

MURDER, WE VOTE:

The Death Penalty and Media Exposure to Violence

BY

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Presented at the Mass Communication & Society Division of the  
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**Running Head : The Death Penalty and Media Exposure to Violence**

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## **Introduction**

“To kill or not to kill?” may well be the question. The decision of U.S. Supreme Court to permit the death penalty and the adoption of death penalty provisions by many states has raised issues of societal values and how they are best preserved. Proponents of the death penalty argue that it is a deterrent, that it is the only way of making our cities and streets safer, that it protects against the abduction, rape, and murder of the children in our communities, and that it is the most efficient and economical way of ensuring a safer and better society for all.

Opponents say the opposite — the death penalty is an inadequate and fundamentally unjust solution, the real issue in the evil events our time is the underlying assumption that human life is cheap, and the real challenge to our legislators is to introduce genuine social and legal reform to ensure justice and equality for all.

The source of these attitudes is manifold — political, social, familial, ecclesial, economic. My interest in this paper is to investigate the role of the mass media in shaping attitudes toward the death penalty, or in promoting a view of society that gives credence to the imposition of the death penalty as a just and necessary solution to social woes.

The victims of the death penalty are usually poor and the majority of them are black.<sup>1</sup> The death penalty is a major area of inequity in our justice system and gives the appearance that justice can be bought if one has sufficient funds for the best legal aid. The rich live, the poor die. Do the media participate in the perpetration of this injustice?

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<sup>1</sup> Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon Hawkins, Capital punishment and the American agenda, (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989), 34.

The whole role of television in society has been questioned over its fifty-year history. As DeFranco puts it,

Television is becoming suspect as the perpetrator of many of the social problems with which we are now confronted. Although other innovations in this never-static twentieth century can also share some of the responsibility for the alterations in human behavior, it must be admitted that TV may be a primary source of these. It has become such a widespread, time-consuming and common habit that it is bound to affect us. ... The main dilemmas it raises are that no-one is sure how harmful an intruder it is nor what to do about breaking its spell. Television is deeply entrenched in our lives: it cannot be easily eliminated.<sup>2</sup>

DeFranco's contention that "television may be a primary source of influence" at least leaves the issue open to question whereas others, notably on the political right, have been keen to move directly to blaming television for societal failures. Such accusations, however, have not been accompanied by strong, empirical findings which show television as the irrefutable cause of negative social influence and change.

In this paper I examine the issue of support for the death penalty, and in a multivariate analysis, examine other variables — age, gender, household income, media exposure to violence, and media usage. The central question of this paper is to discover whether the media do indeed play a distinct role in providing support for the death penalty by their chosen portrayals of society.

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<sup>2</sup> E. B. De Franco, Television On/Off : Better Family Use of Television, (CA : Goodyear, 1980), 4.

## Theory

### Television-Effects Studies

This paper is grounded in various elements of the media-effects literature. Various reports have shown, quite conclusively, that television does affect behavior, at least in the short term. The Report of the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior linked television violence and aggressive behavior.<sup>3</sup> Chaffee's work showed that the reported linkage was applicable to everyday life and not simply restricted to laboratory experimentation.<sup>4</sup> Given the demonstrability of linking television viewing of violent material with negative effects as obvious and as destructive as aggression and violence, the question must be raised as to whether television viewing of "standard fare" has other noxious or destructive results for society or its constituents. By "standard fare" is meant the typical material shown on prime-time television on the major networks in the U.S.<sup>5</sup>

Various studies show that television does influence viewer's perception. While this effect it is limited, it does exist. The amount of viewing, for example, is directly correlated with heightened occupational expectations.<sup>6</sup> The increase of multi-set households and the consequent potential for increase in time spent viewing, along with a decrease in newspaper usage, especially in lower socio-economic households, has a high potential for negative results.

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<sup>3</sup> Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, Television and Growing Up: The impact of televised violence, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> Steve Chaffee, "Television and Adolescent Aggressiveness," in Television and Social Behavior, Vol. 3, ed. George Comstock and E. A. Rubinstein (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 1-34.

<sup>5</sup> For a full listing of prime-time 'standard fare', see The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows, 1946 - Present, 5th ed., ed. Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh (New York: Ballantine, 1992), Appendix 3.

<sup>6</sup> George Comstock and Haejung Paik, Television and the American Child, (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1991), 140.

