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a quantitative research communication study**

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THE #METOO MOVEMENT AND CULTIVATION THEORY:  
A QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH COMMUNICATION STUDY

A Thesis by

Jessica RaeAnne Green

Bachelor of Arts, Wichita State University, 2017

Submitted to the Elliott School of Communication  
and the faculty of the Graduate School of  
Wichita State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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THE #METOO MOVEMENT AND CULTIVATION THEORY:  
A QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH COMMUNICATION STUDY

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Communications.

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Patricia L. Dooley, Committee Chair

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Richard Armstrong, Committee Member

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William Parcell, Committee Member

## DEDICATION

To Joel, my mom, dad, brothers, sisters,  
and dearest friends

I think people are just glad it's happening,  
and that we can bring it up without having to whisper.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my adviser, Pat Dooley, who has helped me tremendously along the way. Writing a thesis is tough and to have your constant, on-going support means the world to me. Many thanks also go out to every professor and instructor within not only the Elliott School of Communication but also the rest of Wichita State University. Without each and every one of you and your guidance, this work couldn't have turned into what it is today.

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Lastly, I'd like to thank the Comm111 Fund for funding this research through the survey reimbursement process with survey participants.

Here's to this work's completion and a momentary sense of satisfaction.

## ABSTRACT

Because television is an ever-present form of media, it can be accessed by anyone, anywhere, at any time. Since the 1970s, George Gerbner and other media scholars have recommended that cultivation theory be used to study television and other media forms to learn whether consumers of media content, over long periods of time, develop fears (“mean world syndrome”) that the world is a more dangerous place than it is. The recent controversy surrounding the #MeToo movement might be helping to mitigate the long-term cultivation effects of workplace-centered entertainment television programs. The movement began in 2006, gained popularity as a social media movement in 2017, and has continued to evolve ever since. Using a quantitative research approach, an online survey questionnaire was administered to 406 participants, who answered questions about their consumption of two types of television: workplace centered entertainment programming and news/public affairs programming about the #MeToo movement. All of the study’s six hypotheses support the idea that heavy viewing of such content has led to cultivations effects. In fact, the research revealed mixed results for cultivation effects. Future research should explore such mixed results for better understanding of these issues.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE	4
2.1 Workplace-centered Sexual Harassment	4
2.2 Television and Workplace Sexual Harassment	5
2.3 The #MeToo Movement	8
2.4 Cultivation Theory	11
2.5 Cultivation Questions and Hypotheses	13
3. METHODOLOGY	14
3.1 Procedures	14
3.2 Measures	14
3.3 Variables	17
4. FINDINGS	19
4.1 Cultivation Effects of General Workplace-Related Television Viewing	19
4.2 Cultivation Effects of the #MeToo-Related Television Viewing	21
5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	24
5.1 Discussion	24
5.2 Conclusion	27
BIBLIOGRAPHY	32

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In 2006, America's #MeToo movement was started to shine a light on the damages that perpetrators of sexual harassment and assault inflict on their victims. About a decade later, in 2017, the movement gained further notoriety when the *New York Times* exposed Hollywood director Harvey Weinstein's scandalous sexual harassment of a series of female actresses. Since then, the #MeToo hashtag has gone viral and is reaching a global community of survivors (Xiong et al., 2018). Although #MeToo is concerned with all sexual harassment and assault where ever it occurs, this thesis limits its focus to the workplace because of its well-known association with a high level of sexual harassment. The results of a poll published on October 30, 2017 by the *Wall Street Journal* and NBC News reported that 48% of currently employed women in the U.S. say they have experienced unwelcome harassment at work (Dann 2017).

Since the 2016 election, meanings behind the #MeToo movement have expanded to include males and anyone else who doesn't self-identify as female. A #HimToo hashtag was launched on Twitter in 2016 as part of the presidential election. Subsequently, Hillary Clinton supporters created the #I'mWithHer rally cry and paired it with #HimToo as support for her running mate, Tim Kaine (Morris 2018). Later, the #HimToo hashtag was picked up by Donald J. Trump supporters, who created the #lockherup hashtag in reference to Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Since then, additional hashtags that have been created to piggyback on #MeToo activism include, among others, #metoomovement, #sexualharassment; #harassment; #instametoo and #Instamovement (Instagram).

Together, today's #MeToo-linked hashtags have focused the public's attention on sexual harassment and other workplace abuses. In addition, they have led to an outpouring of rage

among people regardless of the gender they identify with against workplace sexual harassment and abuse. In 2017, *Time* magazine named those who have told their stories of sexual harassment “The Silence Breakers,” and gave them their “Person of the Year” award. Juana Melara, one of the women featured in the magazine report that accompanied the award, described her experiences as a decade-long housekeeper at a hotel and said guests exposed themselves and masturbated in front of both her and her coworkers. However, none of them complained due to the fear of losing the paychecks they needed to support their families (Zacharek et al., 2017). Melara remembers a time when she felt the pressure of someone’s eyes on her and once she turned around a man was standing in the doorway with his erect penis exposed, “Nothing happened to me that time, thank God,” she said.

Popstar Taylor Swift was also one of the women recognized by the magazine as one of the Silence Breakers. In 2013, during a backstage meet-and-greet session, radio DJ David Mueller reached under her skirt and grabbed her (Blistein 2018). After Swift privately reported the incident to the station, Mueller was fired. In response, he sued Swift for defamation. On the stand during the trial, she said, “I’m not going to let you or your client make me feel in any way that this is my fault. I’m being blamed for the unfortunate events of his life that are a product of his decisions. Not mine,” (Zacharek et al., 2018).

