RURAL AMERICA: THE LAST FIELD OF DREAMS FOR REGIONAL CULTIVATION?

A thesis submitted to the College of Communication and Information of Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

by

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CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

From the country's inception, many people in the U.S. have found and still find the countryside enigmatic. The founders, particularly Thomas Jefferson, lauded the superiority of the disinterested patriot farmer invoked by Machiavelli, the Cinnicatus, who would lead the nation to greatness. This regard for the agrarian section of the country pervaded the political system, as shown in the Electoral College still present today (which allows less populous areas an influence on elections to balance out homogeneously-voting, densely-populated cities). Although rural areas (very broadly classified as non-metropolitan) only contain 17% of the total U.S. population, they cover 75% of the nation’s land, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2003). Vast numbers of people are squeezed into cities, and are far removed from the expansive fields peppered with more secluded homes. This is not surprising to the average American, but the remoteness of these rural areas often causes them and the lives of the people who reside there to be ignored or caricatured by their city neighbors.

This ignorance would not matter if rural citizens had the same access to political power and economic well-being as do their counterparts. However, government statistics show this is not the case (Hamrick, 2004; USDA, 2003).

When a person does not have direct experience with rural people or places, he or she may use indirect communication sources (like television) to fill in the blanks of their knowledge. In fact, mediated sources may affect abstract perceptions of societal cross-sections in spite of contradictory direct experience with those cross-sections. It therefore
is useful to study the extent to which television provides a vision of rural America.

Cultivation theory is one theory of mass communication, that can be used to study the potential influence of television on such perceptions. Asserting that television images influence viewers’ perceptions of the real world, proponents of this theory have examined possible effects of the inaccurate media images on viewer perceptions of people, professions, and feelings (e.g., Gerbner, 1996; Mastro, 2000; Pfau et al., 1995). However, communication studies have not focused on the potential influence of television on perceptions of geographic regions and people from those regions, specifically. One such topic of particular interest is rural America. It is difficult to determine how applicable cultivation theory may be for studying perceptions of rurality – how much television may affect beliefs about rural America -- because it has not been utilized in that inquiry.

In addressing this issue, one must examine American perceptions of rural people and places, separate perception from misconception, and attempt to discover the generally-accepted “truth” regarding the “people of the earth.” Once one separates measurement from fiction, one can suggest which factors may contribute to the cultivated image that may prevent the nation from either responding to the real problems of rural America or appreciating its differences and similarities relative to the rest of the nation.

There is value in applying cultivation theory to the study of regional perception for both esoteric and practical reasons. Although seldom studied, television images of rural America and rural Americans flood the airwaves. Some images are positive and others negative, but most appear to be inaccurate. Over the years, opinion polls (Flinn, 1982; W. K. Kellogg, 2001) have revealed that people (of urban, suburban, and rural
habitats) tend to see rural America inaccurately as homogenous in its differences from the rest of the country. This distancing of geography, lifestyle, and ideology allows society as a whole to ignore the real problems facing rural America, as well as shun the successes and unique virtues of the region. Human communication of rurality over the years simultaneously has raised the concept to an unattainable height, and condemned it to untouchable shame. As responsible students of communication, we must examine the role that television may play in fostering these stereotypes.

Cultivation has been applied to study many contemporary subjects like television stereotypes of particular groups and the normalcy of certain behaviors (as will be illustrated in subsequent sections). In the present study, I will attempt to extend this line of inquiry to television stereotypes of rural people and places, the discrepancies between these stereotypes and reality, and the extent to which viewers have inaccurate rural perceptions.

Lack of Rural Definition

One cannot place blame on society, politicians, or urban-dwellers for their ignorance of rurality, because even political definitions have lost their structure. Like their peers in Europe, American colonists despised the countryside as unsophisticated, brutish, and dull (Danbom, 1996). However, with the spread of Enlightenment philosophy of Rousseau and Locke, rustic settings acquired a renewed image of a beautifully natural and the proper state for man (Danbom, 1996). Yet it was the American Revolution that truly changed American views of rurality. Americans could not rival England in terms of etiquette and polish, so they needed to set their own characteristics as
superior to those of their enemy. “The rurality of America was good because it meant the
country was not England, and the fact that Americans were farmers was good because it
meant that they were not vicious and corrupt” (Danbom, 1996, p. 16). Not only was it
acceptable to be rural, it was immoral not to be rural.

As the American population grew and coalesced into cities, the countryside
became still more desirable, if more unattainable. Instead of a common bond, the
countryside now was a refuge, “celebrated … not for what it was, but for what it was not”
(Danbom, 1996, p. 16). During the Revolutionary period, and with westward expansion,
historians and politicians lauded the adventurous spirit of the frontier. Thomas Jefferson
believed that gentleman farmers would protect the nation, and Frederick Jackson Turner
commemorated the dying frontier as the very concept that created an “American” culture
farmer who toiled the land was the basis for a good and maybe even pure society. The
independent farmer, or yeoman, was free from the frequent corruption of cities; left to his
own devices, he would properly steward, or caretake, his land” (p. 6). This historical
perception of the rural farmer as far-sighted and committed to honesty, truth, and honor
contrasted with what many writers saw as depravities of the city.

Definitions

Yet, even those who delve into the study of rural America have trouble defining
its boundaries. For example, those who study rural education find themselves hard-
pressed to articulate how rural schools differ from urban ones, particularly when different
districts define themselves in slightly different language (Hart, Larson, & Lishner, 2005).
According to Sherwood (2001), “increasingly, multiple types of ‘rural’ are creeping into the public consciousness” (p. 4). These include wealthy and poor, farmers and manufacturers, whites and minorities, and big and small communities.

Depending on the land mass included in the name of the area, “rural” areas may include a very small or a vast number of people. Nearly a century ago, government statistics designated an area of over 2,500 people as urban (in 1906), and an area between 2,500 and 50,000 residents as non-metropolitan (Browne, 2001). This definition has not changed (USDA, 2003). All other areas not thus defined became non-metropolitan by default, and vaguely became defined by individuals as suburban or rural. As mentioned previously, most of the country’s space is occupied by rural people and places, and the rest are confined to the small urban areas. Even with sprawl, urban dwellers are distanced from a majority of the country, which remains a mystery to them.

Vague rural definitions largely allow for particular regions to mold “rural” to best fit those regions’ needs. “The term ‘rural’ suggests many things to many people, such as agricultural landscapes, isolation, small towns, and low population density” (Hart, et al., 2005, p. 1150). Stedman (2003) suggested that environmental definitions depend on both geographical characteristics and human uses of the physical area. The lack of definition has led to some amusing, if less than generalizable, descriptions of rurality: “If your community has a Costco you are not rural….In the past a McDonald’s meant urban, but new mini-McDonald’s have sprung up in smaller towns, competing with the ubiquitous Dairy Queen and A&W, which were the mainstay of small town fast food” (Soles, 2004, p. 143). According to Danbom (1996), “we love rural America for more than just its
utility in providing us with a legitimate critical perspective. We also love it because of its plasticity; because we can import virtually any values we want to it” (p. 17). Danbom further described rurality as “America’s last field of dreams,” in that it is the final frontier – the last outpost of the ideal American society (p. 18). If one cannot see that rural society is not paradise, one still can assert that paradise potentially exists out there.

Ideal Community or Isolated Units?

True rural life is difficult to reveal because different people use different guidelines to measure exactly what “rural” means. This is the difficulty of a concept that is simply “not-urban.” Various scholars and agencies attempt to tackle the issue from different fronts. MacTavish and Salamon (2001) conducted personal interviews of trailer park residents in rural Illinois, assessing demographics and perceptions of neighborhood and community. They found that the residents were homogeneous in terms of race (white) and class (lower income, but above poverty level). Most had a high school education and were employed in full-time jobs. Children tended to live in two-parent households in which the parents were married and both worked. As far as community perceptions, some had strong connection with other residents, but most felt isolated from their neighbors. This isolation may stem from a lack of permanence for residents, and a lack of permanent community symbols, such as a park or a main street. Although this study only sampled one segment of rural America, it does provide an illustration of life that is called “rural.”

Perceptions and Misperceptions

Although historical texts and modern nostalgia-seekers admire the pioneer as
innovative, brave, skilled, and altogether super-human (Bales, 1998; Browne, 2001),
historical investigation shows otherwise. “Rural America … was not necessarily built on
the foundations of the most able citizenry” (Browne, 2001, p. 3). Like those who
emigrated from Europe, many pioneers left U.S. towns because they could not succeed
there and needed less competition for land and resources (Gross, 1976). As shown in
post-Revolutionary Massachusetts, sons started to move West not out of any desire to
lead or conquer, but because they could not wait for their fathers to bequeath them their
small portion of rocky land on which to survive (Gross, 1976). Not skilled farmers,
livestock breeders, educated miners, or banking executives, “for many, agrarianism more
often was a last resort, after the thrill of the frontier chase subsided. People farmed and
ranged because land to do so was available, at least some place and of some sort – even
if it wasn’t very productive or safe” (Browne, 2001, p. 5). As the nation grew, farming
and ranching were done not because they were appealing, but because it was seen as a
safe alternative to working in manufacturing or extraction (for example, oil, coal, or
precious metal). Nonetheless, all one need do is read farm aid bills and vacation logs to
know that Americans still revere the rural person as the self-sufficient leader and nation-
sustaining farmer, as shown in the subsequent sections (Bales, 1998; Browne, 2001; W.

Invisible Poverty

These historical insights also contrast with the modern perception of rural people
and places often stricken with poverty. Focus groups, interviews, and content analyses of
television programs have shown several plots associated with rural America poverty and
strength (Bales, 1998; W. K. Kellogg, 2002b). Most Americans report that rural areas are marked by lower incomes and standards of living, that they will become poorer (Browne & Hadwiger, 1982; W.K. Kellogg, 2002b), and that the populations are more vulnerable than urban areas to economic downturns because of their economic specialization (Hart et al., 2005). One feels for the struggling farmer, but also respects the farmer’s plight as character-building.

In spite of reports detailing dire rural poverty, news reports and social advocates focus on urban poverty, which is seen as a pressing social blight (Curley, 2005; Holloway & Mulherin, 2004). Ending urban poverty is a necessity, but rural poverty has the potential to build character.

Some scholars regard this romanticism of rurality with much disdain because they believe it allows the rest of society to ignore the reality of rural poverty (Friedland, 2002; Little, 1999). Through survey data, Roscigno and Crowley (2001) found that rural adolescents had fewer resources in terms of family and school support than did their urban and suburban counterparts. The researchers claimed that this early disadvantage has the power to start rural youth on the wrong footing, setting them up for less-fulfilling employment, and the dangers associated with low wages. Hansen (1970) claimed that these differences are not differences in major values, at least among Appalachian residents. “The people of even the poorer parts of Appalachia have much the same values and aspirations as other Americans. Moreover, many Appalachians are willing to move to areas where job opportunities are better, or at least they feel that their children should move” (p. 292). If this statement, from over 30 years ago, is true today, it might
contradict much of popular conventional thought.

More recent government studies have shown that, recently, rural areas fared better than urban centers as far as job growth and unemployment (USDA, 2003). They did show that the rural worker earned roughly 80% of an urban worker’s wages (in terms of annual income). However, the government did not compare the cost of living for each region.

*Differing Ideology Fueling Perception of Differing Lifestyle*

People often see and subscribe to preconceived ideas or stereotypes about rural residents and places. When people do think of rural people, they often acknowledge a sense of poverty, but they do not see rural poverty as a major problem, especially in comparison to urban poverty (Bales, 1998; Browne, 2001; W. K. Kellogg, 2002b). This view of “invisible” rural poverty contributes to legislative action. As shown in a survey of legislators (W. K. Kellogg, 2002c), politicians tend to prioritize urban poverty initiatives over rural ones. According to the common perception of agrarian independence, handouts and government subsidies only dissolve the admired independence and disinterestedness of the rural citizen, and this would tarnish the admiration Americans have developed for rurality over the course of history.

