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VIOLENCE IN ADVERTISING

A Multilayered Content Analysis

Tim Jones, Peggy H. Cunningham, and Katherine Gallagher

ABSTRACT: Concern about violence in society as a whole and in advertising in particular is growing. We present a multilayered content analysis of depictions of violence in advertising and develop a classification scheme that allows systematic examination of violent content in advertisements. Using the classification scheme, we use normative ethical analysis to develop guidelines for advertisers, policymakers, and regulators to use in the assessment of the ethicality of violent advertisements.

Most people in the developed world are routinely exposed to violence in television and film, video games, music, the Internet, and advertising. Public concern about media violence, particularly with “excessive quantity, graphic detail, interactive nature (in video and computer games), and gratuitous fictional and non-fictional violence” is growing (Cooper 2008, p. 23).

The effects of exposure to violent media content are well established. Positive associations between media violence and aggressive thoughts, hostile emotions, and aggressive or violent behavior have been found repeatedly, in both children and adults, in studies using a variety of methods, including laboratory and field experiments, cross-sectional studies, and longitudinal research (Anderson and Bushman 2002; Anderson et al. 2003).

Violence in advertising has received much less research attention than has violence in other types of media. This may be understandable given the relatively small amount of time people are exposed to advertising compared to the amount of time they spend consuming content from television, films, video games, music, and the Internet. However, because advertising executions are intended specifically to get and keep audience attention, to persuade, and to be memorable, the power of advertising to affect audience thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, both intended and unintended, is likely to be disproportionate to its share of audience viewing time. In addi-

tion, public concern about violence in advertising is persistent and increasing, prompting greater scrutiny by authorities responsible for responding to complaints about advertising (e.g., Advertising Standards Canada 2006).

If one were to ask audience members their general opinion about violent advertising, most would respond that “violent advertising is bad.” Our research focuses on the question of whether violent advertising executions are always unethical. We propose that the use of violence in advertising may not be unequivocally bad, and that it may be appropriate in some contexts. Our research goal is to identify a set of normative recommendations for the use of violence in advertising. To this end, we use a multilayered analysis to assess the forms of violence used in advertising, the factors that might justify the use of violence in an advertisement, and the circumstances under which a violent advertisement might be considered appropriate within an ethics paradigm.

Our literature review and subsequent multilayered content analysis addresses these questions. Our normative marketing ethics approach identifies when violence in advertising might be an ethical marketing practice. We hope that this approach will provide advertisers with clear, actionable criteria to guide them in deciding whether and how to use violent content in

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advertising, to help policymakers and regulators determine whether violent content in an advertisement is ethical, to offer advocates for better advertising practice the basis for a set of benchmarks upon which to measure progress, and to give researchers a framework for measuring and analyzing the possible effects of violent content in advertising. In addition, our approach avoids the common pitfalls of prevailing approaches to marketing ethics that separate marketing and ethical decision making (Abela and Murphy 2008) by integrating previous research on media violence and empirical observations of violence in advertising with a normative ethical framework.

We begin by reviewing the literature on violence in media and in advertising, its prevalence, impact, and effectiveness. This is supplemented by an analysis of the observable features (manifest content) of a sample of violent advertisements. We then classify a sample of print advertisements and television commercials into themes (latent content). This procedure permits a systematic approach to analyzing violent content in advertisements. Finally, using this classification scheme, we use normative ethical theory to develop guidelines for the use of violence in advertising.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concern about violence in society—domestic violence, bullying and violence in schools, road rage, media violence, workplace violence, violence-related products such as guns and video games, and violence in sports—has been growing. Media violence has long been an area of concern and has been thoroughly researched since 1952 (Smith 2002). The National Television Violence study (Debling 1998), a content analysis of over 8,000 hours of broadcast and cable television, found that over 60% of the programming aired in the United States contained violence. With the Internet allowing consumers to view content from around the world, consumer exposure to violent content may increase. Furthermore, such content is often beyond the regulatory domain of any single country.

The effects of media violence have been hotly debated. (See Freedman 2002 for an overview of the research contributing to the controversy.) While Freedman concludes that the negative effects of violent media content are questionable, Bushman and Anderson (2001) point to over 1,000 studies, both qualitative and quantitative, that show a consistent link between violent programming and increased aggression, especially among children. To counteract concerns about media violence, some voluntary codes have been developed and implemented (e.g., the Voluntary Code Regarding Violence in Television Programming developed by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters [www.cab-acr.ca/english/social/codes/violencecode.shtml], and the Czechoslovakian code, which prohibits linking violence with the advertisement of alcoholic products [www.eucam.info/eucam/czech_republic/]).

The rich literature on media violence indicates that, first, violent content is prevalent in television programs and many other forms of media, and second, violent content is multi-faceted, nuanced, and complex. There are a variety of forms of violence, contexts in which violence occurs, and varying levels of intensity of violence. Such complexity makes accurate counts of violence in media difficult and conclusions from research into the effects of exposure to such violence tenuous. Some content analyses have attempted to overcome these difficulties by specifically examining the nature of violent content and the frequency in which it occurs in a variety of media (Gerbner and Gross 1976; Gosselin et al. 1997; Mustonen and Pulkkinen 1997; Paik and Comstock 1994; Wilson et al. 1997; Wilson et al. 2002).

Research on the frequency of violent content in advertising is surprisingly sparse, particularly given concerns about its effects (e.g., increased tolerance for aggression, increased violent behavior). Table 1 summarizes the samples and sample sizes, dependent variables, and findings of 13 studies. Estimates of the prevalence of violence in television advertising vary widely, ranging from about 3% in general programming (Maguire, Sandage, and Weatherby 2000) to 62% in food ads aimed at children (Rajecki et al. 1994). Caution should be used in comparing rates of violence found due to differences in definitions of violence and aggression, but it does seem that the frequency of violent content in advertising aimed at children is at least as high as and perhaps higher than that in advertising intended for a wider audience.

Many people find violence in advertising offensive (Christy and Haley 2007; Lawson 1985), but violent executions have been used for positive ends as well (e.g., antitdrinking and driving campaigns). Violence has also been associated with different types of advertising appeals such as fear appeals (e.g., for self-defense products), informational appeals (e.g., for products that have a violent component, such as certain video games), and shock appeals (e.g., some fashion advertisements).

Fear appeals attempt to frighten target audience members in order to motivate them to take appropriate precautionary, self-protective action (Ruiter, Abraham, and Kok 2001). This approach is based on the belief that some form of arousal is required for behavior change (Henthorne, LaTour, and Nataraajan 1993). Violent executions have been used to instill fear in viewers (LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss 1996; Schoenbachler and Whittler 1996). Fear arousal has been found to enhance interest in the ad (LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss 1996); attitude toward the ad (LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss 1996); persuasion (Henthorne, LaTour, and Nataraajan 1993); and behavioral intentions (LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss 1996; Lewis, Watson, and Tay 2007). However, fear is a complex emotion that is not fully understood in the context of advertising, so results have been inconsistent (see, e.g., LaTour 2006; LaTour and Zahra 1989).

TABLE I
Studies Pertaining to Violent Advertising

Study	Focus	Sample	Sample size	Dependent variable	Frequency of violence
Maguire, Sandage, and Weatherby (2000)	TV commercials during general programming	Representative TV commercials from eight American networks in 1996 and 1997	1,699 TV commercials	Violent content	2.8%
Scharrer et al. (2006)	TV commercials during general programming	One week of TV commercials in prime-time programming on American broadcast networks in 2004	4,347 TV commercials	Aggression	12.3%
Jones and Cunningham (2008)	TV commercials during general programming	Advertisements extracted from 200 hours of Canadian prime-time television over two weeks across five channels in 2005	7,717 TV commercials	Ads containing violence	12.9%
Anderson (1997)	TV commercials during sporting events	TV commercials aired during the 1996 Major League Baseball Playoffs	1,528 TV commercials	Violent content	6.8%
Anderson (2000)	TV commercials during sporting events	TV commercials aired during the 1998 Major League Baseball Playoffs	1,550 TV commercials	Violent content	8.8%
Tamburro et al. (2004)	TV commercials during sporting events	TV commercials aired during major sporting events aired before 9:00 P.M. for one year beginning September 1, 2001	1,185 TV commercials	Violence	6%
Macklin and Kolbe (1984)	Advertising aimed at children	TV commercials shown on the major American television networks on Saturday mornings in 1982	64 TV commercials	Aggressive content	12.5%
Rajecski et al. (1994)	Advertising aimed at children	Food ads aimed at children	92 TV commercials	Violence as a surface theme	62%

(continues)

TABLE I (continued)

Study	Focus	Sample	Sample size	Dependent variable	Frequency of violence
Larson (2001, 2003)	Advertising aimed at children	TV commercials featuring children in children's programming on Saturday mornings and weekday afternoons	595 TV commercials	Aggression	62%
Shanahan, Hermans, and Hyman (2003)	Advertising aimed at children	Minutes of children's TV programming	1,110 minutes of children's programming	Acts of violence per minute	3.46 per minute of commercials; 2.25 per minute of programming
Ji and Lacniak (2007)	Advertising aimed at children	TV commercials aired in programs children were most likely to watch	297 TV commercials	Violent or aggressive behaviors or scenes	10%
		TV commercials aired in programs younger children were most likely to watch			13%
		TV commercials aired in programs older children were most likely to watch			4.8%
Oliver and Kalyanaraman (2002)	Violence in movie previews on video rentals	Randomly selected 1996 Billboard Top-20 rental movies	47 movie previews	Acts of aggression per minute	2.52
				Gun scenes per minute	2.37
				Explosions per minute	.83
				At least one scene of aggression	75.7%
Scharrer (2004)	Violence in print advertising	Print advertisements for video games appearing in large-circulation video game magazines	1,054 print advertisements for video games	Violence	45.8% 28% 55.8%

Informational appeals focus on consumers' practical, functional, or utilitarian needs. The content of informational advertising emphasizes facts, learning, and logical persuasion. In general, this appeal assumes that target audience members are open to the information provided in the advertisement, and that they will then use the information to make a decision about the subject of the advertising (Shimp 2003). Finally, some products, services, or ideas have a violent component. For instance, some video games are violent, as are some sporting events. In addition, some social marketing campaigns are concerned with violent issues such as domestic violence or cruelty to animals. In such cases, a violent execution may be used simply to provide information.

