

"Aging with Television"

Progress Report No. 3

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INTRODUCTION

This is the third of four progress reports of our ongoing research, "Aging with Television," currently funded under AoA Grant No. 90-A-1299. The first two reports presented findings focusing upon the image of the elderly in prime-time and weekend-daytime (children's) network dramatic programming. These two reports were based upon data originally collected as part of our ongoing research, Cultural Indicators. This research consists of two interrelated procedures: (1) Message System Analysis - the periodic content analysis of prime-time and weekend-daytime (children's) network dramatic programming and (2) Cultivation Analysis - determining conceptions of social reality television viewing tends to cultivate in groups of child and adult television viewers.

This report focuses upon Cultivation Analysis findings for groups of adult television viewers. The analysis was performed on four existing data bases -- two surveys conducted as part of Cultural Indicators research and the secondary analysis of data from national surveys (the 1975, 1977, and 1978 NORC General Social Surveys and the NCOA Myth and Reality of Aging Study) -- originally conducted to examine specific issues in American life.

Progress to Date

The research presented in this report is but a small fraction of the work we have completed over the past year and a half. We are in the last stage of collecting, cleaning, and preparing for analysis of the new content data focusing upon the portrayal of elderly persons and old age in television drama. We have also developed a set of ten Cultivation Analysis questions (see Appendix I) now being fielded as part of the March General Public Caravan survey conducted by Opinion Research Corporation, Princeton, New Jersey. We will receive these data sometime during April. Our final report will focus upon the findings of these two phases of the research, and perhaps some additional analysis of data in the NCOA Myth and Reality of Aging Survey.

We are also in the first stages of planning the Conference to present findings of this research. This meeting will be held on Monday, September 17th, in Washington, D.C.*, and will consist of two sessions -- a morning session to present findings of the research and an afternoon round-table or panel discussion of these findings and their implications for policy formulation. The morning session will be followed by a press conference and a luncheon. We will be working closely with AOA personnel in developing plans for this Conference.

* We are still in the process of selecting a site for the Conference. We hope it will be a hotel or conference facility close to Capitol Hill.

METHODOLOGY

Cultivation Analysis is the study of what is usually called effects or impact. We consider the latter terms inappropriate to the study of broad cultural influences. The "effects" of a pervasive medium upon the composition and structure of the symbolic environment are subtle, complex and mingled with other influences. Also, the concept of causation, borrowed from simpler experimental studies in the physical and biological sciences, is not fully applicable to the steady flow of images and messages that make up much of contemporary popular culture.

People are born into a culture that cultivates their needs as well as their satisfactions. Culture affects assumptions about facts as well as responses to facts. In modern cultures demand is manufactured, as well as supply. Social and psychological characteristics draw individuals to select certain types of content which, in turn, nourish and cultivate those characteristics. Innumerable facts (and values) outside of personal experience can only be learned -- and related values derived -- from the mass media, or from others who have learned them from the mass media. Increasingly, media-cultivated facts and values become standards by which we judge personal experience and family and community behavior.

A slight but pervasive shift in the cultivation of common perspectives may not change much in personal outlook and behavior but may change the relative meaning of much behavior. Furthermore, common perspectives help structure the agenda of public (and often private) discourse and provide a basis of interaction among different social groups. Just as a barely perceptible change of a few degrees average temperature can lead to an Ice Age or make the desert bloom, so a slight but pervasive change in the

cultural climate may create shifts in perspective that do not amount to much measurable difference in single individuals but can have major social and public policy consequences. That is why we tend to speak in terms of the contribution of television to the cultivation of common perspectives rather than in terms of achieving any preconceived goals, impact, or effects.

Cultivation Analysis begins with the patterns found in the "world" of television drama. The message system composing that world presents a coherent image of life and society. How is this image reflected in the assumptions and values held by its audiences? How are the "lessons" of symbolic behavior presented in fictional forms applied to conceptions about real life?

These days nearly everyone "lives" to some extent in the world of television*, so that the problem of studying television's effects is a difficult one. Without control groups of non-viewers it is hard to isolate television's impact. Experiments do not solve the problem, for they are not comparable to people's day-to-day viewing of television. Our approach reflects the hypothesis that heavier viewers of television -- those exposed to a greater extent than lighter viewers to its messages -- are more likely to understand social reality in terms of the "facts of life" they see on television. To investigate this idea we partition the population and our samples according to television exposure. By contrasting light and heavy viewers, some of the "difference" television makes in people's conception of social reality can be examined.