*Antithetical Characteristics*

Many misperceptions stem from the process by which many urban and suburban residents develop a “rural” definition. Like the Americans of previous centuries, they define rural America in terms of what they think is its antithesis, the places in which they live. Whether it is seen as the leftovers from the city, or an alternative to the city, country life is perceived inaccurately by most Americans (Bales, 1998; Browne, 2001; W. K.
Kellogg, 2002b). According to Harold Lasswell, to idealize or demonize an object requires distancing that object from the perceiver, or to superimpose a frame of reference (cited and discussed by Janowitz, 1968). For remote people and places of rural America, this is easy for many to do. In one study (W. K. Kellogg, 2002b), content analyses indicated that news programs dealt with rural areas mainly to cite crime and poverty in those areas. Often, stories sadly reported the immigration of rural residents to the city for hope of sustainable employment and improvement in their lives. The news neglected similar stories of urban residents moving for better jobs.

Mythic Farmers

Urban and suburban residents often continue to view rurality in terms of farming (Bales, 1998; Browne, 2001; Browne & Reid, 1990; Flinn, 1982; W. K. Kellogg, 2002b). This is the most misleading, persistent, and harmful of rural stereotypes. It is misleading because it is false. The height of family farming came in the early 20th century (around 1920, at approximately 30% of the population), and has declined steadily ever since that time (Browne & Reid, 1990). The Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2000) reported that between 2% and 3% of Americans are employed primarily as farmers today. This number is generous in that the USDA defines a farmer as anyone who earns at least $1,000 annually from farming. As food production efficiency increases, farm sizes increase, but the number of farms and those employed at the head of them decreases.

This misconception of farm-dominated rurality directs political and private attention away from more necessary concerns by challenging most, if not all, effort into helping preserve the family farm – whether or not such farms exist for rural families.
“The belief in the yeoman myth obscures a more realistic perception of rural America. And it has led us to important, and expensive, mistakes” (Browne & Reid, 1990, p. 272). Both news stories and public opinion focuses on “preserving the family farm” (Bales, 1998; Browne, 2001; Flinn, 1982; W. K. Kellogg, 2002b). Encroachment on farms and preservation of these family institutions also dominates political legislation, often at the expense of education and health care. Development is seen as change, which is portrayed as inevitable loss to the rural community. To many on the outside, rural life is too important a part of American society to lose. Salamon (2003) argued that suburban influx to rural communities will create a loss of community and attachment for rural youth, similar to the effect of inner-city youth isolation.

The farm-preservation mentality of non-rural Americans may stem from their own experiences (or lack thereof) with rural areas. What little exposure they have to rural life often becomes idealized. “They’ve seen calves and lambs in a petting exhibit at a municipal zoo perhaps. Corn and wheat are merely some things flaked into cardboard boxes for them to eat at breakfast. Agricultural issues are driven by long-held and generalized social beliefs rather than because people regularly are challenged to seriously reflect on the decline of farm and ranch America” (Browne, 2001, p. 12).

These issues interest urban and suburban residents because of their own minimal, and perhaps inaccurate, memories of and experiences with “rural” life. Although cynical, the previous statement illustrates how much an urban-dweller's perceptions of outer regions may depend on whatever filtered experiences he or she may acquire. Rural people and places may appear simple, pleasant, and comfortable, because that is the urban
vacationist’s mindset at his or her resort of choice. Once vacation ends, non-rural Americans return to their own regions, and do not see the poverty remaining in the countryside during the low-tourism season. Although one could say that direct experience is a glimpse of reality, one must admit it that it may not reveal much to those who do not notice it. Those who have preconceived notions of rurality may not be challenged by their experiences with it.

*Isolation*

In addition to the agrarian myth, many non-rural Americans also appear to subscribe to the belief that rural people remain isolated from the rest of society, mainly by choice, and that this isolation equates to refusal of any outside assistance or connection. This perception of rural self-isolation only holds true for some of the rural population. Roughly one third of rural residents live too far away to commute to a major city, but two thirds are capable of commuting for employment (Bales, 1998; Browne, 2001). Newer technologies (a priority for legislators to bring to rural areas, according to W.K Kellogg, 2002c) allow urban ideas, innovations, and products to permeate the rural community. Subscribers to digital divide premises believe rural residents have fallen behind the rest of the world technologically, and need outside assistance to advance (Klinkenborg, 2004; Rice & Katz, 2003; Zhang & Wolff, 2004). With highway systems dissecting rural America, and urban expatriates seeking the most secluded places as resorts, pastoral communities have difficulty keeping the rest of society out, rather than struggling not to be left behind.
Self-Sufficiency

Like economic poverty, people have developed a perception that other hardships for Americans are not really hard for rural Americans. The pastoral idyll myth (Bales, 1998; Little, 1999; W. K. Kellogg, 2001) can lead a person to believe that health care should not be a rural problem, because residents breathe clean air, have less stress, and have layers of friends, family, and neighbors to help them (Bales, 1998). Assistance (particularly outside assistance) might injure their aforementioned self-sufficiency (no longer isolation).

Happiness?

Modern assessments of self and others often reveal that subjective perceived reality can influence beliefs and actions more than does “objective” reality. Early self-report data (Marans, Dillman, & Keller, 1980) on life quality showed that rural residents not only were more likely to own homes than were urbanites, they also reported more satisfaction with their homes and outdoor space. Although rural working men felt that they were not paid well, they also felt higher job security and satisfaction than did their counterparts in cities (Marans et al., 1980). These reports also revealed that rural America, as a whole, was as heterogeneous as urban centers. Some rural residents were poor and uneducated, and others were wealthy and learned. This indicates that rural residents may even differ on their level of homogeneity of happiness or any other quality.

In terms of overall happiness, rural residents reported higher levels of overall happiness than did urban residents (Marans et al., 1980). Rural residents reported more satisfaction with their leisure activities than did urban residents, and felt more content
with their friendships. In terms of community and environment, rural residents expressed higher levels of contentment with their community and environment. Although they reported more dissatisfaction with local public services, and rated police protection at the same level as did urban residents, they were more content with their parks and recreation services, and were more likely to rate their neighborhoods as safe.

Personal life questions also showed rural residents to be more satisfied than urban dwellers. Most respondents regarded their marriages favorably, as well as the time they spent with their children (Marans et al., 1980). Rural residents claimed more satisfaction with their standard of living than did their city peers, and reported higher life satisfaction in general than did urbanites, which may confound perceptions of poverty previously reported. However, it may be consistent with perceptions of rural poverty being less problematic than urban poverty.

Although most rural residents felt that their communities were safe, such isolated havens are not isolated from urban and suburban influx, be it in the form of information, technology, capital, people, or crime. In a survey of rural residents, Swetnam and Pope (2001) assessed perceived gang threat by controlling for types of community member (student, high school faculty, law enforcement personnel). By measuring perceived gang demographics, reason for gang initiation, impact of gangs on community, and community response to gangs, they found consensus among groups surveyed. Most respondents ranked gang members’ average age at 15, primary gang member race as African American, and gang pervasiveness as extreme. Students believed that people joined gangs due to a lack of positive alternative activities. Teachers listed this reason and that
of poor parental guidance. Police officers mentioned those reasons, as well as a need for a support system, and the recruitment on the part of the gang. All groups felt that gangs from big cities had a great influence on this phenomenon. Such rural self-reports indicate that rural residents do believe that they are happier than outsiders, but that outsiders have potential to harm rural life.

Misguided Policies from Misguided Perceptions

Don’t Tread on Them

The myths of rural isolation and self-sufficiency could lead laypersons and politicians to assume that the relevant local governments can solve any rural problems. However, the over-estimation of local government involvement in rural areas has created problems. When similar-minded people disagree on small issues, small issues will gain the status of national crises for those rural residents involved in the arguments. Inter-village relations may be no better than interstate or international ones (Browne & Reid, 1990). Rural residents know that consensus is no easier among themselves than between suburban or urban neighbors. As for homogeneity, at times similar backgrounds and basic beliefs make those who uncharacteristically oppose each other feel more vehemence for their differences (Samovar & Porter, 2001). Surveys of local governments of the Ohio River Valley Region ranging between urban and rural (Dewees, Lobao, & Swanson, 2003), revealed that local governments of rural counties were less likely than city governments to undertake economic development activities. Lack of resources and abilities often were cited as reasons.

A dangerous effect of rural misconceptions is the fact that such misconceptions
often affect policy decisions. As Rowley (1996) posed, “if much of what people value in rural America stems from misconceptions and myths, what does that say about policy based on those values? Does a more accurate representation of rural circumstances undermine the basis for rural policy?” (p. 3). Those who do benefit from rural subsidies may not desire change in public opinion of rural life, but rural misconceptions do not allow for large government expenditures. One would think that a region renowned for its pride and autonomy might interpret government intervention as an insult or intrusion. Only when absolutely necessary would Congress find it worthwhile to assist agricultural endeavors, for the sake of “family” farms (Bales, 1998; Browne, 2001; W. K. Kellogg, 2002b; W. K. Kellogg, 2002c).

In a survey of 1,030 state legislators, half reported that they dealt with rural issues frequently, but the other half claimed that such issues came to the forum occasionally, sometimes, or never (W. K. Kellogg, 2002c). These state legislators explained that issues dominating rural discussions included farming issues, lack of job opportunities for young families, and low wages in most rural jobs (which happen to include manufacturing). All of these issues involve economic problems, and the legislators felt that this is the area in which the government has been most ineffectual. Yet, there were areas that the legislators believed they had advanced well. These included education, the environment, and technology. As they felt that the government had done its part on these issues, the legislators saw little need to bring them up for debate again.

Such findings suggest that although many issues are covered legislatively, still others are ignored. What determines priority may involve the most persistent and vocal
dissatisfactions (Browne, 2001). Instead of piling money onto an agricultural system that no longer supports the majority of rural families, the government might find investments in technology and service sectors more profitable and sustainable forms of business in the modern rural region (Browne & Hadwiger, 1982). Outside funding does reach rural areas, but in less effective ways. Most federal funding comes through farm programs and direct loans and grants. These funds target less distressed and less needy areas (Browne & Reid, 1990; W. K. Kellogg, 2002c). According to the USDA (2003), rural areas receive less funding than urban sites in terms of guaranteed loans, and federal salaries and wages (most likely because hubs of governmental activity and jobs are in cities). This shows a continuing denial of the more necessary aid in favor of superfluous pork – essentially starving and suffocating the region.

Those who inherited the legacy of the Great Society were the first to counter public policy that had misunderstood and mishandled the rural situation. As Hansen (1970) noted, most city residents imagined that whatever ills might befall the country, it had to be a better alternative than the city. However, they often failed to notice that rural areas faced many obstacles to development. “Labor may be plentiful, but it may prove costly to adapt the relatively untrained labor force to the firm’s [company's] needs. Rural areas also tend to be lacking in cultural and educational facilities. Finally, there is often a great deal of mistrust of industrialization in rural areas” (p. 232). Before politicians and rural advocates can improve the economic status of rural residents, they may need to open the communities to the concept of industrialization and improve the educational facilities so as to make the areas desirable for potential developers.
Shifting Loyalties

Politicians may feel that they are representing their constituents based on need. But, recent political shifts in rural America raise questions about the truth of these assumptions. Rural dwellers do differ from urban dwellers on personal beliefs, and often vote along similar political blocs, as shown with the Red-State/Blue-State terms in political and newsmedia discussions. Researchers have discovered evidence to indicate that rural people differ not only in beliefs, but in actions as well (Glenn & Simmons, 1967; Zikmund, 1967). In an analysis of data from the past four general elections (1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004), one sees a shift in rural voting preferences from Democratic candidates to Republican ones (W. K. Kellogg, 2002a). Unlike previous elections, when rural areas (particularly in the South) could be expected to support Democrats, the three most recent national elections showed rural support for the Grand Old Party (Republican). As the W. K. Kellogg (2002a) study revealed, urban-rural divisions emerged on numerous issues. Although rural concerns about the nation mirror urban and suburban worries (about the economy, social security and Medicare, education, morals, the situation in Iraq, health care, and taxes), rural voters showed that they thought Republicans could deal better with those issues, and suburban and urban voters aligned more with Democrats. Rural approval ratings of Bush in the 2000 election were only slightly higher than the national approval rating, but rural support of the U.S. position in Iraq was much higher than was the national support rating (Kellogg, 2002a).