The public’s interest in the #MeToo movement is typically linked most closely to Twitter and other social mediums, but television should also be studied as part of the problem. For better or for worse, since the early days of television, the producers and writers of television soap operas and other dramatic programming have included sexual harassment in their storylines. More recently, television’s live broadcasts of U.S. Congressional hearings featuring Anita Hill

(1991) and Christine Blasey Ford's (2019) testimony against U.S. Supreme Court nominees Clarence Thomas and Brett Kavanaugh captured the nation's attention.

Using George Gerbner's classic cultivation theory as a framework, this thesis reports on research designed to compare the perspectives of heavy and light viewers of workplace-centered television entertainment content and #MeToo-related public-affairs programming. The hypothesis underlying Gerbner's theory suggests that heavy consumers of television become more fearful of the world's dangers compared to those who view less television. Gerbner called this effect the "mean world syndrome."

The research involved the online distribution of a questionnaire that asks participants about their current workplace-related television viewing, and about their beliefs about the prevalence and other factors concerning sexual harassment in the workplace. This study is important for communication research because it fills a gap in the cultivation literature on television and sexual harassment. In addition, it focuses on a social problem that has stubbornly remained a significant issue for many individuals.

Chapter Two includes background information and literature review on sexual harassment, television and the workplace, the #MeToo movement, and the cultivation theory, and concludes with the thesis's research questions and hypotheses; Chapter Three describes the thesis's research methodology; Chapter Four reports on the thesis's research findings; and Chapter Five discusses the research findings, and the thesis's conclusions.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BACKGROUND & REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Workplace-centered Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment, according to the U.S. Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, is a form of employment-based sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964. Workplace sexual harassment manifests itself in unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when submission to such conduct is a condition of such victim's employment, interferes with work performance, or creates an intimidating or hostile work environment. Workplace sexual assault is defined as actions taken by a supervisor or co-worker that encourage or force a colleague to become involved in actions involving sexual genitalia (Miller 2017). Examples of sexual harassment include unwanted compliments about appearance, gifts, sexually-oriented jokes or stories, and sexually suggestive body language.

A report included on the website of the U.S. Federal EEOC stated that combating harassment remains a high priority. Attendees at a 2015 Commission meeting focused on preventing and addressing workplace harassment. They heard testimony that one in four women face harassment in the workplace (Women in the American Workforce). In addition, in 2013, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) reported that from 1993 to 1999, American employees were subjected to 36,500 rapes and sexual assaults in the workplace. The center also found that only 13.5% of survivors reported their victimizations. Even worse, such abuse is underreported by its victims, who find it difficult to report it. Sexual harassment typically results in victims' extreme discomfort, depression, and other problems.

Workplace harassment happens to victims of all ages and races. In 2018, the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) reported on the ages and racial identities of women who had recently disclosed that they were the victims of workplace harassment. According to NWLC, 38% of the women were ages 18-39, 57% were ages 40-64, and 5% were over 65 years old; and 63% of the women self-identified as White, 19% African American, 10% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 3% Native American (Goss Graves et al., 2018). In 2018, researchers who conducted a Marketplace-Edison Research Poll reported that one in seven men stated they faced sexual harassment at work (Balonon-Rosen, Adams 2018).

Workplace sexual harassment and assault is common in countries where rape cultures predominate. Critiqued by feminists and others concerned about the harsh conditions women across the world are forced to endure, rape cultures are environments where prevailing social attitudes normalize and trivialize sexual assault and related forms of abuse. In doing so, rape cultures lead to the perpetuation of harmful attitudes and violence against women (Kahlor, Eastin 2011). Today's high levels of sexual discrimination, assault, and rape offer evidence that those who critique rape cultures are not exaggerating. In 2011, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center reported that one in five women will be raped at some point in their lives; and that one in three women have experienced some form of contact involving sexual violence.

## **2.2 Television and Workplace Sexual Harassment**

By 1960, 90% of U.S. households had at least one television set, and television viewing grew to a peak in 2009-2010, when the average household watched 8 hours and 55 minutes of television per day. Television programming in the medium's early years was relatively unsophisticated, but that didn't stop viewers from watching shows ranging from daytime television's soap operas to nighttime dramas and sitcoms. While the Internet and other forms of

communication have cut into Americans' TV viewing time, in 2019, the average time households spent watching TV was still more than seven hours. Television critics have long argued that exposure to so much television is at best a waste of time, and at worst can lead to psychological harm and anti-social behavior.

Over the history of American television, programs that have become popular among viewers are those with storylines centered on the workplace. One of television's best-known sitcoms, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977), is set in a television news production studio, while the provocative *Hill Street Blues* (1981-1987) portrays the inner-workings of a large city's police precinct. What they have in common are that they skillfully pull viewers in with their entertaining portrayals of the everyday work lives of their primary characters.

A common theme in such workplace-centered shows are the sexual dynamics that can affect coworkers who spend eight-hours a day together. In early television history, such storylines were not as explicit as they have become in the last couple of decades. Today, such programming sometimes includes more provocative displays of sexual dynamics, harassment, and even violence. Just a few of the many shows with workplace-centered storylines are *The Office*, *Parks & Recreation*, *Silicon Valley*, *Arrested Development*, *Workaholics*, *The IT Crowd*, *Scrubs*, *Veep*, *30 Rock*, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, *Getting On*, *Alpha House*, *Are You Being Served?*, *Ugly Betty*, and *Mad Men*.

