

PROSOCIAL MESSAGES IN CHILDREN'S SATURDAY
MORNING TELEVISION PROGRAMS

by

Ferris Edward Hoover Jr.

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This thesis for the Master of Arts
degree by

Ferris Edward Hoover Jr.
has been approved for the
Communication Department

by

[Redacted Signature]

Donald D. Morley

[Redacted Signature]

Kim B. Walker

[Redacted Signature]

Richard L. Dukes

[Redacted Signature]

Pamela S. Shockley

[Redacted Signature]

Michael Z. Hackman

[Redacted Signature]

Thomas L. Sanny

7-19-90

Date

Hoover, Ferris Edward, Jr. (M.A., Communication)

Prosocial Messages in Children's Saturday Morning
Television Programs

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Donald D. Morley

This study was done to test a methodology for measuring the existence and recognition of prosocial messages in children's Saturday morning television programs. A panel of four adults was trained to count the occurrence of prosocial behaviors in sample episodes of the five top-rated Saturday morning children's programs. Per hour occurrence ranged from 22 per hour to 48.5 per hour. Fourth grade children were surveyed to determine if some degree of recognition of prosocial messages can be measured. The method used was to ask the respondent's opinion of whether or not the major character in a program would exhibit prosocial traits. The results of the study were somewhat inconsistent. The rank ordering of prosocial content of the programs by the children was sharply different from that of the adults with the children's most prosocial program being the least prosocial according to the adult panel count. The surprising results could have been due to one of several factors. Among them might be that the intended

connotations of the words used in the questions might not be the same as those assigned by the respondents. Or, the one-time count of a single sample episode of a program by an adult unfamiliar with the usual plot structure of that program would not necessarily coincide with the overall view taken by a child who chooses to watch the program regularly. The trained adult panel method seems to be a valid measurement of the occurrence of prosocial messages, but the method for determining the recognition of such messages by children needs improvement.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Signed


Donald D. Morley

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Mass media effects have been the subject of numerous research efforts among the disciplines of psychology, sociology, political science and communication. Early research was generally done by scientists from disciplines other than communication, and a great deal of what is being done today is done by other than communication scholars. Actual internal effects are probably best studied by behavioral scientists or cognitive psychologists while the mechanisms and processes involved in the formulation and the reception of messages through a mass medium are more appropriate areas for a communication scholar.

Other social science disciplines generally utilize controlled exposure and observation of behavior to determine whether or not a linkage between media consumption and behavioral change exists. This type of methodology is best suited to examining the internal processes that may be occurring in the subjects being studied. If the intent is to examine what sort of messages are discernable in a particular form of program

and whether or not the messages are recognizable, a different methodology is needed.

Although examining the internal processes which lead to behavioral changes is important, this does not lead to a single generalizable conclusion which explains all possible effects that media consumption might cause. An easily accepted idea, that might cause many people some concern about possible effects of media consumption, is that whatever effects occur are the same for everyone. This is a misconception according to Becker (1987):

Too often, when people who do not understand mass communication processes or mass communication research think about the effects of the mass media, they think in terms of all or none. That is, they think if mass communication has a particular effect on one person it must have it on everyone who uses the mass media or who was exposed to that content. Or if they do not see an effect on everyone, they believe it must be due to something other than mass communication. (p. 457)

The idea that mass media have different effects on different people provides many paths for a communication researcher to follow. The goal of this thesis was to find a method to explore one of the factors that might contribute to whatever effects might occur. The factor to be examined was whether or not prosocial messages can be reliably identified by adults and recognized by children in children's television programming. First, it was necessary to become familiar with what research has

been done in the area of mass media effects in order to choose a useful and logical method of research. To this end, a review was done of some of the research from all the disciplines involved that has dealt with what effects the medium of television might have on children. The next step was the development of a valid measure of the prosocial message content of the programs in question and a valid method of indirectly measuring the comprehension of the messages by the intended audience. This involved finding methods that have been used in past research and adapting them to this project. The measures which were developed were then executed as a trial of their viability. The methodologies which have been used primarily to search for the adverse effects of mass media were adaptable to the search for possible prosocial effects. The criteria which were used in the examination of whether or not prosocial messages are present and recognizable in Saturday morning children's television constituted the major difference between this research and other explorations of media effects.

CHAPTER 2

SOME HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF MEDIA EFFECTS RESEARCH

Since the 1920s popular media have been under attack by parents, educators and others for causing such antisocial outcomes as an erosion of moral standards and aggression. The fears that are the basis for such feelings are rooted in the theory of uniform influences of mass media (Lowery & DeFleur, 1988). That is, the mass media have powerful effects on their audiences and these effects are nearly the same for all audience members. The Payne Fund Studies done in 1929 and 1930 were the first attempt to assess the effects of motion pictures on children and adolescents. Some of their findings indicated that adolescents in particular used the actions, styles, and attitudes depicted in the movies as models for their own behavior and style of dress (Lowery & DeFleur, 1988).

The next modern mass medium to come under fire was the comic book. Dr. Frederick Wertham, a noted New York psychiatrist published Seduction of the Innocent in 1954 after having published several articles in popular family magazines of the time. In Seduction of the Innocent,

Wertham attacked comic books for having a "bad influence" on their young audience. Although Wertham's methods were scientifically discredited according to Lowery and DeFleur, he did arouse national attention and contributed to the decline of comic book sales. Wertham was generally ignored by social scientists, but his work is an illustration of uniform influence theory in that he described his research subjects as "normal" even though virtually all of them were referred to him because of some social problem such as delinquency. Because the content analyses conducted by Wertham showed that a great deal of socially unacceptable behavior was depicted, he concluded that so called "crime comics" were severely affecting children (Lowery & DeFleur, 1988).

The increasing popularity of television as the medium viewed by children again aroused concern over the effects of a mass medium during the 1960s. The first major effort to determine what effects, if any, television might have on children was published by Professors Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lyle and Edwin Parker (1961). Their series of reports investigated why children watch television and what they learn from it. The summation of the findings of this study is the often quoted:

For some children, under some conditions, some television is harmful. For other children under the same conditions, or for the same children under other conditions, it may be beneficial. For most children, under most conditions, most television is probably neither harmful nor particularly beneficial. (Schramm, Lyle, & Parker, 1961, p. 13)

This conclusion did not satisfactorily answer the question of whether or not television was causing adverse effects on children.

The debate continues today as indicated by stories of consumers pressuring advertisers to stop supporting programs that are "objectionable" ("Idea of boycotting," 1989). Nor has the concept of direct and uniform influences disappeared, as illustrated by retiring Surgeon General C. Everett Koop's 1989 call for restricting and modifying alcohol-related advertising to reduce the number of teenage drunken driving accidents ("Koop takes aim," 1989). In short, the public continues to believe that the media serves as a powerful cause of socially unacceptable behavior.

