

SOME DISCRETE VIEWS OF TELEVISED VIOLENCE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDIA POLICY*

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Abstract Statements from depth interviews and media sources provided the course for this Q method study of public attitudes towards television violence. A Q sample structured according to Thompson's schema for the study of public opinion was administered to 40 subjects, and resulted in a six-factor solution: (1) Informed, responsible parents, (2) amoral marketers, (3) dramatic TV fans, (4) pro-television homemakers, (5) compromisers, and (6) religious viewers. Policy implications for media, government, and citizen groups are discussed.

The average American spends more leisure time watching television than reading newspapers, books, and magazines and listening to radio and records. Television

*This paper is derived from Mr. Suppasarn's master's thesis, *A Q-methodological Study of Public Attitudes Toward Television Violence* (California State University, Fresno, 1980), completed under the supervision of Dr. Adams, from whom may be obtained copies of the items used and tables upon which analyses were based.

is a firmly established lifestyle feature and plays an important role in society. Among the effects of television, however, the negative impact--actual or potential--of televised violence on human behavior has come to be highly criticized by social scientists, federal agencies, and segments of the general public.

Still, research on the effects of televised violence has not produced any generally accepted conclusions. Many scholars have long agreed that, at least under certain circumstances, televised violence may have some adverse effects on viewers' behavior (Schramm, Lyle & Parker, 1969; *Television and Growing Up*, 1972). From different kinds of research, guided by different schools of thought, have come four major theoretical perspectives subscribed to by significant elements of the research community: Aggressive cues, catharsis, observational learning, and reinforcement (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1976: 219).

Aggressive cues theorists assume exposure to violent content serves a stimulus function; viewing violence is expected, therefore, to increase the probability of aggressive behavior among audience members (Berkowitz, 1962). Catharsis theorists argue that viewing television violence will decrease the probability of violent behavior among viewers because exposure to violence reduces the expression of aggression (Feshback & Singer, 1971: 140). Observational learning theorists propose that televised violence not only stimulates viewer aggression, but also has an instructional function in the development of aggressive behavior that may teach viewers to act violently (Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1961; Bandura, 1962). And reinforcement theorists suggest that viewing televised violence is not the prime, or even an essential, cause of increased audience aggression; instead, they perceive the viewing of violence as reinforcing prior behaviors or behavioral dispositions of the viewer. The reinforcement view is that a combination of many social influences, including media portrayals, act as the causal elements in fostering viewer aggression (Klapper, 1960: 40-50). Other effects have also been identified, such as arousal and numbing, or desensitizing.

The mass media may be the most powerful social force at work in America today. Some scholars claim a "national culture" has been shaped by the media (Edgar, 1977: 6-7). Television is the major means of mass communication; its effects are a matter of concern not only among scholars and in government, but a significant segment of public opinion has been identified with the medium and violent program content.¹ This study examined such public opinion in an effort to identify major segments or dimensions of general attitudes, and those who hold them, as judged against these contemporary theories and other major views. The question of media policy implications is then explored.

METHOD

The work was undertaken by conducting interviews, in depth, with 22 persons selected in accordance with Thompson's schema (Brenner, 1972: xxii). Five, representing Thompson's "special interests" group, were employees/managers in local television stations, a newspaper, and an advertising agency. Eight, identified with his "class interests," included two professors of education, a school teacher, a church leader, a probation officer, the chief of police, and a law student who was also a woman activist. Three, representing his "existing authorities," included a graduate student in mass communications and two professors of radio-television-film. Four "experts" included two professors of psychology and two of sociology. The "uninformed" were two senior citizens who did not have television sets.

The interviews produced extensive protocols which were culled--from audiotapes, via transcripts--for statements judged from wording and expression to be meaningful components of interviewee attitudes, be-

1. For significant examples of a specific concern with public attitudes as affected by televised violence, see recent reports using the cultural indicators approach (e.g., Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 1978).

liefs, opinions, and interests regarding violence in television. This process yielded 167 items that were combined with another 61 drawn from books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and television--a total of 228.

