Television exposure, feelings of fear and confidence in the United States government: Is the government using media to create a culture of fear?

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Television exposure, feelings of fear and confidence in the United States government: Is the government using media to create a culture of fear?

Abstract
This study examines the relation between television media and fear as it pertains to the trust or confidence in the United States government. Using the fundamental hypothesis of cultivation theory (i.e., heavy viewers of television are more likely to believe that the world is a “mean and scary” place), the relation between the amount of television one watches, one's corresponding level of fear, and one's level of confidence in each branch of the United States federal government is examined. It is hypothesized that fear will have a mediating effect on the relation between heavy television consumption and respondents' confidence in each branch of the federal government. It is further proposed that a "culture of fear" is deliberately created by the media and government as a means of social control.

Keywords
Sociology, Public and Social Welfare, Mass Communications, Political Science, General
TELEVISION EXPOSURE, FEELINGS OF FEAR AND CONFIDENCE IN THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT: IS THE GOVERNMENT USING MEDIA TO CREATE A CULTURE OF FEAR?

BY

Janine Marie Soule

B.S. Business Administration, University of New Hampshire, 2005

THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
In Justice Studies

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August 10, 2006
August 10, 2006
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How fortunate for leaders, that the masses do not think.

– Adolph Hitler
“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

– President Franklin D. Roosevelt

“Today’s terrorists can strike at any place, at any time, and with a wide variety of weapons.”

– President George W. Bush

“The one means that wins the easiest victory over reason – terror and force.”

– Adolph Hitler
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TELEVISION EXPOSURE, FEELINGS OF FEAR AND CONFIDENCE IN THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT: IS THE GOVERNMENT USING MEDIA TO CREATE A CULTURE OF FEAR?

by

Janine Soule

University of New Hampshire, September, 2006

This study examines the relation between television media and fear as it pertains to the trust or confidence in the United States government. Using the fundamental hypothesis of cultivation theory (i.e., heavy viewers of television are more likely to believe that the world is a "mean and scary" place), the relation between the amount of television one watches, one's corresponding level of fear, and one's level of confidence in each branch of the United States federal government is examined. It is hypothesized that fear will have a mediating effect on the relation between heavy television consumption and respondents' confidence in each branch of the federal government. It is further proposed that a "culture of fear" is deliberately created by the media and government as a means of social control.
INTRODUCTION: THE ONLY THING WE HAVE TO FEAR IS FEAR ITSELF

The United States is a nation gripped by fear. Fear of the unknown, fear of crime, fear of terrorism. This begs the question, why are we so fearful? Beyond this, are our fears legitimate? Or are they merely the sinister creations of politicians, government agencies and the media employed for the purpose of social control? Surely the latter is impossible – or is it? Indeed, there are dangers that exist in society that the prudent citizen should be aware of and take all reasonable measures to avoid. However, the anxiety, distrust, and willingness to tolerate limitations to our civil liberties and freedoms that seem to pervade our nation may be attributed to an unjustified fear created by the workings of the government and mass media.

The potential for increased social control and reliance on the state offers a very compelling motive for the deliberate creation of a “culture of fear” by governments, to be discussed in greater detail later. “Fearful people are more dependent, more easily manipulated and controlled. They may accept and even welcome repression if it promises to relieve their insecurities” (Gerbner, 1981, pp 5-6). If even a small degree of social control can be achieved through this “culture of fear,” surely there is motive to implement such measures.
The purpose of this study is to determine the relation, if any, between television media and fear as it pertains to the trust or confidence in the United States government. Specifically, data regarding respondents' television viewing habits, levels of fear and levels of confidence in each branch of the federal government will be examined.

This research will not only add to the existing body of literature on the topic of fear and media influence, but will contribute uniquely in that it will provide insight into the effect of this fear on confidence in the federal government. Based on extensive research and review of the literature in preparation for this study it is believed that this relation has not yet been investigated at length.

If it becomes evident that exposure to television is significantly related to an increase in fear among populations and consequently, an increase in confidence in their government to make decisions for them, it is troubling to think of the possible ramifications of such fear — how far would a population in fear be willing to go to protect itself? What rights would they be willing to give up? Surely it is a frightening thought to imagine a nation sacrificing its constitutional rights on the basis of irrational fears created by the collusion of the government and media.
Cultivation theory is a concept that focuses on the influence of the mass media on the attitudes and perceptions of reality of people. According to cultivation theory, those who watch four or more hours per day are labeled heavy television viewers, while those who view less than four hours per day are light viewers (Gerbner, 1976b). Heavy viewers are exposed to more violence and therefore are affected by what cultivation theory calls “Mean World Syndrome,” the idea that the world is a far more violent, mean and scary place than reality would indicate (Gerbner, 1976b).

According to Gerbner, the overuse of television is creating a homogeneous and fearful populace. As audiences rely on the media for information and interpretation, there is a tendency to believe more in the reality of media fictions than in the objective reality surrounding them. The question then becomes, is the media portrayal of the world at large an accurate representation? Anyone who has watched television for even a brief period of time could tell us that the answer is a resounding “no.”

Gerbner’s theory of cultivation states that heavy exposure to mass media, namely television, creates and cultivates attitudes more consistent with a media conjured version of reality than with what actual reality is — cultivation therefore is the long-term socialization and “enculturation” of
the television audience in learning, understanding and accepting the various characters, roles and behaviors people play in society (Gerbner & Gross, 1976b). The cultivation theory asserts that heavy viewers' attitudes are cultivated primarily by what they watch on television.

Gerbner and Gross illustrate cultivation theory by describing a cave-dweller whose only connection to the outside world is through a television in his cave. They assert that if one's knowledge of the real world is based exclusively on the images and stories seen on television, it would stand to reason that one's perceptions and understanding about the real world would be largely derived from their view of television-based reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976a).

In regards to the current study, this theory of cultivation is most relevant as it pertains to television violence and fear-inducing media. Cantor (2002) examined the effects of fear-inducing mass media and concluded that "the fear induced by mass media exposure is often long lasting, with sometimes intense and debilitating effects for its audiences" (p. 289). This study also revealed a variety of intense reactions, including generalized anxieties, specific fears, unwanted recurring thoughts, and disturbances in eating and sleeping.

In addition, research on media violence has suggested that exposure to violent content on television can lead viewers to perceive life as scary, dangerous, and fearful. Cultivation theory states that heavy
viewers of television will perceive the world as a "mean and scary place." Television often distorts crime by over-representing more severe, intentional, and gruesome incidents. Due to this, audiences tend to believe that such incidents are far more frequent, thus misperceiving reality (Heath & Gilbert, 1996).

