

METHODS

Television Violence and Its Context: A Content Analysis

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, AUSTIN

Researchers at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), and the University of Texas, Austin (UTA), conducted separate content analyses of violence in television programming for the National Television Violence Study. However, they crafted together and shared the same definition of violence and sampling methodology. The shared methods used to analyze violence programming at the two universities are outlined below. Utilizing these shared methods, the scholars at UCSB conducted a content analysis of violence on television overall, including drama, comedy programs, movies, music videos, reality programs and children's shows. The sample of reality programming (including news magazine shows, documentaries, police reality shows, and talk and interview programs) was further analyzed by UTA researchers.

In some instances, the researchers from the two universities utilized differing measures to accomplish their specific goals. The methods that differ at the two universities are described on pages 17–19.

Definition of Violence

Any study of violence on television must first establish what types of depictions qualify as violent. Our definition of violence stipulates that several key aspects must be present: the involvement of animate beings, a clear intent to harm, and harm that is physical in nature as opposed to psychological or emotional.

Violence is defined as any overt depiction of a credible threat of physical force or the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings. Violence also includes certain depictions of physically harmful consequences against an animate being or group that occur as a result of unseen violent means.

Thus, three forms of violence are included in our findings: credible threats, behavioral acts, and harmful consequences of unseen violence.

Sample

The findings in this report are based upon the largest and most representative sample of television content ever evaluated by a single research project. Over the nine-month period from October 1995 to June 1996 we randomly selected programs on 23 television channels to create a composite week of content for each source. We monitored programs between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m., a total of 17 hours a day across seven days of the week, yielding a sum of approximately 119 hours per channel.

The 23 channels we studied represent the television sources most frequently viewed by the American public with the exception that we did not evaluate sports or news and thus omitted channels such as CNN and

ESPN (see Table 2 below). The channels we assessed can be grouped into five categories: broadcast networks, independent broadcast, public broadcast, basic cable, and premium cable. In total, we sampled 3,235 programs.

TABLE 2
Channels in Sample

BROADCAST NETWORKS	INDEPENDENT BROADCAST	PUBLIC BROADCAST	BASIC CABLE	PREMIUM CABLE
KABC	KCAL	KCET	A&E	Cinemax
KCBS	KCOP		AMC	HBO
KTTV (Fox)	KTLA		BET	Showtime
KNBC			Cartoon Network	
			Disney	
			Family Channel	
			Lifetime	
			MTV	
			Nickelodeon	
			TNT	
			USA	
			VH-1	

Violence in Television Programming Overall

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

The research at the University of California, Santa Barbara focuses on the entire landscape of television. In this second year of the study, we examined the amount and the nature of violent portrayals on television during the 1995–96 season. Our emphasis is on the contextual features of violence that pose risks for the audience. In addition to studying television overall, we looked at variability in the portrayal of violence across different types of channels (broadcast networks, independent broadcast, public broadcast, basic cable, and premium cable), and in different genres of programming (children's, comedy, drama, movies, music videos, reality-based).

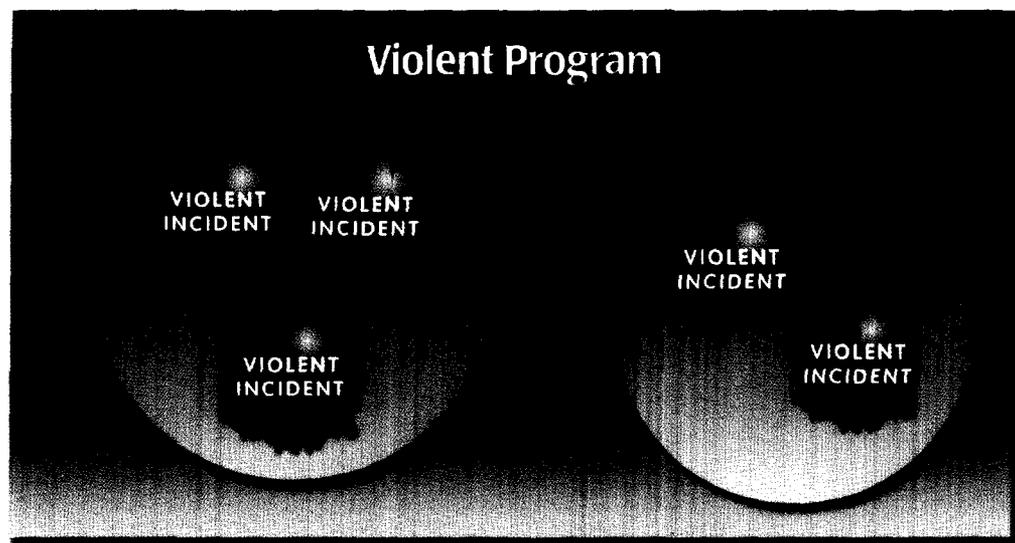
We also assessed whether the profile of violence on television has changed from Year 1 to Year 2. The same procedures were employed as those used last year so that direct comparisons could be made from last year.

Measuring Violence: Incidents, Scenes, and Programs

We examined three different aspects of the program when assessing how violence is portrayed on television (see Table 3). First, we identify each *violent incident*, or interaction between a perpetrator and a victim. Second, we analyzed each *violent scene*, or instance of ongoing, uninterrupted violence. A violent scene, such as a bar fight, often contains several violent incidents between different types of characters. Finally, we analyzed the entire *violent program*. Some contextual features of violence reflect what happens between characters at the most micro-level or portion of the plot, which we label the violent incident. Other contextual features require that we consider larger chunks of content such as an entire violent scene or even the whole program. For example, the full program must be evaluated to determine if there is an overall theme of anti-violence in a show. By analyzing violence at all three of these levels—the incident, the scene, and the overall program—we provide rich information about the meaning of violence in television programming.

