ability to reach a mass audience with powerful ideas and images. To the extent that there is homogeneity in media portrayals of issues and events, the impact of social control will be accentuated. Cultivation research is an example of a theoretical perspective that focuses on the homogenizing impact of mass-mediated social control leading to support for the status quo (Gerbner et al. 1984; see also Shanahan and Jones chapter 1 in this volume).

## Protest Groups

The communicative acts framework for investigating social control mechanisms can be applied to a wide variety of phenomena subject to media coverage. We focus on protest groups because it is relatively straightforward to identify control mechanisms when they are applied to groups that go against the grain. Moreover, social control is central to the struggle for political legitimacy, as various groups contend for power in an environment of constant social change (Janowitz 1991). Media coverage of social protest conflicts plays a role in defining which groups, voices and viewpoints are considered legitimate and which are not (Gitlin 1977).

Protest groups are inherently important to society and, consequently, to mass communication researchers. Protest groups raise important issues, provide feedback, encourage systemic criticism, stimulate reform, foster social change and contribute to the diversity of the marketplace of ideas. Yet, when protesters challenge the system, they often get a hostile response from authorities, the public and the mass media. Sullivan, Parisian and Arcus (1982) found that survey respondents supported dissent as a form of democratic expression when asked in abstract terms, but they were much less supportive when asked about specific protest groups. Many studies have shown that the media are also critical of many groups that challenge the social system (Gitlin 1980; Murdock 1981; Shoemaker 1984; Carragee 1991; McLeod and Hertog 1992; Hertog and McLeod 1995). For many disenfranchised groups, however, protest is one of the few avenues available to get their message across and to seek out social support (Baker and Ball 1969; Goldenberg 1975; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). The attitudes toward and treatment of protesters by authorities, the larger public and the mass media are important indicators of democratic vitality.

Protest groups organize around a variety of issues, including foreign policy, domestic social and economic policies, the environment, gender, race, labor relations, sexuality, class and others. They come in various sizes and forms ranging from loosely organized groups engaged in such activities as open demonstrations or letter-writing campaigns to much larger interest groups and social movements. As times goes by, protest groups may grow and contract; they may enter into coalitions with other like-minded groups that in turn may coalesce or dissolve. They may also change form and focus. For example, Janowitz (1991) observes that the "parapolitical" social movements of the 1960s were transformed into political interest groups.

There are two important dimensions of protest groups that are central to understanding the processes of social control that impinge upon them. These distinct, though often related, dimensions are the group's *extremism* and *militancy*. Extremism is defined by the ideological goals of the group, whereas militancy refers to a group's overt behaviors (i.e., methods, strategies and tactics). The degree of extremism of a group is defined by the degree of social change that it seeks. Some groups seek to maintain the status quo. Some groups seek small policy changes or general reforms. Other groups seek more radical social change. In general, the greater the degree of extremism of a protest group's ideological goals, the more likely its members are to incur the brunt of social control messages. Militancy is demarcated by the behavioral strategies of a group. Many groups seeking to influence public policy, public opinion or other social outcomes work within the system and use conventional forms of expression and influence, but protest groups often adopt more militant strategies that challenge the norms of acceptable behavior. Radical challenges to social norms span a wide variety of behaviors, including civil disobedience, countercultural displays, inflammatory language, violence and attacks on cherished social symbols.

To get media attention, protesters often engage in what Gamson (1989) refers to as a barter arrangement with the media. Protesters provide action video and pictures in return for media attention. This arrangement creates a double bind for protesters in that militant behavior tends to stimulate a more critical response from the media in the form of hostile social control messages.

As research has documented (Shoemaker 1984), protest groups are not treated equally by the media. To the degree that groups espouse extreme views or militant tactics, more forceful social control will be brought to bear by agencies such as the mass media (thus exhibiting limits to the marketplace of ideas). This finding is critical for protest groups because, as Lipsky (1968, I 151) notes,

To the extent that successful protest activity depends on appealing to, and/or threatening, other groups in the community, the communications media set the limits of protest action. If protest tactics are not considered significant by the media, or if newspapers and television reporters or editors decide to overlook protest tactics, protest organizations will not succeed. Like the tree falling unheard in the forest, there is no protest unless protest is perceived and projected.

### *Mechanisms of Social Control in Media Coverage of Social Protest*

The literature of mass communication, political science and sociology provides a considerable amount of research on protest groups. For political science and sociology, media coverage has often taken a backseat to other concerns, such as how protest groups coalesce, organize, establish goals, strategize and mobilize resources, as well as the execution and impact of their actions. As researchers interested in social movements and protest groups realized the power and importance of mass media, they became interested in media coverage. Gitlin's (1980) research on the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and their protest against the Vietnam War is perhaps the most influential research on media coverage of protest groups. This landmark research galvanized the attention of media researchers toward patterns in media coverage that delegitimize protest groups "seeking social change..

Research on media coverage of protest has revealed that there are some typical characteristics of protest stories that amount to a "protest paradigm" (Chan and Lee 1984). The protest paradigm is a routinized pattern or implicit template for the coverage of social protest. The protest paradigm is, at least in part, the product of the news production process. Media scholars have delineated a number of factors that shape the news production process (Bantz, McCorkle and Baade 1980; Fishman 1980; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Tuchman 1978). Researchers must now turn to the examination of the relative impact of factors operating at various levels of analysis, including the bias of the individual reporter, the impact of the news organization, the canons of the journalistic profession, the influence of ideology and the constraints of the medium (Berger and Chaffee 1987; Dimmick and Co it 1983; Hertog and McLeod 1995; Hirsch 1977; Shoemaker and Mayfield 1987; Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Whitney 1982).

