The Unhappy Viewer:

Heavy Television Viewing, Happiness, Social Interaction and the Situation of the Sociology of the Media

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In this paper the role of television in crowding out other social activities is considered in the context of a number of attitudes and feelings. Correlations based on European Social Survey data are presented that demonstrate that the more television people watch the less they participate in social interactions and the less happy etc. they are. It is also indicated that television is just one small part of the wider explanation of the degree of social interaction or happiness. Sociology, it is argued, still has a lot to offer us in coming to a more nuanced understanding for the phenomenon of television and its role in people's lives.

Keywords: media, television, happiness, trust, life satisfaction, social interaction

Introduction

Television continues to play an important role in people's lives and in society more generally. The provision of content via the Internet has resulted in a proliferation of choice, not only in terms of content, but also in terms of when and how people watch that content. Taking all these ways and means of viewing media content together there has been an increase in the amount of time people spend watching 'television'. Sociology as a discipline has a lot to offer in understanding the role of television today. Although Pooley and Katz argued that 'mainstream sociology in the United States may be said to have abandoned media research early on in spite of the centrality it occupied in the pioneering departments' (2008: 767), there have been interesting developments in media research within and without sociology over the years.

In this paper we look at a particular example: we examine correlations which demonstrate that the more television people watch the less they participate in social interactions and the less happy etc. they are. To investigate these correlations we examine how the time spent watching television might 'crowd out' other activities, but we also examine some of the correlations between the amount of television viewed and negative feelings which can impact on people's social participation. These correlations suggest that the content of television programs may also play a role.

There is much evidence in the literature of significant correlations between the amount of television people watch and their happiness etc., whether through the content of its programs, or by 'crowding out' other activities. Although the correlations in the literature and in our research are significant, they are also weak and, because of this, they provide little explanation. Therefore, the influence of television must be more closely examined. A wider understanding of the cultural context is required to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the situation i.e., that watching television as well as social interaction, attitudes and feelings are embedded in a wider cultural context. The influence of television is varied, from the content of programs, the time of day, the reason for viewing, and the style of viewing, to other factors such as with whom (if anyone) one shares that activity.

Background

There has long been a view that television can have powerful influences on its viewers. Horkheimer and Adorno's discussion of the culture industry in the 1940s, although specifically about film, radio and newspapers, applies also to television; they argued that 'amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work … All amusement suffers from this incurable malady. Pleasure hardens into boredom because, if it is to remain pleasure, it must not demand any effort …' (1944: 361). In the early 1980s a number of authors (such as Jhally, 1982; Livant, 1982; Smythe, 1981, as well as Caraway, 2011) argued that watching television is a form of labour in which the work is watching advertisements and the payment comes in the form of the television programs. Although there may be some level of passivity involved in watching television (see for example Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi (2002: 75) on how television works like a drug), there is much more involved in how people interact with television, in front of television and how television is imbricated in their lives.

Ducheneaut et al. (2008) argued that programs with plenty of pauses provide opportunities for interaction among viewers. Rather than passive viewing Caraway (2011) called it 'ambient watching'. The television is on in the background, and people can engage in other activities, conversations, household chores etc. while keeping half an eye on the television until a segment of interest attracts their full attention to the television (this is covered in more detail in British audience research—see below). Even leaving aside the notion of being active in front of the television, Johnson (2005) argued that the average television drama has become increasingly cognitively demanding over the past few decades. This is because these dramas contain more threads, more back stories and fewer explanations than equivalent dramas in previous decades.

Over the years since Horkheimer and Adorno's 1940s work, the power and influence of television have been discussed repeatedly. In 1948 Louis Wirth, in his presidential address to the American Sociological Association, drew an analogy between the mass media and atomic weapons. According to Pooley and Katz he 'equated the power of the mass media to save the world with the power of atomic weapons to destroy it' (2008: 768). Making almost the opposite point, more than a decade later, the President of Ireland, Éamon de Valera, opened the first television channel in Ireland, saying:

> I must admit that sometimes when I think of television and radio and their immense power, I feel somewhat afraid. Like atomic energy it can be used for incalculable good but it can also do irreparable harm. Never before was there in the hands of men an instrument so powerful to influence the thoughts and actions of the multitude. (de Valera, 1961)

A more sophisticated understanding of the mass media has been and continues to be required in order to gain a better understanding of television as a social phenomenon. Beginning with a simplified version of the Shannon and Weaver model of the sender, message and receiver, first outlined by Shannon in 1948 (Weaver & Shannon, 1963), we can see the three main elements of the mass media as institutions, content and audience. A full explanation of any element of the mass media requires a refined understanding of each of these three elements as well as their interrelationships, so that, for example, an understanding of a television program might require a more detailed understanding of the workings of the television institution and how that influences the embedding of the audience into the content of the program, and how that works to attract a particular audience.

This brings us to the question of what an audience is. There is a very long history in sociology that we can draw on. An audience is not a crowd, in the sense of an emotional and quick-acting group of people (Le Bon, 1896), nor is it a public, in the sense of a group of people focused on a single issue (Park, 1903 and Habermas, 1962), nor is it even a mass, in the sense of being a group of people who are heterogeneous, who do not know each other, are spatially separated and have no definite leadership (Blumer, 1946), because, as Freidson argued 'the individual seems to experience those media frequently in an immediately sociable setting that cannot be characterized as anonymous or heterogeneous, with no interaction with

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other spectators, and no organized relationships among them' (1953: 315).