To keep the sorting task from being unduly onerous for respondents, further culling of statements was undertaken, reducing the number to 159, by evaluating for duplication in general content and clarity of an item outside its context. This included modest re-writing in support of completeness and clarity. These 159 items were sorted and resorted until the investigators discerned reasonably cohesive categories; 13 content categories of 6 to 23 items each were identified. On the basis of statement content, categories were labeled: (1) aggressive cues, (2) observational learning, (3) catharsis, (4) reinforcement, (5) numbing, (6) fantasy and reality, (7) program content, (8) mirror of society, (9) definitions, (10) responsibility, (11) tolerance and acceptance, (12) conflict elements, and (13) effectiveness. Five items were then selected to represent each category; selection was arbitrary and oriented to producing a Q sample of "best" statements to represent each category.

Of the original 22 interviewees, 20 were available to perform the Q sort thus constructed; another 20 adults were selected from the community by a random-draw process. Forty persons completed the 65-item Q sort using the forced or structured procedure, scored +5 to -5, for "most like me" to "most unlike me." The resulting 65 x 40 data matrix was submitted to component analysis with varimax rotation using the BIOMED package (Dixon, 1968: 168ff). Factor scores for items were produced and discriminated by Brown's (1980: 301-319) JINNI program.

RESULTS

A six-factor solution--accounting for 61% of the variance in common--provided the intuitive best fit to the data. Using the JINNI program, respondents with factor loadings of .60 or higher on one factor and .40 or lower on all others were coded into the production of factor scores. Over all six clusters,

four statements were identified as consensus items-- i.e., items which were scored essentially the same by all six factor types. These items and their normalized factor scores (z scores) are:

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
	-1.3	-0.9	-0.3	-1.1	-1.4	-1.0
11. Watching violence on TV is a way of purging your emotion for violence.						
	0.0	0.2	-0.8	-0.4	0.3	-0.2
18. There is little evidence that media violence is a prime mover of behavior. The content seems to reinforce or implement existing behavioral tendencies.						
	1.1	1.4	0.7	1.4	1.1	1.0
56. There are other ways of solving conflict besides physical means.						
	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.3	1.4
64. Violence on TV affects different people in different ways.						

Over all six factors, statement 11 tended to be placed about one standard deviation below and statement 64 about one and one-half standard deviations above the mean response to all items, marking the extremes of placement among consensus items. Statement 18 was essentially at the mean and statement 56 about one standard deviation above. Over the 40 respondents, statement 11 is, on average, slightly "unlike me" in descriptions of personal reactions to television violence whereas statements 56 and 64 are, on average, somewhat "like me" in that regard; statement 18 is neither like nor unlike any type. Or, the sample as a whole may be described as tending to reject the purgative conception of catharsis theory, and as being neutral or ambivalent towards Klapper's reinforcement-of-behavior conception. Consensus does tend towards acceptance of the common sense notions that conflict resolution does not require violence and responses to mediated violence are individual.

Factor I: Informed, Responsible Parents

Seven respondents load significantly on factor I. Noting who these are aids interpretation; all were among the original interviewees. Three more loaded highly on the factor but did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the factor score routine: One, a professor from the existing authorities, the other two from the community.

In general, the factor array includes, at the positive end, items primarily addressing television violence in critical terms; at the negative end, items that condone or accept violence on television for a variety of reasons drew strongest rejection. Items addressing the child-television relationship are mixed in, suggesting the factor label. This type accepts such ideas as that children learn both good and bad models from television, that a constant diet of violent behavior on television has an adverse effect, and that television affects attitudes, ideas, and awarenesses. Most strongly rejected are such ideas as television portrayals of violence have no effect on people and television does not teach people how to act violently.

Three statements distinguish this type from the others. Assembling a Q-sort array for the type and comparing factors reveals the essence of this opinion in its strong endorsement of one item and equally strong rejection of two others (scores in parentheses for factors I through VI, respectively, with I's in italics):

26. (+5 0 +1 0 +3 -4) TV gives a distorted view of reality.
24. (-5 +1 -1 0 -3 -3) Violence on TV now does not bother me.
51. (-5 -2 -1 +2 -1 -1) Kids who grow up aware that life is full of violence and horror are apt to be normal because they are better prepared to deal with reality.

