TELEVISION AND THE CHILD

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Reprint of Chapters 1 - 4

A Study sponsored by the Nuffield Foundation

Preface

THE publication of *Television and the Child*, a series of social psychological studies, by Hilde T. Himmelweit, A. N. Oppenheim, and Pamela Vince was regarded on both sides of the Atlantic as an important addition to the research dealing with the influence of television on children.

The Nuffield Foundation, which sponsored the study, has agreed to make available in reprint form the first four chapters of the book published by the Oxford University Press, as a service to parents, teachers, broadcasters, and others interested in television and its impact on children. These chapters include a summary of the main findings of the study, which deal with such basic topics as the amount children view, their taste, the effects of "action drama." Above all, it examines the influence of television on children's values and outlook, on their knowledge and school performance, and shows the extent to which television has affected family life and the children's leisure interests and activities. Positive suggestions are made to parents, teachers, and youth club leaders.

The authors have been at pains to discover the underlying principles which determine children's (and for that matter adults') reactions to television. These principles have to do with the way values are transmitted, with the factors which influence the growth of taste, and with leisure time displacement.

The eleven studies on which this book is based were conducted in England, where there are fewer television channels and fewer hours of television broadcasting than in the United States. Most of the studies were conducted in five cities, and examine the effects on school children between the ages of 10 and 14 who attend the national state schools. Despite these limitations of the study sample, American social scientists consider that the main principles discovered are also applicable to the United States. They show, for example, the extent to which the effects of television vary with the intelligence and personality of the child, with his family life and with his already established pattern of leisure activities. Of particular interest is the discussion of "the television addict" and of the effects of programs of violence and adult television drama on the young.

Dr. Eleanor Maccoby, Associate Professor of Psychology at Stanford and a leading authority in this field, opens her discussion of the

book in *The American Sociological Review* with this comment: "This book is by far the most significant contribution yet made by social scientists to our understanding of television and its influence on children." In the words of *New York Times* columnist Jack Gould, "for the parent who may wonder whether TV does or does not constitute a problem for his child this book contains many pages of sound common sense."

TELEVISION INFORMATION OFFICE
March 1961

The Television Information Office was activated in March, 1959, by resolution of the Television Board of Directors of the National Association of Broadcasters. In October, 1959, the Office was opened to form a two-way bridge between the industry and its numerous publics. It receives financial support from individual commercial and educational US television stations, the three nationwide networks, and the National Association of Broadcasters.

Television Information Office
666 Fifth Avenue
New York 19, N. Y.

Reprint of Chapters 1 - 4

TELEVISION AND THE CHILD

An empirical study of the effect of television on the young

BY

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Published for
THE NUFFIELD FOUNDATION
by the OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

Oxford University Press, Amen House, London E.C.4

GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON
BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI KUALA LUMPUR
CAPE TOWN IBADAN NAIROBI ACCRA

FIRST PUBLISHED 1958
REPRINTED 1960
REPRINT OF CHAPTERS 1–4, 1961

Foreword

In 1954 the Audience Research Department of the BBC suggested to the Nuffield Foundation that it should sponsor an inquiry into the impact of television on children and young people. At that time there were nearly three million television sets installed in the fifteen million homes in this country and their number was increasing rapidly. A good deal of concern was felt about the effect of this new medium on children and especially on very young children. Some maintained that television was on balance bad, that young children were intent on the screen when they should be out at play, that older children spent on it time that should have gone to their homework, and that adolescents were diverted from their youth clubs and their games. Some stressed the dangers arising from the passive character of television viewing, fearing that it would make young people mentally lazy. Some, on the other hand, thought that viewing could help young children, make their homes more attractive, expand their horizons, stimulate new interests, and provide a new basis of contact between the generations. These were the questions which the BBC had in mind. It felt that the proposed inquiry should be authoritative and independent and that it should be made while a large proportion of homes were still without television so that effective comparisons could be drawn between the habits of viewers and of non-viewers.

The Foundation agreed that such an investigation would be useful, if it could be done with sufficient scientific precision. An approach was made to Dr. H. T. Himmelweit, Reader in Social Psychology at the London School of Economics and Political Science, who had had wide experience of research in social and clinical psychology. Dr. Himmelweit accepted appointment as consultant director. A further member of the staff of the London School of Economics, Dr. A. N. Oppenheim, Lecturer in Psychology, collaborated in the study. Both he and Dr. Himmelweit worked on a part-time basis with Miss Pamela Vince, also a psychologist, as full-time senior research officer. The statistical adviser was Mr. Alan Stuart of the London School of Economics.

Including the writing of the report the inquiry has taken four years to complete. In the early stages particularly, while the design of the inquiry was under consideration, the team has had the

guidance and support of a strong advisory committee. As chairman of that committee, I wish to express to its members the warm thanks of the Foundation for their help, especially to those who have been in touch with the actual execution of the inquiry, and who have given the draft report close critical attention. I wish also to express the gratitude, felt by the Foundation, to Dr. Himmelweit and her colleagues for their skill in handling so complex a problem and for their fortitude in coping with so formidable a mass of material. The whole credit and the final responsibility for the report is theirs and theirs alone, and not the Foundation's. I associate the Foundation in the acknowledgements to many helpers which Dr. Himmelweit makes elsewhere.

The Foundation has thus supported one of the most comprehensive studies ever done of the effect of any mass medium on children. The report, the Foundation believes, succeeds in showing that techniques of scientific investigation can be applied to such a set of problems as those originally presented by the BBC. By these methods, fact can be separated from opinion so that constructive, and possibly practicable, recommendations can be made. The social scientist is often criticised for merely charting the obvious. Even this, of course, has its uses. But, as will be seen in this report, the investigation disclosed that numerous supposed facts were not facts at all. And this, too, may be added: no research of this kind is ever final. The situation itself changes, and the methods of inquiry become more refined. So there is nothing here that can be said to have been done once and for all. Within our present experience, the results have a high degree of reliability. But the most certain result is that continuing study of this and of related problems is both necessary and possible. The Foundation hopes that one outcome of this long and, in Britain, pioneering enterprise will be that, in the appropriate places, other similar investigations will, in due course, be undertaken.

HECTOR HETHERINGTON
Chairman of the Advisory Committee

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Introduction

EVERY new medium of communication has in its time aroused anxiety—the cinema, radio, and at one time (a chastening thought) even reading. Now it is the turn of television. This present study was started at a time when public concern about the effects of television on children was at its height. There were few facts available about children's behaviour and reactions to viewing; there were also few documented facts about the way children spent their time before television came on the scene.

Television itself is continuously changing. For example, our main survey work was carried out in 1955 when only BBC television was on the air. When the second channel was introduced, we were able to make a small-scale study of its effects. Since then there have been further changes in programme content and transmission time. In minor ways, therefore, our data were out of date even before they were tabulated, but the major findings and conclusions have not been affected. The role of television in children's lives, the manner of children's reactions and the underlying principles that determine them remain constant in the face of the superficial changes in television itself.

The presentation of this report has not been easy; it covers a wide range of subject-matter; and it is intended for a varied audience (including teachers, parents, programme planners, experts in communication research, and other social scientists). For the sake of the critical reader, we decided not to publish findings without giving the methods by which they were obtained, so as to facilitate the evaluation of one in terms of the other.

Many people may wish to read this book rather like a reference book, consulting mainly those chapters that deal with subjects of special interest to them. Acting on this assumption, we have divided the book into a number of parts, within which the various chapters are relatively self-contained. To the same end, we have, wherever possible, put tables in the Appendix and explained in a glossary such specialist terms as have been used.

The usual order of presentation has been reversed by putting into Part I what goes customarily at the end of the book—namely, the summary of the main findings and the implications and suggestions that arise from them.

The summary of the main findings is given in question and answer form; this seemed the simplest way to give a clear account of the many different effects, the relative importance of which will vary with the interests of the reader. Since it is a digest of the book's main contents, appropriate chapter references to the fuller account are given after each finding.

Part I ends with *implications* and *suggestions*. These recommendations (based on our findings and also on impressions gained as psychologists in the course of three years' study of the effects of television) inevitably suggest criticism of the way television is used. They should, however, be read in the context of the whole report, which makes it clear that there is much about television that is useful and valuable.

Television is used by different children in different ways. In describing television's effects we had, therefore, time and again to consider the way these effects differed according to the ability, maturity, background, and personality of the children concerned. This has not contributed to lightness of presentation, but to gloss over the differential effects of television would have vitiated the whole purpose of the survey.

As an integral part of the study, we have collected a great deal of information about the lives, outlook, background, intelligence, and personality of two age groups of children. This material, based on a large sample drawn from five cities, yields systematic information about children's attitudes, interests, and behaviour. Since a proportion of the children were re-examined a year later, it provides data about the development of the children's attitudes and interests. The material has been analysed only in so far as it bears on the effects of television; it is to be hoped that one day it will be looked at in a broader context, to see how far the various factors of social background, sex, and intelligence determine children's behaviour.

It has often been said, and rightly, that socio-psychological field studies lack the scientific precision of laboratory experiments. In this inquiry we had in some ways the best of both worlds: an experimental set-up within a real-life situation. In 1955 less than half the population had been regularly exposed to television, so that we were able to base our research design on the comparison of an experimental (television) group with a control (non-viewing) group. In Norwich, moreover, the opening of a new television transmitter in an area where up to then little television could be seen, coincided with an early stage in our investigation and provided us with a ready-made experimental situation. We tested nearly all the Norwich children in two age groups, and then waited for the arrival of tele-

vision sets into children's homes. Almost a year later, those children who had since acquired a set were re-examined and compared with a group of children who did not have television.

An understanding of the true character of mass communication is vital in the present world. This study has shown how urgently research is needed into the content of television entertainment; too many programmes appear to be built on conjecture about what people want or can take, too few on fact-finding and experimentation. So far as television in this country is concerned, we have been able to map some aspects of the present situation, but far more detailed charting remains to be done. We would venture, for instance, to suggest that research is needed to examine the effects of television on the country child, the very young child, and the disturbed child; and in addition much needs to be done in the way of testing reactions to particular programmes and particular programme types.

Like research in the natural sciences, social research depends for its value on continuity and on systematic progress towards a deeper understanding of each problem. This applies particularly to a field such as communication research which, in this country, is still in its infancy.

H. T. H.
A. N. O.
P. V.

PART I

Summary and Suggestions

I

The Problem

OUR terms of reference in this inquiry were to study the impact of television on children and young people. In 1954, when the study was officially planned, as many as 3,000,000 homes had television sets. It was known that, compared with radio listening, children viewed more and began viewing at an earlier age. The possible effects of this situation, while the subject of much public speculation, had not been systematically investigated. There was urgency about this research, not only because of public concern about the potentially harmful effects of television, but also because the rate of buying television sets was increasing so rapidly. If such a study, based on a comparison of an experimental (television-viewing) group of children with a control (non-viewing) group, had been left to much later, it would not have been possible to do it at all. One of the difficulties in attempting this type of research in the United States had been just this; namely, that research workers had often to rely on retrospective accounts of pre-television behaviour, rather than on current comparisons of the behaviour of viewers and non-viewers.

Our assignment proved a difficult one because there was no baseline on which to build. Some individual studies apart, there was little knowledge about how much children viewed, or the significance that television had assumed in their lives. Even more important, there was no systematic knowledge about the manner in which children spent

their leisure, or about their outlook and attitudes, before television had had a chance to change them.[1]

This was one problem. In addition, we were faced with the difficulty that the 'effects' of television could manifest themselves in almost every aspect of children's lives. To find out what to measure, and where to draw the line, we therefore turned to the many opinions that had been expressed about the effects of the medium. Not surprisingly, such opinions tended to be heavily influenced by personal attitudes, and were often contradictory. For instance:

> Television, it was said, ruined children's sleep and eyesight, made them passive, made them aggressive (through seeing so many adventure and murder plays); led to a falling off in schoolwork as a result both of tiredness and declining interest. Others, more favourably disposed to television, claimed that it widened children's interests, that it made them more active by encouraging hobbies, that it made them less aggressive (again as a result of watching adventure and murder plays which this time were seen as offering a harmless outlet for pent-up aggression); it was also suggested that school work improved because television stimulated children's interest in some of the subjects taught.

