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Profiling Television Violence

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"No topic touches a nerve in American homes as does violence on television," began the lead article of a highly publicized special issue of *TV Guide* on August 22, 1992. Soon thereafter, ten Senators signed a letter to television executives demanding voluntary controls on violence. The Television Violence Act, in force since 1990, offered limited exemption from the threat of antitrust action if the industry responds. If not, warned the Act's chief sponsor, Senator Paul Simon (D-IL.), harsher legislation will follow. By the end of 1993, nine bills were introduced in Congress to curb television violence.

Attorney General Janet Reno and Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala, along with Department of Education Secretary Richard W. Riley, had convened in Washington, D.C. a "National Consultation on Violence." Their report, released in July 1993, broke new ground in pointing out that the discussion marks the beginning of a broad discussion about cultural policy. The report declared that "the

issue of media violence is really just the first phase of a major cultural debate about life in the 21st Century. What kind of people do we want our children to become? What kind of culture will best give them the environment they will need to grow up healthy and whole?" They recommended that citizens "Take lessons from the environmental movement to form a 'cultural environmental' movement."

Leaders of the television industry had responded to the public and Congressional pressure by declaring their intention to run disclaimers and "parental advisories." That was a move that satisfied no one at the time, and dismayed many in the fall of 1993 when no program was found to deserve the warning label. Another effort at damage-control was the "Industry-Wide Leadership Conference on Violence in Television Programming" in Los Angeles on August 2, 1993. It was dubbed the "Violence Summit" by the international media crowding into its hotel ballroom. This was the first time that the electronic media industries invited legislators, educators, researchers and representatives of citizens groups to discuss a matter of programming policy. The conference was covered by all major networks, broadcast live by CNN and later aired in full by C-SPAN. It marked the widest public recognition by leaders of a deeply divided industry that the issue will not go away and that media violence is part of the broader problem of cultural policy-making.

By year's end, most members of the cabinet and even President Bill Clinton spoke out on television violence. No speech reverberated more than that of the Attorney General. "Top cop Janet Reno may have turned Congress's anti-TV violence bandwagon into a runaway freight train," exclaimed *Variety* (November 1, 1993, p. 25). On the other hand, Ron Alridge, publisher and editorial director of another trade paper *Electronic Media*, commended "plain talking Janet Reno" and declared that "the war against violence has escalated to the point that mere disclaimers will no longer suffice" (October 25, 1993, p. 30).

VIOLENCE PROFILE

The Violence Profile is a periodic report of two types of investigation. The first, Message System Analysis, addresses the question of what viewers see, that is, the content shown on television, and is summarized in the Violence Index. The second, Cultivation Analysis, focuses on consequences of living with and learning from television.

The Violence Index has been compiled annually since 1967. Cultivation Analysis results have been published as part of the Violence Profile since 1972 and in numerous publications listed in the Bibliography. The last Violence Profile covered the years from 1967 through 1989. This

report extends the analysis through the 1992-93 season and includes special studies of non-fiction and cable-originated programs.

The Violence Profile is part of the Cultural Indicators project. Cultural Indicators is a database and an ongoing research project that relates recurrent features of the world of television to viewer conceptions of reality. Its cumulative computer archives contain observations on 2,816 programs and 34,882 characters coded according to many thematic, demographic and action categories.

The research began in 1967-68 with a study for the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. It continued, at various times, under the sponsorship of the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, the National Institute of Mental Health, The White House Office of Telecommunications Policy, the American Medical Association, the Administration on Aging, the National Science Foundation, the W. Alton Jones Foundation, the Screen Actors' Guild, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, the National Cable Television Association, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the Turner Broadcasting System, the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention of the U.S. Public Health Service, The Ford Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and other organizations.

Past reports have focused on television's contributions to images of women and minorities; sex-role stereotypes; occupations; political orientation; aging; disability; mental illness; death and dying; school achievement and aspirations; health-related issues such as safety, nutrition, and medicine; science and scientists; family life; religion; adoption, and other issues. It has also been extended to comparative studies of television content and effects in several countries.

Violence Index

Violence is a social relationship. People hurt or kill to force (or deter) unwanted behavior, to dominate, to terrorize. Symbolic violence is literally a "show of force." It demonstrates power: who can get away with what against whom.

We define violence in a way that does not presume one specific type of effects (i.e., imitation, as so much public discussion does) but, on the contrary, establishes the basis for research on the cultivation of many potential consequences. They include such socializing processes as accommodation to one's place in a power structure; a sense of victimization; and vulnerability, mistrust and dependency, as well as of aggression and violations of the social order.

Our measures are based on the reliable observation of clear-cut, unambiguous, and overt episodes of physical violence—hurting or killing or the threat of hurting and/or killing in any context. Idle threats, verbal abuse, or gestures without hurting or killing (or threatening to do so) are not coded as violence.

