A Scale to Assess Children's Moral Interpretations of Justified and Unjustified Violence and Its Relationship to Television Viewing
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Communication Research 1999 26: 608
DOI: 10.1177/009365099026005004

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://crx.sagepub.com/content/26/5/608
MARINA KRCMAR
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A Scale to Assess Children’s Moral Interpretations of Justified and Unjustified Violence and Its Relationship to Television Viewing

This study develops and validates the Moral Interpretation of Interpersonal Violence (MIIV) Scale. One hundred fifty-eight children responded to 12 stories in which a perpetrator performed either justified or unjustified violence. Children were asked to report how right or wrong they perceived the violence to be and to provide reasons for their responses. Principal components analysis was used to reduce the 12 stories to a smaller set that had higher internal consistency and that correlated with the Sociomoral Reflection Measure—Short Form (SRM-SF). The study also investigated how viewing television violence was related to the MIIV. Children who watched a lot of fantasy violence judged justified violence as less wrong, whereas children who watched a lot of realistic violence judged justified violence as more wrong. In addition, children who watched more fantasy violence and those who watched more realistic violence used less advanced moral reasoning strategies in explaining their judgments.

In the past decade, media effects researchers have progressively reached the consensus that exposure to television violence can result in aggressive behavior (e.g., Donnerstein, Slaby, & Eron, 1994; Paik & Comstock, 1994; Wilson et al., 1997). Several studies have demonstrated that television violence can cause imitation of violent acts (e.g., Paik & Comstock, 1994),...
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desensitization (e.g., Thomas, Horton, Lippencott, & Drabman, 1977), and the conception of the world as a mean and scary place (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994). However, although it is generally recognized that television violence affects behavior, social critics continue to argue that the effects of television violence are subtler and more insidious. One of these claims states that television violence is a causal factor in the breakdown of children’s moral reasoning (e.g., Rust & Wagner, 1998).

Very little research has examined the role of exposure to media violence in children’s moral reasoning. The only study that has as yet focused on this research question has found that overall television viewing, and not viewing of violence per se, was associated with less advanced moral reasoning (Rosenkoetter, Huston, & Wright, 1990). However, this result held only for kindergarten children; overall television viewing was found to have no effect on the moral reasoning of second and fourth graders. One might be led to conclude from these results that television does not hinder moral reasoning of elementary schoolchildren and that the fears of such an outcome are unfounded.

However, Rosenkoetter, Huston, and Wright’s (1990) study in particular, and research into children’s moral development in general, tend to suffer from the following relatively straightforward problem: The range of what might be considered a moral dilemma is not adequately covered by existing measures of moral reasoning. Specifically, moral reasoning in young children is typically measured through stories or items that require (a) prosocial moral reasoning, or reasoning about conflicts between an actor’s own wants, needs, and desires and those of a needy other (Arsenio & Ford, 1985; Dunn, Brown, & McGuire, 1995; Eisenberg-Berg, 1979, 1980); (b) distributive justice reasoning, or reasoning about the distribution of scarce resources in some fair way (Damon, 1977); (c) reflections about truth and honesty (Basinger, Gibbs, & Fuller, 1995; Kohlberg, 1984; Rest, 1975); or (d) reasoning about minor transgressions, such as spilling paint or breaking a window (Costanzo, Coie, Grummet, & Farnil, 1973).

There is little reason to believe, however, that exposure to violent television content would affect these types of prosocial moral reasoning or interpretations of minor transgressions. In fact, it is possible that Rosenkoetter et al. (1990) found no relationship between television viewing and moral reasoning because their study used children’s judgments about prosocial moral dilemmas and distributive justice. It is more likely that exposure to television violence would affect children’s moral judgment of and reasoning about situations that are similar to those that they have seen on television.
Existing Scales to Assess Children’s Development of Moral Reasoning

The two most common ways to measure children’s moral reasoning include the closed-ended survey in which children state the importance of various ethical values (e.g., telling the truth, stealing), and the moral dilemma in which children are presented a brief story about a character faced with an ethical dilemma and then are asked what the character should do and why.

Several instruments that use closed-ended response options have been developed to determine children’s moral developmental stage. For example, the Defining Issues Test (Rest, Cooper, Coder, Masanz, & Anderson, 1976) presents children with an ethical dilemma and asks them to identify the importance of various values (e.g., telling the truth) in making moral judgments about that story. Both the original long form (Rest, 1973) and the short form version (Rest et al., 1976) have been used to determine children’s moral developmental stage.

The SRM-SF has also been used to examine children’s moral developmental stage (Basinger et al., 1995). This measure is similar to the Defining Issues Test, but it omits the presentation of an ethical dilemma. Rather, it asks children to imagine a situation. For example, a question might ask the child to “think of a time you made a promise to a friend.” The child is then asked how important that value is (e.g., “How important is it to keep promises to a friend?”).

However, the problem with closed-ended survey approaches is that they provide less information about the strategies that children use to arrive at their decisions than do traditional dilemma approaches. Although claims can be made about the outcomes of children’s reasoning, these methods do not adequately allow researchers to understand how children arrive at their moral decisions. Therefore, several researchers have continued to use a procedure similar to the one developed by Kohlberg (1984), in which a moral dilemma is presented, and children are then asked to solve the dilemma and, most important, to explain their decisions. Although these traditional approaches are far more time-consuming than the close-ended questionnaires, they do allow researchers to examine how children make decisions regarding ethical dilemmas, which in turn allow for the analysis of moral development as a process.

The most frequently cited dilemma is the now famous Heinz dilemma posed by Kohlberg (1984). In this story, a man must decide between stealing
medication for his sick wife or allowing her to die. Although this dilemma has been used frequently to assess adults’ moral reasoning, it is less successful with children because it is too difficult to understand (Kohlberg, 1984). Therefore, many simpler dilemmas have been developed for children. For example, Eisenberg-Berg (1980) has developed a method that measures children’s moral development by presenting the children with four stories, each of which features a child protagonist. In each case, the child is faced with an ethical dilemma in which their own needs (e.g., to go to a birthday party and eat cake) are in conflict with the needs of another (e.g., stop and help a child who has fallen and is hurt). The Eisenberg-Berg (1980) scale has been found valid and reliable, and it is widely used to assess children’s moral development. Similarly, the classic porcupine dilemma features a porcupine family who must choose between keeping themselves comfortable in their home or inviting a needy porcupine to live with them, and having to deal with overcrowding (Garrod, Beal, & Shin, 1990). A vast majority of these dilemmas are easily interpreted by children; therefore, responses can be generated and coded reliably.

