

## **The Media Effects on Children and Adolescents**

Counseling 448: Intervention and  
Advocacy for Children  
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### **For the Past 20 Years...**

- There is a consensus among researchers that violence on television contributes to aggressive behavior, to anxiety about becoming a victim and to callousness with respect to the impact of violence on others

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### **For the Past 20 Years...**

Research shows us that a diet of media violence can increase the risks that children:

- be more likely to choose to use violence to solve conflicts
- be desensitized to use of violence by others
- develop a mean and scary view of the world

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### Quotes on T.V....

**"We have reconstructed the Tower of Babel, and it is a television antenna: a thousand voices producing a daily parody of democracy, in which everyone's opinion is afforded equal weight regardless of substance or merit"**

**Ted Koppel**

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### Quotes on T.V....

• **"TV is the single most significant factor contributing to violence in America"**

**Ted Turner**

• **"The remarkable thing about television is that it permits several million people to laugh and joke and still feel lonely."**

**T S Elliot**

• **"The one function TV news performs very well is that when there is no news we give it to you with the same emphasis as if there were"**

**David Brinkley**

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### The Influence of the Media on Children

- **Electronic media is playing a significant role in the lives of children (ages 6-17):**
- **86% have access to a VCR (23% in their own rooms);**
- **76% have a video game system at home (32% in their own rooms);**
- **50% have a TV in their own room; 40% have their own portable cassette or CD player; and 35% have their own stereo system (Roper Starch Worldwide, 1998).**

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### **The Media is a Significant Environmental Influence**

Time spent watching TV by age/per week:

- Children aged 2-5 average 25 hours
- Children aged 6-11 average 20-28 hours
- Children aged 12-17 average 23 hours
- "By adulthood (18 yrs) most Americans have spent more time in front of the television set than in school, and far more than they have spent talking with their teachers, their friends and their parents."

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### **Time Spent Watching Television**

Takes away from important activities such as:

- Reading
- School work
- Playing
- Family Interaction
- Social Development
- Knowing the difference between fantasy and reality
- Children who watch Television

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### **Time Spent Watching Television**

Children and Adolescents are more likely to:

- Have lower grades in school
- Read fewer books
- Exercise less: High Couch Potato Index
- Be overweight
- Use television as an escape from reality
- Be less imaginative
- See violence as an appropriate way to solve interpersonal problems

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### Effects on Behavior

- The average child will watch 8,000 murders on TV before finishing elementary school. By age 18, the average American has seen 200,000 acts of violence on TV, including 40,000 murders.
- Television can be a powerful influence in developing value systems and shaping behavior.

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### Effects on Behavior

University of Pennsylvania

- "Children's TV shows contain about 20 violent acts each hour"
- "Children who watch a lot of television are more likely to think that the world is a mean and dangerous place."

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### Effects on Behavior

Children who watch violent shows, even "just funny" cartoons, were more likely to hit out at their playmates, argue, disobey class rules, leave tasks unfinished and were less willing to wait for things than those who watched nonviolent programs.

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## Effects on Behavior

Dr. Leonard Eron - University of Illinois:

- " Children who watched many hours of TV violence when they were in elementary school tended to also show a higher level of aggressive behavior when they became teenagers"
- At age 30, Dr. Eron found that the ones who'd watched a lot of TV when they were eight years old were more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for criminal acts as adults."

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## Comparisons of Six Major

1. Arousal Hypothesis
2. Social Learning Theory
3. Disinhibition Hypothesis
4. Aggression Reduction
5. Cognitive Processing
6. Theory Attitude Change Theory

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## Arousal Hypothesis

Proponent Tannebaum:

- Exposure to television violence increases aggression because violence increases excitation or "arouses" viewers
- Both physiological arousal and level of behavior will vary depending on whether a film sequence ends on an exciting note or concludes with blander depictions

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## Social Learning Theory

- Proponent: Bandura<sup>11</sup> the most influential sources of research on television and aggression. Ways of behaving are learned by observing others and a major means of acquiring unfamiliar behavior.
- Children can acquire aggressive ways of behaving from television and will exhibit these aggressive responses in play behavior.

