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PREFACE

In the last decade cultural indicators research has enjoyed increased scientific and public interest, both in the United States, where this research began in the late 1960's, and in Europe. Whereas, at first, interest in the long-term effects of mass media was what primarily stimulated this quickly advancing field of research in the United States, it was not long before the European countries developed additional approaches, based on the varied historical conditions within their countries. This situation led to a variety of methodologies, and the personal as well as scientific contacts which have since developed between the different research centers opened the door to joint discussions and topics in the field.

The 'Symposium on Cultural Indicators for the Comparative Study of Culture' was convened in Vienna, February 16–19, 1982, under the auspices of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. It brought together forty-eight scholars from Austria, Great Britain, Hungary, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United States, and West-Germany. Experts in cultural indicators research as well as representatives of cross-cultural comparative studies were invited to participate by the Institute for Audience Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the Institute for Sociology of the University of Lund in Sweden, and the Institute for Mass Communication of the Catholic University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

The resulting volume of contributions to this symposium represents a 'state of art report' of the research in the field, with its advantages and problems. It should be a valuable tool not only to those involved in cultural indicators research and cross-cultural comparative studies, but also to all those interested in a vital and productive interplay between the humanities and the social sciences at large. It is my belief that this type of research marks a beginning for a comparative analysis of the development of mankind's cultural heritage. This analysis has become possible because of improved methodologies and necessary because of the rapid social and cultural change characterizing the world of today.

Vienna, June 1982

Margret Dietrich
Director, Institute for Audience Research
Austrian Academy of Sciences

GEORGE GERBNER

POLITICAL FUNCTIONS OF TELEVISION VIEWING: A CULTIVATION ANALYSIS*

Television presents a pervasive, uniform centralized, and coherent world of drama, commercials, news, and other programs to all citizens. Instead of learning to select and use information through perspectives and tastes developed in the home, church, school, and varied cultural media, individuals are now inserted at infancy into a symbolic environment dominated by television and will live more or less with its repetitive rituals throughout life. Television has become the primary common source of everyday information and culture of an otherwise heterogeneous population.

Many of those now dependent upon television have never before been part of the political and cultural mainstream. Also, perhaps for the first time since preindustrial religion, television links the elites and the mass publics with a shared daily ritual of highly informative and dramatic content. What is the role of this common experience, especially among the heavier viewers in each social group, in the general socialization and political orientation of Americans? How does the research approach we call Cultural Indicators, and its analysis of television's cultivation of social and political orientations, contribute to understanding that process? In this report, we extend our theory of "mainstreaming" (see Gerbner et al., 1980 c) to the cultivation of conceptions of aspects of politics, government, and business and advance some suggestions about how television tilts the political balance and cultivates a typology of political orientations we call "commercial populism."

CULTURAL INDICATORS

Conventional research methodologies dealing with selective exposure and specifically targeted communication effects have been inade-

* The material in this paper is drawn from work of the Cultural Indicators Project at the Annenberg School of Communications of the University of Pennsylvania, conducted by George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorielli.

quate to the study of pervasive symbol systems, broad continuities in the symbolic environment, and slow but massive cultural shifts. Research concentration on changing individual attitudes and behaviors has inhibited the investigation of generational and situational transformations in life-styles that remain stable for individuals. Finally, focusing political communication research on explicitly "political" communications has obscured the nature of political socialization in the television age, a process in which the entire spectrum of program types (the bulk of which is drama) plays an integral part.

The theory and methodology of Cultural Indicators was developed (Gerbner, 1969 b) to attempt to overcome these problems. It treats the dramatic world television presents to most viewers as an integrated whole that cultivates relatively stable images of the world, society, and the self, images that may systematically differ by the styles of life and amounts of viewing of different groups of viewers.

The Cultural Indicators Project began in 1967-68 with a study for the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (Gerbner, 1969 a). It continued under the sponsorships of the U. S. Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior (Gerbner, 1972 b), the National Institute of Mental Health, the White House Office of Telecommunications Policy, the American Medical Association, the U. S. Administration on Aging, and the National Science Foundation (Gerbner and Gross, 1976).