However, even though the dilemmas provide insight into the moral reasoning of young children and the responses can be reliably coded, there is little reason to believe that television violence would adversely affect children’s reasoning about, for instance, helping a hurt child or hosting a needy porcupine. For researchers interested in the relationship between television violence and children’s moral development, it is necessary to measure moral development using situations that mirror the violent situations found on television. Unfortunately, published scales do not exist that measure children’s moral responses to dilemmas involving the types of aggression that they may be exposed to in the media. The recently developed Normative Beliefs About Aggression Scale (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997) does include items measuring children’s normative beliefs about interpersonal violence. Although this scale concisely measures children’s normative standards about the acceptability of aggressive behavior, it does not attempt to reveal why children think certain aggressive acts are right or wrong. In other words, it does not give insight into children’s underlying ethical or moral reasoning about interpersonal violence, and therefore it cannot be used to investigate a child’s moral developmental level.

The first aim of this study was to develop and validate a scale (the MIIV Scale) that measures children’s moral reasoning and moral development regarding judgments about violent situations that are similar to those that they might see on television. To this end, we developed a series of stories in
which characters encountered a situation and decided to use violence to solve
the problem. We were first interested in the extent to which children felt that
various actions were right or wrong. Second, we were interested in the rea-
sons that they provided for their responses. Children’s judgments of whether
certain actions are right or wrong can be measured on (at least) an ordinal
level. This allows us to use parametric tests to investigate the validity of our
scale in relation to an existing moral development instrument. Our first
research question therefore asked the following:

Research Question 1: Is the closed-ended portion of the MIIV Scale a reli-
able and valid measure?

We investigated whether children’s open-ended responses to questions
about why certain violent acts are right or wrong could be reliably and validly
coded into an existing coding scheme. We were interested in finding out
whether the reasons that children provided for their judgments would
exhibit a pattern similar to those that were demonstrated with earlier instru-
ments that assess children’s moral developmental stage. Our second
research question therefore asked the following:

Research Question 2: Can the reasons that children provide for their judg-
ments be coded into an existing coding scheme to determine children’s
moral developmental stage?

Television Violence and Moral Reasoning

A second aim of this study was to examine the relationship of exposure to
television violence with children’s moral interpretations of situations involv-
ing interpersonal aggressive acts such as hitting, hurting, and killing. Why
might children’s moral reasoning be affected by exposure to television vio-
ience? First, it is necessary to examine the factors that are involved in the
development of moral reasoning. From a theoretical perspective, moral rea-
soning is identified by the ability to make ethical choices when presented
with a moral dilemma and the ability to articulate reasons for those choices
(Eisenberg, 1986). Moral reasoning research is based on two types of models
of human learning: cognitive developmental models, which seek explana-
tions for the formation of moral values on the basis of progressive qualitative
changes between infancy and adulthood, and social learning models, which
attempt to explain moral development as a function of environmental influ-
ences that are experienced by the child.
Cognitive Developmental Models

Cognitive developmental theories focus on the role that progressive, qualitative changes in children’s reasoning strategies play in children’s understanding of contextual variables. It is assumed that early-stage morality is associated with egocentrism or the lack of an ability to engage in perspective taking because children consider the event from their own, insular perspective. At this stage, children focus on the outcome of an act, their own needs, punishment avoidance, and rules. Later-stage moral reasoning, however, is associated with the ability to imagine the perspective of another individual. At this stage, children focus on the motive of an actor, the welfare and needs of others, and on fairness.

In cognitive developmental theories, children’s advances in moral reasoning are also associated with their attention to the motivation of an actor, rather than the outcome of the act (Piaget, 1965); their concern for the welfare of others and their beliefs about fairness, rather than with their fear of authority and punishment avoidance (Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983); their attention to the needs of others, rather than to their own needs (Eisenberg, 1982); and their use of conventional reasoning that is based on fairness and rights, rather than preconventional reasoning that is based on rules generated by authority figures (Kohlberg, 1984).

Social Learning Models

Moral development in these models is assumed to take place during the child’s interactions with socialization agents in various social settings. In essence, moral choices are learned by watching the moral choices made by others. It has been shown, for example, that exposure to moral regulations in family (e.g., Dunn, 1988), school (e.g., Ruffy, 1981), and peer groups (e.g., Damon & Killen, 1982) can have a profound impact on children’s moral reasoning and development.

Why and how might television violence play a role in children’s moral reasoning? The answer may be found partly in the results of the National Television Violence Study (Wilson et al., 1997), which examined not only the occurrence of violence on television but emphasized and studied the contextual cues surrounding that violence. This extensive content analysis suggested that the violence found in television goes unpunished (73% of the time); is executed by models who have positive qualities with which a child might identify (37% of the time); shows unrealistic consequences (58% of the time); and, perhaps most important for our purposes, is portrayed as justified (44%
of the time). In short, dramatic portrayals of violence depict aggression as a quick solution with few serious consequences. Violence is shown as justified—that is, necessary—to solve problems or to protect others.

When children are frequently exposed to violence that is justified, that carries little punishment or consequence, and that is done by characters with positive qualities, it may lead frequent viewers to believe that violence does have its benefits and that violence may be an acceptable way to solve problems. Therefore, it could be possible that exposure to violence on television would lead child audiences to judge violence as right, particularly when a justification is provided. Our third research question therefore asked the following:

*Research Question 3:* Do children who watch more television violence have less stringent standards of justified violence than do children who watch less television violence?

