

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
AT STONY BROOK

STONY BROOK, N.Y. 11790

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

August 29, 1972

Dr. George Gerbner
Annenberg School of Communications
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Penna. 19104

Dear George:

Our book on the effects of television is now completed. We have made extensive use of your work, as can be seen from the materials attached. [We have also drawn figures from your tables.]

If you are agreeable to having us use your work, would you be good enough to sign the attached, rather "official looking" form and return it in the envelope provided. We will, of course, send you a complimentary copy of the book upon publication and would be happy to provide any sort of credit line you like for the extracts, tables and figures obtained from your work.

Best personal regards,

Robert M. Liebert

Robert M. Liebert, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

RML:ah

Enc.

*BDD - See Sept 72 (current) issue
of Scientific American. My article and
charts have some further findings
of possible interest.*

PS - could) have kept as galleys before publication!

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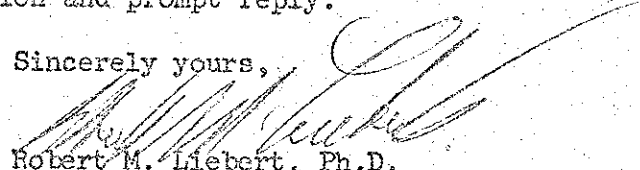
Dear Sir:

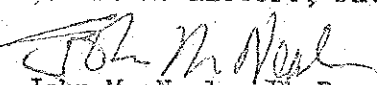
We are currently preparing a book to be entitled The early window: effects of TV on children and youth, to be published by Pergamon Press, Inc. We request permission to quote the materials shown on the attached page(s) in our book. The total citation is about 535 words, from the work named below:

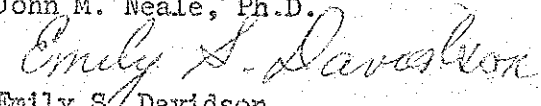
Gerbner, G. Violence in television drama: Trends and symbolic functions. In G. A. Comstock and E. A. Rubinstein (Eds.), Television and Social Behavior, Vol. I: Media Content and Control. Wash., D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1972.

We would also appreciate being advised if you have information that another publisher or author holds any rights to this (these) quotation(s) should we be required to secure this permission. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience, as well as a carbon copy of this letter for your records. Thank you for your cooperation and prompt reply.

Sincerely yours,


Robert M. Liebert, Ph.D.


John M. Neale, Ph.D.


Emily S. Davidson

Permission granted for the above

Signature

Title

to finish. (In contrast, in the 1950's, considered by many to be the "Golden Age of Television," over half of the programs aired during prime-time were independently produced.) Baldwin and Lewis offer a succinct statement of what motivates network programming:²

The character of television programs is determined by the three networks' notions of what will appeal to large numbers of people, sell products or services for advertisers, and not jeopardize the valuable licenses or the good will of affiliates by creating a negative audience response. (p. 294)

Television Content: Stereotypes and Social Roles

In examining the content of television it is important to remember that entertainment fare necessarily does more than merely entertain us and our children; it communicates information about the social structure and it shapes attitudes about ourselves, others, and the world at large. George Gerbner, Dean of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications put it this way:⁵

Representation in the fictional world [of television] signifies social existence; absence means symbolic

annihilation. Being buffeted by events and victimized by people denotes social impotence; ability to wrest events about, to act freely, boldly, and effectively, is a mark of dramatic importance and social power. Values and forces come into play through characterizations: good is a certain type of attractiveness, evil is a personality defect, and right is the might that wins.... The issue is rarely in doubt; the action is typically a game of personality, group identification, skill, and power...Symbolic hurt to symbolic people and causes can show real people how they might use--or avoid--force to stay alive and advance their causes.... Several times a day, seven days a week, the dramatic pattern defines situations and cultivates premises about power, people, and issues. Just as casting the dramatic population has a meaning of its own, assigning "typical" roles and fates to "typical" groups of characters provides an inescapable calculus of chances and risks for different kinds of people. (p. 44)

In this section and the following one we will see that today's television offers many of these symbolic lessons to children--about occupations, racial groups, sex, and violence--much of it perpetuating a rather biased reflection of the world around us.

