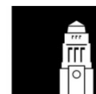
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of *How Not to Establish a Subfield: Media Sociology in the United States*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/132745/

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Revers, M orcid.org/0000-0002-6266-4967 and Brienza, C (2018) How Not to Establish a Subfield: Media Sociology in the United States. American Sociologist, 49 (3). pp. 352-368. ISSN 0003-1232

https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-017-9364-y

© 2017, Springer Science+Business Media, LLC. This is a post-peer-review, pre-copyedit version of an article published in American Sociologist. The final authenticated version is available online at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-017-9364-y. Uploaded in accordance with the publisher's self-archiving policy.

Reuse
Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown
If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/

How Not to Establish a Subfield: Media Sociology in the United States

Matthias Revers
Casey Brienza

Abstract

US-American sociology has largely failed to examine the transformation of mediated communication of the past 20 years. If sociology is to be conceived as a general social science concerned with analyzing and critically scrutinizing past, present, and future conditions of collective human existence, this failure, and the ignorance it engenders, is detrimental. This ignorance, we argue, may be traced back to the weak self-identity, institutionalization and position of media sociology in the discipline. Our argument here is threefold: 1) There was an opportunity structure for specialization, that is, a venerable research tradition in media sociology since the first half of the 20th century. This tradition links back to classics in sociology and peaked at a time (1970s and 1980s) when the discipline differentiated institutionally and many new sections emerged in the American Sociological Association. 2) Despite this tradition, media sociology has not become an established in sociology in the United States until recently. 3) Lastly, we locate reasons for non-establishment on three distinct but interconnected levels: the history of ideas in media sociology, institutional/disciplinary history, and disciplinary politics.

Keywords: Sociology of media, sociology of news, sociology of mass communication, history of sociology, specialization

Media sociology studies all forms of mass-mediated communication and expression. Following John Thompson's definition, mass here is understood in terms of communication "products [being] available in principle to a plurality of recipients" (1995:24). What distinguishes the sociological study of media is "linking the analysis of media industries, text, and audiences to questions about stratification, order, collective identity, sociability, institutions, domination/control, and human agency" (Waisbord 2014:15). Scholars within sociology, communication science, media and journalism studies follow this research agenda. Yet, taken together, this area of inquiry is dispersed, with a weak identity and low standing in sociology, and it lacks platforms for intellectual exchange. Hence, it does not constitute a subfield if understood as an intellectual community for itself.

This is particularly curious nowadays, when more and more areas of social life are permeated by the logic of media (Altheide and Snow 1979)[1] through the internet than ever before. In Europe, this has led to assertions about the "mediation of everything" (Livingstone 2009) and an upsurge of scholarship on mediatization (e.g. Couldry 2008; Hepp 2013; Hepp and Krotz 2014; Lundby 2009). In addition, formerly valid distinctions between news and entertainment, old and new media and associated institutions, and media consumers and producers have been blurring (Jenkins 2006; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). These developments, which we will refer to as mediatization and convergence, respectively, have left little impression on mainstream sociology in the US, and reasons for this are partly to be found in how the subfield of media sociology evolved and dispersed in the late 20th century.

[1] This logic influences the ways information is processed, organized, presented by different institutions and recognized by its recipients.

Before proceeding further, however, we would note that the claim that sociology largely ignores mediated communication must be qualified: Media (and communication content circulated through them) appear in two ways in sociological scholarship: 1) Media are treated as carriers of public discourse or as reflexion surfaces of societies on certain issues. 2) Studies in various subfields, such as gender studies, ethnic and racial studies, and youth and society, view media as the main shapers of worldviews and identities. The straw man theoretical positions corresponding to this dichotomy would be the mirror theory and hypodermic needle theory of media effects, respectively.[2] Looking at contributions in flagship journals reveals that, though media sociology has some visibility, mediatization and convergence do not. Furthermore, works which reach the sociological mainstream through these venues (Andrews and Caren 2010; Bail 2012; Clayman et al. 2007; Janssen, Kuipers, and Verboord 2008; Myers and Caniglia 2004; Pamela E. Oliver and Gregory M. Maney 2000; van de Rijt et al. 2013; Roscigno and Danaher 2001; Tak Wing Chan and John H. Goldthorpe 2007) focus exclusively on legacy news media.

Summing up, then, there is a disconnect between how mainstream sociology considers media and the most salient challenges faced by societies in connection to mediated communication. Although there are many scholars working on the latter issues, many of whom have been members of the section of the American Sociological Association (ASA) called “Communication and Information

[2] To put it in simplistic terms, the hypodermic needle theory suggests that media are able to “inject” certain opinions into the masses who follow them passively. The mirror theory of media effect assumes that media are a mere reflection of social reality.

Technologies" (CITASA) until 2015, we argue that their low standing in the larger discipline leads back to the lack of connection to media sociology.

We will first show that media sociology failed to evolve into a subfield within sociology despite meeting particular preconditions for this formation, that is, classical lineages—the obligatory strategy of justification in sociology—and moments of heightened productivity and visibility. Secondly, we will discuss constituent units for institutionalization and argue that the key issues for media sociology, as for other subfields, are associational representation (in the ASA) and one or more dedicated academic journals. Thirdly, we will offer several explanations for why this path for media sociology has been challenged.

A Brief Intellectual History of Media Sociology

There are several key nodes and moments of media sociology scholarship that could have initiated or been taken as starting points for a more rigorous consolidation of the subfield within the larger discipline.

