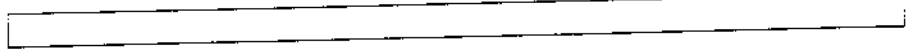


s society, our autonomous role in
wing Marx: If we organize around
can be claimed. So far, we do this
For example, we have Congress-
item. We, as a nation-state, rarely
fundamental element of our culture
able future. That is certainly what
is not a place to relax. The media

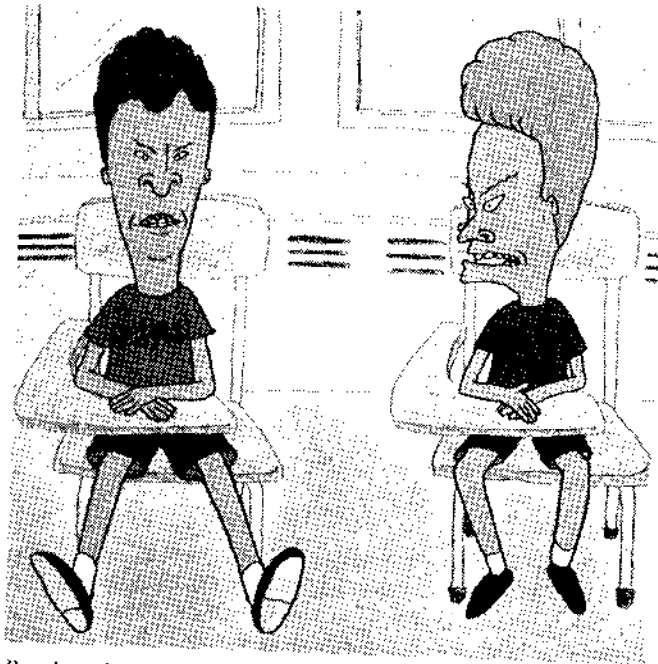
Mass Media Effects I: Individual Effects



3

Up until I turned seven, I thought I possessed magical powers. I knew that She-ra had all the strength in the world, and even magic too. Jem was a rock star who led a double life thanks to her supernatural earrings. I figured eventually I would grow up and find a worthy occupation for my own special powers. It was a sad day when I began to realize that no streams of electricity shot out when I pointed my finger and squinted my eyes. Even when magic was out of the question though, I felt I would somehow grow to be as unique as each of my heroes.
--KRISTEN, COLLEGE SOPHOMORE

In 1993, Beavis and Butthead turned an aerosol can into a torch. Shortly thereafter, three Ohio teenagers imitated the act and set their room on fire. In the same year, two teenagers were killed copying a scene from a movie in which drunken college football players played a game of "chicken"—lying in the middle of a highway at night. The film producers removed that scene from the video version of the movie. In the fall of 1997, a teenage boy killed himself shortly after listening to a Marilyn Manson CD. His father believes the content of the group's lyrics was partly responsible. In December 1997, a 14-year-old boy, son of a church deacon and brother of the school valedictorian, opened fire on a student prayer group killing three students and wounding five. In the weeks that follow the media are full of stories that the killings may have been inspired by a similar scene from the film *The Basketball Diaries*. In response, the producers of the film remove the offending scene from the video version.



Beavis and Butthead have been blamed for anti-social behavior and sometimes violent behavior.

Could such violence have been caused by the mass media? If so, is it the reaction of a few disturbed individuals, or are the media turning us into an angry and violent society? If the media do have negative effects on society, how do we reconcile censorship of media content with our First Amendment ideals?

People spend much of their leisure time interacting with the mass media. Of the approximately 40 hours per week of free time available to the average person, 15 hours, or 38 percent, are spent watching television (Robinson and Godbey 1997:126). This is more time than is spent reading, socializing, and engaging in outdoor activities combined! Because people spend so much time involved with television and other media, and because of the potential power of symbols to evoke emotional involvement, it is assumed that the mass media *must* have effects on both individuals and the larger society—and those effects are often thought to be negative. Some, like epidemiologist Brandon Centerwall, believe that the mass media are a major destructive force in our society. According to Centerwall (1993:58), if television had never been invented, in the United States there would be 10,000 fewer homicides, 70,000 fewer rapes, and 700,000 fewer injurious assaults *each year*. No wonder the debate over mass media effects has been, and continues to be, a constant force in the environment of mass media producers.

While it could be argued that the debate has produced little meaningful reform, recent events, such as the mandating of V-chip technology and the voluntary television

rating system, are indications of societal pressure seriously—if only partially.

In this chapter we will attempt to look at the critique of popular culture about the content of the mass media, the evidence for and against it, and another polemic against the effects assumed about mass media effects that may be less clear than is often assumed.

The Critique of Mass Culture

Historical Roots

The negative evaluation of popular culture when the social position of the masses was low. As the populace gained in equality, a new way of distinguishing themselves from the form of social status was heightened. In England in the eighteenth century, and then to the New World. The displacement of European peasantry, fleeing agricultural lands and seeking jobs in the new factories, included waves of immigrants from rural areas. Religious types were now forced to work in a new class of workers were awful conditions, only long hours and low pay. From the 1890s worked 12-hour shifts in factories with no breaks for food or rest. In the early 20th century on-the-job accidents killed several others.

Living quarters were overcrowded, unsanitary facilities, and were filled with dirt, no comfort or security in their poverty. They worked long hours for a day or less. Pay was so low that they had to work in factories for the sake of survival. The conditions were so bad that birth rates were high, and disease were high, birth rates were so great that their populations would not be able to sustain migration of people who had no other options. The migration of city dwellers surged.

The tradition of *noblesse oblige* ("nobles to the inferiors") did not carry any meaning.

rating system, are indications the mass media producers must take public and political pressure seriously—if only to produce the illusion of real change.

In this chapter we will attempt to examine some of these questions. We will first look at the critique of popular cultural in general, and then examine what we know about the content of the mass media, particularly television. Finally, we will examine the evidence for and against media effects on individuals. This chapter will not be another polemic against the mass media. Rather, it will show that what is often assumed about mass media effects on the individual, both positive and negative, may be less clear than is often assumed.

The Critique of Mass Culture

Historical Roots

The negative evaluation of popular culture has its roots in the French Revolution when the social position of the aristocracy was challenged by the larger population. As the populace gained in equality, the upper classes relied on cultural choices as a way of distinguishing themselves from the masses. The use of cultural choices as a form of social status was heightened by the Industrial Revolution, which began in England in the eighteenth century and eventually spread to the European continent and then to the New World. The urban centers of industry drew a massive migration of European peasantry, fleeing an agriculture that could no longer provide a living, and seeking jobs in the new factory system. In America, the great urban migrations included waves of immigrants from overseas. Previously separate nationalities and religious types were now forced to compete for jobs. The conditions that greeted the new class of workers were awful. The factories were very dangerous and offered only long hours and low pay. For example, steel workers in the Pittsburgh area in the 1890s worked 12-hour shifts in temperatures that soared above 130 degrees, with no breaks for food or rest. In the various mills of Pittsburgh during this era, each year on-the-job accidents killed several hundred men and injured several thousand others.

