

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 095 879

IR 001 061

AUTHOR Streicher, Lawrence H.
TITLE Caricatural Imagery in the Mass Media. Research Report, Vol. 9, No. 2.
INSTITUTION Institute for Juvenile Research, Chicago, Ill.
PUB DATE 72
NOTE 28p.
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.75 HC-\$1.85 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Affluent Youth; *Caricatures; Childhood; Conference Reports; Disadvantaged Youth; Documentaries; *Imagery; *Mass Media; News Media; Programing (Broadcast); Radio; Role Perception; Television; Television Commercials

ABSTRACT

Caricature and its distortion of reality as developed in the mass press are discussed in relation to the appearance of caricatural elements in other media, such as radio and television. High frequency of appearances of these distorted roles and situations might lead to viewers' perceptual rigidity in typing of characters in general, but might have some positive function in radio and television in "unmasking", amusement, innovation, and communication of complicated social types over time. Exploratory research results suggest that upper middle class children find television programs which rely heavily on caricatural elements less believable than patterns of programing which either appear or are stated to be true, such as some commercials, documentaries, and science presentations. This finding of apparent awareness of caricatural elements is in general agreement with other research in which it was found that advantaged children were less likely than disadvantaged children to believe that television presented an accurate portrayal of the world around them. (See also IR 001 027.) (Author)

ED 095879

CARICATUREL IMAGERY IN THE MASS MEDIA

Lawrence H. Streicher

**State of Illinois
Department of Mental Health
INSTITUTE FOR JUVENILE RESEARCH**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION**

**THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO-
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN-
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRE-
SENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY**

IR 001061

**1140 South Paulina Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612**

**R E S E A R C H R E P O R T
1972 Vol. 9 No. 2**

Caricatural Imagery in the Mass Media

Abstract

Caricature and its distortions of reality as developed in the mass press are discussed in relation to the appearance of caricatural elements in other media, such as radio and television. Some expressions of this form of imagery in American television and radio are detailed. Artful distortions of roles and situations portrayed in these media are compared, and some possible consequences for the consuming audiences are elaborated. High frequency of appearances of these distorted roles and situations might lead to viewers' perceptual rigidity in typing of characters in general, but might have some positive functions in radio and television in "unmasking", amusement, innovation and communication of complicated social types over time. Exploratory research results suggest that upper middle class children find television programs which rely heavily on caricatural elements less believable than patterns of programming which either appear or are stated to be true, such as some commercials, documentaries and science presentations. This finding of apparent awareness of caricatural elements is in general agreement with other research in which it was found that advantaged children were less likely than disadvantaged children to believe that television presented an accurate portrayal of the world around them.

Caricatural Imagery in the Mass Media*

Lawrence H. Streicher

Institute for Juvenile Research

A central problem in theorizing about and planning research in the mass media is the concern with the differential claims to truth of the various media, that is, how do they represent and reflect "reality." The problem often is ignored, since it could deal in depth with epistemological problems of great complexity, many of which might be beyond our training or forbearance. Even so, what I would like to do here is at least discuss how the characteristics of one medium, caricature in the mass press, appear at unexpected junctures in other media, such as television and radio; and what those appearances might mean, not only for the substantive content of the media in question but also for our perception of the media. The degree to which caricatural elements might influence children's belief or disbelief in television portrayals then will be discussed as exploratory research findings.

Let us say at the outset that our views of "reality" around us are normative in nature. That is, we choose to grasp "reality" in any one of a number of ways which have attached to them particular consequences for those views taken. For example, there is no scientific reason for using the scientific method as a method of observation, except that it yields certain kinds of observations for unique purposes (Bierstedt, 1957: 3-32). Its use is normative. Where its use may stop, others take over. Common sense, authority, insight are still with us and compete and strain with more "objective" methods at points of argument, e.g., race relations, military massacres, political boundary disputes. It has been convenient for this writer at odd times to see the mass media as a whole, as a series

of normatively organized ways also of viewing "reality" and as prepared for particular kinds or types of audiences. Television programs, e.g., appeal to certain segments of the populace; newspapers of all persuasions and lines have their audiences; magazines, we know, are consumed variously. Comics and cartoons have their following. Given what could be called a "constant reality" some media must compete, complement or be substitutes for each other, as far as they are a means of presenting or representing this reality. It would seem that at the very least all must distort this reality to some extent. Further, that a constant quality of "competitive distortion" must prevail at all times in the media. That is to say, under the special conditions of constancy of subject and except in cases where the media might appear to complement or substitute for each other in presentations of reality, they would appear to compete with each other in the manner in which presentations are given.¹ This particular kind of "battle-field of symbols" actually might appear to the reader to be a model of propaganda in miniature and, in fact, in situations in which the "battle" is raised to "epic," international or dramatic political side-taking, a conflict of symbols between press, radio and television for the attention of audiences might very well be a clash of propaganda, writ large.

