Media Violence: A Summary of Research on Selected Areas

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Submitted to:
John Sherry, Ph.D.
Department of Communication
University of Arizona

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Submitted by:

Claborne, Glenda
Conway, Matt
Lipski, Jenn
Mueller, Kerstin
Pratt, Michelle
Salwin, John
Slipakoff, Bram
Szlauko, Mike

ABSTRACT

This paper gives a summary of the research done on selected areas of the voluminuous and long-standing research on media violence. The introduction traces the impetus and forces that have propelled research on the issue. The next section deals with the much-debated definition and measurement of media violence using the older Cultural Indicators Project and the newer National Television Violence Study as examples. Much of the research in media violence followed in the effects tradition so the next section deals with the effects of media violence that are widely supported by the existing research, namely: learning aggressive attitudes and behavior, becoming desensitized to violence, and developing fear of becoming victimized by violence. The emotional effects of media violence has only been dealt with recently and so a section on the research on fright reactions in children is included in this paper. Because sex and violence almost always go together, the issue of sexual violence is also included . Lastly, this paper tries to include a global picture of the effects of media violence by touching on research in other countries in Europe and Asia. The paper concludes that research cannot be expected to give definitive answers on causality between media violence and real-life aggression but that more can be done to integrate the findings in the existing research.

Violence in the Media

I. Introduction

"The story of the mass media in America reads much like the case history of a public health menace," writes Steven Starker in his book, *Evil Influences: Crusades Against the Mass Media.* He goes on to say that "each technological innovation, or new media application, promptly has been declared a serious threat to the character of children, the behavior of teenagers, the morality and intelligence of adults, and the sanctity of the American way of life"(Starker, 1989 p.5).

This historical and apparent constant concern about the adverse effects of the mass media, especially on children, has prompted much of the research on the effects of media violence. From the Payne Fund Studies on the effects of motion pictures upon youth in the 1930s to the National Cable Television Association-funded studies on television/cable violence in the 1990s, research on media violence make up the bulk of much of research on media effects.

Television is the medium most studied because it can be argued that television was, and is, unparalleled by any other mass medium in its pervasiveness and in the United States. "Almost everyone" watched it, reported the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior in 1972. "That was true in the late 1960's and it is still true in the early 1980's," says a follow-up report in 1982, ten years later, by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 1982 vol.1 p.3). In the 90's, the Nielsen Media Research reports that 99% of homes in the U.S. have a television (Nielsen Media Research, 1995).

Data on the link between television violence and real-life aggression and violence were sparse between 1952 and 1964 but the debate on the issue intensified in the political arena. Several congressional hearings on violent and sexually provocative television programming were held starting in 1952 and gained intensity in the late 1960's. The Congressmen suggested that television violence encouraged juvenile delinquency and that broadcasters were not doing enough to reduce it. The broadcasters, on the other hand, offered assurances that they will monitor violent programming albeit denying any justification for concern, a stance they have consistently assumed ever since.

Intensive scrutiny of the adverse effects of television violence occurred with the formation of two governmental commissions to look into the problem. One was the National Commission on the Causes and

Prevention of Violence, which issued the 1969 report, *Violence and the Media,* summarizing laboratory experiments on television violence and subsequent viewer aggression. The report concluded that viewing violent programs increases the likelihood of a viewer to behave violently. The other commission was the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior which issued a five-volume report in 1972 stating that the "convergence" of evidence from both laboratory and field studies suggested that viewing violent television programs contributes to aggressive behavior.

There was controversy about the exclusion of seven well-respected researchers on the effects of media violence from the committee by members of the broadcasting industry who were given the power to veto "unsuitables" by the Surgeon General. Behavioral scientists criticized the 1972 report as too cautious and conservative. While it was bemoaned that the public, the broadcasters and programming itself remained unaffected by the Surgeon General's report, one observer said that the 1972 report has spawned a "renaissance" in media effects research (Katz, 1977).

Indeed, the 1982 NIMH two-volume report, *Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties,* mentions that more than 2,500 titles in research publications on television's influences on behavior have appeared between 1970 and 1980 (vol.1 p.2). Moreover, while a large proportion of the studies dealt with the effects of television on aggression, many more moved on to deal with the effects of television viewing on other aspects of development and behavior. Because of the large volume of research available, the NIMH did not fund new studies but did comprehensive and integrative reviews of the literature and produced the summary report. Among other conclusions, the report stated that "in magnitude, television violence is as strongly correlated with aggressive behavior as any other behavioral variable that has been measured" (vol.1 p.6).