The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence studied violence on television during the late 1960s. The resultant manuscript, Violence and the Media, edited by Robert K. Baker and Sandra J. Ball (1969), among its intended research purposes, analyzed the portrayals of violence in television programming, measured the violent experiences of Americans, and

compared television portrayals of violence with the perception of the audience as to the existence of violence in society. This was done in order to determine the existence of long- and/or short-term effects on accepted norms pertaining to violence (Lowery & DeFleur 1988). Their conclusions confirmed the findings of short-term effects that had been measured in previous experimental studies. The report then suggested that long-term studies should be conducted to determine whether or not long-term effects existed.

The call for further research was answered when the Surgeon General appointed an advisory committee to supervise a massive research effort in 1969. The report that resulted included more than 40 scientific papers and an overview written by The Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee in 1969. The summation of the research effort, Television and Growing Up (The Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, 1971), was that viewing television violence could be causally linked to aggressive behavior, but only in children who were inclined in that direction. It was further argued that the context in which the violence was viewed had a large influence on the actual effects. In the words of the committee:

Thus, the two sets of findings converge in three respects: a preliminary and tentative indication of a causal relation between viewing violence on television and aggressive behavior, an indication that any such causal relation operates only on some children (who are predisposed to be aggressive); and an indication that it operates only in some environmental contexts. Such tentative and limited conclusions are not very satisfying. They represent substantially more knowledge than we had two years ago, but they leave many questions unanswered. (Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee, 1971, pp. 18-19)

Instead of focusing attention on which children in which contexts were most affected by viewing violence on television, the question that the public, as well as the scientific community, most wanted to answer was that of how much violence was portrayed on television. A comprehensive study conducted by George Gerbner (1971) of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania measured the number and types of violent acts, who the perpetrators were, and who the victims were in both prime time and Saturday morning programming. From this study emerged the use of the violence index that has been cited by both the popular press and the scientific community to argue that almost all of the programs viewed by children contain violence. Of note is the fact that Gerbner's study found Saturday morning cartoons to have the highest level of violent content with a violence index of 251.1 compared to the

next highest index of 241.9 for crime, western and action adventure programs (Gerbner, 1971, p. 67).

However, these findings must be tempered by the fact that the study counted violent acts without regard to context or intent. Gerbner was investigating content as being symbolic material without regard to artistic merit and without distinguishing between the relative impact of any individual action and any other action occurring within the same program (Gerbner, 1971). For example, a pie in the face was weighted equally with the gunning down of an unarmed person. Gerbner's measurement of violent content would seem to be the basis for many proposals which periodically are reported in the popular press for control of the content of children's programs by government agencies. The recurrence of these proposals indicates that popular wisdom still supports the idea of uniform and universal effects.

Since most of the questions raised by Baker and Ball in 1969 about what might cause long-term effects were not answered despite the massive effort, the committee continued with a call for more research and specified some areas to be covered. Among them were such areas as television's effects in the context of other mass media, individual developmental history, and other environmental influences including the home environment. They also

called for research on the relationship between televised violence and aggression, specifically in the areas of predispositional characteristics of individuals, age differences, effects of labeling, contextual cues and other program factors, and longitudinal influences of television. The modeling and imitation of prosocial behavior, the role of environmental factors, including the mass media, in the teaching and learning of values about violence and the effects of such learning on social development were also included as areas to be researched (Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee, 1971, p. 19).

The scientific community responded by multiplying their efforts during the decade that followed. According to Lowery and DeFleur (1988) "approximately 90 percent of all research publications on television's influence on behavior appeared!" and more than 3000 titles are included in the information that was published on television violence between 1971 and 1982 (p. 353). This accumulation led to the publication in 1982 of Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) at the direction of the Surgeon General. This report is a synthesis of the knowledge gained from the effort instigated by the 1971 Television

and Growing Up and included not only research done on the effects of television violence but many other areas. The areas germane to this thesis will be discussed.

Social Learning Theory

The studies done to determine whether or not television violence could be causally linked to aggressive behavior were generally based on social learning theories which posit that children learn by observation or incidentally. One of the foremost researchers and theoreticians in this area is Albert Bandura, who began working in the area during the early 1960s. His work is well represented in his 1977 book Social Learning Theory. It provides a framework for describing the processes experienced by children in their social development and the continuing effects of media throughout most people's lives.

Bandura (1977) posits that observational learning, which is a primary factor in social learning, has four components: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Social learning according to Bandura is a three-way interaction between the person, the behavior, and the situation. The person part of the interaction includes the developmental stage of the individual which affects the ability to model a behavior on a delayed

basis. Another factor is the self-regulatory capacity of an individual. This falls into the motivational component of observational learning in that it affects the determination of whether or not the outcome of a behavior is considered to be valuable to an individual. The situational aspect of the interaction is influenced by reinforcement of the learning process, which Bandura describes as "facilitative" rather than necessary for learning because other influences can determine what is attended to and learning can occur without reinforcement. That is, even if the situation surrounding the observation of a behavior provides no reinforcement, the behavior may be successfully performed at a later time. Behaviors may also be duplicated in the short-term because of a situation like a laboratory experiment, but not retained in an individual's behavioral repertoire for later use. Social learning theory does recognize that the actual learning of a behavior is an individual process, but Bandura indicates that the media have broad-ranging effects in the population when he states: "It has been shown that both children and adults acquire attitudes, emotional responses, and new styles of conduct through filmed and televised modeling" (Bandura, 1977, p. 39).

Social learning theory has been used as a model for explaining many findings of media effects research. Other research using the theory was being done concurrently with the work that Bandura was doing that resulted in the publication of Social Learning Theory as well as after its appearance. Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1961) theorize that most of what children learn from television falls into the category of incidental learning. As children mature, it has been demonstrated that they acquire the ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy in what they view (Corder-Bolz, 1982). During the period between three and eight years, however, they identify with television characters who they think are "real" and probably learn more behaviors from them than they do as they mature and differentiate between reality and fantasy.

Social learning theory as a model would explain these findings in terms of increased ability to perform a behavior after a lapse of time due to maturation and the individual characteristics (i.e., the "person part" of the interaction) being a determining factor in what behaviors would be perceived as having valued outcomes. Situational factors would include the perception of what was desired of the subjects by significant social others such as the researchers in an experimental setting and

what previous learning had been acquired. As long as it is not assumed that a conscious effort is required to learn a behavior, social learning theory would seem to be a convenient and sensible model for explaining incidental learning from the media, particularly that which takes place in experimental settings.

