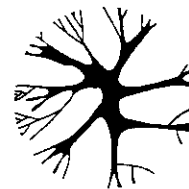


COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS



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Violence in the Media

Do film and television portrayals of violence cause aggressive behaviour in children, juvenile delinquency, increased crime? For more than fifty years this has been one of the most heavily studied — and heavily funded! — topics of communication research. In the United States and, to some extent, in Britain, no other question of media content has been such an important political issue. The public debate about media violence has offered to media researchers one of their most important opportunities to be directly involved in media policy discussions.

Yet, the continuing analysis of programme content by communication researchers such as George Gerbner shows that the levels of gratuitous violence in television are as high as ever. There has been no substantial change in the pattern of TV programming. The media industry in the US continues to claim that there is no conclusive evidence of serious social harm. Why, one must ask, is media violence such a central issue in the US, but much less so in France, Latin America or in other parts of the world?

This number of *Communication Research Trends* summarizes accumulated evidence regarding the effects of media violence and current ideas of why some children and adults are more affected than others. Most important is the view that researchers, reformers and politicians have been asking the wrong questions about media violence and, consequently, have not been able to understand correctly the significance of media violence in our culture or establish a coherent public media policy.

REVIEW ARTICLE

The Failures of the “Media Effects” Research Tradition

William D. Rowland, Jr. *The Politics of TV Violence: Policy Uses of Communication Research*. Beverly Hills and London: Sage Publications, 1983.

Rowland reviews more than fifty years of futile efforts by reformers, politicians and academicians to force the American media industry to reduce violence. In Rowland's view, the root of the failure was the attempt to define the problem of violence in terms of media effects when it is a question of cultural values pervading society. This definition of the problem was very much influenced by the behaviouristic ‘stimulus-effects’ model of broadcasting of American communication researchers. Effects research — originally developed for advertising, propaganda and audience analysis — fostered the belief that public fears of violence could be resolved simply by legislating programme content. The focus on media effects served as a mechanism to avoid facing deeper ambiguities about violence in American culture and the dilemmas of public service in commercial broadcasting.

Rowland traces American preoccupation with media violence to the social upheavals that accompanied the growth of giant industrial cities and the fear that the core American institutions of family and community were threatened. In their anxiety, parents and educators fixed on the mass media, which passes over their heads to impressionable children, as one of the main uncontrolled factors corrupting public morals.

With the arrival of motion pictures in the 1920s as the first of the mass popular media, there began a ritual of invoking the magical powers of experimental, quantitative science that was to be repeated in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Parents, educators and clergymen appeal to their congressmen and to government as the only institution big enough to control the media industry. When the politicians confront the media industry, executives and their in-house research departments dismiss public fears as without conclusive factual evidence. In the rhetorical stalemate, reformers, politicians and the industry turn to the behavioural scientists to be the arbiters and judges with independent, value-free, objective data.

“Science” Can Solve All Human Problems

Rowland argues that by the 1920s, when Americans first began to grapple with the questions of mass media in society, they already had a pragmatic conception of science that drove them toward an experimental, quantitative approach to media studies. The founders of American scientific policy — men such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson — stressed that science should bring forth technical inventions to solve particular problems of private industrial enterprise and public engineering. They rejected as useless

speculation the European tradition of reflection on the human and social meaning of technology. Universities in America, especially the land-grant college system, trained scientists to be technicians, and empirical research had little contact with the world of debate about cultural goals, philosophy and humanities. American scientists seldom questioned whether their service of the industrial corporations growing in the 19th century was for the public good.

This pragmatic spirit which developed in the physical and engineering sciences extended into the developing social sciences and eventually into communication research. If the physical sciences have proved their importance for economic progress by discovering the deterministic, universal, predictable 'laws of nature' in order to control them for engineering purposes, then the human and social sciences should discover the laws of human behaviour for purposes of social engineering. The social sciences also adopted the mathematical, quantitative emphasis of physical science. The American democratic avoidance of invidious distinctions of social class, religion and occupational background further reinforced the tendency toward the neutral, value-free language of numbers. Thus, unless a scientific argument could be backed by quantitative, objective measurement, it was still a speculative subjective opinion and not a verified fact that could serve as the basis for public policy action.

The Pragmatic Origins of Communication Science

From the 1920s onward the new behavioural sciences rapidly developed social-psychological models to explain the roots and social conditioning of human motivation. This served well the purposes of industrial bureaucracies which wanted to improve worker productivity and persuasive marketing. In the 1930s the broadcasting industry used behavioural models to measure audience levels and make programming more attractive — all in order to draw in more advertising revenue. The founders of communication science in America, such as Paul Lazarsfeld and public opinion expert Hadley Cantril, supported their applied research institutes on university campuses by contracts with the media industry. They attempted to prove the value of media research in terms of its practical benefits in political opinion polls, for communicating new health and agricultural practices and for more effective government propaganda. Nearly all of the first generation of communication scholars in the U.S. — Lasswell, Klapper, Schramm — got their start in these applied research bureaus. Most of the basic concepts of communications, such as the source-channel-receiver-effects model of mass media, were framed in terms of the research needs of the American broadcasting industry.

American media researchers developed refined methods for telling broadcasters, politicians, prime-time preachers and educators how to devise messages to get effects and for measuring quantitatively the number of people affected as well as the intensity of that effect. But, as Rowland points out, they did not develop tools of analysis to evaluate critically whether a particular message is relevant, harmful or beneficial for the cultural development of a nation. For example, American culture is saturated with violence in its sports, corporate competition and national myths centred on war and the conquest of the frontier. In decisions about media programming, how does one review what cultural options are defined as violence and present these options for debate within the framework of a tradition of human values and moral guidelines? Facile statistical conceptualisation and mechanistic techniques of social engineering became an ethic in themselves closing off discussion of underlying conflicts in values and social institutions. Ironically, the pragmatic, value-free pretensions of media researchers made their concepts and methods so inextricably tied to the service of a particular industrial-political order that they were unable to critically examine that order.

Media Reformers Compound the Confusion

Rowland notes that American social scientists generally aligned themselves with the liberal tradition of political reform, but this only entangled researchers in the contradictory ideals of reform movements.

On the one hand reformers held to the populist ideal of restoring a kind of local, 'town-meeting' type of democracy and a sense of individual responsibility in a land of free enterprise. On the other hand, they tried to grapple with the new complexities of an urban society with more centralised social planning through government legislation. Reform movements generally believed that social progress would be achieved by making more information available for enterprising individual self-improvement, and that the mass media ought to be harnessed for these educational and cultural goals. On the other hand these movements passionately defended independent artistic creativity and the constitutional freedom of speech which, in America, is expressed in terms of an untrammelled free enterprise system of media.

One of the main achievements of the American reform movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was legislation establishing government regulatory agencies to protect consumers and the public interest against the irresponsibility and monopoly power of private industry. In fact, these regulatory agencies developed as protectors of the interests of the respective industries. The Federal Communication Commission (FCC), organised in the 1920s and 1930s, was largely concerned with the technical problems of station licensing and never assumed responsibility for fostering the educational and cultural goals of broadcasting which were so important for the reformers.

In spite of the ambiguous role of government regulatory and planning agencies, the Federal government increasingly contracted the services of social science researchers to provide ideas for social legislation that supposedly regulatory agencies were to enforce. The US Congress invited reformers and academicians to the political, legislative forum to solve somehow the dilemma of arriving at coherent social planning without disturbing the mechanisms of a free enterprise political-economic system. Few, at least of all the researchers anxious for government funding, were willing to admit the contradictions and impasses that might lie ahead.

