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Big World, Small Screen :

The Role of Television in

American Society

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possible outcomes from exposure to sexually explicit or violent materials were proposed. First, children in the 12- to 18-year-old range may show effects similar to those for adults. At this age children understand causation and the idea of reciprocity in relationships. However, they have fewer life experiences and some differences from adults in cognitive functioning that could lead to dissimilar effects. Second, for children under 12 there is the possibility of "imprinting," or teaching, early associations of sex with violence. On the other hand, there is the possibility of no effects because children of this age may have insufficient emotional or cognitive capacities to comprehend the message. Given the fact that many children now have access to strong sexual images on cable and videocassettes, there is no question that more research and discussion is needed regarding the potential impact of these materials on children.

VIOLENCE

The causes of violence in our society are many, the roots deep, and the possible solutions unclear. Some obvious causes of violence include growing up in an abusive family setting, or the experiences of frustration or hopelessness that stem from a chronic lack of economic resources or a long-continued denial of opportunity. However, the decision about whether or how we use violence in response to the many and varied conflicts that we all experience in our daily lives is also determined by the rules, norms, or standards of behavior that we observe in the world around us—the real world and the television world. Television plays a subtle role as a teacher of norms or standards of behavior, and learning from that teacher can occur during the seven hours per day that the television set is on in the typical household.

Debates about the effects of televised violence have been in the air throughout most of the 40 years of television's history. Official recognition of this problem began with congressional investigations in the mid-1950s and continued with the Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (Baker & Ball, 1969), the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Televi-

sion and Social Behavior (1972) and the update produced by the National Institute of Mental Health in 1982 (Pearl, Bouthilet, & Lazar, 1982). In 1985, the American Psychological Association took the position that television violence can cause aggressive behavior, after the Board on Social and Ethical Responsibility for Psychology surveyed the evidence on this topic (American Psychological Association, 1985).

Researchers have also devoted a great deal of attention to the issue. Since 1955, about 1,000 studies, reports, and commentaries concerning the impact of televised violence have been published (Eysenck & Nias, 1978; Liebert & Sprafkin, 1988; Murray, 1980; Murray & Kippax, 1978). Nevertheless, there is still some disagreement about how important television is as a causal agent in the real world (cf. Freedman, 1984, 1986; Friedrich-Cofer & Huston, 1986). In this discussion, we have not attempted to review all of the controversies or the literature, but to summarize some of the major points and to add recent data.

Television Content

Entertainment television includes large doses of televised violence. Indeed, as Figure 3.1 demonstrates, the results of almost two decades of content analyses conducted by a research team directed by George Gerbner and his associates (Gerbner & Gross, 1980; Gerbner, Gross, Eeey, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1977, 1978; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980, 1986; Gerbner & Signorielli, 1990) show that the level of violence in prime-time television has remained at about 5 violent acts per hour, while the level of violence in children's Saturday-morning programming is much higher, about 20 to 25 violent acts per hour. Since 1980, there have been dramatic increases in violence on children's television, with a peak of 30 to 32 violent acts per hour in 1981 and 1982.

The types of violence portrayed range from destruction of property to physical assaults that cause injury and death. If we multiply these rates of televised violence by the amount of viewing of the average preschooler and school-aged child (two to four hours per day), we begin to understand the magnitude of the problem. By

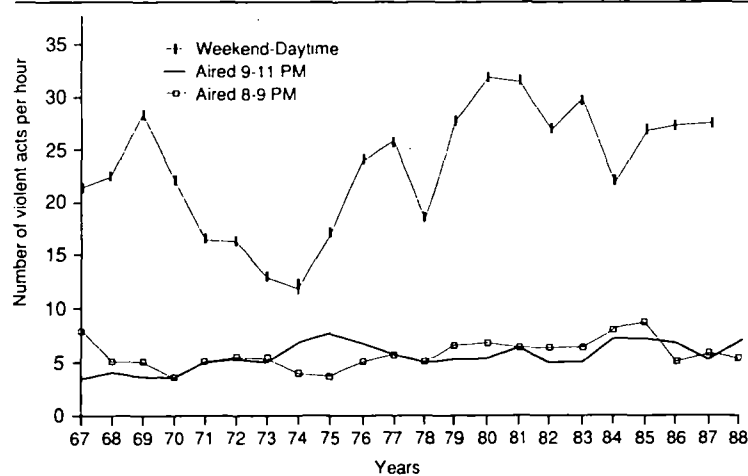


Figure 3.1. Rate of violent acts per hour for children's and prime-time programming from 1967 to 1988. From an unpublished manuscript by G. Gerbner and N. Signorielli, 1990, University of Pennsylvania, Annenberg School of Communications, Philadelphia, PA, Figure 2. Reprinted by permission of authors.