Freidson went on to argue that we require a better understanding of the 'local audiences' in order to explain the behaviour of people; studies which examine 'only such things as the age, sex or personality of the spectators in conjunction with the content of the communication' (1953: 317) can only offer description. It is not enough to study the audience as a mass of atomised individuals, to search for similarities which can be tied to various demographic characteristics. There is sociological research going back to the early days of television, which reflect this sophistication. Riley et al., (1949) in a collaboration between the Columbia Broadcasting System and the Department of Sociology in Rutgers University, conducted research in an Eastern US city. In a publication in 1951 Riley et al. pointed out that the basic hypothesis they were working with at Rutgers was 'that group relations affect communications behavior' (1951: 15).

The approach advocated by Freidson (1953) and Riley et al. (1951) in the early 1950s is best epitomised three decades later by the British television audience research. The move to audience research is most clearly visible in the change in the research approach taken by Morley from his 'nationwide' research (1980) to his 'family television' research (1986) (see also research in the US by Lull 1980). In the nationwide research, Morley showed two clips from the BBC's current affairs program *Nationwide* to 29 different groups and conducted a focus group interview for each group. These groups represented particular social groups. Drawing on Hall's (1980) work on encoding and decoding, Morley expected that the decodings of the *Nationwide* clips would vary according to basic demographic factors such as age, sex, race and class as well as according to involvement in various institutions such as trade unions, the education system and subcultures. Morley realised that decodings made by individuals in a demographically similar grouping could be quite different to decodings they would make in the 'natural' domestic context of viewing. As a result of this conclusion Morley began to interview families in their own home. (As well as Morley 1992, see also, *inter alia*: Bausinger 1984; Goodman 1983; Gray

1987; Hobson 1980; Kim 2004; Lewis 1991; Lull 1980, 1982; Moores 1993; Silverstone 1994).

Although television is often blamed for unhappiness, reduced social interaction and loss of social capital, the influence and use of television must be understood in a wider social, cultural and economic context. To understand the audience's relationship with television we also need a better understanding of television institutions, not only in terms of ownership and control, but also in terms of how television personnel imagine the audience and how they construct programs and schedules and react to new media according to their image of the audience.

Does television crowd out social interaction?

Before turning to look at our correlations we need to provide some idea of how much television people watch on average. According to IP Germany (2014) individuals in Europe watched 27.7 hours per week and individuals in North America watched 34.2 hours per week. The average amount of television viewing has increased over the decades. According to Robinson (1969, p. 214), referring to Nielsen's television-viewing figures from 1965, the weekly television viewing average in the US was over 22 hours. To put these figures in context Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) claimed that this was equivalent to half of all the time available for leisure activities, and was more than the time spent on any other activity except sleep and work. They went on to argue that by 75 years of age the average viewer would have spent nine years watching television (Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi 2002: 74-5) (see also Bruni and Stanca (2008: 509-10), Frey et al. (2005: 3) and Hughes (1980: 295) on this topic; Depp et al. (2010) on the amount of television watched later in life; and Krosnick, Anand, and Hartl (2003) for a discussion of heavy television viewing among preadolescents and adolescents).

The data used in this paper come from the 2014 fielding of the European Social Survey (ESS) (where questionnaires from other years are used, the year is indicated in brackets). Where relevant questions were available only in earlier rounds, these data are also
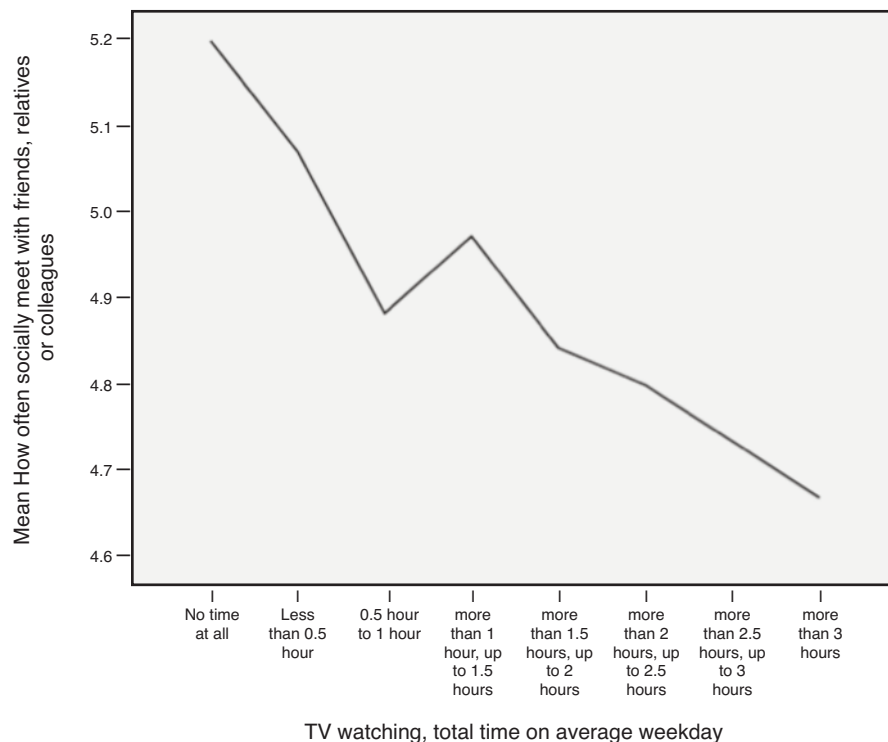
used. ESS is a survey of values, attitudes and behavior in Europe. Between 22 and 31 countries, ranging from Austria to the Ukraine, field ESS questionnaires each time. The questionnaire has been fielded on alternate years since 2002. The sample includes at least 1,500 people aged fifteen or over from each country (800 in smaller countries) using a simple random sample or a sampling frame of individuals, households and addresses. The interviews are conducted face-to-face, with a target of 70% response rate. More details are available on their webpage (http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/methodology/ess_methodology).