Rural women more strongly supported Republicans and their causes than did rural men, and these women contrasted the most with their female counterparts in suburbs and
cities on these issues. Rural residents tended to be pro-life, tended to support the National Rifle Association and own more firearms, and tended to support religious groups. Most regions had a gender split on issues, but rural areas had little or no gender split. Rural areas may have consistent beliefs or characteristics, but politics has not been a widely-publicized aspect of their consistency. The recent presidential election (2004) and bitter party defections (as shown in Zell Miller’s fiery attack on his former party) reinforced these trends, as news agencies pored over Red-Blue divide for months (e.g., Plain Dealer, 2004).

In sum, public misconceptions of rural life seem to run rampant in society, the cause of such perceptions is yet uncertain. One logical source to explore would be media sources, particularly television, that shower the public with images, true and false, of all facets of life, including rural America.

The Role of Television in Cultivating Rural Stereotypes

Lack of substantial personal experience often leads people to rely on second-hand cues to form a judgment on a foreign concept, like that of rural America. Much like a distant culture or nation, the distant regions of America may feel like a foreign country to the urban or suburban resident. They may rely on what others tell them about rural life, their own limited experiences, and media coverage of those areas. In keeping with the rural perceptions of America throughout its history, the urban dweller may view rural America as something to be defined by what it is not – the city. Therefore, the countryside can take on this mantle of charming quaintness or irritating backwater, depending on one’s direct experience and perceptions of that experience in comparison to
the rest of the world.

When one does not have direct experience with rural spaces, the city person might rely on indirect sources, such as interpersonal relationships with persons who have experienced the country. However, when such contacts do not exist or are not convenient, mediated messages may fill in the blanks about rurality. Many studies have dealt with media interpretations of the world, and what effect those interpretations might have on those who view the images, particularly in intercultural contexts. Examples include studies of images of the United States on Soviet television (Herrmann, 1985); news coverage of the U.S. and Canada in American-Canadian trade negotiations (Hall, 2000); British news coverage of European and British-European events (Gavin, 2000); effects of American television images of the Japanese on American viewers (Gerbert, 2001); and effects of American television on Mexican, Turkish, and American perceptions of typical Americans (Hall & Anten, 1999). These images may contribute to viewer perceptions of particular nation or group portrayed on television. Although the viewers may have no concrete, firsthand experience to verify the mediated image, one communication theory suggests that television presentations do influence viewer perceptions and opinions: cultivation theory. An outline of principles and past research utilizing cultivation is necessary to understand its potential value for studying television’s impact on intercultural contexts, specifically the cultures of rural and non-rural America.

**Principles of Cultivation**

Cultivationists ascribe to the general idea that television influences viewers’ beliefs and attitudes. “Much of what we know and think we know comes not from
personal experience but from the stories we hear” (Morgan & Shanahan, 1997, p. 5). By showing a series of characters and events, the audience eventually sees the television world as identical to the real world (even if certain aspects of the television world are inaccurate). The theory assumes that people (a) are exposed to television images of uniform content on essential themes, (b) watch television habitually, and (c) experience the effects of those images gradually and cumulatively (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980).

Habitual Viewing

All television viewing involves a negotiated time of viewer captivation by the media images – in theatrical terms, a suspension of disbelief. Whatever reasons or motives may bring the viewer to the image (as elaborated in Uses and Gratification arguments [e.g., Conway & Rubin, 1991, Haridakis & Rubin, 2003, Perse & Rubin, 1990, Rubin, 1993] and in some cultivation studies and broader media studies [e.g., Hawkins & Pingree, 1981, Perse, Ferguson, & McLeod, 1994, Potter & Chang, 1990]), the interest in media images occurs more than occasionally, and often without a purpose other than entertainment or habit. On a regular basis, people often view specific television programs, often at the same time of day and for the same duration each day. Although a viewer may choose a particular genre, he or she often does not actively choose a program by the assumptions its images portray. As Gerbner (1998) explained, “viewing decisions depend more on the clock than on the program. The number and variety of choices available to view when most viewers are available to watch is also limited by the fact that many programs designed for the broad audience tend to be similar in their basic make-up
and appeal” (p. 178). Portrayals of geography may reach viewers not because of interest in the subject matter, but rather because of regular exposure to the portrayals. Viewers do not routinely choose a program because it occurs in a particular place, and, therefore, do not choose a program based on images presented of the particular place. Even with the advent of video recording and TiVo giving viewers much more choice of program viewed and the time at which it is viewed, geographic images (and assumptions) can filter into the home unregulated by a viewer if that viewer is not actively attending to those specific images.

*Uniform Content*

According to cultivationists (e.g., Morgan & Shanahan, 1997), viewers can develop cultural assumptions from any form of television program (cultural references come out in game shows and cooking shows, even if they are not as obvious as in the crime drama). This point may ring true for geographic image as well – particularly rural images. Because few programs make location the central focus of the plot or goal, most forms of programming (containing some element of geography) have potential to influence viewers’ perceptions of rural people and areas – the genre would not matter as much as would the general assumptions conveyed in all types of programs.

However, uniform content does not necessarily mean rigid hypnotic messages stream from the screen and sculpt the helpless viewer’s mind to fit the mediated belief. It is by no means “a one-way, monolithic ‘push’ process. The influences of a pervasive medium on the composition and structure of the symbolic environment are subtle, complex, and intermingled with other influences” (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli,
Cultivation theory, sometimes vilified for its uncompromising powerful effects, has been adapted by scholars who incorporate viewer variables that work in conjunction with the media images to influence perceptions of the world – and those perceptions may not represent the world as it is.

Recent cultivation studies have taken into account the possibility that specific genres of programs may produce varying degrees of cultivated beliefs. Researchers often measure how often respondents watch several types of shows (Pfau et al., 2001; Potter, 1990; Potter, 1991a; Potter & Chang, 1990; Rubin et al., 2003) in order to determine if cultivation effects increase if controlled for program type.

**Cumulative Effects**

The effects of television exposure, according cultivation theory, are by no means instantaneous. Otherwise they would create suspicion, and the public might curb its television use more drastically (Morgan & Shanahan, 1997). Over time, the small effects, unchallenged or reinforced, can create a fabricated perception of the world in the viewer’s mind. These cumulative small effects, over time, create “the enduring and common consequences of growing up and living with television. Those are the stable, resistant, and widely shared assumptions, images, and conceptions expressing the institutional characteristics and interests of the medium itself” (Gerbner, 1998, p. 191). Further, television viewing reinforces such perceptions, or the material would “resonate” in the viewer’s mind (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner et al., 1980).

For rural images, this has potential for deeply-rooted, if subtle effects. Television programs have, from inception, sent messages about regions and people inhabiting
certain regions, particularly of “the country” (Bales, 1998; Magoc, 1991; Wander, 1976), and the overall effect of rural portrayals has yet to be assessed. Common sense tells viewers that The Beverly Hillbillies and Green Acres are fiction, and that even The Simple Life is exaggerated, but it may be difficult for them to determine where to separate story fiction from cultural fiction.

**Theoretical Refinements**

Although these assumptions are not the only aspects of cultivation theory, they are general tenets that can provide a guideline for assessing the process of television-mediated perceptions. The theoretical refinements made over the years (discussed in the following paragraphs) have helped to more accurately tap the concepts studied. Modern cultivation research incorporates not only more specific television viewing variables, but also more independent variables (like viewer attitudes). Some researchers only concede limited predictive power from cultivation, and then only in conjunction with other variables (Hirsch, 1980; 1981a, 1981b; Hughes, 1980; Rubin et al., 2003; Rubin, Perse, & Taylor, 1988).

Many of these factors are not controlled by the medium, but rather are attributes of the viewer. Once a person takes in media images, his or her characteristics can impact effects. Perceived reality may affect whether a viewer commits an image to memory and uses it for real-life activities, or simply recognizes it as a piece of fiction. Media studies, particularly cultivation studies, have acknowledged this (Busselle, 2001; Busselle et al., 2004; Potter, 1986, 1993), and perceived realism may prove to be an important variable to further studies.
Other studies have examined the influence of other viewer attributes such as cognitive processing (Shrum, 1995; Tapper, 1995), cognitive complexity (Hawkins, Pingree, & Adler, 1987), attitude accessibility (Shrum, 1996, 2001) motivation (Carveth & Alexander, 1985; Shrum, 2004; Rubin et al., 2003), and demographics (Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Rubin et al., 1988).

Despite the impact of viewer attributes, there does appear to be a persistent correlation between various types of television viewing and certain perceptions of things portrayed (Hawkins & Pingree, 1980, Morgan & Shanahan, 1997). Next, one must understand how these effects may manifest in the viewers’ minds.

**Major Applications of Cultivation Theory**

Two major applications of cultivation theory that have been well-researched and may apply most readily to rural life are the study of television violence and portrayals of people and lifestyle. The theory implies that the over-emphasis of violent content in television shows likely will instill a belief in viewers that the world is a violent place (Doob & MacDonald, 1979; Gerbner et al., 1980; Signorielli & Gerbner, 1995). One only need turn on the local news to hear of urban crime. But, what does that leave for the viewer to think about the rest of the country? This may lead one to assume that rural life is safer than crime-ridden city life. Cultivation research (e.g., Busselle & Crandall, 2002; Pfau et al., 2001; Signorielli & McLeod, 1994), also has suggested that television portrayals can influence perceptions of the status of certain groups (professions, ethnicity, race, gender, etc.). Some groups are seen as normal or to exist in a particular context, and have generalizable characteristics. There also is the potential for viewers to consider
aspects of life that are not portrayed on television as abnormal or unimportant, or perhaps as nonexistent. The following research suggests that one could apply such notions to perceptions of geographic regions, too.

Violence

Numerous studies have found links between viewer violence and program violence (Doob & MacDonald, 1979; Gerbner, 1996; Gerbner et al., 1980; Haridakis, 2002; Haridakis & Rubin, 2003; Romer et al., 2003; Signorielli & Gerbner, 1995). These issues of violence make sense to emphasize in order to examine rural perceptions, because one of the strongest rural images is that of safety (Bales, 1998; W. K. Kellogg, 2001, 2002b). Most of these studies showed that violent television, whether or not it is combined with viewer characteristics, is associated with a viewer’s overall perception of violence in the world.

Researchers of violence have attempted to determine not only a viewer’s desire to strike out, but also his or her belief that others will strike out against him or her. Studies of victimization have suggested a connection between this feeling and viewing violent shows (Nabi & Sullivan, 2001; Reber & Chang, 2000; Signorielli & Gerbner, 1995), but often this connection was stronger when other variables were controlled, such as type of crime (Diefenbach & West, 2001), ethnicity (Morgan, 1983), or social class (Frost & Stauffer, 1987).

Portrayals

Cultivation research that is particularly relevant to the purposes of this study is the examination of the effects of media portrayals of people, groups, and the like. Although
many cultivation studies focused on violence (issues that initially appear simple to isolate and measure), televised portrayals of various groups and views may be more prevalent and pervasive. Studies have dealt with overrepresentations of unnatural health, injury, and death (Gerbner et al., 1982), and misrepresentations of members of particular races and ethnicities (Busselle & Crandall, 2002; Gandy & Baron, 1998; Mastro, 2000; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Stilling, 1997; Vergeer et al., 2000), members of certain classes (Ellis & Armstrong, 1989; Harmon, 2001; Thomas & LeShay, 1992), types of marriages and family situations (Scharrer, 2001; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Shrum, 1999; Signorielli, 1991), characteristics of gender (Signorielli & McLeod, 1994), as well as inaccurate portrayals of work (Signorielli, 2001), legal and government professions (Pfau et al., 1995; Pfau et al., 2001), and supernatural phenomena (Sparks & Nelson, 1997). Such research raises interesting questions about how people know what is true about the world, and if that knowledge is accurate. Cultivation theory posits that portrayals of lifestyles or phenomena lead to viewers’ beliefs that these portrayals represent real life. In contrast, those real aspects of life (truth about rural America) that do not get televised coverage may never reach viewers, who, therefore, may never accurately perceive rural America.

