The Neglect of Power in Recent Framing Research

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This article provides a critique of recent developments in research examining media frames and their influence. We contend that a number of trends in framing research have neglected the relationship between media frames and broader issues of political and social power. This neglect is a product of a number of factors, including conceptual problems in the definition of frames, the inattention to frames sponsorship, the failure to examine framing contests within wider political and social contexts, and the reduction of framing to a form of media effects. We conclude that framing research needs to be linked to the political and social questions regarding power central to the media hegemony thesis, and illustrate this focus by exploring how framing research can contribute to an understanding of the interaction between social movements and the news media.

Examinations of the production, character, and influence of news stories represent an enduring focus of media scholarship. A variety of approaches, including gatekeeping, agenda setting, organizational studies of news work, and analyses of news bias, have explored either the gathering of news or journalism's political role. In recent decades, a rapidly expanding research literature on news frames has sought to provide a comprehensive perspective on the production, reception, and influence of news texts.

This article provides a critique of recent developments in research examining media frames and their influence. We contend that a number of trends in framing research have neglected the relationship between media frames and broader issues of political and social power. This neglect is a product of conceptual problems in the definition of frames, the inattention to frame sponsorship, the failure to examine framing contests within wider political and social contexts, and the reduction of framing to a form of media effects. In keeping with early sociological research on framing (Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978), we suggest that framing processes need to be examined within the contexts of the distribution of political and social power. We, therefore, call for the integration of framing research with the

media hegemony thesis. This integration would meet Entman's demand (1993, p. 58) that framing research contribute "to social theory in the largest sense."

Our discussion begins with a definition of frames and their significance. Given multiple conceptual approaches to framing, this discussion highlights our views on the central features necessary to produce a rich and heuristic perspective on framing. We then turn to conceptual problems in recent definitions of framing, which have severely diminished the scope of this concept. We also examine how recent approaches to framing neglect the importance of frame sponsorship, the resources available to sponsors, and how political and social contexts shape framing contests. Our analysis criticizes the increasing tendency to explore frames simply as content features that produce media effects. We subsequently explore how research on framing and hegemony could be enriched by further integration. The interaction between social movements and the news media highlights central questions relating to hegemony; we, therefore, review the opportunities and challenges confronting framing research in this area. This discussion outlines our proposals for new directions in framing research.

The effort here is not to provide an exhaustive review of the rapidly expanding research literature on framing, but to define some troubling weaknesses in recent framing research and to suggest ways to remedy these problems. An additional caveat needs to be highlighted. We recognize that the further integration of framing research with scholarship on the media hegemony thesis is one way to examine how power shapes the framing process; obviously, alternative approaches are possible. We are troubled, however, by recent perspectives on framing that evade a meaningful consideration of political and social power. A substantive approach to the origin, character, and influence of media frames must confront how the distribution of power shapes the construction and interpretation of these frames.

Defining Frames and Their Significance

The attraction of framing research for many scholars is its potential to link news texts to production and reception processes. Ideally, framing research examines how frames are sponsored by political actors, how journalists employ frames in the construction of news stories, how these stories articulate frames, and how audience members interpret these frames (Entman, 1991, 1993; Gamson, 1992; Reese, 2001). In a representative definition of this approach, Pan and Kosicki (1993, p. 57) concluded that "framing, therefore, may be studied as a strategy of constructing and processing news discourse or as a characteristic of the discourse itself."

Much of the research on framing has focused on the ways news stories articulate frames (Croteau, Hoynes, & Carragee, 1996; Entman & Rojecki, 1993; Gamson, 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980). Sensitive definitions of the framing process stress the role of frames in the social construction of meaning, a construction shaped by both producers and consumers of media frames.

Although specific characterizations of frames differ, meaningful definitions emphasize the ways in which frames organize news stories and other discourses

by their patterns of selection, emphasis, interpretation, and exclusion. In a frequently quoted definition, Entman (1993, p. 5) argued that "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described." Gamson and Modigliani (1989, p. 3) defined a frame as a "central organizing idea . . . for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue." In perhaps their most significant contribution to framing research, Tuchman (1978) and Gitlin (1980) linked Goffman's focus (1974) on how frames produce meanings and organize experience to broader structural and ideological processes involving journalists, their news organizations, and their sources.

