

January 13, 1980

Dr. Lloyd N. Morrisett
President
The John & Mary R. Markle Foundation
50 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10020

Dear Lloyd:

Enclosed, at last, is the research proposal on "Television's Contribution to Sex-Role Stereotypes and Public Morality, etc." about which we corresponded and conversed last fall. I am sorry about the long delay but I hope you will recognize in it a major investment of time, thought, and effort. Please let me know if the proposal needs any further modification or elaboration. In any case, we will be looking forward to learning about its suitability for support by the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation.

I am also enclosing for your information a copy of our response to Paul Hirsch to appear in the Winter issue of Communication Research. Your comments are welcome.

With best regards,

Sincerely yours,

George Gerbner
Professor of Communications
and Dean

GG:ab

Enclosures

CC: Larry Cross
Michael Morgan
Nancy Signorielli

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August 4, 1980

Dr. Lloyd N. Morrisett
President
The Hohm & Mary R. Markle Foundation
50 Rockefeller Plaza
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Dear Lloyd:

It was good to see and hear you at the Library conference in New York the other day. It reminded me of your continuing interest in our work and the Markle Foundation's support of efforts to critique and improve it.

I hope you will also be interested in a rather fortuitous opportunity to further illuminate and perhaps even resolve the scientific issues raised by the critiques and our recent theoretical formulations. The opportunity is presented by a very large data base that has become available for secondary analysis and that seems to contain an abundance of relevant data. Let me sketch what we perceive to be the situation and the nature of this opportunity.

The Cultural Indicators Project has been monitoring the world of network television drama since 1967 and investigating the consequences of exposure to television's messages since 1973. Our most recurrent finding is that television viewing makes an independent contribution to viewer conceptions of social reality. Consistent support for this theory was found in a large number of studies by several investigators based on a variety of samples of children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. Our own research has shown that television cultivates assumptions, images, and beliefs about aging, sex-role stereotypes, violence and victimization, occupations and education, family life, and other issues.

In general, our studies have advanced and supported with cumulative data the most sustained and coherent effort in social science to build a theory of television and its role in modern society. Not surprisingly, the Cultural Indicators paradigm has also increasingly become the object of lively scientific debate. While our approach has previously been subjected to methodological and theoretical scrutiny, only recently have our actual findings and data been reassessed by others. In particular, three studies (Doob and Macdonald, Hughes, and Hirsch) have been cited as challenging our conclusions. In all three cases, the central argument is that when the "right" controls are applied -- or when controls are applied in the "right" way -- the relationships we observe between television viewing and perceptions of fear, danger, or mistrust disappear.

We believe that all three share a similar flaw. Even when overall relationships disappear under controls, significant associations within particular subgroups, may and do appear.

These associations with television viewing in some subgroups such as the college educated or the younger viewers may be cancelled out (in overall results) by no associations or even significant association in the opposite direction in other subgroups. Many of these interactions, specifications, and conditional

relationships can be explained by two systematic processes -- called "mainstreaming" and "resonance" -- which are examined in some detail in our latest report (enclosed). Very briefly, "mainstreaming" implies that there may be a convergence of outlooks among the heavy viewers of "otherwise" disparate groups. "Resonance," on the other hand, occurs when a given feature of the television world is congruent with the real-life circumstances of the viewers who thus receive a "double-dosage" of messages that amplifies television's impact.

Our current "Mainstreaming" report presents numerous instances of these phenomena with respect to the cultivation of notions of violence and danger in a "mean world." For example, the relationship between the amount of viewing and alienation holds only for respondents with more education, who are otherwise (i.e. when light viewers) the least alienated. As a group, less educated respondents express a greater degree of anomie and show no association between this outlook and viewing. But the heavy viewer college group joins this general heavy viewer "mainstream." Another example is that the association between viewing and fear of crime is strongest for urban dwellers ("resonance"); special circumstances may sensitize certain groups and make them particularly susceptible to a television message. Most importantly, these between-group differences hold up under all other relevant controls (applied singly or simultaneously).

We need to know the extent to which these processes operate in other areas besides violence, fear, and anomie. We believe that the cultivation of relatively homogeneous "mainstream" conceptions of life and society may be the critical consequence of living and television. The investigation of special susceptibility offers a fuller understanding of which groups are most likely to be affected by television and why. We need to expand the study of these processes into several important realms of social reality.