The first reference point is Max Weber's early proposal for a Soziologie des Zeitungswesens (Sociology of the Press). Shortly after the German Sociological Society was founded, he suggested this as the topic for a collaborative research project at the association's first meeting in 1910 (Weber 1988). Weber conceded that a sociology of the press would be an "enormous subject" (ibid:434; our translation), although this was not the reason why he ultimately did not follow through with this project. Instead, there was a sense that newspaper publishers would not cooperate sufficiently for such an undertaking.[3]

[3] Shortly after he presented the proposal, Weber initiated legal action for slander against one newspaper and essentially demanded a breach of editorial confidentiality. The willingness of newspaper publishers to cooperate with Weber—one important precondition of the project—was in question after this episode (see Meyen and Löblich 2006).

Not long after but independent of Weber's proposal, a series of studies on mass media emerged from the Chicago School of Sociology. The journalist-turned-sociologist Robert Park (1922, 1923) was the first to raise questions about the relationship between the press and the formation of collective identities and public opinion as well as about the distinctiveness of news as a form of knowledge intertextually related to other forms of public culture (cf. Jacobs 2009). Though Louis Wirth (1948), Gladys Engel Lang, and Kurt Lang (1953, 1983) continued this tradition of media sociology in Chicago, it has been overshadowed by the urban ethnography tradition the school is most known for.

In the mid-20th century, public opinion formation studies at Columbia University by Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert Merton, Elihu Katz, and others took center stage (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Lazarsfeld and Berelson 1944; Merton, Lowenthal, and Curtis 1946). These studies were the first forceful critique of the simplistic hypodermic needle model of media effects, emphasizing instead that social networks are important intervening conditions between mass media and public opinion formation.

Simultaneously (and in many ways in opposition, see Fleck 2011), the founders of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, laid the groundwork for critical examination of the culture industry (Adorno 1942; Horkheimer and Adorno 1947) while in exile.

The leader of the second generation of the Frankfurt School, Jürgen Habermas, presented another key work for media sociology with The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962), which received belated international acknowledgement and critical debate (e.g. Calhoun 1992) after the first English translation appeared in 1989. For media sociology, this book laid the foundation for several subsequent

works focusing on the central role of mass media in the process of modernization (Calhoun 1992, 1998; Starr 2004; Thompson 1995).

Influenced by cultural Marxism, particularly the Frankfurt School, and critical literary studies, British cultural studies undertook critical investigations on the mass-mediation of popular culture and ideologies, starting with Raymond Williams (1958) and Stuart Hall (1977). In the UK context, which was characterized by greater regulation and public inquiry into media affairs, this critical outlook implied a greater policy orientation than most other strands of media sociology.[4] Despite their opposition to (particularly US) academic sociology, cultural studies is another influential thread in this research tradition. For example, one important contribution of cultural studies was in the area of media effects, especially the recognition and examination of the gaps between intended meanings of cultural producers and interpreted meanings of recipients (Hall 1973). A US version of cultural studies of the media arose, which was more pragmatic and less politically oriented (especially in relation to social class) than its British counterpart; however, it currently predominates in literary studies, not sociology. Another related, influential area in the sociology of culture is particularly concerned with entertainment media and business under the umbrella of "production of culture" (Crane 1992; Peterson 1976; Peterson and Anand 2004).

One of the most influential, enduring sociological contributions to mass communication research is framing theory (Goffman 1974), which is theoretically at the intersection of psychology (cognitive frames of references) and sociology

[4] The only analog in the US would be Robert McChesney (1999) and C. Edwin Baker's (2002) work on the political economy of media, both of which had some impact in media sociology as well. We would like to thank Paul Jones for his helpful comments about the history of cultural studies and these parallels.

(categories of collective meanings).[5] Early conceptions of framing in the sociology of news (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Gitlin 1980; Tuchman 1978) led to a recognition that probably the greatest influence mass media have on public opinion is in defining boundaries of which pieces of information are brought to attention and which are not.[6] Within the discipline, however, these works were most influential in political sociology in the area of social movement scholarship.

The 1970s were an exceptionally prolific decade for the sociology of news, which focused on the social construction of news (Molotch and Lester 1974; 1975; Lester 1980) and was dominated by a series of newsroom ethnographies (e.g. Altheide 1976; Fishman 1980; Gans 1979; Schlesinger 1978; Tuchman 1972, 1973, 1978). These studies were united by an attempt to demystify journalistic professionalism, particularly the notion of journalistic objectivity, which to Tuchman (1972) is no more than a "strategic ritual." Concurrently, Michael Schudson (1978) presented a historical analysis of the discourse of objectivity in the professionalization of US journalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Newsroom ethnographies declined for two decades and experienced a comeback with the rise of the internet in the early 2000s (Anderson 2013; Belair-Gagnon 2015; Boczkowski 2004; Domingo and Paterson 2011; Klinenberg 2005; Paterson and Domingo 2008; Revers 2017; Usher 2014).

Institutionalization of media sociology today

[5] Goffman's dramaturgical approach to social interaction has also been used to understand the impact of electronic media in public and private life, which occurs through the separation of spatiality and sociality (Meyrowitz 1985).

[6] Framing also became part of a more expansive theory of media effects in communication science associated with agenda-setting, which hold that if media assign importance to certain issues they will also be deemed important by the public (Iyengar and Simon 1993; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007).

In his discussion of the history of sociology, Edward Shils (1970:763) distinguished different aspects of institutionalization of academic fields (though he generally referred to intellectual activities). Not all of them have to be met, but the more criteria that are met, the “more institutionalized” we can consider the activity. Applying these criteria to a subfield rather than an academic discipline requires a few modifications. According to Shils, an intellectual activity is more institutionalized

1) the more people engage with it and the more they interact with each other,
2) when research is supported by established institutions rather than private resources,
3) when the activity is systematically administrated within organizational frameworks—typically universities (this is a given for the academic disciplines within which a certain research specialty is pursued. We may apply this criterion to a research area by asking whether it is recognized and represented within academic associations),
4) when there are jobs enabling people to make a living by researching and teaching it (applied to the case at hand, the question is whether there are jobs designated for research and teaching in an area of inquiry),
5) when there is a specialized teaching staff (in the context of sociology, Shils meant that sociology is being taught by specialists rather than academics from more expansive precursor fields, such as the former *Staatswissenschaften* in the German-speaking world),
6) when it can be studied as a major subject rather than exclusively as a minor subject (applied to a subfield, the question is e.g. if there are

specialized MA teaching tracks or specializations in Ph.D. programs, like qualifying exam areas),

7) when there are designated venues for publication,
8) when there is external demand for its findings.