## **Cultivation Theory**

George Gerbner has proposed a theory of cultivation, in which television, because of its ubiquity, dominates our social environment:

Cultivation is what a culture does...Strictly speaking, cultivation means the specific independent (though not isolated) contribution that a particularly consistent and compelling symbolic stream makes to the complex process of socialization and enculturation.<sup>7</sup>

Gerbner's theory posits the accumulation of belief over time of a "television-world" which will be different from the real world, with degrees of belief in the "television-world" being correlated with television viewing, heavy viewers believing in the existence of the world or social system as mediated by television and light viewers conforming more to the real world.

Gerbner's studies indicated that television influences perceptions of the real world according to the amount watched. Television exposure is statistically associated with a judgment of increased risk and a rise in pessimism. There has been some debate as to whether cultivation effects are primarily related to fearfulness (beliefs about self -- affective) or pessimism (beliefs about circumstances in general -- cognitive).<sup>8</sup> Gerbner's work, however, focused primarily on behavioral effects and cognitive effects -- first order effects are those which result in the viewer coming to see reality in terms of the facts presented in television programming and second order effects are those beliefs implied and inspired by what is seen.. I contend in this paper that if Gerbner's work on second order effects is extended to the examination of social attitudes, then

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<sup>7</sup> George Gerbner, "Epilogue: Advancing on the Path of Righteousness (Maybe)," in Cultivation Analysis: New directions in Media Effects Research, ed. Nancy Signorelli and Michael Morgan (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), 249.

<sup>8</sup> Comstock, 183.

statistically significant effects of violent content will be found, without any necessary foundation on the “mean-world” syndrome. It is not viewing *per se* that has an effect, but rather the content of what is viewed, most specifically when such content is predominantly violent. The “mean-world” syndrome, when present, will enhance such effects.

## **Four Associated Effects of Violence in Media**

### **1. Importance of Content Type**

Exposure to violence leads to desensitization on the part of the viewer in regard to further media portrayals and in a manner which can extend to real-world situations.<sup>9</sup> Donnerstein predicts a stark future at the conclusion of his book:

The research described in this volume suggests that the process of desensitization of media violence may be inevitable with repeated exposure.<sup>10</sup>

Television exposure can also reinforce, by the same psychological mechanisms, the desire to help others — portrayals of heroism and bravery, etc. If, however, the primary television fare chosen is violent, then the possibility for benign influence is greatly lessened.

Hawkins and Pingree argue that cultivation theory, without evidence for psychological processes, rests on a tenuous foundation. It must of necessity be rooted in a firm understanding of the psychological and cognitive components of television viewing.<sup>11</sup> Such cognitive components are linked to specific program

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Donnerstein, Daniel Linz and Stephen Penrod, “The Question of Pornography: Research Findings and Policy Implications”, (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 130

<sup>10</sup> Donnerstein, 196

<sup>11</sup> Robert Hawkins and Suzanne Pingree “Divergent Psychological Processes in Constructing Social Reality from Mass Media Content,” in Cultivation Analysis: New directions in

content rather than to viewing *per se*. In voicing this criticism, Hawkins and Pingree touch on a major weakness in Gerbner's cultivation theory — that the cultivation effect exists independently of the kind of programs viewed.

By arguing for investigation of the cognitive process, Hawkins and Pingree are suggesting that different cognitive processes may be triggered by different program types. They argue for the cumulative effect of aggregate patterns of action and characterization across many programs.<sup>12</sup>

This view is supported by Bandura who says that “televised influence is best defined in terms of the content people watch rather than the sheer amount of television viewing.”<sup>13</sup> Anderson and Lorch come to a similar conclusion and add that the viewer's own situation has a contribution to make in understanding the effect of any particular program content.<sup>14</sup>

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Media Effects Research, ed. Nancy Signorelli and Michael Morgan (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), 35.

<sup>12</sup> Hawkins, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Albert Bandura, “Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication”, in Media Effects : Advances in Theory and Research, ed. Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillman (Hillsdale, N.J : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994), 76.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel R. Anderson and Elizabeth Puzles Lorch, “Looking at Television: Action or Reaction”, in Children's Understanding of Television: Research on attention and comprehension, ed. Jennings Bryant and Daniel R. Anderson (New York: Academic Press, 1983), 30.