The variety of opinions advanced by well-informed people suggested that we could take nothing for granted. It meant that we had to test hypotheses and establish results which many people would regard as 'obvious'. It also meant that our inquiry had to include a large number of children, since one reason for the divergent opinions about the effects of television was that these were generalisations based on observations of different groups of children. But television, like any other influence, is likely to have differing effects on children of different ages, intelligence levels, personality, home background, and so on. Moreover, not only do children vary in what they choose to watch on television, they also perceive and react to the same programmes differently, according to their idiosyncratic needs.

By establishing the variations, we hoped to discover some of the principles underlying television's influence. The survey was consequently designed to find out how television affects different types of children in different aspects of their lives, at different points of time, and according to different sets of viewing circumstances. This procedure also enabled us to locate 'problem areas' where action might be needed.

Assessment of the good or harmful effects of television must depend, in part at least, on the nature and quality of the activities it displaces. This again will vary from child to child; in some cases, for instance,

[1] Some figures were available about how often children went to the cinema and what they read, but there was no coherent picture of the total leisure life of the child into which television had to be fitted.

television will push out comic reading, in other instances homework will suffer.[1]

TYPES OF EFFECTS TO BE EXAMINED

Broadly speaking, two main types of effects can be distinguished: those (which we have called displacement effects) which stem essentially from the time taken up by viewing; and those which relate, more specifically, to the content of television programmes.

Displacement effects

Consciously or unconsciously, children exercise choice in how much they view, and in the way they make time for viewing. They may drop a few activities completely, reduce them all proportionately, or reduce some more than others. We have tried to isolate the principles on which these choices tend to be made; in this way it should be possible to predict what will happen, for instance, if television is newly introduced into a community. To do this effectively, we had to chart, as fully as possible, the leisure pattern of the children's lives; the casual as well as the organised activities, the useless as well as the useful ones.

The effects of programme content

The second type of effect depends more on the content of television programmes, and for the most part consists of the stimulation of interests and activities. We wanted in particular to examine the effects of content on children's knowledge and school performance, and on their outlook and values. In the latter case we studied the subtle, almost imperceptible ways in which children's outlook is affected by the view of the world and society which television tends to offer. This is a realm of intangibles, difficult to chart and measure.

We were concerned here with the content of programmes as children perceive them. This does not necessarily coincide with the perceptions of experienced adults, including producers. Similarly, the standards which adults use to assess violence, aggression, or realism in a programme may well differ from those of children. It is important to bear this in mind, particularly in the case of evening programmes intended primarily for adults.

[1] One paper even came to the conclusion that 'television is helping to turn our youth back from the paths of insobriety which it has been increasingly following in recent years'. If this finding were true, then in this particular area at least, there would be little doubt about the beneficial effects of television!

These two types of effects—those due to the time spent watching television, and those due to the content of the programmes watched —often have a conflicting impact on the same activity. For instance, it will be shown later that many children cut down their book-reading as a result of the time they gave to television, but that at the same time they were stimulated to read some of the books which had been dramatised on television.

Other types of effects

There are other types of effects not dealt with under the two main categories already outlined. These include the effects of television on family life (the extent to which it increases the amount or quality of family contacts, or stimulates conflict between parent and child); and the effect television has on the pattern of children's emotional reactions (on their relationships with their friends, on their general capacity for adjustment, on passivity, aggressive behaviour, sleep, and level of anxiety).

This inquiry, then, was not a simple study of 'the effect' of television on 'the child', but a more complex investigation of many different types of effects on many different types of children. But there were other differentiating factors which complicated the picture further. It was thought, for example, that the effect of television might vary with the context in which viewing takes place, whether alone or with adults, whether in the dark or with familiar objects clearly visible; and also according to the attitude to television of the adults in the child's environment, in particular his parents and teachers.[1] Finally, we had to design the study remembering that some of the effects may be short term, others more lasting. We therefore needed to compare the veteran viewers with relatively new viewers.

Essentially the effects of television can best be seen as an interplay between the characteristics of the viewer and the characteristics and content of the medium.

AN OUTLINE OF THE DESIGN

Our task lay in building up a picture of the changes brought about by television. To do this, we adopted the conventional experimental method: we compared two groups, only one of which had been exposed to the variable (these were the *viewers*, who had television at

[1] A parent who views a great deal himself sets a different example from one who views sparingly, and his example may affect the child's viewing. Equally, the teacher who works the content of suitable television programmes into his teaching creates a different situation from the one who does not link the children's viewing experience with the teaching at school.

home); the other group were the *controls* (who had no television at home and were also not regular guest viewers).

For such comparison to be valuable, the two groups—viewers and controls—must in all other respects *start off* as alike as possible. To this end, we matched each viewer individually with a 'twin' control child; the members of each pair were, therefore, of the same sex, age, intelligence, and social background; in addition, as far as possible, they were selected from the same class-room in order that they might share the same neighbourhood and school atmosphere. This system of *individual matching* (which is described in detail in Chapter 6) was more rigorous and precise than is customary in research of this kind.

In carrying out this type of comparison, the choice of criteria for matching the viewers and controls is, of course, of paramount importance. We chose four (sex, age, intelligence, and social class) which previous research had shown to account for many of the important differences in children's outlook and leisure-time activities. Inevitably, however, they leave other factors out of account; as a result, the two groups could only be very approximate replicas of each other.

This inquiry, which is in effect a comparative study of matched viewers and controls, will be referred to as the *main survey*. It was carried out in four English cities, London, Portsmouth, Sunderland, and Bristol. A total of 4,500 children was tested, leaving us (after the guest viewers and unmatchable cases had been discarded) with 1,854 matched viewers and controls.

The main survey provides a picture of the way in which the viewers differed from their controls. Such differences cannot, however, be automatically ascribed to viewing; our matching criteria were, of course, not exhaustive and there remains the possibility that the differences might already have existed before the viewers acquired their television sets. We knew already that the two groups must have been to some extent different, in that in one case their families decided to buy a television set, whilst the others—despite similar incomes—preferred to use their money in other ways. Such differences in home background might well find expression in the children's attitudes and behaviour.[1] If this were so, some of the differences found in the main survey would not be due to the effects of viewing but would be due to pre-existing differences between children from homes which bought television early and those which did not.

Ideally, therefore, we would require a different type of inquiry—a *before-and-after* study in which children, examined before they had

[1] That is to say, the purchase of a television set may be an expression of a particular home atmosphere, and of particular interests on the part of both parents and children.

access to television, can be examined again after they have come under its influence. In such a study a control group (which continues to lack access to the medium) is necessary in order to ensure that any change between the first and second testing was not in fact due to such extraneous factors as, for example, the passage of time. With this type of research design, changes found between the first and second testing of those children who had acquired television, between test and retest, could be more confidently ascribed to the effects of viewing.

The opening of a new television transmitter in Norwich provided us with the opportunity for a natural *before-and-after* study. Taking advantage of this circumstance, we gave our main survey questionnaires to all the 10–11 and 13–14 year olds in nearly every Norwich school, at a time when hardly any family had a television set. After a year we compared a group of children who had since acquired sets with a group who had not, by matching them, individually in pairs, as in the main survey. By relating the results to those obtained in the main survey, one could see whether the differences emerging in the main survey represented after-effects of viewing, or had existed prior to the arrival of the set; i.e. the extent to which the *future viewers* (those who acquired television in the course of the year) differed from children whose families proved less eager to acquire a television set.[1] Out of the original 2,200 children tested on our first visit to Norwich, we subsequently obtained 370 cases, consisting of all children who had television and of their controls.

One example may serve to illustrate the need for distinguishing between pre-existing differences and after-effects brought about by television. In the main survey we found that viewers went less regularly to Sunday school compared with controls. It would be tempting to argue that this was due to the counter-attraction of television, or to the materialistic attitude fostered by it. The before-and-after study, however, showed that this difference already existed between future viewers and their controls before television came on the scene. The less regular attendance at Sunday schools was not the result of acquiring a television set, but due to a relatively low level of religious interest and observance among those families who responded most promptly to the appeal of television.

Since the before-and-after study—referred to in this report as the *Norwich study*—appeared to be so much more precise than the main

[1] Even then we could not be absolutely sure that we were dealing with after-effects, since one cannot ever be sure of having controlled for all the relevant factors. All we can say is that the Norwich before-and-after study greatly increased the likelihood of getting at differences due to viewing, rather than those caused by extraneous factors.

survey, it might be asked why we did not confine the inquiry to this study alone. This would have been unwise, not only because our final sample could only be small, but also because in Norwich only the immediate effects of television could be examined. We were anxious also to assess the effects which occur once television has become an established feature in the home.[1]

Further, what the Norwich study could not do was to answer our second question, namely, how far the effects of television varied according to the sex, age, intelligence, and social background of the viewers. For this we needed large numbers; we also needed a special type of sample design—a *factorial design* (described in detail in Chapter 6) which makes it possible to study the influence of one background characteristic (for example, age), while holding the others constant. To achieve this, we used not a representative sample, but one in which we had equal numbers of middle- and working-class children,[2] of bright and dull children, and of boys and girls.[3]

The number of viewers included in the main survey was sufficiently large to permit two comparisons to be made within the viewing group. The first examines the effects of television over time, by comparing *recent viewers* (those who have had a television set for between three months to one year) with *experienced* and *veteran* viewers (the last being viewers who have had television for at least three years). The second comparison examines the degree to which the effects vary with the weekly amount of time which children devoted to viewing, and so compares *occasional*, *moderate*, and *heavy* viewers with one another.

The age groups studied

Since the design called for a great deal of information about each child, we decided to concentrate in the survey on two age groups.[4]

[1] In the main survey, we excluded for this reason all viewers who had had television for less than three months.

[2] Throughout this report the term *working class* has been used to describe children whose fathers do manual work, and the term *middle class* to describe those whose fathers are white-collar workers. Since the inquiry was restricted to state schools, the sample includes few children from upper middle-class homes.

[3] In using a factorial design we gained great advantages. We had, however, to forfeit any type of representative sample, since to fit our sample into the design it was necessary, of course, to have more middle class and bright children than any type of random sample would provide. We felt that the advantage of the factorial design outweighed the disadvantage of having an unrepresentative sample; but in considering the results outlined in this report it must throughout be remembered that they are (from the point of view of representativeness) in certain respects overweighted.

[4] Some additional studies, described later, were used to gain information about the reactions of younger children.

These were 10–11 and 13–14 year olds, the former being the youngest group able to deal with written instructions and to give answers in written form, the latter the oldest group still fully represented at school. All the children were drawn from state schools, the 10–11 year olds from the top form of the primary school, the 13–14 year olds from the two main types of secondary schools within the state system: the grammar and the secondary modern schools. Although only 2–3 years apart, preliminary exploration made it clear that the two age groups were sufficiently dissimilar in their interests and behaviour as well as in their emotional and social development to bring out age variations in the effects of television.

The research instruments used

In both surveys the children wrote their own answers to our questionnaires under conditions of anonymity. In Chapter 6 we discuss the advantages and disadvantages of interviews and questionnaires in studies with children. For a variety of reasons, interviews were not feasible in our case. What we did do, however, was to use a number of devices to make the questionnaires as much like an interview as possible, so that the children could answer in their own characteristic ways. The various testing instruments went through many revisions before being used in the survey.

Two main techniques were employed. First, the children were asked to keep a diary, filled in privately at school each day for one week, in which they recorded everything they did between leaving school and going to bed. At this point there had been no mention of our interest in television; the inquiry was presented to the children as a study of their leisure activities. The diaries gave a consecutive account of children's leisure activities which has proved very valuable. The children also indicated each day which were their three most enjoyed activities, so that we could tell how important a role television really played, and what relationship there was between the time and interest devoted to it. Secondly, questionnaires were given to the children some six weeks later, containing detailed questions about their leisure activities and interests, and parallel questions for each of the mass media—the cinema, radio, and reading. (The questionnaire on reading contained questions about comics and magazines, as well as books.)

In addition, measures of children's personality were obtained, as well as ratings by the teachers of the children's behaviour and personality characteristics. The assessment of personality in particular was used to account for differences in emotional impact; to show, for example, whether being frightened by a particular programme

reflected a general tendency to anxiety, or whether it was really a function of the programme, so that fear was experienced also by children not particularly predisposed to anxiety.