1) We cannot provide a more comprehensive account of media sociology scholarship here (but see: Brienza and Revers 2016), nor can we map interaction by way of citation analysis in this article. It has to be sufficient to state that the literature mentioned above is regarded as canonical and widely cited by contemporary media scholars, whether they are employed by sociology departments, labeling themselves as "media sociologists" or not.

Furthermore, there seems to be a steep increase of media sociology scholarship since the advent of the internet. A Google Ngram[7] of a search for the terms "media sociology" and "sociology of media" indicates that 1) both really only became terms between 1965 and 1970, 2) that "media sociology" is more prevalent, 3) the use of both peaked in the late 1970s, declined for a decade, then rose again and remained steady from 1985 to 1995, followed by a steep decline between 1995 and 2000, which was again followed by a steady increase of both terms in the 2000s. 2007 was the year which had most mentions of both terms ever recorded (up until 2008).

2) Media sociologists are usually academics employed by university departments of sociology or communication science, media studies and journalism schools (abbreviated as CMJ in the following). In principle, research conducted in this area receives outside funding like any other subfield.

[7] A full text search of a vast digital library of English books archived by Google. We searched the corpus of books published in the United States until 2008. The corpus excludes low quality scans as well as serials.

3) In the American Sociological Association (ASA)—with over 14,000 members the most important association of sociologists worldwide in numbers—there has been no section on media sociology until recently. This is rather surprising given that the ASA has generally not been shy to recognize rather specific and/or overlapping subfields, which is evidenced by sections on Animals and Society, Latina/o Sociology, Altruism, Morality and Social Solidarity and the technology-trio of Science, Knowledge, and Technology (SKAT), Environment and Technology (ETS) and the recently renamed section on Communication and Information Technologies (CITASA), to name a few of the total 52 sections. Before CITASA was renamed Communication, Information Technologies and Media Sociology (CITAMS) in 2015, it had mainly been the intellectual home for sociologists who study new media technologies.

In contrast to the ASA, other major international associations in the field have established sections on media sociology. There is a research network on Sociology of Communications and Media Research in the European Sociological Association; the German Sociological Society has a section on Medien- und Kommunikationssoziologie;[8] the British Sociological Association has a Sociology of Media Study Group; and the French Sociological Association has a thematic network RT37 on Sociologie de medias—and these are but to name only a few.

We argue that formal institutional recognition in scholarly associations is particularly important for establishing subfield in US sociology. The institutionalization of media sociology (and also cultural sociology) in Germany, for instance, was much more defined and preempted by theoretical positioning. Allgemeine Soziologie (general

[8] The German Communication Association (DGPuK) also has a section on sociology of media communication ("Soziologie der Medienkommunikation"). The DGS and DGPuK sections organize joint section conferences together.

sociology), as an area involved with the main sociological categories and topics and as a discourse which organizes the entire discipline in Germany to some extent, provides a reference and anchoring point for emerging fields on a theoretical level. Partly because of the greater importance of theory and the dominance of systems theory in particular, media sociology in Germany distinguished itself much more strongly from communication science.

The authors of this article initiated the formal process to form a media sociology section in the ASA in 2013, which involved a petition process requiring 200 signatures of prospective members of the section as well as a formal proposal that outlines the purpose of the section and maps the research areas. The section proposal was rejected by the ASA on the grounds that "a compelling rationale for formation of a distinct new section has not been presented" (personal email communication). We have been informed that the proposal was met with hostile opposition by some of the CITASA section leadership. After months of negotiation, CITASA became CITAMS and the signatories of the petition who were not members of CITASA were asked to join the renamed section.[9]

During negotiations, the argumentative strategy of the CITASA committee formed to oppose a separate media sociology section was twofold: 1) Endangerment: a new section on media sociology would harm the existing section of CITASA by extracting members from it. 2) What Abbott referred to as ingestion:[10] CITASA has always in

[9] Given that section membership did not increase significantly in the first year after the section rebranding confirmed the expectation from a survey, which suggested that most petition signatories preferred a separate media sociology section.

[10] In the ongoing fractal cycles of disciplines, conflicts arise based on ever-proliferating oppositions. Success of one side over the other usually involves "bringing the conceptual and substantive knowledge of the defeated side of a dichotomy under the victorious one" (Abbott 2001:20). This tendency is rooted in the social sciences' "urge to comprehensiveness that always ends up taking in more than it can digest" (ibid.:35), according to Abbott.

principle supported media sociological scholarship and thus merging the effort with the existing section would finally realize this potential. The latter strategy was bolstered by a preemptive rebranding of the section's webpage and scholarly pronouncements (Earl 2015; Neff 2014).

Such boundary negotiations are common in the ASA, including among successful section formation attempts. SKAT, for instance, met initial opposition for the overlap with ETS regarding the term "technology." According to ASA records (cited in: Sweeney 2015), the ASA Committee on Sections discussed a "jurisdictional dispute" between the proposed section on "Science and Technology" and the existing section on "Environment," which proposed a name change to "Environment and Technology," during its meeting in 1987. There was fear of an "unproductive competition for membership" and the resolution was to add "knowledge" to name of the section-in-formation (ibid.).

