

# **Cultivation or Resistance? Testing Gender Perceptions of TV Viewers in Mexico<sup>1</sup>**

*Juan Enrique Huerta Wong* \*

*Received 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2007; approved 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2007*

## **Abstract**

This paper tested cultivation approach in Monterrey, Mexico. Specifically, the research question asks for the relationship between television exposure in the Monterrey metropolitan area and the social constructions about the women social distribution, vulnerability and stereotypes. The independents variables are quantity, type of program and origin of program on television exposure. Cultivation studies have been consistently supported in the USA, but they lack of evidence in Latin America. Data from a phone survey showed that television exposure impact is weak, suggesting that cultivation principles are hardly to extrapolate to audiences abroad from the USA.

**Key words:** Gender Perceptions. TV. TV-Viewers.

---

\* Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey. Audiovisual Media and Globalization in North America Research Program. Email: [jehuerta@itesm.mx](mailto:jehuerta@itesm.mx)

Within mass media studies, the social construction of reality perspective has been called the cultivation hypothesis (Potter & Chang, 1990, p. 313). According to its traditional approach, television is a telling-stories system cultivating the values reflected in its messages (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1986, p. 18; Morgan & Shanahan, 1997). Television is an efficient tool mainstreaming how things are, how they should be and why (Gerbner, 1993, 1996).

According to Morgan & Shanahan (1997) cultivation process theory is trying to show some consequences of a cultural industry celebrating consumption, individualism, power and status quo. Originally, this theoretical approach was conceived as a research strategy separated in three kinds of analyses. The first one, institutional process analysis, asks for the systematic pressures and the economical (and political) specifications affecting the media system, including how messages are selected, produced and distributed. The second one, messages system analysis, collects data about the unbalanced media contents in violence stereotypes, gender roles, minority people, occupations and related matters. The third one, cultivation analysis, explores how television contributes to the audiences conceptions about the real world (Morgan & Shanahan, 1997, p. 3). In spite of this broad design, there are no frequent holistic analyses including the three phases of the whole strategy; more specifically, the evidence is accumulated in the strategies 2 and 3.

A typical hypothesis in this approach considers television exposure as the independent variable and the cultivation (an estimation or belief about something in real life) as the dependent variable (Potter & Chang, 1990). There is a relative preeminence of studies considering violence as the dependent variable (Gosselin, DeGuise & Paquete, 1997; Sander, 1997). Other studies have examined family beliefs (Fudge Albada, 2001; Olson & Douglas, 1997), gender relations (Holbert, Shah & Kwak, 2003), political orientations (Grosswiler, 1997; Morgan & Shanahan, 1991), alien issues (Sparks, Nelson & Campbell, 1997), vulnerable people orientations (Sotirovic, 2003), environmental issues (Shanahan, Morgan & Stenbjerre, 1997), and professional stereotypes (Chory Assad & Tamborin, 2003; Valkenburg & Patiwael, 2000). Systematically, data have supported the relationship among TV consumption and conservative opinions, beliefs and attitudes.

---

1. Author wants to say thanks to Jose Carlos Lozano, director of the Audiovisual Media and Globalization in North America Research Program, and his GRA's, who supported the field's work of this study.

Morgan & Shanahan (1991) found that politically repressed people reported that people had to be obedient with the political system and be quiet with their political opinion in a common environment. Watching television was negatively associated with showing political attitudes, a typical expression of the liberal movements. Grosswiler (1997) tested the exposure to different media and the political position derived of common sense sentences. This study revealed that watching television was positively associated with a conservative political position, whereas reading newspapers was associated with a liberal one. Consistently, heavy viewers have shown a tendency to think about poverty as an individuals' matter, not a social issue (Grosswiler, 1997; Morgan & Shanahan, 1991; Sotirovic, 2003).