the time the average child graduates from elementary school, she or he will have witnessed at least 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other assorted acts of violence. Depending on the amount of television viewed, our youngsters could see more than 200,000 violent acts before they hit the schools and streets of our nation as teenagers.

Relations between Viewing and Aggression

The accumulated research clearly demonstrates a correlation between viewing violence and aggressive behavior—that is, heavy viewers behave more aggressively than light viewers. Children and adults who watch a large number of aggressive programs also tend to hold attitudes and values that favor the use of aggression to resolve conflicts (Freedman, 1984; Liebert & Sprafkin, 1988). These correlations are solid. They remain even when many other potential influences on viewing and aggression are controlled, including education level, social class, aggressive attitudes, parental

Violence
A/k reported
checked

behavior, and sex-role identity (Belson, 1978; Huesmann, Lagerspetz, & Eron, 1984).

Causes

Both experimental and longitudinal studies support the hypothesis that viewing violence is causally associated with aggression. Studies conducted with preschoolers, school-aged children, college students, and adults confirm that viewing violence on television can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values, and behavior. The major initial experimental studies were conducted by Bandura and his colleagues with young children (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961, 1963) and by Berkowitz and his associates with adolescents (Berkowitz, 1962; Berkowitz, Corwin, & Heironimus, 1963; Berkowitz & Rawlings, 1963; Geen & Rakowsky, 1973) in highly structured laboratory conditions. Subsequent studies used more typical television programs and more realistic measures of aggression, with similar results (e.g., Collins & Getz, 1976; Ellis & Sekyra, 1972; Frost & Stauffer, 1987; Geen, 1975; Liebert & Baron, 1972). It is clear from experimental studies that one can produce increased aggressive behavior as a result of either extended or brief exposure to televised violence, but such research does not determine whether heightened aggressiveness observed in the experimental setting spills over into daily life.

Natural Contexts

One means of investigating real-life effects is the field experiment in which the investigator presents typical television programs in the normal viewing setting and observes behavior where it naturally occurs. Field experiments with preschool children (Friedrich & Stein, 1973; Stein & Friedrich, 1972) and adolescents (Parke, Berkowitz, Leyens, West, & Sebastian, 1977) found heightened aggression among viewers assigned to watch violent television or films under some conditions (cf. Freedman, 1984; Friedrich-Cofer & Huston, 1986; Liebert & Sprafkin, 1988). One exception was Feshbach and Singer (1971). In a field experiment with adults, men who were asked to watch a diet of violent television were rated by their wives as more hurtful (for example, losing one's

temper, shouting at the kids) than a group who watched a non-violent diet (Loye, Gorney, & Steele, 1977).

One unique source of information was provided in a natural experiment comparing children's aggressive behavior before and after television was introduced in their town (Joy, Kimball, & Zabrack, 1986; Williams, 1986). Children were compared with their peers in two other towns where television was well established. There were no differences among the three towns in the initial comparison, but two years later, the children from the former no-television town were significantly more aggressive, both physically and verbally, than the children in the other towns.

Longitudinal and cross-national studies also support the conclusion that viewing television violence leads to aggression that becomes a lasting part of individual behavior patterns. One group of individuals was studied at ages 8, 18, and 30. Viewing violence at age 8 predicted aggression at 18 for boys (Eron 1982, 1963; Eron, Lefkowitz, Huesmann, & Walder, 1972; Lefkowitz, Eron, Walder, & Huesmann, 1972) and serious criminal behavior at age 30 (Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1984). The most plausible interpretation of this finding is that a child's early preference for violent television programming and other media is one factor in the production of aggressive and antisocial behavior when that child becomes a young adult.

