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Perceptions of programming: Cultivation and third person influences on college students

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Perceptions of Programming:

Cultivation and Third Person Influences on College Students

by

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ABSTRACT

There have been many studies conducted on television and its effects. Since the 1950's, when television emerged, there has been an influx of patterns and behaviors associated with television viewing and programming. Many researchers are fascinated with television and the reactions of those who are directly affected by it. People have been known to act out in many ways as a result of something they saw on television. Many believe that television viewing directly affects a person's mind.

An analysis of the results of this qualitative study indicates that college students perceive television has an impact on viewers. Throughout the course of both the focus group and individual interviews, several themes were strongly developed among participants. These included:

1. College students do not believe that television influences the way they individually dress, act, and eat, but it does influence the same behaviors of other people their age. However, these same students reported that they recognized that television has an influence on their lives, and in combination with how they were raised in their families, it made them who they are today.

2. College students continue to believe there is too much violence on television.

3. Television often does not depict reality.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

Television is an integral part of American culture. Americans can tune into television with the push of a button. It is an extremely easy way to be informed, entertained, and educated. "Television is the main source of information on national and world events for most of us" (Philo, 1990). "In terms of psychological influence, television might have little or no impact if only a few people pay relatively little attention to it. But the opposite is the case: Just about everybody watches some television, it has almost universal appeal" (Condry, 1989). As Condry states, "Television is what television does: entertain, inform, and persuade."

"Television is a device, invented in the mid-1920s, capable of sending a picture with sound over the broadcast band. Television is an industry grown up around the use of the device and regulated (more or less) by the federal government. Television is the content of what it shows every minute of every day: the programs and the commercials. Television is all of these things, and it has the potential to be even more" (Condry, 1989).

When television programming came about, the purpose for it was to provide viewers with informative, entertaining, and educational programs. "The receiver soon dominated the early television home. It usually went in the living room and became the center of attention for the family, and their non-television owning friends" (Sterling and Kittross, 2002). Families would gather around the one television set in the house and watch programs together. Television time was a special time in American households

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when parents and teenagers could enjoy wholesome, humorous, and even inspirational television shows that portrayed the American family as a solid unit. This thesis will explore the effects of television on college students.

The idea of television programming influencing the American family to act as a solid unit and bring parents closer to their teenagers is great; however, it is not an accurate depiction of today's typical American family. In the early days of television, viewers were not exposed to the same types of situations that present viewers are exposed to. In fact, television programming today creates a gap between parents and teenagers. It is difficult for parents and teenagers to associate with one another because certain television programs are strictly appealing to parents, while some are strictly appealing to teenagers.

Madonna took a stand against the excesses of today's popular culture for children. "As a young single adult, this woman (Madonna) reveled in edgy music videos and the freedom of living without inhibition. But, as a married parent of two children, she has become hostile to a popular culture that undermines her efforts to instill a strong moral sense in her children. So now she forbids television and won't let her children watch a video until she has approved it" (Whitehead, 2005).

"Millions of other parents share the Material Girl's view of the effects of popular culture on children. They object to its violence, materialism, and misogyny" (Whitehead, 2005).

Because of the wide gap in television programs, it has become more and more difficult for parents to see eye to eye with their teenagers. Parents rarely associate with the programs that their teenagers are viewing, and teenagers do not want to watch the

programs that their parents are watching. This gap spreads wider and wider due to the fact that the typical American household has more than one television set making it easy for multiple program viewing at any given time.

Some of the television programs that are geared towards college students depict life in a way that seems unrealistic to say the least. College students who are susceptible to these programs can become irritated or annoyed with their own lives because their own lives aren't as glamorous or ostentatious as those depicted on television. This can lead to the widening gap between what college students deem as appropriate behavior and what their parents have been trying to embed in them.

The typical American household has more than one television set. "By 1960, almost ninety percent of American homes had a television set that was, at that time, on for an average of more than five hours a day" (Condry, 1989). Since most households have more than one television set, young adults may view programs with privacy and without their parent's interference. The problem with this modern day convenience is that parents hardly monitor what their young adults are watching. While many believe that having more than one television set in a household is essential, it can be detrimental to a young adult's view of what is appropriate behavior and what is not. Parents should be able to monitor what their young adults are watching, and as a result, set some viewing guidelines.

This thesis will explore the notion that television programs can alter college students' perceptions of violence, alcohol, sexual situations, self-image, and even their eating habits. "Since the early 1950s, there have been several analyses of the program content of television most of which have focused on the programs aired during prime-

time. Although some of the early studies were of a more general nature, most of these descriptions of the world of television have focused primarily on the violent content of television drama" (Condry, 1989). Violence depicted on television has increased to the extent that many studies have been done on its effects in people's lives. Violence as shown on television is not limited to movies and police dramas. It enters into the documentaries, cartoons, news and sports shows as well. This is a problem for college students where television has become a nightly ritual.

"Alcohol is the most common and important drug on television being mentioned in eighty percent of prime-time programs, and places where alcohol is consumed are frequently the centerpiece of action (as, for example, in a bar)" (Condry, 1989). Television programs depict alcohol consumption as sophisticated and mature. This might lead college students to think that by consuming alcohol, they become more mature and wiser in the eyes of others. As a result, they might feel more accepted by their peers. Television ads for alcohol are very prevalent in programming. College students probably see more advertisements for alcohol than anything else.

This thesis will also try to validate that there are many sexual situations in the television programming that college students view. Some students watch a great deal of programming, and there has been a steady increase in the frequency and explicitness of sexual content on broadcast television. In some situations on television, sex is deemed as something that people in committed relationships share. Unfortunately, in many other situations, that is not the case.

A college student's self image can have positive or negative effects on his/hers self worth. For this reason, it might be a good idea for them to know that the body

images that they see on television are not the norm for most young adults. Most young adult female actors do not portray normal body size; instead, they are abnormally thin. Most male actors also look perfect, and this seems to be another discrepancy in terms of self-image.

This thesis hopes to discover relationships between the programs college students watch and how those programs may influence their eating habits. College students who are constantly watching television can resort to eating food that is not necessarily healthy. This trend of not eating nutritionally balanced meals can cause many health problems in college students, obesity being one of them. "Children, ages 8 to 18, spend more time (44.5 hours per week) in front of computer, television, and game screens than any other activity in their lives except sleeping" (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005). "Approximately 30.3% of children (ages 6 to 11) are overweight and 15.3% are obese. For teens (12 to 19) the rate is almost identical: 33.4% overweight, and 15.5% obese" (American Obesity Association, 2006).

By adding to previous research and trying to corroborate a correlation among college students, this thesis should contribute to the ongoing study of how television programs can alter college student's perceptions of violence, alcohol, sexual situations, self-image, and eating habits.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review

Television and Contemporary Society

Television has been an integral part of American households for many years; as a result, there have been many studies conducted on television and contemporary society. This literature review discusses cultivation analysis and third-person effect.

"There is a love-hate relationship between television and contemporary society. Parents, teachers, academics, politicians, moral guardians, social critics, those who work in the medium, and those who simply watch it without thinking about it, have all offered a vast array of charges, counter-charges, complaints, defenses, interpretations and opinions about just what this device is and what it may be doing to us and our children" (Shanahan, 1999).

"If we consider the impact of network television on the majority of American viewers, one observation would be that watching television is the national spectator sport" (Sklover, 1973).

"Television, both technology and institution, has changed on many levels in the past fifty years, yet the public debates it propels often sound like a broken record – but one that is going faster and faster" (Shanahan, 1999). It seems that educators and parents alike complain about children watching too much television and imitating the inappropriate behavior that is advertised on television. "Television, both as technology

and institution, has changed on many levels in the past fifty years, yet the public debates it propels often sound like a broken record – but one that is going faster and faster. Each new crop of parents and teachers sings the same refrain about zombie-eyed, anemic children wasting too much time watching television, imitating the aggressive behavior of whatever super-heroes currently adorn bed sheets and lunchboxes, having no attention span in the classroom, and so on" (Shanahan, 1999).

"Some years ago, Michael Novak offered a refreshingly simple way to frame the question of how television might affect us. 'If you practice the craft of writing diligently, you begin to think and perceive differently. If you run for twenty minutes a day, your psyche is subtly transformed. If you work in an executive office, you begin to think like an executive. And, if you watch six hours of television, on the average, every day…?' (Shanahan, 1999) In other words, our world is influenced by how we spend our time. Novak claims since we watch as much television as we do, we should not be surprised that television can and will influence how we think.

Cultivation Analysis

"George Gerbner's original conception of cultivation was nothing less than an attempt to alter the nature of the conventional academic discourse about social and cultural implications of mass communication" (Shanahan, 1999). Gerbner's plan was to develop an approach to mass communication different from persuasion and propaganda research. He wanted to do away with the traditional research approaches.

"Developments in communication have extended the human ability to exchange messages and have transformed the symbolic environment of human consciousness. Perhaps the most profound dilemma is that just as knowledge can be said to confer

power, so power generates and uses knowledge for its own purposes. Social and institutional structures (governments, broadcasting networks, publishing houses, and educational institutions) have a steadily increasing role in shaping the symbolic environment" (Gerbner, 1977).

"The message systems of a culture not only inform but form common images. They not only entertain but create publics. They not only satisfy but shape a range of attitudes, tastes, and preferences. They provide the boundary conditions and overall patterns within which the processes of personal and group-mediated selection, interpretation, and image-formation go on" (Gerbner, 1977).

"Cultivation analysis begins with the insights of the study of institutions and the message systems they produce and goes on to investigate the contributions that these systems and their symbolic functions make to the cultivation of assumptions about life and the world" (Gerbner, 1977).

Cultivation analysis is field of research that has allowed many researchers to conduct thorough assessments of television in relation to its effects on viewers. "Cultivation analysis is the study of television's independent contribution to viewers' conceptions of social reality" (Shanahan, 1999). In practice, cultivation analysis uses survey research methods to assess the difference amount of television viewing makes (if any), other things held constant, to a broad variety of opinions, images and attitudes, across a variety of samples, types of measures, topical areas and intervening variables (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorielli, 1994). In other words, the central idea behind cultivation research is that those people "who spend a lot of time watching television are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most common and recurrent

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messages of the television world, compared to people who watch less television but are otherwise comparable in terms of important demographic characteristics" (Shanahan, 1999).

Ever since the first results of cultivation analysis were published in the late seventies, many studies have explored, defended, and critiqued the assumptions and methodological procedures that go along with cultivation analysis. "Although cultivation analysis may once have been closely identified with the issue of violence, over the years, researchers have looked at a broad range of topics, including sex roles, aging, political orientations, the family, environmental attitudes, science, health, religion, minorities, occupations and others" (Shanahan, 1999).

Despite criticism, cultivation theory remains an informative theoretical mode of research emphasis. Newhagen and Lewenstein said, "the social implications of the idea that a mass medium can define our culture are too important to dismiss" (Newhagen and Lewenstein, 1992). Even though not all communication scholars agree, cultivation studies have been great in contributing to the scientific and public understanding of media and its effects.

