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TELEVISION AND VIOLENCE

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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PREFACE

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HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH INTO FILMED VIOLENCE

Concern about the possible ill effects of viewing televised violence is in essence the same as the concern expressed earlier this century about the moving picture.

Although individuals undoubtedly had been researching the effects of the moving picture from its beginning, the Payne Fund, set up in New York in 1928, funded one of the earliest large scale research programmes to study the effects of motion pictures. The results of the twelve independent studies were published in 1933.

One study was by Blumer and Hauser (1933) reported in Halloran Brown and Chaney (1970). Their study revealed that of those young people with a history of delinquent behaviour 10% of the boys and 25% of the girls had been influenced by the cinema in some way. A second study by Cressey and Thrasher (1933), also reported in Halloran et al, suggested that a correlation existed between truancy and delinquency, and frequent attendance at the cinema. Notwithstanding these two studies, the authors of the Payne Fund studies,

"were unwilling to offer any conclusions attributing delinquency to movie-going". Brody (1977) p.8. A view shared by Jensen and List (1968).

The formation of a Departmental Committee on Children and the Cinema in 1950 - the Wheare Committee - was the first public expression of official concern in Britain.

The Wheare Committee sponsored;

1. a survey of all juvenile offenders who appeared before the courts during a six month period,

2. another survey which took account of the opinions of teachers, heads of children's clinics, officials from children's courts and other specialists.

The Committee concluded that the cinema could not be blamed for any increase in criminal or immoral behaviour. Brody (1977).

The Television Research Committee, a committee of experts in the fields of psychology, social studies and statistics was set up in England in 1963 to consider:-

1. The relation between television viewing and delinquency.
2. The effect of television viewing on the moral, attitudinal and perceptual development of young people.

The Committee's Working Paper No. 3, Halloran et al (1970) concludes;-

"The whole weight of research and theory in the juvenile delinquency field would suggest that the mass media, except just possibly in the case of a very small number of pathological individuals, are never the sole cause of delinquent behaviour. At most, they may play a contributory role, and that a minor one". p. 178

In 1966, the Centre for Mass Communication Research at Leicester University took over the function of the Television Research Committee. None of the results produced by the Television Research Committee or the Committee for Mass Communication Research unequivocally show a direct link between television films and delinquency. Brody (1977).

In the United States, a Joint Committee for Research in Television and Children, formed in 1963, was followed in 1968 by a National Commission to determine the causes of violence.

In their final report the Commission is quoted as having said;

"We do not suggest that television is a principal cause of violence in society. We do suggest that it is a contributing factor". Brody (1977) p. 10.

"We believe that it is reasonable to conclude that a constant diet of violent behaviour on television has an adverse effect on human character and attitudes. Violence on television encourages violent forms of behaviour and fosters moral and social values about violence in daily life which are unacceptable in a civilised society". (ibid)

At about the same time a United States Commission on Obscenity and Pornography reported in its final report in 1970, that it was unable to find any evidence that exposure to erotic material had any adverse effect on established attitudes or customary ways of behaving.

"Research to date thus provides no substantial basis for the belief that erotic materials constitute a primary or significant cause of the development of character deficits or that they operate as a significant determinative factor in causing crime and delinquency.

This conclusion is stated with due and perhaps excessive caution, since it is obviously not possible and never would be possible, to state that never on any occasion, under any conditions, did any erotic material ever contribute in any way to the

likelihood of any individual committing a sex crime. Indeed, no such statement could be made about any kind of nonerotic material. On the basis of the available data, however, it is not possible to conclude that erotic material is a significant cause of sex crime". United States Commission on Obscenity and Pornography (1970) p. 236-7

The United States Surgeon-General's Scientific Advisory Committee reported in 1972 after sitting for more than two years. The Committee (which had a budget of \$1,000,000) was described as "... experts in the behavioural sciences, the mental health discipline, and communication...." Surgeon-General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behaviour (1972) p.22 whose "... credentials should be recognised by the scientific community, the broadcasting industry, and the general public". p.23 (ibid). 23 independent research programmes were funded to research the effects of television, and there were a number of specially commissioned papers.

The committee concluded that its "... findings converge in three respects:

a preliminary and tentative indication of a causal relation between viewing violence on television and aggressive behaviour;

an indication that any such causal relation operates only on some children (who are predisposed to be aggressive);

and an indication that it operates only in some environmental contexts". (ibid)

The most recent extensive research review available on the effects of television and film violence is, Screen Violence and Film Censorship, Home Office Research Study No. 40, (1977) by Stephen Brody. In Brody's view, "It can be

stated quite simply that social research has not been able unambiguously to offer any firm assurance that the mass media in general and films and television in particular, either exercise a socially harmful effect, or that they do not". Brody (1977) p. 125

The Ontario Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry reported in 1977. The Royal Commission sat for two years, visited 15 countries, assembled all available literature on the subject - more than 4,000 titles, reviewed previous research and commissioned new, and held 61 public hearings in Ontario.

The Commission found;

"that the great weight of research into the effects of violent media content indicates potential harm to society";

"that, while increased exploitation and depiction of violence in the media is only one of the many social factors contributing to crime, it is the largest single variable most amenable to rectification".

Report of The Ontario Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry Vol. 1, p. 53.

One researcher whose latest work has not been considered by the Commissions, Committees and individual reviewers, is Dr W. A. Belson. Dr W.A. Belson, Reader in Research Methods at North-East London Polytechnic, has recently completed a six year study of 1500 13 to 16 years old boys in London. It is claimed that Dr Belson's research supports the view that long term exposure to television violence increases the degree to which boys engage in serious violence.

At the time of writing, the only material available, apart from news clippings, is a transcript of a speech Dr Belson gave in September 1977 on his research. The full research report, Television and The Adolescent Boy has just been published by Teakfield, 1 Westmead, Farnborough, Hants, England.

