CULTIVATION THEORY AND VIOLENCE IN MEDIA:

CORRELATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

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ABSTRACT

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Title: Cultivation Theory and Violence in Media: Correlations and Observations

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Cultivation Theory represents the idea that people's perceptions of the real world are unconsciously influenced by their consumption of media. As technology has improved and increased, so too has the amount of information various platforms are able to spread. However, there is an imbalance between the amount of violence depicted in media and the amount that occurs in real life, leading to unrealistic perceptions of a mean world. Most cultivation research is not experimental. For my thesis, I decided to conduct an experiment of my own using YouTube clips emphasizing violent or fearful content, using a variety of established practices and questions, as well as some of my own. Although result were not conclusive, a few patterns consistent with Cultivation Theory were observed in this online context.

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1. INTRO

As media such as television, social media, and streaming services have become more and more readily available to all of society, questions have risen surrounding the influence they have on a person's perceptions and beliefs. In particular, that of a person's tendency to have a more conservative or liberal outlook on life, as well as their perception of the violence actually present in the real world. Previous research has attempted to connect these changes with the amount of media and violence in said media consumed (Signorielli 1990). This study will act to further expand the research available into this topic by observing and assessing a correlation between the study participants' answers and the video clips they were shown. By presenting three short videos differing in level of violence to two groups made up of randomly selected participants—along with one control group—there should be an observable difference between one group compared to the other two that would indicate a causal link between violent media and perceptions of a mean world.

1.1. Cultivation Theory History

Since the introduction of mass media, the effect it has had on the general public has been a major topic of interest for many researchers. One researcher in particular, George Gerbner, introduced Cultivation Theory "as a macrolevel system of explanation about mass media," (Potter 2014), in order to better understand and explain this phenomena. By the 1970s, media scholars the world over became increasingly interested in the idea of cultivation. Since then, over 500 studies have been published on Cultivation Theory. The theory has a long history, so it is paramount that more information is given before continuing on to the experiment itself.

The term "Cultivation Theory" was first coined by George Gerbner, who greatly influenced Communication Theory while he worked in academia. Gerbner argued that it was important to move past simply examining the short-term effects that media has on a person's beliefs, and to move on to observing how media can subtly but cumulatively exert effects over the long-term (Potter 1993). Gerbner's reason for doing so was because he believed that changes in mass-produced and rapidly distributed messages across previous barriers of space, time, and social groups can bring about systematic variations in the content of public messages (Gerbner 1969).

As a theory, Cultivation Theory was first introduced as a contrast to what Gerbner had considered the dominant form of mass media studies at the time, microfocused studies usually using experiments to figure out whether or not differences between features of media messages would explain immediate responses in attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge. As the alternative, Gerbner introduced a macrosystems approach. Rather than focusing on particular message elements, he wanted to focus on the widespread meanings across the entire media landscape. Gerbner was exclusively concerned with the influence that broader messages gradually exerted on the general public as people were exposed to media messages in everyday life. Within this, there were three components Gerbner looked at: institutional, message, and effects. For the institutional component, he argued that the "mass production and rapid distribution of messages create new symbolic environments that reflect the structure and functions of the institutions that transmit them." For the message component, he claimed that certain meanings are mass-produced and widespread throughout mass media. Lastly, for the effects component, Gerbner claimed that the meanings present through media cultivates public beliefs. These

messages form a common culture which "communities cultivate shared and public notions about facts, values, and contingencies of human existence," (Gerbner 1970, pg. 69). This hypothesis may seem simple and far enough within reason to warrant disbelief as to why so many people are so concerned about it, but outside of the obviousness, Cultivation Theory and the research that has gone into it have become a major branch of mass media studies.

According to one paper, Cultivation Theory claims that watching a massive amount of TV can be associated with a tendency to hold quite specific conceptions that parallel the more consistent and continuous imagery and values of the medium about that reality (Shanahan & Morgan 1999, pg. 3). Questions and studies regarding the "effects" of TV are still being debated today—"the more work that is done, the more complex the questions (and the answers) become" (Shanahan & Morgan 1999, pg. 3).

What does cultivation mean though? The problem arises in that the cultivation literature tends to give at least three different conceptions of the term. The critique lists these conceptions as the following: "cultivation is a mass media theory that was introduced by Gerbner and maintained by him throughout the course of his life[;] arises from the pattern of operational practices used by researchers who have published what they presented as tests of various parts of Gerbner's system of explanation[; and] exhibited by researchers who operate within a general socialization perspective and who largely ignore the conceptualizations of Gerbner as they explore a variety of ways that media exert their influence on individuals," (Potter 2014). In other words, Cultivation Theory has three different conceptual definitions. The first is that it is based off of and retained as what Gerbner defined it as. The second states that it is best represented by the studies performed by researchers other than Gerbner, all of whom used specific parts of

Gerbner's original definition. Lastly, Cultivation Theory can be conceptually defined as, for the most part, completely outside of what Gerbner defined (i.e. looking into specific ways media influences individuals, not the general public).