Sensitive analyses of this process stress that journalistic framing of issues and events does not develop in a political vacuum; it is shaped by the frames sponsored by multiple social actors, including politicians, organizations, and social movements (Beckett, 1996; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). News stories, then, become a forum for framing contests in which political actors compete by sponsoring their preferred definitions of issues. A frame's ability to dominate news discourse depends on complex factors, including its sponsor's economic and cultural resources, its sponsor's knowledge of journalistic practices, these practices themselves, and a frame's resonance with broader political values. Given the practices of journalism and the significance of resources in the successful sponsoring of frames, framing contests routinely favor political elites (Gitlin, 1980; Kellner, 1990; Tuchman 1978).

Because journalists define issues over time and because sponsors often restructure their issue frames given changing political conditions, frames evolve, and particular frames may gain or lose prominence in the news media. Political elites, at times, absorb or co-opt frames advanced by challengers. These transformations highlight the construction of meaning over time and the framing contests that shape this construction (Gamson, 1992; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Snow & Benford, 1988). By ignoring the evolution of frames over time, some researchers have advanced a static conception of the framing process (Durham, 1998, for example).

An expanding literature also has examined the ways in which readers and viewers interpret these frames and the degree to which these frames shape audience understandings (Nelson & Kinder, 1996; Rhee, 1997; Shah, Domke, & Wackman, 1996). This research has documented that frames shape how readers and viewers interpret specific issues or events (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997; Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997; Sotirovic, 2000), attributions of responsibility (Iyengar, 1991, 1996), and evaluations of political action (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996).

At its best, this research has revealed the complexity of audience interpretations of news texts, revealing the degree to which these decodings are shaped by the complex interaction of media frames and personal experience (Gamson, 1992; Liebes, 1997; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). Consequently, Scheufele (1999) has proposed that framing research devote more attention to the individual frames employed by audience members in their interpretation of news texts.

In summary, adequate conceptualizations of the framing process highlight how framing involves the social construction of meaning. Because the distribution of

economic, political, and cultural resources shapes frame sponsorship and framing contests, studying the construction of reality through framing necessarily involves an examination of power.

Conceptual Problems in the Definition of Frames

Multiple problems have surfaced in how researchers define frames. Some studies employ the concept only in a metaphoric sense, whereas others reduce frames to story topics, attributes, or issue positions. Because of their limited scope, these definitions divorce media frames from the context in which they are produced, including the influence of power on frame production. We find this separation troubling, given that the initial applications of this concept to news directly linked framing to power and ideology in a broad sense (Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978).

Some content studies of news simply employ the concept of framing in a metaphoric sense, describing frames as broad definitions of an issue or event. These studies may reveal how journalists portray specific issues or how news stories communicate risk, but they remain divorced from the central concerns of framing research as outlined in our preceding discussion (Coleman, 1995; Goshorn & Gandy, 1995; Parisi, 1997). These studies employ the term "frame" with little or no reference to its theoretical and substantive implications.

Other studies reduce frames to story topics or themes (Powers & Andsager 1999; Rhee, 1997). For example, Miller, Andsager, and Riechert (1998) identified 28 "frames," including crime, welfare, and the economy. These are story topics, not frames, because they categorize news stories by their subject. In contrast, frames construct particular meanings concerning issues by their patterns of emphasis, interpretation, and exclusion. The conflation of frames with story topics occurred despite the researchers' discussion of Entman's perspective on framing. Indeed, given the shortcomings of Miller et al.'s approach to frames, their study can be viewed more appropriately as a continuation of scholarship on the influence of press releases on news content (VanSlyke Turk, 1988), rather than as a contribution to framing research. These two traditions can be merged, but only if an application of framing to the former approach employs a meaningful definition of frames.

Reducing frames to story topics also characterizes framing research inspired by the agenda-setting perspective. McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, and Rey (1997) claimed that framing is the second level of agenda setting. They contend that "[b]oth the selection of objects for attention and the selection of attributes for thinking about these objects are powerful agenda-setting roles" (p. 704). The definition of frames within this tradition, however, differs considerably from past and, in our view, richer definitions of this concept.

For example, Ghanem (1997) and Goodman (1997) defined one element of frames as the topic of the news item. Similarly, McCombs et al. (1997) distinguished between the media agenda of substantive attributes of political candidates and the agenda of affective attributes of candidates. The former refers to descriptions of the candidates' personalities, their issue positions, and their quali-

fications, whereas the latter refers to positive, negative, and neutral characterizations of the candidates by the news media. This approach reduces frames to topics and attributes, ignoring the issues raised by more meaningful definitions of framing. Paradoxically, these definitions are routinely cited and then ignored in framing research informed by the agenda-setting perspective.