Research in New Zealand includes;

studies of the television viewing habits of New Zealand children by Mitcalfe (1967), Panckhurst (1971) (both reported in Elley (1976)), Barney (1973) and Cotton (1976),

reviews of the literature by Jensen and List (1968) and Elley (1976),

a discussion of television research and development in New Zealand by Ritchie (1977),

and experimental studies into the effects of filmed violence on the behaviour of children by Ginpil (1976) and Ling (1977).

An overview of the fifty years of research into the effects of viewing filmed violence reveals conflicting and at times contradictory findings.

This review will show that this unhappy state of affairs, a common fate of much social science research, is more a function of inadequacies of research methodology and definition than of the absence of effects as hypothesized.

PART 2THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF TELEVISION AND VIOLENCEDefinitions of Televised Violence

The definition of what is violent in television programmes is less difficult than the determination of its effects upon viewers. A study, reported in the Surgeon-General's Report (1972) by Greenberg and Gordon (1971b) suggests that most adults, including television critics, generally agree on lists of the "most violent" programmes and do so on the definition of violence as "fighting, shooting, yelling, killing".

A definition, used by Gerbner (1971b), also reported in the Surgeon-General's Report (1972), to study in detail the content of television programmes is,

"the overt expression of physical force against others or self, or the compelling of action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed".

A definition of violence in terms of the viewer's interpretation of it, i.e., does the viewer consider it acceptable, offensive, fanciful, comic, educational - is confounded by many variables.

That this is so is obvious from a brief consideration of the process by which filmed violence affects the behaviour of a viewer, given that it does .

At the simplest level there is;

1. a signal or stimulus - filmed violence which produces
2. an effect or response - violent behaviour

But the effect or response will clearly depend on -

- (a) the personal characteristics of the viewer - e.g. age, sex, mood
- (b) the situation existing when the programme is seen, e.g., presence and comment of other viewers

And whether the response to the programme becomes a stimulus for the viewer to behave in a particular way some time in the future will depend on -

- (a) the personal characteristics of the viewer, and
- (b) the situation existing

at that future time

All this without considering types of filmed violence and the variety of contexts in which it may be presented. A Tom and Jerry cartoon may include a large number of objectively violent actions but be considered by viewers to be non-violent. No definition of filmed violence, in terms of its likely effects on the behaviour of viewers, has been able to account for all of these elements.

The variety and changing characteristics of the viewer and his situation together with the variety of forms and contexts filmed violence may be portrayed in, makes the demonstration of whether or not filmed violence has a single clearly definable effect difficult, if not methodologically impossible.

Televised Violence as a Cause of Violent Behaviour

There are four generally accepted hypotheses as to how televised violence may cause viewers to behave violently.

In the short term;

1. The televised violence is directly imitated or copied.
2. The televised violence arouses or instigates violence.

In the long term;

3. The televised violence may reduce emotional sensitivity to actual violence and so reduce "abhorrence" to it, people thus becoming less inhibited to behave violently.
4. The televised violence may over time change the values of individuals and society in the direction of acceptance of violence as acceptable or unavoidable.

Research Limitations

Before considering the evidence for each hypothesis it is necessary to consider the nature and limitations of social scientific research.

Most research into the effects of filmed violence on the behaviour of people, particularly young people and children, is of one of two research types, viz applied experimental studies, or survey studies.

Applied experimental studies are conducted in controlled situations, usually laboratories, with small groups of subjects considered to be representative of the population from which they are drawn. Efforts are made to reproduce in the experimental situation the conditions that are to be found in the natural environment of the topic under investigation. Because it is a controlled situation it is usually possible to alter only one variable, whilst holding all others constant, and so establish the effect of that alter-

ation on all other variables. The great strength of experimental studies is that they allow cause and effect relationships to be established because any effect can be related to a change made in one aspect of the situation (cause) by the experimenter.

The disadvantages of applied experimental studies will be discussed later in the context of reported research findings; suffice to say that causality demonstrated in a simulated experimental situation does not necessarily entail a similar causality outside an experimental situation.

Survey studies are conducted in the natural environment with large groups of subjects considered to be representative of the population from which they were drawn and attempt to establish relationships among and between variables common to the groups surveyed and chosen for study. The relationship between the variables is expressed as a correlation. This is a measure of the extent to which one variable changes or varies if a related variable changes or varies. When working in the natural environment, the experimenter is confronted with all aspects of the situation and there can be no effective control of all the variables being studied. Consequently, cause and effect relationships cannot be established because although one variable may be correlated with another and change when it changes, both may be correlated with a third variable, about which the experimenter may be unaware, and be changing because it is changing. e.g., There is a correlation between cigarette smoking and lung cancer. Does smoking cause lung cancer or is there a third unknown variable which predisposes some people to smoke and to develop lung cancer?

The great strength of survey studies is that they are done in the natural environment. Their great weakness is that correlation does not signify causality.

Apart from limitations in methodology, the subject matter itself imposes a limitation. Ethical considerations forbid allowing people taking part in the studies to harm themselves or others. The effects of filmed violence have to be studied without letting people behave directly violently to others.

Research findings are intelligible only in the light of an understanding of these and other limitations. In the final analysis it is the importance which is attached to such limitations which is more significant than the intrinsic value of any of the research. Those who say "Oh yes it does" and those who say "Oh no it doesn't" disagree more on this aspect of the research than on the findings themselves.

PART 3THE EVIDENCE FOR IMITATION

The work of Professor Albert Bandura of Stanford University and co-workers from 1961-73 provides the reference experiments on whether or not children imitate what they see on the screen. For imitation to occur, the viewer has to be reminded of a behaviour learned previously or be shown a new behaviour which is within the viewer's present ability to perform. It is also important that the behaviour seen is seen;-

- (a) to have had a favourable outcome.
- (b) to have been expected in the context of the incident .
- (c) to have been performed by a person likely to be considered important by the viewer.

