

2/2/81

TO: Dr. Gerbner

FROM: Michael

RE: NBC revision of "Television and Aggression"

Although their conclusions (TV has no effect on aggression whatsoever) are the same as in the prior draft, the paper itself is substantially improved. It provides much more information about samples, data, analysis strategies, etc.

There are still numerous points of disagreement, conceptual and analytical decisions which are vague or confused or problematic. But in fairness to them, it is worth noting that their "burden of proof" is much greater than would be applied to this study if it came out of a university. No one will be surprised by the results, given the source. Yet, they have done an admirable job of keeping their bases covered, achieving credibility, and maintaining an empirical rigor, far beyond what is usually expected of a social science write-up.

Reservations and objections about the appropriateness of some of their measures still hold, particularly for TV violence exposure, but it is obviously too late to do anything about it. I still think that some of the analyses are backwards, such as controlling for intermediate TV viewing, but that is still here.

Various threats to the validity of their inferences still remain as well. They address panel bias in a limited way, and do not mention the possibility of sensitization, or the effects of repeated testing. They still report the results of averaged correlations. Entering interaction terms along with main effects (p.59) is troublesome. They demonstrate that other factors do influence aggression scores (a kind of predictive validity), but do not deal with whether the TV measures predict anything. The fact that they could not get a good measurement model for the aggression scores (p.56, footnote **) should raise some eyebrows.

A minor point: (p. 24, footnote *). They are quite justified in not using our Violence Index to measure the respondents' exposure to violence vis-a-vis the selected programs. But the reason (the only reason) should be that it is not designed to provide information about specific programs or series. The jabs at "accidents," "acts of nature," etc. are gratuitous.

The most conservative interpretation of their findings is that frequent exposure to some programs the public rates as violent, selected from about "half of the average child's viewing" (p. 26), has no effect on the tendency to be selected as violent by peers, among those who remained in the panel (and who were less aggressive than drop-outs). If they go through with their pledge to make the data available to others, we may someday get a different answer.

Michael