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## Disinhibition Hypothesis

- Proponent: Berkowitz
- Certain circumstances will result in increased interpersonal aggression because it weakens inhibitions against such behavior.
- Circumstances:
- where violence is rewarded;
  - where similar situations are in the current environment;
  - where the environment has a target.

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## Aggression Reduction

- Proponent: Feshbach:
- Under certain conditions exposure to television violence will reduce subsequent aggression.
  - When television violence creates aggression anxiety which leads to the inhibition of aggressive impulses.

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## Cognitive Processing

### Cognitive Processing Psychology

- Certain aggressive behaviors may be learned and stored in the brain for future reference
- Placement of artificial images into our mind's eye by inducing alpha waves (hypnotizing effect) with quick camera switches, rapid image movement, and computer generated morphing and other technical events.
- Q.: Do large amounts of television viewing correlate with attention deficit disorder?

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## Attitude Change Theory

- The more violent television the child watches, the more the child tends to have favorable attitudes toward aggressive behaviors:
1. become "immune" to the horror of violence
  2. gradually accept violence as a way to solve problems
  3. imitate the violence they observe on television; and
  4. identify with certain characters, victims and/or victimizers

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## Violence on Screens, Music, and What We Teach Children

- We teach children about how to treat people and handle conflict
- @ 125,000 youth under 18 were arrested for violent crimes in 1994 @ 805,000 youth under 18 were arrested for violent crimes in 1996 Is this linked to being more impulsive, more aggressive, and an inability to concentrate?

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### **Being Hooked on the Media**

- Resembles the dependency symptoms of substance abuse:
- Using TV as a sedative
- Indiscriminate viewing
- Feeling loss of control while viewing
- Feeling angry with oneself *for* watching too much
- Inability to stop watching, and
- Feeling miserable when kept *from* watching

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### **What Children Learn About Conflict Resolution: TV vs Life**

What children learn from TV

- To see the problem causing the conflict is the other person's fault
- To use only one solution - the violent one which often involves using weapons

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### **What Children Learn About Conflict Resolution: TV vs Life**

What "need" to learn *from* real life

- To see the problem as a shared one and part of an ongoing relationship
- To look *for* many possible solutions and the words to try to explore them

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**What Children About Conflict  
Resolution: TV vs. Life**

What children learn *from* TV

- To have one winner and everyone else losing
- To see violence as happening w/o consequences
- To have the bad guys come back *for* more of the same next time

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**What Children About Conflict  
Resolution: TV vs. Life**

Need to learn from real life

- To choose a solution to try because everyone wins
- To try agreed-on solution and experience consequences
- To evaluate the solution and make it work better

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**Factors Which Increase Risk of  
Violent Behavior in Children**

A complex interaction or combination of factors leads to an increased risk of violent behavior:

- Previous aggressive or violent behavior
- Being the victim of violence
- Exposure to violence in home/community
- Genetic factors
- Exposure to violence in the media
- Use of drugs and/or alcohol
- Combination of stressful family socioeconomic factors

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### **Who Is Most Vulnerable...**

- Children under the age of eight who can not distinguish between fantasy and reality
- Boys because most violence in the media is done by males
- Those who live in violent homes
- Those who spend a lot of time with media

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### **Warning Signs for Violent Behavior in Children**

Children who have several risk factors and the show the following behaviors should be carefully evaluated:

- Intense anger
- Frequent loss of temper or blow-ups
- Extreme irritability
- Extreme impulsiveness
- Becoming easily frustrated

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### **Children's Perceptions of Race and Class in the Media**

- Today's children will be the first generation to come of age in an America where racial minorities are the numeric majority.
- Our future will depend upon children's ability to develop positive racial identities and an appreciation of diversity.
- Children will need to expand their conception of race and race relations in ways their parent never knew.

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