A standard procedure for imitation experiments is to put a child in a room with some materials to play with. An adult in another part of the room begins playing with several toys including a mallet and a five foot inflated Bobo doll. The adult is aggressive towards the Bobo doll, and, amongst other things pummels its head with the mallet. The child observes the aggressive adult.

The child is then taken to another room and allowed to play with attractive toys. The experimenter then frustrates the child by saying that he has decided to reserve the toys for some other children and takes the child to another room to play with some less attractive toys. These include toys typically used in aggressive activities. Among them is a Bobo doll and a mallet.

Typical findings are-

1. that children who had observed adult aggression prior to being frustrated were more aggressive in their subsequent play than those who had been frustrated but had not observed adult aggression.
2. that the character of the children's aggressive behaviour was closely modelled on the behaviour they had seen the adult perform.

A considerable body of research evidence using this procedure and variations on it, has now accumulated and there is general agreement (Siegel (1969), Comstock (1972) Liebert et al (1974), that, within an applied experimental setting -

1. children can readily imitate violent behaviours (whether they have been frustrated or not) which they have seen performed by a model in the flesh or on the screen.
2. their memory of such behaviour can be both accurate in detail and long lived.
3. the children may perform a wider range of violent acts than were modelled.

Whilst the evidence is unequivocal, there are several criticisms of its extrapolation from the laboratory to the natural environment. For example:-

1. Violence is usually defined in terms of use and rough handling of toys and dolls usually designed for that purpose-mallets, Bobo dolls, guns. The evidence does not indicate whether or not violence against Bobo dolls ever becomes violence against people.
2. The children are "invited" to behave violently in that -
 - (a) the opportunity is immediately available.
 - (b) the "weapons" used by the model are available to the children.

- (c) there are no consequences - prohibition or retaliation - to their aggression.

These "demand characteristics" as they are called, make it highly likely that the children will behave in the way that they do. Critics of the imitation hypothesis point out that these three conditions do not apply in the same way out of the laboratory.

Whilst these criticisms may undermine support for the claim that televised violence causes aggressiveness or violence, they do not refute it.

On the question of imitation the Surgeon General's Report states:-

"Some 20 published experiments document that children are capable of imitating filmed aggression shown on a movie or television screen. Capacity to imitate, however, does not imply performance. Whether or not what is observed actually will be imitated depends on a variety of situational and personal factors". p.10 .

These factors must be a great deal more powerful outside the laboratory than inside it.

In the only experimental study of adults imitative reactions to filmed violence and of direct imitation in a real life setting (as opposed to a laboratory setting) Milgram and Shotland (1973) report that adults do not re-enact violence immediately after seeing it on a screen.

Informal Evidence

There is evidence of a very different kind for the imitation hypothesis. Examples can be cited of crimes, often of bizarre and gross violence, by both children and adults which immediately follow a particular television programme

or film and in which the details seen on the screen appear to have been re-enacted in the real world. e.g.-

1. "Born Innocent, a made-for-TV movie, was shown in September 1974. It included a scene in which a girl is raped by her reformatory classmates with the end of a broomstick. The very next day four children raped a nine-year-old California girl and her eight-year-old playmate in an identical manner." Madden and Lion (1976) p.36.

2. Three incidents followed the screening of the film Fuzz on television network in the United States:-
 - (a) In Boston, a girl walking with a can of petrol was compelled by a group of youths to douse herself with it. They then threw a match at her. Three days before the same thing happened in Fuzz.
 - (b) Subsequently, three teenage boys in Miami were arrested for allegedly dousing a derelict with petrol and setting him on fire.
 - (c) A few days later in Chicago a robber doused a man with cleaning fluid which he threatened to light if the man did not give up his wallet. The fluid was ignited. United States Congressional Senate Committee on Commerce. Subcommittee on Communications April 3-5 (1974) pp. 9 and 30.

3. "In Baltimore, within the week of the showing of Hawaii Five-0 featuring a sniper dressed in Army fatigues who systematically shoots people crossing his line of fire, a disgruntled employee of Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company dressed in Army fatigues systematically cut down five of his fellow workers". Madden and Lion (1976), p. 36.

4. "A famous example is the film "The Doomsday Flight" in which a bomb was placed on board an aeroplane by a man

who then telephoned the airline company offering to disclose its location for a huge ransom. This film was shown on American television in 1966. Before it was over, one similar bomb threat was received, four more followed within 24 hours, and eight more before the end of the week. (Equalling the number of such calls that had been received in the previous month according to the Federal Aviation Agency. There is no record that a bomb was in fact placed on any plane. Siegel (1969)). The same film was shown in Australia in 1971, and Qantas Airlines were obliged to pay \$A500,000 after a threat to one of their planes". Brody (1977) p.25.

5. Milgram and Shotland (1973) observed that a series of parachute hijacks appeared to have been due to the publicity given this technique by the mass media.

Whether such incidents are statistically significant or not (Brody 1977), are more likely to be committed by "deranged" people or not (Efron 1975), they do, if authentic, fulfil many of the conditions of the modelling or imitative paradigm and are informal evidence for the imitative hypothesis.

In summary the evidence from applied experimental studies for the imitative hypothesis shows that children and young people can imitate what they have seen on the screen. Whether they will or not depends on personal and situational factors, as yet not fully understood. A study of incidents like those above may contribute to this understanding.

to take part in an experiment designed to study physiological reactions during various tasks. While they both complete the tasks the accomplice sets out to frustrate the student by treating him in a condescending and insulting manner. When the task is finished and the student suitably frustrated, the two are told that they are to watch a film.