**Mass Media & the Culture of Fear**

According to Altheide and other media scholars, the mass media (specifically television media) are the principal contributors to the discourse of fear that pervades the popular culture today. "Fear has become a staple of popular culture, ranging from fun to dread. Americans trade on fear. News agencies report it, produce entertainment messages, and promote it" (Altheide, 1999, p. 480). Beyond that, police and other formal agencies of social control market it. Audiences watch it, read it, and according to numerous mass entertainment spokespersons, demand it. It is virtually impossible to turn on a television set without bearing witness to a program in which the central issue is violent, brutal, or fear-inducing. It is believed by some that when a sense of fear is established in a population, it is the government that reaps the benefits. A "heightened sense of risk and insecurity is more likely to increase acquiescence to and dependence upon established authority, and to legitimize its use of force (Dowling, 1986, p. 20)." Certainly this submission
to authority is not the standard for all people, as not every citizen merely complies with tyranny, even in an atmosphere of fear (people engage in a great variety of actions to undermine the illegitimate authority of governments perpetuating such fear – civil disobedience, protests, lobbying, among others). However, past research has shown that there is a tendency for heavy viewers of television to "give in to authority, as they are more likely to show bias against civil liberties" (Potter, 1999, p. 36). Previous research has also revealed that heavy viewers of television programming are more likely to exhibit a greater level of fear. It has also been suggested that a general sense of fear may be a "natural reaction" to the images that are depicted on television every day (Dowler, 2003, p. 120).

"Culture of fear" is a term proposed in a variety of sociological theses, which argue that feelings of fear and anxiety predominate in contemporary public discourse and relationships, changing how we relate to one another as individuals and as democratic agents (Heath & Gilbert, 1996). Heath and Gilbert found that "although media messages only affect some of the people some of the time, the mass media definitely plays a role in stimulating fear in society, in general" (p. 385).

In many countries, this culture of fear is employed as a means of social control. Governments use mass communication and the media to keep the population in fear, carefully crafting public opinion toward the...
interests of the political elite. The potential for increased social control that a mistrustful and mutually fearing population might offer to those in power is surely an attractive motive for the scaremongering tactics employed in the creation of this culture of fear.

**MASS MEDIA & SOCIAL CONTROL: TELEVISION v. PRINT MEDIA**

In today’s society, we can see that fear permeates all aspects of our lives. We fear violence. We fear disease. We fear war. Certainly, we fear the unknown. Television news drives much of this fear, due to the very nature of its medium. Past research has shown that the “cultivating images presented in the television world do not differ dramatically from the images of social reality presented in other media” (Signorielli & Morgan, 1994, p. 114). However, in a groundbreaking study performed by Chircoros, Eschholz and Gertz (1997) that examined the effects of television consumption in relation to fear, it was determined that “while significantly higher levels of fear are expressed by viewers of television news, the reading of newspapers has no apparent relationship to fear” (p.348).

Television serves as an important source of information for most Americans about events that occur around the world every day (Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004). The repetition of certain stories and specific agendas using television allows for the shaping of the opinions and views of the...
television audience. By distracting oneself with these stories, the television audience is able to keep fears that are more proximate at bay. Television provides a service for “individuals who watch [the stories] and for the politicians who make use of them to garner votes and evade discussions of other policies and problems” (Glassner, 1999, p. 304). For both the television audience and the government alike, “alarming stories about invented or exaggerated dangers and social trends can keep fears of bona fide troubles at bay” (Glassner, 1999, p. 308).

When we examine the critical differences between print media and television, the findings of Chircoros, et al. (1997) should come as no great surprise. Television is more readily accessible for mass consumption than most forms of print media. Access to the television is available to virtually every person, in virtually every home in the United States, twenty-four hours per day. Television has the power to influence more than current trends—it also has an impact on the attitudes and knowledge of the television audience. Also, “television usage does not require the same levels of literacy, income or “interaction” as newspapers and the internet (and movies or theatrical productions, for that matter), therefore making it (television) more accessible to a greater number of people than its media counterparts” (Ragsdale, 2003, p. 18). It is this widespread access that enables television to influence society to a greater degree than other forms of media.
Past research has shown that there exists a symbiotic relationship between mass media and fear. Fears are carefully created and repeatedly fed by the mass media—through the manipulation of words, facts, news, sources or data, in order to induce certain personal behaviors, justify governmental actions or policies (at home or abroad), keep people consuming, elect certain politicians, or distract the public's attention from allegedly more urgent social issues like poverty, social security, unemployment, crime or pollution. This sort of agenda-setting, as it is called, is how "problems become salient as political issues around which policy alternatives can be defined and support or opposition can be crystallized" (Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980, p. 17).

News selection is at the heart of the agenda-setting process. Limited by time and space, news directors often are restricted in their selection of only a handful of stories, while dozens of news stories are left off the air (Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004). With the dependency of mass media upon major sources of news in this selection process, particularly the government, it is believed by some that governments use mass media to create a culture of fear on populations in order to manufacture consent for questionable policy. Fear is an amazing motivator. When
personal safety is believed to be jeopardized, logic and objectivity are lost. For many, freedom seems a small price for protection.

By using graphic images, focusing only on what those in power (be it the government or the network executives) want the television audience to see and hear, and by shaping events so that they fit the political agenda of those in power, the media acts as a very powerful extension of the federal government. It is important to note that although the United States does not have state-controlled media as some other countries that employ fear-mongering tactics as a means of social control, the government and the media often work hand-in-hand to accomplish mutually beneficial goals. Researchers have agreed that, under certain circumstances, "the news media do tell people what to think by providing the public with an agenda of attributes—a list of characteristics of important newsmakers" (Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004, p. 364). For example, Wanta, Golan and Lee (2004), in their attempt to examine the influence of media coverage on perceptions of foreign nations, demonstrated a clear relationship between such coverage and how individuals viewed foreign nations (both positive and negative coverage) – their results illustrate the effects of television framing and Gerbner’s cultivation theory quite clearly.

