

BIG HAIR AND BIG EGOS: TEXAN STEREOTYPES IN AMERICAN ENTERTAINMENT

MEDIA AS FORMED THROUGH TELEVISION VIEWING

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This thesis explores the stereotypes of Texans portrayed in American entertainment media, and attempts to identify the reasons for both the existence, and persistence of these images. The study includes a brief history of Texas, and background information on the formulation of stereotypes. Cultivation theory is used to explain the process of stereotypes formed through television viewing. Content analysis of the responses from an on line survey involving 52 participants revealed that people outside the state of Texas have strong perceptions about Texans that are consistent with media representations. As the level of television viewership increased, so did the indelibility of the impressions. Those who watch more television were more likely to perceive the image of Texans as negative, and less likely to change their opinions of Texans after visiting the state.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

J.R. Ewing. Hank Hill. Don't Mess with Texas. *Friday Night Lights*. *Urban Cowboy*. For most Americans, and perhaps for people all over the world, these are the images of the state of Texas and the people who call it home. Admittedly prideful, and deliberately separatist, Texans have always differentiated themselves from residents of other states. But the stereotypes of Texans in the media have proven widespread and enduring, regardless of their accuracy or timeliness. What are these images, and what keeps them alive? This thesis explores the stereotypes of Texans portrayed in American entertainment media, and attempt to identify the reasons for both the existence, and persistence of these images. Texas' unique heritage is important to the understanding of the Texan stereotype, therefore the discussion of Texan images begins with a brief history of the state.

Lone Star History

Texas has never been a willing part of any whole. Texas is the only state to have been under the leadership of six different entities, hence the familiar phrase, "six flags over Texas." The flags of Spain, France, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the Confederacy, and the United States have all flown over Texas (Rasmussen, 2000). Named "tejas" for the Indian word meaning "friends" (Brunner, 2002), the modern identity of the state is a hybrid of the many cultures that settled and inhabited the region, as well as a reminder of the state's determination to not submit to ruling nations or immigrating "outsiders."

The earliest known settlers in Texas were American Indians. Evidence of Indian communities in the region dates back as far as 40,000 years ago. During the centuries that followed, Tonkawa, Wichita, Coahuiltecan, Karankawa, Kiowa, Apache, Jumano, Atakapan, Cancho, and Commanche tribes would all inhabit the area (Turner, 1996).

In 1519, Spanish conquistadors took interest in the land now known as Texas as they searched for the fabled "cities of gold." No such cities materialized, but the Spanish established missions in South and West Texas, which would later become the first Texas cities (lone-star.net, 2004).

Also motivated by untapped treasures, the French attempted to colonize along the Texas Gulf Coast in 1682. But rough weather and competition with the native Indians forced Sieur de La Salle and his men to return to France. The flag of France flew over the Gulf Coast for just five years, until Spain reestablished its claim of the land (Rasmussen, 2000).

By 1800, there were three permanent Spanish settlements in Texas: San Antonio, Goliad, and Nacagdoches. When France sold Louisiana to the United States in 1803, Texas was left bordering New Spain and the United States. Spain, in order to keep the land from becoming United States territory, encouraged Spanish citizens to settle there, and tried to keep out land-seeking Americans (Workman, 1998).

But in 1821, Spain did allow Stephen F. Austin to bring 300 settler families to the region. During the next 10 years, 900 more American families, and 800 Mexican (Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821) and European families would relocate to the area. Mexico enticed settlers to move to Texas, now Mexican territory after the

end of the Spanish rule over Mexico, with the promise of large land grants. Conflicts emerged between Texians (as people living in the region were called) and Mexicans over property ownership and religion. This tension encouraged the people of Texas to rally for independence from Mexico (Workman, 1998).

The Texas Revolution began in 1835, when Mexican dictator General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna led his men to San Antonio, and conquered a group of Texas soldiers who were using the Alamo mission as a fort. Santa Anna also defeated Texas forces at the Battle of Goliad shortly thereafter. Disillusioned, short-handed and hungry, the Texas army retreated (Workman, 1998). Early the next year, General Sam Houston launched a surprise attack while Santa Anna's troops were napping near the San Jacinto River. The Texas army defeated the unsuspecting Mexican army in 18 minutes, amidst cries of the now-often quoted mantra "remember the Alamo!" (Turner, 1996).

General Houston was named the president of the new Republic of Texas. Texas is the only U.S. state that has been a republic and has had its own president. For ten years, the republic was independent politically and culturally, even building its own navy (Turner, 1996).

Although Texans appreciated their hard-fought independence, the advantages of statehood eventually surfaced. In 1845, the appeal of the U.S. postal service, military protection, and a secure money system convinced the Texas government to allow the republic to become the 28th state in the United States (Turner, 1996). Dependent on slaves to support the huge cotton industry, Texas seceded from the Union in 1861 and joined the Confederate States of America (Rasmussen, 2000).

While many states suffered after the Civil War, especially Confederate states, Texas actually thrived. Longhorn cattle became a nationwide commodity, helping the Texas economy for two decades after the war. But no event in Texas' economic history is more significant than the discovery of oil at Spindletop in 1901. Oil reserves of East Texas proved to be enormous, and a gold rush of another kind began (Rasmussen, 2000).

More Than Black Gold

Texas is certainly known for its role in the oil industry, and the state's economy has been dependent on oil for decades. But Texas in the early days was largely agricultural. During the late 1800s, 85% of the land in Texas was used for farming or ranching. Industry was slow to develop because Texas lacked sufficient hydroelectric power for the machine industry (Rasmussen, 2000).

Everything changed in September 1901 when the Spindletop oil field was discovered in East Texas. The discovery prompted statewide exploration; it was soon revealed that Texas was sitting on top of a massive subterranean sea of oil extending out into the Gulf of Mexico. Huge amounts of natural gas resources, one-third of the nation's supply, were also found (Rasmussen, 2000).

The oil rush brought great revenues to the state and gave birth to hundreds of millionaire oilmen almost overnight. The population of Texas grew from three million to four million in the ten years following Spindletop. The discovery of oil in Texas also allowed the manufacturing industry to develop (Rasmussen, 2000).