Shock appeals deliberately startle and upset audiences. One of the ways this can be accomplished is through gratuitous violence (Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda 2003). The practitioner literature suggests several motives for using shock appeals: to capture audience attention (Croft 2002; deChenecy 2000; Garrett 1999; Jones 2002; Tomblin 2002; Woodward 2005), to attract media interest that will result in free publicity (Croft 2002; Garrett 1999; Jones 2002; Woodward 2005), to raise awareness (Croft 2002), to affect attitudes (Guria and Leung 2004), to enhance recall (Jones 2002), to influence behaviors (Guria and Leung 2004), and ultimately, to increase sales and profits (FrenchConnection 2008) or to achieve other mission-related goals. Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda (2003) found that shocking content is superior to nonshocking content in its ability to attract attention and facilitate memory for the advertisement.

Only a few studies have examined the effectiveness of advertising with violent content. In a semiotic analysis of three violent fashion advertisements appearing in magazines, Andersson et al. (2004) found that respondent interpretations of the violent content were different and more negative than advertisers expected. Gunter, Furnham, and Pappa (2005) found that the violent version of a target advertisement was much better remembered than the nonviolent version when it appeared in a violent film clip. However, Bushman's (2007) study showed that violent ads were no more memorable than were neutral ads. Lewis, Watson, and Tay (2007) found that females were more likely than males to change their behavioral intentions in response to a violent social marketing advertisement.

In sum, estimates of the prevalence of violence in advertising vary widely. Advertisers seem to use violence for a variety of reasons: to capture attention, raise awareness, provide information, affect attitudes, enhance recall, and influence behavior. It is unclear, though, whether violence in advertising is actually effective for two reasons. First, only a few dependent variables have been tested (i.e., interpretation, recall, and behavioral intentions). Second, the results of the effectiveness studies have been inconsistent. We propose that one reason for these equivo-

cal results is that varying definitions of violence have been used in previous research. The presence or absence of other factors might also have affected results. We conducted our content analysis as a way of identifying these other factors.

A MULTILAYERED CONTENT ANALYSIS

We used a multilayered content analysis approach in this research. In general, content analysis involves creating categories (or themes) from the data and then developing rules for assigning instances into these categories. Boyatzis (1998) defines a theme as a pattern in the phenomenon of interest that describes and organizes observations of the phenomenon and may also interpret aspects of it. Themes may be identified at the manifest level, in which they are directly observable (e.g., the number of violent acts per commercial), or at the latent level, in which they underlie the phenomenon (e.g., the meaning, causes, or consequences of violent content). In this study, to focus on more meaning-based understandings of violent content in advertising, we examined manifest content at the level of the advertisement and generated latent themes at two additional levels (see Table 2).

In the first layer of our analysis, we examined manifest content—the easily observable features of the advertisement that are salient for categorization. This included content such as words, visuals, pictures, specific behaviors, and sex of participants. We began by reviewing previous content analyses of violent content in media and programming to uncover commonly observed phenomena. Then, we examined a selection of violent advertisements to confirm the existence of the same phenomena as well as to identify other violent features unique to advertising.

In the second layer, we focused on latent content or themes. The classification of "latent pattern" content relies on the identification of themes relevant to the manifest content. These themes or latent patterns are implicit rather than directly observed. They may be constructed either deductively (based on theory or prior research) or inductively (directly from the phenomenon) (Boyatzis 1998, p. 4). We used both approaches. We read content analyses in media violence research (e.g., Mustonen and Pulkkinen 1997) that used similar approaches to get insight into the themes that appear in research on violence in media. In addition, we examined violent advertisements and made judgments about whether each was inappropriate, offensive, or unethical. We approached the analysis in this manner because of the prevailing belief that "violent advertising is bad."

In the third layer, we examined violent advertising from a normative ethical perspective. Our approach in this layer was deductive: we used existing normative ethical theory to uncover situations in which the use of violent content in advertising might be considered either ethical or unethical. In

TABLE 2
Multilayered Content Analysis

Layer	1	2	3
Type of content	Manifest content	Latent content	Normative content
Level of analysis	Advertisement	Audience member	Societal
Type of data	Observable	Interpretations by researcher	
Research approach	Inductive (from advertisements) and deductive (from violent media research)	Inductive (from advertisements) and deductive (from violent media research)	Deductive (from ethical principles)
Descriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mode of violence (physical, psychological) • Seriousness (realization of violence, consequences) • Dramatization (duration, atmosphere, clarity and vividness) • Consistent with product category* • Consistent with main message of ad-brand/issue* • Authorial or sponsor intent—social commentary versus attention tactic* • Justification (intentionality, motivation, planned) • Legality • Correspondence with genre/context* • Realism (cultural distance) • Realism (temporal distance) • Realism (fictionality) • Power of aggressor (sex, age of aggressor, characteristics) • Power of victim (sex, age, characteristics) • Glamorization (nature of aggressor/victim) • Efficacy of violence/depicted outcomes (profitability) 	Intensity Congruence Perceived intention Legitimacy Identification Power balance	Nonmaleficence Autonomy Autonomy Utility Utility Honesty Respect

* Represents manifest content unique to violent advertisements. Boldface added for emphasis.

In essence, we applied ethical principles to the themes uncovered in the latent content analysis in layer 2 to better understand when and if the use of violent content in advertising is ever ethical.

The result of this multilayered approach is a set of guidelines for use by practitioners and policymakers as well as a set of potential variables that can be used to guide future research on violent advertising.

Data Collection

To aid in our analysis, we amassed a collection of violent advertisements using a selective sampling procedure (Draucker et

al. 2007). This approach is useful for situations in which sampling for proportionality is not the primary concern (Trochim 2006) and in situations such as latent content analyses where the purpose of the sampling approach is to find exemplars of a certain phenomena.

For this research, the population of interest was advertisements with violent content in consumer magazines available in Canada. The sampling site was a university library and advertisements were selected by two undergraduate students, one male and one female, who each spent 20 hours over three months identifying ads for coding. They identified violent advertisements according to the operational definition: "any explicit act of force destined to injure or kill, or the expres-

sion of any serious threat to injure or kill a character, whether human or human-like, regardless of the context in which the act occurred" (Gosselin et al. 1997, p. 143). Some magazines sampled were general interest (e.g., *Maclean's*, *Time*) and some were women's magazines (e.g., *Vogue*), men's magazines (e.g., *Esquire*, *GQ*), and special interest magazines (e.g., *Ski Canada*, *Sportsnet*). The students looked at each page of every magazine they chose. The library chosen as the data source typically displayed current copies of magazines for two to five years (depending on the popularity of such magazines) before they were discarded. Thus, all of the advertisements collected for this study were published within an approximate five-year period, between 2000 and 2005. This procedure resulted in a data set of 98 magazine advertisements.

We also collected a second set of violent advertisements, video advertisements found on the Web site www.adcritic.com, to validate the magazine ad content analysis. A graduate student selected commercials with violent content using the same operational definition. She dedicated 20 hours to scanning the Web site for commercials on the Web site for violent content. This procedure resulted in a 36-commercial data set.

Layer 1: Manifest Content Analysis

Content analysis, at a manifest level, has frequently been used to study violence in advertising (Anderson 1997; Scharrer 2004; Scharrer et al. 2006; Tabburro et al. 2004). This method has provided valuable insight into the number of occurrences of violence in advertising; however, few of these studies have gone beyond simple counts of violent advertisements or acts of violence. The content analyses of television violence conducted in the communications field, however, are much further developed. These studies have developed coding schemes for use in future research on the audience-level effects of exposure to media violence (Gosselin et al. 1997; Huesmann et al. 2003; Mustonen and Pulkkinen 1997; Wilson et al. 1997; Wilson et al. 2002). Such coding schemes have allowed research to capture some of the complexities of violent content.

A review of the coding schemes used in media research revealed a number of content variables relevant to the study of violent advertising. In this research, we adopted and adapted the coding scheme used by Mustonen and Pulkkinen (1997). Our initial review of the print sample identified content unique to advertisements: the link between violence to the purpose of the advertisement and the authorial intention for the use of the violence.

The first area of unique content is the issue of the link between the violence and other aspects of the advertisement such as the category (e.g., product, service, television program, event), the specific brand, or the genre or context of the advertisement (e.g., slice of life, slapstick comedy, sports). For example, an advertisement about a video game might depict

violence because the game itself is violent (see Appendix 1, Figure 1-3). Another advertisement might present its appeal in the context of a sport, such as ice hockey or football—games that include some violence.

The second area of unique content is the issue of authorial intent. A number of the advertisements included violence specifically for the purpose of social commentary or providing an antiviolence message (see, e.g., Appendix 1, Figure 1-5). While it could be argued that there are television programs with the same goal of social commentary, they have not been the focus of content analyses of violent television programming. Because one of our purposes is to ascertain the ethicality of violent advertisements, such content is relevant since a violent advertisement with a positive intention may be ethical.

Our final coding scheme consisted of 30 content variables relevant to the analysis of violent advertisements (see Appendix 2). Each content variable includes several categories. For example, the content variable "primary mode of physical violence" includes eight different categories, such as "hitting with weapons or tools" and "strangling." We used this coding scheme to assess the violent content used in the magazine advertisement sample. Four trained undergraduate students independently coded each of the 98 magazine advertisements on each of the 30 content variables. The training session consisted of a detailed explanation of each of the content variables as well as a four-advertisement practice set that included extensive discussion among the coders and the research team.

