

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 720

CS 506 899

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 TITLE Toward a Phenomenological-Longitudinal Model of Media Gratification Processes.  
 PUB DATE Oct 89  
 NOTE 43p.; Paper presented at the Conference on Culture and Communication (Philadelphia, PA, October 1989).  
 PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS Audience Response; \*Communication Research; \*Mass Media Use; \*Models; Qualitative Research; \*Research Methodology  
 IDENTIFIERS Communication Theory; \*Uses and Gratifications Research

ABSTRACT

While not dismissing the "uses and gratifications" approach to research, this paper attempts to increase the theoretical and practical utility of gratifications measures by approaching them through a more phenomenological and longitudinal tack. The paper suggests that any "gratification unit" is given a unique meaning by the situated-gratified individual (a phenomenological consideration) and that the very perceptions of such units change as the individual's relationship to the media content develops over time (a longitudinal consideration). Specifically, the paper argues that a longitudinal, processual sensitivity can be achieved through a reorientation to mediated communication. The paper is in six sections, as follows: (1) Introduction; (2) Where We Are vs. Where We Want To Be: The Traditional Model; (3) What's the Use? (discussing problems in the research and depiction of uses in the traditional model); (4) The Interpretive Audience: Gratification as Meaning; (5) A Longitudinal-Relational Approach to Uses and Gratifications Analysis; and (6) Three Uses of Naturalistic Inquiry in Uses and Gratifications Research. One figure is included and 60 references are attached. (Author/SR)

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TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGICAL-LONGITUDINAL  
MODEL OF MEDIA GRATIFICATION PROCESSES

Conference on Culture and Communication  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
October, 1989

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## ABSTRACT

As a theoretical (or at least conceptual) framework, the notion of "uses and gratifications" has guided a significant amount of research into mass media usage. The results of so much of this research have, however, seemed less than satisfying to more than a few critics. It has been suggested that audience members do not actually make "free" choices in regard to media content selections, thus questioning the veridicality of the autonomous active audience that is so central to uses and gratifications. Likewise, operational definitions of "gratifications" have been faulted for their overly simplistic reduction of complex (often highly individualistic) satisfactions into redundant hierarchies of "reasons" for mass media usage. While not completely dismissing the uses and gratifications approach, this paper attempts to increase the theoretical and practical utility of gratifications measures by approaching them through a more phenomenological and longitudinal tack. The central ideas explored involve the suggestion that any "gratification unit" is given a unique meaning by the situated-gratified individual (a phenomenological consideration) and that the very perceptions of such units changes as the individual's relationship to the media content develops over time (a longitudinal consideration).

TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGICAL-LONGITUDINAL MODEL OF  
MEDIA GRATIFICATION PROCESSES

Students of communication are not dissecting a cadaver,  
but are probing the pulsing evolution of meaning  
in a living organism.

Dean C. Barnlund (1962)

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this essay is to (roughly) sketch out a perspective that points towards some possibilities for integrating longitudinal and phenomenological considerations into current thinking about uses and gratification processes.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, we argue that a longitudinal, processual sensitivity can be achieved through a reorientation to mediated communication, an orientation that draws more fundamentally from interpersonal, or relational, rather than mass communication models. We further contend that in order to understand such a relational process it is imperative to adopt a phenomenological stance towards notions of "use" and "gratification," a stance

through which such concepts are explained within situated enactments of ritual and meaning.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the proposals we make should be considered as suggestions, not conclusions. Even in so narrow a domain as uses and gratifications, the fertility of the literature is such that it continues to reproduce itself at a rate faster than can be conveniently, or honestly, accounted for here. But such fertility is not simply an obstacle to exhaustive literature reviews.

Despite a vigorously-expanding data base, the uses and gratifications literature continues, for the most part, to suffer from conceptual problems that are as old as the approach itself. And though the approach is now described as entering into a new phase of theory-building and ideational fruition (Rosengren, Wenner, & Palmgreen, 1985), the value of any new theories will also remain doubtful as long as the more basic concepts that still guide research in this tack are not also re-examined and, hopefully, strengthened.