The Cultural Indicators approach employs a two-pronged research strategy. We call the first Message System Analysis, the second, Cultivation Analysis.

First, we have been recording and analyzing yearly samples of network television drama since 1967 and subjecting them to rigorous and detailed content analysis on the basis of which we can delineate many features of the television world.

Second, based upon the patterns and values we discern in the television world, we address questions about aspects of the real world to samples of light and heavy viewers. (Non-viewers are literally too few and demographically too scattered for serious research purposes). We want to determine whether those who spend more of their lives with television are more likely to answer our questions in ways that parallel television's images than are groups that watch less television but are otherwise relatively comparable (in terms of important demographic characteristics) to the heavy viewers. We have used the concept of "cultivation" to describe the contributions of television to viewer con-

ceptions. "Cultivation Differential"is our term for the difference in response patterns between comparable groups of light and heavy viewers. (For a more detailed description see Gerbner and Gross, 1976).

Earlier reports (the "Violence Profiles") focused on dramatic demonstrations of social power and personal risk (see, e. g., Gerbner et al., 1977 b, 1978 a, 1979). In recent years we have used our cumulative data bank of detailed observations, based on the analysis of over 1600 programs and 14,000 characters, and the extensive archives of survey data available for analysis, to investigate television portrayals and related viewer conceptions of women and minorities, aging, scientists and other professions, health and medicine, sexual depictions, family images and impact, educational achievement and aspirations, and other issues. (See Gerbner and Signorielli 1979; Jeffries-Fox and Signorielli 1979; Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli and Morgan, 1980; Gerbner, 1980 a, b; Morgan 1980 b; Morgan and Gross, 1980; Gerbner et al., 1981 c, d.) Our data collection has been broadly conceived from the beginning so as to permit the analysis of many different trends and features of the world of television and their relationships to the conceptions and attitudes of various groups of viewers.

The Theory of "Mainstreaming"

On issue after issue we found that the assumptions, beliefs, and values of heavy viewers differ systematically from those of light viewers in the same demographic groups. Sometimes these differences appear as across-the-board characteristics of the general group of heavy viewers, meaning that those who watch more television are more likely – in all subgroups – to give what we call "television answers" to our questions. But in many cases the patterns are more complex. We have found that television viewing, not surprisingly, serves as a stable factor differentially integrated and interacting with different groups' life situations and world views. In our recent work we have isolated a consistent pattern which we have termed "mainstreaming" (See Gerbner et al., 1980 c).

The "mainstream" can be thought of as a relative commonality of outlooks and values that television tends to cultivate. By "mainstreaming" we mean the sharing of that commonality among heavy viewers in those demographic groups whose light viewers hold divergent views. In other words, differences found in the patterns of responses of light viewers – differences that can be associated with social and political characteristics of these groups – may be diminished or even absent

from the responses of heavy viewers in the same groups. Thus we find the greatest cultivation differences in groups whose light viewers are outside of the television mainstream. In other cases we find that television seems to moderate attitudes in groups whose light viewers hold extreme views. In many cases, viewing signals a convergence of group outlooks rather than absolute across-the-board increments in all groups.

For example, it is well documented that more educated, higher income groups have relatively diversified patterns of cultural opportunities and activities; consequently, they tend to be lighter TV viewers. Predictably, therefore, we find that when they are light viewers they also tend to be the least imbued with the television view of the world. But those members of the higher education/high income groups who are heavy viewers respond quite differently. The pattern of their responses is more like that of other heavy viewers, most of whom have less education and income. Heavy viewers of all groups tend to share that relatively homogeneous outlook we call the television mainstream.

Most of our discussion revolves around differences in patterns of responses between light, medium, and heavy viewers in otherwise comparable groups. For purposes of this analysis, the General Social Survey (GSS) of the National Opinion Research Center for 1975 through 1980 has been divided into light viewers (26%) who said they watched a daily average of less than two hours; medium viewers (45%) who watched between two and four hours; and heavy viewers (30%) who watched four or more hours a day. (For a more detailed explanation of the sample and methodology see Gerbner et al., 1982.)

