

September 2, 1982

Professor Robert M. Liebert  
Department of Psychology  
State University of New York  
Stony Brook, NY 11790

Dear Bob:

Jerome Frank sent me the page proofs of the second edition of The Early Window which I was pleased to read. Enclosed is a copy of the comments I sent him.

In the course of reading the proofs, I was of course pleased to see a number of references to our work. However, there was one paragraph that I read with dismay. I hope it can be corrected in the next printing, if it is too late to change it now. I am referring to the paragraph on top of page 108. It begins by stating, correctly, that our "violence scoring system includes humorous acts and accidents." It fails to explain that intended humor does not make killing or hurting (which is also our basic definition) necessarily funny; we do not code intentions or effects but strictly portrayals that two pairs of trained coders consider unambiguously violent, regardless of intentions and pre-tensions. Furthermore, as you know, and point out elsewhere, humorous violence may be an excellent demonstration of differences of power, whose demonstration is the most pervasive lesson of exposure to violence, as cultivation analysis has indicated over many years of replication in different contexts and by different people.

Therefore, to say that "as a result, Gerbner's analyses are often at odds with those of other studies using the more conventional definition of 'acts intended to harm or threaten people or property'," is not correct. First, most definitions are essentially the same except that the networks, in their own interest, try to exclude as much as possible from the count. Secondly, although the levels are different, the trends have been similar regardless of the standard employed.

Finally, the "contrast" between our classification and the Christian Science Monitor's, taken from Coffin & Tuchman, NBC network researchers, is a sheer invention, and I am surprised that it has not been checked. We do not classify shows as violent or nonviolent. Therefore, to say that we have classified "light-hearted but innocent sit-coms" (where does this characterization come from? Have Coffin & Tuchman done an analysis of these programs?) "such as Flying Nun and That Girl as violent shows" is simply false. We never even publish titles, only the prevalence and rate of violent acts per program and per hour in our sample.

.... cont.

Professor Robert M. Liebert

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August 30, 1982

I hope that the comment apparently taken uncritically from the network researchers' invented example can be corrected or omitted as soon as possible.

Please call me if any further details or explanation might be needed.

With best regards,

Sincerely yours,

George Gerbner  
Professor of Communications  
and Dean

GG:ab

Enclosure