

Media Violence, Video Games, and Public Health: Summary of Readings

Aggie Zimny and Renee Powell

Man Who Counts the Killings: George Gerbner

- Gerbner was the first individual to write a thesis on education and television
 - He believes that TV has led to a misunderstanding about the real world by making everything extremely negative
- Television intoxication: when one can no longer tell right from wrong. This was used as an explanation for why adolescents and teens were committing violent acts
- There are over 3,000 studies suggesting a connection between television viewing and aggression
 - ex) after television was introduced in South Africa murder rates sky rocketed which is similar to the effects of television in the United States
- Surgeon general and National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence say that television is a major contributing factor in violence.
- 1990 Television Violence Act: Senator Paul Simon felt that violence was too accessible and this act was to reduce the amount of violence on shows that were accessible to children.
 - This expired before anything could be done and violence in the media dramatically increased
- V-Chip: this was to be installed in all new TV sets which allowed parents to have more control over what their children watched. This wasn't very useful in preventing children from watching the blocked shows since they were better at using these new electronics (compared to their parents)
- Cultural Indicators Project: longest media research, tested the quantity and quality of media violence.
 - It was found that there are roughly 25 acts of violence per hour on Saturday morning shows/ cartoons which are most likely to be watched by children
 - The average American child witnesses 8,000 murders and 100,000 other violent acts by the time they leave elementary school.
 - Children watch roughly 27 hours of TV a week
- Cultivation Analysis: measured how much television contributes to viewers' concept of reality.
 - Turned out that by constantly focusing on violence, people were actually becoming more fearful which is the point of violence in the first place.
 - Cultivation analysis was done for 39 years; results showed:
 - America spends $\frac{1}{3}$ of their free time watching TV
 - Women make-up $\frac{1}{3}$ of characters in samples
 - Lower class is invisible on TV, only makes up to 1.3 percent of prime-time characters.
 - For every white male victim there are about 17 white female victims.
 - 1 white male dies: 22 minority females die
 - Minority women are twice as likely to be victims than aggressors.

- Villains are usually: male, lower class, young, latino or foreign
- The mind become desensitized/ militarized and leads to what is known as *Mean World Syndrome*
 - *Mean World Syndrome*: Gerbner believes it has made people more aggressive which might be related to why, in the last 30 years, people have become more pro-capital punishment.
 - There is the opinion that TV doesn't **cause** violence, it **contributes** to it.
- Sex doesn't interest Gerbner which is why Cultural Indicators doesn't publish statistics about sexual encounters on television.
 - American is prudish and uptight about sex, there are cultural discrepancies about sex and violence. Europe is more focused on blocking out the violence whereas the United States is more focused on blocking out the Sex and Nudity.
- Television Facts:
 - Out of 30 minutes of TV, you get 23 minutes of your program and then 7 minutes of commercials
 - African Americans are more likely to rely heavily on the TV to know more about the world
 - TV has become this centralized system, TV essentially replaces religion's previous position in linking people together.
 - Humorous violence is no different than overt violence. Happy violence is showing that any problem can be fixed by violence and there are no consequences.
 - It has been noted that action sequels also increase in violence and the amount of dead bodies/ body count.
- Private organization control what we watch and are in charge of majority of TV. In the U.S Public broadcasting only receives 1.50 per capita, not much has been done to protect the public's broadcasting interests.
 - A bill was passed to bring back competition to broadcasting since it was controlled by a few conglomerates.
 - Violent films are still being made even though they are never the highest in demand and this is because violence sells.
 - Individuals around the world can lease these violent TV shows for less than it would cost to make their own keeping the system in business. This is mainly because sex and violence translates very well, much easier than humor.
- Cultural Environment Movement: Gerbner and colleagues attempt to change and restore the power based on the cultural environment and viewers.
 - To see more stories by more different kinds of people get broadcasted, bringing back the cultural choices.
 - Aim is to bring back control to the people so that corporate companies don't run the show
 - Gerbner doesn't think TV is inherently bad, it has been compared to the social cement that religion once was.
 - Democratic people won't be able to remain democratic and free if they give up their control.

Media Violence and the American Public: Scientific Facts Versus Media Misinformation

- The article poses 4 questions...
 - Does the level of violence in media mirror the level of violence in the real world?
 - Violence is grossly overemphasized in media
 - 87% of real crimes are nonviolent; 13% of crimes on reality-based TV are nonviolent
 - 50% of reality-based TV crimes are murder; only 0.2% of real crimes are murders
 - All in all, there is far more violence in the media than in the real world
 - Is there strong evidence linking exposure to media violence to aggression?
 - Some people in film industry claim a “catharsis hypothesis” - that viewing violence gives an emotional release (of anger, aggression, etc.)
 - Narrative and meta-analytic reviews have found that viewing violence increases aggression (a causal connection, significant correlation)
 - Small effect sizes or percentages can still yield a large, concerning number of affected individuals
 - How have news reports of the violent-media effect on aggression changed over time?
 - On average, the mass media acknowledge that media violence is positively related to aggression, though they tend to claim this relationship is not very strong
 - Almost half do not advise parents to prevent their child from viewing violent media
 - Recent news reports have edged away from the already weak message given to the public in earlier years’ news
 - Is there any correspondence between the cumulative scientific knowledge about media violence effects on aggression and news reports about this link?
 - As it became clearer to scientists that media violence effects were real and significant, news media reports on the subject got weaker
 - Mass media sources have failed to report the changes in the scientific knowledge on media violence and aggression
 - What’s the reason for this reporting discrepancy?
 - Print news media likely has a vested interest in denying links between violence and media
 - Misguided attempt to report opposing views
 - Failure of research community to effectively argue its case
- Average American spends 40 hours per week consuming media
- About 60% of TV programs contain violence
- By the time the average American child graduates from elementary school, they will have seen over 8,000 murders and over 100,000 other acts of violence on TV
- 85% of the most popular video games were violent
- Violence is easy to export to other markets because less is lost in translation

