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Graf č. 1 Mainstreaming

Toward 'cultural indicators': the analysis of mass mediated public message systems

George Gerbner

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The systematic analysis of message content is a traditional area of study in communication research and related fields. Recent developments led to a revival of interest in the area. But none of the new frameworks and approaches presented consider the analysis of message systems addressed to heterogeneous and anonymous publics, such as mass communications, a source of theoretical development not necessarily generated in other areas of interest. The purpose of this paper is to suggest an approach that justifies such development and can also lead to results of practical policy significance, such as a scheme of social accounting for trends in the composition and structure of mass-mediated public message systems. The approach is based on a conception of these message systems as the common culture through which communities cultivate shared and public notions about facts, values, and contingencies of human existence.

Change in the symbolic environment

The 'Cultural Revolution' is not only a Chinese slogan. It is also a fact of social life whenever a particular political-industrial order permeates the sphere of public message production. A change in the social bases and economic goals of message mass-production leads, sooner or later, to a transformation of the common symbolic environment that gives public meaning and sense of direction to human activity. The need is for a theory that can lead to the development of 'cultural indicators' taking the pulse of the nature and tempo of that transformation.

Our theoretical point of departure, then, is that changes in the mass production and rapid distribution of messages across previous barriers of time, space, and social grouping bring about systematic variations in public message content whose full significance rests in the cultivation of collective consciousness about elements of existence. (It should be noted at the outset that the terms *common*, *shared*, *public*, or *collective* cultivation do not necessarily mean consensus. On the contrary, the public recognition of subcultural, class, generational, and ideological differences and even conflicts among scattered groups of people requires some common

awareness and cultivation of the issues, styles, and points of divergence that make public contention and contest possible. The struggles for power and privilege, for participation in the conduct of affairs, for the redistribution of resources, and for all forms of social recognition and justice, are increasingly shifting from the older arenas to the newer spheres of public attention and control in mass-produced communications.)

Selective habits of participation in one's cultural environment limit each of us to risky, and often faulty, extrapolation about the cultural experience of heterogeneous communities. Informed policy making and the valid interpretation of social response increasingly require general and comparative indicators of the prevailing climate of the man-made symbolic environment. But knowledge of a message system, over and above that which we select for our own information or entertainment, and which has significance for a collectivity such as an entire cultural community, cannot be given in the lifetime experience of any single person.

What *can* be given is a representative abstraction from the collectively experienced total texture of messages, relevant to certain investigative purposes. Sampling is not the major problem, and neither is the efficient processing of large quantities of data, although these are important procedural considerations. Nor is great theoretical challenge involved in the analysis of mass media messages for specific critical, control, evaluative, or policy purposes. The outstanding problems are the development of a generalized scheme applicable to the investigation of the broadest terms of collective cultivation in different cultural communities, and making these terms salient to elements of existence represented in public message systems. Philosophers, historians, anthropologists, and others have, of course, addressed themselves to such problems before. But the rise of the institutionalized and corporately managed cultivation of collective consciousness by mass media has given a new urgency and social policy significance to the inquiry.

Cultivation of public consciousness through mass communication

A word on *cultivation*. I use the term to indicate that my primary concern in this discussion is not with information, education, persuasion, etc., or with any kind of direct communication 'effects'. I am concerned with the collective context within which, and in response to which, different individual and group selections and interpretations of messages take place. In that sense, a message (or message system) cultivates consciousness of the terms required for its meaningful perception. Whether I accept its 'meaning' or not, like it or not, or agree or disagree, is another problem. First I must attend to and grasp what it is about. Just how that occurs, how items of information are integrated into given frameworks of cognition, is also another problem. My interest here centres on the fact that any attention and understanding cultivates the terms upon which it is achieved. And to the considerable extent to which these terms are common to large groups, the cultivation of shared terms provides the basis for public interaction.

Public is another word of special significance here. It means both a quality of information and 'an amorphous social structure whose members share a community-of-interest which has been produced by impersonal communication

and contact' (Gould and Kolb, 1964, p. 558). As a quality of information, the awareness that a certain item of knowledge is publicly held (i.e. not only known to many, but commonly known that it is known to many) makes collective thought and action possible. Such knowledge gives individuals their awareness of collective strength (or weakness), and a feeling of social identification or alienation. As an 'amorphous social structure, etc.' a public is a basic unit of and requirement for self-government among diverse and scattered groups. The creation of both the consciousness and the social structure called public is the result of the 'public-making' activity approximately named publication. 'Public opinion' is actually the outcome of some sort of eliciting and some private views through their publication – as in the publication of polls.

Publication as a general social process is the creation and cultivation of shared ways of selecting and viewing events and aspects of life. Mass production and distribution of message systems transforms selected private perspectives into broad public perspectives, and brings mass publics into existence. These publics are maintained through continued publication. They are supplied with selections of information and entertainment, fact and fiction, news and fantasy or 'escape' materials which are considered important or interesting or entertaining and profitable (or all of these) in terms of the perspectives to be cultivated.

Publication is thus the basis of community consciousness and self-government among large groups of people too numerous or too dispersed to interact face to face or in any other personally mediated fashion. The truly revolutionary significance of modern mass communication is its 'public-making' ability. That is the ability to form historically new bases for collective thought and action quickly, continuously, and pervasively across previous boundaries of time, space, and culture.

The terms of broadest social interaction are those available in the most widely shared message systems of a culture. Increasingly these are mass-produced message systems. That is why mass media have been called the 'agenda-setters' of modern society. Whether one is widely conversant with or unaware of large portions of them, supportive or critical of them, or even alienated from or rebellious of them, the terms of the culture shape the course of the response.

The approach I am suggesting is, therefore, concerned with the overall patterns and boundary conditions within which the processes of individual cognition, message utilization, and social interaction occur. The approach is directed toward answering the most general questions about the broadest terms of collective concept-formation given in mass-produced public message systems. What perspectives and what choices do they make available to entire communities over time, across cultures, and in different societies? With what kinds and proportions of properties and qualities are these choices weighted? What are the underlying structures of association in large message systems that are not apparent in their separate component units?