Texas ranks among the ten most productive manufacturing states, with oil refining and petrochemical manufacturing as the largest industry. Texas is also where most of the machinery used in oil exploration and drilling is made (Rasmussen, 2000).

In 1961, NASA chose Houston as the site of the Manned Spacecraft Center, later renamed Johnson Space Center in honor of Lyndon B. Johnson. The center is used for astronaut training, and is the hub of mission control. The addition of the space industry to Texas fueled the development of the manufacturing of cars, airplanes, and mobile homes (Rasmussen, 2000).

Huge processing plants were built to handle the steady supply of poultry, livestock and vegetables now needed for new residents. The sudden crash of oil prices in the 1980's forced the state to diversify; now the mining, textile, clothing, and timber industries also thrive in Texas (Rasmussen, 2000).

It's "Texas-sized"

Until Alaska became a state in 1959, Texas was the largest of the United States. It is still the largest of the contiguous forty-eight states, and constitutes one-twelfth of the land mass of North America. The state extends 800 miles from east to west, from the border with Louisiana and Arkansas to the boundaries of Mexico and New Mexico. Almost 730 miles lie between the Oklahoma state line to the north and the southernmost tip of the state. Texas has a total area of more than 250,000 square miles (Rasmussen, 2000). Brewster County is the largest county in the state, covering 6,208 square miles. Connecticut, Delaware and Rhode Island can fit inside Brewster County. El Paso, Texas is closer to Needles, California (516 miles) than it is to Dallas,

Texas (571 miles) (Baker, 2005). Texas is home to more than 22 million people (Seabrooke, 2005) and 16 million cattle (Baker, 2005). Three of the top ten most populous U.S. cities are in Texas: Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio (50 states.com). Texas boasts 24 cities with a population of 100,000 or more (Alvarez, 2005). There are 90 mountains a mile or more high; Guadalupe Peak in West Texas at 8,751 is the tallest (Baker, 2005).

Texas Trivia

Texas has more than its share of "firsts" and "mosts," some considerably more prestigious than others. Texas is home to the first suspension bridge built in the United States, the Waco Bridge built 1870, and the first domed stadium, the Astrodome built in Houston in 1965. The world's largest helium well is in Amarillo. Texas has had five different cities as its state capital, and has eight professional sports teams. Dr Pepper and jalapeño jelly were created in Texas. There have been four U.S. presidents with Lone Star ties, George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush being the most recent. Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lyndon B. Johnson were actually born in Texas. The first word spoken from the moon was "Houston" in 1969. Texas has the world's longest fishing pier (Port Lavaca), the world's largest rose garden (the Tyler Municipal Rose Garden), and the only hotel in the U.S. built entirely over water (the Flagship in Galveston). The Heisman trophy is named for John William Heisman, coach and athletic director of Houston's Rice University (50states.com).

Texans in the Spotlight

There are a host of Texans in the public arena. Well-known Texans thrive in politics, college and professional sports and the music industry, among other areas. The abundance of prominent, "real-life" Texans seems to draw attention to the state, and generates images in addition to those created by entertainment media.

The World Almanac offers a list of famous Texans: Lance Armstrong, Stephen F. Austin, Lloyd Bentsen, James Bowie, Carol Burnett, George H. W. Bush, George W. Bush, Joan Crawford, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Morgan Fairchild, Farrah Fawcett, Sam Houston, Howard Hughes, Kay Bailey Hutchison, Molly Ivins, Lyndon B. Johnson, Tommy Lee Jones, Janis Joplin, Barbara Jordan, Mary Martin, Chester Nimitz, Sandra Day O'Connor, H. Ross Perot, Katherine Ann Porter, Dan Rather, Sam Rayburn, Ann Richards, Sissy Spacek, Kenneth Starr, George Strait (Seabrooke, 2005).

A few other memorable Texans include cosmetics queen Mary Kay Ash and her fleet of pink Cadillacs, musicians Roy Orbison and George Jones, and J. R. Ewing himself, Larry Hagman (who's mother is Mary Martin). Also hailing from Texas are A.J. Foyt, Willie Nelson, Tommy Tune, Kathy Baker and Spanky MacFarland (50states.com).

An understanding of the state's history, character and public image is helpful in evaluating the images and stereotypes of the people who live there. It is also crucial to understand stereotypes-- what they are and why they exist in society.

Stereotypes

Richard Dyer has written extensively on the subject of stereotypes. Dyer (2000) outlines the evolution and the impact of the term in the essay, "The Role of Stereotypes."

According to Dyer, long time newspaper columnist Walter Lippmann coined the term "stereotype" in the early 1920s. Lippmann did not intend that stereotypes would, necessarily, be negative. Lippmann proposed that stereotypes are essential for society, and that they go beyond labeling or categorizing elements in life—that they actually guarantee our values, positions and rights. Stereotypes are emotionally charged and are used to create safe roles for ourselves and others (Dyer, 1993).

Stereotyping can be considered an "ordering process" by which humans make sense of their surroundings by generalizing, patterning and labeling. Some orderings may be limited or incomplete; incompleteness does not render the impression false (Dyer, 1993).

The work of Berger and Luckman (1967) adds another layer to the concept of the stereotype. Their research on the social construction of reality implies not only that stereotyping is a natural and necessary part of human awareness, but that those with power and influence in society have a better chance of imposing their impressions and conclusions on other, less influential people (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

Lippmann also describes a stereotype as "shortcut." Stereotypes are simple, easy to process, and efficient in conveying a great deal of information in a single glimpse (Dyer, 2002). It is for this reason that stereotypical images are so often used in

television and film—a huge amount can be learned about characters the moment the audience meets them. Because stereotypes are often introduced by the media, a discussion of how media images affect the beliefs and behaviors of viewers is valuable. Cultivation Theory addresses the role of media images in the creation of widely-held perceptions and opinions.

