

# Framing Class, Vicarious Living, and Conspicuous Consumption

*Diana Kendall*

The world leadership qualities of the USA, once so prevalent, are fading faster than the polar ice caps. We once set the standard for industrial might, for the advanced state of our physical infrastructure, and for the quality of our citizens' lives. All are experiencing significant decline ... At a time when a college education is needed more than ever to establish and maintain a middle-class standard of living, America's young people are moving in exactly the wrong direction ... Instead of exercising the appropriate mental muscles, we're allowing ourselves to become a nation of nitwits, obsessed with the coming and going of Lindsay Lohan and increasingly oblivious to crucially important societal issues that are all but screaming for attention .... We no longer know how to put our people to work. We read less and less and write like barbarians. We've increasingly turned our backs on the very idea of hard-won excellence while flinging open the doors to decadence and decline. No wonder Lady Gaga and Snooki from "Jersey Shore" are cultural "heroes".<sup>1</sup>

These words from *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert in a piece titled "Putting Our Brains on Hold" may sound harsh; however, for many years, Herbert has framed his articles and blogs to call attention to numerous pressing social problems worldwide, including vast and growing economic

---

D. Kendall (✉)  
Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA

inequality, high rates of un- and underemployment, and massive homelessness and poverty. It is no surprise, therefore, that Herbert's words have become more strident as he has wearied of being a lone voice in the wilderness calling for significant changes before these major economic and social problems overcome us. The first edition of *Framing Class*, published in 2005, argued that the media often trivialize heavy topics, such as class and social inequality. Clearly, journalists like Herbert are the exception to this statement, and more media have shifted their framing of class-related articles and entertainment programs as the USA has experienced persistent economic problems in the 2000s.

The first edition of *Framing Class* also posited that the media encourage overconsumption among people of all classes, particularly those who seek to emulate the rich—whether or not they can afford to do so. Chapter 7 of *Framing Class* began with a TV critic's statement that Paris Hilton, a wealthy celebrity and occasional reality TV star, like others who are “famous for being famous,” could take “the heaviest of topics and make them weightless as a social X-ray.”<sup>2</sup> That critic's point was well made: media representations of inequality frequently make light of the problems of the poor and working class while emphasizing the values and virtues of the middle class and celebrating the luxurious lifestyles and material possessions of those in the top tier of the social hierarchy, regardless of how they may have accumulated these possessions. Previously, I placed most of the blame on journalists, entertainment writers, and web content providers who seemed insensitive or oblivious to class-based inequality:

Rather than providing a meaningful analysis of inequality and showing realistic portrayals of life in various social classes, the media either play class differences for laughs or sweep the issue of class under the rug so that important distinctions are rendered invisible. By ignoring class or trivializing it, the media involve themselves in a social construction of reality that rewards the affluent and penalizes the working class and the poor.<sup>3</sup>

Although my newer data largely confirm this statement, the Great Recession of the 2000s, for which there was no end in sight as of 2011, is apparently affecting how some journalists, bloggers, and entertainment writers represent the growing economic problems of individuals and the nation as a whole.

Throughout *Framing Class*, I have provided many examples of how the media frame class and the messages these framing devices may convey to audiences. In this chapter I look at the sociological implications of how framing contributes to our understanding of class and leads us either to try to emulate other people or to take the ostrich approach, sticking our heads in the sand and ignoring the everyday realities that surround us. First, we look at two questions: How do media audiences understand and act upon popular culture images or frames? Do we understand class differently today because of these frames?

### MEDIA FRAMING AND THE PERFORMANCE OF CLASS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

In a mass-mediated culture such as ours, the media do not simply mirror society; rather, they help to shape it and to create cultural perceptions.<sup>4</sup> The blurring between what is real and what is not encourages people to emulate the upper classes and shun the working class and the poor. Television shows, magazines, and newspapers sell the idea that the only way to get ahead is to identify with the rich and powerful and to live vicariously through them. From sitcoms to reality shows, the media encourage ordinary people to believe that they may rise to fame and fortune; they too can be the next winner of the lottery or *American Idol*. Constantly bombarded by stories about the lifestyles of the rich and famous, viewers feel a sense of intimacy with elites, with whom they have little or no contact in their daily lives.<sup>5</sup> According to social critic bell hooks, we over-identify with the wealthy because the media socialize us to believe that people in the upper classes are better than we are. The media also suggest that we owe no allegiance to people in our own class or to those who are less fortunate.<sup>6</sup>

Many people's reading and viewing habits and their patterns of consumption reflect vicarious living—that is, the tendency to watch how other individuals live rather than to experience life for ourselves—through media representations of wealth and success. According to hooks, television promotes hedonistic consumerism:

Largely through marketing and advertising, television promoted the myth of the classless society, offering on one hand images of an American dream fulfilled wherein any and everyone can become rich and on the other suggesting that the lived experience of this lack of class hierarchy was expressed by our equal right to purchase anything we could afford.<sup>7</sup>

As hooks suggests, equality does not exist in contemporary society, but media encourage audiences to view themselves as having an “equal right” to purchase items that will somehow render them equal to people above them in the social-class hierarchy. However, the catch is that we must actually be able to afford these purchases. Manufacturers and the media have dealt with this problem by offering relatively cheap products that buyers can purchase without actually having the money to pay for them.<sup>8</sup>

The media’s framing of stories about class does make a difference in how we think about other people and how we spend our money. Media frames constitute a mental shortcut (schema) that helps us formulate our thoughts.

