

DO NOT QUOTE

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"WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO  
WHEN YOU GROW UP, LITTLE GIRL?"

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF MEDIA EFFECTS

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## Preface

The aims and limitations of this report require some prefatory clarification. Our intention is twofold: (1) to consider how the effects of television on viewers might be identified and measured, and (2) to present a progress report on the initial stages of a project which has attempted to formulate and investigate that question. The theory which we are detailing and the progress we are reporting are part of a larger enterprise, the Cultural Indicators project, on which George Gerbner and the senior author are co-investigators. The concepts, concerns (and contributions, if any), embodied in this report would not have come into being were it not for Gerbner's initial inspiration and continued collaboration.

We must also note that we are reporting here on only a small part of the aims and accomplishments of the Cultural Indicators project, specifically the early phases of that part of the project that is particularly relevant to the problem of assessing the role of television drama in the cultivation of sex-role related beliefs, values and aspirations among children. There are many dimensions of our research we have not mentioned. In most instances these are also concerned in part with sex-role related aspects of television content and its possible effects on viewers' beliefs and behavior. We refer the interested reader to several other reports which have detailed the larger scope and some of the results of the project. (These are cited in the references sections of this report.)

## I. Can We Measure The "Effects" of Television?

### "Round up the usual suspects"

The accumulated wisdom of social science research offers a clear and respectable method for the identification and measurement of the effects of exposure to messages, namely to assess the differences between the state of the receivers before and after exposure and to compare these differences with those obtained from a control group who have not received the message. One may then venture to draw conclusions about the consequences of exposure to that message, at least for certain kinds of receivers.

When the "message" whose "effects" we wish to identify and measure is television drama, however, this traditional approach may be inappropriate. Indeed, for reasons to be outlined below, it is our belief that any attempt to conceptualize, isolate and assess the consequences of exposure to television drama must begin by categorically abandoning approaches based on either comparison of pre- vs. post-exposure or experimental vs. control-group viewers.

A fond hope of researchers in this area has been to locate an island of unexposed (or, as it usually happens, about-to-be-exposed) potential viewers in order to achieve scientifically valid measures of the effects of exposure to television. The researcher might attempt to gather data on the pre-exposure state of nature for comparison with the later, post-exposure beliefs and behavior of these new viewers; or, if possible, even attempt to maintain (or locate) a group who remain unexposed long enough to serve as a control comparison for the newly exposed. The problem, however, is how such fortuitous natural experiments can tell us anything

about the effects of exposure to television in a society in which television has been ubiquitous for the entire lifetime of half of the population. The results of this type of research may answer a host of theoretical and practical questions about the introduction of television to the few remaining unexposed corners of the earth; they have nothing useful to say, however, about the effects of television on the beliefs and behavior of adults or children in our society.

Another popular research route which we believe to be inappropriate is the experimental or quasi-experimental test of the consequences of exposure to a particular "sample" of television programming. Much of the research on the effects of television media violence has focused on the observation and measurement of viewers' behavior after exposure to a particular television program. All such studies, however, no matter how clean the design and clear the results, are of limited value because they ignore the fundamental feature of television drama, namely that it consists of a vast, complex and integrated system of characters, events, and relationships and that its "effects" cannot be measured with regard to any single program (or set of programs) seen in isolation.

#### The system is the message

How, then, can the effects of television be conceptualized and studied? We believe that one must begin with a fuller understanding of the total phenomenon of television. We begin with two fundamental and related assumptions. The first is that television is a cultural arm of the established industrial order and as such serves primarily to maintain, stabilize and reinforce rather than to alter, threaten or weaken conventional conceptions, beliefs and behaviors. Because media messages are commodities manufactured for sale, their perspective reflects institutional organization and control. The goal of greatest audience appeal at least cost demands

that these messages follow conventional social morality. The second assumption is that in most relevant respects television drama is not essentially different from other forms of "mainstream" cultural entertainment.

These assumptions require us to question many of the common arguments and concerns raised in discussions of television's effects. An important example is the concern over the consequences of violence on television. In contrast to the worries that are most often expressed, we do not believe that the primary result of television violence is the stimulation of violence or aggression on the part of viewers.

The symbolic representation of violence is also communication about social relationships and human types, about goals and means, about winners and losers, about the norms of society and the price for transgression, about the risks of life, and about a variety of other messages -- most of them dealing with who gets away with what, when, how, why, and against whom, and demonstrating some aspect of social typing and the exercise of power. Victims as well as "violents" may have to learn their roles. Fear may be a more critical concomitant of a show of violence than aggression. Assumptions about life and conceptions of social reality may be more telling indicators of what violent representation cultivate than any individual behavior. Acceptance of violence and passivity in the face of injustice may be consequences of great social concern. (Gerbner and Gross, 1974)

The invention and development of systems which produce and disseminate mass mediated fictional images have historically raised a specter of subversion, corruption and unrest being encouraged among the various lower orders -- poor people, ethnic and racial minorities, children and women. Whether the suspect and controversial media are newspapers, novels and theater, as in the 19th century, or movies, radio, comicbooks and television in the 20th century, concern tends to focus on the possibilities of disruption that threaten the established norms of belief, behavior and morality. Therefore, in our view the primary function of these symbolic images is the demonstration of power and authority -- often through the dramatic use

of violence. Moreover, the lessons are generally effective; the social order is only rarely and peripherally threatened. The system is the message and, as our politicians like to say, the system works.

The world view which television drama reflects and supports is a mixture of truth and falsehood, of accuracy and distortion. The audience for which the message of television is primarily intended (recall that an audience of 20 million viewers is necessary for a program's survival) is the great majority of white, middle class citizens for whom America is a democracy (our leaders act in accordance with the desires of the people), for whom our economy is based on a free market (governed by the laws of supply and demand and free competition), and, most likely, for whom God is alive, white and male. The reinforcement of such beliefs can be seen as the major message of television, including television drama.

