Television Violence in New Zealand:

A study of Programming and Policy in International Context

Report on a Research Project
conducted for the NZ Government Working Group
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Executive Summary

The research team's contract with the New Zealand Government Working Party on Television Violence has required an investigation and evaluation in the following three main areas: a 'full' literature survey of the international and New Zealand literature; a 'limited' content analysis, which shows the incidence of violence on New Zealand television in 2003; and a survey and evaluation of the existing regulatory regimes in other nations, and comparison of these with New Zealand.

In our **Literature Survey**, we have used a dichotomy between behaviourist and active-audience approaches as the organising principle, although this necessarily over-simplifies the multiplicity of approaches there have been to television violence. The more behaviourist approaches assume the possibility of establishing a link between a cause such as television violence and a possible effect on social behaviour, as do many recent 'critical' approaches. However, constructivist approaches do not accept such a link, nor the generalisability of findings from one situation to another.

Links between televised violence and social behaviour have been attested in a range of studies, although scarcely within New Zealand itself. Our study has not included any direct work with audiences, since this was not part of the project's brief. We have argued that the framing of the issue of television violence should shift from the concept of effects, with its tendency to evoke a direct linkage between perception and act, towards the concept of risk.

Although we have conducted no audience research as such, we were able to use our demographically-structured group of coders to gain some view of how New Zealanders respond to television violence. One dominant perception was that television violence may raise viewers' anxiety levels about societal violence, especially when presented in local non-fictional programmes.

Any regime for regulating television violence ought to be primarily guided by what are perceived to be the best interests of children. Children appear to be one of the greatest risk groups in respect to TV violence. Cartoons are the most violent genre on New Zealand television in 2003. They have also been the most violent in all earlier local research, and in all international research. While television is but one factor in children's lives and development, there does seem to be some connection between children who have had a violence-saturated media diet and aggression in later life. In addition, television is more likely to have a negative impact on children who grow up with a cluster of negative influences such as poverty, domestic violence, truancy, etc. The 'replacement effect' of television may also be detrimental to children.

The **Content Analysis** component of this study was designed intentionally to maximize comparability with existing studies both overseas and in New Zealand. The NZ2003 sample recorded a full week of television, 6am to midnight, on eight channels. Because of the threatened onset of the second Gulf War in March 2003, we decided to record a continuous week in mid-March rather than the planned composite week spread from March to May 2003. Coders were trained intensively before their work, and calibration of inter-coder reliability by an independent statistician reveals very high consistency across the coders.

Comparing our study against the major international projects, it is evident that levels of violence on New Zealand television are probably less than in the United States, but higher than in Australia or the United Kingdom. Given that the US is regarded as having higher violence rates than most other nations, New Zealand's level of televised violence can thus be regarded as a concern. This is related in part to the high proportion of American-originated programmes on New Zealand television.

The level of violence now seen on New Zealand television is, at first glance, broadly the same as it has been over the nearly three decades since research first began. The exception to this was that the 1995 Mediawatch survey found much lower violence, which was deemed to be due at least in part to broadcasters responding to intense public and lobby group pressures in the early 1990s. However, in our survey of earlier New Zealand research, we critique some aspects of the premises and methodologies used, particularly in the Media Watch surveys between 1982 and 1989. We must therefore allow for the possibility that the violence incident counts in these early studies were exaggerated. On a more qualitative level, our findings and conclusions are – perhaps not surprisingly – similar to those of the only other full academic project on New Zealand television violence, the Massey study of 1991.

The data we assessed show low levels of violence on TV1 in part because of the amount of non-fictional programming, and the lesser proportion of American-originated material. There is much higher violence on Sky Movies and on Nickelodeon, as one would expect from the genre profile of those two channels. Cartoons remain the highest violence producers in all surveys, overseas as well as in New Zealand, and our study is no exception. However, cartoon violence may be discounted in many instances as humorous and trivial. This is certainly true compared with the realistic and often concentrated violence shown in many televised films.

Few international studies have specifically monitored the level of violence in commercial advertisements and programme promotions, although the Media Watch studies did so and found that these concentrated more violence than the programmes themselves. Promotions for later programmes often select the most violent incidents from the programme to function as the audience attraction, and concentrate those incidents to a high degree in a 30-second trailer. Promotions for post-watershed programmes do screen before the watershed, and are therefore being treated as viewable by children. Our findings show that at the top end, New Zealand free-to-air channels in some cases show almost as much violent content in promotions, which generally occupy a maximum of about 5 minutes per hour, as are shown in the 45 minutes of programming in which they

are embedded. Such condensed forms exacerbate the violence count because they remove factors of context and exposition found in longer narrative forms, producing a synoptic concentration of conflict and violent actions.

It is clear that violence has entertainment attraction for television audiences. Programme makers obviously incorporate violence for this reason and clearly the compilers of programme promotions are very sensitive to the holding power of violent images. Given that channels make their own decisions about the content of promotions they screen even for imported programmes, there is scope for change here.

In our evaluation of **Regulatory Regimes and Public Policy**, maintenance of freedom of expression is seen as an important value, alongside the need to safeguard the interests of members of society who may be vulnerable to negative effects from violent televised presentations. A commitment by all parties to put children's needs first is desirable. In addition, television stakeholders should bring a sense of societal responsibility to programming despite there not being incontrovertible proof of a direct link between screen violence and aggression.

Programme classification systems need to be appropriate and responsive to audience understandings of diverse programme contents, not just to appraisers' understandings developed during previews. Here the involvement of viewer opinion and interest groups in informing the classification process will be vital for New Zealand

Any regulatory system should avoid rigidity and be adaptable to shifts in the public perception of television content. Media content labelling systems should be informational rather than judgemental, enabling parents especially to use a range of criteria to decide whether a given programme will be disturbing or offensive. The concept of a flexible watershed, which is variable at the weekend, school holidays and times when children are likely to watch later, is commendable and could be extended.

It is important to consider patterns of distribution of violence-laden programmes across the schedules. Intense back-to-back violence on the same channel should almost certainly be avoided given strong programme-to-programme inheritance of audience.

Viewer education and advocacy are prime needs in the further development of New Zealand media. There is scope for the current school curriculum to include more critical analysis of media texts, both visual and linguistic, thus educating children to be discerning viewers. It appears, however, that this is not happening. The obstacles seem to be threefold: that many educators (and perhaps parents) do not see 'media studies' as a valid knowledge field for serious academic study; the current strong emphasis on 'the basics' of numeracy and literacy; and the lack of strong language and image analysis skills among teachers.

Public education on the media is also needed to equip the people with discerning and critical viewing skills and habits. Importantly, any public education programme should be designed to reach a variety of ethnic groups. Public advocacy groups played a role in the formulation of the current New Zealand regulatory regime in the 1990s. There may well

be a case, given public concern around television content, for government to support such groups financially.

Further research arises directly out of this study and its database, particularly into the more qualitative aspects such as audience reception. Ongoing monitoring of television may also be called for to provide a continuing baseline of information on televised violence in New Zealand. Continuing occasional sampling and monitoring of violent content would provide a regular flow of comparable and sound information on the state of televised violence in New Zealand.

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Preface

In 2003 the New Zealand Minister of Broadcasting Steve Maharey appointed a working party to investigate violence on television, particularly in the context of New Zealand society. This move was in response to a Budget initiative from the Green Party whose broadcasting spokesperson Sue Kedgley proposed the need for a study that would "make clear what we are dealing with in New Zealand in terms of the levels (of) television violence and will map out a way forward to effectively deal with it" (Kedgley, 2002).

The Working Party draws its membership from a wide range of personnel with both experience and an interest in New Zealand television. It includes academics with a particular focus in broadcasting, mental health or social policy, and representatives from the publicly funded broadcaster Television New Zealand, the privately owned channel TV3, the Broadcasting Standards Authority, SPADA (Screen Production and Development Association) and the Children's Television Foundation.

In February 2003 the Working Party commissioned the Centre for Communication Research at the Auckland University of Technology to undertake research into the impact of television violence on New Zealand society. The Centre for Communication Research team - Dr Geoff Bridgman, Associate Professor Barry King, Andrea King, Georgina Major and Philippa Smith - led by the Centre Director Professor Allan Bell, was able to bring a multidisciplinary approach consonant with the research brief set by the Working Party. That brief required that the Research team undertake a comprehensive review of existing research and an analysis of television content. The findings of the research would serve as the basis for the Working Party recommendations to the Government concerning broadcast policy, public decision-making and public debate.

Acknowledging the tight timeframe (six months, March – September 2003) in which this needed to be achieved, the Working Party contract (see Appendix W) commissioned on 25 March, 2003 a research project consisting of a literature review, content analysis and policy survey.

Television Violence Research Team
Auckland University of Technology
October 2003

Introduction

Violence on television and its potential effects have been vehemently debated on both the public and political level even before the first televisions were introduced into New Zealand in the late 1950s. Over time, there have inevitably been changes in what constitutes acceptable viewing content. These changes, along with the constant development of new media technologies, which have improved screen images and enabled the instant transmission of pictures around the world, have fuelled concern as to the possible impact of programme content on social behaviour.

Does television violence cause aggression in people, particularly children? Are there links between television violence and crime statistics? Are we becoming desensitised to violence because we see so much of it on television? Or has television just become a convenient scapegoat to explain the ills of society?

Such questions have been widely circulated and debated, indicating the existence of strong opinions both supporting and refuting the "television violence causes aggression" claim. As a result, a plethora of studies in New Zealand and overseas has sought to establish whether watching television has any short- or long-term effects or no effects at all. Findings supporting both sides of the debate have resulted, and the research worldwide continues in a multitude of disciplines as it aims to keep up with further advances in technology such as video and computer games and the Internet. Studies have also focused on the incidence of violence on television in particular countries and in more recent years investigation into which mechanisms might assist in regulating and limiting the amount and type of violence that is broadcast or viewed has been forthcoming.

In accordance with the Working Group's brief and the research team's proposal (see Appendices U and V), the literature review has ranged widely over the available international and local research relevant to television violence, including studies on television content analysis and the effects of television on audiences and society. It has sought to identify and assess what methodologies have been used to analyse television violence and to establish how robust the findings from different approaches were.

The extensive content analysis in Chapters 10 - is supported by this wide-ranging literature review and examination of findings both in New Zealand and internationally. The content analysis provides an up-to-date comparison which considers whether violence levels on New Zealand television have changed, and how they compare with those in other countries. The data provide answers to key questions which directly address the research team's contract objectives for the Working Party, but it also presents an invaluable ongoing source of information for further research on violence on New Zealand television.

In recognising that many cultures now contribute to the make-up of the society of Aotearoa-New Zealand society, focus groups and questionnaires were used to gather information on the reactions of different social groups to televised violence. In addition, the team conducted an evaluation of the findings of the international literatures on television violence and the regulatory regimes of other polities. These inform the Working Group's own deliberations on the issue and its report to the Minister of Broadcasting.

During the length and breadth of this investigation, the ongoing interest in the issue from politicians, academics, interest groups, broadcasters and the public has been very evident. This is indicative not only of the impact that the technology of television (now 75 years old) has had in a global context, but also of the expansion in the last decade of audiovisual media and their availability because of the spread of the newer technologies of digitalisation and the internet.

Television continues to raise issues for society, none more salient than that of televised violence. The aim of this project has been to provide a wide-ranging investigation of the topic so that New Zealand decision-makers have good quality, balanced information on which to base their decisions.

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SECTION A

REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL AND NEW ZEALAND LITERATURE

1

The Shape of Research into Television Violence

Television and violence is one of the most researched - arguably, over-researched - topics in the field of the social sciences. Estimates of the number of studies conducted over the past 50 or more years range from 3000 to 4000 (Potter, 1999, p2). The topic is international, with research undertaken in many countries – United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Finland, France, Germany, Canada, Mexico, Japan, Belgium, Sweden and South Africa. It is also very local to particular nations, and New Zealand research does and must take account of this.

Most researchers agree that television influences attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. But how this influence occurs, how potent it is compared to other influences and what degree of seriousness should be attached to it remain contentious issues. Potter in his review of this vast literature notes that researchers are still not sure how many effects there are. He suggests there are 19 possible effects and adds that this list is not definitive (Potter, 1999, p 122). Other writers summarising the literature, reassure us that the possible negative effects of television are small in comparison with those of family, school and peers (Gunter & McAleer, 1997, p221).

Part of the reason for the proliferation of potential effects is that television is a pervasive, global medium. This invites a multi-disciplinary approach, drawing many of the social science disciplines into its orbit – sociology, social psychology, anthropology psychology, psychiatry, communications, media studies, cultural studies, discourse analysis and policy studies. Our literature review draws on studies from all these disciplines. Different methodologies – quantitative, qualitative, laboratory, field, ethnographic, discourse analytic – all take their own purchase on the phenomenon, prioritising a particular kind of data as evidence, and drawing conclusions. These may confirm or deny existing findings or propose new findings and new insights. Our report examines the international and local research which has used this wide range of methods.

People know that violent portrayals are pervasive on television, that individuals use such portrayals as a source for modelling behaviour, that for certain kinds of viewers in certain settings the effects may be negative – or in fact, positive. However, despite occasional claims to the contrary and the proliferation of studies, the case that television can be regarded as a necessary and sufficient cause of societal violence remains unconfirmed.

Any attempt to assess the current state of play in this field needs to set the parameters of an entire field of enquiry. As the following literature review shows, the process of influence is complex and supports a range of interpretations. But a fundamental distinction can be made within the field according to how much causal weight is attributed – explicitly or implicitly – by a particular study attributes to the media themselves or to the audience in the influence process. Fundamental assumptions about the basic causal relationships, which govern a field of inquiry, are termed 'paradigms' (Kuhn, 1970). In this report, paradigms are taken to define the nature of the relationship between the media and the public, particularly in terms of the power of one to influence the behaviour of the other. They offer an elementary set of propositions about the nature of the influence process (Livingstone, 1996).

In what follows, we will explore the two basic paradigms evident in the tradition of television violence research, the Behaviourist and the Active-audience paradigms. We discuss the soundness of their respective approaches to the causes and consequences of television violence. Although research into television violence does not fit neatly under one paradigm or the other, the distinction between the two remains valid as a pragmatic device, if not in some cases as an actual summation of the research under review.

An account like this necessarily involves some simplification. It misses some of the nuances and may create an impression of opposing schools where in fact there is much overlap. In the interests of mapping the territory, it imposes black-and-white distinctions on a field that includes many shades of grey. But it has the practical value of providing a clear-cut overview of the dominant traditions within a much-contested field.

After covering the two traditional paradigms, which reflect fundamental differences within the whole of social sciences, our discussion moves to a third, more recent paradigm –Reception Analysis – which offers the prospect of a synthesis. The three paradigms can be summarised as follows:

1.1 The Behaviourist paradigm

In this framework, media "do things" to people. Behaviourism is based on the hypothesis that a given stimulus has a direct impact which produces an identifiable response. The media are seen as providing a powerful set of stimuli that cause audiences to react or behave in various ways, sometimes against their own interests. Consumption of violent media content is held to increase aggression or lead to violent behaviour. Conversely, it may be interpreted as catharsis or a "safety valve", resulting in decreased individual aggression and social violence. Whether imitation or catharsis is regarded as the main effect, the causal relationship between media content and audience behaviour is conceived as direct and uni-directional.

Effects may be conceptualised as short term or long term, as influencing behaviour or having a cognitive impact on perceptions and attitudes. But the overall tendency is to

attribute to the media the power to override individual and social differences and, in the most extreme version, to create a social mass of passive and vulnerable individuals instilled with the same impulses and perceptions. Current studies in the behaviourist mould are more sophisticated and make use of complex effects models that shift the emphasis from a direct impact on behaviour towards a theorisation of the kinds of risks that the consumption of television violence pose for "vulnerable" sections of the audience (Anderson & Bushman, 2002b; Huesmann et al., 2003).

1.2 The Active Audience paradigm

Here, people "do things" with the media. Research into the "uses and gratifications" of television dates back to the 1950s, claiming a more active role for the audience in the flow of influence. The key premise here, which still resonates in contemporary research, is that the central question is to ask not what the media do to people but rather what people do with the media (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The view of the audience as a passive recipient of media messages was replaced by the recognition that people's social interactions and peer group dynamics influence the way they interpret television programmes. Individuals prove to be highly selective over which media content they consume and how they interpret it. The active-audience approach originated in efforts to overcome the limitations of extreme stimulus-response behaviourist research, and itself in some cases has produced an extreme view of the audience sovereign and all-controlling.

In its original conception, the active-audience paradigm was still based on the empirical investigation of individual preferences and choices, much like marketing and audience satisfaction surveys. The research task was to track the audience "use" of the media by a particular audience segment, identifying the kinds of wants and needs that were "satisfied" by such a usage. Such an approach did not break with the positivist orientation of the behaviourist paradigm. It, too, sought to establish proven links between content and behaviour, but it reversed the direction of influence, claiming that media content merely followed rather than moulded audience taste.

In addition, the active-audience paradigm did not entirely dispense with the possibility of direct media influence on some individuals or on some groups within the larger audience. Closer analysis of the classic Katz and Lazarsfeld *Personal Influence* (1955) revealed that in up to half the cases of media-related behaviour, the media had a direct influence (Gitlin, 1978). Research also suggested that some audience members were strongly motivated to expose themselves to media content because they believed that media messages would deliver them the 'truth' and provide guidelines for daily life. This meant that for at least some of the time and for some audience sectors, individuals were dependent on and vulnerable to media influence (Levy & Windahl, 1984). As researchers perceived that the audience brought needs to the media, the social origins of these needs, and the part played by the media in interacting with them, became legitimate topics for investigation. This drew uses and gratifications research away from the emphasis on the individual found in the behaviourist paradigm and towards the social context of reception. Such

a development opened the way to considering the social role of the media as a purveyor of ideological frameworks and worldviews (Gunter, 2000, p15-16).

1.3 Reception analysis

Reception analysis seeks to address both of Katz and Lazarsfeld's questions, posited as alternatives half a century ago (1955): what do media do to people and what do people do with media. Studies conducted in this emerging paradigm synthesise in varying fashions and degrees the two basic approaches. They combine a more rigorous and grounded investigation of the social context of audiences with a greater sensitivity to the forms of content as patterns of meaning. This double refinement involves on the one hand qualitative social science methodologies such as in-depth interviews, participant observation of the viewing situation and focus groups. On the other hand, it also applies tools of textual investigation derived from literary theory and discourse analysis. This offers the advantage of linking questions of effects to the way specific audiences, embedded in specific social contexts, interact with, interpret, and derive meaning from content (Jensen & Jankowski, 1991, p135-140). In this approach, the focus is less on accounting for the range and diversity of the satisfactions that large audiences derive from media content, though this can still be addressed, and more on the role of the media as a resource for the construction of meaning and sense-making in group settings.

A concise definition of reception research is: the study of how media audiences make sense of, and interpret, media texts in relation to their social positions and identities (Carter & Weaver, 2003, p168). This work still admits a role for content analysis, but the issue becomes one of establishing a baseline of (denotative) meaning against which to explore the range of (connotative) meanings that different audience segments attribute to media content.

If active-audience research, like behaviourist research, shares the ambition of constructing law-like generalisations about violent content and audience behaviour, one aspect of research in this paradigm emphasises the role of unique, qualitative patterns of meaning that defy generalisation but are situationally valid (Gunter, 2000, p232). For example, a set of Swedish studies in the 1990s have been oriented towards combining the investigation of audience "repertoires of interpretation" with the sociological investigation of structural factors that shape the viewers as people. Such an approach to reception offers both inclusiveness and generalisability (Rosengren, 1996, p23-29).

Despite the growth of Reception Analysis, the research literature on television violence remains dominated by the behaviourist paradigm. This is the case particularly in the United States, which has probably conducted more research into television violence, supported by more funding, than all the rest of the world taken together. Accordingly much of what follows will be devoted to examining the strengths and weaknesses of the Behaviourist paradigm, and of American research conducted within it.

Ultimately, however, we would argue that in a diverse and complex society like New Zealand, which is undergoing constant cultural and technological change, the role of television violence cannot be explained by perpetuating a false antithesis between media dominance and audience sovereignty. Rather, it is necessary to provide a constructive account of the media-audience interaction as a social and cultural process. Reception analysis, while still a new player in the field, holds out the promise of a more effective grasp of the influences and counter-influences at play in the production and reception of television and, by extension, the exploration of factors that mediate and inflect the influence of television violence.

2

The Behaviourist Paradigm 1: Counting Television Violence

In this approach, the primary impetus is to establish proof of a direct causal relationship between levels of violent content on television and violence (or aggression) in everyday life. The impact of television violence may be seen as direct, causing violent behaviour or indirect, creating behavioural sets or dispositions that trigger violent and anti-social behaviour when real-life situations arise that are broadly consonant with schemas derived from television content.

The defining method in this approach is the controlled experiment derived from behavioural or physiological psychology with its panoply of controls, dependent and independent variables. Using laboratory settings or manipulated field settings, this kind of study explores the relationship between violent stimuli and the reaction of human subjects. The typical treatment involves a prepared setting where an experimental group is exposed to a particular stimulus and then compared to a control group, which has been exposed to a different stimulus or to none at all. Variations between dependent measures are then statistically analysed to see if the differences in behaviour are greater than could have occurred by chance.

Other methods, still within the same general paradigm (field experiments, cross-sectional analysis, longitudinal and even ecological studies), emerged as the limitations of laboratory experiments became obvious. Over hundreds of studies, there has been the steady accumulation of statistical associations which are better than have occurred by chance, to work towards some probabilistic statement of cause and effect. Statistically significant variables established across a range of methods are seen as supporting inferences about the likely effects of the violence in society at large.

Within this paradigm, quantitative content analysis is seen as a source of reliable ecological information about the presence of violence: its prevalence, rate and its typical narrative format or formulae which would support findings of effects research.

2.1 Quantitative content analysis: Gerbner and the count surveys

The history of systematic analysis of violent content on television began in 1967 when George Gerbner began the Cultural Indicators Project (Stossel, 1997). The project counted the acts of violence in television drama and asked questions about the nature of perpetrators and victims, realism, the consequences of violence, the relationship of violence to humour, and the role of violence in conflict resolution

(Gerbner, 1969). The project became famous for its quantitative projections which prefaced many analyses of the impact of television violence:

> By the time the average American child leaves elementary school, he or she will witness 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 acts of violence on television.
>
> (Senate Judiciary Committee, 1999)

Over a 22-year period from 1967 to 1989, Gerbner's violence counts showed that the level of violence on US television drama remained fundamentally unchanged. In prime-time television 70% of programmes have violent acts and the rate of violent acts per hour lies between five and six. Half of prime-time dramatic characters are involved in violence and one in ten in killing. Programmes in children's viewing time have also been stable with 25 acts of violence per hour (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1990). These counts were based on a simple definition of violence:

> …the overt expression of physical force (with or without a weapon) against self or other, compelling action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually hurting or killing.
>
> (Gerbner et al., 1980)

This definition meant that violence could be unintentional (an accident) or caused by non-human agency (e.g. natural disasters). The victim of violence had to be human or human-like (e.g. cartoon characters, talking animals). Later researchers clarified, and then extended or modified, this definition. Williams, Zabrack and Joy (1982) said that the threats "must be plausible and credible", and that there can be "no idle threats, verbal abuse, or comic gestures with no credible violent consequences". They also made it clearer that the violence "may be intentional or accidental"; and that "violent accidents, catastrophes and acts of nature are included".

Extensions of the definition covered the following factors:

* violence against inanimate objects could be coded as a threat (Cumberbatch, 1988) or as an expression of rage (Mustonen & Pulkkinen, 1997);
* all animate beings (not just human and human-like) be regarded as victims of violence (Wilson et al., 1997);
* verbal recounting of violence ("threats, acts and/or harmful consequences") not seen on screen could be counted as an act of violence (Federman, 1998);
* and psychological harm be included along with physical harm, "actions causing or designed to cause harm to oneself, or to another person, either physically or psychologically" (Mustonen & Pulkkinen, 1997, p173). This last approach shifted the emphasis towards count studies which focused not so much on violence but on anti-social behaviours and which have a provenance of their own (Greenberg et al., 1980; Potter et al., 1997).

Some later researchers modified Gerbner's definition to exclude particular features of violence. Most notably Wilson et al., 1997, in their extensive National Television

Violence Study (NTVS) study which ran from 1994 to 1997, excluded unintentional violence. They state that the act of violence must be "intended to harm or intimidate an animate being or a group of animate beings". They did, however, allow for accidents that occurred as part of an intentionally violent act sequence (e.g. where a person intends to hurt someone, but ends up hurting themselves or a different person).

The type of programme coded has also varied across count surveys. Gerbner concentrated on drama (non-fiction; Gerbner, 1969), but his successors have applied his type of analysis to just about all of television programming (e.g. Cumberbatch et al., 1987; Watson et al., 1991) or widened the scope to include some non-fictional or "reality" programmes (news magazines, "infotainment", music and entertainment) while excluding others (news, sport and religious programmes; e.g. Whitney et al., 1998).

The third key element that varied across surveys was the channels that were coded. The early surveys only coded free-to-air channels (e.g. Signorielli, 1990, Bridgman, 1995), whereas from the early nineties pay television was increasingly incorporated into the count surveys (e.g. Gosselin et al., 1997; Lichter & Amundson 1994).

Table 2.1 provides a summary of factors in a selection of count surveys in relation to the level of violence found in those surveys. What this table demonstrates is that if the violence definition is broadened to include anti-social acts as was the case in Potter and Greenberg (studies 3 and 19), the violence count soars. Studies which include psychological harm also tend to have higher average episodes of violence per hour (studies 12, 13). The exception is the Finnish study (study 4) which was constrained by surveying only state-run free-to-air channels with primarily Finnish language programmes (Mustonen and Pulkkinen, 1997). Studies that include pay-TV channels also tend to have higher rates of violence. The difference between the Gerbner-led studies (17, 18, 20) and the later Centre for Media and Public Affairs Studies (21, 22, 25) may be the addition of pay-TV channels. The NTVS overview study showed much higher rates of violence for pay-TV compared to free-to-air (Smith et al., 1998).

Matters are further complicated by issues of genre and particularly by the distinction between fictional and non-fictional programmes. Studies, which cover both fiction and non-fiction, tend to have the lowest rates of violence (1, 9, 11, 14-16, 23). The specific analysis of non-fictional programmes done by the NTVS study (study 24) has a rate of violence that is less than half of its NTVS research counterpart (study 23), which covered both fictional and non-fictional programmes. This is in spite of the fact that the NTVS "reality" study is the only piece of research that counts verbal descriptions of violence as acts of violence. These verbal descriptions make up a quarter of the study's episodes of violence (Whitney et al., 1998). The NTVS studies still exclude news, sport, talk shows, and religious broadcasts from their samples, whereas the British (14-16), Finnish (4) and New Zealand (8) studies sample across all programme genres. The British and Finnish data include the lowest rates of violence. The New Zealand rates (8) are high, almost certainly because the study was

conducted at the beginning of the 1991 Gulf War (Watson et al., 1991) when there was a massive increase in news coverage on television directed at military action.

With such variations in methodology, is it possible to pick any trends? Where the methodology has stayed much the same over a period of time, as with the Gerbner studies (17, 18, 20) and the British, mainly Broadcasting Standards Commission-sponsored, research (14-16) trends are apparent. Gerbner feels that his research has showed a relatively stable pattern of violence over a 22-year period up to 1990. The 1977 Japanese study (5) and the 1981 Australian study (1), both using the Gerbner method, fit the Gerbner pattern of results. The NTVS study which covered three years. from 1994 to 1997 claims that:

> Across a wide range of individual context measures, we found a remarkable consistency over time. Many of our measures held so stable that they changed no more than a single percentage point.
>
> (Smith et al., 1998, p7)

British studies, on the other hand, show low but increasing rates of violence, in the late 90s to 2001 (BSC/BBC/ITC, 2002). These recent studies have increasingly focused on coder reliability and constructed samples covering both summer and winter seasons. They are, however, limited to a 5.30pm-to-midnight time slot, which means that they miss the vast bulk of children's programmes, programmes that other reviews have found to be high in violence (Smith et al., 1998; Bridgman, 1995). Other longitudinal projects, such as Centre for Media and Public Affairs Studies (21, 22), have grown from studies of one-day of television reflecting limited budgets, to larger constructed samples (25) which have more reliability. In this group would have to be placed New Zealand's Media Watch surveys (7,9 & 10), where attention to issues of coder reliability was made only in their last survey (Bridgman, 1995).

In looking at the results of these surveys and their key authors, it is important to remember that they interact with the medium that they survey in powerful ways. Gerbner was appointed to President Johnson's National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in 1968, and was influential in the US Surgeon General's 1972 report implicating television violence as a "major contributory factor" to violence in society (Stossel, 1997). The development of broadcasting codes of practice around violence owes much to the work of Gerbner and the count survey researchers that have followed him. So much of the consistency over time found by Gerbner and the NTVS studies may reflect the pressure that regular surveys place on broadcasters to ensure that the levels of violence in their programming do not rise.

In New Zealand, Bridgman (1995) has argued that three high violence count surveys in a row - a 1990 survey which had 8.1 episodes of violence per hour (Abbott & Disley, 1990), and studies 6 and 7 in Table 2.1 - created strong political pressure in New Zealand to limit television violence levels, to the point of having a bill introduced in Parliament in 1994 (see Chapter 14 for comment on the Reduction of Violence on Television Bill, 1994). The 1995 survey (8), which had the lowest violence count in the history of New Zealand surveys, was a result of that pressure.

Table 2.1: Episodes of violence in relation to some of the key features of selected count surveys from 1967 to 2001

			violence definition factors							**genre factors**			**channel factors**	
Study	year	country	episodes of violence /hour	unintentional acts counted	all animate beings included	violence towards an inanimate object counted	images without overt acts counted	verbally described violence counted	psychological harm counted	fictional/drama	non-fictional	excluding news, sport, talk, religion	free to air	pay TV
1. McCann and Sheehan, 1985	1981	Aust-ralia	5.4	y	n	n	n	n	n	y	y	y	y	n
2. Gosselin et al., 1993	1993	Cana da	4.8	y	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	y	y	y
3. Potter et al., 1997	1997	Cana da	32.5	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	not sure		y	not sure
4. Mustonen and Pulkkinen, 1997	1997	Finla nd	2.6	y	y	y	y	n	y	y	n	y	y	n
5. Iwao, Pool and Hagiwara, 1981	1977	Japan	5.0	y	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	y	y	n
6. Lopez, 2001	1997	Mexi co	4.9	n	y	y	y	n	n	y	n	y	y	n
7. Haines, 1984	1984	NZ	5.7	y	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	y	y	n
8. Watson et al., 1991	1991	NZ	9	y	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	n	y	n
9. Bridgman, 1995	1992	NZ	8.1	y	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	y	y	n
10. Bridgman, 1995	1995	NZ	3.9	y	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	y	y	n
11. Flores, 2000	1999	Philip -pines	6.2	not sure						y	y	n	y	not sure
12. Vala et al., 1999	1997	Port-ugal	14.4	y	y	y	y	n	y	y	n	y	y	not sure
13. Igartua et al., 2002	1999	Spain	12.1	y	y	y	y	n	y	y	n	y	y	n
14. Cumberbatch et al., 1987	1987	UK	2	y	y	y	y	n	y	y	y	n	y	n
15. BSC/BBC/ TC, 2002	1997	UK	4.1	y	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	n	y	n
16. BSC/BBC/ TC, 2002	2001	UK	5.2	y	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	n	y	n
17. Signorielli, 1990	1967-68	USA	5.2	y	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	y	y	n
18. Signorielli, 1990	1977-78	USA	5.2	y	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	y	y	n
19. Greenberg et al., 1980	1980	USA	38	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	not sure		y	not sure
20. Signorielli, 1990	1985	USA	6.8	y	n	n	n	n	n	y	n	y	y	n
21. Lichter & Amundson, 1994	1992	USA	10	y	n	y	y	n	n	y	n	y	y	y
22. Lichter & Amundson, 1994	1994	USA	15	y	n	y	y	n	n	y	n	y	y	y
23. Smith et al., 1998	1995-96	USA	6.8	n	y	n	y	n	n	y	y	y	y	y
24. Whitney et al., 1998	1995-96	USA	3.3	n	y	n	y	y	n	n	y	y	y	y
25. Lichter et al., 1999	1998-99	USA	12	y	n	y	y	n	n	y	n	y	y	y

Deregulation of broadcasting may also have an effect on violence counts. Gerbner (Gerbner & Signorelli, 1990) claims that US deregulation in 1980 lead to a 42% increase in violence in children's daytime television. The high New Zealand counts in the early 90s occurred after the introduction of the first private channel (Bridgman, 1995). The Spanish and Portuguese high counts (10, 11) reflect deregulated and competitive markets, whereas the low counts in the Finnish (3) and the early British surveys come from highly regulated markets where state TV is the major player.

There is much more to the count surveys than the reporting of episodes, sequences or incidents of violence per hour or per programme. There has been widespread criticism of the underlying assumption in rate statistics that all defined acts of violence are, in fact, equal (e.g. Gunter, 1981; Potter, 1993; Kunkel et al., 1995; Mustonen and Pulkkinen, 1997). Does a threat, an accident, an image of the aftermath of violence, or a recounting of violence, have the same impact on viewers as an overt act of violence? Is a shove equivalent to a shooting? The answer to these questions begs for context to be stated. Gerbner attempted to do so by defining some contextual features such as type of violence (intentional, sexual, act of God, threat, etc), the means of violence (fists, guns, knives, etc), the consequences (death, serious injury, no injury), the gender, culture and age of the victim and the perpetrator, and genre (drama, animation, crime, soap, etc.).

From this contextual information Gerbner was able to demonstrate a number of relationships that exist on television and have remained remarkably stable over time. Two-thirds of the major characters in television drama are involved in violence as victims or perpetrators. While white adult men are more frequently involved in violence, women, children and older people, groups of lower socio-economic status, and cultural minorities (Hispanics and African Americans) are more likely to be the victims of violence (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1990; Gerbner, 1991). "Good" males (heroes) were 3.5 times more likely to kill than be killed, while "good" females were six times more likely to be killed (Gerbner et al., 1980), and rates of homicide on television were 100 times greater than in real life (Diefenbach & West, 2001).

This information provided the justification for Gerbner's (1969) cultivation theory and his "Mean World Syndrome". Put simply, cultivation theory argues that television "cultivates" or informs our understanding of the world. If television presents a picture of the world that is more dangerous and cruel than the real world then people are likely to develop a Mean World Syndrome which makes them more fearful and negative than they otherwise might be (Stossel, 1997). Cultivation theory predicted that people who spent a lot of time watching television and people who were in the more victimised groups would have more fearful and negative beliefs that those who watched little television. In general, those predictions have been shown to be statistically significant in meta-analysis studies (Morgan & Shanahan, 1997) but the average correlation between watching television and mean world effects is only +0.091, suggesting a weak relationship. Critics of cultivation theory (Hirsch, 1980; Hughes, 1980; Potter, 1993) argue that it gives too much weight to the impact of media and not enough to the more proximal features of people's

environments (their relationships, their neighbourhood, their work, etc.) and the extent to which the interactions of people with media are contextually complex.

2.2 Following Gerbner

One of the goals of this document is to provide examples of media violence studies in countries other than the United Kingdom and the United States. Gerbner's method has been used around the globe – in the Netherlands, Australia (McCann & Sheehan, 1985), Japan (Iwao, De Sola Pool, & Hagiwora, 1981), Canada (Gosselin et al., 1997) and Spain (Busquet, 2001) and details of some of these studies are cited below. In New Zealand the Gerbner technique was first used by Ginpil in 1976, and subsequently in the Media Watch studies from Haines in 1983 to Bridgman in 1995. These studies will be discussed in the New Zealand section.

2.2.1 Canada

Gosselin et al. (1997) formulated a two-pronged approach in assessing violence on Canadian television. This involved using Gerbner's violence index in a content analysis involving the number of violent scenes rather than individual acts. This analysis was then followed with a survey of university students about whether television viewing affects beliefs about the real world.

The study defined violence as:

> any explicit act of force destined to injure or kill, or the expression of any serious threat to injure or kill a character, whether human or human-like, regardless of the context in which the act occurred. Also included as violent acts were accidents and natural phenomena resulting in injury or death.
>
> (Gosselin et al., 1997)

Using the same definition as Gerbner had, allowed the researchers to make comparisons with studies on American television.

Only fictional programmes shown during the week of March 21-28, 1993 were analysed and these were from the major networks – the public (Societie Radio-Canada and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation), the private (TVA, Television Quatre Saisons, CTV and Global Television) and education networks (Radio-Quebec and TVO in Ontario).

To maintain consistency in comparison with American commercial networks, the Canadian educational stations were not included. The programmes analysed, which were considered representative of what was normally shown on Canadian television, were those broadcast during the week at prime time from 7pm to 11pm on anglophone stations and from 6pm to 10pm on francophone stations. The hours between 6am and 6pm were covered at the weekend. The violence index included: the percentage of programmes containing violence; the number of violent acts per

programme: the number of violent acts per hour; the percentage of main characters involved in acts of violence; and the percentage of main characters involved in homicides.

The researchers found the results in comparing Canadian television to American television were favourable. The scores indicated 23.4 per cent less violence in Canadian programmes. The only area of violence in which Canada surpassed the United States was in the percentage of characters involved in a murder. Canada showed fewer acts of violence but within incidents the graphicness of the violence tended to be greater.

The statistics showed that children's programmes in both Canada and the United States were more violent than adult programmes. The public broadcasting station (SRC) had a greater amount of violence than did the private TVA because its children's programming consisted mostly of violent cartoons. Overall, however, the private Canadian networks scored higher with more violent programming than public television. The French and English language networks had almost the same amount of violence.

Researchers pointed out that Gerbner's index was more qualitative than quantitative in nature. Rather than showing how much violence is broadcast, it only shows whether the programmes are violent or not.

When assessing violence by genre the children's cartoon had the highest violence index, followed by films and then series. Other children's programmes showed almost no violence, indicating that cartoons were responsible almost exclusively for the violence in children's television. When rating programmes according to cost, the more expensive a programme was to produce, the more violence it contained. Another interesting fact revealed was that of the 96 violent programmes broadcast in Canada, 65 had come from the United States, suggesting that the violent nature of the programming on Canadian television was influenced by American culture.

This might suggest that American programming is responsible for the typical Canadian's "exaggeratedly violent image of the world" according to the researchers. Therefore to test Gerbner's "cultivation theory" - that the more people watch television and are exposed to its violent content, the more likely they will be to perceive their society or world as more violent than it really is - the researchers surveyed 360 first-year students enrolled in the Departement d'information et de communication at Universite Laval. They formulated a questionnaire focusing on a wide range of representations, beliefs and attitudes surrounding real or fictional violence. However they found that their work on the metric properties of the cultural indicators showed difficulty in measuring perception as a whole. As a result they enlarged their theoretical framework and looked at the indicator of the perception of danger through two dimensions – the beliefs an individual has about the level of danger in the surrounding world, and the measure of how much an individual fears the surrounding world. Through regression analysis they were able to determine that while television viewing affects the *beliefs* people have about the

level of danger in society, it does not influence the *emotion* people feel about the surrounding world. That is, the influence of television viewing seems restricted to beliefs.

The researchers were quite open in stating that their research was not conclusive. They point to several areas of weakness, for example their sample of people surveyed were from a group who were more knowledgeable about the media and how they work.

2.2.2 Australia

In this study by McCann and Sheehan (1985) 80 programmes, which were shown on all four Brisbane television channels (Channel 0, 2, 7 and 9) from May to July 1981, were selected for content analysis. Because this study contributed to a six-country cross-cultural investigation of the relationship between television viewing and aggressive behaviour in school children in Grades 1 - 5, the programmes chosen were broadcast when Grade 3 children were available for viewing. That is, sampling included both fictional and non-fictional shows broadcast before 8.30am, between 3pm and 11.30pm weekdays and extending to midnight on Friday. Saturday sampling was from 6am to midnight and Sunday 6am to 8.30pm. Excluded from the sample were movies, sports events, current affairs programmes and news reports and religious shows.

Gerbner's message system analysis provided the basis for the methodology, and the primary unit of violence was the violent episode that was any scene depicting violence which was confined to the same participants. Violence was defined as:

> the overt expression of physical force (with or without a weapon, against self or other), compelling action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually killing or hurting.
>
> (McCann & Sheehan, 1985, p35)

Coding was based on the programme as a whole, each specific violent action and specific classes of characters. The programmes were classified as cartoons, fiction (crime, western, action/adventure and domestic/comedy) and non-fiction (variety/quiz, documentary/current affairs and educational). The context in which the violence occurred, as well as the programme's tone, timeframe and location were also coded.

Results from the study showed that 51.3 per cent of programmes and 53 per cent of programme hours contained violence. (This, the researchers comment, is low by international standards, with other studies showing 80.3 per cent in the United States, 81 per cent in Japan, 56 per cent in the United Kingdom and 66.1 per cent in New Zealand.) Crime shows were the most violent, followed by cartoons and action/adventure shows. Just less than 33 per cent of the violence portrayed was gratuitous and unnecessary to the development of the plot or theme.

With regards to the overall frequency of the violence there were four violent episodes per programme and 5.4 violent episodes per broadcast hour. In comparing this with other countries, Brisbane television ranked about the same as New Zealand, above Canada and the UK but below Japan. If non-fiction programmes are not included, the Australian rate rises to 7.4 violent episodes per hour.

In summary, the researchers were concerned that while the prevalence of violent programmes in Australia might be considered low in a country comparison, the frequency of violent episodes per hour meant that children were able to select a schedule of viewing saturated with violence. The level of overall aggression on television was also underestimated because it was based on physical rather than both physical and verbal acts of aggression. The researchers also point out that the focus of the study did not address two major questions. These were: firstly, whether specific features of content such as the level of violence, were related to a child's liking for actual programmes watched; and secondly, whether aspects of television content such as aggression are causally linked with real-life behaviour.

While this study provides interesting information on Australian programming, violence and a comparison with other countries, it is important to point out that the researchers acknowledge that some of the statistics from other countries have differences in the times and types of sampling. It may be more useful to look at the individual results of this study but it is also important to note that this sample was from Brisbane television and although the channels may be broadcast nationwide, it is not clear to what extent this study is representative of Australia as a whole.

2.2.3 Japan

This Japanese study by Iwao et al. (1981) using Gerbner's definition of violence and the same categories and procedures of his content analysis methodology provides an opportunity to examine whether it is the sheer quantity of television violence or the treatment of violence from a culture's dramatic formulae that influences television viewing and behaviour.

One week of entertainment programmes in 1977 was sampled from Japanese television. The programmes were broadcast between 5pm and 11pm on five Tokyo television stations - one public and the other four commercial. The total number of programmes coded was 139 which broadcast over a total of 89 hours and 10 minutes. Half of the programmes were children's programmes of which 37 per cent were cartoons. Twenty-four of the programmes were foreign imports mainly from the United States.

Findings showed a number of similarities in the overall amounts of violence in the programmes shown in both Japan and the United States. The number of violent incidents per programme was slightly lower in Japan than in the United States,

though this is influenced by the fact that the average Japanese programme is slightly shorter and the average violent episode is slightly longer than those in the US. The minutes of violence per hour are virtually identical in each of the two countries, as was the proportion of leading characters committing or experiencing some violence.

However, while the amount of violence on television did not differ greatly, the researchers say that the nature of Japanese violence was quite different because of the greater emphasis on suffering. It is important to differentiate here between cartoons and other programmes. Japanese-produced non-cartoon programmes showed more than double (54 per cent) the actual wounding or killing associated with violent incidents than the equivalent imported programmes screened on Japanese TV (24 per cent). Also of significance were the types of characters who were hurt or killed. While the "good guys" in imported programming were almost never wounded or killed the good major characters in Japanese-produced programmes were wounded or killed three times more often than were the bad ones. The researchers explain this cultural difference of wounding or killing a good character by the need to evoke sympathy and admiration in Japanese audiences. They also found that in Japanese-produced television the villains were more likely to start the violence and that the heroes suffered more. In addition, it was found that violent scenes in both Japanese and American dramatic programmes showed about the same amount of blood, however in Japanese programmes blood appears more often in the case of woundings as well as in the case of deaths.

Japanese cartoons however are different to other imported cartoons in that the number of good assaulters almost equalled the bad ones and bad characters were as likely to be wounded or killed, as were good characters. While imported cartoons portrayed all characters committing assault as being bad guys, in Japanese cartoons, the researchers suggest that the unreal world of cartoons make injury to the hero more acceptable to US viewers and allows Japanese viewers to accept heroes as well as villains who resort to violence. The morality aspect of Japanese programmes is used to explain the significant difference between the two countries' interpretations of violence. The main cultural difference appears to be that in Japanese programmes violence experienced by major characters is for sympathetic reasons and not to glorify violence.

While initially this study seems irrelevant to New Zealand television, it is important for two reasons: firstly, it provides some interesting insights into the different frameworks within which violence exists; and secondly the significant influx of Japanese cartoons into New Zealand in recent years (*Pokemon*, *Digimon*, *Sailor Moon* and *Yu Gi Oh*) and the immense popularity of these programmes amongst children (Wishart, 2003). In looking at violence on New Zealand television it seems most appropriate in these circumstances to further investigate whether New Zealand children view the violence in the same way as it is perceived by Japanese children and what effects this might have.

2.3 Contextual features in violence count surveys

2.3.1 U.S. National Television Violence Survey

The more recent count studies try to counter criticism of their relevance by increasing the contextual information available. The NTVS overview study (Wilson et al., 1997) asked for each incident to be coded with respect to the perpetrator's motivation, the extent of justification, the extent to which pain as well as harm was depicted, and the difference between depicted harm and harm in real life. When looking at violent scenes, the reward, punishment, explicitness, graphicness and humour of violence were assessed. For the programme overall goodness/badness of character and their hero status were assessed as well as the realism of the violence, the overall harm and pain, the level of punishment in relation to good/bad character type, the presence of anti-violence themes and the degree to which the violence was real or animated. This was in addition to all the variables used by Gerbner with exception of accidental harm. The character demographics covered gender, age, culture, type (human, animal, supernatural, etc.) and the physical strength of the perpetrator.

The NTVS study of non-fictional programmes asked for further demographic detail on the characters involved. Firstly, where violence is being recounted rather than watched, the role of bystanders is identified (spokespersons, witnesses), and the relationship between the characters is assessed. In addition to age, gender and culture, the official status of the character (e.g. police, military, expert, etc.) and their citizenship status are identified. Twenty-two specific themes relating to the nature of the programme (e.g. national politics, law enforcement and crime, religion, sexual interaction) are checked against in the coding process. The location (23 US and world locations) and social setting (city, suburb, small town, rural) of violence are coded, as are re-enactments.

2.3.2 The British surveys

From 1993 the British BSC-commissioned violence surveys (Centre for Communication Research, 1997 – see Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002) have collected increasing amounts of contextual information as part of their count surveys, much of which corresponds to the NTVS work. This work has, over time, increasingly placed emphasis on introducing viewer-centred categories into its coding schemes, ultimately leading to an emphasis on Reception Analysis (see Section 3 below).

New areas of content coding indicate an increasing emphasis on the subjective dimension of depicted scenes. For example, codes were designed that would measure the emotional response to the violence scene by the perpetrator, victim and bystander (remorse, relief, anger, fear, pleasure, shock, concern, sorrow). Another British innovation has been the assessment of bystander reactions, based on a long tradition of research in social psychology showing the strong influence of bystanders on social behaviour (Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002). In 71 per cent of the scenes where bystanders were present they showed no emotional response, while in

the remainder they were predominantly upset or disapproving. These measures and the other British data present a picture similar to the NTVS one described above and suggest a television environment that encourages the learning of violence.

Other innovations in the British research were to examine the justness of the violence by looking at such factors as the power relationship between perpetrator and victim, level of helplessness and the degree to which violence was deserved. Coders were asked to assess the psychological harm from violence as well as the physical harm. Specific attention was paid to production devices which might create a sense of violence such as music, lighting, slow motion shots, close-ups and amplified sounds of violence. Finally the BSC surveys examined the reasons for violence in some detail, having nineteen categories in this area.

2.3.3 The importance of contextual features

Contextual features are exceedingly important, according to Wilson et al. (1997). Table 2.2, reproduced from the first NTVS report, summarises the evidence relevant to features of television that are likely to increase or decrease aggression, fear or desensitisation. Wilson et al. cite extensive research to back up each point. For example, concerning the attractiveness of perpetrators and victims, Perry & Perry (1976) found that students who were encouraged to identify with the victor of a boxing match were more aggressive than those who had been encouraged to identify with the loser. A meta-analysis of 217 studies by Paik and Comstock (1994) found that a portrayal of 'justified' violence increased viewer aggression. Another meta-analysis of 56 studies (Carlson et al., 1990) found that the presence of weapons significantly enhanced aggression.

Wilson and her colleagues do not claim that the evidence in all areas is unequivocal. For example, the evidence that viewing graphic or explicit violence leads to desensitisation has been contradicted by Parke et al.'s (1977) study with juvenile delinquents. Nor do they claim that the sum total of these largely experimental effects adds up to proof of the thesis that violence on television is a significant contributor to violence in real life. Rather, they set out the predictors in order to test whether violence on television has necessary features which are likely to enhance the learning of aggression, fearfulness and insensitivity to violence or whether in showing how violence is unjustified, punished, and causes a considerable degree of pain, television acts in a prosocial manner.

Table 2.2: How Contextual Features Affect the Risks Associated with TV Violence

	Learning harmful effects of TV violence		
	Aggression	**Fear**	**Desensitization**
Attractive Perpetrator	▲		
Attractive Victim		▲	
Justified Violence	▲		
Unjustified Violence	▼	▲	
Conventional Weapons	▲		
Extensive/Graphic Violence	▲	▲	▲
Realistic Violence	▲	▲	
Rewards	▲	▲	
Punishments	▼	▼	
Pain/Harm Cues	▼		
Humour	▲		▲

Note. Predicted effects are based on a comprehensive review of social science research on the different contextual features of violence. Blank spaces indicate that there is no relationship or inadequate research to make a prediction.

▲ = likely to *increase* the outcome ▼ = likely to *decrease* the outcome

(Table from Wilson et al., 1997, p22)

The British research has not been so overtly driven by the research on effects theory, and is inclined to report on measures similar to the NTVS studies without drawing conclusions from them. However the results generally support the NTVS conclusions. For example, sixty per cent (80%) of victims had no emotional response at all to the violence shown and where the perpetrator's emotional response was shown, 50 per cent (73%) of the time it was one of pleasure (Communications Research Group, 1999). (The figures in brackets refer to the pay-TV channels (26% of the sample) and the figures outside brackets refer to free-to-air channels. 43% of all free-to-air channels have violent scenes compared with 73% of pay-TV programmes.) With violent interactions (excluding threats and accidents) guns were used in about 20 per cent (46%) of the time; over half (46%) the violence was in domestic or everyday settings; half (41%) the scenes depicted "intimate" hand-to-hand fighting, with one in three (40%) of these being with weapons; and about half (49%) the scenes had victims or bystanders who were undeserving of the punishment they received, with about a third (33%) having victims who were helpless in the face of attack. Only 12 per cent (18%) of programmes with violence portrayed the negative physical long-term consequences of violence and fewer the psychological consequences.

Where the British data differ is the presence of anti-violence messages and the degree to which violence is punished. Eleven per cent (16%) of programmes with violence include anti-violence messages rising to 30 per cent (25%) with fictional programmes.

Only 1 per cent (6%) of programmes had a perpetrator who got away without deserved punishment.

The NTVS overview study showed that 60 per cent of programmes have violent incidents and that the majority of these are in realistic settings (Smith et al., 1997). More than half the incidents involve lethal violence, yet more than half the victims show no pain, and the harm done is unrealistically low 40 per cent of the time. Guns are used in one in four incidents and 40 per cent of the perpetrators are attractive. In about three-quarters of the violent scenes no remorse is shown or negative sanctions provided, and 40 per cent have humour as well as violence. Anti-violence themes occur in only 4 per cent of programmes, and 40 per cent have "bad" characters that go unpunished. Only one in three violent programmes shows any long-term negative consequences of violence. All of these results enhance the likelihood that the presentation of violence will have negative consequences for television viewers. Only the low levels of graphic or explicit violence are encouraging.

When considering children, and the features which enhance the learning of aggression, the study found that 50 per cent of all the high-risk interactions were in children's programmes. The NTVS authors concluded: "Viewed in light of the scientific research on effects, these findings imply a strong potential for learning of aggression, desensitisation to violence, a fear amongst viewers who regularly see much of this violent content" (Smith et al., 1997, p166).

Modern count surveys try to anticipate the effects research, but they do not provide, of themselves, any substantiation for that research. We cannot, for example, go from the best of the longitudinal research (Gerbner and NTVS) and extrapolate a relationship between violence on television and violence in society. This is partly because of the multi-causal nature of violence, but particularly because the main effects of television violence may not be short term, some may take ten years or more to emerge.

3

The Behaviourist Paradigm 2: Television's Violent Effects?

In a recent *Science* article Anderson and Bushman (2002a) provided a meta-analysis of: "all available studies investigating the hypothesis that exposure to media violence increases aggression" (p2377). This is a total of 284 studies involving a total of 51,597 participants in:

1. laboratory experiment participants are exposed to violent media in laboratory settings and their responses measured against appropriate control groups or contexts.
2. field experiments or observational studies participants are exposed to violent media in naturalistic settings (home, school) and their responses are measured against appropriate control groups or contexts;
3. cross-sectional studies are also in the real world but show post-hoc associations between aggressive behaviour and exposure to violent media rather than cause and effect relationships;
4. longitudinal studies children's media watching is measured and compared with aggression at one or more points later in life (after adjusting for other well-known predictors of aggression). Longitudinal studies are field studies, but they are not experimental.

Table 3.1 Average Effect Size (r+), Confidence Interval (Cl), Number of Independent Samples (k), and Total Sample Size for Four Types of Media Violence Studies

Methodology	Effect size (r+)	95% Cl	Samples (k)	N
Cross-sectional	0.18	0.17-0.19	86	37,341
Longitudinal	0.17	0.14-0.20	42	4,975
Lab experiments	0.23	0.21-0.26	124	7,305
Field experiments	0.19	0.15-0.23	28	1,976

(reproduced from Anderson & Bushman [2002b])

Table 3.1 shows the average effect size (correlations), and other details of the sample. We will evaluate some of data that went into this meta-analysis and the importance of the effect size.

The implication that television alters reality, i.e. makes us more violent than we would otherwise be, requires us to examine this "impact" over time. The laboratory and field studies show fairly immediate changes in behaviour as a result of viewing violent television.

3.1 Laboratory experiments

Laboratory experiments provided much of the early work in investigating links between violence and aggression (Martin and Smith, 1997). This type of scientific experimentation involves a prepared setting where an experimental group is exposed to a particular treatment and then compared to a control group. One of the most cited studies is that of Albert Bandura et al. (1961) involving 72 children with a mean age of 52 months. Twenty-four of the children were divided into experimental groups with the rest making up a control group. Some of the experimental subjects were exposed to an adult experimenter in a play area who acted aggressively towards a Bobo doll. When the experimenter left the room, the behaviour of the children was observed and one of the most significant results obtained was that of young boys who, having observed the aggressive behaviour, showed significantly more imitative aggression compared with other children. Martin and Smith (1997) in their meta-analysis, stress the importance of this study in the history of laboratory studies associated with aggression because it has a high level of internal validity.

A considerable number of other studies have also claimed to find a causal link between television/film violence and aggressive behaviour. Liebert and Baron (1972) showed groups of children under the age of ten segments from *The Untouchables* while a control group was shown a programme featuring a track race. Afterwards, in a "play" setting, those children who viewed the aggressive programme showed a greater willingness to hurt another child. Other research (Liss et al., 1983) showed that having a violent superhero in cartoons led to more aggressive behaviour in children than did cartoons without the superhero. Violent characters that children can identify with are imitated (boys imitate boys, girls do not - Bandura, 1986; children imitate children, rather than adults - Hicks, 1965). Knowing that violence is real enhances aggression – students who were shown a campus riot were more aggressive later if they had been told it was real rather than being staged for a movie (Geen, 1975). Atkin (1983) replicated this effect with 10 –13 year old children. The use of guns and other common weapons may aid realism. We have already noted the Carlson et al. (1990) meta-analysis of 56 studies which demonstrated that the presence of weapons enhances aggression.

Watching "justified" violence makes viewers more aggressive and watching "unjustified" violence makes viewers less aggressive, according Berkowitz and Geen (1967; Berkowitz and Powers, 1979; Geen, 1981). Whether an act is justified or not may have something to do with the pattern of reward and punishment. A rewarded perpetrator is more likely to be imitated than a non-rewarded or punished perpetrator – this was one of the outcomes of the "Bobo Doll" research (Bandura, 1986) and one of the major conclusions of Paik and Comstock's (1994) meta-analysis.

On the victim's side, where viewers see a lack of serious consequences of violence, it appears that aggression is encouraged. Seeing victims expressing agony or with graphic wounds tends to discourage aggressive behaviour (Sanders & Baron, 1975), although for people with strong aggressive tendencies this may not be the case (Baron, 1979). The best way to minimise the consequences of violence is, of course, to make it funny. Baron (1978) has shown humour to work in two ways. Where the humour is hostile to the viewer (e.g. makes fun of the viewer's gender, age, culture), its association with violence increases the level of aggression, but where it is not hostile it decreases aggression. Humour may also lead to desensitisation (Gunter, 1985).

Desensitisation indirectly creates opportunities for aggression. Drabman and Thomas (1974) and Berkowitz (1984) argue that there are causes for increases in violent behaviour, whether direct - it is easier to be violent if harming your victim does not trouble you - or indirect it is easier for violence to occur if people are indifferent to the plight of the victim. A number of studies suggest that prolonged exposure to explicit or graphic violence has causes less physiological arousal over the time of watching (Lazarus & Alfert, 1964), and less expressed sensitivity to violence (Mullin & Linz, 1995).

The most sensational research in this area is Linz, Donnerstein and Penrod's (1984, 1988) work on young adult male desensitisation through repeated viewing of scenes of sexual violence against women. However, where there is an effect of desensitisation or habituation to violence, it may be short lived (Mullin and Linz, 1995).

As we have noted before, not all of this type of research found that people became desensitised to violence, Ogles and Hoffner (1987) concluded that fear was the result of exposure to graphic violence in some cases. Realism in violent depictions (bringing it closer to home) can also provoke fear reactions, particularly with children (Cantor and Hoffner, 1990). Jurgen Grimm (1996) tested anxiety, empathy, locus of control and pro-social attitudes as well as arousal. He showed a group of adolescent and adult non-pathological subjects violent scenes from films and news programmes and at the same time had their heart rate and skin conductance level taken, and found that viewing scenes of violence did not increase their level of aggression but did increase their anxiety.

3.1.1 Critiquing laboratory research

The criticisms of laboratory research come from a range of researchers (Cumberbatch, 1991; Freedman, 1984). They question the external validity of laboratory research. How can you generalise this type of research? For example, the choice of the Bobo doll as a stimulus in Bandura's (Bandura et al., 1961) study was selective and its novelty may have motivated aggression. It was also important to note that the presentation of the violence in the laboratory had no interruption so that any learning was violence-based, whereas in a naturalistic setting, commercials

and interruptions from others, such as peers or siblings, could influence the learning of aggressive behaviour. Also, the subjects may behave in accordance with what they thought might be the experimenter's expectations. Felson (1996) says that this "sponsor" effect is one of the biggest problems with laboratory experiments where subjects know they are being studied and therefore might respond differently from the way they would normally behave. He recommends that research which isolates or controls sponsor effects is needed.

Freedman (1984) points out that laboratory experiments are inconsistent in demonstrating whether subjects have to be provoked before being shown violence to get an effect. This, according to Felson (1996), makes it unclear as to whether media exposure acts as the instigator of aggression in the laboratory or only a facilitator. Fowles (1999), too, is critical of laboratory studies because he says they prove nothing about the real world, and are obsessed with aggression. This view is reinforced by Silverstone (1994) who says that laboratory experiments decontextualise the individual from his or her social location and the relations constructed between media and response have to be described in psychological terms. Gauntlett (1995) says there is a lack in the consistency of results from laboratory experiments which is difficult to explain, stating that:

> … some experiments have found that aggressive responses are only produced in subjects who have been previously angered or frustrated, whilst others have shown that quite unrelated stimuli such as comedy films can produce aggression effects in the laboratory which are just as significant as those produced by the violent films.
>
> (Gauntlett, 1995, p116)

Anderson and Bushman's (2002a) meta-analysis does, however, take into account some of the inconsistency arguments and the external validity ones. The effect size includes the inconsistent data, showing that the effect is both present and significant despite some inconsistent findings. The relation between the laboratory research effect size and the effect size through other research methods suggests that the effects found in the laboratory do have analogues in the real world. The effect size (r=0.23) is smaller than obtained in Paik & Comstock's (1994) analysis (r=.31), an issue that we will address after reviewing all four experimental areas.

3.2 Field experiments

Field experiments have a higher external validity. An example is an investigation of the imitation and arousal effects of the *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* programme on children's aggressiveness (Boyatzis et al., 1995). At the time this was the most popular and the most violent children's programme on broadcast television. It involved a racially diverse group of friendly adolescents who were able to transform into superhero alter-egos to battle monsters from space. In the study fifty-two elementary school children with a mean age of 7 years and 9 months were divided into two groups - one the control group and the other assigned to see a half-hour video-taped episode of *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* which contained 140

aggressive acts. Both groups were observed in the natural setting of their classroom environment at different times when they were told to engage in their regular play. Both physical and verbal aggression were counted. The results showed that those children who had seen the *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* episode committed seven times more aggressive acts than those of the control group, with boys committing significantly more aggressive acts than girls. The researchers felt this evidence corroborated the causal link between TV violence and real-life aggression. Their prediction that this would be the case was based on social learning theory fuelled by the fact that the programme was televised frequently and therefore children were repeatedly exposed to the violence. That the *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* were the good guys meant that they could be held in high status and as a result increase children's imitation of their behaviours. Since the majority of the *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* were boys the researchers belief that they would act as aggressive role models for boys, in particular, to identify with was verified.

The researchers themselves stated the strength of the study was that the children were observed in a natural environment and that the aggression was measured as part of their ongoing behaviour with peers. However, they also admit some weaknesses because the children did not normally view videotapes at school and it may have created an expectation to behave in a particular way. Also, the observers were not "blind" to the experimental condition of the children which had the potential of observer bias.

The effects of desensitisation (disinhibition and habituation) have also been explored in field experiments. Drabman and Thomas (1974) showed that eight-year olds could be desensitised to fights in the school playground, and in a field experiment, Voorjis and van der Voort (1993) found that desensitised and sensitised children maintained their predicted attitudes for two years. Again, however, it is not clear that there is an increase in actual violence due to desensitisation. Berkowitz (1984) has argued that disinhibition is more than a dulling of responsiveness to violence, but a priming of opportunistic thoughts and ideas about violence which, in turn, will lead to violent behaviour if this is useful in achieving the needs of the child.

Recent field experiments attempt to show that educational intervention around media violence can make children less aggressive. Nathanson and Cantor (2000) showed that 9- to 11-year-old children in schools whose watching of cartoons was accompanied by an active mediation strategy were less aggressive than were a group with no mediation or a control group who did not watch the cartoons. Robinson et al. (2001) ran a school programme aimed at reducing media use (television, video, computer games) and found that, compared with a control group, children in the intervention group had statistically significant decreases in peer ratings of aggression and observed verbal aggression. Differences in observed physical aggression were not statistically significant but favoured the intervention group. This last result reflects a common theme – verbal or relational aggression seems to be more susceptible to interventions than physical aggression.

Field experiments are not without contradictions. A study by Fesbach and Singer (1971) where boys were observed in three private residential schools and four residential treatment homes found that the group that watched more violent television programmes were less aggressive. However criticism of this study has ranged from that of the lack of checking of the non-violent programmes for levels of violence, the fact that cartoons were included in the non-violent group's television diet, to the fact that some of the children did not actually watch television.

