Violence in Media and its Effects on Behavior: How Various Media Influence Aggressive Behavior in Adolescents

Mikayla Arredondo, Nicholas Castillo, Luisa Holguin, Marco Rodriguez

Texas Tech University

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Introduction

It can be agreed that there has been a tremendous increase in the amount of violent public acts, such as mass shootings, in the United States within the last twenty years. These horrific acts have instilled fear into citizens all over the nation and have even made an impact worldwide. These acts have led to research studies that attempt to understand how someone can shoot and kill innocent people along with trying to understand their psychological state of mind. Some researchers argue that these recent acts of terrorism are a result of televising and glamourizing previous mass shooters such as the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival shooting, in Las Vegas, in Las Vegas on October 1, 2017. It is possible that this level of exposure may lead to copycat shooters, along with new shooters, trying to do more harm than the previous one, maybe even trying to gain fame. This may be a substantial contributing factor, leading experts claim, that the conception of these mass shootings begin at an adolescent age. Adolescents are biologically designed to absorb and retain any knowledge that they are exposed to and not only do the subject’s take in all the information given to them, but they will act on it as well. Today, in the age of modern technology, it is easier to gain access to various mediums that have the potential to be violent in nature. Violence can be found in mediums such as video games, movies, television and music. Each digital media outlet is rated, for the parent’s discretion, according to the severity of the violent acts for which the viewer could potentially be exposed. Through this research and synthesis, we intend to reveal the correlation between violence and digital media. According to recent studies, within the past twenty years, leading experts argue that there is a correlation between the consumption of violent media as an adolescent and its long-term negative effects on behaviors and attitudes as an adult.

Media has a greater influence than most of us can imagine. The media is powerful; it can affect our attitude, beliefs and behavior. This element has a stronger approach on adolescence due to their constant intake of information and ability to be influenced easily. Adolescents spend a large amount of time using media, whether that time is spent watching movies, television, video games, or their interaction with social media and music. The direct relationship between media effects and violent behavior of adolescents is extremely effective.

Throughout the world, there are an innumerable amount of people who spend a considerable amount of time using digital media. In America, people aged 2-17 watch television at the maximum of 40 hours a week [AC Nielsen Company, 2000, p. 2006]. Raşit AVCI and Songül Sonay GÜÇRAY researched the relationship between media effects and violence in adolescents. The sample group of this research project was a total of 2,120 7th and 8th grade private school students. The researchers concluded experiences in a peer environment and family environment have an important role in the development of violent behavior, but the media is just as effective.

During the research, important evidence was found proving that adolescents being exposed to violent movies, television shows, video games and music is an important factor that will increase the development of violence behavior of an adolescent (Anderson et al., 2003, p. 2006). Based on the social cognitive theory, individuals learn violence through modeling someone or something. These models can be parents, siblings, peers or character in the media. Watching violent behavior allows influences the reproduction of violent behavior as a habit.
Does Movie or Video Game Violence Predict Societal Violence? It Depends on What You Look at and When.

Although the relation between violence and media is not rooted in causation, there still appears to be a correlation between the two. In the article by Christopher J. Ferguson, he states that “although graphic violence did not correlate with societal violence, frequency of violence in movies did correlate with societal violence in the form of homicides” (Ferguson, 2015, pg. E9). It appears that the correlation of violence and media is in the frequency of exposure and not in causation. In the article, Ferguson highlights a study conducted by another researcher, Centerwall, who analyzed the rising rates of violence in South Africa after television was introduced to the public in 1975 (Ferguson, 2015, pg. E3). The rising rates of violence also appears to be a trend in the adolescence of Canada (Ferguson, 2015, pg. E3).

Ferguson addresses the debate on whether there is a causation between media and violence stating, “that the introduction of television had no effect on childhood aggression” (Ferguson, 2015, pg. E3). Although Ferguson states that there is no causation between media and violence, he does explain that if this argument about media is true, violence in video games should cause adolescence to react negatively (Ferguson, 2015, pg. E10).

At the conclusion of this article, after Ferguson addresses the other various studies, he states that the “experimental, correlational, and longitudinal studies have failed to provide a consistent answer one way or another regarding this question” (Ferguson, 2015, pg. E2). That question is whether media violence is related to societal violence. When regarding the studies that Ferguson conducted using violent movies and video games, he states that both studies had failed to prove whether they influenced society (Ferguson, 2015, pg. E13). In his own words,
Ferguson states that the data on both studies “demonstrate an inverse relationship,” (Ferguson, 2015, pg. E8).

**Violent Video Game Effects on Salivary Cortisol, Arousal, and Aggressive Thoughts in Children.**

In *Violent Video Game Effects on Salivary Cortisol, Arousal, and Aggressive Thoughts in Children* (2017), Douglas Gentile claims that there is a correlation between the consumption of violent video games and aggressive behaviors (pg. 39-43). Today, video games play an impactful role in an adolescent childhood growing into adulthood. The experiment focuses on children’s flight-or-fight response after playing a violent video game or a nonviolent video game. The signs that Gentile was looking for was an arrhythmia in the heart or any cardiovascular changes. The experiment showed that if the child had played a violent video game that they would be more likely to have aggressive thoughts than if they were to play a nonviolent video game.

The experiment consisted of 136 children that were brought in and were then tested to see their physical side effects from playing a violent video game. (Gentile, 2017, pg. 40). The more intense the violence is in the video game, the larger the physical arousal would be. This experiment supports the claim that there is a correlation towards the consumption of violent video games as an adolescent and negative behavioral effect. The article claims that, “multiple narrative and meta-analytic literature reviews have found that violent video game exposure is positively related to aggressive feelings,” (Gentile, 2017, pg. 39).

**Effects of Prosocial, Neutral, and Violent Video Games on Children’s Helpful and Hurtful Behaviors.**

Saleem agrees that there has been an increase in the introduction and production of new video games. There is a positive correlation within the number of video games and the
prevalence of violence in these games. In the article, the *Effects of Prosocial, Neutral, and Violent Video Games on Children’s Helpful and Hurtful Behavior* (2012), Saleem, an assistant professor in the psychology department at Iowa State University, claims that there are positive effects of playing video games such as it increases prosocial cognitives (Saleem, 2012, pg. 281). Saleem’s research indicates that there is a short-term effect on a child after playing video games if the child has exhibited existing behavioral problems (Saleem, 2012, pg.283). The experiment to support Saleem’s claim enlisted the participation of 191 children, 104 male participants and 87 female participants (Saleem, 2012, pg. 285). The study had the children participate in playing a prosocial video game. Once the child finished the game, they would be given a partner and tasked to complete a puzzle. Saleem’s results show that games that exhibit prosocial behaviors will bring down hurtful behavior while still increasing helpful behavior (Saleem, 2012, pg.285).

**Conclusion**

According to the recent studies portrayed in this essay, it can be agreed that there is not a direct causation between the consumption of violent media as an adolescent and the long-term negative effects into adulthood but rather a correlation. The amount of violent media that an adolescent is exposed to may lead to them being desensitized to violent acts and aggressions as an adult. In the twentieth century there is constant access to many different forms of media such as, television, movies, music, video games and social media. Media plays an important role in our daily lives which means it has a great impact on an individual’s values, beliefs, and behaviors. Media can enhance learning and creativity, but it can also have a negative effect on an individual. The mediums that were researched have the potential to be violent in nature. Adolescents absorb and retain any knowledge that they are exposed to. They will not only obtain the information given to them, but they will also act on it.
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References


