

ATTITUDES TOWARD NUCLEAR WEAPONS : A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
-- The Report of a Study of Edinburgh University Students
Studying Sociology 1.

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C O N T E N T S

Page

INTRODUCTION

1

PART 1 : THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Background to the Questionnaire

3

The Sample

8

The Results

10

PART 2 : THE INTERVIEWS

Background to the Interviews

23

The Sample

27

The Results

28

OVERALL CONCLUSION

41

BIBLIOGRAPHY

43

APPENDIX 1 : The Questionnaire

APPENDIX 11 : The Interview Schedule

APPENDIX 111: Tables constructed to compare the total sample to those willing to be interviewed, and those actually interviewed

KEY TO TRANSCRIPTS
(.....) Material edited out.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a heightening of anti-nuclear activity in Western Europe, the United States and Canada. This has been accompanied by an attempt by some academics to explain this phenomenon. This study was an attempt to look at attitudes towards nuclear weapons as well as discovering whether or not attitudes were translated into action. In anticipation that not all attitudes would in fact be translated in action. I wanted to discover why this was the case. The research was carried out in ^{two} parts and the following report is likewise divided.

In the first part I critically assess the methods used by opinion pollsters when attempting to tap attitudes; in particular attitudes which could be extremely controversial and contradictory. It was for this reason that I conducted a general survey using questionnaires. This survey was carried out on a number of students studying Sociology at the University of Edinburgh. The main aim of this was an attempt to get some idea of the degree of knowledge my sample held on nuclear weapons as well as how important the topic of nuclear weapons was seen to be.

This survey, however, was limited since there was a limited number of items in the questionnaire; some of which were problematic themselves. Despite this, the results highlight the problems encountered when attempting to interpret responses to questionnaire items as well as telling me something about the knowledge about and salience of nuclear weapons. An interesting gender difference in responses was also apparent and a discussion of this is presented although it was not initially intended.

This, however, was a preliminary survey and the second part is the report of a more detailed investigation using informal interviews. I attempted to tap attitudes towards nuclear weapons and action taken in support of nuclear disarmament. I also discuss the effect the media, family and friends might have had on individual attitudes with particular reference to decisions about whether or not to take ^{two} types of action geared towards nuclear disarmament: anti-nuclear demonstrations and membership of C.N.D. Again this study has its limitations given that only 12 interviews were conducted and the gender difference noted in the questionnaire responses was not explored for this reason. However the interviews have shown that allowing respondents to answer in their own words provides a better insight into attitudes by individuals since in some cases respondents did contradict what they had previously said during the interview. The results also show that one should not consider attitudes to be held individually. People who we have close contact with can and often do have an effect on our attitudes and action. Likewise the popular images of the peace movement portrayed in the media can have an effect on decisions to participate in anti-nuclear demonstrations and C.N.D.

PART ONE : THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

(1) Background to Questionnaire

Opinion polling took off when modern sampling techniques were developed earlier this century for it proved possible to estimate the characteristics of a very large number of people from a relatively small sample, so long as it was selected at random. Pollsters then attempted to tap attitudes on anything from capital punishment to soap powder.

Many opinion polls have been conducted on the issue of nuclear weapons. However it is my belief that pollsters perhaps feel that respondents are giving their opinions on topics such as C.N.D, unilateral disarmament, the arms race and so on in the belief that the respondent knows what C.N.D, the arms race and so on is (Marsh 1975). Likewise they may also assume that respondents hold an opinion^{on} these issues..

The concept of 'opinion' underlies the methods used in opinion polling. The notion is individualistic and is built on the idea that everyone holds an opinion about everything and that these opinions are fixed and latent with the potential to cause actions or verbal behaviour; responses to questionnaire items are therefore treated as indicators of underlying attitudes. It has been shown, however, that the most methodical and rigorous social surveys may produce misleading results to questions. This was the case with Goldthorpe et al's study of Vauxhall workers in Luton.. One month after they had published their findings which portrayed workers as being compliant and having good relations with the management, the workers went on strike over some minor grievance (Goldthorpe et al 1969) In this sense some attitudes are too complex to be accurately reflected by a few questions. That is not to say that attitudes cannot be tapped at all.

I agree with Marsh's assertion that certain questions should be asked about any poll. She suggests the following: have the respondents previous knowledge about the topic under discussion? This is important since questions give people the opportunity to give definite and coherent opinions on topics about which, in reality, they may know nothing. This was demonstrated in Stanley Paynes 'The Art of Asking Question'. (Payne 1953)

He reports on a study carried out on a sample of Americans who were asked how much they approved or disapproved of the 'Metallic Metals Act of 1947'. 70% of the respondents gave a clear verdict of approval or disapproval. This was surprising given that no such 'Act' existed.

Even if respondents have heard about the topic under discussion one should always ask how important is the issue to the people being questioned? This is equally important since questions give people the opportunity to give definite and coherent opinions on topics which may have complex and contradictory opinions or no opinions at all.

One should, then, make sure respondents not only have previous knowledge about the topic you are discussing but also see it to be important to them, before attempting to tap such attitudes.

A questionnaire was then constructed with several purposes in mind: to overcome some of the problems with opinion polls; to discover something of an answer to the questions just posed; to provide background to a more detailed investigation and provide a comparison between my sample and a sample of the general public.