4) As mentioned above, many media sociologists who are Ph.D. sociologists have taken jobs in CMJ departments. This is also true for some of the most prominent scholars, which went on the academic job market shortly after communication science departments were founded (the first one at Michigan State University in 1957).[11] There are virtually no jobs advertised in media sociology specifically, neither by sociology nor CMJ departments. However, for media sociologists there are certainly more job opportunities in CMJ departments. Sociologists who transferred to CMJ departments (prominent examples are Rodney Benson, Todd Gitlin, Michael Schudson, Silvio Waisbord) and their students are to a great part responsible for keeping media sociology alive from outside of sociology departments.

[11] See: "Brief History of the Department of Communication at Michigan State," retrieved from http://cas.msu.edu/places/departments/communication/history/ (accessed March 19, 2015).

5) and 6) Media sociology has been a teaching subject at least since the mid 20th century. In a UNESCO report, Charles Wright wrote that between 1945 and 1955 the sociology of mass communication became recognized "as an appropriate subject for social science students" (Wright 1956:78), which he substantiated by the fact that several readers for undergraduate and graduate training had recently come out. As a Ph.D. graduate of Columbia University, having studied with Lazarsfeld and Merton, Wright himself was an early product of the emergent training of specialists in the 1950s, which also included Elihu Katz (Ph.D., Columbia University,1956) as well as Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang (who received their doctorates from the University of Chicago in 1953 and 1954, respectively).

Old editions of the ASA Guide to Graduate Departments of Sociology reveal several interesting details about teaching in media sociology: In the 1970s, it was still a more important subject than cultural sociology. In 1976, the ratio of "courses or special programs" in "mass communication/public opinion" and cultural sociology was 8:5 in US sociology programs. The fact that it was often listed as a departmental specialty, despite the fact that no individual faculty member indicated it as their area of expertise (e.g. UC Berkeley), suggests that there was supply (and commensurate demand) of courses in mass communication/public opinion.

Later, the ASA distinguished specialties from special programs, the latter being more significant, indicating "regularly-scheduled courses, a core faculty, special exams or some other indication of concentration" by which students could then "claim these as areas in which they have special sociological competence" (American Sociological Association 1985:Foreword). Although no US department indicated a special program in mass communication/public opinion (or in cultural sociology) in 1985, 35 of them

declared it as a specialty (relative to 33 for cultural sociology), which meant specialization of several faculty and one or more courses offered regularly.[12]

In contrast, the 1997 guide lists five US departments with special programs (relative to 32 in cultural sociology) in mass communication/public opinion: UC-Santa Cruz, CUNY-Hunter, DePaul University, University of South Dakota, and Virginia Commonwealth University. The most influential sociologists of news (those who had not left for jobs in CMJ departments) did not shape their respective departmental identities in that direction. Examples include Herbert Gans at Columbia University, nor Gaye Tuchman at the University of Connecticut, Harvey Molotch at UC Santa Barbara, or Todd Gitlin at New York University. This phenomenon was certainly connected to the fact that all of these scholars had become identified with other subfields, such as urban or cultural sociology, or had shifted focus completely.

Aside from these categorical distinctions, research areas at sociology departments and areas of specialization for doctoral students in the US, including topics for qualifying exams, also reflect section divisions of the ASA. The lack of a media sociology section conceivably had a negative indirect effect on teaching specialization.

7) There is no journal exclusively focusing on media sociology. There are several journals ranked in sociology (by Thomson-Reuters), however, which frequently publish research in media sociology, above all Media, Culture & Society, Information, Communication & Society, Poetics, American Journal of Cultural Sociology, and Cultural Sociology. Important debates in the sociology of news have also occurred in the journal Political Communication. There have been a notable number of articles which dealt with media in the flagship journals American Sociological Review and

[12] At that time, big departments listed close to 40 specialties, which was capped to 10 in the annual questionnaires the ASA circulated among sociology departments in the following years.

American Journal of Sociology since 2000. What almost all of them have in common is that they link media scholarship to more mainstream areas in sociology, above all social movements and political mobilization (Andrews and Caren 2010; Bail 2012; Pamela E. Oliver and Gregory M. Maney 2000; Roscigno and Danaher 2001), social stratification (van de Rijt et al. 2013; Tak Wing Chan and John H. Goldthorpe 2007), and cultural globalization (Benson and Saguy 2005; Janssen, Kuipers, and Verboord 2008). Only two focus more narrowly on the media (Clayman et al. 2007; Myers and Caniglia 2004).

Several edited volumes and textbooks on media sociology (Benson and Neveu 2005; Croteau and Hoynes 2003; Jackson, Nielsen, and Hsu 2011; McNair 1998; Schudson 2011; Tunstall 1970; Waisbord 2014b) have appeared, and various handbooks, especially on cultural sociology (Alexander, Jacobs, and Smith 2012; Hall, Grindstaff, and Lo 2010; Jacobs and Hanrahan 2005) and social movements (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004), recognize media sociology.

Even though there is significant and visible publication output in the area, the lack of exclusive venues for publication in media sociology is another major deficiency, less regarding broader recognition within sociology but regarding its own intellectual evolution and development, which ideally includes opportunities for exchange of ideas, discussions about key questions and approaches, self-awareness, and identity formation. Put differently and referencing the academic journal typology developed in Brienza (2015), media sociology has neither journals of record nor journals of professional legitimization.

8) Outside demand for insights can take the form of applied research. What comes closest in sociology is what Michael Burawoy (2005) termed policy sociology, which is essentially contract research whose aims are defined by policy makers

commissioning it. Opportunities are relatively limited here but when it comes to public sociology, media sociologists have more to offer on principle and increasingly so: as mediated communication further expands it also becomes more self-referential, which fosters media narcissism in the worst case (Tyler 2007) or critical reflexivity in the best case (Jacobs and Townsley 2011). Social media scholars have been in great demand as experts recently. These scholars often have influential social media presences themselves and are in constant dialogue with media professionals on these platforms.