Felson (1996) notes that at least three meta-analyses have been done on the results of field experiments with at least two showing effects. One by Wood et al. (1991) focused purely on media violence on unconstrained social interaction where children or adolescents were observed after exposure to aggressive or non-aggressive film. Out of 28 studies, 16 showed more aggression by subjects after viewing violence, seven studies showed the control group engaging in more aggression and five had no difference between the control and experimental groups. The effect size (r=0.19) for field experiments from Anderson and Bushman's (2002a) meta-analysis is lower than but similar to that for laboratory experiments.

3.3 The theory behind the behaviourist paradigm

There are theoretical difficulties in extrapolating from laboratory and field experiments to long-term aggressive behaviours. Much of this research leans on imitation (Bandura, 1995) and arousal (Zillman, 1978) theories to explain what are very short-term increases in violent behaviours. They essentially assume a preconscious mind equivalent to Piaget's (1955) sensorimotor stage (dominated by associational learning), or the earliest stage of Kohlberg's (1969) pre-conventional morality in which punishment determines what is right and wrong. Things are quickly learned, but just as quickly undone. While we might operate, in part, at these levels, we cannot get much further in expecting these theories to explain long–term aggression as a result of watching violence on TV.

Other studies, using theories of desensitisation, habituation (Drabman & Thomas, 1974) and disinhibition (Berkowitz, 1984) imply a weakly developed moral framework that watching a few videos can easily shift. This is consistent with Kohlberg's second stage of preconventional morality which is about individualism (me first) and reciprocity (I will, if you will), and with Piaget's egocentrism and animism of the pre-operational stage, where the child negotiates what they can get away with (reciprocity) in a capricious (animistic) world. At this stage negative effects can be more sustained, because they rest on an emerging idea of the self rather than on automated responses driven by imitation and arousal. However, almost everybody has access to multiple and complex moral frameworks, which are not easily overwhelmed by passive transitory experiences for any length of time. Research using prosocial interventions (e.g. Nathanson & Cantor, 2000) seeks to access and strengthen these frameworks, but it is not clear that the impact of these interventions is long term, any more than it is for the negative effects.

Researchers seeking to claim long-term effects from television violence, tend to focus their arguments on the stage of development described as concrete operational (7-11 years) by Piaget, and conventional (9-15 years) by Kohlberg. The more complex aspects of social learning theory (modelling (as distinct from imitation), coding, symbolic rehearsal – Bandura, 1971) fit with these stages of development. Cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1980) and script theory (Huesmann, 1988) both deal with the way that television creates a view of the world in which violent behaviour has an excessive role. Cultivation theory argues that the values and beliefs of heavy viewers of violent television reflect those in the programmes they watch, and that they have insufficient access to information that challenges these values and beliefs.

Script theory proposes that long-term effects relate to:

> …observational learning of three social-cognitive structures: schemas about a hostile world, scripts for social problem solving that focus on aggression, and normative beliefs that aggression is acceptable.
>
> (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski & Eron, 2003, p1)

Both Gerbner and Huesmann focus on stages of moral development where the child is determining the difference between good and bad not only at the individual level but in relation to family, peers and the local community (the first stage of Kohlberg's conventional period). The child seeks to develop a set of moral rules through which to interact with other people. This set is, at first, inflexible, but with the internalising and multiplying of cognitive schema that comes with shift from Piaget's concrete operations to formal operations, the now adolescent child is able to adapt rules to the different settings of home, school, peer group, etc. The suggestion is that children who are heavily influenced by television violence are caught in the more inflexible, concrete operational and conventional stages with a set of rigid rules that cause frustration and difficulties in adaptation and are more likely to lead to a life of violence in adolescence and adulthood.

3.4 Cross-sectional studies

Cross-sectional studies survey the viewing of television violence in relation to other behaviours, usually in the context of some form of cultivation or script analysis that would regard aggression as a long-term pattern of behaviour. Some early studies found a statistical relationship between aggression and TV violence.

Belson's (1978) study is described by Cumberbatch (1989) in his punishing review of television violence research as "far superior to anything else in this field". Belson interviewed 1565 London adolescents (aged from 12 to 17 years), on their television viewing habits over more than a decade and was given information on a wide range of violent behaviour (assault, destruction of property, rape, vandalism, animal abuse, etc.) committed during the previous six months. He found that high exposure to television violence of a particular kind increases the degree to which boys engage in serious violence. Although Belson found no effect of violence in cartoons, sports or news programmes, he states

> …heavier viewers of television violence commit a great deal more serious violence than do lighter viewers of television violence who have been closely equated to the heavier viewers in terms of a wide array of empirically derived matching variables.
>
> (Belson, 1978, p15)

A more recent cross-sectional study examining the hypothesis that children will imitate aggressive behaviours seen on television was carried out by Dafna Lemish (1997) in Israel. With the knowledge from news reports that the World Wrestling Federation programmes had been suggested as being responsible for playground injuries in schools, Lemish did a nationwide survey of elementary school principals who reported that WWF-type fighting was a problem in their schools. This behaviour included re-creations of specific wrestling matches, banging heads, throwing opponents to the floor, pulling hair and grabbing genital areas. The principals reported the injuries relating to these actions included broken bones and concussion and although most of the children were aware that the wrestling matches were staged, it did not stop them copying the moves. While this type of study highlights interesting information implicating imitative behaviour, it is necessary to remember that the observers were school staff, who could have an observer bias.

McLeod et al. (1972) gave a self-administered questionnaire to 600 adolescents, containing a series of statements measuring two dimensions: aggressive attitudes and exposure to television violence. The analysis indicated a positive correlation between exposure to violent programmes and aggressive attitudes ($r = 0.30$), independent of control variables. McIntyre and Teevan (1972) showed a strong relation between the violent content of preferred programmes of adolescents and aggressive behaviour. Robinson and Bachman (1972), studying the viewing habits of close to 1,500 young men, revealed a positive correlation between preference for violent programmes and the degree of aggressiveness.

More recent cross-sectional surveys use tests that are standardised for use by naïve observers (children and parents) to overcome criticism of the inaccuracy of naïve observers. Özmert et al. (2002) in Turkey found, using the Child Behaviour Checklist with nearly 900 7-to-11 year old students, that after the key covariates effects (older age, male gender, and decreasing social subscale and increasing attention problem) are removed, "television viewing time is positively associated with social problems, delinquent behaviour, aggressive behaviour, externalization, and total problem scores".

Another school survey (Buchanan et al., 2002) examined relational aggression (e.g. spreading rumours, excluding peers) as well physical aggression. They found children who watched more television and played video games more often were more likely to view violence and exhibit hostile attributional biases and receive higher teacher and peer ratings of violent behaviour. This study went to some trouble to remove problems of naïve assessors by doing training with their assessors (some 250 seven- to eleven-year olds and their teachers).

An Icelandic study by Kolbeins (2002) showed that watching television violence (but not watching television per se) accounted for 4 per cent of variance associated with girls' aggression and 2 per cent of that associated with boys' aggression, rising to 7 per cent and 4 per cent respectively in relation to delinquent behaviour (equivalent to correlations of r=0.27 and r=0.20). These effects were overshadowed by family cohesion and family tension effects which together accounted for 40 per cent of the variance around delinquency.

Cross-sectional research has an effect size of r= 0.18 in Anderson and Bushman's (2002a) meta-analysis (see Table 3.1) similar to than found by Paik and Comstock (1994). The weakness of most cross-sectional or correlational analysis is that no causal relationships can be inferred. Television violence watching and aggression are simply co-occurring behaviours, with possibly a shared causation such as poverty or abusive parenting. So while cross-sectional studies suggest that there may be violent media-fed scripts, which are prompting aggressive behaviours, longitudinal studies will provide more substance to such theorising.

3.5 Longitudinal research

The most influential longitudinal study is by Huesmann, Eron and their colleagues, spanning up to 22 years (Huesmann et al., 2003). Child and parent reports of the television watching of children aged eight in 1972 and 1977 were later matched with reports of aggressive and criminal behaviour gained through interviews with the participants and significant others at intervals of up to 22 years. They claim to show that:

> … boys' early childhood viewing of violence on TV was statistically related to their aggressive and antisocial behavior 10 years later (after graduating from high school) even after initial aggressiveness, social class, education, and other relevant variables were controlled (Lefkowitz, Eron, Walder, & Huesmann, 1977). A 22-year follow-up of these same boys revealed that their early aggression predicted later criminality at age 30 and that early violence viewing also was independently but weakly related to their adult criminality (Huesmann, 1986, 1995).
>
> (Huesmann et al., 2003, p3)

These researchers also conducted a three-year, five-country study covering Finland, Poland, Holland, Australia and Israel (Huesmann & Eron, 1986). This study has shown contradictory effects. Two countries, Australia and Holland, showed no significant effects for television violence, while the other three showed negative effects of varying strengths roughly comparable with US research. Cumberbatch (1989), however, slated the Huesmann/Eron studies for their poor assessment of what was violent television, and their failure to consider alternative explanations for what were, at most, small effects. Cumberbatch regards the longitudinal study of Milavsky et al. (1982) as more methodologically sound, where only five of the 30 tests were supportive of Huesmann and Eron's findings.

Huesmann et al. (2003) respond to many of Cumberbatch's criticisms, not always convincingly. However this re-analysis goes to considerable detail in dealing with "third variables" and demonstrating the reliability of its measures, and reiterates that childhood exposure to media violence does predict young adult aggressive behaviour for both males and females independently of socioeconomic status, intellectual ability, and a variety of parenting factors. The overall effect size for men and women is about r=0.20. On some measures like spousal abuse and being punched, beaten or choked, high viewers of television violence had twice the rates of other viewers. These measures affected between 20 per cent and 40 per cent of the samples, so they were not trivial.

A more recent longitudinal analysis by Johnson et al. (2002) assessed television watching and behaviour measures across a 17-year period. Starting with 700 children aged six on average in 1975, the study assessed it participants again in 1983 (aged 14) and thrice more up to the year 2000 when the average age was 30 years. This study looked at the period from 1983 to 2000, and is remarkable because not only does it suggest a strong relationship between television watching and aggressive behaviour (assaults resulting in injury, robbery, threats to injure someone, or use of weapons in crime later in life), it also suggests that both adolescent and young adult watching predict aggressive behaviour later in life. It also shows that those who watched for more than three hours a day were more than four times more likely to have committed aggressive acts than people who watched less than one hour a day (29% vs. 6%).

Through multiple regression analyses Johnston et al. (2002) were able to show that high television watching preceded high aggression rather than the other way round, and that this effect was present after all other key predictors of aggression had been factored out. This finding is well substantiated in Huesmann et al.'s (2003) latest work.

Cumberbatch (2002) mocked the conclusion that watching more than an hour of television a day would have such a profound effect:

> How many families do you know where children watch this amount or less? These are highly unusual families — the kind who are more likely to be taking their children to art galleries and museums. And there are so few of them compared to the rest of the children studied ... This is a case of torturing the data to make it fit a theory.
>
> (Cumberbatch, 2002, cited in Tillekens, 2002)

While only 2 per cent of people in a 2001 UK survey (Towler, 2002) indicated that they watched television an hour or less a day, in New Zealand, we watch an average of only 1.5 hours per day (Walters and Zwaga, 2001) and a survey of 28,000 Oregon school children showed that nearly half watched less than or equal to one hour a day (Oregon Health Trends, 2000). This study showed significant differences between

children who watched one hour or less per day and children who watched 5 hours or more, but did not present data for the in-between group.

What is interesting here is adolescents are being affected rather than children. It is possible that watching violence is not the issue, but rather it is the opportunity cost of spending 20 per cent plus of the waking day watching television. Adolescents' television watching drops according to most surveys (Gunter & McAleer, 1997), so those adolescents who increase their watching or maintain high levels are not keeping up with their peers in social and academic development, and, consequently, face increasing frustration, depression and sometimes, substance abuse – precursors of violent behaviour (Oregon Health Trends, 2000). Such theorising views television as displacing more useful activities. While it is not generally supported (Gunter & McAleer, 1997), the theory may have a role for explaining the behaviour of at-risk children and adolescents.

In a detailed analysis of the statistics behind the Johnston et al. study, Tillikens (2002) called the research "a conscious statistical fraud" and "a forgery of the data set", because Johnston et al. drew such strong conclusions from the small number of viewers who watched less than one hour of television a day. Notwithstanding the "science wars" feeling of hysteria in the Tilliken's attack, this point is well made.

3.6 Ecological and epidemiological studies

There are studies that do not fit the four methodological paradigms we have so far discussed. Firstly, there is the small number of ecological analyses of communities which study the introduction of television, and secondly, Centerwall's (1989) epidemiological analyses of the same phenomenon.

Schramm et al. (1961) studied a US town before and after television was introduced. Two surrounding towns were used as control groups. They found that after television was introduced, children were more aggressive and less creative in their play. They had lower reading skills and they exercised less during the first two years after television was introduced. A similar study in Britain at about the same time (Himmelweit et al., 1958), did not find the same effect, but had very poor measures of aggression (Cumberbatch & Howitt, 1989). A third study (Joy et al., 1986), in a Canadian town, found an increase in both physical and verbal aggression with the introduction of television. A very recent study of the introduction of television to St Helens Island in the mid-Atlantic also found no negative effects with the leader of the study saying that: "a child remains unaffected by violence as long as they have a good family background, good schools and a caring community to support them" (BBC News, 1998).

The epidemiological studies of Centerwall (1989) showed that homicide rates in the US rose dramatically for 20 years in fairly exact relationship to the rates of television purchasing 15 years earlier, beginning in the 1950s. Rural communities and the black groups where television was purchased later, had commensurately delayed increases in homicide rates. The homicides peaked 15 years after television ownership had

reached saturation (99% of the population) in the 1980s. In South Africa, where there was no television in this period of time, there was no change in homicide rates.

3.7 Conclusion

A number of meta-studies have been conducted overviewing and calibrating the major negative-effects studies conducted in the tradition presented above. Anderson and Bushman's (2002a) meta-analysis gives a value of r=0.17 (see Table 3.1) for longitudinal studies, very close to that of cross-sectional and field experiments. Further work by Anderson and Bushman (Bushman & Anderson, 2001) argues that overall correlations from meta-analyses have strengthened from r=0.13 for the 1975 meta-analysis to r=0.20 for 2000. Complementing the range and scope of meta-analysis, Anderson and Bushman (2002a) propose a generalised aggression model that incorporates arousal, desensitisation, various aggressive beliefs, schema and scripts, plus the notion of an inherited aggression component. According to Lynn, Hampson, and Agahi (1989), this last factor may eventually account for much of variability of the data in this area.

How important are these correlations? Those in Table 3.1 account for between 2.9 per cent and 5.3 per cent of the variance in the data around aggression. An analysis of risk factors around aggression is presented in Table 3.2 (from the US Surgeon-General's 2001 report on youth violence).

It shows exposure to TV violence to be as powerful an early risk factor (6-11 years of age, r =0.13) as a hyperactivity diagnosis, harsh, lax or inconsistent discipline, anti-social behaviour, or poor performance in school. It is assessed as being much more powerful than factors such as broken homes, abusive parents, neglect and anti-social peers. However, television violence has no impact as a late risk factor (12-14 years of age), suggesting that the critical period does not go beyond Piaget's concrete operational stage, and Kohlberg's stage 1 of the conventional period.

Anderson and Bushman (2001) compare the findings from television violence and aggression to those from meta-analyses of other public health issues such as the relationship between smoking and lung cancer, exposure to lead and IQ scores in children, and self-examination and extent of breast cancer. They find (using Paik and Comstock's (1994) data) that correlations for television violence are less than those for smoking (r=0.31 vs. r=0.39) but much higher than for exposure to lead (r=-0.13), self examination (r=-0.07) and a range of other public concerns. So while the effect size is small, it must, say Anderson and Bushman, be taken seriously.

In a similar vein, a recent study by Huesmann and his associates (Huesmann et al., 2003) which looked at the long-term correlation between television viewing and personal aggression turns out to have a more modest effect outcome than media coverage would suggest. Once again, the hope of providing a direct causal relationship that is externally valid runs up against some serious limitations which mirror earlier concerns with the robustness of the causal claim advanced by these authors (Rhodes 2003). These are:

1. The robustness of the reported evidence of a longitudinal link between childhood viewing and adult aggression is also limited by the fact of attrition (Huesmann et al., 2003). Of 557 subjects in the original 8 to 9 age range, only 329 were found 15 years later – a 40% attrition rate. The authors, perhaps mindful of the relative weakness of the correlation between exposure to television violence as against other factors, point out that those who were not traced scored highest on measures of aggression at age 13. So, had they been included, the correlation between television violence and aggression would have been higher. But this "if we've found more it would have been worse argument", assumes as given what the authors are trying to demonstrate, that childhood exposure to television violence leads to heightened levels of aggressive behaviour. It cannot be assumed that the missing respondents would have become more aggressive; they might have become less. If so, the already slight primacy of the level of viewing television variable would fall away and the null hypothesis – that there is not significant association between viewing violent television and aggression would have to be accepted.

2. Of course this would not mean that results reported for the sample of 329 can be set aside. A sample of this size is certainly capable of telling us something valuable. The question is: what does it tell us? The researchers are unequivocal: "the correlation between TV-violence viewing and childhood and adolescent aggression has been unambiguously demonstrated". But correlation is a measure of association not a demonstration of a causal relationship. For a causal relationship to have been established, the putative cause would have to be associated with the effect, the cause must precede the effect in time and alternative explanations must be ruled out (Babbie, 1992, p72). Only the first of these conditions is met and rather weakly. The analysis fails to prove that there is not some other "third variable" that accounts for the measures of association. The researchers attempts to control for these other factors are not persuasive (Rutter, 2003).

3. Accepting that correlations do express a relationship, what is that relationship? The researchers' own analysis shows that the correlation between the perceived realism of what is viewed, viewer identification with characters and aggressive behaviour is stronger than the fact of watching TV violence. Factors such as these that concern the manner in which viewers *relate* to violent content, leave open the possibility that more aggressive children watch violent programmes to make their own behaviour seem normal. Such a justification theory of the attractions of violent television implies that influences other than television consumption are the base cause of violent behaviour, even if it is recognised that television may have a re-enforcing role to play (Huesmann et al., 2003, p213-217). Paradoxically, then, these results can be read as providing equal support for background influences that is closer to the Reception Analysis.

Table 3.2 Early and late risk factors for violence at age 15 to 18 proposed protective factors, by domain (US Surgeon General's Report on Youth Violence, 2001)

Early Risk Factors (age 6-11)	**Effect Size (r=)**	**Late Risk Factors (age 12-14)**	**Effect Size (r=)**
Large Effect Size (r>.30)			
General offences	.38	Weak Social ties	.39
Substance use	.30	Antisocial, delinquent peers	.37
		Gang membership	.31
Moderate Effect Size (r=.20-.28)			
Being male	.26	General offences	.26
Law family socioeconomic status / poverty	.24		
Antisocial parents	.23		
Aggression**	.21		
Small Effect Size (r<.20)			
Psychological condition	.15	Psychological condition	.19
Hyperactivity	.13	Restlessness	.20
Poor parent-child relations	.15	Difficulty concentrating**	.18
Harsh, lax or inconsistent discipline	.13	Risk taking	.09
Weak social ties	.15	Poor parent-child relations	.19
Problem (antisocial) behaviour	.13	Harsh, lax discipline; poor monitoring, supervision	.08
Exposure to television violence	.13	Low parental involvement	.11
Poor attitude toward, performance in school	.13	Aggression**	.19
Medical, physical	.13	Being male	.19
Low IQ	.12	Poor attitude toward, performance in school	.19
Other family conditions	.12	Academic failure	.14
Broken home	.09	Physical violence	.18
Separation from parents	.09	Neighborhood crime, drugs*	.17
Antisocial attitudes, beliefs		Neighborhood disorganization*	.17
Dishonesty**	.12	Antisocial parents	.16
Abusive parents	.07	Antisocial attitudes, beliefs	.16
Neglect	.07	Crimes against persons	.14
Antisocial peers	.04	Problem (antisocial) behaviour	.12
		Low IQ	.11
		Broken home	.10
		Low family socioeconomic status/poverty	.10
		Abusive parents	.09
		Other family conditions	.08
		Family conflict**	.13
		Substance use	.06

* The risk factors identified by Lipsey and Derzon are predictors of involvement in felonies and could thus be predicting serious, but non-violent offending. However, the vast majority of serious offenders are also violent offenders. The risk factors from Hawkins et al are predictors of serious violence only.

** Males only

Individual risk factor. As a neighbourhood level risk factor (rate of violent offending) the effect is substantially greater (r=.45).

The inability to deliver an internally reliable and externally valid causal relationship between television violence and behaviour, for some commentators, serves to show that otherwise competent research into a flawed concept, can only produce an unsound outcome.

4

The Behaviourist Tradition and its Extensions

Purely behaviourist studies on TV violence have become increasingly rare as the field has developed in the past decade. A range of approaches have grown up which either use behaviourist models to draw conclusions contrary to the traditional negative-effects trend, or to enhance and nuance the interpretation of effects, or extend the paradigm with qualitative data. This includes child development research, and a consideration of the importance of genre and humour in understanding televised violence.

4.1 TV violence as catharsis

Jib Fowles (1999), a proponent of the catharsis theory, puts forward his case in his book *The Case for Television Violence.* He believes that television violence provides a safe outlet for people to purge their aggression rather than transferring it to action within society. The two affective states Fowles believes can lead a viewer to seek a cathartic benefit from television violence are: 1) a need to harmlessly vent antagonism by those who have a predisposition to openly hostile feelings; and 2) a need to deal with elements of stress by releasing repressed anger or feelings which have built up during the day. The release of other emotions such as lethargy and anxiety can also be achieved by watching television violence by those who choose to view it. Fowles points out that it is necessary to understand viewing habits on an individual basis rather than applying it to the collective "audience" because this "demeans the relationship between the purveyors of television programs and the purposive individuals who exploit the content" (1999, p78). Distressed viewers, for example, may watch shows with violent scenes so that they can empathise with the protagonists and approve of their aggression against "evil doers", thereby releasing their own emotions.

Fowles views the TV violence debate in the context of a global civilizing process in which violence is a diminishing factor and individual aggressive tendencies have to be repressed. Television violence offers "ritualistic rewards [that] include at least three kinds of gratification" – an opportunity to feel or act violently in one's imagination by viewing the actions of characters on television; the excitement associated with watching television violence can be achieved in a safe environment; and both the fearful and the fearsome viewer are served as all genres produce resolution and "the troubled mind is set to rest one more time" (1999, p118).

Fowles relies heavily on reviewing the literature of others to support his argument and criticises the research of those who oppose it. For example, he claims that George Gerbner uses a biased manipulation of data in his content analysis of television violence and that weaknesses have been exposed in his cultivation analysis. Equally he believes that Leonard Eron's (Eron, Huesmann et al., 1972) interpretation of data is also suspect.

Both academics, Fowles suggests, are motivated in their findings to gain funding for research and place themselves in positions of power. Overall Fowles questions the objectivity of social science research in an area that looks at behavioural outcomes rather than focusing on the "real" outcome which "may well be interior and semiotic" (1999, p47). This also demonstrates the difficulty in conducting research to directly support his argument.

Fowles has chosen to stand out against the larger body of opinion which decries television violence and take a proactive stance in positive effects theory. In 1985 he testified at U.S. Senate hearings that television's often "brutal fantasies" could be an antidote to the real world and had a therapeutic purpose (Fowles, p*ix*). The hostile response he has received over the years to his views, often from fellow professors, has led him to deduce that the television violence debate involves a grander agenda than just a concern about effects.

While Fowles' comments appear at the extreme end of the TV violence spectrum, the points he makes regarding catharsis are well worth considering although there would be considerable difficulty in setting up studies to prove his theories. It is questionable whether his opinions offer an answer to the debate because of the lack of substantial data to support his views, however they have the potential to direct researchers into other areas and to think on different levels when setting up studies.

Goldstein (1998) outlines three hypotheses that emerge from the concept of catharsis. Firstly the individual-differences hypothesis suggests that a drama eliciting a particular emotion will be more appealing to those viewers who have more of that emotion. Secondly, and the most controversial of the three hypotheses, is that of purgation. After viewing that drama the viewer will have less of the emotion he or she first came with. In other words that drama will have assisted in purging that emotion from the viewer. However as Goldstein points out there is the possibility that watching an emotion such as anger in a drama could just as well increase those feelings in a viewer as to purge them. Also to be considered is the fact that watching comedy or light entertainment rather than violence may also reduce feelings of anger. The third hypothesis is that the greater the reduction in the said emotion the more appealing that programme will be. But Goldstein says that programmes can be appealing for many different reasons and the purging of emotions cannot simply be seen as the ultimate reason for its popularity.

4.1.1 Critiquing catharsis

Other academics have explored catharsis to investigate aspects of the theory which may lead to a broader understanding of its application. The potential for some children who are "skilled daydreamers" to use violent and non-violent film sequences to reduce anger is highlighted by Gunter (1990). In looking to substantiate this view he refers to a researcher E. Biblow (1973), who tested groups of children who were either skilled or not adept at fantasising. By using accomplices to annoy children by interrupting them when building a toy, the children were then shown either violent or non-violent films or no films at all. Afterwards the children were observed at play with access to toys that could be used aggressively. Those children who were high-level fantasisers and who had watched either violent or non-violent film appeared to be more able to reduce their anger than the others who were not adept at fantasising and acted more aggressively after viewing violent film. Gunter concludes that this demonstrates an idiosyncratic aspect of catharsis theory which applies to children skilled at fantasy and imaginative play or daydreaming. Therefore, he says, the same television programme could have differing effects on children. He suggests that further research is needed in this area.

Catharsis theorists have come under fire from other academics and institutions. The Lamarsh Commission, which investigated media violence for the Canadian Government, said that some research had been pre-occupied with the aggression versus catharsis theory. It suggested that the continued existence of the catharsis "myth" was fuelled by the fact that most people did not like to admit that they enjoyed something that could have adverse effects (Dyson, 2000).

Canadian psychologist Jonathan Freedman believes there is a lack of evidence to support either the association between media violence and aggression viewpoint, or the catharsis theory. He conducted a comprehensive review of all the English-languages studies that looked at the effects of violent media. He concluded that the scientific evidence failed to show that "watching television violence either produces violence in people or desensitizes them to it" (in Rolston, 2000, p1). He believes that where some studies may indicate a correlation between violent shows and aggression, such evidence is very weak. Freedman presented this viewpoint before Congress and the Canadian Government in 2000 when testifying on the psychological effects of violent entertainment. While he disagreed with the resulting Federal Trade Commission report (2000) on the marketing of violent media, which concluded that the evidence only showed a high correlation of the watching of violent media and violent behaviour, but not necessarily causation, he felt it was the most moderate report he had seen on this topic.

Freedman (1984) believes there is a two-fold explanation as to why some studies show that children are more aggressive after exposure to violent media whether television or video games. Firstly violent media is more arousing and exciting so that if an effect is noted it could be that this excitement makes the children more active and more likely to participate in active games, making them appear more aggressive. Secondly, children do imitate what they see and when they act out martial arts

manoeuvres after watching such scenes on a video game or television, Freedman believes it is more likely to be a style of play rather than reality.

Equally, Freedman says there is no good evidence to support the catharsis theory mainly because it is hard to demonstrate. Neither argument shows an overall effect and this leads him to believe that it all comes down to the individual:

> My guess (…) is that both sides are right. That some individuals, under some circumstances, at a given moment in their lives, are on the verge of committing a violent act. And some of those people are pushed over the edge, perhaps, by violent television, either because it's so arousing, or because it seems so appealing, or whatever the reasons. And some of them are prevented from going over the edge, cathartically, by it …still [only] a very small percentage of the people have any effect at all. Most of the people just look at it and there's no effect.
>
> (Freedman in Rolston, 2000)

4.2 Shooting the messenger

Kathleen McDonnell (2000) believes that focusing on the media in the television violence debate is really shooting the messenger because television, in fact, reflects our social malaise. She highlights a survey by Dorothy and Jerome Singer in 1990 which suggested that clusters of interrelated factors stimulate violent behaviour in children. These included the individual family culture involving a more authoritarian style of communication such as physical punishment, heavy television exposure and less-developed use of imaginative or fantasy play. Like Gauntlett (1995) and Fowles (1999) she sees the obsession with finding an association between media violence and aggression as part of the moral panic phenomenon and that television, movies and video games are readily available targets. "More and more the idea that TV causes violence is taken at face value, as something so obvious to anyone with an ounce of common sense that it doesn't require proof" (McConnell, 2000, p116).

In addition to this, popular discourses about how media effects can influence the way people like to see themselves, for example as a "concerned parent", can help shape the comments people make. In pointing to this, David Buckingham suggests there are a number of studies which show a "social desirability bias" that evokes the standing of "principled" positions by parents who may "over-estimate the degree of control which they exert over their children" (Buckingham, 1997, p38).

While there seems to be a preoccupation with the focus on looking at potential effects caused by media violence, there is a further angle which should be considered – that of censorship and artistic expression. Lewis Cole, Chairman of the film division in Columbia's School of the Arts, questions whether news should be censored in the name of preventing violence and says that the realistic portrayal of violence is one of the distinguishing marks of great artists from Cervantes to Willa Cather (Cole, n.d.).

The American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression (in Media Awareness Network, n.d.) believes that censorship won't solve the root causes of violence in society. They cite the many plays, books and films which were banned in the past and are now considered classics. The Centre for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) mentions *Saving Private Ryan*, considered the most violent film in 1999 based on the D-Day invasion of Normandy, as being "critically acclaimed for its realistic portrayal of the horrors of war" (in Media Awareness Network, n.d.). Fictional violence is different from violence in non-fiction because it is almost always presented in a conventional moral framework where such acts are condemned rather than glorified according to David Link (1999). Even the animated programme *Beavis and Butt-head* shows that "their violent acts are committed by vacuous losers", and it is important for parents to teach their children to carefully read television for meaning the same way they would a book (Link, 1999, p144).

In spite of the outcry about television violence, there is no denying the fact that watching acts of violence can be appealing or even attractive. Goldstein (1998) suggests that there are many reasons why this may be so. Some people watch for sensation and excitement, some people find watching violence in a safe environment or in a social setting with others attractive, some viewers of violent sports get a physiological kick from the action while those watching fantasy are able to immerse themselves in imaginary worlds and for some children their curiosity about watching taboo subjects is satisfied. Goldstein in fact makes an important point when he says it is important to remember that only a minority of the general audience prefer violent entertainment compared with other forms. Violence in the media is unavoidable, and Goldstein concludes that it is up to the image-makers to put it in perspective.

4.3 Refining the behaviourist paradigm

For many observers the evidence of a direct connection between television and violence is at best mixed. Felson (1996), for example, in his review of 28 studies, found 16 showed more aggression by subjects after viewing violence, seven studies showed the control group engaging in more aggression and five had no difference between the control and experimental groups. Recognising such limitations, there have been two broad responses to this requirement:

- To refine the concept of effect, acknowledging that cultural factors, such as values, cognition and beliefs are important factors in the causal chain. Essentially this means a refinement of the measures – refining the concept of effects, identifying more precisely the nature of the intervening variables that connect the viewing of content to aggressive behaviour and expanding the notion of violence. There is a shift, then, from a direct view of causality towards notions of indirect causality – for the larger number of intervening variables posited between a presumed cause and an effect, the less direct and the more contingent the linkage from content to behaviour. We term this *causal extension.*

- To introduce new theories of causal influence via a reassertion of the directness of the link from cause to effect, bypassing the recognition of intervening variables by establishing stimulus-response linkages that transcend individual and cultural differences. We term this *causal compaction*.

4.3.1 Causal extension

One response to the perceived limitations of the behaviourist paradigm has been to call for a more sophisticated conceptualisation of effects (Potter, 1999). In research design, it is necessary to move beyond an exclusive emphasis on experimental studies which attempt to show that an effect occurs, towards a consideration of the strength and prevalence of identified effects, the role of frequency in creating a threshold for behaviour change, and the salience of a particular violent act in a given social milieu. Potter (1999, p23) also recommends:

1. that complementary effects theories need to be synthesized – theories of social learning or imitation, and priming need to be integrated with theories that emphasise cognitive effects;
2. that conflicting theories are needed and researchers should test out each other's theories; and
3. that a broader conceptualisation of media violence is needed which integrates effects research with content analysis and the analysis of the production of content. Potter includes here the dramatic structure of texts and the views, perceptions and creative intentions of programmers and producers.

The investigation of the interrelationship of these three areas constitutes what Potter terms a lineation theory of violent effects. In this view the influence of media violence is conceptualised as a process of intersecting of influences – the formation of content, the content itself and the investigation of effects. Although Potter notes that viewer or lay definitions of violence should be factored into the account he still sees this kind of material as a dependent variable. Potter's lineation theory is a refinement of the behaviourist paradigm rather than a new approach.

As pointed out in Section 3 above, another response to the perceived inadequacies of experimental studies is to argue that short-term effects produced in an experimental setting are not as transient as they seem. Such effects are the momentary manifestations of processes that operate in the larger environment that lead to long-term change in viewer dispositions, particularly amongst heavy viewers of television and children whose developmental stage is deemed to make them particularly vulnerable. Cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1986) and script theory (Huesmann, 1988) both claim that the repeated viewing of television that has a high violence content cognitively reconfigures the viewer's perception of the real world.

In this approach, television provides schooling in a particular worldview and models and templates for behaviour when the worldview projected by television is similar to individuals' real life worlds. The key challenge for this kind of longitudinal research

is to establish a substantial causal role for television in the production of a mean worldview and to show that the kinds of solutions that heavy viewers propose to everyday problems might be derived from a television-induced misperception of life.

4.3.2 Causal compaction

A distinguishing feature of this recent approach, proposed by Lt Colonel David Grossman (retired), a psychologist once employed by the United States Army, is the re-introduction of strongly behaviourist models derived from physiological psychology. In these models, consciousness is rendered a dependent variable, bypassed by the acquisition of conditioned reflexes and, in the case of video games, automatic motor skills. Watching television is viewed as an iterative process of operant conditioning, as developed in the work of B. F. Skinner, in which a behavioural set that takes pleasure from violence is created. Since levels of television and computer game consumption are high, the iterative presentation of fight and flight scenarios are "hard wired" and shift from a short-term, evanescent response towards a long-term durable disposition. By this means the "natural" pro-social inhibition against harming and killing others, or taking pleasure in fantasising about such actions, is overwhelmed. A certain medical metaphor haunts this formulation and gives an undue resonance to a pathological reading of effects of television:

> The result is a phenomenon that functions much like AIDS, which I call AVIDS – Acquired Violence Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS has never killed anyone. It destroys your immune system and then other diseases that shouldn't kill you become fatal. Television violence by itself does not kill you. It destroys your violence immune system and conditions you to derive pleasure from violence.
>
> (D. Grossman, n.d.)

It is worth noting that the model proposed appears to be very reductive in comparison to other long-term effects research.

A more substantial, but essentially similar example of compaction is the recent work by Murray (2001) that connects, via functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) technology, the viewing of television violence to brain activation in the areas of arousal, attention, detection of threat, episodic memory encoding and retrieval, and motor programming. The writer found that neurophysiological mechanisms that lead to long-term memory storage of emotionally charged perceptions were activated by television violence. The storage of such perceptions greatly enhances the retrieval of violent behaviour as a guide for social behaviour (John Murray, Children's Brain response to TV Violence, Biennial Meeting of the Society for research in Child development, 2001).

Epidemiological studies can also be viewed as an example of causal compaction, if they make unqualified claims for a connection between the introduction of a particular media or a particular genre and rising rates of homicide and assaults in a

particular community or society. Potter cites eight epidemiological studies, including Centerwall's (1989) much cited study, but he notes that such studies can do little more than establish the co-occurrence of crime rate increases and the diffusion of a particular medium. In Centerwall's case, despite claims to the contrary, the association explored is not between television content and violent behaviour, but between television ownership and crime rates. Making inferences from social statistics to the presence of violent content remains risky, given that there may exist other more proximate variables that explain what otherwise appears as a very direct and linear effect (Potter, 1999, p41).

Extreme behaviourist models have great appeal and remain popular with the tabloid press and sections of the general public. Since this is the oldest and least sophisticated behavioural theory, its resurgence is certainly part of a reaction to a spate of mass killings in the US (Columbine) and in the UK (Dunblane) and more generally the post 9/11 climate. Even before 9/11, the media are fond of reporting such stories as part of the well-established theme of respectable fears, which in fact go back to the introduction of the mass press in the nineteenth century (Pearson, 1983).

Felson (1996) notes the widely reported case in Boston of a group of young men who set fire to a woman after forcing her to douse herself with fuel. This scene had appeared on television two days earlier. In 1977 a lawyer in Florida pleaded "not guilty" on behalf of his 15-year-old client Ronny Zamora charged with shooting and killing his 82 year old neighbour on the grounds that he suffered from "television intoxication". By watching too much television, claimed his lawyer, Ronny had become dangerously inured to violence and couldn't tell right from wrong (in Stossel, 1997). In 1990 Quebec teenager Virginie Lariviere collected 1.3 million signatures in a petition to the Prime Minister calling for new legislation requiring the networks to progressively decrease violent programming. She believed that television violence might have been a component in the robbery, sexual assault and murder of her 11-year-old sister.

Doctors working in the Department of Pediatrics at Boston City Hospital labelled the number of cases they saw involving dangerous imitative behaviour the "Evel Knievel Syndrome" (Daven, O'Connor, & Briggs, 1976). Three cases they cited involved boys between eleven and fifteen copying a daredevil motorcycle stunt by Evel Knievel which had extensive media coverage in 1974. The boys using either bicycles or motorbikes attempted to race down long "ski" jumps constructed from wood, each receiving broken bones and multiple lacerations. These doctors claimed that the news media had glorified Evel Knievel's stunts and quoted Bandura's belief that the closer the violent model is to reality, the more likely is the tendency for it to lead to imitative behaviour" (p419). They felt broadcasters had acted carelessly in not at least warning audiences about the injuries that might result from copying such behaviour.

But such "copy-cat" behaviour is not limited to children. Robert Wharton and Frederick Mandell (1985) document two cases where parental child abuse, one

causing death and the other a "near miss", occurred directly following the broadcasting of a made-for-television film involving child abuse. Depictions of a mother "engaging in progressively more severe episodes of abuse" were likely to have influenced the treatment by two women to their babies in separate incidences. The researchers term this as "media-induced parenting behaviour" particularly where parents are vulnerable because of environmental factors such as stress and isolation. They called for a broadening scope of the research to look at the "role television plays in directing parental interaction with children" (p1122).

While such situations are anecdotal and may be coincidental they also suggest that such unusual and dramatic behaviour on television could possibly be copied by people who might never have thought about behaving that way (Felson, 1996).

4.4 Children and television violence

4.4.1 Stages of child development

Understanding of reality and its acquisition during the course of human development is complex. To most infants in the modern world, events involving various moving items, apparently taking place within a box in the living room is a familiar experience and is no more or less noteworthy than other features of their world. At this age, suddenness, loudness and chaotic imagery can be frightening. A three-year old is likely to ask how the moving items came to get in the box and what they are doing there, as well as following what they do.

Up to the age of about five, children commonly believe that the people they see on the screen are miniature humans who exist within the set. They will make various efforts to relate to them. An understanding that they are a projection of actual events occurring somewhere else is acquired in the early school years.

From around five, children pick up cues as to how seriously they are expected to take what they see and whether it is meant to be a depiction of the real world or a fantasy (as in cartoons). Even so, through mid-childhood children do not separate themselves readily from what they see, so although they may know something is not real it may still frighten them. In their play they assume the roles of characters seen on television, and distinguish between "goodies" and "baddies", heroes and villains. The attributes of people identified as "goodies" or heroes tend to be taken on uncritically (Wellisch, 2000).

It should be assumed that any image, situation or idea picked up from television may be acted out in play. This may be accommodated seamlessly into children's repertoire of attitudes and behaviour at least for the time being until it is challenged and shaped by other influences, such as what their parents say and how their peers respond.

The emotional impact of events seen on television cannot be reduced in children up to the age of about seven by reassurances that they are not real (Gunter and McAleer, 1997). By the age of 12 two-thirds of children know that television dramas are portrayed by actors. This is not the same thing as understanding how realistic a staged performance is in depicting human situations (social realism). Throughout adulthood we may be moved by transmitted images of actual events, fictional portrayals of actual events and entirely fictional productions. In each case our perception of the item's realism is one factor that determines its meaning and impact and is influenced by the way in which it is presented.

There are many factors operating in childhood that are known to contribute to adult violent behaviour and their effect tends to be cumulative. Observation by children of violent behaviour between parents can have long-term deleterious effects including violent behaviour when the children reach adulthood (Fergusson, 1998). Some have expressed the view that experiencing "real" violence as a child has a much greater effect on aggressive predisposition than observing it on film or television (Pennell, & Browne, 1999).

> Most researchers of aggression agree that severe aggression and violent behaviour seldom occur unless there is a convergence of multiple predisposing and precipitating factors such as neurophysiological abnormalities, poor child rearing, socioeconomic deprivation, poor peer relations, attitudes and beliefs supporting aggression, drug and alcohol abuse, frustration and provocation, and other factors.
>
> (Huesmann, 2003)

There are a number of levels of the effect of violence. The first is immediate and involves in young children the process of imitation and in children and older people the processes of priming and excitation. The second level is longer term and involves incorporation of violence into personal life scripts and beliefs about the relative hostility of the world and the appropriateness of responding violently. The third is a societal effect of the establishment and transmission of a culture of violence, which includes pessimism, lack of trust and erosion of commitment to the common good, as well as overt expressions of hostility.

As previously stated the immediate effect of observing violence has been tested in numerous laboratory-type trials by Bandura and colleagues (Bandura, 1963), and in New Zealand by Ling (1977). The New Zealand work found what the many other studies have, that interpersonal aggression increases in eight-year-old children (and children of around that age in other studies) after they have watched films of aggressive behaviour of a kind that is meaningful to them.

4.4.2 Violence against New Zealand children

New Zealand society has a high rate of violence committed against children through child abuse and child injury deaths. For the years 1985-1990 the rate of death of

under-one-year-olds killed by those who had their care was sixth highest of the 23 industrialised countries (UNICEF, 1994). Some 12 children are killed each year (Kotch et al., 1993). Between 1991 and 1995 New Zealand had the fifth highest rate of death of children by injury, 13.7 per thousand, of the 26 OECD countries (UNICEF, 2001). The number of children referred to the Department of Child Youth and Family Services in 2001 and assessed as abused or neglected was 5,432 (Ministry of Social Development, 2003).

New Zealand surveys of children and young people have found that violence and concern about it are prevalent. In a survey of 9,569 13-18 year olds attending New Zealand schools, 52 per cent of males and 41 per cent of females reported being hit or physically harmed by another person in the preceding 12 months (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). Children and young people up to eighteen years of age were invited to respond to a discussion pack prepared in connection with the government's Agenda for Children project. The packs were posted on a popular website and circulated to schools and to organisations for children and parents. 3,500 responses were received. In response to the question, "What's not so good about being a child or young person on New Zealand?", 8.9 per cent of the individual and 29.9 per cent of the group (mostly prepared as school projects) responses, referred to bullying, either its existence or the fear of it (Barwick, 2001).

On the legislative side, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (defined as under 18 years) provides a comprehensive, standard and almost universally recognised set of children's rights (Appendix B). It was ratified by the New Zealand Government in 1993 and has become a point of reference in New Zealand law, policy and practice. Four of its articles are particularly relevant to children as television viewers. Together they recognise:

1. the importance of the mass media in shaping children's views and behaviour;
2. that a balance must be struck between the child's right of, and need for, education and access to information;
3. the right and need to be protected from adverse experiences; and
4. the responsibility of parents.

4.4.3 Child violence and the media

Research has been conducted over a period of more than forty years to test the hypothesis that observation of violence on television increases the likelihood of aggressiveness and violent behaviour. The earliest of studies were concerned with the potential effect of television on children (Himmelweit et al., 1958). In the public arena the immediacy of child imitation has been highlighted by shocking cases in which children have clearly copied something seen on television or film, for example:

1. A five-year-old boy set his home on fire, killing his two-year-old sister, after seeing a *Beavis and Butt-Head* episode. His mother said he was addicted to the show.
2. An adolescent boy was killed by a car and several of his friends seriously injured when they lay between car lanes on a busy road in imitation of a scene from the movie, *The Program*.
3. A thirteen-year-old boy killed himself when he and a friend acted out the Russian roulette scene from the movie, *The Deer Hunter*.

(Levine, 1998)

These cases illustrate the immediate effect, in which imitation, arousal and priming are likely to have played a part. While they are dramatic, they are relatively unusual and sometimes commentary by authorities and the media as in the Jamie Bulger murder in England, can wrongly attribute violent behaviour to this direct influence (Pennell and Browne, 1999).

As television has been introduced it has been possible to carry out before and after studies and to compare communities in which television has not yet been installed, with those in which it has. Williams (1986) found that the introduction of television into a Canadian community was associated with an increase in its children's violent behaviour. Other studies have compared populations of young people and found that those who watch more television violence are more likely to commit more seriously violent criminal acts (Belson, 1978).

Denial that there is a causal relationship between watching violence and violent behaviour is usually based on two theories. The first is that the tendency to aggression or some associated attribute comes first and predisposes the person to find displays of aggression and watch violence. The person who watches violence is drawn to it or likes it because he has a tendency to violent behaviour. The second is that some third variable such as low IQ, low socio-economic status, or parental violence or rejection is at work.

The Huesmann study (2003), discussed above, set out to examine both the "tendency-to-violence-comes-first" and the "third variable" theories in his longitudinal study tracking children into adulthood. It is sometimes postulated that the connection between TV violence and aggression is the result of some common factor such as parental violence or rejection rather than operating as cause and effect. The study of groups of 7- to 10-year olds re-examined after 15 years, separated the parent-mediated variables of rejection of the child or of parental aggression from violent television watching and concluded that there was an independent and significant effect of childhood viewing of TV violence in determining subsequent violent behaviour.

Another theory is that the violence comes first, i.e. children who are violent for whatever reason are attracted to violence on television, because it justifies their behaviour. Huesmann (2003) tested this by examining the fit of models of pathways

from childhood aggressive behaviour to adult TV viewing and found the "violence comes first" theory was less plausible as an explanation than an effect of viewing violence. Once again, the data here is less definitive than hoped, as the use of qualifiers such as "less plausible" indicates.

A cross–cultural survey covering 25 countries and including 2788 boys and 2353 girls aged 12 years found that the relationship between television violence was interactive. Television violence contributed to an aggressive culture because children already located in high-risk circumstances where adult aggression was commonplace used television to confirm and reinforce their own aggressive attitudes. The same study found that children in a low and high aggression situation took the message from television that violence is a good means to solve conflicts, that aggressive behaviour confers status, and is fun. These relationships held for boys and girls, though more strongly for the former than the latter. Boys were particularly prone to see violence as providing an attractive frame of reference for role models, for example, the 'Terminator' syndrome (Grobel, 2001).

Further insight into the way in which television violence influences behaviour can be gained by considering successful interventions to reduce the effect. Parents watching television with a child, and making comments, can reduce the effects of TV violence on the child (Nathanson, 1999). It may be that this effect is mediated by maintaining the separation of fictional representation (what's on the television) from reality (the presence of parents and their comments). Reducing the time spent watching television regardless of content together with lessons on selection of programmes can have a similar effect perhaps by limiting the time spent in "total immersion" (Robinson, et al., 2001).

Ron Phillips, a child and family therapist at South Auckland Health in New Zealand, uses storytelling in his therapy sessions dealing with children who are tumbling out of control, on the road to penal or psychiatric facilities or in danger of suicide. The fable he wrote *Gem of the First Water* (Phillips, 1990), influenced by his experience of J.R.R. Tolkein and C.S. Lewis, involves both good and evil characters that focus on themes of "making choices, thinking before acting, setting goals and being responsible" (Young, 1998). While this is oral storytelling rather than visual, it does seem to indicate the important role fantasy and imagination have in the lives of children in helping them to cope with real life experiences.

4.4.4 Taking cartoons seriously

Cartoon violence could be dismissed as being too trivial for inclusion in content analysis studies because initial impressions might be that such violence, often humorous and involving only animated figures, could hardly be considered a public health issue. However, it is the way children might perceive the aggression and the possibility that it could be associated with anti-social behaviour that suggests that cartoon violence ought to be taken more seriously. Journalist and comic book author Gerard Jones is firm in his belief that "creative violence" helps far more children than

it hurts. Through his experience writing action movies and comic books (his own favourite was the Hulk) and talking to children who read his stories, he kept seeing the same stories appear across generations, genders and ethnicities – "people pulling themselves out of emotional traps by immersing themselves in violent stories" (Jones, 2000). In his book entitled *Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Heroes and Make-believe Violence* Jones tells how, working with psychologist Melanie Moore, he has studied how violent stories helped children meet emotional and developmental needs. Rather than indoctrinating them, fantasy violence gives them coping skills, teaches them to trust their own emotions and develop a firm sense of self. To demonstrate this, Jones cites that pretending to have superhuman powers can help children overcome a sense of powerlessness felt through being young and small, and "creative violence" such as head-bonking cartoons, bloody videogames, playground karate and toy guns provides a tool for them to master their rage. Immersing themselves in imaginary combat and identifying with a violent protagonist, says Jones, can assist children in letting out stifled rage which can be an energising emotion, giving children courage to resist greater threats and take more control when faced with life's challenges.

> Visual storytelling unlocks the images they've stored up from cartoons, movies, and video games and helps them make more sense of the media-transmitted stories that fill their environments.
>
> (Jones in CBS, 2002)

Jones acknowledges that the media can inspire some people to real-life violence but this involves a very small percentage compared to those it has helped. His theory provides 'food for thought' but some commentators are not so positive in their views on the topic.

Dale Kunkel, Professor of Communication at the University of California at Santa Barbara believes that cartoon violence, even though presented in a fantasy setting carries risk of anti-social effects (in Gardner, 1996). In line with this view, Brady (1992) cites a teacher's recount of a three-year old boy yelling out the *Teenage Mutant Ninja* turtle cry of "cowabunga" in class, thereby provoking a little gang of Ninja's to kick each other.

More recently concern has been raised over the increased number of Japanese-style programmes (known as 'anime') such as *Pokemon* and *Digimon* being shown on television. In a NZ On Air focus group survey (in Lavranos, 2003) one adult commented "*Pokemon* and *Dragonball Z* are the bane of parents' lives - it's really ugly cartooning - it just revolves around war and fighting". An article in the *New York Times* titled "Violence Finds a Niche in Children's Cartoons" (Rutenberg, 2001) claims critics of anime believe that the Japanese culture has a higher tolerance for "blood and guts" on television compared with the United States. However the programmes appear to be popular with boys in particular because they mirror the Japanese video games where enemies are destroyed one after another, often in graphic detail. Anime are cheaper to buy compared with the average cost of producing American-made cartoons says Rutenberg (2001) citing that an average

episode of *Pokemon* costs about US$100,000 whereas the average cost of an original episode of an American-made cartoon is estimated to be about US$500,000. This factor plus the high ratings achieved by anime appeals to broadcasters, while the niche-oriented advertisers have the ideal show on which to market action figures, cards, cereal and snack foods. While some broadcasters such as Fox sometimes schedule *Digimon* marathons during the Saturday morning cartoon block, the Nickelodeon station has refused to screen any of the anime programmes because it considers them so violent (Rutenberg, 2001).

Psychologist Dr Joyce Brothers believes that while watching cartoons might not make a child get a gun and shoot someone, it can raise levels of aggression (in Hudis, 1993). Or, is it that anti-social behaviour can simply be explained by the fact that more aggressive children tend to watch more violent television? Or, as suggested by Canadian psychologist Judith van Evra (in Brady 1992), that there is a wide availability of cartoons that they can select from? Whatever the explanation cartoon violence is an area crying out for deeper investigation.

4.4.5 Cartoon-induced anxiety

A Finnish study published in the International Journal of Psychology (Bjorkqvist & Lagerspetz, 1985) looked at the way children experienced three different types of cartoons. These were: a *Woody Woodpecker* cartoon, categorised as aggressive humorous; an aggressive drama cartoon which contained violence of a boy shooting a bird but later regretting it (indicating a clear message that one should not harm others with violent behaviour); and a non-aggressive cartoon based on a Lapland folk-tale about a man who is magically turned into a wolf, hunts birds and reindeer before becoming a man again. This mystical-magical tale contained no explicit violence but included fear-eliciting sound effects. The study, overall, found the degree of anxiety shown by children was not due to the amount of explicit violence but rather in the way it was presented. The researchers concluded that the way children experienced films was important in determining how they might be affected. The "non-aggressive" cartoon was thought to be the most frightening due to its sound effects. The researchers found that younger children aged five to six did not see the cartoons as continuous stories, understood less and "tended to base their moral judgements of a character's behaviour on whether they identified with that character"(Bjorkqvist and Lagerspetz, 1985, p77). Any moral or anti-violence message was likely to have been lost on these children. Six months later the scenes that they remembered best were those that had made them the most anxious. A sub-group of children with abundant aggressive fantasies, (aggressive fantasies are used as a measure of aggressiveness in this research), had a lower level of moral reasoning, preferred violent scenes, were less anxious while watching them and had a tendency to give illogical explanations when describing the behaviour of cartoon characters.

Another study analysed 74 animated movies with a G rating including *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, The Lion King, Toy Story* and *The Rug Rats Movie* (Yokota and Thompson, 2000). Reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association, the

researchers found the range of movies coded had significant amounts of violence in them and often implied that the good characters were allowed to triumph over bad using physical force. The researchers warned that parents should not assume that films were acceptable for young children to watch or should not be monitored just because they had the 'G' rating. Parents, they suggested, should be more proactive in acting as gatekeepers in what their children are exposed to in television programmes, on video or at the movies.

4.4.6 Adult mediation and environmental factors

Amy Nathanson and Joanne Cantor (2000) sought to investigate whether active mediation could help reduce the aggression-promoting effect of violent cartoons on children. With cartoons such as *Woody Woodpecker* or *Bugs Bunny* failing to demonstrate the negative consequences of violence, thus minimizing (for example, the pain and suffering of victims), they conducted a controlled study using active mediation strategy. Showing children a five minute *Woody Woodpecker* cartoon one group of children were asked to think about the feelings of a man who was constantly attacked by the cartoon character because he constantly, though unintentionally, interrupted the woodpecker's nap. This simple procedure of increasing children's fictional involvement with the victims of televised violence, the researchers found, changed the way the children viewed the characters and the violence and could easily be used by parents. Children exposed to the active mediation appeared to see the violence inflicted on a victim was less justified. They seemed to be able to imagine what the consequences of the violence to the victim might be rather than identifying with the "attractive and humorous perpetrator of violence (a condition that encourages the learning of aggression)" (p137). The researchers also found that mediation prevented boys in particular from "experiencing an increase in post-viewing aggressive tendencies" (Nathanson and Cantor, 2000, p136).

Various groups support the role of parental mediation in the viewing habits of children by either teaching children to decode cartoons, limiting television use, restricting the purchasing of character spin-off products, or simply finding out about the content of programmes (in Hudis, 1993; Benham, 2001; Pace, 2000). A California-based advocacy group "Children Now" has suggested that children's cartoons should be rated specifying their age appropriateness and level of violence, sexual content and adult language (Gardner, 1996) to assist parents making these judgements. As Jeff Cole, director of UCLA's Center for Communication Policy in (Benham, 2001) says, animated violence should not be dismissed. Although children know it is fake, he believes, it can be the worst kind of violence because of its failure to show the consequences. If this is the case, mediating children's access to and engagement with cartoon violence should not only be left to parents and caregivers. Just as research into child obesity appears to be pointing to the need to change the social environment so that people can make better food and exercise choices (NZPA, 2003), it would appear that, responsibility on the part of a wide range of broadcast

stakeholders needs to be taken for the provision of a balanced viewing environment for children.

Insufficient funding in New Zealand and a so-called market-led economy has led to a "predominance of imported cartoon material embedded in local programming links" of TVNZ's *What Now?* and TV3's *Sticky TV* (Lavaranos, 2003, p9). Lavranos has pointed out that the heavy diet of foreign children's cartoons is in stark contrast to what was available to New Zealand children in the early 1980s with other genres of drama, crafts, puppets, natural history and science. How New Zealand children in particular respond to the violence in foreign cartoons has received little attention. But whether slapstick, tame combat or sinister combat animation - these categories were used by UCLA in monitoring animated programmes (UCLA, 1996, see UCLA, n.d.) - it appears that cartoons deserve to be paid as much attention as other genres in television violence research.

4.4.7 Interactive media

Research into the influence of other media such as music videos, computer games, cable and the internet, whether seen as separate or as digitally interwoven in what is known as *interactive* television, is conceptualised as extending and aggravating a proven trend established over several decades in relation to television. Thus one recent meta-analytic review, concerned with media influence on children states:

> The newer forms of media have not been adequately studied, but concern is warranted through the logical extension of earlier research on other media forms and the amount of time the average child spends with increasingly sophisticated media.
>
> (Villani, 2001, p1)

Since "earlier research on other media forms" is concentrated mainly on television, it follows that the kinds of questions asked of the new media tend to mirror the kind of questions that are asked of television. This assumption is not entirely unwarranted given the ongoing convergence of media content, but it clearly begs many questions about the actual relationship between television and other media and obscures the consideration of medium and format specific effects. Does watching Lara Croft Tomb Raider on Sky Movie Max have the same impact as playing the computer game or even watching the same movie in the cinema? If not, what are the significant differences and what effects flow from these? Can media violence be treated as a general phenomenon found across a variety of different media or does each medium have its own kind of effect? Are such effects more or less powerful and more enduring than television effects? The assumption points to another possible limitation of the behavioural paradigm. It tends to accept that differences in media formats and, indeed, genres can be ignored because the content of the media is so similar. Potter, for example, speaks of a television violence landscape that is common across drama series, situation comedies, news, movies, talk shows and shows for children (Potter, op. cit., pp56-59). This assumption of **content homogeneity of the**

medium mirrors the assumption of audience homogeneity that has been heavily criticised by proponents of the Reception Analysis.

Ellen Wartella, a co-principal investigator of the NTVS study, sums up both these points when she observes that, in relation to children's television: "…much of the motivation for this research comes from social concerns about the adoption of new technologies voiced by parents, educators, the clergy, and social reform groups", and asks that more research be done on the ways in which:

> …child audiences perceive, appropriate, and negotiate media messages through the variety of social groups to which they belong, such as the family or ethnic identity groups. …[We need] to paint a picture of a much more "able" child viewer, more competent in coping with violent, sexual, or commercial content than ["effects"] researchers have described.
>
> (Wartella, 2002)

5

The Active Audience: From Object to Subject

One of the key criticisms of the behaviourist paradigm is that it treats audiences as comparatively homogeneous, always allowing that some groups, e.g. children, are seen as particularly vulnerable – which is to say different in circumstance, but not in kind. The assumption of audience homogeneity is perhaps weakest when it generalises from international studies of violent content on television. For example, Potter (1999) reports that the United States has the highest rate of violence on television worldwide with countries such as Great Britain, Korea, Finland, and parts of Asia showing lower rates. Japan, Australia and Canada's levels of violence come close to those of the United States. He continues:

> The findings indicate that television shown in all parts of the world contains a great deal of violence and that this violence usually is portrayed in an antisocial manner; that is, the portrayals contain many elements that would lead viewers to experience negative effects.
>
> (Potter, 1999, p59)

The possibility that the same levels of violence (or even what counts as violent) may be interpreted differently by audiences in different cultures seems to be ruled out by this conclusion. The Reception Analysis, most strongly associated with research in the UK, takes the opposite view of the relationship between the media and audience:

> The British tradition, then, is to argue for "influences" rather than "causal effects", however indirect. It suggests that the viewer is not passive but interacts with the screen and what is seen…. the audience is considered not to be a homogeneous group but to be made up of groups of individuals with various experiences.
>
> (ITC, 1998)

If the assumption of audience homogeneity is set aside in this manner, it follows that the media cannot be considered as homogeneous either. The media are responded to, by audiences, in different ways and it is only through selective use, selective attention and selective perception that influence occurs. What emerges is a broadly phenomenological approach, in which television (and other media) is viewed as a distinct realm of experience, the consumption of which is structured by the location

or place of the viewer or the audience, within non-media realms of experience arising from everyday life, such as home, work and community.

Viewers placed at the intersection of these realms interpret media content – even the same content - in a variety of ways. They construct meaning in different ways under different circumstances. If, in the behaviourist paradigm, viewers are blank slates, in the active audience paradigm they are "meaning makers" who, consciously or unconsciously, edit their own consumption. Different kinds of viewers from different backgrounds perceive and interpret content differently, depending, for example, on the dramatic context and the identity of the perpetrators and victims. What is often treated as the fundamental definition of violence in content analysis – objective or direct physical action – is revealed through viewers' accounts to be a multi-layered, subjective phenomenon.

The active audience paradigm received its most extensive exploration in studies that began to question the validity of content analysis, which even in the case of Gerbner's work (1967-1989 – see Chapter 2) remained fundamentally quantitative. In essence, the emphasis was to restructure the study of content in order to bring out the qualitative dimensions of audience experience. Much of the work here, as already pointed out, emerged out of the effort to refine studies that remained within the precincts of the behavioural paradigm. Modifications led in time to a new emphasis on the role of audience interpretation in the flow of influence.

The most substantial research contribution to this development was conducted by the Centre for Communication Policy at UCLA over a three-year period from 1994. Under the leadership of Jeffrey Cole it tackled the issues of context and the deficiencies of count surveys by undertaking qualitative analysis of television violence, while still operating within the broad framework of the behavioural effects paradigm.

5.1 The UCLA study: Design

The study, to monitor all television, and in particular broadcast network television, was requested by Senator Paul Simon and the four broadcast networks, ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC. Over 3,000 hours of television were monitored in a television season each year and included every series, television movie, theatrical film shown on television, children's programme, special and advertisement. Some programmes were purposely omitted such as the news, late night programming and talk shows.

While claiming not to need a "precise definition" but rather a "contextual framework", UCLA's definition of violence ("the act of, attempt at, physical threat of, or the consequences of, physical force") includes inanimate objects and images. The researchers made it clear that the report that they undertook was not an effects study. They acknowledged that effects research provided them with important background information and that they were aware that television violence was a potential danger. However they emphasised that the UCLA study was a content analysis of

television, with a focus on programming, which "may raise concerns with regard to violence" (UCLA, n.d.). Building on the qualitative analyses of Gerbner's studies UCLA assessed every scene in detail to see whether it conformed to their definition of violence. They purposely used a broad definition to include sports violence, cartoon violence, and slapstick violence, though verbal threats were deemed to be of secondary importance. Because they felt that not all violence was the same, the focus was not on counting the number of acts of violence but analysing the context in which these acts took place. In their words "the issue is not the mere presence of violence but the nature of the violence and the context in which it occurs" (UCLA, n.d.).

Highly trained students were responsible for coding the acts of violence on the television programme sample and these were recorded on scene sheets. Based on the broad definition of the study the students filled out scene sheets for any act of violence. Once a week the entire staff of the project reviewed the programmes that had been coded. On some occasions reporters, writers, producers, television executives, academics and members of advocacy groups attended these meetings as observers.

The programmes would be discussed with the specific purpose of deciding whether or not they raised concerns about television violence. The programmes had the potential to be placed in three categories: 1) those that contained no violence; 2) those that raised no concern because of the appropriateness of the violence in the context of the story; and 3) those that raised concerns because of the inappropriateness of the violence in the context of the story. Scenes of violence were noted and details of how they were set in the programme were also highlighted. For example, this included what came immediately before, what were the consequences, whether the scene was necessary to tell the story or to develop the character, whether the violence in the scene needed to be as long as it was, and whether the act of violence was contextually appropriate.

