**Methods**

For the collection of data, a class of eleven students conducted a content analysis of 60 prime time television programs broadcasted in late September 2008, featuring 205 characters that were coded. The recording instrument was developed in class and measured aspects of both the programs and the main characters in each program, including detailed demography of each character. The instrument included 66 program variables and 65 character variables on a wide variety of topics. In order to be able to code accurately, students were trained over ten class sessions.

Each class member coded two evenings of programming and intercoder reliability was measured for many of the programs to ensure the variables of the instrument were reliable. The only variable that was not reliable was attractiveness of characters. Both gender and race were unconditionally reliable while all other variables were conditionally reliable. However, some of the results did not turn out to be statistically significant at the .05 significance level. This will be mentioned with the discussion of each of the findings.

For this content analysis, several of the character variables were used to test the hypotheses. This analysis mainly focuses on the characters involved in violent acts so variables of the program itself were not used. Violence was defined in this study as the act of hurting or killing of someone. The variables of each character that were used included the attractiveness of each main character that was coded, whether they committed violence or where the victim of a violent act, whether the violence was justified, whether the character was male or female, their attractiveness, their social age, and race. Each variable featured choices that were both

exhaustive and mutually exclusive and some were later combined to better fit the needs of the study.

Each analysis was done using Chi square, combining each variable with another to analyze the findings and their correlation.

## Findings

In analyzing the main characters of each program, the majority of characters were male. Of these males, almost two-thirds were attractive, while 93% of females were labeled as being attractive. So although there were more males than females, the females were labeled as being more likely to be attractive.

The character's attractiveness was also compared to whether they committed violence. Of those that hurt or killed someone, 73.6% were considered attractive. However, of those that did not commit violence, 73.7% were attractive as well. These results did not turn out to be