"Cultivation is about the implications of stable, repetitive, pervasive and virtually inescapable patterns of images and ideologies that television (especially dramatic, fictional entertainment) provides" (Shanahan, 1999). It sees television as a system of messages. From those messages over long periods of time, viewers are affected.

Cultural Indicators

"Cultivation analysis is one component of a long-term, ongoing research program called 'Cultural Indicators.' The concept of a 'cultural indicator' was developed by

Gerbner as a complement to the more common idea of an economic or social indicator, a kind of barometer of important cultural issues" (Gerbner, 1969, 1974). "In the United States, Cultural Indicators research has focused mostly on the implications of growing up and living with television, since it is the country's most widely shared cultural agency and most visible disseminator of cultural symbols" (Shanahan, 1999).

"The project was developed as a three-part research framework for investigating the structure, contours, and consequences of pervasive symbol systems, premised on three global, interrelated questions:

1. What are the processes, pressures, and constraints that influence and underlie the production of mass media content?

2. What are the dominant, aggregate patterns of images, messages, facts, values and lessons expressed in media messages?

3. What is the relationship between attention to these messages and audiences' conceptions of social reality?" (Shanahan, 1999)

It is interesting to see that the answer to any one of the three questions is seen as having tremendous implications for the other two questions. "Early on, Gerbner maintained that the 'effects' of communication are not to be found in short-term attitude or behavior change, but in the history and dynamics of the reciprocal relationships between the structure of the institutions which produce media messages, the message systems themselves, and the image structures which are embedded within a culture" (Shanahan, 1999).

The history of television research dates back almost to the time when television sets were first introduced to our culture. Studies on the behaviors of those who owned

television sets produced many valuable insights. "Since television was spreading so rapidly, however, these kinds of studies mainly described novelty effects accompanying the adoption of the new medium; they told us little about what television means in a society when most people have grown up living with its stories" (Shanahan, 1999).

Once cultivation research surfaced, we were able to see that it is more than an abstract conceptualization of an interesting question. "Rather, we see cultivation as a 'critical' theory of communication, insofar as it subjects the institution of television and mass communication to an investigation which can show the dimensions of important problems and even suggest ways to fix them" (Shanahan, 1999). It is a great tool used in critical social science research.

"If cultivation is a critical theory, it is a theory of media's role in social control. That is, it examines how media are used in social systems to build consensus (if not agreement) on positions through shared terms of discourse and assumptions about priorities and values" (Shanahan, 1999).

Gerbner once stated "Cultivation is what a culture does," because "culture is the basic medium in which humans live and learn." "Culture is a 'system of stories and other artificats-increasingly mass-produced- that mediates between existence and consciousness of existence, and thereby contributes to both" (Gerbner, 1972). It is because of this that messages sent are more contingent with the views of the organizations that produce them instead of the views of individuals. "Television is perfectly poised to play a crucial role in the cultivation of common and specific images, beliefs, values, and ideologies" (Shanahan, 1999).

There are five ideas that specify how cultivation adds to processes of social control. The first is "we assume that institutions of mass communication are owned by social, cultural, and primarily economic elites. Cultivation researchers are most concerned with the aspects of a media system in which ownership and access are limited and tightly controlled" (Shanahan, 1999).

The second is "social and economic elites codify messages in their media which serve elite aims" (Shanahan, 1999). There is not a clear correlation that tells us if the messages of television are in agreement with the measured ideological positions of message producers. "This proposition can be controversial, particularly for those who see the American media culture moving in a more democratic, diversified, and demographically segmented direction" (Shanahan, 1999). It is especially controversial "for those who see media as controlled by market forces and protected by the First Amendment because it can be maddeningly perverse to suggest that social elites somehow use the media for their own purposes" (Shanahan, 1999).

Shanahan and Morgan are "not asserting that there is a conspiracy of trilateral-commission one-worlders somehow getting their message through to a duped public." They suggest that "dominant cultural institutions, clearly serving economic elites, are systemically structured so as to most often favor the viewpoints and information that would help those economic elites in the long run" (Shanahan, 1999).

The third idea is "the tendency for media messages to conform to elite needs and desires can be revealed through empirical studies" (Shanahan, 1999). This merely states that messages have the tendency to reveal systems and patterns when they are tested empirically. "Gerbner has noted that analysis of television's message systems (content)

provides clues to cultivation. Cultivation analysis must therefore be grounded in real data about over-arching content patterns, shared by large groups over long periods of time" (Shanahan, 1999).

The fourth idea is that "audience members, whether or not they are seeking to fulfill individual needs, participate in a social process in which they hear and internalize messages of social elites" (Shanahan, 1999). "This is the key proposition for cultivation as a theory of social control" (Shanahan, 1999). The suggestion here is "that audiences frequently 'get' messages from message systems that have been structured to reflect the interests of social elites" (Shanahan, 1999). Shanahan and Morgan say that "any 'absorption' of meaning from that process is different than straight persuasion."

"Cultivation assumes that massive attention to television results in a slow, steady, and cumulative internalization of aspects of those messages, especially the aspects with ideological import" (Shanahan, 1999). This idea does not "imply that aims of social elites will be universally accepted by viewers, but it does suggest that social elites have and excellent resource with which to color public discussion of social, political, and economic issues" (Shanahan, 1999). As a result, "cultivation argues that an important outcome of our media system is that social elites can play a disproportionate role in determining the 'boundaries' of social discourse" (Shanahan, 1999).

The fifth idea is that "audience members more 'committed' to media will have belief structures more consonant with those desired by social elites" (Shanahan, 1999). "This proposition is the one most directly tested by cultivation analysis: viewership (for example, exposure to television) is related to belief structures, under the assumption that more time spent with an elite-dominated media system reflects:

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(1) a willingness to accept the propositions within those media as useful, and

(2) a tendency to accept the propositions within those media as, in some sense,

factual or credible or normal."

This idea "is directly susceptible to empirical analysis, and so has been the key focus of Cultural Indicators research and especially cultivation" (Shanahan, 1999).

"Gerbner and his team limit their analysis of TV violence to dramatic entertainment programming which means that news, documentaries, variety, and quiz shows and sports programs are excluded during coding" (Gunter, 1985). Gerbner and his team use the following definition of violence while analyzing: "the overt expression of physical force (with or without a weapon) against self or other, compelling action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually hurting or killing" (Gerbner, 1972).

Violence Profile

With the previously mentioned definition to guide them, "a team of trained coders are employed to record such features as the frequency and nature of violent acts, the perpetrators and victims of violence, and the temporal and spatial settings in which the acts occurred" (Gunter, 1985). The "Violence Profile" is derived from certain combinations of the measurements. It "purports to represent an objective and meaningful indicator of the amount of violence portrayed in TV drama" (Gunter, 1985).

"The Violence Profile consists of two sets of indicators: the Violence Index and the Risk Ratios. The amount of violence occurring on TV is represented directly by the Violence Index. Essentially this index represents the percentage of programs containing any violence at all, the frequency and rate of violence episodes per program and per hour, and the number of leading characters involved in violence either as aggressors or as

victims. The Risk Ratios signify a character's chances of involvement in violence in TV drama programming and, once involved, the likelihood of positive or negative consequences for him or her" (Gunter, 1985).

There are three reasons why there have been more links between cultivation and television than cultivation and other media. "First, overall amount of exposure to television dwarfs the use of most other media for most people" (Shanahan, 1999). People spend more time on average with television than with any other media. "Second, exposure to television begins before we first use most other media" (Shanahan, 1999). It is an accurate representation that most people have been watching television since before they could read or speak. "Third, television is more available and accessible than most other media" (Shanahan, 1999). Since watching television does not require literacy, it is easier for many to watch television rather than read a newspaper.

"Gerbner and Gross argued that television is different from other media in its centralized mass-production and ritualistic use of a coherent set of images and messages produced to appeal to virtually the entire population" (Shanahan, 1999). Television is still the dominant force behind stories and messages that are shared among the lines of class, gender, and race.

"Cultivation analysis should always begin by identifying the most recurrent and stable patterns in television content, emphasizing the consistent images, portrayals, and values that cut across most program genres" (Shanahan, 1999).

Cultivation is measured by collecting observations from individuals. "This presents some conceptual and theoretical problems, though these problems are common in social science and not unique to cultivation" (Shanahan, 1999). It is not easy to

measure the reactions that individuals have to television messages without taking data from those individuals.

The 'Mean World' Syndrome

"The 'Mean World' Syndrome is one of the main effects of the Cultivation Theory. It occurs when heavy viewers see the world a much nastier place than do light viewers" (Greunke, 2000). "This, theorists attribute to the fact that television depicts the world as a mean and violent place and therefore, heavy viewers are overly frightened and too cautious of the real world" (Phillips, 1999). "Gerbner believes this may have something to do with America's policy on capital punishment" (Stossel, 1997).

"In terms of psychological influence, television might have little or no impact if only a few people pay relatively little attention to it. But, the opposite is the case: Just about everybody watches some television, it has almost universal appeal" (Condry, 1989). Since different types of people watch different types of programs throughout different times in a given day, they are exposed to dissimilar information in terms of programming. Most of the research on television content is conducted during the "prime-time" viewing hours because that is the time that most viewers tune in.

Television informs, persuades, and entertains. "The content of television is drama, soap opera, religion, game show, news, situation comedy, sports, advertisements, promotions for upcoming material, public service announcements, and so forth" (Condry, 1989). Since television content is constantly changing, it is difficult to define.

There are numerous reasons for the change in content. "The most important of which is that the audience is easily bored and the industry must keep gathering and

holding the audience. The audience is attached, via the ratings services, to a feedback loop reaching into the corporate offices of the industry whose job it is to program the device. In a real sense, the content of television is responsive to the changing tastes and prejudices of the audience" (Condry, 1989).

"In 1961, to the consternation of network executives, the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Newton Minow, complained that 'television is a vast wasteland'. Whether or not that was true (or still is), trying to get a fix on the content of television is a little like trying to map the desert. The winds of change are constantly blowing, and much of what was true at one time will not be true a short time later" (Condry, 1989).

"By all accounts, children begin watching television as a steady habit at around the age of 2 ½ (Anderson and Levin, 1976), although there is some evidence that children are aware of some things about television, and like it, as early as 6 months of age (Hollenbeck and Slaby, 1979). A recent study demonstrated that infants not only watch television, but they can imitate it as well" (Condry, 1989).

"Not only does the habit of watching television begin very early in life, but it also continues to hold the attention and interests of people well into old age" (Condry, 1989). It is easy to make the assumption that television is a relevant mainstay in American households. It is the pure essence of entertainment within a household. Television does not discriminate among age groups. There is enough television to go around and entertain various age groups.

"Violence is not the only distortion of the content of television, but it is the most heavily studied" (Condry, 1989). "In addition to violence, the content of television

drama distorts the distribution of individuals by sex, occupation and race" (Signorielli, 1987).

"What is the impact of television exposure on sex-role attitudes? Several researchers have tried to answer this question, and the findings are mixed" (Condry, 1989). "In 1974, Beuf studied sex-typed occupational choices and found that heavy viewers made more stereotyped choices. In 1975, Freuh and McGhee looked at preference for sex-typed activities among heavy and light viewers and found that heavy viewers were more sex typed in their responses to the questions on the 'it' test (a psychological measure of sex roles). Volgy and Schwartz found in 1980 more sexism in adults heavily exposed to entertainment programs" (Condry, 1989). The amount of evidence supports the theory that "television viewing does make and independent contribution to adolescents' sex role orientation" (Morgan, 1987).

