

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BELIEFS, ATTITUDES AND TELEVISION VIEWING PATTERNS

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There can be little doubt that television provides a vivid and compelling form of home entertainment or that it exists as a pervasive and potent source of influence in the lives of most people. Nevertheless, the effect which television viewing has on behaviour is a highly contentious issue. One area which has received detailed attention by researchers is the relationship between violent TV programming and antisocial or delinquent behaviour. While the overall weight of evidence on this issue suggests a definite, and unfavourable, link (Stein & Freidrich, 1975; Belson, 1978; Murray, 1973) polemical, rather than critical, evaluation often predominates the literature. Thus, Skornia claims that... "there is abundant evidence that TV violence is indeed dangerous to our nation" (1976, p.30) while Lessor (1977) asserts that the research is ... "shackled to untenable theoretical and methodological considerations that render the research findings virtually useless" (p.30).

Recently, investigators have shifted their focus to more positive aspects of programming but the basic research paradigms remain the same and presumably will provide equally equivocal answers. To some extent the literature on the influence of television appears to have reached a stalemate with many studies being simple replications with minor variations. Doubtless these efforts are important in contributing to our general pool of knowledge but perhaps it is time to approach the topic from a new perspective and to ask some qualitatively different questions.

Two aspects of TV's influence are in urgent need of creative research:

- (a) the attitudes of parents towards television programming, both generally and specifically, in relation to the viewing rules they impose on their children; and
- (b) an investigation of the "values" which children hold and the relationship between these and viewing patterns.

The current project is seeking information on both these aspects and the first part of the study is already in progress (though the data have not been analysed). This study focusses on the attitudes of parents — a seemingly crucial issue. Since parents have the power to control the TV viewing of their children, under what conditions will they do so? For example,

the link between violent programs and anti-social behaviour is often noted in the press but few researchers have examined the impact of these reports on parents. If this link is finally and explicitly proven what action will parents think — though TV monitoring guidelines, for parents, have often been presented (Tindall, Reid & Goodwin, 1977). The current study collects two levels of data, behavioural and attitudinal. Parents are asked to report on the viewing habits of their pre-school child, the amount of control which they exert over this activity, and the type of control actually exerted. Specific subscales examine:

(i) parental attitudes toward the influence of TV on children in general and (ii) parents' attitudes toward the need to protect children from this source of influence. We are particularly interested in the relationship between parents' expressed attitudes and their actual behaviour regarding their child's TV viewing.

Some 500 questionnaires covering these topics have already been despatched. Mothers of children attending the six Lady Gowrie Child Centres in each of the six capital cities of Australia have been requested to complete the forms. It is anticipated that the sample will include a wide range of occupational and educational levels.

Data for the second part of the project will be collected during the 1979 school year. Currently, we are developing a tool for assessing the values of primary school children and adolescents. It is envisaged that all children will complete a values' scale and additionally will participate by rating a variety of TV programs. Short segments of these programs will be shown on videotape so that the subjects will have concrete evidence about the main characters and themes. Additionally, it is expected that extensive open-ended interviewing will be an important component of the data collection process. It is hoped that these procedures will describe not only what programs the children watch, but will also help to explain **why** they watch particular programs. Additionally, this study should reveal which style of program children believe should be presented more often and what activities they find to be desirable competitors for their TV viewing periods. If our investigations yield fruitful data, the study will be expanded to

consider additional aspects. Further, it is anticipated that a replication of this study will be conducted in the United States so that some statement on the cultural generality of our findings can be made.

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CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PARENTS AND THEMSELVES — ANNE SILCOCK

One hundred boys and one hundred girls aged 6, 7 & 8 years ($N = 600$), attending Brisbane Primary Schools which cater for children from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, completed structured and unstructured tasks on their perceptions of their parents and themselves. Possible relationships between these two sets of data, age and sex differences relative to each area, will be examined. The responses of children from single parent families and those with cross — sex identifications are of particular interest to the researcher. To date only the structured parent data has been analysed and the unstructured material is being processed.

Factor I, Authoritarian Behaviour loaded on items such as "strict", "angry", "yells", "threatens" and "punishes". These items were more often allocated to fathers than to mothers with the exception of "yells" which the six year old boys and girls received as somewhat more appropriate for mothers.

Factor II, Intimidation loaded on "bosses", "rough", "scared of", all overwhelmingly assigned to fathers, and negatively on "gentle", "kind" and "comforts", overwhelmingly assigned to mothers.

Factor III, Devotion, loaded on items such as "most loving", "helps" and "works hard". "Most loving" was strongly endorsed as applicable to mothers and "works hard" to fathers. "Helps" was received as appropriate to mothers although the margin of difference was small for boys aged 6 and 8 years. At all ages girls give a much stronger endorsement of "helps" as appropriate to mothers than was apparent for boys.

Factor IV, Physical Strength, was associated with items such as "strong", "brave" and "powerful", words overwhelmingly attributed to fathers.

Factor V, Cognitive Strength, loaded on "wise", "clever" and "smart", generally considered to be more appropriate to fathers. With the first two items there was a trend for girls to see fathers as wiser and more clever than mothers, lent decreasingly so with

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increase in age.

Although there were interesting age and sex differences on a number of items subjects generally followed the traditional cultural stereotypes in allocating items as appropriate to either fathers or mothers.

Consideration of the unstructured data indicates that this differs from the above in a number of important ways. During the administration of this task the children appeared to give a great deal of thought to the matter and work much longer to complete the six short sentences than they did to assigning the thirty-six items of the forced choice questionnaire. They appear to have completed the former with their own parents in mind, and the latter with cultural stereotypes of parents in mind.

Half of the responses to "Mothers are ..." and "Fathers are ..." described personal qualities in approving terms. "Good", "Nice", "Happy", "Terrific" and "Wonderful" were applied more or less equally often to fathers and to mothers. The possibility for this type of response does not exist in the formats customarily used to investigate children's perceptions of their parents.

Furthermore less than two per cent of the responses had negative connotations and more of the six responses given by each of the 600 children referred to punishment.

Paradoxically, items in both these categories feature prominently in the traditional measures of parent perception. Thus the divergence between children's more or less spontaneous descriptions of their parents and the responses they allocate in structured test situation appears to be very great.

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