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# Television and Children. Priorities for Research

Ford Foundation

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## Television and Children

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### Priorities for Research

Report of a Conference at Reston, Virginia  
November 5-7, 1975

Sponsored by  
The Ford Foundation  
The John and Mary R. Markle Foundation  
The National Science Foundation

**JUN 1976**

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## Introduction

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"I believe television is going to be the test of the modern world, and that in this new opportunity to see beyond the range of our vision, we shall discover either a new and unbearable disturbance of the general peace or a saving radiance in the sky." *E. B. White, 1938\**

Television was just a magic box when E. B. White first saw it in 1936. Yet to him and to many others its potential to change people's lives was stunning. Social observers were not long in noting the especially powerful attraction of television for children, and by the mid-fifties television and children had become the subject of large-scale research. Still, the momentum of this revolutionary invention outpaced the study of its impact in society. Now, almost forty years later, it is even harder to unravel the myriad effects of television. And television refuses to stand still so that research can catch up; new variations, such as cable and pay television, home videotape recorders, and video-discs will make it even more difficult for those who continue to try to assess the role of the now pervasive magic box.

As a step toward thoughtful use of past research experience to guide future study and action, three foundations—the Ford Foundation, the National Science Foundation, and the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation—co-sponsored a conference at Reston, Virginia, in November 1975 to propose priorities for new research on television and children.

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\*E. B. White, "One Man's Meat," *Harpers Magazine* 177 (1938): 553.

The conference had two objectives. The first was to assemble as broad a range of people as possible to think through the many directions future research might take and to produce from these possibilities an ordered set of guidelines for the benefit of researchers and sponsors of research. The second was to so frame the guidelines that those responsible for formulating television policies—government agencies, the broadcasting and advertising industries, educational institutions, and citizen groups—might be aided by social science research. This publication is both a report on the conference and a statement of the recommendations made by the eighty-five participants.

The conference was organized by the Ford Foundation and reflected increasing concern among many public and private groups about the role of television in the lives of the young—a role so powerful that some believe television's significance in children's lives now approaches that of the traditional educational agents, parents and schools. The Ford Foundation had been interested in the potential of television since 1951, when it began making grants to increase the educational possibilities of the medium. Like many others, however, it concentrated early efforts on the improved use of television and gave little attention to understanding its effects. Not until the 1970s did the Foundation—its Communications and Public Education offices—recognize the need to bring understanding to parity with activity. In 1974 it began considering support for new research on the subject.

Also in 1974, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation 3

sponsored a thorough evaluation of the current state of scientific knowledge about the influence of television on human behavior, directed by George Comstock at the Rand Corporation. Three volumes of that series appeared in June 1975. One report, *Television and Human Behavior: The Research Horizon, Future and Present*,\* surveyed current trends and priorities in television research within the social science community. The effects of television on children was by far the most extensive area of past research and also led the list of priorities for future research.

This study signaled several lessons of the past as guides for the future:

- The priorities of the social science community heretofore were closely linked to the expressed interests of funding agencies—e.g., Congressional alarm about television violence resulted in extensive research on that subject.

- Several aspects of the role of television in the lives of young people have been extensively studied and significant conclusions can be drawn from this research. However, these conclusions may be ignored or poorly understood by those responsible for formulating policies.

- No systematic approach has been taken to study television's effects on children's development over time. Although existing *ad hoc* support has been beneficial in allowing creative people to pursue fresh ideas and theories, the resulting research has not been integrated into a coherent theory.

- No communication or coordination exists among the institutions supporting research in this area; thus there is no connective mechanism to ensure that projects do not duplicate similar studies going on elsewhere.

These lessons, combined with the fact that the report reflected only the inclinations and interests of the research community, suggested a need for broader partici-

\*George Comstock and Georg Lindsey, *Television and Human Behavior: The Research Horizon, Future and Present*, R-1748-CF, Santa Monica, Calif., The Rand Corporation, 1975.

pation in setting an agenda for future research. The appearance of the Comstock report not only affected the Ford Foundation's explorations along similar lines but also coincided with a discernible increase in interest in the subject at other foundations and in government. We therefore proposed using the report as a point of departure for planning a new research agenda with contributions from a wide spectrum of interested parties.

With cooperation from the National Science Foundation, which also was considering a new program of research on television and social behavior, and the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation, which specializes in communications issues, we designed a working conference to include both leading social scientists in the field and others concerned about the role of television in children's development.

Unlike many conferences at which participants are mere auditors, this one demanded active involvement by all present. It began with an evening session addressed by officials of three federal agencies occupied with television and the young. After two background reviews, the next day was devoted to five concurrent workshops, each with about fifteen participants carefully chosen to represent pertinent viewpoints. Each workshop had an assigned focus and delivered its conclusions at a plenary session on the third day.

This report presents a summary of remarks by the opening night's speakers, the background statements by George Comstock and Lloyd Morrisett, an overview of the workshop recommendations, and the individual workshop reports. A table summarizing workshop recommendations appears on page 16. Participants and their affiliations are shown on page 36.

We were gratified by so much concentrated work by so many but we wish to acknowledge with special thanks the invaluable help from George Comstock and workshop leaders Henry Goldberg, Gerald Lesser, Keith Mielke, Eli Rubinstein, and Alberta Siegel.

Kristin Anderson  
Nancy Dennis

# 1

## Opening Sessions

"Having come of age in the industrial countries, television has lost its magic power of mimicry. Now, television is criticized from all sides. . . . Television is . . . made responsible for every malfunctioning of modern society. In short, it has become the new scapegoat. . . . Are we not now simply burning what we have adored too long?"\*

Opening the conference, Fred W. Friendly, the Ford Foundation's Advisor on Communications, used this quote to emphasize that the meeting had been called neither to bury nor to praise television, but to try to understand it—specifically its impact on children. "The statistics tell us that our children are spending more than half of their waking hours before a television set. Yet we are still seeking an understanding of the exact influence of so much television viewing, and indeed we are uncertain about how to come to grips with it." But more and more people want answers from social science about the complicated questions surrounding television's influence. "The time seems right," he said, "to set new priorities for research on the medium, and potential users of research should have a say in setting those priorities; for that reason, we have called together this group of experts. Is it possible for you to establish some degree of consensus about which ideas will work and which will make some difference?" In calling for general agreement about research priorities,

he pointed to the problem funding agencies face in dividing dollars among many good ideas and projects in an area of such magnitude and importance. "We in the foundation world have got to make a lot of decisions about what research we will fund. . . . We hope this meeting will start a dialogue about what research is important, what is pertinent, what is do-able."

Speaking for the major federal agency funding scientific research, Dr. Richard C. Atkinson, Deputy Director, the National Science Foundation, described the recent reorganization of the NSF, which has given increased prominence to the social and behavioral sciences. This new commitment, he said, was made more difficult by the increasing demands on the limited funds available for all categories of research. Nevertheless, as part of its commitment to the social and behavioral sciences, he announced that NSF planned a new program to support research on television and behavior. "I believe that we're at a point in the development of the field where, with a proper degree of funding, long-term support, and both basic and applied work, a significant contribution could be made by the scientific community."

The relationship between research and federal policy was the theme of the two other principal speakers at the opening dinner. Lewis A. Engman, then Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission, stated the dilemmas faced by the FTC in attempting to protect against advertising potentially harmful and deceptive to young persons. Regulatory action, he said, was difficult because there was almost no time when there were not

\*John C. Texier Review of *Television Authority and Money* by Jacques Thibau. *INDEX on Censorship* 3 (1974): 84.

some children in the television audience. He said that research could assist the agency by identifying aspects of commercials that are "harmful" or "deceptive" and by determining the impact of various regulatory alternatives.

Richard E. Wiley, Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, described his agency's role in the adoption by the broadcasting industry early in 1975 of the "family viewing" period during which violent and sexual content is restricted. He observed that this development had its roots in the Surgeon General's study of television and violence in 1970-72, which supported the hypothesis that television violence increases young people's aggressiveness. That study led Congress to demand FCC action. The agency, in accord with statutory restrictions on its powers, asked the industry to consider self-regulatory action. He emphasized that the "family viewing" reform was adopted

voluntarily without any threat of government regulation. He concluded that the experience had convinced him that research on the social effects of television can influence both government and the industry.

Both Engman and Wiley argued that research should not focus exclusively on questions bearing directly on regulatory options. There are too many important issues, they agreed, on which greater knowledge would be desirable but which, for various reasons, are not suitable for regulatory action.

Two keynote addresses the next morning outlined background factors that the workshops ought to consider in recommending priorities. George Comstock reviewed the research history that preceded the conference. Lloyd Morrisett, President of the Markle Foundation, delineated the conflicting interests that make the setting of research priorities a necessity.

### Setting the Stage for a Research Agenda

George Comstock

The Rand Corporation

We are here to formulate guidelines for future research on the role of television in the lives of young persons. Six relevant factors form the background to our task. They are:

- First, the historical evolution of such research to date.
- Second, the research priorities currently held within the scientific community.
- Third, the pattern of prior support for such research.
- Fourth, the many signs of high interest in the topic.
- Fifth, the conflicts between a science-oriented approach to research and one which is intended to guide decision-making and social innovation.
- Sixth, new options for the organization and conduct of such research.

**Historical Evolution** Three singular events stand out in the development of research on television and children.

The first was the report in a leading scientific journal in 1963 of two laboratory experiments: "Imitation of Film-Mediated Aggressive Models," by Bandura, Ross,

and Ross\* and "Effects of Film Violence on Inhibitions Against Subsequent Aggression," by Berkowitz and Rawlings.† Certainly a complete history of television research would give a prominent place to the large-scale studies of Schramm, Lyle, and Parker in the United States and of Himmelweit and her colleagues in England.\*\* I single out the two smaller studies, however, because when they were published the prevailing view in the social science community was that television had few effects on the young. These two studies marked a shift in thinking toward the current belief

\*A. Bandura, D. Ross, and S. A. Ross. "Imitation of Film-Mediated Aggressive Models." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 1963, 66, 3-11.

†L. Berkowitz and E. Rawlings. "Effects of Film Violence on Inhibitions Against Subsequent Aggression." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 1963, 66, 405-412.

\*\*W. Schramm, J. Lyle, and E. B. Parker. *Television in the Lives of Our Children*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1961; and H. T. Himmelweit, A. N. Oppenheim, and P. Vince. *Television and the Child*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

that there is a wide range of possibly important relationships between television viewing and the young.

The second singular event was the "Surgeon General's study" of televised violence. It began in 1969, included about 25 individual research projects, and cost some \$1 million. The research findings, along with evidence from earlier research, were reviewed by a special twelve-member scientific advisory committee. The final output consisted of five volumes containing sixty separate papers and reports by social scientists, plus a 169-page committee report.\*

The most important conclusion of the committee, whose membership included several broadcasting industry representatives, was that there was evidence of a causal relationship between exposure to television violence and aggressiveness. However, the Surgeon General's study also had several other, equally important, outcomes.

First, it directed the attention of the scientific community to new issues, because it probed the cause-and-effect question as thoroughly as methodology would permit. Furthermore, the positive inference drawn by the committee dramatized the possibility that there might be other relationships between television and children worthy of investigation. As a result scientific attention was redirected to:

—New topics, such as television's actual and potential contribution to other kinds of behavior, e.g., cooperation, help, and leadership.

—Psychological and social processes behind effects.

\*G. A. Comstock and E. A. Rubinstein (Eds.). *Television and Social Behavior*. Vol. 1. *Media Content and Control*; J. P. Murray, E. A. Rubinstein, and G. A. Comstock (Eds.). *Television and Social Behavior*. Vol. 2. *Television and Social Learning*; G. A. Comstock and E. A. Rubinstein (Eds.). *Television and Social Behavior*. Vol. 3. *Television and Adolescent Aggressiveness*; E. A. Rubinstein, G. A. Comstock, and J. P. Murray (Eds.). *Television and Social Behavior*. Vol. 4. *Television in Day-to-Day Life: Patterns of Use*; G. A. Comstock, E. A. Rubinstein, and J. P. Murray (Eds.). *Television and Social Behavior*. Vol. 5. *Television's Effects: Further Explorations*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972.

Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior. *Television and Growing Up; The Impact of Televised Violence*. Report to the Surgeon General, United States Public Health Service. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1972.

—Circumstances and conditions that might mitigate undesired effects or enhance desired effects.

Second, prior to the Surgeon General's study, about fifty experiments had demonstrated—within the confines of the laboratory—that young persons who viewed something the investigators labeled "violent" on film or television were more likely to respond immediately thereafter in a manner the investigators called "aggressive." About twenty of these experiments showed that young children would imitate such observed violence. About thirty showed that non-imitative aggressiveness of children and adolescents increased after observing such violence. The results of the studies, all of which employed the laboratory experiment, the most rigorous and most recommended method available for causal inference, were published in scientific journals and were well received by social scientists.

Others, however, doubted that in this area the laboratory experiment could produce results generalizable to real life. The credibility of the method was not persuasive beyond the social science community. What the Surgeon General's study undertook to provide, and what the positive inference of the committee turned upon, was the corroborating evidence from experiments in real-life settings and from surveys that measured real-life viewing and real-life aggressiveness.

Thus, a major legacy of the Surgeon General's program is the striking demonstration that under some circumstances a single method, however powerful in certain respects, is inadequate. In this case, the inadequacy is not attributable to any flaw of the laboratory experiment but rather to the fact that no single methodological genre is free from plausible criticism when it comes to drawing inferences about real-life cause and effect. The legacy might be put in the form of a proposition: the greater the degree of vested interest or controversy, the less credible the findings produced by a single method and the greater the need to employ a multiplicity of different methods.

The third singular event in recent television research history was the appearance of Children's Television Workshop in 1968. From the perspective of this conference, CTW's major relevance is not its demonstration that high-quality children's entertainment is possible, but that research can play a role in developing such programming. Like the Surgeon General's study,

CTW has widened the range of television-related interests among social scientists, turning attention toward:

—Research to design better programs for young persons.

—Research to identify how television may contribute positively to young people's lives.

**Priorities Within the Social Science Community** The research priorities currently held by social scientists reflect these three events. In *Television and Human Behavior: The Research Horizon, Future and Present*, I report that the highest priority, among all possible topics for the study of television and human behavior, is the study of television in the socialization of young persons. Within this broad rubric, there is strong interest in television's role in contributing to:

—Socially desirable, or "prosocial," behavior

—Role socialization, or the learning of expectations about the behavior of others and appropriate responses

—Political socialization

—Antisocial behavior

Before the Surgeon General's study, the last would have been first by a wide margin.

Despite the concern expressed by many outside the social science community about television advertising, only limited interest was found in scientific research on the effects of such advertising on young persons. There has been very little support for such research, and social scientists are not accustomed to thinking of it as a possible area for study. Many disdain research involving advertising, thinking it useful only for commercial purposes and therefore unworthy of science. There has also been skepticism about whether such research would have any practical influence. The report concludes, however, that this topic could rise sharply in prominence if there were signs of new support; if attention were focused on such important issues as effects on health practices or basic values; and if there were evidence of genuine interest in using research to correct possible abuses.

The report suggests that the highest methodological priorities are given to:

—Naturalistic experimentation, where the design is the same as for a laboratory experiment but the circumstances are everyday and as nonartificial as possible.

—Multiple methods, where different methodological

genres with compensating strengths are employed to study a single question.

—Improvement of techniques for panel studies, where measurements are made of the same group at various points in time, so that effects and their fluctuations as they actually occur can be understood.

—Continuing adaptation of the laboratory experiment, to take advantage of its strengths in making causal inferences and of its flexibility for studying questions difficult to study in other ways.

**Pattern of Support** The pattern of support for television research is of special significance for this meeting. Excluding research related to instructional programming, the total of research support for all topics is currently less than \$2 million a year.\* This is about 2/100th of one percent of the total spent on television by consumers and advertisers annually in the early 1970s. The amount devoted to research on television and young persons is somewhat less.

More important, support for research on television and young persons is highly fragmented. Institutions involved include the television networks, several private foundations, the Office of Child Development, the National Institute of Education, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the National Science Foundation. There is little, if any, coordination. Furthermore, much of the research occurs within programs whose emphases are other than television and in isolation from other relevant research.

Equally important, the support is *laissez-faire*. The typical approach is to solicit proposals on a vaguely defined topic, seek outside counsel on their quality, and fund on the basis of some combination of scientific merit and institutional interest. Sponsors rarely require clear specification of issues to be addressed, methods to be employed, or possible applications. Even more rarely do sponsors insist upon whatever specifications they initially may define. Almost never is support managed so that studies develop around a theme to which television is central.

**Signs of High Interest** Nevertheless, there presently are many signs of widespread interest in the role of

\*Estimated from the data collected for: *Television and Human Behavior: The Research Horizon, Future and Present*.

television in the lives of young persons and in research on the topic. To cite a few:

—Activity of the Social Science Research Council's Committee on Television and Social Behavior, which recently issued a report on the feasibility and the desirability of a "violence profile."<sup>\*</sup>

—The continuing concern in Congress about the influence of television violence and the more recent concern about the influence of television advertising. Numerous hearings have been held over the past 25 years, most recently in 1972, 1974, and 1975, and more are promised for 1976.

—The adoption of "family viewing" hours by the broadcasting industry in 1975 following concern expressed by Congress and the Federal Communications Commission.

—The publicly announced concern at the Federal Trade Commission over the effects on young persons of television advertising.

—The 1975 Aspen Foundation Forum on Communications, which reviewed options for foundation action relative to the mass media and recommended support for research.

—Active pressure from various public interest organizations, such as Action for Children's Television and the Council on Children, Media, and Merchandising.

—The current effort by the Writers Guild of America to obtain Congressional hearings and, eventually, a "blue ribbon" commission to examine television's performance.

—The announcement by the National Science Foundation that it is considering greatly expanded support of research on television and social behavior, with emphasis on television and the young and on the effects of television advertising.

**Conflicts Between Research Approaches** *Television and Human Behavior: The Research Horizon, Future and Present* found widespread interest within the social science community in conducting research more relevant to the decisions made by broadcasters, producers, and writers; by parents, teachers, and community

<sup>\*</sup>Social Science Research Council, Committee on Television and Social Behavior. "A Profile on Televised Violence." Report to the National Institute of Mental Health, July 1975.

leaders; by schools and other institutions; and by such regulatory bodies as the Federal Trade Commission and the Federal Communications Commission.

However, it also found that there were some not-always-clearly-perceived conflicts between such action-oriented research and the science-oriented research customarily pursued by most social scientists. The two major conflicts between action-oriented and science-oriented research derive from their differing criteria, first, for deciding what to study and second, for evaluating the significance of their results:

—Action-oriented research arises from the desire to cope with problems in the real world. Some questions, however intrinsically intriguing, can be ignored if there seems little chance of doing anything about them. Action-oriented research is directed to assessing the benefit or harm of specific circumstances. By contrast, science-oriented research explores questions because they are theoretically relevant. It tests hypotheses to revise and refine the theories from which they are derived, without regard to any implications the hypotheses may have for actions in the real world.

—Science-oriented research tries to establish general laws. It therefore uses very rigorous standards for accepting a specific research outcome as significant. The result is that some outcomes are dismissed, although they may be of great practical importance. Action-oriented research, on the other hand, is interested in exploring the consequences of specific circumstances and innovations designed to improve the human condition, rather than in establishing general laws. It must evaluate its results by criteria that recognize the significance and meaningfulness of outcomes that may not meet strict scientific standards. The pure social scientist's inclination to infer "no effect" unless it is demonstrated at a very high level of certainty must be modified by the applied researcher exploring the ambiguities of real-life situations for guidelines to help solve problems and make decisions.

Research thus should be seen as serving not one but two functions, each based on somewhat different rules. There is the knowledge expansion function, where the rules are those of science-oriented research, and there is the innovation assessment function, where the rules must guard against ignoring what is helpful or harmful

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solely because it is not validated by strict scientific criteria.

**New Ways to Organize and Conduct Research** The sixth factor—another legacy of the Surgeon General's study—consists of new options for the conduct of research on television and the young.

Leo Bogart's evaluation of the Surgeon General's study in the *Public Opinion Quarterly* concluded that it was unique as a focused program of federally supported research on the mass media.\* Some of the characteristics of such an approach are:

—An encompassing theme is chosen, around which a coordinated research program is organized. The varied individual studies reinforce, complement, and question each other.

—There is a scientifically capable staff, which seeks out researchers, guides proposals and their implementation, and criticizes draft reports. One result is increased quality of research.

—With the varied studies conducted within a single framework, there is opportunity for cooperation and collaboration among the investigators even when the desirability of such activity becomes clear only after the research is well underway.

—With a publication program, the research moves with unusual rapidity from completion to discussion by

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\*See L. Bogart. "Warning, The Surgeon General Has Determined That TV Violence Is Moderately Dangerous to Your Child's Mental Health." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1972, 36, 491-521.

scientists and the general public. One result is increased impact on new research. Another is early availability for use by decision-makers.

—Given a coherent effort, it is possible to have scientific impact well beyond the research actually conducted. For example, the Surgeon General's study involved a number of vigorous young researchers in studies of television, thereby increasing the number of social scientists capable of dealing with the subject.

—There is a built-in mechanism—the report of the scientific advisory committee—for review and integration with existing scientific knowledge. One result is almost instant evaluation of the research, followed by further evaluation as the initial critiques are debated by interested parties.

**Conclusion** Those are the six factors that form a backdrop to the conference. There is also a very important seventh factor that stands apart because it does not relate directly to research. I refer to the future character of television in the United States. No one knows what the configuration will be in a few years among open commercial and public broadcasting, cable television, and in-home playback technology. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that among the changes will be greatly increased individual choices in viewing, sharply curtailed possibilities to improve programming by centralized action within the broadcasting industry, and greater opportunities and greater problems in providing good television for young viewers.

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### The Need for Research Priorities

Lloyd N. Morrisett, President

The John and Mary R. Markle Foundation

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Research is an intriguing topic for a conference on television and children because it seems to have some value for everyone—the social scientist, the citizen advocate, the government regulator, and the foundation executive. But their interests sometimes conflict, making it difficult to agree on research priorities.

**Conflicting Interests** For social scientists research is their profession, their daily activity, the stuff of their

careers. Their hopes for professional achievement frequently center on research. They are therefore eager to design scientifically good research projects in all areas, including studies of television and children. The problem is that the researcher's methodology and theory may not be capable of answering the kinds of questions that others interested in television and children ask. Nor will the researcher necessarily be able to see that his techniques are not adequate to the tasks at hand.

For **citizen advocates** research promises incontrovertible evidence for firmly held beliefs. The problem is that there are others who hold opposite views and who hope for different and equally incontrovertible outcomes from research. It is difficult, therefore, to design neutral research that will give empirical answers to questions, rather than research that is somehow biased to support the views of people who think they already know its outcome.

For **government regulators** research offers a possible way to remove some of the uncertainties faced when decisions are to be made—or not made. It is also a way to rationalize governmental and bureaucratic processes, which is a continuing goal for those in public administration. Although research results may remove some of the uncertainty surrounding decisions, they may also open up new areas of uncertainty. Research is seldom definitive. It invariably suggests new avenues to explore and raises new questions because its results are less than clear-cut.

For **foundation executives** research is a way to do good in a legitimate, nonpartisan manner in the best tradition of philanthropy. The difficulty is that there are always alternate, equally legitimate uses for foundation funds, although they may be somewhat riskier than research. An additional problem is that research is often long-term, and many foundation executives like to see their funds have immediate impact.