Geographic Cultivation

An underlying premise of much of the literature on cultivation hints at the main focus of this study – geographic cultivation. All of the studies can be seen as taking place in a particular location (for example, the big city, the suburbs, a desert island, etc.), and often that location studied was distant enough from the viewer that he or she might need to make assumptions about the veracity of the media images.
Many studies of violence and aggression, for example, have dealt with *location* of crime. Some studies (Heath, 1984; Heath & Petraitis, 1987) have shown that respondents did not indicate a fear of victimization in “urban” areas if they themselves lived in similarly urban areas. Slater and Elliot (1982) found a similar pattern with respondents’ fear of law enforcement officials. Tyler (1980) found differences between fear of urban *people* and urban *places*. This means that scholars should not apply cultivation to people without allowing for the possibility of both third-person and third-place effects. For example, people may state a fear of New York City, but not of the murderers or thieves of New York. Even those who live in smaller cities may attribute dangerous or evil qualities to a distant, more publicized version of their own setting. Researchers could find the study of regional assumptions, particularly rural assumptions, useful in determining what impact the media may have on viewers, especially if there is little chance that the viewer could check on the accuracy of images presented on television.

More relevant still is geographic location and media *portrayals*. Perceptions of geographic places and the people who reside in such places may have a greater potential for cultivation because of the physical distance between viewers and image portrayed (Browne & Reid, 1990; Howell, 2001; MacTavish & Salamon, 2001; Willits & Luloff, 1995; W. K. Kellogg, 2001; 2002b). This does not mean that distance is the only factor allowing for geographic cultivation. Personal experience does not necessarily erase stereotypes of “other” areas that the viewer may assume to be more representative of the area than his or her own experience. However, one must acknowledge the possible role of direct experience in cultivation (Frost & Stauffer, 1987; Heath, 1984; Heath & Petraitis,
In fact, many cultivation scholars emphasize experience as a mediating variable on cultivation effects (Gerbner 1998; Gerbner et al., 1980; Morgan, 1983).

The strongest support for regional cultivation studies comes from popular culture. Recently, belief in geographic cultivation fueled fire for protests against a proposed CBS pilot reality show, The Real Beverly Hillbillies (Byrd, 2003; Center for Rural Strategies, 2004). In the proposed show, Americans would see a “rural” family handpicked and transplanted to an urban mansion, and then observe the antics that would follow. Rural laypersons and politicians so vehemently protested the show that CBS quickly pulled it (Center for Rural Strategies, 2004).

However, there is no guarantee that similar programming might not reach airwaves in the future. Anecdotally, one can remember unflattering images of local buffoons on shows like Green Acres or The Dukes of Hazzard, and UPN recently premiered the reality show entitled Amish in the City (Center for Rural Strategies, 2004; Salamon, 2004). The protests against The Real Beverly Hillbillies illustrate how strongly people believe in cultivation, and the popularity of programs like The Simple Life shows that protestors may be fighting a losing battle. Although rurality has too many nuances to develop a true definition of a “true” rural place or rural person, anger from rural sources suggests that more careful study of rural conditions would be useful when including rural themes in subject matter on television.

International Roots of Geographic Cultivation

In order to understand more clearly the possibility of geographic cultivation, one
can liken the portrayals of rural America to media images of different nations and cultures. Several scholars who specialize in international communication (particularly cultivationists) have examined perceptions that international viewers have of the U.S. through the images they see in the media. For example, Pingree and Hawkins (1981) studied Australian children and adolescents whose television consumption largely consisted of U.S. shows. Recording participants’ opinions, media beliefs and habits, general knowledge of program topic, and amount of violence, they found that Australian viewers selected what parts of shows to dismiss as part of a different culture, and what parts they embraced as aspects of society in general. Viewers naturally discounted U.S. accents and location as particular to one nation. They attributed program features (such as violence) to real society, including Australia. This suggests that cultivation does not necessarily have cultural boundaries. However, studies involving more diverse cultures would provide more understanding.

Immigrants’ assessments of images of the U.S. prior to their journey here also show the mixed power of cultivation, especially when combined with real life exposure to once-distant images. Messaris and Woo (1991) interviewed several Korean-American immigrants about their perceptions of the U.S. that they gleaned from television before they arrived in the U.S. All respondents mentioned wealth as the primary image (though higher education levels made the expressions more complex). They also admitted that they saw negative aspects of American society portrayed in the media (such as the violence), but that they usually dismissed these points as an anomaly or part of a fictional show. Thus, large cultural differences (unlike Australian-U.S. situations) also may impact
cultivation effects. In the case of rural America, farm life is such an oddity to urbanized viewers that it is a natural issue of fixation in the media, if not a realistic depiction. Even if portrayals of the farm are true to life (but not common), images that a viewer perceives as odd may remain in the viewer’s mind. Realistic images may fade from memory, leaving only the media image.

Other researchers find it useful to compare reactions to programs along cultural lines of the viewer compared to the culture presented on television. Woo and Dominick (2001) compared American and international student reactions to U.S. talk shows. Although Americans watched more television, both groups watched the same amount of talk shows. The researchers also found that international students exhibited more of a cultivation effect than did U.S. students. Broadly speaking, intercultural differences in perception can be thought of as the lack of understanding of the differences among groups created by, or the similarities sustained in spite of, physical distance.

Without any direct contact with Americans, foreigners’ perceptions of the typical American can be forged by media images. Tan, Li, and Simpson (1986) studied television use by both Mexican and Taiwanese students, along with their perceived reality and social stereotypes. Adapting previous racial and ethnic stereotype measures (Gilbert, 1951; Katz & Braly, 1933), they attempted to assess intercultural stereotypes as an extension of international stereotypes. They found that two U.S. programs (Dallas and Dynasty) were watched the most and were perceived as accurately portraying Americans (mainly in a negative light). Tan and Suarchavarat (1988) found similar influences of programming on stereotypical perceptions of the U.S.
In a study of Japanese adolescents, Inoue (1999) found that violent images of the U.S. were related to negative attitudes toward the U.S. as a nation, but not toward individual Americans. Also, American programs and movies (in general) often linked with positive attitudes toward the U.S. and Americans by respondents.

In another study, Willnat et al. (2002) found a difference between direct effects, perceived direct effects, and perceived third-person effects by separating viewers by culture. In a survey of both European and Asian students from several nations (1,968 students), Willnat et al. found differences between Asian and European perceptions of U.S. television. Although persons from these different cultures felt that violent content affected their own and other cultures negatively, that was the only consensus. Europeans felt that U.S. television affected other cultures more than their own, and that most of the influences were negative. Respondents felt that U.S. television had a powerful and negative influence on viewers – not the respondents themselves, but most other viewers – and that the influence was socially harmful. On the other hand, Asians felt that U.S. television affected their own culture more than others, and that most of the influences were positive. They felt that U.S. television affected their lives in a good way, but did not assume that other viewers would gain similar social rewards from U.S. programming.

Geographical News Coverage

U.S. television news exhibits an interesting bias toward cities, and (perhaps by default) a perception of boredom with rural areas that is evident in its broadcasts. Urban centers tend to become media and technology centers. This makes it easy for television producers to focus on those areas, at the expense of suburban and rural areas (Gilens,
1996). Even with representation, there is no guarantee, and little opportunity or desire, to check for the accuracy of those representations.

A content analysis of U.S. television news (Dominick, 1977) revealed that news programs focused on urban sites – political, economic, and cultural centers – at the expense of the rest of the nation (a much larger portion of the country). Two thirds of news coverage on U.S. networks was divided between three regions: California (an urban center of entertainment), New York (an urban center of culture, entertainment, and economics), and Washington, D.C. (an urban political center). Washington receives still more attention when reporters cover national political news. The east and west coasts also are over-represented compared to the “heartland.” The middle sections of the nation, as well as rural areas throughout the country, share the remaining one-third of air-time. This means that news from these regions would have to be exceptional, or fit into the set perception of the news in order to reach a public forum. More examination of such coverage would be necessary to determine if this is still the case, but anecdotal evidence leads one to believe that much has remained the same.

A content analysis of Canadian news (Clarke, 1990) showed similar trends of emphasizing large metropolitan areas. Most stories centered around the capital of Ottawa and its province of Ontario. Stories outside the capital usually focused on urban centers of other provinces. Such neglect of rural coverage shows that rural regions are a ripe area for research.

**Misrepresentations of Flyover Country.**

Coverage does not mean that geographic regions portrayed on television are
portrayed accurately, or that they necessarily have a privileged position in society. Yet, lack of coverage also can lead to misrepresentation. The case of “rural” America lends itself to discussion. As previously discussed, the working definition of “rural” changes from source to source and person to person. Scholars can develop a measurable concept of rural. It appears to be defined primarily by three factors: its relative abundance of land and other natural resources, its significant distance from urban centers, and the poverty of its inhabitants (Wiggins & Proctor, 2001). However, it has yet to be proven that these factors translate well to the average American. Both laypersons and politicians define public policy based on their perceptions (not academically defined constructs), and often rely on non-academic information (Browne, 2001) to make decisions on rural regions.

Researchers have revealed many commonly-held rural perceptions based on content analysis of television shows (Bales, 1998; Clarke, 1990; Corbett, 1992; Dominick, 1977), and opinion surveys (Hansen, 1970; Magoc, 1991; Marans et al., 1980; Swetnam & Pope, 2001; Wander, 1976; W. K. Kellogg, 2001; 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). Recorded over several years, researchers now can group these perceptions and test whether or not the media contributes significantly to their perpetuation.

Differences

One major theme of many geographic studies was that of difference between regions – rural settings were quite different from other settings, be they urban or suburban (e.g., Bales, 1998; Browne, 1990; 2001; W. K. Kellogg, 2001; 2002b). Just what “different” means may vary among people, but what each person envisions as “Rural America” usually means something that is not like their own setting. Respondents
saw rural regions as different from all other parts of the nation (Bales, 1998; Browne, 1990; Browne, 2001; W. K. Kellogg, 2001; 2002b). The differences emerge in areas of social comparison, poverty, technology, and farm life (discussed in the following sections).

Lack of a rural definition may seem daunting when trying to understand cultivated perceptions of rural areas. However, previous research has shown that such ambiguity has allowed for several rural stereotypes to proliferate, many of which may be present in media images. One can find an easy basis for comparison of rural traits with respondents’ own environment, because most documented rural images hint at rural settings being different -- not urban, not suburban, or not what we experience. It is an “other” place.

Pastoral superiority has lined the foundation of most historical writing, and is perpetuated today in the assumptions of countryside safety, work ethic, community bonds, and serenity (Bales, 1998; Browne, 2001; Hansen, 1970; Little, 1999; MacTavish & Salamon, 2001; Marans et al., 1980; Swetnam & Pope, 2001; Willits & Luloff, 1995; W. K. Kellogg, 2001). Although one cannot assess an “accurate” definition of rurality, it is worthwhile to examine whether or not perceptions of rurality are linked to television viewing, and whether those perceptions are positive or negative. Respondents’ feelings of similarity and difference between their own habitations and rural places may be the only way to describe rural qualities. One can describe one’s own home, and whether or not it is rural.

The concept of geographical cultivation is a fairly new area of research, which makes the research questions and hypotheses tentative at best. Because researchers have
not clearly linked television’s role in perpetuating such assumptions, I articulate several research questions rather than hypotheses for the following areas of inquiry.

RQ1a: What is the relationship between amount of television viewing and viewers’ stereotypes of rural people?

RQ1b: What is the relationship between amount of television viewing and viewers’ evaluations of rural people?

**Poverty**

It has been asserted that images of poverty and backwardness dominate media coverage of the countryside that does exist (Bales, 1998; Browne, 2001; Browne & Hadwiger, 1982; W. K. Kellogg, 2002b, 2002c), and researchers have found that poverty is a dominant aspect of rural life (USDA, 2003, 2004). From this, one can ask the following research question:

RQ2: What is the relationship between amount of television viewing and viewers’ evaluations of the severity of rural poverty?