To sum up, we believe the lack of exclusive publication venues and recognition in the ASA have been the two greatest impediments for the establishment of media sociology as a subfield. We thus agree with Jeff Pooley and Elihu Katz, who argued that for sociology to lure back the media studies domain would "require not just self-consciousness and a shared set of topics but also much more mundane goods: core journals, for example, or divisional status within a scholarly association" (Pooley and Katz 2008:776). Whether the partial recognition through an addendum to an already long section name suffices remains to be seen.

Reasons for non-establishment

In the remainder of this article, we explain why media sociology has not succeeded in becoming a subfield in sociology so far. Here we will present explanations provided by others as well as our own thoughts about this conjuncture in order to argue that these reasons are complementary and most likely mutually reinforced each other.

Diversion and the limited-effects hypothesis

One circumstance, which has been discussed and decried during the 1970s, is that sociology ceased to consider mass media as a subject worth studying in the wake of the public opinion research at Columbia University, conducted by Lazarsfeld, Merton,

Katz, and others. These studies led to a hypothesis of the “limited effects of mass media,” which was famously criticized by Todd Gitlin (1978). The view that public opinion is formed (and most importantly changed) primarily through social networks rather than mass media, which is a function of the particular topical focus of one of the key works Personal Influence (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955), assigned a subsidiary sociological role to mass media. Gitlin argued that, by uncritically accepting this conclusion, sociology has not only failed to ask important questions regarding the power of mass media but also helped justify its institutional hegemony.

Elihu Katz responded to Gitlin and similar critiques (e.g. Lang and Lang 2006) 30 years later in the context of a panel on the history of media sociology at the ASA meeting in 2007, sponsored by the Section on the History of Sociology and organized by Ronald Jacobs (Katz 2009).[13] The main reason Katz offered for “why sociology abandoned communication,” which he also emphasized in another paper with Jeff Pooley (Pooley and Katz 2008), is the reception of public opinion research rather than what Columbia sociologists themselves have argued: mass media have a secondary role in short-term opinion change during campaigns. This finding was interpreted in terms of a flawed “limited-effects hypothesis” of mass media in general, which led sociology to focus its attention to other questions of public opinion formation and leaving the study of mass media prematurely behind.

Narrowing of focus

Jacobs (2009) blamed media sociologists themselves for the subfield’s demise before properly establishing itself. What has occurred from the mid-20th century onwards was a gradual narrowing of focus to the intervening social conditions of mass media

[13] The panel resulted in a special edition on media sociology of The American Sociologist (volume 40, issue 3).

production instead of the wider public implications of mass mediation. By losing sight of macro-level questions, media sociology has lost its connection to the larger discipline.[14] Jacobs underlined Robert Park's early work on mass media as a classical foundation for a more ambitious understanding of media sociology, which is heralded by recent studies on social movements and media framing, cultural sociological studies on the media, and the (re)discovery of the public sphere (see also Benson 2009).

Benson (2004) stressed that a focus on media institutions from a comparative and Bourdieuian perspective can help media studies overcome the gap between overly macro (political economy) and overly micro (organizational case studies) understandings of the news. One decade later he advocated for a "structural media sociology" that emphasizes institutional complexity over unitary understandings of "the media" or a singular "media logic" shaping the world (Benson 2014).

Differentiation, dispersion and absorption

One explanation for the non-establishment of the subfield in sociology is that media sociology got absorbed by emerging academic disciplines more specifically concerned with mediated communication, housed at CMJ departments and schools. By absorption we mean several circumstances: 1) Scholars changing sides to adjacent disciplines after earning a Ph.D. in sociology. The dispersion of media sociologists meant, on the one hand, a loss from the point of view of sociology, on the other hand was what kept media sociology alive and ensured some accumulation of knowledge and continuity of ideas. 2) However, it also meant a loss of organizational momentum which would have been needed to establish a section in a scholarly association. Why

[14] In the German context, this macro understanding is much more pronounced to the extent that such organizational studies of media production would not even be considered as media sociology (Ziemann 2006).

should scholars who are able to establish themselves in another discipline struggle for recognition in sociology? 3) The emergence of media studies-focused journals in communication science, which reduced the necessity to create media sociology journals. 4) The competition between social science disciplines for their respective jurisdiction (Abbott 1988).

This last point needs some elaboration: Generally, sociology is indifferent when it comes to substantive overlap with other academic disciplines. In fact, one way to understand the objective of sociology is that it constitutes a meta-social science—a residual discipline which poses questions other social sciences put aside or fail to ask (Bauman 1995). Sociology is, furthermore, interstitial in that it claims the status of a general social science through its inner dissension between the sciences and humanities (Abbott 2001). One important difference between media sociology and other sociological subfields that overlap with neighboring social sciences, like economic sociology (economics) or political sociology (political science), is that these adjacent disciplines emerged at about the same time or before sociology and enjoy higher status within the social sciences. The inception of communication departments in the second half of the 20th century paralleled the professionalization of sociology through the proliferation of methods of empirical social research in the post-war era. As a younger and less established social science discipline, communication stands in a different competitive relationship to sociology. Furthermore, in contrast to other social sciences, communication science applies sociological methods, though they have been gradually superseded by psychology and political science, particularly in political communication (Waisbord 2014a).