The Quest to Prove Media Effects Begins

In 1928 the National Committee for the Study of Social Values in Motion Pictures secured \$200,000 from the Payne Fund to support research by eighteen well known social scientists. In the 1933 report, the chairman, W. W. Charters, confidently affirmed that "no one in this country up to the present has known in any general and impersonal manner just what effect motion pictures have on children". Rowland observes that the study reported massive evidence of effects, but, like every other subsequent round of effects research, was uncertain how to separate out the precise effect of media from the complex influences of family, school, church and teen-age peer groups. Significantly, the study rejected analysis of the financial and economic structure of the film industry as inappropriate for "our group of investigators (who) were psychologists, sociologists and educators". The study dealt with narrow effects on sexual mores and leisure, but offered little interpretation of how these effects were influenced by the profound cultural changes occurring in the late 1920s.

It was also significant that the Payne Report was brought to the political forum of the 1934 congressional hearings to consider legislation that would have created a Federal Motion Picture Commission to inspect, classify and licence films. Congress backed away from a proposal of such obviously questionable constitutionality. In the end this research had little clear-cut impact on public or film industry policy.

The 1950s: Anxiety Over Juvenile Delinquency

The decade-long Senate hearings on the role of media in juvenile delinquency under Senators Hendrickson and Kefauver insisted on getting from behavioural scientists conclusive evidence of long-term harmful effects of media. But psychologists and representatives of the new field of communications could only give conflicting theories of media and delinquency — catharsis, arousal, social learning — and they dismayed politicians by arguing only high statistical correlation, not the proof of direct causality needed for legislation. The media industry quickly exploited the uncertainty of research results and pushed for a policy of 'cautious self-regulation'. Researcher Paul Lazarfeld admitted that 'in this whole matter of the mass media, there are questions of convictions and taste which can never be settled by research'. Nevertheless he argued with the logic characteristic of social engineering that if research on the effects of television were to receive the same priority in funding and planning as the physical sciences had received in the development of the atomic bomb, then there would eventually be conclusive evidence. This phase of the hearings ended with only a scolding of the industry, but did recommend that the National Science Foundation fund more research on television effects.

1960s: TV Becomes Action-Adventure

The US networks, in a fierce race for ratings and advertising revenues, introduced more and more attention-gripping programmes of quick action and simple solutions — crime, international intrigue, Westerns — all with the stock feature of the final violent scene. Meanwhile, Rowland notes, news and public affairs were a tiny percentage of programming, and there was no federal policy for support of educational or public TV. In the wake of the 1960s Quiz Show frauds, the subcommittee, now under Senator Dodd, observed that commercial TV had no internal mechanism for responsible self-regulation and that clearly the only criterion was profits. Yet neither the politicians nor the researchers presented or called for an analysis of the relationship between the medium's economic foundations and its programme content.

Researchers were now advancing ever more complex, multi-variable explanations of the effects of violence. For the politicians, Rowland concludes, the research results proved just sophisticated enough to lend credibility to the political claims of serious scrutiny, but sufficiently inconclusive to avoid any draconian legislation. Psychologist Albert Bandura, however, exemplified the confidence of Schramm and other researchers at the hearings when he said 'I would expect that \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year over a period of five years would answer most of the important questions we have about the influence of television on the behaviour of young children ... the problems are subject to solution. It is just a matter of having the funds for experimentation'.

1970s: Race Riots, Campus Protest and Counterculture

Following the assassination of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King and the fear of a general breakdown of 'law and order', President Johnson established in 1968 the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. During the 1960s and 1970s the consumer movement set off by Ralph Nader and others questioned the public service interests of industry. Media reform groups such as Action for Children's Television (ACT) argued that the media industry was exploiting children with its advertising. In 1969 Sen John Pastore, chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Communications, commissioned the Surgeon General to carry out an exhaustive study of media violence similar to the research which led up to legislation against smoking.

In the formation of the Scientific Advisory Committee, which was to review research and make recommendations to the Surgeon General, the media industry successfully vetoed several candidates, and there were widespread accusations that the Advisory Committee

was biased in favour of the industry. However, Rowland suggests that this was of minor importance, because virtually all of the candidates, including those rejected, held a behaviourist, 'effects' philosophy of science. There were only one or two members who had any roots in the qualitative social sciences or in the historical, critical or cultural studies aspects of communication and none came from the humanities.

The 1972 Surgeon General's report on the impact of television violence and subsequent Senate hearings were a landmark in US violence research, but Sen. Pastore's efforts to persuade the industry by amassing 'conclusive' evidence of effects had no significant influence on industry practices. Proposals of Alberta Siegal and FCC commissioner Nicolas Johnson for major restructuring of US broadcasting institutions were ignored or ridiculed. In Rowland's view, the hearings demonstrated that the violence debate has been a ritual combat over superficial matters such as quantitative research methodologies. This error has permitted avoidance of fundamental issues such as ownership, control and purposes of broadcasting.

One of the major recommendations of the Surgeon General's report was for an ongoing index of violence levels in TV programming. The most important of these indices, that developed by George Gerbner, mechanically recorded all apparent aggressive actions — regardless of the meaning of the context — in order to be impeccably quantitative and free of subjective interpretation by those recording incidences of violence. The index was based on the scientists' social-psychological model of violence and did not take into consideration audience interpretations or the broader cultural meaning of violence. In following this index, the critics of the media industry found themselves in the position of seeming to condemn light comedy because of the slapstick violence and dramatization of fairy tales and other classical children's stories. Here the quantitative, positivistic tradition found itself in a position of appearing ridiculous and vulnerable to industry apologists and common sense appraisals.

The Defeat of the Media Reform Movement

During the 1970s, pressure for direct government regulatory action was pushed by a powerful coalition that included ACT, The National Association for Better Broadcasts, the National Congress of Parent-Teacher Associations, The National Coalition on Television Violence and the prestigious American Medical Association. At the same time the House Budget Committee began to threaten the FCC with funding cuts if it did not take action against the industry. In response, the FCC worked out with industry executives a 'family hour' of programming free of objectional violence and pornographic content. Many media researchers regarded this proposal as the successful application of their model of affecting social learning by controlling broadcast content.

However, the 'family hour' plan brought a firestorm of reaction, not directly from the industry but from creative writers and producers who should have been the best allies of the reformers. In the early 1970s a new generation of independent Hollywood producers, such as Norman Lear, had wrested control of programme production from the networks and were receiving public acclaim for improving the quality of American TV.¹ The creative community shared the media reform objections to gratuitous violence, but they saw the 'family hour' as a return to a flat, mindless form of moralistic TV fare. This group successfully brought suit against the FCC 'family hour' as a new form of censorship violating the constitutional 'free speech' amendment.

At the same time, another coalition of reform from the rural, populist, religious right — a group often hostile to the liberal reformers — argued that the problem was not violence but pornography and the threat to traditional family morality. In the face of disagreements between the creative community, reform

groups and the industry, the will to legislate faded. The solution seemed to be the 'new technologies', such as cable and direct satellite broadcast, which would provide a diversity of channels and programming to satisfy all tastes and values. The industry successfully convinced the politicians that diversity of channels could be fostered by profit and investment incentives and by the removal of all regulated forms of non-profit public services.

In the 1980s, more than 50 years of research and reform movements were quickly brushed aside. The old American institution of 'let the free market decide among cultural options' prevailed over efforts to establish a planned public service broadcasting policy.

