DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 189 668 CS 502 978

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TITLE Viewer Definitions of Violence.
PUB DATE May 80
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (Acapulco, Mexico, May 18-23, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; Attitudes; Communication Research; Content Analysis; *Evaluation Criteria; *Programing (Broadcast); *Television Research; *Television Viewing; *Violence

ABSTRACT

Segments of primetime and Saturday morning television programing were viewed by 225 people who then reported what criteria they used to assess violence on commercial and public television. The subjects also provided data on their visual media experience, their viewing habits, their viewing attitudes, and demographic characteristics. The subjects ranged in age from 15 to 59 years, with about two-thirds of them in the 15 to 18 and 19 to 22 age ranges. The results suggested four major criteria for evaluation of television violence: humor, credibility, empathy, and verbal abuse. Age, sex, family orientation toward television, attitude against televised violence, visual experience, and parental status related to how the various criteria were used. The sample as a whole and parents in particular rated cartoons low in violence. A pattern developed in which viewers professed more concern about program quality than about televised violence. This preoccupation with quality indicated that training people to be more sophisticated viewers of television might reduce their emotional reactions to televised violence.
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VIEWER DEFINITIONS OF VIOLENCE

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VIEWER DEFINITIONS OF VIOLENCE

In the past decade considerable pressure has been directed toward the FCC, networks and advertisers to remove what anti-TV-violence groups view as harmful violence. Activist arguments often refer to social science research on the relation between televised violence and aggressive behavior. Although most researchers in this area attempt to specify their own definitions of what constitutes violence, two definitions are most frequently cited by citizen activists: that of George Gerbner's Cultural Indicators Project:

> Violence is defined as the overt expression of physical force (with or without a weapon) against self or other, or compelling action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually hurting or killing. Must be plausible and credible; no idle threats, verbal abuse, or gestures with no credible violent consequences. May be intentional or accidental; violent accidents, catastrophes, acts of nature are included.[1]

and that of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting:

> The definition of a violent action . . . is: violence with guns: includes gun fight, gun threat, and shooting at a person. Personal physical violence: includes beating, strangling, manhandling, fistfighting, or inflicting wound, stab, attempted drowning, and attempted suicide. Capital episodes: includes killing, kidnapping, and suicide.[2]

Various objections may be raised to these definitions, as both ignore differences in program genre, quality, and degree of abuse. Also, both ignore verbal aggression, even though it could be as devastating as some types of physical harm. David Blank, Vice President and Chief Economist

with CBS, Inc., has additional objections to the Gerbner definition:

> Gerbner includes a number of kinds of dramatic action which clearly ought not to be included in a count of violence. Thus, he includes comic violence (e.g. a custard pie in the face on an "I Love Lucy' program), and injuries caused by accidents or acts of nature (e.g. injuries occurring in earthquakes or hurricane). None of these, we think, are included in what reasonable citizens would consider to be potentially harmful dramatic forms.[3]

The following study is designed as a first step in finding out what "reasonable" citizens consider to be violence.

Most studies have not addressed the question of <u>what</u> viewers regard as violent, but instead, have concentrated on <u>how much</u> violence various groups of viewers see on TV. Viewers most frequently have been categorized according to age and sex. Age has been a consistent factor in differing perceptions of degree of television violence. For example, Murray, Cole and Feller[4] found dissimilar teenage and adult perceptions. Greenberg and Gordon[5] found differences between older and younger viewers. Abel and Beninson[6] found children perceive more violence than their mothers.