The hypothesis that television exposure is a factor influencing how reality is perceived has been tested through a plethora of data collection techniques including nonexperimental (Sparks, Nelson & Campbell, 1997; Sotirovic, 2003) and experimental designs (Mares, 1996). Also cultivation studies have been supported using several audiences, including teenagers (Morgan & Shanahan, 1991) and college students (Potter & Chang, 1990).

Beyond data collection techniques, cultivation theory proponents have specially focused in how to measure the variable of television exposure. The classic approach has been that global content on television is uniform (Gerbner, Morgan & Shanahan, 1997). Consequently, an item could be simply validated as an exposure measure, for example, "please tell how many hours you watch television in a common day". Typically, this kind of data could be analyzed with T-test or ANOVA procedures, obtaining categories in the independent variable as light and heavy viewers, or light, medium and heavy viewers.

More sophisticated indexes have been constructed to measure the independent variable. Some studies have tested recall capacity in respect to what the viewer watched during the day, the afternoon or the week before (Shrum, 1997). Other studies have asked for the frequency of exposure to a specific type of programming (Huessmann, Lagerspetz & Eron, 1984) or specific programs watched each week, some weeks, the majority of the weeks or never (Reeves as quoted by Potter, 1991).

Other measures for television exposure variable include the sum of hours of "TV viewed on an average weekday and an average weekend day" (Hawkins, Pingree, & Adler, as quoted by Potter & Chang, 1990); the average of two measures, "amount of television watched yesterday (a weekday) and amount of television usually watched on an average weekday (Rubin,

Perse, & Taylor, as quoted by Potter and Chang, 1990); or the average of the hours spent watching television “before noon”, between noon and 6 PM”, “between 6 and 10 PM” and “after 10 PM” (Mares, 1996).

Statistical analyses have increasingly become more sophisticated. Beyond total exposure, more evidence is consistently showing that is not global exposure, but exposure to specific types of television what explains the cultivation process. Holbert, Shah & Kwak (2003) found that the exposure to liberal drama programs/sitcoms was positively and strongly related to a sympathetic perspective about women’s rights. Also, they found that the exposure to conservative drama programs/sitcoms was negatively and strongly related to the same perspective. Sparks, Nelson & Campbell (1997) tested TV viewers’ beliefs in paranormal phenomena, finding that general TV exposure did not work as a predictor of these beliefs, but supportive program exposure did.

Potter & Chang (1990) tested in college students 5 types of measuring television exposure: 1) total exposure, 2) exposure to program types, 3) exposure to type controlling for total exposure, 4) proportional exposure among program types, and 5) weighted proportions (proportion for each viewing type multiplied by the total number of hours of weekly television viewed). Their results indicated that the less successful way to operationalize television exposure was the total hours of exposure. The best way was a proportional exposure measurement. Generally, all the alternative ways to operationalize were better predictors of cultivation measurements than the total hours dedicated to watch TV. Morgan & Shanahan’s (1997) suggested that because it is difficult to separately analyze TV and other social influences, the best way to test the variables in a multivariate analysis is partial correlation.

Cultivation studies lack of support in other regions, mainly in Latin America. Huerta, Garagarza & Villegas (2000) failed to support the hypothesis that heavy viewers in Monterrey, Mexico, would trend to easily accept legitimate violence. Conducting a phone survey study, they did not find differences between light and heavy viewers in relation with violence world-views, a typical finding in cultivation studies. In opposition, Morgan & Shanahan (1991) tested cultivation studies in Argentina assuming that people in all America<sup>2</sup> have consumed so USA’s television contents that cultivation findings may easily be extrapolated. However, Gerbner (1996) suggest that because history and identity is not the same in anywhere, it is needed to test what happen when viewers in other countries expose to domestic and USA’s

---

2. In this paper, “America” is used as a continent’s name, and USA is used as a country’s name.

exposure. A recent study (Huerta, Lozano & Zuniga, 2005) show that imported, but not domestic violent contents in television influence Mexicans. Those findings suggest that cultivation seems a USA phenomenon because the contents of USA television, and support the hypothesis that specific types and no global exposure cultivate television's lessons on viewers.