II. Primus Inter Pares

The reality of television drama does not differ in its basic assumptions from the reality of our public (and false) consciousness; indeed, given television's corporate, institutional source and economic imperatives, how could it? Public protest and scientific research may bring about adjustments in the cruder, more controversial or repellant aspects of television's fictional fare; they are unlikely to challenge its central principles and lineaments.

At this point, however, we may appear to have eliminated any possibility of success in our task, i.e., the identification and assessment of the "effects" of television drama. If it is the case that television functions to prevent or minimize changes in beliefs and behavior, and if it is the case that television drama performs this function in concert with all other major cultural institutions, how

can (and why should) one hope to isolate its effects, let alone presume to measure them? Clearly, this is a dilemma for policy makers as well as for researchers, a favorite rejoinder on the part of the television industry being "Why pick on us?"

#### The medium of the masses

First, television is more persuasive than the other media.

(We) cannot emphasize too strongly the historically novel role of television in standardizing and sharing with all as the common norm what had before been more parochial, local, and selective cultural patterns. We assume, therefore, that TV's standardizing and legitimizing influence comes largely from its ability to streamline, amplify, ritualize, and spread (to previously unreached groups) the conventional capsules of mass-produced information and entertainment. (Gerbner and Gross, 1974)

Television may thus be credited with an unprecedented ubiquity that makes it potentially much more effective than the other branches of mass culture. It reaches ninety-six per cent of U.S. households, is available literally round-the-clock for most of the population, and is watched over five hours per day in the average household.

Second, the nature of the medium itself contributes to the degree and the depth of television's cultural penetration. Unlike the print media, television does not require literacy from its audience. Unlike the movies, television is free (at least one doesn't pay by the show - we all pay over the counter, whether or not we watch TV), and truly runs continuously. Unlike radio, television can show as well as tell. Each of these characteristics is significant in itself, and the combined force of all three is overwhelming. This constellation of medium-specific characteristics endows television with a dangerously seductive credibility. It seems to us indisputable that television's predominance can be attributed to its "transparent" intelligibility as well as to its omnipresence. In fact, it is probable that the for-

mer has helped make the latter possible.

The message is the system

We are arguing that the appropriate "stimulus" or "treatment" is not any specific program or type of program, nor any particular hero or villain or action. The important stimulus is the entire world of television drama. We are concerned with the system of messages to which total communities are exposed and which provide bases for interaction and common assumptions and definitions (though not necessarily agreement) among large and heterogeneous publics.

The dominant agencies of communication produce the messages that cultivate the dominant image patterns. They structure the public agenda of existence, priorities, values and relations. (Gerbner, 1972)

By contrast, public concern about the content and effects of other symbolic message systems is generally directed towards specific and limited aspects of content, particularly is such content could instill in audiences ambitions and notions inappropriate to their stations in life. In the terms of our analysis such concerns are missing the point. The ground, as well as the figure, is crucially important.

Fictional figures on "real" grounds

The dominant stylistic convention of Western narrative art -- novels, plays, films, TV dramas -- is that of representational realism. However stereotyped television plots are, viewers assume that they take place against a backdrop of the real world. Characters must behave as normal people would in most situations. When the impossible does occur, it will often be treated as if, too, were part of a natural order in which nuns can fly and horses speak. (Gross, 1974)

Nothing impeaches the basic "reality" of the world of television drama. TV offers the viewer an apparently rich array of windows through which he can glimpse apparently diverse images and actions, but the diversity is only in the shape of

the window and the angle of the glimpse -- the basic topography of the fictional world is constant. It is also highly informative, offering a continuous stream of "facts" and impressions about the way of the world, the constancies and vagaries of human nature, and the consequences of actions. "The premise of realism is a Trojan horse which carries within it a highly selective and purposeful image of the facts of life." (Gross, 1974)

Can we assume, however, that viewers absorb these facts of life from the world of media fiction? More important, can we determine whether and to what degree they assimilate these "facts" into their images and beliefs about the real world?

A normal adult viewer is not likely to be unaware of the fictiveness of television drama. No one calls the police or an ambulance when a character in a television program is shot. Still, one may wonder how often and to what extent viewers suspend their disbelief in the reality of the symbolic world. Surely viewers know that Robert Young is not a doctor and that Marcus Welby is an M.D. only by poetic license. Yet in the first five years of the program, Mr. Young (or should we say Dr. Welby) received over a quarter of a million letters from viewers, most containing requests for medical advice (The Bulletin, Phila., 7/10/74).

The naivete which leads viewers to ask Dr. Welby for medical advice, however, is a misleading minor example of the phenomenon we are interested in. After all, many of these viewers may simply have assumed that Robert Young had picked up a lot of medical knowledge or that he has a staff of medical experts working on the show. Underlying either of these explanations, however, is the real crux of the issue -- the apparently convincing naturalism of the Dr. Welby program that could give a viewer grounds for making either of those exculpatory assumptions. In the newspaper story cited above, the Pennsylvania Insurance Commissioner was reported to have "blamed" Dr. Welby for

causing the public to expect much more of doctors and to have claimed the series might be one reason for the increase in malpractice suits!

Doctor shows are not the only targets of such accusations. A former New York City police official has complained that jury members have formed images and expectations of trial procedures and outcomes from television which often prejudice them in actual trials.

Isolated anecdotes and examples should not, however, confuse or trivialize the real point -- that even the most sophisticated among us can find many large and important components of our knowledge of the real world which, upon reflection, are found to derive in whole or part from fictitious symbolic representations. How often, in fact, do we un-suspend our disbelief as we attend to the action-figure (which we know is not "real") but also assimilate the ground (which is, after all, "realistic")?