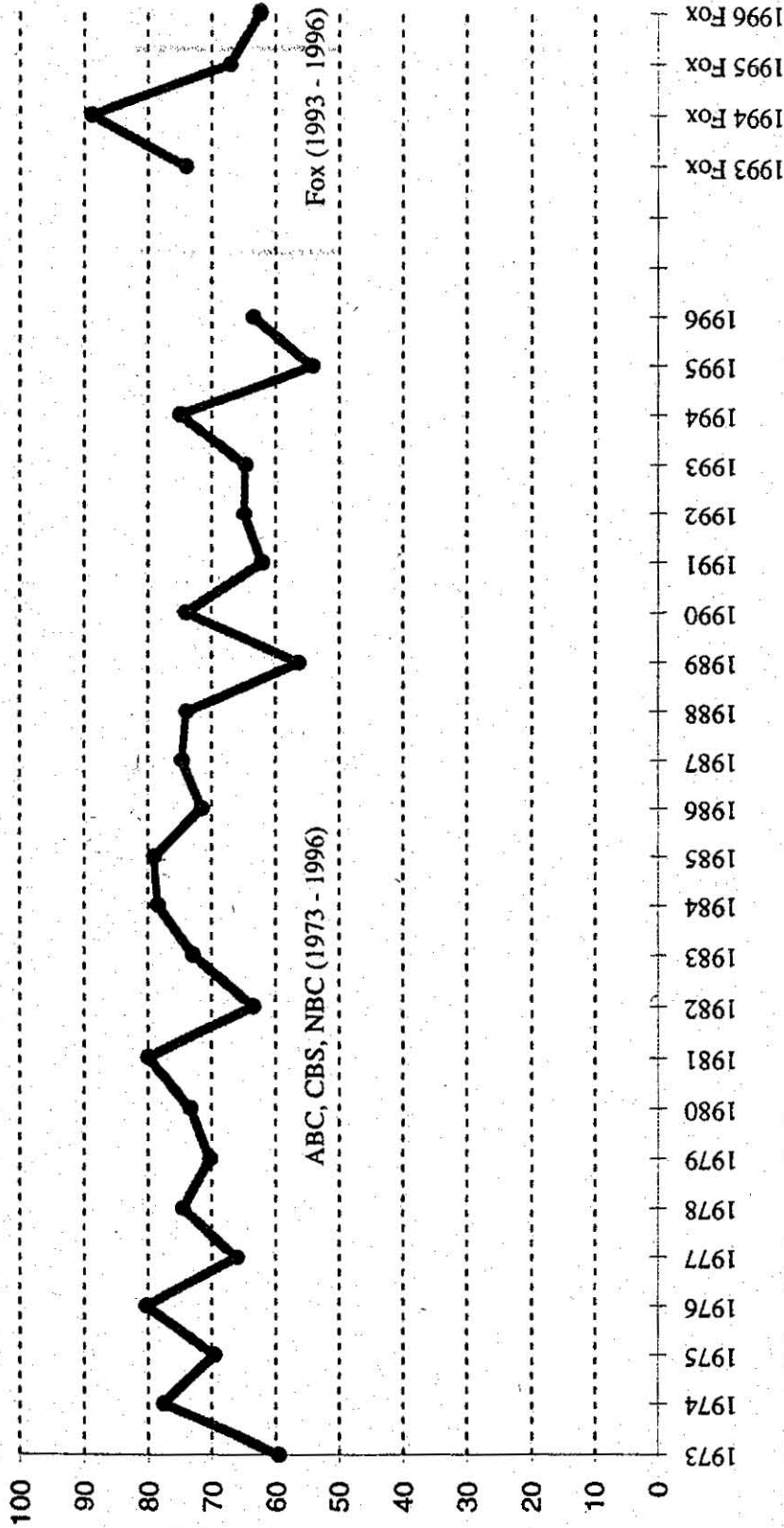
We record any act of violence that fits the definition, regardless of conventional notions about types of portrayals that may have “harmful” effects. We include violence that occurs in a realistic and serious or fantasy or humorous context. “Accidental” violence and “acts of nature” are recorded because fictional violence is always purposefully contrived, always claims victims, and always demonstrates power. There is also considerable research evidence that humor and fantasy are effective forms in which to convey serious lessons (Bandura et al., 1967; Ellis & Sekura, 1972; Lovas, 1961). Fantasy, comic, “natural” and “accidental” violence all demonstrate relationships of power and vulnerability. Humor may be the sugar coating on the pill, making it more acceptable, enjoyable, and easily digestible than in other “serious” forms. Eliminating it from the analysis would be a major conceptual error.

The units of analysis are the dramatic program as a whole, each character (speaking part) in the program, and the violent scene (defined as violence among the same characters). Trained coders analyze week-long videotaped samples of each season’s programs using an extensively tested instrument of analysis. The instrument requires the reliable observation by independent coders of many aspects of the programs and their characterizations. All programs and all speaking characters in the samples are included in the analysis.

The Violence Index combines three sets of observations to provide a single indicator sensitive to a range of program characteristics. The observations record (a) the percent of programs containing any violence (%P); (b) the rate of violent scenes per program (R/P) and per hour (R/H); and (c) the percent of major characters involved in violence (%V) either as perpetrators or victims or both. The Violence Index is the sum of these measures with the rates of violent scenes and the percent of major characters involved in killing weighted by a factor of two. The formula is $VI = \%P + 2R/P + 2R/H + \%V + \%K$. Its purpose is to facilitate comparisons over time and across networks and types of programs.

Trends

Violence on prime-time major network dramatic programs, as measured by the Violence Index (Figure 18.1 and Table 18.1), declined slightly in the 1989-90 season.



Source: Cultural Indicators Project

Figure 18.1. Percentage of prime-time programs with violence in broadcast networks

Table 18.1. Violence in Television Networks Prime-Time Dramatic Programs (1973–1996).

Year	Samples		Violent Scenes per hr.	Percentage of Programs with Violence			
	Pgms	Hrs		Combined	ABC	CBS	NBC
1973	62	56.5	4.9	59.7	47.8	66.7	66.7
1974	58	60.0	5.5	77.6	94.1	63.6	78.9
1975	66	61.0	5.9	69.7	75.0	52.0	85.7
1976	61	58.5	5.8	80.3	89.5	70.8	83.3
1977	68	62.4	5.9	66.2	66.7	61.3	75.0
1978	63	63.0	4.5	74.6	83.3	68.2	70.6
1979	64	60.7	5.7	70.3	60.9	79.2	70.6
1980	64	59.2	5.7	73.4	66.7	68.2	88.9
1981	65	57.8	5.9	80.0	83.3	79.2	76.5
1982	77	60.6	4.6	63.6	63.6	63.6	63.6
1983	63	58.8	4.8	73.0	83.3	63.6	73.9
1984	65	60.0	6.9	78.5	83.3	82.6	70.8
1985	67	61.5	6.8	79.1	80.0	77.3	80.0
1986	67	61.5	5.2	71.6	75.0	85.7	57.7
1987	75	63.3	5.1	74.7	65.2	88.5	69.2
1988	77	66.0	6.2	74.0	80.0	68.0	74.1
1989	69	56.3	4.7	56.5	41.7	77.8	51.7
1990	54	45.0	4.0	74.1	81.3	72.2	70.0
1991	61	50.5	5.1	62.3	66.7	68.4	54.2
1992	60	50.0	2.9	65.0	57.1	64.7	72.7

Table 18.1. Violence in Television Networks Prime-Time Dramatic Programs (1973–1996) (cont'd).

Year	Samples		Violent Scenes per hr.	Percentage of Programs with Violence			
	Pgms	Hrs		Combined	ABC	CBS	NBC
1993	57	48.5	3.7	64.9	60.0	68.8	66.7
1994	48	45.6	4.8	75.0	94.4	75.0	50.0
1995	116	95.0	3.7	54.3	56.1	52.9	53.7
1996	66	50.0	4.5	63.6	56.0	73.3	65.4
1973 - 1996	1,593	1,412	5.1	70			
1993 Fox	27	16.9	10.3	74.1			
1994 Fox	27	21.6	7.9	88.9			
1995 Fox	58	38.0	6.3	67.2			
1996 Fox	24	16.0	5.1	62.5			
1993 - 96 Fox	109	76	6.4	73			

Source: *Cultural Indicators Project.*

Saturday morning children's programs, traditionally the most violent, present a mixed picture. More than 9 out of 10 programs (90.3%) and 8 out of 10 characters (81.0%) were involved in violence. But while children's programs in 1990-91 were saturated with a record high of 32 violent scenes per hour, by 1992-93 the rate declined to 17.9 violent scenes per hour.