WHERE WE ARE VS. WHERE WE WANT TO BE:

#### THE TRADITIONAL MODEL

The uses and gratifications model as it applies at the individual level is summarized by Anderson and Meyer (1988) as follows: Some purpose (demand, need, want, desire), conscious or not, initiates some

behavior to serve that purpose. When the use serves the initial purpose, gratifications are gained that heighten the likelihood that should the need again arise, one's solution would be the same. In short, motives for action arise within the individual, direct the individual toward action, and provide the criteria for determining satisfaction.

On a broader societal level, the uses and gratifications model sees the "...demand for media use arising in different life-styles that can be led, rather than the psychologistic explanations of individual purposes" (Anderson & Meyer, p. 0). From this macro-perspective it would follow, therefore, that if a person were upwardly mobile, then certain behaviors (including media use) would be demanded as part of such a life-style.

Another line of uses and gratifications research has begun to examine the relationship between gratifications desired and the gratifications received (e.g., Wenner, 1982). Research to date shows that there is not a one-to-one relationship between gratifications sought and obtained. Because of this, "the purpose-use-gratification chain comes into question" (Anderson & Meyer, 1988, p. 0). Given the absence of this match, it is clear that the process of media use cannot be sufficiently explained by ascribing motives or purposes to each use and assuming that

content accordingly delivers gratifications linked to the purpose.

A final and most important limitation of the uses and gratification perspective as it has evolved is that it is epistemological. As such, it provides no insights into the nature of purposes or uses, how these purposes arise and change over time, how these uses provide gratification, and how such gratifications change over time. The dimension of process is not considered in that uses and gratifications are studied at a fixed point in time with the requisite assumption that the respondent-identified uses and gratifications are quite stable. If stability is absent or if there are changes over time that alter patterns of use and/or perceived gratifications, then the model's explanatory power is considerably weakened.

Despite these concerns, the uses and gratifications perspective has value in that it helps to explain why various media institutions develop and serve consumer demands, how these institutions are shaped by various consumer demands, and how media use follows often-predictable patterns. Conceptually, in fact, this approach draws us into a consideration of auditors in transaction with an audited text. That is precisely where we want to be.

## WHAT'S THE USE?

After reading the results of so many uses and gratifications research efforts, we have often been left wondering, only half-facetiously, "What's the use?" Operational definitions of "use," while internally valid, provide little insight into the infinitely more complex and dynamic usage enacted in naturally-occurring processes of mediated communication (Meyer, Anderson, O'Guinn & Faber, 1982; Swanson, 1979). Most reports of uses have troped use as need rather than action. That is, uses are viewed as indexes of cognitive factors that can explain past, present and future experiences with mediated communication.

In this context, uses and gratifications research poorly realizes preambulatory commitments to increasing our understanding of the "active" audience (Blumer, Katz, & Guervitch, 1974). Moreover, readers of research are commonly dissatisfied with reported uses that, through a startling vagueness, are theoretically impotent. Biocca (1988) argues that efforts at clarifying what is meant by audience activity have led to the development of a metaconstruct that actually resists measurement and specific ation. He contends:

We can see that the concept of active audience defined as cognitive independence,

personal freedom, and imperviousness to influence appears strangely to be both bloated and seemingly anemic and thin. By attempting to cover everything the audience member does, it ends up specifying little and excluding nothing.... In some extreme formulations of the active-passive audience dichotomy, only a corpse propped in front of a television set could be registered as a member of the much scorned 'passive audience' (p. 75).

We essentially agree with Biocca's stance, but would like to specifically suggest that the concept of audience activity has been overly broad because of its reliance upon essentially inactive manifestations of needs. If audience activities were troped within metaphors of action, then perhaps a more provocative construction of the active audience concept might emerge.

In fact, the traditional uses reported often suggest a rather inert audience, at least inasmuch as the nature of reported "activity" is not specified beyond a valencing of need satiation. It is not at all clear, however, if describing the qualities that attract or repel an individual in regard to mediated communication is equivalent to describing the

individual's activities, or uses of mediated communication. To date, the literature of uses and gratifications research is mostly a catalog of outcome gratifications. While the uses of mass communication might result in gratification, the use itself is not explained in the gratification. Simply, there seems to be few actual uses reported in uses and gratifications studies.

