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And Now a Punch, Kick, and Slap from Our Sponsors:  
A Content Analysis of Aggression in Network Television Commercials

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Communication  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in Professional Communication

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by  
Robert C. Carpenter  
August 2005

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Dr. John King, Chair  
Dr. Jack Mooney  
Dr. Janet Neal

Keywords: Aggression, Violence, Television, Commercials

## ABSTRACT

And Now a Punch, Kick, and Slap from Our Sponsors:

A Content Analysis of Aggression in Network Television Commercials

by

Robert C. Carpenter

While the violent content of television news and entertainment programs has been widely documented, commercials have been rarely scrutinized for aggressive traits. This study sought to improve on this situation and gather additional data about television commercial violence. Because commercials make up 25 percent of each network hour of programming, the potential for exposure to violent content may be even greater than previously believed. To explore this issue, a content analysis was conducted of 2,162 prime-time television commercials on three major networks: ABC, CBS, and NBC. The sample was coded with a scheme developed by Anu Mustonen and Lea Pulkkinen to measure and interpret violent acts in television programming. Violent content was depicted in 9.3 percent of the sample with the majority of acts being physical in nature. The research indicated that villain-types and males perpetrated most of the violence and males were most often the victims of violent acts.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

According to the body of research about television, the medium holds considerable sway in American homes.<sup>1</sup> In the average household, the television plays 7.2 hours a day<sup>2</sup> and children watch an average of 2.6 hours per day.<sup>3</sup> The typical high school graduate will have watched 15,000 to 18,000 hours of television compared to spending 12,000 hours in school.<sup>4</sup> By the time the average person reaches age 70, he or she will have spent the equivalent of seven to 10 years watching television.<sup>5</sup>

Research holds that television exposure creates knowledge, behaviors, and value systems in its viewers<sup>6</sup> and centers on two communication themes: cultivation analysis theory and social cognitive theory. Cultivation analysis theory asserts that television influences reality and it dictates perceptions of day-to-day norms and values.<sup>7</sup> Social cognitive theory says children and adults basically learn their attitudes, emotional responses, and conduct from television and film.<sup>8</sup> Because Americans spend large amounts of time in front of the television, programming content and the effects of that content have been examined at length. Research has demonstrated multiple effects on the viewing public and these effects are often negative. The National Television Violence Study examined research about the impact of television violence and concluded there were three types of harmful effects: aggressive attitudes and behaviors, desensitization to real-world violence, and fear of victimization.<sup>9</sup> At the extreme, one researcher listed 12 negative effects of television programming, claiming that most viewers are not even aware of the subtle but detrimental effects of prolonged exposure.<sup>10</sup>

Much of television research has involved children and the effects are startling. Villani argues that viewing large amounts of content that is violent, gender-stereotyped, sexually

explicit, drug- or alcohol-influenced, or filled with human tragedy skews a child's world view, increases high-risk behaviors, and damages his or her ability to carry off successful human relationships.<sup>11</sup> The influence of television is especially apparent in areas such as violent and aggressive behavior,<sup>12</sup> sexuality,<sup>13</sup> health and nutrition,<sup>14</sup> and gender profiling.<sup>15</sup> Concern for television's omnipresent and powerful messages have prompted a ratings system for television shows as well as V-chip technology that allows viewers to block objectionable programming.<sup>16</sup> These safeguards indicate television's impact on American society and that viewers, especially parents, have concerns about programming content.<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that research is not limited to children. One study linked heavy television viewing and low morale to persons aged 60 and older.<sup>18</sup> Another found that a heavy diet of television among adults caused them to think their lives were lousy, dull, and unexciting when compared to their television counterparts.<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, not all research condemns television. In a 1971 study, Feshbach and Singer did not find a link between aggression and violent films. They showed violent and non-violent films to boys in seven schools, finding that the non-violent film actually made the boys more aggressive.<sup>20</sup> The researchers theorized that violent programming acted as a catharsis for viewers as reduced their need to act aggressively; however, this conclusion was unpopular and met with much criticism.<sup>21</sup> Another study by Howitt and Cumberbatch examined the potential influence of aggressive film characters on children's attitudes about violence.<sup>22</sup> They found that children who identified with aggressive television characters did not necessarily become more tolerant of violent behavior. However, this thesis is inconsistent with the majority of research about television viewing and aggression.<sup>23</sup>

To date, the majority of research on television violence has centered on programming without much consideration for commercial and/or non-programming content<sup>24</sup> even though American children view an estimated 360,000 advertisements before getting out of high school.<sup>25</sup> Because non-programming content accounts for more than 16 minutes in each hour of prime time<sup>26</sup> this presents a fertile field for examination. It is possible that viewers may have greater



exposure to negative programming and the cognitive effects it may yield. This study will examine the prime-time commercial content of major networks for violent content and measure each instance based on a coding scheme developed by Anu Mustonen and Lea Pulkkinen<sup>27</sup> that defines television violence as “actions causing or designed to cause harm to oneself, or to another person, either physically or psychologically, including implicit threats, nonverbal behavior, and outbursts directed toward animals, and inanimate objects.”

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The impact of television violence has long been debated. Concern first surfaced in television's infancy in 1952 and 1953 when U.S. House and Senate committees examined the effects of violent content on juvenile delinquency.<sup>28</sup> Since that time, public concern about television has sparked numerous studies and research efforts to define and measure violent content and explain what it means.<sup>29</sup> While little research exists about the violent content of television commercials,<sup>30</sup> past studies on television content examine the prevalence of violence in programming and provide theoretical perspectives about the effects of violent programming and insights into the outcomes of such programming, which include aggression, desensitization, and fear.<sup>31</sup>

#### Cultivation Theory

At the center of research into television violence stands George Gerbner's cultivation theory,<sup>32</sup> which asserts that television is primarily responsible for our perceptions of reality. In essence, television shapes viewers' beliefs about the world by messages that are the most repetitive and persuasive, and the more television a person watches, the more he or she is likely to be influenced by television's view of reality.<sup>33</sup>

Violence is a major theme in television programming. From 1967 to 1985, Gerbner monitored violence in prime time and Saturday programming, finding that 72 percent of prime-time shows and 94 percent of children's shows contained violence.<sup>34</sup> In 2003, Signorielli published an update of the study, analyzing prime-time programming broadcast from 1993 to 2001. She found 60 percent of programs contained violence – a rate of 4.5 acts per program.<sup>35</sup> A

study by Smith, Nathanson, and Wilson examined programming across 23 broadcast, independent, and cable channels, finding that 61 percent of programs featured violence. The researchers also found that violent interactions occurred at a rate of 6.63 per hour in prime time and 6.40 in all other time slots.<sup>36</sup> Another study found children's programming contained 14.1 acts of violence per hour compared with 5.6 for adult programming.<sup>37</sup> The average child will view 8,000 screen murders and more than 100,000 acts of violence by the end of elementary school. By the end of the teenage years, that figure will double.<sup>38</sup>

From 1994 through 1997, a research team from the University of California at Santa Barbara and the University of Texas at Austin assessed programming content as part of the National Television Violence Study, funded by the National Cable Television Association.<sup>39</sup> During a nine-month period each year from 1994 to 1997, the researchers evaluated content on 23 television channels to create a composite week for each source, yielding about 120 hours of programming per channel. The project sampled nearly 10,000 hours of television programming over a three-year period.<sup>40</sup> Across the three years of this study, 60 percent of all television programs contained violence. Researchers also found that violence increased 14 percent on prime-time shows broadcast on ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC from 1994 to 1997. Violent acts on prime-time cable shows rose 10 percent during the same time frame.<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, cultivation theory research has found that heavy doses of television violence causes viewers to see the world as a mean and scary place and believe that crime and violence are much more pronounced than in reality. These viewers may also believe their neighborhoods are unsafe and overestimate their risk of becoming a victim of crime.<sup>42</sup>

### Social Cognitive Theory

Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory<sup>43</sup> has been the springboard for research into links between aggression and media violence.<sup>44</sup> Social cognitive theory suggests that repeated, simple, and rewarded messages and actions can cause viewers to empathize with what they see

and hear. Viewers learn from these messages and may model behavior based on the information, especially if the information is profitable and rewarding. According to Bandura, people usually refrain from aggressive acts because they anticipate that such actions will produce guilt or punishment. Nonetheless, aggressive behavior that is portrayed as attractive and justified may limit this inhibition.<sup>45</sup> A content analysis conducted by Stacy Smith, Amy Nathanson, and Barbara Wilson of 23 programs found that 40 percent of violent perpetrators on television were attractive and that 29 percent of all violent acts were justified. In addition, the most frequent reasons for violence were anger or personal gain.<sup>46</sup> In another study, Wilson found that victims of violence in children's programming showed no pain 63 percent of the time and no harm 67 percent of the time. In addition, punishment was dished out for "bad" perpetrators 64 percent of the time, while "good" perpetrators were admonished only 32 percent of the time.<sup>47</sup> According to Wilson:

Programs targeted to children are in many cases more problematic than non-children's shows. They contain more violence overall and, although the violence is just a likely to be glamorized or attractive as in other programming, it is far more likely to be sanitized and trivialized. These patterns heighten the risk of viewers learning aggression and becoming desensitized from such portrayals.<sup>48</sup>

The National Television Violence Study found similar results. Researchers noted that attractive role models committed 40 percent of violent acts and less than 5 percent of programs contained any sort of anti-violence message. The study also found that more than 70 percent of violent scenes contained no remorse, criticism, or penalty for violence at the time it occurred, which poses a risk to younger viewers who may not be able to distinguish between reality and fantasy portrayals.<sup>49</sup>

In related research, L.R. Huesmann proposed a theory of cognitive scripting<sup>50</sup> in 1986, which stated that social behavior is controlled by scripts that are learned and stored in a person's memory as guidelines for conduct and problem solving. He suggested that television violence allows individuals, especially children, to acquire scripts for

aggressive behavior, which are reinforced and maintained with further viewing of violent content. According to Huesmann, the more appealing an aggressive scene is to a child, the more likely he or she will form a script based on the scene and use it in a social problem-solving situation.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the process becomes perpetual as the child grows into adulthood and continues to store and retrieve aggressive scripts as needed. The National Television Violence Study found that the average American preschooler is exposed to more than 500 of these attractive portrayals each year, which feature “a potent set of contextual features making them high risk for teaching aggressive attitudes and behaviors.”<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, Bushman and Geen<sup>53</sup> observed that the viewing of media violence elicits thoughts and emotional responses related to aggression. In other words, watching violence on television may prime or trigger aggressive thoughts and emotions. In this study, the researchers performed two experiments to gauge the thoughts and emotional reactions of subjects while watching violence. Subjects were shown 10-minute clips from both violent and non-violent movies. The study found that both aggressive thoughts and emotions increased as the violent content of videotape increased. Subjects reported feeling irritable and angry after viewing violence and cardiovascular measurements showed an increase in blood pressure and pulse rates. Interestingly, extremely violent content caused all subjects to have an increase in aggressive thoughts, even those who were not rated as aggressive in nature.<sup>54</sup>

### The Effects of Television Violence

While studies prove that violent programming is prevalent on television, the next logical step is to discern whether that content has a causal link to human aggression. Laboratory experiments, field research, and correlation studies have all been used as investigative tools. Some studies suggest that there is a direct relationship between media violence and violent

behavior, while others have concluded that there is no association. Nonetheless, most suggest that exposure violent to content enhances the risk that the viewer will adopt or exhibit aggressive traits in some way.<sup>55</sup>

Over the past 50 years, there have been a substantial number of experiments that have examined whether violent TV content increases aggressive behavior in the short term. Most of these experiments are similar to the Bushman and Geen research mentioned in the previous section on social cognitive theory. Basically, researchers randomly assigned participants to view either short clips of violent or nonviolent material and then observed how they interact with other people after viewing the clips.<sup>56</sup>

In 1985, Kaj Bjorkqvist showed either violent or nonviolent films to groups of five- and six-year-old children. Observers, who did not know which type of film was shown to the children, then watched the youngsters playing together in a room. According to the results, children who had viewed violent content were much more likely to hit, threaten, and scream at playmates, as well as exhibit other types of aggression.<sup>57</sup> Another study exposed seven- to nine-year-old boys to view either a violent or nonviolent film before games of floor hockey. Then observers, who did not know the type of film viewed by each boy, recorded aggressive behavior during the games. In addition, referees sometimes carried a visual cue (a walkie-talkie) contained in the violent film during the games. The study found that the combination of the violent film and visual cue, which supposedly reminded the boys of the film, significantly stimulated aggressive behaviors such as hitting, elbowing, tripping, kneeing, and hair pulling.<sup>58</sup> In a similar study, teenage boys in a secondary school were exposed to five nights of violent films and then observed interacting with classmates.<sup>59</sup> The boys who watched such films as *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Dirty Dozen* were 40 times more likely to hit, choke, slap, or kick other students than their classmates who viewed nothing but comedy and family-oriented films.

While it is one thing to note the short-term effects of viewing aggressive content, it is important to discern whether these effects have any lasting effect. Simply put, are the effects

temporary and likely to wear off after a period of time or are they likely to remain with the viewer and manifest themselves at a later date? One of the first, and most noteworthy, longitudinal studies was performed by Leonard Eron of the University of Illinois.<sup>60</sup> In a sample of 856 youths in New York State, the study found that a boy's exposure to media violence at age 8 was significantly related to his aggressive behavior at age 18, even after initial aggressiveness, social class education, and other relevant variables were controlled.<sup>61</sup> Aggressive behavior was measured primarily by peer nomination, which asked each child to assess his or her classmates' aggressiveness. For example, "Who pushes and shoves other kids?" and "Who makes up stories and lies to get other kids in trouble?"<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, the findings revealed no relations between exposure to violent content and aggressive behavior in girls.

Another study linking media violence and aggression examined 557 first- and third-grade students for long-term relations between violent content viewing and aggressive behavior in adulthood. In 1977, the students were tested and interviewed about their viewing habits, whether they identified with aggressive television characters, and whether they thought television violence was realistic. The students were contacted 15 years later and re-interviewed to see if exposure to media violence related to aggressive behavior as adults.<sup>63</sup> The study found that children who watched the most television violence were significantly more likely to have "pushed, grabbed, or shoved their spouses; to have responded to an insult by shoving a person; to have been convicted of a crime; and to have committed a moving traffic violation."<sup>64</sup> The study also stated that the habitual early exposure to television violence indicates aggressive behavior later in life independent of initial childhood aggression, intellectual capabilities, social status, or environment.<sup>65</sup>

Another noteworthy longitudinal study assessed television viewing and aggressive behavior in 707 individuals over a 17-year period, finding a significant association between the time spent watching television during adolescence and early adulthood and aggressive acts committed against others.<sup>66</sup> Heavy TV exposure at age 14 significantly predicted "assault or

physical fight resulting from injury” at ages 16 and 22 even after the statistics were controlled for family income, parental education, verbal intelligence, neglect, neighborhood characteristics, peer aggression, and school violence. In addition, heavy television consumption at age 22 predicted assault and fighting behavior at age 30. Perhaps the most important aspect of the research is that it challenges conventional wisdom that media violence only affects children.<sup>67</sup>

In a 1992 study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, researcher Brandon Centerwall examined homicide statistics in the United States, Canada, and South Africa before and after the advent of television. In the United States and Canada, which launched television in 1945, the murder rates increased 93 percent and 92 percent respectively by 1970. In South Africa, the government allowed television in 1975. By 1987, the homicide rate had increased 130 percent among white citizens.<sup>68</sup> While Centerwall acknowledged an array of factors that influence violent acts – poverty, political unrest, firearm use, and drug and alcohol abuse – he noted that television may be a causal factor behind approximately one half of the homicides committed in the United States each year. Without television’s influence, Centerwall hypothesizes that there would be 10,000 fewer homicides each year in the United States, 70,000 fewer rapes, and 700,000 fewer injurious assaults.<sup>69</sup>

While there is substantial evidence that links aggression to violent media, there are few studies that have evaluated intervention and solutions. A Stanford University researcher performed one such study to assess the effects of reduced television and video game use on school-age children.<sup>70</sup> The participants were third- and fourth-grade students in two public elementary schools. Children in one of the schools participated in an 18-lesson, 6-month program to reduce television, videotape, and video game use, while the students in the other school were assigned as a control group.<sup>71</sup> After the program, students were asked to refrain from television and video game use for 10 days and then encouraged to limit television and video game use to seven hours per week.<sup>72</sup>



Through interviews, peer ratings, parental reports, and direct observation, the researchers found that the children who participated in the television reduction program had statistically significant decreases in peer ratings of aggression and observed verbal aggression.