We propose to investigate "mainstreaming" and "resonance" in the cultivation of sex-role stereotypes, sex-typed behaviors, and contemporary sexual morality, through a broad-based and comprehensive secondary analysis of a data base gathered by a commercial research firm. The data were collected in 1979 from a nationwide representative cross-section of almost 4000 adults, with quotas for age, sex, and (for women) employment status. The instrument contains over 500 variables, representing an enormous variety of questions in such areas as family, marriage, morality, life-styles, sex-roles, working women, sexuality, and much more. The survey also includes excellent items on media behavior and covers all important demographic controls.

Many findings from our long-range, ongoing content analysis of network programming can be brought to bear on the issues and questions raised in this survey. At a time of great societal change, many fundamental aspects of the world of television remain remarkably stable. For example, female television characters generally are unable to combine a family and a career with success. The survey contains several series of questions (which can be analyzed singly or in index form) which tap respondents' images of the positive and negative effects of working on women in general, as well as self-reports of the personal effects of working. Regardless of whether amount of viewing has much overall relationship with such images, there may be strong negative influences in those subgroups who might "otherwise" have a more positive or egalitarian view (such as younger, more educated women).

The survey also contains a series of questions dealing with the acceptance of the "new morality" and nontraditional lifestyles. The cultivation of "mainstream" beliefs and perspectives should be highly apparent in these areas; those groups most likely to endorse and support counter-stereotypical behaviors (when light viewers) may show the greatest evidence of cultivation (when heavy viewers).

In short, the study would help clarify the role television plays as an agent of social change or continuity for different groups. The survey provides a rich source of multidimensional indicators of both male and female stereotypes and social morality in areas where the "real" and the television worlds may be growing further apart. It is in these areas that television's "mainstreaming" potential may be most deeply felt.

Because the data are already collected and available (thus providing great savings of time and money), because of the sample's large size and quality, and because of the extraordinary depth and range of variables, the study we are proposing would offer a rare opportunity to further our understanding of television's impact on society.

We believe that for a relatively small investment such an analysis could make a major contribution toward resolving the issues and testing the theories involved. We hope that the Markle Foundation's demonstrated interest in this area can be extended to support such a contribution.

I am looking forward to your reaction and advice about possible next steps.

Sincerely yours,

George Gerbner
Professor of Communications
and Dean

GG/jmd
Enclosure

The
John and
Mary R.
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Foundation

*Larry
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May 27, 1981

Lloyd N. Morrisett
President

Dean George Gerbner
Annenberg School
University of Pennsylvania
3620 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19174

Dear George:

During the last few weeks we have thoroughly reviewed and considered your research proposal, "Television's contribution to sex-role stereotypes and public morality..." Unfortunately, I must now tell you that the Markle Foundation will be unable to help support this work. Rather than simply reporting to you the results of a decision, as we ordinarily do, I want to try and give you some insight into the basis for this outcome.

I know that you and your colleagues have spent considerable time and effort in preparing the proposal. The work certainly fits within our program, and we expect to continue to support research that helps to improve understanding of television and its effects. Also, of course, we have supported the work of Paul Hirsch and Horace Newcomb and part of that work involved a critique of some of your own research.

First, let me dispel any idea that the Markle Foundation will only support research on one side of a controversy. Several times in the past we have supported work on both sides of controversial issues, and we expect to do so in the future. Indeed, one of the attractions of your proposal to us, was that it represented an attempt to deal with some of the criticisms of your earlier work.

Mr. George Gerbner

May 27, 1981

Page....2

The content issue "sex-role stereotypes in public morality" did not influence our decision one way or another. While this content area is interesting and important, our attraction to the research proposal was based upon its relation to your theoretical formulation. We saw the particular content area that you had chosen, from our point of view, as simply a convenient one, based upon the availability of a large body of survey evidence.

