

# Cultivation theory



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Television today is one of the most common items in every household.

Almost everybody watches television every day.

We learn from, it enjoy it, and even change our schedules to watch it.

Television is used to try and change our views or feelings on particular subjects, and even can change the way we look at the world. The media has an impact on us all whether we realize it or not, and cultivation theory attempts to explain this impact. In my paper I am going to explain what cultivation theory is and applies it to two television shows which are Family Guy and South Park. Family guy consist of a mom name Louis Griffin and a dad name Peter Griffin, two teenagers who are Chris and Megan, cynical dog who is smarter than everyone else name Brian, and a mutant baby who makes numerous attempts to eradicate his parents and siblings name Stewie. This television episode is trying to show you how a family lives in everyday life and they relate most of the events in this how to real life issues that is going on in society today.

South Park on the other hand, South Park is an animated series featuring four foul-mouthed 3rd graders, Stan, Kyle, Kenny and Cartman. The show is set in the Colorado town of South Park where weird things keep happening. Every time one turns the television on there is some form of violence on any program one watches. This is where cultivation theory comes into play. Cultivation theory was developed by George Gerbner. This theory focuses on how people's attitudes are impacted by the media and on how what one thinks more than what one does (Theories of Violence in the Media 2008).

Cultivation theory focuses solely on the amount of television viewed and does not allow for differences in the ways in which viewers interpret television realities. Cultivation Theory 2008,). Cultivation Theory also, states that the more a person is exposed to a message provided by the media, the more likely that person is to believe the message is real. Cultivation Theory is often applied to people's perceptions of reality. Gerbner argues, "Television is the source of the most broadly-shared images and messages in history.

" " It is the mainstream of the common symbolic environment which cultivates the preferences of the general public" (Points of Convergence 2008). I think that Gerbner is trying to say television is our main source for what we see in the outside world. Whatever happens in the real world is seen on television. For example, everyone saw the events of September 11 2001, on television as they unfolded. I believe that what we see on television is how we form the messages of history. Also, what happens in reality is portrayed on television and that is why many people are confused as to what is real and what is not.

In society today, if there is a crime happening in a neighborhood or at school it is automatically broadcast on television. Cultivation theory is also concerned with people's television-viewing patterns. Cultivation theory predicts a difference in the social reality of heavy television viewers versus light viewers. Many of the cultivation theorists state that watching a lot of media is positively correlated with people's feelings of fear (Reber, Bryan 2001). In 1950s Gerbner observed that more than 75 percent of television

films contained acts of violence and were portrayed in 56 percent of the programs.

In 1967 and 1968, he recorded that 80 percent of television programming contained violent portrayals (Bryan H. Reber 2001). Also Gerbner reported that local television news crime reports doubled in the past two years 1995-1996. In my opinion, I think that is why many young children are in gang fights or they do not respect their parents, because they act out what they see on television. One of the main reasons why Gerbner developed cultivation theory due to the great deal of violence people see on television, so he can figure out why people behave the way they do and see if he can help them in any way.

This is one of the reason why people have become this way is because of the long term effect television has on its audiences. Many people out there are so addict to television that they tend to act out what they see on television or behave like the character to which they relate to the most on their favorite television show. Television reality is also overshadowed by the primacy of paramount reality, to which viewers return after watching. When they watch television, viewers interpret television content in order to make sense of it. If the content pertains to actual experiences or concerns a viewer may perceive television content as a form of closeness to their own issues (Helena Bilandzic 2006).

Apart from activating relevance structures, television content may create closeness without relating to a viewer's actual experiences, simply by highly involving the viewer in the television story and by creating immediacy to the

represented events, characters, and emotions. This kind of closeness can be described as a “ transportation” of the viewer into the television narrative (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000). (Helena Bilandzic 2006). This is why many people rely on media because they feel connected with the characters they are watching and the viewers tend to build an emotional relationship with them. Additionally, according to Doob and MacDonald (1979), the crime rate is so high because persons who are exposed to a lot of television are fearful and feel alienated from the real world (Michael Hughes 1980)

Cultivation theory is the agreement that the mass media are strongly influential in presenting the value and belief systems of society and that media messages are constructed by a dominant group, which are in turn adopted by the mass audience without explicit attention (Points of Convergence 2006) To find out how people portray what they see on television in the real world, one can perform an analysis called the cultivation analysis that was constructed by Gerbner and his colleagues. Cultivation analysis is a particular set of theoretical and methodological assumptions designed to assess the contributions television viewing makes to people’s conceptions of social reality.

” (Points of Convergence 2006). This analysis also tries to measure how much television influences a viewer’s perception of reality and to what extent television programming cultivates our understanding of the world (Cultivation Theory Introduction 2008). This is used to perceive the world in ways that reflect the most commonly repeated messages in television content compared to people who watch less television. Points of Convergence 2006) Cultivation theory consists of the following two

conceptual frameworks; 1) First-order cultivation effects refer to the effects of television on statistical descriptions about the world" (Miller, 2005, p. 287).

For example, " a first-order effect would suggest that heavy viewers would overestimate the likelihood of being the victim of a crime" (Miller, 2005, p. 287). 2) Second-order cultivation effects refer to effects on beliefs about the general nature of the world" (Miller, 2005, p. 287). For example, " a second-order effect would suggest that heavy viewers would be more likely to view the world as a mean or scary place" (Miller, 2005, p. 287).