Differences in amounts of viewing are, of course, rooted in the way people live. Generally, less educated, less affluent, and more dependent or isolated persons use, need, enjoy, depend on, or at any rate watch more television. The heavy viewing one-third of the population includes a disproportionate number of women, young and old people, and non-college and lower income persons (see Table 1).

Conversely, relatively more men, middle-aged people, and college-educated higher-income persons tend to be among the light viewing one-fourth. It is evident, therefore, that simple comparisons of heavy and light viewers involve much more than television. In order to isolate the independent contribution of television to the cultivation of ideas and behaviors, it is necessary to control for other factors and to compare viewing-related differences in relatively homogeneous subgroups. All findings in this report include such controls. Subgroup differences be-

tween heavy and light viewers within each group enable us to specify the differential as well as the common dynamics of television viewing.

Political Orientations

In this report we refine and apply the paradigm of mainstreaming to political orientations. We shall advance and illustrate some propositions about television's contribution to class and political self-identification. We shall examine the political dynamics of television through the analysis of the positions of comparable heavy and light viewers of different political tendencies.

Table 1: Relationship between Amount of TV Viewing and Demographic Variables

	TV Viewing						
	Light %	Medium %	Heavy %	Base N	Gamma	Simple[1] r	4th Order Partial r
Sex							
Male	50	46	37	2638	.16***	.12***	.09***
Female	50	54	63	3352			
Age							
18–29	24	24	31	1531			
30–54	51	46	34	2598	.03	.02	−.06***
55+	25	30	36	1834			
Education							
No college	54	67	82	4077	−.38***	−.19***	−.14***
Some college	46	33	18	1893			
Income							
Low	31	33	49	2060			
Medium	35	37	33	1971		*	−.12***
High	35	30	18	1543			
Region							
Urban	45	43	43	2618	.03	−.02	−.02
Non-Urban	55	57	57	3372			

[1] Simple and partial correlations based on continuous data. Partials based on simultaneous controls for all other demographic variables in the table.

*** $p < .001$ (tau)

Data source: NORC General Social Surveys, 1975, 1977, 1978, 1980

TV Viewing: Light = 0–1 hours/day
Medium = 2–3 hours/day
Heavy = Over 4 hours/day

We shall not review here the relevant findings of television message system (content) analysis or provide tabular data supporting Figures 1 to 4. Those Tables are included in a different version of this report (Gerbner et al., 1982). The focus of this report is the cultivation analysis showing how television tilts the political balance and cultivates an approach to government activity we shall call "commercial populism."

Class and Political Identification

Political party affiliation is traditionally related to social status. Therefore, it is not surprising that more heavy viewers, who tend to have lower status, are Democrats than light viewers (42% to 35%), while more light than heavy viewers are Independents (41% to 31%) and Republicans (24% to 21%). We shall see, however, that television alters the social significance and political meaning of these and other conventional lables.

An example of this transformation is the blurring of class lines and the self-styled "averaging" of income differences. Figure 1 shows that low socioeconomic status (SES) and low income respondents are most likely to call themselves "working class" – but only as light viewers. Heavy viewer respondents of the same low status group are much less likely to think of themselves as "working class" and more as "middle class." The television experience seems to swamp other circumstances in thinking of one's class. It is an especially powerful antidote to "working-class" class consciousness.

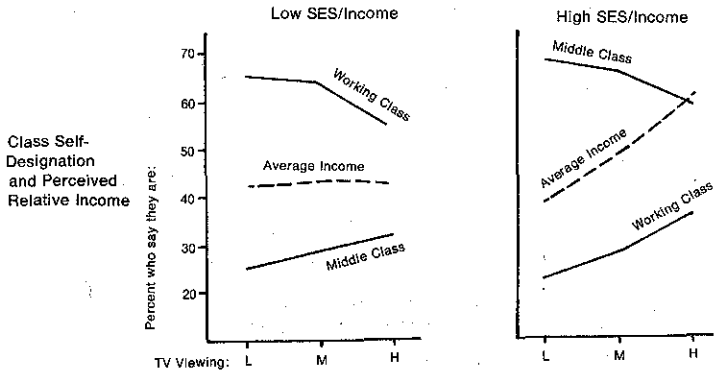

FIGURE 1: Class and Income Self-Designations by TV Viewing within Actual SES/Income Groups

Middle SES/income group viewers show the least sense of class distinction. They are already in the "mainstream." The high SES/income group, however, as the low group, exhibits a response pattern which is associated with television. More upper class light viewers seem to know they are "upper class" than do upper class heavy viewers. Television tends to blur class distinctions and make more affluent heavy viewers think of themselves as just working people of average income.