One of two versions of a supposed synopsis of the film is given to the viewers, ostensibly to help them understand the context of a film which they are then shown.

In one version the hero is portrayed as a villain who deserves all he gets, in the other, a well intentioned person struggling to overcome the effects of an unfortunate upbringing. The first version is said to "justify" the aggression, the second to indicate that the aggression was not justified. The two then watch seven minutes from the film Champion in which Kirk Douglas, playing the part of a boxer, receives a severe beating and loses his title.

In order to measure the effects that the film has had on the student, the latter is separated from the accomplice and told that the accomplice has designed a floor plan for a dwelling and the student is to judge this plan. The student has before him an electric shock device which he is told is wired to the accomplice. If he thinks the plan is highly creative he is told to give one shock (a somewhat questionable procedure) and the worse he thinks the plan is, the greater and longer the shocks he is to administer. Naturally all the students are given the same floor plan and the electric shock device is not wired to the accomplice but to a recording machine which logs the number and duration of the shocks administered.

Typical findings are:

1. that angered subjects are more aggressive than those who have not been angered.

2. that angered students who have seen "justified" aggression, i.e., the "bad guy" being beaten, show more aggression than angered subjects who have seen the "good guy" being beaten.

Because, as Comstock (1972) pointed out, arousal as a concept is poorly defined, interpretations of Berkowitz's findings are highly speculative, e.g., seeing the "good guy", for whom most viewers will have some sympathy, beaten "inhibits" the viewers hostility toward the experimenter. This effect does not occur when the "bad guy" is beaten. Brody (1977).

Berkowitz's use of preparedness to give electric shock to others as a measure of aggressiveness in subjects is nearer "real world" aggressiveness than measures used by Bandura. To some this makes Berkowitz's findings more convincing.

Laboratory research based on Berkowitz's methods shows that college students are prepared to administer what they believe to be painful electric shocks to strangers after viewing filmed aggression if -

1. they have been made angry prior to seeing the film.
2. the aggression is shown as justified and permissible.
3. a link is established between a screen victim and a real live target.

But are less likely to administer shocks if:-

1. The film emphasises the disagreeable consequences of violence
2. The bloody and painful results are presented in realistic detail.

Berkowitz's experiments have been criticized on a number of grounds:-

1. The subjects are given every encouragement to use shocks, in fact, as was pointed out by Wess, (Surgeon General's Report 1972), subjects have no alternative way of responding.
2. Readiness to use shock in a laboratory situation is not necessarily an indication of readiness to be aggressive in the community. Milgrams work, Obedience to Authority (1974) convincingly demonstrates that readiness to use shock in an experimental situation may have little if anything to do with individual characteristics like aggressiveness, but depends on the demand characteristics of the experimental situation.
3. The experimental conditions optimize the likelihood of the expected behaviour occurring, - immediately after being made angry, the subjects watch aggressive action and they are then presented with ready, and, as it were, 'willing' victims.
4. Berkowitz's exclusive (Noble 1975) use of clips of violent scenes from the film Champion featuring a well known actor limits the generality of the results.

Nevertheless the research by Berkowitz and others, like the research by Bandura, demonstrates important relationships which exist between filmed violence and aggressive behaviour which hold under laboratory conditions.

The Surgeon General's Report (1972) states that the experimental studies on arousal,

"have considerable cogency" p.11

and concludes that

"under certain circumstances, television violence can instigate an increase in aggressive acts". (ibid.)

Catharsis

Catharsis is the harmless expression of aggressive feelings, which would have been expressed directly, through watching aggressive behaviour in others.

The leading proponent of the view that filmed violence can have a cathartic effect is Seymour Feshbach (1955) (1961) Feshbach and Singer (1971).

Feshbach found that angered college students were less hostile in their remarks about the person who angered them after they had a chance to write fantasy aggression stories. Worchell (1957) reported in Glucksmann (1966), reported a similar effect by giving angered students a chance to "sound off" to a sympathetic listener. There have been only two studies, Worchell (1957) and an unpublished study, in direct support of Feshbach's original result i.e. simply thinking about aggressive behaviour enables subjects to relieve their aggressive feelings.

The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (USA) (1969) was not impressed by the evidence produced by those supporting the catharsis hypothesis and argued that there was little support for it. Halloran et al. (1970).

However, it is fairly well substantiated that when -

1. subjects are made angry, and
2. the person causing the anger or someone closely associated with him is seen to be injured or attacked, a cathartic effect can be demonstrated. Brody (1977).

The likelihood of a normal viewing situation approximating these conditions is remote indeed, as therefore must be the possibility of filmed violence having a cathartic effect in such situations.

*Arousal and catharsis are usually presented as opposing hypotheses. Logically this would be the case only if there was a single effect of televised violence. Clearly this cannot be the case. Noble (1975), who supports the catharsis hypothesis suggests that the arousal hypothesis holds only for -

- (a) "realistic" filmed aggression.
- (b) among viewers who are not normally aggressive

and that the catharsis hypothesis holds for -

- (a) "stylistic" violence (cowboys and Indians)
- (b) among aggressive viewers.

The arbitrary "realistic", "stylistic" dichotomy suggested by Noble belies the complexity of the nature and content of filmed violence.

The evidence for catharsis, other than in the strict sense suggested by Brody is meagre indeed. However the matter cannot be considered closed. The effects of films are more complicated than are represented in laboratory studies and individuals' responses to films will vary, depending, amongst other things, on their capacity for identification, empathy and imagination. Brody (1977).

PART 5.THE EVIDENCE FOR TELEVISED VIOLENCE REDUCING EMOTIONAL
SENSITIVITY IN VIEWERS

The research in this section suffers from the lack of an adequate definition of emotional sensitivity.

