

**ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF
TELEVISION VIOLENCE**

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This project was funded by the New Zealand's Broadcasting Standard's Authority to investigate differences in the perception of a representative sample of television violence excerpts by a selected sample of different social groups. The study also investigated differences in attitude and belief in relation to television violence.

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INTRODUCTION

This research project builds on earlier research commissioned by the Broadcasting Standards Authority which centred on "An Analysis of the Portrayal of Violent Acts on the Three New Zealand Broadcast Channels During the week 11th-17th February 1991 (Watson *et al.* 1991). This latter research consisted of the measurement of violent incidents and images on New Zealand television throughout a week's broadcasting. A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was used not only to measure the number of violent incidents but also relate them to the contextual and genre features of individual television programmes. The theoretical justification for this approach was based on the assumption that the meaning of television "violence" was closely related to a variety of conditional factors associated with the context in which television violence occurs. Individual judges were also required to subjectively judge the "seriousness" of each violent incident. This judgement was made on a five point scale from 1 (not very violent) to 5 (very violent). The coders were mainly Media Studies students who had been trained to judge television violence, in terms of a modified version of Cumberbatch's (1988) definition of "violence", namely:

Any violent image or action or physical force or threat thereof, with or without a weapon against oneself or another person, animal or inanimate object, whether carried through or merely attempted, and whether the action caused injury or not. (Watson *et al.* 1991, 3).

The important features which distinguished this definition from others was the inclusion of "violent image" and "threats" of violence (both verbal and physical) which were omitted from Gerbner's (1971) definition and only partly included in the Cumberbatch definition. While this definition is not central to the present research it was a fundamentally determining element in identifying violent images or actions in the original study. In the case of the present research a subsequent selection of violent incidents was made from the original research project which incorporated this definition.

It was felt that a useful follow-up to the earlier research might profitably examine the degree to which the coders' judgements about the "seriousness" of television violence could be compared with other groups in the community. It was felt that it would be of particular interest to explore the perceptions and attitudes of older age groups in comparison with the younger age group as a basis for establishing the kind of differences in judgement which might exist between groups on the basis of age. Through the combination of viewers' judgements of television violence and the measurement of viewers' attitudes to (television) violence, this study aimed to identify the factors involved in viewers' judgements of television violence. More specifically the study sought to examine the degree to which age was an important variable associated with differences in judging television violence.

BACKGROUND

On the surface it seems something of a commonplace to suggest that different viewers will interpret television violence differently. However relatively little information is available concerning the considerations and factors which serve to differentiate viewers in their judgements of television violence.

Viewer's subjective assessment of violent television content as Gunter (1989) has pointed out, must not only be contextualised according to the social background of the respondents but should also be understood in terms of how the content itself is perceived:

...individuals vary considerably in their perceptions of violence. Not all people judge the same violent incident in the same way. Some may perceive certain acts as violent, while others will not. Consequently, when attempting to derive a system of content classification based on viewers' perceptions of content, it is essential that the nature of the judges themselves is taken into account, as well as the nature of the content that is being judged (Gunter, 1989:243).

The clear conclusion to be drawn from Gunter's work with the Independent Broadcasting Authority is that the fundamental differences in how television viewers actually understand and define violence raises a number of questions for those who impliment and administer codes and standards governing television violence. Central to the official process governing the control of violence on television is an assumption concerned with "public standards" and "public tastes" about which it is assumed there is a certain measure of agreement or consensus. It is presumably on the basis of an understanding of what the public understand by "violence" and what they are willing to accept or reject as being appropriate in this sphere, that the codes governing television violence are based. Yet as Gunter points out, relatively little research has been done on how viewers actually judge "violence" on television or the beliefs and attitudes which they hold. It is this issue which the present study examines, namely "how do different age and social groups judge television violence and what are their attitudes and beliefs?"

During the earlier study on the incidence of television violence on all three New Zealand TV channels, it was felt that the subjective judgements scale was a potentially valuable means of comparing and contrasting the different meanings that television might have. However the fact that the judges themselves were young (from 18 to 28 years of age) and mainly Media Studies students was a significant limitation. Clearly it remained to be seen how other age and social groups might judge television violence in comparison with the original judges. Thus the present study sought to explore how a range of other age and social groups responded to a representative sample of television violence taken from the earlier Watson study.

PROCEDURES

A random sample of violent incidents was extracted from the earlier Watson study across each of the judgement categories as well as across major genre categories such as cartoons, sports, drama, news, films, etc. These excerpts were recorded on a separate video tape and comprised 13 violence items, each approximately 30 seconds in length. This selection of thirteen episodes was considered to be more or less typical of the variety of television violence screened in the week of 11 - 17th of February 1991. The items were then placed in random order to constitute the final experimental tape. The selected items are shown below according to the programme in which the violence occurred. The number in parenthesis represents the judgement accorded the particular excerpt by the original judges.

*viewing
repeated
taken and
of repetition*

1. Haunted Honeymoon - Film (2)
2. One World of Sport - Sport (3)
3. Gulf War News - News (5)
4. Woody Woodpecker - Cartoon (1)
5. Alfred Hitchcock - Drama (5)
6. The Park is Mine - Miniseries (4)
7. The Park is Mine - Miniseries (2)
8. Dennis the Menace - Cartoon (1)
9. Defenders of the Earth - Cartoon (3)
10. Mania - Film (5)
11. MacGyver - Drama (3)
12. Top Cops - Drama Documentary (4)
13. The Roadrunner Show - Cartoon (3)

The total length of the thirteen videotaped excerpts was approximately 11 minutes 49 seconds. This was considered the optimum length and number of excerpts to allow the various groups to complete the judgements on the thirteen items within a time frame of approximately one hour.

Prior to the beginning of the judgement exercise, each group was shown an introductory item which consisted of a violent excerpt from the police drama "Shark in the Park". This consisted of a policeman struggling with an assailant armed with a knife. In the course of the struggle the policeman is cut on the arm and the bloodstained knife falls to the ground. Subjects were asked to judge the item in terms of the seriousness of the violence on a one to five point scale. After the respondents had recorded their judgements some discussion followed in which they were able to clarify any confusion about what was required or the basis upon which they should judge the items. A common question at this stage was whether the "seriousness" of the items should be judged in terms of the consequences as they perceived them for other people, the item should be judged from one's own personal point of view. The latter was reinforced as the appropriate way to approach the judgements.

After completing the judgements of the videotaped violent items, the groups were asked to respond to 29 items reflecting a variety of beliefs and attitudes concerning violence in general and television violence in particular. Each item involved a response on a five point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The items on the attitude scale had been chosen on the basis of an assumed relevance to the judgement of television violence items.

THE SAMPLE

A number of "opportunity" groups were approached to take part in the study based upon a need to obtain responses from a wide variety of groups who might potentially represent different perceptions of televised violence. Considerable difficulty was experienced in obtaining access to a sizeable sample of respondents in the older age group. This may have been partly a function of general reticence amongst older individuals to become engaged in a research project which they This appeared to be largely a function of the tendency for retired and older people to only infrequently come together in large groups and then only for specific social purposes. Taking part in a research programme often appeared at odds with the primary social purposes which older people held as their fundamental motivation for belonging to a group in the first place. As a result a lower total sample of older respondents was obtained than was initially expected. However even though the total sample was only 85, it consisted of 56% respondents 40 years and over, making possible a comparison with younger respondents. The total sample was composed of 6 groups as follows:

	No	%
Workers Education Association Group	13	15.3
Massey University Students	21	24.7
Anglican Church Mission Group	16	18.8
YWCA Group	10	11.8
10-12 Group	7	8.2
Army Group	18	21.2
Total	85	100.0

The nature of each of these groups is described as follows:

Workers Education Association Group

This comprised 13 retired or semi-retired older men and women who met together each week to participate in a course entitled "Local History of the Manawatu" Many of these subjects had been professionals during their working life employed in such areas as teaching, nursing and related professional occupations.

Massey University Students Group

This was composed of a voluntary group of Media Studies Students enrolled in 54.101 Introduction to Media Studies. This group fell within the age range 18 - 23 years of age.

Anglican Church Mission Group

This group comprised 16 older individuals the majority of whom were women. The group constituted a mixture of socio-economic backgrounds who had been previously employed in a variety of occupational groups. They met monthly for a variety of social and church related purposes which included the organisation and administration of specific church mission projects.

YWCA Group

This group was composed of 10 older women who had a long association with the YWCA over a period of years. They met on a regular monthly basis for educational and social purposes.

10 - 12 Group

This group obtains its name from the fact that they meet weekly from 10 - 12 noon. They consist of 7 women who meet in each others' homes for social and educational purposes. This involved the discussion of books, films or related educational topics. The women in this group were either widows or retired professionals.

Army Group

This group comprised 18 members of a unit from the NZ Army Signal Corp stationed at Linton Camp. They consisted of approximately equal numbers of men and women in the age range from 21 - 35 years of age.

The distribution of the sample is shown in the attached graphs. From these figures it can be seen that the sample comprised approximately 56% over 40 years of age and 43% under 40 years, a predominance of females (64%), mostly pakeha (84%), retired (43%), approximately evenly distributed across occupational groups, and on average viewed television for approximately 3-4 hours per day (48%).