**Isolation**

Popular to the digital divide premise, much public funding does reach rural areas in the form of technological developments (Hendricks, 1999; Klinkenborg, 2004; Krattenmaker, 1996; Rice & Katz, 2003; W. K. Kellogg, 2002c; Zhang & Wolff, 2004). The fact that such funding continually goes to rural development shows that the public assumes a need to connect rural society with the rest of the world. However, one could argue that the once-pristine hills and plains now have better technology than many urban areas (Edmondson & Fontanez, 1995; Howell, 2001; LaRose & Mettler, 1989).
Technology may play a more important role in the life of a rural entrepreneur than for an urban one (Hindman, Ernst, & Richardson, 2001), leading one to question perceptions of the extent to which rural America is disconnected and backward. Such development is not necessarily an abandonment of rural heritage (Arrighi, Silver, & Brewer, 2003, Chen, 2001; “No land”, 1992; Starr & Adams, 2003), but rather a fixed part of rural society. Such information would be surprising to those who listen to media and government reports of the isolated and unconnected countryside. Such studies suggest that the public perceives, perhaps inaccurately, that rural areas are isolated and technologically backward, and lead to the following hypotheses:

H1: Higher amounts of television viewing will be positively related to perceptions that rural areas are less technologically advanced.

H2: Television viewing will be positively related to evaluations that rural areas are isolated from the rest of society.

Perceptions of rural disconnect can take on many names: purity, isolation, wildness, and the like (Bales, 1998; Klinkenborg, 2004; W K. Kellogg, 2002c). All of these terms reflect an attitude of the perceiver, and it is worthwhile to determine if people tend to view that disconnect in positive or negative terms. The urban vacationer may long for an isolated refuge, and may view rural disconnect positively. However, that same vacationer may bring along a child who might detest the lack of television or broadband connections, and would view rural disconnect negatively. This leads to the next research question regarding the isolation of rural people:

RQ3a: Do heavy television viewers think that rural people are isolated?
RQ3b: Do heavy television viewers consider rural isolation to be a positive or negative quality?

*The Farm*

The most persistent and most erroneous image of rural life is that it is dominated by agriculture. This perception also must be examined. For years, people have associated the countryside and rural income with farming (Bales, 1998; Browne, 2001; Browne & Reid, 1990; Flinn, 1982; W. K. Kellogg, 2002b). As government studies have shown, nothing could be further from the truth (Hamrick, 2003; USDA, 2000). Encroachment on that perceived family farm (the key symbol of pristine, separate rurality) fuels angry protests and welcomes expensive initiatives to salvage the past (Bales, 1998; Browne, 2001; Flinn, 1982; Salamon, 2003; W. K. Kellogg, 2002b). This forms grounding for the final hypotheses:

H3: Higher amounts of television viewing will be positively related to higher estimates of rural residents employed as farmers.

H4: Television viewing will be positively related to reports of threats of funding to farming being a major challenge to rural America.

*Contributing Viewer Factors*

Although cultivation assumes that television images can influence perceptions of reality, other factors must be acknowledged for their possible contributions to the cultivation process. Researchers examining media effects often have examined the impact of perceived reality (Haridakis, 2002; Haridakis & Rubin, 2003; Potter, 1986; Rubin, 1981; Rubin et al., 2003) and television viewing motives (Haridakis, 2002; Kim & Rubin,
1997; Rubin et al., 2003; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985) as contributing factors in media effects. Communication scholars have examined the link between ethnocentrism and educational and interpersonal perceptions (McCroskey, 2003; Neuliep, Chaudoir, & McCroskey, 2001), as well as between ethnocentrism and limited media effects (Hall, 2001). All of these variables may be useful to include in cultivation research in order to understand more fully the factors that may, together with amount of television viewing, contribute to inaccurate perceptions of rural America. This leads to the final research question:

RQ4: What are the relative contributions of viewer attributes (perceived reality, viewing motivation, ethnocentrism, and experience with rurality) and amount of television viewed to predicting rural stereotypes?
CHAPTER II
METHODOLOGY

Sample

Although many studies have dealt with youth perceptions (usually separated by grade level) of social reality acquired from media images (Cohen et al., 1983; Davis & Mares, 1998; Potter, 1990; Roessler & Brosius, 2001), the underlying assumption of cumulative cultivation effects suggests that a sample of college students might prove more useful. This is because most students entering college have developed a fairly mature mental processing system. Unlike children, most students can understand fully the plot of a television show. Also, upon entry to college, most students have been exposed to many televised images, and some students will spend much of their college years consuming many more.

Because this study involves perception of an abstract vision of “rurality,” personal habitat plays less of a role than it does for other cultivated images. In addition, personal experience with a geographic region may not necessarily prevent a respondent from forming untrue stereotypes about distant groups or samples (for example, a person may know a rural person who does not fit a media stereotype, but may think of that person as an exception to the rule). Therefore, a group from a large college population would provide a relevant sample to study. With such a sample, not only do most respondents have adequate cognitive abilities and exposure to television, but they also are young enough to have lived most of their lives technologically-connected. Respondents (N = 325) were undergraduate students enrolled at a Midwestern public university. As part of a
convenience sample, they completed surveys in order to satisfy part of a research requirement.

Measurement and Analysis

Scales and indexes were adapted from prior cultivation studies and prior research that have proven to be reliable over the years.

Stereotypes

In order to test the hypotheses and explore the research questions, one must measure viewer perceptions and attitudes pertaining to “rurality.” First I assessed respondents’ perceptions about the topic of rurality. To measure rural stereotypes, I used an adapted version of the ethnic stereotype scale (Inoue, 1999; Karlins, Coffman, & Walters, 1969; Tan, Li, & Simpson, 1986; Tan & Suarchavarat, 1988). This scale has been used in a variety of settings to measure stereotypes of nationalities and ethnicities, and can be used to measure cultural stereotypes as well.

The respondents were provided with a list of 61 words and their definitions. After that, respondents listed the 10 words that best apply to their perception of distant “rural” people (see Appendix A). They also were allowed to add any appropriate words that they did not see listed. Once the words were listed, the respondents rank ordered their list from one to ten (10 = best describing rural), and evaluated each word as positive (+), neutral (0), or negative (-). If the respondent found the word very positive or negative, he or she added an additional symbol (++ or --), respectively. This translated directly to a Likert-type index (two pluses = 5; two minuses = 1). Responses then were summed and averaged to create an index of the direction (positive or negative) and intensity of rural
stereotypes. A higher score was associated with a more positive stereotype.

The most frequently-stated perceptions were loyalty to family ($N = 207$), love of tradition ($N = 191$), faith ($N = 120$), reserve ($N = 108$), isolation ($N = 101$), efficiency ($N = 96$), courtesy ($N = 90$), conventionality ($N = 90$), straightforwardness ($N = 79$), and industriousness ($N = 72$) (See Table 1). The average evaluation of all free-list perceptions was slightly positive ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.50$).

Table 1

*Rural Stereotypes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stereotype</th>
<th>% Out of 325</th>
<th># Reported Out of 325</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loyal to Family</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition-Loving</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faithful</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserved</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficient</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courteous</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventional</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straightforward</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrious</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualistic</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naïve</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talkative</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physically Dirty</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jovial</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sophisticated</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorant</td>
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<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gregarious</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loud</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superstitious</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentative</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick-tempered</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rude</td>
<td>5.8</td>
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</table>

(Table 1 continues)
Table 1 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stereotype</th>
<th>% Out of 325</th>
<th># Reported Out of 325</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suspicious</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrewd</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evasive</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sly</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revengeful</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrogant</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humorless</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frivolous</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientifically-Minded</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deceitful</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruel</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humorous</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rural Evaluations

In order to assess a respondent’s personal definition of rural, one must assess rural evaluations along the main themes of rural media portrayals. As mentioned in the literature, these themes involve respondents’ perceptions of rural health, safety, economy, community, and morality. Therefore, I asked a series of questions for the respondent to evaluate rural areas on these various topics (see Appendix B). Respondents evaluated their agreement with these statements about rural people and places on several questions ranging from connection to the world (“Rural people have strong connections with the rest of the world”) to safety (“Rural places are safe from crime”), as well as on a statement of rural immediacy (“Rural places are very different from where I live”) on a range of 1 to 5 (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Respondents also evaluated their agreement with statements regarding rural poverty (“How serious a problem is rural
poverty?” and “For rural America, how serious a problem is the lack of funding for farms?” on a range of 1 to 5 (1 = *Not Serious at All*, 5 = *Very Serious*). For each statement, the responses were summed and averaged to create an index for each evaluation.

Respondents also listed an estimate (percentage) of how much rural America is defined by farming (“What percentage of rural America is employed as farmers?” and “What percentage of rural Americans own a farm?”).

Overall, respondents tended to believe that rural people have strong community connections (M = 3.87, SD = 0.91), that rural people have a strong work ethic (M = 3.96, SD = 0.81), and that lacking of funding for farms is a serious problem for rural America (M = 3.82, SD = 0.84). Overall, respondents tended to disagree with evaluations that rural people have strong connections with the rest of the world (M = 2.60, SD = 0.85), and that rural places have diverse groups of people (M = 2.69, SD = 1.07). The severity of rural poverty rankings were calculated (M = 3.42, SD = 0.87), as were the perceptions of rural places being different from the respondent’s residence (M = 3.29, SD = 1.22).

Estimates of rural people employed as farmers were averaged to form a farming employment index (M = 34.96, SD = 24.39), and estimates of rural people *owning* farms (in the form of percentages) were averaged to form a farm ownership index (M = 28.09, SD = 22.56).

*Television Viewing*

Past studies (Haridakis, 2002; Kim & Rubin, 1997; Rubin, et al., 2003) have assessed amount of television viewing with two questions: “How many hours of
television did you watch yesterday?” and “How many hours of television do you watch on a typical weekday?” These questions have proven to be reliable (Haridakis & Rubin, 2003; Kim & Rubin, 1997; Rubin, 1981, 1983). Some researchers (Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Pfau, Moy, & Szabo, 2001; Potter, 1990) have had respondents indicate how many hours per week they watched particular genres (e.g., situation comedy, general drama, daytime soap opera, news program, movies on television, sports, science fiction, reality shows, music videos, talk shows, game shows, cartoons). The reliability of genre measures can vary with the genres included, but typically yield reliable results (according to Rubin et al., 1988). In this study, I asked the two general television exposure questions (“How many hours of television did you watch yesterday?” and “How many hours of television do you watch on a typical weekday?”). Responses to these two questions were summed and averaged to create a general television exposure index. I also asked how many hours (per week) respondents watched the following genres: news programs, situation comedies, dramas, soap operas, sports, science fiction, reality shows, music video television, talk shows, game shows, and cartoons (see Appendix C). The scores for the two questions were combined and averaged to create a general television viewing index, and the scores of each genre were averaged to create a television viewing index for the particular genre.

For overall television viewing, average total amount of television watched ($N = 325$) was 2.85 hours per day ($SD = 2.22$). The maximum amount of hours watched per day was 12.25, and the minimum amount was 0 hours. The most watched genres (in number of hours per week) were situation comedies ($N = 276, M = 3.15, SD = 3.63$),
news programs \((N = 229, M = 1.43, SD = 2.28)\), sports programs \((N = 219, M = 3.26, SD = 4.79)\), reality shows \((N = 214, M = 2.01, SD = 3.44)\), and music television \((N = 203, M = 1.82, SD = 3.30)\). The means and standard deviations for each of the genres watched are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Television Genres Viewed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genres</th>
<th>(M)</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation Comedies</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramas</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap Operas</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality Shows</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Videos</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk Shows</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Shows</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartoons</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>2.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Viewer Variables**

*Perceived reality.* In order to determine how much influence a television image could have on a viewer’s perception of the real world, one must determine if a viewer actually does believe that those images are realistic. To do that, I used the Perceived Reality Scale (Rubin, 1981). These questions ask whether the respondent believes that the images presented are in fact true representations of the surrounding world (see Appendix D). Respondents answered several Likert-type questions reflecting their perception of the realism of television images, such as “Television presents things as they really are” \((1 = \text{strongly disagree}, 5 = \text{strongly agree})\). This measure has been a reliable in measuring
perceived reality in prior research (Haridakis, 2002; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Rubin et al., 1988). Responses to the five items were summed and averaged to create an index of perceived reality \((M = 3.08, SD = 0.38, \alpha = .72)\). Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations of each of the five items.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Reality of Television Viewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Television presents things as they really are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. If I see something on television, I can’t be sure it really is that way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Television lets me really see how other people live.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. TV does not show life as it really is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Television lets me see what happens in other places as if I were really there.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Items 2 and 4 were reverse coded. The data in the table reflect the coding.