Cultivation studies about television, gays, and gay marriages have also surfaced. "Cultivation theory is interested in televised messages, and examining how gays have been portrayed helps predict audience attitudes. Early depictions of gay men and lesbians were rarely positive and were often based on negative stereotypes In the 1940s and 1950s, for example, cartoonishly feminine men were often the butt of jokes, making them ridiculous and non-threatening to viewers uncomfortable with the notion of gayness. By the 1960s, gay men, while still being used to comic effect, also were depicted frequently as either murderers or murder victims in entertainment programs. In the 1970s, shows such as *All in the Family* included gay characters in their plotlines, allowing the main characters to misunderstand, fear, and finally come to accept a gay person. These stories often happened over the course of an episode, with the gay character a never-to-return

guest star" (Netzley, 2007).

Not only is there a scholarly link with cultivation, other scholars believe we under value its influence on us. "Television is not simply an entertainment medium; it has the ability to communicate the norms, rules, and values of a society. Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli state that the major social function of television lies in the continual repetition of patterns (myths, ideologies, facts, relationships, etc.), which serve to define the world, legitimize the social order, and cultivate cultural values" (Zhang and Harwood, 2002).

Cultivation theory also exists cross-culturally. Zhang and Harwood published an artcicle in 2002 after examining television's cultivation effects on perceptions of traditional Chinese values among a group of Chinese college students. "Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that total viewing of imported programs negatively predicted viewers' endorsement of interpersonal harmony values. Chinese music performance programming, Chinese children's education programs, imported movies, and imported sports were negative predictors of interpersonal harmony value endorsement; whereas, viewing Chinese sports was a positive predictor of hierarchical relations" (Zhang and Harwood, 2002).

Jennifer Good explored the links between television viewing and attitudes about the natural environment. "Environmental cultivation research (research exploring the links between television viewing and attitudes about the natural environment) has found that heavier television viewers tend to have less concern for environmental issues and feel less agency in addressing environmental issues than their lighter viewing counterparts" (Good, 2007).

"At a fundamental level, commercial television exists because of an arrangement

between those who create television, those who wish to advertise on television, and those who view television. It is not only via advertising, however, that television transmits information about materialism. Television programming has also been found to contain positive images, narratives, and messages about materialism" (Good, 2007).

This literature seems to tell us that television continues to have an impact on society, and that impact is reflected in this research.

Third-Person Effect

"Most of us believe that other people are more influenced by advertising, media violence, and news coverage than we are; this is the *third person effect*" (Bryant, 2002). "Instead of looking at media effects on beliefs, it examines beliefs about media effects. Rather than assuming that media affect perceptions, it assumes that perceptions can shape media. For this reason, the third-person effect (TPE) has generated substantial research interest in recent years. The third-person effect is a relatively new concept, as social science constructs go. It was invented in 1983 by sociologist W. Phillips Davison in a clever article that drew on intuition and public opinion theory. The third-person effect is an individual's perception that a message will exert a stronger impact on others than on the self. The "third-person" term derives from the expectation that a message will not have its greatest influence on "me" (the grammatical first person), or "you" (the second person), but on "them" – the third persons. Individuals may overestimate the impact that mass media exert on others, underestimate media effects on the self, or both" (Bryant, 2002).

"The TPE hypothesis has two parts. The perceptual hypothesis asserts that people assume that communications influence others more than the self. The behavioral

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component suggests that people's expectations of media impact on others leads them to take action, perhaps because they want to thwart the predicted effects. There is intuitive appeal to the third-person effect. It resonates with everyday experience in which people attribute powerful, typically negative, effects to "the media." At the same time, people deny that media have affected them personally or have difficulty locating a single instance in which the same mass media have altered their ways of seeing the world" (Bryant, 2002).

"Although the third-person effect is more hypothesis than full-blown theory, it has roots firmly planted in venerable communication concepts and respected research traditions. It is one of a family of concepts that bridges sociology and psychology, focuses on perceptions of social reality, and centers on beliefs about public opinion" (Glynn, 1995). "Like such constructs as pluralistic ignorance, it emphasizes that people harbor illusions-mistaken beliefs about others' opinions. Yet it contrasts sharply with such concepts as looking-glass perception (Fields, 1976) or its psychological counterpart, false consensus. According to looking-glass self or false consensus, people perceive that others share their views of the world. The third-person effect view is different. It claims that people are prone to assume that media have different-invariably stronger-influences on others than on themselves" (Bryant, 2002).

"The third-person effect has been studied in a variety of ways, but typically survey respondents are asked to estimate effects of researcher-described messages on others and self. In some cases, people read or view a communication; subsequently, they indicate their beliefs about the message's impact on third persons and themselves. Wording and question order vary with the study" (Bryant, 2002).

"Early research on the third-person effect suggested that it was a universal phenomenon, one that emerged every time individuals were asked to estimate media effects on others and the self. With more research and inevitable dampening of panglossian perceptions has come the realization that, like most things in science, the effect is more likely to occur under particular conditions. Indeed, a careful look at third person research reveals that some respondents are more prone to third-person perceptions than others; for some messages, people do not discriminate between self and others; and for still other communications, people are prone to do something that might bedevil Davison himself: they acknowledge they are susceptible to media effects" (Bryant, 2002).

"Self-enhancement theories tell us that people should be loathe to admit that they are influenced by messages when such admission reflects negatively on the self. Third-person effects should be particularly pronounced when the message is perceived as undesirable-that is, when people infer that 'this message may not be so good for me' or 'it's not cool to admit you're influenced by this media program.' The flip side to these findings is more interesting. According to a self-enhancement view, if the third-person effect is driven by a desire to preserve self-esteem, people should be willing to acknowledge effects for communications that are regarded as socially desirable, healthy, or otherwise good for the self" (Bryant, 2002).

"The search for individual differences in third-person perceptions has identified self-perceived knowledge, ego-involvement, and self-esteem as potential moderators of the third-person effect. It seems likely that there are subcultural differences in third-person perceptions" (Bryant, 2002).

"Television studies is the relatively recent, disciplinary name given to the academic study of television. Modeled by analogy on longer established fields of study, the name suggests that there is an object, 'television', which is the self-evident object of study using accepted methodologies. This may be increasingly the case, but historically, most of the formative academic research on television was inaugurated in other fields and contexts. The 'television' of television studies is a relatively new phenomenon, just as many of the key television scholars are employed in departments of sociology, politics, communication arts, speech, theatre, media and film studies" (Brunsdon, 1998).

Studies

There have been studies on television and its effects on college students. Recently, Rick W. Busselle conducted a study on television exposure titled "Television Exposure, Parents' Precautionary Warnings, and Young Adults' Perceptions of Crime." "Crime-related television viewing may influence not only the viewer but also individuals with whom the viewer communicates. A matched sample of parents and their first semester college-age children were surveyed independently (N = 178 pairs) to test a model linking parents' crime-related television viewing with their college-age children's perceptions of crime prevalence. The model identifies parents' precautionary warnings as influenced by their own crime viewing and as influencing their college-age children's crime-prevalence estimates. Results indicate the relationship between parents' crime viewing and their issuance of precautionary warnings is mediated by their own estimates of crime prevalence and that parents' precautionary warnings influence young adults' perceptions of crime prevalence. Young adults' gender influences both the frequency of parental warnings and young adults' perceptions of how frequently they

were warned by parents but appears not to influence perceptions of crime directly"
(Busselle, 2003).

"Nielsen Media Research announced in February of 2006 that it would include college students living away from home in its television ratings beginning in early 2007" (Aspan, 2006). At that time, college students were not included in the Nielsen ratings. "Nielsen ratings measure viewing habits in sample homes to determine how many people in certain age and demographic groups watch television programs. Networks and advertisers rely on the ratings to sell commercials, and the exclusion of college students who live away from home omits a potentially influential demographic. According to Nielsen, these students watch an average of 24.3 hours of television a week" (Aspan, 2006).

"Only students whose families already participate in Nielsen's television surveys will have their viewing habits measured, meaning that college students will be seen as part of their families rather than as new, independent households. But for the first time, the ratings will reflect viewing habits in dorm rooms, fraternity and sorority houses, and off-campus apartments" (Aspan, 2006).

"According to Nielsen, the inclusion of college students could increase the viewing levels in the 18- to 24-year-old age by 3 to 12 percent, which could result in ratings increases of 0.2 to 1.0 points for programs. The impact would vary for each network, depending in the ratings they currently receive" (Aspan, 2006).

On January 29, 2007, Nielsen Media Research began including college students living away from home in its count. As a result, "shows like "America's Top Model" and "Family Guy" were expected to see their ratings surge" (Story, 2007).

Usually, when Nielsen ratings rise, there is an increase in advertiser dollars, so the adjusted ratings are good news for networks like ESPN, Fox, and CW.

"If advertisers decide to spend more on shows that demonstrate high college viewership, TV networks may decide to dedicate more of their schedule programming to college tastes" (Story, 2007).

"Measuring students' viewing of television comes with its own pitfalls. College students still watch a significant amount of television, spending three and a half hours a day tuned in on average, about an hour less than all people on average, according to Nielsen. But college students are not watching only TV. They are also among the most likely consumers to be browsing the Internet, watching streaming video, text messaging on their cell phones and playing video games-sometimes all at once. Their media habits make them targets of marketers, but just how attentive college students are while they are watching TV may give advertisers pause about how much they can trust their viewing" (Story, 2007).

"Until now, the 18- to 24-year-olds counted by Nielsen were mainly those who did not attend college, attended part-time or still lived at home. During holiday and summer breaks, many college students are home and were counted by Nielsen at those times on their parents' set top boxes" (Story, 2007).

"Over the last decade, several TV networks with shows aimed at young people grew increasingly frustrated that college students were not counted. About five years ago, Turner Broadcasting, which owns Cartoon Network and TBS, approached Nielsen about the issue" (Story, 2007).

Other research examines how perceptions of body image are shaped by television.

Stella Chia investigated the third-person effect in relation to body-image factors in Singapore. "College women in Singapore reported that thinness ideals, as portrayed in magazine ads, had greater media effects on friends than on themselves. Their perceptions of media effects on themselves was positively associated with their intention to lose weight. The sum of perceived effects on self and on friends accounted for college women's overall intention to adopt weight-loss behavior, whereas the third-person differential between self and female friends was negatively associated with the subjects' intention to go on a diet" (Chia, 2007).

The previous research allows for an understanding of how individuals respond to television whether examining cultivation research or third-person effects.

This background leads us to research questions which may be evaluated qualitatively. These questions include:

1. Do college students today think that there is too much violence on television?

2. Do third person effects present themselves as students discuss the effects of television in relation to the way they act, dress, and eat?