Cultivation Theory

In 1973, Dr. George Gerbner created the Cultural Indicators Project, involving three research components. The first was to study the institutional processes behind the production of media content; the second to evaluate the media messages. The third prong of the research paradigm, known now as cultivation analysis, was to explore the connection between exposure to media messages and audience perception and behavior (Signorielli & Morgan, 1990).

Cultivation theory was further developed by Gerbner in the 1970s and 1980s as an approach to understanding media's role in society. Gerbner studied television viewers and their impression of violence in the world. Gerbner concluded that if a person watched several acts of violence against characters on TV, the viewer would assume that violence was common, even if the reality is that violent acts are rare. Gerbner believed that television actually "cultivates" a world view that viewers accept as reality. Even when this perceived reality is inaccurate, viewers think it is real and base decisions around that sense of reality (Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox & Signorielli, 1978).

Gerbner concluded that television is “essentially and fundamentally different from other forms of mass media,” that it serves as the “central cultural arm of American society,” and is the “chief creator of synthetic cultural pattern.” (Gerbner et al, 1978, p. 178). Gerbner determined that television images provide a consciousness (not specific attitudes or opinions) upon which conclusions and judgments are later made, and that television acts as a stabilizer of social patterns by generating resistance to change (Morgan & Signorielli, 1990).

The amount of television viewing is an important aspect of Gerbner’s theory. Gerbner maintained not only that television effects viewers’ perception of reality, but that *more* television affects a viewers’ perception *more*. The more time a person spends watching television, the more likely that person is to perceive the world the way it portrayed on the screen (Gross & Morgan, 1985).

The first reported cultivation studies were conducted in 1976 (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). Using data collected by the National Opinion Research Center, Gerbner and colleagues reported that heavy television viewers were more suspicious and distrustful, and more likely to overestimate the likelihood of violence in their lives (Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeke, Jefferies-Fox and Signorielli, 1978).

The basic premise of cultivation theory is that multiple exposures to consistent images and ideas sway viewers’ impressions, and that increased exposure strengthens those impressions (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). The term cultivation is deliberately used to reflect the notion that the impact of media images does not follow the simple, linear cause-and-effect or stimulus response model. Instead, cultivation implies a cumulative

response to media messages over time (Morgan & Signorielli, 1990). It encompasses the notion of an impression or idea being planted and growing bigger and stronger in a favorable environment.

In response to criticism of the theory, Gerbner added two concepts during the early 1980s: resonance and mainstreaming. Resonance is the increased impact of media images when they are consistent with real life experiences. Mainstreaming is the leveling effect of heavy viewing, which generates a shared impression in the minds of heavy viewers that outweigh differences that would normally be a result of social and demographic factors (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1986).

In further investigation of the cultivation hypothesis, Hawkins and Pingree (1990) looked at the psychological process of constructing reality from media messages. The authors determined that it is not individual actions, characters, or messages that become the basis for reality; instead it is consistent patterns of action and characterization found in different shows and even throughout several seasons of entertainment television. As a result, single actions or depictions may not factor into the sense of reality. The viewer's reality is based on the aggregate images generated over time and across different programs (Hawkins & Pingree, 1990).

Hawkins and Pingree also noted the distinction between learning and reinforcing (1990). Viewers receive and maintain various fragments which, together, form an impression. They speculated that as people collect the fragments, they automatically align the new information with previously learned prototypes, reinforcing existing opinions and judgments. Instead of taking the information and processing it singularly,

television audiences process information according to established beliefs and experiences (Hawkins & Pingree, 1990).

The creation of certain opinions and stereotypes is not completely the act of the viewer, though. Hawkins and Pingree also pointed out that most television writers, producers and directors actually do have a point they want to make. They are not sending out random, ambiguous fragments to be assembled by the viewer, but instead, a specific message to be absorbed by the audience over time (Hawkins & Pingree, 1990).

Cultivation Theory and Film

It is important to note that the discussion of television and its influence is not limited to TV shows. Films seen on television, whether through broadcast television, cable, satellite, videotape, or DVD, also play a role in audience's impressions of the world. Film comprises a significant portion of what is seen on television, and should be included in the analysis of the influence of television on viewers' perception of reality. Movies are part of the television experience, and contribute to impressions, perceptions and stereotypes of characters.

Since the early days of television, Hollywood movie makers wanted to use the power and pervasiveness of television as an outlet for their films and the promotion of films (Kramer, 1992). But the adversarial relationship between the networks and Hollywood, with both interested in increasing their own viewership, meant that the major studios were reluctant to put films on TV until the 1950s (Lafferty, 1990).

The number of films seen on television has grown steadily since then, as a result of both an increase in the number films being integrated into television programming, and the ability for audiences to watch films at home through advancing technology. NBC's 1961 debut of "Saturday Night at the Movies," a weekly prime-time broadcast of feature films that had already been in theaters, started a trend that eventually caught on with other networks. By 1971, films constituted one quarter of primetime programming. The 1970s also saw success for made-for-tv movies (Lafferty, 1990).

The development of video cassette recorders (VCRs), cable television, and satellite television continued the trend of watching films at home (Hilmes, 1990). By the 1980s, home video and cable were a stable source of income for movie studios, equaling that of the theatergoing market (Kramer, 1992). In the mid-1980s, cable penetration in the United States was 50%, and VCRs had become as common as television sets (Lafferty, 1990). By 2005, 59% of U.S. households had cable TV (www.ncta.com). By 2005, VCR penetration reached 95% and 25% of households had digital video disk (DVD) players (www.vsda.org).

The advent of pay-per-view, digital cable, and high definition television (HDTV) during the 1990s meant an increased number of channels and the ability for audiences to personalize programming. The trend continues as these products and services become easier to use, and more affordable (Hilmes, 1990).

Another development that allowed for an increase in the number of films viewed at home is the creation of more independent stations, through the development of cable in the 1980s and HDTV in the late 1990s. More stations meant the ability

specialize, and to show more films on television. By 1987, feature films were the foundation of independent station programming in the nation's top 20 markets, with 90% of the independent stations in those markets airing movies during prime-time (Lafferty, 1990).