## **2. Mean World Syndrome**

At the heart of cultivation theory lies the “mean-world syndrome,” a direct outcome of Gerbner’s “television-world.” Signorelli points out the prevalence of violence in television programming from a number of studies — 66% of prime time television drama had violent incidents, 60% of which were assault, armed robbery or murder; 50% of all the movies on television were classified as being violent in content; violence was a factor of 16% of all news stories (these stories were longer than non-violent stories and unrelated to crime statistics).<sup>15</sup> Further, Signorelli says,

an analysis of television series with law enforcement or other violent themes broadcast between 1950 and 1976 found that violence was systematically presented within a framework that suggests that people have an unquestioned moral and/or legal right to use violence, including deadly force, to protect the status quo.<sup>16</sup>

While those studies are dated, there is no evidence to suggest that television drama has become any less violent. Signorelli’s cultural indicators study was an analysis of the mean-world syndrome, whereby heavy viewers of television fare are deemed to have a more negative view of their society than light viewers. As Signorelli puts it

In most subgroups, those who watch more television tend to express a heightened sense of living in a mean world of danger and mistrust with alienation and gloom. ... Fearful people are more dependent, more easily manipulated and controlled, more susceptible to deceptively simple, strong, tough measures and hard-line postures — both political and religious.<sup>17</sup>

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15     Signorelli, 85.

16     Signorelli, 86.

17     Signorelli, 102.

### **3. Justification for Violence**

The mean-world syndrome is substantiated by many research findings, including that of Howitt.<sup>18</sup> His studies found definite correlations between the violence of programs viewed with attitudes to violence in society, including an increase in the belief that the police should act violently when faced with trouble. Violent behavior is seen as a justifiable response by those who hold a mean-world view. The work of Israel and Robinson reinforces the idea that those who watch violent programs are a distinctly different demographic group from those who watch national news and read newspapers and are thereby likely to hold different attitudes to the degree that they are differentiated from their peers by their viewing habits.<sup>19</sup>

### **4. Media Validation of Institutional Violence as Legitimate**

Surette, in his major work on media and criminal justice, cites a number of studies including those of Doob, McDonald and Barrille who report an association between television viewing and punitive attitudes towards criminals.<sup>20</sup>

Berkowitz and Rogers have postulated that violent behavior depicted in the media can lead to a priming effect whereby viewers “responded to the meaning of the media event and exhibited behavior having the same general meaning.”<sup>21</sup>

Further, they say,

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<sup>18</sup> D. Howitt, “Attitudes towards violence and mass media exposure”, in *Gazette*, 1972, 18, 208 - 234.

<sup>19</sup> H. Israel and J. P. Robinson, “Demographic Characteristics of viewers of television violence and news programs” in *Television and Social Behavior, Vol. 4: Television in day-to-day life*, ed. E. A. Rubenstein, G. A. Comstock, and J. P. Murray (Washington: GPO, 1972), 87 - 128.

<sup>20</sup> Ray Surette, “Criminal Justice Policy and the Media” in *The Media and Criminal Justice Policy: Recent research and social effects*, (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1990), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Leonard Berkowitz and Karen Heimer Rogers, “A Priming Effect Analysis of Media Influences” in *Perspectives on Media Effects*, ed. Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillman (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986), 57.

there is both direct and indirect evidence that observation of aggression leads to aggression-related thoughts and ideas in viewers. ... These activated ideas can ... strengthen the belief that aggression is desirable or acceptable at times.<sup>22</sup>

## **Hypotheses for Investigation**

Gerbner says that viewers who develop a mean-world syndrome actually believe the world to be as violent as portrayed on television. This is reinforced, in what Gerbner calls resonance, when those viewers own environment is itself violent and threatening, a feature commonly found in low-income neighborhoods. Taking these elements together — the mean-world syndrome, the possibility of attitudinal effects of media violence, the justification of violence generally by media portrayals, and the legitimization of media violence — I argue that, as a result, viewers who fit into such a category, particularly those who watch violent programs predominantly, will be more likely to support the death penalty, itself a violent response to anti-social behavior. It is this media presentation of violence that leads to the hypotheses associated with this paper:

- H<sub>1</sub> — The more people are exposed to action/drama television shows, the more they support the death penalty.
- H<sub>2</sub> — The more people favor violent television shows, the more they support the death penalty.
- H<sub>3</sub> — The more people favor violent movies, the more they support the death penalty.
- H<sub>4</sub> — The greater the amount of television viewed, the more the support for the death penalty.
- H<sub>5</sub> — The less newspapers are read, the more the support for the death penalty.

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<sup>22</sup> Berkowitz, 64.

H<sub>6</sub> — The lower the consumption of news, the more the support for the death penalty.

These represent an extension of various effects studies linking exposure to violence in media to aggressive and violent behavior and are proposed as a reinforcement of Gerbner's work on cultivation, linking cultivation theory to the development of attitudes on the important social issues of the day.