**Problems to be Confronted** To design research that will have both scientific and practical importance is not easy. Not only must priorities be set, but they must be constantly revised and persistently pursued. Many years ago, a specially organized study group on psycholinguistics followed this course and demonstrated that such an undertaking can succeed. The mapping of priorities for psycholinguistics in that Interuniversity Summer Research Seminar on Linguistics and Psychology held at Cornell University in 1951 resulted over the next two decades in an outpouring of research and the maturing of a young discipline.\*

\*For a description of these developments, see "The Decades of Council Activity in the Rapprochement of Linguistics and Social Science" by Susan Ervin-Tripp. *Items*, Vol. 28, No. 1, March 1974, New York: Social Science Research Council.

If it was easy to do good research on television and children, it would have already been done. The research on teaching and television, where innumerable studies have shown that there is little difference between teaching in the classroom and teaching over the television screen, shows that it is all too easy to do repetitive and insignificant research and very difficult to do research that is cumulative and significant.

Because social scientists were relatively quiescent during the explosive growth of television between 1950 and 1965, many research opportunities were lost. Appropriate controls that could have been set up when television was not universal are now almost impossible.

Although it is generally agreed that television has become a part of modern culture, we have scarcely begun to understand the relation between television and child development. Several problems must be addressed. One is stimulus definition. Despite some studies of violence and prosocial television programming, definitions of violence and prosocial programming remain fairly broad. Nor do these or any of the other customary categories address analytically the effective stimulus that television provides. Instead, definitions of television stimulus are often based on the observers' beliefs about what television does, rather than relating the stimulus to behavior.

Although a number of studies, including those of Himmelweit and colleagues in England and some of the studies in the Surgeon General's program, have shown that television interacts with personality, these interactions are often ignored in the design of research. Rather, it is assumed that television will have a uniform effect across personality differences.\*

Because television is a constant companion of most children as they grow up, the duration of its influence and potential effects must be assumed to be long-term. They therefore demand long-term studies—the hardest for social scientists to carry out because they take maximum energy, time commitment, and funding, and must

\*See H. T. Himmelweit, A. N. Oppenheim, and P. Vince, *Television and the Child*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958; and the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, *Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence*. Report to the Surgeon General, United States Public Health Service. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1972.

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usually be conducted by institutions equipped to engage in such tasks.

When we ask how television is influencing child development we sometimes have difficulty differentiating among feelings, thoughts, and behavior. Television may have influences on all these levels and one level may influence another. We must thus inquire which of these variables are the most important dependent variables and how they can best be studied.

Even though we know that television has some influences on behavior, many questions remain. For example, how do environmental characteristics either support the influence provided by television, or diminish it? The well-known processes of extinction and discrimination almost certainly operate upon behavior initiated by television. If television-induced behavior

has long-term effects, environmental influences probably will extinguish and discriminate among television-influenced behaviors, yet we have little knowledge of how such mechanisms operate in the social environment.

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**The Task at Hand** Research is an orderly and disciplined process of asking and answering questions in a publicly verifiable manner. Priorities need to be set. The question of the relevance of the research itself to these priorities needs to be examined continually, and the priorities need to be redefined as understanding increases. Successful research in this area demands a constant interplay between the need for useful knowledge and the requirements of sound research. All the participants in this conference have a significant role in achieving that interplay.

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## Working Sessions Overview

The five workshops were the heart of the conference. They occupied one full day and concluded on the following morning. Each workshop was assigned a topic, a workshop leader, a reporter, and approximately fifteen participants. These are shown on pages 16-18. Two criteria guided the assignment of participants to particular workshops: matching the experience and interests of the participants to the workshop topic; and achieving a broad range of viewpoints within each group.

Workshop participants were drawn from four sets of interested parties:

—social scientists specializing in the study of television and young persons;

—potential consumers of research, such as representatives of public interest groups, the broadcasting and advertising industries, and various government agencies;

—persons from private and public funding agencies;

—social scientists not directly active in such research but interested in the subject of television in the lives of children.

To insure that there would be sufficient attention to the possible contribution of research to policy and action and that recommendations would not be too wide ranging, each workshop had an assigned focus. Two workshops gave primary emphasis to priorities for research to guide public and regulatory policy. Two emphasized priorities for research to guide action outside the regulatory sphere. The fifth concentrated on research to advance scientific understanding.

All workshops were asked to frame priorities for:

(a) research topics, (b) methods and methodological strategies, and (c) innovations for the organization, funding, and evaluation of research. When the day-long sessions ended, the five workshop leaders prepared reports of their groups' discussions for presentation the following day. Workshops reconvened the next morning to review and amend the leaders' reports and the conference concluded with delivery of the five workshop reports at a plenary session.

Despite the mix of workshop topics and participants, it is evident from the leaders' reports that several common concerns permeated the deliberations. These included:

- Better translation of research findings into policy and action (apparent even in the report of Workshop V, devoted to priorities for the advancement of "pure" science).

- Protecting young persons from unintended harm (most eloquently articulated in the report of Workshop I, but expressed throughout), which is responsible for the amount of attention given television violence and television advertising.

- Insuring that young persons derive the greatest possible benefits from television (predominant in the report of Workshop III, but stressed elsewhere as well).

- Improving the dissemination and evaluation of scientific findings so that the self-correcting mechanisms of science and the rate of practical application can be speeded up (expressed particularly strongly in Workshops I, II, and V).

- Increasing the quality and the impact of research

on television and the young. In every workshop, doubt was expressed that present arrangements are the best, although there was no consensus about improvements.

### Recommendations

The workshop recommendations, as interpreted by the leaders in their reports, are summarized in *Table I* (page 16). In addition to the expected diversity, considerable consensus about topics, methods and innovations was evident.

### Topics

There was consensus on the need for research on several issues:

—Research placing the influence of television more clearly in the context of other factors influencing young people—the family, for example.

—Research focusing on television's contribution to aspects of individual and social life considered important in American society—variously called "prosocial behavior," "antisocial behavior," "attitudes and values," "comprehension," "cognitive skills," "role expectations," "social understanding," "emotional sensitivity."

—Research permitting comparisons between the United States and other societies on television's influence on the young.

—Research taking into account developmental differences so that the influence of television on young persons of different ages can be better understood.

—Research analyzing and monitoring the content of television. The workshops varied in choice of emphasis from anti- and prosocial content to the devices, techniques, and components that make up a television program.

—Research on the television industry as an institution. Here, too, emphasis varied, from the effectiveness of television's self-regulation, to its economics, decision making processes, and relation to other institutions.

**Workshops I and II**, concerned with research to guide regulatory policy, assigned high priority to two topics:

—Television violence, especially the impact on broadcasters and viewers of the "family viewing" hour.

—Television advertising, especially possible deception, the effectiveness of warnings and disclaimers, and

the various factors, such as the age of the viewer, on which the effects might be contingent.

Both workshops urged that regulatory action be minimal, although the report of Workshop I observed that in a few instances regulation of advertising might be called for, since advertising, unlike programming, has only a limited claim to the protection of the First Amendment. Both workshops agreed that reform in broadcasting could be advanced by research in the absence of regulatory action, for example through industry self-regulation. One mechanism by which this could occur is the Congressional hearing to which broadcasters respond, especially over such issues as violence and advertising.

These two workshops also put a high priority on studying the possible effects of change in the broadcasting industry caused by the spread of cable television and the introduction of in-home playback equipment. Other suggestions included research on the effectiveness of present governmental regulation and on the various mechanisms used for self-regulation.

**Workshops III and IV**, concerned with research to guide the non-regulatory sector, both assigned a high priority to research that would guide those who write, produce, and broadcast television specifically designed for young persons. Both also assigned a high priority to research on various effects of programming intended for adults but viewed by young people. Workshop IV, which was the only one that tried to discriminate among priorities, listed as first priority a national assessment of the experience of young people with television in the United States, including what is viewed, the time spent on varying kinds of programs, how television interacts with family life, and how various demographic and ethnic groups differ in their viewing habits. Workshop IV also assigned a high priority to research that would help develop and implement a public-school program to teach children and adolescents about the mass media.

**Workshop V**, concerned with research that would advance scientific understanding, assigned high priorities to cross-national comparisons, to the study of television within the broadest possible social context, to children's developmental differences related to television,

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to the influence of differences in the structural features of programs (such as pacing and interruptions), and to television within the context of the family.

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### Methods

Considerable consensus about methods emerged. It was generally agreed that longitudinal studies were desirable and that specific issues, particularly where action and policy are intended to follow from research, should be investigated by multiple, complementary methods so that the conclusions reached by using different methods can be compared. There was agreement, too, that whenever possible the setting from which data are obtained should be naturalistic, and intrusion into daily life should be minimized, to prevent distorting the data obtained.

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### Innovations

There was some consensus as well as some uncertainty across the five workshops, but little disagreement, about innovations and alternatives to improve the quality and impact of research. It was generally agreed that some kind of new non-governmental center or institute specializing in research on television and the young could serve many useful functions. Nevertheless there was uncertainty on three points about establishing such a center: first, how to find the most useful combination of activities for it to perform out of the large number of possibilities; second, the possible relationship that might develop between the new organization and existing institutions; and third, the problems that might result from creating a new vested interest. These questions are mentioned in the reports of Workshops I, II, and V. It was agreed that alternatives for such a television research institute or center should receive careful consideration.

There was also agreement that a high priority should be assigned to problems of the interrelations among scientists, and between scientists and those responsible for policy or action, whether they are in the government, the broadcasting industry, public interest groups, the schools, or the home. Among the suggestions to improve these relations were better means of disseminating results, for example through special annual issues of a journal or report; the addition of social scientists to the staffs of regulatory agencies and within

the broadcasting industry; and the evaluation of efforts to apply social science to broadcasting questions.

Because of its concern for scientific progress, Workshop V offered emphases somewhat different from the others. Its report strongly supported the research university as the principal locus of basic research, although it acknowledged a role for various specialized institutions. The report also affirmed peer review as the principal means to attain high quality, proposed a program of dissertation research support specially devoted to television and the young, and recommended the regular convening of small, specialized meetings for exchanges among investigators with common interests.

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### Other Considerations

The open discussion following the workshop reports indicated little disagreement with the suggested guidelines. However, several additional considerations were voiced by individual participants.

Ithiel de Sola Pool urged that the varying emphases on the possible positive contributions of television should not draw attention away from the continuing importance of the issue of television violence. He reminded the group that questions revolving around the development of a new "violence profile" are still being debated and that important issues are involved.

Ronald Milavsky argued that those who hope to affect the behavior of broadcasters by measuring what is broadcast must employ measures that are meaningful in two ways. The measures should identify truly harmful or beneficial aspects of programming. The measures should also refer to aspects of programming that broadcasters can effectively change. He also emphasized that the methodological tools for longitudinal studies needed much further development. One useful step, never taken, would be to analyze the same longitudinal data on the effects of television by several different procedures (each of which has its own advantages) to see if conclusions differ.

Adding a trans-Atlantic perspective, Hilde Himmelweit suggested that there were numerous continuities across findings and theories that are sometimes overlooked. The integration and synthesis of these findings and theories, including the integration of American and European research, would be useful.