The questionnaire then, contained 3 sets of questions, all containing one or several questions which had been asked of a sample of the public during surveys carried out by Gallup. The questions were in accordance with the aims of the survey and access to the results was obtained. (These questions are indicated by an asterix)

The first set of questions consists of 4 questions aimed at discovering whether or not my sample knew something about the topic of nuclear weapons:

- * (1) As far as you know, do we have nuclear weapons located in Britain?
Yes;No;Don't Know
- (2) As far as you know does Britain produce warheads for nuclear weapons? Yes;No;Don't Know
- (3) Have you heard or read about the 'cruise missile'?
Yes;No;Don't Know
- (4) How much would you say you knew about nuclear weapons capability to destroy? A Great amount;A Fair Amount;Not Much;Nothing;Don't Know

The second set of questions were an attempt to discover how important an issue the topic of nuclear weapons was seen to be:

- (5) Do you consider the nuclear weapons controversy to be of importance to you? Yes;No;Don't Know
- (6) How often do you consider the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out in which nuclear weapons will be used? Frequently;Sometimes;Never; Don't Know

- (7) Have you in the past month discussed or thought about the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out? Yes;No;Don't Know

* (8) How worried are you about the chances of a nuclear war breaking out in which nuclear weapons will be used? Very Worried; Fairly Worried; Not Worried At All; Don't Know

(9) Are you more worried now than a few years ago about the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out? Yes; No; Don't Know

While question (5) directly taps salience, questions (6), (7) and (8) contain indicators of salience asking how much my sample considered; discussed or thought about; and worried about the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out. Question (9) was aimed at gaining some idea as to whether or not the recorded salience had been a long held view.

The last set of questions ask about attitudes towards some of the controversial issues relating to nuclear weapons.

* (10) Do you think the fact that Britain itself has nuclear weapons increases or decreases the risk of nuclear attack on this country? Increases; Decreases; No Effect; Don't Know

* (11) Do you think that anti-nuclear demonstrations contribute to peace or do you think they make peace more difficult to achieve? Contribute; Make More Difficult; Make No Difference; Don't Know

(12) If the public strongly disagreed with nuclear weapons do you think they could put a stop to the arms race? Yes; No; Don't Know

These questions far from exhaust the issues relating to nuclear weapons but were of interest to me.

I thought it would be better to gain some background information on the students themselves. I therefore included in the questionnaire a set of 4 questions to determine the age (2 categories: 17-20 and 21 or over); sex; faculty of study and year of study.

A pilot study was carried out on a number of friends, not all students, but no alteration was made.

(2) Sample

Although I could have used a sample of the general public the questionnaire was given to students studying Sociology 1 at Edinburgh University. This choice had several advantages: Firstly, many people stereotype students, sociology students in particular, as being more 'radical' than members of the general public. This, then, would perhaps be highlighted by a greater knowledge about ^{and} salience of nuclear weapons. As well as more 'radical' attitudes towards nuclear weapons. This hypothesis could be tested given that I had included in my questionnaire questions which had already been asked of the general public. Secondly, working within the sociology department reduced administrative difficulties: I would have had to get written permission to carry out a survey of students from a different department. Thirdly, it enabled me to obtain a high return on the questionnaires in a short space of time (see below). Finally, Sociology 1 was chosen, in particular, since it had the largest number of students studying Sociology.

I could have posted the questionnaires or allowed tutors to hand them out in tutorials. This would have meant that the students would have meant that the students would have to complete them in their own time and return them to me. However, it was the final term and if I was to conduct interviews before the students went on vacation it was important to gain as high a response rate as possible in a short space of time. I then decided to ask the lecturers concerned if I could hand out the questionnaires during lecture time and wait until they had completed them. (This involved more physical labour given that Sociology 1 was divided into 3 'options' classes but the pressure of time was more important). Permission was granted and I obtained a 66% response rate in one week.

Sociology 1 is made up of 122 students: 38 males and 84 females (31% and 69% respectively). As already mentioned a 66% response rate was obtained (28% males and 72% females).

(3) The Results

To recap, my questionnaire was constructed with several purposes in mind.. Firstly, to overcome some of the difficulties in tapping attitudes. Secondly, to discover whether the respondents held a degree of knowledge on the topic of nuclear weapons; to discover how important the topic of nuclear weapons was to the respondents; to gain some insight into the attitudes held by the respondents. Thirdly, to provide background information to a more detailed investigation using interviews.. Finally, to provide a comparison between my student sample and a sample of the general public..

Given that I had asked the sex of the respondents I decided to see if any gender difference was apparent.. The results of the questionnaire did highlight a gender difference and a discussion of this is included.

(a) Knowledge

Despite the difficulties with some of the questions, the questions in this section produce results which indicate that the topic of nuclear weapons was not alien to my sample..

Not surprisingly, all the respondents knew that nuclear weapons were located in Britain and had heard or read about the 'cruise missile'. The questions relating to the production and destructiveness of nuclear weapons did not produce such homogenous results.. Just over half of the respondents (54%) knew that Britain did produce warheads for nuclear weapons (see Table 1).. I now feel, however, that the use of the word 'warhead' was perhaps misleading. A high percentage of the total (35%) answered 'don't know'. It is not clear whether they do not know what a 'warhead' is, or whether they do not know if Britain produces warheads for nuclear weapons. I fell into the same trap that opinion pollsters very often do, given my assumption that respondents know what

Warhead was before asking whether or not Britain produced them.. This problem, unfortunately, was not spotted during the pilot study.

Table (1)

As far as you know does Britain produce warheads for nuclear weapons?

	Total Response	Males	Females
Yes	54%	50%	55%
No	11%	2%	7%
Don't Know	35%	27%	38%

Returning to responses to the questionnaire, more than threequarters (77%) said they knew at least a fair amount about nuclear weapons capability to destroy (see Table 2)

How much would you say you knew about nuclear weapons in terms of their capability to destroy?

	Total Response	Males	Females
A Great Amount	16%	2%	14%
A Fair Amount	61%	69%	58%
Not Much	22%	9%	26%
Nothing	1%	-	2%

The figures from Tables (1) and (2) can be seen to highlight a gender difference in responses to 2 of the questions in this section. It appears that 5% more females knew that Britain does produce warheads for nuclear weapons (see Table 1). These figures must, however, be treated with caution..

Firstly the sample is small. If one more male had responded 'yes' to this question the difference between male and female responses would be reduced to 1%. The difference between males and females answering 'no' and 'don't know' is of course more substantial. I do however, feel that it would be interesting to discover whether or not a similar gender difference would be apparent in a larger sample.