In the study the researchers outlined ten basic judgements which would help the reader understand the monitoring process and the decisions that were made. These were:

1. There is no such thing as an accident in fictional programming. Everything is created by a screenwriter, and a director decides how to depict the "accident" with camera angles, music and level of graphicness.
2. Violence is important in character and plot development to establish the bad guy as the bad guy.
3. Audiences like to see the bad guy "get it good".
4. Time slots make a difference and networks need to be responsible and to take into account when children are watching.
5. For context to have an impact, consequences or punishment must occur within the specific episode. If a consequence for an act is shown several episodes later

there is no guarantee that the viewer who watched the violent act initially will be watching to see it punished a week or months later.

6. Advisories do what they are intended to do and aged-based content labels probably will also. The researchers state that they would like to see advisories used more often and more consistently and perhaps published ahead of time.
7. Music is a very important part of context. Music has the ability to tell the viewer about what they are watching. It can cue to warn or reassure the viewer. It can trivialise the seriousness of the violence or make it seem acceptable or exciting.
8. Cinematic techniques can also affect the context of violence such as slow motion, blurring techniques and fast editing to convey chaos and the horror of violence or to aggravate it and increase concerns.
9. "Pseudo" guns are only slightly better than real guns, if at all. Although a character may use a futuristic ray gun, children can still imitate the act by grabbing his or her parents' real gun. The researchers treated all guns as real.
10. "Real" reality is given more latitude than re-creations. There is a proviso however that real footage needs responsible editing.

These judgement criteria reflect the same issues that have emerged from effects studies and which the NTVS and the BSC studies have tried to incorporate into their contextual frameworks (for example, the concerns about justification and punishment, "good" and "bad" characters, the role of weapons, the impact of production effects). What is different is the insistence that nothing is an "accident". Both The NTVS and the BSC studies regard character intentionality as critical in the evaluation of violence. For the NTVA study, accidents have to be removed.

In addition to the above operating premises, whether a programme's use of violence was contextually appropriate was determined through the application of no less than fourteen criteria. The researchers emphasized that no one factor determined whether a programme did or did not raise concern about the levels of violence. All the criteria were weighed together and each programme treated uniquely. For example, while Beavis and Butt-Head used an advisory and ran after 10.30pm, a similar animated programme such as The Simpsons, which screened at 8pm, without an advisory, was treated separately.

The 14 criteria under which a programme was scrutinized were comprehensive and included the time a programme was shown, if an advisory was used, whether violence was integral to the story, how graphic or realistic the violence was, who was involved, what weapons were used and what percentage of violent scenes made up the show. No programme could be declared a problem without the director of the centre making a direct ruling. The researchers indicated there was often lengthy discussion on various issues before any such ruling was made.

5.2 The UCLA findings

Three reports made up the study spanning 1994 to 1997. Because of the detail of the research and the resulting depth of material, this assessment highlights just some of the findings in the UCLA study over that time period. Network television was divided into six areas for analysis and some of the programmes it highlighted are listed below.

Television series. The number of television series that raised frequent concerns in their dealing with violence reduced over the three year period - from nine in 1995, five in 1996 and only two in 1997. One of the programmes that raised frequent concerns was Walker Texas Ranger, particularly because the fight scenes were "excessively long and graphic". Guns and explosions with fight scenes involving head injuries were evident in several Walker made-for-television movies and often the use of slow motion extended and enhanced the violence. The X-files was commended for portraying violence as an evil in need of containment with the two protagonists having a strong aversion to violence. However the researchers felt the show frequently over-stepped the mark in creating uneasiness in the viewer. Examples include one episode about poltergeists, where the audience see a father graphically flailing while hanging by his tie on a garage door opener and another episode where an evil plastic surgeon tortures and kills his patients through methods such as liposuctioning them to death. Interestingly, America's Funniest Home Videos also raised concern because they "merely decontextualised violence as humour". The compilation of video clips sent in by viewers was taken out of context and included exaggerated sound effects and camera shots of the audience laughing as people were seen in painful and harmful situations. The researchers felt that the programme trivialised violence and its effects. However, by the time they monitored this programme again in the 1996/1997 report, the researchers felt that the programme had changed and very little problematic material existed. Shows that were commended for their treatment of violence included NYPD Blue, ER, Under Suspicion, The Commish, Law and Order, and Picket Fences. Although they included scenes of violence they were not overly graphic and the scenes were relevant to the story.

Television specials. This was the only area that was worse at the end of the three years. This deterioration related mostly to television reality specials featuring real or re-created footage, which included graphic scenes of death and disaster, whether police shoot-outs, car chases or animal attacks. The researchers labelled some of the nature programmes as "Animal Shockumentaries" because of the alarming scenes they included. For example, When Animals Attack or Shark Week, while still classed as documentaries contained some terrifying footage. Programmes such at The World's Scariest Police Chases reminded researchers of Gerbner's theory of the creation of a scary world through the television. The trend towards these types of programmes and the high ratings that were achieved alarmed the researchers.

Made-for-television movies. The number of movies raising concern was almost the same with 14 per cent in 1995, 10 per cent in 1996 and 12 per cent in 1997. Among

those raising concern was Alien Nation where aliens came from outer space and integrated into society. The researchers felt this programme was more about action than anything else and included fistfights, guns and explosions. Another made-for-television mini-series was Scarlett, the long-awaited sequel to Gone with the Wind. While the initial episodes had low amounts of violence, the final two hours included some of the most graphic and explicit scenes of violence viewed on television that season including rape and the aftermath of a stabbing. The explicitness of this went far beyond what the story required, the researchers said.

Theatrical films on television. These are made for a different medium and are retrofitted for broadcast television. In its first year the study recognised this area as being the most problematic with 42 per cent of films in 1995 raising concern. However the figures improved in 1996 dropping to 29 per cent and with an insignificant rise to 30 per cent in 1997. Examples of those movies that raised concern were Under Siege, Ghost and Home Alone 2. Under Siege had over 50 scenes of violence including gruesome detailed shootings and stabbings. While the film Ghost did not have many scenes of violence, the final scene showing the bad guy falling through a broken window and being impaled by a large piece of glass was considered unnecessary because its editing would not have interfered with the integrity of the story. The children's movie Home Alone 2 also came in for criticism. A young boy, played by actor Macauley Culkin, devised various ways to torture two robbers who broke into his family's home. While some may consider the movie a child's fantasy, the researchers felt it was sadistic. Although the violence is not considered realistic, the researchers felt it sent messages that to hit a person over the head with a crowbar is funny.

On-air promotions. On-air promotions showed the most improvement since the 1994-1995 season. The study showed that promos were often out of context, shown in inappropriate time periods and included the most compressed and intense scenes of violence. However it noted the efforts by the networks to reduce the number of on-air promotions featuring only scenes of violence from a television series; those promoting theatrical films, while still full of action, had fewer scenes of violence. However the promos for live-action reality specials still raised considerable issues of concern.

Children's television on Saturday mornings. Children's television on Saturday mornings showed a drop in the number of programmes featuring "sinister combat violence" (such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles or X-Men) from seven in 1995 to four in both 1996 and 1997. Cartoons such as Bugs Bunny and Tweety Show showed slapstick violence which concerned the researchers. Acceptable cartoons included Ace Ventura whose main character rarely inflicted harm on his enemies and Brand Spanking New Doug which had little violence but promoted pro-social messages.

While this study intensively examined broadcast network television, UCLA also viewed other television sources including cable television (which it found to contain more explicit programming than seen on the networks), public television (which raised virtually no concerns about violence), local independent stations (which

included a number of programmes which raised concern such as Xena Warrior Princess and Real Stories of the Highway Patrol), video rental and video games played on television (which have a wide range of content from violent to non-violent).

Monitoring television over a three-year period enabled the researchers to establish a meaningful baseline from which to make conclusions about violence on television - the amount, type and level. The researchers made considerable effort to emphasise that their study was not a quantitative count because of its contextual nature. They pointed out that their broad definition might result in the counting of a high number of violent scenes in a programme. However this was superseded by the contextual nature of the research which focused on whether the violence raised concern. Examples they gave include situation comedies such as Home Improvement or Third Rock from the Sun, which might tally up a number of scenes of 'violence', but its nature and context might categorise them as not raising concern. Equally examples where violence may be appropriate to a story such as Schindler's List or the television series M*A*S*H do not raise concerns.

The UCLA studies (1994-1997) are the most substantial example of a qualitative content analysis available. Rather than providing a count of violence, the methods deployed focused on the salience of violence rather than simply recording its frequency. In this manner it was possible to develop a formula for deciding whether a show was a matter for public concern. The methodology aimed to be extremely thorough and consistent in the amount of criteria it examined in determining the level of concern about how violent a programme might be. One of its advantages was that programmes from the same series could be assessed over the three years and any changes in the way violence was treated were noted. Full discussion of each programme was deemed necessary before any decision was made as to how serious a concern was held by the researchers in its portrayal of violence. However, in looking at the example above of necessary violence to tell a story, it leaves open the question as to whether the showing of such violence, appropriate or not, might still have a negative effect on some viewers rather than others. The researchers commended shows which they felt dealt well with violence because of the context in which it was shown. These included the "high-quality drama" of NYPD Blue, Chicago Hope, ER, Homicide and Law and Order. Again, what one viewer sees as high-quality drama may be very disturbing to another and there may be cultural differences in people's responses. In spite of the thorough discussion that surrounded the decision making about programmes, the researchers' decisions must still be seen as subjective.

The researchers commented that monitoring so many thousands of hours of television helped them to gain an overall impression of the television medium. Even after the first report they felt that the broadcasting world had "begun to get the message about television violence" and this was reflected in the fact that there appeared to be fewer scenes of disturbing violence in mini-series, for example, compared to theatrical movies. Rather than graphically showing knives and bullets

entering the body, the networks seem to have a policy of only showing the victim after the shooting or stabbing.

The researchers viewed the monitoring process as not only an academic study but also a public policy project and it appears that during the course of the research the results created an understanding between the television industry and the researchers which prompted positive action. That is, during the study period, the UCLA research team met regularly with network executives to discuss their findings and to look at ways to improve areas of concern over violence, to which the networks, according to the results in the UCLA report, responded. The UCLA Center for Communication Policy has since moved one to a project assessing the evolution and impact of computers and the Internet.

The UCLA study is useful for other countries like New Zealand to look at because they, too, broadcast many of the programmes that were assessed. The study can therefore highlight areas of enquiry that may not have been considered or understood by others.

The UCLA and NTVS studies were contemporaneous and both found that there had been little or no change in the overall levels of violence on TV. Both studies began with similar beliefs about the impact of television violence and have similar prescriptions around how that impact can be minimalised. Because of the work they did with the networks, UCLA presents a more hopeful outlook for the future than does NTVS which worked at arm's length.

6

Evolving a New Paradigm: Reception as Cultural Production

6.1 Broadening audience studies in the UK

The monumental UCLA study discussed in the previous chapter did not stand alone, it drew on a sub-current of studies, largely drawing on models derived from social psychology, that attempted to bring interpretation back into the assessment of content.

6.1.1 Forerunner studies

The most detailed analysis of the limitations of the behaviourist paradigm was Barrie Gunter's Dimensions of Television Violence (Gunter, 1985). For the purposes of synopsis it is useful to look at a single study. Barrie Gunter and Adrian Furnham, in their study of viewers' perception of television violence challenged Gerbner's cultivation research on the grounds that it was inconsistent (Gunter & Furnham, 1984). On the one hand, Gerbner and his associates have denied that their content-analytic method is concerned with audience reactions and yet on the other they continued to draw inferences about the psychological impact of television violence on audiences with the introduction of concepts such as resonance and the frightened viewer. Using a panel of respondents who viewed selected violent materials, this study found, firstly, that the subjects exhibited less extreme or serious behavioural responses to fictional as opposed to factual portrayals. This finding was consistent with other studies that showed viewers tended to discount violence if it was clearly seen as fictional.

Secondly, it was found that the actual type of weapon used – guns as contrasted to knives – influenced the level of disturbance that respondents felt. The level of disturbance was also influenced by programme type – with knives being seen as most violent in British crime-drama series and shootings as the most violent in Westerns. This indicated that cultural proximity and genre could influence the perception of seriousness. Third, the respondents' perception of the seriousness of violence depended on their self-ascribed style of aggression. Verbally aggressive respondents tended to find violence in British crime-drama settings more disturbing than self-styled physical aggressors. The authors concluded: "..(I)t is evident .. that ordinary viewers make highly differentiated judgements about violent portrayals…" (Gunter & Furnham, 1984, p1).

Another study that addressed the Gerbner approach, and suggested the importance of context, was undertaken by Finnish researchers (Mustonen & Pulkkinen, 1993). Observing that Gerbner's content analysis methodology had been widely used for international comparisons, these researchers noted that there were differences in the units of measurement that different studies deployed in following Gerbner's basic approach. In their view, this inconsistency at the level of implementation only compounded a fundamental weakness of content analysis - that it provides a count of violent acts without considering the interpretation and reactions of the audience. Such a weakness was considered to be particularly critical when cross-cultural comparisons are sought, even if the same definitions and measures of violence are used. Studies of audience reactions indicate that the salience of a particular aggressive act varies widely between cultures. In Japan, for example, the suffering of victims is emphasised, while this is rarely the case in Western drama.

The authors state that their key aim is "to broaden the analysis of television content in an ethnographic direction". Setting aside the Gerbner definition of violence as an objective, externally undertaken, physical act, the authors define aggression on TV "as any action causing or attempting to cause physical or psychological harm to oneself, another person, animal or inanimate object, intentionally or accidentally". This definition implies that viewers were prone to make psychological inferences about the visual manifestation of violent behaviour. To catch this interpretive activity, a system for coding content that measures the *salience* of TV aggression rather than merely counting incidents was developed. The salience of an aggressive act, its perceived brutality, was measured on a Likert 5-point scale. Brutality was seen as varying according to:

(a) the programme context - different stylistic combinations, atmosphere, theme and degree of perceived realism;
(b) the justification of aggression - defensive or altruistic aggression is interpreted as milder than offensive, intentional or sadistic aggression;
(c) the techniques of dramatisation or the manner in which violence is presented.

The place of a particular aggressive act on the three dimensions of context, justification and dramatisation provides an index of brutality. This index can be related, in turn, on the basis of existing research literature, to the kinds of inferences viewers make in judging the acceptability or unacceptability of a violent act. Coding a content sample from Finnish television, the authors found that, overall, the rate of aggressive acts per programme hour was 3.5 per programme for all programmes and 5.6 per hour in fictional programmes. Although Finnish programmes dominated the sample, the rate of aggression was heavily concentrated in foreign, particularly American, programmes.

The authors found there was no connection between the popularity of programmes and the level of aggression, despite the fact that producers seem to believe that aggression is the key to popularity. The authors noted that their expansive definition

of violence was likely to increase the Finnish score, but the implication was that were other cross-cultural studies to use the same measure then the already high counts of physical violence would be higher. At the same time the increase in violent counts was based on a qualitative judgement which could indicate that the numeric value of a count needed to be distinguished from its cultural and social significance. Counting acts did not provide a meaningful indication of the social function of violence, which was culturally specific. The significance of this study rests less on its findings which the authors admit are not really generalisable to existing Gerbner method based studies, than on its attempt to relate the intensity of violence to subjective factors and audience interpretation. The study is interesting in that it attempts, like the NTVS and UCLA studies, to bring the audience back into the picture as an active interpreter of content. In this it is closer to the British tradition.

6.1.2 Stirling work

An example of ethnographic approaches is to be found in the series of studies undertaken by the Stirling University Research Centre on behalf of Broadcasting Standards Commission in the UK (Stirling, 1998, see Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1998). The latest of these studies, *Men Viewing Violence*, deploys like the first, *Women Viewing Violence*, focus group methodology in order to elicit how subjects respond to and interpret televised violence. In both studies gender was a central factor in the constructing focus groups. But such groups were further organised by socio-economic class, age, ethnicity and previous experience of actual violence. In *Men Viewing Violence*, selected subjects were shown examples of fictional and factual programming – soap opera, television drama, sport and Hollywood films. Amongst some of the results, it was found that the more realistic a violent depiction was the greater the impact it had on the viewer group. The perception of realism was complex, depending on the difference between the perceived target audience and the ethnicity and gender of the *dramatis personae* or kind of genre considered; the match between the respondent's own experience of violence and the way the violence was represented in specific programmes – Hollywood movies were particularly seen as lacking credibility. Such findings indicate that the content of violent scenes cannot be separated from their dramatic embedding or from the wider context of viewer experience as *kinds of persons*.

6.1.3 Leeds United

A more recent body of research, that confirms the active role of the audience in relation to violent content, was undertaken by the Centre for Media Research at the University of Leeds. The published account of this research, which was commissioned by a collaborative industry group of the BBC, Broadcasting Standards Commission, Channel Four Television, Channel Five Broadcasting, The Independent Television, the ITV Association and British Sky Broadcasting, appeared in 2000 (Morrison, 2000).

Twelve focus groups of eight respondents each were selected demographically to represent the age, gender and social grade distribution in the population at large. Since the purpose of the study was ethnographic - to find out how audiences defined and evaluated television violence - selection within the demographic categories was not random but was targeted to individuals who had characteristics or experiences that would give them a particular insight into the nature of violence and how it might be defined. Individual groups were composed of people with a common characteristic, for example, young men with an experience of violence, young women with an experience of violence, World War Two veterans, older women with a fear of violence, parents with young children, and Cable and Satellite viewers who subscribed to film channels. From a review of focus group transcripts, three evaluations of fictional violence were detected:

1. Playful violence – violent actions that are clearly staged and set in an exaggerated or unreal setting which is associated with a recognised genre.
2. Depicted violence – marked by the attempt, by means of cinematic devices such as close-ups and graphic detailing, to show violence as it might occur in real life settings.
3. Authentic violence – violence that is set in a world that the viewer recognises as everyday, with actions and scenes that involve ordinary people e.g. domestic violence.

(Morrison, et al., 1999, p4)

In the programmes shown to the respondents, these forms of violence were often found to be intermingled, and in talking about them respondents appeared to be operating with a kind of calculus of the seriousness of what was seen. This calculus was intertwined with notions of fairness.

The primary definer of a depicted action as violent was its relation to codes of conduct governing everyday life. An act on screen was deemed violent if a similar act occurring in real life would be perceived as a breach of widely accepted moral codes. Respondents, for example reported that "grassing", or snitching on someone, was unacceptable in any circumstances. Punching could be acceptable in some circumstances. Beating up a snitch would be an example of acceptable behaviour, with unfortunate consequences perhaps, but essentially fair and deserved.

Given the exercise of this primary moral economy, in which fairness defined what was or was not violent, the realism of the scene determined the perceived seriousness of what occurred, thus influencing viewer reactions to what was viewed. Since most respondents had not encountered violence in everyday life, ideas about the realism of violence on screen were strongly influenced by previous screen depictions. The interaction of fairness and realism in forming judgements and reactions to violent content, indicated that, for these respondents, violence was not an objective or uniform category, defined by a specific kind of act, with a uniform effect. Rather, television violence was a complex subjective phenomenon, whose seriousness depended on the dramatic context in which it was placed and on the kinds of prior

understandings that respondents brought to the context of viewing. David Buckingham in his study of children and violence reached a similar conclusion (see Buckingham, in Barker & Petley, 1997, p40).

6.1.4 UK Broadcasting Standards Commission

The broad findings of the Leeds Group, along with other commissioned research into audience-based perceptions of violence, now form the basis of the monitoring of broadcast content in the United Kingdom**.** The background to this shift is interesting because it raises once again the adequacy of content analytic approaches to television violence. The BSC (Broadcasting Standards Commission), the statutory body for standards and fairness in broadcasting, is charged with the responsibility for monitoring, researching, and reporting on these standards. In order to achieve this, it has consistently monitored levels of violence on terrestrial television through content analysis, beginning in 1993.

In 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2001 (but not 2000), findings were based on two seven-day blocks of prime-time programming. Each was collected as a composite block of a different day in each week over seven weeks (see Jones & Carter, 1959). So, for example, the 2001 data was collected between 30 March to 5 May, and again from 8 September to 26 October. In this way, the project's aim was to provide a "snapshot" of changes over time. On the selected days, all programming between 1730 hours and midnight was recorded across Britain's five terrestrial channels: BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, and Channel 5. No programmes were omitted from the overall study. Until 1996, the analysis of content was primarily quantitative using researcher-based categories.

From 1996 the University of Sheffield provided monitoring reports to the now combined BSC/ITC consortium under a modified violence definition (Communications Research Group, 1998). All monitoring reports since this have used this definition, which is consistent with the NTVS definitions, although it excludes the "talking about violence" option (Gunter & Harrison, 1998, Gunter et al, 2003). The definition of violence as stated in the 2002 report was: "…any action of physical force, with or without a weapon, used against oneself or another person, where there is an intent to harm, whether carried through or merely attempted and whether the action caused injury or not".

However, with each subsequent report, the BSC has noted flaws when they occur, and have provided additional research when necessary. This means that its methodology has developed over the years, taking the more traditional content analysis definition and including key audience driven elements. It found this was necessary in order to take account of changing public attitudes and perceptions toward violence on television over the years. Following the publication of the 1997 findings, it was decided that the operating definition of violence was inadequate and it was decided to conduct research into viewer definitions of violence. The focus of the research (as exemplified in the work done at Leeds, reported above) now shifted

towards a consideration of how audiences viewed violence, and audience-driven measures were included from 1999 onwards. As the definition developed, it was then divided into three audience-driven categories:

1. Accidental violence: where violence is unintentional or caused by accidents or natural disasters.
2. Aggression: violence comprising the intentional (sizeable) destruction of inanimate objects.
3. Intentional interpersonal: where violence against people is intended. This is regarded as the most serious form of violence.

(Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002)

Basing content analysis on these definitions, the researchers were able to provide a monitoring of changes in violence portrayal across the years 1997 to 2001. However, they emphasise that their study offers a snapshot of television at those particular times as opposed to an overall representation. This is particularly striking in terms of news recording (which was included in the study) around the time of the September 11 events.

While they did provide content analysis of television violence across the five channels, they did not consider these findings as fully comparable because, for example, "…Channel 5 shows by far the highest rate of violence scenes, due to the high proportion of films in its scheduling…" (Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002). However, this does still demonstrate that some channels show more violence than others. It was also important, as they noted in the 1999 report, that audiences' attitudes towards factual violence (having a "legitimate place in broadcasting because it reflected reality") differed from their attitudes towards fictional violence, such as the films shown on Channel 5. This would affect audience perceptions across the 5 channels if some broadcast more fiction genres than others. The principal findings of the Leeds BSC study included.

1. News constituted 24 per cent (i.e. almost a quarter) of all violence monitored in 2001, with the events of September 11 and the related aftermath impacting on the figures. This is a huge increase from 1999 (8.3%) and 1998 (3.6%). The researchers attributed the 1999 increase to the news reporting on events in Kosovo. The 2001 snapshot of violence shown on television therefore shows a high incidence of violence in the news, more depiction of property damage, more violence contextualised by terrorism, and more violence motivated by ideals, beliefs, or religion. Some studies exclude news because of the way it inflates counts of violence. The researchers explain their decision to include news reporting by emphasising that their study offers a snapshot of television at those particular times.

   The researchers also acknowledged that simply omitting the news would be difficult, as the increase in television violence due to September 11 events cannot be restricted to this genre alone. This was reflected by an increase in

violence contextualised by crime and terrorism across a wide range of programme genres. This also created quantitative problems, for example, 2001 monitoring showed a marked increase in violence in children's programmes. However, this was because the sample included "Newsround", a children's news programme. The figures for the sample of children's programmes were therefore limited by the fact that the analysis did not begin until 1730 hours and so not such a representational sample of children's programming was collected.

2. Although accounting overall for a small proportion of violence in 2001, there was some increase from previous years in the number of scenes of violence in light entertainment. For example, the 1999 sample showed an average of 2.2 scenes of violence per hour, while in 2001 this had increased to 3.7 scenes of violence per hour. The number of violent scenes per hour had also steadily increased in film. In contrast, however, 2001 showed an overall decline on previous years in terms of violence rates in drama.

3. Using the audience-driven categories for coding violence in the 2002 report, researchers found that "aggression" had increased over the years 1997 to 2002, while over the same period "accidental" violence had declined. Intentional interpersonal violence remained fairly stable over the sampling period but still made up the majority of violence scenes shown on television. In 2001, for example, 11 per cent of television violence scenes were aggression, 18 per cent accidental, and 71 per cent intentional interpersonal. This latter result was important because through audience research it was discovered that the types of scenes most likely to be considered violent were those which depicted interpersonal violence. The audience's perception was also that this type of violence was more "relevant".

4. Where fiction (which for this prime-time analysis means comedy, soap operas, drama and film) shows scenes of violence, these have, over the years, tended to depict more realistic violence. The analysis showed this had been an increasing trend across all the monitored years. In the 2001 sample, 70 per cent of violence scenes were realistically depicted, compared with 1999 (68%), 1998 (62%), and 1997 (66%). This trend however only held true for soap opera, drama, and film. The realistic depiction of comic violence has remained fairly stable from 1997 to 2001.

   The researchers also looked at the type of violence shown in drama and film, and found that crime-related violence scenes have almost doubled in 2001 compared to 1999 (377 against 198). This is despite the fact that the total number of drama and film programmes has remained unchanged.

5. USA programmes (primarily film) continued to portray more scenes of violence than UK productions. In 2001, for example, UK productions had an average of 4.4 scenes of violence per hour, while USA productions averaged 8.2 scenes of violence per hour.

According to the researchers, this sample shows that the gap is narrowing, as earlier samples showed USA programming consisting of more than double the rates of UK programming. Again, the researchers acknowledged this change in trend is "…affected by (British) news programmes classified as domestic UK productions", taking September 11 news reporting into account.

This series of "snapshots" of violence in prime-time viewing over a five-year period, allowed the researchers to conduct content analysis and to monitor trends over this five-year period. It is interesting that they modified their methodology to better suit changing audience perceptions. The huge impact of September 11 events provided an interesting conflict of quantitative results falling into a new (and full-of-violence) context. Their results show that September 11 news reporting filtered through to children's programming and fiction genres as well, affecting the level of violence scenes overall (BSC, 2002).

6.2 Revisiting the active audience

One outcome of the British research was the recognition that viewers' reactions to violent depictions depended on the kinds of expectations and understandings they bring to the viewing situation. The BSC research groups, in particular, took the step of making content analysis categories *viewer driven* rather than constructed by academic researchers. In its totality, the search for viewer–based definitions of violence indicated:

1. A very important, if not the important factor, is the governing perception of the fictional or factual status (modality) of what is viewed. Viewers' approach to interpretation and evaluation was guided by this prior appraisal of modality.
2. The level of identification of the audience with content, regardless of its modality status, was based on "location, clothing, a feeling of contemporaneity, or recognition of cultural and other features".
3. The perception that techniques and effects derived from the production of fiction should not used be in factual programming. Such effects were perceived as gratuitous, indicating that viewers set clear boundaries on what is appropriate or inappropriate in the presentation of factual material.
4. The degree of empathy for the victim and/or the perpetrator exerted a key influence over the way a violent scene is perceived.
5. The acceptability of violent imagery was related to the viewer's own experiences, particularly in terms of the perceived vulnerability of the self to the actions and incidents depicted.

(Independent Television Commission, 1998)

Not only does the study of what actual members of the audience think about media content raise issues about the pervasive "brutalising" influence of violent depictions, it also reveals that audiences judge the appropriateness of what is seen in terms of its

degree of gratuitousness, which relates to the perception of its "realism". They take in other words, a *distanced* stance to content, rather than being overwhelmed by it.

If the active audience paradigm offers a more subtle account of the role of the audience, it has its own limitations. Some of these are methodological. First, the preferred format of inquiry in active audience studies is the focus group. Individuals within the group are expected to comment or offer opinions on a selected sample of media content. This method, if well handled, is capable of producing ethnographic insights – ethnographic meaning the unforced collection of observations from individuals about how they perceive themselves, others and the world. But it cannot produce law-like generalisations about causality. Second, active audience research tends to be focused on individual differences, even if these are formed through the recording of group interaction. Its insights are often rich in meaning but the typicality of the responses remains uncertain even when linked to objective measures (Walters & Zwaga, 2001).

Finally, although such research debunks the myth of audience passivity, it is open to the opposite fault of overrating the degree to which audiences exercise an independent judgement in deciding what to watch and what it means. Thus focus group accounts whilst seeming "natural" often place subjects in the unusual role of media critics. Whilst some may be good at this (and how typical are they?), others may simply draw on general ideas about the media which may in themselves have been taken from media commentary. What appears as independent thought, may in fact disguise deeper conceptual dependency (Buckingham, 2000). Such a dependency goes beyond the fact that media products are extensively promoted and publicised before the audience gets to see them, so the audience arrives with an agenda for interpretation (Wernick, 1992). It also refers to the fact that in the contemporary situation of media saturation, the media not only reflect everyday experiences but also do so in a heightened and compact form not encountered in everyday life (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 2000). The media are not just a form of experience to set against everyday life experiences, they may be a unique and desired form of experience in their own right, providing sights and sounds that literally cannot be found elsewhere. For these reasons, it is not entirely certain that audiences are completely independent of the media in judging programme quality. To a degree, in considering matters beyond personal taste - matters of citizenship, community values and public identity - audiences are dependent on the media to understand and formulate responses to what cannot be experienced directly (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989).

Reception analysis is designed to correct the overvaluation of the notion of freedom of choice found in the active audience paradigm. The task for reception analysis is to produce a synthetic account, which locates audience behaviour in the larger historical and cultural context of social and interpersonal relationships. It is this enlarged context that different kinds of audience encounter and interpret media texts according to their social position, education and opportunities. Choice is not an entirely free act but is constrained by the social processes that make the viewer a kind of person in a kind of social setting which sets certain values on aspects of

identity, such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, class and nationality. Media texts, in turn, are designed to address audience members as certain kinds of individuals with race, class and gendered qualities. Audiences exercise choice, but not in circumstances of their own choosing.

> The production of meaning from a given content is a complex process of **social negotiation** in which the media are just one voice amongst many. Not all voices are equal of course, and the purpose of the research is to identify which voices are pre-eminent in the formation of interpretations and attitudes, without a presuming that the media or the social context are paramount.
>
> (Buckingham, 2000, 111)

A recent international study is interesting in this regard. Keith Roe from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, conducted an investigation into studies of media use amongst children in various European countries (2000). Studies he cited showed significant national differences, such as British children developing a greater interest in visual culture than their Dutch counterparts, as well as striking similarities between some countries such as Flanders, Germany and Sweden where television held a dominant position in the media activities of 6 to 17 year olds and these young people spent more time with PCs and computer/console games than with print media. However Roe sought a more sociologic perspective in looking at adolescents' media use, as he was wary about making generalisations based on nationality alone. From his review of the literature he concluded that there were a number of mediating factors essential in discussing adolescents' media use. These included age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, level of cognitive development, educational achievement and school commitment. He related findings from several studies and in particular noted a link between school variables and the use of socially devalued video content, particularly that featuring explicit violence. For example, early Swedish studies, he said, concluded that home viewing of violent films was especially characteristic of underachieving schoolboys. Roe's own Flemish longitudinal study suggested that heavy users of computer games not only tend to be males from lower socio-economic backgrounds, but also are heavy VCR users who prefer violent and horror films (Roe & Mujis, 1995, 1997). In another study he conducted, Roe (2000b) indicated a relationship between parental socio-economic status and young people's media use. For example, the higher the educational status of the mother in particular, the less time children spent with the electronic media and the more culturally legitimate their media preferences tended to be. This factor in particular indicates the important role that parents have in children's media exposure and suggests that more responsibility taken on their behalf could alter potential media effects on the family.

A Swedish study highlighted the fact that those with a criminal background believed that the media influenced their behaviour. On behalf of the National Council for Crime Prevention and the Council on Media Violence in Sweden, therapist Gudrun Udden (n.d.) interviewed eight boys aged between 15 and 19 with criminal backgrounds on issues relating to their views on violence. The boys were unanimous

in some of their responses. These were that: the concept of violence is primarily associated with real-life violence; there are clear rules and limits for when and how violence can be exercised, but these cease in critical situations; you are born violent and develop it through training; the most common causes of violence are conflicts and provocation; the connection between norms for violence and media violence is seen as weak, but you allow yourself to be inspired by films; you learn real acts of violence and attitudes through films; and the identification with film heroes actualises your own psychological themes. While a study such as this makes interesting statements it needs to be viewed cautiously because, as in the laboratory experiments, the subjects are aware of the research and the sponsor effect may be in operation.

6.3 The pleasures of television violence

As noted earlier in the discussion of Fowles' (1999) assertions of cathartic effects, there are positive benefits which have been ascribed to TV violence. In the context of the audience reception research, it is pertinent to consider the pleasurable aspects of viewing violence on the screen. However, when violence is portrayed in such a variety of ways and influenced by a range of variables including: genre; whether it is fiction or non-fiction; the audience it targets (gender, age or culture); and the message the producers seek to disseminate, it is difficult to say definitively what, when and how violence is pleasurable and entertaining. The popularity of blockbuster movies with violent content, such as *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings* or *Die Hard*, indicate there is little doubt that some violence is both attractive and entertaining. This begs the question why? Cathartic reasons have been highlighted earlier in this report, particularly in relation to children, but there are other aspects to consider. Dolf Zillman (1985) in his contribution to the book *Why We Watch: The Attractions of Violent Entertainment* (Goldstein, 1998) summarizes the many theories and studies into the psychology of this phenomenon. He works through the analytical psychology of Jung and Freud, as well as highlighting other suggestions. He contends that violence invokes a biological hunter/gatherer excitement of overcoming fear and confronting life or death situations, a simple morbid curiosity, empathy and identification with characters, and a need for justified violence or the seeking of thrill maximization brought on by "an intensely positive affect on the favourable resolutions of conflict" (1985, p206). Many of these elements are apparent in action adventure movies as demonstrated in the following definition:

> They meet a need for thrills. They often stage a dramatic, clear-cut duel between good and evil, with characters audiences are led to identify with. Their action and special effects are often breath-takingly staged. Throw in sub-plots that revolve around adventure, romance and courage in the face of overwhelming odds, and it's easy to understand why such movies attract audiences.
>
> (Johnson, n.d.)

Using an engaging fantasy theme where "disliked characters are defeated by liked characters in the cause of justice", according to Goldstein, seems to make violent entertainment most attractive. In fact, he suggests that the significant appeal is in being immersed in a world of fantasy. Goldstein's edited volume (1998) lists the features that contributors have highlighted in what makes violence attractive:

Subject characteristics
Those most attracted to violent imagery are
- Males
- More aggressive than average
- Moderate to high in need for sensation or arousal
- In search of a social identity, or a way to bond with friends
- Curious about the forbidden, or interested because of scarcity
- Have a need to see justice portrayed or restored
- Able to maintain emotional distance to prevent images from being too disturbing

Violent images are used
- For mood management
- To regulate excitement or arousal
- As an opportunity to express emotion

Characteristics of Violent Images that Increase Their Appeal
- They contain clues to their unreality (music, editing, setting)
- They are exaggerated or distorted
- Portray an engaging fantasy
- Have a predictable outcome
- Contain a just resolution

Context
- Violent images are more attractive
- In a safe, familiar environment
- When war or crime is salient

Goldstein points out that the research data on what makes violence attractive is minute and there is plenty of room for further investigation into areas such as the role of culture or subcultural groups in attitudes to violence, or even how to adequately define key terms such as "attraction", "entertainment" and "violence". With programmes and movies continuing to evolve and push the boundaries of what might be deemed acceptable, establishing just what is attractive in the violence continues to be a challenge.

Violence almost certainly becomes more entertaining and attractive in combination with other factors like romance, comedy or pathos, as the following quote suggests: "It's not enough that superheroes fight our battles. We need them to suffer our heartbreaks, reflect our anxieties, embody our weaknesses" (Poniewozik, 2002, p49). In attaining the perfect formula for creating a modern blockbuster in Hollywood, Joel

Stein in Time Magazine (2002, pp45-46) suggests, after reviewing *Spider-Man*, "that rule number one is to make it half action, half romance". By designing the film this way the producers would appeal to the four demographic quadrants of male, female, under 25, and 25 and over.

In recent years, women have increasingly been cast in empowering and often violent roles. "Girl-power" flicks such as *Charlie's Angels*, *Crouching Tiger* and *Tomb Raider,* or "action chicks" on prime-time television programmes such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *La Femme Nikita,* are overtaking their *Rambo* and *Terminator 2* male counterparts at the box office and in popularity (Mencimer, 2001). Explanations for this, range from the rise of the sexual revolution, a rejection of "studs on steroids", or simply sex appeal. But as Mencimer stresses that there are strict parameters which allow the violence of these assertive women to be acceptable and that these are determined mostly by what men will supposedly "tolerate". The violence is considered sterile, Mencimer (2001) says, because the women don't really fight or gun down the major bad guys (this would upset the balance of gender power), they always look great and their hair is rarely messy after a fight, they spar mostly with other women, their motives are pure and they never use unnecessary violence. In other words, these women can celebrate their power as long as they are not a threat to men.

Balancing violence with other factors assists in making that violence acceptable, though a journalist from an on-line arts magazine believes that violence still plays a central role in a film's attractiveness. "Although character, plot and intertextuality may keep the audience in the seats ... the fantasy of striking out is what brings them there" (Meyer, n.d.). Jason Meyer goes on to suggest that "even if conceived and created as an attack on violent behaviour, action movies still allow a reading … that centers around the pleasure in the depiction of violent acts" (Meyer, n.d.).

With the reality of violence seen in the events of the 9/11 attacks, a revulsion by Americans to view anything similar in movies or on the television might have been expected. However, journalist Francis Davis cites an example from the *Los Angeles Times* where one video store owner was reported as saying that people were wanting to rent "anything where terrorists got the stuffing kicked out of them". Davis highlights the possibility that audiences might seek action in the movies to offer them "the illusion of control" (Davis, 2002). This also highlights the fact that historical and social situations of the day can influence what people watch.

7

The New Zealand Research

7.1 1975: The first New Zealand study

The first empirical study of violent content on New Zealand television is by Ginpil (1976). The study coded 99 programmes in a week in December 1975 on the then two channels (TV1, and the recently inaugurated SPTV – South Pacific Television). These represented all programmes starting between 4.00 and 10.00 pm on weekdays, and between 12.00 noon and 10.00 pm on Saturday and Sunday. News, weather, documentaries, sport and advertisements were excluded.

Ginpil (1976) does not source any particular existing study as the basis of his methodology and coding scheme. There is no discussion of theoretical frameworks, and no overall definition of violence. The study counted four classes of acts as violent:

1. *Assault* defined as "the use of physical force or weapons which appears to attempt to, or succeed in, restraining or causing disability, injury, or hurt to a human being or human-like being" (p152);
2. *Threats* or menacing gestures;
3. *Indirect violence* injures without direct use of physical force or the "common" weapons;
4. *Risky actions* which "include those acts which although not falling with the assault, threat, or indirect definition of violence, are still apt to lead to injury to self or others if repeated" (p153).

The basic frequency unit was the "episode", which consisted of one act or multiple related acts (such as a fight). One act within each episode was also classified for age, gender and the role of the perpetrator in the programme, and was rated for seriousness, imitability, and successfulness in producing an outcome. Overall coder agreement was quantified as 87 per cent.

The sample of 99 programmes consisted of 62 made in the United States, 31 from the UK, with only 5 made in New Zealand (the 1 remaining programme is not sourced). There were 17 cartoons, 4 westerns, 8 "police" and 22 "action-adventure" programmes, and the remaining 48 were combined as "other". Forty-four were screened on TV1, and 55 on TV2. Nearly two-thirds of the violent episodes (62%) were in the "assault" category, 16 per cent were threats, 3 per cent indirect, and 19 per cent risky actions.

The study's main analysis includes "risky actions" but, to achieve comparability with the US studies by Gerbner (see Chapter 2) and the UK study by Halloran and Croll (1972), it then re-quantifies the violence counts with risky actions deleted. The average number of episodes per hour in New Zealand (excluding risky actions) is 7.3, which is "roughly comparable" - the authors observe (156) - to the US level of 8 from Gerbner, and double the UK level of 4 reported by Halloran and Crull. The American-made programmes screened in NZ average 9.4 episodes per hour, and in the UK 3.3 episodes per hour.

Ginpil (1976) notes that New Zealand tended to screen those US programme which have above-average levels of violence. This strengthens the American contribution to New Zealand levels of screen violence, as has also been found in other countries. These counts are described as "per programme hour", and therefore probably (but not necessarily) exclude advertisement time. The detailed analysis of other factors included the risky actions category, and therefore the counts below somewhat over-weight the number of violent episodes.

Including risky actions, the average number of violent episodes per programme was 5.8, with 9.1 episodes per screened programme hour. Twenty-five programmes had no violence, and 23 only one or two episodes. At 11.5 episodes per hour, TV2 showed twice as much violence as TV1 (6.5), which probably correlates with carrying a higher proportion of American programmes, although Ginpil is silent on this matter. Westerns (25.9 episodes per hour) and cartoons at 25.6 episodes were considerably the most violent genres, with "police" at 13.4 and "action" at 9.4. Cartoons were therefore as violent as westerns. The "other" category rated at only 3.1 episodes per hour. The earlier a programme was broadcast, the more violent episodes it contained. This presumably reflects the timing of cartoons being screened, but also means that violence was concentrated rather than avoided in children's viewing time, a finding which has tended to be repeated in successive NZ studies.

In addition to describing violent TV content, the second purpose of the Ginpil (1976) study was to rate how likely it was that children would imitate violent acts which they viewed. This was done in terms of their likely access to weapons or their opportunity to perform particular actions. This is based on the researchers' estimation, then, rather than on any direct empirical audience-response data, but they conclude that in 1975 the average young NZ child could "witness about 3 or 4 potentially dangerous acts, or which approximately one-half might have a somewhat higher probability of being imitated" (p157).

Ginpil's study is efficiently conducted, although his brief paper does not specify some methodological procedures, or fully report results. Its methodology is in fact entirely unsourced, although it is presumably largely based on early Gerbner work. Nor does it explicitly address theoretical issues. The analysis mixes counts which both include and exclude risky actions, and this requires careful reading to clarify comparability.

7.2 1982 – 1995: Media Watch

In the 1980s and 1990s the New Zealand Mental Health Foundation, under the Media Watch rubric, was the primary researcher and critic of violence on New Zealand's television screens. Its first study and report (Haines, 1983) was comprised largely of a detailed survey of the international literature, plus brief description of the survey itself and its findings.

In his foreword to the report, the Foundation's then director, Max Abbott, outlines the basis of his organisation's approach to the issue of violence on television. He cautions against simplistic understandings of the complex of causes behind violence in society, particularly the singling out of television without consideration of other and interacting factors:

> A number of factors contributing to violent behaviour have been identified by researchers. Studies have indicated that television violence is implicated. It is not the only cause. It is probably not the major cause. However, recent reviewers of the relevant literature and independent commissions have converged in their conclusion that television violence and real-life violence are linked and this relationship is a causal one. Such statements are not made lightly by social scientists.
>
> (Abbott, in Haines, 1983, p5)

The Foundation concluded that television violence was an issue for New Zealand society, and Abbott claimed (1983, p6) that Ginpil's findings (1976) and a preliminary literature survey:

> …indicated that we were in the "big league" as far as screened violence was concerned. Indeed, it appeared that New Zealand was a close second to the United States, the country with the highest levels of television violence in the Western World.
>
> (Abbott, in Haines, 1983, p6)

Haines's own summation of her literature review begins the first section of the report "The violent world of television":

> Television portrays the world as an excessively violent, hostile and scary place, where human conflict is settled by fists and guns and where good triumphs over evil by force. This is the conclusion of a growing number of social scientific studies of the images of human life transmitted by this powerful medium.
>
> (Haines, 1983, p9)

Writing at a time when Gerbner's methodology was the leading and largely unchallenged paradigm for TV violence research internationally, Haines expounds the Gerbner studies and methods to that date in some detail, and summarizes the small amount of British work (especially Halloran and Croll, 1972), and studies from

Israel and Sweden. Summarizing briefly the existing critiques of Gerbner, Haines concludes:

> The Gerbner method of measuring television violence, which has been most extensively used for the purposes of year-by-year comparisons, and for comparisons between countries, has been validated by independent assessors. It is reliable, in that different observers can obtain similar counts for the same programmes, and it is conceptually valid, since in-depth considerations of alternative definitions of violence have failed to find a better one.
>
> (Haines, 1983, p15)

She closes, however, with the caution that violence counts are just general indications, and further information is needed "to provide a well-balanced picture" (p15).

Haines's literature survey covers the viewer-ship of television and television violence (especially by children), US studies of television as a cause of aggression, discussion of which groups are most affected (especially children and males), and television's response to research findings on screened violence. On the issue of the link between television and social violence, Haines concludes that the findings of laboratory studies are the most clear-cut, while "field experiments, which would potentially seem to offer the best evidence on the subject, are often less than adequately designed, and have provided anomalous results". However, her overall summation is that causality has been established:

> Experts weighing up the evidence on television and aggression nearly all agree that the link has been proven. Occasional critics e.g. Howitt and Cumberbatch, Kaplan and Singer, and Noble believe that the evidence is as yet inconclusive, but theirs is definitely a minority opinion, and fresh evidence (most particularly the impressive Belson study) has become available since they passed their judgements.
>
> (Haines, 1983, p36)

This then was the state of play in the international literature in 1983, as presented to the New Zealand community and as a basis for the Media Watch projects conducted over more than a decade.

7.2.1 Media Watch 1982

The first Media Watch study (Haines, 1983) monitored violence on a full week of television on both the then channels (TV1 and TV2) in November 1982. Only "dramatic" programmes were included (therefore not news, documentaries, sports and variety shows), producing a sample of 94 hours. Most of the methodology was taken from Gerbner, including the definition of violence:

> The overt expression of physical force against other or self, compelling action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed or actually hurting or killing.
>
> (Haines, 1983, p53)

Media Watch therefore excluded violence against property or animals (unless these are human-like), and included threats and accidental harm. The basic unit of analysis was an episode, which consisted of an act or a related set of acts of violence. Most of the raters (it is not specified how many there were) were recruited from among Mental Health Foundation staff, and members of Monitor, the Society for Better Broadcasting (Haines, 1983, p55). The ratings were done live off-air, usually by two coders. The instructions for coding television programmes are attached as Appendix C.

The study found 535 episodes of violence in the 94-hour sample, giving an average of 5.68 episodes per hour. One third of the 118 programmes coded contained no violence at all, while 28 per cent were high on violence. By genre, cartoons were by far the most violent. Table 7.1 abstracts the main factors analysed by Haines, all computed in terms of number of violent episodes per programme hour.

Haines (1983) found that heroes were more likely to commit serious injury than were villains, and their violence was deemed more effective in producing the outcome they desired. Most perpetrators (83%) were males, and the violence they committed was more serious than violence by women, but males as victims also had more serious violence committed against them. Programmes, which started screening after 2.30pm and before 10pm on weekdays, were counted as being within children's viewing hours. There were fewer violent episodes within these children's viewing hours than in programmes beginning after 10pm, and the violence in them was less serious.

Haines concludes that 5.68 episodes per hour represents "an unacceptably high level of violence" on New Zealand television, and that "if Media Watch week was an average week, New Zealand television is in need of reform" (Haines, 1983, p60). However, she does note that this is an improvement on the rate of 7.3 found by Ginpil in 1975, attributable largely to the presence of only half the number of cartoons in the Media Watch sample (9, vs. 17 in 1975). The breakdown of figures shows a close match between the Media Watch specifics for genres and Ginpil's.

Haines's assessment is that "TVNZ is to be commended for screening less violence than in 1975 (Ginpil's study), but one suspects that the change is fortuitous, rather than a result of any changing policy" (1983, p60). She also remarks on the concentration of violent episodes in trailers promoting future programmes:

> In previews of future programmes, the most violent episodes are often strung together to convey an air of excitement and action, with the result that images of violence are flashed across the screen totally out of context, and in a gratuitous manner.
>
> (Haines, 1983, p60)

Table 7.1: Selected findings of Media Watch 1982

Genre		
Cartoons	26.1 episodes/hour	
Police/crime/thriller	10.1	
Children's drama	5.3	
Adult drama	3.7	
Age band		
Children's programmes	8.4 episodes/hour	
Adult programmes	5.0	
Origin		
US origin	61 hours	6.6 episodes/hour
UK	21 hours	4.2 episodes/hour
Australia	9 hours	4.1
NZ	2 hours	---
Type of violence		
Assaults	64%	
Direct threats	21% e.g. with gun	
	[presumed physical not verbal]	
Indirect	5%	
Accidental	10%	
Effect on victim		
Killed	12%	
Seriously injured	6%	
Mildly injured	23%	
No harm	46%	
Violence unrealistic	13% (usually cartoons)	
Result of violence		
Intended outcome	68%	
Ineffective	16%	
Role of perpetrator		
Hero	42%	
Villain	33%	
Neutral	25%	

She notes that the detailed findings are close to Gerbner's, and concludes:

> The brilliant colours of our modern TV sets portray a morally black-and-white world, where good and bad are sharply delineated, and where violence is

> necessary for good to triumph. … Violence is endemic in the crass, unimaginative, mass-produced potboilers, the "junk food" of television.
>
> (Haines, 1983, p61)

Her report concludes with detailed recommendations addressed to the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand, to educators and to parents (see Appendix D).

Haines's study is reported clearly and in some detail. Its methodology derives closely from Gerbner's, and its theoretical underpinning is that of Gerbner. It therefore shares in the critique we made earlier of the limitations of Gerbner's approach, but this was the dominant paradigm and methodology of the time and had been the object of much less critique 20 years ago than it is now.

That said, there are some procedural concerns that need to borne in mind when considering the reliability of the Haines study. The study recruited coders from the commissioning organisation, which took a definitive stance on the issue to be researched, and supplemented these with coders from a lobby group for one viewpoint in a debated area. The coder pool was therefore drawn mainly from those who were associated with already active opposition to television violence, a confounding situation that would have better been avoided. This sourcing does not automatically guarantee the intrusion of bias of course; much will depend on the robustness of the coder training. It is somewhat reassuring to note that this study reported a lower average level of violent incidents than the preceding Ginpil study and was more systematic. Nonetheless the data must be treated with caution.

7.2.2 Media Watch 1992

The 1992 survey monitored a full week of television drama programmes on the main NZ channels in November 1992, and was reported in Bridgman (1993). Violence was defined as:

> the use of physical force or the threat of such use on a person or persons. Verbal abuse or cruelty, destruction to property or animals (unless human-like as in cartoons) was not rated.
>
> (Bridgman, 1993, pI. 1)

The survey identified 1774 episodes of violence, averaging 8.1 per hour of television drama. TV3 showed 9.4 episodes per hour, TV2 8.4 and TV1 6.0. Half the serious violence on screen (causing death or serious injury) occurred in films.

As in Ginpil (1976), there was more violence in children's than adult viewing times. Cartoons are the main bearer of violent episodes, and the mainstay of children's programming (79%). They contribute nearly half of all the violent episodes in this survey, all of the 20 programmes with the most violence per hour. Eighteen of these 20 cartoons are American (one British and one Australian). In all the programming

surveyed, American-originated drama showed 10.2 violent episodes per hour, and British drama only 2.6.

The 1992 survey was the first of the Media Watch projects to separate and analyse promotional trailers, and found them to be a particular focus of violence. There were three times more violent episodes (23.9 per hour) in trailers than in the overall dramatic programming (8.1). This was largely due to TV2's level of violence in trailers (33.1 episodes per hour of trailer) and TV3's (24.0), rather than TV1 (8.3).

Bridgman's conclusion is that:

> What is most salient about the results of Media Watch 1992, once we have moved beyond the continuing high levels of violence recorded, is the way in which TV2 and TV3 have carefully targeted children as viewers of violence… For the first time in Media Watch, data show that TV2 and TV3 have specific promotional practices which sell television violence, particularly, in the case of TV2, to children.
>
> (Bridgman, 1993, pII.19)

7.2.3 A longitudinal view: Media Watch 1982 - 1992

Bridgman (1993) also offers an overview and comparison of the Media Watch studies from their beginning in 1982 through to 1992. This provides us with summary findings on the interim studies. Selected tables from this longitudinal comparison are reproduced in Appendix E.

Bridgman lays out the basis of the Mental Health Foundation's approach in these studies by discussing the rise in violent crime in New Zealand over the decade, and stating that "while some broadcasters continue to trivialise the causal relationship between television violence and violent behaviour, evidence for this relationship is overwhelming" (1993, pII.1). He then covers the international and local literature, which has a bearing on the issue.

Bridgman's Table 1 (Appendix E) shows the near tripling in programme hours as broadcast hours have been increased, and the third channel added in 1990. The absolute number of violent acts screened is therefore predictably much higher than 10 years before (1774 compared to 535). The violence rate in the successive surveys has fluctuated from 5.7 per hour in 1982 to 9.5 in 1984, a low of 4.3 in 1989, to 8.1 in 1992. Bridgman's Table 2 (Appendix E) shows some rise in the level of violence on TV2 over the decade, but the data for 1990 and 1992 "confirms that the introduction of TV3 has had a significant impact on levels of violence, as in both years its rate of violence has been, at 10.2 and 9.4 episodes/hour, the highest of the three channels" (1993, pII.6).

Broken down by genre, cartoon animations are, in most years, the most violent type of programme, usually by a considerable margin over genres such as police dramas

and films. 1992 violence levels in cartoons are the same as in 1982, after a considerable dip in the 1986 and 1989 surveys. Figures for most other genres remain broadly similar across the decade. The number of "assaults", the most serious category of violent episodes, has multiplied fourfold from 1982 to 1992 (from 341 episodes to 1340), a much higher increase than the expansion in programme hours would produce.

Programmes originating in the UK (2.6 – 4.6 episodes) and Australia (2.4 – 4.2 episodes) are comparatively low and show no clear trend to increasing violence between 1982 and 1992 (Appendix E, Table 8). The level in American programmes is much higher and fluctuates much more across the years US (5.4 – 13.1 episodes), although the overall trend is upwards.

7.2.4 Media Watch 1995

1995 saw the last and most sophisticated of the Media Watch surveys, supported by funding from the Broadcasting Standards Authority. The survey covered all drama in a week in April 1995, but excluding programmes beginning between 1.00am and 6.30am. All the earlier surveys had been conducted in the month of November.

Bridgman (1995) writes that the 1995 methodology was "identical to that of all previous Media Watch surveys" as outlined in Haines (1983) for the first survey in 1982. 1995 was the first survey to be recorded then rated, rather than being rated live off-air. Reliability was checked across the five coders.

The survey found a halving in the levels of violence compared to 1990 and 1992, with all channels dropping significantly, especially TV3 (from 10.2 per hour in 1990 to 3.3 in 1995). Having led the trend towards higher television violence when it entered the market in 1990, TV3 now took the lead in reducing its own level to zero. Most genres had reduced violence levels in 1995, with cartoons down to a rate of 11.6 episodes per hour (from a 1992 level of 21.7, and a high in 1984 of 37.2). However, the rate of violence in cartoons screened on TV2 remained high at 13.5, compared with zero on the other two channels. Although American-originated programming (4.3 episodes per hour) continues to have a level well above programmes from the UK (2.5) and Australia (1.6), the absolute level has fallen considerably. New Zealand-made programmes received a high score (7.5), but almost all of this occurred in the Gallipoli film *Chunuk Bair* (the recording period included Anzac Day). There remained a much higher rate of violence in children's viewing time (4.7) than in adult time (3.1). Violence in promotions had also declined since 1992, although not to the same degree as in dramatic programming overall.

Bridgman (1995, p18) concludes that "the results of Media Watch 1995 are, overall, very positive", representing the lowest violence counts in all of the surveys from 1982. He attributes the change to "the weight of evidence against television violence, public pressure for less violence on television, and more respect for the evidence from people within television" (p19). But he notes the increase in video and pay

television usage, with its un-researched content and effects. He concludes as an advocate:

> The campaign against television violence does not argue that it is necessarily dangerous to see graphic acts of violence … What is at issue is the relentless, repetitive and mindless presentation of individually negligible acts of violence as entertainment; acts that are taken up by boys as a template for social development and control, with consequent disadvantage to themselves and society.
>
> (Bridgman, 1995, p20)

7.2.5 Watching Media Watch

Specifics of the Media Watch survey methods over the years are not easy to establish. However, Bridgman's overview of the 1982 to 1992 surveys (Bridgman, 1992, pII. 6) says that the 1992 survey had 13 coders, with inter-coder reliability correlated at a statistically significant level ($p<.01$). The 1989 and 1990 coding teams were all trained by Barbara Disley.

Bridgman notes that in comparing across Media Watch surveys "it is important to note that prior to 1992 only pencil and paper analyses were able to be done, resulting frequently in only partial analyses of the data" (Bridgman, 1992, pII. 6). The 1992 data were entered and analysed on computer. Bridgman (1993, pII. 9-10) also discusses alterations in programme categories and classifications over the years of Media Watch surveys, which can change the comparability of the figures.

The design and implementation of the Media Watch surveys clearly create some issues over the reliability of their data and findings. This is not to criticize this earlier work unduly, but it means that later researchers must be cautious in handling the Media Watch findings, particularly for comparability, just as one must be in comparing NZ studies with international benchmark research. The origin of the Media Watch work inside an organisation committed to a particular viewpoint in this charged and disputed area must also invite caution. The phrasing and presentation of the Media Watch reports is frequently overtly partisan (e.g. Haines, 1983, p61). It is good to know the stance of particular research groups, and upfront expression of one's viewpoint is preferable to a semblance of objectivity. It is this which allows successors to take that stance into account in their interpretations.

However, there is some external data that support the validity of Media Watch violence scores. Most importantly, in 1991 Massey University

conducted the first fully academic content analysis of television violence in New Zealand (Watson, Bassett, Lambourne and Shuker, 1991- see 7.3 below). They found even higher levels of violence than the two Media Watch surveys of 1990 and 1992, undermining the suggestion the Media Watch's partisan orientation might have inflated their violence counts.

Secondly, Media Watch's longitudinal data can be seen as reflecting the influence of public concern about television violence on broadcasters, and competitive forces that might lead to an increase of television violence. Abbott and Disley (1990) suggest that the 1987 Roper report in violence in New Zealand led to changes in the Broadcasting Act in 1989 (see 14.2 for a fuller coverage) that made broadcasters more careful about showing violent programmes and to the lowest violence count of the 80's - 4.3 incidents per hour in 1989. The introduction of competitive television in 1990 was seen by Abbott and Disley as responsible for the increase to 8.1 incidents per hour in 1990. The three high count surveys from 1990-1992 (8.1, 10.3, 8.1) eventually had an impact on public opinion, resulting in one violent programme being publicly withdrawn and further changes to the Broadcasting Act and changes to the way that censorship was applied to television (Bridgman, 1995 – see 14.2 for a fuller discussion). This, argued Bridgman, was the context for the lowest violence count (3.9 incidents per hour) in the history of Media Watch content analysis. So while reliability is a concern in assessing the consistency of Media Watch content analyses, particularly the earlier ones, their validity as a measure of violent incidents on television, appears to be reasonably sound.

7.3 The Massey studies

7.3.1 1991: Content analysis

In 1991 Massey University's Educational Research and Development Centre conducted a study commissioned by the Broadcasting Standards Authority (Watson, Bassett, Lambourne, & Shuker, 1991). They recorded a full week of television content (11–17 February) screened on the then three channels, TV1, TV2 and the recently inaugurated TV3.

The research team surveyed the existing literature, particular studies of violent content, and developed their own definitions and coding instrument. Their definition of violence was adapted from Cumberbatch (1988):

> Any **violent image** or action of physical force **or threat thereof**, with or without a weapon, against oneself or another person, animal or inanimate object, whether carried through or merely attempted, and whether the action caused injury or not (the Massey additions are in bold). [sic]
>
> (Watson et al., 1991, p3)

The researchers say that their definition was intentionally broad in adding violent images and threats to Cumberbatch's criteria, which "had a marked influence on the total amount of violence recorded in the survey" (Watson et al., 1991, p3). However, because they counted scenes (which could include several incidents) rather than

incidents this may have reduced their count in relation to Gerbner based surveys. The project used 20 students as coders and gave them two days' training. The methodology seems to indicate that coding was done live in shifts by pairs of coders. However, the use of video clips as stimuli in the Bassett and Shuker follow-up audience study (n.d.) indicates that the sample apparently was videotaped after all.

The sample was taken throughout a week in February 1991. The continuous week was clearly not ideal. The research team notes that the week was "arguably atypical", including the first Gulf War, two one-day cricket matches, and the launching of new programmes. 336 hours of programmes were recorded, 104 hours from TV1, 123 from TV2 and 109 from TV3. 3012 acts or images were classified as violent, according to the above definition. 42 per cent of the identified violence was screened on TV2, 38 per cent on TV3, and 20 per cent on TV1. This yielded an average of 8.95 violent events per hour, 10.3 on TV3, 10.1 for TV2, and 5.3 for TV1. 18 per cent were images rather than acts.

Re-quantifying with the additional categories of "images" and "threats" excluded, as well as so-called "peaceful genres", gave an overall count of 10.32 events per hour, and a slightly different ranking of channels – TV2 at 12.2, TV3 11.3, and TV1 5.0. Much of the violence was screened before the child-viewing watershed in time slots rated as G or PGR, largely because of violence in cartoons although Gulf War coverage was also a factor. A more detailed breakdown of their findings is summarized in Table 6.2.

Violence was again concentrated in the cartoons, but coders rated cartoon violence low on the subjective scale as "almost totally unrealistic/fantasy". By contrast, news and documentary rated high on the subjective scale, being regarded mainly as "realistic".

Methodologically, the Massey definition of violence was very broad, and by the researchers' own declaration, inflated the violence count, as did the specific sample timing. When comparing their data to the Media Watch surveys, which surveyed only drama, the Massey researchers recomputed their data excluding the non-drama programming. This produced a figure of 6.3 acts or images of violence per hour for drama (Watson et al., 1991, p28). However, Bridgman (1993) later pointed out that the Massey team's computation for drama used the total hours of programming as their basis rather than the hours of drama. When Massey recomputed the data for comparability, their count was 10.3 episodes per hour rather than the 6.3 originally reported. This was the highest ever found in a New Zealand survey Bridgman (1993). We should add here that, in presenting their findings, the Massey team expressed strong doubts about the value of the violence count as a statistic, stating that "the researchers on this project have serious reservations about conclusions based on the process described above" (1993, p28), that is, the process of calculating of violence counts.

The Massey report ends with detailed recommendations (p91), summarized here (see Appendix F for full text):

1. Violence must be broadly defined, and not restricted to physical harm.
2. The overall violence count obtained shows no significant increase compared with previous New Zealand studies once adjustments for comparability are made.
3. Violence should be classified according to its realism, its context and audience perceptions of its seriousness.
4. Genre should be recognised as a key organising principle of television, particularly its relation to realism. Promotional trailers should be screened only in appropriate time slots.
5. Audience studies are needed to investigate the relative significance and cultural meanings of violence for different social groups.
6. Violence is inherently attractive to viewers, signifying action, impact and conflict.
7. Education of both students and the general public is needed as well as classification and regulation.
8. The television industry needs to consider its codes of professional practice in relation to violence.

These recommendations coincide with some of our own research team's approach to this field. There remains a need to research and take account of audience perceptions and attitudes, and not just to undertake content analyses. Genre is important, as are the related issues of fantasy and the level of realism in programmes. Watson et al. (1991) call for education of the audience, particularly students, and raise the issues of screening before the child-watershed time of 8.30pm and of trailers promoting programmes being broadcast in later, adult-recommended hours.

7.3.2 The Massey audience study

Bassett and Shuker (n.d.) conducted an audience survey, also funded by the BSA, as a follow-up study to their 1991 project. This picked up on their proposal in Watson et al. (1991) on the necessity for audience studies in order to "focus on the social and cultural meanings embodied in television programmes and … different groups of viewers …".