FIGURE 1 - DISBRIBUTION BY GROUPS

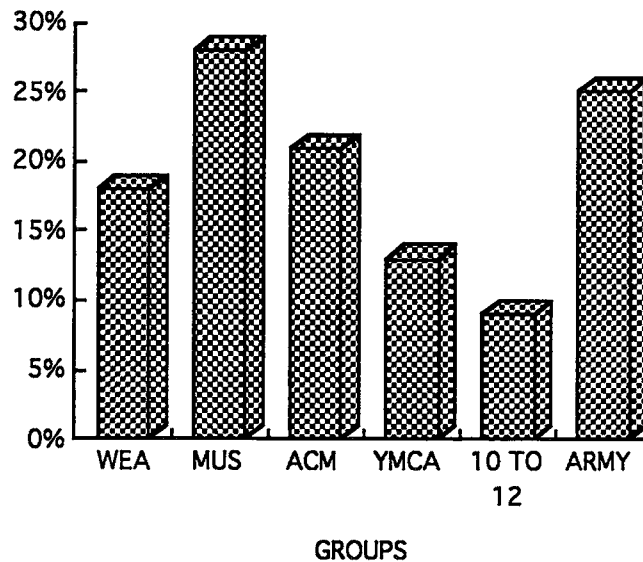


FIGURE 2

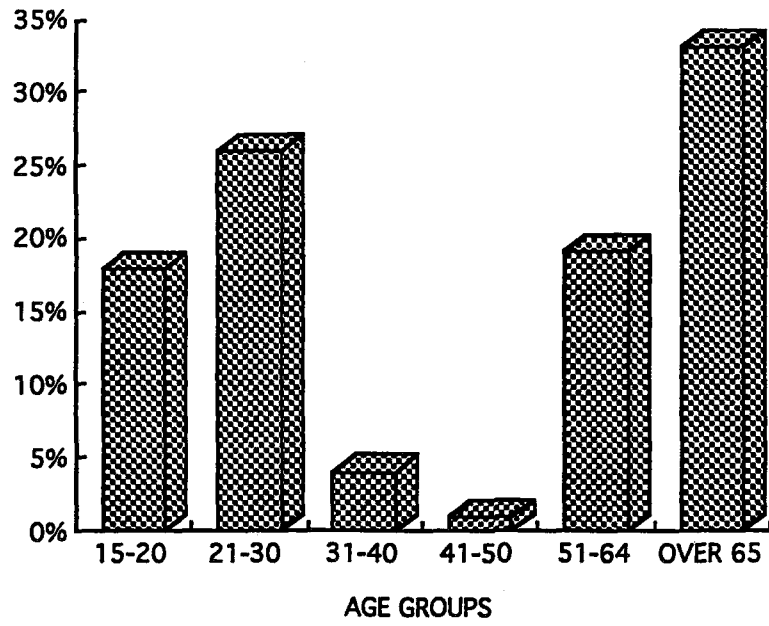


FIGURE 3

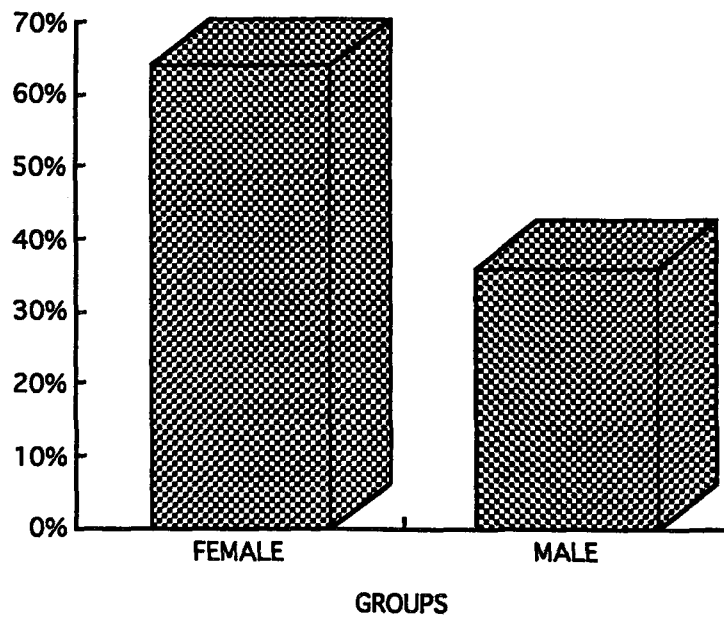


FIGURE 4

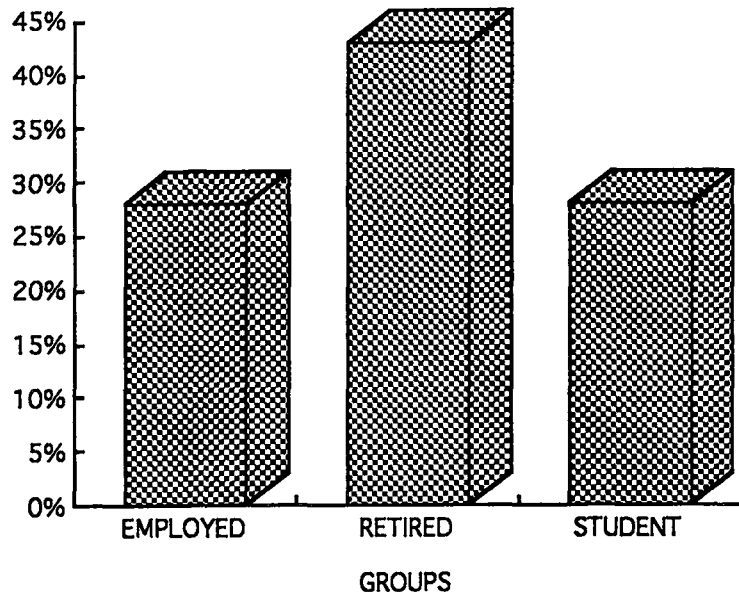


FIGURE 5

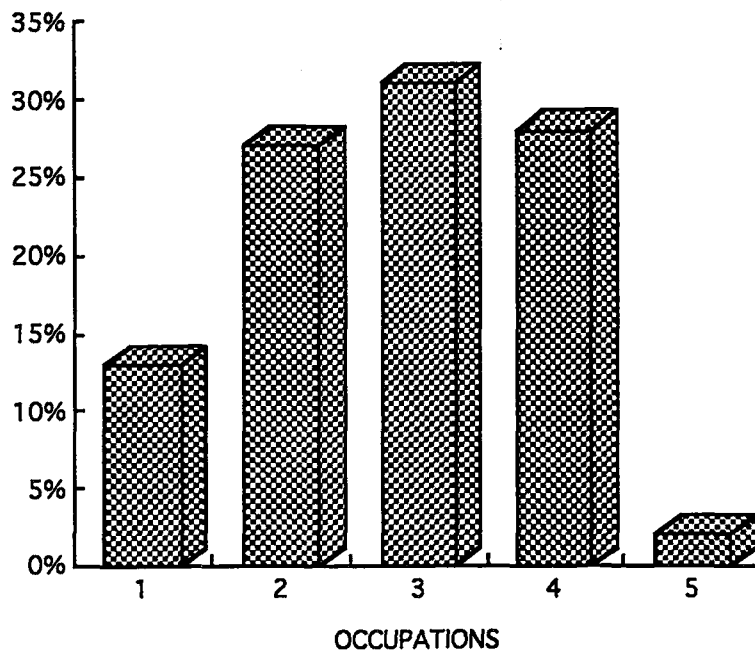
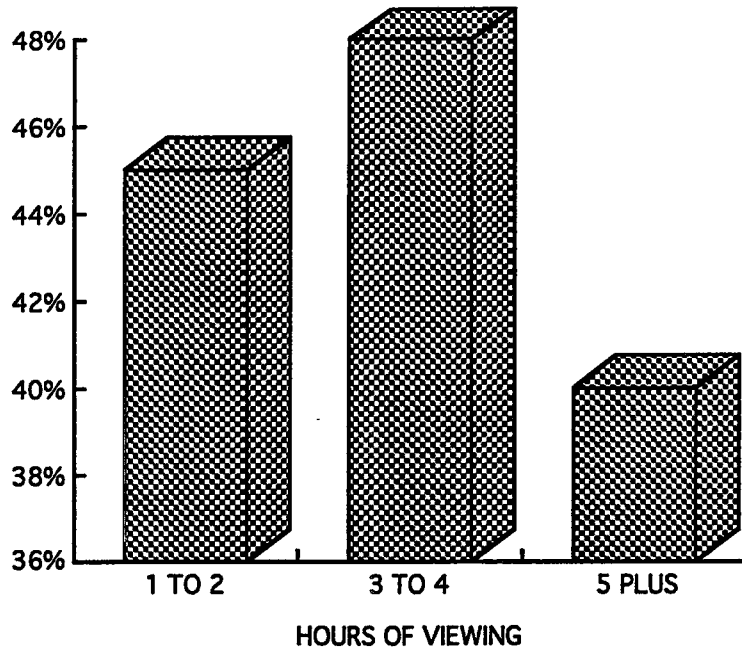


FIGURE 6



DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

(i) Age

The results obtained from this study can be summarised across a range of variables. In general there is a broad tendency for age to be the most significant factor influencing differences in judgements of television violence. The older age group is more likely to judge television violence as "more serious". The differences in judgements on the basis of age was reflected in the mean judgements of the violence items for those under 40 years as compared with those over 40 years. There was a consistent pattern for the older age group to judge the televised violence toward the more serious end of the continuum for almost every item. This is shown in the table below:

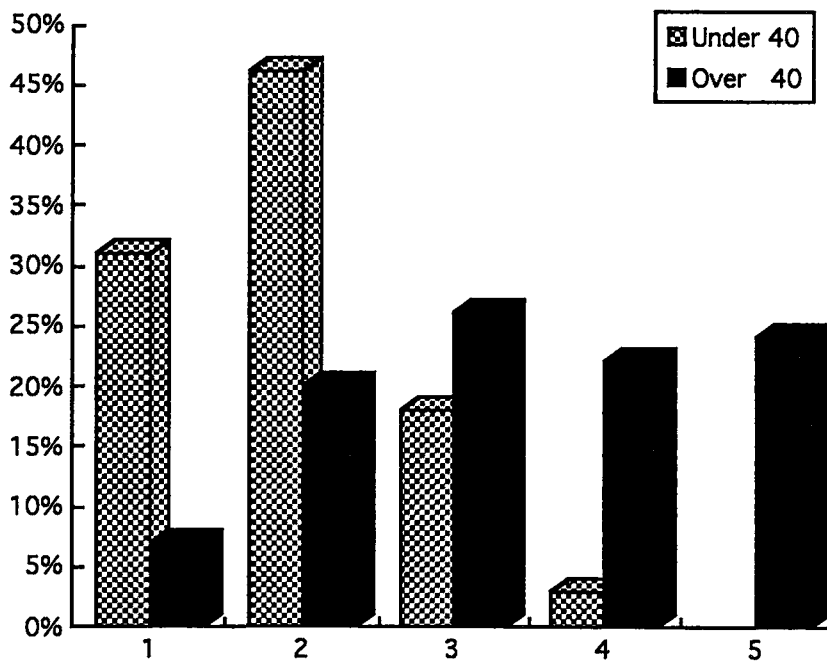
MEAN JUDGEMENTS BY AGE GROUP

Item	Under 40	Over 40	Difference
1. Haunted Honeymoon (2)	1.67	2.73	+1.06
2. One World of Sport (3)	2.68	3.24	+0.56
3. Gulf War News (5)	3.30	4.11	+0.81
4. Woody Woodpecker (1)	1.68	1.98	+0.30
5. Alfred Hitchcock (5)	3.73	4.71	+0.98
6. The Park is Mine (4)	3.00	3.44	+0.44
7. The Park is Mine (2)	1.97	2.89	+0.92
8. Dennis the Menace (1)	1.68	2.49	+0.81
9. Defenders of the Earth (3)	1.97	3.43	+1.46
10. Mania (5)	3.86	4.87	+1.01
11. MacGyver (3)	3.16	4.47	+1.31
12. Top Cops (4)	3.76	4.07	+0.31
13. The Roadrunner Show(3)	2.14	2.73	+0.59

These results clearly demonstrate the tendency of those over 40 years of age in this sample to judge television violence as represented by the items in this study as "more serious" than those under 40 years of age. There is a consistent pattern amongst the older age group to place each violent incident at the more serious end of the 1-5 continuum, not only in comparison with the younger age group but also in comparison with the judges in the original Watson study (the judgement of the original Watson study is represented by the number in parentheses after each item). In four of the items the difference between the two age groups was a full judgement category.

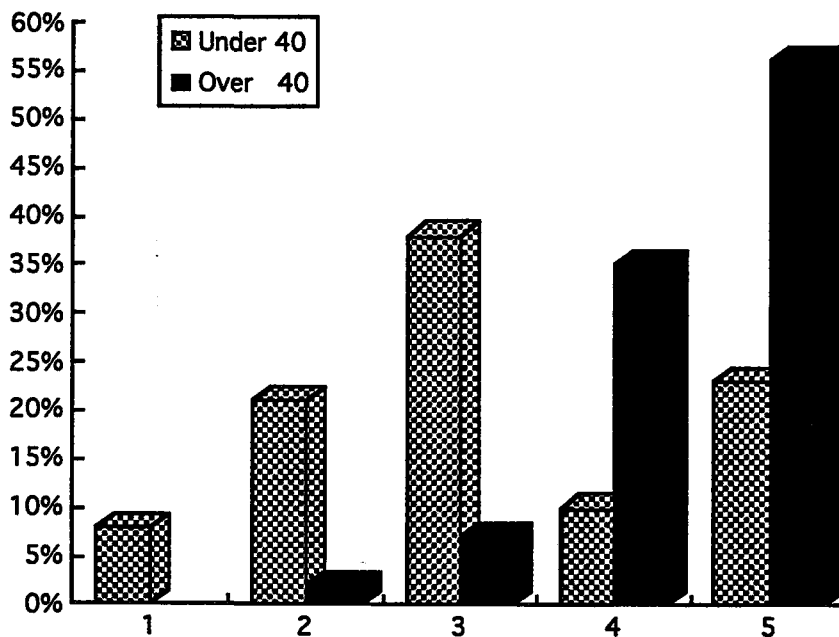
The degree of difference between the age groups was most marked in relation to item 9 "Defenders of the Earth" (3) where a difference of +1.46 was recorded. The item consisted of an excerpt from a cartoon feature involving an attack upon the earth by alien creatures in the form of mechanical robots. The excerpt involved a number of shootings, explosions and various forms of destruction depicted in animated form. This appears to indicate that the older age group in this sample regard the cartoon form of television violence with more seriousness than those under 40 years of age. Certainly the other cartoon excerpts involved in this study were not judged to have the same degree of seriousness as this item. It is interesting to note that the other cartoon excerpts did not contain the same explosive, battle scenes as this particular item. It may well be that this represents a significant factor in how older individuals judge the various forms of cartoon violence. In terms of average (mean) judgements however, the two age groups reported here were more or less in harmony with the original judges in the Watson study. When one represents these judgements in graph form as percentages of each age group the differences become more apparent.

