

Is Media Responsible For Aggression and Violence – A Theoretical Perspective?

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ABSTRACT

Life is not a simple thing as it is used to be in the past few centuries. Media is playing an important role in the system of present life. Although media has turned the world into a global village but the violence has increased dramatically over the years. As such people blame media just because movies contain these themes and concepts. People assume that society not only get the ideas from the movies they watch, but copy them in general behavior which takes the shape of aggression among public in general and among youth in particular. In this paper an attempt has been made to partially highlight on the most important role of media that is leading to aggression and violence. The more aggressive behavior people see, the more it becomes an acceptable way to settle conflicts. Most studies reveal that people who attempt some violent behavior, appears to have some psychological disorder. However, how much impact can the media really have and in what direction and nature need to be examined empirically.

Key words: Aggression, Violence, Media

INTRODUCTION

As we progress into 21st century, life is not a simple thing. People had less demands and less requirements in the past as compare to today. Today people know about their rights and they are also very well aware of their requirements and demands. Media is playing an important role in the systems of present life. In the world of today, media has become almost as necessary as food and clothing. It is true that media is playing an outstanding role in strengthening the society. Its duty is to inform, educate and entertain the people. They help us to know what's going on around the world. It is partly because of them that awareness is spreading in the society. It is the media who shape our lives. Our lives would be incomplete without the media. In this paper I partially highlight the most important role of media that is leading to aggression and violence.

In general "media" refers to various means of communication. For example, television, computer, radio, and the newspaper etc. are different types of media. The 'media' refers to the different channels we use to communicate information in everybody's world. Media is the plural of medium (of communication), and the main media are television, film, advertisement, newspaper, magazines, radio, music, internet etc.

Aggression and Violence

Aggression is defined as behavior aimed at causing harm or pain, psychological harm, or personal injury or physical distraction. An important aspect of aggressive behavior is the intention underlying the actor's behavior. Not all behaviors resulting in harm are considered aggression. For example, a doctor who makes an injection that harms people, but who did so with the intent of preventing the further spread of illness, is not considered to have committed an aggressive act. Defining aggression is not an easy task because it can vary depending on the culture, individual, or situation. "Aggression is an intentional behavior that is done to cause harm or pain to another person." Aggression can come in many forms. It can be verbal, physical, successful or unsuccessful. According to Shaffer (2002), "an aggressive act is a form of behavior designed to harm or injure a living being." Aggression can be broken down into two different types.

Hostile Aggression – When an act of aggression comes from feeling of anger and is intended to inflict pain, then it is called hostile aggression. An example of this would be someone stabbing a knife into another person's leg. Obviously, this is an act that is made with the intention of causing pain.

Instrumental Aggression – Any other act of aggression that isn't intended to cause pain is called instrumental aggression. This might be older brother wrestling with the younger sibling. The aggression is in good fun and not necessarily to inflict serious pain.

Aggression usually comes from anger, and the motives for violent acts of anger come from the feeling a person has. These feelings have been put in to five different groups that Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) believe explain act of conflict and aggression.

- Superiority- The belief that one is superior to another.
- Injustice- The belief that one has a legitimate reason to be aggressive against others.
- Vulnerability- The belief that one could be aggressively annihilated at the hands of another.
- Distrust- The belief that another will not honor their promises or commitments.
- Hopelessness- The belief that one cannot improve their condition.

The first four beliefs lead to aggression, while the last one leads to self-destruction. Aggression refers to any behavior that is hostile, destructive, and/or violent. Generally, aggressive behavior has the potential to inflict injury or damage to the target person or object. Example of aggressive behavior includes physical assault, throwing objects, property destruction, self-harming behaviors and verbal threats. Aggression can have mental aspects, as well. A number of psychiatric disorders are associated with an elevated risk of aggressive behavior, including post traumatic stress disorder, conduct disorder, anti social personality disorder, border line personality disorder and attention deficit/hyper activity disorder.

The term violence is used to describe animal and human behavior that threatens to cause or causes severe harm to a target. Most animal studies emphasize variations in aggression and use the concept of extreme aggression (rather than violence) to denote the most serious and injurious behavior. In studying human behavior, violence and aggression are frequently used as synonyms, with violence marked by an extra degree of excessiveness. In some cases, the choice of term "aggression" or "violence" is a matter of preference or convention. For example, aggression is most commonly used to describe young children's behavior while such behavior in adolescents is called youth violence.