Parallel longitudinal studies were conducted in five countries: Australia, Finland, Israel, Poland, and the United States (Huesmann & Eron, 1986). Although the average levels of television violence in these other nations were much lower than those in the United States, the associations between viewing and aggression occurred in most populations studied. The analyses supported a bidirectional hypothesis—viewing violence leads to aggression, and aggressive tendencies lead to viewing violent television. The authors of another panel study concluded that their findings did not support a causal role for television violence in later aggressive behavior of boys (Milavsky, Kessler, Stipp, & Rubens, 1982), but methodological experts who examined their findings reversed that conclusion (Cook, Kendziersky, & Thomas, 1983).

Violence
A/x experiments

Television violence can lead to desensitization as well as to aggressive behavior. Children and adults who are exposed to television violence show reduced physiological arousal, and they are less likely than unexposed individuals to seek help for victims of violence or to act on the behalf of victims (Cline, Croft, & Courrier, 1973; Drabman & Thomas, 1974; Thomas, 1982; Thomas, Horton, Lippincott, & Drabman, 1977).

Although there is continuing controversy about the interpretation of research evidence on the impact of television violence (e.g., Berkowitz, 1984; Freedman, 1984; Friedrich-Cofer & Huston, 1986; Liebert & Sprafkin, 1988; Murray, 1973, 1984; Murray & Kippax, 1978; National Institute of Mental Health, 1982; Pearl et al., 1982), most researchers would agree with the conclusion in a recent report by the National Institute of Mental Health (1982), that "violence on television does lead to aggressive behavior by children and teenagers who watch the programs. This conclusion is based on laboratory experiments and on field studies. Not all children become aggressive, of course, but the correlations between violence and aggression are positive. In magnitude, television violence is as strongly correlated with aggressive behavior as any other behavioral variable that has been measured. The research question has moved from asking whether or not there is an effect, to seeking explanations for the effect" (p.6). To this we would only add that the behavior patterns established in childhood and adolescence are the foundation for lifelong patterns manifested in adulthood.

SUMMARY

Television is a potentially powerful teacher about social relationships, intimacy, conflict, and feeling. Family relations, emotion, sexuality, and violence are the stuff of entertainment television. Although theory leads one to expect that viewers will absorb many of the messages about family relations, emotions, and sexual relationships that are presented on television, little research designed to assess that expectation has been conducted. Television is a

subtle, continuous source for learning about the rules of life and society.

The family types portrayed on television have shifted over time, only partly reflecting changes in family structure in the society. In the early days of television, families fit the mold of two parents, a homemaker mother, and a few children. When single-parent families appeared, many of them were headed by fathers, and most were the result of the death of a parent rather than divorce. Content analyses provide relatively little information, however, about how family members interact, the types of parenting methods used, or the images of children and adolescents presented. Moreover, little is known about the effects of these portrayals. Children apparently consider families with a traditional structure to be more realistic, despite the fact that many families in 1990 depart from that structure.

Although we also know remarkably little about the nature of emotions displayed by television characters there is evidence of viewers' emotional responses. People use television to deal with their emotional states—seeking arousal when they are bored and seeking reduced arousal when they are under stress. Children also learn about emotions from television. They learn what situations lead to what emotions and the social norms for expressing emotion. People also respond emotionally to television content, but individual responses differ, depending on cognitive and personality characteristics.

Violence and sexuality are of particular social concern to citizens and professionals alike. American television contains a great deal of violence, a pattern that has been relatively stable over many years. Broadcast television contains little explicit sexuality, but does contain indirect, suggestive references to sexual behavior. Explicit sexuality is shown on cable television and commercially available videotapes. There is extensive evidence that television violence can influence aggressive attitudes and behavior. Sexually explicit material does not appear to induce antisocial behavior, except when it portrays sexual violence or violence in a sexual context. Adults respond to such material with increased callousness toward women and increased acceptance of rape and other forms of sexual violence.

Violence
A/k sexual violence

Table 3.1 Programs Portraying Families on American Television: 1947-1987

1947-51

Amos & Andy, Aldrich Family, Crime with Father, Detective's Wife, Egg & I, Fairmeadows USA, First Hundred Years, George Burns and Gracie Allen, The Goldbergs, I Love Lucy, I Remember Mama, Life of Riley, Mixed Doubles, Mr. & Mrs. Mystery, Mr. & Mrs. North, One Man's Family, Roy Rogers Show, Search for Tomorrow, Those Enduring Young Charms, Wesley, Wren's Nest.