TABLE 3

Levels of Program Analysis



Coding and Reliability

Many precautions were taken to ensure that a consistent standard of judgment was used to evaluate the television programming in the sample. An elaborate codebook was developed to provide detailed and precise definitions of terms and rules of judgment for coders to follow. We trained more than 50 undergraduate research assistants to become thoroughly adept at applying the rules laid out in the codebook. The research assistants received 60 hours of classroom training and 40 hours of laboratory practice in making coding judgments prior to beginning coding programs for this study.

Coders worked individually in quiet labs as they assessed programs for violence. Every two weeks, each coder was tested to make sure the same rules and definitions were used across individuals. Agreement or reliability among the coders was consistently high throughout the coding process, underscoring the scientific rigor of the study.

Violence in Television "Reality" Programming

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, AUSTIN

This section represents our efforts to study violence within "reality" programming, meaning television programming which represents, or purports to represent, the "real world." As is true in the overall report from our Santa Barbara colleagues, we used the same procedures in 1995–96 as were used in the prior year to be able to make direct comparisons between the two years, in a typical week of television programming. Similar to our UCSB colleagues, we describe the amount and nature of violent reality programming overall, and variations in those presentations by program sub-genre, channel type and time of day that programs appear. We offer one mode of analysis different from the overall measures in the Santa Barbara report. We add the category of "Talk About Violence" in reality programming, or discussions of violence and its consequences *absent* visual depictions of violence.

Definition of Violence

The definition of violence we use is the same as for all other programming. In addition, we created a category called *Talk About Violence*, which is defined as *the verbal recounting of threats, acts and/or harmful consequences by a person or person-like character appearing on screen or heard from off-screen. Verbal abuse per se is not coded as Talk About Violence*, and Talk About Violence is considered a secondary category: if a sequence contains both Visual Violence and Talk About Violence, it is coded as violence as defined on page 15.

In our analyses, violence is generally coded at the same "levels of analysis" as in the UCSB report, with two exceptions: a majority of reality programs are *segmented*, meaning that a single program (e.g., *60 Minutes*) contains several narratively distinct stories that are coded essentially as separate programs. Further, we do not code specific incidents of violence as they are coded in the Santa Barbara analysis, but many of the variables in that analysis are coded at the sequence level of analysis in our report.

Sample

The reality program analysis is based on a subsample of programs selected from the full sample as described on pages 15–16. In all, 494 reality programs were analyzed in 1995–96, compared with 393 in the 1994–95 sample year.

Reliability

Trained coders were monitored continuously for their ability to make reliable or replicable coding decisions. As noted in the full report, overall intercoder reliabilities were very high.

Ratings and Advisories

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MADISON

The second year of research on ratings and advisories explored the extent to which different types of rating and advisory systems affect children's interest in programs and movies. It also analyzed how ratings and advisories are being used on television.

The main experiment involved 374 children between the ages of 5 and 15, from three public schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. These children were given booklets describing eight different television programs and movies and were asked to indicate how much they wanted to see each one. The children's responses were anonymous, and they were told that their ratings would influence which program we would actually show them. Every booklet contained the same programs and movies with the same brief descriptions. What was varied, at random, from booklet to booklet was the rating or advisory that was assigned to a particular program.

Because the results of Year 1 had shown that Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) Ratings have the undesirable effect of stimulating some children's interest in restricted programming, eight different rating and advisory systems were tested in Year 2. We again tested the MPAA ratings and two advisories, "parental discretion advised" and "viewer discretion advised" (with and without the phrase "contains some violent content"). The phrase "contains some violent content" was tested alone as well. We also included tests of the effects of three content-based rating systems: the violence codes used by the premium cable channels, HBO, Showtime, and Cinemax (e.g., "MV: Mild Violence"), the Recreational Software Advisory Council (RSAC) ratings used for video games (e.g., "Violence: Creatures Killed"), and the violence ratings used in Canada in conjunction with early implementation of the V-chip (e.g., "brief violence"). In addition, we tested two types of ratings that have been discussed publicly but are not currently in use: Age Indicators, that simply indicate the age-appropriateness of a program (e.g., "not for kids under 8"), and another label that indicates that a program has won various types of awards (e.g., "Teens' Choice Award"). We also explored how background variables such as aggressiveness, television viewing habits, and parental involvement influence the effect of advisories and ratings.

To explore whether ratings affect children's interest in programs via the so-called "forbidden-fruit" effect or simply by providing information about content, we also asked children to indicate the age for which they thought each program was appropriate and how violent they expected it to be.

Finally, we analyzed the use of ratings and advisories during the composite week of television.

Designing Anti-Violence Messages for Television

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL

The research conducted at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, has explored the use of television to prevent or reduce violence among American youth. Studies have focused on evaluating and improving the effectiveness of television anti-violence messages targeted at adolescent audiences.

During Year 1, we conducted several studies to assess the effectiveness of a sample of televised anti-violence public service announcements (PSAs) and educational programs. We found little evidence that these anti-violence messages would change significantly adolescents' attitudes about violence or violent behavior.

In Year 2, we developed a systematic approach for improving the effectiveness of anti-violence messages. We analyzed the content of 100 existing anti-violence PSAs to assess the extent to which potentially effective design features (e.g., format, sources) and messages had been used. We also analyzed a representative survey of more than 2,000 American adolescents and identified seven different groups of teens who might be the target audiences for future anti-violence campaigns.

Content Analysis of Public Service Announcements

The design and messages of 100 anti-violence PSAs produced and/or aired by the television industry and collected in an archive at the University of North Carolina were systematically analyzed by trained coders. The PSAs were assessed in terms of their form, sources, settings, portrayals of violence, and themes.

Analysis of Adolescent Audiences

Commercial advertisers often focus their messages on specific segments of the viewing audience rather than on the whole population, with the understanding that some members of the population will be more receptive to their messages than others. This "segmentation" may also indicate which messages will most effectively speak to the specific concerns and motivations of the various audience segments. To create profiles of potential audience segments for future anti-violence media campaigns, we conducted a secondary analysis of a national survey of adolescents.

