

Media Violence and Moral Development

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the relationship between media violence and moral development through a review of cognitive-developmental and social-cognitive theories of moral development. Furthermore, gender perspective and multiple domain models of moral reasoning are looked into. The cognitive-developmental theories provide a good framework for age-related changes in moral reasoning but are insufficient in accounting for variations and regressions in moral judgment. The social-cognitive perspective provides a better explanation of the processes of development and disengagement of moral judgments. A gender perspective helps explain affective factors of compassion and caring in moral judgments. A domain model of aggression and social reasoning explain moral as well as non-moral sources of information used by individuals to assess conflicts and dilemmas. Some assumptions about the relationship between media violence and moral development are drawn from the different theories of moral development. Further analysis of the relationship is recommended.

Introduction

The 70-year history of experimental research on media violence has continually shown a positive link between televised violence and real-life violence based on metaanalyses (Anderson, 1977; Hearold, 1986; Carlson, Marcus-Newhall, & Miller, 1990; Wood, Wong & Cachere, 1991; and Paik & Comstock, 1994) as well as narrative reviews (Baker & Ball, 1969; Roberts & Maccoby, 1985; Friedrich-Cofer & Huston, 1986; Comstock & Strasburger, 1990; Comstock & Paik, 1991; and, Geen, 1994) of the research literature. Furthermore, naturalistic and longitudinal studies (Huesmann et al, 1972, 1984, 1986; Centerwall, 1989) also have shown a positive relationship between viewing televised violence and real-life aggressive behavior. However, some researchers have pointed out some problems with the existing research, both with internal questions of conceptualization and methodology and external questions of impact on public policy, the media industry, and the public's critical use of the media (Cook, Kendzierski, & Thomas, 1983; Rowland, 1983; Levinger, et al. 1986; Rosenthal, 1986; McGuire, 1986; Friedlander, 1993; Gunter, 1994; Potter & Waren, 1996; Sander, 1997).

While the critics pointed out many problems in the research and have all proposed a broader view of the question of media violence, they also have acknowledged the dilemma between complex problems and the narrow demands of scientific investigations. Comstock (1998), in his analysis of past problems and present issues in television research, highlighted the difficulties posed by the embeddedness of television in society to four particulars of the practice of science, namely: application of the experimental paradigm; measurement of television viewing; identification of the independent variable; and, generalizability in regard to outcomes.

Notwithstanding the problems in and with the research on media violence, there still remain three reasons why further research on the subject is needed: The embeddedness of mass media (particularly TV) in many societies; the vulnerability of some segments of society to media violence; and the impact of effects on vulnerable populations on society as a whole. The mass media have become extensions of our physical bodies demanding new adjustments and equilibrations among the other parts of the body, as McLuhan (1964) insinuated three decades ago. Most children and other vulnerable groups of people have little choice but to live within a world inundated with the mass media. Society, as a whole, has the responsibility to

ensure that children grow up in an environment that fosters their development into caring, responsible, competent and capable adults.

In this paper, I will explore one area of children's development that has not been directly addressed by the research on media violence: moral development. The reason for the dearth of research on the relationship between media violence and moral development perhaps has to do with the opprobrium associated with the word '*moral*' with its connotations of hell, fire and brimstone judgments. However, the term *moral development* as used in this paper refers to the development and maintenance of the ability to "differentiate judgments about moral issues (e.g. issues of harm and fairness) from non-moral issues (e.g. mathematics)" (Guerra, Nucci, & Huesmann, 1994 p.14). I present two reasons why a consideration of moral development in the study of media violence effects is important. Through the example of the Payne Fund Studies and contemporary public criticism of the research in media violence, I try to show the importance of presenting an alternative to the persistent public misperception of the scientific study of media effects as moral crusading. The second reason has to do with the inadequacy and perils of relying on supposedly value-free definitions of violence as well as relying on audiences' subjective perceptions of violence. Next, I will relate moral cognition, childhood aggression, and media violence drawing on Piaget's (1965) and Kohlberg's (1984) cognitive-developmental stages in moral reasoning, Bandura's (1991) perspective on moral development from a social-cognitive theory, and Gilligan's (1982; 1988) gender perspectives on moral development. Furthermore, I will consider the domain model of Guerra, Nucci & Huesmann (1994) which integrated moral reasoning from both the cognitive-developmental and social cognition/social learning perspectives, and moral action. From these theories of moral development, I will draw some assumptions about the relation of media violence and moral development.

