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ASPECTS OF SOCIAL LEARNING
FROM TELEVISION

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requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

The social learning effects of full length television programmes were assessed using experimental methodology. Since television programmes contain depictions of "life" with all its complexities, specific learnings were selected for assessment. The learnings selected were the influence of televised programmes on attitudes toward violence, and in the adoption of self-gratification goals by observers.

Sixty-four fourteen year old boys participated in the study. Background data on the subjects was obtained in a survey carried out a week prior to the experimental sessions. The subjects were randomised into two groups of thirty-two, and all subjects completed questionnaires before and after observing the films. To assess their attitudes they evaluated violent and comedy concepts, and reported their action tendencies, and in addition their delay of gratification orientation was measured. One group saw television films containing aggression and the other group comedy films. In order to deal only with small groups, four experimental sessions were carried out and the viewing situation resembled a home dining room or lounge. The television films were two violent programmes and three comedy programmes taped off air some three months prior to the experimental sessions.

Results indicated that exposure to television films leads to a change in attitude consistent with the themes in the films which were used, although the films containing violence do not seem to influence action tendency. It was further found that exposure to the programmes produced a reduction in the desire to delay gratification. The effect was not significantly stronger in either type of programme. It is suggested that the stimuli for this change are the subtle and not so subtle life style cues contained in the programmes.

The study demonstrates therefore that television programmes influence attitudes toward violence as a method of goal attainment, while at the same time teaches observers to want more immediate self-gratifications. The implications of these trends are discussed.