The reduction of frames to story topics, attributes, or issue positions ignores the ways in which frames construct particular meanings and how they advance specific ways of seeing issues. This reduction also neglects how particular frames apply to multiple issues, and how a single issue position can be a product of more than one frame. Two examples help to clarify the distinction between this broader perspective on framing and the approach taken by agenda-setting researchers.

A potential application of the agenda-setting perspective on framing to coverage of American foreign policy from the aftermath of World War II to the Soviet Union's dissolution might identify frames in terms of the nations examined (Korea, Vietnam, El Salvador, for example), neglecting that the ideological character of the Cold War frame informed news coverage of American policies in many nations across 4 decades. Reducing frames to story topics also ignores that conflicting frames may appear in stories on the same issue. Hallin (1987) documented that reportage on El Salvador often was characterized by both the Cold War frame and a competing human rights frame.

Similarly, framing research informed by an agenda-setting perspective would identify nuclear power as a frame or story topic and characterize pronuclear power or antinuclear power positions as particular frames on this topic. This approach, however, neglects how frames construct the very meaning of nuclear power as an issue. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) identified multiple frames that articulate antinuclear power viewpoints, but these frames differ in how they define the problem and how they would remedy it. The "not cost effective frame" advances a pragmatic position against nuclear power based on its excessive cost, whereas the "soft paths frame" stresses the danger of nuclear technology and calls for the development of ecologically safe sources of energy. An issue position can be informed by multiple, indeed conflicting, frames. Benford (1993) advanced this perspective in his analysis of framing disputes within the nuclear disarmament movement. To reduce frames to issue positions neglects how issues are defined.

The difficulties evident in how agenda-setting researchers have approached framing are linked to broader problems in this tradition. McCombs and Shaw's claim (1993) that framing is an extension of the agenda-setting process ignored the very different origins and focus of agenda-setting and framing research (Maher, 2001). Agenda-setting scholarship represents a continuation of media effects research, and its prominence as a tradition reflects a disaffection with the limited effects model. In contrast, framing research originates from the sociological research of Goffman (1974) and the media sociology of Tuchman and Gitlin, both of whom focused on the ways in which frames informed news production and on the ideological implications of framing. Tucker (1998, p. 143) ignored the differences in the origin and development of these two perspectives when she claimed that media researchers "have employed the concepts of framing and frame analysis most often as an extension of the agenda-setting model of public issue formation."

Furthermore, the problems in how agenda-setting researchers define frames parallel the difficulties in how these researchers traditionally have defined political issues. By describing issues in broad terms, such as "the economy" or "the environment," the agenda-setting tradition advances a perspective "too sterile to allow for thorough inquiry into the nature and evolution of controversial issues as treated by the media" (Kosicki, 1994, p. 104). The very same problem now characterizes the definition of frames within the agenda-setting tradition.

By identifying frames as little more than story topics, attributes, or issue positions, some contemporary approaches to framing neglect the ideological nature and consequences of the framing process as well as the power relationships that influence that process. Framing research that ignores the ways in which frames construct meanings and the interests served by those meanings deprives the concept of its theoretical and substantive significance.

The Neglect of Frame Sponsorship and Its Influence on Framing Contests

Researchers commonly refer to the multiple, at times conflicting, frames in news stories, but frequently fail to trace these frames back to specific sponsors or to consider the economic and cultural resources available to sponsors to promote frames. We contend that these resources are central to the ability of a particular frame to enter news discourse and, more significantly, to dominate it.

Some studies neglect the process of frame sponsorship entirely (McCombs et al., 1997; Sotirovic, 2000; Turner & Allen, 1997). They focus exclusively on the frames emphasized in news texts and, in some cases, on their influence. These studies take news texts as a given, neglecting the degree to which journalistic discourse is shaped by external sources, including elites, advocates, and movements. This research runs the risk, by default or implication, of exaggerating the degree of journalistic autonomy in the framing process. Journalists frame issues, but their interpretations are shaped, in part, by discourses external to news organizations.

Other studies do acknowledge the process of frame sponsorship and trace media frames to particular social actors. Researchers frequently cite Gurevitch and Levy's (1985, p. 18) observation that news stories are "a site on which various social groups, institutions, and ideologies struggle over the definition and construction of social reality."