Gun Violence Trends in Movies

- Method: content analysis
 - Coders identified the presence of violence in each 5-minute film segment for ½ of the top 30 films since 1950
 - Coders identified the presence of guns in violent segments since 1985
- Violence in films has more than doubled since 1950
- 1985 - the first full year that PG-13 rating was used
- Gun violence in PG-13 films has more than tripled since 1985
 - When PG-13 ratings started, these movies has as much gun violence as G and PG films
 - But, since 2009, PG-13 films have contained as much or more gun violence as R-rated films
 - The proportion of PG-13 rated films in top 30 grossing films has increased since 1985
- By including guns in violent scenes, films may both strengthen the weapons effect and provide scripts for using guns - a double whammy
 - In memory, scripts define situations and guide behavior
 - A person selects script for situation, assumes a role in the script, and behaves accordingly
 - Scripts can be learned through direct experience or through observation (such as viewing violent characters in media)
 - Weapons effect
 - Just seeing a weapon can increase aggression
 - Has been proved in a number of experimental studies
- Violence is a common theme in top-selling films
 - Violence in top-grossing films has increased since 1950, even in G-rated films

Why is it so hard to believe that media influence children and adolescents?

- Violent video games have been compared to Grimm's fairy tales and Homer's Odyssey
- There is literature on the effects that media has on health issues and part of the reason/problem might be that the general public and some academics might not know how to interpret it
- Media might only contribute to 10%-20% of any given problem but its an amount that we have more control over since risk factor are difficult to control.
- Human behavior is complex, often times determined by multiple factors:
 - Third Person Effect: people think the media has a stronger effect on others than themselves.
 - Faulty Reasoning: many people think that there is no relationship between violent media and aggression because they themselves have watched and played violent video games and movies and never killed anyone. However murder and mass killings are seen as very uncommon so it's not a valid way to think

- Refusal to believe in the evidence: many people simply refuse to believe the data, Academics contribute to this problem because they like to “buck the establishment” by promoting themselves and their research.
- Cognitive Dissonance: conflicting thoughts can lead to psychological discomfort. People find the media to be fun and entertaining so it conflicts with the information they are being told. They assume that the research is wrong.
- Psychological reactance: people experience reactance also known as unpleasant tensions. This is when people feel that their freedom is being limited and causes a “forbidden fruit” effect.
- Catharsis Theory: Aristotle felt that people’s unhealthy emotions were removed by watching greek tragedies. Hollywood still believes this to be true even though it is not
- Hollywood denials: entertainment industry point to all their winning and ennobling products but denies any negative effects from violent films. When millions of dollars are at stake no one wants to take personal responsibility for the harmfulness
- Media is good for children and teenagers: there are several outlets that are deemed as education and good for children and adolescents such as PBS and Sesame street. So critics of the media are often accused of being overly negative and shortsighted.
- Media themselves don’t often report on negative media effects
 - Between 1972 and 2000 media effects were increasing overtime in research studies, news reports on media causing harm were decreasing.
 - Journalists rely on weak sources that don’t match the expertise or experience of the lead researchers therefore confusing everyone.
 - Relationships between media violence and real life aggression is stronger than most public health connections.
- How to help the cause
 - A joint task force on children, adolescents and the media can be a powerful force that would affect the entertainment industry as well as the federal government
 - Few schools teach media literacy in the states, more funds can be collected to sponsor research, better education for the public and the children in school. Important that the academic researchers learn how to better communicate the science to the public- Less scientific jargon.

Violent Movies and Severe Acts of Violence: Sensationalism versus Science

- Gun violence in films as prevalent in PG-13 as in R-rated films
- Violent portrayals in movies provide a script for gun use
 - Some real-world shooting perpetrators even dress as if “following a script from a movie”
- This study examined relationships between violence/guns in films and gun-related homicides, homicides, and aggravated assaults
 - Three sets of analyses conducted to find links between violent movies and severe violent behavior
 - Used Bushman (2013)’s sample of 945 top-grossing films between 1950 - 2012
 - Gathered information on the on annual rate of violent sequences per hour of film
 - Gathered information on the occurrence of violent sequences in films released after 1985 (the year PG-13 rating was introduced)
- Movies have become more violent over time
 - In 2012, movies were 177% more violent than the mean film violence for the entire period from 1950 -2012
 - During this same time, real-life homicide rates were lower than the overall mean for this time period
- Violence in films has increased over past 50 years
- Gun violence in PG-13 movies has more than tripled in the past 27 years
- Despite popular notion, *this study did not find violence in films to be a cause of violence in the US*
 - Annual trends in violent films from 1950 - 2012 found to be unrelated to violent crime
 - Annual trends in gun violence in PG-13 movies found to be unrelated to violent crime and homicides involving guns
 - Findings consistent with previous research
 - A recent meta-analysis of 26 independent samples failed to find a link between violent media and violent criminal behavior
- In some studies, the popularity of violent TV/movies has been found to be *negatively* related to rates of severe violence
 - In the days following the release of popular violent movies, violent crime rates decrease
 - Homicides have been found to decrease in the months following a violent video game release
 - Perhaps violent media provides an outlet for violent individuals to commit violent acts - instead of committing such violence in a public place