

## CHAPTER V

### SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented. The preceding analyses of the selected episodes then provides the basis for an examination of the possible ways in which narrative television entertainment can function rhetorically. A related concern also addressed is a discussion of the possible ways that optimum persuasiveness can be achieved with the management of content in television entertainment programs.

#### Findings

This study revealed a distinct audience orientation in both Star Trek and Battlestar Galactica. Star Trek's orientation was toward an audience thought to be intelligent and capable of sharing in particular viewpoints, while Battlestar Galactica's orientation simply was toward the largest possible mass audience. Episodes from both series show evidence that propositions or claims can, in fact, be embedded in television drama to direct people to look at the world and at other people in particular ways, through the use of modes of logical argument integrated with emotional/psychological elements.

Star Trek episodes were shown to convey a reasonably well supported, credible, and holistic idea orientation which implicitly directed viewers to share in particular beliefs, attitudes, and values associated with broadly universal philosophical issues that were made relevant to viewers. These stemmed from the series' use of political and social opinions that were integrated into the dramatic narratives using modes of argument which compared and contrasted political and social viewpoints, inductively constructed generalized principles about political and social order from a series of dramatic conflicts, and, defined particular viewpoints about galactic unity and peaceful coexistence from standard American ideologies concerning democracy and international relations. Integrated with these arguments were emotional/psychological elements in the episodes which contributed much support to the logical claims: an action/adventure slant served to maintain viewer interest and attention; believably depicted futuristic hardware which, although not the primary emphasis of the series, contributed to overall plausibility; well-defined, clearly motivated characters functioned to encourage viewer acceptance of the depicted behaviors and coordinate value systems; and, a consistently optimistic, hopeful tone made it likely that viewers could derive a "good feeling" in the experience of watching.

Battlestar Galactica episodes were shown to have an idea orientation of limited distinctiveness. The orientation, like that of Star Trek, also implicitly directed viewers to

share in particular beliefs, attitudes, and values. Due to a simplistic narrative preference which avoided any real reliance upon scientific fact or theory, and a heavy pro-war orientation which limited the range of possible stories, however, the series was shown to convey unsubstantial, weak propositional claims. Such were advanced by comparing and contrasting the humans with their enemies, and by inductively constructing generalized principles about warfare, its glory, and coordinate value systems from a series of dramatic conflicts. Integrated with these arguments was the emotional/psychological element of clear-cut characters which served the purpose of conveying easily understood viewpoints about behavior and values that supported the logical claims about warfare and dealing with one's enemies. Two other emotional/psychological elements, however, did little to augment the episodes' overall rhetorical effectiveness: an emphasis on the awe and wonderment of futuristic hardware, although visually appealing and believable, failed to elevate the dramatic conflicts to much significance or originality, the same is true for the action/adventure orientation which was at least useful in maintaining viewer interest somewhat.

In contrast to these two series, Space: 1999 episodes were shown to have several deficiencies which mitigated against the series' rhetorical effectiveness. Of prime importance were storytelling conventions which reduced the clarity of the episodes. Consistently absurd, unjustifiable dialogue and typically deadly, horrifying space monsters and

beasts were characteristic features that diminished the seriousness of the narratives. The result was a space travel adventure series which evidences a substantial lack of basic credibility to the point that episodes are abstract and/or incomprehensible. Although Space: 1999 episodes offer some observations similar to the ideas expressed in Star Trek, because the dialogue is so poorly-written, the observations do not merit being taken seriously. Jumbled, random platitudes were conveyed in episodes instead of well adapted viewpoints concerning people's beliefs, attitudes, and values. Although inductively constructed generalized principles about survival in space were made from a series of dramatic conflicts, these claims were unable to have much rhetorical effectiveness. A basic abstractness of episodes was an emotional/psychological element that detracted from clear exposition. An action/adventure emphasis and the highly credible portrayal of the beauty and serenity of space travel, and the awe and wonderment of futuristic hardware, although emotional/psychological elements with much utility to encourage viewer interest and maintain attention somewhat, could not contribute to the episodes' rhetorical effectiveness since the narrative approach was so abstract.

#### Rhetorical Functions

The programming sample examined evidenced four interrelated rhetorical functions which are possible for dramatic narrative entertainment on television: 1) The narrative content of entertainment programs can adjust ideas to viewers

while viewers can, reciprocally, adjust to content; this transactional process seems encouraged when a specific target audience is selected for receiving embedded ideas. 2) A program's particular idea orientation can range in clarity from abstract to distinctive regardless of any rhetorical intent preceding the actual broadcast itself. 3) Modes of argument can be employed in the narrative to convey particular idea-oriented viewpoints concerning beliefs, attitudes, and values adapted in particular ways to viewers. 4) Emotional/psychological elements can be blended in the narrative with modes of logical, rational argument either to augment a program's potential persuasiveness or to diminish it regardless of any rhetorical intent preceding the actual broadcast itself.

A reliance upon analogical and generalizational modes was found in the sample. There is no reason to believe that other modes could not function as effectively in entertainment programs. Apparently, however, the combined visual and verbal nature of television is particularly well suited for comparisons and contrasts as well as inductive generalizations. The inherent juxtapositioning of images and sounds for viewers in an implicitly analogical process itself in the medium; the programming content therefore seems to reveal this basic attribute. It is not difficult, moreover, to understand how simple a matter it is for an analogical medium to function well using inductive processes in its visual and verbal form since both modes are quite similar. Further research along the lines suggested by this study should be able to determine

how well other modes of argument can be adapted for persuasive use in dramatic entertainment programming. The particular significance of the use of one mode over another could also be established by such additional research.

#### Toward Optimum Persuasion in Dramatic Entertainment

Although this study did not attempt to measure any program's particular effect upon an audience, several factors emerge which suggest that there are narrative elements of greater rhetorical utility than others. Specifically, the relative distinctiveness of idea orientation in an episode, in addition to how arguments are adapted to specific viewers, seems to govern the rhetorical potential of a program. Abstract ideas appear to diminish persuasive potential in entertainment narratives as compared with the potential of distinctive ideas. Unsupported or poorly supported arguments whose failings stem from inadequate clarity in exposition or in execution, seem less likely to be rhetorically effective compared to well supported and well executed arguments in narratives.

To be rhetorically effective, narrative entertainment on television appears not to require a demonstrable intent on the part of producers or writers, nor singular ideas or issues upon which to state a given viewpoint, nor even a particular system of ideas which are philosophically or intellectually related to each other. Rather, narrative entertainment seems to be most effectively rhetorical if distinctive idea content can be appropriately adapted in argumentational

modes to a specific viewing audience. Even though, in all likelihood, narrative entertainment programming will change over the years to come, its relative persuasive potential most certainly will remain dependent on the manner in which idea content relates to argumentation and to audience adaptation.