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) theorized that attitudes and behaviors are learned on the basis of rewards and punishments. That is, what is perceived to have a valued outcome will be adopted. Whether or not the outcome of a behavior will be valued will be largely dependent on what attribution of responsibility for a behavior is assigned to the model. Five levels of attribution are described by Fishbein and Ajzen. They are: association with the behavior, commission of the behavior, foreseeability of the result, the intentionality of the model and intentionality with justification. Fishbein and Ajzen also describe three factors which bear on what attribution will be assigned to a model. These are: the consistency of the behavior, the distinctiveness of the behavior and consensus with other behaviors of the model. Rosenthal and Zimmerman (1978) include cognition, defined as the covert processing of information, and abstraction, defined as going beyond discrete stimulus-response associations, in their expansion of social learning

theory. They explain four specific behaviors as a refinement of social learning theory. The first is inhibition which is the result of learning what behaviors result in punishment. The second is disinhibition which results from learning what behaviors will not result in immediate punishment. The third is facilitation which results when an observed behavior serves as a reminder of things learned at an earlier time. The fourth is novel behavior which is something not previously modeled.

Rosenthal and Zimmerman (1978) posit that enculturation is the result of modeling parental behaviors and learning group standards and mores. This process could include behaviors learned from modeling on television. They also state that "the social context factors in implementing learning have received limited attention" (p. 267). This relates to the "situation part" of the social learning interaction as described by Bandura (1977) and reiterates a call for research in an area that was specifically mentioned by the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee in 1971.

The 1982 NIMH Report

Among the areas explored in the 1982 National Institute of Mental Health Report were factors believed to determine children's attention to television, how much

and what type of content was retained, and what processes might explain the relationship between violence viewing and behavior.

Collins (1982) postulated three factors for determining children's attention to and comprehension of television content. The factors relating to attention were: viewer characteristics (e.g., mostly age-related), content attributes (e.g., auditory and visual cues), and comprehensibility (which again is a function of the child's age and development). Research reviewed by Collins suggested that older children have a more extensive background making more material understandable and have a longer attention span. Factors relating to processing content were also found to be age related. They were: knowledge of common formats such as narrative stories and commercials, knowledge of commonly portrayed situations and event sequences, and knowledge of the forms and conventions such as the minor climax just before a commercial break. Collins also posited that younger children would be less likely to have the ability to link actions with their consequences.

Huesmann (1982), in his contribution to the NIMH report, describes five processes that might be used to explain the relationship between violence viewing and behavior. The first is observational learning that he

states has been verified in laboratory settings. The persistence, or retention of observational learning is dependent on whether or not it is reinforced in some manner. The second is attitude change which can alter the acceptance of violence by an individual. This process of attitude change can be modified by prosocial reinforcement or outside attitude training. The third is the arousal process which is somewhat of a dichotomy. That is, viewing violence could cause an "overload" leading to hyperactivity or could have an anesthetizing effect due to sensory "overload" and thereby lead to the need for increased aggressive behaviors to achieve normal arousal levels. The fourth is catharsis, that is, watching violence reduces the need for aggressive behavior because normal arousal levels are reached by the act of viewing. Huesmann states that the catharsis postulation has been rejected by research. The fifth is justification. Aggressive individuals watch violent programming in order to justify their own behavior as "normal" and reduce guilt levels.

Freedman (1984, 1986) challenged the conclusions of several articles in the 1982 NIMH report that causally linked viewing television violence with aggressive behavior. He found in reviewing the research for the NIMH report that "The bulk of the correlations fall

between .10 and .20." (1984, p. 237). He described these correlations which were found in both laboratory studies and field research as "mild" and judged them insufficient to extrapolate to a cause and effect determination. He concluded that: "(a) exposure to and preference for violent programming correlates with aggressive behavior and (b) there is little convincing evidence that viewing violence on television in natural settings causes an increase in subsequent aggressiveness" (1984, p. 244). This position would also dispute any argument for the possibility of television viewing having beneficial effects on the audience.

Cook, Kendzierski and Thomas (1983) also argued that the 1982 NIMH report failed to establish the causal link between viewing television violence and aggressive behavior. Additionally, they criticized the report for focusing on behavioral studies only and its failure to discuss aspects of television programming other than its possible influence on children.

Prosocial Research

Bryan and Walbek (1970a, 1970b) in studies with second through fifth grade children found that prosocial behavior modeled by both live and videotaped models affected the propensity to share game winnings from a

subsequent session. The actions of the model seemed to have more effect than what was said while the game to be played was demonstrated. Inconsistency on the part of the model was found to have no significant effect. Stein and Bryan (1972), however, found that preaching about following rules while practicing violation of those rules led to an increase in cheating by their third and fourth grade female subjects. When the model preached and practiced rule compliance, cheating was nearly eliminated.

In a study of three- to five-year-old children who were tested before and after being exposed to violent, neutral or prosocial programming, Stein, Friedrich and Vondracek (1972) found that those who were most aggressive according to the baseline test exhibited the greatest increase in aggressive behaviors after exposure to the violent programming. They also found that the group receiving the prosocial treatment exhibited a higher level of self controlling behaviors than the other groups.

In an experimental study on three- to six-year-old children, Friedrich and Stein (1975) found that prosocial behavior could be learned from television and that the subjects applied the behaviors. They also found that verbal labeling training and role playing exercises

enhanced the learning experience. Gorn, Goldberg, and Kanungo (1976) also found that prosocial television could have clearcut short-term effects on the attitude of three- to five-year-old children toward members of other racial and ethnic groups.

Singer and Singer (1976) in a study of three- and four-year-old children in a day care center over a two-week period used a prosocial program along with structured play sessions to determine the effect of adult mediation on the level of imaginativeness showed by the children. The findings indicated that imaginativeness of play could be increased by the presence of an adult mediator.

Poulos, Harvey and Liebert (1976) in their content analysis of Saturday morning television found that prosocial acts were being depicted on children's programs. In the fifty programs which made up their primary sample the combined network number of prosocial acts per half-hour was higher than the number of aggressive acts (a mean of 10.7/half-hour versus 6.10/half-hour). They also found that one quarter of the sample contained no examples of aggression. The one shortcoming noted in Saturday morning television was the lack of examples of preventing or eliminating violence.

In their 1979 study, Friedrich-Cofer, Huston-Stein, Kipnis, Susman, and Clewett, also found that reinforcement of the model provided by prosocial programming can increase its effect. Their study of two- to five-year-old children in a Head Start program done over an eight-week exposure period found increased levels of prosocial behavior in children who were provided reinforcement through associated play materials and a greater increase when special teacher training was added to the reinforcement.