The need for 'cultural indicators'

We need to know what general terms of collective cultivation about existence, priorities, values, and relationships are given in collectively shared public message systems before we can reliably interpret facts of individual and social

response. For example, it means little to know that 'John believes in Sa, Claus' until we also know in what culture, at what point in time, and in the context of what public message systems cultivating the reinforcement or inhibition of such beliefs. Similarly, interpretations of public opinion (i.e. responses to questions elicited in specific cultural contexts), and of many social and cultural policy matters, require the background knowledge of general 'cultural indicators' similar to the economic indicators compiled to guide economic policy and the social indicators proposed to inform social policy making.

What distinguishes the analysis of public, mass-mediated message systems as a social scientific enterprise from other types of observation, commentary, or criticism is the attempt to deal comprehensively, systematically, and generally rather than specifically and selectively or *ad hoc* with problems of collective cultural life. This approach makes no prior assumptions about such conventionally demarcated functions as 'information' and 'entertainment', or 'high culture' and 'low culture'. Style of expression, quality of representation, artistic excellence, or the quality of individual experience associated with selective exposure to and participation in mass-cultural activity are not considered critical variables for this purpose. What is informative, entertaining (or both), good, bad, or indifferent by any standard of quality are selective judgements applied to messages quite independently from the social functions they actually perform in the context of large message systems touching the collective life of a whole community. Conventional and formal judgements applied to selected communications may be irrelevant to general questions about the presentation of what is, what is important, what is right, and what is related to what in mass-produced composite message systems.

Non-relevance of some conventional distinctions

Just as we make no *a priori* assumptions about the significance of style, quality, and subjective experience associated with different types of message systems, we do not recognize the validity of conventional distinctions of function attached to non-fictional vs fictional modes of presentation. 'Fact' may be stranger than fiction, and the veracity of 'fiction' greater than that of the presumably factual. Regardless of verisimilitude, credibility, or what is actually 'believed' in a presentation, message systems cultivate the terms upon which they present subjects or aspects of life. There is no reason for assuming that the cultivation of these terms depends in any significant way upon the mode of presentation, upon agreement or disagreement with or belief or disbelief in the presentations involved, or upon whether these presentations are presumably factual or imaginary. This does not mean, of course, that we do not normally attach greater credibility to a news story, a presumably factual report, a trusted source, a familiar account, than to a fairy tale or to what we regard as false or inimical. What it does mean is that in the general process of image formation and cultivation, fact and fable play equally significant and inter-related roles.

There is, however, an important difference between the ways fiction and non-fiction deal with life. Reportage, exposition, explanation, argument – whether based on fact, fancy, opinion, or all of these – ordinarily deal with specific aspects of life or thought extracted from total situations. What gives

tion of cultivation analysis to study a distinct religious subculture, the Mennonites (Chapter 8).

The next several chapters focus on the application of cultivation theory and analysis in international and intercultural contexts. In Chapter 9, Ron Tamborini and Jeonghwa Choi examine the role of cultural diversity in cultivation research using findings from a number of studies conducted on samples of foreign-born respondents in the United States and members of other cultures. Then, Bo Reimer and Karl Erik Rosengren (Chapter 10) examine cultivation from a Swedish perspective, applying a life-style framework to study cultivation and human values. In Chapter 11, Mallory Wober discusses a number of different studies that attempt to apply aspects of cultivation theory and analysis in Great Britain. In a similar vein, Michael Morgan (Chapter 12) explores cultivation analysis in the international setting, using findings from samples of respondents from Argentina, the People's Republic of China, and South Korea.

Finally, George Gerbner, the "founding father" of cultivation theory, presents an epilogue in which he reflects on some of the advances described in the book and develops what he sees as the most appropriate agenda for cultivation analysts to pursue.

Overall, this collection provides a broad glimpse into the ways cultivation analysis has evolved on both micro and macro levels. We hope the book advances the important role that the theory, methods, and findings of cultivation analysis have played and will continue to play in communication research.

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*Cultivation Analysis:**Conceptualization and Methodology*

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We are a mass mediated society. The mass media, especially television, play important, if often invisible and taken-for-granted, roles in our daily lives. Television sets are usually placed in prominent positions in our homes, whether in the family room, the living room, the kitchen, the bedroom, or all of the above. Few can remember, or care to remember, what life was like before television.

Each day, in the average American household, a television set is turned on for over 7 hours. Individual family members watch it for about 3 hours. Children and older people watch the most; adolescents watch the least, but even they view an average of 20 or more hours each week. Although most Americans report that they read a daily newspaper, television is often cited as their major source of news and information.

Television has become our nation's (and increasingly the world's) most common and constant learning environment. It both (selectively) mirrors and leads society. Television is first and foremost, however, a storyteller—it tells most of the stories to most of the people most of the time. As such, television is the wholesale distributor of images and forms the mainstream of our popular culture. Our children are born into

shape, focus, and purpose to the non-fictional mode of presentation is that it is analytical; it implicitly organizes the universe into classes of subjects and topics, and it devotes primary attention to one or more of these subjects and topics.

The usual purpose of the fictional and dramatic modes of presentation is to present situations rather than fragments of knowledge as such. The focus is on people in action; subjects and topics enter as they become significant to the situations.

From the point of view of the analysis of elements of existence, values, and relationships inherent in large message systems, fiction and drama thus offer special opportunities. Here an aspect of life, an area of knowledge, or the operation of a social enterprise appears imaginatively re-created in its significant associations with total human situations. The requirements that make the treatment of specific subjects secondary to the requirements of telling a 'good story' might make the treatment of those subjects more revealing of the underlying assumptions cultivated in the story-telling process.

It should be stressed again that the characteristics of a message system are not necessarily the characteristics of individual units composing the system. The purpose of the study of a system *as system* is to reveal features, processes, and relationships expressed in the whole, not in its parts. Unlike most literary or dramatic criticism, or, in fact, most personal cultural participation and judgement, this approach to message system analysis focuses on the record of institutional behaviour in the cultural field, and on the dynamics of message-production and image cultivation in a community but not necessarily in selective personal experience and response.

