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Targeting families and teens: Television violence on the WB

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TARGETING FAMILIES AND TEENS:
TELEVISION VIOLENCE ON THE WB

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Cleveland State University
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

Targeting Families and Teens: Television Violence on The WB

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The author investigates the amount of violence contained within WB primetime programs in order to determine The WB's number of violent acts per program and per program hour as well as determine some of the possible effects of The WB's violence. The author sampled one week of WB primetime programming. A definition of violence similar to other violence studies was employed for comparability. The unit of analysis used for coding was the violent act. The author found all WB primetime programs to contain some violence. The most violent WB primetime program was "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and the highest number of violent acts aired was found on Tuesday night. The author concludes the majority of WB primetime programs contain a low amount of violence. The author suggests future violence studies employ a single accepted definition of violence and include The WB and UPN programming in their samples.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................ iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...................................................................................... vi

CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION ............................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE ............................................................... 8
  Definitions of Violence .................................................................................. 9
  Measures of Violence ............................................................................... 11
  Television Program Samples .................................................................. 14
  The Present Study ..................................................................................... 15

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY ............................................................................. 18
  Sample of Programs ................................................................................. 18
  Definition of Violence .............................................................................. 20
  Types of Violence Coded .......................................................................... 21
  Program Information ................................................................................ 23
  Violence Measures ................................................................................... 24

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS ......................................................................................... 26
  Inter-coder Reliability ............................................................................... 26
  Prevalence of Violence ........................................................................... 27
  Research Questions .................................................................................. 31

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION .................................................................................. 35
  Background & Goals of Study ............................................................... 35
  Summary of Findings ............................................................................... 35
  Network Dedication ................................................................................. 36
  Target Audience ...................................................................................... 38
  Potential Implications ............................................................................. 40
  Limitations .............................................................................................. 48
  Suggestions for Future Research .......................................................... 50
  Conclusions ............................................................................................. 51

APPENDIX ............................................................................................................ 52
  WB Primetime Program Schedule ......................................................... 53
  Coding Instrument .................................................................................. 54

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present study is to code one episode of each of The WB's primetime programs for violence in order to determine this network's number of violent acts per program and per programming hour. These numbers will be compared to previous studies of violence on all broadcast network (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC) primetime programming in order to determine if the amount of violence The WB network airs is higher or lower than the average. Current studies of violence have left out both The WB and UPN (United Paramount Network), broadcast networks which began airing programming in January 1995.

The WB was chosen over UPN for the present study for three reasons. First, The WB's target demographic is teens and young adults, the same people who organized reform and parental groups, the academic world, religious contingents, medical and legal associations, and all three branches of the Federal Government are trying to protect from viewing heavy amounts of televised violence (Fowles, 1996, p. 41). According to an Entertainment Weekly article, two-thirds of The WB's audience is under 35 and new entertainment president Susanne Daniels' long-term plan is to "make the network number one in the 18-34 demographic" (Flint, 1998). Second, The WB is dedicated to presenting programming devoid of heavy sexual content, violence, and off-color language that
appeals to the whole family, especially teens and young adults (Katz, 1997, p. 6).

However, The WB has been criticized in the past for airing programming which was inappropriate and offensive to viewers (Tobenkin, 1995, p. 18). More recently an episode of a highly popular WB program was pulled and aired at a later date due to its similarity to the Columbine High School tragedy. Finally, The WB is available through both antenna and cable reception in the Las Vegas area, while UPN, as of this study, is only available through antenna reception. This allows The WB programs the potential to affect more children, teens, and young adults than UPN.

Violence is a common characteristic of many television programs (Hough & Erwin, 1997, p. 411). The violence contained within the primetime programs aired by The WB is known as fictional television violence, the fantasy violence of the television drama (Van der Voort, 1986, p. 23). Violence can also be found in news and current affairs programs, sports programs, and documentaries. The violence contained within these programs is known as actual television violence, which is the broadcasting of real-life violence that takes place outside the doors of the television studio (Van der Voort, 1986, p. 23).

Based on a long series of content analyses of fictional programming, it can be concluded that violence, aggression, and anti-social activity are highly over-represented in television programming (see Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1980; Lichter and Lichter, 1983; “NCTV says,” 1983; Potter, et al., 1995; Potter, et al., 1997; Schramm, Lyle, and Parker, 1961; Smythe, 1954). Content analyses have also been done on non-fictional programming and have found a large amount of violence and aggression within documentaries (Williams, Zabrack, & Joy, 1982), news programs (Cumberbatch, et al., 1987; Johnson, 1993, 1990), and on reality programs dealing with law enforcement such
as "Cops" and "America's Most Wanted" (Oliver, 1994; Potter, et al., 1997). The over-representation of violence could be traced to the use of violence as a competitive tool in entertainment to attract particular viewing audiences (Hamilton, 1998; Briller, 1995).

Young adults are much more likely to consume larger amounts of violent programming and men are more likely to watch particularly violent programming than women (Hamilton, 1998, p. 51). Ranked by demographics groups, the highest consumers of violent entertainment are men 18-34, followed by women 18-34, and men 35-49 (Hamilton, 1998, p. 51). In the struggle to obtain advertiser dollars and viewers, more violent programming may be added because it is believed that violence (and sex) add to a program's appeal (Hansen & Hansen, 1990, p. 213). However, this leaves few alternatives to "violent-laden" programming. Broadcasters may not fully incorporate the costs to society of their violent programming if those costs include such factors as increased levels of aggression and crime (Hamilton, 1998, p. 3). However, enough evidence from studies exist to justify the idea that television violence contributes to children's aggression.

According to Huston, Watkins, and Kunkel (1989) children are estimated to watch between 11 and 28 hours of television a week, more than any other activity except sleep. Cantor and Nathanson (1997) found children view the heaviest amounts of violence between the ages of seven and nine. By the time the average child graduates from elementary school, he or she will have witnessed at least 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other assorted acts of violence (Lazar, 1994, p. 5). According to the American Psychological Association, depending on the amount of television viewed, children could see more than 200,000 violent acts before they hit the schools and streets of this nation as teenagers (Lazar, 1994, p. 5). These statements are backed by the findings of violence.
studies throughout the years. Gerbner and his associates, who have been monitoring the amount of violence on primetime programming annually since 1967, found 4 to 6 violent acts are committed per hour (Gerbner, et al., 1980). Greenberg, et al. (1980), reported the average primetime hour contained 12 acts of physical aggression. The National Coalition on Television Violence (NCTV) found 9.7 acts of antisocial violence per hour on primetime television ("NCTV says," 1983). Potter & Ware (1987) found action adventure shows portrayed murder and assault approximately 8.6 times per hour. More recently, Signorielli, Gerbner, and Morgan (1995) concluded violence appears in two-thirds to three quarters of all television programs at a rate of between six and ten incidents per hour in primetime and at rates three to four times as much in children's programming. However, no one experiences this kind of routine violence that is depicted on television everyday in real life (Silver, 1994, p. 43).

The WB network began broadcasting on January 11, 1995. As mentioned earlier, the network is dedicated to presenting programming devoid of heavy sexual content, violence, and off-color language that appeals to the whole family, especially teens and young adults (Katz, 1997, p. 6). According to former WB network executive Jamie Kellner, The WB network "made a real effort to focus on teens first, (males) 18-34 second, and (women) 18-49 third" (Rice & McClellan, 1997, p. 21). However, Kellner also said, "When you talk about family programming, many times people assume that you're trying to be Nickelodeon. And we're not. The word family to me is a non-adult concept. There are teens involved, there are kids involved. Family doesn't mean G-rated. Family means it's something adults and kids can watch together" (Rice & McClellan, 1997, p. 21).
For all the talk about programming geared toward young adults, teens, and kids, The WB's early programs were criticized for being inappropriate for younger viewers and offensive to some older viewers (Tobenkin, 1995, p. 18). While the network was dedicated to presenting programs devoid of heavy sexual content, violence, and off-color language, it was airing comedies such as "Unhappily Ever After" (a "Married with Children" clone) and "Nick Freno: Licensed Teacher," both of which contained a heavy amount of sexual content, violence, and off-color language.