### The Great Unknown: Television Commercials

While violent television programming has been examined time and again, there is a scarcity of research where commercials are concerned.<sup>73</sup> This is interesting given that television in the United States began as a commercial enterprise to sell goods and services, unlike most other countries in the world that began broadcasting with public systems.<sup>74</sup> The real purpose of television is to provide an audience for product advertisements.<sup>75</sup> Or as one media observer noted: “TV programming really is just bailing wire strung up to exhibit the commercials.”<sup>76</sup> Commercials have escaped scrutiny in large part because advertising has the reputation of being benign and neutral when it comes to violence.<sup>77</sup> While advertisers do not seem to mind being tied to materialism, they do not want to be associated with anything that might put off potential customers. Conventional wisdom maintains that commercials should be pleasant and content should put viewers in a good mood. Unpleasant imagery is viewed as risky and rare in commercials.<sup>78</sup> In many ways, advertisers have not strayed far from early twentieth century descriptions of the business when it was credited as having a progressive, educative, and civilizing influence.<sup>79</sup>

Nonetheless, Americans like violent programming<sup>80</sup> and it appears that advertisers are experimenting with violence to grab the attention of viewers.<sup>81</sup> The National Media Institute on Media and the Family suggests that advertisers use “jolts and tricks” to engage emotions and the most common devices are sex and violence coupled with technical tools such as special effects, quick cuts, camera angles, and music.<sup>82</sup> These devices help trigger something called an orienting response, which is an instinctive reaction to pay attention to any sudden or unusual stimulus.<sup>83</sup>

Advertisers simply try to engage viewer emotions, knowing viewers are more vulnerable at that stage to suggestion. As one researcher noted: “Media producers believe that grabbing our attention eventually translates into grabbing our money.”<sup>84</sup> It may be logical to assume that the audience’s proclivity for violent programming may have advertisers sprinkling commercials with violence to keep eyes on the screen. This may not be wise according to one researcher, who found that television violence impaired the ability of viewers to recall brand names.<sup>85</sup>

Participants saw commercials embedded in violent or nonviolent film clips and then were asked to perform several recall and recognition tests. In all experiments, participants who viewed violent content were less likely to recall brand names and messages than were the participants who viewed nonviolent content.<sup>86</sup>

To date, few studies have examined violent content in television commercials. With the exception of one study about commercials in children’s programming, research has shown that violence has a limited presence in advertising. However, there are some indications that violence may be increasing in television commercials.

A 1998 study examined commercial violence during that year’s major league baseball playoffs. The study then compared the results with a similar study performed in 1996. Researchers videotaped six National League championship games, two American League championship games, and four World Series games, collecting 1,550 commercials.<sup>87</sup> The commercials were evaluated for violent acts, violent threats, and violent consequences; if any of these was present, the commercial was deemed violent. In the commercials reviewed, there were 137 (8.8 percent) containing violent interactions. The bulk of the violent commercials were either television promotions or promotions for big-screen movies. These two types of commercials accounted for 128 of the 137 violent advertisements.<sup>88</sup> The study found that violent commercials increased slightly during World Series coverage, rising from 10 per game in 1996 to 11 in 1998. Violent commercials during American League coverage increased from six per game in 1996 to eight per game in 1998. There was no change for National League coverage.

The research notes that the violent content was placed into family-oriented programming, making it difficult for parents to avoid exposing their children to such matter.<sup>89</sup> According to the research, an average National League playoff broadcast would have exposed a child to 16 violent commercials.<sup>90</sup>

Researcher Robert Tamburro and others performed a similar study in 2001 and 2002<sup>91</sup> when 1,185 commercials aired during the year's 50 top-rated sports programs were rated for their depiction of violence and unsafe behavior. Unsafe behavior was defined as any action that could have harmful consequences. Violence was defined as any intentional physical contact that had the potential to cause harm or injury or a legitimate threat of such action.<sup>92</sup> The study found 14 percent of the commercials displayed unsafe behavior, while 6 percent contained violence. Simply put, one of every five commercials aired during major sporting events show unsafe or violent behavior. The study also noted that 86 percent of commercials that depicted violence were promotions for movies or television programs.<sup>93</sup> Because children may view 360,000 television commercials before graduating from high school,<sup>94</sup> this presents a problem for parents because no ratings system exists for commercials. Parents may be vigilant about programming content only to find their children blind-sided by objectionable content in advertisements.

A 1992 New Zealand study examined commercials directed at children for behavioral response, gender stereotyping, and aggression,<sup>95</sup> comparing the result to a similar study conducted in 1990.<sup>96</sup> The study sampled commercials broadcast during Saturday morning children's programming. The study looked at commercials only and did not analyze program or movie previews. In addition, commercials were counted once, with repetitive showings ignored. Results noted that only 3 percent of advertisement contained aggressive acts, a marked reduction from 14 percent found in 1990.<sup>97</sup> The researchers expressed concern that a frequently played commercial used a hero employing aggressive acts. "Advertisers using children's heroes thus (involved in violent acts) have a particular responsibility to exercise scrupulous care over how these role models behave."<sup>98</sup>

A content analysis conducted in 1997 and 1998 examined children's programming on Saturday mornings and weekday afternoons. The study analyzed 595 commercials for gender stereotyping and aggressive behavior in children 12 years of age and younger.<sup>99</sup> Aggression was present in 206 or 35 percent of the commercials with most of the violence described at "fortuitous," meaning it was not directly caused by a character in the advertisement.<sup>100</sup> These numbers do not include 77 additional commercials that contained violent content but did not feature children.<sup>101</sup> This compares with a 1984 study that found 12.5 percent of Saturday morning advertisements contained violence.<sup>102</sup>

A study on general television commercials conducted in 1996 and 1997 examined 1,699 commercials for violence that consisted of physical harm, property damage, and verbal threats.<sup>103</sup> In addition, the commercials were coded "for controversial or questionable morality when the content featured selfishness, dishonesty, disloyalty, use of sex, or bad triumphing over good."<sup>104</sup> The sample included programming from ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC, CNN, ESPN, FAM, and MTV. The analysis used commercials shown in these time periods: 7 to 8 a.m., 2 to 5 p.m., 7 to 8 p.m., and 11 p.m. to midnight.<sup>105</sup> The study found that only 49 or 2.8 percent of the commercials contained violent content. Twenty-six commercials featured physical harm, eight displayed property destruction, and 15 contained verbal threats. The study did not include network or movie promotions, but noted that nearly two-thirds of these ads included violent scenes.<sup>106</sup> In summary, the research found that "violence is not commonly found in television commercials;" nonetheless, the data showed that twice as many commercials coded for violence in 1997 as did in 1996.<sup>107</sup> In addition, the study identified 116 commercials as morally objectionable or controversial, about 7 percent of the total.

### Literature Review Summary

Violent television content is prevalent and appears to have both short-term and long-term effects in creating aggressive acts and thoughts in viewers. Researchers have found that repeated violent images influence how people, especially children, view the world and how they may react in certain problem-solving situations. Television cultivates behavior and programs thoughts and actions through years and years of viewing.

Most research to date has centered on violence in television programming, with scarce attention to commercials. This lack of attention, plus the fact that each hour of prime-time television consists of 16 minutes of material not rated for content, prompted the development of the research questions and hypotheses contained in Chapter 3 of this study. The inquiries address the amount and types of violence in television commercials as well as the nature and sex of aggressors and victims.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### Introduction

As illustrated in the literature review, research about television violence is plentiful except where television commercials are concerned. Research in this area is scarce and generally focused on sporting events and children's programming. Only one study has examined the violent content of network commercials; however, it did not analyze prime time programming completely. Because commercials occupy up to one-quarter of each prime-time programming hour, there is clearly a need assess content given the cultivating influences that violence may have. This is especially true during family programming when children are likely to be watching. While regular programming carries a rating system, commercials do not, leaving children potentially exposed to inappropriate images and messages. The focus areas of this study seek to determine the level of violence present in prime-time commercials.

#### Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Physical violence will appear more frequently in television commercials than verbal violence.

Hypothesis 2: Males will commit more acts of violence in television commercials than females.

Hypothesis 3: Males will be the victims of violence in television commercials more than females.

Hypothesis 4: Hero-type aggressors will commit more acts of violence in television commercials than villain-type aggressors.

### Exploratory Research Questions

Based on previous research, these research questions were formulated for this study:

Exploratory Research Question 1: Which network is most likely to broadcast commercials containing physical and/or verbal violence?

Exploratory Research Question 2: Which mode of violence is an aggressor most likely to employ?

Exploratory Research Question 3: How is the sex of aggressors portrayed in regard to the nature of aggressors?

Exploratory Research Question 4: How are the modes of physical and verbal violence depicted in regard to realism?

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODS

#### Introduction

The majority of research on television violence has focused on programming with little examination of commercial and/or non-programming content. This study sought to expand the body of knowledge concerning violence and television advertising and answer the research questions posed in the previous chapter.

#### Research Design

The data analyzed in this study were gathered from seven days of consecutive prime-time programming (8 p.m. to 11 p.m.) during the fall 2004 season on the ABC, CBS, and NBC networks. Fifty-eight hours of programming were taped from September 11, 2004 through September 17, 2004. The content included 21 hours from NBC, 18 hours from ABC, and 18 hours from CBS. A videotape malfunction caused the loss of September 17 programming on ABC and three hours of programming on CBS during September 15 and 16. This loss of data may have influenced some frequencies and cross-tabulations reported in the study. In the original design, commercials from the FOX network were to be examined as well. However, a videotape malfunction resulted in a complete loss of data and the network was dropped from the study.

