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Prime-time Entertainment and Values:  
Network Television as New Religion

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Communication

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Robin C. Mills

April, 1995

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**THESIS ACCEPTANCE**

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## ABSTRACT

The influence of mass media, particularly the portrayal of value-related issues in prime-time entertainment television, has provoked much recent debate concerning a perceived impoverishment of values in society.

Recently, current and popular prime-time television shows have been cited for a presentation of values which do not reflect values endemic to the teachings of most mainstream religions.

The present study examined content in a sample of prime-time network entertainment television to see how value portrayal compares to the values associated with basic Judeo-Christian tenets. Television is considered a common cultural storyteller and therefore is thought to be a reflection of society while presenting ideas that may affect it.

The present study, although not an exact replication, was similar to a study conducted by Selnow (1990). Values toward self and others, including a sense of duty to family and self, were observed with the highest frequency (41.2 percent of all coded value incidents).

For all value incidents coded, more value presentations were unfavorable (58.4 percent) than favorable (41.6 percent). Specifically, a favorable value presentation was coded for value incidents which advocated, supported, and/or demonstrated a particular value as it is stated in the BCPS

taxonomy, while an unfavorable value presentation was coded for value incidents which failed to demonstrate, challenged, and/or contradicted a particular value from the BCPS taxonomy. The BCPS taxonomy was the value index used for operationally defining values in the present research.

For each value incident coded, the principal or active agent--the one character whose lines and/or dialogue were dominant--was noted. The observed age of each principal or active agent was coded by assigning the principal or active agent to an age coding category, i.e. 31-40 or 41-50 years of age. The most common age for all principal or active agents coded fell in the age 41-50 category.

Results obtained in the present research are not overwhelming toward any one trend or conclusion. The distribution of favorable and unfavorable value presentations, for example, does not indicate a trend which characterizes television as a "new religion."

However, whereas the Church in earlier times was the major mediator of values, norms, and beliefs--a role now taken by television (Hoover, 1988)--values as observed in the present study are only dissimilar to Judeo-Christian beliefs in terms of the nature and degree of unfavorable value presentations, if not in terms of frequency. The average ages of principal or active agents in association with favorable or unfavorable value presentation was inconclusive (age 41-50 for both).

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

In a campaign speech in the Spring of 1992, former Vice President Dan Quayle leveled criticism at television's fictional character, Murphy Brown, for deciding to bear a child alone and "call it just another lifestyle choice" (Hartman, 1992, p. 387). Issues raised by Quayle, known as the "family values" debate, capped-off concerns which had been developing for several years (Klein, 1992). These include a belief that "the breakdown of the family, and a general...abandonment of religious belief" is the result of the "unhealthy influence of television" (Selnow, 1990, p. 64).

Furthermore, as noted by Klein (1992), Quayle's remarks spread, drawing in debate on a host of related value issues, from women's rights to racial discrimination.

All aspects of the debate, however, seemed to be intricately tied to several questions: (1) the question of "whose values?" particularly in terms of any one religious perspective and (2) how should value issues be portrayed in public arenas, such as the mass media (Klein, 1992).

The functions of religion have been compared to those of television on a number of levels. Comstock (1980) identifies both religion and television as two major systems by which the public is introduced to the norms and values of society. In addition, Garvey (1992) argues that television

is to our culture what the language of the Bible was to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Television and religion are thought to have equal power due to "acceptance of...communications by the intended audience" (Comstock, 1980, p. 130).

Furthermore, Signorielli and Morgan (1990) argue that mainstream television may act as the primary competitor for conventional religion in the enculturation of basic beliefs and values:

This is a task that we think of as the province of religion in years gone by...Religion seems to face, in conventional television, a powerful competitor for cultural power. (p. 138)

The present research analyzes content in a sample of prime-time network entertainment television to see how values are portrayed and how value presentations compare to "common core beliefs...[and] basic Judeo-Christian tenets" (Selnow, 1990, p. 65), which traditionally have been reflected in prime-time television (Potter, 1990; Signorielli, 1991).

In other words, while television and religion, in some ways, are both about the same things--values, beliefs, and behaviors (Hoover, 1988), the nature of values on television is thought to have departed from Judeo-Christian traditionalism, as exemplified in recent, highly-rated episodic series which include: *Murphy Brown*, *Roseanne*,

*Picket Fences*, and *Married...With Children* (Garvey, 1992; Berkman, 1993; Miller, 1993; and Zoglin, 1990). Therefore, as the "teller of stories" (Hoover, 1988, p. 56) and "arbiter of acceptability" (Comstock, 1980, p. 130), television may indeed be a "new religion" (Comstock, 1980, p. 129).

Citing heightened interest in personal values due to recent scandals involving government and religious figures and Wall Street executives, Selnow (1990) notes an increased societal desire to discover causes for the "perceived impoverishment of values" (p. 64). Specifically, attention has focused on a possible link between a decline in values and the impact of mass media:

Prominent among scores of candidates, including drug abuse, the breakdown of the family, and a general population-wide abandonment of religious beliefs, is the unhealthy influence of television. (Selnow, 1990, p. 64)

In addition, Selnow (1990) suggest that "third-party institutions" (p. 64), namely community organizations and schools, are now being looked upon to fulfill the primary responsibilities of teaching values, which have traditionally been the domain of family and church. However, the task of teaching values is now seen by some to be the responsibility of another institution as well, specifically, television (Selnow, 1990).

While only a few studies have dealt with television and values, most have concluded that television does not condone "immoral behavior" (Selnow, 1990, p. 64). For example, a 1985 study by Sutherland and Siniawsky (Selnow, 1990) concluded that soap operas do not advocate moral violations. Potter (1990) argues that adolescents perceive moral maxims from entertainment television such as, "truth always wins out" and "hard work yields rewards" (p. 848). In addition, a study by Signorielli (1991) attributes adolescents' positive attitudes toward marriage to the influence of episodic television.

However, as noted by Montgomery (1989), minorities, women, seniors, the physically challenged, conservative religious groups and others continue to attack television programs which they believe have ignored, misrepresented, or in some way threatened them and their values. Fictional television, including prime-time episodic programming, is believed to be the one common source which most effectively embodies and reinforces the dominant images and values in American society (Montgomery, 1989).

Using operational definitions and methods, which have been partially duplicated in this study, Selnow (1990) conducted research on the portrayal of values in prime-time television. Adopting an 18-item inventory of values developed by the Baltimore City Public Schools, known as the BCPS taxonomy, Selnow coded and described value portrayal in

a sample of scripted, prime-time television episodes. Littlejohn (1992) defines a taxonomy as "a list of concepts and definitions [which describe] a particular theory" (p. 22).

The BCPS taxonomy, the value classification scheme replicated in this study, consists of an inventory of ten "personal values" and eight "citizenship values" (Selnow, 1990, p. 66). BCPS is valuable for the present research because it reflects "basic Judeo-Christian tenets" (Selnow, 1990, p. 65) and therefore provides a means of measuring the treatment as well as the frequency of traditional values in entertainment television. Noting the difficulty in selecting a clear values typology, Selnow (1990) selected the BCPS values program for several reasons:

BCPS...provides bold, clear statements and so avoids problems inherent to vague value concepts [and offers] a set of key tenets or a common core of beliefs which exist within a pluralistic society (p. 65) [and is] easily adaptable to television content analysis. (p. 66)

Specifically, Selnow (1990) examined the television portrayal of values for their total impact on the viewing audience. First, Selnow coded and described operationally defined value incidents according to the BCPS taxonomy. The following were also observed: the sex, age, and occupation of the characters, including the principal or active agent

in each value incident; the disposition of values as either favorable or unfavorable; the prominence of values in a story line; how fully values were explained; how value incidents were structured and linked; and the instructional potential for the viewing audience. The following illustrate those categories which are duplicated in the present research.

The main unit coded, a value incident (Selnow, 1990, p. 67), indicated direct to indirect references to one of the 18 values articulated in the taxonomy. Incidents may range from passing references, in one or two lines of dialogue, to central subplot themes. A value incident is defined as: "An event, behavior, or verbal reference revealing any one, or any substantive portion, of the 18 values [listed] in the BCPS taxonomy" (p. 67). Value incidents were coded in this study.

When compared to the belief systems of most mainstream religions in the United States, television has been found to reinforce rather than contradict traditional values, a trend confirmed by Selnow (1990). Specifically, Selnow designated the portrayal of values as either favorable or unfavorable, a coding category replicated in this study. As values in the BCPS taxonomy reflect "basic Judeo-Christian tenets" (Selnow, 1990, p. 65), favorable value presentations represent the reinforcement of mainstream religious beliefs.

According to Selnow, favorable value presentations

include praise and reward shown to characters for their actions, while unfavorable presentations include disapproval and degradation. Favorable as well as unfavorable value incidents are coded according to how the value incident, taken as a whole, either supports or does not support a particular value as it is stated in the BCPS taxonomy.

Unlike Selnow (1990), the present research makes inferences about television as a "new religion" (Gerbner & Connolly, 1978 and Comstock, 1980), based on the favorable or unfavorable presentation of values in prime-time entertainment television.

For example, a favorable value presentation was coded in the present research for a value incident in *Murphy Brown* where character Jim Dial praised the work habits of his co-workers: "There's nothing like the sound of people hunkering down to work..."

In another example, an unfavorable value presentation was coded for a value incident in *Picket Fences* where an attorney demonstrates religious bigotry in a court hearing: "We have to keep [our town] pure...we have to keep out frightening elements..."

In addition, While Selnow (1990) linked the positive portrayal of mainstream values with figures of authority and power, he made no further inferences about how various age groups on television, including older characters, were

associated with either the treatment or transmission of value issues.

Furthermore, Selnow (1990) separately coded the principal or active agent (character) in each value incident, and found no significant differences between these characters and the general pool of characters in terms of age, other demographics, or the distribution of values. Principal or active agents are defined as those characters in a value incident whose lines and/or behavior dominate.

Nonetheless, of interest in the present research is an issue raised by Medved (1992), who argues that television deliberately undermines the credibility and competence of older characters, particularly parental figures, an idea that is contradictory to most mainstream religions. The link between age and the treatment of values may reflect current distinctions, as well as similarities, in the way both mainstream religion and television communicate morality.