Media Violence: A Problem for Humanistic Studies

Rowland concludes that reformers, politicians and academicians were mistaken in trying to apply to a question of cultural options a model of scientific policy developed for public engineering, economic productivity and the protection of physical health. They tried to clarify a complex societal question with the effects research approach originally designed to help the media industry solve short-term administrative problems of audience levels and persuasiveness of advertizing. In this they ignored the dissenting arguments of people such as James Q. Wilson who advised, 'In the case of violence and obscenity, it is unlikely that social science can either show harmful effects or prove that there are no harmful effects. It is unlikely that ... these considerations of utility or disutility can be governing. These are moral issues and ultimately all judgements about the acceptability of restrictions on various media will have

to rest on political and philosophical considerations'.

Effects research led the discussion away from a serious analysis of the commercial, economic factors that influence programme content and how programming reproduces the violence embedded in cultural myths and folk-tales of 'law and order', Westerns and competitive sports. The source-effects model does not conceive of media as a communal dialogue for expressing and freely debating options for a national culture, but as a vertical process of sending messages to get desired effects. This model led media reform into the political forum of legislated control of messages and into the dangerous waters of censorship.

Rowland observes that by the late 1970s many communication scholars began to be aware of the limitations of behaviouristic, quantitative effects research. Media studies also began to borrow methods from literary interpretation, cultural anthropology and political economy to analyse, not effects, but how the media construct messages and reproduce cultural myths and symbols. This approach promises to lead reform into the *cultural forum* where the partners of dialogue are not behavioural psychologists, legal experts and engineers but members of the creative community, leaders of popular movements who are forging new cultural symbols, the social critics, philosophers and theologians.

If we turn now from the history of the policy debate to the historical development of research on media violence, we see that, in fact, the focus has steadily moved away from psychological, stimulus-effect explanations in the 1950s and 1960s to an analysis of audience tastes and of the broader cultural sources of violence in media content.

II HOW Does Media Violence Cause Aggression?

Robert Liebert, Joyce N. Sprafkin, Emily S. Davidson. *The Early Window: Effects of Television on Children and Youth*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1982.

John P. Murray. *Television and Youth: 25 Years of Research and Controversy* (with complete bibliography). Boys Town, Nebraska: The Boys Town Center for Youth Development, 1980.

Edward L. Palmer and Aimée Dorr. *Children and the Faces of Television: Teaching, Violence, Selling*. New York: Academic Press, 1980.

Given the American concern with the causes of violence, it is not surprising that more than 80% of the studies on children and violence were in the US, with most of the remainder in Britain, Canada and Australia. Wartella and Reeves note that from the 1930s to the 1950s research on children and media dealt largely with what kind of programming children prefer and how the media affect children's physical and emotional health. But in the 1960s and 1970s research on children and TV centred on providing for politicians and reformers proof that TV violence is a direct and immediate cause of aggression.²

Early Theories Tested in Laboratories

Most of the violence research in the US from 1960-1980 has been strongly influenced by Bandura's 'social learning' theory. In their 1963 book, Bandura and Walters took issue with the prevalent psychoanalytic explanation of children's personality growth in terms of sexually tinged conflict with parents.³ Bandura and Walters proposed that children *learn* their personalities by *imitating* the models presented to them by family, peers and the social environment. Bandura also argued that learning theory could be substantiated by objective, value-neutral laboratory experiments on normal children, while psychoanalytic explanation was subjective interpretation of disturbed personalities.

In his classic laboratory experiment, Bandura showed groups of small children a film of an adult male pummelling and shouting at a plastic bobo doll with variant films in which the aggressor was either rewarded with sweets or scolded. As expected, the children imitated the adult male in their aggressive play with similar bobo dolls, but much less if they saw the film in which the adult male was scolded. Repeated experiments of this type, some of which observed greater aggression in children many months after seeing the film.

convinced researchers that *modeling* is an important effect of TV violence. Significantly, boys often became more aggressive than girls; this suggested for later research that aggression is also culturally associated with the male role.

Feshbach and Singer challenged the social learning theory, arguing that viewing TV violence could be a *catharsis* which actually reduces aggression.⁴ The child who views violence on TV experiences the violence vicariously, identifies with the aggressive actor and discharges imaginatively pent up anger, hostility and frustration. However, subsequent research shows that vicarious participation in aggression does not reduce tension, although children may be so frightened by TV violence that aggressive impulses are inhibited. Actual expression of aggressiveness may reduce anger, hostility and the likelihood of immediate aggression, but if this 'letting off steam' receives a pleasurable reinforcement, there will be increased likelihood of future aggression when the stimuli are presented again.

Psychologists also proposed other alternative explanations of the effect of media violence. The "*instigation theory*", supported by some experimental evidence, maintains that any kind of emotionally arousing TV even if it is not specifically violent, such as a highly erotic scene, produces aggressive responses. The "*desensitisation theory*" proposes that continual viewing of media violence not only teaches children to imitate responses to specific situations but builds attitudes and cultural norms tolerating more 'real life' violence. Experiments have found that when children, who have seen a violent programme, are shown a film reconstructing flights with increasingly violent conflict, they were more likely to wait until the conflict had escalated into physical assault before calling an adult for help. Since media has more vicious violence than that which children normally experience, real-life violence seems bland, and

children think that aggression is simply part of 'the American way of life'.

Simulating 'Real-Life Violence' in Laboratories

The early social learning experiments of Bandura and others had the advantage of rather precise control of the 'cause' and direct observation of the effect in laboratories. They showed a specially designed 'violent film' to a selected, representative group of children and then immediately afterwards compared the play of exposed children to non-exposed children. The cause-effect relationship was fairly certain — at least in those artificial laboratory circumstances. But the debate between reformers and the media industry demanded proof of the effect of ordinary TV fare.

Later experiments tried to keep the laboratory precision, but introduced selected prime time TV programmes or popular films and tried to create at least hypothetical circumstances of real life temptations and instigations to aggression. This new approach brought important modifications and additions to social learning theory.

In a typical series of experiments, Leifer and Roberts argued that people do not simply imitate portrayals of violence but rather in circumstances of anger and frustration select from a hierarchy of possible responses from non-violence to very violent solutions. They showed a mix of Westerns and crime programmes, rated by independent observers as highly violent, to 271 youngsters ranging from kindergarten to twelfth grade. They then asked the viewers to indicate how they would respond if another youngster walked up to them and hit them. Those who had seen the violent programmes were more likely to choose a solution higher up the hierarchy of violence.

Berkowitz and others showed that if TV violence is portrayed as justified self-defense or is glorified as a means of maintaining order in society, viewers are more likely to choose a violent solution when they are in situations of anger or frustration. Other similar research — based on the 'instigation theory' — concluded that viewers are more likely to choose a violent solution when they come to the viewing in an angry mood and see a film that presents violence as the solution to a situation very much like their own.

Other research suggests that the more children *enjoy* and are more attentive to portrayals of violence, the more they are likely to imitate this. Also important, is the degree to which youngsters think that TV portrays life realistically and TV characters are like real life people. Greenberg and Gordon found that children from the lower socio-economic class, both black and white, rated the violent behaviour shown as more acceptable, more lifelike, and more enjoyable to watch than those from more economically advantaged families.

These studies suggest that the more the portrayal of violence is linked to culturally approved heroes and values or is related to the real life frustrations of people, the more TV violence is likely to seem to be a 'normal' solution to life's problems.

Field Surveys of Actual Behaviour

A further step toward understanding the effect of TV violence were surveys in which youth indicated in questionnaires which TV programmes they watched and what kind of aggressive behaviour they were involved with. The laboratory observation of the immediate effect of a violent film was not possible, but by using questions measuring different levels of intensity, researchers could assign an ascending scale of numbers to levels of intensity and then calculate statistical degrees of relationship.