Findings on sex are less conclusive. While Greenberg and Gordon[7] found differences in the perceptions of men and women, Abel and Beninson[8] and Hayes[9] found no sex differences in the perception of televised violence by children. Greenberg and Gordon also have explored the variables of race and class,[10] and TV critics vs. the general public.[11]

With a few exceptions[12] data have been gathered by asking subjects to rate the violence in recalled, not immediately-observed, programs. Further, definitional differences have been described only as perceptions

of more or less violence. In reference to their own research, Greenberg and Gordon said:

> This study begs the question of what it is in the programs that is being perceived as violent. . . . The content clues used by the viewers have not been studied elsewhere, nor has the present research served to clarify such issues.[13]

Two studies have made a beginning in the direction indicated above. First, in 1972 the BBC Audience Research Department surveyed approximately 1000 households and conducted discussion groups to define what viewers perceive to be violent on television.[14] They found that viewers identify violence more often when it is factual, realistic, takes place in a familiar setting, the victim is the underdog, the aggressive action is seen as unwarranted, when there is an element of surprise, and when the action is unpunished. The study was based upon recalled material. In the second study Hayes[15] showed children either a realistic or a comic cartoon. The cartoons contained what he regarded as equal amounts of aggressive action. He found that children perceived the comic cartoon as more violent. He did not, however, find out why.

Given the context of past research, this study addresses four questions:

1. What criteria do viewers use to define TV violence?
2. Which viewers use which criteria?
3. Are viewer criteria related to degree of perceived violence?
4. Which viewers observe more or less televised violence?

METHOD

Subjects

Under perfect conditions, a representative group of subjects would reflect the SES characteristics of a population under study. However, the nature of our inquiry made strict random selection impractical. For example, people under age fifteen could not be included due to potential psychological harm; logistics of the study precluded use of an unbiased adult sample because subjects had to be assembled in a central location; adequate variation in racial and cultural characteristics could not be achieved in the context of our geographic area. Thus, we settled for as much diversity as was possible among high school, community college, and university students. As the community college and university groups included fewer older people than expected, we added some local PTA members.

Subjects range from tenth grade students (age 15+) to older students and PTA members (maximum reported age 59, some subjects appeared older). Family income was not checked but the nature of the institutions involved indicates a wide socio-economic range. Finally, in each group females outnumber males. Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Method

We used a forty-five minute color videotape showing segments extracted from primetime and Saturday morning dramatic TV programming (serious, comedy, animated, and fantasy drama). All segments were recorded in the fall of

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SUBJECTS

		N	%
Age	15-18	71	32
	19-22	77	34
	23-26	21	9
	27-59	29	12
	Not Reported	27	12
Sex	Male	87	39
	Female	118	52
	Not Reported	20	9
Group	High School	60	27
	Community College	114	51
	University	40	18
	PTA	11	5
Married (or lives with significant other)	Yes	58	26
	No	146	65
	Not Reported	21	9
Has Children	Yes	31	14
	No	176	78
	Not Reported	18	8
Total N		225	

1978 using the following procedure. First, all dramatic programming for one evening and one Saturday morning was recorded for each network (ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS). Second, this initial program selection was examined and a grid devised for a reasonably exhaustive array of types of violence, i.e., any actions that viewers might possibly label violent. Third, grid slots were filled as completely as possible from programs already recorded and from additional programs recorded in similar fashion over the following two months. Enough of the program's context was retained to make the segment action readily understood.

During this process we discovered two program biases: 1) people on TV rarely die by natural causes; rather, they are done in by other people or their own wickedness; and 2) actual death scenes are almost never shown. For these reasons and also because comedies and cartoons are unlikely to contain certain actions, some of our grid slots remained empty. Table 2 presents the potential-violence grid. For the reader's convenience, this table also incorporates statistical information and plot descriptions. These data will be mentioned throughout this report.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The final videotape comprised forty-seven violent segments (three practice items and forty-four test items). For the ease of subjects, ten-second tape intervals with written and aural numbers of up-coming segments were inserted. A second, reversed-order tape was constructed to counteract order effects. Half the subjects saw Tape 1, half Tape 2. A