There is a growing corpus of evidence showing the unbalanced treatment to gender roles in television contents. Hardwood & Anderson (2002) found that prime-time television is mainly composed of males' characters. If they appear, females are consistently represented in traditional roles (Elasmar, Hasegawa & Brain, 1999), even in educational children shows (Barner, 1999). On television's world, strength and power are represented as male characteristics and grace is represented as a female one. Masculinity is represented as hyper-masculinity, or coldness and cynical attitudes (Scharrer, 2001). Even though in Mexico data is scarce about stereotypes issues, a few studies show that *telenovelas* (Latino soap operas) tended to show sex stereotypical roles (Quintero Ulloa & López Islas, 1999).

However, evidence in different countries is not conclusive about how viewers establish relationships with other people and the television in front of the TV set. European studies (Morley, 1992; Rogge & Jensen, 1992) found that the bread-winner role influences the domestic power relationships. In Mexico, boys exposed to *Pokemon*, a *cartoon anime* where male characters were stronger than female, assumed a natural male-centered power (Cerdeña Cristerna, 1998). However, other studies did not support such male-centered hypothesis. Studies conducted in Colombia (Muñoz, 1992), Venezuela (Barrios, 1992), Chile (Fuenzalida, 1992), Mexico (Huerta-Wong, 2003), China and India (Lull, 1997) showed the relative power of the housewives in managing the remote control, with particular emphasis on watching *telenovelas*. Those findings are consistent with the principles of cultivation process, whose proponents have reported that less powerful groups are indeed negotiating or refusing mainstreaming ideas, including a male-centered perspective.

In addition, gender studies suggest that traditional roles of gender relations are not itself oppressive in Latin America. Carmona (2003) measured gender attitudes as a 35 item-scale related to male/female responsibilities to care for children, domestic work and economic roles. Her findings showed that females assumed more traditional roles than males. There was some balance between genders in their perspectives about issues of children care or even domestic/not domestic work. However, respondents (especially females) stated that the bread-winner role is a male job. More than gender, education accounted for more variance of social constructions of gender.

In summary,

- There is plenty of evidence supporting that television exposure influences social construction of reality among viewers.
- The lesson of television about gender is that gender relationships are traditional and male-centered.
- Data have suggested that mainstreaming lessons of television are not uniform but especially concentrated in some types of programming and specific shows.
- Cultivation studies are scarce in Latin America, specifically in Mexico, although the available evidence suggests that culture play a role in the relationship between television and viewers.

This paper objective is to answer the following research question:

RQ1. How television exposure is associated to social constructions of gender issues, as stereotypes, females' representation and females' vulnerability?

## 1. Method<sup>3</sup>

Variables:

### Independent variable

Television exposure has three components. The first one is the quantity of exposure, computed as the average of the sum of hours watched in an average weekday and on weekends, using a similar daily scale as Mares (1996). The second one is the exposure type, or the frequency of hours spent in watching the main types of programming transmitted by open Mexican TV on a weekly basis. The third one is the origin of the television program, or the frequency of hours spent in watching the main types of programming depending on whether the show has a Mexican or imported origin.

### Dependent variables

DV 1. Stereotypes, or the attitudes toward the moral/body strengths, intelligence, fidelity, and work moral of males and females.

DV 2. Representation, or the mean of four representations, measured in percentages: females, females as family leaders, married females on the job market, and single-mothers. Cultivation analyses showed the sub representa-

---

3. Although only some guidelines about instrument and variables are shown here, a complete operationalization and scales can be requested for free by e-mail to the author.

tion of specific populations by TV viewers, potentially influencing their presence and status.

DV 3. An important part of females' under representation is the idea of females as victims. According to the second-order cultivation analysis, this is a cognitive level of viewers' appropriation. A typical variable in this theoretical perspective is the females' vulnerability index, or the difference between the estimations of females as violence perpetrators and females as victims. (Gerbner, 1997).