The systems with which we deal contain images and motion as well as words. This places great demands on methods of recording and notation, and challenges the ingenuity of the scientific analyst. Because of the necessity to abstract propositional forms from statements made in a variety of modes, methods of analysis must rely on explicitly formulated rules and procedures. But there is no reason to assume that the system-theoretic notions developed by Rapoport (in press) are not as applicable to these as to other 'large corpuses of verbal data'. Rapoport's description of man's 'ocean of words' provides a vivid rationale for the study of the process in which mass produced messages play a key part:

Just as all living organisms live in certain specialized environments to which they adapt and which completely determines their lives so do human beings live to a significant extent in an ocean of words. The difference lies in the fact that the human environment is to a large extent man made. we secrete words into the environment around us just as we secrete carbon dioxide and in doing so, we create an invisible semantic environment of words which is part of our existence in quite as important ways as the physical environment. The content of verbal output does not merely passively reflect the complex social, political, and economic reality of the human race; it interacts with it as well. As our semantic environment incorporates the verbal outputs secreted into it, it becomes both enriched and polluted, and these changes are in large measure responsible for the course of human history. It behooves us to study this process.

Terms of the analysis

The approach needed is that capable of abstracting and analysing the most general terms of cultivation given in mass produced public message systems. Generality is necessary to encompass many specific classes of statements and diverse investigative purposes within comparable terms of the same framework. But this kind of generality implies a high level of abstraction and selection which, in turn, arises from a conception of salience to some general investigative purpose. As I have already noted, the present purpose is not governed by direct interest in sources as senders or in interpreters as receivers of messages. It is, however, governed by interest in the cultivation of consciousness of elements of existence inferred from public message systems. Our task is to combine generality with salience to the composition and structure of knowledge given in large-scale message systems addressed to collective social entities.

We begin by defining such knowledge as propositions expressed in the images, actions, and language of the most widely shared (i.e. mass-produced and rapidly distributed) message systems of a culture. Elements of existence refer to the assumptions, contexts, points of view, and relationships represented in these message systems and made explicit in the analysis.

A summary of the questions, measures, and terms of general analysis of public message systems appears in Fig. 18.1. The questions relate to the

Questions	Definitions	Measures and terms of analysis	Brief explanations of questions
1. What is?	Public assumptions about existence	Distribution, frequency of attention	What things (or kinds of things) does this message system call to the attention of a community?
2. What is important?	Context of priorities	Ordering, scaling, for emphasis	In what context or order of importance are these things arranged?
3. What is right, etc.?	Point of view, affective qualities	Measures of differential tendency	In what light or from what point of view are these things presented?
4. What is related to what?	Proximal or logical associations	Contingencies, clustering structure	In what structure associations with one another are these things presented?

Fig. 18.1. Questions and terms of public message system analysis

the National Science Foundation, the Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Television Research, and other agencies.

Although these early efforts (and many published reports) focused primarily on the nature and functions of television violence, the Cultural Indicators project was broadly based from the outset. Even violence was studied as a demonstration of the distribution of power in the world of television, with serious implications for the confirmation and perpetuation of minority status in the real world (Gerbner et al., 1979; Morgan, 1983), and the project continued to take into account a wide range of topics, issues, and concerns. The Cultural Indicators research team has investigated the extent to which television viewing contributes to audience conceptions and actions in such realms as sex roles (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1979; Morgan, 1982; Signorielli, 1989), age-role stereotypes (Gerbner et al., 1980), health (Gerbner, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1982), science (Gerbner et al., 1981d), the family (Gerbner et al., 1980c), educational achievement and aspirations (Morgan & Gross, 1982), politics (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1982, 1984), religion (Gerbner et al., 1984), and many other issues (see Gerbner et al., 1986).

The methods and assumptions behind cultivation analysis are different from those traditionally employed in mass communication research. Research and debate on the impact of mass communication has often focused on individual messages, programs, episodes, series, or genres and their ability to produce immediate change in audience attitudes and behaviors. Cultivation analysis is concerned with the more general and pervasive consequences of cumulative exposure to cultural media. Its underlying theoretical framework could be applied to any dominant form of communication. Most cultivation analyses, however, have focused on television because of the medium's uniquely repetitive and pervasive message characteristics and its dominance among other media in the United States.

Cultivation analysis generally begins with identifying and assessing the most recurrent and stable patterns in television content, emphasizing the consistent images, portrayals, and values that cut across most program genres. In its simplest form, cultivation analysis tries to ascertain if those who spend more time watching television are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most common and repetitive messages and lessons of the television world, compared with people who watch less television but are otherwise comparable in important demographic characteristics.

People who regularly watch a great deal of television differ from light viewers in many ways. Although all social groups include both heavy and light viewers (relative to the group as a whole), there are overall differences between heavy and light viewers according to sex, income, education, occupation, race, time use, social isolation/integration, and a host of other demographic and social variables. But there are also differences in terms of the extent to which television dominates their sources of consciousness. Cultivation theory assumes that light viewers tend to be exposed to more varied and diverse information sources (both mediated and interpersonal), while heavy viewers, by definition, tend to rely more on television.

The goal of cultivation analysis is to determine whether differences in the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of light and heavy viewers reflect differences in their viewing patterns and habits, independent of (or in interaction with) the social, cultural, and personal factors that differentiate light and heavy viewers. Thus, cultivation analysis attempts to document and analyze the independent contributions of television viewing to viewers' conceptions of social reality. The chapters in this book vividly demonstrate that we have come a long way toward this goal; at the same time, the more work that is done, the more complex the questions (and the answers) become.

Cultivation vs. Change or Effects

The vast bulk of scientific inquiry about television's social impact can be seen as directly descended from the theoretical models and the methodological procedures of marketing and attitude change research. Large amounts of time, energy, and money have been spent in attempts to determine how to change people's attitudes or behaviors. People believe "X"; how do you get them to believe "Y"? Or, people do "X"; how do you get them to do "Y"? The Xs and Ys have covered such diverse topics as authoritarianism vs. egalitarianism, one brand of toothpaste vs. another, or one political candidate vs. another.

Sometimes a message or campaign works (and sometimes it doesn't), but there is usually little question about what the effect should look like: an explicit change of one sort or another. The effects usually sought are those that occur immediately or soon after exposure to a single, specific message, often in a relatively artificial context of exposure and for sub-

homes in which, for the first time in human history, a centralized commercial institution rather than parents, the church, or the school tells most of the stories. The world of television shows and tells us about life: people, places, striving, power, and fate. It presents both the good and bad, the happy and sad, the powerful and the weak, and lets us know who or what is successful or a failure.