Hertog and McLeod (1995) conducted an analysis of media coverage of anarchist protests to examine the impact of factors operating at different levels of analysis. They concluded that news values, bias and ideology embedded within news stories were affected by a number of different factors. Mainstream versus alternative media and type of story (hard news vs. feature vs. column vs. editorial) accounted for the most variance, while differences linked to the medium (television vs. newspaper) and the news organization were minimal.

The degree of a protest group's extremism and militancy may also be important factors when it comes to the application of the protest paradigm. We propose a corollary to the Shoemaker (1984) proposition that the more radical that a group is perceived to be 'by journalists, the more negative the coverage the group will receive. We postulate that *the more radical a group is perceived to be, the more closely journalists will conform to the protest paradigm when covering the group.*

Social control messages are manifested in the characteristics of the protest paradigm.

Such messages take many forms, including story framing; reliance on official sources and official definitions; the invocation of public opinion; delegitimization, marginalization and "demonization"; and non coverage. In the following sections, we identify various

forms of social control mechanisms embedded within news coverage (largely based on our studies of news coverage of anarchist protesters).

### Story Framing

One of the most important characteristics of any news story (newspaper, radio or television) is the "frame" (Tuchman 1978; Gitlin 1980; Gamson 1992; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Pan and Kosicki 1993). Though framing has been defined in many ways (Entman 1993), we define it as the application of a "narrative structure" that journalists use to assemble facts, quotes assertions and other information into a new story. The protest paradigm includes a number of different protest-story frames (Le., clichés for communicating the events of a protest). The frame has important implications for the protest group, especially in terms of how it is perceived by the audience. While it is clear that the framing of a story provides cues that help audience members make sense out of information, individuals also bring their own orientations or schemata into the interpretation process (Goffman 1974; Kinder and Mebane 1983; Graber 1988). In other words, framing is a process that includes the packaging of information by the news media and perception by the audience filtered by existing knowledge, personal background, social location and group norms (Gamson and Modigliani 1989).

Journalism schools and news organizations train reporters and journalists to approach the environment as raw material with which to build a news narrative, with certain kinds of narratives preferred over others, as determined by myriad factors shaping the construction of news. The journalist approaches the story with a limited repertoire of frames. Once the frame is chosen, news-gathering efforts seek to find information to fill in the story template rather than generating deep understanding of relevant viewpoints.

Many of the potential narrative structures for protest stories are identified in the following sections. Some are more common than others, and they vary from supportive to hostile toward the protesters. Each of these frames may appear as the dominant organizing scheme of the story or as a subtheme contained within the story. Frames may also be used in combination. Certainly, those that we identify here do not constitute an exhaustive list of the different ways in which a protest story may be told, but they do provide a starting point in the identification of social control mechanisms.

#### *Marginalizing Frames*

We have identified eight varieties of story types that tend to marginalize protesters. Perhaps the most common of these frames is the *violent crime story*, which organizes the story around violent acts committed by the protesters. The *property crime story* details the commission of property crimes such as vandalism, graffiti and other acts of civil disobedience. In the case of both these crime frames, considerable attention is typically given to the efforts of the police to apprehend the perpetrator. The *carnival* frame treats protesters as performers engaging in theatrical entertainment. The *Thefreakshow* emphasizes the graphic deviance and oddities of the protesters. The "*Romper Room*" frame portrays the protesters as immature deviants engaged in childish antics. The *riot* frame depicts the

protesters as purveyors of random acts of violence. The *storm watch* warns society about the possible threats posed by the protesters. The *moral decay* story frame holds up the protesters as evidence of general social decay.

#### *Mixed Frames*

There are other frames that are less one-sided against the protesters; however, they are rarely used by mainstream media. The *showdown* frame is a confrontation between two or more groups without a designated "bad guy." The *protest reaction* frames the protest as a response to some previous event. The *dissection* story is an analysis of the components and practices of a protest group, social movement or subculture. The *psychoanalysis* story frame is an examination of the psychological or social roots of a group. The *association* frame delineates the linkages between the protest group and some other group that may bestow either legitimacy or deviance. The *comparison* frame contrasts a group with some other group to connote either legitimacy or deviance. The *trial* story frame focuses on court proceedings involving the protest group.

#### *Sympathetic Frames*

Another group of story frames treats protesters in a positive light. These frames are typically found only in the alternative press. The *creative expression* frame centers around aesthetic, artistic or emotionally expressive aspects of a protest group. The *unjust persecution* frame chronicles infractions incurred by the protest group, such as civil rights violations or police brutality. *Our story* lets protesters give their viewpoints in their own words, such as a transcript of an interview. The *we are not alone* frame draws connections between protesters and other like-minded groups to show that the protest group in question is not an isolated phenomenon.

#### *The Balanced Frame*

Finally, the *debate* frame is coverage that centers on the issues and viewpoints of the various parties to an issue of public concern. Every effort is made to focus on the issues and represent all sides adequately and fairly. It would seem that this would be the most beneficial frame to stimulating discussion in the marketplace of ideas. Despite the fact that this frame is given a lot of lip service by the mainstream media, it is not commonly used. It represents an ideal that may not be possible to objectively perfect, but nevertheless can serve as an ideal.