#### Control variables

Sex, education and age were used as control variables. Education is measured as completed education degrees (elementary, junior high, high school, bachelor and graduate).

## **2. Population, sample and procedure**

This paper reports a phone survey conducted in the summer 2004, in exploring the relationship between television exposure and social construction of family and gender relationships in Monterrey, Mexico.

A multiple-stage process was followed to select a random sample. The relative anarchy of the telephone companies and people contracting telephone lines made especially difficult to get the final respondents. The exact population is unknown, and estimated to be near to 543 thousand household with their telephone listed in the local phone book. There are two companies in the metropolitan area of Monterrey, but just Telmex offer to their clients a phone book. As a consequence, the population is not composed of the total phone users in Monterrey, just Telmex's clients. The white pages book consists of 1223 pages, each of 4 columns with 111 phone numbers as average. Each name was considered as an entry and each phone number as a household. Random sample procedures were established in choosing page numbers, columns, and the final phone number where each questionnaire was administered. A list containing 500 phone numbers was used as the original sample, but after discarding businesses and non existent phone numbers, the final sample was composed of 420 phone numbers.

In the gathering of data participated graduate research assistants (GRA's) from the Tecnológico de Monterrey's Audiovisual Media and Globalization in North America Research Program. They were trained and their field work was supervised. Pilot tests were run until the research assistants understood the process.

### 3. Results

The total number of answered questionnaires was 401. Despite cautions as calling at different hours, the majority (62%) of respondents were females. Age appeared negatively skewed, and the average age was 39 years, with a mode of 18 years. Years of school was a bimodal variable, marking junior high ( $n=91$ , 22.7%) and bachelor ( $n=91$ , 22.7%) as modes.

People in Monterrey reported to be heavy viewers ( $m=3.6$ ,  $sd=2.1$ ), a finding consistent with a similar study conducted in 1999 (Huerta et al., 2000). Domestic programming ( $M = 5.6$ ,  $SD = 6.4$ ) was preferred, mainly *telenovelas* ( $x=3.08$ ,  $s=5.1$ ). Local news programs ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 3.4$ ) were also watched more frequently than national news ( $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 3$ ). (Table 1).

Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency tests were run by testing the measure of stereotypes. This measure asks for the respondents' opinion (measured in a scale 1-10) toward strength, fidelity, health, intelligence, and work capacity between males and females. The result (.737) shows the internal consistency is good.

**Table 1.** Television exposure.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mexican movies	401	1.21	2.140
American movies	401	2.25	3.745
Mexican sit coms/comedy	401	1.36	1.766
American sit coms	401	.98	2.451
National news	401	2.95	3.028
Local news	401	3.79	3.453
Telenovelas	401	3.08	5.100
Exposure to Mexican programming	401	5.6441	6.40970
Exposure to American programming	401	3.2351	4.85743
Daily index exposure	401	3.6242	2.14367
Valid N (listwise)	401		



A similar test was run by testing the 4-item scale on representation of females living in Mexico, females as family leaders, family on the job market, and single-mothers. The result (.725) shows the internal consistency also good enough to use the scale.

Four partial correlation coefficients were computed to determine the degree of relationship for television exposure and stereotypes, and representation of genders on respondents. Independent variables were global exposure, types and origin of television. Dependent variables were males' assessment, females' assessment (stereotypes), females' representation and females' vulnerability index. Sex, education and age worked as control variables.

There was no association between watching television and women representation, or between watching television and women vulnerability index (Table 2). The findings indicated that watching television is associated with a positive men assessment ( $R = .207, p < .01$ ), more strongly than a positive women (.107,  $p < .05$ ) assessment. Also Mexican but not American programming was related to men (.133,  $p < .01$ ) and women (.101,  $p < .05$ ) assessments. Other significant findings were the positive associations between Mexican movies and women assessments (.130,  $p < .01$ ) and Mexican comedies with men assessments (.131,  $p < .01$ ). Otherwise, there is scarce relationship between the programs that participants reported to watch more frequently and those influencing their perceptions about men and women.