Living quarters were overcrowded, dark, and filthy; they lacked water and sanitary facilities, and were filled with vermin. The early workers of industry had no comfort or security in their poverty. The pay for factory work was typically one dollar a day or less. Pay was so low that young children were required to work in the factories for the sake of survival. There were no school systems. Rates of death, accident, and disease were high, birth rates were low. The biological cost of city life was so great that their populations would have decreased had it not been for the continued migration of people who had no place else to go. Despite hazards, the numbers of city dwellers surged.

The tradition of *noblesse oblige* (the moral obligation of the nobility to aid their "inferiors") did not carry any meaning for the new class of capitalists. The American

elite class was especially lacking in social responsibility because, with no history of U.S. aristocracy, there was no tradition of *noblesse oblige*. The feudal system was dying in Europe, but it left behind the ancient idea that property conferred special privilege and social authority. This legacy was thoroughly expressed everywhere in the new industrial order, both in law and by the great capitalist "robber barons" who considered themselves completely above the law.

The newly rich capitalists got the property, but did not take the age-old responsibility that went with it. The turmoil of the Industrial Revolution overlapped with the formation of nation-states in a era of transition to democratic government. All this structural change resulted in more than 130 years of revolutions, rebellions, riots, mob violence, and bloody labor strikes. On the U.S. side of the Atlantic, this era of fury lasted through the great strikes in the teens of this century. Among the various nations of European heritage, World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia seemed to end this epoch of chaotic alienation in the lower classes.

In the meantime, these years had been very good to the new elite classes. Their wealth was growing, they had spawned a small, dependent middle class very much swayed by capitalist values, and they were forging ties to the new democratic governments that consolidated the social power of the elites. The newly enriched groups could not or would not see beyond their own good fortune to understand the conditions of the working poor. The countless urban riots and labor struggles were to them moral outrages. The elites looked down and saw not the righteous struggles of people, groups, or classes. Instead, what they saw from their perspective were irrational masses engaged in formless turmoil, stirred by senseless and destructive impulses.

Ideologies were in place to foster such a view of the masses. This was an age that valued rationality both as the most evolved expression of human intelligence and as the driving principle behind the successes of science and industry. Further, Social Darwinism emerged to justify the differences among classes and to excuse lower-class conditions on the basis of natural law: the survival of the fittest. Not only did Social Darwinism absolve the elite of any moral responsibility, the presumed irrationality of the masses was a sign of moral unfitness. From this perspective, the masses deserved what they got.

Even as the wealthy viewed the restive stirring of the masses as senseless, they still sought a cause for the discontent. Enter the media.

The elite concluded that, not only were media (including newspapers, handbills, posters, pamphlets and, later, radio), lowering public taste, a few demagogues could amplify their views by cleverly inserting a political agenda into the emotion-laden descriptions of the plight of the masses. The elite came to believe strongly in the undermining effect of the media on high culture and social order. The other side of that same coin was the belief by radicals that the media could be used to rouse the people to revolt. Both sides saw the media as a powerful means for political influence over the great masses of people. Thus, out of the mutually antagonistic history

of class relations came a widely of the masses and blamed uphe existed that control of the media coercive, force.

Two World Wars

This belief in strong media effect II. The media were directed by go their populations against opposing the United States defined the ene holding his bayoneted rifle mena and dripping blood, was an infan Hun." The U.S. poster war conti You," "Loose Lips Sink Ships"). T including radio campaigns, in a 1978). Joseph Goebbels acted as t bels saw "...propaganda as a prag power (Herzstein 1978:69).

When the media were turned a version, it began to be called "psy logical operations). For example, the voice of "Tokyo Rose" and the weaken the resolve of American tr

Whatever effect the media actu World Wars, they were viewed as t of the world and uniting all the re United States, the media were wide ance with or participation in Nazi a not condone such acts without first

In the years after World War II, stations broadcast music and news a transmitters were 20 times more domestic stations, broadcasting with mated 75 million. Unlike the Voic reporting, Radio Free Europe, with t paganda into Communist countries. sage out in 64 languages. And durin the voice of Hanoi Hannah to dispiri on enemy locations. One type had implied that next time something dr leaflet. Still other U.S. leaflets desc waiting for anyone who willingly di if the media could produce strong ef

of class relations came a widely accepted doctrine that justified a disparaging view of the masses and blamed upheaval on the power of the media. The conviction existed that control of the media was the control of a powerful manipulative, even coercive, force.

Two World Wars

This belief in strong media effects influenced media use during World Wars I and II. The media were directed by governments on both sides for the purpose of uniting their populations against opposing external forces. A famous World War I poster in the United States defined the enemy in stark form: A German soldier was painted holding his bayoneted rifle menacingly before him. On the bayonet, stuck through and dripping blood, was an infant. The bottom of the poster held the words "The Hun." The U.S. poster war continued through World War II ("Uncle Sam Wants You," "Loose Lips Sink Ships"). The Nazis employed every medium systematically, including radio campaigns, in a highly coordinated propaganda blitz (Herzstein 1978). Joseph Goebbels acted as the master propagandist for the Nazi Party. Goebbels saw "...propaganda as a pragmatic art, the means to an end, the seizure of total power (Herzstein 1978:69).

When the media were turned against the enemy in a methodical strategy of subversion, it began to be called "psychological warfare" or, later, "psi ops" (psychological operations). For example, during World War II the Japanese radio beamed the voice of "Tokyo Rose" and the Germans broadcast "Axis Sally" to seduce and weaken the resolve of American troops.

Whatever effect the media actually had in the propaganda campaigns of the two World Wars, they were viewed as the key to raising the largest armies in the history of the world and uniting all the resources of society toward the war effort. In the United States, the media were widely blamed for German citizens' seeming compliance with or participation in Nazi atrocities. Surely, rational, civilized people could not condone such acts without first being brainwashed.

In the years after World War II, during the Cold War, the Voice of America radio stations broadcast music and news across the "iron curtain." Some Voice of America transmitters were 20 times more powerful than the maximum allowed for any domestic stations, broadcasting with up to 1 million watts to an audience of an estimated 75 million. Unlike the Voice of America, with its reputation for unbiased reporting, Radio Free Europe, with ties to the CIA, largely transmitted Western propaganda into Communist countries. In return, Radio Moscow sent the Soviet message out in 64 languages. And during the Vietnam conflict, the enemy transmitted the voice of Hanoi Hannah to dispirit American troops. In return we dropped leaflets on enemy locations. One type had threatening pictures of B-52 bombers. These implied that next time something dropped from the sky it would be a bomb, not a leaflet. Still other U.S. leaflets described procedures for surrender and the benefits awaiting for anyone who willingly did so. Once again, our government was acting as if the media could produce strong effects.

