Aggressive Cue Prominence and Gender Participation in MTV

Aggressive cues in MTV may be less prominent than critics indicate.

Rock and roll music has generated criticism both for the music itself and for the manner in which the music has been presented. When Elvis Presley appeared on the "Ed Sullivan Show" in 1956, camera operators were instructed to shoot him from the waist up because his pelvic gyrations were considered lewd. The Rolling Stones' 1965 release "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" was banned by many radio stations because of its suggestive lyrics.

With cable television, popular music may now reach a large audience visually as well as aurally. The most important and pervasive outlet for rock videos is Music Television (MTV), a 24-hour network devoted to cablecasting some 1,200 rock videos, all of which are supplied by record companies for promotional purposes. Costing Warner Communications and the American Express Company $20 million to initiate in 1981, MTV offers 35.8 million cable homes nearly constant exposure to music videos. MTV's average rating hit a high of 1.2% in 1983, and although it has since fallen (recent estimates halve the 1983 figure), advertisers eagerly continue to aim messages at teen viewers of music videos, and MTV revenues are up.

Criticism has been leveled at MTV for its proliferation of supposedly hostile imagery and sexist relational portrayals. "[T]he message is that violence is normal and OK, that hostile sexual relations between men and women are common and acceptable, the heroes actively engage in torture and murder of others for fun."

A number of content analytic studies have examined violence in rock music and music videos. Albert found intensity and violence to constitute the most important factors in discriminating among rock songs; evaluations of beauty, interestingness and goodness played very minor roles. A study by the NCTV investigated 160 hours of music videos, estimating that viewers are exposed to an average of 18 instances of violence per hour. Sherman and Dominick found 57% of concept

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1 Barbara Jaeger, "Rock Shows its Uglieft Face," the Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 15, 1984, pp. 1D, 9D. For an "Ed Sullivan Show" appearance, the lyrics to "Let's Spend the Night Together" were altered to "let's spend some time together."
4 Zoglin, ibid.
6 Jaeger, ibid., p. D8; This quote is the expressed view of Dr. Thomas Radecki, the controversial chair of the National Coalition on Television Violence (NCTV).
videos\(^9\) to contain violent acts, with an average of 2.9 separate acts per concept video, and Baxter et al. pegged the proportion of videos containing any violent acts or crime at 53\%.\(^{10}\) Thirty-four percent of videos analyzed in a 1985 study contained violence,\(^{11}\) while Davis found that 44% of concept videos contained nihilistic images.\(^{12}\) Other music video investigations have found women to be more likely than men to initiate aggressive acts,\(^{13}\) and blacks more likely than whites to engage in prosocial acts and sexual acts and less likely to engage in antisocial acts.\(^{14}\)

The purpose of this research was to explore the content and structure of music videos, extending this extant evidence, and to place the findings into the context of research addressing violence, aggression and media. This study examined three characteristics that have theoretical relevance to media effects:

1) **Pervasiveness of aggressive cues in music videos**: Due to evidence that suggests an object or event has the potential of eliciting aggressive actions to the extent that the object or event has aggressive meaning, it is of interest to examine the frequency of cues deemed aggressive by viewers of MTV.\(^{15}\) A delineation was made between aggressive events and aggressive objects according to standard definitions of those terms; prior investigations had centered on events or actions as aggression-inducing, while failing to include simple objects that may carry aggressive meaning by audience members. The highly symbolic nature of much video imagery led us to believe that such aggressive objects need to be included.

2) **Gender portrayals within a context of aggression**: Due to evidence that suggests the genders of participants in aggressive acts will be likely to influence expectations by observers about the appropriateness of such actions, it is of interest to examine the ways in which males and females are shown in aggressive contexts on MTV.\(^{17}\)

3) **Pacing of music videos**: Due to evidence that suggests that programs of high pace and variation increase physiological arousal and subsequent aggressive behavior in individuals regardless of the violent content contained in the programs, it is of interest to examine the pacing of MTV content.\(^{18}\) While such arousal is not a necessary component of subsequent aggression in those exposed to aggressive cues, it does facilitate the process and strengthens the aggressive response.\(^{19}\)
Methods

Over a period of seven days in 1985, 14 hours of MTV content in 2-hour units were randomly videotaped off-cable. Three sets of content analytic and survey response procedures were developed in order to measure (1) the occurrence of and audience validation of aggressive cues, (2) the prominence and cue type, and the initiators and recipients of, validated aggressive cues, and (3) the pacing, videotype, and real time length of music videos.