### THE UPPER CLASSES: AFFLUENCE AND CONSUMERISM MAKE PEOPLE HAPPY

Although some media frames show the rich and famous in a negative manner, they still glorify the material possessions and lifestyles of the upper classes. Research has found that people who extensively watch television have exaggerated views of how wealthy most US residents are and of the material possessions they own. Studies have also found that extensive television viewing leads to higher rates of spending and lower savings, presumably because television stimulates consumer desires.<sup>9</sup>

For many years, most media framing of stories about the upper classes has been positive, ranging from consensus framing, which depicts the wealthy as being like everyone else, to admiration framing, which portrays them as generous, caring individuals. The frame most closely associated with rampant consumerism is emulation framing, which suggests that people in all classes should reward themselves with a few of the perks of the wealthy, such as a larger house, a more luxurious vehicle, or better jewelry. The writers of television shows like *Platinum Weddings*, *The Fabulous Life*, and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* rely heavily not only on admiration framing but on price-tag framing, according to which a person’s worth is measured by what he or she owns and how many assistants cater to his or her whims. In this world, the people with the most expensive limousines, yachts, and jets are declared the winners in life. Reality shows like *American Idol*, *America’s Got Talent*, and *The Apprentice* suggest that anyone can move up the class ladder and live like the rich if he or she displays the best looks, greatest talent, or sharpest entrepreneurial skills.

No wonder economist Juliet B. Schor finds that the overriding goal of children aged ten to thirteen is to get rich. In response to the statement “I want to make a lot of money when I grow up,” 63 percent of the children in Schor’s study agreed, whereas only 7 percent disagreed.<sup>10</sup>

Many adults who hope to live the good life simply plunge further into debt. Many reports show that middle- and working-class US consumers are incurring massive consumer debts as they purchase larger houses, more expensive vehicles, and many other items beyond their means. According to one analyst, media portrayals of excessive consumer spending and bombardment by credit card advertisements encourage people to increase their debt.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, some people with average incomes who aspire to the lives of luxury of the upper classes have instead found themselves spending their way into the poor house, joining members of the impoverished class. According to a Pew Research Center study, “Inside the Middle Class: Bad Times Hit the Good Life,” middle-income US-Americans have spent more and borrowed more since the 1980s, in large part for housing. Many families bought new single-family dwellings, which are about 50 percent larger than in the past, and existing houses were about 60 percent more expensive (in inflation-adjusted dollars) in 2008 than in the mid-1980s.<sup>12</sup> According to this study, increased consumerism, even by those who cannot afford it, relates to the vastly expanding supply of goods to purchase and services to desire:

Goods and services that didn’t exist a few decades ago—such as high definition television, high speed internet, and cable or satellite subscriptions—have become commonplace consumer items. And the costs of many of the anchors of a middle class lifestyle—not just housing, but medical care and college education—have risen more sharply than inflation.<sup>13</sup>

As working-class and middle-income people saw the rich grow increasingly wealthy and the income gap between the rich and everyone else continue to grow, until it was the highest it had been in thirty years, they found it extremely tempting to buy houses with adjustable-rate mortgages, which initially made the property affordable; then, monthly payments would spiral upward, making it impossible for owners to keep up with their mortgage payments and all the monthly expenses associated with the property.

As wealthy elites have publicly run afoul of the law and media coverage has intensified about financial tycoons’ improprieties and excessive spending, some journalists, late-night talk show hosts, cable TV network

talking heads, and social media bloggers have berated these so-called masters of the universe. Despite condemning the actions of unscrupulous individuals, however, many people still hold a grudging admiration for those who manage to accumulate the trappings of wealth and success, regardless of how they do so. Many corporate CEOs and financial executives, such as hedge-fund managers accused of civil or criminal offenses, have exited their organizations with golden parachutes—severance packages that amount to millions or billions in cash and stock options. Ironically, people view some scoundrels leaving such parachutes as winners because, in their own perverse way, they have achieved the American Dream, just not in the traditional manner. Media framing of stories about the wealthy and unscrupulous continues to exhibit grudging admiration, mixed with disdain, for the illegal actions of elites: the media spotlight highlights their prominence in society and vividly describes the lavish trappings of their success. Occasionally, when it looks like getting ahead is a game that only the already wealthy can play, people in other classes become angry about the exclusionary nature of the winner-takes-all society in which business as usual is an exclusive private club. Secretly, many people wish that they had the wealth and benefits of the upper classes without having to face some of the problems affluent people experience. According to a social analyst quoted in the *New York Times*:

There's always been envy and hatred toward the rich, but there was also a strong undercurrent of admiration that was holding these people up as a goal. This time it's different because it feels like it's a closed club and the rich have an unfair advantage ... But the same people who say that money is bad say that money is connected to their self-worth—and they wished they had it and you didn't.<sup>14</sup>

### THE POOR AND HOMELESS: “NOT ME!”—NEGATIVE ROLE MODELS IN THE MEDIA

The sharpest contrasts in media portrayals are between depictions of people in the upper classes and images of those at the bottom of the class structure. In the twenty-first century, social analysts like Barbara Ehrenreich have argued that it is possible to be “too poor to make the news.”<sup>15</sup> In the recession of the 2000s, many of the superrich made media headlines when they gave up their private jets; upper-middle-class individuals thought of

themselves as the “new poor” because they could not afford a new luxury vehicle every year. According to Ehrenreich, however, the already invisible poor became even more invisible in the recession, partly because they were seen as not having much to lose in the first place.

When the media do provide coverage of the poor and homeless, individuals in these categories are portrayed, at best, as deserving our sympathy on holidays or after disaster has struck. In these situations, those in the bottom classes are depicted as being temporarily down on their luck or as working hard to get out of their current situation but in need of public assistance. At worst, however, the poor are blamed for their own problems, and the homeless are stereotyped as bums, alcoholics, and drug addicts, caught in a hopeless downward spiral because of their individual pathological behavior.

For the most part, people at the bottom of the class hierarchy remain out of sight and out of mind for most media audiences. Thematic framing depicts the poor and homeless as “faceless” statistics in reports on poverty. Episodic framing highlights some problems of the poor but typically does not link their personal situations to such larger societal problems as limited educational opportunities, high unemployment rates, and jobs that pay depressingly low wages.

The poor do not fare well on television entertainment shows; writers typically present them as one-dimensional, bedraggled characters standing on a street corner holding a cardboard sign reading, “Need money for food.” When television writers tackle the issue of homelessness, they often portray lead characters (who usually are white and relatively affluent) as helpful people, while they depict the poor and homeless as deviants who might harm themselves or others. Hospital and crime dramas like *Grey’s Anatomy*, *House M.D.*, *CSI*, and *Law & Order*, as well as other network and cable series that frequently come and go within one or two seasons, consistently portray the poor and homeless as crazy, inebriated, or otherwise incompetent to provide key information to officials. Television reality shows like *Cops* go so far as to advertise that they provide “footage of debris from the bottom tiers of the urban social order.”<sup>16</sup> Such statements say a lot about how television producers, directors, and writers view (or would have us view) the lower classes.