First we look at how television might 'crowd out' other activities. In 1995 Putnam uncovered the mystery of 'the Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America' in which he claimed that he 'discovered only one prominent suspect against whom circumstantial evidence can be mounted' (1995: 677). Putnam maintained that the 'civic generation', which grew up after World War II, grew up without television and that social capital disappeared in the US with the next cohort because they grew up with television, and television

displaces or crowds out other (social) activities. Putnam's evidence is that the timing fits: the arrival of television appeared to coincide with the disappearance of social capital. In a more specific argument Bruni and Stanca (2008) focused more particularly on social interaction (rather than social activities in general). They maintained that although it has a positive effect on life satisfaction, social interaction can be displaced by time spent watching television.

In the ESS questionnaire there are a number of questions about social interaction, such as 'how often do you meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues?' (from 'Never' to 'Every day' on a 7-point scale) (Fig. 1)[1] and 'Compared to other people of your age, how often would you say you take part in social activities?' (=-.014) (from 'Much less than most' to 'Much more than most' on a 5-point scale). We can see from the correlations that the more television people watch the less often they meet socially with friends (Fig. 1) or take part in social activities. The suggestion here is that watching television 'crowds out' such social activities and thereby prevents people from

Figure 1: TV viewing X how often meet socially with friends etc, ρ=-.029, p<.01 level (two-tailed test)

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experiencing the positive benefits on life satisfaction and happiness that some social activities might bring.

Figure 1: TV viewing X how often meet socially with friends etc, ρ=-.029, p<.01 level (two-tailed test)We found that social interaction correlated much more strongly (although still weakly) with happiness and life satisfaction than with television viewing. We found that the more often people met socially with friends, relatives or colleagues the happier they were (=.125) and the more often they took part in social activities the happier they were (=.161). We also found that the more often people met socially with friends, relatives or colleagues the more satisfied they were with life as a whole (=.106) and the more often they took part in social activities the more satisfied they were with life as a whole (=.152). Of course, with each of these four correlations the opposite is also the case: the happier or more satisfied with life people are the more often they meet with friends etc.

Bruni and Stanca call these social activities relational goods. They looked specifically at volunteering activities and time spent with specific groups of people. They argued that 'the time spent watching television is generally subtracted from communicating with family and friends, participating to [sic] community-life or interacting socially, that is, relational activities that contribute significantly to our life satisfaction' (2008: 510).

We can see that these social activities are of different types. Spending time with immediate family, with other relatives, with friends or with colleagues are all different types of social activity, as are engaging in voluntary charity activities, voluntary professional activities, etc. For example, Bruni and Stanca reported that

> time spent with parents and relatives has the largest effect on life satisfaction and time spent with friends and people from service organizations also has a positive and significant effect … [but] time spent with people from work or church, are not significantly related to life satisfaction. (2008: 525)

Again the context is important—not all social activities are positively correlated with happiness and life satisfaction. Despite this added nuance Bruni and Stanca (2008) appeared to agree with the general thesis advanced by Putnam (1995).

One would wonder if other activities, such as work, could also crowd out time spent with friends or family or in voluntary activities. Focusing specifically on civic activism (the main social activity discussed by Putnam), Uslaner argued that 'busy people are likely candidates for civic activism,' but went on to argue that 'the effect is small. Someone who works 75 hours per week will join 0.75 more organisations than a person who doesn't work at all' (1998: 458). Despite the small effect, this shows that working, unlike watching television, does not crowd out 'civic' activities. However, drawing on Robinson (1990; see also Robinson & Martin, 2008 and 2009), Putnam had already made the point that

> people who spend more time at work … spend less time eating, sleeping, reading books, engaging in hobbies, and just doing nothing … they also spend a lot less time watching television—almost 30% less. However, they do not spend less time on organizational activity. (1995: 669)

Adding another dimension to this argument, Frey et al. (2005) examined the difference between people according to their opportunity costs of time (i.e., whether or not they forego other activities in order to watch television). They discovered that 'the group with high opportunity costs of time watches a bit less TV,' (2005: 17) but also that watching more television has a more negative effect on people with high opportunity costs of time than it has on people with low opportunity costs of time. To a degree then 'busy' people tend to watch less television (and, if they watch more television, they suffer more the negative consequences on life satisfaction) than do less busy people. People with time inconsistent preferences, that is, individuals who choose a present choice over a future choice, 'are therefore unable to adhere to the amount of TV viewing they planned' tend to watch more television than they had planned to watch (Frey et al., 2005: 3). It appears the 'crowding out' effect is stronger on people with time to spare. (See also Hughes, 1980, p. 293).