Not only were we interested in investigating whether exposure to violence on television was related to less stringent moral judgments about justified violence but we also wanted to investigate if exposure to television violence would impede children’s moral development. Specifically, we wanted to know if watching televised violence encouraged children to use earlier-stage moral reasoning strategies. It could be, for instance, that younger children who are exposed to more of the violence portrayed in fantasy violence series, like the *Ninja Turtles* and the *Power Rangers Turbo*, may linger in early-stage moral reasoning.

Why might this be the case? First, young children are more apt to focus on the rules that are provided by authority figures (Kohlberg, 1984), the outcome that an act has for the perpetrator (Piaget, 1965), and the presence or absence of punishment resulting from the act (Piaget, 1965). The nature of televised fantasy violence is very similar to these typical early-stage moral reasoning strategies. Television violence often focuses on authority figures and heroes who use low-consequence violence with positive outcomes to solve problems in what appear to be justified situations. Therefore, it could be possible that such portrayals might reinforce the lower level moral reasoning strategies that younger children typically use.

Second, due to egocentrism, young children tend to focus on themselves and not on others (Piaget, 1965). This particular tendency of young children might be reinforced by the contextual cues in television violence. After all, fantasy violence shows usually focus on the actor and tend not to promote identification with the victim (Wilson et al., 1997). It could be possible that young children who are consistently exposed to television violence may be
encouraged by it to continue to use an egocentric perspective in which the consequences for others are ignored and violence is seen as positive. Therefore, young children who watch more television violence may be more likely to use earlier-stage moral reasoning strategies than do those who watch less television violence. Our final research question therefore asked the following:

*Research Question 4:* Are children who watch a lot of television violence more likely than children who watch less television violence to use earlier-stage moral reasoning in the dilemmas that are posed to them?

**Method**

**Sample and Procedure**

The study included 156 children who were sampled in two different ways. First, students in a media effects course at a midsize southern university were offered the option to obtain partial course credit by collecting data. It was specified that child data had to be collected from children between the ages of 6 and 12. The students were required to attend a 1-hour training session, during which they were told that the children had to be interviewed on a one-on-one basis, without having parents or other children in the room or within hearing distance. It was explained to them that after they contacted potential respondents and their parents, and obtained their verbal agreement to participate, they must obtain written consent. Consent forms obtained the consent of the parent or guardian and the educational level of the consenting parent. In a majority of instances, students went to the homes of the respondents to collect data. In three instances, data were collected on the site of a child care facility. In these instances, children were administered the survey during the day in a quiet corner of the room.

An additional 33 children were from a local grade school. In this case, the parents of all children in this school were sent a consent form that asked if they and their child could participate in a survey about children’s television viewing. It was explained in the letter that if they consented, children would be interviewed at school. Approximately 30% of the consent forms were returned. All of these children were then scheduled for one-on-one interviews during a 5-day period. Each interview lasted approximately 35 minutes and was conducted by the first author during school time in an empty classroom.

In the sample of children, all educational levels of parents were represented, although the majority of the children came from households in which the parents were relatively well educated. Fifteen percent of the parents had
some or completed high school, 27% had some college, 35% were college graduates, 18% had some graduate school, and 4.5% had a graduate degree. The final sample of children was 45% male and 55% female; 71 children were in the youngest age group (5 to 8 years), 50 were in the middle age group (9 to 10 years), and 35 were in the oldest age group (11 to 12 years).

Measures

The MIIV Scale. Children listened and responded to 12 stories that were designed for the purpose of this study. In each story, a scenario was described in which the main character used violence to solve a problem. Four stories dealt with stealing, four stories dealt with situations in which a perpetrator hurt another person (e.g., kicking, beating someone up), and four stories dealt with killing. Of each of the three categories of stories, two stories were intended to show unjustified violence, whereas the other two stories described justified violence—that is, violence used to protect another person or as restitution for harm done. In each category, one justified and one unjustified story were matched in terms of the seriousness of harm and violence. For example, in a given matched pair of stories, if a victim was kicked unjustly by a perpetrator and the victim required a hospital visit as a result, the victim in the unjustified condition also required a visit to the hospital (see appendix for examples).

After the story was read to the child, the child was presented with a scale ranging from 1 (very, very wrong) to 7 (very, very right). For each of the seven responses, a schematic face appeared above the response (see appendix). Once the child was presented with this scale, the child was asked only to state if the character was right, wrong, or in the middle for harming the other individual. Once this information was obtained, the child’s attention was directed to the appropriate end of the scale. The child was then asked how right or wrong the character was. In this way, even the youngest children were able to use the entire 7-point scale.

After the child indicated the degree to which the character was right or wrong, the child was asked to explain his or her response. Their responses were written down verbatim. If the child did not respond or stated that he or she did not know, then the child was prompted three times before moving to the next story. At the end of the interview, the children were thanked and given a sticker for their participation.

Coding the MIIV Scale. To ascertain children’s developmental stage based on their responses to the question “Why was he right/wrong?” a coding scheme was adapted from Eisenberg’s (1986) 10-category scheme of
children's responses to prosocial dilemmas. Eisenberg's scheme has been reliably and widely used, and it has been shown to have strong predictive validity (e.g., Davidson et al., 1983; Dunn et al., 1995; Eisenberg-Berg, 1979). Because two of the categories were nonoccurring, only eight categories were retained for later coding.

The SRM-SF. The 11-item SRM-SF (Basinger et al., 1995) was included in the survey to assess validity coefficients for our newly formed MIIV Scale. The first four items of the SRM-SF address the importance of keeping promises and telling the truth. Item 5 to Item 7 apply to the value of affiliation (helping, saving someone's life); Item 8 to Item 11 pertain to property (to take things that belong to others), law (obey the law), and legal justice. Children were asked to evaluate and justify the importance of each value. The children's responses were scored for stage of moral reasoning. Cronbach's alpha for the SRM-SF scale was .66. This alpha is comparable to the alpha levels reached in the study of Basinger et al. (1995).

