



# Boys and TV Violence

**The most recent research from the ABA has revealed significant gender differences between young boys and girls in attitudes to violence, death and injury on television, particularly in news programs, and should raise serious questions for parents and educators about the way boys are socialised in our society.**

The results of a survey which looked at children's attitudes to violence, kissing and swearing on television are contained in the ABA's most recent monograph (No.4), titled *Cool or Gross*, published in October (details in Policy File, p. 16).

The research showed that boys generally had a higher level of acceptance towards seeing and hearing about some types of news on television: for example, 51 per cent of boys said it was 'OK to see and hear about car accidents that show blood' compared with 23 per cent of girls. Similarly, 42 per cent of girls said they did not like to see or hear about items depicting 'people who have been shot or killed', compared with 24 per cent of boys. The researchers commented that '[t]he strength of association between gender and reaction to specific news events where a significant result was obtained is greater than the relationship between most other variables throughout the report'.

When children were presented with a number of program scenarios, girls once again tended to react more negatively than boys in virtually every case. These scenarios included programs with fights, guns and car chases, or with scenes of kissing or using 'very rude words', programs showing men or women without clothes, or children or animals being hurt, or parents arguing.

In some cases the variation was extremely marked: for example, 60 per cent of girls said that they didn't like to watch programs showing people fighting and beating each other up, compared to 21 per cent of boys; 51 per cent

of boys disliked seeing children being hurt or whacked, compared with 72 per cent of girls, and the variation was similar in the case of reaction to animals being hurt or killed.

Significantly - particularly for those who argue for more regulation of 'taste and decency' matters along the line of the UK's Broadcasting Standards Council - the great majority of children seemed unconcerned about sex and nudity, and about swearing: only 8 per cent and 2 per cent of the sample respectively nominated these matters when asked to say what upset or concerned them on television.

As ABA chair Brian Johns said on the release of this research, its importance lies in looking at these issues from a child's perspective, after a series of other projects which have focussed on adult attitudes to classification issues.

As has been customary with recent ABA research, the study involved a qualitative stage, with 18 focus groups of five to-12-year-olds in Sydney and NSW country towns (108 children), and a quantitative stage involving 1602 primary schoolchildren in NSW. This was followed by a survey of parents - 517 matched pairs of parent and child.

## Television and Families

The ABA study provides interesting insights into the patterns of television watching by Australian children, and the extent to which parents control (or attempt to control) their children's viewing.

There were some surprising findings, especially for those who imagine that television watching would rate ahead of all other interests for the modern child. For example, over one quarter of children (27 per cent) said they did not watch television every day - a figure which correlated almost

exactly with parents' responses on this question. The overwhelming majority of children (89 per cent) reported that there were rules governing their watching of television (eg only after homework was completed). Rather more parents (nearly all!) said that there were such rules in their household.

Over half the sample (55 per cent) said that they had stopped watching on occasion because something had upset them; but once again, girls (66 per cent) were significantly more likely than boys (44 per cent) to have taken this action.

It is encouraging that the flow of program-related research from the ABA is continuing, though it is ironic that this monograph should be issued around the same time as the ABA's 1993-94 Annual Report, a document long on objectives and performance indicators (as now required by Canberra of its statutory authorities) but very short on the type of data which made the old ABT Annual Reports such an invaluable resource for researchers, policy analysts and historians. The demise of *Broadcasting in Australia* (last edition 1992) serves to emphasise the paucity of statistics - particularly about program types and financial information - which are to be collected (or made public) under the Broadcasting Services Act regime.

In view of this, publications like the AFC's *Get the Picture* (see p.12), and a continued flow of quantitative research like this monograph from the ABA, will be increasingly important in maintaining a body of data about Australian film and television. □