The correlation between how much television people watch and how much they participate in social activities (Fig. 1) is significant. The correlation, however, is weak. When we calculated the coefficient of

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determination we found that less than 1% of the variance in how often people meet friends, relatives of colleagues is explained by the amount of television they watch. On the other hand, correlations between those social activities and variables around happiness, life satisfaction, etc. (which we will discuss below) are stronger, explaining between about 3% and about 6% of the variance (depending on the specific variables). Although television plays a role, there are many other factors involved in people's level of social interaction.
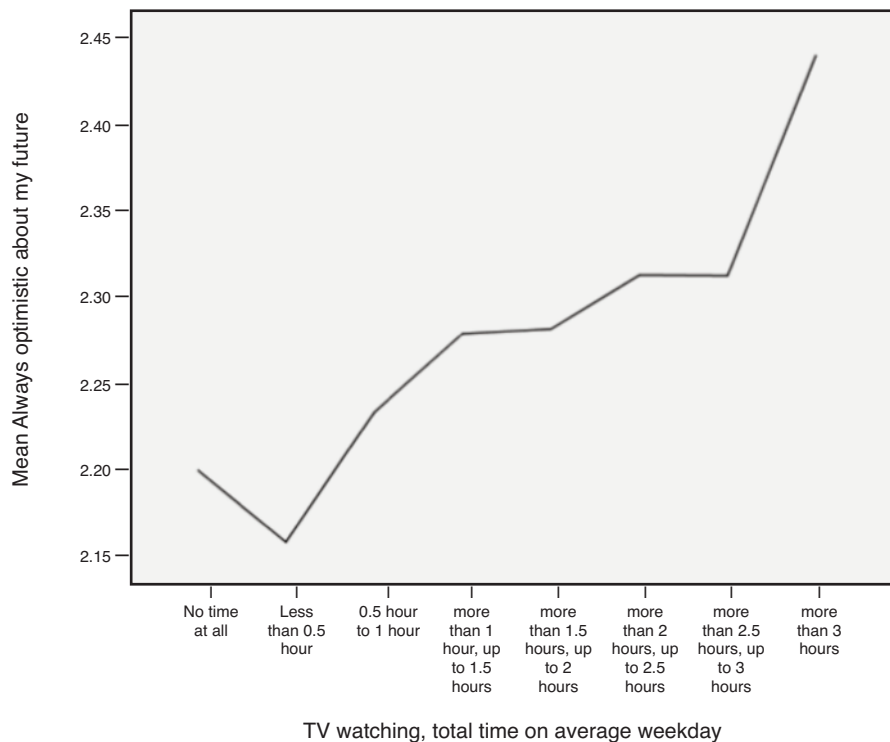
The relevance of optimism and trust

Uslaner (1998) argued that more trusting people participate in civic groups and that optimism leads to trust i.e., optimism leads to trust, which leads to participation (cf. Shah (1998) who argued the opposite—that participation leads to trust). Uslaner (1998) argued that television is not to blame for the lack of participation in civic activities. He said that 'television is *not* the culprit once we bring optimism for the future into the picture' (Uslaner 1998: 458). Participa-

tion in civic activities results from trust, and trust comes from optimism.

Trust and optimism, however, correlate inversely with television viewing. There are several relevant questions in the ESS questionnaire (mainly taken from the 2012 module) relating to optimism, such as 'I'm always optimistic about my future' (Fig. 2); 'In general I feel very positive about myself' (=.041 2012); and 'On the whole my life is close to how I would like it to be' (=.064 2006) (on a 5-point scale from a low score for 'Agree Strongly' to a high score 'Disagree Strongly') as well as 'had a lot of energy?' (=.-094 2012); and 'felt calm and peaceful?' (=.-033 2012) (on a 4-point scale from 'None or almost none of the time' to 'All or almost all of the time'). The pattern is the same here again—the more television people watch the less optimistic they are about the future, the less positive they are about themselves, and the less close they feel their lives are to how they would like them to be.

Uslaner did not agree that television was behind

Figure 2: TV viewing BY always optimistic about my future, ρ=.069, p<.01 level (two-tailed test)

TV watching, total time on average weekday

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this lack of optimism, arguing instead that optimism 'is only marginally affected by what we see on television' because it 'reflects our values at least as much as our experiences—and it is only marginally affected by what we see on television' (1998: 446). He argued that optimism is a belief in the future and this was 'essential to American culture,' but by the late 1970s Americans no longer 'believed that their children would have a better life than they did' (1998: 447). Optimism, or lack thereof, comes not from television, but from the people around you—'if most people around you believe that things are destined to get better, you will be more prone to be an optimist too (by about 22%)' (1998: 454). Along similar lines, Morgan and Shanahan (2010) argued that compared to television 'everyday non-mediated experiences may play a stronger role' (p. 243).

