



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90024

October 6, 1980

David Pearl, Ph.D.  
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Dear Dr. Pearl:

Thanks very much for your letter of September 26, 1980, with the enclosure "Television and Aggression; Results of a Longitudinal Study".

In order not to hold up your review dealing with the influences of television on aggressive behavior and violence, I read the report as soon as I received it, and consequently, I have the following evaluation.

Personally, I find it impossible to reach a conclusion about the effect of television on aggressive behavior based on the report that you sent me. The basic problem is that the report contains an incomplete description of crucial methodological details that would make it possible to critically evaluate the appropriateness of decisions made in the study. For example, a great deal of further information is required regarding the design of the study, the sampling plan, the analytic methods used for analysis, and alternatives that were attempted. In general, the report conveys an attitude of "trust us" regarding dozens of decisions that were made in the course of the study. Based on the report, I cannot truly evaluate the adequacy of the decisions that were made. In summary, I can draw no conclusions based on this report with any degree of confidence. While the conclusions of the authors may be entirely correct, I cannot verify or disconfirm their opinions.

Turning now to the realm of speculation, and assuming that the majority of details reported in the study are basically trustworthy, I would venture that no conclusions ought to be drawn based on the chosen method of analysis. Frankly, the strategy of analysis chosen, involving primarily structural equation methods based on measured, manifest variables, is not an appropriate one given the apparent high-quality data that is at hand. A more appropriate strategy would utilize modeling with latent variables, so as to eliminate the effects of random errors of measurement and uniquenesses that will attenuate any critical effects of television on aggression that might be obtained. While the authors state that they did attempt to take measurement error into account, this claim is not evaluable, and, furthermore, in my

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opinion their method of modeling is not the most adequate for answering the posed questions. I would speculate that a completely different set of analyses need to be undertaken than those already completed by the authors.

I am sorry I cannot provide you with a clean-cut opinion about the quality of the work. In view of the controversial nature of this research area, it would certainly be important to make the raw data from the study publically available for analysis by a variety of investigators. Until such analyses are undertaken, my own opinion regarding the substance of the question at hand is summarized by a feeling of disappointment regarding the missed opportunities and the ambiguity of the given report.

Sincerely,



Peter M. Bentler  
Professor

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