

MERCHANDIZING MAYHEM

Violence in Popular Entertainment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rising tide of violence in popular entertainment has raised widespread concern over its effects on American culture and America's children. Increasingly the problem extends across the spectrum of popular entertainment, regardless of the format in which it is packaged. This led us to undertake the first large-scale and systematic study to examine violent imagery across four different entertainment formats – television series, made-for-TV movies, feature films, and music videos.

We examined 248 episodes from prime time fictional television series that ran during the 1998-99 season on all broadcast and cable networks and in first-run syndication; 189 music videos that ran on MTV during this time period; the season's 50 highest rated made-for-television movies; and 50 top-grossing films that were released in theaters during 1998. In formats ranging from three-minute videos to two-hour movies, the 573 programs that we catalogued contained 8,350 scenes of violence. The majority of these (4,204) involved serious or life-threatening acts such as murder, rape, kidnapping, or assault with a weapon.

The most violent broadcast network series was CBS's "Walker, Texas Ranger," which averaged 82 scenes of serious violence per episode. On basic cable the leader was TNT's "LA Heat," with 46 serious incidents; on premium cable HBO's "Oz" led with 54 serious scenes. But five of the ten most violent series were in first-run syndication, led by "Mortal Kombat" with 47 scenes of serious violence. The season's most violent TV movie was TNT's "Dollar for the Dead," which featured 87 scenes of serious violence.

The most violent music video was “Body Movin’,” which jammed 21 scenes of violence, 13 of them serious, into a roughly three minute running time. The most violent feature film, the critically acclaimed “Saving Private Ryan,” contained 262 separate scenes of serious violence. (More typical of high-violence films were potboilers like “Ronin” and “Blade,” with 92 such scenes, and “Lethal Weapon 4,” with 91.)

After taking into account differences in program length and commercial interruptions, however, the different varieties of popular culture produced similar rates of violence. This was particularly true for the most graphic and brutal material. Theatrical movies, music videos, and television series (cable and broadcast alike) produced almost identical rates of serious violence – about one scene every four minutes.

In every format, the bulk of all violent material – especially serious violence – was concentrated in relatively few shows. The ten most violent movies, television series, and music videos averaged nearly one scene of serious violence per minute of running time. Nonetheless, half of the ten most violent movies carried PG-13 ratings, and a majority of the ten most violent television series were rated TV-PG.

We also examined the way violence was shown and the role it played in the story that was being told. Most acts of violence were not presented as causing either physical or emotional harm. In the world of popular entertainment, bullets frequently miss their mark, heroes bounce back from beatings without a scratch, and few victims of violence are emotionally traumatized by the experience. Further,

violence was often carried out by good guys who acted out of laudable motives. Finally, scripts almost never carried explicit criticism of the use of violence.

Thus, violence is a major feature of popular entertainment. It is often portrayed in a positive light, as a laudable, necessary, or relatively harmless way of solving problems. And it is heavily concentrated in programming aimed at young people, such as music videos and action-adventure movies and television series. Yet many of the most violent programs carry PG ratings that give parents little hint of the mayhem they contain. In short, the entertainment industry continues to feed an appetite for violence that it has spent decades creating.

INTRODUCTION

The explosion of violence and sleaze in popular entertainment has raised widespread concern over its effects on American culture in general and America's children in particular. Over 80 percent of Americans believe TV violence is harmful, a figure that has been steadily rising.¹ In fact, polls show that majorities of Americans under age 30 (as well as their elders) hold the popular culture responsible for promoting violent crime, teen sex, and drug abuse.²

These concerns are shared by some of the country's most respected scholars and professional organizations. The American Psychological Association estimates that the average twelve-year-old has seen 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence on network television.³ Over three decades of research, summarized in reports by the National Institutes of Mental Health, have documented the harmful effects of such violent entertainment.⁴ This body of research shows that media violence not only increases aggression among young viewers, it breeds a callousness toward violence directed at others. In response to such findings, the American Medical Association passed a resolution declaring that TV violence "threatens the health and welfare of young Americans."⁵

Traditionally, the greatest concern has been directed toward television entertainment. But the recent wave of high school shootings has raised questions about the role of such diverse entertainment formats as movies, music videos, and computer games. Increasingly the problem appears to extend across the spectrum of popular entertainment, regardless of the format in which it is packaged. This perception led us to undertake the first large-scale and systematic study to examine violent imagery in several major entertainment formats simultaneously. Indeed, we looked not only at violence but

also at the use of sexual imagery and graphic language. This is the first of two reports which, taken together, will measure the location, content, and narrative context of the material that President Clinton decried as “the banalization of sex and violence in the popular culture.”

SAMPLE SELECTION METHODS

The sampling strategy of this study was dictated by our intention to analyze and compare four distinct genres of entertainment programming: First-run broadcast and cable television series (including both network and syndicated fare); made-for-TV movies on broadcast and cable networks; recently released theatrical movies; and music videos. For each genre, we chose a sampling approach that would provide the greatest representation of programming viewed by the largest audience. Each genre required a slightly different selection method to accomplish that goal.

For broadcast and cable television series, we sampled two “constructed weeks” of programming. A constructed week consists of one episode from every series that appears on the prime time schedule over the course of a single week. The individual episodes are drawn from the entire schedule throughout the season, so that the sample is not skewed by accidents of timing. These weeks were constructed so that one represented the fall schedule and the other the spring schedule of programs. To make the sample as inclusive as possible, we also sampled any mid-season replacement series that was televised. In this way, as several unsuccessful fall shows were canceled, we were able to examine their replacements. Because of this sampling structure, some shows appear only once in the sample, while successful shows that lasted throughout the entire season appear twice.

The world of made-for-TV movies offered a different challenge. Since these movies are one-time events, they do not have an ongoing audience base. We wanted to examine movies that best represented what viewers chose to watch. For broadcast network television movies, we relied on published Nielsen ratings data to choose the top 25 movies in terms of audience size. We further restricted our pool to made-for-TV movies copyrighted in 1998 or 1999 to make certain that we were looking at new movies.⁶

For made-for-cable movies, an analogous approach was used. Since ratings data are not readily available for individual cable movies, we based our selections on the overall ratings for each cable network. It is also difficult to compare individual cable programs from different networks, since each network has a different universe of viewers. Since many cable networks offered only one or two original movies that were copyrighted in 1998 or 1999 and were shown during the sample period, we were able to examine a very large percentage of cable offerings. Our final selection included four movies from TNT, five from the USA Network, one from TBS, three from Lifetime, two from A&E, three from the Family Channel, one from Sci-Fi, four from HBO and two from Showtime.

TNT, USA, TBS, and Lifetime are rated first through fourth respectively in audience size, among cable networks that show their own made-for-TV movies. A&E ranks ninth, the Family Channel tenth, and Sci-Fi twelfth. HBO and Showtime are the leading subscriber-based cable channels that produce their own movies. We selected five movies from USA even though it was in second place because it offered a larger group of movies than did TNT, and the rating difference was very small. TBS only aired one original movie as did the Sci-Fi channel.

We examined a combined total of 50 broadcast and cable movies to match the quantity of theatrical movies that were included in the study. In this way longer-format material from television and theaters was evenly balanced in the sample. In selecting theatrical films, we chose those with the highest domestic box office receipts and a release date during 1998. We relied on taping from premium and pay-per-view cable channels as well as videotape rentals to obtain copies of each film. Some films were not yet available from any of those sources by the end of our sampling period. To replace those features we continued down the list of box office rankings. The final sample represents 50 of the top 72 grossing films released during 1998.

The selection of music videos was somewhat easier to conduct than the samples of movies. To obtain our sample of music videos, we taped four randomly selected 24-hour periods from MTV – the cable channel with the largest audience for music videos. This method insures that the videos we examined were those most widely seen, although the method does affect the representation of certain types of music. For instance, it includes no country music videos. Within these limits, the selection process was straightforward. We examined only the music videos aired during the four days, excluding news programs, talk shows, fictional series, commercials and the general chit chat between videos. Our final analysis is based on 189 unique videos that aired a total of 495 times.

All told, then, this study is based on analysis of 573 separate popular culture products representing four distinct entertainment genres – prime time television series, television movies, feature films, and popular music. In each of these we examined every act of violence, the character who was responsible for it and the meaning it was assigned within the broader context of the narrative.

DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE

In our analysis of programming, we utilized a definition of violence that is similar to those used in most scholarly studies of violence. We applied the same definition to all programming. Violence was defined as: Any deliberate act of physical force or use of a weapon in an attempt to achieve a goal, further a cause, stop the action of another, act out an angry impulse, defend oneself from attack, secure material reward or merely to intimidate others. Only violence that was shown on-screen or whose immediate aftermath was seen on-screen was coded; discussions or descriptions of violence were not coded.

Also excluded from our definition of violence were unintentional acts of physical contact, such as people bumping into one another in a dark room by accident. Violence that is a routine part of contact sports, such as tackling in football, punches in a boxing match or checking in a hockey game, were not included. Any fights or other violent acts that are not part of the game were counted as violence. Acts of nature such as hurricanes, floods and earthquakes were not coded as violence unless they were somehow under human control. Animals reacting violently were not considered violence, unless a human being was using the animal as a weapon (e.g. guard dogs or police dogs). Verbal threats or emotional abuse that did not rely on physical force were excluded from our counting of violent scenes. Threats that were backed up with a weapon were coded in our study.

The violence included in entertainment programming runs the gamut from the petty to the severe. Overall, the majority of the violence we observed could be described as serious. By serious we refer to acts of violence that would reasonably be expected to cause significant injury or death to the victim

(even if this is not evident in the scene). This includes gunplay, assaults with other weapons, and severe beatings, as well as suicides and sexual assaults. The violence classified as minor includes such behaviors as pushing and dragging, slapping, or throwing a punch.

The basic unit of analysis in our study was the “scene.” We defined a scene as a group of interconnected actions and dialogue that take place in the same location, in the same time frame, between a similar group of characters. A scene may consist of one act or multiple acts of violence. If there were multiple violent acts as in a beating or a brawl, then the individual blows were grouped together and coded as one scene that depicts an assault. If there was any break in the action, change in locale, time frame, or the characters involved, then the material following the change was considered a new scene.

By counting violent scenes instead of individual blows we were better able to treat violence in its full context. There is a real difference in the appearance of violence when four punches are thrown in four separate scenes scattered throughout an hour-long drama than when those four punches are brought together into one fight scene. Coding on a scene basis allows us to distinguish different levels of severity of violence. In this report we refer interchangeably to scenes, acts, incidents or instances of violence. All such terms are based on this definition.

In the course of storytelling, lesser violence often leads to more severe forms of violence. For instance, a fist fight takes on a more violent nature if one of the participants pulls a knife. The weapons race can escalate further if the other participant produces a gun and shoots his attacker. To accommodate escalations in the types of violence, we divided scenes when each new level of violence

occurred. Thus, the above example would be recorded as three scenes – one depicting an unarmed assault, a second depicting an assault with a weapon and a third depicting gunplay. In order to accommodate a variety of entertainment formats, we examined the ways in which violence was presented. We differentiated between violence whose occurrence was shown on-screen from that which was only seen in the aftermath (e.g., a body being removed after a shooting, or a close-up of bullet holes in a blood-spattered wall).

Our study examined not only the amount of violence, but the context in which it occurs. Without assessing that context it is impossible to know if the violence was carried out in an effort to preach against violence or to celebrate it. For this reason, we examined each violent scene to determine the narrative context in which it appeared. Specifically, each time violence occurred, we determined whether it was sanctioned, what physical or emotional effects it produced, who was responsible for it, and what motivated the perpetrator.