H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, and H<sub>3</sub> are proposed as direct effects of media violence. Given the mean world syndrome, consumers of media violence will be likely to seek violent remedies and will have less inhibitions about the state seeking violent remedy. Because the television world is perceived to be a dangerous place, heavy viewers believe themselves to be much more in danger of personal attack than the real-world figures suggest.

H<sub>4</sub>, H<sub>5</sub>, and H<sub>6</sub> are extensions of the same line of argument. Higher network viewing and higher amounts of television watching generally are associated with the mean-world syndrome. Less reading of newspapers is an indicator of greater amounts of television viewing, a reinforcement of the mean world syndrome which fits into the category of Israel and Robinson's "different demographic";<sup>23</sup> those who read newspapers are more likely to have a much better and more accurate perception of the true state of social delinquency. The same holds true for the consumption of news, either by newspaper, radio, or television.

The concepts under investigation are support for the death penalty, exposure to action/drama type programs, exposure to violent television programs, exposure to violent movies, level of newspaper readership, amount of television viewing, and the level of news consumption. Support for the death penalty is the degree to which people will regard a sentence of punishment by

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<sup>23</sup> Israel

execution as an appropriate legal remedy. Violence is the use of force to damage or injure, or an abusive use of force. Violent television programs or movies are those that portray such violence routinely as part of their plots. Exposure to action/drama shows is the amount of shows that respondents watch each week. Exposure to violent television shows is the violence rating people attach to their favorite show. Exposure to violent movies is how violent people think their favorite movies are. The level of newspaper readership is the amount of time spent in the examination and consumption of the newspaper stories. The level of news consumption is the amount of time spent in the consumption of news stories from all media sources — radio, television, newspaper and news magazines.<sup>24</sup>

## **Methods**

### **Survey Design**

The data used in this study were part of the results from a telephone survey designed by graduate students of a large north-eastern university. A 2-day pretest resulted in several questions being dropped from the survey and others being modified. The final questionnaire contained a total of 108 questions. Nearly two-thirds of those questions reflected the eight individual research interests of the contributing students. Those interests ranged from media credibility to new technologies to the question of media influence on attitudes towards capital punishment. The final third of the questionnaire consisted of media use and demographic questions to be shared by all the researchers. Many of the questions asked respondents to respond along Likert-type scales. Only a few of the questions, on the media use portion of the survey, were open-ended.

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<sup>24</sup> For the purpose of this paper, the definition of news is covered by the content of news reports and current affairs programs but excludes talk shows.

These open ended questions were subsequently recoded. Tables 1a, 1b, 2 and 3 list the survey questions and response rates for demographics (1a and 1b), media variables and media violence respectively.

**INSERT TABLES 1a, 1b, 2, and 3 ABOUT HERE**

**Survey Questions for Study**

The items on the questionnaire pertinent to this study were related to support for capital punishment, usage of television and newspapers, and other media preferences. Respondents were asked to name their favorite film of the last year as well as the prime-time television program they would most likely watch during the week. The responses to these latter questions were all tabulated and a group of 50 communications students was asked to rate each item for its level of violence on a 1-7 scale. The data were arranged to give a violence measure for each television show and movie named..

In addition to the measures of violence derived for shows and movies, I have also created some additional measures from the survey data -- exposure to local news ( the number of days for reading a local newspaper by the time spent reading each day), exposure to national news (the number of days for reading a national newspaper by the time spent reading each day), and exposure to television (number of days spent watching by the time spent watching each day).

**Sampling**

The sample used in the telephone survey was drawn from a CD-ROM telephone directory (SelectPhone Northeast, 3rd. Edition, 1994) as follows:

All residential telephone numbers in exchanges that could be called by means of a local call from the university campus were included in the universe of numbers from which the sample would be drawn. This generated approximately

160,000 possible numbers. Starting at a random number from the top of the list, which was ordered numerically in ascending order, every 108th number was selected and placed in a spreadsheet file.

The resulting set of 1450 numbers were then placed in random order in the spreadsheet using a software randomize function.<sup>25</sup> From this resulting file, the 1450 telephone numbers were each assigned a unique I.D. number and placed in 29 replicates of fifty numbers. Each individual telephone number, together with its attendant I.D. number, was printed on a label and pasted to a Call Record Sheet. For every number which was answered, efforts were made to select a respondent by the Kish method to ensure an even distribution of men and women in the study.