From a sociological perspective, framing of stories about the poor and homeless contrasts starkly with that of stories about upper-class individuals and suggests that we should distance ourselves from “those people.” Such framing encourages us to view the poor and homeless as the Other, the outsider; the media show us little commonality between our lives and the experiences of people at the bottom of the class hierarchy. As a result, we

find it easy to buy into the dominant ideological construct that poverty is a problem of individuals, not of society as a whole, and we may feel justified in our rejection of the poor.<sup>17</sup>

### THE WORKING CLASS: HISTORICAL RELICS AND JOKES

As we have seen, the working class and working poor do not fare much better than the poor and homeless in media representations. Described as “labor,” working-class people are usually nothing more than faces in a crowd on television shows. The media portray those who produce goods and services as much less interesting than the people who excessively purchase them—a problem that can only intensify as more of the workers who make such products are thousands of miles away from the typical US consumer, in nations like China and India.<sup>18</sup>

Contemporary media coverage carries little information about the working class or its problems. Low wages, lack of benefits, and hazardous working conditions are considered boring and uninteresting topics, except on the public broadcasting networks or as an occasional segment on television “news shows” like *60 Minutes* or *20/20*, after some major case of worker abuse has been revealed. The most popular portrayal of the working class, caricature framing, depicts these people in negative ways, for instance, as idiots, white trash, buffoons, bigots, or slobs. Many television shows featuring working-class characters play on the idea that their clothing, manners, and speech patterns are inferior to those of the middle or upper classes. For example, working-class characters may compare themselves to the middle and upper classes by saying that they are not as “fancy as the rich people.” Sitcom writers have perpetuated working-class stereotypes, and a number of reality shows try to “improve” seemingly “ordinary” working-class people through exercise, surgery, fashion, and makeovers. TLC’s *American Chopper* features characters with tattoos—particularly a father and son duo who fight all the time—and participate in the rough-and-tumble blue-collar world of bikers, yet show great creativity when they create a new bike. *American Chopper* illustrates how working-class men may be perceived as macho while, at the same time, they produce custom bikes that sport a unique appearance and elaborate design.

Like their upper-class celebrity counterparts, so-called working-class comedians like Jeff Foxworthy have ridiculed the blue-collar lifestyle. They have also marketed products that make fun of the working class. Foxworthy’s website ([www.jefffoxworthy.com](http://www.jefffoxworthy.com)), for example, includes redneck figurines (“little



statues for inside the house”), redneck cookbooks, *Games Rednecks Play*, and calendars that make fun of the working class generally. Although some people see these items as humorous (“where’s yore sense of humor?”), the real message is that people in the lower classes lack good taste, socially acceptable manners, and, above all, middle-class values. If you purchase redneck merchandise, you too can make fun of the working class and clearly distance yourself from it.

The late-night television program *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* demonstrated the persistence of class-based jokes about rednecks and white trash when host Jay Leno showed pictures of “white trash repairs,” described as how white trash might repair broken items in their homes. According to Leno, examples of white-trash repairs include using a stack of old books to prop up a chair with a broken leg, holding a broken belt together with the tines of a fork, and dealing with a broken stove by cooking food on an upside-down clothes iron. Mainstreaming of jokes about white trash on network television legitimizes a culture that mocks people based on class and their assumed lack of education and cultural capital.

In the 2000s, the working class has fared somewhat better on a few reality series that have attempted documentary-style coverage of selected blue-collar occupations. Episodes of shows like *Undercover Boss*, *Dirty Jobs*, *Ice Road Truckers*, *Construction Intervention*, and *Deadliest Catch* illustrate the difficulty of surviving in jobs in which workers face all kinds of hazardous weather and working conditions. Ultimately, however, media framing of disaster stories—such as the vast BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and the US economic crisis—overlook many problems confronting the working class and working poor. The media also largely ignore the contributions of the working-class people who are then called on to “fix” these problems, focusing instead on the ideas and concerns of politicians and business executives, many of whom may have contributed to these problems in the first place. We make a mistake when we trivialize or ignore the working class because the nation goes much as the working class does. Media framing of stories about people in this segment of the class hierarchy leaves much to be desired because it provides few insights into problems faced by working people in everyday life.

### MIDDLE-CLASS FRAMING AND HIGH-LEVEL WORRYING

Media framing of stories about the middle class tells us that this economic group is the value center and backbone of the nation. Middle-class-values framing suggests that the mores of this class hold the nation together.

Even the White House has conducted studies and made extensive lists of common characteristics of middle-income individuals and families to show that certain common threads run through this group. According to these studies aspirations more than incomes define middle-class families. High prices, job insecurity, and the US economic crisis are also making it more difficult in the early twenty-first century to achieve and maintain middle-class status. Media framing of stories about the middle class (and the would-be middle class) informs us that many middle-income people are going through a period of great economic and social uncertainty, and neither these families nor officials in federal, state, and local governments know what to do to permanently reverse the problem.

Why have networks framed television shows to appeal to the middle class and emphasize middle-class values? Early television writers knew that their shows needed to appeal to middle-class audiences, the targeted consumers for advertisers' products, and thus framing of the middle-class values of honesty, integrity, and hard work formed an integral ingredient of early sitcoms. However, some contemporary television writers spoof the middle class and poke fun at the values supposedly associated with people in this demographic. Some sitcom writers focus on the dysfunctions of a fictional middle-class family, including conflicts between husbands and wives, parents and children, and family members and outsiders. Media critics have also noticed the absence of Latino and Asian-American families in television sitcoms. Characters from these racial/ethnic categories tend to have small roles and to be part of a program's joke. Asian Americans are particularly likely to be depicted as middle class but as having some sort of quirkiness.