In these types of situations, the exercise of rules of evidence of "scientific" truth are difficult to apply to test the adequacy or the error of the generalizability of a given perspective. The consumer of dramatized or propagandized facts and their combinations is on his own or in concert with others who might persuade or "personally influence" him (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1966). The consequences are not always or only negative. Even in "improvised news" sessions (Shibutani, 1966) the consumer of media symbols may not be far from the truth in serious encounters; and in more benign or amusing confrontations, whatever he is persuaded to find amusing,

seems funny enough.'

Distortion in Media Imagery

The above situations may be included under a rubric which refers to distortions of facts or knowledge. And the negative consequences of these distortions seem at once to be dangerous and weakly valued. Distortion in the fine arts, however, may have different consequences, that is, it may embellish or transform reality into forms at once more acceptable and aesthetically pleasing to the observer. Perspectivist transformations, even sometimes unidentifiable cubist, expressionist or surrealist concoctions represent reality, at least, it is considered, to some. The para-art form of caricature represents a four-hundred-year-old innovation of distortion which reconciles to some extent the exaggeration of subject with the sometimes subtle appeal of pictorial and graphic imagery. Pictorial caricature, following a definition by Ashbee, (1928: 30) is "grotesque or ludicrous representation of scorn or ridicule of human vices or follies and exaggeration of their most characteristic features by means of images." Caricature may here be stated to differ from stereotyped images in that stereotypes are typically constructed from a cluster of features seen to be characteristic of a class or category of elements and might not be exaggerated. Caricature is most idiosyncratic or unique in its presentation and the grotesque or ludicrous depiction of satirical materials may be extremely exaggerated. What kind of distortion is asserted by pictorial caricature?

I (1967) have stated previously that:

"Caricature may be called yet another kind of distortion, one which articulates the subject within the framework of probability, but in a unique sense. It is that in which the object is presented to the spectator in a whole, in a Gestalt sense, in the form of a type,

artfully done with an economy of line. Perspective and natural proportions may still be exaggerated, as Born (1944) cogently suggests, but their presentation is in outline form. Within this synthesis of dimensions and economy of effort speed of identity is enhanced by the innovation of 'tabs of identity' (Low, 1935: 18). These are hieroglyphs of idiosyncratic characteristics of a subject, e.g., Hitler's forelock and moustache or De Gaulle's and Lyndon Johnson's noses. All one need know about De Gaulle or Johnson, the 'tabs' seem to suggest, is that they have unique noses; or about Premier Ky, is that he has a well-trimmed moustache. The principle of 'economy of lines' refers to the art of omission which Adolph Menzel (1815-1905), a Swiss lithographer and painter, actually has called the art of drawing. The economy of lines does not quite reach that extreme of distortion where the person becomes unidentifiable. Distortion, after all, for the caricature must be limited by the identifiability of the person. Perhaps tabs of identity control these limits for personal characters. Some schools of modern painting, however, distort to the point of unidentifiability.... Unlike painting, the drift in caricature over the past two centuries has been toward representation, but it is not total; rather it is idiographical and typological. The movies at that point have helped train modern spectators to better appreciate these types and fleeting physiognomic expressions with their meanings and connotations. Eisenstein (1898-1948), e.g., discusses and links film themes to hieroglyphical language in the movies (1959: 28-44). Personal roles and stereotypes of actors bear a close resemblance to the

role acts of Kabuki actors with their masks. Personal idiosyncrasies and expressions can be communicated effectively by such masks or types. Concern with deformation, distortion and approximation to reality by the construction of types unite science and art at this point.

"Caricature presupposes the existence of relatively fixed iconographic types in art. The development of a language of types in art during the Renaissance and Reformation was international in scope and involved artists in Italy, Germany, France, Holland and other countries in Europe. Ultimately, with the mobilization of man's sentiments and national armies of drafted citizen-soldiers, a pictorial press language evolved. Caricature and cartoons do seem like ancient hieroglyphics or graphical characters as a new type of pictorial language which incorporates the legacy of centuries of fine arts. Suffice it to say here that social and cultural changes over time yielded publicly available and accessible imageries. These types were appropriated by artists and became part of a pictorial language which vaulted national, literatural and linguistic barriers, expanded anonymous publics and bespoke a common culture legacy of the west derived from ancient Jerusalem, Athens, Rome and North Alpine Europe.