The rise of "reality" programs based on purportedly true accounts of often violent events prompted a special analysis of nonfictional programs; these had not been included in previous studies. An analysis of a week of all prime-time programs broadcast on ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox in February 1993 was conducted at the University of Delaware. In addition to "reality" programs, this analysis included variety shows, news/magazine programs as well as the traditional dramatic fare (situation comedies, action programs, dramas, and TV movies).

The analysis finds that violence in "reality" programs is a close second to dramatic action shows (Table 18.2). The 7 variety shows in the sample were saturated with 13 violent scenes per program (11.4 per hour), mostly of the "kick-in-the-groin" variety of "humor." News/information magazine shows were considerably less violent. The overall Violence Index including "reality" and other "non-fiction" (117.5) is slightly below the comparable fictional-dramatic program Index (127.2).

Another special study focused on violence in cable-originated programs (those produced by cable networks rather than all programs

Table 18.2. Violence in Prime Time, 1993, Including Nonfiction Programs.

		Percentage of programs with any violence %P	Rate per Program R/P	Rate per Hour R/H	Violence Index
Sit-com	(N=36)	52.8	1.4	2.7	85.6
Action	(N=9)	88.9	5.0	4.7	165.4
Gen. Drama	(N=19)	63.2	5.4	4.2	120.8
"Reality"	(N=15)	73.3	5.3	7.5	145.9
Variety	(N=7)	85.7	13.0	11.4	195.6
News-Mag	(N=4)	25.0	2.3	2.2	42.0
Total	(N=90)	63.3	4.2	5.0	117.5

carried by them) for the 1990-91 season (for a full report see Gerbner, 1993a). Cable-originated children's programs had substantially less violence than children's programs broadcast on the networks. On the other hand, cable-originated general programming and particularly action programs were more violent than similar programs broadcast on the networks.

Flap Over Measurement

When some of these results were first released, just before the Los Angeles conference, some network executives used the occasion to publicize long-standing criticism of the research. They complained that cable networks and movies are even more violent than the major broadcast networks and yet they are not included in the Index. They said that our "bizarre bit of bean-counting does not hold up to scrutiny" because we treat slapstick comedy the same as serious gunplay. They dismissed our study as "nonsensical" because we found violence in "I Dream of Jeannie."

These arguments have been made and refuted for at least 25 years. The Violence Index focuses on broadcasters whose programs are viewed by most people and who receive their licenses to serve "the public interest, convenience, and necessity." Cable-originated programs have also been studied and the results released separately (see Gerbner, 1993a). As to violence in slapstick comedy, coders have to find that there is an overt physical threat or action to hurt or kill. A slap or a slip is not necessarily coded as violent unless the character can or does get hurt. Making it seem funny or happy does not change its lessons.

Concerning Jeannie, she was seized upon some 25 years ago and trotted out ever since as an example of absurdity. In fact, the episode of "I Dream of Jeannie" in our sample did have a very violent dream sequence.

It is, of course, possible for reasonable people to disagree over whether or not a specific action or event in a program should be considered violent. But continued squabbles about technical methodological details of definition and measurement deflect attention from more serious areas of agreement and consensus. The concerns of the public and the Congress over pervasive, gratuitous, and formulaic violence have clearly reached the boiling point, and the networks have recognized and acknowledged the urgency of these concerns. Therefore, it is now more important than ever, for all concerned, to have reliable and objective measures of violence on the airwaves, and we invite the networks to join us in our effort to generate such valid and comprehensive indicators. Their coders can work alongside our coders and follow the same ground rules; let the chips fall where they may.

DYNAMICS OF VIOLENCE

Violence is a complex scenario. It involves a wide range of motivations, circumstances, and justifications. It sends out messages about power and vulnerability, problem-solving, human relations, law enforcement, consequences of actions, and the rules of society. Many of these "lessons" may be interpreted differently by different viewers, although it is hard to conceive of infants "interpreting" the television they see. So on a more basic and general level, any sustained exposure to dramatic violence may cultivate similar assumptions about power and vulnerability regardless of whether the violence is "gratuitous" or justified, if the social relationships involved (who can get away with what against whom) are stereotyped, repetitive, and pervasive.

The Violence Index was not designed to do justice to subtleties and complexities of individual works. Close, detailed interpretations of single works, such as those of television critics, may provide compelling insights about specific acts in specific dramatic contexts. Our analysis serves a different purpose. It is more a bird's-eye-view of familiar territory, showing not what individual viewers may see at a particular time but the inescapable common features to which large communities are exposed from infancy on and over long periods of time. The repetitive daily experience of who gets away with what against whom, regardless of reasons or justifications, has a message of its own. It is the message of power and risk, of violents and victims, of a dramatic "pecking order."

Obviously, all violence is not alike. Violence can be seen as a legitimate and even necessary cultural expression if it is not a vast "overkill" of inequitable one-sided victimizations, and if it conveys valid lesson about human consequences. There is murder in Shakespeare, mayhem in fairy tales, blood and gore in mythology. But Greek drama, often cited for its compelling pathos and cathartic effects, showed only the tragic consequences of violence on stage; "Greek sensibilities," observes theater historian Oscar G. Brockett (1979, p. 98) "dictate that scenes of extreme violence take place offstage, although the results . . . might be shown."

Individually crafted and historically inspired, the sparingly and selectively used symbolic violence of powerful stories is capable of balancing tragic costs against deadly compulsions. However, under the increasing pressures of global marketing, graphic screen imagery is produced for worldwide entertainment and sales on the dramatic assembly-line. This "happy violence" is swift, cool, thrilling, painless, effective, designed not to upset but to lead to a happy ending and to deliver an audience to the advertiser's message in a receptive mood.

The marketing strategies driving mass-produced violence affect the total tone and context of programming. The scenario begins with cast-

ing and fate, the subtitle of a study prepared for the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (see chapter 12). It found that women play one out of three characters in prime time, one out of four in Saturday morning children's programs, and one out of five in the news. With a predominantly male cast, and given the typical action scenario, the stage is set for stories of power, conflict, violence. The SAG-AFTRA study found that most of those who are underrepresented are also those who, when portrayed, suffer the worst fate.