Finally, Selnow's (1990) research is the most recent study of the general portrayal of values in prime-time entertainment television. However, the present research examines values in prime-time television to satisfy a more specific objective. In other words, current popular prime-time programs reflect changes in value presentation (Garvey, 1992 and Berkman, 1993), changes which may no longer reinforce mainstream Judeo-Christian belief. Therefore,



because there exists a lack of research which deals with values on television and mainstream religion (Hoover, 1988), further investigation is warranted.

## Chapter II

### Review of Related Literature

Although radio drama provided the format and form for television series, the Hollywood movie industry provided the programming for the first made-for-television movies and entertainment series (Cantor, 1980). The first Hollywood and network collaboration took place in 1954, when ABC made a deal with Walt Disney for a Disneyland series (Cantor, 1980).

Popular movies provided for television by Hollywood soon developed into episodic series, including the movies of four major categories: "the western, the detective or mystery, situation comedies, and general drama (a catch-all category)" (Cantor, 1980, p. 30). Cantor defines the episodic series as those shows which are "one-half hour or one hour long...which appear on the air on a weekly basis" (p. 28).

#### Prime-Time Entertainment Television

☞ Cantor (1980) defines prime-time entertainment television as the "episodic series, movies made for television, miniseries, specials, and other serialized drama which appear between the hours of 8:00-11:00 p.m." (p. 12).

★ In the first two decades of television entertainment, the episodic series gradually fostered viewer attachment to stock characters, their relationships, and the form of the television episode, which developed from the traditional

narrative of early radio series (Taylor, 1989). The episodic series of 1950s and 1960s television provided a contemporary form of storytelling which focused on widely received ideas about one topic in particular--the American family (Taylor, 1989). Prime-time entertainment television has continued to generate series built around domestic themes, which have evolved as a "changing commentary on family life" (Taylor, 1989, p. 17).

### **Characteristics of Entertainment Television**

One built-in characteristic of entertainment television is the idea of a plot ritual (Cantor, 1980), also referred to as the rules of television (Potter, 1990). Plot rituals and television rules represent consistently used story lines, story outcomes, and themes in which dominant value lessons are embedded (Potter, 1990).

Some rituals or rules in entertainment television have become so consistent that certain themes, particularly violent themes, have been the subject of content analysis for more than three decades (Cantor, 1980). The rationale behind these content analyses is that television, considered a dynamic force in society, influences attitudes and behaviors of children on social issues (Cantor, 1980).

In addition, related to the common rituals and rules of entertainment television is the idea of closure (Levy, 1993). Closure refers to the "tidy endings" which bring the expected resolution, clarification, and moral exposition

that provide, in part, "release with no tension" (Levy, 1993, p. 52). Closure is important as a characteristic of prime-time entertainment television because it suggests a particular value lesson to be taken from an episode (Levy, 1993).

Another characteristic of prime-time television, specifically the situation-comedy, is the "battle of verbal wit" (Sklar, 1980, p. 66). Sklar notes that the popularity of the verbal put-down as communicative expression precedes the age of electronic broadcasting and is derived, in part, from the rhymes and songs of British school children.

Sklar (1980) also makes the point that television more often reflects than creates elements from the larger culture, citing a verbal style, or "cheeky impertinence" which makes it "better to be witty than to be right" (p. 67). Although television humor, including verbal barbs, may be nothing new to the American culture, Sklar maintains that television establishes a context of "who's saying what to whom" (p. 67), and that the verbal repartee often originates within the intimate family circle, one place where values are powerfully demonstrated.

### **Political and Economic Factors**

Before turning to further treatment of values in television content, several key issues need to be recognized. First, Parenti (1992) argues that because television images consist of "real ideological content" (p.

1), concern should focus on the prevalence of broad political messages, including imperialism and racism, that are likely to be assumed by the audience when perceived purely as entertainment:

Beliefs, attitudes, and values are more palatable and credible to an audience when they are molded and reinforced by characters and program plots than when they are preached by a newscaster or speaker for a particular cause. (p. 3)

Second, Taylor (1989) stresses the development of the prime-time episodic series, including its articulation of the family, as an outcome of the economy of the entertainment industry. In other words, the family scenarios and values portrayed in entertainment television are the result, in part, of attempts to find predictable formulas that will draw mass audiences and thus sustain advertising revenues (Taylor, 1989).

Thus, both political and economic factors that effect the entertainment industry are determinates of values in prime-time entertainment television. In addition, McCrohan (1990) notes that while television may present value-driven issues such as violence, bigotry, and sex--television did not invent these issues--"the trick is to offer enough of the new to be intriguing while couching it in enough of the familiar that it doesn't scare viewers away" (p. 6).

### Values in Prime-Time Entertainment Television

Although values have been defined in many ways, most definitions converge on Rokeach's statement that a value is "a type of belief, centrally located within one's belief system, about how one ought or ought not to behave" (Selnow, 1990, p. 64). Entertainment critic and author Michael Medved (1992) defines "family values" as a "belief in the nuclear family" (p. 258), while pollsters Mellman and Lazarus define family values as, "Providing emotional support for your family" (Klein, 1992, p. 22).

The concept of personal values, a classification of values which will be examined in this study, will be defined as a set of individual philosophies that govern core beliefs and behaviors toward self and others. Clearly, any definition of values is not the only definition possible, but, the above provide a place to begin.

The theme of values in mass media research, including references to family, stem in part from a desire to discover causes for the "perceived impoverishment of values" (Selnow, 1990, p. 64). After viewing, coding, and analyzing 40.5 hours of network prime-time television programming, Selnow found that programs in the sample imitated traditional values embedded in American culture.

Specifically, Selnow (1990) found that out of the 40.5 hours of programming analyzed, nearly half (49.4 percent) of all recorded value incidents dealt with positive values

toward others. Thus, Selnow's findings suggest that television portrays a range of positive personal values in the teaching of the standards of individual morality.

However, prime-time entertainment television has remained a critical target for a variety of special interest groups that oppose content which contradicts deeply held beliefs and values (Montgomery, 1989).

~~X~~ As early as the 1950s, prime-time television was under attack (Montgomery, 1989). Black groups, anti-communists, and others criticized the new medium for commercial and violent excesses (Montgomery, 1989). Through the next three decades, mounting pressures reflected the increasing prominence of television as a primary handler of values in American society (Montgomery, 1989). By the early 1980s, more than 250 advocacy groups had been involved in efforts to alter network television (Montgomery, 1989).

Well known issues that have exemplified public protest include images of Blacks, abortion, and nuclear proliferation (Montgomery, 1989). Over the years, however, issues which have raised the most objection, including those in top-rated television shows, represent broken social, religious, and sexual taboos and language barriers

~~A~~ (Montgomery, 1989).

For example, Norman Lear's 1970s series, *All in the Family*, featured episodes where the main female character, Edith, faced menopause and the fear that she had breast

cancer (McCrohan, 1990). Although these subjects offended some viewers at the time: "How dare you? It's too personal" (McCrohan, 1990, p. 218), bringing these issues out in the open removed some of the social stigma and provided effective discussion tools for community service groups and counseling purposes.

Recent studies have confirmed that value lessons to be learned from the content of prime-time television mostly reflect basic "Judeo-Christian tenets" (Selnow, 1990, p. 65). For example, in a 1991 study, Signorielli looked specifically at adolescents' attitudes toward marriage as an outcome of television influence. Citing a 1980 study by Gerbner et al., Signorielli notes the consistent appearance of marriage and the family as important themes in television research.

In the sample of 596 programs, the theme of home-family-marriage appeared in more than 85 percent of the programming (Signorielli, 1991). Following the content analysis, a survey of over 3,000 high school students supported the hypothesis that television viewing is related to high school students expressing the likelihood of getting married, a result demonstrated in a statistically significant relationship between television viewing and scores on the Index of Future Marital Behavior. Signorielli suggests that the findings for this study represent a television view of marriage and family that is realistic, a



view where marriage is encouraged, but not without the expectation of hard work.

In one additional study of television and its portrayal of values, Potter (1990) surveyed a sample of 308 high school students to analyze their perceptions of the dominant moral lessons in television. The three value themes found to be the most popular among the respondents were strongly related to amount of television viewing.

The three themes include: "Truth always wins out," "Hard work yields rewards," and "Good wins over evil" (Potter, 1990). Inferences can be made that these dominant lessons echo those of mainstream pastors of any given Sunday morning. Potter concluded that these three themes represent rules by which almost all television stories are resolved, thus representing dominant value lessons to be learned from television content.

Unlike Signorielli's (1991) and Potter's (1990) findings, popular shows from four networks' (ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox) recent seasons have featured "a new clutch of anti-family sitcoms...exploring the squalid underbelly of domestic life" (Zoglin, 1990, p. 85). According to Richard Zoglin, top-rated shows *Roseanne* and *Married...With Children* depend on "domestic discord and jokey put-downs for humor" (p. 85), as have many of the television family comedies that have come before them. However, these shows provide a level of "real-world grit...and verbal venom" (Zoglin, 1990, p.

85) that defy their family sitcom predecessors, from *Father Knows Best* to *The Cosby Show*.

While shows like *Roseanne* and *Married...With Children* present low-level humor and family dysfunction, Zoglin (1990) argues that these shows "aren't against the family exactly, just scornful of the romantic picture TV has often painted of it" (p. 85).

In another example, *NYPD Blue*, which has been targeted for its sexual and violent content, has also been defended for upholding traditional values (Stein, 1992). For example, Stein argues that *NYPD Blue* expresses the same revulsion that the audience has towards crime and a "decline in personal accountability" (p. 39).

Nonetheless, questions of negative audience effect as a result of prime-time television portrayals remain viable if one attends to arguments such as those of James W. Chesebro:

Night after night, and year after year, prime-time television series reinforce the desirability and feasibility of the values they portray...the context for prime-time television viewing does not invite alternative and oppositional readings... these series ultimately disarm viewers, for the series are cast and viewed as entertainment.