Hertog and McLeod (1995) examined the use of five potential story frames in media coverage of anarchist protests: (1) circus or carnival; (2) riot; (3) confrontation; (4) protest; and (5) debate. One goal of protest groups is to attract media attention and to produce news coverage that is framed as a debate. In this case, the anarchist protesters were attempting to engage political and corporate officials in policy debates. The actions used to get media attention, however, often resulted in circus-carnival, riot or confrontation stories. Stories that mocked the anarchists' "eccentric" appearance and behaviors framed the protest as a collection of sideshow oddities. Other stories painted

the actions as a mass riot or as a sporting confrontation between the protesters and police and even bystanders.

McLeod and Hertog (1992) note that the news frames of the protest paradigm emphasize the actions rather than the issues of a protest in a way that protects the illusion of objectivity. Reporting concrete actions is safe. The reporter assumes the role of conduit delivering a "value-free" account of the events. By contrast, issues are more difficult to cover "objectively." Covering issues requires the reporter to make decisions about the legitimacy, construction and ordering of viewpoints. As a result, protest stories tend to be framed around the actions of the parties to the protest rather than around the issues at hand. In general, the subjugation of protest issues operates to the detriment of the protesters. A focus on the militant actions of the protest may cause the underlying issues to become obscured or not fully developed within the story. By the same token, protest actions devoid of a fully developed issue context may appear senseless.

### Reliance on Official Sources and Official Definitions

As noted by numerous media researchers, journalists rely heavily on official sources for information (Sigal 1973 ; Fishman 1980; Paletz and Entman 1981; Soley 1992). There are many reasons for such reliance, among them these three: (1) to add prestige to the story; (2) to increase the efficiency of news production; and (3) to maintain the illusion of objectivity. First, official sources connote status and legitimacy to a news story. Second, the commensal relationship that develops between journalist and source provides media with a dependable source of content. Official sources are easy to locate and tend to produce "easy-to-use" news in the form of press conferences, news releases and public statements. Reporters have to do less to validate information when they use official sources. Finally, news from official sources is easier to defend on the grounds of objectivity. For instance, what the president says is news automatically by virtue of the office. Similarly, what the police chief says about a protest is news automatically. On the other hand, if a reporter gives too much attention to a protest group and its issues, the reporter might appear to be an advocate. As a result, news coverage (including the coverage of a protest) is heavily laden with official viewpoints.

Indeed, McLeod and Hertog (1992) found that police officials were quoted frequently regarding the anarchist protests. The prominence of police sources helped assert the dominant frame that elevated legal issues relating to the protest tactics, as opposed to the moral issues raised by the protesters. It can be argued that the protests themselves were newsworthy because the protesters engaged an official institution—the police department. McLeod and Akhavan-Majid's (1984) study of antipornography protests in Minneapolis also illustrates the institutional effect. The authors found that very little coverage of the pornography issue made the agenda of an official institution, the Minneapolis City Council. In the fall of 1993, the city council held public hearings on a proposed ordinance that amended the city's Civil Rights Code to include pornography as grounds for civil rights suits (the amendment was passed and later vetoed by the mayor). Despite a long history of activities by antipornography groups, news coverage was sparse

until 1993 . At that point, coverage erupted in a frenzy of news stories. In addition, official sources accounted for 83 percent of the attributed information found in news stories. Most of the information supplied by unofficial sources came from an institutional locus-testimony from the public hearings. Unofficial sources (such as consumers and potential victims of pornography) can contribute valuable insights to the debate, yet the media seemed to ignore them.

When news coverage is dominated by officials, official viewpoints and definitions tend to predominate, lending support to the status quo and chastising would-be challengers.

### The Invocation of Public Opinion

McLeod and Hertog (1992) argue that depictions of public opinion are one of the prime forces of social control embedded within news coverage. They identify several different forms of public opinion that may appear in a news story. In its most obvious form, public opinion is characterized by reports of public opinion polls. It may also appear as statements made by the reporter or sources quoted in the story that characterize public opinion, the public mood or the social consensus. Depictions of norm and legal violations constitute the invocation of public opinion in that norms and laws represent an implied consensus. Finally, reporters' use of bystanders is an implied form of public opinion in that bystanders provide a symbolic reaction from the common or typical person.

Research has shown that individual attitudes and behaviors can be influenced by perceptions of public opinion and the social consensus. Examples can be found in research on the "bandwagon effect" (Lang and Lang 1984), conformity (Asch 1956) and the "spiral of silence" (Noelle-Neumann 1974, 1984). When assessing public opinion, people turn to mass media for cues. In the case of protest coverage, there is reason to expect that opinion cues are particularly powerful. Noelle-Neumann argues that the fear of isolation makes people less likely to speak out when they perceive themselves in the minority. Typically, the spiral of silence has been examined in the context of political elections where members of the minority party still represent a fairly large segment of the population (Salmon and Kline 1985). In the case of small protest groups, fear of isolation may be a more powerful concern. In addition, protest (unlike voting) is a public behavior that puts the protester on view to the larger public. Thus, social control messages that portray protesters as an isolated minority may induce fear of isolation that hinders the growth of the group and discourages participation from existing members and potential sympathizers.

