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Images across Cultures: Teachers in Mass Media Fiction and Drama

Although there have been many studies of occupational status and prestige, some even comparative, the cultural sources of occupational images have received little attention.[1] A recent bibliography of works dealing with the image of the teacher in American culture[2] unearthed some fifty references of uneven focus, quality, and availability, lacking the comparative element necessary for incisive analysis.

This is the first attempt we know of to study representations of teachers in mass-media fiction and drama in a cross-cultural perspective. The study was based on the comparative analysis of films, television and radio drama, and popular magazine stories in the United States, four countries of western Europe, five countries of eastern Europe, and the U.S.S.R.

THE STORIES

We were interested in the image of teachers as it exists in cultures, and in methods of cross-cultural analysis, rather than in images developed through individual, and thus limited and personal, selective processes. This made it necessary to focus on general features of collective imagery which do not necessarily correspond to features of single stories or to impressions held by individuals.

Features of collective imagery relate to historical continuities and to the institutional structures and operations composing them—all abstract, if real, processes. The price we pay for such a generalized

approach is the loss of concrete detail and richly imaginative quality of the individual products and personal impressions which compose the generalized systems. The price is worth paying as long as it is understood as an attempt to gain significance on the institutional and policy levels through a discussion of representative message systems, not on the personal taste and selectivity levels through a discussion of critical and esthetic distinctions.

Yet we should not lose sight of the fact that the original material is lively and rich, even if not necessarily of great literary and artistic merit. Its significance arises from the fact that millions of people —each of them in somewhat different selective combinations—read, view, and listen to stories in which they find, without seeking, imaginative and often compelling representations of all sorts of people, including teachers. Here, for example, is an array of basic plots of such stories, produced in the mass media of Czechoslovakia, the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, Hungary, France, and Poland, in that order:

"Red Castle" is what townspeople call the new headquarters of the Teachers' Recreation Center. It was a baron's palace before the revolution. A priceless collection of jewels is still stored in the castle. One day a precious stone is missing. The shadow of suspicion falls on Professor Zach, a frequent visitor at "Red Castle." But the clever deductions of his students (turned amateur detectives) vindicate the professor, and the real culprits are caught.

Word gets around that the attractive new teacher is carrying on with the well-known high school gorilla. And in the locker room, too. She is nearly ruined when it develops that the student, himself the victim of a psychopathic, scandalmongering father, only tried to rape her in an unguarded moment.

The tactlessness of a dry and dogmatic school director drives one of the students of the intermediate school of Borsk into the clutches of a religious sect. The teachers' collective is dismayed. A timid young instructor is drawn into the struggle against the sect. Emboldened through her efforts to demonstrate that sectarian dogmatism defeats the goals of free education, she realizes the great role of the teacher in public life.

The humane methods of the new teacher in an East End slum school lead to disaster. "Spare the rod . . ." gloat the hardened old disciplinarians. The teacher is about to give up and leave when a glimmer of student response at the end of the term gives him second thoughts.

The impoverished peasants of a village refuse to work for starvation wages on the count's estate. But the gendarmes have a firm grip on this treasonous activity. Later, the peasants are ordered to the railroad station to welcome the arriving count. They come. But they come to pay respects to the departing teacher who is being run out of town as the chief troublemaker.

A utopian idealist teaching in a lycée becomes so involved in his pacifist schemes that he neglects his family. Reality finally deals him a tragic but sobering blow: his daughter has a lover, has taken part in a robbery, and is about to run away.

Orphaned, hungry, and demoralized, a gang of boys terrorizes the countryside at the end of the war. A former partisan leader, now teacher, turns them into useful citizens.

Such stories result from individual creative acts. Put hundreds of them together, analyze them as a system rather than as simple aggregates, and the results are generalized features that are shaped by collective influences and that cultivate common assumptions of communities rather than of separate individuals. Two chief influences shaping such mass-produced message systems are (1) the historical continuities of images held by publics and thus available for meaningful (and profitable) cultivation and (2) the structures and operating relationships of the media organizations selecting and composing imaginative representations of life to be mass-produced for broad public exposure.

THE INFLUENCES

In his succinct summary of historical continuities in education and intellectual life, Richard Hofstadter wrote that "the figure of the schoolteacher may well be taken as a central symbol in modern society."[3] Hofstadter pointed out that the American teacher has not become an important national figure, worthy of emulation, as have teachers of countries where the intellectual functions of education are highly valued. Nor has the American teacher been in the forefront of social movements, as has the teacher of nations led by intelligentsia risen from the ranks, mostly through the avenue of school teaching. Although teachers are widely regarded as "good"

people, they rank low on indexes of potency and effectiveness.[4] "The scholar . . . as a type," wrote Dixon Wecter in *The Hero in America,* "has never kindled American imagination."[5] Denied the status of culture hero, the American teacher may fare best at the hands of his non-deferential culture by appearing no different from anyone else—an appearance which may not be deceptive.

From the raw material of such continuities of national tradition and popular imagery, writers and the public media select and compose their representations. Mass-produced messages further channel and cultivate the broadest common terms of image formation and social interaction in modern societies. The process is selective. And it is as much related to the institutional structures and vantage points of the media as to the availability of popular images.

In the United States, mass media have played an ambivalent role vis-à-vis public education, as has the corporate establishment of which media are the cultural arms. In countries where media operations depend upon the indulgence or support of public rather than private governments, the relationship to public education is likely to be somewhat different. And in countries where mass media as well as education are interlocking agencies of planned social transformation, the media are most likely to promote the aims and values of that transformation.