It is widely understood by governments that state propaganda, when supported by the educated classes (i.e. the political elite) and
when no deviation is permitted from it, can have an enormous effect. What better way to promulgate state propaganda than mass media? Throughout history, governments have used mass media to create a sense of apprehension, or fear, in their country’s population. When we examine the agenda-setting phenomenon from a historical perspective, we discover that mass media has been used to create tension and fear as a means of social control by many governments and political figures. Adolf Hitler used radio broadcasts, cinematic newsreels, posters and propaganda as a form of social control in Nazi Germany, influencing thousands to do his will (Chomsky, 2002). Around the same time, the Wilson administration employed similar tactics through a government propaganda commission in order “drive a reluctant population into a war by terrifying them and eliciting jingoist fanaticism” (Chomsky, 2002, p. 6). Following World War I, President Wilson again employed media manipulation through newsprint, radio broadcasts and print media in order to whip up a hysterical Red Scare, as it was called, which attempted to eliminate such dangerous problems as union organization and freedom of political thought. President Wilson enjoyed very strong support from the media and from the business sector, which ensured that the operation would have great success (Chomsky, 2002).
When we look at the present in light of the past, we can see that the collusion of the government and the media in order to shape the views and beliefs of the public continues even today. The current “War on Terrorism” can be seen as a prime example of how political agendas are used to generate fear within populations. President Bush speaks about “evil ones” and “evil doers.” The nation remains on “alert.” The next attack could come at any time.

Media coverage of certain events (such as terrorist attacks, violent crime, etc.) has been shown to be related to an increase in fear, anxiety and xenophobia among television audiences (Ragsdale, 2003). This sense of fear has been used by politicians to “justify centralization of authority, stripping away of citizens’ rights, surveillance and executions, with politicians in both parties calling for still broader government powers and increased expenditure to fight the global war on terrorism” (Barnet, 1996, p. 2). Apparently their tactics are working—a recent poll conducted by FOX News indicated that more than half (54%) of those polled would be willing to give up personal freedoms in order to reduce the threat of terrorism (FOX News/Opinion Dynamics Poll. May 16-18, 2006), while a study at the University of Florida found that close to 60% of all those polled answered that “terrorism, bombings or other crises” are justification for the
governments suspending the civil rights of the people (Ragsdale, 2003, p. 84).

The events of September 11th constitute a pivotal moment in the history of the United States. In the months following the attacks, the Bush Administration was accused of using television and the media to keep the patriotic faithful glued to the idea that we are being threatened. It has been said that the Bush administration has used the mass media to manipulate and deceive in ways "suited to the trappings of American culture as surely as Goebbels shaped Hitler’s speeches to the German volksgeist" (Wasserman, 2005, p. 1).

Some believe that the attacks of September 11 have become a focusing event for news media and policy agendas. Researchers have defined a focusing event as an event that is:

“sudden, relatively rare, can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms, inflicts harms or suggests potential harms that are or could be concentrated on a definable geographical area or community of interest, and that is known to policy makers and the public virtually simultaneously” (Birkland, 2004, p. 22).

A considerable amount of research has been conducted over the years on the relation between such focusing events and political agenda-setting. Focusing events can be viewed as a key to opening the door to new policy—they highlight policy failures and provide opportunities for
“solving” existing problems. Following the attacks of September 11th, attention was focused on “a range of issues related to the attacks, claims [were] made that policies designed to prevent or mitigate such attacks have failed, and new policies [emerged] to address the problems revealed by the attack” (Birkland, 2004, p. 179). The September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon are clearly focusing events. Birkland states that the September 11th attacks “were a substantial focusing event that continues to reverberate through American politics today, and will likely do so for some time” (p. 196).

The most prominent example of questionable post-September 11th policy, the USA PATRIOT ACT, was formed in response to the 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States, and dramatically expanded the authority of U.S. law enforcement for the stated purpose of fighting terrorist acts in the United States and abroad (USA PATRIOT ACT, H.R. 3162, Public Law No: 107-56). Although the Act passed in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, interestingly, and disturbingly, the document was written long before those attacks ever took place. The Act sped through Congress with remarkably little dissent.

Although a number of its provisions are not controversial, the USA PATRIOT Act nevertheless stands out as revolutionary in its design. To an unprecedented degree, the Act sacrifices the political freedoms of the American people in the name of national security, while upsetting the
democratic values that define our nation by consolidating considerable new powers in the executive branch of government. The USA PATRIOT ACT "encompasses much of the conservative law enforcement community's preexisting desires for more aggressive law enforcement tools" (Birkland, 2004, p. 187), and infringes on basic freedoms and privacy of the American people. The sense is that the administration is using the war on terrorism to accomplish long-held policy goals (Birkland, 2004, p. 187). Despite this, the ACT passed with little question from the public. One may ask how this could be—the answer: FEAR.
CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will address the relation between the mass media and the so-called “culture of fear” as it pertains to the trust or confidence of the population in each branch of the federal government. It is important to note that although the scope of this study is not expansive enough to determine a causal mechanism for the development of the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors exhibited by television audiences, the ramifications of any significant relation that may emerge between heavy television exposure, peoples’ levels of fear and confidence in the government are certainly worth investigation.

METHOD

Due to certain unavoidable time constraints, the creation of an original data set through the collection of primary data was not possible for this research. As a result, an existing data set was chosen to facilitate this research. The General Social Survey (GSS) data used in this study were collected by The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) using a sample frame based on Census data in 2004, block quota sampling in 1972-1974 and for half of the 1975 and 1976 surveys, and full probability sampling of all non-institutionalized English-speaking persons 18 years of age or older living in the United States in 1977, 1978, 1980, 1982-1991, 1993-
1994, 1996, 2000, 2002, 2004, and half of the surveys conducted in 1975 and 1976. The version of the 1972-2004 Cumulative General Social Surveys used in this study has been weighted to adjust for the purposive oversampling of the Black subpopulation in 1982 and 1987 and for the subsampling design used in 2004, according to the NORC. The surveys were conducted via face-to-face interviews and computer-assisted personal interviews. This particular data set was chosen due to its large population size, the specific variables available that were pertinent to this research (outlined below), and for the relative ease with which the data could be analyzed quantitatively. This data set is widely available to the general public and contains data from respondents nationwide.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study were respondents to the General Social Survey Series (GSS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center and sponsored by the National Science Foundation between 1996 and 2004 (a subset of the aggregate GSS data available from 1972-2004). The sample consisted of 46,345 respondents. Respondents were chosen from all non-institutionalized English-speaking persons 18 years of age or older, living in the United States. Due to the nature of the data itself and the proposed use of this data, this study poses very little risk to the human subjects involved. This research presents a reasonable opportunity to
further the understanding of the effects of television media on the general public.

**Design**

A relevant subset of the secondary data (GSS) obtained through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) has been created for the purposes of this study. Included in the subset of the data are demographic items of age, sex and education, items pertaining to respondents' level of confidence in each branch of the government (i.e. executive, judicial and legislative), the number of hours of television respondents consume in a given day and variables that account for the respondent levels of fear in different situations, as described below. Using data regarding time spent watching television, a quantitative analysis was conducted in order to determine if a relation exists between the amount of television respondents’ watch and their levels of fear and confidence in each branch of the federal government in accordance with Gerbner's theory of cultivation.