In Appendix 2, we also report interrater reliabilities (IRR) and the frequencies of each category of each content variable. We assessed interrater reliabilities using the Perreault and Leigh (1989) reliability formula. The interrater reliability was 75% on average for all content variables, ranging from 53% to 91%, which for exploratory work such as this is acceptable. For some content variables (e.g., Purpose of the advertisement: to promote a product/service, to raise awareness of a social issue, to promote an upcoming program/movie, to promote an upcoming event, other), there was substantial interrater agreement (i.e., $IRR > 80\%$). On the other hand, for content variables that required coders to make more subjective judgments (e.g., Efficacy: extent that the aggressor profits by violence: cannot code; not at all, a little bit, a lot), as might be expected, strength of agreement was only fair ($IRR = 53\%$). In addition, the coding scheme we used was relatively unrefined; we identified several content variables in which categories could be combined to enhance reliability. For example, in the category Seriousness: aggressor's intent, 61% of the advertisements were coded for physical harms (to injure or to kill) as opposed to more psychological harms (to have fun, to threaten, or to insult). Such fine-grained distinctions among harms required the coders to make attributions about the violence and thereby depressed interrater reliabilities. The depiction of violence in advertisements when compared with media violence in general is less

straightforward because advertising faces both time and space constraints. For example, a television commercial may not have the time to show a complete violent act, thus making the coding of its consequences a subjective opinion. The implication of this is that coding advertisements for violent content should emphasize agreement at the latent level (e.g., intensity, legitimacy) rather than the manifest level, since agreement at the latent level is acceptable (IRR = 66% to 80%).

Our frequency analysis began with the calculation of the reliabilities of the decisions made by all six pairs of coders for each content variable (recall that four coders assessed the 30 content variables for each of the 98 advertisements). To maximize reliability, we selected the pair of coders with the highest level of agreement within a given content variable across all 98 advertisements. If the two coders agreed on the category for a content variable for a particular advertisement, we used this pair's decision. If this pair did not agree, we resolved the disagreement by using the decision of the coder with the next highest level of agreement with the first pair. If there was still disagreement, we used the remaining coder's decision to resolve the disagreement. Of 2,940 coding instances, there were only 19 occurrences (<1%) when there was disagreement among all four coders. Only two of the 98 advertisements (~2%) had two content variables in which the coders could not agree. The remaining advertisements were either fully coded ($n = 81$; 83%) or had one content variable in which the coders could not agree ($n = 15$; 15%). In other words, the sample does not contain any advertisements that defied coding on more than two of the 30 content variables.

According to our frequency analysis (Appendix 2), this sample contained many different forms of violence consistent with the coding scheme developed by Mustonen and Pulkkinen (1997). For example, we found instances of both physical and psychological violence and of every type of consequence (e.g., harm to property/objects; mild, moderate, and severe injuries to people/living things; and death). Thus, all the content variables found in studies of violent media also appear in violent advertisements. We found one exception within content variable categories: there were no instances in which the aggressors included people of several age groups. We speculate that this exception is a result of a deficiency in the representativeness of our sample, as there is no obvious reason to expect that violent advertisements could not contain instances of groups of aggressors.

In addition to the forms of violent content found in media research, we confirmed that violent advertisements have some unique characteristics. First, we found advertisements in which the violence was both consistent (44%) and not consistent (56%) with the product category, the product category was clear (13%) and not clear (87%) to the audience member, and the inclusion of violence was consistent (54%) and not consistent (46%) with the positioning of the brand. Second, we found

advertisements in which the purpose of the advertisement was to promote a product/service (80%), to raise awareness of a social issue (5%), to promote an upcoming program/movie (11%), and to promote an upcoming event (2%). Attributions for the inclusion of violence in the advertisement included the following: to enhance viewer interest/attention to the ad (74%), to make a social commentary about violence (7%), or to realistically depict a product category or context (16%).

Because violence in advertising occurs in many different forms, under several different contexts, with varying underlying motivations, and because it may be directed at various entities, research directed at uncovering the effects of exposure to violence is difficult. The natural question that arises from identification of all of these different characteristics of violence in advertising is as follows: "Are there common elements that will allow us to make generalizations about the nature of violent advertising?" Such generalizations require a latent content analysis, which we present next.

Layer 2: Latent Content Analysis

The purpose of this second layer of analysis was to organize the manifest content in Layer 1 into a number of higher-level abstractions or conceptual categories. We used a blended grounded theory approach (see Locke 2001) that uses both the data and the existing substantive theory on violence to inform our latent content development.

Two of the researchers generated latent content/themes based on their observations of the entire print advertisement data set ($n = 98$). We approached the analysis with the intention of finding examples of violent advertisements that could be considered not unethical. We then sought to explain why these particular advertisements that had violent content were not unethical.

Boyatzis (1998) warns against the natural tendency to project researcher values, thoughts, feelings, and competencies onto the data. To lessen contamination from projection, our research team came to the data with different perspectives. First, because the experience and interpretation of violence may differ across genders, we thought it important to have a mixed-gender team. In addition, the two researchers who performed the latent content analysis are focused in different areas of marketing. One has a background in ethics, the other in consumer behavior. Both have training in advertising. Each researcher examined the violent advertisements and made notes on what underlying themes might be present. We then met to compare notes and negotiate a common set of themes.

We identified six themes that might influence the appropriateness of an advertisement depicting violence: intensity of the violent depiction, congruence between violent content and the product or message, perceived intention behind the use of violence in the advertisement, legitimacy of the vio-

lence given the context, identification with the victim, and the extent of power imbalance between victim and aggressor. For each theme, we looked for similar themes in violence-in-the-media research. We uncovered three similar themes in the violent media research area and identified three themes unique to violent advertising.

We validated these themes by examining the television commercial data set. Two of the researchers looked for exemplars in the commercial data set that represent both high and low versions of each theme (see Appendix 3). For example, to validate the *intensity* theme, we identified one commercial that was considered by the researchers to be high in intensity and one commercial that was considered by the researchers to be low in intensity. We found exemplars of the extreme levels of all six themes in this data set (e.g., high/low intensity, congruent/incongruent, legitimate/illegitimate, positive/negative intention, realistic/fictional, empowerment/victimization). Because we were able to identify the six themes in this independent data set, we inferred that the themes were valid.

Theme 1: Intensity

We define “intensity” as the extent to which an advertisement displays violence as the powerful, forceful, explicit, and graphic presentation of violence. For example, depicting murder would be high in intensity, whereas showing a person shoving in a crowded place would be considered low in intensity. This theme stems from the manifest content of mode, seriousness, and dramatization aspects of the violence. This same theme has been identified in media research as extent and graphicness (Mustonen and Pulkkinen 1997).

This notion of intensity stems from research in psychology on stimulus and object valence. Events, objects, or situations may possess intrinsic attractiveness or aversiveness (Frijda 1986). Positive or negative emotions are said to be elicited by positive or negative stimuli such as pictures or words (Cacioppo and Berntson 1994), events (Bradley and Lang 2000), or film clips (Lang, Davis, and Ohman 2000). Viewers often perceive advertisements containing intense violence as a negative stimulus (Barnes and Dotson 1990).

The intensity of the violence depicted in the advertisements in our samples varied. An advertisement for plastic wrap (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 1, Figure 1-2) contains low levels of violence. This and similar ads use violence or references to violence as a metaphor for an attribute of the product (e.g., built tough). In contrast, an ad for sunglasses (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 1, Figure 1-1) and an ad for an advertising firm (see Appendix 3) show disturbing levels of physical violence (through depictions of blood and gore) and emotional violence (the threat of violence to a vulnerable victim), respectively. The “chain saw” commercial by a leading athletic shoemaker

(see Appendix 3) is so intense that it was withdrawn from television after complaints from viewers.

Theme 2: Congruence

We define “congruence” as the extent to which the violent content in an advertisement is consistent with the product category or, in the case of social marketing messages, the main message in the ad. The idea of executional congruence (or relatedness) has appeared in a number of advertising studies on the use of humor (e.g., Zhang and Zinkhan 1991), with the central argument being that related humor can serve as issue-relevant arguments, thereby helping to provide benefit claims. Similarly, we suggest that issue-relevant violence may help to provide benefit claims about a particular violent product or marketing issue.

Our samples contained examples of both high- and low-congruence advertising violence. Some advertised products, such as many video games, television programs, movies, and sports, are inherently violent. The use of violence in advertisements intended to promote these products is consistent with their nature. For example, an advertisement for a program on the A&E network (see Appendix 4) shows a dead body covered in a white sheet. Viewers can infer from this advertisement that the show includes violence. Similarly, an advertisement for a video game (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 1, Figure 1-3) depicts characters in the game using violence. The viewer can infer from this advertisement that the game itself is violent. Yet in some advertisements, violent content is simply an executional element designed to garner viewer attention. For instance, the “Trunk Monkey” commercial for an automobile sales group (see Appendix 3) shows two episodes of violence: an angry driver verbally abusing another driver and the “Trunk Monkey” assaulting the angry driver with a tire iron. The violence in this commercial is not naturally connected to the automotive product category.

Theme 3: Perceived Intention

We define “perceived intention” as the viewer’s attributions about the sponsor’s purpose for including violence in an advertisement. The Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad and Wright 1994) suggests that people are aware of advertisers’ goals and tactics, and that they can use this knowledge actively and skillfully. Perceived intention, therefore, is a judgment made by the viewer/reader about authorial intent—the intended meaning (Ahuvia 1998). Here, attributions of intent are based on the assessment of the violence and the corresponding inferences about intentions made by the viewers (B. Phillips 1997).

Violent advertising that might be perceived to have positive intentions would include advertising aimed at raising

awareness of a social issue that involves violence (e.g., capital punishment, domestic violence, war, torture), and social marketing advertising campaigns designed to persuade target audience members to alter a harmful behavior (e.g., drive less aggressively). Violent advertising that might be perceived to have negative intentions would include the depiction of violence merely to increase attention to the advertisement and motivation to process and remember it.

A fashion advertisement (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 1, Figure 1-6) in our sample depicts explicit violent content with no text other than the brand name. This tactic seems to be used only to increase attention to the advertisement. In contrast, an advertisement for a community charity (Appendix 4) shows the disturbing results of violence, but the intent of the advertisement is to raise awareness of a social issue, namely, abuse of women and children. Similarly, Benetton advertisements (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 1, Figure 1-5) have often been used as a form of social commentary against violence.

Theme 4: Legitimacy

We define “legitimate violence” as behavior that is legal or appropriate given the context. The idea of “legitimacy” in this context has its roots in sociology and criminal justice, specifically the work done in the creation of the Violence Approval Index (Baron, Straus, and Jaffee 1988), which is based on directly expressed attitudes about when it is appropriate to use physical force. While the index finds regional variations in the approval of some forms of violence, there is consensus on a number of legitimate forms of violence. For example, activities such as hunting, the playing of contact sports, or the use of reasonable force in self-defense or in the protection of others are considered legitimate violence. Violent activities that are criminal or illegal in the context are considered illegitimate violence. The theme of legitimacy has also appeared in the research on media violence under the term “justified violence” (e.g., Mustonen and Pulkkinen 1997).