3. How do students view television and its depictions of reality?

4. Will students recognize the influences that television and other media have on their lives?

Chapter 3:

Methodology

"Cultivation typically uses survey procedures for examining relationships
between exposure to television and reactions to those messages" (Shanahan, 1999).
There are many questions that can be used to gain insight into people's conceptions of
social reality. Questions that deal with the statistics and facts of the television world are
common. Other questions deal with symbolism and implications of television content.

"The questionnaires typically include questions relating to many aspects of social
reality as well as measures of television viewing and demographic variables such as age,
gender, race, education, occupation, social class, and political orientation" (Shanahan,
1999).

"Amount of television viewing is usually assessed by asking how much time the
respondent spends watching on an 'average day'" (Shanahan, 1999). Although it is
important to know about how much time a respondent spends watching television, it is
more important to know the viewing level of the respondent.

"All in all, cultivation analysis tests for relationships between the amount of
television viewing and the tendency to respond to survey questions in the terms of
the dominant and repetitive facts, values, and ideologies of the television world.
Systematic differences in the outlooks of heavy and light viewers provide evidence of
television's contribution to viewers' conceptions of social reality" (Shanahan, 1999).

"People who regularly consume a great deal of television differ from light viewers in many ways besides how much time they spend watching. In the general population, light and heavy viewers differ by age, sex, income, education, race, occupation, time use, religion, social isolation, political orientation, and a host of other demographic, social, and psychological variables. But they also differ in terms of the extent to which television dominates their sources of consciousness. 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" (Shanahan, 1999).

"One way to explain the methodological approach of cultivation is to invoke an old parable: Imagine a person living all alone on a tiny deserted isle (or a mountaintop, or a cave, or a biosphere) with no contact with anyone or anything in the outside world besides what he or she sees on television. Everything this hypothetical hermit knows about 'reality' is derived from the television world – a world that differs sharply from the 'real' world in terms of demography, violence, occupations and so on, and a world in which motivations, outcomes, and many normally invisible forces of life and society are made clear" (Shanahan, 1999). It is possible that such a person would and could learn about the 'real' world through patterns embedded in the 'symbolic' world.

Qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to allow researchers to study social and cultural issues in contexts beyond those limited by the constructs of quantitative research. For instance, qualitative research may help us answer questions about how or why a human-directed phenomenon takes place. Qualitative data incorporates participant observation with extensive interviews. The researcher's experiences, thoughts, and ideas are also included in the analysis.

Qualitative methods use descriptions and categories, as opposed to quantitative methods, which use numbers and statistics. Quantitative studies will tell researchers what is happening, but depending upon the survey or approach, may not help researchers answer other important questions. Experiments, co-relational studies using surveys and standardized observational protocols, simulations, supportive materials for case study are examples of quantitative methods. The general sequence for quantitative methods begins with the observation of events, presenting a questionnaire, and asking questions with fixed answers. The next step is to tabulate, then summarize the data. The last two steps include analyzing and drawing conclusions.

Examples of qualitative methods are open-ended interviews, naturalistic observation, document analysis, case studies/life histories, descriptive and self-reflective supplements to experiments and co-relational studies. The general sequence for qualitative methods is to observe events, and ask questions with open-ended answers, to record or log what is said and/or done, to interpret, to return to observe or ask more questions of people, to theorize formally, and to draw conclusions.

Qualitative methods allow a deeper understanding and interpretation of people and their behavior. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to investigate and further develop cultural and social contexts.

Phenomenology is a common qualitative method that involves studying multiple individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. The typical access and rapport issues are finding people who have experienced the phenomenon.

One selects individuals to study by finding individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, and once they have been found, a sample is generated. The type of

information that is typically collected is from interviews with up to ten people. Information is then recorded through a long interview protocol.

The common data collection issues or field issues that are usually associated with Phenomenology are bracketing one's experiences and the logistics of interviewing. Information is typically stored with computer files or transcriptions.

The strengths of qualitative research are its depth and detail, its openness, which can generate new theories and recognize phenomena ignored by most or all previous researchers and literature, and it helps people see the worldview of those studies. It also attempts to avoid pre-judgments.

The weaknesses of qualitative research are that fewer people are usually studied, it is less easily generalized, it is difficult to aggregate data and make systematic comparisons, and it is dependent upon researcher's personal attributes and skills.

A qualitative phenomenology study was conducted in which participants answered questions pertaining to the effects they believe television has on them. The participants were college students who view television on a frequent basis. In this particular study, "frequent basis" refers to college students that watch at least an hour a night of television.

The college students that participated in this study came from a major community college in a large metropolitan area in Florida. The students were asked if they would like to participate in such a study. They were informed that the study was voluntary, and they were also informed that their responses would remain anonymous.

The participants were asked to set aside fifty minutes outside of regular class for the study. This way, the students had time to reflect on their answers. The community

college students ranged in age from 18 to 24. Eleven students in their first year of college

participated in the study. Nine of the students who participated are female, and two of

the students who participated are male.

The first set of interviews was conducted as a focus group discussion, and the

second set of interviews was conducted as individual interviews. The interviews were

tape recorded.

Chapter 4:

Results

The following four research questions were examined:

R1. Do college students today think that there is too much violence on television?

R2. Do third person effects present themselves as students discuss the effects of television in relation to the way they act, dress, and eat?

R3. How do students view television and its depictions of reality?

R4. Will students recognize the influences that television and other media have on their lives?

Throughout the course of both the focus group and individual interviews, several themes were strongly developed among participants. These included:

1. College students do not believe that television influences the way they individually dress, act, and eat, but it does influence the same behaviors of other people their age. However, these same students reported that they recognized that television has an influence on their lives, and in combination with how they were raised in their families, it made them who they are today.

2. College students continue to believe there is too much violence on television.

3. Television often does not depict reality.

There were other themes less conclusive that arose throughout the course of the interviews. Anorexia was discussed among the interviewees as a problem for young female viewers of *America's Next Top Model* and most television shows. They stated

that the young women on the show are extremely thin, and that most of the time, the

contestants think they are overweight. The interviewees discussed Jennifer Love Hewitt

and a magazine article that stated that she was gaining weight when in fact she looked fit.

The students interviewed praised Jennifer Love Hewitt for responding to the claims that

she was overweight with a statement claiming that she feels comfortable in her own skin.

> They had Jennifer Love Hewitt on it and she has put on a few pounds but she looks
>
> great. They are giving her a hard time saying that Jennifer Love Hewitt has gained
>
> twenty pounds and then they show her in a bikini and she has got this whole quote
>
> only one magazine featured and she said, "I feel comfortable in my skin. I want to let
>
> everyone know that." But every other magazine was like, "she's gained weight. She is
>
> getting fat." And she's like, "I want to give a positive message to women." It is sad
>
> that only one magazine will do that and all the other ones will be like, "oh, she is
>
> getting fat." But America is getting larger every day. We're getting fat, but still the
>
> media portrays be skinny, be skinny. It's disgusting. (Student 4)
>
> Oh yeah, there should be less. They see it on TV and they are going to do it in real life
>
> too. (Student 3)

> R1. Most students that were interviewed thought that there is too much
>
>   violence on television.

The key to captivating viewers is entertainment; a certain amount of violence is to

be expected in a person's s every day life; therefore, to re-portray the norm on television

is not as entertaining or captivating. The consensus in this discussion is that violence on

television is glorified and beyond what the average person sees outside of the realm of

television viewing. The students had different views as to whether the violence on television was harmful or healthy to a person's psyche.

This lady, she was on a show, and she had more than 96 surgeries. The lip surgery, the cheeks, she just got to be the perfect. She got so old that all those things she was doing to her face were not healthy. Her face was smooshed in. (Student 2)

It isn't that there needs to be less violence. Taking away violence from TV isn't going to keep people from seeing it. They will just get it online. (Student 11)

I think they glorify violence. They take violence and they make it look like it is okay, and they don't really show exactly the consequences. They might show the bad guy goes to jail, but they don't really show the people around that are affected by the violence. They don't show the violence in harsh reality, like in a TV show you see a person get shot and like a little small pellet hole. It doesn't look like that. If they were to show what a real bullet would do to somebody, you might think like, you know what, I don't think that I can stomach this. So, that is why people probably go around shooting people. It's not until you actually shoot somebody that you would be like, wow, this guy's really messed up right now. They glorify it too much. They make it look like it is okay. (Student 6)

They have a lot of violence on TV but I don't think they should reduce it. They should just watch when they put it on and who is being impressed upon, like the youth. (Student 4)

They put it on the wrong time, the wrong place, everything. *The Simpsons* is supposed to be a kid's show or was supposed to be a kids show, but it isn't a kids show now. Like *Itchy and Scratchy*… (Student 4)

I think that it is all on the parents. They should watch what their kids are watching. If

they don't want them to have a TV in their room then don't let them have a TV in

their room. Families aren't the way they were before. You have single moms who

want their kids to go to sleep so they let them have a TV in their room so they will go

to sleep. They don't know how to control their kids and they just let them do what

they want. (Student 8)

Violence is there. There is no sense in trying to hide it. Taking it out of the media isn't

going to do it. (Student 4)

The students had different views as to whether the violence on television is

harmful or healthy to a person's psyche; nonetheless, the students seem to agree that the

the violence is captivating.

The interviewees seemed to agree that the networks have a responsibility in

regard to the time of day they air certain violent programming. They also stated that

parents need to monitor what their children and young adults are watching. The students

voice their concerns about violence throughout the study. In some instances, students

stress how some television shows depict violence to a degree that is harmful for some

viewers. The violence on television is glorified, and "good guys" are behaving as badly

as the "bad guys."

The students agree that the violence on television seems to intensify as time goes

on. Violent situations on television are becoming more intense, and the scenes are

becoming more gruesome. Shows continue to exceed what was once considered the

acceptable threshold of violence. The original research question seems to be supported in

this case.

R2. Most students that were interviewed thought that television affects the way some dress, act, and eat, but some of the students that were interviewed argued that the same does not apply to them.

A trend that seems to remain consistent in the history of television is that viewers seem to adapt their lifestyles to the trends that they see on television. Today's television viewing population seems to rely on what is popular at the present time and to incorporate it into its lifestyle.