Out of and into the moral morass

In a recent book on the Payne Fund Studies (PFS), Jowett, Jarvie and Fuller (1996) noted the moral and social context from which the impetus for the studies came and into which the scientific findings were made public and interpreted as a moral crusade against movies. The PFS came out at a time when there was growing interest and concern about the urban pathologies developing in the urban centers of the U.S. as the Protestant hegemony was being threatened by successive waves of non-Protestant immigrants.

There was concern that the growing popularity of the movies was contributing to the decay of communities and morals. The organizer of the PFS was persuaded that America's children could be saved from this decay based on knowledge rather than feelings. This led him to recruit his research talent from the University of Chicago, which then had the largest and most prestigious sociology department in the United States. The impressive team of researchers not only had to tackle the social upheavals of the late 1920s but also the theoretical upheavals in the social sciences as to how society and its problems ought to be viewed.

Jowett et al., (1996) noted that up to the 1930's, the Chicago school, despite its emphasis on theory, has relied on a view of society that treated social problems as deviations from the proper course of society and has therefore tended to coincide with the public agenda. In contrast, the Harvard school of thought did not consider it important to specify, a priori, a proper course for society, but regarded social problems as integral to personality and social structures, the scientific study of which is to inform, rather than to determine public policy.

Along with the dispute on how society should be viewed was the split within the research team between those who found supportive data for concern about the effects of the movies on youth and those who have not found supporting data for alarm. In the end, the PFS was presented to the public in the form of articles in *McCall's* then published as a book *Our Movie Made Children* (1933). Jowett, et al. (1996) noted that the bestseller book "became *the* representation of the PFS in the public mind and gave the false impression that the researchers had lent themselves to a moralizing crusade. It diverted attention from the scientific achievement of the studies" (p. 7-8, emphasis theirs).

Although times have changed and scientific progress has supposedly come up with more plausible explanations of social problems than those offered by moral explanations, scientific findings in media violence still are interpreted by many critics as hardly any different from the moralistic agenda of yore. Fowles (1992) lumped scientific findings together with contemporary criticisms of the popular media to constitute what he calls "TV priggery" and which he defines as a cluster of condescending, self-righteous, anti-TV attitudes. Leonard (1997) contemptuously associated the issue of violence with left-wingers (he included social scientists) just as the right-wingers are obsessed with the issue of sex. I propose that one way to counter a misperception is to grab it by its own assumptions and present a better answer to the moral aspect of media violence.

Who says violence is bad?

Macbeth (1998) noted that most laboratory experiments on the effects of television asked the question "Can television affect viewers?" whereas field studies asked "Does television affect viewers as they use it over time in day-to-day life?" (p.109) I think that the *can* and *does* questions only produce answers that are trivial when the question of *why* is not adequately answered first. *Why* should we care about the effects of media violence?

To answer that question only with experimental research findings opens research to criticisms of science's delusion of objectivity since any consideration of harmful effects necessarily entails a priori judgment of value. To answer same question with new approaches that emphasize the subjectivity (Gunter, 1985; Gunter & Furnham, 1982; Gunter & Wober, 1988) of audience response may get us closer to what people really think but leads us to data that are infinitely muddled and convoluted.

Consider for example a recent study (Sander, 1997) using the dynamic-transactional approach (DTA) which is claimed to integrate the old stimulus-response approach of media effects and the uses and gratifications approach. In a quasi-experimental design, Sander (1997) manipulated independent variables (TV programme content, cognitive perception, emotion, personality dispositions, and demographic controls) to determine audience's perceptions of violence (dependent variable) using three regression models to test the predictions of the theoretical model of DTA. Sander (1997) wrote, " This complex model was used to only explain the *perceptions* of TV violence. Models of *effects* of TV violence will have to be even more complex" (p.82).

And yet, for all the complexity of the model used and although Sander found support for the multi-dimensionality of violence, the dimension of *physical violence* emerged as the most important dimension of violence, a dimension emphasized by other definitions of violence (e.g. Cultural Indicators Project, National Television Violence Study). Furthermore, only partial support was found for some deductions made on the basis of the DTA and that the content variables explained considerably more variance than the cognitive perception no matter what other variables were controlled. Thus, Sander conceded, " a considerable direct, independent relationship between content factors and the perception of violence was found, contrary to the theoretical assumptions" (p. 79).