Television viewing frequency. Children were asked to indicate whether they always, pretty much, sometimes, not much, or never watched each of 20 popular television series that were broadcast weekly during the data collection period. This was done to form four separate viewing-frequency scales for the four program types: violent fantasy programs, violent realistic programs, situation comedies, and educational children's programs. Violent fantasy and violent realistic programs were considered violent because they received an FV (fantasy violence) and a V (violence), respectively, in the American rating system. In addition, these programs are considered to be violent because the recent National Television Violence Study (Wilson et al., 1997) found that 66% of the former and 30% of the latter contained violence. These numbers reflect less violence than the programs in our scale because they represent the violence found in all children's cartoons (e.g., X-Men and Rug Rats) and all realistic programs (e.g., COPS and Hard Copy). The National Television Violence Study did not differentiate based on violence, whereas programs in our scale were selected specifically for their violent content.

A principal components analysis was conducted on the 20 television programs. It revealed four factors that represented the following: (a) violent fantasy programs (five items: X-Men, Ninja Turtles, Power Rangers Turbo, Superman, and Men in Black), (b) violent realistic programs (three items: Rescue 911, COPS, and America's Most Wanted), (c) situation comedy programs (four items: Sabrina the Teenage Witch, Boy Meets World, Friends, and Home Improvement), and (d) educational children's programs (four items: Wishbone, Science Court, Beakman, and Bill Nye, Science Guy). Four
items had to be eliminated because they loaded less than .35 on the factor that they helped to define. The principal components analyses accounted for 61.3% of the variance.

Viewing-frequency scales were calculated for each of the four viewing scales by averaging the unweighted scores on each of the items that loaded on the factor. The Cronbach’s alpha for violent fantasy programs was .84, for violent realistic programs .78, for situation comedy programs .71; and for educational children’s programs .69. The correlations between the viewing scales ranged from $r = -.10$ (comedies—violent fantasy programs) to $r = .45$ (comedies—violent realistic programs).

Results

*Development of a Scale to Assess Children’s Moral Judgments of Interpersonal Violence*

With two goals in mind, we designed 12 stories for this study. First, we wanted to explore the dimensional structure of children’s responses to the stories. Second, we wanted to reduce the number of stories to a smaller set that had high internal consistency and that would be easy to administer to a larger sample of children. To this end, we conducted a principal components analysis with varimax rotation on the children’s responses to the 12 stories about stealing, hurting, and killing. This factor analysis did not distinguish between the type of violence that was committed (stealing, hurting, or killing); rather, it revealed only two factors that explained 47.5% of the variance. The six justified violence stories defined one factor ($\alpha = .80$) and the six unjustified violence stories defined a second factor ($\alpha = .70$).

In a second step, to explore whether we could keep reasonable alpha levels with fewer stories, we eliminated the two stories that loaded lowest on the justified and unjustified factors. Cronbach’s alpha for the five-item justified factor moved up to .82, and the alpha for the five-item unjustified factor became .71. This elimination procedure was repeated with the two items that loaded second lowest, third lowest, and fourth lowest on the justified and unjustified factors. The alphas for the justified factor moved from .82 (four items) to .83 (three items) to .81 (two items). The alphas for the unjustified factor moved from .69 (four items) to .68 (three items) to .75 (two items).

Because our analyses showed that satisfactory alphas could be reached for scales based on only two justified and two unjustified violence stories, we based our remaining analyses on children’s responses to the two stories that loaded highest on each factor. The four stories are presented in the appendix. An index of children’s responses (i.e., how right/wrong was [perpetrator’s
name?) to justified violence was calculated by averaging their responses to story A-justified (Paul) and story B-justified (Philip). An index for unjustified violence was created by averaging their responses to story A-unjustified (Frank) and story B-unjustified (Barrie). The correlation between children’s responses to the unjustified and the justified index was $r = -.01$, with $p = .88$.

As the appendix shows, the four stories all dealt with physical violence without killing. The stories that were retained were the least violent of the 12 stories. None contained victims who sustained serious injury. Ultimately, this type of scale is preferable because interviewers would not be required to discuss serious injury with young children.

Validation of the MIIV Scale With the SRM-SF

To answer our first research question, which asked if our MIIV Scale is a valid measure, we calculated zero-order Pearson correlations between the MIIV Scale and the SRM-SF. Children’s responses to the SRM-SF correlated significantly with their opinions about unjustified violence ($r = .34; p < .001$), but not with their opinions about justified violence ($r = .00$). To verify whether the low correlation between justified violence and the SRM-SF could be attributed to differences in types of moral judgments in the two scales, we calculated correlations between the SRM-SF and children’s responses to justified and unjustified stealing, because moral judgments of stealing are better represented in the SRM-SF. However, the correlations between children’s judgments about justified and unjustified stealing and the SRM-SF showed the same pattern of results. Children’s responses to justified stealing in the new scale correlated only with the SRM-SF ($r = .10; p = .21$), whereas their responses to unjustified stealing did correlate significantly ($r = .33; p < .001$). Overall, children’s responses to the SRM-SF correlated with the unjustified portion of the MIIV Scale, but not with the justified portion of the scale.

Validation Check of the Justified and Unjustified Factors With an Adult Sample

To further check the validity of the factor analysis that was gathered from the child sample, we asked 43 college students to report how justified they believed the violence was in each of the stories that was initially used in the child version of the MIIV Scale. Because we were interested mainly in the factor analytic structure of the MIIV Scale with an adult sample, participants responded only to the closed-ended portion of the MIIV Scale. The factor analysis, which explained 65.7% of the variance, revealed a factor structure similar to the one found for children. The six unjustified stories loaded on one
factor (eigenvalue = 3.02), whereas, with the exception of one story, all justified stories loaded on another factor (eigenvalue = 2.45).

Similar to the data obtained from the child sample, college students perceived the two unjustified stories, Barrie and Frank, to be unjustified. Whereas 98% of the children thought Barrie was wrong (a little wrong; wrong; very wrong; very, very wrong), 100% of the college students felt that he was wrong. Frank was also considered wrong by 93% of the children, and by 100% of the college students.