### Attractiveness: Aggressors

Figure 1a

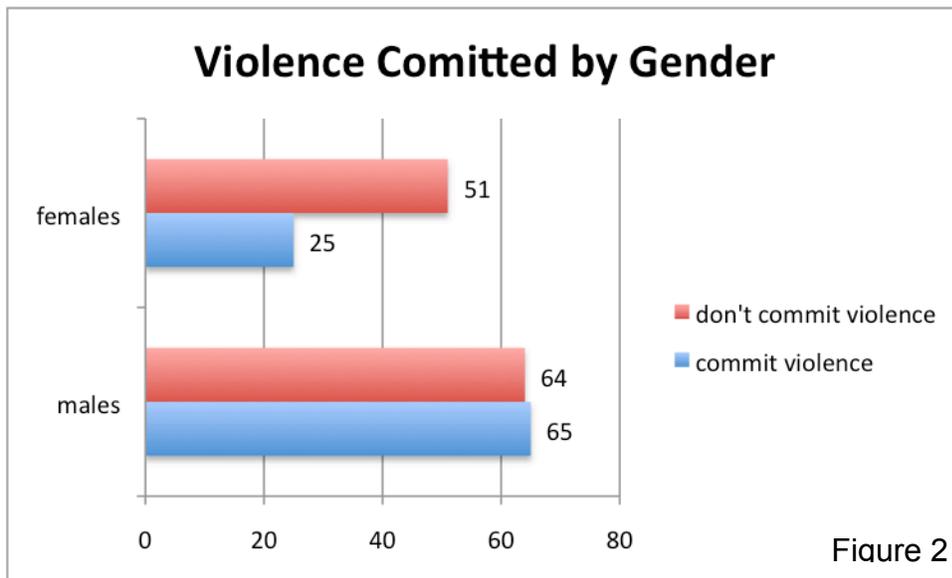### Attractiveness: Victims
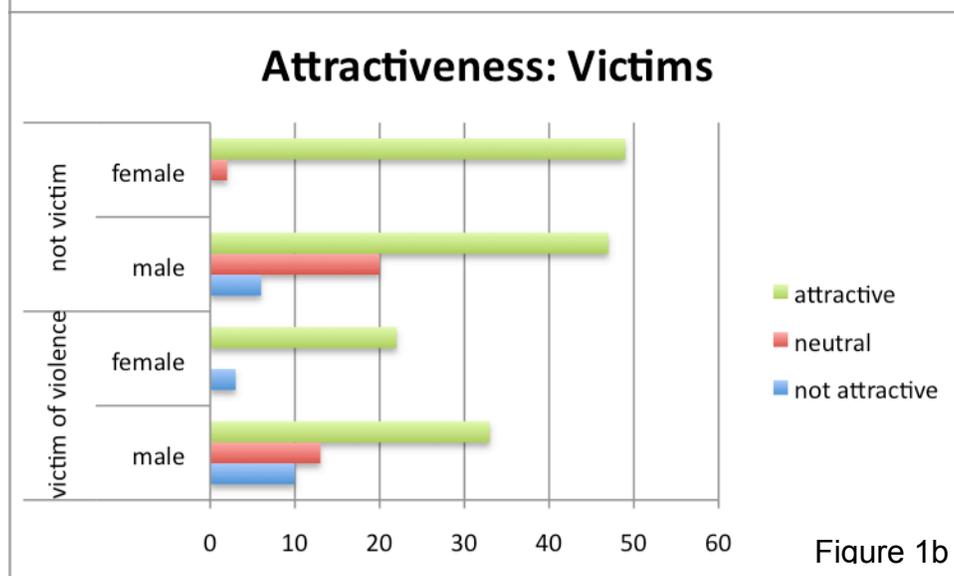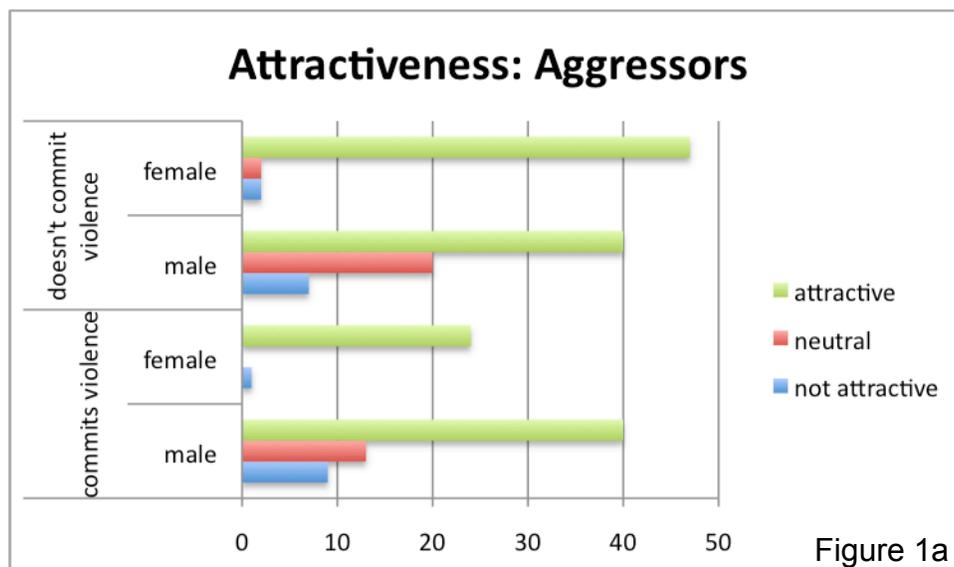
Figure 1b

statistically significant.

When dividing those results by gender, almost two-thirds of males that hurt or killed someone were mostly attractive (see figure 1a). Yet, similar to the previous cross-tabulations, the majority of those who did not commit violence were attractive also. For females, the results were similar. 96% of females who hurt or killed someone were attractive while 92.2% of those who did not hurt or kill someone were attractive. Interestingly, every female who was neutral in attractiveness did not commit a violent act. Two-thirds of the unattractive females did not commit a violent act at all.

Although the findings support my hypothesis that of those that commit violence are more likely to be attractive, the results are not statistically significant. However, when looked at as a whole, even though the majority of violent characters are attractive, the majority of non-violent characters are attractive also. Therefore, the only finding that can be deduced from these cross-tabulations is that there are more attractive characters on these prime-time programs.