Gerbner believed that the mass-produced messages that form culture would influence the public over the long-term by reinforcement as well as change, and that the dynamic of continuity—rather than only that of change—needed to be considered when examining mass-produced message systems and their symbolic functions. In summary, the key points of Cultivation Theory as defined by Gerbner, were that it focused on the macro level of broad scale institutional practices, long-term acculturation, and widespread meaning. The theory doesn't emphasize exposures or messages, but acknowledges individuals' typical patterns of media exposure in their everyday lives, taking a systems approach by emphasizing the importance of tracing media's institutional practices, as well as how these practices shaped the meanings in mass-produced messages widely disseminated amongst and influential in shaping the general public's knowledge and beliefs over the long-term (Potter 2014). One topic that has been a point of much debate and research in regards to media is violence, especially violent crimes.

Often times, the arguments surrounding the topic of violence and cultivation are concerned with how violence in media can influence people, especially children and young adults. However, the way violent media influences people isn't necessarily by urging them to act violently—as many news articles and debates have claimed in the past, most recently concerning the effects of violent video games on children. A lot of the social debate surrounding media is focused on very specific issues, problems, controversies or programs, all of which are current at any time. Cultivation is not really about the more allegedly dramatic "single instance" effects of

TV media that appear so frequently in public debate. They are only related to the issues addressed by cultivation (Shanahan & Morgan 1999, pg. 5). Rather, cultivation influences the way a person thinks and views the real world, building upon the assumption that any major impacts brought about by TV media come into being by the way people are exposed to the same images and metaphors over and over again, and that the metaphor for cultivation is best understood as being able to provide a way to talk about the "influence" without having to talk about the "effects" (Shanahan & Morgan 1999, pg. 12).

According to Gerbner, "crime in prime time [TV] is at least 10 times as rampant as in the real world. An average of 5 to 6 acts of overt physical violence per hour menace over half of all major characters." Again, this paper was written almost 30 years ago, and as mentioned before, the amount of information that can be spread increases as technology changes and grows, so these numbers have most likely increased since the paper's publication. Additionally, in the world of TV "pain, suffering, and medical help rarely follow this [violence]...it shows who can get away with what against whom." By analyzing the content data as a message system rather than as isolated incidents of violence, it's possible to view these acts of violence in a context that represents social relationships, and the distribution and symbolic enforcement of the structure of power according to TV (Gerbner et al. 1986, pg. 26). Seeing so much violence in media, and having the same kinds of messages presented to you over and over again will influence how you perceive the real world.

1.2. Indicators and Analysis

There are three ways that cultivation can be further thought of: a construct that refers to a single type of media effect; a hypothesis that is predictive of a positive relationship between the

amount of TV exposure and the evidence of cultivated perceptions or beliefs; and a formal theory made up of constructs and propositions (Gerbner 1969). Next, there are cultivation indicators, which Gerbner uses to refer to any elements in the messages that reflect the culture, stating that they needed to be continuously identified within media. Before being able to reliably interpret an individual's or society's response, one needs to know what these indicators are. Indicators can be assessed by examining TV shows and asking four questions: "what is present in the messages to the highest levels of frequency?", "what indicators are presented in a context of importance or relevance?", "what is the interpretive context of the presentations?", and "what concepts are usually found interrelated in messages?" (Gerbner 1969). More specific are the types of analysis Gerbner outlined.

According to Gerbner, there are three different types of analysis: institutional, message system, and cultivation. Through institutional analysis, the goal is to look for changes in the production and distribution of messages across barriers of time, space, and social grouping to figure out how these changes create systematic variations in content. It was recommended that with message system analysis, searching for widespread meanings should be done in a scientific manner. The difference to keep in mind between the analysis of mass-mediated public message systems as a social science observation, commentary, or criticism versus other types is that there is an attempt at dealing with the problems of collective cultural life comprehensively, generally, and systematically rather than specifically and selectively (Gerbner 1969). As for content analysis, Gerbner cautioned that researchers should look for patterns of meaning across the entire media landscape and not to make any distinctions between information/entertainment, fact/fiction, high/low culture, good/bad, images/words, or "levels of artistic excellence." Thus,

message system analysis' purpose is to identify meanings that could possibly be attributed and linked to institutional practices of mass-produced messages that were found spread widely across the entirety of the media landscape (Potter 2014). Gerbner argued that cultivation analysis needs to begin with the insights of the study of institutions and the message systems produced, going on to investigate the contributions that these systems and their symbolic functions made to the cultivation of assumptions about life and the real world (Gerbner 1973, pg. 567).