In midseason 1997, another program which bucks The WB's dedication to presenting programming devoid of heavy sexual content, violence, and off-color language made its debut, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer." According to a WB press release, "Buffy" is described as "an action-packed thriller cleverly laced with comedy and horror." The title of the program implies violence (vampire slayer) and every episode to date has included stabbings, martial arts fighting, beheadings, and vampires biting the necks of secondary characters. The 1998-1999 "Buffy" season finale was pulled from airing because it bore an eerie similarity to the tragedy that occurred at Columbine High School only weeks earlier.

The WB began to add more teen targeted dramas to its growing line-up after the success of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer." Programs such as "Dawson's Creek" and "Charmed" would continue to put stress and strain on The WB's dedication to presenting programs devoid of heavy sexual content, violence, and off-color language. The first few episodes of "Dawson's Creek" included a storyline about an older (female) high school teacher having intercourse with a (male) teenage student. The premise of "Charmed" is
that of three sisters, who also happen to be witches, using their powers to battle demons who want to kill them in order to gain the sisters' powers.

For the 1999-2000 television season, The WB added the "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" spin-off "Angel" to its growing line-up. "Angel" follows the "Buffy" formula of an action-packed thriller cleverly laced with comedy and horror. The program follows the adventures of the vampire "Angel" as he repents for once being a vicious killer by protecting those who cannot protect themselves in the city of Los Angeles. One episode featured Angel being tortured by another character who was impaling Angel on various parts of his body with thick, long sticks. In another episode, a character could detach various body parts, such as an eyeball or both hands, in an effort to stalk and spy on a woman he was obsessed with. Once again The WB had added a program which was hypocritical to its dedication of providing programs devoid of heavy sexual content, violence, and off-color language.

Studying the amount of violence The WB network airs is just one dimension of family oriented programming. Since children and teens are the viewers parents and child advocacy groups are trying to protect from viewing heavy amounts of television violence, it would make sense that a network which targets its programming toward teens and children would air programs which do not go against their dedication to presenting programming devoid of heavy sexual content, violence, and off-color language. Looking at the current WB network programming schedule, it would appear The WB has a majority of programs ("Buffy the Vampire Slayer," "Angel," "Charmed," "Dawson's Creek," "Popular," and "Roswell") which go against their dedication to present programs devoid of heavy sexual content, violence, and off-color language. Since these programs
do not fit The WB network's dedication, it is possible these programs could yield a high amount of televised violence for a network which targets teens, children, and families.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Television violence research attention has been primarily devoted to addressing the question: "How much violence is there on television?" (Wurtzell & Lometti, 1984, p. 89). To answer the question, "How much violence is there on television?" most researchers choose to use a descriptive content analysis technique in which clearly defined occurrences of violence can be objectively quantified and catalogued (Gunter, 1994, p. 190). Researchers provide the violence definition that doubles as a measuring instrument and coders are trained to use this instrument.

Like obscenity, violence seems to be something everybody feels they can recognize when they see it, yet it is difficult to define operationally (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 279). There is no single commonly accepted definition of violence. Violence is treated as a construct and different researchers have different ways to include elements into their definitions (Wilson, et. al., 1997, p. 37). The results of a given content analysis are strongly influenced by the definition of violence, the measures of violence, and the sample (Wilson, et. al., 1997, p. 36). For example, if a study defines violence to include comic or slapstick violence, its count of violence will yield a higher amount of violence than a comparable study that excludes comic or slapstick violence from its definition (Wilson, et. al., 1997, p. 36). Also, a study which focuses on individual violent acts as the unit of analysis will likely have a higher count of violence than a study using
larger units of analysis, such as the scene (Wilson, et. al., 1997, p. 36).

Definitions of Violence

The first thing that influences the results of a given content analysis is the definition of violence. The Cultural Indicators Project (CIP) defines violence in a straightforward way and makes no presumptions about effects, but establishes the basis for research (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 279). The CIP definition of violence focuses on physical force, hurting, and killing, and defines violence 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 hurting or killing (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 280). This definition is the most often used for content analysis of television violence (Potter, et al., 1997, p. 70).

According to Gerbner (1995), this definition allows for the reliable observation of clear-cut, unambiguous, and overt acts of physical violence involving human or human-like characters, while idle threats, verbal abuse, or gestures without consequences (hurting or killing or threatening to do so) are not coded as violence. However, some researchers feel this definition is too narrow and have expanded their definitions of violence to include verbal forms of violence (Potter, et al., 1997; Potter & Ware, 1987; Williams, Zabrack, & Joy, 1982).

The ABC Broadcast Standards and Practices Department uses the Incident Classification and Analysis Form (ICAF) System to identify and categorize violent actions which appear in an ABC television program. The ICAF system takes into account the type, severity, victim, and consequences of violence, as well as the overall context.
within which the violence is portrayed (Wurtzel & Lometti, 1984, p. 92).

The ICAF system defines violence as force or the compelling threat of force that may result in harm to life or valued objects, involving harmful or antisocial consequences, and behavior which violates, damages, or abuses another person, animal, or valued object (Wurtzel & Lometti, 1984, p. 92).

Mustonen and Pulkkinen (1997) define 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 of anger directed towards animals and inanimate objects. Antisocial activities with no aggressive connotations, such as deceit and theft, hostile reactions, unaccompanied by physical injury or damage, and verbal reports of violence were excluded (p. 173).

Kunkel, et. al. (1995) used three key elements in their definition of violence: credible threats, behavioral acts, and harmful consequences. Violence is defined as any overt depiction of a credible threat, a physical force, or the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings (p. 286). Violence also includes certain depictions of physically harmful consequences against an animate being or group that occur as a result of unseen violent means (Kunkel, et. al., 1995, p. 286).

Greenberg, et al. (1980) use a four-part conception of antisocial behavior that includes physical aggression, verbal aggression, theft, and deceit. Physical aggression is defined as any overt behavior intended to injure, frighten, or damage oneself, another individual, an animal or property (p. 107). Verbal aggression is defined as sending noxious symbolic messages (p. 107). Theft is defined as an intentional and deliberate taking of another individual’s or institution’s property without right or permission and deceit is defined as
the intentional misleading of someone for purposes detrimental to an individual, group, or institution (p. 107).

Physical harm is at the root of all conceptions of violence and is a key dimension in the basic definition of violence (Kunkel, et. al., 1995, p. 286). A key dimension to definitions of violence that look beyond physical harm is the threat of violence.

Measures of Violence

The second thing that influences the results of a given content analysis is the measures of violence. The Cultural Indicators Project (CIP) measures violence in several ways—counting the number of separate violent actions and the amount of time devoted to these acts, as a thematic element to isolate its context and significance to the plot, and in relation to whether characters commit violence or are victimized (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 281).

The CIP defines a violent act as a scene of some violence confined to the same characters, even if interrupted by flashback period. When a new character, or characters, enter the scene, it becomes another separate action (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 281). The number of violent acts (NVA) is the total of violent acts within the entire program (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 281). Each violent action is timed and recoded, in minutes and seconds, the total amount of time devoted to these violent actions within the program (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 281). The CIP also measures the seriousness and significance of violence. The seriousness measure determines whether the violence in a program is strictly humorous or comic, partly humorous, or mostly real serious violence (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995,
The significance measure determines whether the violence is incidental to the plot, a significant portion of the plot, or the major feature, highlight, climax, or resolution of the plot (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 281).

Finally, the CIP categorizes characters who commit violence by whether they hurt, kill, or do not hurt or kill. Characters who are victims of violence are categorized by whether they are hurt, killed, or not hurt or killed (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 281).

The CIP uses the following formulas to obtain a violence measurement: prevalence (%P) is the percentage of programs in a particular sample containing any violence; rate (R) expresses the frequency of violent actions in units of programming and in units of time; the rate per program (R/P) is the number of violent actions divided by a total number of programs; and the rate per hour (R/H) is the number of violent actions divided by the number of program hours in the sample (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 282).