The traditional research in this area presents a picture of uses as little more than processes of selection amongst alternative sources of gratification. Selectivity is almost fully the substance of any documented audience action. Of course, individuals do engage in routines of actions that lead to rewards, or gratification. Our point is that only an inspection of the actions and events (behavioral and cognitive) that compose such routines leads to an encounter with human activity. A listing of the rewards that have been or might be achieved only suggests that some activity merely has taken place, or might somehow take place in an amorphous future.

Ironically, less-sophisticated U & G studies do not so much liberate us from determinism and behaviorism as they bind us back to these obsolete theory sets. Consider, for example, Anderson and Meyer's (1988, p. 333) definition of "behaviorism":

A set of older theories in social science that focuses on observable, outcome behaviors and avoids explanations that involve cognitive processes. Directly opposite interpretive theories.

For while the desire has been to substitute cognitive processes for outcome behaviors, uses and gratifications research has generally not specified the content of such cognitive processes. Thus, the data that are derived from this research are still measures of "outcome behaviors." Simply, through a focus upon the selection of response alternatives and, by extension, in the presumed correspondence between those selections and prior media content uses, a quasi-behavioral orientation has directed uses and gratifications conceptualizing. More recent and sophisticated research attempts to overcome this problem, through specification of motivational and attitudinal variables (Babrow, 1988; Babrow & Swanson, 1988; Wenner, 1985). In this way, cognitive events can be modeled, typically through expectancy-value or gratifications sought/gratifications received formulas. Yet, where traditional research has been limited to the outcome activity of reporting media usage or reasons for media usage, newer research is limited to the cognitive activity of explaining such reports. A more

adequate focus would draw us into confrontation with the behavioral and cognitive routines of media uses and gratifications processes. That focus requires inspection of the social actions that constitute audience activity (Anderson & Meyer, 1988).

We see the need for a new body of research that moves away from the ill-conceived idea of an "active audience," and toward a more useful metaphor -- the "interpretive audience" (Lindloff, 1988). This move, broadly considered, focuses upon audience routines in which behavior and cognition are enjoined in the practices of interpretation. The processes of use and gratification are explained in the contexts by which they are evoked and maintained, not within the reified and ahistorical act of selecting from amongst various response alternatives on a survey instrument.

#### THE INTERPRETIVE AUDIENCE:

##### GRATIFICATION AS MEANING

Uses and gratifications research requires, at least theoretically, attention to questions of meaning. In one fashion or another, the central thrust behind research questions is the desire to get at "what does this content, these media, this ritual mean to you, and me?" It is useful, then, to examine the characteristics of meaning, since they ultimately shape the characteristics of a use or a gratification.

Anderson and Meyer (1988, pp. 22-34) consider the achievement of meaning as a process involving at least these salient characteristics:

1) Meanings are constructed within semiotic frames (an interpretive system), of which content is a part. As such, meaning construction is governed by, and embodied within, the interaction between communicants, content and contexts.

2) Meaning is constrained by the content presented inasmuch as a unit of content must limit the meanings that can competently be constructed from it. Content is not, however, a determinant of meaning, though the significance of content is often erroneously dismissed through a failure to examine all of the content in a given communication event. For example, what is said on the television and by those watching the set is part of the entire text that demands examination by the researcher (cf. Crow, 1981; Newcomb, 1984; Wolf, Meyer & White, 1982.)

3) Context significantly guides the construction of meaning(s). Context can be considered in terms of a "semantic frame that contains the rules that enable some and disable other meaning constructions.... a format in which sense making will progress. A format

guides the performance of the communication event, establishes priorities of significance and orders the likelihood of interpretations" (p. 27).

We suggest that the activity that can be fruitfully tapped through a uses and gratifications approach is the activity involved in maintaining an interpretive knowledge of various media processes. This will require a shift from current conceptions of gratification as an epistemological index of satisfaction, to a view of gratification as a meaning, an individual, interpretive value attributed to an act of mediated communication. "Gratifications," then, can be situated as factors in the routines by which audiences make sense of texts. The "use" is then cast within the process of making meaning; the "gratification" is meaning itself.

When gratifications are conceived of as attributions of meaning to some text, then it becomes clear that uses and gratifications research must be designed with sensitivity to the characteristics of meaning, such as those mentioned above. Thus, an orientation towards the experience of gratification should demonstrate that:

- 1) Gratifications are derived within and are empowered through the interactions of content,

communicants and context. Any explication of the gratification concept that is not referenced to such a complex of interactions cannot claim to represent the individual's experience (use) of satisfaction (gratification) with media fare. Most research ruptures the content-communicant-context complex and, as such, provides always partial and often misleading gratification measures.