All commercials and other non-programming content – public service announcements, promotions for upcoming news segments, and other miscellaneous matter - were coded based on the Coding Scheme of TV Violence developed by Mustonen and Pulkkinen. Past research, for the most part, has excluded portions of non-programming content, especially with regard to promotions for television programs and movies. Nonetheless, viewers are exposed to these



advertisements in the same manner as commercials for automobiles, soap, or any other product, so they were included in the coded content. Sports content, which is often violent, was coded as non-violent when the action was within the context of a game.

The coding scheme, based on traditional analyses, sought to record the nature and context of the violent acts, especially where themes of intensity and attractiveness of violence were concerned.<sup>108</sup> A commercial was coded as violent if it fell within the definition developed by Mustonen and Pulkkinen. Because some commercials contained several violent acts, only the first aggressive act viewed was used to code the commercial as violent.

The coding scheme items were as follows:

Part I

1. Date
2. Hour
3. Networks: ABC, CBS, and NBC
4. Commercial's name

Part II

5. Mode of violence

1=Physical

2=Verbal

3= Physical and Verbal

6. Mode of physical Violence

0=No Physical Violence

1=Shooting

2=Threatening or forcing with guns

3=Fist-fighting, pushing, striking

4=Hitting with weapons/tools/objects

5=Strangling

- 6=Poisoning
- 7=Slashing
- 8=Sexual violence
- 9=Kidnapping/typing up/arresting
- 10=Damaging property
- 11=Other

7. Mode of verbal aggression

- 0=No verbal aggression
- 1=Mild
- 2=Angry talk
- 3=Verbal threat or humiliating
- 4=Serious threatening (I'll kill you!)

8. Consequences of violence

- 0=Not portrayed
- 1=No harm
- 2=Mild
- 3=Severe
- 4=Death

9. Realism

- 1=Cartoon/animation
- 2=Unrealistic fiction (caricature or fantasy)
- 3=Realistic fiction
- 4=Authentic

10. Dramatization

- 1=Humorous, comic
- 2=Neutral or unclear

3=Quarrelsome

4=Exciting, adventurous

5=Frightening, threatening, horrific

11. Motivation of violence

0=Cannot code

1=Defensive

2=Offensive

3=Both offensive and defensive

12. Sex of the aggressor

0=Cannot code

1=A male

2=A female

3=Two or more males

4=Two or more females

5=A mixed group

13. Age of the aggressor

0=Cannot code

1=Child

2=Adolescent

3=Young Adult

4=Middle-Aged Adult,

5=Older Adult

6=People of several age groups

14. Sex of the victim

0=Cannot code

1=A male

- 2=A female
- 3=Two or more males
- 4=Two or more females
- 5=A mixed group
- 6=An animal
- 7=Inanimate objects

15. Age of the victim

- 0=Cannot code
- 1=Child
- 2=Adolescent
- 3=Young Adult
- 4=Middle-Aged Adult,
- 5=Older Adult
- 6=People of several age groups

16. Nature of the aggressor

- 0=Cannot code
- 1=A villain
- 2=Neutral, ordinary
- 3=A hero

17. Nature of the victim

- 0=Cannot code
- 1=A villain
- 2=Neutral, ordinary
- 3=A hero

A brief explanation of key items in the coding scheme helps explain what Mustonen and Pulkkinen were seeking with this instrument.

Consequences: This element is related to attractiveness of violence. Consequences ranged from not portrayed to death. For this study, consequences were tied to the outcome of violence, rather than to the punishment or discipline received by an aggressor. For instance, in one commercial a character splashed another in the face with a glass of water, which was coded as a mild consequence. In another, a character knocks another down and unconscious with a door, which was coded as a severe consequence.<sup>109</sup>

Realism: This element is related to intensity of violence. Violent acts occurring in a believable context therefore make more of an impression on the viewer. Elmer Fudd blasting Bugs Bunny with a shotgun is not as cognitively affecting as Detective Andy Sipowicz of *NYPD Blue* roughly interrogating a suspect.<sup>110</sup>

Dramatization: This element is also related to intensity of violence. The more detailed and emotional the action, the more intense it appears to viewers. In this category, the ratings ranged from humorous to horrific. This study found that humor cloaks violence in television commercials to some degree. Advertisers often seemed to be saying violence is not really violence if it is funny.<sup>111</sup>

Motivation: This element was tied to attractiveness. According to social cognitive theory, violence that is justified is more attractive to viewers and more likely to influence their actions. If aggressors have a good reason for violence, viewers are likely to give violent behavior the benefit of a doubt.<sup>112</sup>

Nature of Aggressors and Victims: The coding scheme placed aggressors and victims in the same three categories: villains, ordinary types, and heroes. Given the short, compact format of television commercials, aggressors and victims were fairly stereotypical in this regard and easy to identify. This item was an indicator of attractiveness. For example, villains who perpetrate violence are less attractive to viewers than heroes who do the same.<sup>113</sup>

## Coding

Two independent reviewers examined all commercials included in the study. When findings did not concur, the coders discussed each discrepancy, usually returning to the study's definition of violent content to resolve issues. Nonetheless, since the commercials examined in the study were extremely repetitive, the need for arbitration was minimal. To ensure the reliability of the coding process, an intercoder reliability test was administered prior to the start of the study. Based on a percentage agreement, the two coders were assessed on each variable analyzed. The coders analyzed a sample of 60 commercials, attaining the following percentages:

1. Mode of Violence, 100 percent agreement
2. Physical, 98 percent agreement
3. Verbal, 96 percent agreement
4. Consequences, 92 percent agreement
5. Realism, 94 percent agreement
6. Dramatization, 96 percent agreement
7. Motivation, 98 percent agreement
8. Sex of Aggressor, 98 percent agreement
9. Age of Aggressor, 98 percent agreement
10. Sex of Victim, 96 percent agreement
11. Age of Victim, 98 percent agreement
12. Nature of Aggressor, 98 percent agreement
13. Nature of Victim, 96 percent agreement

### Threats to Validity and Limitations

One limitation of the study is its time frame of one week. A longer study of months or even years might provide a better gauge and accuracy as to the occurrence of violence in television commercials. There may also be concern that prime-time hours from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. are not representative and that these hours may contain more, or less, violent content than other times. An additional limitation is the inclusion of only three networks. Ideally, an examination of all major network and cable channels would provide better information as to the prevalence of aggression in television commercials.

While the study identified commercials with violent content, it did not track each act of aggression within a commercial. While most advertisements contained a single instance of violence, others packed several acts into 30 seconds. This was especially true for previews of upcoming television shows and movies. For instance, one promotion ad for *CSI: Miami* contained at least four acts of violence that involved gunplay, shoving, punching, and a vehicle being pushed off a bridge. Simply put, the violent highlights of hour-long dramas were condensed into 30 seconds. While violent commercials are vastly outnumbered by nonviolent advertisements, they do get their licks in, so to speak. Future research efforts may want to consider this element when analyzing violent content.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the results of a content analysis of ABC, CBS, and NBC television commercials broadcast from September 11 through September 17, 2004. The results provided answers for four hypotheses and four exploratory questions.

#### Hypotheses 1

Hypothesis 1 stated that physical violence will appear more frequently in television commercials than verbal violence. Hypothesis 1 was supported with the results from a frequency analysis of modes of violence as shown in Table 1. The study, which examined 2,162 commercials coded for 17 variables, revealed that 202 commercials or 9.3 percent of the advertisements broadcast contained aggressive content. The non-violent commercials were removed from the analysis after the 202 commercials were identified. Within the subgroup of 202 commercials with violent content, 84.2 percent were physically aggressive, 11.9 percent were verbally aggressive, and 4 percent contained physical and verbal violence.

Table 1 Mode of Violence

	Frequency	Percent
Physical	170	84.2
Verbal	24	11.9
Both	8	4.0

Note: N=202



A frequency analysis of the modes of physical violence and verbal aggression, as shown in Tables 2 and 3, respectively, provide evidence of the specific types of violence that occurred in television commercials.

Physical violence most often took the form of damaging property, which occurred in 32.7 percent of the instances. The other category posted occurrences 20.8 percent of the time, while fist fighting was recorded in 11.4 percent of instances. The remaining results were: hitting with objects, 9.9 percent; shooting, 8.4 percent; and threatening with guns, 5 percent. There was no physical violence in 11.9 percent of coded commercials.