#### *Public Opinion Polls*

As noted by Lang and Lang (1980), public opinion polls are a powerful force shaping perceptions of public opinion, which translates ultimately into public policy decisions. Polls provide powerful cues that shape the actions and beliefs of audience members (Lang and Lang 1984; Noelle-Neumann 1974, 1984). With the exception of protests centered on major events like wars or battles over an enduring issue like abortion, however, polls

are not commonly conducted about protests. McLeod and Hertog's (1992) qualitative analysis of mainstream and alternative media coverage of a series of anarchist protests did not find a single poll report. Public opinion did appear in other forms, however.

#### *Sweeping Generalizations*

McLeod and Hertog's (1992) analysis of mainstream media coverage of anarchist protests found a limited number of cases in which reporters made general statements about public reaction to the protesters. Statements about public opinion were more common in

material that was attributed to official sources such as police officers. Most of these comments stressed what a small, isolated group the anarchists were. There were a few quotations from the anarchists themselves that recognized that the group was a minority but that members of the majority were under the control of the powerful institutions of the status quo. By and large, characterizations of public opinion in the mainstream media represented the majority of people as being in opposition to the anarchists. Although the alternative coverage used very few overt statements about public opinion, there were some statements portraying the Minneapolis community as receptive to the anarchists.

#### *Norm Violations*

Social norms are at the heart of the processes by which deviance is communicated (McKirnan 1980). Similar to Gitlin's (1980) finding that media coverage trivialized SDS protesters by "making light" of their clothing and hairstyles, McLeod and Hertog (1992) found that mainstream media coverage of anarchist protests frequently used social norms to comment unfavorably on the protesters. Coverage focused on the "abusive" behavior, "obscene" language and "eccentric" appearance of the anarchists. Out of concern for making interesting video, cameras gravitate toward protesters with the most extreme appearance (i.e., clothing and hairstyles) and behaviors (i.e., language and actions).

Alternative media coverage of the anarchists was quite different. For example, McLeod and Hertog (1992) note one protest at which female protesters removed their shirts as a symbolic gesture against businesses that sell pornography. In the alternative press, this gesture was explained, whereas the mainstream press depicted it as another example of norm-breaking behavior. In the alternative press, social norms were violated by the "protested" (government and business institutions) rather than the protesters.

#### *Legal Violations*

Legal violations are a special case of norm violations; laws are essentially social norms that have been codified and officially sanctioned. The analysis of anarchist coverage by McLeod and Hertog (1992, 267) pointed out:

Obeying the law is a strong social norm; violations are considered permissible only in situations governed by a higher moral purpose. Mainstream coverage never addressed the anarchists' claim to a higher moral purpose. Although some of the crimes catalogued in mainstream media—conducting a parade without a permit, failure to use established routes or to coordinate their activities with police, and sundry property damage—may not

be expected to upset people greatly, the idea that anarchists are law-breakers may have an impact on audience impressions.

Legal violations by the anarchist protesters were displayed prominently in mainstream media coverage (McLeod and Hertog 1992). In fact, the coverage pitted the protesters against the police instead of the anarchists' chosen targets--excessive government and military power. The police were an important source for most stories, whereas government and business officials were not brought in to comment on the protesters' charges. Stories focused on the "legal" issues of the conflict between protesters and the police, while ignoring the "moral" issues of the actions of the protested. In the process, the target of the protest is shifted to the police; the actions of the protesters are reported as legal violations rather than moral challenges to the targets of the protest.

By contrast, legal violations by the protesters were downplayed in the alternative media (McLeod and Hertog 1992). When legal violations were discussed, they were put in the context of strategic options and tactical information. Ultimately, the dominant focus of the alternative coverage was the underlying moral rather than legal issues.

Hall and colleagues (1978) observe that it is quite common for radical protesters to be treated as criminals, particularly when there is violence at the protest. The potential for violence by a protest group is part of the criteria by which news media evaluate the newsworthiness of a protest group (Murdock 1981; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). Hall's study of media coverage of Vietnam War protests in Britain found that violence was a prominent focus of coverage despite the fact that very little violence actually occurred. Similarly, Cohen (1980) found that the media overdramatized the violence at mods and rockers gatherings during the 1960's in Britain.

### *Bystanders*

Reporters frequently use bystanders as symbolic representations of public opinion. Back (1988) argues that bystanders are used like the "Greek chorus" of ancient drama as metaphors for public opinion to comment on the actions at hand. Bystanders may also serve as cues to how members of the general public react.

As McLeod and Hertog (1992) point out, the use of bystanders may inherently work to the detriment of protesters. If an individual is supportive of the protesters, the reporter may treat that person as part of the protest. Supportive bystanders may actually join in protest. Almost by definition, the onlooking bystanders are at best indifferent to the protest and at times hostile. McLeod and Hertog argue that journalists use bystanders as an "anchor" to provide meaning to the story and as a "thermometer" to gauge public reaction. Moreover, journalists tend to use the most interesting bystander reactions, which are often the most hostile.

Bystanders were a common element in mainstream coverage of anarchist protesters (McLeod and Hertog 1992). Generally, bystanders were negative. The following quotation from a television reporter is an example:

We didn't see anyone along this demonstration through the city who actually showed this

group any support. And most of the people were actually disgusted with it. And one woman said, "It's easy for them to be against everything because they themselves are not involved in anything."  
(McLeod and Hertog 1992,268)

Unlike the mainstream media, the alternative newspapers did not engage in the convention of interviewing bystanders. In fact, the only mention of bystanders was one newspaper article that described how numerous onlookers, at first curious and then intrigued, joined in the protest.