Bassett and Shuker note that some people may regard as violent certain acts which others do not consider violent. As they observe:

> Central to the official process governing the control of violence on television is an assumption with "public standards" and "public tastes" about which it is assumed there is a certain measure of agreement or consensus.
>
> (Bassett and Shuker, n.d., p2)

However, there had not, at the stage of this Massey study, been much research on viewers' assessments of violence on television internationally, let alone in New Zealand.

Bassett and Shuker investigated the degree to which the judgments of their 1991 coders about the "seriousness" of TV violence coincided with those of other groups. The coders had all been comparatively young (aged 18–28), and were mainly media studies students. The follow-up study aimed to examine the degree to which age differences were associated with different perceptions of TV violence. The study's research question was therefore:

> How do different age and social groups judge television and violence and what are their attitudes and beliefs?
>
> (Bassett and Shuker, n.d., p2)

They excerpted from their February 1991 television sample (see Watson et al., 1991, as reported above) 13 sequences of approximately 30 seconds each, which were regarded as typical of violent incidents from different genres. The 13 excerpts came from cartoons (4), films (2), mini-series (2), dramas (2), drama documentary (1), news (1) and sport (1). The 1991 study's definition of violence had included "violent images" and "threats of violence", which had been omitted by Gerbner (1971) and only partly included in Cumberbatch (1988), so these were potentially part of the stimulus materials used in the audience study.

The sample size was 85 respondents. The older cohort of the sample was mainly approached through social groups to which they were affiliated. The younger cohort consisted of 18 personnel from a nearby army facility (aged 21-35), and 21 students aged 18-23. Most participants were in the 15-30 and 51-65+ age range, with very few aged in the thirties or forties [thus excluding the core middle-aged group]. Two-thirds of the sample was female, and over 80 per cent were Pakeha. The average personal viewing habit was to watch 3-4 hours of television per day.

Bassett and Shuker's questionnaire asked all 85 respondents for their subjective ratings of the seriousness of the violence in each of the 13 clips, using the same 1-5 scale as the 1991 coders. They also gathered demographic information and the participants responded, on a 1-5 agree/disagree scale, to 29 general evaluative statements concerning TV violence.

In the study's findings, age was the most significant factor, with the older respondents (defined as over 40) rating every excerpt more violent than did the younger respondents (under 40), in some cases by more than a full point on the 1-5 scale. Recall that, in this context, almost all the younger group were under 30, and most of the older group were over 50. Bassett and Shuker initially claim (n.d., p9) that the older group rated incidents as more serious than had the coders in the 1991 Watson et al. (1991) study. However the detailed figures they present later (Bassett & Shuker, n.d., p9) indicate the opposite, and their assessment after presenting the findings is that: "It seems all the more remarkable for the older age group to obtain a numerical figure as close to the original judges as is recorded here" (p23).

Table 7.2: Selected findings from the Massey study 1991	
Type of violence	
Assaults	55%
Genre	
Cartoons	36% of total violence
News	17%
Films	17%
Victims	
Male	85%
Female	15%
Adults	91%
Children	9% [unspecified]
Bystanders	38% [neutrals, rather than involved participants]
Race	
'White'	81%
'Non-white'	19%
Perpetrators	
White	75%
Adult	87%
Mostly male	
Weapons	
Guns	33%
Fists or feet	31%
Voice/raised voice	24%
Location	
Outdoors	60%
Daytime	78%
Brightly lit	74%
At work or recreation	70%
Harm	
Nil	approx. 50% [largely because of cartoons]
Death	17%
Mild injury/damage	14%
Fairness	
Justified	46%
Not justified	54%

Re-interpreting the data they present, we can see that the older age group rated five of the excerpts at above 4 on the 5-point scale. These excerpts came from one of the films, two dramas, a drama-documentary, and a 1991 Gulf War news item. *Mania* (a drama) had an average rating very close to the maximum of 5 (4.87). The younger group rated no excerpt at 4 or above on the scale, but rated the same five excerpts highest. Judged most serious overall were two drama/docu-drama excerpts and a Gulf War news item. The younger group also tended to rate the cartoon excerpts much lower than did the older group. The authors' presentation of the age-group scores for each of the 13 programmes shows a tendency for the under-40s to rate programmes from the midpoint down to the lower end of the violence scale (1-3), while the over-40s rate from the midpoint up to the high end (3-5).

Bassett and Shuker interpret the age group differences as likely to result in part from the younger group's greater familiarity with the actual programmes, or at least with the genres that they represent.

Gender showed up as a much less important factor than age in judging the seriousness of violence. Women tended to rate excerpts more violent than did men, but not by a great margin, and three of the 13 excerpts were rated more violent by the males in the sample. No cross-tabulations of age x gender are presented.

The demographic information yielded a classification into five socioeconomic class groups, with class 1 as the lowest and class 5 highest. The researchers state that "no clear patterns of difference emerged on the basis of socioeconomic level" (Bassett & Shuker, n.d., p25) within the sample. However, if one discounts the uppermost class (5) which contains only one respondent, there are clearly observable trends between the lowest class (1) and the second-upper class (4). Class 1 rated all but one of the 13 excerpts more violent than did class 4, although the patterns for classes 2 and 3 were variable rather than graded between the scores of classes 1 and 4. Certainly, this factor was much less important than age, a common finding in New Zealand social research. Information on ethnicity was gathered in the questionnaire but no findings are mentioned.

7.4 Other New Zealand studies

7.4.1 Television and domestic violence

Weaver (1997) describes a project examining the coverage of domestic violence by television, putting it into the context of current concerns in this area. The programmes Weaver analysed included both documentaries on domestic violence, as well as advertising campaigns funded by the New Zealand Police. She became interested in this area after noting that New Zealand had a similar campaign against violence to other countries such as Scotland (where Weaver is from). She wanted to know how people expected to evaluate whether these campaigns were actually preventing domestic violence.

To put this project into context, Weaver explains that New Zealand has a current behaviourist belief that violence on television directly contributes to violence in society. There is more concern over male response to violent depictions on television than over female response. Weaver gives a brief summary of this behaviourist argument, and says that some researchers dispute this theory, saying that television alone is not powerful enough to incite aggressive behaviour; other social factors must be taken into account. She cites examples of these factors from Amis (1996) and Gauntlett (1995): "…gender, unemployment, cultural conditioning, housing, social positioning and/or the individual psychological predispositioning…" (Weaver, 1997, p123).

A major focus of Weaver's project is on the theory that men and women react differently to depictions of violence on television. She acknowledges that this theory is not new, and uses as an example the Annenburg School of Communication's Cultural Indicators Project, which began in the 1970s. This project "…argued that television's repeated portrayal of certain groups as victims represented a symbolic expression of those victim types' social impotence" (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p180, as cited by Weaver, 1997, p123). Weaver also explains that this project has since been heavily criticised, because it put forth assumptions based only on content analysis and not audience research.

However, her own research indicates that these assumptions are true: "…some women's fears for their safety in public is directly attributable to these forms of portrayals, with programmes like *Crimewatch* being cited as the reason why women interviewees were afraid to go out alone at night…" (Weaver, 1997, p123). She explains that while depiction on television of women as victims of male violence is common, it is unlikely to change because violence is capable of increasing ratings (1997, p123).

In terms of social context, television broadcasting of high profile cases of domestic violence (Weaver cites the O.J. Simpson case in the U.S. and the Bristol family case in New Zealand, 1997, p124), society is now more accepting of this subject, as "…it is at least receiving formal public discussion… the media provides a platform on which some of these discussions can be played out" (p124).
Weaver then discusses some preliminary results of her own research in this area, on three sets of data. The first part looks at an advertising campaign called *Break the Cycle of Violence*, which screened in New Zealand during the mid-nineties. She explains that these ads encourage viewers to realise that domestic violence is a learned behaviour, and that it is possible to unlearn it. She also notes that in this advertising campaign, "…violent imagery is being used as a means to supposedly help combat real acts of violence" (1997, p125).

The second campaign Weaver investigated was called *Not just a Domestic* (Communicado) which consists of ten infomercials, and Weaver uses one of these as an example. Cutting rapidly between scenes of a happy family and the father in the family being sentenced to jail for domestic violence, it implies that domestic violence is a crime and that it can occur in even ideal-looking families (Weaver, 1997, p126).

One contradiction Weaver identified is that "…the song lyrics still describe the man's wife as 'his woman', thereby potentially helping to reinforce the notion that a man's wife is his property" (p126).

Lastly, Weaver (1997) focused on a documentary on domestic violence, called *Picking Up the Pieces*. She found this programme interesting in "…how it communicated experience of domestic violence in considerable depth and concentrated entirely on giving voice to its victims" (p126). She explains that because of this emphasis, the documentary does not go into the background of why domestic violence occurs.

7.4.2 The BSA overview report

This 1990 report was prepared by Helena Barwick for the New Zealand Broadcasting Standards Authority, and is an overview of codes governing violence on television as well as research done in this area up until 1990. The reason for this overview was that, at that time, the Broadcasting Standards Authority was to develop a code of practice concerning television violence (Broadcasting Act, 1989). Barwick was particularly interested in a trend apparent at the time for researchers to claim a causal link between violence on television and violent behaviour, without having any substantial proof.

Barwick found that much research up until 1990 had found a causal link between viewing violence and behaving aggressively. She found that reviews on this research divided it into two categories: 1) laboratory studies, for example Berkowitz and Rawlings (1963) who found that "… 'justified' aggression had a more powerful effect on later behaviour than viewing 'unjustified' aggression" (Barwick, 1990, p5); and 2) field studies, for example Singer et al. (1984) who researched the long-term effects of television violence on children's behaviour, and found a causal link that viewing violence on television attributed to an increase in aggressive behaviour in children (Barwick, 1990, p6). Barwick noted that "field studies became more popular as the shortcomings of laboratory experiments made it possible for the critics to discount their findings as 'artificial'" (Barwick, 1990, p5).

Examining these studies led Barwick to find that most researchers agreed that a causal link between viewing violence and aggressive behaviour existed. However, she found very little agreement when it came to the process of influence: how are viewers affected in this way by the depiction of violence on television? Research and reviews also showed little agreement when it came to pinpointing the audience group most likely to be affected by television violence (Barwick, 1990, p11).

In chapter 2, Barwick gives an overview of research which argues that a causal link between television violence and real time aggression is not proven. She says that "…there has been a vocal minority of researchers who have claimed, not so much that television has no adverse effect on people's behaviour, but rather that any effect has not been demonstrated or proven in the research to a sufficient degree that it should be taken as fact and acted upon" (p15). Barwick also points out that several

researchers (such as Fowles and Feshbach) have argued that television violence is beneficial to viewers, having a 'catharsis effect', although she points out that "this view, although frequently mentioned in the literature, has been convincing to very few" (1990, p15).

Barwick makes brief mention of those studies which found a 'null hypothesis', saying that they "…tend to remain unpublished, presumably because editors think they add little to the debate about this relationship" (1990, p18). The implication here is that published studies may look more persuasive because of under-reporting of studies that show no significant linkage. She also points out that those researchers who found a lack of proof for the causal effect theory (for example Gunter, 1985), tended to agree that the measure of violence used (the Gerbner Violence Index) was inadequate. According to Barwick, Gunter argued that "…the perception of violence is socially and culturally determined; therefore the use of a content based index of violence such as Gerbner's is invalid and not useful" (1990, p20).

According to Barwick, this overview showing the two sides of the debate is important as it "…reflects the polarity of the debate: it seems that much research has been undertaken in order to prove hypotheses and confirm presuppositions, rather than to increase the knowledge about the effects of television, and hence provide clearer indicators of direction to the social policy makers" (1990, p3).

In chapter 3, Barwick provides an overview of New Zealand research up until 1990. She focuses firstly on Dr Hilary Haines (*Violence on Television*, Mental Health Foundation, 1983), who produced this booklet in conjunction with the Media Watch surveys (1982, 1983, 1984). Haines concluded that, "the social science research reviewed in this report clearly points to a causal relationship between viewing violence on television and the cultivation of aggressive attitudes and behaviour in children and adolescents" (Haines, 1983, as cited in Barwick, 1990, p28). Subsequent reports Barwick mentions in this overview include the 1986 Royal Commission of Inquiry into Broadcasting and Related Telecommunications, and well as the 1987 Roper Report: The Report of the Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into Violence. Both reports supported the recommendations of the Mental Health Foundation.

Barwick then focuses on new directions in the research of the effects of television, as "…in some quarters energy has moved from the violence debate to looking more broadly at the effects of television, particularly in relation to children" (1990, p3). She uses a study by Hodge and Tripp (1986) as one example of this. These Australian researchers conducted a qualitative study of television effects on over 600 children. According to Barwick, they argued that "…lobbyists should be more concerned with limiting some types of violence – such as sexism and racism – which promote and legitimise an offensive and unacceptable world view" (1990, p42).

Codes governing violence on television from Britain, Australia, and Canada are included in this overview. The BSC (Broadcasting Standards Commission, Britain) was set up in 1988, two years before Barwick's overview. She includes the BSC's full code on violence (Barwick, 1990, pp46-59). She also includes the Australian

Broadcasting Corporation's code on violence, but mentions that at the time of writing this overview, a major Australian research report on the influence of television violence was waiting to be tabled before the Australian Federal Parliament, and therefore that was likely to influence a change in codes of practice concerning violence on television. Barwick also mentions the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand, which, "prior to the Broadcasting Act 1989, …was responsible for maintaining standards of good taste and decency" (1990, p68).

In conclusion, Barwick reiterates her point that although research around the world suggests that violence on television causes violence in viewers, no one has provided a definitive proof. She also asks whether or not policy makers need this proof. She suggests that qualitative research methods would be most useful in the future.

7.4.3 Television and aggression among New Zealand children

Peter A. Ling, in his 1977 report, examines the effect of television violence on children. Utilising an experimental design, this research aimed to fill a gap in current research where there was a surfeit of debate and very little hard evidence. Ling's aim was to determine not only if violence on television directly contributed to aggression in children, but also whether there was any difference across gender and ethnicity.

The subjects in this study were 52 eight-year-old children, from Hamilton. They included an equal number of boys and girls, as well as an equal number of Maori and Pakeha within each gender group. The children's play was observed before and after watching a film showing aggressive play, as well as before and after watching a film showing non-aggressive play. The children's free playtime before and after was observed (using trained university students) and recorded "unobtrusively" by way of one-way mirrors and hidden cameras (Ling, 1977, p15). The children, as well as their parents and teachers were also interviewed, "…so that children's aggressive responses in the natural play situation could be measured and related to the socio-cultural environments" (1977, p16).

The trained observers worked in pairs, and measured the children's behaviour relating to different types of violence. Ling found that the children more frequently showed response to violence by shooting (using water pistols) (1977, p23). Overall, both types of film shown (aggressive and non-aggressive) increased the rate of activity in children's post-viewing play, but only the aggressive film elicited direct imitative aggressive play.

According to Ling, "the overall results of the present experiment appear to provide relatively consistent evidence for the view that television is a powerful "electronic brainwasher" in the modification of children's social behaviour" (1977, p40). He also believes that his study provides support to the findings of earlier research (for example US Surgeon General Report, 1972; Bandura, 1973).

Ling acknowledges that these direct imitative results are the product of "circumstance similar to the one observed" (1977, p40, citing Liebert, 1972), i.e. the children's post-viewing playtime setting was similar to that on the aggressive film. Ling identifies these influencing factors in the children's playtime as:

> …available targets (other children were around), situational cues (it was a play situation where aggressive behaviour was tolerated), motivational antecedents (it was after school, away from school, and it was exciting for the children to copy behaviour from the film having the theme 'Fighting is Fun'), model and place characteristics (identification was not difficult owing to great similarities), and how the observer perceives the situation…
>
> (Ling, 1977)

One original hypothesis, that ethnicity would affect the degree to which a child imitated violence on television, was not supported by the research data. This led him to suggest that earlier researchers "…may have over-emphasised ethnic differences, since there are other social and situational factors (SES, stress, alienation), which differ between the two ethnic groups, which could be more important in accounting for the differences in aggressive behaviour they reported" (Ling, 1977, p42).

Similarly, the hypotheses that there would be a gender difference (that boys would respond more violently than girls), was also not supported. Ling found that girls imitated violent behaviour shown in the aggressive film in the same ways that boys did (1977, p42). Interestingly, the mean behaviour cluster scores (see Ling's table 3.04, p28) "…suggest that the boys were not significantly more aggressive than the girls during the play following the viewing of violent films, but were actually less aggressive than the girls after the neutral programme" (1977, p42).

Ling points out that these findings, of children's direct imitation of violent behaviour on film, is evidence against hypothesis that violence on television had a cathartic effect, and was therefore beneficial to children (see Chapter 4). He also raises implications for further research in this area. One relates to New Zealand crime, as official statistics at that time showed a difference in crime rates across different ethnic groups. This difference was then disproportionately represented in the media, making it seem worse than it was. Therefore, Ling suggests that future research on violence include an "…elaboration of the factors affecting media instigation of delinquent or criminal behaviour, as well as an attempt made through epidemiological studies to understand the social and cultural environment which generates it" (1977, p50).

Some of Ling's results undermined his experimental design by highlighting the role of contextual variables such as the symmetry between stimulus content and the context in which the children responded and the necessary presence of other, non-media based situational cues for an imitation effect to occur. His emphasis on the uniqueness of the situation and the role of the observers within it, suggests the influence of the "sponsor effect" reported in other studies.

7.5 Evaluating New Zealand research

Weaver (1996) evaluates the NZ research up to 1996. She expresses concern over the television violence debate in New Zealand. This debate, with the specific view that television is able to incite aggressive behaviour, is current in many countries. Weaver focuses on New Zealand in terms of how the researchers' use of evidence has influenced public opinion so far.

Weaver explains how television broadcasting standards have been largely influenced by "behaviourist effects" theory, which was popular in New Zealand at the time this article was written (1996). She gives *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* as an example; this controversial children's programme was stopped in 1995 because of complaints of excessive violence, even though it was found acceptable in Australia and the US. So New Zealand, at that time, took a more "rigid stance".

Weaver believes that the levels of violence on New Zealand television are lessening over the years and this is because the current argument against television violence is very persuasive. However, it is mostly based on overseas research rather than our own, which Weaver claims is weak because they "…are using what has been viewed elsewhere as dubious research evidence to claim that television violence is damaging to the health of New Zealand" (1996, p65). She notes the extent to which US social science assumptions and methods have colonised local debate and research on the issue.

Weaver writes that evidence that television violence is contributing to increasing statistics on violence in society should be treated with caution, because the rates of social violence in New Zealand can be unclear. This is because they are collected in a different way to other countries (she gives the U.K. as an example, Weaver, 1996), so it can be difficult to compare findings when researchers are using television violence evidence from overseas. Also people's perceptions of crime are changing; New Zealand society is now less tolerant, so that could be a factor in increasing figures (Young, 1991). An example she uses is Ritchie and Ritchie (1993) who asserted that television violence is the cause of violent behaviour. However Weaver suggests this research is not very credible because it is "…not substantiated by any evidence from the New Zealand context" (1996, p66).

She also describes the Mental Health Foundation's research work (Bridgman, 1995), saying that it follows the theory that television violence causes social violence. She implies a weakness in this research is that "the evidence for these claims is derived almost entirely from the US…" (Weaver, 1996, p67), meaning there is an assumption that New Zealand audiences react to violence I the same way as US audiences do when the programming is very different in the two countries. She also claims that while this research is largely based on Gerbner's model of content analysis, "…the Mental Health Foundation has never questioned the validity of Gerbner's model nor its empirically unsubstantiated assumptions of a link between television portrayals

of violence and how viewers perceive their own socio-cultural environments" (1996, pp67-68).

Weaver says that people in New Zealand (including those with the power to make important decisions about this) are disadvantaged by not having full information, because most of the information available in New Zealand is from this same view (behaviourist effects). She summarises Media Aware's work and comments on their influential power in this area: "…although a voluntary organisation, its activities are not insignificant in rallying support for its ideals" (1996, p69).

Weaver also gives a brief summary of the BSA's research, saying that it has avoided these "simplistic" behaviourist theories, but its own research has not included any qualitative analysis. According to Weaver, "whilst the New Zealand study revealed high levels of public concern about violence on television, these did not easily translate into desires for the imposition of stronger levels of restriction and/or censorship of violence" (1996, p70). She says that the BSA's research raises questions, which highlight the need for further research.

Weaver comments that politicians will be most likely to take the views of the 40+ age group seriously, while younger viewers are disregarded. This is a problem because it is these younger viewers (who are more likely to be watching the programmes containing violence) that everyone has concerns about. Effects theorists do not include feedback from this section of society in their research: "it is as though sections of the population are regarded as too caught up in the spectacle of entertainment to be able to objectively assess the impact it might have upon them" (1996, p71).

Another weakness she has found with research and campaigning in New Zealand is the lack of audience reception research in New Zealand. People generally claim that drama contains the highest levels of violence, but the majority of drama shown on New Zealand television comes from overseas, and so we don't know if New Zealand audiences take the same meaning from the violence in these programmes. Weaver believes more attention should be paid to non-fiction programmes as studies have shown that non-fiction programmes can also have a negative impact on the audience, especially as this type of violence can be more realistic.

Overall, Weaver's article calls for more research from a range of disciplines; she acknowledges that this will be a difficult and complicated task, but stresses that it is necessary:

> …it is imperative that politicians, policy makers, and the voting public are provided with as complete a picture as possible about the many perspectives on the issue of television and violence. If this is not forthcoming it could well be that measures of censorship are introduced not on the basis of compelling research evidence, but because we have been seduced into believing that censorship will make our society a better place to live in.
>
> (Weaver, 1996, p73)

The arguments of Weaver reflect part of the general trend, particularly evident in British research towards the cultural effects paradigm. The limitations of the New Zealand studies considered above are in part methodological, as the above review has indicated. Certain interesting lines of enquiry have been suggested by the data collected but these have not always been pursued. The limitations are also conceptual, if understandable in the context of the time when the studies were conducted, since there is an over-reliance on Gerbner's methodology. Max Abbott's early caution about the causal complexity of violence as a social problem notwithstanding, there has been a tendency to argue for a linear and direct line of causality from television violence to violence in the larger social context. What is different at the time of writing is that there is a body of literature to support a cultural effects approach, which is contextually sensitive.

This does not mean that content analysis is irrelevant. It is necessary to have a reliable indication of the level and frequency of violent depictions on television, but it is also necessary to have some measure of the cultural salience of content before rushing to pronouncements of influence and effect.

In general terms, the way forward is to triangulate the findings of the behavioural and reception-oriented research, striking a balance between the determinism of the behaviourist paradigm and the voluntarism of the Reception Analysis. This entails an effort at synthesis, which combines the best of the behavioural approach - its power to establish generalisations - with the sensitivity to contextual determinants that is found in reception studies. Our design of the content analysis has attempted to address in a modest way some of the measures of salience that follow from a more contextual and culturally informed approach. This also means that any results need to be set in the larger, but specifically New Zealand context. Some observations are in order.

7.6 Television in the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand

In assessing the relationship between international research into violence on television and the New Zealand context, certain features of the latter must be considered. Generally speaking, the New Zealand television system is one of the most de-regulated systems in the world (Herman & McChesney, 1997). The emphasis on the free market and the light regulatory touch has a long pedigree which predates the market liberalisation that occurred in the late 80s (Hayward, 2003). The debate over the merits of a state regulated broadcasting system as against a free market model is not to be entered into here (although there is more detail in Chapter 14). But it is undeniable that there is evidence of an enduring concern with the role of the national media in the formation of a national identity.

To give one example, the deliberations in 1975 of a film industry working party which recommended the setting up of a National Film Commission was driven by deep concern over a marketplace thoroughly dominated by foreign-made product. It

recommended the principle of a spectatorial "right" – New Zealanders have a right to see films and television programmes related to what is important to New Zealanders – not be subjected to a constant diet of programmes from other cultures. To be sure, concepts of art and culture and labels such as "New Zealander" and "our way of life", were used in an unproblematic way. This was at a time when the social dynamics of the culture where being altered by a massive influx of Polynesian – as opposed to European – immigrants, and a Maori "cultural resurgence".

The claim for a "spectatorial right" and the associated concept that there should be a public broadcasting role in managing the process of national identity formation, is a present reality as evidenced by the lengthy deliberations over the introduction of a charter for TVNZ (Hayward, 2003). Indeed, the Charter for TVNZ, as the only television company owned by Kiwis for Kiwis states that it shall, amongst other requirements "provide shared experiences that contribute to a sense of citizenship and national identity" (TVNZ Charter, 2003). The search for national defining experiences is also resonant with the general public as can be illustrated by considering the report, Attitudes to NZ on Air Funded TV Programming (NZOA, 2002). In this survey of public attitudes, it was found that there was a strong interest in locally originated documentaries that could help to define who New Zealanders were as a nation and a people (NZOA, 2002, p5). Locally originated fictional programmes (dramas) were also valued over foreign fictional programmes for their local relevance despite some concern over the quality of the acting and scriptwriting (NZOA, 2002, p7).

The fascination with questions of identity was also borne out by the finding that New Zealand drama is preferred over foreign drama, despite the fact that the latter is often better acted and better shot and better scripted (TVNZ, 2002). Incidentally, the same report noted a preference for action (fast moving physical activity) over violence and most respondents, with the exception of young males, felt violence on television was at its upper level of acceptability. New Zealand drama, compared to foreign drama was seen to favour unsubtle, graphic violence – a tendency that was connected to poor scriptwriting and acting.

European respondents were divided over the merits of Maori mainstream programmes. A majority favoured programmes in order to learn about Maori, but others preferred that Maori only have minority programmes since they are already receiving enough "preferential treatment" (TVNZ, 2002, p 9).

Recent concerns over the ethnic composition of New Zealanders and what this means to "*who we are*" suggests that concerns about identity still remain a popular theme with the general public as well as media reportage (Sunday Star Times, 2003). More generally, the deepening of the post-settler context in which a once dominant Pakeha ethnicity is becoming one ethnicity amongst many and in itself conditioned more by the indigenous experience of being a New Zealander, than by a European lineage, is clearly a factor which accounts for the profound fascination with matters of identity (Bell, 1996).

The particular significance of the "identity crisis" for this research is that it indicates that the meaning given to violent content is an important factor in the pattern of influence. This further re-enforces the point that the most appropriate research paradigm is looking at viewer reception as a form of cultural production.

8

Conclusions from the Literature Review

In line with the brief provided by the Working Group, the literature review has ranged widely over the available international and local research relevant to television violence, including research studies and paradigms on television content analysis and the effects of television on audiences and society. It has sought to identify and assess what methodologies have been used to analyse television violence, and to establish how robust the findings from different approaches were.

Such an investigation covering both international and local studies has involved a journey into a variety of disciplines such as media and communications, psychology, physiology, medicine, sociology, anthropology, social sciences, mental health research – to mention but a few. The studies examined have included longitudinal, experimental and naturalistic approaches, and investigation of how audiences interpret violent scenes and make meaning from them. The central literature includes those major international studies conducted over several decades into the incidence of violence on television, and the New Zealand studies of the 1980s and 1990s.

8.1 Main conclusions

The researchers believe that review has been beneficial to the debate about television violence because as it has shown just how complex the issue is and that it can be approached from many directions. Several advantages derived from the review can be indicated. First, the review has provided the opportunity to present a considerable body of research evidence accumulated over the last 50 years that bears on the relationship between television violence and social behaviour. Second, the review has demonstrated the complexity of the research, which has sought to both support and refute the issues of causation. Third, it has highlighted the many theories ranging from media system dependency theory, cultivation theory, and social learning theory, right through to theories that say there is no effect other than exposing our prudishness and unwillingness to change, that there are benefits to be gained through catharsis, that censorship and artistic licence are at issue, or that there exist various groups with various agendas that wish to see policy or regulation move in specific directions.

In addition to these gains, the literature review has aided the researchers in establishing their own design and methodology in preparing the empirical phase of this project. It has helped to define issues of sampling, genre definitions, coding parameters, definitions of what constitutes an act of violence and other methodology

matters. In addition, the literature review has sought to provide the Working Party with a clearer picture of both international and local findings in television violence research, thereby identifying those aspects of the phenomenon that deserve further investigation. These features should ultimately assist the Working Party in formulating its own recommendations.

Turning to more substantive matters, the literature review demonstrates that the relationship between television violence and the occurrence of aggression and violence in real life is still a subject for debate. Whatever the level of television violence revealed by our content analysis, the facts will not speak for themselves and will still require interpretation in relation to clearly formulated policy objectives. The behaviourist paradigm has held out the hope of surpassing interpretation and ensuring a reliable measure of the processes involved. But the restricted conditions, under which the data is collected, raise serious questions about the validity of its findings when applied to real life contexts, compared to the more qualitative approaches suggested by the Active Audience and Reception Analyses. It is worth emphasizing that studies in the behavioural paradigm, even the most sophisticated and comprehensive studies, cannot deliver certainty.

A conclusion such as this may seem to be a counsel of despair for policy makers, but it may also be a salutary encouragement to lower expectations in the realm of problem solving. As one eminent and authoritative psychiatrist, Michael Rutter, observed in his review article in *Development Psychology* (the same issue in which the Huesmann study was published):

> Politicians and the general public may reasonably expect that empirical research into the causes, correlates, and consequences of antisocial behaviour, and into its prevention and treatment, ought to give rise to clear-cut implications for policy. We have no right to complain that policymakers fail to pay adequate attention to research findings if such findings have only weak implications for policy.
>
> (Rutter, 2003, p376)

Acknowledging that the collection of papers published in the issue he is reviewing fall short of providing clear and robust guidelines for policy, Rutter offers some observations that can stand as a summation of our review of the television violence literature. These are:

- Most research falls well short of identifying the causes of antisocial behaviour. "We know a lot about risk and protective indicators but much less about risk and protective causal processes" (loc. cit., p376) We know, in other words, that television violence increases the risk of antisocial behaviour, but why and by how much compared to other factors remains uncertain.
- Even when there is a reasonable "handle" on risk and protective process, there is only a limited understanding of what is required to bring about change.

- Even when interventions are effective, it remains difficult to get those who will benefit to be involved.

The first lesson to be drawn from these conclusions is that the concern about television violence should shift from the quest for (or the denial of) a direct causal link between television content and behaviour towards a process of risk evaluation and assessment. Such an assessment implies a broad understanding of the various factors that have a causal influence on violent behaviour.

8.2 Television violence and risk

As the literature review has indicated, television violence has a risk enhancement impact in relation to factors such as: childhood experience of family violence; traditional male sex roles; public attitudes towards violence; lack of empathy towards others; poor anger management strategies; inability to tolerate frustration; and gaining rewards for aggression.

Television does not create the conditions that contribute to violent behaviour but it can enhance and extend their impact through providing scripts for action, increasing the readiness to act violently and through normalising the role of violence and aggression in interpersonal relationships. Approaches to regulating violent content should seek to minimise the likelihood of violent content interacting *synergistically* with external causes of violence and setting up an interactive process that increases the probability of anti-social outcomes. If this view is taken, then a practical consequence is that the view that television causes violence should be abandoned in favour of a finer graded assessment of the risk factors associated with particular programmes. Thus, it is clear from the count data, that TV1 has a lower count than TV3, but the risk potential of programmes on either channel will depend on contextual factors related to genre, the use of humour, degree of graphicness, justification and the like, as well as external variables related to the typical audience, time of broadcasting and so forth (Potter, 1999). The following table summarises the main negative effects found in the literature review. The right hand column, in particular, indicates possible long-term effects that are likely to enforce rather than ameliorate the risk factors indicated under Section A in the Table 8.1.

The second lesson to be drawn is that the concept of risk, much like the concept of effect, needs to accord to viewers the capacity to interpret and re-interpret the meaning of violent content in ways that cannot be deduced from the content alone. Content analysis needs, as in the British example, to include measures of the ways in which various kinds of groups make sense of their world, what understandings, perceptions and value sets they bring to the viewing situation and how specific kinds of violent depictions reinforce or transform viewer perceptions.

The third lesson to be drawn is that individual and group perceptions of risk must be related to a larger public frame of reference that concerns the role of television in the

formation of public attitudes to the nature of society and the kinds of rules of treatment and respect that structure relationships in public and private life.

Table 8.1: Types of effects and risk accumulation factors

Type of Effect	Scope of Effect	
	Immediate reactions	**Cumulative or long-term moulding of dispositions**
Physiological	Temporary fight or flight	Physiological habituation – the need for stronger stimuli to evoke physiological responses.
Emotional	Temporary fear, anger, excitement	Emotional habituation – the need for stronger stimuli to evoke emotional responses.
Cognitive	Learning specific acts and lessons about violent behaviour	Generalising patterns – applying lessons as generalisations e.g. mean world syndrome, likely victims, perpetrators, and third person effects. Learning social norms – violence as an acceptable solution, justified in certain circumstances, violence as an enhancer of personal status.
Attitudinal	Creation or change of attitudes towards specific situations and kinds of individuals	Reinforcement of attitudes or beliefs – the nature of the social realm, sexism, racism, xenophobia etc.
Behavioural	Direct imitation or copying Disinhibition Activation, triggering or instigation Attraction	Generalised to scripts for behaviour in a range of situations. Readiness to act aggressively, priming, "addiction" to violence.

(adapted from Potter, 1999, p124)

8.2.1 Scenarios of intervention

From the perspective of policy formulation, the fundamental issue is not whether the claim for a particular effect can be definitively demonstrated but what would be the consequences of not acting if it were actually true (Potter, 1999). Another way to consider the literature on effects, with all its limitations, is through identifying the kinds of risks that would follow from ignoring the influence of television violence on behaviour.

Table 8.2 above summarises the broad terrain of "antisocial" effects that the research literature has identified, setting aside the kinds of findings that argue for positive or no effects. The various types of effects carry with them their own risk factors. As with

the term effects, risk factors can be short term or long term, they can be immediate or cumulative, they can be conceptualised as having individual, group or national consequences, and differing levels of seriousness. In moving from the left-hand column to the right, there is a shift from short-term, evanescent effects to long-term more durable dispositions. If the left hand column identifies experiences, the right identifies dispositions formed on the basis of those experiences. If the short-term experiences become part of the individual's make-up, then we can say that television has socialised him or her into a culture of violence. Socialisation, in this sense, is the production of kinds of personalities, with attributes, preferences and beliefs that in their totality give society its particular norms of civility, loyalty and attachment. Research has not proven that television alone accomplishes the conversion of experience to disposition, but it clearly has that role for some individuals in some situations. On the basis of Table 7.1, it is possible to identify three kinds of risk situations.

8.2.2 Individuals at risk

Television violence can contribute to the likelihood of individuals engaging in aggressive or anti-social behaviour through providing models and techniques to imitate, and ideas or scripts that can be applied to specific situations. There may also be a *rationalisation* effect on violent behaviour that increases readiness to act by providing justification, or in the post-hoc situation, the excuse of influence – *television made me do it*. But television's role is to augment or extend violent behaviour. Such behaviour is caused by other factors, some collective and structural – poverty, history of family violence, gang subculture – and some individual e.g. impaired emotional or cognitive development. Even accepting that television violence effects only occur if certain external factors – poverty, deprivation, history of abuse, involvement in a gang subculture, and so on – are moving in an accumulative direction, it might be prudent to restrict violence on television. Seeking to mitigate television violence as a risk factor in the equation is, of course, a long way from treating television as a primary cause. On some estimates, television violence would account for only about 10 per cent of antisocial behaviour (Garbarino, 2001). Certainly in the most disturbing case of mass slaughter in New Zealand, that undertaken by David Gray at Aramoana in 1990, there was no evidence of the influence of television viewing on behaviour. In retrospect, the possession of arms, identification with American survivalist gun culture and social isolation, were seen as the most important factors that led to the sudden irruption of violence. (O'Brien, 1991).

8.2.3 Social groups at risk

This heading would include the broad category of children and young people who, through their reliance on significant others, such as parents and then increasingly on peers and mass media figures, are potentially at risk from media influence. Some commentators have pointed out that the perception of children as "victims in waiting" owes much to the fact that parents today have an historically unique view

of childhood as a realm of innocence; this factor is not unrelated to the emotional value that children bring to adult relationships. Socio-economic class also figures strongly in this equation (Buckingham, 2000, p65). Accepting these qualifications, children do represent a category in which the influence of television can be intensive and extensive. If the potential duration of exposure alone is considered, children are more "at risk" given their dependency than other contemporaneous demographics, irrespective of race, class and gender background.

Other demographic groups are at risk, less for their dependency, but more because of their presence in the media as stereotypes. As Gerbner's violence profiles indicate, women, the elderly, and black people figure highly as victims on prime television and non-white males are more likely to figure as perpetrators and lawbreakers. These trends have their counterparts in New Zealand television.

Perhaps more important than the risk from physical violence is the *symbolic violence* done to the self-image of various groups within New Zealand society. The mainstream New Zealand- originated media tends to project a largely Pakeha-centred view of the world which, by implication, if not directly, tends to marginalize the cultures of Maori, Pasifika and Asian people (Bell, 1996, Chapter 6). As an indigenous culture, Maoridom has been seen as having received a particularly negative and inferior treatment (Walker, 1989).

Television violence, although certainly not the exclusive source of demeaning and racist stereotypes, is nonetheless a powerful source for the production and dissemination of symbolic violence. Such violence, influencing intra- and inter-group relationships, is a potential source for conflict and cultural misunderstanding, which may be the prelude to conflict and violence.

8.2.4 The "good society" and risk

The foregoing dimensions of risk bear on the larger issue of the condition of civic life and culture. A salient matter here concerns the role of the media in the projection of a workable vision, a vision that could be shared, or at least agreed to, of what is socially and culturally desirable for society as a whole. Such a vision of a good society serves a collective cognitive function. New Zealanders, of whatever background and persuasion, rely on the media to let them observe, from a distance, fellow Kiwis they are unlikely to encounter in their everyday lives. From such mediated "encounters" an image of the larger national community arises. This community rests on an act of imagination of a totality which otherwise cannot be observed. It is an unavoidably fictional framework of supposedly commonly held beliefs and values (Anderson, 1983).

This construction of "community" is not just a matter of engaging and narrating cultural and other differences at home. New Zealanders, like most peoples today, live in a context that is inextricably global and local – or *glocal* as it has been labelled. The media are a source of extended cultural contact with both local and

cosmopolitan cultures. New Zealand media audiences not only interact with fellow Kiwis, they interact with others "freed" from the constraints of time and space.

> As a result of electronically mediated interactions, the definitions of situations and of behaviours is no longer determined by physical location…. The evolution of the media has begun to cloud the differences between stranger and friend and to weaken the distinction between people who are "here" and people who are "somewhere else".
>
> (Meyrowitz, 1985, pp117, 125)

The sense of placelessness means that the construction of a "home" is both urgent and fraught. Television because it functions as a national, mass medium (or in TVNZ's case because of its explicitly stated obligations under the Charter) assumes the burden of constructing and nurturing an imaginary community in these conditions. As we have seen above, there is evidence that ordinary New Zealanders expect that locally originated programming provide them with an overarching sense of community and place. This expectation is not easily met given that the economics of production dictate that foreign content must be a significant part of national broadcasting. Foreign programming, while not subject to the same expectation of local relevance, is nonetheless constrained by the same expectations that stories told, either through drama or documentary, provide information and equipment for living. Naturally enough, this does not imply that locally originated programmes actually succeed in nurturing a strong and workable sense of community. But they alone are positioned to provide a platform through which such a sense of community might emerge. Nor is it a matter, either, of concluding the foreign programming has nothing to contribute to national life. It is rather a matter of ensuring that foreign programming is selected, as far as possible, to support local programming objectives.

Violence on television, whether as physical action or as the verbal expression of aggression towards others, may well pose a threat to the building and maintaining of a vision of community intimately linked to ideas about a good and virtuous life. Community in this sense does not mean people with a common identity, but rather people in a multicultural society who are tolerant of difference and informed by diversity. It does seems likely that televised violence affects, through the development of fear, desensitisation and a perception of the world as "mean", the manner in which individuals apprehend the world outside of their immediate experience. If this is the case then society, through television violence, risks distrust and incivility.

Paradoxically, even ostensibly pro-social reactions to the "problem" of television violence can have the same effect. This relates to third person effects. Such effects are cognitive and derive from the perception that television violence is not a "problem" for one, but is a problem for others who are supposedly more prone to influence. Such a perception, the ascription of vulnerability to others, can be misguided and, in the worst case, lead to support for censorship and curtailment of creative freedom. Another consequence may be that certain categories of people, e.g. children, Non-Europeans, "asset poor" and educationally deprived New Zealanders come to be

perceived as being in need of protection from their own tastes and culture. If this step is taken then consideration of harm and vulnerability becomes embroiled in social and political judgements which are divisive.

In relation to broadcast regulation, three models can be identified, each of which implies different conceptions of the role of broadcasting in sustaining a good society. They are: the "covenantal", the "contractual", and the "stewardship" models.

The *covenantal* model would argue for censorship and moral judgement or prudery while the *contractual* model would permit individuals to watch whatever they choose to watch. Neither of these would seem to offer a viable basis for public policy development in broadcasting in New Zealand.

A third model, the *stewardship* model suggests that those charged with stewardship preserve the interests of succeeding generations. Agencies charged with stewardship must mediate between the various stakeholders in society in order to balance interests in the present with those in the future. The stewardship model would seem to fit the pluralistic cultural framework of New Zealand society. Far from being a middle of the road solution, it presents a challenge from a regulatory viewpoint to balance what are often quite strongly felt and powerfully argued positions. The stewardship model whilst having clear affinity with state funded broadcasting and the Charter, nonetheless can recognise the interests of broadcasters who are not bound by the TVNZ Charter.

As any discussion of regulation should recognise there is a balance to be struck between standards and expression. This balance is also found in relation to the role of violence and creativity. It is important here to make a distinction between the concept of violence as a disruption of order and the role of innovation and artistic licence. Any consideration of the public risks posed by television violence must also recognise that violence in some form is part and parcel of the creative process. To that extent prohibitions on content run the risk of inhibiting free expression and the full reign of creativity. Faced with this dilemma, it is useful to make a fundamental distinction between different kinds of violence. Democratic violence "does not deny or negate the possibility and ability of fellow-interactants to go on interpreting meaning as they choose, even as the meanings which each construes in the interaction might be found to violate the others". Nihilistic violence by contrast "breaches the surface of civil exchange, breaks shared norms of behaviour, such that an orientation towards it by others, and their development of stable expectations with regard to it, is prevented" (Rapport, 2000, in Aijmer & Abbink, p53).

In other words, there is a balance to be maintained between violence as a creative, but *democratic,* force that encourages innovation and the social exchange of ideas, and *nihilistic* violence that tends to polarise opinion and inhibit the social conversation about different values and different ways of being.

Regulatory standards, then, need to be developed that, in principle, rest on a distinction between democratic violence and nihilistic violence. The details of such standards will need to be graded more finely than the existing standards that govern

content codes: they will need to be consensual in that they should arise out of discussions with the key stakeholders in the broadcasting process and they should identify the kinds of broadcasting standards that are consonant with good citizenship in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

In summary, the literature review indicates that television violence is an important factor in a nexus of factors associated with antisocial behaviour. It has not been definitively demonstrated to be a cause, though it may substantially increase the power of other factors that lead to antisocial behaviour. Perhaps of greater significance than the role of television in the production of antisocial and aggressive individuals, is its role as a mediator of images of the promises and opportunities for a better life. It would seem, therefore, that television's contribution to "the good society" needs careful stewardship and clear ethical guidelines.

Section B

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF VIOLENCE ON NEW ZEALAND TELEVISION

9

Design and Method

9.1 Defining television violence

9.1.1 What is violence?

Many interpretations can be put on the word violence. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1999) defines violence as "behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage or kill" (p1600). This demonstrates the traditional association the word has had with physical aggression (Felson, 1996). In its earliest derivation, the term violence derives from the Latin term *vis* meaning force and the later Latin term *violentia* meaning impetuosity and vehemence. However the root of the term in notions of physical action was complicated by its association with a related term – violation – or the breaking of the law or the rules of proper behaviour. Thus verbal behaviour can be described as violent as well as threats that do not involve physical force. In efforts to accommodate this shifting term, contemporary parlance has used other terms – aggression and anti-social behaviour – to introduce the notion of kinds of violence. On account of this hybrid heritage, it is not surprising to find that there is a wide range of definitions of violence in use in contemporary documentation.

For example, the New Zealand Domestic Violence Act 1995 (1995) extends the boundaries of definition by describing "domestic violence" as being not only a "fist in the face or a kick in the head…", but also as physical, sexual or psychological abuse. Other groups such as the International Labour Organization (n.d.) define violence in specific situations, such as the workplace, describing the cumulative effect of what might be seen as relatively minor acts becoming serious forms of violence such as sexual harassment, bullying or mobbing.

Further complications arise when certain groups claim that it is not the action that defines something as violent but rather its conformity to social norms or stereotypes, a concept which runs close to the idea of violence as disruption of common frameworks of perception. Thus the Men's Health Network (n.d.) says that society does not define violence by women as a problem because prevailing gender stereotypes define women as the "gentle" sex.

This emphasises the issue that social, cultural and racial attitudes can affect the way individuals or specific groups of people define violence or determine what is acceptable behaviour. In a world in which television and audio-visual

representations function as a global cultural framework, the ambiguities of the term violence and its seeming intimate relationship to beliefs and values, makes the business of finding a universally agreed definition of what kind of behaviour is to be labelled violent difficult. Correspondingly, defining televised violence is a complex issue.

9.1.2 Defining television violence

Violence on television has been a concern since broadcasting first began in 1946 (Anderson and Bushman, 2002). As a consequence, research on the effects from those black and white images and sound emanating from the small screen has been consistent over the years. Various academics within disciplines such as sociology, psychology, psychiatry, medicine, communication studies, anthropology, cultural studies and humanities have studied television violence. But one of the essential elements in their work, whether laboratory, experimental, field, longitudinal or content analysis, has been the definition of violence.

Researchers at the Institute of Communication Studies at the University of Leeds were commissioned by the British broadcasting institutions as well as the Broadcasting Standards Commission and the Independent Television Commission, to find the subjective meaning of violence. Using "video editing groups" and talking with individuals they concluded that:

> Screen violence is any act that is seen or unequivocally signalled which would be considered an act of violence in real life, because the violence was considered unjustified either in the degree or nature of the force used, or that the injured party was undeserving of the violence. The degree of violence is defined by how realistic the violence is considered to be, and made even stronger if the violence inflicted is considered unfair
>
> (Morrison, 1999, p9).

Kunkel et al (1995) chose to make the following conservative definition of violence as "…any overt depiction of a credible threat of physical force or the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings."

Some broadcasters have adopted their own codes on violence. VisionTV (n.d.), an independent, not-for-profit public service broadcaster in Canada, defines violence as a deliberate act of causing harm to human beings whether it is physical, emotional, social/cultural, intellectual or spiritual in nature. However, the Canadian private broadcasters' voluntary code for regulating violence opted to avoid a specific definition and instead lists examples of violent scenarios which, it suggests, should be approached with caution (Alter, 1997).

Regardless of the various interpretations put on television violence, there are those who view it in a positive light. Jib Fowles in his book *The Case For Television Violence* (1999) attacks the unrelenting and unwarranted "assault" on television violence

calling it a victim of the social phenomena of "moral panics". Fowles, evoking Aristotle's definition of drama as purging aggression or catharsis proposes that televised violence has a similar cathartic role by routinely assisting people to work out "innate aggressiveness and fear" (p119) and he criticises studies showing a connection between television violence and aggressiveness.

Not surprisingly defining violence has played a major part in television content analysis research.

9.1.3 Definitions in TV violence counting

For the early violence counts surveys, violence was defined as having to involve physical violence or a credible threat of violent consequences – "hurting or killing or the threat of hurting and/or killing" (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1990, ¶2). Gerbner's definition and analysis of television violence was used in regular surveys for more than twenty years in the USA, and was also used in the Netherlands (Bouwman & Stappers, 1984), Australia (McCann & Sheehan, 1985), Japan (Iwao, De Sola Pool, & Hagiwora, 1981), Canada (Gosselin *et* al, 1997), and Spain (Busquet, 2001). In New Zealand the Gerbner technique was first used by Ginpil in 1976. The technique was picked up by the Mental Health Foundation for its Media Watch studies (Haines, 1983, Bridgman, 1995). Gerbner also developed a Violence Index in which the level of violence over a period of time referred to the prevalence of violence, and rate of occurrence in TV programmes, but also to the likelihood of the characters being involved in violence (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1990, ¶55). Researchers from Spain, Japan and the United States combined to do a comparative study in their respective countries using the Violence Index (Sutil, Esteban, Takeuchi, Clausen et al., 1995).

Gerbner's definition excluded violence against inanimate objects; and violence where viewers could see the act (shooting, dropping a bomb), but not the consequences, or where viewers could see the consequences (dead bodies, bullet wounds), but not the act. Cumberbatch (1988), a British researcher, added inanimate objects and by doing so extended the dimension of the threat to that of damaging an inanimate object, and New Zealand researchers added to Cumberbatch (Watson et al, 19991), including "images" as well as "acts" where images allowed the unseen connection between acts and consequences.

In 1994 a team of researchers from the Center for Communication Policy at UCLA did a three-year, largely qualitative analysis, of television violence. While claiming not to need a "precise definition", but rather a "contextual framework", their definition of violence ("the act of, attempt at, physical threat of or the consequences of physical force" - UCLA Center for Communication Policy, 1995: ¶7) includes inanimate objects and images. Verbal threats were of secondary importance and treated in much the way as Gerbner - there had to be a credible threat of violent consequences (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1990).

At about the same time as the UCLA study started, another 3-year research programme, the National Television Violence Study (NTVS), got underway (Wilson et al, 1997). Their definition retained the idea of images ("credible threats, behavioral acts, and harmful consequences of unseen violence" - Federman, 1998, p18), but restricted their analysis to animate beings. In looking at reality programmes (programmes showing or discussing real life events the NTVS researchers created a secondary definition of a violent act that was used only when violence was being described verbally, but not shown visually. "Talking about violence" covered "verbal recounting of threats, acts and/or harmful consequences by a person or person-like character appearing on screen or heard from off-screen" (Federman, 1998, p22).

The NTVS methodology has been used in a Mexican analysis of television violence (Lopez, 2001) and in US research into violence in video games (Lachlan, Smith, & Tambourini, 2000). Cumberbatch and others, through the Communications Research Group, have run a series of television violence monitoring exercises for the British Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) over the period from 1993 to 1995 (Communications Research Group, 1996). Their definition of violence incorporated the concept of images and verbal abuse, but cut out reference to inanimate objects. In 1996 the University of Sheffield provided monitoring reports to the now combined BSA/ITC consortium under a modified violence definition (Communications Research Group, 1996, 1998). In this definition, violence against inanimate objects was not counted and the definition of violence is consistent with the NTVS definitions, but excluding the "talking about violence" option (Communications Research Group, 1998). The British definition makes it clear that "actual or potential, intentional or accidental" (p17) violence is included, as is "violence caused by supernatural forces" (p17). With respect images of violence, these were only counted if it was known that in the "destroyed buildings or wrecked cars" (p17) there had been people at the time of the destruction. Verbal abuse is not part of the definition. All monitoring reports after 1995 used the Sheffield definition (Communications Research Group, 1997, 1998; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2000, 2002).

In the middle of this monitoring period the British researchers asked audiences whether or not scenes coded as violent really were violent (Communications Research Group, 1998, 1999). The construct of fairness/unfairness seemed critical to perceptions of violence and had three components:

- the imbalances of power between instigators and targets of violence (uneven distribution of power).
- the extent to which targets were able to handle and counteract violence (helplessness).
- the extent to which targets deserved the violence (deserved). (p42)

This construct has not been incorporated into the primary definition of violence for subsequent counts of violence on British television, but is referred in the post hoc analysis.

Finally in this review of violence definitions, Finnish researchers have used the most inclusive definition covering inanimate objects, implicit threats (verbal abuse) and, in a departure from all other definitions, psychological as well physical harm (Mustonen & Pulkkinen, 1997).

In summary all definitions of television violence include:

- The act of, attempt at, or physical threat of, physical force that does, or could, physically harm an animate being.
- The act can be actual or potential, intentional or accidental, natural or supernatural.

To which can be added:

- Credible verbal threats.
- Images where only the act or consequence of violence are shown, but where a credible link between the two can be made.
- Verbal descriptions of violent acts.
- Acts against inanimate objects.
- Psychological harm (including resulting from verbal abuse and implicit threats).

Finally there is a move to post-hoc definitions where for an act to be defined as violent it has to be seen as unfair to the victim.

The definition we formulated for this study into violence on New Zealand television is consistent with the NTVS and BSC/ITC/BBC definitions which are inclusive of Gerbner's definition and reads as follows:

> A violent act is an act of force that physically harms a human or other animate being. The act may be carried out or just be a credible threat of physical harm. It may or may not result in visible harm. It may be intentional or accidental. It may be an act of nature or of an animate being. It may involve natural or supernatural beings or force. It may be a credible verbal threat of violence, or verbal behaviour which increases the probability of physical violence. It may be a verbal description of an act of violence which is not itself shown. The violent act itself may be shown, or only the consequences of the act.

Our definition excludes three features in the above lists - acts against inanimate objects, verbal descriptions of off-screen violence, and psychological harm. Although we have not incorporated global concepts such as fairness and justification into our working definition of televised violence, the data collected will permit post-hoc analysis of the sample materials to tease out these dimensions. Overall the approach we have taken aims to produce as inclusive measure of the incidence and significance of televised violence as possible, leaving open the possibility of further analysis in the final report phase.

9.2 The rationale behind our coding approach

The validity of any content analysis of televised violence is intimately tied to the way the meaning and coding instruments are designed. What is expected will determine what is found and by extension the limitations and validity of the results. A detailed discussion of the coding schemes is to be found in Appendix H. In this section, the purpose is to deal with issues of definition as these pertain to the core concepts of violence and effects.

In relation to the coding of violence, there is considerable variation in the research literature. One way to summarise the range of definitions is to think of there being different modes of what is counted as violence. Such modes are not exclusive and as far as actual content is concerned will be found to interact in various ways. They are distinct in the sense that they place a focal emphasis on a particular dimension of televised violence. They can be summarised as follows:

a) **Manifest or objective coding:** the most commonly cited definition in this mode is that proposed by Gerbner (Signoreilli, Gerbner, et al., 1995) which focuses on physical force (with or without a weapon, against self or other) compelling action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed or actually hurting or killing. This definition excludes counting violent actions that are unintended or those that are not related to direct harm. Threats or menacing behaviour, which do not result in overt expressions of physical force, are not counted. However, the definition does include acts of nature such as earthquakes and fires on the assumption that these are intentionally part of the script or that a particular story is selected precisely because it contains such "scenarios".

b) **Latent or subjective coding:** this mode has emerged out of the perceived inadequacies of limiting the counting of violence acts to overt physical expressions. Thus, the UCLA and NTVS studies include threats under the count of violent actions and to count indirect expressions of aggression such as vandalism and forms of verbal behaviour such as malicious gossip and the vehement use of "bad" language. Latent subjective violence is seen as a weapon used by the weak against the strong and, therefore, is related to social and/or physical inequality between different kinds of people – gender being a particularly salient example. One particular finding is that verbal "violence" has a halo effect, which magnifies the actual perception of physical violence found within a programme (Brown & Tedeschi, 1976). A study conducted by the BSA (5 June, 1999) tends to confirm this result with bad language and sex scenes giving greater offence than physical actions. Once the notion of indirect forms of violence –aggression or anti-social behaviour, offensiveness - is accepted then other kinds of qualitative judgements come into play.

c) **Moral coding** – the emphasis here is whether a depicted verbal or physical behaviour is good or bad, fair or unfair, ethically justified or unjustified by the dramatic or actual circumstances, selfish or altruistic. What matters here is less

the actual number of direct or indirect violent acts than the overarching moral purpose. This purpose is a summative or post-hoc evaluation of the moral force of violent depictions in terms of their immediate justification and in the context of the narrative as a whole. Research conducted by the British Independent Television Commission exemplifies this type of coding approach. (Centre for Communication Research, 1998, 1999 - see Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002)

d) **Reality coding** – In this view the influence of televised violence depends on the perception of its relationship to the real world or at least the reality invoked by the dramatic action. Realism is a slippery concept – true to life –probable, possible - true to the vision of life within a particular genre or fictional realm, true to what ought to be as opposed to what is. But overall there seems to be a persistent emphasis in audience perceptions on the reality of perceived depictions compared to everyday life. Thus violent actions in "unreal" settings such as cartoons which are physical very violent are less disturbing that such actions in settings that seem or are actually real. Similarly violent scenarios set in culturally distant or "foreign" locations, e.g. American or British programmes, cause less concern than actions set at home. If it is recognised that different genres have their own version of what is "reality" then these may affect the perception of violent depictions as harmless entertainment. (Potter, Warren, et al., 1997). The recent ascension of reality programming to a staple of prime time with shows such as the Survivor series or The Osbournes have added a new set of techniques and production standards. These standards carry with them a notion of realism as authenticity.

e) **Social cognition coding** – in this approach, televised violence is less important in and of itself but rather for the constructs it provides for viewer understanding of his or her own world. "Who is in control, who has the right to control, who can get away with what against whom, where the safe and dangerous places are and what are the chances of encountering of falling victim to violence may be" (Signorielli, 1990). Where social cognition is emphasised, the range of violent acts is expanded to include attacks by vicious animals, natural disasters and distortions of natural forms – all of which may induce fear. (Cantor, 1994). Social cognition approaches refer generally to long-term effects that have a bearing on phenomena such as "mental geographies", worldviews and ideologies.

f) **Professional coding**– this mode focuses on the staging of violent scenes and scenarios. If scenes of violence are rendered in a virtuoso manner, with the latest computer enhanced techniques, does the excitement imparted to such scenes undercut the "moral" of the story imposed by the final scenes in which good triumphs over evil? Does the glamour and excitement imparted to scenes of confrontation between superheroes and villains glamorise conflict and celebrate winning at any cost and by any means. Is violence itself glamorised by the use of exciting cinematic and video techniques? Do the use of techniques that violate the parameters of natural perception such as body-

morphing or micro-photographic effects showing bullets entering bodies, contain messages about the integrity of the self and the body? Or are such effects simply disturbing? (Gibson, 1987). It is particularly important to note that over the last decade, techniques of image rendering have transformed the look of action sequences.

The six modes identified above are, not of course, exclusive and indeed many studies include at least some of them in the analysis of content. Yet there remains a fundamental premise that such approaches share. They all to some degree assume a straight line of influence from violent content to some form of violent behaviour in viewers. (Potter, 1999). This adherence to the direct impact or "silver bullet" model of influence, however qualified, assumes viewer passivity.

For some researchers this premise is a serious flaw that renders much of the research invalid (Weaver, 1996) Even if content can be accurately counted, do actual viewers read content in the same way and react in the same way as the extrapolation from content analysis suggests? Are viewers more active and "creative" in their interpretation of content and are, thus, responsible for their own consumption of content? These kinds of questions have been addressed by researchers who adopt ethnographic methods (see discussion of the Stirling group's work above, Chapter 6). The findings from such studies indicate that the content of violent scenes cannot be separated from their dramatic embedding or from the wider context of viewer experience as *kinds of persons*.

Ethnographic studies clearly represent a welcome corrective to the overly mechanical concepts of audience passivity. But the evidence of audience interpretation does not conclusively prove the absence of influence, only that is not one-way. Producers and audiences can be conceptualised as involved in an ongoing negotiation of content. This leads us to identify a seventh mode of effects:

g) Transactional coding - interpretative coding concepts are viable because producers have long included them into the coding of content as dramatic values that will appeal to audiences. This appeal is not a hypothetical process since it is based increasingly on audience survey through the very kinds of techniques favoured by active audience theorists – focus groups and opinion surveys. Nor should a certain convergence between aesthetic coding of programmes and audience experiences be unexpected, audiences have an extensive experience of televisual formats and forms and may use these as scripts for their own lives (Huesmann, 1986). Active audience approaches are not therefore diametrically opposed to the content analysis of televised texts nor are they spared considering a particularly kind of influence – the reinforcement of attitudes that audiences already have in respect of the world outside the screen. Ironically, if there is any theory that finds strong endorsement in popular consciousness, it is the theory of direct impact (Laugesen, March 30, 2003).

9.3 Our design and methodology

9.3.1 The sample

The major research into the level of violence on television has analysed at least a week or a constructed week of television programmes. Media Watch (Haines, 1983, Bridgman 1995) and the Massey University Study (Watson et al, 1991) covered a set week. Media Watch covered from 6am to midnight, and Massey ran for 24 hours on the three free-to-air channels. NTVS created a composite week of television from 6am to 11pm across 23 channels (free-to-air and pay TV) over a period on 21 weeks, but excluding holidays (Smith et al, 1998). The British research (BSC/ITC) from 1993 to 1995 used a fixed week and covered only "prime time" viewing 5.30pm to 12.00 midnight (Communications Research Group, 1997), but moved in 1996 to sampling two composite weeks (spring/summer and autumn/winter) collected over two seven week periods and covering by 1997, five free-to-air (terrestrial) channels and four pay-TV (satellite) channels. Composite weeks better ensure the representativeness of the selections (Smith et al, 1998) and "void the distortions created by seasons of particular types of programmes or significant world events"(Communications Research Group, 1997, p28).

Media Watch only sampled drama; the Massey and the British surveys covered all programmes on in the period of sampling. NTVS excluded hard news (but not news magazines or current affairs programmes), religious programmes, game shows, infomercials/home shopping, instructional programmes and sports. These four surveys provided the key points of comparison for the data analysis along with a fifth survey series from the Centre for Media Public Affairs (Lichter et al., 1994, 1999, 2000) which was added later because of the longitudinal analysis it provides over the 90's in the USA. It is a drama only survey, but covers a composite week.

Our intention was to tape a constructed week over a seven-week period. However the timetable for beginning the invasion of Iraq was obvious to us, as were the timelines for the completion of the research. Consequently we felt that to avoid the distortion to violence counts that the invasion would bring, it would be preferable to record a full week of television prior to the invasion. The timeline for the research did not allow for us to create a constructed sample after the invasion was completed.

We also made a decision to focus on viewing times of 6am to 9am and 3pm to 11pm Monday to Thursday, with Friday going through to midnight, and 6am to 12pm on Saturday and 6am to 11pm on Sunday. The later finishing times on Friday and Saturday acknowledge that children stay up later on those two evenings. Our recording then covers the period from Friday 14 March to Thursday 20 March, the day that the "pre-emptive" strike on Baghdad occurred.

We have recorded on the following channels: *free-to-air*: TV1, TV2, TV3, TV4, Prime; *pay TV*: Sky 1, Nickelodeon, Sky Movies. This covers the five national free-to-air channels, and the most accessible pay TV channels suitable for this research. The pay

TV channels we have selected are available both on UHF and digital platforms making them more accessible. Three other channels are also available on UHF (Trackside, Discovery and Sky Sport) all of which substantially meet of our criteria for exclusion in our sample because they are likely to have low to nil counts of violence.

Criteria for exclusion: We have recorded a total of 91 hours on each channel, giving a total of 728 hours. From this sample we excluded religious programmes, game shows, infomercials/home shopping, instructional programmes (including home/garden improvement, cooking and travel programmes) and non-contact sports. In addition, some programmes were repeat-screened within the sample and were not be coded twice. The sample coded was predicted therefore to amount to some 550 hours (out of the 728 hours to be recorded). Excluded genre were still part of the violence count in that they showed as nil violent scenes.

9.3.2 The coding schedule

In order to catch the complexity of televised violence and its possible effects, it is proposed that the coding schedule was structured around three macro-levels of coding – the incident, the scene or sequence and the programme (Mustonen & Pulkkinen, 1997). These macro-levels or meta-codes subsume the codings from *a* to *f* noted above.