Recent studies indicate people are watching more films at home than ever before—and fewer in the theater. A USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll revealed that 73% of the adults surveyed prefer seeing movies in their homes. Some former theatergoers cite high ticket prices, noisy patrons and cell phones, pricey snacks and long lines as reasons to stay home. Also, a shorter wait for release on DVD (to offset the studio's loss to piracy) has affected theater attendance, and increased DVD rentals and sales. In 2005, consumers spent \$15.5 billion buying DVDs 33% from 2003 (Breznican & Strauss, 2005).

Cultivation Theory and Stereotypes of Social Groups

Cultivation theory can be used to explain to the creation of widely-held stereotypes based on images and characterizations found on television. In order to evaluate the images of Texans in media, it is important to establish the connection between the media's portrayal of specific social groups and the development of stereotypes.

Age

In 1980, almost 16% of the population was over the age of 60, but only 3% of the characters in prime-time television series were over 65, with even fewer elderly people represented in commercials. In addition to being underrepresented, elderly

people are usually shown as physically and mentally weak, narrow-minded, and never satisfied. They are often shown with menial jobs or sitting in rocking chairs; they are often depicted as unattractive, incapable and ill (Weimann, 2000).

Gerbner (1993) studied the portrayal of elderly people in the media, and the effect of the media images on viewers. Gerbner discovered the more people watch television, the more they tended to see older people in a negative light. The under representation of older people during primetime also led viewers to assume the elderly population was diminishing, instead of growing (Gerbner, 1993). Wober and Gunter (1982) established a connection between the impression of the elderly on television and in real life, but added that it is difficult to determine which one had led to the other.

Occupation

DeFluer and DeFleur (1967) discovered that children are more likely to describe the characteristics of occupations they see on television than those they would likely come across in real life. They concluded that the media paint a shallow and distorted picture about the work force in general, and that these images are accepted as truthful by audiences, especially children (DeFluer & DeFleur, 1967). Jeffries-Fox and Signorielli (1979) concluded that half of the viewers placed the television representation of doctors, lawyers and police officers over their own impressions of dealing with these people in their real lives. When these viewers described certain occupational roles, their descriptions matched the images seen on TV (Jeffries-Fox & Signorielli, 1978).

Wroblewski and Huston (1987) noted that teenagers learned about different jobs from

television, and that they wanted to have the jobs they had seen in their favorite shows, even when they had never actually known a person in that occupation.

A study by Pfau, Mullen and Garrow (1995a) looked specifically at the television depiction of doctors, and how those images affected viewers' perceptions. The researchers measured the impact of the television images of physicians on viewer perceptions of the doctors' personal attributes, such as character, interpersonal style, physical attractiveness, power, competence and regard for others. Also examined were the effects of the depiction of the doctors' professional attributes, including proportion of doctors who are female, young, upper class, and involved in family medicine. They concluded that the depiction and perception of doctors on TV is different from the way that doctors perceive themselves and their peers, and that the audience perception is consistent with the television representation. Their study also revealed that the tendency to perceive doctors as they are portrayed on the screen increased with the number of medical programs a person watched (Pfau, Mullen & Garrow, 1995a).

They also studied television viewing and audience perceptions of attorneys, and found that the impression of lawyers' character, traits, and demeanor were based largely on the program images (Pfau, Mullen, Deidrich and Garrow, 1995b). Signorielli (1993) also found that the portrayal of certain occupations on TV led to specific impressions of those jobs in the viewers' minds. In a national study of high school seniors, the researcher noted that some jobs, and not others, were glamorized on the screen. The more TV the students watched, the more likely they were to desire prestigious, high-status jobs that are glorified on television (Signorielli, 1993).

Race

Cultivation theory has also been applied to the portrayal and perception of racial groups. Several studies indicate that televised portrayals of minority groups influence the real-life perception of majority group members.

Zuckerman, Singer and Singer (1980) identified a connection between white children's exposure to TV and their perception of racial and ethnic minorities. The white children who were heavy viewers of violent programs were more likely to describe African Americans as less competent and less obedient than white people (Zuckerman, Singer and Singer, 1980).

Also, the number of portrayals of African American characters in TV shows led young white viewers to overestimate the number of African Americans in various real world roles. These impressions remained in tact, even when the children had real life experiences with African Americans (Atkin, Greenberg and McDermott, 1983).

When minorities are portrayed in media, members of the minority group tend to have different opinions about the depiction than members outside the group. Faber, O'Guinn and Meyer (1987) discovered that Latinos who were heavy viewers did not feel the portrayal of Latinos on television was fair. Comparatively, the white heavy viewers were more likely to deem the Latino depiction as equitable (Faber, O'Guinn and Meyer, 1987).

Gilens (1996) determined that African American people are shown as poor at a level inconsistent with the percentage of the poor population they actually represent. As a result, a national survey found that the public overestimates the tendency for African

American people to be in poverty. The U.S Bureau of Statistics found that viewers estimated 50% of poor people are African American, in contrast to the 29% they represent. When asked which group was more likely to be poor, African American people or white people, 55% answered African American, as opposed to 24% who answered white (Gilens, 1996).

Tan, Fujioka and Tan (2000) surveyed white college students who watched an average of 9.96 hours of television each week. The students were asked to list adjectives and images of African American people in movies and TV shows they had seen recently. More than twice as many negative attributes were listed than positive. The respondents were then asked to rate African American people on a variety of social and economic factors. The students ranked African American people less positive than white people on almost all factors: drug dealing, crime, violence, intelligence, laziness, tolerance, patriotism, preference for welfare, wealth, education and drug use. The only factors the students did not rank African American people less positive than white people were alcohol abuse and family ties (Tan, Fujioka & Tan, 2000).

In some cases, the media images of social groups serve to reinforce perceptions and opinions already held by viewers (Huston, 1992). A study of adult reactions to *All in the Family* indicated that viewers who showed prejudice against African Americans before the viewing thought the TV program supported their views. Those who did not exhibit prejudice against African Americans felt the show reinforced nonprejudicial attitudes (Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974).