National and Ethnic Stereotypes

Misconceptions of national and ethnic groups are also fostered by television. In an early study, 80% of all characters were found to be white Americans; of the 20% remaining, Europeans (especially English and Italians) appeared most frequently.⁷ India and Africa, with more than one-third of the world population, are almost entirely unrepresented and China provides a mere 0.2 percent of the television population even though it represents 22% of the world's population. More recent research reveals that Americans comprise more than two-thirds of television's fictional population.⁵

Minorities were more likely than Anglo-American whites to be law breakers: Italians were law breakers over half the time they were presented (54%).⁷ In regard to their respective participation in violence, Gerbner concludes that⁵ ...

foreigners and those not identifiable as Americans, as a group, were increasingly more likely to become involved in violence and to pay a higher price for it than were the Americans. (p. 58)

Non-Americans are not very successful, either: "The role of killer and the lethal balance--the final arbiter of power--remains a prime preserve of the dominant group." (p. 59)

enforcers today. This portrayal presents the black community with the view that blacks do, and should, support the status quo.⁹

However, regardless of the role, the non-white is still under-represented. | "Television drama's global population ... was 77 percent white, 70 percent American, and 67 percent white American," | according to Gerbner's report--yet most of the real world's population is non-white.⁵ One might attempt to explain this under-representation by saying that television is an accurate reflection of America--not the world. Yet only 15% of the non-whites on television were American. Indian Americans, and Americans of oriental descent are almost never seen on television drama.⁵

Occupational Roles

In the real world most people have jobs. Not so on television. Only six out of ten television characters are clearly engaged in some occupational activity. Moreover, prime time television usually presents upper and middle class characters. Less than one-tenth of the characters are working class; when blue collar people do appear they are usually presented in a negative light.^{10,11} Such presentations may contribute to the fact that blue collar occupations continue to have a lower status in the eyes of our children than one would expect from income alone, and that people outside the United States--reinforced by our television entertainment--think of the United States as fostering values antagonistic to the working class. Those who are employed are most likely to be doctors, teachers, entertainers,

Prime Time and Saturday Morning

One of the most accurate estimates of current levels of violence on television during prime time and Saturday morning, is provided by Gerbner.⁵ He first established the representativeness of programming for one week in October by comparing it to that of other times during the year. Then trained teams of observers watched each dramatic program shown during an October week selected in 1967, 1968, and 1969, recording the number of violent episodes. For the purposes of this study violence was defined as:

"The overt expresssion of physical force against others or self, or the compelling^{of} action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed." The expression of injurious or lethal force had to be credible and real in the symbolic terms of the drama. Humorous and even farcical violence can be credible and real, even if it has a presumable comic effect. But idle threats, verbal abuse, or comic gestures with no real consequences were not to be considered violent. (p. 31)

Gerbner used two units of analysis: the play or skit, and the program hour. Although in most adult programs these units are equivalent, many children's programs present several plays per hour (e.g., as in a half hour cartoon program). Investigating more than the amount of violence, he also examined what types of programs contained the most

violence, who acts violently, who is victimized by violence, and what happens to the participants.

The major results of this research are striking. In 1969 "about eight in ten plays still contained violence, and the frequency of violent episodes was still about five per play and nearly eight per hour" (p. 33). Further, the most violent programs were those designed exclusively for children--cartoons:

The average cartoon hour in 1967 contained more than three times as many violent episodes as the average adult dramatic hour. The trend toward shorter plays sandwiched between frequent commercials on fast-moving cartoon programs further increased the saturation. By 1969, with a violent episode at least every two minutes in all Saturday morning cartoon programming (including the least violent and including commercial time), and with adult drama becoming less saturated with violence, the average cartoon hour had nearly six times the violence rate of the average adult television drama hour, and nearly 12 times the violence rate of the average movie hour. (p. 36)

In fact, in 1967 and 1968, only two cartoons were non-violent, and only one in 1969. The overall situation has not appreciably changed since 1954, when Smythe

much less physically injure, the property owner. And "white collar crime" is virtually non-existent on TV.

The role of law enforcement officers in all drama is relatively small (about 20% of general dramatic episodes), but that role is exceedingly, and increasingly, violent. Law officers were violent in about 60% of their appearances in 1967, 72% in 1968, and 77% in 1969. Law men became more likely to inflict violence, without being aggressed against themselves. In real life the great majority of law-enforcement officers rarely, if ever, engage in violence.