If they want to appeal to middle-class viewers, why do some television shows make fun of the middle class? The corporations that pay for advertising want to capture the attention of males between the ages of eighteen and thirty-nine, and individuals in this category, it is believed, enjoy laughing at the uptight customs and ideas of conventional middle-class families. Advertisers also recognize the influence programs have on families. That is why they happily spend billions of dollars on product placements (such as a Diet Coke can sitting on a character's desk) and on ads during commercial breaks.

In *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*, Schor examines why very young children buy into consumer culture and concludes that extensive media exposure to products is a key reason: "More children [in the USA] than anywhere else believe that their clothes and brands describe who they are and define their social status. American kids display more brand affinity than their counterparts anywhere else in the

world; indeed, experts describe them as increasingly ‘bonded to brands.’”<sup>19</sup> Part of this bonding occurs through constant television watching, Internet use, and participation in social media, as a steady stream of ads and blogs targets children and young people. Schor concludes that we face a greater problem than just excessive consumerism. Consumer culture undermines children’s well-being: “High consumer involvement is a significant cause of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and psychosomatic complaints.”<sup>20</sup> Although no similar studies have determined the effects of the media’s emphasis on wealth and consumerism among adults, today’s children will likely take these values with them into adulthood if our society does not first reach the breaking point with respect to consumer debt, and some analysts believe we are heading in this direction, given high rates of long-term unemployment, a stalled housing market, high foreclosure rates, and an unsuccessful effort by the federal government to stimulate the economy.

The issue of class in the USA has not been portrayed in the media through a realistic assessment of wealth, poverty, and inequality: rather, it has been shown through superficial patterns of rampant self-interest and consumerism. Among these patterns in media representation are the glorifying of shopping as a major life experience, encouraging individuals to acquire large mortgages they cannot afford and that will soon sour on them, and offering high-risk people seemingly unlimited amounts of credit, but then loudly lamenting the fact that these unsupportable patterns of behavior have contributed to the worst economic meltdown in the USA since the 1930s Great Depression. The general message remains, one article stated, “We pledge allegiance to the mall.”<sup>21</sup>

### MEDIA FRAMING AND OUR DISTORTED VIEW OF INEQUALITY

Class clearly permeates media culture and influences our thinking about social inequality. Media framing of stories involving class presents a socially constructed reality that is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the USA. Because of their pervasive nature, the media have the capacity to define the world symbolically for other people. In turn, readers and viewers glean information from the media that they use to construct a picture of class and inequality—one that they come to see as realistically representing where they stand in the class structure, what they should (or should not) aspire to achieve, and whether and why they should view other people as superior, equal, or inferior to themselves.

Because of the media's power to socially construct reality, we must make an effort to find out about the objective nature of class and evaluate social inequality on our own terms. Although postmodern thinkers believe it is impossible to distinguish between real life and the fictionalized version of reality presented by the media, some sociologists argue that we can learn to discern the difference between media images of reality and the actual facts pertaining to wealth, poverty, and inequality. The more we become aware that we are not receiving "raw" information or "just" entertainment from the media, the more we are capable of rationally thinking about how media portrayals represent us and what these depictions encourage us to do (engage in hedonistic consumerism, for example). Print and electronic media have become extremely adept at framing issues of class in a certain manner, but we still have the ability to develop alternative frames that better explain who we are and what our nation is truly like in regard to class divisions.

### THE REALITIES OF CLASS

What are the realities of inequality? The truth is that the rich are getting richer, and the gulf between the rich and poor continues to widen in the USA. How do we know this? In the decade between 1996 and 2006, the income of the top one-fifth of US families increased by more than 40 percent; during that same period, the income of the bottom one-fifth increased by only 5.6 percent. By 2009, the rich were no longer getting richer at the same rate as in the past, but they were far from living in poverty. This drop stemmed partly from the recession that started in December 2007, when real median household income declined by 3.6 percent (from \$52,163 to \$50,303) between 2007 and 2008.

As discussed in Chap. 3 of Kendall's *Framing Class* sociologist Dennis Gilbert illustrates US income distribution as a national pie and shows that the wealthiest 20 percent of households received 50 percent of the total income in 2008, while the poorest 20 percent of households received 3 percent. Moreover, the income share claimed by the richest fifth of households is seventeen times that received by the poorest fifth, contradicting the common belief that most income in the USA goes to the middle class.<sup>22</sup> Income distribution also varies by race/ethnicity, and this disparity has continued for many years. Consider the following figures for 2008: The highest median income

was for Asian households (\$65,637), as compared to white (non-Hispanic) households (\$55,530), Hispanic households (\$37,913), and African-American households (\$34,218). As these figures show, African Americans and Latinos are over-represented among those in the bottom income levels. Over half of African-American and Latino households fall within the lowest income categories.<sup>23</sup>

Wealth inequality is even more pronounced than income inequality. Wealth includes property such as buildings, houses, land, farms, factories, and cars, as well as other assets such as bank accounts, corporate stocks, bonds, and insurance policies. Wealth is computed by subtracting all debt obligations (what you own minus what you owe) and converting the value of remaining assets into cash. Since the 1970s, the wealth of the richest 1 percent of US families has grown dramatically. In 2007, the wealthiest 1 percent owned about one-third (33.8 percent) of total family wealth in the USA. The next wealthiest 9 percent owned about 37.7 percent, leaving the rest (90 percent of families) with the remaining 26 percent of wealth. For the upper class, wealth often comes from interest income, dividends, and inheritance. Consider, for example, that about half of the individuals on the *Forbes* 400 list of the wealthiest people in the USA had inherited sufficient wealth to put them on the list. As with income, wealth disparities are greatest across racial and ethnic categories. As discussed in Chap. 7 of *Framing Class*, the wealth gap between white and African-American families has more than quadrupled over the course of a generation. By 2007, the average middle-income white household accumulated \$74,000 in wealth, whereas the average high-income African-American household owned only \$18,000 in wealth.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in 2008, 39.8 million people lived below the official government poverty level of about \$22,000 for a family of four. The official poverty rate for 2008 was 13.2 percent; however, many analysts believe that this number has continued to increase, and more people have found themselves without employment and sometimes without homes.<sup>25</sup>

Data showing how people are faring in the second decade of the twenty-first century highlight the fact that we are not all comfortably located in the middle class; nor is the middle class as comfortable as many politicians would have us believe. In fact, many in the middle- and upper-middle classes, and even in some segments of the upper class, are trying to overcome financial problems that became more pronounced after a period of hedonistic consumerism.