The sample size is not the only reason for caution. Given my scepticism about this question, just discussed, it could be that although more females may know that Britain produces warheads for nuclear weapons less females know what a warhead is: 39% of females responded 'don't know' compared to 27% of males. The responses to the question on nuclear weapons capability to destroy indicate that women know less about this (see Table 2). I would like to suggest, however, that this could be more to do with the images men and women hold of themselves. Women are perhaps less likely to admit to how much they actually know or more specifically, given the range of possible answers opt for a less positive one. It is not, then, clear whether women in fact know less about nuclear weapons capability to destroy or nuclear weapons in general.

Comparison with Gallup's Poll:

As discussed earlier 100% of my sample knew nuclear weapons were located in Britain. The figures from Table (3), however, show a difference of 37% between my sample and a sample of the public.

Table (3)
As far as you know do we have nuclear weapons located in Britain?

	Gallup Nov '79	Gallup Jan '80	Student Survey May '84
Yes	59%	63%	100%
No	13%	9%	-
Don't Know	28%	28%	-

It is now realised that the difference these figures suggest, may not be a product of the samples themselves. I am comparing my survey results which were carried out in 1984 to a survey carried out in 1980. The increase in knowledge could have more to do with the increased publicity nuclear weapons have had since 1980 with particular reference to the decisions to introduce 'cruise missiles' and trident at the end of 1979 and the beginning of 1980 respectively. Unfortunately this was not realised in time to obtain a more recent, public poll of this question. If this had been possible I would have been able to come to some conclusion as to whether or not my student sample was in fact more knowledgeable.

(b) Salience

The respondents to the general question which asked whether the respondents thought the nuclear weapons controversy was important to them, showed this to be the case for the vast majority (90%). The responses to the other 3 questions in this section suggest a high degree of concern about the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out, hence the importance of the topic of nuclear weapons.

Although from Table (4) we can see that just over a quarter (29%) of the respondents said they frequently considered the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out only 3% said they had never considered this possibility. Almost threequarters (74%) had however, discussed or thought about the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out in the past month (see Table 5). This and the fact that a high degree of worry was recorded (see Table 6) does seem to indicate that the topic of nuclear weapons is seen to be important.

Table (4)
How often do you consider the possibility of a war breaking out in which nuclear weapons will be used?

	Total	Males	Females
Frequently	29%	7%	12%
Sometimes	67%	27%	8%
Never	3%	-	3%
Don't Know	1%	-	2%

Table(5)
Have you in the past month discussed or thought about the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out?

	Total	Males	Females
Yes	74%	72%	74%
No	21%	23%	21%
Don't Know	5%	5%	5%

Table 6
How worried are you about the chances of a nuclear war breaking out in which nuclear weapons will be used?

	Total	Males	Females
Very Worried	42%	27%	48%
Fairly Worried	41%	45%	40%
Not Worried At All	13%	23%	9%
Don't Know	4%	5%	3%

The final question in this section was aimed at discovering whether or not the concern about the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out was a long held view. 70% of the respondents in fact said they were more worried now than a few years ago (see Table 7). Although no real explanation of this can be given at present, this change does not appear to be due to the fact that the students had got older, in the sense that the majority of the students would have been about 16 years old a few years ago and would perhaps be more aware about current affairs in general now. If this was the case one would expect the 10 respondents who were not more worried now, than a few years ago to be older. However, out of the 10, 5 belonged to the 17-21 age category while the other 5 belonged to the 21 and over category.

Table 7
Are you more worried now than a few years ago about the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out?

	Total	Males	Females
Yes	70%	55%	76%
No	25%	45%	17%
Don't Know	5%	-	7%

As with the knowledge questions, the questions in this section produced results with interesting gender differences. Almost threequarters (73%) of males said they frequently considered the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out compared to only 12% of females (see Table 4). This however does not necessarily mean that females are less concerned about this prospect. It may again be due to the fact that females opted for a lesser choice of answer; given that the majority of females responded 'sometimes'. This could also account for the relatively low total response to 'frequently' just discussed.

Given the above hypothesis it is interesting to note that when asked about how worried respondents were about the prospect of nuclear war, more females than males said they were 'very worried' (see Table 6). Almost half the female respondents said they were 'very worried' compared to only 27% of males. Likewise only 9% of females said they were not worried at all compared to 23% of males. This difference is not surprising given the ways in which gender differences are socially produced: females are brought up to believe that they are more caring given their ability to produce children, while men are seen to be aggressive. The difference may be a reflection of this, therefore does not contradict the above hypothesis that in general females perhaps opt for the lesser choice of possible answers, when responding to questionnaire items.

It is interesting to note, however, that more females than males said they were more worried now than a few years ago (see Table 6)

Comparison with Gallups Poll

The comparison question in this section of the questionnaire also shows a difference between my sample and Gallups sample of the public. My sample appears to be more worried about the prospect of a nuclear war breaking out in that the vast majority of my sample (80%) said they were either 'fairly' or 'very worried' compared to just over half (56%) of Gallups (see Table 8). With the comparative knowledge question, however, it was not clear whether the difference was due to the sample characteristics or an increased awareness in general over time. This comparison does reduce the time factor from 4 to 1 year but could again account for some of the difference. I would like to suggest however that a large proportion of that difference is due to the sample characteristics themselves and that my sample are in fact more worried than a sample of the public.

Table (8)
How worried are you about the chances of a nuclear war breaking out in which nuclear weapons will be used?

	Gallup April '83	Student Survey May '84
Very Worried	25%	42%
Fairly Worried	31%	41%
Not Worried At All	42%	13%
Don't Know	2%	4%

(c) Attitude

The responses from this section suggests that the majority of my sample reject the idea that Britain's nuclear weapons reduce the risk of attack

on this country but are not particularly optimistic about the effectiveness of demonstrations or public opinion to bring peace.