Table 2 Mode of Physical Violence

	Frequency	Percent
Damaging Property	66	32.7
Other	42	20.8
No Physical Violence	24	11.9
Fist Fighting	23	11.4
Hitting with Objects	20	9.9
Shooting	17	8.4
Threatening with Guns	10	5.0

Note: N=202

In commercials containing aggression, verbal threats occurred in 10.9 percent of instances, followed by angry talk in 4.1 percent of instances. Death threats occurred in 1 percent of commercials with verbal violence. There was no verbal aggression in 84.2 percent of commercials containing violence.

Table 3 Mode of Verbal Aggression

	Frequency	Percent
No Verbal	170	84.2
Threat	22	10.9
Angry Talk	8	4.0
Death Threat	2	1.0

Note: N=202

### Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 stated that males would commit more acts of violence in television commercials than females. Hypothesis 2 was supported with the results from a frequency analysis of aggressors and their sex as shown in Table 4. As noted in Table 5, the hypothesis is supported by statistically significant results that show males committed more instances of physical and verbal violence than females. Only acts committed by males and females were considered for this hypothesis, which specifically targets males and females. All other categories were removed from the sample. Within the subgroup of 119 commercials, males committed 83.2 percent of all violent acts, while females committed 16.8 percent of aggressive acts.

Table 4 Sex of Aggressor

	Frequency	Percent
Male	99	83.2
Female	20	16.8

Note: N=119

Table 5 Commercial Type and Sex of Aggressor Cross-Tabulation

	Male	Female	Total
Beer	1/33.3%	2/66.7%	3/100%
Communication	5/83.3%	1/16.7%	6/100%
Entertainment	0/0%	1/100%	1/100%
Financial	3/60%	2/40.0%	5/100%
Food	3/100%	3/100%	6/100%
Health	6/100%	0/0%	6/100%
Movie	10/83.3%	2/16.7%	12/100%
Sports	1/100%	0/0%	1/100%
Television	70/88.6%	9/11.4%	79/100%
Total	99/83.2%	20/16.8%	119/100%

Note: N=119;  $\chi^2=20.00$ ; df=8;  $p<.01$

15 cells (83.3 percent) have expected counts of less than 5

### Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 stated that males would be the victims of television commercial violence more than females. Hypothesis 3 was supported by a frequency analysis of the sex of victims as shown in Table 6. As illustrated in Table 7, the hypothesis is supported by statistically significant results that show males were more often the targets of violence than females. Only acts committed against males and females were considered for this hypothesis, which specifically refers to males and females. All other categories were removed from the sample. Within the subgroup of 89 commercials, males were victims in 73 percent of all violent acts, while females were the focus of aggressive acts 27 percent of the time.

Table 6 Sex of Victim

	Frequency	Percent
Male	65	73.0
Female	24	27.0

Note: N=89

Table 7 Commercial Type and Sex of Victim Cross-Tabulation

	Male	Female	Total
Beer	3/100%	0/0%	3/100%
Communications	4/80%	1/20%	5/100%
Entertainment	1/100%	0/0%	1/100%
Financial	30/100%	0/0%	30/100%
Food	3/60%	2/40.0%	5/100%
Health	6/100%	0/0%	6/100%
Movie	2/18.2%	9/81.8%	11/100%
Sports	1/100%	0/0%	1/100%
Television	15/55.6%	12/44.4%	27/100%
Total	65/73%	24/27%	89/100%

Note: N=89;  $\chi^2=36.69$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p<.001$

13 cells (72.2 percent) have expected counts of less than 5

#### Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 stated that hero-type aggressors would commit more acts of violence in television commercials than villain-type aggressors. As indicated in Table 8, a frequency analysis of the nature of aggressors did not support Hypothesis 4. Results in Table 9, show the hypothesis was not supported. Statistically significant results indicate that villain-types committed more violent acts than hero-types. Within the subgroup of 128 commercials that

contained violent acts by identifiable aggressors, villains committed 43.8 percent of all instances, while heroes committed 28.9 percent of all aggressive acts. Ordinary-types perpetrated 27.3 percent of all violent acts.

Table 8 Nature of Aggressor

	Frequency	Percent
Villain	56	43.8
Ordinary	35	27.3
Hero	37	28.9

Note: N=128

Table 9 Commercial Type and Nature of Aggressor Cross-Tabulation

	Villain	Ordinary	Hero	Total
Beer	0/0%	3/100%	0/0%	3/100%
Communications	0/0%	6/100%	0/0%	6/100%
Entertainment	0/0%	0/0%	1/100%	1/100%
Financial	0/0%	0/0%	5/0%	5/100%
Food	0/0%	5/83.3%	1/16.7%	6/100%
Health	0/0%	6/100%	0/0%	6/100%
Movie	19/76%	1/4%	5/20%	25/100%
PSA	0/0%	3/100%	0/0%	3/100%
Sports	0/0%	0/0%	0/0%	0/0%
TV	37/51.4%	10/13.9%	25/34.7%	72/100%
Total	56/43.8%	35/27.3%	37/28.9%	128/100%

Note: N=128;  $\chi^2=93.24$ ;  $df=18$ ;  $p<.001$

24 cells (80 percent) have expected counts of less than 5

### Exploratory Question 1

Exploratory Question 1 asked which network would most frequently broadcast commercials containing physical and/or verbal violence. As illustrated in Table 7, statistically significant results indicated that CBS most frequently aired commercials with physical violence, while NBC most frequently showed advertisements with verbal aggression. Of the commercials that contained aggression, 91.4 percent of ABC's commercials contained physical violence, 97.8 percent of CBS's advertisements contained physical violence, and 82.5 percent of NBC's commercials contained physical violence. Of the commercials that contained verbal violence, 8.6 percent of ABC's contained that type of aggression, 2.2 percent of CBS's contained verbal aggression, and 17.5 percent of NBC's commercials aired with verbal aggression. It should be noted that the three hours of content lost for both ABC and CBS, may have influenced or impacted the results differently. For example, these networks may have posted even higher percentages of commercials containing physical and verbal violence.

Table 10 Network and Mode of Violence Cross-Tabulation

	Physical	Verbal	Both	Total
ABC	32/91.4%	3/8.6%	2/5.4%	37/100%
CBS	44/97.8%	1/2.2%	4/8.2%	49/100%
NBC	94/82.5%	20/17.5%	2/1.7%	116/100%
Total	170/87.6%	24/12.4%	8/4.0%	202/100%

Note: N=202;  $\chi^2=11.43$ ; df=4;  $p<.02$

4 cells (44.4 percent) have expected counts of less than 5

### Exploratory Question 2

Exploratory Question 2 asked which mode of violence was an aggressor was most likely to choose. Removing instances where villains, ordinary-types, or heroes could not be identified

reduced the sample size. As illustrated in Table 8, statistically significant results indicate that villain-types were shown committing physical violence 67.9 percent of the time, while resorting to verbal aggression 28.6 percent of the time. Ordinary-types were physical in 68.6 percent of instances, while using verbal violence in 14.3 percent of instances. Hero-types were most likely to choose physical violence 91.9 percent of the time, while using verbal aggression in 8.1 percent of occurrences.

Table 11 Nature of Aggressor and Mode of Violence Cross-Tabulation

	Physical	Verbal	Both	Total
Villain	38/67.9%	16/28.6%	2/3.6%	56/100%
Ordinary	24/68.6%	5/14.3%	6/17.1%	35/100%
Hero	34/91.9%	3/8.1%	0/0%	37/100%
Total	96/75.0%	24/18.8%	8/6.3%	128/100%

Note: N=128;  $\chi^2=17.07$ ; df=4;  $p<.05$

3 cells (33.3 percent) have expected counts of less than 5

### Exploratory Question 3

Exploratory Question 3 asked how the sex of aggressors was portrayed in regard to the nature of aggressors. Removing instances where villain-, ordinary-, or hero-type aggressors could not be identified reduced the sample size. As noted in Table 9, statistically significant results reveal males were portrayed as villains in 45.5 percent of violent commercials, as ordinary in 19.3 percent of instances, and as heroes in 35.2 percent of commercials. Females were portrayed as ordinary in 75.0 percent of instances and as heroes in 33.3 percent of commercials. Female aggressors were not shown as villains within the sample.

Table 12 Sex of Aggressor and Nature of Aggressor Cross-Tabulation

	Villain	Ordinary	Hero	Total
Male	40/45.5%	17/19.3%	31/35.2%	88/100.0%
Female	0/0%	15/75.0%	5/25.0%	20/100.0%
Total	40/37.0%	32/29.6%	36/33.3%	108/100.0%

Note: N=108;  $\chi^2=26.65$ ; df=2;  $p<.001$

#### Exploratory Question 4

Exploratory Question 4 asked how the modes of physical and verbal violence were depicted in regard to realism. Combined instances of physical and verbal violence were removed from the sample. As noted in Table 10, statistically significant results revealed that physical violence was portrayed as realistic fiction 54.7 percent of the time, as fantasy in 39.4 percent of instances, and as animation in 5.9 percent of commercials. Verbal aggression was portrayed as fantasy in 70.8 percent of instances. Animation accounted for 16.7 percent of verbal instances, while realistic fiction depicted verbal violence in 12.5 percent of occurrences.