"In drawing, these types may be represented by standardized ideographs or hieroglyphical arrangements. Compare the innovations introduced by F. X. Messerschmidt's series of masks of facial expressions done in sculpture,² for example, to Daumier's (1808-1879) drawings of LeRoi Citoyen or David Low's (1891-1963) drawings of Hitler and Mussolini. The person becomes caught,

stereotyped and gets cast as a type which is then interpreted. This kind of distortion is a sort of 'mask' creation which would often appear to be more 'real' than the subject's actual face with all its changeability and variations (Streicher, 1967: 436-437)."

In different words, what I am trying to suggest in the above remarks is that distortions, and competitive distortions at that, warp and bend some communications of reality in the mass media with negative consequences, i.e., audiences and publics may at worst be relatively uninformed or informed peculiarly of the events of the day and at best, amused. In the fine arts, however, a degree of manifest distortion is expected, if not appreciated, as an expression of the artist's view to his audience. In the case of caricature, emergent and refined distortion in its presentation over the centuries has come to represent the finest expression of caricatural imagery and is peculiarly appropriate to its genre.

And to contrast: we would not expect a caricatural-like rendition of the news or of political events, that is, a hieroglyphic or idiographic or type-like presentation, e.g., "armed conflict as a circus." And where it does obtain, one might think it "incomplete" or "strange" (if there were access to other standards of comparison). The "facts" of political and social life are not caricatural and, further, not artful (in the sense of distortion) but they could be aesthetically pleasing, e.g., "the beauty of peace." And we would not expect artful presentations to be reported as journalese expressions or wire service items (except as "news"), e.g., "Picasso invades Chicago" as over against "Picasso exhibition unveiled." On the other hand, news of the day, issues, figures, are caricatured; and much caricature is aesthetically pleasing, creative, innovative - artful.

Caricatural Elements in the Mass Media

What kinds of caricatural elements are found in the mass media? And what could be possible consequences for such discovery, both for the program contents and cognition of the viewing audience?

We argue at this point that caricature and its distortion are expected and appropriate in their appearances in the mass press. One expects to see a David Levine caricature of President Richard Nixon with a ski jump of a nose and a paunchy smiling face attempting to communicate a very mean man. The famous Levine drawing of Nixon eating grapes during the grapepickers' strike symbolically communicates the image of a callous national executive (Levine, 1970: 8). But caricatural distortion of character and plot in other media, such as television and radio, could have ambiguous consequences, especially in program contexts presenting nominally "real life" situations. Programs with these elements may be unbelievable; distorted characters types may delude or persuade viewers of the types represented; and repetition of such caricatured presentations finally may be boring. But extremely caricatured presentations could be amusing over time and serve to balance partially caricatured ones.

The case for the appearance of caricatural elements in radio was stronger before the advent of television. Television to a large extent has replaced radio as the main informational and entertainment source in the mass media. But "vocal caricatures" on radio and in our immediate past were employed frequently for typecasting and placed great reliance on the imagination of the listener to extend or limit the boundaries of the type. Heroes such as Superman or the Green Hornet had strong virile voices and a galaxy of sound stagings to reinforce their types. Rochester, on the Jack Benny show was a funny (to some) type of a valet manservant.

Mike Nichols and Elaine May, largely in nightclubs and recordings, actually played out the roles of several types, including over-protected sons, doctors, lovers, consumers, parents. Perhaps their great appeal was due to the coalescence or actual resemblance of their dramatized types with the reality experienced by great numbers of listeners. Occasionally, they still are heard on recordings. Bob and Ray vocally caricatured a display of types including perplexed citizens, confused and "conned" consumers. During appearances, vocal caricatures serve to pluck out from the flow of radio talk and at staged times a selection of types serving as kinds of punctuation points in programming. Combinations appear at which we may only hint or point for now, which seem to be greatly innovative and communicative of certain relationships beyond the simple exposure and maintenance of a single type. Rochester, above, e.g., serves as a kind of foil to Jack Benny to reflect Benny's supposed miserliness and conservatism. Doctor Watson in the Sherlock Holmes mystery series serves a similar function to Holmes, that is, he demonstrates Holmes' brilliance in crime detection by serving the role of helpmate, gentle bungler and constant admirer of Holmes' genius. Holmes performs in front of Watson and Watson is Holmes' spokesman but is no marionette, since Watson is a competent professional (medical doctor) in his own right. Rochester and Watson serve roughly the same functions in radio as did Colonel Blimp for Low in Low's cartoon series and single drawings. But Blimp was put to the extreme of caricature and was made a fool in front of Low, who, in his drawings, played the role of the "confused citizen" (Streicher, 1965). In the Fibber McGee series, McGee played the role of the "put-upon" and impractical homeowner, his "tab of identity" being the door opening on the resultant crash of an overstuffed storage closet. Charlie McCarthy, the ventriloquist's dummy, was the sarcastic commentator