The validity of this sample was tested by comparison with data drawn from the 1990 Census.<sup>26</sup> Data have been drawn from the census data set for all the zip codes listed in our survey data set on the following demographics : age, sex, race, educational attainment, household income and total number of persons. These data were compared with the data from our survey to give an indication of the representativeness of our sample, as shown in Table 4. The survey data fairly well matches the census data for gender, race and income but not as well for age. This is possibly because the CD-ROM source omitted transient populations, especially students whose phone numbers tend to be very changeable.

**INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE**

### **Data collection**

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<sup>25</sup> The randomize function in Microsoft Excel, used in this process, can be used to distribute a given set of numbers in an entirely random fashion.

<sup>26</sup> 1990 census of population and housing, summary tape file 3B, Washington DC : U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Data User Services Division,

Sixteen graduate students from a research methods class worked as telephone interviewers and seven graduate students from a survey research class worked as both interviewers and supervisors. All 23 students were monitored at least once and each interviewer evaluation was followed by debriefing the interviewer. At least 10% were verified to make sure that the completed interviews were completed and that the correct respondent was selected.

The field period ran from 2/25 to 3/10/95 (excluding 3/2). This translated to 35 four-hour shifts. With the exception of Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, each day consisted of three shifts; 9-1, 1-5 and 5-9. No interviewing was done on Sunday, Monday or Tuesday mornings.

The response rate was calculated using three formulae as follows: Procedural 0.77, Casro 0.47 and Upper Bound 0.55). Three replicates (each of 50 numbers) were opened during the pre-test accounting for 150 numbers. There were 329 refusals out of 1300 which was equivalent to 25%.

## **Results**

Table 5 lists the correlations between respondents' views on capital punishment and various media usage variables.

### **INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE**

The statistically significant correlations in Table 5 are few and modest. It is necessary therefore to control for other various demographic and media use variables to ensure that these are not the source of these correlations. Table 6 represents a hierarchical regression of demographics, media exposure and exposure to television and movie violence on attitudes toward capital punishment.



The regression analysis indicates clearly that the media violence variables are not correlated with attitudes to capital punishment. The only statistically significant items are exposure to television talk shows and National Public Radio news shows.

None of the hypotheses in this study are supported when control variables are used. While the correlations shown in Table 5 do show support for H<sub>4</sub>, H<sub>5</sub>, and H<sub>6</sub>, the subsequent hierarchical regression, however, shown in Table 6, shows that the only media variables statistically significant in respect of attitudes to capital punishment are exposure to talk shows and to NPR news shows. Given the typical coverage of death penalty issues in these fora, such significance is not implausible.

**INSERT TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE**

## **Discussion**

People differ in their attitudes toward the death penalty and other social issues. The source of these attitudes is clearly manifold — political, social, familial, ecclesial, economic. My interest in this paper was to investigate the role of the mass media in shaping attitudes toward the death penalty.

The whole role of television in society has been questioned over its fifty-year history. As DeFranco points out, such suspicions about the negative role of television have not been resolved by existing studies.<sup>27</sup> Many reports and studies have shown the reality of behavior being influenced by television.

Gerbner's<sup>28</sup> theory of cultivation, maintains that television, because of its ubiquity, dominates our social environment. Donnerstein<sup>29</sup>, Bandura<sup>30,31</sup> Hawkins

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27 De. Franco, Television On/Off.

28 Gerbner, "Epilogue."

29 Donnerstein, Question of Pornography.

30 Bandura, Social Cognitive Theory.

and Pingree, Anderson and Lorch<sup>32</sup> all agree that television content is a major component in any social effects theory

Signorelli<sup>33</sup> examined the role of violence in television effects studies and concluded that higher viewing is directly correlated with a belief that the world is a nasty place, the “mean world” syndrome. Howitt<sup>34</sup> found that the violence of programs viewed affected attitudes to violence amongst viewers. Israel and Robinson<sup>35</sup> found that those who chose violent television fare constituted a different demographic group.

Based on this body of research, this paper proposed the following hypotheses, none of which were supported by the results.

H<sub>1</sub> — The more people are exposed to action/drama television shows, the more they support the death penalty.

H<sub>2</sub> — The more people favor violent television shows, the more they support the death penalty.

H<sub>3</sub> — The more people favor violent movies, the more they support the death penalty.

H<sub>4</sub> — The greater the amount of television viewed, the more the support for the death penalty.

H<sub>5</sub> — The less newspapers are read, the more the support for the death penalty.