(1991, p. 220)

### **Mass Media Effects**

Mass communication researchers have long sought answers

to questions about what audiences glean from the value messages implicit in prime-time entertainment television (McCrohan, 1990). A late 1970s study conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health concluded that most children and adults use television to learn how to handle their own domestic situations (McCrohan, 1990). Potter's (1990) research uncovered a positive relationship between amount of viewing and reinforcement of television's dominant moral lessons. In addition, mass media analyst Bruce Ledford (1991) warns of audiences' vulnerability to manipulation: "[they are] uniquely vulnerable to the industries that manufacture and manage their belief systems" (p. 33).

However, research as a whole has yet to establish any definitive causal link which explains the degree to which prime-time television values determine viewers' values, as noted by Chesebro (1991) in acknowledging "the lack of a governing paradigm for addressing these issues" (p. 219). Therefore, examination of key mass communication effects theories and their long-term development will best illustrate what value portrayals in prime-time television mean for the audience.

### **Uses and Gratifications**

As a mass communication theory, uses and gratifications focuses on the audience rather than the message of media content (Littlejohn, 1992). In other words, the primary

assumption is that audience members actively participate in selecting media to meet needs (Katz & Blumler, 1973).

Early uses and gratifications studies developed rough groupings of perceived gratifications, which included two primary categories: fantasist-escapist and informational-educational (Katz et al., 1973). Later studies developed the additional and very important gratification category of social and personal identity, including the need to "feel connected" (Katz et al., 1973).

Uses and gratification studies in the 1980s brought further theoretical coherence through the work of Philip Palmgreen, who developed the idea that people orient themselves to the world, including mass media, according to their expectations, beliefs, and evaluations (Littlejohn, 1992).

Therefore, because television viewing is thought to be a goal-oriented, purposive activity, the uses and gratifications approach provides a theoretical basis for thinking of television viewing as a "use" of the media to supply certain "gratifications," including the reinforcement of established beliefs and values--a function shared with organized religion (Comstock, 1980).

### **Cultivation Theory**

Conversely, early mass communication research, which reflected the direct effects model, held that mass communication content had a direct and powerful effect on

audiences, much like a "hypodermic needle" or "magic bullet" (Wimmer & Dominick, 1991). The powerful effects philosophy was evident as far back as the 1920s when critics charged that motion pictures had a negative influence on children (Wimmer et al., 1991). However, later studies in mass communication effects, including those of the cultivation perspective, uncovered the vital issue of intervening variables (Signorielli & Morgan, 1990). Intervening variables represent primary sources of influence, including family and education, that "intervene" and somehow diffuse or alter the possible effects of mass communication (Signorielli et al., 1990).

In addition, cultivation theorists maintain that the place from which a society can "learn, share, and act upon meanings" (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 174) has shifted from interpersonal processes of community to the institutional process of mass media. Therefore, the cultivation model of the effects of viewing prime-time television, including value portrayal, presents those most likely to be impacted as heavy viewers with little contact or influence from intervening sources such as family or organized religion (Signorielli et al., 1990).

### **Social Construction of Reality**

The social construction of reality approach views any possible effects of mass media as a function of the social reality of a group or culture:

People communicate to interpret events and to share those interpretations with others. For this reason it is believed that reality is constructed socially as a product of communication. (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 190)

Social constructionists maintain that social groups or communities, through interaction, create "theories" to explain the experience of reality (Littlejohn, 1992). Therefore, the ordinary language that people use, for example, to describe and explain an episode in prime-time entertainment television may represent shared meanings that are then reflected in prime-time entertainment television.

Reactions to value messages in prime-time television also include ideas regarding the role of television in disseminating ideological information. For example, Abelman and Neuendorf (1987) contend that television may complement, replace, or even counteract family, school, and religious influences. Before turning to a discussion of television as a possible replacement for some functions of religion, including the transmission of values, discussion of the following prime-time network series will examine contemporary portrayals of personal values.

### Murphy Brown

Perhaps the only point generally agreed upon by all in the debate over family values instigated in 1992 by former Vice President Dan Quayle is amazement that a single episode

of a situation comedy was made politically important (Garvey, 1992). Quayle derided the portrayal of popular fictional TV character Murphy Brown as a "woman bearing a child out of wedlock...deemed something as worthy of approval" (Garvey, 1992, p. 9). Another point, however, which developed from the debate but was not given as much attention as the "values" question, was the possibility that "nothing spreads across culture so suddenly as a change introduced into a situation comedy" (Garvey, 1992, p. 10).

Garvey (1992) argues that entertainment television is all most of us have in common, and therefore grants a kind of cultural permission to deal with complex value issues, a notion demonstrated through "common references, common taglines, and joke phrases" (p. 9). The Murphy Brown character, a high-profile career woman, maintained her "tit-for-tat verbal zingers" (Rhodes, 1992, p. 9) while battling the stresses of being a new mom, a trait perceived as strength and independence by some, a trivialization of the need for fathers by others.

However, as noted by Whitman and Freidman (1992), the segment of the American population that is most at risk for suffering set-backs due to unwed pregnancies does not comprise the audience for shows like *Murphy Brown*. Whitman et al. (1992) contends that while "few girls in the ghetto watch '*Murphy Brown*'" (p. 35), many scholars trace the causes of family breakdown to changes in attitudes,

attitudes that are largely a product of television which reflects white-middle-class culture.

Also considered with controversial shows, like *Murphy Brown*, are the views and intentions of those who create the material. According to *Murphy Brown* producer Diane English, the job of television is to merely reflect culture:

"television does not have a moral responsibility to uplift or downgrade society" (Mandese, 1992, p. 55). English also sees family values espoused in almost all television, "from *Blossom* to *Roseanne*" (Mandese, 1992, p. 55). Therefore, what seems to have been learned from the *Murphy Brown* debate, based on a variety of views, is that "Each of us tends to have the deep conviction that our values are both self-evident and right" (Hartman, 1992, p. 387).

### Roseanne

As one of the top-rated shows of the 1988-89 prime-time schedule, *Roseanne* is one of the few recent comedy series which have changed the face and nature of sitcom television (Berkman, 1993). According to Berkman, the popularity of *Roseanne* is due to characteristics which break away rather than conform to the formulas established by situation comedies such as *Ozzie and Harriet*.

First, *Roseanne* explores the elements of day-to-day existence, including economic pressures, through a "realism of plot" (Berkman, 1993, p. 65). For example, we see *Roseanne's* husband's futile attempt to realize the American



dream when his repair shop fails (Berkman, 1993). In addition, we see Roseanne extinguish the myth of the "50s-like, pristine mom" (Berkman, 1993, p. 67) as a mother of three who is forced to work at non-fulfilling, near-minimum wage jobs.

Second, *Roseanne* violates conventions of entertainment television while attracting and holding viewers who comprise television's most loyal viewership (Berkman, 1993). For example, consummated teenage sexuality had been virtually unheard of in prime-time television before an episode of *Roseanne* in which the oldest daughter, Beckey, asks for advice on birth control (Berkman, 1993). As a matter of values, Roseanne's reaction to her daughter was presented as *the issue*, rather than the merits of teenage sex.

Handling of issues like teenage sexuality is but one area contributing to questions about the nature of fictional character Roseanne Conner as a model of the American mom. Stein (1993) reported divergent reactions to an informal poll in which he asked readers about their views on Roseanne as a model of motherhood. Basically, the responses fell into two categories: for some, the Conner's were "just dysfunctional" and her "words do more harm than good," but for others, Roseanne is touted for her loyalty to her kids while "free to be herself" (p. 45). All in all, as noted by one respondent in Stein's informal survey, "On *Roseanne*,

'family values' isn't a catch phrase. It's just the way they live" (p. 45).

### Picket Fences

Known for its consistently "bizarre and aberrant subject matter" (Miller, 1993, p. 21), *Picket Fences* is a low-rated but gradually rising issue-oriented drama which tackles controversial subjects like gun control, sexual abuse, and religious beliefs (Gerston, 1993). In 1993, two CBS affiliates owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints pulled the hour-long drama, citing "the network's refusal to heed their complaints about the show's sensationalistic tendencies" (Miller, 1993, p. 21).

Specifically, controversial episodes from the 1992-1993 prime-time season featured issues like "an adolescent's wet dream...and Mormon bigamy" (Miller, 1993). In the fall of 1992, Viewers for Quality Television named *Picket Fences* best drama of the season (Miller, 1993).

Despite the award and the loyalty of both CBS and Twentieth Television, however, it has not been controversy concerning the show's value laden themes which threaten *Picket Fences'* prime-time slot (Miller, 1993). Although popular in some diverse urban audiences, like Seattle, the show's mediocre ratings have made it more vulnerable to attack, unlike *Northern Exposure*, which also deals with controversial sexual and religious subject matter but is a "ratings superstar" (Miller, 1993, p. 24).

In terms of presentation of beliefs and values, *Picket Fences* uses an approach that is more direct and presentational than the situation comedy, an approach known as the courtroom device:

It allows them to put burning questions of right and wrong before judge and jury...Any viewer...is invariably stimulated...by the way the dramatist lays out the evidence and forces the resolution of the ethical conundrum. (Stahel, 1993, p. 15)

Characters on *Picket Fences* are given "hard decisions to make" (Stahel, 1993, p. 15), and the courtroom device allows viewers to see value issues debated without going hard-line toward any one perspective. According to co-executive producer David E. Kelley, the sole purpose of the show is to entertain: "We never sit down at a story meeting and say, 'How can we teach the world something?'" (Gerston, 1993, p. 36).

In addition, *Picket Fences* is known for its regular treatment of religious doctrines, including those of Christianity and Catholicism (Stahel, 1993). One episode, which was "loaded with religious voices and moral questions" (Stahel, 1993, p. 16), pondered the possibility of a modern day virgin birth.

Character voices, both of believer and skeptic, debated the idea of bringing beliefs out of the church and into everyday lives: "that's the very thing about Christianity:

it's got God in the same room with us" (Stahel, 1993, p. 16). Thus, if viewers are learning anything about religious beliefs or values from *Picket Fences*, they may be learning from the debate as well as the verdict.