Generally, this opinion seems to be held among highly educated professionals who might be expected to be acquainted with research findings, clearly structured into their beliefs and attitudes, as represented by this array. The primary element of this opinion is that television presents a distorted view of reality; in effect, life is not full of violence and aggression, nor is seeing it portrayed regularly in television programs beneficial, especially to children. The criticisms of some social scientists are both articulated and endorsed by these parents/scholars. Nearly all have children at home; all express concern for children's viewing. This is probably a small segment of the public made up of well educated, mature people who have children or a special concern for them.

Factor II: Amoral Marketers

Three males are the highest loaded respondents on this factor; one is from the original group of interviewees, two from the community. One did not meet the criteria for entry into the factor-score routine, a divorced 69 year old active as a home-exhibitions producer; he had no children at home and professed no religious affiliation. Occupationally, these three were engaged in activities that present products in ways skillfully designed to induce purchase.

Strongest acceptances show the type to believe television cannot be used as an easy out for antisocial behavior, parents should control children's viewing rather than have government regulate the industry, and children's viewing ought to be controlled by parents. Strongest rejections discount such ideas as treating people like objects is violence and television shows children how things are planned such as crime and evasion of capture. Seven statements distinguish the prototype (factor II's score in italics):

40. (-2 +5 -1 0 -2 0) Violence is a part of life; if we are going to get a realistic interpretation of life, I think a certain amount of violence on TV is justified.

58. (+1 +4 +1 -4 +1 +2) Constantly to present dramas that show the only way to solve a problem is by violence is obscene.
55. (+2 +3 -5 -4 -2 +1) People like violence because it is stimulating; it is a source of vicarious thrills. We all like to face danger.
36. (-3 +3 0 -3 0 +1) I think TV is just reflecting the society because violence has been with us for a long time.
10. (+4 -2 +5 +2 +3 +5) TV is a powerful teaching tool; I think it is too bad that TV is not being used to teach prosocial rather than antisocial behavior.
4. (0 -4 +4 +3 -3 0) The more severe violence that children watch, the more aggressive they are in their behavior toward schoolmates, parents, and teachers.
5. (0 -5 -1 -3 -1 +1) Televised violence and depicted aggression increase aggression in the world.

This second type was labeled Amoral Marketers; the three men in this cluster were vocationally engaged in some form of advertising/selling, claimed no religious affiliation, and were generally less educated than those holding the factor I opinion. Distinguishing this view from others is the very general acceptance of violence as a real part of society and a legitimate part of television, with some concern that presentation of violence can be overdone. This type does not display concern for children or endorse the criticisms of social scientists as factor I did; rather, it seems to be voicing the stereotypical salesman's ethic--and television is a sales medium. This segment of the public may be larger than that represented by factor I.

Factor III: Dramatic TV Fans

Two from the community loaded significantly on factor III--one man, one man. Their highest acceptance scores indicate a belief that parental training will offset media influences, television is a powerful teaching tool, the networks may be doing their best to minimize violence but ratings are more important to them, and violence is anything that constitutes a damaging assault on someone else. Highest rejection scores negate beliefs such as people like violence because it is stimulating, violence is to be blamed on television, and more religious programs and shows like *The Waltons* and *Little House on the Prairie* are needed.

Three statements distinguish this type (scores for factors I to VI, respectively, III in italics):

53. (-2 -4 +2 -2 -3 -4) I am offended when TV news shows people being carried into an ambulance, pulled out of a fire, or injured in car accidents; I don't like it.
49. (0 +2 -3 +3 +4 +2) I think that TV producers do have the responsibility for seeing if there are ways to keep the violence to a minimum--no more than necessary to set the story.
59. (+3 0 -5 0 0 +1) Drama has to have conflict, but it does not have to end in violence--slapping a woman, shooting a man, or any of the violent episodes that take place.

This third type was labeled Dramatic TV Fans; the man and woman loaded on this factor displayed a liking for dramatic fare on television and accepted some violence in entertainment content. The real distinctiveness of this type is the notable dislike for violence in news programs, apparently because it is real, while rejecting the idea that dramatic entertainment should be less violent than it is. Because no personal characteristics seemed reasonably identified with the opinion, no suggestion can be offered as to

the probable distribution of this view among the public.