**Topics**

- A. Impact on young persons of television advertising, whether directed to children or directed to adults but watched by young persons. Issues to study:
  - What leads to possible deception?
  - Options for regulatory control
- B. Processing by young persons of television portrayals, with special attention to content that is violent, treats of sexual relationships, or uses deception to solve problems. Issues to study:
  - Differences between perceptions of young viewers and of adults
  - Variations according to age of viewer
  - Factors influenced by method of presentation
  - Degree of reality attributed to portrayals
  - Effects of behavior after viewing
- C. Influence of television as a socializing agent, particularly in regard to the formation of attitudes and values, and skills. Issues to study:
  - Effects of racial and sexual stereotyping
  - Effects relating to health and nutrition practices
  - Effects on acquisition of cognitive skills
- D. Negative and positive effects of warnings and disclaimers in both advertising and programming. Issues to study:
  - Influence of viewer's age
  - Possible counterproductive influence by stimulating curiosity
- E. Impact of increased program choice to young persons resulting from technological changes, such as cable and in-home replay. Issues to study:
  - Effect on viewing habits
  - Effect on use of other mass media

**Methods**

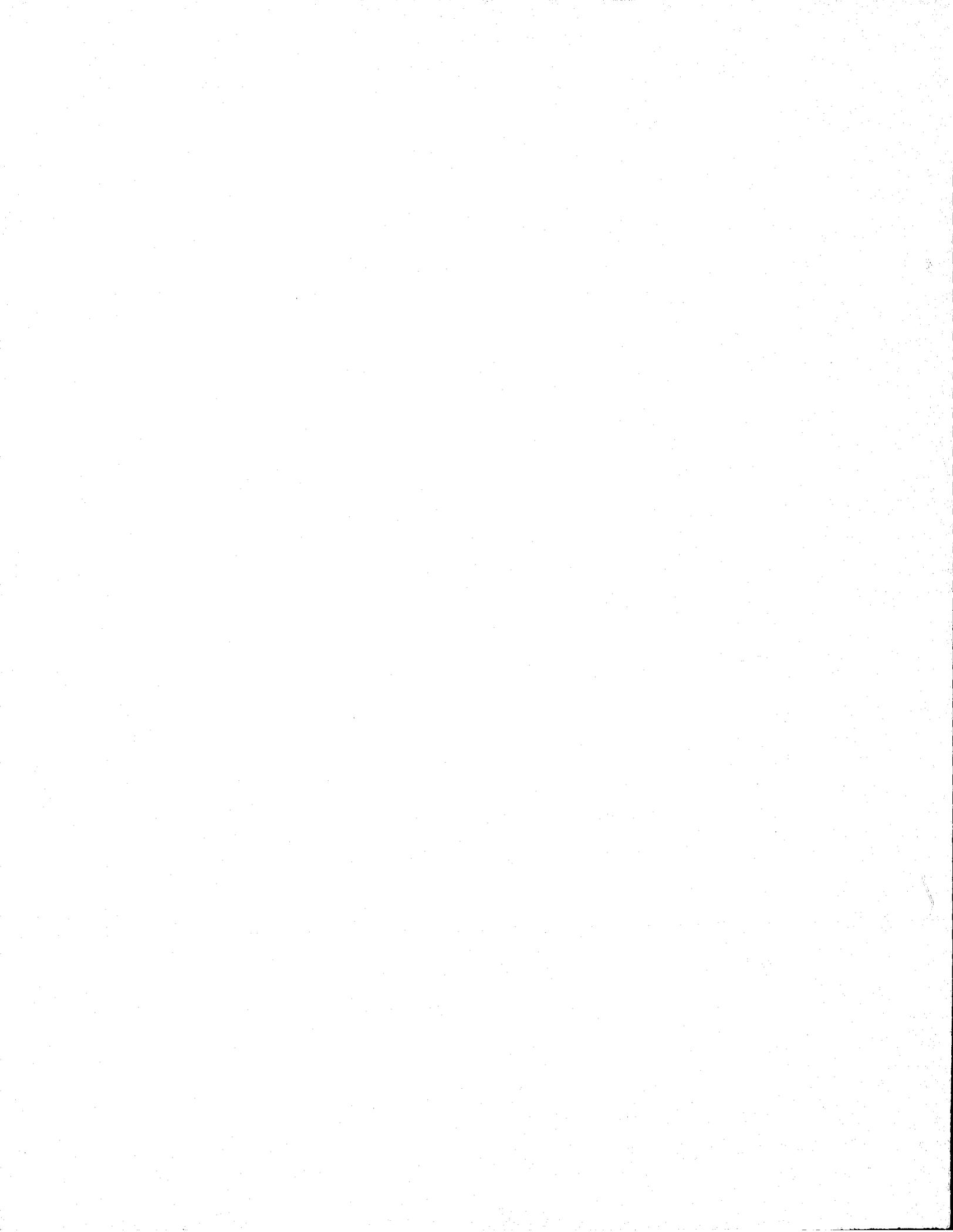
- A. Use multiple, complementary methods to study a problem
- B. Use longitudinal designs to trace effects on socialization
- C. Use field experiments with variation among the television environments of differing communities to test effects of technological changes

**Innovations and Alternatives**

Examine the feasibility, need for, and possible nature of a new center devoted to analysis and dissemination of research on young persons and television

**Participants**

Workshop Leader, Henry Goldberg; Assistant, Ann Simon; Reporter, Judith Riven; Participants: Ellen Shaw Agress, Forrest Chisman, Robert B. Choate, John A. Dimling, Jr., Fred W. Friendly, Bradley Greenberg, Karen Hartenberger, Robert M. Liebert, Alan Pearce, Paul Putney, Jonathon Sheldon, Allen M. Shinn, Jr., Scott Ward, Stephen B. Withey, William Wright



## Workshop II

- A. Effects of changes in broadcasting caused by technological advances. Issues to study:
  - Effect of increased diversity of choice on diversity in viewing
  - Effect of increased diversity of choice on viewing habits over time
  - Differential effects of increased diversity of choice on different classes of viewers, such as the information-rich and the information-poor
- B. Analysis of the effectiveness of self-regulatory policies, National Association of Broadcaster codes, and Federal Communications Commission ascertainment procedures.
- C. Effects of major policy changes and the influence of pressures intended to alter policy. Issues to study:
  - Influence on the broadcasting industry and the behavior of the audience of the "family viewing" hour
  - Effects on subsequent broadcaster performance of license challenges and petitions to deny
  - Effects on policy and practice in government and the broadcasting industry of the growing interaction of consumer groups with broadcasters and regulatory agencies and with the industry
- D. The nature of organizational decision-making within broadcasting. Issues to study:
  - How do the various economic, aesthetic, sociological, and psychological factors influence decisions that determine what is broadcast?
  - What is television's relation to other social institutions, and what is the effect on broadcasting of that relationship?
- E. The impact on young persons of television advertising. Issues to study:
  - Influence on consumption
  - Effects on negative attitudes, such as distrust and cynicism
  - Effects of shifts between programming and advertising content

Multiple, complementary genres focusing on a single problem

## Workshop III

- A. Identification of the role of television in the lives of young persons. Issues to study:
  - What they watch and why
  - Features that distinguish television from other socializing agents
  - Effects when television messages reinforce, contradict, or are irrelevant to messages from other sources, such as parents and teachers
  - Role of the family in television's influence
  - Role of age in responding to television
  - Relationship between differences in family viewing patterns and other family attributes
  - Role of other socializing agents in mediating television's prosocial or antisocial effects
- B. Effects of variation in specific features of television programs, including both programs directed at young persons and programs directed at adults. Issues to study:
  - Influence of pace, humor, action, violence, ideas, segments within programs, auditory techniques, and visual effects
  - Influence of portrayals of social behavior, self-regulatory and self-governing behavior, affective expressions, and roles assigned to women and minorities
- C. Effects on important aspects of individual and social functioning. Some examples:
  - Appeal and attention
  - Comprehension
  - Cognitive skills
  - Attitudes
  - Emotional development
  - Social behavior

- A. Use long range longitudinal, and cross-cultural designs
- B. Develop new, more valid measures of appeal, attention, comprehension, attitudes, and behavior change

- A. Train producers and researchers to collaborate
- B. Create some institutional mechanism to foster collaborative activity so that research will be less piecemeal

Workshop Leader, Eli A. Rubinstein; Reporter, Milton Chen; Participants: Robert F. Han, Leo Bogart, Charles Brownstein, Steven H. Chaffler, Peggy Charren, Barry G. Cole, W. Andrew Collins, Thomas D. Cook, David M. Davis, George Gerbner, Roland S. Homet, Stephen Kagann, William J. McGuttc, Lawrence S. Zacharias

Workshop Leader, Gerald S. Lesser; Assistant, Richard Adler; Reporter, Lewis Rimer; Participants: Chloë Aaron, Peter O. Almond, Lionel C. Barrow, Jr., Maxine F. Brown, Samuel Y. Gibbon, Jr., Hilde T. Himmelwelt, F. Gerald Kline, Knudace Lass, Edward J. Meade, Jr., Ronald Milavsky, Charles Pinderhughes, Donald F. Roberts, Christopher Sarson, Marshall Smith, Alerha H. Stein

## Workshop IV

- A. Establish baseline, normative data nationally on the role of television in the lives of young persons. Issues to study:
  - Quantity and character of what is viewed, including analysis of content and analyses of attention devoted to specific kinds of content
  - Role of television in family interaction
  - Differences in response to television among different demographic and ethnic groups
- B. Development and implementation of public school curricula to instruct the young about the mass media. Issues to study:
  - Development of curricula
  - Strategies for adoption and diffusion
  - Mode of teacher training
  - Evaluation procedures
- C. Develop principles for production of better programs intended for young persons and evaluate effects on the viewing by the young of differing kinds of programs. Issues to study:
  - The specific features that influence the responses of young persons, so that programs can be devised that would enlarge social understanding, emotional sensitivity, and aesthetic sensibilities.
  - Experiment with alternative ways of communicating, such as prosocial spots, varying rates of commercial interruption, manipulations of program choices over the day, and pretesting what is to be broadcast
  - Differences in viewing by the young traceable to differences in available programs.
- D. Other issues of lower priority:
  - Evaluation of ascertainment procedures
  - Analysis of the effects of different economic and social structures on the broadcasting industry, including comparative analysis of patterns in other societies
  - Development of better program ratings to guide parents
  - Analysis of decision-making processes in the broadcasting industry
  - Effect on IQ of exposure to television
  - Effects of television exposure on extremely young children

- A. The collection of baseline, normative data implies a national survey with oversampling of some groups to insure efficient numbers for analysis
- B. The testing of programming alternatives implies either experimental manipulation in the field or the taking advantage of "natural" experiments by reanalyzing ratings data

Not discussed

Workshop Leader, Keith W. Mielke; Assistant, Richard Hezel; Reporter, Maggi Cowlan; Participants: George Comstock, Nan B. de Gaspere Reaubien, Nancy Dennis, June Esserman, Seymour Feshbach, Ruth Friedman, Emily Galusha, Philip A. Harding, Paul Kaufman, Anne Dorr Leifer, Edward J. Palmer, Richard M. Polsky, Jeffrey Schiller, Wilbur Schramm, Marvin Segelman

## Workshop V

- A. Study television and its impact in a wide social context, in relation to other media of communication, and in relation to other social institutions. Cross-national comparisons are recommended.
- B. Study the development of young persons and its relation to use and effects of the mass media. Issues for study:
  - The cognitive maps learned
  - Effects on role expectations
  - Effects of age
  - Effects on political and social beliefs
- C. Study influences of variations in the structure of television programs, such as pace and interruptions, rather than content. Issues for study:
  - Addiction to television
  - Passivity
  - Discrimination between fantasy and reality
- D. Study television as a family member. Issues for study:
  - How does television influence family interaction?
  - Does television weaken or strengthen the family unit?
  - What functions does television fulfill for families?

- A. Cross-national comparisons
- B. Laboratory experiments, short-term longitudinal studies, and naturalistic observation, which focus on developmental variables
- C. The study of the influence of structural features implies experiments and naturalistic observation
- D. The study of television as a family member implies naturalistic observation

- A. Strengthen the research university
- B. Use peer review
- C. Establish dissertation support
- D. Convene small, topic focused, periodic meetings of researchers
- E. Publish annual review
- F. Convene annual meetings bringing together researchers with varied interests
- G. Develop a mechanism for improving information dissemination

Workshop Leader, Alberta Siegel; Assistant, Fred Volkmar; Reporter, Oona Sullivan; Participants: Ronald Abeles, Krystle Anderson, Masao Ichiyama, Douglas Cater, James J. Olson, Douglas Emley, Mark Geier, James D. Halloran, Rande A. Harrison, H. Thibault, James Jack Lyle, Ross D. Parke, David Pearl, Jerome L. Singer, Percy Tannenbaum, Mary Alice White

## Afterword

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From the foregoing it is evident that the conference accomplished its main purposes. It concentrated many different perspectives on thinking about the single topic of television and children. And it yielded clear agreement about topics, methods, and innovations to advance the practical applicability of research.