1952-56

Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet, As the World Turns, Bennets, Bonino, Brave Eagle, Circus Boy, Claudia, Davy Crockett, December Bride, Ethel & Albert, Father Knows Best, Fury, The Great Gildersleeve, Guiding Light, Halls of Ivy, Heaven for Betsy, The Honeymooners, I Married Joan, Imogene Coca Show, Jamie, Joe & Mabel, Lassie I, Life with Elizabeth, Life with Father, Make Room for Daddy I, The Marriage, Meet Corliss Archer, Mr. Adams & Eve, My Favorite Husband, My Friend Flicka, My Little Margie, My Son Jeep, Norby, People's Choice, Portia Faces Life, Pride of the Family, Professional Father, Road of Life, Secret Storm, Sky King, Take It from Me, That's My Boy, Topper, Woman with a Past.

1957-61

Andy Griffith, Angel, Bachelor Father, Bonanza, Buckskin, Casey Jones, Date with the Angels, Dennis the Menace, Dick & the Duchess, Dick Van Dyke Show, Donna Reed Show, Edy Wynn Show, Eve Arden Show, Father of the Bride, Fibber McGee & Molly, Flintstones, From These Roots, Guestward Ho, Harrigan & Son, The Hathaways, Hazel, Ichabod and Me, Lucille Ball-Desi Arnez, Jefferson Drum, Laramie, Lassie II, Leave It to Beaver, Love and Marriage, Lucy Show I, Make Room for Daddy II, Margie, Mr. Ed, Mrs. G. Goes to College, My Three Sons, National Velvet, One Happy Family, Peck's Bad Girl, Pete & Gladys, Peter Loves Mary, The Real McCoys, The Rifleman, Thin Man, Today Is Ours, The Tom Ewell Show, Too Young to Go Steady, Yes, Yes Nanette, Young Doctor Malone.

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

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The work of this committee was initiated by a request from Senator John O. Pastore to Health, Education, and Welfare Secretary Robert H. Finch in which Senator Pastore said:

I am exceedingly troubled by the lack of any definitive information which would help resolve the question of whether there is a causal connection between televised crime and violence and antisocial behavior by individuals, especially children. . . . I am respectfully requesting that you direct the Surgeon General to appoint a committee comprised of distinguished men and women from whatever professions and disciplines deemed appropriate to devise techniques and to conduct a study under his supervision using those techniques which will establish scientifically insofar as possible what harmful effects, if any, these programs have on children.

The question raised by this request has been this committee's central concern. However, the research program that was undertaken

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has attempted to place this question within a larger context. For this reason, the committee's title deliberately emphasizes more than the issue of televised violence and aggressiveness and more than the question of television's harmful effects during childhood and youth.

At the same time the committee was explicitly enjoined from drawing policy conclusions. Our task has been to state the present scientific knowledge about the effects of entertainment television on children's behavior, in the hope that this knowledge may be of use to both citizens and officials concerned with policy.

The findings we will summarize represent the issues and questions treated in the body of the report. They derive primarily from the research conducted under this program but take account also of past research and other current research.

THE TELEVISION EXPERIENCE

It would be difficult to overstate the pervasiveness of television in the United States. Census data indicate that 96 percent of American homes have one or more television sets. The average home set is on more than six hours a day. Most adults report watching at least two hours daily. Most children also watch at least two hours daily. For most people, whatever their age, television viewing is a daily experience. Although not everyone watches every day, many watch for much longer than two hours.

Television viewing stands in sharp contrast to the theater, movies, and other entertainment presented outside the home in that it does not

usually involve such exclusive or focused attention. Viewers of all ages regularly engage in a wide range of activities while the set is on.

The extent to which this discontinuity of attention alters what would be perceived and understood from television were attention undivided is a moot question. Young children before the age of six usually cannot successfully divide their attention. As a result, what they get from television is probably generally restricted to what is taken in while viewing with full attention and is perceived bereft of a larger context. As the child grows older, he becomes more able to follow at least the rough continuity of what is taking place on television while he is simultaneously doing other things.