By including these techniques, we tried to obtain the type of material normally collected in a case study, but within the framework of an extensive survey dealing with large numbers.

Additional studies

Special studies were also carried out to examine groups not covered by the survey, and to investigate problems for which other techniques were needed. Some of these studies again used pencil and paper tests and questionnaires, but others, this time, relied more on the qualitative data that could be obtained through observational methods or through long, informal interviews with individuals or groups.

Altogether, there were eleven such studies: one enrolled the help of mothers to keep seven-day diaries of the viewing habits and reactions of their young children. Two were opinion studies carried out among teachers and parents. Three studies dealt with the assessment of the impact of specific programmes (one by observing children while watching a programme, one by measuring children's understanding and recall of certain programmes, and the third by investigating the extent to which child attendance at a museum had increased after some of its exhibits had been shown on television). One study dealt with the effect of television on school performance. Two aimed at understanding the role that television plays in children's lives, the one by interviewing 9–10 year olds, the other by group discussions with a similar age group, this time with special reference to their reactions to Westerns, crime and detective series. One very different study systematically examined the content of television programmes, in terms both of the amount of programme time given to different types of programmes, and of the values, attitudes, characterisation, and themes contained in television plays.[1] Finally, a study was included to measure the effect of an alternative television channel on the amount of children's viewing, and on their programme choice.

One final point needs to be made here. Our first task lay in charting the manner in which children who see television differ from those who do not: in their way of life, interests, knowledge, and values. Such a study is essentially a comparative one which is concerned

[1] Although the main survey and the Norwich study were conducted with children who had access to BBC only, the content analysis was carried out for both BBC and ITV, so as to be more representative of television entertainment today.

with the children's total viewing experience. In the course of this work we have also tried to answer certain other questions—which are not all specific to this medium alone. Here is a sample of such questions:

1. What factors determine consumption of a mass medium?
2. Do children reach satiation point in their desire for spectator entertainment?
3. To what extent can tastes be developed?
4. What frightens children, and how do the fears induced by television vary according to the sex and age of the child? Are there any discoverable principles about the sort of programmes or incidents that are most likely to arouse fear?
5. What is the effect on children of programmes featuring aggression and violence?
6. To what extent do children turn for their entertainment to programmes designed primarily for adults?
7. How far does television entertainment put over a constant set of values? How far are such values taken over by the children?
8. To what extent do children become so preoccupied by television that it dominates their lives and interests?
9. How does television affect family life?

Lastly, we should point out that in many ways a 13–14 year old does not differ much from an adult in his tastes and reactions. For this reason, and also because the research develops general principles about consumption of, and reactions to, television, many of the findings may have relevance to adults as well as to children.

2

Summary of Main Findings

THIS chapter is designed to give a general picture of the main findings. It divides into two main sections. Section I gives the effects for each area in turn, while Section II provides the broader picture of the way different factors determine children's reactions. To keep the presentation brief, we may on occasions sound more categorical than the evidence warrants. This summary should, therefore, be read in conjunction with the main report, where the evidence is presented with its necessary qualifications and where the implications of the findings are more fully discussed. The relevant chapters are indicated in brackets throughout this summary. Unless specifically stated otherwise, the findings refer to children with access to BBC television only and are based on the results obtained from 10–11 and 13–14 year old children.

Who are the early viewers? (Ch. 7)

Apart from various social and economic determinants, we found that the first people to buy television were those with the strongest need for ready-made entertainment. In the United States research among adults has shown that the early set buyers were originally more avid cinema-goers and radio listeners. Our work with children also indicates that those from homes which bought television early were more dependent on outside stimulation—they had an unusually high interest in comics, radio, and clubs, and their taste in book reading tended to be narrower. All this suggests a home atmosphere which would seek the stimulation of outside entertainment rather than rely on its own resources.

SECTION I

THE AMOUNT CHILDREN VIEW

How many hours per week do children view television? (Ch. 8)

At the time of our survey, viewers in both age groups watched television for an average of 11–13 hours a week, or just under two hours a day; they spent more time on television than on any other single

leisure activity. While older and younger children devoted about the same amount of time to television, the time was in each case differently distributed; the 10–11 year olds watched more children's television and less evening television than the adolescents. On average, children's television was watched by grammar, secondary modern, and primary school children respectively for four, five, and six hours a week. Viewing was fairly regular throughout the week, Saturday being the favourite viewing night.

The popular image of the child glued to the television set, watching whatever is on, did not fit the facts. Most children viewed reasonably selectively, turning to other things when something was on which they did not like. Many also consulted the *Radio Times* or the newspapers before they settled down to viewing, despite the fact that in many of the homes—two-thirds, according to the children—the set was left on for most of the evening. This happened as often in middle- as in working-class homes.

What factors reduce interest in and time spent on viewing? (Ch. 8)

The single, most important background factor was undoubtedly intelligence; the higher the child's intelligence, the less his viewing. This difference was already clear cut among the 10–11 year olds and became more pronounced in early adolescence—where the grammar school pupils, of all the children tested, proved the least interested and the least prepared to spend a lot of time on television.

In both age groups boys and girls spent roughly the same amount of time in front of the set.

Viewing seemed to become a habit on which the child fell back when nothing more interesting was available. Consequently, the child with many interests, the active child, and the outdoor type tended to view less than the other children. But for all children, outdoor play and (in adolescence in particular) social activities proved television's strongest rivals. For the average child, viewing took second place to these.

The social level of the home (whether it was a middle- or a working-class home) proved of little importance in affecting how much children viewed. Only among the younger children was there any difference. Middle-class children tended to view a little less than working-class children, largely because of their earlier bedtimes. What proved much more important was parental example, and to a lesser extent, parental control. In homes where the parents themselves were selective and moderate viewers, the children also tended to view relatively little. While this was the general pattern, we also found much individual variation between members of the same family.

It would appear that the amount a child views depends in the first instance on his intelligence, secondly on his personality and on how full and active a life he had led before television came on the scene, and thirdly on parental example.

How does the amount of viewing change (a) *over time and* (b) *with the introduction of a second channel?* (Ch. 8)

Viewing rapidly becomes a habit—within the first three months the children settled to a routine in keeping with their age, intelligence, and personality, and one which seemed relatively independent of how long they had had television. The veteran viewers (those with television for over three years), compared with recent viewers, reduced their viewing by only two hours a week although they were more critical and less attached to television.

Even the attractions of an alternative channel, offering many more of the children's favourites, did not change this pattern. A study carried out with children who had access to both channels showed that the average number of hours they viewed was about the same as for children with access to BBC alone.

Do the children watch many programmes designed for adults? (Ch. 8)

From the age of 10 onwards, at least half the children watched adult programmes in the first part of the evening (until 9 p.m.). Even after 10 p.m. one-third of the 13–14 year olds was still watching. On evenings not followed by school days, the children viewed until a later hour.

An assessment of the effects of television on children which did not take evening programmes into account would, therefore, be seriously misleading.

CHILDREN'S TASTE IN TELEVISION

What kinds of programme do children like best? (Ch. 9)

Three-quarters of the votes for the most favoured programme went to adult programmes, particularly to crime thrillers and, to a lesser extent, to comedies, variety programmes, and family serials. Westerns were much favoured by the younger children. Other types of programme—such as puppets, nature and animal programmes, and how-to-make programmes—were not especially popular. Only among the 8–10 year olds did children's television programmes or *Watch with Mother* appear among the top five favourites.

As with time, so with taste. We found that age and intelligence

affected preferences, while the social level of the home made little difference. A child's liking for a given programme is a function of his sex, emotional and intellectual maturity, and of his own idiosyncratic needs.

The preferences of adolescent girls and boys differed more than did the tastes of the younger boys and girls. Rather unexpectedly, girls seemed as much interested as boys in crime and detective series.

Adult political programmes, documentary and discussion programmes such as *Panorama* or the *Brains Trust* held little appeal, even for the more intelligent grammar school children.

One finding was of special interest; even the most popular programme or programme type was mentioned by no more than one-third of the children. Within any given age and intelligence group there is thus a great deal of variation in taste, a fact which seems to be considerably underestimated in popular discussion.

Do children's tastes in television reflect their tastes in other mass media? (Ch. 11)

On the whole we found they did. Children liked similar types of programmes whether they occurred on television, or radio, or in the cinema, or whether they formed the content of a book. Tastes in television were further linked with interest in other activities. Children have a general underlying pattern of preferences, and it is therefore possible to predict (within limits) a child's television likes and dislikes from a knowledge of his age, intelligence, and taste in other mass media.

Can children's tastes be developed by seeing programmes which are not on the whole popular with children? (Ch. 10)

When programmes such as *Science Review*; *Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral?*; *Meet the Commonwealth*; *From Tropical Forests*; *Have You a Camera?* come on the screen, children with access to one channel only must either stop watching or view programmes which they do not expect to be very interesting. Under these circumstances, quite a number of children chose to see such programmes and in fact enjoyed them. Children with access to one channel only get the chance to discover such programmes, but those with two channels hardly ever.

The more the child can follow his favourite choices by switching from channel to channel, the less likely is he to come in contact with programmes which, from an educational viewpoint, would prove more worth-while and which would enable him to experience new things and so broaden his taste.

How is taste affected by access to a second channel? (Ch. 10)

While the amount of viewing did not increase, children now tended to concentrate more on their favourites, switching from channel to channel. They therefore saw other kinds of programmes less often. Thus, child audiences for adult crime and detective series, panel games, Westerns, drama and variety programmes remained high, while information and documentary programmes suffered a disproportionate loss (from 48 per cent down to 13 per cent). Once there is a choice of channels, with programmes as at present distributed, those with educational value or those which have been especially produced for children are most likely to suffer.

Family conflict over the choice of channel was rare; only about 10 per cent of the children on any one day could not watch a programme they wanted to see because (they said) the rest of the family preferred to view something else on the other channel.

On the whole, children in homes where a second channel had recently become available much preferred ITV. It offered more of their favourites, and many liked the advertisements. This was particularly true of the 10–11 year olds; the older and the more intelligent children tended to be more critical both of the advertisements and of the interruptions they cause.

What constitutes television's appeal for children? (Ch. 12)

The interviews with the children suggest that part of television's appeal lies in its easy availability and its consequent value as a time filler.

Television offers the satisfaction of being in the know, of going behind the scenes and of learning about the world and about people. On the emotional side, television appeals in different ways to different children. It offers security and reassurance through the familiar format and themes of many of its programmes, notably the family serials and the Westerns. It offers constant change, excitement, and suspense. It provides escape from everyday demands with lightheartedness, glamour, and romance, and permits the child to identify himself with different romantic heroes.

Television also offers the appeal of personalities, presented more intimately and in more everyday terms than the stars of the cinema. The personalities of television seemed to be liked by the children in particular for their warmth and friendliness.

THE CONTENT OF ITV AND BBC TELEVISION PROGRAMMES

As a preliminary step in the study of the effects of television on the child's values and outlook, a content analysis was made of the programmes on both channels, first when ITV had only just come on the air and again about nine months later.[1] The allocation of time to different types of programme was charted and a detailed analysis made of the themes, motives, values, and characterisation of adult plays (excluding comedies) and of children's Westerns.

What does television offer to the child in terms of programme content? (Ch. 13)

Taking both children's and evening television together, the staple fare consisted of plays—chiefly Westerns, crime, and adventure. Without overstaying his bedtime the child with access to both channels could watch well over twenty-five plays a week. In one rather typical week, between 5 and 9 p.m., eighteen plays were shown which dealt with one or other aspect of lawbreaking and retribution,[2] fourteen of them on ITV (nine of these were designed for adults). In the same week, the BBC during these hours offered four programmes of this kind (two designed for children).

In the evening, ITV offered twice as many plays or playlets as the BBC, half of them episodes from crime, adventure, and adult Western series; the BBC devoted about one-fifth of its plays to such episodes, the remainder being comedies or problem plays.

In children's television the BBC allotted about one-third of its time to information programmes and one-third to plays. On ITV, plays occupied first 50 then 73 per cent of the time. While both channels offered mainly adventure plays, in the case of ITV these amounted to 96 per cent. They consisted of Westerns, swashbuckling adventure and animal adventure series, most of them produced in America. 73 per cent of BBC children's plays were adventure plays; they covered a wider range of topics than those shown on ITV, with more of them being live productions.