An important part of the overall depiction of violence involves the consequences of violent acts. For each scene of violence, we looked for any information (either visual or verbal) about the physical consequences, which ranged from none at all to multiple fatalities. We also looked to see whether violence was connected to emotional or psychological consequences for either the victim or other characters, such as onlookers or friends and relatives. We also analyzed each incidence to determine whether the script contained overt judgments of violence.

Our contextual analysis dealt with the sources as well as the consequences of violence. We examined every scene of violence to determine whether the perpetrator's motives could be ascertained through

dialogue and other cues. We coded the demographic characteristics and plot functions of these characters, with special attention to whether they were portrayed positively or negatively. Finally, we included scenes dealing with the immediate aftermath of violent events, even though the violence may not have been seen on-camera. This variation in coding allows us to more fully record violence that is indicated by images of bodies, blood-spattered crime scenes, etc., with characters discussing the violence that occurred out of camera range.

In the following sections we examine the portrayal of violence in each of four distinct entertainment genres – prime-time television series, made-for-TV movies, films released in theaters, and music videos. After considering each format separately, we compare and contrast the use of violent materials in all four.

TELEVISION SERIES

AMOUNT OF VIOLENCE

We analyzed two “constructed weeks” of prime-time fictional programming from randomly selected dates during the 1998-1999 season. Our sample included all series on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, UPN and the WB networks, nationally available first-run syndicated broadcast series, and original series shown on major cable stations aimed at a general audience. The seven basic cable channels sampled were the Fox Family Channel, Lifetime, the Sci-Fi Channel, TNT, USA, MTV and PAX. We also examined two premium cable stations, HBO and Showtime, which are expanding their original series programming. In addition to original series, we looked at made-for-TV movies shown on all channels during the dates selected.

We identified a total of 3,381 acts of violence in 284 series episodes at all outlets. Of these, over half (1,754) could be described as serious violence, according to FBI definitions. An overview of these findings appears in Table 1. This trend held across most outlets, making it nearly impossible for channel surfers to avoid the worst kinds of violence. Fully 80 percent of the violence we found occurred on broadcast TV. The two premium cable channels accounted for 13 percent, with the remainder (8 percent) appearing on the seven basic cable channels. Among all outlets, the 24 nationally syndicated series topped the list, with a whopping 1,500 violent acts. Over half of these (770) involved serious violence. CBS, which ranked second on the list, echoed this pattern with 635 violent acts. Of those, over half (385) were classified as serious. This result proved surprising, since CBS aims its programs at an older audience than the other major networks. In addition, CBS had nearly five times as much violence as the much-criticized Fox network, which aired only 137 violent

TABLE 1 AMOUNT OF VIOLENCE IN TELEVISION SERIES			
	<u>TOTAL</u>		
	<u>ALL VIOLENCE</u>	<u>SERIOUS VIOLENCE</u>	<u>NUMBER OF EPISODES</u>
ABC	112	41	35
CBS	635	385	39
NBC	206	89	42
FOX	137	60	30
UPN	196	114	26
WB	198	73	30
S/T NETWORKS	1484	762	202
Syndicated	1500	770	43
S/T BROADCAST	2984	1532	245
Family	7	1	2
Lifetime	5	0	6
Sci-Fi	64	34	6
TNT	73	46	1
USA	112	60	8
MTV	7	2	2
PAX	4	0	2
S/T BASIC CABLE	272	143	27
HBO	92	64	3
Showtime	33	15	9
S/T PREMIUM CABLE	125	79	12
S/T ALL CABLE	397	222	39
ALL OUTLETS	3381	1754	284

acts. NBC scored 206 violent acts (89 serious), while ABC was the least violent of the big four broadcast networks, with only 112 total and 41 serious acts of violence. The smaller networks – UPN and WB – fell in the middle ranges of the broadcast TV group. While these two fledgling networks contained a similar amount of overall violence, UPN aired significantly more serious acts (114 vs 73).

Cable series generated notably less violence overall than did their broadcast counterparts. In fact, the most violent cable network, USA, had the same number of acts as the least violent broadcast network (ABC). There was significant variation among the cable outlets. HBO was the second most violent cable channel, with a total of 92 violent incidents, two-thirds of them serious. In contrast, its competitor Showtime showed only 33 violent acts, slightly under half of them (15) serious. Sci-Fi and TNT fell between these two. Predictably, the most family-oriented channels – PAX, Fox Family, and Lifetime – had the lowest frequency of violence and few serious acts. Surprisingly, the youth-oriented MTV mirrored this pattern, with only seven violent acts. Of these just two were serious.

RATE OF VIOLENCE

The difficulty in assessing TV violence according to the sheer number of acts portrayed stems from the widely varying number of series broadcast on the respective networks, particularly when cable is included in the mix. A more nuanced approach requires looking beyond the total number of violent acts to their relative frequency per episode shown. By calculating rates of violence per episode, we control for the different number of episodes that appeared on each outlet. The results of this procedure appear in Table 2.

TABLE 2
RATE OF VIOLENCE IN TELEVISION SERIES

	<u>RATE PER EPISODE</u>	
	<u>ALL</u>	<u>SERIOUS</u>
ABC	3	1
CBS	16	10
NBC	5	5
FOX	4	2
UPN	8	4
WB	7	2
S/T NETWORKS	7	4
Syndicated	35	18
S/T BROADCAST	12	6
Family	3	1
Lifetime	1	0
Sci-Fi	11	6
TNT	73	46
USA	14	8
MTV	3	1
PAX	2	0
S/T BASIC CABLE	10	5
HBO	31	21
Showtime	4	2
S/T PREMIUM CABLE	10	7
S/T ALL CABLE	10	6
ALL OUTLETS	12	6

One of the most important findings was the consistency of violence across major outlet groupings. The average rate across all outlets was 12 acts of violence per episode, half of which were serious. This pattern varied little across such major categories as the six broadcast networks, the seven basic cable channels, and the two premium cable channels. However, sizeable differences emerged among specific outlets, which generally coincided with the absolute amounts of violence we coded for each of those outlets. (One exception to this pattern was TNT. Our sample included only one episode of TNT's sole original series, making it difficult to gauge the representativeness of this total for either the series or the entire network.)

Most importantly, we isolated one program source as exceptionally violent – first-run syndication series. Syndicated series topped the lists for both the highest amount of absolute violence and the highest rate of violence. These 43 episodes averaged 37 acts of violence per episode, the majority (19) of them serious. The number of syndicated series in the sample (24) was roughly equivalent to that of a single broadcast network. Yet the amount of overall and serious violence in syndicated series exceeded that of all six broadcast networks combined. Thus, the typical syndicated series episode was five times as violent as the average network episode: Syndicated series averaged 35 scenes of violence per episode, 18 of them serious, compared to eight scenes, four of them serious, on network series.

There were differences among the individual networks as well. The most violent of the major broadcast networks, CBS, far outdistanced its network competitors when measured according to rate per episode. With 16 violent acts per episode, 10 of them serious, its violence rate was over three times higher than that of the other major networks. (As we note below, however, CBS's total was

somewhat skewed by the inclusion of an unusually violent episode of one series in the sample.) This was the only instance in the study in which a clearly atypical episode of a series produced anomalous results.

Among cable channels, HBO, which had a fraction of the absolute violence shown on CBS, had a much higher violence rate – nearly twice that of CBS (31 versus 16 per episode). In addition, most of the violence on HBO was serious (21 acts). The gap between HBO and Showtime was even greater when measured by rate per episode. In absolute terms, HBO had nearly three times the violence of Showtime (92 acts versus 33). When compared by rate, HBO was nearly eight times more violent than Showtime (31 acts versus four acts per episode). The gap in serious violence was even higher – 21 acts per HBO episode versus only two on Showtime.

Among basic cable channels, apart from the previously noted finding for TNT, Sci-Fi and USA remained the most violent overall, but measuring rates per episode significantly narrowed the gap between the two. While USA showed nearly twice as much violence in absolute terms (112 versus 64 acts), USA's rate of violence was only slightly higher than Sci-Fi's (14 versus 11 acts per episode), owing to its more extensive list of original programming.

In sum, this pattern of results shows that overall rates of violence are similar across particular programming venues, but a small number of outlets account for much of the violence on any particular venue. In an age of niche marketing for television programmers, violent series have carved out identifiable slots on the broadcast, basic cable, and premium cable dials. Most of the violent series on broadcast television have migrated from the networks to first-run syndication. Among the six

broadcast networks, only CBS continues to feature much violent programming. As cable networks begin to develop their own original series, HBO has positioned itself as the premium channel of choice for TV violence. Among basic cable networks, TNT has staked its claim with one extremely violent series, while the USA and Sci-Fi networks show signs of developing the same territory.

THE MOST VIOLENT SHOWS

In addition to our overall comparative analysis of violence on different channels, we also examined the rates of violence on specific shows. Table 3 lists the 20 most violent shows. The primacy of syndicated shows is immediately evident from this listing. Among the 20 most violent shows, 12 were syndicated. Among the few major network entries was “Walker, Texas Ranger” (CBS), which took the top spot for overall violence with a rate of 112 acts per show, over two-thirds of them (82) serious. Almost every episode of this long-running Chuck Norris cop show includes several martial arts fight scenes and some gunplay. The fall season’s first episode was especially violent. It opened with a combination gun battle/fight scene that ran approximately ten minutes, resulting in several characters being shot and beaten. This episode also featured a montage of violent scenes, including police raids to catch the bad guys, as well as another major gun battle.

There was a substantial dropoff to the second most violent show, “Oz” (HBO), which contained 76 violent acts per episode. But an even higher proportion – nearly three-quarters – of the violent acts were serious (54 out of 76). This critically acclaimed prison series provides a perfect setting for plot developments involving physical brutality. “Oz” presents not only frequent but also extreme violence, including a heavily publicized and very graphic crucifixion scene. Following closely behind in third

place was VIP (SYN), with 74 violent acts per episode, about half of them (38) serious. This cartoonish action series with a soft porn flavor features [the endowed] Pamela Lee Anderson as part of a Hollywood bodyguard agency. Here the cartoonish violence goes beyond guns to grenades, bombs and even rocket launchers. This new syndicated series proved so popular that its ratings surpassed Ms. Anderson's previous hit "Baywatch," which typically dominates the ratings among first-run syndicated fiction.

Another syndicated series, "Mortal Kombat," took fourth place with 72 violent acts per episode, fully two-thirds of them (47) serious. This low budget martial arts extravaganza was drawn from the notoriously violent video game and movie of the same title. The television version provides a low budget vehicle for fights, injuries, and deaths of various sorts. In fifth place was another cable offering, "LA Heat" (TNT), which offered a similar pattern of overall and serious violence. This show had 73 violent acts in the one episode we viewed, 46 of them (63 percent) serious. This nonstop montage of gunplay and fistfights contains wisecracks and ribbing reminiscent of the "Lethal Weapon" movies.

