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)
    - 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1940</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>~1930s The Frankfurt School</td>
<td>1941 Office of War Information; persuasion studies</td>
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<td>1938 Wells's War of the Worlds</td>
<td>1945 Allport and Postman rumor study</td>
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<td>1955 Two-step flow</td>
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# The Effects Debate

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<tr>
<th>Era</th>
<th>1960</th>
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<td>~1960–1975</td>
<td>Klapper's <em>The Effects of Mass Communication</em> reinforced theory</td>
<td>~1960s ▲ Social cognitive theory; symbolic interaction; social construction of reality; British cultural studies</td>
<td>2012 ▲ New questions emerge: Does Facebook change the meaning of friendship? Is there a <em>Will and Grace</em> effect?</td>
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<td>~1970s</td>
<td>Cultivation analysis</td>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>Agenda setting; Surgeon General's Report on Television and Social Behavior</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Uses and gratifications; dependency theory</td>
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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

• To understand mass communication theory, recognize that:

  ➢ There is no one mass communication theory

  ➢ Theories are often borrowed from other fields of science

  ➢ They are human constructions

  ➢ Theories are dynamic
A Short History of Mass Communication Theory

- The Era of Mass Society Theory
  - Mass society theory
  - Hypodermic needle/Magic bullet theory
  - Grand theory
A Short History of Mass Communication 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
A Short History of Mass Communication Theory

- 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 the media”

- Our dependence on media and how this alters audience behavior
Dependence 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 (importance) of the specific information-delivery functions served by medium”; 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**
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