These suggestions are supported by the conclusions of a larger investigation from which the study reported here has been drawn.[6] The theoretical terms and formulations of the approach to mass-media analysis sketched in this paper have also been summarized elsewhere.[7]

THE STUDY

The comparative study of mass-media fiction and drama was based on analyses of feature films, television and radio drama, and popular magazine stories conducted between 1961 and 1963 in the United States, four countries of western Europe, five countries of eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union. There was no attempt to sample the

stories (a term we shall use to include films and programs as well as magazine stories). Films in the U.S.S.R. and all major media in the other countries were screened and monitored during the analysis periods by terms of native analysts recruited and trained by the investigator. All media stories containing a significant portrayal of

TABLE 1

VARIMAX ROTATION FOR FIVE FACTORS IN "PERSONALITY DIFFERENTIAL"; ALL CHARACTERS, ALL MEDIA, ALL COUNTRIES

Factors and Scales*	Scale Loadings	Percentage of Variance
"Congeniality":		
Unsociable-sociable	.833	15.3
Repulsive-attractive	.804	
Cruel-kind	.759	
"Vitality":		
Restrained-free	.823	14.2
Timid-bold	.815	
Dull-sharp	.740	
"Morality":		
Dirty-clean	.770	10.4
Immoral-moral	.749	
Dishonest-honest	.688	
"Stability":		
Changeable-stable	.760	9.7
Excitable-calm	.723	
Bungling-efficient	.705	
"Manliness":		
Short-tall	.725	6.9
Feminine-masculine	.708	
Delicate-tough	.538	
Total variance		56.5

* Scales appear here and throughout this report, reversed when necessary for uniform directionality. Actual scales marked by analysts appeared in random order and directionality.

schools or teachers were subjected to detailed analysis following the same instruments and procedures. A grand total of 1,406 stories and 2,800 fictional and dramatic characters were analyzed. Each analysis was performed by two or more analysts working together after a period of training. Spot checks, multiple analyses, and tests of internal consistency were used to enhance reliability and screen out analyses that did not meet standards established for the study.

Of the 2,800 character analyses, 1,041 came from U.S. media, 1,161

from western European media (more than half from Great Britain, with the rest from West Germany, Austria, and France), 554 from eastern European media (Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary), and 44 from Soviet films. The smallness of the Soviet media "population" should be kept in mind in considering the findings. A breakdown of these numbers by types of characters will be found on the figures that accompany this report.

The portrayal of teachers will be related to that of other adult characters and of students playing a role in the same groups of stories. After a brief sketch of the general fictional and dramatic context in which these characters appeared, we shall present highlights of the analysis of personality traits.

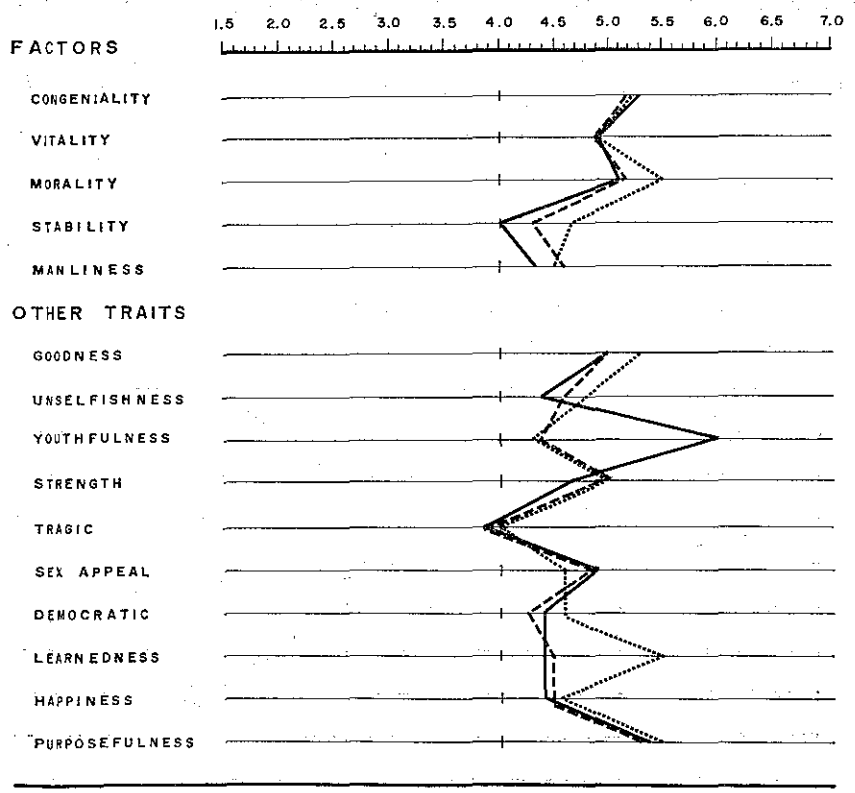

FIG. 1.—Mean ratings of teachers, students, and others; United States. *Short-dashed line*, teachers ($N = 329$); *solid line*, students ($N = 377$); *long-dashed line*, others ($N = 335$).

Data will be summarized for the United States, western Europe, eastern Europe, and the U.S.S.R. For some purposes East-West comparisons will suffice.

The fictional "world" of teachers.—The fictional and dramatic "world" of education is, of course, an integral part of the total media "world" of each country. A count of the significant appearance of one or more out of a list of twenty-one common themes showed all media sharing the highest ranking themes in common. The principal differences were the greater frequency of financial themes, violence, and personal injury in the West and of historical themes (especially of the recent past) in the East.