In 2003, the journal *Sex Roles* published a study looking at 32 workplace-based television programs with 20 of them being dramas and 12 comedies from networks such as NBC, ABC, and CBS. In this study, researchers discovered 3.3 incidents of gender harassment per episode compared to .5 incidents of sexual harassment along with 2.7 “uninvited sexual teasing, jokes, remarks or question” incidents per episode (Montemurro 2003). Overall, Montemurro found that

TV show sexual harassment is generally initiated by someone in a position of power and more often by a man than a woman. Behaviors in these shows can range from sexual innuendos and/or jokes to making specific sexual requests for favors.

A more recent study published in 2016 in *Sex Roles* reported that young people and adolescents look to media for information about their behavior with workplace colleagues, supervisors and subordinates (Taylor, et al., 2016). That same study also claims sexual bantering, flirting and intra-office dating are commonplace workplace behaviors, and tend to demonstrate to young people and adolescents that this behavior is acceptable and happens in every office despite the job type. The study examined 100 individual episodes of television programs in the United States on popular networks and streaming sites such as NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox, USA, the History Channel, TNT, TBS, Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime and observed 179 sexual interactions across 95 episodes — five episodes were excluded due to no depiction of a workplace. While most researched programs contained one to two sexual interactions, the CBS comedy *Two Broke Girls* topped the chart with 12. The researchers reported that most sexual talk can be characterized as talk about sexual interactions rather than sexual behavior (Taylor et al., 2016). Overall, the study found 179 sexual interactions that were mostly initiated by men ( $n = 101$ ) rather than women ( $n = 73$ ). Five cases did not have a clear initiator of such interactions.

Crime drama is a form of television entertainment that typically focuses on the interactions of employees in all kinds of workplaces. Examples includes shows such as *CSI*, *NCIS*, *Law & Order*, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* and *Criminal Minds*. In a 2015 study, Hust, et al., asked 313 individuals to report on the impact of *CSI*, *NCIS* and *Law & Order* on their sexual activity. They reported that those exposed to *Law & Order* were not likely to seek consent prior to engaging in sexual activity; those

exposed to CSI would also not likely seek consent; and, those exposed to NCIS were not likely to refuse unwanted sexual activity. Of the 313 respondents, 123 self-identified as male and 189 as female. However, women involved with the study were less likely to accept rape myth and more likely to refuse unwanted sexual activity.

A second genre of television entertainment that often includes sexual harassment in their storylines are soap operas. In 1999, Mary Buhl-Dutta claimed that Luke Spencer from *General Hospital* was the most famous television rapist. He raped Lara, later married her and program writers redefined her rape as “a choreographed seduction” (Buhl-Dutta, 1999). *General Hospital* attracted a record-breaking viewership for the wedding episode between Luke and Laura. Buhl-Dutta commented in her research that its audience willingly participated in the show’s portrayal of current society’s rape myth. Other soap operas Buhl-Dutta included in her study were *One Life to Live*, *All My Children* and *The Cutting Edge*, wherein the rape myth was prevalent, and audiences joined in by tuning into its daily episodes.

### **2.3 The #MeToo Movement**

The #MeToo movement has become a symbol offering the victims of sexual harassment and/or assault, whether they are female, male, or people who don’t identify with either of these genders, a safer environment in which to share their stories, and to give the public a better idea of the magnitude and seriousness of the problem (Stevens 2018). Historically, outside occasional incidents that have momentarily grabbed public attention, workplace sexual harassment and/or assault remained relatively obscure until 2006, when Tarana Burke decided she needed to do something about it. That year, after surviving sexual assault, she coined the term “Me Too” to help launch a campaign to address its associated problems. Since then, she has made numerous

public appearances, and has launched a MySpace program, youth intervention camps, and began working on a documentary film project (Johnson & Hawbaker 2018).

A second media-led event, on October 5, 2017, added fuel to the fire behind Burke's #MeToo movement. On that date, the *New York Times* published a story about Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein's sexual assault and/or harassment of women and the toll it took on them and their careers. Not long after, actress Alyssa Milano tweeted, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet" (Johnson 2018). Overnight, Milano's tweet attracted around 40,000 replies from both males and females. Accompanied by Milano's #MeToo campaign, the *Times* story unleashed an explosion of reports accusing entertainment and business icons, sports figures and lawmakers of similar treatment. The tweets came pouring in — survivor's stories containing details about being sexually assaulted as children, harassed in uniform, assaulted by coaches and workplace managers (Stevens 2017).

Media attention to the #MeToo movement has encouraged victims to come forward. About a year after reporting on Harvey Weinstein's crimes, the *New York Times* followed up with further reporting that during the past year more 200 additional powerful journalists, government leaders, celebrities and artists accused of harassment had been brought to justice (Carlsen et al., 2018). In addition, the article reported that after leaving their positions, many were replaced by women.

*BuzzFeed News*, among other news outlets, have gone farther than simply reporting on #MeToo by asking readers to answer the question: "Who Are the Harvey Weinsteins of Your Industry?" Within 24 hours it received more than 60 tips reporters could act on; and by the end

of the weekend, *BuzzFeed News* had received more than 200 (Sutton 2018). By November 2018, *BuzzFeed News* had published more than 55 stories about sexual misconduct.

Newspapers have likewise demonstrated an increased interest in covering workplace sexual harassment. For example, *Variety* recently reported that newspaper coverage of sexual assault rose 30% between May 2017 and August 2018 in a sample of 14 major U.S. newspapers (Steinberg 2018).

Television entertainment producers are appearing to respond sympathetically to #MeToo by distributing programming that reflect concern about workplace sexual harassment. For instance, Netflix's popular series, "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt," has written it into some season four episodes (Wilkinson 2018).