Some studies, however, provide a limited exploration of frame sponsorship. They reduce sponsorship to the efforts of elites, ignoring the framing efforts of social movements and marginalized communities (Nelson & Kinder, 1996; Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997). Other researchers, relying exclusively on an analysis of sourcing patterns to identify frame sponsorship, do not assess the economic and cultural resources available to sponsors and how these resources influence framing contests (Liebler & Bendix, 1996; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). This research also does not account for frames that are advocated by interest groups and social movements but fail to influence mainstream news discourse because their

sponsors lack resources. A comprehensive approach to frame sponsorship needs to examine an issue culture in terms of frames that influence or fail to influence reportage.

The economic and cultural assets of elites provide significant resources for shaping journalistic frames. The centralization of news gathering at institutions and the tendency of reporters to grant more credibility to official sources than to challengers increase the ability of the powerful to influence journalism's symbolic world (Gitlin, 1980; Ryan, 1991). Tuchman (1978), in particular, provided impressive evidence that routine practices used in producing news, including the placement of reporters at major political institutions, reinforce the existing distribution of power in American society.

A meaningful examination of frame sponsorship acknowledges that access to news as a political resource is distributed inequitably within American society and that this inequality has profound implications for the framing of issues. In Entman's words (1993, p. 53), frames in news stories reveal "the imprint of power" because they register "the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text." The character of framing contests and the ability of a particular frame to dominate news discourse even when opposing frames are present owe much to the resources available to and employed by sponsors.

Reducing the Framing Process to the Study of Media Effects

In recent years, there has been an increasing tendency to isolate frames as a characteristic of news texts in an effort to trace their influence on audiences. Within this approach, framing research becomes part of the wider tradition of media effects scholarship. Despite differences in how they define and operationalize the concept of frames, studies by Rhee (1997), Iorio and Huxman (1996), and McCombs et al. (1997) examined framing almost exclusively in terms of audience effects. They explored the degree to which media frames shape interpretations of particular issues.

This tendency represents a considerable narrowing of the framing process by ignoring why certain frames dominate news texts and others do not. Although studying the influence of frames on audiences has significance, an exclusive focus on audience effects neglects the process of frame sponsorship and the nature of news work and its influence on framing. It also often provides only a cursory examination of the frames that dominate news stories. We share Reese's concern (2001, p. 9) that "plugging in framing as just one more content element, against which to measure effects, risks continuing to ignore basic power questions." A determination of the influence of news frames remains incomplete without accounting for their origin and the character of the framing contests conducted both within and outside of the news media (for an example of a study examining the framing process, including audience interpretations of issues, within these broader contexts, see Gamson, 1992).

Given these considerations, research on the influence of media frames should not devote exclusive attention to the information-processing strategies used by

individuals in their interpretation of news stories. A more meaningful approach to framing effects examines the media

> as both an agent and venue. That is, media professionals shape the way we think and talk about public policy issues, and at the same time, mass media are a site for various actors to contest the ways in which we think and talk about policy issues. (Kosicki & Pan, 1997, p. 8)

Similarly, despite his desire to develop framing as a theory of media effects, Scheufele (1999) underscored the need to examine the process of frame construction or building.

Our concern with recent trends in research examining the influence of media frames reflects the long-standing cultural studies critique of the media effects tradition (Hall, 1979; Morley, 1980). This critique has focused on the tendency to take media content as a given in an effort to isolate particular content characteristics as a means to determine media influence; it also has faulted research for examining media effects without an extensive consideration of political and social power.

We should emphasize here that we are not opposed to studies exploring the influence of media frames on public perceptions of issues and events; indeed, we view these studies as an essential part of a comprehensive understanding of the framing process. Our objection centers on the way in which some studies have narrowly circumscribed their consideration of the framing process and its influence.

Frames, Hegemony, and Political and Social Power

The origin of framing research in media sociology directly linked the framing process to the distribution of social and political power in American society (Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). Subsequent studies have explored the connection between media frames and ideological hegemony (Ashley & Olson, 1998; Carragee, 1991; Hallin, 1987; Herzog & Shamir, 1994; Kellner, 1990). Much of contemporary framing research, unfortunately, has ignored this scholarship.