In addition to these steps, researchers also investigate two different types of effects: first the facts those viewers learn about the world from television, which are first-order effects which are demographics or frequency of violent acts and secondly, how television shapes attitudes, which are the second-order effects expressed as mistrust of others or level of satisfaction with life. This is called dependency theory in which predicts a greater media influence for people who do not have personal experiences with a topic and are forced to rely on media information (Helena Bilandzic 2006). Therefore, cultivation theory is the way on how television affects behaviors through culture. In American society may relate to the diffusion of culture and to alteration in social structure and affect the behavior of all persons in the society regardless of how much television they watch. It is also an understanding of the effects of the media on the public's conception of reality. Some young people today, live in a fast pace world.

They are overwhelmed with violence in the media, and lack of parental supervision in the home. The violence shown on television can have a negative impact on the minds of the viewers. People who watch a great amount of television lose their form of reality and distort it. I am going to concentrate how watching Family Guy and South Park could affect young people and how the violence in society can be cause due to the exposure to television. Watching violence does not make a person violent.

The South Park episode that I will review is called " Good Times with Weapons" from Season Eight. The boys are being transformed into Japanese warriors after they buy martial weapons at a local flea market. Due to their imagination one of the boys gets carried away and throws his ninja star into his opponent's eyes. These boys try to get it out without getting in trouble with their parents.

The episode that I chose from Family Guy is called " Ready, Willing and Disabled" from Season Three. In this episode Peter enters his friend Joe into the Special Olympics and gives him steroids without telling him. Another main point in the episode is when Meg, Stewie, and Chris fight over money that does not belong to them. Even though these episodes are shown at night many parents do not know what their children watch or do not care what time they go to bed.

Some parents do not know what these shows are about and let their children watch them. Why producers would show vulgar language, rude behavior, and make fun of social issues? Even though watching this episode from South Park might not influence all children but there are some children that can be

influence by it. This could relate on how the person is feeling and they could be afraid by something (Reber, Bryan 2001). The young generation has a lot to deal with. They are either trying to fit in with the crowd, dealing with their self esteem issues, or even having problems at home and they take their anger out in society. According to cultivation theory, the viewer identify with the characters' emotions.

I think that many young children are connected to these shows because they have created some relationship with the characters. At the beginning of the episode the four boys are seen at a flea market and they are interested in some weapons. When they want to buy the weapons the seller told them he cannot sell the weapons without having a parent present. The four boys end up making up a lie which they get away with and end up with what they want. Some children think that this is what is going on in society.

Once a child saw this they would think this is happening in their neighborhood even though nothing is happening. The characters use obscene language which young viewers might use. The Family Guy, theme song it starts, " It seems today that all you see is violence, in movies and sex on TV", which is consistent with cultivation theory. This is what Gerbner was on concentrating while he was doing his experiments when he watching all the television films which they contained acts of violence. In this episode, Peter give his friend Joe steroids so he can feel better about himself and win the Special Olympics. If young viewers saw this, they would think that this is the answer to all of the problems a person face in life and to be better at something steroids is the answer on how to succeed in life.



Watching these shows everyday can increase aggression in these children. In my opinion, this aggression could affect the people around them. The young viewers are going to believe that this is the only way they can act because that is all they see on television. At the end of the South Park episode the child with the ninja start came on stage while the parents were at an auction and fainted. When the parents saw this they were not concerned on him but they were concerned on what the other child did, which was, he came on stage naked.

The characters were in shock when the parents were discussing this matter at a meeting and they did not discuss on what happened to the child's eye. The boys were happy because they thought their parents were alright with them being violent. If any child saw this they are going to believe that it is alright to be violent and get away with it because that is how the parent's on South Park acted. This is the message of this episode. Even with the episode of Family Guy, they will believe that you can do everything with steroids and be the better person not knowing that using steroids is against the law in the real society.

There is a scene in Family Guy where the siblings are fighting over money and they are beaten badly to the point where the viewer can see bruises and blood. Even though the beating among the siblings for money kind of happens in society but it does not happen to the point that the siblings are badly beaten. The viewers will believe that this is true because they saw it on television. I believe that if television limited their violence they would have less violence going on.

I think the main reason why there is so much violence because many viewers try to reenact everything. The society should try to find a way and try to limit this violence on television. If the parents do not want their children to grow up with fear or have fear with them in their daily lives, then we should try a way to solve these issues. Many parents are trying to find a way to block these violent television shows but many children will find a way around their parents. For example I knew this girl and she watch a scene from an episode where while taking a form of public transportation several girls got murdered. After she saw this she decided not to go on any public transportation by herself.

Even though she saw this on television she believes it could happen to her. Even though this happen on television that does not mean that this could happen in society. Many people are so drawn to television that they believe every single thing that they see. This could affect society because the media has such a hold on they we think and act every single day. Marshall McLuhan states: " The media are not just passive channels of information and they supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought" (2008). He is trying to say that even if we believe something is true; we still need the media to help us shape our answers and make it truly believable.

Then in the future, it will be a problem for human beings because the media are going to be taking over us. Then we will have to depend on the media to tell our brains what we have to do and how we have to think. That is not how we would like to live every day. We need to try to limit the television intake in our lives. That is the only way we can enjoy our society to the fullest. I bet

if we limit the television we would think differently and would not have to worry about what happened on television happening in front of our eyes.

That is why we should be careful on what the younger generation is watching now a day. When it comes to South Park and Family Guy; these are the two shows that show some issues that are going on in society today. When it comes to violence; most of the episodes that a viewer watch there is some kind of violence whether it is hurting someone, hitting someone or using words to hurt someone's feelings. Whether or not this is happening watching a great deal of this can cause a great amount of aggression in children. This aggression can lead up to fights, rude behavior, and disrespect for others.