

Outline and evaluate research theories in to media influences on behaviour.

Certain forms of media compose the multi-billion dollar a year entertainment industry. The largest markets in the entertainment business are TV and movies. Almost one and a half billion Americans attend movies in the theatres each year. Over one billion households worldwide have at least one television set.

TV and movies have positive aspects, which enhance the society. Numerous films and programs bring joy and satisfaction to many people; however a number of observers will argue that some elements of entertainment are not appropriate for young children. Violence on TV and in movies is a controversial aspect under much scrutiny nowadays.

A reason TV and movies are under scrutiny is that children in America are exposed to more violence on TV with each passing year. The average American child watches 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school.

Studies suggest that television violence is responsible for the increase in childhood violence. Conversely, it is widely believed that American children are negatively affected by violence on TV and in movies because it desensitises them to violence, and leads to sometimes irreversible patterns of behaviour and actions in their adult lives.

Watching violence is a popular form of entertainment, and watching it on TV is the most frequent and influential means of children being exposed to violence. For example, some early local news programs provide extensive coverage of daily violent crimes simply because it is believed by many executives that covering crime increases ratings. Violence is only one form of human behaviour, while smiling, laughing, poking fun in a harmless way, teasing, flirting, arguing, reasoning, family discussions, and showing simple affection between human beings may be considered some of its other forms but violence is the form that is dominantly displayed in all kinds of packaging on TV and movies and video games, etc. Other forms of human behavior and activities may not be given an equal opportunity in the entertainment industry. Those choosing what will entertain society seem to be admitting that violence is viable type of human behavior and other forms appear less presentable, attractive and marketable.

Television is a focal component of American life. American children spend less time in school than watching TV (Sege 32). Yale graduate, Dr. Robert Sege is a physician and researcher studying the development of a medical response or eventual cure to violence involving children and adolescents. Sege found that in 1989 the common child in the United States spent more time watching TV than doing any other activity, other than sleeping. In the early 1990s, The Nielson Report, a leader in internet media and market research, stated that children ages two to five viewed nearly twenty-seven hours of television each week, and teenagers between the ages of twelve and seventeen spent twenty-two hours a week watching TV (Sege 32). During the past several decades, the number of violent programs on TV has been increasing steadily. Many researchers believe in the possibility that a direct relationship may exist between the violence witnessed on today's television and the increasingly violent behavior of children and adolescents (Palermo 23). During a time in the 21st century when the homicide rate is rising six times faster than the population, a controversial yet common theory is that television violence causes real violence (Egendorf 27). A thesis that is hard to refute.

In support of the accusation that violence is prevalent on U.S. television, while studying eight different television networks the Washington-based Parents Television Council found 3,488 instances of violence, which is an average of 7.86 violent acts each hour out of the 443 hours of children's programming analyzed. Also noted were 858 incidents of verbal aggression; 662 occurrences of disruptive, disrespectful behavior; and they found 275 examples of sexual content (Ngoei). The numbers displaying violence on TV leads into a question many researchers strive to answer: Does violence on television directly effect

how children act?

One man that actively works against television violence and believes that it may have negative effects on children is L. Brent Bozell. Bozell is president of the Parents Television Council and is striving to assist parents in monitoring their children's TV viewing by educating them on the facts. Bozell says that there is more violence directed toward young children than anyone towards any other age group. Bozell says, "Too often we dismiss violence in children's programming as inconsequential." Bozell continues to comment, "Studies have shown exposure to television violence to be positively associated to aggressive behavior in some children, and exposure to sexual content increases the likelihood that children will become sexually active earlier in life" (Ngoei).

The government has been tracking the number of arrests in schools very closely in attempt to recognize trends, and eventually find a way to decrease crime rates. In the book, *Violence: Opposing Viewpoints*, Bill Owens, a Colorado governor and avid media researcher writes, that over a million children under eighteen-years-old are arrested every year. Around thirty-two percent of the arrested youth are under the age of fifteen. In the 1996 through 1997 school year alone, public schools across the country reported 4,000 instances of rape or sexual abuse and 11,000 cases of fights in which weapons were used (Egendorf 28).

Owens brings up the fact that over a two year span, more than 6,000 kids were caught in schools in possession of a gun. Of the 6,000 children caught, only thirteen were prosecuted (Egendorf 28).

A real life example of violence affecting children in a negative way presented itself for the first time in 1977. Ronald Zamora, a 15 year old Florida youth was on trial for the murder of his 82 year old neighbor. At the trial, Zamora's attorney claimed insanity suggesting, "subliminal television intoxication". Zamora's attorney claimed that the 15 year old spent countless hours watching action packed television programs such as *Kojak* and *Beretta*. Zamora was said to be "brainwashed into living in a television fantasy world", rendering him incapable of understanding he was even committing a murder (Torr 21).

This case is the first of many in which the defendant claims he or she was exposed to too much violence on TV or in video games. This case leads to a question: Does television violence directly affect the behavior of children? Is television violence responsible for the number of violent acts by America's youth? Thomas G. Moeller would agree. Moeller is a psychology professor at the University of Mary Washington and a licensed psychologist who specializes in youth behavior and is an expert in childhood violence.