Although the research is appropriately grouped under such a heading it does not extend beyond a study of fear reactions and of general physiological arousal.

To react emotionally to or be frightened by a film or television programme is the experience of perhaps everyone and is certainly readily observed in young children.

Carruthers and Taggart (1973) report that it is not unusual for managers of cinemas showing films of violence to have to deal with cases of fainting, vomiting and incontinence.

Advertisements in Philadelphia in 1974 for the film The Mark of the Devil included;

"Due To The Horrifying Scenes No One Admitted Without A
Vomit Bag" Goldstein (1975)

Research by Blumer (1933) reported by Brody (1977) and Wall and Simson (1951) showed that although a high percentage of children reported being frightened by filmed violence, rather than being upset, most said that they enjoyed being frightened.

Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince's (1958) survey found that with increasing age the fear elicited in children by filmed violence gave way to "pleasurable suspense".

The research indicates that children are likely to be frightened when the violence -

1. is realistic.
2. is eerie or supernatural.
3. involves a character, human or animal to whom the child is attracted.
4. reminds the child of his own fears.

There never has been any suggestion that fear will in itself promote aggressiveness or delinquency in children. Brody (1977).

A major problem in studying the emotional sensitivity of viewers is measuring emotional responses as they occur during the viewing of filmed violence. Infra red photographs or videotapes of viewer facial expressions during the screening have been used. However, the interpretation of facial expression is to say the least, highly speculative.

The most objective indices of physiological arousal are obtained by monitoring physiological processes such as heart rate, muscle tension, skin resistance, pupil dilation. Whilst general arousal is readily detected, there is little evidence for the detection of specific emotional responses such as anger, fear, happiness, in everyday situations let alone when viewing filmed violence. One exception is Carruthers and Taggart (1973) who found a slowing of heart rate, a characteristic "fear" reaction, in subjects watching violent television programmes.

Evidence by Lazarus et al (1964) reported by Brody (1977) and Davidson and Hiebert (1971) suggests that repeated viewing of scenes of violence reduces people's "abhorrence" of it. In Carruthers and Taggart's terms, the fear response habituates with repeated viewing. The evidence also suggests that the response is highly specific to particular acts, that is to say, it is only effective if the same stimulus is repeated. When shown fresh scenes of violence viewers generally react with renewed intensity.

Evidence presented to the United States Commission on Obscenity and Pornography supports the specificity of habituation effects.

"The results obtained from both physiological measures and reported levels of psychosexual stimulation support the hypothesis that repeated exposure to sexual stimuli results in decreased responsiveness. In addition, degree of interest in both the study and the stimulus materials declines predictably among the subjects. Although complete satiation in the sense of total inhibition of response did not occur, the physiological data and reported levels of arousal and interest point toward satiation in terms of diminished response.

At no time during the course of the experiment did subjects report detrimental effects of the experiment upon sleep, mood, study or work habits or any other aspect of their personal or social behaviour. Satiation was specific to erotic material and did not extend to their personal sexual activities". p. 218.

However dissenting evidence is presented by Cline, Croft and Courrier (1977). They compared a group of children (5-12 years of age) who in the preceding two years watched television 25 or more hours a week, with a group who watched 4 hours or fewer a week (verified by parents), on two physiological measures - blood volume pressure and galvanic skin response (G.S.R.) - after watching a sequence of filmed non-violent and violent material.

They found that the low television exposure boys were significantly more aroused "emotionally" in terms of blood volume pressure and G.S.R. after watching the violent material than the high exposure group. The authors claim that a habituation-to-violence effect had set in for the high exposure boys.

Thomson (1959) reported a similar finding based on ultra-violet photographs of facial expression, but offered a simpler explanation. He suggested that the results indicate that high viewers have a better appreciation of film conventions. Support for this explanation is provided by Himmilweit, Oppenheim and Vince (1958) who suggest that young children are less disturbed by "Westerns" when they have learned the "Western scenario" i.e., readily identified "goodies" and "badies", lots of shooting, fighting, chasing, and the last minute arrival of the United States Calvary. The children, having learned what to expect are less frightened, not less sensitive. In Thomson's view

"For crime films at both high and low levels of tension the evidence appears to be that high film insight in the viewer, presumably leading to a maturer form of film appreciation, is the best single safeguard against the appearance of reactions which might lead to some adverse personality effects, this being particularly true at the more moderate levels of tension." p.107 (ibid).

In summary, there appears to be no research which relates specifically to the long term effects of viewing filmed violence on the emotional sensitivity of the viewer.

The evidence does show that the continual presentation of a particular type of filmed violence which initially produces a high level of physiological arousal eventually results in a habituation of that arousal to that particular violent incident. The research does not relate this to emotional sensitivity.

The evidence suggests that what has been taken for reduced emotional sensitivity in viewers is more likely to have been a better appreciation of the various violence scenarios. This improved appreciation has resulted in a corresponding reduction in fearful reactions to violent programmes.

Whether habituation of sensitivity to, or reduced fearfulness of, filmed violence are discrete variables or not, the equivalent responses to actual violence are of a different dimension and remain unresearched.

PART 6EVIDENCE FOR TELEVISED VIOLENCE OVER TIME CHANGING THE VALUES
OF INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY VALUES

One of the Payne Fund studies, Peterson and Thurstone, (1933) reported in Brody (1977) showed that attitudes and beliefs on a wide range of issues could be influenced by commercial films. The effects remained up to nineteen months after seeing the films.

Brody (1977) cites numerous experiments which demonstrate the effectiveness of propaganda films in influencing racial stereotypes and attitudes toward Chinese, Jews, and Germans.