2) While traditional uses and gratifications researchers correctly argue that meaning (and, thus, gratification) is not delivered in or determined by content, the amputation of content from the practice of interpretation is indefensible (Carragee, 1989; Katz, 1987). Unique textual attributes are associated with unique gratification experiences and, as such, content must be examined as an agent that orders action in communication events and, consequently, as one of the fundamental (and not peripheral) structures by which gratifications are empowered in mediated communication (Kielwasser & Wolf, 1989; Whetmore & Kielwasser, 1983). Researchers still ironically cast themselves as either those who study the audience (uses and gratifications research) or those who study the text (critical researchers). Consequently, we are too familiar with research results that reconcile only

awkwardly (if not falsely) with the individual's mundane media usage as it is lived, wherein no separation of audience from text can ever be made. Gratification, as the result of interpretation, is a gauge of transactions between textual form and audience action, between content and consciousness. More researchers should directly inspect the site of those transactions (Deming, 1988; Rimmon-Kenon, 1983).

3) Additionally, gratifications should be understood with reference to the entire text of a communication event, not just the text of a mass medium. For example, a gratification (positive evaluation) associated with a particular TV program must be understood as an evaluation of not just the program content, but also of the content of any talk, thoughts or other social actions that surround the media fare. Satisfaction or disaffection with television, then, must be understood as satisfaction or disaffection with the contents of the ecology in which the activity of "doing television" gets done.

Basically, by placing the notion of gratification within various concepts associated with meaning formation and the performance of interpretation, a bridge is formed between traditional (epistemological)

and nontraditional (phenomenological) operationalizations. Crossing such a bridge, we might at least come to an understanding of what given gratifications signify within larger contexts of social action and, indeed, what these gratifications mean to the individuals for whom they are of a purported significance.

Moreover, by locating gratifications as empowered elements in the communication event, definitions of gratification arise in at least three contexts, all of which are viewed in relation to the total text of the event under analysis (see figure 1). Grossly, gratification processes are examined within the largest context of the gratification field, which constitutes the context of a specified communication event (cf. Lewin, 1935). This field links various sources and attributions associated with reported (unobservable) and observed uses and gratifications. Certain clusters of gratifications can be organized into a group, along a variety of dimensions. For example, certain sorts of gratifications may be apprehended only by persons who have had a long-standing relationship with a particular television series, and are thus unique to specific contexts of interpretation (Kielwasser & Wolf, 1989). Finally, a decidedly micro perspective can be adopted to identify very specific gratification units or events within a given gratification field. These units could

correspond to specific elements in a television text and/or to specific units of interpersonal discourse during television viewing (Wolf, Meyer & White, 1982).

The ultimate value of this scheme is not so much in the categories it provides, however, but in the demand it makes for a synthesis of various, very dynamic avenues by which gratifications arise, are recognized, are changed, and perhaps fade away within the interpretive practices of media audiences. At the very least, the scheme urges a connection between text-based messages (gratification units) and auditor-based routines of interpretation (gratification fields). Clusters of gratifications (groups) certainly depend for arrangement upon the development of patterned interactions between the field and its constituent units. Most simply stated, the source of meaning can be attributed neither to the auditor (A) or the text (T), but only (at least, ultimately) to the relationship that is forged and maintained between the two; (A + T) is the unit of analysis needed in U & G research.

#### A LONGITUDINAL-RELATIONAL APPROACH TO USES AND GRATIFICATIONS ANALYSIS

A wide range of researchers are advancing the position that many features of mediated communication can be understood through the use of traditionally

interpersonal models (e.g., Kielwasser & Wolf, 1989; Perse & Rubin, 1989; Pfau, 1989; Reardon & Rodgers, 1988; Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Notably, the individual's relationship to certain mass media, ubiquitously and persistently present over periods of the life-cycle share characteristics associated with interpersonal relationships.