A "middle-class" setting was the most common in the media stories of all countries. Places of luxury, seats of power were promi-

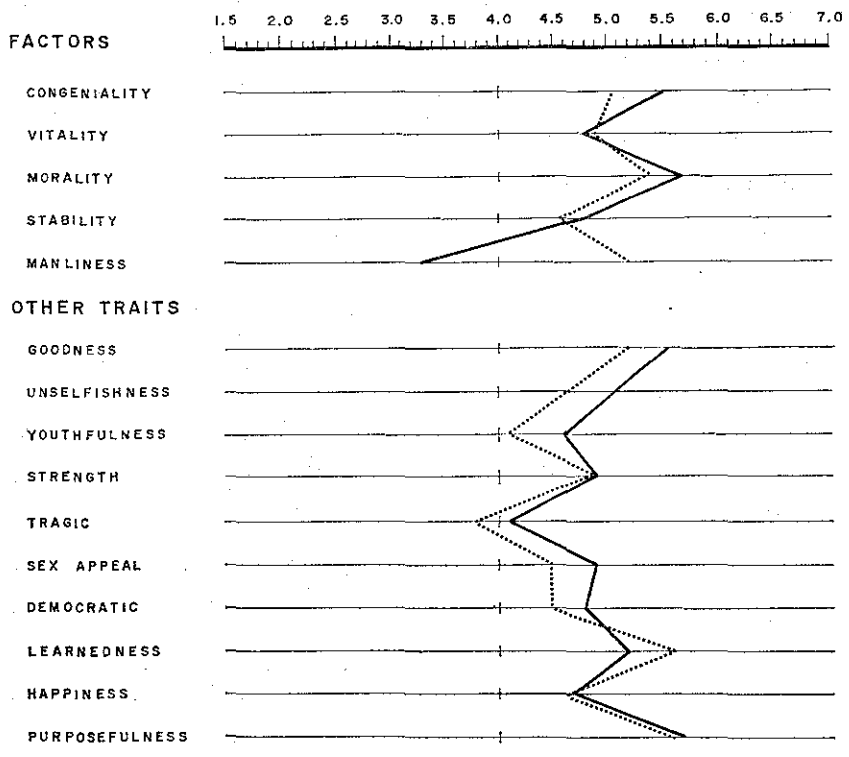

FIG. 2.—Mean ratings of teachers; United States. *Short-dashed line,* male ($N = 215$); *solid line,* female ($N = 114$).

nent in 10 per cent of U.S., 14 per cent of western European, 3 per cent eastern European, and 7 per cent of Soviet media stories. "Lower-class" settings dominated 8 per cent of U.S., 9 per cent of western European, 20 per cent of eastern European, and 33 per cent of Soviet media stories.

Western media stories were more likely to be associated with secondary school and college than were Eastern media stories. Only U.S., British, and French media stories showed teachers giving fairly frequent emphasis to the solution of personal problems. However, Eastern media teachers (and students) were depicted as "helping" and "enjoying" each other much more frequently than were those of other media. Eastern media portrayed "successful democratic prac-

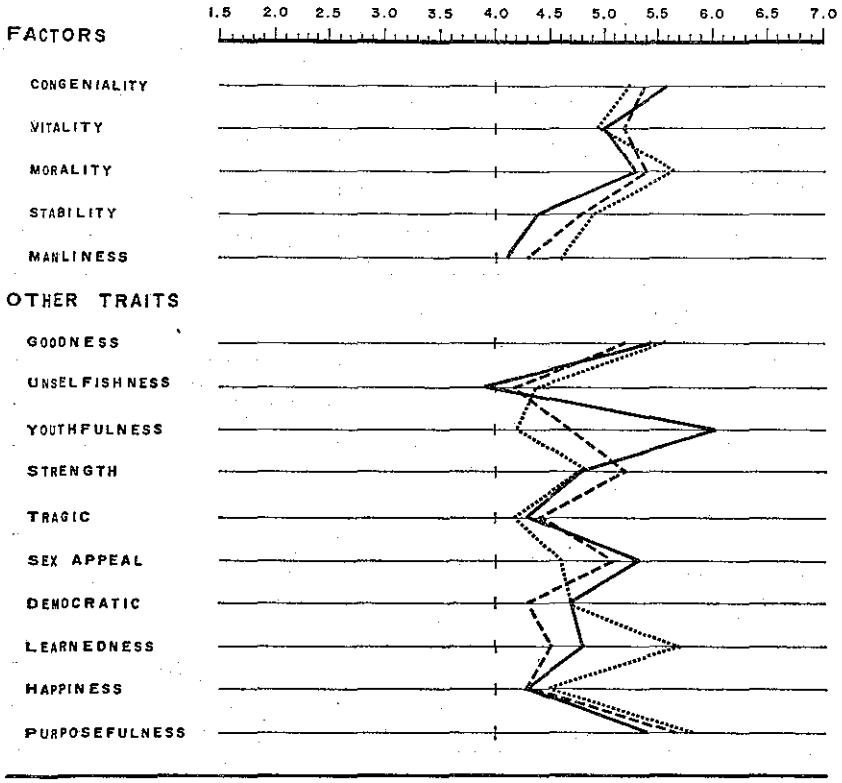

FIG. 3.—Mean ratings of teachers, students, and others; western Europe. *Short-dashed line,* teachers ($N = 397$); *solid line,* students ($N = 356$); *long-dashed line,* others ($N = 408$).

tice" three times as frequently as those of other areas, and Eastern media teachers stressed "service to community and nation" by even greater margins.