Specialization entrepreneurship and associational politics

Besides a general organizational momentum, other successful section formations suggest that successful specialization needs to be spearheaded by leading figures in the field. We refer to these as specialization entrepreneurs. To name only two examples: In the case of cultural sociology, Jeffrey Alexander, Paul DiMaggio, Richard Peterson, Anne Swidler and other household names were involved in getting the section off the ground. Neil Fligstein, Mark Granovetter, Brian Uzzi, Harrison White and others led the late formation of the section on economic sociology in 2000. We have argued that there was a historical opportunity for the establishment of a media sociology section in the ASA in the 1980s after the field was at its height and when many other sections emerged.[15] To our knowledge nobody engaged in serious attempts to form a media sociology section at that time. The potential specialization entrepreneurs either lacked academic political ambitions, were busy with helping to form other sections, or advanced their associational careers on the ASA council level. To name a few examples: Gaye Tuchman and Michael Schudson were both actively involved in the formation and early leadership of the cultural sociology section in the mid 1980s, which would grow into the largest sections of the ASA. Though there is no way to measure this, culture, with media understood as mass-mediated and/or popular culture, was perhaps the most important section for media sociologists in the ASA until recently. Herbert Gans built his reputation in several areas, though his most lasting influence (measured by citation counts) is in media sociology. However, his recognition within the ASA, whose president he was in 1988, is mainly based on his work in urban sociology.

[15] Between 1970 and 1988 the number of sections in the ASA multiplied more than threefold from eight to 27, see: http://www.asanet.org/asa-communities/asa-sections/all-about-sections/section-membership-history/section-statistics (accessed July 28, 2016).

One would have expected the rise of the internet to create new momentum to form a media sociology section. This momentum was at least partially commandeered by the section on Sociology and Computing which was renamed Communication and Information Technologies in 2002. There are several reasons why the section proposal submitted in 2013 was unsuccessful. Despite support by numerous senior scholars, the authors of this article, both young and relatively unknown sociologists at the time, were perhaps not the right kind of specialization entrepreneurs for this task. Another factor is the sense that there are too many ASA sections already—certainly connected to Abbott's (2001) damning diagnosis of the fractal differentiation of sociology. Of the 52 current sections, six cannot maintain the necessary number of members and partly have not been able to do so for at least a decade. Since there was only one section in the history of the ASA that has ever been discontinued (Visual Sociology), there do not seem to be effective mechanisms to get rid of sections once they are established. The ASA instead discourages the formation of new sections and seems to prefer new initiatives to join forces with existing sections, as it happened with media sociology and the former CITASA section.

Conclusion and final advice

What can we learn from this case about specialization in academic disciplines and about how subfields fail to evolve? 1) Unsurprisingly, it shows that scholarly output and impact is not the only (and probably not even the most important) factor involved in the establishment of subfields. Media sociologists produced sizable and influential knowledge during a time when new sections flourished in the American Sociological Association (ASA). The 1970s and 1980s often rates as a golden age to media sociologists, though this notion has itself been subjected to criticism recently (Benson 2014; Tumber 2014). 2) For an academic subfield to thrive, appropriate institutional

foundations are also required. In the case of media sociology, we have suggested the lack of associational representation and one or more specialized journals as key factors for why it failed to establish itself in the discipline, even one as wide-ranging and “weakly disciplinary” as sociology (Healy forthcoming). 3) Related to that, specialization depends on the “specialization cycle” of the academic discipline, that is, the sense of whether a field is “too differentiated” or not. Here, the perceptions of representatives in position of influence and organizational mechanisms in scholarly associations that allow fluctuation of section divisions are critically important. The lack of the latter and the givenness of the former in the ASA appear to be critical factors for the case in point.

4) Subfields depend on the existence, influence, and initiative of what we might call specialization entrepreneurs who promote their establishment. Charismatic leaders might not be a necessary condition for changing the powers that be, but it is hard to dispute their importance, especially in an association 111 years of age with a singular consensus, which is the admiration of its classical founders.

5) Last but not least, specialization may depend on the relationship between discipline and adjacent disciplines and the hierarchy between them. Sociology, which lacks an exclusive subject domain, relates to all other social sciences, at least in principle and unilaterally. In contrast to all other social science disciplines, communication is younger, less established than sociology, and itself applies many tools of sociology. As a consequence, communication is not a point of reference for sociological inquiry to answer unresolved questions as other social sciences are.

One issue which remains to be discussed is to what extent these challenges are unique to media sociology. Besides some specificities (exodus to an adjacent discipline and its relation to sociology), some general lessons may be drawn, especially with regard

to the importance of entrepreneurship and associational resistance against the proliferation of sections. We believe there should be mechanisms in place for sociological associations to not only expand but evolve so that its divisions reflect broader social changes rather than solidifications of past intellectual energies. Our final advice for scholars who dare to try founding an ASA section: Choose a distinguishing name, identify classical lineages, get senior scholars involved and actively negotiate, make a strong case for unmet demand and distinctiveness of the subfield, and highlight possibilities of growth (of the section and the ASA as a consequence) when you make your case and do not stop petitioning even after submitting your proposal.

The immediate future of media sociology is unknown. We posit, however, that there is future potential. Much depends upon how many media sociologists CITAMS will be able to attract as new members, how satisfied they are with the section, and the extent to which they are able to participate and shape the section's future. The prosperity of the field is also a question of specialized publication venues and continued contributions to knowledge production in the general journals. Initially, openness of the main CITAMS section outlet Information, Communication & Society for media sociology may be helpful. However, since the journal is associated to two other scholarly associations, the International Communication Association (ICA) and the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), its capacity to absorb additional institutional interests may be limited, despite twelve annual issues. In the long run, we would maintain, media sociology will need its own journal. Nevertheless, we are cautiously optimistic about the prospects for the subfield of media sociology, especially in light of the ever-increasing ubiquity of media in social life.

References

Abbott, A. D. (1988). The system of professions: An essay on the division of expert labor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Abbott, A. D. (2001). Chaos of disciplines. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Adorno, T. W. (1941). On popular music. Studies in Philosophy and Social Science, 9, 17–48.

Alexander, J. C., Jacobs, R. N., & Smith, P. (2012). The Oxford Handbook of cultural sociology. New York: Oxford University Press.