Note that legitimate violence differs from congruent violence. While congruent violence refers to a violent product (e.g., a violent video game, a violent movie, a gun), legitimate violence refers to the violent act depicted in the advertisement (e.g., a police officer using force to restrain a criminal or a hockey player body checking an opponent).

Many violent advertisements in our samples incorporate legitimate scenes from sports, connecting the advertised product with the lifestyle, behaviors, and attitudes associated with that sport (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 1, Figure 1-7), which would be deemed legitimate in that context. Or the advertisement may depict legitimate use of force defined by an aggressor’s role. For example, an advertisement for a news program shows a scene involving police in riot gear (see Appen-

dix 4 and Appendix 1, Figure 1-10). The police are exhibiting a legitimate use of force. In contrast, the advertisement for a brand of snowboards shows what appears to be a violent and presumably illegal interrogation of a prisoner (see Appendix 4). Similarly, an advertisement for a handbag brand displays a woman being held at gunpoint (see Appendix 1, Figure 1-8). Both are examples of illegitimate violence.

Theme 5: Identification

We define “identification” as the extent to which viewers have a natural connection or association with the characters in the advertisement. The idea of association with the characters in the advertisement has its roots in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986), which asserts that group membership creates feelings of belongingness and association with other group members. Thus, if a viewer identifies with the victim of a violent act, the violence will be perceived as more harmful than if the viewer does not identify with the victim. The theme of identification has appeared in research on media violence as “realism” (Mustonen and Pulkkinen 1997) and the “nature of the perpetrator” (Wilson et al. 2002).

In some cases, advertising violence occurs in what is clearly a fictional or imaginary setting such as cartoons or fantastic settings, inhibiting identification. For example, the chocolate bar advertisement in our sample (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 1, Figure 1-9) shows physical bullying, but uses two characters from an animated television series. This act of bullying may be relatively less offensive because the characters are obviously not real. While we may recognize the two characters in the advertisement, we see this execution as fictional. Fictionalized executions may thus lessen the impact of the violence they contain.

In contrast, some ads use realistic or documentary-type scenes of violence. For example, an advertisement encouraging people to subscribe to a newspaper (see Appendix 4) shows a photograph of a Ku Klux Klan rally in which a cross is burning in a field. The advertisement asks whether this is occurring in Mississippi, Alabama, or Ontario. Similarly, advertisements for news programs often show real violence (see, e.g., Appendix 1, Figure 1-10). Because these images are realistic, they may result in stronger and more emotional reactions than fictional representations since the viewer can identify with the victim.

Theme 6: Power Balance

We define “power balance” as the viewer’s perception of the differences in power possessed by the characters in a violent advertisement. Characters who gain from violence are empowered, while those who are harmed are victimized. While

most violent acts involve an imbalance of power, the extent to which the viewer identifies with the empowered versus the victimized is the salient issue. This theme can be explained by theories of perspective taking and empathy. "Perspective taking" refers to the imaginative ability that allows people to imagine themselves in the place of another. "Empathy" is the capability to share feelings and understand another's emotion and feelings. To the extent that a viewer identifies with the empowered character, he or she would find the violence acceptable; to the extent that the viewer identifies with the victim, he or she would find the violence less acceptable. In media research, this idea of power balance has been examined using the idea of rewards and punishments—that is, the extent to which one benefits from the violence versus being punished for violent acts (Wilson et al. 2002).

In some advertisements in our samples, the featured product empowers an individual to combat a violent force. For example, a breath freshener advertisement uses phrases such as "to fight the evil Gingivitis" and "to destroy bad breath." One such advertisement (see Appendix 4) shows a woman able to fight the "bad breath monster" using the product as a weapon. Similarly, we find a woman empowered by her running shoes in the chain saw commercial (see Appendix 3). In horror-movie style, this commercial shows a woman being pursued by a villain wearing a hockey mask. She is able to outrun him, presumably because of the performance of her brand of running shoes.

Violence in some advertisements in our samples does not have a positive consequence for the protagonist. These advertisements depict victimization, including dominance over women and what Kilbourne (1979, 1987, 2000) calls the "dehumanizing" of the character featured in the ad. In a perfume advertisement (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 1, Figure 1-11), a naked woman is shown with her hands bound behind her back. The central figure in this advertisement is clearly a victim and the product in no way saves her from the circumstances.

In sum, the results of this latent content analysis reveal six important themes inherent in the literature on media violence as well as in the content of a sample of violent advertisements. These themes help to describe the nature of the violent content in advertising. Many of these themes are also found in analyses of violent content in media. Violent advertising differs, however, when its violent content has a positive intention (i.e., the advertisement opposes violence) and in the extent to which the violence has any connection to the main message of the advertisement. All six themes are evident in both the sample of magazine advertisements (Appendices 1 and 4) and the confirmatory sample of television commercials (Appendix 3). They raise a number of interesting ethical issues, which we explore in a normative analysis presented next.

Layer 3: Normative Content Analysis

Our third layer of analysis examined violent advertising from an ethical perspective. Our goal in this layer of analysis was to integrate the latent content analysis of violent advertising with a normative ethical framework.

Advertising has been attacked on moral grounds since at least the 1930s (M. Phillips 1997). Murphy and Lacniak (1981), in one of the first comprehensive reviews of marketing ethics literature, noted that the extant literature was predominantly prescriptive in its normative advice to marketers, and dominated by ethical issues in advertising and marketing research. However, they made no specific mention of violence in advertising and they did not provide guidelines that could be implemented by practitioners.

Nill and Schibrowsky (2007) point out that marketers who have to make real ethical decisions every day are not looking for idealism but for strategies and decision-making systems that work. We propose that rather than specifying a theory and then working to apply it universally to different marketing practices (such as violent content in advertising), it may be valuable to specify a comprehensive set of principles derived from the literature that may be regarded by all stakeholders (i.e., advertisers, consumers, regulators) as having moral value. Practitioners and regulators alike can then undertake a moral calculus that works to balance these principles.

The principles to choose from are myriad, but following social contract theory, the key is finding a small set that can be easily applied. Ross (2002) described one approach for defining such principles. He suggested that a moral dilemma could be viewed as a conflict between certain duties. These duties could be represented as a set of general principles rather than being expressed as absolute rules. In a similar vein, Field (1999) suggests a set of "moral presumptions" to be followed by all unless there is a justifiable reason not to. Using such a contingency approach may be useful in the context of advertising. Field points out that when and if a principle is not observed, then this exception must be justified by a prevailing requirement to satisfy a different principle.

We propose that setting out a small set of principles that captures both duties and consequences may be useful for both practitioners and regulators. There are a few examples of this approach from the marketing ethics literature. Martin and Smith (2008), for example, used the presence of deception, intrusion (violation of privacy), and exploitativeness, combined with a consideration of potential consequences when they studied the ethics of stealth marketing practices. Lacniak and Murphy (2006) developed a normative framework grounded in the centrality of exchange. They begin by stating seven integrated basic perspectives that reflect the ethics literature: people first; standards in excess of the law; responsibility for

intentions, means, and consequences; moral imagination of managers and employees; a core set of ethical principles (non-maleficence, nondeception, protection of vulnerable markets, distributive justice, and stewardship); stakeholder orientation; and delineation of an ethical decision-making protocol. Resnik (1988) provides eight moral principles as standards or guides to ethical decision making and the foundation for a moral community: autonomy, beneficence, trustworthiness and honesty, justice, nonmaleficence, privacy, fidelity, and utility. Each of these approaches captures both duties and consequences.

Based on these various frameworks and our own analysis, we propose a parsimonious set of principles that can be used by both advertisers and regulators to determine whether violent executions in advertising are ethical. We integrate these principles with the six themes developed in the previous section and present these in Table 3.

Principles Relating to Consequentialism: Nonmaleficence and Utility

“Nonmaleficence” is the principle of “do not harm yourself or other people.” This principle captures President John F. Kennedy’s principle of the right to safety (1962). Although Kennedy was referring to the right to safe products and services, we extend the meaning here to include psychological safety because violent ads may induce fear, loathing, or other strong negative emotional reactions. In our use of this term, we not only want to capture consequences but also to apply Gilligan’s (1982) “Ethics of Care.” This normative theory is especially relevant to marketing, since it is founded on the importance of relationships—the notion of being interconnected with others—in contrast to justice-based ethics, which is founded on autonomy and individuality. In a network of relationships, we have to be conscious of others’ needs. We also have to deal with people the way they want to relate to us and be conscious that we do not impose our standards on them. Using this duty-of-care perspective also privileges vulnerable markets such as children.

In applying this principle, advertisers must consider not only the characters depicted in the ad (the manifest level) but also how the action may be perceived by both intended and unintended audiences and the meanings they may construe from the action depicted (the latent level). Questions about the type of media vehicles for the advertisement are pivotal here since control of exposure to the material is media dependent. Our theme of intensity should be considered when making this assessment; therefore, advertisers have to consider not only the degree of harm portrayed but the level of psychological arousal and subsequent emotional harm that may result.

“Utility” refers to maximizing the ratio of benefits to harms for all people. Again, all stakeholders must be considered, and marketers must be conscious not to put their own interests

and those of the firms they represent ahead of those of target audiences, minority groups, or vulnerable groups.

The theme of perceived intention has particular relevance when considering this principle. If the violent content is used to build awareness of a social cause, and it works to avoid harm to any group resulting from the ad execution, then the principle of utility would be met. An example of such a campaign is one recently run by Benetton. It is a series of three print advertisements showing women and girls of mixed racial backgrounds with bruised lips and blackened eyes. In each advertisement they stare quietly into the camera. There is no violence in the ad even though their faces bear the results of violence. The ads used the tagline “Colors of Domestic Violence.” The use of violence in these advertisements may be deemed in keeping with the principle of utility since the benefits (i.e., awareness of the issue of violence toward women) exceed the harm (i.e., the graphical display of violence and potential emotional harm).

The theme of legitimacy is also relevant when considering the utility principle. For example, a violent advertisement that shows good triumphing over evil (e.g., a police officer apprehending a criminal) helps to reinforce social norms or social contracts. Such a violent execution would reinforce the role of the police force in maintaining peace and public order (a benefit) and educate the general public about social norms (a benefit). These benefits would outweigh the possible emotional harm associated with the exposure to the depicted violence.