Although the factor analyses for the two samples showed identical structures, the college sample tended to judge justified violence as more positive than did the child sample. Philip was considered wrong by 30% of the children and 28% of the adults, in the middle by 27% of the children and 12% of the adults, and right (a little right; right; very right; very, very right) by 43% of the children and 60% of the adults. Paul was considered wrong by 38% of the children and 7% of the adults, in the middle by 31% of the children and 14% of the adults, and right by 31% of the children and 79% of the adults.

Reliability of the MIV Coding Scheme

Our second research question asked whether the reasons that children provided for their right-wrong responses could be reliably coded into an existing coding scheme. This coding could ultimately provide information about children's stage of moral reasoning. Specifically, we wanted to know if Eisenberg-Berg's (1979) 10-category coding scheme could be used reliably with children's responses to the question “Why was Frank right/wrong?” To address this research question, several steps were taken. First, one author made an initial coding pass using Eisenberg-Berg's 10-category coding scheme. Two categories were eliminated because they were nonoccurring in the children's responses, most likely because the categories were inappropriate for the violent stories that were used in the analysis. Table 1 presents the category definitions, examples of child responses for those categories, and the decision rules associated with the categories. Second, a randomly selected sample of 25% of the responses was coded independently by a second coder. The kappa was .92 for Paul (justified violence), whereas the kappas for Philip (justified violence), Barrie (unjustified violence), and Frank (unjustified violence) were 1.00.

Although intercoder reliabilities for the eight categories were satisfactory, there were both statistical and theoretical reasons to further collapse the categories from eight to six. From a statistical standpoint, several of the categories (affectional relationship, concern with humanness, and
Table 1
Coding Scheme to Children’s Responses to “Why Was [the Perpetrator] Right/Wrong?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Exemplars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority/</td>
<td>Primary mention of authority</td>
<td>“You could get yourself arrested.” “You’d get in trouble.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>punishment</td>
<td>Stereotypical images of good and bad behavior; use of the word should without giving reason</td>
<td>“You shouldn’t kick.” “It’s wrong to hit.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypical reasoning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedonism</td>
<td>Orientation to selfish gains</td>
<td>“It was her purse, so he should beat [the thief] to get it back.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs-oriented</td>
<td>Mention of the physical safety of the individual; mention of pain</td>
<td>“That guy could get really hurt if you kicked him.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective taking/</td>
<td>Mention of identification with another, especially family relationships</td>
<td>“Because she is his granny.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affectional</td>
<td></td>
<td>“[He/She] is his friend.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concern with</td>
<td>Mention that the other is a living, human person</td>
<td>“A person could have died.” “He’s a person too, you know.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humanness</td>
<td>Mention of good or bad motives of the actor</td>
<td>“He probably didn’t mean it.” “The guy took the purse, so he had to get it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empathic/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motive-based</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>Mention of rights hierarchy</td>
<td>“He wanted to defend his sister and he has a right to do that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“You have a right to get mad, but not to beat someone up.”</td>
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</table>

empathic/motive-based orientation) that were originally established by Eisenberg-Berg (1979) contained relatively few responses, making it difficult to make valid comparisons between groups. From a theoretical standpoint, we reasoned that each of these three categories implicitly referred to the child’s tendency to focus on the perspective of other people’s point of view rather than on his or her own. More specifically, these categories all imply that a child focused on the feelings or thoughts of the individuals in the story. Unlike needs-based reasoning, which requires perspective taking, the three collapsed categories all relate to the child’s attention to emotion and thoughts, rather than the physical needs of the individuals involved. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to collapse affectional relationship, concern with humanness, and empathic/motive-based orientation into one category called perspective taking. Because the remaining five coding categories remained intact from Eisenberg’s initial coding scheme, the final coding scheme included six categories.

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Based on the theories discussed earlier (e.g., Eisenberg-Berg, 1980; Kohlberg, 1984), we considered authority-based reasoning to be the earliest-stage reasoning. It is in this stage that children look to rules, punishment, and authority figures to make ethical decisions. Similarly, stereotypical reasoning, in which children provide simple, culturally acceptable answers (e.g., “it is wrong to hit”), can be considered egocentric because it relies on the rules passed down by parents and other authority figures. This kind of reasoning is similar to authority-based reasoning, but it does reflect some progress because, at this stage, children demonstrate an initial attempt to internalize the rule. Thus, they state the rule (e.g., “it is wrong to hit”), but they no longer articulate that adults are necessary to enforce it. Note that in coding the MIIV Scale, stereotypical reasoning is considered early-stage reasoning, unlike the Eisenberg-Berg (1980) scale in which stereotypical reasoning is considered a more advanced stage of reasoning. Reasons for this will be discussed presently.

Children’s Moral Judgments of Justified and Unjustified Violence for Different Subgroups

To investigate how children’s moral judgments of justified and unjustified violence varied with age and gender, we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance with age (6-to-8-year-olds vs. 9-to-10-year-olds vs. 11-to-12-year-olds) and gender as between-subjects factors and kind of violence (justified vs. unjustified) as a within-subjects factor. Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of children’s judgments of justified and unjustified violence.

The MANOVA showed a significant main effect of kind of violence. This effect indicated that children judged justified violence as less wrong than unjustified violence. As Table 1 shows, children judged justified violent acts, on average, as between the middle and a little right, whereas they judged unjustified violent acts, on average, as between very, very wrong and very wrong. The MANOVA showed a significant main effect of gender, $F(1, 150) = 3.65; p = .05; \eta^2 = .02$, indicating that boys in general judged the violence as less wrong than did girls.