Television did not invent the formula. But, unlike other media, it requires no literacy, comes into the home, and its relatively non-selective viewing ritual starts in infancy. Children are its captive audience.

Is Violence Avoidable?

As a medium, television is not comparable to other media. It pervades the entire community and the cultural environment of the home. The proliferation of channels with the coming of cable and VCR's has not led to greater diversity of production or of actual viewing. (see, e.g., Morgan & Shanahan, 1991b; Gerbner, 1993b; Gerbner et al., 1993). A study of "The Limits of Selective Viewing" (Sun, 1989) related frequent thematic categories including romance, family, business, education, nature, science, religion and the supernatural to the incidence of violence. The study found that, on the whole, television presents a relatively small set of common themes, and violence pervades all of them. A major network viewer looking for a nature or family theme, for example, would find violence in 7 or 8 out of every 10 programs.

Of course it is possible to view nonviolent programs, but only for short periods of time at certain hours. The majority of network viewers who watch more than 3 hours in the evening have little choice of thematic context or cast of character types, and virtually no chance of avoiding violence.

A Calculus of Risks

Violence defines character and enhances importance. About one out of four (26.5%) of all characters but more than half (52%) of major characters are involved in violence in any given week (Tables 18.3 and 18.4).

In the total cast of all characters, 17% commit violence. The most violent are young adult males (27%), Hispanic Americans (26%), and settled adult males (22%).

The overall rate of victimization is 21%. The most violent groups also run the highest risks of victimization: young adult males (34%),

Hispanic Americans (32%), and lower class characters (31%). Settled adult males are the exception: their rate of victimization is only 23%.

The ratio of violence to victimization defines the price to be paid for committing violence. Generally speaking, as the most violent groups also tend to be the most victimized, they both commit and suffer violence in roughly similar proportions. But when one group can commit violence with relative impunity, the price it pays for violence is relatively low. When a group suffers more violence than it commits (i.e., in excess of the standard ratio), the price is high.

The average for all characters, that is, number of victims per 10 violents, is 12. Women, children, old people and other minorities tend to be underrepresented and commit less violence but pay a higher price for it than do white males in the prime of life. The price paid in victims for every 10 violents is 15 for boys, 16 for girls, 17 for young women, 18.5 for lower class characters, 20 for elderly women and 28 for elderly men.

Violence takes on an even more defining role for major characters. It involves more than half (52%) of all major characters (58% of men and 41% of women). Most likely to be involved either as perpetrators or victims, or both, are characters portrayed as mentally ill (84%), handicapped (82%) characters with any disability (70%), young adult males (69%), those injured (68%), and Hispanic Americans (64%).

Committing violence are 40% of major characters, while 43% fall victim to it. The most likely perpetrators are the mentally ill (70%), young adult males (53%), and disabled characters (51%).

The average ratio among major characters is 11 victims for every 10 perpetrators of violence. Children of both genders, lower class, ill and handicapped characters, pay a higher price—13–16 victims for every 10 perpetrators.

Saturday morning children's program violence involves more characters than in prime time in every category, and they generally pay a higher price in victimization. The patterns are similar, Hispanics being the most violent and girls, boys and older men paying the highest price.

Major characters in Saturday morning children's programs are the most violent: 82% of men and 66% of women are involved in violence. Mentally ill characters and the few older women cast in cartoons are the most likely perpetrators, except for the even fewer Hispanics who are all violent. Young girls, older men and lower class characters rarely commit but often suffer violence; they pay the highest price for mayhem.

Lethal victimization extends the pattern. In prime time, about 5% of all and 10% of major characters are involved in killing. "Bad" men and women, and Hispanic and lower class characters do most killing. Older men and women, women of color, and lower class characters pay the highest relative price for their acts.

Table 18.3. Violence and Victimization in Major Network Programs; All Characters, Prime Time (1982–1992).

	N (100%)	Involved in violence %	As per- petrators %	As victims %	As both %	For Every 10 perpetrators no. of victims
Total	10647	26.5	17.4	21.0	12.0	12.1
Males (Total)	7089	31.0	21.6	24.6	15.3	11.4
Child., adol.	623	27.1	14.4	21.8	9.1	15.1
Young adult	1051	39.5	27.0	34.2	21.7	12.6
Settled adult	5142	29.7	21.6	23.1	15.0	10.7
Elderly	133	24.8	7.5	21.1	3.8	28.0
Females (Total)	3534	17.3	8.9	13.7	5.4	15.3
Child., adol.	479	12.5	5.8	9.4	2.7	16.1
Young adult	777	19.0	9.7	16.6	7.2	17.2
Settled adult	2119	17.8	9.3	13.7	5.2	14.6
Elderly	90	15.6	6.7	13.3	4.4	20.0
Chars of color	1385	24.4	15.4	19.0	10.0	12.3
Afric.-American	1151	23.2	15.3	17.8	9.9	11.6
Hisp. American	119	40.3	26.1	31.9	17.6	12.3
Lower class ^a	77	33.8	16.9	31.2	14.3	18.5

^aClass not coded for minor characters before 1985.

Table 18.4. Violence and Victimization in Major Network Programs; Major Characters, Prime Time (1982–1992).

	N (100%)	Involved in violence %	As per- petrators %	As victims %	As both %	For every 10 perpetrators, no. of victims
Total	1940	52.3	39.7	42.9	30.3	10.8
Males (Total)	1254	58.5	46.7	49.1	37.3	10.5
Child., adol.	119	53.8	30.3	46.2	22.7	15.3
Young adult	167	68.9	52.7	59.9	43.7	11.4
Settled adult	916	57.3	47.6	47.9	38.2	10.1
Elderly	23	34.8	26.1	26.1	17.4	10.0
Females (Total)	679	40.6	26.8	31.1	17.2	11.6
Child., adol.	67	31.3	17.9	23.9	10.4	13.3
Young adult	122	41.0	32.0	33.6	24.6	10.5
Settled adult	455	42.2	26.2	31.6	15.6	12.1
Elderly	18	33.3	33.3	22.2	22.2	6.7
Chars. of color	218	49.5	37.2	39.4	27.1	10.6
Afric.-Americans	190	48.9	36.8	38.4	26.3	10.4
Hisp. Americans	14	64.3	50.0	50.0	35.7	10.0
Lower class	14	42.9	28.6	42.9	28.6	15.0
Physically injured	137	67.9	48.2	62.8	43.1	13.0
Mentally ill	71	84.5	70.4	70.4	56.3	10.0
Physically ill	125	60.8	40.0	54.4	33.6	13.6
Handicapped	28	82.1	42.9	67.9	28.6	15.8
Any disability	218	70.2	51.4	60.6	41.7	11.8

Among major characters in prime time programs, 10% of whom are involved in killing, for every 10 "good" (positively valued) men who kill, more than 4 are killed, while for every "good" women who kill, 6 are killed. The "kill ratio" of women of color is nearly 17. All minorities pay a higher price for killing than others do. Older men never kill or get killed, but older women get involved in violence only to get killed.