Viewing motivation. Much like perceived reality, a viewer’s motives for watching television may affect the impact of television content on the viewer and whether the impact is positive or negative (Rubin et al., 1988). As with previous studies (Haridakis, 2002; Kim & Rubin, 1997; Rubin et al., 1985), I presented respondents with evaluative statements that measure different types of motivation (Rubin, 1983, see Appendix E for a list of items adapted from the 27-item scale). These items reliably tap television viewing motive factors (such as relaxation, excitement, information, escapism, habit, and social interaction). The score for each factor was averaged to create an index of each motive. These factors vary in their reliability across studies, but the Cronbach alphas in previous studies for each have ranged from .67 to .85 (Haridakis, 2002; Rubin et al., 2003; Haridakis & Rubin 2003).
I used principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation to analyze the responses. I required a minimum eigenvalue of 1.0 and at least two loadings (using a 60-40 rule as guidance) to retain factors. Five factors accounted for 57.7% of the total variance after rotation. Table 3 summarizes the factor analysis. Responses to the items that loaded on each factor were summed and averaged to create indexes for each motive factor.

Table 4

*Factor Analysis Results for Television Viewing Motivations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television Viewing Motive Items</th>
<th>Television Viewing Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I watch television…”</td>
<td>EE  H  L  X  I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Excitement/Entertainment</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it’s exciting</td>
<td>.81 - .14 .13 .06 .13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it’s enjoyable</td>
<td>.79 .18 -.08 .30 .04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it amuses me</td>
<td>.74 .09 .02 .26 .07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it entertains me</td>
<td>.67 .28 -.12 .27 .09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I just like to watch</td>
<td>.60 .35 .09 .27 -.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| *Habit/Pass Time*               |                           |
| When I have nothing better to do| .05 .84 -.02 .07 .02 |
| So I have something to do to occupy my time | .18 .65 .41 .12 .09 |
| To pass the time away, especially when | I’m bored | .23 .62 .39 .21 -.09 |
| Just because it’s there         | .03 .61 .10 -.07 -.05 |

| *Loneliness*                    |                           |
| To make me feel less lonely     | .04 .11 .82 .11 .12 |
| So I won’t have to be alone    | .02 .04 .79 .15 .13 |
| When there’s no one else to talk to or be with | .01 .37 .71 .07 .17 |

(Table 4 continues)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television Viewing Motive Items</th>
<th>Television Viewing Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I watch television…&quot;</td>
<td>EE H L X I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Escape**
So I can forget about school, work, or other things
Because it relaxes me
So I can get away from what I’m doing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>EE</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escape So I can forget about school, work, or other things</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape Because it relaxes me</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape So I can get away from what I’m doing</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Information**
So I can learn how to do things I haven’t done before
Because it helps me learn things about myself and others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>EE</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information So I can learn how to do things I haven’t done</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Because it helps me learn things about myself and others</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalue: 8.13, 2.72, 2.19, 1.52, 1.01
Variance Explained: 30.12, 10.10, 8.11, 5.64, 3.73
Cronbach Alpha: .86, .76, .82, .71, r = .66

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** EE = Excitement/Entertainment; H = Habit/Pass Time; C = Companionship; X = Escape; I = Information.

Factor 1, *Excitement/Entertainment* (*eigenvalue* = 8.13), explained 30.12% of the total variance after rotation. It contained all three entertainment items, one arousal item, and one habit item. This 5-item factor reflected watching television because it was exciting, enjoyable, amusing, entertaining, and because viewers liked to watch (*M* = 3.65, *SD* = 0.77, *α* = .86). Factor 2, *Habit/Pass Time* (*eigenvalue* = 2.72), explained 10.10% of the total variance after rotation. It contained two habit items and two pass-time items. This 4-item factor reflected watching television to occupy time, because it was there, and because there was nothing better to do (*M* = 3.33, *SD* = 0.85, *α* = .76). Although it did not conform strictly to the 60-40 rule, I included the occupy time item because it increased
reliability and fit with the other items conceptually. Factor 3, *Companionship* (*eigenvalue* = 2.19), explained 8.11% of the variance after rotation. It contained three companionship items. This 3-item factor reflected watching television to feel less lonely (*M* = 2.31, *SD* = 0.98, *α* = .82). Factor 4, *Escape/Relaxation* (*eigenvalue* = 1.52), explained 5.64% of the variance after rotation. It contained two escape items and one relaxation item. This 3-item factor reflected watching television to relax and to get away from work or concerns (*M* = 3.32, *SD* = 0.80, *α* = .71). Factor 5, *Information* (*eigenvalue* = 1.01), explained 3.73% of the variance after rotation. It contained two information items. This 2-item factor reflected watching television to learn new things, or to learn about the self and others (*M* = 2.36, *SD* = 0.89, *r* = .66).

*Ethnocentrism.* Some viewers make snap judgments based on very little information, and feel that those judgments are strong and applicable on a widespread scale. Viewing people in terms of stereotypes they hold is a common focus of study (Gerbert, 2001; Hall & Anten, 1999; Inoue, 1999; Scharrer, 2002; Tan, Li, & Simpson, 1986; Tan & Suarchavarat, 1988; Willnat et al., 2002), and viewing one’s own culture as superior to all others plays a part in forming stereotypes. Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) developed a measure of ethnocentrism that has proven to be both valid and reliable (Neuliep, 2002; Toale & McCroskey, 2001). Respondents were asked to evaluate 22-items (see Appendix F) based on their agreement with statements in Likert-type answers (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). I used this scale to measure ethnocentrism. Responses were summed and averaged to yield an ethnocentrism index (*M* = 2.66, *SD* = 0.95, *α* = .77). Table 5 presents the scale items, their means, and their standard
deviations.

Table 5

*Ethnocentrism Measure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Most other cultures are backward compared to my culture.</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My culture should be the role model for other cultures.</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. People from other cultures act strange when they come into my culture.</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lifestyles in other cultures are just as valid as those in my culture.</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Other cultures should try to be more like my culture.</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am not interested in the values and customs of other cultures.</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. People in my culture could learn a lot from people in other cultures.</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Most people from other cultures just don’t know what is good for them.</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I respect the values and customs of other cultures.</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Other cultures are smart to look up to our culture.</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Most people would be happier if they lived like people in my culture.</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I have many friends from different cultures.</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. People in my culture have just about the best lifestyles of anywhere.</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Lifestyles in other cultures are not as valid as those in my culture.</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I am very interested in the values and customs of other cultures.</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I apply my values with judging people who are different.</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I see people who are similar to me as virtuous.</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I do not cooperate with people who are different.</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Most people in my culture just don’t know what is good for them.</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I do not trust people who are different.</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I dislike interacting with people from different cultures.</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I have little respect for the values and customs of other cultures.</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Experience with rurality.* Personal experience with the countryside cannot be ignored, nor should a cultivation study fail to account for such experience (Gerbner et al., 2002; Morgan & Shanahan, 1997). Therefore, one must check to see if respondents or their family or friends had lived in or visited a “rural” area. Measuring exposure to real events in order to uncover variables that might influence the cultivation process is not a new technique (Tamborini & Choi, 1990; Woo & Dominick, 2003). By adapting previous
questions regarding crime (Tan, Li, & Simpson, 1986, Tan & Suarchavarat, 1988), along with nationality and ethnic exposure questions (see Appendix G), I asked respondents five questions to determine if the respondents had such contacts. Responses were coded (\textit{YES} = 1, \textit{NO} = 0). Scores then were averaged to create a rural experience index (\(M = 0.71, SD = 0.26, \alpha = .74\)). Table 6 presents the index items, their means, and their standard deviations.

Table 6

\textit{Contact with Rural Areas}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>(M)</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you live in a rural area?</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Have you ever lived in a rural area?</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have you ever visited a rural area?</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you have family or friends who live/have lived in rural areas?</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do you have family or friends who have visited rural areas?</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most respondents (\(N = 218\)) did not live in what they would describe as “rural” areas (67.1%), but felt that they had experienced rural areas in less direct ways, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

\textit{Contact with Rural Areas (Frequency)}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Frequency (Out of 325)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you live in a rural area?</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Have you ever lived in a rural area?</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have you ever visited a rural area?</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>95.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you have family or friends who live/have lived rural areas?</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do you have family or friends who have visited rural areas?</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many respondents felt that they had lived in a rural area ($N = 160$), and a clear majority had visited what they considered to be rural areas ($N = 310$). Taking into account perceptions about the contact of family and friends with rural areas, the respondents stated that at least someone they knew had lived or currently live in a rural area ($N = 279$) or had visited rural areas ($N = 303$).
CHAPTER III
RESULTS

In this study, I proposed a direct link between television viewing and perceptions of rural America as a region and the people who live in this area. I also considered possible relative contributions of television viewing, and viewer attributes (perceived reality, viewing motivation, ethnocentrism, and experience with rurality) to these perceptions. I posed four hypotheses and four research questions, as described in the following section.

Links Between Amount of Viewing and Perceptions

The first research questions asked about the relationship between television viewing and viewer stereotypes (RQ1a) and evaluations of rural people (RQ1b). Answering RQ1a required that respondents enumerate their stereotypes of rural people. Most respondents felt that rural people could be identified by their loyalty to family (63.7%) and their love of tradition (58.8%). On the whole, respondents in this sample evidenced a slightly positive ($M = 3.58, SD = 0.50$, out of 5) feeling toward rural people (RQ1a). In order to determine the overall direction of particular perceptions, I used a Pearson correlation to relate the relative positivity or negativity of stereotypes (dependent variables) to overall television viewing (independent variable), but found no significant results.

To answer RQ1b, I next calculated a correlation between particular evaluations and the amount of overall television watched. I also calculated a correlation between evaluations and specific genres watched, as many media-effects scholars have found
genre distinction to be a productive method to analyze viewer perception (Pfau et al., 2001; Potter, 1990; Potter, 1991a; Potter & Chang, 1990; Rubin et al., 2003). Results for several particular correlations were small, but significant. Detailed significant results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluations</th>
<th>NEWS</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>SF</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>G</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“... people have strong community connections.”</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“... places are eco-friendly.”</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“... places have abundant natural resources.”</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“... people have a strong work ethic.”</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“... people are isolated.”</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“... people are happy.”</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“... places are safe from crime.”</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“... people are moral.”</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“... people are physically healthy.”</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“... places have diverse groups of people.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“... people are wealthy.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“How serious a problem is rural poverty?”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“For Rural America, how serious a problem is the lack of funding for farms?”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate of Rural America employed as farmers (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate of Rural Americans owning a farm (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. NEWS = News Programs; SC = Situation-Comedies; SP = Sports; SF = Science-Fiction; R = Reality Shows; M = Music Video Television; T = Talk Shows; G = Game Shows. N = 325. *p < .05 level, **p < .01 level.

Total television viewing (in hours per day) related to the perception of low funding problems for rural farms ($r = -.11, p < .05$). The more television respondents watched, the less they felt that low funding was a problem for rural farms. However, viewing certain television genres related to evaluations rural people and/or places (see
Table 8). News viewing correlated positively with perceptions that rural places are eco-friendly ($r = .11, p < .05$), have an abundance of natural resources and wildlife ($r = .12, p < .05$), and are safe from crime ($r = .11, p < .05$). News viewing also correlated positively with the perception that rural people have strong community connections ($r = .12, p < .05$), have a strong work ethic ($r = .12, p < .05$), and are happy ($r = .12, p < .05$), and negatively with perceptions that rural people are isolated ($r = -.13, p < .05$).

Watching situation-comedies was related to perceptions that rural people have a strong work ethic ($r = .12, p < .05$). Sports program viewing was related positively to perceptions that rural places have an abundance of natural resources and wildlife ($r = .15, p < .01$). Sports program viewing also was related to perceptions that rural people are moral ($r = .12, p < .05$), physically healthy ($r = .22, p < .01$), happy ($r = .13, p < .05$), and have a strong work ethic ($r = .17, p < .01$). Such viewing related negatively to the perception that low funding was a problem for rural farms ($r = -.12, p < .05$). Science-fiction program viewing was negatively associated with perceptions that rural people are moral ($r = -.12, p < .05$).