## THE HANGOVER AFTER HEDONISTIC CONSUMERISM

Consumerism is a normal part of life; we purchase the things that we need to live. Hedonistic consumerism, however, exceeds all necessary and meaningful boundaries. As the word “hedonism” suggests, some people are so caught up in consumerism that it becomes the main reason for their existence, their primary source of happiness. Such people engage in the self-indulgent pursuit of happiness through what they buy.

When the US economy was soaring, people were encouraged to spend money. When the recession started in the fourth quarter of 2007, families were still encouraged to spend money to help stimulate the faltering economy. As the Great Recession worsened, however, many people began cutting back on spending for some items but not others. Information, entertainment, and advertising media have contributed to the types of products and services for which US-Americans have increased or decreased consumption. Since the recession began, spending has increased almost 17 percent on mobile devices such as smart phones. Although these phones have many uses and applications beyond simply telephony, they are also widely used and promoted on television, the Internet, and other forms of media. For example, on competitive television shows like *American Idol* and *America's Got Talent*, viewers are repeatedly reminded to call or text in their votes. Communications devices, including cell phones, Kindle readers, and iPads, are widely advertised as the new must-have items.

By contrast, US-Americans are spending less on moving and storage because they cannot afford to buy newer and bigger houses. They are spending less on motor vehicles and gas and a little less on clothing and travel, particularly to foreign countries. Despite some cutbacks in spending, problems such as job loss, part-time rather than full-time work, owning a house bought at the top of the market and trying to sell after the housing market bottomed out, and an increase in so-called fixed costs, such as utilities and food, have increased the overall debt owed by families. Estimates vary widely on the amount of credit card debt that individuals possess: some estimate the average unpaid credit card balance to be about \$3387. Other estimates place the average credit card debt per household at about \$15,788. Despite problems associated with credit cards, some credit card companies run aggressive advertising campaigns to entice potential customers into opening an account. Capital One's “What's in Your Wallet?” uses humor to show that, despite adversity, everything will come out fine for people if they own a credit card from that company.

Obviously, credit card advertisements are successful because sponsors pay as much as \$5.4 million per month to run them on sports and entertainment shows. Despite ups and downs in the economy, as consumers our expectations for ourselves and our children have risen as the media have continued to portray the good life and bombard us with other products that we must have. The iPhone 3 is not good enough; we must have access to the new applications (“apps”) available on iPhone 4, and then iPhone 5, and on it goes.

Are US-Americans only interested in getting the economy back on track so that we can continue our consumer habits, or are we actually interested in learning about class and inequality? Although some people prefer to operate in a climate of denial, media critics believe that more people are awakening to biases in the media, particularly when they see vast inconsistencies between media portrayals of class and everyday reality. According to sociologists Robert Perrucci and Earl Wyson, “It is apparent that increasing experiences with and knowledge about class-based inequalities among the non-privileged is fostering a growing awareness of and concerns about the nature and extent of superclass interests, motives, and power in the economic and political arenas.”<sup>26</sup> Some individuals are becoming aware of the effect that media biases can have on how they interpret what they read, see, and hear. A Pew Research Center poll, for example, shows that working-class individuals do not unquestioningly accept media information and commentary that preponderantly support the status quo.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, Perrucci and Wyson note that television can have a paradoxical effect on viewers: it can serve both as a pacifier and as a source of heightened class consciousness. Shows that focus on how much money the very wealthy have may provide a source of entertainment for non-elites, but seeing people get paid so much for doing so little (e.g., the actress who earns \$17 million per film or the sports star who signs a \$100 million, multiyear contract) may also produce antagonism among people who work hard and earn comparatively little. Even more egregious are individuals who do not work at all but have been born into the “right family” and inherited billions of dollars.

Although affluent audiences might prefer that the media industry work to “reinforce and disguise privileged-class interests,”<sup>28</sup> denizens of the USA may become more class conscious as we face tougher economic conditions, which some believe the greed of the wealthy and powerful has exacerbated. In the future people may demand more accurate assessments

of the problems we face, particularly if more middle- and working-class families see their lifestyles continue to deteriorate in the twenty-first century.

### IS CHANGE LIKELY? MEDIA REALITIES SUPPORT THE STATUS QUO

Will journalists and entertainment writers become more cognizant of class-related issues in news reports and television shows? Will they more accurately portray those issues in the future? It is possible that the media will become more aware of class as an important subject to address, but several trends do not bode well for more accurate portrayals of class. Among these are the issues of media ownership and control.

#### MEDIA OWNERSHIP

Media ownership has become increasingly concentrated since the 1990s. Massive mergers and acquisitions involving the three major television networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) have created three media behemoths—General Electric, Walt Disney Company, and CBS—whose news and entertainment divisions now constitute only small elements of much larger, highly diversified corporate structures. Today, these media giants control many outlets of expression, and entertainment and news divisions of major networks are viewed as “just another contributor to the bottom line.”<sup>29</sup> As media scholar Shirley Biagi states, “The central force driving the media business in America is the desire to make money. US media are businesses, vast businesses. The products of these businesses are information and entertainment ... But American media are, above all, profit-centered.”<sup>30</sup>

The top online news companies are Yahoo!, General Electric, Time Warner, Gannet, and AOL. However, these new-media sites are closely related to old-media sources, such as newspaper chains (Gannett, MediaNews Group, McClatchy, Advance Publications, and Tribune Company) and television companies, because new media have limited ability to produce content on their own and often disseminate information from old-media sources such as the Associated Press and United Press International. Concentration of media ownership through chains, broadcast networks, cross-media ownership, conglomerates, and vertical integration (when one company controls several related aspects of the same business) impose major impediments to change how class is represented



in the news and entertainment industry. Social analysts like Gregory Mantsios are pessimistic about the prospects for reform because of the upper-class-based loyalties of media corporate elites:

It is no wonder Americans cannot think straight about class. The mass media is neither objective, balanced, independent, nor neutral. Those who own and direct the mass media are themselves part of the upper class, and neither they nor the ruling class in general have to conspire to manipulate public opinion. Their interest is in preserving the status quo, and their view of society as fair and equitable comes naturally to them. But their ideology dominates our society and justifies what is in reality a perverse social order—one that perpetuates unprecedented elite privilege and power on the one hand and widespread deprivation on the other.<sup>31</sup>

According to Mantsios, wealthy media shareholders, corporate executives, and political leaders have a vested interest in obscuring class relations not only because these elites are primarily concerned about profits but because—being among the haves themselves—they do not see any reason to stir up class-related animosities. Why should they call attention to the real causes of poverty and inequality and risk generating friction among the classes?