We calculated a "pecking order" of relative risks of victimization as the price for committing violence (Table 18.5). As we have noted earlier, this shows imbalance between committing and suffering violence, regardless of the amount of violence inflicted and absorbed.

Women, children, young people, lower class, disabled and Asian Americans are at the bottom of the general violence "pecking order." When it comes to killing, older and Hispanic as well as the other minority groups pay a higher-than-average price. That is to say that hurting and killing by most majority groups extracts roughly a tooth for a tooth, or less. But minority groups tend to suffer greater symbolic reprisals for such transgressions.

CULTIVATION ANALYSIS

Cultivation analysis attempts to ascertain what it means to be born into and grow up in a home in which television is on more than seven hours a day. In its simplest form, cultivation analysis explores whether those who spend much time with television tend to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most common and repetitive messages and lessons of the television world (see Morgan & Signorielli, 1990, for a detailed discussion of the theoretical assumptions and methodological procedures of cultivation analysis).

The systematic patterns observed in television content provide the basis for formulating questions about people's conceptions of social reality. Using standard techniques of survey methodology, the questions are posed to samples (national probability, regional, or convenience samples) of children, adolescents, and adults. Secondary analysis of large scale national surveys (for example, the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Surveys) have often been used when they include questions that relate to identifiable and relevant aspects of the television world as well as measures of amount of television viewing.

Amount of television viewing is usually measured by asking how much time the respondent watches television on an average day. Other media use habits are also recorded. Respondents in each sample are divided into those who watch the most television, those who watch a moderate amount, and those who watch the least. Cultivation is

Table 18.5. Violence and Victimization Ranking in Major Network Programs; Major Characters, Prime Time (1982–1992).

Group	Number of Chars in Group	For every 10 perpetrators, no. of victims
Foreign chars of color	7	5.0
Native American	5	6.7
Elderly	41	8.3
60 and over	103	8.4
Upper Class	189	9.7
Mentally ill	71	10.0
Latino/Hispanic-Amer.	14	10.0
African-American	190	10.4
Settled adult	1371	10.5
Male	1254	10.5
All char. of color	219	10.7
TOTAL	1940	10.8
All whites	1675	10.8
White American	1548	10.8
Foreign whites	54	10.8
Middle class	1685	10.9
Married	343	10.9
Not Married	1149	11.0
Young adult	289	11.1
Female	679	11.6
Any disability	218	11.8
Physically injured	137	13.1
Physically ill	125	13.6
Child., adolescent	186	14.8
Lower class	14	15.0
Handicapped	28	15.8
Asian/Pacific-American	7	20.0

assessed by comparing patterns of responses in the three viewing groups (light, medium, and heavy) while controlling for important demographic and other characteristics.

Patterns of Response

Evidence of cultivation is likely to be modest in terms of absolute size. Even light viewers may be watching a fair amount of television, and, in any case, live in the same cultural environment as heavy viewers; what they do not get through television they get through others who do watch more.

Accordingly, we should not dismiss what appear to be small effects. As the cards are stacked against large differences, small effects in a large field may have profound significance. For example, a single percentage point difference in ratings is worth many millions of dollars in advertising revenue. A range of 3% to 15% margins (typical of most differences between light and heavy viewers) in a large and otherwise stable field often signals a landslide, a market takeover, or an epidemic, and it certainly tips the scale of any closely balanced decision or election.

The cultivation analyses reported here use data from several sources including the annual General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, the Monitoring the Future Surveys conducted by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan, and a national survey conducted for us by the Roper Organization in 1990. Questions from these surveys measure conceptions of violence, victimization, and safety, as well as interpersonal mistrust (what we call the Mean World Index) and alienation.

Crosstabulations of these measures were run with reported amount of daily television exposure, independently controlling for important background variables (e.g., sex, age, education, etc.). Respondents were classified into light (under 2 hours each day), medium (2 to 4 hours per day), and heavy (over 4 hours each day) television viewing groups. (There are minor variations in these viewing time distinctions across surveys; the important factor is not the absolute amount of viewing but the relative differences in viewing levels.) Respondents were compared in terms of the Cultivation Differential (CD)—the percentage of heavy viewers minus the percent of light viewers who give a specific response. The degree of the relationship, within each subgroup, was measured using the gamma statistic, with significance level indicated by tau-b or tau-c.

“Mean World” Syndrome

Data from numerous large national probability surveys (reported in detail in several articles cited in the Bibliography) indicate that long-

term regular exposure to television, in addition to many other factors, tends to make an independent contribution to the feeling of living in a mean and gloomy world. The "lessons" may range from aggression to desensitization and to a sense of vulnerability and dependence.

For example, heavy viewers are more likely than comparable groups of light viewers to overestimate one's chances of involvement in violence; to believe that one's neighborhood is unsafe; to state that fear of crime is a very serious personal problem; and to assume that crime is rising, regardless of the facts of the case. Heavier viewers in every subgroup (defined by education, age, income, gender, newspaper reading, neighborhood, etc.) express a greater sense of apprehension than do light viewers in the same groups. Other results show that heavy viewers are also more likely to have bought new locks, watchdogs, and guns "for protection."

These patterns are of course not always the same for everyone. Victimization on television and real world fear, even if contrary to facts, are highly related. Viewers who see members of their own group have a higher calculus of risk than those of other groups develop a greater sense of apprehension, mistrust, and alienation.

"Mainstreaming"

The relationship is stronger in some groups and weaker in others. These differences across groups illustrate the dynamics of what we call "mainstreaming"—the tendency for viewing to blur distinctions between groups, to bring heavy viewers of otherwise different groups closer together in the television "mainstream." Viewing may also leave some groups already in the "mainstream" (for reasons other than television) relatively unaffected while other groups are extremely susceptible to the television image.

Heavy viewers in most subgroups are much more likely to express feelings of gloom and alienation than the light viewers in the same groups, and these patterns remain stable in surveys over time. Many subgroup patterns show evidence of mainstreaming. For example, light viewing men are less likely to express feelings of gloom than light viewing women, whereas about the same percentage of men and women who are heavy viewers have a high score on this Index. In other words, heavy viewing members of the genders are closer together than light viewers of the two groups. Similar patterns hold when the associations are controlled for education and income. In short, heavy viewers seem to be more homogeneous, and more likely to express gloom and alienation, than their light viewing counterparts.

Comparable findings are obtained in analyses of a nationwide survey of high school seniors called "Monitoring the Future." The stu-

dents indicated how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements such as "I feel that I can do very little to change the way the world is today," "I often wonder if there is any real purpose to my life in light of the world situation," and "nuclear or biological annihilation will probably be the fate of all mankind, within my lifetime." The more time the respondents spent watching television, the more likely they were to agree with pessimistic and alienated views. These cultivation differences between light and heavy viewers were especially significant for respondents of color, students whose parents had not been to college, and those of a more liberal orientation.

Results from a 1990 national survey of adults conducted by The Roper Organization confirm and extend these patterns (Tables 18.6–18.9). About one in five respondents says that the fear of crime is a "very serious" personal problem, but this view is more likely to be expressed by heavy viewers, overall and in most subgroups. This is especially pronounced among females and for those with more education (and both cases show mainstreaming).

Television's impact is especially pronounced in terms of how people feel about walking alone at night on a street in their own neighborhoods. Overall, less than a third of the light viewers, but almost half of the heavy viewers, say that being out alone at night on their own street is "not safe." This relationship holds up across-the-board, but the cultivation differentials are about 20 percentage points or higher for females, middle-aged respondents, and those with more education. Whatever real dangers may lurk outside people's homes, heavy television viewing is related to more intense fears and apprehensions.

These patterns illustrate the interplay of television viewing with demographic and other factors. In most subgroups, those who watch more television tend to express a heightened sense of living in a mean world of danger, mistrust and alienation. The cultivation of such anxieties is most pronounced in groups whose light viewers are the least likely to be mistrustful and apprehensive.

This unequal sense of danger, vulnerability and general unease, combined with reduced sensitivity, invites not only aggression but also exploitation and repression. Insecure people may be prone to violence but are even more likely to be dependent on authority and susceptible to deceptively simple, strong, hard-line postures. They may accept and even welcome repression if it promises to relieve their anxieties. That is the deeper problem of violence-laden television.

Table 18.6. Percentage of Respondents Who Say That the Danger of Personal Victimization is "Very Serious."

TV Viewing:	Light	Med	Heavy	Total	Gamma
Overall	16.0	21.6	23.6	21.1	.12*
GENDER:					
Male	20.0	18.2	20.4	19.0	.01
Female	12.2	25.0	25.9	23.0	.20**
AGE:					
18-34	19.1	25.1	23.1	23.6	.05
35-54	13.6	18.6	23.3	18.3	.19*
55+	15.5	20.8	24.3	21.2	.14
EDUC:					
Hi School	19.6	24.8	24.3	23.9	.05
Some Coll +	12.8	17.4	22.2	17.3	.19*

Question: How serious is the danger for you personally that you might be the victim of some crime? Very serious; rather serious; not very serious; not serious at all.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 18.7. Percentage of Respondents Who Say That It Is "Not Safe" to Walk Alone at Night on Their Street.

TV Viewing:	Light	Med	Heavy	Total	Gamma
Overall	29.1	42.3	47.9	41.4	.21***
GENDER:					
Male	20.4	32.6	33.3	30.6	.16*
Female	37.3	51.8	59.0	51.2	.24***
AGE:					
18-34	23.1	40.1	39.7	37.2	.17*
35-54	28.2	38.8	52.0	39.0	.28***
55 +	42.4	50.0	54.3	50.3	.12 ($p =$.09)
EDUC:					
Hi School	37.3	48.4	51.3	47.7	.13*
Some Coll +	21.8	33.7	41.0	32.5	.25

Question: In your opinion, is it safe to walk alone at night on the street where you live? Yes; No.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 18.8. Percentage of Respondents Who Say That When It Comes to Trusting People "You Can't Be Too Careful."

TV viewing:	Light	Med	Heavy	Total	Gamma
Overall	51.6	61.9	64.1	60.6	.14**
GENDER:					
Males	50.8	56.8	63.9	57.3	.15**
Females	52.3	66.8	64.2	63.6	.12*
AGE:					
18-34	58.9	62.7	68.3	63.4	.12 (p = .06)
35-54	43.3	61.5	61.3	57.5	.22**
55 +	55.4	61.3	61.4	60.6	.05
EDUC:					
Hi School	66.6	68.5	65.2	67.3	-.03
Some Coll +	37.9	53.1	61.7	51.4	.27***

Question: In general, do you think that you can trust most people, or do you think that one can't be too careful in dealing with people? You can trust most people; you can't be too careful.

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 18.9. Percentage of Respondents Who Say Most People Are Not Helpful But "Are Just Looking Out For Themselves."

TV Viewing	Light	Med	Heavy	Total	Gamma
Overall	34.7	48.5	49.6	46.3	.16***
GENDER:					
Male	38.2	49.3	49.7	47.5	.12*
Female	31.6	47.7	49.5	45.3	.19**
AGE:					
18-34	36.6	57.2	52.5	52.5	.14*
35-54	32.7	41.9	50.5	41.5	.21**
55 +	35.5	44.3	45.6	43.6	.09
EDUC:					
Hi School	48.3	54.5	53.3	53.3	.03
Some Coll +	22.1	40.2	42.1	36.5	.26***

Question: In general, do you think most people try to be helpful or are they mainly just looking out for themselves? Most people try to be helpful; they are just looking out for themselves.

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

STRUCTURAL BASIS OF TELEVISION VIOLENCE

Humankind may have had more bloodthirsty eras but none as filled with *images* of violence as the present. This has generated what is probably one of the most massive concentrations of studies on a single subject. The evidence from these studies converges on the conclusion that growing up and living with these images contributes to aggression, especially among males. Our own research, as we have noted above, shows even more pervasive and debilitating relationships, affecting our sensibilities and insecurities in ways that perpetuate and even strengthen damaging social inequalities.

This is not a reflection of creative freedom, viewer preference, or crime statistics. "Happy violence" is the by-product of a manufacturing and marketing process. The real problem of television violence reflects structural trends toward concentration, conglomeration and globalization in media industries and the marketing pressures fueling those trends.

Concentration, Conglomeration, Globalization

"Studios are clipping productions and consolidating operations, closing off gateways for newcomers," notes the trade paper *Variety* on the front page of its August 2, 1993 issue. The number of major studios declines while their share of domestic and global markets rises. Channels proliferate while investment in new talent drops, gateways close and creative sources shrink.

Concentration brings streamlining of production, economies of scale, and emphasis on dramatic ingredients most suitable for aggressive international promotion. Cross-media conglomeration and "synergy" means that ownership of product in one medium can be used, reviewed, promoted, and marketed in other media "in house." It means less competition, fewer alternative voices, greater emphasis on formulas that saturate more markets at a lower cost per viewer. "Privatization" of formerly public-service broadcasting around the world means production and distribution of even more of the same type of product.

There is no box office or any kind of free consumer market in television. Viewers watch by the clock, not the program. People watch television whenever they are available to the set; very few tune-in to specific programs and then tune out. The total number of viewers is about the same at the same time of the day, week, and season and, as we have seen, the more they watch the less choice they have. Commercial media use programs as bait to tap into the available audience and deliver them to the advertiser at the lowest possible cost.

Competition among network programs at the same time is for marginal advantage. Most major cable networks compete for the same audience with similar or recycled fare. Return on investments, attractive demographics, and low cost, rather than program quality (which may cost more) drive commercial success. "Cost per thousand," the ratio between cost and reach (per thousand viewers), is the general measure of value in commercial television. Ratings, whose comparative value is limited to a measure of the share of the audience at any one time, are one side of the equation; cost is the other. Violence becomes a key ingredient of the formula, for reasons we examine further below, despite the price it exacts in public health, freedom, fairness, and even absolute (as compared to relative-to-cost) popularity.

Not the least of the consequences is the damage done to dramatic originality and integrity. Arbitrarily contrived violence is inserted into formula-driven programs according to market conditions, not dramatic need. Warner Brothers production chief Ed Bleier admitted as much when he protested NBC president Warren Littlefield's claim that NBC turned down the Warner Brothers movie "Falling Down" because "it was too violent." *Variety* reported on July 17, 1993, that Bleier said the charge was "unjust, unfair and irresponsible" because NBC never asked to see the version that had the graphic violence deleted. "Scissoring will not do any damage to the movie," he explained.

If dramatic integrity and creativity are not valid reasons for most violent scenes, neither is the industry's chief rationale—public appeal. To be sure, some highly popular films and programs are violent, but by no means most. In fact, violent programming is not especially popular either with viewers or, as we shall see, with broadcasters who are responsible to the public as license-holders. Why, then, does a public relations-conscious and politically sophisticated industry persist in risking domestic backlash and international embarrassment for its perennially violent fare? The answer is that violence "travels well."

Violence Travels Well

There is no free market on television. Expensive and risky production requires the pooling of large resources and even larger distribution capabilities. That is (and will continue to be) the main reason for networks and other forms of consolidation and conglomeration. The oligopolies that dominate the market can set the price of production so low that most producers barely break even on the domestic market. They are forced onto the world market and all forms of syndication, including cable and video sales worldwide, to make a profit. Therefore, they must look for an ingredient to inject into the product that "travels well." They

find that ingredient in violence. (Graphic sex is second, but that runs into many more inhibitions and restrictions around the world.)

The trade paper *Broadcasting & Cable* editorialized (September 20, 1993, p. 66) that "the most popular programming is hardly violent as anyone with a passing knowledge of Nielsen ratings will tell you. Action hours and movies have been the most popular exports for years." Syndicators demand "action" (the code word for violence) because it "travels well around the world," said the producer of "Die Hard 2" (which killed 264 compared to 18 in "Die Hard 1," produced in 1988). "Everyone understands an action movie. If I tell a joke, you may not get it but if a bullet goes through the window, we all know how to hit the floor, no matter the language" (cited by Ken Auletta in "What Won't They Do," *The New Yorker*, May 17, 1993, pp. 45-46).

Bruce Gordon, President of Paramount International TV Group, explained in the same journal (June 15, 1992, p. 19) that "the international demand rarely changes. . . . Action-adventure series and movies continue to be the genre in demand, primarily because those projects lose less in translation to other languages. . . . Comedy series are never easy because in most of the world most of the comedies have to be dubbed and wind up losing their humor in the dubbing."

"Syndicators are developing action shows with international play in mind and are triggering 20 to 22 initial hours," *Electronic Media* reported in its March 8, 1993 issue (p. 4), because foreign buyers are "tired of . . . series ordered in dribs and drabs of six or eight episodes—in genres they don't find appealing."

"Action series," reported *Variety* on October 5, 1992 (p. 21), sell particularly well if produced by the dozens. "In today's trigger-happy marketplace, a 22-episode order is a creative (and financial) cushion for producers" because the network standard of 13 or even 6 installments "is too paltry" for cable and foreign markets where the marketers' profits come from.

An analysis of international data from 1987 in the Cultural Indicators database shows that violence dominated U.S. exports. We compared our sample of 250 U.S. programs exported to 10 countries with 111 programs shown in the U.S. during the same year. Violence was the main theme of 40% of home-shown and 49% of exported programs. Crime/action series comprised 17% of home-shown and 46% of exported programs. The tendency to produce violence for the world market and the pressure to exhibit at home whatever global economies of scale make most profitable, even of not most popular, has accelerated since.

"Ironically," the *Variety* story cited earlier explained, current pressures on violence make "the networks often choose cheaper reality shows instead" that are, as we have seen just as violent as dramatic action programs.

Violence Cuts Cost—and Freedom

"Syndicated series find success through lowering costs, attracting international markets" was a headline in the August 17, 1992 issue of *Broadcasting & Cable* magazine. Over half of the revenues come from the international market, noted the story, and "Action-adventure and bikini-clad beachgoers play particularly well." The executive in charge of production pointed out that cutting costs reduced "the average \$1.2-million-per-episode budget . . . by 25%, to just over \$900,000 per episode." Critical elements have been the acting guilds and trade-craft unions making "certain concessions," and the speeding up of the weekly production schedules from six days to four days. "Production savings," it was noted, "will allow for additional expenditures to promote the series."