Disability

The perception of people with disabilities, based on television portrayal, was explored by Elliot and Byrd (1983). The researchers showed three different programs to three groups of eighth grade students: one group watched a "Mork and Mindy" episode featuring a blind character; the second saw an informative film that addressed how to meet blind people; the third group was exposed to a "Mork and Mindy" episode that did not feature a disabled character. The informative video group reflected the most positive attitude toward blind people. The study was replicated in 1984 using college men. Again, the group who experienced the informative video developed more positive impressions of disabled people. Elliot and Byrd conclude that media images reinforce negative attitudes through misinformation and stereotypes, and that images (positive or negative) effect viewer perception (1984).

These studies indicate that viewers form opinions and expectations of certain social groups based on the way the groups are shown on TV. Also implied is that these impressions seem to be generated and maintained in spite of, or in the absence of, real life experiences with people in that group.

Texans as a Social Group

In the same way that media introduces and reinforces stereotypes of social groups that are defined by age, ethnicity, occupation, or disability, television and film images can generate stereotypes of people from certain countries or regions. It is possible that the portrayal of Texans in entertainment programming has led to specific impressions and expectations of the group, irrelevant interaction with "real" Texans.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Texan stereotypes, their connection to American entertainment media, and the reason for their persistence. To do this, it is important to learn how people outside Texas perceive Texans. It is also crucial to discover their level of viewership, what media images these people have experienced, and how much real life experience they have had in the state. The following questions guided the original research:

RQ1: What are the stereotypes of Texans held by people outside Texas?

RQ2: How were these stereotypes generated?

CHAPTER II

METHOD

The research is a qualitative study involving approximately 50 people who live in the United States outside the state of Texas, and have never lived in Texas. The study is qualitative in nature, in order to learn about participants' perceptions and how those perceptions were founded. Multiple choice and open-ended questions were used to allow for both concrete categorization of information, and more personal interpretation of responses. A small study group and various question formats were implemented to yield data that is manageable, yet rich and detailed.

Open-ended questions and first person accounts are useful in understanding how people characterize their realities. These types of questions allow respondents to answer in their own words, using their own terminology. Allowing people to answer freely creates an intimacy not present in more structured surveys; reading open-ended responses is similar to observing a subject in the natural environment (Fortner & Christians, 1989). The open-ended questions afford the researcher the chance to see the pictures painted by the respondents, without guidance or limitation. Multiple choice questions were also used because the answers can be objectively categorized.

For RQ1, "What are the stereotypes of Texans held by people outside Texas?" an open-ended question was used to gather descriptions of images of Texans. Respondents were allowed to list as many descriptors as desired. A multiple choice question followed, to determine whether participants perceived the image of Texans in entertainment media to be positive or negative.

To generate data for RQ2, "How were these stereotypes generated?" respondents were asked to list television shows and films they have seen that are about Texans. This was open-ended in nature, so as not to suggest certain titles. In this case, the perception of a show or film as being "about Texans" is valuable. If a participant experienced a show or film, and did not associate it as being about Texans, then it would not be useful to know that the viewer has seen it. Inviting respondents to list the titles of the shows and films allows them to make the judgment.

Also for RQ2, respondents were asked to indicate the amount of television and the number of films they watch each week. The format for these questions was multiple choice in order to categorize viewers and compare their level of viewership. Multiple choice questions were used to categorize viewers by the amount of television they watch each week and the number of films they watch each week. A multiple choice question was used to establish the amount of time participants had spent in Texas, if any. Questions regarding age and gender also utilized multiple choice format.

In a less structured question, participants who indicated they had been to Texas were asked whether their experience in the state reinforced or challenged their previous impressions. The question invited respondents to choose "reinforced" or "challenged" and then to explain either response in an open-ended format.

Content Analysis of Data

The data from the surveys was collected and content analyzed in order to discover patterns in responses that relate to the research questions regarding

stereotypes and their relationship to film and television viewership. Content analysis was used, given the broad and varied responses to the open-ended questions.

As defined by Krippendorff, (1980, p. 21) content analysis is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context.” Content analysis is a reliable, objective approach to understanding and measuring communication.

Content analysis allows for effectively categorizing and synthesizing television viewers' impressions and observations so that patterns may emerge. The application of structured questions in conjunction with open-ended items allows for both concrete categorization of data, and more personal interpretation of responses. The point of any analysis is to clarify something that is not immediately obvious. When analyzing communication, the “something” is significance or meaning hidden in communicated messages. People have been searching for significance in symbolic context since the earliest forms of communication existed. As communication became more diverse, and the advent of media meant the introduction of mass-produced messages, the need for an objective system of interpretation developed. Content analysis provides a way to objectively, systematically scrutinize messages and groups of messages to discover patterns, and the resulting “meaning” hidden within (Gerbner, 1969). Content analysis is used in communication research because of its reliance on messages and message subtext to illuminate patterns.

Survey

The survey consisted of 12 questions, using a blend of yes/no, multiple choice, and open-ended questions. Approval of the survey was granted by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Texas on December 16, 2005. The survey as it appeared on line is printed in the appendix.

A paper version of the survey was given to five respondents on December 22, 2005 in order to pre-test the questionnaire for errors, confusing wording and leading questions. The pre-test was also used to estimate the amount of time needed to complete the survey. Two demographic questions were eliminated from the survey after the pre-test: questions about the respondent's level of education, and current occupation. These questions were seen as intrusive and suggestive.

An online version of the survey was created using the service Web-OnLine-Surveys.com. This website allows the researcher to design the survey, and receive and process responses. The service assigned the survey a specific Web address (URL) allowing participants to access the site without the researcher's involvement. Each respondent was given a unique code to be used during data analysis, ensuring the anonymity of each participant. A version of the Approved Consent Notice, also approved by the IRB, appeared at the top of the survey on the Web-OnLine-Surveys site.

Participants

Participants were recruited for the study using a network of friends and family members who do not live in Texas. Twelve out-of-state friends and family members were asked, via e-mail, to each solicit potential respondents, maintaining a blend of age

groups and gender. The 12 people, six women and six men, represented the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Maryland, Missouri and Virginia. The contacts provided the researcher the names of the 60 people who agreed to participate. Each of the potential respondents was contacted by the researcher via a single e-mail, providing a description of the project and the URL to the survey. The request for participants was made via e-mail on January 31, 2006. The survey site was closed to respondents on February 18, 2006.