We wanted the conference to begin an on-going, non-adversary process of communication among parties interested in a common problem. The effort to balance and mix professional viewpoints and backgrounds, both in the conference as a whole and in the individual workshops, was productive. This approach not only contributed to well-rounded discussions but opened wholesome communications among some institutions and individuals who ordinarily would meet only under conditions of strain, if at all. The high degree of consensus that emerged revealed much common ground among people playing very different professional roles. The challenge now is to build on that common ground through relevant new research and reinforcement of the communications links established.

Our principal aim was to arrive at a set of recommendations that would articulate agreed research

emphases yet not prescribe a fixed scale of research priorities. We think that goal was achieved. The common concern and agreement expressed took the priorities reported in the Comstock study one step further, enlarging the number of topics and suggesting specific ways that needed research could be implemented. Further, the workshop format of the conference functioned as a cross-validating mechanism. That workshops with different orientations produced similar, even overlapping, recommendations offers reassuring evidence that the priorities are widely shared.

We wanted the meeting to produce a frame of reference that funding agencies could use to develop new research programs or to redefine current activities. For the three sponsoring foundations, the conference experience served that purpose; it was both educational and useful. In particular, the process offered valuable guidance for those engaged in program planning at funding agencies. It is our hope that the publication of this report will similarly benefit others from the funding community who could not be present and that it will draw a larger network of organizations and individuals into continuing evaluation and dialogue.

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**Workshop Reports**  
**I. Research to Guide Public Policy**  
**Henry Goldberg, Leader**

In general, there was unanimity in our recommendations as to issues and priorities. And, even though the main focus of our discussions was research intended to guide regulatory and other related policy action, we rejected federal regulation in all but a few instances, which related primarily to television advertising and children. Agreeing on methodological strategies, we rejected the notion that any single method would do and supported the notion of integrated, complementary research methodologies.

**Priorities for Future Research**

1. The first research priority is the **impact of advertising on children**. We include not only advertising directed to children but also advertising directed to adults that children are likely to see.

A. **Research Topic.** It is necessary to protect young children from certain kinds of advertising content and techniques because their age and inexperience may make them incapable of discriminating between programming and commercial content and unable to recognize the motivations that dominate advertisements. Moreover, it is the responsibility of federal regulatory agencies to supervise commercial messages and to regulate their content, but program content regulation is prohibited by the First Amendment.

Research on the impact of advertising should uncover not only deceptive advertising techniques and approaches but also those that could convey prosocial messages. Related research would involve studies of the effectiveness of public service announcements to communicate a particular prosocial message to chil-

dren. Television commercials can be thought of as short entertainment programs. Thus, understanding of both their positive and negative effects will facilitate effective communication with a young audience in the large sphere of children's programming as well as in advertising.

B. **Methodology.** The most advantageous approach to research on this topic, as to research on all the topics identified as having a high priority, would emphasize team work and cooperation among social scientists with varied skills and interests. Complementary methods should also be emphasized.

Three types of research are recommended:

—Relatively narrow investigations of immediate policy issues defined by policymakers, e.g., current research on effects on children's perceptions and desires for advertised products with premium offers.

—"Middle-range theory" types of investigations focusing on somewhat more general and abstract issues of children's cognitive and behavioral responses to television advertising. These would include research on children's information-processing of advertising, i.e., processes by which they learn to select, evaluate, and use information in advertising, and consumption-related information available from other sources.

—Longitudinal survey research to examine the long-term, cumulative impact of advertising, as mediated by the family and other social contexts, in the natural environment.

The goal of the recommended methodology is to develop approaches that produce complementary results, thereby constructing as complete a picture as possible

of the impact of advertising on children. We feel that the setting in which a commercial is viewed may affect a child's response, and that frequency of exposure and intervening stimuli may also have some effect on resulting long-term behavior patterns. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the cumulative impact of all television advertising over an extended period of time, as well as the immediate impact of particular advertisements. A critical variable in each research project should be the age of the television viewer. Other variables that ought to be considered in relation to the impact of advertising are ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic background as each affects the television experience of each child.

### C. Action.

1. **Regulatory**—Research on the impact of advertising on children may be directed toward influencing the policy of the federal government and the self-regulation practiced by the advertising and television industries. It may be desirable to present evidence of injury to young viewers resulting from deceptive commercials to the Federal Trade Commission at a rulemaking hearing. If, for example, there were noteworthy findings from research on the effect of such techniques as clustering, repetition, time lapse between commercials, isolation, and the labeling of commercial messages, specific guidelines could be developed for advertisers and used to reduce the capacity of an advertisement to deceive. In addition, the Federal Communications Commission might also be petitioned to regulate frequency and repetition of advertisements and the numbers of public service announcements required. Research might also be directed toward influencing the policies of the Congress. For example, the findings of research may spur consideration of specific legislation, encourage hearings that will publicize important issues and findings, and indirectly influence self-regulatory measures by the television and advertising industries such as the code of the National Association of Broadcasters.

2. **Voluntary**—In addition to self-regulation by the advertising and television industries, other voluntary action that might be stimulated by research findings would be more effective supervision of children's viewing habits by better informed parents.

II. The second research priority deals with developing more knowledge about how children process informa-

tion received from television. We are particularly concerned about their response to program material involving violence, deceptive behavior as a means of problem solving, and sexually oriented subject matter.

A. **Research Topic.** Basic to the study of the impact of television on children is an understanding of what it is that children perceive when they watch television programming, and how their perception differs from both adult perception of the same material and the kind of perception anticipated by the programmer. Although age is unquestionably significant as a discriminating factor, its full relevance to information-processing has not been explored. Assessment of the ultimate impact of television programming on children will require research aimed at discovering what is perceived and what is retained by young viewers, and to what extent retention varies with the age of the viewer, the quality and character of perception, and various factors related to the method of presentation and composition of the programming. Finally, research should contribute to a better understanding of two major questions—the degree to which the child perceives television as portraying or representing reality, and the extent to which some children imitate behavior they perceive on television.

B. **Methodology.** The tracking of a child's viewing patterns and habits over a relatively concentrated period of time, in as natural a situation as possible, would be one method of establishing a measure of the degree of retention of material viewed. By complementing this method with studies of greater duration, an approximation of the variations in the impact of content over a period of years might emerge.

C. **Action.** An analysis of how children process the vast array of information disseminated over television would facilitate better identification of the kind of programming designed to encourage positive behavior. Through a careful determination of what distinctions are made in the perception of discrete kinds of information, carefully shaped codes for television programs and television commercials that would fit the needs and abilities of the separate age groups could be advocated. Armed with a more precise awareness of the information-processing abilities of their children, parents could better determine appropriate content for their children's viewing.

III. Research is also needed on the **role of television as a socializing agent**. We are particularly concerned about its contribution to the formation of children's attitudes and values and to their acquisition of basic cognitive skills.

A. **Research Topic.** In order to determine whether it is appropriate for television to assume more of a role in socializing children, we must first understand in what ways and to what extent current programming affects socialization. A relevant focus for research is thematic analysis of program content performed in conjunction with the study of effects: To what extent is a particular theme capable of communicating an identifiable message to a young audience? There is a special need to analyze television programming's potential socializing effect as regards racial and sexual stereotyping and attitudes toward health and nutrition. There is also a need to analyze its potential role in the acquisition of basic cognitive skills. This is another area in which research can help identify both the positive and negative effects of television programming.

B. **Methodology.** Carefully constructed longitudinal studies should be designed to evaluate evolutionary changes in the impact of content over a five- to six-year period. In addition, studies of shorter duration should track a child's viewing patterns and habits over a four- to twelve-day period.

C. **Action.** Regulatory action by the federal government was thought by the group to be an inappropriate goal for research dealing with prosocial program content. But guidelines could be developed as a result of analysis of socialization and of prosocial program themes to indicate the characteristic content of television program series. This might facilitate industry self-regulation and help educate parents to make appropriate decisions with regard to their own children's viewing habits. The data collected in this type of research might also show network trends in emphasizing or deemphasizing certain themes or stereotypes over a period of years. Such information could be used by interested private groups to advocate reforms within the television industry.

IV. Another research priority is to examine the **effect on young viewers of disclaimers and warnings**, both in advertising and in programming.

A. **Research Topic.** It is necessary to understand the effect of disclaimers on children in order to determine whether they constitute a viable method of reducing the negative effects of programming or ads. If, for instance, the effect of a warning is to excite a child's curiosity about a dangerous product, use of the warning would be counterproductive. Moreover it is important to ascertain what information is conveyed to a child, or to the parents, by a disclaimer, so that the adequacy of disclaimers to their intended purpose may be assessed.

B. **Methodology.** Research should focus on both the personal comprehension of disclaimers by young viewers and the interaction between parents and their children stimulated by a warning or disclaimer directed to a parent.

C. **Action.** Some regulatory action by the Federal Trade Commission might be appropriate based on research on commercials, either requiring, developing specifications for, or barring disclaimers in advertising of particular products. However, the primary thrust of the research would be to educate the television and advertising industries and parents to the effects of disclaimers and so encourage voluntary action.

V. Research is needed on the **impact, if any, of increased program choice** available to children exposed to cable television.

A. **Research Topic.** The effect on children of transition from the limited selection of programs on conventional, broadcast television to the diversity of programs promised on cable television is an unexplored area. It might be anticipated that significant changes in television viewing habits and in exposure to other forms of mass media would follow from the introduction of cable television into the home.

B. **Methodology.** In order to test the effect of cable television on children, researchers might select a town with poor over-the-air reception that was about to acquire cable television. The study might then follow the viewing habits of children through the transition from conventional to cable television.

C. **Action.** None required yet.

VI. The final question examined was whether it would be desirable to develop an institute, clearinghouse, or

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other **central resource facility** to engage in secondary analysis of research on children's programming and to disseminate this information to interested parties. If so, what type of facility would be preferable?

Many producers of both children's programming and commercials cannot afford to do extensive research into the efficacy of the techniques or strategies they plan to use to communicate the desired message to young viewers. As a result they may produce ineffective or even harmful programming. If data on children's programming could be collected, analyzed, and made available to producers, it might obviate these costly mistakes. Moreover, this same information would be available to parents and other parties interested in voluntary regulation of children's television viewing.

In analyzing the possibility of establishing such an institute, some of the issues that must be confronted are the potential interrelationship between social scientists and the institute, especially the potential for generating debilitating competition, and the potential interrelationship between such a facility and agencies that fund children's television research.

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### Conclusion

Generally, our working group came away with a feeling for the complexity of the policy process in which social scientists are beginning to participate. Social

science research—even unassailable research findings, if there are such things—does not automatically lead to adoption of policies or regulations based upon those findings. This is so despite the fact that much of the research agenda is set because of expressions of concern by the Congress, regulatory agencies, and other governmental bodies. Although the research in effect is often requested, its conclusions are not necessarily followed, because a bitterly contested adversary proceeding invariably awaits any research results intended to guide regulatory action.

However, in order to make it more likely that any research recommendation directed to government policymakers will affect their behavior and lead to desired action, some of the social scientists in our group believed that all research must have a legal aspect—the end result must be in a form lawyers can understand and can use.

The workshop leader's personal view, perhaps shared by some others, is that the effort to bring together scientists, government officials, consumer advocates, television industry people, and even lawyers was a valuable exercise and a portent of future progress in bringing social science research into the policy-making process. Even if all we will have done is to make future research results less ignorable by policymakers, we shall have made some progress.

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## II. Research to Guide Public Policy

### Eli A. Rubinstein, Leader

Our group wants to go on record as endorsing the priorities outlined in *Television and Human Behavior: The Research Horizon, Future and Present*, by George Comstock and Georg Lindsey. That volume encompasses much of what we discussed in our workshop. However, we tried to reexamine the issues according to the special focus assigned our workshop.

In our workshop the participants were asked to initiate the discussion by suggesting kinds of research they would like to see done. Discussion by the full group followed. This summary is an imposed and somewhat artificial structuring of what was said. Some

differences of opinion have disappeared in the effort to be tidy. Others will be alluded to where pertinent. A number of specific research areas touched on are not included in order to emphasize those that we felt most important.