on passing events and people. Allen's Alley was a showcase of such types. And there were many more.

Commercials in radio could perhaps be the model case of vocal caricature. With no vision and the necessity to define roles quickly in expensive radio "spots" and to make for high persuasion, it is incumbent for types to be distorted for quick identification and "punch." Hence, the necessity for salesmen to be typed as fast talkers and glib; the consumer to be glib and accepting; the information giver to be extremely sincere, the receiver to be trusting and childishly questioning, "And where do I go to get my loan?" Radio commercials tend to sound like accomplished facts and their distortions therefore quite real.

Vocal caricatures demand great deal of imagination, not only in the sense of the content of the communication but in the predicted (if successful) amount of the outline or chiaroscuro left to the imagination of the listener. The play of voices to create not only vocal but graphic stereotypes of course, must be seen as a necessary preliminary for the consumption of television. The "competitive distortions" mentioned above, however, even when both media are talking about the same thing, must appear difficult for the listener viewer to reconcile. The duet between vocal and graphic caricatural elements, the possible disharmony between radio and television, could result in a panorama or parade of types which creates its own world of distortion. The concatenation of radio and television types permits choice of consumption and belief of stereotype; but it might at the same time drive the consumer back to the dreary world of "real reality" where the media types are laughed out of belief.

Caricatural Television

Family comedies and soap operas are clear vehicles in television

presentations for caricature. Cartoons and cartoon series, per se, such as "Cartoon Town" or the "Flintstones" literally are origins of caricatural imagery. Their facile linkage to modern concerns could serve not only as a relaxing agent for adults, but as an appropriate learning mechanism for cultural imagery for children. Adults, perhaps, might find a dose of Saturday morning cartoons relaxing in the sense that so much of the imagery leaves little to their (learned) imagination and seems, therefore, appropriate and familiar and requires little effort to enjoy.

A family comedy, such as "My Three Sons" with Fred MacMurray as the head of a middle or upper middle class family provides a rather flat and benign model of a father who attempts to deal "rationally" with his family and with a bare minimum of disruption. There are no great crises and the participants are pictured hardly as disturbed, deprived or conflictful, troubled people. Perhaps it is that sensitive research might discover that truly this model of "clean disturbances" prevails in our culture. The stereotype presented in this drama certainly would seem to lull some but not others for whom daily life is a bit more calamitous if not entirely emergent and dependent on unpredictable or unanticipated contingencies, aside from the perhaps boring but dependable daily routine of family life. What seems to be lacking in the benign stereotype which contributes to its caricatural qualities is precisely this aspect of the humdrum character of daily life or even the appeal for some of this flatness. Of course, one may argue about the aesthetic or commercial necessity for such "clean" presentations; the point here is not that (except in part). But rather the divorce from experience which appears to provide amusement in these dramas and a bit of identification but also a way of (for want of a more polite word) degrading viewer integrity. The dramas may tickle; but they also

taunt the viewer not only as a moral lesson but as experiences to which he might hardly succeed.

In the case of "soap operas" such as "As the World Turns" or "Love Is A Many-Splendored Thing," the argument typically is made that their appeal is based on the imputed fact that especially housewives are able to identify with certain character roles in the programs, such as the "ever-noble wife" or the "ill-treated husband" and that the programs serve as vehicles for housewifely projection of all sorts of desires and malaise. What is at once striking about the "operas" is the apparent "flatness" of the drama. The constant tenseness of the presentation which runs as a rope from one day to the other and the stereotypicality of almost all the principle actors is the outstanding quality of the caricature here. The either very poor or stage managed strain provides an almost para-clinical setting in which mightily stressed people attempt to play their roles. A better contrast might be prepared if we were able to see comedies of this genre comparable to those which can be contrasted with some of the classic monster roles and presentations such as "The Munsters" or "Bewitched."

