

Media consolidations threaten access, truth

■ **OUR OPINION:** Corporate ownership of networks creates risks of censorship and silence

Bigger is better.

The proposed \$7.4 billion merger of Time Warner and Turner Broadcasting Inc. comes on the heels of two other major media consolidations that took place this summer. The \$19 billion purchase of ABC by Walt Disney and the \$5.4 billion Westinghouse paid for CBS seemed to peak the trend toward the deregulation of media ownership and the industry in general.

Enter Time Warner Chairman Gerald Levin and CNN creator Ted Turner.

If the merger is approved by company shareholders, the Federal Communications Commission and other regulators, Levin and Turner will head up a company with combined revenues of more than \$18.7 billion. Legal challenges of unfair competition and antitrust violations have already been raised and consumer groups are concerned about the potential increase in cable prices.

These concerns, however, miss the real threat these corporate conglomerates pose for the American public: the control of information.

Since the 1980s, the ownership of the companies that disseminate information has made a continual shift toward corporations that are profit- rather than news-driven.

Approximately 75 percent of the nation's 1,610 newspapers are now owned by chains. The Time Warner/ Turner partnership

would control CNN, HBO, and *People*, *Time* and *Sports Illustrated* magazines, the world's largest music group and a smattering of "smaller" holdings including Tele-Communications Inc. NBC and CBS now find themselves on product lists with light bulbs and refrigerators.

More of the companies that determine what we see, hear, read and believe about our world have become controlled by fewer people. Now, the people who own the means by which information is transmitted also have a vested interest in what the public does or does not see.

In addition, these monopolies erect barriers to entry to anyone with a message in conflict with the mainstream. Small publications are sucked into the corporate vortex, and the dissident voices become fewer and fainter.

Proponents of the latest boom of buyouts and boardroom-sharing have said that such changes are necessary to compete in the "global economy" of the "Information Age." Bigger, they say, is not only better, but essential for survival. But at what cost?

We have become a nation of people who watch "whatever's on" with little thought of "whatever's not." For every episode of *Cops* that makes prime time, an investigation of the war in Rwanda or the economic crisis in Mexico gets pushed into the vaults. One thing is certain: The new owners of the national agenda will continue to provide us with what we want to see rather than what we need to see. At a price, of course.



The 'wild life' can teach critical lessons

One of the best parts about being at the University is that I continually meet people who demonstrate the amazing range of lifestyles that differ from those in my personal universe. My latest contact with an alternate frame of mind happened during New Student Orientation.

I had just given a talk to a group of older students about some of the problems they might encounter here when I met a young woman who was a little confused about getting registered. She had recently graduated from an Oregon high school and appeared to be the bright, determined type of student all parents hope their children will be.

I was able to clear up her confusion, and then she asked if I knew of any way she could change residence halls. When she applied for a housing assignment she asked not to be assigned to Bean, the all-freshman complex. To her, it would be "like the blind leading the blind." She said she wanted "to be around older students who already knew where everything was." The University had assigned her to Walton, which, to me, seemed like the perfect fit. Walton is open to students of all grade levels and it's a "quiet" hall where she could study without constant interruption from party animals. She had other thoughts on the matter. Her ideal residence hall was Hamilton, not only because it's open to all grade levels, but also because she heard it was "party central." The "everything" she wanted to find was where the best parties were.

I learned she was planning to do a science program that requires seven to 10 years of intensive study. Her apparent intelligence and determination made me believe that she would probably succeed, and that made her efforts to get into "party central" all the more puzzling. You see, my son is a freshman at another college.

While I'm aware that partying is a natural part of his world, I always thought it was only a small part of the college experience and not a prime objective. Foolish me.

My brief meeting with the future party animal made me stop and think about the fundamental role alcohol and late-night parties play in a college environment. Glimpses of alternative approaches to life tend to trigger such reflections.

Later that night I told my son about the young woman and

asked him to explain the partying mindset to me. I know I had it when I was younger, but as I approach senility (a disease parents catch from their teenage kids) I tend to forget much of my misspent youth. As we talked, I began to understand that partying is an essential part of the college experience, even for students who never go to the parties. Let me try to explain.

For parents, college can be a scary place to send their children. They know their children are becoming adults and will be exposed not only to a wealth of new ideas, but also to many new situations, some of which are potentially dangerous. Alcohol and partying are two such circumstances. Parents know their children will run into both but hope the exposure will be minimal. Once again, the naive hopes of a parent.

I came to see that learning to deal with alcohol consumption and late-night partying are more than just a casual part of college life; they're a critical part. College provides most students with a new-found sense of freedom and making choices and living with the consequences are an essential part of that freedom.

Because the results associat-

ed with alcohol, drugs and sex can be life-altering, they provide excellent opportunities to learn how to cope with all sorts of interesting social situations.

They also play a major role in thinning the herd.

The best part is that those who never or moderately indulge can learn as much as those who overindulge. Seeing your roommate drive the porcelain bus at 3 a.m. is just one example. If the roommate is still able to maintain his or her grades after repeated overindulgence, then it demonstrates the power of the human spirit and body to overcome all sorts of obstacles (like alcohol poisoning and extreme fatigue) and still survive. If, on the other hand, your roommate has to leave school because his or her grades are in the same toilet as last night's beer, it demonstrates what happens when you don't take care of business first.

Alcohol and late-night partying, like sex and drugs, do not necessarily create problems. They do create chances to make potentially life-altering choices and to enjoy or suffer the aftermath of those decisions. Abstinence, indulgence and overindulgence each have their own tradeoffs and no matter what you choose, you will be responsible for the consequences. Good luck.

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