However, critics, like Jonathan Freedman of the University of Toronto in Canada and J. Ronald Milavsky of the research section of NBC, have said that the 1982 NIMH figure of 2,500 studies is an exaggeration. They said that the relevant literature which dealt with a positive link between television violence and viewers' aggression is closer to only 100 studies. Furthermore, that the positive links produced by these studies are too weak to make a conclusive, general statement linking television violence to real-life aggression. Freedman also said that studies showing a negative link between television violence and viewers' aggression are rarely published (Freedman, 1984, 1988; Milavsky, 1982, 1988).

Despite criticisms of a nil effect of television violence on viewers' aggressive behavior, research on the issues has moved from asking whether or not there is an effect to seeking explanations for the effect. Government actions continued to come in and out of the research picture. Most recently, in 1993, Democratic Senator Paul Simon called for an independent study of violence on American TV. He warned the broadcast and cable industry to address the issue; otherwise Congress would introduce legislation about the matter.

The broadcast TV networks chose the UCLA Center for Communication Policy to do the television study. UCLA analyzed violence on broadcast TV based on which programs raised concerns or not because of the inappropriateness or appropriateness of the violence in the context of the story. UCLA released its findings in September 1995 in the *Television Violence Monitoring Report.* Among the report's findings: a decrease of network series raising frequent concerns from 9 in the 1994-95 season to 2 in 1996-97; a decrease in percentage of television movies raising concerns about violence (14% in 1994-95 to 12% in 1996-97); and a decrease in percentage of theatrical films raising concerns about violence shown on the networks (42% in 1994-95 to 30% in 1996-97).

The National Cable Television Association chose the Universities of California, Texas, North Carolina and Wisconsin to study violence on cable TV. The universities looked at violent content in all kinds of TV programs, research on violence in reality programs, studies on ratings and advisories and anti-violence and educational initiatives by the TV industry. They examined thousands of cable TV programs to learn about the context in which TV violence was most likely to pose psychological risks to viewers. Mediascope, a non-profit media organization, administered the three-year (mid-1994 to mid-1997) project. It released an initial report, the *National Television Violence Study,* in 1996. Among the report's key findings were: the context in which most violence is presented on TV poses risks for viewers; perpetrators go unpunished in 73% of all violent scenes; and, in all, 47% of violent interactions show no harm to victims, and 58% show no pain.

II. Definition and Measurement of Violence

What constitutes violence on television and how one measures it were questions crucial to the study of the relationship between viewing violence on television and committing violence and/or exhibiting aggression in real life. Researchers have not found it easy to define violence in an unambiguous way. Parties interested in the issue bring with them different perspectives about the issue resulting in differences in what to include and what not to include in the definition. How violence is defined determined, to a large extent, the amount and kind of violence isolated for analysis.

Over the past three decades, analysis of violence content on television has moved from merely counting incidents of violence to considering the many aspects of media violence and how these relate to the effects in real life which most people are concerned with. This paper will look at two projects that employed different approaches to the definition and measurement of media violence: the older Cultural Indicators Project which had been measuring violence on television since 1967 and the newer National Television Violence Study which studied television violence from 1994 to 1997.

- ***The Cultural Indicators Project.***

This project was started in 1967 to assist the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence and has done annual week-long analysis of violent content on samples of primetime and weekend daytime network dramatic programming since then. Dramatic programming included all shows with a story line- situation comedies, cartoons, action-adventures, science fiction, dramas, etc. The Project focused mostly on the three major broadcast networks (ABC, CBS & NBC) though it has recently started including newer samples of programming like reality shows, FOX, basic and pay cable programs. George Gerbner, professor and Dean Emeritus of the Annenberg School of the University of Pennsylvania, led the project and his approach to analyzing content on TV is often referred to by his name. The Cultural Indicators team define violence as:

> *the overt expression of physical force (with or without a weapon, against self or other) compelling action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually hurting or killing* (Signorielli, Gerbner, & Morgan, 1995).

This definition emphasizes overt physical force and as such, excludes idle threats, verbal abuse, or gestures that do not result in hurting and/or killing. It includes fantasy, comic, and "acts of nature" violence

because these events on television "are always purposeful, claim victims, and demonstrate power" (Signorielli et al. p.280). This inclusion of virtually all behaviors, phenomena, and incidents that can overtly harm or kill human or humanlike characters, regardless of the context in which the violence occurs is closely tied to Gerbner's and colleagues' view of violence as a "complex social relationship." They characterize this relationship as "who can get away with what against whom- who wins and who loses" (p.279). They see violence on television as often serving the same functions in real life and so would have a broad impact in how people see social reality.