Table 13 Mode of Violence and Realism Cross-Tabulation

	Animation	Fantasy	Realistic Fiction	Total
Physical	10/5.9%	67/39.4%	93/54.7%	170/100.0%
Verbal	4/16.7%	17/70.8%	3/12.5%	24/100.0%
Total	14/7.2%	84/43.3%	96/49.5%	194/100.0%

Note: N=194;  $\chi^2=15.76$ ; df=2;  $p<.001$



## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the major findings of the study and with discussion of the results, and suggestions for future research into the subject of violence in television commercials.

#### Survey of Major Findings

This study surveyed 2,162 television commercials telecast on ABC, CBS, and NBC, finding that 202 or 9.3 percent of advertisements contained physical or verbal violence. It is difficult to compare these results with previous studies because of scant attention paid to violence in television commercials. Research by Anderson<sup>114</sup> and Tamburro<sup>115</sup> may provide the best comparison; however, both studies only examined violent commercial content broadcast during major sporting events. Anderson reviewed 1,550 commercials, finding that 8.8 percent contained violent acts. Tamburro surveyed 1,185 commercials and found that 6 percent depicted violence. The only study to examine mainstream television scrutinized 1,699 commercials, finding violent content in 2.9 percent of all advertisements.<sup>116</sup> However, this study did not include promotional advertisements for television shows and movies.

Nonetheless, the fact that almost 10 percent of all television commercials examined in this study contained violence may be cause for concern, especially when considering these commercials are shown outside the protection of a ratings system. In addition, television commercials, by their very nature, are repetitive. Cultivation theory, social cognitive theory, and cognitive scripting theory all point to the negative influences of recurring violent messages, especially when those messages are attractive. If approximately 10 percent of commercials contain violence, and the average child views 360,000 advertisements before graduating from high school,<sup>117</sup> then he or she has the potential to view 36,000 acts of violence in commercials

alone. This is in addition to the 200,000 acts of violence the average child views on television by the time he or she graduates from high school.<sup>118</sup>

Hypothesis 1 predicted that physical violence would be portrayed more often than verbal violence in television commercials. This prediction was borne out by a frequency analysis that showed physical violence was seven times more likely to appear in television commercials than verbal violence. Given that television is a visual medium, it is logical that pictures and actions would be used to tell a story, especially in the limited time format of a commercial. Commercials are simply too short to rely on dialogue to convey a point. Disagreement is much more easily conveyed with a shove or a slap than talk. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that a frequency analysis of physical violence showed almost a third of all violence involved the destruction of property. This may indicate that advertisers are concerned enough to limit violence committed against people, at least to some degree.

Hypothesis 2 stated that males would commit more acts of violence in television commercials than females. This hypothesis was supported as results revealed that males were much more likely to engage in violence than females. Gender stereotyping may be the root cause of this finding. Research has shown that males outnumber females in primary character roles in television commercials<sup>119</sup> and programs.<sup>120</sup> In addition, research has also shown that women are the least likely to be cast in action/adventure programs.<sup>121</sup> Females simply lack the roles that might let them engage in physical or verbal violence.

This observation about gender stereotypes may also be applied to Hypothesis 3, which stated that males would be the victims of television commercial violence more than females. The hypothesis was supported by results that showed males were more often the targets of violence than females. Within the subgroup of 89 commercials, males were victims in 73 percent of all violent acts, while females were the focus of aggressive acts 27 percent of the time. Since males dominate roles on television, it stands to reason they would be more likely to commit violent acts and be victims of aggression.

Hypothesis 4 stated that hero-type aggressors would commit more acts of violence in television commercials than villain-type aggressors. The hypothesis, which was not supported, was based on research that indicated attractive role models commit about 40 percent of violence in television shows. However, this was not true of television commercials. According to the results of the study, villains committed 43.8 percent of all violent acts, while heroes were involved in 28.9 percent of instances. Where social cognitive theory is concerned, this is a positive result. Since viewers are more likely to embrace attractive aggressors, the television commercial villains are less likely to have an impact on the thoughts and actions of viewers.

Exploratory Question 1 asked which network was most likely to broadcast commercials containing physical and/or verbal violence. Of the commercials that contained violence, the study indicated that CBS aired physical violence more than ABC and NBC, while NBC was more likely to show verbal violence. Of the commercials that contained aggression, 91.4 percent of ABC's commercials contained physical violence, 97.8 percent of CBS's advertisements contained physical violence, and 82.5 percent of NBC's commercials contained physical violence. Of the commercials that contained verbal violence, 8.6 percent of ABC's contained that type of aggression, 2.2 percent of CBS's contained verbal aggression, and 17.5 percent of NBC's commercials aired with verbal aggression. It should be noted that the three hours of content lost for both ABC and CBS, may have influenced or impacted the results differently.

Exploratory Question 2 asked which mode of violence an aggressor was most likely to choose. Hero-types used physical violence in 91.9 percent of instances compared to villains who resorted to physical aggression 70.4 percent of the time. Villain-types used verbal violence in 29.6 percent of instances, while heroes totaled 8.1 percent. Ordinary-types were shown using physical violence in 82.8 percent of instances, while employing verbal aggression in 17.2 percent of occurrences. Since, social cognitive theory suggests that repeated, simple, and rewarded messages and actions can cause viewers to empathize with what they see and hear, viewers may learn from these messages and model behavior based on the information. This may especially

true when heroes resort to gunplay, fist-fighting, and property destruction to solve problems. While people usually refrain from aggressive acts because they anticipate that such actions will produce guilt or punishment, aggressive behavior that is portrayed as attractive and justified may limit this inhibition.

Exploratory Question 3 asked how the sex of aggressors was portrayed in regard to the nature of aggressors. Male aggressors were more likely to be portrayed as villains, rather than heroes or ordinary. Females were more often depicted as ordinary or neutral but never portrayed as villains. This follows conventional gender stereotyping: virile male characters dish out punishment or save the day, while females characters occupy passive or neutral roles. In the study, males were neutral in 19.3 percent of instances, while portraying villains or heroes 45.5 percent and 35.2 percent of the time, respectively. Females were largely neutral in their roles.

Exploratory Question 4 asked how the modes of physical and verbal violence were depicted in regard to realism. Results revealed that physical violence is most often portrayed as realistic fiction 54.7 percent of the time, as fantasy in 39.4 percent of instances, and as animation in 5.9 percent of commercials that contained violence. Verbal aggression was largely portrayed as fantasy. Because physical violence dominates television commercials, the dramatic use of realistic fiction may be of concern where children are concerned. As indicated in the literature review, children are not as adept in understanding the difference between reality and fiction and are more vulnerable to cognitive scripting of aggressive thoughts and actions.

## Recommendations

Violence in television commercials remains a fertile field for research. To date, research efforts have been too narrow and fragmented to give this subject proper perspective.

Future research should be long-term in nature and comprehensive in evaluating networks and content. With the exception of a few longitudinal studies that are restricted to sporting events or conventional commercials, there are no long-term evaluations of television advertisements for reference. An extended study, perhaps of six- to 12-months in duration, is needed to provide a benchmark for further research.

Future studies also will need to range across a variety of networks and cable channels. The literature review uncovered only one study that evaluated commercials beyond the conventional network structure and even then established networks such as CNN, MTV, and ESPN were evaluated. It would be interesting to note whether channels such as FX, UPN, or Spike TV are bolder in their commercial content. Studies such as the National Television Violence Study and others have examined more than 20 channels for content. This would certainly provide a better look at how advertisers and marketers prepare content for different types of audiences. The traditional networks may garner similar advertisers, thus limiting the scope of commercials shown during breaks.

Future studies must also evaluate all non-programming content. In this study, television promotions alone accounted for 28.4 percent of all advertisements and 46.5 percent of all violent instances. Movie promotions, which accounted for 3.8 percent of all commercials, were responsible for 21 percent of violent occurrences. Content of this nature is simply too prevalent to ignore. These two categories are the most cause for concern because there is no rating or preview system to help parents screen these commercials. While some may consider these types of advertisements beyond the scope of conventional commercials, it would be difficult to argue that movie and television promotions are not trying to sell a product. In addition, these

commercials have as much chance of being viewed as conventional advertisements. Future research may even investigate whether viewers pay more attention to television and movie promotions than conventional content. Advertisers and networks may want to consider a screening process for television and movie promotions. Because these two types of commercials account for 67.5 percent of violent content, policing these advertisements could greatly reduce aggression.