Defenders of the Earth (3)



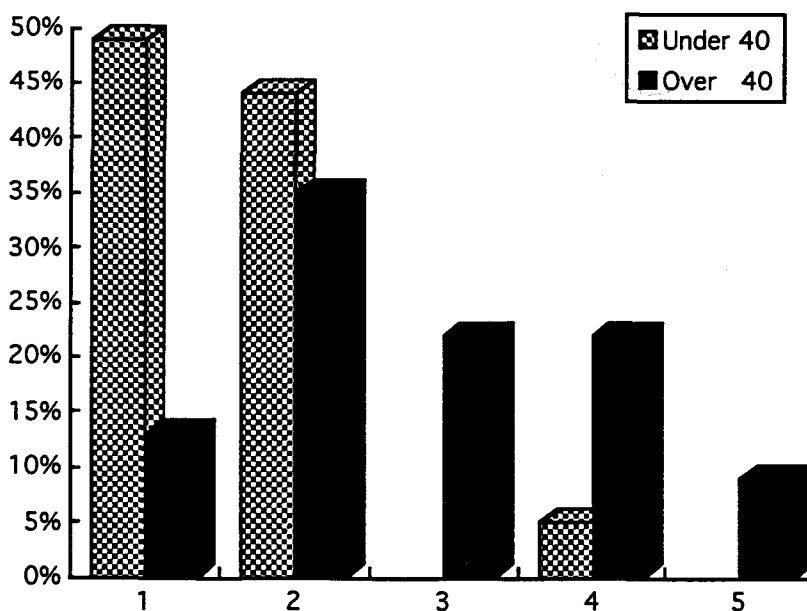
The second greatest difference involved an excerpt from the drama series "MacGyver" (3) in which a young woman introduces herself to another woman in a carpark then casually pulls out a revolver and shoots her. Those over 40 years of age tended to judge this excerpt much more seriously (+1.31) than the younger age group who constitute its main audience. By comparison with the younger group, a much larger percentage (56%) of the older group judged this item as very serious whereas only 23% placed it in this category. It may well be that familiarity with the "MacGyver" series plays an important role in producing this difference since the programme is not commonly explicit in its violence and tends to utilise rather stylised forms of violence in which the consequences of the action are seldom explicit. The violence in this particular excerpt is notably unrealistic - a fact that would most likely to be observed by the younger viewer. The older age group on the other hand, unfamiliar with the series and its particular conventions would more likely react negatively to the casual, seemingly gratuitous nature of the incident and therefore judge it more seriously.

MacGyver (3)



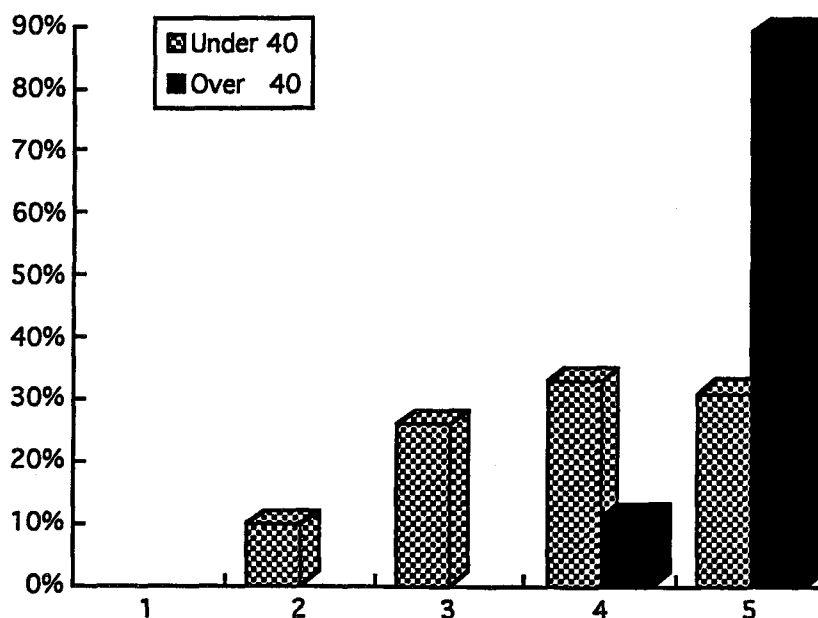
Likewise with the item entitled "Haunted Honeymoon"(2) where the difference was +1.06. This excerpt consisted of an introductory scene to a satirical horror film showing a man dressed as a woman falling forward in an open window revealing a knife in his back with the words "It's not what it might seem". It is clearly intended to be a humorous send-up and parody of some of the conventions association with Gothic horror films. It is likely that the older age group, less familiar with the genre, would interpret this item in accordance with a different set of criteria than the younger audience who constitute those more familiar with the horror genre. As one can see from the graph below 49% of the younger group regarded this item as very mildly violent whereas only 13% of the older age group perceived the violence in this way.

Haunted Honeymoon (2)



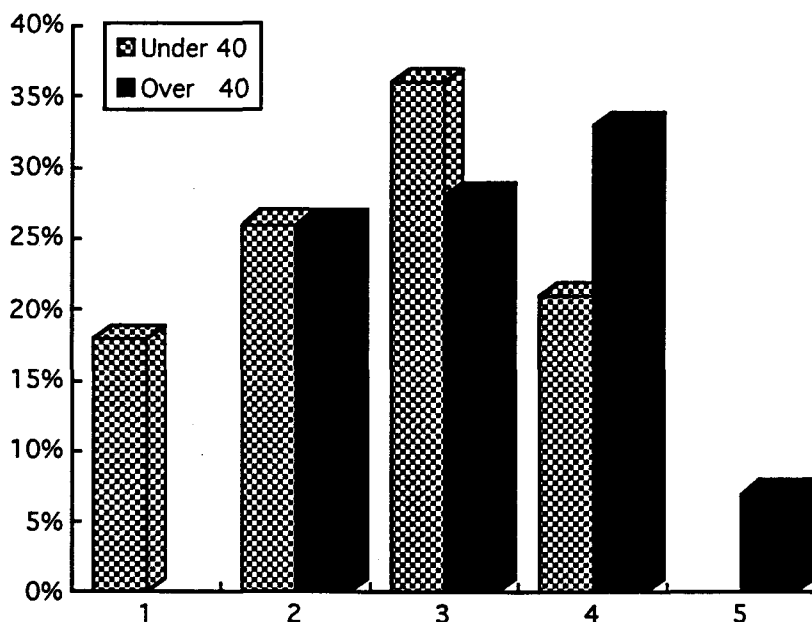
Another large difference in the mean judgements of the two age groups occurred with an excerpt from a film called "Mania" This consisted of a crazed teenage girl attacking a man with a knife and after stabbing him she turns to her father with the bloodied knife in her hand and then moves toward him in a threatening fashion. A difference of +1.01 was recorded between the two age groups with respect to this item. In contrast to the original judges' rating the under 40 age group judged this item to be less serious than the "very serious" category response of the Watson study. In comparison, the mean judgement of the older age group was similar to that of the original judges. However a very large percentage (89%) of the older group confined their judgements to the very serious category 5 as compared to 31% of the younger age group.

Mania (5)



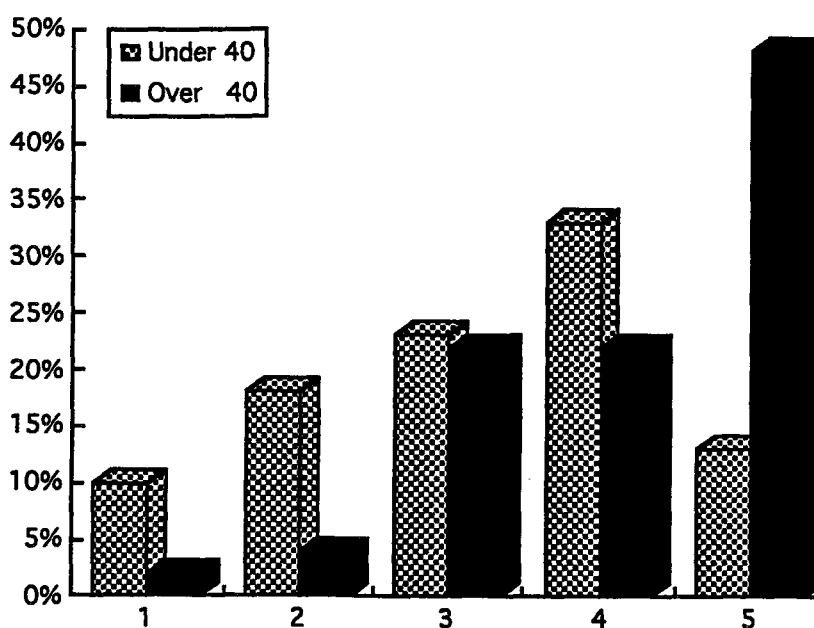
Other items were similarly judged differently by the two age groups. The violence incident from "One World of Sport" consisted of an excerpt from a British rugby game between England and Scotland in which a player was tackled in an excessively aggressive manner and was injured in the process. The incident was repeated in slow motion with the critical comments of the commentator pointing out how dangerous the action was. The mean difference in judgement was +0.56 with the older age group moving more toward the "serious" end of the continuum in comparison with the younger age group as can be seen from the graph below. As can be seen from the graph below 33% of the older group placed this excerpt in category 4 with an additional 7% judging it as category 4. By comparison the majority (36%) of the younger group judged this item as category 3.

One World of Sport (3)



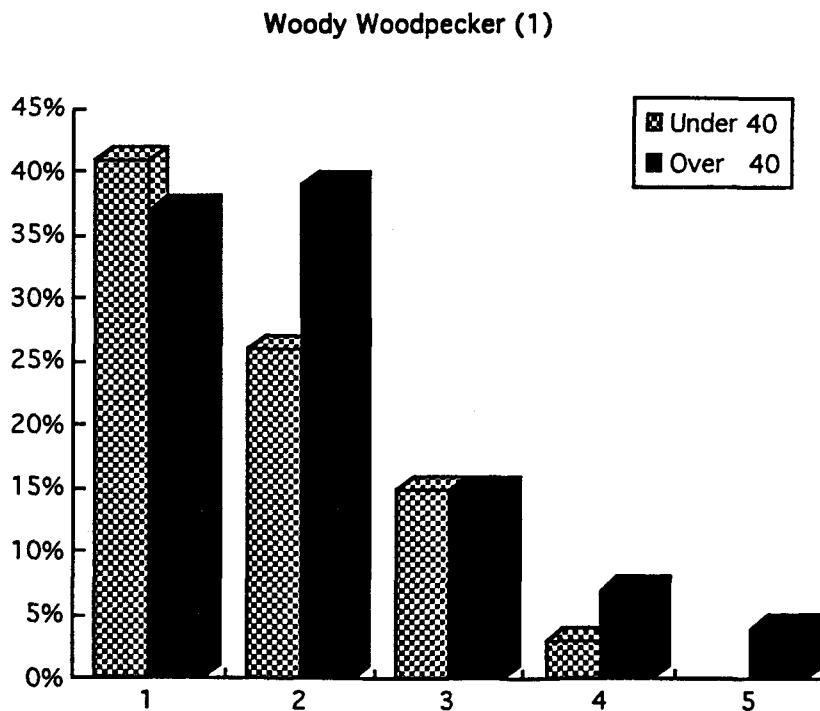
The "Gulf War News" item consisted of a news excerpt from a reporter in Baghdad showing the destruction brought about by an American bomb dropped on a civilian shelter at Amariya. The excerpt showed mourning relatives of the women and children killed in the shelter and included images of some of the dead bodies being removed and laid out in a courtyard. While the mean difference between the two groups was +0.81 the difference between the two groups is dramatically shown by the graph giving the percentage judgements of each age group. Here 48% of the older age group placed this item at the very serious end of the coninum while only 13% of the younger age group judged the item in this way. Overall, the more serious judgement of this item is in keeping with other research (Gunter, 1988) which suggest that more "realistic" violence is judged to be more disturbing and therefore more serious.

Gulf War News (5)



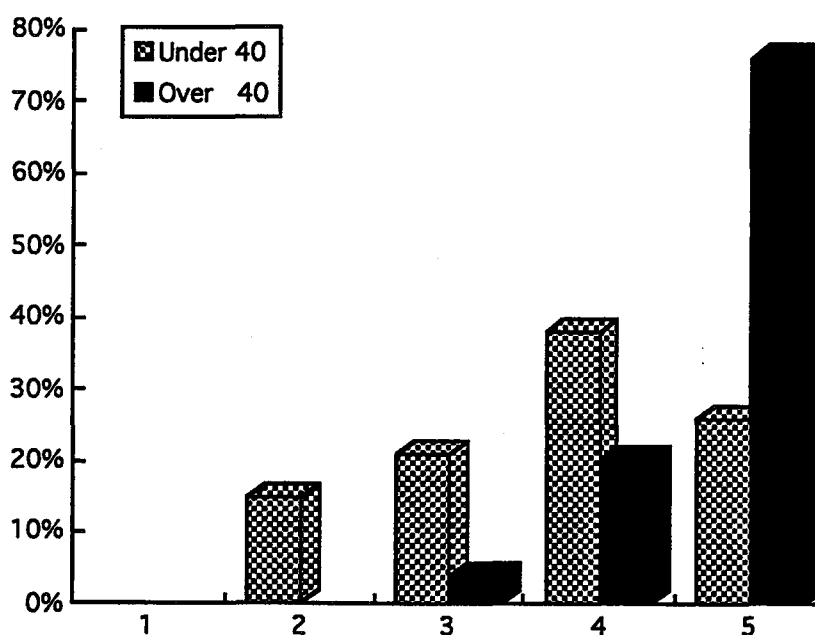
The item entitled "Woody Woodpecker" contained an excerpt showing the animated cartoon character Woody Woodpecker fishing beside a rather large man who responds to questions with a threat to punch Woody Woodpecker on the nose if he doesn't "shut-up". It is the threat which constitutes the "violence" in this case and the original judges considered it very mildly violent. The small difference in means of +0.30 signifies a good measure of agreement between the two age groups on this item with 41% of the younger age group judging the item the same as the original judges and 37% of the older age group judging it in the same way.