### Married...With Children

Although its characters, plot, and dialogue are considered more "on the edge" than any other situation comedy in network television, *Married...With Children* stands out for sustaining high levels of sexual innuendo and verbal abuse while posing as an "ostensibly traditional family" (Berkman, 1993, p. 64). "Ah, home sweet hell" (Zoglin, 1990, p. 85) is the kind of sentiment which summarizes family life for the show's main characters, the Bundy family, as expressed by the father, Al.

However, the kinds of issues, innuendoes, and slurs that define the Bundy family life on *Married...With Children* are characteristics which have simultaneously drawn harsh criticism as well as high ratings (Berkman, 1993).

In 1992, Michigan mom Terry Rakolta, media watchdog Donald Wildmon and others teamed up to publicize objections to the show's graphic, sexually charged dialogue (Berkman, 1993). At the same time, Fox, the network carrier for *Married...With Children*, was enjoying not only a large audience but a lucrative, younger viewership which advertisers most value (Berkman, 1993). Therefore, while *Married...With Children* may be too unreal to be categorized

as any true representation of the American family, the banal nature of its dialogue, which makes it so popular may be taken seriously as a profitable means of presenting, if not trivializing, values.

### Current Observations

Generally, there are two key observations concerning current American attitudes toward values in prime-time television. First, "not all thematic content barriers have been breached" (Berkman, 1993, p. 65). For example, opting for abortion and physical contact between homosexuals remain mostly taboo for entertainment television (Berkman, 1993). While these barriers may not represent full public consensus, they do reflect an ideological crossroads.

Second, according to Berkman (1993), in its values and beliefs, "America has become two separate nations" (p. 64). On the one hand, there are those who recognize only "traditional family values"; conversely, there are those who demand acceptance of non-traditional "social and economic realities" (Berkman, 1993, p. 64). Cable television, including the success of the Fox network, has facilitated the break from some of the traditionalism characteristic of the ABC/CBS/NBC oligopoly" (Berkman, 1993, p. 64).

However, what has changed little is the prominent place of prime-time entertainment television in the day-to-day culture of America (Comstock, 1980)--a fact that is

particularly important if entertainment television is to be touted as a new religion for the viewing public.

### Television as New Religion

As noted by Gerbner and Connolly (1978), television presents a total world of meaning whose relationship to the viewing audience is not unlike that of the Church to the congregation in an earlier time. Whereas the Church in earlier times was the major mediator of values, norms, and beliefs--the teller of stories--that is a role now taken by the processes of mass media, particularly television (Hoover, 1988).

Comstock (1980) identifies religion, education, and mass media as the major systems by which the public is introduced to the norms and values of society. Religion and mass media, however, are distinguished from education due to their repetitious presence throughout life (Comstock, 1980). Comstock also points to evidence that television viewing slightly reduces the amount of time per week devoted to conventional religious observance. Therefore if, according to Comstock, "television is one component of modernization which channels public energies toward secular pursuits" (p. 129), then television may indeed be a new religion.

To provide further evidence, Comstock (1980) cites a 1976 study by Katz and Gurevitch in which changes in both religious and leisure practices are traced to the introduction of television into segments of the Israeli

culture. Katz et al. documented a negative relationship between increased television viewing and participation in traditional religious observances. For the United States, Comstock concurs with Gerbner in assessing the impact of television:

Television in the United States can be looked upon as an institution that has assumed some of the functions of a dominant religion, and thus might be thought of as the successor to conventional religion. (p. 129)

Furthermore, Comstock (1980) notes a number of areas of strong resemblance between the functions of religion and those of television. First, both religion and television are thought to have equal power due to "the acceptance of its communications by the intended audience" (Comstock, 1980, p. 130). In addition, television would also appear to resemble religion in the communication of values, although television does not do so explicitly as does religion (Comstock, 1980). Finally, television transmits value messages by using preeminent figures to "act as priests, " where viewers are guided to watch people and things "fit for their scrutiny" (Comstock, 1980, p. 130).

In more casual observation, Garvey (1992) concludes that values are communicated to Americans by television more than by any other means, including family and the church. Garvey argues that television is to our culture what the

language of the Bible was to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition, Garvey contends that the values which are influenced through repeated exposure on prime-time television are the kinds of values that would be "rejected as immoral" (p. 10) by most traditional religions.

Nonetheless, many studies, including those of Potter (1990) and Signorielli (1991), have found that television, "without explicitly articulating religious doctrine...incorporates principles...that serve the church" (Selnow, 1986, p. 71). But have recent, highly-rated shows like *Roseanne* and *Married...With Children* broken television's trend of traditional conformity?

Examination of selected television shows provides information about a possible television-religion relationship, "especially prime-time situation comedies with their near-universal appeal, [which] provide a common, unifying experience" (Comstock, 1980, p. 128). Thus, television may be defined as a new religion if the values presented there "cause Americans to think the way they think because of television, and little else" (Garvey, 1992, p. 9).



### **Research Questions**

Selnow's (1990) recorded value incidents, a category coded in the present research, produced the following distribution: values toward others (49.4 percent), values toward self (26.3 percent), values toward self and others (20.8 percent), and citizenship values (less than four percent). In the present study, the following labels denote the four value categories: citizenship values/category 1; values toward self/category 2; values toward others/category 3; values toward self and others/category 4.

While each of the four value categories closely match general Judeo-Christian tenets (Selnow, 1990), Selnow's dominant category, values toward others, reflects a type of value which is integral to most mainstream religions. Presentation of positive values toward others, however, is said to be declining in prime-time shows such as *Roseanne* and *Married...With Children* (Zoglin, 1990). What is the frequency as well as the nature of values presented on current popular network programs? Thus, the first research question:

**RQ:1 What is the distribution of values for Selnow's (1990) four value categories?**

While Comstock (1980) and Gerbner et al. (1978) refer to television as a new religion in terms of function, previous studies have uncovered very little that is "new" about the content of network entertainment television in

general. In other words, when compared to the belief systems of most mainstream, organized religions in the United States, television has been found to reinforce rather than contradict traditional values.

In his 1990 study, Selnow designated the portrayal of mainstream values as either "favorable" or "unfavorable," a technique duplicated in this study, where favorable presentations represent the reinforcement of mainstream religious beliefs.

A favorable value presentation was defined as reward, praise and approval shown to characters for their actions; correcting wrongdoing; and plot contingencies turned in positive directions. In the present research, a value presentation is coded as favorable only if the words, dialogue, plot direction, and/or actions in the value incident, taken as a whole, support, demonstrate, and/or advocate the particular value as it is stated in the BCPS taxonomy.

Selnow (1990) defined an unfavorable value presentation as the degradation of characters; plots turned for the worse; and the forces of good broken. In the present research, a value presentation is coded as unfavorable only if the words, dialogue, plot direction, and/or actions in the value incident, taken as a whole, challenge, fail to demonstrate, and/or contradict the particular value as it is stated in the BCPS taxonomy.

Selnow (1990) found that the majority, or 84.1 percent, of all value incidents coded were depicted as favorable. Do a group of recent network prime-time shows, which include *Murphy Brown*, *Roseanne*, *Picket Fences*, and *Married...With Children*, present personal values in a way that is favorable toward mainstream, Judeo-Christian beliefs? Are these shows indicative of a new religion in terms of content? The second research question, therefore, is:

**RQ:2 Will the positioning of values be more favorable or unfavorable?**

Although Selnow (1990) discovered a strong association between portrayal of traditional values and authority figures on television, he found no significant link between presentation of values and age. In other words, portrayal of values was distributed evenly for all characters coded in the study, despite age. Selnow's value classification scheme, which is duplicated in this study, is said to represent traditional values because it reflects "basic Judeo-Christian tenets" (p. 65).

In addition, Selnow (1990) separately coded the principal or active agent (character), whose dialogue or behavior dominated in each value incident, and found no significant differences among these key players and the general pool of characters in their distribution by value categories, or demographic profiles. Principal or active agents were coded in this study.

Unlike Selnow (1990), however, Medved (1992) claims that television specifically undermines the authority and credibility of older characters, citing the consistent portrayal of parents as "corrupt...[and] hypocritical" (p. 147). According to Medved, television also promotes the idea that "children know best" (p. 147), particularly teenagers, who have assumed an adult role in communicating values.

The average character age in Selnow's (1990) study, including principal agents, is between thirty and thirty-nine years. As the primary focus in any particular value incident--the character with the dominant lines and/or behavior--the principal agent has an impact on how a value is presented to the audience. Are there differences in age among principal agents in recent, popular network shows? Are there differences in the association of principal agents with either favorable or unfavorable value presentations? The two final research questions are:

**RQ:3(a) What will be the average age of principal or active agents?**

**RQ:3(b) What is the average age of principal or active agents in value incidents coded as favorable, or unfavorable?**

## Chapter III

### Methodology

The present research involves a content analysis of operationally defined messages in a sample of prime-time, network entertainment television. Methodological procedures described here are based on a modified replication (Kelly, Chase, & Tucker, 1979) of a study conducted by Selnow (1990).

#### Content Analysis

Content analysis, according to Emmert (1970), was developed primarily as a means of analyzing mass communication messages to determine the who, what, where, when, and how of an event. Empirical inquiries into communications date back to studies in theology in the late 1600s--when the spread of nonreligious matters was a major concern of the Church (Krippendorf, 1980). Contemporary content analyses explore a wide range of interests, as indicated by Berelson: "Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Krippendorf, 1980, p. 3).

According to Babbie (1992), content analysts examine a class of social artifacts, typically written documents. Communication exists in a variety of forms, however, and content analysis may be applied to any one of these forms, including electronic broadcast communication (Babbie, 1992).

Specifically, one objective of content analysis is to inquire into the symbolic meaning of messages:

Messages and symbolic communications generally are about phenomena other than those directly observed. The vicarious nature of symbolic communications is what forces a receiver to make specific inferences from [context].

