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The Propaganda Model and Black Boxes?

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Abstract

This essay brings together leading scholars to debate important questions pertaining to methodological, philosophical, and pragmatic arguments and counterarguments about the necessity to observe the Propaganda Model filters in operation.

Keywords

Propaganda Model, media analysis, observability, social science research, methodology, methods, epistemology, validity, Cultural Studies, Communication Studies, media theory.

Introduction

Much of the criticism that has been directed at Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's Propaganda Model (PM) reveals, on a close reading, tacit assumptions about the nature of evidence and explanation. The following debate attempts to articulate some of these tacit assumptions. As it happens, even scholars who believe the PM is, at core, evidentially sound, have expressed the concern that the unobservability of some aspects of the PM's operations weakens its explanatory power and validity, and have called for research which would render the PM's components more observable than they presently are. These points are articulated and directly addressed by the participants in what follows.

Andrew Mullen: There is a voluminous body of evidence supporting the first hypothesis of the PM: that where there is elite consensus on a particular policy issue, media will largely reflect this view in its coverage of that issue. Scholars have demonstrated, time and again, that media systems – in the United States and in other countries where media are predominantly corporate in orientation – effectively serve state and corporate interests in what can be described as propaganda-managed democracies. The macro-level approach that the PM engenders has not only been applied in a wide variety of countries, it has also proved its worth in terms of understanding and explaining media coverage of both domestic and foreign policy issues. I have produced evidence confirming the third hypothesis of the PM: that the media, and academia, will generally ignore or marginalize the PM and the empirical evidence offered in support of it (Mullen, 2010). The second hypothesis of the PM – that media coverage of any policy issue is effectively shaped by five filters – is much more problematic. Indeed, it could be argued that this is the Achilles’ heel of the PM in terms of understanding and explaining media performance. As Boyd-Barrett (2004: 448) argued, “Some filters of the PM, by their very nature, constitute a significant challenge of observability: they tend to fall within the compass of what may be described as the ‘black box’ within whose darkness occur some of the operational transactions that probably must occur for the implementation of Herman and Chomsky’s political-economic determinants. Penetration of this ‘black box’ remains, for the most part, a major challenge to those who would seek further operational confirmation of the PM.”

Indeed, I have frequently encountered difficulties in operationalizing some of these filters when researching and writing about specific case studies of media performance using the PM. Moreover, these difficulties have been recognized and highlighted by book and journal article reviewers who have complained that the analytical framework provided by the PM does not and, in their opinion, cannot, account for the particular instances of media coverage that are being discussed. Critically, this has often been used to justify a fundamental revision, or sometimes rejection, of my work in terms of publication. In short, it is often argued that these filters are too abstract and removed from the day-to-day realities of the media production process

to account for the observed media coverage. This is not true of all of the filters however.

The sourcing filter and the ideological filter are relatively straightforward to operationalize via the standard content and discourse analysis approaches utilized by media scholars. More problematic are the ownership, advertising and flak filters as these cannot be readily discerned, or “read off,” using such approaches. Instead, operationalizing these filters in any particular instance requires evidence that can only be gleaned from a micro-level study of those involved in the media production process of that particular output at that time (i.e. the journalists and editors involved). To strengthen the body of evidence put forward to justify the PM, I would suggest that scholars engage in more qualitative micro-level studies, focusing on how media owners, advertisers and flak machines constrain and shape journalistic and editorial output in particular instances. This micro-level evidence can then be deployed to augment the macro-level data generated via the sourcing and ideological filters in a way that makes the PM much more difficult to dismiss. It’s time to open that “black box.”

Yigal Godler: What we’re dealing with is the question of what should count as evidence for the validity of the PM, whose assumptions consist of a series of institutional facts which were dubbed “filters.” Whereas Herman and Chomsky provided content-based evidence which was collated from US elite media-coverage and which dovetailed with the institutional facts they’d listed, critics have alleged that such dovetailing is insufficient evidence in support of the PM. From the critics’ perspective, the only way in which the PM could be borne out is a scenario in which one could directly observe the operation of all or some of the filters. At times, this complaint was accompanied by a call for various kinds of micro-sociological research into the goings-on inside news organizations.