Sander explained the problem as not to be taken as meaning that content variables are more relevant for the viewers' perceptions of violence than are their differential cognitive perceptions of these content aspects but that the problem has more to do with not determining what definitions the viewers used in making their responses. Characteristically, Sander called for "future research on the viewers' individual definitions of these dimensions of violence and of TV violence itself" (p.80).

A more ominous implication of reliance on subjective perceptions of violence than cumbersomeness of research is the observation of a *magnitude gap* (Baumeister, 1997) between the perceptions of victims and perpetrators of violence. While society normally judges violence in terms of the harms done to the victim, perpetrators see violence in a different way. While victims remember hurt and humiliation, perpetrators remember pleasure regarding the violent act (Baumeister, 1997). Hitler, Pol Pot, and Stalin thought that their genocidal rules were to further the good of their respective countries, and Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dammer, Charles Manson thought that their serial killings were a pleasure. It was also found that adolescents who engage in antisocial behavior were less likely to judge such behaviors as wrong (Nucci, Guerra, & Lee, 1991).

The fact that most perpetrators of violence do not see anything wrong with their violent acts puts a limit to how far we can use subjectivity to define the concept of violence. That content has direct, independent effects on audiences' perception of violence would suggest that there are criteria outside of people's subjective interpretations of violence and that these are shared by a large portion of society. That the dimension of physical harm stand out as defining violence suggest that most people employ some level of moral judgment when perceiving violence.

Theories of Moral Development

Developmental Stage Theories

Piaget's and Kohlberg's theories are sometimes referred to as *cognitive-structuralist theories of moral development* (Thomas, 1997) and have dominated contemporary research on children's moral development (Guerra, Nucci & Huesmann, 1994). The cognitive-structuralists or cognitive-developmental theories share the following basic assumptions (Thomas, 1997):

1. The meaning that an individual assigns to a moral incident depends on his/her cognitive structures or mental schemas. Cognitive structures differ from one person to another; therefore, there are differences in interpretation of moral incidents among individuals.
2. The cognitive structures of individuals are shaped by the interaction of genetic and environmental factors. The genetic code establishes a given time when a cognitive structure can be activated and everyday experiences determine the changes in the structure.
3. The changes in a person's cognitive structures (the interpretive mechanisms of the mind) and in the contents of the mind (memories, beliefs) follow a progressive sequence of stages.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980)

Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, derived specific stages of moral development from his more general stages of mental growth. His stages of cognitive development from sensori-motor to perceptual to concrete on to higher abstract thinking are the foundations on which his stages of moral reasoning are erected. From moral dilemmas that he posed to children aged 6 through 12, Piaget (1965) derived the following two successive domains of moral judgment:

1. *Heteronomous*. People operating from this domain base their moral judgments on authorities such as parents, teachers, the clergy, the police and the rules that these authorities prescribe.
2. *Autonomous*. People operating from this perspective base their moral reasoning on mutual regard among peers or equals and respect for the rules that guide their interaction.

From his observations of children during the elementary years, Piaget (1965) suggested that children progress from a heteronomous to an autonomous moral perspective through three periods. The first period characterizes children up to 7 or 8 years of age who believe that justice is what is prescribed by adult authorities. By age 8 to 11, the concept of justice as authority-prescribed is gradually altered by a belief in justice as treating and reciprocating with peers as equals. The third period is characterized by a higher morality that appears around ages 11 and 12. Within this period, children learn to judge the rights of others based not on arbitrary application of laws of justice but on a consideration of individual situations and circumstances.

Piaget's academic training in biology influenced his emphasis on genetic heredity as an important causal factor in intellectual and moral development, along with other factors such as the child's direct

experience with the world, social transmission and equilibration. Thus, based on Piaget's quartet of causal factors in moral development, we can infer that children judge the moral propriety or impropriety of aggressive behavior based on genetic propensities that interact with the individual's direct and vicarious encounters with his physical and social world. Furthermore, the fourth causal factor, equilibration, maintains the balance between the genetic, direct experience and social transmission influences. The interplay of these factors depends on the mechanism by which the individual assimilates or accommodates new experiences or events to an already existing collection of schemes of adaptation or to newly created or adjusted schemes.

Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987)

DeVries (1991) has commented that Kohlberg has "succeeded in moving the discussion of moral development out of philosophy and religion, bringing it into the social sciences as a legitimate domain for scientific study" (p. 7). Kohlberg was very much aware that the very word 'moral' was something any up-to-date social scientist would dare not use but he went against the cultural relativism inherent in psychoanalysis and behaviorism and became one of the leading "structuralists" along with Piaget and Chomsky (Power, 1991).

Kohlberg, a Harvard University professor, adopted Piaget's notions of stages and of the child as basically a philosopher. Kohlberg's theory describes the origins of justice reasoning rather than of emotions, aspirations, or action. Like Piaget, Kohlberg posed moral dilemmas but extended the age of his subjects from early adolescence, where Piaget left off, to adulthood. Kohlberg's dilemmas are moral episodes derived from a set of nine standard incidents and which posed "conflicts between the rights or claims of different persons in dilemma situations" (Kohlberg, 1984 p.224). Subjects completed eight unfinished anecdotes and evaluated the ninth completed one. Following are the essence of four of the anecdotes (Kohlberg, 1984 pp.640-651):

1. A husband (Heinz) cannot afford an expensive drug to treat his wife's cancer, so he must decide whether to steal the drug from a pharmacy.
3. A son (Joe) has earned money to go to camp, but his father asks for the money so the father can go on a fishing trip; Joe must decide whether to give his father the money.

7. In a military unit during wartime, one man must remain behind to blow up a bridge if the unit is to retreat safely. But that man will thereby risk certain death. Thus, the officer in charge must decide whether to order one of the men to blow up the bridge or do it himself.

9. Two brothers want to get \$1,000 each before they sneak out of town. One gets money by stealing it, the other by feigning illness and begging an elderly man to "lend" him \$1,000 for an operation. Which of the brothers did the worse thing, and why is that worse than the other brother's action? (condensed in Thomas, 1997 pp. 58-59).

The responses of subjects to the moral dilemmas determined which stage of moral reasoning they are operating from. Kohlberg postulated his stages of moral development in his doctoral dissertation in 1958 and made adjustments in subsequent publications to account for moral reasoning of different age levels in different cultures. The concept of substages was introduced to account for variance in moral reasoning within a stage. Kohlberg (1984) postulated the following six stages:

Stage 1: *Heteronomous Morality*. A person at this stage assumes that moral judgments are self-evident and do not need justification beyond simply stating the rule that was broken.

Stage 2: *Individualistic, Instrumental Morality*. At this stage, people learn that moral justification depends on different points of view toward a moral incident. People at this level take on a pragmatic approach "to maximize satisfaction of one's needs and desires while minimizing negative consequences to the self" (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 626). No general moral principles are invoked. Each case is handled separately.

Stage 3: *Impersonally Normative Morality*. Moral reasoning advances from self-interest and specific-situation-based norm to shared moral norms that guide everyone's moral behavior. In contrast to Stage 1 where the rules are derived from authority figures, the moral norms in Stage 3 result from general consensus regarding what are socially acceptable. People in this stage try to maintain positive social roles to gain mutual trust and social approval.

Stage 4: *Social System Morality*. Moral judgments at this stage go beyond the need for social approval to encompass the whole social system founded on legal religious institutions and belief systems. "The pursuit of individual interests is considered legitimate only when it is consistent with the maintenance of the sociomoral system as a whole.... A social structure that includes

formal institutions and social role serves to mediate conflicting claims and promote the common good' (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 631).

Stage 5: *Human-Rights and Social-Welfare Morality*. This stage provides for rules to account for moral conflicts not accounted for by the rules of society as they are already constituted (e.g. the rights of the minority). 'Social institutions, rules, or laws are evaluated by reference to their long-term consequences for the welfare of each person or group in the society' (Kohlberg, 1984, p. 634).

Stage 6: *Morality of Universalizable, Reversible, and Prescriptive General Ethical Principles*. Morality at this stage applies at all times, in all places among all peoples. Kohlberg calls this stage as the *moral point of view* that "all human beings should take toward one another as free and equal autonomous persons" (1984, p.636). Kohlberg distinguishes between general principles from either rules or rights , "first, in being positive *prescriptions* rather than negative *proscriptions* (don't kill, don't steal or cheat)" (1984, p.636).