As with the functions of culture in general, the substance of the consciousness cultivated by television is not so much composed of specific attitudes and opinions as it is by broad, underlying, global assumptions about the "facts" of life. Television is only one of the many things that serve to explain the world; yet television is special because its socially constructed version of reality bombards all classes, groups, and ages with the same perspectives at the same time. The views of the world embedded in television drama do not differ appreciably from images presented in other media, and its rules of the social hierarchy are not easily distinguishable from those imparted by other powerful agents of socialization. What makes television unique, however, is its ability to standardize, streamline, amplify, and share common cultural norms with virtually all members of society.

Although television has a great deal in common with other media, it is different in some important ways. For one thing, people spend far more time with television than with other media; more time is spent watching television than doing anything else besides working and sleeping. Most people under 35 have been watching television since before they could read or probably even speak. Unlike print media, television does not require literacy; unlike theatrical movies, television runs almost continuously, and can be watched without leaving one's home; unlike radio, television can show as well as tell. Each of these characteristics is significant; their combined force is unprecedented and overwhelming.

Almost since the first television show was broadcast people have been concerned about the effects of this phenomenal medium. The popular press and the government ask, What does television do to us? Parents and teachers wonder whether television makes children more aggressive or if television helps or hinders learning. Students in both high school and college want to study the effects of the mass media but want simple, straightforward answers to questions. Yet, as numerous communication scholars have found, the questions are complex and the answers are neither simple nor straightforward.

Cultivation Analysis

Cultivation analysis is one approach to these broad questions. It represents a particular set of theoretical and methodological assumptions and procedures designed to assess the contributions of television viewing to people's conceptions of social reality. Cultivation analysis is the third component of a research paradigm called Cultural Indicators that investigates (1) the institutional processes underlying the production of media content, (2) images in media content, and (3) relationships between exposure to television's messages and audience beliefs and behaviors. Cultivation analysis is what this book is all about.

Like so many projects in the history of communications research, Cultural Indicators was launched as an independently funded enterprise in an applied context (Gerbner, 1969). The research began during the late 1960s, a time of national turmoil after the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy when the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence was set up to examine violence in society, including violence on television (see Baker & Ball, 1969). The earliest research of what was eventually to become the Cultural Indicators Project attempted to ascertain the degree of violence on television; it documented the extent to which violence predominated most dramatic television programming, described the nature of this violence, and established a baseline for long-term monitoring of the world of television (see Gerbner, 1969).

Nationwide unrest continued as did concerns about television's impact on Americans. In 1969, even before the report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence was released, Congress appropriated one million dollars and set up the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior to continue this area of investigation. All together, 23 projects, including Cultural Indicators, were funded at this time. Again, Cultural Indicators research focused primarily on the content of prime-time and weekend-daytime network dramatic programming (see Gerbner, 1972).

The cultivation analysis phase of the Cultural Indicators research paradigm was fully implemented with the first national probability survey of adults during the early 1970s in research funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (see Gerbner & Gross, 1976). The research continued in the 1970s and 1980s with funding by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the American Medical Association, the Office of Telecommunications Policy, the Administration on Aging,

jects (such as college students in introductory communication classes) who are usually not particularly representative of the larger population.

This scenario of classic laboratory experiments in mass communication has, we believe, influenced a great deal of popular as well as scholarly thinking about media effects. It leads to thinking about communication (and television's messages) as foreign "objects" somehow inserted or injected into us, as discrete, scattered "bullets" that either hit or miss us. In contrast, cultivation analysis looks at those messages as an environment within which people live, define themselves and others, and develop and maintain their beliefs and assumptions about social reality.

Others have, of course, suggested that mass media may involve functions and processes other than overt change. Forty years ago, Lazarsfeld and Merton (1948/1974) argued that the primary impact of exposure to mass communication was not likely to be change, but maintenance of the status quo. Similar notions have been expressed since then by Glynn (1956) and Bogart (1956).

Similarly, "cultivation" does not imply any sort of simple, linear "stimulus-response" model of the relationships between media content and audiences. Rather, it implies long-term, cumulative consequences of exposure to an essentially repetitive and stable system of messages, not immediate short-term responses or individual interpretations of content. It is concerned with continuity, stabilization, and gradual shifts rather than outright change. A slight but pervasive shift in the cultivation of common perspectives may not change much in individual outlooks and behavior but may later change the meaning of those perspectives and actions profoundly.

Thus, the use of the term *cultivation* for television's contribution to conceptions of social reality is not simply a fancier word for "effects." Most of all, it does not imply a one-way, monolithic process. Cultivation also should not be confused with "mere" reinforcement (as if reaffirmation and stability in the face of intense pressures for change were a trivial feat); nor should it suggest that television viewing is simply symptomatic of other dispositions and outlook systems. Finally, it should not be assumed that no change is involved. The "independent contribution" of television viewing, means, quite specifically, that the generation (in some) and maintenance (in others) of some sets of attitudes or beliefs can be traced to steady, cumulative exposure to the world of television.

The cultivation process is not thought of as a unidirectional flow of influence from television to audiences, but rather part of a continual, dynamic, ongoing process of interaction among messages and contexts. This holds true even though (and in a sense especially because) the hallmark of the process is either stability or slow change. Habits and styles of media exposure tend to be stable over long periods of time (Himmelweit & Swift, 1976), and cultivation analysis seeks to illuminate the consequences of the presence of television in stable styles of life and environments. It is designed to understand gradual, long-term shifts and transformations in the way generations are socialized (not short-term, dramatic changes in individuals' beliefs or behaviors). As successive generations become enculturated into the mainstream of television's version of the world, the former traditional distinctions become blurred. Cultivation thus means the steady entrenchment of mainstream orientations in most cases and the systematic but almost imperceptible modification of previous orientations in others; in other words, affirmation for the believers and indoctrination for the deviants.

Procedures Used in Cultivation Analysis

Cultivation analysis begins with content (message system) analysis: identifying and assessing the most recurrent and stable patterns of television content (the consistent images, portrayals, and values that cut across most types of programs). There are many critical discrepancies between the world and the world as portrayed on television. The shape and contours of the television world rarely match objective reality, though they often do match dominant ideologies and values.

Findings from systematic analyses of television's content are then used to formulate questions about people's conceptions of social reality. Some of the questions are semiprojective, some use a forced-choice format, and other simply measure beliefs, opinions, attitudes, or behaviors.

Using standard techniques of survey methodology, the questions are posed to samples (national probability, regional, convenience, or purposive; children, adolescents, or adults). Secondary analysis of large-scale national surveys (for example, the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Surveys) have often been used when they include questions that relate to identifiable aspects of the television world as well as television viewing.