To adjudicate in this debate I think one must derive some basic (and admittedly, in my case, inadequately informed) lessons from the history and philosophy of science. My understanding is that science routinely explains observable phenomena through the postulation of unobservable layers of reality. Of course, such unobservable layers

are not simply postulated – their consequences are worked out in detail and often with a startling degree of mathematical precision. However, there is no expectation that the multiverse or strings or dark matter, or for that matter such well-established forces and entities as gravitation or atoms or curved spacetime, would simply reveal themselves to the observer in any direct way. Instead, such entities are postulated insofar as they help scientists explain why a set of phenomena behaves in some manner, rather than in some other logically possible manner. Simply put, in science what's observed is the tentative consequence of the hidden underlying reality which cannot be observed. Thus, what is observed is neither identical to, nor is it a replica of, the unobserved.

Now there is obviously an important difference between the underlying realities that the natural sciences postulate to account for observable phenomena and the realities postulated in the PM. Whereas the former seek to postulate entities which were not thought to exist prior to their postulation, the PM postulates realities which are hardly in dispute and in fact are trivial: the profit-orientation of businesses, the reliance on advertisers' money, the reliance on official sources etc. Unlike in the case of the multiverse, the PM's assumptions are considerably less open to controversy and dispute. Thus, it is unclear why it is reasonable to forego direct observation in the case of the putative hidden structures of nature, whose existence is often questioned, but unreasonable to forego observation vis-à-vis institutional structures about whose existence and operation there is no comparable dispute. Indeed, it appears that the latter is an attempt to manipulate the burden of proof in the hope of denying the obvious.

The late Edward Herman pointed out long ago that critics of the PM failed to demonstrate that it violated the principle of logical consistency; namely, that they haven't shown in their critiques that the PM would explain opposites. Herman further pointed out that the critics failed to explain by means of some alternative explanation why the contents of the American elite media came out in the way that they did in Herman and Chomsky's study of the media (recall Daniel Hallin's attempt to explain Herman and Chomsky's and his own findings through the vague notion of "professionalism," which itself is quite logically inconsistent; see Herman [2000: 106]

for details). For this reason, one awaits a serious critique of the model, and not one which sets an arbitrary precondition for its validity.

I have no doubt that one can sometimes obtain micro-sociological evidence for the PM under exceptional circumstances, and my understanding is that Marsha Coleman's doctoral dissertation about the coverage of the Steve Biko assassination initially contained such valuable interview material (in that case, a journalist was pulled out from covering the subject because of editorial pressures, and both the editor and the journalist were interviewed), which was incidentally excised from her dissertation due to faculty pressures. But there's a difference between taking the interview data as something to be explained, which is how I think Coleman approached it, and hoping that the interview data will contain admissions by journalists and editors of succumbing to power (the absence of the latter, incidentally, seems to be Michael Schudson's reasoning behind rejecting the PM). As it happens, Coleman's case also anecdotally illustrates that mainstream scholars are not satisfied even with micro-sociological evidence which is consistent with institutional explanations. Thus, it seems like the demand for micro-sociological evidence is not really about an authentic concern for the validity of the research, but about finding an excuse to dismiss unpalatable political-economic questions and empirical conclusions.

In sum, no one to my knowledge has provided a persuasive argument about why micro-sociological evidence is a necessary condition for establishing the validity of the PM. At best, it's a possible independent source of evidence, the absence of which in no way undermines the model, anymore than the unobservability of underlying realities postulated in the natural sciences undermines the validity of scientific theories.

Jeffery Klaehn: I'm not in favor of formally revising the PM to include analysis of various micro-level processes. Study of micro-processes and admissions of intent should not be necessary conditions for PM research. Herman ([2018 \[1996\]](#)) characterized intent as an "unmeasurable red herring."