Because this study uses pre-existing data, the research is bound by the existing variables to a certain degree. This limitation is inherent in the use of secondary data, however, as previously noted, the use of primary data was not possible for this research. It is the limitation of existing
variables combined with the fundamental theories upon which cultivation research is based that shaped the hypotheses set forth in this research.

Variables regarding confidence in the government refer to the federal government and data was categorized by branch of government (i.e., executive, judicial, legislative). Variables with data pertaining to an overall level of fear were not available in the existing data set. Because of this, broad variables that relate to several different types of fear were chosen from the existing variables in the data set. Specifically, data regarding whether or not the respondent feels unsafe walking in their neighborhood at night is examined. Data pertaining to the likelihood (in the respondents' opinion) that the United States will be involved in another world war in the next ten years is explored. Finally, data regarding whether the respondent believes that as a general rule, most people can be trusted, or that one cannot be too careful when it comes to trusting other people is examined.

Using the aforementioned variables that pertain to fear in conjunction with variables regarding respondents' confidence in each branch of the government, the following hypotheses will be considered:

H1: Greater exposure to television will lead to a greater level of fear of walking in the neighborhood at night.
H2: Greater exposure to television will lead to a greater belief that the United States will engage in another world war in the next ten years.

H3: Greater exposure to television will lead to a lack of trust in other people.

H4: Respondents exhibiting greater levels of fear of walking in the neighborhood at night will have a greater level of confidence in the government.

H5: Respondents exhibiting a greater belief that the United States will be involved in a world war in the next ten years will exhibit a greater level of confidence in the government.

H6: Respondents exhibiting lower levels of trust in other people will demonstrate a lower level of confidence in the government.

H7: Those respondents classified as “older” will exhibit a greater level of confidence in the government than will those respondents classified as “younger.”

H8: Female respondents will exhibit a greater level of confidence in the government than will male respondents.

H9: Respondents classified as “less educated” will exhibit a greater level of confidence in the government than will those respondents classified as “more educated.”

Using the fundamental hypothesis of cultivation theory (i.e., heavy viewers of television are more likely to believe that the world is a “mean and scary” place), this study proposes to determine what relation, if any, exists between the cultivation of fear in television audiences and their confidence in each branch of the United States government.

**PROCEDURE**

For the purposes of this study, data was examined to determine the extent to which television influences respondents’ level of fear, if at all,
and the implications of this relation on respondents’ level of confidence in the government. As it pertains to confidence, a score of three (3) represents a great deal of confidence in the government, a score of two (2) represents only some confidence in the government, while a score of one (1) indicates very little confidence in the government for the executive, judicial and legislative branches.

In regards to whether or not respondents felt afraid to walk in their neighborhood at night, a score of one (1) indicates that the respondent is not afraid, while a score of two (2) indicates that they are afraid to walk in the neighborhood at night.

In reference to whether or not the respondent believes that the United States will be involved in another world war in the next ten years, a score of one (1) indicates that the respondent does not believe that the United States will be involved in a world war, while a score of two (2) indicates that the respondent does believe that the United States will be involved in a world war in the next ten years.

As it pertains to trust in other people, a score of one (1) indicates that the respondent feels that they cannot be too careful when it comes to trusting other people, while a score of two (2) indicates that the respondent feels that whether or not they can trust another person "depends" on some other factor and a score of three (3) indicates that the respondent feels that most people can be trusted.
CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

The results indicate that the mean number of hours respondents viewed television per day was 3.06 with a standard deviation of 3.827 and that 30.1% of respondents are considered to be “heavy viewers” according to Gerbner’s theory of cultivation (i.e. view four or more hours of television per day). Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample indicate that 43.9% are male; the mean age is 45.27 with a standard deviation of 17.486; 43.3% are educated beyond the high school level.

HYPOTHESES 1, 2, & 3

Zero-order correlations revealed a statistically significant relation between the number of hours of television viewed and respondents’ fear of walking in their neighborhood at night \( r = .06, p < .001 \). This indicates that the more hours of television respondents watched, the more fearful they were in their neighborhood at night. Further, a significant negative relation \( r = -.026, p = .025 \) between the amount of time spent watching television and the level of confidence in the executive branch of the government was found. In other words, the more television respondents watched, the less confident they were in the executive branch of the government. Further, a significant negative relation \( r = -.024, p = .037 \) between the amount of time spent watching television and the level of...
confidence in the judicial branch of the government was found. In other words, the more television respondents watched, the less confident they were in the judicial branch of the government. However, there was no significant relation \( r = -.010, p = .233 \) between the amount of time spent watching television and the level of confidence in the legislative branch of the government.

Zero-order correlations revealed a statistically significant relation between the amount of television viewed per day and respondents’ belief that the United States would be involved in a world war within the next ten years \( r = .050, p < .001 \). This indicates that the higher the number of hours of television respondents watched, the more likely they were to believe that the United States would be involved in a world war in the next ten years. Further, there was no significant relation \( r = -.012, p = .137 \) between the amount of time spent watching television and the level of confidence in the executive branch of the government.

In addition, a significant negative relation \( r = -.023, p = .020 \) between the amount of time spent watching television and the level of confidence in the judicial branch of the government was found. In other words, the more television respondents watched, the less confident they were in the judicial branch of the government. However, no significant relation exists \( r = -.003, p = .379 \) between the amount of time spent
watching television and the level of confidence in the legislative branch of the government.

Zero-order correlations revealed a statistically significant relation between the number of hours of television viewed per day and respondents’ belief that other people can be trusted \((r = -.072, p<.001)\). In other words, the more hours of television respondents consumed, the less likely they were to believe that other people can be trusted. No significant relation exists \((r = -.012, p=.078)\) between the amount of time spent watching television and the level of confidence in the executive branch of the government, although it does approach significance.

Further, a significant negative relation \((r = -.024, p<.05)\) between the amount of time spent watching television and the level of confidence in the judicial branch of the government was found. In other words, the more television respondents watched, the less confident they were in the judicial branch of the government. However, no significant relation exists \((r = -.005, p=.275)\) between the amount of time spent watching television and the level of confidence in the legislative branch of the government, although it does approach significance.