In the initial identification of aggressive cues, coders were instructed to collect an exhaustive list of potentially perceived aggressive cues. An aggressive cue was defined as "the occurrence(s) (video or audio) of objects or events actually occurring or simulated representing physical harm or the threat thereof." Song lyrics were not analyzed, except to the extent that the action in the video dramatized or corresponded to the lyrics. Since the goal of this cue collection process was to achieve exhaustiveness rather than reliability (hence the validation process described below), high intercoder agreement was not mandated.

Using a technique unique among content analyses of music videos, each of the 1,108 cues identified was assessed for "perceived aggressiveness" by a response survey of at least 50 respondents. Those cues with means of 5 or greater (on a scale where 0 = "not at all aggressive" and 10 = "extremely aggressive") comprised the sample of aggressive cues retained for subsequent analyses—i.e., they were validated. Validated cues were re-examined via videotape for features described below.

Coding of the prominence with which aggressive cues were displayed consisted of coders (1) indicating those shots in which aggressive cues were shown, (2) identifying the type of camera shots employed (i.e., long shots, medium shots, close-ups, and extreme close-ups), and (3) noting the time devoted to the display of aggressive cues. The type of cue—event or object—was coded. Data were collected concerning the type (i.e., male human, female human, animal, inanimate object, other) and number of initiators and recipients present. An initiator was an individual who was shown as instigating or bringing about the aggressive cue, while a recipient was a target of the cue. Initiators and recipients could be singular (e.g., one male) or multiple (e.g., two females; one dog and three males). Reliabilities for the coding of these variables ranged from .77 to 1.0.

In the pacing analysis, coders recorded the number of cuts in each video. A cut was operationalized as the occurrence of any of the following: Take, dissolve, wipe, or split screen special effect (i.e., any change in the field of view, not counting a zoom or pan, was a cut). A shot represented the single uninterrupted image recorded by one camera, i.e., the content between two adjacent cuts. Each video was categorized as a concept or performance video (see note 9). The total length of each video was measured in seconds. Coding reliabilities for these variables were all near 1.0.

Results

Pervasiveness of Aggressive Cues in Music Videos. Table 1 presents structural descriptors for the total sample of videos, and for concept and performance videos separately. Nearly 40% of the 163 videos were free of validated aggressive cues. Differences did exist between the two video types: 75% of concept videos contained at least one aggressive cue, while 29% of performance videos did, and 71% of validated...

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Complete sets of codebooks, questionnaires, and coding forms for these analyses are available from the authors.

Even so, 78% of cues identified in a sample of 10 videos were matched by two 2-person teams—i.e., the teams clearly referred to the same cue, though they may not have described the cue in identical terms. In a more conservative analysis, 41% of codings were in identical or near-identical wordings: 69% of all validated cues (see following section) were joint-coded in this more stringent analysis.

Due to the large number of cues, each respondent assessed only about 160 randomly assigned cues. Subjects were students enrolled in undergraduate courses at a large urban university, with a mean age of 24 years—a sample similar to the intended MTV audience. The distribution of mean aggressiveness scores across cues was normal.

For camera shot, the percent-agreement was 85%, with Scott's pi of .77; for event vs. object coding, the percent agreement was 100%; for initiator and recipient type, the percent-agreement was 98%, with Scott's pi of .97; for time per aggressive cue, the Pearson correlation coefficient was .92.