Level One: Coding of manifest, objective and latent, subjective incidence of televised violence. The coding level here was interactions between perpetrators and the targets of violence at the level of the ***incident***. In the research literature the kinds of effects thought be involved at this level are imitation, disinhibition, activation or triggering, addiction and generalisation from novel behaviour. Counting at this level replicates the majority of previous research in New Zealand. Focal measure: frequency

Level Two: Coding for Reality and Professional production values. The coding here focused on the ***scene*** in order to measure the attractiveness or intensity of violent depictions. Focal measure: Intensity or graphicness. Because of the complexity of the task of integrating different methods of coding and the time frame for the analysis, we elected to omit the scene level, but to transfer measures of this into the next level.

Level Three: The coding here focused on the ***programme*** as a totality. Violent acts were treated as messages about the nature of the individual and his or her place in the community, society and the cosmos. The coding level here focused on social cognitions and moral precepts and is primarily implicated in effects such as the acquisition, re-enforcement and change of attitudes, beliefs and values. Focal measure: cultural significance or the big questions of existence. This level of coding is more obviously concerned with consequences than the first two levels.

A 17-page manual (see Appendix J) was created covering thirteen different sections for coding at the level of the incident, and 8 at the level of the programme, giving a total 126 coding cells at the incident level and 106 at programme level.

The meta-coding levels suggested above are broadly consistent with previous studies. The NTVS (Smith et al, 1998) study identified three levels at which coding occurs. These are the "incident", "the scene" and "the programme". The incident is equivalent to Gerbner's (1972) definition of an episode and to Cumberbatch's (1988) "single event". Gerbner describes an episode as an uninterrupted scene of violent action where there is no major introduction of new protagonists or weapons (cf. Haines, 1983). The NTVS scene is a series of violent events that maintain a "narrative flow" without significant break and is equivalent to Cumberbatch's sequence (cf. Watson et al., 1991) where the violent acts "stem from the same provocation" and "happen in the same location", are seen as one event. With both these definitions there can be breaks in action as long as these are small and do not disrupt the feeling of the action being an extended sequence. While Cumberbatch's coding does distinguish between event and sequence, in the New Zealand (Watson et al., 1991) report there is no such distinction made, and British reports (Communications Research Group, 1998, 1999; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2000, 2002) refer to only "scenes" of violence. While NTVS reports contain incident, scene and programme level analysis, most other analyses only have a measure at the episode, sequence or scene level and another at the level of the programme (see Appendix I for a detailed description of the components of incident, scene and programme).

It might be thought that increasing the range of values coded would increase the actual level of recorded violence. But it was not the intention to aggregate the scores across the three meta-codical levels. The reportage of results will not be combined across the levels but show the scores in each level. The levels themselves – frequency, intensity and cultural significance – are not necessarily inter-related and can vary independently. It should also be stressed that meta-codes are not qualities of texts so much as ways of reading the recorded sample for the presence or absence of different kinds of effects or consequences.

9.3.3 Recruitment and training of coders

Because in New Zealand age, gender and culture play a significant role in attitudes and perceptions of violence on TV (Bassett & Shuker, 1993; Ballard, Sheldon, & Dixon, 1997; Dickinson, Hill, & Zwaga, 2000), we decided to recruit through AUT and UNITEC 24 coders following the matrix to obtain some balance across these features. In all we began with six Pasifika (Samoan, Tongan and Cook Island), six Maori, six Pakeha/European and six Asian (all Chinese, five from China and one from Indonesia) of which eight were be under 25 years of age, eight between 25 and 44, eight 45 years and older, and twelve were men and twelve women (Table 9.1). Other relevant demographic material such as marital and parental status, television viewership, and socio-economic status was collected. Each coder was to code about

25 hours of television. We lost one coder during the training and a two more after the coder focus groups and so ended up with 21 coders.

The coders undertook 15 hours of intensive classroom training and approximately 20 hours of homework in front of television sets where they mastered the manual of coding instructions (Appendix J) applied to the following genres: cartoon, soap, comedy, police/action drama, movie, reality-based, documentary/news magazine. The work they produced was assessed in classroom and in tutorial sessions with two experienced coders. While coders were exposed to arrange of material most of the training focussed on programmes that are difficult to code because of the volume of incidents, their brevity, and their complexity. A reliability study was done in which all coders had to code the same programme (an episode of *Nikita*), but it was not been possible to analyse this work before the coding commenced. The coders' ability to proceed was assessed in tutorials which examined the consistency of their work on set pieces. We intend to produce reliability coefficients across all measures, but look for consistency from the more objective measures – e.g. type of violence, mean number of violent acts, number of perpetrators and victims involved. We found, as expected, high reliability for judgments around the assessment of pain, harm, motivation, emotional response, attractiveness or goodness of character, justification, fairness and appropriateness of reward and punishment as some variation is to be expected.

Table 9.1: **Recruitment matrix for coders**

	Pasifika		**Maori**		**Pakeha/ European**		**Asian**	
under 25	men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women
25-44	men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women
45 and over	men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women

The actual coding took place over a period of 3 weeks, and was done in the homes of the coders. Coders were given a batch of two tapes at a time to code (six hours of coding) and a 15 minute segment from each batch was randomly selected for recoding by one of the research team as a check. All coding was checked with the coder to ensure that all appropriate sections were coded, that obvious coding contradictions were reviewed (e.g. death is the type of injury, but depicted harm is scores as none), and that coder rigidity (where coders appear to be routinely using the same category over and over again) was identified. Where obvious errors occur, coders were asked to recode the offending sections. Reliability coefficients will be calculated at the end of coding against the material recoded by research team members.

9.3.4 Coder reliability

A statistical analysis was run to check variation, consistency and reliability of coding across all our coders. This found that inter-coder reliability was very high, well above the usually accepted standard.
All coders were given an episode of *Nikita* to code and the results are analysed in this section to give some indication of the reliability amongst coders. After some correction of results as a result of this "practise run" it is likely that the reliability of coders might have increased afterwards. In addition, a checking coder was employed to carry out independent coding of a small sample of the tapes, but these codes are not yet to hand.

The first of the checks examined the extent to which the 21 coders varied in their average attribution of coding categories, across the full range of incident-level coding characteristics. This information is summed from the incident-level codings and then the 21 coders compared (see Appendix N). It is arguable that the reliability of coding of "objective" characteristics is likely to be higher than that for 'subjective' characteristics. Indeed, the "research design" involved in the selection of coders was chosen entirely to allow for variability in terms of cultural and other norms. The table in Appendix N provides not only the mean, standard deviation of the mean and standard deviation, but also the coefficient of variation (i.e. the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean). It is difficult to set a precise standard beyond which the standard of coding is considered to be poor. Certainly a coefficient of variance of above 1 would be unacceptable. In fact, such indications of high variability only applied to rather difficult and often relatively rare items in our coding, especially to "don't know" codings.

It seems that there was considerable difficulty in achieving comparability in relation to the coding of the socio-demographic characteristics of participants shown on screen. The subjective weightings of degree of harm/pain etc. were also moderately higher (as expected) in relation to the more objective characteristics.

The matrix of multiple codings was also subject to multi-variate analyses. The correlation matrix of each coder by each other yielded very high correlations, although clearly two or three of the coders achieved a slightly lower level of consistency (although even these were above the normal level required for such reliabilities). A principal component factor analysis found that one factor accounted for over 90 per cent of the variation. A formal reliability analysis found the alpha coefficient of inter-coder scores to be very high, and well above the usual standard required.

9.3.5 Opinions of individual coders: Questionnaires and focus groups

All coders were given a short questionnaire to fill out (see Appendix L) covering basic demographic material and the following questions:

- What kinds of materials do you normally watch?
- Why do you watch them?
- Of the materials you coded which did you feel was the most violent and why?
- What aspects of the materials did you find most offensive?
- What in your view was the most realistic content you viewed? Why?
- What are their personal impressions of how violence is constructed and what such constructions might have on others in their family.

A key part of training is to give the coders an opportunity to debrief about what they are experiencing as coders. We used the debrief sessions to conduct four cultural focus groups (Maori, Pakeha/European, Pasifika, Asian) which invited the coders to reflect on the materials they have seen in light of experience of training and coding of television violence. The focus group covered such areas as the coders TV watching habits and choices, the degree to which they felt the material they had practised on was or was not violent or offensive and why, and their views on whether violent television presents a risk to them or others, such as children. The groups brought these issues into the focus group's discussion and sought to find whether there are distinct cultural positions around viewing television violence and the impact that it might have on behaviour. The findings are discussed in Chapter 13 below.

The questionnaire and focus groups provide some indications of the way in which different kinds of New Zealand viewers respond to televised violence which can then be related to the results of the coding process and other ethnographic literature

9.3.6 Methods of analysis

All the programme coding entered into an Excel spreadsheet. SPSS and SYSTAT was used for statistical analysis of the quantitative material. Thematic analysis of the interview and discussion material was managed through QSR-NUDIST and Excel. Ethnicity, age and gender and other demographic features of the coders were variables in the analysis.

The data analysis compares the levels of violence obtained in our survey with other quantitative surveys of television violence in New Zealand and other countries. We compare our data with five survey methods – three international and two New Zealand. This involved creating a simulation with data that matched as closely as we could the methods of the other studies (see Appendix G). The first comparison study is the US National Television Violence Survey (NTVS) done from 1994 to 1997 (Smith et al., 1998). They included all channels in their study. Their coding did not include

accidents (unless occurring during an intention act of violence), promotions or advertisements. In addition they did not assess or incorporate into their analysis news programmes (as distinct from news magazine programmes), sport, talk, religion, infomercials, instructional or game show programmes).

The British Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) surveys cover all programmes and include accidents. They do not include promotions or advertising in their analysis and they only cover from 5.30pm to 12.00am. Their analysis of free-to-air channels is more comprehensive than for pay channels and our simulation includes only free-to-air channels. They also count scenes and not incidents, which may deflate their episode scores compared to other methods of counting. We could not easily adjust our data to create a scene analysis, but we configured it to replicate the other features of the BSC surveys.

Finally in the international area, there are surveys by the Centre for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA). These surveys again focus on drama, but cover both free-to-air and pay television over a 24-hour period. Again promotions and advertisements are excluded, but the method has very similar criteria, only excluding violence towards animals.

The New Zealand surveys were the ones done by Massey University researchers and the Media Watch series. Massey's study covered 24 hours of free-to-air channels, using a methodology very similar to the BSC studies (Watson et al, 1991). In creating their simulation we excluded promotions and advertising and restricted the data set to free-to-air channels

The New Zealand Media Watch Studies used the Gerbner method. Gerbner only surveyed drama. Again promotions and advertisement are excluded and images of violence, violence towards animals, non-verbal threats and behaviours inciting violence are not counted. Although we do not specifically record images we extracted incidents where there had been an image of violence, rather than an act observed from execution to aftermath. Images are defined as the aftermath of violence (not an accident or a threat) where there is depicted harm to a victim but there is no clear act of violence and often no identified perpetrator, or as an action where there is a credibly assumed victim, but the means of violence is remote (using heavy weapons) and while there is there is a reasonable expectation of harm, there is no depiction of harm or pain.

9.4 Characteristics of the database

Seven hundred and twenty eight hours of television on eight channels were recorded on the week beginning Friday March the 14th and ending on the 20th as the first missiles were falling on Baghdad in opening moments of the second Gulf War. Two tapes were defective, meaning that only 722 hours were actually recorded. For one of those tapes programmes repeats meant that no programme material was missed. Table 9.2 summarises the results of the recording and coding for the eight channels.

Table 9.2: Summary of the recording and coding

Channel	**free-to-air or pay TV**	**total hours targeted**	**Infomercial hours**	**hours not coded due to errors**	**total hours assessed**	**% of target done**	**hours preassessed as zero violence, and not coded**	**hours coded**	**number of programmes assessed**
TV1	free-to-air	91.0	0.0	2.0	89.0	98%	19.6	69.4	128
TV2	free-to-air	91.0	0.0	0.0	91.0	100%	15.3	75.8	169
TV3	free-to-air	91.0	1.5	0.0	89.5	98%	12.7	76.8	158
TV4	free-to-air	91.0	53.9	0.0	37.1	100%	1.0	36.1	42
Prime	free-to-air	91.0	0.0	1.0	90.0	99%	22.5	67.5	129
Sky1	pay TV	91.0	0.0	0.0	91.0	100%	25.7	65.3	117
Sky Movies	pay TV	91.0	0.0	0.0	91.0	100%	0.3	90.8	73
Nickelodeon	pay TV	91.0	0.0	1.0	90.0	99%	0.0	90.0	195
Total		**728.0**	**55.4**	**4.0**	**668.6**	**99.4%**	**97**	**572**	**1012**

When we closed the data for analysis 4 hours of programmes had either not been coded or entered onto a spreadsheet. In addition there were 55.4 hours of infomercials that were omitted from the analysis. A further 97 hours were not coded but included into the analysis as programmes with no incidents of violence. These were non-contact, non-extreme sports programmes, talk, game or light entertainment shows, documentaries, live music, travelogues, cultural, religious, instructional or do-it-yourself programmes such as gardening, cooking, dating, auctions, antiques and home buying and home makeovers. In addition, 40 hours of programmes that were repeated were not coded the second and third time round. A total of 668.6 hours of television were assessed and coded – 99.4% of our target. A total of 1012 programmes were assessed and 800 coded and analysed.

10

Content Analysis: Core Findings

In this chapter we present the central findings of our content analysis. Chapter 11 presents more detailed findings on selected dimensions. The core findings break down the incidence of violence by:

* channel
* programme material, versus promotions and advertisements
* children's versus adult viewing times
* genre
* country of origin
* comparison with earlier New Zealand content analyses
* comparison with international content analyses.

Our sample contained a total of 8217 incidents with violence, including those in repeat screenings. Some 25 percent of these occurred in promotions for upcoming television programmes, and 6 percent in advertisements. Within programmes the overall level of violent incidents per screened hour was 8.02.

Table 10.1: Overview of incidents of violence on NZ television, 2003

	Programmes assessed	Hours assessed	Incidents of violence	% of total incidents	Incidents/ Hour	Programmes with violence	% of programmes with
Programme data	1012	669	5363	65%	8.02	591	58%
Promotion data	800	530	2035	25%	3.84	458	57%
Advertising data	800	530	490	6%	0.92	261	33%
Programme data in programmes assessed for violence in promotions and advertising	800	530	4976	61%	9.39	647	81%
All data in programmes assessed for violence in promotions and advertising (excluding repeat screenings)	800	530	7501	91%	14.16	647	81%
Repeat screenings	60	40	716	9%	17.90	56	93%
Total	1012	669	8217	100%	na	705	na

Table 10.1 sets out the overall shape of the analysis. In comparisons our data set is labelled NZ2003. In the course of this analysis we produce several configurations of

the data set. These configurations entail reanalysing our data according to the count definitions used in other studies. Because our measures are more comprehensive, we can re-analyse our results, simulating how they would look if we had adopted the measures used in other studies. Generally speaking, NZ2003 is unusual in that we not only coded the violence with programmes but also the violence in any promotions or advertisement that were played during the commercial breaks. Because we did not view all programmes, we assessed violence in promotions and advertising only in the 530 hours of programmes we had actually viewed, out of the total of 669 hours recorded.

Our sample week was recorded in March 2003 in order to avoid covering a period that might be dominated by footage from coverage of the looming second Gulf War. Table 10.2 shows the incidents of violence in the main, early evening newscasts on TV1 and TV3 over the week of our survey. The large increase in screened incidents of violence as that war began in earnest on the night of Thursday 20th March is clear.

Table 10.2: Incidents of violence in New Zealand 6 pm news, 14-20 March 2003 (excluding promotions and advertising).

	One News	3 News
Friday	13	9
Saturday	10	0
Sunday	3	3
Monday	6	14
Tuesday	0	12
Wednesday	0	2
Thursday	26	19

10.1 Violence on different channels

Table 10.3 shows the great range in violent content across the channels, from 2.5 incidents per hour in programmes shown on TV1 to 13.4 on Nickelodeon, and from 44% of programmes with violence on TV1 to 90% on Sky Movies. The incidence data from Table 10.3 (column 2) are graphed in Figure 10.1.

TV1 is the closest New Zealand has to a public broadcasting channel in its programming. It shows the lowest percentage of violent programmes. TV2 is also part of the publicly owned Television New Zealand, but has incidence figures similar to a commercial free-to-air broadcast network. The other free-to-air channels look similar in their levels of violence to the American broadcast networks (see international comparisons, below).

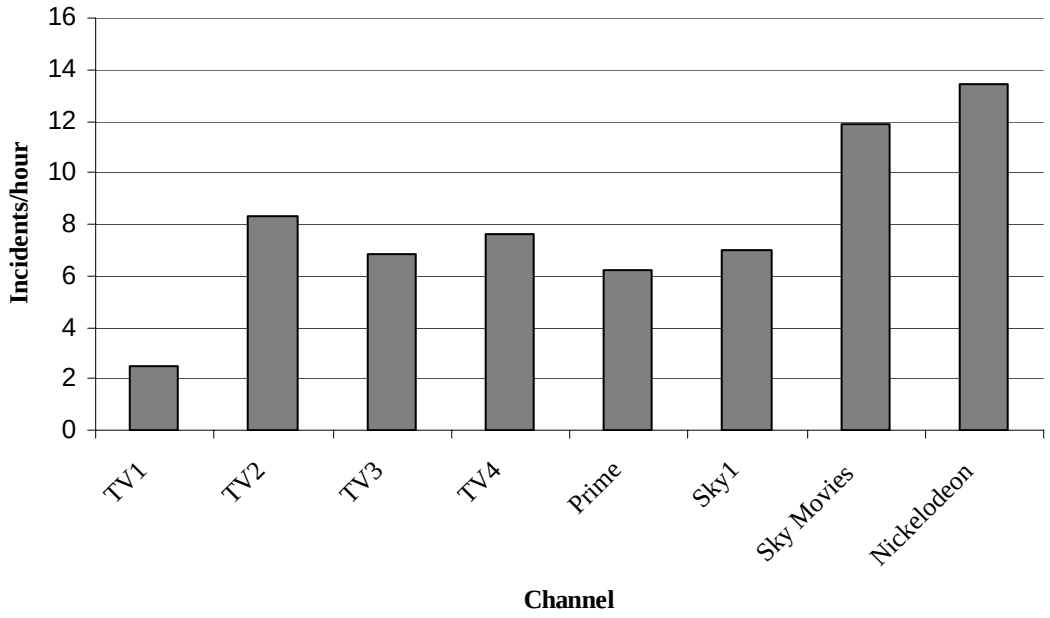

Figure 10.1: Count of violent incidents on the 8 sampled channels, NZ2003, (programme material only, excluding advertisements and promotions).

These incident count variations reflect differences in the genres of material shown on each channel. Nickelodeon runs programmes directed at children. Most of these are animations, which other studies show to have high violence counts. The same is true of movies, which explains Sky Movies high incident count. The ability of cable and satellite television to specialise in particular genres means that large differences in levels of violence on particular channels can be expected. Drama-focussed channels will have high counts; whereas documentary, sport and light entertainment channels will have low counts. Within the free-to-air channels, those which have comprehensive news and news magazine programmes (TV1, TV3 and Prime) could be expected to have lower violence counts (unless there is a major conflict being covered).

Table 10.3: Violent incidents on the 8 sampled channels, NZ2003 (programme material only, excluding advertisements and promotions)

Channels	Incidents	Incidents /Hour	% Programmes with violence	Programmes with no violence or not coded	
TV1	219	2.5	44%	30	23%
TV2	757	8.3	48%	19	11%
TV3	609	6.8	53%	21	13%
TV4	280	7.6	67%	1	2%
Prime	566	6.2	50%	38	29%
Sky1	632	7.0	51%	40	34%
Sky Movies	1085	11.9	90%	1	1%
Nickelodeon	1215	13.4	77%	2	1%
Total	**5363**	**8.02**	**58%**	**152**	**15%**

We also need to note from Table 10.3, the proportion of programmes assessed as having zero violence, but not coded. About a quarter of TV1's programmes were assessed as zero violence, possibly reducing the violence count on that channel. However, even more programmes were assessed as zero on Sky 1 (mainly dating programmes and talk shows) and on Prime (DIY shows, game shows, current affairs).

10.2 Promotions and advertisements

Thus far we have only considered violence in programmes – Table 10.4 examines the level of violence within promotions and advertising that surround the programmes, with the count displayed in Figure 10.2. There are few international studies of violence in promotions and advertising. In New Zealand, Bridgman (1995) reported levels of violence in promotions within local drama programmes as 0.8 incidents/hour in 1992 and 0.6 in 1995 – about 10% of the total incidents in those years.

In NZ2003, for about 11% of programmes, the only violence is in the promotions or advertising. Of the programmes we assessed more than half have violent promotions for other programmes, and one in three will have a violent advertisement in the commercial breaks. Overall promotions and advertisements provided more than a third of all the violent incidents we saw in our survey.

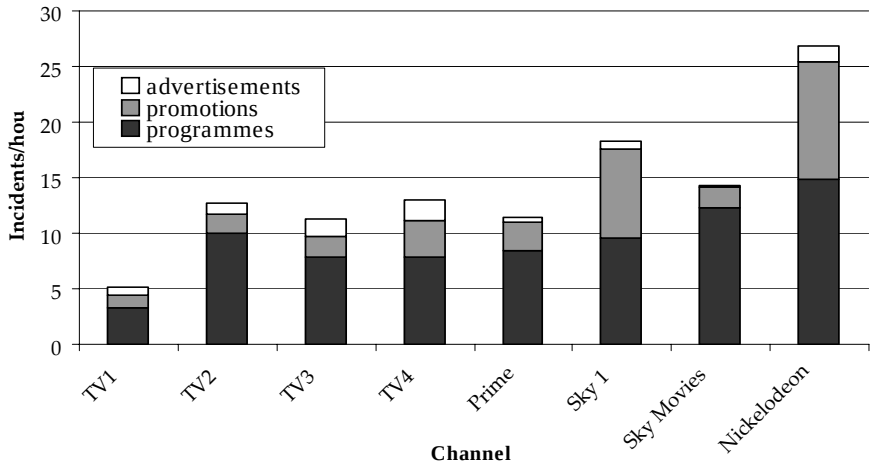

Figure 10.2: Violent incidents in promotions, advertisements and programmes on 8 channels, NZ2003.

Thus it appears from the NZ2003 data that there has been a three-fold increase in the use of violence in promotions over the intervening period. Analysis of violence occurring in promotions is a key point of difference in our survey compared to most international work.

For Sky 1 promotions and advertising contribute almost half of the violent incidents screened and are associated with almost every programme. Nickelodeon and TV4 show a similar pattern. Even low-violence channels such as TV1 have a violent promotions or advertisements associated with half their programmes. Sky 1 has just over half of the 61 crime/action/sci-fi/horror programmes in the survey and vigorous promotion of these programmes is responsible for its high violence count.

Nickelodeon is targeted at older children and younger teenagers, and adopts an explicitly anarchic approach in much of its programming and presentation – witness it's screening of a 'no-parents' logo as part of channel promotion. On this channel promotions often consist of a montage of rapid–fire clips from cartoon series, each involving a character having an accident or being 'bopped' or 'zapped'. The advertisements are often a promotion for Nickelodeon itself rather than any particular programme. A channel mascot will slip and become a splat on the screen on which the channel's moniker is rendered.

Advertisements contain violence for a number of reasons. Firstly, they may advertise an upcoming movie for theatre release such as the R18 *Blade II*, or a police action or animation video (*Inspector Morse, The Muppets*) and focus on some of the violent acts in these productions.

Then there is a small category of advertisements which show aspects of an accident or a violent act as part of a public health campaign: in an *Accident Compensation Corporation* advertisement a woman is shown falling on to a plate glass table. Many road safety advertisements show some of the consequences or drinking or speeding while driving. Television campaigns against domestic violence show both the threatening context and the outcomes of domestic violence.

Table 10.4: Violent incidents in promotions, advertisements and programmes on 8 channels, NZ2003 (derived from the coded 800 programmes and 530 hours).

Channels	Incidents/Hour in				% of Total violence	% of Programmes with violence in the promotions and ads.
	Promotions	Advertisements	Programmes	TOTAL		
TV1	1.07	0.70	3.25	5.01	35%	49%
TV2	1.72	0.99	9.99	12.70	21%	39%
TV3	1.84	1.56	7.93	11.32	30%	44%
TV4	3.38	1.77	7.76	12.91	40%	95%
Prime	2.61	0.46	8.39	11.45	27%	58%
Sky 1	8.02	0.72	9.59	18.33	48%	89%
Sky Movies	1.77	0.22	12.28	14.27	14%	47%
Nickelodeon	10.69	1.29	14.81	26.78	45%	90%
Total	**3.84**	**0.92**	**9.39**	**14.16**	**34%**	**61%**

Finally, advertisements seek to attract attention to products by using violence. Energy drinks are good example. In an advertisement for the drink *V*, an old man is pushed into a hedge. An advertisement for *E2* a man has his underwear removed. *Mizone* is advertised through a robotic character being destroyed. Other commercials make specific use of animation. Two snowmen fight in a *FruJu* ad, and *Hubba Bubba* bubble gum has a character smashed through a wall or window. Many of the acts of violence are trivial – a character faints in an *Auckland Savings Bank* advertisement, a boy with a hose sprays a man to advertise *Raro* juice, and a woman falls off her chair trying to read the *New Zealand Herald*. However, deaths are shown in a few advertisements – most notably when the *NZ Employment Service* used pictures of the nuclear explosion over Hiroshima to promote its mediation services.

10.3 Children's viewing times

In New Zealand, children's viewing times run from 6.00 am to 8.30 pm in the weekends, and between 6.00 am and 9.00 am, and 3.00pm and 8.30 pm, during the week. There is some variation on these times during school holidays. Our content analysis does not show major differences in incident levels between the two time periods (Table 10.5, incidence data graphed in Figure 10.3), with the most child oriented channels (TV2, TV3 and Nickelodeon) being more violent during children's viewing time.

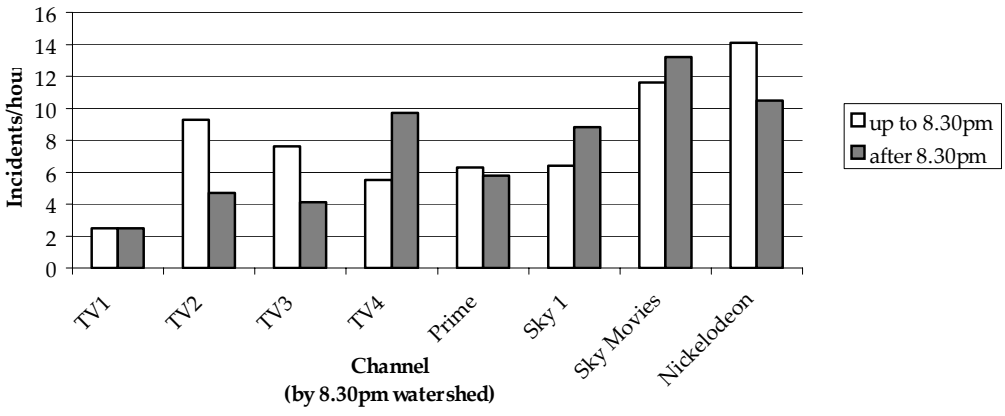

Figure 10.3: Incidence of violence before and after the 8:30pm watershed between adult and children's viewing times.

Nickelodeon shows much the same programmes in adult viewing time (8.30pm to 5am) as it does in children's viewing time, but in the 8.30pm to midnight slot, the programmes that it shows (competitions and dramas rather than animations, repeats of programmes shown children's viewing times) are some of its least violent. In general, where rates in children's viewing times are high relative to those in adult time, it is because of the presence of animations in children's' as against adult viewing times. Channels with a focus on young adult audiences (Sky1 and TV4) do seem to run the more violent programmes in adult's viewing times.

Table 10.5: Incidence of violence before and after the 8.30 pm watershed between adult and children's viewing times.

Channels	Incidents/hour before 8.30 pm	Incidents/hour after 8.30 pm
TV1	2.46	2.45
TV2	9.29	4.74
TV3	7.62	4.05
TV4	5.53	9.68
Prime	6.33	5.78
Sky 1	6.43	8.82
Sky Movies	11.57	13.23
Nickelodeon	14.13	10.51
Total	**8.17**	**7.40**

Typically in international studies, children's viewing times have been found to have much higher incidents of violence than adult viewing times (after 8.30pm). Gerbner reports rates as high as 25 incidents per hour for children's viewing times (1980). The New Zealand Media Watch content analyses did not show consistent major differences between the time slots, ranging between –1.7 to +4.0 incidents/hour over the last 5 content analyses, although the trend in the 90's is for children's viewing times to have a higher incidence of violence – up to 64% higher in 1992 (Bridgman, 1995). The British content analyses have also shown an increasing proportion of violence in children's viewing times with their 2001 survey showing identical proportions for children's and adult's viewing times (Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002).

The consideration of children's' viewing patterns raises the question of the relative impact of animation as a form of violent depiction. As Chapter 12 suggests the relative seriousness of, or to put the matter slightly differently, the potential for harm from, televised violence is not merely dependent on the nature of the audience, but on the nature of the genre or format.

10.4 Genre

In looking at how violence is distributed across channels we inevitably face the issue of genre and its relationship to violence counts. Table 10.6 and Figure 10.4 set out the impact of genre in both fictional and non-fictional categories. Fictional programmes contribute 82% of the violent incidents in programmes, and children's programmes are responsible for about half of this, with action/crime/sci-fi/horror series and movies also making substantial contributions. There can be high counts of violence in non-fiction categories, such as extreme sport, but their overall contribution to violence levels would seem to be slight. Contact sports (rugby and rugby league) barely register. The coding process for these sports ignores violence that is committed within the rules of the game (a punishing tackle, a drop kick inside the

wrestling ring) and focuses on "illegal" violence (punches in rugby, or using a chair to hit your opponent in wrestling).

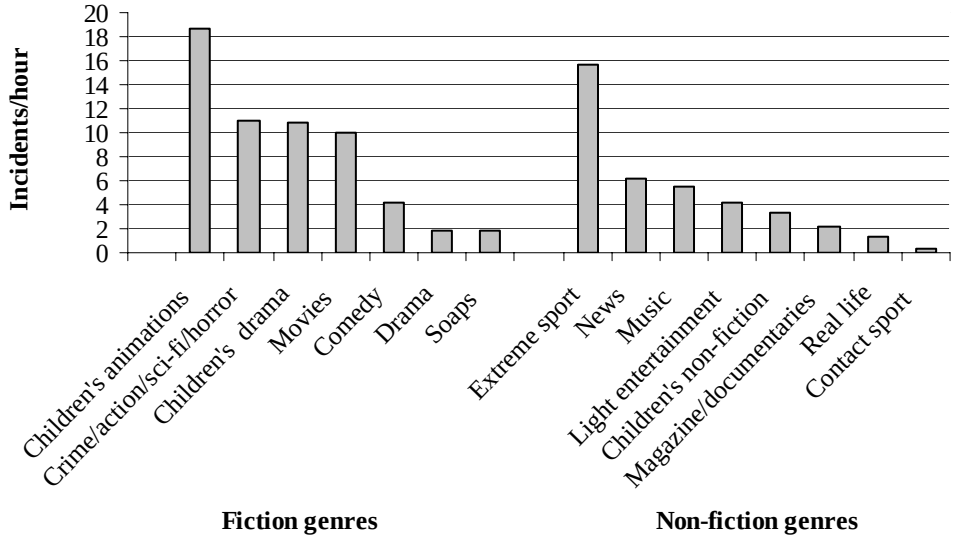

Figure 10.4: Distribution of violent incidents by genre, NZ2003.

Animations have very high violence counts and are typically directed at children. However, some animations have a wider audience - either a family audience (*The Simpsons*), an older teen or young adult audience (*South Park*), or even a slightly highbrow adult audience (*The Oblongs*). These adult and family oriented animations are small in number and are included in the comedy genre.

Table 10.6: Distribution of violent incidents by genre, NZ2003

Fiction genres	**Incidents of violence/hour**	**% of total incidents of violence**
Children's animations	18.7	34%
Crime/action/sci-fi/horror	11.0	15%
Children's non-animated drama	10.9	7%
Movies	10.0	21%
Comedy (incl. animations for adult audiences)	4.1	3%
Drama (plays, series with limited episodes)	1.9	1%
Soaps (long running series played 2-5 times/week)	1.8	1%
Non-fiction genres		
Extreme sport (incl. wresting & roller blade shows)	15.7	3%
News	6.1	4%
Music	5.5	2%
Light entertainment	4.1	5%
Children's non-fiction (game shows, music, news, reality)	3.4	2%
News magazine/current affairs/documentaries	2.2	2%
Real life (reality) shows	1.3	1%
Contact sport	0.4	0%

Although the issue can only be resolved by audience research into New Zealand children's reactions to live-action versus animated depictions of violence, the high levels of violent acts in cartoons suggests a cause for concern. Generally speaking, the greater degree of fit between an image and everyday perception the more real it seems. In terms of a direct impact, children's exposure to "live action" may be more consequential. But the high levels of violence in cartoons, if perceived as less real and less serious, may nonetheless indirectly re-enforce the violent world view more directly portrayed through live action.

10.4 Origin of programmes

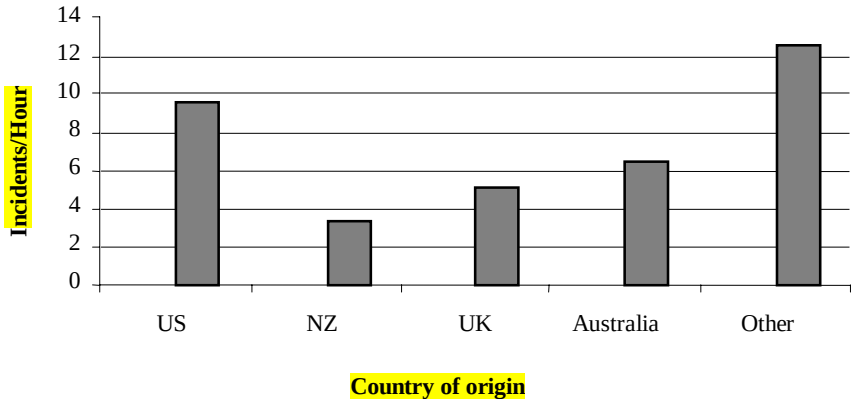

Figure 10.5: Country of origin of programmes and incidents of violence in programmes for NZ2003

Table 10.7 (see also Fig 10.5) shows that nearly two thirds of New Zealand's television content comes from the United States, with New Zealand material being the second highest contribution. A small number of programmes (4%) are co-productions from more than one country, hence the totals add to more that 100%, as these programmes are counted twice

Compared with Media Watch content analyses from 1990 to 1995, the origin of New Zealand's television content has not changed much in relation to fictional programmes. The reduction in the US proportion is countered by a four-fold increase in programmes from "other" countries, notably Canada and Japan. The Japanese contribution is entirely animations (*Pokemon. Dragon-Ball Z, Yu-Gi-Oh*), whereas the Canadians have animations, movies and crime/action/sci-fi/horror productions. Japan's contribution to the amount of fictional programming is as large as New Zealand's or Australia's, but its violence rate is more than double. The Japanese programmes (12.4) are somewhat more violent than those from the US.

Table 10.7: Country of origin of programmes and incidents of violence in programmes for NZ2003 and Media Watch 1990-1995

	% of programmes			Incidents per hour		
Country	**All programmes**	**Fictional**	**Media Watch 1990-95**	**All programmes**	**Fictional**	**Media Watch 1990-95**
US	65.6%	60.6%	64.0 - 68.2%	9.6	10.2	4.3 -10.2
NZ	14.5%	6.6%	4.7 - 6%	3.4	5.8	1.8 - 7.5
UK	10.1%	17.1%	15.9 - 21%	5.1	5.8	2.5 - 4.9
Australia	6.0%	6.6%	7.2 -10.5%	6.4	4.7	1.6 - 4.2
Other	7.0%	12.7%	0.0 -3.5%	12.5	14.0	
Total	**104%**	**104%**		**8.0**	**8.0**	**3.9 - 8.1**
Individual data on 'other' countries						
Canada	2.9%	4.7%	-	11.7	12.6	-
Japan	2.3%	6.3%		12.4	12.4	
Germany	0.9%	0.3%		11.3	38.0	
France	0.6%	1.1%		11.1	21.2	
Spain	0.4%	0.3%		26.5	40.0	
Singapore	0.3%	0.0%		0.0		
Ireland	0.2%	0.0%		14.5		
Poland	0.1%	0.0%		9.3		
Hungary	0.1%	0.0%		19.0		

The major suppliers, US programmes have more than twice the incidents of violence of the programmes from the UK, New Zealand and Australia. The US influence is also felt in Canadian productions, and the few productions from Europe (other than the UK) have very high violence counts because they produce animations and crime/action/sci-fi/horror productions for selling in the American market. All the minor suppliers have high levels of violence in fictional programmes, although the hours contributed from France, Germany and Spain are tiny and mainly in animations. Comparison with Media Watch content analyses from 1990 to 1995 show that the NZ2003 data has values at the higher end.

10.6 Comparison with other New Zealand studies

In Table 10.8, we compare simulations of earlier studies constructed from the NZ2003 data to data from the New Zealand content analyses described in Chapter 7 above. Our figure of 6.1 incidents per hour is considerably lower than the figure of 9.0 Massey obtained. The Media Watch/Gerbner method gave a result of 8.0, which is above the 5 to 7 range typical of Gerbner studies in the US (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1990), and at the high end of the 3.9 to 8.1 range obtained from Media Watch Studies in New Zealand (Bridgman, 1995). With 60% of drama programmes containing a violent incident, this is similar to the 64% obtained in 1992, but higher than the 1995 Media Watch survey where only 52% of programmes contained violent incidents.

Table 10.8: Comparison of violence in NZ2003 data with previous New Zealand content analyses

Content Analysis	Programmes assessed	Hours of TV assessed	Incidents	Incidents per hour	Comparison data	Programmes with violence	% Programmes with violence	Comparison data	% of incidents in NZ2003 excluding promotions and
Massey	627	396	2420	6.11	8.96	313	50%		45%
Media Watch	364	198	1580	7.98	3.9 - 8.1	218	60%	52 - 64%	30%
NZ2003	1012	669	5363	8.02		591	58%		100%

With respect to the New Zealand comparisons, we have clearly lower rates than the Massey survey and very similar rates than Media Watch content analyses of 1990 and 1992. The Massey survey result was strongly affected by recording its sample at the peak of news coverage for the first Gulf War.

When the Massey researchers removed the factual material from their sample a level for drama of 10.3 incident per hour emerged. Our rate for drama on free-to-air channels is 9.2, much closer to the Massey result (Table 10.9, Fig 10.7). Additionally our data look similar to the three Media Watch and Massey content analyses in 1990-1992. Table 10.9 shows the relationship of the two different measures, suggesting that despite different methodologies and orientations, the Media Watch and Massey surveys are in close agreement.

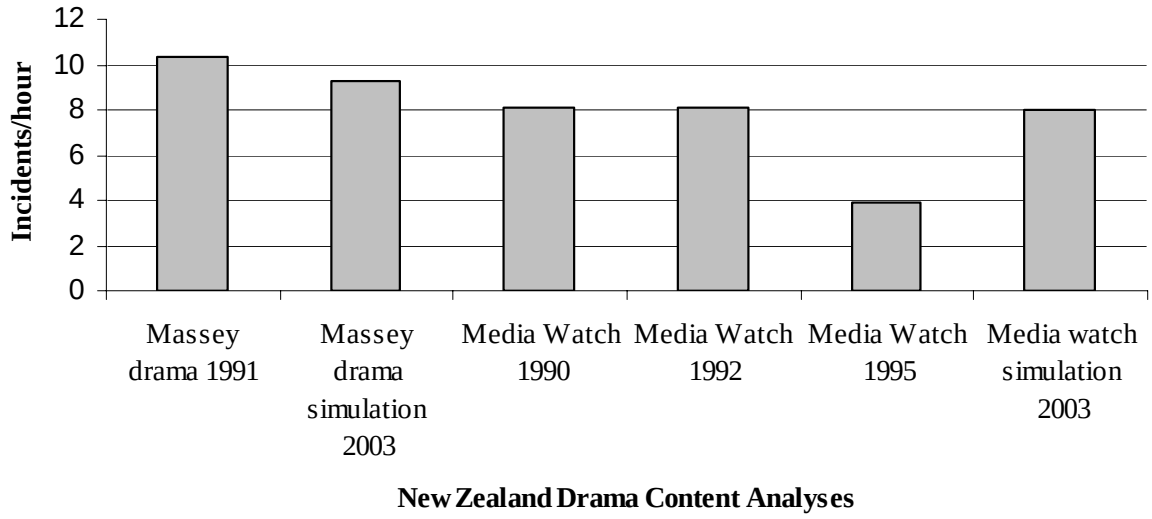

Figure 10.7: Comparison of violence in drama in two New Zealand content analyses with NZ2003 simulations data of those analyses.

Table 10.9: Comparison of NZ2003 with drama data from Media Watch (1990-1995) and Massey (1991) content analyses

Date	Content Analysis	Incidents/hour
1990	Media Watch	8.1
1991	Massey drama	10.3
1992	Media Watch	8.1
1995	Media Watch	3.9
2003	NZ 2003 using Media Watch simulation	8.0
2003	NZ 2003 using Massey drama simulation	9.3

Table 10.10 looks at the contribution of different genres to the violence count in NZ2003 Media Watch simulation and the 1990-1995 Media Watch content analysis. There is some variation in the contribution made by each genre over the period 1990-1995, but the NZ2003 data has a similar structure to the 1990 and 1992 content analyses.

Table 10.10: Comparison of genres in NZ2003 with Media Watch data 1990-1995

Genre	Incidents per hour			
	NZ2003 Media Watch simulation	Media Watch		
		1990	1992	1995
Animations	16.0	18.5	21.7	11.6
Crime/action/sci-fi/horror	8.6	11.9	9.0	4.2
Children's drama, excluding animations	5.7	0.5	4.9	2.1
Movies	5.3	4.9	9.4	5.2
Adult drama	2.9	6.1	2.6	0.8

10.7 International comparisons

Table 10.11 (see also Figure 10.8) compares the levels violence obtained in our survey with simulations of three of the main international content analyses of television violence, using the process described at the end of Chapter 8. When our data was reconfigured to eliminate areas not covered by the American NTVS analysis, we cut 164 programmes and over 4000 incidents from the data. The result was a level of incidents was 7.1/hour, which is close to the NTVS value for 1996-97 of 6.8/hour and to the values from the two earlier years. Fifty seven percent of programmes contained violence, very close to the 58 per cent to 61 per cent range of the NTVS study.

The simulation of the major British study (BSC) reduced the data set to 248 programmes, from which we obtained a measure of 5.1 incidents per hour of violence. This compares closely with recent BSC data (BSC, 2002) from 1997 to 2000, which have a range from 4.1 to 5.2. In 2001 51 per cent of all programmes contained violence, whereas our survey found 56 per cent.

Table 10.11: Comparison of NZ2003 data with three international content analyses of television violence

Survey	Programmes assessed	Hours of TV assessed	Incidents	Incidents/ hour	Comparison data	Programmes with violence	% Programmes with violence	Comparison data	% of incidents in NZ2003 excluding promotions and advertising
NTVS	848	546	3901	7.14	6.82	483	57%	58-61%	73%
BSC	248	198	1024	5.18	4.1 - 5.2	139	56%	51%	19%
CMPA	648	407	4286	10.53	12.00	474	73%	na	80%
NZ2003	1012	669	5363	8.02	na	591	58%	na	100%

Using the method of the US Centre for Media Policy and Analysis (CMPA) covered 648 programmes in our sample, and resulted in 10.5 incidents of violence per hour. CMPA reported 12 episodes of violence in 1999 and again in 2002 (Lichter et al, 1999, 2002) and even higher levels in earlier studies.

The overall rates of violence fit well with contemporary measures from Britain and the USA (the sources of the vast majority of the programmes we view), suggesting that levels of violence on New Zealand television are very similar to those in both countries, and, more importantly, that the differences between the counts generated by three international measures reflect the focus of the methodologies, not the underlying levels of violence. Each of these methods accesses only a portion of the data – as little as 19% of the incidents for the BSC simulation to as much as 80% for CMPA. What the simulations strongly suggest is that whether we are here in New Zealand, or in the USA or Britain, we are watching television of similar content and with similar levels of violence.

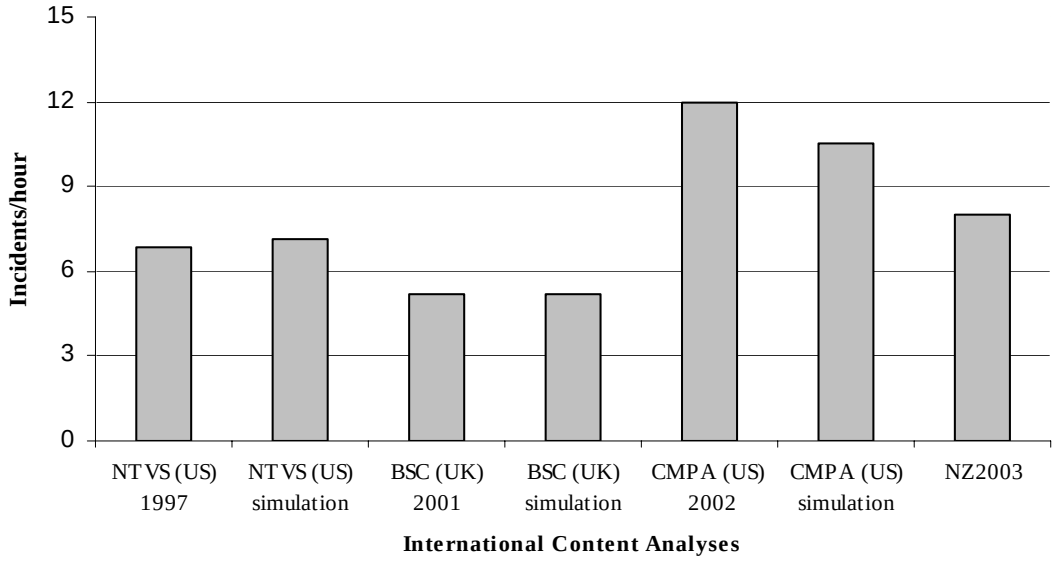

Figure 10.8: Comparison of three international content analyses of television violence in the US (NTVS and CMPA) and UK (BSC) with NZ2003 data and simulations of those analyses.

This is further borne out by an analysis of genre. Table 10.12 compares by genre the percent of violent programmes in New Zealand channels to US data from the NTVS study. The NTVS simulation removes many of the programmes assessed as zero violence from the analysis. What emerges is a New Zealand simulation that is similar in structure to the US one.

The NTVS children's rate (Table 10.12), however, does seem ~~very~~ higher. This could be because of the inclusion of full cartoon channels such as Cartoon Network, which have a reputation for more action than Nickelodeon. Nickelodeon has refused to play *Pokemon* and *Dragonball Z* on its channel because it is "too much violence for violence' sake" (Rutenberg, 2001). Nickelodeon has a number of non-animated dramas and non-fiction shows, which contribute much less to the violence count than, do animations.

Table 10.12: Comparison of genres between NZ2003 and the American NTVS survey

Genre	**Incidents/hour**	
	NZ2003 NTVS simulation	**NTVS 1994-97**
Children's programmes (fiction/non-fiction)	10.9	13.4
Movies	9.0	7.7
All other drama excluding comedy and movies	7.6	7.4
Music	4.0	3.1
Comedy	2.8	1.8
Real life	0.7	1.7

The alignment with the BSC data (Table 10.13) is not quite as close as with the NTVS content analysis~~.~~ The incidents/hour and the percent of total violence figures for the BSC news and non-fiction (news magazine and documentary) are high, it is argued by the survey's authors, because the survey was done in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the US.

Table 10.13: Comparison of genres between NZ2003 and the British BSC survey

	Incidents/hour			**% of total violence**	
	NZ2003 BSC simulation	**BSC 2001**	**BSC 1997-2001**	**NZ2003 BSC simulation**	**BSC 2001**
Movies	9.0	8.4	5.9 - 8.4	10%	23%
News	7.5	8.3	3.6 - 8.3	14%	24%
All other drama includes crime/action/sci-horror	7.3	6.6	5.7 - 10.1	36%	15%
Light entertainment including real-life shows	3.8	3.7	1.9 - 3.7	16%	10%
Comedy	2.8	4.8	4.1 - 5.2	16%	4%
All children's programmes including music videos	2.5	4.4	2.1 - 4.4	4%	6%
Non-fiction other than news and sport	1.5	3.8	2.3 - 3.8	3%	17%
Sport	0.8	0.8	0.3 - 0.8	0%	1%
Soaps	0.3	3.4	2.2 -3.4	0%	5%

10.8 Conclusions

Our findings appear to calibrate with a wide range of measures from recent major international count content analyses of violence in the two countries (UK and USA) that supply the bulk of our television programmes. So although the simulations provide some insight into the relationship between a particular methodology, the definition of violence and the estimated rates of violence found in programming, what is perhaps surprising is not the divergence in the rates but their overall international similarity.

In relation to the UK, the BSC content analyses in the UK have shown an increase in the levels of violence since the late 1980s and our BSC simulation showed patterns and a rate of violence that were highly consistent with the 2001 BSC survey, which recorded the highest rate of violent scenes/hour. It is important to emphasise that this increase is in the free-to-air channels and that pay TV has higher rates of violence.

The American NTVS and CMPA studies covered both pay-TV and free-to-air. The NTVS study is the most comprehensive and carefully executed count study in the world, and the degree of correspondence of our research with this study is high.

The detailed breakdowns also align with two New Zealand studies using different methodologies.

In summary, our data suggest that the incidents of violence per hour on television have increased since the mid 1990s in New Zealand. This was a time when there was considerable political pressure to reduce the level of violence on television (Bridgman, 1995). The three content analyses (two Media Watch and Massey) in the early 1990s showed counts (8-10 incidents or scenes per hour) that were high in comparison to international studies using the Gerbner or BSC-type methods. Our survey has very similar levels and patterns violence to those content analyses and double the incidence of violence found by the 1995 Media Watch survey.

If we accept the conclusions of section 7.2.5 that the Media Watch and Massey content analyses were relatively successful in identifying the levels of violence on New Zealand television and these levels were connected to the policy and regulatory environment of the time, then we might speculate that a similar relationship holds today. It seems likely that external factors such as the lack of public pressure and the competitive commercial environment have again created the context for high levels of television violence.

Turning to advertising and promotions, the proportion of violence contributed by promotions and advertising is three times higher than in 1992 and 1995. This a major shift, and one that needs careful attention as it indicates the attraction that violence has to many viewers and the preparedness of some TV channels to exploit this. The only recent major international study to consider promotions stated:

> In our examination of the issue of television violence, we found promotions to raise very serious concerns. They contain some of the most compressed and intense scenes of violence on television. Because they are short, promotions usually cannot provide much context for the violent acts. Promos may also be one of the easier issues in the world of television violence for the networks to correct.
>
> (UCLA, 1995, Section D)

Violence levels in children's viewing time are slightly higher to those in adult's viewing time, and violence levels in some genres aimed at children (animations and movies) are very high. The issue of whether the violence in children's viewing time and promotions and advertising is trivial or serious will be explored in the next chapter.

11

Content Analysis: Supplementary Findings

This chapter presents detailed findings on dimensions such as perpetrator and victim characteristics, types of incidents, the extent of victims' suffering, and the graphicness of portrayals of violence.

11.1 Types of incident

Table 11.1 records the way incidents were delivered – as an assault, an accident or a threat – and compares this with other content analyses using reconfigured data. The pattern for programmes and for promotions and advertisements is very similar. A fourth category, not in the table, was "don't know whether it was an accident or an assault" was used 3% of time for programmes and 7% for promotions and advertisements.

Table 11.1: Types of incident – simulated comparisons with other content analyses

Content analysis	**% of incidents in:**					
	assaults		**accidents**		**threats**	
NZ2003 programmes	62%	**NZ2003**	22%	**NZ2003**	15%	**NZ2003**
NZ2003 promos and ads	60%	**simulation**	24%	**simulation**	10%	**simulation**
NTVS 1994-97	66-69%	79%	-	-	24-29%	19%
BSC 1997-2001	71-77%	60%	17-27%	24%	4-11%	14%
Media Watch 1982-95	59-72%	69%	9-15%	22%	13-25%	8%
Massey 1991	55%	61%	14%	24%	11%	13%

Most incidents involve assault – this is true across all methods. When we look at the NZ2003 simulations for assault they seem high in relation to NTVS, low with respect to BSC content analyses, but about right in relation to Media Watch and Massey. This relationship might suggest that there is something particular about the New Zealand context that needs exploring or that the nature of content is changing over time. But it is difficult to claim more than a general relationship between NZ2003 and the other content analyses with respect to the overall pattern of assault, accident and threat. Variations in the coding may account for the observed differences. For example, Massey had a specific category for images, and although we can calculate images, requiring coders to intentionally code for images will affect the way they code. Massey coders used images 18% of the time, whereas our calculation of images suggests only 5% of incidents are images.

Table 11.2: **Types of incidents across channels**

	% of programme incidents that are			
channels	**assaults**	**accidents**	**threats**	**not sure**
TV1	60%	15%	22%	4%
TV2	60%	30%	9%	2%
TV3	70%	15%	11%	5%
TV4	71%	8%	17%	5%
Prime	46%	39%	16%	1%
Sky 1	81%	5%	15%	2%
Sky Movies	72%	9%	17%	4%
Nickelodeon	45%	37%	14%	3%
Total	62%	22%	15%	3%

Assaults are more inherently violent than accidents or threats, and so the relative pattern of assault across channels is of interest (Table 11.2). Three channels (TV2, Prime and Nickelodeon) have higher percentages of accidents and correspondingly lower assault rates. In the case of TV2 and Nickelodeon, this is because accidents are the stuff of cartoons. With Prime, one half hour programme devoted to extreme sporting accidents (*Mad, mad world of sport*) produced 120 incidents. One the other hand, channels dominated by movies in the action/crime/sci-fi/horror genres (Sky 1, Sky Movies and TV4) have relatively few accidents and high proportions of assaults. TV1's high percentage of threats was in part due to the Gulf War and the deadly threats made prior to its opening.

Table 11.3: **Removal of accidents from incident counts**

channels	incidents/hour	
	excluding accidents	**including accidents**
TV1	2.1	2.5
TV2	5.6	7.9
TV3	5.7	6.7
TV4	6.9	7.5
Prime	3.8	6.3
Sky 1	6.6	7.0
Sky Movies	11.1	12.2
Nickelodeon	8.6	13.7
Total	6.3	8.0

Removing accidents from the analysis (as in Table 11.3) produces much lower incident rates for channels that show large amounts of animated programmes. The effect of one programme (*Mad, mad world of Sport*) on Prime's count is dramatic, indicating that it is a low violence channel, possibly because of its high Australian content. The similarity of rates across TV2, TV3, TV4 and Sky 1, drawing more on US and British content, is striking. Sky Movies becomes the most violent channel and even without accidents Nickelodeon has high levels of assaults and threats. If non-accidental promotions and advertisements are included Nickelodeon's count nearly doubles to 15.5 incidents/hour while Sky 1 and TV4's rates go up 87% and 73% respectively. So, even without accidents, there are high violence counts on

some channels, and these counts have more to do with the channel's promotional practices than the violence in the programmes per se.

11.2 Extent of suffering

Deaths and injuries: A common criticism of violence counts is that most of the suffering counted is trivial. In Table 11.4 we examine suffering in promotions and advertising and in the programmes themselves. Because threats, by definition in this research, have no physical outcome of pain and harm, we have omitted them from this part of the analysis.

More than a third of all assaults and accidents result in death or an injury ranging from being or stunned through to a stab or gun-shot wound. Movies are both high incidence and high impact violence with over half the incidents resulting in death or injury. Animations are high incidence, but with low impact violence and relatively few deaths – 46 of the 628 deaths identified in the week of the recording. Sport has no deaths at all, but a higher percent of injury that any other genre.

Forty-seven percent of programmes involve a death or injury, with a very small percent occurring in children's programmes. There are 58 deaths in children's programmes almost all of which involve animated, supernatural or animal characters. The level of death and injury in movies is much higher than in promotions and advertising while movies are showing. This is partly because 83% of the movies are on Sky Movies who run promotions only at the beginning and end of programmes, leaving the movies relatively promotion free. Deaths in the non-fictional programmes involve images of war, murders, accidents, funerals, and in about a quarter of the cases, animals eating insects. Crime/action/sci-fi/horror genres have plenty of real deaths and injuries to human characters, as do movies, and account for three-quarters of all deaths.

Table 11.4: Percent of assaults and accidents resulting in death and injury in programmes, promotions and advertising across genre

	programmes		**promotions**		**advertising**	
genre	**death**	**cuts, burns, gunshot and/or stunned**	**death**	**Cuts, burns, gunshot and/or stunned**	**death**	**Cuts, burns, gunshot and/or stunned**
real-life, reality	35%	29%	15%	19%	10%	24%
movies	29%	25%	9%	23%	6%	12%
news, news magazine, documentary	26%	19%	14%	20%	9%	9%
crime/action/sci-fi/horror	23%	28%	25%	16%	6%	33%
light entertainment	11%	12%	6%	10%	10%	13%
comedy incl adult oriented animations	8%	26%	28%	13%	3%	20%
music	8%	22%	1%	7%	0%	4%
animations for children	3%	20%	1%	12%	0%	15%
children's drama (without animations)	2%	18%	2%	19%	0%	7%
drama - soaps, plays, medical series	2%	28%	10%	24%	0%	21%
all sport	0%	36%	4%	22%	0%	40%
total	13%	23%	10%	15%	4%	18%

One quarter of all accidents or assaults in promotions result in a death or an injury, which is a lower figure than for programmes in general. This figure seems to reflect the fact that is

little time in promotions to show the full consequences of violence. Ten percent of violent promotions feature a death, with only a tiny amount associated with children's programmes, most of which related to the 'death' of an animated character or an insect. One death related to a promotion for *CSI* during a 7pm showing of the Simpsons on Sky 1. Outside of children's programmes almost all deaths involve human rather than animal, animated or supernatural characters. Nearly half of the deaths in promotions come from Sky 1 promotions for action/crime/sci-fi/horror series promoted within those series, but also across other genres on Sky 1, particularly comedy. This promotion of violent programmes with comedy is virtually unique to Sky 1.

Advertising accounts for a 1% of the incidents on television that cause death or injury. Notably in the realistic ads show the sinking of the Wahine and the Hiroshima explosion – both on during children's viewing time. "Action" advertisements in which injuries are likely to occur are more likely to be placed on "action" programmes, such as crime/action/sci/fi/horror and sport genres, where 40% of assaults and accidents result in death or injury. Our content analysis is the first time that advertising has had any profile in a violence count content analysis, and while it clearly a low profile, it may well be a space to watch for the future.

Comparing the death and injury rates with the other New Zealand content analyses showed 10% for death and 30% overall (NZ2003 Massey simulation) compared to 11.5% for death and 37.5% overall for Massey, and 9% for death and 32% overall compared to between 7 and 17% for death and 32 and 35% overall for the last three Media Watch surveys – a reasonable degree of correspondence.

NTVS does not report on types of injury and nor does BSC in their 2002 summary. The thrust of data indicates that high-count children's programmes have very little serious violence and that the pattern of coding is closely aligned with previous content analyses.

Sexual assault: We coded separately for sexual assault. This occurred in 0.5% of all incidents (37 times). Nearly half of the assaults were in promotions and advertisements, and about a quarter had 'extreme' depicted harm in relation to rapes and, in one case, mutilation. This is consistent with low values in this area from the other comparison studies. A promotion for a current affairs programme depicted elements of a rape. The Smint advertisement in which a large woman runs jumps on man holds him down and kisses him was coded by three different coders as a sexual assault.

Subjective assessment of harm and pain: While NTVS did not code for types of injury, it did introduce a rating measure of depicted harm and pain. Table 11.5 compares our NTVS simulation with the overall pattern of harm and pain judgements across the NTVS data for 1994 and 1996. Both studies found that around 80% of the depictions involved no pain and 70% no harm. The extreme pain ratings were predominantly from movies and action/crim/sci-fi/horror series, but TV2's *Pokemon* and TV3's *Defensor* (in Mäori) and *Yu-Gi-Oh* also had several extreme incidents. Extreme harm was more spread across genres, including news programmes.

Table 11.5: Depicted pain and harm: NZ2003 simulation comparison with NTVS 1994 and 1996

Depiction of:	Content analysis	Subjective level of pain or harm			
		none/can't tell	slight/mild	moderate	extreme
pain	NZ2003	60%	27%	9%	4%
	NTVS	51-57%	30%	7-11%	6-9%
harm	NZ2003	49%	26%	13%	12%
	NTVS	43-47%	22-26%	12-13%	18%

Table 11.6 addresses the relationship between genre and depicted pain and harm. In general the genres which are seen as mostly without pain and harm in the US study are seen in a similar light in New Zealand. While there is little difference in depicted pain between children's programmes and all adult genres (58% average), there is quite a big difference in depiction of harm, with two-thirds of children's programmes having no depicted harm compared with a 40% average for adult genre. Again the pattern of scores shows a similar hierarchy, and a similar relationship between pain and harm scores in the two studies. The trend is towards a perception of less depicted harm and pain in NZ2003 than in the NTVS research.

Table 11.6: Percent of programmes without depicted pain or harm across genres: NZ2003 simulation comparison with NTVS 1994 and 1996

Genre	without depicted pain		without depicted harm	
	NZ2003	NTVS	NZ2003	NTVS
music	75%	71-76%	65%	56%
comedy	75%	49-50%	57%	49-58%
non-fiction other than children's	72%	70-74%	45%	42-44%
all children's programmes	63%	57-68%	66%	54-62%
all drama other than children's, movies and comedy	57%	41-51%	33%	34-39%
movies	54%	43-49%	42%	34-35%
total	60%		50%	

The NTVS study also created a measure of the degree to which effects of violence in terms of physical harm were realistic. They argued that where participants rated likely harm as being more extreme than depicted harm, they were, in fact, confirming a lack of realism in the depiction. Table 11.7 looks at how the created variable of realism plays out in the two content analyses.

The pattern and the range of scores are different, with New Zealand coders tending to regard consequences in many genre (reality-based, music, movies, other drama) as less realistic. There is relationship between depicted harm and likely harm – is the relative lack of perceived realism a function of lower levels of depicted harm? Likely harm is the first truly subjective measure analysed in this study and the difference here may reflect some age and cultural patterns of the two coder groups – our group being older and more structured in culture and age than the US group. However, the overall measures are very close.

Table 11.7: Realism across genre**:** NZ2003 simulation comparison with NTVS 1994 and 1996		
	% of times consequence was unrealistic	
Genre	**NZ2003**	**NTVS**
all children's progammes	48%	56-57%
music	46%	29-34%
non-fiction other than children's	40%	18-22%
all drama other than children's, movies and comedy	35%	19-21%
movies	32%	20-21%
comedy	30%	23-32%
total	40%	34-35%

The NTVS study characterised moderate or extreme likely harm as 'incapacitating' or 'lethal'. In their studies 52 to 54% of the violence was lethal. Using the NTVS simulation, we found 48% was lethal.

We also looked at promotions and advertisements again to see whether the patterns of pain, harm and likely harm differed and found that they were similar to those for programmes. Slightly less harm being depicted in promotions and advertising than in programmes. This summary of the pain and harm data shows that the bulk of violent incidents involve no pain or harm and that much of the violence is seen as unrealistic in its consequence. This is particularly true for children's programmes, and is highly consistent with results from other content analyses. The tendency for harm not to be depicted clearly raises issues about whether young viewers perceive the consequences of violent behaviour accurately, a possibility re-enforced by animations.

A composite evaluation of pain and harm was carried out at the programme level. Sixty-one programmes or 6% of the sample were judged as having "long-term harm or pain extended across the plot" and for which there is no recovery. Again there were animations in this group (Vortech and Pokemon), but the vast majority were crime/action/sci-fi/horror series and movies. One notable exception was One News on the entry to the Gulf War. Again these results seem consistent with other studies.