Gerbner's and his colleagues' measure of television violence included a count of the number of separate violent actions. They defined a violent action as "a scene of some violence confined to the same characters, even if interrupted by a flashback. When a new character (or characters) enters the scene, it becomes another separate action" (p.281). Their measure also included the amount of time devoted to the violent act, the seriousness of the violent act (whether strictly humorous or comic, partly humorous, or mostly real, serious violence), and the significance of the violent act to the plot (whether the violence is incidental to the plot, a significant segment of the plot, or the major outstanding feature, climax, highlight, or resolution of the plot). Moreover, whether characters commit violence or are victimized is also included in Gerbner's measurement of violence.

In its almost 30 years of operation, the Cultural Indicators group has consistently produced measures of television violence which shows, on average, that 80% of all programs, 70% of primetime programs, and 94% of weekend daytime programming sampled contained violence.

- ***Independent Television Monitoring Project.***

This is the three-year project that produced the *National Television Violence Study* (NTVS) mentioned earlier. The University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) was given the task of designing the framework for analyzing the violence content in cable programming. The UCSB team defined violence as:

> *any overt depiction of a credible threat of physical force or the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings. Violence also includes certain depictions of physically harmful consequences against an animate being or group that occur as a result of unseen violent means. Thus, there are three primary types of violent depictions: credible*

threats, behavioral acts and harmful consequences (Kunkel, Wilson, Donnerstein, Linz, et. al., 1995).

The UCSB team sought a definition of violence that is based on past research on the effects of media violence. They observed that most analyses of violence content on television, like Gerbner's approach, have failed to connect their content analysis to the body of research that looked into the effects of television violence on attitudes and behavior. The UCSB team argued that these individual effects contribute to many antisocial impacts besides creating unrealistic perceptions of the extent of violence that exists in the world.

The UCSB definition puts emphasis on intention to harm which the team concedes is a private, internal psychological state not open to direct observation, but that humans attribute intentions to the actions of others. Therefore their definition would include acts that attempt to cause harm but which prove unsuccessful, because people can infer the intentions of these acts and can respond with fear or learn aggressive tendencies from these acts.

Another emphasis of the definition is on the physical nature of harm. Again, the team included and excluded aspects of harm based on what past research strongly and unequivocally supports. Consequently, their concept of physical harm excludes verbal assaults that intimidate or physical acts that are meant to cause psychological or emotional harm (e.g. embarassment, humiliation) because these effects are not well supported by research. Credible threats are included because these acts cause harm by contributing to fear responses (well-researched by Cantor and others) as well as contributing to aggressive thoughts which could lead to aggressive behavior (studied by Berkowitz and others). Unseen violence or violence that can be inferred from the overt depiction of harmful consequences (e.g. depiction of a dead body of which cause can be inferred clearly from subsequent investigations in the story), is also included in the definition because these can also contribute to antisocial effects such as fear. However, the team put less weight on unseen violence than on the overt depiction of the implied behavioral act because the former would pose less concern that the implied act would be learned or modeled after.

The definition requires that "at least one animate being capable of possessing intentions must be involved as a perpetrator" (Kunkel et.al., p.287) and that an animate being must be a targeted for physical harm in order to meet the definition of violence. They define animate beings as including humans (real or

animated), animals, supernatural creatures, and humanized characters of all kinds. However, the team says that these different animate beings are not necessarily equivalent.

Violence to somebody's property might be associated with antisocial influences on the audience but it is excluded in the definition because "the research evidence documenting the antisocial effects of violence against living beings is compelling while no comparable body of direct evidence exists regarding the impacts of violence against inanimate objects" (p.287). Furthermore, acts of nature such as earthquakes, tornadoes and hurricanes, though they can cause harm and fear responses in the audience, are also excluded from the definition because these are not likely models for aggressive or violent behavior.

The UCSB measured violence in terms of larger units of meaning, which include a violent incident and a violent sequence. They define a violent incident as involving "an interaction between a perpetrator, an act, and a target (victim)" (p.288). A violent sequence is defined as "a related series of violent behaviors, actions, or depictions that occur without a significant break in the flow of actual or imminent violence" (p.289). Using these units of analyses, the NTVS tracked and reported collectively all violence within the same violent incident framework, which occurred within the same violent sequence of a program.

The definition and measurement of media violence will continue to be debated, reassessed, redefined and reconsidered as new research, new media and new concerns come up. For all its shortcomings, the Cultural Indicators Project still stands as the backdrop for future research on the violence content in the media because of the amount of data and analyses that the project has accumulated over the three decades of its existence. Projects, such as the Independent Television Monitoring Project, that try to link measurement of violence in the media with existing research on the effects of media violence on the audience are important and encouraging. They help bring together the findings of academic research, the perspectives of media producers and public policy concerns, elements that should all be considered if any meaning should come out at all from the consideration of the issue of violence in the media and in our lives.