The War of the Worlds

The 1938 Halloween night radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* seemed to justify the belief in powerful media effects. Sponsored by CBS radio, this dramatic program created a panic that began among millions of listeners who believed the earth was being invaded by Martians. Research indicated that, conservatively, the program that night had an audience of about 4 million (Lowery and DeFleur 1995). Of those listeners, 28 percent thought they were listening to an actual news report and, of those, 70 percent (1.2 million people) were frightened or disturbed by the broadcast. The panic seemed to be a clear indication of the power of the media. Yet, not everyone who heard the broadcast believed the dramatic fiction was real—providing an early indication that media messages do not affect all people in the same way.

The Basic Critique

By the 1950s, the critique of the mass culture that had begun with the French Revolution produced the general argument that:

1. Industrialization leads to urbanization because factories and people converge in areas with adequate power, roads, and housing.
2. As people move to these large urban areas they lose their strong ties to community and family of origin.
3. People cut loose from community and family have fewer restrictions on their behavior and more readily seek the quick gratifications of permissive sex, crime, and vice.
4. Because of the higher standard of living brought about by industrialization, these unattached individuals also have more money in their pockets.
5. Businesses (including the mass media) spring up in an attempt to profit by nurturing and satisfying these unrestrained urges of the industrial masses.
6. The grand result: Society drifts away from high standards of morality and art and is thus opened to and permeated by the influence of images of sex and violence. Such images appeal to an alienated, debased audience, which, having lost contact with virtue, is easily manipulated by political opportunists, advertisers, and mass media programmers.

This argument, called “the critique of mass culture” (see, for example, Shils 1959), was popular during the 1950s, but elements survive today. Note, for example, the late Allan Bloom’s 1987 best-seller, *The Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom’s book is largely an attack on the concept of cultural relativism, which he associates with a lack of standards for moral conduct, and a call for a return to more absolute standards of truth and beauty. Whether or not you agree with Bloom’s position, much of what he had to say harkens back to the 1950s critique of culture. For example, in discussing music, Bloom agrees with Plato that the power of music to arouse emotion must be tempered by reason. This must be done in order to appeal to what Bloom calls “higher purposes”—beauty, religion, or politics. The task for the arts is



Some social critics such as the late Allan Bloom argue that mass culture arouse frenzied passion in listeners.

to both provide pleasure and an appeal of classical music to young people. It provides no such wedding of emotion as an addiction to a rhythm and a rebellion against parental authority. The concerns of earlier critiques of mass culture are frequently enough in exciting con-

What is interesting about the attack on popular or mass culture received—praise from critics of *Books*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Time* magazines, coupled with the popularity of the content of popular culture.

There are other signs that our mass-mediated culture. Not television. This concern has res broadcasters and the government. In the past two presidential elections have criticized mass media entertainment. The Resource Center (PMRC) works recordings. Heavy Metal and Rock allegedly damaging to fans and



Some social critics such as the late Allan Bloom have been disturbed by rock 'n' roll's ability to arouse frenzied passion in listeners.

to both provide pleasure and appeal to these higher purposes. Lamenting the loss of appeal of classical music to young people, Bloom contends that rock 'n' roll provides no such wedding of emotion and intellect. He refers to the popularity of rock as an addiction to a rhythm and lyric that stirs sexual passions while appealing to rebellion against parental authority. In discussing MTV, Bloom directly evokes the concerns of earlier critiques of mass culture as he writes, "Hitler's image recurs frequently enough in exciting contexts to give one pause" (1987: 74).

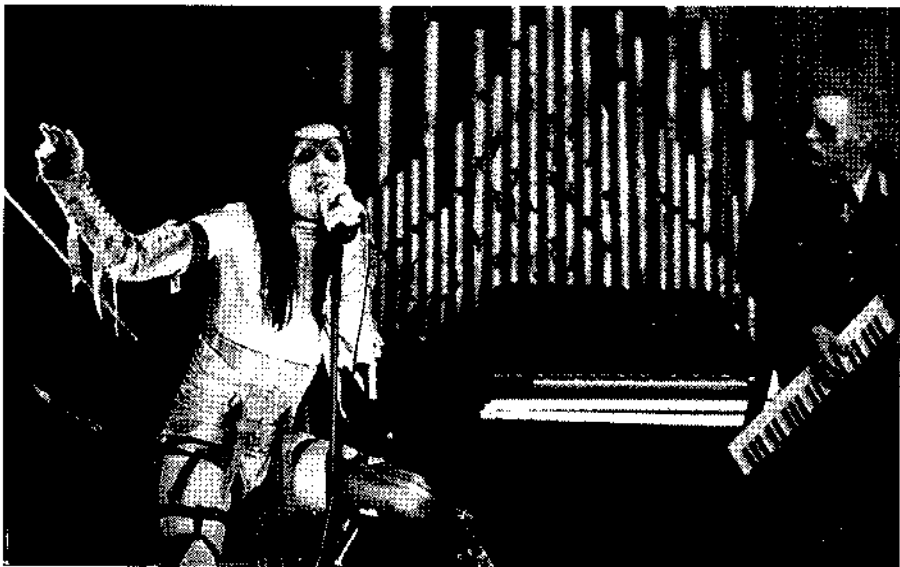
What is interesting about Bloom's position is not just its reprise of the earlier attack on popular or mass culture, but also the widespread endorsements it received—praise from critics writing for such publications as the *New York Review of Books*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post*. These endorsements, coupled with the popularity of his book, imply a continuing uneasiness with the content of popular culture in the United States.

There are other signs that, as a society, we are not completely comfortable with our mass-mediated culture. Note the persistent concern over sex and violence on television. This concern has resulted in a much criticized voluntary rating system for broadcasters and the government mandated V-chip for televisions. In addition, the past two presidential elections have seen first, Dan Quayle, and then, Bob Dole, criticize mass media entertainment. In 1985, Tipper Gore and the Parent's Music Resource Center (PMRC) worked to have rating labels placed on popular music recordings. Heavy Metal and Rap music have been particularly criticized for content allegedly damaging to fans and to society (see Ryan, Calhoun, and Wentworth 1997).

Expected Effects

The mass media, especially television, have been suspected of having a wide array of effects on individuals and the larger culture. The litany of complaints against television is long. Commercial U.S. television is thought by many to increase the level of violence in our culture by increasing aggression in children and adults and by desensitizing us to violence. Our most used medium has also been accused of decreasing fantasy play among children, stealing time away from homework and other productive pursuits, creating a nation of conspicuous consumers, trivializing political campaigns and social issues, turning politicians into actors (and actors into politicians), misinforming or underinforming the public about important social issues, encouraging promiscuity, lowering attention spans, and stereotyping women and other minorities. Meanwhile, popular music and music videos, especially rap and heavy metal, have been accused of fostering Satanism, suicide, promiscuity, and violence against women. Even country music shared the spotlight when researchers seemed to find a connection between the popularity of country music in a given locale and the suicide rate (Stack and Gundlach 1992).