Students had most "fun" in U.S. media stories, especially in high school and college. They were shown taking examinations in Eastern media stories much more frequently than elsewhere. They rebelled against school life most often in British and Polish media stories. Rebellion was most likely to occur in high school in Western media and on the university level in Eastern media.

U.S. media portrayed a higher proportion of women teachers on all levels of education than did the media of other countries. U.S. media depicted a composite image of the teacher as less professional,

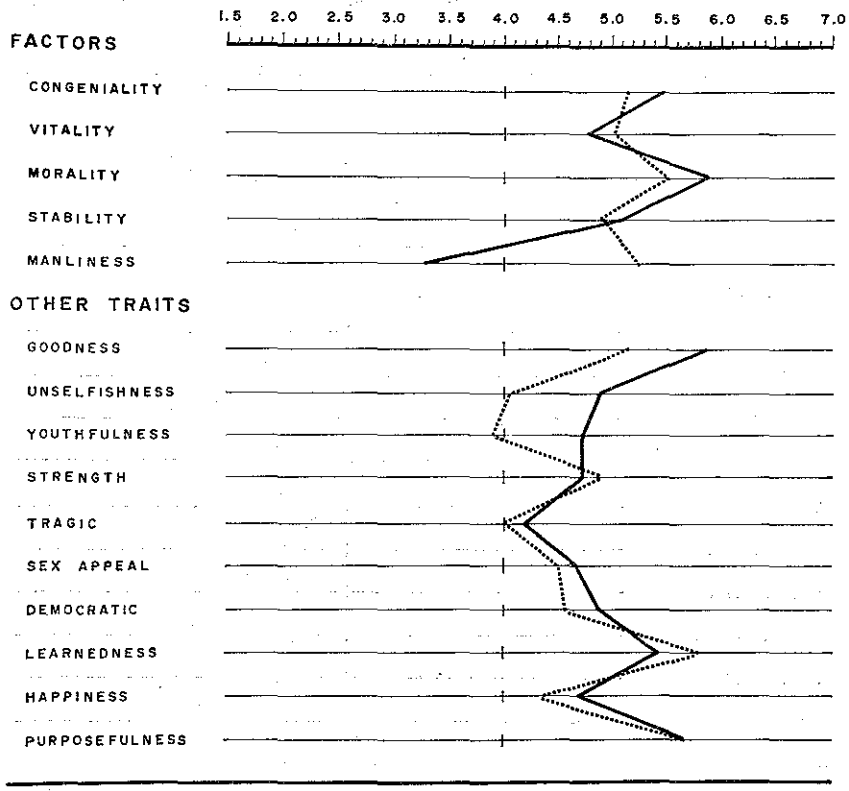

FIG. 4.—Mean ratings of teachers; western Europe. *Short-dashed line,* male ($N = 277$); *solid line,* female ($N = 120$).

as less likely either to advance or to slip on the social ladder, and as more easily frustrated and victimized by the higher level of violence and illegality prevalent in her "world" of fiction and drama than did the media of other (especially of the Eastern) countries.

"Personality differential" findings.—Analysts' judgments of personality traits attributed to the fictional and dramatic characters were recorded on "personality differential" scales.[8] These are seven-point scales defined by contrasting adjectives representing a variety of characteristics.

Factor analysis of the ratings of all characters in all countries showed that 56.5 per cent of the total variance could be accounted for by five factors. Each of these factors represents a group of per-

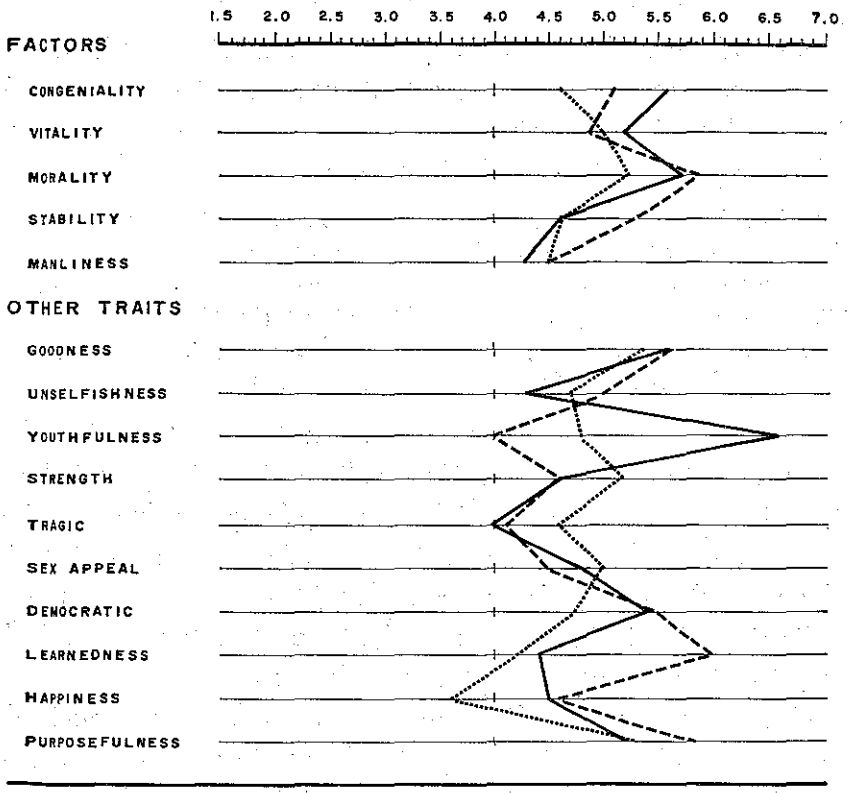

FIG. 5.—Mean ratings of teachers, students, and others; eastern Europe. *Long-dashed line,* teachers ($N = 165$); *solid line,* students ($N = 279$); *short-dashed line,* others ($N = 110$).

sonality traits (scales) more closely related to one another than to other clusters of traits.