TABLE 2: VIEWER-DEFINED TELEVISION VIOLENCE GRID

	Action	Serious Drama (S) Item # Mean SD V* D** Program and plot	Comedy Drama (C) Item * Mean SD V* D** Program and plot	Fantasy Drama (F) Item # Mean SD V* D** Program and plot	Animated Stories (A) Item # Mean SD V* D** Program and plot
	Kill/die				
1	with weapon by other person death certain	S1 4.77 .53 V44 D2 Masterpiece Theater I Claudius (woman gets head chopped off by sword)	----------	F1 3.82 .90 V42 D24 Star Trek (man killed by giant spear in back)	----------
2	with weapon by other person death in doubt	S2 3.57 .92 V38 D28 Papillon (hero shot with blow darts)	C2 3.71 .79 V41 D15 Ripping Yarns (a prisoner of war shoots fellow prisoner)+	----------	A2 2.07 .93 V15 D29 Bugs Bunny (Bugs fights alligator under water)
3	without weapon by other person	S3 3.70 .92 V40 D27 Charlie's Angels (woman electrocuted in bath)	----------	F3 3.08 1.03 V34 D40 Star Trek (monster attacks man)	----------
4	accidentally by other	----------	----------	F4 3.15 .95 V36 D33 Ripping Yarns (a woman blows up a shipful of people)+	----------
5	self-inflicted (suicide or accident)	S5 3.55 1.08 V37 D43 Hawaii 5-0 (man jumps off high building)	----------	----------	A5 2.88 .98 V30 D36 Johnny Quest (villain accidentally crashes own plane)

TABLE 2 (continued)

6	natural causes or accident	----------	----------	F6 2.14 1.06 V17 D41 Ripping Yarns (old man dies)+	A6 2.14 1.02 V17 D38 Bugs Bunny (coyote seems to get blown up)
	Hurt/physical				
7	with weapon by other	S7 4.00 .93 V43 D29 Summer of My German Soldier (father beats daughter with belt)	C7 1.81 .74 V10 D8 Laverne and Shirley (Laverne hits Shirley with rolled paper)+	F7 3.07 .95 V33 D32 The Hulk (Hulk pins man on wall with a pole)	A7 2.29 .85 V24 D17 Tom and Jerry (Jerry sets Tom's foot on fire)
8	without weapon by other	----------	C8 1.95 .79 V13 D13 The Jeffersons (George kicks man in pants)+	F8 2.26 .79 V21 D14 The Hulk (man pinches hero's neck, knocks out)	A8 2.19 .88 V19 D20 Daffy Duck (Porky Pig substitutes Daffy for car motor)
9	accidentally by other	----------	C9 2.44 1.01 V26 D37 Carol Burnett (man is blown up)+	----------	----------
10	self-inflicted	S10 3.59 1.08 V39 D42 Papillon (man cuts knee to save self)	C10 1.97 .86 V14 D19 Carol Burnett (Carol bangs head against refrigerator)+	----------	A10 2.28 1.03 V23 D39 Road Runner (coyote falls off cliff)
11	natural/	----------	C11 2.54 .94 V28 D30 Ripping Yarns (man has legs broken)+	F11 3.09 .96 V34 D34 Linda Blair (horse attacks girl)	A11 1.76 .80 V7 D16 Daffy Duck (cloud attacks Daffy)
12	accident, no one's fault	S12 2.83 .94 V29 D31 Hawaii 5-0 (man hurt in car crash)	----------	----------	A12 1.59 .68 V6 D5 Tom and Jerry (Tom hit by board)

TABLE 2 (continued)

	Hurt/verbal				
13	threat with weapon	S13 2.89 .97 V31 D35 1-Adam-12 (bank robbers with guns)	C13 1.80 .77 V9 D12 Ripping Yarns (soldiers stick guns in prisoners' faces)+	F13 1.88 .76 V11 D9 Star Trek (monster throws rocks and spears at crew)	A13 1.57 .86 V5 D18 Road Runner (coyote threatens to fall rocks on himself)
14	threat without	S14 2.44 .90 V26 D22 Charlie's Angels (large woman threatens angel)	C14 1.57 .64 V4 D3 Mary Tyler Moore (Mr. Grant says will spill Ted's blood)+	F14 2.27 .72 V22 D6 Battlestar Galactica (hero almost has fight)	A14 1.95 .90 V12 D25 Batman and Robin (threatened by villains)
15	insult/ego damage	S15 2.43 1.21 V25 D44 Summer of My German Soldier (father tells daughter she is dead to him)	C15 1 11 .43 V1 D1 Mary Tyler Moore (Murray insults ted)+	F15 2.91 .89 V32 D21 Linda Blair (mother tells daughter not to see her, slaps girl in face)	A15 1.39 .72 V2 D7 Foghorn (dog insults baby ostrich)
	Property damage				
16	damage to objects only	S16 1.76 .68 V8 D4 Lou Grant (man smashes tennis racquet)	C16 2.20 .91 V20 D26 Happy Days (Fonzie bends man's claw hand)+	F16 2.09 .77 V16 D11 Battlestar Galactica (man blows up barrels)	A16 1.54 .76 V3 D10 Popeye (Popeye pounds a car flat)