These concerns are the continuation of worries over mass media content that focused on newspapers in the 19th century, the movies as early as the 1920s, and comic books in the 1940s. Even the reading of fiction was once thought to be bad for children, although today you rarely hear that children are reading too much. What may be considered harmful at one point can be perceived as harmless or even beneficial at another point in time.



Heavy metal groups such as "Marilyn Manson" have been accused of damaging America's youth.

Nevertheless, many of the above concerns seem legitimate. In the next section we will examine some studies exploring the content of our most controversial medium, television. Then we will turn our attention to the effects of that content.

Television Content

Over the years there has been a fairly constant critique of the content of television. Sometimes it rises to near social movement status, while at other times it recedes more into the background—but it is always there. Sometimes it's about violence, sometimes about commerce, sometimes about sex, and sometimes about intellectual emptiness. Meanwhile, academics and representatives of various minority groups have raised their own concerns about the way various groups are represented on television. Television is our most popular leisure activity, and also the most criticized.

Stereotyping

One critique of television is that it presents a distorted demographic view of the real world. That is, members of a particular race, gender, social class, age, or occupation may not be represented in numbers corresponding to their presence in the real world. This is a problem because, it is argued, television provides the central social discourse of our society. It is the primary storyteller, the mythmaker, the supposed mirror of society. Thus, according to this rationale, to be invisible on television is to be invisible culturally and socially.

It is important to keep in mind that television programming is constantly evolving as the constraints of law, technology, industry structure, organizational structure, occupations, and market have their combined effects. Thus, content-analysis studies are extremely time-bound, although it is difficult to discuss findings in such a way as to get that across. It is, therefore, critical to remember that the studies discussed in this section refer to particular periods of time, and their particular conclusions may be more or less true for today. Nevertheless, these studies show that television, in one way or another, has consistently presented a distorted view of the world. For example, television has regularly overrepresented high-status occupations while paying little attention to how such an occupation might be attained (Ryan et al. 1988).

The most concern has been expressed about gender and ethnic stereotyping on television. For example, research has shown that during certain periods there have been three times as many white male characters as white females on television (Gerbner et al. 1980; Basow 1992). The ratio is about four to one in children's programming (Barcus 1983). According to some research, when television characters are women, they typically are young and beautiful sex objects, passive, dependent, dumb, and incompetent. In contrast, men are typically portrayed as powerful, aggressive, adventurous, and so on (Downs 1982; Wood 1994). However, as an indication of the constantly evolving nature of content, think about such characters as *Roseanne*, *Murphy Brown*, and Julia Sugerbaker of *Designing Women* in television comedy. In television drama,

there have been such strong characters as and Carol Hathaway on *ER*, *Caroline*, *Quinn*, *Medicine Woman*. And, they are represented well on sitcoms. Many television characters there is Drew Carey, the program *Home Improvement* and, earlier, characters such as *Married with Children* masculine stereotypes suggested.

Other research indicates a trend toward more entertainment television (Stroman 1992) and that, when ethnic minorities do appear, they are often as villains (Lichter et al. 1987). In general, ethnic characters are rare in prime time, but there are exceptions. *Fancy* on *NYPD Blue*, Eugene Levy on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, and the characters of African American males.

Also underrepresented are older women greatly outnumbered by younger women (Wood 1993). In addition, characters who are financially insecure, inactive, and dependent are shown to ensure their marginalization.

Violence

Numerous studies show that our television programs contain high levels of violence. On average, acts per hour on prime-time television are about 1.5. On Sunday morning children's programs, there are about 1.5 acts per hour, as these have become staples of children's programming or improving children's television programming. Violence is not in context. For example, a character has been weighted equally with a character who is not violent.

Studies by the Violence Research Center have attempted to remedy this methodological problem by allowing for independent monitoring of the content of broadcast and cable television. A comprehensive approach, examining the content of children's program on network television, cable networks (they did not look at pay-per-view), and advertisement aired during prime time on independent television in the United States, public television, and eight cable channels. The content for randomly selected two-week periods were monitored in a single study. The results of top-ten videos available on television

there have been such strong characterizations as Scully on *The X-Files*, Jeanie Boulet and Carol Hathaway on *ER*, Captain Kathryn Janeway on *Star Trek: Voyager*, and Dr. Quinn, *Medicine Woman*. And, in real life, there is Oprah. Men in general are not presented well on sitcoms. Many tend to be rather dim-witted, weak, or silly. For example, there is Drew Carey, the program *Men Behaving Badly*, Tim Allen on *Home Improvement* and, earlier, characters such as Cliff and Norm on *Cheers*. Do they fit the positive masculine stereotypes suggested in some research?

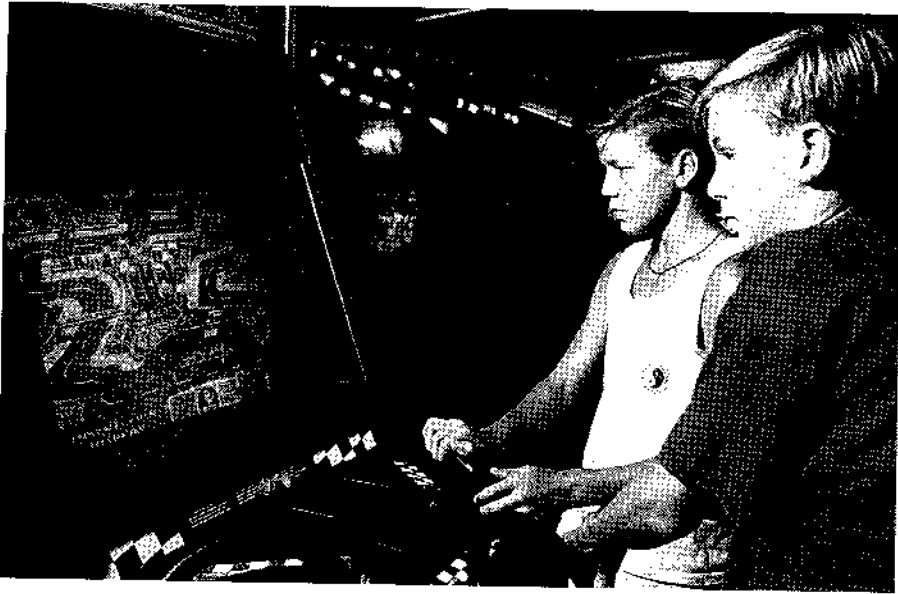
Other research indicates an underrepresentation of African Americans on entertainment television (Stroman 1989) as well as Hispanics and Asians. It is also argued that, when ethnic minorities do appear on television, it is in stereotypical roles or as villains (Lichter et al. 1987). It is true that positive African American male characters are rare in prime time, but there are Bill Cosby, Gregory Hines, Arthur "Lou" Fancy on *NYPD Blue*, Eugene Young on *The Practice*, and Captain Benjamin Cisco on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. Interestingly, there are many more positive portrayals of African American males on daytime television.

Also underrepresented and stereotyped are the elderly. Despite the fact that older women greatly outnumber older men in society, on television it is just the opposite (Wood 1993). In addition, the elderly are typically portrayed as feeble, financially insecure, inactive, and sickly (Gerbner et al. 1980)—stereotypes that seem to ensure their marginalization in society.