Principles Relating to Intentions and Duty: Respect, Autonomy, and Honesty

“Respect” refers to the duty one has to regard all stakeholders, especially human stakeholders, to be valuable or worthy (Bourassa and Cunningham 2008), and to be treated with dignity. This is the manifestation of the principle embedded in much of deontology, and was expressed by Immanuel Kant’s idea that individuals exist as ends-in-themselves. If the principle of respect is followed, issues such as exploitation, noted by Martin and Smith (2008), are avoided. The idea of the inherent value of life is also apparent in various human rights declarations such as the principles that guide the Global Compact (www.unglobalcompact.org).

The theme of victimization is relevant to this principle. When an advertisement uses an individual who is portrayed as a victim, it would be in violation of the principle of respect since victimization reduces dignity. This would be especially true when the victim is depicted as being subservient or dominated by a specific other (e.g., a woman being abused by a male, an animal being beaten by its master).

“Autonomy” refers to the right to choose and to be informed. The principle assumes a rational individual. It has considerable application to advertising with violent content. If the violence depicted is intense or there is excessive victimization,

TABLE 3
Six Themes of Violent Advertisements and Ethical Principles

Ethical Principles	Definition	Theme	Description
<i>Principles related to consequentialism</i>			
Nonmaleficence	Do not harm yourself or other people	Intensity	Increased levels of intensity are presumed to be more emotionally harmful to the viewer violating the principle of nonmaleficence.
Utility	To maximize the ratio of benefits to harms for all people	Intention	Some levels of violence may be necessary in advertisements that provide a social commentary (e.g., messages against violence) in keeping with the principle of utility.
<i>Principles related to intention and duty</i>			
Respect	The duty one has to regard all stakeholders, especially human stakeholders, to be valuable or worthy	Power balance	Advertisements that show individuals being exploited or victimized violate the principle of respect.
Autonomy	The rights to choose and to be informed	Congruence	Violent content in advertisements that is not related to (i.e., congruent) to the product category violates the principle of autonomy.
		Intensity	Violent advertisements that are high in intensity may impair viewers' rational decision-making abilities due to severe emotional reactions, thereby violating the principle of autonomy.
Honesty	The duty not to lie, defraud, deceive, or mislead	Congruence	Advertisements that use violence to accurately convey the violent nature of a product/service are in keeping with the principle of honesty.
		Identification	Advertisements that use nonhuman characters as victims of violence may mislead viewers into the true outcomes of such violence in violation of the principle of honesty.

audience members' rational decision-making abilities may be impaired due to the strength of their emotional response to the violence in the advertisement, in violation of the principle of autonomy. The application of the principle of autonomy is also relevant to our theme of congruence. If the violence is incongruent with the product category, and if it is used only to attract attention (i.e., it involves using people portrayed in the ad as a means to an end), it would violate the principle of autonomy by "forcing" the viewer to pay attention to the advertisement, because the choice to pay attention is based not on the relevance of the message to the viewer, but on the violence used to create involuntary attention. The principle of autonomy also applies to audience member selection. In some cases, audience members may be unable to discern between acceptable and unacceptable forms of violence. For example,

many forms of violence should not be viewed by minors, as this would violate the principle of autonomy.

"Honesty" refers to the duty not to lie, defraud, deceive, or mislead and is manifest in numerous advertising codes. Advertisers have a duty to adhere to this principle in all types of advertising, but it is especially important to violent advertising, with its heavy reliance on emotion-laden images that may cause distress among some audience members.

Our themes of congruence and identification are relevant in addressing this principle. In terms of congruence, depictions of violence adhere to principles of honesty in advertisements for contact sports and violent games when the violent aspects of these products are communicated to audience members. With respect to identification, when nonhuman characters are used in advertisements, audience members may not identify with

the focal character as much as when a human subject is shown. Therefore, such portrayals may mislead viewers into believing that the outcomes of violence are trivial, inconsequential, or short term, in violation of the principle of honesty.

In summary, the results of this normative analysis reveal five important principles that advertisers and regulators can use to determine whether a violent advertising execution is ethical. In the next section, we further integrate the six principles from our normative analysis with the six themes from the latent content analysis to provide a set of practical guidelines for advertisers and regulators.

RECOMMENDATIONS: APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK

We recommend that consideration of the ethicality of violent content in advertising should be conducted using the ethical principles in our normative analysis. In order for our framework to be useful, each advertisement needs to be assessed holistically, using all of the principles. We present below a set of guidelines for advertisers, policymakers and regulators, advocates for better advertising practice, and researchers to follow when evaluating the ethicality of an advertisement with violent content. These guidelines should be applied only under the foundational assumption that the content complies with existing regulations. "Compliance with regulations" is a minimum standard for ethical advertising. Most countries have developed laws or specific codes of conduct for advertising content (although not always for violent content).

Guidelines

1. It is ethical to have scenes of intense violence in advertising only when
 - a. the intention is positive (principle = utility), or
 - b. the violence is legitimate (principle = utility).
2. It is ethical to use violent content without a positive intention only when
 - a. the violence is congruent (principle = honesty), or
 - b. the violence has a positive depicted outcome (principles = respect, nonmaleficence).
3. It is ethical to use illegitimate violence only when
 - a. the intention is positive (principle = utility), or
 - b. it is congruent (principle = honesty).
4. It is ethical to have a negative power balance outcome (e.g., victimization) only when
 - a. the intention is positive (principle = utility).
5. It is ethical to use incongruent violence only when
 - a. the intensity is low (principle = nonmaleficence/autonomy).
6. It is ethical to use characters with whom audience members will not identify only when
 - a. the violence is congruent (principle = respect), or

- b. the violence is legitimate (principle = compliance), or
- c. the intention is positive (principle = utility).

These guidelines provide a general framework, but are incomplete in two ways. First, the guidelines focus on the content of the advertisements only; they do not take into account the nature of the audience member. For example, legitimate and intense violence (as described in 1b) should likely never be shown to minors since this would violate the principle of autonomy (i.e., the right/ability to make an informed choice) for these audience members. This is largely a media placement issue at the discretion of the practitioner. In addition, the low levels of agreement among our coders in Layer 1 suggest that there may be considerable variability among audience members in the assessment of violent categories such as intensity. This highlights the importance of focusing on audience members' perceptions rather than those of the advertisers.

Second, the guidelines do not suggest what to do with very intense violence or potentially emotionally disturbing advertisements. We suggest that these may be ethical under the conditions of positive intention (1a) and legitimacy (1b). Similarly, we suggest that an advertisement displaying victimization may be ethical should the intention be positive (5a). In each of these cases, however, the advertisements would violate the principle of autonomy (i.e., the right to be informed). Based on these two concerns, we add a seventh guideline:

7. It is ethical to use advertisements with intense violence, a negative power balance outcome, or illegitimate violence only when
 - a. viewers are provided with a suitable warning and given the right to choose to view the content (principle = autonomy).

For advertisers, we suggest that these guidelines be integrated into the process of creative strategy development. For policymakers and regulators, and advocates for better advertising practice, we recommend that the guidelines be used to direct the decisions of an adjudication panel. For example, television advertising aimed at children in Canada must be screened and given an approval number by the Children's Clearance Committee before such ads can be aired. The panel is made up of representatives from both the industry and the public. Presented with the seven guidelines detailed above, such a panel should be able to determine the ethicality of an advertisement that contains violent content.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Advertising is an important social force, and violence in advertising may have either positive or negative effects on society. Our multilayered content analysis increases understanding of this phenomenon.

Our analysis suggests that there are several important facets to violent advertising executions: intensity, congruence, intention, legitimacy, identification, and depicted outcomes. Empirical research is needed to determine the effects of these themes alone or in combination in advertisements with violent imagery.

Our analysis casts doubt on the generally accepted view that violent advertisements are always unethical, as there may be potentially positive outcomes arising from these advertisements. While our latent content analysis helped us better understand when violent advertisements might be ethical, our normative ethical analysis permits a better appreciation of how to judge whether a particular violent execution is ethical. However, such analysis does little to reveal the actual effects on consumers, and this work needs to be undertaken. Our analysis brings some structure to the ambiguities in violent advertising and the difficulties that policymakers face when attempting to regulate such content.

Inherent in our themes are six latent constructs of interest for future research in violent advertising. As a first step, the six may be used to conduct a more detailed content analysis of violent advertising. The first variable, intensity, would seem to have a direct effect on viewer information processing (e.g., brand awareness, ad recall). Previous research has shown that increasing levels of intensity result in decreasing amounts of memory for ads (i.e., the intended effects) (Bushman and Bonacci 2002). These effects are likely influenced by the other five constructs of interest. At the very least, this suggests that any experimental examinations of violent ads must explicitly control for these potential effects.

Within our analysis of the advertisements, we found a number of other interesting areas for future inquiry. First, it appears that some product categories have adopted a "culture of violence." For example, we found many examples of violent ads for products such as snowboards and skis. These two sports, which have been called "extreme sports," may have aligned themselves with an ethos of aggressive achievement. Second, the issue of personal framing is one that needs further exploration. Life experiences, cultural ideals, personality traits, and other psychological or sociological factors may dictate what is perceived to be legitimate, but also what is perceived to be low versus high intensity.

Violence in advertising is an important social force affecting consumers' perceptions of violence in subtle and unexpected ways. Our analysis suggests that violence in advertising is more complex than previously realized, and that this is an area in need of attention by researchers. Our contribution is to provide a framework for advertisers and policymakers to use in the assessment of such advertisements.