Finally, role is defined as the portrayal of characters who commit violence (or are violent), or those who are subject to violence (victims), or both, and give several measures; the percentage of violence out of all characters in a sample, the percentage of victims out of all characters in a sample, the percentage of characters involved as violent or as victims, or both, the percentage of killers, the percentage who are killed, and the percentage involved in killing, either as killers, as killed, or both (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 282).

The ABC Broadcast Standards and Practices ICAF system classifies violent acts into four categories: threats, assaults, violence of nature, and human accidents. A threat is the
expression of an intention to exert or the promise of exerting physical, destructive force, may be verbal and/or physical, and has two subcategories, unarmed threats and weapons threats (Wurtzell & Lometti, 1984, p. 92). An assault is the use of physical force against a person, animal, or valued object and are classified into three mutually exclusive categories: weapons assault, unarmed major assault, and assault against property (Wurtzell & Lometti, 1984, p. 92). Violence of nature are acts of destructive or harmful force (floods, earthquakes, etc.), which are not attributable to intentional human behavior or are beyond human control (Wurtzell & Lometti, 1984, p. 93). Human accidents are violent acts which occur without the contribution of a hostile agent, such as falling off a ladder (Wurtzell & Lometti, 1984, p. 93). Additionally, the ICAF system codes three possible outcomes of violence to humans or animals, including no injury, minor injury, and killed (Wurtzell & Lometti, 1984, p. 93).

Just like Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan (1995), Mustonen and Pulkkinen (1997) used the violent act to measure the amount of violence. They did this in order to promote the comparability and reliability of their coding. A violent act was defined as a coherent, uninterrupted sequence of violent actions (one or several) involving the same agents in the same roles (Mustonen and Pulkkinen, 1997, p. 177).

While Kunkel, et. al. (1995) count as violence any act which fits their definition of violence, they also classified many acts collectively as part of a larger unit of analysis known as a violent incident. A violent incident involves an interaction between a perpetrator (P), an act (A), and a target (T) (Kunkel, et. al., 1995, p. 288). This was done because Kunkel and his colleagues felt the richest meaning of any violence portrayal is found in larger units rather than individual acts. Another larger unit used in this study is
the violent sequence, which is a related series of violent behaviors, actions, or depictions that occur without a significant break in the flow of actual or imminent violence (Kunkel, et. al., 1995, p. 289).

The measures of violence have a major impact on the results of content analyses. The studies done by Signorielli, Gerbner, and Morgan (1995) and Mustonen and Pulkkinen (1997) code for the individual violent act, likely resulting in a higher count of violence than Kunkel et. al. (1995) who use the larger units of the violent incident and the violent sequence.

Television Program Samples

The final thing that influences the results of a given content analysis is the sample. The Cultural Indicators Project (CIP) uses annual week-long samples of primetime and weekend daytime network programming each fall (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 283). All programs with a storyline are considered dramatic programming, including situation comedies, action-adventure, dramas, science fiction, and cartoons (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995, p. 283).

The ABC Standards and Practices ICAF system uses an entire population instead of a sample. That population is every episode of every program that is part of the ABC network line-up.

Mustonen and Pulkkinen (1997) used a sample that consisted of 259 programs (153 hours) of all genres presented during one week in November 1991 on three television channels of the Finnish Broadcasting Company (FBC). The analysis included all
programming airing on six randomly selected days per channel (Mustonen and Pulkkinen, 1997, p. 174).

Wilson, et. al. (1997) used 23 channels in their sample, including commercial broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC), commercial broadcast independents, the public broadcasting network (PBS), basic cable (A & E, AMC, BET, TNT, USA, VH-1, MTV, etc.) and premium cable (Cinemax, HBO, and Showtime). The sampling period ran from October 8, 1994 to June 9, 1995 and only those programs which aired between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. were sampled (Wilson, et. al., 1997, p. 47). Religious programs, game shows, sports, “infomercials,” instructional shows and breaking news were not included in the sample (Wilson, et. al., 1997, p. 47).

The sample a television violence study uses can impact that study’s findings through the inclusion and exclusion of programs and channels. Violence studies that include cable networks (see Wilson, et al., 1997, 1998, 1998a) leave open the possibility their violence numbers could be high because it is believed that cable channels and premium channels will program more violence than broadcast network channels.

The Present Study

The basis of all violence studies is to objectively quantify and catalogue clearly defined occurrences of violence (Gunter, 1994, p. 190). From combinations of these measures, a profile is derived which represents an objective and meaningful indicator of the amount of violence in television programs. These indicators may include the percentage of violence out of all programs, the amount of violence per program, and the amount of violence per program hour.
In January 1995, a new broadcast network came on the air: The WB. Currently, The WB covers 90% of United States households and broadcasts programs Sunday through Friday (Katz, 1997, p. 6). As mentioned earlier, two-thirds of The WB’s audience is under 35 and new entertainment president Susanne Daniel’s long-term plan is to “make the network number one in the 18-34 demographic.” Indeed, The WB’s motto is to present programming devoid of heavy sexual content, violence, and off-color language that appeals to the whole family, especially teens and young adults (Katz, 1997, p. 6). According to Hamilton (1998), young adults are much more likely to consume larger amounts of violent programming and the willingness of sponsors to pay more for young adult viewers translates into greater incentives to program violent content. As mentioned earlier, it would seem The WB has a majority of primetime programs (“Buffy,” “Angel,” “Charmed,” etc.) which do not live up to The WB’s dedication of presenting programming devoid of heavy sexual content, violence, and off-color language. However, recent studies have left The WB network off their sample of networks from which to code programs.

The present study will attempt to determine the amount of primetime program violence aired by The WB. Two research questions will attempt to answer whether the WB is programming large amounts of violence that could lead to harmful effects on its teen and young adult audience. These research questions are:

R1: Does The WB network have a majority of primetime programming which yields a high amount of televised violence?

R2: Does WB primetime programming contain a higher average of violent acts per programming hour in primetime compared to the other broadcast networks?
This study will also discuss some of the possible effects of The WB’s programmed violence.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Sample of Programs

The population of interest here was all WB network primetime programs. The sampling frame for this investigation was defined by four parameters: television network, programs types, sampling time (i.e., time of day), and sampling period (i.e., time of year).

Television Network

Only programs aired as part of The WB network primetime schedule were used in this study. All other programs, which are not aired as part of The WB network, were excluded. All monitoring for this study was conducted in the Las Vegas market using WB network affiliate KVWB Channel 21.

Program Type

Movies, religious programs, sports, news, game shows, "infomercials," instructional programs, home shopping material, and syndicated programming which aired as part of The WB network or as part of the programming line-up of KVWB Channel 21 in Las Vegas were excluded from this sample. The following WB primetime programs were included: “7th Heaven,” “7th Heaven: Beginnings,” “Angel,” “Buffy the Vampire Slayer,” “Charmed,” “Dawson’s Creek,” “Felicity,” “For Your Love,” “Jack & Jill,”

**Time of Day**

All WB network primetime programs listed in *TV Review: Las Vegas Review-Journal Guide to Cable and TV Listings* from 8:00 p.m. to 9:59 p.m. Monday through Friday and 7:00 p.m. to 9:59 p.m. Sunday were eligible for inclusion in the sample.

Primetime programming was defined as programming that began at 8:00 p.m. and ended at 10:59 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 7:00 p.m. through 10:59 p.m. on Sunday. Currently, The WB network only programs from 8:00 p.m. to 9:59 p.m. Monday through Friday in primetime and from 7:00 p.m. to 9:59 p.m. on Sunday in primetime. At the time of this study, The WB was not programming during primetime on Saturday, thus that day's exclusion from this sample.

**Sampling Period**

One week of WB network primetime programming beginning Monday, December 13, 1999 and ending Sunday, December 19, 1999 was chosen as the sampling period.