From Table 9 we can see that almost two-thirds (66%) of the respondents thought that the presence of nuclear weapons in Britain increased the chances of nuclear attack on this country while only 13% believed that presence to decrease the risk of attack.

Table (9)

Do you think the fact that Britain itself has nuclear weapons increases or decreases the risk of attack on this country?

	Total Response	Males	Females
Increases	64%	55%	67%
Decreases	13%	23%	9%
No Effect	15%	14%	16%
Don't Know	8%	8%	8%

With respect to anti-nuclear demonstrations slightly less than half the respondents (43%) thought that demonstrations did contribute to peace (see Table 10). However only 12% believed them to be detrimental.

Table (10)

Do you think that anti-nuclear demonstrations contribute to peace or do you think they make peace more difficult to achieve?

	Total Response	Males	Females
Contribute	48%	27%	55%
Make More Difficult	12%	23%	9%
Make No Difference	28%	32%	26%
Don't Know	12%	18%	10%

The final question in this section also indicates a high degree of pessimism. Less than half the respondents (43%) felt that if the public strongly disagreed with nuclear weapons they could do something to put a stop to the arms race while 39% thought they could not (see Table 11). (The ineffectiveness of action is discussed in the interview section). I now feel, however, that this question was perhaps too broad. I refer to 'the public' and it is not clear what public I am referring to: the British public or the world's public. I also assume that respondents know what the 'arms race' is. Again this highlights the difficulties in tapping attitudes from simple questions and why I felt it necessary to carry out a more detailed investigation of attitudes towards nuclear weapons using interviews.

Table (11)

If the public strongly disagreed with nuclear weapons do you think they could do anything to put a stop to the arms race?

	Total Response	Males	Females
Yes	43%	41%	43%
No	39%	41%	36%
Don't Know	19%	18%	21%

These questions also show a gender difference in responses. More females appear to reject the idea that Britain's nuclear weapons reduce the risk of attack on this country: two-thirds of the female respondents thought that Britain's nuclear weapons increased the risk of attack compared to just over half of the males (see Table 9). Females also appear to be less pessimistic about the effectiveness of anti-nuclear demonstrations to bring peace: over half of the female respondents (55%) said they thought that anti-

nuclear demonstrations contributed to peace compared to just over a quarter of the males (see Table 10).. Likewise only 9% of females thought that they made peace more difficult to achieve, compared to 23% of males.

Comparison with Gallup's Poll

A difference between the responses of my sample and that of Gallups is again noticeable. As discussed above two-thirds of my sample do not believe Britain's nuclear weapons reduce the risk of attack on this country. In comparison, only one-third of Gallups sample of the public responded in this way (see Table 12). Likewise almost half of my sample thought that anti-nuclear demonstrations did contribute to peace compared to a quarter of Gallups (see Table 13).

Although those differences could again be affected by time, this seems unlikely given that no real change in the attitudes of the general public is recorded between 1980 and 1983 to the first of these comparative questions (see Table 12). I would therefore, like to suggest that my sample is not typical of the general public and are perhaps more radical. This is in accordance with the stereotypical image of sociology students. Table (12)

Do you think the fact that Britain itself has nuclear weapons increases or decreases the risk of attack on this country?

	Gallup Sep '80	Gallup Nov '81	Gallup Nov '82	Gallup Feb '83	Student Sample May '84
Increases:	26%	31%	28%	35%	64%
Decreases	37%	36%	41%	41%	1%
No Effect	27%	22%	24%	17%	15%
Don't Know	10%	10%	7%	7%	8%

Table (13)

Do you think that anti-nuclear demonstrations contribute to peace or do you think they make peace more difficult to achieve?

	Gallup April '83	Student Survey May '84
Contribute	24%	48%
Make More Difficult	45%	12%
Make No Difference	25%	28%
Don't Know	6%	12%

(d) Conclusion

Although the questions themselves are not without fault, this survey has shown that the general topic of nuclear weapons was not alien to my sample given the degree of knowledge reported. The recorded concern about the prospect of nuclear war also suggests that this topic is seen to be important to the majority of the students. A gender difference was also recorded, however, it is not clear whether women know more or less about the topic of nuclear weapons or whether women are in fact more or less concerned about this topic. This and my proposition that females perhaps respond less positively to questions which have varying degrees of possible answers deserves further research.

My attempt to compare my sample with a sample of the general public was limited given the number of questions and the effect change over time could have had on the recorded difference. However I would like to suggest that Sociology students as a sample are not typical of the general public and are perhaps more 'radical'. This is in accordance with the stereotypical image

of sociology students.

This survey, however, was a preliminary study before carrying out a more detailed investigation of attitudes towards nuclear weapons.

PART TWO : THE INTERVIEWS.

(1) Introduction to the Interviews

Given my scepticism about the ability of simple questions to tap attitudes which could be extremely controversial and contradictory, I thought that informal interviews would be a better method of tapping attitudes towards nuclear weapons. An interview schedule was then constructed to tap further attitudes towards nuclear weapons. Not all aspects of the nuclear weapons debate could be discussed during short interview and therefore deal with some which I saw to be the major issues.. Those discussed were the likelihood of nuclear war; the chances of surviving a nuclear war; the chances of surviving a nuclear war; Britains nuclear defence policy, that is the need for a deterrent and the cost of nuclear weapons..

I was also interested in whether or not attitudes towards nuclear weapons and in particular attitudes towards Britains nuclear defence policy was translated into action. I was not able, however, to ask about all the possible types of action which could be taken and in my own work only asked whether or not the interviewees had taken part in anti-nuclear demonstrations and whether they were members of C.N.D. In the belief that not all those in favour of unilateral disarmament would have taken either of these forms of action I wanted to discover why this was the case. I therefore asked why these types of action were not taken as well as asking about the effectiveness of these types of action in general.

Since these types of action are feared towards unilateral as well as multilateral nuclear disarmament it was anticipated that some of the interviewees would participate in such action for this reason. However

The main reason, given by those who were in favour of unilateral disarmament, as well as general criticisms about attempts to bring disarmament was the ineffectiveness of such action.