In television cloak and dagger shows, villains and crooks, local and international variety, are suspicious, cunning, plotting and constantly ready to hurt, destroy, wreck the lawful protagonists. In the case of Al Mundy in "It Takes A Thief," Mundy is humanized and made to play the part of a thief who is sensitive, loving and lovable, attractive, competent to a fantastic degree in his "trade" and, of course, does it all for the SIA, a thin ploy for the United States Central Intelligence Agency. Virility, erotica and thievery are put in the service of international (USA) justice. The extreme example in television fare would seem to be the program "Get Smart," a "compleat" caricature and lampoon of the cloak and dagger genre

presentations. A more "moderate" example is "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." This cycle of programs to varying degrees caricatures plots, characters and issues.

It seems likely that televised news presentations appear at the probable low end of frequency of caricatural appearances. However, some elements are found in the extremely funny, friendly or sexy weather people, perhaps as a balance to the relative unpredictability of poor weather. Additional examples are found in "clean, young men" to handle sports announcements as models of "athleticism" when "ordinary" males or females would seem to qualify for the task. Documentaries, travelogues and nature studies, e.g., "The Undersea World of Jacques Costeau," are almost devoid of caricatural elements, except perhaps in the Disney-type animal stories in which Disney concoctions of woody creatures demonstrate human qualities.

A high presence of caricatural elements tends to lead to unbelief in certain kinds of television presentations or scenarios but may amuse, or familiarize or calm the listener, e.g., "spoof" shows, such as "Get Smart." A relatively low presence of caricatural elements tends to lead to belief in certain kinds of television presentations of scenarios and may truthfully inform the viewer of the unambiguous elements of a particular perspective, e.g., news or documentary shows. A varying number of caricatural elements in television presentations could transform the originally intended purpose of these presentations toward either belief or disbelief in the presentation, e.g., dramas or situation comedies. In other words, particularly crucial or important roles may be caricatured (or not); central issues or plots may be caricatured (or not). Selective caricaturing may or may not push a program toward credulity, e.g., dramatization of historical events, Joan of Arc.

It would appear that caricatural elements could distribute themselves in a more or less orderly fashion within particular classes of television presentations. All the above assertions, of course, require additional definition and research. It might be stated here, however, that the continued and increased frequency of caricatural elements in television presentations (cross sectional, comparative and cross-cultural research needed here) would seem to be contrary to any idealized versions of television flexibility, malleability or innovativeness, in general, e.g., McLuhan (1965: 308-337). Caricature redefines television and high presence of these satirical elements could lead to rigidity in typing of characters, plots and issues and a certain lack of freedom in rendition of narrative. But for mass audiences, ease of recognition of diverse but limited-in-number types might facilitate receptivity and impact of narrative, across differentiated publics and political boundaries. Certainly, this could be an aid to communication.

But after some period of time of continued caricature of types, in general it would appear that possible satire would lead to degradation of the type, if not the total class of such characters. Repetitive and consistent typing could be a source of television degradation in general, e.g., "Beverly Hillbillies," where characters initially amuse, eventually bore, the viewer.

In a dramaturgical context, however, this may not be so negative in character for television. Certainly, we have implied that caricature and large amounts of caricatural elements do not belong in televised imagery. But caricature in newspaper context/mass press also unmasks. "See," the caricature would seem to say, "This is the way this guy or plot really is. This is the true truth." "And see how funny it is?" "Let's laugh together

at it." Perhaps it is that television could present unique opportunities for staging and control of the limits of credibility by artfully inserting caricatural elements as foils or balance to genre or type presentations, as might now appear to exist piecemeal. In this fashion television not only presents factual and documentary presentations but also amusing and entertaining ones which laugh the actors into the credible court of the viewer, and thus make possible more powerful impact. Factual/informative presentations could lead to entertaining/believable and purely fanciful/innovative imageries without consumer/ viewer doubt or confusion as to contents.

The movies, of course, employ type-casting and caricature as central thematic structures; and movies undoubtedly serve as models for television presentations, of all sorts. And as we have previously stated with reference to Eisenstein, movies have trained "modern" spectators to understand social types and physiognomic expressions. It should be stated here that movies also have trained viewers of television to consume that medium. And if we are to understand and research caricatural elements thoroughly, it must be that movies and television could be seen as coalescing sources of such idiographs. Caricature is seen here as having wended a broken line of development from a playful pursuit of elitist and sometime professional cognoscenti of the fine arts in the sixteenth century to a public communication which has its loci not only in the mass press of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but also in elaborated form in other mass media, such as television, radio and movies.