H<sub>6</sub> — The lower the consumption of news, the more the support for the death penalty.

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<sup>31</sup> Hawkins, Divergent Psychological Processes.

<sup>32</sup> Anderson, Children’s Understanding.

<sup>33</sup> Signorelli, Cultivation Analysis.

<sup>34</sup> Howitt, “Attitudes.”

<sup>35</sup> Israel, “Demographic Characteristics.”

Although the initial analysis showed some level of support for the hypotheses, such support disappeared except for exposure to NPR news and to television talk shows.

Taking the lack of support for the hypotheses first, it seems that there can be some explanation short of dismissing the theoretical base as flawed. In the first place, the relatively small number of respondents in the survey, taken together with the high non-response rate, gives reason to wonder as to whether the data adequately represents the population from which they are drawn. In view of the fact that the survey data set is somewhat different from the census data set in the area of education, the survey being skewed to the lesser educated in society, there are some concerns as to whether H<sub>4</sub>, H<sub>5</sub> and H<sub>6</sub> might be different with a more educated group in the data set.

The second possible reason for the lack of support for the hypotheses comes in part from inadequate measurement of the concept of exposure to violence. This is crucial to the study and a better way of operationalizing the variable is a prerequisite for any further research in this area. This error was further compounded by the actual question used in the survey which focused on prime-time television alone. In the case of movie violence, respondents were asked to limit their selection to movies seen in the last 12 months. In hindsight, these were unfortunate limitations in the survey instrument.

A further area of inadequacy in the questionnaire was the set of items used to measure news source dependence. An effort to construct a news index from the many news-related variables failed on the grounds of reliability. Responses then to questions relating to news source usage were not measuring the same thing for each question. It may be that different news sources have different effects among viewers.

This study does show that exposure to NPR news and to television talk shows is correlated with attitudes toward capital punishment. Such a finding is plausible. But the question arises as to why such disparate sources are connected on this one social issue. Answers, alas, are not readily forthcoming.

Possible answers lie in the relative liberalism of NPR, which does not shy away from in-depth coverage of important social issues -- against that, so does public television news which does not show as significant in the study. Talk shows are known for their wide range of topics and controversial stances, and perhaps it is the case that those exposed to talk shows are being exposed to a wider perspective on social issues than non-viewers. Both these results could also be the result of error.

On the other hand, the study does raise questions about Gerbner's approach to cultivation and the extent to which cultivation effects exist with regard to television. Historically, cultivation effects have been shown with variables controlled one at a time -- but what happens to cultivation theory when multivariate control is used in a hierarchical regression?

This study is limited in virtue of the survey instrument. Better operationalizing of variables in the future, together with strong indices for news source reliance, could mean that a data set might be exploited more fully. Further research is definitely indicated by the finding. A specially constructed survey could be used to test these same hypotheses and see if the theoretical underpinnings are, in fact, as I believe, sound. Any extension of cultivation theory needs to examine the role of influence on attitude and the general direction outlined in the research points in the right direction.

A new survey instrument should include tighter questions for distinctly defined variables, should allow for development of reliable indices for newspaper

exposure, television exposure, news source reliance, and violence exposure; this development of accurate, precise and detailed measurement of content type, especially of violent content, is a key issue in furthering this area of research.

Drawing on the understanding of cultivation as an effect of exposure to specific content rather than simply an effect of general content over time, it is clearly crucial to develop accurate coding schemes for television content.

Potential does exist in the analysis of existing Nielsen data in this light but would require significant amounts of content analysis in order to be able to distinguish the influence of different content types. In the absence of such data being made available, an alternative survey could provide rich material if allied with detailed content analyses of television programs.

The other dimension involved in possible future research is to attempt to isolate a series of potential attitudes which might be influenced by television exposure of various kinds. What role does television play in the development of attitudes towards various social issues e.g., social welfare, AIDS, unmarried parents, homelessness, mental illness, or unemployment to name but a few.

Cultivation theory has its supporters and critics. Gerbner's proposal that the ubiquitous nature of television has a profound effect on our society remains contentious. Further research to examine his findings, and to apply his research to salient social issues could make a crucial difference to the whole field of media effects studies. There are rich possibilities in this field along the lines outlined above.

**TABLES**

**Table 1a**

**Demographic Questions and Response Rates (a)**

<b>Questions<sup>36</sup></b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>N</b>
What is your age?	48.482	16.897	403

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<sup>36</sup> The precise text of these questions is listed in Appendix A.

