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TV Violence

A major topic of conversation nowadays is whether or not voilence on

television causes children to bahave more violently. Shortly after I began to

research this topic, I realized that it is not a clear cut issue. Evidence can

be easily found to support each position. In the following essay I will examine

the different positions that can ba taken on this topic and try ro form my own

view on the affect violent TV has on chidren.

The first position I will examine is the one in which it is believed

that, without a doubt, violent TV increases the likelyhood that a child will

behave in a violent manner. This stands is examined in the Maclean's article

intitled," Power to the people. Television's teen Rangers Kick up a storm. The

author of this article, Particia Chrisholm, explains a heated debate over the

affects that the kids show " The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" has on children.

According to this article, the " hemeted lycra covered Rangers" acts as a bad

influence on children. Many parents have come to believe that the childen try

to act like the kids hreo's. A cocerned mother, Kathryn Flannery went so far as

to petition the CRTC. The CRTC responded by saying that " the show is avassively

to violent."(Chrisholm 1994 p. 52) As a result of the petiton, many stations

voluntarily refused to air the controversial kids show. This case shows the

power that people can have over the CRTC. Unfortunately, the parents were not

able to entirely shield their children from the Power Rangers TV show. Many US

broadcasters, available on cable, continued to air the show.

Another study that supports this belief that TV violence causes children

to act more violently is an experiment conducted by Leonard Eron and his

collegues. In these studies, Leonard Eron and his collegues studied childern

for a number of years and measuread peer ratings obtained from each child's

classmates. By doing this, they could see if violent TV changed the attitudes

of the children. In the end, it was concluded that violent TV significantly

affected the way in which the children behaved.

The other position that can be taken when discussing this issue is one

in which people believe that violent TV does not affect the behavior of children.

In the Canadian Forum article, " TV and The Child Savers. Bad Habits and The

Boob Tube" this position is discussed. The author, Thelma McCormack discusses

the goals of the action group that refers to themselves as the Child Savers.

According to this article, the Child Savers believe that " Programs which contain

gratitous violence will not be shown on television."(McCormack 1993. P20) They

basically want to force the CRTC to wake up and take action. They are also

considering making an ammendment to the Criminal Code. The author of this

article seems to be more interested with discrediting the Child Savers action

group. McCormack quotes George Gerbner as saying " in reality, there is less

violence on TV now than in the past.(McCormack 1993 p. 20) Gerbner belongs to the

Unniversity of Pensylvannia's Annemburg School Of Communications and has been

studying TV for more than a decade. Gerbner believes that there is less

tolerance for any type of violence. This article discusses rhe situation in

which the American Psychologists decided to change their initial view on TV

violence negatively affecting the behavior of children. They now believe that

thier view was based on laboratory results. They also realize that the long

term affects have not yet been determined. This article has vast importance

because it shows that what is expertly reported is not necessarily true. If the

American pychologists can make a mistake anyone can. The American Pychologists

have not entirely dismissed their view, they have merely realized that they did

not have enough concrete evidence to suoourt their view. This Canadian Forum

article also realizes that most studies on violence and TV isolate TV as the

only contributor to the childrend violent behavior. They forget about the other

aspects of the subjects lives. They might have allready been prone to act

violently. This article states that " the result is that our studies tell us

little violence or the culture of childhood."(McCormack 1993 p. 22) The author

believes that we need to understand how children react and respond to TV before

we can make judgements on it's affects.

An experiment that supports this view that TV violence does not promote

violence in children is a group of studies conducted by Seymour Feshbach and

Robert D Singer. In their book, " Telivision and Aggression" they state that the

issue " arrises from a concern over an important contemporary social

issue"(Feshbach & Singer 1987). This group of studies looked at the way violent

TV affects adolescent and preadolescent boys. Feshbach and Singer believed this

particular group had a natural tendancy to watch more violent TV programs.

Although this book was published in 1977, the trends it discusses are still

apparent today. Rescent studies have come to the same conclusion. This study

involved boys from private schools and residencies. The subjects were allowed

to watch a minimum of six hours of TV a week. They could watch as much as they

wanted, but the shows were specified. Seymour and Feshbach used personality

tests and attitude tests to record the boys behavior. More emphasis is placed

on was placed on on the behavior ratings. In the end, the results favoured the

view that violent TV does not cause childen to bahave more violently. Seymour

and Feshbach stated that " We feel reasonably confident, however, that the

violent program content which the boys observed is not a significant cause of

their aggression."(Seymour & Feshbach 1977) This experiment is somewhat

resticted because it focused on a subset of the population. The experimenters

would have liked to have involved girls and other ages of boys, but they felt

that these particular subjects were a natural control group. They also chose

them because they lived relatively close to where they lived.

The view that volent TV does not promote violence in children is also

supported in the book " Mass Media and Society" written by Dennis Howitt and Guy

Cumberbatch. Howitt and Cumberbatch looked at social psychology, experimental

psychology, sociology and phychiatry to come their belief that " mass media do

not have any significant effect on the level of violence in society."( Howitt

and Cumberbatch 1975 p. VII) Howitt and Cumberbatch looked at experiments,

reports and studies and tried to figure out the meaning of each. They concluded

that many studies do not specify reasons for why they believe violence makes

violent children. Th at the children imitated the suicides they saw.

The results from all these studies are incredibly difficult to disect

and understand. This is because, contrary to popular belief, whether or not

violence on TV causes children to act violent is not a clear cut issue. It is

practically impossible to entirely believe in one position. Even the studies

that conclude that violence on TV does not cause violence in children do not

ignore that there may be some type of relationship. In the book intitled

" Television and Aggression" one of the very last things mentioned is that there

may be some sort of correlation between the two variables. It seems like no one

is completely certain what view is correct.

A major issue that is raised when trying to understand all these

experiments is the existance of experimenter bias. It seems quite obvious that

most of the experimenters involved had results that they expected to and wanted

to find. This may or may not have affected the final results. It seems quite

possible that the goals of the experimenter may have interfered with the results.

Of course an experimenter does not want to prove himself wrong. For this

reason, some of these experiments may have had inconclusive results. This

situation should be taken into account when any results are discussed.

Rescently, new ways of looking at TV violence has been discussed. One

of these is tha catharsis thery. This theory involves the belief that watching

violence actually purges us of our violient urges. It is actually a healthy

process. This theory is very hard to comprehend, but in time it may actually

prove correct. No one knows what the beliefs will be in the future.

It is very hard to conclude that TV violence does affect the violent

behavior of children because the long term results have not yet been identified.

It is not until rescenly that experiments focused solely around this issue. An

experiment that involved this is one discussed in our text book " Communication

in Canadian Society" In this a study is condicted on three towms and the affect

that TV had in each. In the end it seemed like TV did not play all that much a

role in the violent actions made by children. More studies that discuss the

long term affects need to be studied.

After researching this paper I realized that I cannot come to a

conclusion on whether not I believe violent TV makes violent chilren. The

results that havr been found are entirily too confusinf for me to be able to do

this. I cannot decide which side makes more sense. I would like to be able to

believe that violence causes violence, for the simple fact that it seems like

the easy way out, but I can't do this. Each position has very valid points and

can be proven easily. What I am sure of is that there is some type of link

between the two variables. It seems like everyone agreed on this. It is going

yo take a lot more experienced, based on the long term affests to decide whicd

position is correct. Even then, not everyone will believe in the same position.

This is an entirely impossible task.