Although criminal activity and efforts to stop it are excessively violent, these situations do not make up the bulk of violence in television. As Gerbner puts it: ⁵

Illegals naturally inflicted proportionately more violence. But about nine-tenths of all violence and at least three-quarters of all killing did not involve criminals....Recognition of the illegality of violence usually relegated the play to the limited genre of crime or courtroom drama. The 1967-68 analysis found that due process of law was indicated as a consequence of major acts of violence in only two out of every ten violent plays. (p. 56)

It appears, then, that the law--justice and arbitration in the courtroom--almost never succeeds in the world of television. Violence,

work, education, and manners. The characters do not need them in their way of life; they are rarely encumbered by parents, wives, or children, and seldom eat or go into their homes.... (p. 184)

Recently Gerbner summarized the values now presented on American television:⁶

To be able to hit hard and to strike terror in the hearts of one's opponents--that makes one count when the chips are down. The battered hero triumphs over evil by subduing the bad guy in the end. The last man to hit the dust confirms his own flaw of character and cause. Hurting is a test of virtue and killing is the ultimate measure of man. Loss of life, limb, or mind, any diminution of the freedom of action, are the wages of weakness or sin in the symbolic shorthand of ritual drama. (p. 44)

Can Violence Viewing Blunt Children's Sensitivity?

The values presented on television may actually change children's perceptions. One study, for example, showed that sensitivity to violence may be affected directly by television.⁷ Sixth grade children saw either a violent (an episode of Peter Gunn) or a nonviolent program (an

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August 29, 1972

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Annenberg School of Communications
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Penna. 19104

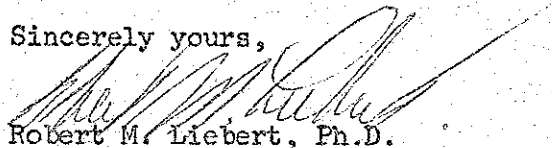
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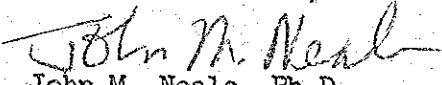
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Gerbner, G. The violence profile: some indicators of the trends in and the symbolic structure of network television drama 1967-1971. Unpublished manuscript, The Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, 1972.

We would also appreciate being advised if you have information that another publisher or author holds any rights to this (these) quotation(s) should we be required to secure this permission. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience, as well as a carbon copy of this letter for your records. Thank you for your cooperation and prompt reply.

Sincerely yours,


Robert M. Liebert, Ph.D.


John M. Neale, Ph.D.


Emily S. Davidson

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Signature

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Figure 2-1

The percentage of network dramatic programs containing violence: 1967-1971.