In contrast, we call for further integration of the framing and hegemony perspectives. In doing so, we reject mechanistic perspectives that reduce hegemony to the unproblematic distribution and acceptance of an integrated dominant ideology. Simultaneously, we seek to avoid difficulties in past efforts to combine these perspectives. Rachlin (1988) and Goldman and Rajagopal (1991), for example, provided fairly effective discussions of hegemony, but their analyses of framing remained underdeveloped. In her analysis of reporting on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Gulf War, Liebes (1997) provided a better illustration of the benefits derived from examining how news frames contribute to hegemony. She, however, did little to locate her study within framing research and outline debates within this tradition.

Hegemony, a concept derived from Gramsci (1971), refers to the process by which ruling elites secure consent to the established political order through the

production and diffusion of meanings and values. According to Gramsci, dominant groups and classes struggle to maintain their ideological hegemony, resistance occurs, and hegemonic ideology evolves over time as elites seek to diffuse and incorporate political challenges. Consequently, within Gramsci's work, there remains a recurring emphasis on ideological struggle. In keeping with this emphasis, Williams (1977, p. 112) pointed out that a "lived hegemony is always a process. . . . It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modified. It also is continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own."

Essential to the ideological struggle to establish and maintain the legitimacy of the existing political order is the production of meanings and values by cultural institutions, including churches, schools, and the media. This emphasis on cultural "work" distinguishes Gramsci's framework from orthodox Marxist traditions, which stressed economic determinism (for more detailed discussions of hegemony, see Artz & Murphy, 2000; Carragee, 1993; Hall, 1979; Lewis, 1999; Williams, 1977).

Following Gramsci, considerable scholarship has focused on the news media's ideological role. Some of this scholarship has integrated the concepts of framing and hegemony. This integration has produced multiple benefits, benefits ignored by some contemporary trends in framing research. Most significantly, the media hegemony thesis directly connects the framing process to considerations of power and to examinations of the relationship between the news media and political change. Studying the framing process within the context of the production, distribution, and interpretation of hegemonic meanings enables researchers to chart the relationship between news and the distribution of power in American society.

At the same time, the framing concept, including arguments about the influence of power asymmetries on frame sponsorship and framing contests, has enriched some scholarship on hegemony. It has done so by providing a specific means to examine how the news media construct ideological meanings largely consistent with the interests of powerful elites. Other research on hegemony has suffered given its broad claims, its overly theoretical character, and its failure to successfully operationalize the concept (Binder, 1993; Condit, 1994; Grossberg, 1984). These abstract perspectives transform hegemony into little more than "a label that substitutes for explanation rather than providing it" (Gamson, 1985, p. 614). These weaknesses have become manifest in how some researchers examining hegemony have explored news texts and audience interpretations of these texts.

In a representative criticism of studies examining news and ideology, Graber (1989, p. 148) concluded that media "content needs to be examined far more systematically to assess the nature of ideological slants." Similarly, Goldman and Rajagopal (1991, p. xi) noted that studies examining the ideology of news texts often devote insufficient attention to "what is said and how it is said." Determining which frames dominate particular news texts would provide the systematic assessment of content demanded by these and other critics. Frames, as imprints of power, are central to the production of hegemonic meanings.

By linking framing and reasoning devices to meaning construction within news stories, Gamson and Lasch (1983) provided a useful means to guide the analysis of frames and, by extension, the articulation of hegemonic ideology through fram-

ing. They contended that the framing of issues depends upon specific devices: metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images. Reasoning devices—roots (causal interpretations of issues), consequences, and appeals to principle—"provide justifications or reasons for a general position" (p. 399). Detailed examinations of framing and reasoning devices in journalistic discourse allow for an informed discussion of the relationship between news and ideology.

Examination of the relationship between hegemony and framing also draws attention to the uncontested realm of media discourse; within this realm, particular frames so dominate the discourse that they are taken as common sense or as "transparent descriptions of reality, not as interpretations" (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992, p. 382). Such dominance, of course, is a result of considerable ideological work. Beckett (1996, p. 57) succinctly reminded us that "both the presence and absence of struggles over the signification [of issues], then, are best understood as the product of agency." Agency, too, causes some issues and their framing to move from the uncontested realm to the contested realm of news discourse; the efforts of challengers, including social movements, cast doubt on frames that were once seen as ideologically neutral reflections of the social world (for discussions of this complex process, see Gamson, 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Hallin, 1987).