McIntyre and Teevan, for example, distributed questionnaires to a sample of 2,300 junior and senior high school boys and girls — black and white of different socio-economic backgrounds — in Maryland USA.⁵ The respondents' favorite TV programmes were rated on a scale of violence and the questionnaire obtained self-reports of aggressive behaviour on a quantitative scale ranging from fights

at school, petty delinquency, defiance of parents to gang fights and serious criminal offenses. The study found at least some statistical correlation but with so many complex factors included, the researchers concluded that TV can be no more than one among many factors in influencing behavior and attitudes. Nevertheless, their statistical analysis showed that TV viewing remained a factor even when other possible factors were 'removed' by partial correlation techniques.

In a similar study, Robinson and Bachman found that a complex set of factors such as mother's education, race and a general background of higher aggression influenced the learning of violence from TV. They introduced the hypothesis that viewing violence serves as a *reinforcing* or *facilitating* factor for adolescents already inclined toward aggression or more involved with possible situations of aggression.

Dominick and Greenberg varied this model of research by relating viewing to attitudes of approval of violence as an effective solution in conflict situations. They concluded that for average children in average environments violent TV influences the willingness to use violence, but that when the home environment ignores the child's development of aggressive attitudes, this relationship is even more substantial and more critical.

McLeod, Atkins and Chaffee included many of these accumulating hypotheses in an elaborate series of studies that examined self-reports of parental control over television, parental punishment and aggression, and interviews with mothers about the history of the child's aggression. They also obtained self-reports about factors which influence learning from TV, such as identification with stars of violent programmes or picking up ideas on how to get away with things without getting caught. Finally they got reports from peers and teachers about aggression. They found that viewing violence influences aggression over and above all these factors and that aggressive habits are gradually built up by exposure to violent TV. Their studies ruled out the hypothesis that prior aggressiveness leads to a preference for violent TV and thus even more aggressive behaviour. Clearly the major factor is the viewing of violent TV.

Proving that TV Viewing is the 'Cause'

Surveys have the disadvantage that they gather data at one point in time and, even when sophisticated statistical techniques 'remove' the influence of third variables, they can only measure the degree of association of variables. To prove that viewing is the 'cause' one must be sure that the viewing is prior to the aggressive behaviour.

Lefkowitz et al. studied a sample of US third-graders, finding that high viewing of violence was associated with more aggression.⁶ Ten years later, when the participants were nineteen, he again studied the same group and found that high viewing of violent TV in the third grade was associated with higher aggression at nineteen.

In a major British study, Belson traced the interaction of viewing of violent TV and the history of fighting, delinquency, etc., of adolescent boys.⁷ Belson concluded that violent programming tends to break down social inhibitions to aggressive behaviour and makes it culturally more acceptable. Most important, Belson detected the kind of programming that most influences boys toward violence: when violence appears to be sanctioned by a good cause or by apparent legality; when boys easily identify with violent heroes; in programmes such as Westerns where there are systematic killings; and when violence is thrown in just for fun and excitement.

'Field studies' attempt to maintain the precision of the laboratory but in more natural circumstances. For example, in a Belgian study of boys in a summer camp, those in one cottage were shown popular action-adventure TV series and films while boys in another cottage saw more neutral fare. Observations of the boys in their normal interaction and play indicated significantly more aggressive behaviour among those seeing the violent programmes. However, the most dominant, popular and aggressive boys tended to increase their aggressiveness much more.

III What We Now Know About the Effects of Media Violence

Aimée Dorris and Peter Kovacic, 'Some of the People Some of the Time — But Which People? Television Violence and Its Effects' in *Children and the Faces of Television*. New York: Academic Press, 1980.

By the late 1970s the accumulated research evidence suggested that all children — and adults, too — of all ages, all social class backgrounds, and all personalities can become more aggressive by watching large amounts of TV violence. Obviously, if violent means of solving life's problems are portrayed in a culture as acceptable and recommended, then most children will be socialized in terms of these norms and most adults will conform.

However, recent research has been more concerned with *different* impact in *different* stages of age development of children, with *different* family viewing contexts and *different* kinds of violence portrayal.

What Children are Most Affected?

Knowledge is still limited, but the following are the most susceptible to media violence:

1. Children between the ages of eight and twelve, more than younger or older youngsters.
2. More aggressive (dominant, extrovert) children or youth.
3. Boys more than girls are influenced by aggressive role models, especially boys with personalities or in social contexts that incline them toward delinquency.
4. Boys exceed girls in the preference for and actual viewing of violent TV, and members of the working classes tend to watch more action-adventure, violent TV. Thus, working-class boys, because of their greater exposure, are more likely to be found imitating violent TV.

What Kind of Media Portrayals?

Certain aspects of portrayal in the media increase the likelihood of imitative aggressiveness:

1. Reward or lack of punishment of the perpetrator.

2. Depiction of violence as justified or glorified.
3. Cues which relate violence to the real life problems of viewers.
4. Similarity of a perpetrator to a viewer and portrayal of perpetrators as attractive models eliciting identification.
5. Presentations of violence which highlight the clear *intention* to be malevolent and injure another.
6. The greater the approximation of the programme to real life and less clearly fictional or fantastic.
7. Violence which communicates pleasure in the act or is calculated to please the viewer.
8. Violence which goes uncriticised.

The Importance of Social Values

Media violence is more likely to influence aggression when there is *social approval* in the portrayal itself, in the viewing context or when aggression is accepted as part of everyday life. For example, when adults viewing with children make positive or negative remarks about the portrayal, this reinforces TV influence. The Singers have found that when families are conflictive, they not only do not solve problems by better communication but they take refuge in the silent distraction of watching action-adventure TV.⁸ The family is the most influential source of values which stress that either violent or non-violent solutions are important in life.

In general, the media are more likely to be a salient guide for behaviour when crises or problems arise that demand information, especially when people do not have alternative sources of information. Effects are also contingent upon the opportunity for the behaviour in question and on the state of excitation or drive impelling toward any kind of behaviour. But most important is the general state of values about violence that pervade a culture or subculture.

IV Our National Cultures Glorify Violence

George Gerbner and Larry Gross, 'Living With Television: The Violence Profile', *The Journal of Communication*, Vol 26, No. 2 (Spring 1976), pp. 172-199.

George Gerbner and his associates have argued that much of the experimental and survey research misses the pervasive influence of media violence on whole cultures. The problem is not a matter of specific attitudes of aggression or the relatively isolated cases of delinquency, but the portrayal of a competitive power struggle that affects the cultural world view of *all* people in virtually *all* aspects of their lives. It makes no sense to measure the 'before and after' effect of a single set of programmes because people are imbibing a view of violent power relations from the time they are babies watching Saturday morning cartoons. TV is the cultural arm of the capitalist industrial order, and the function of TV is to legitimise and maintain the power and authority of that order. Violence is not a detachable dimension of some action-adventure programme but is the central message of all TV — news, documentary, drama and even religious programming. TV dramatises who are the winners and losers in life and teaches us how we must conform to the rules if we are to survive in a violent, competitive world.

Gerbner's meticulous content analysis of American TV programmes over more than a decade has shown that consistently the victims and losers in TV are the powerless: the elderly, lower-status groups, non-whites and women. The Cultural Indicators research (studying long-term cultural trends) also finds that heavy viewers, regardless of age, sex, education or social class, perceive their environment as more fearful, threatening and dangerous than it is in real life. Heavy viewers also tend to be more acquiescent toward powerful figures, more dependent on authorities, more inclined to justify the use of force, and more conservative and

conventional in their attitudes.