Verbal threats of violence appear to create more agreement amongst the sample than other forms of violence. Both groups equally consider them to be of less concern.



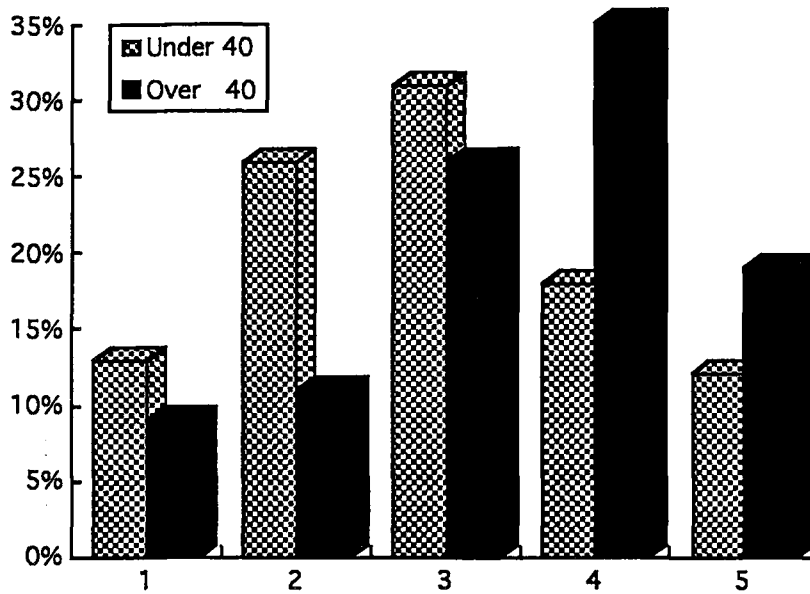
The "Alfred Hitchcock" item consisted of a man being killed by an intruder with an axe. Although the actual killing was not shown explicitly the sound effects were realistic and the killer was shown standing over the dead body holding the bloodied axe. The mean difference in the judgements of the two age groups was +0.98. However the graph of the percentage judgements shows the differences more dramatically. Amongst the older age group 76% judged this item to be very serious as opposed to 26% of the younger age group. It may well be that these judgements are an expression of the relative television experiences of the two groups. Compared with more explicit representations of violence the younger age group may judge this to be less serious, whereas the older age group consider the literal content of the excerpt (a murder) to be serious whether explicitly shown or not.

Alfred Hitchcock (5)



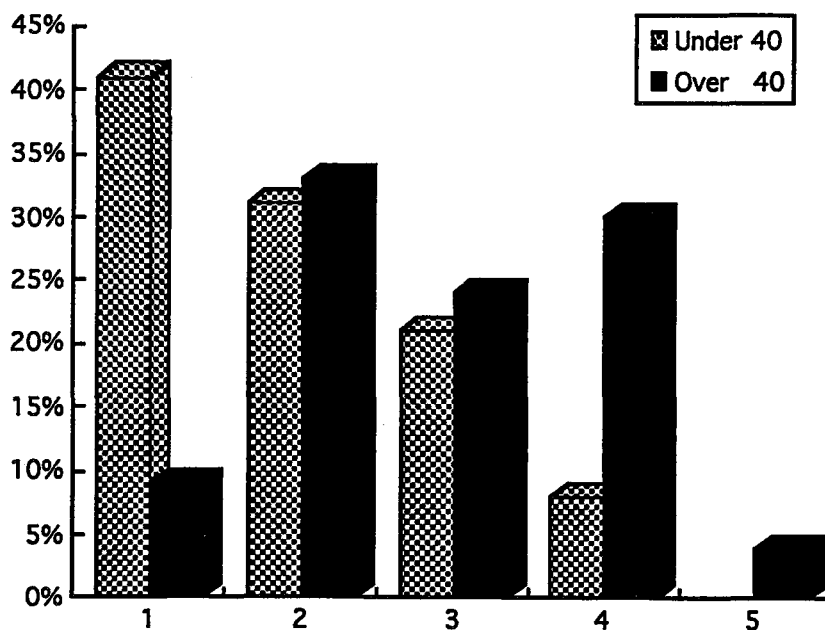
The first item entitled "The Park is Mine" consisted of a hospital patient standing on top of a tall building and committing suicide by jumping to his death below watched by a crowd of onlookers. His fall is shown in slow motion and the actual impact only recorded on the sound track. The dead man is then shown lying on the ground surrounded by shocked spectators. The difference between the mean judgements of the two age groups on this item was +0.44. However the graph shows a higher percentage (54%) of the older group placed the item at the more serious end of the continuum (category 4 & 5) as compared with 30% of the younger group.

The Park is Mine (4)



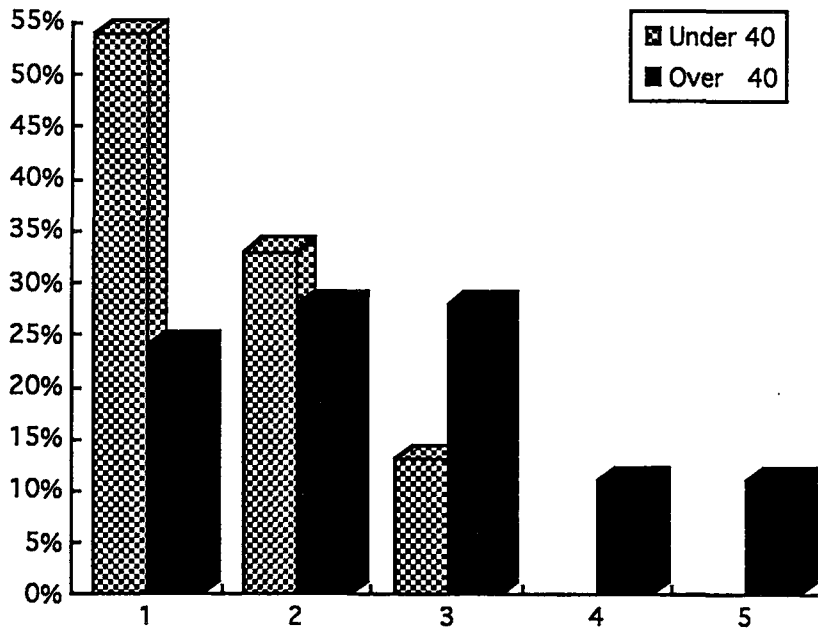
The second "Park is Mine" item involved a telephone call to a police receptionist in which a verbal threat was given by an "urban terrorist" to blow up a police station with a series of bombs. The "violence" in this item was in the form of a verbal threat although the actual violence threatened was of a more powerful or "serious" kind. The difference in mean judgement for this excerpt was +0.92 although as the graph shows a sizeable percentage (30%) of the older age group judged the item much more seriously (category 4) than the younger age group the majority of whom (41%) judged it to be only mildly violent. It would appear that the older age group tend to regard the threat of explosion and human destruction with more seriousness than the threat of physical aggression as was the case with the Woody Woodpecker item. Certainly the movement toward the more serious end of the scale is clearly apparent in this item.

The Park is Mine (2)



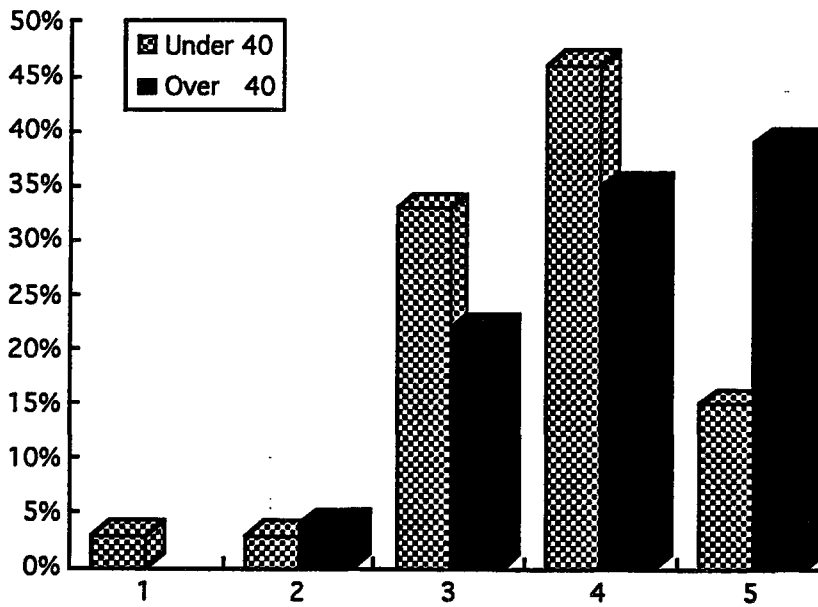
In the excerpt from the cartoon feature "Dennis the Menace" the main character Dennis (a young child) and his father are visiting an aircraft testing facility. While observing a test in operation Dennis interferes with the controls and a series of (humorous) events follow, culminating in a door slamming on the father's hand. The difference in mean judgements was +0.81 but the percentage judgements represented in graphic form show how markedly different the actual patterns of judgements were. Fifty four per cent of the younger age group regarded this item as mildly violent while only 24% of the older age group judged it in this way. None of the younger group placed this item at the seriously violent end of the continuum whereas 22% of the older group judged it in this way, placing it in category 4 and 5. The general pattern shows how the older age group judge television cartoon violence more seriously than the younger age group . This tendency is in harmony with the results obtained from the attitude measures in the second part of this study.

Dennis the Menace (1)



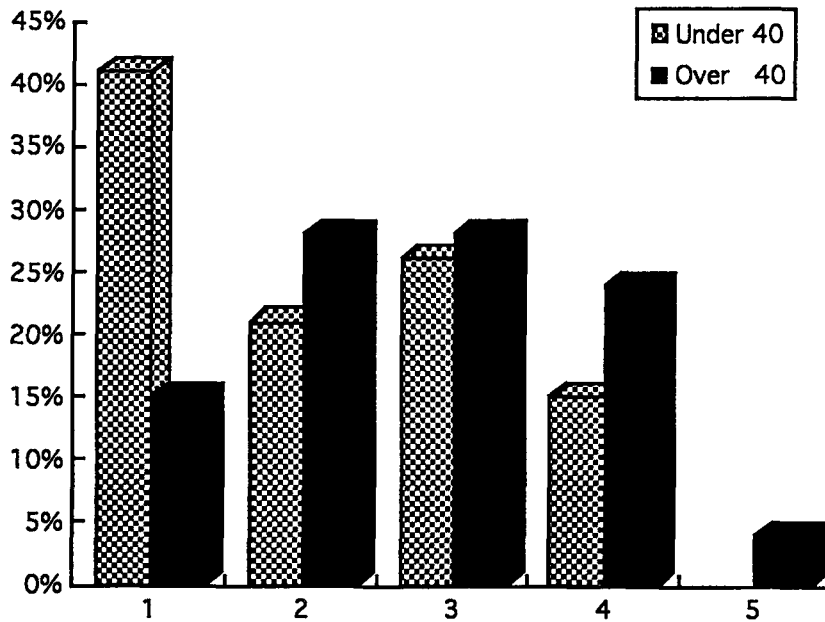
The "Top Cops" item consisted of a re-enactment of a police incident in which a policeman confronts an armed criminal and is eventually forced to shoot him in the leg to prevent him escaping. The presentation of this programme assumes a documentary format in an attempt to create a more "realistic" style and it was no doubt because of this (and the actual shooting) that this item was given a rating of 4 by the original judges. The difference in the mean judgements of the two age groups was only +0.31, however a significant 39% of the older age group placed this item in category 5 at the very serious end of the scale. In comparison, 46% of the younger age group judged it as a category 4 item.