Because of these challenges and because elite consensus on issues sometimes collapses, news stories may contain ideological inconsistencies and contradictions. This underscores the need to abandon mechanistic definitions of hegemony. Binder (1993) and Dahlgren (1982), for example, highlighted the news media's production of an integrated and relatively consistent dominant ideology, ignoring the fact that oppositional frames sometimes are present in news texts. Gitlin's discussion (1980) of the dynamic character of hegemony stands in sharp contrast to these studies.

Research on audience interpretations of media frames also can enrich scholarship on hegemony. Whereas many content studies have revealed hegemonic meanings in news stories, detailed analyses exploring interpretations of these texts by readers or viewers remain scarce. This imbalance results in the privileging of textual properties over audience activity and, in its most extreme form, reduces audience members to passive receivers of ideologically closed texts.

Research needs to examine how and why some audience members resist and others accept hegemonic frames. This research should focus on the complex interactions between the dominant meanings within news texts, the class and cultural positions of the readers and viewers attending to these texts, the discourses and codes associated with these positions, and the influence of these discourses and codes on audience interpretations. Influenced by Hall's encoding-decoding model (1980), the expanding cultural studies scholarship on audience interpretations of news has provided insight on these issues (Dahlgren, 1988; Lewis, 1985; Richardson & Corner, 1986). Morley's work (1992, 1980) is exemplary because of his careful appraisal of the factors shaping the interaction between media texts and audiences.

Given the tendency of some research within cultural studies to overstate the ability of audience members to reject dominant meanings within texts (Fiske,

1987; Steiner, 1988), researchers should particularly evaluate audience resistance to hegemonic frames. Research on oppositional decoding needs to distinguish between resistance to central hegemonic frames that challenge the existing social order and interpretations that contradict textual meanings divorced from or remote to significant political issues. Oppositional decoding or resistance occurs only when readers or viewers reject or substantially modify frames linked to issues of political and social power. Without analytical distinctions of this kind, the concept of oppositional decoding remains far too generalized, and it inadvertently trivializes that which it seeks to affirm by avoiding distinctions between insubstantial and substantial rejections of textual meanings. Forms of resistance without a connection to broader political knowledge or action have little or no consequence for the established social order (for extended discussions of this issue, see Budd, Entman, & Steinman, 1990; Carragee, 1990, 1996).

There should be scholarly debate concerning the degree to which specific frames are linked to central issues of power. Considerable debate also should focus on what kind of rejections of particular frames constitute resistance. These debates are unavoidable, indeed essential. The current evasion of these distinctions limits our understanding of how hegemonic frames are accepted and resisted.

The subjects raised by the integration of framing research with scholarship on hegemony go far beyond narrow definitions of frames as story topics, attributes, or issue positions. Most significantly, the integration of these perspectives emphasizes that the framing process must be understood within the context of political power.

Frames, Movements, and Political and Social Power

The interaction between social movements and the news media provides a particularly fruitful means to evaluate the relationship between framing processes and hegemony. Social movements are among the premier challengers of hegemonic values. Their ability to challenge hegemony is tied directly to framing processes and to their effectiveness in influencing news discourse. The interaction between movements and the news media raises central concerns, including the news media's relationship to political authority and the character of news coverage of challengers demanding change. In short, the study of movement-media interaction necessarily involves considerations of power.

Focusing research on the relationship between social movements and the news media is enhanced by past scholarship on this topic, including studies that have examined this interaction by applying a framing perspective to it (Ashley & Olson, 1998; Carragee, 1991; Gitlin, 1980; McAdam, 1996; Tuchman, 1978; Zald, 1996). Some of these studies have focused on how the news media delegitimized oppositional movements through framing, thereby affirming hegemonic meanings. These studies take on added significance because of the recurring ideological patterns they document in reporting on disparate social movements, including the women's movement, the New Left, the labor movement, and the West German Green Party.

Gitlin's study (1980) provided a representative example of research demonstrating how news frames influence the self-definition of movements (see also Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). In addition, an expanding literature in sociology is devoted to framing processes within social movements (Benford, 1997; Carroll & Ratner, 1996; Snow & Benford, 1992; Williams, 1995). This literature should inform future research on movement-media interaction.

We share Gamson and Wolfsfeld's view (1993, p. 117) that movement-media interaction is best understood as a "struggle over framing." Often emerging from marginalized groups, movements seek to advance frames in the news media to highlight their concerns, mobilize support, and validate their existence as political actors. Research should examine how movements construct meanings through framing and how, at times, these meanings challenge hegemonic ideology. Consequently, framing represents the signifying work of oppositional movements engaged in counterhegemonic politics (Carroll & Ratner, 1996).