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APPENDIX 1

Samples of Advertisements Used in Thematic Analysis

Figure 1-1: High Intensity

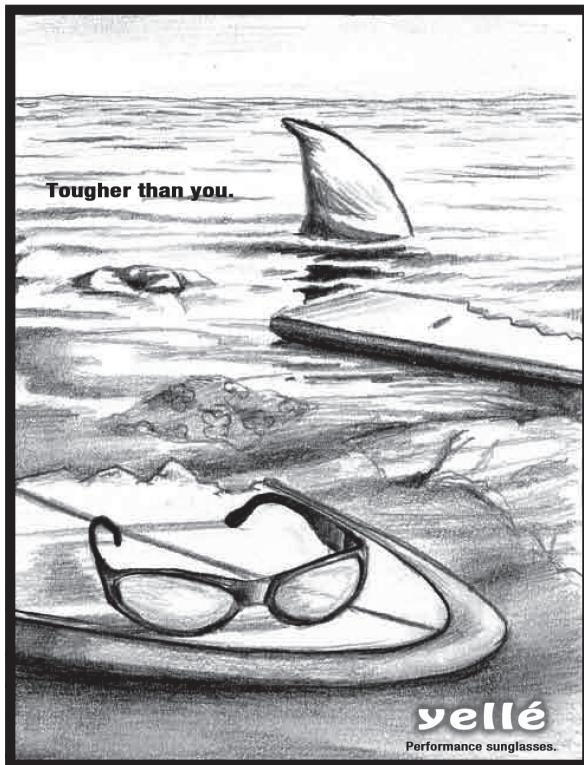


Figure 1-2: Low Intensity

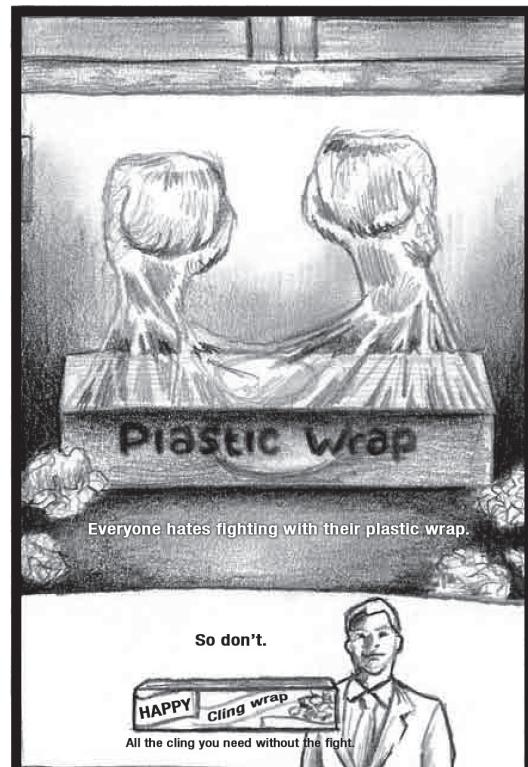


Figure 1-3: Congruence

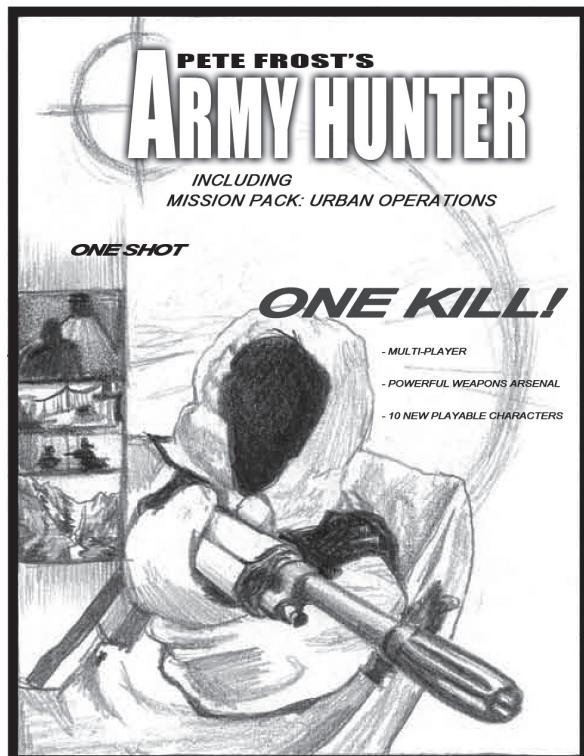


Figure 1-4: Incongruent

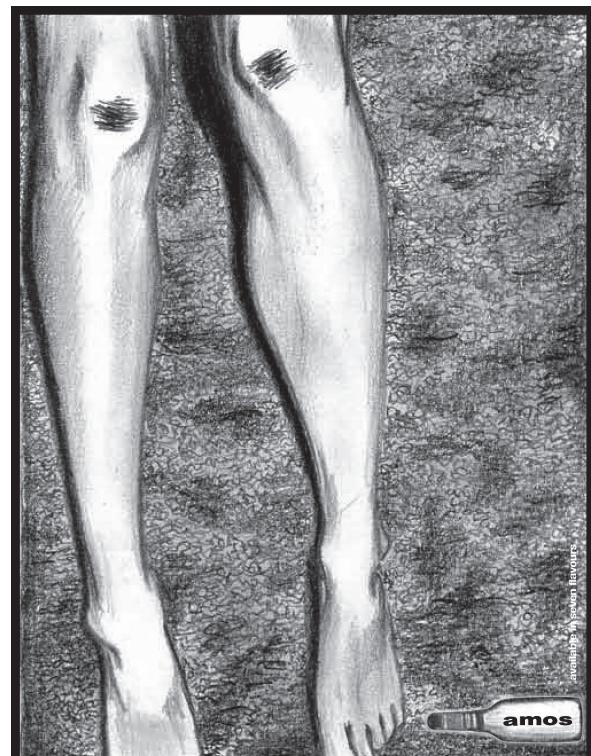


Figure 1-5: Positive Intention^a

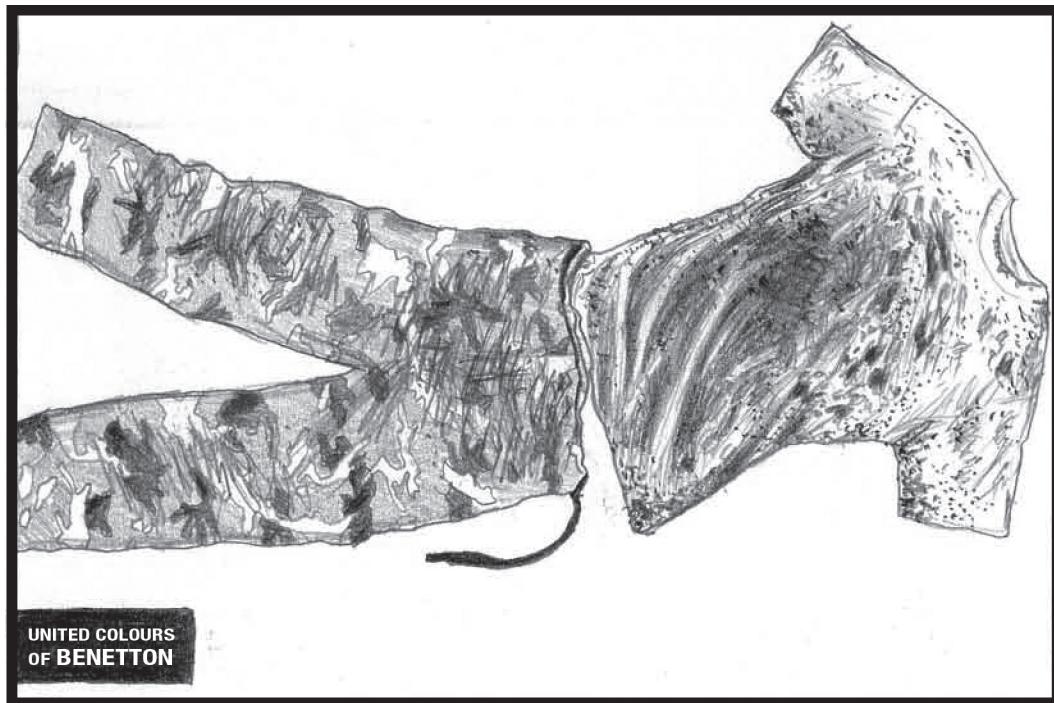


Figure 1-6: Negative Intention^b

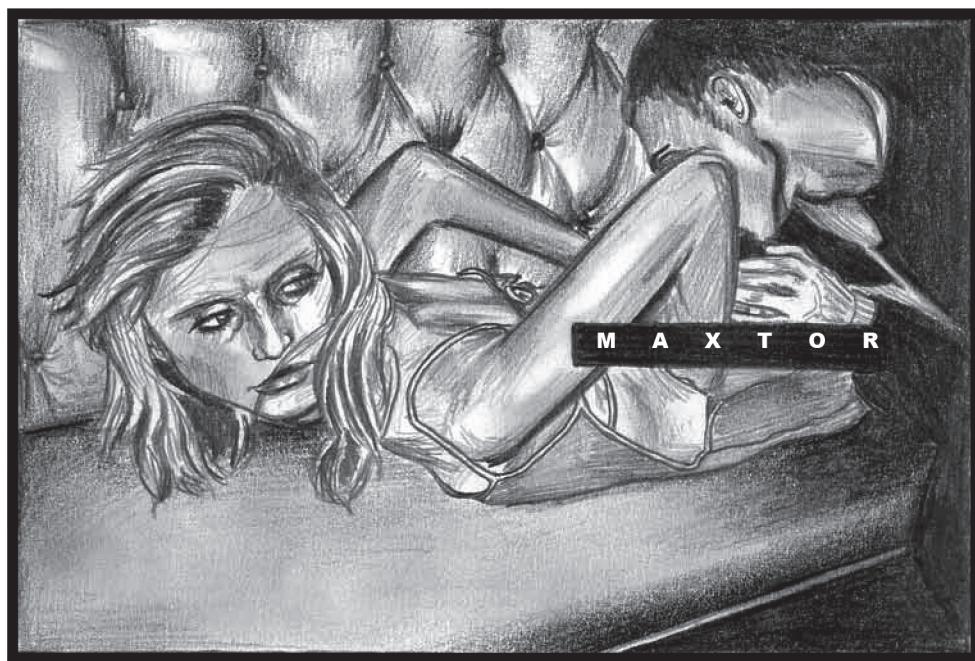


Figure 1-7: Legitimate

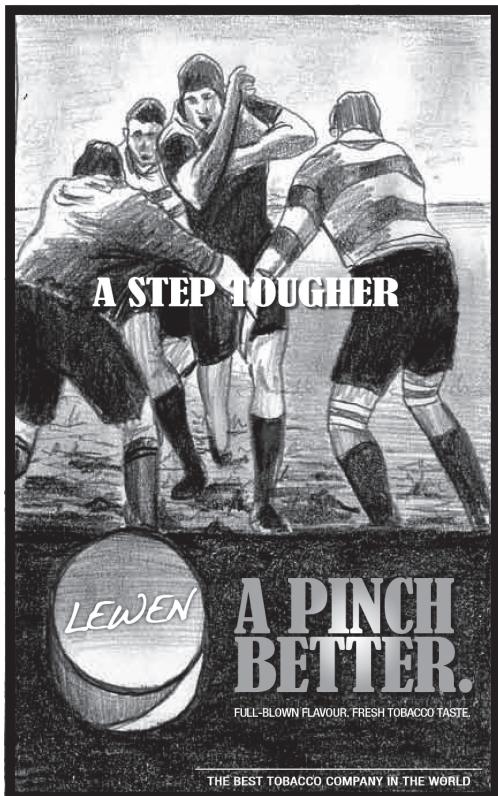


Figure 1-8: Illegitimate

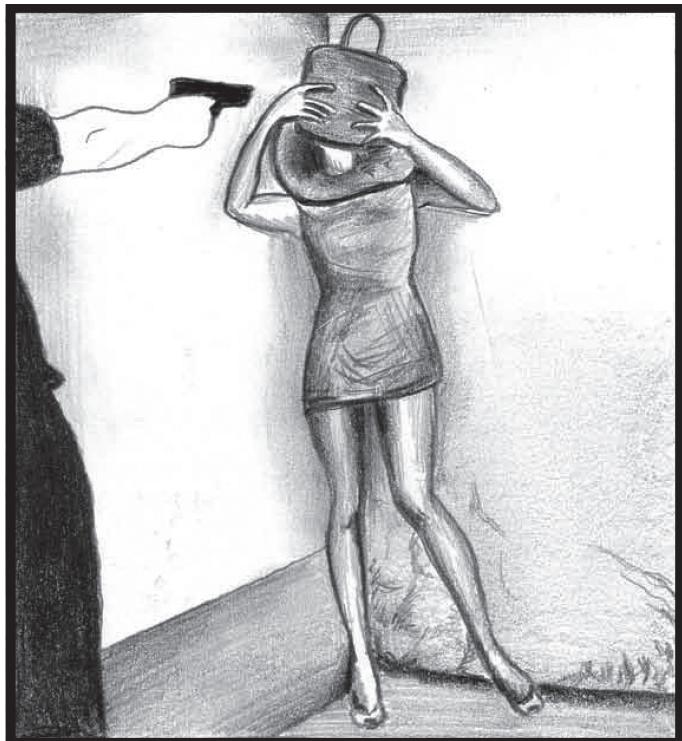


Figure 1-9: Fictional

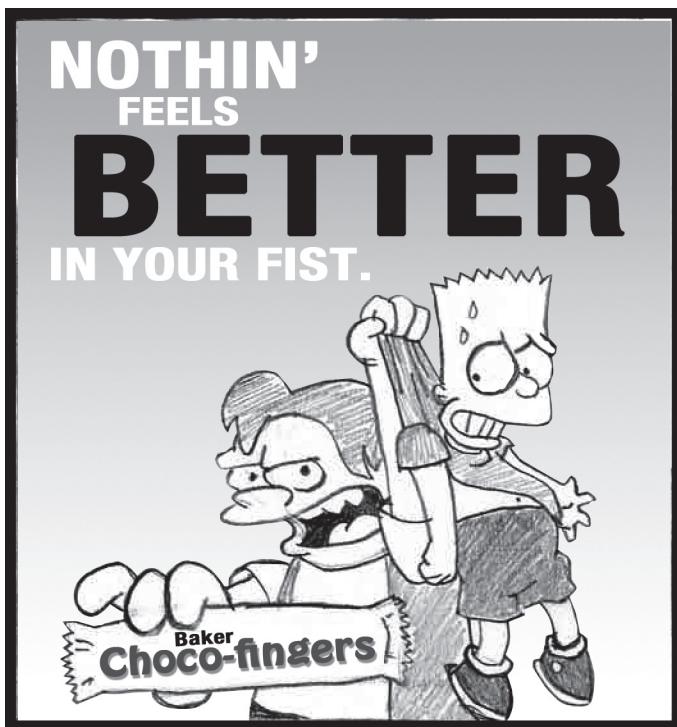


Figure 1-10: Reality

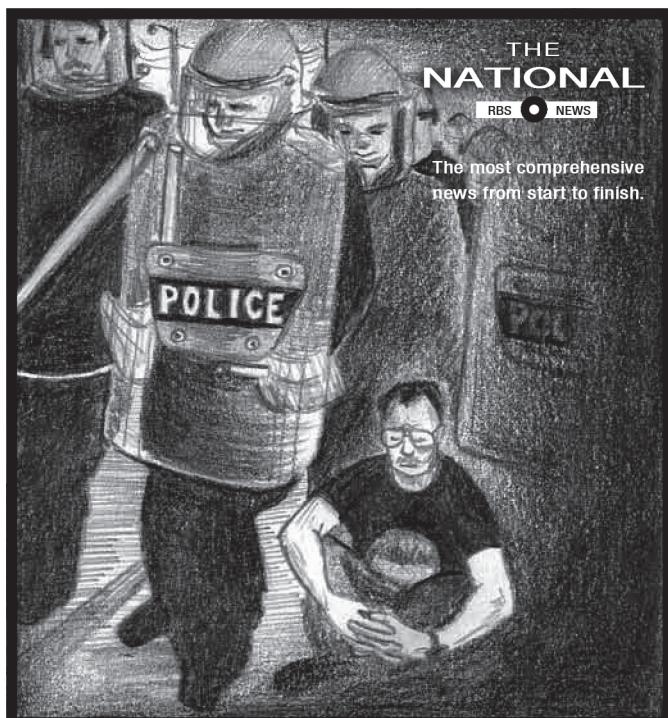


Figure 1-11: Victimization

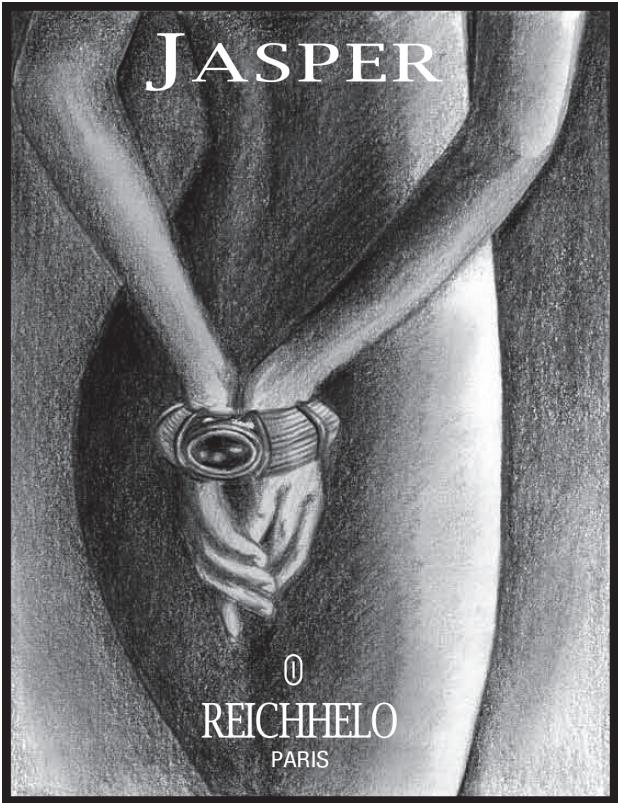


Figure 1-12: Victimization



Notes: The advertisements depicted here are hand-drawn re-creations of the actual advertisements. The brand names or tag lines have been changed to conceal the identity of the sponsor (with the exception of the Benetton advertisement, Figure 1-5). The advertisements were redone in this way to avoid copyright issues. Permission to use these advertisements as exemplars of violent advertisements was deemed unlikely.

^a The advertisement depicts a soldier's uniform with blood splatters.

^b The advertisement is for fashion apparel (women's).

APPENDIX 2

Coding Scheme Used in Manifest Content Analysis (Level 1)

Content variables	IRR^a	Categories	Frequency