Descending to number six on the list, the swashbuckling "New Adventures of Robin Hood" (SYN) had an overall violence rate of 66 acts per episode, just over half of them (36) serious. Teen heroine "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" (WB) took seventh place with 59 acts per episode, but just a third (20) were serious. Among the top 20 shows, "Buffy" had one of the lowest rates of serious violence. This hit series, inspired by a movie of the same name, follows high school student Buffy Summers and her friends as they battle vampires and other evil denizens of their town. Martial arts fights usually culminate with a stake through the heart of a vampire (one of the rare acts of violence that is nearly

TABLE 3
MOST VIOLENT TV SERIES*

<u>SERIES</u>	<u>VIOLENCE</u>		
	<u>OUTLET</u>	<u>ALL</u>	<u>SERIOUS</u>
1. Walker, Texas Ranger	CBS	112	82
2. Oz	HBO	76	54
3. VIP	SYN	74	38
4. Mortal Kombat: Conquest	SYN	72	47
5. LA Heat	TNT	73	46
6. New Adventures of Robin Hood	SYN	66	36
7. Buffy the Vampire Slayer	WB	59	20
8. Viper	SYN	54	29
9. 7 Days	UPN	51	33
10. Team Knight Rider	SYN	50	19
11. Crow: Stairway to Heaven	SYN	49	43
11. Xena: Warrior Princess	SYN	49	33
13. Nightman	SYN	45	20
14. Hercules: Legendary Journeys	SYN	42	23
15. Diagnosis Murder	CBS	41	28
16. Special Ops Force	SYN	39	15
17. Martial Law	CBS	36	14
18. Air America	SYN	35	23
19. Acapulco H.E.A.T.	SYN	35	14
20. Stargate SG1	SYN	30	18

* Average number of violent acts per episode

unique to a particular show). This show's violence is laced with typical teenage angst and activities, along with the gallows humor of youths condemned to face unearthly opponents as a part of their daily lives.

"Viper" (SYN), which was eighth on the list, had a similar volume of violence with 54 acts per episode, 29 of them serious, in an equally unrealistic setting. The star of this drama is a high-tech Dodge Viper sports car and the secret team of cops who use its exotic weapons and armor to catch bad guys. On this show good guys and evildoers alike routinely engage in fights and gunplay. "7 Days" (UPN) was the ninth most violent show with a rate of 51 violent acts, about two-thirds of them (33) serious. This sci-fi thriller focuses on a top secret government project that uses alien technology (recovered from the famous Roswell, New Mexico crash of UFO lore) to send an agent seven days back in time to change history. The premier episode of this show involved a terrorist bombing of the White House and the release of nerve gas that killed many civilians.

A cluster of three syndicated shows displaying similar patterns of violence took the number ten, 11, and 12 spots on the list. "Team Knight Rider" had an overall rate of 50 acts of violence, with 38 percent (19) serious. "Xena: Warrior Princess" and "Crow: Stairway to Heaven" each had overall rates of 49 acts per show, but "Crow" had a higher rate of serious violence (43 versus 33). "Team Knight Rider," an update of the successful 1980's series, is another action show built around a high-tech car. But while the original series had only one car, the current series has five, each with an individual personality suited to its respective driver. The protagonists ostensibly work for the government, but they operate like vigilantes. In this series violence runs the gamut from basic fights to laser blasts and bombs.

"Xena," originally a spinoff of "Hercules" (see below), follows the princess Xena around the ancient world as she tries to atone for a past in which she gleefully decimated cities and enslaved whole populations. The plot turns in part on tension between Xena and her sidekick Gabrielle, an avowed pacifist. This device allows the show to explore the contexts and consequences of violence. Along with another female heroine, Buffy, Xena had the lowest rates of serious violence on the top20 list.

"Crow" was yet another martial arts fantasy series. The premise of the show is that series star Eric Drebin and his young girlfriend were killed by robbers. But Eric was resurrected by a crow, an image loosely connected to the spiritual beliefs of Native Americans. Invincible to all lethal weapons, Eric protects the innocent and rights wrongs in order to earn his way into heaven and be united with his true love. Although the violence in this series is usually portrayed as well-deserved, it often triggers some regret on Eric's part.

"Nightman," another syndicated sci-fi drama, was number 13 on the list with 45 violent acts per episode, 20 of them serious. The show's focus is a jazz saxophone player, Johnny Domino, who develops the ability to read people's thoughts after he is struck by lightning. Teaming up with a designer of secret weapons systems, Domino flies with the use of an anti-gravity belt. With martial arts skills, body armor and the ability to become invisible with a stealth cloak, Domino fights evil amid computer-generated special effects.

"Hercules: the Legendary Journeys" (SYN) took the number 14 spot with 42 violent acts per episode, just over half of them (23) serious. This leather clad, sword-brandishing hero protects the oppressed and downtrodden from cruel gods or evil humans. The character of Xena originally appeared on this

show, but proved popular enough to spin off her own eponymous vehicle. Most of the violence involves choreographed fist fights, which rarely seem to have any lasting physical or emotional impact. Since Hercules is immortal, he has little to fear from attack. As a result, he rarely finds it necessary to kill his aggressors.

At number 15, "Diagnosis Murder" (CBS) was one of the few major network shows on our top 20 list, with 41 acts of violence per episode. As the show's title implies, most of these acts (two-thirds) on this medical drama were serious. However, this series, which stars Dick van Dyke as a crime-solving physician, has more in common with "Murder She Wrote" than with "Walker, Texas Ranger" or "Moral Kombat." Alone among our top 20 shows, this series is probably misplaced among those typically thought of as violent. Our count was skewed by an unusually violent episode involving the bombing of a hospital, which aired as the series premiere. Presumably, this plot device was designed to broaden its usual audience for the coming season.

Back in the mold of shows that regularly rely on violence was the syndicated "Special Ops Force." With 39 violent acts, 15 of them serious, this show placed sixteenth on our list. The series follows a group of special operations soldiers as they shoot their way through missions. The talent level is reflected by the presence of basketball's aging enfant terrible, Dennis Rodman, as a member of the team. The show's bravado-laden introductory voice-over attests to its reliance on violent action sequences, "When the job's too tough for the Navy SEALs and too dangerous for the Green Berets and far too risky for anyone else...they call in Special Ops Force." "Martial Law" (CBS), at number 17, had 36 violent acts per show, just under half (14) of them serious. This counterpart of "Walker, Texas Ranger" stars a Chinese cop, Sammo Law, who now works in Los Angeles. He and his

colleagues rely largely on their martial arts skills, but the bad guys show no reluctance to use guns.

“Air America” (SYN) took the number 18 spot with a rate of 35 acts of violence, about two-thirds of them (23) serious. Based on the Mel Gibson movie, two freewheeling pilots work as CIA operatives in Latin America and cater to shady clients who want to avoid established airlines and local authorities. “Acapulco H.E.A.T.” (SYN), number 19, had the same rate of overall violence (35 acts per episode), but a lower rate of serious violence (40 percent). This is a standard secret agent drama with gun battles and fistfights.

Rounding out the top 20 list was “Stargate SG1” (SYN), with 30 acts of violence per episode, 60 percent of them (18) serious. This sci-fi show, also based on a successful movie, features a U.S. military team’s adventures in outer space. They use an alien device called a Stargate to travel to far off planets in search of allies to combat the Go’auld, a technologically advanced monarchy known for its cruelty and oppression. Periodic battles with the Go’auld show that justified violence is an unavoidable part of the job.

This listing of current shows illustrates the degree to which fantasy settings involving futuristic science fiction or mythological sword and sorcery scenarios have replaced the more prosaic westerns and private eye shoot-em-ups from a previous generation of action-adventure series. Notably absent from the top 20 are some critically acclaimed police shows, such as “Homicide” and “N.Y.P.D. Blue,” which have attracted occasional criticism for their graphic portrayals of violence. Such shows portray violence realistically but infrequently, in contrast to the comic book battles of entries such as “VIP” or “Xena,” the comic gore of “Buffy,” or the choreographed martial arts displays of “Walker” and

“Mortal Kombat.” Such differences point to the importance of context in assessing TV violence.

CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE

Violence in popular culture is a behavior whose meaning to audiences is embedded in the context of plot and characterization within a larger narrative. Media violence is more than the representation of a physical act. Its impact on viewers can vary greatly according to how it is presented and judged by the storyline and the characters affected by it. To more fully capture these crucial dimensions of violent acts, we coded the visual context of each violent incident, its moral dimension, and the consequences it had for those involved. The results appear in Table 4.

First, we noted whether violence actually took place on-screen. In some cases, the audience saw only the aftermath of the violence, such as injured people or property damage. As it turns out, however, the activity and impact of violence was rarely left to the imaginations of viewers. Nearly all acts of violence (98 percent) were shown directly to the viewers of both broadcast and cable series, with serious violence only slightly less likely to be beamed into America’s living rooms. Eighty-two percent of serious acts of violence on the broadcast channels were shown on-screen, as were two-thirds (67 percent) of all cable violence. Thus cable viewers were nearly twice as likely to be spared a direct visual encounter with serious violence (33 percent versus 18 percent).

Another key contextual aspect of violence is whether violence is seen to inflict physical harm on people or damage to property. (An example of violence without negative consequences occurs when a gun is fired, but misses its target.) We found that despite the high volume of televised violence,

TABLE 4
CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE IN TV SERIES (%)

	<u>BROADCAST</u> - 1		<u>CABLE</u> - 2	
	<u>ALL</u>	<u>SERIOUS ONLY</u>	<u>ALL</u>	<u>SERIOUS ONLY</u>
PRESENTATION				
Shown	98	82	98	67
Aftermath	2	18	2	33
PHYSICAL HARM				
None	75	59	68	54
Fatal Injury	7	14	4	8
Other Injury	11	18	20	32
Property Damage	7	8	8	6
PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM				
None	90	84	87	84
Victim	8	8	11	10
Others	2	8	2	6
JUDGMENT				
None	87	75	89	75
Right	1	1	0	0
Wrong	12	24	11	25
MOTIVES*				
Positive 81	45	47	44	43
Negative 22	55	53	56	57
PERPETRATOR*				
Good Guy	46	44	36	29
Bad Guy	41	48	41	53
Mix/Neutral	13	8	23	18

* Where Known

viewers rarely see it causing adverse effects. No physical harm was shown three quarters (75 percent) of the time violence occurred on broadcast series and over two-thirds (68 percent) of the time it occurred on cable programs. A mere 7 percent of violent acts on broadcast shows and 4 percent on cable resulted in fatalities. Property damage occurred in the absence of harm to people only 7 percent of the time in broadcast series and 8 percent in their cable counterparts.

Serious violence was more likely to have tangible consequences, but a majority of even these more brutal acts had no direct harmful results. Fifty-nine percent of acts of serious violence on broadcast series and 54 percent on cable lacked negative consequences. Physical injuries appeared about one-third (32 percent) of the time on broadcast series and 40 percent of the time on cable. Property damage was again a relative rarity, linked to only 8 percent of serious violent acts on broadcast channels and 6 percent on cable.

We noted separately whether violence caused its victim or other characters to suffer negative emotional consequences such as fear, mental anguish or grief. The result: Psychological harm was even more infrequent than physical harm. Only 10 percent of all violent acts on broadcast series and 13 percent of those on cable series inflicted some type of mental distress on either the victim or some other character (e.g., a grieving friend or relative). Thus, fully 90 percent of violent acts on broadcast and 87 percent on cable proved psychologically painless. This pattern also held for serious violent acts, in contrast to the more frequent depictions of physical harm. Only 16 percent of serious violence resulted in mental distress on broadcast shows, and even fewer (13 percent) did so on cable shows. For all outlets combined, only one out of seven serious acts of violence (14 percent) inflicted psychological damage.

Perhaps the most important contextual aspect of entertainment violence is whether and how it is judged within the context of the story, e.g., in statements by characters or depictions of legal consequences. Within this moral dimension, violence can be condemned, condoned or simply shown to occur with no judgment. Once again, we found that a significant majority of violent acts took place in a moral vacuum. Just as they rarely had direct physical or psychological consequences, most were not judged as right or wrong. No judgments were made 87 percent of all violence on broadcast stations and 89 percent on cable. While serious acts of violence were condemned somewhat more frequently, three quarters still lacked any such negative evaluations in both broadcast and cable series. Thus, while violence was almost never explicitly condoned, it was also as rarely condemned. In popular entertainment violence usually just happens, without moral judgments taking place.