Evaluating data for content, omissions and style of presentation may be undertaken in order to delineate the extent to which news discourses and “boundaries of debate” are ideologically inflected. Such analysis entails assessing media choices regarding how news stories are framed and presented.

Andrew Mullen: To clarify, and to avoid misrepresentation, I am not advocating a fundamental revision of the PM to include micro-level analyses in each and every case where the PM is utilized. The macro-level studies of media performance that have been conducted to date should be taken on their own merit and scholars should engage with these findings and provide alternative explanations where they disagree – instead of simply ignoring the PM and its supporting data as so many seem to do. Furthermore, there are many practical problems involved in conducting such research. Gaining scholarly access, in real time, to journalists and editors during the media production process regarding a particular policy issue may be difficult. And even when such access is granted, journalists and editors may not be truthful about the structural constraints under which they are working – preferring instead to defend their claimed objectivity and professionalism – and/or they may have internalized elite perspectives such that they are not even aware of their functional role in a propaganda system. My argument was simply that the existing scholarship on the PM would be strengthened by providing such data. Providing greater clarity on the operation of the five filters – as Hearn-Branaman (2018) and Robinson (2018) advocate in their contributions in [*The Propaganda Model Today*](#) – would make it more difficult for opponents of the PM to dismiss Herman and Chomsky’s work.

The filters that Herman and Chomsky chose to include in the PM are not simply the result of deductions and/or logical abstractions of the media production process. Take the advertising filter for example. This was included in the PM because of the many *observable* cases of advertisers’ preferences manifestly having an impact on the media production process. Herman and Chomsky talk at length in *Manufacturing Consent* (2002 [1988]) about Curran and Seaton’s *Power without Responsibility* (1981) study which documented the history of the British press and how, over the course of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, the radical and working class press was transformed, or in some cases closed, because of commercial and ideological

discrimination by advertisers. Herman also discussed a specific case of advertisers' editorial intervention in the Sut Jhally (producer, director) documentary, *The Myth of the Liberal Media* (1997). In short, the filters are not just structural; agency on the part of journalists and editors can be empirically demonstrated in concrete instances. As social scientists, and positivists, we should, indeed must, be able to empirically verify – and allow others to test – the conceptual and theoretical precepts that we advance. A set of micro-level studies informed by the PM would allow us to do just that.

Yigal Godler: It is true that if one were to adopt a positivist view, then the PM could only be valid if it had been formulated on the basis of a generalization from exclusively observable phenomena. However, I think there are good philosophical grounds for rejecting positivism (I found particularly inspiring Roy Bhaskar's [2008] arguments against it), as science does not seem to proceed on the assumption of thoroughgoing observability of theoretical concepts. Now, sure enough, there are cases in which advertiser pressures can be directly observed, as well as documented cases in which journalists are pulled out, moved to another beat or replaced after their actions have come into direct conflict with the business interests of publishers. The crucial question, though, is whether such cases must be shown to occur in every instance of coverage which is explained by the PM, lest the PM be dismissed as insufficiently verified (despite a plethora of content-based evidence explicable in terms of the assumptions of the PM). In my view, an affirmative answer to the latter question is not a reasonable position to take, unless one adopts a positivist view (which I reject). Now it is true that cases of observable and active interventions by business interests to shape coverage are likely to make life a bit harder for those seeking to dismiss institutional analyses, but only a bit, as even then mainstream scholars will (and have) come up with an excuse to dismiss conclusions they don't like (as happened in Coleman's case; I also don't think Herman and Chomsky's mention of Raymond Bonner's case or Chomsky's mention of the replacement of the editors of the op-ed page of the *New York Times* has made them more popular with the mainstream crowd).