Gerbner and his team further established that there are seven characteristics of the operational practices in the study and analysis of Cultivation Theory. The first two of these refer to the patterns of practice—used to limit the sampling frame to messages on TV and equating frequency with meaning—within the analysis literature of message systems. Though it would be useful to analyze messages across all media platforms, the resources and time that would need to be committed would have been counterproductive to the information that Gerbner and his team were attempting to collect and analyze (Potter 2014). Thus, they narrowed their focus down to include just media on TV, arguing that "commercial television, unlike other media, presents an organically composed total world of interrelated stories (both drama and news) produced to the same set of market specifications," (Gerbner et al. 1977). Their focus was further narrowed down to only include programs presented on primetime and children's weekend morning programming provided by the three dominant networks at the time—ABC, CBS, and NBC—stating that as networks with the largest viewership, specific messages found throughout all forms of media should be present within their programs. Lastly, Gerbner and his team further specified their focus by examining only entertainment, though they did not state the purpose of this in their paper. Eventually their content analysis expanded to include not just the topic of

violence, but also marriage/family, gender roles, race/ethnicity, aging, affluence, occupational status, mental illness, politics, and the environment, though they consistently used the sampling frame of entertainment on mainstream TV. The other five key characteristics Gerbner and his team made in regards to operational practices were the use of cross-sectional surveys, the assumption of stable TV viewing, the focus on beliefs as a cultivation indicator, the use of national probability samples, and a categorical analyses of the relationship between TV exposure and cultivation indicators (Potter 2014).

There are so many cultural messages and varieties in media that it's hard to figure out where to begin. Gerbner addressed this very problem by leading cultivation analysis towards messages that "present a very different portrayal from real life." One such message is the amount of crimes committed in media versus the amount reflected in criminal records. Gerbner predicted that people with higher levels of exposure to TV would be more likely to believe the world is more violent than it actually is (Gerbner 1969).

On the operational level, a wide variety of topics have been addressed, perceptions and beliefs about violence and crime being the most popular. Though Gerbner gave researchers a template to work with when identifying indicators on TV, "no one has attempted a conceptualization of what might be the complete set of cultivation indicators. Instead, individual researchers conducting independent projects generate empirical findings inductively on a topic-by-topic basis." The result of this has been that the many studies on Cultivation Theory have only examined a select few, specific topics (Gerbner 1969). There has also been a problem in the order of the research, or the type of measure that's used. In one study (Hawkins and Pingree 1982), two different types of orders were fleshed out: demographic (first order) and

value system measures (second order). In this case, demographic does not just refer to information such as age, ethnicity, etc. Rather, first order measures require subjects to make quantitative estimations in regards to the occurrence of certain things, such as how likely the subjects believe they could be a victim of a crime in public. Gerbner never explains why exactly this is a first order measure, but most likely it is because this question is generally phrased as being on a scale of some sort that is equated to a set of numbers (i.e. *Extremely likely* could equal a 7 on a scale of 1 to 7). Second order measures then assess beliefs that are relatively generalized about the world. Some examples of this would be questions such as, "do you think people are basically honest?" (Gerbner 1969).

1.3. Types of Research

Now that the indicators, analysis, etc. of Cultivation Theory has been explained, it is important to look at the work various researchers did to study the subject. When comparing TV exposure and cultivation indicators to compute their relationship, Gerbner and his team used two procedures. One was to compute the degree of association between viewing level and what answer was selected on the cultivation indicator described in the previous paragraph. The larger the correlation coefficient, the more likely heavy viewers (when compared to light viewers) were to pick the TV world answer. The second procedure was to calculate the cultivation differential, the difference between the percentage of those in the heavy viewing group who selected TV world answers compared to the percentage of those in the light viewing group who selected TV world answers. The cultivation differential turned out to be positive, meaning that a larger percentage of heavy viewers selected the TV world answer than the light viewers (Potter 2014).

As for analyzing cultivation indicators, respondents were presented with two statements (separately reflecting the TV world and real world) and were asked which they believed was more accurate (Potter 2014). For example, "During any given week, what are your chances of being involved in some kind of violence? About one in ten? About one in a hundred?" (Gerbner et al. 1978, pg. 195). However, though each answer is close to the TV world and real world figures, neither is accurate. The team's belief was that the accurate answers would make it look like a trick question due to how extreme the reality is in comparison (Shanahan & Morgan 1999, pg. 53-54). This is an understandable belief, but the problem remains that the provided answers were not the factual figures, which would make an accurate analysis from such an experiment less believable. This was not the only point that might have caused some initial problems in the data gathered.