In Fall 1995, Louis Harris and Associates administered a national survey of 2,023 students in grades 7 through 12. The study was commissioned by the Teens, Crime and Community Program, a Washington-based education group. It was designed to provide a look at adolescents' exposure to, and attitudes about, violence in their lives. The sample is representative of adolescents in the United States who are still in school.

The violence prevention literature suggests that youth who are most likely to be either perpetrators or victims of violence in the future are those who have had experience with violence in the past. Therefore, we identified adolescent audience segments based on the adolescents' self-reported experience with fights (starting fights, being in fights, witnessing fights) and with weapons (carrying guns, knives and/or other weapons) in the previous year. The seven segments were compared on a number of demographic, attitudinal and behavioral variables that provided the basis for suggestions of effective strategies for future media-based campaigns aimed at each of the segments.

FINDINGS

Violence in Television Overall

Violence in Television Reality Programming

Ratings and Advisories

Designing Anti-Violence Messages for Television

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

ANALYSIS OF ADOLESCENT AUDIENCES

FINDINGS

Violence in Television Programming Overall

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

The content analysis of violence in the overall television environment is based on a representative week compiled from October 1995 to June 1996 of television programming across 23 channels. The examination of 2,757 programs (while we sampled 3,235 programs, certain types of programming were excluded from our analysis, including game shows, infomercials, news, religious programming and sports) revealed the following findings:

- THERE HAS BEEN NO MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION SINCE LAST YEAR.

Neither the overall prevalence of violence nor the way in which violence is presented has changed appreciably during the last year. In the first year of this study (1994–95), 58% of programs contained violence. This year (1995–96), 61% of programs contain violence (see Table 4). This small difference does not represent a significant shift, according to the standards of change used in this study. Thus, the prevalence of violence on television has not increased or decreased meaningfully from Year 1 to Year 2. It is important to note that these statistics do not reveal the nature or extent of violence in television programs; rather, they indicate only that some violence occurs within these shows.

A separate analysis of the different channel types shows remarkable stability as well, with one exception. The percentage of programs with violence on the broadcast networks has increased slightly from 47% to 54%. This small increase holds up even when we examine only prime-time programming on the broadcast networks. Though showing no significant change from Year 1 (85%) to Year 2 (86%), premium cable channels continue to have the highest proportion of programs with violence.

We also found that the way in which violence is presented has not changed from last year to this year. For example, violence still typically involves extensive violent action, often includes a gun, is trivialized by humor, but seldom is graphic or gory (see Table 4). These patterns characterize the entire television landscape, and for the most part, also hold true across different types of channels and genres of programming. This extraordinary degree of consistency shows that there are very stable formulas or patterns for depicting violence on television.

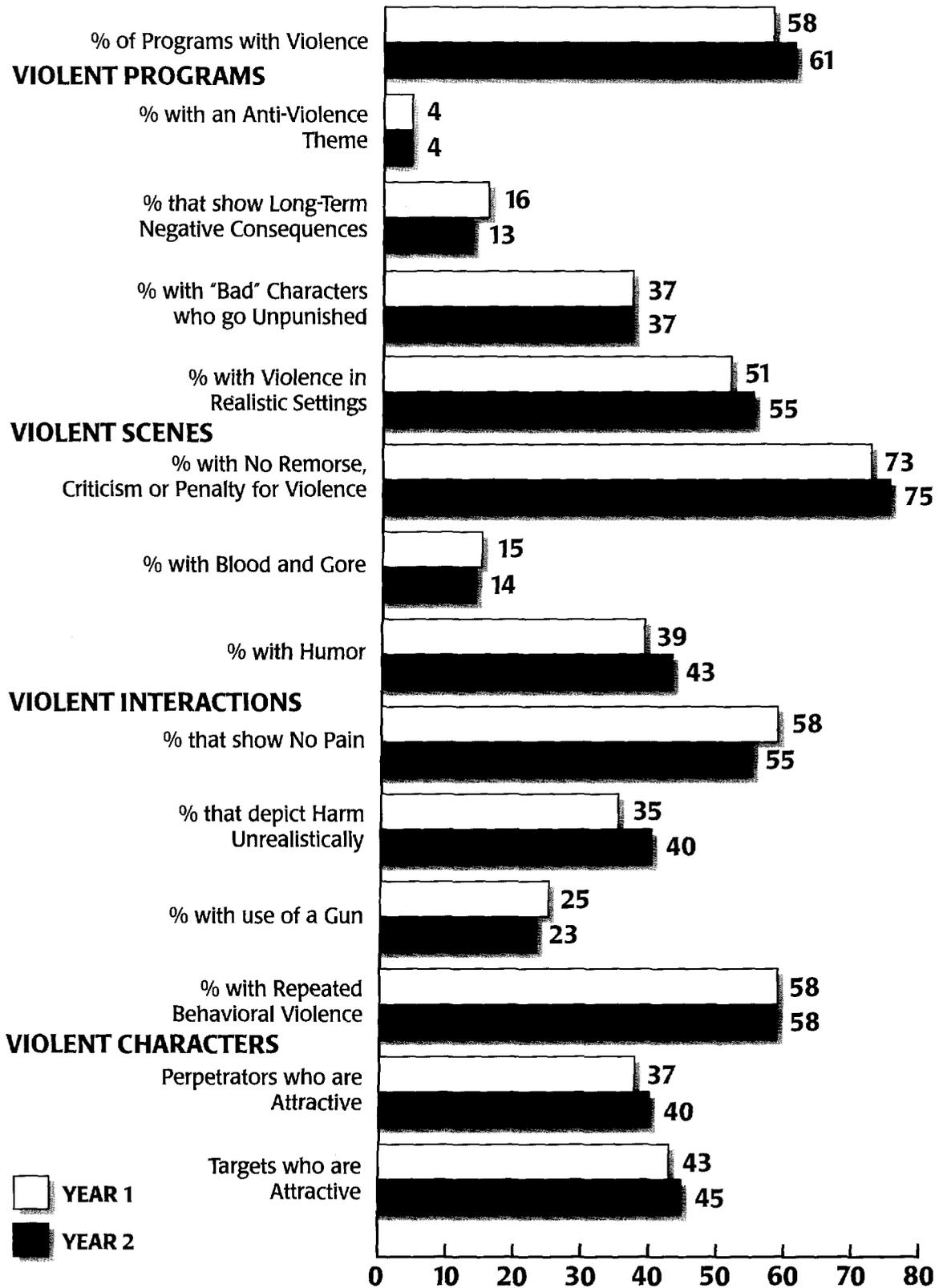
- VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION IS STILL FREQUENTLY GLAMORIZED.

