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TV Violence

A major topic of conversation nowadays is whether or not violence on television causes children to behave 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 be taken on this topic and try to form my own view on the affect violent TV has on children.

The first position I will examine is the one in which it is believed that, without a doubt, violent TV increases the likelihood 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, Patricia 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 children try

to act like the kids heroes. A concerned mother, Kathryn Flannery went so far as

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

violent."(Christholm 1994 p. 52) As a result of the petition, 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

colleagues. In these studies, Leonard Eron and his colleagues studied children

for a number of years and measured 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

gratuitous 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 Annenburg School Of Communications and has been

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studying TV for more than a decade. Gerbner believes that there is less tolerance for any type of violence. This article discusses the 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 their view was based on laboratory results. They also realize that the long term effects 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 psychologists can make a mistake anyone can. The American Psychologists

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

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

article also realizes that most studies on violence and TV isolate TV as the only contributor to the children's violent behavior. They forget about the other

aspects of the subjects' lives. They might have already 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, " Television and Aggression" they state that the

issue " arises 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 children to behave 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 restricted 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.

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The view that violent 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 psychiatry to come to 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. That the children imitated the suicides they saw.

The results from all these studies are incredibly difficult to dissect 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

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of these is the catharsis theory. This theory involves the belief that watching violence actually purges us of our violent 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 recently 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 conducted on three towns 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 or not I believe violent TV makes violent children. The results that have been found are entirely too confusing 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 to take a lot more experienced, based on the long term effects to decide which position is correct. Even then, not everyone will believe in the same position. This is an entirely impossible task.