III. Possible Effects of Television Violence

This paper will organize this section based on the three primary types of harmful effects that were identified by the NTVS report: learning aggressive attitudes and behaviors; becoming desensitized to real world violence; and, developing a fear of becoming victimized by violence. There are other probable effects that were studied such as discharging of aggressive impulses through involvement in violent drama, researched mostly by Seymour Fesbach, chairman of the psychiatry department at UCLA, but these were not supported by other studies.

- ***Learning Aggressive Attitudes and Behaviors.***

Research on this effect is based on the idea that people, especially children, can imitate aggressive behaviors that they observe from watching violent actors on television programs just as they would learn social skills from watching their parents, siblings or peers. The best-known early laboratory experiments in learning from observation were done by Albert Bandura of Stanford University (Bandura et al. 1961; 1963). In these experiments, a young child watched a live or filmed actor punch, pummel with a mallet, toss and kick around a 5-foot inflatable doll, called a Bobo doll. Later, the child was placed in a room with a Bobo doll and his/her behavior observed. It was found that children often imitate the aggressive behaviors immediately after observing an aggressive actor, whether live or filmed.

L. Rowell Huesmann of the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle cited the following studies that dealt with some factors contributing to learning by observation (NIMH, 1982 vol.2 pp.128-132):

Reinforcement of a model's aggressive behavior determined the extent to which a child imitates the model. If the child sees the model being punished for aggressive behaviors, the child is less likely to imitate such behaviors (Bandura 1965; Walters and Parke 1964). If the child sees the model being rewarded for aggressive behaviors, the child is more likely to imitate such behaviors (Bandura 1965; Bandura et al. 1963a; Walters et al. 1963).

While the observed reinforcements of the actor's behavior influence the likelihood that the child will exhibit such behavior, how persistent that behavior will be depends on the reinforcement received by the child. However, Bandura found that rewarding an aggressive act had no greater effect on children who observed an aggressive act than on the control children who had not observed the aggressive act.

Identification with an actor or actress being modeled may also influence learning by observation. It was found that both boys and girls readily imitated male rather than female models (Bandura et al. 1963a, 1963b; Huesmann et al. 1978); that black children have sometimes been found to imitate white models more than black models (e.g. Neely et al. 1973); that in some cases, children have been found to imitate adults more than peers (Nicholas et al. 1971). While perceived similarity of interest between the model and child can enhance the likelihood of imitation (Rosekrans 1967), perceived valued characteristics appear more to be the key factor in these studies of identification.

Several researchers have also attempted to determine the age at which most children are most susceptible to imitating observed behaviors. Eron et al. (1972) argued that by adolescence, behavioral predispositions and inhibitory controls have become entrenched to the extent that a child's aggressive habits would be difficult to change by modeling. Collins (1973; Collins et al. 1974; Newcomb and Collins 1979) consistently found that young children are less able to draw the relation between motives and aggression and therefore may be more prone to imitate inappropriate aggressive behaviors. Hearold's (1979) review generally supports these views but suggests that modeling might increase again among adolescent boys. Perhaps the more important question, however, is at how young an age children begin to imitate behaviors viewed on television. Experiments by McCall et al. (1977) indicate that children as young as 2 years were good at imitating televised behaviors, and some imitation was observed in even younger children.

- ***Becoming desensitized to real world violence.***

Some people have wondered about incidents where people just stood by while other people are being mugged, killed or raped. Some psychologists studied this phenomenon and theorized that, over time, repeated exposure to crime and delinquency blunts some people's ability to respond with distress or concern towards violence or aggression. They call this process of reduction in emotional responsiveness habituation or desensitization.

Researchers in the Department of Psychology at the Florida Technological University (Drabman & Thomas, 1974) assessed the effects of viewing filmed violence and children's subsequent readiness to report to an authority figure an argument and fight between two younger children. They set up groups of third and fourth graders. Half of the children watched a violent cowboy movie and the other half watched nothing. The children then all watched a video of what they thought was live aggression between two

younger children. The subjects were tested to see how long it would take for them to get the experimenter for help, if they sought help at all. The children who had watched the violent cowboy movie took significantly longer to get help than the children who had not watched the movie. The gender of the child had no effect on the time taken to respond. Drabman and Thomas concluded that exposure to media violence may increase viewers' subsequent toleration of aggression by conveying the impression that such behaviors are normative by making real-life aggression seem trivial in comparison to the more extreme violence presented in the media, and/or by reducing viewers' emotional sensitivity to subsequent scenes of violence.