The effectiveness of action taken in support of beliefs was seen to be one of the main reasons given by 'Nuclear Freeze Activists' and 'Survivalists' in a study carried out in America by Tyler and McGraw in 1982 (Tyler and McGraw 1983). In their study they asked about 4 psychological factors which they saw to be important before action was taken in support of attitudes. They however neglected to consider other types of factors, including external influences on individual decisions.. Pursuit of a sociological perspective makes this neglect unacceptable.

Sociology tells us that there is no such thing as 'human nature'. We learn to become members of a particular society and the most important forces involved are social not biological or instinctual. Individuals are constantly learning about ways of thinking and behaving in ways considered appropriate by those members of society with whom we come into contact. In the interviews I then attempted to discover to what extent close family and friends might have had on the interviewees attitudes towards nuclear weapons and in particular decisions to take action. This is a difficult task given that much of the influence of family and friends on individuals is unintended and informal, as a product of social interaction between people in extremely close physical and emotional proximity to one another, rather than deliberate instruction. I therefore used as indicators of the influence

family and friends might have had by asking whether or not the interviewees had disagreed with anyone about the issues discussed. I also asked whether any of their friends or relatives had taken either of the forms of action discussed. The interviews did show that some of the interviewees decisions to take or not to take action was probably affected by friends and relatives. The general picture, however, was that there was no overall conformity of the attitudes held by the interviewees and their close friends and relatives.

The media also constitute potentially strategic socialisation agencies.. Exposure to and consumption of media products has become an integral part of daily life for the majority in Western societies, occupying a considerable proportion of leisure time.. For example television is the principal activity of most adults and children (Bilton et al 1981).. More specifically then the media represent an institutionalised channel for the distribution of social knowledge and hence a potentially powerful instrument of social control. The popular image of the media especially television and press is that the media simply reflects the ideas existing among the mass of the population.. It can and has been argued, however, that the media does not simply reflect the social world but structures it for us.. It was for these reasons that I attempted to discover the extent to which the media might have influenced the attitudes of the interviewees. I therefore asked where information on nuclear weapons and related issues was obtained as well as asking about the ways in which the media reports demonstrations. Although the majority of information was obtained from television and newspapers most of the interviews expressed an awareness that the media, very often, did not give fair coverage

to demonstrations and demonstrators..

It was not clear from the interviews, however, the extent to which the media actually influenced the 'type of people' who demonstrated and were members of G.N.D. did not have their criticism on actual experience and was perhaps more a product of the ways in which demonstrators and G.N.D. members are stereotyped in the media. One woman also pointed out that her attitudes were perhaps a product of Western 'propaganda'.

The media, family and friends, of course, are not the only potential influences but it was not possible to explore all or, even many of these in the present study.

Throughout the interviews I again attempted to tap the salience of the attitudes expressed. I used indicators similar to those employed in the questionnaire.. Although a detailed discussion of this is not presented in the present report the attitudes disclosed did not appear to be on the spot decisions but were views which had been held for some time before the interviews..

The interviews produced a vast amount of data and I was unfortunately unable to include all of this in the present report. The transcriptions can be made available to any interested party..

(2) The Sample

To ease the pressures of time it was decided to ask the respondents to the questionnaire whether they agreed to a short informal interview.. If this was the case, they were to give their name, address and telephone number at the end of the questionnaire.. Thirty three respondents agreed to take part in an interview: 12 males and 21 females.. I then randomly selected 6 males and 6 females..

It would have been better to chose a sample of those 33 students who were more knowledgeable about and salient of the topic of nuclear weapons. This was not possible since I did not have time to tabulate the responses before conducting the interviews: it was getting nearer to the end of term and I wanted to complete my interviews before the students went on vacation. This however was not of major importance given that knowledge about and salience of, each issue discussed in the interviews was tapped.

Tables were constructed to see how representative, those who agreed to be interviewed and those actually interviewed were of the total responses.. (see Appendix 1)

The interviews lasted about 20 minutes and were tape recorded. Ten of the interviews were carried out in the Sociology Department while the other 2 were carried out in the homes of interviewees..

(3) The Results

(a) Attitudes Towards The Likelihood of Nuclear War
Out of the 12 interviewees, 9 thought that a nuclear war was likely. Of those 9, 5 believed that a nuclear war would break out during their own lifetime. The other 3 interviewees, however did not think that a nuclear war would ever break out. When asked if they thought this a possibility during their own lifetime, the following responses were given.

Susan
Well if there is going to be a nuclear war it is likely that it is going to be in my lifetime. But at the same time I don't think that there will be.. I don't know I'm not sure about that.

Bruce
I don't think there is going to be a nuclear war.. I've got my fingers crossed.

Paul
I don't think its ever likely to be honest..

Paul is the only one who seems sure about this, while the other 2 appear to base their negative response on hope rather than a genuine belief that a nuclear war will never break out.. This is highlighted by the fact that both said they were worried about nuclear war breaking out and could envisage the potential causes of conflict.

Susan
(....) there have been one or 2 scares in the past, when you get politically unstable characters like General Gaddafi; or someone like that (....) which I think is the most frightening thing in my opinion.

Bruce
(....) I don't think that there's going to be a nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States. The only thing I'm worried about is the Middle East. Especially the Gulf where they have nuclear weapons but not the conscience to use them.

Even Paul who appeared to be more sure about the unlikelihood of a nuclear war breaking out was worried about the Middle East..

Paul (.....) the major worry for me at the moment is the Middle East, that has the potential for starting something.

These apparent contradictions highlight my point that attitudes can very often be inaccurately reflected by simple questions.

(b) Attitudes Towards Survivability

All the interviewees were pessimistic about the effects of a nuclear war.

All believed that there would be few survivors.

(When asked: How many people would survive a nuclear war)

Aileen Only a small percentage.