That such programme uniformity is not an inevitable by-product of commercial television is seen in comparison with New York television; where programme output for children proved more varied, even though New York has seven stations competing for audiences.

[1] The analysis was based on programmes put on the air by the BBC and by the two programme companies serving the London region (Associated Rediffusion and Associated Television); for brevity's sake these will be referred to as ITV. The analysis was carried out in 1956.

[2] These figures were obtained in May 1958 and are similar to those of 1956.

In consequence, children's information programmes on ITV compared with BBC were fewer, shorter, and covered a smaller number of topics. There were no programmes to correspond to the BBC programmes on foreign countries, fewer 'making and doing' programmes, and fewer programmes about the ways of life of people in different occupations. Apart from current affairs programmes like *This Week* and the news, children missed nearly all ITV evening information programmes, as these were on too late. In the case of the BBC, information programmes were more uniformly spread over the evening, so that children could see more of them; but even so they would miss most of the BBC science programmes (which might well appeal to children) and all the programmes on art.

In the course of the last year, ITV programmes for children have become more varied.

EFFECT OF TELEVISION ON VALUES AND OUTLOOK

What view of life and what values do adult television plays offer the child? (Ch. 17)

Analysis of the content of randomly selected adult plays from both channels (excluding comedies, crime and detective series), showed the values put over to be remarkably consistent from play to play. Since children see and enjoy a great number of plays, we set out to discover how far there was a cumulative effect on their outlook and values.

The world of television drama tends to be that of upper middle-class urban society. The occupations of people of this social level are depicted as worth-while, while manual work is presented as uninteresting. Television plays teach that self-confidence and toughness are needed to achieve success—goodness of character is not enough; that life is difficult, especially for women; that marriages are frequently unhappy, and parent–child relationships often strained. Events rarely turn out satisfactorily and virtue seldom brings happiness in its train. Violence is an inevitable part of life, and good people often resort to it. For the adult observer a hackneyed view of life emerges, similar in many ways to that offered in films or in the theatre; for the child television may afford a glimpse of adult life which he would otherwise gain less often and only at a later age.

To what extent is the child's outlook coloured by what he sees on television? (Chs. 18–21)

We have found a number of instances where viewers and controls differed in their outlook, differences which did not exist before

television came on the scene. There was a small but consistent influence of television on the way children thought generally about jobs, job values, success, and social surroundings. In their wishes about jobs the viewers proved more ambitious than children not exposed to television; in their job values they were more 'middle class', and in their assessment of the factors making for personal success they more often stressed the need for self-confidence. Some of their descriptions of the homes of rich people reflected the hall-marks of wealth depicted on television.

Adolescent girl viewers proved more concerned than their controls about growing up and marrying—possibly a reaction to the difficulties of adult life of which television made them aware at an age when they are much in need of reassurance.

Probably as a result of BBC programmes about foreign (and especially European) countries, viewers made fewer value judgements about foreigners; where stereotypes were given, they tended to reflect those offered by television.

Television tended to make no impact where the child could turn for information to his immediate environment, parents, and friends; it had little effect on the jobs children expected to do, as distinct from their wish dreams about them.

The most affected were the less intelligent 13–14 year olds. The lesson of television was not absorbed by a child bright enough to be well informed, or critical of what he viewed, or by one too young to perceive or to take an interest in the implied values.

All in all, the values of television can make an impact if they are consistently presented in dramatic form, and if they touch on ideas or values for which the child is emotionally ready. Extrapolating from these findings, one would expect that in the crime and detective series the constant display of aggression by both the criminal and the upholder of the law would also make an impact on those children sensitised to such cues.

REACTIONS OF FEAR AND ANXIETY

What frightens children on television? (Chs. 14, 15)

Westerns tended to frighten only the very young or the insecure; it is likely that the majority of children can enjoy them without fear by the time they are about 7. On the other hand, detective, murder and crime thrillers were often mentioned as frightening by adolescents as well as by the 10–11 year olds. Violence in these plays, unlike Westerns, is realistic, not stylised, and forms less often part of a stereotyped plot sequence.

Many children were frightened by incidents in horror programmes, space fiction, and even such dramatisations as *Jane Eyre*. On the other hand, real events of a violent nature seen on newsreels were rarely mentioned as frightening. Fiction made a deeper impact than reality.

Where children mentioned incidents that had frightened them, they often spoke of nightmares and of difficulty in falling asleep. It is in such effects as these that the disturbance caused by frightening programmes can best be seen.

Children tended to be more readily frightened when viewing in the dark, and when watching programmes in the evening without an adult present. Television in so far as it is more of a family activity than radio listening is likely to arouse less fear, but television's visual impact in darkened rooms could well make up for this. In general, television emerged from our survey as very similar to the cinema and radio, both in the amount of fear it engendered and in the types of programmes which children found frightening.

What types of aggression prove most disturbing to children? (Ch. 15)

Guns and anything to do with guns, proved least and daggers and sharp instruments most disturbing, with swords somewhere in between. Fist-fights and fighting on the ground were disturbing only when they occurred in sports programmes, i.e. in real life, rather than in fictional programmes.

We found young children unmoved by a scene in which polecats devoured a rat; but they were very disturbed by danger to animals like the dogs in *Lassie* and *Rin-Tin-Tin*, for which they had a particular attachment or which had been cast in a special role.

Verbal acts of aggression, reprimand, and ridicule sometimes occasioned more unease than physical aggression, particularly when they occurred in real-life situations, in panel games, or sports programmes. Children were disturbed by situations with which they could identify themselves; this is a more important factor than the sheer amount of force of the physical violence shown.

Children enjoy being a little frightened; they like suspense for the sake of the relief that follows. There is a narrow margin between pleasurable suspense and intolerable fear. The children themselves made a clear distinction between exciting and frightening programmes, enjoying the former and not the latter.

THE EFFECT OF WESTERNS, AND OF CRIME AND DETECTIVE SERIES

Do these programmes make children aggressive? (Ch. 16)

We did not find that the viewers were any more aggressive or maladjusted than the controls; television is unlikely to cause aggressive behaviour, although it could precipitate it in those few children who are emotionally disturbed. On the other hand, there was little support for the view that programmes of violence are beneficial; we found that they aroused aggression as often as they discharged it. We also found that they taught the one-sided lesson that to offend against the law is bad, without teaching its positive counterpart.

By taking up such a disproportionate amount of viewing time, these programmes prevent the showing of more varied types of programmes that could offer children a broader view of life.

Do these programmes fill an urgent demand? (Ch. 16)

While *Fabian of Scotland Yard* was the first favourite, as many as two-thirds of the children mentioned quite different programmes as their favourites. Also, when asked to plan an ideal evening's entertainment, only 10 per cent of the adolescents and 26 per cent of the younger children mentioned these programmes in their bill of fare. It would seem, therefore, that the number of these programmes could safely be reduced without fear of losing the child audience.

TELEVISION'S EFFECT ON GENERAL KNOWLEDGE AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Does television improve children's general knowledge?[1] (Chs. 22–26)

On the whole the gain was very slight, but varied with the type of child. Children can undoubtedly learn from television; but viewing takes time, some of which might be spent with books or other sources of information. It incurs, therefore, both gain and loss. We found a net profit only for the younger, duller children.

There were several reasons for the absence of gain. Documentaries and the discussion programmes offered a good deal of information; but the type of information contained in programmes designed especially for children is also readily available to the controls from other media, so that there is little advantage to be gained from viewing. Adult information programmes were not very popular and did

[1] We were examining the increase of knowledge obtained not from school's television, but from general television entertainment.

not always get their points across even to adolescents. In any case, younger children do not remember the content for any length of time, so that there is little storing of information. Paradoxically, our results suggest that gains in general knowledge come mostly from adult non-information programmes; these contain useful details of plot and circumstance which are more readily remembered because of their dramatic content.

For most children in our survey, television proved neither a help nor a hindrance as far as general knowledge was concerned, except for the younger or duller children (as yet able to read very little), for whom it proved a real advantage. Their gain in knowledge proved the equivalent to what a child would normally gain in the course of four to five months of intellectual development. For these children, television provided information in the form and the pace best suited to them—in dramatic and above all in visual form. Grammar school viewers, on the other hand, did not gain; in fact they proved a little less knowledgeable than their controls. Viewing offered them little that was new and took time away from other sources of knowledge, such as reading or radio.

Although children remembered nature programmes well, they carried over little of such programmes into their general knowledge of this subject or into their performance in related subjects taught at school. Gain in knowledge of current affairs was negligible because children had little interest in these programmes. There was equally little gain in cultural interests. Few children, for example, went to a museum after seeing exhibits from it in a children's programme.

How does television affect children's school work? (Ch. 25)

On the whole, viewers more or less held their own with class mates of similar age, sex, social class, and intelligence; but the brighter children in both age groups tended to fall a little behind.

Television created no particular interest in any school subject, nor were viewers markedly better or worse at any of them.

Viewers and controls also spent much the same amount of time on homework. But the closing of the transmission gap between 6 and 7.30 may well make a difference here, and a repeat inquiry is needed under these new conditions.

Does television make children listless and lead to poor concentration at school, and reduce interest in school? (Chs. 33, 20)

Our findings suggest that it does not. There was no difference between viewers and controls in children's subjective assessments of

tiredness in the morning, nor in ratings by class teachers of each child's concentration.

On the other hand, half the teachers, when asked for their opinion, said that one of the three most important effects of television was the children's tiredness in the morning and consequent lack of concentration. Their views reflected their general attitude to television and their class-room experience with viewers; our findings were likely to be more valid since they were derived from a comparison of viewers and controls, taking into account the number of children without television who nevertheless lacked concentration and felt tired.

Children's interest in school or school societies did not seem to be affected. Viewers and controls differed neither in the age at which they would like to leave school, in the frequency with which they took part in extra-curricular activities, nor in their attitude to school as judged by their class teachers.

THE EFFECT OF TELEVISION ON LEISURE

Are children's lives dominated by television? (Ch. 27)

This proved true in only a minority of cases—just as only a minority of children are obsessed with the cinema or radio. Children gave much of their time to television, but far less of their interest. There was an age difference here: the 10–11 year old in the survey proved more attached to television than the adolescent and, within each age group, the child of below average intelligence more than the bright child.

How much television is wanted depends on the relative emptiness of the child's life before he had television and also on his emotional needs. For a minority of cases the vicarious companionship and excitement offered through television is very important, and in such cases television occupies a central place in their lives. But about half the children said they would not very much miss television if they had to do without it, and most children on most ordinary days of the week had other activities which they enjoyed more than viewing.

What makes room for viewing? (Ch. 27)

Viewing takes up a good deal of children's time—on average just under two hours a day. Something, then, must make room for viewing. We consider first the two mass media which are most closely akin to television: cinema and radio; then reading; and finally other leisure activities.

How has television changed children's interest in the cinema? (Ch. 29)

Cinema and television are seen by many children as interchangeable. Both provide entertainment, one with the added advantage of convenience and of not having to pay. Younger viewers therefore reduced their cinema visits and continued to go less often even after viewing for some years. More among them only went once a fortnight rather than once or twice a week. The cinema, however, is also a social occasion, a way of meeting friends away from home. This proved more important for the adolescents than for the younger children; recent adolescent viewers went to the cinema only a little less often than before, but those who had already been viewing for a year had returned to the number of cinema visits characteristic of the adolescent control group.

Individual films made less impact on viewers than controls, accustomed as the former were to the rapid panorama of television programmes with their juxtaposition of emotion and content. But admiration for film stars continued undiminished—television here helps with the many personal appearances of film stars that it features.

How has television affected listening to the radio? (Ch. 29)

Children with access to television listen very little to the radio. While future viewers were keener listeners than their controls, once they had television they stopped listening almost completely. Half the older and a third of the younger viewers still spent a little time with the radio—on average, about one hour a week. One exception here were the frequent viewers who were also relatively heavy consumers of whatever other ready-made entertainment was available; when television was off the air, they would turn to radio. However, for the majority of children, there is a limit to the amount of ready-made entertainment they require—given enough of one mass medium, they cut down severely on the others.