Some findings in the 1982 NIMH report also indicated that viewing television need not necessarily affect behavior in an adverse way. Singer (1982) reported finding that when children's viewing was monitored and mediated by an adult, it helped to improve the children's imagination. Corder-Bolz (1982) called for the teaching of television literacy and parental participation in children's viewing in order for children to better discriminate between reality and fiction and to improve the learning process when educational programs were viewed. Rushton (1982) reviewed numerous experiments that were designed to determine if television could have beneficial as well as detrimental effects on the audience. He defines prosocial material as "that which specifies things that are socially desirable and in some

way benefit another person or society at large" (p. 249). He describes four types of prosocial influences. First are those which promote altruism, that is, generosity, helping behavior, and cooperating. The second is friendly behavior; the third is self-control, which is resisting temptation and delaying gratification; and the fourth is coping with fears. Rushton's review of both laboratory and naturalistic research designs indicated that viewing prosocial material correlated with an improvement in prosocial behavior in the short-term and on delayed measures.

However, Rushton (1982) drew a conclusion that supported not only the argument for beneficial effects from television viewing, but also supported the widely held contention that viewing television has detrimental effects on behavior. Specifically, "Television is much more than mere entertainment; it is also a major source of observational learning experiences, a setter of norms. It determines what people judge to be appropriate behavior in a variety of situations. Indeed it might be that television has become one of the most important agencies for socialization that our society possesses" (p. 255).

Finally, Forge and Phemister (1987) found that preschool children demonstrated more behaviors of

sharing, cooperation, delay of gratification, and positive social contacts after exposure to prosocial programming. The direction of their research was to determine whether or not the mode of presentation, animated versus non-animated, made a difference. The mode of presentation was not found to be significant but prosocial versus neutral program topics did seem to affect the subjects behavior. This would lead one to believe that the effects of television viewing would be a function of what sorts of messages were being presented.

Other Research

Given that the studies reviewed in the 1982 NIMH report did not fully establish the causal link between viewing violence on television and aggressive behavior, it could be suggested that establishing a causal link between viewing prosocial television and increases in prosocial behavior would be equally difficult. Although the social learning theory work of Bandura and others provides an explanation of how observed effects could have occurred, other works published since 1980 provide additional information about how and why television might influence audience members.

Corder-Bolz (1980) also found that intervention by an adult mediator can affect the learning process and the

formation of attitudes about sex roles and violence. The findings were that primary social agents, those that can demand compliance with their expectations such as parents, teachers, neighbors, the clergy, institutions, organizations, and peer groups, have the most effect on attitudes and beliefs. If secondary social agents, those that cannot demand compliance, such as mass media, present information contradictory to that presented by the primary social agents, it is likely to be discredited.

Huesmann, Eron, Klein, Brice, and Fischer (1983) approach the question from the standpoint of cognition. They suggest intervention in the form of teaching that television violence is an unrealistic portrayal, that aggressive behaviors depicted on television are not as acceptable in the real world as they are in televised stories, and that one should not behave in the same ways as the aggressive characters on television. This intervention would reduce the effect of violent portrayals by altering the cognitive process. They also posit that children who are normally less aggressive will perceive television violence as less realistic and will be less likely to model it. However, a didactic course of treatments designed to produce attitude changes produced no significant results in their second and

fourth grade student subjects. The researchers considered it possible that their didactic treatment was not directed at exactly the right variables and this may have affected the outcome. A second treatment that involved having the subjects produce their own arguments about why television violence is not realistic and should not be modeled did produce some measurable results. However, their primary finding was that identification with a character was the best predictor of whether or not a child was peer nominated as an aggressive individual. They also noted that the subjects who initially had the lowest level of identification showed the most effect. Of special interest is the fact that the amount of television viewed was found to have no significant effect on the other findings.

Berkowitz (1984) discussed some factors that extend the "person part" of the social learning interaction beyond age and development. He posited that reaction to a message was dependent on interpretation by the individual as well as the ideas previously held and the thoughts activated by the message. He called this a "priming" effect. That is, a media event leads the viewer to thoughts about similar things without conscious effort. This effect could be caused by both pro- and antisocial situations depicted in media. However,

Berkowitz states that a semantically related concept, such as a previously acquired set of words or images, must be available to the individual for the effect to occur and that the effect of "priming" decreases over time. Berkowitz also found that viewing fictional material and focusing on the aesthetic aspects of a program reduces the impact of aggression facilitating ideas. Tamborini, Zillmann, and Bryant (1985) expanded this concept with their finding that short-term "priming" occurs after a single exposure to a program but long-term effects result from "repriming" which occurs with multiple exposures.

Christenson (1986) determined that the perception of moral lessons improves with age. In a study of kindergartners, first, third, fourth, and sixth graders, the highest level moral lesson as determined by an adult panel was more likely to be perceived by older age groups. The kindergarten and first grade group had no members perceive the highest level lesson while the sixth grade group had 39 percent of its members perceive the lesson.

Tan (1986) describes some possible models that can be used to track how children might acquire the cultural values that determine their individual attitudes toward the viewing of violent television programming. The major

structure is the coorientation model, that is, communication requires the participation of at least two persons. According to Tan, three criteria must be met for coorientation to exist. The first is congruency, which is similarity between one person's cognitions and the perceptions of another person's cognitions. The second is agreement, which is the extent to which two people have the same salience evaluations. The third is accuracy, which is the extent to which the estimate of another's cognitions matches what the other actually thinks (Tan, 1986).

Tan (1986) places coorientation within families into two patterns and describes four variations of family types based on whether one or the other or both patterns exist. The first pattern is socioorientation in which parents stress the child's relationships with others with the desired outcome of conflict avoidance. The second pattern is concept orientation in which parents stress seeking new ideas, looking at all sides of issues and forming one's own opinions.

The first family type is a laissez faire attitude in which neither socioorientation nor concept orientation are stressed and the children are "undirected." The second family type is the protective family in which socioorientation is stressed, social harmony is valued

and the children are "obedient." The third family type is pluralistic in which concept orientation is stressed. In this family type there is no constraint in interpersonal relationships and open discussion is encouraged. The fourth family type is consensual in nature with both orientations being stressed and discussion but not debate is encouraged (Tan, 1986).

Some behavioral patterns can be associated with family types. In pluralistic families the children are generally more competent, active in public affairs, more receptive to contradictory ideas and less persuasible. Junior and senior high school students from pluralistic type families also use media more extensively to learn about public affairs and are more positive about the political system. Same age students from protective families generally rank lower in use of media for gaining information, are less politically active, and less positive about the political system (Tan, 1986).

In addition to discussing what contributions are made by immediate family members to the acquisition and development of attitudes, Tan (1986) describes some possible effects of violent television and some possible prosocial effects of television. The effects of violent television are: learning new acts, disinhibition and facilitation of aggression, reinforcement of attitudes

held prior to observation, vicarious reinforcement of behavior patterns, and postobservation reinforcement of modeling behavior observed on television. The prosocial effects are divided into cognitive effects and behavioral effects. The cognitive effects are learning useful information and development of cognitive skills, that is, perceptual discrimination, reasoning, and problem solving. The behavioral effects are performance of socially desirable acts, these are: helping others, altruism, controlling aggressive impulses, delaying gratification, persistence, explaining feelings, resisting temptation, adhering to rules, and expressing sympathy to others. Tan states that most of the research done in the area of prosocial effects has been done with preschool children but the results have been positive.