Generally, Gerbner and his team gathered data using a commercial polling firm that would conduct an annual national telephone survey of randomly sampled household in an attempt to represent the US' adult population. The survey was designed to be cross-sectional, meaning respondents would only be measured once, rather than longitudinally, where the respondents would have been the same every year to determine changes in TV exposure, cultivated beliefs, or any relationship between the two. This was not a wise use of the tools the researchers had at their disposal. Television exposure was measured by asking how many hours of TV the respondent watched on average the week before. This led to an assumption of habitual viewing—that people habitually watch TV, and that there was very little difference in the amount of time a person was exposed to TV compared to the day, week, or year before. According to this assumption, three categories were created: light, moderate, and heavy viewing.

For the most part, Gerbner's team consistently stayed within the boundaries of the original conceptualizations and operational practices. In 1980, the addition of the constructs mainstreaming and resonance were added. The mainstream can be thought of as a general commonality of beliefs TV tends to cultivate, while mainstreaming is the sharing of that commonality among heavy viewers who are in the same demographic groups as light viewers. Resonance is a sort of "double dose" of meaning that comes from TV messages and real-world experiences. For example, people who live in areas with higher rates of crime and who are heavy viewers would get a "double dose" of exposure to crime, and thus should show a higher than average degree of cultivation (Potter 2014).

Of course, Gerbner and his team were not the only researchers interested in this subject. Similar to many other areas, as the literature on Cultivation Theory grew, researchers began testing various extensions to the established operational practices, especially with cultivation indicator measures. One example of this is the development of additional topics, such as beliefs about mental illness (Diefenbach & West 2007), substance abuse (Minnebo & Eggermont 2007), the environment (Holbert, Kwak, & Shah 2003), and acceptance of homosexuality (Calzo & Ward 2009). There was also the introduction of different types of measures. One study tested different cultivation indicators to see if knowledge (respondents were asked to provide estimates of the prevalence of occurrences such as crime) was related to beliefs. It was found that different types of measures weren't as strongly related to each other, and thus argued that when testing cultivation indicators within the topic of violence, three types of measures should be considered: knowledge (perceptions of the amount of violence in society), emotion (fear of being victimized), and beliefs (about one's likelihood of being victimized by violence). Other

additions made have been from media effects scholars attempting to find other variables that could increase the predictive power of cultivation by using more than just the amount of TV media viewed. Some such additions are perceived reality, transportation, and distance (Potter 2014).

Alongside the studies that have extended the parameters originally set by Gerbner are those studies that completely reject his claims and replaced them with their own. There are two ways in particular that this has happened. One has been the shift from macro to micro focus, and the other has been a significant movement "away from regarding the locus of meaning in the media messages toward regarding the locus of meaning in receivers." Previously, Gerbner's reasoning for using macrolevel research was that microlevel research would likely yield contradictory, misleading, and confusing results (Potter 2014). Later, he would add that the way his team was studying cultivation did not minimize the importance of specific programs, individual and group differences, selective attention and perception, specifically targeted communications, and research on individual attitude and behavior change. However, giving primary attention to these aspects, there's a risk of "losing sight of what is most distinctive and significant about television as the common storyteller of our age," (Gerbner et al. 2002, pg. 44). Many researchers have moved away from using TV viewing as a predictor of cultivation indicators, along with testing more micromeasures of exposure. For example, some researchers argued that evidence for belief in a mean world shouldn't be attributed to total TV exposure, but exposure to violent programs. Generally, empirical tests have confirmed this expectation that genres such as crime drama and the news were stronger predictors of cultivation than a person's total TV viewing exposure. Recently two researchers, Shanahan and Morgan, cautioned that the

observed relationships may reflect selective exposure rather than cultivation, but the two did label this different observation as “genre-specific cultivation”. Though Gerbner himself still objected to microlevel studies, they have become more accepted (Potter 2014). For example, Shanahan and Morgan stated that cultivation clearly construes messages as systems, which—by definition—are the most macrofocused one can be. Other approaches have a tendency to reduce messages to simple components, especially if they can be easily manipulated in a laboratory setting. Both of these differing conceptions have survived throughout the decades. In an era of mass communication, macrolevel conceptions seem to have the most explanatory power, but in an era of more mediated interpersonal communication and fragmented audiences, such macrolevel conceptions may seem less relevant (Shanahan & Morgan 2010, pg. 351).

According to the 1984 Nielsen Report, a TV is typically used for about 7 hours a day, though people over the age of 2-years-old generally only actively watch TV for 4 hours. One paper states that “there can be little selectivity”—understandable, considering the relative lack of variety—but that this doesn’t necessarily matter as it has been found that the more TV a person tends to watch, the less selective they generally are in regards to the types of TV media they consume (Gerbner et al. 1986). While the variety of TV media has expanded and diversified since his 1986 publication, the findings are relatively still the same. Year after year, the Nielsen Reports have shown that people who watch TV regularly or heavily are less and less selective in the types of shows they consume. Something interesting mentioned in this particular paper of Gerbner’s was that most researchers often attribute their findings to how often people watch the news or if they prefer action programs, but these researchers tend to overlook the fact that those who watch more action or news programs actually watch more of all program types (Gerbner et