Drabman and Thomas replicated their study six months later but with third and first graders to account for age differences (Drabman & Thomas, 1975). They also tried to create a relatively similar arousal state in the subjects by showing half the subjects an aggressive film (detective series) and the other half an exciting but non-violent televised baseball game. They found that third graders in the group that saw the aggressive film took longer to respond than third graders who saw the baseball game. Furthermore, the first graders in both conditions did not respond by notifying the experimenter. Drabman and Thomas explained this by saying that younger children are still socially immature to know how to call for help when they see trouble.

Other studies in desensitization tried to measure body changes in emotional responses to filmed violence based on the idea that people empathize by exhibiting the same physiological changes (e.g. skin changes and blood volume changes) as the person they are observing. Researchers at the University of Utah's Department of Psychology (Cline, Croft & Courrier, 1973), tried to find out if there is a measurable physiological difference in emotional response to filmed violence between children who watch more television (25 hours or more per week) than children who watch less television (4 hours or less per week).

Eighty male children between the ages of 5 and 12 were divided into two groups based on high-exposure or low exposure to television. (The subjects were recruited through ads in the local daily newspaper. The researchers noted that most of the boys who were classified as highly exposed to television came from lower-income families where the parents have less education.) The boys were shown an 8-minute boxing match with equal amount of violent and non-violent content. The boys who watched more

television exhibited less skin and blood volume responses to the boxing film than the boys who watched less television.

To rule out the possibility that the socio-economic status of the boys in Cline's study may have had a significant impact on the results, researchers at the Florida Technological University's Department of Psychology (Thomas, Horton, Lippincott & Drabman, 1977) randomly assigned 28 boys and 16 girls between the ages of 8 and 10 to one of two conditions. One group was shown an 11-minute aggressive excerpt from a televised police series (SWAT) while the other group was shown an 11-minute excerpt from an exciting championship volleyball game. Skin response (GSR) was measured during viewing. They subjects then filled out a questionnaire to assess his/her television viewing habits, with the parents helping fill out the form when necessary. The study found out that children who watched more violence on television (based on answers to questionnaire) showed less responsiveness to either filmed violent drama or "real-life" aggression. There were no significant differences between boys and girls.

In a similar experiment by the same researchers, 30 female and 29 male undergraduates who voluntarily participated were also randomly assigned to the two conditions described above. The students also filled out a questionnaire on their television viewing habits. But then were all shown an 18-minute riot film. Those exposed to the police series exhibited less skin response to the subsequent riot film. Again, there was no significant difference between male and female students.

- ***Developing a fear of being victimized by violence.***

One of the potential harmful effect of viewing media violence that is of concern to some people is the possible formation in the viewer of an exaggerated and maladaptive fear of becoming a victim of violence. This is conceivable given the high incidence and exaggerated nature of criminal behavior in televised entertainment fare (Dominick, 1978; Lichter & Lichter, 1983). Most notably, Gerbner and his colleagues argue that television's overemphasis on violence causes some viewers to form exaggerated perceptions of the chances that they will be victims making them suspicious and distrustful of others (Gross & Morgan.1985; Morgan, 1983; Signorielli et al., 1982). However, Doob & Macdonald (1979) found that this relationship derived more from crime conditions around the viewer's neighborhood rather than from heavy exposure to television. Also, that people's fear of real crime around them encourages them to stay indoors and watch more television.

Gerbner and associates took this inconsistency into account and refined their original hypothesis by asserting that television's effect is strongest among viewers whose real-life situations closely approximates that of the violent situations they see on television (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1980a, 1980b).

While exposure to violent television may in fact create perceptions of fear of crime in society and distrust of fellow citizens, other researchers have tried to distinguish the effects on a more general societal level from those at the personal level (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Tyler, 1980). They found that although the mass media provide people with general information about crime in society, the media actually have little impact on personal judgments about crime and safety compared to the influence of direct personal experience with crime and conversations about crime with friends, family or coworkers.

Why people generally do not connect general knowledge about crime derived from the media to their personal sense of safety is explained in some ways. Personal danger may appear unreal until one has directly encountered it (LeJeune & Alex, 1973); people exaggerate their ability to avoid becoming victims of crime (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1978); and, individuals often do not draw personal implications from general statistical data such as crime rates (Borgida & Brekke, 1981).