Turning to the question of trust; according to Uslaner (1998) optimism leads to trust. In the ESS questionnaire there are a number of relevant questions: 'generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?' (=-.033) and 'do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair?' (=-.046) (from 'You can't be too careful' / 'Most people would try to take advantage of me' to 'Most people can be trusted' / 'Most people would try to be fair'). Again we find the same pattern: that the more television people watch the less trusting they are.

This pattern is also evident in Putnam's work. He argued that 'TV viewing is strongly and negatively related to social trust and group membership' (1995: 678). Against that, however, Uslaner argued that the group on whom Putnam had focused—the 'baby boomers,' who were the first to grow up with television—were supposed to be the most distrustful generation of Americans, and yet by the 1980s they 'became the most trusting, the most optimistic, and the most participatory' (Uslaner 1998: 443). Uslaner argued that 'it is not television that makes people less trusting, but optimism for the future that makes people more trusting' (1998: 441).

Uslaner (1998) argued that 'the aggregate trends suggest that trust and optimism run in cycles. The most trusting generations grew up under transforming experiences, namely the Second World War and the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960's' (p. 463). This can be tied to the work of Inglehart and Welzel (2005, p. 130) in which they argued that happiness and interpersonal trust are components of self-expression. They demonstrated that 'self-expressive' and 'post-materialist' values are correlated with socio-economic development (and to a lesser extent the social and cultural historical context). Although the self-expressive values decline during a period of economic recession, the cohort who were adolescents or young adults during a period of economic prosperity retain more self-expressive values than other cohorts. This suggests that trust runs in cycles more related to social and economic development (and cultural context) than to the effect of television. (On the connection between television and materialism see the work of Bruni and Stanca (2006); Frey et al. (2005); Shrum et al. (2005); Sirgy et al. (1998); Yang and Oliver (2010); and for more international research see Speck and Roy (2008); Yang et al. (2008)).

On the other hand Patulny (2011: 289-93) reported that people who spend more time with strangers (not watching television) are more trusting, and that people who spend time watching television with friends and family are less trusting. Reversing this statement, one could say that more trusting people spend more time with strangers (not watching television), and less trusting people stay at home watching television with friends and family.

Happiness is a Warm Television?

The question of crowding out, although complex, has a simple proposition at its core: time spent watching television is time that could have been spent engaged in other social activities. There is, however, a more intractable question that we examine in this paper: the correlations between the amount of television people watch and various attitudes. This question is particularly dense because of the difficulty in being precise about the influence the content of television programs can have on people.

Many authors have discussed the connection

between television and unhappiness, dissatisfaction with life, fear of victimisation, perceptions of quality of life etc; for example, in the late 1970s and early 1980s there were Dobb and McDonald's (1979) 'Television Viewing and Fear of Victimisation'; Hirsch's (1980) 'The Scary World of the Non-Viewer'; and Hughes' (1980) 'The Effects of Television Watching on Fear of Victimisation'; in the 1990s there were Putnam's (1995) 'Tuning in, Tuning Out'; Sirgy et al. (1998) on television and perceptions of quality of life; and Frey et al. (2005) and Bruni and Stanca (2006) on television and happiness.

There is some literature (such as Kubey and Csik-szentmihalyi 2002) about the impact that the physical act of sitting passively in front of a television or computer screen has on people's feelings, but far more attention has been paid to the influence of the content of the television programs themselves, such as cultivation research (see Morgan and Shanahan 2010) or

the 'mean world' effect (see Putnam 1995). Many others have written about similar topics, such as television and socialization (see Bruni and Stanca 2008); and 'main streaming' (see Sirgy et al. 1998); however, Uslaner argued that 'overall, people don't confuse the television world and the real world' (1998: 442).

Looking at the question of happiness we found that the more television people watch the less happy they are (and vice versa). The correlation in Fig. 3 is between the question 'Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?' (from 'Extremely Unhappy' to 'Extremely Happy' on a 10-point scale) and the amount of television people claim to watch.

The pattern evident in Fig. 3 is repeated in correlations with scores of other items in the questionnaire, many of which are included in this paper.; for example, the rather similar question, 'please tell me how much of the time during the past week you were happy? ... None or almost none of the time ... All or

Figure 3: TV viewing BY Happiness, ρ=-.071, p<.01 level (two-tailed test)