11.3 Graphic violence

In this final section we look at the issue of graphic violence. We identified twelve characteristics that are part of graphic violence: presence of blood (more than a scratch), close-up shot of an injury, close-up shots of action, slow-motion filming of violence, drawn-out fight scenes, drawn-out aftermaths of violence, replays of violent scenes, clear injury sounds, powerful pain expressed, threatening or aggressive music accompanying, preceding, or following the violence, a threatening visual environment, and narrative of violence. About half of the programmes in which there is violence contain a graphic violence feature and 6% (62 programmes) contain at least ten examples of graphic violence. Twenty of these were animations, 19 were movies and 12 were crime/action/sci-fi/horror series. However, 21 these programmes did not contain any incident of violence that had

caused moderate or extreme harm. Of the 45 remaining, 6 were animations – five programmes and one repeat. Four had been coded by the one coder (*Cat Dog*, *Action League*, *Spongebob Squarepants* and *The Wild Thornberies*), and the fifth (*Vor-TEC* – the most graphic, painful and harming) by a second coder. These programmes were all characterised by close-ups of injury and action and by injury sounds. Three had drawn out fights and threatening visual and musical environments and two had the presence of blood, powerful pain, drawn out aftermath, slow motion, and replays. However, *Cat Dog, Spongebob Squarepants* and *The Wild Thornberies* were seen as sometimes funny by the coder and by the victims.. This was not true of *Vor-TEC* or *Action League*, or of any other high graphic violence programme.

A light entertainment programme featured as the most graphically violent in this list: *Cine News* (a programme that features trailers for movies), an edition of which had more than two instances of every graphic feature, except replays. After *Cine News*, the next 10 most graphic programmes were action/crime/sci-fi/horror series or movies, which made up about three-quarters of this high graphic violence group. This group included two episodes of *CSI, Logan's War, Walker Texas Ranger, The Breed, Hollow Man, True Lives, Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* and *Copy Cat* as the most graphic examples. Two examples of extreme sports featured – *Rollerjam* and *Smackdown*. Coders were asked to focus only on the illegal violence in these programmes, so features like 'drawn out fight' would apply to fighting outside the ring, but not inside it. Two documentaries, *Medical Horrors* and the *Life of Mammals*, with threatening music, replays, slow motion, drawn-out fights and a narrative of violence being part of the latter programme. Lastly one episode of *America's Most Wanted*, a reality-based programme, also featured in this list with bloody scenes, close-ups of injuries and action, replays and expression of powerful pain.

The NTVS study found very few close-ups in scenes (5% of violent scenes) and moderate to extreme amounts of blood (11%). This would translate to lower levels within programmes. Massey, Media Watch and the BSC studies do not have graphicness evaluations but Massey's subjective assessment rated 10% of violent scenes or incidents as 4 or 5 on a five point scale between 1 = not violent and 5 = very violent. We found about 10% of programmes used close-ups in relation to violence and 4% more than once, and similarly for scenes involving a significant amount of blood.

11.4 Death, pain, harm and graphic violence in children's viewing time

Two important questions around graphicness are how does it relate to measures of pain and harm and how much is it a feature of children's viewing times?. We have already noted in 10.3 that there is little difference in incidents per hour for children's viewing time.

Figure 11.1 shows that violent death occurs much less frequently in children's viewing overall, and is lower on all channels than in adult viewing time. It is lowest overall (10% of all programmes) in the channel devoted to children – Nickelodeon. On the down side, there is a four out of five chance that if you are watching Sky 1 after 8.30pm you will see a programme in which some animate being dies violently, and even chance of the same during children's viewing time on Sky Movies. TV4 has the highest percent of programmes with a violent death of all the free-to-air channels.

Table 11.8: Percent in programmes of death, moderate to extreme pain, harm and likely harm and high graphicness (at least 10 graphic instances). The total sample NZ2003

Channel	death		moderate to extreme						high graphicness	
			depicted pain		depicted harm		likely harm			
	adult	children	adult	children	adult	children	adult	children	adult	children
TV1	19%	13%	10%	11%	38%	30%	43%	35%	0%	1%
TV2	40%	10%	30%	21%	40%	31%	50%	44%	15%	1%
TV3	50%	11%	50%	19%	55%	25%	65%	37%	20%	1%
TV4	60%	22%	60%	15%	80%	37%	87%	63%	13%	0%
Prime	32%	8%	36%	9%	59%	23%	59%	38%	9%	1%
Sky1	79%	43%	58%	38%	84%	44%	84%	53%	21%	5%
Sky Movies	71%	56%	57%	71%	50%	54%	71%	83%	36%	24%
Nickelodeon	18%	9%	45%	41%	33%	35%	83%	78%	8%	10%
Total	41%	18%	42%	27%	51%	33%	68%	52%	13%	5%

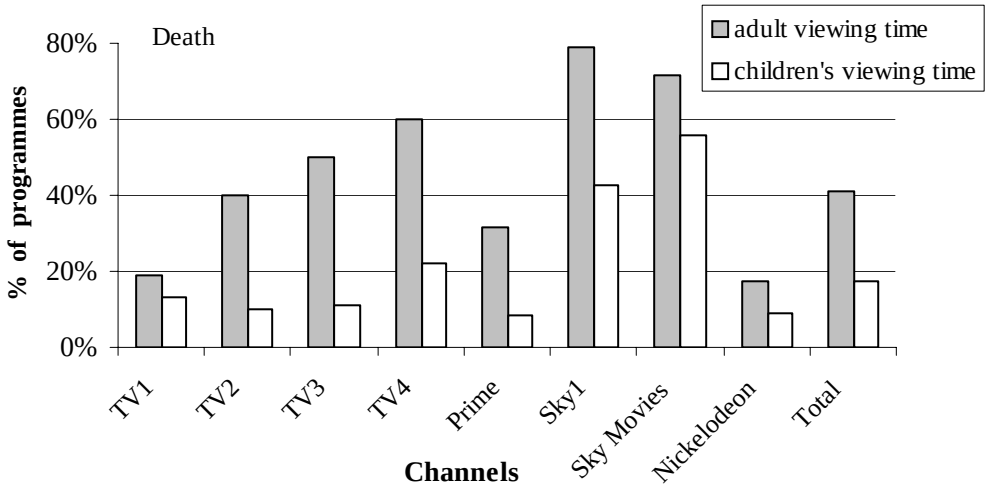

Figure 11.1**: Percent of programmes in which a character dies as a result of a violent act in adult and children's viewing times.**

About 30% of programmes have at least one incident where moderate to extreme pain (as rated by the coders) as a result of violent act. Figure 11.2 shows that 71% of movies shown during children's viewing times have an instance of moderate to extreme pain, and Nickelodeon has the second highest percentage of programmes with moderate to extreme pain during children's viewing times – 41%. Coders particularly identified the injury sounds and drawn out fights in animations and these may have influenced the pain ratings. TV4, with 60% of its programmes having moderate to severe pain shuts out even the pay-TV channels in this area. The free-to-air channels, in keeping the pain percentage down during children's viewing time, make a discrimination between painful and pain free programmes that is not used on the genre narrow pay-TV channels.

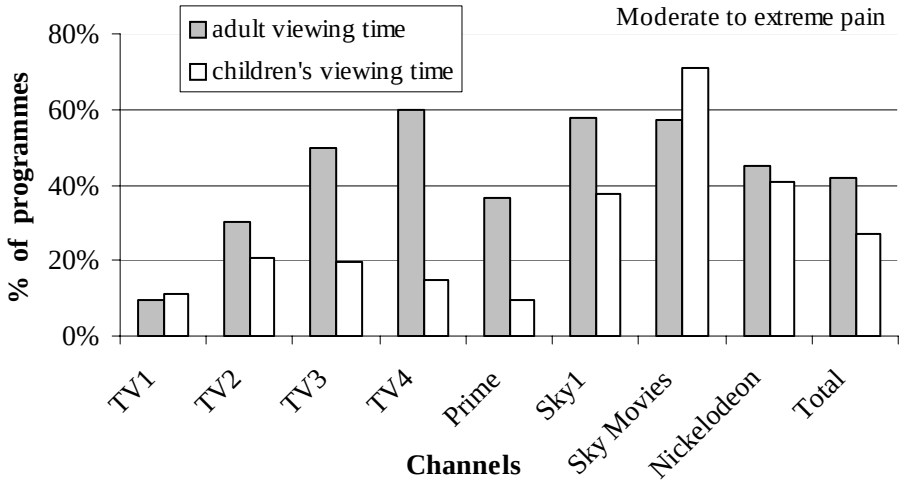

Figure 11.2: Percent of programmes in which a character experiences moderate to extreme pain as result of a violent act in adult and children's viewing times**.**

This pattern continues when we look at harm. Two of the three pay-TV channels (Sky Movies and Nickelodeon) show a higher percent of programmes with moderate to extreme harm incidents in children's viewing time than in adult's (Figure 11.3). Eighty-four percent of Sky 1's adult viewing time programmes and 80% of TV4's will show an incident of moderate to extreme harm. Nickelodeon is the least harmful place to be after the 8.30 watershed, but not before, as four free-to-air channels have a lower percentage of programmes with moderate to extreme harm in them.

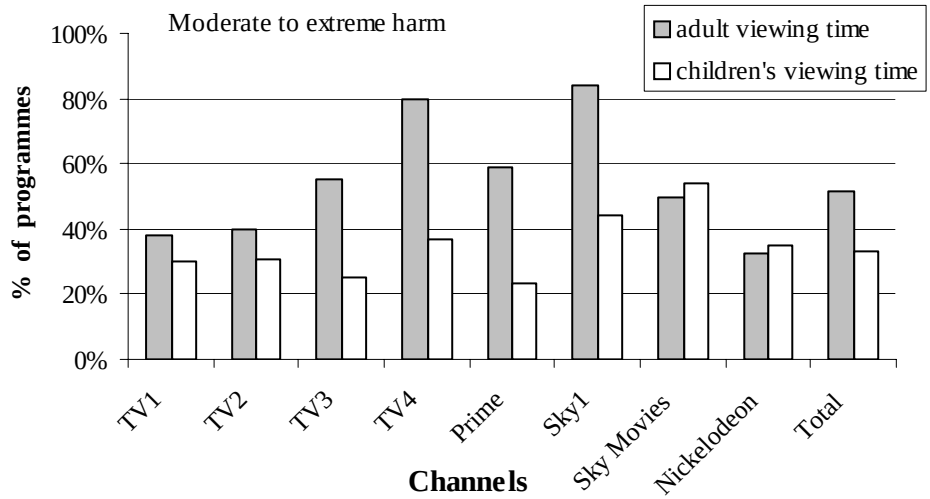

Figure 11.3: Percent of programmes in which a character experiences moderate to extreme harm as result of a violent act in adult and children's viewing times**.**

The lack of realism in animations is clearly demonstrated in Figure 11.4 where the real life harm of violent events is evaluated by the coders. The chance of seeing on Nickelodeon a programme with an incident that would case moderate to extreme harm in real life is 83%, well up from the one third that actually depicted moderate to extreme harm. Movies, too, have a big difference between depicted harm and real harm, and more so in children's viewing time, but on Sky 1and the free-to-air channels the probability of a moderate to extreme harm incident being depicted in a programme is nearly as high as the coder interpolation of that outcome from the violent event. Overall in about 55% of programmes we will see a violent incident that in real life would cause moderate to extreme harm, but only 36% of programmes will actually depict that level of harm.

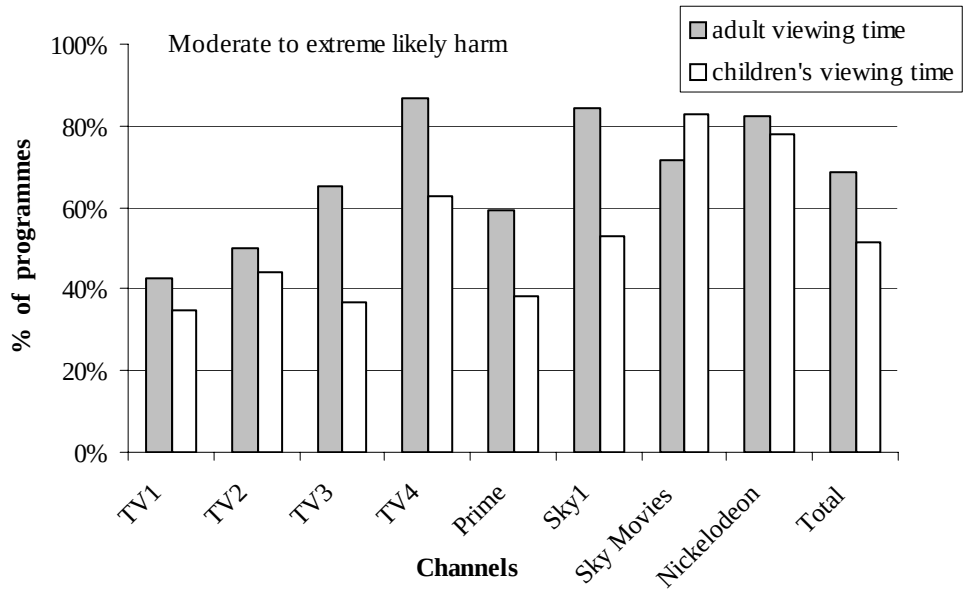

Figure 11.4: Percent of programmes in which a character would have realistically experienced moderate to extreme harm as result of a violent act in adult and children's viewing times**.**

Just as movies in Sky Movies and the animations in Nickelodeon are the least realistic of genres, they are, as we have seen in section 11.3 above, also the most graphic, alongside the crime/action/sci-fi/horror genres shown Sky 1, TV2 , TV3, TV 4 and Prime. But while the Sky 1 and the free-to-air channels, keep children's viewing times almost completely free of graphic material during children's viewing times (Figure 11.5), we are more likely to see a Nickelodeon programme with graphic material in children's viewing time. This is because 64% of children's viewing time programmes are animations, whereas this is the case for only 38% of adult viewing time programmes. This does suggest that Nickelodeon's cartoons are more graphic than those used in children's viewing time by TV2, TV3 and Prime. Fully one quarter of the movies shown on Sky Movies have high levels of graphic violence, and many of these are shown in children's viewing time.

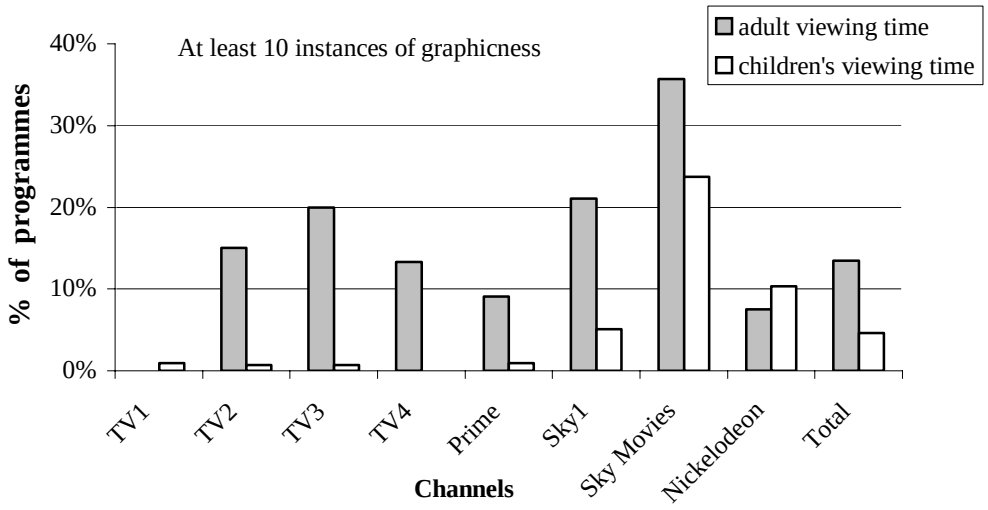

Figure 11.5: Percent of programmes in which a there are at least 10 "graphically" violent acts in adult and children's viewing times**.**

In summary, while the incidents per hour of violence in children's viewing times is slightly higher in than in adult viewing time, there is good evidence that programmes run in children's viewing time contain considerably fewer deaths and events of graphic violence, and somewhat less depicted pain, harm and realistic violence. Tracking at the level of incidents confirms this picture. The exceptions to the rule are the pay-TV channels. Sky Movies appears to show more serious violence in children's viewing time that the free-to-air channels show in adult viewing time. Nickelodeon has more serious violence during children's viewing time than adult's, and quite high levels of depicted pain and graphicness, considering that its target audience is children. Sky 1 also has high levels of death, pain and harm in children's viewing time, and higher levels again for adult viewing time, such that any child who watched Sky 1 beyond the watershed is almost certain to be watching a high violence programme. Of the free-to-air channels, the now-defunct TV4 stands out as high violence channel, but not in children's viewing time, with TV 3 in a not dissimilar role. TV1 and Prime appear to have the least serious violence.

11.5 The nature of perpetrators

The means of violence. We begin this analysis of perpetrators by examining the means of violence used by perpetrators (Table 11.9). The means of violence for nearly half of the incidents was the body (human or animal – fist, feet, teeth, head) while for a further quarter it was items of everyday life not normally used for violence (e.g. cars and bikes, household equipment and furniture, fruit and vegetables, balls and skis, tools, garden implements, natural obstructions like power poles and walls). Violence using these means has about a one in thirty chance of death and these means accounted for 23% of the incidents resulting in death. Conventional weapons of fighting (e.g. guns, knives, bats, bar), and heavy (e.g. machine guns, tanks, missiles), futuristic (e.g. ray guns, forces of the mind) or historical (e.g. battle axes, magic) weapons have a near to one in three chance of causing death and account for 60% of the incidents involving death. Where we do not know the cause of violence, but

see only the aftermath, there is a 62% chance that we are looking at a dead body. This suggests that evidence of violence had to be very clear before coders would attribute violence without seeing the action of violence. The 'other' category is mainly about accidents and natural disasters (e.g. electrocutions, fires, storms).

Table 11.9: Primary means used in the commission of violence and their impact. The total sample NZ2003

			Conventional fight weapons		Other weapons			
NZ2003	natural	unconventional household	handheld guns	knife, bat bar	futuristic historical	heavy weapons	don't know	other
incidents	46%	26%	7%	3%	4%	6%	3%	2%
incidents resulting in death	3%	5%	36	27%	12%	37%	62%	7%
NZ2003 NTVS simulation	48%	17%	13%	5%	5%	6%	2%	2%
NTVS	39%	19%	26%	9%		5%	2%	

The NTVS study made a particular point about the effect of everyday or conventional weapons such as guns and knives have priming situations for violence (Federman, 1998). Thirty-five percent of NTVS incidents involve conventional weapons compared to half that level in the NZ2003 NTVS simulation, which suggests that the content analysis shows less risk with respect to depictions using conventional weapons. However, part of this equation is the degree to which the violence is imitable (Smith, 1998). Violence with handheld guns is not so readily imitable in New Zealand, whereas 'natural' violence is. So that even though the consequences of natural violence are generally mild, it remains of concern.

Perpetrator characteristics. Table 11.10 and subsequent tables look at perpetrator characteristics in the presence of serious violence – i.e. where there is moderate to extreme pain, harm or likely harm or actual death. This first table in this sequence analyses incidents in programmes, promotions and advertising. Not all incidents have a perpetrator – 15% of programmes and 18% of promotions and advertising do not. The tables that follow refer to incidents with perpetrators, unless otherwise stated.

Table 11.10 shows that most incidents have a single perpetrator. Thirteen percent involve more that two people. Incidents involving unknown perpetrators have the most serious consequences. This is often where we see consequences and not the action. Multiple perpetrators have more serious consequences in terms of death than incidents involving a single perpetrator in promotions and advertising. Where there is no perpetrator (most accidents) or he or she is unknown, the perception of depicted harm and likely harm increases dramatically and not just because of the outcome. Deaths are low for accidents, but high for an unknown perpetrator. Accidents normally happen without warning to the victim and the connection between the two categories (no perpetrator and unknown perpetrator) is the feeling of the unpredictable.

Table 11.10: Perpetrator features – number, known and unknown, and pain, harm, likely harm and death – in programmes, promotions and advertising. The total sample NZ2003

Perpetrators in:	% of incidents	Moderate to extreme			Death/ category
		pain	harm	likely harm	
programmes					
single perpetrator	65%	13%	22%	47%	11%
more than one perpetrator	14%	13%	22%	47%	14%
no perpetrator	15%	11%	28%	56%	6%
unknown perpetrator	6%	11%	46%	77%	35%
promotions and ads					
single perpetrator	59%	10%	17%	40%	4%
more than one perpetrator	10%	11%	15%	35%	10%
no perpetrator	18%	14%	21%	53%	7%
unknown perpetrator	10%	12%	42%	71%	34%

As we have already seen in Table 11.4 above, promotions and advertising ~~again~~ show lower overall levels of death~~,~~ particularly where a single perpetrator is involved, and this is matched by lower estimates of harm and likely harm. The pattern for promotions and advertising of pain, harm and death across the categories of perpetrator is very similar to that of programmes. In the following analyses of perpetrator characteristics (age, gender, cultural group, type, approval of violence, motivation, goodness and attractiveness) we deal with just the total sample, unless there are some clear differences between programmes and promotions and advertising. The number of perpetrators in each table is somewhat approximate because animations and animals were only coded where this was possible. Most animations and animals can be coded for gender, but age and culture are only occasionally codable (e.g. *The Simpsons*). The 'don't knows' may include some human animations, but exclude the vast bulk of animations.

Table 11.11 shows that most perpetrators are in a 25 to 44 year old age range, and at this age are most likely to cause pain and harm. Mature adult perpetrators (45 to 64 years) are most associated with death. Few child perpetrators cause death and where this occurs it is in the context of animations, where sometimes the victim returns to life, or very occasionally in movies where there are also adult perpetrators present (e.g. *Waterworld*). Again, likely harm is found to be higher where details of the perpetrator are unknown. (Note that we can know there is a perpetrator without knowing what age, gender and culture the person is.) The percentage of adults plus mature adults (55%) is lower than the 72 to 76% obtained in the NTVS study, although the difference is less when the NTVS simulation is run (61%). The proportion of teenagers and the elderly is very similar to NTVS, but children are about double the NTVS percentage (NZ2003 = 6% vs. NTVS =2-4%)

Table 11.11: Perpetrator features – age and pain, harm, likely harm and death. The total sample NZ2003

Perpetrators	% of incidents with perpetrators	Moderate to extreme pain	harm	likely harm	Death/ category
children	9%	6%	6%	24%	2%
teenager	8%	10%	14%	31%	6%
adult	51%	16%	27%	48%	13%
mature adult	4%	9%	22%	44%	16%
elderly adult	1%	9%	17%	43%	8%
don't know age	27%	8%	24%	56%	15%

Table 11.12 shows that males predominate over females as perpetrators, both numerically and by levels of harm and death. Women are more prominent in this content analysis as perpetrators than in the NTVS content analysis. The NZ2003 NTVS simulation finds 16% of the perpetrators are women compared with only 10% for NTVS. Men's rates are slightly lower in the simulation – 67% vs. 73 to 78%.

Table 11.12: Perpetrator features – gender and pain, harm, likely harm and death. The total sample NZ2003

Perpetrators	% of incidents with perpetrators	Moderate to extreme pain	harm	likely harm	Death
male	62%	13%	22%	46%	11%
female	18%	11%	16%	30%	5%

Table 11.13 shows a majority of perpetrators are white, with only a small representation of cultural groups of non-European origin. The small number of Pacific Island perpetrators were in advertisements for *Lift* drink, Rugby and League scuffles on the *One News* and *3 News*, *Gilligan's Island* as the 'natives', and in some animations (Chinese coders only). Maori perpetrators were found in the *Life and Times of Te Tutu*, in a New Zealand crime watch show, once or twice in overseas productions, in a League news story, the *Ripples* ad, and, again only by Chinese coders, in a number of animations. The pain/harm/death figures for Maori and Pacific Island perpetrators combined, are based on less than 1% of the 8000 plus incidents. Minority television cultures (Hispanic, Asian, other cultures) tend to have higher levels of likely harm and death associated with their perpetrators. 'Black' culture, which has the highest representation after white, is not over-represented in the death statistics, possibly because there are black shows, where black actors are not simply bit parts to white cultural conventions. Also television may be more politically correct with black characters, than with other minority characters. The percentage of white perpetrators is lower than the 71% obtained in the NTVS study, although the difference is slightly less when the NTVS simulation is run (57%). The 'don't know' category is correspondingly much higher (25% vs. 14%). While a small percentage of 'don't knows' are due to the unseen perpetrator (7%), the reason for the difference with the NTVS research could be due to the difficulties of New Zealand coders picking up the US nuances of cultural recognition. 'Don't know' for culture is 30%, but for gender (easier to code), only 20%.

Table 11.13: Perpetrator features – cultural groups and pain, harm, likely harm and death. The total sample NZ2003

Perpetrators	% of incidents with perpetrators	Moderate to extreme pain	harm	likely harm	Death
White	54.1%	13%	22%	42%	11%
Black	6.2%	15%	23%	39%	11%
Asian	3.2%	12%	31%	60%	14%
Other cultures	2.9%	19%	35%	51%	19%
Hispanic	2.3%	14%	23%	44%	19%
Maori	0.5%	10%	10%	27%	3%
Pacific Island	0.5%	41%	48%	59%	3%
Don't know culture	30.3%	9%	23%	55%	14%

Table 11.14: Perpetrator features – type: human, animal or otherwise and pain, harm, likely harm and death. The total sample NZ2003

Perpetrator type:	% of incidents with perpetrators	Moderate to extreme pain	harm	likely harm	Death
human	59%	15%	28%	48%	15%
animations	35%	7%	9%	42%	3%
supernatural	3%	15%	44%	64%	10%
wild animals	2%	15%	33%	60%	17%
human-like animals	1%	31%	15%	47%	2%

Table 11.14 looks at whether the perpetrator is human, supernatural, animated or animal. There is a small amount of double dipping with programmes like *The Simpsons*, where animations generally conform to the rules of the human world, and have been coded as both animations and human. Table 11.14 shows that 35% of perpetrators come from animated programmes where the consequences on pain, harm and death are much lower than for other perpetrator types, and the difference between harm and likely harm is greater than for any other comparison in this section on perpetrators. Human-like or domestic animals seem to cause high levels of pain, but not death, but this is based on a small number of incidents, most of which come from the movie *See Spot Run*. Supernatural beings and wild animals are the most frightening with high levels of likely harm.

Smith et al. claim that perpetrator approval of violence encourages violence. In our content analysis perpetrators were approving 78% of the time (Table 11.15), even though the outcomes were worse (more pain, harm and death) than when perpetrators were approving. Approval is associated with more than twice the death rate of disapproval, but not knowing the perpetrator's attitude (because the perpetrator is unknown or unfamiliar) is associated with the worst outcomes

Table 11.15: Perpetrator features – approval or disapproval of violence and pain, harm, likely harm and death. The total sample NZ2003

Perpetrator response to the commission or aftermath of violence	**% of incidents with perpetrators**	**Moderate to extreme**			
		pain	harm	**likely harm**	**Death**
approval	78%	12%	21%	45%	11%
disapproval	8%	10%	15%	48%	5%
don't know response	14%	14%	36%	59%	18%

Some form of self-interest is the most frequent perpetrator motivation (Table 11.16), of which wanting to harm tops the list for both programmes and combined promotions and advertising. In promotions and advertising, because context is so limited, it is much harder for coders to name or categorise motivation than in programmes. Fun is the only named motivation that is more frequent in promotions and advertising, and this is due to the influence of humour in ads. In nearly one out of five ads where violence occurs, the motivation was categorised as having fun.

Table 11.16: Perpetrator motivation and pain, harm, likely harm and death. Programmes and promotions and advertising. The total sample NZ2003. Percent of incidents

	Protection		**Self Interest**			**Other:**	
	personal	**community or country**	**wanting to hurt**	**personal gain**	**wanting to have fun, play**	**self-inflicted**	**don't know/not specified**
programmes	14%	12%	30%	20%	7%	2%	15%
promotions	8%	6%	29%	10%	10%	3%	33%
moderate to extreme pain, harm and likely harm							
pain	18%	13%	20%	20%	4%	2%	23%
harm	15%	12%	19%	21%	3%	2%	28%
likely harm	14%	11%	28%	17%	4%	2%	24%
death							
deaths	17%	20%	18%	18%	2%	1%	23%

Again when looking at pain, harm and death, the unknown or lesser known perpetrator whose motivation is hard to describe has a higher association with negative outcomes than perpetrators whose motivations are definable. The motivation most associated with death as an outcome, is protection of community or country. In this motivation guns and heavy weapons are most likely to be involved. Justified violence is associated with protection as a motivating issue, either of self, friends, family or personal property when under threat, or in an official capacity as a protector of the community or the country. Although only 22% of violence is associated with a protection motivation, death is a much more likely outcome (37% of deaths) when this is the issue, rather than naked self-interest (54% of the incidents, but only 38% of the deaths). Pain, harm and likely harm are more associated with self-interest issues of wanting to hurt or of personal gain.

Most perpetrators are unknown to their victims, or the coders could not tell what the relationship was (Table 11.17), and together these two categories of perpetrators are

responsible for 59% of deaths. Although police and military make up just 9% of the perpetrators, they are responsible for 23% of the deaths that occur on television as a result of violence, again showing how sanctioned violence has the worst outcomes. At the other end of the spectrum are the friends, relatives and acquaintances of victims who are the least likely to cause a death, pain or harm

Table 11.17: Perpetrator relationship with victim in relation to pain, harm, likely harm and death. The total sample NZ2003. Percent of incidents

moderate to extreme	relative	friend	acquaintance	no relationship	police or military	don't know
pain	2%	5%	24%	27%	14%	28%
harm	3%	3%	19%	28%	13%	35%
likely harm	3%	4%	24%	24%	10%	34%
death	4%	2%	13%	31%	23%	28%
% of incidents	5%	7%	24%	24%	9%	31%

Table 11.18: The goodness and attractiveness of perpetrators and the delivery of punishment in relation to the level of pain and harm, realism and graphic violence. The total sample NZ2003. . Percent of programmes

Level	N perpetrators rated	character goodness			character attractiveness			delivery of punishment		
		good	mixed	bad	attractive character	mixed	unattractive	throughout programme	only at the end	never or rarely
- of pain and harm										
long-term	153	33%	28%	40%	43%	32%	25%	13%	48%	39%
short-term	424	30%	40%	30%	33%	42%	25%	17%	28%	55%
none at all	159	40%	34%	26%	39%	38%	23%	16%	23%	62%
- to which the depiction of pain and harm was realistic										
low	364	28%	42%	30%	27%	47%	26%	20%	27%	53%
appropriate	296	33%	31%	36%	42%	35%	23%	9%	32%	59%
- of graphic violence										
none	207	32%	41%	27%	31%	47%	22%	11%	22%	67%
low (1 - 7) score	321	31%	38%	31%	36%	37%	27%	14%	26%	60%
moderate (8 -14) score	110	26%	29%	45%	37%	36%	27%	21%	38%	40%
high (>14)	98	35%	28%	37%	36%	37%	27%	29%	47%	24%
% of perpetrators	736	31%	36%	32%	35%	40%	25%	16%	29%	55%

Television often makes violent characters attractive. We asked coders to rate at the programme level, attractiveness, goodness and the appropriateness of the punishment on up to two key perpetrators per programme. Not all perpetrators were rated, particularly where the violence in the programme was limited to one or two incidents of little consequence. Overall (Table 11.18) we found that coders rated the perpetrators of violence as more attractive, than unattractive and as 'good' and 'bad' in equal measures. NTVS coders rated perpetrators as attractive between 37% and 40% of the time. Our NTVS simulation gave a value of 36% for attractive perpetrators.

Long-term pain and harm within the programme was more associated with 'good' and 'bad' perpetrators, but had little relationship to their attractiveness. Where pain and harm , was a realistically shown coders rated perpetrators as more attractive than those in unrealistically portrayed situations.

We developed an total graphic violence measure across the twelve measures of graphic violence in the content analysis by scoring 1 point for a single instance of graphic violence within a category and 2 points for more than a single instance. A graphic violence score of 10 means that there were at least 10 instances of graphic violence per hour in the programme under scrutiny. The attractiveness of perpetrators was not at all diminished by the increase of graphic violence, but there was some polarisation (fewer 'mixed' goodness judgements) around being either a good or a bad character as the level of graphicness increased.

Coders also rated the extent to which punishment was meted out to perpetrators of violence. Overall there is a relatively low chance (16%) of television perpetrators being punished soon after their violent deeds, and more than half escape punishment altogether. Realistic presentations of the consequences of violence had little effect on the level of punishment, but long-term pain and harm and the presence of graphic violence have a strong effect in increasing the receipt and timeliness of punishment.

11.6 The nature of victims

In this section we present the features of victims of violence in our content analysis in relation to the most obvious of outcomes – death. We do not report on programmes vs. promotions and advertising or on pain, harm and likely harm as the patterns around these variables are very similar to those reported in the perpetrator analysis.

Table 11.19: Victim features – number, known and unknown. The total sample NZ2003

		% deaths/category	
Victims per incident	**% incidents**	**victims**	**perpetrators**
single victim	78%	9%	8%
more than one victim	22%	17%	13%

Table 11.19 is one of a series that lists the demographic features of victims, and it shows that one-fifth of incidents had more that victim. The total number of victims is an indeterminate one above 9584 – there are 368 incidents with between 10 and 100 victims and 89 with more than 100 victims. Where there are multiple victims, the chances that one will die in an

incident of violence, are nearly double those in incidents where there is one victim. Overall, some 11% of incidents result in death. Also in Table 11.19 and in subsequent tables are comparison columns for perpetrators, most of which have already been reported on above.

Victims show much the same patterns as perpetrators in their age distribution (Table 11.20), but there is a strong tendency, where death is the outcome, for children, mature adults and the elderly to be over-represented as victims in comparison to perpetrators-and that one in five older victims (mature and elderly) will die, double that for all other victims. Again when compared with NTVS, using the simulation, the profile of victims shows fewer adults (NZ2003 = 63% vs. NTVS = 71 to 76%), and more than double the proportion of children (NZ2003 =10% vs. NTVS =3 to 5%).

Table 11.20: Victim features – age. The total sample NZ2003

	% incidents		% deaths/category	
Age group	**victims**	**perpetrators**	**victims**	**perpetrators**
children	13%	9%	5%	2%
teenagers	9%	8%	7%	6%
adults	51%	51%	13%	13%
mature adults	5%	4%	23%	16%
elderly	2%	1%	18%	8%
don't know, NA	20%	27%	12%	15%

Table 11.21: Victim features –gender. The total sample NZ2003

	% incidents		% deaths/category	
Gender	**victims**	**perpetrators**	**victims**	**perpetrators**
male	66%	62%	10%	11%
female	21%	18%	10%	5%

Table 11.21 shows that the gender ratio for victims matches perpetrators, and that the chance of death is the same for both sexes. Again the match with NTVS is very close for men (73% vs. 71 to 75%), but women at 21% are twice as frequent as in NTVS (10%).

Looking at Table 11.22, again the pattern of victim and perpetrator is very similar across cultures. The over representation of television minority cultures in the death rates becomes more pronounced in victims than it was with perpetrators. A quarter to a third of Asian, Hispanic and other minority cultures will be dead after a violent incident compared to a tenth of 'whites'. Maori and Pacific Island cultures are even less present as victims than as perpetrators. Compared with NTVS, whites are under-represented as victims, as well as perpetrators (61% vs. 72 to 77%). It is worth noting that both victims and perpetrators showed a consistent decline of 2 to 3% per year in white characters over the three years of the NTVS content analysis, which might be the result of a slow shift in the cultural mix of characters on TV programmes.

Table 11.22: Victim features – culture. The total sample NZ2003

	% incidents		% deaths/category	
Culture	**victims**	**perpetrators**	**victims**	**perpetrators**
White	60.5%	54.1%	10%	11%
Black	5.5%	6.2%	10%	11%
Other	3.3%	2.9%	34%	19%
Asian	2.5%	3.2%	24%	14%
Hispanic	2.1%	2.3%	26%	19%
Maori	0.5%	0.5%	0%	3%
Pacific Island	0.1%	0.5%	18%	3%
Don't know	25.3%	30.3%	10%	14%

Table 11.23 shows that the distribution of the victims and perpetrators in relation to type is very similar, as one would expect. As with perpetrators, the vast majority of victims are human or animations. Just as animations seldom kill, they are seldom killed. A high proportion of wild animal related violence leads to death, particularly as victims of that violence.

Table 11.23: Victim features - type: human, animal or otherwise. The total sample NZ2003

	% incidents		% deaths/category	
Type	**victims**	**perpetrators**	**victims**	**perpetrators**
human	58%	59%	15%	15%
animations	38%	35%	3%	3%
supernatural	1%	3%	14%	10%
human-like animal	1%	1%	6%	2%
wild animal	1%	2%	27%	17%

An important difference between NZ2003 and the NTVS content analysis emerges when we compare the distribution of perpetrator type. NZ2003 appears to be 10 to 13% higher in animated characters and 5 to 12% lower in human characters than NTVS (Table 11.24). This could be due in part to coding differences, but is more likely to reflect the much broader coverage of the NTVS content analysis, particularly of movie channels. We sampled only one of 13 movie channels on SKY (eight of them are pay per view channels). This skew in our data not only affects the type distribution, but also the age distribution where there are fewer adults and more children. A higher proportion of animations will increase the 'don't know'/'not applicable' category in the culture and age distributions probably at the expense of 'adults' and 'whites'. It also affects overall estimates of pain, harm and likely harm and could account for our lower overall estimates of extreme pain and harm in comparison to the NTVS analysis.

Table 11.24: Perpetrator and victim features – type: human, animal or otherwise – comparison with NTVS data with NZ2003 NTVS simulation

	% of incidents with perpetrators		% of incidents with victims	
Type:	**NZ2003**	**NTVS**	**NZ2003**	**NTVS**
human	59%	70-71%	65%	70%
animations	32%	21-22%	33%	20-22%
supernatural	3%	3-4%	2%	2-4%
animals	2%	1%	0%	2%

Table 11.25: Victim features – approval or disapproval of violence. The total sample NZ2003

Character response to the commission or aftermath of violence	% incidents		deaths/category	
	victims	perpetrators	victims	perpetrators
approve	9%	78%	9%	11%
disapprove	81%	8%	10%	5%
don't know	9%	14%	17%	18%

Not all victims disapprove of the violence against them. Where there is no pain or harm this is not unexpected, but in 9% of the approvals, death is the outcome (Table 11.25). These relate mainly to self-inflicted violence and accidents. An example of the latter would be reckless driving resulting in death. However, victims disapprove of the violence they are subjected to in equal measure to perpetrators' approval, but, unlike perpetrators who disapprove, it has no impact on the likelihood of death.

Table 11.26. The goodness and attractiveness of victims and the deservedness of punishment in relation level of pain and harm, realism and graphic violence. The total sample NZ2003

Level	N perpetrators rated	character goodness			character attractiveness			deservedness of punishment		
		good	mixed	bad	attractive	mixed	unattractive	not deserved	sometimes deserved	mostly deserved
- pain and harm										
long-term	174	73%	20%	8%	67%	24%	9%	82%	10%	8%
short-term	449	54%	34%	11%	45%	42%	13%	61%	29%	10%
none at all	165	69%	27%	4%	53%	33%	15%	65%	28%	7%
- to which the depiction of pain and harm was realistic										
low	378	56%	36%	8%	46%	41%	14%	62%	31%	8%
appropriate	333	65%	24%	10%	53%	35%	12%	71%	19%	10%
- of graphic violence										
none	235	56%	38%	6%	47%	40%	13%	68%	27%	6%
low (1 - 7) score	335	62%	29%	9%	50%	36%	14%	65%	23%	11%
moderate (8 -14) score	121	65%	25%	10%	56%	30%	14%	64%	26%	10%
high (>14)	97	61%	25%	14%	56%	38%	6%	67%	27%	6%
total	788	61%	30%	9%	50%	37%	13%	66%	25%	9%

In contrast to the perpetrators (compare Table 11.18 with Table 11.26), most victims are seen as being good and more are seen as attractive. However, as with perpetrators, attractiveness is not affected by levels of pain and harm. In fact, goodness and attractiveness show no convincing change in connection levels of pain and harm, realism or graphic violence, apart

from a tendency for high graphicness to polarise 'good' and "bad' character judgements, as it did with perpetrators. Most victims were rated as not deserving the violence they received, especially where the consequence was long-term pain and harm. Realism and graphicness had no strong link with deservedness of punishment, even though both interact with the likelihood of punishment to the perpetrator. The general picture perceived by the coders is that, overwhelmingly, victims neither approve nor deserve the violence they experience, while perpetrators both approve the violence and largely remain unpunished for it.

In comparison with NTVS, our coders tended to find perpetrators slightly less attractive (NZ2003=36% vs. NTVS=37 to 40%), and victims slightly more attractive (NZ2003=50% vs. NTVS=42 to 45%). They also felt there were more long-term negative consequences (NZ2003= 22% vs. NTVS=12 to 16%); and fewer 'bad' guys who got punished (NZ2003=29% vs. NTVS=37 to 45%. This suggests that the violence was more unpalatable to New Zealand coders, than to US coders. However, ~~they~~ New Zealand coders also felt that there were more anti-violence messages (NZ2003=11% vs. NTVS=3 to 4%), particularly messages stating that violence was morally and/or socially wrong – more than half of the messages.

We also analysed the nature of bystanders according to the same criteria as perpetrators and victims, and they conformed closely to patterns seen for both of these other groups. There were some important differences. Where there were bystanders (39% of incidents) there were likely to be many, and chance of death as an outcome rose from 8% to 17% as the number of bystanders increased from none to many. Children, teenagers and females were much more likely to be bystanders than perpetrators or victims. Bystanders are more balanced in the approval and disapproval of violence (34% approving and 41% disapproving), but are more likely to be disapproving when the outcome is death.

11.7 Conclusion

Throughout the analysis of perpetrator, victim and bystander characteristics in relation to pain, harm, likely and death a number of features emerge. White adult males commit much more of serious violence on television, than do any other group. The presence of these features in a perpetrator means close to a one in three chance of moderate to serious harm and a one in six chance of death in an incident. This is consistent with international findings over two decades.

Violence involving children or animations is unlikely to lead to serious pain or harm. Moderate to extreme pain is relatively rare in incidences of violence across all perpetrator types. The things that we are least familiar with - the unknown, minority cultures, the supernatural and wild animals produce the highest estimates of moderate to extreme likely harm. This may be partly due to the way these perpetrators are presented on television, and partly to do with how coders judge them. Many perpetrators are portrayed attractively, a majority avoid punishment, and this is particularly true of violence where the pain and harm are portrayed realistically.

Victims are generally seen as white adults males who are attractive and undeserving of the violence they receive. Where the victims are from minority television cultures they tend to

suffer more serious consequences and about a fifth of victims experience long-term consequences of violence. The presence and the approval of bystanders appears to enhance the likelihood of serious violence

Comparisons with NTVS show a close alignment of most of the key variables, with the important difference being in the contribution of animations to the two content analyses. On the issues raised by NTVS about the attractiveness of perpetrators, the general absence of appropriate and timely punishment, the high level of unjustified violence, the use of available weapons, and high levels of harm and 'lethal' violence, our measures parallel those used by NTVS and in some cases, such as unjustified violence, our content analysis indicates more extreme values. The context of violence on television was considered by the NTVS authors to be related to the development of favourable attitudes towards the use of violence in relationships. This is certainly an argument for reducing the level of violence on television (Section 2.3.3). In so far as that argument is justified, our data strongly supports it.

The analysis of types of incident shows the 62% of incidents in programmes are assaults, and that high incident/high volume genres such as movies, animations, and crime/action/sci-fi/horror have high levels of intentional violence, much of which is shown on children's viewing time. Particularly, with respect to animations, our research reflects the finding of previous content analyses that much of the violence on television is not serious or realistic; some of it is trivial and funny, even when it is graphic. However, three of 10 accident or assaults in movies result in death, and around half the programmes shown on the movie and crime/action/sci-fi/horror genres channels, Sky 1 and Sky Movies, during children's viewing time feature a violent death and an incident of moderate to extreme pain or harm. Even on the free-to-air channels around 30% of programmes have an incident of moderate to extreme harm during children's viewing time.

Where free-to-air and pay-TV channels dramatically part company is in the presentation of graphic violence and depicted pain in children's viewing time. Almost absent on free-to-air, 24% of Sky Movies and 10% of Nickelodeon feature an incident of high graphic content. Seventy-one percent of Sky Movies and around 40% of Nickelodeon and Sky 1 will have an example of moderate to extreme pain in children's viewing time – more than double the levels of the free-to-air channels..

We have already noted the large contribution of promotions and advertising to the overall violence count in the previous chapter. In this chapter we have seen that the consequences of violence in promotions and advertising are less extreme than in programmes, largely due to the short amount of time these genres have to make point. While, violence in advertisements is mainly trivial and humorous in intent, a quarter of promotions feature death or injury and, on Sky 1 in particular, violent promotions are frequently run in low-violence comedy programmes. On other hand there appear to be few seriously violent promotions during animations or children's drama.

Promotions, advertising, the connection of violence and humour, low realism and the use of graphic elements all play a significant role in getting viewers, and children in particular, to seek out and to enjoy violent programmes. Because of the role that violence has in encouraging children to watch television, both serious and trivial violence is an issue, as is

violence in promotions and advertising. There is a debate to be had here: does television make children violent, or through their attraction to violence, deny them access to more productive *fora* for pro-social learning and social development.

12

Qualitative Analysis

> The virtue of content analysis is that it enables a vast range of textual data to be summarised and quantified in a way that is open to independent verification by any suitably informed or trained observer. Given the coding scheme for violent actions on screen anyone should be able to confirm that the text has the features being counted - the number, frequency and intensity of violent acts. But a coding scheme is only a device for translating what is seen on screen into a description from a particular viewpoint and with a particular purpose. As with all translations something gets lost in the process, in the case of television and film, what is lost is the richness and complexity of the images and the accompanying sounds.
> (Rose, 2000, 246 – 247)

Quantitative content analysis captures trends across a mass of data, but it risks losing connection with the moment-by-moment images and text which viewers experience on their screens. To catch some of the quality that was lost in translating images on screen into an audit of physical acts of violence, the coding schedule included some measures which permitted the coders to record their subjective reactions to what they saw. This was identified under the coding rubric of graphicness, pain and harm. The aim here was that the coders would act as the qualitative sounding boards for the experience of watching, recording their impressions of the intensity of the violence within a particular programme.

This chapter offers a preliminary analysis and commentary on examples of programmes from three different genres (movie, drama and cartoon) which our study found to have high counts of violence and which provide an interesting comparison of the types of violence viewers are exposed to. A brief synopsis of each programme is given followed by descriptions of selected sequences to give a closer-grained feel for the actual content, plus evaluative commentary. The actual transcripts of these sequences are contained in Appendix O.

12.1 The high-violence programmes

12.1.1 A motion picture: The Breed (2001, shown on Sky Movies)

Synopsis:
In the near but post-apocalyptic-looking future, vampires, numbering only 4000 worldwide, no longer prey on humans using, instead, a chemical substitute to satiate

their blood lust. The leader of the vampire underground, Dr Cross, is advocating that all vampires declare their identity and seek a rapprochement with humankind which will end centuries-old antagonism and hatred.

Unaware of the existence of vampires, Detective Steven Grant and his partner enter a broken down apartment building where they find the woman strung upside down with the blood drained from a cut in the neck. Shooting the fleeing murderer, Grant is attacked and his partner's jugular vein is ripped open by the assailants' bite. Called after the killing to the offices of National Security, Grant is informed of the existence of vampires, a genetically mutated breed close to humans, and told that the vampire community is seeking to be reconciled with humanity. A rogue member of the vampire community is suspected of killing Grant's partner and a series of female victims who have all been found with their throats ripped out and their blood drained. The authorities reveal that they are developing an airborne virus that if released will kill off all the vampires. But a political solution is preferred since the vampire species has properties of invulnerability, automatic tissue repair and immortality that science may be able to replicate. Grant is paired up with vampire detective Aaron Gray, and with the help of Dr Cross sets out to find the killer.

As they follow the trail into the vampire underworld, it becomes increasingly apparent that the answers lie with a fundamentalist faction of the vampires who are against the integration of the vampire and human worlds. In the final sequences, it is revealed that Dr Cross has been playing a double game, masterminding a plot to subordinate the human race to the power of vampires. The virus developed by Dr Fleming, in fact, has the opposite effect - that of killing humans - whilst being harmless to vampires. Were it to be released in retaliation for the murders, the human race will become dependent on infusions of vampire blood to be cured. The detectives in pursuing the rogue vampires have been unwittingly advancing Cross's stratagem to eliminate rivals. In a final bloody confrontation, Cross is destroyed. The authorities are appraised of Cross' machinations and seek reconciliation with the vampire community. Detective Grant having fallen in love with the beautiful vampiress, Lucy Westrena, returns to his normal duties with Aaron Gray as his new buddy and partner. An era of harmony between vampire and humans beckons.

Setting

The climax of the plot finds the detectives Grant and Gray imprisoned in glass cells in the Serenity Village Police station. Dr Cross has revealed himself as the mastermind behind the plot to make humans dependent on vampire blood as an antidote for a deadly virus. Cross admits to having murdered Grant's partner and the young women in order to precipitate an over-reaction on the part of the authorities. Now in possession of the virus, Cross has drained Gray of his blood and placed the two detectives in the cells. Gray is deranged with blood lust and it appears he has fully assumed the vampire persona.

Sequence

Cross stands at the control panel eagerly watching as the cell partition between Grant and Gray rises. As Gray raves madly, Grant recoils in fear. As Gray enters Grant's

cell his eyes are lustful and a vein pulses in his sweaty neck. Against sound effects of human screams and animal howls Gray batters the wall of the cell and this is interspersed with subjective flash cuts to scenes of the Nazi murder of Gray's wife and child.

Gray smashes the glass cell, leaps on to Cross, sinks his fangs into his neck and drinks his blood. Gray yells to Grant: "Go!" As Grant flees through the cellars to the armoury Gray and Cross struggle until Cross overcomes Gray and snaps his neck. Grant grabs a weapon in the armoury. Cross rises up from his struggle with Gray and arrives in the armoury. Grant loads a rifle with silver bullets and Cross remarks "Excellent Choice…". He tries to wrestle the gun from Grant. We see a close up of Cross's face and an extreme close up of the muzzle of the expensive gun pointed at Grant.

Gray suddenly rises up behind Cross who swings around to fire at him. Gray's body is hit by the bullet and, crying out with the pain, he collapses. Grant struggles with Cross who holds him up with one hand and tosses him away saying: "That's enough of that!".

Gray rises behind Cross and drives the sheared–off butt of a rifle through his mid torso. Cross withdraws the rifle back through his torso. Grant reaches for a grenade and drives it into the gaping wound in Cross' stomach. Cross reaches into the wound to retrieve the grenade but there is a loud explosion and Cross' body disintegrates and his head is blown off.

Fig 12.1 The Breed - Cross Death Sequence

Fig 12.2 The Breed – the disintegration of Cross

Fig 12.3 The Breed – Cross' severed head and hand

Commentary

The above sequence is fairly representative of the scheme of violence found in *The Breed*. Other scenes involve impaling, decapitation, skull crushing and, though not explicitly shown, a shooting off of a vampire suspects' testicle as an encouragement to get him to talk. The sight of blood oozing from bodily parts is common, but this consonant with the genre of vampirism. There are several explicit sexual scenes in the movie, usually but not exclusively of the sado-masochistic variety. The angle of

shot is generally low when showing interactions between humans and vampires or vampires in isolation, signifying the overwhelming power of the supernatural. Interactions between humans tend to be eye-line matched, facilitating viewer identification.

12.1.2 Series: Crime Scene Investigation (Sky One)

This series chronicles the lives of a passionate, but professional team of crime scene investigators in Las Vegas: Gil Grissom (William Petersen), the senior forensics officer who lives and breathes his job; Catherine Willows (Marg Helgenberger), an ex-stripper and single mother juggling the job she loves and her daughter; Warrick Brown (Gary Dourdan), a junior investigator who learns some of his lessons the hard ways; Nick Stokes (George Eads), whose charming manner goes a long way in aiding investigations, and Sara Sidel (Jorja Fox), the newest member of the team. Captain Jim Brass (Paul Guilfoyle) is a no-nonsense investigator who assists from his position in Homicide. "Not since the days of *Quincy* have audiences been glued to the television to watch forensic experts peer through microscopes and dust bathtubs for fingerprints." – (CBS n.d.)

Synopsis: The Stalker episode

A young woman is found dead, the victim of a bizarre murder in what seems to be a totally locked apartment. The initial investigation reveals that the woman was being stalked by a killer who appeared to watch her every move , despite her efforts to seal off any possible point of entry. In the opening sequence, the woman, panic-stricken hides herself in the closet only to be surprised by the stalker and asphyxiated by a plastic bag, brutally forced over her head. The woman's body, when discovered, is draped over a toilet and her hair has been dyed red. Grissom discovers that the murderer had been hiding in the attic of the woman's apartment, watching her every move from above. The team are directed to interview any tradesperson who would have had access to the woman's apartment. A clairvoyant visits Grissom and is able to describe the woman's murder in detail. Grissom is suspicious but is in no position to bring a charge. Meanwhile, Nick soon runs afoul the stalker when he and Warrick visit a cable installer who had worked at the victim's apartment. The installer is in fact the perpetrator and attacks Nick, pushing him out of the window. Fortunately he survives the fall with minor injuries and concussion. As Nick goes home to recuperate, the CSI team view tapes found in the perpetrator's apartment which reveal that Nick is also an object of the stalker's obsession.

When Nick is resting in his home, he is visited by the clairvoyant who insists that he is in imminent danger. The Stalker who has been hiding in the ceiling space, descends and kills the clairvoyant, and then confronts Nick. In the ensuing discussion the stalker claims that he and Nick are kindred spirits. The arrangement of his latest victim copying an incident in Nick's past when he found his prom night girlfriend, a natural redhead, passed out on a toilet floor. After an altercation with Nick, the Stalker threatens to kill himself and Nick attempts to stop him and puts his own life in jeopardy. Fortunately, Brass and some uniformed cops arrive just in time to save Nick and place the suspect under arrest. In the closing sequence Grissom, citing Maslow's

hierarchy of needs, unravels the complexities of the sick play of identity that led the stalker to want to become Nick. (Plot summary with additional observations from Elyse (n.d.).

Setting

The opening pre-credit sequence in all episodes in which the specific event – usually the act of murder or the discovery of a corpse - that sets the forensic narrative off on its search for a resolution, invariably case solved.

Sequence

Aerial shots set the scene of Las Vegas at night. We hear a telephone ring and a synthesised voice say: "No one is available, please leave a message." A male voice replies: "Okay I'll call back later."

The camera tracks to a partially undressed young woman cowering in fear and clutching a baseball bat. We hear a repeat of the synthesised telephone message. A close up of the woman reveals her biting her nails as a man's voice says: "Look you can't hide from me bitch. Are you there? Now didn't I tell you not to bite your nails?"

Against sounds of screams and heavy breathing the woman tears out the telephone jack and then runs in panic through the apartment checking that the windows are sealed. A close up shot of the bathroom window shows a large nail buried in the frame. The heavy breathing sound continues. The woman enters a room and hides in a clothes closet. A bird's-eye shot from the interior of the closet shows the woman squatting on floor peering out. There are sounds of someone approaching. Through the closet door the woman sees a Scottish Terrier looking up and asking it to be let in. She tells it to go away. But she lets it in and draws back into the interior with the dog in her arms. A close up of the woman's face lit from above shows her scream as she is suddenly snatched back into darkness. She struggles in a stranglehold as the dog barks.

The next shot is of a dead woman draped over toilet her face turned to the bowl. A torch beams and camera flashes. Grissom says: "Posed?"

Grisson and Willow photograph and examine the crime scene. The bath is shown splattered with a red substance. Willow swabs it and says it is definitely not blood because it is the wrong colour and wrong texture. It's hair dye. They discuss that the lady next door heard the dog yelping and called the cops. Willow checks the window and finds no sign of forced entry. Grissom goes to look for the dog. He notices that there are triple locks on all the doors, every shade is drawn and they see an alarm. Agreeing that the woman was a prisoner in her own home, Willow then asks: "How'd he get in?" To which Grisson replies: "Better question, how'd he get out?"

CUE Opening credits, theme music.

Figure 12.4 CSI, The Stalker – victim posed with hair dyed.

Fig 12.5 CSI The Stalker – the bathtub

Commentary

The above sequence follows the discovery pattern that opens each episode. A crime is committed and then the process of discovery of the evidence begins. In the episode that follows, the originating violence is returned to several times. In the autopsy, when the mortician's verbal description cues a visual flashback and computer graphics sequence showing a haemorrhage occurring inside the victim's brain, and subsequently when a mysterious psychic descriptions of the scene are matched by flashbacks of a woman's face tight wrapped under plastic struggling for breath and a struggle on a bed. Reconstructed violence is matched by the murder's assaults on Nick Stokes. The camera deployment tends to be level with the viewer's eyeline unless the relative height of the interactants indicates looking down or looking up, or if there is an eyeline match, as in the high angle shots in the closet, with someone's actual position in on screen space. The fairly static deployment is not found in the

subjective "flashback" sequences which are clearly bracketed as emotional. This bracketing serves to underscore as normal the objective, emotionless engagement of the crime scene investigators, typified by the tightly wrapped leader, Gil Grissom.

12.1.3 Cartoon: The Angry Beavers

Aired by Nickelodeon and created by Mitch Schauer, this cartoon ran for four seasons in the USA. The series was cancelled by Nickelodeon in 2000, with an entire 5th season remaining unseen. In this series, younger viewers meet Daggett and Norbert, two fun-loving brothers who just happen to be aquatic rodents. When their mother has a second litter, it's time for Dag and Norb to strike out on their own and fend for themselves. Soon they have a swingin' bachelor beaver pad in a dam and can stay up as late as they want, doing what they want. But if living on your own can be a blast, it's not always a piece of cake. And when circumstances lead normally good-natured Dag and Norb to show their ugly side, they are really The Angry Beavers (Nickelodeon, n.d.).

Synopsis: Beach Beavers A-Go-Go episode
(originally screened 20 Sept 1997)
Norb and Dag are depressed by the prospect of Winter hibernation and decide to head South to chase the Sun. The trip promises adventure and high jinks. But turns out to be a road to disaster, especially for Norb. Suffering in quick succession being flattened on the radiator of a truck as they hitchhike, a foot roasting by hot sand, being slammed by an out of control jet ski, trampled on by volley ball players and snipped at by a gang of enraged crabs and, to top it all, flattened by a passing tsunami, the boys decide that there are good reasons why beavers don't migrate for winter. Pulling the plug on their trip, literally, whilst on the seabed, they are sucked back to their lake and resume their normal rambunctious lives. (Plot summary with additions from the television guide TV Tome (n.d.).

Setting
Dag, the least lucky and more accident prone of the two beaver brothers, has convinced his brother Norb to venture south for the winter. Nearly ending up as road-kill on a truck radiator grille, the fun-seeking pair arrives in a Miami-style beach location. In a short while the accident-prone Dag is having less fun than his brother and is beginning to fume about it. The episode pursues the usual theme of sibling rivalry.

In an open sea and sky Dag passes from left to right on an aggressive shark-faced jet ski calling it a stupid thing. The jet ski accelerates and crashes into a distant lighthouse. Calling out "you can't leave me here", Dag is thrown off and returns to foreground. The jet ski rushes back and crashes again into the lighthouse which collapses into the sea. It shoots back to foreground with Dag prostrate on handlebars.

Norb nonchalantly water-skis by exclaiming: “Hey, look at me! I love it here!”. Fuming Dag rises unsteadily and revs up his jet ski proclaiming: “I’ll show him! Come on you stupid thing let’s go!”. He blasts off and crashes into a buoy.

It is sunset and Norb is on the beach playing the guitar and singing. A bevy of scantily clad beauties soon surround Norb.

Dag holds a saxophone and says: "Huh you call that music! I’ll show ‘em some music." Puckering and wetting his lips Dag blows into saxophone but there is no sound. He blows again and again until out pops a crab which pinches his nose and makes him yowl. Dag and the crab blast off into stratosphere. There is a whistling missile noise and they crash back into the sand. The crab blows a raspberry to Dag while he repeatedly strikes at it with the saxophone. The crab dashes across beach chased by a saxophone wielding Dag. But Dag runs back, chased by a snapping claw wielding posse of crabs. Dag counterattacks, and the crabs flee.

Dag and the crabs battle it out as Norb’s singing continues to gather admirers. He finishes singing with cheers and applause. Dag runs into the sea pursued by crabs. The crabs halt at water’s edge waving saxophones in anger. There is the noise of a jet ski. Dag turns on hearing the jet ski. His eyes pop out in terror as the jet ski hits him at high speed. Crunch! Dag flips into seat and the jet ski races off. The beach is ahead Dag tries to stop the engine exclaiming: "Die you stupid thing die!". The jet ski ploughs up beach and slams Dag into a wall.

Fig 12.6 The Angry Beavers – Dag prostrate on his jet ski

Fig 12.7 The Angry Beavers – Dag Nipped

Fig 12.8 The Angry Beavers: Dag smashing at Crab

Commentary

The sequence just described is typical of the fast pacing found in this episode and in cartoons in general. To some extent dividing the sequence into shots is artificial since unlike live action sequences, camera movement is simulated by the graphic content expanding or contracting to give an illusion of movement and depth. As is common in cartoons, very little harm is depicted following major collisions and upsets. Though the intensity of the violence is high, the pain or harm caused is not directly represented but communicated by verbal reactions and impact sounds. Overall, action is confined to the level of gross bodily action consistent with the traditions of slapstick humour and the use of cheap and quick animation techniques. One of the reasons, the violence count is high is that physical interaction is the main vehicle for humour.

12.2 Getting real: Questions of modality

An obvious question arises when considering the above examples, a question that relates to the study's sample as a whole. Are the violent incidents being counted really comparable? The virtue of a quantitative analysis is that it reduces the difference between kinds of genres and formats to a single, economical measure – is this a false economy?

At first sight, the comparison between live action and cartoons would strike most individuals as inappropriate. But is it any less inappropriate than comparing a film with an overt fantasy setting such as *The Breed* with *CSI*, a series that parades its objectivity and relevance to the real world? Are cartoons any less real to young children? Is a vampire movie less real to a believer in the occult? A meaningful answer to such speculations can only be provided by a careful study of the kind of interpretations that specific audiences deploy when watching such programmes.

Having said that, all texts cue their audience or readers to take a particular stance to the reality they portray and this cueing has some impact on viewer or reader perceptions. The cueing process is related to the concept of modality. In this context modality refers to the nature of the reality that a text claims to stand for: a claim which indicates its truth-value. The truth-value can be literal - the text claims in its essentials to mirror the real world as present in natural perception. Or the claim can be more fanciful or imaginative – if such a world existed it would look like this and people within it would behave accordingly. Truth can have a literal or "real" value, it can be probable or possible or, as in fantasy, impossible outside the text in which it occurs.

Different types of texts and different types of genres can be said to express an affinity with different states of the real. By extension viewers who enjoy these texts share the same kind of affinity – compare, for example, the reality favoured by X-File fans with that favoured by Soap Opera fans. Commonplace expressions, such as "too real", unreal, cool or ubercool, turn out on examination to be judgements about the relationship between a particular film or video and the reality it is perceived as valuing. Children - and some adults - have an interest in fantasy, one reason being that the mundane "normal" reality is a world defined and controlled by adults (Hodge and Kress, 1988, 121-142).

An important standard defining the "realism" of images is the standard set by 35mm colour photography. We judge an image "real" when, for instance, its colours are approximately saturated as those in 35 mm photographs. When they are more saturated, we judge them as exaggerated "more than real", excessive. When they are less saturated we judge them as less than real, "ethereal" and "ghostly" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, 163). What is true of colour saturation applies to other features such as rendition of detail, lighting, depth and detailing of the background. The greater images deviate from the 35mm standard the less real they are perceived to be.