Weaver and Washklag (1986) suggests that the opposite causal direction of the relationship between viewing television and fear of crime should also be considered. They suggest, for example, that that it may be the fear of future victimization as a result of having once been victimized that can cause a person to avoid watching crime-related television shows.

IV. Fright Reactions in Children

The Incredible Hulk, The Wizard of OZ, and television news are just a few examples of shows that cause fright reactions in children. A fright reaction is the fear-like response elicited from viewing something that is scary. Research concerning fright reactions has looked at children's responses to television news and mass media, the forewarning of a threat and prior knowledge of an outcome, and various ways in which to intervene in stressful fright reactions in children.

According to Joanne Cantor, professor in the Department of Communication Art at the University of Wisconsin, and Glenn Sparks, also of the same university, there is a consensus that age is an important variable when looking at fright reactions in children (Cantor & Sparks, 1984). Their research looked at

developmental differences in how children are frightened. They tested Piaget's (a Swiss psychologist) work on children's cognitive development which indicates that very young children judge objects by their outward, physical appearances and that as they grow older, they learn to judge objects by their abstract qualities. Congruent to Piaget's developmental stages, Cantor and Sparks found that for very young children, something merely needs to look scary in order to produce a fear response while older children are more frightened by evil motives and the possibility of harm or death to a character. Fantasy content appears to be less frightening for older children who have a better grasp of what is real and what is make-believe than younger children. Also, older children were more frightened by shows such as Jaws and television news that depicted real-life threats or dangers than younger children. Cantor's and Sparks' explanation was that younger children are less able to understand the true threat behind such shows.

Following experiments (Cantor & Sparks, 1984; Sparks and Cantor, 1986) showing that younger children exhibited fear reactions to the monstrous, green skinned Hulk in the action-adventure series, "The Incredible Hulk", Cantor et al. (1988) also looked at ways to lessen the effect of frightening shows on television. They took a Mr. Rogers' episode that showed the Incredible Hulk having makeup put on as Mr. Rogers talked to the actor. Then the researchers coupled that with another tape that emphasized the similarities between the Hulk and the mild-mannered scientist who turns into the Hulk. They found that Mr. Rogers' episode actually helped ease fears about the Hulk among young children.

However, Cantor and Hoffner (1990) demonstrated in an experiment with younger and older children that forewarning children of a scary scene is not an effective means to reduce fear, and in fact may only increase their fear. This appears to be true for both younger and older children. Cantor and Hoffner also found, contary to their expectation, that knowledge of a happy ending has a weak correlation with reducing fear.

A considerable amount of research on fright reactions fail to examine why so many children enjoy and seek out scary movies. Hoffner and Cantor (1991) studied the factors affecting children's enjoyment of a frightening film sequence. They showed scary programs that either had a resolution or no resolution to young and older children. They found in their study that the factors affecting enjoyment of scary films varied according to the outcome of the movie. Among older children, the liking for the threatened character influenced whether they enjoyed the show. This goes with the notion that as older children get older, it

becomes more important to find some connection with the character's situation and their own lives. Across all age groups, prior knowledge of an outcome reduced enjoyment of a show. Children of all ages seem to enjoy not knowing what will happen next.

Entertainment shows are the most often researched forms of mass media when studying fright reactions. But Cantor and Nathanson (1996) looked at television news and its effects on children's fright reactions. They found out that fright reactions to television news increased with age. As expected, older children were frightened by the real-life threats shown in news stories of wars and natural disasters.

The current research done shows a relatively strong link between age and fright reactions. While research on this area has made a comeback after being ignored in the 60s and 70s, recent research has been somewhat sparse in the last several years. Future research might want to include newer forms of mass media that might frighten children, such as video games or even certain websites on the internet.

V. Sexual Violence

A physiological connection between sexual arousal and aggression has been studied by Zillmann (1984). It has been demonstrated that sexual arousal enhances aggression and this aggression-linked arousal can, in turn, intensify sexual experience. The use of sexually explicit media materials has a long history but it had been limited to a few private groups. Only in modern times has access to pornographic materials become public. Coupled with the easy access to sexually explicit materials, sex and violence has increasingly been linked together in several media genre. This section will look at sexual violence in the media and its effects on aggression on women.

- **Sexual Violence in the Media: Aggression against women**

In a study done by Malamuth and Briere, indirect effects suggests a connection between exposure to sexually violent media and the development of thought patterns that support violence against women among men (Malamuth & Briere, 1986).

According to several studies, about one quarter of North American women have been raped or sexually assaulted at some point in their lives (Brickman & Briere, 1984) and about one half of all female college students have experienced some form of male sexual aggression in a given year (Kanin & Parcell,

1977). Such statistics suggest that sexual violence against women, rather than being the product of only a few deviant individuals, is committed by a large number of men (Malamuth & Briere, 1996). Hence, sexual male aggression against women has received great attention in the recent ten years. The role of mass media is one such object of inquiry.

