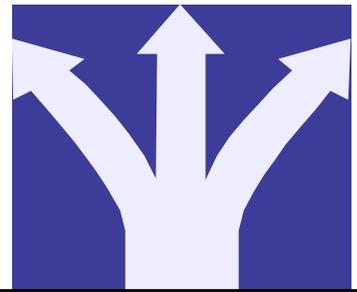


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Aggression, Violence, and the Media

- ◆ Is it a problem if your 13-year-old watches too many violent movies from the action section of Blockbuster?
- ◆ Is it worrisome if a child in your life only enjoys video games where the object is to kill and maim as many enemy soldiers as possible?

Mainstream articles regularly appear on each side of this debate. What does the research on these issues conclude?

Media Violence= Health Dangers

Experts in the field of violence in the media have determined that exposure to aggression and violence in popular culture may be dangerous. Violent and aggressive subject matter clearly impacts people, and can significantly change the nature of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. As far back as 1972, the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior reported a clear link between exposure to media violence and increases in aggressive and violent behavior in children and adolescents.

Other Questions

Since the 1970s, researchers have expanded their inquiries. What are the short-term and long-term effects for children, adolescents and adults? What differential effects exist for specific types of media, including television, movies, radio and video games? These findings have more recently been presented within a societal context, taking into account the complex interplay of factors that can cause aggressive attitudes and behavior. New research looks to brain imaging and other neurological techniques as physiological proof of the effects of media violence on aggression.

Defining Terms

Common definitions have emerged for various aspects

of aggression. Violence includes a range of behaviors such as pushing, assault, rape, and murder. Within the construct of aggression, investigators have identified and examined a number of components: aggressive behavior (including violence), aggressive cognition (thinking), aggressive affect, (emotion), physiological arousal, and prosocial/ helping behavior.

Two researchers in the field, Anderson and Bushman (2001) came up with their General Aggression Model (GAM) as a framework to understand the effects of exposure to violent and aggressive media. The GAM contains the processes involved in the learning, rehearsal and reinforcement of aggression-related thoughts, feelings, perceptions and expectations, and in the creation of physiological arousal. Using this model they found that the association between the effect of violent video games on aggression is compelling.

Factors Associated with Aggressive Behavior

Newer research reveals that adults and children are impacted differently. Long-term effects are more likely to occur in children. The size of the effect is related to media realism, justification of aggressive behavior, and amount of positive rewards for violent behavior. The child's identification with the aggressive actor is another factor; ironically, action heroes are more damaging models of violent behavior than are villains. Observational learning appears to be the major psychological process resulting in aggressive behavior.

Surgeon General Report

Many clinicians, researchers, and policy makers consider exposure to aggressive and violent media a public health issue. Another Surgeon General paper Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General (2001) presents an overview of many possible causes of youth violence, with media violence viewed as one influence. The summary of this

(Continued)

report presents again strong evidence of the impact of violent media on young people's aggressive behavior, particularly in the short-term. The causal link between media exposure of this kind and specific violence was considered to be weaker. The report calls for more research to include variables such as: amount of exposure, mediums of exposure (TV, movies, video games, etc) length of exposure, age, child characteristics, and setting.

Public Health Efforts

The weight of all this evidence has been the impetus for health organizations and agencies to create public health strategies for violence prevention, specifically targeting media influences, including the Internet. Evaluation of a number of these strategies by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) are underway to develop best practice recommendations.

In 2005, the American Psychological Association did its part by adopting a resolution recommending several strategies to prevent and monitor the effects of violent video games and other interactive media on children and adolescents:

- ◆ Create a media literacy campaign to teach young people how to choose media that is not dangerous;
- ◆ Encourage the entertainment industry to connect violent behavior with negative consequences in media they develop;
- ◆ Enact an accurate rating system as to content of interactive media;
- ◆ Encourage creators of violent interactive media (such as video games) to address the possibility of increased aggression in viewers, which may be more pronounced than the impact of violent television and movies, because of the interactive component.

Personal Interventions

Psychologist Dr. William Pollack has written about how parents as well as other concerned adults can provide guidance and support to children and adolescents about violence in different media that they may be exposed to in different areas of their lives. While he was focused on interventions with boys, his recommendations can be used for girls as well.

For example he suggests that parents ask themselves a number of questions as they decide on reasonable guidelines for their child's involvement with media:

1. What do you feel is a reasonable amount of time for your children to watch television, play videos, be on the internet every day?
2. Are there guidelines you'd like to see observed having to do with the amount they watch? (For example, not watching or participating until homework is done or not watching after 10pm on weekdays.)
3. What are the "rules" as to the specific content they are allowed to have access to (For example, not allowed to use MySpace or watch certain television programs).

Dr. Pollack also suggests that parents watch the television programs their children enjoy viewing. Alternate between watching programs their children have chosen and programs you as a parent has chosen. He suggests that parents ask questions and not be dismissive of their child's responses: *Why do the characters act the way they do? Would he/she ever act that way? What might the consequences of their actions be.*

If parents take a more proactive approach they may be able to guide their children in being more critical consumers of the media they are exposed to in their lives.

(This article was written with the assistance of Alice Miele, LICSW)

Anger Management Program Satisfaction Results

We have recently updated our numbers regarding client satisfaction with the anger management program. A questionnaire is given to individuals when they have completed our 12-week anger management group program. They are asked a number of questions about how the program has been helpful with regard to their anger problems and to what degree they felt that they were helped. We are pleased to report that:

- ⇒ **98.4%** of individuals who completed the 12-week anger management group were either helped a "great deal" or "some" to address their anger problems.
- ⇒ **100%** of individuals who completed the 12-week group were either "very satisfied" or "mostly satisfied" with the knowledge, personal manner and skills of the group leader.

Further information about the results can be found by going to the Outlook Associates website and clicking the page on the anger management program and then clicking *Anger Management Program Satisfaction*.

Quote to Remember:

If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.

Chinese Proverb