Exploratory data deserve to be reported here which have some bearing on the above questions of belief and disbelief and entertainment of television presentations in which caricatural elements might be present.

Children Talk About Television

Open-ended interviews carried out in summer of 1970 in two summer day camps, one for boys, 6-12 years-old, the other for girls of the same age, revealed interesting ways in which these children in a preliminary salient fashion defined certain television characters.³ The subjects came from upper middle class backgrounds in one of the wealthiest suburbs in a major metropolitan area. The interviews were conducted with groups of four children each to ascertain in an introductory and casual fashion the way in which children in small groups talked about what they thought, liked and disliked about television presentations. The matter of veridicality of television presentations is relevant here.

In our first attempts to understand what the children were attempting to say about television in the taped interviews we imposed a crude set of criteria apparently used by the children in their assessments of the truthfulness of television presentations. Rationale for these criteria were implied and abstracted, from statements of the children rather than overtly stated, per se. Thus far, at least four criteria have been inducted from readings of the responses to the questions on the credibility of television programs: 1) external verification; 2) internal verification; 3) validation by authority; and 4) dramaturgical interpretation. In the case of external verification, a plot, personage or event is assessed on the basis of the respondents' actual sense experience of the phenomena or aspects of it.

"This guy can concentrate hard and he makes all the people disappear. You can't really do that. You concentrate hard at school."

"We're not goody-goodies like they show in the 'Brady Bunch.'
If they come home, they are never dirty."

The case of internal verification includes rejections of incidents or themes due to lack of consistency or coherence in the patterning of events themselves or patent absurdity.

"I don't believe Mannix. In one show he's dead and when it continues, he's alive."

"I think things they prove--like the National Geographic. They prove it. They prove what they're saying. And some commercials they prove--and I believe when they prove because they prove it in a well way."

The category of validation by authorities includes incidents or themes rejected or accepted as true because they are said to be so by some apparently adult authority.

"You have to believe the commercials unless they are unlawful because the law is that everything has to be true that they put on."

"Some war movies at the end. They say this was true and that these men were so and so."

(Frequently, programs like the "F.B.I.," a dramatized and positive imagery of the Federal U.S.A. law enforcement agency and "Adam 12," the same for a localized urban [Los Angeles] police department are said to be true because it is so stated at the beginning and end of the program.)

The criterion of dramaturgical interpretation represents a case in which the truthfulness of an event, person or plot is based upon the children's incipient awareness of the necessities and conventions of dramatic encounters.⁴

"Like on Mannix. He couldn't do all those things. He's probably got a stunt man. But they always make it.... It couldn't be him

doing all those things. He breaks his arm. He falls off a cliff and the other lady breaks her legs and both arms, and he hardly comes out with one scratch."

In a fifth group of cases, in which the above four criteria seemed inapplicable, children were unable to completely assess veridicality in particular media presentations and their judgment remained open on these issues.

"I'm not sure on some things, 'cos it's hard to tell. Like on Medical Center (a dramatized version of life in a large hospital setting). I watched that one time and this guy was taking drugs--and he kept on sticking drugs in him(self). You can't tell. You really don't know."

Programs mentioned as being believable are almost all those which purport to be documentary or close to it. The most numerous type of programming mentioned as believable were crime dramas based on real incidents. Each of these programs inform the viewer that they are based on events that have really happened. The next most numerous programs mentioned by the children as being believable are those which include news, sports and National Geographic materials. Programs specified as not believable include fantasy productions, cartoons, some commercials, situation comedies, (e.g., "Here's Lucy") and dramatic presentations. A complete report of this and other exploratory materials will be published at a later date. But let us now come back to caricature and expose the above materials in another manner.

The tapes of our interviews are pervaded with childish laughter. And, in fact, the problems of managing such "cluster" interviews were enormous. But the kids, males and females alike, enjoyed television; for them it was entertainment and a means of experiencing fun when there was nothing better to do. The programs that most readily came to their minds when asked about

likes, as opposed to dislikes, were the ones not believable at a ratio of about 2 to 1. And the characters most unbelievable to them were those of a not only stereotypical but also caricatured variety. That is, they were exaggerated and lampooned. They were funny: they also were not believed to be truthful. Rather the children, especially the more sophisticated and verbal among them, consciously realized that many programs are dramatic productions which operated under certain conventions and allowed departure from purely representational (factual) norms of communication. So particular programs may not appear to be faithful to a depiction of reality, but "dramatic license" permits fantasies and situation comedies to depart from reality. Further, this permits caricature to operate in such a manner that characters, issues, plots, are typed for a moment or for repetition for particular purposes. To partially sum here, the most frequently recalled and liked television presentations for these children were unbelievable in nature, contained great freedom of dramatic license and caricatured processes and characters.