Finally, the MANOVA showed a nonsignificant main effect of age, $F(2, 150) = 1.88; p = .15; \eta^2 = .02$. However, this could be a result of the relatively low power of our study, due to a relatively small sample size. As Table 2 shows, there is a clear trend for older children to judge justified violence as more wrong than younger children. In this respect, it must be noted that the effect size ($\eta^2$) for age is equal to that for gender. The MANOVA did not show any significant interactions.
Table 2  
*Mean Scores of Children’s Responses to “How Right/Wrong Was [the Perpetrator]?” for Justified and Unjustified Violence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Justified Violence</th>
<th>Unjustified Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4.24 (1.67)</td>
<td>1.44 (.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>3.91 (1.50)</td>
<td>1.32 (.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 8 years old</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>4.02 (1.63)</td>
<td>1.46 (.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 to 10 years old</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.81 (1.55)</td>
<td>1.27 (.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 12 years old</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4.50 (1.45)</td>
<td>1.37 (.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole sample</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>4.06 (1.58)</td>
<td>1.37 (.58)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Responses ranged from 1 (*very, very wrong*) to 7 (*very, very right*). Boys judged both justified and unjustified violence as more right than did girls. Justified violence was judged significantly more right than unjustified violence.

**Television Viewing and Children’s Moral Judgments of Justified and Unjustified Violence**

To investigate our third research question of whether children who watch more television violence have less stringent standards regarding violence than do children who watch less television violence, we conducted two hierarchical multiple regression analyses. One was on children’s judgments of justified violence and the other was on their judgments of unjustified violence (see Table 3).

In each of the two regression analyses, children’s age and gender, and parents’ educational level were entered in the first block; the four television-viewing variables (violent fantasy programs, violent realistic programs, situation comedy programs, and educational children’s programs) were entered in the second block. The first block accounted for 4.7% of the variance in justified violence, $F(3, 145) = 2.42; p = .07$, and 2.3% of the variance in unjustified violence, $F(3, 145) = 1.19; p = .31$.

The addition of television-viewing variables added 10% of the variance explained in justified violence, $F(7, 141) = 2.12; p < .05$. The television variables did not add a significant increase in the variance of unjustified violence, $F(7, 141) = 1.06; p = .39$. As the final beta weights in the left-hand columns for justified and unjustified violence in Table 3 show, exposure to violent fantasy programs was positively related to children’s judgments of justified violence, and exposure to violent realistic programs was negatively related to children’s judgments of justified violence.
Table 3
Multiple Regression Analyses of Children’s Judgments of Justified and Unjustified Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Justified Violence</th>
<th>Unjustified Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$\beta_{ind.}^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender$^b$</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of child</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level of parent</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Television variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent fantasy programs</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent realistic programs</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation comedy programs</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational children’s programs</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. These columns present the beta weights for the individual television-viewing variables without controlling for the remaining ones; the coefficients for the background variables represent first-order correlations.
b. Gender was coded as 0 (male) or 1 (female).
*p < .05.

To eliminate the possibility of suppressor effects, we performed another series of regression analyses in which each of the television variables was entered alone, after the first block of demographic variables was entered. The coefficients of these separate regression analyses are presented in the two right-hand columns for justified and unjustified violence. Although some of the individual beta weights deviated somewhat from the simultaneous beta weights, all directions and patterns of results were consistent for the two kinds of analyses.

Is Television Violence Related to Children’s Moral Development?

To investigate our final research question of whether frequent viewers of television violence are more likely than infrequent viewers to use earlier-stage moral reasoning in the dilemmas that are posed to them, we relied on children’s open-ended responses to questions about why they perceived justified and unjustified violence as right or wrong. To compare frequent and infrequent viewers of violence, the scales for fantasy violence viewing and realistic violence viewing were dichotomized by means of median splits. We then cross-tabulated the six categories that we identified (authority, punishment, stereotypic reasoning, hedonism, needs-oriented, perspective taking,
and human rights) with the two dichotomized television violence viewing variables.

However, because we had two justified (Paul and Philip) and two unjustified (Frank and Barrie) stories, we first investigated whether it was statistically acceptable to add children's nominal responses to the two justified and the two unjustified stories. To test this, we cross-tabulated the two justified and the two unjustified stories with each other. The contingency statistics for both Barrie and Frank (unjustified) and Philip and Paul (justified) were significant, with Cramér's Vs of .40 (p < .001) and .33 (p < .001), respectively, indicating that children tended to provide similar types of responses to each of the two similar stories.

Children's response categories, which are presented in Table 4, are ordered with lower-stage moral reasoning (authority and punishment) at the top, and higher-stage moral reasoning (perspective taking and human rights) at the bottom. As can be seen in Table 4, frequent viewers of both violent fantasy and violent realistic programs engaged more frequently in lower-stage moral reasoning (authority, punishment, and stereotypic reasoning) than did infrequent viewers. Conversely, infrequent viewers of violent fantasy and violent realistic programs used higher-stage moral reasoning (perspective taking and human rights) more often than did frequent viewers.

Tests of statistical significance of differences between high- and low-fantasy and high- and low-realistic violence viewers for the six categories cannot be presented, because chi-square analyses are questionable when more than 20% of the expected frequencies are fewer than five, and such is the case for many of the categories. To overcome this problem, children's open-ended responses were recoded into a composite score of moral stage reasoning, a procedure adopted from Eisenberg, Lennon, and Roth (1983). Children's responses to each of the dilemmas were coded as follows: authority and punishment = 0, stereotypic reasoning = 1, hedonism = 2, needs-oriented = 3, perspective taking = 4, and human rights = 5. Next, children's responses to the two justified and two unjustified stories were added, resulting in one justified and one unjustified composite score for each child.

We conducted two repeated measures MANCOVAs on children's composite scores of justified and unjustified violence, with kind of violence (justified vs. unjustified) as a within-subject factor. In the first MANCOVA, the dichotomized fantasy-violence viewing variable was a between-subject variable. In the second MANCOVA, the dichotomized realistic-violence viewing variable was a between-subject factor. To eliminate the possibility that differences between high- and low-violence viewers must be seen as a function
Table 4
Percentage of High- and Low-Violence Viewers’ Responses to “Why Was [the Perpetrator] Right/Wrong?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Whole Sample</th>
<th>Fantasy Violence Viewing</th>
<th>Realistic Violence Viewing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unjustified violence (in percentages)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority/punishment (0)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypical reasoning (1)</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>63.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedonism (2)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs-oriented (3)</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective taking (4)</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights (5)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n responses (to two stories)a</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justified violence (in percentages)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority/punishment (0)</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypical reasoning (1)</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedonism (2)</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs-oriented (3)</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective taking (4)</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights (5)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n responses (to two stories)a</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Each child responded to two justified and two unjustified stories; therefore, the ns represent the number of responses, not the number of children.

of age, gender, and educational level of the parent, these three background variables were entered as covariates.