Basically, our negative decision derived from three conclusions: First, and perhaps most importantly, we are not convinced that the proposed research significantly advances the theoretical formulations that you have already made. The idea of "cultivation" and the concepts of "mainstreaming" and "resonance" have been formulated and explored in some detail in previous work. Now it seems necessary unambiguously to specify to what bodies of information these concepts can be applied. What evidence will tend to confirm the theory and what will disconfirm it. Second, we believe that the methodological approach you have suggested is too open to the criticisms of taking advantage of chance correlations and failing to deal with regression artifacts and ceiling effects. Third, -- although this is more of a bias than a conclusion -- we believe that secondary analyses of survey data and correlational procedures are more appropriate to the earlier exploratory stages of research than to the level of theory to which you have already advanced.

With best wishes.

Sincerely yours,



LNM:xe

July 21, 1981

3620 WALNUT STREET G5
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TELEPHONE: 215 243-7041

Dr. Lloyd N. Morrisett
President
The John and Mary R. Markle Foundation
50 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10020

Dear Lloyd:

Thank you for your letter of May 27 and especially for the courtesy of giving us an explanation of your decision. I must say that the explanation puzzled us and for weeks we had debated the wisdom of sharing our bewilderment with you. The reason was that we thought the proposal was addressed precisely to the questions you (or your reviewer) found lacking and we were disturbed that our lack of clarity or focus made it possible to miss or misunderstand the main points. Finally we decided that any lengthy clarification would seem contentious so we abandoned that idea.

However, your continued interest in supporting research that helps to improve understanding of television and its effects prompts us to inquire about your willingness to consider another proposal. You may know that we have been concerned with the potential effects of televising criminal trials both on courtroom procedure and participants and on general public understanding of the judicial process. We are now preparing a rather large project to subject the contentions of proponents and opponents of television cameras in the courtroom to an empirical test. The design would include research in comparable TV and non-TV courtrooms as well as surveys of viewers in the respective areas.


The Supreme Court (in its Chandler decision) and the American Bar Association have called for such research and our survey of all states (just completed) indicates that none is conducted or planned. When I discussed the issues on a panel of the Judicial Conference of the District of Columbia Circuit, Chief Justice Burger expressed strong agreement that the research is needed. Subsequently he wrote me a note which may be of interest (enclosed).

We have discussed the proposed research with the American Judicature Society and we may team up with them or some other legal research organization for consulting and other purposes.

Would such a proposal be appropriate for the Markle Foundation? I would appreciate your advice.

Sincerely yours,

EG: L. Gross, M. Morgan and N. Signorilelli



George Gerbner
Professor of Communications
and Dean

GG:mw
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*mailed and distributed 7/21/81
mw*

The
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August 18, 1981

Lloyd N. Morrisett
President

Professor George Gerbner
The Annenberg School of Communications
University of Pennsylvania
3620 Walnut Street C5
Philadelphia, Pa. 19104

Dear George:

I am uncertain how to answer the question you raised in your letter of July 21st. From time to time we have taken a look at the problems of television and criminal trials, but so far, we have done nothing in that area.

In the early fall we will be looking at our plans for the year and will discuss the question you have raised. I will be back in touch with you by early October.

Sincerely,



LNM:dm

Larry Gross
Michael McGowan
Nancy Signorelli } *Distributed*

The
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Markle
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50 Rockefeller Plaza
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January 8, 1982

Lloyd N. Morrisett
President

Professor George Gerbner, Dean
The Annenberg School of Communications
University of Pennsylvania
3620 Walnut Street C5
Philadelphia, Pa. 19104

Dear George:

Several months ago you raised the question of our possible interest in your planned study of the effects of televised criminal trials. I have delayed in answering because the possible place of this idea in our program was unclear as were the limitations of our budget. The topic is clearly important and should be carefully examined. Unfortunately, we will be unable to help.

As you perhaps know, we have made some unusually large commitments, including starting Channels magazine. As a result, this year we find ourselves unable to undertake any substantial new program directions. In fact, we have already had to decline many good things we ordinarily might have done. My guess is that your topic is of sufficient importance so you may be able to find other ways to go ahead with it. I hope so.

Sincerely,



LNM:dm

The
John and
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July 12, 1982

Lloyd N. Morrisett
President

Professor George Gerbner
The Annenberg School of Communications
University of Pennsylvania
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Philadelphia, PA 19104-3858

Dear George:

Your good invitation to attend the Washington program inauguration reached me while I am in the middle of jury duty. I can't be there but I hope the inauguration is just the beginning of a most successful program.

Thanks for inviting me.

Sincerely,



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