Watching reality shows was associated with perceptions that rural places have diverse groups of people ($r = .13, p < .05$). Such viewing also related positively to the enumeration of rural Americans employed as farmers ($r = .18, p < .01$), and enumeration of rural Americans owning farms ($r = .19, p < .01$). Music television viewing was positively related to perceptions that rural people have strong community connections ($r = .13, p < .05$), to the enumeration of rural Americans employed as farmers ($r = .14, p < .05$), to the enumeration of rural Americans owning farms ($r = .17, p < .01$), and to the
perception that rural poverty is a severe problem \((r = .12, p < .05)\). Talk show viewing was associated positively with perceptions that rural people are wealthy \((r = .11, p < .05)\), to enumerations of rural Americans employed as farmers \((r = .17, p < .01)\), and to enumerations of rural Americans owning farms \((r = .16, p < .01)\). Such viewing was negatively related to perceptions that rural people are isolated \((r = -.11, p < .05)\).

Game show viewing was related positively to perceptions that rural people have a strong work ethic \((r = .11, p < .05)\), and to enumerations of rural Americans employed as farmers \((r = .13, p < .05)\). This viewing was negatively associated with the perception that rural people are isolated \((r = -.13, p < .05)\).

RQ2 asked about the relationship between the amount of television viewed and viewers’ evaluations of the severity of rural poverty. Music television viewing correlated positively with perceptions of severe rural poverty \((r = .12, p < .05)\). For other genres, I found a negative relationship between television viewing and perceptions of rural poverty when phrased in different ways. General television viewing was negatively related to the perception that low funding for farms is a problem for rural areas \((r = -.11, p < .05)\), as was sports program viewing \((r = -.12, p < .05)\). In fact, talk show viewing was related to perceptions of rural wealth \((r = .11, p < .05)\).

Hypothesis 1 posited that higher amounts of television viewing would be related to perceptions that rural areas are less technologically advanced. However, the hypothesis was not supported. Amount of television viewing was not related significantly to evaluations that rural people were technologically advanced in regard to media tools \((r = .003, p = .95)\), or to machinery \((r = -.07, p = .23)\).
Hypothesis 2 posited that television viewing would be related to evaluations that rural areas are isolated from the rest of society. Hypothesis 2 was not supported \((r = -.01, p = .83)\).

However, descriptive and correlational analysis used to answer the third research question provided further insight regarding respondents’ perceptions of rural isolation. RQ3a asked if heavy television viewers thought that rural people are isolated. Many respondents listed isolation as the defining characteristic of rural people \((31.1\%, \text{ or } 101 \text{ out of } 325 \text{ respondents})\). However, the type of programming watched seemed to make a difference. There was a negative correlation between a perception that rural people were isolated and news program viewing \((r = -.13, p < .05)\), talk show viewing \((r = -.11, p < .05)\), and game show viewing \((r = -.13, p < .05)\). The positive or negative perception of rural isolation (RQ3b) related only to those respondents who listed isolation as a characteristic of rural people in the stereotypes measure, because it asked whether heavy television viewers thought that rural isolation was positive or negative. By averaging the scored \((1 \text{ to } 5)\) for each listing of isolated, I found that isolated was seen as somewhat negative \(M = 2.35 \text{ out of } 5)\).

The third hypothesis posited that high amounts of television viewed would be related to higher estimates of rural residents employed as farmers. This hypothesis was addressed in two ways. In general terms, respondents over-estimated the percentage of rural residents employed as farmers \(M = 34.96, SD = 24.39\) compared to government statistics of 1.8% (United States Census Bureau, 2006). Higher estimates of rural residents employed as farmers correlated with higher amounts of viewing particular
genres of television. A higher estimate of rural people employed as farmers was
associated with viewing reality shows ($r = .18, p < .01$), music television ($r = .14, p < .05$), and talk shows ($r = .17, p < .01$). A higher estimate of rural people owning farms
also was associated with viewing reality shows ($r = .19, p < .01$), music television ($r = .17, p < .01$), and talk shows ($r = .16, p < .01$). Accordingly, there was mixed support for
the third hypothesis.

The fourth hypothesis posed that television viewing would be related to reports of
threats of funding to farming being a major challenge to rural America. However,
analysis of the data revealed no significant relationship. H4 therefore was not supported.
Respondents did not tend to believe that rural America is struggling economically. In
this case, sports viewing related negatively to the perception that farms lacked funds ($r = -.12, p < .05$), and talk show viewing related to rural wealth perceptions in general ($r = .11, p < .05$). Overall, viewers did not perceive any dire threat problems facing rural
America due to lack of funds.

Contributing Factors to Overall Rural Perceptions

Research Question 4 asked about the relative contributions of viewer attributes
(perceived reality, viewing motivation, ethnocentrism, and experience with rurality) and
amount of television viewing to predicting rural stereotypes. I used multiple regression
analysis to assess the relative contributions of the antecedent variables to predicting rural
stereotypes.

The variables were entered in separate blocks, with the expectation that rural
exposure and ethnocentrism would influence viewing motivation, which would in turn
influence perceived realism and amount of television viewed.

Variables entered on the first step (rural exposure and ethnocentrism) accounted for 3.8% of the variance in rural stereotypes ($R = .19$, $p < .002$). Ethnocentrism ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .001$) was the only significant predictor.

The five viewing motives (*Entertainment, Habit, Loneliness, Escape*, and *Information*) were entered on the second step, and accounted for less than 1% of the variance. No motive was a significant predictor of rural stereotypes. Entering perceived realism (on the third step) also accounted for less than 1% of the variance. Average amount of television viewed was entered on the fourth step, and also accounted for less than 1% of the variance. Neither perceived realism nor amount of television viewing were predictors.

Accordingly, after all variables were entered, the final equation accounted for 4.3% of the variance in television viewers’ stereotypes of rural people $R = .20$, $R^2 = .04$, $F(9, 314) = 1.56$, $p = .13$. These results suggest that viewers with lower levels of ethnocentrism were more likely to have more positive stereotypes of rural people.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications

This study did offer interesting details about one of most basic premises of cultivation: that television has an effect on a viewer’s perception of a subject, perhaps more than real life experience of that subject. However, it does call into question the basic tenets of cultivation theory, such as uniform content of television content, habitual viewing of messages by viewers, and the gradual and cumulative effects of the messages over time (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980).

Uniform Content

In terms of general television viewing, the only significant relationship was with a perception that funding was not a problem for rural America. Any other significant relationships with specific rural evaluations surfaced only when television viewing was segmented into specific types of television genres. Further specialization of viewing habits (e.g., viewing of different genres), in contradiction with cultivation theory, may lead to more significant cultivation effects (Potter, 1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c; Signorielli & McLeod, 1994; Woo & Dominick, 2001, 2003).

Habitual Viewing

Although viewing motives did not appear to be related to rural stereotypes (RQ4), motives such as these identified should not be ignored. Much research does suggest that viewing motives do influence stereotypes (e.g., Potter, 1991a; Shrum, 1995, 1996, 2001, 2004). More careful examination of this process may reveal more conclusive evidence
that messages absorbed are more than random habit, but are actively chosen for particular reasons, as speculated by theories such as Uses and Gratifications (Hawkins & Pingree, 1981, Perse, Ferguson, & McLeod, 1994, Potter & Chang, 1990).

The relationship between ethnocentrism and rural stereotypes also suggests viewer characteristics such as psychological factors may have a more powerful role in how messages are processed, and retained or discarded (Carveth & Alexander, 1985; Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Hawkins, Pingree, & Adler, 1987; Rubin et al., 1988; Rubin et al., 2003; Shrum, 1995, 1996, 2001, 2004; Tapper, 1995). What might be an innocuous message to one viewer might leave a lasting impression on another, due at least in part to how individual characteristics influence how they see images.

Cumulative Effects

This particular premise of cultivation is the most difficult to discount, as lives become ever more saturated with mediated messages. A belief in cumulative effects of cultivation would assume that heavy viewers would have more cultivated beliefs, as they would have accumulated the largest store of images and ideas. As only one significant relationship was shown between general viewing of television and rural evaluation (of funding not being a problem for rural America), one could conclude that cumulative effects of television viewing on stereotypes are virtually nonexistent. However, examining genres viewed revealed some significant relationships between television viewing and rural evaluations. For example, those who watched television news appeared to have a more positive perception of rural people (that they had strong community connections, that they had a strong work ethic, and that they were happy). Therefore,
studies of genre-specific, motivation-specific, television viewers might show further evidence of cumulative effects, in certain cases, as might future research that considers other individual differences of viewers.

Limitations and Future Research

The limited results and support for hypotheses leads one to consider how to advance such lines of inquiry through refinement of measurement or theory, as well as possibilities for expansion of the inquiry to other relevant fields of communication.

Limitations

Rural Measurement

Although self-report measures regarding national and ethnic stereotypes have a history of reliability (Inoue, 1999; Karlins, Coffman, & Walters, 1969; Tan, Li, & Simpson, 1986; Tan & Suarchavarat, 1988), the desire, particularly for college students to be perceived by themselves and by others as tolerant (in other words, non-judgmental), may interfere with a measure that calls for formulating stereotypes of an unknown other. As McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) noted, self-evaluation is most useful when a respondent has no reason to feel that there will be negative consequences for any particular answer. For college students valuing a reputation of tolerance and open-mindedness, measurements asking for their stereotypical perceptions of rural people and places may lead some respondents either to positively inflate their public stereotype responses, or to circle both positive and negative ranks of qualities, and to mark that all groups can represent all qualities. As one respondent noted, the stereotypes exist only because of the “ignorance” of those who prejudge, which may or may not be true. Such
responses may prevent honest evaluations of what rural images may persist in a person’s mind, justified or unjustified. A stereotype measure that consists of more sensitively-phrased questions about a person’s first and strongest images of rural America may allow for more forthright responses.

Along with more sensitive stereotype question-phrasing, more open-ended questions regarding a respondent’s images of rurality could provide more insight as to how well the respondent understands the term “rural” and what specific images it invokes, and may keep the responses more free from researcher bias. For example, asking a respondent to enumerate movies or television shows that take place in rural settings, or to list American places that are rural, may prevent the respondent feeling pressure to look for a “correct” adjective to circle.

Real-Life Rural Exposure

Most respondents believed that they had had at least some contact with rural areas (95.4% stated that they had visited a rural area). A study conducted with students from an urban campus may yield more inherent controls than the study that was conducted on a suburban campus (having participants complete surveys in a non-rural setting may allow for more open responses). It might be useful for future studies to inquire more into the exact location of these rural places (by listing the name of the town visited, or providing the zip code of a “rural residence” to compare with population figures). It also may provide more insight to examine the number or length of rural visits, the purpose of the visits, and the overall feeling (positive or negative) of the visit.
Variables Combined with Television Exposure

As some scholars have noted (Hirsch, 1980; 1981a, 1981b; Hughes, 1980; Rubin et al., 2003; Rubin et al., 1988), the overall effect of television often must be paired with other factors (usually involving the viewer) in order to reveal any significant generalizable link with a viewer’s perception of life. This study also concluded that research of television’s effects on perception must include variables other than total television viewed. Ethnocentrism emerged as a particularly significant variable, but specific genres of television viewed also resulted in interesting correlations with particular perceptions. As most subjects only had a moderate perception of television being realistic, it might be useful to measure perception of reality by particular genre viewed or particular motive for viewing.

Future Research

As viewing of particular genres had significant correlations with specific perceptions, more in-depth research regarding specific perceptions and specific television genres could provide further insight into rural stereotypes and images. In particular, viewing of science-fiction programs was associated negatively with perceptions that rural people are moral. Thus, it might be productive to investigate why this genre produced arguably the most negative perception of rural people (for example, dealings with crop circles or alien encounters).