Good characters frequently are the perpetrators of aggression on TV. A full 40% of the violent incidents are initiated by characters who have good qualities that make them attractive role models to viewers.

Not only are attractive characters often violent, but physical aggression is frequently condoned. More than one third (37%) of violent programs feature “bad” characters who are never or rarely punished anywhere in the plot; another 28% contain bad characters who are punished only at the end of the story. Good characters hardly ever experience repercussions (i.e., regret, criticism) for violence on television. Finally, 75% of violent scenes contain no form of punishment for the aggression. That is, perpetrators rarely show remorse at the time they engage in aggression, and are seldom condemned by others or immediately apprehended. This is of particular concern for younger children, who often lack the capability to link punishments shown later in a program to earlier violent acts.

TABLE 4

Overall Industry Averages: Year 1 vs. Year 2 Comparisons



This glamorization of violence poses risks for the audience. Studies show that children will imitate violent characters who are heroic or attractive. In addition, viewers are more likely to learn aggressive attitudes and behaviors from violence that is rewarded or implicitly condoned than from violence that is clearly punished.

• MOST VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION REMAINS SANITIZED.

Violence is typically shown with little or no harm to the victim. In fact, more than half of the violent incidents on television depict no physical injury or pain to the victim. Looking across the entire program, only 13% of violent shows portray the long-term negative consequences of violence such as physical and psychological suffering.

Research indicates that showing the realistic consequences of violence, such as pain cues and suffering, can decrease the chances that viewers will learn aggression from television violence. Therefore, sterilized portrayals of violence pose risk for the audience.

• THERE ARE STILL VERY FEW PROGRAMS THAT FEATURE AN ANTI-VIOLENCE THEME.

Rather than showing violence merely to excite or entertain, a program can feature violence in a way that discourages it. The overall message in such a program is actually an anti-violence one. This study identified four ways in which a program can emphasize an anti-violence theme: (1) alternatives to physical aggression are presented and discussed; (2) pain and suffering from violence are depicted throughout the plot, especially with regard to the victims' families, friends, and community; (3) the main characters repeatedly show reluctance or remorse for committing acts of violence; and (4) on balance, violence is punished far more than it is rewarded.

Only 4% of the violent programs on television convey an overall anti-violence theme. In other words, violence is seldom used in an educational way to emphasize the personal and social costs of such antisocial behavior.

EXAMPLE OF ANTI-VIOLENCE THEME IN A CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

One example of the use of an anti-violence theme is from an animated children's program. The cartoon tells the story of a young girl who travels to New York to visit her grandfather. During their visit, the girl suggests to her grandfather that violence in the world occurs because people are so different from one another, and that the only possibility for harmony is for people to become more similar to one another. As they journey around the city, the two observe and criticize several instances of violence, such as two motorists fighting after a traffic accident. They also observe many examples of people from very different backgrounds involved in teamwork, cooperation, and play. By the end of the program, the girl changes her original beliefs about violence and declares that individual differences should be cherished and present no barrier to peace and harmony.

This example illustrates how a program can emphasize an anti-violence theme by presenting and discussing alternatives to aggression. In this cartoon, the grandfather repeatedly points out to the girl that interpersonal violence is neither desirable nor inevitable. Also, in marked opposition to the girl's initial assertion that differences breed conflict, the cartoon sequences show people of different ethnicities, religions, and languages engaged in supportive, prosocial behaviors.

EXAMPLE OF AN ANTI-VIOLENCE THEME IN A DRAMA PROGRAM

Another example of an anti-violence theme is from a prime-time drama series focusing on crime. This particular episode involves the investigation of a brutal slaying of a mother and one of her two children. The other child, a teenage daughter, survives the attack. The police suspect the father may be responsible for the murders, and he is taken in for questioning and charged with the crime. The police officers and attorneys attempt to build a case against the man, presuming that work and financial pressures caused the once devoted father to become a psychopathic killer. During the trial, the father is cross-examined by lawyers and breaks down in tears reliving the trauma. Throughout the court scenes, the focus turns to other relatives who are visibly distraught over the murders. Eventually, a police psychologist takes the stand and casts serious doubt on the father's guilt. The police undertake further investigation and discover that the murders were committed by the surviving daughter's boyfriend, at her request.

This example has a strong anti-violence theme because of its emphasis on the pain and suffering caused by violence. In the beginning of the program, the dead bodies are discovered by relatives who are so emotionally traumatized that police offer professional counseling to the family members to help them cope with the ordeal. Also, the plot focuses repeatedly on the father's anguish over the murder of his family. Although the program deals with an extremely violent crime, there is only one depiction of violence in the entire episode, a brief view of the victims' dead bodies. In other words, no actual behavioral violence is shown on screen.

- **PORTRAYALS THAT HAVE A HIGH RISK OF TEACHING AGGRESSION TO CHILDREN UNDER 7 ARE CONCENTRATED IN THE VERY PROGRAMS AND CHANNELS TARGETED TO YOUNG VIEWERS.**

Certain depictions can be labeled "high risk" because several plot elements that encourage aggression are all featured in one scene. These high-risk portrayals involve: (1) a perpetrator who is attractive; (2) violence that seems justified; (3) violence that goes unpunished (no remorse, criticism, or penalty); (4) minimal consequences to the victims; and (5) violence that seems realistic to the viewer. It should be noted that what is perceived as "realistic," and therefore "high risk," differs according to the age of the viewer.