Top Cops (4)



Finally "The Roadrunner" item consisted of an excerpt from an animated cartoon in which Coyote (a regular character in the cartoon) attempts to capture the Roadrunner and is eventually run down by a freight train. The item is intended to be humorous and is in the cartoon style characteristic of the programme. The difference in mean judgements between the two age groups was +0.59. The percentage judgements however show 41% of the younger age group judged this excerpt as only mildly violent while only 15% of the older age group judged it in this way. Once again cartoon violence is judged very differently by the two age groups. Those over forty years of age continue to perceive cartoon violence quite differently from the younger group.

The Roadrunner Show (3)



In one sense the results reported here have a somewhat different value and meaning to those obtained from the original Watson study in which the judges were required to reach a consensus on the category to be recorded for each violent incident. In contrast it would be unlikely for the present study to record a figure identical to the original study as it would require a complete consensus amongst the age group. Thus the interpretation of the present results must be understood against the background of the manner in which the original judgements in the Watson study were obtained. Given this factor it seems all the more remarkable for the older age group to obtain a numerical figure as close to the original judges as is recorded here.

Yet the results do substantially support the view that at least with regard to this sample, age constitutes an important variable contributing to differences in judgements concerning the seriousness of individual excerpts of television violence. Those over 40 years of age consistently judge television violence as "more serious" than those under 40 years. These differences appear greatest at the "more serious" end of the continuum. This is in contrast to Gunter (1989) who found that age was less clearly related to perceptions of televised violence than other variables.

(ii) *Gender*

Some studies have suggested that gender is an important variable responsible for differences in perceptions of television violence. A recent study undertaken by Sclesinger *et al.* (1992) explored the way women perceived television violence and the basis upon which they made their judgements. A clear finding which emerged was that women who had experienced violence in their own lives were more sensitive to televised violence, more subtle and complex in their readings, more concerned about possible effects and more demanding in their expectations. It was not the purpose of the present study to focus particularly on this aspect of the gender issue. However differences did emerge between males and females in the judgements of television violence. While they were significant, these differences were not as large as those based on age. The mean judgements of the various violence items according to gender are shown below.

MEAN JUDGEMENTS BY GENDER

Item	Male	Female	Difference
1. Haunted Honeymoon (2)	2.07	2.36	+0.29
2. One World of Sport (3)	2.63	3.17	+0.54
3. Gulf War News (5)	3.30	3.89	+0.59
4. Woody Woodpecker (1)	1.90	1.78	-0.12
5. Alfred Hitchcock (5)	4.07	4.39	+0.32
6. The Park is Mine (4)	3.13	3.24	+0.11
7. The Park is Mine (2)	2.07	2.67	+0.60
8. Dennis the Menace (1)	2.20	2.04	-0.16
9. Defenders of the Earth (3)	2.57	2.81	+0.30
10. Mania (5)	4.27	4.52	+0.24
11. MacGyver (3)	3.77	3.96	+0.19
12. Top Cops (4)	4.00	3.85	-0.15
13. The Roadrunner Show (3)	2.40	2.48	+0.08

While there is a clear tendency for females to judge these items as "more serious" than males, the differences are not in the same proportion as those on the basis of age. Indeed with regard to three excerpts, females judged the violence in the excerpts to be less serious than males although the differences are relatively small (0.12, 0.16 and 0.15). Thus with regard to the sample involved in this study, while gender does contribute to differences in perceptions of television violence it appears to be a somewhat less powerful factor. Certainly in comparison with age, gender appears to contribute much less to the differences that were obtained in this study. It may well be that gender differences in perception of television violence diminish with age. Since the majority of this sample were over 40 years of age this could explain the relatively small gender differences recorded in this study. Gender differences in this area may well be more marked amongst younger age groups but no attempt was made to measure such a feature in this study since the majority of the sample were over 40 years of age.

(iii) Socio-economic level.

Socio-economic level was determined by the use of the Elley/Irving Index. (Elley and Irving, 1981). Category 1 consists of professionals such as Physicians, Dentists, Architects and Secondary School Teachers. Category 2 consists of white collar workers in high level jobs such as Administrators, Managers, Technicians, and Primary Teachers. Category 3 consists of skilled trades and white collar workers such as Electricians, Clerks, Sales Managers and also includes Nurses, Tailors and the Clergy. Category 4 consists of lower level skilled jobs such as Signwriter, Slaughterman, Builder, Chauffeur, Cook and Florist. Category 5 consisted of semi-skilled jobs such as Bricklayer, Construction Worker, Driver, and Waitress. Finally category 6 involved unskilled work such as Labourer, Gardener, Kitchenhand, and Cleaner.

Based on this sample no clear patterns of difference emerged on the basis of socio-economic level. From the results recorded below it can be seen that no particular occupational/class group shows a consistent pattern of different judgements from any other group. In fact there was a remarkable degree of agreement across socio-economic class and few differences emerged as a result.

MEAN JUDGEMENTS BY SOCIO ECONOMIC LEVEL

Item	Level				
	1 (N=9)	2 (N=18)	3 (N=20)	4 (N=19)	5 (N=1)
1. Haunted Honeymoon (2)	3.00	2.78	1.95	1.89	2.00
2. One World of Sport (3)	3.11	3.11	2.95	2.42	3.00
3. Gulf War News (5)	3.22	4.06	3.90	3.00	5.00
4. Woody Woodpecker (1)	1.67	2.28	1.76	1.74	1.00
5. Alfred Hitchcock (5)	4.56	4.89	4.05	4.00	4.00
6. The Park is Mine (4)	3.78	3.83	3.19	3.00	2.00
7. The Park is Mine (2)	2.56	3.11	2.24	2.11	1.00
8. Dennis the Menace (1)	2.67	2.22	1.62	2.11	1.00
9. Defenders of the Earth (3)	2.89	3.39	2.20	2.37	2.00
10. Mania (5)	4.78	4.83	4.14	4.42	4.00
11. MacGyver (3)	4.56	4.50	3.52	3.68	4.00
12. Top Cops (4)	4.33	4.11	3.62	3.79	4.00
13. The Roadrunner Show (3)	2.67	2.83	2.14	2.53	3.00

ATTITUDES TOWARD TELEVISION VIOLENCE

The second aspect of the study involved the subjects responding to a 27 item questionnaire concerned with violence in general and television violence in particular. The questionnaire consisted of selected statements reflecting various beliefs associated with television violence, to which subjects were asked to respond on a five point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The results were separated by age to distinguish those over 40 years and those under 40. The results tended to support the view that the over 40 year age group who judged televised violent excerpts more seriously also held stronger beliefs and attitudes representing anti violence views in general. In comparison with the under 40 year age group, the older age group tended to express a greater consensus of agreement in their responses. In contrast the responses of the younger age group reflected less consensus and was more widely spread across the range of categories. This result is consistent with a consolidation of attitudes and beliefs as individuals grow older. Details of these results appear in the appendix

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results on the whole supported a conclusion that those over forty years of age in this sample hold beliefs and attitudes about television violence that substantially differ from those under forty years of age. The older age group also hold these beliefs and attitudes more strongly than the younger age group. In contrast there was relatively little difference in attitudes toward aspects of violence in general although the tendency of the older age group to hold these views more strongly was maintained

(i) Views on violence in general

The first group of statements were chosen to reflect a general set of beliefs about violence as a whole. Both groups were in general agreement that violence was acceptable in order to protect one's family although a greater proportion of the younger age group held this view (71%) than the older group (49%).

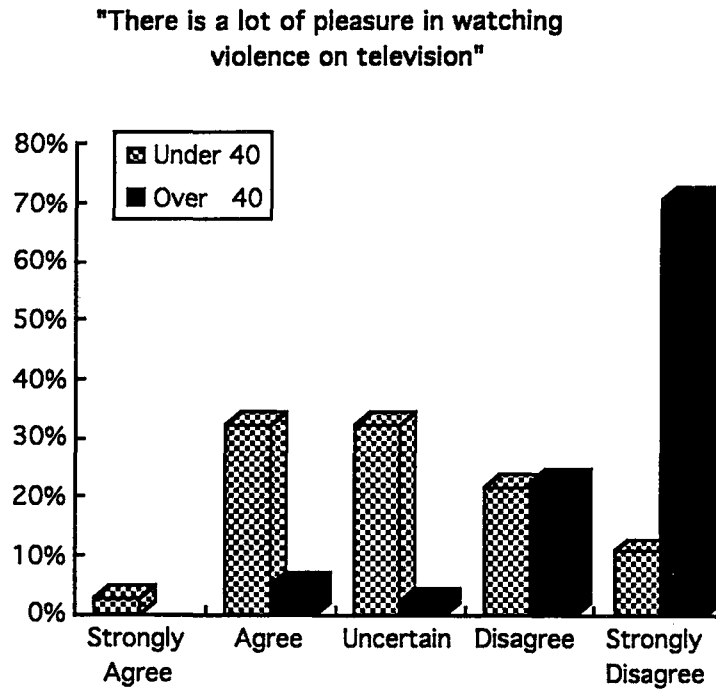
When it came to violence to prevent cruelty to animals both groups tended to be uncertain with the responses evenly spread across the categories. A greater percentage of those under 40 believed violence was acceptable to prevent crime (68%) whereas for the older age group this figure was 40% with an additional 36% disagreeing with this statement. There was general agreement amongst both groups that we live in a violent society with 82% of the older group and 92% of the younger group strongly agreeing or agreeing with this item. Likewise both groups believed that violence in our society is on the increase (89% of those over forty and 78% of those under forty although the older age group held this belief more strongly (49%). Both groups agreed that older people today are worried about being physically attacked (86% of those over forty and 81% of those under forty).

Both groups opposed physical punishment in schools (57% of those over forty and 64% of those under forty) but the older age group were surprisngly more strongly opposed to the reintroduction of captial punishment (82%) as against 37% of the under 40s. A significant proportion of the younger age group were uncertain on this issue (35%). With regard to whether the police should carry guns both groups were generally opposed to this (47% of the over 40s and 42% of the under 40s) although there was a significant percentage of the younger age group (38%) who favoured the police carrying guns.

Thus it would appear from these results that the groups were not sharply divided in their beliefs and attitudes about violence in general. In spite of the differences between the two groups in the way they tended to judge television violence, a similar difference was less apparent in their attitude toward violence in general.

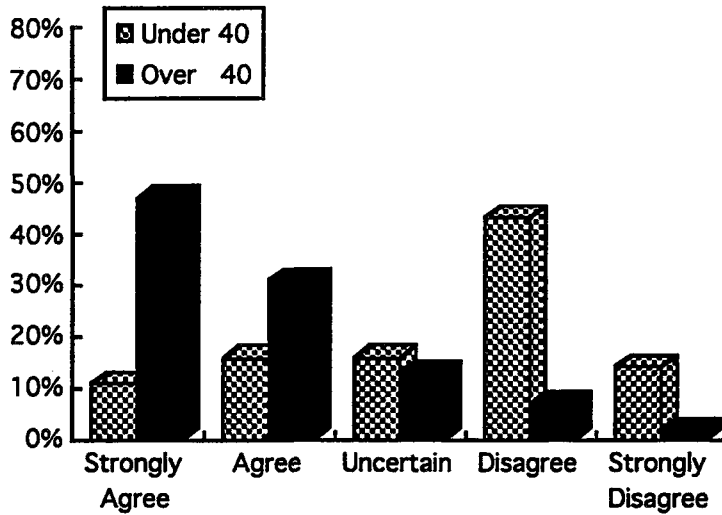
(ii) Television violence as entertainment

In general it can be said that more distinctive differences emerged between the two groups with regard to the entertainment value of television violence. The over 40s group clearly rejected the idea that there is a lot of pleasure in watching television violence (71%), while the younger group were more divided (32% agreed there was, 32% were uncertain and 22% disagreed). This is shown in the graph below:



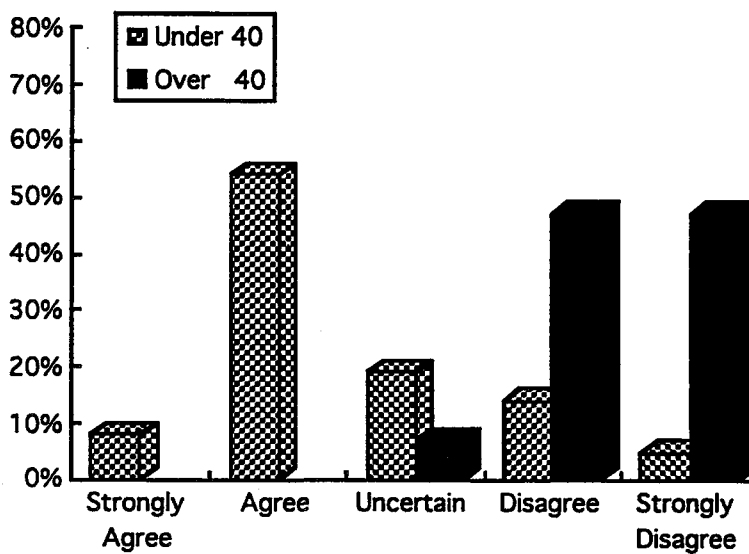
Similarly 78% of those over forty believed experiencing pleasure from television violence was sick while 57% of the younger group rejected this idea. This is represented below:

"Experiencing pleasure from TV violence is sick"



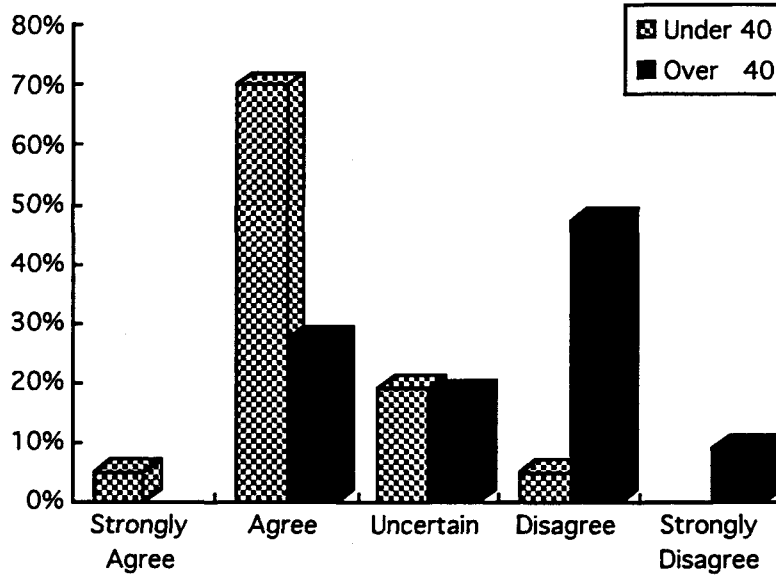
Likewise an overwhelming 93% of the older age group rejected the idea that television violence is good entertainment while 62% of the younger group agreed with this idea.

"Television violence is good entertainment"



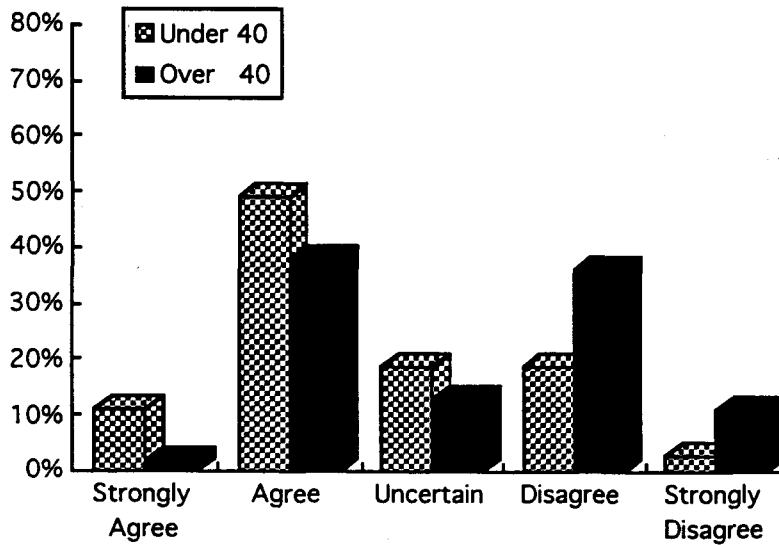
Seventy six per cent of the younger age group also believed it was o.k to watch a bit of television violence from time to time, while 56% of the older age group rejected this.

"It's O.K. to enjoy a bit of television violence from time to time"



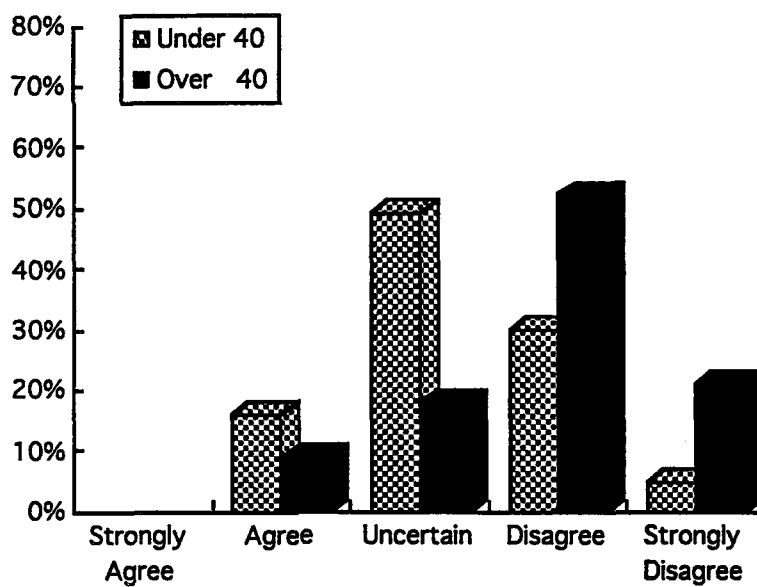
Fifty-nine per cent of the younger age group believed it was only realistic to believe that people would be entertained by television violence while 46% of the older age group rejected this idea.

"It is only realistic to expect that people will be entertained by television"



Finally older respondents (73%) were far more likely to disagree with the cathartic argument that watching television violence allows the viewer to let off steam. Only 35% of the younger group held this attitude with the majority of them expressing uncertainty about this statement.

"Watching TV violence allows the viewer to let off steam"



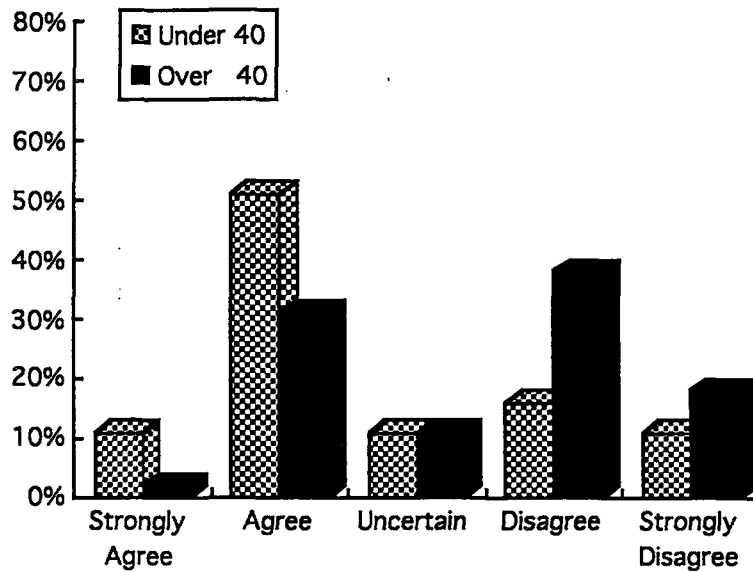
Thus it seems clear that the older age in this sample were unwilling to accept the idea that television violence has a certain entertainment value while the younger age group firmly believed that television violence does have such a value. This may be explained in part by the popularity amongst the young of such media forms as the horror genre and a general willingness to grant that television violence can operate as a source of entertainment through its contribution to narrative structure and dramatic tension. In other words the entertainment value of television violence which the older group so firmly rejects may be an expression of their unfamiliarity with the genre forms and the various expressions of television violence which add to the dramatic impact of the programme. Younger viewers not only seem to be more aware of this but also appear able to accept that violence serves an entertainment function on television. It is difficult to know whether this difference between the groups accounts for the differences in judgements but it would certainly seem to be a contributing factor.

(iii) Television Violence and its Context

It is commonly claimed that the meaning of television violence is dependent on the context in which it occurs (Gunter 1989). Realist violence such as occurs in the news or documentaries has a different meaning to that which occurs in fictional drama. A significant finding of Gunter's research was the fact that cartoon violence was not considered to be a serious matter because of the fantasy context in which took place and the animated form in which it was expressed. Thus a number of items in the present study explored the respondents attitudes to the various genre contexts of television violence.

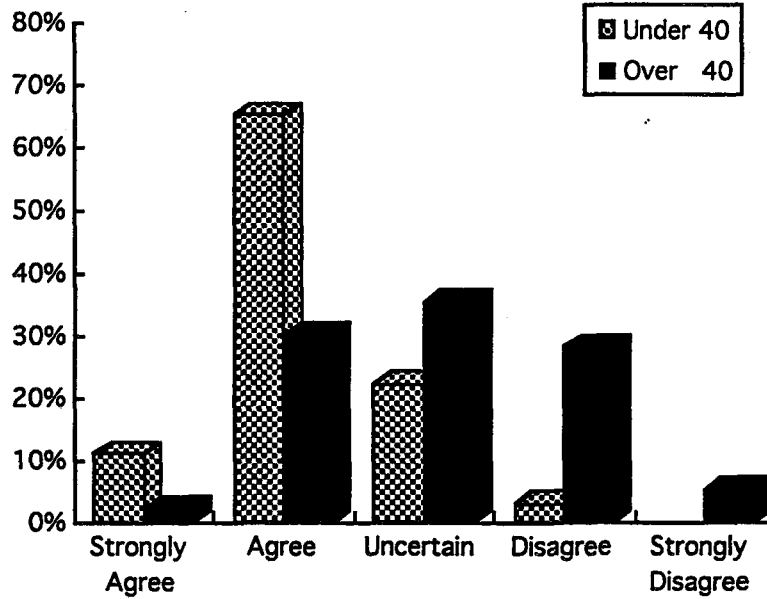
Once again the differences between the two groups was clearly apparent. Fifty six per cent of the older age group rejected the notion that violence is an inevitable part of television cartoons while 62% of the younger group agreed with this statement.

"Violence is an inevitable part of television cartoons"



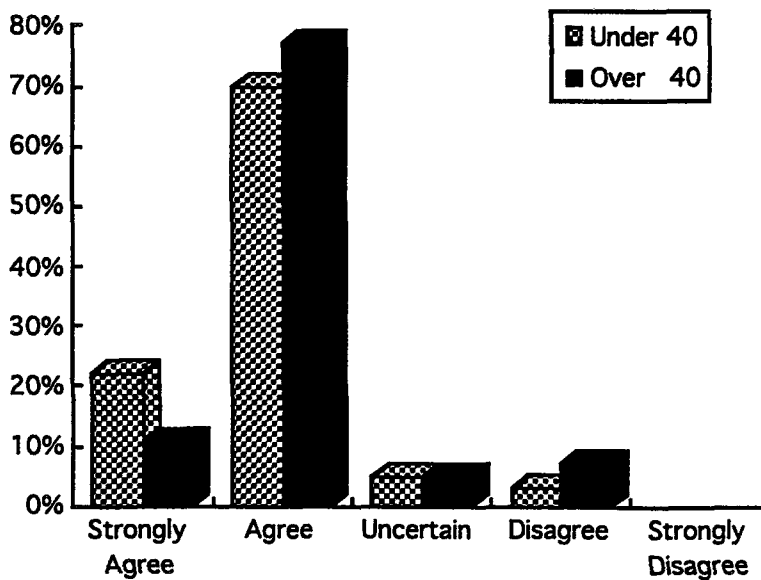
Seventy six per cent of the younger age group supported the idea that humorous violence in television comedy was all right while only 32% of the older age group agreed with this

"Humorous violence in television comedy programmes is all right"



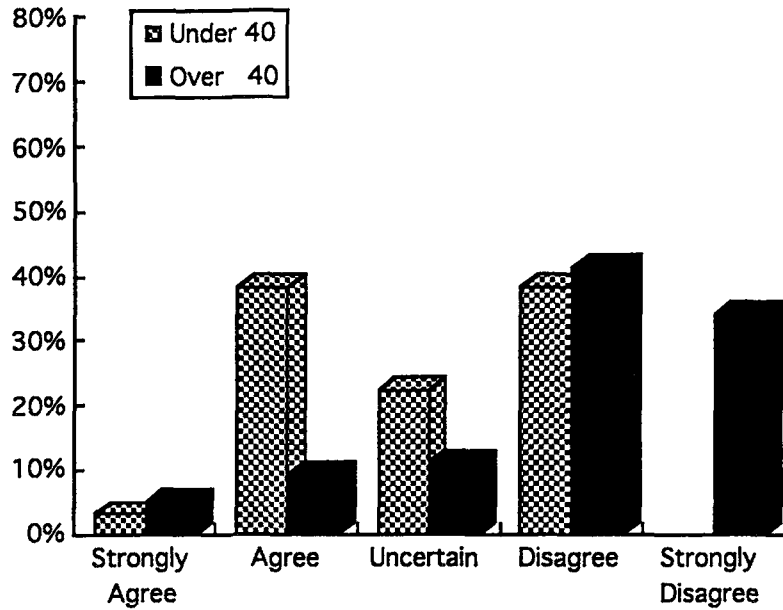
On the other hand both groups substantially agreed (87% of those over forty years of age and 92% of those under forty), that it was necessary to show violence on television news and documentaries.