To progress from one stage to another, Kohlberg proposed four factors that interact to determine an individual's progress: a) the individual's level of logical reasoning; b) the individual's motivation; c) opportunities to learn social roles; and d) the form of justice in the social institutions in the person's social environment.

Gilligan's Compassionate Caring

Carol Gilligan, a colleague of Kohlberg at Harvard University, pointed out that Kohlberg's theory is biased toward the masculine propensity to interpret moral values in terms of a contractual, even-handed justice. She proposed a different view of moral development that accounts for the moral decisions of others in terms of compassionate caring associated with the traditional mothering role of women.

In her controversial 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan traced the moral development of girls and boys from infancy through adolescence, noting the differences in the two sexes' central values at each successive stage of growth. She argued that mothers perceive boys and girls in a different way, seeing their daughters as extensions of themselves and their sons as male opposites. The girls then learn to identify with the mother's inclination for attachment and caring while the boys learn to separate themselves from

their mothers thereby "curtailing their primary love and sense of empathic tie" (Gilligan, 1982 p.8).

Gilligan argued that this process of differentiation is well established during the first three years of a child's life when, generally, their primary caregiver is the mother. Therefore, she argued, children's identity are well established by the age of three.

Furthermore, Gilligan illustrated how boys and girls differ in middle childhood through their different attitudes toward play and games. She concluded that boys are more concerned with rules of fairness while girls do not mind changing rules to accommodate people's feelings. Boys continue their emphasis on fair rules as they engage in more competitive activities during young adulthood while girls focus on improving their personal relationships.

In response to criticisms and to studies that have shown no differences between the sexes in their expression of empathy and moral reasoning, Gilligan & Wiggins (1988) posited that both sexes can see relationships and moral events from two angles and that both sexes strive to reconcile two different ways of looking at moral dilemmas. While Gilligan maintained that "either we are men or women and certain experiences may accrue more readily to one or the other sex," she also conceded that "the capacity for love and the appreciation of justice is not limited to either sex" (Gilligan & Wiggins, 1988 p. 137).

Social-Learning/Social-Cognitive Theory

In contrast to the cognitive-structuralist theorists of moral development, social-cognitive/social-learning theorists are more concerned with the processes of moral development rather than the reasoning behind moral judgments. The social-cognition/social learning theory has dominated the studies of the effects of media violence on aggressive attitudes and behavior. In terms of moral development, the theory assumes the following (Thomas, 1997):

1. People's moral values are not inborn. Rather, they are learned.
2. Moral values are learned through direct or vicarious social experience.
3. The nature of the consequences following social encounters determines which moral values to adopt and which to avoid. Positive consequences motivate the individual to adopt the value expressed in the social encounter. Negative consequences inhibit the adoption of expressed values.
4. Moral development is a day-to-day, not a stage-by-stage, process.

Albert Bandura (1925-)

Bandura (1991) argues that the major theoretical dispute between social-learning/social-cognition and cognitive-structuralist theorists "center not on whether there are some universalities in the order of development, but on the validity of casting developmental changes in discrete lock-step stages" (p. 52). Bandura emphasized that "developmental trends obviously exist in moral reasoning and judgment, as they do in everything else. But the conditions of social learning are much too varied to produce uniform moral types" (p.58).

Bandura (1991) noted that there are various ways by which people develop their moral judgments: a) direct instruction in the precepts of conduct; b) evaluative reactions of others toward one's actions; and, most importantly, c) modeling. From these diverse sources, particularly the examples of models, and through physical, social and self-sanctions, children learn to select, weigh and integrate the elements that are viewed as having moral relevance. As children gain more experience and cognitive competence, "moral judgments change from single-dimensional rules to multidimensional rules of conduct" (p. 65).

In contrast to cognitive-structuralist theories which tend to see children's moral reasoning as dichotomous, that is, using harm when young and intention when more mature, Bandura points out some studies which show that children combined intentions and consequences in judging transgressive actions. Bandura points out that the variations in the way children integrate information to make moral judgments varies more across individuals than ages. Also, the influence of the level of parents' reasoning accounts for the variation more than age. Children model their parents' form and complexity in moral reasoning, "Thus, if parents use simple moral rules, so do their children, whereas if parents rely on more complex relativistic rules, their children do likewise" (p.55). Furthermore, parents tend to adjust their moral reasoning with their children based on parents' grasp of their children's cognitive capabilities.