*Violence ranking (V1=lowest in violence, V44=highest in violence according to overall sample)
**Disagreement ranking (D1=subjects agreed most on ranking, D44=subjects disagreed most on ranking)
+Accompanied by laugh track

subsequent analysis of variance showed no significant difference in violence rankings given by the two groups.

A questionnaire was used to collect data on subjects' visual media experience, habits, and attitudes and on their demographic characteristics.

Procedure

Each group of subjects, except the PTA members, was contacted twice. Groups comprised classes and contained fifteen to forty students. Initial one-hour sessions occurred in video-equipped rooms either at the university or at the community college. Subjects were told about our interest in what viewers perceive as violent material on TV and were asked to rate the three practice items on a scale of 1 (not violent at all) to 5 (very violent). The tape was stopped and subjects checked for questions or problems. The remaining forty-four test items were played without interruption while subjects rated them. After the rating procedure, subjects completed the questionnaire.

With the exception of the PTA, the second session was conducted in the students' regular classrooms. These sessions occurred approximately one week after the first sessions. PTA members were given a break and then were asked to comment on their ratings. For all groups we computed segment means and standard deviations. During the second sessions, we replayed those items which engendered the most disagreement and solicited comments from the respondents. These comments were recorded and used in subsequent interpretations of data. We also used this session to debrief subjects and as a curriculum discussion on the general topic of TV violence.

RESULTS

General Sample Characteristics

Background data on attitudes, uses, and experience in relation to the visual media suggest that most subjects like TV although few think they like it more than their friends and few are satisfied with current programming. The most frequent objection was low level of programming. TV violence was mentioned as a program objection by only 17 percent when asked why they were dissatisfied.

Respondents appear to regard television as a family activity, most watching and talking about it within a family context. Also, most subjects think parents ought to restrict what their children watch, primarily because of unsuitable material. A few have adopted a visual-literacy approach and think parents ought to watch TV with their children to encourage formation of good viewing habits.

Sixty-two percent of the subjects reported watching less than eight hours per week, which may be an underestimation of real viewing time. On the other hand, infrequent viewing could be due to time constraints on the part of students. In contrast, film attendance is high.

Few have been formally trained in viewing or production skills, though second-session comments indicated high consciousness of production and literary qualities present or lacking in specific programs. Table 3 summarizes the particulars of the background information.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

TABLE 3: VISUAL MEDIA ATTITUDES, USES, EXPERIENCE AND SKILL OF OVERALL SAMPLE

Attitude, use, experience, or skill	% adjusted for missing data
Attitudes	
Likes TV.	81
Likes TV more than most of friends.	17
Satisfied with current TV programming.	26
*Not satisfied because of poor quality or low level programs.	64
*Not satisfied because lack of diversity in programming.	29
*Not satisfied because programs too violent.	17
*Not satisfied because programs too sexy.	8
Thinks citizens can influence current TV programming.	87
Has tried to influence TV programming.	13
Thinks parents ought to restrict children's TV viewing.	88
*Because TV is a waste of children's time.	20
*Because TV programs contain unsuitable content.	47
*Because TV programs are too violent or sexy.	23
*Because children can't understand many programs and ads.	8
*Because parents should promote good viewing habits.	14
TV violence is harmful to children under age ten.	77
TV violence is harmful to teenagers.	58
TV violence is harmful to adults.	50
Uses	
Watches TV less than eight hours per week.	62
Attends at least one film per month.	55
Sometimes goes to films alone.	24
Prefers to watch TV alone.	11
Family sometimes or frequently watches TV together.	93
Family sometimes or frequently goes to films together.	70
Family talks about TV programs frequently or sometimes.	92
Experience	
Has taken a course in filmmaking.	12
Has taken a course in videomaking.	10
Has helped to make a videotape.	28
Has taken a course in film criticism.	17
Has taken a course in TV criticism.	15