This sampling period was ideal because it fell directly in-between the end of November sweeps and the Christmas and New Year's holidays. Programs were not sampled during November sweeps because it is a time when networks pull "stunts," such as the characters from two different programs crossing-over to interact with each other or other plot developments that will draw more viewers than usual. It is very likely that violence numbers could be much higher or lower than during a non-sweeps month.

Programs were not sampled during Christmas and New Year's due to the inclusion of many holiday specials which only air during the month of December and also due to the
network airing a majority of reruns instead of new episodes of network programs. Only five of the fifteen WB network primetime programs were reruns during the sampling period.

**Total Program Count**

A total of fifteen WB network primetime programs were recorded for coding. Of these programs, one half-hour comedy was aired twice, the first showing a rerun and the second a new episode. In all, eleven of the programs recorded were one-hour dramas and four programs were half-hour comedies. Three of the dramas and two of the comedies were reruns. One drama, "7th Heaven: Beginnings," is a rerun of the first few years of the drama "7th Heaven." However, neither The WB nor the TV Review program guide listed "7th Heaven: Beginnings" as a rerun, so neither will this study. A complete grid of all programs selected for inclusion in the sample appears in the Appendix of this study.

**Definition of Violence**

Violence was defined as the open and observable depiction of the use of physical force to harm one's self, others, or inanimate objects with or without the use of a weapon. Included in this definition was the depiction of comedic or slapstick acts of violence.

Just like Signorielli, Gerbner, and Morgan's (1995) definition of violence, this study's definition of violence allowed for the observation of clear-cut acts of physical violence. Physical action against any living thing is the basis for any conception of violence. Comic violence was included because making violence funny, such as the slapstick of "The Three Stooges," does not change the idea that viewers do not necessarily discount the violence that occurs in a comedy context (Signorielli, Gerbner, and Morgan, 1995, p.
Inanimate objects were included because it was possible that a person might take his/her anger out by punching a wall or throwing a glass instead of physically hurting another living being. This type of violence is still an act of physically harming something and viewers may not discount it just because it wasn't violence against a person.

Types of Violence Coded

The coding scheme focused on analyzing the frequency of violent acts on television. In order to measure the frequency of television violence, a basic unit similar to the one used by Signorielli, Gerbner, and Morgan (1995) and Mustonen and Pulkkinen (1997) was employed. The unit of analysis was a violent act and was used to promote the comparability and reliability of coding (Mustonen and Pulkkinen, 1997, p. 173). A violent act was defined as one or several violent actions involving the same character(s) in the same roles even if interrupted by a flashback, and when a new character or characters enter, it becomes another separate act (Mustonen and Pulkkinen, 1997; Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995). Coders were instructed to code as many violent acts as they witnessed for each program. The types of violent acts coded were based on a similar coding scheme used by Greenberg, et al. (1980). Violent acts could be coded as assault without an object, assault with an object, shooting, detention, extended fighting, and means unknown.

Assault Without An Object

Assault without an object was defined as an act of violence by a character who attacks a human, non-human, or him/herself with any body part, but without weapons or any other object. This type of violent act included punching, kicking, hitting, biting,
pinching, scratching, shoving, pushing, grabbing, or jerking. Assault without an object was coded as a 1.

**Assault With An Object**

Assault with an object was defined as an act of violence with the assistance of a weapon or object, which may be large or small, conventional or unconventional. Shooting a gun was not included here. This type of violent act included stabbing, burning, bombing, hitting with any object, or the use of any object in an aggressive fashion against a human, non-human, or him/herself. If a gun, or a type of weapon that can be fired, was used to hit a human, non-human, or self, and was not discharged, it was included here. Assault with an object was coded as a 2.

**Shooting**

Shooting was defined as the behavior of discharging any firearm against a person, non-human, or oneself. This type of violent act included the discharging of a pistol, rifle, machine gun, cannon, bazooka, etc. Shooting was coded as a 3.

**Detention**

Detention was defined as a violent act consisting of keeping someone or something, human or non-human, in captivity. Animals in circus cages, a zoo, or in a home (bird in a cage) were not coded. Grabbing someone’s arm was not considered detention, but was considered to be assault without an object. This type of violent act included kidnapping, incarcerating, tying up, binding, confining to a room, caging, surrounding, or any other means of restricting free movement that could not be considered assault. When a person was kidnapped and in the process of kidnapping the person was hit, grabbed, or jerked, then two acts were coded, (1) detention, and (2) assault with or without a weapon. When
a person was ordered to obey because a weapon was pointed at him or her, the act was not considered detention. Detention was coded as a 4.

**Extended Fighting**

Extended fighting was defined as inseparable or indistinguishable acts of violence, with or without an object or firearm, involving three or more characters. These were long series of such acts in which a character became a target and vice versa in rapid movement without interruption by a flashback or the appearance of a new character. An example of this was a barroom brawl. Extended fighting was coded as a 5.

**Means Unknown**

Means unknown was scored if the coder was unsure of whether or not a violent action fit into one of the aforementioned categories. Means unknown was coded as a 0.

**Program Information**

Program information was completed by the coder before viewing each taped program. Each videocassette cover contained all the information needed to complete the program information section.

**Program Name**

Coders checked the circle next to the program name that corresponded to the program they were about to watch. If a coder was going to view the rerun episode of “The Steve Harvey Show,” then the coder checked the circle next to “The Steve Harvey Show(R).” If a coder was going to view the new episode of “The Steve Harvey Show,” then the coder checked the circle next to “The Steve Harvey Show.”
Program Genre

The coder checked the circle next to “comedy” if the program about to be viewed was listed as a “comedy” on the videocassette cover. The coder checked the circle next to “drama” if the program about to be viewed was listed as a “drama” on the videocassette cover.

Program Length

The coder checked the circle next to “30 minutes” if the program, including commercials, ran 30 minutes. The coder checked the circle next to “1 hour” if the program, including commercials, ran one hour. Program length was given for each taped program on the videocassette cover. Coders did not code commercials.

Day of Broadcast

The coder checked the circle next to the day of the week (Sunday through Friday, The WB does not air programming on Saturday) the program was aired. The day of broadcast for each taped program was listed on the videocassette cover.

Hour of Broadcast

The coder checked the circle next to the time the program began (such as 8:00 p.m. or 9:00 p.m.). The hour of broadcast for each taped program was listed on the videocassette cover.

Violence Measures

The number of violent actions (NVA) was the total number of violent scenes within the entire program (Signorielli, Gerbner, and Morgan, 1995, p. 281). Prevalence (%P) was the percentage of programs in a particular sample containing any violence while rate (R)
expressed the frequency of violent actions in units of programming and in units of time (Signorielli, Gerbner, and Morgan, 1995, p. 281). The rate per program (R/P) was the number of violent actions divided by the total number of programs and the rate per hour (R/H) was the number of violent actions divided by the number of program hours in the sample (Signorielli, Gerbner, and Morgan, 1995, p. 281).
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Inter-coder Reliability

In order to test for inter-coder reliability, Morris, Fitz-Gibbon, and Lindheim (1987) suggest a second coder “perform at least a sample of the observations or the readings that the test requires” (p. 112). In order for the coding scheme to be considered reliable, inter-coder agreement must be at a minimum of .80 (80%) (Walizer & Wienir, 1978, p. 406). Although Morris, Fitz-Gibbon, and Lindheim (1987) did not give a specific sample number, it was assumed 20% (3 programs totaling 3 hours) of The WB program sample would be sufficient for testing inter-coder reliability.

In order to have a representative sample of programs for re-coding, the following procedure was used. Programs re-coded for inter-coder reliability were chosen randomly. Each WB program name was placed on a white, 3 x 5 notecard and all notecards were placed in a black bag. The black bag was then shaken in order to mix up the notecards. An assistant then reached into the bag and selected one notecard. This was repeated twice more. A separate coder, a University of Nevada, Las Vegas graduate assistant, then re-coded the three programs. Inter-coder agreement was calculated to be .857 (85.7%), which exceeded the .80 (80%) minimum agreement as indicated by Walizer and Wienir (1978).
Prevalence of Violence

As mentioned earlier, prevalence (%P) is the percentage of programs in a particular sample containing violence (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995; Wilson, et al., 1997, 1998, 1998a). Based on this definition of prevalence, 100% of all The WB primetime programs in the sample contained some amount of violence.