(Krippendorff, 1980, p. 23)

Furthermore, as noted by Krippendorff (1980), "messages do not have a single meaning that needs to be unwrapped" (p. 22). In other words, one can analyze letters, words, phrases, expressions, etc., and offer varying interpretations, all of which may be simultaneously valid (Krippendorff, 1980). Therefore, according to Krippendorff, the claim to have analyzed the content of communication is untenable because "meanings do not need to be shared" (p. 22).

In addition, Holsti (1969) defines content analysis as "a procedure whereby one makes inferences about sources and receivers from evidence in the messages they exchange" (p. 13). Anthropologists, sociologists, and others have traditionally examined societal artifacts to describe and make inferences about constant and changing characteristics of cultures (Holsti, 1969). Thus, television is a social artifact (Babbie, 1992) useful for revealing aspects of

cultural change (Cantor, 1980), including changes in value messages.

Although interpretations of content do not necessarily need to be shared (Krippendorf, 1980), there are a number of requirements for the use of content analysis as a research tool (Holsti, 1969). First, objectivity stipulates that each step in the research process be carried out in terms of explicitly formulated rules and procedures (Holsti, 1969). Second, content analysis must be systematic (Holsti, 1969). For example, categories by which content will be classified must be defined so that they are used according to consistently applied rules (Holsti, 1969). Third, content analysis must include generality, where descriptive information about content has some kind of theoretical relevance (Holsti, 1969).

Another requirement of content analysis is the specification of the unit of analysis (Babbie, 1992). Units of analysis are the individual units "about which or whom descriptive and explanatory statements are to be made" (Babbie, 1992, p. 314). Units allow communication messages to be counted or measured and placed into categories (Bowers, 1984). Categories are specific niches in which units either fall or are placed (Bowers, 1984).

According to Bowers (1984), categories must be manageably finite, have a beginning and an end that clearly and completely contain the units of data being analyzed;

they must be exhaustive, having categories for all units of analysis; and finally, categories must be mutually exclusive, having units assignable to one and only one category.

Communication content is placed into specified categories through the process of coding (Babbie, 1992). The process of coding is the process of breaking communication messages into units and placing them into categories (Bowers, 1984). A coder places units into categories. According to Holsti (1969), coders can be human beings or computers. In this study, content is coded by human beings. In addition, no coding scheme should be used in content analysis until it has been carefully pre-tested (Babbie, 1992). Finally, as noted by Babbie, the end product of coding must be numerical.

### Sample

The sample for this study consists of selected shows from three networks' (ABC, CBS, Fox) prime-time schedule. In that way, the sample is purposive and judgmental. However, the specific episodes of the shows analyzed in the study have been selected on a random basis. Babbie (1992) defines a purposive or judgmental sample as:

A type of sample in which you select the units to be observed on the basis of your own judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative. (p. G5)



Specific shows selected for the sample are based on two primary criteria. First, this study examines the presentation of values in programs which have been specifically linked, in recent and popular literature, to consistent themes of morality, values, and religion.

Second, *Broadcasting and Cable* magazine has been consulted for ratings information. According to Cantor (1980), critics lament sex, violence, and the stereotypic treatment of women and blacks in television, but the market audience continues to watch such programs in large numbers. Therefore, it is important to reconcile criticism of certain programs for controversial presentation of values with the continuing popularity of episodic television: "Ratings are indices of audiences' wishes" (Cantor, 1980, p. 100).

While Selnow (1990) analyzed a randomly selected sample of scripted network shows over two nonconsecutive weeks during the Spring of 1987, consisting of 40.5 hours of regularly scheduled programming, the present study examines four pre-selected shows--three 30-minute situation comedies and one 60-minute drama--all of which air weekly. The four shows are *Murphy Brown*, *Roseanne*, *Picket Fences*, and *Married...With Children*. The study period consists of four weeks during the "heart" of the prime-time season, spanning the last two weeks of October and the first two weeks of November, 1994.

Specifically, over the four-week period, two episodes

of each show, for a total of eight episodes, were recorded and analyzed. Two separate shows (i.e. *Murphy Brown* and *Picket Fences*) were randomly selected for analysis during weeks one and three, while *Roseanne* and *Married...With Children* were analyzed during weeks two and four. Analysis begins and ends with the first and final scenes of dialogue and/or action. A total of five hours of programming was covered. All commercial breaks and non-programming material were excluded from analysis.

### Coding

Each episode in the sample was analyzed by the researcher and two independent coders (Wimmer et al., 1991). Units, categories, and operational definitions used duplicate those of Selnow (1990). However, not all of Selnow's categories were observed in this study.

In addition, Selnow (1990) notes the difficulty in developing a coding scheme for values without interjecting considerable subjectivity. Following careful examination of a number of value classification schemes, Selnow adopted an 18-item inventory developed by the Baltimore City Public Schools, known as the BCPS taxonomy, the values classification scheme duplicated in this study.

Selnow (1990) selected the BCPS taxonomy because it provides "bold, clear statements and so avoids problems inherent to vague value concepts" (p. 65). In addition, the BCPS values program was chosen because it offers "a set of

key tenets or a common core of beliefs...which exist within a pluralistic society" (Selnow, 1990, p. 65) and is "easily adaptable to television content analysis" (p. 66). Selnow also notes that the BCPS taxonomy "reflects basic Judeo-Christian tenets" (p. 65), which make it effective for evaluating both the existence and treatment of traditional values in entertainment television--values which may or may not reinforce those of mainstream Judeo-Christian religion.

The BCPS values inventory consists of ten personal values and eight citizenship values (Selnow, 1990). The personal values involve a set of individual philosophies related to self-perceptions and an outlook toward others.

#### Personal Values

1. Personal integrity and honesty rooted in respect for the truth, intellectual curiosity, and love of learning.
2. A sense of duty to self, family, school, and community.
3. Self-esteem rooted in the recognition of one's potential.
4. Respect for the rights of all persons regardless of their race, religion, sex, age, physical condition, or mental state.
5. A recognition of the rights of others to hold and express differing views, combined with the capacity to make discriminating judgments among competing opinions.
6. A sense of justice, rectitude, and fair play, or a commitment to them.
7. A disposition of understanding, sympathy, concern, and compassion for others.

8. A sense of discipline and pride in one's work: respect for the achievement of others.
9. A respect for one's property and the property of others.
10. Courage to express one's conviction.

(Selnow, 1990, p. 66)

Citizenship values deal with an individual's responsibilities to the state, are culture specific, and outline an individual's commitment to a democratic philosophy (Selnow, 1990).

#### Citizenship Values

1. Patriotism; love, respect, and loyalty to the United States; a willingness to correct its imperfections by legal means.
2. An understanding of the rights and obligations of a citizen in a democratic society.
3. An understanding that other societies in the world do not enjoy the rights and privileges of a democratic government.
4. Respect for the U.S. Constitution, the rule of law, and the rights of every citizen to enjoy equality under the law. An understanding of the Bill of Rights and a recognition that all rights are limited by other rights and obligations.
5. Respect for legitimate authority at the local, state, and federal level.
6. Allegiance to the concept of democratic government and opposition to totalitarian rule.
7. Recognition of the need for an independent court system to protect the rights of all citizens.
8. An acceptance of all citizenship responsibilities at the local, state, and national levels, and a commitment to preserve and defend the United States and its democratic institutions.

(Selnow, 1990, p. 66)

In order to facilitate the application of the BCPS taxonomy to analysis for television content, Selnow (1990) collapsed citizenship items into a single category, noting that "many citizenship values may be embedded in the structure of the program and are not easily recorded by conventional content analysis tools" (p. 68). Personal values were collapsed into three categories: "'values toward self' (values 1, 3, 10); 'values toward others' (values 4, 5, 6, 7); and 'values toward self and others' (values 2, 8, 9)" (p. 68). This study duplicates the above modifications, however, citizenship values are referred to as "category 1"; values toward self as "category 2"; values toward others as "category 3"; and values toward self and others as "category 4."

The primary unit for coding in this study, as duplicated from Selnow (1990), is a value incident. A value incident includes three primary units of analysis:

an event, behavior, or verbal reference revealing any one, or any substantive portion, of the 18 values articulated in the BCPS taxonomy.

Incidents range from passing references, in one or two lines of dialogue, to central subplot themes. (Selnow, 1990, p. 67)

The operational definition of an Event is defined in this study as follows: a prearranged or organized activity

or situation which, on its own, indicates a value from one of the four values categories. While behavior and/or verbal references may also be present, the event is the dominant indicator of a value.

A Behavior is defined as action on the part of character(s) which, on its own, indicates a value. While an event and/or verbal references may also be present, the behavior is the dominant indicator of a value.

A Verbal Reference includes words and/or dialogue, which, on their own indicate a value. While an event and/or behavior may also be present, the verbal reference(s) is the dominant indicator of a value.

Coders have also catalogued and provided a narrative, qualitative description of each value incident. Qualitative descriptions include, but are not limited to, notes about the language used by the characters, as well as the physical and situational context of the incident. According to Wimmer et al., (1991), qualitative research "examines the entire process believing that reality is holistic and cannot be subdivided" (p. 139).

In addition to coding and analysis of value incidents, Selnow (1990) also coded the presentation of each value as either favorable or unfavorable, a procedure duplicated in the present study. As each value in the BCPS taxonomy represents "common core...beliefs...[and] Judeo-Christian tenets" (Selnow, 1990, p. 65), coding of value presentations

as either favorable or unfavorable provides a means, for the purposes of this study, of making inferences about how entertainment television, if at all, reinforces or contradicts the values of mainstream religion.

Favorable presentation of a value includes praise, reward, or approval shown to characters for their actions; correcting wrongdoing; and plot contingencies turned in favorable directions (Selnow, 1990). Specifically, a favorable value presentation is one in which words, dialogue, plot direction, events, and/or actions in the value incident, taken as a whole, support, demonstrate, and/or advocate a particular value as it is stated in the BCPS taxonomy.

Values positioned unfavorably include the degradation of characters, plots turned for the worse, and the "forces of good" broken (Selnow, 1990). Again, an unfavorable value presentation includes words, dialogue, plot direction, events, and/or actions in the value incident, taken as a whole, which challenge, fail to demonstrate, and/or contradict the particular value as it is stated in the BCPS taxonomy.