#### *Generalized Conceptions of Public Opinion*

McLeod and Hertog (1992) develop three conceptual models of public opinion based on the writing of Hennessy (1985) and Herbst (1991). The first view of public opinion is as "aggregated individual opinion"; the second view moves beyond summing individual opinions in that it defines public opinion as "the active attempts of groups and individuals to influence public policy"; the third view defines public opinion as the "general will" or 'zeitgeist' which acts as an expression of the consensus beliefs and moral values of some social group" (McLeod and Hertog 1992,261). McLeod and Hertog argue that these orientations toward public opinion are social control messages embedded within journalistic accounts of news involving social issues and conflicts.

In their analysis of mainstream media coverage of the anarchists, McLeod and Hertog (1992) found that the emphasis on the small size of the protest groups relative to the larger population indicates that the journalists were thinking about public opinion as an aggregate. Mainstream journalists also adopted the second view of public opinion in that their stories often treated the protesters as an unsuccessful group contending for power.

The conception of public opinion woven into the alternative newspaper coverage was quite different. It contained elements of the first view in recognizing that the anarchists were a distinct numerical minority, but it also devoted considerable effort to establishing them as an effective power group. The most intriguing underlying conception of public, however, was as a force of social control (the third view) that threatens marginal groups like the anarchists. Much of the alternative coverage was oriented toward building bonds between members of the anarchist movement in order to provide a "haven from isolation" from the oppressive pressures of the mainstream consensus. This type of coverage may provide an important protection for radical groups from spiral-of-silence processes. In the classic conformity experiments of Asch (1956) and Milgram (1963, 1964), the power of conformity pressure was reduced when the subjects were in the presence of other deviants. Moreover, the coverage may capitalize on conflict processes described by Coser (1956) to produce cohesion among the anarchists by engaging in conflict with an external group, the larger society. To further insulate the anarchists from isolation, the coverage legitimized the hairstyles and clothing that were ridiculed by the mainstream media. In short, the alternative coverage recognized "the social control function of mainstream public opinion and tries to provide a haven from its influence by establishing a distinct subgroup with its own set of norms" (McLeod and Hertog 1992, 272).

## Delegitimization, Marginalization and Demonization.

Characteristics of the protest paradigm contribute to three processes: *delegitimization, marginalization, and demonization.*

### *Delegitimization*

A group seeking social change must establish itself as a legitimate voice in public discourse. Unfortunately, media coverage guided by the protest paradigm tends to question the legitimacy of radical protest groups.

For instance, Tuchman (1972) describes the "judicious use of quotation marks" by which reporters can call into question the legitimacy of a concept or group. Gitlin (1980) provides an example in the context of social protest. Journalists covering anti-Vietnam War demonstrations put the term *peace march* in quotation marks to question the intentions of the protesters. McLeod and Hertog (1992) describe an analogous technique used by broadcast journalists that effectively delegitimizes protesters. They note an example of a reporter who used the phrase, "These protesters call themselves anarchists." In the same way that quotation marks might call into question the true purpose of a protest march, statements such as this denigrated the image of the anarchists by challenging their self-designated label. The story continued to question the anarchists' identity and behavior by noting that "some of them became vandals."

Another characteristic that connotes legitimacy is whether protesters are allowed to speak through their own voices. When protesters are shown speaking on camera or quoted directly in a newspaper article, they are accorded a certain degree of legitimacy as a source. The level of legitimacy is reduced if the protesters' views are only paraphrased by the reporter. In some cases, the protesters' views may be disregarded all together. To the extent that the protesters are not represented as sources and their views and issues are displaced by other elements of the story, the protesters are delegitimized (McLeod and Hertog 1992).

### *Marginalization*

Elements of the protest paradigm also serve to *marginalize* social protesters—that is, they accentuate the deviance of the protesters from the mainstream public. McLeod and

Hertog (1992) suggest that when media fail to explain the issues and viewpoints of protesters, audience members may overlook the common ground in their stands on issues.

One of the ways in which protest groups are marginalized is through coverage that downplays the size and effectiveness of the protest. According to Gitlin (1980), media coverage of SDS protests against the Vietnam War tended to undercount the number of protesters involved and to disparage the effectiveness of the protest. Coverage ignored the extent to which the ideas of the SDS were shared with mainstream society. As Hallin (1986) notes, the media were behind the wave in showing the prevalence of opposition to the war.

In general, the media apply a very narrow definition of what constitutes a successful protest. From this simplistic perspective, the typical protest is seen as an attempt to change

government or corporate policy. If, as is often the case, there is no immediate change in institutional policy, the protest is deemed a failure. However, this all-or-nothing criterion for judging success ignores many of the important functions of protest. First of all, while immediate changes in institutional policy may be unlikely, protests may have an impact over time. The visibility of an opposition group may keep an institution in check by preventing future policy changes in the opposite direction. Protests may also encourage more cautious, reasoned decision making from power holders. A protest may be one of the most efficient ways for a group to create awareness and disseminate information both to the larger population and among the protest-group members and potential sympathizers (Tichenor et al. 1973; Viswanath and Finnegan 1995). The protest brings like-minded people together, connecting isolated individuals to a collective voice. Protests are also important in connecting like-minded groups into coalitions. When a group engages in a protest against another group or institution, the external conflict tends to increase commitment and morale within the protest group (Cosser 1956). Protests also serve an expressive function, allowing protesters to have their say and to experience the thrill of activism. During the course of a protest, protesters are often provided with opportunities for the rehearsal of arguments and the sharing of ideas. Ultimately, protest is a cornerstone of the marketplace of ideas and a sign of a healthy democratic system. Though the manifest goals of a protest are not achieved, the protest may still be considered successful. Media coverage that fails to recognize these functions contributes to the marginalization of a protest group.