Most viewers have never been in an operating room, a criminal courtroom, a police station or a jail, a corporate board room, or a movie studio. Much of what they "know" about these diverse spheres of activity, about how these various kinds of people live and what they do -- much of their "real" world has been learned from fictional "worlds." To the extent that viewers see television drama -- the foreground of plot or the background of the television world -- as naturalistic, they may derive a wealth of "incidental" knowledge. This incidental learning may be effected by bald "facts" and by the subtle interplay of occurrence, co-occurrence and non-occurrence of actors and actions.

The premise of realism is a major promoter of such tacit learning because it predisposes us to falsely assess the status of the images we observe. To recognize an event as symbolic is to see it as intentionally articulated in accordance with known conventions of communicative behavior (Worth & Gross, 1974). However, if we

assess that event as natural we make a very different assumption -- natural events are governed by the facts of life, not by the conventions of art. The naturalistic conventions of television realism, while far from natural in any sense of objective truth, are perilously susceptible to such assessment errors. We may therefore have grounds for apprehension that all of us are fooled some of the time and some of us may be fooled all of the time.

In addition to the subtle patterns against whose influence we may all be somewhat defenseless, television provides another seductively persuasive sort of imagery. In real life much is hidden from our eyes, motives are often obscure, outcomes ambiguous, personalities complex, people unpredictable. The truth is never pure and rarely simple. The world of television, in contrast, offers us clarity and resolution. Unlike life, television is an open book. Problems are never left hanging, rewards and punishments are present and accounted for; the rules of the game are known and rarely change. Not only does television "show" us the normally hidden workings of many important and fascinating institutions -- medicine, law enforcement and justice, big business, the glamorous world of entertainment, etc. -- but we "see" the people who fill important and exciting roles. We see who they are in crude terms of sex, age, race and class and we also see them as personalities -- dedicated and selfless, ruthless and ambitious, good-hearted but ineffectual, lazy and shiftless, corrupt and corrupting.

From the myriad of images, events and patterns a world emerges that is often intermingled with our "real" world. In an interview with a middle-aged Philadelphia man, one of our researchers was told that the police he saw on television were "more real" than those in real life, because in real life one occasionally found a bad apple who wasn't, therefore, a "real" policeman. While that opinion seems relatively rare, this viewer was joined by many others in justifying his belief in the realism of television

police shows by saying, "Well, if it wasn't real they wouldn't be allowed to show it, would they?"

### "The Seduction of the Innocent"

Finally, however generous we may be in granting adults a degree of sophisticated immunity to many of the subtle lessons of television's hidden curriculum, it is not possible to be as sanguine about the ability of children to distinguish the accurately realistic from the improbable and the downright misleading -- but equally realistic -- "facts of life" they see on television.

There are several reasons for thinking that children may be particularly susceptible to those aspects of television drama which cultivate systems of belief and "knowledge" that may be assimilated into their basic world view. In the first place, they simply have less opportunity to contrast the world of television with the real world. Much of what they see on television is no more directly familiar to them than are the depictions of cowboys and Indians in the Old West (from which most of us have also learned many false "facts"). Moreover, much of what they watch, Saturday morning cartoons in particular, presents the lessons of television in starkly blatant form.

Children also have a particularly strong belief in the inherent reality and truth of photographic and filmic images. Worth and Gross (1974) have proposed a theoretical model of the ways in which we learn to assess and interpret natural and symbolic events. Studies conducted by them and their students have shown that children will respond to a story shown them in the form of photographic slides by stating that it was "real" -- that it really happened. The reasons the children give for these judgments are based precisely on the assumption of realism: they "know" the story is real because, after all, photographs show reality and don't lie (Murphy, 1973; Harlan, 1972).

Our concern over the likelihood that children are the most vulnerable consumers of television's messages is heightened by the research of Melvin and Lois DeFleur. The DeFleurs set out to assess the relative influence of television on children's occupational knowledge (1967). Utilizing an analysis of the portrayal of occupational roles on television (DeFleur, 1964), they selected groups of occupations in three categories -- those with which the ordinary child comes into direct contact, those that are rarely seen directly but which are frequently portrayed on television, and those that are neither encountered directly nor seen on television. When they asked children of various ages to identify and describe and to assess the relative prestige of these occupations, the influence of television was obvious and powerful:

(It) seems safe to conclude that, within the limits of the present sample of children and occupations, television is a more potent source of occupational status knowledge than either personal contact or the general community culture. (DeFleur & DeFleur, 1967)

Moreover, the DeFleurs reported an effect that is even more supportive of our approach. Television was indeed a "potent source of 'incidental' learning for children concerning adult occupational roles," but what were they learning? The DeFleurs noted that the TV portrayals were, in fact, stereotyped and that their data showed a homogenization effect -- both among the children and between the children, their parents and experts -- in "ranking the occupations for which TV was the major learning source." They concluded with an expression of concern about television's influence:

Given the limited amount of objective research data on incidental learning which has been assembled at present, we can do little more than note that television appears to be an important agency of socialization for children concerning the adult world. However, there is ample reason to suspect that the information it presents is often distorted in a variety of ways.

(It) can be suggested that TV provides children with much superficial and misleading information about the labor force of their society. From this they acquire stereotyped beliefs about the world of work.

### III. "What's a researcher to do?"

Television drama functions primarily, we have argued, to stabilize and reinforce rather than challenge or alter established norms, conventions and behavior. For this reason, one might think that the question of effects would be better addressed by focusing on those who are not exposed to television rather than on those who are exposed. But then, it will be objected, surely such people must differ from the general population on many grounds and dimensions that will be at least as important in determining their beliefs and behavior than not watching television could ever be.

In fact, the causal question is fundamentally insoluble. The arguments that lead us to reject the orthodox effects-research approach do not at the same time suggest any easy alternative solutions. If television is all of a piece, and if that piece is itself interwoven into a wider net of social institutions and values, how can we possibly hope to isolate, let alone measure its effects? The very title of our project -- Cultural Indicators -- embodies the belief that television drama can be taken, and studied, as a reflection and manifestation of a culture that it may also help shape and maintain.