A major reason for the relative absence of condemnation is that violent acts are often committed for good reason by the good guys. We coded the motives for violent acts whenever they were known. Positive motives included self-defense, the defense of others, and acts committed as part of a legitimate job, such as law enforcement or national defense. Among the most frequent negative motives were greed, anger, hatred, revenge, and bigotry. The result? We found that violence was committed for positive purposes nearly as often as it was directed to negative ends. Fully 45 percent of acts that were carried out for a discernable reason were presented as positively motivated. Even more striking, that proportion rose to 47 percent among acts of serious violence.

If violence on television often serves a positive purpose, it is because good people often have good reason to be violent. In fact, when the perpetrator could be identified, it turned out to be a good guy more often than a bad guy. Forty-five percent of the people who behaved violently were positive

characters, compared to 41 percent who were negative characters. The remaining 14 percent were portrayed either in neutral terms or as exhibiting a mixture of positive and negative traits. Even in cases where serious violence was involved, the percentages shifted only slightly, and not enough to put bad guys in the majority. A plurality of 49 percent of serious violence was carried out by bad guys, compared to 42 percent by good guys and 9 percent by mixed or neutral characters.

In sum, violence in prime time series was frequent and surprisingly constant across categories of broadcast, basic and premium cable networks. However, it was concentrated in relatively few shows, particularly those shown in first-run syndication and series shown on CBS, TNT, USA, and HBO. Cable and broadcast networks were also similar in terms of the narrative context in which they portrayed violent behavior. Violence was presented relatively rarely as causing either physical or emotional harm; it was even more rarely criticized; and it was often carried out by positive characters acting out of good motives.

BROADCAST AND CABLE MOVIES

The 50 movies on broadcast and cable channels we coded had a total of 865 violent acts, just over half of them (485) serious, as Table 5 indicates. Thus, these movies contained an average of 17 violent acts, 10 of them serious. These rates are about half again as high as those we recorded for prime time series episodes, which averaged 12 violent acts, six of them serious. However, this difference is in keeping with the longer running time of movies. They typically fill a two-hour time slot, as opposed to the half-hour or hourly slot allocated to a weekly series. (Our sample included one three-part and five two-part movies.)

Unlike series television, however, cable and broadcast movies differed sharply in the amount of violence they portrayed. Although the sample was evenly divided between the two venues, made-for-cable movies accounted for two-thirds of all violence and three quarters of the serious violence in TV movies. That is, the typical cable movie contained about twice as much violence and three times as much serious violence as the typical broadcast movie. Across all 50 movies, the average cable offering outstripped its broadcast counterpart in serious violence by nearly a three to one margin (14 scenes vs. five).

THE MOST VIOLENT TV MOVIES

As we found with episodic television, the violence was heavily concentrated, with the ten most violent movies accounting for the bulk of all violence. The top ten totaled 527 acts or 61 percent of all violence. This proportion was even higher for the most serious violence – 350 acts or nearly three quarters (72 percent) of those in all 50 movies. Not surprisingly, in light of our overall findings, all

but two of the ten most violent movies appeared on cable. TNT and USA each placed two on the list, as did NBC, the only broadcast network represented.

“Dollar for the Dead” (TNT) topped this list with 104 violent acts, 84 percent (87) serious. This movie alone accounted for one in four violent incidents for all the top ten movies and about a quarter of the most violent acts. This revenge Western contains all the standard features of the genre – gold, greed and gun fights. The unnamed cowboy hero kills the man who murdered his family. He is then forced to flee from the hired “regulators” sent by the dead man’s father, a wealthy landowner. Along the way, the hero joins up with a ex-Confederate soldier who is hunting buried treasure while trying to dodge the Union mercenaries who want his map. The duo shoot their way across the West until they arrive at a Mexican village, where they help the oppressed townsfolk battle soldiers. The movie climaxes with a major shootout involving the “regulators,” Mexican soldiers, the Union mercenaries, our hero and his partner.

“Killers in the House” (USA) took second place on the list with 65 violent acts, 58 percent (38) of them serious. The title summarizes the film –a gang of ruthless bank robbers terrorizes a family. Replete with gunplay and menacing threats, the most graphic violence involved the use of bear traps as defensive weapons. In a grisly sequence, the hero sets a series of traps that catch the ringleader’s legs, throwing him headfirst into another trap.

“Purgatory” (TNT) ranked third on the list, and its violence was also predominantly serious –85 percent (35) of its total 41 acts. This rivaled the rate of serious violence for the top-rated “Dollar for the Dead.” The unusual “Purgatory” combined two genres – fantasy and Western. The plot revolves

TABLE 5
TEN MOST VIOLENT TV MOVIES

	<u>OUTLET</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>SERIOUS</u>
1. Dollar For Dead	TNT	104	87
2. Killers in the House	USA	65	38
3. Purgatory	TNT	41	35
4. Fatal Error	TBS	37	26
5. Noah's Ark*	NBC	36	17
6. Horatio Hornblower	A&E	34	19
7. Invasion Earth*	Sci-fi	30	22
8. Jack Bull	HBO	29	18
9. Baby Monitor: Sound of Fear	USA	28	14
10. Naked City: Justice	SHO	27	14

* Multi-part movie; violence totals prorated to reflect average totals for a single segment.
However, cumulative "top ten" totals include all segments.

an imaginary town called Refuge, where the dead who led tarnished but not evil lives (ranging from gamblers to people who committed justifiable homicide) get one last chance to go to heaven. Good deeds are not required, merely the absence of offenses for a period of ten years. However, there is a catch – suffering a second death will bring damnation.

When the town is threatened by a band of marauders, five people decide to forego heaven so the town's other residents can attain it. The band of five were led into this gambit by one of the marauders who, after a change of heart, fights against his former comrades. The band succeeds after a lengthy gun battle, but their leader is killed and becomes a resident of Refuge. The residents who engaged in violence are pardoned and taken into heaven. But the two marauders who suffered their second death as a result of the battle are cast into Hell.

The sci-fi suspense film “Fatal Error” (TBS) ranked fourth on the list with 37 violent acts, 70 percent of them (20) serious. Most of the violence in this high-tech nightmare involves a deadly computer virus that infects humans and not only kills them, but turns them into skeletons. The plot features a stock hero – the rule-bending doctor who bucks the hospital administration. He discovers the virus when seven lawyers who are participating in a teleconference are all killed.

Our hero teams up with a female scientist and they begin to unravel the mystery. They discover that the virus was created by a mad software designer seeking revenge on humanity because his genius goes unrecognized. He is employed by another stock bad guy – a powerful businessman who is launching a worldwide television system with 500 channels. There is some gunplay in the movie, but most of the violence involves the indirect murder of people infected with the virus.

The computer-generated “Noah’s Ark” (NBC) took fifth place with 36 violent acts, 17 serious. (These are prorated figures reflecting the average total for a single two-hour episode of this two-part movie.) This was the only movie among the top ten in which only a minority of violent acts were serious ones. However, it should be noted that the artistic liberties producers acknowledged added fictitious violent scenes to the original biblical tale. Not satisfied with the violence of the great flood that destroyed the earth, “Noah’s” creators surpassed God’s wrath.

This movie begins with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, which occurs in the Bible long after Noah’s time. The additional drama bloodied the movie with battle scenes and the beheading of the leader of Gomorrah. Another fictitious scene that increased the violence quotient found Noah and his sons fighting idolaters who tried to sacrifice a virgin to the god Molay, in hopes of getting rain. When Noah calls for divine intervention, God rips the roof off the pagan temple and sends lightning bolts to strike its priests deaf, mute and blind. In yet another manufactured scene, the ark encounters a fleet of ships manned by the flood’s last survivors. They are led by Lot, a co-opted biblical character who faced his own share of adversaries, though Noah was not among them.

Opponents battle for control of the ark with axes, clubs and even frying pans, but the ark’s heroic animals eventually repel the attackers. They retaliate in turn by launching flaming balls from catapults. As Noah’s family fights the fires, God sends a waterspout to destroy the last evil vestiges of humanity. This movie undermines Hollywood’s defense against its critics that classics like the Bible and Shakespeare are filled with violence. In this case, at least, Hollywood consciously chose to “improve” the original by adding blood and gore.

The A&E swashbuckler “Horatio Hornblower” was number six with 34 acts of violence, just over half of them (19) serious. It is set in the eighteenth century, when England was at war with France and, for a time, Spain as well. One of four original Hornblower movies commissioned by A&E, this segment contained numerous violent sequences involving both naval combat and personal disputes. They range from the hijacking of a French ship by Horatio and his crew, to his capture by enemy sailors and a failed prison break that leads to several deaths. In the tradition of historical swashbucklers, the violence is portrayed realistically but not as graphically as in many other movies in the sample.

“Invasion: Earth,” (Sci-fi) was the only three-part movie in the sample. It placed seventh on the list with an average of 30 acts of violence, about three quarters of them (22) serious, per episode. In this British-made movie, humans futilely use their guns on alien invaders who are armed with exotic and effective weapons. In one of the more bizarre instances of violence, the aliens turn a man into a biological factory for a disease, seizing control of his mind, then having him contaminate a nearby reservoir by slitting his arm from the wrist to the elbow and throwing himself into the water. The poisoned water sickens the townspeople. When the humans realize the invaders are unbeatable, they decide to destroy all life wherever the aliens make a “factory.” It seems that death is preferable to enslavement. The movie ends with a hydrogen bomb destroying a town in the northern England.

Another Western, “Jack Bull” (HBO), ranked eighth with 29 violent acts, about three in five (62 percent) of them serious. Set in the Wyoming territory on the eve of statehood, it follows the exploits of a rancher who becomes a populist hero. There is a typical conflict with a land baron who exploits the hero and the sympathetically portrayed small ranchers. The bad guy is also responsible for the

death of a Native American ranch hand. Unable to obtain justice, the hero decides to “make his own law.” After he wages a terrorist-style violence campaign, the government of the Wyoming territory is forced to grant him amnesty for his deeds. But the plot veers away from the typical happy ending, when the hero’s amnesty is revoked and he is hanged in a prolonged and graphic sequence.

Ninth on the list was “Baby Monitor: Sound of Fear” (USA). It had 28 violent acts, half (14) serious. The melodramatic love-triangle plot involves Ann, a nanny employed by Matt and Carol Whitson to care for their son Peter. When Carol discovers the affair between Ann and her husband, she hires thugs to murder her rival. Ann hears the murder of her upstairs neighbor over a baby monitor (hence the movie’s title). In order to pay the killers, Carol has instructed them to call Matt and demand a ransom for Peter. While they await the ransom, the killers realize they have killed the wrong woman and pursue Ann. The plot is laced with dead bodies, an attempted rape, shootings and Ann’s self-defense against her attackers. She runs one over with a car and pushes another off a balcony. In a “Fatal Attraction” style twist, Carol tries to kill Ann herself, but the police arrive in time to save her.

Rounding out the top ten list with 27 acts of violence, 14 of them serious, was “Naked City: Justice With a Bullet.” This police drama carries the name of an old television series, which was based on an even older movie. They popularized a gritty, quasi-documentary approach to urban crime stories. This Showtime version bears little resemblance to the low-key style of its predecessors. This movie manages to include gunfights, an attempted suicide, a hanging and a mob beating. When the movie begins, we find a city terrified by a “serial killer” who targets only persons with drunken driving offenses. The killer is committing his crimes while wearing a rubber mask that makes him look like another man who is wrongly accused of the murders. The latter is sufficiently evil to taunt the

investigator to the point of shooting the latter's girlfriend. He also arranges the apparent suicide of the wrongly accused suspect before he is finally brought to justice.

CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE

We also examined the major contextual dimensions of violence for the television movies, comparing the results to those for series episodes. The findings appear in Table 6. Following the same general pattern we encountered with prime time series, the bulk of violent acts were shown to viewers – 79 percent of all violence and 67 percent of the most serious acts. Both proportions were slightly lower than those we found in the sample of series episodes. Conversely, only one in five acts were presented only in terms of their aftermath, as were one-third of the most serious incidents.

The consequences of these acts differed according to the level of violence. Half of all serious acts of violence inflicted physical harm – 19 percent resulted in one or more fatalities and 31 percent produced lesser injuries. Overall, only 31 percent of all violent acts brought physical harm to people. Conversely, 60 percent of all violence had no physical consequences, as did 42 percent of serious acts. The residual cases – just under 10 percent for each category – produced only property damage. Thus, most violence on TV movies did not hurt anyone, and this was true for nearly half of all acts of serious violence. Nonetheless, violence proved more consequential in this genre of television entertainment than it did in series episodes. Although less than one-third of all violence resulted in injury or death, that was true for less than one-fifth of the violence in broadcast and cable series. Similarly, the 50 percent injury/fatality rate for movies substantially surpassed the 33 percent rate we recorded in series episodes.

Similarly, although few victims of violence suffered emotional harm in TV movies, the figures were higher than we found in series. Only 22 percent of overall violence and 27 percent of serious violence had adverse mental consequences for their targets. The suffering of other characters accounted for an additional 14 percent of cases for each type of violence. Thus, 36 percent of all violence and 41 percent of serious acts did emotional damage to someone. Characters in series episodes were even less likely to be emotionally affected – only one out of ten acts of violence left psychological scars, as did one in six acts of serious violence.

As in cable and broadcast series, few violent acts in TV movies received any kind of moral appraisal. Fully 89 percent of serious acts and 91 percent of all violence occurred without any judgment. These numbers were even higher than those for series episodes. The few remaining cases for any type of violence were uniformly deemed to be wrong. TV movies also echoed series television in their divided portrayals of perpetrators. Neither genre drew a definitive link between violence and evil. Although bad guys in movies committed a bare majority (51 percent) of serious violence, there was a split decision for violent acts overall – 43 percent were done by good guys and 43 percent by bad guys. The remaining 14 percent of all violence and 7 percent of serious violence was committed by mixed or neutral characters. The results were almost identical in series episodes.

Considering the relatively high proportion of violence committed by good guys, it is not surprising to find that similarly high proportions of violent acts were committed for several reasons. The motivation for violence was positive (i.e. defensive or in the line of duty) for just under two-fifths (37 percent) of all acts and also (36 percent) the most serious acts. These proportions are only slightly lower than those we found on series television.

TABLE 6
CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE IN TV MOVIES (%)

	<u>BROADCAST</u>		<u>CABLE</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>	
	<u>ALL</u>	<u>SERIOUS</u>	<u>ALL</u>	<u>SERIOUS</u>	<u>ALL</u>	<u>SERIOUS</u>
PRESENTATION						
Shown	84	67	77	67	79	67
Aftermath	16	33	23	33	21	33
PHYSICAL HARM						
None	69	47	54	41	60	42
Fatal Injury	8	18	14	20	12	19
Other Injury	12	22	23	33	19	31
Property Damage	11	13	9	6	9	8
PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM						
None	80	80	57	52	64	59
Victims	10	7	27	33	22	27
Others	10	13	16	15	14	14
JUDGMENT						
None	79	75	95	93	91	89
Right	1	0	0	0	–	0
Wrong	20	25	5	7	9	11
MOTIVES*						
Positive	35	33	38	39	37	38
Negative	65	67	62	61	63	62
PERPETRATOR*						
Good Guy	45	37	42	43	43	42
Bad Guy	32	49	47	52	43	51
Mix/Neutral	23	13	11	5	14	7

* where known

In sum, we found substantial amounts of violence in television movies, which was heavily concentrated in relatively few features. The rate of violence per movie was higher than in a typical prime time series episode, but the difference can be attributed to the longer running time of movies. The context of violence in television movies was also similar to that of prime time series, although some of the contextual elements were not quite as pronounced. In both single and multiple episode formats, television violence tends to be shown on-screen; it usually does not cause either physical or emotional harm; it is frequently carried out by positive characters and for good reason; and it is rarely condemned in the script.

MOVIES (THEATRICAL RELEASES)

We coded all violence in 50 of the top-grossing theatrical films released in 1998. A moviegoer who managed to watch all 50 of the year's most successful films would have viewed a total of 2,319 violent incidents, about three-fifths (1,377) of them serious acts of violence. The profile of violence in theatrical films can be seen in Table 7. Overall, moviegoers saw an average of 46 violent acts per film, 28 of them serious. We found that 10 of those 50 movies accounted for over half (55 percent, $n=1,280$) of all the violence we coded, and almost two-thirds (63 percent, $n=865$) of the serious violent acts shown on the big screen. Therefore, we focused our analysis on this group and constructed a "top ten" list based not on financial earnings, but the quantity of violence.

Heading this highly diverse group of the year's most violent films was the award-winning World War II drama "Saving Private Ryan." This movie not only far outpaced any other in the overall amount of violence, it showed 30 percent of all serious incidents we coded. Notably, almost all the violent acts in this movie were serious ones (262 out of 275). No other film had such a high proportion of serious violent acts (95 percent). This reflects the film's emphasis on capturing the brutality of combat on D-Day and afterwards.

Specifically, the film follows a squad of soldiers on a dangerous mission to find Private James Ryan, whose three older brothers were killed in combat, and to bring him back safely home. The story seeks out the human decency that survives the madness of war. The first 20 minutes of the movie give a vivid illustration of the horrors of war by placing the viewer on a Normandy beachhead as the Allies storm it. The gunfire and explosions come fast and furious in this sequence as well as in the battle that concludes the film. The frequent and graphic violence in this critically acclaimed film is

TABLE 7
TEN MOST VIOLENT MOVIES*
(THEATRICAL RELEASES)

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>SERIOUS</u>
1. Saving Private Ryan	275	262
2. The Mask of Zorro	147	82
3. Lethal Weapon 4	134	91
4. Blade	130	92
5. Rush Hour	124	56
6. Ronin	119	92
7. The Negotiator	99	26
8. U.S. Marshals	97	61
9. Man in the Iron Mask	79	47
10. Small Soldiers	76	56

* Based on sample of 50 top-grossing films released in theaters during 1998.

a reminder that the portrayal of violent behavior can serve artistic and moral purposes.

There was a significant drop-off in terms of both violence and aesthetics to the swashbuckler “The Mask of Zorro,” which took the number two spot on the list. “Zorro” contained a total of 147 violent acts, barely more than half the total from “Saving Private Ryan.” “Zorro” also had a substantially lower percentage of serious acts (56 percent), despite the many sword fights it contained. In this successor to the 1950s TV series (and several previous movies), an aging Don Diego de la Vega recruits former bandit Alejandro Murieta to become his replacement as the legendary hero, Zorro. With his signature mask, sword, whip and black stallion, the new Zorro sets out to stop a Spanish tyrant from buying California, bring justice to the oppressed populace and win the heart of Don Diego’s daughter.

The amount of violence fell incrementally throughout the rest of the list, putting “Private Ryan” in a class by itself. The cop thriller “Lethal Weapon 4” was number three with 134 violent acts, 91 of them (68 percent) serious. The fourth installment of this popular action series features the further adventures of two policemen whose approach to law enforcement tends to leave ruined property, dead villains and angry bystanders in their wake. In previous outings this duo has battled adversaries ranging from a drug smuggling ring of mercenaries to a group of South African diplomats involved in counterfeiting. This time out, they investigate a string of crimes that are linked to an immigrant smuggling ring from China. The violent scenes are over-the-top with numerous car chases, heavily choreographed fight sequences, explosions that result in the destruction of property, and a fast and furious gun-fight.

The sci-fi action adventure “Blade” was just behind “Lethal Weapon” with 130 violent acts, 92 of them serious. In this fantasy setting, the eponymous Blade is an immortal warrior who possesses superhuman strength. When he finds out about a plot to annihilate the human race so that vampires can take over the Earth, Blade uses his powers to stop them. The film is filled with bloody violent sequences, especially in the opening scenes in which Blade crashes a vampire party and proceeds to exterminate the guests in a brutal and calculated fashion. Blade’s chief opponent, a vampire who views humans as a source of nourishment, also contributes some grisly moments.

The number five entry was “Rush Hour,” which featured 124 violent acts. Thus, its overall profile was nearly as high as “Blade’s,” but it contained far fewer scenes (56) involving serious violence. “Rush Hour” is the latest string of Jackie Chan martial arts vehicles. Jackie Chan is one of the top box office draws throughout Asia, and his highly stylized and hyper-kinetic action films have a very recognizable style. These movies are not sequels, but rather cookie-cutter production line movies. This one follows Inspector Lee, a Hong Kong detective who confiscates stolen Chinese artifacts from a mysterious crime lord. He seeks revenge by kidnaping the young daughter of the Chinese consul while she is in America. Lee is teamed up with a loud-mouthed FBI agent and former LA cop. They must overcome their cultural differences in order to rescue the girl. The plot is an excuse to string together some well-choreographed martial art fight scenes mixed with gunplay and over-the-top stunts, mostly performed by Jackie Chan.

Sixth on the list was the espionage thriller “Ronin” with 119 violent acts, most (92) of them serious. This movie’s conceit is that the end of the Cold War has brought the rise of a group of mercenaries whose skills in surveillance, reconnaissance and attack are for sale to the highest bidder. Five of these

operatives, known as Ronin, are brought to Paris by a mysterious client to steal a top secret briefcase. What appears to be a straightforward assignment turns into a deadly pursuit as other underworld organizations vie for the same briefcase. This movie is a traditional thriller with abundant car chases on narrow and winding roads and in dark tunnels filled with other motorists. There are also explosions and gunfights that take place during the group's many attempts to get the briefcase.

The police hostage drama "The Negotiator" contained nearly as much violence as "Ronin" (99 acts), but the least amount of serious violence (26 acts) on the top ten list. This film's premise is that the hotshot negotiator of a police department discovers a conspiracy against him by fellow officers. Convicted on trumped up charges and desperate to clear his name, he fights back by taking over part of the police department building and forcing a hostage negotiation. This film features over-the-top action sequences, most of which occur during the protagonist's stint as a hostage taker, where helicopters with snipers are out to get him from all directions.

"U.S. Marshals" finished just behind "The Negotiator" with 97 violent acts, but it contained over twice as much serious violence (61 acts). This loosely based sequel to "The Fugitive" follows the earlier film's formula of pitting a determined U.S. Marshal against an accused criminal who turns out to be innocent. This time the quarry is a former Navy Seal and government operative. He was framed by government officials on charges of stealing and selling government secrets to the Chinese government and murdering two FBI agents in the process. He must prove his innocence before he is caught and sent to prison. Of course, this requires many violent sequences ranging from fistfights to gunplay.

The latest version of the classic Alexandre Dumas novel, “Man in the Iron Mask,” was number nine on the list with 79 violent acts, 47 of them serious. The movie retells the story of a tyrannical king and his imprisoned twin brother. Convinced that things must change for the good of France, the aging Musketeers (late of “The Three Musketeers”) come together to free the imprisoned brother and switch him with his despotic twin. The swashbuckling action scenes include gunplay as well as swordplay.

