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ABSTRACT
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the characteristics of those children also need to be examined.
Factors such as age, intellectual level, identification with
television personalities, the total amount of television watched, and
the belief that television is realistic affect the influences of
television violence on behavior. Intervention techniques such as
child and parent training have proven successful in diminishing the
negative of television violence. (Contains 30 references.)
(Author/RS)

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Television Violence and Behavior:

The Effects of Television Violence on Children

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Abstract

Television violence and the impact it has on children is a growing concern in the world today. Although research indicates that violence on television triggers aggressive behavior in children, the characteristics of those children also need to be examined. Factors such as age, intellectual level, identification with television personalities, the total amount of television watched, and the belief that television is realistic effects the influences of television violence on behavior.

Television Violence and Behavior:

The Effects of Television Violence on Children

The overall pattern of research findings indicates a positive association between television violence and aggressive behavior. Television violence is one of the things that may lead to aggressive, antisocial, or criminal behavior (Smith, 1993). Several characteristics of viewers have been shown to effect the influence of television violence on behavior. Aggressive behavior is related to the total amount of television watched, not only to the amount of violent television watched (Smith, 1993). Other factors such as age, identification with television personalities, and intellectual achievement influence the effect of television violence on behavior. A critical factor is the extent to which television is perceived as real or make-believe (Feshbach, 1983). This study will help isolate the characteristics of children whose aggressive behavior is triggered by television violence.

The public is enormously interested in the effects of television on children (Neuman, 1984; Phillips, 1986; Rosenthal, 1986). By the time children graduate

from high school, they have spent more time viewing
television than any other activity with the exception
of sleep (Christo, 1988).   Therefore, there is a need
to examine the negative impacts of television, and to
find the common characteristics of the children who are
effected negatively by television.

History of Research

The first congressional hearing on television
programming took place in 1952, when the House
Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce
investigated television entertainment to ascertain if
it was excessively violent and sexually provocative and
if it had pernicious effects (National Institute of
Mental Health [NIMH], 1982).   Violence in the media has
increased since 1952 and continues to increase
(Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1984).

During the period from 1952 to 1967, analyses of
programs found a great deal of violence on them.   One
analysis in 1954 reported an average of eleven threats
or acts of violence per hour (Pearl, 1984).   Later
analysis confirmed that violence on television was
increasing and that it was increasing more rapidly on

programs with large numbers of children viewers (NIMH, 1982).

The initial research efforts of numerous investigators led to the Surgeon General's research program on television and social behavior in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Surgeon General's conclusion that television violence does have an adverse effect on certain members of our society stimulated a torrent of research, congressional hearings, and expressions of public concern (Huesmann & Malamuth, 1986).

The late 1970s and early 1980s also saw the emergence of cable television and the video cassette as major media forces. Many teenagers and even preadolescents became frequent viewers of scenes that graphically couple sex and violence (Huesmann & Malamuth, 1986). A new research focus developed on the effects of such media stimuli.

In 1982, the National Institute of Mental Health commissioned a comprehensive review of the recent scientific literature on television and social behavior as a 10-year follow-up to the Surgeon General's report. This study indicted television violence in even

stronger terms than did the earlier report.   The

National Association for the Education of Young

Children (NAEYC) 1990 reported that air time for war

cartoons increased from 1.5 hours per week in 1982 to

43 hours per week in 1986.   In 1980, children's

programs featured 18.6 violent acts per hour, that

number rose to about 26.4 violent acts each hour

(NAEYC, 1990).

Smith (1993) concluded that by the time children

leave elementary school, they will have witnessed at

least 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other

assorted acts of violence.   It seems fair to say that

the majority of researchers in the area are now

convinced that excessive violence in the media does

exist.

<p style="text-align:center">Results of Research</p>

Most of the scientific evidence reveals a

relationship between television and aggressive

behavior.   Television violence is one of the things

that may lead to aggressive behavior, however, it

usually works in conjunction with other factors.

Characteristics of Viewers

   Intellectual Achievement.

Children of lower intellectual achievement
generally watch more television, watch more violent
television, believe violent television reflects real
life, and behave more aggressively than children of
higher intellectual achievement (Huesmann, 1986).
Singer and Singer (1986) found that children who show
greater verbal intelligence and greater overall mental
abilities watch less television and are less
aggressive. Brighter children are less prone to naive
imitation of television material and adopt a more
discriminating approach to it (Singer & Singer, 1986).
Poor intellectual achievement contributes to the
association between violence viewing and aggression,
but it does not fully account for it.

   Age.

A relationship between television violence and
aggression has been observed in children as young as
three (Singer & Singer, 1986). Longitudinal data
suggests that the relationship is much more consistent
and substantial for children in middle childhood than
at earlier ages (Smith, 1993).