However, Horace Newcomb and others suggest that Gerbner himself has not departed from the 'effects' research tradition. They see his definition of violence in his analysis of content as his own arbitrary conception of violence which does not take into consideration the complex meaning of violence expressed by the characters of TV. Gerbner's theory of TV as a form of powerful social control is, in this view, contradicted by the fact that audiences give very different interpretations to a violent scene. Newcomb argues that research on content must start with an analysis of the meaning of violence in a given culture.⁹

A first step is to recognise that the producers of TV do not simply create images of violence *ex nihilo* but draw them from a long tradition of culture symbols. This research must study the various meanings associated with symbols of violence in different historical contexts and how these symbols have formed part of classical myths of war, law and order, national development, sports and success.

The second step is to examine the particular meaning of symbols of violence in the adaptation of classical folktale plots to TV programme formulas, in the styles of individual producers, and for the characters in TV news and fiction.

Thirdly, we must be open to the possibility that different members of the mass audience will attach different meanings to the same scenes and programmes. The researcher must employ a kind of audience ethnography to analyse how people pick and choose elements from TV programmes and reconstruct them in terms of their own personal world view.

V The Relativity of Cultural Values Regarding Violence

Barrie Gunter. *Dimensions of Television Violence*. London: Gower Publishing Company, Ltd, 1985.

A general aim of research on media violence is to help broadcasters avoid portrayals that are considered socially harmful or offensive to prevalent values and tastes. The difficulty in establishing guidelines for broadcasters is the complexity and variety of public views regarding violence. In virtually all cultures, an action injurious to others is not considered anti-social violence if it is used in justified self-defence. No one would consider the pain inflicted in the dentist's chair to be violence, but many would question the physical violence of boxing, a parent spanking a mischievous child and the horrible violence of war even in defence. The portrayal of conflict and some form of violence is an integral part of the plots of classical folktales and drama with their symbols of good and evil and the clash of heroes and villains. Inevitably the definition of an action as 'violent' depends on its meaning in the narrative context of media and on the culturally influenced perceptions of audiences.

Early American research on media violence was concerned with proving to a reluctant media industry that their programming does have harmful effects. In the preoccupation with effects, researchers tended to use a perfunctory, easily measured definition of violence as any injurious action to another against the will of the victim. By the late 1970s, it was becoming apparent that this functionalist, researcher-defined concept of violence was not only inadequate, but made consensus between broadcasters and the public difficult — or led to accusations of censorship.

In 1979, the research department of the British Independent Broadcasting Authority, the agency regulating and coordinating British commercial broadcasting, wished to establish some form of monitoring of violence content. Following a European media research tradition which is more interested in public uses of media than effects, the IBA wanted to classify content in terms of audience perceptions and responses.

The research carried out by Barrie Gunter used three audience-based criteria for describing the complex cultural, personal and psychological factors in the definition of violence:

1. The degree to which audiences are aware of violence as salient and disturbing.
2. How audiences react to different portrayals of violence in different programme formats (comedy, drama, etc.).
3. How the perceptions vary according to gender, age, social background and personality.

VI From 'Violent' to Constructive Uses of Television

Ellen Wartella, ed. *Children Communicating: Media and Development of Thought, Speech, Understanding*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979.
Jennings Bryant and Daniel R. Anderson, eds. *Children's Understanding of Television: Research on Attention and Comprehension*. New York: Academic Press, 1983.

In the 1970s there was a growing opinion in the US that the best defence against media violence was to develop the instructional and prosocial potential of TV, especially for children. The new Public Broadcasting Service opened up a channel for highly acclaimed children's programming such as 'Mister Roger's Neighbourhood'. Production centres such as the Children's Television Workshop in New York developed the carefully designed instructional-entertainment programmes 'Sesame Street' and 'The Electric Company'. The formative, planning research as well as the evaluative research fostered a new line of media studies analysing how children can learn from television, and how TV contributes to the social development of children.

Developing 'Prosocial Television'

Studies of prosocial TV generally retained social modeling theory

One of the noteworthy results of this study of a representative sample of British viewers is a new understanding of the influence of national cultural values in the judgement of what is violent and what are inappropriate portrayals of violence. These British viewers had different normative expectations regarding British-made TV than they had for imported American crime drama. Perceptions of violence in familiar British settings involving British characters seemed to be strongly influenced by norms of conduct that prevail in British society. Similar types of portrayals of violence in American crime drama settings are sufficiently distanced from the everyday reality of the British viewers for the same rules of judgement not to apply.

Regarding types of programmes, fictional settings that approach contemporary everyday reality were rated more violent than humorous cartoons or futuristic science fiction. But British crime dramas were considered more disturbing than American action-adventure, in part because America is seen as a culturally distant, quasi-fictional world in which crime and violence are supposedly an appropriate part of the setting.

In the evaluation of character roles, if the drama was British, the viewers surprisingly found violence by law-officers much more serious than violence by criminals, even when law enforcers were carrying out normal duties.

When the drama was American, however, they accepted violence on the part of law officers and found violence of criminals more disturbing. This seems to reflect British traditions of law officers not using weapons and avoiding unnecessary violence. Furthermore, when the drama was British, viewers found male-perpetrated violence on a female victim more disturbing than female violence on a male victim, but when it was American crime drama, viewers considered the aggressive female to be more violent.

In general, this research confirms that perception of an aggressive action as violent varies greatly with the type of programme, the setting of the action, and the type of characters as well as individual factors such as age, sex, social class background and social beliefs. But what stands out is the fact that the terms of the public debate on media violence are very much influenced by national cultural differences in broadcasting institutions, approaches to media research and normative expectations of audiences.

and 'effects' research methodology. Early research constructed a seven-dimension definition of socially desirable behaviour — altruism (sharing, helping, etc.), control of aggressive impulses, delay of gratification, ability to express feelings to others, reparation for bad behaviour resisting temptations, and sympathy — and then measured the effects of programmes such as 'Mister Roger's Neighbourhood' in terms of these dimensions. Most of the research showed that children did imitate the positive portrayals, at least in the period immediately following the experiments. However, some of the attempts to develop prosocial programmes aroused public accusations of manipulation of children similar to the claims of censorship in the proposal for an early evening 'family hour'.¹⁰

The Viewer Actively Constructs Meaning

Early research on instructional TV, following social learning theory,

focussed on the transfer of programme content to viewers and assumed that TV viewing, especially by children, was a passive, reactive imitation of content. Research was concerned with devising attention-getting formal features of TV such as zooming, fast pace and humour, believing that comprehension depended on the degree of involuntary attention.

Subsequent research has shown that viewers, including children, are much more active seekers of information to solve problems and answer questions. Viewing TV, like other communication is not just rote imitation but an interactive construction of meaning that depends on intentions, plans, communicative strategies and past experiences of media. Research has focussed on how children

comprehend and interpret TV narrative, how children interpret the intentions and meaning of TV characters, and how adolescents seek information to solve problems of sexual identity and careers.

Recent research has also emphasized the developing cognitive and linguistic capacities of children and youth. Children grow in their ability to grasp more abstract meaning, place events in an integrated hierarchy of more and less important elements of TV, understand the perspectives and intentions of others and comprehend TV in a more differentiated, complex manner. The developmental perspective further supports the view that TV viewing is not a reflex imitation but the selective use of a source of information in order to make sense of situations in which one lives.

PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

A New Approach to Research on Media Violence

The public debate about violence in the media has been dominated by a conception of all-powerful media having a powerful direct effect on attitudes and behaviour. The functionalist, 'effects' tradition of research reinforced the view that by easy manipulation of media content it was possible to solve problems of violence in society. This led once more into a debate on media censorship that is as old as Plato's desire to ban poetry from his utopia because he felt it corrupted emotions. Media researchers and leaders in media policy are now in something of a quandary. Direct emphasis on prosocial content comes close to censorship. Complete deregulation allows freedom, but also licence and debasement of the media. Guidance of content by a careful reading of current 'tastes' seems to avoid some of the deeper social and moral issues.