Thus, instead of playing into the hands of mainstream scholars who postulate unreasonable preconditions for the verification of the PM, one should be able to

articulate what precisely is wrong with these arbitrary preconditions. It is also curious how mainstream scholars generally reject positivism, but tacitly accept its tenets when dealing with ideologically unpalatable work (in contrast, has anyone ever gotten a direct micro-sociological glimpse of Bourdieu's concept of habitus? See Dylan Riley's (2017) penetrating critique of Bourdieu's fundamental concepts). Furthermore, the PM, as I recall, was designed to account for routine coverage, not to account for strategic interventions. And in routine cases, it is reasonable to assume that journalists and editors know and acquiesce in (if not outright accept) what is expected of them. This does not mean they have lost their agency, but merely that under the institutional constraints that exist it is completely rational for most of them to do exactly what is likely to increase the probability of their promotion and job security. The self-justification comes later (i.e. post-acquiescence) as people like to make virtue out of necessity, with the possible exception of complete cynics.

Tom Mills: As others have intimated, I think a realist as opposed to positivist approach is useful to address this question of "black boxes." Content analysis of the type presented in *Manufacturing Consent* strongly supports what we referred to here as the first hypothesis of the PM, namely that the corporate news media largely reflects the elite consensus on particular policy issues. The evidence for that is overwhelming, whatever journalists and liberal intellectuals like to think. The remaining scientific question is one of causation. What are the underlying mechanisms that give rise to the observed patterns of reporting? With a complex system like the news media we are talking about the tendency of a particular ensemble of structures, powers and relations to produce empirically observable effects (Fleetwood, 2001); in this case particular types of news content. Some of the "filters" postulated in *Manufacturing Consent* can be observed empirically, others we would expect to manifest more subtly in the culture and practices of journalists. But all the "filters" (or causal mechanisms) can be, and have been, researched. Comparative studies can suggest, for example, to what extent different media ownership structures or revenue models give rise to different patterns of reporting, whilst archival or investigative research, for example, can help uncover the role of the state in "sourcing" and "flak." I think it is important to push back against the dismissive responses to the PM, but equally I think we can be perfectly open-minded

about the role, and relative significance, of the “five filters.” What’s important about *Manufacturing Consent* is that it very effectively debunks the foundational myths of liberal journalism, and also offers a plausible explanatory model. None of the calls to open up the “black box” that gives rise to media content threatens to undermine this political significance.

Jeffery Klaehn: The PM is what it is: extremely well-suited toward analyzing media content. Should it be concerned to explore other issues and processes that are outside its field of play but looked upon as constituent parts of what may be viewed as an organic, coherent whole? I agree, supporting data can be and is useful, but this can exist apart from PM analysis (see, for example, Klaehn, [2010](#)). I’m not in favor of updating the PM in ways that will make admissions part of the burden of proof equation, and this isn’t typically required of other conceptual models (Klaehn, 2003a; 2003b). Qualified change would also be problematic. Herman ([2018 \[1996\]](#)) was very clear that the PM is not concerned with intent. Supporting data can, however, exist alongside PM analysis.

Daniel Broudy: History offers examples of how major media and other organizations work to guard mainstream gates in service to real power. While it is rare, indeed quite unlikely, that institutional insiders possessing evidence of crimes would testify to researchers intent to understand why and how corporate media select issues “fit to print” and so shape public debate, declassified documents certainly provide compelling proof that the PM is a mostly accurate reflection of how media perform.

[Declassified documents](#) can serve to breach the lock on the “black box” that often prevents researchers from accessing micro-level evidence that would confirm in interviews how media coverage is effectively shaped by the PM’s filters. Though they are in no way necessary to substantiating the power of the PM to illustrate mass media behavior, such documents can disclose evidence of key patterns of how major media and their institutional actors fulfill their gatekeeping functions when scandals or fundamental shifts in public opinion threaten to undermine the entire system.

During America's age of apartheid, social movements in the political left working toward labor rights, women's rights, native American rights, and the rights of African Americans threatened to destroy the hegemonic order. The American Civil Rights Movement began emerging more clearly in December 1955 when Rosa Parks was arrested for disobeying ordinances requiring blacks to give up their seats to whites demanding comfortable space on crowded buses. While Parks' arrest precipitated a series of events galvanizing people into action, the establishment response to the widening Movement appeared in official policy merely a few months later, in March 1956.