Selnow (1990) also cited information for character demographic traits, including age. Information was collected regarding character sex and occupation; however, only the demographic category of age is duplicated in this study. Selnow established age categories of characters in

increments of ten years: under 10 years, 10-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, 80 and above. Although not explicitly stated, one might assume that Selnow specified increments of ten years in order to avoid some of the difficulties of estimating exact ages of characters in television programs.

For the purposes of this study, the approximate age of characters was coded in order to gather evidence concerning the portrayal of characters in certain age groups, specifically older characters, in association with ideas about respect for elders (Medved, 1992) and their role in reinforcing and transmitting values.

In addition, principal or active agents--characters whose lines and/or actions dominate in a value incident--are coded separately (Selnow, 1990). Selnow compared these characters with the general pool of characters across each demographic coding category included in the study. In this study, principal or active agents are coded separately in the category of age.

Selnow (1990) also coded for the prominence of values, which included a value's visibility and significance to the story line. Extent of value explanation, or how clearly a value was explained by a show's characters, was also observed. These categories were not included in this study.

According to Wimmer et al., (1991), pre-tests are useful for two reasons: "poorly defined categories can be



detected, and chronically dissenting coders can be identified" (p. 172). For the pre-test, the researcher and two other coders analyzed a thirty-minute episode of *Roseanne*. However, the episode coded in the pre-test was not one of the episodes included in the actual study.

Before conducting a pre-test, coder training included, first, an initial session where the coders were introduced to the project, including its scope and purposes. The session included a general introduction to the methodology and the various aspects of content to be coded.

After general questions were addressed, training turned to discussion of the coding sheet, including variables and coding categories, and a demonstration of how actual coding should be conducted using samples from the four shows included in the study. After review of the coding instructions, coders' responses were discussed, with further explanation of coding categories provided.

Upon completion of the pre-test, data from the two independent coders was compared to test for intercoder reliability. According to Weber (1985), intercoder reliability "refers to the extent to which content classification produces the same results when the same [content] is coded by more than one coder" (p. 17).

When testing for reliability between two coders, Holsti's formula (Wimmer et al., 1991) determines the reliability of nominal data in terms of percentage of

agreement. Holsti's formula, below, (Wimmer et al., 1991) where  $M$  denotes the number of coding decisions on which two coders agree, and  $N_1$  and  $N_2$  refer to the total number of coding decisions by the first and second coder, revealed an intercoder reliability of .65 for the category of value type.

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

Intercoder reliability was found to be .83 for the category of favorable/unfavorable value presentation and .74 for the category of age. (See Appendix B for intercoder reliability calculations).

### **Data Analysis**

A total of 257 value incidents were coded and analyzed for the present study. The 257 value incidents include those value incidents where the researcher and two independent coders all agreed that a particular value from the BCPS taxonomy was indicated.

For the category of value presentation (favorable/unfavorable), the researcher served as a "tie breaker" when disagreement was present between the two independent coders. In other words, where one independent coder specified a "favorable" value presentation while the other specified an "unfavorable" value presentation, the coding decision of the researcher (favorable or unfavorable) would break the tie.

In addition, for the coding of age for principal or active agents, disagreement was resolved in a similar manner. Specification of an age category for a principal or active agent never spanned more than two consecutive age categories. In other words, while the researcher and one of the independent coders would specify, for example, the age category of 31-40 years for a particular principal agent, the second independent coder would have specified 21-30 or 41-50 years of age. Again, the researcher would "break the tie" for cases of disagreement.

For the categories of value presentation as well as age where the two independent coders agreed with each other but not with the researcher, the coding decision of the two independent coders would win out in a "majority rules" approach (two out of three) to solving the disagreement. (See Appendix B for intercoder reliability calculations).

For the first research question, a frequency distribution (Wimmer et al., 1991) displays the score, or actual frequency, for each value category (1, 2, 3, and 4), as well as the total number of value incidents coded in the study. The frequency distribution of favorable and unfavorable value incidents was also noted.

The second research question was analyzed in a contingency table from the SPSS computer program (Wimmer et al., 1991, p. 382). The frequency of favorable and

unfavorable value incidents was crosstabulated with value incidents coded for each of the four value categories.

Qualitative descriptions also were examined for the nature of value presentations observed in each value incident, including words used by the characters and the circumstances of the incident.

The final research questions also employed a contingency table. First, the observed age distribution, including the average, of all principal or active agents coded was noted. The distribution of principal or active agents by age was then crosstabulated with the distribution of favorable and unfavorable value presentations. Again, qualitative description provided contextual information.

In summary, the primary unit for coding in this study was a value incident. A value incident included three primary units of analysis: an event, behavior, or verbal reference revealing any one, or any substantive portion, of the 18 values articulated in the BCPS taxonomy.

For each value incident, the following categories were observed: favorable/unfavorable value presentation, principal or active agent, and character age. Coders also included a brief, qualitative description of each value incident. (See Appendix A for a copy of the coding sheet).

## Chapter IV

### Results

A total of five hours of prime-time network entertainment programming (three 30-minute situation comedies and one 60-minute drama--two episodes each) with 257 value incidents was analyzed.

For the category of value distribution, the category with the highest percentage (41.2 percent) was "category 4," also known as "values toward self and others." "Category 3," or "values toward others," ranked a close second with 38.5 percent of all recorded incidents.

For all value incidents coded, most (58.4 percent) revealed an unfavorable presentation of one of the values from the BCPS taxonomy while 41.6 percent were coded as favorable.

In addition, nearly half of all principal agents (49 percent) were coded in the age range of 41-50 years and the majority of principal agents (59.2 percent) were associated with unfavorable value presentations.

The answers to the research questions are as follows:

**What is the distribution of values for Selnow's (1990) four value categories?**

Selnow (1990) reported that for the prime-time television programs he analyzed in 1987, of the total value incidents recorded, nearly half (49.4 percent) dealt with values toward others.

In the 1994 shows analyzed for this research, 41.2 percent of all incidents dealt with values toward self and others--a category with a near even split (38.5 percent) with "values toward others" (category 3). Again, a nearly even split describes the distribution of the remaining value categories: 11.7 percent for "values toward self" (category 2) and 8.6 percent for "citizenship values" (category 1). (See Table I).

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TABLE I  
VALUE DISTRIBUTION BY CATEGORY (N = 257)

category 1 Citizenship	category 2 Self	category 3 Others	category 4 Self and Others
8.6% (N=22)	11.7% (N=30)	38.5% (N=99)	41.2% (N=106)

---

For the specific values coded for each value incident, the personal values which denote "a sense of duty to self, family, school, and community" (27.2 percent of all values coded) and "a disposition of understanding, and sympathy...for others" (22.2 percent of all values coded) were observed with the highest frequency. (See Table II).

For example, the personal value which reflects "a sense of duty to self, family, school, and community" was illustrated in a value incident coded in an episode of

*Picket Fences*: "...you helped me to believe that it was important to contribute to the community..."

The personal value which reflects "a disposition of understanding, and sympathy...for others" was demonstrated, in one example, in an episode of *Roseanne* where two characters discuss their romantic relationships: "Is something wrong...would you like to talk?"

TABLE II

## VALUE DISTRIBUTION BY SPECIFIC VALUE (N = 257)

	N	%
<u>Personal Values</u>	235	91.4
Values toward self	30	11.7
Personal integrity and honesty	15	5.8
Self-esteem	13	5.1
Courage to express conviction	2	.8
Value Toward others	99	38.5
Respect rights of all	5	1.9
Respect differing views	6	2.3
Sense of justice	31	12.1
Compassion for others	57	22.2
Values toward self and others	106	41.2
Sense of duty	70	27.2
Pride and respect	32	12.5
Respect for property	4	1.6
<u>Citizenship Values</u>	22	8.6
Patriotism	0	.1
Citizens' rights	2	.8
Other societies	0	.1
U.S. Constitution	10	3.9
Legal authority	3	1.2
Democratic vs. totalitarian	2	.8
Independent courts	5	1.9
Citizens' responsibilities	0	.1

Will the positioning of values be more favorable or unfavorable?

Selnow (1990) reported that the vast majority of all recorded value incidents (84.1 percent) were positioned as favorable. In only a few cases (5.8 percent) were demonstrations of values clearly positioned unfavorably. In the remaining cases (10.1 percent), Selnow found value presentation to be mixed.

The present research revealed a split where a majority of value presentations were coded as unfavorable (58.4 percent) and the remainder (41.6 percent) were coded as favorable. (See Table III).

A favorable value presentation, for example, was coded for an episode of *Murphy Brown* where two co-workers discuss the ethics of their profession: "What kind of people screw each other over just for a story?"

One example of an unfavorable value presentation was coded in an episode of *Married...With Children* where the Bundy daughter, Kelly, complains of her father's inattention: "You never pay any attention to me...that's probably why I seek the attention of older men."

---

TABLE III

**DISTRIBUTION BY VALUE PRESENTATION (N = 257)**

favorable	unfavorable
41.6% (N=107)	58.4% (N=150)

In the 1994 shows analyzed in this research, value



categories three and four, "values toward others" and "values toward self and others," produced an even split (37.4 percent each), for the majority of value incidents coded favorably. For all unfavorable value presentations coded, category four, "values toward self and others," revealed the highest frequency (44 percent). (See Table IV). With a Chi-square value of 13.07, the difference is significant at the  $p < .004$  level.

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TABLE IV  
VALUE CATEGORY BY VALUE PRESENTATION (N = 257)

Value category	N	favorable %	unfavorable %
citizenship	22	15.9	3.3
self	30	9.3	13.3
others	99	37.4	39.3
self and others	106	37.4	44.0
	257	100%	100%

---

**What will be the average age of principal  
or active agents?**

Selnow (1990) recorded an average age of 31-40 years for all characters coded, noting no significant age differences among principal or active agents and the pool of general characters.

The present study revealed similar results where nearly half of all principal or active agents (49 percent) were coded in the age 41-50 category and where very few (10.2 percent) were coded over age 50. The most common age for all principal or active agents coded fell in the age 41-50 category. For those value incidents where no one character was clearly dominant, no principal or active agent was recorded. (See Table V).