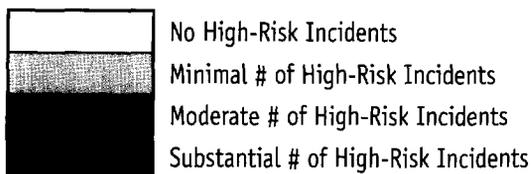
In a typical week of television, there are over 800 violent portrayals that qualify as high risk for children under 7. Where are these hazardous portrayals located on television? Table 5 shows that of all genres, children's programs contain the greatest number of these high-risk violent portrayals. In other words, most of the portrayals that pose particular concern for teaching aggressive attitudes and behaviors to young children are contained in the very programs that are targeted to young viewers. Furthermore, nearly all of the children's programs that contain these kinds of portrayals are cartoons.

Of all channel types, child-oriented basic cable (Cartoon Network, Disney, and Nickelodeon) contains the most high-risk portrayals for young viewers. The individual channels and time periods that primarily feature cartoons are most responsible for this finding. However, it should be noted that not all cartoons contain high-risk portrayals.

TABLE 5

Young Children: High-Risk Patterns for Learning Aggression by Genre and Time

	DRAMA	COMEDY	CHILDREN'S	MOVIES	MUSIC VIDEOS	REALITY-BASED
Before School (6:00a.m.-9:00a.m.)						
During School (9:00a.m.-3:00p.m.)						
After School (3:00p.m.-6:00p.m.)						
Early Evening (6:00p.m.-8:00p.m.)						
Prime Time (8:00p.m.-11:00p.m.)						



Adults often assume that violent cartoons are not a problem for children because the content is so unrealistic. However, this assumption is directly contradicted by research on the effects of viewing violence by younger children. Numerous studies show that animated programs have the potential of increasing aggressive behavior in young children. Thus, violent cartoons should not be regarded as harmless, particularly for children under 7 years of age who have difficulty distinguishing reality from fantasy.

EXAMPLE OF A HIGH-RISK PORTRAYAL FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

One example of a high-risk portrayal in our sample is from a cartoon series featuring human-like animals as heroes. In this particular episode, evil characters are attempting to drain solar energy from the earth in order to freeze people and take over the planet. The high-risk portrayal features the four heroes using their superior physical strength to battle the villains. Many punches are thrown, and the heroes smash furniture and other heavy objects over the bad guys' heads. The violent incident ends as the evil characters escape, and the heroes de-activate the solar drainage device and revel in their triumph.

This violent depiction has all the plot elements that qualify it as high-risk for teaching aggressive attitudes and behaviors in young viewers. The perpetrators are readily identifiable as attractive role models, the violence seems justified because the heroes are trying to save the planet, and there is no remorse for or criticism of the violent behaviors. On the contrary, the heroes praise each other after they win the battle and are commended by their leader in the next scene. Also, the rough and repeated aggressive behaviors do not result in any lasting harm. In fact, the evil characters appear to be unscathed as they run away, in spite of some rather serious blows to their heads. Though this portrayal involves non-human characters in an animated setting, it still qualifies as high risk for children under age 7 because younger viewers have trouble separating fantasy from more realistic depictions.

- FOR OLDER CHILDREN AND TEENS, HIGH-RISK PORTRAYALS THAT ENCOURAGE AGGRESSION ARE FOUND MOSTLY IN MOVIES AND DRAMAS.

A similar formula poses a high risk of teaching and reinforcing aggression among older viewers: *an attractive perpetrator who engages in justified violence that goes unpunished, that shows minimal consequences, and that seems realistic.* Unlike younger children, older children and adolescents are capable of discounting portrayals of violence that are highly fantastic, such as cartoons. Thus, older viewers are susceptible primarily to more realistic portrayals of violence.

In a typical week, there are nearly 400 portrayals of violence that qualify as high risk for older children and adolescents. Movies and drama programs are the two genres most likely to contain high-risk portrayals for older children and teens.

EXAMPLE OF A HIGH-RISK PORTRAYAL FOR OLDER CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

Another example of a high-risk portrayal is from a movie about a hostile motorcycle gang that terrorizes a neighborhood. As part of their harassment, the gang members kidnap a well-known rock singer during one of her performances at a local nightclub. A former boyfriend of the singer then decides to rescue her. In the high-risk portrayal, the ex-boyfriend sneaks up on the gang and shoots six different members, one at a time, from a rooftop. Some of the gunfire causes the motorcycles to blow up, whereas other shots hit the gang members directly. The scene ends as the former boyfriend rescues the tied up singer.

This violent incident contains all the features that encourage aggression in older viewers. The perpetrator is young, good-looking, and portrayed as a rugged rebel. He decides to rescue the singer when it is clear that the local police are stymied. His attack on the gang seems justified—the members are ruthless and uncontrollable, and they have kidnapped an innocent and attractive woman. The perpetrator is never punished or disciplined in this movie even though he has taken the law into his own hands. In fact, the neighbors and the police encourage the young man to fight the leader of the gang. Serving as the ultimate reward, the young woman proclaims her love for the perpetrator after he rescues her. And, in spite of a great deal of lethal violence in this scene, nobody is shown getting seriously hurt. The focus quickly shifts away from each gang member after he is shot, and no information is given about the outcome. In other words, the serious consequences of violence are ignored. Compared to the previous example, this portrayal is presented in live action, involves human characters, and features events that could happen in real life. Because it is more realistic and features teen characters, this portrayal would be more problematic for older children and adolescents than the one described above.

Violence in Television "Reality" Programming

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, AUSTIN

We now have two consistent years of results to support several key findings regarding the presentation of violence in television "reality" programming, or nonfictional programming in which the portrayal is presumed to present current or historical events or circumstances in productions presenting themselves as realistic.