All of this attention suggests that Americans are increasingly paying attention to sexual harassment. The Pew Research Center found that more than 19 million references to the #MeToo movement have been posted on Twitter since October 2017 (Brown 2018). Aside from direct references, Pew also found that roughly 65% of adult social media users regularly see #MeToo related posts, and around 29% of that group said most of what they see is related to the issue.

Hashtags are playing an important role in the growing notoriety of the #MeToo movement, as well as in the recent history of feminism more generally. A total of 21 Twitter hashtags over the last decade indicate the movement's importance to feminists and others who support it. Among them are #Fem2, 2008; #MooreAndMe, 2010; #GirlsLikeUs, 2012; #BlackGirlMagic, 2013; #WhyIStayed, 2014; and #EverydaySexism, 2015 (Blay 2016).

Through hashtags, Twitter users can instantly connect with anyone interested in what they have to say. In addition, tweets carry not only content, but context, meaning and emotion (Chen et al., 2018). Some attribute the success of the #MeToo movement and other feminist causes to

hashtags, which provide a space where feminist virtual communities can organize, discuss and critique cultural happenings (Chen et al., 2018).

Despite this, some doubt the overall effectiveness of feminist hashtags such as #MeToo (Mendes et al., 2018). While experts agree that they offer effective ways for supporters of feminist causes to gather and have their voices heard, the digital divide severely limits how much some members of society can participate (Chen et al., 2018). In addition, the reality that the workplace is still dominated by male managers is a detriment to women who continue to fear that they will still be subjected to sexual harassment and/or assault. Despite these concerns, the #MeToo movement has given some individuals a new platform on which to object to their ill-treatment at work (Deggans 2018).

## **2.4 Cultivation Theory**

The cultivation theory was proposed by George Gerbner in 1973 (Signorielli 2018) and is one of the core theories about media effects (Cultural Communication 2015). The theory suggests that individuals who are heavy media consumers are likely to be influenced by the messages within such content. Such influence can be so extensive that an individual's view on the world may start to reflect what they repeatedly see and hear. Originally, the theory solely applied to the effects of light and heavy television consumption, but with the evolution of media since 1973, studies have begun to look at the potential effects of a variety of mediums. For example, studies have examined how young women are influenced by print media advertisements containing topics such as makeup, body image and personal appearance (Cho et al., 2010).

An example of a cultivation study that explores the cultivation effects of media includes one that reports that some young male consumers of violent electronic media and Internet

content can be influenced by such medium's portrayals of young male fictional characters. As a result, the research claims, some of the young male viewers of such content begin to exhibit symptoms of conditions such as attention deficit disorder, emotional inexpressiveness, poor self-esteem and intimacy dysfunction (Dyson 2011).

Cultivation researchers have explored the potential cultivation effects of mass media in many countries. A 2010 study, with results published in 2012, reported that Belgian researchers collected data from 546 women over the age of 18 who were exposed to television crime dramas and found that there were direct relationships between fear of sexual violence, risk perception and perceived seriousness (Custers & Van den Bulck 2012).

Another cultivation theory study, conducted in 2015, searched for a relationship between television consumption and the social realities of 258 student participants (72 males and 186 females) at Hong Kong Shue Yan University. This study indicated that there is a strong relationship between television viewing habits and the concept of social realities with those students. It reported, "An individual who had prolonged exposed in television, or in other words, being a heavy user of TV, his/her concept of social realities will change. [...] an individual is an intensive user of online media, he/she would intend to act in some activities and after a period of time, altered and to become a kind of behavior" (Lau 2015). Lau's study demonstrated that heavy television and/or social media users have a different view of the world and reality.

Generally, the cultivation theory is most effective when using content analysis or survey data from large-scale audiences (University of Twente 2017) to learn about their media habits and demographics, including sex, age, income and level of education, and to learn about how their consumption of media content affects their perceptions of the world around them.

## 2.5 Cultivation Questions and Hypotheses

In line with the recommendations and research of cultivation theorists, the following research questions and hypotheses led to the thesis's design of its questionnaire and analysis.

Research question #1: Do heavy viewers of television workplace entertainment programming become more fearful of the threat of workplace sexual harassment than viewers who don't watch as much of such programming?

- Hypothesis 1: Increased workplace television consumption is associated with decreased feelings of safety in the workplace.
- Hypothesis 2: Increased workplace television consumption is associated with increased belief that employees either have or will experience sexual harassment/assault in the workplace.
- Hypothesis 3: Increased workplace television consumption is associated with the increased belief that sexual harassment and/or assault is common in the workplace.

Research question #2: Do heavy viewers of #MeToo television programming become more fearful of the threat of workplace sexual harassment than viewers who don't watch as much of such programming?

- Hypothesis 4: Increased #MeToo-centered television consumption is associated with decreased feelings of safety in the workplace.
- Hypothesis 5: Increased #MeToo television consumption is associated with increased belief that employees either have or will experience sexual harassment/assault in the workplace.
- Hypothesis 6: Increased #MeToo television consumption is associated with the increased belief that sexual harassment and/or assault is common in the workplace.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Procedures

Research participants were recruited using various methods. First, Mechanical Turk was used to recruit participants through the online platform; Mechanical Turk has been credited as a reliable tool (Buhrmester et al., 2011) for quantitative research. Second, students in a midwestern university's communication class were offered extra-credit for completing the questionnaire. Third, the snowball survey was shared on social media sites (e.g Facebook). All of the data for total participants ( $N = 406$ ) was combined for the entirety of the study. Participants ( $n = 299$ ) recruited through Mechanical Turk were awarded \$1.50 for completing the online survey at their own convenience after filling out the consent form. Participants ( $n = 107$ ) recruited through social media or classes received either class credit or extra credit. Each participant included in the study was required to sign its IRB required consent form before continuing on to complete the survey.