These processes show up clearly when we relate television viewing to labels of direct political relevance. We chose a relatively general and stable designation of political tendency most likely to structure a range of political attitudes and positions. This designation is divided into the self-designations "liberal," "moderate," and "conservative." Political tendency was measured by the question, "We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the *Political* views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal – point 1 – to extremely conservative – point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?" Self-placements on this seven-point scale were recoded into three categories; "extremely liberal," "liberal," and "slightly liberal" (points 1, 2, and 3) respondents were treated as "liberals"; points 5, 6, and 7 were classified as "conservative," and point 4 was classified as "moderate, middle of the road." The resulting groupings provide, over the four years combined, 1611 "liberals" (28.2%), 225 "moderates" (39.4%), and 1894 "conservatives" (32.4%); 306 cases (5.1%) have missing data.

Figure 2 shows the percent of light viewers in each political tendency category and the percentage spread between them and heavy viewers by both demographic classifications and party affiliation.

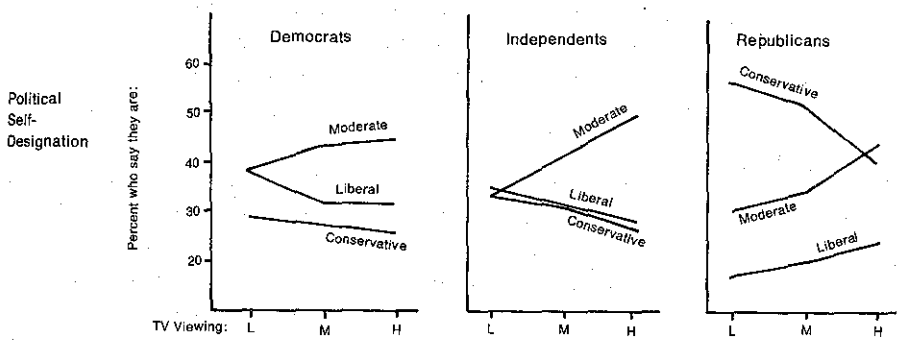

FIGURE 2: Political Self-Designation by Amount of TV Viewing within Party Categories

The most general relationship between television viewing and political tendency is that significantly more heavy than light viewers in all subgroups call themselves moderates and significantly fewer call themselves conservatives. (This "moderating" is a specific correlate of television viewing and not a general media exposure phenomenon. Neither radio listening nor newspaper reading produce similar results.) The number of liberals also declines among heavy viewers, except where there are the fewest liberals: among Republicans. Figure 2 illustrates the absorption of divergent tendencies, blurring of conventional distinctions, and blending of clear-cut positions into the "moderate" mainstream.

On the surface, "mainstreaming" appears to be a centering of political and other tendencies. However, a closer look at the actual positions taken in response to questions about political issues such as racism, rights, the economy, etc., shows that the "mainstream" does not necessarily flow down the center.

Which way does it "bend"? Our analysis of responses on minorities, reported by Larry Gross in this volume, shows that although television viewing brings conservatives, moderates, and liberals closer together, it is the liberal position – the main support for minority rights – that erodes most among heavy viewers. Viewing blurs traditional differences, blends them into a more homogeneous mainstream, and bends the mainstream toward the "hard line" position on issues dealing with minorities and personal rights.

When we apply that paradigm to more explicit expressions of political ideology, we find that relatively repressive pattern confirmed.

Opposition to Communism, Free Speech

Whatever its reasons and justifications, anti-Comunism has been used as the principal rationale for political repression in the U.S.A. since the first Red Scare of 1919-20. Responses to three questions tap television's relationship to anti-Communist sentiments and to the tendency to restrict free speech.