**Hypothesis 4**

To test whether number of hours of television viewed per day and fear of walking at night in neighborhood predicted confidence in each
branch of the government (i.e., executive, judicial, and legislative), separate hierarchical regression analyses were performed in which number of hours of television viewed per day was entered in Step 1 and fear of walking in the neighborhood at night was entered in Step 2. With regard to confidence in the executive branch, both steps were statistically significant ($F(1, 5605) = 3.81; p < .05$ and $F(2, 5605) = 8.211; p < .001$; respectively). In Step 1, number of television hours per day was a significant predictor of confidence in the executive branch ($\beta = -.026, p < .05$). In Step 2, when fear of walking in neighborhood was entered, the amount of television one watched no longer significantly predicted their level of confidence in the executive branch of the government ($\beta = -.023, p = .081$); however, fear of walking in neighborhood was statistically significant ($\beta = -.047, p < .001$), suggesting that fear of walking fully mediates the effect of television viewing on confidence in the executive branch, and that the more fear one has of walking in their neighborhood at night, the less confidence one has in the executive branch.

**Table 1**
Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Confidence in the Executive Branch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>SE $B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>-.006</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.952*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-1.744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of walking at night</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>-.047</td>
<td>-3.550***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall $R^2 = .003$

***$p < .000$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

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With regard to confidence in the judicial branch of government, Step 1 was not statistically significant, however Step 2 did reach statistical significance ($F(1, 5528) = 3.177; p < .075$ and $F(2, 5528) = 13.040; p < .001$; respectively). In Step 1, number of television hours per day was not a significant predictor of confidence in the judicial branch ($\beta = -.024, p < .075$). As we would expect, in Step 2, when fear of walking in neighborhood was entered, the amount of television one watched still was not a significant predictor of respondents' level of confidence in the judicial branch of the government ($\beta = -.020, p = .134$); however, fear of walking in neighborhood was statistically significant ($\beta = -.064, p < .001$), suggesting that when controlling for number of hours watching television, fear of walking is a significant predictor of respondents' level of confidence in the judicial branch. In other words, the more fearful one is of walking in their neighborhood at night, the less confidence they have in the judicial branch of government.

**Table 2**

Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Confidence in the Judicial Branch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.024</td>
<td>-1.782</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.020</td>
<td>-1.498</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of walking at night</td>
<td>-.086</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>-.064</td>
<td>-4.784***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall $R^2 = .005$</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**$***p<.000$; **$p<.01$; *$p<.05$**

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Finally, with regard to the legislative branch of government, neither Step 1 nor Step 2 were statistically significant ($F(1, 5617) = .534; p = .465$ and $F(2, 5617) = .271; p = .763$; respectively). In Step 1, number of television hours per day was not a significant predictor of confidence in the legislative branch ($\beta = -.010, p = .465$). As expected in Step 2, when fear of walking in neighborhood was entered, the amount of television one watched still did not influence their level of confidence in the legislative branch of the government ($\beta = -.010, p = .469$); fear of walking in neighborhood was also not statistically significant ($\beta = -.001, p = .927$). This suggests that confidence in the legislative branch is not predicted by respondents’ television viewing habits or by their fear of walking in the neighborhood at night.

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>SE $B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$R^2\Delta$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>-.731</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>-.724</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of walking at night</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.092</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall $R^2$</strong></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.000; **p<.01; *p<.05
Hypothesis 5

To test whether greater exposure to television and greater belief that the United States will engage in another world war in the next ten years predicted confidence in the three branches of government (i.e., executive, judicial and legislative), separate hierarchical regression analyses were performed, in which television hours viewed per day was entered in Step 1 and respondents' belief that the United States will be involved in a world war within the next ten years was entered in Step 2.

With regard to the executive branch of government, Step 1 was not statistically significant ($F(1, 8042) = 1.194; p = .275$), however Step 2 was statistically significant ($F(2, 8042) = 38.821; p < .001$). In Step 1, number of television hours per day was not a significant predictor of confidence in the executive branch ($\beta = -.012, p = .275$). As expected in Step 2, when belief that the United States would be involved in a world war within the next ten years was entered, the amount of television still did not predict their level of confidence in the executive branch of the government ($\beta = -.007, p = .510$); however, belief that the United States would be involved in a world war was statistically significant ($\beta = -.097, p < .001$). This suggests that confidence in the executive branch is not predicted by respondents' television viewing habits, but is predicted by respondents' belief that the
United States will be involved in a world war within the next ten years, after controlling for amount of television viewed. Specifically, the more respondents believed that the United States will be involved in a world war, the less confident they were in the executive branch of government.

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>-1.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>-.658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US in WWII within 10 years</td>
<td>-.131</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>-.097</td>
<td>-.873***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall R²=.010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.000; **p<.01; *p<.05

With regard to the judicial branch, both steps were statistically significant (F (1, 7957) = 4.207; p < .05 and F (2, 7957) = 87.149; p < .001; respectively). In Step 1, number of television hours per day was a significant predictor of confidence in the judicial branch ($β = -.023$, $p < .05$), with the more hours spent watching television the less confidence in the judicial branch. In Step 2, when belief that the United States will be involved in a world war was entered, the amount of television one watched no longer influenced their level of confidence in the judicial branch of the government ($β = -.015$, $p = .164$); however, belief that the United States will be involved in a world war within the next ten years was statistically significant ($β = -.145$, $p < .001$), suggesting that belief that the United States will be involved in a world war fully mediates the effect of
television viewing on confidence in the judicial branch and the more
one believes that the United States will be involved in a world war, the less
confident they are in the judicial branch.

| Table 5 |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Variable        | B      | SE B   | β      | R²Δ    |
| Step 1          |        |        |        |        |
| TV hours per day| -0.004 | 0.002  | -0.023 | -2.051*|
| Step 2          |        |        |        |        |
| TV hours per day| -0.003 | 0.002  | -0.015 | -1.391 |
| US in WWIII within 10 years | -0.191 | 0.015  | -0.145 | -13.038*** |
| Overall R²= | 0.021 |

***p<.000; **p<.01; *p<.05

Finally, with regard to the legislative branch Step 1 was not
statistically significant, however Step 2 did reach statistical significance (F (1, 8056) = .096; p = .757 and F (2, 8056) = 8.600; p < .001; respectively). In
Step 1, number of television hours per day was not a significant predictor
of confidence in the legislative branch (β = -.003, p= .757). As we would
expect, in Step 2, when belief that the United States will be involved in a
world war was entered, the amount of television one watched still did not
significantly predict respondents' level of confidence in the legislative
branch of the government (β = -.001, p=.914); however, belief that the
United States will be involved in a world war was statistically significant (β = 
-.046, p<.001), suggesting that belief that the United States will be involved
in a world war predicts respondents' level of confidence in the legislative
branch when controlling for number of hours viewing television per day.

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The more one believes that the United States will be involved in a world war the less confident they are in the legislative branch of government.