The survey had five sections for participants to complete: part one, demographics; part two, media habits; part three, the #MeToo movement; part four, workplace sexual harassment; part five; general questions. After completing the survey, participants were debriefed and thanked for their time. Ten participants' answers were not included in subsequent analysis because of incomplete or invalid survey results.

#### 3.2 Measures

##### *Demographics*

Answers to demographic questions assessing participant's age, gender, level of education, race and/or ethnicity and employment were collected.

### *#MeToo*

Participants were asked about their knowledge of the #MeToo movement, how often they consumed two types of television content, and whether they have kept up with the movement's events. Other measurements about the #MeToo movement asked participants to estimate the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment and/or assault. On a 1-5-point Likert scale, participants were asked about the following: how common are false accusations of sexual harassment at work, if workplaces are fair in their treatments of accusers, how difficult is it to tell what is and is not sexual harassment, how safe employees feel in their workplace, how common sexual harassment and/or assault is in the workplace, and how likely they thought it was that employees either have or will experience sexual harassment and/or assault in the workplace.

### *Media consumption*

Several questions regarding participants' levels of media consumption were included in the survey. First, participants were asked about their workplace television viewing habits both as an average and an exact number for more precise measurements. Participants who claimed they watched 1-5 hours of television were considered "low" consumers while those who watched 6-10 hours were considered "medium" consumers and those with 11 hours or more were considered "heavy" consumers.

Next, participants were given examples of workplace television programs and asked how often they have viewed those specific programs. Specific programs, such as *House*, *The Office*, *Mad Men*, *Parks & Recreation*, *The Newsroom*, *House of Cards* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, were included because they are listed among IMDb's top-rated shows and because they portray their characters in workplace settings. IMDb's disclaimer states, "To be included on the list, a

series or mini-series must receive ratings from at least 5,000 users, and a TV series must also have aired at least 5 seasons.”

### *Cultivation*

The cultivation theory is appropriate for this study because it looks at long-term effects of media. Originally, Gerbner developed the theory to look for patterns between children’s behavior and the types of television programs they consumed each day (Signorielli 2018). Used accordingly, the cultivation theory can determine if there are long-term effects on adult’s behavior based on their frequency of workplace fictional and #MeToo public-affairs television program viewing.

Cultivation was measured in two ways: first, participants were asked in general how often they watch fictional workplace television programs; and, second, participants were asked how often they watch journalistic and/or public affairs #MeToo movement content and what specific events they have kept up with. Not only that, but participants were asked to estimate the percentage of men and women they think have been subjected to sexual harassment and/or assault in the workplace.

Also related to sexual harassment, participants were asked six Likert scale questions about the commonness of false accusations in the workplace (very common to very uncommon), if workplaces were fair in their treatment of accusers (unfair to very fair), how difficult it is to tell what is and is not sexual harassment and/or assault (very difficult to not very difficult), how safe employees feel in the workplace (very unsafe to very safe), the likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment and/or assault in the work place (very likely to very unlikely) and the commonness of sexual harassment and/or assault in the workplace (very uncommon to very common). In order to accurately read and record test results, participant answers for fairness,

safety and commonality were reverse coded for consistency in the SPSS software which was used to run tests.

### 3.3 Variables

#### *Participants*

Participants were initially asked to submit demographic information about themselves. They were asked specifically how old they are and the gender they most identify with including male, female, non-binary or other. Participants ( $n = 191$ ) identified as female, participants ( $n = 213$ ) identified as male and the remaining participants either chose not to identify or identified as non-binary.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 79 years old ( $M = 33$ ,  $SD = 10.90$ ). Participant age data was then used to sort the data into five age groups. The first group of participants ( $n = 80$ ) were 18 to 24 years old. The second group of participants ( $n = 123$ ) were 25 to 30 years old. The third group of participants ( $n = 132$ ) were 31 to 40 years old. The fourth group of participants ( $n = 42$ ) were 41 to 50 years old. The fifth group of participants ( $n = 29$ ) were 50 years old or older.

#### *Consumption*

There was a majority of participants ( $n = 391$ ) who agreed to watching workplace television programming and fewer participants ( $n = 15$ ) who do not watch workplace television programming. Participants ( $n = 382$ )<sup>1</sup> who submitted data concerning the hours of television they watch per week were then divided into three categories. Of those participants ( $n = 261$ ) were considered “low” consumers if they watched 1-5 hours of television per week. Participants ( $n = 70$ ) were considered “medium” consumers if they watched 6-10 hours of television per week.

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<sup>1</sup> 24 participants were not included because they do not watch at least one hour of television per week.

Participants ( $n = 51$ ) were considered “heavy” television consumers if they consumed 11 or more hours per week.

### *#MeToo*

Participants were asked whether or not they are familiar with the #MeToo movement and whether or not they watch #MeToo content on television. There were a majority of participants ( $n = 350$ ) who selected “yes” and the other participants ( $n = 35$ ) who selected “no” concerning whether or not they are familiar with the movement. There were also some participants ( $n = 19$ ) who said they were “unsure” of their familiarity with the movement.<sup>2</sup>

Participants were also asked if they watch #MeToo-related content on television; most ( $n = 240$ ) reported they have not, while some ( $n = 59$ ) said they have.<sup>3</sup> Participants who confirmed that they watch some kind of #MeToo television content ( $n = 121$ )<sup>4</sup> were then placed into the same three consumption groups. Participants ( $n = 98$ ) were considered “low” consumers if they watched 1-5 hours of #MeToo content. Participants ( $n = 12$ ) were considered “medium” consumers if they watched 6-10 hours of #MeToo content. Participants were considered “heavy” consumers if they watched 11 hours or more of #MeToo content.