#### *Demonization*

Not only does media coverage often downplay the effectiveness of a protest, it may also *demonize* the protesters by exaggerating the potential threat of a protest group, which may galvanize public hostility toward the group. As Cosser (1956) argues, having an enemy or threat is functional to producing support for the status quo.

Gitlin (1980) found that media coverage of the SDS focused on communist elements among the protesters and the presence of Viet Cong flags, thereby demonizing the anti-war movement. In addition, media coverage polarized the SDS by accentuating the radicalness of its goals and viewpoints. Coverage of counterdemonstrations and comparisons of the anti-war protesters to "extremist" ultra-rightist groups, such as neo-Nazis, further demonized the SDS.

McLeod and Hertog (1992) observed that flag burning was a major feature of the coverage of the anarchist protests. Video and photographs—as well as interviews with bystanders—focused on the burning of an American flag, downplaying the fact that a Soviet and a McDonald's flag were also burned at the demonstration in question.

Cohen's (1980) study of the mods-and-rockers movement in Great Britain provides another example of the media's role in demonizing "deviant" groups. From 1964 through 1966, the mods and rockers gathered at English seaside resorts to engage in youthful revelry. The mods and rockers were portrayed as "folk devils," and the coverage created an air of "moral panic" that Cohen compared to the reaction to a natural disaster.

## Noncoverage

One limitation of the communicative acts approach is that it may cause researchers to overlook an important factor in the process of social control; noncoverage. As Breed's (1958) "reverse content analysis" revealed, ideas that challenge the status quo are at a disadvantage when it comes to getting attention from the media. Visible protest is one of the few avenues that groups that challenge the system have to get their opinions heard. But protesting alone does not guarantee that the media will provide a platform for advocacy.

One factor that predicts whether a group will get attention is the sheer size of the protest group. McCarthy, McPhail and Smith (1996) examined *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, ABC, CBS and NBC coverage of protest marches in Washington, D.C., during the years 1982 and 1991. To examine which protests were covered, the researchers examined the records of the organizations that issue permits for protests at various locations in Washington, D.C. (the National Park Service, the U.S. Capitol Police, and the D.C. Metropolitan Police). By far the most powerful predictor of whether the media covered a demonstration was the size of the protest. "The vast majority of demonstrations are ignored by the mainstream media; the very large ones are covered. Demonstration size is, by far, the most important characteristic determining the likelihood of media coverage" (McCarthy, McPhail and Smith 1996, 494).

As noted earlier, McLeod and Akhavan-Majid's (1984) study of the antipornography movement showed that protest groups get media attention when their issues are adopted on the agenda of an official institution. When a group is challenging an official institution, however, the institutional agenda is likely to be resistant to addressing the issue. As a result, groups that are having trouble finding their voice through the media often must resort to doing something dramatic to get media attention. Prior to getting a proposed amendment to the Minneapolis Civil Rights Code, the only significant media attention that the antipornography groups got was when protests at local "adult" bookstores resorted to damaging merchandise.

Mainstream news coverage of the anarchists studied by McLeod and Hertog (1992) appeared only after the groups engaged in violence. One of the protest marches came at the end of a three-day anarchist convention in Minneapolis. During the first two days of the event, there were many workshops and speeches during which the anarchists were able to express ideas. These events were ignored by the mainstream media. The actions of the anarchists became important enough for the media to take notice only on the final day of the convention, when the anarchists marched through the Minneapolis downtown area. The dominant focus of mainstream news reports was on property damage and the disruption of traffic, indicating that what the media considered important was not the ideas of the anarchists, but rather their "deviant" actions. Ironically, the violence that occurs at protests may be prompted in part by frustration stemming from a system including the mass media that seems to lack interest in the causes and issues of the protest. This situation puts radical protest groups in a double bind. They must engage in dramatic activities, including violence and unusual demonstrations, to get the attention of the

media. When groups do engage in these attention-getting activities, however, media coverage tends to use them to delegitimize, marginalize and demonize the group.

### *Effects of Social Control Mechanisms*

Identifying social control mechanisms embedded in media coverage is merely the first step in understanding the social control process. It is important to understand the impact that these messages have on the audience, the protest groups and society as a whole. Clearly, there is much more literature on the content of protest coverage than there is on coverage effects. This is a fairly common pattern in mass communication research; early research begins by focusing on media content and then proceeds to look at effects, in part because one must understand the nature of the content before its effects can be understood. The pattern also reflects the difficulty of studying effects. There are methodological hurdles that make effects research difficult. Experiments suffer from artificiality, and surveys are limited by their reliance on self-report data. There are also practical problems of defining and assembling an appropriate subject pool. In addition, it is more difficult to assess the impact of messages on collectivities such as the protest group or society as a whole.

