

THE JOURNAL LOOKS AT A PROFILE OF VIOLENCE

This is a summary of a series of Violence Profiles, of which this is No. 7, of trends in Network television drama and viewer conceptions of social reality from 1967 to 1975. The full Technical Report, conducted by The Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, was written by George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael F. Eleey, Suzanne Fox, Marilyn Jackson Beeck and Nancy Signorielli.

Americans live much of their lives in the world of television drama. Children and adults alike are exposed to vivid patterns of the facts of life in that world. What are those facts, especially with regard to the context, structure, and functions of violence, and what lessons do children and adults derive from their exposure to those facts?

These are the basic questions addressed in the research that yields the Violence Profile. Trends in network television drama and the conceptions of social reality that viewing tends to cultivate in the minds of viewers are studied in a continuing project called Cultural Indicators. The research is designed to provide annual indicators of television content and effects.

The current season's Violence Profile is the first to report a special comparison of trends during the so-called family hour (for practical purposes 8 to 9 p.m. EST) and other hours of programming including late evening and weekend daytime (children's) program hours. The research is based on the observations of trained analysts coding videotaped samples of each season's programming since 1967, and on surveys of child and adult viewers conducted since 1973.

The Violence Profile consists of measures of (1) the programming context in which dramatic violence occurs, (2) the composite counts of the prevalence, rate, and roles of violence that make up the Violence Index, (3) the structure of power in the world of television drama as indicated by the different risks of violence and victimization for different groups in the fictional population, and (4) the extent to which television cultivates its own view of social reality as reflected in the responses of light and heavy viewers to questions related to the message of violence on television but applied in the real world.

The critical aspect of programming is the proportion of "action programs" which contribute most violence to the world of television drama.

Our indicators show that such programs comprise more than half of all prime-time and week-end daytime cartoon programming, and their proportion of the total has not changed much in recent years. In fact, while general (non-cartoon) crime and adventure plays dropped from their 1974 high of 62 percent to 54 percent in 1975, cartoon crime and adventure rose in the same period from 47 percent to 66 percent of all cartoons.

These programming trends foreshadow the violence findings that follow. We can summarize them by noting that there has been *no significant reduction*

in the overall Violence Index despite some fluctuations in the specific measures and a definite drop in "family hour" violence, especially on CBS, in the current season. The "family hour" decline has been matched by a sharp increase in violence during children's (weekend daytime) programming in the current season and by an even larger 2-year rise in violence after 9 p.m. EST.

Similar information provided separately by each network, shows that late evening violence shot up on all three networks in the past two or three years (with minor dips on CBS and ABC in 1975), and that children's (weekend daytime) programs became more violent on ABC and NBC in the past season. A direct comparison of the Violence Index for all hours for each network, shows remarkable long-term stability and similarity among them. A direct comparison of the "family hour" Violence Index for each network, shows little change over a two-year period for ABC and NBC, but a substantial reduction for the second year in a row for CBS.

The indicators reflected in the Violence Index are clear manifestations of what network programmers actually do as compared to what they say or intend to do. While our data permit many specific qualifications to any generalization that might be made, it is safe to say that network policy seems to have responded in narrow terms, when at all, to very specific pressure, and only while the heat was on. After nine years of investigations, hearings, and Commissions (or since we have been tracking violence on television), eight out of every ten programs (nine out of every ten weekend children's hour programs) still contain some violence. The overall rate of violent episodes, 5.6 per play, is, if anything, highest on record. (The violence saturation of weekend children's programs declined from the 1969 high but increased from its 1974 low to 16 per hour, double that of overall programming. Between six and seven out of every ten leading characters (eight and nine for children) are still involved in some violence. Between one and two out of every ten are still involved in killing. Reductions have been achieved in the portrayal of on-screen killers (especially during weekend children's hours) and in "family hour" violence (especially by CBS), but, as we have noted, a sharp rise in late evening and general children's violence has canceled out any overall gains from the latter.

The most elementary—and telling—relationship involved in violent action is that of violent and victim. The pattern of those who inflict and those who suffer violence (or both) provides a differential calculus of life chances for different groups of people in the world of television drama.

The 1967-75 totals of our summary show 1.19 male and 1.32 female victims for every violent male and female. Even more striking are the differential risks or fatal victimization. There were nearly two male killers for every male killed; however, for every female killer one woman was killed.

The summary also shows the differential risks of involvement and victimization attributed to other groups, projecting assumptions about social and power relations. Old men, married men, lower class, foreign, and nonwhite males were

most likely to get killed rather than to inflict lethal injury. "Good guys" were of course most likely to be the killers.

Among females, more vulnerable than men in most categories, both young and old women as well as unmarried, lower class, foreign, and nonwhite women bore especially heavy burdens of relative victimization. Old, poor, and black women were shown *only* as killed and never as killers. Interestingly, "good" women, unlike "good" men, had no lethal power, but "bad" women were even more lethal than "bad" men. (The victimization of the "good" woman is often the curtain-raiser that provokes the hero to righteous "action.")

The pattern of relative victimization is remarkably stable from year to year. It demonstrates an invidious (but socially functional) sense of risk and power. We do not yet know whether it also cultivates a corresponding hierarchy of fear and aggression. But we do have evidence to suggest that television viewing cultivates a general sense of danger and mistrust. That evidence comes from the final element of the Violence Profile, the component we call the Cultivation Differential.

The Cultivation Differential is the difference in the pattern of responses between light and heavy viewers of television, with age, sex, education, and newspaper reading controlled. Child and adult samples are asked questions about social reality that relate to the "facts" television presents in its own particular way. The difference between light viewers (usually watching 2 hours or less a day) and heavy viewers (usually watching 4 hours or more a day) giving the "television version" of two divergent answers is the Cultivation Differential indicating the "biasing" effects of exposure to television drama.

The Violence Profile's Cultivation Differential shows heavy viewers significantly overestimating (compared to light viewers in the same age, sex, education, and reader categories) the extent of violence and danger in the world. Their heightened sense of fear and mistrust is manifested in their typically more apprehensive responses to questions about their own personal safety, about crime and law enforcement, and about trust in other people.

Children exhibit the same patterns as adults, but the "under 30" or "television generation" is even more imbued with the television view of life than the "over 30" generation — the last to grow up without television. Education makes a difference, as does regular newspaper reading, but heavy viewing of television tends to counter these other cultural influences even within the college and news reader groups.

The facts of life in the world of television drama—a violent world and a mean world—seem to be reflected in the conceptions of heavy viewers about social reality. This is particularly true of the young and less educated viewers.

Future reports will be able to show whether these conceptions can also reflect changes in television programming, if any, that may occur in the years ahead.