A thoughtful media reformer, William Fore, Communications Director of the American National Council of Churches, now says, 'Before we can do anything to confront the problem of violence in the media, I suspect that we must first decide what kind of society we really want'.¹¹ Absolutely true, but this, in itself, does not clarify the role of *media* in society.

Can the Media Avoid Violence?

In all of the discussion about media violence, it is often forgotten that forms of violence have been a perennial dimension of human and social existence. Even when it does not erupt in war, riots or criminal aggression, it is lurking beneath the surface in personal and national ambitions, in social injustice and in myriad individual or social frustrations. Much of human history is the attempt to come to grips with this fact of human violence.

Inevitably the 'media', whether in epic folktale, Greek or Shakespearean drama or TV, take up that dark side of human potential which is violence. The clash of good and evil, violence and peace, is enshrined in the narrative structure of story-telling, and this conflict becomes part of our cultural perceptions. The 'media', in this broad sense, become the mirror of humanity and the cultural space in which we can, at some distance, reflect on the mystery of violence. The vital question is the interpretative *meaning* that both creators and audiences place upon portrayals of violence. Classical drama has typically treated violence as tragedy, sometimes as a cyclical, fatalistic purge of the evil in society, at other times more hopefully in terms of the redemptive value of suffering in tragedy. Comedy, too, often comes close to an interpretation of the ridiculous in aggression.

Significantly, the time in our lives for the media, whether this be story-telling around the fire in peasant huts or the public spectacle of theatre and TV, is what we today call leisure. In these moments away from the pragmatic workday world, our imaginations are free to enter into the selectively constructed world presented by the media. We can allow our anxieties about violence or other matters to come to the surface of consciousness, and we can sort out or reorganise our own cultural values.

What kind of media research can help us to understand better the role of this media experience in our collective effort to deal with the human potential for violence and create a less violent cultural history?

A Cultural Studies Approach to Media Violence

Firstly, as Horace Newcomb suggests, we must examine the cultural history of the symbols of violence and their counter-symbols of peace. A model of this kind of research is the analysis by Peter Golding and Sue Middleton of how contemporary images of poverty and welfare in British TV are drawn from four centuries of cultural interpretation of poverty in England.¹² This sort of study not only reveals the contrasting symbolic interpretation of the human problem of violence, but lays bare the social conditions and cultural intentions underlying different glorifications and condemnations of violence. We begin to see how different images of violence in our contemporary culture have been influenced by our great historical myths, the narrative structure of folktale and the conventions of classical drama.

A second step is a comparative study of how different political-economic conditions have produced different forms of media organisation and how these different forms of media organisation in turn influence the selection of different symbolic interpretations of violence from the latent pool of images of violence in our cultural history. We might discover, as Rowland and others suggest, that commercial media systems lead toward a superficial treatment of violence for violence's sake. Or, we might find the question is much broader than that.

A third stage would analyse how current social crises — riots, increase of crime, assassinations, etc. — trigger the media into a search for symbols of violence in our cultural history in order to portray and explain the meaning of current events for an anxious public. Not only newscasts but situation comedy and action-adventure shows, in their attempt to give an old story a new twist, often weave into the plots the attempts of heroes to deal with typical problems of violence in our societies.

A fourth stage analyses how the restraints of media production cause the media to systematically pick up from the cultural background certain images of violence and selectively portray these for contemporary audiences. What is the influence of the constraints on budget, production schedules, the need to use certain dramatic conventions and media languages in order to attract audiences and make sure audiences understand.?

A fifth stage is a kind of audience ethnography which studies how individuals and groups with different cultural backgrounds take from their viewing of TV certain images of violence and integrate these into a subjective interpretation of the world. A second level of audience ethnography, suggested by Rowland, would analyse the interpretative constructs of that elite part of the audience made up of the critics, media researchers, reformers and politicians.

Cultural Studies and Media Policy

The purpose in this approach to violence research may not be to directly change media content for purposes of social control, but to help policy-makers—the media industry, the creative community, the reformers, the researchers, the politicians and the audiences — understand what kind of culture they are creating. This kind of research clarifies not just the psychological and behavioural impact, but the cultural values which are at stake. The discussion is raised from the level of social engineering, in which cultural values are kept at a distance, to the level of moral questions and the public philosophy guiding policy. The arena of debate is not primarily political maneuvering for the legislation of social engineering, but the cultural arena in which the major partners of dialogue are the creative community and all those who have some responsibility for freely deciding on future cultural development. In pluralistic

societies such a discussion is not easy, but at least the media are conceived of, not as a form of social control to obtain effects, but as an open forum, a public space for free debate.

This model of research is not naive about the real structure of power in society, but it makes clear the historical roots of the intentions of all major parties in the debate and the political, economic and cultural factors influencing these actions. The charade of public policy described by Rowland, in which intentions and power are covered over by a myth of the almost magical power of positivistic science, is less likely. In the end, the purpose of this research is to bring before the public the question raised by William Fore: What kind of society do we want and what kind of media organisation contributes to that kind of society?

Robert A. White and John Sheehan
Issue Editors

- 1 Cowan, Geoffrey. *See No Evil: The Backstage Battle Over Sex and Violence in Television*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978
- 2 Ellen Wartella and Byron Reeves, 'Trends in Research on Children's Television', in *The Future of Children Television*. Boys Town, Nebraska: The Boys Town Center for Youth Development, 1984, pp. 23-36.
- 3 Bandura, A. & R.H. Walters. *Social Learning and Personality Development*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963
- 4 Seymour Feshbach and Robert D. Singer. *Television and Aggression*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1977.
- 5 McIntyre, J.J. & J.J. Teevan Jr. 'Television Violence and Deviant Behavior'. in G.A. Comstock and E.A. Rubinstein (Eds.). *Television and Social Behavior, Vol III: Television and Adolescent Aggressiveness*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1972, 383-435.
- 6 Monroe M. Lefkowitz, Leonard D. Eron, Leopold O. Walder and L. Rowell Husemann. *Growing Up To Be Violent*. New York: Pergamon Press, Inc., 1977.
- 7 William A. Belson. *Television Violence and the Adolescent Boy*. Westmead, Farnborough, Hampshire, England: Saxon House, 1978.
- 8 Jerome L. Singer and Dorothy G. Singer. *Television, Imagination and Aggression*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1981.
- 9 Horace Newcomb. 'Assessing the Violence Profile Studies of Gerbner and Gross: A Humanistic Critique and Suggestion', *Communication Research*, Vol 5, No 3, July 1978, pp. 264-282.
- 10 Robert M. Liebert, Joyce N. Sprafkin and Emily S. Davidson. *The Early Window*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1982, pp. 180-211.
- 11 William Fore, 'Media Violence: Hazardous to Our Health'. *The Christian Century*, September 25, 1985, Vol 102, No 28, pp. 834-836.
- 12 Peter Golding and Sue Middleton. *Images of Welfare: Press and Public Attitudes*. Oxford: Martin Robertson & Company, Ltd., 1982. Cf. review in *Communication Research Trends*, Vol 4 (1983) No 1, p.4.

APPENDIX

Should terrorists be put on TV?

Since the introduction of mass audience newspapers in the 1800s, little known groups have used mass media to get public attention. Today, television cameras and hostage-takers each feed off the other. Reporters have become involved in hostage negotiations, and terrorist 'press conferences' are now standard procedure.