* Marilyn Jackson-Beeck, "The Nonviewers: Who Are They?" Journal of Communication, 48, 1977, pp. 65-72.

Development of Questions

The investigation of television's effects upon conceptions of social reality begins with systematic analysis of the world of television drama. Message System Analysis reveals how certain "facts" and aspects of social reality are presented in television drama; these "facts" are then compared with other conceptions of the same "facts" and aspects derived from direct and independent observations, such as U.S. Census figures. For example, in prime time television drama aired from 1969-76, 64 percent of major characters and 30 percent of all characters (major and minor) were involved in violence as either perpetrators or victims or both. According to the 1970 Census, there were only .32 violent crimes per 100 persons.* In the world of television, therefore, one has between a 30 and 64 percent chance of being involved in violence, but, in the real world, only a chance of one-third of one percent.

Next, we determine what heavy and light viewers (both children and adults) believe to be the facts. To the extent that patterns of life presented in dramatic television programs cultivate distinct conceptions of social reality, heavy viewers are expected to be more likely than light viewers to choose answers that reflect television perspectives. Our research strategy, instrumentation, and samples are designed to established the extent to which and the ways in which television cultivates such patterned responses.

Once the "television view" and the "real world" or some other view of selected facts and aspects of social reality have been determined, we

* Newer data on personal violent-crime victimization range from 1.41 per 100 (based on 1973 Police reported figures which include homicide) to 3.3 per 100 persons over 12 (based on 1974 probability sample which doesn't include homicide).

construct questions dealing with these facts and aspects of life. Each question has an inferred or objectively determined "television response" reflecting the "television view" of the issue as well as a "non-television answer." For example, one cultivation question asks: "During any given week, what are your chances of being involved in some kind of violence? About one in ten? About one in a hundred?" The first answer -- "about one in ten" -- more closely reflects the world of television and is used as the "television answer," while the "one in a hundred" more closely matches U.S. Census data and reflects the real-life circumstances of most Americans.

Samples of Respondents

To test our hypothesis we continually gather data reflecting television viewers' beliefs and behaviors. These data have been collected from samples diverse in such characteristics as age, location, and institutional affiliation. Within each sample, television viewers' responses are further analyzed in terms of age, education, sex, and other social and personal characteristics.

The data used in this analysis were gathered by commercial agencies and academic institutions.*

Figure 1 describes the six data bases used in this Cultivation Analysis. Five of these national samples are fully representative; one, however, includes respondents from only four major cities.

The STARCH survey was commissioned by the Cultural Indicators Project in Spring 1973 (see Figure 1). In each of four cities (Dallas, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles), Starch/Hooper selected households at random

* We gratefully acknowledge the National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, for sharing its 1975, 1977, and 1978 General Social Surveys, and NCOA for the Myth and Reality of Aging Survey.

from the area telephone directories according to the following procedures: Pages were selected by random start and fixed intervals. One column was selected at random from each page. One telephone number was selected at random from each column. If the number was not assigned to a private household, the next number in the column was used. Potential respondents then were screened for television viewing level and for sex, so the sample is comprised equally of heavy and light television viewers and of men and women. Interviewers sought men in households until the quota was filled; then they filled the quota for women. All respondents were asked this question concerning television viewing: "How many hours a day do you usually watch television? Please include morning, afternoon and evening." Respondents who answered "less than two hours" are light viewers and those who answered "at least four hours" are heavy viewers.

ORC data were contracted for by the Cultural Indicators Project in the May 1974 Opinion Research Corporation General Public Caravan Survey. These surveys consisted of face-to-face interviews of national probability samples of men and women 18 years of age or over living in private households in the continental United States. The primary sampling unit (PSU) was the community, defined as those people included in the largest telephone book containing a randomly selected "minor civil division" (MCD). The MCD's came from sixty U.S. counties chosen by systematic random methods (with probability proportional to size of population). Within the community (PSU), individuals to be interviewed were chosen on the basis of randomly determined starting points, which became the first of a household cluster. In effect, interviewing thus proceeding, by neighborhood, and included households with and without listed telephone numbers.