These personality factors, and their associated traits, are the following:

1. "Congeniality"—composed of "sociability" as measured on the "unsociable-sociable" scale, "attractiveness" as measured on "repulsive-attractive," and "kindness" as measured on "cruel-kind."
2. "Vitality"—composed of "freeness" versus "restrainedness," "boldness" versus "timidity," and "sharpness" versus "dullness."
3. "Morality"—composed of "cleanness" versus "dirtiness," "moral" versus "immoral" qualities, and "honesty" versus "dishonesty."
4. "Stability"—composed of being "stable" versus "changeable," "calm" versus "excitable," and "efficient" versus "bungling."
5. "Manliness"—composed of "tallness" versus "shortness," "masculine" versus "feminine" traits, and "toughness" versus "delicateness."

Scale loadings and percentage of variance appear in Table 1.

A number of other personality traits were found to be relatively independent of the principal factors. These traits, and the scales on which they were rated, are the following:

"Goodness" ("bad-good")
"Unselfishness" ("selfish-unselfish")
"Youthfulness" ("old-young")
"Strength" ("weak-strong")
"Tragicness" ("comic-tragic")
"Sex appeal" ("frigid-sexy")
"Democraticness" ("tyrannical-democratic")
"Learnedness" ("ignorant-learned")
"Happiness" ("sad-happy")
"Purposefulness" ("purposeless-purposeful")

Figure 1 is the profile of teachers, students, and other characters analyzed in the same group of U.S. media stories. "Congeniality" and "morality" tend to be rated higher for all characters than "vitality" and "stability" (and, of course, "manliness"; the mean ratings include females as well as males). "Tragic" qualities rated lowest, indicating high incidence of comedy. Students naturally rated the most "youthful" and teachers the most "learned."

U.S. media teachers differed most from students appearing in the same group of stories in being rated higher in age, "learnedness," "stability," "unselfishness," and "morality." Teachers differed most from non-teaching adult characters in "learnedness."

Figure 2 is a character profile of U.S. media teachers only, with male and female teachers plotted separately. Teachers generally scored on the favorable side, as did other characters. Female teachers were, of course, less "manly" than their male counterparts. They were also less "learned." This may be due to the fact that half of all male but only 18 per cent of female teachers appeared in stories depicting college or university life. Aside from their "learnedness," however, female teachers appeared in a generally better light than male teachers in U.S. media stories (and everywhere else except in the U.S.S.R.).

The character profiles of teachers, students, and others in the media stories of the western European countries studied (Figs. 3 and

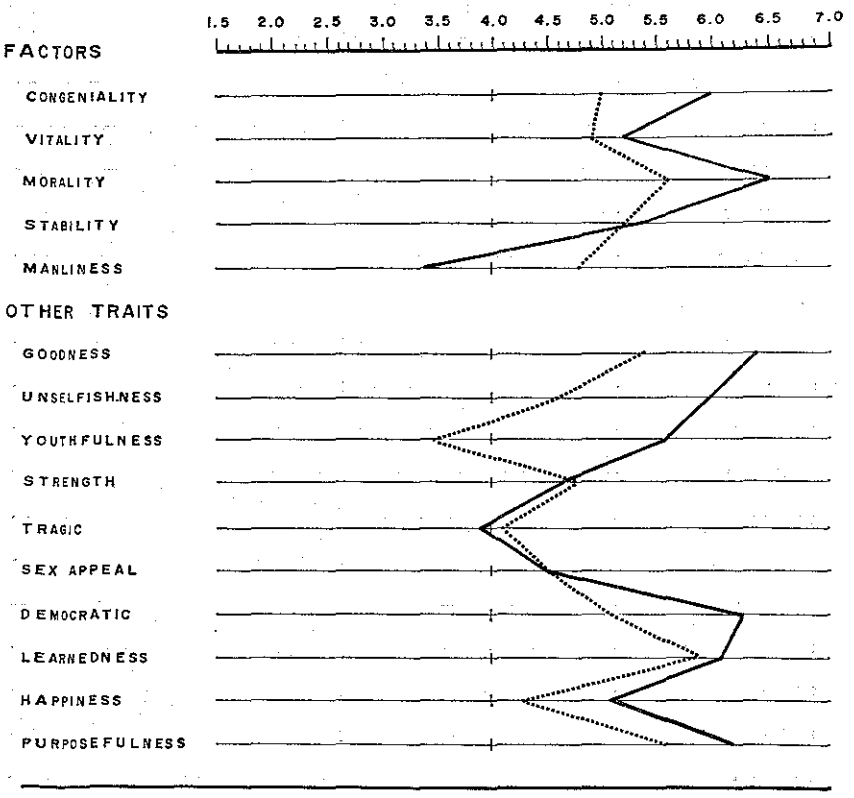

FIG. 6.—Mean ratings of teachers; eastern Europe. *Short-dashed line,* male ($N = 124$); *solid line,* female ($N = 41$).

4) reveal a striking similarity to the United States. Teachers, on the whole, were somewhat more differentiated from students and others than in the United States. Their mean ratings deviated from those of students or others by half of a scale point or more in four different characteristics in the United States, six in Great Britain, eight in West Germany, and nine in France.