Children who had been viewing for several years showed a very slight revival of interest in the radio. Where listening to the radio continued, viewers assigned it a specialist role. They listened to sports commentaries, discussions, panel games, and musical programmes, rather than to plays; these they enjoyed more on television.

What is the effect of television on reading and skill in reading? (Ch. 28)

Children, once they started viewing, certainly read less than before; by how much depended on the type of child and on how long he had been viewing; it also differed for book- and comic-reading.

The future viewer read more comics than his control, but once he had been viewing for a time his comic-reading came down to the level of that of the control children. Ultimately, then, viewers read no fewer comics than their controls, although before they had television they read more. Books, on the other hand, were read equally often by future viewers and their controls (even though the quality of books read by the former tended to be lower); but with the arrival of television, the viewers reduced their book-reading more severely than their comic-reading. This reduction was most marked among older children and those of medium intelligence; the bright children were little affected and the dull children read very little in any case.

At first, television decreased the proportion of books to comics read. But as children got used to viewing they gradually reverted to books; so that after a few years the viewers were once again reading as many books as the controls, and the duller children had even increased their share. Ultimately, therefore, television favours book- —rather than comic-reading.

Book-reading comes into its own, not despite television but rather because of it. Television stimulated interest in reading, through its serial dramatisation of books; it also aroused the child's interest and curiosity so that he became interested in a wider range of books than before, including non-fiction.

Television may reduce children's reading skill at first, but not in the long run. The present generation of children, who first meet with television at a crucial stage of development, come off worst in this respect, especially since those who reduce their book-reading most tend to be most in need of reading practice. But it must be remembered that book-reading (and therefore reading practice) revives after several years of viewing, and that duller children come to read more than their controls. Ultimately, when television sets have become as commonplace as radio and children grow up accustomed to viewing, there is likely to be no loss in reading skill.

Does television reduce social contacts outside the family? (Ch. 30)

Entertaining at home tended to increase with the acquisition of a television set, but visiting other children was not affected. What did suffer somewhat was the time spent in casual companionship with other children; this is in line with other effects we have noted, the more clearly defined activities being the least affected.

As a result of television, children's lives become more structured; less time is spent on doing 'nothing in particular' either alone or with other children. There is less time 'to stand and stare'.

Whether this is desirable or not will depend on the use to which such time is put and how much of it a child has. A distinction needs to be made here between aimless, bored loafing, on the one hand, and 'healthy' idleness on the other, which enables the child to draw on his own resources rather than on ready-made entertainment.

EFFECT ON FAMILY LIFE

Does television keep the family together? (Ch. 34)

Television does keep members of the family at home more. But it is doubtful whether it binds the family together in more than this physical sense, except while the children are young. As they grow older, their viewing becomes more silent and personal. Also, as children grow into adolescence, the increased time spent with the family may set up strains, since it runs counter to their need to make contacts outside; they may therefore do less in the way of other joint activities with their parents than formerly .

Does television cause conflict in the family? (Ch. 34)

Conflict about television does occur, especially over bedtimes, mealtimes, and the banning of certain programmes. But in many cases this conflict is only indirectly due to television; it may arise from existing poor parent–child relations, from unwise handling by the parents of problems thrown up by television (failure, for instance, to understand the child's absorption in what he views), or from emotional disturbance within the child. In all this television does not create conflicts, although it may precipitate them; it provides a whole new range of situations about which conflict can occur—but the root cause of the conflict normally goes much deeper than television.

Do parents control their children's viewing? (Ch. 34)

Many parents are greatly in favour of television, even to the point of being defensive about it. To some extent television helps them to keep an eye on the children. Also, if they themselves enjoy television and view a lot, they have a vested interest in defending it. Perhaps for these reasons many parents do not admit to a need to control the amount and content of children's viewing. Also, of course, when parents view unselectively themselves, such control becomes difficult to enforce. Two-thirds of the children we questioned said that the television set was left on all the evening in their homes.

There were also signs—though many children and parents tended to deny it—that television is used as an instrument of discipline, for punishment and reward.

PASSIVITY AND STIMULATION

Does television make children passive? (Ch. 31)

In the opinion survey, as many as a quarter of the teachers (and an even higher number among those who disliked television) believed that television made children more passive.

This vague term 'passivity' seems to be used in five different senses; taking each sense in turn and comparing the viewers' behaviour with that of the controls, we found no evidence whatsoever of increased passivity.

1. Children, it is said, absorb television like a sponge; this view (in which physical and mental inactivity are confused) proved untenable, judging from the observations of mothers and the subjective reports by children of their reactions to programmes. Inherent in this view is a confusion between what to the adult may appear poor entertainment, and the way such programmes may appear to the less sophisticated child.

2. Viewing, it is argued, leads children to prefer an edited version of life to the 'real thing', since they can have the screened version without effort. We found no evidence of this.

3. It is also said that viewing leads to loss of initiative. But both viewers and controls enjoyed the same types of activity; and in fact children mainly tended to make room for viewing by cutting down on other ready-made entertainments, notably the cinema and radio, rather than on hobbies and play. Similarly, teachers' ratings of the children's initiative were identical for the two groups.

4. A fourth assertion is that television leads to a jaded palate; we found if anything that the opposite was true, especially among dull adolescents and bright 10–11 year olds; as a result of viewing, they had become interested in a wider range of subjects than their controls.

5. Finally, it is thought that viewing dulls the imagination. Yet when the teachers in our survey were asked to rate each child as 'unusually' or 'moderately' imaginative or as 'unimaginative', no difference emerged between viewers and controls.

The consistently negative results obtained for each one of these five aspects give confidence in our findings. Children's love of activity and exploration is very strong. When there was a choice between sports or hobbies and viewing, television was often the loser.

Can television broaden and stimulate children's interests? (Chs. 28, 31)

The power of television in this respect is most evident in relation to reading. We found that future viewers, before they got their sets, showed less interest than controls in specialised and non-fiction subjects, but that after they had been viewing for a time their interests expanded. This change seemed to occur most often among children of a mental age of about 12; the duller 13–14 year olds and the brighter 10–11 year olds proved most receptive to television's benefit.

Does television make children more enterprising, or stimulate them to make things, enter competitions, visit places of interest, or develop new hobbies? (Ch. 31)

On the whole it does not. We found few children had made anything after seeing it modelled on television, and those who did tended to be the hobby-minded, generally alert children—the ones least in need of stimulation. Only 2 per cent of the older and 3 per cent of the younger children had made and sent things to the BBC Television Centre for a competition.

The under-nines, according to their mothers' accounts, became interested in things shown on television and tried to copy them more often than did the older children. Apart from an increased interest in sport, children of nine years and older proved little responsive.

Visits to museums and art galleries increased little after the viewing of specific programmes.

Viewing, it seems, stimulates interest rather than activity. This may be due to the methods of presentation and choice of topics; but it is probably in large measure due to the nature of television entertainment—a rapid succession of programmes allowing little time for reflection and so only stimulating children with initially strong interest in a given topic. Serialised dramatisations of books are effective possibly because each episode ends on a note of suspense, so retaining the children's interest after the programme has finished.

EFFECT OF TELEVISION ON NIGHT REST AND EYESIGHT

Do child viewers get less sleep than their controls, and have more trouble in falling asleep? (Ch. 33)

Within the two age groups studied, viewing caused a slight postponement of bedtime on weekdays; on average not more than twenty minutes a night. Moreover, the controls spent more time than viewers playing or reading in bed, before they turned out the lights; there was, therefore, very little difference between viewers and non-viewers in effective sleeping time.

Bedtimes were postponed especially among those who would otherwise go to bed early, that is girls and younger children from middle-class homes. Contrary to popular belief, really late bedtimes occurred as often among controls as among viewers; they reflect not so much the lure of television as the general home atmosphere, of which excessive viewing may be just another facet. In fact, the Norwich findings suggested that more relaxed parental control of bedtime was characteristic of parents who were among the first to buy television sets.

We had many reports of difficulties in falling asleep, and of nightmares after some specially frightening programme. But, in general, viewing did not seem to over-excite children; viewers had no more difficulty in falling asleep and reported no more frightening dreams than their controls. Younger children may, however, be more seriously affected than the two age groups we studied.

Is there more defective eyesight among viewers than controls? (Ch. 33)

Defective eyesight was no more frequent among viewers than controls, at least when assessed in terms of the number wearing glasses or complaining of eyestrain. In fact, adolescent girls without television—those who read most—complained of eyestrain more often than the viewers. Of course, some children with poor eyesight may find that their eyes hurt after viewing. Our findings suggest, however, that if these children had used their eyes in other ways (as in reading) the effect would have been much the same.

Do children view under optically suitable conditions? (Ch. 33)

A fair proportion viewed under poor conditions. Children often sat on the floor with the screen above eye level; and as many as one in four viewed in the dark, thus maximising the glare. Viewing in the dark, we found, had a further disadvantage: it enhanced the emotional impact of potentially frightening programmes. There is need for more education of parents and children on the correct conditions for viewing, so as to lessen the possibility of eyestrain for those predisposed to it.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TELEVISION ADDICT—THE EFFECTS OF HEAVY VIEWING

What type of child becomes a television addict? (Ch. 35)

It is difficult to characterise the television addict or heavy viewer, since addiction is, of course, not simply a matter of heavy viewing.

For classification purposes, however, we have been forced to treat it in these terms and have defined as addicts or heavy viewers the 30 per cent in each age group who viewed the most. We have already shown on p. 12 the different factors that correlate with amount of viewing. The most important was intelligence, the duller children viewing more than those of high intelligence; in addition, in the younger age groups, heavy viewing occurred rather more frequently among working-class children.

But personality make-up tends to be at least equally important, and here an addict type emerged who is not exclusive to television; his emotional insecurity and maladjustment seem to impel him towards excessive consumption of any available mass medium. If television is available to such a child, he will view excessively; if not, he will go very often to the cinema, listen a great deal to the radio, or become a heavy reader of comics (but not of books). Such children were characterised by lack of security, by being ill at ease with other children. Their teachers often described them as shy and retiring.

The television addicts in our sample showed less initiative than occasional viewers. They preferred plays of two escapist types—adventure or mystery, and family serials. The first type of play offers them the vicarious pleasure of an active, dangerous life, while the family serial facilitates identification with a happy and united family, offering them reassurance.

While the occasional viewers cut heavily into radio listening and cinema-attendance, the addict managed to fit in something of them all. He listened to the radio when there was no television to watch, and went to the cinema as often as two or three times a week in spite of spending over half his free time in front of the television set.

A comparison of television addicts with control children who were frequent cinema-goers showed that both groups need a great deal of ready-made entertainment; both were insecure and afraid of striking out for themselves. These characteristics are more likely to be the cause than the result of heavy viewing, but the intensive viewing which addiction entails can only make matters worse. With escape through television so readily available, the heavy viewer's outside contacts become more restricted still. Such contacts demand much effort and offer little promise of success; they therefore compare unfavourably with the certain, undemanding companionship of television.

Within a given intelligence level, social class, and age group, the amount a child views gives an indication of the degree to which his life is satisfactory; heavy viewing is a symptom of unsatisfactory adjustment or of inadequate environmental facilities.

SECTION II

THE WAY IN WHICH DIFFERENT CHILDREN REACT TO TELEVISION

Throughout the summary we have discussed each effect in turn and indicated how it varied for different types of children. Here we shall look at the picture from the other point of view and attempt to show how the various factors of intelligence, age, sex, social class, personality and home background determine television's role in the child's life.

Effects on children of different intelligence

The relationship between intelligence and the effects of television is complex, depending on the one hand on the ability to comprehend what is offered, and on the other hand on the level of programme content, compared with that of other sources of information with which children are likely to come into contact.

In this survey intelligence emerged as the single most important determinant. This is shown both in the amount children view and in their interest in viewing; the more intelligent the child, the less inclined he will be to watch television and the less interest in it will he show.

In the case of the 13–14 year olds the picture is clear-cut, irrespective of the effects examined; grammar school children, compared with the less intelligent children of the same age group, proved the less interested, devoted less time to viewing, and also were the less affected by what television offered in the form of values or knowledge. This was partly because for these children television offered little that was new; also because in the case of knowledge, television even hampered intelligent adolescents by reducing the time they might otherwise spend on different sources of information, such as books or the radio, for instance.