**Table 1b**                      **Demographic Questions and Response Rates (b)**  
**Variables**                      **Valid Percent**

	male	52.4
	female	47.6
Race		
	white	94.7
	other	5.3
Educational Attainment		
	5th grade	.2
	7th grade	.5
	8th grade	1.0
	9th grade	1.2
	10th grade	1.7
	11th grade	2.7
	12th grade	6.5
	high school or ged	22.9
	some college no degree	22.1
	associates degree oc	8.7
	associates degree ac	3.7
	bachelors degree	15.7
	masters degree	10
	professional degree	1.2
	doctoral degree	1.7
Household Income		
	less than 5000	3
	5001 to 9999	4.6
	10000 to 14999	6.3
	15000 to 24999	15.8
	25000 to 34999	13.7
	35000 to 49999	19.1
	50000 to 74999	23.5
	75000 to 99000	8.7
	100000 or more	5.2
The death penalty should be permitted for certain crimes. Do you ...		
	strongly disagree	31.4
	disagree	39.7
	neutral	7.8
	agree	12.2
	strongly agree	8.9

**Table 2                      Media Use Questions and Response Rates**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>N</b>
How many days a week do you watch TV?	6.03	1.70	403
On those days, how much time do you spend watching?	171.12	110.21	402
How much time do you spend watching news or public affairs?	68.76	51.78	401
In the average week how many days do you watch morning news programs?	1.81	2.61	403
...news magazine shows	1.33	1.80	401
...talk shows?	1.34	1.95	402
...tabloid TV news like A Current Affair?	.83	1.47	403
...Public TV news like McNeil-Lehrer News Hour?	.99	1.68	401
In an average week how many news magazines do you read?	.59	.97	402
...how many days do you listed to a radio talk show?	1.62	2.42	403
...how many days do you listed to a public radio news?	1.09	2.14	401
Newspaper Exposure <sup>37</sup>	242.00	235.18	400
Television Exposure <sup>38</sup>	1070.58	814.09	402

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<sup>37</sup> This refers to Newspaper Exposure and was obtained by the product of time spend reading by the number of days spent reading.

<sup>38</sup> This refers to Television Exposure and was obtained by the product of time spend viewing by the number of days spent viewing.



**Table 3**                      **Media Violence Questions and Response Rates**

How many TV shows a week do you watch with crime in their plots? <sup>39</sup>	6.25	24.44	397
What one show are you most likely to watch on TV? <sup>40</sup>	2.53	1.19	337
What is your favorite movie of the last 12 months? <sup>41</sup>	3.33	1.46	296

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<sup>39</sup> The figures reported in six cases for 'the number of action/drama shows watched each week' seemed oddly out of place e.g. 90, 120, 150 or more shows and these have been recoded as system missing data. There were possibly miscoded by interviewers in terms of minutes watched instead of shows, hence the multiples of 30.

<sup>40</sup> These were converted to a violence index as described later in the text. The statistics here refer to that violence index.

<sup>41</sup> These were converted to a violence index as described later in the text. The statistics here refer to that violence index.

**Table 4. Crosstabulation of survey results and area census returns.**

Gender	Survey Results	Census Returns
Men	47.7%	48.1%
Women	<u>52.3</u>	<u>51.9</u>
	100%	100%
	(N=403)	(N=621,946)
Race		
White	94.0%	91.3%
African-American	4.0	6.4
Other**	<u>2.0</u>	<u>2.3</u>
	100%	100%
	(N=403)	(N=621,946)
Household Income		
< \$5,000	3.0%	4.6%
\$5,000 - \$9,999	4.6	9.6
\$10,000 - \$14,999	6.3	8.3
\$15,000 - 24,999	15.8	17.1
\$25,000 - \$34,999	13.7	16.5
\$35,000 - \$49,999	19.1	19.4
\$50,000 - \$74,999	23.5	16.6
\$75,000 - \$99,999	8.7	4.7
>\$100,000	<u>5.2</u>	<u>3.2</u>
	100%	100%
	(N=366)	(N=233,100)
Age		
18-19	2.2%	4.5%
20-24	5.2	10.7
25-29	5.0	11.3
30-34	8.7	11.9
35-39	11.9	10.5
40-44	13.2	9.3
45-49	11.4	7.3
50-54	7.2	5.8
55-59	5.5	5.6
60-64	6.5	5.8
65-69	8.2	5.6
70-74	6.2	4.4
75-79	4.7	3.3
80+	<u>4.2</u>	<u>3.8</u>
	100%	100%
	(N=403)	(N=465,256)