**TABLE 6**

Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Confidence in the Legislative Branch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>-.309</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US in WWIII within 10 years</td>
<td>-.058</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>-4.136***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall R²</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.000; **p<.01; *p<.05

**Hypothesis 6**

To test whether greater exposure to television and lack of trust in other people predicted confidence in each branch of government, separate hierarchical regression analyses were performed, in which number of hours of television viewed per day was entered in Step 1 and belief that other people can be trusted was entered in Step 2.

With regard to the executive branch of government, Step 1 was not statistically significant, however Step 2 did reach statistical significance ($F(1, 14443) = 2.016; p = .156$ and $F(2, 14443) = 51.209; p < .001$; respectively). In Step 1, number of television hours per day was not a significant predictor of confidence in the executive branch ($β = -.012, p = .156$). As we would expect, in Step 2, when belief that other people can be trusted was entered, the amount of television one watched still did not
predict respondents' level of confidence in the executive branch of the government ($\beta = -.006, p=.487$); however, belief that other people can be trusted was statistically significant ($\beta = .083, p<.001$), suggesting that the even when controlling for the number of hours viewing television, belief that other people can be trusted predicts respondents' level of confidence in the executive branch. In other words, respondents who believe that other people can be trusted tend to have a higher level of confidence in the executive branch of the government.

**Table 7**

Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Confidence in the Executive Branch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>$-0.002$</td>
<td>$-0.012$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust others</td>
<td>$0.058$</td>
<td>$0.006$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall $R^2=.007$

***$p<.000$; **$p<.01$; *$p<.05$

With regard to the judicial branch of government, both steps were statistically significant ($F(1, 14243) = 8.299; p < .05$ and $F(2, 14243) = 112.780; p < .001$; respectively). In Step 1, number of television hours per day was a significant predictor of confidence in the judicial branch ($\beta = -.024, p< .05$). In Step 2, when belief that other people can be trusted was entered, the amount of television one watched no longer predicted their level of confidence in the judicial branch of the government ($\beta = -.015, p=.077$); however, belief that other people can be trusted was statistically
significant ($\beta = .123$, $p < .001$), suggesting that belief that other people can be trusted fully mediates the effect of television viewing on confidence in the judicial branch. Specifically, respondents who believe that other people can be trusted are likely to have more confidence in the judicial branch of the government.

### Table 8

Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Confidence in the Judicial Branch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>SE $B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$R^2\Delta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.024</td>
<td>.004**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.015</td>
<td>-1.767</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust others</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>14.736***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall $R^2$</strong></td>
<td>.015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***$p < .000$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$***

With regard to the legislative branch of government, Step 1 was not statistically significant, however Step 2 did reach statistical significance ($F(1, 14445) = .359; p = .549$ and $F(2, 14445) = 9.425; p < .001$ respectively). In Step 1, number of television hours per day was not a significant predictor of confidence in the legislative branch ($\beta = -.005$, $p = .549$). As we would expect, in Step 2, when belief that other people can be trusted was entered, the amount of television one watched still did not predict respondents’ level of confidence in the legislative branch of the government ($\beta = -.002$, $p = .784$); however, belief that other people can be trusted was statistically significant ($\beta = .036$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the belief that other people can be trusted predicts respondents’ level of
confidence in the legislative branch when controlling for number of television hours viewed per day. In other words, respondents who believe that other people can be trusted tend to have a higher level of confidence in the legislative branch of the government.

**Table 9**

Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Confidence in the Legislative Branch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>-.599</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV hours per day</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>-.274</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust others</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>4.300***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***$p<.000$; **$p<.01$; *$p<.05$ **

**Hypothesis 7**

To test the hypothesis that older respondents will exhibit a greater level of confidence in the government than younger respondents, zero-order correlations were performed for each of the branches of government (executive, judicial and legislative). Results suggested that the older the respondent, the more likely they were to exhibit a high level of confidence in the executive branch of the government ($r=.019$, $p<.001$), as hypothesized. However, it was also revealed that the older the respondent, the less likely they were to exhibit a higher level of confidence in the judicial ($r=-.053$, $p<.001$) and legislative ($r=-.017$, $p=.001$) branches of the government, contrary to the hypothesis.
HYPOTHESIS 8

To test the hypothesis that female respondents will exhibit a greater level of confidence in the government than will male respondents, an independent t-test was performed for each of the branches of government (i.e. executive, judicial and legislative). Independent t-tests revealed that female respondents had more confidence than males in the legislative branches of the government but not in the executive branch ($t(29,261.39) = -5.851; p<.001$ and $t(29,566.66) = -.614; p<.539$, respectively). However, with regard to the judicial branch and contrary to what was hypothesized, males had more confidence than females ($t(28,984.31) = 5.13; p<.001$). Refer to Table 10 for sample sizes, means and standard deviations for confidence levels by sex.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 10</th>
<th>Confidence in Executive Branch</th>
<th>Confidence in Judicial Branch</th>
<th>Confidence in Legislative Branch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.8769 (0.66061) N=17616</td>
<td>2.1644a (.64459) N=17254</td>
<td>1.8875b (.60354) N=17588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.8722 (.69189) N=14095</td>
<td>2.2035a (.69010) N=13977</td>
<td>1.846b (.64629) N=14108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means sharing superscript significantly differ.

HYPOTHESIS 9

To test the hypothesis that respondents with a high school education or less will have greater confidence in the government than will those respondents with greater than a high school education, an
independent t-test was performed for each of the branches of government (i.e. executive, judicial and legislative). The independent t-test revealed that those respondents with greater than a high school education were more confident in the executive and judicial branches of government than those with a high school education or less, \( t(28,750.952) = -0.654; p < .008 \) and \( t(29,276.98) = -19.503; p < .001 \), respectively, contrary to the hypothesis. The independent t-test revealed that, as hypothesized, the respondents with a high school education or less had more confidence in the legislative branch of the government than those with greater than a high school education \( t(29,470.42) = 5.277; p < .001 \). Refer to Table 1 for sample sizes, means, and standard deviations for confidence levels by education.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence in Executive Branch</th>
<th>Confidence in Judicial Branch</th>
<th>Confidence in Legislative Branch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; High School Education</td>
<td>1.8657^a</td>
<td>2.1197^b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.67434)</td>
<td>(.67449)</td>
<td>(.63477)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=18289</td>
<td>N=17882</td>
<td>N=18265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; High School Education</td>
<td>1.8861^a</td>
<td>2.2665^b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.67422)</td>
<td>(.64371)</td>
<td>(.60635)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=13343</td>
<td>N=13270</td>
<td>N=13347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means sharing superscript significantly differ.
CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

This study reveals a number of insights into cultivation theory as it may pertain to the relation between television viewing, fear and confidence in the United States government. Although many of these findings are statistically significant, the strength of the findings is minimal. In nearly every hierarchical regression analysis, the proportion of variance accounted for is quite low. The smallness of cultivation correlations found in this study is consistent with previous research.