Altheide, D. L. (1976). Creating reality: How TV news distorts events. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Altheide, D. L., & Snow, R. P. (1979). Media logic. Beverly Hills: Sage.

American Sociological Association, ed. 1985. Guide to Graduate Departments of Sociology. Washington, D.C: American Sociological Association.

Andrews, K. T., & Caren, N. (2010). Making the news: Movement organizations, media attention, and the public agenda. American Sociological Review, 75(6), 841–66.

Bail, C. A. (2012). The fringe effect: Civil society organizations and the evolution of media discourse about Islam since the September 11th attacks. American Sociological Review, 77(6), 855–79.

Baker, C. E. (2002). Media, markets, and democracy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bauman, Z. (1995). Thinking sociologically. Malden: Blackwell.

Belair-Gagnon, V. (2015). Social media at BBC News: The re-making of crisis reporting. New York: Routledge.

Benson, R. (2004). Bringing the sociology of media back in. Political Communication, 21(2), 275–92.

Benson, R. (2009). Shaping the public sphere: Habermas and beyond. The American Sociologist, 40(3), 175–97.

Benson, R. (2014). Strategy follows structure: A media sociology manifesto. In S. Waisbord (Ed.), Media sociology: A reappraisal (pp. 24–45). Cambridge: Polity.

Benson, R., & Neveu, E. (2005). Bourdieu and the journalistic field. Cambridge: Polity.

Benson, R., & Saguy, A. C. (2005). Constructing social problems in an age of globalization: A French-American comparison. American Sociological Review, 70(2), 233–59.

Brienza, C. (2015). Activism, legitimation, or record: Towards a new tripartite typology of academic journals. Journal of Scholarly Publishing, 46(2), 141–157.

Brienza, C., & Revers, M. (2016). The field of American media sociology: Origins, resurrection, and consolidation. Sociology Compass, 10(7), 539–52.

Burawoy, M. (2005). 2004 presidential address. For public sociology. American Sociological Review, 70(1), 4–28.

Calhoun, C. J. (1992). Habermas and the public sphere. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Calhoun, C. (1992). The infrastructure of modernity: Indirect social relationships, information technology, and social integration. In H. Haferkamp & N. J. Smelser (Ed.) Social change and modernity (pp. 205–36). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Calhoun, C. (1998). Community without propinquity revisited: Communications technology and the transformation of the urban public sphere. Sociological Inquiry, 68(3), 373–97.

Clayman, S. E., Heritage, J., Elliott, M. N., & McDonald, L. L. (2007). When does the watchdog bark? Conditions of aggressive questioning in presidential news conferences. American Sociological Review, 72(1), 23–41.

Couldry, N. (2008). Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling. New Media & Society, 10(3), 373–91.

Crane, D. (1992). The production of culture: Media and the urban arts. Newbury Park: Sage.

Croteau, D., & Hoynes, W. (2003). Media society: Industries, images, and audiences (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press.

Earl, J. (2015). CITASA: Intellectual past and future. Information, Communication & Society, 18(5), 478–91.

Fishman, M. (1980). Manufacturing the news. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Fleck, C. (2011). A transatlantic history of the social sciences: Robber barons, the Third Reich and the invention of empirical social research. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1989). Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. The American Journal of Sociology, 95(1), 1–37.

Gans, H. J. (1979). *Deciding what's news: A* study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Gitlin, T. (1978). Media sociology: The dominant paradigm. Theory and Society, 6(2), 205–53.

Gitlin, T. (1980). The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making & unmaking of the New Left. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Goffman, E. (1974). Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Habermas, J. (1962). Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. Neuwied: Luchterhand.

Hall, J. R., Grindstaff, L. & Lo, M. C. (2010). Handbook of cultural sociology. London: Routledge.

Hall, S. (1973). Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse: Paper for the *Council of Europe Colloquy on'Training in the Critical Reading* of Televisual *Language', Organized by the Council and the Centre for Mass* Communication Research, University of Leicester, September 1973. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham.

Hall, S. (1973). Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse. Paper prepared for the "Council of Europe Colloquy on 'Training in the Critical Reading of Televisual Language.'" Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham. http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/history/cccs/stencilled-occasional-papers/1to8and11to24and38to48/SOP07.pdf. Accessed 10 March 2017.

Hall, S. (1977). Culture, the media and the ideological effect. In J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, & J. Woollacott (Eds.), Mass communication and society (pp. 315–348). London: Edward Arnold.

Healy, K. (forthcoming). Fuck nuance. *Sociological Theory*. https://kieranhealy.org/files/papers/fuck-nuance.pdf (Accessed 10 March 2017).

Hepp, A. (2013). *Cultures of mediatization*. Cambridge: Polity.

Hepp, A., & Krotz, F. (2014). *Mediatized worlds: Culture and society in a media age*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (1947). *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*. Amsterdam: Querido.

Iyengar, S., & Simon, A. (1993). News coverage of the gulf crisis and public opinion: a study of agenda-setting, priming, and framing. *Communication Research*, 20(3), 365–383.

Jackson, J. D., Nielsen, G. M., & Hsu, Y. (2011). *Mediated society: A critical sociology of media*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press.

Jacobs, M. D., & Hanrahan, N. W. (2005). *The Blackwell companion to the sociology of culture*. Malden: Blackwell.

Jacobs, R. N. (2009). Culture, the public sphere, and media sociology: A search for a classical founder in the work of Robert Park. *The American Sociologist*, 40(3), 149–166.

Jacobs, R. N., & Townsley, E. (2011). *The space of opinion: Media intellectuals and the public sphere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Janssen, S., Kuipers, G., & Verboord, M. (2008). Cultural globalization and arts journalism: The international orientation of arts and culture coverage in Dutch, French, German, and U.S. Newspapers, 1955 to 2005. *American Sociological Review*, 73(5), 719–740.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Katz, E. (2009). Why sociology abandoned communication. *The American Sociologist*, 40(3), 167–174.

Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955). *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Lang, G. E., & Lang, K. (1983). *The battle for public opinion: the president, the press, and the polls during Watergate*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lang, K., & Lang, G. E. (1953). The unique perspective of television and its effect: A pilot study. *American Sociological Review*, 18(1), 3–12.

Lang, K., & Lang, G. E. (2006). Personal influence and the new paradigm: Some inadvertent consequences. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 608(1), 157–178.

Lazarsfeld, P. F., & Berelson, B. (1944). *The people's choice: How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign*. New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce.

Lester, M. (1980). Generating newsworthiness: The interpretive construction of public events. *American Sociological Review*, 45(6), 984–994.

McChesney, R. W. (1999). *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176–187.

McNair, B. (1998). *The sociology of journalism*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Merton, R. K., Lowenthal, M. F., & Curtis, A. (1946). *Mass persuasion: The social psychology of a war bond drive*. New York: Harper.

Meyen, M., & Löblich, M. (2006). *Klassiker der Kommunikationswissenschaft: Fach- und Theoriegeschichte in Deutschland*. Konstanz: UVK.

Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Molotch, H., & Lester, M. (1974). News as purposive behavior: On the strategic use of routine events, accidents, and scandals. *American Sociological Review*, 39(1), 101–112.

Molotch, H., & Lester, M. (1975). Accidental news: The great oil spill as local occurrence and national event. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 81(2), 235–260.

Myers, D. J., & Caniglia, B. S. (2004). All the rioting that's fit to print: Selection effects in national newspaper coverage of civil disorders, 1968-1969. *American Sociological Review*, 69(4), 519–543.

Neff, G. (2014). Boundaries and centers: Disciplines and the mediation of communication studies. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, CA.

Pamela E. Oliver, & Gregory M. Maney. (2000). Political processes and local newspaper coverage of protest events: From selection bias to triadic interactions. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(2), 463–505.

Park, R. E. (1922). *The Immigrant press and its control*. New York: Harper & Bros.

Park, R. E. (1923). The natural history of the newspaper. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 29(3), 273–289.

Peterson, R. A. (Ed.). (1976). *The Production of culture*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Peterson, R. A., & Anand, N. (2004). The production of culture perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30(1), 311–334.

Revers, M. (2017). *Contemporary journalism in the us and germany: Agents of accountability*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ritzer, G., & Jurgenson, N. (2010). Production, consumption, prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital "prosumer." *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10(1), 13–36.

Roscigno, V. J., & Danaher, W. F. (2001). Media and mobilization: The case of radio and southern textile worker insurgency, 1929 to 1934. *American Sociological Review*, 66(1), 21–48.

Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 9–20.

Schlesinger, P. (1978). *Putting "reality" together: BBC News*. London: Constable.

Schudson, M. (1978). *Discovering the news: A social history of American newspapers*. New York: Basic Books.

Schudson, M. (2011). *The sociology of news*. New York; London: W. W. Norton.

Shils, E. (1970). Tradition, ecology, and institution in the history of sociology. *Daedalus*, 99(4), 760–825.

Snow, D. A., Soule, S. A., & Kriesi, H. (2004). *The Blackwell companion to social movements*. Malden: Blackwell Pub.

Starr, P. (2004). *The creation of the media: Political origins of modern communications*. New York: Basic Books.

Sweeney, E. (2015). Shifting paradigms on the verge of a revolution: The evolution of the ASA section on Science, Knowledge, and Technology. *SKATOLOGY: Newsletter of the ASA Section on Science, Knowledge, & Technology*, April 2015, 4–9.

Tak Wing Chan, & John H. Goldthorpe. (2007). Social status and newspaper readership. *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(4), 1095–1134.

Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The media and modernity: A social theory of the media*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Tuchman, G. (1972). Objectivity as strategic ritual: An examination of newsmen's notions of objectivity. *American Journal of Sociology*, 77(4), 660–679.

Tuchman, G. (1973). Making news by doing work: Routinizing the unexpected. *American Journal of Sociology*, 79(1), 110–131.

Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making news: A study in the construction of reality*. New York: Free Press.

Tumber, H. (2014). Back to the future? The sociology of news and journalism from black and white to the digital age. In S. Waisbord (Ed.), *Media sociology: A reappraisal* (pp. 63–78). Cambridge: Polity.

Tunstall, J. (1970). *Media sociology: A reader*. London: Constable.

Tyler, I. (2007). From 'The Me Decade' to 'The Me Millennium': The cultural history of narcissism. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(3), 343–363.

van de Rijt, A., Shor, E., Ward, C., & Skiena, S. (2013). Only 15 Minutes? The Social Stratification of Fame in Printed Media. *American Sociological Review*, 78(2), 266–289.

Waisbord, S. (2014a). Introduction: Reappraising media sociology. In S. Waisbord (Ed.), *Media Sociology: A Reappraisal* (pp. 1–21). Cambridge: Polity.

Waisbord, S. (Ed.). (2014b). *Media Sociology: A Reappraisal*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Weber, M. (1988). Rede auf dem ersten Deutschen Soziologentage in Frankfurt 1910. In M. Weber (Ed.), *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitk* (pp. 431–449). Tübingen: Mohr.

Williams, R. (1983). *Culture and society, 1780-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wirth, L. (1948). Consensus and mass communication. *American Sociological Review*, 13(1), 1–15.

Wright, Charles R. 1956. “Sociology of Mass Communication, 1945-55.” Pp. 78–83 in Sociology in the United States of America: A trend report, Documentation in the social sciences, edited by H. L. Zetterberg. Paris: UNESCO.

Ziemann, A. (2006). *Soziologie der Medien*. Bielefeld: transcript.