Our views of the nature of the medium and of the content and function of its messages lead us to begin the study of television's effects with the delineation of the central and critical facts of life in the world of television. Once we describe and enumerate many of the elements, relationships and emphases of this system we should be able to tackle the problems of assessing their contributions to the beliefs, behavior and values of viewers.

It has been noted that if everything a person knew were learned from television drama his perceived world would differ sharply from the so-called "real" world. Beliefs about population parameters, the chances of people like himself for success and

happiness, his chances of meeting with violence -- all are portrayed differently by TV and the census statistics. Which version of the world is the "real" one for most people?

One of our strategies is to pick out of our analysis and description of the content of television drama instances which exemplify its distortions and question viewers about their beliefs and perceptions on such issues. While no member of society can remain unaffected by an influence so pervasive as television, those who spend more of their time in the world of TV facts may be more likely to perceive the world in terms of television's lessons. Responses to our questions allow us to assess the degree to which the more frequent television viewers may be more likely than less frequent viewers to give answers which reflect television's image of the world. These patterns can then be examined in light of various controls -- age, sex, education, occupation, etc. -- in order to determine the extent to which it is possible to view television's influence as independent, complementary or contrary to these other major social variables.

This strategy is least appropriate when we are trying to study the role of television in shaping or cultivating images and beliefs in areas about which viewers have a great deal of first-hand knowledge, and in which television presumably presents an over-simplified but not exactly distorted view of reality. This is certainly the case in the area of sex-role portrayals and patterns.

As a purveyor of sex-role images television drama can be indicted on at least three distinct grounds. There are ways in which television presents a false image that can be attributed to the indirect consequences of its dramatic conventions and plot stereotypes. These conventions limit and restrict the roles and characters portrayed by women for reasons that have little or nothing to do with the true state of the world. We are all in some sense the "stars" of our own life stories but only a very few kinds of stories are ever presented in fiction and most of them feature male

heroes. The fact that most television programs have male heroes derives entirely from the conventions of fiction.

In addition to distortions attributable to story telling conventions which presumably reflect the basic values of the culture, there is a second form of bias that is characteristic of mass media portrayals. When women are shown in the fictional world (and they comprise only about 25% of the characters in television drama) they are usually depicted in a fashion which mirrors stereotypes. This type of distortion is functionally separate from the first kind we mentioned in that even when a program has a female hero she is generally presented as a "typical" female.

To cite one example, Mary Tyler Moore is the lead character in a very popular show, yet the way she is depicted manages to subtly undermine her status as star-character. Although officially the fictional Mary works as an associate producer of a television news program, the viewer who knew only what he or she actually saw on the screen would be likely to think she is a secretary, an impression that is reinforced by the fact that her boss calls her "Mary" and she calls him "Mr. Grant" while all the males on the staff call him "Lou."

The third sort of bias is in some "moral" sense more ambiguous than the others. Many of the more stereotyped features of the portrayal of women on television are also accurate reflections of the sexist reality of our society. This should not be taken in any sense as a justification for the existence or the continuation of such patterns; it does, however, complicate the process of identifying and studying the consequences of such stereotypes for viewers' conceptions of the world.

At this point it must be clear that we do not have any simple or satisfactory answer to the question of how to proceed. Our rejection of many "orthodox" attempts to formulate and investigate the question of television's effects does not reflect the smugness of those who possess the final solution to the problem. We feel strongly,

though, that any hope of achieving even a partial solution must rest upon the kinds of considerations we have detailed. In the remaining sections of this paper we shall describe and briefly illustrate an ambitious, but still embryonic, effort to pursue, illuminate and possibly confirm the DeFleurs' conclusion that "television appears to be an important agency of socialization for children concerning the adult world."

Plus Ca Change . . . ?

In the spring of 1955, the Kefauver Committee, which was investigating juvenile delinquency, held hearings on the effects of television. One of the prominent witnesses was Paul Lazarsfeld and his testimony was later published under the title, "Why is so little known about the effects of television on children and what can be done?" (1955) These questions are still being asked and still lack definitive answers. Part of Lazarsfeld's testimony is especially relevant to our enterprise:

We in the universities, with our limited funds, can do only short-term studies. We put kids into laboratories, have them listen to programs and then find out what they think or feel a few minutes later. But the real problem is the cumulative effect of television, what it does to children six years, not six minutes, later.

. . . What I am trying to argue is that we probably have to follow up all sorts of children for a period of 4 to 8 years to get a real picture of what role television plays in the development of personality . . . I submit that only such long-term studies would give us a realistic picture of the role of television in a child's personality development.

One of the larger ambitions of the Cultural Indicators project is to investigate the long-range effects of television.

We have noted that there are many things that most of us have learned exclusively or primarily via the mass media. In contrast to these arguably media-derived images, however, there are many more things we know and believe in whole or large part as a result of our personal experiences and observations of the real world around us. Some of the most fascinating and critical questions facing us in our attempt to identify and assess the effects of television drama lie primarily in this second area. Questions of what children (or adults) think and believe about the nature of men and women -- their differences and similarities, their potentials and proper roles in society, etc. -- cannot be answered without attending to a complex of familial, social, mass-mediated and other influences.

The attractions of longitudinal research, therefore, go far beyond our distrust of and lack of interest in the demonstration of effects that are observed six minutes after a child is shown a particular television program. By gathering information on a variety of dimensions and variables and tracing patterns and relationships over time, we may be able to achieve insight into the intricacies of association, correlation and perhaps even causes and effects.

### Setting the stage

Our faith in the theoretical importance and potential empirical riches of a longitudinal study of television's effects on children has yet to be subjected to the inevitable trials and disappointments that lie ahead. Our willingness even to contemplate such an undertaking has derived in large part from the raising of our collective consciousness by Professor Frank Furstenberg of the Sociology Department of the University of Pennsylvania. Having helped us to realize the critical necessity of asking the right questions, he has contributed generously to our attempts to achieve some answers.