NORC data came from the National Data Program for the Social Sciences as part of its data diffusion project and continuing program of social indicator research. The 1975 study is mixed with respect to sampling technique: it is one-half full-probability and one-half block-quota, because of a transition to full probability sampling. The quota sample is a multi-stage area probability sample to the block or segment level. At the block level, however, quota sampling was used (interviewing occurred only after 3 p.m. on weekdays or during the weekend or holidays). Interviewers at the block or segment level traveled from the first dwelling unit of the northeast corner of the block and proceeded as specified until age, sex and employment quotas were filled (based on exact proportions in each segment determined by the 1970 Census tract data). The full probability samples in 1975, 1977, and 1978 are stratified, multi-stage, area probability samples of clusters of households in the continental United States. Households at which interviews took place were probabilistically selected from available lists of addresses for blocks and enumeration districts within Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas or counties.

HARRIS data come from "The Myth and Reality of Aging" survey conducted by Louis Harris and Associates for the National Council on the Aging, Inc. The sample included a representative cross-section of the American public 18 years of age and older. The research design called for oversampling of three groups--persons over 65 years of age and older, persons 55 to 64 years of age and blacks 65 and older. Although these three groups were oversampled, all subgroups were weighted back to their true (1970 census based) U.S. population proportions in the analysis. The sample was selected by multi-stage random cluster sampling techniques that assured every household a statistically equal chance of being drawn into a given survey.*

* A full description of sampling procedures may be found in Appendix B of the codebook for "The Myth and Reality of Aging" survey, Duke University Medical Center, Box 3003, Durham, North Carolina, 27710.

Dimensions of Analysis

When reporting responses to forced-choice questions, the non-parametric gamma statistic is given. Gamma measures the relationship between television exposure and TV answers, with significance indicated by tau-b or tau-c.

The proportion of respondents who give the television answer to cultivation questions are tabulated on the basis of daily television exposure, controlling for age and other personal and social characteristics. Our analysis typically classifies "heavy," "medium," and "light" television viewers (group-relative), and then compares the proportion giving television answers among aggregates of viewers. The comparison is made in terms of gamma and the "Cultivation Differential" (CD) defined as the difference in relative frequency of TV answers between lighter and heavier viewing aggregates (that is, the proportion of heavy viewers who give TV answers minus the proportion of light viewers who give these answers). A positive CD, in our view, indexes television's cultivation potential in the hypothesized direction.

The present report focuses on three aspects of perceived social reality which have been investigated among television viewers:

(1) perceived danger, (2) mistrust and alienation, and (3) sex-role stereotyping. Perceived danger is tapped by the following items (TV answer underscored) adapted or constructed by the Cultural Indicators staff:

"During any given week, about how many people out of 100 are involved in some kind of violence -- would you say 1 in a 100, or about 10 in 100?"

"About what percent of all males who have jobs work in law enforcement and crime detection -- like policemen, sheriffs, detectives? Would you say it is 1 percent of 5 percent?"

"What percent of all crimes are violent crimes -- like murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault? Would you say it is 15 percent or 25 percent?"

Some or all of these items have been administered with slightly different response options to two samples of adults: STARCH and ORC.

To extend our analysis, overt and hypothetical behaviors suggesting perceived dangers also have been studied. Respondents in the HARRIS survey were asked:

"How serious do you think the danger of being robbed or attacked in the street is for most people over 65 -- a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or hardly a problem at all?"

"Would you tell me whether fear of crime is a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or hardly a problem at all for you personally?"

Respondents' fear of walking in the city has been studied among adults in the 1977 NORC General Social Survey. Respondents were asked:

"Is there any area right around here -- that is, within a mile -- where you would be afraid to walk alone at night? Yes or No?"

The response dimension "mistrust and alienation" was measured by existing indicators that have been tested and constructed by other researchers. Three of Rosenberg's* ("faith in a people" index items) have been used in our secondary analysis of the 1975 and 1978 NORC General Social Survey data.

"Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair?"

"Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?"

"Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?"

* Morris Rosenberg, Occupations and Values (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1957), ppp. 225-35.

These three items were analyzed separately and also combined into an index, entitled "Mean World." A high score on this index meant that the respondent gave primarily "television world" answers.

Three items reflecting "anomie"* were also analyzed among respondents to the 1977 NORC General Social Survey:

"In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse, not better. Agree or Disagree?"

"It's hardly fair to bring a child into the world with the way things look for the future. Agree or Disagree?"

"Most public officials are not really interested in the problems of the average man. Agree or Disagree?"

The first of these three items was also analyzed among respondents to the Myth and Reality of Aging Survey.