The FBI was tasked explicitly in agency [memoranda](#) by J. Edgar Hoover to surveil, infiltrate, discredit, disrupt, and even eliminate people and the activities of movements seeking redress. The FBI's illegal and secret counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) remained hidden from public view until 1971, when anti-Vietnam War activists stole evidence of the operation from the FBI and leaked it to the news media. The media's performance during this period – and since – in prioritizing and selecting the topics of public import, confirm the PM's hypothesized filters. In 2013, when Glenn Greenwald broke Edward Snowden's story of not just continued but expanded counter-intelligence operations waged against citizens, it became clear that the corporate media as a check on power is a pervasive and insidious myth – a necessary illusion that news somehow accurately reflects objective reality.

Clearly, there is no elite consensus in the Republic today on the vital importance of preserving or protecting Constitutional rights of common citizens, nor on the rights of real journalists exercising press freedoms to report on repression and malfeasance. Testifying to the power of the PM to illustrate such corporate media performance is the marginalization of truth tellers, the periodic calls for the assassination of journalists seeking to report objective truths, and the demonization of whistleblowers. Would a Wiki-source for Leaks open to public scrutiny have been necessary had corporate news actually been fulfilling its role as a watchdog? The porthole on truth that Assange and his cohorts have opened appears to be another "black box" rife with unfiltered versions of history.

It's no surprise, therefore, that you now have *Newsweek*, a purveyor of corporate public relations, featuring [Naveed Jamali](#) – Senior Fellow in the Program of National Security at the Foreign Policy Research Institute – [calling for the swift prosecution of Assange](#). The five filters illustrate how Jamali's opinion piece can be decoded: A self-professed [spy](#) employed by an influential Flak machine argues in a mainstream publication an opinion that stokes public fears that national security must take precedence over the U.S. Constitution, while the owners of this medium and the advertisers protect the status quo in the interest of preserving power and profits. Such is the ongoing work of warlocks and magicians who wrap themselves in the flag on corporate media platforms while working to undermine the Constitution. It is vitally important, you see, that we remain as citizens committed to our habits of consuming products and points of view while being suspended in states of ignorance as plans unfold to destroy completely the rules of law.

These are extremely serious issues and cut straight to the heart of the 1st and 4th Amendments and our ability as citizens, aware of the threats before us, to speak and to understand the most pressing concerns of our time. Is it any wonder that budding scholars concerned about these very same issues are routinely cowed into self-censoring and looking away from research projects that might engage them further into studies of this elaborate system of manipulation? Empirical evidence verifying the PM's hypotheses can be extrapolated from these patterns of behavior.

Joan Pedro-Carañana: I agree with Andrew Mullen that there is a lot of evidence that demonstrates that the five filters identified by the PM have an important influence in corporate media performance. The collection [The Propaganda Model Today](#) (Pedro-Carañana, Broudy and Klaehn, 2018) added further empirical evidence of this influence to the existing body of literature. However, as Andrew argues above, it is also true that it is difficult to measure the impact of *each* of the filters in the news coverage of *all* specific case studies through the analysis of media contents.

On the other hand, I agree with Yigal Godler that positivist epistemology should be discarded, while still orienting PM research towards empirical analysis. In the introduction to *The Propaganda Model Today* we provide a criticism of positivism as

originally conceptualized by Auguste Comte, later developed by the school of Mass Communication Research (Lasswell, Lazarsfeld etc.) and currently being applied in Big Data and algorithms.

Further empirical evidence based on content analysis can be provided in regards to ownership, for example, with studies that analyze the quantity of media representations that convey the view of liberals and conservatives on a given topic (the two ideologies of media owners) as well as the view of revolutionary or alternative forces (which are usually marginalized or excluded).

As Andrew holds, the direct influence of advertisers cannot always be observed, but I have [argued](#) (Pedro, 2011a) that there is also an indirect influence which can be summarized in the axiom of “not biting the hand that feeds you.”