The casual acceptance of viewing, however, does not equal indifference to television. By the first grade, a majority of boys and girls exhibit individual taste in program selection and preference for characters. Among younger children, situation comedies and cartoons are most popular. Sixth graders like family situation comedies and adventure programs. Tenth graders prefer adventure programs and music and variety programs. Children and adolescents are attracted to programs featuring characters their own age.

The propensity to view television changes as the individual goes through the major stages of maturation. Frequent viewing usually begins at about age three and remains relatively high until about age 12. Then viewing typically begins to decline, reaching its low point during the teen years. When young people marry and have families, the time they spend viewing tends to increase and then remain stable through

the middle adult years. After middle age, when grown children leave home, it rises again.

Many questions about television are presently unanswerable. Three basic ones concern the future character of television, the influences and dynamics involved in the choosing of programs by individual viewers, and the underlying needs served by television that lead to its present extensive use.

It would appear that television, like other media, is progressing through a series of stages from intriguing novelty to accepted commonplace to possible differentiation as a servant of varied tastes. New developments--UHF, public television, cable, cassettes, portable minisets--suggest that in the future the programming available may become increasingly varied and that the mass audience may become a diversity of smaller segments, each with its special interests. Newspapers, magazines, and radio provide examples of similar evolution.

Why people choose to view what they do, and why they view so much, remain open questions after 20 years of commercial broadcasting. From the various rating services it is easy to determine what audiences choose to view from among what is offered. The process by which choices are made, and the basic appeal that leads to persistent viewing at all ages, remain obscure.

VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION

Studies of media content show that violence is and has been a prominent component of all mass media in the United States. Television

is no exception, and there can be no doubt that violence figures prominently in television entertainment. People are probably exposed to violence by television entertainment more than they are exposed by other media because they use television so much more.

In regard to dramatic entertainment on television, and with violence defined as "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," an extensive analysis of content has found that:

--The general prevalence of violence did not change markedly between 1967 and 1969. The rate of violent episodes remained constant at about eight per hour.

--The nature of violence did change. Fatalities declined, and the proportion of leading characters engaged in violence or killing declined. The former dropped from 73 to 64 percent; the latter, from 19 to five percent. The consequence is that as many violent incidents occurred in 1969 as in 1967, but a smaller proportion of characters were involved, and the violence was far less lethal.

--Violence increased from 1967 to 1969 in cartoons and in comedies, a category that included cartoons.

--Cartoons were the most violent type of program in these years.

Another study concluded that in 1971 Saturday morning programming, which includes both cartoons and material prepared for adults, approximately three out of ten dramatic segments were "saturated" with violence and that 71 percent involved at least one instance of human violence

with or without the use of weapons.

There is also evidence that years high in violence also tend to be years high in overall ratings, and that the frequency of violent programs in a year is related to the popularity of this type of program the previous year. This suggests that televised violence fluctuates partly as a function of the efforts of commercial broadcasters to present what will be maximally popular.

TELEVISION'S EFFECTS

Television's popularity raises important questions about its social effects. There is interest and concern in regard to many segments of the population--ethnic minorities, religious groups, the old, the unwell, the poor. This committee has been principally concerned with one segment, children and youth, and in particular with the effects of televised violence on their tendencies toward aggressive behavior.

People ask behavioral scientists various questions about television and violence. In our opinion the questions are often far too narrowly drawn. For example:

(1) It is sometimes asked if watching violent fare on television can cause a young person to act aggressively. The answer is that, of course, under some circumstances it can. We did not need massive research to know that at least an occasional unstable individual might get sufficiently worked up by some show to act in an impetuous way. The question is faulty, for the real issue is how often it happens,

what predispositional conditions have to be there, and what different undesirable, as well as benign, forms the aggressive reaction takes when it occurs.

(2) It is sometimes asked if the fact that children watch a steady fare of violent material on television many hours a day from early childhood through adolescence causes our society to be more violent. Presumably the answer is, to some degree, "yes," but we consider the question misleading. We know that children imitate and learn from everything they see--parents, fellow children, schools, the media; it would be extraordinary, indeed, if they did not imitate and learn from what they see on television. We have some limited data that conform to our presumption. We have noted in the studies at hand a modest association between viewing of violence and aggression among at least some children, and we have noted some data which are consonant with the interpretation that violence viewing produces the aggression; this evidence is not conclusive, however, and some of the data are also consonant with other interpretations.