Unfortunately, it does affect teenagers, pretty much unsupervised teenagers. (Student 2)

On the way television affects the way people dress:

Greatly; they see something (on television) and they are like, "I have to have that. See the Prada shoes she is wearing. I have to have that, and I'm going to spend my whole paycheck or my rent as well as my car insurance money on them. I will spend this money. (Student 2)

Well, I believe like a lot of actors like Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan do dress skanky, and then you have, you know, the younger college girls or even high school girls dressing that way, and I mean, a lot of times, you know, heaven forbid you have things like rape to worry about. These girls are wearing next to nothing. (Student 5)

On the way television affects the way people act:

I can say that I can relate to one instance. There was like this TV show where, what are those guys who take the law into their own hands? (Student 6)

Vigilantes (Student 4)

Vigilantes, yeah. I can tell you from my personal experience coming out of war and

having to go through something like that. I had the whole mindset that it was okay to take down bad people. (Student 6)

Yeah, in these TV shows they get away with the crime. It shows the kids that you can get away with crime. (Student 4)

I actually read a study a few years ago that said that TV and Movies skip the thought process and go straight into the imagination, so a lot of people don't really think about what they are watching and it does put something in their head and people get false hopes about things that they do watch, like watching fairy tale endings. (Student 5)

It's not real. It's exaggerated. Oh God, Like this little girl, Britney Spears. Like, for instance, she was portrayed as a teeny bopper from Mickey Mouse, all sweet, and then she got married and she turned like a fool. She just acts like a fool. They are all hyping it up every chance they get. They are all like, "She threw the child down or she is mentally insane. (Student 2)

I think that they put it all out on the media like she is a bad person. She's probably not even a bad person. It's just she has been a celebrity all her life and she got people influencing her. (Student 3)

But that's not true though. A lot them, you don't see. A lot of these younger ones you don't see. You don't see Anne Hathaway in the news acting like a fool, you know. (Student 2)

You know like Screech from *Saved by the Bell*. He's doing that sex tape. He's acting disrespectful. He's on *Celebrity Health Fitness*. (Student 6)

It all goes back to how the media portrays it. They don't want to see Anne Hathaway getting married. You know, it's whatever gets them more money. So, they see

something bad and it is entertaining (Student 2)

So, the media agrees with the courts and the courts agree with the media, and then you got everybody against this one person that they really don't know. You can't, like, not like a person because they in a magazine because, you know, paparazzi is going to take pictures when you're not looking. Well, you know, you are in your own house, messing up, or arguing with your boyfriend and they going to take it (a picture). (Student 3)

It is not real. It is acting that is what it is, it's acting. Everybody is putting on a show. (Student 6)

It doesn't matter, you know, they are putting on show. I mean acting is not what it used to be in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Those people, they acted, that is who we are today is from that. I mean nowadays half of the people on there, I mean like, oh my gosh, where did they find this girl?. I could have done a better job for less. (Student 5)

I would say, on their acting, the roles that they portray nowadays compared to back in the day, like back in the day you had like John Wayne, you know, like good guy, bad guy. The good guy tries to prevail over the bad guy. But nowadays they got shows going on where the bad guy may be winning, you know, like, the good guys doing bad things, like that show *Shield*. I love that show *Shield*. You got the good guy who is this bald white dude and he just beats the hell out of everybody, so in a sense, sorry, but he is a bad ass. That is not John Wayne; John Wayne is a good guy. (Student 6)

What is that show called about the serial killer that is the cop? (Student 5)

Dexter. (Student 6)

The cop that investigates serial killers; you are like, yeah, he kills people but he kills

bad people (Student 5)

So the good guys are the bad guys nowadays. (Student 6)

It's like they're blending the lines between good and bad so the kids don't know how

to act. So if I'm killing a bad guy, it's okay. They don't know that it's still a crime.

(Student 4)

On the way television affects the way people eat:

I remember a couple years ago being fat and being big was like, oh, I'm big, and I

love it, and all this but now people are getting the bypass surgery. Those people are

trying to lose weight now. So, I guess it's being healthy. People are dying more of

obesity and wanting to be skinny. (Student 2)

After all that surgery, you don't know who you are. You really don't.

I feel like America, like, they only look at one type of pretty. There is not one type,

you know. There are so many, like you have like India Arie pretty. You got like

Beyonce or the Beyonce look, you know, the J Lo look is more popular, but you

know, there are so many types of pretty and I don't think the media sees that.

(Student 3)

I know that going to a fast food restaurant is going to affect me somehow in the long

run. I try to eat something good, like a yogurt or a hot meal, something, but no, not

what they show on TV. Again, I am so comfortable in my skin. (Student 2)

There are some people that are naturally skinny too. They have a fast metabolism. My

sister is in high school and she just hit 90 pounds. She's tall, skinny, and she eats a lot

of food. It is not because, when she was younger, she kind of had an eating disorder

because she drank a lot of milk and milk fills you up, therefore when she was growing

up she didn't get the proper nutrition. So, now, it kind of looks like she eats healthy

and looks like she doesn't eat at all but she eats bad food which isn't good. You know,

you can still get heart attacks from McDonalds. (Student 8)

Queen Latifah, I just saw her do a Jenny Craig. She said, "I don't want to be super

skinny. I want to be healthy." And you do see people with a little bit of weight on

them that are like, "this is healthy. (Student 2)

Based on the discussion, there does not seem to be a difference in today's

television population. Television viewers seem to look at television as a source for

their fashion, diet, and overall lifestyle choices.

The students seem to agree that television plays an important part in the way

viewers dress. It is apparent in society that fashion choices are emulated from what is

seen on television. The sight of a product on television can ignite a need for it. For

example, a popular dress, haircut, or shoe style can become an instant sensation

overnight.

The interviewees tend to agree that television has an impact on the way people

diet. Body weight and shape play an important role on television. The actors and

actresses seem to be thin and attractive. The discussion led to an interesting theory that

even actors and actresses on television are criticized when they gain weight. The

consumers of television tend to be harsh on celebrities when they do not look perfect or

as perfect as they once did.

The discussion prompted students to discuss the way viewers act as a result of

watching certain television shows. They agreed that certain people are affected more

than others while watching certain things on television. Students spoke about celebrities who were once role models becoming the opposite of what society expected them to. Students discussed Britney Spears being on *The Mickey Mouse Club* and how her life now does not emulate in any way the type of person she was back then.

An issue that was also discussed is how television viewers tend to imitate what they see. This becomes a problem when the line between good and evil gets blurred.

The original research question seems to be supported in this case.

R3. Most students agreed that television does not depict reality.

To emphasize on entertainment value, it seems that most television shows rely on reality in the most minimal way. In order to engage viewers, television depicts unrealistic scenarios that in turn seem to captivate the audience.

It's hard. You have TV shows with doctors doing some wild stuff on the side like *Nip/Tuck*. It's a great show but you can't associate with those peoples' lives. Their lives have too much drama. Like reality TV. The minute there is no drama, they get dropped. (Student 4)

We are in reality. We deal the everyday struggles of life, car breaking down, not having money to pay for it, a check bounced, and these people on these TV shows are like, call the nanny over. (Student 5)

Everybody has struggles. Nobody is safe. I don't care if you are a celebrity or a judge, you have your bills. (Student 7)

Yeah everybody has struggles, but you know what, we work everyday. Like in *90210*, who didn't watch that in the 90's. We can work through this Dillon. A lot of it is just not realistic, and I can't relate. (Student 5)

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That is so unrealistic. *24* is the most dramatic show I have ever seen. I love that show

though. (Student 3)

I don't relate personally to the characters on *Family Guy*. I kind of just enjoy the

show. Not necessarily relate to one or another. (Student 4)

No. I don't relate to the characters on *Grey's Anatomy* because number one, I am not

in that profession. I enjoy watching it for strictly, you know, the drama, of course.

But I don't relate with them because a lot of their issues to me are not realistic, so.

I guess I would say Izzy and the guy getting together (I forget his name because of the

writer's strike), falling in love, and then realizing they are not in love. You know, that

type of thing. I think that it is kind of giving (I used to like it)…It is kind of starting to

bore me now. It is not as good as it used to be. I would say, you know, I look at it this

way… Let's say you are a college student who wants to go pre-med. I watch the show

In Treatment because I want to major in psychology, and I find it very informative. A

lot of the words that they use and what you might come across with different patients

and let's say there might be a student who watches it for the medical aspect of it like

they might have watched *ER* or something else. There might be some college students

who watch it like a soap opera because of course they can't catch those during the day,

so they watch it for the drama aspect. That is kind of how I look at it. (Student 5)

Although most students interviewed agree that television is unrealistic, they also

argue that it is entertaining. Many of the conflicts presented on television shows are

solved at ease while the same cannot be said for everyday reality.

The students all tend to agree that television is unrealistic, and that the same trials

and tribulations that apply to the actors on television do not apply to them. They

discussed living in reality with everyday living expenses such as rent, car payments, and college tuition. One student said that shows like *Grey's Anatomy* and *ER* could help college students understand the field of medicine better, but that most people watch those shows for entertainment value only.

The students agree that there is too much drama on television, and because of that, it can not be compared to the real world. The original research question seems to be supported in this case.

R4. At one time, the students said that television does not affect them, but then they say in many different ways that the combination of television and the way they were raised made them who they are.

Many of the students interviewed agree that television seems to affect viewers significantly; however, most argued that they were not affected themselves. Some of the students agree that television does in fact mold young minds.

It depends on what type of movies you were watching when you were a kid. I watched *The Wood*, *Friday,* and *Do the Right Thing*. Those were the things I watched. It does, kind of, affect the way your personality molds. (Student 3)

We had cartoons that were fun, and it seems like cartoons grew up with us and now we have cartoons like *Family Guy*. They are not a typical family in the United States, but they try to make it fun more than a typical family would be. It is a pretty unique interaction that they have. That is what makes the show fun… that they are just always getting into something that is not usual. It is not the typical kid's show. It is not what the younger audience should be watching. It is more of an adult's cartoon. So, in that way, you could see more real life stuff in there. It is just not a kid's show,

so we can relate to it more being older I guess. I think that a lot of people misinterpret that it is meant for kids and the main idea that it is a cartoon, but it is an adult's show. Because it is on at a certain time, people think their kids can watch it and that is my whole reservation. That it is not meant for kids, it is for adult entertainment. *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* kind of grew up with us, and they are not younger shows anymore. They mature like us and now they grew up and there are about more everyday issues. (Student 4)

Um, me personally, I don't relate to the characters on *Las Vegas*, but someone that wants to work in a casino or they like playing cards or gambling or something. There are shows that I relate to, but this is not one of them. I relate to *That 70's Show* because there is this guy called Fez, and I relate to him because when I first came to the United States, I was like him. Not as bad as him, but in a way, because I couldn't speak English, you know it was an experience like the one he has. It is hard for foreigners to try to adapt to America and to learn a language, so I try not to pick on them. (Student 9)

In the discussion, the type of programming that the viewers watched as children came up as having an impact on the way they acted as children and adolescents. It was apparent to the interviewees that some television programs like *The Simpsons* grew up with them over the years. The subject matter seemed to become more mature as time went on.

In the discussion, a student points out that cartoons used to be aimed at children; however, over the years, shows like *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* were introduced. Despite their colorful appearance, they are not meant to be viewed by children. They

contain mature situations that can be misinterpreted by young viewers. The generation

that created *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* understands that these shows are meant for

mature viewers, but the same cannot be said for older generations that are looking for

entertainment for youth that they may be caring for. As a result, many have been

exposed to situations beyond their comprehension for reason. The original research

question seems to be supported in this case.

Chapter 5:

Conclusions

An analysis of the results of this qualitative study indicates that community college students perceive television has an impact on viewers. Numerous themes "bubbled" up during the course of interviews and contributed to our understanding of college students perceptions of the influence of television in their lives.

The findings imply that Third Person effects were taking place among the students. This was an interesting result of the study. For instance, among the most significant findings were that while college students do not believe that television influences the way they individually dress, act and eat, it does influence the same behaviors of other people their age. However, these same students reported that they recognized that television has an influence on their lives and in combination with how they were raised in their families, it made them who they are.