“Small Soldiers” rounded out the top ten list. This computer-generated tale of toys run amok was decidedly not written by Alexandre Dumas. But it contained a similar amount of violence—76 violent acts, 56 of them serious. The unlikely protagonists are the Commando Elite—toy action figures with attitude generated by a sophisticated Defense Department computer chip. After arriving at stores to be sold, they escape from their boxes along with the Gorgonites, kindhearted creatures whom the Commando Elite are programmed to destroy. The Commando Elite appear poised to wreak havoc on the human world when an unlikely teenaged hero gets enlisted to help the Gorgonites, rescue the girl of his dreams, and stop the Commando Elite before they turn the whole town upside down. The presentation of violence is somewhat humorous and satirical due to the nature of the plot. Most of it consists of the larger humans fighting against the smaller and persistent members of the Commando Elite.

This top ten list hardly exhausts the panoply of violent major studio movies that finished among the year’s top grossers. They ran the gamut from science fiction films like “Star Trek: Insurrection” and the “X-files” movie to conspiracy thrillers like “The Siege,” “Snake Eyes,” and “Mercury Rising,” in which the apparent good guys turn out to be the real perpetrators of assassinations and terrorist

activities; teenage “slasher” films that trade on screams and gore, like “Halloween H2O” and “I Still Know What You Did Last Summer;” the murder mystery “A Perfect Murder,” actually a remake of Alfred Hitchcock’s “Dial M for Murder;” to an unlikely big budget remake of the cheesy Japanese grade B monster movie “Godzilla.”

In fact, it is notable how many of these films were remakes, sequels or spinoffs of earlier pop culture products. To some degree they are widgets from the Hollywood film factory – action movies marketed to youthful, largely male audiences who are entertained by watching the various ways in which characters inflict pain on each other and damage on inanimate objects. In this context it is also worth noting that fully half of the ten most violent films in the sample received PG-13 ratings rather than the more restrictive R. Of course, the halfhearted effort to enforce R ratings is the wake of the Littleton shootings reminded us that even this restriction on young viewers is honored mainly in the breach.

CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE

The context in which film violence occurs is summarized in Table 8. Although most violent acts appeared on-screen, theatrical movies rarely portrayed any detrimental consequences to the mayhem they featured. Theatergoers saw an overwhelming 95 percent of the violence that we coded, and nearly as high a proportion of serious violence – 88 percent. In this celluloid world of “clean” violence, most acts of violence were executed without physical harm to people or places – 79 percent of all violence and 56 percent of serious violence. Serious acts of violence resulted in injury or fatality only 42 percent of the time, with this total evenly divided between fatal and non-fatal injuries. Only three percent of serious violence produced property damage.

Violence was even less likely to inflict emotional than physical harm. Fully four in five (81 percent) of all acts and nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of serious acts left the characters involved psychologically unscathed. Just one in ten violent acts emotionally injured victims, as did a mere one in six acts of serious violence. While logic would seem to dictate more devastating effects from so many depictions of serious violence, the movies seem to defy logic by showing so much violence free of consequences.

Considering that most violence was committed without causing harm, it is not surprising that most movies failed to pass judgment on these acts. In 84 percent of all cases and 88 percent of serious cases of violent behavior, the violence simply happened. Its morality was not an issue in the plot line. Only one in seven acts of violence and one in ten serious cases brought some condemnation, while 2 percent of violent acts were portrayed as the right thing to do.

Perpetrators and their motives, where known, present a somewhat more complicated picture of the context in which movies place violent behavior. Bad guys slightly outnumbered good guys in committing violent acts (45 percent versus 37 percent for all violence, and 49 percent versus 37 percent for serious violence). Mixed or neutral perpetrators accounted for 18 percent of all violence and 14 percent of serious acts.

Thus, unlike television series, Hollywood movies failed to associate a plurality of violent acts with bad guys. By the same token, however, the proportion of violence committed by villains remained a minority of all such behavior in theatrical releases. Our analysis of motives intensified the link between violence and virtue, especially for serious acts. Over half (53 percent) of all violent acts and

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about two-thirds (61 percent) of serious acts had positive motivations. It is especially striking to note that only two-fifths (39 percent) of serious violence was driven by negative motives, as was 47 percent of all violence.

TABLE 8
CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE IN MOVIES (%)
(THEATRICAL RELEASES)

	<u>ALL</u>	<u>SERIOUS</u> = 2
PRESENTATION		
SHOWN	95	88
AFTERMATH	5	12
PHYSICAL HARM		
NONE	65	56
FATAL INJURY	13	21
OTHER INJURY	13	20
PROPERTY DAMAGE	9	3
PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM		
NONE	81	74
VICTIMS	10	17
OTHERS	9	9
JUDGMENT		
NONE	84	88
RIGHT	2	2
WRONG	14	10
MOTIVES*		
POSITIVE	53	61
NEGATIVE	47	39
PERPETRATOR*		
GOOD GUY	37	37
BAD GUY	45	49
MIX/NEUTRAL	18	14

*where known

MUSIC VIDEOS

As with the playlists of commercial radio stations, repetition is the norm for MTV. Dedicated young viewers can see and hear the same brief music videos numerous times over the course of a single day, getting dose after dose of song lyrics paired with fast-paced visuals. Some music videos have a definable narrative, like a shortened version of a television program, while others present a string of disjointed images. We coded the level of violence in both types and noted how frequently each music video appeared on MTV throughout our four-day sample period. This enabled us to distinguish those videos that were extremely violent in absolute terms from those whose contribution to our violence count was mainly a function of the number of times they played.

We viewed 188 different music videos on MTV, which were shown a total of 495 times. This meant that, on average, a given video was shown 2.6 times. As Table 9 indicates, the number of violent acts shown on music videos totaled 1785, one-third of them (588) serious. Thus, a single day of music videos shown on MTV averaged 446 violent acts, 147 of them involving serious violence. And we calculated an average rate of 3.6 acts of violence, of which 1.1 were serious, for a single music video. As we found with other entertainment formats, however, much of this violence was concentrated in relatively few videos. The ten most violent music videos accounted for half (50%) of all violence and over three-quarters (77%) of all serious violence shown.

Table 9 represents the ten most violent music videos in terms of the total violence across all showings while Table 10 represents the videos that contained the most violence in the single showing. There was considerable overlap among the videos listed in the two tables. Topping each list was “Body Movin’” by the Beastie Boys, a dark spoof of spy films from the 1960s and ’70s. Viewers were

TABLE 9
MOST VIOLENT MUSIC VIDEOS – ALL SHOWINGS

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>SERIOUS</u>	<u>NUMBER OF SHOWINGS</u>
1. Body Movin'	252	156	12
2. Duel of the Fates	136	120	8
3. Can I Get a ...	110	22	11
4. Blue Monday	88	0	8
5. Special	66	66	6
6. Hate Me Now	64	64	4
6. Who Dat?	64	8	8
8. Another Brick in the Wall	40	12	2
9. How Deep Is Your Love	36	4	4
10. Whiskey in a Jar	30	0	2

treated to 12 showings of “Body Movin’” during the sample period, more than any other music video. By both absolute and comparative measures, it surpassed all other music videos in violent content. With 21 violent acts, 13 of them serious, in each showing, audiences were exposed to a total of 252 violent acts (156 serious) from this music video alone during a four-day period.

The violence begins when a burglar blows up a safe in a sleeping man’s bedroom. The man awakens to be swept up in a sword fight that results in his beheading. Exemplifying a major motif of this study – that serious violence rarely has serious consequences– the man’s head is magically reattached, allowing him to pursue his assailant. In the following scene, the bad guys chase the good guy secret-agent in a helicopter. Although the bad guys’ shots force his car over a cliff, the agent survives. The next scene shows him tied up in a plane piloted by two bad guys. After he manages to grab a parachute and jump, he has a midair fight with one of his adversaries, who eventually plunges to his death. The other bad guy is killed when a bird flies into the open plane and knocks him into an electrical panel. The concluding scene finds the agent at home, happily preparing a meal.

Second most violent on the list for total showings was “Duel of the Fates.” This soundtrack from the latest “Star Wars” movie featured snippets of the film’s action sequences, including light saber duels and spaceship battles. Viewers saw 17 violent acts per showing, 15 of them serious, for a total of 136 violent acts, nearly all (120) serious. This gave “Duel of the Fates” the number three ranking on our list for single showings, but it actually surpassed the top-rated “Body Movin’” in terms of its proportion of serious violence (88 percent versus 62 percent).

Next on the list on the basis of all showings, “Can I Get A . . .” earned its number three ranking for

its frequent appearances on MTV rather the amount of violence in a single showing. Out of a total 110 violent acts, only one in five (22) were serious. Per showing, this music video contained only 10 violent acts, two of them serious. In fact, it didn't make our top ten list for single showings. Another movie soundtrack, "Can I Get A. . . ." contained fist fights, gun battles and the use of explosives from the action scenes of the movie "Rush Hour," which was among the most violent theatrical films we coded.

"Blue Monday," at number four, was another example of a music video that made the list mainly because of the number of times it played (eight), although it also appeared at the bottom of our list for single showings. It had a total of 88 violent acts, although none were serious. At the other end of the spectrum in terms of serious violence was "Special," which placed number five on the list in terms of overall violence. "Special" was one of only two videos in which every violent act shown was serious. With 11 acts per showing, viewers could have witnessed a total 66 serious incidents over the course of one four-day sample period. Recorded by Garbage, this sci-fi fantasy in the Star Wars mode featured a spaceship battle in the year 3030 between a powerful queen and the evil forces of Garbania who threaten her kingdom. The queen bests her enemies and sends them crashing to the ground.

"Hate Me Now," at number six, was the other video in which all violence was serious. With 16 violent acts per showing, for a total of 64 acts, it ranked even higher on our list for violence by single showings, taking the number four spot. Recorded by the rapper Nas with an appearance by Puff Daddy, "Hate Me Now" depicts the potentially inflammatory image of Nas playing Jesus Christ carrying a cross through a crowd that pelts him with rocks. Between his climb to "Calvary" and his

TABLE 10
MOST VIOLENT MUSIC VIDEOS
PER SHOWING

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>SERIOUS</u>
1. Body Movin'	21	13
2. Another Brick in the Wall	20	6
3. Duel of Fates	17	15
4. Hate Me Now	16	16
5. Whiskey in a Jar	15	0
6. Anthem for Year 2000	12	5
7. Special	11	11
7. Everlong	11	5
7. Intergalactic	11	4
7. Blue Monday	11	0
7. Spark	11	0

crucifixion, Nas is seen rapping to a crowd from the roof of a grocery store. Arson completes this grim urban drama as several cars burn in the background.

“Who Dat” took the number six spot, but the nature of its violence was very different from “Hate Me Now.” Although “Who Dat” had the same number of violent acts (64), it played twice as often as “Hate Me Now.” Thus, despite producing the same amount of violent images over multiple showings, a single showing of “Hate Me Now” contained twice as much overall violence and 16 times as much serious violence as “Who Dat.” The “Who Dat” video is based on the action adventure movie “Face Off,” which focused on a law enforcer who goes undercover in a prison to find the location of a bomb. The music video presents several violent scenes from the prison segments of the movie, including domineering guards, a prison riot, and a brawl between the rapper and another inmate.