Examples of principal or active agents coded in the age 41-50 category include Roseanne and Dan Conner from *Roseanne*, Murphy Brown and Frank Fontanna from *Murphy Brown*, Al Bundy from *Married...With Children*, and Jimmy and Jill Brock from *Picket Fences*.

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TABLE V  
PRINCIPAL AGENT BY AGE (N = 245)

Age category	N	%
0-10	4	1.6
11-20	28	11.4
21-30	20	8.2
31-40	48	19.6
<b>41-50</b>	120	<b>*49.0</b>
51-60	10	4.1
61-70	15	6.1
71--	0	0.0

---

**What is the average age of principal or active agents in value incidents coded as favorable, or unfavorable?**

While Selnow (1990) did not specifically examine the relationship of principal or active agents with the positioning of values as either favorable or unfavorable, the present study explored value presentation as a function of the age of principal or active agents. In the present research, a majority of principal agents coded (59.2 percent) were associated with unfavorable value presentations while 40.8 percent were associated with favorable value presentations.

There was little distributional difference in coded age between favorable and unfavorable presentations. (See Table VI).

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TABLE VI

**AGE--PRINCIPAL AGENTS BY VALUE PRESENTATION (N = 245)**

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Age category	N	favorable %	N	unfavorable %
0-10	1	1.0	3	2.1
11-20	7	7.0	21	14.5
21-30	7	7.0	13	9.0
31-40	27	27.0	21	14.5
<b>41-50</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>*44.0</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>*52.4</b>
51-60	8	8.0	2	1.4
61-70	6	6.0	9	6.2
71--	0	0.0	0	0.0
	100	100%	145	100%

---

## Chapter V

### Discussion

The present research sought to answer questions about the portrayal and presentation of commonly accepted Judeo-Christian values in a selected sample of prime-time network entertainment television.

Most studies that have dealt with values and television entertainment, including those studies cited in the literature review, have confirmed the expectation that network television value portrayal varies little overall from the values reinforced in America's mainstream religious institutions (Potter, 1991; Signorielli, 1991).

However, phrases like "...anti-family...domestic discord...and verbal venom..." (Zoglin, 1990, p. 85) have been used to describe the four notable shows included in the present research--shows which have survived multiple seasons and are characteristic of network television in the 1990s.

In addition, themes of morality, religion, values, family definition, and right and wrong, which have traditionally been shunned by the networks for fear of alienating viewers, are now embraced in popular discussion and have been successfully embedded in television story lines more than ever before (Selnow, 1990; Stein, 1992; Sterk, 1994; and Seplow, 1994).

The present research partially duplicated a 1990 study by Selnow. One of the research questions in the present

study looked at the general distribution of values and found an emphasis on "values toward self and others," or values which stress inter-family relationships, duty, and mutual respect. Another research question looked at value positioning--where most presentations were unfavorable. A third research question examined principal or active agents--most were coded in the age 41-50 category and most were associated with unfavorable value presentations. Change in value portrayal was very evident in one category--the percentage of unfavorable value presentations was much higher in the present study than in Selnow's research.

While the dominant value category coded for Selnow (1990) was "values toward others," the dominant category of "values toward self and others" coded in this study reflects a more homogeneous sample of shows where the plot/dialogue revolves around a central family unit.

For example, all four shows coded in the study center on either a nuclear family (*Roseanne* and *Married...With Children*), a close-knit "family" of co-workers (*Murphy Brown*), or an individual nuclear family as a part of the larger community "family" (*Picket Fences*).

One show in particular, *Roseanne*, consistently featured scenes where relationships were tested through issues involving family duty and respect for others' achievements--ideas represented in the personal value category of "values toward self and others." In one scene, the youngest son,

D.J., complains about having to share his room with a house guest who has been informally adopted by the Conners: "Why should I have to share my room?"

Like Selnow (1990), the personal value which denotes "a sense of compassion...for others," ranked high. However, the personal value which reflects "a sense of duty toward self, and family..." ranked highest in frequency in this study, which may illustrate several trends: more sophisticated character development, the complexities of family re-definition, and the popularity of put-down humor between family members.

In other words, as more complex life problems were presented, less traditional, formulaic responses were offered. Characters openly experienced struggles which simultaneously affected themselves and their families. For example, in one coded episode of *Picket Fences*, a woman agrees to have the child of a single man through a surrogacy contract. When the woman decides not to fulfill the contract and have an abortion, the local judge struggles with competing issues not often dealt with in prime-time entertainment television: "The Constitution is silent on this matter [abortion]...the right to an abortion is only as clear as the Supreme Court..."

Conversely, the most shallow treatment of family relationships, via put-down humor, was also represented through the personal value which denotes "a sense of duty to

self, and family..." in a form of sitcom humor that is currently popular (Zoglin, 1990)--a characteristic that accounts for many of the unfavorable value presentations coded in the present research. For example, Al Bundy, the main character in *Married...With Children*, explains his reasons for spending little time with son, Bud: "Son, it's not that I don't care...well sure, that's part of it..."

*Roseanne*, a long-running sitcom known for its reality-based plots and acrid humor (Berkman, 1993), recorded the highest percentage of observations for the categories of "values toward self," and "values toward self and others." Self-deprecating humor and personal dishonesty as a matter of gaining power in the family, particularly on the part of Roseanne, accounted for most of the incidents coded under "values toward self." Competition between family members accounted for the majority of values coded under "values toward self and others."

*Picket Fences*, an issue-driven family drama, recorded the highest percentage of "citizenship" values as well as "values toward others." Citizen rights and responsibilities, a prevalent theme for the show, were debated in a court room context for both episodes coded--including the issues of the right to a fair trial, the integrity of the Constitution, and abortion.

In one pivotal scene coded in an episode of *Picket Fences*, the father of a murder victim expresses frustration

regarding the ramifications of an illegally obtained confession: "They may free the man who murdered my daughter because they don't like the way you [the police] caught him..."

Also observed in *Picket Fences*: individuals and families were constantly viewed in terms of their role in the larger fictional community of Rome, Wisconsin, so racial and religious diversity were also issues representing incidents coded under "values toward others."

Do the *kinds* of values recorded for the episodes coded in the present research reflect traditional values often associated with Judeo-Christian belief? The answer is not clear, in part, because all values included in the BCPS taxonomy can be associated with traditional, mainstream values (Selnow, 1990). However, the circumstances of the specific incidents coded for any particular value may be more telling.

For example, "you are a parent, your children need to have you around here..." was a sentiment issued by main character, Jimmy Brock, and is characteristic of the kind of situation in *Picket Fences* where the value indicating "a sense of duty toward self, and family..." was coded.

In a separate example, Al Bundy, the main character in *Marricd...With Children*, stated that failure to return home would "...ruin an otherwise sickening marriage." Al Bundy's statement is more indicative of the kind of situation for



which a value reflecting "a sense of duty toward self, and family...", and other incidents coded in the dominant category of "values toward self and others," was most often recorded in this study.

Nonetheless, the nature of the particular values that were coded in the present research indicate more profundity as well as a willingness to look at personal and family imperfections (Seplov, 1994) than most of the shows included in past studies, including those cited in the literature review, where Judeo-Christian values were thought to be reinforced.

Noting Selnow's (1990) reported results for the distribution of value incidents with a favorable versus unfavorable portrayal, value presentation for the present research produced the most divergence for any one category when compared with Selnow's findings. In other words, while 84.1 percent of Selnow's value incidents were coded as favorable, only half (41.6), in terms of percentage, were coded as favorable in the present study.

For the 41.6 percent of value incidents coded favorably in the present study, where "values toward others" and "values toward self and others" (value categories three and four) were dominant, favorable value presentation was the result of several characteristics endemic to prime-time television programming.

For example, the personal value which reflects "duty

toward self, and family...," accounted for more favorable presentations than any other single value. A sense of obligation and loyalty to family, including the best and worst of working through relationships, remains a central theme and setting in entertainment television--even when the family unit is a close-knit "family" of co-workers, for example, the primary characters in *Murphy Brown*.

In addition, the idea of personal responsibility, particularly when linked to crime and welfare, is a popular idea in current national discourse (Alter & Wingert, 1995)--an idea that found representation through the value with the second highest frequency of favorable presentations (personal value six) where a sense of "justice, rectitude, and fair play..." was upheld.

Furthermore, shame for wrongdoing or lack of personal responsibility is an idea that is also finding its way into the national consciousness (Alter & Wingert, 1995), and is reflected in issue-oriented prime-time television shows, including both episodes of *Picket Fences* coded in the present research.

For example, in one episode of *Picket Fences*, "...all it takes for evil to succeed is for good black men to do nothing..." was a rebuke issued by an African-American attorney toward other African-Americans in the community when confronted with racial tensions.

In another example, *Picket Fences'* town judge sent a

suspected murderer, who was later found innocent, to trial with the iron-clad proclamation: "Mr. Latham, you are going to trial...if the Supreme Court has a problem with that...they can come and get me..." When analyzed by show, *Picket Fences* received the highest percentage of favorable value presentations coded.

Nonetheless, the majority of all value incidents (58.4 percent) coded in the present study were deemed unfavorable. The two value categories, which include "values toward others" and "values toward self and others" (value categories three and four), that received the highest percentage of favorable value presentations also recorded the highest percentage of unfavorable value presentations. Again, family relationships were a central theme in value incidents--incidents which featured tension between spouses and competition among siblings.

However, a characteristic which stylistically defines the three situation comedies included in this study, as well as much of contemporary prime-time television in general, is best described as a campaign of pointed put-down humor demonstrated by the characters. The prevalence of put-down humor is the most substantial evidence collected in the present research for distinguishing the values of Judeo-Christian traditionalism with the values of entertainment television.

Specifically, the personal values which denote "a sense of duty toward self, and family..." and "kindness and compassion toward others..." were coded for the majority of all unfavorable value presentations. Duty towards self and family as well as a sense of kindness and compassion toward others were the very ideas mocked in character exchanges that ranged from light banter to brawls.