We also have enjoyed the unstinting cooperation of the public school officials through whom we were able to initiate a proposed three-year panel study involving approximately 350 children now in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades of a suburban/rural school. At present we have concluded two rounds of questionnaire administration (in December, 1974 and March, 1975) and are now engaged in the complexities of coding, classifying, compiling, and cautiously contemplating the still rather chaotic conglomeration of responses. Consequently, the most we can hope to comprehend or communicate in this report are a few of the simpler, preliminary "results." Our discussion will also reflect the primary goal of this initial analysis -- the delineation of patterns and relationships that can serve as the baseline levels for our projected

longitudinal comparisons and interpretations.\*

Too much, too early?

One of the first things we wanted to look at was the amount and the pattern of television viewing in our sample. Those readers who have not been exposed to previous research in this area are likely to be somewhat surprised by the sheer amount of television children report watching. The distribution of reported television viewing by sex and grade is given in Table 1. In our analyses we have constructed a three-way classification of low, medium and high viewers. In order to isolate a group of children we could comfortably term low viewers, given the high levels overall, we have settled for an uneven distribution in which only 17% fall in the lowest category and 37% of the children are classified as high viewers. As the table indicates, our group of medium viewers watch up to five and a half hours per day and the heavy viewers claim six or more hours per day of television!

While the sheer amount of viewing seems obviously important it may be that most adults will not fully comprehend some of the implications of this phenomenon. Let us suggest, therefore, to those readers who were born before 1950 or thereabout, that they consider the following. Imagine the response of your parents had you, at the age of twelve, developed the habit of coming home from school every day, grabbing a quick bite, and going off to spend about three hours at the movies then returning home for supper and going back for another three hours at the movies (not to mention spending even more time at the movies on the weekends). Needless to say not only would most parents not have permitted such behavior but most children would not have

\* Although the make-up of our sample will permit cross-sectional as well as longitudinal comparisons we have, for a variety of practical and theoretical reasons, concentrated in this paper on identifying baseline variables and patterns.

contemplated the possibility. Yet, in our sample, 37% of the twelve-year-olds fall in the group that watches 6 or more hours of television daily.

Even without considering other important data and control comparisons or analyses, these data seem to have important implications. One of these is the strong possibility that besides whatever effects the content of television may be accused of, a critical consequence of viewing may be the diversion of time that would otherwise be spent in other pursuits. Sections of our still unanalysed data include many questions about time-budgeting and the extent to which our respondents engage in a variety of activities (including those that may accompany the watching of television). Our suspicion that television does "drive out" other activities is strengthened by the findings of a study (described by Wright, 1975) which escapes the range of our somewhat shotgun condemnation of most research in this area by combining independent before-and-after surveys with a panel design in investigating the impact of the introduction of television on adolescents in Sydney, Australia (Campbell, 1962). Finding that television viewing reduced the amount of time spent on other leisure activities, "They observe that the most striking change occurred in a sharp reduction in social interaction." (Wright, 1975).

#### Antecedents and associations

A primary issue in the investigation of television as a factor in the development and shaping of sex-role images and beliefs is whether one can determine the extent to which it essentially supports and reinforces the life-style patterns, values and expectations that the child's family and social environment embody, manifest and transmit. Alternatively, can television be shown to exert an independent and potentially divergent influence which may complicate, confuse or even alter the expectations and aspirations of some of its viewers? Although this is precisely the

sort of question we feel must be held in abeyance pending longitudinal evidence, some of the ground-work must be initiated at this stage.

Literally as well as analytically, light, medium and heavy viewers are different prior to becoming television viewers. If we want to ask about the possible consequences of television viewing for their beliefs and behavior we must begin by attending to some basic antecedent characteristics of our respondents. Many of these are neither subtle nor unexpected. As Table 2 shows, the educational attainments of parents is a powerful predictor of the children's television viewing behavior.\*

Although this finding is not surprising, it does alert us to certain possible questions. We are assuming that the probable influence of television is the strengthening and reinforcement of conventional values and beliefs. To the extent that the more educated parents can be assumed (and it is a tentative assumption) to be somewhat less likely to manifest and transmit conventional values in the realm of sex-role related matters, we should be particularly interested in the correlates of television viewing among their children. The low viewers in this group might comprise the segment of our sample most insulated from the complex of those conventionalizing influences which might result in more traditional sex-role conceptions and "lower" aspirations among the girls.

An important demographic characteristic which does not have an effect on the level of television viewing is the pattern of parental employment (we have left out the very few cases where only the mother works full-time). In terms of a variety of sex-role dimensions it is clear (and has been often demonstrated) that parental

\* Two caveats: at this stage in our data gathering and analysis we have only indirect, incomplete and not necessarily valid data on parental education -- derived from the children's reports -- and we have also left out of some initial comparisons those cases in which only the father (19%) or the mother (8%) was reported to have gone to college. A possible artifact we cannot rule out at this moment is that the children of college-educated parents may be more likely to under-report the amount of television they watch.

employment has a great impact on children's beliefs and aspirations. At the moment it also appears not to directly affect their viewing habits.\*

A third variable, which is arguably a correlate (or even consequence) as well as an antecedent of television viewing, is the child's level of educational aspiration and expectation. Table 3 shows the distribution of viewing patterns in terms of the level of schooling the children said they hope to achieve and the level they expect to achieve. Again unsurprisingly, these are inversely related to the amount of television they report viewing. (Clearly, the two "education" measures are highly correlated; they are also correlated with parental education.)

None of these data are novel or unexpected, of course, but they do provide a basis for some interesting if tentative forays into the rest of our data.