Adults can be affected as well as children.
Aggression in early adulthood is related to the amount
of violence watched in middle childhood (Eron,
Huesmann, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1972). The great
majority of studies have shown that media depictions of
violence can have a socially adverse impact on the
behavior of young adults and these people are often
capable of doing more harm than children (Berkowitz,
1986). Turner, Hesse, and Peterson-Lewis (1986)
demonstrated that the level of exposure to television
violence in the third grade is associated with
increased rates of aggressive behavior when viewers
achieve adulthood.

Amount of Television Watched.

Aggressive behavior is related to the total amount
of television watched, not only to the amount of
violent television watched. Aggressive behavior can be
stimulated also by frenetic, hectic programming that
creates a high level of arousal in children (Wright &
Huston, 1983). Huesman (1986) found that more
aggressive children generally watch more television and
prefer more violent television.

People who view the greatest amounts of television

have been reported to exhibit the highest levels of
perceived reality resulting in high levels of
aggression (Elliott & Slater, 1980). As a result of
repeated exposure to media violence, people may
eventually perceive violence as an effective means of
solving personal or social problems, and accept
violence as a way of life (Rule & Ferguson, 1986).

Realistic Violence Vs. Fictional Violence

Significant relationships have been found between
children's belief that television violence is
realistic, their aggressive behavior, and the amount of
violence they watch (Huesmann, 1986). According to
Atkin (1983), adolescent aggression increased with
perceived reality of television violence.

The findings that real violence elicits more
arousal than fictitious violence suggest that it is
probably processed as a more intensive informational
input. Realistic violence may therefore be more likely
to occupy the observer's attention, and thus to elicit
associated aggression-related thoughts, emotions, and
action tendencies (Geen & Thomas, 1986).

For a script to be encoded and maintained through
rehearsal, it must be real to the viewer (Huesmann,

1986).   A violent action that a child perceives to be

totally unrealistic is unlikely to receive the

attention necessary to be encoded and maintained.   The

relationship between violence viewing and aggression is

exacerbated for children who believe the violence is

representative of real life (Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz,

& Walder, 1984).

Perceptions of reality are a matter of individual

interpretation, and message effects must be measured

instead of assuming that certain message cues will make

the reality obvious to all viewers (Potter, 1988).

Potter (1988) suggested that perceived reality should

be treated as an attitude that varies across people

rather than as a characteristic of media content.

Identification With Television Watched

Huesmann, Lagerspetz, and Eron (1984) found that

identification with a character substantially increases

the likelihood that the character's aggressive behavior

will be modeled.   Aggressive behaviors are likely to be

modeled if cues in the portrayal of violence on

television resemble those likely to be encountered in

real life.   Television violence-induced aggression

tends to be directed most strongly against those

persons associated in the viewers' mind with the victim

of the observed violence (Berkowitz & Geen, 1967).

Therefore, if a victim on television has the same name

or characteristics as someone towards whom the viewer

holds animosity, violence is likely to result.

Interventions

The most obvious place to intervene in order to

diminish the effect of television violence would be at

the programming level. However, the television

networks have never conceded that there is a relation

between violence displayed on the screen and the

viewer's subsequent aggressive behavior (Chaffee, et

al., 1984; Wurtzel & Lometti, 1984a; Wurtzel & Lometti,

1984b).

Since parents in our society bear the major

responsibility for the training, education, and

socialization of their children, it would be logical

for attempts at intervention to start with them. Eron

(1986) concluded that if parents could be informed as

to the negative effect that the viewing of violence on

television can have on their children, and at the same

time be taught how to control and shape their

children's television habits, that would be a major

contribution.

Much stronger evidence for the weakening of the
link between television violence and aggressive
behavior as the result of an intervention was through
child training. Eron (1986) found that the effect of
television violence could be reduced by changing the
children's attitudes, both about the influence of
television and about the appropriateness of aggressive
behavior.

Summary

The overall pattern of research findings indicate
a positive association between television violence and
aggressive behavior. Theorists generally agree that
serious antisocial aggression is determined by multiple
factors (Peterson & Peters, 1983). Factors such as
intellectual achievements, age, amount of television
watched, whether the violence is perceived as real or
make-believe, and whether the viewer identifies with
the character must converge for aggression to emerge.
Intervention techniques such as child and parent
training have proven successful in diminishing the
negative of television violence.

Hypotheses

Based upon this literature review, I present the following hypotheses:

H^1:   Television violence triggers aggressive behavior in children as moderated by the following characteristics: age, intellectual achievement, amount of television viewed, and perceived reality of television.

H^2:   The effects of television violence in triggering aggressive behavior in children can be diminished through parent and child training.

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