Mary It wouldn't be very many

Susan The consequences would be absolutely disastrous (.....) there's not much hope.

Donald Not many, a few million..

Henry Very few in Britain

Paul (.....) At the end of the day I don't think anyone would survive.

Those that would survive were said to be those living in remote places or an elite section of the population who would be protected in 'bunkers'.

Amy (.....) there are jungles in wherever that nobody's going to bother bombing.

Henry (.....) people living in remoter places might survive.

Bruce (.....) the government will have bunkers for the so-called elite.

Tony (.....) Basically, officials, administrators and people like that (would survive).. I think the vast vast majority would be killed.

Three interviewees, however, said they were not worried about these consequences. All giving reasons for this.

Elaine Not really cos I don't think it'll happen in my lifetime..

Mark I was (worried) at a time when I was a bit frightened but we have not reached the stage where humanity deserves that we're not due for extinction yet.

Paul No because its out of our hands (.....) what's the point of worrying about things I can't control (.....)

Although the chances of a limited war or a winnable war were not asked about directly these possibilities appear to be ruled out given the above attitudes towards the consequences of a nuclear war. This was also highlighted when discussing whether or not any country had a lead in nuclear weapons. Half of the interviewees said that it didn't make any difference given that it didn't make any difference given that there were enough to blow the world up several times over.

Donald I don't think that really matters if that's true about having enough to blow the world up 4 or 5 times.

Mark I laugh at this, the Russians say the Americans have so much and it doesn't really matter they've got enough to kill each other.

Bruce We are at the stage now where the United States and the Soviet Union could blow the world up about 8 times over so numbers doesn't really come into it. It's the effect that counts.

Paul (.....) but numbers doesn't matter the sheer power of the things makes numbers an absolutely stupid waste of time (.....)

Tony I think its irrelevant.. It's just statistics. If they can destroy the world a 100 times over then what's the point.

Susan (....) We have so much nuclear weapons that could destroy the world so many times over it's a bit silly to talk about how many weapons each side has..

Out of the other 6 interviewees 3 said that America was in the lead; 2 said they didn't know and the other thought 'if not equally balanced there's not such a big deficit in Russia's favour'..

(c) Attitudes Towards Britains Nuclear Defence Policy

Tony and Paul, regardless of their views on the likelihood of nuclear war and the consequences of such a war, were the only interviewees who agreed with Britains nuclear defence policy. This in Paul's case was related to the fact that Britain would 'lay itself open to attack'; in particular Russian invasion.

Paul (....) I see the Russian's as a threat cause their whole way of life is aimed at spreading communism throughout the world and how they spread it, they have no qualms. I mean you've only got to look at Afghanistan

Tony on the other hand did not see Russia to be a particular threat to Britain and was concerned about Britain having an independent defence policy in case the Americans pulled out.

Tony Its (Britain's Nuclear Weapons Policy) an insurance, that they're (Government) not going to be subject to blackmail from an outside power, insurance against attack or if the Americans pull out.

The other 10, however, rejected the Government's position that Britain's nuclear weapons acted as a deterrent..

For example

Aileen Well it's not going to matter whether or not Britain has nuclear weapons..

Elaine No I don't agree with Thatcher cos she's just a maniac anyway. So it's just an excuse to have them really.

Amy I think they're possibly right but on the other hand there's plenty of countries, Scandinavian countries which don't have nuclear weapons.

Mark Its (Britain's nuclear weapons policy) not a deterrent, there's not much use in having it.

(d) Attitudes Towards The Cost of Nuclear Weapons

Not surprisingly everyone interviewed thought that the amount of money spent on nuclear weapons was ridiculous. However, Tony and Paul were able to justify the cost given their support for Britains nuclear defence policy.

Paul (....) I know it's downright bloody disgusting I mean, ideally in an ideal world the whole thing is wrong and we should stop it immediately but its not an ideal world

Tony I believe the money for this country to have an independent deterrent to be well spent but for the 2 superpowers its pointless spending all that money. Its obscene really (....) people are starving and they're spending billions of pounds on nuclear weapons.

Two of the 10 who did not think the amount of money spent was justifiable gave examples of how the money could be better spent.

Mary (....) I think they (the Government) could be doing spending it on other things like hospitals, they're running down the National Health Service. I think they should be building hospitals and making sure there's enough Doctors and Nurses.

Bruce (....) Why not put it (the money) into job creation.. Why not keep Bathgate open.. They make out that nuclear weapons are the needed thing, the necessity and you can close down industry.

(e) Attitudes Towards Anti-Nuclear Demonstrations and C.N.D.

Out of the 10 interviewees who supported unilateral disarmament only 2 were members of C.N.D. one of which was the only person who had been on a demonstration in support of nuclear-disarmament.. The other 8 had considered taking these forms of action but only one had not rejected this consideration and in fact said she would probably join C.N.D. in the near future. The major criticisms of anti-nuclear demonstrations and C.N.D. was the ineffectiveness of such action. Two main, related, reasons were given as to why these types of action would not bring about nuclear disarmament: the Government 'won't listen' and the 'types of people' who participated in such action.

The other 2 had not considered these types of action since they were seen to support unilateral disarmament, something which both disagreed with. One of them, however, was not critical of demonstrations and C.N.D. and thought they helped achieve nuclear disarmament.

The Government 'won't listen'

When asked whether anti-nuclear demonstrations help achieve nuclear disarmament the following responses were given:

Mary (....) I just don't think the Government listens. It's not bothered.

Elaine (....) It (demonstrating) just makes the Government or whoever knows that there are a lot of people against it but I don't think it will bring peace.

Henry Not with the present Government.

Paul

(....) The Greenham Common women are doing a damned good job (....) but at the end of the day they've failed. The Governments taken no notice of them Unless you can orchestrate a large block (in Parliament) then demonstrations are, well, vocal but that's about it really.

Bruce

With this Government there's no chance demonstrations aren't gonna make any difference to Government policy.