Advertising and mass communication professors may want to ensure curriculum pays attention to the influence of violence. Since research is overwhelming about the negative effects of violent content, there is a professional and moral responsibility to educate students about these influences. While violence may have a place in communication, other alternatives should be sought, especially if one considers that children may be watching.

Finally, the study of television commercial violence needs a coding instrument of its own. The Coding Scheme of TV Violence developed by Mustonen and Pulkkinen worked sufficiently well, but in some cases it contained too many variables and categories to render statistically sound data. Commercials require a simpler instrument given their short format and compact messages.

## ENDNOTES

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## APPENDIX

### Frequency Tables

The frequency tables for this study are included below.

Table 14 Network

	Frequency	Percent
ABC	601	27.8
CBS	697	32.2
NBC	864	40.0
Total	2162	100.0

Table 15 Sex of Victim

	Frequency	Percent
Not Shown	102	50.5
Male	65	32.2
Female	24	11.9
Mixed Group	11	5.4

Table 16 Age of Victim

	Frequency	Percent
Not Shown	77	38.1
Adolescent	2	1.0
Young Adult	98	48.5
Middle-Aged	19	9.4
Older Adult	4	2.0
Several Ages	2	1.0

Table 17 Nature of Aggressor

	Frequency	Percent
Not Shown	74	36.6
Villain	56	27.7
Ordinary	35	17.3
Hero	37	18.3

Table 18 Age of Aggressor

	Frequency	Percent
Not Shown	90	44.6
Child	4	2.0
Adolescent	8	4.0
Young Adult	35	17.3
Middle-Age	65	32.2

Table 19 Nature of Victim

	Frequency	Percent
Not Shown	83	41.1
Villain	56	2.5
Ordinary	111	55.0
Hero	3	1.5

Table 20 Dramatization

	Frequency	Percent
Humorous	90	44.6
Neutral	26	12.9
Quarrelsome	6	3.0
Adventurous	5	2.5
Frightening	75	37.1

Table 21 Motivation

	Frequency	Percent
Not Shown	104	51.5
Defensive	13	6.4
Offensive	70	34.7
Offensive and Defensive	15	7.4

Table 22 Sex of Aggressor

	Frequency	Percent
Not Shown	83	41.1
Male	99	49.0
Female	20	9.9

Table 23 Consequences of

	Frequency	Percent
Not Shown	82	40.6
No Harm	14	6.9
Mild	40	19.8
Severe	65	32.2
Death	1	.5

Table 24 Realism

	Frequency	Percent
Animation	14	6.9
Fantasy	88	43.6
Realistic	99	49.0
Authentic	1	.5

Table 25 Hour

	Frequency	Percent
8-9 p.m.	741	34.3
9-10 p.m.	745	34.4
10-11 p.m.	676	31.3

Table 26 Date

	Frequency	Percent
09/11/04	326	15.1
09/12/04	277	12.8
09/13/04	332	15.4
09/14/04	371	17.2
09/15/04	326	15.1
09/16/04	280	13.0
09/17/04	250	11.6

Table 27 Type of Commercial

	Frequency	Percent
Automotive	237	11.0
Beer	13	.6
Communications	48	2.2
Education	1	.0
Entertainment	5	.2
Environmental	1	.0
Fashion	49	2.3
Financial	121	5.6
Food	385	17.8
Health	238	11.0
Household	147	6.8
Insurance	38	1.8
Lottery	1	.0
Movie	82	3.8
Pet	15	.7
Political	2	.1
PSA	32	1.5
Real Estate	2	.1
Religion	1	.0
Seasonal	5	.2
Technology	47	2.2
Toys	1	.0
Travel	14	.6
TV	614	28.4



Table 28 Commercials

	Frequency	Percent
Valid		
1-800-Flowers	1	.0
20/20	8	.4
3A Day	2	.1
60 Minutes	3	.1
Better Community	2	.1
ABC 19 News	2	.1
ABC Promos	1	.0
ABC Sports	3	.1
According to Jim	4	.2
Actonel	1	.0
Acura	7	.3
ADT	2	.1
Advair	4	.2
Advil	4	.2
AFLAC	4	.2
AIG	1	.0
Alamo Car Rental	2	.1
Alavert	1.0	.1
Aleve	4	.2
Alexander	1	.0
Alley's Dodge	2	.1
Allstate	12	.6
Always	3	.1
America Online	1	.0
American Express	8	.4

Table 28 Continued

Antidrug.com	4	2
Appalachian Power	1	.0
Applebee's	6	.3
Aqua Drops	3	.1
Aquafresh	3	.1
Aquos	2	.1
Arby's	7	.3
Ascensia	1	.0
ATA Black Belt Academy	1	.0
Atlantic Coast Conference	2	.1
Aussie	2	.1
Aveeno	5	.2
Avis	2	.1
Avon	2	.1
Banquet	2	.1
Barbie	1	.0
Ben Gay	3	.1
Benadryl	3	.1
Best Buy	4	.2
Big Brother 5	2	.1
Big Lots	3	.1
Billy Graham	1	.0
Blockbuster	3	.1
Blue Cross Blue Shield	5	.2
Botox	3	.1
Bounce	3	.1
Bounty	1	.0
Breathe Right	2	.1

Table 28 Continued

Brilliant Brunette	1	.0
British Airways	5	.2
Bud Light	3	.1
Budweiser	1	.0
Burger King	21	1.0
Butterfinger	2	.1
Cadillac	3	.1
Campbell's	12	.6
Canon	1	.0
Capital One	25	1.2
Carefree	1	.0
Cariten Health Care	2	.1
CBS News	1	.0
CBS Sports	5	.2
Center of the Universe	2	.1
Centrum	3	.1
Cesar	9	.4
Charles Schwab	4	.2
Charmin	2	.1
Charter Communications	1	.0
Cheerios	7	.3
Cheez It	1	.0
Chevrolet	34	1.5
Chili's	1	.0
Chrysler	5	.2
Cingular	12	.6
Citi	28	1.3
Clairol	2	.1

Table 28 Continued

Claritin	10	.5
Cedarview Patio	1	.0
Clemson University	1	.0
Clorox	1	.0
Clubhouse	4	.2
Coca Cola	2	.1
Coffee Mate	3	.1
Coldwell Banker	2	.1
Colgate	1	.0
Collateral	3	.1
Colonial Penn	2	.1
Complete Savages	1	.0
Conan	4	.2
Consumer Credit Counseling	1	.0
Cooper Tires	2	.1
Corona	1	.0
Crest	4	.2
Crossing Jordan	2	.1
CSI	11	.5
CSI: Miami	16	.7
CSI: NY	10	.5
CVS	6	.2
Dairy Queen	2	.1
Dannon	2	.1
Dawn	1	.0
Day of Discovery	1	.0
Days of Our Lives	3	.1
Degree	1	.0

Table 28 Continued

Denny's	1	.0
Desperate Housewives	7	.3
DHL	7	.2
Di-Tech	3	.1
Diet Dr Pepper	2	.1
DiGiorno	2	.1
Direct TV	2	.1
Discover	11	.5
Discovery Kids	1	.0
Dish Network	4	.2
Dodge	8	.4
Domino's	1	.0
Don Smith Ford	1	.0
Dove	1	.0
Downy	3	.1
Dr Pepper	2	.1
Dr. Phil	15	.7
Dr. Schoal's	1	.0
Dr. Vegas	6	.3
Duracell	3	.1
EA Games	1	.0
Eclipse	1	.0
Electrasol	1	.0
Elidel	3	.1
Emmy Awards	12	.6
Energizer	25	1.2
Entertainment Tonight	3	.1
ER	11	.5

Table 28 Continued

ESPN	2	.1
Estroven	1	.0
Everybody Loves Raymond	14	.6
Excedrin	1	.0
Expedia.com	4	.2
Factory Direct Furniture	1	.0
Father of the Pride	17	.8
Fear Factor	13	.6
Febreze	7	.3
Fed Ex	1	.0
Fed Ex Kinko's	12	.5
First Daughter	1	.0
Flonase	1	.0
Folger's	1	.0
Food City	5	.2
Ford	37	1.7
Freestyle Flash	1	.0
Fresh Brush	1	.0
Friday Night Lights	5	.2
Friends	1	.0
Frontier Health	1	.0
Fruit 2o	5	.2
Game Boy	2	.1
Gap	8	.4
Garnier	2	.1
Gatorade	1	.0
GE	13	.6
General Motors	3	.1