"It is sometimes necessary to show violence on TV news and documentaries"



Finally, 73% of the older age group disapproved of violent language on television while 40% of the younger group agreed that it was alright.

"Violent language is alright on television"

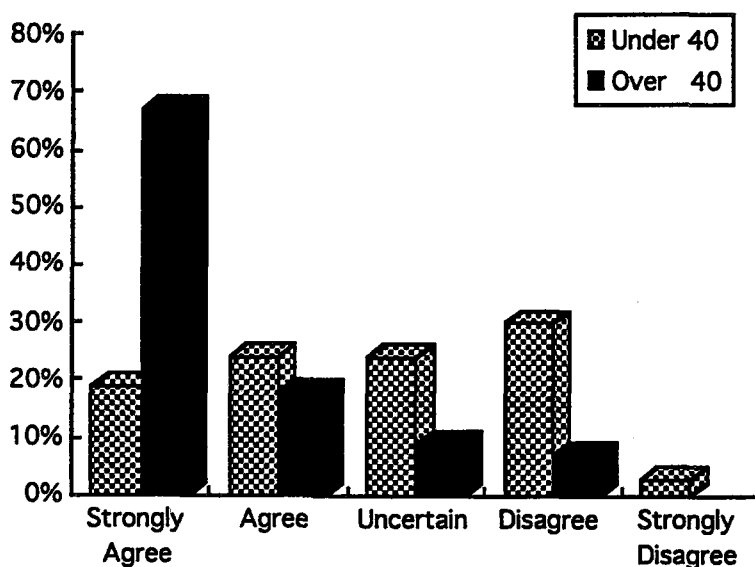


These results support the conclusion that the younger age group tends to make distinctions between television violence based on the genre context in which it occurs. With the exception of News and documentaries where there was general agreement between the groups it seems clear that the younger age group had a more positive attitude toward violence in television cartoons and comedy, whereas the older age group disapproved in spite of the generic conventions which give the meaning of violence in these contexts a different kind of meaning. It seems clear that the older age group do not distinguish between the different meanings which violence may have in these contexts but with the exception of news and documentaries, continue to disapprove of television violence with regard to the kind of programme in which it may occur.

(iv) Television Violence and Children

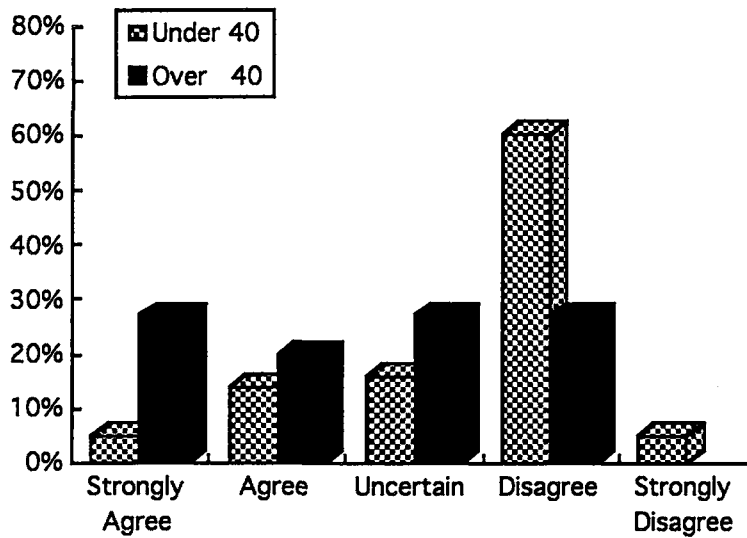
Concern about television violence is frequently justified by reference to its impact upon the young who are regarded as more vulnerable and therefore more likely to be adversely affected by it. It seems that a major component of the argument for increased censorship and control of television violence centres on the greater susceptibility of the young to the influence of televised violence. A number of statements therefore dealt with children. The older age group was strongly committed (85%) to the notion that very young children should never be exposed to television violence while only 43% of the younger group held this attitude.

"Very young children should never be exposed to violence on television"



Correspondingly 47% of the older age group supported the view that parents should not allow their children to watch violence on television while 64% of the younger age group disagreed with this statement.

"Parents should not allow their children to watch any violence on television"

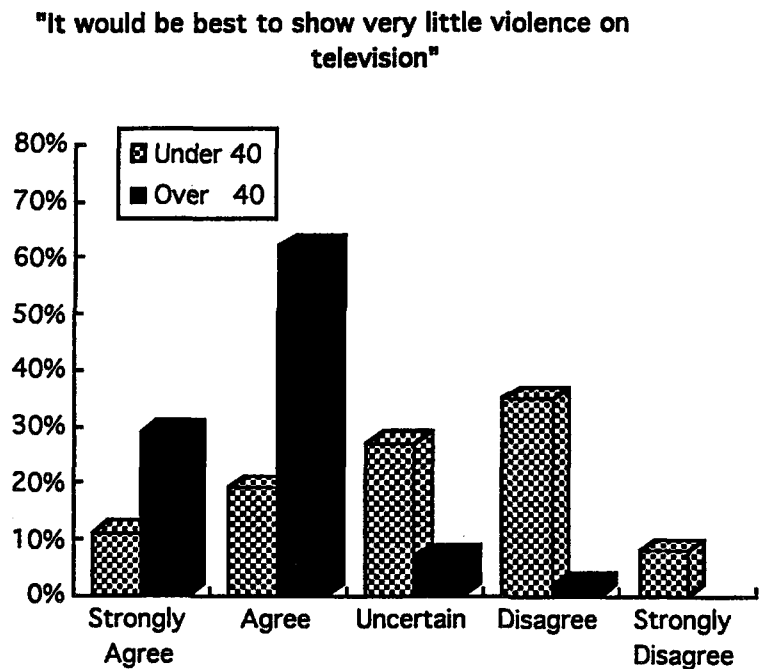


Whether the younger age group have failed to be convinced of the adverse effects of television violence upon children or whether this is simply a reflection of a more liberal attitude toward censorship and control in general is difficult to establish. But it does seem clear that this attitude constitutes an important difference between the two groups and may contribute to the differences in the respective judgements of violent excerpts.

(v) Censorship and Control of Television Violence

Attitude to issues of the censorship and control of television violence would logically be related to the way individuals or groups might judge television violence as a whole. It might be expected that those who have strong attitudes in favour of the censorship and control of television violence would similarly judge television violent excepts as more serious. Thus a number of statements were concerned with this issue.

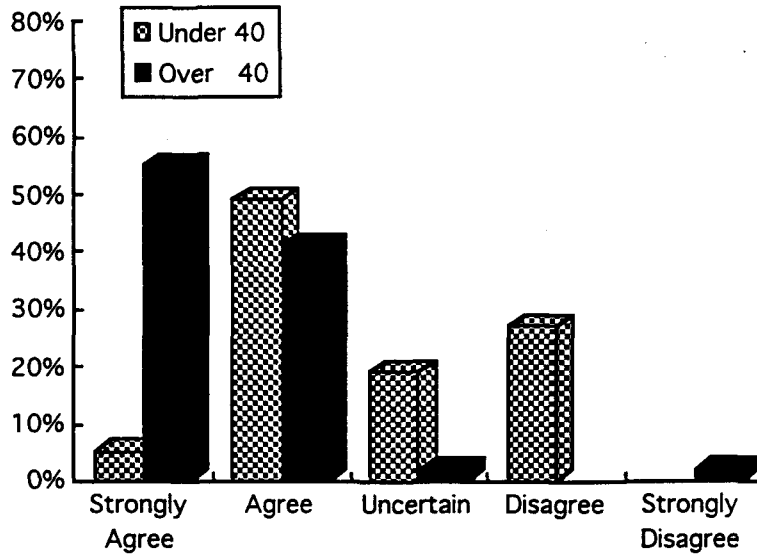
Ninety one per cent of those over forty years of age agreed that it would be best if very little violence was shown on television. For the younger age group 43% disagreed with this statement and only 29% agreed.



In other words there was far stronger agreement about the need for censorship and control amongst the older age group than the younger group.

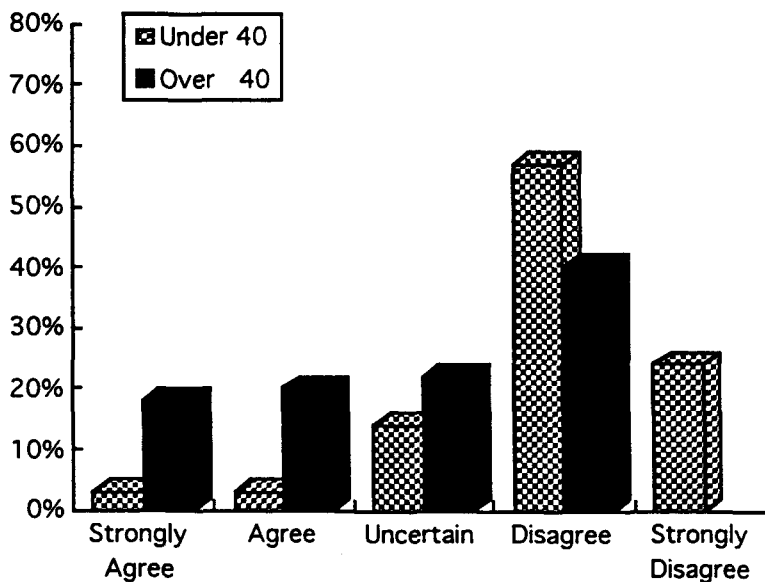
Similarly 96% of the older group felt that television violence should be restricted while 53% of the young group felt this way.

"Even if television violence is inevitable, it should be restricted"

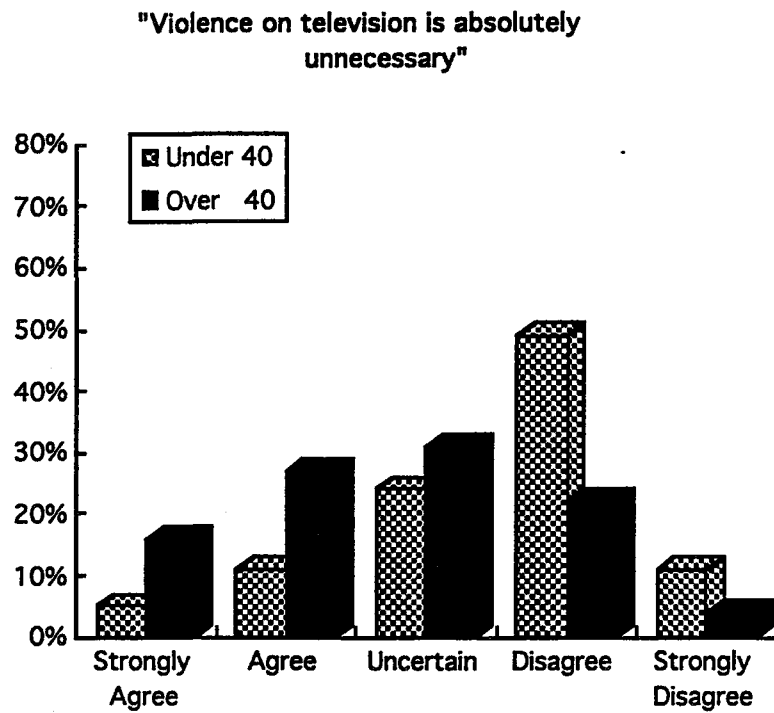


Eighty one percent of the younger group disagreed with the statement that violent television programmes should never be broadcast while only 40% held this view amongst the older group and 38% of them agreed with this statement.