Many mass media are uniquely situated in the individual's daily life; these media are familiar elements that cut across a number of quotidian rituals. The persistent historical presence of specific programs, technologies or characters is seldom evaluated in uses and gratifications research. Thus, the dynamic qualities of an individual's relationship to the content under analysis are seldom considered. Yet, just as interpersonal relationships evolve and devolve, escalate and deescalate, relationships with various mediated realities (programs, genres, characters, etc.) form along equally dynamic lines.

Significantly, the varieties of uses and gratifications associated with an individual's relationship to a television series will change over time, as that relationship changes. In certain instances, the nature of that change determines the sorts of gratifications associated with the program's content (Kielwasser & Wolf, 1989). It strikes us as exceedingly curious that so intuitive a position --

that an individual's interpretation of a given TV series will change over time, as the individual gains more experience with the content - has not been seriously considered within the uses and gratifications perspective. More curious still, this perspective has often adopted the counterintuitive stance, in which gratifications and uses are seen as essentially stable variables. When attempts are made to explain gratification/use changes, such explanations are usually made in reference to changes in the individuals life-style, age, education, or some other factor presumed to exist apart from the historicized context in which content is naturally interpreted. It is not only the person who changes over time, but the relationship between person and text, especially when the text is encountered over a lengthy period (as in soap opera viewing).

Because the substance of the program-person relationship changes over time, the uses and gratifications that are associated with that relationship must also change. A longitudinal approach, focused upon these change processes, should occupy the attention of U & G researchers. Charting the evolution of the uses of mediated communication is, after all, a task for which uses and gratifications researchers are quite prepared, conceptually if not methodologically. This research might, at last, allow

researches access to the very audience activity they have always sought, but which has heretofore eluded them.

We need to demonstrate greater sensitivity to the fact that gratifications and uses must vary across contexts (phenomenologically) and over time (longitudinally), as we have argued. Given this dynamic, we must then become sensitive to variations in the experience of gratification that might not be explicable through a listing of more-or-less logical uses. An auditor can make many meanings out of a text at one time, and these meanings need not cohere in an obviously logical way. Likewise, changes in such meanings over time need not follow a singular course. The traditional uses attributed to mass mediated texts -- either as gratification or motivation -- are still more logical than not. They restrict reports of experience to logical groupings and exclusive categories. Yet, the very experience of mediated communication need not be "logical." One's uses of the media exist at numerous levels, which can be logically (though not phenomenologically) contradictory. "Everywhere the tessellated surfaces and plural textures of contemporary popular culture, " Hebdige points out, "require us to remain alert to possibility and contradiction" (1988, p. 211). A longitudinal-phenomenological model for uses and

gratifications research would help ensure that this much-needed alertness is not further dulled.

### THREE USES OF NATURALISTIC INQUIRY IN USES AND GRATIFICATIONS RESEARCH (OR, A SUMMARY OF SORTS)

Uniting the suggestions we have provided in this paper is a desire to see the procedures of naturalistic inquiry brought into the service of the goals of the uses and gratifications perspective. The methods of naturalistic inquiry -- sometimes classed as phenomenological empiricism, qualitative analysis, ethnography, or field work -- have found increasing acceptance within mass communication studies (Anderson, 1987; Christians & Carey, 1981; Dahlgren, 1983; Lindlof, 1987; Lull, in press, 1988, 1985, 1976; McCain, 1982; Meyer, Traudt & Anderson, 1980; Traudt, 1981; Traudt, Anderson & Meyer, 1987; Wolf, 1984; Wolf & Kielwasser, 1989). This emerging tradition stands to further invigorate many entrenched research perspectives, including uses and gratifications.

The first main area where uses and gratifications research stands to profit from the advantages offered by naturalistic audience inquiry is the accurate documentation and measurement of patterns of media use and media-related behaviors. Many scholars continue to point out that media use does not constitute a simple act or behavior, nor is it easily understood or

measured.