The above findings and interpretations are comparable with a recent study which suggested that 40% of "poor" black children and 30% of "poor" white children (compared with 15% of middle class white children) believe that what they see on television represents an accurate portrayal of what life in America is all about.⁵ This finding suggests further that there exists a class mediated discrepancy between what could be called "expectations" and "reality" of children as communicated to them by television, compared to the real world. It may be diagrammed as a triangle with its fairly large base resting on a stratum called "lower class" and its apex penetrating through a stratum called "upper class." That is, there is increasingly less discrepancy between expectations possibly created by

television imagery and reality (world) for middle class children as one proceeds upward in the class structure; and perhaps more discrepancy as one proceeds downward. The structure of the triangle may not be perfect; the designation of the class strata are imperfect. What may be appropriate for television may not be so for other mass media. But to the extent that television could serve as a kind of "paradigm of stereotypes" for mass communication, especially for graphic media, other media would seem to conform to such a triangular shape.

The generally greater disbelief of middle and upper middle class children in television imagery, especially that which contains great degrees of caricatural elements, may be traced to at least two or three sources: 1) inputs of middle class imagery on television; 2) greater socializing opportunities among middle class experiences and 3) critical attitudes. Predominant middle class content in television presentations, especially in situation comedies and some dramatic presentations might seem familiar to middle class kids and easy for them to criticize. In addition, their own experiences ("external verification," above) facilitate this procedure. The probable greater educational background of their parents and questioning attitudes reinforce this stance.

Synecdoches

What we have done is to discuss caricature and its distortions of reality as developed in the mass press in relation to the appearance of caricatural elements in other media in America, such as television and radio. It has been suggested that high frequency of appearances of distorted roles and situations portrayed in these media might lead to viewers' perceptual rigidity in typing of characters in general but might have some positive functions in the media in "unmasking," amusement, innovation and communication

of complicated social types over time. Exploratory research results suggest that upper middle class children find television programs which rely heavily on caricatural elements less believable than patterns of programming which either appear or are stated to be true, such as some commercials, documentaries and science presentations. This finding of apparent awareness of caricatural elements is in general agreement with other research in which it was found that advantaged children were less likely than disadvantaged children to believe that television presented an accurate portrayal of the world around them.

It is difficult to avoid certain queries here concerned with the consequences of caricature for the media within which it appears, the observers and consumers of caricature. No more may be done at this point than to raise some questions which concern these areas, rather than to answer them.

Some researchers distinguish between those media which have a predominantly entertainment function (graphic media) and those which possess a largely informational function (print) (Klapper, 1960). Of course, the two general types of media-vehicles overlap in their functions and most graphic or pictorial imagery appears along with or is explained by discursive speech. But there is no apparent reason not to consider factual presentations as possessing entertainment, even aesthetic, appeal. Or, in other words, the "true" may be the "beautiful." This posture may be contrasted with the stance which suggests that much entertainment depends on absurdity and a departure from purely factual reportage. How, then, does it help us to see the departure in extremis from factual, informational and believable communications, as stereotypical and caricatural? How does the intrusion of caricatural elements possibly transform various media?

Sensitivity to the dimensions of caricatural imagery may be useful for

the assessment of differential claims to truth of various graphic imagery. In the absence of established criteria for the assessment of truth claims (one source of which may be rational scientific methodology) pictorial caricature may be an aid to both the penetration or unmasking of types of figures and structures and an independent measure of reality from a particular vantage point in comparative presentations of imagery. But how would it be possible for consumers and observers of pictorial imageries to employ caricature both as a tool of analysis and possibly for enjoyment? How does consumer reaction in turn affect any continuing elaboration of caricatural imagery in the mass media? Is the presence of caricature increasing in the media? And in what ways does our social structure encourage or enhance the appearance of caricature in the media? If caricature is hieroglyphic or idiographic in nature, viz., "tab-like," without exposing the assumed "real" variations in a character or a process, do increased frequencies of caricatural elements provoke and reciprocate, reinforce, the institutionalization and consequent perpetuation of deceit in society? Do "shorthand" graphic imageries reinforce the "caricatural" communication of each of us to others, e.g., "the intellectual comment" which stands for the scholarly approach and stance; "the literatural presence" which substitutes for the literary preparation; "the objective posture" which stands for the really biased commentator; the "friendly smile" for the manipulator?