#### Subjective careers

Having granted the obvious fact that our heavy, medium and light viewers were different (within as well as between groups) conceptually as well as chronologically prior to being exposed to television, we also may ask whether they are different in any interesting ways after (conceptually if not, in this case, chronologically) such exposure. Specifically, in the areas on which we are reporting, can we find consistent and interpretable differences between sex-role related beliefs and aspirations of our heavier and lighter viewers of television, holding our antecedent control variables constant?

The question is deceptively simple and possibly misleading. While we have argued that television's influence should reinforce and support (and, in some possible instances, introduce) conventional beliefs and traditional aspirations,

\* As might be expected from the two comparisons in Table 2, there is no relationship between parental education and parental employment patterns.

we must recognize that in the realm of sex-role images television is but one among many powerful symbolic and social forces. Many of these, as other research has demonstrated, share the same distorted sexist biases we have ascribed to television; but at the same time all, television included, are beginning to show at least tokens of change to a more egalitarian and even-handed portrayal of the sexes. Our content analysis of television drama has so far not shown signs of change that can be considered more than token, but that may not be true in the future (although we have found the more subtly insidious stereotypes quite resilient -- cf. Gerbner & Gross, 1974); and it is difficult to estimate the short or long term impact of even a few highly-visible token improvements.

Further, although our conceptual model requires us to predict that high levels of exposure to television should be correlated with "lower", more traditional aspirations among the girls in our sample, even the most powerful controls will not allow us to infer from our data causal directions from such relationships. In part these may eventually emerge from our longitudinal analyses, but regardless of the outcome of such assessments we do not believe that the question is meaningfully posed in that way. Certainly, we might discover that our "dependent variables" of attitudes and behavior are overwhelmingly attributable to the complex of life-style dimensions that we have termed the antecedents of television viewing. This could lead us to question the influence of television in cultivating the conceptions and values of the parents which, in turn, are embodied and transmitted via the life-style and environment in which they raise their children. When the burden of the message system is the maintenance and stabilization of conventional patterns, however, it may be both wrong-headed and fruitless to define or search for change (within or across generations) as the way of demonstrating effects.

Accepting these limitations, let us look at some patterns which suggest that we may be able to make some headway. Borrowing a term from Everett Hughes, we will

present a few base-line "findings" which bear on the "subjective career" aspirations and images of our respondents, particularly the girls. We have already noted that there is a predictably strong relationship between parents' educational attainments and the children's reported educational aspirations and expectations (the latter measures are of course highly correlated). We have also noted that there is a significant negative relationship between these expressions of educational goals and reported levels of television viewing. Let us now turn to some other career and life-style questions which should be related to educational plans.

Table 4 shows the patterns of association between the boys' and the girls' educational expectations and aspirations and their estimations of two other aspects of their futures -- the age at which they expect to begin working at a full-time job and the age at which they expect to get married. (As it happens, only a few respondents do not expect ever to hold a full-time job, however briefly; even fewer do not expect to marry.)

The relationships in Table 4 are not surprising but they do begin to show some interesting sex-linked differences. While the relationship between educational aspirations and the age of beginning to work are understandably positive and strong, they are clearly stronger for boys. Much more interesting, however, is the relationship between educational aspirations and expected age at marriage. Here the boys show the same strong association pattern (which is presumably an accurate assessment of the way things tend to work out), but there is no relationship at all in the case of the girls. One can begin to suspect or suggest that contradictions are developing within the various career images and aspirations of the girls, at least in contrast to the boys.

If we turn now to the relationships between these career variables and television viewing habits we can see some further indications of the difference between the as-

pirations of the boys and the girls. Tables 5 and 6 show the associations between the responses to the questions and the level of television viewing, controlling for the two demographic factors we considered earlier.

If we assume that expecting to start to work full-time at an earlier age is an indication of lower mobility aspirations, we can see that there is an overall negative pattern of association between television viewing and aspiration which is, however, stronger for the girls. More importantly, while unrelated to parental employment, the pattern is much stronger for children whose parents are college-educated, and again the relationship is stronger for girls. Clearly, this seems to suggest that these girls are evincing a strong relationship between the amount of television they watch and a measure which may be taken as a component of the conventionally lower career aspirations of girls in our society (Table 6 shows a similar pattern). The strength of the relationship derives from the fact that the low-viewing girls whose parents went to college are extremely unlikely to estimate an early age of starting work (as compared with the low-viewing girls whose parents did not go to college), and the high-viewing girls whose parents went to college are even more likely to give an early start-age than the high-viewing daughters of the non-college group. To recall a point we made earlier, in such analyses the responses of the low viewers are of equal if not greater importance than those of the high viewers.

Table 5 also gives the associations between television viewing and the age they expect to begin work for those respondents who desire and/or expect to complete college (the modal response). Here we see a second indication of the possible emergence of contradictions and conflict in the aspirations and expectations of the girls. Although Table 4 shows that there is an understandably positive association between educational aspirations and the age the girls expect to begin working (and, as noted in Table 3, television viewing is negatively associated with educational aspira-

tions), we now see that for those girls who want to go to college there is still a strong pattern of high viewers giving an earlier estimation of their work-starting age. For the boys there is absolutely no such relationship.

The age at which they expect to get married is not quite as implicated in other career expectations (although we shall turn next to some related questions which are more so). We find less overall difference between the boys and the girls in terms of the association between this question and their television viewing although there is a highly significant tendency for high viewers to expect to marry at a younger age than do the light viewers. Again we find the relationship stronger for the children of college-educated parents. In this instance, however, it is the boys rather than the girls in this group who show the pattern of "starting" lower and "ending" higher than the boys whose parents did not go to college. The associations we find when we control for parental employment are puzzling (there are no strong differences in the pattern of responses to the marriage age question between these groups), but then, at this stage of our research the puzzles are as numerous as they are natural.