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<sup>2</sup> Two participants did not submit data about their familiarity with the #MeToo movement.

<sup>3</sup> 107 participants did not submit data about whether or not they watch #MeToo content on television.

<sup>4</sup> Question 9 in section two of the survey asked participants if they watch television programs centered around the #MeToo movement. Initially, 59 participants answered “yes” to that question. Question 11 in that same section then asked participants to identify on average how many hours of #MeToo content they consume. Upon review, 121 participants gave an answer as to how many hours per week they watch #MeToo content and this sample size was used instead.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Cultivation Effects of General Workplace-related Television Viewing

The first of this chapter's two results sections reports on how the study's participants responded to question one, and whether their answers supported its three hypotheses.

##### *Research Question #1*

The first research question is concerned with whether heavy viewers of television workplace entertainment programming (e.g. *The Office* and *Mad Men*) are more fearful than light viewers that the workplace is an environment where sexual harassment commonly takes place, and that they are likely to become the targets of sexual harassment and/or assault.

*Hypothesis 1: Increased workplace television consumption is associated with decreased feelings of personal safety in the workplace.*

For the analysis of Hypothesis 1, participants ( $n = 382$ ) who confirmed they watch workplace television programs were divided into low, medium and heavy consumption groups. Most participants ( $n = 251$ ) indicated they watch 1-5 hours of workplace-related fictional television programming per week; a smaller group of participants ( $n = 70$ ) indicated that they watch 6-10 hours of such programming per week; and an even smaller number of participants ( $n = 51$ ) indicated they are "heavy" viewers who watch 11 or more hours of such television programming each week.

On the 1-5 Likert scale, participants were asked how safe they feel in their workplace from very unsafe to very safe. In the SPSS analysis software, answers were reverse coded for consistency. There was no statistically significant correlation between the number of hours

viewed per week and perceived safety ( $\tau_b(382) = .01, p = .90$ ). Because of these results, the data suggests that Hypothesis 1 can be rejected.

*Hypothesis 2: Increased workplace television consumption is associated with increased belief among respondents that employees either have or will experience sexual harassment/assault in the workplace.*

For the analysis of Hypothesis 2, the same low television consumption ( $n = 261$ ), medium television consumption ( $n = 70$ ) and heavy television consumption ( $n = 51$ ) groups were used for analysis.

On the 1-5 Likert scale, participants were asked how likely it is that employees either have or will experience sexual harassment and/or assault in the workplace. Their answers could range from very likely to very unlikely. There was no statistically significant correlation between the number of hours watched per week and the belief that employees either have or will experience sexual harassment and/or assault in the workplace ( $\tau_b(382) = .08, p = .11$ ). Because of these results, the data suggests that Hypothesis 2 can be rejected.

*Hypothesis 3: Increased workplace television consumption is associated with the increased belief that sexual harassment and/or assault is common in the workplace.*

For the analysis of Hypothesis 3, the same low television consumption ( $n = 261$ ), medium television consumption ( $n = 70$ ) and heavy television consumption ( $n = 51$ ) groups were used for analysis.

On a 1-5 Likert scale, participants were asked how common they believe sexual harassment and/or assault is in the workplace from very uncommon to very common. In the SPSS analysis software, answers were reverse coded for consistency. There was no statistically significant correlation between the number of hours watched per week and the belief that sexual

harassment and/or assault is common in the workplace ( $\tau_b(382) = -.06, p = .19$ ). Because of these results, the data suggests that Hypothesis 3 can be accepted.

#### **4.2 Cultivation Effects of #MeToo-Related Television Program Viewing**

##### *Research Question #2*

Research question two is concerned with whether heavy viewers of #MeToo television programming, e.g., news reports that focus on stories such as the Weinstein scandal, or live public broadcasts such as the Brett Kavanaugh hearings, are more fearful than light viewers that the workplace is an environment where sexual harassment commonly takes place, and that they, along with employees in general, are likely to become the targets of those who sexually harass others at work.

*Hypothesis 4: Increased #MeToo television consumption is associated with decreased feelings of personal safety in the workplace.*

For the analysis of Hypothesis 4, participants ( $n = 121$ ) who admitted to watching #MeToo television content were divided into low, medium and heavy consumption groups. Participants ( $n = 98$ ) were considered “low” television consumers if they reported watching 1-5 hours of workplace television per week. Participants ( $n = 12$ ) were considered “medium” television consumers if they reported watching 6-10 hours of workplace television per week. Participants ( $n = 11$ ) were considered “heavy” television consumers if they reported watching 11 hours or more of workplace television per week.

On the 1-5 Likert scale, participants were asked how safe they feel in their workplace from very unsafe to very safe. In the SPSS analysis software, answers were reverse coded for consistency. There was a statistically significant correlation between the number of hours

watched per week and the perceived safety ( $\tau_b(121) = -.26, p = .01$ ). Because of these results, the data suggests that Hypothesis 4 can be rejected.

*Hypothesis 5: Increased #MeToo television consumption is associated with increased belief that employees either have or will experience sexual harassment/assault in the workplace.*

For the analysis of Hypothesis 5, the same low television consumption ( $n = 98$ ), medium television consumption ( $n = 12$ ) and heavy television consumption ( $n = 11$ ) groups were used for analysis.