One of the primary limitations of this study is that the type of program that the respondent is viewing is unknown. There is a great deal of variety in television programming, and respondents may be partial to one type of programming over another. Because of this, some respondents may exhibit greater levels of fear due to their programming preferences (for example, if they watched largely crime drama and television news), than others who may exhibit very low levels of fear due to their programming preferences (for example, if they were partial to Home & Garden Television or the Food Network). Because there is no way of determining what type of programs the respondent is viewing, utilizing television hours watched as a variable becomes problematic. Gerbner's theory of cultivation predicted that all television viewing would lead to an increase in fear. Though Gerbner's theory of cultivation focuses on media
consumption in terms of hours, Potter and Chang (1999) determined that the most successful independent variable for measuring the cultivation effects of television viewing is a content analysis (in other words, an analysis of the specific type of television programming viewed in relation to the total television consumption by respondents). Such content analysis may reveal that program type mediates the effect of cultivation theory's "Mean World Syndrome."

Also, examining television as the primary source of information (as cultivation theory suggests) implies that only television influences respondents. Surely this is not the case – respondents shape their perceptions of reality from a number of sources, such as newspapers, film and/or personal experiences. Beyond that, there may be limitations in the external validity of this study with regards to the sample population. One must wonder how representative is the sample of adults living throughout the United States.

In addition, while the questionnaires used in the General Social Surveys are suitable for testing the hypotheses set forth in this study, the questionnaire was not specifically designed for cultivation research or the particular hypotheses presented here. Using secondary data not specifically designed for this study presents limitations such as those outlined above that were unable to be dealt with in this study.
Despite these limitations, there are several interesting results regarding fear and confidence in the government. The results of this study are largely consistent with previous research findings and although small, may have a significant impact on society as a whole. Critics of cultivation research cite these relatively small correlations as evidence of the inherent weakness of the theory itself (Hirsch, 1980; Potter & Chang, 1990). However, Gerbner et al. (1990) defend these minimal findings by describing how even the smallest of effects can have very significant repercussions – that as long as there exists a slight positive correlation, evidence exists that cultivation is indeed taking place and that television has a potentially tremendous effect on society as a whole.

With regard to the hypothesis that greater exposure to television will lead to a greater level of fear of walking in the neighborhood at night, the results indicate that for the sample in question, this is indeed the case. This is consistent with previous cultivation research that indicates that heavy television viewers will exhibit greater levels of fear (Gerbner, 1976; Glassner, 1999; Dowler, 2003; Schlesinger, Tumber & Murdock, 1991). Gerbner asserts that heavy viewers of television will express a greater level of apprehension, mistrust and perceptions of living in a dangerous world than light viewers (Gerbner, 1994). This aspect of cultivation theory provides explanation as to why respondents in this study who experience
exposure to television will exhibit a greater level of fear of walking in the neighborhood at night.

With regard to the hypothesis that greater exposure to television will lead to a greater belief that the United States will engage in another world war in the next ten years, the results indicate that as hypothesized, the more hours of television respondents watched, the greater their belief that the United States would be involved in a world war within the next ten years. Gerbner's (1994) assertion once again provides some explanation as to why heavy viewers in this sample population would be more likely than light viewers to believe that the United States will be involved in a world war within the next ten years. If through television media, respondents are indeed being "cultivated" to believe that the world is a mean and scary place, it is not surprising that respondents who consume large amounts of television media would be more inclined to fear an imminent world war.

When we examine the results as they pertain to hypothesis that greater exposure to television will lead to a lack of trust in other people, we find that as hypothesized, the more hours of television respondents consumed, the less likely they were to believe that other people can be trusted. This is consistent with previous research that revealed a strong correlation between heavy television viewing and a general mistrust of other people (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1980).
With regard to the hypothesis that respondents exhibiting greater levels of fear of walking in the neighborhood at night will have a greater level of confidence in the government, we experience mixed results. In terms of the executive branch, respondents' fear of walking in the neighborhood at night fully mediates the significant effect of television viewing on confidence in the government. However, the results indicate that respondents who are more fearful of walking in their neighborhood at night exhibit a significantly lower level of confidence in the executive branch. Similar results were found for the judicial branch, although television viewing did not have any significant effect on confidence. Once again, contrary to the hypothesis, respondents who are more fearful of walking in their neighborhood at night exhibited a significantly lower level of confidence in the judicial branch. Respondents' confidence in the legislative branch was not significantly affected by their fear of walking in their neighborhood at night, even when controlling for number of television hours viewed.

When we examine the results as they pertain to the hypothesis that respondents exhibiting a greater belief that the United States will be involved in a world war in the next ten years will exhibit a greater level of confidence in the government, we again experience mixed results. While respondents' confidence in the executive branch was not significantly affected by television viewing, it was affected by the respondents' belief
that the United States would be involved in a world war within the next ten years. Contrary to the hypothesis, those respondents exhibiting a greater belief that the United States would be involved in a world war were more likely to have a significantly lower level of confidence in the executive branch. Likewise, while respondents' confidence in the legislative branch was not significantly affected by television viewing, their belief that the United States would be involved in a world war was significantly related to a lower level of confidence in the legislative branch. Further, television viewing was a significant predictor of confidence in the judicial branch of the government – the greater the amount of television respondents watched, the less confident they were in the judicial branch. Respondents' belief that the United States would be involved in a world war fully mediated this effect, suggesting that respondents' belief that the United States would be involved in a world war was a predictor of their level of confidence in the judicial branch. Specifically and contrary to the hypothesis, respondents with a greater belief that the United States would be involved in a world war in the next ten years exhibited a significantly lower level of confidence in the judicial branch of government.

With regard to the hypothesis that respondents exhibiting lower levels of trust in other people will demonstrate a lower level of confidence in the government, the results indicate that, as hypothesized, respondents...
who felt that others could be trusted had a higher level of confidence in all branches of the government than those who felt that others could not be trusted. These findings of course, stand to reason – respondents who are less likely to trust other people should be expected to have a lower degree of confidence in a government comprised of the very people they believe cannot be trusted.

When we examine the results as they pertain to hypothesis that respondents classified as “older” will exhibit a greater level of confidence in the government than will those respondents classified as “younger,” we see that as hypothesized, the older the respondent, the more likely they were to exhibit a higher level of confidence in the executive branch of the government. However, contrary to hypothesis, older respondents were less likely to exhibit higher levels of confidence in the judicial and legislative branches of government. According to past research, we should expect that confidence in the government would increase with age, as the results of this study indicate for the executive branch of government. In a 2005 study on trust in the government, Christensen and Laegreid found that age has significant effect, whereby older people generally have more trust in governmental institutions than younger people. They attributed this difference to the idea that older people have experienced the development of the welfare state and will therefore tend to have more trust in government than younger people who have
experienced a heavy reliance on the private sector (Christensen & Laegreid, 2005). As to the inconsistent results for the judicial and legislative branch, it is possible that the sample used in this study is not representative of the population of interest with regards to this hypothesis and past literature.