In both MANCOVAs, there were significant main effects of type of violence, with $F(1, 114) = 4.61, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$ and $F(1, 114) = 5.49, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$, respectively. As Table 5 indicates, children use higher-stage moral reasoning more often in cases of justified violence than in cases of unjustified violence. The MANCOVAs yielded significant main effects of fantasy-violence viewing and realistic-violence viewing, with $F(1, 114) = 3.87, p = .05, \eta^2 = .03$ and $F(1, 114) = 4.00, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$, respectively. There were no significant interactions between kind of violence and television-viewing variables. This indicated that children who watch more fantasy and realistic violence use lower-stage moral reasoning more often than their less frequent viewing counterparts when judging justified and unjustified violence.

Discussion

The first goal of this study was to develop an instrument to assess children’s moral reasoning about interpersonal violence, and thereby broaden the base
for theoretical arguments made concerning children’s moral reasoning and development. Twelve stories were designed to investigate how right or wrong children perceive various acts of interpersonal violence to be and what reasons they would provide for their responses. Using principal components analysis, only two factors were found, one justified violence factor and one unjustified violence factor. Furthermore, the MIV Scale proved to be reliable in terms of intercoder reliability and internal consistency. It can be administered efficiently because alpha levels remained high even when only two, rather than six, stories were used to measure each dimension.

In addition to measuring children’s judgements about the extent to which violence is right or wrong, we investigated whether children’s qualitative reasoning about interpersonal violence could be coded into an existing coding scheme (the second research question). We used and adapted an existing coding scheme (Eisenberg, 1986; Eisenberg-Berg, 1979) that was used to investigate children’s moral reasoning about prosocial dilemmas. Eisenberg’s original 10-category scheme was trimmed first to eight categories for practical reasons (children did not provide reasons that fit into two of the original categories). The scheme was further pared down for statistical reasons (few children provided reasons that fit into three of Eisenberg’s categories) and theoretical reasons (the three infrequently occurring categories all shared in common a necessity for children to engage in perspective taking to provide responses, making the collapse of the three categories theoretically meaningful). Thus, six categories remained. The intercoder reliability for the four stories and the six categories was satisfactory.

Although Eisenberg’s (1986) coding categories proved to be applicable to our stories about justified and unjustified violence, there was one exception. Whereas Eisenberg found that stereotypical reasoning occurred more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Justified Violence</th>
<th>Unjustified Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fantasy violence viewing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>6.24 (2.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5.64 (2.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Realistic violence viewing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>6.28 (2.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>5.57 (2.35)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Responses ranged from 0 (low-stage moral reasoning) to 10 (high-stage moral reasoning). Column values for low- and high-violence viewers are different at the *p < .05 level.*
frequently in older children responding to prosocial dilemmas, we found that stereotypical reasoning occurred more frequently in younger children. It is possible that this occurred because of the differences between violent and prosocial dilemmas. In the case of violent dilemmas, stereotypical reasoning may constitute a simple, fallback type of response, especially in the case of unjustified violence. Obvious answers are easier to come by for younger children because they are taught at a young age that, for example, “it is wrong to hit.” However, stereotypical responses to prosocial dilemmas may be taught neither as early nor as easily to very young children (e.g., “you should always help people” or “it is nice to share”). Our results suggested that stereotypical responses reflected lower-level reasoning when children are responding to violent dilemmas.

We also attempted to validate the newly formed scale by correlating children's responses to the MIIV Scale with their responses to an existing scale of moral reasoning, the SRM-SF. Overall, we found that only children’s judgments of unjustified violence, but not those of justified violence, correlated significantly with the SRM-SF, suggesting that the situations found in the SRM-SF are conceptually similar to the unjustified portion of the MIIV Scale, but not to those in the justified portion of the MIIV Scale. The SRM-SF presents relatively unambiguous ethical dilemmas. Children are asked, for example, “how important is it to tell the truth?” or “how important is it for people not to take things that belong to other people?” In these dilemmas, no contextual cues are provided when the children are asked to respond. Similarly, the unjustified portion of the MIIV Scale presents relatively unambiguous violent dilemmas. Perpetrators are described as aggressive with no real motives or reasons. Therefore, the conceptual similarity between the unjustified portion of the MIIV Scale and the SRM-SF may account for the significant correlation.

However, children’s moral reasoning about justified violence resulted in different response patterns in children. First, whereas the vast majority of children judged the unjustified violence stories as wrong, more than two thirds of the children judged justified violence as right or in the middle. Second, there was a greater variance (i.e., disagreement, ambiguity) in children’s responses to this type of violence. Violence that is committed with motive or reason (e.g., to protect or save a loved one) obviously elicits a greater range of moral standards than violence committed without motives. Third, children used more advanced moral reasoning strategies in response to justified violence than in response to unjustified violence. Faced with the ambiguity created by justified violence stories, children are forced to consider the situation more carefully and not to provide simple, stereotypical responses.
It is inaccurate to conclude that moral reasoning is a unitary construct, with children’s responses to a moral dilemma being similar across all contexts (e.g., truth telling, justified violence). Rather, moral reasoning must be seen as contextually dependent, with children’s responses to dilemmas varying not only by their developmental stage and by environmental characteristics, but by the characteristics and contextual cues of the dilemma itself.

**Television Viewing and Children’s Responses to the MIIV Scale.**

Our third research question asked whether children who watch more television violence have less stringent standards of justified violence than do children who watch less television violence. We found that children who watched more fantasy violence in series like *Superman, X-Men,* and *Power Rangers Turbo* were more likely to judge justified violence in moral dilemmas as right. Why does this occur? When watching these programs, children are intended to identify with and admire the superhero and not the villain. Because these kinds of programs tend to portray violence as perpetrated by a hero for the greater good, it makes sense that frequent viewers of fantasy violence would agree with the idea that violence can be good when there appears to be a cause. Therefore, they may feel that just causes for violence may exist, as in the case of superhero violence.