Alex P. Schmid and Janny de Graaf. *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and Western News Media*. London: Sage, 1982

Schmid and de Graaf begin with the thesis that an act of terrorism is in itself an act of communication. The primary message of terrorism is that there is a serious flaw in our systems of mass communication. As they examine specific cases and how terrorists and media 'use' each other, they develop evidence calling for a serious reassessment of the whole structure and direction of mass media systems today.

The relationship between the terrorist and the media is not one-dimensional. Beside simply reporting the news, one of the media's several effects is to provide identification between the viewers and the terrorist group. Additionally, each incident illustrates a basic form of interchange relationship. Both sides gain and give value to the other, and the strength of that relationship influences and modifies the stated goals and objectives of each party.

Censorship and Media Access

In a number of nations, the press have tried to develop their own guidelines, sometimes in conjunction with government agencies, specifically to forestall the threat of the imposition of similar codes or restrictions. In the case of the Schleyer kidnapping in Germany

in 1972, at the request of the government, voluntary restraint was used in reporting story details. Editors discussed these with the government prior to publication. 'News management' was the term used, more than 'censorship'. Thus, of the 139 communications sent by the kidnappers, very few ever reached the public. According to opinion polls, about 75% of the people agreed with this news embargo.

In Great Britain, there are general censorship procedures to permit government restriction of broadcasting, and special internal procedures for both the BBC and ITV (Independent Television) with regard to programmes about Northern Ireland. In the BBC, for example, any news decision out of the ordinary is to be 'referred up'. In Britain the term most frequently used by those involved is 'being at war', and the dominant feeling is that loyalty to the government is paramount. Stories tend to emphasize bombings, protests and violent events, so that many reports appear without ever being placed in context. For many viewers, the Irish troubles are largely irrational and impossible to understand.

Public opinion, however, is still strongly in favour of unrestricted broadcasting. In a survey published August 9, 1985 in *The Times*, 56% of those surveyed said that there should be no government restrictions on broadcasting, 22% thought the government should be able to stop particular programmes, and 15% felt it should be allowed some influence on programming. Only 6% agreed that government should decide what should be broadcast.

Most of the US networks and news agencies have developed 'in-house' policy guidelines for dealing with terrorists and terrorist

situations. Many guidelines are quite comprehensive, including cautions about not dealing directly with terrorists, lines of authority, and priorities.

Schmid and de Graaf conclude that we need a public body, neither government- nor media-controlled, which would formulate and enforce guidelines for media coverage. They believe that, since we are accustomed to elect parliament to make laws to govern us, if news about terrorism is to be censored, it should be done by such a publicly elected body.

Philip Schlesinger, Graham Murdock and Phillip Elliott. *Television Terrorism: Political Violence in Popular Culture*. London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1983.

Television Terrorism is a detailed examination of terrorist activity as broadcast on television, including both fictional accounts and TV dramas. The authors reject the view that publicity supports terrorists and should be censored. But they also reject the simplistic radical views of television as a 'conduit medium' for official views. Instead, the authors maintain that principles of 'independence, authorship and universal availability' should be primary areas of concern in any statement of broadcasting principles or guidelines.

They examine terrorism in terms of four categories into which programmes are rated: *open, closed, tight, and loose*. *Open* programmes provide spaces 'in which the core assumptions of the official perspective can be interrogated and contested and in which the other perspectives can be presented and examined'. *Closed* programmes, on the other hand, 'operate mainly or wholly within the terms of reference set by the official perspective'. These are concepts that vary

depending on whether the programme deals with one or more viewpoints.

The other distinctions look at the internal organization of the programmes and how those elements are related. *Tight* format indicates a design in which the images, arguments, and evidence offered by the programme are organized to converge upon a single preferred interpretation and where other possible conclusions are marginalized or closed-off'. A *loose* format, conversely, 'is one where the ambiguities, contradictions, and loose ends generated within the programme are never fully resolved'.

A Remedy in Better Public Broadcasting

The authors see in public service broadcasting the best possible way we have to defend and extend the present range of information and debate on terrorism and political violence. And they urge active support for such broadcasting to guarantee its autonomous ability to deal with the political, social, and economic issues which terrorism often takes as its starting point.

Further Reading on Media and Terrorism

Alexander, Yonah and Seymour Maxwell Fringer, eds. *Terrorism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. New York: John Jay Press, 1977. Discusses media and terrorism from an international, comparative perspective in a general treatment of the history, politics and legality of terrorism.

Clutterbuck, Richard. *The Media and Political Violence*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1981. Examines the dilemma of media in reporting social protest fairly without becoming an instrument of terrorists seeking publicity.

Midgley, Sarah and Virginia Rice, eds. *Terrorism and the Media in the 1980's*. Washington, DC: The Media Institute, 1984. Proceedings of a 1983 conference which included news directors, politicians and former hostages.

Current Research in Television and Violence

BELGIUM

Muriel Dunand, Leonard Berkowitz, Jacque-Phillipe Leyens (*British Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 21, 1984) Report of a study with university students that suggests that seeing violent films in the company of active companions reduced restraints against aggression.

CANADA

Dr. J. Philippe Rushton (Dept. of Psychology, University of Western Ontario, London, Canada N6A 5C2) Interested in how children and adults acquire norms of appropriate behavior from viewing how 'models' behave on television. Particular interest in whether prosocial behaviour can be learned as well as violent behavior.

DENMARK

Jorgen Bruun Jensen has published on the results of effects research in both film and television, most recently arguing that violent films do have bad effects.

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Aktion Jugendschutz (Landesarbeitsstelle Baden-Wurtemberg, Stafflenbergstrasse 44, 7000 Stuttgart 1) publishes and investigates on questions concerning dangers of the media for young people.

Bernd Schorb (Institut Jugend Fernsehen, Waltherstrasse 23, 8 Munich 15). Co-author of *Gewalt im Fernsehen - gewalt des Fernsehens?* (Sindfingern: Expoert Verlag, 1984). The Institute is following up a pilot study as part of a 2-year project on youth, media and violence, working to develop techniques to train young people to handle media creatively and responsibly.

FINLAND

Kirsti Lagerspetz (Dept of Psychology, University of Turku, 20500 Turku 50) will report in a book edited by L. Rowell Huesmann and Leonard Eron (Erlbaum Associates, New York) and published in 1986 research on the circumstances that tend to decrease or strengthen the relationship between viewing violent TV and aggressive behaviour.

ISRAEL

Akiba A. Cohen (The Communications Institute, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem. 91905) is studying the perception of social conflicts by adolescents in social reality and television news.

JAPAN

Prof. Sumiko Iwao (Keio University, Institute for Communications Research, 15-45, Mita 2-chrome, Minato-ku, Tokyo 108) has been conducting a series of comprehensive content analysis of television dramas every third year since 1977 with a particular emphasis on violence. Is also preparing research to test how audiences react to and process different types of violence, some of which may be beneficial in terms of developing inhibiting factors in young people.

GREAT BRITAIN

Barry Gunter (IBA, 70 Brompton Road, London SW3 1EY) and **Adrian Furnham** (University College, London) are continuing research on how sex and personality influence the perception of TV violence, especially differential perception of male and female victimization. Gunter is also cooperating with Jack Wakshag (listed below) in the US in research on TV viewing and perception of crime.

LEBANON

Richard Day and Maryam Ghandour (University of Beirut) A report in *The Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* (38:718) reports on responses of Lebanese arab boys and girls to violent films, violent cartoons, and non-violent films. Results were contrasted with similar experiments of US children.

THE NETHERLANDS

Tom H.A. van der Voort (University of Leiden, Dept. of Education, Postbus 9507, Leiden) has recently completed a study on the development of children's perceptions of violent television programmes. An English translation is forthcoming (*TV Violence: A Child's Eye View*. Elsevier's Science Publishers, Amsterdam, in press). Current research is devoted to development and empirical evaluation of a nine lesson curriculum teaching elementary school children to perceive violent TV programmes more critically. A final report has been issued, and a book will follow.