In regards to the hypothesis that female respondents will exhibit a greater level of confidence in the government than will male respondents, the results indicate that as hypothesized, females were more likely to exhibit a higher level of confidence in the executive and legislative branches of government. However, contrary to hypothesis, females were less likely to exhibit a higher level of confidence in the judicial branch of government than were males. When examining the link between fear and confidence in the government, the significant findings for the executive and legislative branches are very important. Past literature suggests that the trait most consistently linked to fear, especially fear of crime is being female (Ferraro & Lagrange, 1992; Warr, 1984; Chiorhos, et al., 1997). Cultivation studies have consistently shown that females are significantly more fearful than males (Peck, 1999). When we observe the results in light of past literature on cultivation gender differences, it should come as no great surprise that women tend to have more confidence in the government than do males, as the data suggests (for the executive and legislative branches). The inconsistent finding for
confidence in the judicial branch is quite puzzling — one possible explanation for this finding could be that females are more likely to fear becoming a victim of crime than males (Ragsdale, 2003) — if one is afraid of victimization, they may place less confidence in the effectiveness of the institutions that are supposed to protect them, for example, the criminal justice system. Another explanation is the proximal nature of the judicial branch when compared with the other branches of government. It could be that respondents are more likely to have had direct personal experience with the judicial branch than with the executive or legislative branches. If that is the case, the sample population may have an overrepresentation of respondents who have had a negative experience with the judicial branch of government. Further research is required to determine what possible variables may account for this inconsistent finding for the judicial branch.

When we examine the results in regards to the hypothesis that respondents classified as “less educated” will exhibit a greater level of confidence in the government than will those respondents classified as “more educated,” the results indicate that contrary to hypothesis, those respondents who had less than a high school education exhibited less confidence in the executive and judicial branches of government than those respondents with a greater education level. However, as hypothesized, those respondents who were “less educated” exhibited a
higher level of confidence in the legislative branch of government. The findings for the executive and judicial branch are perplexing indeed. They refute the findings of previous literature that indicate that the less educated have more confidence in the leaders of the three branches of government (Cook & Gronke, 2004) as hypothesized, and as we found for the legislative branch of government in this study. A possible explanation for this inconsistent finding is that the sample in this study, due to the nature of using pre-existing data, was not representative of the population of interest with regards to this hypothesis.

As to how the aforementioned hypotheses relate to a culture of fear, we can see that even when examining variables pertaining to specific fears such as walking in the neighborhood at night, belief of an imminent world war, or the inability to trust others, we see that television has a significant cultivating effect. This research indicates that there is evidence that exposure to television is significantly related to an increase in fear among the population in question, consistent with Gerbner's cultivation theory.

It is important to note that correlation does not equate to causation. A great number of variables need to be examined through further research to determine whether heavy exposure to television is the actual cause, or perhaps one of many causes of fear in television audiences. While it is the position of this research that television exposure
leads to a heightened sense of fear, the possibility does exist that increased fear leads one to stay at home and be exposed to a greater amount of television. Further, it is the position of this research, and of past cultivation research, that television exposure leads to an exaggerated level of fear. However, due to the nature of this research, we cannot rule out the possibility that television provides audiences with a more accurate representation of how “mean and scary” the world actually is.

While the present study indicates that an increased level of fear leads to a decreased level of confidence in the federal government, contrary to the hypotheses set forth in this research, there are still concerns that the government and media may be able to manipulate populations through an increased level of fear. Gerbner’s Theory of Cultivation proposes that television watching over a period of many years may lead the viewer to establish certain television-based beliefs. These beliefs, according to cultivation research and the present study, correspond to a heightened level of fear. This sense of fear can be (and has been) used by politicians to justify centralization of authority, strip away citizens’ rights, increase surveillance, and call for still broader government powers (Barnet, 1996). Based on the results of this study, combined with past literature and recent events, it is proposed that these cultivation effects may be both immediate and short-term, especially in the immediate aftermath of a focusing event.
Despite the fact that many of the hypotheses set forth in the present study indicated that an increased level of fear leads to a decreased level of confidence in the federal government, there is evidence nonetheless that increased fear has a significant effect on confidence in the government. Past data reveals that public confidence in the government soars in the face of international crises (Sigelman & Conover, 1981). This effect, dubbed a "rally effect" by Sigelman and Conover in 1981, may be further fueled by the ensuing media coverage and the deliberate creation of a culture of fear, and the public may be manipulated into consenting to questionable policy. As previously discussed, focusing events are viewed as the key to opening the door to new policy—they highlight policy failures and provide opportunities for "solving" existing problems (Birkland, 2004). It is proposed that in the immediate wake of focusing events (such as the attacks of September 11, 2001), a culture of fear is created by the cooperative efforts of the government and the media, creating a boost in public confidence in the government. This boost in confidence may serve as a window of opportunity for passing questionable policy that would otherwise face dissent – for example, policies that suspend our civil liberties and strip us of our freedoms guaranteed by the United States Constitution. If this is indeed the case, it would provide an explanation for the ease with which
the USA PATRIOT Act passed into law following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

If fear can be used to increase confidence, even if the increase is short-lived and its effects fade over time, it is possible that a corrupt politician or government agency could harness this fear in order to drive their own agenda. Further, such fear and passiveness toward the revocation of civil liberties could eventually, if left unchecked and unquestioned, become a detriment to democracy itself.

Although there are limitations within the data set and many of the findings were contrary to the hypotheses set forth in this research, television viewing is significantly related to fear and fear is significantly related to confidence in the government. The smallness of the findings in this study does not suggest that television viewing has no impact whatsoever on the level of fear of viewers. However, it does reveal the need for more thorough investigations into how television consumption, fear and confidence in the government are related. More research, particularly content analysis, is required to determine the relation between media consumption, fear and confidence in the government. Further studies should seek to determine the relation, if any, between cultivation effects of television in the immediate wake of focusing events and confidence in the government as well.
LIST OF REFERENCES
REFERENCES


INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

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May 25, 2006

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IRB #: 3733
Study: Television, Feelings of Fear, & Confidence in the US Government
Approval Date: 5/25/2006

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

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Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed pink Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

[Signature]
Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
    Donna Perkins

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