Figure 3 shows the familiar pattern. Heavy viewing blurs political lines, blends otherwise divergent views into the mainstream and bends that toward anti-Communism and repression. Six out of ten light viewing conservatives and five out of ten light viewing moderates consider Communism "the worst form of Government." Heavy viewing conservatives and moderates nearly unite in condemning Communism as "worst" by even larger margins. But viewing makes the biggest

difference among liberals: Only one-third of light viewing but half of heavy viewing liberals agree that Communism is "the worst form of government." (All results are significant after all controls.)

Responses on restricting free speech show similar patterns. Heavy viewers of all three political persuasions are more likely to agree to restrict, in various ways, the speech of "left" and "right" nonconformists than are their light viewing counterparts, again after all controls. There is little difference between conservatives and moderates, especially when they are heavy viewers. The most striking difference is between light and heavy viewing liberals.

With respect to anti-Communism and restrictions on political speech of the left and the right, those who call themselves conservatives are in the television mainstream. Those who consider themselves moderates join the conservatives or exceed them as heavy viewers. Liberals perform their traditional role of defending political plurality and freedom of speech as light viewers, but are closer to the moderate/conservative position as heavy viewers. Mainstreaming means a narrowing of political differences and a significant tilting of the political balance.

That tilt is also evident in the difference between attitudes toward restrictions of speech by "leftist" nonconformists and of "rightists."

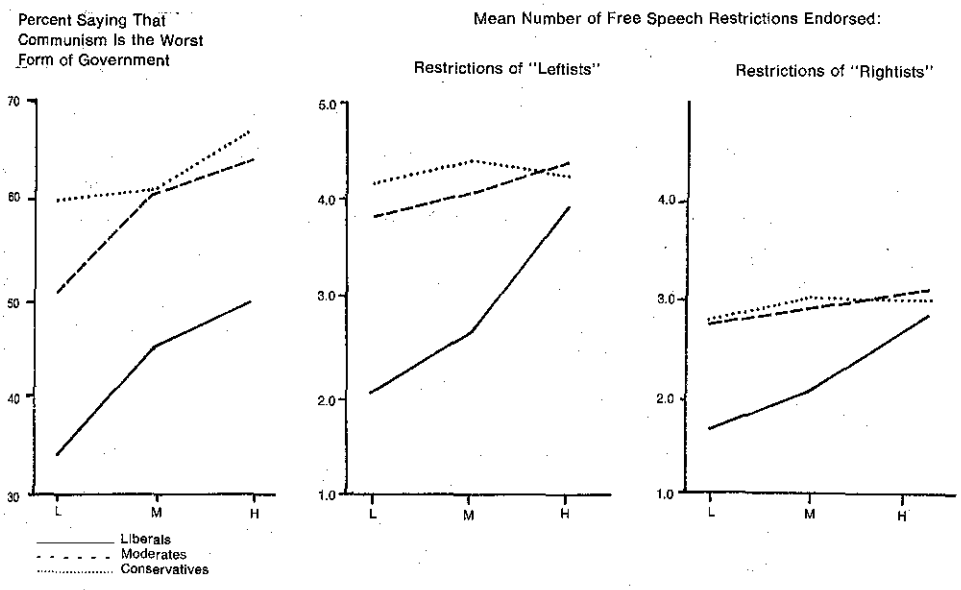

FIGURE 3: TV Viewing and Attitudes towards Communism and Free Speech, by Political Self-Designation

More respondents of all three political tendencies approve of suppression of the left than of the right; however, the difference between light and heavy viewers leaning towards restriction on the left is much greater, especially among liberals, than on the right. In other words, the mainstream runs in a generally repressive direction and pulls hardest on those otherwise (as light viewers) farthest away from its current. The erosion of the liberal position among heavy viewers shifts the center toward the conservative side.

Commercial Populism

But rightward drift is not the full story. Television is a social institution and corporate organization with a business clientele of its own, which is generally conservative, but also a mission to perform for its clients, which requires other directions.