Next on the list is “Another Brick in the Wall,” with 40 violent acts, 30 percent of them (12) serious. This music video’s relatively low ranking reflects how infrequently it ran – only twice. But with its high rate of violence (20 violent acts, six of them serious), it was the second most violent music video in terms of single showings. The Class of ’99 recorded this remake of the 1979 Pink Floyd song. The newer version was part of the soundtrack to “The Faculty,” a teen scream horror movie about a high school faculty whose minds are controlled by aliens. Only the natural rebelliousness of the teens foils their evil plot to subject the students to a similar fate. The music video shows students punching each other, attacks and counterattacks between kids and teachers, and extensive property destruction as the students trash the school.

“How Deep Is Your Love” was ninth on the list for all showings, though it failed to make the list for single showings. This soundtrack from the movie “Rush Hour” ran four times, for a total of 36 violent acts, almost one-third of them (11) serious. Rounding out the top ten list for total showings was “Whiskey in A Jar,” with 30 violent acts for its two showings, none of them serious. This music video took the number five spot as measured by single showings. In this profile of a drunken fraternity party, most of the violence was property damage – smashing windows, toppling furniture, breaking bottles against walls and doors – courtesy of the band and party guests.

A few music videos did not make the list of overall showings because they played infrequently, but were notable nonetheless for the violence they portrayed. These included “Anthem for the Year 2000,” by Silverchair, which was the sixth most violent video in terms of single showings. This millennial drama, with 12 violent acts (five of them serious), showed a student protest against a politician who was just a puppet-like torso and head controlled by technicians at a network TV office. Most of the violence occurred when police turned hoses on the protestors as they tried to storm the TV studio. Eighth on the list was “Everlong” by Foo Fighters, with 11 violent acts, just under half of them serious. This melange of mayhem in a strange dream sequence included fist fights, vaporizing bodies, ax-wielding attackers and an assault with a frying pan.

Number nine was “Intergalactic,” another offering from the Beastie Boys. It contained 11 violent acts, four of them serious. This hip hop parody of the 1960s Japanese monster movies features robots and monsters who battle each other with flames and lightening bolts, demolishing a cityscape along the way. Sharing the bottom of the list (with “Blue Monday”) was “Spark,” with 11 violent acts, none of them serious. Recorded by Tori Amos, founder of RAIN (Rape and Incest Network),

it shows the aftermath of a kidnaping. Ms. Amos, bound and blindfolded, is left in the open trunk of an abandoned car. As she stumbles away from the car, she is trailed by an ominous man in black.

CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE

Music videos echoed movies in shrugging off most effects and judgments of violence, while otherwise leaving little to the imagination. This pattern of findings is shown in Table 11. Viewers directly witnessed almost all the violent acts depicted – 90 percent of general violence and 87 percent of serious violence. (Ms. Amos's video, which apparently depicts the aftermath of an abduction, was an exception to this rule.) Physical harm as a consequence was the exception, not the rule on MTV. Three quarters (76 percent) of all violence and nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of serious acts were bloodless. Fewer than one in five scenes (17 percent of all violence and 18 percent of serious violence) resulted in property damage. An injury or fatality occurred in just 7 percent of all violence and 19 percent of serious violence. Even when injury was inflicted, death rarely resulted. Just 2 percent of overall violence and 4 percent of serious violence precipitated a fatality.

Emotional harm was even less likely to occur than physical damage, being absent from 91 percent of all violence and 81 percent of serious violence. Just 13 percent of serious acts affected their targets emotionally; the rate was less than half that among all victims of violence combined. Characters other than the victim were mentally afflicted by just 6 percent of serious violence and 3 percent of overall acts. Given the relative dearth of consequences, it is hardly surprising that judgments of violence in music videos were nonexistent for 98 percent of violence and 99 percent of serious violence. In fact, the only judgment passed on serious violence was positive. Not a single act was explicitly condemned as wrong.

MTV's musical narratives provided the closest links between evil and violence in the study, but only for the most serious acts. When perpetrators could be identified, 64 percent of serious violence was committed by bad guys, leaving another third (34 percent) to be committed by positive characters. However, this pattern did not hold for all violence – a majority (51 percent) of all violent acts were committed by good guys and only a third (34 percent) committed by bad guys, with the remaining 15 percent attributed to mixed or neutral characters.

It should be noted that only 38 percent of perpetrators could be identified. This reflects the relatively meager narrative requirement of this genre. Violent acts were often shown in disjointed images intended to accompany a particular lyric or musical figure, but without prior or subsequent narrative context. For the same reason, motives for violent behavior could be identified only 44 percent of the time. Nonetheless, there was also a close link between evil motives and violent behavior. In cases where motives were known, 89 percent were negative for serious violence, as were 73 percent for all violence. Positive motives accounted for about one in ten (11 percent) of serious violence and just over a quarter (27 percent) of all violence.

TABLE 11 CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE IN MUSIC VIDEOS (%)		
	<u>ALL</u>	<u>SERIOUS</u>
PRESENTATION		
Shown	90	87
Aftermath	10	13
PHYSICAL HARM		
None	76	63
Fatal Injury	2	4
Other Injury	5	15
Property Damage	17	18
PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM		
None	91	81
Victims	6	13
Others	3	6
JUDGMENT		
None	98	99
Right	1	1
Wrong	1	0
MOTIVES*		
Positive	27	11
Negative	73	89
PERPETRATOR*		
Good Guy	51	32
Bad Guy	34	64
Mix/Neutral	15	4

* where known

CONCLUSION: THE BIG PICTURE

COMPARING VIOLENCE ACROSS FORMATS

This study has examined the presence of violence in various forms of popular entertainment. Thus far, however, we have not directly compared the amount of violence in each genre. To do so requires that we consider the different presentation formats that are distinctive to each one. For example, theatrical movies are not interrupted by commercials. So a two-hour made-for-television movie actually provides less than an hour and a half of actual viewing time. In order to make valid comparisons, we calculated the average amount of violence that viewers would see per hour of actual running time of each entertainment product.

This calculation was conducted by giving equal weight to each format, summing the average rate of violence per hour across the four formats, and dividing by four. The result tells us how much violence a viewer would encounter every hour if he or she watched equal amounts of television series, television movies, music videos and movies shown in theaters. The result: While there were distinct variations among genres for overall violence, the most serious violence was present in surprisingly similar amounts throughout popular culture.

Overall, as Table 12 shows, the various popular culture formats generated an average of 31 acts of violence per hour, or one every two minutes. Music videos topped the list with 62 scenes per hour, more than twice as much as of any other medium. Television series and theatrical films contained almost identical rates of violence – 25 scenes per hour for movies and 24 for all TV series. Within the latter group, however, syndicated series were by far the most violent, with 51 scenes per hour.

Network and cable series had less than half that amount – 19 scenes for cable and 17 for network series. TV movies had the lowest rate of overall violence – 12 scenes per hour. However, cable movies were more than twice as violent as those on broadcast stations (16 versus seven).

Focusing on serious violence significantly reduced the differences among genres. The average across all genres was 14 serious acts of violence per hour, or one every four minutes, about half the rate for overall violence. Viewers would have witnessed 16 scenes of serious violence per hour on TV series, 15 in theaters, and 15 in music videos. Only TV movies were considerably lower, averaging seven scenes of serious violence per hour. However, the rate for cable movies was nearly three times higher than that of broadcast movies (11 versus four).

Among TV series, syndicated shows once again stood out, with 28 serious acts per hour versus 18 for cable series and 13 for those on the broadcast networks. Thus, the rate of serious violence was quite similar for network television series, cable movies, theatrical releases and music videos. Syndicated television series stood out as the most violent sector of popular entertainment, while movies airing on the broadcast networks were the least violent format.

Of course, the “average” popular culture product, like the average viewer, appears only rarely. Relatively few titles contain an average amount of violence, because they tend to divide between high-violence and low-violence features. This is not coincidental. Entertainment products are increasingly aimed at niche audiences or particular demographic segments of the population. Particular sub-genres, such as action-adventure TV series and slasher movies, are aimed at youthful audiences, particularly young males. So it is not surprising that much of the violence we coded was clustered in a relatively small portion of the sample.

TABLE 12
AVERAGE AMOUNT OF VIOLENCE PER HOUR¹
(ACTUAL RUNNING TIME)

<u>OUTLET</u>	<u>NUMBER OF SCENES</u>	
	ALL VIOLENCE	SERIOUS VIOLENCE
TELEVISION		
Broadcast Series	25	18
Network	17	13
Syndicated	51	28
Cable Series	19	9
All TV Series	24	16
TELEVISION MOVIES	12	7
Broadcast	7	4
Cable	16	11
MUSIC VIDEOS	62	15
MOVIES IN THEATERS	25	15
ALL SOURCES²	31	14

1 - Based on actual running time of TV series, TV movies, music videos, and movies in theaters.

2 - Grand mean of four genres weighted equally: (TV series + TV movies + music videos + movies in theaters) ÷ four.

Frequency of
Violence
Violence

Anti-histamine
Hydroxyzine 10 mg 3/day
2/day

In order to find out how much violence a viewer would encounter when seeking out violent entertainment, we performed the same calculations based on the top ten titles in each genre. Instead of telling us how violent the overall popular culture is, this tells us just how violent the most violent entertainment has become. The results appear in Table 13. Thus, we found that the top ten titles within each entertainment format contained a majority of the serious violence found in the entire sample for that format. The average for all genres was 90 acts per hour, or one and one-half per minute. Topping the list for overall violence were music videos, with a high of 173 scenes, nearly three per minute, reflecting the fast-paced profusion of images pioneered by this format. TV series were a distant second at 96 scenes per hour, followed by theatrical releases with 59, or one per minute. The ten most violent TV movies, the least violent genre, had 30 scenes per hour, or one violent incident every other minute.

Not surprisingly, the majority of all violent acts on high-violence shows were serious ones. The overall average was 54 acts of serious violence, or almost one per minute of actual running time. In our previous analysis of the entire sample, the proportion of serious violence in highly violent titles was fairly consistent across formats. Not so with the most violent titles. Music videos remained far and away the most violent genre, with the top ten averaging 100 acts of serious violence per hour, nearly twice the rate for television series (56 per hour). Movies in theaters were a clear increment below than television series, with 38 acts per hour. As usual, television movies finished at the bottom with 20 per hour.

VIOLENCE AND RATINGS

By examining the actual running time of music videos, theatrical releases and TV series and movies,

TABLE 13
AVERAGE VIOLENCE PER HOUR
IN HIGH VIOLENCE SHOWS¹

	<u>NUMBER OF SCENES</u>	
	<u>ALL VIOLENCE</u>	<u>SERIOUS VIOLENCE</u>
Television		
Series	96	56
TV movies	30	20
Music Videos	173	100
Movies in theaters	59	38
All Sources ²	90	54

1 - Based on actual running time of the ten most violent TV series, TV movies, music videos and movies in theaters.

2 - Grand mean of four genres weighted equally: (TV series + TV movies + music videos + movies in theaters) ÷ four.

we documented the pervasiveness of violence across all genres of entertainment, as well as the variations that occasionally occur. The industry's rating system for theatrical releases and the more recent television parental guidelines are intended to give parents reliable instruments to review or filter out content that might be objectionable for young children and adolescents. (Individual music videos are not currently rated.) This part of our study looks at the relationship between industry-designated ratings and the levels of violence in the highly violent TV series, TV movies and theatrical films that we coded.

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) has a voluntary rating system of five categories that designate the appropriate minimum age for viewers by the amount and intensity of sex and violence in each film. A "G" rating (general audience) means that the film is deemed suitable for even the youngest children; hence filmgoers of all ages are admitted. "PG" (parental guidance suggested) means some material in a film may not be suitable for children. "PG-13" (parents strongly cautioned) films may have some material that is inappropriate for children under 13 years of age. For "R" (restricted) films, anyone under 17 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian (although, as noted, enforcement of this restriction is notoriously lax). The content of a movie labeled NC-17, the strongest rating, is sufficiently violent or suggestive that no one under 17 is admitted. In practice, filmmakers avoid material that would produce this label, since it cuts them off from the lucrative teen audience.