Comparable findings from the countries of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are plotted on Figures 5 to 8. Male and female teachers were even more clearly differentiated from one another than in the West (but, unlike in the West, equal in "learnedness"). The composite teacher image as a whole was still more distinct from the profiles of students and others. Mean ratings of teachers deviated

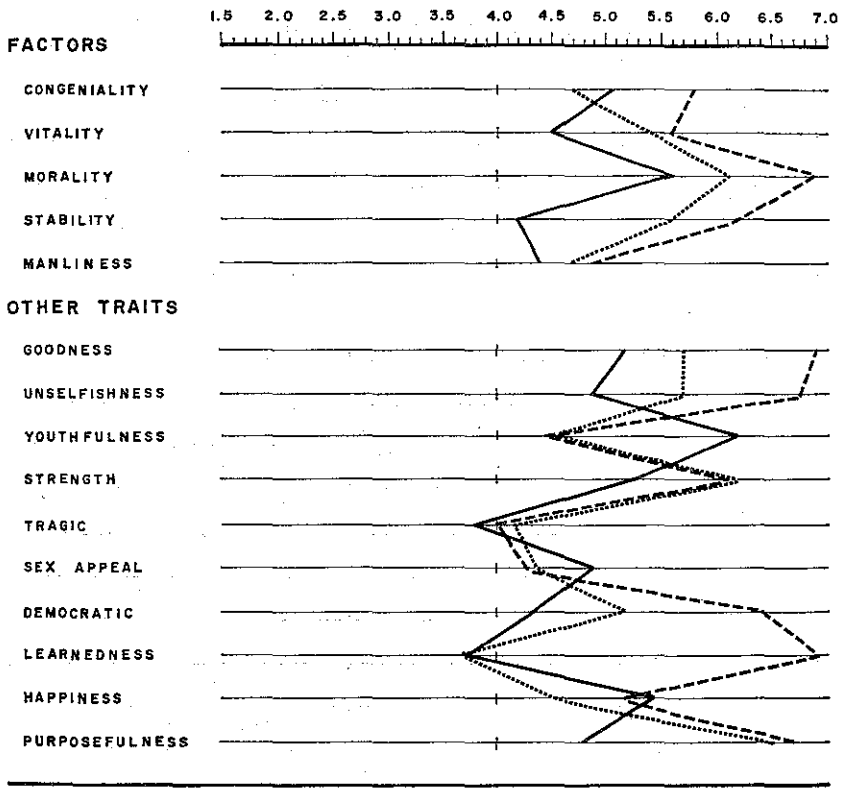

FIG. 7.—Mean ratings of teachers, students, and others; U.S.S.R. *Long-dashed line,* teachers ($N = 15$); *solid line,* students ($N = 23$); *short-dashed line,* others ($N = 6$).

from those of students or others by half of a scale point or more in six character traits in Poland, eleven in Czechoslovakia, and thirteen in both Hungary and the U.S.S.R.

Direct comparisons of teacher profiles can be made on Figure 9, and of student profiles on Figure 10. The left sides of both figures present absolute ratings, the right sides relative ratings.

The absolute ratings are quite similar, with only the few Soviet film teachers standing out as paragons of virtue. However, relative measures using the countries' own standards as yardsticks may be more significant. One of these relative measures is the order in which teachers' characteristics are ranked. Another is the position of teachers in relation to other characters appearing in the same stories.

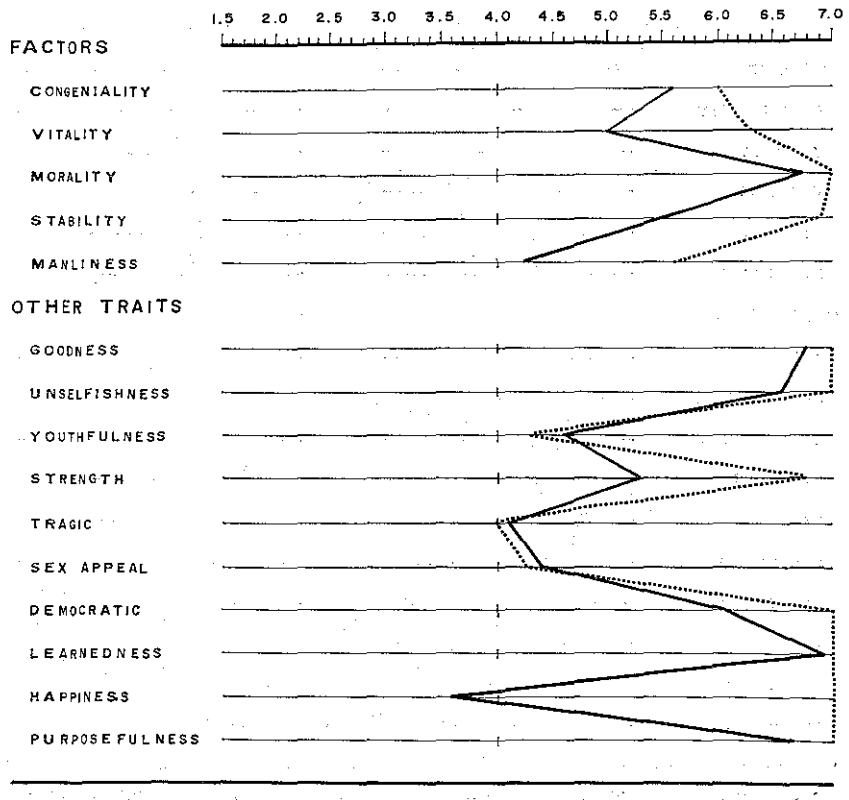

FIG. 8.–Mean ratings of teachers; U.S.S.R. *Short-dashed line,* male ($N = 7$); *solid line,* female ($N = 8$).