*Multiple responses possible.

General Reactions to Violence

Table 2 gives the means and standard deviations for each segment as perceived by the total respondent group. Means were used to rank segments from least violent (V1) to most violent (V44). Standard deviations were used to rank segments from least disagreement among subjects (D1) to most disagreement (D44). Using these rankings the overall sample data on segment ratings suggest a number of general observations:

1. Physical and weapon violence ranked higher than verbal violence.

2. Insulting or ego-damaging verbal abuse produced the most controversy. For some subjects incidents such as a father telling his daughter that she is dead to him were more violent than killing because the psychological effects may last for a long time.

3. Cartoons ranked low in violence despite the high level of physical abuse in them. Johnny Quest, a more realistic cartoon, was the only one to fall in the upper-half of violence rankings.

4. Subjects reacted strongly to the theme of parental violence. Segment S7 where a father beats his daughter ranked second only to item S1 where a woman is beheaded. Comments indicated subjects were less upset over the beating itself than over the father's refusal to listen to the daughter's explanation of her actions. Similar comments were made about S15 and F15 where parents disown their children without permitting them to speak.

5. Self-inflicted physical abuse produced nearly as much disagreement as verbal abuse (S5, suicide, and S10, a man cuts his own knee).

6. Perceived poor production quality or elements of ambiguity provoked disagreement. For example, subjects commented that the monster looked "fake" in F3 (D40), that the car crash might have been a murder attempt because of "phony" details in S12 (D31). Similar comments were made about many of the items which ranked high in disagreement.

7. Violent action accompanied by laugh tracks also caused disagreement. Segments from the British "Ripping Yarns" series either were not seen as funny at all or became topics of controversy. The implied cultural difference, however, does not explain similar reactions to segments from Carol Burnett.

8. Cartoons, although generally ranked low in violence, often produced disagreement. Subjects were confused about whether to judge the violence in animated segments from their own point of view or that of children. Many people commented that they might understand the rejuvenation of the coyote but children might not. Others said that children might think such violence was not harmful because the coyote always springs back good-as-new.

Viewer-Defined Dimensions of TV Violence

Next we examined the underlying structure of viewer definitions of TV violence, by using a principal-factor, varimax-rotation factor analysis of the data. Four major factors, accounting for 48 percent of the total variance, were retained. The dimensions represented by each factor parallel some of the general observations listed in the preceding section. Interpretations of each factor are based on factor loadings and are augmented by subject comments and considerations of segment content. Table 4 reproduces the factor matrix.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

The Humor Dimension

Factor 1 represents 71 percent of the variance accounted for. The seven top-loading segments are all animated. At first glance, therefore, this factor might be interpreted as an animation criterion. Closer examination, however, shows that four comedies load fairly heavily and that no non-humorous segments except the serious and fantasy property-damage episodes are even marginally important here. Loadings correspond to subjects' laughter responses while viewing segments. For example, both