Bruce continued to explain that the West German demonstrations were more

wide-spread than those in Britain and even if they didn't have much effect.

The only action he believed made the Government take notice was the Toxteth and Brixton riots:

Bruce

The only thing that has done anything to change Government policy is the Toxteth and Brixton riots (....) but when it gets to the stage of setting fire to cars to make Governments take notice there is no hope for peaceful demonstrations..

Mary also gave an example of other failed demonstrations:

Mary

There used to be ones at Aldermaston in the fifties and they just sort of faded away.

Respondents cynicism concerning how likely it was that a Government would take steps towards nuclear disarmament was more general than the remarks quoted. They not only saw the Government as unresponsive to demonstrations but as generally unlikely to carry out a policy of nuclear disarmament. This was highlighted when discussing the Labour parties nuclear disarmament policy at the last general election. Nobody had a strong feeling that this would have been carried out fully, if at all.

Mary

(....) I'd say they'd get rid of cruise but I don't know about Polaris cos that's been with us for years and years and they never said they'd get rid of them 10 years ago so why this big thing about it now. I mean they didn't stop it coming in, in the first place.

Elaine They probably would have got rid of a few to start with, then it would dwindle away and faded into obscurity and nobody would hear much more.

Amy Probably not, being cynical, cos most Governments don't carry out their policies (....)

Rhona I don't think they would have carried it out fully but I think they would have made a start.

Donald Well in 1974 they put in their manifesto that they renounced any intention of moving into a new generation of nuclear weapons and then they still updated Polaris secretly without telling anybody..

Mark I just think there would be too many difficulties, the army and that have too much power, and probably be able to wreck the Government.

Bruce (....) I can't just see then throwing away nuclear weapons. They might have fudged around the issue (....)

Paul (....) I don't think they would have carried it through (....)

'Types of People

The other reason for the ineffectiveness of these forms of action was that the type of people who went on demonstrations or were in C.N.D. were not the type of people who would be listened to and often gave the 'cause' a bad name.

(When discussing demonstrations)

Elaine (....) At times they (demonstrators) can just go too far and do more harm than good.

Susan (....) If it was a bunch of doctors and lawyers and all sorts of very highly respected people and politicians protesting than people would take notice of them. As it is its sort of barber jackets, Green wellies type of people and people tend to ridicule that and I don't think that'll get anywhere.

Similar criticisms were made about the people in C.N.D.:

Elaine (....) if you could get away from the fanatical people who don't do the cause much good. Cos a lot of them are quite mad.

It can be seen then, that these interviewees did not wish to associate themselves with those 'types of people'. The 'types of people' who were considered to be effective were doctors, lawyers, politicians, public and religious figures..

Another reason for not taking action was the feeling that one individual will not make much difference:

Mary (....) one person's not going to make much difference (....)

Bruce I suppose you could argue that it would be one more member but one more member isn't going to make much difference.

The other reasons for not taking these forms of action were 'never get round to it' or 'having other commitments'.

(f) Influence of Friends and Relatives

It was only directly indicated twice, during the interviews that a friend had in actual fact influenced individual decisions on action:

(When asked why not a member of C.N.D.)

Susan (....) I know actually a friend of mine who did join C.N.D. and she left again because of the things she was asked to do as a member She was asked to go round campaigning and knocking on peoples doors

(When asked if any of friends members of C.N.D)

Rhona (....) Well its actually through my friend that I've decided I might join.

Rhona's father, however, was also a member of C.N.D. and could also have influenced that decision. Likewise the only interviewee who had been on a demonstration was accompanied by her brothers and sisters. She and her sister were also members of C.N.D. It seems likely that her sister did

influence decisions to take these actions given that during a discussion about political activity the following was said:

Aileen (....) my sister was in Militant but she isn't any more she discussed how she was getting disillusioned with it and I think that made me decide not to join although I did go to one of the meetings myself..

With respect to attitudes in general influences of friends and parents was reported.

(When discussing membership of political parties)

Susan (....) I think I'm probably a product of my parents actually because they're very sort of liberal people (....)

(When discussing consequences of nuclear war)

Mark (....) a friend I spoke to was saying that nobody would risk the consequences yet cos humanity isn't ready for extinction and I thought that was right.

These examples show that individuals do not use the 'facts' of nuclear weapons in a social vacuum. Individuals do not decide in isolation whether or not to take action or what their views are on certain issues. Often these decisions are taken in conjunction with relations to significant others.

However, my interviews also showed that in many instances my interviewees held opinions which were contrary to many of the people whom they had close contact.. This point was illustrated by the incidence of disagreement; some of the respondents had disagreed with both friend and parents about certain issues. The typical picture then did not suggest conformity of opinions between self, close friends and parents although at times friends and parents did have a direct impact on opinions..

(E) Influence of the Media

Although my interviewees consumption of media products, more specifically television and newspapers, was low the majority of the interviewees obtained their knowledge about nuclear weapons from these. This and the fact that their was an awareness of media bias would suggest that the media did not play a major role in influencing attitudes towards nuclear weapons. However it seems likely that with respect to attitudes towards demonstrations, in particular the 'types of people' taking part in such action, the media could have influenced one interviewee in particular..

When asked whether or not the media reported demonstrations accurately the following responses were given:

Aileen (....) just their bias in favour of not showing a lot of conflict because it causes instability.

Mary I suppose it is a bit biased the way they do it but its just sort of what everyone expects. They like to see people shouting and things like that.

Elaine (....) well bias usually towards the Government and not, they don't really give a true report on why people are demonstrating. Usually quite fairly, thats looking at it with a very critical eye because I tend to be very wary of what the media says. If there's a big demonstration it usually gets fair coverage. Its quite fairly done.

Susan I think actually reporters are quite sympathetic towards nuclear people cos in a way its against Government policy and maybe that creates a more exciting story for them (....) I don't know exactly if thats true or not.

Rhona They do it very fairly really.