On the 1-5 Likert scale, participants were asked how likely it is that employees either have or will experience sexual harassment and/or assault in the workplace from very likely to very unlikely. There was no statistically significant correlation between the number of hours watched per week and the belief that employees either have or will experience sexual harassment and/or assault in the workplace ( $\tau_b(121) = .03, p = .76$ ). Because of these results, the data suggests that Hypothesis 5 can be accepted.

*Hypothesis 6: Increased #MeToo television consumption is associated with the increased belief that sexual harassment and/or assault is common in the workplace.*

For the analysis of Hypothesis 6, the same low television consumption ( $n = 98$ ), medium television consumption ( $n = 12$ ) and heavy television consumption ( $n = 11$ ) groups were used for analysis.

On a 1-5 Likert scale, participants were asked how common they believe sexual harassment and/or assault is in the workplace from very uncommon to very common. In the SPSS analysis software, answers were reverse coded for consistency. There was no statistically significant correlation between the number of hours watched per week and the belief that sexual

harassment and/or assault is common in the workplace ( $\tau_b(121) = -.01, p = .96$ ). Because of these results, the data suggests that Hypothesis 3 can be accepted.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As noted, workplace sexual harassment is commonplace in the United States. As a result, it could be argued that contemporary workplace-centered television programming's frequent portrayals of sexual harassment simply mirror what happens in real life. If that were the case, there would be no need to do research to learn whether heavy consumption of workplace-centered television leads to a cultivation effect. But cultivation theorists have learned through their many research projects that television doesn't always project realistic images of the world. This has been the premise behind the research reported on in the thesis.

To reiterate, several of the thesis's hypotheses validated the existence of a cultivation effect among respondents.

#### *Research Question 2, Hypothesis 2*

It was expected that heavy viewers of #MeToo content would be more likely to believe that employees are likely to become victims of sexual harassment and/or assault. The research data supported this hypothesis.

#### *Research Questions 1 and 2, Hypothesis 3*

It was also expected that heavy viewers of both general workplace television content and #MeToo content would indicate that they believe that sexual harassment and/or assault is common in the workplace. The data supports this hypothesis.

In contrast, several of the research hypotheses, contrary to cultivation theory's tenets, were not supported by the research data collected in the project.

### *Research Questions 1 and 2, Hypothesis 1*

It was expected that both consumers of general workplace television content and #MeToo content would likely fear for employee safety in the workplace; however, the data suggested the opposite. The data collected suggests that heavy consumers both of general workplace television programs and #MeToo movement content believe employees are safe in their workplaces. This could be dependent on the individual's surveyed or their realization that these sorts of events happen in the workplace, so they have become more cautious in recent years.

### *Research Question 1, Hypothesis 2*

It was also expected that participants who watch general workplace television content would be more likely to think that experiencing sexual harassment and/or assault will happen to employees in the workplace; however, the data collected produced opposing results. The data suggests that general workplace television viewers are more likely to think that it is unlikely that employees either have or will experience sexual harassment and/or assault in the workplace. This result could be attributed to the idea that television programs simply mirror what is already happening in the workplace.

### *Other Findings*

While there was only one result that was statistically significant concerning the initial research questions, other findings were discovered while running tests in the SPSS software.

Participants ( $n = 382$ ) who watch workplace television are more likely to believe workplaces are unfair in their treatments of those accused of sexual harassment and/or assault. On a 1-5 Likert scale, participants were asked how fair they believe workplaces are in their treatments of those accused of sexual harassment and/or assault from very unfair to very fair. In the SPSS analysis software, answers were reverse coded for consistency. There was a

statistically significant correlation between the number of hours watched per week and the belief that workplaces are unfair in their treatments of those accused of sexual harassment and/or assault ( $\tau_b(382) = -.10, p = .03$ ). Because of these results, the data suggests that individuals who watch more television are more likely to believe that workplaces are unfair.

The data also suggests that of the women surveyed 11.5% believe it is very likely that employees either have or will experience sexual harassment and/or assault than the men surveyed 3.8%, there was a statistically significant moderate association between gender and the likelihood to experience sexual harassment and/or assault,  $\chi^2(12, N = 406 = 34.413, p = <.001$ . Cramer's V ( $\phi$ ) was = .168.

While there was a statistically significant association between gender and whether or not employees either have or will experience sexual harassment and/or assault, there was not a statistical significance between gender and difficulty telling what is or is not considered sexual harassment and/or assault.

Another finding the data suggests is that of the women surveyed 16.8% believe sexual harassment and/or assault is very common in the workplace. Of the men surveyed 27.7% believe sexual harassment and/or assault is uncommon in the workplace. There was a statistically significant moderate association between gender and the belief that harassment and/or assault is common,  $\chi^2(12, N = 406 = 25.514, p = .013$ . Cramer's V ( $\phi$ ) was = .145.

The final finding in the data suggests that of the men surveyed 16.4% felt very safe in the workplace while 44.2% of women surveyed felt neutral about their safety in the workplace. While this data is not statistically significant, it is still an interesting result,  $\chi^2(12, N = 405 = 14.788, p = .253$ . Cramer's V ( $\phi$ ) was = .110.

## CONCLUSION

The cultivation theory has been applied to multiple other disciplines including political affiliation, social roles, violence and body image. Prior to the current study, the cultivation theory had not been applied to the #MeToo movement. While not all hypotheses were supported, the information learned in this study provides a solid structure for future research.