TV watching, total time on average weekday

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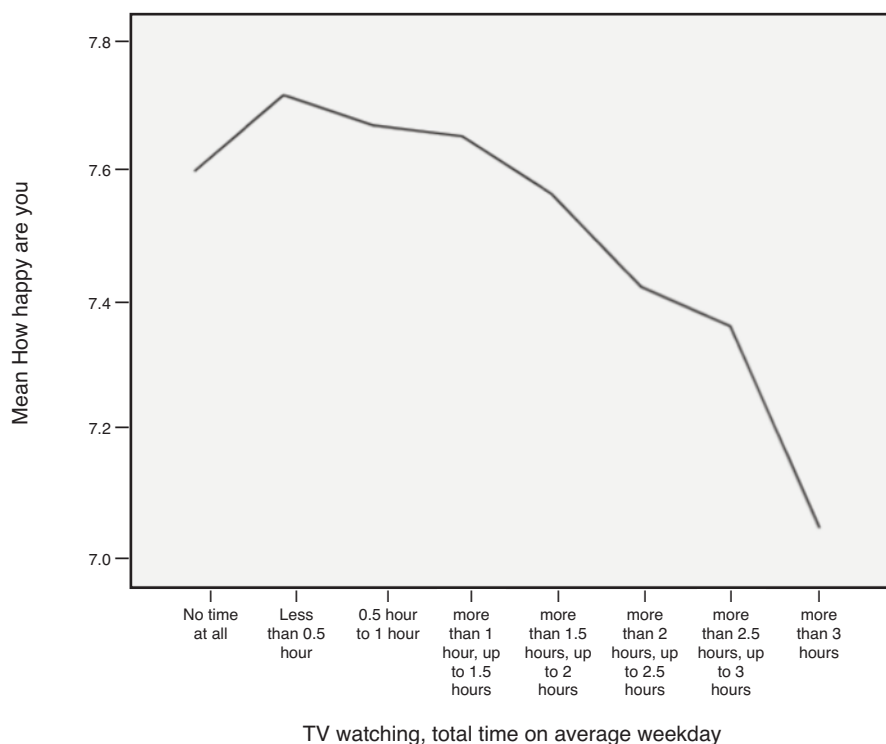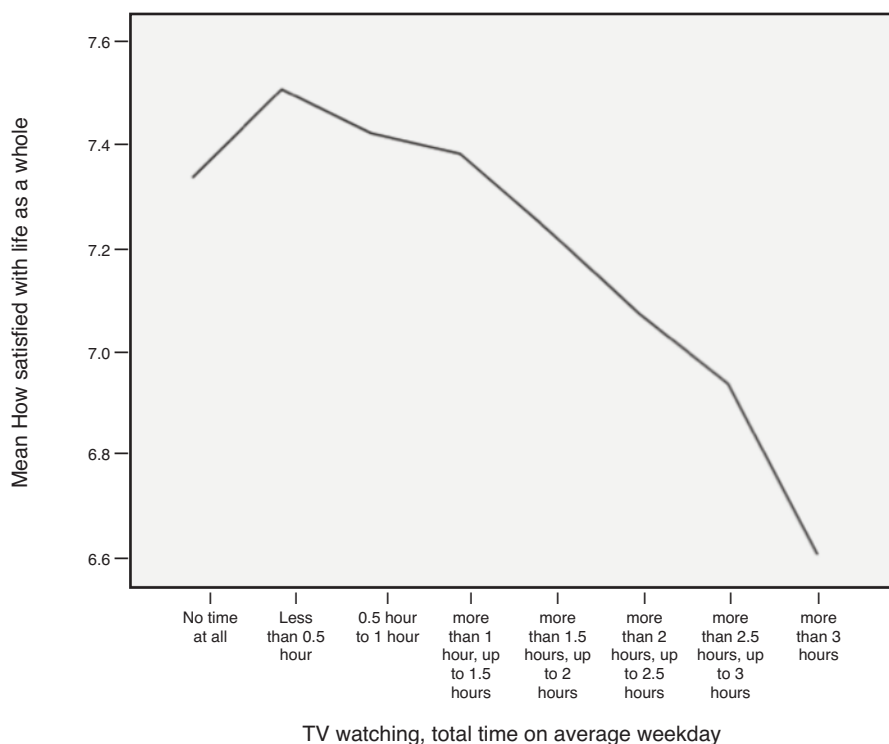
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Figure 4: TV viewing BY Satisfied with life, ρ=-.079, p<.01 level (two-tailed test)

almost all of the time' (on a 4-point scale) (=-.061), shows that the more television people watched the less happy they were in the last week. The correlation is significant, but weak, as it was in Fig. 3.

The pattern is also evident in less similar questions such as those relating to life satisfaction, e.g., 'All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?' (from 'Extremely Dissatisfied' to 'Extremely Satisfied' on a 10-point scale) (Fig. 4). Similarly, Frey et al. found that 'excessive TV viewers, on average, report lower life satisfaction' (2005: 3) (see also Bruni and Stanca (2006 and 2008); Sirgy et al. (1998); and for a discussion of virtual life satisfaction see Castronova & Wagner (2011)). As discussed above, Frey et al. (2005) found that this was particularly the case for those with significant opportunity costs of time. They also found the other side of that coin i.e., that 'People who watch less than half an

hour of TV a day are more satisfied with their life ' (Frey et al. 2005: 14). Hammermeister et al. (2005: 262) found no difference between those who watched a little and those who watched no television.[2]

The pattern is repeated in relation to the questions about enjoying life, such as 'please tell me how much of the time during the past week you enjoyed life?' (from 'None or almost none of the time' to 'All or almost all of the time' on a 4-pooint scale) (=.03).