Mark They either sort of ignore you (demonstrations) or write the same thing over and over again.. You're really trying to get publicity and that you don't get.

Bruce

If there's any trouble at a demonstration its front page news and centre page spread and a couple of weeks ago there was something like 10,000 on the march to Aldermaston and there was a tiny little bit, 2 inches on page 2 tucked away beside 'the weather' (....) it doesn't get press coverage at all if it is peaceful.

One of the criticisms Susan had about anti-nuclear demonstrations was the 'type of people' engaged in that action. She also believes, however, that the media are 'sympathetic towards nuclear people'. I would like to suggest then that her image of the people participating in anti-nuclear demonstrations is one which is portrayed in the media and is not based on real experience. This is not made explicit but highlights the influence the media can have on attitudes.

What is more conclusive however is the references made, by one of the interviewees 'propaganda'.

For example

(When asked if any one country in lead with nuclear weapons)

Mary I suppose you automatically, well propaganda you sort of assume that it must be Russia cos you don't know whats going on there

(When asked if would like to know more about C.N.D.)

Mary I suppose so, I think you sort of get the image that they're all sort of young hippies on drugs, just dropouts sort of thing.

This would suggest that her attitudes towards nuclear weapons were in fact influenced by the popular images portrayed in the media.. She is however now aware that these images may not in fact be accurate.

(h) Conclusion

The interviews have shown that attitudes towards nuclear weapons can be controversial and contradictory and that this may not have been recorded when using questionnaire items with set answers to gather information. That is not to say that the interview method is not without faults. One problem encountered was analysing the material obtained. As already mentioned the results just discussed do not include all the material obtained but highlights the importance of taking into account how attitudes are shaped in particular how decisions to take action in support of attitudes can be affected by external factors.

The aims of the interviews were perhaps too numerous but the report provides many areas for further detailed investigation..

OVERALL CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the problems of tapping attitudes which could be extremely controversial and contradictory and that great care should be taken when attempting to tap such attitudes. My own research was an attempt to overcome some of these problems and although my methods are not without fault some of the findings are interesting and deserve further research.

The results of the general survey carried out using questionnaires has shown that my student sample held a fair degree of knowledge about nuclear weapons and saw this topic to be of importance to them. A gender difference in responses was recorded but it is not clear from the questionnaire itself whether or not the women in the sample actually know more or less about the topic of nuclear weapons or whether this topic is seen to be more or less important to them. Some of the difference may be attributed to the fact that women perhaps respond less positively to questions which have varying degrees of possible answers. The sample however, is small and to come to any conclusions about gender differences further research should be carried out.

The results of the questionnaire also suggest that my student sample are not typical of a sample of the general public and are perhaps more radical. I would like to point out however that the results should be treated with caution given the limited amount of questions and the problems encountered with some of the questions themselves. If the pressures of time and resources had not been so great the scope of the questionnaire would have been extended.

The interviews show that although ten out of twelve interviewees were against the governments nuclear defence policy only one had in fact been on a demonstration in support of nuclear disarmament and she and one other were the only members of C.N.D. The main reason given for non-participation in these types of action was the ineffectiveness of such action. It was said that the 'government won't listen' or the 'types of people' participating did the cause no good. The other reasons given were 'laziness' or 'never get round to it'. Two people also felt that they were taking other action in the form of religious or political beliefs and activities. It must be stressed, however that one must take into account how attitudes are shaped and in particular how decisions to take action in support of attitudes can be affected by external factors. In the present study I only looked at the effect of the media, family and friends on the interviewees, although in many cases the interviewees did hold attitudes which were contradictory to those held by their friends and relatives in some cases these can be seen to have had an effect on attitudes and decisions to take the types of action discussed.

The scope of the interviews was perhaps too broad. This became apparent when processing the interview transcriptions. However the present report can be seen as a preliminary investigation and provides many areas for further research.

APPENDIX A

10/5/94

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I am a junior honours sociology student at Edinburgh University and I have to submit a project as part of my final assessment. I have chosen the topic of nuclear weapons and am carrying out my own research. I would be grateful if you could assist me by answering the following questions. The information you give will be strictly confidential and will not be used for anything other than my project. Thank you.

Heather Dover

Age: 17-20 21 or over

Sex: Male Female

Faculty: Soc.Sci Arts Sci Other

Year of Study: 1 Other

1. As far as you know, do we have any nuclear weapons located in Britain

Yes

No

Don't know

2. As far as you know does Britain produce warheads for nuclear weapons?

Yes

No

Don't know

3. Have you heard or read about the 'Cruise Missile'?

Yes

No

4. How much would you say you knew about nuclear weapons in terms of their capability to destroy?

a great amount

a fair amount

not much

nothing

don't know

5. Do you consider the nuclear weapons controversy to be of any importance to you?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

6. How often do you consider the possibility of a war breaking out in which nuclear weapons will be used?

- frequently
- sometimes
- never
- don't know

7. Have you in the past month discussed or thought about the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

8. How worried are you about the chances of a war breaking out in which nuclear bombs will be used?

- very worried
- fairly worried
- not worried at all
- don't know

9. Are you more worried now than a few years ago about the possibility of nuclear war breaking out?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

10. Do you think the fact that Britain itself has nuclear weapons increases or decreases the risk of a nuclear attack on this country?

- Increases
- Decreases
- No effect
- Don't know

11. Do you think that anti-nuclear demonstrations contribute to peace or do you think that they make peace more difficult to achieve?

- contribute
- make more difficult
- make no difference
- don't know

12. If the public strongly disagreed with nuclear weapons do you think they could do anything to put a stop to the arms race?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

I shall be carrying out interviews on the same subject to gain more research material for my project. If you agree to a short informal interview please fill in your name, address and, where possible, telephone number below. The information you give me will again be strictly confidential and no names will be disclosed in my project or to any person other than myself. Thank you for your time and co-operation.

Name.....

Address.....

Tel. No.....