Other interesting and important findings included that a) college students continue to believe there is too much violence on television, and b) that television often does not depict reality.

The impact of each theme will now be discussed in further detail.

The college students thought that television affects the way some dress, act, and eat, but some said the same does not apply to them. The consensus throughout the interviews was that most television viewers see something on television, and they want to emulate it. This can apply to the clothes the actors wear, their behavior patters, and their

food and diet. Clothing trends are often set after a popular actor models them. Stylish handbags, shoes, and jeans are often seen for the first time on television creating a "need to have them" craze among young adults and college students.

The interviews brought up an interesting theory about the way that body weight and shape play an important role on television. Most actors on television are thin and attractive, and most people think it is unrealistic to be so thin and attractive. However, as soon as the thin and attractive actor gains the least amount of weight, he or she is harshly criticized.

The interviewees were in agreement that certain people are affected more than others while watching television. Some viewers tend to imitate what they see whether it is healthy or harmful.

Although it can be concluded that most college students believe that television affects the way some dress, act, and eat, some argued that the same does not apply to them.

The college students recognized the influences that television and other media has on their lives, and they recognized that in many ways the combination of television and the way they were raised made them who they are. At one time, some students said that television does not affect them, but they also said in many different ways that the combination of television and the way they were raised made them who they are.

The interviews brought up a few significant statements. Young minds are impressionable; therefore, the television programs and movies that some watched as children and young adults molded their personalities. Another interesting conclusion is that some television programs like *The Simpsons* grew up with their original viewers.

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The subject matter on *The Simpsons* seems more mature as the years go on. The intended audience is not children, as a cartoon may imply, but an older audience that can indeed handle the mature nature of the program.

The college students thought that there is too much violence on television. The college students thought that although there is too much violence on television, a certain amount is needed in order to captivate audiences. A person deals with a certain amount of violence in his/her everyday life, but nothing as drastic as the violence that is depicted on television. The violence on television tends to be glorified, and actual consequences are not illustrated; therefore, an impressionable viewer could be inclined to think that the violence is acceptable in real life.

When violence is depicted on television, the viewers seldom see that such violence in real life can lead to repercussions that are not only difficult to handle for the perpetrator, but for the other people that are affected by the violence. Television does not accurately depict the consequences that a violent act can have on all those involved directly or indirectly.

The college students also thought that taking violence completely out of television programming would be a wasted effort because people could go to other sources in order to obtain it. Instead, they suggested that parents should monitor what their children are watching. They also believe that networks have a responsibility to their viewers. Violent programs should be aired later in the evening in order to protect the more impressionable viewers.

The college students agreed that television does not depict reality. In fact, most television shows use unrealistic scenarios in order to captivate the audience. The

interviews led to some interesting conclusions. Television viewers cannot relate to the actors on television because on television issues get resolved within an episode or a season. On the other hand, real life struggles cannot be solved in such a small amount of time. In everyday life, people deal with disease, financial obligations, and day to day struggles. Most of these issues cannot be solved in an easy fashion; therefore, one can conclude that television does not depict reality. The interviews concluded that television programs are watched for entertainment purposes not problem solving techniques.

Based on the findings, we can tie cultivation theory and third-person effects into the study. "Cultivation is about the implications of stable, repetitive, pervasive and virtually inescapable patterns of images and ideologies that television (especially dramatic, fictional entertainment) provides" (Shanahan, 1999). Gerbner developed the concept of a "cultural indicator." He developed it as a social indicator for important cultural issues. He critiqued those indicators through a set of questions (also discussed earlier in this research). Those questions were:

1. What are the processes, pressures, and constraints that influence and underlie the production of mass media content?

2. What are the dominant, aggregate patterns of images, messages, facts, values and lessons expressed in media messages?

3. What is the relationship between attention to these messages and audiences' conceptions of social reality?" (Shanahan, 1999)

Cultivation theory ties in to the study because cultivation suggests that exposure to television over time does, in fact, develop viewers' perceptions of reality.

The third-person effect also ties in to the study because most of the college students believe that other people are more influenced by media, violence, and news coverage than they are. The third-person effect was developed in 1983 by sociologist W. Phillips Davison.

The third-person effect is an individual's perception that a message will exert a stronger impact on others than on the self. The "third-person" term derives from the expectation that a message will not have its greatest influence on "me" (the grammatical first person), or "you" (the second person), but on "them" – the third persons. Individuals may overestimate the impact that mass media exert on others, underestimate media effects on the self, or both" (Bryant, 2002). The third person effect was evident throughout the interviews.

Based on cultivation theory and third-person effect, the study supported ideas generated from both theories. Cultivation theory still remains an integral part of studying television and its effects on viewers. Television viewers' perceptions of reality seem to be altered over time. The college students agree that too much exposure to television can create problematic situations for some viewers. The interviewees believe that people watch too much television, and it does, in fact, mold who they are.

Third-person effect was increasingly common throughout the course of the interviews. College students today seem to agree that although television affects most of its viewers, it does not affect them directly. On the other hand, there were statements throughout the course of the interviews that implied otherwise. College students today said that the television they watched as children and adolescents helped mold who they are today.

Since these findings support cultivation theory and third-person effect, the findings can extend the previous research. Cultivation theory and third-person influences on college students are two thought provoking areas of research that provide insight to a demographic that has not been studied as much as perhaps it should.

College students can provide valuable responses to questions that arise in terms of programming. College students' perceptions of television programming are an interesting avenue worth exploring.

This research was important because there have not been many studies conducted on television and its effects on college students. It is important to continue such studies in order to gain a better understanding of how college students perceive television and its content. The college students interviewed provided insight and thought provoking notions that are underlying themes in television. The interviews provided yet further insight into the overall appeals that television programming has with college students.

A limitation is that with qualitative research, fewer people are usually studied, and it is less easily generalized. In this particular phenomenological study, there were eleven participants. More participants might provide more answers to each of the research questions and, as a result, formulating more ideas.

Another limitation of the study is that those interviewed were college students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four; therefore, one might argue that they were not as experienced in life as older participants could have been. Also, college students represent a limited group for any study.

Gender distribution is also problematic because one can also argue that males or females are not properly represented.

There can and should be future research conducted on perceptions of programming in relation to college students. Such studies can contribute to the small amount of related studies that are available today. The studies relating to college students and their perceptions of television programming that are circulating among the research community are few today. There were many television studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, but they have tapered off. It is important to incorporate more college students in studies relating to television. They are a significantly large group that watches television on a consistent basis. An influx of commercials and programming is geared at them, so it is alarming that more studies have not been conducted in this particular area.

An area for further research can include interviews that focus on different television programs such as soap operas. Do college students watch soap operas? If so, how often do they watch them? Do they relate to the characters on the soap operas? Do they think that soap operas depict reality? Are there any favorite soap operas among college students?

Another promising area for further research is college students and movies. How often do college students view movies? Can they relate to any of the actors in the movies? Do they think movies depict reality? What do they think of the amount of violence portrayed in some movies? Do the ratings work? For example, is a PG13 movie really appropriate for a thirteen-year-old? Is a rated R movie appropriate for a seventeen-year-old?

Yet another potential area for further research would be to develop a study comparing and contrasting regular television programming with cable television

programming. Is there more or less violence in one or the other? Do college students prefer one over the other? What are the different themes that viewers can expect from regular television versus cable? The specific design of the study and the number of stations included from the cable side would need serious consideration before undertaking the research.

Further research can also be conducted studying college students and the levels of influence their parents have or have had on the type of programs that they watch. Do the programs that they watch reflect the choices their parents made for them as children and adolescents? In other words, are they watching programs on television that their parents would approve of, or are they watching television programs that their parents would censure?

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Transcripts

The following transcripts are from the focus group discussion that took place on March 20, 2008.

1. How do you believe television affects its viewers?

When someone dies or something happens where someone meets up with someone…

See, TV exaggerates on stuff when it is not really like that. (Student 1)

Unfortunately, it does affect teenagers, who, pretty much unsupervised teenagers; they see something on TV, not, for instance, drag racing. They do that a lot, and unfortunately they don't look at the consequences of drag racing. You know, they run over one another. They hurt themselves. They kill themselves. Unsupervised teenagers who have absolutely nothing to do unsupervised. (Student 2)

I think videos influence kids today. Videos make them prone to sex more, because that is how it is in the streets. That is all it is on TV, a bunch of sex, you know, and that influences kids. That's one of the reasons. (Student 3)

I think the news likes to put a lot of negativity out there. They don't like to cover any of the good stories about what people have done good in their lives, or what they see as bad, like what was the worst accident that day. What's the worst that happened. (Student 4)

They only give half of the story. They don't give the whole story. (Student 2)

When they do do something good it is for like 2 seconds and then it is followed by something extremely horrible. (Student 5)

2. How do television actors affect the way people dress?

How would you describe the way actors on television dress?

Greatly; they see something (on television) and they are like, "I gotta have that. See the Prada shoes she is wearing. I gotta have that, and I'm gonna spend my whole paycheck or my rent as well as my car insurance money on them. I will spend this money. (Student 2)

Well, I believe like a lot of actors like Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan do dress skanky, and then you have, you know, the younger college girls or even high school girls dressing that way, and I mean, a lot of times, you know, heaven forbid you have things like rape to worry about. These girls are wearing next to nothing. (Student 5)

3. How would you describe the way actors act on television?

It's not real. It's exaggerated. Oh God, Like this little girl, Britney Spears. Like, for instance, she was portrayed as a teeny bopper from Mickey Mouse, all sweet, and then she got married and she turned like a fool. She just act a fool. They are all hyping it up every chance they get. They are all like, "She threw the child down or she is mentally insane. (Student 2)

I think that they put it all out on the media like she is a bad person. She's probably not even a bad person. It's just she has been a celebrity all her life and she got people influencing her. (Student 3)

But that's not true though. A lot them, you don't see. A lot of these younger ones you don't see. You don't see Anne Hathaway in the news acting a fool, you know. She, she she… (Student 2)

You know like Screech from *Saved By The Bell*. "He's doing that sex tape. He's acting disrespectful. He's on *Celebrity Health Fitness*. (Student 6)

It all goes back to how the media portrays it. They don't want to see Anne Hathaway getting married. You know, it's whatever gets them more money. So, they see something bad and it is entertaining. (Student 8)

They hype it up to make it look extra bad. (Student 5)

It's the media. It's their job (Student 8)

They're out there doing stupidness. (Student 2)

So, the media agrees with the courts and the courts agree with the media, and then you got everybody against this one person that they really don't know. You can't, like, not like a person because they in a magazine because, you know, paparazzi is going to take pictures when you're not looking. Well, you know, you are in your own house, messing up, or arguing with your boyfriend and they gonna take it (a picture) (Student 3)

I gotta a question about your question. You said, "What is our opinion of the actors and the way they act." Are you saying in their personal lives or on TV? (Student 6)

How they act on TV and you can expand into their personal lives as well. (Interviewer)

It is not real. It is acting that is what it is, it's acting. Everybody is putting on a show. (Student 6)

It doesn't matter, you know, they are putting on show. I mean acting is not what it used to be in the 40's, 50's, and 60's. Those people, they acted, that is who we are today is from that. I mean nowadays half of the people on there, I mean like oh my gosh where did they find this girl at. I could have done a better job for less. (Student 5)