The production of frames by movements is often ignored. Framing scholarship within media research and cultural studies primarily has devoted attention to how news organizations have employed frames in their definitions of social movements. Frame sponsorship and the interaction between the news media and social movements have received far less attention. Owing to their textual emphasis, studies frequently have identified frames exclusively as content features, neglecting that frames represent practical accomplishments for both movements and news organizations. Simply put, more research has been devoted to frames than to framing (Benford, 1997).

Our emphasis on framing as a social process and as a practical accomplishment reasserts themes central to Goffman's perspective (1974) on framing. His detailed examination of everyday social interaction, including its informal rules, highlighted how social actors organize experience and define situations through framing processes. For Goffman, however, the frames guiding social interaction are fragile and vulnerable, at times open to challenge. Gamson (1985) pointed out that Goffman's perspective has particular relevance to micromobilization processes within social movements given their face-to-face character. Analyses of focused encounters in movements relating to micromobilization, for example, recruitment meetings and encounters with allies, provide a means to study framing as a social process.

Future research should focus on how frames are constructed by the news media and movements, how asymmetries in power influence the ability of groups to influence news, and what this means for the nature and evolution of framing contests. These processes shape the context in which news texts are interpreted by individuals. While news audiences are engaged in the construction of meaning, their constructions are set within and, in part, determined by these wider contexts.

Movements principally challenge hegemonic meanings through the production of collective action frames (for discussions of these frames, see Snow & Benford, 1992; Williams & Benford, 2000). Future research, therefore, should devote particular attention to how movements develop these frames and how journalists report and audiences interpret them. Gamson (1992) identified three dimensions

of collective action frames: an injustice component (an identification of a harm produced by human action), an agency component (a belief that it is possible to change conditions through collective action), and an identity component (the identification of a specific adversary). Despite their central role in meaning construction within movements and in challenging hegemony, collective action frames have received scant attention in media and cultural studies scholarship on movement-media interaction. The failure of cultural studies to explore this concept is troubling given this tradition's interest in ideology and resistance to hegemony.

Because asymmetries in power influence the framing process, social movements experience considerable difficulty in shaping news coverage in ways consistent with their collective action frames. Despite these difficulties, movements, at times, do manage to advance some elements of their collective action frames into media discourse (Gamson, 1992). Researchers, therefore, need to examine how readers and viewers interpret the traces or elements of collective action frames in news texts. Past studies have suggested that interpretations of these texts would be shaped by many factors, including the degree to which audience members have had past access to oppositional discourses and frames. Given Gamson's findings (1992), we also expect that oppositional decoding of hegemonic news texts that exclude movement frames would be based upon the activation of some elements of collective action frames by an individual. This would occur in circumstances where a viewer or reader has had prior exposure, through mediated channels or interpersonal networks, to these frames.

In identifying the internal and external factors shaping a movement's ability to develop collective action frames and to influence the news agenda, researchers would benefit from an examination of the sociological literature on social movements in general and the framing processes within movements in particular. A review of scholarship on media-movement interaction reveals, however, the relative isolation of both mass communication and sociological research on this topic. Zald (1992) properly criticizes most sociologists for their inattention to communication research on the relationship between the news media and social movements. A corresponding inattention to scholarship within sociology characterizes far too much of mass communication and cultural studies research on movement-media interaction.

Factors internal to social movements significantly influence their ability to construct effective collective action frames. Media scholars, for example, need to realize that a movement represents "a field of actors, not a unified entity" (Gamson & Meyer, 1996, p. 283). The heterogeneity of movements makes the development of collective action frames a complex process, a process marked by conflict and negotiation. Framing contests are common within social movements, but they are frequently ignored by researchers interested in the interaction between movements and the news media (for discussions of framing contests within movements, see Benford, 1993; Marullo, Pagnucco, & Smith, 1996). This suggests the need for particular caution in advancing claims about a singular, unified movement framing of an issue.

The resources of movements need to be considered, too, but researchers often ignore how economic and cultural capital shape frame sponsorship and framing

contests. Therefore, much could be gained by linking the framing tradition to the resource mobilization perspective in sociology (for an introduction to this perspective, see McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Zald, 1992). This perspective draws attention to the significance of organizational structures, communication networks, and resources in mobilizing and sustaining collective action.