Television viewing is usually assessed by asking how much time the respondent watches television on an average day. Since amount of viewing is seen as in relative terms, the determination of what constitutes light, medium, and heavy viewing is made on a sample-by-sample basis, using as close to a three-way split of hours of self-reported daily television viewing as possible. What is important is that there are basic differences in viewing levels, not the actual or specific amount of viewing.

The questions posed to respondents do not mention television, and the respondents' awareness of the source of their information is seen as irrelevant. The resulting relationships, if any, between amount of viewing and the tendency to respond to these questions in the terms of the dominant and repetitive facts, values, and ideologies of the world of television (again, other factors held constant) illuminate television's contribution to viewers' conceptions of social reality.

The observable empirical evidence of cultivation is likely to be modest in terms of its absolute size. Even light viewers may be watching up to 7 hours of television a week; a trivial, and demographically eclectic, handful say they do not watch at all. But, if we argue that the messages are stable, that the medium is virtually ubiquitous, and that it is accumulated exposure that counts, then almost everyone should be affected, regardless of how much they watch. Even light viewers may watch a substantial amount of television per week and in any case live in the same cultural environment as heavy viewers; what they do not get through television can be acquired indirectly from others who do watch more. It is clear, then, that the cards are stacked against finding evidence of cultivation. Therefore, the discovery of a systematic pattern of even small but pervasive differences between light and heavy viewers may indicate far-reaching consequences.

Accordingly, we should not dismiss what appear to be small effects, because small effects may have profound consequences. For example, a slight but pervasive (e.g., generational) shift in the cultivation of common perspectives may alter the cultural climate and upset the balance of social and political decision making without necessarily changing observable behavior. A single percentage point difference in ratings is worth many millions of dollars in advertising revenue. It takes but a few degrees' shift in the average global temperature to have an ice age. A range of 3 percent to 15 percent margins (typical of most differences between light and heavy viewers) in a large and otherwise

stable field often signals a landslide, a market takeover, or an epidemic, and it certainly tips the scale of any closely balanced choice or decision.

Variations in Cultivation

We have noted that cultivation is not a unidirectional flow of influence from television to audience, but part of a continual, dynamic, ongoing process of interaction between messages and contexts. In some cases, those who watch more television (the heavy viewers) are more likely — in all or most subgroups — to give the “television answers.” But, in many cases the patterns are more complex. Television viewing usually relates in different ways to different groups' life situations and world views.

Cultivation is both dependent on and a manifestation of the extent to which television's imagery dominates viewers' sources of information. For example, personal interaction makes a difference. Parental co-viewing patterns and orientations toward television can either increase (Gross & Morgan, 1985) or decrease (Rothschild & Morgan, 1987) cultivation among adolescents; also, children who are more integrated into cohesive peer or family groups are relatively immune to cultivation (Rothschild, 1984).

Direct experience also plays a role. The relationship between amount of viewing and fear of crime is strongest among those who live in high crime urban areas (a phenomenon called *resonance*, which in everyday reality and television provides a double dose of messages that “resonate” and amplify cultivation). Further, relationships between amount of viewing and the tendency to hold exaggerated perceptions of violence are more pronounced within those real-world demographic subgroups (minorities) whose fictional counterparts are more frequently victimized on television (Morgan, 1983).

Television viewing usually relates in different but consistent ways to different groups' life situations and world views. A major theoretical and analytical thrust of many recent cultivation analyses has been directed toward the determination of the conditional processes that enhance, diminish, or otherwise mediate cultivation. Many researchers are trying to figure out what types of people are most vulnerable to television's messages, in what specific substantive areas, and why. This type of research, well represented in this volume, investigates which subgroups are more or less susceptible to television on which issues,

and has significantly enlarged our understanding of the more subtle and fundamental consequences of living with television.

There are a wide variety of factors and processes that produce systematic and theoretically meaningful variations in cultivation patterns. One process, however, stands out, both as an indicator of differential vulnerability and as a general, consistent pattern representing one of the most profound consequences of living with television: mainstreaming.

Mainstreaming

Our culture consists of many diverse currents, some weak, some strong. Some flow in the same general directions, some at crosscurrents. Yet there is a dominant set of cultural beliefs, values, and practices, in some ways at the core of all the other currents, and in some ways surrounding them. This dominant current is not simply the sum total of all the crosscurrents and subcurrents; rather, it is the most general and stable (though not static) mainstream, representing the broadest and most common dimensions of shared meanings and assumptions. It ultimately defines all the other crosscurrents and subcurrents. Because of television's unique role in our society, it is obvious that television can and should be seen as the primary manifestation of the mainstream of our culture.

Transcending historic barriers of literacy and mobility, television has become a primary, common source of everyday culture of an otherwise heterogeneous population. Television provides, perhaps for the first time since preindustrial religion, a strong cultural link between the elites and all other publics. It provides a shared daily ritual of highly compelling and informative content for millions of otherwise diverse people in all regions, ethnic groups, social classes, and walks of life. Television provides a relatively restricted set of choices for a virtually unrestricted variety of interests and publics; its programs eliminate boundaries of age, class, and region and are designed by commercial necessity to be watched by nearly everyone.

The mainstream can thus be thought of as a relative commonality of outlooks and values that heavy exposure to the features and dynamics of the television world tends to cultivate. *Mainstreaming* means that heavy viewing may absorb or override differences in perspectives and behavior that ordinarily stem from other factors and influences. In other words, differences found in the responses of different groups of view-

ers, differences that usually are associated with the varied cultural, social, and political characteristics of these groups, are diminished or even absent from the responses of heavy viewers in these same groups.

As a process, mainstreaming represents the theoretical elaboration and empirical verification of the assertion that television cultivates common perspectives. It represents a relative homogenization, an absorption of divergent views, and a convergence of disparate viewers. Former and traditional distinctions (which flourished, in part, through the diversity provided by print culture) become blurred as successive generations and groups become enculturated into television's version of the world. Through the process of mainstreaming, television has in essence become the true 20th century melting pot of the American people.