<i>Intensity (66%)^a</i>			
Mode of violence	67%	Physical (including sexual) Psychological (including verbal) Both: physical and psychological	83% 8% 9%
Primary mode of physical violence	69%	No physical violence Shooting (with a gun) Threatening/forcing with guns Fist fighting, pushing, striking Hitting with weapons or tools Strangling Sexual violence Kidnapping/tying up/arresting	14% 44% 6% 15% 7% 2% 8% 3%
Primary mode of nonverbal (psychological aggression)	70%	No nonverbal aggression Forcing, subjection, pressuring Threatening, intimidation Irony, scorning gestures Other	83% 5% 10% 1% 1%
Seriousness: aggressor's intent	62%	Cannot code To have fun To threaten To insult To injure To kill	8% 18% 11% 1% 28% 33%
Seriousness: likely consequences of violence to victim (whether depicted or not)	62%	No harm Harm to property/objects only Mild harm or injuries to people or living things Moderate injuries to people/living things (medical care needed) Severe injuries (hospital care needed) Death	9% 6% 23% 11% 10% 36%
Dramatization: timing of the violent act	78%	About to happen Happening Has already happened	32% 39% 30%
Dramatization: tone of the violence	64%	Unclear Humorous/comedic Conflict, fighting Exciting, adventurous, sporting, fantasy (games) Frightening, threatening, horrific	4% 15% 21% 28% 27%
Dramatization: clarity and vividness of the depicted violence	57%	There is only the potential for violence Unclear depiction of violence Clear depiction of violence Detailed and graphic depiction of violence	19% 17% 57% 6%
Intensity of violence	62%	Mild Moderate Brutal	53% 42% 5%