If we ask what are modality values of the three programmes we have described, we find that they differ quite markedly. *The Angry Beavers* claims a different kind of reality than that claimed by *CSI* which of the sample is closest to the 35mm norm. The difference between *The Angry Beavers* and *CSI* rests most obviously on the fact that the former is a graphic rather than a photographic medium. *The Angry Beavers* makes no attempt to render its graphic images as close to the photographic standard – the colours are garish, the figures two dimensional, rendered with a lack of texture and detail on a largely undifferentiated background. Obviously, beavers do not walk upright or talk or interact with humans as if they were just one of a kind.

The Angry Beavers does not aim for realism in depiction but the communication of an emotional dynamic. Dag and Norb are sibling rivals, and Dag in particular models the bottled-up rage of the disappointed. The violence of *The Angry Beavers* is closer to geometry than depiction. The violence that is shown is devoid of serious physical consequences, all the better to provide object lessons in the dynamics of interpersonal aggression.

By contrast, *The Breed* and *CSI* are photographically based and to that extent both lay a claim to the realism of the 35mm standard. Both films construct three-dimensional looking human bodies and scenarios with a depth perspective. Colours and surface features simulate natural perception and wounds, bodily reactions to blows look as they might look in real life. But even here there are differences that suggest *The Breed* and *CSI* communicate a different relationship to reality. The coding of the images in *The Breed*, particularly in its use of colour – mainly confined to blues and blacks – departs from the 35mm standard and conventional photographic realism. True, the prevalence of murk and dark is consistent with the vampire genre, but also with an abstract or high art modality. This departure from normal perception into the realms of art is further re-enforced by the settings and the way the actors are dressed, evoking a Gothic subculture and some unnamed Central-European culture. Although it does not entirely succeed in its ambitions, *The Breed* is attempting to be an art movie about vampires. The world it evokes is depicted realistically in its own terms but it is a world that proclaims its unnaturalness. The violence shown, although mired in gore, is highly ritualistic and is likely to be read as conventional rather than real, although some scenes are very graphic.

CSI by contrast is fully committed to the reproduction of "natural" perception. The microphotography sequences showing objects entering the body of victims would seem to be an exception but for the fact that this unusual level of perception is nonetheless represented as forensically accurate and real. The entire emphasis of the series is to focus on events that are occurring in the here and now and to underscore the personal and domestic setting of most murders. The investigation process, represented as the epitome of objectivity, is reinforced and reinforces the "emotional" realism of the relationships between the men and women who make up the Crime Scene team and the men and women who are the perpetrators and victims.

The consideration of the different modalities in force in these examples calls to mind the distinction between *playful*, *depicted* and *authentic* violence found in the Leeds

studies (Morrison, 2000; Morrison et al., 1999). The violent counts may be the same but the meaning of the violent acts for audiences is likely to be inflected by the setting and genre in which the violence occurs. These texts are not neutral channels, but through their construction signal their own relationship to the world as normally perceived and the likelihood of the events depicted happening to the viewer, and their severity. This kind of conclusion, found in the reception paradigm, tends to reverse the behaviourist view that a violent act is a violent act irrespective of the means and modality of representation. In this view it could be argued, for example, that humour does not moderate the impact of depicted violence so much as serve to desensitise the viewer to its occurrence. The degree to which the modality features of the text can be disregarded in the interests of generalisability is the issue posed by a quantitative as opposed to a qualitative form of analysis.

From a developmental perspective, very young children would find all of these programmes very disturbing, including *The Angry Beavers*, because they do not distinguish between an action and its context. But for older children and adults the reality value given to acts on screen will depend on a range of variables such as the context of viewing, emotional state at time of viewing, familiarity with the genre, degree of identification with victim. *CSI* because it attempts to replicate a real time forensic process occurring in the present is likely to have the greatest potential to disturb. But even here the problem solving process and the mood of cold objectivity may distance the viewer from becoming emotionally engaged with the violence on screen.

The materials analysed in this chapter underscore the influence of the text as a factor in the evaluation of violent content. The concept of degrees of realism implied by the concept of modality has a direct relationship to the graphicness and explicitness of violent depictions. Cartoons can be graphic but, because they are not photographic, they always signal the fact that they are representation of a violent act. In that sense, they are a step away from "reality". Film as a medium, no less a representation, nonetheless creates an impression that what is depicted is really occurring or has really occurred. The same act, say a stabbing, can be perceived as more or less "real", more or less threatening, depending on the way it is presented.

As pointed out in Chapter 10, the influence that different kinds of programmes have is, in part, a function of the way in which they are constructed as texts. This construction, in turn, may encourage or discourage the viewer to react in a particular way. But the chain of influence is not yet complete. For if different kinds of text encourage different kinds of reactions, it is equally the case that different kinds of viewers may react in different ways. The role of the viewer is considered in the next chapter.

13

Viewer Reactions to Violence

13.1 Introduction

As noted in Chapter 9 (which dealt with methodology) an important aspect of the research brief was to include a qualitative analysis of viewer reactions to violence on television. The research participants for this qualitative phase were the coders selected for the content analysis. The coders were chosen from four ethnic groups. These were: Pasifika (Samoan, Tongan and Cook Island), Maori, Pakeha/European and Asian (all Chinese, five from China and one from Indonesia). Although these participants cannot be said to be fully representative of all ethnicities, their responses do shed some understanding on the way New Zealanders of different cultural backgrounds respond to televised violence. Participants consisted of both genders, divided by age (under 25 years, 25-44 years, and 45 years and over). Each focus group was composed of 5 or 6 coders. The qualitative research consisted of two steps:

a. Individual questionnaires filled out by all of the coders.
b. Focus group sessions with each of the major representative cultural groups (Pasifika, Maori, Pakeha/European and Asian) of the coder group.

The research was carried out after coder training but before the content analysis was started.

13.2 Coders' questionnaires

The questionnaire covered socio-demographic, media exposure and attitudes to violence questions (Appendix L). Although the coder group was small, the questionnaire did provide some information about a range of views concerning media violence, and more general information on exposure to the media. This information can help provide some further understanding on the issues being covered in this report, at least for a small grouping of New Zealanders. Without further research work with a larger sample, any attempt to generalize these results would be incorrect. However, some initial hypotheses are suggested through the current study.

In reporting on characteristics and attitudes of coders, each coder is identified by a short pneumonic, in terms of their three key sampling characteristics - their age, ethnicity and gender (See table 13.13 in Appendix M).

Table 13.1: Ethnicity by age, by gender: realization of sampling design

			Yrs			Total
			Under 25	25-44	45 +	
Male	Ethnicity	Pakeha	2		1	3
		Asian	1		2	3
		Maori	1	1	1	3
		Pasifika	1	1		2
	Total		5	2	4	11
Female	Ethnicity	Pakeha		1	1	2
		Asian	1		2	3
		Maori	1	1	1	3
		Pasifika	1	1	1	3
	Total		**3**	**3**	**5**	**11**

Table 13.1 reports on the implementation of the research design according to the key characteristics of the coders. The aims of covering a balance of people for age, ethnicity and gender were broadly achieved.

Table 13.2 repeats the key sampling characteristics of the coders and then provides a more extensive range of social background information about them. Given the main base of recruitment was from students, it is not surprising that most are tertiary students with some one-fifth being post-graduate. Most are single and most have no children living with them. On the other hand, the remaining one-third of older coders are married and these coders do tend to have children living with them.

Table 13.3 on occupations shows that although almost all have a tertiary education involvement, this is leavened with a range of wider experiences.

The next set of data (Table 13.4) reveals the media equipment available to the coders and some aspects of their daily media exposure/use. All had TVs: with households split between 1 & 2 sets. Two-thirds had VCRs and another quarter 2 VCRs, and the group was split half and half between those with and those without DVDs. A quarter subscribe to Satellite TV. In terms of use, two-thirds watch one hour of TV or less and one-third 2 to 3 hours per day.

The group of coders is quite varied in its media diet (Table 13.5 in Appendix M) and enjoys a broad mix of drama, comedy, news and documentaries (with a small interest in sport). It would be difficult to pin down the range, since the overwhelming impression is of mixes.

Reasons for watching (Table 13.6 in Appendix M) are split fairly neatly three ways: intellectual motives, entertainment needs and those indicating the importance of both. One coder expressed the range: “Information, entertainment, (to relieve) boredom”; and another reports similarly: “Interesting, learning new things, relaxation - comic relief from stress”.

Table 13.2: Socio-demographic characteristics of coders

		Count	Col %
1. Age	-25	9	39.1%
	25-44	5	21.7%
	45 +	9	39.1%
Group Total		23	100.0%
2. Ethnicity	Pakeha	6	26.1%
	Asian	6	26.1%
	Maori	6	26.1%
	Pasifika	5	21.7%
Group Total		23	100.0%
3. Gender	Male	11	47.8%
	Female	12	52.2%
Group Total		23	100.0%
4. Education	Secondary	2	8.7%
	UG	16	69.6%
	PG	5	21.7%
Group Total		23	100.0%
5. Marital Status	Single	14	60.9%
	Married	6	26.1%
	Single parent	3	13.0%
Group Total		23	100.0%
6. Number of children living with you?	None	14	60.9%
	One	4	17.4%
	Two/more	5	21.7%
Group Total		23	100.0%

The same set of questions was repeated, but more specifically, in relation to favourite programme (Table 13.7 in Appendix M): the very considerable popularity of CSI is overwhelming. Otherwise only a couple of soaps and news programmes appear.

The distribution of motives changed considerably when the coders were queried about specific favourite programmes (Table 13.8 in Appendix M) – these were chosen far more for intellectual appeal reasons (70%) than for entertainment motives.

When asked about offensive aspects of TV (Table 13.9 in Appendix M) many (some 60%) of the coders mentioned violence (e.g. "Explicit sex/violence programmes as early as 9.30 pm"), but a handful were concerned about other programming issues (e.g. number of ads, number of similar programmes) and another handful gave more disparate responses (a couple without any concerns, or criticising programmes for reasons other than violence e.g. "Advertising, Promotions - constant channel/programme boosterism - Excessive triviality of most programming" or "reality TV (e.g. OZ: big brother) or Trailed trash entertainment").

The coders were asked about the effect of violent TV on themselves (Table 13.10 in Appendix M): there was a roughly 40:60 split between those unconcerned about such effects (e.g. "has little effect on me because I know it's acted") and those who were concerned.

When asked about the effect of violent TV on others in their families, the coders revealed a higher level of concern (Table 13.11, Appendix M): there was a roughly 30:70 split between those unconcerned about such effects (e.g. "Wife probably watches more violent programme, than I am inclined to; Effect? - Not discernible" or "The effects for me, is to watch less TV") and those who were concerned (e.g. "My son finds violence very frightening and it does affect him in many ways like how people should behave towards others").

Table 13.3: Occupation	**Key: Y=young, M=middle, O=older E=European, M=Maori, A=Asian, P=Pasifika**
YEF	Student Bachelor of social practice
YEM	University student (Business) also part-time waiter
YEM	Tertiary student
YMF	Student/ retail assistant & 3rd year BA Social Science
YMM	Student
YPF	Full time Student - Bachelor of Social Science
YPM	Student
YAF	Full time student
YAM	Immigration consultant
MEF	Student, Bachelor of Social Practice -Counselling Major
MMF	Student
MMM	Student - Applied Science
MPF	Student full-time
MPM	Film Maker, P Time Gardener
OEF	Tourism marketer, teacher
OEM	Retired (formerly journalist)
OMF	Student ft, pt mail officer
OMM	Ft student
OPF	Correctional/Assessment Manager
OAF	
OAF	
OAM	Student of Master of Arts in Communication Studies
OAM	Books distributor, Lab supervisor

Finally, the coders were asked about the effect of violent media on society more generally (Table 13.12 in Appendix M), and this shift in focus reshaped the distribution even further, to a 10:90 split between those unconcerned ("I think it could affect society, but what I see doesn't seem to be particularly violent") and those concerned, who expressed their views in a variety of ways (e.g. "TV violence does not encourage violence in society, however seeing too much of it numbs us to violence in reality, so that we think nothing of a real life beating, explosion or death" or "I feel that certain areas of society feel that their violent acts are justified by what's portrayed on TV").

Table 13.4: Media

		Count	Col %
Does your home have?	1 TV	11	47.8%
	2/2+ TVs	12	52.2%
Group Total		23	100.0%
VCR	0	2	8.7%
	1	15	65.2%
	2	6	26.1%
Group Total		23	100.0%
DVD	0	10	45.5%
	1	12	54.5%
Group Total		22	100.0%
Satellite TV	1	6	100.0%
Group Total		6	100.0%
Free to Air TV	1	21	100.0%
Group Total		21	100.0%
Satellite TV	1	5	100.0%
Group Total		5	100.0%
use Rental Tapes etc	1	17	100.0%
Group Total		17	100.0%
Hours of TV per day	1 hour/less	10	62.5%
	2-3 hours	6	37.5%
Group Total		16	100.0%

The broad lesson seems to be that one's concern with violence increases with social distance. Most of the coders felt that they themselves could avoid violent programmes or handle them (even if some were annoyed about being exposed) but were concerned about others in their families (and very much so in relation to children) and even more were concerned about the diffuse effects of media violence on the wider community.

13.3 Focus groups: Method

The focus groups were held after the coders had filled in the questionnaires. The main purpose of the group discussions was to begin to develop an understanding of viewer perceptions of TV violence across key cultural groupings. Through their initial training, the coders had already begun to consider and evaluate televised violence. To that extent, their responses may not be typical, but as the transcripts of the discussions indicated, the participants were able to reflect on the views and opinions they had held prior to the initial training sessions. For example, when asked whether the training had affected her views on television violence, one coder commented: "I think for me it's heightened my awareness".

Two of the project researchers took the role of facilitators in the one-and-a-half hour focus group sessions with the aim of introducing aspects of television violence for discussion. In line with focus group methodology, the facilitators did not lead the discussion but provided prompts for the focus group to elaborate upon. The attitude was taken that the least involvement of the facilitator the better, leaving the coders mostly to discuss topics amongst themselves. Also present at each focus group meeting was a cultural consultant. Their role was to represent members of their group who might have any issues or problems with the research itself or the way it was being conducted. In addition, the cultural consultants were able to expand on particular cultural themes or attitudes that were raised during the focus group sessions for the researchers. Note-takers were also present and the discussions tape-recorded and transcribed.

The following list was used by the facilitators in prompting discussion though it was not necessarily strictly adhered to, since the aim was to allow the groups to focus on what was important to them within their culture:

- What kinds of programmes do you normally watch? Why do you watch them?
- Of the programmes you have been coding which did you feel was the most violent and why?
- What aspects of the programmes did you find most offensive?
- What in your view was the most realistic violent content you have viewed in training or otherwise? Why?
- What are your personal impressions of how violence is used on TV?
- What effects might violence have on others in your family?
- Has the training influenced your views on the effect of violence on TV? How?

Key findings from the focus group sessions are described below.

13.4 Focus group findings

13.4.1 Awareness of violence after coder training

Members in each focus group commented on how their coder training had heightened their awareness of violence on television. This seemed to be particularly noticeable in relation to the cartoons that were viewed. While some people were not sure whether they believed televised violence was actually linked to aggression, most commented that increased knowledge through the coding process had made them more sensitive to what they and their children were now watching. Some felt that their families may have become somewhat desensitised to violent images on television and they appreciated having their attention explicitly drawn to the issue.

13.4.2 Concern about the impact of violence on children

Across all groups, members were particularly concerned about the impact that television has on children. The Pakeha/European group stressed the copycat or imitative behaviour that was seen in school playgrounds particularly of programmes with martial arts themes such as the cartoon *Jackie Chan.* While cartoons involved 'slap-stick' violence and was not considered 'real', children still had the propensity to copy characters they idolised. Within the Maori focus group, some members commented that they found some language on television to be verbal violence that could upset children. One Maori participant suggested that children may feel that cruel or vicious language was actually directed at them: "Even with *Scooby Doo* there was a lot of 'I'm going to exterminate you' – that sort of language around killing – to wipe things out." Realistic images of volcanoes erupting or meteorites hitting the earth were also felt to be particularly upsetting for younger viewers. The Pasifika group were aware that some of the violence portrayed on television was at odds with Pasifika family values such as collectivity, respect, humility and love. The Asian group was concerned that children copied behaviour that they saw or got excited by violence and violent language. The Pasifika, Maori and Asian groups all made a point of emphasising that the use of coarse, cruel or 'nasty' language was disrespectful to their elders.

13.4.3 Sex on television is worse than violence

All of the focus groups were worried about sexually explicit material on television declaring it to be more of a problem than violence. Some members of the Maori group reported stories of whanau members turning away from the television screen in embarrassment, when people were kissing. The Pasifika group also said that they objected to graphic nudity, inappropriate dress, or the exposure of breasts and genitalia. Sexual images portrayed in advertising as well as in television programmes were often considered distasteful. It was reported that this attitude reflected social norms back in the Islands where such matters are private and the body is seen as sacred. It was also quite common in Pacific families to avoid watching sexual scenes when the opposite sex was present. This was particularly observed in the case of girls in the presence of brothers, fathers or uncles. The Asian group disliked the amount of sex on television. They also objected to the fact that it was shown at times when children might see it. Comment was made that, in China, television was regulated and sex scenes were censored, though one participant noted that in some Asian countries, if people wanted to see sex films they could buy pirated copies.

The Pakeha/European group, and especially the younger males and females, raised objection to the portrayal of young girls wearing sexy clothing and having a 'suggestive' look. It was noted that this seemed to be more apparent in music videos. They felt these images verged on soft porn. The speed of the change, over the years, in what was acceptable on television was worrying to the group. It was perceived that family values were being eroded and that this could be seen in programmes

such as *Shortland Street* which showed people "hopping in and out of bed" all the time.

13.4.4 Some violence is acceptable

Violence that could be morally justified was seen as being acceptable by most of the focus group participants. The Maori members referred to such justification as utu (retribution). An example of utu was provided via the treatment of the character of Uncle Billy in *Once Were Warriors.* Uncle Billy was seriously beaten up when it was discovered he had molested his brother's daughter.

The Asian focus group felt that violence needed to have a purpose, such as the teaching of right from wrong. In the East, violence is seen as a tool for compliance and morality. The group cited violent programmes such as *CSI* and *Walker Texas Ranger* as being acceptable and potentially satisfying because justice is meted out and the bad guy gets caught. In addition, *CSI* was cited as a programme that encouraged analytical thinking and this was considered to be both entertaining and mentally challenging. Authentic Chinese Kung Fu movies were considered to be more enjoyable than Hollywood versions of martial arts, which were exaggerated, and not true to life.

The younger females in the Pakeha/European group, although objecting to violence, felt that the graphic violence in community advertisements about drink driving and domestic violence had an important place in television because of the stark messages they sent to viewers about the consequences of irresponsible behaviour. Generally members of the Pakeha/European group felt that they could accept or even enjoy some other types of violence because it was not considered 'real'. Examples of this included Arnold Schwarzenegger films or those involving shooting, bombs or fighting using special effects as in 'blockbuster war movies'. The younger Pakeha/European males said they liked action and martial arts films and this was also reflected in the Maori group who commented that tane (males) were more likely to watch such films as well. Younger members of the Maori group said they were insulated from the influence of televised violence because they concentrated on the special effects and the craft of the film-makers. The Pasifika group saw more of a generational difference, with younger Pasifika viewers being more desensitised to violence. Older viewers tended to compare the current violence on television with their memories and recalled seeing less graphic violence on television when they were growing up. The group distinguished between violence and action saying they enjoyed the wrestling by the Samoan known as "The Rock", not perceiving this as violence because his moves were pre-planned. They also highlighted the fact that violence in overseas programming had less of an effect on them because they saw the protagonists and victims as 'foreign', whereas programmes with connections to home, (New Zealand or the Pacific) had more 'relational' influence and could be disturbing.

13.4.5 Violence that was disliked

The more realistic violence was, the more the Pakeha/European group disliked it. They referred to the news as an example involving realistic violence and it disturbed them because it showed people with whom they could identify. However, they felt it was important that the news included violent images in broadcasts so that people could be aware of what was going on in the community and internationally. They found violence in fiction more gratuitous where, for example, someone might be punched several times and then might just get up and walk away unscathed.

Participants in both the Maori and Pakeha/European groups disliked programmes that contained themes about the supernatural or spiritual world. Several members of the Maori group mentioned programmes that represented the supernatural as being unreal. This was a paradox for many Maori who relate to the supernatural as a part of reality, and read programmes of the supernatural and the like as being cautionary tales relevant to their own life. Inappropriate rendering of this concept in television programming was seen as dangerous and emotionally violent. Members of the Pakeha group said that programmes involving supernatural forces or the potential for the unknown to be real were scary and disliked. They felt less in control of their feelings about what might be "out there".

Some programmes with religious themes were perceived as derogating the Pasifika group's religious values and were offensive. This included programmes that tended to show extremist views of religion as in 'crazy' people killing others by the will of God or focusing on God as being the one to blame for everything. Programmes such as *Charmed* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which made 'demons' and 'spirits' popular, were entertaining to some members of the group but others objected to the content because it did not relate to commonly held values about God. This group felt that much of what was shown on television (for example, rude or crass behaviour, disrespect for elders, swearing) was contradictory and offensive to Pacific people's faith and seemed to be becoming the norm.

The Asian group were able to clearly differentiate between East and West interpretations of violence. From an Asian point of view, programmes like *Charmed* and *CSI* were empowering because the bad guys always got caught. Comedy or cartoons that had no purpose and did not teach anything were not valued. These participants also perceived a Western tendency to value animal over human life, which they found strange and potentially immoral. Wrestling programmes such as WWF might be a good tension release, they said, but most disliked the programme for its violence.

13.4.6 Generational differences

Some of the Pasifika group felt that younger members had grown up with television violence and were less likely to be offended or shocked by it, compared with their elders. As a result, violence was seen by younger members as 'common' or 'normal'.

Similar comments were reflected in the Maori group with younger members saying that they sought programmes with action. It was reported that if there was no action younger viewers tended to get bored and channel-surfed. The younger members of the Asian group took a different perspective saying they found television a good source of understanding Western culture and provided guidance for how they might adapt to living in New Zealand. Generational differences amongst the Pakeha/European group mainly focused on the choice of programmes that were watched with the older members preferring documentaries and British comedies.

13.4.7 Attitudes to death

Because screen violence is often associated with death, the different attitudes to dead bodies and the circumstances surrounding them raised interesting comments from the focus groups. The Maori group, in particular, spoke of their respect for the dead and found treatment of bodies in some programmes distasteful. For example, in the American fictional programme about morticians, *Six Feet Under,* one of the protagonists had a cup of tea while next to a body. This would be quite unacceptable in Maori culture. In *The Sopranos,* the older Maori female member of the focus group could not watch the mutilation of a dead body because she found it offensive. However different cultural practices did not stop most members of the group watching or enjoying these programmes. The Pakeha/European group regretted that their culture was not so open on the topic of death and commented that dead bodies at funerals, for example, were often hidden away in real-life situations. They thought that this meant that they were less able to cope with realistic or violent scenes on television. The Asian group seemed to view death in programmes as entertainment and they liked the challenge involved in solving an on-screen murder. They appeared to focus more on the quality of the story-telling of fictional programmes rather than relating them to real life. Violence in Western society was perceived by the Asian focus group participants to have more grey areas than in Asian cultures and they therefore found violence on television interesting from this perspective.

13.4.8 Influence of geographic location

Both the Maori and Pasifika groups raised the concept of the influence of geographic location in the way some members might interpret violence on television. Some of the Maori group felt that there could be a slight difference between urban and rural Maori viewers. For example, rural Maori were possibly more sensitive to violence on television as they lived a quieter lifestyle and did not necessarily have access to television or the variety of channels available in cities. From a slightly different point of view the Pasifika group commented that they found it easy to remove themselves from the violence shown on overseas programmes which were foreign to them and did not have much personal meaning or effect on them, for example *CSI* or *Charmed*. However, those programmes that had a connection with home, being either New Zealand or the Pacific, had more personal significance. The News, or stories with

local content for example, relating to a criminal/victim with a Pacific Island background had more impact because the person involved could be someone they knew about and with whom they shared the same values.

13.4.9 Stereotyping

The Maori focus group raised concerns about the stereotyping of Maori in connection to violence. It was felt that male Maori characters were often depicted negatively as warrior types, thus perpetuating myths around Maori and violence. Another representation, which worried the group, was that of Maori routinely getting into trouble with the authorities. Such negative portrayals reflected on Maori as a whole and were felt to be offensive. The group also discussed the depiction of other non-European groups in American and British television and felt that these were routinely constructed as being 'less than' the European actors/characters. Participants made the observation that throughout the coding training, racism was implicit in many of the programmes viewed, with the perpetrators of crime mostly being 'other' (for example, Middle-Eastern, Latino, African-American) in relation to dominant European groups.

13.4.10 What can be done about television violence?

Besides parents being more responsible for what their children watched on television, the Pakeha/European group felt strongly that broadcasters should be more accountable for which programmes were shown on television. More options on the types of programmes should be made available instead of broadcasting similar programmes across all the channels. One female participant was critical of the ratings monitoring boxes (people metres) used by research/marketing agencies because she believed they did not provide a picture of a good cross section of the community and their viewing habits. She also felt that advertisers should take more of a stand in not supporting violent programming. The complaints process was mentioned as a vehicle for complaining about television violence. The Asian group, in particular, believed that there was not enough time to complain and they were unsure how to go about it.

13.5 Conclusion

Whether a public execution during the French Revolution, gladiator fights at the Colosseum, football hooliganism at the World Cup, Spanish bull-fighting or New Zealand's own "Yellow Ribbon Fight for Life" – all of these events involve elements of violence which are part and parcel of different cultural attitudes and interpretations of violence past and present. In the book *Meanings of Violence – A cross cultural perspective* co-editor Goran Aijmer describes violence as a "basic ethnological phenomenon in human life on a par with phenomena like sexuality, sociality and domination" (Aijmer and Abbink, 2000, p1). He points out that

violence is a human universal and that "in no known human society or social formation is interpersonal aggression, physical threat, assault or homicide and armed conflict completely absent or successfully banned."

However, while violence may be considered a "human universal", the focus group research, along with the results from the questionnaires, indicates some of the complexities of audience interpretation and construction of televised violence in New Zealand society. Individuals and groups differ in the range, intensity and nature of their reactions to violence on television. Not surprisingly, even within different ethnic groups, there are those who dislike violence while others revel in its entertainment value. Different attitudes also relate to a person's gender, age, socio-economic background and even personality. The researchers found that the influence of an individual's culture on his or her interpretation of violence has been a particularly interesting and important issue to consider. While New Zealand is often portrayed has having its own kiwi culture, the concept of a 'typical' New Zealander remains problematic and potentially contentious. The benefit of audience-based research is that it highlights the variability of interpretation that can be attached to the same television content across different sectors of the population. The current study points to the need for further, larger-scale qualitative studies in the New Zealand context, in order to gain a more nuanced appreciation of the range of viewer effects and reactions to television violence. Such knowledge would be a valuable base for the development of policy and educational initiatives in relation to television violence.

Section C

POLICY ON TELEVISION VIOLENCE

14

Regulating TV Violence

14.1 New Zealand's Background to the current policy environment

There is no evidence of a consistent public policy approach to television in New Zealand. Writers and observers of broadcasting policy in this country comment on its frequent twists and turns as successive governments have changed New Zealand television and broadcasting structures. An oft-quoted remark is that by a former chairperson of the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand, Ian Cross (1988, p93), that broadcasting is the "battered baby of New Zealand's parliamentary democracy".

One approach to analysing this complex history is to identify key themes. These recurrent themes have utility in seeking to understand the current broadcasting environment and how it developed. They are 'regulation and deregulation', 'public service broadcasting', and 'advertiser funding'. It is argued that these themes have been ever present and have shaped broadcasting in New Zealand in the absence of a clearly enunciated and stable philosophy that might have set out its goals and expected social and cultural contribution.

The one period when it might be argued that television did operate under a clear public policy prescription was from 1989 to 1999. In a country where the earliest legislation governing wireless telegraphy and radio transmission was among the most restrictive in the world, the government decided in the late 1980s on a deregulated 'market' strategy for the sector. This was part of a new economic orthodoxy that aimed to lessen its involvement as a provider and regulator of services in the pursuit of greater economic efficiency and consumer benefits. In broadcasting, as in other sectors, it was argued that a free market would eventually serve every niche and satisfy every consumer's needs. However, until that consumer ideal was achieved it was conceded that the 'outputs' from the initially limited competitive pool of broadcasters would probably not cater for some desirable social needs from broadcasting (Prebble, 1988). The solution would be that the public broadcasting fee, replaced by direct government funding in 1999, was to be channelled to the Broadcasting Commission (a.k.a. New Zealand On Air). That body would fill the gap and act as the contracting agency to achieve 'public good' outcomes. It was tasked with allocating funding to assist any producer or broadcaster, public or private, who was undertaking the production of programmes that met the desired social outputs. The government would have no further involvement beyond this in the outputs from the broadcasting system and their quality except for standards relating to 'good taste', violence and sex that were to be overseen by the new Broadcasting Standards Authority.

The irony has not been lost on critics of these policies that as the deregulating governments of Britain (Thatchernomics), the United States (Reaganomics) and New Zealand (Rogernomics) pushed towards the wholesale removal of economic regulations their reforming zeal did not include removing controls governing taste, decency and violence. Certainly for the theorists advising them, moving towards "a sophisticated market system based on consumer sovereignty" included the expectation that negative censorious controls would "disappear or much diminish" (*Report of the Committee on Financing the BBC,* 1986, p133). The Peacock Committee advising the Thatcher government on the future of the BBC also believed that pre-publication censorship had no place in a free society and that the end of all censorship arrangements "would be a sign that broadcasting had come of age" (*Report of the Committee on Financing the BBC,* 1986, p150).

In late 1995 New Zealand broadcasters said that they were "puzzled and dismayed" by the plans to extend the powers of the Broadcasting Standards Authority (*NZ Herald,* October 25, 1995). It was pointed out that the Broadcasting Amendment Bill went further than the regulatory restraints in this area that existed prior to regulation. It was also an irony that a Minister of Broadcasting known for his advocacy of the free market, Maurice Williamson, proposed these changes. This was regulation in contravention to the philosophy that had driven deregulatory change. The standards regime that was imposed in these years is marked by a process of reactive regulation imposed after the BSA had upheld complaints on standards or in response to perceived deleterious media trends. This reflects the absence of an underpinning philosophy about broadcasting which might seek to point the way as to what might be achieved in, for example, programming for children rather than how high levels of violence in animated cartoons might be restricted.

One philosophy and model of broadcasting that has been referred to throughout New Zealand's broadcasting history is *public service broadcasting*. However, its adoption has been highly selective and idiosyncratic in New Zealand. The BBC model of public service broadcasting was cited as the model for the structure announced to run the national 'A' radio stations in 1932, for the national non-commercial radio network headed by Professor James Shelley in 1936, for the new corporation (NZBC) to run New Zealand Broadcasting in 1961 and has been alluded to with the new Charter for TVNZ. However, any close examination of the forms of broadcasting established in the 1930s or 1960s reveals a very sullied version of PSB when compared to the BBC model. Indeed for the period from 1936 until the end of the 1960s it can be more cogently argued that our national broadcaster was a 'state' rather than a 'public' broadcaster. Close political influence was discernible over content, finance and day-to-day policy.

New Zealand historian W.H.Oliver (1960) offers one explanation why the PSB model was so transformed in its journey from Britain to this country. He describes what he calls the 'utilitarian test'. This was applied rigorously to those imported ideas that had "the most immediate bearing on the practical satisfaction of economic demands" (p.270). The test could often transform the original model and appears to have done so in the case of public service broadcasting. What the settler community of New

Zealand demanded was universal coverage of broadcasting signals and public funding to bring this about, the other fundamental features of PSB such as independence from the government of the day and commercial pressures, broadcasting's educative, cultural and social role and provision for minorities and special interests, were much less faithfully adopted. In the absence of a strong PSB philosophy informing New Zealand broadcasting the broadcasters in this country veered between 'state', 'commercial' and PSB models.

Until the present government signalled changes to television broadcasting when it came into office in 1999, New Zealand had an almost unfettered commercially driven system. The market was relied upon to supply diversity and quality aside from the limited public good intervention of New Zealand On Air. However, market limitations have meant that some key audiences, especially provision to Maori, would never be supplied by market means alone. The nineties were marked by ongoing attempts to provide a television service for Maori, the advent of a number of niche television services, many of which struggled to find sustainable revenue (Sky Television, New Zealand's only subscription television provider, failed to make a profit through the decade of the 1990s), and the growing influence of advertising over content as television services struggled to fund programming in an increasingly competitive market.

In the decade following deregulation a significant proportion of television programming became part of a promotional culture. The walls between editorial and advertising were increasingly breached and in many cases removed. Advertising content ceased to be confined to the 'advertising break'. From the infomercial model, with its prescription of blurring the distinction between editorial and advertising, came many of the tools used in new 'forms' of programming such as the 'Revenue Enhanced Programme' or the 'Primetime Sponsored Programme'. These developments reinforced the perception of television as an entertainment industry funded by advertisers and serving the needs of consumers and its role as an information and educative service for citizens was diminished.

Critical reaction to these consumer-focused television structures in New Zealand has led the government to return yet again to 'public service' principles to inform a new policy that will see Television New Zealand operate under a Charter that resurrects the language that television should feature programming that "informs, entertains and educates New Zealand audiences" (TVNZ Charter in the TVNZ Bill, 2003). Yet it is still unclear as to how successful the new policy will be in meeting the government's stated commitments to both social obligations and the free market economy.

14.2 Public debate and Broadcasting Policy 1986-1995

In considering the balance between public interest and broadcast policy it is instructive to set current policy against the backdrop of recent history. It appears that as television violence became a major topic of public interest in New Zealand in

the late 1980s, a radiating effect resulted, turning reaction into action on a variety of levels both privately and through public policy. The following reaction/action chain of events in the 1980s/1990s, while not conclusively showing a direct relationship, can be interpreted as at least being influenced by what was happening at the time.

The Report of the Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into Violence in 1987 had been requested by the then Minister of Justice Geoffrey Palmer to seek "practical steps which could be taken to reduce the incidence of violence and violent crime in the community" (Roper, 1987, p9). Part of this report looked specifically at violence on television and the Committee received 425 written submissions and a number of oral submissions expressing concern about it. The Roper Report (as it became known after its Chairman, retired High Court judge, Sir Clinton Roper) was in basic agreement with the Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Broadcasting and Related Communications in NZ, 30 September 1986, chaired by Professor Robert Chapman. The Royal Commission had concluded that there was enough established knowledge and public concern about the long-term cumulative effects of viewing high levels of violence to warrant action to reduce the amount of it shown on television. Further, rather than television merely being a "mirror of reality", as described by the Commission, the Committee felt that television grossly distorted and exaggerated violence and was therefore harmful to young viewers.

The Committee supported the Royal Commission recommendations (Appendix T) but had reservations about the "watershed commercial" to indicate the end of family viewing. It recommended a reduction in violent viewing across the board rather than just prior to the watershed. The Committee was also critical of further research which it labelled as being expensive and might "only result …in implementing the remedies which present research indicates are required now" (p133).

While the Roper Report's section on television was embedded amongst other chapters associated with violence and the community, such as crime, education, gangs, firearms and unemployment, it may well have heightened the awareness of the issue in the minds of the public. Not all of its recommendations or those of the Royal Commission were adhered to immediately. (The political rejection of the Royal Commission's report overall came down to a "lack of connection with the wider policy changes being introduced by the Lange government" which was in favour of a market-driven ethos (Day, 2000, p328).) However, changes were in the wind.

Prior to 1989, New Zealand broadcasting was controlled by the Broadcasting Tribunal, which was responsible both for issuing warrants and for the maintenance of standards. The Tribunal had the power to refuse renewal of a warrant of a broadcaster if standards were not being upheld (although it never did so).

In 1989 the Tribunal was abolished and the Broadcasting Act 1989 became law. The Act provided for the establishment of an independent Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA). The Authority is made up of four members, appointed by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Minister of Broadcasting. Its mission statement was: 'To establish and maintain acceptable standards of

broadcasting on all New Zealand radio and television, within the context of current social values, research and the principle of self-regulation, in a changing and deregulated industry.' (This statement was changed in 2002 and is detailed later in this chapter.)

A number of pro-active moves appear to have occurred during the early 1990s after the high violence counts in both the revised Massey study figures, and the results of the 1992 Media Watch Survey which included comments on societal changes leading to higher levels of violence in society as well as the structural changes to more competitive television leading to more violence on television. It seems rather ironic that although the Roper Report had recommended further research into violence on television should not proceed the subsequent Massey Study (1991) and the Media Watch survey (1992) may have been responsible for spurring on the public reaction to television violence.

In a retrospective look at what happened to the issue of television violence since *Media Watch 1992*, Bridgman (1995, pp4-5) says the results showing high levels of television violence in New Zealand could not be ignored and he outlined the following occurrences:

1. Media_Aware, an anti-television violence organisation, used the data to encourage big business not to advertise in violent programmes and obtained a commitment from a number of major companies.

2. Educators and parents had become more sensitised to the issue of television violence directed at children and public pressure (along with the BSA) forced TVNZ to withdraw the violent children's programme *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*.

3. The introduction in 1993 by Mrs Tirikatene-Sullivan of the Reduction of Violence on Television Bill. The submissions to the bill gained considerable media attention and were covered in television news and current affairs programmes. Although the Bill was not passed the Government agreed that there should be more education about the complaints process, a more user friendly and rapid response to complaints and an improved research base enabling the BSA to monitor the overall level of violence. While opposing the Bill, some broadcasters still responded to the comments about excessive violence on television arguing that they and the New Zealand public did not want excessive violence on television. TV3 liaised with Media Aware to promote a non-violent "Family Viewing Week" and Kiwi Cable endorsed the anti-violence campaign and presented the USA cable network Voices Against Violence programme. TVNZ said of the top 25 programmes only that in 24th place *Goldfinger* could be said to have a significant level of violence. Toy Manufacturers sought to demonstrate at the select committee hearings that the New Zealand market was more sensitive to the issue of violence than the US market by showing the cuts that they saw as necessary in US-sourced promotional material.

Bridgman (1995) also notes that changes to the law governing censorship now required all television programmes to be classified by the television broadcasters and the classification displayed as part of the advertising of and information about each programme.

The above actions demonstrate that public debate, encouraged through Government investigations and research, created a greater awareness about television violence, which ultimately led to those involved with broadcasting and policy making to take more decisive action.

The Mental Health Foundation's 1995 Media Watch Survey found reductions in the level of violence on television and violence in children's viewing time had reduced by more than half, although it was still high at 4.7 episodes per hour (Bridgman, 1995). Analysis of the data showed the halving of the level of violence was across the categories considered major contributors of violence – animations, movies and police/action and adventure. While the rates of violence in the animation category were still more than twice of any other category, the overall reduction of violence in this area was "the single most important factor in keeping overall levels low." (p.8) The number of combat cartoon series had decreased. For example, *Samurai Pizza Cats* was the only five-days-a-week series compared with three series in 1992 and it ran at 6.55am weekdays rather than the key after school slot.

In 1995, as a response to ongoing public concerns about violence on television, the Government introduced a Broadcasting Amendment Bill, which sought to strengthen the standards regime to make it more user-friendly and responsible to the public. The Bill was made law on 1 July 1996.

It is important to note here that broadcasters have recognised the need to evaluate violence on television at times. In Patrick Day's book *Voice and Vision – A History of Broadcasting in New Zealand* (2000) he points out that broadcasters receive conflicting impressions from the community with screen violence receiving "as much support as it does condemnation" (p340). Julian Mounter, appointed Director-General of TVNZ in 1986 and Des Monaghan, TVNZ director of programmes and production, were congratulated by the TVNZ Board for taking action in reducing the amount of violent programming. But Day does not describe how this was done, or by how much. He does, however, mention that the Mounter-led reduction of violent content did not continue and that anti-violence groups did not accept it as being sufficient to substantially change the environment.

14.3 The New Zealand regulatory regime since 1996

The Broadcasting Amendment Bill (1995) increased broadcasters' requirements for publicising the complaints process, shortened the required time for processing complaints to 20 days, and gave the BSA the power to withdraw or modify an entire series if an episode seriously breached standards. The Bill became law in 1996.

In 2002, the BSA changed its mission statement to read as follows:

> To encourage broadcasters to develop and maintain programme standards which respect human dignity, acknowledge current social values and reflect research findings, while providing a process for the consideration of complaints from the public about broadcasting matters.

14.3.1 Codes of practice

Under the Act (s21(1)(e)), the BSA is given powers to:

Encourage the development and observance by broadcasters of codes of broadcasting practice appropriate to the type of broadcasting undertaken by such broadcasters, in relation to:

- the protection of children
- the portrayal of violence
- presentation of appropriate warnings in respect of programmes, including programmes that have been classified as suitable only for particular audiences.

The Broadcasting Act encodes *self-regulation;* that is, New Zealand broadcasters are expected to maintain standards and take responsibility for complying with the Codes of Practice. Two separate codes of broadcasting practice are currently in effect.

14.3.2 The Free-to-Air Television Code of Broadcasting Practice

The current code of practice for free-to-air television was developed by the New Zealand Television Broadcasters' Council, an industry group representing the "non-competitive interests" of New Zealand's broadcasters. This code became effective on 1 January 2002. It lays out ten broad standards: good taste and decency; law and order; privacy; balance; accuracy; fairness; programme classification; programme information; children's interests; and violence.

The violence standard requires broadcasters to "exercise care and discretion when dealing with the issue of violence." It provides nine specific guidelines on issues including context, cumulative effect, ensuring violence is not a dominating theme, sexual violence, violence in sports and news programmes, and violence in promotional trailers.

The "children's interests" standard states: "during children's normally accepted viewing times … broadcasters are required, in the preparation and presentation of programmes, to consider the interests of child viewers." The concept of "normally accepted viewing times" – further defined as "usually up to 8.30pm" – is emphasised

again in the nine guidelines that follow, four of which pertain to viewing times. In light of this 8.30 watershed, broadcasters are enjoined to "exercise discretion to ensure that the content which led to the AO rating is not shown soon after the watershed." They are also cautioned that "special attention should be given to providing appropriate warnings" on weekends and during school and public holidays.

The "programme classification" standard holds broadcasters responsible for classifying programmes, adhering to time bands, and displaying classification information, and provides specific guidelines on promotional trailers, the use of warnings, and "news flashes." The Code provides for a three-level classification system:

- G (General) programmes, which contain no material unsuitable for children (although they may not be designed for children) may be screened at any time.
- PGR (Parental Guidance Recommended) programmes, including material more appropriate for mature audiences, may be screened from 9am to 4pm and from 7pm to 6am.
- AO (Adults Only) programmes, containing adult themes and content, may be screened between midday and 3pm on weekdays and from 8.30pm until 5am.

The Code also notes: 'There will be programmes containing stronger material or special elements which fall outside the AO guidelines. These programmes may contain a greater degree of sexual activity, potentially offensive language, realistic violence, sexual violence, or horrific encounters. In such circumstances, time designations such as "AO 9.30pm or later" may be appropriate.'

With respect to non-fiction programmes, the Code states: "News and current affairs programmes, which may be scheduled at any time and may, on occasion, pre-empt other scheduled broadcasts, are not, because of their distinct nature, subject to censorship or to the strictures of the classification system. However, producers are required to be mindful that young people may be among viewers of news and current affairs programmes during morning, daytime and early evening hours and should give consideration to including warnings where appropriate."

14.3.3 Subscription Television Codes of Broadcasting Practice

Since 2000, subscription ("pay") TV has had its own Codes of Practice, developed by the BSA following a review and research exercise. The BSA's introduction to the Codes states: "Because Subscription Television is a discretionary service to particular subscribers there is a case for a different approach to content regulation. Separate Codes will also enable future changes in technology to be more readily

accommodated." In other words, because pay TV subscribers have elected to receive the broadcasts, they are (presumably) aware of the nature of the programme content on each channel.

Although this is a discretionary service in that viewers choose the "package" of channels they subscribe to, there is a further division of the codes of broadcasting practice for subscription television. One is labelled 'Standard' and the other 'Advanced'. The Advanced code applies to programmes that can only be accessed by using either a screening device or remote control, as in "pay per view" programming. The two codes are broadly similar with respect to violence, although the Standard code specifies that 'devices and methods of inflicting pain or injury – particularly if capable of easy imitation – will not be shown without the most careful consideration'; whereas the Advanced codes specifies that 'themes and scenes dealing with disturbing social and domestic friction, extreme violence, or sequences in which children may be humiliated or badly treated are to be appropriately classified.'

Both the Standard and Advanced codes specify a five-level classification system:

- G (general exhibition);
- PG (parental guidance recommended);
- M (suitable for mature audiences16 and over);
- 16 (approved for exhibition only to persons 16 and over); and,
- 18 (approved for exhibition only to persons 18 and over).

The pay-TV code specifies a watershed only for programmes classified 18, which may be broadcast only between 8pm and 6am, and from 9am to 3pm on weekdays outside of school holidays. The code also provides for verbal and visual warnings, the latter to be displayed onscreen at the start of the programme, before each programme break, and on all promotional material. The visual warnings are:

- C (content may offend);
- L (language may offend);
- V (contains violence);
- VL (violence and language may offend), and
- S (sexual content may offend).

New Zealand's major subscription broadcaster, Sky TV, supplements the classification system with its Parental Control Facility, a tool similar to the V-chip system available in the USA and Canada. UHF subscribers can block out all programmes classified 18. Digital subscribers have a "parental lock" feature in the remote control's preferences menu, which enables them to set the highest unrestricted classification level they wish to receive, and use a PIN number to access higher-level programmes.

14.3.4 Broadcasting and the New Zealand Bill of Rights

The Free-to-Air Television Code of Broadcasting Practice acknowledges the rights and obligations regarding the ethic of social responsibility, the statutory right to freedom of expression which is provided for in Section 14 of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, and the fact that New Zealand is a party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, with the exception of the Section on voting rights, applies to people of all ages. It does not take precedence over other legislation but provides a default position. It provides a standard set of citizen rights including the right of freedom of expression, which is relevant to both television transmission and television viewing.

Section 14 of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 says:

> "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and opinions of any kind in any form."

This section is a point of departure in New Zealand law for regulations which limit this freedom. Sections five and seven of the Act go on to say:

> "...the rights and freedoms contained in this Bill of Rights may be subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society."

and

> "Where any Bill is introduced into the House of Representatives, the Attorney-General shall,-
>
> a) In the case of a Government Bill, on the introduction of that Bill; or
> b) In any other case, as soon as practicable after the introduction of the Bill,-
>
> bring to the attention of the House of Representatives any provision in the Bill that appears to be inconsistent with any of the rights and freedoms contained in this Bill of Rights."

Section 14 was referred to in two recent Court of Appeal cases that had initially been considered by the Board of Review under the Films, Videos & Publications Classification Act 1993 and, on appeal, by the High Court.

In *Living Word Distributors Ltd* the Court, in quashing an 'objectionable' finding in relation to two videos, emphasised the importance it placed on the right of freedom of expression.

In *Moonen 2* the Court restated an earlier decision that the 1993 Act should be applied in a way which least limits s14, with due regard to the circumstances of the case.

14.3.5 Programme appraisal

An important component of broadcasting self-regulation is in-house programme appraisers. The BSA has no powers of censorship; consequently, it is up to the broadcasters to ensure that the programmes they broadcast are appropriate for television, appropriately classified, and broadcast in the correct time zone.

TVNZ has a team of four appraisers: three based in Auckland, one in Wellington (so as to efficiently advise Wellington-based programme producers). The team is supervised by Programme Standards Manager David Edmunds, who is also responsible for processing formal complaints. All programmes except news, current affairs and live broadcasts go through the appraisal process. Appraisers assign classifications and if appropriate, warnings; they are encouraged to make the warnings as specific as possible. Local producers may also contact the appraisers for advice.

Cuts are not unusual, including language if judged gratuitous by the appraiser. A film may also be rejected as unsuitable for television. If a locally produced programme has been classified AO but the programmers strongly prefer to run it in PGR time, it may be returned to the producer with recommendations for editing. Locally produced programmes are generally edited by the producers, and imported programmes by TVNZ.

The appraisal process is broadly similar for New Zealand's two private free-to-air stations, TV3 and TV4: a small team of in-house appraisers has been trained to interpret the Code of Practice consistently. Locally produced and imported programmes are appraised. If a programme is not Code compliant it is referred to the team's supervisor, Broadcasting Standards Complaints Coordinator Clare Bradley, who is also TV3/4's in-house legal counsel. If she concurs with the appraisal, the inappropriate material will be ameliorated or cut. Editing of a locally produced programme is carried out in consultation with the producer, but the broadcaster, as the party with ultimate responsibility for the programme, also has ultimate control.

Ms Bradley notes that despite the team's consistency of approach, the network may be surprised by BSA decisions. A change in BSA personnel may result in an unsignalled change in interpretation, which is having a growing impact on the way the system works. She cites the Advertising Standards Authority, a larger regulatory body with broader industry and community representation, as perhaps providing a better model in terms of consistency.

14.3.6 The complaints procedure

While the BSA has no powers of censorship in relation to violence, sex, racism, fairness or decency, it is required to make rulings on any formal complaints made by viewers who believe that broadcasting standards may have been breached. Broadcasters are required to advertise the procedure for making a complaint at least once per broadcasting day. TVNZ and TV3/4 also publish the procedure online.

Any complaint must be lodged initially with the broadcaster. Complaints must be made within 20 working days of the programme's broadcast. They must include the name of the programme, the channel or station on which it was broadcast, the date and time of broadcast, which programme standard or standards the complainant believes has been breached, and why (preferably using specific examples.) Staff at TVNZ and TV3/4 will listen to initial complaints by phone, but complainants are advised that the matter must be submitted in writing or by e-mail in order to be treated as a formal complaint. The broadcaster must respond to the complainant within 20 working days.

If the broadcaster fails to respond, or the complainant is not satisfied with the broadcaster's response, the complaint may then be referred to the BSA. If the BSA upholds a complaint sanctions may be applied; these can involve on-air corrections or apologies by the broadcaster or the abstention of broadcasting or advertising for up to 24 hours. In addition costs to the complainant, or costs to the Crown (of up to $5,000) can be awarded.

14.4 Other English-speaking countries

As with every other country, New Zealand has distinctive cultural characteristics, and it would not be appropriate simply to choose one other country's regulatory regime as a model. However, the experiences of other nations offer valuable evidence of which 'ingredients' are most likely to result in a broadcasting policy that can both address immediate concerns and serve as a solid foundation for further development.

14.4.1 The USA: Regulate = educate

The American system offers a useful starting point for exploring contrasting approaches to broadcast regulation, as the issue of television violence is the subject of extensive and well-documented research and debate in the USA. Two major background issues have influenced broadcast regulation in the United States. The first is the country's early decision to finance programming with advertising, which has inevitably led to conflicts between private and public interests. The second is the country's historical interest in protecting freedom of expression, codified by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ("Congress shall make no law … abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press …").

Whether or not television violence qualifies as protected speech is one of the questions in the debate that is ongoing in the United States, from grassroots up to government level. Children's advocacy, public health and media watch groups square off against broadcast industry groups and free-speech purists. (The latter may be "free market" purists in sheep's clothing: 'Reason' magazine and its online counterpart (www.reason.com), which have published an adaptation of academic Jib Fowles' *The Case for Television Violence*,' bear the subhead *Free Minds, Free Markets*).

Despite this babble of opinion, there is sufficient consensus that TV violence is undesirable for children to make it a basis for policy. The most recent legislation, the Telecommunications Act of 1996, prescribes a combination of education and technology: a seven-level classification system to be used by all programme distributors (curiously described as 'voluntary', although the legislation clearly mandates its use), and the 'V-chip,' a television accessory used for blocking transmissions based on this system's codes. Every new television manufactured or sold in the USA must be equipped with this device.

The seven classification categories are:

- TV-Y – appropriate for all children
- TV-Y7 – directed to older children, i.e. over 7 years of age
- TV-Y7-FV – directed to older children, includes a high level of fantasy violence
- TV-G – general audience; not necessarily directed to children, but nothing unsuitable for children
- TV-PG – parental guidance suggested
- TV-14 – parents strongly cautioned; may be unsuitable for children under 14
- TV-MA – mature audience only; may be unsuitable for children under 17

It is clear that in the USA, content regulation is not viewed as an appropriate role for government; responsibility is placed squarely on consumers, i.e. parents. The relevant section of the current legislation is in fact titled *Parental Choice in Television Programming*. This approach is underscored by the wording of the legislation:

> "There is a compelling governmental interest in *empowering parents* to limit the negative influences of video programming that is harmful to children. *Providing parents* with timely information about the nature of upcoming video programming and with the technological tools that allow them easily to block violent, sexual, or other programming that *they believe* harmful to their children is a nonintrusive and narrowly tailored means of achieving that compelling governmental interest"(author's italics).

The Web site of the Federal Communications Commission features an upbeat page for parents, the 'FCC Parents' Place' (http://www.fcc.gov/parents/) offering detailed information to help parents understand legislation, interpret programme classifications, and make use of the various technological aids available to block

undesirable programming. The agency is thereby able to sidestep taking an active role in setting standards or monitoring content.

The latter responsibilities are deflected to the broadcasters themselves. Both industry groups, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and the National Cable & Telecommunications Association (NCTA) have voluntary guidelines on violent content. Complaints about programmes must be directed in the first instance to the individual broadcaster; if the issue is not resolved to the consumer's satisfaction, the complaint may be directed to the FCC. .

Another player in the American regulatory regime is the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board, the public face of the classification system: an independent committee composed of industry and non-industry representatives. They also provide online resources including a downloadable brochure. The FCC, the industry groups and the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board present a united front to the public, representing themselves as parents' partners in the effort to maximise the potential of TV viewing for children and minimise its harmful effects. Both industry groups have their own parent-oriented consumer Web pages, and both have sponsored major studies on television violence.

On the surface this coalition of broadcasters and regulators providing a detailed classification system, supplemented by a wide range of media literacy resources, appears to be a comprehensive solution to the TV violence issue. It is therefore interesting that concern with the issue, at government, commentator and consumer levels, is unflagging. Some examples of this ongoing dissatisfaction:

- A new piece of legislation banning violent programming during hours when children are likely to be watching has been introduced this year and has supporters from both the country's major political parties.

- Media critics have argued since the system's inception that it protects the industry from the viewers, not vice versa – particularly because producers rate their own programmes. In the words of media expert George Gerbner, 'To have ratings designed by the industry and then programmed in to the V-chip … is like letting the fox guard the chicken coop.'

- A recent consumer study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center, focusing specifically on V-chip use, revealed that without guidance from the researchers, parents were unlikely to use the V-chip technology; they didn't understand the system, found the device itself difficult to program, or were simply unaware of it. A follow-up study of families who were using the device successfully revealed that although the largest percentage were satisfied with it, the system was not seen as a complete solution to their concerns, which included the validity of the classification system and the inability of the device to block trailers, advertising or news.

A little mentioned but worrying facet of the parent-education approach to broadcast regulation is the assumption that the information provided will get into the hands of all parents. All aspects of the structure – the detailed classification system, the V-chip, and the voluminous online information available – are obviously aimed at literate, pro-active parents with both Internet access and the leisure to use it. The question of how children whose parents or caregivers are unable or unwilling to engage with such a complex system are to be protected from TV violence has not been addressed.

14.4.2 The Canadian approach: Consensus building

The Canadian regulatory regime resembles its American counterpart in many respects, and in fact some elements of the current Canadian policy are modelled on the American system. The Canadian Broadcasting Act does not prescribe any standards for content, although it authorises the regulatory agency, the Canadian Radio-television and Communications Commission (CRTC), to do so. There are voluntary codes for broadcasters on violent programming, and there is a strong emphasis on providing resources to educate parents. V-chip technology (which was actually invented in Canada) is in use, though not yet mandated by legislation. In both countries consumer dissatisfaction has been a stimulus for reform.

There is, however, a crucial difference in the Canadian approach: the initiative that resulted in the current system sought to build consensus among all key players: broadcasters, programme producers, regulators, consumers and advertisers. (It is worth noting that the USA's Telecommunications Act was opposed by the broadcasting industry, despite bipartisan political support.)

In 1992, following nearly 20 years of study and public discussion, the CRTC invited cooperation from all sectors of the broadcasting industry, parents' groups and educators in a new initiative. The following year, a conference on television violence was convened in Toronto. One result of this conference was the formation of AGVOT (Action Group on Violence on Television), a committee of industry representatives. This body is analogous to the USA's TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board, but is more pro-active; among other efforts, it has hosted an International Colloquium on Television Violence and has adopted a General Statement of Principles concerning TV violence. Its membership includes the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB; Canada's private broadcasters), the Canadian Cable Television Association (CCTA); pay-TV services, the Association of Canadian Advertisers, the Canadian Film and Television Producers Association (CFTPA), the *Association des producteurs de film et de television du Quebec* (APFTQ), the Association of Canadian Advertisers (ACA), and the Alliance for Children and Television (ACT). AGVOT drafted – and still administers – Canada's programme classification system for English language broadcasters.

In order to develop a common approach stakeholders in the CRTC initiative were obliged to take a position on two areas of contention in the violence debate: First,

how strong the proof of a cause-and-effect relationship between TV viewing and violent behaviour had to be to justify policy intervention. The working solution adopted was to treat TV violence as a child mental health issue. Second, the CRTC needed to define the relationship between violence and free speech. Addressing this issue they chose to focus exclusively on violence, separating it from other content issues that might compound the debate. This was especially important in light of Canada's freedom of expression law and the traditionally liberal interpretation of it by the Canadian Supreme Court. Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication." Even such forms of "expression" as hate propaganda and hardcore pornography are protected. Canada's Criminal Code includes an obscenity provision (R.S.C. 1985, c. c-46, s. 163) in which obscene material is defined as "the undue exploitation of sex, or of sex and any one or more of the following subjects, namely, crime, horror, cruelty and violence." The depiction of violence alone is not obscene under the law, and efforts over the years to amend the law to include violence have not been successful.

Although Canada's Broadcasting Act (1991) does not legislate codes of practice, it does define a broadcasting policy with goals that address standards for content. These goals clearly express Canada's nationalistic, pro-social approach to broadcasting, providing a noteworthy example of a system created to serve the needs of a country and its people. (Appendix S)

The "watchdog" for Canada's regime is the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC), a self-regulating council for private broadcasters. The CBSC comprises national and regional panels with membership drawn from broadcasters, academics, and representatives from community and public interest groups. It produces a manual for broadcasters and administers several codes of practice including the Voluntary Code Regarding Violence on Television. As the agency to which complaints are addressed (if the consumer has not been offered a satisfactory resolution by the broadcaster), it also serves as a link between broadcasters and advertisers. It is not involved in the administration of the classification system, which is the responsibility of AGVOT. There is also a Cable Television Standards Council (CTSC), a smaller body that plays a comparable role (including receiving complaints) but has no violence code.

The CAB, in consultation with public interest and industry groups, developed Canada's Voluntary Code Regarding Violence in Television Programming. It was introduced in 1987; the current version was published in 1993. The Code is prefaced by a Background statement that sets out the principles underlying the country's current regulatory structure: "Censorship is not an answer. Canadian viewers continue to ask for a wide range of programming options to be made available to them … However creative freedom carries with it the responsibility of ensuring that our children are protected, and that viewers have adequate information about program content to make informed viewing choices based on their personal tastes and standards."

The Background section is followed by a Statement of Principle, which states that by adopting the Code broadcasters endorse three broad principles:

- "That programming containing gratuitous violence not be telecast;
- That young children not be exposed to programming which is unsuitable for them;
- That viewers be informed about the content of programming they choose to watch."

The Code itself contains explicit provisions with respect to gratuitous or glamorised violence, children's programming; scheduling; viewer information systems; portrayal of violence against women, other specific groups of people, or animals; and violence in news and sports programming. It defines a watershed of 9pm, which applies to promotional trailers and advertising as well as programmes, and mandates viewer advisories during children's viewing hours and in the first post-watershed hour.

In 1994 a Pay Television and Pay-per-view Programming Code Regarding Violence, incorporating the essential principles of the CAB Code, was accepted by the CRTC. The Pay TV code contains a broad prescription: "Pay and pay-per-view licensees shall not air programming which: contains gratuitous violence in any form; or sanctions, promotes or glamorizes violence." There are more detailed provisions regarding the depiction of violence in children's television. Like the CAB Code, the Pay TV Code specifies a 9pm watershed.

Canada's seven-level classification system, developed and administered by AGVOT, is broadly similar to the six-level US system. A key difference is that not all programming broadcast in Canada is rated. News programmes, documentaries, talk shows, sports and variety shows are exempt from rating; hence the seventh level, "Exempt." Canadian broadcasters are responsible for rating the programmes they broadcast, including imported material; even USA-rated shows must be evaluated and assigned Canadian ratings. The AGVOT system is used by Canada's English language broadcasters. French language broadcasters continue to use the six-level system of the "Régie du cinéma du Québec", which they had already used successfully for a number of years prior to the introduction of the AGVOT system.

A problematic area for regulation in Canada has been cable television, which relies heavily on films and programmes imported from the USA. An early proposal to black out any US shows that did not meet Canadian standards was rejected by the cable industry. The CCTA preferred the concept of enabling greater viewer control and to that end, provided financial backing for the development of the V-chip by British Columbia professor Tim Collings. Following public hearings, the CRTC agreed to support the V-chip as a regulatory tool. Today most televisions in Canada can decode the US TV Parental Guidelines as well as the Canadian classification systems, and no violence code applies to imported programmes distributed by cable. Locally originated cable programmes must adhere to the CAB code.

The CRTC regards international cooperation as a key element in successfully controlling TV violence. Its members have participated in numerous international conferences and its Chair has made personal visits to the USA, Mexico, the Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, France and Britain. Other countries are now looking at the Canadian approach as a model. In June 1994, an international conference titled *Television Violence: the Canadian Example* was held in Paris, hosted by Sorbonne's Centre for Canadian Studies.

14.4.3 The United Kingdom: Regulating for diversity

Although most people may think of the BBC when they think of British broadcasting, the UK system has in fact featured side-by-side public and private television provision since the 1950s. Accordingly, side-by-side regulatory regimes have evolved. At present two regulatory bodies deal with content issues in the UK: the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) and the Independent Television Commission (ITC).

The BSC, a statutory body, is responsible for both standards and fairness in television broadcasting, including terrestrial and satellite media. Members include representatives of the broadcast industry, the media, the community, the education sector and the Church of England. The three main tasks of the BSC, as set out in the Broadcasting Act 1996, are: to produce codes of conduct relating to standards and fairness; to consider and adjudicate on complaints; and to monitor and report on standards and fairness in broadcasting. The BSC code of guidance with respect to portrayal of violence is detailed and specific, addressing the issues of violence in news, current affairs and documentaries; genre movies; cartoon violence; children's drama; behaviour that may be imitated; violence against animals; and suicide.

The BSC carries out research on the effects of broadcasting, reviews public attitudes towards television content, and regularly publishes its findings. The resulting Monitoring Reports form the basis for producing a Code of Practice which is drafted in consultation with all sectors of the broadcasting industry (Broadcasting Standards Commission, n.d.). This three-part document considers the portrayal of violence in news bulletins, current affairs and documentaries, and fictional programmes. The programme Code stipulates a 'watershed' of 9.00 pm, a family viewing policy, and recommends that broadcasters give 'careful consideration' to violent content and present viewer advisories (Broadcasting Standards Commission, n.d.). The public are able to submit complaints regarding programme content and broadcasters are required to explain their transmission decisions.

The ITC is the regulatory body for the UK's commercially funded television services, including terrestrial channels 3, 4 and 5 and all subscription cable and satellite services. Its roles include issuing licences, setting standards, monitoring and reporting on output, ensuring equity of access, and investigating complaints. The ITC has its own programme code including guidelines for the portrayal of violence.