Malamuth and Briere proposed with their indirect model that thought patterns, sexual arousal patterns, and other responses are modified by exposure to sexually violent depictions. When sexual violence is portrayed, it is suggested that despite initial resistance the victim secretly desires and eventually derives pleasure from the assault (Malamuth & Briere, 1986). In addition, sexual aggression is often presented without negative consequences for either the victim or the aggressor. In this respect, Malamuth and Briere, present a model of indirect effects of mass media exposure on antisocial behavior against women.

Malamuth and Check found that college men's frequency of reading sexually explicit magazines correlated positively with their beliefs that women enjoy forced sex. In an experimental research design, male subjects were exposed to either rape with "positive" consequences for the female victim (e.g., she became sexually aroused), rape with "negative" consequences, or mutually consenting sex. Those men who were exposed to the positive rape portrayal believed a higher percentage of women would derive pleasure from being sexually assaulted than the subjects under the different conditions.

In the above-mentioned experimental design, data indicates that exposure to aggressive pornography may alter the observer's perception of rape and the rape victim. For example, exposure to a sexually explicit rape scene in which the victim shows a "positive" reaction tends to produce a lessened sensitivity to rape, increased acceptance of rape myths and interpersonal violence against women (Donnerstein & Linz, 1986).

In conclusion, research may suggest that sexually violent explicit material cause violence against women. However, further research on the connections between sexually violent media and the development of thought patterns that support violence against women is suggested. For example, the indirect-effect model must better identify the conditions under which thought pattern changes do or do not affect sexually aggressive behavior and other antisocial behavior.

- **More female than male victims in media portrayals?**

Linz, Donnerstein and Penrod (1986) started this direction of study in an essay in which they state that slasher films have an overwhelming amount of violence directed towards women, that the victims are almost always female, and that sex tends to be linked to the violence in this genre of movie. This essay lacked any hard data, however, and offered very few examples from any specific horror movie. This article prompted many to go ahead with their own studies. The study splits here in two directions, the first attempting to find out if the violence is directed toward a specific gender, namely females, and the second is to actually link sex with violence in these films.

Molitor and Sapolsky (1994) attempted to generate hard data backup or refute Donnerstein's original claim. For this, they decided to code 30 horror movies for who the victims of these acts are, and to determine an actual male/female ratio. For the thirty films, the ratio came back as almost equal. It turned out that men actually had a slightly higher chance of being the victim of the killer than women did, yet overall the difference was insignificant. Weavers study (1991) also found similar results and backed up the one to one ratio. Objectively, it appears that women are not targeted more specifically than men. Molitor's and Sapolsky's study also coded the average time each character takes to die, and in this, women do appear to be targeted. The average length of time that the killer hunts females was ten minutes, while males were only hunted for two. Donnerstein points to this evidence and compares the one to one ratio to other forms of media violence, where men tend to be the victims about eighty percent of the time, and states that this evidence does back up his point that women are singled out for attack in these movies.

The other direction of study for these movies is the direct connection of sex and violence. Weaver (1991) focused on this aspect. For hard data, he coded ten horror movies, and limited himself to only the first movie of any horror movie series, due to the extreme duplication, and coded the types of scenes. He specifically looked for scenes of aggression, sex, sexual aggression (such as rape or forced sex), and all other scenes. He coded the scenes for duration, characters, type of action, nature of action, resolution, and involvement of nudity. He was also specifically interested in sexual scenes that lead directly into violent scenes. Weaver found that 24.1% of scenes were aggression, 6.2% were sexual, 0.5% were sexual aggression, and 69.2% were other. Of these, foreplay was the most frequent sex act at 51.9% of those scenes, and most of the violent scenes (67.4%) involved an attack. He also found that 9.5% of sexual

scenes lead to a violent scene, which was also backed up by the ratio found in the Molitor and Sapolsky study, which claimed that one out of nine sex acts lead to violence. A direct connection does not appear evident when viewed on its own, yet this can be subject to interpretation, as Donnerstien (1994) once again points out that the sex scenes in the movie link it to the violence, as that is the major point of the movie in the first place, and that the ratio is much greater than other types of media. In his study of X- rated movies and phone porn, Donnerstein find that sex leads to violence 0% of the time in the movies and services he has investigated, and suspects that the industry is very close to that number.