Media executives do not particularly care if the general public criticizes popular-cultural content as long as audiences do not begin to question the superstructure of media ownership and the benefits these corporations derive from corporate-friendly public policies. According to sociologist Karen Sternheimer:

Media conglomerates have a lot to gain by keeping us focused on the popular culture “problem,” lest we decide to close some of the corporate tax loopholes to fund more social programs ... In short, the news media promote media phobia because it doesn’t threaten the bottom line. Calling for social programs to reduce inequality and poverty would.<sup>32</sup>

Although shareholders and individuals in the top corporate ranks may set the corporate culture of the media industry, day-to-day decisions often rest in the hands of the editor in chief (or a person in a similar role) at a newspaper or a television executive at a local station. Typically, the goals of these individuals reflect the profit-driven missions of their parent companies and the continual need to attract the right audiences (often young males between eighteen and thirty-five years of age) for advertisers.

Television commentator Jeff Greenfield acknowledges this reality: “The most common misconception most people have about television concerns its product. To the viewer, the product is the programming. To the television executive, the product is the audience.”<sup>33</sup> Television and the Internet derive their profits from advertising, not from producing programs or providing information that accurately reflects social life.

Since the 1996 Telecommunications Act was passed, trends in the media industry—including concentration of ownership, a focus on increasing profits, and a move toward less federal regulation—do not offer reassurance that media representations of class (along with race, gender, age, and sexual orientation) will be of much concern to corporate shareholders or executives at the top media giants—unless, of course, this issue becomes related to the bottom line or there is public demand for change, neither of which seems likely. It does, however, appear that there is a possibility for change among some journalists and entertainment writers.

### OLD-MEDIA JOURNALISTS: CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Some analysts divide journalists into “big-time” players, that is, reporters and journalists who are rich, having earned media salaries in the millions, and “everyday” players, who are primarily known in their local or regional media markets. Elite journalists in the first category typically work for major television networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC), popular cable news channels (CNN and FOX News), or major national newspapers (*Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, or *USA Today*). These journalists may be influential in national media agenda settings, whereas the everyday media players, beat reporters, journalists, and middle- to upper-level managers at local newspapers or television stations can at best influence local markets.

Some individuals at both levels are deeply concerned about the state of journalism in the USA, as one Pew Research Center for the People and the Press study of 547 national and local reporters, editors, and executives found.<sup>34</sup> One major concern among these journalists was the belief that their companies’ economic behavior was eroding the quality of journalism in the USA. By way of example, some journalists believe that business pressures in the media industry are making the news “thinner and shallower.”<sup>35</sup> Journalists are also concerned that the news media pay “too

little attention ... to complex issues.”<sup>36</sup> However, a disturbing finding by the Pew study was that some journalists believe that news content is becoming shallower because that is what the public wants. This cynical view may become a self-fulfilling prophecy that leads journalists to produce a shallower product, based on the mistaken belief that the public cannot handle anything else.<sup>37</sup> Despite all this, some opportunities do exist in the local and national news for community or civic journalism—for the “belief that journalism has an obligation to public life—an obligation that goes beyond just telling the news or unloading lots of facts.”<sup>38</sup> Civic journalism is rooted in the assumption that the profession has the ability either to empower or to help disable a community. Based on a civic-journalism perspective, a news reporter gathering information for a story has an opportunity to introduce other voices beyond those of the typical mainstream spokesperson called upon to discuss a specific issue, such as the loss of jobs in a community or the growing problem of homelessness. Just as more journalists have become aware of the importance of fair and accurate representations of people based on race, gender, age, disability, and sexual orientation, we may be able to improve media representations of class. Rather than pitting the middle class against the working class and the poor, for example, the media might frame stories in such a way as to increase people’s awareness of their shared concerns in a nation where members of the upper class typically get portrayed as more important and more deserving than the average citizen.

Civic journalism encourages journalists to rethink their use of frames. Choosing a specific frame for a story is “the most powerful decision a journalist will make.”<sup>39</sup> As journalists become more aware that the media are more than neutral storytellers, perhaps more of them will develop alternative frames that look deeply into a community of interest (which might include examining the class-based realities of neighborhoods) to see “how the community interacts with, interrelates to, and potentially solves a pressing community problem.” By asking, “What is the essence of this story?” rather than “What is the conflict value of this story?” journalists might be less intent, for example, on pitting the indigenous US working class against more recent immigrants or confronting unionized workers with their non-unionized counterparts. Stories that stress conflict have winners and losers, victors and villains; they suggest that people must compete, rather than cooperate, across class lines.<sup>40</sup> An exploration of other types of framing devices might produce better results in showing how social mobility does or does not work in the US stratification system

highlighting, for example, individuals' real chances for moving up the class ladder (the possibility of which much of the jargon about the rich and famous promises).

Advocates of civic journalism suggest that two practices might help journalists do a better job of framing in the public interest: public listening and civic mapping. Public listening refers to "the ability of journalists to listen with open minds and open ears; to understand what people are really saying."<sup>41</sup> Journalists engaged in public listening would be less interested in getting "superficial quotes or sound bites" and would instead move more deeply into the conversations actually taking place. They would use open-ended questions in their interviews, by which they could look more deeply into people's hopes, fears, and values, rather than asking closed-ended questions to which the only response choices are yes/no or agree/disagree—answers that, in effect, quickly (and superficially) gauge an individual's opinion on a topic. When journalists use civic mapping, they seek out underlying community concerns through discussions with people. They attempt to look beneath the surface of current public discourse on an issue. Mapping helps them learn about the ideas, attitudes, and opinions that really exist among diverse groups of people, not just "public opinion" or politicians' views of events.