In general, we found that the 13–14 year olds of average and below average intelligence and the bright 10–11 year olds were the most responsive both in terms of gaining wider interests (though not activities) and also in terms of their absorption of the values television offered. It would, of course, also follow that they would be similarly affected by inadequate or harmful values, if these were consistently presented. These two groups of children have approximately the same mental age of about 12 years, an age at which television still offers sufficient that is new to the children and where

at the same time other sources of stimulation are unlikely to be more adequate than television.

The 10–11 year old of average or below average intelligence can absorb only the simplest of values from television entertainment. However, it is this group—whose reading and access to other sources of knowledge is the most limited—who has gained most from television as far as general knowledge is concerned.

In the matter of gaining knowledge, television has narrowed the gap between the more and the less intelligent 10–11 year olds; in the case of values and outlook it has brought about the same equalising process between the more and the less intelligent older children.[1]

When a child of relatively low intelligence views a great deal, this has quite a different significance than with a child of about average intelligence. With the former, television provides his main source of stimulation; such a child tends to have few hobbies, and often comes from a home with equally few interests; television for him takes the place of the newspaper and the book; it becomes his main source of information, offered in a manner and at a pace which suits him.

In the case of the intelligent child, the same amount of viewing would more often be a sign of an environment poorly equipped in resources, or else of personal problems within the child himself. Such a child can read and engage in hobbies; under these circumstances, with the majority of children television occupies a less central role.

Effects on children of different ages

At adolescence, television becomes less important; this is not so much because its content no longer interests the children, but rather because viewing occurs among the family at home and so fails to meet the adolescent's social needs. For this reason, the cinema, for instance, by providing opportunities for meeting friends as well as entertainment, gains in popularity as children grow older.

Tastes also change; some of this change comes from increased intellectual maturity, some from changing emotional needs and circumstances. The adolescent ceases to be interested in Westerns (so popular with the 10–11 year olds) with their stereotyped plots and straightforward action; he prefers the more varied action and more complex motivation of detective and other adult plays.

[1] In the study of teachers' opinions, some teachers from schools for educationally subnormal children mentioned that television had helped their pupils not only in providing them with a common talking point with the rest of the family, but also by offering them a source of information which they could easily comprehend.

At all ages, children respond to the programmes in terms of their own needs and of their personal capacity for understanding; in adolescence this involves greater responsiveness to information about personal relationships, and about adult life. About to leave school, the adolescent responds to cues about the type of jobs and about the social values contained in much television drama, which as yet make no impact on the younger child. Similarly, only the older children reacted, and some of them with anxiety, to the problem-laden view of adult life that inevitably forms part of so many evening television plays.

The younger child likes action; his capacity for perceiving motives, unless they are explicitly stated, is as yet limited. Consequently, he responds to episodes or incidents rather than to the overall theme (unless through repetition the theme has been learnt, as in Westerns). This factor must be borne in mind in evaluating the manner in which a child will respond to a given programme; the younger the child the greater the tendency to respond to particular incidents rather than to the story as a whole. He prefers clear-cut characterisation, provided there is also excitement and suspense; as a result he enjoys both the stereotyped Western and the less stereotyped detective series. At the same time he likes family serials and shares with the older child enjoyment of programmes which invite laughter.

In their enjoyment of funny programmes and in their susceptibility to the fear potential in various programmes, no age difference was found. The older child, because he is more concerned with problems of interpersonal relationships and able to understand a wider range of situations, can be as readily disturbed as younger children, albeit by different types of situations. This is important; particularly since older children compared with younger ones are less ready to admit to fear or disturbance.

Effects on boys and girls

Girls, especially among the adolescents, proved more responsive than boys to television's impact even though they gave no more time to viewing. Girls were more often influenced in their outlook, and also more often than boys admitted to fears and disturbances after seeing certain television programmes.

Television's impact on girls may be stronger than on boys because they tend to be the more interested in plays dealing with problems of human relationships; also because television tends to reinforce girls' feelings of insecurity (characteristic of adolescence) by failing to provide them with reassuring models. The sympathetic female characters in television plays tend to be unhappy and troubled, and

to be dominated by events of which they are unable to take command.

Considering that half the child audience consists of girls, it is indeed surprising to see how few children's plays seem to take account of this factor; their themes tend to relate to boys' rather than to girls' interests, providing adequate heroes for the former, but inadequate heroines for the latter.

Yet, this survey evidence provides little support for the popular view that girls compared with boys are more squeamish about violence. Westerns appealed to girls a little less than to boys, but they were just as, indeed more, interested in the detective series *Fabian of Scotland Yard*.

Effects on children from middle- and working-class homes

Contrary to popular opinion, social background exercised an almost negligible influence on children's reactions to television.[1]

It must be remembered that when we looked at social-class differences, we held intelligence constant, that is, we ensured that there were as many bright, medium, and dull children in the working- as in the middle-class sample.

Under these circumstances, social-class differences were still found; many examples of them, in terms of the children's behaviour and outlook, have been cited in this report, but not usually in relation to amount of viewing or to children's taste in programmes. In the case of cinema visits, for instance, social-class differences were found; paradoxically, social background was less influential in respect of the home-bound media (radio and television); the children's use of these readily accessible media depends less on social conventions and more on personal choice.[2]

The same would seem to be true for adults; we found that as many children in middle- as in working-class families claimed that their television sets were left on all the evening; nor was there any class difference in the amount of parental viewing reported. Social conventions would seem to enter more into those activities which take place outside the home, and into such traditional patterns of upbringing as are expressed in the selection of appropriate bedtimes rather than into the use to which children put this new and readily available medium.

[1] Social background is defined here in terms of differences in parental occupation. The group of 'working-class' children consisted of children whose fathers engaged in manual work. The middle-class sample, since it was restricted to state schools, included only a few children whose fathers did professional work or held higher executive posts.

[2] There was similarly no difference among the controls between middle- and working-class children listening to the wireless.

Effects on children of different personalities

One important factor determining the amount of time a child watches television and the importance viewing assumes for him, lies in the personality of the child, in the quality of his relationships with his friends and family, and in the general home atmosphere.

The active child, socially at ease and with a happy home background, is the least likely to become preoccupied by television. On the other hand, children who view a great deal do so (particularly the intelligent ones) because they have difficulties in making friends or problems in their family relationships. They retreat into viewing or into ready-made entertainment of other types. A vicious circle is then set up whereby the ready access to television aggravates those problems of the children which led them to view heavily in the first instance.

The child's personality also affects his reactions to the content of television programmes; the extent to which these frighten and disturb him and the extent to which he identifies himself with the characters on the screen.

Equally important in this context is family atmosphere and parental example. Where parental viewing is high the children will tend to adopt a similar pattern.

3

Principles and Generalisations

FOR some of television's effects we have been able to arrive at a set of principles which would help to predict, for instance, what would happen if television, or some other medium, were newly introduced into a community comparable to our own; or if at some time in the future a medium capable of satisfying three, instead of two, senses were to make its appearance.

These principles can be grouped into four main categories:

1. The principles of leisure displacement.
2. The principles underlying television's effects on children's outlook and values.
3. Generalisations about taste.
4. The principles which determine what types of incident arouse fear and emotional disturbance.

THE PRINCIPLES OF LEISURE DISPLACEMENT

With television available, the child finds himself in a conflict situation: consciously or unconsciously, he has to decide how much to view, and how to make room for viewing. The resulting compromise seems to be made on the basis of three principles: first, he will sacrifice most readily those activities which satisfy the same needs as television but less effectively—those activities which are *functionally similar*. Secondly, some activities will be so thoroughly cast in the shade by television that in order to continue with them at all children will come to use them in a specialised way so that they do not overlap with viewing: these are the *transformed* activities which must either change in character or cease to exist. And thirdly, the child will tend to make room for television at the expense of activities on which he places little value, or of those which are of an unspecific, indefinite character (the *fringe* or *marginal* activities).

Functional similarity: the first of these principles concerns functional rather than objective, similarity, or equivalence. For instance,

cinema visits are considerably reduced by the younger viewers, for whom cinema and television are relatively interchangeable; but amongst adolescent viewers cinema visiting is little affected—and then only temporarily—because for the adolescent the cinema represents an opportunity to meet friends and to develop a social life away from home, a need which television cannot gratify.

Other activities are little affected by viewing, because they are of great importance to children and yet functionally different from viewing, as, for example, outdoor play, and activities which permit self-expression. When there is competition between viewing and activities of this kind, viewing often turns out to be the weaker rival.

Transformed activities: there were two examples of transformed activities. Radio, in particular, comes to take on a specialised role for those viewers who turn to it at all. To a lesser extent, something of the same kind happens with reading: the circulation figures for adult magazines in general have dropped but not for the specialised and non-fiction ones.[1] Among children, interest in non-fiction subjects increases under the impact of television, turning reading slightly away from the well-trodden paths of television.

Marginal or fringe activities: we found that in so far as outdoor activities or social pastimes are affected at all, the more casual, unstructured activities are the ones that suffer, rather than the organised or more clearly purposive ones. There is a consequent reduction of *leisure itself* as children's lives inevitably become more crowded.

These two basic principles are illustrated particularly well in the case of reading. Book-reading is most severely reduced among those children who start off with only a marginal interest; and comic-reading, it will be remembered, was permanently reduced by television. But whereas television can provide an effective substitute for a good deal of comic-reading, in the case of books the position is very different. Book-reading is temporarily reduced because the satisfactions offered by books and viewing at first seem similar. In the long run, viewing cannot offer the same freedom of choice or diversity of subject matter; as a result, after a few years, both viewers and controls are once again reading a similar number of books.

[1] Bogart shows that in the United States this trend has gone much further, with specialised magazines flourishing, and magazine articles increasingly dealing with informational topics. Fiction is more and more left to television. Between 1946 and 1955 there was a much increased demand for non-fiction books.

THE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING TELEVISION'S EFFECTS ON CHILDREN'S OUTLOOK AND VALUES

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, television entertainment brings about changes in children's outlook and values, even though the programmes that achieve this do not deliberately set out to influence. It is rather that the similarity of views and values conveyed in television programmes, particularly in plays, make their cumulative impact.

The following principles indicate the conditions under which maximal effect is likely to occur (i.e. from the cumulative impact of a number of programmes rather than from the impact of a particular programme):

1. If the values or views recur from programme to programme;
2. if the values are presented in dramatic form so that they evoke primarily emotional reactions;
3. if they link with the child's immediate needs and interests;
4. if the viewer tends to be uncritical of and attached to the medium;
5. if through his friends, parents, or immediate environment the viewer is not already supplied with a set of values which would provide a standard against which to assess the views offered on television.

Provided these conditions are fulfilled, values may be taken over from the main themes of plays or programmes, and also from the subsidiary touches used in presenting them. Children have an inconvenient way of responding to isolated incidents rather than to overall themes.

These same principles apply equally whether the views and values are worth-while or worthless. The process is likely to be a slow and gradual one, reflecting not so much the impact of individual programmes as the cumulative effect of them all. Over and above this slow effect (composed of the accumulation of minute influences from many programmes) individual programmes also make their impact, either because of their dramatic excellence or because they touch on something of specific importance to the child. For most children both types of effects are likely to operate.

GENERALISATIONS ABOUT TASTE

Five generalisations can be made on the basis of our findings:

1. Taste in one medium is linked, not only to taste in other media, but to the child's interests generally. Already by the age of 10, children have a fairly integrated set of taste patterns.

2. Children tend to prefer adult to children's programmes and watch more of them; it may therefore be adult rather than children's programmes which have the larger share in forming tastes.

3. Children appear to be quite capable of enjoying programmes without understanding them fully.

4. When children are brought inadvertently into contact with programmes which do not, 'in anticipation', interest them, they often like them and may later even seek them out again. To develop children's tastes, it is therefore important to provide in programme planning for such experiences. It is possible to achieve this in a one-channel situation where the choice lies between watching such a programme and switching off, but it is more difficult where there is access to two channels—under these circumstances the child can more easily limit himself to his favourite types of programme. This will ultimately lead to a narrowing of taste.