In summary, the theory of cultivation is an attempt to understand and explain the dynamics of television as a distinctive feature of our age. It is not a substitute for, but a complement to, traditional approaches to media effects research concerned with processes more applicable to other media. Designed primarily for television and focusing on its pervasive and recurrent patterns of representation and viewing, cultivation analysis concentrates on the enduring and common consequences of growing up with and living with television: the cultivation of stable, resistant, and widely shared assumptions, images, and conceptions reflecting the institutional characteristics and interests of the medium itself and the larger society. Television has become the common symbolic environment that interacts with most of the things we think and do. Therefore, understanding its dynamics can help develop and maintain a sense of alternatives and independence essential for self-direction and self-government in the television age.

The Battles

The methodology and findings of message-system analysis, particularly in the area of violence, were the focus of a number of colloquies in the 1970s. Most of these stemmed from critiques by industry researchers and involved differences over definitions (What is violence? What is a violent act? How is violence unitized? etc.). They also addressed concerns over sample size, reliability, validity, and numerous related issues (see Blank, 1977a, 1977b; Coffin & Tuchman, 1972-73a,

1972-73b; Elcay et al., 1972-73a, 1972-73b; Gerbner et al., 1977b, 1977c).

Soon after the first cultivation results were published (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), cultivation analysis became the focal point of the Cultural Indicators project. Message system analysis continued to be conducted each year, but the industry's critiques abated. The lull in the Cultural Indicators (CI) storm was brief, however, and a period of intense debate over cultivation soon began.

One of the first critiques of cultivation (Newcomb, 1978) in part was based on some supposed differences between a quantitative and qualitative approach and again reflected differences in definitional perspectives (see also Gerbner & Gross, 1979). Around the same time, research conducted by the Independent Broadcasting Authority in the United Kingdom was reported as failing to replicate what was called the "paranoid effect of television" (Wober, 1978). This research, however, can be seen more as serving to point out the cultural and institutional differences between the United States and Great Britain than as disconfirmation of cultivation (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1979; see also Neville, 1980; Wober, 1979).

The early 1980s brought a new, massive, unprecedented round of attacks, responses, and rejoinders. The regular publication of cultivation findings in several annual Violence Profiles (Gerbner et al., 1977a; Gerbner et al., 1978; Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, Morgan, & Jackson-Beeck, 1979) had set the stage for the onslaught that was to come. And come it did. Fierce, prolonged battles (occasionally acrimonious and vaguely ad hominem at times) consumed hundreds of pages of scholarly and research journals; their repercussions were vividly felt at academic conferences and the controversies even spilled over into such popular media as *Time* magazine. The conflicts grew harsher and louder, and the rivers ran red with dead data and mutilated statistical techniques.

Why all the fighting? It is not possible to review all the arguments and counterarguments here (but see Doob & Macdonald, 1979; Hughes, 1980; Gerbner et al., 1980a, 1980b; Hirsch, 1980b; Gerbner et al., 1981c; Hirsch, 1980a, 1981b; Gerbner et al., 1981b; Hirsch, 1981a; Gerbner et al., 1981a—preferably in that order—for a relatively complete account). Among many other charges and countercharges, it is safe to say that the major issues revolved around questions of spuriousness and controls.

All at around the same time, Hirsch, Hughes, the Cultural Indicators research team, and others were independently finding that many of the

relationships reported earlier using the National Opinion Research Center's (NORC) General Social Surveys looked different under multiple controls. For the most part, cultivation analyses had been implementing controls by examining associations between amount of viewing and attitudes within subgroups, one at a time. That is, the results were presented for males, older people, those with less education, and so on, separately. On reanalysis of those same data, it was found that *multiple* controls (i.e., controlling for age, sex, education, etc., all at once), tended to reduce or completely eliminate those relationships.

Yet, we found that the absence of an overall relationship under multiple controls did *not* mean that there were not nonspurious and theoretically meaningful associations *within* specific subgroups (Gerbner et al., 1980b). This discovery had profound conceptual and analytical implications for cultivation theory, and ultimately led to important refinements and enhancements. The most central of these was the idea of mainstreaming, first noted in research relating to conceptions about sex roles (Signorielli, 1979); it has been found since in more and more substantive areas, including interpersonal mistrust (Mean World Syndrome), alienation/gloom (Anomie), political orientations, and many other issues.

In sum, these battles have been characterized as everything from "healthy scholarly exchanges" to "scathing exposes" to "vicious and unprofessional spats." They were challenging, unpleasant, and in some ways, fun. They attest to the importance of cultivation theory in the discipline and to the fact that cultivation analysis has not been a static research approach, but one that has evolved and developed in numerous ways, making it not only more complex and intricate but also more dynamic and intriguing. Arguments concerning cultivation analysis did produce significant new issues and questions, many of which are addressed in the chapters in this book.

Current Issues in Cultivation Analysis

As cultivation analysis has evolved it has continued to raise more and more questions about underlying processes and broader consequences. There is general (though not universal) acceptance of the conclusion that there *are* statistical relationships between how much people watch television and what they think and do; there is far less consensus on a host of related questions and problems. Space does not

permit a full and comprehensive review of all of these questions and relevant research, but this section outlines some of the major issues that have evolved from cultivation analysis and which numerous independent investigators are pursuing.

How does cultivation occur? What are the psychological processes and cognitive mechanisms that best explain the ways in which heavy viewers incorporate television content into their conceptions of social reality? What principles of learning, if any, are relevant? These have turned out to be challenging and complex questions. While some conceptual and empirical answers are beginning to emerge (see D'Alessio, 1987; Hawkins & Pingree, 1980, 1982; Hawkins et al., 1987; Hawkins & Pingree, this volume; Pingree, 1983), much work in this area remains to be done.

What demographic subgroups are more likely to show evidence of cultivation? As previously noted, cultivation patterns are rarely uniform across all subgroups in a sample. Many differential conditional associations suggest mainstreaming, in which the heavy viewers of a subgroup that is relatively "out" of the mainstream tend to express views that match those of their counterparts (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980b, 1982, 1984; Morgan, 1986; see also Perry, 1987, for an account of some possible statistical artifacts). Other patterns of results sometimes suggest "resonance," in which cultivation is enhanced among those for whom a certain issue has some special salience. More work needs to be done to determine if certain socio-demographic groups are consistently and systematically more likely to be vulnerable to television, and to explore why they are (Morgan, 1983).