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### Priorities for Future Research

I. Research related to **anticipated important changes in television** over the foreseeable future. It is clear that advanced technology offers the potential for increased diversity of programming. Despite the many research opportunities we may have lost since the early 1950s,

the changes the future will bring offer many new and important areas for research.

A. How does increased freedom of choice and diversity affect individual response? Does greater freedom produce greater diversity of response?

B. How does this increased diversity modify viewing habits over time and viewer choice and preference?

C. Does increased opportunity for choice affect different categories of viewers in different ways? For example, would information-rich viewers enlarge the diversity of their viewing while information-poor viewers pretty much keep to previous viewing habits, thereby creating even greater differences between the two in communicatory experience? It is important to recognize that information-poor viewers might include children, who may not effectively utilize increased opportunity for choice.

## II. Research on the adequacy and extent of **response to existing policy.**

A. How well do the various self-regulation policies and codes work?

B. What are the effects of the National Association of Broadcasters' code on programming practices?

C. How can we stimulate and produce studies to evaluate the "ascertainment" procedures that the Federal Communications Commission requires stations to undertake to learn community needs? How, too, can we stimulate studies to evaluate present and potential ways for using social science research evidence in the license renewal process?

## III. Research on **effects of important policy changes and pressures toward policy change.**

A. What are the implications of establishing a "family viewing" hour? What are the differences in content between programs shown during the "family viewing" hour and the remainder of prime-time television? How does the "family viewing" hour affect viewer behavior? How does it affect programming decisions? Such questions are important because there has been a major policy change and its impact is unknown.

B. What has been the effect on station performance of license challenges and petitions to deny license renewal?

C. How has consumer opinion affected changes in policy or practice by broadcasters or regulatory agencies?

## IV. Research on the **organizational decision-making process.**

A. How do various factors, including artistic and creative concerns, economic competition, and special psychological preconceptions within the broadcasting industry, influence the major decisions that lead to what is eventually broadcast?

B. What are the relationships between television and other major institutions in our society and what are the effects of those relationships?

C. On a cross-national level, how do the differences in the organizational structure of broadcasting affect the content of programming?

V. Research on **advertising.** In one sense, many of the points made so far about research and programming also hold for television commercials. If entertainment programming affects behavior, advertising content also affects behavior. If there is a cumulative effect of watching programming, there is also a cumulative effect of repeated advertising. However, there are unique attributes about the advertising message and the place of advertising in the total viewing sequence that raise important questions that research can help to answer.

We believe research on advertising is an important component of the whole area of research on television and children and youth. Issues range from the simple but important question of whether advertising directed to children has an effect on sales to the more complex questions of whether and how commercial pressure through repeated advertising tends to develop cynicism and distrust of the advertising message by the child viewer. On an even more complex level, how does the advertising message, as a punctuation mark in the programming sequence, affect the program format and content itself, and what is the effect on the child viewer of the rapid and marked shift from program content to advertising message?

Our workshop was much concerned with long-range aspects of research and policy formulation. We favor **long-range studies** despite their methodological diffi-

culties. And we favor whatever can be done to foster long-range funding for this entire field of research.

There was interest in our group in examining the possibility of developing what has been termed a **television research center**. The group had mixed enthusiasm for such a facility. There is a danger that it would be seen as a final authority. There probably should be more than one. There was some question as to what it should do. Should it just be archival? Should it sponsor research? Should it do research? Should it serve an advocacy role? Should some existing organization be asked to take on this additional activity?

Our group left these questions for others to answer with the belief that such a center could be a potentially useful resource, but also with the fear that inexorable forces toward self-perpetuation could seriously impair its utility.

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### Conclusion

Those are the priorities of our workshop. In reaching them, we also reviewed a number of factors that must be taken into account if research on these topics is to be of any use to those who formulate policy or if it is in any way to influence policy. These factors include (1) some constraints, problems, and special issues relevant to research related to policymaking; (2) the major goals for policy-related research; and (3) some unique attributes of television that have implications for policy-related research.

**1. Some constraints, problems and special issues influencing research related to policymaking.** In this category fall the many First Amendment questions and all the implicit problems of censorship and/or control. No one in our group wanted to abridge First Amendment freedom and we recognized that problems are inevitable if research is pointed toward altering communications content. Policy-related research needs to be sensitive to such problems.

Another problem is that of translating research findings into policy decisions. Policymaking and research are separate domains; one does not necessarily follow the other. Sometimes research should stand on its own, independent of any statement of policy alternatives, as in the Surgeon General's study of the effects of television violence. And attempts to implement a policy

can become an issue in itself that may well need further research. In any case, it should be clear that research with policy implications is not the same as policy research.

Another constraint is the time pressure on the policymaker to decide quickly and the more than likely inability of the scientist to do adequate research in that short a time.

And, one last illustration out of a much longer list. Policy-oriented research is less appealing to competent social scientists precisely because that kind of research tends to be messy, time-consuming, imposed from the outside, and usually atheoretical. The best stimulant toward increasing its appeal would be a healthy dose of funding.

**2. Major goals for policy-related research.** In order to overcome some of these constraints, it would be useful to develop large-scale research projects so that both theory-building and policymaking could emerge over time. Properly organized, such large-scale projects would attract good people and result in good work. This, incidentally, is not to discount small-scale, targeted research that can make an immediate difference on a policy issue of immediate moment.

As a corollary, it would be useful to do studies that answer research questions by getting comparable findings from a variety of approaches. One strength of the Surgeon General's program was the convergence of the evidence from experimental studies showing short-run causation of aggression with the evidence from surveys and longitudinal studies of naturally occurring behavior, namely, that extensive violence-viewing precedes some long-run manifestations of aggressive behavior.

It is also necessary to find ways of disseminating research findings and conclusions so that the implications for policy are more clearly drawn. Independent restatements and reinterpretations of major research findings are one such mechanism. Thus, the various reexaminations of the report of the Surgeon General by Robert Liebert, Leo Bogart, George Comstock, and others helped to highlight the report's policy implications.\* And, indeed, this conference is evidence that a

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\*See R. M. Liebert, J. M. Neale, and E. S. Davidson. *The Early Window: Effects of Television on Children and Youth*. Elms-

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careful reexamination of the existing research on television and human behavior can highlight the implications for policymaking of future support for further research in this field.

It would be desirable, not as a direct goal for research but as a means of facilitating the translation of knowledge into action, to encourage the inclusion of social scientists on the staffs of regulatory bodies and other government entities concerned with television policy to serve as translators, communicators, and stimulators of research.

**3. Some unique attributes of television and their implications for policy-related research.** Television is in universal use in the United States. As a result, conventional before-and-after studies are no longer possible, although some limited aspects of before-and-after studies may be done in a controlled environment.

Television viewing is now a pervasive activity from

early childhood through old age. Thus, the important phenomenon to study is the total pattern of viewing rather than certain programs or certain content.

Television is used unselectively by the viewer and often has an unselective audience in individual homes. This complicates measurement of the effects of viewing and makes it difficult for broadcasters to program for a specific audience. This is a particularly important point because children are included in many audiences besides those for programs intended for children.

Measurement of effects is further complicated because there is not necessarily a "semantic equivalence" between the labeling of behavior on television and the behavior of the viewer. Thus, violence on television does not simply translate into aggression by the viewer. Other consequences may include "fear" as a consequence of seeing someone victimized on the screen, rather than aggression as a consequence of seeing someone behave violently.

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### III. Research To Guide the Non-Regulatory Sector

Gerald S. Lesser, Leader

We started by trying to identify some premises that we could agree upon concerning the role of research on children and youth and television. Our first premise was that at some point we would need to do something that has not yet been done clearly--namely, to define our long-range goals for young people, and, further, to specify the principles and values behind our choice of these goals.

We realized that this was beyond the scope of what we could achieve during a conference, but we would like to offer some examples of the kinds of goals we have in mind. One is increasing children's awareness of self and others. Another is increasing their ability to make rational choices and selections. A third is en-

larging their capacity to empathize with people different from themselves. A fourth is enhancing their cognitive skills. And there are many others. Suffice it to say here that we want to mark for the future the importance of clearly defining long-term goals in doing research on children and television.

Our second premise was that, although we acknowledged the need to know more about television's damaging effects on children and families and how these effects could be controlled, we wanted to emphasize the constructive uses of television as well and to suggest ways in which they could be promoted and enhanced.

Our third premise was that we would need to discuss many different levels of research and analysis if we wished to encompass the topic of television and children, ranging from some very broad questions to quite specific ones.

Broadly speaking, we wanted research that would capture much, if not all, of the life that surrounds each child--the family, community, friends, school, and

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ford, N.Y.: Pergamon Press, 1973; L. Bogart, "Warning, The Surgeon General Has Determined That TV Violence Is Moderately Dangerous To Your Child's Mental Health." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1972, 36, 491-521; and G. Comstock, *Television Violence: Where The Surgeon General's Study Leads*. Santa Monica, Calif.: The Rand Corporation, 1972. P-4831.

other influences, so that the child's experiences with the television medium itself might appear in proper perspective as one element in a complex mix that may either increase or diminish the influence of television.

More specifically, we wanted research on particular program elements, such as their styles, techniques, and content, and on particular program outcomes, such as appeal, attention, comprehension, attitudes, emotional development, and social behavior, and on the complex connections between program elements and their outcomes.

### Priorities for Future Research

In setting priorities for research that would be broad enough to place exposure to television within the child's real life of family, friends, school, community, and other influences, we started with these assumptions:

—What children actually get from television may be very different from what the producers intended

—There are major differences among children in their response to television, depending upon their family background, personality characteristics, age, race, social class, sex, peer influence, and amount of television viewing. All these differences will, of course, require the analysis of complex interactions.

I. We began by specifying, quite broadly, what would identify **the role of television in children's lives** more clearly. Among the topics that we consider to be of high priority, although we did not rank them in order of priority, are:

A. What shows do children actually watch? Why do they choose them? What is the appeal of different programs, including "adult" programs? How does the viewing of American children compare with that of children in other countries, especially in countries known to have programs different from ours?

B. What are the distinctive characteristics of television as a socializing agent, as compared with other forces that shape children's outlook, taste, and behavior?

C. What happens when television messages reinforce, contradict, or bear no relation to messages from other sources, such as parents, schools, and peers?

D. How does the family enhance or diminish the

impact of television on children?

E. How do children of different ages draw on television content for their view of the world, and how do they distinguish between television fantasy and reality?

F. The value of longitudinal studies was stressed, including one clinical, psychoanalytically-oriented study of children in families where there is limited television viewing and in families where there is a great deal of television viewing. Are there differences between families with very different program preferences?

G. To what extent can intervention by family, school, peers, or others reinforce prosocial messages or mitigate antisocial influences of television programming? For example, can schools strengthen prosocial messages by providing opportunities for implementing those messages?

II. We then turned to research on specific **program elements and their outcomes**. We included not only those programs specifically designed for children but also those not designed for them but which they watch anyway. (We know that about 85 percent of what children view is not designed for them.)

In looking for connections between program characteristics and program outcomes we think that research will need to cover a lot of ground. Two major areas are stylistic features and thematic components.

A. Program characteristics we believe should be given attention include stylistic features such as:

—Pace

—The use of humor

—Action and violence

—The length of ideas or integrated segments within a program

—Various auditory techniques

—Special visual effects, such as zoom-ins, and quick-cuts

B. Program characteristics we believe should be given attention include such thematic components as:

—Portrayals of particular social behavior, such as altruism, nonviolent forms of conflict resolution, seeing another person's point of view, etc.

—Portrayals of self-regulatory and self-governing behavior, such as persistence, and choosing among ways of behaving.

—Portrayals of affective expressions, such as demonstrations of warmth and affection, kindness, and compassion, and of reactions of fear and how to cope with it.

—The degree of diversity in roles assigned to women and minorities.