Table 28 Continued

Georgia Tech University	1	.0
Glad	3	.1
Glade	8	.3
GlaxoSmithKline	1	.0
Glucerna	1	.0
Go Breathe	2	.1
Golden Corral	4	.2
Goody's	6	.3
Goodyear	2	.1
Got Milk	1	.0
Grands	3	.1
Hall's Fruit Breezers	2	.1
Hallmark	5	.2
Hamburger Helper	1	.0
Hardee's	9	.4
Hawaii	10	.5
Heniken	1	.0
Herbal Essence	2	.1
Hershey's	5	.2
Hewlett-Packard	5	.2
Hidden Valley	1	.0
Home Café	1	.0
Home Depot	6	.3
Home on the Range	7	.3
Hoover	3	.1
Hot Pockets	2	.1
Hotel.com	2	.1
Hummer	3	.1

Table 28 Continued

Hyundai	19	.9
IBM	6	.3
Icy Hot	1	.0
Ipod	1	.0
J.C. Penney	13	.8
JAG	2	.1
Jeep	5	.2
Jimmy Dean Sausage	3	.1
Jimmy Kimmel Live	1	.0
Joan of Arcadia	3	.1
Joey	10	.5
Kellogg's	1	.0
KFC	18	.8
Kia	10	.5
King of Queens	1	.0
Kohl's	11	.5
Kraft	1	.0
Krispy Kreme	1	.0
L.L. Bean	5	.2
Ladder 49	5	.
Las Vegas	15	.7
Last Comic Standing	5	.2
Late Show	17	.8
Law and Order	18	.8
Law and Order CI	2	.1
Law and Order SVU	12	.6
LAX	21	.10
Lean Cuisine	2	.1



Table 28 Continued

Levitra	10	.5
Lexus	12	.6
Life As We Know It	2	.1
Life Savers	4	.2
Listen Up	13	.6
Listerine	2	.1
Little Caesar's	6	.3
Long John Silver's	4	.2
Loreal	2	.1
Lost	16	.7
Lowe's	7	.3
Lubriderm	2	.1
Lysol	2	.1
M&Ms	2	.1
Man on Fire	2	.1
Mass Mutual	6	.3
Mastercard	6	.3
Matrix Direct	6	.3
Max Factor	1	.0
Maybelline	3	.1
Mayfield's	3	.1
McDonald's	18	.8
Mean Girls	4	.2
Medical Investigation	10	.5
Medicare Prescription	1	.0
Mercury	16	.7
Michelob	2	.1
Miller Lite	2	.1

Table 28 Continued

Miniwax	2	.1
Minute Maid	1	.0
Miss America	1	.0
Mister Clean	1	.0
Mitsubishi	2	.1
Monday Night Football	3	.1
Monster.com	4	.2
Morgan Stanley	6	.3
Mountain States Health	1	.0
Mr. 3000	6	.3
MSNBC	1	.0
My Wife and Kids	4	.2
Mylanta	1	.0
NASCAR	1	.0
National Football League	1	.0
NIEH	2	.01
Natural Foods Market	1	.0
NCIS	3	.1
Neosporin	1	.0
NetZero	2	.1
Neutrogena	5	.2
News Channel 11	25	1.2
Newscenter 5	14	.6
Nexium	1	.0
Nextel	1	.0
NFL Today	4	.2
Nissan	5	.2
Nivea	4	.2

Table 28 Continued

Northeast Credit Union	4	.2
Northern	2	.1
NYPD Blue	6	.3
Olay	6	.3
Old Spice	1	.0
Olive Garden	13	.6
Olympus	1	.0
One A Day	4	.2
One Stop Shop	1	.0
Oprah	1	.0
Oral B	7	.3
Oust	5	.2
Outback	20	.9
Oxyclean	1	.0
Pacific Life	1	.0
Pampers	3	.1
Pantene	1	.0
Papa John's	11	.5
Pedigree	2	.1
People's Court	1	.0
Pepcid	4	.2
Pepperidge Farms	6	.3
Pepsi	8	.4
Perkins	2	.1
Petsmart	3	.1
Phillip Morris	3	.1
Pier One	6	.3
Pillsbury	2	.1

Table 28 Continued

Pizza Hut	6	.3
Planter's Peanuts	1	.0
Playskool	1	.0
Pledge	2	.1
Ponds	1	.0
Pontiac	8	.4
Prego	5	.2
Prempro	4	.2
Prevacid	2	.1
Prime Time Live	6	.3
Procrit	4	.2
Pur	1	.0
Quaker Oats	8	.4
Radio Shack	1	.0
Ragu	3	.1
Raisin Bran	2	.1
Red Bull	1	.0
Red Lobster	9	.4
Revenge of a Middle Aged	6	.2
Revlon	4	.2
Rick Boucher	2	.1
Rodney	4	.2
Russell Athletic Wear	1	.0
Ruth King Antiques	2	.1
Ryder Cup	5	.2
Samuel Adams	3	.1
Sanderson Farms	1	.0
Saturn	5	.2

Table 28 Continued

SBC	1	.0
Scooby Doo	14	.6
Scrubs	8	.4
Sears	8	.4
Secret	1	.0
Serenity	1	.0
Shark Tale	4	.2
Sherwin-Williams	2	.1
Shout	1	.0
Siegfried and Roy	7	.3
Silk	1	.0
Singulair	5	.2
Sirius	1	.0
Skippy	5	.2
Sky Captain	7	.3
Smokeaway	1	.0
Smucker's	1	.0
Snickers	1	.0
Snuggle	1	.0
Sonata	1	.0
Sonic	11	.5
Splenda	3	.1
Sprint	1	.0
Sprint PC	4	.2
St. Joseph	1	.0
Star Wars	2	.1
State Farm	5	.2
State of Tennessee	1	.0

Table 28 Continued

Still Standing	14	.6
Stouffer's	1	.0
Suave	1	.0
Subway	8	.4
Sudafed	3	.1
Sun Com	2	.1
Sunny D	2	.1
Sure	1	.0
Survivor	26	1.2
Suzuki	5	.2
Swanson	3	.1
Swifter	1	.0
T Mobile	6	.3
Taco Bell	8	.4
Takoma	1	.0
Talbot's	2	.1
Tampax	2	.1
Target	18	.8
Taxi	3	.1
Tenn. Dept. of Safety	2	.1
Tenn. Dept. of Education	1	.0
Tennessee Lottery	4	.2
Tennis Welcome Center	2	.1
The Amazing Race	9	.4
The Apprentice	22	1.0
The Bachelor	6	.3
The Benefactor	15	.7
The Early Show	1	.0

Table 28 Continued

The Forgotten	5	.2
The Hartford	2	.1
The Home Depot	1	.0
The King of Queens	2	.1
The More You Know	7	.3
The People's Court	1	.0
The Practice	2	.1
The Salvation Army	1	.0
Third Watch	11	.5
Thrifty	1	.0
TIAA CREF	1	.0
Tide	3	.1
Titanic	4	.2
Tonight Show	8	.4
Tony Danza Show	1	.0
Tostitos	1	.0
Total	4	.2
Total Gym	1	.0
Toyota	34	1.6
Tri-State Broadway	2	.1
Trident	4	.2
Tropicana	4	.2
Trump the Game	1	.0
TVA	3	.1
Two and a Half Men	13	.6
Tylenol	8	.4
Tyson	7	.3
U.S. Postal Service	7	.3

Table 28 Continued

UBS	6	.3
Uncle Ben's	5	.2
Unicoi County Gas Co.	1	.0
UPS	4	.2
V8	2	.1
Vagisil	4	.2
Valtrex	5	.2
Valvoline	2	.1
Vaseline	4	.2
Verizon	19	.8
Viagra	4	.2
Victoria's Secret	3	.1
Visa	5	.2
Visine	3	.1
Volkswagen	6	.3
Wachovia	1	.0
Wal-Mart	6	.3
Wight Watchers	9	.4
Wellbutrin	6	.3
Wellmont BRMC	1	.0
Wellmont Holsten Valley	1	.0
Wendy's	25	1.2
Werther's	5	.2
Whiskas	1	.0
Wifeswap	7	.3
Will and Grace	18	.8
Wimbledon	11	.5
Windex	1	.0



Table 28 Continued

Without A Trace	11	.5
World Music Awards	11	.5
Wrigley's	3	.1
Xerox	1	.0
Yoplait	4	.2
Zales	1	.0
Zantac	3	.1
Zelnorm	2	.1
Ziploc	4	.2
Total	2162	100.0

## VITA

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Western Texas College, Snyder, Texas;  
Management, A.A.S., 1976  
Tarleton State University, Stephenville, Texas;  
Business, B.B.A., 1979  
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;  
Professional Communications, M.A., 2005

#### Professional

Experience: Assistant Director of Communications, Texas Engineering Experiment Station;  
College Station, Texas, 1986-1992  
Director of Public Affairs, Virginia Engineering Foundation;  
Charlottesville, Virginia, 1992-1994  
Reporter, Kingsport Times-News;  
Kingsport, Tennessee, 1996-1997  
Director of Community Relations, Northeast State Community College;  
Blountville, Tennessee, 1997 to present

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