VI. Media Violence in Other Countries

Is the problem of violent television exclusive to just the United States? Studies of television broadcasting in Great Britain, Finland, Japan, Australia and New Zealand show some similarities and differences when compared to the U.S.

Great Britain's television networks have few similarities with the U.S. In Great Britain, a much smaller percentage (30%) of all television contains violence (Cumberbatch 1987). Of this 30%, 56% is fiction-based programming. There is also a difference in the type of violence that can be found. Much of the violence in Great Britain comes across as very sterile. Weapons will usually hit or miss their targets and the injury to the victim is rarely shown. In fact, only 26% of the violence results in a fatality (Hardy 1987) compared to 43% in the U.S. (Williams,1982). Perhaps the biggest difference lies in the 1.7 act of aggression per hour in British television compared to the U.S.' 18.5 acts of aggression per hour (Williams, 1982).

Finnish television broadcasting also bears little resemblance to the United States. In Finland, 40% of television programming contains aggression. Of that, 69% is fiction-based programming (Mustonen 1991). The violence portrayed in Finland is also less brutal when compared to that of the U.S. There is also no presence of sadistic sexual violence that is included in the programming. Most of the aggression is dominated by physical fighting and shootings. Of these shootings and beatings, only 11% of instances resulted in death. On the whole, aggression can be found 5.6 times per hour (Pulkkinen 1992).

Australian television has a count of 51.3% of programs containing violence (McCann & Sheehan, 1985) and New Zealand has 66.1% (Haines, 1983). Cartoons and fiction shows monopolized violence in

these countries. McCann & Sheehan (1985) have noted that 33% of Australian TV programming, particularly in the fiction category with its heavy emphasis on violence, is imported from the U.S. American imports also contribute significantly to the violence levels in New Zealand's television (Gilpin, 1976; Haines, 1983).

Although the amount of television violence found in Great Britain and Finland are relatively low in comparison to the United States, Japan closely approximates that of the United States'. Violent television is very characteristic of Japan. 81% of all fictional television contains violence (Iwao 1981). The types of violence are also similar to the U.S. Japan actually exceeds the U.S. in the amount of bloodshed in television programs but Japanese programs emphasize the suffering of the victims much more than any of the other countries (Iwao 1981). Japanese television's emphasis on the suffering of the victims seem to explain the findings that the Japanese are less influenced to commit aggressive behavior by the abundant amount of violence on their television. Another explanation for the lower influence received by the Japanese audience may be found in their perceptions of the acts. The oriental style of TV violence seems to differ from the western style of TV violence as demonstrated by Iwao. Blood and suffering were portrayed more openly in Japan. Aggressors were often "goodies" in Japanese TV culture, while in western styles, the aggressors were more generally "baddies"(Mustonen 1992).

While the case of Japan may show that cultural considerations matter when looking at differences in portrayal of violence in the media and the effects on the population, Halloran and Croll (1972), in their study of British television, found that it was program type rather than country of origin that determined violence content. Also, Pingree and Hawkins (1981) have found that Australian children disregarded the facts of American accents and locations in watching television, accepting them as television conventions.

While one can make comparisons of the amount of television violence in different countries, interpreting television violence counts must take into account differences in analyzing violence content, cultural contexts, government regulations and control of the media, media production capabilities, etc.

VII. Conclusion

Research in the effects of media violence has been prompted largely by public concern, many times jumpstarted by political actions and provided funding by governmental institutions and the media industry. The focus of research, over the years, has moved from establishing a direct causal relationship

between viewing television and subsequent aggression to a consideration of the processes and mechanisms mediating any effects. Analysis of television violence has improved from a gross count of violent acts to a more contextual approach.

Learning aggressive attitudes and behaviors by imitation, becoming desensitized to real-life violence, and developing a fear of becoming victimized are the types of possible media violence effects that are supported by research. Fright reactions to scary media among children has made a comeback and has produced findings to helping children cope with these fears. Research in sexual violence in the media has shown that generally, more males tend to be victims in media portrayals than females but that in certain genre like slasher films, male and female victims seem to even out, with differences in the portrayal of killing or death. Lastly, data from different countries show that television violence is also prevalent in many countries though the counts are lower than in the U.S.

The issue of media violence will probably be around for as long as the mass media is thriving. It is unrealistic and simplistic to expect the research community to come up with a categorical, definitive statement on the harmful effects of media violence. The most that research can do is to offer data and analysis for the media industry to evaluate its programming, for government to assess its media policies and regulations, and for the public to get wise and be sensible about using the mass media.

Research, however, can do better by finding ways to integrate their findings into a more coherent whole or to find basic principles from their study of television that can be applied to newer forms of mass media such as the Internet.

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