A fundamental requirement for ongoing research at this point is a series of systematic content analyses of the appearances of caricature in all graphic media. This would help to stabilize and standardize definitions of caricature and help to determine its presence in the media. Further, such content analysis would aid the construction of various continua of distortion, principal among them being that which details the

variations in distortion from objective pictorial representation to artfully contrived representation. Analyses of particular kinds of imageries peculiar to each medium would help to delineate the kind of "monopoly of subject matter" characteristic of each.

Lastly, what are comparative differences in graphic media content between nations? And with what direction and magnitude do caricatural elements appear in media between nations. How do the chances for the appearance of caricatural elements in the media vary as a function of changes in social structures between nations. These and other questions invite our attention to caricatural imagery in the mass media.

References

- Ashbee, C. R. Caricature. London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1928.
- Bierstedt, R. The social order. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1957.
- Born, W. The nature and history of medical caricature. Ciba Symposia, VI. (November, 1944): 1910.
- Eisenstein, S. Film Form. Ed. and trans. by Jan Leyda, New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1959.
- Katz, E., Lazarsfeld, P. F. Personal influence. New York: The Free Press, 1966.
- Klapp, O. E. Symbolic leaders. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1964.
- Klapper, J. T. The effects of mass communication. New York: The Free Press, 1960.
- Kris, E. Psychoanalytic explorations in art. London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1953.
- Levine, D. No known survivors. Boston: Gambit, Inc., 1970.
- Low, D. Ye madde designer. London: The Studio, Ltd., 1935.
- National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence Progress Report. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969.
- Shibutani, T. Improvised news. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966.
- Streicher, L. H. David Low and the sociology of caricature. Comparative Studies in Society and History, 1965, 8(1), 1-23.
- Streicher, L. H. On a theory of political caricature. Comparative Studies in Society and History, 1967, 9(4), 427-445.

Footnotes

*I am indebted to Norman L. Bonney, Daniel Druckman, Daniel Solomon and Helen W. Streicher for their comments and suggestions.

¹For example, given the same news subject, radio broadcasts may present only a short audio version of the material; television presentations may embellish it with visual "live" materials which may emphasize particular aspects of it; written reports could go more deeply into discursive analysis and interpretation.

²Ernst Kris, (1953: 373-380) Franz Xavier Messerschmidt (1736-1783) was a student at the Academy of Vienna under Matthaus Donner and Jacob Schletterer. He was never on good relations with the Vienna School and lived the life of a hermit at Presbourg. He was famous for his sixty character heads, a few of which are shown in the above reference. The sculptures evoked the contemporary research of Johann Caspar Lavater, Essays on Physiognomy, Designed to Promote the Knowledge and Love and Mankind, trans. Henry Hunter (London: J. Murray, 1789-1798), on the same subject. The sculptures were inspired partially by the theories of Friedrich Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), a Viennese physician, with whom Messerschmidt also was a friend. From Mesmer we get the word "mesmerize" which means "to hypnotize" and the sculptured heads appear to be a partial result of Mesmer's theories which held that a person's expressions could be "frozen" at the command of the hypnotist. The caricaturist, as it were, may be thought to "freeze" the expression on a figure's face, thereby sociologically typing the person with a standard expression and defining character with this mask or hieroglyphic. Political events provide the clinical milieu. But this also suggests that caricatural influence may be based on ad hoc situations and divorced from a socio-cultural legacy or

history of symbols. If we hold this legacy constant or divorce a reading public from it, a certain kind of manipulation and influence may be possible (p. 437).

³We are grateful for the cooperation given by Mr. John Bird, Headmaster, Mrs. Barbara McGivern, Head and Counselors, Summer Day Camp, Ferry Hall School for Girls, Lake Forest, Illinois; and Mr. Walter Hoesel, Headmaster, Mr. Richard W. Montgomery, Director and Counselors, Lake Forest Academy Summer Day Camp, Lake Forest, Illinois, in the accomplishment of the interviews. Our thanks also to our young respondents for their great patience.

⁴Cf. Klapp (1964: 66-100) for an elaboration of the elements of such encounters.

⁵Cf. (National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, 1969).