Siegal (1958) reported in Noble (1975), found that children without any experience of taxi drivers more readily attributed violent behaviour to taxi drivers after hearing a radio drama about a taxi driver resorting to violence to settle a dispute than to other occupational groups. They also attributed more aggressiveness to taxi drivers than children who had heard a radio drama in which the taxi driver resolved the problem constructively.

Although the evidence is clear cut the effects are specific and relate to matters outside the immediate experience of the subjects and could, as easily, be reversed.

Investigation into the long term effects of the mass media have had necessarily to rely on survey rather than experimental techniques. Keeping subjects in experimental conditions to study long term effects may be acceptable for animal but not human subjects. Occasionally, a real-life situation in which something approaching experimental research can be set up occurs. Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) reported by Brody (1977) exploited such a situation. They compared two small communities in Western Canada, one of which was receiving television broadcasts,

the other was not. They found that television had affected children's entertainment preferences and habits, but 'aggressive attitudes', if anything, had declined with the advent of television.

Himmelweit et al, compared a community with itself before and after the introduction of television. They gave questionnaires to every (10-11) and (13-14) year old child in nearly every school in Norwich England at a time when hardly any family had a television set. A year later they compared a group of children from families who had acquired a set with a group who had not.

"We did not find that the viewers were any more aggressive or maladjusted than the controls; ..." p.20.

Jensen and List (1968) compared the number of television licences issued in New Zealand with the number of Court Appearances for crimes of violence expressed as a percentage of all appearances, for the periods 1953-1961 (pre television) and (1962-1966). A correlation was found between the number of television licences and the percentage of appearances which were for crimes of violence. As Jensen and List pointed out this does not prove a causal relationship, but does indicate that the hypothesis cannot be dismissed.

The first major survey into the relationship between the mass media and children's social attitudes was carried out in South Australia by Lovibond (1967) on 374 school-boys aged 11 to 15. They were questioned on -

1. Their readiness to use violence in solving problems of personal relations.
2. The value placed on toughness and strength.

Lovibond found that scores increased -

1. with the number of comic books read per week,
2. with the number of hours of television watched per week,
3. and with frequency of cinema attendance.

and concluded, "that there is a relationship between exposure to crime and violence in the media and endorsement of an ideology which makes the use of force in the interests of egocentric needs the essential content of human relationships." p.98. Lovibond thought that temperamental characteristics may predispose some children more than others to violence which is then reinforced by exposure to violence in the media. Many of the boys who had little contact with the mass media scored quite highly.

Perhaps of more interest are Lovibond's views as to how the attitudes measured in the children in the study may effect their behaviour.

"... it might reasonably be expected that children who are highly exposed to crime comics and films will tend to commit delinquent acts only if

- (a) opposing moral influences are weak,
- (b) opportunities for particular delinquencies present themselves, and
- (c) the chances of punishment are rated reasonably low.

In the case of the majority of children, however, high levels of exposure to the violence media are more likely to result in

- (a) decreased readiness actively to oppose delinquent behaviour and the associated system of ideas, and

- (b) a decreased readiness to take humanitarian principled action when the situation demands that such action be taken" (ibid).

Dominick and Greenberg (1972) found that the time spent watching television by 800 (9-11 year olds) was positively correlated with their self-expressed willingness to use violence. Belson (1977) in a study of the long term effects of televised violence found that long term exposure to televised violence did not change in any appreciable way the boys attitudes to violence.

The distinction between an attitude and a behaviour and their relative importance in this context is exemplified by the fact that a person can be convicted for his behaviour but not for his attitude. Attitudes relate to thoughts and feelings. Crimes of violence relate to what somebody has done, i.e., to behaviour.

There have been a number of surveys which have explored the relationship between viewing filmed violence and aggressive behaviour.

McIntyre and Teevan (1972) reported a small but significant correlation between the violence of the four favourite programmes of 2000 (11-19) year olds and their "involvement with legal officials".

Robinson and Bachman (1972) found that as the favourite television programmes of their 1500 19 year old subjects contained more violence, their reported aggressive behaviour increased.

McLeod, Atkin and Chaffee (1972) questioned 600 13 and 16 year olds about patterns of television viewing, attitudes towards aggressive action, their reactions to hypothetical anger-provoking situations and their feelings about television violence, as well as about their own aggressive

behaviour. A correlation was found between frequency of viewing violent television and both aggressive attitudes and aggressive behaviour.

As measured by the correlation coefficient (r) the association between viewing violent television and aggressive behaviour in the McLeod et al study was 0.32. This means that if one is to predict aggressive behaviour from viewing violence on television, one knows approximately 10% (r squared) of what one would need to know to make a certain or perfect prediction, i.e., for any value of viewing televised violence 90% of the aggressive behaviour associated with that value could not be predicted from the amount of violence viewed.

The research presented here shows that attitude and behaviour changes in children and young people are correlated with viewing filmed violence. The extent to which such changes may be long-term will be discussed in Part 7.

There is no evidence which gives any indication of whether or not a society's values on violence are correlated, or in other ways related, to the filmed violence seen by its citizens.

PART 7OTHER STUDIES

A longitudinal study of the effects of viewing televised violence on violent behaviour by Lefkowitz, Eron, Walder and Huesmann (1977) (first published in 1972) relates to all four hypotheses considered without being specific to any one. It is one of the few longitudinal studies.

The purpose of the study was to compare:

1. Viewing televised violence and aggressive behaviour in the 3rd grade (9 year olds).
2. Viewing televised violence and aggressive behaviour in the same children in the 13th grade (19 year olds).

In 1960, Lefkowitz et al., surveyed 875 children - the entire 3rd grade from a middle class area. In 1970 they were able to locate in the same area and survey 427 of the original 875.

The findings were:

1. The greater a boy's preference for violent television at age 9, the greater was his aggressiveness both at that time and ten years later.
2. There was no relationship between a 19 year olds current preference for television violence and his current aggressiveness, i.e., the programmes a 19 year old watched on television did not seem to affect his aggressiveness.