In an investigation involving preschoolers and first and second graders, Nikken and Peeters (1988) found that by age seven children realize that what is on television is not necessarily real. Liebert and Sprafkin (1988) found that by age eight, a majority of children understand the purpose of commercial messages and that among fourth grade children, 65 percent of the central content of a program should be remembered. As a means of reducing possible detrimental effects, they suggest that teaching younger children that most programs do not

reflect reality could reduce aggressive reactions. Liebert and Sprafkin also found that adult co-viewers providing commentary on programs improves children's comprehension of the content. These findings indicate that perhaps the best way to limit possible undesirable effects of television on children is to teach them how to discriminate truth from fiction and provide commentary to improve their comprehension.

Walker and Morley (1988) found that a liking for violence and a generally aggressive attitude was related to watching violent television and that different types of violence are perceived in differing ways. They also found that adolescents with aggressive behavioral intentions found violent television to be more aesthetically acceptable. These findings could be explained by the proposition that the intended or unintended intervention in the early learning processes by primary social agents helped form the beliefs and attitudes which made the watching of violent television programs more desirable.

CHAPTER 3

RATIONALE

Review of research on the effects of mass media reveals that the topic can cause the researcher a great many problems. Finding causal links between viewing any genre of television and subsequent behavior can become a circular process that the researcher may not see. Are aggressive tendencies acquired from primary social agents with adolescents consequently watching violent programming or, does watching violent programming lead to aggressive tendencies in behavior? Clearly, the processes that occur are difficult to isolate and study and the artifacts that result from the research programs are difficult to sort out. If children are being observed outside the home and are being exposed to researcher selected programming, is such a study externally valid?

The bulk of the studies relating to media effects deal with the possible adverse effects. Exploring the possibility that prosocial messages exist in Saturday morning children's programs has not received a great deal of attention. Measuring the existence and recognition of these messages in the programs that the children chose to view would begin to balance previous research.

If social learning theory is valid and children learn from watching others' behavior either in person, or through some mediated means, it can be posited that the existence of prosocial messages in Saturday morning television could provide the prosocial models for children to emulate. Furthermore, if it can be demonstrated that some recognition of the message occurs in young viewers, then from a social learning theory perspective it would follow that prosocial behavioral changes may be occurring.

Existing prosocial research can be described as highly restricted in that it occurs in laboratory settings or is done with groups of subjects in other than an at home setting (e.g., pre-school, lower grade elementary school, or head start). Another problem is that the researcher typically selects the material to be watched rather than the subjects watching what they normally select (Bryan and Walbek, 1970a, 1970b; Stein, Friedrich, & Vondracek, 1972; Friedrich & Stein, 1975; Gorn, Goldberg, & Kanungo, 1976; Friedrich-Cofer, Huston-Stein, Kipnis, Susman, & Clewett, 1979; Singer & Singer, 1976). The ages of the subjects could also be questioned in that normally all are six years old or younger and consequently not of an age where they could be expected to have a full comprehension of reality (Christenson,

1986; Nikken & Peeters, 1988). The present investigation proposes a more naturalistic method that would not select the programs viewed and use measures other than behavioral observation in a laboratory setting to determine what messages are recognized by the children.

In order to determine whether or not Saturday morning programming contains prosocial messages, and whether or not those messages are being recognized, two things should be accomplished. First, the existence of prosocial messages needs to be reliably determined based on at least face valid criteria. This requires the use of trained adult rating panels. Second, the recognition of the messages should be measured using an instrument based on the same criteria. In order to avoid the artifacts that might occur in a laboratory setting, the recognition measurement has to be indirect. This requirement somewhat restricts the amount of information that can be gathered in a small scale study. Another consideration that arises from conducting research on a small scale is the limited number of adult participants. In order to fully examine whether or not prosocial messages exist in Saturday morning programming, several panels should be used and interrater reliability be established not only within each panel but across panels.

Within the limitations of scales that exist, the methodology should yield results that are indicative of the efficacy of the training procedures used and the reliability and validity of the survey instruments. A shortcoming of controlled studies that do not attempt to determine whether or not recognition of a particular type of message has occurred in the subjects from a communication standpoint is that the subjective processes within the receivers is not examined. That is, the simple observation of behavior before and after a controlled exposure to some media event has value but fails to take into account what the subjects of the study think about the experience. By developing methods that allow the subjects to express what message is being recognized, it may be possible to describe more completely the processes that occur during individually selected media consumption.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to develop and use methods for examining the possibility that not all media effects are adverse. The first step was to develop a methodology for determining whether or not prosocial messages exist in Saturday morning children's programs. The second step was to develop an instrument which would indirectly measure children's recognition of prosocial messages in those programs. The

third step was the execution of the methodology on a trial basis. Lastly the results of the trial were analyzed to determine whether or not the methodology was viable and what improvements need to be made.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

Procedures

The research methodology was built on three elements. These were the Saturday morning television programs, a trained adult rating panel, and fourth grade school children. The only experimenter manipulation of any sort was the training of adult rating panel to rate selected programs on prosocial message content.

In order to assess the presence of prosocial messages, a sample of Saturday morning programs was drawn for a trained panel of adult observers to evaluate. The programs used were selected based on Nielsen ratings. The programs that held the top five positions for Saturday morning ratings among six to eleven year old children during the November 1989 rating period were selected to maximize the likelihood of the survey respondents having viewed them. Since there was a tie for fifth place in the ratings, a disinterested party blindly drew the name of the program to be used. The five programs selected for the study and their rank according to the ratings were: (1) "Slimer and the Real

Ghostbusters" (2) "Beetlejuice" (3) "Alvin and the Chipmunks" (4) "Denver, the Last Dinosaur" and (5) "Garfield and Friends." The actual episode of each program to be recorded and shown to the adult panel was selected by numbering the Saturdays during the period 30 December 1989 through 27 January 1990 and rolling a die.

A panel consisting of four female upper division and graduate students was recruited at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. All of the panel members were communication students but only one undergraduate had some background in media effects research. The panel had two training sessions during which interrater reliability was established using examples of programs not included in the study. The definitions of prosocial behaviors given by Liebert and Sprafkin (1988) were used in training the raters. They are:

- Altruism - consists of sharing, helping and cooperation involving humans or animals.
- Control of aggressive impulses - involves nonaggressive acts or statements that serve to eliminate or prevent aggression by self or others toward humans or animals.
- Delay of gratification/task persistence - consists of the related acts of delay of gratification and task persistence, expressed either nonverbally or verbally.
- Explaining feelings of self or others - consists of statements to another person(s) explaining the feelings, thinking, or action of self or others with the intent of effective positive outcome, including increasing the understanding

of others, resolving strife, smoothing out difficulties, or reassuring someone.