- THERE HAS BEEN NO MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN THE OVERALL LEVEL OF VIOLENCE IN REALITY PROGRAMMING BETWEEN YEAR 1 AND YEAR 2.

In Year 2, 38% of reality programs contained at least one sequence of visual violence; in Year 1, 39% of reality shows contained some visual violence (see Table 6). This year-to-year difference of one percentage point is not statistically significant.

- THERE HAS BEEN A DRAMATIC RISE IN THE AMOUNT OF REALITY PROGRAMMING.

In the 1995–96 sample year, there are 26% more reality programs (1995–96 N=494 programs) than there were in 1994–95 (N=393). This is the case even though the sample design remains the same across the two years—a representative seven day, 17 hour per day, week of programs on 23 channels.

- REALITY PROGRAMMING IS LESS VIOLENT THAN TELEVISION PROGRAMMING OVERALL.

As a genre of television programming, reality programming is less likely to contain at least one instance of violence. In 1995–96, 38% of reality programs contained at least one visually violent instance, compared with 61% of programming overall. These relative proportions are virtually the same as in the first year report. As in the first year, most reality programs are concentrated on the broadcast networks and basic cable, although independent stations are heavy programmers of a sub-genre, Talk Shows.

- THE PREVALENCE OF "TALK ABOUT VIOLENCE" IN REALITY PROGRAMMING IS ALSO UNCHANGED BETWEEN YEAR 1 AND YEAR 2.

Instances of discussion of violent acts without the presence of any visual display of violence are coded only for reality programs, a genre marked by reporting and other forms of talk rather than actions. In 1995–96, 14% of reality programs contained sequences of "talk about violence" with no visual portrayals of violence, compared with 18% in 1994–95, a difference that is not statistically significant.

- THERE ARE STRIKING DIFFERENCES IN THE PORTRAYAL OF VIOLENCE BETWEEN SUB-GENRES OF REALITY PROGRAMS, AND THEY ARE CONSISTENT BETWEEN YEAR 1 AND YEAR 2.

In 1995–96, every Police reality program we analyzed portrayed visual violence, as was also true in 1994–95. Other sub-genres high in the incidence of visual violence were the Tabloid News (69% in 1995–96; 85% in 1994–95) and Documentaries (53% in Year 2; 73% in Year 1). Entertainment News and Review programs, News and Public Affairs shows, and Entertainment Non-news programs are close to the average of 38% of programs with some visual violence. Talk Shows are below average in the presentation of visual violence (15% in each year), and are most likely to present Talk About Violence (29% in 1995–96; 30% in 1994–95).

- WHILE REALITY PROGRAMMING IS PREDOMINANTLY A FEATURE OF DAYTIME TELEVISION, VIOLENT REALITY PROGRAMMING IS CONCENTRATED IN THE EVENING.

A majority of reality programming occurs during daytime hours, but most violent reality programs occur in the evening. Early evening reality programming (6:00–8:00 p.m.) is as likely to feature visual violence as later programming. In major part, the prevalence of violent reality programming in the evening hours is a function of reality sub-genre: Police and Tabloid News programming is concentrated in the evening, while other reality sub-genres are spread across the programming day.

- SYNDICATED REALITY PROGRAMS ARE SOMEWHAT MORE VIOLENT THAN LOCALLY-PRODUCED AND NETWORK-PRODUCED PROGRAMS.

In 1995–96, some 45% of 259 syndicated reality programs contained no violence, while 53% of 212 network-produced reality shows and 65% of 23 locally-produced reality programs contained none. In part, this too is attributable to sub-genre differences: all Police shows and almost all Tabloid News shows, the most violent sub-genres, are syndicated, not network, fare.

TABLE 6

Profile of Reality Program Violence Across Genres

	Overall %	Police Shows	Ent mnt Non-News	Ent mnt News and Review	Documentary	News and Public Affairs	Tabloid News	Talk Shows
% of Programs with some visual violence	38%	100	35	31	53	37	69	15
% of Programs with some talk about violence	14%	0	9	10	1	13	24	29
Among Programs that contain violence								
Violence in Visual sequences: % of sequences...								
Depicting acts	73%	66	68	81	74	63	69	80
Depicting credible threat	32%	57	37	30	29	21	14	41
Showing no harm and pain	16%	27	20	21	13	14	17	11
In which a gun is used	40%	67	55	38	37	38	26	26
In which perpetrators are punished	25%	38	23	24	35	15	26	46
In which perpetrators are rewarded	8%	8	3	12	17	3	0	8
In which violence is extremely intense	23%	27	16	26	21	15	25	36
In which violence is very graphic	9%	6	7	7	10	12	3	15
Violence in Talk about violence sequences: % of sequences...								
Discussing acts	78%	76	87	67	81	62	65	89
Discussing credible threat	21%	14	13	22	18	29	22	20
Involving no harm and pain	14%	14	10	18	10	24	15	12
In which a gun is used	27%	43	27	47	34	24	9	23
In which perpetrators are punished	40%	48	29	58	46	41	26	38
In which perpetrators are rewarded	7%	5	4	13	19	0	0	8
In which talk is graphic, concrete	53%	48	71	44	63	53	43	51
Involves first person testimony	40%	24	39	28	22	36	18	61
Involves second person testimony	20%	33	18	20	18	14	20	23
Involves third person testimony	53%	48	46	59	68	58	75	38