al. 1986, pg. 19). To add on to this point, everyone who views TV—regardless of the amount of time spent watching—should be affected by the media they consume, but only if "the messages are so stable, the medium is so ubiquitous, and accumulated total exposure is what counts." What light viewers are not exposed to via TV, they would instead most likely get from the people who live in the same cultural environment. For example, let's say Person A, B and C are all middle-aged mothers in the middle socioeconomic class, of the same educational and racial background, and all became friends through the knitting class they attend. For the sake of this example, the only difference between the three is that A watches very little TV, while B and C watch TV whenever they have time to spare. All three women are going to talk to each other and share information, because as social creatures, that is what humans do with those we share commonalities with and thus include in our social circle. If B and C talk to A about how dangerous the neighborhood has become, how crime has increased, A is not going to be immune to what the women in her social group say. It doesn't matter whether A is not directly influenced by the media on TV, if those in her social group are directly influenced, she will be indirectly influenced by the media on TV.

As mentioned before though, this specific publication by Gerbner's was written in 1986. Gerbner and his co-authors wouldn't have been able to include the effects social media has had on the spread of information and the creation of a more international cultural environment, constricted not by physical distance but more by a lack of common interests.

While Gerbner and others continued to assert that TV viewing creates impressions of the real world that are closer to the realities TV presents, some studies have found that there is no relationship between viewing and perceptions of crime in the respondent's neighborhood (Potter

2014). Two separate studies, both conducted by Linda Heath and John Petraitis, were able to clear up this confusion and disagreement. Both studies found that the total amount of TV viewed is not related to a respondent's fear in relation to their own city or immediate neighborhood, but is instead related to fear in relation to distant urban settings (Heath & Petraitis 1987).

1.4. Moral Foundations Theory

Closely related to Cultivation Theory and Mean World Syndrome is something called Moral Foundations Theory, a social psychological theory. The theory was based off of cultural anthropologist Richard Shweder's work, and first presented by psychologists Jonathan Haidt and Craig Joseph (Haidt & Joseph 2004). Currently, the theory states that a person's moral concerns can be grouped into five different moral foundations: care (cherishing and protecting others), fairness (justice according to shared rules), loyalty (standing with your group), authority (submitting to tradition and legitimate authority), and purity (repulsion towards disgusting things). These five groups are then grouped into two more groups: individualizing and binding. Care and fairness are part of the individualizing group, while loyalty, authority, and purity are part of the binding group (Graham 2009). Moral Foundations Theory is incredibly important because it has been found that a person's liberal or conservative tendencies are linked to how sensitive they are to certain moral foundations. While those who are more conservative are equally sensitive to each of the five foundations, those who are more liberal are more sensitive to the care and fairness foundations (Graham et al. 2011). A person's sensitivities to certain foundations is often influenced by the media they consume.

The news is constantly looking for another story, something exciting to report on. This in itself isn't necessarily a bad thing, but the problem is that the number of reports on violence

vastly outnumbers the amount of reports on more heartwarming material. One paper put it this way, "people seem to be obsessed with three things: dangers, politics, and sports." However, there is more to it than that. These topics of interest are related. Besides having an influence on how a person views the world, the way something is phrased or presented can also influence how conservative or liberal a person is. For example, if someone is incredibly concerned about dangers, chances are that that person is more politically conservative, and that they are likely to place more importance on their own group. Studies conducted to research political conservatism have found that it is often a consequence of a person's need to manage uncertainty and perceived threats, and "of moral intuitions emphasizing group loyalty, respect for authority, and bodily and spiritual purity," (van Leeuwen & Park 2009). Correlations have been found through various studies between conservatism and psychological variables linked to needs regarding management of uncertainty and threat (i.e. system instability, need for order, fear of threat, etc.). Someone who perceives the world as a dangerous place will tend to score higher on measures of conservatism. Multiple studies have shown that manipulating situational factors that are associated with said psychological variables will in fact make a person more inclined towards conservative politicians or beliefs (van Leeuwen & Park 2009). The difference between liberal and conservative political attitudes can be explained by referring to moral intuitions. For liberals, morality is an issue of harm, rights, and justice, while for conservatives morality is an issue of group loyalty, respect for authority, and bodily/spiritual purity. It's argued that the different patterns of moral intuitions result from differences in sensitivity to the distinct moral foundations (van Leeuwen & Park 2009). The reason discussion of this theory is important for the purposes of this paper is that there is a possibility that perhaps such a noticeable difference would be

displayed through the collected responses. There's a possibility that cultivation might show up in such a form rather than explicit beliefs about violence in the world.