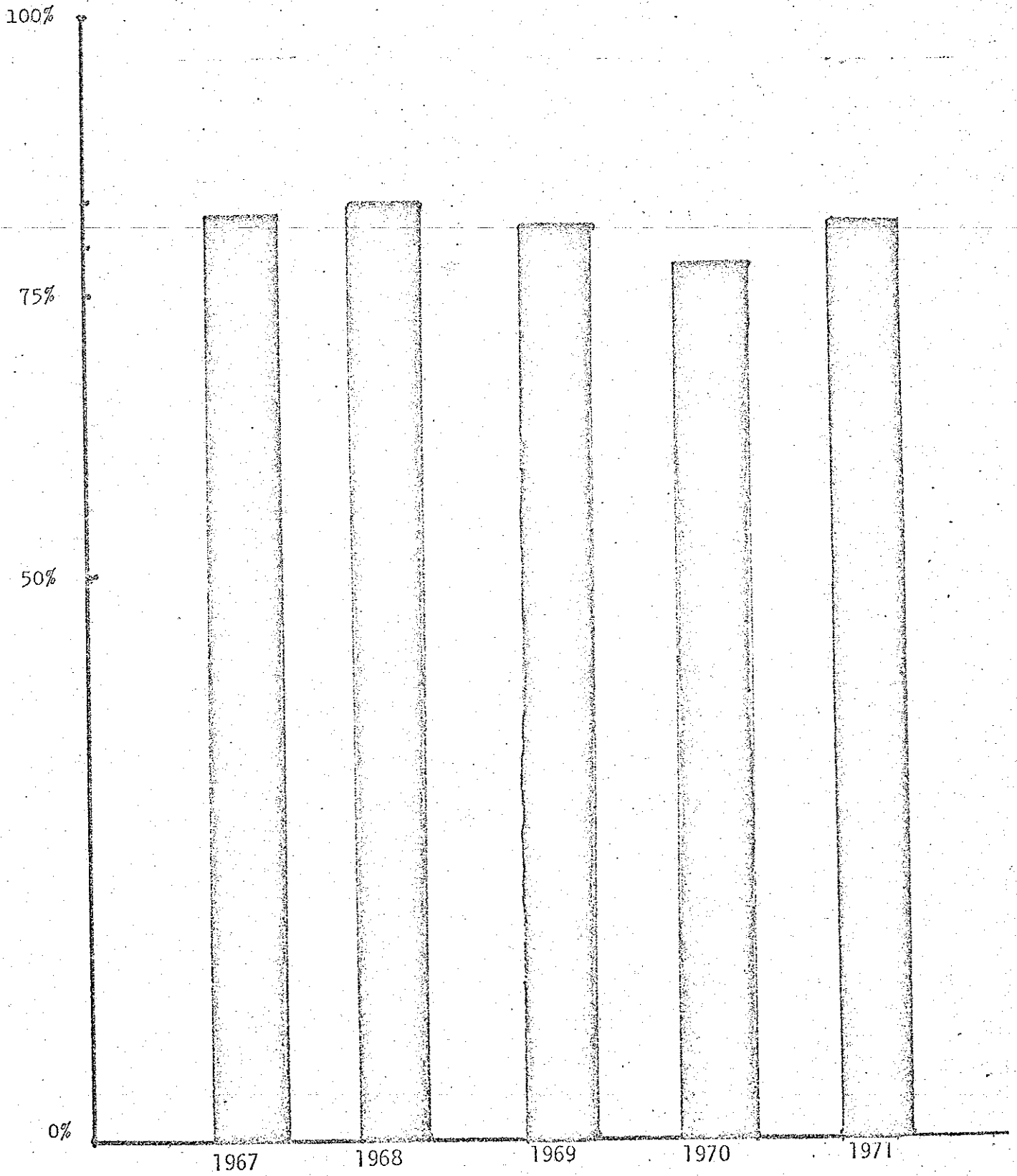
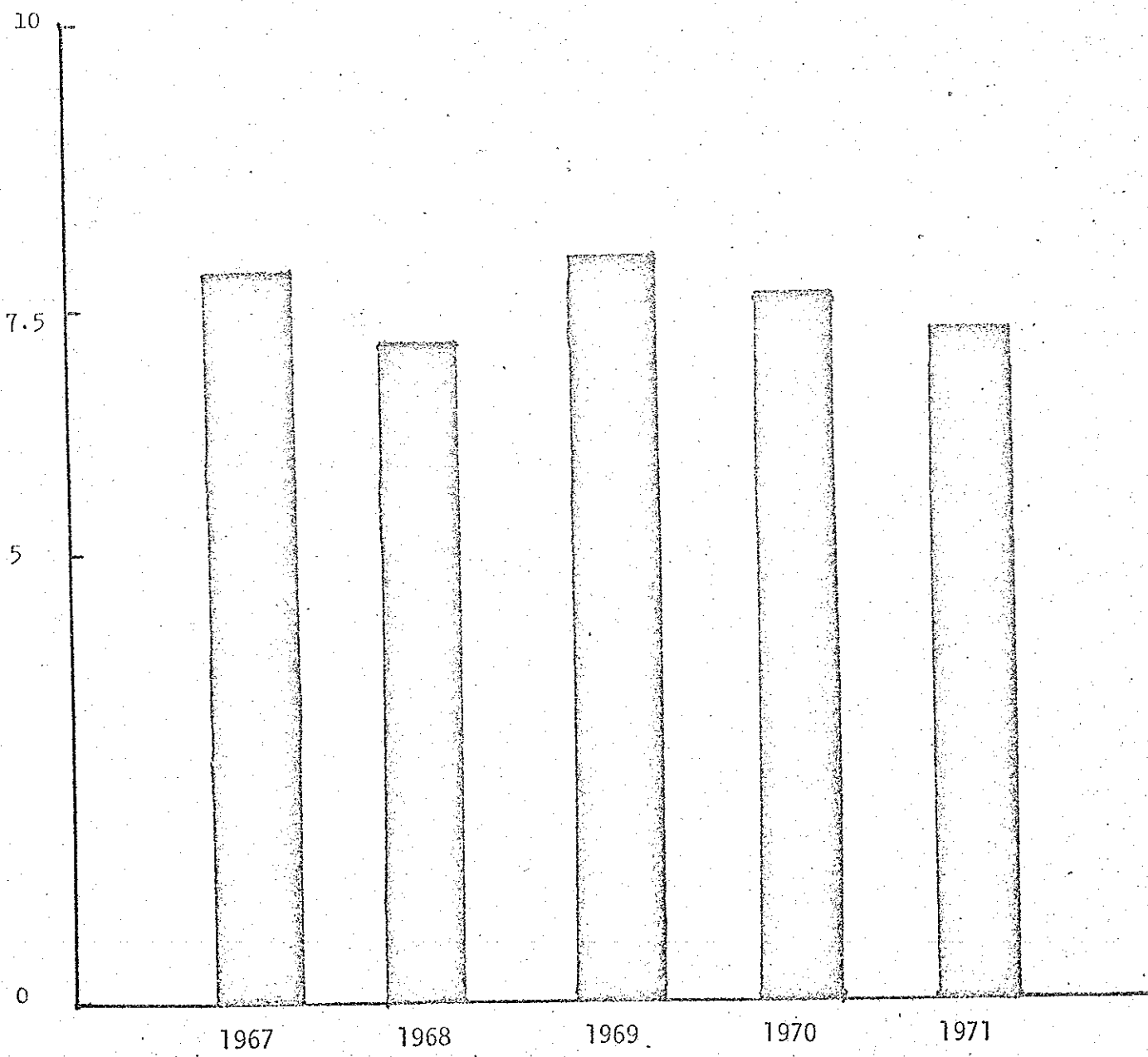