5. The diversity of taste among children of the same sex, age, and intelligence is so great that in our survey even the most popular programme was the first favourite of no more than 30 per cent of children in any one age or intelligence group. It follows that firm predictions about what children will like or reject cannot be easily made; this is even more so when considering favourite television personalities.

THE PRINCIPLES WHICH DETERMINE WHAT TYPES OF INCIDENT AROUSE FEAR AND EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE

In the last resort, children's fears are idiosyncratic, determined by the nature of the stimulus (or programme), by the child's own needs, and also by the extent to which particular incidents touch on personal preoccupations. Nevertheless, certain general principles can be laid down about the type of incidents which tend to arouse fear. Emotional disturbance of this kind is not only aroused by episodes of killing, wounding, and lethal weapons; fist-fights are also disturbing (whether in plays or in the boxing-ring), and incidents of verbal aggression such as quarrelling and one person telling another off. Children can also be upset by portrayal of adult relationships where unhappiness is stressed more than violence. Finally, the uncanny may frighten, as, for instance, the sleep-walking of the mad wife of Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre* or the invasion from outer space in *Quatermass*.

In general, we found that violent or aggressive episodes tend to cause far *less* disturbance where the following conditions are fulfilled:

1. If the presentation of violence is stylised, as in Westerns.

2. If the programme forms part of a series, so that the child can become familiar with the conventions; if the ending falls into an accepted pattern; and if there is a hero figure who appears in each of the episodes.

3. If the setting in which the violence occurs is unfamiliar, so that children are the less likely to imagine that similar events might occur in their own home or street. But at the same time the setting and violence should not be so unfamiliar as to be uncanny (as in the case of *Quatermass*).

4. If the characters are black and white rather than grey. Detective plays, with their emphasis on the psychological exposition of character, often arouse sympathy with the criminal; this is absent in Westerns, whose villains usually remain shadowy, unsympathetic figures.

5. If the child can feel sure that the events are make-believe rather than real; although it must be remembered that with smaller children this distinction tends not to be clear-cut.

6. In general, children tend to be less concerned about the magnitude of the disaster or the seriousness of its consequences, than about the prospect of hurt to *someone with whom they can identify*. For this reason, disasters in newsreels may be less disturbing than a heated discussion on television in which one person may be made to look foolish, or the threat of injury to the dogs in *Lassie* and *Rin-Tin-Tin* (the same children, however, remained quite undisturbed by the sight of animals in nature programmes being attacked and eaten by other animals). Differences were also found with regard to the type of physical aggression. Fighting on the ground proved no more disturbing than other kinds of fighting. Any gun fight, whether 'real' or fictional, was enjoyed, probably because children play at shooting, and see so much of it in Westerns, that they treat gun fights as spectacles, whatever the context in which they are shown. On the other hand, knives, used at close quarters, quite often proved disturbing.

Finally, there are the differential effects of violent and disturbing programmes. While familiarity with the series tends to reduce emotional impact, familiarity with viewing does not; we found that children who had been viewing for many years were as readily affected as those who had as yet little experience of television entertainment. Moreover, programme impact was no greater for heavy viewers than for those who saw less television.

Nor does susceptibility to fear decrease with age, although the types of situation capable of arousing fear do undergo change. Equally, susceptibility to fear does not appear to be related to intelligence: even though the intelligent children viewed less and

were more critical of programmes than the other children, they were as readily disturbed by them.

Perhaps most important of all, television does not seem to induce fear any more readily than sound radio. There is, however, evidence to suggest that the emotional impact of reading may be slighter than those of radio and the two visual media—television and films.

THE BROAD PICTURE

The final picture of the influence of television on children's leisure, interests, knowledge, outlook, and values proves to be far less colourful and dramatic than popular opinion is inclined to suppose. Effects occur in each one of the various fields, but not to such a degree that the children would have been fundamentally changed.

Television, then, is not as black as it is painted, but neither is it the great harbinger of culture and enlightenment which its enthusiasts tend to claim for it. If television is a window on the world, it gives a view not very different from that provided in books, comics, films, and radio programmes. Similarly, its capacity for broadening a child's horizons is not spectacularly different from that of any of the other mass media.

Part of the reason why popular opinion produced a picture considerably at variance with the facts lay in each observer's tendency to generalise from the children he knew. Part, however, stems from the distrust with which people tend to view new technical inventions (particularly in the field of culture): the radio, the cinema, and now television. Each tends to be seen as bringing about a change for the worse, a lowering of standards and behaviour. In such an atmosphere of distrust three things combine to distort the picture of television's true effects; the intrinsic power of the medium is exaggerated, the resilience of the children tends to be seriously underestimated, while at the same time the past is idealised. The same factors operate in reverse with those people who welcome the medium and are among the first to use it.

With each new medium the experience gained from the introduction of the previous one counts for little. Each time the attractions of the new technique loom so large that once again its potential effects are exaggerated.

It is important to gain a proper perspective, not only for correct understanding and recording of contemporary events, but also for finding the best ways of effecting change. Unless the effects are known to be undramatic, there is the danger that untoward re-

actions (such as very heavy viewing, very late bedtimes, loss of concentration or interest at school)—aspects which have to do with the child and his environment rather than with the lure of television—may be mistakenly passed off as the inevitable by-product of having television in the home.

In the course of this inquiry we have often been asked to sum up briefly what we have found, particularly to evaluate whether television is good or bad for children. It will be clear from the findings reported in the preceding chapter that any answer to such a question would require innumerable qualifications in order to be even approximately accurate.

In fact, this question makes no more sense than asking a doctor 'Are injections good or bad for children?' He will answer that it depends on the type of injection, the dosage, the particular condition and age of the child, the appropriateness of the injection to the illness, and the context in which it will be administered. Similarly, whether television is good or bad for children depends on the programmes, the amount the child views, the type of child, the type of effects to be examined, and the context in which viewing takes place. In the last resort, it is an individual matter with the effects varying from child to child. Nevertheless, just as in immunology it is possible to lay down certain rules or broad guiding principles as to when injections should or should not be used, so here we have been able to make certain generalisations.

At *best*, television can implant information, stimulate interests, improve tastes, and widen the range of the child's experience so that he gains some understanding of people in other walks of life; this can make him less prejudiced and more tolerant. It can make him less susceptible to over-simplified value judgements; it can raise the level of his aspirations. At *best*, viewing can reduce the child's less worth-while activities (such as comic-reading), whilst leaving the more worth-while ones intact.

At *worst*, on the other hand, viewing can lead to a reduction in knowledge (in that it takes up time which could be spent more profitably), keep children from relatively worth-while activities (like outdoor play and book-reading), and implant or accentuate one-sided, stereotyped value judgements—if the content of television is such as to convey this kind of attitude. Depending on content, television can frighten and disturb, particularly those who are emotionally insecure or those who are preoccupied with a particular problem.

While the majority of children are not drastically affected, it must nevertheless be remembered that each minority group represents a large section of the child population, whose needs must be considered.

Lastly, two further generalisations can be made. First, the extent to which the introduction of a new medium forces a greater differentiation into the existing ones—radio and to some extent reading show signs of taking on specialised roles. We have signs of this in our survey, and also a good deal of confirmatory data from surveys in the United States (19).

Secondly, the introduction of any new element into an existing structure requires assimilation and integration. We have shown that this takes place smoothly in the majority of cases; but with children who have problems, families which have conflicts, or (for example) clubs which have a decreasing membership, television may just tip the scale.

4

Implications and Suggestions

At the beginning we showed how, in the absence of data, the public's views about television and children tended to be heavily influenced by their own attitude to the medium and often to consist of generalisations based on observing a very small number of children. They were neat, global views. After some years of research, during which many so-called 'facts' about viewing and children were found not to be facts at all, the inaccuracy of these neat images became apparent; children differ too widely and the impact of the medium is not such as to stamp out these differences. Nevertheless, as has been shown in the last chapter, for each effect in turn or for each type of child, a fairly tidy picture can be built up and some generalisation made.

It is not just the research worker's desire to stay in business which prompts him to end his inquiries with a plea for further research; it is the inevitable consequence of seeking a pattern to explain the facts which have been uncovered. For example, when we began the inquiry we asked ourselves why is television so attractive to children? We end by asking why is television not more attractive? What is the pull of the everyday activities which children are unwilling to give up even to view a favourite programme? This leads to a re-examination of existing concepts about children's needs and requirements. Many similar examples could be cited. How many such questions are raised depends not only on the scope of the inquiry, but also on the existing state of knowledge in the field. In this instance, the questions are many because few facts were known about the way children spend their leisure or react to television, and also because there is hardly any systematic body of knowledge or theory about the development of children's needs and tastes or about their acquisition of knowledge. Chapter 3 indicates some of the principles that derive from the inquiry; other general issues and questions are dealt with in Chapter 36. Here we shall discuss only issues relevant to the suggestions which follow.

First, any division into children's and evening entertainment has

little meaning; children view both and derive impressions from both. The assessment of the effect of television on attitudes and knowledge must therefore be based on both sets of programmes.

Second, any division into programmes designed to instruct and those designed to entertain is unjustified. Children often acquire a good deal of knowledge from entertainment programmes and may learn little from instructional programmes if the level is pitched too low. We have shown that the child's outlook and store of information are derived from all kinds of programmes; in fact, those which make an immediate emotional appeal seem to have the greater effect. The division between instruction and entertainment should disappear altogether; the distinction should rather be in terms of the topic to be covered. All programmes, if successful, entertain; and all programmes provide the child with some information.

Once the problem is considered in this light, it becomes clear that devices successful in entertainment programmes should be tried when dealing with instructional topics. More will be said of this later.

Third, it is also incorrect to suppose that supervision of viewing is a matter of the social level of the home; it is no greater in middle-class than in working-class homes. Certainly, we found evidence of a positive relationship between children's viewing and parental example, but one which cuts across social-class divisions. Excessive viewing and crude, narrow tastes are to be found as often in both sets of homes.

We also found that the focus of public concern had been misplaced. The public had been concerned chiefly with the effects of children spending so much *time* in viewing. Our research suggests that the amount of time spent is a less important cause of concern than the nature of the programmes the children see. There has been public anxiety about such supposed consequences of long hours spent in viewing, as strain on the eyes, insufficient sleep and fresh air, neglect of school work, reduced club attendance, and the development of a generally passive attitude to recreation. These anxieties we have found to be largely unfounded—they were based on an insufficient appreciation of children's resilience and flexibility. More important questions are: what determines the kinds of interests or activities the child will give up in favour of viewing and what are the programmes giving him in compensation?

The impact of television gains its strength from the large number of programmes of similar content that the child sees. There is need therefore to think in terms of *programme balance*. It is important not to concentrate too exclusively on the effects of programmes containing violence, but instead to focus on the whole range of pro-

grammes that present a view of life to the child, and, in particular, examine the *implicit* values contained in plays, serials, and panel games.

Looking at the problem in this way immediately suggests the need for diversification, for seeing that the views and values presented are not too one-sided and for producers of children's programmes, in particular, to add to their diversity.

Finally, we have seen that an assessment of how much is learnt from television must be done in terms of a profit-and-loss account—in terms of gain in knowledge from television and in reduced opportunity of acquiring knowledge from other sources such as books. This at once shows why intelligent children with ready access to books profit little from television while duller children, who rarely turn to books, often profit more.

The research has destroyed a number of bogies; we hope that it will also indicate areas where concern and interest could more usefully be placed so as to minimize the harmful effects and increase the beneficial ones.

In the remainder of this chapter we outline various suggestions to the general public, in particular to parents, teachers, and youth leaders. In the next chapter we shall try to make suggestions which relate to the planning of television entertainment.

Many of our suggestions will not be new; too many thoughtful people have written about what might be done; and some of our suggestions have already been tried. They are still worth stating here, however, as they derive closely from our findings and thus we have some confidence in their appropriateness. Moreover, an uninvolved observer may draw attention to certain reforms which have not been carried out for organisational reasons—because old ideas are too deeply ingrained, or because they cost too much.

However much one tries, it is difficult in formulating suggestions not to sound obvious.

This is a risk the research worker takes, once he steps out of his role of fact finder and assumes that of interpreter. We feel, however, that in being asked to undertake this inquiry it was partly in the hope that positive suggestions would result from our findings.