Factor IV: Pro-television Homemakers

Two women from the community, who identified themselves as homemakers, were loaded significantly on this factor. Their highest ranked acceptances indicate belief that parental training will offset television models, children can differentiate fantasy from reality, parents should control children's viewing rather than have the government regulate the industry to minimize violent program content, and violence on television affects different people in different ways. High scored rejections discount such ideas as television portrayals have no effect on people, the medium does not reflect society, violence on television can stimulate aggressive behavior, and some cultures accept violence as a way of life.

The factor was distinguished by six items (factor IV's score in italics):

27. (-1 0 -2 +5 +2 -3) Fairy tales or bugs bunnies, kids can identify with those but they know it is fantasy and they know a way to get out of it; they never transfer the bunnies, bugs, roadrunners into their real life situations.
51. (-5 -2 -1 +2 -1 -1) Kids who grow up aware that life is full of violence and horror are apt to be normal because they are prepared to deal with reality.
42. (0 +1 +5 -2 -4 +3) Violence is anything that constitutes an assault on someone else, that in some way is damaging to that individual.
43. (+2 +2 +3 -4 +1 +4) What is violence to you may not be violence to me.
17. (+3 +1 +3 -4 +1 +4) Those people who are unstable might be encouraged to commit crimes by

some TV shows.

38. (+2 -2 +2 -5 0 -1) TV does not reflect the society very well; TV shows a lot more violence than happens in real life.

This fourth type was manifest in two Pro-television Homemakers, mature women with no children in the home. The type wants more family and religious shows, expresses the insecure feeling that life is full of violence, and indicates it should be minimized on television. Still, the type likes watching and finds enjoyment and satisfaction in the medium. It agrees that children can learn what is reality and fantasy, good and bad--from television; but children should be prepared to deal with violence because it is a part of life. Also, television programs have not been designed to teach, stimulate, or encourage anyone to commit violence or crimes, or to reduce aggressiveness. The prototype sees television not in a position to harm its audiences, but to entertain and inform, to provide relaxation and information. Parents and the industry ought to share responsibility for protecting children from any potential negative influences (a) by controlling viewing and (b) by minimizing violence in presentations, respectively. This opinion segment has potential for being of significant size and for including men.

Factor V: Compromisers

A male expert and a homemaker from the community loaded on factor V. Their convergent opinion identifies reinforcement as best describing their views of televised violence.

Highest scored acceptances indicate belief that parental training will offset media models, even though networks may be doing their best to minimize violent content ratings are more important to them, sports programs are not a problem because they are rule-guided, and showing violence nightly is not necessary. Highest scored rejections negate such beliefs as empathy is reserved for the violent protag-

onist rather than antagonist, aggressive behavior is retained over long periods of time to prompt anti-social action much later, and violence on television can stimulate aggressive behavior.

Five items set the factor apart (V's scores italicized):

16. (-2 -3 -5 -2 +3 -5) In watching TV everyone is reinforced in their same positions.
62. (-5 -2 -3 -5 0 -5) TV portrayals of violence have no effects upon individuals, groups, or society.
48. (+2 +5 +4 +5 -2 +2) I would rather see parents exercise control over watching TV violence by youngsters than to have federal government control over broadcasters.
42. (0 +1 +5 -2 -4 +3) Violence is anything that constitutes an assault on someone else, that in some way is damaging to that individual.
46. (-1 +3 -3 +4 -5 0) I don't think it's necessarily the responsibility of TV to make sure it does not offend certain people.

This fifth type was labeled Compromisers--people who seem to be neutral or ambivalent about televised violence. The type does see the medium giving a distorted view of reality and the violence in that view is disturbing. This type, uniquely, endorses the most direct of Klapper's reinforcement statements (statement 16) but is neutral or ambivalent towards a less direct articulation of a related idea (statement 62) and discounts the potential effects of television on children. It also indicates support for the free enterprise conception of media operation but endorses family, industry, and government cooperation in controlling the undue exposure of children to violent content. The array seems to manifest a search for a middle ground in the argument. Characteristics of these two respondents do not provide a sufficient ba-

sis for projecting distribution of this view in society.