A total of 109 violent acts were coded in the sample of WB primetime programs. Almost 60% (65 acts) of the violent acts coded on The WB programs are some form of assault without an object. As stated earlier, assault without an object is defined as an act of violence by a character who attacks a human, non-human, or him/herself with any body part (but without weapons or any other object) and includes punching, kicking, hitting, biting, pinching, scratching, shoving, pushing, grabbing, or jerking. The next closest type of violent act was assault with an object (14.7%, 16 acts), followed by shooting (7.3%, 8 acts) and extended fighting (7.3%, 8 acts), and detention (5.5%, 6 acts) and means unknown (5.5%, 6 acts).

Table 1  Violent Acts Coded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violent Act</th>
<th>Total Coded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assault without an object</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault with an object</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended fighting</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shooting</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detention</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means Unknown</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The WB Network Overall

Using the formula to determine the overall network rate of violent acts per program (R/P), The WB primetime programs averaged 7.27 acts of violence per program for the entire WB primetime line-up. Using the formula to determine the overall network rate of violent acts per broadcast hour (R/H), The WB primetime programs averaged 8.39 acts of violence.

"Buffy the Vampire Slayer" accounted for the most acts of violence (37 acts, 33.95%), followed by "Charmed" (18 acts, 16.50%), and "Angel" (13 acts, 11.90%). The rest of The WB programs had eight or less acts of violence each.

Table 2 Violence Coded Per Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Total Acts</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Total Acts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Felicity</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charmed</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Jamie Foxx Show</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dawson's Creek</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Steve Harvey Show (R)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Steve Harvey Show</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jack &amp; Jill</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roswell</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7th Heaven</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Harbor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7th Heaven: Beginnings</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Your Love</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(R) denotes "rerun"
In order to see if the differences in the number of violent acts between programs was significant, the Kruskal-Wallis test, a non-parametric test, was employed because a non-normal distribution was assumed. Kruskal-Wallis was also used because the predictor variable, the program viewed, was nominal while the dependent variable, the total number of violent acts, was interval or ratio. According to the Kruskal-Wallis test ($\chi^2 = 14$, df = 14, $p = .450$) no significant difference was found.

**Day of Broadcast**

The WB’s Tuesday primetime line-up of “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” and “Angel” had the highest number of violent acts (50 acts, 45.87%) of all six nights The WB airs programming. The next closest night was The WB’s Friday primetime comedy line-up of “The Jamie Foxx Show,” two episodes of “The Steve Harvey Show,” and “For Your Love.” This primetime line-up had a total of 21 acts (19.26%) of violence. The WB’s Thursday primetime line-up of “Popular” and “Charmed” had one less act of violence (20 acts, 18.34%) than Friday’s comedy line-up. Sunday night’s line-up had a total of 9 acts (8.26%) of violence, Wednesday night’s line-up had a total of 7 acts (6.42%) of violence, and Monday night’s line-up had a total of 2 acts (1.83%) of violence.
Table 3  Violence Coded Per Broadcast Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broadcast Day</th>
<th>Total Acts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Heaven; 7th Heaven: Beginnings</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffy the Vampire Slayer; Angel</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawson’s Creek; Roswell</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular; Charmed</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Jamie Foxx Show; The Steve Harvey Show (R); The Steve Harvey Show; For Your Love</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Harbor; Felicity; Jack &amp; Jill</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to see if the differences in the number of violent acts aired between different broadcast days was significant, the Kruskal-Wallis test was employed. According to the Kruskal-Wallis test ($\chi^2 = 8.541$, df = 5, $p= .129$) no significant difference was found.

Genres Prevalence

Broken down by genre (rate per genre, R/G), The WB airs 11 dramas and 4 comedies in primetime. The dramas had a total of 88 acts of violence (80.77%) and each drama averaged 8 act of violence. The comedies had a total of 21 acts of violence (19.2%) and each comedy averaged 5.25 acts of violence. However, the difference in the number of violent acts between dramas and comedies aired in primetime on The WB is not significant ($t=.482$, df=13, $p=.638$). The level of significance is most likely due to the small sample of fifteen programs used for this study.
Hour of Broadcast

The WB primetime programs airing from 8:00p.m. to 9:00p.m. had a slightly higher prevalence (56 acts, 53.85%) than The WB primetime programs airing from 9:00p.m. to 10:00p.m. (48 acts, 46.15%). The 8:00p.m. to 9:00p.m. time period is known as the "family hour," an hour believed to have the most children watching television. However, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" accounts for the majority of violent acts (37 acts, 66%) aired on The WB from 8:00p.m. to 9:00p.m.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

The first research question asked if The WB network had a majority of primetime programming which yields a high amount of televised violence? This question is difficult to answer because a "high" or "low" amount of violence is arbitrary. There is no accepted value that draws the line for programs to be "high" in violence or "low" in violence.

The WB network had three primetime programs which reached double figures in the number of acts of violence. "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" had 37 acts of violence, "Charmed" had 18 acts of violence, and "Angel" had 13 acts of violence. This shows that only three WB primetime programs out of fifteen had more than ten acts of violence each. Of the fifteen WB primetime programs sampled, twelve of the programs had eight or less acts of violence each. Only one of the remaining twelve primetime programs had eight acts of violence, one primetime program had six acts of violence, two primetime programs had five acts of violence each, one primetime program had four acts of
violence, two primetime programs had three acts of violence each, two primetime programs had two acts of violence each, and three primetime programs had one act of violence each. Of the twelve WB primetime programs in the single digits for the number of violent acts, ten contained five or less acts of violence each and eight contained four or less violent acts each. If five acts of violence separated programs into “high” and “low” amounts of violence, then the majority of WB primetime programs (10 out of 15, 66.6%) would yield a “low” amount of violence. If four acts of violence separated programs into “high” and “low” amounts of violence, than The WB programs would be split almost half-and-half (8 low, 53%, and 7 high, 46%).

The safest way to determine if The WB has a majority of primetime programming yielding a high amount of televised violence is to see how many programs contained a lower amount of violence when compared to the network’s overall rate of violent acts per program (R/P). The rate of violent acts per program for all The WB primetime programs sampled averaged about 7.3 acts per program. Nine of the fifteen WB primetime programs sampled contained six or less acts of violence. Thus, it can be concluded that The WB network does not have a majority of primetime programming yielding a high amount of televised violence.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked if The WB primetime programming contained a higher average of violent acts per hour compared to the other broadcast networks? The WB’s overall rate of violent acts per programming hour averaged about 8 acts of violence.
The most recent study by Signorielli, Gerbner, and Morgan (1995) reported that The Cultural Indicators Project (CIP) found an average of 4-6 violent acts per hour in primetime on the broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC). Comparing this finding to The WB’s average of about 8 acts of violence per hour in primetime leads to the conclusion that The WB primetime programming does contain a higher average of violent incidents per hour than the broadcast networks.

Potter and Ware (1987) found an average of 8.1 violent acts per hour in primetime on the broadcast networks. The WB’s primetime programs averaged about 8 acts of violence per hour. The WB’s average number of violent acts per hour falls extremely close to the average number of violent acts per hour Potter and Ware found for the other broadcast networks. This leads to the conclusion that The WB primetime programs contain the same number of violent acts per hour as the other broadcast networks.

The National Coalition on Televised Violence (NCTV, 1983) reported the broadcast networks averaged 9.7 acts of violence per hour in primetime. The WB’s average of about 8 acts of violence per hour is lower than the average the NCTV reported. This leads to the conclusion that The WB has less violent acts per hour compared to the other broadcast networks.