Violence

Numerous studies show that our commercial television and movie images do, as critics suggest, contain high levels of violence. Studies have estimated some 6 violent acts per hour on prime-time television, and an attention-grabbing 18 per hour in Saturday morning children's programming (Signorielli et al. 1982). While figures such as these have become staples of various interest groups devoted to reducing violence or improving children's television, they have been criticized for failing to place violent acts in context. For example, in some cases violence caused by natural disasters has been weighted equally with murder and slapstick cartoon routines.

Studies by the Violence Assessment Monitoring Project (Cole 1996) have attempted to remedy this methodological problem. This ongoing project is designed to allow for independent monitoring by the UCLA Center for Communication Policy of the content of broadcast and cable television. The researchers have taken a comprehensive approach, examining every series, television movie, theatrical film, and children's program on network television, including 24 series from the UPN and WB networks (they did not look at news programs). In addition, every on-air promotion and advertisement aired during the programming was monitored. They monitored independent television in the Los Angeles area, a random two-week selection of public television, and eight cable channels (three pay and five basic) were monitored for randomly selected two-week periods. In all, some 3000 hours of television content were monitored in a single year. Finally, the researchers also monitored selections of top-ten videos available in stores, as well as a selection of video games.



Video games are another controversial form of entertainment for children.

Rather than take the traditional approach of simply counting incidents of violence—much objected to by television programmers—the researchers attempted to look at violence in context. They allowed that some violence might, in fact, be appropriate or used for comedic effect in such a way that it would not be taken seriously. It is clear that the very existence of a project of this scope, funded by the four broadcast networks, points to the importance of beliefs about powerful media effects in shaping the activities of mass media producers.

In September 1995 the UCLA Center released the first of three annual reports on the state of television violence. The report suggested that violence in programming created for broadcast television was not as prevalent as many believe. There was a greater problem with theatrical films (films originally released to theaters) shown on broadcast television but, even here, editing for television had greatly reduced the level of violence. Also seen as problematic were promotions for future programs. These often compressed several violent scenes which, although appropriate in the context of the actual program, seemed more violent when extracted from that program. Most disturbing to the researchers was the violence in films shown in theaters, in home videos, and on pay cable.

The UCLA researchers raised concerns that there is still too much violence on broadcast television, even though it is not generally graphic. They felt that, too often, violence was used on television as a solution to dramatic problems, especially in children's programming, and that violence occurred too early in the evening when children might still be watching. More specifically, they reported that, of the 161 television movies monitored, 23 (14 percent) raised their concern about the use of

violence. Of the 118 theatrical movies monitored, 12 raised concerns about the use of violence. Of the 121 prime-time television movies monitored, 11 raised concerns about the use of violence. Of the 121 prime-time television movies monitored, 11 raised concerns about the use of violence.

The 1996 report showed a decrease in the number of prime-time series raised concerns about violence. The number of prime-time series raised concerns about violence dropped from 42 percent to 29 percent. The number of television movies raised concerns about violence dropped to 10 percent.

One of the most positive changes was the decrease in the number of television movies raised concerns about violence. The number of television movies raised concerns about violence dropped to 10 percent.

The problem of violent programming was seen as a problem in the 1996 report.

The researchers also saw in the decrease in the number of television movies raised concerns about violence, in part, to the implementation of the Children's Television Act of 1990. The number of children per week as a condition of the license. The researchers had used the term "educational" to describe such abuses by more clearly defining the term. The researchers had used the term "educational" to describe such abuses by more clearly defining the term.

The authors of the report expressed concern about the "sinister combat violence." This type of violence glorifies and uses violence as a solution to dramatic problems. The researchers, the number of children per week as a condition of the license dropped from seven to four.

The 1996 report described violence in programming created for broadcast television was not as prevalent as many believe. There was a greater problem with theatrical films (films originally released to theaters) shown on broadcast television but, even here, editing for television had greatly reduced the level of violence. Also seen as problematic were promotions for future programs. These often compressed several violent scenes which, although appropriate in the context of the actual program, seemed more violent when extracted from that program. Most disturbing to the researchers was the violence in films shown in theaters, in home videos, and on pay cable.

The UCLA report offers a new perspective on the issue. The researchers believe is the improving picture of the issue prominently in the public opinion data showing (2) public opinion data showing the monitoring process itself. The monitoring process is in place may have

violence. Of the 118 theatrical films shown on television monitored, 50 (42 percent) raised concerns about the use of violence. These figures are in contrast to the approximately 121 prime-time television series monitored, of which 10 (8 percent) had frequent problems with violence and 8 (7 percent) had occasional problems.

The 1996 report showed considerable improvement over those numbers. The number of prime-time series raising concern dropped from 10 to 5 and, of those, two ran for only a few episodes during the season. In the first year report, 14 percent of television movies raised concerns about violence. In the second year this figure dropped to 10 percent.

One of the most positive changes was that the number of theatrical films shown on television that contained what the researchers categorized as intense violence dropped from 42 percent to 29 percent. Despite this improvement, it continued to be the case that most serious television violence is in theatrical movies shown on television.

The problem of violent promotions, described in the 1995 report, was no longer seen as a problem in the 1996 report.

The researchers also saw improvement in the area of children's television, perhaps due, in part, to the implementation of the three-hour educational rule. The Children's Television Act of 1990 required three hours of educational programming for children per week as a condition for holding a broadcast license. However, broadcasters had used the term "educational" quite liberally, including such programs as *The Jetsons*, and *The Flintstones* as educational. In 1996, the FCC moved to prevent such abuses by more clearly defining educational programming, perhaps contributing to the difference found by the UCLA researchers.

The authors of the report expressed their greatest concern over what they term "sinister combat violence." This is violence that is central to the story, in which heroic characters glorify and use violence enthusiastically. While still of concern to the researchers, the number of children's programs featuring this type of violence dropped from seven to four.

The 1996 report described what the researchers considered a disturbing trend in the 1995–1996 season. This was the emergence of a genre of successful television specials containing real and re-created footage of animals attacking and sometimes killing people. While few in number, the researchers caution that the popularity of these types of programs may lead to their proliferation in the future. The Fox Network pioneered this genre of "reality TV" with its program *Cops*. The network has taken the reality genre to new levels with its *Greatest Car Chases* series. The third segment in the series climaxed with graphic footage of a truck driven by a teenager and his girlfriend being hit broadside by a tractor-trailer rig, killing them instantly.

The UCLA report offers a number of possible reasons for what the researchers believe is the improving picture on television violence. These include, (1) the raising of the issue prominently in the political arena—including two White House summits (2) public opinion data showing public concern, and (3) the establishment of the monitoring process itself. The simple fact that an extensive and very public monitoring process is in place may have altered the behavior of the producers. These three

factors together make it clear that concern over media content and its effects is an important factor in the environment of mass media organizations.