External factors are important, too. Movements trying to promote collective action frames and challenge hegemonic meanings are influenced by the framing initiatives of multiple actors, including the state, elites, and countermovements (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996; Zald, 1996). The framing efforts of countermobilizing elites who seek to limit political challenges have received little research attention. Haydu (1999) provided a telling case study of how elites mobilized their resources and formulated frames in response to the collective action of workers in the late 19th century. Similarly, Gitlin (1980) revealed how the political right and the Johnson administration mobilized to limit the New Left's appeal in the 1960s.

A review of the sociological literature on framing also indicates the need for studies of movement-media interaction over time because of the evolving character of social movements, hegemony, and framing contests (for illustrations of the benefits of studying framing contests over time, see Gamson, 1992; Gitlin, 1980; Marullo, Pagnucco, & Smith, 1996). Formal social movement organizations often dominate in the later stages of a movement's evolution, and this has implications for framing strategies. For example, Donati (1996) provided impressive evidence that the increased attention and resources devoted to shaping news coverage by the Italian environmental movement produced a centralized and professionalized organizational structure, diminishing the movement's participatory character and moderating its framing of environmental issues.

The detailed study of the interaction between social movements and the news media represents a rich forum for examinations of the relationship between framing processes and political and social power. Research on this topic offers a means to explore both resistance to and acceptance of hegemonic frames.

Conclusion

We have sought to contribute to framing research by identifying weaknesses in this tradition and by proposing an agenda for future research.

By failing to consider political and social power adequately, some contemporary trends in framing research severely diminish the scope of scholarship on the production, character, and influence of media frames. These trends provide a theoretically and conceptually impoverished definition of framing in several ways. They reduce frames to story topics, attributes, and issue positions, and neglect frame sponsorship and the asymmetries in power that influence the ability of sponsors to shape the news agenda. They also isolate frames as content features to study their influence and thereby neglect why particular frames dominate news discourse.

We contend that further integration of framing scholarship with research on hegemony would benefit both traditions. Framing processes are central to both

the production of hegemonic meanings and to the development of counterhegemonic ways of seeing. A careful integration of these perspectives allows researchers to study why some audience members resist and others accept hegemonic news frames, while avoiding a mechanistic approach to hegemony and an inadequate definition of cultural resistance. Framing research, informed by the media hegemony thesis, should devote particular attention to the interaction between social movements and the news media. Within this context, framing research confronts significant questions focusing on journalism's relationship to political authority and to demands for change.

Exploring the interaction between the news media and social movements represents an opportunity to examine not only frames embedded in news texts, but also the process of framing within movements and news organizations. This attention to framing as a social process remains consistent with Goffman's emphasis (1974) on framing's role in meaning construction. Ethnographic examinations of how journalists and movement activists construct frames would enrich our knowledge of framing as a social process. Our understanding of framing processes within news organizations owes much to Tuchman's insightful work (1978), but her field studies were conducted in the 1960s and 1970s in a news environment far different from today's.

Analyzing the interaction between the news media and social movements helps to expose ideological struggle and contestation. Research should focus in particular on collective action frames because they sustain movements and because they are a principal means by which movements challenge hegemonic ideology. Studies need to examine how social movements develop these frames, how journalists evaluate and define them, and how readers and viewers interpret them. The neglect of these frames in media and cultural studies research on both framing and social movements represents a significant limitation in this scholarship. A dynamic approach to framing and hegemony also needs to consider the evolution of framing contests over time and the countermobilization of elites when confronted with ideological challenges organized by social movements.

Given the scope of our recommendations for future scholarship, we believe that researchers can best address our proposals through collaborative efforts. These efforts should embrace multiple methods, including ethnography, focus group research, content and discourse analysis, and survey research. Teams of researchers should explore how movements construct collective action frames regarding a particular issue, how elites frame the same issue, and how and why journalists define these frames in their reporting over time. The research, therefore, would address both the framing process and the frames articulated in multiple discourses, keeping in focus the influence of power and resources on these complex processes. This approach would allow for a contextual evaluation of audience interpretations of news stories.

Despite weaknesses in some recent approaches, framing research has the potential to link news texts to broader social and ideological contexts, including production and reception processes. These contexts and processes, however, are shaped by the distribution of political and social power. The challenge of framing research is to study the complex ways power informs frame sponsorship, the

articulation of frames within news stories, and the interpretation of these frames by audience members.

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