As is the case above in relation to happiness and to life satisfaction, there is a similar pattern evident in the relationship between how much television people claim to watch and how pessimistic they claim to be. There are two questions relevant to this in the ESS questionnaire: 'For most people in [COUNTRY] life is getting worse rather than better' and 'The way things are now, I find it hard to be hopeful about the future of the world' (from 'Agree Strongly' to

Figure 5: TV viewing BY for most people life is getting worse, ρ=-.048, p<.01 level (two-tailed test

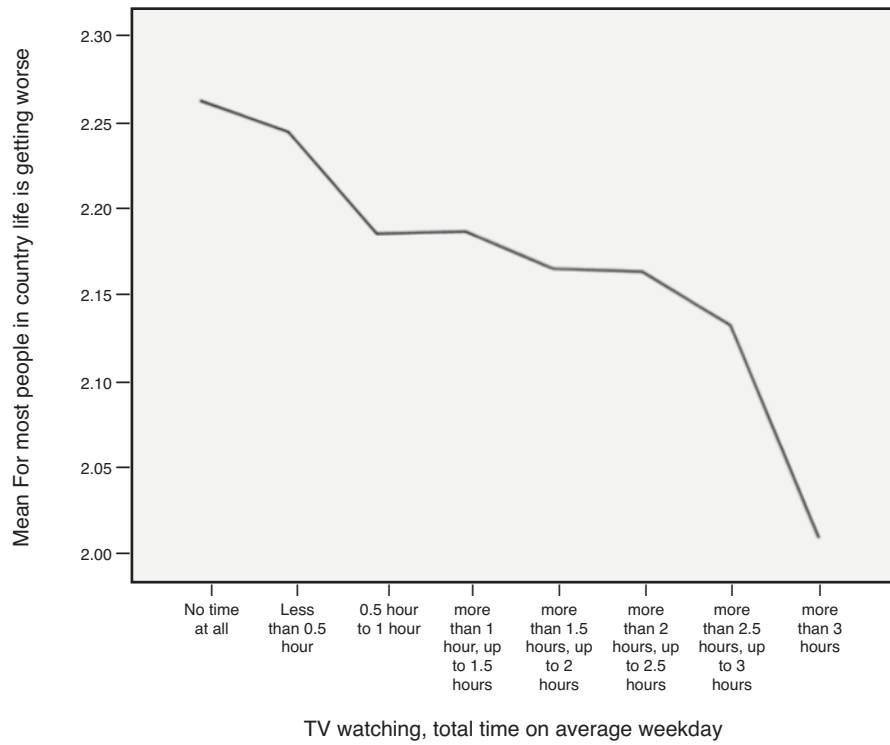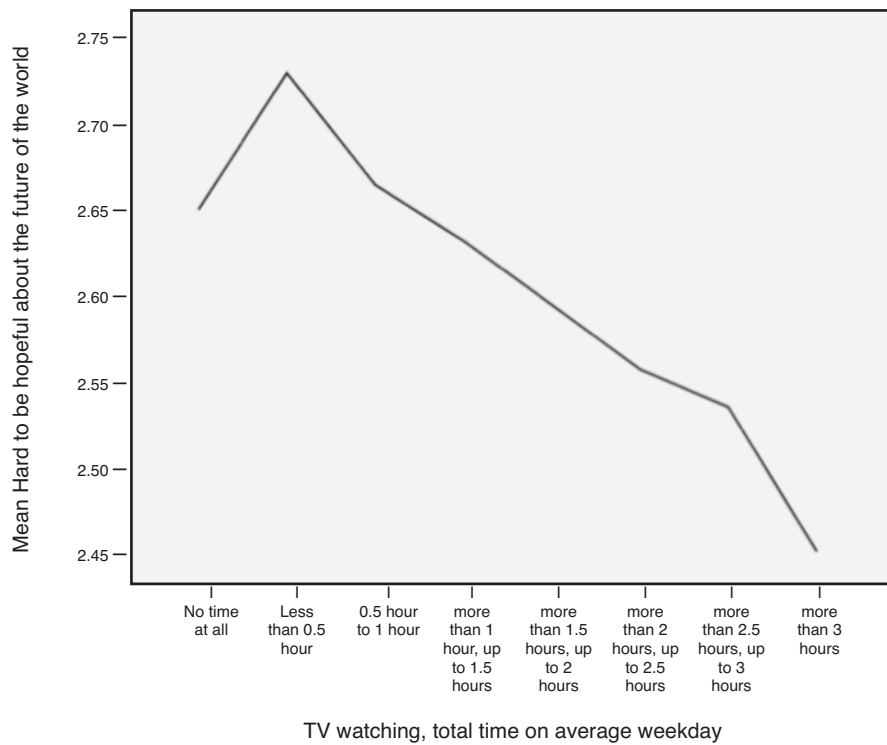**Figure 6: TV viewing BY hard to be hopeful about the future, ρ=-.065, p<.01 level (two-tailed test)**

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'Disagree Strongly' on a 5-point scale, asked in 2012) (Figs 5 and 6). It appears that the more television people watch the more pessimistic they are (and vice versa).

On the question of fear, one of the most common survey questions is replicated in the ESS: 'How safe do you – or would you – feel walking alone in this area after dark?' (from 'Very Safe' to 'Very Unsafe' on a 4-point scale) (Fig. 7). There were also a number of other similar questions relating to 'worry about your home being burgled' (=-.041 2010) or 'becoming a victim of violent crime' (=-.072 2010).