In January 1998, the Center released its third and final report. Data from the 1996–1997 television season showed that the number of network series raising frequent concerns over violence had dropped to two (compared to nine in 1995 and five in 1996), the number of series raising occasional concerns had dropped as well—from eight in 1996 to six in 1997. However, as predicted in the previous report, violent “reality specials” proliferated in the 1996–1997 season.

But before we rejoice too much over the improved picture regarding television violence, it should be pointed out that not all researchers agree with these interpretations. Just months after release of the third report, another group of researchers using a different methodology released findings suggesting an *increase* in prime-time violence over the same period studied by the UCLA researchers (Mifflin 1998).

The Evidence against Effects

Despite the commonsense notion of mass media effects, and despite the comments of numerous media critics, the search for powerful media effects has been less than successful. Two comprehensive reviews of the effects literature illustrate this point.

In an extensive review of the literature on media effects, McQuire (1986) found some surprising results. In examining areas where there were *intended* media impacts, McQuire found that few studies showed effects that approached statistical significance. This means that few findings could reasonably be assumed to have *not* been due to chance. And those that did reach significance actually explained very little of the variance in the variables being studied. In other words, the studies were unable to demonstrate much in the way of media effects, and those effects that were demonstrated were small. This was true for each of the following areas in which there was a conscious effort to create media effects.

1. Commercial advertising effects on consumer behavior. Despite the billions of dollars spent on media advertising, few effects could be demonstrated.

2. Mass media political advertisements. McQuire again found that studies showed few effects. Some results even suggested that what relationship there was between political advertisement expenditures and campaign success was actually the opposite of what is commonly thought. Because political incumbents tend to be elected, they also tend to draw the most support. It may well be that their large advertising budgets are more the result than the cause of their success! The studies reviewed indicated small effects that were limited to those who were late in making up their minds about a candidate, to lesser known candidates, to minor office races, and the ads were just as likely to influence voters to vote against a candidate as for the candidate. McQuire concludes: “In sum, it has not been established that political ads have sizeable effects on the amount or the direction of voting” (183).

3. Other types of political coverage. Mass media cover elections. The effect is to project sporting competition in which the substance of the issues. Of more concern is projecting winners in national polls have closed. It has been found that voting behavior based on East Asian that there is little support in any way.

4. Public Service Announcements. These are intended to encourage the use of seatbelts, but they indicate little or no direct relationship between the advertisements and changes in behavior.

Of course not all media effects are negative. Mass media content has to do with entertainment, one except the programmers and content in the mass media. Yet, violence on the effects of violence in television showed effects that reached a significant study of the effects amounted to a small percentage. The best effects were found in controlled experiments that simulate real-world conditions.

A 1996 comprehensive review (1996) reached similar conclusions on content, exposure, and violence in television research. He writes, “The real effect consistently observed is probably a small percentage of viewers” (Felson 1996).

Other areas where television effects are quite as poorly in McQuire’s review. Numerous studies have shown that television seriously distorted. Historical figures, retyped women, African American women, the effects of these portrayals on viewers. In fact, exhibit perceptions that are quite different from reality.

The Cultivation Effect

The best-known explanation for the cultivation effect (1986). In a series of studies, researchers discovered that television over time shapes the reality of who is most like

3. Other types of political coverage. Concern is often expressed about the way U.S. media cover elections. The elections are often treated as a horse race or some other sporting competition in which the emphasis is more on who is winning than on the substance of the issues. Of more specific concern has been the networks' practice of projecting winners in national elections from East Coast results before West Coast polls have closed. It has been argued that voters on the West Coast may alter their voting behavior based on East Coast results or exit polling results. McQuire reports that there is little support in the research that the public actually is affected in this way.

4. Public Service Announcements. Whether the goal is to discourage smoking or to encourage the use of seatbelts, the studies reviewed by McQuire once again indicate little or no direct relationship between exposure to public service announcements and changes in behavior.

Of course not all media effects are intended. Indeed much of the concern over media content has to do with *unintended* effects, especially violence. Nearly everyone except the programmers themselves agrees that there is significant violent content in the mass media. Yet, when McQuire examined some of the best studies done on the effects of violence in the media, the results were the same—few studies showed effects that reached statistical significance and, in those that did, the magnitude of the effects amounted to no more than a few percentage points. And the greatest effects were found in controlled laboratory experiments, which usually do not simulate real-world conditions well.

A 1996 comprehensive review of the literature by sociologist Richard Felson (1996) reached similar conclusions regarding the relationship between media content, exposure, and violence. Felson notes numerous contradictory results in the research. He writes, "The reason media effects (on violence and aggression) are not consistently observed is probably because they are weak and only affect a small percentage of viewers" (Felson 1996:118).

Other areas where television is thought to have important effects did not fare quite as poorly in McQuire's review of the literature. For example, as noted above, numerous studies have shown that television's depiction of the real world has been seriously distorted. Historically, television has underrepresented and negatively stereotyped women, African Americans, the elderly, and other minorities. Research on the effects of these portrayals seems to show that heavy television viewers do, in fact, exhibit perceptions that are in line with these distortions.

The Cultivation Effect

The best-known explanation for this phenomenon is the "cultivation effect" (Gerbner 1985). In a series of studies, Gerbner and his associates at the Annenberg School discovered that television overrepresents the level of violence in society and distorts the reality of who is most likely to be a victim. In particular, women, the young, the

old, and some minorities are most likely to be victimized on television. According to Gerbner, rather than causing most people to be violent, this distortion cultivates in heavy viewers, particularly members of victimized groups, feelings of mistrust, alienation, gloom, and a sense that the world is a "mean" place.

The Annenberg studies show that heavy viewers possess perceptions of the world that more closely correspond to the televised world than do those who watch less television. Thus, heavy viewers are more likely to possess stereotypes of minority groups corresponding to those on television, and are more likely to perceive a "scary world" in which they perceive that they are in greater danger from crime than they really are. Gerbner and his associates argue that these perceptions are "cultivated" in heavy viewers through their television watching. While the effects are not large, they are consistently statistically significant. This seems to be a clear example of negative effects of television content.

However, there is controversy regarding these findings. Causal direction is problematical. It could be that media writers hold the same stereotypes as the general public, or that their marketing knowledge about what sells leads these writers to mirror attitudes with commercial value. This would suggest that heavy viewers already possess attitudes and beliefs similar to those portrayed on television, rather than acquiring them from television. Or, regarding the tendency for heavy viewers to see a "scary world," it could be that heavy viewers come from neighborhoods and demographic groups more likely to experience crime and violence. It could also be that heavy viewers watch more TV *because* it conforms to their world view. There are other problems with these findings that suggest the need for further research (see Hughes 1980; Hirsch 1980, 1981).

McQuire contends that even pornographic imagery does not have clear effects, despite the fact that it seems intuitive that it would. And, if pornographic material does not have obvious effects, this calls into question the concern over the comparatively mild erotic imagery of broadcast television. McQuire's findings are supported by those of a Presidential Commission (U.S. Government 1970), which found at most very small effects of pornography on behavior, and Felson's (1996) review of the literature.