TABLE I
Music Video Aggressive Cue Pervasiveness, Duration, and Pacing, in Percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Videos Containing Validated Aggressive Cues</th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
<th>Concept Videos</th>
<th>Performance Videos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cues</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shots Containing Aggressive Cues</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cues Classified as Events (vs. Objects)</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Video Time Devoted to Display of Aggressive Cues</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shots Containing Aggressive Cues in Subset of Videos Containing Aggressive Cues (n=number of videos)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=99)</td>
<td>(n=84)</td>
<td>(n=15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Cuts Per Video</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Duration Aggressive Cue Displayed Per Shot (in seconds)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Total Aggressiveness Score Per Video</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aggressive cues in concept videos were classified as events (vs. objects) while 26% of the cues in performance videos were classified as events.

While most videos (61%) contained at least some aggressive cues, the proportion of video shots devoted to aggressive content was small: Aggressive cues were found in 13% of all shots, with such content more prevalent in concept videos (16% of shots) than in performance videos (5%). Even when examining the subset of videos containing aggressive cues, these percentages were still small: 18% overall, 20% for concept videos and 11% for performance videos. Real time devoted to aggressive cues was correspondingly brief: 9% of the total music video time (12% for concept videos, 3% for performance videos).

Despite this predominance of nonaggressive content, an analysis of camera shots utilized at the beginning and at the end of each shot in which an aggressive cue was displayed indicated that focal length prominence is given to aggressive cues when they appear. A full 40% of all beginning camera shots were in extreme close-up, with an additional 21% in close-up. And, 39% of all end camera shots were in extreme close-up, 21% in close-up.

Applying the results of the response survey to the 333 validated aggressive cues (an additional 775 were not validated), a “total aggressiveness score” was calculated for each video (i.e., a simple sum of the mean perceived aggressiveness scores for all validated cues in a video). The average total aggressiveness score was 62.6. For concept videos, this average was 86.4, and for performance videos, 16.6—a statistically significant difference (t=5.60, p<.0001). Concept videos comprised eight of the top 10 most aggressive videos.

Gender Portrayals of Participants in Aggressive Events. Table 2 presents the frequencies of types of initiator/recipient pairings for aggressive events with identifiable initiators and recipients. Males were the most frequently identified recipients of aggression (58% of all recipients) and the second most frequently identified initiators of aggression (42% of all initiators), following “other” types (44%). Females were infrequently identified as recipients of aggression (13% of recipients) and were slightly more likely to be identified as initiators of aggression (15% of initiators). However, female recipients of aggression were likely to receive such aggression from

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A complete list of all videos analyzed, with total aggressiveness scores, is available from the authors.

Table 2 collapses across singular and multiple male and female initiators and recipients; the category “other” includes groups of mixed gender (8% of initiators and 13% of recipients), inanimate objects, animals and those whose type coders were “unable to determine.”
TABLE 2
Gender of Initiator/Recipient Pairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiators</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>980</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square=70.56, df=4, p<.0001

TABLE 3
Gender of Initiators and Beginning Camera Shot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiators</th>
<th>Long Shot</th>
<th>Medium Shot</th>
<th>Close-up Shot</th>
<th>Extreme Close-up Shot</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>1013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square=91.09, df=6, p<.0001

TABLE 4
Gender of Recipients and Beginning Camera Shot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipients</th>
<th>Long Shot</th>
<th>Medium Shot</th>
<th>Close-up Shot</th>
<th>Extreme Close-up Shot</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>1255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square=21.54, df=6, p<.0015

males (61% of female-received aggression). The most frequent initiator-recipient pairing was male-to-male (24% of all pairings), while the least frequent pairing was female-to-female (1%). Comparisons between the two video types did not uncover striking differences.

Male-initiated aggression, female-initiated aggression and aggression initiated by others did not differ substantially in amount of time shown per occurrence (2.0 seconds, 2.2 seconds and 2.3 seconds, respectively; the overall average was 2.2 seconds per shot—see Table 1). Aggression aimed at females was, however, shown for a significantly longer period of time than aggression aimed at males or others (3.1 seconds, compared with 2.0 seconds and 2.1 seconds, respectively; F=19.28, p<.0001).