Ratings and Advisories

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MADISON

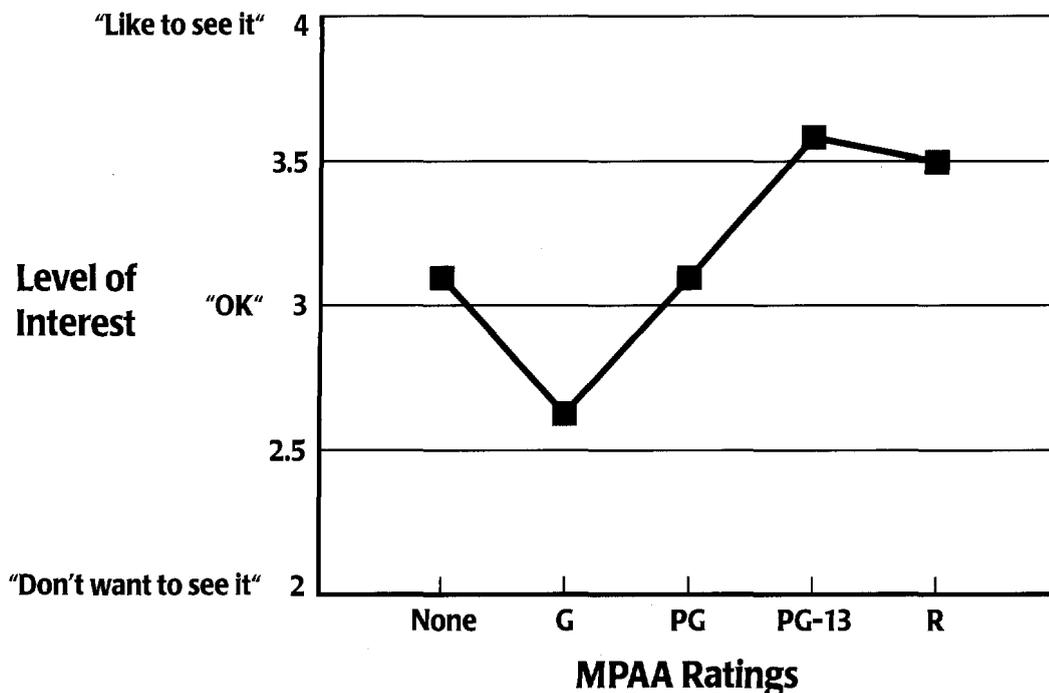
To study the impact of ratings and advisories on children's viewing choices, we gave younger (age 5-9) and older (age 10-15) children eight program and movie descriptions with varying rating designations and asked them how much they wanted to see each one. Three of these systems were content-based and indicated the level of violence to be expected: the HBO-Showtime system, the Recreational Software Advisory Council system, and the Canadian system. The others made or implied viewing recommendations for various groups: the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings, the advisories "viewer discretion advised" and "parental discretion advised," simple recommendations of age-appropriateness, and award notations. The major findings include the following:

- THE MPAA RATINGS INCREASED CHILDREN'S INTEREST IN RESTRICTED PROGRAMS, BUT NONE OF THE CONTENT-BASED SYSTEMS HAD THIS EFFECT.

The MPAA ratings were the only one of the eight systems tested that significantly affected older children's eagerness to see programs. The more restrictive ratings of "PG-13: Parents strongly cautioned" and "R: Restricted" increased a program's attractiveness, and the lowest rating "G: General Audiences" decreased it (see Table 7). Both boys and girls in the older group were attracted by the more restrictive ratings.

TABLE 7

Effect of MPAA Ratings on Older Children's Interest in a Movie



As we observed in Year 1, "parental discretion advised" affected boys and girls differently. For younger children, this admonition tended to increase the interest of boys while decreasing the interest of girls.

The only other significant effect of ratings on children's interest in programs was that of the HBO-Showtime content codes on younger children. However, rather than increasing interest in the movie, the content codes of "MV: Mild Violence" and "GV: Graphic Violence" reduced children's interest in it.

- RESTRICTIVE MPAA RATINGS MADE PROGRAMS ESPECIALLY ATTRACTIVE TO THE MORE AGGRESSIVE CHILDREN AND THE MORE AVID TV VIEWERS.

Certain background factors seem to exacerbate the effect of restrictive MPAA ratings. Although MPAA ratings did not affect younger children overall, the most aggressive younger children and those who liked to watch television the most were the most attracted by the more restrictive MPAA ratings. Among older children, beyond the overall magnetic impact of restrictive MPAA ratings, the more children said they liked watching violent TV, the more they were interested in seeing a movie rated "PG-13." These relationships were observed even after controlling for the child's sex.

- CHILDREN WHOSE PARENTS WERE MORE INVOLVED IN THEIR TELEVISION VIEWING WERE LESS INTERESTED IN A PROGRAM DESIGNATED AS VIOLENT.

On an encouraging note, among younger children, those who said their parents more often watched and discussed TV with them were less interested in a program labeled "contains some violent content." This suggests that parental involvement may encourage children to internalize their parents' viewing standards.

- MANY OF THE RATING SYSTEMS AFFECTED CHILDREN'S EXPECTATIONS FOR VIOLENT CONTENT WITHOUT MAKING THE MORE VIOLENT PROGRAMS MORE APPEALING.

The ratings and advisories had very few significant effects on younger children's reported expectations. The higher level RSAC ratings and some of the Canadian ratings led to expectations of greater violence in the programs. However, these expectations did not translate into greater interest in seeing the programs.

In contrast, older children's expectations were affected by many of the rating systems. Specifically, older children generally expected more violence as the MPAA ratings became more restrictive. They also expected more violence in the higher level ratings of the HBO-Showtime codes and the Canadian system. Only the MPAA ratings and the Age Indicators affected older children's expectations of the age for which a show was appropriate. Overall, the findings show that labels which imply restrictions attract children more than those which suggest the presence of violence. Another finding that supports this "forbidden fruit" effect is that "parental discretion advised" increased younger boys' interest in a program, whereas "contains some violent content" did not.

- RATINGS OR ADVISORIES THAT URGE PARENTAL CONTROL BASED ON AGE CONSIDERATIONS SEEM THE MOST LIKELY TO PRODUCE THE "FORBIDDEN FRUIT" EFFECT.

