

**CULTIVATION ANALYSIS/
CULTURAL INDICATORS
THEORY**



Central Thesis



- “The repetitive pattern of television’s mass produced messages and images forms the mainstream of the common symbolic environment that cultivates the most widely shaped conceptions of reality.”
- Television in particular has become for many people a prime source of a socially constructed picture of reality which is substantially different from what exists within society.

Main concern: Television



- Reflects the dominant role of network broadcast television in the 1970s and 1980s.
- Television is a unique medium for mainstreaming:
 - ▣ It penetrates every home in the land.
 - ▣ It does not require literacy.
 - ▣ It's free
 - ▣ It doesn't require mobility.

Main concern: Television



- Television functions in a ritualistic way
- Television is the chief common ground among the different groups that make up a large and heterogeneous national population

Three major research interests



- **Institutional Process Analysis**
Analysis of how institutional processes work
- **Message Systems Analysis**
Analysis of the characteristics of messages
- **Cultivation Analysis**
Analysis of the effects of the messages

Analysing institutional processes



- Mass media are not the organs of the people: they are the result of particular social institutions and bested interests.
- Questions:
 - ▣ What is the overall effect of corporate controls on the basic terms of symbolic cultural outputs?
 - ▣ How do various media managers determine and perform the functions required by their institutions, clients and the social order?
 - ▣ What policy changes affect those terms, and how?

Television as an institution



- Television socialises most people into standardized roles and behavior.
- Television functions as an agency of the established order
 - ▣ Its primary social and cultural function: to extend and maintain the established order rather than to alter, threaten, or weaken it
- TV stabilizes social patterns, cultivates resistance to change.

Analysing television's message systems



- The object of study: To uncover the dominant patterns of the symbolic world of television.
- Primary research methodology: content analysis
- Major areas of research:
 - crime and law enforcement
 - occupational roles
 - sexual stereotyping
 - the roles of women.

Violence



- TV a very violent medium
- In the early 1980s
 - ▣ In society
 - Rate of violent crimes = .32%
 - ▣ On TV
 - Major characters involvement = 64% (x200)
 - Minor characters involvement = 32% (x100)
- The nature of TV violence reflects particular symbolic patterns

Cultivation analysis



- What it is
 - ▣ The study of how the dominant patterns of television symbolic systems are reflected in the lives of viewers

Cultivation analysis



- What it assumes

- The major effects of mass media are not in immediate, dramatic change, but in slowly shaping the perceptions of social reality within which the viewer must plan, make decisions, and act.
- The effects of television are not primarily in what they make us “do”, but in what they contribute to the meaning of all that is done.
- Representation in the fictional world of the cultural system signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation.

Cultivation analysis



- The focus of its study
 - ▣ not on the individual nor specific goals or impacts,
 - ▣ but on its contribution to the cultivation of common perspectives - the “mainstreaming effect.”

- In relation to violence,
 - ▣ the focus on individual aggression is misguided.
 - ▣ the major effect and purpose of televised violence is the cultivation of fear.

Findings



1. Heavy television viewers perceive social reality differently from light television viewers, even when other social and personality factors are present
2. The conceptions of social reality of heavy viewers of television reflect the patterns of facts and actions presented on television.
3. Heavy viewers of television demonstrate a tendency to respond to social situations on the basis of the reality viewed on television.

Findings



4. The absence of first-hand information on issues may increase the salience of the television imagery.
5. This cultivation is mediated, enhanced, or diminished by powerful personal, social and cultural variables...
6. But the relationship between television viewing and conceptions of social reality remains positive across each of these variables.

Critique



1. TV is not the near-sovereign shaper of culture that Gerbner suggests.
2. Methodological problems: accuracy and adequacy of definitions – heavy & light viewers, violence
3. Causation: Are heavy viewers shaped by viewing, or do those characteristics make them heavy-viewers?

Critique



4. Problems in conflicts between some findings, e.g. men's anxiety cf. women.
5. It assumes a mass society view left behind long ago
6. The TV reality is not homogenous in its impact, but filtered through numerous audience characteristics.

REVIEWING THE EFFECTS THEORETICAL TRADITION



What they have in common



- Focus on communication as process
- Focus on cause and effect
- Research process:
 - ▣ Isolate variables
 - ▣ Manipulate and test
 - ▣ Explain
 - ▣ Predict & control
- Test of truth: quantify and measure
 - ▣ Research methodologies = quantitative

The attractiveness of effects theories




- Relatively simple
- Builds on our tacit understanding that action has consequences
- Theories for action
 - ▣ Simple theory sets mind free for strategy
 - ▣ Learn the techniques you can achieve the results
- Purports to offer “objective” information – apolitical, indifferent
- Reinforces the knowledge power structures

Criticisms



- Effects theories tackle social problems backwards
 - ▣ Media are agents of society, not its masters
- The “objective” claim of knowledge hides vested interests
 - ▣ Focusing on media as the source of social problems avoids tackling social roots
 - ▣ Creates a group of social guardians who aren't affected and want to dictate to others

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- The need to isolate variables artificially fragments holistic situations & misrepresents reality
 - Effects theories treat audiences as infantile
 - ▣ The “vulnerable audience” critique
 - The scientific approach emphasizes commonality and downplays difference
 - Effects theories of media make no attempt to understanding meanings of media

Desirability of the effects theories



- Offers possible “objective” information
- It identifies aspects of social practice that can be acted upon
- Gives insights for parents and others to nurture and guide development
- Provides a basis of information for social policy making

Criticisms



- ❑ This approach tackles social problems backwards – what's cause and what's effect?
- ❑ It separates media from the whole of a person's life
- ❑ It treats children as inadequate – the vulnerable audience
- ❑ It reflects a conservative ideology: focusing on media while ignoring other factors, such as political and economic
- ❑ It tends to ignore significant contradictions in research findings
- ❑ It ignores the question of meanings of media

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