In Moeller's book, *Youth Aggression and Violence*, different studies are analyzed correlating the link between youth aggression and TV violence. One study highlighted in his book is done of three different Canadian towns. The towns, Notel, Unitel and Multitel all received the same government owned Canadian television networks. At the time of the study, the children in all three towns had the same aggression level. The towns were then introduced to three major U.S. networks. Soon after, the levels of both verbal and physical aggression among not only the youth but adults as well had increased dramatically. Notel had the most significant increase with the number of verbally aggressive acts per minute doubling and the number of physically aggressive acts performed in the town tripling (Moeller 139).

This study shows two facts. First, the violence on U.S. television is far greater than that of Canada's. Canada has stricter laws on the media than the United States does and the entertainment industry is monitored more aggressively by the Canadian government. The second observation from this study is the direct effect the violent television shows had on the people of the three towns. After being exposed to U.S. television, the amount of physical and verbal aggressiveness rose dramatically.

Whether or not the violent programs on television directly affect children is nearly impossible to discover. A different study presented in Moeller's book shows the relationship between violent television and social vs. antisocial behavior. The results are clear. Some examples of change in antisocial behavior include: family discussion being reduced by over two-hundred percent, stereotyping increased by ninety percent, significantly less

socialization occurred, the subjects in the study were found over fifty percent more likely to break set rules, the urge to hurt rather than help rose forty percent, violent verbal and physical behavior increased by over thirty percent and some people even started using drugs (Moeller 133).

Some social behaviors improved however. Almost all subjects showed a fair amount of self-control after the study; a better respect for the law was shown as some people were able to play without aggression. One thing, however, together with the prosocial behavior was cooperation, and zero cooperation was recorded among test subjects (Moeller 133).

In *Early Childhood Television Viewing and Adolescent Behavior*, a book written by a number of social scientists, it is stated that the consensus is that most social scientists that see the facts agree that there is a causal relationship between viewing violence and aggressive behavior. It is predicted during adolescence, exposure to television violence has long term effects in aggressive attitudes and responses on children (Overton 79).

An explanation to this theory presented in the book is, "...exposure to television violence in early childhood may be especially important because young children have few preexisting scripts for many types of social conflict or problem situations" (Overton 79). Many organizations follow this belief firmly as well. Between 1990 and 1996, the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, National Institute of Mental Health, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry unanimously concluded that TV violence contributed to violence in the real world (Massing).

There are many theories as to what problems can occur from the effects of television violence. Examples of long term effects are desensitization to violence, skewed relationships, racism, crime, drug use, inability to focus or concentrate, impatience and the list could go on. Though studies have been done to seemingly prove these facts true, many argue that violence has no correlation to the way kids end up.

In *A Companion to Media Studies*, Mary Beth Oliver a professor at Pennsylvania State University specializing in media and psychology writes about race and crime in the media. In this chapter, Oliver States that murder rates are lower in today's age, than in the nineties (Valdivia 421).

Oliver also touches on the fact that violence is needed in the media. She states that it is a form of entertainment and that people enjoy seeing crime or violence on television and in movies (Valdivia 422). Although many would see this as a problem, the market is there and violence sells.

In *Violence: Opposing Viewpoints*, Michael A. Males argues for children. He says that the problem is the adults. Males writes that the rate of violent crimes among adults has actually has risen faster than among teenagers in the last ten to twenty years (Egendorf 33). Males also says that the problem with youth violence is due to poverty.

With more evidence opposing TV affecting children, in *On Media Violence*, W. James Potter presents the argument that the drive to act aggressively is instinctual (Potter 11). One could argue that a person is going to be aggressive whether he/she is exposed to violence or not but as is shown in Moeller's book with the study involving the three Canadian towns, the citizens of those towns didn't record aggressive behavior until after viewing violent television shows.

More arguments come from James D. Torr's book: *Violence in Film and Television*. Jacob Sullum writes a chapter questioning the research on media violence. In this chapter, he explains that most studies are done in a controlled laboratory and that the researcher's expectations manipulate the outcome more so than in the real world. Sullum also suggests that the researchers see and record what they want to see. He quotes a psychologist named Jonathan Freedman who has done many studies on media violence and researched many aspects of TV, and he says, "The majority of studies do not find evidence that supports the notion that television violence causes aggression" (Torr 111).

Sullum also argues that correlation does not prove causation. The fact that people act more violent when around violence doesn't mean that their actions are caused by it. Sullum writes that children acting aggressively could just be that violent or aggressive

people prefer to watch violent entertainment (Torr 112).

Finding a flawless means of testing the effects of TV violence on children seems not to be plausible. There will be those who support the studies supporting it and those who oppose. No one party is incorrect with their theories, but the question still remains if there is a direct correlation between what children see on TV and how they act. Regardless of what the studies show, what children see on TV is on the shoulders of the parents. America's mothers and fathers are directly responsible for not only what children watch on TV, but more importantly how a child is raised, and what kind of man or woman he or she is likely to become