Television and Children

In addition to the great concern over the effects on children of violent and sexual content in the mass media, the media have been accused of negatively impacting the cognitive and academic functioning of children. Again, the results are contradictory. Many studies seem to show negative effects. However, a 1988 report, *The Impact on Children's Education: Television's Influence on Cognitive Development* (Bennett et al. 1988), reviewed 165 studies and found little support for the idea that television is bad for children cognitively and academically. The studies showed no evidence that children are overstimulated by television, or that children who do *not* watch television spend most of that time in more worthwhile pursuits, or that children do a

poorer job on their homework than children who watch more television. The weak evidence that television causes academic problems is evidence of the effect of television. Other studies show that children who watch more television spend more time in television while other studies indicate that television does not affect academic play.

The Evidence for Effects

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the mass media to influence behavior. We have also seen that some experiments have also seen that some experiments. In addition, there are other studies that show no effects (see Freedman et al.). Or no effects (see Freedman et al.). Some of the same studies draw just opposite conclusions. Friedrich-Cofer and Huston (1994) in which the researchers used a "naturalistic analysis" that allows for the

Paik and Comstock conducted a meta-analysis of the subject of mass media exposure and behavior. Their analysis results in a correlation of .15 (1986) and Felson (1996). Felson's study shows a relationship between exposure to violence and behavior. This means that whatever the effect is, it is not random or simply a function of the relationship between exposure to violence and behavior.

While statistical significance is not a measure of the size or importance of an effect is in terms of the variation in observed or predicted behavior. For example, the variation in observed or predicted behavior such as media exposure and behavior in a sample could be explained by the data and concluded that the relationship between exposure to violence and behavior in a sample could be explained by the data. In trying to study something like this, it is difficult to find an effect. However, their results are mixed. They report that 16 percent of the variance in behavior in experiments was due to being exposed to violence in time-series studies (in which the variance explained is a percent of the variance explained).

poorer job on their homework if they do it in front of the television. It is true that children who watch more television tend to read less, although it is unclear whether that effect is due to television itself or to parental modeling. The researchers found weak evidence that television shortens children's attention spans and contradictory evidence of the effect of television on imaginative play. Regarding the latter, some studies show that children who watch more television are less creative in their play, while other studies indicate that children use televised images to stimulate imaginative play.

The Evidence for Effects

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, there is widespread belief in the power of the mass media to influence a wide range of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. We have also seen that some extensive reviews of the literature do not support that belief. In addition, there are other reviews of the literature that support the idea of limited or no effects (see Freedman 1984, 1986, 1988). However, still other reviews of many of the same studies draw just the opposite conclusion (see Comstock and Paik 1991; Friedrich-Cofer and Huston 1986). One of those is a review by Paik and Comstock (1994) in which the researchers use a methodological technique known as "meta-analysis" that allows for the statistical analysis of the findings of groups of studies.

Paik and Comstock conducted their analysis on 217 studies dealing with the subject of mass media exposure and content and its effect on aggressive behavior. Their analysis results in some very different conclusions than those of McQuire (1986) and Felson (1996). Paik and Comstock find a statistically significant relationship between exposure to violent programs and various forms of aggressive behavior. This means that whatever differences in aggressive behavior exist between those who are exposed to more television or other violent programming and those who are not is *not* random or simply due to chance. According to this study, there *is* a relationship between exposure to television violence and antisocial behavior.

While statistical significance tells us whether or not there is a real effect, it is not a measure of the size or importance of that effect. One way to determine the size of an effect is in terms of the amount of variance explained. That is, how much of the variation in observed or reported aggressive behavior can be explained by a variable such as media exposure? Paik and Comstock conducted a statistical analysis of the data and concluded that, overall, about 10 percent of the variance in aggressive behavior in a sample could be explained by media exposure. Given the limitations in trying to study something as complex as media effects, this is a rather sizable effect. However, their results differed widely depending on the type of study examined. They report that 16 percent of the variance in aggressive behavior in laboratory experiments was due to being exposed to a violent stimulus, compared to 4 percent in time-series studies (in which effects are traced over a period of time) and 3 percent of the variance explained by media exposure in survey studies. One possible

explanation for these discrepancies is that laboratory experiments have been heavily criticized for creating artificial conditions under which aggressive acts are more likely to occur. We will discuss that issue in greater detail below.

Another interesting aspect of this study was that the researchers looked at effect sizes for different *types* of effects. The researchers looked at several kinds of aggressive behavior:

1. Simulated aggressiveness: defined as playing with an aggressive toy, use of aggression machines to deliver a simulated shock, or stating an intention to perform an aggressive act.
2. Minor aggressiveness: defined as physical violence against an object, such as a toy, verbal aggressiveness, or noncriminal violence against a person.
3. Illegal activities: burglary, grand theft, or criminal violence against a person.

The results of this analysis are quite interesting. Again, effect sizes vary by method used. And again, experimental studies showed, by far, the greatest effects. For laboratory studies examining simulated aggressive behavior, the overall effect is 11 percent of the variance explained by exposure to violent media content. For all studies examining minor aggressive behavior, the overall effect is 10 percent of the variance explained, and for all studies examining criminal behavior, the effect was 3 percent.

For policy purposes, the findings regarding criminal violence against others are most important. After all, this has been the most damning critique of television: that it causes the level of violence to increase. Paik and Comstock found that surveys indicate the effect of media exposure on criminal violence (homicide, suicide, stabbing, etc.) was less than one-half of one percent of the explained variance. This leaves over 99 percent of the variance in criminal violence unexplained by media exposure.

What you make out of this depends on your point of view—a variation on an old cliché, “Is the glass 99 percent empty or 1 percent full?” Paik and Comstock conclude that the overall effect of media exposure on aggressive behavior is of moderate size, and the effect on illegal activities is small. Some, such as McQuire (1986) and Felson (1996), might argue that the overall effect of 10 percent of the variance explained (assuming that number is accurate) is small, and the effect on illegal activities is minuscule. It depends on your point of view. Perhaps any effect on criminal behavior is too much.

In either case, causality is still a problem. For example, individuals who engage in criminal activities typically do not hold regular jobs and therefore have more time to watch television. Individuals with violent dispositions may be drawn to violent programming. Only the experimental studies give some indication of causality, but those types of studies have their own problems. More generally, a major problem with meta-analysis is that it cannot undo the numerous methodological problems in the studies it is grouping together.

What are we to make of the findings of mass media effects? What are the possible explanations for such

Methodological Expla

Because of the complex nature of the problem, firm conclusions from mass media studies that independent variables such as hours of television exposure may cause someone to watch a week he or she watches. It is not clear what someone watches, what they do while watching, and so on. Such a study would not remember what they watched. Studies of children's viewing habits based on parents' reports of their children's viewing is a low correlation between the two. Researchers have an accurate measure of what they have enough variation in the independent variable categories of level of viewing. If someone watches 10 hours or 20 hours, and a higher threshold—say, 40 hours—then lumped together, the effect is small.