**TABLE 5** Correlations of Media Use Variables, Attitudes to Capital Punishment and Media Violence Variables

	Attitudes to capital punishment	Exposure to TV action/drama	Morning news programs	News magazine shows	TV talk shows	TV tabloid news	Public television news	News magazines	Radio talk shows	NPR shows	Exposure to violent TV	Exposure to violent movies	Exposure to television	Exposure to newspapers
Attitudes to capital punishment	—	-.09	.04	.01	.06	-.09	.15**	.07	.06	.27**	-.02	-.04	-.13**	.09
Exposure to TV action/drama		—	.01	.07	.03	.05	.00	.02	.07	.09	-.05	.03	.17**	.01
Morning news programs			—	.20**	.16**	.17**	.12*	-.03	.05	-.01	-.08	-.13*	.25**	.04
News magazine shows				—	.25**	.35**	.14**	.09	.07	-.10	.03	.03	.31**	.05
TV talk shows					—	.26**	-.04**	-.03	.12*	-.13**	.03	.09	.39**	-.02
TV tabloid news						—	.07	.02	-.02	-.13**	.07	-.08	.33**	.03
Public television news							—	.14**	.07	.38**	-.14	-.04	.04	.22**
News magazines								—	.11*	.17**	-.06	.04	-.06	.22**
Radio talk shows									—	.13**	-.06	.10	.07	.10*
NPR shows										—	-.05	-.02	-.17**	.20**
Exposure to violent TV											—	.12*	-.07	-.01
Exposure to violent movies												—	.02	-.03
Exposure to television													—	.10
Exposure to newspapers														—

\* p > .05      \*\* p > .01



**Table 6 Hierarchical Regression of Demographics, Media Exposure and Exposure to Violence on Attitudes to Capital Punishment**

Independent Variables	Standard Beta	R <sup>2</sup> Change	Total R <sup>2</sup>
<b>1 Demographics</b>		.04	.04
Age	.09		
Sex	.05		
Education	.01		
Income	-.01		
Race <sup>1</sup>	-.15		
<b>2 Media Variables</b>		.17	.21
NPR-shows	.39 <sup>c</sup>		
Television talk shows	.23 <sup>a</sup>		
News magazine shows	.12		
Newspaper exposure	.08		
Public television news shows	.05		
Television exposure	.03		
News magazines	-.02		
Tabloid news shows	-.08		
Radio talk shows	-.09		
Morning news programs	-.10		
TV news programs	-.11		
<b>3 Media Violence</b>		.01	.22
Exposure to violent Movies	.03		
Exposure to violent TV	.00		
Exposure to TV action/drama	-.10		

(a) p < .05

(b) p < .01

(c) p < .001

<sup>1</sup> This was dichotomized with white = 1.

## APPENDIX A

### Complete text of questions/statements as asked:

1. The death penalty should be permitted for certain crimes. (Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree)
2. In the average week, how many days do you watch television?
3. On days that you watch television, about how much time do you spend watching?
4. On days when you watch TV, about how much time do you spend watching news or public affairs programs?
5. In an average week, about how many TV shows do you watch that involve crime in their plots or could be called action-adventure?
6. Between the hours of 7 and 11 at night, what one show are you most likely to watch on TV?
7. Of the movies you've seen in the last 12 months, which is your favorite?
8. Now I'd like to ask you how often you watch different types of TV programming. In an average week, how many days do you watch
  - ... Morning news programs
9. ... National network news
10. ... Local
11. ... News magazine shows
12. ... Talk shows
13. ... Tabloid TV news like A Current Affair
14. ... Public TV news shows like the McNeil-Lehrer News Hour
15. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about newspapers. In an average week, how many days do you read a daily local newspaper?
16. On days that you read a local newspaper, about how much time do you spend reading it?
17. In an average week, how many days do you read a national newspaper?
18. On days that you read a national newspaper, about how much time do you spend reading it?
19. In an average week, about how many news magazines do you read?
20. In an average week, how many days do you listen to a public radio news program, like NPR's Morning Edition or All Things Considered?
21. How old were you on your last birthday?
22. Now can you tell me your race?
23. How much school have you completed? (
24. Now I'd like to ask you about your family's income. I am going to read a list of income categories. Which category represents the total combined income of all members of this family during the past 12 months. This includes money from jobs, net income from business, farm or rent, pensions, dividends, interest, Social Security payments and any other money income received by members of this family who are 15 years of age or older.
25. Are you male or female?