TABLE 4: DIMENSIONS

	Humor	Credibility	Empathy	Verbal Abuse
Segment*	Factor 1**	Factor 2**	Factor 3**	Factor 4**
A2	.713	.286	.072	.127
A5	.462	.379	.317	.125
A6	.651	.270	.128	-.024
A7	.485	.415	.289	.082
A8	.709	.097	.313	.124
A10	.731	.040	.353	-.032
A11	.695	.151	.023	-.041
A12	.613	-.054	.233	.044
A13	.551	.186	.291	.155
A14	.252	.509	.226	.077
A15	.318	.176	.207	.689
A16	.449	.417	-.036	.089
C2	.223	.416	.559	.046
C7	.466	.440	-.060	.134
C8	.354	.236	.204	.307
C9	.545	.471	.140	.074
C10	.345	.470	.083	.148
C11	.188	.061	.586	.076
C13	.149	.364	.297	.131
C14	.414	.278	.081	.194
C15	.023	.029	.106	.687
C16	.505	.458	.143	.013
F1	.199	.463	.523	.013
F3	.215	.513	.404	.021
F4	.283	-.004	.546	.045
F6	.241	-.031	.533	.130
F7	.234	.547	.308	.057
F8	.107	.560	.210	.208
F11	.223	.545	.344	.076
F13	.228	.429	.132	-.193
F14	.280	.511	.310	.054
F15	.129	.135	.492	.327
F16	.309	.620	.108	.091
S1	.006	.278	.402	.053
S2	.156	.226	.641	-.065
S3	-.016	.419	.490	.146
S5	.058	.290	.545	.085
S7	.085	.293	.470	.160
S10	.034	.268	.507	.019
S12	.129	.510	.282	-.043
S13	.085	.577	.176	.197
S14	.188	.263	.517	.261
S15	.079	.395	.338	.396
S16	.307	.155	.058	.073
Eigenvalue	13.436	2.583	1.690	1.284
% Total Variance	31.8	7.1	5.1	4.1
% Major Factor Variance	70.7	13.6	8.9	6.8

*For convenience this matrix is arranged according to segment genre (A=animation, C=comedy, F=fantasy, S=serious drama). Also see Table 2.

Underlined weights are for segments referenced in the text.

the serious (Lou Grant) and fantasy (Battlestar Galactica) incidents evoked laughter in response to ridiculous lines and action. The presence of the Johnny Quest episode (A5) here appears to argue against a laughter interpretation. However, subjects laugh when the hero makes a ludicrous comment as the villain plunges to his death.

Credibility Dimension

Factor 2 comprises 14% of the major factor variance. As with factor 1, initially the criterion seemed based on genre (fantasy). Closer scrutiny, however, showed that although the heaviest loadings are on science fiction, second-echelon loadings contain all four genres. The common thread among all these segments is a lack of believability. Each item is marred by unrealistic details. Each episode loading over .4 on this factor was criticized for "silly", "fake", "unreal", "inconsistent" details or for low quality throughout. Segments regarded as highest in production and content quality (I Claudius, Papillon, In the Summer of My German Soldier) loaded negligibly on this factor. Thus, it is a segment's lack of quality which contributes to its lack of credibility.

Empathy Dimension

Factor 3 (9% of the accounted variance) involved audience identification with the episode characters. Typical comments concerned the helplessness of the victim and details which encouraged identification, e.g., "saw his face in pain", "heard the leg snap", "his face looked beaten up", etc. Interestingly, the two highest-ranked segments (I Claudius, S1,

V44, and In the Summer of My German Soldier, S7, V43) loaded only .402 and .470 on this factor. Comments suggest that despite the productions' excellent quality, people had difficulty identifying with the victims. Subjects felt that since I Claudius was set in the past, it lost some effect on viewer feelings. Others, unfamiliar with the series, were unsure why Messalina was killed. Similarly, people puzzled over the girl's lack of reaction to her father's beating her in Summer. The lowest-loading segments on this factor provided either no characters with whom to identify or unsympathetic characters. For example, according to subject comments, characters like Ted in Mary Tyler Moore "get what they deserve".

Verbal Abuse

Factor 4 accounts for only 4% of the variance. The two highest loading segments contain no references to physical violence or threat, but involve only verbal insults. The next three highest-loadings are segments which imply the possibility of future violence or contain minor physical violence (a slap), as well as verbal insult. Segments which load negatively on this factor are nonverbal. Their action is presented visually with few, if any, words. Segments with no physical abuse, but containing overt threats of future physical abuse (A14, C14, F14, S14) weigh lightly here, as do the two most violent segments (S1 and S7). Thus, the underlying dimension is verbal abuse.