Greenberg (1980) found the following number of violent acts per hour in primetime on the other broadcast networks: Year 1, 8.8 (8-9p.m.) and 15.6 (9-11pm); Year 2, 9.3 (8-9p.m.) and 14.4 (9-11p.m.); and Year 3, 11.9 (8-9p.m.) and 11.9 (9-11p.m.). The WB averages about 8 violent acts per program from 8-9p.m. and about 6.9 acts of violence per program from 9-10p.m. The WB’s average amount of violence from both 8-9p.m. and 9-11p.m. fall just below Greenberg’s average amount of violence from both 8-9p.m. and 9-
11 p.m. on the other broadcast networks. This leads to the conclusion that the WB's primetime programming does not contain a higher average of violent incidents per hour compared to the other broadcast networks.

Based on these four comparisons, further study is recommended to answer the question of The WB having a higher average number of violent acts per hour compared to the other broadcast networks.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Background & Goals of Study

The goal of this study was to determine if The WB had a majority of primetime programs which go against the network's dedication of presenting programs devoid of violence. Based on this goal, three research questions focused this study on finding The WB's number of violent acts per programming hour and compare this number to the other broadcast networks, determine if The WB aired a majority of primetime programming yielding a high amount of televised violence, and determine some of the possible effects of The WB's program violence.

Summary of Findings

The first finding of this study is all WB primetime programs contained some violence. None of the fifteen WB primetime programs coded contained zero violent acts. Three primetime programs reached double figures in the number of violent acts coded. “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” accounted for the most acts of violence, followed by “Charmed,” and “Angel.” The twelve remaining programs contained eight or less violent acts and five of these twelve primetime programs contained two or less acts of violence.

The second finding of this study is the most prevalent act of violence coded was
"assault without an object." The second most prevalent act was assault with an object.

The third thing this study found was that the majority of WB primetime programs contained a low amount of violence. Determining a "high" or "low" amount of violence was arbitrary. The safest way to determine a "high" or "low" amount of violence was to find how many programs contained a lower number of violent acts than the overall network's average of violent acts per program. Nine of the fifteen WB primetime programs coded contained a smaller number of violent acts than The WB's overall average. Thus, a majority of WB primetime programs were considered to contain a "low" amount of televised violence. However, depending on what study you compare this number to, The WB's overall average number of violent acts per program will be higher, lower, or comparable to the other broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC).

Finally, further study was recommended when comparing The WB's average number of violent acts per hour to the other broadcast networks' (ABC, CBS, FOX, & NBC) average number of violent acts per hour.

Network Dedication

As mentioned earlier, The WB is dedicated to presenting programming devoid of heavy sexual content, violence, and off-color language that appeals to the whole family, especially teens and young adults. This study found that The WB has a majority of primetime programs with a low amount of violence. Of the fifteen programs coded, nine (60%) contained a lower number of violent acts than The WB's overall average of 7.3 violent acts per program. This average may have been lower had the number of violent
acts coded for "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" been much less extraneous. The majority of
WB primetime programming containing a low number of violent acts supports The WB’s
program dedication. However, not all of the findings of this study support The WB’s
program dedication.

This study found that 100% (15 out of 15) of WB primetime programs contained some
amount of violence. This challenges The WB’s dedication to airing programs devoid of
violence. Another finding which challenges The WB’s program dedication is the number
of violent acts found on the network’s Tuesday night schedule. Combined, “Buffy the
Vampire Slayer” and “Angel” accounted for about 46% (50 acts of violence) of the
violent acts coded on the six nights The WB airs programming.

The WB’s three most violent programs were “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” (37 acts,
33.95%), “Charmed” (18 acts, 16.50%), and “Angel” (13 acts, 11.90%). Finding
“Charmed” to be the second highest violent program aired by The WB network in
primetime was very surprising. One possible reason for “Charmed” being so high in
violence was because the episode featured the “charmed” sisters trapped inside a haunted
castle that was trying to kill them. This particular episode seemed to contain more
violence than an average “Charmed” episode and could have skewed the results.

“Buffy the Vampire Slayer” and “Angel” being two of the most violent programs
aired by The WB in primetime was expected. The title alone suggests “Buffy” is going
to contain a large amount of violence. Sixteen of “Buffy’s” thirty-seven acts of violence
occurred during the opening title sequence of the show. Also, the “Buffy” episode coded
was considered a “special presentation,” however, it contained a similar amount of
violence an average “Buffy” episode contains.
“Angel” is a spin-off of “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” and was thus expected to be one of The WB’s most violent primetime programs. The most interesting thing about “Angel” was that it contained a third of the violent acts “Buffy” contained. One explanation for this could be that at the time of this study, “Angel” had just recently begun airing and the program was still trying to find its rhythm. Thus, some episodes of “Angel” have much more violence than others. A show like “Buffy,” which has been on television for a couple of years, has found its rhythm and airs a more consistent number of violent acts in each episode.

The rest of the programs met expectations for the number of violent acts each program contained. For example, “7th Heaven” and “7th Heaven: Beginnings” each contained one violent act which was usually two of the children fighting with each other.

This research project studied only one-third of The WB’s program dedication, presenting programming devoid of violence. Future research should study WB primetime programs to see if they meet the other two-thirds of The WB’s dedication to presenting programs devoid of heavy sexual content and off-color language.

Target Audience

As mentioned earlier, former WB network executive Jamie Kellner said The WB has “made a real effort to focus on teens first, (males) 18-34 second, and (women) 18-49 third.” Also mentioned earlier, two-thirds of The WB’s audience is under 35 and new WB entertainment president Susan Daniels’ long-term plan is to “make the network number one in the 18-34 demographic.” According to Hamilton (1998), young adults are much more likely to consume larger amounts of violent programming and rated by
demographics groups, the highest consumers of violent entertainment are men 18-34, followed by women 18-34, and men 35-49.

On Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday nights before an eight o’clock WB primetime program begins, The WB airs the following warning: “Tonight’s WB presentation is intended for our adult and teen viewers, and is not recommended for younger viewers.” This warning covers eight of the fifteen WB primetime programs, including “Buffy the Vampire Slayer,” “Angel,” “Dawson’s Creek,” “Roswell,” “Popular,” “Charmed,” “Felicity,” and “Jack and Jill.” Two of these four nights, Tuesday and Thursday, contain 70 of the 109 (64%) acts of violence coded. Together, the four nights the warning airs contains 76% (86 acts of violence out of 109) of the violence aired during primetime on The WB. It is not surprising that these more violent programs are “intended for adult and teen viewers” since, according to Hamilton (1998), they are the main consumers of televised violence. The most interesting thing about this is that this warning is only shown before programs airing during the so-called “family hour” at 8:00 p.m. The “family hour” is considered to be the time when the most children are watching television during primetime hours. However, many children are still watching television at 9:00 p.m., yet The WB does not air the warning before these programs. The WB airs more violence during the 8 p.m. family hour (53.85%) then during the 9:00 p.m. hour (46.15%).

There are two things The WB could do to easily change this. First, move “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” to 9:00 p.m. This would drastically cut the number of violent acts aired during the 8:00 p.m. “family hour” by The WB. Second, The WB should air its warning before those shows that air at 9:00 p.m. since many children are still watching television...
during that hour of primetime. These two changes would help The WB to better fit its concept of being a "family-friendly" network.

Potential Implications

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory contends television violence distorts our perceptions about the prevalence of real-world violence (Lometti, 1995, p. 292). Simply put, heavy viewers of television will view the world as a more fearful and violent place due to the high levels of violence shown on television, while light viewers of television will view their communities and neighborhoods as less violent (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995, p. 404). There are four key assumptions to cultivation theory: (1) television is a unique medium for communication; (2) television’s presence is pervasive; (3) most households have access to at least one television and its use exceeds that of other mass media; and (4) television’s accessibility is not limited by availability, cost, or the skills required to comprehend the broadcasted messages (Jeffres, 1997, p. 87). Cultivation occurs in two ways, mainstreaming and resonance.

