

## OVERALL VIOLENCE IN FRONTLINE PROGRAMS

A higher proportion of Frontline programs contain violence than do major commercial networks (see Table 1). However, the viewer of Frontline sees lesser number of violent scenes (4.3) per hour than the viewer of network drama (5.3). The average length of the violent scenes they see is half that of the network drama (1.1 minutes versus 2.2 minutes per hour).

Much of Frontline violence is imported from abroad. All of the seven episodes that dealt with foreign countries contained violence. The average number of violent scenes in these programs were nine times higher than the programs with "domestic" topics, and about twice that of the 20 year network average. Yet, their average total duration was still lower than those of the networks. (See Table 1.)

As can be gleaned from the lists under Table 1, the reason for the foreign/domestic differences is that the former episodes are about the troubles of countries stricken with civil-war. Programs with domestic orientation, on the other hand, are concerned with a somewhat broader variety of issues, hence use violence sparingly.

## THE POPULATION OF FRONTLINE

Analyzed episodes contained 801 persons in different roles, apart from 14 Frontline professionals in the capacity of presenter or interviewer (all of whom were white, mostly male, and appeared to be younger than 50).

Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics and forms of on-screen appearance of three main groups of Frontline characters. "Participants" are those whose lives, practices and experiences are the subject of Frontline episodes; "experts" are persons who are casted in the program in a professional or otherwise ratified capacity; "bystanders" are those who witness the events without being an actor in the Frontline story, or those who state an opinion from a non-expert position.

This population is broadly, but not exactly, similar to the world of the commercial television networks. Frontline presents a much broader picture of

age, social class, and occupation. However, for every female character, there are four males in Frontline (among "experts", the ratio is one to five), while the same ratio in network drama has in the last decade risen to about two to three. As Table 2 indicates, the racial composition of Frontline appears to show a good representation of non-whites, however, when characters of U.S. citizenship (denizenship) are singled out from the rest, Frontline fares worse than the commercial networks.

#### DEMOGRAPHY OF VIOLENCE IN FRONTLINE

Relatively few characters are involved in violence as perpetrators, as victims, or both, in Frontline episodes (14.4% of the "participants"). This proportion is half that of all characters, and a fourth of the major characters in network television drama analyzed in Cultural Indicators project over the past two decades (see Table 3 and Table 4). [FOOTNOTE: It is more meaningful to compare "participants" in Frontline episodes with "major characters" than "all characters" of television drama. On the other hand, one might argue that "experts" are often the main protagonists of Frontline-type programs, if not of the events and issues in question. Nevertheless, whether we pick major or all characters for comparison purposes would probably not change the main direction and points of the analysis.]

Even though Frontline characters' involvement in violence is often a fraction of those of the commercial networks, there are significant differences in the comparative proportion of involvement across demographic categories. Characters of color are twice as much involved in violence as the white characters (while in networks, it is about the same). This may be accounted for by the fact that in many episodes is a high proportion of foreign characters from countries with predominantly non-white population. In fact, the proportion of involvement of foreign characters is the third highest, after the physically disabled and mentally ill. Yet, much unlike the commercial networks, the proportion of African-Americans involved is higher than White-Americans, and other ethnic-racial minorities of American citizenship are not involved in any violence at all.

Class composition of those who are involved in Frontline violence is radically different from the networks. While in the latter class status is inversely

proportional to involvement (lower the class, higher the involvement), the highest involvement among the classes in Frontline population is the middle class, followed by upper and lower.

When it comes to the question of relative retribution suffered for an act of violence, however, the world of Frontline emerges as significantly more punitive than the networks across the board (see the last columns of Table 3 and Table 4). In several instances, the pecking order is also reversed. Middle class, White-Americans, females, and people aged 60 and over pay more for their infringements than do the lower class, minority Americans, males, and people younger than 60.

There are marked gender differences in pecking order (see Table 5). Women below 60 pay more dearly than men, while men are only victims when they are 60 or older. White women, African-American women, and middle class women get their retribution at a rate higher than men of the same demographic categories. In fact, African-American males are never victimized, and white males are victimized only at about the same rate as they victimize others.

Overall, comparable patterns of differences are observed for killers and killed in Frontline and commercial network programs, and between men and women. The ratio of people who get killed over those who kill is often higher in Frontline than network programs. And women of most demographic categories get a higher retribution in kind when they kill. Males' fate reflect the power structure more accurately, where upper class killing goes unretributed, for every 10 middle class killers there are only 8 who are killed, and lower classes only get killed. Middle class women, however, pay at a rate of three to one for killing, and lower class women are not involved at all. (See Table 6, Table 7, and Table 8.)

#### VIOLENT SCENES

As previously discussed, there are lesser number and shorter duration of violent scenes in Frontline than in commercial network programming (see Table 1). Our analyses found 107 scenes of violence, defined as .... [standard definition here]. Overwhelming proportion (91.6%) of these incidents took

place on the street or other public spaces (excluding work). This is quite different from commercial programs, where more violence occurs at home and work. When only still photos of violence are shown (19 cases) they lasted about 6 seconds on the average. When shown on film (88 cases), violence lasted about three times longer.

Seven out of ten scenes involved five persons or less. A fourth of all scenes involved masses. Firearms were used in more than a half of the scenes. About a fourth of the scenes involved no involvement of any agents of law, who played a major role only in 15% of the cases. Eighty nine percent of violent scenes took place after 1985, and three fourths were in a major city. Over half of the scenes were from former Yugoslavia, and 13.1% were located in the U.S.A.

#### LEGITIMACY OF VIOLENCE

In our violence coding instrument, we had nine items, each with a scale from 1 to 5, that were intended to measure the legitimacy of violence. Inter-item reliability tests indicated that six of these are usable for the computation of summary scores for each episode:

- Emphasis on the physical consequences of violent action.
- Emphasis on the consequences of violence as serious rather than "comic".
- Emphasis on graphic detail.\*
- Emphasis on fatal consequences of violent action.
- Emphasis on long term consequences.
- Depiction of violence as immoral.\*

[\*VERY INSIDE FOOTNOTE: Two oddities here. First: Graphicness is often considered as sign of sleaze, tabloid journalism, etc.. That was our understanding originally too. I was thinking of "reversing" the scale for this item -- less graphic would have been more legitimate. However, it turned out that it correlates very highly with all of the items that we are determined to assert as measures of legitimate violence. One reason, I think, is the weight of the two Bosnia episodes -- and why not: the more good the cause is, the more politically correct to describe the horror graphically. Second: "Immorality" item should be somewhat problematic. I am not sure whether we are talking about DEPICTION BY THE PROGRAM OF THE ACTION AS IMMORAL or CODER'S EVALUATION OF THE ACTION AS IMMORAL. I think the actual on-site instructions leaned toward the latter. The problem is, if that is the case, then it is more difficult to conceptually justify using it in this scale. Why should depiction of immoral violence make the depiction more "legitimate"? -- on the other hand, if it is the program's point that the act is immoral, then it does make the program legitimate, which was what we had in mind originally constructing this item.]