Both the "parental discretion advised" effect on younger boys and the effect of "PG-13" and "R" on older children fit these criteria. The Age Indicators, which simply stated the expected age of viewers without calling for parental guidance, did not produce the same effect. And none of the ratings that influenced expectations of violence without suggesting who should see the program increased children's interest.

The television industry's new rating system is similar to the MPAA system in that it provides guidance on the appropriate age for viewing while exhorting parental control over children's access to programs. Moreover, it does not provide information about the specific content of individual programs.

- THE PREMIUM CHANNELS MAKE HEAVY USE OF MPAA RATINGS AND CONTENT CODES.

As in Year 1, the MPAA ratings and premium channel content codes were used almost exclusively by the premium channels. Combining the premium channels, most movies were rated "PG" (30%) or "PG-13" (35%). While only 3% were rated "G," 14% were rated "R." The rest were either labeled "not rated" or had no rating designation.

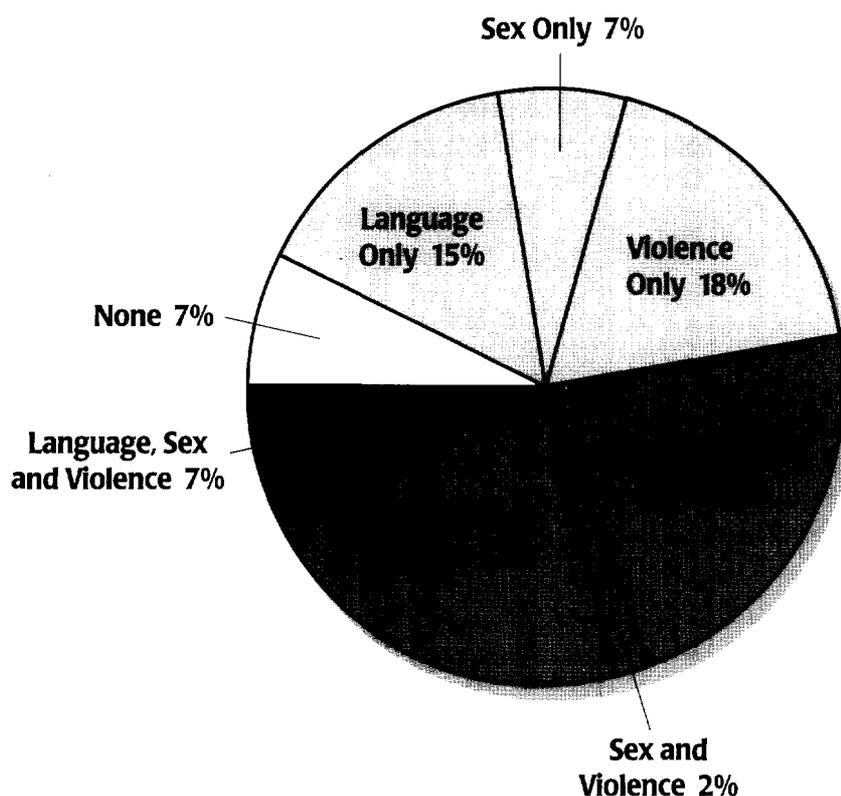
The content codes were heavily used by the premium channels. Of the movies on these channels, 51% had a violence code, 63% had a language code, 48% had an "adult content" label, and 17% had a nudity code.

- THE MPAA RATINGS OF "PG" AND "PG-13" REFERRED TO A WIDE DIVERSITY OF CONTENT TYPES.

An analysis of the movies that were aired with both MPAA ratings and premium channel codes showed that there is considerable overlap in content between the ratings of "PG" and "PG-13," especially in terms of violence and language. In addition, an analysis of the frequency with which the various types of content codes appeared alone and in different combinations in movies with different MPAA ratings showed that both the "PG" and the "PG-13" ratings signal a wide variety of disparate possibilities of content combinations. For example, 15% of "PG"-rated movies had only adult language, 18% had only violence, 22% had sex and language, and 22% had violence and language (see Table 8). This leads to the conclusion that without the content codes, there is little indication of what type of content to expect in a movie rated "PG" or "PG-13."

TABLE 8

Distribution of Language, Sex, and Violence Codes in PG-Rated Movies



Designing Anti-Violence Messages for Television

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL

Content Analysis of Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

A content analysis of 100 anti-violence PSAs produced by the cable television industry revealed that:

- PSAs FREQUENTLY RELIED ON CELEBRITY TESTIMONIALS RATHER THAN ON A NARRATIVE FORMAT.

Eight of ten PSAs reviewed in Year 2 were testimonials by individuals or groups about the need to stop violence. Year 1 research had found, however, that narrative PSAs that *showed* rather than *told* why violence is inappropriate were more appealing to adolescents.

- PSAs OFTEN USED POTENTIALLY NON-CREDIBLE CELEBRITIES.

Half of the PSAs featured adult male celebrities delivering anti-violence messages. However, Year 1 studies showed that some celebrities, especially those who have been involved in violence either in their personal or professional lives, were perceived by some adolescents as hypocritical or insincere.

- PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE WITHIN ANTI-VIOLENCE MESSAGES WERE NEVER PUNISHED.

One-fifth of the PSAs contained graphic violence; most of the narrative PSAs showed the consequences of violence for victims, but perpetrators were rarely injured and were never punished.

- PSAs RARELY OFFERED USEFUL ADVICE.

Three fourths of the PSAs included recommendations or advice, but often these were vague slogans or clichés (e.g., “stay strong,” “take control”). Few concrete suggestions for alternatives to violence were portrayed or discussed.

- NONE OF THE PSAs ADDRESSED THE USE OF GUNS IN SCHOOLS.

Although the use of guns was addressed in 62% of the PSAs, no PSA addressed the issue of the use of guns in schools.

- CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP STATEMENTS OR LOGOS WERE USED EXTENSIVELY.

Sponsor tags occupied as much as half of the total air time of the PSAs, using time that could have been spent on the anti-violence message.