Dependent variables are also a problem. Lack of validity. For example, the “Bobo” doll or simulated aggression is either overtly or more subtly aggressive. The researcher either is expecting a certain response, obligated to fulfill, or at least to observe a mission to be aggressive. In the laboratory setting, the effect is small. In laboratory settings, the aggression is not real. People who react aggressively in a laboratory setting, even after receiving a reward, of the laboratory is even more biased reports from teachers. Whether effects are being measured is a problem.

Another problem is that the effect is small and some effect, the causal relationship. For example, as we saw with cultivation theory, viewers to feel like they are watching violence. People who already feel vul-

What are we to make out of this confusing array: moderate, weak, or nonfindings of mass media effects? McQuire (1986) and Felson (1996) offer a number of possible explanations for salvaging the idea that the mass media indeed have effects.

Methodological Explanations

Because of the complex methodological problems involved, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from mass media effects research. For example, it is often the case that independent variables in mass media studies are poorly measured. A measure of television exposure may be as crude as asking a respondent how many hours per week he or she watches. It seems almost certain that it may be more important *what* someone watches, what they are doing while they are watching, in what context they watch, and so on. Such information is difficult to obtain. People don't always remember what they watch and have difficulty estimating how much they watch. Studies of children's viewing habits are particularly suspect in this regard. Some rely on parents' reports of their children's viewing and, as Felson (1996) points out, there is a low correlation between parents' reports and children's reports. Even if the researchers have an accurate measure of how much television is watched, do they have enough variation in television viewing in their sample to develop meaningful categories of level of viewing? That is, it may not make much difference if someone watches 10 hours or 20 hours per week but it may make a difference if they cross a higher threshold—say, 40 hours. If those watching 20, 30, or 40 hours per week are lumped together, the effect of the highest exposure will be masked.

Dependent variables are also often inadequate. Measures of aggressiveness may lack validity. For example, in an artificial laboratory, such measures as attacking a "Bobo" doll or simulated shocking of confederate subjects may be encouraged, either overtly or more subtly, by the researcher. A subject may perceive that the researcher either is expecting aggressiveness, an expectation that the subject feels obligated to fulfill, or at least the subject may feel that the researcher is giving permission to be aggressive. In experimental research this is known as the **sponsoring effect**. In laboratory settings there is no likelihood that aggression will be punished and the aggression is not real in its consequences. It is likely that most individuals who react aggressively in an experiment would not do so in a normal social environment, even after receiving the same stimulus. Measuring "aggressiveness" outside of the laboratory is even more problematic. Often researchers rely on potentially biased reports from teachers or peers or self-reports. In any case, it is not clear whether effects are being masked or exaggerated by such measurement problems.

Another problem is that, even when a correlation is found between media exposure and some effect, the causal direction is often difficult to determine. For example, as we saw with cultivation analysis, does watching television cause heavy viewers to feel like they are more likely to be victims of violent crime, or is it that people who already feel vulnerable, the elderly, for example, are more likely to stay

home and watch television, or is it both? Are violent people more drawn to violent programming and therefore watch more than less violent people?

Outside of the experimental laboratory there is also the potential for spurious relationships between television watching and behavior. There may be a spurious correlation between a child's viewing and later aggressiveness because children who are closely monitored by parents may be less likely to watch television and less likely to commit aggressive acts. Felson points out that researchers typically do not control for need for excitement, level of fear, commitment to school, intelligence, and other variables that may influence the effect of media exposure. For example, Wiegman et al. (1992) have found a negative relationship between intelligence and both media exposure and aggressive behavior.

Beyond these types of methodological problems, there is much to be learned about the whole process of how people interact with the media. This process may have much to do with whether or not we are able to perceive effects. It has been fairly well demonstrated that viewers tend to seek out information that supports their view of the world (see Klapper 1960). More controversial is the possibility that people actually attempt to avoid exposure to media content that they find distasteful, or that is not in accordance with their beliefs and values. It seems likely that this would depend on a number of factors, including the discrepancy between the person's values and the material, the level of curiosity, and so on.

The growth of cable television with channels specifically targeted to certain lifestyles may make selection even more possible. Similarly, it could be argued that, because mass media messages pervade our society at such a high level, direct exposure is not necessary. In a sense, each one of us is exposed through our friends and associates, even if we do not view the material directly. If their attitudes and beliefs are influenced, and they are significant others to us, then this will have an impact on us as well.

Summary

We have seen that there is a widespread and longstanding belief in the power of the mass media to influence behavior. Yet, the research on the subject of media effects has yielded confusing and contradictory evidence. This does not necessarily mean that the media *have* no effect. It may mean that the effects are too complex to discern using the tools we have been using thus far. There are, in fact, reasons to expect that the mass media *must* have an effect, even if that effect is difficult to discover empirically. After all, we have all had the experience of leaving the grocery store with an item that we neither wanted nor needed until we saw an advertisement extolling its virtues. Or perhaps you have found yourself wearing a particular hairstyle or item of clothing that you saw on *Friends*. We know that a single 90-second story on the nightly news about some new "cure-all" herbal supplement can clear store shelves of that product in just a few hours. And, when Oprah Winfrey picks a book for her

on-air book club, sales soar. Little prices fall. The quote that the authors that suggest that lives and can provide specific discrepancy between what w the research show.

What we can say is that, to measure and are complex prising. Looking back to our it is easy to see both that we a simple one. The nature and individual) within which the acteristics of the person exp message.

If we accept the question ative effects on individuals, a to justify the efforts our socie sible that the media are being might be more difficult to so the effects are real or not, th systems, V-chips, and CD w major constraint in the enviro not escape the fact that there concern makes it necessary t mind.

on-air book club, sales soar, and when she does a program on mad cow disease, cattle prices fall. The quote that opened this chapter is one of many collected by one of the authors that suggest that people believe that the media have had effects in their lives and can provide specific instances of influence. This seems to be a case of a discrepancy between what we feel that we know and what some interpretations of the research show.

What we can say is that, if there are effects of the mass media, they are difficult to measure and are complex and probably subtle in nature. This should not be surprising. Looking back to our discussion of sociological theory and the mass media, it is easy to see both that we should expect an effect but not expect that effect to be a simple one. The nature and quality of the message, the context (from societal to individual) within which the message is received (if it is received at all), and characteristics of the person exposed to the message all moderate the influence of the message.

If we accept the questionable assumption that the mass media have clearly negative effects on individuals, a key question is whether these effects are large enough to justify the efforts our society puts into attempts at regulating the media. Is it possible that the media are being made the scapegoat for more complex problems that might be more difficult to solve than regulating television programming? Whether the effects are real or not, the belief in effects is real in its consequences. Ratings systems, V-chips, and CD warning labels all illustrate the fact that this belief is a major constraint in the environment of mass media producers. Media producers cannot escape the fact that there is widespread concern about what they do. And this concern makes it necessary to select and edit content with critics of the media in mind.