

DIPLOMA IN MEDIA  
AND COMMUNICATION

MCG 204

MASS MEDIA & SOCIETY

WEEK 4

## **The Search for Mass Media Effects**

- Expected Results – the mass media (TV) has been suspected to have a wide array of effects on individuals & the larger culture.
- TV is thought by many to increase the level of violence in our culture by increasing aggression in children & adults and by desensitizing us to violence.
- TV has been accused of decreasing fantasy play among children; stealing time away from homework & other productive pursuits, etc.
- Popular music & music videos (heavy metal & rap) have been accused of fostering Satanism, suicides, promiscuity & violence against women [Stack & Gundlach, 1992]

## Television Content:

- Stereotyping – TV often depicts a distorted demographic view of the real world – race, gender, social class, age or occupation
- There are more men than women on TV [3:1].  
Women characters are often young & beautiful sex objects - passive, dependent, dumb & incompetent.
- Men are always portrayed as powerful, aggressive & adventurous.
- But as society evolves, the 90's brought characters such as Roseanne, Murphy Brown
- Non-whites are few but always as villains [Lichter et al, 1987]

- Stereotyping – also under-represented & stereotyped are the elderly; mostly men but feeble, financially insecure, inactive & sickly [Wood, 1993 & Gerbner et al, 1980]
- Violence – TV & movies tend to contain high levels of violence; 6 acts per-hour of prime time TV & 18 acts per-hour in Saturday morning children’s programs.
- In some cases, violence caused by natural disasters has been weighed equally with murder & slapstick cartoon routines.
- The Children’s Television Act 1990 – requires 3 hours of educational programs per week in order to have a broadcast license.
- The FOX Network pioneered this genre of “Reality TV” with its program Cops.

## The Evidence Against Effects

- McQuire (1986), found that few students showed effects that approached statistical significance – unable to demonstrate media effects.
- Commercial ads effects on consumer behaviour – despite billions of dollars spent, few effects can be demonstrated.
- Mass media political ads – actual expenditure & campaign success was opposite of what was thought.
- Other political coverage – election coverage is more like a horse race with the emphasis more on who's winning.
- PSAs – there was no direct relationship between exposure to PSAs & change in behaviour

## The Cultivation Effects

- Gerbner (1986) and associates found that TV over-represents the level of violence in society & distorts the reality of who is most likely to be a victim – women, the young, the old, minorities are more likely to be victimized on TV.
- Heavy viewers possess perceptions of the world that closely resembles the one on TV than those who watch less TV.
- These perceptions are “cultivated” in heavy viewers through their TV watching. This seems to be a clear example of negative effects of TV content.
- Maybe media writers hold the same stereotypes as the general public or their marketing knowledge about what sells leads these writers to mirror attitudes /commercials value.

## Television & Children

- TV has been accused of negatively impacting the cognitive & academic function of children.
- A 1988 study by Bennett, et al. “The Impact on Children Education: TV’s Influence on Cognitive Development” – reviewed 165 studies & found little support that TV is bad for children.

### The Evidence for Effects:

- Paik & Comstock(1994) – analyzed 217 studies dealing with the subject of mass media exposure and content, and its effects on aggressive behaviour.
- Paik & Comstock found that there is a relationship between exposure to TV violence & antisocial behaviour.

## The Evidence for Effects:

- Paik & Comstock looked at the size of effects for different types of effects:
- Stimulated aggressiveness – defined as playing with an aggressive toy, using aggressive machines to deliver stimulated shock, stating an intention to perform an aggressive act.
- Minor aggressiveness – defined as physical violence against an object, such as a toy, verbal aggressiveness, non-criminal violence against a person.
- Illegal activities – burglary, grand theft or criminal violence against a person.
- Even when a correlation is found between media exposure & some effect, the casual direction is often difficult to determine.