#### **4. Discussion**

How television exposure is associated to social constructions of gender issues, as stereotypes, females' representation and females' vulnerability? Partial correlations showed that global exposure is positively associated with men and women assessments, but not with women's representation or vulnerability.

These findings suggest that women matter, and people watching television has good ideas about them. In addition, the finding that Mexican programming was positively associated with gender construction, but not USA programming, suggest that greater exposure to Mexican programming, better notions about the Mexicans themselves, no matter if they are men or women. Those notions are best supported by movies and comedy programs. However, men and women assessments were not evenly supported by the exposure to the same programming types, and such difference matters. Mexican movies supported good assessments of women; Mexican comedy programs support-

**Table 2.** *Partial correlations controlling for sex, education and age.*

	Females' vulnerability index	Females representation	Males' assessment	Females assessment
Telenovelas	-.015	.020	.091	.044
Mexican movies	.041	-.037	.075	.130(**)
American movies	.096	.020	.085	.089
Mexican comedy	.024	-.020	.131(**)	.080
American sit coms	.029	-.079	.062	.021
National news	-.019	-.040	.004	.008
Local news	.059	-.036	.151(**)	.109(*)
Mexican programming	.009	-.002	.133(**)	.101(*)
American programming	.091	-.024	.098	.081
Daily exposure	-.019	-.024	.207(**)	.107(*)
N	401	401	401	401

\* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

ed good assessments of men. Whereas the presence (and production) of Mexican movies is marginal, Mexican comedy programs support a huge AAA industry exporting programs to all the Hispanic world, including the Latin markets in the USA. Comedy programs are plenty of chauvinist jokes and mocking representations of women, particularly housewives. That cause could explain why watching television is not associated with negative assessments of women at all, but it is more directly associated with positive men assessments.

There are some theoretical implications to discuss here. First, despite of the last discussion, cultivation process is not clear in this study. There is no association with the two variables taken from the literature, and more detail is needed to explain the association with men and females assessment. Moreover, these findings are consistent with a similar study confronting cultivation in violence worldviews as dependent variables (Huerta et al., 2000).

Besides they are consistent with other studies described above that suggest that Latinos and people in other less industrialized countries as China and India are resistant to power manifestations, not just from TV lessons, but also in the domestic reception sphere. Second, those findings suggest that cultivation studies are hardly extrapolated to other audiences and countries. Despite of the globalization movement and industry standardization, identities seem matter in understand media contents. Third, this study did not show great differences between global exposure and specific programs. One reason could be the lack of clear cultivation effects on audiences. However, this study is an example that beyond global exposure, test specific programming types convey a more accurate picture of what happens in audience issues.

Some clear limitations to this study point to how independent and dependent variables were measured. Scale variables were built in order to run partial correlations, but a categorization of light and heavy viewers could reveal some other details. However, from the author's point of view, a former huge corpus of literature suggest that partial correlation is the minimal powerful test to review the relationships between TV exposure and social constructions of reality. Nonreported bivariate correlations and regressions were also run. The former tests were run to see if correlation coefficients were greater without control for demographics; the latter tests were run because the absent of association between two variables may suggest the presence of intervenient variables and the need for structural models deeply explaining the relation between a group of variables. Nonsignificant results seem confirm that cultivation is hardly to extrapolate, at least, to this sample. Other limitations include the absent of experimental conditions. Indeed, nonexperimental studies have been more frequent than experimental, and cultivation studies have been traditionally supported by Gerbner, Morgan and their colleagues, who specialized in that kind of designs. Other limitations to this study could include the use of phone surveys in less industrialized countries. However, private companies have compared phone and house-to-house surveys in electoral campaigns in Monterrey, reaching similar results, and validating their broad use.