(Yet, as we have said, the real issue is once again quantitative: how much contribution to the violence of our society is made by extensive violent television viewing by our youth? The evidence (or more accurately, the difficulty of finding evidence) suggests that the effect is small compared with many other possible causes, such as parental attitudes or knowledge of and experience with the real violence of our society.)

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The sheer amount of television violence may be unimportant compared with such subtle matters as what the medium says about it: is it approved or disapproved, committed by sympathetic or unsympathetic characters, shown to be effective or not, punished or unpunished? Social science today cannot say which aspects of the portrayal of violence make a major difference or in what way. It is entirely possible that some types of extensive portrayals of violence could reduce the propensity to violence in society and that some types might increase it. In our present state of knowledge, we are not able to specify what kinds of violence portrayal will have what net result on society.

What are the alternatives? If broadcasters simply changed the quantitative balance between violent and other kinds of shows, it is not clear what the net effect would be. People hunt and choose the kinds of stimulus material they want. Violent material is popular. If our society changed in no other way than changing the balance of television offerings, people, to some degree, would still seek out violent material. How much effect a modest quantitative change in television schedules would have is now quite unanswerable. More drastic changes, such as general censorship, would clearly have wide effects, but of many kinds, and some of them distinctly undesirable.

In our judgment, the key question that we should be asked is thus a complicated one concerning alternatives. The proper question is, "What kinds of changes, if any, in television content and practices could have a significant net effect in reducing the propensity to undesirable aggression among the audience, and what other effects, desirable and undesirable, would each such change have?"

The state of our knowledge, unfortunately, is not such as to permit confident conclusions in answer to such a question. The readers of this report will find in it evidence relevant to answering such questions, but far short of an answer. The state of present knowledge does not permit an agreed answer.

EFFECTS ON AGGRESSIVENESS

Television is only one of the many factors which in time may precede aggressive behavior. It is exceedingly difficult to disentangle from other elements of an individual's life history.

Violence and aggressiveness are also not concepts on which there is unvarying consensus. This applies equally to events observed in real life or through the media and to behavior in which an individual may engage. Violence is a vague term. What seems violent to one may not seem so to another. Aggressiveness is similarly ambiguous, and its designation as antisocial depends not only on the act but also on the circumstances and the participants.

For scientific investigation, terms must be defined precisely and unambiguously. Although various investigators have used somewhat different definitions, generally both televised violence and individual aggressiveness have been defined as involving the inflicting of harm, injury, or discomfort on persons, or of damage to property. The translation of such a conception into measurement procedures has varied very widely, and whether antisocial activity is involved or implied is a matter for judgment in the specific instance.

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Effects on Aggressiveness: Evidence from Experiments

Experiments have the advantage of allowing causal inference because various influences can be controlled so that the effects, if any, of one or more variables can be assessed. To varying degrees, depending on design and procedures, they have the disadvantages of artificiality and constricted time span. The generalizability of results to everyday life is a question often not easily resolvable.

Experiments concerned with the effects of violence or aggressiveness portrayed on film or television have focused principally on two different kinds of effects: imitation and instigation. Imitation occurs when what is seen is mimicked or copied. Instigation occurs when what is seen is followed by increased aggressiveness.

Imitation. One way in which a child may learn a new behavior is through observation and imitation. 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.

No research in this program was concerned with imitation, because the fact that aggressive or violent behavior presented on film or television can be imitated by children is already thoroughly documented.

Instigation. Some 30 published experiments have been widely interpreted as indicating that the viewing of violence on film or television by children or adults increases the likelihood of aggressive behavior. This interpretation has also been widely challenged, principally on the ground that results cannot be generalized beyond the

experimental situation. Critics hold that in the experimental situation socially inhibiting factors, such as the influence of social norms and the risk of disapproval or retaliation, are absent, and that the behavior after viewing, though labeled "aggressive," is so unlike what is generally understood by the term as to raise serious questions about the applicability of these laboratory findings to real-life behavior.

The research conducted in this program attempted to provide more precise and extensive evidence on the capacity of televised violence to instigate aggressive behavior in children. The studies variously involve whole television programs, rather than brief excerpts; the possibility of making constructive or helping, as well as aggressive, responses after viewing; and the measurement of effects in the real-life environment of a nursery school. Taken as a group, they represent an effort to take into account more of the circumstances that pertain in real life, and for that reason they have considerable cogency.