Along these lines, Sirgy et al. reported that 'heavy viewers of television have higher expectations of being crime victims than do light viewers' (1998: 128). On the other hand Grabe and Drew (2007) argued that fear of crime is related to the perceived realism of the television programs more than just the amount of television. In relation to that, Uslaner argued that 'people who live in high-crime areas tend to watch more violent programs; their fear is based more on reality than on the television world' (1998: 444) and that

'perceptions of safety don't depend on how much you watch television in general or local news in particular. Instead, they reflect where you live' (1998: 462). Similarly, Hughes reported that 'sex, age, and size of place are extremely powerful predictors of fear of walking alone at night, and that television watching is very weak by comparison' (1980: 295).

In the ESS questionnaire there is a battery of questions dealing with issues related to the 'mean world' syndrome. The questions begin with the statement: 'please tell me how much of the time during the past week you…' and end as follows: 'felt tired?' (=.022 2006); 'felt bored?' (=.085 2006); 'felt anxious?' (=.044 2006); 'felt lonely?' (=.060); 'felt depressed?' (=.069); 'felt that everything you did was an effort?' (=.061); 'your sleep was restless?' (=.092); 'could not get going?' (=.077); 'felt sad?' (=.065) (from 'None or almost none of the time' to 'All or almost all of the time' on a 4-point scale). Each of these questions correlates significantly (but weakly, as is evident in the figures above) with the amount of television respondents claim to watch. When graphed, the same

Figure 7: TV viewing BY how safe you feel walking alone in this area after dark, ρ=.090, p<.01 level (two-tailed test)

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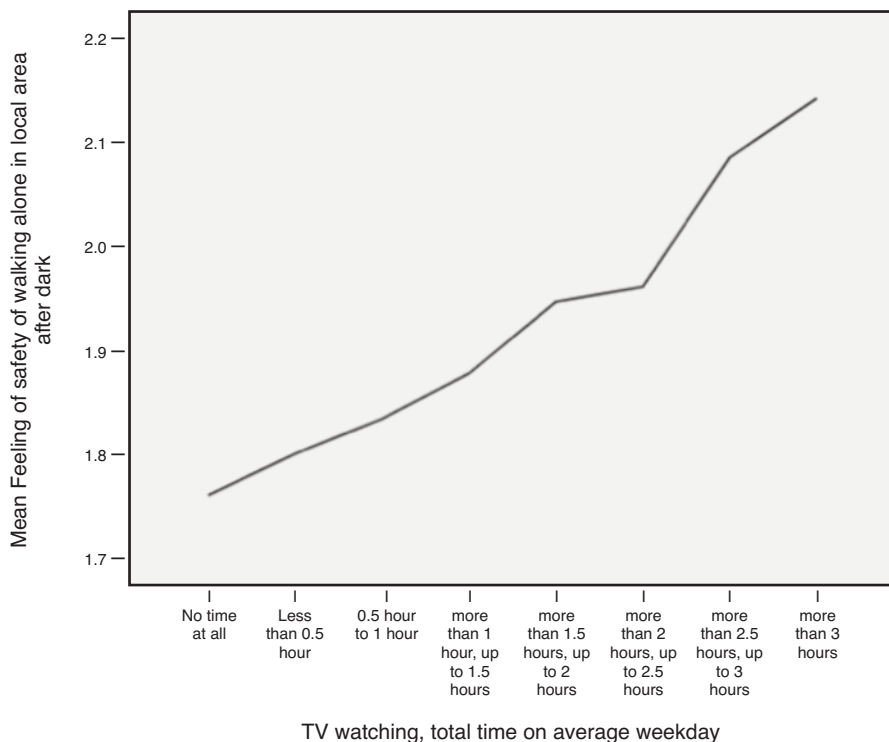
pattern appears as was evident in all the correlations above—the more television respondents watched the more tired, bored, lonely, depressed etc. they claimed to have felt during the past week.

Despite the same pattern repeating with all these variables and the appearance that television is the cause, evidence from the literature suggests that rather than making people pessimistic, fearful, lonely, depressed etc., television might be used to avoid negative thoughts and for relaxation. Following Hegel (1807), one could say that people who find themselves in the unhappy situation of *das unglückliche Bewusstsein* of a divided mode of consciousness (divided between master and slave consciousnesses) retreat from the 'world.' Rather than turning to prayer or meditation (which may in some way be an effort to deal with the divided consciousness Hegel outlined as part of the stages of the development of the freedom of consciousness) people nowadays sometimes retreat to the sanctuary of television viewing.

Conclusion

This research confirms that people who watch more television participate less in social activities and are more unhappy, fearful, pessimistic, etc. (than people who watch less television). We argue, however, that television is a small cog in the wider wheel of life and a better understanding of the role of television requires a more nuanced and detailed perspective of the various ways in which television fits into the diverse aspects of people's changing lives, and how all these different elements interconnect and react back upon each other. A sociological imagination still has a lot to offer us in understanding television as a wider phenomenon.

Notes

[1] In all the correlations in this paper we used Spearman's rho. All the correlations are 2-tailed and the significance is always at the 0.01 level.

[2] Many of the graphs have a 'flick in the tail' which shows that people who watch no television are slightly less happy etc. than those who watch a little television.

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