A total of 54 surveys were completed. Two participants, who mentioned that they had lived in Texas in their responses, were eliminated from the results, as the study required that respondents reflect the impressions of "non-Texans" living outside Texas. The remaining 52 responses were used for analysis.

Data Analysis

The unit of analysis is a single response. Many of the survey responses contain many answers to one question, as participants were asked to list or describe their impressions or experiences. Categories for RQ1 are physical descriptions, attitude/behavior and activities/lifestyle (see Table 1). Categories for RQ2 are western films, football films, documentaries, and TV shows set in Texas.

Table 1

Categories for Content Analysis

RQ1 Categories	RQ2 Categories
Physical Description	Westerns
Attitude/behavior	Football Films
Activities/lifestyle	Documentaries
	TV Shows Set in Texas

Of the 52 completed surveys, a subset (10%) was coded by an additional coder who was trained on the use of the content categories to establish intercoder reliability. The calculated reliability was 95% using Holsti's formula for reliability (Holsti, 1969).

Several patterns emerged from the data as it was content analyzed. The survey yielded useful insight into stereotypes of Texans and the formulation of those stereotypes.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Information from a sample group was gathered to determine the participants' perception of Texans, their level of television viewership, and the amount of real life experience they have had in the state of Texas. Details were also collected regarding changes in perception after spending time in Texas. The study sought to find relationships between the amount of television viewing and the creation or persistence of these perceptions. According to cultivation theory, people who watch television are likely to generate impressions of social groups based on their portrayal on the screen. Heavy viewers are more likely to develop persistent perceptions and stereotypes that endure even when balanced against real life representations.

Perception of Texans

Several themes emerged when respondents were asked to "describe a Texan." Content analysis of the responses revealed three primary categories accounted for the majority of the responses: physical description, attitude/behavior, and activities/lifestyle.

Regarding physical description, the "cowboy" theme was prevalent. Many people answered "cowboy," "cowboy hats," "boots," and "big belt buckles." More specific answers included "boots with the silver round thingy" and "expensive boots." Other popular answers were "big hair" and "flashy" and references to excessive diamond or gold jewelry.

With regard to the attitude and behavior of Texans, many answered "proud." Many felt that Texans are proud of the state and its history, while others indicated that Texans show pride with an element of elitism: "proud of their state and remind everyone that Texas is B-I-G," "extremely proud of who they are and think their state is the best," and "'I'm from Texas and you're not'."

Other trends among responses were that Texans are loud, arrogant, confident, tough, friendly, "easy going," materialistic and rich. Many responses involved the concept of "big": "everything is bigger in Texas," "bigger is better," "think big." More than a third of the participants described Texans as speaking with a "southern drawl" "accent," or "twang." Some described the accent as "nice," others, "weird."

The activities and lifestyle of Texans, as perceived by the participants is that Texans drive trucks, and listen to country music. They also own and herd cows, and are in the oil business.

In response to the question, "would you describe the image of Texans as positive or negative?" 60% selected "positive." The remaining 40% chose negative.

Level of Viewership

Among the respondents, 42% indicated that they watch between 1 and 5 hours of television each week (see Table 2). A smaller percentage (33%) answered that they watch more than 10 hours a week, followed by 21% of respondents who watch 6-10 hours. Only 4% of participants answered that they watch less than 1 hour in a week. The group who answered "less than one hour per week" is not referenced in the other tables and figures throughout the study. This is for two reasons: one, the group is

statistically very small. Secondly, the goal of the study is to determine what are the stereotypes that have been generated, and if those impressions strengthen and persist as viewership increases. The perception of people who watch little or no television does not likely reflect the media influence crucial to the study.

Table 2

Hours of Television Watched Each Week

< 1 Hour	1-5 Hours	6-10 Hours	10+ Hours
2 (4%)	22 (42%)	11 (21%)	17 (33%)

When asked about the number of films they watch each month, 44% of participants indicated they watch 1 or 2 (see Table 3). A smaller group (31%) watches 3 or 4 films each month, while 17% watch more than 5. Only 8% chose “none” as the number of films watched. Again, the group who do not watch films are not included in the discussion that follows.

Table 3

Number of Films Watched Each Week

None	1 or 2	3 or 4	5+
4 (8%)	23 (44%)	16 (31%)	9 (17%)

Level of Viewership and Perception

A trend emerged between the amount of television watched and the opinion about the portrayal of Texas as positive or negative (see Table 4). As the amount of television viewing increased, the perception of the depiction of the state as negative

increased. These figures support the premise that as television viewership increases, the impressions that are cultivated are stronger and more enduring. The data also indicates that there is a cumulatively negative impression that is seen as increasingly negative as TV viewership increases.

Table 4

Television Viewership and Perception of Image as Positive or Negative

Hours of TV Each Week	Positive	Negative
less than 1 hour	100%	0%
1-5 hours	68%	32%
6-10 hours	55%	45%
10+ hours	53%	47%

The data collected regarding whether or not respondents perceived that stereotypes of their own states existed was not consistent enough to draw useful conclusions. Similarly, the responses addressing the description of the stereotype, if perceived, were not conclusive.

TV Shows and Films about Texas

Respondents were asked to name television shows they have seen that are about Texans. All answers fell in one category: shows that take place in Texas. Just over half of the participants included "Dallas" in their answer, and one fourth named "Walker, Texas Ranger." Much of the appearance and behavior of the characters on

both of these shows is reflected in the description of a Texan given by many of the respondents.

The response to the question about Texas films was more diverse. The responses can be divided into three categories: westerns/cowboy films, football films, and documentaries. Westerns/cowboy films that were referenced several times are *Giant*, *The Alamo*, and "any John Wayne movie." The most common football film mentioned was *Friday Night Lights*. Two respondents mentioned remembering watching documentaries about the Kennedy assassination.