[In sum. The experimental studies bearing on the effects of aggressive television entertainment content on children support certain conclusions. First, violence depicted on television can immediately or shortly thereafter induce mimicking or copying by children. Second, under certain circumstances television violence can instigate an increase in aggressive acts. The accumulated evidence, however, does not warrant the conclusion that televised violence has a uniformly adverse effect nor the conclusion that it has an adverse effect on the majority of children. It cannot even be said that the majority of the children in the various studies we have reviewed showed an increase in aggressive behavior in response to the violent fare to which they were

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exposed. The evidence does indicate that televised violence may lead to increased aggressive behavior in certain subgroups of children, who might constitute a small portion or a substantial proportion of the total population of young television viewers. We cannot estimate the size of the fraction, however, since the available evidence does not come from cross-section samples of the entire American population of children.

The experimental studies we have reviewed tell us something about the characteristics of those children who are most likely to display an increase in aggressive behavior after exposure to televised violence. There is evidence that among young children (ages four to six) those most responsive to television violence are those who are highly aggressive to start with--who are prone to engage in spontaneous aggressive actions against their playmates and, in the case of boys, who display pleasure in viewing violence being inflicted upon others. The very young have difficulty comprehending the contextual setting in which violent acts are depicted and do not grasp the meaning of cues or labels concerning the make-believe character of violence episodes in fictional programs. For older children, one study has found that labeling violence on a television program as make-believe rather than as real reduces the incidence of induced aggressive behavior. Contextual cues to the motivation of the aggressor and to the consequences of acts of violence might also modify the impact of televised violence, but evidence on this topic is inconsistent.

Since a considerable number of experimental studies on the effects of televised violence have now been carried out, it seems improbable

that the next generation of studies will bring many great surprises, particularly with regard to broad generalizations not supported by the evidence currently at hand. It does not seem worthwhile to continue to carry out studies designed primarily to test the broad generalization that most or all children react to televised violence in a uniform way. The lack of uniformity in the extensive data now at hand is much too impressive to warrant the expectation that better measures of aggression or other methodological refinements will suddenly allow us to see a uniform effect.

Effects on Aggressiveness: Survey Evidence

A number of surveys have inquired into the violence viewing of young people and their tendencies toward aggressive behavior. Measures of exposure to television violence included time spent viewing, preference for violent programming, and amount of viewing of violent programs. Measures of aggressive tendencies variously involved self and others' reports of actual behavior, projected behavior, and attitudes. The behavior involved varied from acts generally regarded as heinous (e.g., arson) to acts which many would applaud (e.g., hitting a man who is attacking a woman).

All of the studies inquired into the relationship between exposure to television violence and aggressive tendencies. Most of the relationships observed were positive, but most were also of low magnitude, ranging from null relationships to correlation coefficients of about .20. A few of the observed correlation coefficients, however, reached .30 or just above.

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Findings consonant with the interpretation that violence viewing leads to aggression include the fact that two of the correlation coefficients at the .30 level are between earlier viewing and later measured aggression. However, certain technical questions exist regarding the measures employed, and the findings can be regarded as equally consonant with the view that both violence viewing and aggression are common products of some antecedent condition or conditions.

Various candidates for such a preceding condition can be identified in the data. These include preexisting levels of aggression, underlying personality factors, and a number of aspects of parental attitudes and behavior, among them parental affection, parental punishment, parental emphasis on nonaggression, and habitual types of parent-child communication patterns. Several of these variables failed to operate statistically in a manner consonant with common origin interpretations. At least two, "parental emphasis on nonaggression" and "family communication patterns," operated in manners consonant with such an interpretation, but the pertinent data were too limited to validate common origin status for either one.

The common origin interpretation remains viable, however. Improved measures might possibly change the picture, and there is need for further and more refined investigation of the role played by personality factors and by family and peer attitudes and behaviors.

GENERAL IMPLICATIONS

The best predictor of later aggressive tendencies in some studies is the existence of earlier aggressive tendencies, whose origins may

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lie in family and other environmental influences. Patterns of communication within the family and patterns of punishment of young children seem to relate in ways that are as yet poorly understood both to television viewing and to aggressive behavior. The possible role of mass media in very early acquisition of aggressive tendencies remains unknown. Future research should concentrate on the impact of media material on very young children.