Bandura (1991) criticizes stage theories for not linking the form of moral reasoning to particular moral conduct. Stage theories claim a positive relationship between level of moral reasoning and moral conduct - the more mature the reasoning, the more likely is moral conduct. Bandura argues that the relation between moral reasoning and conduct must specify the psychological mechanisms by which moral thought is translated into moral action. In this, Bandura emphasizes the regulatory mechanisms of social sanctions and internalized self-sanctions. "Both control mechanisms operate anticipatorily. In control arising from

social sanction, people refrain from transgressing because they anticipate that such conduct will bring them social censure and other adverse consequences. In self-reactive control, they behave prosocially because it produces self-satisfaction and self-respect and they refrain from transgressing because such conduct will give rise to self-reproof" (p.68).

However, Bandura (1991) also explains how self-regulatory capabilities can be disengaged from inhuman conduct. "Self-sanctions can be disengaged by reconstruing conduct, obscuring causal agency, disregarding or misrepresenting injurious consequences, and blaming and devaluating victims" (p.72).

Through moral justification, Bandura wrote that "what is culpable can be made righteous through cognitive reconstrual. In the process, detrimental conduct is made personally and socially acceptable by portraying it in the service of moral purposes. People then act from a moral imperative" (p.72). In mobilizing society to justify violent means to squelch present threats, Bandura notes that the mass media, particularly television, are now the principal vehicle for justification. Individuals also model their rules of moral justification on media portrayals of the reprehensibility or acceptability of certain transgressive behavior.

Through the process of advantageous comparison, Bandura explains that "self-deplored acts can be made righteous by contrasting them to flagrant inhumanities. The more outrageous the comparison practices, the more likely it is that one's destructive conduct will appear trifling or even benevolent" (p.80).

Through the displacement of responsibility, Bandura cited several studies which show that restraints over one's own detrimental actions and concern for the welfare of those mistreated by others diminish. People who disengage in this way regard their actions as "springing from the dictates of authorities rather than their being responsible for them. Since they are not the actual agent of their actions, they are spared self-prohibiting reactions" (p.81).

The link between conduct and consequences is also obscured by diffusing responsibility. Bandura cites several ways by which diffusion is achieved. Division of labor tends to isolate the fragmentary job from the eventual function. Group decision-making tends to make some individuals not feel responsible for the adverse consequences of a group or collective decision because blame can always be ascribed to the other members of the group.

Self-detering reactions can also be weakened by disregarding, distorting, misrepresenting or minimizing the consequences of an action. When personal gain is at stake, people sometimes minimize the harmful effects of their actions on others. When the suffering of others are not visible or are remote, people tend to disregard such suffering. When people find themselves in a situation where they cannot easily escape responsibility, they tend to minimize the injurious effects of their actions.

Lastly, Bandura (1991) explains that disengagement from self-sanctions occur through dehumanization of the victims. This is done by "divesting people of human qualities. Once dehumanized, they are no longer viewed as persons with feelings, hopes, and concerns but as subhuman objects" (p.88). It then becomes easier to see subhuman objects as possessing bestial qualities such as seeing them as pigs or worms. "When persons are given punitive power, they treat dehumanized individuals much more punitively than those who have been invested with human qualities" (p.88).

The Domain Model of the Development of Social Reasoning

Like Bandura, proponents of the domain model provide a multi-faceted relationship between aggression and socio-moral development. They posit four categories that can confound distinctions between moral and non-moral issues (Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 1982; Turiel, 1983; Tisak & Turiel, 1984).

These are:

1. Concepts of morality (issues of fairness and human welfare)
2. Convention (consensually determined norms that maintain social structure)
3. Personal issues (areas of perspective and privacy, actions that impinge primarily on the self)
4. Prudential (concepts about those personal acts that are potentially harmful to the self).

The domain model recognizes that people's social judgments derive not only from a straightforward reasoning based on moral terms but on non-moral terms as well. Through this model, Kohlberg's stages of moral development are reinterpreted as "an approximation of age-related changes in the development of cross-domain coordinations" (Guerra, Nucci & Huesmann, 1994). For example, Kohlberg's stages of conventional reasoning emerging in middle to late adolescence reflects the conventional domain that social norms constitute social systems.

