MICHAEL F. ELEEY, GEORGE GERBNER, and NANCY TEDESCO

Validity Indeed!

AUTHORS Coffin and Tuchman bring their discussion to rest on the consideration of validity, as they see it. Their argument however, is not with the validity of our data, but really with the validity of the definition of violence we have employed. Their choice of validation criteria reveals once again a basic confusion between studies of content and investigations of effects, a confusion in which the logical order of this research is reversed. The task of content studies is to provide reliable assessments of images, which can then be related to studies of effects. To predicate analyses of content on the basis of presumed effects is an uncritical approach.

This confusion leads Coffin and Tuchman to maintain, for example, that violence in humorous contexts is of no concern, for its inclusion runs contrary to the popular wisdom of parents, teachers, journalists, critics, and the like. To be valid, they say, a definition of violence must correspond with those effects that "have prompted genuine social concern—shootings, knifings, fistfights, etc. [p. 32]" Why not relate symbolic violence to fear? To learning how to be a victim? To feelings of panic or power? Or to the peaceful *acceptance* of violence? These are equally plausible behavioral outcomes or effects.

Why not assume that by demonstrating power and differential risks in life, violent symbolic portrayals accomplish the tasks of real-life violence in a cheaper and more entertaining way? Why not assume that situation comedies and "gentle" Thurberesque characters (the repressed frustrations and violent fantasies of Walter Mitty come to mind) are especially effective devices for accomplishing the social functions of symbolic violence? These are equally plausible assumptions, but if one adopts Coffin and Tuchman's "common-sense" restrictions a priori, one could never determine which were

the most "likely" or important effects. We are all children of our culture, and only to the extent that we can critically examine its axioms will our research elucidate its dynamics and structure.

It is obvious that validity in communications research cannot be assumed to rest in a naive semantic correspondence between a symbol and a certain arbitrarily selected type of behavior. To do so is to beg the very question that communications researchers should try to answer. That question is: What types and ranges of conceptions and behavior (other than naive semantic equivalents) do symbolic representations in fact cultivate?

Coffin and Tuchman's "validity" is like that of the alchemist, so hypnotized by the elusive prospect of creating gold that he overlooks the more profound and varied results of his experiments. Symbolic violence may have a variety of functions, of which some may have no more to do with violent action than dreaming of falling has to do with gravity. If the researcher makes up his mind about this vital connection before he begins, he cannot possibly come to a sound—let alone valid—conclusion. We have attempted to avoid such unvalidated preconceptions in our studies, and thus have deliberately included symbolic violence in *all* its contexts. This is not to say that we ignore contextual aspects; in all our reports detailed breakdowns are provided separately for comedies and serious dramas, for cartoons and noncartoons, and for several other contextual categories.

To the extent that we avoid simplistic preconceptions and employ a stringent definition of violence, our studies should differ from others selected by Coffin and Tuchman to fit their presumptions. But here we leave it to the reader to decide whether the technical issues we raised earlier are really so minor as Coffin and Tuchman would have us believe. We only reiterate that closer attention to the methodological aspects involved leads to a comparative picture quite different from the one they have advanced.

Once Again, Due to Circumstances . . .

beyond our control, we are forced to raise subscription prices for the JOURNAL OF BROADCASTING in 1973. The increasing rate of inflation is demonstrated by the fact that we last increased rates just four years ago and must now do it again. From its inception in late 1956 through the Fall of 1961 (Vols. I-V), the JOURNAL cost $5.00 per year ($2.50 for students). The first price increase (a modest $1.00) was voted by the APBE board to be effective January 1962, raising subscriptions to $6.00 ($3.00 for students), and was effective through 1968 (Vols. VI-XII). The cost rose to $8.00 ($4.00 for students) in January of 1969 and remained in effect through the end of 1972 (Vols. XIII-XVI). Now it must be raised again—but for as long as we can, the cost of back issues (through Vol. XVI) will remain at the old rate of $2.50 an issue or $8.00 per volume. Out of all this confusion and compromise, we arrive at the following approved by the APBE Board and effective January 1, 1973:

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