III. In looking for the **effects upon children of programs with different style and content characteristics**, we believe that some of the areas where more knowledge would be helpful in improving television include effects on:

- Appeal and attention
- Comprehension
- Cognitive skills
- Attitudes
- Emotional development
- Social behavior

Each of the workshop members had somewhat different priorities for which program characteristics and outcomes should be studied. Some stressed the effects of role-stereotyping, racism, and sexism. Others were more interested in program characteristics that would most effectively reach minority children in particular. Still others were interested in program styles and content that increase appeal and attention, those that change attitudes in children, or those that stress self-identity.

Research directed to understanding connections between program characteristics and their outcomes may seem simple in concept. The research itself will not be simple. How can we measure all these program features and possible outcomes? How are the outcome measures interrelated? Are certain outcomes gained only at the expense of others? How do the connections between program characteristics and outcomes change over time, as children become more accustomed to watching particular programs? Do different program features, such as the pace of the program or the display of particular emotions, have different effects on different children? If this research is necessarily complex, it is also essential, if we are ever to understand how to improve the quality of the programs children watch.

IV. We also deliberated on the **research methodology and organizational arrangements** that would help the

research get done and get used.

One methodological recommendation that is obvious, but that needs repeating, is the importance of long-range, longitudinal studies that we all know are so badly lacking. Another is the need to develop valid measures of appeal and attention, comprehension, attitudes, and behavior change, and then to make sure that researchers know about and share these methods as they are refined. Cross-cultural studies are also badly needed to ensure that the relations that we might find are not specific to the particular content of television in this country. Our search needs to be for generalizable propositions; different broadcasting systems as well as different cultural expectations provide a useful testing ground. We emphasized in this connection the validity of Kurt Lewin's famous statement that "nothing is as practical as a good theory" and would urge foundations to fund appropriate, theoretically oriented research.

On organizational arrangements, we stressed the need to train both researchers and producers to work together instead of regarding each other as natural enemies. Establishing training centers where social scientists and producers study together is one possible means to this end.

We would also encourage foundations to find some means of fostering collaborative activity among researchers so that research may become less piecemeal and more cumulative. In recommending that foundations take this sort of initiative, we do not believe that such a mechanism need intrude on the individual researcher's independence, nor need it restrain researchers from developing new methodologies. However, such a mechanism would keep us from producing only isolated fragments of research and prevent us from the continual reinvention of the wheel.

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### Conclusion

To sum up, our workshop discussed research that we believe could make a difference. How to get such research to make that difference must go beyond making sure that the research is properly done.

We will also have to take steps to see that the research is actually employed to improve children's programs. We will need to influence the environment in which the programming and research are received.

We will need to influence the opinions of parents and teachers, talented producers and writers (most of whom now avoid children's television like the plague), and the broadcasters and advertisers who decide which shows are aired. We may also need to influence the

regulatory bodies.

We did not choose to list our research proposals according to priority. We suggest that one way to choose among them would be to identify where change is most accessible and likely to occur.

#### IV. Research to Guide the Non-Regulatory Sector

Keith Mielke, Leader

Our workshop participants had developed a variety of research suggestions prior to the conference, and more were developed during the workshop session. Considerable effort was devoted to the organization of these suggestions into coherent themes or categories to which priorities might be assigned.

The first attempt to classify the recommendations was according to target groups that have special information needs and interests, and that can use the findings of research to guide their decision making. The major groups were identified as:

##### **Broadcasting industry decisionmakers**

—Those who create and produce the programs that make up the catalogue from which broadcasters select.

—Those who decide, from the available programs in that catalogue, what will be broadcast and when.

—Those who are responsible for television commercials.

All three of these groups could use research to guide their decisions.

##### **Educators**

—Formal educators, such as teachers.

—Informal educators, such as parents.

Both groups need to know more about the effect of the media on young people and, in particular, need to know what action, if any, is called for on their part.

##### **Intervention-oriented entities**

—Government agencies, which fund research and intervene in the lives of citizens in what they intend to be beneficial ways.

—Private foundations, which do much the same.

—Citizen action groups, which must choose among possible tactics and topics to achieve their ends.

These three groups have information needs and interests that research can help meet.

The discussion was useful in clarifying the research issues, but concentrating on these target groups was abandoned as an organizational scheme as it became apparent that most of the proposed research was relevant to more than one of these groups.

Instead, we identified problem areas to which we believe those who support research should be responsive. The scheme finally decided upon was based on research priorities submitted in writing by each participant near the end of the session. The report of this workshop is thus organized by broad program areas and in approximate order of perceived priority, with more specific research needs suggested within areas.

##### **Priorities for Future Research**

I. Research to establish **baseline, normative, descriptive data on the viewing experience of young people**, including their response to television and what they view.

A. **A national child-oriented audience survey.** A large survey, similar in scope to previous national audience surveys conducted by Steiner and Bower, is recommended.\* It should include interviews of both parents and children. It is suggested that methodological research be conducted on ways to interview children of various ages before such a survey is undertaken. A large probability sample could be subdivided into several demographic subgroups, with such classifica-

\*See G. A. Steiner, *The People Look at Television*. New York: Knopf, 1963; and R. T. Bower, *Television and the Public*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973.

tions serving as independent variables. Minority, socioeconomic status, geographic, and other groups of special interest should be oversampled as necessary to provide adequate numbers for thorough analysis. Dependent variables for the survey should be responsive to the following kinds of questions, which are meant to be illustrative but not exhaustive:

—How do parents see the functions of television for their children?

—How do children perceive the functions of television for themselves?

—What characterizes the light and heavy viewer?

—How do parents and children perceive advertising and the impact of advertising on children?

—Who controls access to the television set, or sets, in the home?

—What viewing rules, if any, are employed, and why?

—What programs are viewed by the children?

—What is the relationship between the child's personality characteristics and his or her viewing patterns?

—How is the child's leisure time allocated among various activities, including television watching?

—To what extent do parents regulate and/or participate in their children's television viewing?

—What are the children's and parents' estimates of beneficial and harmful effects of watching television?

—How do children perceive parents as controllers of their television watching?

—What is the relationship between types and amount of television viewing and children's performance in school?

**B. Content analyses** of television programming most viewed by children. The consensus was that analyses were useful, they should be done on a continuing basis, and they should cover topics of policy relevance. In addition to violence, such topics should include portrayals of sex-roles and occupations, ethnic representations, modes of conflict resolution, prosocial models, and erotica. These content analyses should cover programs viewed heavily by children, whether or not the programs were designed especially for them.

The utility of these content analyses will be enhanced when related to other data, such as would be provided in the national survey described earlier. This would allow, for example, a comparison between tele-

vision content as measured by adults and as perceived by young persons.

We recognize that many of these questions are at least partially answered within the existing scientific literature. However, there is no large-scale national body of data that provides a complete or compelling picture of what living with television means to the American child. We believe such an assemblage of data could be an important spur to action, both because of the information the data would provide and because of the heightened public awareness such an undertaking would create.

## II. Research to assist in the **development and adoption of public school curricula** providing instruction about the mass media.

We concluded that there was an important need for widened and improved instruction about the mass media in the public schools. We decided that literacy of young persons in regard to the mass media is the proper concern for educational institutions analogous to their concern about language literacy. We also concluded that there was a major role for research in developing and introducing mass media instruction into the curriculum, in training teachers to teach it well, and in evaluating its effectiveness.

**A. Content development.** Basic research is needed to develop the content for a media literacy curriculum. The curriculum could include such subjects as production conventions, analysis of media appeals, the character and role of nonverbal cues, overview of the history and structure of the broadcasting industry, the economic basis for television, analysis of typical formats for entertainment programming, major concerns about negative effects of programming, analysis of the values portrayed in television content, standards for criticism of television content, and, if possible, some direct experience with television equipment. Just as speaking and writing are useful to the skill of reading, so, it is believed, producing messages will be helpful in attaining media literacy.

**B. Adoption and diffusion strategies.** Various forms of marketing research should be employed to determine optimal means of achieving adoption of media literacy programs in the schools.

**C. Teacher training.** In view of a considerable gap 31

between teachers and pupils in their approaches to television, it is recommended that research be undertaken to improve the training of teachers in media instruction. The training should be available to future teachers in schools of education, and should also be available as in-service training for current teachers.

D. **Evaluation.** Exposure to a media literacy curriculum should be evaluated by empirical research to measure changes in the type, amount, or sophistication of children's television viewing.

### III. Research to develop principles of program development for children and to assess effects of various programming practices.

A. **Program development research.** The purpose would be to develop principles useful in creating programs that are attractive to children and that also enlarge their social understanding and emotional sensitivity, increase their self understanding, and help develop their aesthetic sensibilities. Illustrative research questions would include:

- What are the production cues used by children to separate fantasy from reality?
- By what criteria do children believe or disbelieve television content?
- What programming elements appeal to children?
- What incidental learning takes place and how can it be increased, if desirable, or countered if undesirable?
- How can audio and video channels complement each other to increase powers of observation?
- What is an optimum mix of entertainment and instruction?
- Is it possible to “inoculate” children against effects of violent programming via other types of programming?
- To what extent, if any, does type of visual presentation affect ways of thinking?
- Do children perceive a “contract” with the television producer? That is, can they infer producer assumptions about them, and have they assumptions about the producer? What do children perceive as condescending?
- Can children vicariously experience such things as potential occupational roles via television?
- Can television cultivate “good taste?”

—What programming strategies will best serve to encourage active physical and/or mental participation by the child?

B. **Experimental assessment of variations in programming practices.** Although time limitations precluded extended discussion of feasible methodologies and designs for most of our research recommendations, it was felt that field experiments, possibly utilizing split cable arrangements, would be helpful in assessing the effects of various programming alternatives. These include, for example:

- Effects of prosocial “commercial” spot announcements.
- Effects of varying rates of commercial interruptions in entertainment and news programming.
- Manipulation of programming alternatives available at various times of day. For example, would children view a children's program at 8 p.m. or 9 p.m. if such programming were available?
- “Pretesting” effects of proposed or possible regulatory options before they are adopted officially. For example, what would be the effect of various pre-program ratings for parental guidance to children's programs?
- Testing of pilot programs.
- Effects of disclaimers in advertising.
- Effects of various types of advertising techniques on attitude formation and consumer behavior.

C. **Reanalysis of ratings data.** The rationale here is based on the probability that, in various local markets across the country, “naturalistic experiments” have occurred. For example:

Market 1: Program A being aired against competition X;

Market 2: Program A being aired against competition Y.

Interest was also expressed in analyzing what demographic shifts, if any, have resulted from the “family viewing” hour, which also implies a reference to previous ratings data. To the extent that meaningful research questions can be addressed to such “natural” variations across markets or across time within markets, a reanalysis of ratings data should prove useful.

IV. **Other issues.** Entries here were judged important and worthy of funding by one or more workshop participants, but were not judged collectively to be of high

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priority compared to the other research issues considered:

A. Evaluation of the adequacy or inadequacy of current methods of "ascertainment"—the repeated assessment of community needs that the Federal Communications Commission requires commercial and public broadcasters to make regularly—in terms of sensitivity to the special needs of young persons. One goal would be the development of improved techniques for assessing these needs.

B. Analysis of possible alternatives to the present economic and sociological structure of the broadcasting industry, which might result in programming of greater diversity and aesthetic originality. This might include the comparative analysis of the apparent effects on programming of the quite different economic and sociological patterns found today in different societies.

C. Development of various multi-dimensional forms of evaluative "rating" or "grading" of children's programs for parental guidance.

D. Analysis of decision making processes in broadcasting organizations, with a view to identifying points most susceptible to influence and change as a result of research evidence relevant to the effects of children's programming.

E. Methodological research to develop improved techniques, which could be used in varied kinds of research, for the study of young persons' thought and behavior with respect to television. Two suggested fields were the development of improved techniques for interviewing children, and better techniques to measure affective responses.

F. Research to ascertain the extent, if any, to which exposure to television has affected performance on IQ measures, with special attention to effects on nonverbal aptitudes and on language aptitudes.

G. Exploration of effects of television exposure on very young children. Parents sometimes place babies in cribs near an operating television set for extended periods of time. The suggestion is to attempt to assess short-term and long-term effects of this very early exposure to television.

