

## B Are You In Control?

### Reading

1 Just how and how far does the media affect people? Four theories on this are presented in the article *The Influence of the Media* that follows.

Five sentences have been removed from the article. Choose from sentences **A-H** the one which fits each gap (1-5). There are three extra sentences which you do not need to use.

- A** Moreover, their reasons for watching or reading something might be more complex than to simply inform themselves.
- B** Some parents punish their children by not letting them watch TV.
- C** They also point to the decision of the film director Stanley Kubrick to withdraw his film *A Clockwork Orange* after copycat violence.
- D** Firstly, people read, watch or listen to a variety of media.
- E** On the other hand, other experiments have been less conclusive.
- F** It emphasises that people do not exist in vacuums alone with the media but are part of complex social networks.
- G** If they enjoy it, they may seek to recapture the enjoyment by committing violent acts themselves.
- H** For adherents of this theory, people are influenced by the media as a result of repeated exposure to certain ideas.



## The Influence of the Media

*Just how and how far does the media affect people?*

Arthur Palmer reports

So how many murders did you see on television last week? Are you going to go out and murder someone in response? There is considerable discussion on whether incidents seen on television or in films stimulate people to commit crimes or to behave in anti-social ways. The discussion of the influence of the media on behaviour can be categorised into four approaches: the Behaviourist, Opinion Leader, Audience Selection and Cultural Effects.

The Behaviourist approach claims that the media present models of behaviour which influence people by convincing them that they could achieve the same results as those portrayed in a film. Thus, someone watching violence on film or TV may be appalled (punished) or enjoy it (rewarded). (1) ... Supporters of this theory cite research that shows, for example, that children are more likely to act violently towards toys if they have just been shown a violent film (2) ... Similarly, the horror film *Child's Play*, in which a child's doll inflicts acts of violence on other dolls, was blamed for two ten-year-old Liverpool boys killing a child of two. To conclude, the Behaviourist approach holds that the media have a direct influence on human behaviour.

The Opinion Leader theory stresses the social context within which the media's messages are received. (3) ... According to this theory, each of us looks up to or respects the opinions of certain people, and it is these people who will influence our behaviour. Thus, we are more likely to vote for a certain political party after hearing the views of a respected family mem-

ber, friend or colleague than after reading a newspaper or watching the news. Likewise, young people will see certain clothes as being fashionable because their friends wear them and not because they see them advertised on TV, or they will go and watch a movie recommended by their peers rather than one recommended by a movie critic, and so on. To summarise, the Opinion Leader theory claims that people are influenced more by the people around them than by the media.

The third approach is the Audience Selection approach. This claims that the impact of the media on the way people act or think is almost negligible. At the centre of this theory is the belief that people are consumers who decide for themselves what they will watch or read. They act as their own censors, turning the TV on or off as they wish and choosing which publications to buy and what parts they'll read. (4) ... For example, someone might be watching the TV half-interestedly while waiting to do something else, like waiting to go out, or it might be a serious activity and engage their full attention. Also, different groups will respond in different ways: young people will not view an advert or news item in the same way as adults, and neither will they attach the same importance to it. Thus, this approach suggests that the media have little impact on the way we behave.

The Cultural Effects approach, on the other hand, suggests that the media does have an impact on the way we think and behave, but that it is more subtle and long-term. (5) ... A major example



of this would be the portrayal of women in films, magazines and adverts in terms of how physically attractive they are and how good a housewife they are; this then creates cultural expectations on the part of both women and men as to the role of women in society. Similarly, people might be affected by continual exposure to violence on TV over long periods of time; the final result, in some cases, might be a desensitisation to violence and thus a greater acceptance of it. Hence this approach sees the media as affecting the general culture of society.

In conclusion, there are four approaches to the influence of the media on behaviour. The Behaviourist approach sees the media as having a direct influence on the individual, the Cultural Effects approach sees the media as influencing the general culture of society in the long term, the Opinion Leader approach suggests that individuals are influenced by other people rather than the media, while the Audience Selection approach claims that the individual is in control of the influence the media may have on him. Given the variety of individual personality types, it is quite probable that all four approaches have some truth in them.

2 Here are some criticisms of the four approaches. Decide which approach these criticisms refer to.

Write **A** for **Audience Selection**  
**B** for **Behaviourist**  
**C** for **Cultural Effects**  
or **D** for **Opinion Leader**

- 1  \* individuals who influence others might be influenced by the media themselves  
\* can only be tested by questionnaires, etc. rather than scientific experiments
- 2  \* claims the media is the main culprit for society's problems, ignoring other factors such as unemployment, urbanisation, education, upbringing, etc.  
\* research doesn't bear in mind what the subjects were like beforehand  
\* oversimplified view of what motivates people
- 3  \* virtually denies media have any effect at all  
\* overemphasises people's ability to control the media  
\* if this model were correct, why would companies spend so much money on advertising?
- 4  \* because of the time spans involved, it's difficult to prove scientifically  
\* evidence concerning media attitudes to specific groups or issues is necessarily subjective, and so can be manipulated to support the theory

### Vocabulary

The words in bold in extracts 1-6 below have more than one meaning. Which of the words or phrases, **A** or **B**, have a similar meaning to these words as they are used in the extracts.

- 1 The Behaviourist approach **claims** that the media present models of behaviour ...  
**A** asserts  
**B** demands
- 2 Thus, someone watching violence on TV may be **appalled** or enjoy it.  
**A** frightened  
**B** horrified
- 3 If they enjoy it, they may seek to **recapture** the enjoyment by committing violent acts themselves.  
**A** bring back  
**B** catch again
- 4 If they enjoy it, they may seek to recapture the enjoyment by **committing** violent acts themselves.  
**A** perpetrating  
**B** promising
- 5 The Behaviourist approach **holds** that the media have a direct influence on human behaviour.  
**A** grasps  
**B** maintains
- 6 Also, different groups will **respond** in different ways.  
**A** react  
**B** reply
- 7 This approach suggests that the media have little **impact** on the way we behave.  
**A** collision force  
**B** influence