I would say, on their acting, the roles that they portray nowadays compared to back in the day, like back in the day you had like John Wayne, you know, like good guy, bad guy. The good guy tries to prevail over the bad guy. But nowadays they got shows going on where the bad guy may be winning, you know, like, the good guys doing bad things, like that show *Shield*. I love that show *Shield*. You got the good guy who is this bald white dude and he just beats the hell out of everybody, so in a sense, sorry, but he is a bad ass. That is not John Wayne; John Wayne is a good guy. (Student 6)

What is that show called about the serial killer that is the cop? (Student 5)

Dexter. (Student 6)

The cop that investigates serial killers; you are like, yeah, he kills people but he kills bad people. (Student 5)

So the good guys are the bad guys nowadays. (Student 6)

It's like they're blending the lines between good and bad so the kids don't know how to act. So if I'm killing a bad guy, it's okay. They don't know that it's still a crime. (Student 4)

4. How can others or you relate with people on television?

It's hard. You have TV shows with doctors doing some wild stuff on the side like Nip/Tuck. It's a great show but you can't associate with those peoples' lives. Their lives have too much drama. Like reality TV. The minute there is no drama, they get dropped. (Student 4)

Like this one guy, he was working as a doctor, I think in Pinellas. He was working as a doctor… I can't remember the exact profession he was in. He was not a doctor, and he got busted. Something, he was doing something and he just got caught up. (Student 2)

Nowadays, you can get away with a lot of stuff. (Student 3)

You do, but.. I mean, you can't. I wouldn't be able to, to be honest with you. (Student 2)

You take it to court and evidently you are going to win, because you didn't look into it back when it started. How did you not notice this and umm.. Evidently, you are going to get away with the crime. (Student 3)

Yeah, in these TV shows they get away with the crime. It shows the kids that you can get away with crime. It shows a kid that he only got 10 days probation or something. (Student 4)

Paris Hilton couldn't stay in jail. If it was us, we'd stay in jail. He said that she was too pretty to be in jail. And then there is the pedophile Debra Lafave who was too pretty to be in jail. That's bull crap right there. (Student 2)

If you have money,…(Student 8)

(Money) should not be an object. (Student 2)

But that's how it works. (Student 7)

Well, to piggy back off of what she said already, you can't relate. We are in reality. We deal the everyday struggles of life, car breaking down, not having money to pay for it, a check bounced, and these people on these TV shows are like, call the nanny over. (Student 5)

Everybody has struggles. Nobody is safe. I don't care if you are a celebrity or a judge, you have your bills. (Student 7)

Yeah everybody has struggles, but you know what, we work everyday. Like in *90210*, who didn't watch that in the 90's? "We can work through this Dillon." A lot of it is just not realistic and I can't relate. (Student 5)

That is so unrealistic. 24 is the most dramatic show I have ever seen. I love that show though. (Student 3)

I can say that I can relate to one instance. There was like this TV show where, what are those guys who take the law into their own hands? (Student 6)

Bounty hunters (Several respond)

Vigilantes (Student 4)

Vigilantes, yeah. I can tell you from my personal experience coming out of war and having to go through something like that. Then I had the whole mindset coming out, I had the whole mindset that it was okay to take down bad people, so I figured, I don't know. You gotta remember that I just came out of this state. So, I was thinking, like, if I go home and start taking a few people that I deem as bad, it would be alright. They are bad people and in my head, you know, they are bad, period. Therefore, and, I would say it was probably because of the media, because of watching TV shows like that. I came from the marines so all we would ever watch is macho stuff, you know. So, no matter what it's macho, macho, macho, and I get this whole mindset that it is, like, okay to just come back home and do what I want. You know, without any repercussions, because, you know, that is just what my life revolved around between work and what I watched on films. It just dawned on me at one point that, whoa, you are going crazy dude. You need to relax. This is not, this is war, and this is TV, and when you go home, life is not like this. (Student 6)

Did it turn into a *Boondocks* scene over there? That's a perfect example too. (Student 4)

Yeah, actually, that's one of the things that I watched as soon as I got out. I had never seen it before, but I was like wow, that's awesome. (Student 6)

It is about these two Irish who use their religion and background to kill bad people. They always say a prayer right before they kill them. They go after them. They hunt them down and then they are going through this ring because the neighborhood they live in is going under. It was turning into a bad neighborhood. They took it into their own hands. That's what they did. A lot of people looked up to them. It is not right what they are doing, but in a small way you kind of think it is but it's not. (Student 4)

5. How does television affect the way your peers act?

It depends on what type of movies you were watching when you were a kid. Me, I watched *The Wood*, and *Friday*, and *Do the Right Thing*. Those were the things I watched. It does, kind of, affect the way your personality molds. Those other people that were watching *Clueless* or something like that. (Student 3)

I actually had this friend of mine, true story, she was out there. I mean, when I tell you she was out there, I mean she would watch the video. She would do the wildest thing and I thought, "Oh my God, I'm going to hell because I am listening to her." She lived with her Mom at the time, so she didn't have to do a lot of things. She worked every day. Her paycheck was to go out to the mall. Every time she was going to the club she would get new shoes, would get an outfit and she would say I saw this outfit on a video. Everything that the video portrayed, she did and she dressed like that. The things that she did, and I'm like, "Oh my God." It's dumb. You really believe everything you see in these videos? It's a green wall, I mean it's not real. She loved it. Every night she would be out and go some where. She just wouldn't stay home. I'm like, you need to grow up. She didn't have any responsibility. Her Mom treated as such, so she had this mentality that it was fine, but everything she saw in the videos she would get at a later time. She would get the

latest shoes, nails, the spiral one. She just loved the attention. I swear, that is all she watched. She looked nice but what about your 401k? What about your health plan? (Student 2)

My experience was like, um, *Jackass* and weight lifting. So, it was like, it was a mixture of who could do the most craziest stuff, because honestly we had absolutely nothing. So, it was like Jackass stuff. We had guys who had like, you know, were throwing scorpions into each others sleeping areas. Or, any little critter we found in the desert. We'd be like, let's see how this guy reacts to it. (Student 6)

I actually read a study a few years ago that said that TV and Movies skip the thought process and go straight into the imagination, so a lot of people don't really think about what they are watching and it does put something in their head and people get false hopes about things that they do watch, like watching fairy tale endings. (Student 5)

Romeo and Juliet. (Student 3)

Yeah, I think it gives people false hope, especially teens. (Student 5)

6. How does television affect the way people eat?

Oh man. (Student 3)

Anorexia (Several Respond)

Oh my God, the model show. (Student 2)

Yeah, yeah, every time I see that, I think I have to be this thin (makes hand gesture of thin figure) (Student 5)

That's not reality. These girls are like extra skinny. (Student 2)

Not necessarily because, I mean, if you want to eat whatever you want to eat and not be criticized, that is kind of your own opinion of what you want to do. I find that it is

becoming more acceptable to be overweight now. And I don't know if that is a bad move to say. Like, when I go shopping it is harder to find my size clothes because there are so many bigger sizes. (Student 3)

Are you serious? Wow. (Student 2)

It is hard to find my clothes too. I wear like an 11. (Student 3)

I never knew that males, they just started to study male anorexia and bulimia. I was, like, oh my God. I never knew that. I thought it was mostly women, but actually males are doing it to stay thin. That is so unhealthy. Sometimes I watch Maury Povich and this lady was 32 pounds wet. She was so sick. I started crying because I am so comfortable in my skin, whatever. I can take a walk. I could go exercise. I feel good about myself, but when they start portraying things like that, it is so sad. And they think it is cool like it is the biggest thing that hit. (Student 2)

There are some people that are naturally skinny too. They have a fast metabolism. My sister is in high school and she just hit 90 pounds. She's tall, skinny, and she eats a lot of food. It is not because, when she was younger, she kind of had an eating disorder because she drank a lot of milk and milk fills you up, therefore when she was growing up she didn't get the proper nutrition. So, now, it kind of looks like she eats healthy and looks like she doesn't eat at all but she eats bad food which isn't good. You know, you can still get heart attacks from McDonalds. (Student 8)

Queen Latifah, I just saw her do a Jenny Craig. She said, "I don't want to be super skinny. I want to be healthy." And you do see people with a little bit of weight on them that are like, this is healthy. (Student 2)

You see all the magazines in the super markets as you walk out that are right there. (Student 4)

Who was in a bikini? (Student 3)

They had Jennifer Love Hewitt on it and she has put on a few pounds but she looks great. They are giving her a hard time saying that Jennifer Love Hewitt has gained 20 pounds and then they show her in a bikini and she has got this whole quote only one magazine featured and it said, "I feel comfortable in my skin. I want to let everyone know that." But every other magazine was like, "she's gained weight. She is getting fat." And she's like, "I want to give a positive message to women." It is sad that only one magazine will do that and all the other ones will be like, "oh, she is getting fat." But America is getting larger every day. We're getting fat, but still the media portrays be skinny, be skinny. It's disgusting. (Student 4)

I remember a couple years ago being fat and being big was like, "oh, I'm big and I love it," and all this but now people are getting the bypass surgery. Those people are trying to lose weight now. So, I guess it's being healthy. People are dying more of obesity and wanting to be skinny. (Student 2)

After all that surgery, you don't know who you are. You really don't.

This lady, she was on a show, and she had more than 96 surgeries. The lip surgery, the cheeks, she just got to be the perfect. She got so old that all those things she was doing to her face were not healthy. Her face was smooshed in and like...

I feel like America, like, they only look at one type of pretty. There is not one type, you know. There are so many, like you have like India Arie pretty. You got like Beyonce or

the Beyonce look, you know, the J Lo look is more popular, but you know, there are so many types of pretty and I don't think the media sees that. (Student 3)

Like Paris Hilton, she is not pretty. She is really skinny, but they portray her as this gorgeous girl. (Student 4)

If she was like us normal, she would not look cute. It's like a close up of Jessica Simpson. You get a close up on her face like on the commercials… She's got all those zits. She has no makeup on. (Student 3)

Like Alicia Keys, Queen Latifah, she is beautiful. (Student 7)

I think there should be an issue where it shows all the women with no makeup on. How many of them would sign up to it? There wouldn't be (any)… (Student 4)

7. How does television affect the way you or your peers eat?

I know that going to a fast food restaurant is going to affect me somehow in the long run. I try to eat something good, like a yogurt or a hot meal, something, but no, not what they show on TV. Again, I am so comfortable in my skin. (Student 2)

They try say that water has calories, but it is okay to drink a soda. (Student 3)

Bottled water sometimes has added sugars. (Student 8)

I don't care, it's still water. (Student 3)

8. How much violence is there on television?

Too much. (Several respond)

A lot of it. (Student 3)

That's all they want to show. (Student 4)

Then you got the police doing violence. (Student 7)

There is a lot of violence on TV, even in the cartoons. I'm like, "Oh my gosh.

(Student 2)

Like *Family Guy*, there is a lot of violence on *Family Guy*. (Student 4)

Interestingly enough, I have questions on *Family Guy*.