Reparation for bad behavior - refers to behavior that is clearly intended as reparation for an act seen as a wrongdoing committed by the person himself/herself.

Resistance to temptation - refers to withstanding the temptation to engage in behaviors generally prohibited by society (e.g., stealing), which may be prohibited in the program explicitly or implicitly.

Sympathy - is a verbal or behavioral expression of concern for others and their problems.
(Liebert & Sprafkin, 1988, Table 10.3, p. 230)

These definitions provided the criteria to determine the existence of prosocial messages and were explained to the panel during the first training session. An example of a program not broadcast on Saturday mornings was used to illustrate behaviors that fit each of the definitions. Raters were simply asked to count the occurrence of each form of prosocial behavior during a practice rating done on a different program to establish a preliminary level of interrater reliability. The second training session consisted of further discussion and group analysis of a program to establish shared definitions for the panel members. Again an example of a program not broadcast on Saturday mornings was rated by the panel and interrater reliability was checked. The final session for the panel consisted of rating the selected episodes with the commercials being skipped by means of fast forwarding the

tape. The programs rated aired as nominally three and one half hours of programming.

A sample of 371 fourth graders from a local school district was surveyed to ascertain whether or not prosocial messages were being recognized by viewers of the programs. There were 96 valid returns for a 25.9% return rate. The responses came from 38 males and 57 females and one response with the gender left blank. Demographics for the schools was not collected at the time the surveys were distributed. When a comparison of the respondents gender distribution to the gender distribution of the school populations seemed to be necessary, the school district was queried for the information. As the term had been over for several weeks, the data files had been purged and the information was not available in a usable form. One survey was returned without being completed and one respondent indicated that neither of the programs had been watched. Neither of these was counted as a valid response.

The distribution of the number of responses for each program was not related to the Nielsen ratings. "Alvin and the Chipmunks" which was rated number three had 25 responses, "Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters" rated number one had 22 responses, "Beetlejuice" and "Garfield and Friends" rated number two and five respectively had

18 responses each, and "Denver, the Last Dinosaur" rated number four had 13 responses.

Fourth graders were determined to be capable of reading the simple questions used on the survey instrument. Further, only three simple answer choices of yes, no, and don't know were provided (See Appendix B). Two program surveys were given to each student in order to increase the probability of getting one valid program evaluation from each respondent. For those indicating the same frequency of viewing for both programs, a coin flip was used to determine which one would be used in the data analysis. For differing frequencies of viewing, the program watched most was used.

Instruments

The panel used a tally sheet with each of the individual prosocial behaviors listed and briefly defined. While viewing the program episodes selected, they noted the occurrence of each behavior (See Appendix A).

The survey forms for the fourth graders were tailored to the programs. That is, each form had the name of the program at the top and the questions pertained to that program's title character (See Appendix B). Prior to distribution, the questionnaires were paired equally

and shuffled so that the programs any particular child was asked about occurred randomly. The two questionnaires were stapled to a parental permission form prior to being distributed. The sets of questionnaires were broken down prior to being delivered to the participating schools and were picked up after being returned to the schools by those who chose to participate.

The seven questions about the title characters paralleled the Liebert and Sprafkin prosocial behaviors listed on the trained rating panel's sheets and the respondents were asked whether or not the main character of the program would choose to behave in that manner. For example, on the altruism behavior the respondents were asked to reply yes, no, or don't know to the statement, (Character Name) likes to share and help others. Additionally, the respondents were asked if they would like to have the title character as a friend, how often they viewed the program in question, and their gender and age (See Appendix B).

Data Analysis

The rating panel tally sheets were compiled to determine a rate per program of each prosocial behavior and a total rate. These results were put into a common

measurement on a per hour basis for ranking the programs according to the rate of occurrence of prosocial behaviors. Interrater reliability was established by intercorrelating the four raters evaluations of each program. Specifically, each rater's count of each type of prosocial behavior were intercorrelated with the other raters' counts of each type of prosocial behavior. This yielded six correlations per program which were converted to z scores and averaged to arrive at interrater reliability for each program and across all programs.

The data from the children's survey instruments were used to calculate a total positive rating score. This score was the total of positive answers given by the respondents for each program. A prosocial ratio score was also determined for each program. This was done by dividing the number of positive answers by the total of the positive and negative answers. This ratio was used to determine the prosocial message recognition rank of the programs.

A one between analysis of variance was done to determine if significant relationships existed among the program rankings as determined by the adult panel and the survey respondents' evaluations. The dependent variable in this procedure was the student derived positiveness ratio for each program. The independent variable was the

prosocial ranking of the program as determined by the adult panel. Thus, if the children were recognizing prosocial messages in the same way as the adults, the ordering of the children's positiveness ratio means should be the same as the prosocial ordering of the adults.

Analyses of variance were also done using the respondent's gender and the answer to the question about whether or not they would like to have the main character of the program as a friend as independent variables. The positive answer totals for the various behaviors were used as dependent variables in order to determine whether there was more recognition of any of the behaviors based on gender or the desirability of the character as a friend.

In order to explore the relationship between whether or not the various characters would be desirable as friends and the number of positive opinions assigned to the programs by the children, the correlation between these items was checked. The number of positive opinions was counted and used as a score in this case and the friend dimension was left on its one to three scale.

Finally, a rank order correlation was done between the prosocial rankings assigned by the adult panel and children's prosocial rankings of the programs. A

positive correlation would indicate similarities in adult-child recognition of prosocial messages while a negative correlation would indicate dissimilarity.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The first item that needed to be established was the interrater reliability of the adult panel. The reliable recognition of the occurrence of prosocial behaviors in the programs was the basis for determining whether or not the methodology used in this project was viable. The statistical operation used for establishing reliability in this case was the average intercorrelation of the scores given by the four panel members. The resultant average intercorrelations among raters are listed in Table 5.1. The overall good intercorrelation among adult raters indicates that the training sessions established a shared set of definitions.