Those characters that were victimized, however, were significant results. Of those who were hurt or killed, over two-thirds were attractive (see figure 1b). Of these attractive characters, however, 63.6% were not victims. The results were similar for neutral characters, where 62.9% were not victimized but for the characters labeled as not attractive, 68.4% were hurt or killed. These results were consistent when divided by gender. Although the males were not statistically significant, the results were similar to the overall findings of characters attractiveness in relation to victimization. The females, however, were statistically significant at the .05 level and the results were even more extreme. Similar to the overall attractiveness, 69% of attractive females did not get hurt or killed. But every neutral female was not a victim of a crime and conversely, every unattractive female was a victim of a crime.

The hypothesis that violence is mostly committed by males was supported, and with statistically signicicant results (see figure 2).  50% of males committed violence while only 33% of females did.  Although there was a large number of both males and females who did not commit violence at all, there is a much higher number of males committing violence than females.

## Violence Comitted by Gender

| | don't commit violence | commit violence |
|---|---|---|
| females | 51 | 25 |
| males | 64 | 65 |

Figure 2

The hypothesis that the majority of violence is justified was supported.  Although more than half of characters did not commit any violence at all, there were 59 instances of characters committing justified violence and only 31 cases of unjustified violence (see figure 3).  Both males and females were more likely to commit justified violence than violence that was not justified.  The data was significant at the .05 level.

**Characters who commit Justified Violence**

29% — Commits justified violence

15% — Commits not justified violence

56% — Does not commit violence

Figure 3

In looking at social age, those classified as a settled adult performed the highest number of violent actions, at 62%, which was twice as often as young adults who performed a violent action (see figure 4). Those who were victims of violence were mostly adults. Almost half of the victims of violence were young adults and almost half were settled adults. In combining the number of violent actions committed by characters and number of violent actions received, settled adults were involved (whether victim or aggressor) in 92 violent actions. Young adults were involved in 65 violent actions. Overall, out of the 204 violent actions recorded, settled adults were the leading group that was involved. Although the results were not statistically significant, the data supports the hypothesis that most of those involved in violence are middle-aged, or as the instrument labeled it, a settled adult.

Figure 4

In support of my hypothesis, the majority of victims and aggressors are white. 85% of aggressors were white and 87.7% of victims were white (see figure 5). Although the results were not statistically significant, the overwhelming numbers are still in support of my hypothesis.



Figure 5

## Limitations

Due to the nature of the class, not all of the variables were reliable. In this analysis, character attractiveness was not a reliable variable and gender and race were the only unconditionally reliable variables. All other variables used were conditionally reliable. Also, some results were not statistically significant. In comparing attractiveness to those who commit violence, the results were not significant at the .05 level. When divided by gender, the results remained not significant. The victimization of characters when compared to attractiveness was not statistically significant for the males, but was statistically significant for the females. Both age and race in relation to violence was also not statistically significant.

## Discussion

The researched yielded results that supported most of my hypotheses. The data supported my first hypothesis that violence in the media is mostly justified. Out of the violence committed, it was twice as likely that the violence was justified than not justified. Because this data was statistically significant at the .05 level, these results are consistent with those of previous research, such as in the National Television Violence Study, which states that the majority of television violence is justified (Center for Communication and Social Policy 1997). Although the results are not as extreme as Potter and Ware's study, which found that 93% of perpetrators felt the act was justified (1987a), the findings supported my hypothesis which was based on such previous research.

The National Television Violence Study interprets these results by explaining, "Studies show that justified violence increases the chance that viewers will learn aggression; such

portrayals legitimize such behavior" (Federman 1998, pg. 8). The NTVS also looks at the effects on children and how viewing aggression that seems acceptable could pose a greater risk for learning aggression.