Classification details, consumer advice and warnings are advocated but not prescribed; implementation is left to the broadcaster.

The ITC programme code includes the concept of a period of transition after the watershed, and graduated watersheds where appropriate: "… [Care should be taken in the period immediately after the watershed. There should be a gradual transition and it may be that a programme will be acceptable at 10.30pm for example that would not be suitable at 9pm. Decisions will also depend on the nature of the channel and the audience it attracts." Graduated watersheds are mandated for showing feature films, which are rated according to the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC): 8pm for '2', 9pm for '15', and 10pm for '18'.

A new piece of regulatory legislation, the Communications Act, received the Royal Assent in July 2003. It established a single Office of Communications (Ofcom) for television, radio and telecommunications; both the BSC and the ITC are subsumed into the new body. Ofcom will not become fully operational until the end of 2003, and currently has no statutory powers.

Under Ofcom, an "advisory" Content Board – actually a subcommittee of the main Board – will be responsible for content matters. A three-tiered system of regulation is envisioned. All broadcasters will have to meet the criteria of the first tier, while the second and third tiers will apply to the five universally available broadcasters (the public service BBC1 and BBC2, the private ITV network, and the advertising-funded Channel 4 and Channel 5.) Protection of minors and 'negative content regulation' will be included in the first-tier criteria. First-tier codes are currently being drafted. To date, Ofcom has defined a set of standards objectives, but the standards themselves have not yet been defined. The objectives pertaining to portrayal of violence are:

- That persons under the age of eighteen are protected;
- That generally accepted standards are applied to the contents of television and radio services so as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion in such services of offensive and harmful material.

Ofcom's other statutory responsibilities with respect to content are: promoting media literacy (including the development of classification systems and filtering technology); and, carrying out research in the areas of media literacy and programme standards. The Communications Act also provides for the establishment of a Consumer Panel to represent 'consumer interests', but content matters are not covered by the panel's remit.

The Communications Act was before Parliament for over two years and underwent over 500 amendments. The Ofcom approach represents a considerable departure from the public-service orientation of the BSC and ITC. It defines its regulatory role as promoting "effective self regulation and co-regulation", and the Content Board is defined as serving "those parts of the public interest that competition and market

forces cannot and do not reach." It will be interesting to compare the new content codes with those currently in place, as Ofcom has announced its intention to "use the opportunity of a new set of statutory content standards to rethink the form and style of existing content codes."

14.4.4 Australia: Multiple choice

Australia's television landscape is characterised by a wide range of broadcast services: state-owned, public/private, commercial, community and subscription. All sectors of the industry have been encouraged to produce their own programming guidelines; consequently there is also a range of codes of practice with respect to violent content, along with viewer programme advisories.

Australia has adopted a co-regulatory regime with respect to television violence. Australia's 1992 Broadcasting Services Act establishes the goal of a broadcasting industry that is "responsive to audience needs, respects community standards, and places a high priority on the protection of children from harmful material." The Act therefore provides a legislative foundation for self-regulation.

The Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) oversees broadcasting throughout the Commonwealth and undertakes the registration of all codes of practice, once these have been developed by each particular industry. The ABA also has the power to hear viewers' complaints regarding violent programme content which breaches code provisions, and where it sees fit, is able to impose fines on broadcasters. Viewers are required to submit complaints in writing and receive a response from the particular broadcaster prior to the ABA investigating the matter.

Codes of practice

Australia's regulatory scheme is based on a set of detailed classification systems and a corresponding scheme of time zones.

Commercial free-to-air broadcasters are represented in Australia by Commercial Television Australia (CTVA). CTVA developed the commercial television industry's code of practice, which includes a seven-level classification system:

- C (children's)
- P (pre-school children)
- G (general; not necessarily for children but not containing anything unsuitable for children)
- PG (parental guidance recommended)
- M (mature – recommended for viewing by age 15 or older)
- MA (mature audience – suitable for viewing only by age 15 or over); time zone 9pm to 5am.
- AV (adult violent – differentiated from MA by intensity or frequency of violence, or because violence is a central theme); time zone 9.30pm to 5am.

Material may also be rated 'not suitable for television'. The code also divides the broadcast day into classification 'zones' based on the expected audience for the respective times of day. The result is a scheme of multiple watersheds, ranging in the evening from 7.30 to 9.30, depending on the age of the audience and the content of the programme.

The CTVA Code includes a mandate for a formal review every three years. The AV classification and the 9.30 watershed for such material were introduced in 1999, following the last review. The Code is currently being reviewed again, and CTVA is inviting public comment on a draft revision.

The pay TV sector, represented by the industry group ASTRA (Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association), has three codes representing the different delivery systems available: subscription broadcasting, open narrowcasting and subscription narrowcasting. Community television services currently operate under the ASTRA Codes of Practice for Open Narrowcast Television Services.

Australia has two public broadcasters: the state-owned Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC); and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), chartered by the government to provide multilingual and multicultural broadcast services, which is partially state-supported. Both have their own programme codes.

Pay TV networks, the ABC and the SBS all use five-level classification systems based on the system developed by the Commonwealth Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC), which classifies all cinema films, home videos, and computer games:

- G - general
- PG - parental guidance recommended)
- M(15+) - recommended for age 15 and over
- MA(15+) – legally restricted to those age 15 and over
- R(18+) – legally restricted to adults

The SBS uses a variation on this scheme: its highest rating is "MAV" for material containing a higher intensity or frequency of violence than the MA category. It also uses a unique set of warnings including descriptions such as "graphic surgical procedures" and "cruelty to animals."

All sectors of the industry require complaints to be made directly to the broadcaster in the first instance. A complaint to any broadcaster that is not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction may be referred to the ABA. The ABC also has its own Independent Complaints Review Panel. All broadcasters will receive complaints by telephone, but advise callers that a complaint must be put in writing in order to receive must be put in writing in order to receive a formal response.

Research

The ABA actively commissions and publishes research into many aspects of broadcasting, with a particular focus on community attitudes. This year it published "Research into Community Attitudes to Violence on Free-to-air Television", conducted by ACNielsen in 2002. The goal of the study was to measure changes in attitudes since the last comparable study was done in 1989. The results show that although violence remains the main concern of TV viewers, the level of concern about has decreased from 78% to 64%. The respondents also demonstrated a high level of awareness of classifications guidelines, consumer advice, and warnings.

Because the current regulatory regime was introduced in the early '90s (in the interim between the two studies), these positive results appear to validate its approach. However, there is evidence that both the regulator and the industry may be interpreting the study with an undue degree of optimism. Following the ABA's release of the study results and accompanying commentary, the advocacy group Young Media Australia (YMA) issued a press release expressing dismay that the ABA had chosen to highlight the drop in community concerns about TV violence, stating that the ABA's emphasis could result in unjustified complacency on the part of broadcasters and the community.

YMA's Barbara Biggins stated: "The ABA could equally have emphasised that 64% of adults still indicated that they were quite or very concerned about television violence. Or the 73% who stated they wanted more controls. We know from our experience talking directly to parents on a daily basis that violence in the media is the number one issue of concern for them."

Of particular concern to YMA is the fact that the CTVA has used the significant but modest decrease in concern revealed by the study as a rationale for substantial changes in its code of practice, including the expansion of the PG time zone at the expense of the G time zone. CTVA's statement accompanying the draft revision shows a rather idealistic view of the status quo ("Parents monitor their children's viewing and interaction with the range of electronic media now available, and PG level material is by definition suitable for children to watch with parental supervision.") The changes are also represented as serving viewers' interests ("The expansion of the PG zone will allow a greater diversity of programming on commercial television … The current rules restrict programming choices for viewers.") The possibility of broadcasters using promising research results to undermine the very system that has produced them is an unfortunate development.

14.4.5 South Africa: In the public interest

South Africa's 1999 Broadcasting Act facilitated the merging of South Africa's telecommunications regulator – the South African Telecommunications Authority (SATRA) - and the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), which is the statutory body responsible for regulating South Africa's broadcasting industry. The result was

the formation of the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa, ICASA (National Association of Broadcasters, n.d.). This new Authority continued the post-1994 policies of a broadcasting regulator constitutionally independent of government and of broadcasting being self-regulating.

In South Africa, the portrayal of violence is of primary concern because of the country's history and current high level of violence, particularly interracial violence and violence against women. Freedom of speech is no less an issue due to the history of repression under apartheid. A position paper published by the IBA, addressing proposed changes to the Broadcasters' Code of Conduct, contains a thoughtful discussion of the competing interests involved:

> "The issue of violence in broadcasting, and particularly on television, is a worldwide concern. In South Africa, with our legacy of violence and abuse of human rights, this issue is of even greater concern, particularly in relation to violence against women.
>
> The Authority has therefore included in the Code, specific prohibitions on material which contains gratuitous violence or which sanctions, promotes or glamorizes violence. There are also provisions dealing with violence against women and violence against specific groups.
>
> As well as the specific limitations on the broadcasting of certain violent material, broadcasters will also be required to provide adequate information to audiences ahead of screening, will have to exercise caution in scheduling of violent material and abide by the watershed period."

Unlike the 'voluntary' industry codes used in the USA and Canada, the South African Code of Conduct is part of the broadcasting legislation and has the force of law. In the same paper, the IBA is unapologetic about its right to regulate:

> 'In developing this Position Paper, the Authority has taken into account the range of submissions which were put before it as well as the Bill of Rights. However, when making decisions, it is obviously not possible for the Authority to incorporate all divergent views. The Authority is charged with the obligation to formulate regulatory policy independently, in terms of what it judges to be in the broader public interest.'

The Code of Conduct for broadcasters recommends that programmes suitable for children are shown before the 'watershed' of 9.00 pm. It provides specific prohibitions on material that sanctions, promotes or glamorises violence, and requires the showing of advisories prior to the screening of programmes containing violent material.

South Africa has two bodies that review complaints. The Broadcast Monitoring and Complaints Committee (BMCC) is a standing committee of ICASA, established by legislation. It is responsible for ensuring compliance with legislation including the

Code of Conduct, and hears complaints from both consumers and broadcasters (i.e. against other broadcasters). The Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) is a self-regulatory body established by the industry group, the National Association of Broadcasters, to hear consumer complaints against its members. The BCCSA is chaired by an attorney, and its membership consists of industry representatives and "listener and viewer" representatives. Its jurisdiction in Code of Conduct matters is recognised by ICASA, and its judgments and annual review are published online (http://www.bccsa.co.za/).

14.4.6 Ireland: New Regulations for New Times

Ireland's most recent Broadcasting Act became law in 2001, succeeding the Radio and Television Act 1988. With respect to content regulation, the 1988 Act stated, "Every sound broadcaster shall ensure that … anything which may reasonably be regarded as offending against good taste or decency, or as being likely to promote, or incite to, crime or as tending to undermine the authority of the State, is not broadcast by him."

The 2001 Act encodes the creation of the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI), successor to the Independent Radio and Television Commission (IRTC). Like its predecessor, the BCI is charged with drawing up codes of practice in consultation with the public. The BCI has recently completed a draft of a new code for children's advertising. A new code for violence and other "taste and decency" issues will be drafted later this year.

Ireland's national public broadcaster, Radio Television Eire (RTE), was brought under the remit of BCI by the 2001 Act. RTE currently takes a preventive approach to the issue of violent content by operating with a set of Programme Makers' Guidelines. The Violence guidelines contain general advisories about context, nature and audience, the limitations of the 9pm watershed, and the production and scheduling of trailers. The element of prevention is explicit: "In all cases where realistic violence is planned in programmes, producers must consult their Department Heads at the scripting stage. It is far easier to address some of the issues raised in this section at the scripting stage than it is later on in the production process. In the case of television, programme [appraisal] acceptance viewers should be alert to problematic content in acquired programmes. Particular attention should be paid to the viewing of running series, which are normally scheduled before the watershed. It may be necessary to reschedule or drop a particular issue."

In Ireland complaints are heard by the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, an independent statutory body. Complaints regarding violent content have been infrequent.

14.5 Non-English speaking countries

14.5.1 The European system: For the common good

In keeping with Europe's history of developing broadcasting as a public rather than a commercial service, legislation currently in place for the European Union and its member states is based on the concept that broadcast regulation is and should be a role for the state, both for the common good and for the maximisation of the medium's economic potential. Regulation of television violence is justified by the concept of "protection of minors and human dignity" – a stronger principle than the idea of parents' right to choose. However, parental choice has become a major focus for the EU as it reviews its legislation.

The EU's umbrella legislation for broadcasting policy, the "Television without Frontiers' Directive" (1989 amended 1997) aims to 'ensure the free movement of broadcasting services within the internal market and at the same time to preserve certain public interest objectives, such as cultural diversity, the right of reply, consumer protection and the protection of minors'. It established the principle of regulation by the country of origin and gives member states a broad prescription for 'protection of minors,' including watershed hours and visual and/or acoustic warning systems. A further directive, the 'Recommendation on the protection of minors and human dignity in audiovisual and information services, became law in 1998, This directive legislation is currently under review by the European Commission, which has commissioned several studies examining the issue of parental control, the feasibility of introducing blocking technology such as the V-chip, and the implications of the transition to digital television.

In 1992 The European Broadcasting Union, the world's largest association of national broadcasters, adopted its own 'Guidelines for Programmes when Dealing with the Portrayal of Violence', detailing principles around the establishment of watersheds and the protection of children and young people, as well as dealing with issues around gratuitous violence, violence in fiction, the news and advertising. These self-regulatory guidelines are detailed, specific and explicit.

Within this overall regulatory framework, there is a broad range of approaches to internal regulation among the EU member states. The most common form of broadcasting regulatory organisation in Europe today is the independent regulatory authority, which is neither tied to governmental administration nor serves any other body. This pattern appears to have coincided with the decreased number of public service monopolies in the 1980s, though some public service broadcasting self-regulation still exists in countries such as the United Kingdom and Germany. Given the diversity of cultures in Europe, the powers of these regulatory bodies can vary greatly. According to the European Platform for Regulatory Authorities, the 'power of drawing up binding rules which is common in Anglo-Saxon systems is also not shared by all regulatory authorities in Europe' (EPRA, n.d.).

Following are some examples of current regulatory systems in EU member states.

German television comes under the 1991 State Treaty on Broadcasting as well as the Penal Code where programmes are prohibited to 'incite race hatred or depict cruel or otherwise inhuman acts of violence against human beings in a way which glorifies or makes appear harmless such acts.' State broadcasters have their own code of practice, which has kept portrayals of violence 'particularly low' (Schmidbauer, 1999). The commercial broadcasters have a body for 'voluntary self-restraint'. In April 2003, new laws were introduced to coordinate aspects of regulation across different media (television, film, video, internet, video games) and to strengthen the self regulatory codes with the object of providing a system that was more user friendly to the public and that provided better protection to children and young people. A commission for youth media protection will be established covering both television and the Internet. To augment the self-check system, a complaints body will be established which will be expected to demonstrate independence from the broadcasters and higher standards of accountability (Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle Fernsehen, 2003).

The Netherlands has recently introduced an innovative self-regulation tool for broadcasters: a single classification system for TV programmes, cinema films, videotapes and electronic games. 'Kijkwijzer' has four levels: All Ages, Age 6, Age 12 and Age 16. Pictograms are also used to indicate which elements in the content have led to the classification. The categories include violence, fear, discrimination, drug or alcohol abuse, sex, and coarse language. Products are classified by in-house coders of the production and broadcasting companies, using a standardised form.

Kijkwijzer is administered by NICAM (Netherlands Institute for the Classification of Audiovisual Media), an organisation with representation from public and private broadcasters, cinema operators, and film and video distributors. NICAM, which dates from December 1999, is the product of a cooperative effort between the Dutch government and the audiovisual sector. The development of this Canada-like initiative followed research that revealed growing concern among Dutch parents about audiovisual media content.

Complaints about violation of the Kijkwijzer system – e.g., a programme having an inappropriate classification, or being broadcast at an inappropriate time – are directed to NICAM's independent Complaints Committee. A second independent committee hears appeals against the Complaints Committee's rulings.

Kijkwijzer is unique in Europe and possibly in the world. It has been designed as "a dynamic system which will continue to reflect further research and the dominant ideas in society at any time about issues such as violence and sex." The system is being monitored by an independent research agency, which will produce a report after a two-year period of observation.

France has recently conducted a Commission of Inquiry into the issue of violence on television (Kriegel 2002), resulting in the recommendation of a number of sweeping changes around the classification of programmes, the watershed, the structure,

regulations and powers of the independent regulatory body for television (Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel, CSA). Specific recommendations include:

- the establishment of an integrated classification body that adjudicates across films, videos, DVDs, games and television. Membership would include 'representatives of the rights of the children' (doctors, psychologists and educators) as well as broadcasters.
- a time zone for excluding violent or pornographic programmes from 7am to 10.30pm, a slight relaxation on the previous 6am start.
- a requirement that television companies develop and widely publicise new codes of practice, and contribute to a research fund.

In **Sweden, t**he Swedish Broadcasting Commission supervises the compliance of its own country's programme content, as well as that received by foreign channels via satellite, under the laws that regulate broadcasting services and the licences granted by the Government. One of the licensing conditions for broadcasters is to exercise care with programmes representations of violence, sex, drugs and those that discriminate against people on the basis of gender or ethnic background. Complaints can be lodged with the Commission within six months of transmission.

A strong common emphasis of most regulatory bodies is on *not* showing programmes or scenes that will adversely affect children. The International Centre of Films for Children and Young People (CIEFJ) provides information on television regulations and children in a number of countries. The **Austrian** Broadcasting Corporation is self-regulating and restricts the broadcasting of certain films during the early evening. It provides printed television guides with advice for parents. **Belgium** has a legal provision prohibiting the broadcast of programmes on French-language radio and television services that may have a negative impact on the development of minors, particularly pornographic scenes or those involving gratuitous violence. The **Danish** Broadcasting Act does not specifically mention children's programming. However, all the departments of the public broadcasting network take into consideration the suitability of programmes for young viewers, especially those aired before 9.00pm.

14.5.2 Eastern Europe: Non-EU countries

Romania established its National Audiovisual Council in 1992. This is a public, autonomous authority, founded to provide a legal framework in setting up a competitive and free private market in Romania. It is responsible for granting licences and also issues decisions. One such decision concerned the restrictions and warnings for the protection of minors (Decision no 47, 24 April 2000). Under this decision the NAC required the classification of programmes which might contain scenes of violence such as those that might be an 'aggression' to minors, may impair children through recurring scenes of physical and psychological violence, or the prohibition of pornographic or extremely violent programmes 'that may seriously

impair the physical, psychological or mental development of minors'. Identification symbols and time bands are included in the decision. The NAC also requests stations to take extra measures to inform the public such as through publishing schedules and providing warning symbols on the categories of programmes which are to be broadcast.

The **Bulgarian** Council of Electronic Media supervises both radio and television broadcasters. Registered broadcasters are expected to adhere to the programme project, programme concept and programme profile or programme scheme they have submitted. Amongst the activities that are monitored on a day-to-day basis is the 'observance of the requirements for programme items addressed to minors and young people under age'

The Czech Republic instituted a Broadcasting Act in 2001, which placed restrictions on broadcast of a number of violent activities. These included ensuring programmes did not promote war or show brutal or otherwise inhumane behaviour, did not arouse hatred relating to race, gender, religion, nationality or membership of a certain group of the population, and did not include anything which might seriously affect the physical, mental or moral development of minors by, in particular, involving pornography and gross gratuitous violence. Verbal and symbolic warnings are also required before the broadcast of programmes that are unsuitable for minors.

14.5.3 Singapore: An Asian Experiment

Historically, the media in Singapore have been characterised by monopolistic ownership and a high level of censorship. However, in recent years the Singapore government has become keenly interested in exploiting the economic potential of the media within its information economy. Its ambitious goal is to "transform Singapore into a global media city." Singapore is therefore steering a middle path between deregulation to encourage competition and a relatively high level of content control.

The media in Singapore are regulated by the Media Development Authority (MDA), a statutory body under the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts. MDA, inaugurated on 1 January 2003, was created by the Media Development Act 2002 and subsumes the functions of the former Singapore Broadcasting Authority, the Singapore Films Commission and the Films and Publications Department. It is responsible for industry development and standards for television, film, video, radio, publication and new media. MDA's fourteen members are all appointed by the Minster of Information, Communication and the Arts. The structure also includes a Programme Advisory Committee and five subcommittees.

Singapore has two free-to-air broadcasters. The MediaCorp Group owns and manages five channels; SPH Media Works, a subsidiary of Singapore Press Holdings, the monopoly newspaper company, owns two. Between them the two broadcasters provide a wide range of programmes, with channels for its Chinese, Malay, Indian

and English-speaking communities. There is a single cable television franchise, StarHub (formerly Singapore Cable Vision) providing a multichannel service. It is currently Singapore's only pay-TV provider. Private satellite dishes are not permitted.

MDA is authorised by the Media Development Act to set codes of practice" to safeguard the interests of consumers of media services and of the public generally." There are separate codes for free-to-air and pay television.

Breaches of the codes are subject to a fine which can range from $1,000 to $50,000. Complaints are heard by the MDA. Broadcasters can appeal against an unfavourable decision to the Broadcasting Authority Appeals Committee (BAAC), a 14-member body appointed by the Minister of Information, Communication and the Arts. After hearing the appeal the BAAC makes a recommendation to the Minister, whose decision is final.

The MDA places a high priority on media education and parent involvement; its Web site states: "MDA encourages the public to provide feedback when they have problems with objectionable programme content, and also takes a proactive role in guiding their children's viewing."

14.6 Going global: Common factors

14.6.1 Media education and advocacy groups

A key factor in the evolution of media regulation in other countries has been the influence of media education organisations. A thorough account of these numerous and diverse groups is not possible within the scope of this study; an overview follows.

Media education is an established feature of the regulatory landscape in the USA. As noted above, the FCC and the industry groups publish their own parent education materials. There is also a huge range of advocacy groups representing consumer interests. The following brief list is representative:

- MediaWise (the National Institute on Media and the Family, www.mediafamily.org), an educational organisation providing resources for parents and educators.
- Mediascope (www.mediascope.org), a nonprofit organisation focused on helping the creative industries to become more socially responsible.
- The Parents' Television Council, a non-partisan lobbying group that publishes programme information, reviews, commentary and statistics.
- The Center for Media Literacy (www.medialit.org), an organisation providing media literacy resources for educators.

- The Lion & Lamb Project is a lobbying group devoted to stopping the marketing of violence, including violent entertainment, to children.

The American public health industry also plays a substantial advocacy role. A 'Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment on Children', presented at a Congressional Public Health Summit in 2000, was signed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Psychological Association, the American Medical Association, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. The AAP has initiated its own media education campaign, 'Media Matters.'

Canada also has a well-developed range of media education and advocacy groups. They range from the Media Awareness Network, "home to one of the world's most comprehensive collections of media education and Internet literacy resources," down to The Free Radical (www.fradical.com), a grassroots Web-based initiative whose reports suggest that the country's innovative approach to regulation is no reason to become complacent. A noteworthy group in the Canadian scene is Concerned Children's Advertisers, whose mission is "to be the credible, caring and authoritative voice of responsible children's advertising and communications." Members include broadcasters and corporations producing children's products.

The United Kingdom does not have a large number of advocacy groups, perhaps because standards have been in place since the early days of broadcasting and the BSC's ongoing research programme has engaged with consumer concerns. There is, however, a well-established national group, mediawatch-uk, formerly the National Viewers and Listeners Association (www.mediawatchuk.org). Its emphasis is on lobbying, and it has published a detailed critique of the recently passed Communications Bill.

In Australia, the national advocacy organisation Young Media Australia (YMA) provides resources for legislators, regulators, media scholars and parents, and serves as a clearinghouse for information about children and media. YMA publishes information about Australia's codes and classification systems, research findings (national and international), and materials offering guidance to parents, both online and in print. They also publicise upcoming conferences on media issues and operate a 24-hour helpline. An active regional group affiliated to Young Media Australia is the New South Wales Council for Children's Films and Television, known as 'Monitoring Media for Youth', which dates back to 1954.

Unlike the USA and Canada, Australia does not provide any ongoing government funding for independent consumer advocacy. YMA's Barbara Biggins reports, "Broadcasting consumer groups in Australia mostly have supported themselves with a mix of hard-earned funding. It's not surprising therefore that we are almost the only group left (certainly in the children's area, we are). We survive on membership fees, through project grants, and one small organisational grant from the SA Film Corporation (and our hold on that is very shaky, as we are less and less seen as a film culture organisation.)" The group's helpline and Web site up were set up with a

grant from the federal Stronger Families Initiative, which will expire at the end of 2003; they are currently seeking funding from other sources to continue these services.

14.6.2 Third party positions

While the debate on television violence often takes place in context of scientific or at least academic rigour, it is heavily influenced by third parties, groups for whom one way or another, television violence is part of their practical life. This obviously includes the viewing public, but it also includes pressure groups on either side of the debate. There is broad agreement across the spectrum of researchers into the impact of television that 'reality' on television does influence to some extent attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in real life. This is true for prosocial behaviours such as altruism (Mares, 1996) as well as for anti-social behaviours. This agreement holds for the macro or societal view of media and cultural studies as well as the more micro view of child and family psychology. However, the degree and process of influence remains in question.

As the literature review has shown, some media scholars, such as David Gauntlett, Jib Fowles and Barrie Gunter tend to either deny "effects" theories or (in the latter case) reassure us that the negative effects of television are small in comparison with those of family, school and peers (Gunter & McAleer, 1997, p221). Their views tend to be supported by researchers with a cultural effects orientation, who reject the individualised, acultural, reductive, and marginalising focus of much effects research (Wartella, 2001); civil libertarians (who fear the implication of censorship), and media professionals (who resent criticism and interference with their work). It is possible that researchers' views and the methods they deem appropriate are influenced by the television environment in their own country. French researchers tend to be more concerned with protecting free speech and artistic expression (Kriegel, 2002). UK researchers tend to be less concerned about media violence than US researchers (Atkins & Culpit, 1998). The US homicide rates are four times those in Britain (Barclay et al, 2001), and rates of violence on TV appear to be much higher. Gauntlett, (1998) from England, acknowledges:

> ….it is certainly possible that gratuitous depictions of violence might reach a level in American screen media which could be seen as unpleasant and unnecessary….

But concern over gratuitousness is a far step from the belief, prevalent in the US research community, that a direct causal link between televised violence and crime and homicide rates if not proven so far, remains to be discovered. In the context of New Zealand, which has a comparatively high homicide rate per head of population if compared internationally, and, as our content analysis shows, a high incidence of violence on TV, there is certainly no call for complacency.

The traditional arch-villains of behavioural research – media professionals – are not uniformly unconcerned about the effects of violence in television and movies (Potter, 1999, pp 154 –155). But the industry as a whole is often compelled to respect the bottom line and issues of artistic licence. The intense competition for audiences can mean that issues such as the protection of children are accorded a lower priority. This is particularly true in the USA where market imperatives are strongest. There are examples of professionals, if that is an appropriate accolade, who are prepared to unscrupulously target children with violent products. This is what the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) found in its evaluation of the marketing of R-rated movies.

> Of the 44 movies rated R for violence the Commission selected for its study, the Commission found that 35, or 80 percent, were targeted to children under 17. Marketing plans for 28 of those 44, or 64 percent, contained express statements that the film's target audience included children under 17. For example, one plan for a violent R-rated film stated, "Our goal was to find the elusive teen target audience and make sure everyone between the ages of 12-18 was exposed to the film." Though the marketing plans for the remaining seven R-rated films did not expressly identify an under-17 target audience, they led the Commission to conclude that children under 17 were targeted nonetheless. That is, the plans were either extremely similar to the plans of the films that did identify an under-17 target audience, or they detailed actions synonymous with targeting that age group, such as promoting the film in high schools or in publications with majority under-17 audiences.
>
> (Federal Trade Commission, 2000; iii)

The FTC finds similar results when looking at video games. Hamilton (1998), an economist, who has analysed the marketing of violence on TV, contests the assertion of television programmers that "we use violence on television to tell, not sell, stories". He says there are there are a number of incentives that favour the provision of violent programming, particularly some violent shows are cheaper to purchase, and that they are twice as likely to be exported, which increases the returns to producers.

If professional support is a measure of credibility, then scholars working within the behaviourist paradigm, often psychologists (e.g. Huesman, Eron, Anderson, Bushman and Murray), have made the greatest inroads. From a funding point of view, the equation that media violence equals societal violence has proved a best seller not merely with media researchers but with medical, paediatric or mental health professionals, or educators who want to see active strategies in place to reduce media violence. One example is the US Commission for the Prevention (2000) of Youth Violence whose commissioners are representatives of the following organisations:

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry;
- American Academy of Family Physicians;
- American Academy of Paediatrics;

- American College of Physicians;
- American Society; of Internal Medicine;
- American Medical Association;
- American Medical Association Alliance;
- American Psychiatric Association;
- American Public Health Association;
- US Department of Health and Human Services.

Another example is the National Educational Association (1996/2001), a US organisation with 2.7 million members, which takes television violence seriously as a "factor contributing to aggression" and promotes programmes of minimising access to violent television. Media professionals might observe in return, that the above organisations whilst pursuing legitimate policy issues, have market pressures of their own in relation to funding and public accountability. Such *ad hominem* arguments and *parti pris* need to be separated from issues of proof and effective policy formulation.

14.6.3 The conundrum of convergence

Whatever their provenance or origin, all regulatory regimes face a common development: the increasing convergence of communication forms and the interlinking of delivery systems. In a converged communications environment, the ability of any central regulatory body to regulate, let alone censor content, is limited and will be increasingly so. As television becomes increasingly an interactive medium, offering (along the model of satellite provision in New Zealand), a menu of programmes from which consumers choose their own 'diet' of content, and as this content is increasingly globally sourced, the role of the consumer as a filterer of content will become central (Keller and Verhulst, 2000).

In this scenario, the role of regulatory bodies, if it is to be significant, must shift to a strategy of providing, and requiring content suppliers to provide, accurate and reliable information about the nature of content, empowering the consumers, either as parents or as individuals, to make informed choices about content. Regulators must increasingly carve out a role as educators and be party to discussions about what the values of the nation or the community are and how they can inform instruments of regulation.

15

Policy Present and Future

In order to plan for the future of broadcasting policy in New Zealand, it is important to consider the standards New Zealand viewers want for broadcasting, how well the current regulatory system is working, and where there is room for improvement. For such consideration to be informed by an understanding of how other countries approach the regulation of broadcasting clearly makes sense.

15.1 The standards New Zealand viewers want for broadcasting

Compared with other English-speaking countries New Zealand has little history of consumer media activism or viewer-initiated commentary. In the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada and Australia a wide range of advocacy and lobby groups representing all sides of the issue enter the debate on broadcasting. The commentators range from national organisations with large memberships to individuals with a range of views and positions.

In New Zealand there is no national organisation devoted to media issues. The Children's Television Foundation is focused on television made for children and does not appear to address other aspects of children and media. Christchurch-based Viewers for TV Excellence (VOTE), is an active contributor to the broadcasting dialogue but reflects the views of a limited constituency.

A review of BSA complaint decisions indicates that some individuals at least have the knowledge and confidence to protest when they feel the standards they expect are not being met. Why then is there no mechanism for collective protest? There is no evidence that New Zealanders feel any less concerned about the quality of broadcasting in general, or about protecting children in particular, than citizens of other modern English-speaking nations, so the absence of such groups emerges from this study as a important and unanswered question.

A clue as to why one group which may include many of those most concerned about television violence has no strong organised voice, can be found in a statement in the Web site of Parents Centres, a parenting support organisation: "If you run a business in New Zealand the government wants you to succeed. It has created a raft of agencies to help you with skills, fund raising, marketing opportunities, and has a host of awards to boost enthusiasm. … If you are a parent you are ignored. If you want skills to do a good job you pay for them yourself and can't claim them as a tax write off, there are no awards for parenting and there are no government agencies to

help. … Parents have lacked a united voice to politicians and paid the price, not intentionally but through constantly being ignored in the development of policy." In other words, there is no historical precedent in New Zealand for parents as a lobbying group with the right to make demands of government.

In the absence of a clear consumer voice research has been the main source for understanding of New Zealanders' expectations. Since 1990, the BSA has been undertaking research into community attitudes toward broadcasting standards. A 1999 survey of public attitudes toward broadcasting standards revealed that violence was a major concern, particularly for the older participants, women, and parents with children at home. As a group, young men were the most tolerant of violence. Of particular concern were the graphic portrayal of violence and the depiction of violence against women, children and the elderly. The participants believed that violence could sometimes be justified depending on context. They did not make a distinction between programmes shown on free-to-air and pay TV, and some objected specifically to absence of a watershed on pay TV (prior to the current Code of Practice).

Most participants, regardless of age, gender or family status, supported the concept that children should be protected from violent content. Perceived harmful effects included the danger of imitation, the potential for children to be frightened or disturbed, and negative role models. Some Maori participants were concerned that New Zealand youth gangs could emulate American youth gang culture. Participants also identified the negative effects of television in general on education, family life and children's social lives. The 8:30 watershed was seen as effective for younger children, but less so for older children who have later bedtimes and are more likely to have television in their bedrooms.

Overwhelmingly, participants believed that the major responsibility for controlling children's media consumption lies with parents, although some acknowledged the difficulties involved. Broadcasters were seen to have a role to play in maintaining standards, and comments on the need for standards and their effectiveness were generally positive. Again, scheduling was the most commonly identified problem. Many parents cited the 'Goodnight Kiwi', a watershed icon formerly used by TV2, as a useful tool that should be reinstated.

15.2 How well the complaints system is working

In a system such as New Zealand's that relies on broadcaster self-regulation, consumer complaints play an important role in establishing the boundaries broadcasters are expected to maintain.

The Broadcasting Standards Authority is the body to which complaints about television are referred once they have already been addressed to the broadcaster. Decisions made in response to complaints are published online, and a small representative selection is also published in the BSA's quarterly newsletter.

Participants in the Dickinson survey were generally aware of the complaints system but many expressed a reluctance to use it, and many thought that the BSA would not respond to a complaint from just one person. People also expressed the views that New Zealanders are "lazy", "passive" or "apathetic" when it comes to taking action.

Nevertheless, the volume of complaints referred to the BSA has grown steadily over the years, from 12 published decisions in 1989/90, its first year of operation, to about 200 a year for the past five years. A review of recent decisions reveals that complaints with respect to the portrayal of violence are numerous and diverse, representing a wide range of issues. Although some names recur, complainants are by no means a small handful of 'cranks'. They are men and women and come from all over the country.

Seventy-five per cent of complaints to the BSA are not upheld.

The following selection of recent decisions provides a good example of the variety of complaints regarding televised violence and the BSA's approach to such complaints.

i. A complaint against an episode of *The Sopranos*, an American crime drama broadcast on TV2 at 9.30pm was upheld, refuting the broadcaster's argument that the scene, in which a pregnant woman is beaten and killed, was justified in context and was important to character development. No penalties were imposed.

ii. A *Newsbreak* broadcast on TV3 at 2.30pm on a Saturday, during a children's programme included an item about two children found guilty of killing their father with a baseball bat. In line with the broadcaster's earlier response to the complainant, the BSA declined to uphold the complaint, agreeing with the broadcaster that the delivery was constrained and contained no disturbing images.

iii. An interview with actor Matt Damon broadcast on TV3 between 6:00 and 7:00pm, included two fight scenes from his recent film. The complaint was that the scenes were extremely violent and shown out of context and without a warning. The broadcaster, and a majority of the BSA, declined to uphold the complaint. However, the Authority also noted that although children are unlikely to be watching the news, this does not excuse broadcasters from considering impact on children when news is broadcast in "G" time. Furthermore, the BSA concurred with the complainant that pre-school children cannot necessarily distinguish between fictional and real violence, refuting the broadcaster's statement to the contrary. A minority of the BSA considered that the showing of violent scenes from an "M" rated film in a "G" time slot did indeed violate television standards.

iv. A complaint about the teen drama The Tribe, broadcast on TV3 at 9.50am on a Sunday alleged that the programme was inappropriate for children. The broadcaster failed to respond to the complaint, but did respond (with an

apology for the oversight) after learning that it had been referred to the BSA. The complaint was not upheld. Dissatisfied with the response, the complainant referred the matter back to the BSA, which once again declined to uphold it.

v. The programme Maximum Exposure – International Fight Club was broadcasting on Prime at 8.30pm on a Sunday. The programme, classified as "G", was a montage of video clips of violent behaviour from security camera footage, amateur video and other sources with a jokey voice-over narrative. The complaint was based on six different standards. Prime upheld the complaint regarding three of the standards, apologised to the complainant, and advised that the series would not be broadcast again until it was classified. The complainant was not satisfied with the response and referred the complaint to the BSA which upheld the complaint regarding five of the standards as well as agreeing that Prime's response was inadequate. Prime was ordered to make an on-air statement about the complaint within one month of the date of decision.

It is clear that a significant number of New Zealanders are aware of the complaints procedure and feel comfortable using it. It is also clear that the BSA takes its regulatory role seriously. Complaints are evaluated case by case, and sensitivity to viewers' concerns is generally demonstrated even where the complaint has not been upheld. A more explicit description of the complaints procedure in broadcasters' obligatory on-air announcements could remedy some viewers' lack of understanding, resulting in increased usage.

15.3 Broadcasters' commitments on the issue of televised violence

There are four major television broadcasters in New Zealand: CanWest, the largest Canadian media company, which owns and operates TV3 and TV4 (as well as about half of New Zealand's radio stations); Prime Television New Zealand, a subsidiary of an Australian company, which broadcasts on UHF and satellite; Sky Network Television, New Zealand's primary subscription ("pay") broadcaster; and the government-owned TVNZ, which broadcasts on TV1 and TV2.

The broadcaster with the major share of the audience, Television New Zealand, has recently adopted a new Charter (March 1 2003), which states that it will 'play a leading role in New Zealand television by complying with free-to-air codes of broadcasting practise, in particular any code with provisions on violence.' TVNZ also publishes the Free-to-Air Code of Broadcasting Practice and the complaints procedure on its Web site.

The fact that 75% of complaints referred to the BSA are not upheld indicates that broadcasters are generally complying with the existing standards. However, the percentage of successful complaints is not insignificant, and the instances where a complaint is upheld may reveal carelessness or a lack of insight on the broadcaster's

part. For example, in item 14.2.v above, it appears that no one responsible for the decision to screen the programme had actually seen it, and item 14.2.ii suggests a failure to realistically assess the programme in light of the Code of Practice violence standards.

15.4 The potential for media education

The Massey studies of the early 1990s discussed earlier pointed to the potential for enhanced media education in schools to better equip children as contemporary television viewers. The 1999 Dickinson survey revealed that 91.5% of respondents (age 15 and up) believed parents or caregivers should have primary responsibility for what children watch on TV. Only 6.1% believed that broadcasters should have the primary responsibility. However, a subsequent survey of parents revealed that only around one-tenth of respondents were wholly comfortable with what their children saw on television, with 56% concerned about violence. (Interestingly, a follow-up survey of children aged 6-13 revealed about the same percentage of children concerned about violence.) A 2000 qualitative survey commissioned by New Zealand On Air revealed that in addition to concern about negative content, parents want television to be an effective information source for children, with programming that addresses current issues and demonstrates positive values.

Given these high expectations of television, if parents feel that they alone must be responsible for their children's viewing experience, they take up a heavy burden. This burden becomes even greater in the absence of any media education initiatives. As noted above, one approach to the impact of media violence on children is to treat it as a public health issue. Consider some other public health issues that concern parents: drug and alcohol abuse, tobacco, under-age sexual activity. It is safe to say that most parents welcome all the outside help they can get with these complex issues – help from teachers and community groups as well as national initiatives. Protection of children from inappropriate media content has become just as complex, as sources, delivery methods and sheer volume of material have multiplied.

As has already been described within this document, a diversity of opinion surrounds the debate of children and television violence. The central issue may not be whether children are passive vessels that will be filled with aggression due to their exposure to television violence. It may be that in an increasingly global society marked by television/computer convergence, with access to instant communication and with technology expanding at an accelerating rate, the question we need to ask is how can we assist children to learn to be discriminating in their viewing

Some may argue that full regulation is necessary to ensure children's interests are protected when it comes to television violence. But this is unlikely to be achievable even if it is thought to be desirable. There are other alternatives that should be considered.

One of the most powerful options may be to weave together in a more integrated and coherent fashion elements from the English, Social Studies and Health and Physical Education curricula in a way that incorporates the essential skills so that *all* media violence is seen to be addressed and not left to chance. It is an opportunity for broadcast companies, ISPs, Learning Media, and the Ministry of Education, together with media watch groups, to produce resources and accompanying units of work for teachers and students at all levels.

15.5 A plan for action: Common goals and practical solutions

15.5.1 Consensus for change

In order to move forward on the issue of broadcast regulation, all parties must agree in principle on the role of regulation and shared goals for change. The aspect of regulating violent content that all parties are most likely to agree on is the need to protect children from inappropriate material. New Zealand is a party to the Untied Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states (Article 3(1)): "In all actions concerning children … the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration." Reaching a consensus that protecting children must be the highest priority of content regulation would be a productive starting point for a fresh approach to the issue. The issues of free expression, freedom to make profit, and the relationship between violent programming and aggression must therefore be placed in perspective.

Another precondition for a positive regulatory environment is a non-adversarial relationship between regulators and the broadcasting. This has been a significant advantage in developing the progressive regulatory regimes of Canada, Australia and the Netherlands; conversely, the obvious antagonism between broadcasters and the FCC is one of the greatest stumbling blocks to progress in the USA. A corollary to this is a role for government that all parties can agree on.

15.5.2 Regulatory tools: Watersheds and classification

New Zealand's watersheds – 8.30 pm for free-to-air television and 8.00pm for subscription television – are among the earliest worldwide and are cited as a problem in parent surveys. A graded series of watersheds should be introduced, taking into account the times when children are likely to watch later, such as weekends and school holidays. This is a commonsense, short-term measure that may also work well in the long run, and does so in many countries. It can be implemented without additional technology or massive public education, and serves to put a barrier between children's likely viewing time and the most inappropriate of adult-oriented material.

New Zealand's current classification system would benefit from standardisation. Currently the free-to-air code of practice has a three-tier system and the pay-TV code

has a six-tier system. Both are different from the classification system for cinema films and rental videos, which is encoded by the Films Videos and Publications Classification Act. At the least, the free-to-air system should be expanded to be consistent with the pay-TV system, particularly as the centre tier (PGR) is extremely broad. The Ministry may well wish to consider a single classification system for broadcasting, film and video as recently introduced in the Netherlands.

Classification systems should be based on a clear awareness of what consumers will find appropriate and user-friendly. Recent surveys of awareness of classification systems in the USA (Annenberg, 2000) and Australia (Nielsen, 2003) demonstrate an impressively high level of awareness in Australia, a surprisingly low level in the USA (despite a substantial public education effort). It is not possible to know the exact reasons for this without further information. However, certain assumptions are possible. The Australian regulatory system is heavily dependent on classification schemes, and such a scheme could not be expected to work without a high level of accompanying consumer advice. Codes of practice for all sectors of the industry contain provisions about consumer advice; in the code for commercial free-to-air broadcasters, these are quite detailed and specific. Australian TV classification systems are also consistent with, if not always identical to, the system for cinema films and video. In the USA, reception of the TV classification system has been mixed since its introduction in 1997, and the Annenberg study showed that awareness of it had actually declined since it was last measured. The system is different from those used for other media (film and video, electronic games, music CDs and tapes), and the study rated it the least-used of the four systems. Television was also rated the most highly supervised medium, suggesting that parents find it easier to simply supervise their children's viewing when a classification system is not user-friendly.

The classification system should also be re-evaluated from the perspective of cultural diversity and sensitivity. New Zealand's population is a mix of diverse cultures with distinctive values and beliefs. The focus group discussions conducted for this study clearly demonstrate that New Zealand's four largest ethnic groups use different values in judging programme content. The issue of language should also be addressed, not just as a cultural issue but as a practical one: New Zealand continues to welcome immigrants for whom the first language is not English, and the adults in such families may be slower to learn English than their children.

Finally, although the importance of classification systems should not be underestimated, neither should their limitations. "Particular care should be taken to avoid the 'boomerang effect', whereby a 'mature' rating serves to make a programme or film irresistible to a younger-than-intended audience." (Roberts).

15.5.3 Media education and advocacy: The missing ingredients

Media education and consumer input are essential to the dialogue on broadcasting. In a convergent media environment the BSA should initially assume an educational role, aimed at empowering parents and guardians and general viewers to make

informed decisions about what to watch. For longer term planning, New Zealand would profit from studying the wide variety of overseas media education initiatives in other countries. The Government could then construct its own initiative, in cooperation with appropriate partners – for example the education system, the public health system, and community groups. Affiliation with an established overseas organisation could be considered to "get the ball rolling."

In the absence of a well-developed culture of consumer advocacy, representative consumer panels should be set up to aid programme makers and regulators to keep in touch with public opinion. Such activity, which is ongoing now but in institutionally separated arenas, for example by the BSA and NZ on Air, should be co-ordinated by a central monitoring unit. The Government should also seek to kick-start the consumer advocacy process, perhaps by forming a task force to establish a national advocacy organisation.

16

Conclusions

The research team's contract with the NZ Government Working Party on Television Violence has required the research team to undertake the work to investigate and evaluate in the following three main areas (see contract in Appendix W):

Conduct a 'full' literature survey of the international and New Zealand literature, which (*inter alia)*:

* clarifies the definitions of violence applied in existing studies, both locally and internationally
* evaluates the methodologies used to measure violence in existing research
* outlines and overviews the findings on the incidence of television violence
* outlines and overviews the findings on links between television violence and social behaviour
* evaluates the relevance of this literature to the contemporary New Zealand situation
* assesses the appropriateness of the prevailing methodologies for this project's empirical work

Conduct a 'limited' content analysis, which:

* shows the incidence of violence on New Zealand television in 2003
* assesses whether this constitutes a problem in New Zealand society
* clarifies the comparability of this study's methodology and findings with earlier New Zealand work
* compares the incidence of violence (historically) with earlier studies within New Zealand
* compares the incidence of violence (geographically) with studies conducted elsewhere

3

a. Describe the existing regulatory regimes in New Zealand and overseas
b. Evaluate and compare the New Zealand regime with those in other polities
c. Evaluate the contemporary relevance of the existing New Zealand regulatory regime for New Zealand society

This concluding chapter will address these prime questions. Linkages will be made as necessary, and organised generally in accord with the contract objectives above.

16.1 The literature on television violence

16.1.1 The research paradigms

We have used a dichotomy between behaviourist and active-audience approaches as the organising principle for our literature review. This necessarily over-simplifies the multiplicity of approaches there have been to television violence. The dichotomy is also not an independent phenomenon but derives from a basic cleft through contemporary social science theory and method. The Behaviourist paradigm is of American origin and still holds sway there. It believes in the identifiability of stimuli, which produce specific responses, although there are now many dilutions of that stance.

By contrast, the more recent critical or constructivist approaches, which originated in and prevail in Europe do not necessarily accept that it is possible to generalize from one situation to another. Critical approaches may, however, stand on the premise that media are a powerful tool for influencing the mass of people – this view of influence is therefore largely shared with the behaviourist approach. By contrast, constructivist or interpretivist approaches believe that individuals make their own meanings anew from each viewing (or other social experience), and there is no given, shared meaning to be found, or generalisable conclusions to be drawn between situations.

All approaches except extreme behaviourism would agree that one cannot extrapolate from the nature of media content to a finding about audiences' response to that content. But while behaviourist and critical theories offer some hope that there are common assumable patterns between individuals and communities, radical constructivist approaches question even the possibility of this being the case.

16.1.2 The link between television violence and social behaviour

The depiction of violence on television is a message about the social relationship between people. This is apparent in the case of drama, but it also applies to news programmes, which strongly emphasise the personal or human interest aspects of world events. It is important to point out, however, that categories and genres of programmes are becoming progressively more slippery and less easy to define. Fictional drama, for example, increasingly uses the techniques of 'factual' portrayals – while 'factual' programmes such as news and current affairs adopt what have traditionally been considered dramatic techniques, for their entertainment value. We know from the international research that perceived realism in depiction tends to affect people more

than does lack of realism. Thus, 'real' violence on the news may have more impact on viewers than fictional violence, particularly the overtly fantasised violence of animations

Links between televised violence and social behaviour have been attested in a range of studies, although scarcely within New Zealand itself. Our study has not included any direct work with audiences, since this was not part of the project's brief. As indicated earlier, this means that no link between the levels of violence we have recorded and social behaviours in New Zealand has been investigated or established. There is in fact only one New Zealand study into direct effects of television on aggression (Ling 1976), and this is nearly 30 years old and was conducted in a previous era of the electronic media. There is also the Massey audience survey of the early 1990s, which resulted in more qualitative understandings of viewer perceptions of violence.

We have argued that the framing of the issue of television violence should shift from the concept of effects, with its tendency to evoke a direct linkage between perception and act, towards the concept of risk. In so doing, television content becomes one factor in a causal process whose outcome is contingent rather than predetermined. There is no royal road from television images to behaviour.

Although we have conducted no audience research as such, we were able to use our demographically-structured group of coders to gain some insight into how New Zealanders respond to television violence. These groups were selected to represent equally the major demographic dimensions of New Zealand society (by age, gender and ethnicity). This means that they were proportionally unrepresentative of New Zealand's actual ethnic composition. The focus groups data did, however, enable the research team to address the question of the different perceptions, which ethnically diverse groups have of televised content.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the catharsis hypothesis holds that television does have an effect, but that the effect is benevolent in enabling people to work off their aggression vicariously through the images on screen. Televised violence would thus be seen to reduce rather than increase socially aggressive behaviour, but this remains an unevidenced and minority view.

16.1.3 Risk and anxiety

It has been suggested that television violence may raise viewers' anxiety levels about societal violence, especially when presented in local non-fictional programmes such as (New Zealand) Crimewatch. In viewing such concentrated images of violence people are likely to assess society as being more violent than it actually is. This is what Gerbner referred to as the 'mean world' syndrome. It is worth noting that the degree of graphicness of violence portrayed increases the sense of societal danger to viewers.

Significantly, aggressors and victims tend to be stereotyped demographically, so that males are more often portrayed as aggressors and females as victims. Viewers perceive the risk to themselves in terms of the portrayal of people like themselves so that if women are routinely portrayed as victims of violence, women will be more anxious about violence in their own life-worlds. Having noted this, however, the role of gender and ethnicity in audience evaluation of screened violence requires further research. It is noteworthy that the analysis of perpetrators and victims show a trend towards the increasing use of females as perpetrators and that ethnic victims are more likely to suffer serious harm from violent incidences.

16.1.4 Children and television violence

A key principle of television regulation in any nation should be the care of children, and any regime for regulating television violence ought to be primarily guided by what are perceived to be the best interests of children. Children appear to be one of the greatest risk groups in respect to TV violence. Although the research is not unequivocal, some effects of television violence can be ascertained. For example, numbers of children have been observed directly copying violence incidents from cartoons. In New Zealand, the supposed imitative effects of the Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers prompted widespread public concern culminating in the cartoon being removed from programming schedules.

Another issue identified by the analysis concerns the effectiveness of the 8.30pm watershed. A comparison of the violence counts before and after the watershed suggests that the watershed is not working very well as a boundary marker between general audience and adult-oriented programming. New Zealand children are watching television well past the 8.30pm watershed time for the screening of adult-only programmes, particularly on non-school days.

Cartoons (targeted at children) are the most violent genre on New Zealand television in 2003. They have also been the most violent in all earlier local research, and in all international research. The fact that major international television violence studies (e.g. NTVS and UCLA) include cartoons in their analysis suggests that it is a genre that deserves closer analysis in terms of viewer perceptions and effects

While television is but one factor in children's lives and development, there does seem to be some connection between children who have had a violence-saturated media diet and aggression in later life. In addition, television is more likely to have a negative impact on children who grow up with a cluster of negative influences such as poverty, domestic violence, truancy, etc. The 'replacement effect' of television may also be detrimental to children. That is, children who spend extended periods watching

television are not engaging in other potentially valuable activities e.g. socialising, reading, playing games, and doing chores.

Finally, it is important to distinguish between youth and children in researching television violence. International studies have shown that younger children and adolescents do not respond to television violence in the same way.

16.2 Content analysis of New Zealand television, 2003

16.2.1 Design and method

As the discussion of methodology in earlier chapters shows, our study was designed intentionally to maximize comparability with existing studies both overseas and in New Zealand. We adopted and then adapted our definition of television violence from the major international projects. Our sample recorded a full week of television, 6am to midnight, on eight channels. Because of the threatened onset of the second Gulf War in March 2003, we decided to record a continuous week in mid-March rather than the planned composite week spread from March to May 2003.

Our data coding and analysis was informed by the practice of the existing studies to ensure comparability. However, we also brought in more qualitative and 'subjective' measures to our coding from some of those surveys and from our own judgment of appropriateness for New Zealand. Coders were trained intensively before their work, and calibration of inter-coder reliability by an independent statistician reveals very high consistency across the coders.

16.2.2 New Zealand and the world

Calibrating the methodology of our study against the major international projects indicates that levels of violence on New Zealand television are probably less than in the United States, but higher than in Australia or the United Kingdom. Given that the US is regarded as having higher violence rates than most other nations, New Zealand's level of televised violence can thus be regarded as a concern. This is related in part to the high proportion of American-originated programmes on New Zealand television. Importantly, New Zealand programme appraisers are required to remove highly violent content from programmes before they are screened in this country and yet the practice does not appear to have reduced violence counts.

16.2.3 New Zealand now and then

The level of violence now on New Zealand television shown through the incident counts is, at first glance, broadly the same as it has been over the nearly three decades since research first began, with Ginpil's 1976 study. This similarity may seem rather surprising given the change in the number of channels available today but it should be recalled that violent counts are expressed as an average number of incidents per hour. In the current environment, the total number of violent incidents is higher because a more diverse media fare is available for those determined to seek it. As the core findings indicate, the decomposition of incident counts by the eight sampled channels show a wide range of incident count levels.

Comparisons with earlier studies in order to provide an interpretation of trends must be treated with caution both in terms of the robustness of the methods deployed in earlier studies and the influence of the social and political climate in which research was conducted. Thus it seems likely that the 1995 Mediawatch finding of lower levels of violence reflected the broadcasters' responsiveness to intense public and lobby group pressures in the early 1990s. A similar downward trend in overall counts has been observed in 1989, prior to the introduction of private television. The interface between content analysis findings and the larger social context is, of course, a sign of hope since it indicates that change is possible given a common will to moderate violent television content.

On a more qualitative level, our findings and conclusions are – perhaps not surprisingly – similar to those of the only other fully academic project on New Zealand television violence, the Massey study of 1991. They emphasised the importance of genre in determining violence levels, the concentration of violence in programme promotions, and they recommended the need for audience studies (and carried out one soon after). They also advocated the need for public education to promote discerning television viewing.

16.2.4 Concentrations of televised violence in New Zealand

Country of origin

Comparisons of the country-of-origin of television programmes show clearly that the most violent programmes on New Zealand television come from the United States. Studies in the United Kingdom have also identified the United States as the source of highly violent programmes. New Zealand-originated programmes are less violent than imported ones, particularly those from the US. This finding might suggest that increasing local content automatically decreases the level of screened violence. However, it is important to take account of genre. There is a prevalence of overseas imports in the

drama genre, which is potentially high in violent incidents, while New Zealand productions concentrate in the non-fiction (often lifestyle) genres. That said, were local drama to be developed, there would be an opportunity to explore dramatic forms more consonant with local interests and tastes.

Channel

The data show low levels of violence on TV1 in part because of the amount of non-fictional programming, and the lesser proportion of American-originated material. There is higher violence on Sky Movies and on Nickelodeon, as one would expect from the genre profile of those two channels.

Genre

Cartoons remain the highest violence producers in all surveys, overseas as well as in New Zealand, and our study is no exception. Televised films also have a concentration of violence. Cartoon violence may be discounted as humorous and trivial, and in a sense it is compared with the realistic violence shown in many televised films. As Chapter 12 indicates, there is no simple equation to be made between the high levels of violence in cartoons and the potential for harm to children. The potential for cartoons to harm may rest on the way they interact with live action images to create a general perception of violence without consequences.

Timeband

Largely because of the amount of violence in cartoons, there is more violence in children's viewing time than in the recommended adult-only times.

Promotions and advertisements

Few international studies have specifically monitored the level of violence in commercial advertisements and programme promotions, although the Media Watch studies did so and found that these concentrated more violence than the programmes themselves. For advertisements, this occurs at a higher level than the surrounding programmes, but a much lower level than the promotional trailers between which they are routinely embedded in 'ad breaks'.

Advertisements sometimes concentrate violent incidents in order to attract and retain viewers' attention. However, promotions include a degree and severity of violent material that would probably not be permitted in the commercial advertisements screened alongside them.

Promotions for later programmes often select the most violent incidents from the programme to function as the audience attraction, and concentrate those incidents to a

high degree in a 30-second trailer. Promotions for post-watershed programmes do screen before the watershed, and are therefore by default being treated as viewable by children. Broadcasters and regulators point out that the placement of promotions is always consistent with the codes of practice governing the timeslot in which they are screened. It is outside the remit of this current report, but the validity of this claim could be determined by a review of the 2003 sample. Taking broadcasters and regulators at their word, the issue remains the same: promotions whether geared to a general audience or adult audience add appreciably to the degree of violence wherever they occur. A promotion cleared for a general audience is likely, because of the compactness and intensity of its form, to prove more disturbing than the surrounding media fare.
In our study it was very clear that the level of violence on any channel is substantially increased by the presence of advertising and promotions. The concentration of violence in promotions is at least twice, and at most seven times, that in the programmes themselves. Our findings show that at the top end, New Zealand channels in some cases show almost as much violent content in promotions, which generally occupy a maximum of about 5 minutes per hour, as are shown in the 45 minutes of programming in which they are embedded. Such condensed forms exacerbate the violence count because they remove factors of context and exposition found in longer narrative forms, producing a synoptic concentration of conflict and violent actions. They are also repeated, which adds to the level of exposure and the degree of familiarity that viewers develop. Public service campaigns, such as Accident Compensation Corporation advertisements, also fall under this heading.

Violence has entertainment attraction for television audiences. Programme makers obviously incorporate violence for this reason and clearly the compilers of programme promotions are very sensitive to the holding power of violent images. Given that channels make their own decisions about the content of promotions they screen even for imported programmes, there is scope for change here.

16.2.5 Reservations

Reservations apply to this study. These include the limitations of our content analysis design and method, and those imposed on the project by the tight time frame and practical constraints of the contract. There are also the limitations-in-principle, which some social scientific paradigms would set to the kind of study commissioned. In particular, because of the absence of audience data, there can be no direct deductions for New Zealand audiences' understandings and responses of the content we have analysed here, except insofar as the coder questionnaire and focus-group findings give some indications

16.3 The regulatory regime and public policy

16.3.1 Freedom of Speech

Maintenance of freedom of expression is an important value, alongside the need to safeguard the interests of members of society who may be vulnerable to negative effects from violent televised presentations. The two concepts of 'offence' and 'harm' are important to identify and distinguish in assessing the place of freedom of expression versus regulation.

A commitment by all parties to put children's needs first is desirable. In addition, television stakeholders need to bring a sense of societal responsibility to programming despite there not being incontrovertible proof of a direct link between screen violence and aggression. Audiences need to be considered as citizens rather than consumers and the right to 'freedom of speech' may not be a strong enough argument for a laissez faire approach to programming on television.

16.3.2 Classification of programmes

Classification systems that are culturally sensitive, especially in countries such as New Zealand where there is a cultural mix of people with distinctive values and beliefs are important. However there are limitations and care should be taken to avoid the 'boomerang effect' (Roberts 1997), whereby a 'mature' rating serves to make a programme or film tempting to a younger-than-intended audience. Classification systems should be based on a clear awareness of what consumers will find relevant and user-friendly.

Programme classification systems need to be appropriate and responsive to audience understandings of diverse programme contents, not just to appraisers' understandings developed during previews. Here the involvement of viewer opinion and interest groups in informing the classification process will be vital for New Zealand. Such involvement is structured into the systems in Canada and the UK.

16.3.3 Labelling systems

Any regulatory system should avoid rigidity and be adaptable to shifts in the public perception of television content. Media content labelling systems should be informational rather than judgemental, enabling parents to decide on a range of criteria whether a given programme will be disturbing or offensive. The Recreational Software Advisory Council system developed for the Internet might provide a useful template for a specifically tailored New Zealand system.

16.3.4 Flexible Watersheds

The concept of a flexible watershed variable at the weekend, school holidays and times when children are likely to watch later is commendable and could be extended. Neither additional technology or massive public education is required and the watershed serves to put a barrier between children's likely viewing times and the most inappropriate of adult-oriented material.

16.3.5 Programme scheduling

Gunter (p.c.) in reviewing our research suggests that overall aggregate totals or counts of violent acts may be less useful than analyses that indicate the patterns of distribution of violence-laden programmes across the schedules: "For instance, how often do opportunities arise for viewers to watch back-to-back intense violence on the same channel?" Programme-to-programme inheritance still occurs with each programme deriving more viewers from the preceding broadcast on the same channel than anywhere else. Opportunities such as this could be avoided through scheduling requirements.

16.3.6 Media education for children

Viewer education and advocacy are prime needs in the further development of New Zealand media. There is scope for the current school curriculum to include more critical analysis of media texts, both visual and linguistic, thus educating children to be discerning viewers.

Children need to understand when and why to choose to switch off. There is currently facility in the New Zealand curriculum documents to educate children to be critical and perceptive viewers. It appears, however, that this is not happening. The obstacles seem to be that:

Many educators (and perhaps parents) do not see 'media studies' as a valid knowledge field for serious academic study

There is a strong emphasis on 'the basics' – numeracy and literacy and it is not obvious to many how media studies might further such goals. In addition, such an emphasis tends to rule out the study of images or multimodal texts in which a variety of graphic, photographic and sonic signs combine to produce a suite of effects.

Teachers do not necessarily have strong language and image analysis skills.

16.3.7 Public education

Public education on the media is also needed to equip the general public with discerning and critical viewing skills and habits. Parents will thus be better positioned to guide their children's viewing choices.

Public education campaigns are important in order to educate the public and parents, in particular, to guide their children's viewing practices. The Pasifika cultural advisor to our project noted that Pasifika parents only tend to guide their children in avoiding sexually explicit images on TV. Otherwise, the perception is that if content is on television, it has already been approved and is therefore appropriate for children. Importantly then, any public education programme should be designed to reach a variety of ethnic groups.

16.3.8 Public advocacy

Public advocacy groups played a role in the formulation of the current New Zealand regulatory regime in the 1990s. Despite this success, voluntary lobby groups have historically found sustained national development and activity difficult in New Zealand because of infrastructural challenges and under funding. There may well be a case, given public concern around television content, for government to support such groups financially. Stronger groups would be in a better position to engage in dialogue and negotiations with broadcasters to establish broad understandings around television content so that issues and objections are less likely to arise.

16.3.9

Consideration of broadcasting policy in respect of television must take into account the media environment in which television now operates. The sources of violent imagery are now multifarious and dynamically interrelated on a local and global scale. One consequence, already mentioned, of such a converged media environment, is that public education to enable the general public to make informed choices should become a key policy objective. At the same time, the direction of broadcasting policy should shift from gate keeping to supporting quality production that sets standards for broadcasting as a whole.

16.4 Further research

Further research arises directly out of this study and its database, particularly the more qualitative aspects, and the rich pool of data supplied by the coder focus groups. There are also areas which need to be addressed but cannot be with the current data, in particular to make the vital link between television content and audience understandings. As the Massey research group urged a decade ago, there is again pressing need for a major study of how New Zealanders respond to televised violence. Ongoing monitoring of television may also be called for to provide a continuing baseline of information on televised violence in New Zealand.

Continuing occasional sampling and monitoring of violent content on New Zealand television, as is done in the United Kingdom, is suggested as a way of providing a regular flow of comparable and sound information to Government, broadcasters and the public about the state of televised violence in New Zealand.

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