Nevertheless, the literature has now developed to the point where it is time to look more thoroughly at the effects of protest coverage. To date, there have been only a few studies that have looked at effects; it is important to begin the systematic empirical investigation of the linkages between the characteristics of social control messages and their impact on the audience and the protest groups involved. The discussion that follows identifies some potential areas for research on the impact of social control messages.

### Effects of News Coverage on Audience Members

Research on the effects of protest coverage on audience members has looked at two types of consequent variables: (1) audience perceptions of the groups involved in the protest, and (2) general perceptions of the utility of social protest as a form of democratic expression.

#### *Effects on Audience Perceptions of Groups Involved in a Protest*

Shoemaker (1982) performed one of the first studies linking the content of protest news coverage to effects on the audience. She conducted two experiments to examine the impact of news coverage on audience perceptions of the legitimacy of political groups. She showed subjects mock newspaper stories about nonmainstream political parties. Subjects' perceptions of the legitimacy of a political party varied depending on how the party was treated in the story.

McLeod (1995) conducted a similar experiment on how television news stories affect public perceptions of a protest group. This experiment demonstrated that subtle differences in the construction of protest stories can have a large impact on audience

members' impressions of protesters and police. Two different television news stories of an anarchist protest were shown to two separate groups of experimental subjects. The two stories differed in terms of the social control messages embedded within them. One story used bystanders to criticize the anarchist protesters. The other story showed the protesters speaking on camera. The first story depicted a clash between protesters and police as being initiated by the protesters, while the second framed both sides as instigators. The first story also questioned the protesters' self-designated label of anarchists. However, apart from these differences, the two stories exhibited a great deal of similarity. Both stories focused predominantly on the clash between police and protesters without any serious discussion of protesters' issues. Experimental subjects who saw the less one-sided story were significantly less critical of the protesters and more critical of the police. They were also more likely to identify with the protesters' viewpoints.

Based on the Shoemaker (1982) and McLeod (1995) experiments, it is clear that the nature of a news story does have an effect on the audience. Theoretically, we would expect that this effect would be greater when an audience member has little pre-existing knowledge or attitude about the group in question. Future research needs to vary the content characteristics more systematically to look at content-effect linkages at a closer level of specificity. It should also investigate mediating factors such as an audience member's class background, news processing strategies, background knowledge and political orientation.

#### *Effects on Perceptions of the Utility of Protest as a Form of Democratic Expression*

McLeod (1995) also examined whether the television news story that subjects saw was related to differences in the perceived utility of protest. Unlike the dramatic effects that the stories had on perceptions of the groups involved in the protest, effects on protest utility were minimal. While the subjects who saw the story that was more critical of the protesters were more likely to agree with the statements that protest is a waste of time and that protesters are often disrespectful, there were no significant differences on three other items used to measure protest utility. This study showed that the nature of a news story can have a major impact on perceptions of the participants in the protest, but that attitudes about the utility of protest as form of democratic expression are not as susceptible to the effects of exposure to a single message. A single news story's effect on protest utility is to a great extent mediated by a lifetime of exposure to protest coverage, as well as other personal experiences and influences. If social control messages affect audience members' attitudes toward protest, it must be the result of long-term socialization to relatively consistent messages across a variety of protest contexts.

#### Effects of News Coverage on Protest Groups

There has been even less research on the impact that news coverage has on the protest groups themselves. To the extent that protest coverage may constrain the growth, activities and ultimately the viability of protest groups, social control messages pose a threat to the democratic marketplace of ideas.

*Effects on Protest-Group Recruitment and Growth*

The extent to which protest coverage affects the growth of a protest group can, in part, be a function of the impact of coverage on audience perceptions of the protest group as well as perceptions of protest utility. If, as research has begun to document, negative coverage leads to more hostile evaluations of the protest group, there may be individuals who are demobilized from joining the group. At the same time, any publicity may be better than no publicity at all. There may be individuals who are strongly inclined to support a protest group who become aware of the group's activities and join the group despite the negative tone of the news coverage. Another important issue is the impact that exposure to decades of protest paradigm messages has on willingness to view protest as a legitimate activity. To the extent that these messages have a long-term effect of demobilizing the population, news coverage may constrain the growth of protest groups.

*Effects on Willingness to Speak Out*

A related question is whether protest coverage has an impact on the willingness of group members to speak out. If, as argued by Noelle-Neumann (1974, 1984), media coverage provides cues to what opinions are popular and unpopular, acceptable and unacceptable, coverage that is critical of a protest group may discourage group members and other like-minded individuals from speaking out. On the other hand, classical studies of conformity (Asch 1956; Milgram 1963, 1964) show that people will stand up against the majority if they have social support. To some extent, protest coverage may make people aware of others who share their view and may help them make contact with social support, which may help them speak out despite critical news coverage.

In addition, McLeod and Hertog (1992) show that the alternative press may also provide a "haven from isolation." The study found that much of the alternative press coverage of the anarchist coverage was oriented toward providing social support.

*Effects on Group Dynamics*

The nature of news coverage that a protest group receives may affect group dynamics such as internal solidarity, boundary maintenance and coalition formation. Theoretically, social control messages may have contrasting effects on the internal cohesiveness of a protest group. On the one hand, challenges from the media may have the "centripetal" effect of binding a group together. As Coser (1956) postulates, conflict with an external group leads to greater internal solidarity. On the other hand, critical coverage can cause dissension and fragmentation within the protest group. Stein (1976) argues that the level of pre-existing solidarity is an important determinant of the ultimate impact.