Rankings of mean scores show that the four highest ranking teacher characteristics are the same everywhere. They are "purposefulness," "morality," "learnedness," and "goodness." Within the top four, "purposefulness" ranks highest in the United States and Great Britain, "goodness" in France, "morality" in Czechoslovakia, and "learnedness" in Poland, Germany, Hungary, and the U.S.S.R. "Congeniality" is in fifth place in each Western country but in none of the Eastern countries. "Democraticness," a quality ranking relatively low in the West, is the fifth highest-ranking characteristic in Poland and Czechoslovakia; "unselfishness" is fifth (with "democraticness" sixth) in both Hungary and the U.S.S.R.

The right sides of Figures 9 and 10 present the relative positions.

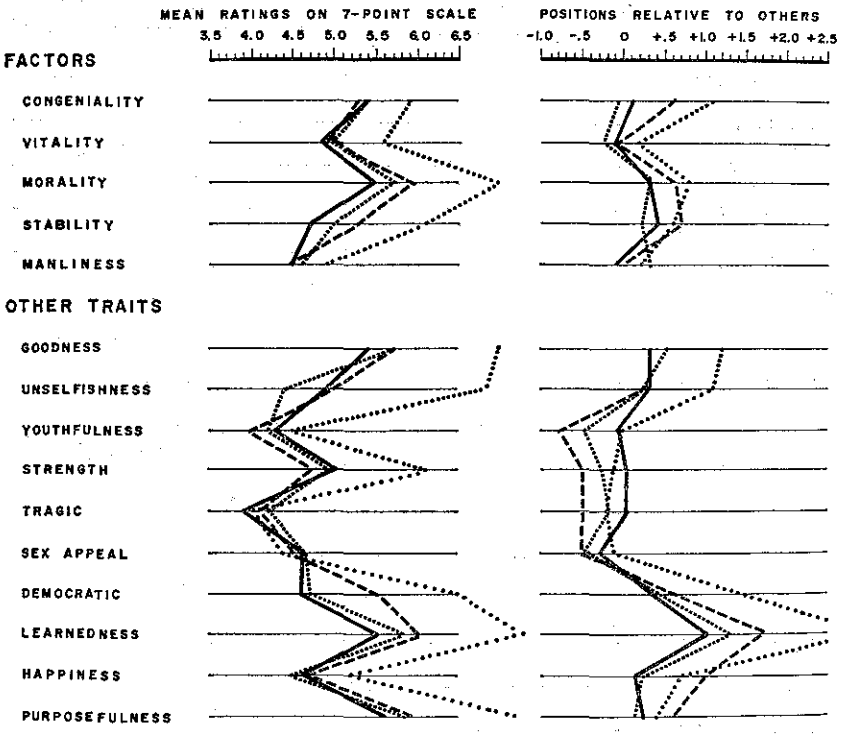

FIG. 9.—Teacher profiles: mean ratings and distances from others. *Solid line,* United States ($N = 329$); *short-dashed line,* western Europe ($N = 397$); *long-dashed line,* eastern Europe ($N = 165$); *dotted line,* U.S.S.R. ($N = 15$).

On Figure 9, mean scores for the "others" of each country have been transposed to zero. Only the relative distances of teachers' mean scores from those of other adult characters are shown. The closer the teacher mean to zero, the less it deviates from the mean score of other adults in the same stories.

Western and especially U.S. media teachers tend to be less sharply differentiated than Eastern media teachers from other adult characters in their own fictional environments. In "morality" and "stability," teachers everywhere rate somewhat higher than other characters in the same stories, but by greater margins in the East than in the West.

The most distinct teacher trait everywhere is "learnedness." Media teachers are more "learned" than other adult characters by a margin of 3.3 scale points in the U.S.S.R., 1.7 in eastern Europe, 1.3 in

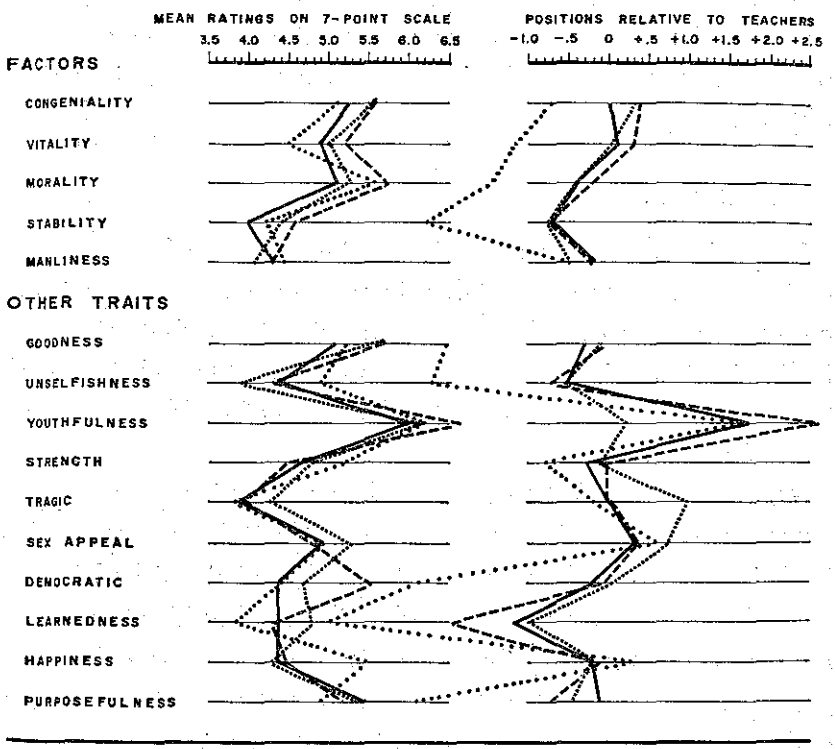

FIG. 10.—Student profiles: mean ratings and distances from teachers. *Solid line,* United States ($N = 377$); *short-dashed line,* western Europe ($N = 356$); *long-dashed line,* eastern Europe ($N = 279$); *dotted line,* U.S.S.R. ($N = 23$).

