Chapter 13

Theories and Effects of Mass Communication
The Effects Debate

- Argument: Media content has limited impact on audiences because people know it isn’t real

  - Counterarguments:
    - News not make-believe
    - Most film and tv dramas intentionally produced to seem real
    - Contemporary shows expressly real e.g. reality tv
The Effects Debate

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  - Counterarguments:
    - News not make-believe
    - Most film and tv dramas intentionally produced to seem real
    - Contemporary shows expressly real e.g. reality tv
    - Advertising supposed to tell the truth
    - Early window effect on small children
    - We enjoy shows by willingness to suspend disbelief
The Effects Debate

- Argument: Media content has limited impact on audiences because it is only play or just entertainment

  - Counterarguments:
    - News is not play or entertainment
    - Play is important to the way we develop our knowledge
The Effects Debate

- Argument: Media holds a mirror to society and reflects our world as it is

  - Counterarguments:
    - Media holds a very selective mirror, and some things are overrepresented, others underrepresented, and still others disappear altogether
The Effects Debate

• Argument: Media reinforces preexisting values and beliefs; family, church, school and other socializing agents have much more influence

  ➢ Counterarguments:
    ➢ The traditional socializing agents have lost much of their power to influence in our complicated and fast-paced world

  ➢ *Reinforcement* is not the same as having no effects
The Effects Debate

- Argument: Media may affect unimportant things in our lives, such as fads and fashions

  - Counterarguments:
    - Fads and fashions are not unimportant
    - If media influence only the unimportant things in our lives, why are billions of dollars spent on media efforts to sway opinion about social issues?
The Effects Debate
The Effects Debate

- Micro level
- Macro level
- Administrative vs. Critical research
  - Critical research asks larger questions about what kind of people we are becoming
The Effects Debate

- Transmissional perspective
- Ritual perspective
Defining Mass Communication Theory

- Mass communication theories
- Cultivation analysis
- Attitude change theory
- Middle–Range theory
Defining Mass Communication Theory

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- Theories are dynamic
A Short History of Mass Communication Theory

- The Era of Mass Society Theory
  - Grand theory
  - Mass society theory
    - Hypodermic needle/Magic bullet theory
The Emergence of the Limited Effects Perspective

- Researchers learned that media influence was limited by individual differences, social categories, and personal relationships

- Limited effects theories
1940: Lazarsfeld’s two-step flow theory

- People’s voting behavior was influenced by opinion leaders -- people who interpret media and pass it on to opinion followers
A Short History of Mass Communication Theory
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● Attitude Change Theory

➢ Dissonance theory

➢ Selective processes
  ➢ Selective exposure
  ➢ Selective retention
  ➢ Selective perception
A Short History of Mass Communication Theory

- Joseph Klapper’s reinforcement theory
- Uses and Gratifications Approach
- Agenda setting
Dependency theory:

- Media’s influence based in “the relationship between the larger social system, media’s role, and audience relationships to media

- Our dependence on media and how this alters audience behavior
Dependency theory:

- Dependent on media to understand social world, how to act effectively in society and as a means of escape or diversion.

- Level of dependency related to "number and centrality of specific information-delivery functions served by media, and degree of change and conflict present in society."
A Short History of Mass Communication Theory

- Social cognitive theory
  - Modeling
  - Imitation
  - Identification
Social cognitive theorists demonstrated that imitation and identification are products of three processes:

- Observational learning
- Inhibitory effects
- Disinhibitory effects
Cultural Theory: A Return to the Idea of Powerful Effects

• Critical Cultural Theory

  ➢ Tend to be macroscopic in scope

  ➢ Openly and avowedly political

  ➢ Goal is at the least to instigate change in government media policies

  ➢ They investigate and explain how elites use media to maintain privileged status and power base
Cultural Theory: A Return to the Idea of Powerful Effects

- Critical Cultural Theory: Schools of thought
  - Frankfurt School
  - British Cultural Theory
  - News Production Research
Cultural Theory: A Return to the Idea of Powerful Effects

- The Meaning-Making Perspective
  - A micro-level-centered view of media’s influence

- Symbolic interaction

- Social construction of reality
  - Symbols
  - Signs
  - Typification schemes
Cultural Theory: A Return to the Idea of Powerful Effects

- **Cultivation Analysis**: television “cultivates” or constructs a reality of the world that is accepted because the culture believes it to be true

  ➢ Mainstreaming of reality
The Effects of Mass Communication: Four Questions

1. *Does Media Violence Lead to Aggression?*

   - Under what circumstances?
   - Stimulation model
   - Aggressive cues model
   - Social cognitive theory deflated the notion of *catharsis*
The Effects of Mass Communication: Four Questions

1. *Does Media Violence Lead to Aggression?*

- Under what circumstances?
  - Social cognitive theory introduced several concepts:
    - Vicarious reinforcement
    - Environmental incentives
The Effects of Mass Communication: Four Questions

1. *Does Media Violence Lead to Aggression?*

   - **For whom?**

   - Cognitive learning research aside, most people *do not* exhibit aggression after viewing film or video violence.

   - According to cultivation analysis, we live in a world in which we are less trusting of our neighbors and more accepting of violence in our midst.

     - We experience desensitization.
The Effects of Mass Communication: Four Questions

2. Do Portrayals of Drugs and Alcohol Increase Consumption?

- Scientific evidence links media portrayals of alcohol consumption to youthful drinking and alcohol abuse
3. **What is Media’s Contribution to Gender and Racial/Ethnic Stereotyping?**

- Women, people of color, older people, gays and lesbians are consistently underrepresented in all media.

- Political campaigns and voting.
4. Do Media Have Prosocial Effects?

- Scientific evidence shows that people, especially children, can and will model the good or prosocial behaviors they see in the media.
Developing Media Literacy Skills

• Applying Mass Communication Theory

  ➢ Media literate people apply available conceptions of media use and impact to their own content consumption and the way they live