Another risk factor according to the NTVS is attractiveness of the perpetrator. Our results indicate that the majority of those who commit or receive an act of violence are attractive, consistent with studies done by the NTVS (Federman 1998) and also by Potter and Ware (1987a). Although the results for character's attractiveness and their involvement with violence were statistically significant, when divided by gender, the results were not significant. Additionally, the variable of attractiveness was not reliable. Also, even though the majority of characters involved with violence were attractive, the majority of those who were not involved in violence were attractive also.

Therefore, when looked at as a whole, the only conclusion that can be made is that the majority of characters on prime time television are attractive. Due to the expectations of the entertainment industry, this is not a surprising result. However, more research in this area could be conducted to look at attractiveness in relation to violence, perhaps with a larger sample to yield more statistically significant results. Although it doesn't pertain as closely to the hypothesis, the effects of the overwhelming number of attractive characters on television is a common research topic in today's society and should continue to be studied.

When looking at race, the results also were not statistically significant. However, there were an overwhelming number of whites involved in violence, both as victim (87.7%) and perpetrator (85.1%). Hamilton found that 76% of perpetrators were white, but across many types of programming, including music videos where 38% of perpetrators were black (1998). Meanwhile, white victims made up 76% of the targets of violence in drama series that Hamilton

studied, which is similar to the genre of programs our content analysis featured. The majority of the population in all of these programs is white, yet it is important to take note of the contribution to unrealistic views that audience may have about violence.  Those involved with violence are probably best broken down into types of programs, as Hamilton did, to assess the effects on particular audiences.

The data comparing social age to involvement in violence also did not produce results significant at the .05 level.  The hypothesis was supported, however, and the majority of violence was committed or received by a middle-aged character, or settled adult. Our results can compare to Hamilton's, who found that 76% of perpetrators are adults between the ages of 21 and 64 and 72% of victims are adults (1998). While our variable was not as broad, 62.8% of perpetrators were settled adults and 46.9% of victims were settled adults.  Our definition of "settled adults" could be broadened to include some characters classified as "young adults" to make the data more consistent with Hamilton's. Potter & Ware found the highest instance of violent behavior in the 35 - 49 age group (1987b).  Although the instruments are not exactly the same, the implications can be made that those involved in violent actions are not children or elderly and therefore not the vulnerable or helpless characters we see on television.

In support of the hypothesis, 65 males committed violence while only 25 females did. Although not as extreme as Hamilton's results (78% male perpetrators, 9% female), we can conclude with our statistically significant data that male characters are more likely than females to commit a crime (1998).  However, in our study males were more than twice as likely to commit justified violence than females.

Potter & Ware bring up the idea that, "Since the majority of all activity (both antisocial and prosocial) on television is attributed male, white, middle-aged characters, the data must be

analyzed in a proportional, not an absolute sense" (1987, p. 386). When our data was compared with these proportions, 50% of all male characters committed violence and 33% of all females commit violence.

Gunter looks at similar aspects in his research. "Most aggressors and victims were either young (20 to 35 years) or middle-aged (35 to 64). Across various age groups, white aggressors and victims predominated" (1998, p.689). Gunter looked at ratios as well and found that in both American and British television violence, the likelihood for whites to be victimized is greater than for blacks. He notes that this is consistent with previous American findings.

As Smythe indicates, content analyses, such as the one we conducted, are the stimulus for which effects studies are conducted (1954). Effects studies regarding the independent variable of viewing television violence and its correlation with aggressive behavior are conducted, are completed particularly to measure television's effect on children. Many scholars hold the belief that media violence is a small contributor to aggressive behavior, especially by way of the social learning theory of behavioral effects. Even short-term exposure can be associated with a greater acceptance of aggressive behavior (Perse 2001, pg. 202-213).

The Television Violence Monitoring Projects found that television has been improving over the 1990s, but there is still much more room for improvement. The report states, "All the good that television does is in danger of being eclipsed by an angry public and government demanding that something be done about violence on the screen" (UCLA 1995, Part V). In assessing the character variables for this content analysis, the portrayal of characters in violence also indicates a need for improvement to appease the public and benefit society rather than raise more concerns. Future research in this area is necessary and needed to come as close to obtaining this goal as possible.