western Europe, and 1.0 in the United States. "Democratic" qualities of teachers exceed those of other characters by 1.3 scale points in the U.S.S.R., 0.7 in eastern Europe, 0.4 in western Europe, and 0.3 in the United States. (The Eastern "others" also lead in being "democratic": 5.2 in the U.S.S.R., 4.8 in eastern Europe, 4.3 in both western Europe and the United States.) Teachers stand out in "happiness" and, to a lesser extent, in "purposefulness" in Eastern media, but not in the West.

Student profiles (Figure 10) are remarkable in their similarity across areas. Students appearing in Soviet films present a much less ideal image than do Soviet film teachers, and in certain respects a less ideal image than do students elsewhere. A glance at Figure 7 will show that Soviet film students were rated lower than both teachers and others in ten out of the fifteen characteristics. This is also reflected in the generally greater gulf separating the image of students from that of teachers in Soviet films, as shown on the right side of Figure 10.

CONCLUSIONS

There is much in common in the image of teachers across the national media studied. Higher in purpose and morality than in power, teachers everywhere appear to suffer from what might be an inclination to denigrate "outgrown" authority and to rob it from that tragic sense of life which animates the heroes of adulthood. But there are differences.

As we go from West to East, teachers appear in a generally more favorable and somewhat more deferential light. They also stand out in their own fictional environments as more distinguished in learning and in qualities of personal and social morality. The terms of this morality are not necessarily comparable across cultures; the idea of laissez faire liberalism is not the same as that of "socialist morality" or devotion to the cause of a revolution or the Soviet concept of education as "the moral development of the child," even if the same terms are used. Nevertheless, the image of the teacher in the social-

ist media reflects a happier fate and more "stable," "purposeful," and "democratic" existence in its own fictional "world" of education than it does in the West.

Differences in media organization and purpose undoubtedly account for some of these findings. Although both commercial and political methods of organization in the cultural field tend to be reflected in ideological perspectives,[9] the "propaganda" implicit or explicit in the content performs different functions. The client relationship of Western media with business organizations and parliamentary governments, or both, results in a system of emphases and omissions which capitalizes on the most prevalent attitudes, images, and conceptions. The client relationship of Eastern media with public organizations, which, along with education itself, are agencies of planned socal transformation, places them at the service of cultural revolution. In this effort, they can take advantage of the European legacy of intellectual leadership in nationalistic and proletarian movements, a legacy in which teachers have had a prominent place for two centuries.

A methodological finding of some interest and potential usefulness for cross-cultural research is the apparent structure of personality judgments applied at least to fictional characters. The clusters of personality characteristics associated with "congeniality" (or "sociable attractiveness"), "vitality" (a sense of lively freedom), "morality" (including "honesty" and "cleanness"), "stability" (a sense of calm efficiency), and masculine or feminine traits appear to be five principal general dimensions of judgment. But, as in this study, scales designating traits of specific relevance to the probable subject matter and to a variety of other demographic and personality characteristics are useful and relatively independent indicators of image similarities and differences.

NOTES

1. Two recent contributions are Melvin L. DeFleur, "Occupational Roles as Portrayed on Television," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XXVIII (1954), 57–74, and Charles Winick, "Trends in the Occupations of Celebrities: A Study of

Newsmagazine Profiles and Television Interviews," *Journal of Social Psychology,* LX (1963), 301–10. Also of interest are books by Orrin E. Klapp: *Heroes, Villains, and Fools* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962) and *Symbolic Leaders* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1964). Pioneering works are Leo Lowenthal's "Biographies in Popular Magazines," in *Radio Research 1942–43* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), and Dallas W. Smythe's *Three Years of New York Television* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1953).

2. George Gerbner, "A Bibliography of Studies on Education and the Mass Media" (Philadelphia: Annenberg School of Communications, 1965 [mimeographed]).

3. Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1963), p. 309.

4. Cf. Smythe, *op. cit.,* and Joseph R. Gusfield and Michael Schwartz, "The Meanings of Occupational Prestige: Reconsideration of the NORC Scale," *American Sociological Review,* XXVIII (1963), 270.

5. Dixon Wecter, *The Hero in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), p. 478.

6. George Gerbner, "Mass Communications and Popular Conceptions of Education" (Cooperative Research Project 876 [Washington: Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1964).

7. George Gerbner, "An Institutional Approach to Mass Communications Research," in Lee Thayer (ed.) *Communication: Theory and Research* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C Thomas, 1966).

8. The theory and methodology of the "personality differential" as an instrument for the measurement of the "semantic space" of personality judgments is being developed by Charles E. Osgood and Edward E. Ware of the Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois. For a report on this work, see Osgood's "Studies on the Generality of Affective Meaning Systems," *American Psychologist,* XVII (1962), 10–28.

9. George Gerbner, "Ideological Perspectives and Political Tendencies in News Reporting," *Journalism Quarterly,* XLI (Autumn, 1964), 495–509.