Figure 2-2

The average number of violent episodes per program hour: 1967-1971



also found that children's programming contained three times as much violence as adult drama.⁷

Gerbner has continued his analysis of network television dramas, and the data gathered in 1970 and 1971 are now available.¹⁵ He summarizes the new findings:

The 4-year trend toward lower levels and less lethal violence was reversed in 1971 Feature films and new programs in 1971 spearheaded the trend toward more lethal violence by depicting record high proportions of screen killers. (p. 3)

The changes in violent programming over the five years studied can be seen in Figure 2-1, which shows the percentage of programs containing violence. Figure 2-2 shows the number of violent incidents per program hour.

Insert Figures 2-1 and 2-2 here

Clearly, violence on television is not decreasing at any appreciable rate. Prime-time drama is still (in the 1971-72 season) overwhelmingly aggressive. The new figures are of special interest since they reflect a long history of unfulfilled network promises. Back in the mid-1960's network officials promised a sharp decrease in TV violence and then claimed the promise had been met; Gerbner's 1967 and 1968 data showed that it had not.

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STONY BROOK, N.Y. 11790

September 26, 1972

Dr. George Gerbner
Annenberg School of Communications
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104

Dear George:

My colleagues and I are beginning a project investigating the effects of television on the prosocial behavior of children. One of our first steps will be to survey and code TV programming as to the kinds and prevalence of prosocial examples available to viewers. It occurred to us that your work on TV violence obviously can provide us with a good model as to how to proceed most efficiently. It would, thus, be most helpful if we could chat with you and some of the people who were involved in your research. Do you think it is possible to arrange a meeting in the near future? If so, we would be happy to journey to Philadelphia at your convenience.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Personal regards,



Robert M. Liebert, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

ah

October 3, 1972

Dr. Robert M. Liebert
Department of Psychology
State University of New York
at Stony Brook
Stony Brook, N.Y. 11790

Dear Bob:

I will be very pleased to meet with you and your colleagues to discuss your project on the effects of television on the prosocial behavior of children. In general, the best days for me are Fridays and Thursdays, in that order.

Call me (if you can't reach me you can discuss the matter with my secretary, Mrs. Schiller) and we shall set a mutually agreeable date.

With best regards.

Sincerely yours,

GG:kas

George Gerbner,
Professor of Communications
and Dean

Professor Robert M. Liebert

-2-

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

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.