As we have noted, the data, while not wholly consistent or conclusive, do indicate that a modest relationship exists between the viewing of violence and aggressive behavior. The correlational evidence from surveys is amenable to either of two interpretations: that the viewing of violence causes the aggressive behavior, or that both the viewing and the aggression are joint products of some other common source. Several findings of survey studies can be cited to sustain the hypothesis that viewing of violent television has a causal relation to aggressive behavior, though neither individually nor collectively are the findings conclusive. They could also be explained by operation of a "third variable" related to preexisting conditions.]

[The experimental studies provide some additional evidence bearing on this issue. Those studies contain indications that, under certain limited conditions, television viewing may lead to an increase in aggressive behavior. The evidence is clearest in highly controlled laboratory studies and considerably weaker in studies conducted under more natural conditions. Although some questions have been raised as to whether the behavior observed in the laboratory studies can be called "aggressive" in the consensual sense of the term, the studies point to

two mechanisms by which children might be led from watching television to aggressive behavior: the mechanism of imitation, which is well established as part of the behavioral repertoire of children in general; and the mechanism of incitement, which may apply only to those children who are predisposed to be susceptible to this influence. There is some evidence that incitement may follow nonviolent as well as violent materials, and that this incitement may lead to either prosocial or aggressive behavior, as determined by the opportunities offered in the experiment. However, the fact that some children behave more aggressively in experiments after seeing violent films is well established.

The experimental evidence does not suffer from the ambiguities that characterize the correlational data with regard to third variables, since children in the experiments are assigned in ways that attempt to control such variables. The experimental findings are weak in various other ways and not wholly consistent from one study to another. Nevertheless, they provide suggestive evidence in favor of the interpretation that viewing violence on television is conducive to an increase in aggressive behavior, although it must be emphasized that the causal sequence is very likely applicable only to some children who are predisposed in this direction.

* [Thus, there is a convergence of the fairly substantial experimental evidence for short-run causation of aggression among some children by viewing violence on the screen and the much less certain evidence from field studies that extensive violence viewing precedes some long-run manifestations of aggressive behavior. This convergence of the two types of evidence constitutes some preliminary indication of a causal

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relationship, but a good deal of research remains to be done before one can have confidence in these conclusions.

The field studies, correlating different behavior among adolescents, and the laboratory studies of the responses by younger children to violent films converge also on a number of further points.

First, there is evidence that any sequence by which viewing television violence causes aggressive behavior is most likely applicable only to some children who are predisposed in that direction. While imitative behavior is shown by most children in experiments on that mechanism of behavior, the mechanism of being incited to aggressive behavior by seeing violent films shows up in the behavior only of some children who were found in several experimental studies to be previously high in aggression. Likewise, the correlations found in the field studies between extensive viewing of violent material and acting in aggressive ways seem generally to depend on the behavior of a small proportion of the respondents who were identified in some studies as previously high in aggression.

Second, there are suggestions in both sets of studies that the way children respond to violent film material is affected by the context in which it is presented. Such elements as parental explanations, the favorable or unfavorable outcome of the violence, and whether it is seen as fantasy or reality may make a difference. Generalizations about all violent content are likely to be misleading.

Thus, the two sets of findings converge in three respects: a preliminary and tentative indication of a causal relation between viewing violence on television and aggressive behavior; 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. Such tentative and limited conclusions are not very satisfying. They represent substantially more knowledge than we had two years ago, but they leave many questions unanswered.

Some of the areas on which future research should concentrate include: (1) Television's effects in the context of the effects of other mass media. (2) The effects of mass media in the context of individual developmental history and the totality of environmental influences, particularly that of the home environment. In regard to the relationship between televised violence and aggression, specific topics in need of further attention include: predispositional characteristics of individuals; age differences; effects of labeling, contextual cues, and other program factors; and longitudinal influences of television. (3) The functional and dysfunctional aspects of aggressive behavior in successfully adapting to life's demands. (4) The modeling and imitation of prosocial behavior. (5) The role of environmental factors, including the mass media, in the teaching and learning of values about violence, and the effects of such learning. (6) The symbolic meanings of violent content in mass media fiction, and the function in our social life of such content.

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