3. Regardless of a child's initial level of aggressiveness, a preference for television violence significantly increases his later aggressiveness.

Lefkowitz et al. concluded,

"... there is a probable causative influence of watching violent television programmes in early years on a boy's later aggressiveness". p.126 (ibid.).

The correlation between the 3rd grade preference for televised violence and 13th grade peer-rated aggression was 0.31. This means that about 10% of the variation in a boy's aggression is explained by his earlier viewing preference, i.e., for 9 year old boys who have a preference for televised violence and who are aggressive, approximately 10% of their aggressiveness at that age and 10 years later can be attributed to their preference for televised violence.

By showing that a preference for viewing televised violence is unrelated to the initial level of aggressiveness, Lefkowitz et al showed that the association between televised violence and aggressiveness cannot be explained as simply due to aggressive boys preferring televised violence. The Lefkowitz et al study would seem to be important evidence in support of a causal relationship between watching televised violence and aggressive behaviour. Not all agree and there have been several criticisms of the Lefkowitz study.

Kay (1972) criticised the measure of viewing televised violence. At the 3rd grade, mothers told the experimenters the childrens' three favourite programmes. Kay (1972) found that when mothers were asked which programmes their (5-11) year old children watched, they agreed with what the children said they watched only 62% of the time.

Kaplan (1972) criticised the measure of aggression. Ratings by peers was the only measure used at both levels.

The same questions were asked at both levels but at the 13th grade they were all phrased in the past tense, e.g., "Who starts fights over nothing?" at the 3rd grade became "Who started fights over nothing?" at the 13th grade, i.e., peers were asked about previous behaviour, not current behaviour. There were, however, other measures used at both levels.

Lefkowitz et al. related their measure of aggressiveness to "official" delinquency. Although the Police arrest rates were higher for the high-aggressiveness groups at both the 3rd and 13th grades, the differences in arrest rates between the high and low aggressive groups although in the right direction were not statistically significant.

Another important study is that by Belson (1977). Belson's full report has yet to come to hand. The following comments are based on a copy of a speech Dr Belson gave in September 1977 in Birmingham to the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

The speech deals mainly with the findings of the research with only brief mention of the design of the study. Comments which follow on this latter aspect of the study cannot be considered to be more than observations.

Belson headed a research programme funded by the Columbia Broadcasting System to the extent of \$290,000 to study:

1. the extent of personal involvement in violent behaviour; and
2. the level and kind of televised violence watched;

of 1,500 (13-16) year old boys in London.

The central hypothesis of the study was that "high exposure to television violence increases the degree to which boys engage in violent behaviour", p.6 (ibid.).

From self reports Belson established what acts of violent behaviour the boys committed in the previous six months. A sample of 68 programmes was formed from the televised violence broadcast between 1959-71. Presumably subjects were asked whether they had watched any of the programmes in the sample and how often.

The techniques for measuring:

1. the extent to which boys engage in violent behaviour
2. exposure to televised violence

are important in Belson's study because from the information available, Belson is relying solely on self report and the ability of boys in the study to recall accurately events in the recent and distant past.

Thirteen boys claimed to have recalled committing more than 100 acts of violence in the preceding six months (approximately 1 every 2 days), another 54 claimed to have recalled 40 to 100 in the same period. Belson found that 12% of the boys in the sample accounted for 72% of the acts of violence allegedly committed. Presumably the percentage of these boys, particularly those in the 100 plus category, who came to "official" notice will be included in the full report.

On the question of viewing, presumably the boys could be asked about programmes screened up to twelve years previously.

Belson claims to have controlled for personal and background characteristics considered to be predictors of violent behaviour. There is considerable evidence (Kozol, Boucher and Garofalo 1972, Wenk, Robinson, and Smith 1972, Klein 1976, Mojares 1976, van der Kuast 1976) that neither psychological or psychiatric assessment, nor clinical or actuarial techniques can predict dangerousness or violent behaviour and that a prior record of dangerous behaviour is the best single predictor of future dangerousness.

This is a crucial question for the Belson study because if the high viewing group and the low viewing group differ on factors in addition to the amount of televised violence they watch, the violent behaviour they engage in cannot be attributed simply to watching televised violence, i.e., a causal relationship cannot be argued. If the "227 possible predictors of violent behaviour" (p.7) are not valid predictors of violent behaviour Belson has not matched his high and low exposure to violent television groups. Clearly some of the variables used are not such predictors, e.g, average grip strength, chest measurement, weight, height, p.20 (ibid.), although the two groups could be matched on these variables.

The evidence presented by Belson supports the hypothesis that long term exposure to television violence increases the degree to which:

boys engage in violent behaviour
 boys use bad language/swear
 boys are violent in sport or play.

"... the evidence is strongly supportive of the hypothesis that long term exposure to television violence increases the degree to which boys engage in serious violence." pp.12-13 (ibid.).

On the question of whether he has demonstrated a causal relationship between televised violence and aggressive behaviour Belson says,

"Now that finding still leaves open the possibility that the ... difference we have found ... is partly a reflection of violent boys tending to watch the more violent television material just because they are violent." ... "In the present state of our research technology, we do not have a method for unambiguously resolving these possibilities." p9.(ibid.).

With that qualification Belson agrees that for what he called "violence in general" (more trivial and non-serious kinds of violence (sic)) the possibility that the relationship between viewing televised violence and behaving aggressively may be simply explained by the fact that violent boys watch violent television cannot be excluded. However Belson does consider that this possibility can be excluded from the relationship between televised violence and what Belson called serious violent behaviour by boys in the study.