The Kohlberg group tried to deal with the variation in response to moral dilemmas within a stage by postulating the idea of substages either through the perspective of rules and authority (substage A) or welfare and justice (substage B). From the domain point of view, "such within-stage variation can be accounted for only by recognizing that the tasks used by Kohlberg to assess moral development generate reasoning employing knowledge from more than one conceptual system" (Guerra, Nucci & Huesmann, 1994 p.23).

The domain model relates moral cognition and aggression by specifying the following four assumptions (Guerra, Nucci, & Huesmann, 1994 pp.25-26):

1. Knowledge is structured in discrete knowledge systems that correspond to fundamentally and qualitatively differing aspects of individual-environment interactions.
2. Understanding within each knowledge system or domain undergoes structural changes with age.
3. Decisions in context are a function of the coordination of contextually generated information across domains. This coordination is a function of the levels of development within accessed domains.
4. Actions in context may solely entail the automatic implementation of procedural knowledge (scripts) or may involve reflective engagement of structural knowledge. These aspects of knowledge are reciprocally implicated and cogenerative.

The Relationship Between Media Violence and Moral Development

From the above theories of moral development, I draw the following assumptions regarding the relationship between media violence and children's moral development:

1. The ability to judge moral issues involving harm to self and others is generally and primarily acquired through social transmission of standards of what is acceptable and what is reprehensible. The justification of violence in the media is one among many ways by which children infer standards of harm to self and others.
2. The weight of influence by media violence on children's moral reasoning relative to other influences in the child's environment depends on the child's cognitive capabilities as formed by the interaction of biological and environmental factors. For example, parents who try to exemplify

complex rules of moral standards in response to their children's cognitive abilities will influence their children to adopt the same form of moral reasoning in judging portrayals of violence in the mass media. Parents who model simple rules of reasoning influence their children to think the same way in evaluating media violence. As children enter adolescence, the moral reasoning of their peers may outweigh the rules of reasoning they learned from their parents.

3. Because younger children assess the transgressive nature of their actions based on the authority of adults around them, they are more susceptible to learn standards of harmful and not harmful behavior from media portrayals of violence by adult actors who look and sound authoritative.
4. Because adolescents tend to value the approval of their peers, they also tend to go along with their peers' moral reasoning in making transgressive conduct permissible. Portrayals of anti-social behavior in the media influences adolescents' standards of moral conduct to the extent that the portrayals resonate with the standards of their peers.
5. Standards of moral conduct not only involve cognitive skills in reasoning about harm and fairness but also involve affective factors of compassion and caring. Generally, boys are socialized to assess moral issues in terms of justice while girls are socialized to employ compassion and caring when assessing moral issues. The two modes of moral judgment may converge in both sexes when there are enough consistent models in their social world to exemplify such convergence of justice and compassion reasoning. The models that boys and girls see, read and hear in the mass media influence the forms of justice and/or compassion reasoning that they adopt.

Conclusion

The relationship between media violence and moral development is one of the areas that the research on media violence can expand into. This is important since the dimension of harm is inherent both in the conceptualization of violence and in the concept of moral development. An empirical articulation of the effects of media violence on moral development may also counter the misinterpretation of scientific findings in media violence effects as mere, self-righteous "moralism." Furthermore, the limit on relying on audience's subjective perceptions of violence and on research-defined concept of violence make it important to investigate extant sources of judgment of harm, fairness and compassion.

The developmental stage theories of Piaget and Kohlberg provide a good framework for studying moral development in terms of genetic and cognitive maturation but do not explain the many variations in moral judgment not explained by age or cognitive ability. Gilligan's gender perspective takes into account the affective components of caring and compassion as important factors in moral judgment. Bandura's social-cognitive perspective provides an excellent explanation of the processes by which moral judgments are acquired as well as how these moral judgments are weakened to produce antisocial attitudes and behavior. The domain model articulates the different knowledge systems that are not necessarily moral in nature in defining the decisions people make in situations involving conflicts or dilemmas between personal interests and the interests of others.

In relating media violence and the theories of moral development, assumptions about the relative influence of media violence on children's moral reasoning are drawn from a consideration of the interaction between biological, cognitive and social maturation. Further analysis of the relationship between media violence and moral development and a careful drawing of hypotheses are recommended for further research.

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