Tables 3 and 4 show results for focal length prominence, broken down by the gender of participants. Both crosstabulations for initiators (Table 3) and recipients (Table 4) show statistically significant relationships between gender and type of camera shot. In both cases, "others" and females were more likely to be shown in
close-up or extreme close-up than were males. Seventy-six percent of “other” initiators were shown in such prominence, as were 76% of female initiators and 58% of male initiators. Seventy percent of “other” recipients were displayed in close-up or extreme close-up, compared with 68% of female recipients and 65% of male initiators. Comparisons between the two video types did not reveal significant differences.

Music Video Pacing. The 14 hours of music video content yielded 13,058 cuts—an average of 80.1 cuts per video. Concept videos were found to be somewhat faster-paced than were performance videos; the former had an average of 82.4 cuts per video, while the latter had 75.1 (see Table I; this difference was statistically significant at \( t=22.01, p<.0001 \)).

Discussion

Aggressive cues may be less prominent in music videos than common criticisms would lead one to believe. Multiple indicators in this investigation showed a predominance of nonaggressive stimuli: 13% of all shots contained aggressive cues, constituting 9% of all video time, and nearly 40% of the videos in the sample contained no validated aggressive cues. Although concept videos consistently contained more aggressive content than did performance videos, aggressive cues were still a minor portion of their content.

Interestingly, of the top four most aggressive videos, three utilized violent themes in an effort to convey pro-social messages. For example, the second-rated video, The Rolling Stones’ “Too Much Blood,” is itself a commentary on excessive media violence. Following shots of violent TV programs and a shot of a TV set oozing blood, the video ends with a woman throwing a television out the window.

Some critics will certainly argue that the mere presence of aggressive cues is cause for alarm, regardless of context. And, 61% of all videos did contain one or more validated aggressive cues. Indeed, this study found somewhat more aggressiveness than have prior music video analyses. Such differences may be due to the inclusion in this analysis of aggressive objects as well as events, a different year of videos sampled, and/or the important addition by this investigation of validation by response survey for perceived aggressiveness of cues.

A comparison with conventional television entertainment content may provide further insight. Using definitions of physical and verbal aggression that are consistent with those used in this study, Greenberg content analyzed three seasons of prime time network programming. The most recent season analyzed, that of 1977-78, had an hourly rate of 39 instances of physical or verbal aggression. Including events only for comparability, this MTV analysis found 34.7 instances per hour. If one includes objects as well—something content analyses of conventional TV have not done—this hourly rate obviously increases. MTV content seems consistent in amount of aggressiveness with prime time TV of the late 1970’s.

The response survey that validated these cues was both problematic in its translation of visual/verbal cues into labels in a questionnaire and highly valuable in its clarification of what imagery is and is not considered aggressive by audience members. Berkowitz’s aggressive cue perspective would predict that those cues judged more aggressive will elicit more aggressive responses; the response survey showed that objects as well as events may possess such aggressive meanings.

The inclusion of objects to the coding scheme is unique to this investigation. Thirty-four percent of all validated aggressive cues were objects, leading us to conclude that a substantial body of poten-
ially aggressive stimuli has heretofore been ignored. Inclusion of objects is especially pertinent to this content type, given the abstract nature of many of the visuals, the clear "parallels between dream structure and music video structure."

When aggressive cues are shown, they seem to be given prominence—cues are highly likely to be shown in either extreme close-up or in close-up. In such shots aggressive cues do not compete with other stimuli contained in a shot, and viewers may be more likely to notice them.

Quick pacing may add to the aggressive potential of music videos. In addition to the greater level of activity attributable to a tightly edited video, the rapid juxtaposition of discrete visual elements (a "digital narrative" as described by Jones) may be superior to verbal descriptions in presenting a variety of unrelated stimuli quickly. Concept videos, which were twice as prevalent in this sample as were performance videos, were also paced faster. This "triple whammy" of the concept video (i.e., its greater prevalence, higher level of aggressiveness, and faster pacing) indicates its greater potential for mediation of aggressive effects.

