

Irene Berkowitz,3/13/98 1:53 PM,Violence Index Report

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Date: Fri, 13 Mar 1998 08:53:08 -0500
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To: ggerbner@nimbus.ocis.temple.edu
Subject: Violence Index Report

Hi George:

Yes, I do have thoughts on this subject (see below). It's about using a correlated set of measures including those produced by other agencies, including surveys conducted by the networks, some geodemographic overlays, and fractual measures to validate some of what your saying. Essentially, cutting the cake into 15 different pieces and letting them go at that instead of finding the vulnerability in a single set of measures. This is the easiest thing in the world to do, and the reason you are still fighting the same old battle. We can talk, when we have lunch.

I suggested something like this once in a proposal I wrote to Penn on Fact and Fantasy. I will look it up and print a copy for you, if I think it still makes sense. I forget exactly what I said at the time, but, I think it was something about strenghtening the tests and making some methodological changes, but I wasn't specifically talking about cultural indicators research, as you speak about it, I was looking a fuzzy borders as you know I like to do.

Looking forward to seeing you on the 23rd, if not before.

IB

George Gerbner wrote:

>
> A COMMENT ON ITEM IN: STUDIO BRIEFING
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> >
> >RATINGS ARE MEANINGLESS, STUDY CONCLUDES
> >A Temple University study of TV ratings has concluded that there
> >is little difference in the number of violent acts in shows rated
> >TV-G (general audiences), TV-PG (unsuitable for younger children)
> >and TV-14 (for 14 and older). Today's (Tuesday) New York Daily
> >News quoted George Gerbner, professor of communications at
> >Temple, who conducted the survey, as saying, "If parents think
> >that using the guidelines will protect their children from
> >violence, they're crazy." But an unnamed broadcast executive
> >told the newspaper, "This is just vintage Gerbner not taking
> >context into account. With him, the violence on Touched by an
> >Angel is just as bad as NYPD Blue."
>
> >From George:
>
> Ha! And somebody should tell "unnamed broadcast executive"
> to be a little more careful and imaginative. His quote is pure fiction, as
> we have pointed out in previous exchanges.
>
> Here is the relevant section of our last Violence Index report (1993):
>
> 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.

>
 > Needless to say, they never took up the invitation. Better to drag out the
 > by now 28-year-old fiction!.

>
 > So - we need some strategic advice: how do you make Big Brother Networks,
 > hiding behind "unnamed broadcast executive," sit up and take notice?

>
 > Any ideas?

>
 > George

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