Even if direct influence cannot be demonstrated in every case, there are plenty of studies that confirm advertisers’ meddling in media treatment of fundamental topics. The indirect influence of advertisers could also be observed in media contents through an analysis of news items dealing with the main advertisers by comparing the number and the characteristics of the stories that are favorable to advertisers and those that are critical. Other studies of content analysis can be conducted to identify the influence of each filter in communication production.

In addition, I agree with Andrew that sociological and ethnographic analyses of journalism can and should be used because they usually support the PM’s main hypothesis. Some of these studies, including those conducted by Herbert Gans (2003), have shown, for example, that journalists think that commercial pressure and fear from flak play a key role in limiting journalist’s autonomy and establishing the frames of news coverage. Florian Zollman (2009) and [Jesse Owen Hearn-Branaman](#) (2018) have also shown that sociological studies actually support the PM.

Jeffery Klaehn: I’m in complete agreement.

Joan Pedro-Carañana: Further reflection about “black boxes” should lead PM scholars to include new filters, such as the propaganda system proposed by [Oliver Boyd-Barrett](#) (2004) and [Piers Robinson](#) (2018) and the security system proposed by [Daniel Broudy](#) (2018). The direct influence of the Pentagon and other powerful agents of propaganda in Hollywood has been demonstrated by [Matthew Alford](#) (2009, 2010, 2018).

There is surely a need to carry out further studies on the transformations that the internet has brought about, especially with regards to algorithms and Big Data, which are obviously connected with private ownership, the need to maximize profits and advertising, but also with the other filters, as [Christian Fuchs](#) (2018) has shown. We know that these factors contribute to a great extent to the hegemony of algorithms that favor well-established, commercial, institutional and powerful actors, as well as superficiality and redundancy, while diminishing the visibility of different, innovative and alternative communication (see [Barry Pollick's](#) (2018) analysis of the websites shown by the Google search engine dealing with sports team owners and those about athletes).

In my opinion, the biggest “black hole” of the PM is derived from the fact that it is not dialectical enough. The filters focus on class struggle from above, but in order to understand the existence of plurality in the media, even if limited, and the possibilities of democratic and egalitarian change, it would be necessary to include factors related to class struggle from below. Counter-forces promoting plurality in the media and social change were identified and explained in [Manufacturing Consent](#) (Herman and Chomsky, 2002 [1988]) and in Herman's [revisiting](#) (2018 [1996]) and [retrospective](#) (2000). However, these counter-forces weren't included, conceptualized, operationalized and systematized in the model itself, which is focused exclusively on the critique of powerful agents that affect media performance and explain media propaganda.

I agree with [Colin Sparks](#) (2007), [Des Freedman](#) (2014), [Christian Fuchs](#) (2018) and [Miguel Álvarez-Peralta](#) (2018) that instead of focusing exclusively on filters that explain the propaganda function of the mainstream media, PM scholarship should

also pay attention to counter-forces that influence media performance. It is clear that, in any historical period, the media are organized to reproduce the existing macro-social system, and the PM is the most comprehensive model to explain why this is so in today's capitalist societies. However, it is also important to consider that there are alternative forces that work to expand the spectrum of acceptable opinion and eventually transform both the media and social systems.

Some of the counter-forces that PM scholarship has identified include the conflicts between different sectors of the elite, the emergence of strong social movements, the role of journalists (and star-journalists) as allies of the precariat in the class struggle for social change, the culture of different national and local cultures (which might push towards media and social change), the existence of producers of online media contents who promote change, and the need of the media to sell their products by complying with some of the demands of audiences. If we take into account power relations, we notice that the capacity of these factors to influence the media system is limited by the structural filters of the PM, but they, nevertheless, have some impact which ought to be observed.

Florian Zollmann: I basically agree with both positions offered in the exchange. On the one hand, the traditional PM approach is certainly valid. In *Manufacturing Consent*, Herman and Chomsky (2002 [1988]) clearly established the PM's filters on the basis of an extensive analysis of media scholarship as well as empirical data. Using these filters as variables and deducting predictions for media content pattern is fully in accord with the positivist scientific program (see Klæhn, 2003a; 2003b; Zollmann, 2017; also Thompson, 2009). On the other hand, it is not in contravention to the traditional PM approach if novel research aims at assessing the mechanics inside the black-box outlined by Boyd-Barrett (2004) and as suggested by Andrew and Joan above (see Thompson, 2009). In fact, the early so-called gatekeeper studies based on newsroom ethnographies, questionnaires and content analysis have done just that – although, of course, not with reference to the PM as they were often published earlier.