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### Conclusion

Our workshop did not always proceed in the step-by-step order suggested by this summary. It cannot do justice to the nuances of an extended deliberation by people from varied backgrounds. We simply hope that others will consider the effort as productive and useful as we considered it challenging.

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## V. Research to Increase Scientific Knowledge

Alberta Siegel, Leader

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Fundamental knowledge about children and youth and the communications media may arise from several fields of investigation. These include social psychology, economics, anthropology, developmental psychology, political science, sociology, neurophysiology and brain science, linguistics, educational psychology, psychiatry, and journalism and communications. In all of these fields, basic scientific investigation must continue to be vigorously supported both by federal patrons, such as the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, Office of Child Development, National Institute of Mental Health, and by private foundations. There is nothing so practical as a good theory, and good theories are both the inspiration and the result of sound

empirical research.

"Media research" has suffered from parochialism and ethnocentrism. We recommend vigorous efforts to internationalize this research, and to gain the benefits of cross-national and cross-cultural comparisons.

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### Priorities for Future Research

We discussed numerous questions and issues that research could address. We believe that whatever the topic under investigation, excellence should be the criterion in the support of research, and that peer review is a mechanism to assure excellence.

We identified a number of topics that we agreed merit high priority. However, we did not rank them in

order of priority because there was no unanimity about which topics would yield the greatest scientific payoffs. Our priorities, then, are these:

**I. The social setting.** We hope that television and its impact will be studied in a wide social context. Television needs to be studied in relation to other media of communication and in relation to other social institutions. The social organization of communications media deserves special attention, as do the economics of the media. Cross-national comparisons will be informative here.

**II. Developmental differences and the media.** We assign a high priority to studies of children's development and how a child's developmental level affects his or her use of media materials. What cognitive maps are learned from media materials? How are role expectations shaped by media content? How does the very young child derive meanings from his sensory and perceptual experiences? Is information processed differently by the adolescent than by the elementary school-age child? How does the child learn about public affairs from the media? How are his political and social beliefs influenced? Television is an educator, and we need to study its curriculum and organization. Such study may eventually lead to integration of knowledge from brain research, but right now the most fruitful leads come from developmental psychology as influenced by Piaget. We call attention here to the promising work of Collins, Leifer, and Roberts on cognitive development, and to Singer's work on young children's fantasies and play.\*

We expect that short-term longitudinal studies and

\*For example, see W. A. Collins, T. J. Berndt, and V. L. Hess. "Observational Learning Of Motives and Consequences For Television Aggression: A Developmental Study." *Child Development*, 1974, 45, 799-802; A. D. Leifer, S. B. Graves, and N. J. Gordon. "When People Think Television Is A Window On Their World." Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D. C., April 1975; D. F. Roberts. "Communication and Children: A Developmental Approach." in I. de Sola Pool and W. Schramm (Eds.) *Handbook of Communication*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1975, pp. 174-215; and J. L. Singer. *The Child's World of Make-believe: Experimental Studies of Imaginative Play*. New York: Academic Press, 1975.

naturalistic observations will be the central methods in this research, along with laboratory experiments.

**III. Structural features of television as a medium.** We also assign a high priority to studies of television and its effects in which the focus is on the structural features of television rather than its programming content. We are thinking here of matters like pacing, tempo, continuities and discontinuities, interruptions, formats, style. We are also thinking of issues like addiction to television, spectatoritis, habits of passivity and looking on, detachment and indifference. As well, we believe we need investigations of the child's discrimination between fantasy and reality when he or she is viewing television. Further, we need to study the audio and visual components. Does the video dominate the audio? Does the audio dominate the video? How are these two sensory inputs integrated, interpreted, and stored?

The methods here would include experiments and naturalistic observation. Cross-cultural studies are needed with this topic as well as the others we are flagging.

**IV. The family and television.** Our other priority is for studies of television as a family member. How is family interacting affected by television? What role does television play in family dynamics? Does television inhibit family conversation or provide topics to enhance it? Is television used as a babysitter? Do people attend to television in order to avoid or inhibit conflict, hostility, and arguments in the family? The family has been seen as the basic social unit. Is television supporting or weakening that unit? Do neighbors visit and interact more now than when television was not available? These questions have implications for the availability of supports to the beleaguered nuclear family.

Clearly, naturalistic observation in the home will be the method of study here. We greatly doubt the usefulness of self-report interviews and questionnaires in the study of family functioning in the home. We need direct observation of family life in the television era.

**V. Ways to improve quality and impact of research.** It is easier for research workers to agree on the ways to foster excellence in research than on specific topics of

research likely to have payoffs. There are several kinds of institutions that we decided could be supported and fostered in order to advance research on young people and the media.

A. **The research university.** The basic organization is the research university. Without our great national centers of research and graduate education, some private and some public, science would flounder in the United States. We anticipate that most of the good research on this topic, as on others, will continue to be done at universities by professors and their students. We recognize also the contributions of such nonuniversity centers and institutes as The Rand Corporation.

B. **Direct support for research.** We believe that the amount of research could be expanded and its quality upgraded by several techniques:

—Dissertation research support grants of the kind already available through the National Science Foundation, but specially targeted for this topic.

—Annual awards for outstanding research on this topic, whether by graduate students or established investigators.

—Employment of the process of peer review in the evaluation of competing proposals for research funds. The National Institutes of Health and the National Institute of Mental Health have developed model systems of peer review, conducted in face-to-face meetings of standing committees made up of respected scholars.

—Support of small-group meetings of active research workers to facilitate exchange of ideas and collaborations on topics of shared interest. These meetings would usually be at a university, at the laboratory of one of the group members. Such meetings might catalyze collaborations as well as closer interaction, and might lead to sharing of research techniques and replication of findings. The Society for Research on Child Development has experimented with this format over the past year, and its experience could be useful in setting up these interdisciplinary small-group conferences of research workers.

C. **Communication of research findings.** We are concerned about achieving rapid communication of research findings among workers in several diverse disciplines. The annual meetings and the scholarly journals of the various disciplines are basic to scholarly communication, but not sufficient for transmission

across disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, we propose the following new methods:

—An existing journal should publish a special issue periodically, this issue to be devoted to reporting current research on television and social behavior. Funds could be offered to underwrite the distribution of this issue to all interested in its topic who might not be subscribers. If the journal editor wishes to appoint a guest editor for this issue, funding might be needed for that editorship as well. An alternative to this proposal would be the establishment of a new annual review publication.

—An annual meeting should be called at which research workers from the various disciplines would present and discuss their findings concerning television and social behavior. We would urge that this be an international meeting and that interested foundation and government officials be invited as well as scholars currently active in the field.

—An abstracting service is needed to continue and to institutionalize the useful communications device that Dr. Comstock has launched. We would hope that this service would be strongly international in its coverage.

D. **Central facilities.** We discussed the possibility that certain central facilities might be put at the disposal of research workers on various university campuses, in order to avoid wasteful and expensive duplication of facilities. For example, we discussed the possible usefulness of central archives of video materials. From our discussion, it was not evident that such a facility would be worth what it would cost.

We agreed that it would be most useful to have a production center to which a research worker could go for the production of professional quality video materials to his or her specification. Currently some research workers must rely on the amateur theatrical groups on their local campuses. We can envision a possible liaison between the facility we propose and the production efforts of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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### Conclusion

We are also concerned about the interface between scholarly research and the making of public policy. We can envision certain mechanisms that would enhance the extensiveness and frankness of communication be-

tween research workers in this field and those concerned with policy analysis.

For example, before new research findings get into the public record in hearings by Congressional committees or regulatory agencies, it would be helpful to have informal discussions between the social scientists and the policymakers. An organization is needed that can arrange and sponsor such meetings in a timely way. The Aspen Institute Program on Communications and Society has been meeting this need.

We also need to learn from experience. Many of us have the impression that mistakes get replayed in this field. Case studies of major efforts in research and

policymaking can help us to learn. We recommend that resources be made available for such case studies. The Cater-Strickland report was a model.\*

Finally, we discussed the need for an extra-governmental task force on communications to play an advisory role. Such a group would be interdisciplinary and could be helpful in setting priorities for research and in policy analysis. We reached no consensus on this matter, but we think it should be given further discussion.

\*See D. Cater and S. Strickland, *TV Violence And The Child: The Evolution And Fate Of The Surgeon General's Report*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1975.

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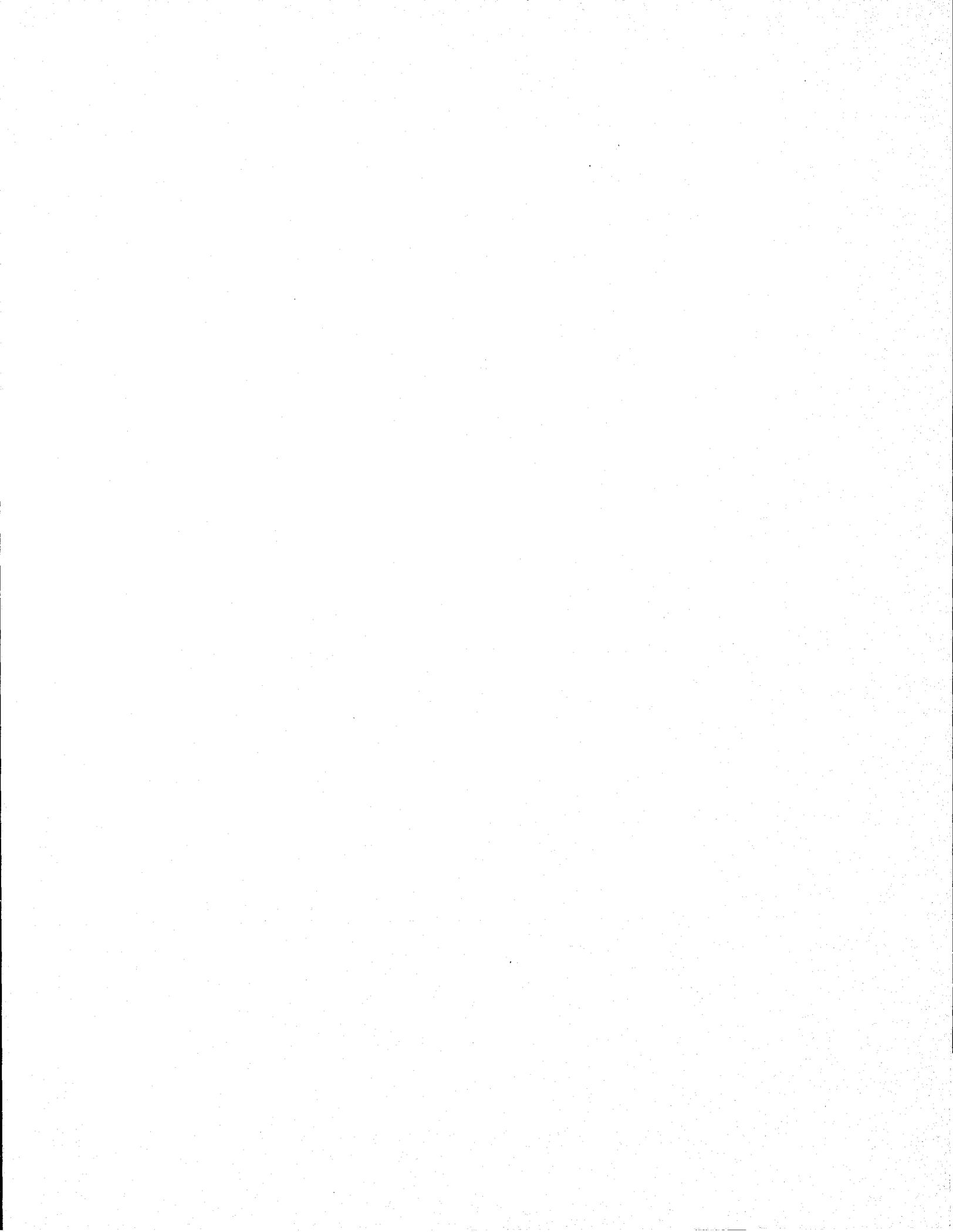
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