This study is not without its limitations. One limitation is missing data. Participants who volunteered to be part of the study were able to skip questions they felt uncomfortable answering which leads to missing data. Another limitation to the study was the age of participants in the sample. Teenagers are applying for their first job at younger ages now so the study could be opened to participants younger than 18. The final limitation of the study was to accurately measure television consumption. With the different methods currently available (e.g. DVR, internet streaming, DVD/Blu-Ray) a true method of measurement would need to be developed for future studies involving the cultivation theory. Given television's universal and consistent messages, this may not be an issue but is certainly worth further exploration.

With workplace television programs, there were also limitations in the study. Participants were asked when completing the survey to list any other fictional workplace television programs they watch. Some examples included Criminal Minds, The Good Doctor, NCIS, 30 Rock, The IT Crowd, Superstore, Rescue 91, and Law & Order. Some of these shows (e.g. Criminal Minds, NCIS, Law & Order) were not considered workplace television because they focus mainly on crime and not on the workplace. Limiting the workplace television programs may have skewed the data and responses received from participants.

Another limitation of the study is that the participant pool was developed utilizing a convenience sample rather than a scientific random sample. Due to time limitations and the fact

that is an exploratory study, it was not considered necessary to amass a scientific random sample for the questionnaire. The results of the research offer directions that future #MeToo cultivation studies could go. If further research is pursued, it is suggested that a more rigorous sample be developed.

Cultivation was moderately demonstrated in the study with television viewing levels being divided into the three consumption categories low, medium and high. As expected, consumers of workplace television programs and #MeToo content were more influenced than those who do not consume both. Generally, participants who only watched workplace television programs believed employees were safe and likely would not experience sexual harassment and/or assault in their workplace. However, participants who watched workplace television and #MeToo content believe that sexual harassment and/or assault is common in the workplace and that employees either likely have or will experience sexual harassment and/or assault.

An additional limitation of the study was the understanding of television viewing. In recent years, the method of program viewing has changed with internet streaming, television, and DVD/Blu-Ray seasons of specific shows. Individuals today are more selective about when and how they access their technology. The use of technology may be a mediating variable in association with the cultivation theory. Because individuals can binge-watch at their own discretion, the hours of consumption with specific shows can vary from person to person. For example, individuals can watch 3 hours of traditional television but can also binge-watch 8 hours of DVD/Blu-Ray programming. In turn, when participants in a study are asked, "On average, how many hours of television do you watch per week," their answers can vary which may skew the cultivation theory's influence.

George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorielli published “Living with Television: The Dynamics of the Cultivation Process” in 1986 and stated that in the typical home the television set is in use for about seven hours per day. Before other methods of television consumption surfaced, cultivation studies were easier and more reliable. Gerbner, the scientist responsible for the cultivation theory, said the cultivation theory and television consumption go hand-in-hand. In his cultivation overview published in 2000, “Television is the source of the most broadly-shared images and messages in history. It is the mainstream of the common symbolic environment into which our children are born and in which we all live out our lives,” Gerbner said.

Television is an inescapable influence and will be for the rest of our days. But with the influence of #MeToo, it’s possible that television and all areas of society will begin to reflect changing attitudes less tolerant of workplace harassment. There is already evidence that #MeToo is bringing change. Together, the #MeToo hashtag movement and its national news coverage have had an impact on the legal services that are available to victims of sexual harassment. The TIME’S UP Legal Defense Fund was established at the National Women’s Law Center on January 1, 2018, with large donations from celebrities such as Reese Witherspoon, Shonda Rhimes, Sandra Bullock, Cate Blanchett and Oprah Winfrey (Fortado 2018). To date, the fund has raised \$22 million from 21,000 people around the world to connect women with necessary legal services after suffering from sexual harassment and/or assault in the workplace. In 2018, TIME’S UP reported that 3,755 individuals sought help from the 792 attorneys in its network, which at that time had earmarked \$5 million to pay for their legal fees.

The United States Congress and all 50 state legislatures have enacted 2,000 bills since October 2017 that contained the word “sexual” and/or other terms such as “me too,” “rape kits”

and “nondisclosure” (Kelly & Hegarty 2018). By encouraging lawmakers to create policies concerning gender equality and fair treatment in the workplace, employees have made headway in ongoing reform efforts. But there are two sides to every story; a closer analysis of those new bills reveals that few of them remove barriers for reporting sexual assault or increasing accountability for perpetrators (Kelly & Hegarty 2018).

Today, most employers take full advantage of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs), although employees are sometimes coerced into signing them to protect their positions in the workplace, and some states have limited how NDAs can be used. In 2018, Rebecca Beitsch published the article “#MeToo Has Changed Our Culture. Now It’s Changing Our Laws.” in which she stated that both Washington and Arizona have approved new bills about how NDAs can be used. In Washington, employers will no longer be able to require people to sign them as a condition for employment; existing contracts will be considered void. Likewise, in Arizona, NDAs cannot stop victims from participating in criminal proceedings that relate to their assault/harassment; the Arizona law also bars sexual harassment agreements reached with public officials from including an NDA if victims are paid with tax dollars.

In 2019, Charrise Alexander, an associate at Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP Insurance Recovery & Advisory, published an article reporting that only about 41% of companies with 1,000 or more workers offer insurance plans to cover issues dealing with sexual assault or discrimination; that only about 33% of companies with at least 500 employees offer such insurance coverage; and that only about 3% of companies with fewer than 50 employees offer such coverage.

Such changes are encouraging signs. In the meantime, some have argued that even stronger protections against workplace sexual harassment will not become a reality unless employers begin to pay more attention to the needs of their employees (Tippett 2018).

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