The studies by Lefkowitz et al. (1972) and Belson (1977) are significant in that despite the limitations and difficulties of survey studies they provide evidence supportive of a probable causal relationship between viewing violent television programmes and aggressive behaviour.

Anderson (1977) did a cumulation of study results for the period 1956-1976. He collected and recorded results of all available studies between 1956 and 1976. He selected studies which;

- (a) dealt directly with the relationship between television and violence,
- (b) presented a basic hypothesis which was later rejected or accepted on the basis of results generated by the study,
- (c) used a stimulus which was shown on a screen be it large or small.

Of the 153 studies scrutinized, 73 (involving 30,000 subjects) including a number reviewed in this study, meet the above criteria and were accepted.

The results of Anderson's cumulation of the correlation between viewing violence on television and subsequent aggressive behaviour may be summarised thus:

39.

3 studies	4.1%	showed a weak negative correlation
14 studies	19.2%	showed a zero correlation
27 studies	37.0%	showed a weak positive correlation
25 studies	34.2%	showed a moderate positive correlation
4 studies	5.5%	showed a strong positive correlation

73

PART 8CONCLUSIONS

As Howitt (1971) points out, the problem of television and violence should present few research difficulties. Simply seat some people in front of a television set and see whether or not they become violent. But;

1. which people do we use
2. which programmes do we show them
3. how do we measure the effects and for how long after the programme

The complexity of the effects of filmed violence and the methodological difficulties of isolating them precludes simple answers to these questions and exposes every research study reviewed in this paper to cogent and fundamental criticisms which weaken the conclusiveness of the findings. The experimental studies demonstrate causality at the expense of lack of generality. The survey studies are confounded by "third" variable effects. All this without considering the competence of the design and implementation of the research.

Given a causal relationship between filmed violence and aggressive behaviour the research gives little indication of who is most likely to be affected save frequent reference to the tautological "those disposed to behave aggressively." Since such people are usually identified as aggressive after the fact, this contributes very little to the identification of those for whom viewing filmed violence is likely to be one of the causes of aggressive behaviour.

Notwithstanding these limitations the research presented in this paper sustains a number of important findings.

Experimental studies of imitation of aggressiveness and arousal to aggression with children and young people show clearly a causal relationship between viewing filmed aggres-

siveness and behaving aggressively in laboratory settings.

Survey studies of television viewing patterns of children and young people and their aggressive behaviour show modest positive correlations. Two such studies provide evidence supportive of a probable causal relationship between viewing violent television programmes and aggressive behaviour.

The evidence of the survey studies is consonant with the findings of the experimental studies and indicates that the effects of viewing filmed violence are more than short-term.

Although when taken together, the evidence of experimental and survey studies is supportive of the conclusion that there is a causal relationship between viewing filmed violence and aggressive behaviour, the extent to which viewing filmed violence is a significant contributing factor in aggressive behaviour remains problematic.

Acts of violence can be seen as the unique confluence of a large number of personal, social and situational variables, one of which may be having viewed televised violence. The contribution of such viewing to this confluence remains an imponderable. The evidence suggests that it cannot be more than a small but significant one.

PART 9IMPLICATIONS

If there is a causal relationship between viewing televised violence and behaving aggressively, and the research reviewed in this paper suggests that there is, what is to be done about it and by whom?

There are at least three groups which have the opportunity to do something about it, viz.,

- (a) the legislators
- (b) the television programming professionals
- (c) the consumer of television programmes

The television channels in New Zealand are part of the Broadcasting Corporation on New Zealand and therefore are subject to the provisions of the Broadcasting Act 1976. The Act requires (s20) the Broadcasting Corporation to have regard "...to the general policy of the Government in relation to Broadcasting", and to "...comply with any directions given by the Minister to the Broadcasting Corporation..." save in respect of a particular programme or a particular complaint.

In theory anyway, a Government with a policy of removing all violence from television programmes could direct the Broadcasting Corporation to follow such a policy.

Section 24 of the Act gives the Broadcasting Corporation a responsibility for programme standards which will be generally acceptable in the community, and in particular for having a regard to;

providing "a range of programmes which will cater in a balanced way for the varied interests of different sections of the community", ensuring "that a New Zealand identity is developed and maintained in programmes", observing "standards of good taste and decency", maintaining "law and order".

Section 61 of the Act provides for a Broadcasting Tribunal, one of the functions of which is "...to receive and determine complaints from persons who are dissatisfied with the outcome of complaints made..." directly to the Broadcasting Corporation.

The act thus makes provision for the three groups identified, viz., the politician, the professional broadcaster and the consumer, to influence television programming in the direction of a reduction of televised violence if they so desire.

But do they? If they do, the results of their efforts, presumably successful, and the amount of violence shown on television would seem to indicate a large measure of disagreement between them and the results of this review.

If they don't, why don't they? For the politician one answer is simple. It is the measure of the problem. To weigh the harmful effects of viewing televised violence against the independence of the media and the least amount of censorship consistent with the public good, is a matter of political judgment to be exercised by the electorates elected representatives and not social scientists.

One suspects that one constraint upon the professional television programmer is finance. Programmes which reflect New Zealand cultural and regional diversity, which reflect the quality of life to which most New Zealanders aspire and which are sensitive to the needs of the public are expensive. Perhaps we get the television we can afford.

It is sometimes argued that the consumer, and in particular the parents of children who watch televised violence, is best placed to counteract any harmful effects and viewing televised violence. But do parents know what is best in relation to their children and television, and if they do not who is going to tell them? Even then parents cannot control all the opportunities for their own children's television viewing let alone the effects of television on other people's children and through them on their own.

Clearly none of the three groups mentioned can work in isolation from the other two and the most appropriate forum for an exchange of views likely to produce action is public debate. The initiative for promoting this debate would seem to me to be clearly with the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand.

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