Television needs to attract wide following and reasonable confidence to perform its principal task of delivering the buying public to its sponsors. It could afford even less than most politicians to project austerity, to denigrate popular bread-and-butter issues, or to economize at the expense of security. The essential mission of the institution – mass mobilization for consumption – would seem to dictate an economically popular and even populist stance.

We examined patterns of responses to questions about goverment spending on 11 programs. The results are shown in Figure 4. Seven are traditional "liberal" issues: health, environment, cities, education, foreign aid, welfare, and blacks. The percents of light, medium, and heavy viewers in the three political categories who say we spend "too much" on these programs are shown on the upper part of Figure 4. Here, instead of heavy viewing liberals taking positions closer to conservatives, the opposite happens: Heavy viewing conservatives, as well as moderates, converge toward the liberal position on six of the seven issues. The exception is the issue of least apparent relevance to consumer spending: foreign aid.

The remaining four programs deal with crime, drugs, defense, and space exploration. Percents of respondents who say we are spending "too little" on these can be seen on the lower part of Figure 4. Here again, with the exception of space, all groups of heavy viewers want to spend more. As these are more "conservative issues," it is the moderates and conservatives who are in the television mainstream, taking position toward greater spending, and heavy viewing liberals stand close to them.

To further investigate the populist streak in the otherwise restrictive political mix of the typology of the heavy viewer, we looked for questions that combine taxes and spending. The 1980 GSS permitted us to isolate those respondents who want no reductions in government spending and yet feel their taxes are too high. Table 2 shows that heavy viewers are more likely to express this contradictory position in every subgroup. Figure 5 illustrates the political lineup. As on the other economic issues, liberals and moderates are close together while heavy

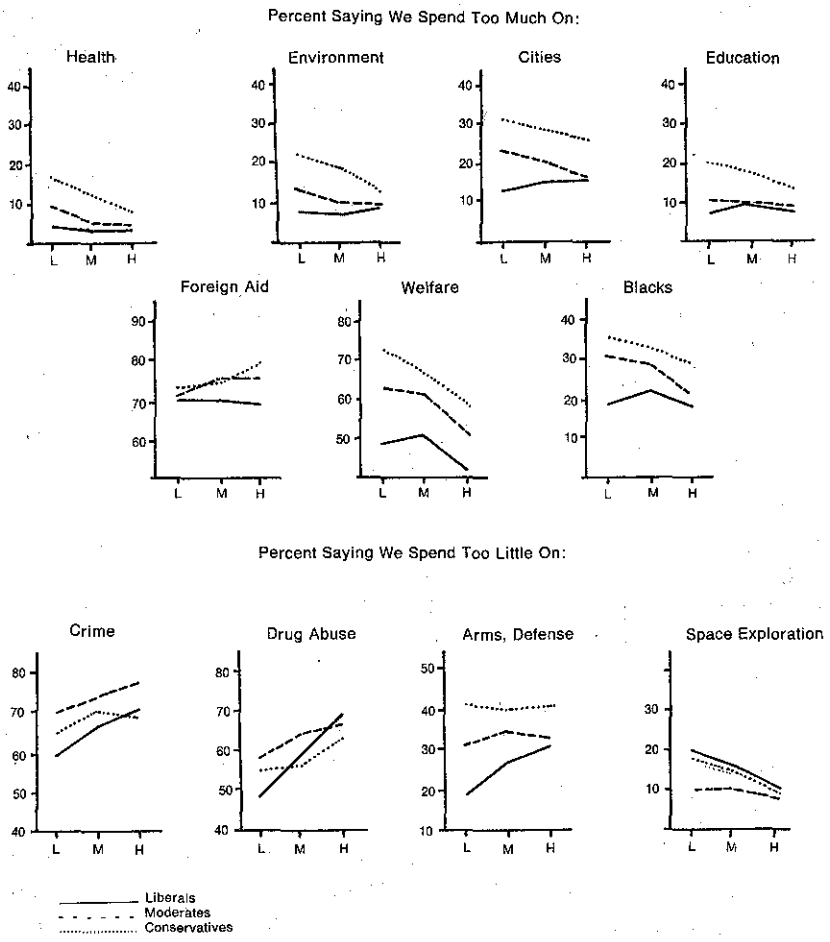

FIGURE 4: Television and Attitudes towards Federal Spending, by Political Self-Designation