News coverage with social control messages that criticize a protest group is likely to sharpen distinctions between the group and society at large. Cohen (1980) notes that "punitive" news coverage of deviant groups reinforces group boundaries. Such coverage may scare away fence-sitters and potential converts to the group. But at the same time, media coverage that fuels conflict between protesters and society at large may strengthen the internal solidarity of the protest. Similarly, Cohen (1980) notes that negative coverage of deviance may actually lead to further acts of deviance because of its functional effects

on group solidarity.

Gitlin (1980) notes that media coverage led to internal dissension between factions of the anti-war movement and helped drive a wedge within the anti-war movement. According to Gitlin (1980, 30), "The media not only helped produce and characterize this sharp break within SDS, but they proceeded to play it up; in doing so, they magnified its importance--both to the outside world and inside the organization."

A similar pattern was observed in protests that reacted to the Reagan administration's decision to send the National Guard to Honduras to prevent "border incursions" by the Nicaraguan army in 1988. In Minneapolis, a diverse coalition of groups (including labor groups, veterans' groups, church groups, student groups, women's groups and a group of anarchists) organized a series of six protests over the course of a two-week period. At the first two protests, which were largely peaceful gatherings, there were some isolated incidents of violence, including confrontations between the anarchists and police. These incidents became a dominant focus of media attention. The internal dissension within the coalition that resulted threatened to put an end to the demonstrations. Some groups were forced to disassociate themselves from a larger coalition of groups in order to placate disenchanted group members who had threatened to quit. The final protest was attended by 3,000 marchers. Although there were no incidents of violence at this protest, media coverage framed stories around violence; in essence, reporters expressed surprise that there was no violence. Ultimately, what was building to be a potentially influential coalition of like-minded groups was derailed by coverage that turned coalition groups against each other.

### *Summary and Discussion*

For mass communication researchers interested in studying media coverage of social protest, there are many important tasks ahead. It is essential to continue to specify the characteristics of the protest paradigm. Moreover, it is important to assess how strictly journalists apply this set of journalistic conventions to covering various protest groups; in other words, how strictly do media follow the protest paradigm across different protest groups, in different situations and at different points in time? Furthermore, what conditions regulate how closely media follow the protest paradigm? From there, researchers can continue to examine linkages between content variables and audience outcomes. This examination may be accomplished in an experimental setting by systematically varying content attributes and observing audience outcomes. In addition, further fieldwork is needed to explore the interactions between media, protest groups and the larger society.

As research on the effects of protest paradigm coverage begins to accumulate, it will then be possible to turn more specifically to the impact that this set of journalistic conventions has on society as a whole. First, it is important to understand the impact that protests and media coverage of protests have on public opinion processes. Realistically, we know little about either.

Several studies have looked at the impact that anti-war protests had on public opinion toward the war in Vietnam (Berkowitz 1973; Schuman 1972). While these studies conclude that the anti-war protests likely backfired, producing support for the war, Peterson (1994) argues for a multistep flow in regard to the impact of protest on public opinion. He asserts that the protests stimulated discussion among political elites, which, as has been argued by Zaller (1991), then resulted in media coverage critical of the war and ultimately to the erosion of public support for the war.

Some researchers, such as McLeod (1995), have begun to look at the impact of protest paradigm coverage on attitudes toward protest in general. Again, while this single-exposure study found only minimal effects on protest utility, we know little about the long-term impact of repeated exposures to protest coverage. Complaints about public apathy are bountiful; participation rates are chronically low. Willingness to participate, not just in protests but in all forms of political expression, is the product of a lifetime of influence from various socializing agents. Similarly, attitudes toward various forms of participation and those who participate are also the product of long-term socialization. Experiments conducted by Shoemaker (1982) and McLeod (1995) have demonstrated effects of short-term exposure to single media messages. From this type of research, important questions emerge: How consonant is media coverage of protest across groups and contexts? and What is the long-term societal impact of coverage on participation and attitudes toward protest as a form of participation?

Positive social change is something that is often initiated from outside the dominant social institutions. Government agencies, business corporations and religious and educational institutions are notoriously resistant to change. It is important for a progressive society to have a vibrant, active populace that encourages challenges to the status quo. The media are also supposed to play a role as a change agent. Unfortunately, as numerous studies from the mass communication literature have shown, the media all too often end up protecting the status quo. Moreover, the literature shows that the media act to constrain other groups, such as social protesters, who attempt to effect social change, especially when the protest groups become more extremist and militant. Gitlin (1977) argues that the nature of media coverage of social protest "fragments" social consciousness and stunts social change.

The communicative acts approach provides a point of departure for investigating the social control function of the media. It sidesteps the problem of defining social norms and deviance. Rather than trying to develop some a priori definition of what is normal, and what constitutes deviation from the norm, the communicative acts approach begins by focusing on the communicated message. Any attempt to communicate what is normal and what is abnormal represents an act of social control. Of course, the power of that controlling act is determined by the extent to which the communicator can control incentives and sanctions. Regardless, the first task for communication researchers should be to identify social control mechanisms. On the basis of those observations, researchers can establish common patterns of control. From there, it may be possible to examine the power that these messages have over individuals and groups, and ultimately over society as a whole.

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