There are many psychological causes for violence and aggression:

- Prolonged frustration or disruption of goal seeking.
- Stress (inability to deliver what is demanded).
- Socially learned behavior.
- Combination of all environmental forces that invite violent response.
- Effect of rewards that come attached to violent behavior.
- Combination of all inhibitory forces, both internal and external.
- Strength of an immediate situation with respect to triggering the offender.
- Lack of alternative non violent responses available to the offender.
- Cultural inversion or reaction formula; i.e. "since I can't be on the football team I will pick fights with the football players."

Media is the mirror of the society. People want to remain informed about everything and news, which is taking place anywhere in the world. The world has become a global village and this is because of media only. Now people living in different countries know everything about the people of other countries sitting at home with the help of media. Education has become very easy and understandable with the help of audio and video media because children understand things through them quite easily. The main advantage of media is current information, which is available round the clock and people remain informed about important news through radio, television and other sources. So we can say the role media is very important in our life. But sometimes it gives bad impact on the society. It spread violence and aggression in society especially among youth. There are many studies which give support to this thought.

Escobar-Chaves, Kelder and Orpinas (2002) investigated the relationship between violent video games, acculturation and aggression among Latino adolescents. They found multiple factors are involved in the occurrence of aggressive behavior. The study evaluated that Latino middle school children exposed to higher levels of video game playing will exhibit a higher

level of aggression and fighting compared to children exposed to lower levels and that the more acculturated middle school Latino children will play more video games and will prefer more violent video games compared to less acculturated middle school Latino children. This study involved 5,831 students attending eight public schools in Texas. A linear relationship was observed between the time spent playing video games and aggression scores. Higher aggression scores were significantly associated with heavier video playing for boys and girls. The more students played video games, the more they fought at school. As Latino middle school students were more acculturated, their preference for violent video game playing increased, as well as the amount of time they played video games.

The popularity of videogames, especially violent videogames has reached phenomenal proportions. The theoretical line of reasoning that hypothesizes a casual relationship between violent videogame play and aggression draws on the very large literature on media violence effects. Additionally, there are theoretical reasons to believe that video game effects should be stronger than movie or television violence effects. The preponderance of the evidence from the literature suggests that exposure to video- game violence increases aggressive behavior and other aggression related phenomena.

Griffiths (1999) highlighted one of the main concerns that have constantly been raised against video games is that most of the games feature aggressive elements. This has led many people to assert that this may have a detrimental effect on individuals who play such games. He focused the empirical studies in this area, including research methodologies such as the observation of free play, self-report methods, and experimental studies. The findings revealed that the majority of the studies on very young children – as opposed to those in their teens upwards – tend to show that children do become more aggressive after either playing or watching a violent video game. However, all these come from the use of one particular research methodology (i.e., observation of children's free play).

Behaviors like aggression can be learned by watching and imitating the behaviors of others. A considerable amount of evidence suggests that watching violence on television increases the likelihood of short term aggression in children (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2005), through for a dissenting viewpoint, (Freedman, 2002). Individuals may differ in how they respond to violence. The greatest impact is on those who are already prone to violent behavior. Adults may be influenced by violence in media as well. A long term study of over 700 families found a significant association between the amounts of time spent watching violent television as a teenager and the likelihood of committing acts of aggression later in life. The results remained the same in spite of factors such as family income, parental education and neighborhood violence (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 2005).

Although exposure to violence in media is associated with likelihood of short term increases in aggression, none of these studies provides evidence for a definitive casual mechanism. Instead, violence in media may be one of many factors, or it may play a maintenance role since violent media tend to be selected by people who are prone to violence. Ferguson (2011) worked on video games and youth violence and revealed that video game violence harms children.

Anderson and Bushman (2002) studied the effects of media violence on society. They found that that there is a causal connection between exposure to violence in the media and subsequent violent behavior. With results from their own analytic review of close to 300 studies, they show how longitudinal, cross-sectional, field and experimental studies each contribute to an understanding of how exposure to violent media increases violent behavior. Findings showed that among those who watched less than an hour of TV a day, 5.7 percent had committed a violent act that resulted in serious injury. Among those who watched one to three hours per day, 18.4 percent had been violent. Of those who watched more than three hours a day, the rate of aggression was 25.3 percent.

