

Mean World Syndrome

Authored by
mohammad looti

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"Mean World Syndrome" is a term coined by George Gerbner to describe a phenomenon whereby violence-related content of mass media makes viewers believe that the world is more dangerous than it actually is. Mean World Syndrome is one of the main conclusions of cultivation theory. Gerbner, a pioneer researcher on the effects of television on society, argued that people who watched a large amount of television tended to think of the world as an intimidating and unforgiving place. The number of opinions, images, and attitudes that viewers tend to make when watching television will have a direct influence on what the viewer perceives the real world as. They will reflect and refer to the most common images or recurrent messages thought to impact on their own real life. Gerbner once said "You know, who tells the stories of a culture really governs human behaviour," he said. 'It used to be the parent, the school, the church, the community. Now it's a handful of global conglomerates that have nothing to tell, but a great deal to sell.". We learn through story telling, Gerbner describes the story telling of today as television.

Gerbner claims the spread of this syndrome has become more intense over time. Gerbner describes that with newer technologies such as VCR, DVD, and cable, these do not disturb the cultivation theory, but actually allow more complete access and spread of recurrent messages, although widening access to the internet world of information can counteract that. The 1930s behaviorism models, the Payne Fund Studies, show that the effect of mass media are considerable influences on our behaviors. This is called the Hypodermic Model theory: people are injected with appropriate messages and ideas constructed by the mass media. Individuals who watch television infrequently and adolescents who talk to their parents about reality are claimed to have a more accurate view of the real world than those who do not, and they may be able to more accurately assess their vulnerability to violence. They also may tend to have a wider variety of beliefs and attitudes.