

Effect of violence in the media

Sociology, Violence



Decades of psychological research confirms that mediaviolence can increase aggression. Virtually since the dawn of television, parents, teachers, legislators, and mental health professionals have been concerned about the content of television programs and its impact, particularly on children. Of special concern has been the portrayal of violence, especially given psychologist Albert Bandura's work on social learning and the tendency of children to imitate what they see.

As a result of 15 years of consistently disturbing findings about the violent content of children's programs, the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior was formed in 1969 to assess the impact of violence on the attitudes, values and behavior of viewers. The resulting Surgeon General's report and a follow-up report in 1982 by the National Institute of Mental Health identify these major effects of seeing violence on television:

Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others.
Children may be more fearful of the world around them
Children may be more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others
Research by psychologists L. Rowell Huesmann, Leonard Eron and others found that children who watched many hours of violence on television when they were in elementary school tended to also show a higher level of aggressive behavior when they became teenagers. By observing these young people into adulthood, Dr. Huesmann and Dr. Eron found that the ones who had watched a lot of TV violence when they were eight years old were more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for criminal acts as adults.

Interestingly, being aggressive as a child did not predict watching more violent TV as a teenager, suggesting that TV watching may more often be a cause rather than a consequence of aggressive behavior. Violent video games are a more recent phenomenon; therefore there is less research on their effects. However, research by psychologist Craig A. Anderson and others shows that playing violent video games can increase a person's aggressive thoughts, feelings and behavior both in laboratory settings and in actual life. In fact, a study by Dr. Anderson in 2000 suggests that violent video games may be more harmful than violent television and movies because they are interactive, very engrossing and require the player to identify with the aggressor.

Dr. Anderson and other researchers are also looking into how violent music lyrics affect children and adults. In a 2003 study involving college students, Anderson found that songs with violent lyrics increased aggression related thoughts and emotions and this effect was directly related to the violent content of the lyrics. " One major conclusion from this and other research on violent entertainment media is that content matters," says Anderson. This message is important for all consumers, but especially for parents of children and adolescents. " A typical child in the U. S. watches 28 hours of TV weekly, seeing as many as 8, 000 murders by the time he or she finishes elementary school at age 11, and worse, the killers are depicted as getting away with the murders 75% of the time while showing no remorse or accountability. Such TV violence socialization may make children immune to brutality and aggression, while others become fearful of living in such a dangerous society.

With the research clearly showing that watching violent TV programs can lead to aggressive behavior, The American Psychological Association passed a resolution in 1985 informing broadcasters and the public of the potential dangers that viewing violence on television can have for children. In 1992, the APA's Task Force on Television and Society published a report that further confirmed the link between TV violence and aggression. In 1990, Congress passed the Children's Television Act (CTA), which outlined new regulations for commercial broadcast stations.

As a result of the CTA (which was updated in 1996), stations are required to air at least three hours of programming " that furthers the education and informational needs of children 16 years and under in any respect, including children's intellectual/cognitive or social/emotional needs. " These programs must be labeled with the designation " E/I" and have clearly stated, written educational objectives. These educational programs generally contain both direct and indirect messages fostering cooperation and compassion rather than aggression. Parents now have positive options when it comes to choosing TV programs for their children.

Research on television and violence has also led to the development of content-based rating systems that allow parents to make judgments about the programs' content before allowing their children to watch a show. Besides warning of the harmful effects of violent media content, psychology has a strong history of bringing out the best in television. For example, Daniel R. Anderson, a professor of psychology at the University of

Massachusetts, has worked with producers of children's programs like Sesame Street and Captain Kangaroo to help TV shows educate children.