Johnson, Cohen, Smailes, Kasen and Brook (2002) worked on television viewing and aggressive behavior during adolescence and adulthood. This study remains unique because it links exposures to violent media after childhood-i.e., among teenagers-and then follows them into young adulthood when aggressive behaviors actually take place. This study with its large sample size (707 families) and time span (17 years) allowed a meaningful test of television exposure on severe aggressive behaviors (such as assault and robbery) among these young adults. Also, they were able to control for key childhood factors that might otherwise be a cause of the aggression-e.g., childhood neglect, family income, neighborhood violence, parental education, and psychiatric disorders. Research found that exposure to violent video games also contributes to aggressive thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

Anderson and Dill (2000) found that exposure to violent video games also contributes to aggressive thoughts, feelings and behaviors. He also found that playing video games like Doom, Wolfe stein 3D or Mortal Kombat can increase a person's aggressive thoughts, feelings and behavior both in laboratory settings and in actual life. The scientists said that in one study they found that young men who are habitually aggressive became more so when exposed repeatedly to violent games. The

other study revealed that even a brief exposure to violent video games can temporarily increase aggressive behavior in all type of participants.

Anderson and Bushman (2001) studied effect of violent video games on aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, aggressive affect, physiological arousal and pro-social behavior. Findings revealed that playing violent video games will increase aggressive behavior. A meta analytic review of the video-game research literature revealed that violent video games increase aggressive behavior in children and young adults. The results also revealed that exposure to violent video games increases physiological arousal and aggression-related thoughts and feelings.

Of the several different forms of media, television is one of the most influential in terms of child development. The effects of seeing violence in television has been debated among the scientists interested in child development. The main reason why watching violence on television causes violence in real world is the pervasiveness of violent programs. There are several ways of explaining how the viewing of violence on television affects aggression in young people, including the direct effect, desensitization, and so called mean world syndrome. Aggression and favorable attitudes towards the use of aggression will develop if people watch a lot of violence on television.

Huesmann and Eron (1986) found that children who watched many hours of violence on television when they were in elementary school tended to show higher levels of aggressive behavior when they became teenagers. According to desensitization theory, people who watch a lot of violence on television may become less sensitive to the various kinds of aggression and violence in the real world. A third explanation for the link between television and aggression holds that some people suffer from the mean world syndrome, in which they believe that the world is as dangerous as it appears on television.

Children are not the only ones that can be affected by violence and aggression in the media. Adults can also be swayed by the things they watch or play. A long term study of more than 700 families over the span of 17 years showed that there is a strong link between the amount of time people watch television during adolescence and adulthood and the likelihood that those people will commit violent acts against others, some people argue that adolescents and adults can get inspiration to bring violence from their entertainment out into the real world.

The violence in the world has been said to have increased dramatically over the years. However, there have been many different reasons as to why people claim the violence in the world has been increasing at such a rate. People blame media violence on the problems like murder, rape, drugs, and gore. Just because movies contain these themes and concepts, people assume that people get ideas for doing things like these from the movies they watch, or what they see on television. However, how much impact can the media really have? People act by nature, not by what they see on television. Its true that media might have a small influence on people, but there are much more important causes at hand.

Serial killers have psychological problems, all of which are usually similar to each other. These problems are not developed from watching people kill each other on television, they are developed in much earlier stages. Most people believe that just because they see and hear more of murder, rape, drug use, and other vulgarities that they have been increased over time. This is highly unlikely. The media today just tends to focus on more of these issues, because they are more likely to gain the most attention of people watching. People only think that events such as these occur more frequently in modern times because they see and hear more of it. The truth of the matter is, these things have been happening a throughout history, we are just starting to hear more and more about it now, through the media and through people that spread information around. These events are happening, and are becoming more socially acceptable because we are hearing so much about it. If these events are truly more socially acceptable, then they are going to happen more.

People are quick to blame violence in our society on television, movies or video games because they are simple believable targets. We have to look beyond this disinformation and attack the real causes for the violence in our society. Violence in television programs, movies, or video games will not make a person kill someone else. People watch violent images all the time, and only a very small percent of them actually commit violent crimes. Violence on television, movies and video games is not the problem. The problem is that we wrongfully blame these media sources for violent crimes, rather than put the blame where it rightfully belongs. Crime and violence might be the result of a mental condition. But more often than not, it is the result of a child growing up in a violent family, a troubled childhood, or simply bad parenting. Although the violence present in these media sources may help instigate a violent act, it is never the only causes. Yet it is true that the media are partly to blame for violence in society. Television, movies and video games have a great influence on the minds of the masses. If we want to be a better community, perhaps even world, we must address the real problems, rather than the trappings of media. And it is the duty of media to present healthy and fruitful things which is necessary for betterment of society.

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