Table 5.1 Interrater Reliability

<u>Program Title</u>	<u>Correlation</u>
Garfield and Friends	0.935
Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters	0.915
Denver, the Last Dinosaur	0.910
Alvin and the Chipmunks	0.890
Beetlejuice	0.775
Across all programs	0.895

The question of the occurrence of prosocial behaviors in Saturday morning children's programs that were evaluated was the next consideration. The rate of occurrence differed widely across the set of programs but all were determined to portray at least some prosocial behaviors. The adult panel means for the number of prosocial occurrences on a per hour basis is given in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Adult Rating Panel Observation of Prosocial Behaviors
(Panel mean of occurrences per hour)

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Program Title</u>	<u>Score</u>
1.	Alvin and the Chipmunks	48.5/hour
2.	Beetlejuice	48.0/hour
3.	Garfield and Friends	26.75/hour
4.	Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters	23.75/hour
5.	Denver, the Last Dinosaur	22.0/hour

In order to establish a basis for comparing what the opinions of the fourth graders about the probability of the main characters of the programs behaving in a prosocial manner with the results of the adult panel's evaluation, an index of some sort was necessary. The children's total positive answers about the main characters for each program were divided by the total of

the positive and negative answers for each program to determine a "positiveness ratio" for each program. The "Don't Know" answers were considered to be a "no opinion" and omitted from the calculation. The resultant ratios established the ranking given in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Fourth Grader Ranking of Positiveness Ratios*

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Program Title</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
1.	Denver, the Last Dinosaur	0.98
2.	Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters	0.74
3.	Alvin and the Chipmunks	0.42
4.	Beetlejuice	0.34
5.	Garfield and Friends	0.24

*(Ratio=Positive Answers/Positive+Negative Answers)

In a one between analysis of variance the number of positive answers given for the program rated by each respondent was entered as a separate case. This was used as the dependent variable with the adult ranking of the programs as the independent variable. The results indicated that significant differences, $F(4,92) = 20.86$ $p < .001$, existed in the number of positive answers given for each program. Specifically the results in Table 5.2 indicate that adults ranked the prosocialness of programs from most to least as: (1) "Alvin and the Chipmunks"

(2) "Beetlejuice" (3) "Garfield and Friends" (4) "Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters" (5) "Denver, the Last Dinosaur." In contrast, the results in Table 5.3 revealed that children ranked the prosocialness of the lead characters in these programs from most to least as: (1) "Denver, the Last Dinosaur" (2) "Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters" (3) "Alvin and the Chipmunks" (4) "Beetlejuice" (5) "Garfield and Friends." The Tukey HSD procedure indicated that the differences at the $p < .05$ level existed between both "Beetlejuice" and "Garfield and Friends" and the other three programs. This procedure was indicated by the sharp differences in the ordering of the programs according to prosocial content between the adult panel and the children. The results indicate that the children rated the programs as being significantly different in content.

Rank order correlation between the adult and children's prosocial rankings of the five programs indicated that the adults and children have different opinions about the amount of prosocial behavior that occurred in the programs (Spearman's $\rho = 0.60$, $p = 0.164$). The correlation did not approach acceptable significance due to a small sample of only five programs.

Analysis variance using gender as the independent variable revealed significant differences in the

children's answers on two of the behavior descriptions. The first was reparation for bad behavior which on the survey constituted apologizing for wrongdoing, $F(1,91) = 6.45$ $p < .013$. The second was sympathy which on the survey was helping others to feel better, $F(1,91) = 8.89$ $p < .004$. Males rated the characters as exhibiting both of these traits more than did the females.

For analysis of variance with the answer to whether or not the respondent would like to have the main character as a friend, there were significant differences in the answers to the same two behavior descriptions. That is, reparation for bad behavior, $F(2,91) = 4.56$ $p < .013$, and sympathy, $F(2,91) = 6.76$ $p < .002$, again were the dimensions that were rated differently. Those who would like the character as a friend rated them as exhibiting both the traits more than did those who did not desire the character as a friend.

The correlation between the total of positive opinion answers assigned to the programs by children and their desire to have the character as a friend was contrary to expectations. The negative correlation of -0.444 $p < .001$ across all programs, between these items indicates that the less perceived prosocial behavior by a character predicts greater desire by children to want the

character as a friend. This is well illustrated by the fact that the program "Garfield and Friends" ranked lowest on the prosocial scale derived from the children's opinions and yet 13 of 18 total respondents indicated they would like Garfield as a friend.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this research was to develop a reliable and valid methodology in order to examine the existence and recognition of prosocial messages in Saturday morning children's television programs. The bulk of previous investigation of the effects of television viewing on children has been focused on the possible detrimental effects. The research that has explored the possibility of prosocial effects occurring has been done largely in laboratory settings and has used preschool age children as subjects. In order to determine whether or not prosocial messages exist in Saturday morning programs, it was necessary to use adults as raters in order to increase the objectivity of the observations. Fourth grade students, who are of an age to understand that the programs are fiction, were surveyed about their opinions of how the characters in top rated Saturday morning programs behave in order to establish whether or not the messages were being recognized by the audience members. The investigator did not control the programs students viewed thereby minimizing experimental effects. Using a national rating service's ratings to determine what

programs were to be investigated also eliminated researcher bias from that part of the process. In effect two parts of a communication process were investigated. First, the content of a message, that is, the occurrence of prosocial behaviors within the programs, was examined as objectively as possible. Second, the receivers' recognition of the content was indirectly measured by soliciting their opinions about how the main characters behave.

The question of whether or not the Liebert and Sprafkin typology provided the basis for a reliable method of measuring the prosocial message content of Saturday morning children's programs can be at least partially resolved. The high degree of interrater reliability among the members of the adult rating panel indicates that agreement can be reached about the meaning of a set of criteria for such measurement. Although unknown factors may have contributed to the ease of establishing the common definitions that the panel used in their rating, it is probable that a high degree of interrater reliability could be established with appropriate training of any similar rating panel.

The success with establishing a high degree of interrater reliability among the adult panel members implies that the occurrence of prosocial behaviors in the

program episodes that were rated is a valid finding. This finding can be used to support the hypothesis that prosocial models exist for the audience members to emulate if other individual psychographic factors provide the initial influence for such behavior. An important fact to keep in mind is that the presentation of a prosocial model for a child to emulate is not likely in itself to cause an alteration of behavior patterns. The influence of primary social agents would in large part determine what behaviors would be acceptable for emulation and this would provide the criteria that a child used for categorizing the modeled behaviors as to acceptability.

The survey instrument used in assessing the recognition of prosocial messages by children yielded somewhat ambiguous results. Although the respondents gave positive answers about at least some of the behaviors in question for all the programs, their ranking of which programs contained the most prosocial content varied widely from the rankings assigned by the adult raters. It can be concluded from this that the subjective recognition of the prosocial messages by the children differs from the trained objective observation of the programs by the adult raters. This may be a function of identity with the characters in question.

Adult raters would have little or no identification with the characters during a one-time observation of an episode of a program while the regular child viewer would develop identification with the main character over time. The children's opinion of how a character behaves would evolve from seeing how the character acted in several episodes of a program. If the episode viewed by the adult rating panel happened to be one in which the prosocial content was low, differences would occur in the rankings assigned.