How is cultivation mediated by interpersonal and family relations? Television viewing is often a family activity; family members may influence each others' interpretation of television content in direct and intentional as well as indirect and unintentional ways, and the nature of the family's interactions apart from the television viewing context can also relate to variations in vulnerability to cultivation (Gross & Morgan, 1985; Rothschild & Morgan, 1987). Again, differences in children's levels of peer integration also indicate differences in susceptibility to cultivation (Rothschild, 1984), and such factors as "sociability" may play important roles (Geiger, 1987). Overall, further research is needed to understand how the dynamics of interpersonal interaction mediate cultivation.

What are the levels of cultivation? Explorations of cultivation have suggested that there are important differences between the cultivation of (1) conceptions of the "facts of life," such as estimates of how many people are involved in violence, how many people work in different occupations, and so on (sometimes referred to as *first-order cultivation*), and (2) the cultivation of more global extrapolations from those facts, such as degree

of interpersonal mistrust, or some political orientations (a kind of *second-order cultivation*) (Gerbner et al., 1986; Hawkins, et al., 1987). Similarly, there are potential differences between societal-level beliefs and personal-level beliefs; for example, images of the amount of violence in society may or may not be related to perceived chances of personal victimization, or fear in one's own home or neighborhood (Geiger, 1987; Gerbner et al., 1981a; Tyler, 1984). Finally, there may be differences between the cultivation of various attitudes and their specific behavioral manifestations (Morgan, 1987). Conceptions of social reality have branched off in various directions, and future work should provide greater specificity of the level(s) at which such conceptions apply.

What is the role of personal experience in cultivation? It is a truism that media effects will be greater for issues about which we have less direct personal experience. But this need not be the case; it is indeed possible for one to assume that his or her own experience is atypical, and that the television version or the cultural stereotype is more accurate. In any case, the issue of personal experience is closely tied in with the issue of perceived reality of television content. Studies of these issues have produced some useful findings, but for the most part they have only focused on violence (Geiger, 1987; Potter, 1986; Elliott & Slater, 1980; Slater & Elliott, 1982; Weaver and Wakshlag, 1986). Research should be undertaken to explore the implications of both personal experience and perceived reality as they might relate to other substantive areas besides violence.

How do viewers' orientations toward television influence cultivation? By "orientations toward television," we mean such phenomena as "active" vs. "passive" viewing, "selective" viewing, uses, and gratifications, "involvement" with television, and conscious interpretations of television content as well as perceived reality. All these have been the focus of numerous studies of cultivation (Carveth & Alexander, 1985; Gunter & Furnham, 1984; Perse, 1986; Perse, this volume; Rouner, 1984; Rubin et al., 1988; Wakshlag et al., 1983). Some of these issues need more work in terms of conceptualization and operationalization, and too often they are used as independent variables along with amount of viewing; they are more likely to offer further understanding of cultivation when they are implemented as intervening variables in order to explore the within-group conditional associations they might produce.

What are the roles of specific programs and genres in cultivation? A frequent concern raised about cultivation analysis is the focus on overall amount of viewing without regard to exactly what programs people watch. Cultivation theory insists that the message elements that are likely to lead to cultivation (as opposed to other effects) are those that cut across most programs and are inescapable for heavy viewers, and therefore how much is far more important than what. Many researchers, however, believe that

cultivation must be traced to exposure to specific types of programs. For example, some have explored the cultivation potential of soap operas (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Mayes, 1981; Carveth & Alexander, 1985; Perse, 1986), family programs (Buerkel-Rothfuss et al., 1982), or have partitioned cultivation relationships according to specific viewing patterns (Hawkins & Pingree, 1981; Potter, 1986). Yet, except when VCRs are used to time-shift, viewing is limited by what is on at a particular time. More specifically, in the case of network programming, situation comedies usually are seen in the early evening while action adventure programs are shown during the late evening (Signorielli, 1986). Certainly, there may be *some* heavy viewers who only watch news, or sitcoms, etc. But by and large, to the extent that common economic imperatives and production influences mean that most programming conveys complementary cultural values, and if *most* heavy viewers indeed see more of everything, then idiosyncratic viewing patterns are less relevant. Most of all, while specific programs and genres may certainly have effects, those effects are indications of cultivation *only* if they occur at the aggregate level. Researchers who wish to explore genre-specific relationships should not neglect to consider overall viewing as an important theoretical construct and as an empirical measure.

How and what do other media cultivate? Little cultivation work has explicitly compared the relative contributions of television and other media. In terms of political self-designation, a greater tendency to describe oneself as moderate was associated with greater viewing, but not with newspaper reading or radio listening (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1982); movies, music, and magazines (Preston, this volume) offer important avenues for future cultivation analysis. Extensive typologies of media exposure profiles would allow for more precise understanding of the degree of interaction among various media.

How will new technologies influence cultivation? Television is not the same institution it was when the Cultural Indicators project began, when commercial-network, over-the-air broadcasting essentially had the medium to itself. But more channels do not necessarily mean more diversity, especially given increasing concentration of ownership and the relatively small number of production companies. In fact, Morgan and Rothschild (1983) found greater cultivation among cable-viewing adolescents. The rapid proliferation of VCRs may have similar implications for cultivation (Dobrow, this volume).

Does cultivation occur in other countries? The extension of cultivation analysis to other countries and cultures represents a major development in the approach (Morgan, this volume). Just as cultivation patterns are not uniform across subgroups in the United States, they vary tremendously across different cultural contexts. As evidence from cross-cultural repli-

cations of cultivation continues to accumulate, it will be necessary to begin to analyze and explain what accounts for these differences. International cultivation analysis will also need to differentiate between the contributions of domestic and imported programming (Pingree & Hawkins, 1981).

These are just some of the conceptual issues that have been developing from cultivation analysis. In addition, there are many methodological issues that cultivation analyses must continue to explore. These include the appropriateness of the samples used (too many studies present data from undergraduate communication majors, which raises severe problems of external validity); problems of question order and sensitization of respondents (too often respondents are clued in to the fact that the survey they're filling out is about the effects of television); and the use of simultaneous multiple controls, both overall and within groups, coupled with persistent problems of neglected potential sources of spuriousness and curtailment of variance within groups (Carlson, 1985; Hawkins & Pingree, 1982). This list could be expanded considerably; the point is that these methodological concerns are as complex, critical, and challenging as are the more substantive issues previously described.

The Future of Cultivation Analysis

As the above list demonstrates, our knowledge of the cultivation process is by no means complete. A great deal of work is underway on exploring the conceptual and methodological implications of cultivation on numerous levels, from the micro to the macro. The development of cross-cultural studies (including an ongoing global-level international cooperative venture) will provide even more information about the generalizability of cultivation as a phenomenon.

New technologies, alternative delivery systems, new program genres, and changes in institutional structures may have varied consequences for cultivation theory in the future. Predicting the future is always dangerous, but we believe that the likely-to-continue decline in the dominance of network broadcasting will not reduce the relevance of cultivation analysis. All current (and historical) indications point to increasing concentration and interdependence in media industries, imitation of successful formats and styles, and greater competition for the

broadest, most attractive, mainstream audiences. These are conditions that enhance, rather than fragment, the cultivation of standardized values and ideologies. The hymn is likely to be the same, even if the choir is larger.

There are many additional substantive areas to address. We have barely scratched the surface of the 20-year archives of message system analysis. While cultivation analysis has already clearly moved well beyond violence, the range of issues and dimensions that may be fruitful areas for cultivation analysis will continue to expand.

In sum, the chapters in this volume make it abundantly clear that whatever advances we are making, cultivation analysis will lead to more and more questions about the role of television in our lives. We expect cultivation research to continue to flourish and to provoke lively controversy about media effects and how to study them. While much work has been done, there is far more to do. The arguments, findings, and issues raised in this book are intended to contribute to the further development, elaboration, and refinement of the theory and method of cultivation analysis.

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Divergent Psychological Processes in Constructing Social Reality from Mass Media Content

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The cultivation hypothesis, the proposal that television's presentation of social reality influences the social reality beliefs of its viewers, has been characterized by two research orientations: (1) investigations into the simple existence or robustness of the effect, and (2) its integration with sociological theories in work examining group and social setting differences in the effect. We have argued at various times (Hawkins & Pingree, 1980, 1982; Hawkins, Pingree, & Adler, 1987; Pingree, 1983) for research into the psychological processes that may underlie cultivation effects. That is, how is it that watching television contributes to certain social reality beliefs and not others? What are the psychological processes that lead individuals to construct their own social reality in ways that mirror both the facts and the ostensible meaning of television's social reality?

We think that these questions are crucial to research on cultivation as well as to our understanding of social reality construction. Unless such questions can be successfully addressed, *cultivation* runs the risk of being dismissed as a label for a single correlate (television time) masquerading as a program of research, and as an ideological position more than as a focus for social scientific research. The problem is that

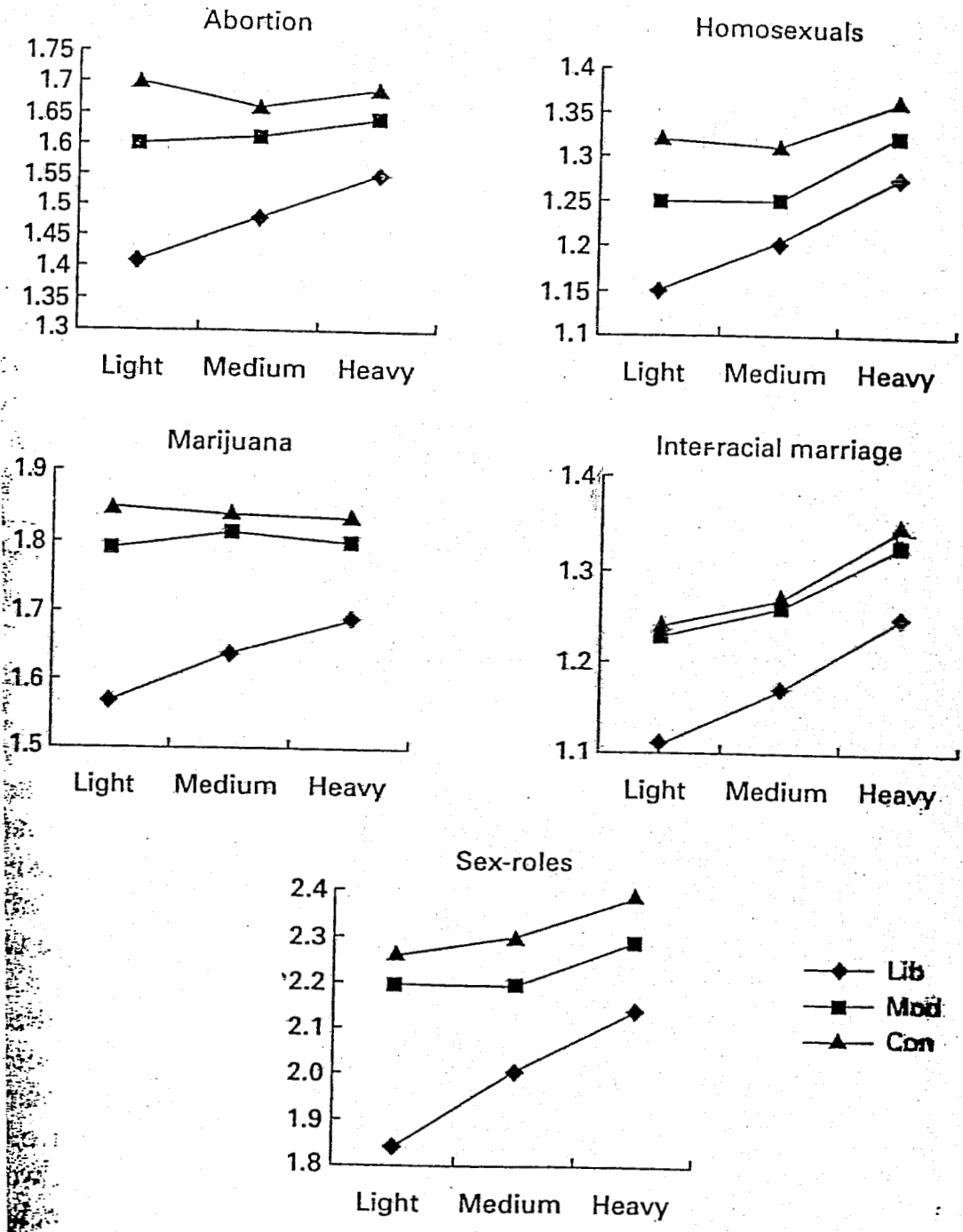


Figure 7.10 Examples of mainstreaming by ideology