Consider the deceptively simple notion of amount of time spent watching television (generally, or in regard to specific content or programs). The question, "On a typical weekday, how much television do you watch?" makes a number of critical assumptions that very likely rule out accuracy of measurement or certainly confuse the construct of "time spent watching TV." The question assumes that the respondent in fact knows what it means to "view" television (i.e., what counts or does not count as "watching") that the respondent knows the answer, that the respondent is prepared to answer the question, that the respondent, even if given sufficient time to think about what information is called for in the question, is capable of providing an even remotely accurate answer, and that the respondent will make a sincere and thoughtful assessment before coming up and out with an answer. And, if the question provides the respondent with pre-determined categories (e.g., less than one hour, 1 - 2 hours, etc.), then the respondent is able to give a satisfactory answer without appearing to be ignorant or incompetent. Now, if the researcher's concern is to accurately determine the actual amount of television viewed in a given time period, then the methodology fails miserably. Unless a viewer participates in a ratings system that systematically monitors and

accurately records certain aspects of the individual's viewing behaviors, the person can only hazard a guess. Obviously such guesses would be fraught with inaccuracies. Moreover, these inaccuracies can be neither quantified nor correctly labeled as under- or overestimates. Thus, what appears to be a straightforward question (similar to ones asked in viewing surveys) turns out to be a question which produces unreliable and misleading answers.

Naturalistic inquiry seems especially useful for identifying media usage that may escape the notice and conscious awareness of the individuals performing the behaviors. For example, a woman may go through a regular weekday ritual of coming home from work and, after briefly greeting household members, will settle down to read the newspaper before having dinner (perhaps the newspaper reading waits until after she's made dinner and eaten). During the time she reads the newspaper an implicit rule may be in operation: barring an emergency, no one disturbs Mom when she's reading the newspaper. Now if you ask Mom why she reads the newspaper every night when she gets home from work, she might give you a number of predictable, conventional answers. But these answers might represent only part of the reasons or none of the reasons why she "really" reads the paper. Being "informed about what's going on" may be one reason for reading the paper; it may

also be what sounds like a socially-desirable response that will make her "look good" (cf. Kielwasser & Wolf, 1988). She might be effectively unaware of the fact that she uses the time with the newspaper to avoid having to deal with household members, a kind of transition from the interaction demands of the workplace to the interaction demands of the household. While participant-observation would note the operation of the "don't disturb Mom" rule, and the effect that observance apparently has on Mom's state of mind, it is not likely that Mom would tell a researcher that one of the reasons she reads the paper is to avoid talking to her family. Naturalistic observation would likely reveal an unexpected purpose that is served by reading the newspaper. Similarly, a person's decision to watch TV instead of conversing with a spouse would ordinarily not produce the response that "I watch TV mostly to avoid talking with my husband." The point is that such reasons are in operation but are not likely accessible through commonly used research methods that ask standardized questions in search of standardized answers. Naturalistic inquiry provides accessibility to many dimensions of behavior that other methods miss completely or barely acknowledge.

A second main benefit of integrating naturalistic inquiry into media uses and gratifications is the ability of naturalistic methods to observe and monitor

complex processes over time. While participant-observation has some significant limitations in this regard (Lindlof & Meyer, 1987; Anderson & Meyer, 1988), the procedures increase the likelihood that complex processes can be monitored and interpreted at least in part. For example, a family could be observed over a period of time that covers a period prior to purchasing a VCR, just after purchase, and after varying lengths of time have elapsed and the family gets used to having the VCR available. In this way, some of the impact of the VCR on the family and its daily behaviors could be assessed and explored within the context of daily family life. While survey questionnaires could attempt to elicit some of the same information, such procedures would be very limited by the inability of the researcher to anticipate the context in which a given individual would make use of the VCR and to have a sense of what family life was like before purchase, immediately after purchase, and "down the road." Moreover, since most people are not accustomed to systematically monitoring daily behavioral rituals (e.g., watching TV), their ability to recall how TV viewing patterns had been affected by the purchase and subsequent use of a VCR would also be minimal or non-existent. At best, answers would be very general or merely represent a wild guess.

A third benefit of naturalistic methods in

studying uses and gratifications is the opportunity for richly-detailed descriptions of the nature of how media are used and how, indeed if, gratifications from such behaviors are perceived by consumers. As mentioned previously, one of the main criticisms of the uses and gratifications model is its focus on epistemological issues to the exclusion of ontological and praxiological dimensions. Scholars in communication and in other fields have long argued that epistemological questions are appropriate only when there is some consensus on the nature of the phenomena being studied and how these phenomena appear to operate (answering questions of "What is it that's going on here?" and "How does it get done?"). Questions of why something occurs are therefore inextricably tied to an accurate description of what is being studied and how it works. And, epistemological arguments hinge on at least some core of agreement regarding the nature of the phenomena -- what they are and how they operate. Only when an accurate description has been constructed and agreed upon can scholars direct their subsequent research efforts to clarifying and determining the answers to epistemological questions.