"Television programmes that involve violence should never be broadcast"



Finally 42% of the older group believed that television violence was absolutely unnecessary while 59% of the younger group were opposed to this view.



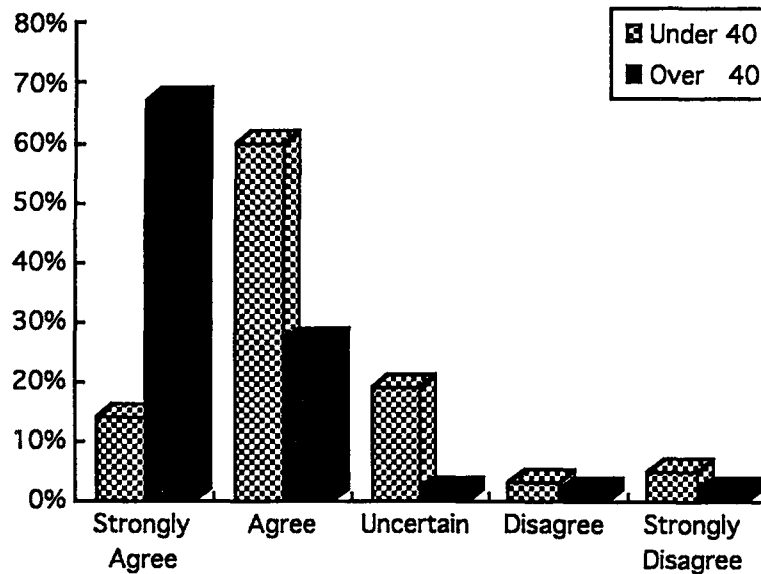
Those over 40 years of age in this sample therefore clearly held attitudes and beliefs about television violence that more strongly favoured censorship and control. The proportion of older people holding this view was not only much greater than amongst the younger group but these beliefs were also more strongly held.

(vi) Concern with Television Violence as an Issue

A number of statements reflected a general concern over television violence and the need or otherwise for control and censorship. Beliefs about the importance of this issue would seem likely to have a fundamental influence upon how different groups might judge specific items of television violence.

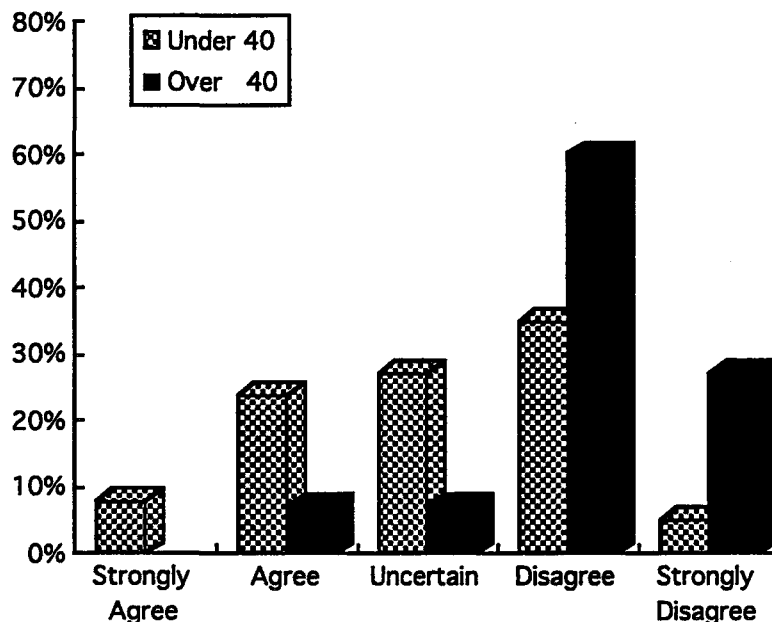
Here the differences between the groups were more a matter of degree and strength of belief. Ninety three per cent of older people believed that a concern about television violence was justified (67% strongly believed this), while 73% of the younger group held this view (only 13% strongly agreed).

"People are justified in being concerned about violence on television"



Likewise 86% of the older group disagreed with the statement that television violence had been blown out of all proportion. Amongst the younger group, only 40% disagreed with this view while a further 32% agreed with the statement.

"The issue of television violence has been blown out of all proportion"



Thus it seems clear from these results that the older group hold attitudes about television violence which are substantially different to the younger group on a number of variables. Those over forty in this sample tend to hold attitudes which are characterised by a greater concern with television violence, a strong tendency to favour censorship and control, a rejection of television violence as entertainment, and a clear acknowledgement of the need to protect children. In contrast the younger age group tend to express different attitudes on these issues and hold their attitudes less strongly than the older group. The only statement on which there was a substantial degree of agreement between the two groups concerned the necessity to show violence on news and documentaries - a recognition of the importance of providing a "factual" account of news events. Apart from this statement, the two groups tended to hold quite different attitudes on most of the variables measured.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained from this study support the general conclusion that respondents over forty years of age judge television violence more seriously than respondents under forty. The older age group consistently judged the violence excerpts to be more serious than the younger group, sometimes to the extent that the mean judgements of the two groups were separated by one and half categories on the 5 point judgement scale. These differences were particularly marked in items where the genre or context of the violence might be expected to modify the judgements involved such as in television cartoons, programmes involving parody, or the horror genre. Incidents that had previously been judged "very violent" (Category 5) by the original judges in the Watson study also created a very much higher degree of consensus amongst the older group. An important limitation should be acknowledged here, namely that the original judges had the advantage of observing the entire context in which the violent incident occurred as opposed to the highly restricted contextual information provided by the violent excerpts used in this study. However the fact that the younger group in this study were subject to the same contextual limitations indicates that the differences between the two groups could not be explained by reference to the lack of contextual information. It may well be however that the younger group identify these important genre characteristics more quickly and require less contextual information than the older group.

In addition the older age group in this sample tend to possess particular attitudes about violence which are specific to television itself rather than an expression of general attitudes about violence substantially different from the younger group. Since there was relatively little difference between the older and younger age groups in regard to a range of general attitudes about violence in society it would appear that the different judgements of the older group are a product of attitudes and beliefs specific to television itself. In addition, since those over forty had a marked tendency to hold stronger attitudes opposed to television violence, this would seem to be a further element influencing the television violence judgements of this group. Several possible explanations have been suggested to account for this specificity of attitude, not the least of which is the question of the degree to which older groups may be less familiar with particular television genre conventions and codes and as a result tend to judge all television violence on the same basis regardless of the context in which it occurs. Hence violence items from television cartoons are not only judged more seriously by the older age group but are supported by a set of attitudes about children and television which favour stronger censorship and control. In particular, the horror genre, its codes and conventions, may be less familiar to the older age group and this could in part account for their judgement of these genre items as "very serious" forms of television violence. In addition the older group possess negative attitudes about violence in television cartoons, and very strong attitudes favouring the general restriction of television violence.

It may not be justified to conclude from these results that the older age group therefore exercises judgements and possesses attitudes about television violence, that are wholly indiscriminating. The greater strength and commitment with which those over forty tend to hold their beliefs and attitudes about television violence, may act as an overriding factor which supersedes any distinctions in form, genre and televisual context. In other words beside the strength of attitudes and beliefs, distinctions in genre and form become superfluous and may fail to exert any influence on the overall judgements that are made.

Certainly the very negative attitude of those over forty years of age toward the view that television violence may act as a source of enjoyment or entertainment, constitutes an important difference between the age groups. It may well be that the younger group's positive attitude toward television violence as entertainment may act as a fundamental influence dictating the differences in judgement of particular television violence items. When the attitude of the older age group on the entertainment value of television violence is combined with their greater concern with television violence as an issue, then the basis

upon which judgements are made concerning the seriousness of television violence, begins to become more clearly apparent.

While it is not possible to claim a strictly causal connection between the judgements of television violence and the particular attitudes and beliefs which characterise these different age groups, one can conclude that both attitudes and judgements bear a close connection and act as interrelating forces in the overall differences which have emerged. The fact that those over forty years of age judge television violence more seriously than those under forty years, and at the same time hold to attitudes and beliefs which support television censorship and control, reject any notion of entertainment value in television violence, and generally demonstrate a much stronger concern for the issue of television violence, together constitute a significant profile of characteristics which differentiate the two age groups in relation to television violence. It may well be that in the final conclusion the younger age group makes less distinction between the world of television and the everyday world of experience in ways that mean they respond to television as an integrated feature of everyday life. The older age group however, holding specific attitudes and judgements about television violence, may perceive television and thus the violence it may contain, in distinction to and in contrast with everyday life and therefore a threat to it. Whatever the explanation for the marked differences between the age groups in judgements of television violence the results obtained in this research, in relation to this sample, suggest that differences in attitudes and beliefs operate as important factors determining how different age groups judge television violence.

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**1992 BSA TELEVISION VIOLENCE
 RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please Do Not
 Write In This
 Column

This research is being undertaken by Dr. Graeme Bassett and Dr. Roy Shuker, through the Educational Research and Development Centre, Massey University, for the Broadcasting Standards Authority.

This questionnaire is to help us learn about your views on violence in general and on television violence in particular. The personal information we ask you to provide in the first part of the questionnaire is to assist us in analysing the general pattern of your responses. The second section of the questionnaire records your responses to a series of television extracts.

All information provided by you is strictly confidential.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Please circle the appropriate response, and add details as necessary.

1. Age Group: 1. 15-20 4. 41-50
 2. 21-30 5. 51-64
 3. 31-40 6. 65 plus

	11
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2. Gender: Male Female

--

3. Ethnic Status: 1 Pakeha New Zealander
 2 Maori
 3 Polynesian Islander
 4 Other (please specify) _____

--

--

4. Employed: Yes No

--

5. Retired: Yes No

--

6. Student: Yes No

--

7. Occupation (Either previous or current); please specify: _____

--	--

8. How many hours a day (approx) do you usually watch TV?

1-2hrs 3-4hrs 5 plus

--

JUDGEMENTS OF T.V. EXTRACTS

We are interested in how different people look at television violence. In particular we are interested in judgements of the seriousness of television incidents involving violence. We want you to judge how serious the following examples are. After viewing each extract, circle the number which most accords with your judgement.

Here is an example: (Watch Video)

Extract X	Not Violent					Very Violent	
	1	2	3	4	5		

We will now go through a number of other Extracts

	Not Violent					Very Violent		
9. Extract A	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>	20	
10. Extract B	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>		
11. Extract C	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>		
12. Extract D	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>		
13. Extract E	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>		
14. Extract F	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>		
15. Extract G	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>		
16. Extract H	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>		
17. Extract I	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>		
18. Extract J	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>	29	

		Not Violent			Very Violent	
19.	Extract K	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Extract L	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Extract M	1	2	3	4	5
22.	Extract N	1	2	3	4	5

30

VIEWS ON VIOLENCE

Please indicate your view of each of the following statements by circling the appropriate response:

23. Violence is often acceptable in order to protect one's family

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

24. Violence is often acceptable to prevent cruelty to animals

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

25. Violence is often acceptable to prevent crime.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

26. We live in a violent society

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

27. Violence in our society is on the increase.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

38

28. Older people today are worried about being physically attacked.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

 39

29. Physical punishment should be retained in schools.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

30. Capital punishment should be reintroduced in New Zealand.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

31. Police should carry guns.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

32. Television violence is O.K. as long as no one gets hurt.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

33. There is a lot of pleasure in watching violence on television.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

34. Television programmes that involve violence should never be broadcast.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

35. Experiencing pleasure from TV violence is sick.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

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36. Television violence is good entertainment.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

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37. Parents should not allow their children to watch any violence on television.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

38. It's O.K. to enjoy a bit of television violence from time to time.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

39. It would be best to show very little violence on television.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

40. Very young children should never be exposed to violence on television

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

41. It is only realistic to expect that people will be entertained by television violence.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

42. Violence on television is absolutely unnecessary.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

43. Violence is an inevitable part of television cartoons.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

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44. People are justified in being concerned about violence on television

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

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45. It is sometimes necessary to show violence on TV news and documentaries

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

46. Violent language is alright on television.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

47. Humorous violence in television comedy programmes is all right.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

48. The issue of television violence has been blown out of all proportion.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

49. Even if television violence is inevitable, it should be restricted.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

50. Violence is a part of life and is therefore appropriate on television.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

51. Watching TV violence allows the viewer to let off steam.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	uncertain	disagree	strongly disagree

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION