

THE ANNENBERG SCHOOL FOR
COMMUNICATION

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

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Dear Steve:

Thanks for forwarding to me on 12/21/94 the memos from Deborah Galvin and Ulanda Shamwell. I appreciate their comments and interest.

Dr. Galvin asks several good questions. First about "intensity of violence." As you know, our content analysis rests on clear-cut, unambiguous and, therefore, reliable observations as measured by tests of inter-coder reliability. Although this gives us rich, useful, and relatively "quibble-proof" aggregate comparative data not obtainable in any other way (and important for public policy use), we pay the price of losing subtleties and more subjective impressions. Those are best provided by reviewers and critics of individual programs. "Intensity" in general depends on the specific context and calls for judgments that are unreliable by our tests.

However, we do have a measure of reliably observable "intensity." That is whether the violence has non-fatal or fatal consequences. This can be done (including trends) with respect to any demographic, racial, and ethnic variable. So I would propose discussing a special analysis of how television violence in general vs. severe (lethal) violence plays out by gender, age, race, and selected ethnic and nationality groups.

Such an analysis would also include violence against children. ("Demeaning," in Dr. Galvin's last question, is again as much in the eyes of the beholder as of the coder and is, therefore, an unreliable observation.)

Dr. Galvin's next question is whether there is a way to measure racial/prejudicial speech on the media over time. If that means dialogue, the answer is yes. We have access to a script archive that can be used to measure such trends. It would also yield interesting information about prejudice expressed through sarcasm and other types of humor vs. invective, etc. This would call for a new and fairly labor-intensive investigation.

Another interesting question involves "responsible positions" held by different groups. The Cultural

Indicators data would yield information about socio-economic status, occupation, and other aspects of "responsibility." As the largest single activity of men on television is crime and law enforcement, and the largest single activity of women is "uncertain" or "none," it would be best to use frequent actual characterizations to define television's dramatic concept of "responsibility" and compare that with real-life concepts. I think this would yield some striking findings especially about children and adolescent boys.

Ms. Shamwell's first question suggests a further exploration of substance use and its consequences for women. This should be included in a cultivation (effects) analysis survey that I would like to propose as part of our next project. (There is virtually no measurable attention given to pregnancy, let alone alcohol use during pregnancy, on television. I doubt that it is depicted, even in daytime serials, more than once or twice a year.)

The second question suggests a further exploration of violence against women of different ages, races, etc., on television (and perhaps in other media) and the inclusion of related viewer attitudes in our cultivation analysis.

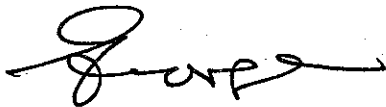
All of this, and our prior conversations, lead me to propose the following.

For the extra final report of the current extended contract, I propose the delivery of a special analysis of trends in general and fatal violence by gender, age, race, class, and ethnicity in prime time and Saturday morning children's programs.

For the next stage, I would appreciate another meeting and discussion to help me develop a well-directed and useful proposal. It so happens that I have an engagement in Washington, D.C. on Wednesday, Jan. 25. at 1 p.m. Unless you want to do something sooner, and if convenient for all concerned, the three of us, and any others you think may be interested, could meet about 10 a.m. that day. Please let me know.

And a Happy (and more promising) New Year to all!

Sincerely yours,



George Gerbner
Dean Emeritus
Director,
Cultural Indicators Project