Visiting Texas

Most of the respondents (79%) have visited Texas. The largest percentage of respondents (52%) had visited Texas for several days, followed by 21% who had stayed for a long visit (see Table 5). Only 6% answered that they had been in Texas for just a few hours. 21% of respondents reported never visiting the state of Texas.

Table 5

Time Spent In Texas

A Few Hours	A Few Days	A Long Visit	Have Never Been
6%	52%	21%	21%

Participants were asked whether their impressions of Texans were challenged or reinforced after visiting Texas. The responses were coded by the researcher, and placed in four categories: "challenged," "reinforced," "neither," "both." A number of answers were deemed unusable, as they failed to address the question.

Among the 14 respondents who had perceived the image of Texans to be negative and who had been to Texas, 14% (3 respondents) found their impressions were challenged when they visited, compared to 10% (2 respondents) who felt their original impressions were reinforced (see Table 6). Among the 27 people who described the stereotype of Texans as positive and had visited the state, 22% (6 respondents) said their impression was challenged when they visited Texas, as opposed to the 30% (8 respondents) who indicated that their original impressions were reinforced. In this study, it seems that the positive impressions were more indelible than the negative impressions when presented with real life experience as opposed to a media representation.

Table 6

Indelibility of Impressions

	Described Stereotype as Negative	Described Stereotype as Positive
Challenged After Visiting	14%	22%
Reinforced After Visiting	10%	30%

There does appear to be a connection between the amount of television viewing and the persistence of stereotypes, even after real life experience. Among the lighter television viewers, those who watch 1-5 hours each week, 20% answered that their previous impressions had been reinforced after spending time in Texas (see Table 7). Among the heaviest users who watch more than 10 hours each week, 34% reported

that their impressions of Texans were reinforced after visiting. Among slightly heavier viewers, those who watch 6-10 hours each week, 60% indicated that their previous impressions of Texans were reinforced after visiting the state.

Table 7

Viewership and Persistence of Impressions

1-5 hours/week	6-10 hours/week	10+ hours/week
20 % reinforced	60% reinforced	34%

Interestingly, the heavy users also represented the highest percentage of unusable answers. In the 10+ hours category, 42% of the responses failed to actually address question. This is compared to 6% in the 1-5 group and 20% in the 6-10 group. An example of a heavy user response that was not used in response to the question, “When you went to Texas, were your impressions reinforced or challenged? Please explain.” is: “My impressions were fine although it has been several years ago [sic]. I was there on a vacation to visit family. It was extremely hot and the food was excellent.”

The results of this study were consistent with prior studies regarding the formulation and maintenance of stereotypes. The survey results and their connection to both previous research and implications for further research are addressed in the discussion that follows.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that people outside the state of Texas have strong perceptions about Texans that are consistent with media representations of Texans. As the level of viewership increases, so does the indelibility of the impressions. Those who watch more television are more likely to perceive the image of Texans as negative, and less likely to change their opinions of Texans after visiting the state. As cultivation theory suggests, heavy television viewers formulate stereotypes and continue to harbor those stereotypes, even if real life interaction proves contrary to their original impression.

The Texan image doesn't seem to have changed much over the last thirty years. Most Texas cities are far from the land of big hair and oil barons depicted on "Dallas" and in *Urban Cowboy*, but those images remain in the minds of non-Texans. The relatively small number of TV shows and films about Texans means that people outside the state are getting their impressions of Texans from common sources, adding to the development of a universal image. Consistent reinforcement of these images on television has generated a solid, recognizable stereotype that has not been diluted over time.

In many ways, the participants' vivid and specific descriptions of Texans are a reflection of Texas' uniqueness, and a reminder of the rich history that contributed to a culture that is truly different from other states. The perception of Texans as proud and strong reflects the attitude of the settlers who followed Stephen F. Austin in 1821 and

fought to be independent, first from Spain and then from Mexico. It seems fitting that the people who are now seen as boisterous, loud, and patriotic represent the only state that ever had a revolution (against Mexico) and a president (Sam Houston).

It is logical to take this stereotype a step further and speculate as to whether Texans not only endure the stereotypes, but enjoy them. Perhaps Texans are not merely the subjects of the stereotypes, but the instigators; not trapped by these images, but freed by them. Lippmann's early work in the 1920s assessed that people form stereotypes to categorize, simplify or label (Dyer, 1993). But it can be argued that those who *are stereotyped* connect to their common image as a source of community, identity and solidarity.

In the academic arena, stereotypes are so often frowned upon as vicious and limiting, and seen as both a reflection of and catalyst for ignorance. Hence, the phrase "victims of stereotypes." But, in this case, it can be argued that Texans like their image as it is portrayed on television. Texans are not the victims, but the authors of the stereotype.

A glance at state license plates suggests that many states have a self-propelled image, as opposed to one that is assigned by outsiders. Visitor bureaus, chambers of commerce, and state historians alike celebrate catchy slogans and visual metaphors that make their states stand out among the other forty-nine. License plate mottos reveal states' attempts to individualize their image: "Florida, The Sunshine State," "Illinois, Land of Lincoln," "Missouri, "The Show-Me State", "Ohio, "The Birthplace of Aviation."

While there may always be a small element of “we’re not all like that here,” involved in any state image, it seems that most states appreciate just having an image at all. They are thankful just to have something “to *be* like” that proves an image and a reputation exists.

Marketers and advertisers have capitalized on state pride for generations. In Texas, campaigns like “Texas, Ford, and You” and Mrs. Baird’s “Texas Born, Texas Bread” draw on state pride and solidarity. Beer companies specialize, using regional pastimes, landmarks and spokespeople to appeal to state pride. Even beers that aren’t unique to Texas are marketed to Texans as if they are- “Texas Budweiser” is really brewed in Missouri. Public service messages such as safe driving or water conservation have always operated on a sense of state pride and preservation. This is the strength of the “Keep (your city/state) Beautiful” campaign. “Don’t Mess with Texas” began as an anti-litter public service announcement slogan, and transformed into a representation of state pride and strength used in a variety of contexts and venues.