NORWAY

Olav Vaagland (Institute of Sociology, University of Bergen, Christiesgate 19, N-5000 Bergen) has worked on attempting to develop analytical tools in the field of violence in television.

POLAND

Janina Koblewska (Instytut Programów Szkolnych, Ministerstwa Oświaty I

Wychowania, Warsaw, Al. I Armii Wojska, 25) is one of the leading researchers on the impact of film and television on adolescents in Poland.

SWEDEN

Cecilia von Feilitzen (Audience and Programme Research Dept, Swedish Broadcasting Corp, S-105 10 Stockholm) is investigating children's fear reactions and television viewing.

Ebbe Lindell (Lrhgskolan i Malm, Institutionen fr pedagogik, Box 23501, S-20045, Malm) has published on the effects of violence in the media, and more recently, the relationship between fictional violence and real violence.

Elias Hedinsson and Sven Windahl (Dept. of Sociology, University of Lund, Box 5132, S-220 05, Lund) has written *Media Analysis: A Swedish Illustration*, which both analyzes the work of Gerbner and discusses Swedish data exploring cultivation effects among children and adolescents.

Sveriges Radiosrlfag (Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, S-105 10 Stockholm) has a 1979 book *Open Your Eyes to Children's Viewing. On Children, TV and Radio, Now and in the Future* (1979), especially the chapter "How Children Are influenced by Television".

Sven Windahl and Susan Strohm (University of Lund, Box 5132, S-220 05, Lund) have co-authored *Enculturation and Cultivation Analysis - Straddling the Fence?* posing some questions about the nature of enculturation theory and mainstreaming, and suggesting approaches to remove some of those problems.

UNITED STATES

Lee Bollinger (University of Michigan Law School, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48109) is working on a book on mass media law, including proposals to regulate television violence.

Joanne Cantor (Dept. of Communication Arts, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, 53706) is conducting research on children's emotional reactions to mass media, particularly fear reactions. The emphasis is on developmental differences in the type of stimuli that frighten children and in the intervention and coping strategies that are effective in reducing fear. Violent images and ideas are an important component of messages which induce fear in children.

Thomas Dixon Cook (Dept. of Psychology, Northwestern University, 2040 Sheridan Road, Evanston, Ill 60201) is currently interested in the identification of leverage points which research on television violence might contribute to changes in programming, and the methodology of longitudinal field studies on the topic.

Seymour Feshbach (Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, Cal. 90024) has recently completed (in collaboration with **June Price**) a 2-year longitudinal and cross-sectional study of social, cognitive and psycho-pathological correlates of television viewing behavior in ten- to twelve-year-old children. Currently they are carrying out causal model analyses of the relationship between exposure to television violence and aggressive behavior, viewing profiles of aggressive children and personality profiles of children who watch violent programs.

Russell Green (Dept. of Psychology, University of Missouri-Columbia, Columbia, Mo. 65211) doing research concerning individual differences in responses to stimuli for aggressive behavior and arousal. Recently completed two exploratory studies which show that individual differences in manifest aggressiveness accurately predict judgements of violence and aggressive behavior in response to media presentations judged to be moderately violent. Investigating the possibility that the underlying process is differential arousability in the autonomic nervous system.

George Gerbner (Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104) has recently presented, in association with **Larry Gross, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorielli**, a statement to the Study Committee of the Communications Commission of the National Council of Churches "Gratuitous Violence and Exploitive Sex: What Are the Lessons?", which included Violence Profile No. 13.

L. Rowell Huesmann (Dept. of Psychology, University of Illinois at Chicago, Box 4348, Chicago, Illinois, 60680). The results of a set of 5 three-year longitudinal studies are about to be published in *Television and Aggression: A Cross-National Perspective* (Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers, Edited by Professor Huesmann and Professor Leonard Eron), investigating the effects of media violence on the development of aggression in children and its relation to adult criminality. Professor Huesmann is currently analyzing data from a 22-year study that followed children from 8 to age 30.

Ronald C. Kessler (Dept. of Sociology, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48106) is studying the influence of news broadcasts about celebrity suicides on the general population suicide rate. The first published report of this work, written with **Horst Stipp**, is "The Impact of Fictional Television Suicide Stories on U.S. Fatalities: A Replication". *American Journal of Sociology* 90(1) (1984): 151-167.

Samuel Robert Lichter and Linda Lichter (Center for Media and Public Affairs, 2120 L Street NW, Suite 255, Washington, DC 20037) are currently involved in a content analysis of prime time television entertainment programmes broadcast by the three major networks over the past thirty years. Recently published *Prime Time Crime: Criminals and Law Enforcers in TV Entertainment*, The Media Institute, 1983.

Wendy Lucas and Dorothy Singer (in *Television and Families*, Winter 1985) Reports a study of the use of conflict as part of TV drama, and difference between TV executives and health care providers as to what constitutes aggressive violence as opposed to dramatic conflict.

Neil Malamuth (Communication Studies Dept, UCLA, Los Angeles, Cal) At a recent conference ("Children and the Media", May 6 - 8, Los Angeles), reported on study between relationship of TV violence and actual violence against women. No conclusive evidence for direct imitation, but much evidence to support an indirect-effects model, that TV violence influences attitudes about violence against women. Educational intervention can diminish the effects of violent television viewing.

Media Action Research Center (475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1370, New York, NY 10115) is both involved in research and in developing resource materials to help people deal with a violent entertainment culture. These include Television Awareness Training, Growing with Television, and working with the National Council of Church Communication Commission in holding hearings on sex and violence in the entertainment media.

National Coalition on Television Violence (PO Box 2157, Champaign, Ill. 61820) publishes a newsletter which includes updates on current research in violence research and associated fields. Also has focused bibliographies on selected areas of violence research, and updated monitoring reports of television, films, music videos, etc.

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Violence and Sexual Violence in Film, Television, Cable and Home Video. Report of a Study Committee of the Communication Commission. New York: Communication Commission, NCC, 475 Riverside Dr, NY 10015. 1985. The list of many concrete recommendations stresses the responsibility of the industry to the public, e.g., producers of TV programmes should meet annually with the public to explain how and by whom decisions are made about programme content. For its part the public is to be offered media education courses to help avoid using TV and the cinema as for baby-sitting. Recommendations cover the range of the media from TV, motion pictures, cable, videocassettes.

Edward L. Palmer (Davidson College, Davidson, N.C. 28036) has just completed research in the areas of television fright reaction and its specific implications for children's response to nuclear attack drama and description. Currently writing *Saturday Morning and Children: The Television Story*, a study of both the current and historic programming milieu in children's television in the U.S.

Thomas Radecki (Dept of Psychiatry, University of Illinois School of Medicine, Champaign, Ill. 61820) Recently reported that since 1980, movie violence had increased by 68% and television violence by 100%. He additionally notes that in 8 foreign countries surveyed, over 70% of the violent programs originated in the US.

Dorothy G. Singer and Jerome L. Singer (Dept. of Psychology, Yale University, 405 Temple Street, New Haven, Conn. 06511) The results of a 6-year study indicate that heavy TV viewing, especially of violent programs, tended to decrease self-restraint in children's behavior patterns. (*Journal of Communications*, Vol 34, No.2)

Jacob Wakshlag (Dept. of Telecommunications, Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind. 47405) Current research is dealing with selective exposure to violent content. Research indicates that certain types of people are predisposed to exposure to violence and find them particularly enjoyable.

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