For the present respondent group, then, the four most readily apparent criteria for estimating the degree of violence in television content are: 1) how funny the material is, 2) how credible it is, 3) how much viewer empathy it evokes and 4) whether it contains purely verbal abuse.

Subject Characteristics and Violence Dimensions

We explored the relationships between the independent variables of sex, marital and parental status and the dependent variable of subject factor scores as indicators of relevant definitional patterns or differences.[16] Empathy was the only dimension of significant divergence. Females appeared more concerned with the psychological aspects of programs than males (F=25.69, df 1/176, p=.00). Marriage or living with a "significant" other was unrelated to factor scores. Parents rated empathic segments higher in violence (F=5.69, df 1/178, p=.02) and tended to rate less credible segments higher in violence than did non-parents. However, parents did not rate cartoons any higher in violence than non-parents.

In addition, three scales were constructed by combining questionnaire items as follows:

Visual experience: film/video courses taken + TV watching + film attendance.

Family orientation: watch TV with family + talk with family about TV + attend films with family.

Anti-violence stance: TV has too much violence + TV is harmful to children + harmful to teenagers + harmful to adults.

Pearson product moment correlations were computed and relationships to the four factor dimensions assessed. Age was also considered. We found that:

1. Respondents with family orientation rated violence in funny segments higher than other subjects (.15, p<.05).

2. People with family orientation (.16, p<.03), those with an anti-violence stance (.28, p<.00), and older people (.18, p<.01) rated incredible/low quality segments as higher in violence than did others.

3. Subjects with an anti-violence stance rated empathic segments higher in violence than other people (.25, p<.00).

4. The "visual experience" group rated empathic elements lower in violence than other people (- .20, p<.00).

We found no association between viewer characteristics and factor four, verbal abuse.

Perceived Degree of Violence and Subject Characteristics

The last step of our analysis was to examine the relationships between viewer characteristics and the degree of perceived violence. The results were consistent with previous findings. Females perceived more violence than males (F=17.24, df1/203, p<.00) and parents perceived more violence than non-parents (F=5.80, df 1/205, p<.02). Subjects with family orientation toward TV perceived more violence (.18, p<.01), as did subjects with an anti-violence stance (.36, p<.00). Finally, respondents with greater visual experience perceived the least violence (- .20, p<.00).

Conclusions

Though formally untrained as viewers, most participants manifested keen observer abilities. An encouraging implication of this study is that viewers appreciate quality programming and are selective in what they view. Although 82% like TV as a medium, 74% are dissatisfied with programming, primarily due to its low level. The majority reported watching less than 8 hours of TV per week, in contrast to Roper average estimates of almost three hours per day.[17] The segments rated highest in violence also were rated highest in quality (I Claudius, In the Summer of

My German Soldier, Papillon). One criterion used to rate violence turned out to be whether or not a segment was of good enough quality to be credible. Another criterion was whether viewers empathized with portrayed characters. We might assume that viewers cannot empathize if distracted by inconsistent or incredible details.

Various viewer characteristics are associated with one or more of the four criteria identified in violence definition by viewers. Sex was a consistent associate of viewers' definitions. In contrast, age did not show such a consistent pattern. Being a parent affected the way people defined violence and how much they perceived. Surprisingly, parents laughed at cartoon violence and did not rate it higher in violence than non-parents. The overall respondent group was unconcerned with cartoon violence and rated funny animation segments as low in violence. In our opinion, a separate assessment of cartoon violence based on childrens' responses would enhance the validity of the definitional work begun with this study. For example, a comparative analysis of violence ratings and definitional criteria by adults vs. children viewing the same animated programs would shed further light on the issue.