In my book *Media, Propaganda and the Politics of Intervention* (2017), I have devoted a literature-based chapter to discussing how the empirical findings of this gatekeeper and related research actually support the PM. The gatekeeper researchers demonstrated that journalistic intent is largely overridden by organization-institutional imperatives in the fashion theorized by Herman and Chomsky.

To provide a few examples of the striking findings of that research: Edward J. Epstein (2000 [1973]: 41) concluded that “While any given news decision, when taken alone, may seem idiosyncratic, it is still possible, paradoxically, for the total news output of an organization to be largely determined by general rules, routines and policies.” Herbert J. Gans (1980: 119) stressed in a study of broadcasting news, which was based on participant observation and content analysis, that, “while, in theory, sources can come from anywhere, in practice, their recruitment and their access to journalists reflect the hierarchies of nation and society.”

Moreover, Gans (1980: 277) contextualized the findings of his study as follows: “[...] my observations support the structural analyses of the news media proposed more often by activists or social scientists on the Left than on the Right: that journalists are restrained by systemic mechanisms that keep out some news.”

Gatekeeper research, in fact, can shed light into the black-box of news filtering processes assessing the impact of hierarchies and organizational pressures on the conduct of individual journalists. Whilst much of this research supports the PM, gatekeeper approaches could also be used to investigate the significance of potential counter-forces, as suggested by Joan above. So there are no contradictions if scholars develop the gatekeeper and related approaches further in order to investigate the mechanics within the filters of the PM. Perhaps this should be conducted in conjunction with a macro-level analysis of the news organization and its output.

I agree with Jeffery that such gatekeeper-analyses should not be regarded as a condition to validate the PM and that it is problematic that PM research is often held to higher standards than other research programs. But I also agree with Andrew and Joan that there is no harm in further validating the PM on the basis of deeper

analyses of newsrooms and other agency contexts. In fact, building on Oliver Boyd-Barrett's work (2004), I have just written a new, forthcoming chapter looking at structure-agency dynamics. The aim of the chapter is to advance the PM by way of incorporating studies that show how agency is undermined in media organizations or otherwise plays a role in manipulating the news (to be published in the forthcoming edition [*Still Manufacturing Consent: the Propaganda Model in the Information Age*](#), edited by Alan MacLeod of the Glasgow University Media Group). In the chapter I am not suggesting any revisions to the PM's filters in terms of processes on a micro-level. I rather highlight that structure-agency dynamics could be further accounted for by PM scholarship in order to advance our understanding of how filtering processes occur. Additionally, and incorporating intersectionality scholarship, I also suggest that sexism and racism should be regarded as new filters for the PM (see Zollmann, forthcoming). For instance, in the Western hemisphere, media owners and investors are overwhelmingly part of a male-dominated, white elite. Similarly, women, persons of color or migrants are disproportionately underrepresented in the journalism industry and disadvantaged in hierarchical decision-making tiers. These structural issues facilitate multiple biases in news content as identified by an abundance of scholarship (see e.g. Ross, 2017; Van Dijk, 2012). I propose in my chapter that these issues and scholarships should be integrated within an intersectional PM and also in terms of novel news filters (see Zollmann, forthcoming).

Jeffery Klaehn: These are fantastic ideas! I'm in complete agreement with Andrew regarding relative merits and difficulties associated with obtaining black box type data. This debate will no doubt continue and give way to even more beneficial developments in the years and decades to come, as scholars continue to develop and refine their methodological and conceptual approaches in utilizing Herman and Chomsky's PM to undertake research in the ever-changing contemporary social world; as it really should be, given the relentless development of persuasive communication and propaganda.

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