Naturalistic inquiry affords researchers the opportunity to produce thick descriptions of the "what" and "how," dimensions that are either assumed to be generally understood or are only superficially treated

as preliminary to the presentation of statistically verifiable hypotheses that are generated from theories developed to explain what occurs and why. Through the study of situated individuals (Anderson & Meyer, 1988), naturalistic methods can provide a basis for establishing various contexts in which research variables and relationships of interest can be identified and described. Such outcomes could then profitably be used to construct more standardized questions for use in traditional survey research across a sample of individuals or households (depending upon the particular unit of analysis).

To summarize, naturalistic methods of researching media uses and gratifications have a great deal to contribute to our understanding of the meanings linked to media usage; this is one avenue for accessing the interpretations and evaluations made by individuals using mass media. First, naturalistic methods allow for greater accuracy in documentation and measurement of patterns of media use and media-related behaviors, including many that seemingly operate without the user's awareness. Second, naturalistic inquiry allows researchers the opportunity to observe and monitor complex behavioral processes over time -- both a processual and longitudinal orientation. And third, naturalistic methods provide the opportunity for researchers to produce richly-detailed descriptions of

the nature of how media are used and how (or if) gratification from such behaviors are perceived by consumers. The uses and gratifications model needs to move beyond the superficial representation of complex underlying processes and rituals governing media use and consequences. Naturalistic research can provide the depth and detail essential to the growth and elaboration of the uses and gratification model.

With as much excitement as dread, mass communication scholars increasingly acknowledge that the sites of "effects" are inexorably entwined within the predicaments of interpretation. In the human ways of constructing meaning, all theories of mass communication must be grounded. The semiotic-semantic activities of the being-in-interpretation -- of the situated person -- are the activities of the active audience. These social actions are, as such, the activities by which uses and gratifications are made possible. To use is to somehow anticipate understanding; to be gratified is to have somehow understood. As researchers, we commit to the tasks of seeking disclosure of how the suspicion and completion of understanding proceeds. Studies of sociogenic and psychogenic factors in mass communication are disturbingly implicit in recognizing that such factors are derived through performances of interpretation, through the creation of meaning. Still, the rather

doctrinaire reliance upon "semio-genic" factors in much critical research does not alleviate this problem, as it poses a problem of its own.

Constructed readings of texts, produced in critical research, do offer an exhilarating array of meanings and interpretational strategies (e.g., Eco, 1980; Berger, 1984; Smach, 1990; Kaplan, 1983; Kuhn, 1985). Yet, such readings usually occur for that reader (or perhaps some canonical audience), and are not precisely reflective of the social actions by which auditors mundanely come to understand texts.<sup>3</sup> It is as obvious as ever, and perhaps more so, that researchers must seek ever-creative methodologies through which to explain both the noumena and the phenomena of mass communication. So again, a convergence of the critical and the empirical is an exigency for communication scholarship at all levels of inquiry (Katz, 1983, 1987). Moving toward a phenomenological-longitudinal model of media gratification processes will help to achieve this urgent integralism.

## Notes

1. For some discussion of phenomenological praxis, see Bogdan and Taylor (1975), Davis (1971), Deetz (1981), Schutz (1967), and Traudt, Anderson and Meyer (1987). To say that there exists a diverse range of opinion on just what constitutes phenomenology is an obvious understatement. We particularly like Deetz's (1981) notion of phenomenology as a "radical empiricism." In practice, phenomenologically-based research seeks, always, the avenues for return to "things-in-themselves" -- lived experiences, naturally occurring processes, and so on. Also, this philosophy comprehends that the realities that matter most to the individual are his or her own. Thus, the researcher seeks to expose how individuals explain the world to themselves. Research is designed to disclose such explanations (by observation or interrogation). Such explanations (ideally, of social actions) are, for the phenomenologically-sensitive analyst, the data of primary interest (cf. Znaniecki, 1936).