TABLE 2: Percent of Respondents Who Oppose Spending Cuts and Reductions in Services but Feel Their Taxes Are Too High, by TV Viewing (1980 Data)

	TV Viewing				
	Light	Medium	Heavy	CD	Gamma
Overall	29	31	38	+ 9	.13**
Controlling for:					
Sex					
Male	26	26	36	+10	.14*
Female	32	35	39	+ 7	.10 (p = .07)
Age					
Under 30	35	32	44	+ 9	.14 (p = .07)
30–54	27	35	41	+14	.19**
55+	26	22	29	+ 3	.08
Education					
No college	36	32	40	+ 4	.09 (p = .08)
Some college	23	28	29	+ 6	.12 (p = .08)
Income					
Low	31	32	37	+ 6	.10
Medium	28	29	40	+12	.18*
High	28	30	35	+ 7	.10
Region					
Urban	29	29	40	+11	.16*
Non-Urban	29	32	36	+ 7	.10 (p = .07)
Party Affiliation					
Democrat	40	35	42	+ 2	.04
Independent	24	31	38	+14	.19**
Republican	20	22	30	+10	.17 (p = .07)
Political Tendency					
Liberal	36	32	44	+ 8	.11
Moderate	32	33	37	+ 5	.07
Conservative	20	26	30	+10	.16*

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

viewing conservatives join the liberal-moderate mainstream; the tilt is in the liberal (if conflicted) direction. Heavy viewing Republicans and Independents also express attitudes closer to the Democratic position than do their light viewing fellow party members, and all heavy viewers want more social spending but lower taxes.

Relations to Business: Delivery vs. Flattery

Television thus seems to cultivate both ideological conservatism and pork-chop liberalism. It is a syndrome that has disturbed some business executives. How come, they ask, that a commercial medium that is funded by business sponsors and insulated from popular control either by box office or by ballot box still strikes a populist pose in some important matters? Business people also accuse television of adding personal insult to economic injury by portraying them, according to the title of a recent booklet, as "Crooks, Conmen, and Clowns" (Theberge, 1981).

Although these terms are overdrawn, our own data and other investigations also show that business executives are portrayed less favorably than are some other professionals such as doctors. We believe that the full explanation includes consideration of the requirements of credibility necessary for audience appeal within the non-deferential and anti big-business tradition of American popular culture.

The most frequently recurring parts of the television ritual are commercials. They of course extol the virtues of business. But such communications known to be controlled by powerful authorities (be they private or public) are assumed to be self-serving and have relatively low credibility. Dramatic programs and news, on the other hand, can reflect somewhat more diverse, critical, and popular points of view. This

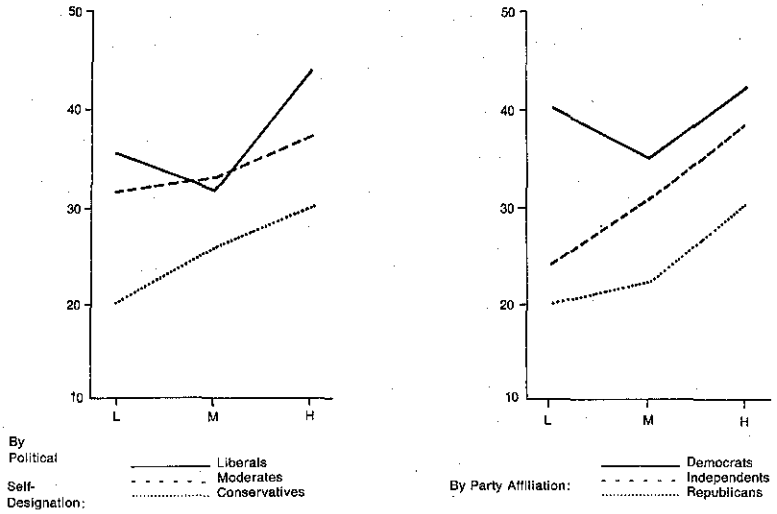

FIGURE 5: The Association of TV Viewing with Opposing Spending Cuts but Feeling Taxes Are Too High, by Political Self-Designation and Party Affiliation

helps restore credibility essential for both the political and commercial tasks of the medium.