Factor VI: Religious Viewers

Two respondents, both male, identify the factor VI view. Their high scored acceptances indicate belief that television is a powerful teaching tool that ought to be used to teach prosocial rather than anti-social behavior, showing violence on television nightly is not necessary, and the medium affects ideas, attitudes, and awarenesses. Highly scored rejections negate beliefs such as televised portrayals of violence have no effect on and do not bother most people, people are reinforced in their own positions by media portrayals, and watching violence helps the viewer "get it out of his system."

Only one statement distinguishes this view:

26. (+5 0 +1 0 +3 -4) TV gives a distorted view of reality.

This sixth type was termed Religious Viewers. Two men were the salient respondents to the factor--one selected for his religious perspective in the initial interviews from which the sort was constructed and one who revealed his religious view in the course of the Q-sort interview. The opinion type is characterized by rejection of the idea that television gives a distorted view of reality; indeed, the basis for the view seems apparent in the first man's interview statement that television gives a very realistic presentation, that scenes are depicted vividly. The prototype, nevertheless, accepts much the same set of criticisms from social scientists as did factor I. These religious viewers broadly disapprove of violence and indicate that televised violence bothers them and, they think, the majority of people. They evaluate it negatively because of the potential for a numbing effect. This type is also concerned for children's viewing in that the young cannot differentiate fantasy and reality--because of the realistic presentation of the medium--and will tend to imitate

television models. Also, televised violence can form and stimulate aggressive impulses in audience members. The question of how pervasive this opinion segment is cannot be estimated realistically; a critical factor in making an estimate might be to assess the salience of religion in the life of the individual.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Drawing upon these six opinion types to analyze the question of violence in television programming during those hours in which children are a significant portion of the audience may produce some insights into desiderata for media policy formation. A not uncommon assumption among the uninformed is that all programming decisions are dictated by profit motive and guided by ratings. That broadcasters are in business and remain so only by virtue of operating in the black is not to be disputed, of course; however, other factors also enter into the decisional strategies that produce a seasonal schedule or mid-season change. Consumer sentiments might well be one of the more visible of these.

Among the six types, all expressed some problem with some violence in television programs; most want a more responsible approach by the industry. This observation carries the inherent suggestion of a democratically achievable majority on one side of the issue. Review of these opinion segments indicates a latent majority opinion probably does exist; the strength of opinion likely to produce action, however, appears limited to the kind of minority effort observed in the past--e.g., Action for Children's Television and other parent groups--for most also place control of children's viewing in the hands of parents. Responses to the following provide some insight:

9. (+2 +3 +4 +4 +4 +1) If the parents train the child in the proper way, the child will not use the TV model. The most important model for children is the parents.

While all opinion segments give some endorsement to the statement, the Informed, Responsible Parents (factor I) and the Religious Viewers (VI) are least supportive. But, they are most likely to be organized or to have access to existing organizations for disseminating their views on the general question. While the data analysis suggests that those with the general characteristics of most Americans endorse the statement very strongly, the influence of an amorphous democratic majority may prove less effective than the lobby of the well informed, the religious, and the well organized broaching industry and government.

A question of parallel importance is that of controlling media content for child viewers:

50. (+4 +5 +2 0 +4 0) Children's TV viewing has to be controlled by the parents.

Informed, Responsible Parents (factor I), wanting positive parenting; Amoral Marketers (II), favoring unrestricted media; and Compromisers (V), avoiding controversy, give strong endorsement. On the other hand, Dramatic TV Fans (III) enjoy action programs and are marginally supportive; whereas Pro-television Homemakers (IV), wanting children prepared to live in a tough world, and Religious Viewers (VI), wanting morally acceptable content, have indicated the statement to be irrelevant to their perspectives. And, parental control is preferred over government control:

48. (+2 +5 +4 +5 -2 +2) I would rather see parents exercise control over watching TV violence by youngsters than to have federal government control over broadcasters.

Only the Compromisers (V) are even marginally non-supportive of parental control rather than government control over the amount of violence on television, but the best organized and best informed only marginally favor parental control.