## Bibliography

---

- COOPER, C. (1997). Women Warriors. **In:** *The Village Voice*, 42 (22), S27.
- DIETZ, T. L. (1998). An examination of violence and gender role portrayals in video games: implications for gender socialization and aggressive behavior. **In:** *Sex roles*, 38 (5/6). pp, 425-442.
- FUDGE A. K. (2000). The public and private dialogue about the American family on television. **In:** *Journal of Communication*, 50 (4). pp, 79-110.
- GERBNER, G. (1996). The hidden side of television violence. En G. Gerbner, H. Mowlana & H. Shiller. **In:** *Invisible crisis*. pp. 27-34. USA: Westview Press.
- GERBNER, G. (1993). Television violence: The power and the peril. **In:** J. HUMEZ & G. DINES, *Gender, race and class in the media*, pp. 547-557. USA: Sage Publications Inc.
- GERBNER, G.; GROSS, L.; Morgan, M. & Signorielli, N. (1986). Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process. **In:** J. BRYANT & D. ZILLMAN (eds.). **In:** *Perspectives on media effects*. pp. 17-42. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- GOSSELIN, A.; DE GUISE, J. & PAQUETTE, G. (1997). Violence on Canadian Television and some of its cognitive effects. **In:** *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 22, pp. 143-160.
- GROSSWILER, P. (1997). A Q Methodology Study of Media and Ideology Orientations: Exploring Medium Theory, Critical Theory and Cultural Studies. **In:** *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 22, pp. 261-287.
- HUERTA WONG, J. E. & CERDA CRISTERNA, A. (2003). *Qué y cómo se ve televisión en México* [What and how (and what does it mean) Mexicans watch television]. Mexico: Anuario Coneicc IX.
- HUERTA WONG, J. E.; GARAGARZA RAMOS, I. & VILLEGAS LÓPEZ, R. (1999). Percepción de la violencia en televidentes del área metropolitana de Monterrey. **In:** *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 36. pp. 199-226.
- HUERTA WONG, J. E. (2004). Dominación y negociación entre géneros en el acto de ver televisión. **In:** *Comunicación y Sociedad: Nueva época*, 1 [Mexico].
- LÓPEZ ISLAS, J. & CERDA CRISTERNA, A. (1999). Violencia en la televisión mexicana: Un análisis del contenido de los treinta programas con

- mayor nivel de audiencia. **In:** *Hiper-textos*, 2. Retrieved October 2, 2004, at <http://www.mty.itesm.mx/dcic/hiper-textos>.
- MARES, M. (1996). The role of source confusions in television's cultivation of social reality judgments. **In:** *Human Communication Research*, 23 (2), pp. 278-297.
- MORGAN, M. & SHANAHAN, J. (1991). Television and the cultivation of political attitudes in Argentina. **In:** *Journal of Communication*, 41 (1), pp. 88-103.
- MORGAN, M. & SHANAHAN, J. (1997). Two decades of cultivation research: An appraisal and meta-analysis. **In:** *Communication year-book*, 20, pp. 1-45.
- POTTER, W. J. & CHANG, I. C. (1990). Televisión exposure measures and the cultivation hypothesis. **In:** *Journal of broadcasting & electronic media*, 34(3), pp. 313- 333.
- SHANAHAN, J.; MORGAN, M. & STENBJERRE, M. (1997). Green or Brown? Television and the Cultivation of Environmental Concern. **In:** *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 41 (2), pp. 305-323.
- SHRUM, L. J. (1997). The role of source confusions in cultivation effects may depend on processing strategy: A comment on Mares (1996). **In:** *Human Communication Research*, 24 (2), pp. 349-358.
- SIGNORIELLI, N. & KAHLBERG, S. (2001). Television's world of work in the nineties. **In:** *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45 (1), pp. 4-22.
- SOTIROVIC, M. (2003). How individuals explain social problems: The influences of media use. **In:** *Journal of Communication*, 53 (1), pp. 122-137.
- SPARKS, G. G.; NELSON, C. L. & CAMPBELL R. G. (1997). The relationship Between Exposure to Televised Messages About Paranormal Phenomena and Paranormal Beliefs. **In:** *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 41, pp. 345-359.