1.5. Mean World Index

Mean World Index is another development that may be linked with Cultivation Theory. In the past, studies have shown that the amount of TV consumed is associated with a person's tendency to agree with three statements: you can never be too careful in dealing with people; people will always take advantage of you if they get the chance; and most people are just looking out for themselves. From these past studies, a person's personality does not seem to influence the degree to which that person agrees with the three statements (Gerbner et al. 1986). The purpose for including this development within this paper is similar to that of the Moral Foundations Theory, in that it might be possible to see a form of cultivation through these responses.

1.6. Relevance

In summary, Cultivation Theory is not quite as simple as one might first believe. There are many different parts and divergent studies that have made the topic denser than it once was when Gerbner first introduced the term. Depending upon how the experiment is performed—from following Gerbner's parameters exactly to completely disregarding them—one must take into account indicators, measurements, and analyses. Not to mention theories, such as Moral Foundations Theory, that have been linked by various researchers in an attempt to further explain Cultivation Theory. However, denser doesn't necessarily mean well-researched. It is true that there are hundreds of published studies on Cultivation Theory, but often times these publications include wildly different subjects, parameters, and media. This can make accurate

conclusions somewhat difficult to make. My own experiment was created in an effort to try and find a better standard practice, and to begin the steps towards a more stable and viable point of reference using a variety of techniques previous studies have utilized.

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

One hundred and sixty-one students from the University of Texas at Austin participated in the study for course credit. The survey was completed from the participant's computer or mobile phone, and from the release of the survey, each participant was given two weeks to complete it.

Not all participants finished the survey. Of the 72 participants who did finish the entire survey (25 men, 46 women, 1 non-binary; mean age = 20.04), there were 15 people in the Violent group, 38 in the Nonviolent group, and 19 in the Control group. The results below are interpreted with these low sample sizes in mind. An approximately equal number of participants were originally in each group, so the differential numbers of people dropping out of the three groups may open the possibility of consistent differences between groups based upon who dropped out of each group. In order to help ensure that the participants were answering as truthfully as possible, one question was used as a manipulation check for those in the Violent and Nonviolent groups (*How violent was the clip you just watched?*). If a participant's answer was the opposite of what one might expect from either group (i.e. Nonviolent participant stating that the clips were extremely violent), then it was more likely that the participant was not paying attention to their answers. If it was deemed that a participant was not in fact paying attention,

then their responses would not be included in the final data collection. Very few participants were actually disregarded for responding in such a way though. Control group participants were not given this question to avoid contaminating their answers. There was an additional attention check in the Moral Foundations Questionnaire section (*Whether or not someone was good at math*). If a participant ranked that statement as being greater than 4 (*Somewhat relevant*, with endpoints *Not at all relevant* and *Extremely relevant*), then their data was ignored completely. Again, such an answer would most likely signify that the participant was not paying attention to their answers.

2.2. Procedure

Participants were randomly distributed into one of three groups. The first two groups were first shown three videos taken from ABC's YouTube channel—one group was shown news clips regarding violent events (Violent), while the other group was shown news clips regarding non-violent events (Nonviolent). The Control group was not shown any clips. Each clip was about two minutes long. Each video would be shown on a separate page, and a timer set to the same length of time as the video clip would keep the participant from continuing on before they had finished watching the video. Specifically for the Violent group, news videos regarding the fairly recent discovery of a murdered woman's body in a suitcase, warnings about identity theft online, and a private plane crashing into a house. For the Nonviolent group, news videos regarding a father surprising his son after coming back from oversea military service, two dogs saving their owner when she had a seizure, and a viral video of an elderly woman clearing the snow away from in front of her house.

Upon completing all three videos, the participant would be asked a series of questions, starting with those from the Moral Foundations Questionnaire. The questionnaire asks the participant to rate, on a 6-point scale (endpoints labeled as *Not at all relevant* and *Extremely relevant*), how relevant 16 different stated factors are when deciding whether an action is morally right or wrong. For example, one statement might be "Whether or not someone suffered emotionally." On the next page, participants are asked to indicate on a 7-point scale (endpoints labeled as *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*) how much they agree with 16 more statements. One such statement is "Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial value." These two portions were included in an effort to see if there would be a pattern between violence in the news and a person's conservative or liberal leanings. Having taken this questionnaire is likely to have altered their responses to the next set of questions. Since participants in all groups took the questionnaire, it does not create a confound, though it may raise issues concerning generalization.