Still, the potential for a significant majority to emerge on the "family" side of conflict over pro-

gram content can be seen in assessments of the efficacy of the medium in a teaching capacity:

10. (+4 -2 +5 +2 +3 +5) TV is a powerful teaching tool; I think it is too bad that TV is not being used to teach prosocial rather than anti-social behavior.

Only Amoral Marketers (II) do not support this "motherhood" issue. Here, the best organized, best informed, and most likely to be vocal are strongest in their endorsement. The potential of the tool to be an instructional device has wide acceptance and might be pivotal in mustering support beyond a vocal, organized minority. The potential of the idea is further supported by the use children are perceived to make of the medium:

8. (+5 +1 +3 +3 -1 +3) Kids can see and easily learn from TV programs; they learn both good and bad models from TV.

Again, the best informed give the strongest endorsement; only Amoral Marketers (II) and Compromisers (V) are not clearly accepting. The instructional/educational utility of television seems well established in the minds of many.

These findings are not derived from a representative, national sample, but the antipathy to violence in television program content apparent in all six opinion types--however varying--suggests that a majority of Americans have at least some reservations about the amount of violent behavior presented through the medium.² While most strongly believe in the importance of the parental role (statement 9), those most content to rely on it are least likely to exer-

2. This can be corroborated in general by consulting reports of major surveys that have posed relevant items. To the statement "Television shows so much violence that people grow up not being shocked by violence," for example, 53% of a national sample responded "agree" (Harris, 1975: 418).

cise leadership. Still, parental responsibility (statement 50) is strongly endorsed by the best educated, those who want unrestricted media, and those who seem to want to avoid conflict over the issue. And, a preference for parental rather than government control (statement 48) is supported most by those who want unrestricted media, those who want children prepared to face an unpleasant reality, and those who like action in their viewing; the best educated and the best organized are only marginally committed.

In a formal argument, two issue-related concepts may prove critical: That the medium is an effective instructional tool (statement 10) and that children learn both good and bad from it (statement 8) draw strong support from the best educated and moderate to strong support from the religious. The persuasive potential of these arguments is evident in the level of endorsement from Dramatic TV Fans and Pro-television Homemakers to both items.

Television programmers will recognize here only one major source of ready support for typical levels of violence in general programming--the Amoral Marketers. Dramatic TV Fans and Pro-television Homemakers may tend to be somewhat in the same camp, but elements of their views make them especially amenable to the arguments of lobby groups. Compromisers find appeal in the reinforcement theory perspective but seem to make no firm commitment, probably because they do not see themselves affected by watching violence. Religious Viewers and Informed, Responsible Parents will likely continue to be the nucleus of lobby groups and are in the best position to make an impact; they are party to existing organizations and have the education to interpret social research and the concern to work for changes based on findings of detrimental effects--especially for children.

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NEWS, NOTES & COMMENT

Putting Q into QASS

Alexander Nesterenko (Communication, U Tulsa) has been formally invited by Sage Publications to prepare a manuscript on Q methodology for possible publication in the prestigious series, Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences (QASS), which is part of Sage's University Paper Series. The intent of the monograph is to fill the need for an approximately 90-page primer on technical and philosophical issues which would prepare the novice for more elaborate treatments. Nesterenko's manuscript is due later in 1984 and, if accepted, will be published in 1985, Q methodology's 50th year. The monograph would cost approximately \$5 and would join an impressive list of almost 40 other QASS titles on topics such as factor analysis, variance analysis, causal modeling, multi-dimensional scaling, and network analysis.

For the Record

In the January 1983 *OS* (p. 68), the 14-item Q sample used in a 1981 study by Manera and Wright was cited as the smallest ever to have been used, but this record was eclipsed with the recent publication of a medical degree thesis written by Lucila Castañeda de León in which a Q sample of size $N=7$ was employed: *Correlacion Entre Privacion Temprana y Conducta Asocial: Metodología Q Aplicada en la Clínica del Niño Sano del Hospital Roosevelt de Guatemala* [Correlation Between Maternal Deprivation and Asocial Behavior: Q Methodology Applied at the Healthy Child Clinic of the Roosevelt Hospital in Guatemala City], Faculty of Medical Science, University of San Carlos of Guatemala, August 1983, 104 pp. (limited publication and distribution). According to a summary provided