Content variables	IRR^a	Categories	Frequency
<i>Congruence (75%)</i>			
Product category congruence	77%	Inclusion of violence is not consistent with the product category at all Inclusion of violence is consistent with the product category	56% 44%
Product category clarity	81%	Product category is clear from ad Product category is not clear from ad	13% 87%
<i>Congruence with positioning of brand (e.g., brand/issue)</i>			
	65%	Inclusion of violence is not consistent with the positioning of the brand Inclusion of violence is consistent with the positioning of the brand	46% 54%
<i>Intention (79%)</i>			
Purpose of the advertisement (e.g., brand/issue)	91%	To promote a product/service To raise awareness of a social issue To promote an upcoming program/movie To promote an upcoming event Other	80% 5% 11% 2% 0%
Why do you think the creator put violence in the ad?	75%	To enhance viewer interest/attention to the ad To make a social commentary about violence Because it is a realistic depiction of a particular product category or context Other/unsure	74% 7% 16% 2%
<i>Legitimacy (69%)</i>			
Justification: aggressor's intention	79%	Cannot code/unclear Intentional violence Unintentional violence (including accidental)	9% 73% 17%
Justification: primary motivation for aggressor's use of violence	61%	Cannot code To defend another being To defend oneself Violence as a means to an end Violence as a reaction or expression of emotion Violence for the sake of violence	23% 0% 6% 54% 4% 8%
Justification: If this violence happened in real life, would it be legal or not?	75%	Cannot code Legal Illegal	4% 55% 41%
Justification: role of aggressor	65%	Cannot code Violence is part of the aggressor's role (e.g., police officer, soldier, hockey player) Violence is not part of the aggressor's role	16% 41% 42%
Justification: congruence with context/genre (e.g., war genre/sporting events)	65%	Violence is not consistent with the context/genre Violence is consistent with the context/genre	37% 63%
<i>Identification (79%)</i>			
Realism: cultural distance	86%	Fantasy (e.g., sci-fi, cartoons) North American culture and English language North American culture and foreign language Foreign culture and English language Foreign culture and language	12% 82% 3% 2% 1%
Realism: temporal distance (setting of the ad)	86%	Current/contemporary (the 1990s and beyond) Retro (from the 1950s to the 1990s) Historical (before the 1950s) The future	1% 91% 4% 3%

(Continues)

APPENDIX 2 (*continued*)

Content variables	IRR^a	Categories	Frequency
Realism: fictionality	66%	A cartoon/animated program Unrealistic fiction (caricatured and fantasy characters involved) Realistic fiction Authentic	4% 16% 62% 17%
Power balance (80%)			
Power: likely sex of aggressor	81%	Cannot code Male Female A group of males A group of females A mixed group	50% 30% 10% 1% 1% 7%
Power: likely age of aggressor	83%	Cannot code Child Adult People of several age groups	44% 1% 55% 0%
Victimization: likely sex of victim	77%	Cannot code A male A female A group of males A mixed group Animal(s) Inanimate object(s)	26% 31% 20% 2% 5% 3% 11%
Victimization: likely age of victim	80%	Cannot code Child Adult People of several age groups	36% 7% 51% 6%
Glamorization: nature of the aggressor	60%	Cannot code A villain or "bad guy" Regular person, neither good nor evil A hero or "good guy"	24% 21% 38% 16%
Glamorization: nature of the victim	66%	Cannot code A villain or "bad guy" Regular person, neither good nor evil A hero or "good guy"	15% 16% 64% 3%
Efficacy: ignoring the consequences of violence	62%	The victim/aggressor will not/does not suffer any consequences The victim will suffer, but it is not explicitly depicted The victim suffers and it is depicted Both the victim and the aggressor will suffer, but it is not depicted Both the victim and the aggressor suffer and it is depicted	6% 48% 39% 5% 2%
Efficacy: extent that aggressor profits by violence	53%	Cannot code Not at all A little bit A lot	17% 27% 12% 42%

^a IRR = interrater reliability. Perreault and Leigh's (1989) reliability index is calculated as an assessment of interrater reliability.

APPENDIX 3

Television Advertisements Confirmatory Sample: Themes and Exemplars

Theme	Level	Brand	Description of advertisement
Intensity	High	Advertising agency	This television advertisement begins with soft-focus shots of a kitten playing. Then, the barrel of a gun is pointed at the kitten and cocked. This is a metaphor for the effectiveness of the agency's advertising.
	Low	Copier repair service	This television advertisement shows a woman sitting on a photocopier attempting to make a copy of that portion of her body. When an error message requiring a larger paper size appears, she begins to kick and hit the photocopier. At the end of the commercial, the text reads, "We don't care how it gets broken, we'll be there to fix it."
	High	Sportswear	This television advertisement shows the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team warming up. Interspersed with these images are shots of Maori warriors and rugby scenes. The chants and the actions of the players are aggressive, as is the game itself.
Perceived intention	Low	Auto group car dealership	This television advertisement begins with a scene of road rage in which one driver is verbally abusing another. The angry driver has left his vehicle and is pounding on the window of the other car. The victim presses a button on his dash labeled "Trunk Monkey." This releases a chimpanzee carrying a tire iron from the trunk of the victim's car. The chimpanzee strikes the angry driver with the tire iron.
	Positive	Charitable organization	This television advertisement opens with two teenage boys who are about to try "crystal meth." Suddenly, a wild man appears, jumps onto their car, grabs one of the boys and shoots at him the consequences of taking "crystal meth," including: "screw your brain up with paranoia . . . punch your girlfriend . . . die of a stroke." The text at the end of the commercial reads, "Only you can stop you."
Legitimacy	Negative	Video game	This television advertisement begins with a scene in a lingerie store in which a man tells his girlfriend, "I don't care what she says, you're not too fat to wear a thong." This instigates a wrestling match between two women. The commercial then cuts to scenes from the video game in which two women characters are wrestling. The tag line is, "Get hot girls to wrestle on command."
	High (legal)	Soft drink	This television advertisement shows a BMX extreme sport rider. He does several stunts perfectly and then on his last jump he is hit by a low-flying bird. This accident knocks him off the bicycle.
Identification	Low (illegal)	Sports Web site	This television advertisement begins with shots from a hockey game. It then focuses on two players who battle for the puck. This battle moves from the rink into the surrounding streets, where the players interfere with others and damage property. Eventually they fight their way back to the rink.
	High (realistic)	Fast-food restaurant	This television advertisement shows an office lunchroom scene in which one man attempts to take another's spicy chicken sandwich. The aggressor's shirt is ripped in the process.
Victimization	Low (fictional)	Luxury vehicle manufacturer	This television advertisement shows a class for villains in the context of the James Bond franchise. The instructor provides a series of things not to do when attempting to kill James Bond, including "not assuming James Bond is dead before actually seeing him die . . . never, ever ride in anything chasing Bond's XXX."
	Positive (empowerment)	Running shoes	This television advertisement is a takeoff of a horror movie. A woman has returned from a run and is shocked to see a hockey-masked, chain saw—carrying villain in the mirror. She runs, he follows, and eventually he gives up. The commercial concludes with the tag line, "Why sport? You'll live longer."
	Negative (victimization)	Sportswear	This television advertisement is one of a series featuring Terry Tate, a large lineman in the NFL. In this commercial, Tate is shown tackling someone in an office. The tag line is, "The pain train is coming."

APPENDIX 4

Print Sample: Themes and Exemplars

Theme	Level	Brand/category	Description of advertisement
Intensity	High	Yellé sunglasses (see Appendix I, Figure I-1)	This print advertisement shows a surf board that has been bitten in half. The surrounding water is full of blood. Floating in the water are several objects that may be clothing and body parts. A shark's fin is in the background. The sunglasses are intact and positioned on one of the surfboard pieces. The tag line reads, "tougher than you."
	Low	Garbage bags	This print advertisement depicts a bull charging a rodeo clown. The rodeo clown is using a garbage bag instead of the traditional red blanket to attract the bull's attention. The tag line reads, "Tear resistant enough for any job."
Congruence	High	Television drama	This print advertisement for a television drama that appears on A&E shows police crime tape and what appears to be a dead body covered by a white sheet. Several people appear to be investigating the scene. The crime-scene tape reads, "They found a body. They have 2 days to find a lead."
	Low	Dymo label printer	This print advertisement shows two men in an office environment. One man is smiling while he sits at a desk that has a Dymo label printer on it. The other man, who is grimacing, is about to strike a printer with a baseball bat. That printer appears to be jammed with labels. The headline reads, "Fast vs. Furious of label printing."
Perceived intention	Positive	Charitable organization	This print advertisement shows a woman and her young child outside a house. They appear to be bruised and despondent. There is an enlarged set of palms drawn into the picture tented over the woman and child. The copy refers to providing abused women and their children safe shelter and counseling.
	Negative	Fashion apparel (see Appendix I, Figure I-6)	This print advertisement shows a woman being restrained by a man on what appears to be a restaurant bench. She is lying on her stomach and looking back over her shoulder at the man who seems to be either kissing her buttocks or binding her hands. She is wearing a revealing dress and looks disheveled. There is no text in the advertisement apart from the brand name.
Legitimacy	High (legal)	National television news program (see Appendix I, Figure I-10)	This print advertisement shows several police officers in riot gear carrying batons. In their midst is an unarmed man sitting cross-legged on the ground. The tag line says, "The most comprehensive news from start to finish."
	Low (illegal)	Snowboards	This print advertisement depicts a torture scene. One man is tied to a chair. Blood covers much of his clothing and face. A standing man, dressed in black, appears to be questioning the first man. The scene is very dark. Light is shining through gritty windows in the background.
Identification	High (realistic)	Newspaper	This print advertisement shows the Ku Klux Klan burning a cross with the headline, "Mississippi? Alabama? Ontario?" The copy in the advertisement encourages subscription to the newspaper based on the benefit that the newspaper provides "a range of ideological insights."
	Low (fictional)	Chocolate bar (see Appendix I, Figure I-9)	This print advertisement shows two characters from the <i>Simpsons</i> television show. Nelson (the bully) is holding a sweating and anxious Bart up by the shirt with one hand while the other holds a chocolate bar. The headline reads, "Nothing feels better in your fist."
Power balance	Positive (empowerment)	Breath freshener	This print advertisement shows a woman dressed in a skin-tight body suit resembling Lara Croft, Tomb Raider. She has a determined face, a powerful body, and is armed with what appears to be an ammunition belt. She is firing a pocket breath freshener at a monster. The headline reads, "The war against evil breath bacteria just got a new hero."
	Negative (victimization)	Perfume (see Appendix I, Figure I-11)	This print advertisement depicts a naked woman bound at the wrists by a bracelet-shaped perfume bottle. The woman is visible from the shoulders to the knees, and is photographed from the back.