The conflict between serving the politics of business and the need of business to attract and sell large middle and low status consumers is resolved in what we call commercial populism. A result of the cultural tradeoff is the cultivation of relatively low confidence in big business in general and relatively high confidence in the television business. Table 3 gives the percentages of those who express a "great deal" of confidence in people running major companies and in people running television. Figure 6 graphically represents these data. Liberal, moderate, and conservative heavy viewers all express less confidence in major companies and more confidence in television than their light viewing counterparts. (It should be noted that these relative differences exist in the context of generally declining confidence in most institutions, not only or even primarily business.)

The trade off is thus between delivery and flattery. Business sponsors pay television to deliver the largest possible audience. Television has developed a strategy to attract such an audience, not just to please corporate egos. That is the strategy we call commercial populism – the cultivation of a paradoxical but coherent mix of political, economic, and institutional leanings.

TABLE 3: Relationship between Expressing a Great Deal of Confidence in the People Running "Major Companies" and "Television" by Amount of TV Viewing and Political Self-Designation (All GSS Years)

	TV Viewing					
Percent Expressing a Great Deal of Confidence:	Light %	Medium %	Heavy %	CD	Gamma	Interaction[1] Beta
Major Companies						
Liberal	23	19	20	− 3	.04	
Moderate	31	23	19	−12	.14***	−.10*
Conservative	36	32	28	−18	.10**	
Television						
Liberal	12	19	27	+15	−.31***	
Moderate	14	14	22	+ 8	−.23***	−.09*
Conservative	10	13	20	+10	−.23***	

** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$
[1] Interaction of Amount of TV Viewing and Political Self-Designation with Age, Education, Income, Sex, Race, Region, and Amount of Viewing and Political Self-Designation in equation.

The basic process of cultivation fits our paradigm of mainstreaming. The present findings help refine the paradigm with respect to political orientations. We can describe these refinements, with apologies for the alliteration, as blurring, blending, and bending. Comparing responses of heavy viewers to those of light viewers in comparable subgroups, we find a blurring of political distinctions, the blending of attitudes into the mainstream, and the bending of the direction of that mainstream to the political and economic tasks of television and its client institutions.

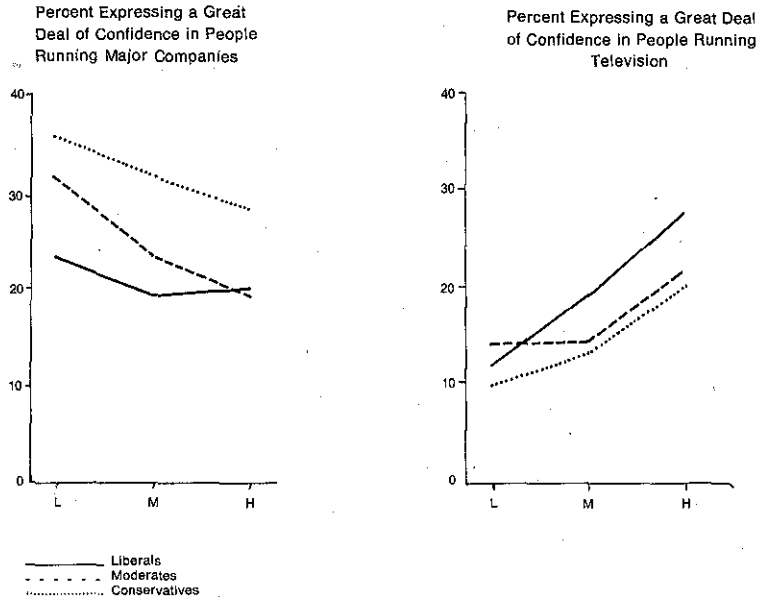

FIGURE 6: TV Viewing and Confidence in Major Companies and Television, by Political Self-Designation