A final pair of responses that are related to this complex of career images are the answers given by the children to the questions of how happy or unhappy they would feel if they (or, for boys, if their wife) were to be a "full-time mother" at age 30, and if they were to have four children at age 30. (As we would expect, the answers to the two questions are positively correlated.) Table 7 and 8 show the associations between the responses to these questions and television viewing, controlling for our two parental variables.

We can first note that the relationship between television viewing and being happy about being a full-time mother are strong only for the daughters of college-educated parents, or of families in which only the father works full-time (the two

control variables, as we have noted, are orthogonal). In the case of the daughters of the college-educated we have another instance in which the low television viewers are extremely unlikely to give what we would call the traditional answer and the high viewers are extremely likely to do so. The absolute levels of response for the daughters of the non-college group are uniformly traditional (although not as extreme as the high viewers in the parents-college group), regardless of viewing levels. The significant pattern for the boys in the non-college group results from a steady but non-dramatic increase in line with viewing level.

The fact that the girls whose mothers and fathers both work full-time show no relationship between television viewing and their responses to this question, while those whose mothers do not work show an extremely strong association might be taken as an indication of the complex inter-relationship of television viewing and prior, concurrent and possibly consequent manifestations of conventional values and aspirations. Although the associations are more dramatic here than the differences in absolute levels, this finding was perfectly matched in the response to another question in which the children were asked whether they thought the father, the mother, or both parents should have a full-time job. Again, although overall the high viewers were significantly more likely to say that only the father should have a full-time job (this was also the modal response for all groups), the effect was almost entirely due to the overwhelmingly skewed responses of the male and female high viewers whose fathers, but not mothers, had a full-time job.\*

Finally, Table 8 shows the associations between the kids' television viewing and the likelihood of their saying they would be happy if they were to have four

\* Incidentally, quite independent of television viewing, previous research has shown that the mother's employment history and status does increase daughters' expectations of combining marriage and a career. (c.f. Broverman, et al, 1972)

children by the time they are 30. Here we find another instance of the positive relationship between the girls' espousal of traditional female-role values and aspirations and the amount of television viewing they report (and, again, the low-viewing girls in the college group are less traditional and the high viewers more traditional than their counterparts in the non-college group).

There is also an interesting finding in the case of the boys, where we find that those sons of the college-educated parents who watch the least television are the most in favor of having four children (both absolutely and in comparison with the high viewers). One might speculate that in the case of the boys there is no necessary contradiction between their career aspirations and the number of children they want -- as long as it is their wife who stays home and takes care of the kids.

To be continued . . .

It would be neither necessary nor appropriate to end this report with a concluding discussion or summary -- unnecessary because the theoretical and methodological analysis has been stated at great length; inappropriate because the data presented are from what is very much work in progress. In place of a summary or conclusion, then, we offer a parable.

Suppose that your doorbell rang and you opened the door to find a very pleasant, well-dressed and respectable-looking man standing there. You smile inquiringly at the man (he doesn't look like a salesman or F.B.I. agent) and ask what you can do for him. He replies that, on the contrary, he wants to do something for you. He still doesn't look like a salesman, so you wait, still smiling, to hear what he has to say. He has a very simple proposal. He wants to come and visit your house every day for a few hours (particularly in the day-time while you are working and on weekend mornings when you want to sleep late) and tell stories to your children. He

has no ulterior motive, he just likes to tell stories to children (maybe, just occasionally, he will tell them about some toy they might like to have or some new cereal they would like to eat), and he would love to babysit for your children and keep them happily entertained while you are busy or when you want to get away from the kids.

It is really a very simple, tempting offer. What would you do?

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Table 1

TV Viewing by Grade by Sex<sup>1</sup>

	-----BOYS-----				-----GIRLS-----				-----TOTAL-----				
	---GRADE---				---GRADE---				---GRADE---				
	<u>6th</u>	<u>7th</u>	<u>8th</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>6th</u>	<u>7th</u>	<u>8th</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>6th</u>	<u>7th</u>	<u>8th</u>	<u>Total</u>	(N)
TV VIEWING													
<u>Low</u>	16%	29%	17%	(20%)	15%	8%	18%	(13%)	16%	17%	18%	(17%)	( 56)
<u>Medium</u>	40	44	59	(48%)	49	39	48	(45%)	44	42	54	(47%)	(156)
<u>High</u>	43	27	24*	(32%)	36	53	34	(42%)	40	42	28*	(37%)	(123)
	N=	(67)	(45)	(59)	(171)	(59)	(61)	(44)	(164)	(126)	(106)	(103)	(335)

<sup>1</sup> All associations reported in these and the following tables are gamma levels:

\* Association significant at  $p \leq .05$

\*\* Association significant at  $p < .01$

For these and the following tables, TV Viewing is hours reported watching TV on an average day:  
 Low -- 2 hours or less; medium -- 2½ to 5½ hours; high -- 6 hours or more.

Table 2

TV Viewing by Parental Education and Employment Status by Sex

	-----BOYS-----			-----GIRLS-----			-----TOTAL-----			
	--PARENTAL EDUCATION			--PARENTAL EDUCATION			--PARENTAL EDUCATION			
	<u>Both College</u>	<u>Neither College</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Both College</u>	<u>Neither College</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Both College</u>	<u>Neither College</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(N)</u>
TV VIEWING										
<u>Low</u>	30%	16%	(20%)	26%	10%	(13%)	28%	13%	(17%)	( 56)
<u>Medium</u>	50	46	(48%)	46	39	(45%)	48	42	(47%)	(156)
<u>High</u>	20	38**	(32%)	28	51**	(42%)	24	45**	(37%)	(123)
N =	(50)	(81)	(171)	(39)	(80)	(164)	(89)	(161)	(335)	

  