Contrary to the criticism that excessive violence is aimed primarily against women, the findings indicated that males were shown as targets of aggression more than 3.5 times as often as were females. And, males were more likely to be depicted as recipients than initiators of aggression, in contrast to females, who were more likely to be depicted as initiators than recipients. Using Gerbner et al.’s risk ratio scheme, we may compare findings of this study with those of others. In this investigation, the proportion figure was -1.38 for males, compared to -1.05 in the Sherman and Dominick music video study and Gerbner et al.’s 1969-78 average of -1.18 for conventional television. This study found a female ratio of +1.15, compared to +1.15 by Sherman and Dominick and Gerbner’s average of -1.23.

This study has confirmed a consistency in female portrayals across music video studies, differentiating such content from conventional TV, in that MTV females were more likely to be initiators than recipients of aggression. (Sherman and Dominick have labeled this reversal the "predatory female" stereotype of music videos.) As if in compensation for their infrequent appearance in any role, however, when females were shown as recipients, they were displayed on the screen for a significantly longer period of time, and females were more likely than males to be shown in close-up or extreme close-up as both initiators and recipients. Thus, while female involvement in aggressive activities seems a "rare event," its appearance is accorded the attention such a rare event deserves—perhaps making its occurrence more memorable in the bargain.

Aggression is not a necessary component for a video’s success as art or as commerce the 52 videos that contained no validated cues included many successful songs, including Don Henley’s "Boys of Summer," awarded "Best Video" honors at the Second Annual MTV Video Music Awards. Award winners from seven categories appeared in our sample; in only one case—that of David Atkins’ choreography for "Sad Songs (Say So Much)" (Elton John)—did the video register any aggressiveness.

Recent drops in video budgets would predict a cut in concept video production.
$45 (Communication and Information Science).

This book provides original inquiries into the communication of women with other women, a type of research that has generally not been included in recent studies of gender and communication. It is intended to fill this void within communication research and to provide a variety of qualitative studies in a single volume that focus on the actual communication behavior between women.


This annotated bibliography focuses on communication with, by, and about the elderly through media and interpersonal means. Publications spanning 40 years are included, beginning with a 1949 article by Wilbur Schramm.


In 1964 Marlene Sanders made TV history when she substituted for an ABC nightly news anchor and has continued leading the way for other women in network news. This book provides a behind-the-scenes look at broadcasting and examines the unique problems faced by women in the industry by means of a series of interviews with women actually working in the media.

SEX DISCRIMINATION
(Continued from page 100)

way to accomplish this necessary interaction.

Although intradepartmental committees and social activities provide two means by which women can interact with colleagues, women also need to communicate verbally and symbolically with women in other universities. Allocating travel funds for such purposes supports the efforts of women to connect with others who are like them. And, in addition to meeting faculty women elsewhere, women sent to professional conferences such as AEJMC, ICA, SCA and PRSA offer the bonus of opportunity for organizational innovation and visibility. As one assistant professor at a university in the West put it, “Although opportunities for women on most campuses are limited, opportunities within the professional organizations are unlimited—and these are important considerations at tenure time.”

Although increased attention to the problems of faculty women in journalism undoubtedly costs men some comfort in the short run, the problems will not go away by ignoring them. Instead, hoping the situation will somehow evaporate will only lead to missed opportunities, high levels of stress on the part of both women and men and poor overall performance of the academic unit. Only by understanding the special difficulties women face and acting decisively to combat them will women—along with their male colleagues, their universities and their students—prosper.

AGGRESSIVE CUE PROMINENCE
(Continued from page 154)

But as director Wayne Isham notes, rock videos are intended to be sales tools: “What’s good these days is what sells products.” And, as the popularity of the more aggressive, faster-paced concept video continues strong, we can expect continued concern over aggressive and gender-typed images.

41 Zoglin, ibid.
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