Following this section, the participant is given 10 questions to answer regarding their view of the world around them. Specifically, whether the participant believed that various areas of ranging size (i.e. the neighborhood, city, country the participant lives or has lived in) have become more or less violent compared to how it was in the past. A 5-point scale is given (endpoints labeled as *Much more* to *Much less*), though an additional option of *Don't know/Not applicable* is provided in case the participant does not apply for that specific question. For example, the question "Compared to your childhood (if you grew up in the United States), how much more/less violent do you think the United States has become?" would not apply to someone who grew up in another country. In a large university, the possibility of this happening

is greater than most others. Unfortunately, participants were not asked where exactly they lived for most of their childhood, so questions regarding comparisons between when a participant currently lives and used to live might not give as much information as previously believed. Next, the participants were asked seven questions regarding the three video clips they watched previously. This is the one section other than the three videos that the control group is not given. It was debated briefly whether to give these questions to the control group regardless, but there was a possibility that this would alert at least some participants that they were in the control group and that this might affect their answers for the rest of the study. Some questions asked were *How violent do you think the content you just watched was?*, *While watching the clips, how uncomfortable did the violence make you?*, and *Have you been to any of the places shown in the clips?* The first two questions were asked in an effort to better understand how desensitized the participant is to violence in the news. Desensitization for someone might show up as a different perception of what *Some violence* might be compared to other people, or it might show up as a lack of anxiety or distress when shown a violent or disturbing news clip.

The next and shortest section was based off of the Mean World Index with three questions, each with a sliding scale of 1-7 (1 was *Not at all* and 7 was *Always and absolutely true*). Participants were asked to indicate their level of belief in three statements—*You can never be too careful in dealing with people*, *People will always take advantage of you if they get the chance*, and *Most people are just looking out for themselves*.

Finally, participants were asked to answer 17 demographic questions. The first five were general questions regarding age, gender, etc., while the following 10 were asked about how much media the participant generally consumes, what genres the participant has recently been

consuming, and the levels of violence within media they consume (media specified was movies, television, and video games). The last two questions concerned approximately how often the participant sees/hears news reports per day, and what sources they usually see/hear these reports from.

Upon finishing these questions, participants would be thanked and the survey would be complete.

3. RESULTS

SPSS Statistics program was used for all analyses. The data from the Mean World Index section was used as the dependent variable, and the Moral Foundations and conditions (Violent participant, Nonviolent participant) were used as independent variables. Then a linear regression model was used to find if there were any correlations between the dependent and independent variables. Participants in the Nonviolent group (when compared to the Violent and Control group) were less likely to say that they were likely to be a victim of violence in a public place (this question will be referred to as "PublicLikelyVictim" within the text and in the tables), t (79) = -2.71, p = 0.01 (**Table 1**). They were also somewhat less likely to say that they were likely to be a victim of violence in a private place (referred to as "PrivateLikelyVictim"), t (79) = -1.24, p = 0.22 (**Table 1**). Both of these relationships were consistent with Cultivation Theory's claim, even after just a single exposure. However, there were no other differences between the three groups and the MWI questions that were detected. When participants in the Violent group are compared to both the Nonviolent group and Control group together, less of the data stands out. For PublicLikelyVictim, t (79) = 0.07, p = 0.95 (**Table 1**). For PrivateLikelyVictim, t (79) =

0.32, $p = 0.75$ (**Table 1**). As can be seen in **Table 2**, there is not a significant or noticeable difference between the data either.

Table 1 — Nonviolent (N) and Violent (V) Group MWI (Independent Samples)

Question	Group	*t*	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
PrivateLikelyVictim	N	-1.24	.22	-0.25
	V	0.32	.75	0.09
PublicLikelyVictim	N	-2.71	.01	-0.48
	V	0.07	.95	0.02
NeverTooCareful	N	-0.33	.74	-0.09
	V	0.62	.54	0.23
PeopleTakeAdvantage	N	0.46	.65	0.14
	V	0.81	.42	0.33
LookOutForThemselves	N	-0.28	.78	-0.07
	V	0.98	.33	0.35

**Decimals rounded to nearest hundredth*

For **Table 2**, although the only significant event observed was in PublicLikelyVictim, if you look at all dependent variables, all five are in direction of being consistent with the Mean World hypothesis. The mean of the Violent group is consistently higher for every question.

The difference between what is currently labeled **Table 2** and **Table 3**, is that the latter contains the Violent, Nonviolent, and Control (the offset) groups. Whereas **Table 2** contains the exact same dependent variables, but the data compared is only Violent versus Nonviolent. Both tables show that the perceptions of likelihood of being a victim in public was highest after the violent condition.

Table 2 — Nonviolent (N) and Violent (V) Group MWI (Group Statistics)

Question	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation
PrivateLikelyVictim	N	2.86	0.9
	V	3.07	0.83
PublicLikelyVictim	N	2.36	0.72
	V	2.64	0.93
NeverTooCareful	N	5.14	1.13
	V	5.38	1.33
PeopleTakeAdvantage	N	4.72	1.37

	V	4.92	1.04
LookOutForThemselves	N	4.97	1.36
	V	5.31	1.03

**Decimals rounded to nearest hundredth*

Of all of the tables of data, **Table 3** is the most significant. For the question regarding how likely someone believes they could be the victim of a crime while in public, the Mean Square and *F* are significantly greater than the rest. Of all of the data gathered, its sheer difference in size marks it as an important point of information to be analyzed.