	-----BOYS-----			-----GIRLS-----			-----TOTAL-----			
	--PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT			--PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT			--PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT			
	<u>Father Only</u>	<u>Both Parents</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Father Only</u>	<u>Both Parents</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Father Only</u>	<u>Both Parents</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(N)</u>
TV VIEWING										
<u>Low</u>	19%	19%	(19%)	16%	13%	(13%)	17%	16%	(17%)	( 56)
<u>Medium</u>	49	49	(49%)	40	47	(45%)	45	48	(47%)	(156)
<u>High</u>	32	32	(32%)	44	41	(42%)	38	37	(37%)	(123)
N =	(81)	(75)	(162)	(70)	(86)	(162)	(151)	(161)	(324)	

\*\* p < .01

Table 3

## TV Viewing by Educational Desires and Expectations by Sex

	-----BOYS-----				-----GIRLS-----				-----TOTAL-----				
	-- EDUCATIONAL --				-- EDUCATIONAL --				-- EDUCATIONAL --				
	DESIRES				DESIRES				DESIRES				
	High school	College	Grad school	Total	High school	College	Grad school	Total	High school	College	Grad school	Total	(N)
TV VIEWING													
<u>Low</u>	9%	26%	32%	(20%)	6%	15%	23%	(13%)	7%	20%	29%	(17%)	( 56)
<u>Medium</u>	47	49	54	(48%)	40	51	31	(45%)	44	50	46	(47%)	(156)
<u>High</u>	44	25	14**	(32%)	54	34	46**	(42%)	49	30	26**	(37%)	(123)
N=	(34)	(72)	(22)	(128)	(35)	(80)	(13)	(128)	(69)	(152)	(35)	(256)	

	-----BOYS-----				-----GIRLS-----				-----TOTAL-----				
	-- EDUCATIONAL --				-- EDUCATIONAL --				-- EDUCATIONAL --				
	EXPECTATIONS				EXPECTATIONS				EXPECTATIONS				
	High school	College	Grad school	Total	High school	College	Grad school	Total	High school	College	Grad school	Total	(N)
TV VIEWING													
<u>Low</u>	18%	23%	42%	(20%)	7%	18%	22%	(13%)	11%	20%	46%	(17%)	( 56)
<u>Medium</u>	42	52	47	(48%)	44	46	56	(45%)	43	48	31	(47%)	(156)
<u>High</u>	39	26	11**	(32%)	50	36	22**	(42%)	46	50	14**	(37%)	(123)
N=	(33)	(62)	(19)	(114)	(46)	(66)	(9)	(121)	(79)	(128)	(28)	(235)	

\*\* p &lt; .01

Table 4

Associations<sup>1</sup> Between Educational Desires and Expectations  
and Occupational and Marital Expectations, by Sex

	<u>BOYS</u>	<u>GIRLS</u>
AGE AT BEGINNING FULL-TIME WORK		
<u>Educational Desires</u>	+ .58** (N=128)	+ .36** (N=128)
<u>Educational Expectations</u>	+ .43** (N=114)	+ .25** (N=121)
AGE AT MARRIAGE		
<u>Educational Desires</u>	+ .37** (N=128)	+ .17 (N=128)
<u>Educational Expectations</u>	+ .36** (N=114)	+ .13 (N=121)

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<sup>1</sup> Gamma levels.

\*\* p < .01

Table 5

Associations Between Age They Expect to Begin Working Full-Time and Television Viewing, by Sex, Parental Education, Parental Employment, Desiring and Expecting to Complete College

	<u>BOYS</u> (N=171)	<u>GIRLS</u> (N=164)	<u>TOTAL</u> (N=335)
PARENTAL EDUCATION			
<u>Both College</u> (N=86)	-.32*	-.57**	
<u>Neither College</u> (N=151)	+.13	-.25*	
PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT			
<u>Father Only Working</u> (N=144)	-.18*	-.24*	
<u>Both Parents Working</u> (N=153)	-.18*	-.20*	
DESIRE COLLEGE (N=152)	+.00	-.34**	
EXPECT COLLEGE (N=128)	+.08	-.26*	
TOTAL	-.14*	-.21**	-.20**

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\*  $p \leq .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

Table 6

Associations Between Age They Expect to Marry and  
Television Viewing, by Sex, Parental Education, Parental Employment

	<u>BOYS</u> (N=171)	<u>GIRLS</u> (N=164)	<u>TOTAL</u> (N=335)
PARENTAL EDUCATION			
<u>Both College</u> (N=86)	-.30*	-.34*	
<u>Neither College</u> (N=151)	-.16	-.16	
PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT			
<u>Father Only Working</u> (N=144)	-.10	-.32**	
<u>Both Parents Working</u> (N=153)	-.34**	-.11	
TOTAL	-.26**	-.21*	-.26**

---

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

Table 7

Associations Between Expecting to Be Happy If They (Or Their Wife)  
Were a Full-time Mother at Age 30 and Television Viewing,  
by Sex, Parental Education, Parental Employment

	<u>BOYS</u> (N=171)	<u>GIRLS</u> (N=164)	<u>TOTAL</u> (N=335)
PARENTAL EDUCATION			
<u>Both College</u> (N=86)	-.08	+.61**	
<u>Neither College</u> (N=151)	+.19*	+.02	
PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT			
<u>Father Only Working</u> (N=144)	+.08	+.63**	
<u>Both Parents Working</u> (N=153)	+.09	+.03	
TOTAL	+.10	+.31**	+.22**

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\*  $p \leq .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

Table 8

Associations Between Expecting to Be Happy If They Have Four  
Children at Age 30 and Television Viewing, by Sex,  
Parental Education, Parental Employment

	<u>BOYS</u> (N=163)	<u>GIRLS</u> (N=154)	<u>TOTAL</u> (N=317)
PARENTAL EDUCATION			
<u>Both College</u> (N=83)	-.42**	+.54**	
<u>Neither College</u> (N=152)	+.00	+.27*	
PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT			
<u>Father Only Working</u> (N=144)	-.03	+.25*	
<u>Both Parents Working</u> (N=152)	-.05	+.37**	
TOTAL	-.03	+.32**	+.15**

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\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$