Mainstreaming is where television’s messages dominate other sources of information about the world leading viewers, especially heavy viewers, to a view of reality that is more aligned with television’s messages about reality (Baran & Davis, 1995, p. 309). Resonance is where viewers receive a “double dose” of cultivation because what some people view on television more resembles the viewer’s own everyday life (Baran & Davis, 1995, p. 309).
Social Learning Theory

Another theory dealing with televised violence is social learning theory. This theory asserts that a person's responses are acquired either through direct experience or indirectly through the observation of models, such as those presented on television and other forms of mass media (Wilson, et al., 1997, p. 11). Through the observation of television and other mass media models, the observer comes to learn which behaviors are "appropriate" or which behaviors will later be rewarded and which will be punished (Wilson, et al., 1997, p. 11). According to Bandura (1971), social learning is accomplished through the use of media representations in one or all three of the following ways: observational learning, which suggests viewers can acquire new patterns of behavior through simple observation, inhibitory effects, which decrease the likelihood that observers will repeat certain behaviors because they witnessed a model being punished for exhibiting those behaviors, and disinhibitory effects, which increase the likelihood observers will repeat certain behaviors because they witnessed a model being rewarded for exhibiting those behaviors. Joy, Kimball, and Zabrack (1986) report past studies have documented a number of replications where a viewer will repeat something they have seen on television. Most recently, a child set his house on fire after viewing a similar situation on an episode of "Beavis and Butt-head," a student was run over by a car while lying in the middle of the road imitating a scene from the film, "The Program," and, as mentioned earlier, an episode of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" was pulled and aired at a later date because of its similarities to the Columbine High School tragedy.

Desensitization Theory

A third theory dealing with televised violence is the desensitization effect. The
desensitization effect explains that a reduction in emotional reactions occurs after frequent or repeated viewing of television violence (Van der Voort, 1986, p. 34). Basically, the more television violence viewed, the more insensitive to violence or the less emotionally touched by violence a television viewer becomes (Van der Voort, 1986, p. 34).

Catharsis Theory

Similar to desensitization, the catharsis theory of violence (sometimes called sublimation) asserts the viewing of violence on television is sufficient to purge one's desire to act aggressively (Briller, 1995, p. 43). Catharsis was originally conveyed by the philosopher Aristotle to explain the reaction of the audience to Greek tragedy (Baran & Davis, 1995; Jeffres, 1997). Baran and Davis (1995) review how catharsis suggests that television violence has social utility, thus providing young adults and teens with a harmless outlet for pent-up aggression and hostility. Seymour Feshbach (1961) demonstrated catharsis in an experimental setting by insulting college-aged men with “unwarranted and extremely critical remarks” and then having them watch either a neutral film or filmed aggression. The men then evaluated the experimenter. The men who had seen the neutral film were more aggressive in their attitudes than those who had seen the filmed aggression (see also Feshbach & Singe, 1971). Reith (1996) similarly found aggressive viewers seek out crime drama in order to control their aggression in a socially sanctioned direction.

Arguments Against Violence Theories

While there has been extensive research regarding violence theories, there are those who argue they have no validity. According to Monaco (1998), media effects research
assumes media exposure creates behavior, but "there is no direct correlation between what is seen on television and the number of crimes." Russell Neuman of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania concurs: "There is no evidence of consistent or significant differences in the abilities of different media to persuade, inform, or even instill emotional response in audience members" (Monaco, 1998, p. 95). Fowles (1986) explains that irrespective of violence levels, viewers believe their favorite action programming is low in violence and programs they do not like contain excessive amounts of violence. Furthermore, Silver (1994) lists the five myths that heighten the defense for media violence: (1) "I watched television violence when I was a child and I turned out o. k."; (2) "Violence in the media just reflects violence in society."; (3) "Decisions about viewing violence should be up to the parents."; (4) "Violence is a natural part of drama."; and (5) "Media producers should be free to create any images they want." Along with the last myth for defending media violence, Potter, et al. (1997) explain that producers of television entertainment programming defend portrayals of television violence with the claim that they have no obligation to present television violence realistically and their purpose is to entertain. Jeffres (1997) furthers this by explaining that if television producers presented violence realistically, ratings could significantly decrease because "viewers often seek the unexpected, the unusual, the atypical, the dramatic, the funny, or the emotional." However, as mentioned earlier, no one experiences the amount of violence depicted on television in real life (Silver, 1994, p. 43). Even reality-based programs over-represent violent crime, as well as the amount of crime that is solved or cleared by law enforcement personnel (Oliver, 1994, p. 189).
Potential WB Violence Implications

In the Las Vegas television market, The WB has the potential to be seen by more children, teens, and young adults than UPN because at the time of this study, The WB can be received by antenna and cable reception while UPN can only be received through antenna reception. Since The WB has the means to be seen by more television viewers, it has the potential to affect more television viewers than UPN.

The WB averages a higher number of violent acts during the 8:00 p.m. primetime “family hour” than the “safer” 9:00 primetime hour. In my opinion, this also gives The WB the potential to affect more viewers since it is believed that the largest number of children are watching television during the 8:00 p.m. primetime hour. A larger number of children are more open to being subject to the harmful violence theories of cultivation, social learning, and desensitization.

The main way cultivation can affect children and young adults who regularly view violent programs such as “Buffy” is through mainstreaming. This is where television’s messages dominate other sources of information about the world leading viewers to a view of reality more aligned with television’s messages about reality (Baran & Davis, 1995, p. 309). Huston, Watkins and Kunkel (1989) estimated that children watch between 11 and 28 hours of television a week, more than any other activity except sleep. More recently, Cantor and Nathanson (1997) found children view the heaviest amounts of violence between the ages of seven and nine. One explanation for the heavy viewing of television by children can be traced to parents who use the television as a babysitter or as a way of keeping children occupied and television supplies the programming for this, mainly cartoons. However, many cartoons contain violence as well. As of this study, the
most popular cartoon is “Pokemon,” which not only contains many acts of violence, but also happens to be aired by The WB. “Pokemon” airs Monday through Friday at 4:00 p.m. and on Sundays from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and at 10:00 a.m.

The heavy viewing of violence by children can also cause children to learn and imitate the violent behaviors they witness. In the early 1990s, the most popular children’s program “The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers,” was criticized for the amount of violence it contained. Many children, especially boys, were imitating the martial arts fights contained within the program and hurting each other on the playground.

Also in the early 1990s, some children began imitating the cartoon “Beavis and Butthead.” The two main characters constantly played with matches, set things on fire, and said fire was “cool.” In one incident, a child set his house on fire and said he did it because he was doing what “Beavis and Butthead” do.

More recently, teenage boys have begun imitating the moves of pro wrestlers. The ABC newsmagazine “20/20” aired a segment on “backyard wrestling” and the serious injuries being inflicted on those who participated. Teen fans of pro wrestling were using chairs, barbed wire, and tables in “wrestling matches” which took place in someone’s backyard. Participants in these matches were breaking bones, bleeding badly, and inflicting serious head and back injuries.

These incidents have led to the creation of television content ratings and warnings. To The WB’s credit, the network does air a warning to viewers before their more violent programs. However, it is possible that the content ratings and warnings will allow television networks to air more violent programs in the future. Network executives can defend the airing of more television violence by explaining that they are serving the
public interest through the airing of content ratings and warnings before a program airs.

Clearly, the incidents mentioned above support the existence of violence theories. Future television violence studies should not just be used to prove the existence of violence theories, but should also help in lowering the amount of violence on television.

How WB primetime program violence positively or negatively affects viewers of WB primetime programs depends on the individual viewer. Each individual has a different level of aggressiveness as part of their overall personality or being before he/she sits down to watch programs such as “Buffy the Vampire Slayer,” “Angel,” and “Charmed.” Thus, people viewing these programs on a weekly basis will not all be affected in the same way. This makes it extremely hard to forecast what types of effects violent WB primetime programs will have on viewers. Many viewers will claim that after viewing “Buffy,” “Angel,” or “Charmed,” he/she felt less aggressive than before the program began. This is a positive effect of violence called catharsis. The plethora of violent acts contained within programs such as “Buffy” and “Angel” can be very satisfying and act as a calming agent to individuals who may feel more aggressive before viewing one of these programs. Some viewers will feel the opposite of this. Violent acts contained within the more violent primetime programs aired by The WB could cause an adrenaline rush in certain viewers, leaving that individual feeling more aggressive after viewing these programs.