A final interesting, perhaps even surprising, result of this study is that subjects who were more experienced viewers, i.e., who had watched more TV and attended more films than other people and who had taken courses in audio-visual production and criticism, perceived less violence and seemed to be more objective viewers, i.e., did not respond as empathetically as did other viewers. These subjects also were significantly more analytic

in their film attitudes and behaviors than the other participants although the magnitude of that relationship is small (r=.14, p=.03).[18] A plausible conclusion could be that training people to be more sophisticated viewers of television might reduce their emotional reactions to televised violence.

> In sum, our findings appear consistent with the BBC conclusion that whether or not an act is objectively violent, the significance of the programme and its function for the individual viewer can be expected to depend upon whether or not the act is <u>perceived</u> as violent.[19]

We hope that this study has contributed some further detail to individual viewer perceptions of violence. Certainly, many of our participants disagree with the violence definitions of the NCCB and Gerbner. The wide range of perceptions exhibited suggests viewers are far from uncritically taking any type of violence to heart. Rather their concern with the quality of television production and content comes to the foreground, regardless of whether programs contain violence.

NOTES

[1]George Gerbner et al. The Cultural Indicators Project "short instrument of recording," Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania, p. 4.

[2]National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting (NCCB), "NCCB Releases Results of the 1979 TV Violence Monitoring," Media Watch, special edition, 1979, p. 2.

[3]David M. Blank, "The Gerbner Violence Profiles," Journal of Broadcasting, 21:3 (Summer, 1977), p. 275.

[4]R. L. Murray, R.R.Cole, F. Fedler, "Teenagers and TV Violence: How They Rate and View It," Journalism Quarterly 47:247-255 (Summer, 1970).

[5]Bradley S. Greenberg and Thomas F. Gordon, "Perceptions of Violence in Television Programs: Critics and the Public," in G. A. Comstock and E. A. Rubenstein (eds.), Television and Social Behavior, Vol. 1: Media Content and Control (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 244-258.

[6]J. D. Abel and M.E. Beninson, "Perceptions of TV Program Violence by Children and Mothers," Journal of Broadcasting 20:355-363 (Summer, 1976).

[7]Greenberg and Gordon, op. cit.

[8]Abel and Beninson, op. cit.

[9]R. B. Hayes, "Children's Perceptions of 'Comic' and 'Authentic' Cartoon Violence," Journal of Broadcasting 22:63-70 (Winter, 1978).

[10]Bradley S. Greenberg and Thomas F. Gordon, "Social Class and Racial Differences in Children's Perceptions of Television Violence," in G. A. Comstock, E. A. Rubinstein, and J. P. Murray (eds.), Television and Social Behavior, Vol. 5: Television's Effects: Further Explorations (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 185-210.

[11]Greenberg and Gordon, "Perceptions of Violence . . .," op cit.

[12]For example. Greenberg and Gordon, "Social Class and Racial Differences . . .," op. cit.

[13]Greenberg and Gordon, "Perceptions of Violence . . .," op. cit., p. 254, emphasis ours.

[14]Independent Broadcasting Authority, summary of BBC Audience Research Department report, "Violence on Television: Programme Content and Viewer Perception," in IBA Working Party Second Interim Report: The Portrayal of Violence, 1975.

[15]Hayes, op. cit.

[16]Factor scores indicate how each subject responded to the common thread in each factor, e.g., whether a subject ranked humorous items as more or less violent than did the average subject. Subjects who score close to 0 on Factor 1 do not differ much from the mean on that factor. Subjects who score two or three standard deviations away from the mean rank funny items consistently higher or lower than average participants.

[17]The Roper Organization, "Changing Public Attitudes Toward Television and Other Mass Media 1959-1976," May 1977.

[18]See Deanna C. Robinson, "A Scale for Measuring Film Analyticity," Communication Research 2:396-411 (October 1975) for an explanation of the film analyticity scale used for this correlation. Correlations with the analyticity scale may be depressed because of the skew of the scale when used with college-age students who tend to score 2 more often than 0, 1, or 3. See John Carroll, "The Nature of the Data, or How to Choose a Correlation Coefficient," Psychometrika, 26 (December, 1961), p. 349.

[19]IBA, op. cit., p. 7.