SUGGESTIONS TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

How much should a child be allowed to view? A fixed number of hours cannot be laid down; too much depends on the child's age, intelligence, on his family, and also on the resources in his environment. If we were judging from an educational standpoint alone, we should

say that viewing is comparatively unprofitable for the grammar school child, but may teach a good deal to younger children, to adolescents of average and below average intelligence, to children who read little, and to those who live in isolated rural areas. The assessment of the value of television to the child must therefore take into account what else he would do with his time.

Nevertheless, one can say more generally that it is useful to reduce children's viewing by providing more attractive alternatives—viewing, we have seen, takes more time than any other leisure activity and there is no evidence that it is correspondingly more profitable, be it from an emotional or an intellectual point of view. Much viewing is relatively casual, for want of something better to do. Children have a lively curiosity, an enjoyment in exploring and doing things for themselves, so that it is not really difficult to wean them away; the more active the alternative provided, the more likely is it to compete effectively with viewing. A child with many hobbies who leads an active social life has generally a limited interest in viewing; a child who views a great deal, may have few resources or may experience difficulties in making relationships. Thus his viewing is a refuge. Such a child needs to be helped to make better relationships and to be given better environmental opportunities. As far as the majority of children are concerned, there is no need for great concern about the effects of the amount of time they spend viewing. They will view less if their attention is directed towards other activities.

We have been surprised, however, by the small amount of concern that has been expressed about the effect of the *content* of programmes. Violence is the only feature that seems to cause anxiety among parents and educators. There is little evidence of effective parental control or supervision of children's choice of programme, though in some families children are forbidden to see programmes thought to frighten.

Our research suggests that the positive and negative effects of the content of television may be quite powerful. The following need to be borne in mind:

1. Children's interests can be extended by what they see, and their receptiveness to new ideas and their understanding of situations and people outside their immediate experience broadened. But by the same token, if the values portrayed on television are slick and materialistic and give a stereotyped and one-sided view of societies and groups, these values too will be absorbed.
2. Such effects on outlook and values are cumulative; each play and each programme makes only a small effect, but the sum total is considerable.

3. Children are not so much frightened by the amount of violence shown and the physical seriousness of its consequences, as by the context in which it occurs and the way in which it is presented; some programmes disturb not so much through the violence or aggression they contain, as through the picture they give of adult relationships which (in the case of an adolescent, for instance) may heighten the child's concern about the difficulties of adult life. We have evidence that girls particularly suffer from this adverse effect.

It follows that parents and teachers should inform themselves about the programmes which are being shown, not only to prevent the child from seeing what is harmful, but—more important—to encourage him to view some of the worth-while programmes. The public should urge producers to experiment more than they do, by lending support to the worth-while; too much of the criticism of television has been negative and destructive.

In addition, there is need for discussion of programmes, with the child, both at home and at school, to show up the unreality and one-sidedness of the views television frequently offers. Equally, discussion may help to reinforce the impact of good programmes.

Such discussions need not be on a high plane—casual comments are often sufficient. With adolescents, shy in talking about their feelings, a particular play may even serve to get them to talk about emotional problems of concern to them.

With the younger child in particular, the emotional impact can be reduced by making him aware of the production tricks. Reduction of emotional impact, correction of faulty views, and reinforcement of valuable experience are all ways in which parents and teachers can help to make viewing less harmful and more valuable.

Finally, television stimulates interests, but only fleetingly. It is up to the adults around the child to maintain these interests and turn them into action: by rendering accessible the books that have been dramatised, by helping the child to find materials needed to make things suggested on television, by encouraging him to visit places (such as art galleries or exhibitions) that have been featured. Advertisers have long known the importance of making immediate use of the demand which an advertisement has aroused, by having the advertised goods in the local shops the same day, not merely in a few large stores two weeks later. Similarly, at present too much of the child's interest aroused by television programmes is allowed to become dissipated, to be swamped by the impact of the succeeding programme. Adults could do much more to ensure that interest is kept alive.

Specific suggestions to parents

Many homes have worked out useful rules to discourage indiscriminate viewing and to prevent television from becoming an interminable source of conflict. It may, for instance, be decided that the children be allowed to watch the early evening programmes, but nothing (except under exceptional circumstances) after a certain hour; that there will be no viewing until homework is done; or that each child has the right to watch certain programmes regularly. This latter alternative also helps to avoid family conflict over choice of channel.

Children become readily absorbed in what they view and to interrupt their viewing unexpectedly, even with the best intentions (be it for bed, homework, or running errands), is likely to provoke unnecessary conflict; children in this respect should be given the same consideration as adults expect to receive.

Control of children's viewing does not mean using television as a means of discipline—as punishment or reward; extensive use of it in this way would only add to the value which children set on viewing.

More attention needs to be paid to the optical conditions of viewing. Viewing in the dark increases the emotional impact of a programme; it also maximises glare.[1]

Television can be used too readily as a means of keeping the children quiet, a temptation which often faces the busy mother, especially with several young children. It is also a temptation to use television unquestioningly as a means of 'keeping the family together', of encouraging the children to stay under their parents' eye instead of following their own interests farther afield. Television is, of course, unlikely by itself to bring the members of the family closer together.

Each member of the family will to some degree absorb what he views into his private world of experience; a sense of shared experience can, however, be built up through talking about programmes afterwards or even by doing together some of the things suggested. Discussion is particularly necessary with the older children who see so many adult plays. The young child has a small store of experience, as yet little detachment or ability to differentiate between reality and fiction; his response is to incidents, he cannot yet comprehend the broader theme. This is why it is so useful if parents can find the time to watch with the younger children or,

[1] Other conditions of correct viewing as laid down by the Association of Optical Practitioners are given in Appendix H.

failing that, encourage them to talk to them about the programme afterwards. In this way one can see if there is anything that disturbs the child, and use the opportunity for building on the new impressions he has gained.

Undoubtedly care should be taken not to expose children to programmes which might frighten and disturb, taking into consideration here each child's personality and predisposition. In general, murder and crime thrillers should not be seen just before going to bed.

Altogether, children should not watch too many murder plays or programmes which feature violence and aggression, not so much because they may frighten, as because they offer a one-sided view of life, implying that all conflict has to be resolved by force. The danger lies less in imitation than in acceptance of violence as manly and inevitable.

Similarly care should be taken to see that children do not watch too many adult plays for which they are not emotionally ready, plays which cumulatively convey too much of an anxiety-laden view of adult life.

Since television can do much to broaden or narrow children's tastes, some guidance as to what children should view might be unobtrusively given. This is particularly important in the two-channel home, where children switch from favourite programme to favourite programme, and so limit themselves to a very narrow range. Here control may have to be more direct to ensure that children select a more balanced diet.

We cannot stress too much the importance of parental example; if parents view continuously and indiscriminately themselves, hushing their children's questions because they might interrupt the next programme, then their children are likely to view equally unselectively. Our survey has shown that as many as 60 per cent of the children claimed that in their homes television was left on all the evening.

Finally, there is a strong temptation to see in television the cause of symptoms that in fact derive from other sources. We suggest that it may be more profitable for the purposes of diagnosis to assume that television itself is unlikely to be the primary cause and that at most it acts as a catalyst.

Recommendations to youth club leaders

We have seen that television has little effect on club attendance or membership. Some clubs have even brought television into the club on an experimental basis and with good results; it is put on for

special programmes thought to offer opportunities for informal education.

The National Advisory Committee for Television Group Viewing has been established to experiment with this approach to television.[1] This committee co-ordinates group-viewing activity, advises youth clubs, promotes training courses, and issues a bulletin with advance notices of programmes of likely interest to clubs. Here are some examples of the use to which television has been put in some clubs:

One club used a programme on delinquency to bring together different groups from the same district; in this instance the local magistrate and probation officer were introduced into the club—an experiment from which the magistrate learnt as much as the club members. Similarly, the club's sports instructor watches sports programmes with his team.

In another club, a programme on textiles was accompanied by a visit from instructors from a sewing-machine company; they demonstrated their technical skill, with the result that some of the girls began to take up sewing lessons. In the same club, a local drawing master watched a series of programmes on art with the club members, got them sufficiently interested to look up books on painting, and induced a number of them (this time, not only the converted) to join him on sketching excursions.

Television can be used as a means of starting discussion of a subject which is not easily broached. One club, for instance—joining with marriage guidance counsellors to view a BBC documentary on *Patterns of Marriage*—finished with a lively discussion of the problem; this also offered an easy way of informing young people about the services of the Marriage Guidance Council.

Such examples show how the appeal of television can be exploited as a means of informal education. They also show how much of the success of the venture depends on detailed planning, and on the enthusiasm and devotion of the experts who are brought in. In every district there is usually sufficient local talent to call on, so that television could in fact help to develop closer ties between members of youth clubs and the community.[2]

France was the pioneer in setting up the first tele-clubs (28). Holland, Austria, Japan, and Italy are now also forming national advisory committees on group viewing. In all these countries special attention is being paid to group viewing for young people.

[1] This committee was established under the sponsorship of the National Federation of Community Associations within the National Council of Social Service.

[2] The examples are taken from T. Monks's report on *Television and the Youth Services* (1953). The report also offers an account of the formation of a television appreciation group in Wembley, Middlesex.

Suggestions to the teaching profession

Finally we come to teachers, discussing the role that they might play, not in relation to schools' television, but to television entertainment viewed by children at home. Many of the suggestions have been followed for many years by the Society of Film Teachers. They are, nevertheless, set down here because they have not been widely applied in schools in relation to television, and because the problem is one which, in our view, concerns every teacher, not only those specially interested in film appreciation.

While our study of teachers' opinions showed that about half judged the effects of television on their pupils to be beneficial rather than harmful,[1] only 6 per cent regularly suggested to their pupils programmes to view, and even fewer referred to programmes in their teaching.

We should like to suggest that the child's viewing experiences be linked with teaching or discussion wherever feasible so as to bridge the gap between the teacher's and the child's world and interests, to counterbalance some of the values conveyed by television, and to utilise television as a means of getting children interested in certain topics. This is particularly important with the younger children and the adolescent of average and below average intelligence.

Some programmes prove useful starting points for discussion. Teachers from schools in isolated areas commented particularly on the way television had widened children's horizons and had helped to bring home certain lessons, with greater force, than would have been possible through discussion and books alone.

We have seen that television at first reduces reading, and does so particularly with the marginal reader (the boys and the less intelligent children). Some remedial action might be necessary here, a special watch being kept on the amount such children read out of school.

Programmes of any kind, the good and the less good ones, can, of course, be used as exercises for composition, comprehension, and accurate perception. We should welcome, for instance, discussions and analysis of the build-up of detective plays, or comparative analyses by the children themselves of the different Westerns they know so well. All this would help towards more detached, critical viewing.

[1] Only 11 per cent thought that, taken all in all, television's effect on their pupils was harmful rather than beneficial, and a further 39 per cent were undecided. Among those who had television and observed the effects on their own children, three out of four thought the good effects outweighed the harmful ones. The rate of purchase of television sets among teachers was the same as among other groups of comparable income and education.

We see the teacher's role also as one of suggesting future programmes to be viewed, of interesting children in the better plays or in some non-fiction programmes which, through the switching from channel to channel, they are likely to miss. Children who have no television at home could guest-view on these occasions.

The extent to which teachers will make systematic use of television (apart from schools' television) will, of course, depend on the demands of the time-table, the pressure of examinations, and the intelligence and age of the child. Every teacher can do a little, even if only in the form of a casual comment and guidance about viewing. Television is too important a source of values and of knowledge (correct and incorrect) for the teacher to take no positive action. Expression of dislike of the medium as such is of little value here.

Finally, teachers could do a great deal in drawing the attention of producers of children's television to suitable books for dramatisation and to topics of likely interest. The link between children's television and teachers should, in our opinion, be as close as that between the teaching profession and schools' television. Television seen at home touches a far larger audience, without the correcting influence of the teacher's presence.

How best to utilise television could with profit be taught at the training colleges; it is something that teachers can, of course, do effectively only if head-teachers and educational administrators, too, accept that this task should be done by them. If it is not done, the development of taste, the ability to view critically, will be left too much to chance.

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