Younger viewers of the more violent WB primetime programs may re-enact the televised violent acts on the playground with their friends. Some will re-enact the martial arts fighting in shows like “Buffy” and “Angel,” while others may include weapons in their re-enactments. While guns are very rarely used on “Buffy,” “Angel,” and
“Charmed,” weapons such as wooden stakes, swords, and other sharp objects are used very often. Those who re-enact the fight scenes without weapons are less likely to seriously injure or kill somebody than those who include weapons in their re-enactments.

Some younger viewers may also be very frightened by the “demons” portrayed within the more violent WB primetime programs. “Demons” are usually disfigured, dark, and slimy, and are usually “the bad guys.” Children who view these programs and are easily scared by the “demons,” could view the world as a more scary place, even though these “demons” do not really exist, because television programs are their link to the world outside their neighborhood and school.

Finally, some viewers of the more violent programs aired by The WB may not feel any different or scared after viewing these programs. These viewers have been desensitized to violence and view violent programs in stride. Viewers affected by desensitization will most likely not be surprised by real-world violence because they have witnessed a plethora of violent acts while watching television.

The only way to determine what effects the violence aired by The WB will have on the individual viewer is to do research and studies geared toward observing and testing these viewers on their perceptions and behavior before and after viewing violent WB programs such as “Buffy the Vampire Slayer,” “Angel,” and “Charmed.” Only then will researchers be able to determine if one effect of violence is more prominent than the others.
Limitations

The first limitations of this study, and all television violence studies, are the lack of a single, commonly accepted definition of violence and the use of the violent act, instead of the violent scene for coding. The lack of a commonly accepted definition of violence limits result comparisons to those studies which employ a similar definition of violence. The use of the violent act instead of the violent scene further limits result comparisons to previous studies which employ a similar definition of violence and use the violent act for coding purposes.

As explained earlier, coding for the violent act likely results in a higher count of violence than coding for the larger units of the violent scene, incident, or sequence. Due to this study's violence definition and use of the violent act for coding, result comparisons could not be made to the most recent television violence study, "The National Television Violence Study Vol. 1-3." Instead, result comparisons had to be made to many television violence studies done in the 1980s and to only one study from 1995. However, because the Cultural Indicators Project and the National Television Violence Studies have found a consistent amount of violence on television over a number of years, result comparisons to the studies done in the 1980s should hold up.

The definition of violence used for this study included the use of physical force to harm inanimate objects (car, window, wall, table, etc.). The different acts of violence defined in the coding scheme also included harm to inanimate objects. As mentioned earlier, inanimate objects were included because it was possible that a person might take his/her anger out by punching a wall or throwing a glass instead of physically hurting another living being. It could be argued that harming an inanimate object is really just
anger as opposed to violence. Anger may eventually lead to violence, but not always. This brings up the idea of coding violence based on the context of the act. Friendly slaps on the back and tripping and falling through a table are examples of acts that could be coded as violent when the context of the act is not taken into consideration. Also, the context of acts could be addressed at the end of a program, such as a moral. This would also help to exclude acts being coded as violent. Not taking the context of an act into consideration could explain why a majority of acts (65 acts, 60%) were coded as “assault without an object.” Not taking the context of the act into consideration also brings up a question of validity. If coding without considering context causes acts to be coded as violent when they should not be, then the study is not measuring what it is supposed to be measuring.

Another limitation of this study is the sample and sampling period used. Studies which code violence for a particular program or set of programs for an entire television season will get a better overall idea of the amount of violence a particular program airs. This study was limited to one episode each of a particular set of programs airing during just one week of a particular television season. While special episodes were avoided as best as possible, the episode of “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” was billed by The WB as a “special presentation,” even though the episode aired at the same time and ran the same length of time as every other episode of “Buffy.” A sampling of a specific program with every episode aired of that program coded for violence over an entire television season would yield more reliable results.
Suggestions for Future Research

The first suggestion for future research is to construct a single, commonly accepted definition of violence and decide whether the violent act, scene, incident or sequence is the best way to code for violence. A commonly accepted definition and way of coding for violence will allow television violence studies to be more consistent and greatly more comparable in the future.

Another suggestion is to code each episode of every primetime television program aired on a particular network over an entire television season in order to get a more consistent and reliable average number of violent acts for a particular program. Coding a single episode of a particular program could result in an extraneous number of violent acts coded, especially if the episode coded was aired during a “sweeps” period or billed as a “special presentation” or “special event.” These “sweeps” or “special” episodes are commonly considered to contain more violence in order to attract more viewers.

Finally, future television violence research needs to include The WB and UPN programming in their samples. These networks are quickly building large audiences consisting of mostly teens and young adults—the same viewers parent groups are trying to protect from viewing large amounts of violence. Studying the amount of violence a particular program and/or network airs is a significant tool parents and their children can use to make informed decisions on what programs they want to view and what programs they want to protect themselves from.
Conclusions

A majority of WB primetime programs contain a lower amount of violence than the WB network’s overall average. This leads to the conclusion that The WB primetime programs uphold the network’s dedication to presenting programs devoid of heavy amounts of violence. The only program found to pose a real threat to The WB’s network dedication is “Buffy the Vampire Slayer.” Future research should include The WB network in their samples for three reasons: (1) there are six broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC, UPN, & WB) as of January 1995, not four (ABC, CBS, FOX, & NBC); (2) The WB network targets teens and young adults, the same people child advocacy groups want to protect from viewing heavy amounts of televised violence; and (3) to continue monitoring WB primetime programs to see if The WB’s network dedication is being upheld.
APPENDIX

WB PRIMETIME PROGRAM SCHEDULE AND CODING INSTRUMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>7:00 p.m.</th>
<th>7:30 p.m.</th>
<th>8:00 p.m.</th>
<th>8:30 p.m.</th>
<th>9:00 p.m.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7th Heaven</td>
<td>7th Heaven: Beginnings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tue.</td>
<td>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</td>
<td>Angel</td>
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<td>Wed.</td>
<td>Dawson’s Creek</td>
<td>Roswell</td>
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<td>Thu.</td>
<td>Popular (r)</td>
<td>Charmed (r)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri.</td>
<td>The Jamie Foxx Show (r)</td>
<td>The Steve Harvey Show (r)</td>
<td>The Steve Harvey Show</td>
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<td>For Your Love</td>
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<td>Sat.</td>
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<td>Sun.</td>
<td>Safe Harbor (r)</td>
<td>Felicity</td>
<td>Jack &amp; Jill</td>
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(r) denotes repeat
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violence Coding Chart</th>
<th>PROGRAM INFORMATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0=means unknown</td>
<td>1. Program Name (check only one) (R)=repeat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1=assault w/o object</td>
<td>0 7th Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2=assault w/ object</td>
<td>0 7th Heaven: Beginnings</td>
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<tr>
<td>3=shooting</td>
<td>0 The Jamie Foxx Show</td>
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<td>4=detention</td>
<td>0 Angel</td>
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<td>5=extended fighting</td>
<td>0 Popular</td>
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<tr>
<th>V. Act #</th>
<th>Time CodeAct Type</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. Program Genre 3. Program Length

| 0 drama | 0 30 minutes |
| 0 comedy | 0 1 hour |

4. Day of Broadcast 5. Hour of Broadcast

| 0 Monday | 0 7:00pm |
| 0 Tuesday | 0 7:30pm |
| 0 Wednesday | 0 8:00pm |
| 0 Thursday | 0 8:30pm |
| 0 Friday | 0 9:00pm |
| 0 Sunday | 0 9:30pm |
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