The relationship between television viewing and conceptions of sex-role stereotyping was examined by the secondary analysis of four items asked in the 1975, 1977, and 1978 NORC General Social Survey:

"Do you agree or disagree with this statement: Women should take care of running their homes and leave running the country up to men."

"Do you approve or disapprove of a married woman earning money in business of industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her?"

"If your party nominated a woman for President, would you vote for her if she were qualified for the job? Yes or No?"

"Tell me if you agree or disagree with this statement: Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women."

* Leo Srole, "Social Integration and Certain Corollaries: An Exploratory Study," American Sociological Review, 21, 1956, pp. 709-712.

Appendix I

ORC Public Caravan Survey Questions

Now for a change of topic --

A1. During any given week about how many people out of 100 are involved in some kind of violence in the U.S.? Would you say it is closer to about one person in 100 or about ten people in 100? (JUST AS A GUESS -- FORCE CHOICE.)

- 1 ABOUT 1 IN 100
 - 2 ABOUT 10 IN 100
 - 9 DON'T KNOW
- 6

A2. How safe do you feel walking around in your own neighborhood alone, at night -- very safe, somewhat safe or not safe at all? (INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT SAYS HE NEVER WALKS ALONE AT NIGHT, DETERMINE IF THE REASON IS FEAR OR INABILITY TO WALK. IF FEAR, DETERMINE HOW SAFE OR UNSAFE RESPONDENT FEELS.)

- 1 VERY SAFE
 - 2 SOMEWHAT SAFE
 - 3 NOT SAFE AT ALL
 - 4 UNABLE TO WALK (VOL.)
 - 9 DON'T KNOW
- 7

A3. I am going to read you several statements about life in the United States. As I read each one, please indicate whether you more or less AGREE with it, or more or less DISAGREE with it.

	<u>AGREE</u>	<u>DISAGREE</u>	<u>DON'T</u> <u>KNOW</u>	
a. Crime in the nation is rising	1	2	9	8
b. Women are more likely than men to be the victims of violent crimes	1	2	9	9
c. Elderly persons are more likely to be the victims of violent crimes than any other age group	1	2	9	10

A4. How serious would you say the fear of crime is for you personally? Would you say that it is a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or hardly a problem at all for you personally?

- 1 VERY SERIOUS PROBLEM
 - 2 SOMEWHAT SERIOUS PROBLEM
 - 3 HARDLY A PROBLEM AT ALL
 - 9 DON'T KNOW
- 11

A5. Turning away from crime now, in general, which age group do you feel is more important in our society -- children or elderly persons? (INTERVIEWER: FORCE CHOICE. ONLY RECORD "BOTH EQUALLY IMPORTANT" IF RESPONDENT INSISTS.)

- 1 CHILDREN
- 2 ELDERLY PERSONS 12
- 3 BOTH EQUALLY IMPORTANT (VOL.)
- 9 DON'T KNOW

A6. Do you more or less AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statement: Elderly people are more stubborn than any other age group.

- 1 AGREE
- 2 DISAGREE 13
- 9 DON'T KNOW

A7. On the average weekday, about how many hours do you personally watch television? (Weekday includes daytime and nighttime viewing.) (INTERVIEWER: CIRCLE BOTH NUMBERS NEXT TO APPROPRIATE ANSWER.)

- | | | | |
|-------|-------------------------|------------------|-------|
| 14-15 | 00 NONE | 10 6 - 7 HOURS | 14-15 |
| | 01 LESS THAN 15 MINUTES | 11 7 - 8 HOURS | |
| | 02 15 - 29 MINUTES | 12 8 - 9 HOURS | |
| | 03 30 - 44 MINUTES | 13 9 - 10 HOURS | |
| | 04 45 - 59 MINUTES | 14 OVER 10 HOURS | |
| | 05 1 - 1½ HOURS | 99 DON'T KNOW | |
| | 06 1½ - 2 HOURS | | |
| | 07 2 - 3 HOURS | | |
| | 08 3 - 4 HOURS | | |
| | 09 5 - 6 HOURS | | |

A8. How often do you read a newspaper -- counting both daily and weekend editions? Do you read every day, occasionally, or almost never? (INTERVIEWER: IF VARIES, ASK ABOUT AVERAGE WEEK.)

- 1 EVERY DAY
- 2 OCCASIONALLY 16
- 3 ALMOST NEVER
- 9 DON'T KNOW