News viewing related significantly to the most evaluations, most of which reflected positively on both rural places (perceptions of eco-friendliness, abundance of natural resources, and safety) and people (perceptions of strong community connections,
happiness, and having a strong work ethic, and negatively to perceptions of isolation).
Comparing local news to national news, as well as comparing different regions covered in local news may yield interesting results. Sports program viewing also related significantly to the many evaluations, most of which reflected positively on both rural places (positively to perceptions of safety, abundance of natural resources and wildlife, and negatively to perceptions that farms suffered from low funding problems) and rural people (positively to perceptions of morality, happiness, physical health, and having a strong work ethic). Dividing sports program viewing into sports that features wildlife in the background (for example, fishing, golf, non-arena football, or non-dome baseball) and sports that have a more neutral background (for example, basketball or arena sports) might lead to further insight about perceptions of rurality. As sports fans tend to have more interest in and belief in the reality of the main action of the sport (Ganz et al., 2006), he or she may more unquestioningly absorb the periphery of location, and the connotations that accompany it.

This study was conducted to investigate college students’ perceptions of a specific part of America and American people: rural settings and inhabitants. Specifically, I wanted to determine what, if any, effect television viewing might have on viewer perceptions of rural America. Although results were mixed, it does show that there is more room for such lines of inquiry. With Congress passing more farm legislation and musicians continuing Farm Aid alongside other high profile charity events, the perception of the poor migrant farmer of Steinbeck novels (e.g., The Grapes of Wrath) persists. It will be important to see if television enforces, detracts, or ignores these perceptions.
APPENDICES
Appendix A

Social Stereotypes Measure

*Instructions:* Read through the list of words below and select those which you think are typical of *rural* people. (If you do not know the word, a list of definitions is on the next page.) Circle words that you think best describe the concept of *rural*. If you do not find the appropriate word, feel free to add it to the list. Then go on to the next page.

Intelligent  Neat  Generous  Methodical
Nationalistic  Grasping  Stubborn  Cowardly
Honest  Persistent  Ambitious  Religious
Conservative  Boastful  Imitative  Unreliable
Imaginative  Practical  Witty  Quiet

Talkative  Lazy  Naïve  Rude
Industrious  Scientifically-minded  Individualistic  Aggressive
Impulsive  Revengeful  Suspicious  Deceitful
Kind  Sophisticated  Sensitive  Shrewd

Conventional  Arrogant  Evasive  Cruel
Faithful  Loyal to family  Progressive  Reserved
Argumentative  Ignorant  Loud  Humorless
Efficient  Gregarious  Straightforward  Sly
Frivolous  Physically dirty  Superstitious  Stupid
Courteous  Isolated  Tradition-loving
Jovial  Quick-tempered
Now, go back to the list of circled words, and rank them from 1 to 10 (1 = best described rural)

List below:

1. _______________________
2. _______________________
3. _______________________
4. _______________________
5. _______________________
6. _______________________
7. _______________________
8. _______________________
9. _______________________
10. _______________________

Next, decide if each description above is positive (place a + next to it), neutral (place a 0 next to it), or negative (place a – next to it). If an item is very good, write two pluses (++) . If an item is very bad, write two minuses (- -).
Appendix B

Rural Evaluation Measure

The following questions were drawn from the literature as recurring themes of media content depicting rural life. The last two statements are used to distinguish between perceptions of rural places and perceptions of rural people (based on Inoue, 1999).

Instructions: Here are some statements people may make about rural areas and rural people. For each statement, please circle the number that best expresses your own feelings. If you strongly agree with a statement, circle a 5. If you agree, circle a 4. If you agree some and disagree some, circle a 3. If you disagree, circle a 2. If you strongly disagree, circle a 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree Some/Disagree Some</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Rural people have strong community connections. 5 4 3 2 1
2. Rural people have strong connections with the world. 5 4 3 2 1
3. Rural places are safe from crime. 5 4 3 2 1
4. Rural places are eco-friendly/earth-friendly. 5 4 3 2 1
5. Rural places have an abundance of natural resources and wildlife. 5 4 3 2 1
6. Rural people are technologically advanced (with media tools, like the internet or cell phones). 5 4 3 2 1
7. Rural people are moral 5 4 3 2 1
8. Rural people are technologically advanced (with machinery). 5 4 3 2 1
9. Rural people are tolerant. 5 4 3 2 1
10. Rural people are wealthy. 5 4 3 2 1
11. Rural places have diverse groups of people. 5 4 3 2 1
12. Rural people are physically healthy.  5 4 3 2 1
13. Rural people have a strong work ethic.  5 4 3 2 1
14. Rural people are isolated.  5 4 3 2 1
15. Rural people are happy.  5 4 3 2 1

Instructions: Imagine what you think most of rural America is like (in general), and then answer the following questions. (Circle the answer that best corresponds to your agreement with each statement, or fill in the blank with an answer.)

1. What percentage of rural America is employed as farmers? _________%

2. What percentage of rural Americans own a farm? _________%

3. How serious a problem is rural poverty?

Very Serious   Somewhat Serious   Not Sure   Not Very Serious   Not Serious at All
5 4 3 2 1

4. For rural America, how serious a problem is the lack of funding for farms?

Very Serious   Somewhat Serious   Not Sure   Not Very Serious   Not Serious at All
5 4 3 2 1

5. Rural places are very different from where I live.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Agree Some/Disagree Some   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
5 4 3 2 1
Appendix C

Television Viewing Measure

The following measure is adapted from past media studies that have recorded the amount of television watched both by measuring television use on a weekday, and use per week broken into specific genres of programming (Haridakis & Rubin, 2003; Pfau, Moy, & Szabo, 2001; Potter, 1990; Potter, 1991a; Potter & Chang, 1990; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; Rubin, Perse, & Taylor, 1988; Woo & Dominick, 2003).

Instructions: Here are some questions about television use. For each question on television use, please write the number of hours watched.

1. How many hours of television did you watch yesterday? _________

2. How many hours of television do you watch on a typical weekday? _________

3. How many hours (PER WEEK) do you watch of the following:
   a. News programs (local or national, like NBC Nightly News or Dateline) _________
   b. Situation Comedies (like That 70s Show or Sex in the City) _________
   c. Dramas (like ER or 24) _________
   d. Soap Operas (like Days of Our Lives/Young and the Restless) _________
   e. Sports (like football or basketball) _________
   f. Science Fiction (like The X-Files or Unsolved Mysteries) _________
   g. Reality Shows (like The Real World, Survivor, or Cops) _________
   h. Music Video Television (like MTV, VHI or Country Music TV) _________
   i. Talk Shows (like Dr. Phil or Jerry Springer) _________
   j. Game Shows (like Jeopardy! or Wheel of Fortune) _________
   k. Cartoons (like The Simpsons or The Family Guy) _________
1. Other (please specify: ___________________ )
Appendix D

Perceived Realism Scale

The Perceived Realism Scale (1981) reliably predicts how truthful viewers believe television images to be. Subsequent studies further developed and tested the validity and reliability of the measure (Rubin, 1983; Rubin & Perse, 1987).

Instructions: Here are some statements people may make about television. For each statement, please circle the number that best expresses your own feelings. If you strongly agree with the statement, circle a 5. If you agree, circle a 4. If you agree some and disagree some, circle a 3. If you disagree, circle a 2. If you strongly disagree, circle a 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree Some/Disagree Some</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Television presents things as they really are. 5 4 3 2 1

2. If I see something on TV, I can’t be sure it really is that way. 5 4 3 2 1

3. Television lets me really see how other people live. 5 4 3 2 1

4. TV does not show life as it really is. 5 4 3 2 1

5. Television lets me see what happens in other places as if I were really there. 5 4 3 2 1
Appendix E

Television Viewing Motives Scale

Adapted from Rubin’s (1983) Viewing Motives Scale, the following survey will measure why viewers watch television (as seen in examples Haridakis, 2002; Kim & Rubin, 1997; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985).

*Instructions:* Here are some reasons that people have given for why they watch television. Please circle the number to indicate whether each reason is *exactly* (5), *a lot* (4), *somewhat* (3), *not much* (2), or *not at all* (1) like your own reason for watching television.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exactly</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not Much</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I watch television …

1. Because it relaxes me.  
   5 4 3 2 1
2. So I can forget about school, work, or other things.  
   5 4 3 2 1
3. So I won’t have to be alone.  
   5 4 3 2 1
4. Just because it’s there.  
   5 4 3 2 1
5. Because it’s thrilling.  
   5 4 3 2 1
6. Because it helps me learn things about myself and others.  
   5 4 3 2 1
7. When I have nothing better to do.  
   5 4 3 2 1
8. Because it’s something to do when friends come over.  
   5 4 3 2 1
9. Because it entertains me.  
   5 4 3 2 1
10. When there’s no one else to talk to or be with.  
    5 4 3 2 1
11. So I can learn how to do things which I haven’t done before.  
    5 4 3 2 1
12. So I can be with other members of the family or friends who are watching.  
    5 4 3 2 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>So I can get away from the rest of the family or others.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Because it’s a habit, just something I do</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>So I can talk with other people about what’s on.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>So I could learn about what could happen to me.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Because it’s enjoyable.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Because it allows me to unwind.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Because it’s exciting.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>So I have something to do to occupy my time.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Because it peps me up.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Because it’s a pleasant rest.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>So I can get away from what I’m doing.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Because it amuses me.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>To pass the time away, especially when I’m bored.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>To make me feel less lonely.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Because I just like to watch.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Ethnocentrism Measure

The following measure is from Neuliep and McCroskey’s (1997) Generalized Ethnocentrism Scale. It has been used to deal with communication issues arising from intercultural differences (Neuliep, 2002; Toale & McCroskey, 2001).

**Instructions:** In the space provided please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you (5) **Strongly Agree**, (4) **Agree**, (3) **Agree Some/Disagree Some**, (2) **Disagree**, or (1) **Strongly Disagree** with the statement. There are no right or wrong answers and some statements are similar to others. Work quickly and record your first response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree Some/Disagree Some</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Most other cultures are backward compared to my culture. 5 4 3 2 1
2. My culture should be the role model for other cultures. 5 4 3 2 1
3. People from other cultures act strange when they come into my culture. 5 4 3 2 1
4. Lifestyles in other cultures are just as valid as those in my culture. 5 4 3 2 1
5. Other cultures should try to be more like my culture. 5 4 3 2 1
6. I am not interested in the values and customs of other cultures. 5 4 3 2 1
7. People in my culture could learn a lot from people in other cultures. 5 4 3 2 1
8. Most people from other cultures just don’t know what is good for them. 5 4 3 2 1
9. I respect the values and customs of other cultures. 5 4 3 2 1
10. Other cultures are smart to look up to our culture. 5 4 3 2 1
11. Most people would be happier if they lived like people in my culture.  
5 4 3 2 1

12. I have many friends from different cultures.  
5 4 3 2 1

13. People in my culture have just about the best lifestyles of anywhere.  
5 4 3 2 1

14. Lifestyles in other cultures are not as valid as those in my culture.  
5 4 3 2 1

15. I am very interested in the values and customs of other cultures.  
5 4 3 2 1

16. I apply my values with judging people who are different.  
5 4 3 2 1

17. I see people who are similar to me as virtuous.  
5 4 3 2 1

18. I do not cooperate with people who are different.  
5 4 3 2 1

19. Most people in my culture just don’t know what is good for them.  
5 4 3 2 1

20. I do not trust people who are different.  
5 4 3 2 1

21. I dislike interacting with people from different cultures.  
5 4 3 2 1

22. I have little respect for the values and customs of other cultures.  
5 4 3 2 1
Appendix G

Rural Experience Measure

The following questions are based on previous intercultural studies (Inoue, 1999; Karlins, Coffman, & Walters, 1969; Tamborini & Choi, 1990; Tan, Li, & Simpson, 1986; Tan & Suarchavarat, 1988; Woo & Dominick, 2003). These questions involve personal and interpersonal experience with rural life.

Instructions: Circle yes or no to the following questions.

1. Do you live in a rural area?       YES      NO
2. Have you ever lived in a rural area?       YES      NO
3. Have you ever visited a rural area?       YES      NO
4. Do you have family or friends who live/have lived in rural areas?       YES      NO
5. Do you have family or friends who have visited rural areas?       YES      NO
6. In the space below, please provide your definition of rural.
References