2. Many of the terms used in this essay differ in meaning across various analytical contexts (e.g., "situated," "empowered," "interpretive knowledge,"

"performance," and so on). Here, in general, we adhere to the definitions of such terms provided by Anderson & Meyer (1988).

3. Just two important exceptions: Morley (1980, 1986); Radway (1984a, 1984b, 1986). See also, Lindlof and Grodin (1989).

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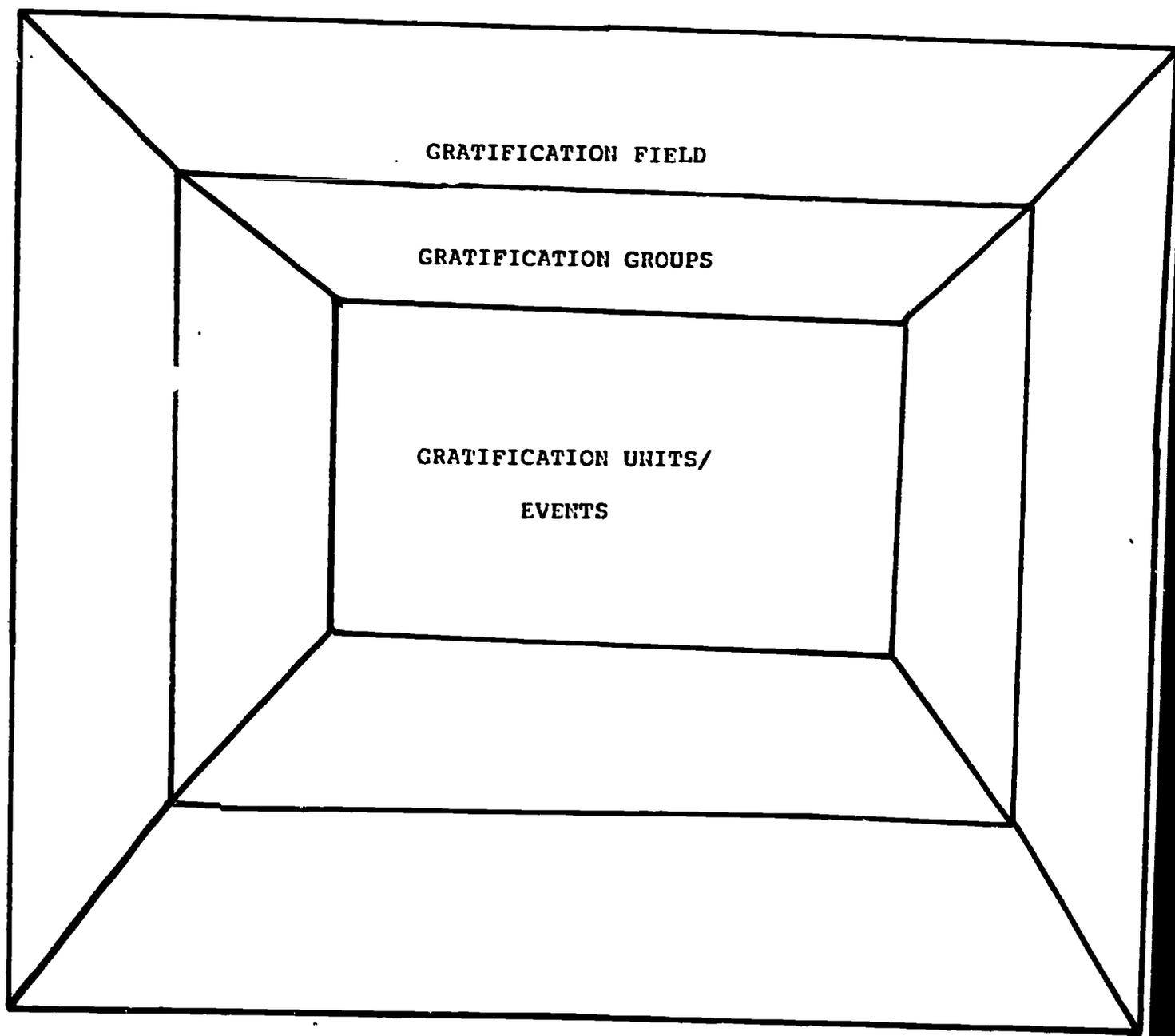


Figure 1