In one example, Roseanne offers a parenting philosophy which provides not only an unfavorable presentation of personal value two ("a sense of duty toward self, and family..."), but typifies the tongue-in-cheek attitude of the show: "...we cannot control our kids' dreams...we can only make sure they don't come true..."

In a separate example, an unfavorable presentation of the personal value which reflects "a sense of kindness, and compassion...for others" was coded for an incident in *Murphy Brown* where the title character denies food and sleep to co-workers with whom she is judging a broadcasting awards contest.

Clearly, similar examples from *Murphy Brown* as well as other sitcoms are recognized for their context in humor. However, the attributes and antics of a character such as *Murphy Brown* which make her compelling, including the attribute of stubborn tenacity, clearly result in negative consequences as well--consequences which are often downplayed or completely ignored in prime-time entertainment

television. *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne* recorded the highest frequency of unfavorable value presentations.

While value messages in prime-time entertainment television shows may simply be the result of a kind of formula for comedy or drama which attracts an audience, rather than any deliberate promotion of values, the "punch-line" style of delivery in television dialogue seems to be purposive.

In other words, as a characteristic of television scripting, the approximately twenty minutes of time allotted to actual programming in a sitcom, for example, leave no time for lines/dialogue to be wasted. The pattern of carefully timed dialogue with audience (or "canned") laughter is perhaps one determinate by itself of the presentation of values as either favorable or unfavorable. Therefore, while value presentation provides one way of comparing television values with those of Judeo-Christian belief, the causes and effects of prime-time value presentation are not easily assessed.

The average age-range of principal or active agents coded in the present study was slightly older than the average age coded in Selnow's (1990) research. While Selnow examined the complete cross section of episodic programming scheduled within his study period, three of the four selected shows coded in the present sample, which was purposive, revolved around family units where many of the

main characters were parents--parents who were coded in the 41-50 age category.

In similar fashion, the average age of principal or active agents associated with favorable as well as unfavorable value presentations in the present study was again the result of the inclusion of only four selected shows in the sample, shows which included characters with like demographic qualities. Therefore, the ages of principal or active agents in general, and in association with value presentation, was more a function of the type of show included in the sample rather than a deliberate, negative presentation of parental figures.

Of interest in the present research: with value incidents where a teenager (11-20 years) was coded as the principal or active agent, twice as many (14.5 percent) were associated with unfavorable as favorable (seven percent) value presentations--a result which may lend credence to complaints that children and teenagers in television openly promote disrespect toward authority figures (Medved, 1992).

In addition, for principal or active agents coded in the age range of 31-40, twice as many (27 percent) were associated with favorable than unfavorable (14.5 percent) value presentations. For many of the characters observed as 31-40 years of age and associated with favorable value presentation, they seemed to serve as catalysts of "youthful optimism and reason" for their older, but more savvy,

counterparts--for example, Jackie to older sister Roseanne and Corky to veteran journalist Murphy Brown.

Thus, the promotion of youthful superiority, whether through favorable or unfavorable value presentation, is distinct from Judeo-Christian traditional belief when viewed within a complex of other television characteristics that are also present. In other words, although the percentage of characters over age 40 who are associated with unfavorable value presentation is not overwhelming, positive and traditional portrayal of the middle-aged and older characters is not consistent enough to offset the idea that "children [or youth in general] know best" (Medved, 1992, p. 147)--an idea that is inconsistent with Judeo-Christian values.

Many of the same kinds of situations and story lines were coded and analyzed in the present research as have appeared in prime-time entertainment television over many seasons--for example, sibling rivalry and marital difficulty, as well as many positive instances of family togetherness and citizenship. Although the distribution of unfavorable value presentations coded here was not overwhelming (58.4 percent of all coded incidents), the present study recognizes that unfavorable value presentations may be recognized for their degree on a continuum of negativity, as well as frequency.

In other words, the nature of a verbal insult, for

example, is not the same on *Married...With Children* as it was on *The Brady Bunch*. Verbal put-downs are more biting and sexual innuendo is more explicit now than ever before. Also recognized is the fact that coding and analysis of only four shows which comprise a purposive sample is not wholly conclusive on any level.

However, results obtained from the present study may provide evidence for claims that mainstream value presentation in contemporary television has redefined the invisible parameters of acceptability. Network television is an amalgamation of many different value systems but network television entertainment shows which center on a family unit mainly present images of mainstream American families and their values. The nature of some unfavorable value presentations coded in the present study are far from images traditionally associated with mainstream Judeo-Christian belief. A more comprehensive and longitudinal study would be required to fully realize the possible effects of value presentation, as well as the effects of character age in association with value presentation.

Other considerations for future research include greater clarity in operationally defining value incidents and value presentation. Also, what about the effects of a current trend in the positive and regular portrayal of religion as an integral part of television life as noted by Seplow (1994) and Briggs (1994)? Do the influence of



television values co-vary with the influence of religious values when strong religious commitment is present?

Finally, in terms of the functions common to television and religion, both institutions communicate morality although religion is expected to be more dogmatic in its treatment of values. However, viewing audiences may not expect television values to be dogmatic in respect to anti-traditional value messages either. While both television and religion may share similar functions in communicating value messages, the value messages they communicate are becoming more dissimilar.

Therefore, television may be touted as a "new religion" if the presentation of values observed in the present research are indicative of future cumulative themes and patterns--value messages which may move audiences toward a new perception of mainstream cultural norms.

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## APPENDIX A

### Coding Sheet

**Value incident** (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ **Time (VCR)** \_\_\_\_\_  
 Indicate the specific personal or citizenship value, i.e.  
 "personal # 2" or "citizenship # 4"

Date of Show \_\_\_\_\_ Show \_\_\_\_\_

**Value category:** (check one)

- (all)            1 \_\_\_\_\_ Citizenship values: patriotism, citizen's rights, other societies, U.S. Constitution
- (1, 3, 10)      2 \_\_\_\_\_ Values toward self: personal integrity and honesty, self-esteem, courage to express conviction.
- (4, 5, 6, 7) 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Values toward others: respect rights of all, respect differing views, sense of justice, compassion for others.
- (2, 8, 9)       4 \_\_\_\_\_ Values toward self and others: sense of duty, pride, and respect toward self and others.

**Type of incident:** (check one)

\_\_\_\_\_ Event: a prearranged or organized activity, or situation which, on its own, indicates a value from one of the four value categories. While behavior and/or verbal references may also be present, the event is the dominant indicator of a value. Examples: national anthem at a sports event, a political debate, charity or fund-raising activity, birthday party, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ Behavior: action on the part of character(s) which, on its own, indicates a value from one of the four value categories. While an event and/or verbal references may also be present, the behavior is the dominant indicator of a value. Examples: a child stealing from its mother's purse, cutting the neighbor's lawn, burning the flag, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ Verbal reference: words and/or dialogue, which on their own, indicate a value from one of the four value categories. While an event and/or behavior may also be present, the verbal reference(s) is the dominant indicator of a value. Examples: "I'm going to pay that traffic ticket;" "You're the worst parent in the world;" "I can do anything I set my mind to, etc."

**Value positioning: (check one)**

\_\_\_\_\_ Favorable: a value presentation in which words, dialogue, plot direction, events, and/or actions in the value incident, taken as a whole, support, demonstrate, and/or advocate a particular value as it is stated in the BCPS taxonomy. Examples: a parent praises a child for getting good grades; several characters discuss the importance of voting; citizens organize a community crime forum.

\_\_\_\_\_ Unfavorable: a value presentation in which words, dialogue, plot direction, events, and/or actions in the value incident, taken as a whole, challenge, fail to demonstrate, and/or contradict the particular value as it is stated in the BCPS taxonomy. Examples: a character challenges the U.S. system of government; someone innocent is charged with a crime and goes to prison; parent criticizes child for not beating up the neighborhood bully; teens watch and do nothing as small child wanders into traffic.

**Character age:** Place a "P" in the appropriate blank for the estimated age of the principal or active agent. The principal or active agent is the one character in any value incident whose lines and/or dialogue dominate.

Place one mark in the appropriate blank for the estimated age of all other characters included in the incident (speaking or not)

	0-10/11-20/21-30/31-40/41-50/51-60/61-70/71--
Principal	_____
Other	_____

**Qualitative description:** include observations about the language used by characters as well as the physical, or situational context of the incident. Include any other observations which may provide insight into the presence and treatment of values in network programming.

(continue on the back)

## Appendix B

### Intercoder Reliability

#### PRE-TEST

##### Value Distribution

Total coding decisions: 61 + 49 = 110

Total agreement for Values: 35

$$R = \frac{2M}{N + N} = \frac{2(35)}{61 + 49} = \frac{70}{110} = .65$$

##### Favorable/Unfavorable

Total coding decisions: 35 + 35 = 70

Total agreement for F/U: 29

$$R = \frac{2M}{N + N} = \frac{2(29)}{35 + 35} = \frac{58}{70} = .83$$

##### Age (principal agent)

Total coding decisions: 9 + 10 = 19

Total agreement for Age: 7

$$R = \frac{2M}{N + N} = \frac{2(7)}{9 + 10} = \frac{14}{19} = .74$$

#### STUDY

The following reliability results represent total data collected from a random sample of programming segments. A five-minute segment from each episode of the three 30-minute situation comedies and a ten-minute segment from each episode of the 60-minute drama (from a total of five hours of programming) were tested for intercoder reliability.



Value Distribution

Total coding decisions:  $\underline{62} + \underline{51} = \underline{113}$

Total agreement for Values:  $\underline{37}$

$$R = \frac{2M}{N + N} = \frac{2(37)}{62 + 51} = \frac{74}{113} = .66$$

Favorable/Unfavorable:

Total coding decisions:  $\underline{37} + \underline{37} = \underline{74}$

Total agreement for F/U:  $\underline{31}$

$$R = \frac{2M}{N + N} = \frac{2(31)}{37 + 37} = \frac{62}{74} = .84$$

Age (principal agent)

Total coding decisions:  $\underline{17} + \underline{18} = \underline{35}$

Total agreement for age:  $\underline{15}$

$$R = \frac{2M}{N + N} = \frac{2(15)}{17 + 18} = \frac{30}{35} = .85$$