By seeking out "third places"—locations where people gather and often end up talking about things that are important to them—journalists can find other voices, hear different stories, and perhaps learn more about people from diverse backgrounds and what they are actually thinking and experiencing.<sup>42</sup> According to sociologist Ray Oldenburg, the term *third place* describes "a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work."<sup>43</sup> If the first place is the home, and the second place is the work setting, then the third place includes churches, community centers, cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, and other spots where people gather informally. As journalists join in the conversation, they can learn what everyday people are thinking about a social issue such as tax cuts for the wealthy. They can also discover what concerns people have and what they think contributes to such problems as neighborhood deterioration.

In addition to listening to other voices and seeking out different stories in third places, journalists might look more systematically at how changes in public policies—such as in tax laws, welfare initiatives, or publicly funded child care or housing programs—might affect people in various

class locations. What are the political and business pressures behind key policy decisions like these? How do policies affect the middle class? The working class? Others? For example, what part does class play in perceptions about local law enforcement agencies? How are police officers viewed in small, affluent incorporated cities that have their own police departments, as compared to the low-income neighborhoods of bigger cities? While wealthy residents in the smaller cities may view police officers as employees who do their bidding (such as prohibiting the “wrong kind of people” from entering their city limits at night), in some low-income sectors of larger cities, the police may be viewed as oppressors or as racists who contribute to, rather than reduce, problems of lawlessness and crime in the community. Journalists who practice civic journalism might look beyond typical framing devices to tell a more compelling story about how the intersections of race and class produce a unique chemistry between citizens and law enforcement officials. In this way, journalists would not be using the taken-for-granted framing devices previously employed to “explain” what is happening in these communities.

Given constraints on the media, including the fact that much of the new investment in journalism is spent on disseminating rather than collecting news,<sup>44</sup> there is room for only cautious optimism that some journalists will break out of the standard reflexive mode to explore the microscopic realities of class at the level where people live, as well as at the macroscopic level of society, where corporate and governmental elites make important decisions that affect everyone else.

Some media analysts believe that greater awareness of class-related realities in the media would strengthen the democratic process in the USA. According to Mantsios, “[a] mass media that did not have its own class interests in preserving the status quo would acknowledge that inordinate wealth and power undermine democracy and that a ‘free market’ economy can ravage a people and their communities.”<sup>45</sup> It remains to be seen, however, whether organizations like the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Committee of Concerned Journalists will be successful in their efforts to encourage journalists to move beyond the standard reflexive mode to use new frames that more accurately reflect class-based realities.

Like journalists, many television entertainment writers could look for better ways to frame stories. However, these writers are also beleaguered by changes in the media environment, including new threats to their economic security from reality and talent competition shows and

from new social media sources that often do not use either in-house or freelance writers. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult for writers to stay gainfully employed, let alone bring new ideas into television entertainment.<sup>46</sup>

## NEW MEDIA: CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Pew Internet and American Life Project have conducted extensive studies about the nature of audience behavior in regard to new media, which comprise Internet communications and cell phones. According to these studies, “The Internet and cell phones are changing people’s relationship to news,”<sup>47</sup> and so they may also change how we view class-related issues. One change brought about by new media is that social media sites and blogs have helped the news become a social experience rather than a passive one for many consumers: “People use their social networks to filter, assess, and react to news.”<sup>48</sup> Another change is that laptops and cell phones provide mobile connectivity, which turns news gathering and news awareness into an “anytime, anywhere affair for a segment of avid news watchers.”<sup>49</sup> It also means that people across lines of class, race, and gender can find the kind of news and entertainment that they want, while largely excluding all other information from their life. For example, 21 percent of online news users report that they routinely rely on just one website for their news and information.<sup>50</sup>

Although people get their news from a wider variety of platforms, including broadcast, online, and print media, they may selectively choose their sources. Some may prefer their news from CNN cable television and [CNN.com](#) as compared with FOX and [FOX.com](#). A cell phone “app” may quickly retrieve news and entertainment from one network but not the other. Or they may prefer blogs or Tweets bringing specific kinds of information to them because it suits their interests and lifestyle, but they may be completely unaware of other sources of news and entertainment. It is no surprise that online news users are younger than the general adult population: about two-thirds are under age fifty, and 71 percent are white (non-Hispanic).<sup>51</sup> One of the major changes that the unbundling of news—dividing it across a number of different platforms—will bring about for journalists and media consumers alike is fragmentation: consumers are not looking to one news or entertainment source for their full news agenda or for their

amusement. They are “grazing” across multiple outlets, and this will have a profound effect on how all news and entertainment is framed and packaged for sampling by potential consumers. Cable television is the only portion of the old-media sector that has growing audiences, and today more than 1 million blogs and social media sites beckon to potential consumers for their time, attention, and money. According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism, “self-interested information providers” are now growing rapidly, and many non-journalistic players are entering the information and news field. Any further cutbacks in old media, such as the hiring of fewer investigative reporters, will affect what people learn in both old and new media because traditional media have been the source of most Internet and new social media information. It is estimated that only 14 percent of new-media sites actually produce original reportorial content rather than providing commentary on existing media reports.<sup>52</sup>

It remains to be seen what effect these rapid changes in the media, as well as the downturn in the US economy, will have on how the media frame class. In the future, however, we are likely to have even more of “all media, all the time,” and it will be up to us to measure the extent to which we are willing to accept ideas about class and inequality set forth in old and new media. The popularity of cell phones and social media indicates that the melding of information and entertainment will only increase, as it seems people cannot get enough media spectacle and are willing to participate in what analysts refer to as a “mediated” life.