I love *Family Guy* though. (Student 4)

9. Should there be less or more violence on television?

    Why?

Oh yeah, there should be less. They see it on TV and they are going to do it in real life

too. (Student 3)

It isn't that there needs to be less violence. Taking away violence from TV isn't going to

keep people from seeing it. They will just get online (Internet) (Student 11)

I think they glorify violence. They take violence and they make it look like it is okay, and

they don't really show exactly the consequences. They might show the bad guy goes to

jail, but they don't really show the people around that are affected by the violence. They

don't show the violence in harsh reality, like in a TV show you see a person get shot and

like a little small pellet hole. It doesn't look like that. If they were to show what a real

bullet would do to somebody, you might think like, you know what, I don't think that I

can stomach this. So, that is why people probably go around shooting people. It's not

until you actually shoot somebody that you would be like, wow, this guy's really messed

up right now. They glorify it too much. They make it look like it is okay. (Student 6)

They have a lot of violence on TV but I don't think they should reduce it. They should

just watch when they put it on and who is being impressed upon, like the youth.

(Student 4)

They put it on the wrong time, the wrong place, everything. *The Simpsons* is supposed to be a kid's show, or was supposed to be a kids show, but it isn't a kids show now. Like *Itchy and Scratchy…* (Student 4)

Oh my God. (Student 2)

That is not a show that kids should be watching. (Student 4)

Cartoons they used to, you know, we had cartoons that were fun and you know it seems like cartoons grew up with us and now we have cartoons we make like *Family Guy*. (Student 4)

I think that it is all on the parents. They should watch what their kids are watching. If they don't want them to have a TV in their room then don't let them have a TV in their room. Families aren't the way they were before. You have single moms who want their kids to go to sleep so they let them have a TV in their room so they will go to sleep. They don't know how to control their kids and they just let them do what they want. (Student 8)

Violence is there. There is no sense in trying to hide it. Taking it out of the media isn't going to do it. (Student 4)

10. How does television promote drinking?

They have commercials with people talking about sex and stuff. Children are still close to their roots, they don't know what they are doing. Parents say, "Oh he's too young to talk about it." You don't know what your child is out there doing. You don't know what he's talking about. Nowadays, they start early girl. They are young but they see their parents doing it and they feel like they can go do it. There was a little girl who saw her momma

smoking a blunt. Her momma was out doing drugs and introduced her daughter to and then saw her daughter doing it. (Student 3)

You actually delved into my next question, which is good. Let's just talk about that.

11. How does television promote adolescents behaving badly?

It always starts at home, and a lot people don't realize that. It starts at home. We had to be home before the streetlights came on and go to bed at a certain time. If I was out and didn't say good afternoon to the neighbor, my mother would know because the neighbor would tell her about it. (Student 2)

It's not all at home. It is also about the people they hang around with. (Student 3)

No, no, it is at home. Don't say that. It start's at home. When I was a kid, I wasn't allowed to do the things that these little kids are doing. (Student 2)

Yeah, there are no repercussions. (Student 4)

It is about manners and saying good morning and good afternoon, and please and thank you. (Student 2)

They can get it in the streets too, or at school, or with the people that they hang out with. When other kids come around, you don't know what they are doing. (Student 3)

Okay, next question. What…

Wait, can I say something? Um, I think they commercialize alcohol like it is okay. Actually, it's all the time. When you watch the commercials, it's either funny or it's absolutely okay. Like, some guy face plants on the floor and it's funny but they don't show the guy is OD'd (over dosed) on alcohol and next thing is in the hospital with an I.V. shoved up in them. They make it seem like it is absolutely okay and go ahead and drink as much as you want to. (Student 6)

12. Overall, what type of influence is television in the lives of others?

   In your life?   Answered in previous responses.

13. What makes a television program too violent?

Cutting off someone's head. (Student 3)

Rape. (Student 6)

When it is not something that can actually happen in real life, that is when I think it is

insane. Like, in 24, there is always some sort of bomb going off. There is always

someone dying and someone is trapped. It is not realistic. Like, Saw, is just so sick and

twisted. Like, people cut someone's arms and legs off… (Student 4)

Some people are like that. You never know. (Student 7)

14. What makes violence on television appealing to some viewers?

It's a rush. (Student 3)

I think it is not reality. (Student 2)

It's getting to go to a world that you would never see (in reality). That is entertaining to

someone. (Student 8)

Yeah, it speaks to the imagination. (Student 4)

15. What makes violence on television appalling to some viewers?

We've already touched on this question and you mentioned some things like heads

getting cut off. Would anyone like to add to this?

I think, nowadays, anything violent against women and children is deemed morally

wrong. In any movie, a guy can get blown up and it is like, whatever, next seen. But, if a

woman and child get blown up it's like, they play the dramatic music and they say feel

bad about this. And, um, what was the other question? (Student 6)

You answered it. What makes violence appalling?

16. How many hours a day of television is too much?

When you just sit for like 8 hours, anything over 6 hours. (Student 2)

Everywhere you turn there is TV. You go down to the cafeteria to eat lunch and there is a

TV. You go to some waiting rooms now and they have TV. (Student 4)

17. How many hours of television do you view a day?

Now, going around the room, how many hours a day of television do you watch? And,

I'll give you a second to think about it, including Tivo, a day, a typical day.

probably 2 (hours).

four.

four.

five.

not more than 1 hour.

an hour to two.

zero.

Can I say something about it? (Student 6)

Sure, let's get through everyone saying how much they watch and then we'll get back to

your comment.

three.

one.

thirty minutes.

zero to thirty minutes.

about three hours.

Okay, what was your comment?

Okay, I think that, like, two hours is enough if you are watching prime time and trying to catch up on things but if you find yourself watching reruns; that is not okay. (Student 6)

The following transcripts are from the individual interviews that were conducted on April 8, 2008.

What can you tell me about the characters *Family Guy*?

They are not a typical family in the United States, but they try to make it fun more than a typical family would be. (Student 4)

How do you feel about the way they interact socially?

It is a pretty unique interaction that they have. That is what makes the show fun… that they just always getting into something that is not usual. (Student 4)

How would you describe the way the actors on *Family Guy* dress?

Casual, everyday. (Student 4)

Do you have anything you would like to add about why college students relate to the show?

Because it is not the typical kid's show. It is not what the younger audience should be watching. It is more of an adult's cartoon. So, in that way, you could see more real life stuff in there. It is just not a kid's show, so we can relate to it more being older I guess. (Student 4)

Do you think *Family Guy* sends a message to viewers out there?

The general message is that everything shouldn't be taken so seriously. (Student 4)

How do you feel about the way the characters on *Grey's Anatomy* interact socially?

I guess they interact pretty well. They do hold values of friendship. There is the issue between Izzy and Christine. For whatever reason, Christine doesn't like her. And I think there is their issue. Izzy and George and the lady that George was married to (of course,

they don't like each other because of those two getting together." But, socially, I guess they interact pretty well. (Student 5)

How would you describe the way the actors on *Grey's Anatomy* dress?

Like doctors, pretty much urban, nothing that is too provocative. I feel like they dress fine. Urban, casual. (Student 5)

Is there anything you would like to add about the show in general?

That it needs to get better because I am starting to lose interest. (Student 5)

Do you relate personally to any of the actors on *America's Next Top Model*?

No. Because they are really, they really care about their look. I mean, I care about my look, but they are to the extreme. You know, I don't care to the point I'll stop eating and you know, they like kill themselves. The girls on there are really anorexic, and they still feel that they are fat. And, I am like, you know, if that is fat to you, then I am huge. It is a good show because it gives girls a chance to be models and stuff, but some of the stuff those girls do is just ridiculous. (Student 3)

How do you feel about the way they interact socially?

It is more of a competition thing. They start off as friends or try to be friends, but then they backstab and they compete. They try to compete for the spot. (Student 3)

How would you describe the way the models on *America's Next Top Model* dress?

They pretty much wear what the photographer picks out for them to wear. It is usually provocative stuff usually like leaves, island looking stuff. When they are not being photographed, they dress normal, jeans and shirts, but when they are modeling, they put on a lot of makeup, a lot of rhinestones, eyebrows. (Student 3)

What type of message do you think it (*America's Top Model*) sends to college students?

I don't think it affects college students, but if you are like middle school or high school, it might affect you because little girls might say 'I wear a size 5 and I am probably too big.' You know, they might think that way, but I wouldn't think it would affect college students. (Student 3)

What are some of the ideas you hold about this show (*America's Top Model*)?

It is just you always have your favorite girl that you want to win, but it is just something to entertain. (Student 3)

How do you relate or how do others relate to this show (*America's Top Model*)?

Oh, me personally, I don't relate to the show, but I do know people that want to be models, and they want to go on *America's Top Model*. They just take notes of what they like and what they don't like, so they will know when they apply for it. (Student 3)

Is there anything else you would like to add about the show?

It is a good show. I like Tyra. You know she's like a size 9, and I just don't understand how those girls can think they are fat. Tyra is a super-model, and she has hips, thighs, she is not skinny at all. And they look at themselves and they think they are fat, but Tyra is a super-model. She is the one judges you. I don't know why you feel like you are fat? (Student 3)

Do you relate personally to any of the actors on *Gossip Girl*?

I don't really relate to any of them because they lead kind of a different life than my own. They live in New York, and they all have a lot of money. Um, I guess sometimes in the things that they do like when they betray each other or when they help each other; I guess I can relate to that kind of thing. (Student 10)

How do you feel about the way they interact socially?

I think that their social interactions are really weird. Everyone kind of hates each other,

but they also pretend to be friends. And, I guess that is kind of true about some people,

but they are really mean, like outwardly mean to each other sometimes. And, I don't

think that is what really people act like. (Student 10)

How would you describe the way the actors on *Gossip Girl* dress?

They dress really high fashion. They wear a lot of designer clothes and one of the girls'

moms owns her own fashion label, and, so, they are always wearing these couture kinds

of dresses, and they dress kind of fancy um not like anybody I know. (Student 10)

Why do you think college students or you relate to this show?

Because the characters are young, and they can do stuff, and they have the kind of life

that most people wished they had. And, so, it is kind of like, you get to see what it would

be like if you had a lot of money. (Student 10)

Do you relate personally to any of the actors on *Las Vegas*?

Um, yeah, kind of. I forgot what his name is. It is the guy that used to be in the military.

(Danny?) Yeah, Danny because he is cool about everything; he is serious when he has to

be. (Student 9)

How do you feel about the way they interact socially?

It is a TV show, you know, it happens in life, but not for everybody." Um, like

everything is set up in the TV show; they have their drama and everything, but it doesn't

really happen every single day in real life. (Unrealistic in a way.) (Student 9)

How would you describe the way the actors on *Las Vegas* dress?

It is all fancy, you know, like they work in a casino, and they are supposed to look nice

and everything, but there are regular life people that go to work in their usual uniform

and that is it you know. But I guess they have to dress nice because it is a show. They just manage the casino. I know the old guy; I forgot his name. I am not good at names. (James Caan?) The owner of the casino. He is the one that manages. His daughter she does shows; they try to get artists and all of that. (Student 9)