Fantasy violence was unrelated to children’s perception of unjustified violence. It is possible that because unjustified stories do not mirror the type of superhero violence that is found in violent fantasy programs, no relationship with television exposure exists. Realistic violence, such as the kind found in *COPS,* on the other hand, was negatively related to children’s moral judgments about justified violence, indicating that children who often watch these shows perceive justified violence as less correct. In realistic violent programs, such as *COPS,* police are often attempting to arrest individuals similar to the perpetrators in the justified stories. The actions of the police in these programs imply that violence, even when there is a reason, is not a legal way to solve problems. Therefore, exposure to realistic violence may result in frequent viewers’ agreement that the violence committed by the perpetrators in the moral dilemmas is wrong, even when a justification is provided.

Do these findings suggest that realistic violence, but not fantasy violence, can be good for children’s moral reasoning? Insight into this question comes from understanding the children’s reasoning about their responses and not simply the responses themselves. For viewers of fantasy violence and viewers of realistic violence, frequent exposure was associated with significantly less advanced moral reasoning. Overall, frequent viewers were more likely to
use strategies such as authority-punishment reasoning, hedonistic reasoning, and stereotypic reasoning than did their less frequent viewing counterparts. As argued in the introduction, young children are more apt to focus on the rules that are provided by authority figures, the outcome that an act has for the perpetrator, and the presence or absence of punishment resulting from the act. Televised violence may enforce this early-stage moral reasoning because it portrays justified violence that is perpetrated by heroes with little, if any, negative consequence. By glorifying violence in this way, empathy for the victim, and therefore perspective taking by the children, may be discouraged.

Limitations, Implications, and Future Research

In this study, we presented theoretical arguments that suggested how exposure to television violence could affect children's moral development. Although we controlled for a number of potential background variables, such as age, gender, and the educational level of the parent, we still found negative relationships between television violence and moral development. Therefore, despite some evidence to the contrary (Rosenkoetter et al., 1990), it appears that media violence may be related to children's moral reasoning. However, our data were cross-sectional and, therefore, do not allow for causal interpretations. There is a need for longitudinal research to test whether exposure to television violence is causally related to children's moral development.

Despite limitations, this study provided initial results regarding the validity and reliability of the MIIV Scale, and it suggested a possible link between the viewing of violent television programs and children's interpretations of and reasoning about violent moral dilemmas. Additional research is needed to further test the predictive validity of the MIIV Scale and to test the relationship of other media with children's moral reasoning. Future research might also further explore the construct of moral reasoning. In broadening the construct to include a variety of moral dilemmas in a variety of contexts, we might gain a better understanding of the parameters and predictors of moral development.
Appendix
Four Stories to Assess Children’s Moral Judgments of
Justified and Unjustified Interpersonal Violence

Story A-Unjustified (Frank)

Frank is a grocery store clerk. He has big muscles and exercises every day. One day, his pal Jeff asks Frank why he is lying to him. Frank gets furious and kicks his pal several times.

Story A-Justified (Paul)

Paul is walking home with his sister. A man grabs her purse, pushes her down, and runs away. Paul chases the man to get the purse back. When he gets hold of the thief, he kicks him several times and grabs the purse.

Story B-Unjustified (Barrie)

Barrie is a tall guy. One day, his neighbor accidentally parked his car too close to Barrie’s car. Barrie became extremely angry and started to beat up his neighbor. His neighbor had to go to the hospital.

Story B-Justified (Philip)

Philip’s grandmother lives in a neighborhood that is terrorized by some young men from a gang. The gang members regularly demand money from the older people. The older people usually refuse, but they are frightened. One day, Philip is staying over at his grandmother’s when the doorbell rings. One of the gang members comes in and demands a drink and some money. Philip jumps from behind the curtain and starts to beat the gang member. The gang member had to go to the hospital.

Put a check in the circle. Was (name perpetrator) right, wrong, or in the middle?

Why was (name perpetrator) right, wrong, or in the middle?

Note: Responses are coded from 1 (very, very wrong) to 7 (very, very right).
Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meetings of the International Communication Association, San Francisco, 1999, where it received a top paper award. The authors would like to thank the Dutch National Science Foundation [Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek] and the Dutch Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences [Koninklijke Nederlandse Academie van Wetenschappen, KNAW] for their support of this study, and Mark Cooke for his assistance in coding.

2. Category 3 in Eisenberg’s scheme is titled “nonhedonistic pragmatism.” This category includes responses in which children’s orientation is associated with practical considerations that are unassociated with selfishness. For example, when responding to prosocial dilemmas, children reported “I’d help because I’m strong” (Eisenberg-Berg, 1979). Perhaps because of the nature of violent dilemmas, this category did not occur in children’s responses; that is, children did not state that “hitting should not occur because Barrie is too weak.” In addition, other authors (e.g., Davidson et al., 1983) have eliminated this category. Category 9 in the scheme is titled “internalized positive affect.” This category was also nonoccurring because of the context of violent dilemmas as compared to prosocial dilemmas. This category was eliminated.

3. We used Box’s M test as a test of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices. Box’s M is too sensitive for use at routine alpha levels (for a discussion, see Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). According to Tabachnick and Fidell (1989), only “if sample sizes are unequal and Box’s M test is significant at p < .001, then robustness is not guaranteed” (p. 379). The Box’s M test that we performed did not reach this level of significance, F(15, 23705) = 1.92, with p = .02.

4. We also conducted a series of moderated regression analyses for both the justified and unjustified violence variables. In each of these regression analyses, we entered the demographic variables on the first step. On the second step, we entered an individual television variable (violent fantasy programs or violent realistic programs). On the third step, we entered one of the multiplicative Demographic × Television Viewing variables. None of the interaction terms was significant.

References


Krcmar, Valkenburg • Television and Morals