According to the survey results, the heavy television users are more likely to absorb and believe repetitive images shown on TV. This information is useful to marketers and advertisers, who can incorporate those images, accurate or not, because it serves as a reflection of the common understanding and identity of the people in the state. In the end, the most practical application for the results of this survey is that the old adage holds true: people who watch more TV are more susceptible to its images, and more likely to accept those images as reality, even when they are different from real life experiences.

The findings in the study are consistent with previous research regarding the formulation and maintenance of stereotypes of social groups, such as age (Weimann, 2000), occupation (Jeffries-Fox & Signorielli, 1979) and race (Atkin, Greenberg & McDermott, 1983). The results are also in keeping with the research involving media images of a group such as disabled people (Eliot & Byrd, 1983) and the resulting perception of that group. Interestingly, as viewers in this study watched more television, not only were they more likely to maintain the impression after having real life experience with Texans, but they were more likely to describe the portrayal of Texans on television as negative.

This study suggests that regional groups can be studied in the same context as other socially defined groups. Few studies have been done involving Texans and stereotyping; the lack of previous research about Texans contributes to the significance of the study, although the small sample size and short survey offer just a glimpse.

Limitations

The design of this study posed several limitations, the small sample size being the most noteworthy. The small number of respondents meant that some results varied only by two or three respondents. Another inherent limitation was the use of family and friends to generate a sample. Although the twelve contacts were instructed to seek a blend of different ages, cities, and genders, there is still a commonality among those asked to participate considering the fact that they are all loosely connected. Also, the sample was not balanced in the representation of age and gender. This limited the use of age and gender as criteria for analysis.

The use of the on line survey service was also limiting. Each participant who went to the site to answer the survey was assigned a random, unique identification number. As a positive feature, this created an anonymous atmosphere, allowing the respondent to answer freely. But a negative aspect to the code number assignment was that it was impossible for the researcher to actually see who had been to the site and successfully finished and submitted the survey. Therefore, it was never completely established that the people who took the survey were actually the people who had been solicited by the network of friends and family members and later contacted by the researcher.

Another imitation was the wording of the question about other states' stereotypes and descriptions, which prevented that data from being factored into the results. The series of questions was intended to examine which states (besides Texas) have recognizable stereotypes, if stereotypes are more obvious to outsiders, and if people are able to identify their own stereotypical behavior. The answers varied from descriptions of the respondent's state, without specifying which state, to further description of the Texas image, to simple yes or no answers. It was not possible to categorize and use this information. This was an unforeseen limitation that may have been avoided by the implementation of three questions: a yes/no question about the existence of a stereotype, a question asking the name of the state, and a follow-up question about the description of the stereotype.

The data collected for the survey was self-reported. Self reports naturally require some amount of recall and can be subjective. The self-reported nature of the data for this study can be considered an additional limitation.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future research in this area could include the exploration the impact of the age of the viewer on the perception of certain social groups. For example, a researcher could study the differences in people who watched "Dallas" as a child or as an adult. Another approach could be to examine if older people, who have experienced media representations over a longer period of time, have stronger impressions than younger viewers.

The data regarding other state stereotypes was inconclusive in this study, but it remains a possible research approach for later studies. Further research might involve determining which states have strong stereotypes, and whether those images are recognized and appreciated by the people who live in those states. Studying the relation of those images to media is also a possibility.

Another interesting research approach would be to survey Texans about what they see as their image and their opinions about the validity of the representation. Further studies could examine the other side of stereotyping, and groups who, like Texans, seem to encourage stereotypical images of themselves. A content analysis of advertisements, tourism brochures, and even history book entries could be used to explore the use of self generated stereotypes as the basis for pride and unity.

The study naturally leads into the investigation of Texan stereotypes outside the United States. Given the popularity of American TV shows abroad, and the prominence of Texas personalities in entertainment and politics, an examination of the impressions people in other countries have of Texans could be useful and interesting.

Conclusion

From JR to LBJ, and from big hair to big egos, it seems that people outside Texas share vivid and enduring ideas of what Texans are all about. Images that were cultivated by entertainment media, and reinforced with repetition have become the basis of the “typical Texan” in the minds of television viewers. In the world of the television viewer, impressions outweigh real life experience, and stereotypes become reality.

This study is snapshot of the Texan image and its indelibility. While consistent with previous research, this research could also be used as a springboard for further investigation of the formulation and survival of media inspired stereotypes.

APPENDIX
ONLINE SURVEY

Informed Consent Notice

The purpose of this research study is to examine the stereotypes of Texans held by people outside Texas, and to understand the reason for the both the existence and persistence of those stereotypes. You are being asked to complete a survey that will take about ten minutes. Completion of the survey involves no foreseeable risks. Participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time. You give consent by completing the survey. No individual responses will be reported to anyone because data will be reported on a group basis. If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Catherine Burdette or Alan Albarran, (940) 565-2537, albarran@unt.edu. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board (940) 565-3940. You may print this Informed Consent Notice for your records.

Thank you for agreeing to assist me with my research.

Please answer the following questions. Your answers will be returned to me via this website.

Thank you!

Catherine Bowers Burdette

How many hours of television do you watch each week?

- less than 1 hour
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- more than 10 hours

How many films do you see each month? Include DVDs, cable and broadcast movies, and films seen in the theater.

- none
- 1 or 2
- 3 or 4
- more than 5

Describe "a Texan" mentioning any traits/characteristics you

associate with Texans.

Would you describe the public image of Texans as positive or negative?

- positive
- negative

Is there a stereotype of the people in the state where you live?

- yes
- no

If so, describe the stereotype of people in the state where you live (if not, leave blank).

What TV shows about Texans have you seen?

What films about Texans have you seen?

Have you ever been to Texas?

- yes, for a few hours
- yes, for a few days
- yes, for a long visit

no, have never been (skip the following question)

When you went to Texas, were your impressions reinforced or challenged? Please explain.

Please indicate your age:

- 21-34
 35-49
 50-64
 65+

Please indicate your gender:

- male
 female

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.

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