How useful were the ratings to parents concerned about their children's exposure to violence? For our list of the ten most violent films, as Table 14 shows, half were rated R and half were rated PG-13. This means children could have seen five high violence films unaccompanied by an adult. This

TABLE 14
RATINGS OF VIOLENT MOVIES*
(THEATRICAL RELEASES)

<u>THEATRICAL RELEASE</u>	<u>RATING</u>
1. Saving Private Ryan	R
2. The Mask of Zorro	PG-13
3. Lethal Weapon 4	R
4. Blade	R
5. Rush Hour	PG-13
6. Ronin	R
7. The Negotiator	R
8. U.S. Marshals	PG-13
9. Man in the Iron Mask	PG-13
10. Small Soldiers	PG-13

* Based on sample of 50 top-grossing films released in theaters during 1998.

includes "Zorro," the second most violent film on our list, which had 147 acts of violence, 56 percent of them (n=82) of them serious. The last three entries on the top ten list were also rated "PG-13," but each of these films had an even higher rate of serious violence. "U.S. Marshals" (63 percent), "Man in the Iron Mask" (59 percent), and "Small Soldiers" (74 percent) matched or surpassed several "R" rated films for proportion of serious violence. The other "PG-13" movie on our list, "Rush Hour," ranked number five in overall violence but had a lower rate of serious violence (45 percent).

"Saving Private Ryan," the most violent film as measured by general and serious violence (and without a doubt the most serious film in artistic terms) was rated "R". The same rating was given to "Lethal Weapon" (number three on the list), "Blade" (number four), and "Ronin" (number six). Of these three, "Ronin" had the highest rate of serious violence (77 percent). Yet another "R" film, "The Negotiator," (number seven) had the lowest rate of serious violence for the top ten films (26 percent), even when compared to all five "PG-13" movies.

TV series and movies are rated by a separate system that is derived from the MPAA categories, but employs somewhat different criteria. Parental guidelines for TV series and movies contain six categories. Two of these, which are specific to children's programs, did not appear on our lists: "TVY" is for shows deemed appropriate for all children, while "TVY7" shows may contain mild physical or comedic violence that may not be suitable for children under seven years of age. The remaining four categories are applied to programs aimed at a general audience. The mildest of these, "TVG", contains little or no violence, sex or strong language.

The other three ratings designate ascending levels of sex, violence and suggestive dialogue. "TVPG"

(parental guidance suggested) contains some material that could be unsuitable for young children, so that parents may wish to watch the program with them. Shows that receive this rating may include infrequent coarse language, limited violence or some suggestive sexual dialogue and situations.

“TV-14” (parents strongly cautioned) urges adults to exercise greater care in monitoring this program, and cautions against letting children under 14 watch the show unattended since it may contain sophisticated themes, sexual content, strong language and more intense violence. “TVMA” shows are for mature audiences only. Since they are specifically designed for adults, they are deemed unsuitable for anyone under 17. Program content may contain mature themes, profane language, explicit sexual content and graphic violence.

Our list of the 20 most violent series on broadcast and cable television, shown in Table 15, included two that were not rated – “Special Ops Force,” number 16, and “Acapulco HEAT,” number 19. Among the remaining shows, 14 were rated “TVPG,” two were rated “TV 14,” and two received the strongest rating of “TVMA.” The four shows with the most restrictive ratings were concentrated in the top half of the list. HBO’s “Oz” (TVMA) was ranked number two. The top-rated martial arts western “Walker, Texas Ranger” had a milder rating of “TV14,” while “LA Heat” (number five) and “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” (number seven) also had “TV14” ratings.

Notwithstanding the stronger caution these four shows received, a majority of the ten most violent programs carried only a mild “TVPG” rating. (Similarly, half of the ten most violent top grossing theatrical films were rated “PG13.”) Extending our view to the 20 most violent series, we found they averaged 78 incidents of overall violence, with 47 serious acts, per hour of running time. This raises

the question of how consistent current ratings are and how violent entertainment must be before it garners strong cautions.

Ironically, TV movies were most likely to receive restrictive ratings, although they were less violent than either TV series or theatrical releases. This can be seen in Table 16. Of the ten most violent TV movies, seven received a "TV14" rating, and only three were rated "TVPG." In contrast, six of the ten most violent TV series rated were designated "TVPG." All TV series rated averaged 56 acts of general violence per episode, with 34 of them serious, while TV movies averaged 43 acts overall, 29 serious. Once again, the ratings do not reflect the violence we found in different genres of entertainment.

SUMMARY

For this study we examined 573 distinct products of popular entertainment, including many of the most widely seen television series, movies, and music videos that appeared during the 1998-99 season, and the most popular feature films released during 1998. In formats ranging from three-minute videos to movies that lasted over two hours, we catalogued 8,350 scenes of violence, the majority of which (4,204) were serious or life-threatening. Some of the findings are not surprising. For example, feature films proved to be the most violence-filled vehicles, and made-for-TV movies shown on cable were more violent than their broadcast counterparts. A few television series stood out from the rest, led by a host of first-run syndicated series that are aimed at a youthful audience – "Mortal Kombat," "Crow," "Viper," and the like. Among the broadcast networks, CBS stood out, led by "Walker, Texas Ranger." Taking the dubious honors on cable were HBO, led by the graphic

TABLE 15
RATINGS OF VIOLENT TV SERIES*

<u>SERIES</u>	<u>OUTLET</u>	<u>RATING</u>
1. Walker, Texas Ranger	CBS	14
2. Oz	HBO	MA
3. VIP	SYN	PG
4. Mortal Kombat: Conquest	SYN	PG
5. LA Heat	TNT	14
6. New Adventures of Robin Hood	SYN	PG
7. Buffy the Vampire Slayer	WB	14
8. Viper	SYN	PG
9. 7 Days	UPN	PG
10. Team Knight Ridder	SYN	PG
11. Crow: Stairway to Heaven	SYN	PG
11. Xena: Warrior Princess	SYN	PG
13. Nightman	SYN	PG
14. Hercules: Legendary Journeys	SYN	PG
15. Diagnosis Murder	CBS	PG
16. Special Ops Force	SYN	—
17. Martial Law	CBS	PG
18. Air America	SYN	PG
19. Acapulco H.E.A.T.	SYN	PG
20. Stargate SG1	SYN	PG

prison drama “Oz,” and TNT, which featured the nonstop shoot-em-up “LA Heat.”

But the similarities proved more interesting and less predictable than the differences in entertainment violence. After taking into account differences in program length and commercial interruptions, the different varieties of popular culture produced remarkably similar rates of violence. This was particularly true for the most graphic and brutal material, which we labeled “serious violence.” Across all genres, viewers watched an average of about one scene of serious violence every four minutes of actual running time. Theatrical movies, music videos, and television series produced almost identical rates of serious violence.

In every format, the bulk of all violent material – especially serious violence – was concentrated in relatively few shows, which were clearly aimed at a youthful audience. The “top ten” lists we compiled typically contained a substantial majority of all serious violence shown in each format. These “high-violence” shows averaged nearly one scene of serious violence per minute of running time across all formats. Nonetheless, fully half of the ten most violent movies carried PG-13 ratings, and a majority of the ten most violent television series were rated TVPG.

In addition to tabulating the amount of violence, we examined the way violence was shown and the role it played in the story that was being told. Apart from minor exceptions stemming from the brevity of the music video format, the narrative context of violent behavior was surprisingly similar across all formats of popular entertainment. Most acts of violence were not presented as causing either physical or emotional harm. In the world of popular entertainment, bullets frequently miss their

TABLE 16
RATINGS OF VIOLENT TV MOVIES*

<u>TV MOVIE</u>	<u>RATING</u>
1. Dollar for Dead	TV-14
2. Killers in the House	TV-14
3. Purgatory	TV-14
4. Fatal Error	TV-PG
5. Noah's Ark*	TV-14
6. Horatio Hornblower	TV-PG
7. Invasion Earth*	TV-PG
8. Jack Bull	TV-14
9. Baby Monitor: Sound of Fear	TV-14
10. Naked City: Justice With a Bullet	TV-14

* Multi-part movie; violence totals prorated to reflect average totals for a single segment.
However, cumulative "top ten" totals include all segments.

mark, heroes bounce back from beatings without a scratch, and few victims of violence are emotionally traumatized by the experience. Further, violence is often carried out by good guys who act out of laudable motives, such as self-defense or the defense of others. Finally, scripts almost never carry explicit criticism of the use of violence. In Hollywood's fantasy world, violence just happens, it happens often, and it often happens for a good reason.

Before leaving this topic, however, it is necessary to give the devil its due. There are clearly instances in which frequent and graphic violence is integral to the narrative and even to the artistic value of a work of popular culture. In our study this was epitomized by "Saving Private Ryan," the award-winning film that was by far the most violent movie in our sample, due to its realistic portrayal of the horrors of battle. This film follows in a dramatic tradition that depicts violence in order to produce an emotional catharsis in the audience, a tradition that leads back to Shakespeare and Greek tragedy. It would be both foolish and short-sighted to suggest that such works should be condemned purely for their violent content. (It would be equally foolish to suggest that such works are suitable for viewing by most children, as "Private Ryan's" R rating illustrates.)

In the context of contemporary popular culture, however, what is significant about "Private Ryan" is how unusual it is. Far more typical of film violence in our sample were cookie-cutter shoot-em-ups like "Lethal Weapon 4," gruesome sci-fi fantasies like "Blade," and the martial arts mayhem of the PG-13 rated "Rush Hour." Nor would many critics rush to defend the high artistic purpose of such vast wasteland fare as "Walker, Texas Ranger" and "LA Heat," or music videos like "Body Movin'" and "Hate Me Now." Indeed, an advantage of examining a representative sample of popular culture artifacts is to learn just how infrequently highly violent programs aspire to serious artistic or moral

purposes. "Saving Private Ryan" is precisely the exception that proves the rule.

This point was made even more systematically by James Hamilton of Duke University. In a study of 5,000 movies labeled with violence indicators, he found that fewer than 3 percent of high-violence films were rated highly by critics. Hamilton concluded, "Though high-quality violent films exist, they are not the norm..."⁷ In other words, for every "Schindler's List" there are scores of Schwarzenegger and Seagal vehicles that pollute the popular culture with graphic and gratuitous gore. No sensible person wants to throw out the baby with the bathwater. But the converse also holds true: The bathwater can become so polluted that it threatens the health of the baby.

1. "TV Violence: More Objectionable In Entertainment than in Newscasts," Times Mirror Center for People and the Press, March 24, 1993, p.7.
2. See the polling data cited in S.R. Lichter, "America Down the Tube," Madison Review, Summer 1996, pp.22-27.
3. American Psychological Association, Big World Small Screen, Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press 1992.
4. National Institutes of Mental Health, Television and Behavior, Washington, DC, 1982.
5. Charles S. Clark, "TV Violence," CQ Researcher, Vol. 3, #12, March 26, 1993, pp.167-187.
6. Due to mechanical failures during taping, some movies from outside the top 25 were included to bring us up to a total of 25 movies. The end result is a sample of 25 movies from the top 32 made-for-network movies. The only missing features were a group of relatively low-rated sci-fi/action movies that aired on UPN.
7. James T. Hamilton, Channeling Violence, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998, pp. xvii.