"Cost-cutting," therefore, means reducing staffs, squeezing more work in less time out of those who write scripts and create programs, developing cheaper tabloid formulas that were not acceptable before, forcing independent producers into mass-production and deficit financing to be recouped on cable, video, and the foreign market, and beefing up promotion (often in family programs) to further extend the market. The strategy delivers an audience—even if not the largest—at a relatively low "cost per thousand" viewers—the formula for success. Violence delivers it worldwide.

Far from reflecting creative freedom, the strategy wastes talent, restricts freedom and chills originality. Production companies emphasizing alternative approaches to conflict, like Globalvision, Inc., G-W Associates, and Future Wave, have difficulty selling their product. Even Turner Program Services, whose CEO at the time, Ted Turner, campaigns against violence, is forced to make compromises. *Broadcasting* magazine reported on August 17, 1992 that when Turner Program Services proposed to sell two unusual series worldwide, the challenge, the marketing executive said, "will be to attract males as well as females One of the keys," he added to reassure buyers, "will be to promote the mystery and action both of these programs will have."

Public Backlash

The violence formula for short-run commercial success is, in fact, a reason for popular dismay and institutional stress. Of course, growing up with violence produces its addicts who then provide the core audience for even more graphic cable programs, movies, video games. But it only takes a small proportion of viewers, perhaps the equivalent of one night's television audience, to make all other violent media a commercial success. Stars, strong stories, and lavish promotion can also sell vio-

lent, as almost any other, product. But there is no evidence that, other factors being equal, violence per se is giving most viewers, countries, and citizens "what they want." The most highly rated programs are usually not violent. A test of the relationship between violence and ratings refutes the standard rationalization for violent programming.

Our study compared the average Nielsen ratings of two samples of over 100 programs each to test the popularity of the violence formula. The samples were drawn from the Cultural Indicators Data Archive for the past five seasons. In one sample all programs have high levels of violence; in the other sample no programs contain violence. Average Nielsen ratings and shares for the two samples were then compared. Table 18.10 gives the results. It shows that violence per se consistently received lower ratings.

The overall average rating of the violent sample is 11.1; the same for the nonviolent sample is 13.8. The share of the violent and nonviolent samples is 18.9 and 22.5, respectively. Furthermore, the nonviolent sample was more highly rated than the violent sample for each of the four seasons.

On the contrary, the evidence is that most people suffer the violence inflicted on them with diminishing tolerance. Organizations of creative workers in media, health-professionals, law enforcement agencies, and virtually all other media-oriented professional and citizen groups have come out against "gratuitous" television violence. A March 1985 Harris survey showed that 78% disapprove of violence they see on television. A Gallup poll of October 1990 found 79% in favor of "regulating"

Table 18.10. Comparison of Nielsen Ratings of Violent and Non-Violent Network Prime-Time Dramatic Programs Aired 1988-93.

Years aired	Violent programs N = 104		Non-violent programs N = 103	
	Rating	Share	Rating	Share
1988-89	12.8	21	14.5	24
1989-90	12.0	20	14.8	24
1990-91	8.4	17	10.5	21
1991-92	11.3	19	14.8	23
1992-93	10.0	16	13.0	20
Overall means	11.1	18.9	13.8	22.5

objectionable content in television. A Times-Mirror national poll in 1993 showed that Americans who said they were "personally bothered" by violence in entertainment shows jumped to 59% from 44% in 1983. Furthermore, 80% said entertainment violence was "harmful" to society, compared with 64% in 1983, and almost twice as many people—58% compared with 31%—said entertainment violence bothered them more than news violence (Diane Duston of the Associated Press in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 24, 1993, p. F5).

Local broadcasters, legally responsible for what goes on the air, also oppose the overkill and complain about loss of control. *Electronic Media* reported on August 2, 1993 the results of its own survey of 100 general managers across all regions and in all market sizes. Three out of four said there is too much needless violence on television; 57% would like to have "more input on program content decisions."

FROM RESEARCH TO ACTION

The Hollywood Caucus of Producers, Writers and Directors, speaking for the creative community, said in a statement issued on the eve of the August 1993 conference: "We stand today at a point in time when the country's dissatisfaction with the quality of television is at an all-time high, while our own feelings of helplessness and lack of power, in not only choosing material that seeks to enrich, but also in our ability to execute to the best of our ability, is at an all-time low."

Popular concern and government's responsibility for health, education, and security led to the Washington Working Group's warning that "In the face of rising violence creating a clear public health crisis, First Amendment arguments no longer seem unassailable." But it also added that "we *can* change the direction of media by a combination of audience education and effective organizing techniques."

Industry ferment and public disaffection prompted the Los Angeles "summit." The threat of restrictive action was uppermost on the minds of most participants as Senator Paul Simon, originator of the Television Violence Act, warned of a legislative backlash.

There is an alternative. It is not the "electronic superhighway." Given the convergence of communication technologies, the concentration of ownership, and the shrinking of independent creative alternatives, the notion that a new abundance of hundreds of channels will provide greater choice is a technocratic fantasy. The most profitable programs now being mass-produced for the vast majority of viewers will run on more channels more of the time, while infomercial hustle, direct marketing, and electronically-delivered magazines catering to small audiences will fill the rest. Cross-media synergy and the global consolidation of electronic marketing is more likely to reduce than increase the

diversity of the total orchestration of cultural resources—unless provision is made for liberating it from its present constraints.

The liberating alternative requires citizen action. No other force can provide the broad support needed for loosening the global marketing noose around the necks of producers, writers, directors, actors and journalists. More freedom, not more censorship, is the effective and acceptable way to reduce television violence to its legitimate role and proportion. The role of Congress, if any, is to turn its antitrust and civil rights oversight on the centralized and globalized industrial structures and marketing strategies that impose violence on creative people in many cultures, and foist it on the children of the world.

It is time to augment research with media education and coalition-building to develop a constituency for more effective public participation in making decisions about cultural investment and cultural policy. As cable, computer, and telephone technologies and industries first compete and then converge, as the syndication market opens up to network broadcasters, and as transnational mega-conglomerates centralize production and distribution, the issue of media violence opens opportunities for action that may not return for a long time. It is high time to formulate a concept of the right of children to be born into a cultural environment that is relatively free, diverse, fair, and not threatening to human potentials.

That liberating alternative exists in the Cultural Environment Movement. CEM is a nonprofit educational corporation, a new coalition of media, professional, labor, religious, health-related, women's and minority groups opposed to private corporate as well as public censorship. CEM is working for freedom from stereotyped formulas; for investing in a freer, fairer, and more diverse cultural environment; and for citizen participation in cultural decisions that shape our lives and the lives of our children.

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