

UNIVERSITY OF BRADFORD  
Department of Interdisciplinary  
Human Studies

Bradford BD7 1DP, England

Tel.0274/ 383988 (direct) or 383986 (secretaries)

Letters, *The Psychologist*,  
British Psychological Society,  
St. Andrews House,  
48 Princess Road East,  
Leicester LE1 7DR.

20th June 1994.

Dear Editor,

In response to my complaint about difficulties in obtaining her report for David Alton MP on screen violence, Professor Newson accuses me of criticizing it before reading it (Letters, July 1994). If she refers here to the *content* of her paper, then I did no such thing. Precisely because I could not obtain it before the Parliamentary debate was over, I did no more than cite one press report about it, and offer several general remarks on the alleged causal role of screen violence. I trust she will therefore withdraw her unjustified slur?

More seriously, she appears bent on misrepresenting my concerns about not having access to the report at the crucial time. Of course it would be absurd to demand that in general an individual's "discussion papers for Government bodies...be submitted to the membership" for prior approval - but again I said nothing of the kind. Her report was special in two rather obvious ways. First, she sought to give it extra weight, and to turn it into something more like a petition, by soliciting signatures from an unrepresentative sample of other professionals. (Few if any have evident specialist expertise in the complexities of media communication processes.) And above all, it was prepared as ammunition for one partisan MP to use in his very public media campaign to stampede Parliament into serious new erosions of fragile civil liberties.

I do hope that other BPS members will support my plea for the Professional Affairs Board to consider how the Society should regard situations of this rather distinctive kind - where reports are not properly accessible to psychologists in general, yet are given a very open role in swaying public opinion.

I have now read Professor Newson's report, and to say the least I find it very defective as a scientific document. Apart from noting its largely anecdotal focus and highly selective literature review, I shall confine myself here to one point of logic. To account for the supposed escalation of brutal youth crime, she asks what "the 'different' factor...in recent years" can be? Her answer "has {sic.} to be the easy

availability to children of gross images of violence on video". I could just as well offer "Thatcherism" as the answer. Picking scapegoats out of hats is easy - but it does not qualify as rigorous scientific analysis.

Yours sincerely,

IAN VINE  
{{ C.Psychol., AFBPsS }}