Table 3 — ANOVA

Question	Sig.	Mean Square	*F*
ChildNeighborhood	.71	0.44	0.34
NeighborhoodNow	.89	0.17	0.12
MoreViolentCityNow	.29	1.65	1.25
MoreViolentUSNow	.36	2.23	1.03
MoreViolentNon_USNow	.56	2.01	0.58

ExtremeViolenceWorry	.37	0.9	1.00
HowLongBeforePublic	.75	1.89	0.28
PrivateLikelyVictim	.47	0.64	0.77
PublicLikelyVictim	**.02**	**2.75**	**4.34**
RecognizePlacesInClips	.49	0.15	0.49
BeenToPlacesInClips	.89	0.00	0.02

**Decimals rounded to nearest hundredth*

The reason for including both **Table 2** and **Table 3** is for two reasons:

A) To see whether the effects would remain significant when we had offset control. The offset control could have nullified the effect, but this was not the case, which is exactly what we were checking to see.

B) We simply wanted to be confident that the observed effect was directionally consistent with the hypotheses, specifically that the *F* statistic does not give directionality, but the *t* statistic does (i.e. had to see whether *t* was negative or positive).

4. DISCUSSION

The goal of the current study was to determine whether a one-shot, short experiment could yield at least temporary perceptions of a mean world. Another goal was to determine

whether a particular measurement would still work to help predict cultivation when used within such a short experiment. Unfortunately, the ability to draw a conclusion was limited due to a low complete sample size, though we did still detect a noticeable difference between the Violent group versus the Nonviolent and Control groups when it came to PublicLikelyVictim. This means that participants within the Violent group were affected by the news clips they were shown.

When first conducting the experiment, there were of course certain expectations, though most were relatively small. Some such expectations were that the data from certain questions or demographic groups would pop out, such as gender demographics—specifically the women after being shown the body in a suitcase video. At the very least, there was an expectation that there would be some sort of difference between the Violent group when compared to the Nonviolent and Control groups, even after a short period of time. However, as presented in the data, there were no noticeable differences between demographic groups. The only noticeable difference between the Violent group and the other two groups was that participants in the Violent group were more likely to believe that they could be a victim of a crime while in public. Lastly, despite the fact that there was only one statistically significant dependent variable out of five, all five of the dependent variables were directionally consistent with the Mean World hypothesis (as seen in **Table 2**).

As mentioned previously, a noticeable difference between the Violent and the Nonviolent and Control groups was expected, but this does not mean the results are any less interesting. The reason why is because of the media used, and the amount of time each person participated. The media used was incredibly short in comparison to the media most other studies have used, and

the participants only watched each video once, but those in the Violent group still experienced cultivation.

We might have had more data, which would have made our conclusion more reliable, but a problem occurred while building the survey that led to a decrease in the number of participants who completed the entire survey. The third video (a plane crashing into a house) was missing from the published survey, and by the time this was discovered, participants had already started taking the survey. There might have been a stronger response by the Violent group participants if the third video had been in the survey, as well as differing responses to other questions. The video that was missing was a violent, non-crime related video, while the first two videos were both crime-related. Had Violent participants seen that last video, perhaps their responses to the PublicLikelyVictim or how violent they believe the world to be questions would have been more pronounced. The small sample size and possibility of a weakened response does limit the conclusions we can make.

In conclusion, we did in fact find a noticeable difference between those participants who were in the Violent group and those who were not when it came to their belief that they could be the victim of a crime while in public. Because the results of the Nonviolent group versus the Violent and Control groups together were nowhere near this difference, it can be assumed that the news clips the Violent group watched did affect their believed safety in public places. This study has also served as an example of the ways a small error can possibly affect the results of a study. In the future, we will be sure to not make the same mistake and check multiple times—especially after publishing the survey—that all components available to the participant are in place and correctly prepared. The results may still be useful, as it does show that

short-term exposure can still cultivate the sense of a mean world in a person to a noticeable degree. At the very least, it reminds the person of their belief in a mean world and would then appear in the results as a stronger sense of mean world than those in other groups. More research would be required in order to further flesh this out and add more proof (i.e. more subjects, as well as a larger demographic). For example, it would be interesting to see how long a person's beliefs are influenced by the effects of watching the short video clips, or how long someone would need to watch short video clips in order to be affected by long-term cultivation. Some other interesting possibilities is to see if short video clips have different effects on people in comparison to longer media, such as 30-45 minute long episodes. Testing out different forms of media might give some more useful information, such as whether animations have any effect whatsoever, or what the difference is in the participant's reactions towards videos including people of a similar grouping (i.e. similar age, gender, ethnicity, etc.) and of different groupings.

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BIOGRAPHY

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