Other possible processes which might account for the fact that the children's opinions differed from the adult counting of behaviors are recall and context. The children's opinions would be based on the recall of final outcomes of stories rather than concentration on detecting and counting occurrences in a single episode. This would tend to blend the memory of individual antisocial acts that might have occurred into the context of a prosocial outcome such as ultimately helping another to solve a problem or escape from a perilous situation.

The differences among the children's opinions of whether or not the main characters exhibit various prosocial behaviors occurred in two areas. Reparation for bad behavior and sympathy were rated differently according to the gender of the child and whether or not

the character was desirable as a friend. These differences could be attributed to the socialization process. Nine and ten year old fourth graders have probably started to develop gender related social characteristics. Desirable characteristics in a friend could be expected to be different for girls and boys depending on what sort of role modeling had been done by primary social agents.

The negative correlation between the overall positive answer score for the programs and the desirability of the characters as friends must also be attributed to identification with the characters. Over a period of time, it is reasonable that children would not repeatedly choose to watch a particular program unless they felt some sort of friendship based on identification with the main character.

The method used in this project to determine whether or not prosocial messages are included in the content of Saturday morning children's television seems to be reliable and valid. High interrater reliability was established and the programs that were rated were found to have some prosocial message content. The method used to determine whether or not these messages are received by the audience appears to have worked to a degree but did not yield sufficiently clear results to suggest that

the prosocial messages are being recognized. If the adult rankings are used as a standard of measurement, it could be argued that the differences between the adult panel and the children indicate that the children do not recognize the prosocial messages in Saturday morning programming. This is most likely a reflection of the different ways in which the measurement was done. The adult rating panel was counting overall occurrences to include the actions of supporting characters in the programs. This would mask somewhat the fact that the main character was not behaving in what would be considered a prosocial manner. The children were restricted to evaluating the main character and this would mask the prosocial actions of supporting characters. In order to resolve this problem of measurement, it would be necessary to word the survey questions to cover the entire cast of characters in a program or to have the adult rating panel count only prosocial behaviors exhibited by the main character. However, the fact that the children's opinions of the prosocial content of the various programs were significantly different indicates that their responses were nonrandom. This finding suggests some sort of systematic recognition of a perceived prosocial pattern of behavior on the part of the characters by the

children. The finding of an inverse correspondence between the adults' and children's prosocial rankings muddies the finding that the children recognized some prosocial messages and requires further investigation with more comprehensive research tools.

The questions which arose during the analysis of the results of the survey administered to the children concern the validity of the method. The first problem area which must be noted is the fact that the surveys were accompanied by a parental consent form and were completed by the children at home. This may have led to consulting with the parents about the meanings of the questions and what the "appropriate" answer might be. This would introduce some parental bias into the answers given and would not be detectable in the course of analyzing the results. In order to avoid this, it would be better to obtain parental permission separately from the administration of the survey instrument.

The necessarily simple wording of the questions on the survey was another problem area. Asking the children their opinion of overall behavior patterns makes it easy for them to answer but does not elicit a truly thoughtful response. An instrument consisting of various scenarios with the character name inserted would provide a method for more precisely measuring children's opinions of a

character's behavior patterns. Additionally, it is difficult to determine whether or not the behavioral descriptions used carry the same connotation in the children's minds as in the mind of an adult. Resolving this problem would require interviewing a large sample of children in order to determine what best describes to them the various behavior patterns being investigated. Once the most common connotations used by children in a particular age group were determined, the questions used in soliciting their opinions could be worded in a way that would make them a more valid measurement.

Another extension of the opinion measurement would be to recruit the parents of the children to also view the programs and evaluate the main characters on the Liebert and Sprafkin typology. This would allow for cross referencing the opinions of the parents and their children to determine what similarities exist between the opinions of primary social agents and the children using a common basis of measurement. The results obtained would provide indications of how much influence is exerted by primary social agents on the attitudes of children. This two pronged approach could also provide indications as to how much the training of a rating panel contributes to the reliability of its measurements. Comparing the results obtained from two different adult

groups with those of a group of children would yield more comprehensive findings on which to base conclusions and determine what the next level of refinement should be in order to more firmly establish the existence and recognition of prosocial messages in Saturday morning programming.

The results of this research indicate that the prosocial messages do exist in Saturday morning children's television programs and that it can be reliably measured. There were also indications that children recognize these messages. The reliability and validity of the method used to measure the children's recognition of prosocial messages needs to be greatly improved over what was used in this project. This improvement would require more resources to be available to conduct the survey of children's opinions. The possible influence of parental bias needs to be eliminated by administering the survey outside the home. Using a national rating service's ratings to select subject programs and not controlling the children's viewing should be retained in order to prevent researcher bias from influencing the results.

It is evident that examining the possible effects of television viewing on children in a naturalistic manner is achievable. Taking such research outside the

laboratory and controlled field experiment setting provides a more realistic picture of what children are recognizing as the message of what they view. The communication concept of the meaning of a message residing in the receiver can be applied only by determining what meaning is given to the message content of television programs by the receiver, in this case the children who are the intended audience of those who produce what is broadcast on Saturday mornings.

APPENDIX A - Adult Rating Panel Coding Sheet

CODING SHEET

NAME OF PROGRAM _____

DATE TAPED _____

As you note the occurrence of one of the listed behaviors, mark its occurrence in the count column for that behavior.

MESSAGE TYPE

COUNT

ALTRUISM - sharing, helping & cooperation involving humans or animals.

CONTROL OF AGGRESSIVE IMPULSES - nonaggressive acts or statements that prevent aggression.

DELAY OF GRATIFICATION/PERSISTENCE - acts of delaying gratification & task persistence.

EXPLAINING FEELINGS - statements explaining the feelings, thinking or action of self or others.

REPARATION FOR BAD BEHAVIOR - behavior intended as reparation for wrongdoing by person.

RESISTANCE TO TEMPTATION - withstanding the temptation to engage in prohibited behaviors.

SYMPATHY - verbal or behavioral expression of concern for others.

APPENDIX B - Fourth Grade Student Survey Instrument

I watch (name of program)	ALMOST ALMOST NEVER	ALWAYS	SOMETIMES HAVEN'T SEEN IT
(Character name) likes to share and help others.	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
(Character name) likes to fight.	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
(Character name) keeps working until the job is done before playing.	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
(Character name) helps settle arguments by explaining why they started.	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
(Character name) apologizes when he/she does something wrong.	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
(Character name) takes things that belong to someone else.	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
(Character name) would help someone who was feeling bad to feel better.	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
I would like (Character name) to be my friend.	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
I AM A BOY_____ GIRL_____ WHO IS_____YEARS OLD.			

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