

Media violence turning good kids bad: fact or fiction?



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Media Violence Turning Good Kids Bad: Fact or Fiction? Cultivation as defined by George Gerbner, "is the building and maintenance of stable images of life in society," (Electronic Storyteller). It is this idea of cultivation that researchers are becoming more and more concerned with when it comes to media violence and the effect it is having on our culture; is it possible that video games, TV shows, and expensively produced films are influencing our behaviors and decisions? This has been a topic of debate since program broadcasting began in 1946. There have been millions of dollars donated and thousands of research studies and experiments conducted to see if this cultivation theory of Gerbner's was, in fact, true.

Is Gerbner accurate in saying that through the images and ideas we express in our media we have cultivated a society of insecurity and fear; aggression and dependence? What is media violence really doing to our society? Media violence goes beyond the common stereotype of being limited to prime time shows and 'R' rated films. No, media violence can be found everywhere from food advertisements to children's cartoons. However, many believe that the type of violence found in these commercials or cartoons is just for fun and kids know that it is only for entertainment and is pretend; is that really the case, however? In a study conducted by Kendeou and colleagues, it was discovered that young children focus most of their viewing attention on things they can relate to in the real world, in other words, they focus solely on the violence and forget about the character intention or internal plot of the show (Cartoon Violence). In addition, Gerbner stated that most children's cartoons displayed over 30 episodes of violent acts per hour of television watched (The Killing Screens). In another study performed by Matthews and

colleagues, it was concluded that heavy exposure to intense media violence by non-aggressive children lowered neural activity in the frontal cortex of the brain in a majority of the subjects (Cartoon Violence). The frontal cortex is the region of the brain in which attention and self-control are controlled.

So before you turn on Cartoon Network and leave your child, remember that he or she is more likely to see five times more violence in those so-called “harmless” programs than he or she would in a prime time show. The influence of media violence is neither limited to cartoons nor is its effects only displayed in children. In an article published in the Harvard Mental Health Letter, a research study was performed to understand the effects of media violence on young adults and whether viewing media violence alone or in groups affected cognitive and social behavior. The data collected from this research is very interesting, it is found that viewing of violent media and images not only provoked aggressive thoughts, but also led to high blood pressure and increase heart rate in young adults exposed to heavy amounts of violent films or images. In addition, it was also found that the viewing of violent images or media in a group setting created a stronger sense of aggression and stirred feelings of irritation. Also, it was also concluded that people with a highly aggressive personalities were more likely to be stimulated or influenced by media violence.

In another study, subjects broke into groups one group was exposed to violent films continuously for four days and then were randomly provoked or confronted by the researchers with violent behavior or demeaning comments. The other group did not view violent films, but were still provoked in the same manner and the third group was exposed to violent
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behavior but not provoked. The researchers found that the group who viewed the violent films but were not provoked displayed the same physiological and psychological effects as the groups who were physically provoked. This study indicated that media violence creates unconscious feelings of aggression and irritation (Harvard Mental Health Letter).

In his video documentary, *The Electronic Storyteller*, Gerbner explains that the idea of cultivation is especially dangerous in those who are either a heavy television viewer, or are less educated. This theory was put to the test in a study performed by Seymour Feshbach of the University of California and June Tangney of George Mason University when they studied the effects of media violence on children of various ages, IQ levels, gender, and race. What they found did in fact support Gerbner's theory of cultivation. Feshbach and Tangney recorded that children with a lower IQ were easily influenced and persuaded by the images and ideas they were exposed to, in comparison to children who scored higher on IQ exams. In addition, it was also found that gender also plays a very important factor in the effects of media violence; males displayed much more aggressive, antisocial, and decrease in cognitive ability after heavy exposure to media violence than females. In addition, it was also found that all groups displayed a higher aggressive rate after viewing violence than before except the group of African-American males.

Researchers, however, noted that black males displayed a very sharp decrease in school work and social behavior after heavy exposure; this maybe due to a different form of aggression: lack of self-acceptance or awareness, and feeling of inferiority due to the image given to minority
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males in the majority of prime time shows, and violent films (Television Viewing and Aggression). In addition to Feshbach and Tangney's research, John Murray of Kansas State University stated that he discovered in one of his experiments that children who are exposed to violent images or violence in TV, movies, or games stimulate the same part of their brain as an individual who is actually involved in a real life trauma or violent situation (Young People and Media Violence). Jeffrey Johnson of Columbia University of Physicians and Surgeons concluded after a 17 year long study that children who regularly watch over three hours of TV per day in their early teen years were more than four times likely to act out violently than kids of the same age who watched one hour or less of TV per day (Young People and Media Violence). The epic battle of whether or not media violence really affects people, as I mentioned before, has been going on since the first broadcasting in 1946. Then in 1972, the United States Surgeon General released a warning, "... televised violence, indeed, does have adverse effect on certain members of our society.

" In addition, more than six major organizations including the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry have openly stated that significant data and research verifies a strong correlation between exposure to media violence and aggressive behavior in certain demographics (Effects of Media Violence). These ideas were further supported by a study performed Robin Nabi and Karyn Riddle to study the effect of media violence on perception of violence and personality traits such as trait anxiety, sensation seeking, and psychoticism. What Nabi and Riddle

concluded was that individuals who were uneducated or living in poverty were easily influenced by media violence and had developed a perception of fear and insecurity regarding the real world. This type of fear furthermore creates a feeling of need and dependence upon people or organizations of power and authority; easily controlled or influenced (Media and Cultivation).

So is the violence that is consuming our world the effect of what our society is seeing and hearing in the media? Based on the previously stated studies and research, I strongly believe that media plays a big role in violence in our society and culture. With the stimulation of aggressive thoughts and a decrease in neural action of the frontal cortex, it seems obvious that children and young adults alike, are not just viewing these shows or images as entertainment; it is having an unconscious effect on how they think and behave. In addition, it was also found that media violence had a physiological effect via heart rate and blood pressure, so it is not just a psychological issue we need to worry about; people are getting stressed and/or excited watching these shows, which in turn is having a direct correlation with their social and cognitive behaviors. However, I do believe that media violence only plays a hand in part of the violence in our society; I strongly feel that as individuals we need to educate ourselves and our younger generations about what is right and wrong; real and entertainment.

In almost every study data proved that those who were too young to understand, uneducated, or had a significantly low IQ were easily influenced by the violence they were exposed to; we have to step in our children's lives and teach them about what they are watching. In a culture where TV has become the modern storyteller, we must understand what we are subjecting <https://assignbuster.com/media-violence-turning-good-kids-bad-fact-or-fiction/>

our children to, and realize the damage it is doing to them and our society. TV has a strong influence on what we believe and how we behave; it has become the measuring tool for what we base our culture upon. With that said, violence in today's society is a result of what we are being exposed to in the images and shows in our media, however, we have control over how big of an effect we let it have upon ourselves and the society in which we live. References Anderson, Craig A. , and Brad J.

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