We cannot assume that most journalists and television writers are in a position to change media portrayals of class and inequality; however, in the final analysis, the responsibility rests with us to evaluate the media and to treat it as only one limited source of information and entertainment in our lives. For the sake of our children and grandchildren, we must balance the perspectives we gain from the media with our own lived experiences and use a wider sociological lens to look at what is going on around us in everyday life. Some analysts believe that the media amuse and lull audiences into complacency rather than stimulating them or encouraging them to think, but we must not become complacent, believing that everything is all right as our society and world become increasingly divided between the haves and the have-nots.<sup>53</sup> If the media industry persists in retaining the same old frames for class, it will behoove each of us as readers and viewers to break out of those frames and more thoroughly explore these issues on our own.

## NOTES

1. Bob Herbert, "Putting Our Brains on Hold," *New York Times*, August 6, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/07/opinion/07herbert.html> (accessed August 10, 2010).
2. Choire Sicha, "They'll Always Have Paris," *New York Times*, June 13, 2004, AR31.
3. Diana Kendall, *Framing Class: Media Representations of Wealth and Poverty in America*, 1st ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).
4. Tim Delaney and Allene Wilcox, "Sports and the Role of the Media," in *Values, Society and Evolution*, ed. Harry Birx and Tim Delaney, 199–215 (Auburn, NY: Legend, 2002).
5. bell hooks [Gloria Watkins], *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 73.
6. hooks, *Where We Stand*, 77.
7. hooks, *Where We Stand*, 71.
8. hooks, *Where We Stand*, 72.
9. Juliet B. Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004).
10. Schor, *Born to Buy*.
11. Joseph Nocera, *A Piece of the Action: How the Middle Class Joined the Money Class* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).
12. "Inside the Middle Class: Bad Times Hit the Good Life," Pew Social Trends, April 9, 2008, <http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/706/middle-class-poll> (accessed July 29, 2010).
13. "Inside the Middle Class: Bad Times Hit the Good Life."
14. Paul Sullivan, "All This Anger against the Rich May Be Unhealthy," *New York Times*, October 17, 2009, B6.
15. Barbara Ehrenreich, "Too Poor to Make the News," *New York Times*, June 13, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/opinion/14ehrenreich.html> (accessed November 8, 2010).
16. Karen De Coster and Brad Edmonds, "TV Nation: The Killing of American Brain Cells," *Lewrockwell.com*, March 5, 2003, <http://www.lewrockwell.com/decoster/decoster78.html> (accessed July 7, 2004).
17. Judith Butler has described gender identity as performative, noting that social reality is not a given but is continually created as an illusion "through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign" (see Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990], 270). In this sense, class might also be seen as performative, in that people act out their perceived class location not only



- in terms of their own class-related identity but in regard to how they treat other people, based on their perceived class position.
18. See Thomas Ginsberg, "Union Hopes to Win Over Starbucks Shop Workers," *Austin American-Statesman*, July 2, 2004, D6.
  19. Schor, *Born to Buy*, 13.
  20. Schor, *Born to Buy*, 167.
  21. Louis Uchitelle, "We Pledge Allegiance to the Mall," *New York Times*, December 6, 2004, C12.
  22. Dennis Gilbert, *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality*, 8th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 2011).
  23. Gilbert, *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality*.
  24. Thomas M. Shapiro, Tatjana Meschede, and Laura Sullivan, "The Racial Wealth Gap Increases Fourfold," Institute on Assets and Social Policy, Research and Policy Brief, Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University, May 2010, <http://iasp.brandeis.edu/pdfs/Racial-Wealth-Gap-Brief.pdf> (accessed October 15, 2010).
  25. Carmen DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette D. Proctor, and Jessica C. Smith, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2008*, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-236 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009).
  26. Robert Perrucci and Earl Wysong, *The New Class Society*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 199.
  27. Perrucci and Wysong, *The New Class Society*.
  28. Perrucci and Wysong, *The New Class Society*, 284.
  29. Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The State of the News Media 2010," The State of the News Media, [http://www.stateofthemedias.org/2010/overview\\_major\\_trends.php](http://www.stateofthemedias.org/2010/overview_major_trends.php) (accessed October 15, 2010).
  30. Shirley Biagi, *Media Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003), 21.
  31. Gregory Mantsios, "Media Magic: Making Class Invisible," in *Privilege: A Reader*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel and Abby L. Ferber, 99–109 (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003), 108.
  32. Karen Sternheimer, *It's Not the Media: The Truth about Pop Culture's Influence on Children* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003), 211.
  33. Quoted in Biagi, *Media Impact*, 170.
  34. "Finding Third Places: Other Voices, Different Stories," Pew Center for Civic Journalism, 2004, <http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/videos/thirdplaces.html> (accessed July 6, 2004).
  35. Bill Kovach, Tom Rosenstiel, and Amy Mitchell, "A Crisis of Confidence: A Commentary on the Findings," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2004, <http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/prc.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2004), 27.

36. Kovach, Rosenstiel, and Mitchell, "A Crisis of Confidence," 29.
37. Kovach, Rosenstiel, and Mitchell, "A Crisis of Confidence."
38. "Finding Third Places."
39. Steve Smith, "Developing New Reflexes in Framing Stories," Pew Center for Civil Journalism, 1997, <http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/civic-cat/displayCivcat.php?id=97> (accessed July 3, 2004).
40. Richard Harwood, "Framing a Story: What's It Really About?" Pew Center for Civic Journalism, 2004, <http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/videos/framing.html> (accessed July 3, 2004).
41. Smith, "Developing New Reflexes in Framing Stories."
42. "Finding Third Places."
43. Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York: Marlowe, 1999), 16.
44. "The State of the News Media 2004," Committee of Concerned Journalists, <http://www.journalism.org> (accessed June 17, 2004).
45. Mantsios, "Media Magic," 108.
46. "So You Wanna Be a Sitcom Writer?" SoYouWanna, 2004, <http://www.soyouwanna.com/site/syws/sitcom/sitcom.html> (accessed July 7, 2004).
47. Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The State of the News Media 2010."
48. Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The State of the News Media 2010."
49. Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The State of the News Media 2010."
50. Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The State of the News Media 2010."
51. Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The State of the News Media 2010."
52. Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The State of the News Media 2010."
53. Sternheimer, *It's Not the Media*.