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The Effects of Televised Violence on Students

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**THE EFFECTS OF TELEVISED
VIOLENCE ON STUDENTS**

by

Bobbi Jo Kenyon

**MASTERS PROJECT
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty of the School of Education
At Grand Valley State University
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Grand Valley State University

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“We cannot pretend that there is no impact that is adverse on our culture and our children if there is too much violence coming out in what they see and experience.” - Bill Clinton

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: THESIS PROPOSAL

Introduction	1
Statement of Purpose	1
Proposal	2
Background	3
Increasing Violence Among Youth	4

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Introduction of Television	6
What is Being Viewed?	7
The Amount of Televised Violence	8
Is There a Link Between Televised Violence and Aggression?.....	9
Independent Research.....	12
Experimental Studies.....	12
Field Studies	13
Studies in Natural Settings	15
Long-Term Studies	16
Factors that Lead to Aggression.....	18
Violent Acts Being Copied	21
Why the Impact?	22
Desensitization.....	24
Mean World Syndrome.....	25
Televised Violence and Stress	26
Summary	27

CHAPTER THREE: THESIS DESCRIPTION

Introduction	29
Participants.....	30
Design of Study.....	30
Procedure.....	30
Instrumentation.....	31
Results and Analysis.....	33
Recommendations.....	40
Conclusion.....	45

REFERENCES.....	48
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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Human Subjects Review Consent	52
Appendix B – Student Survey	53
Appendix C – Student Interview Questions	56
Appendix D – Resources on Televised Violence.....	57

DATA FORM

ABSTRACT

Violence among our youth today has skyrocketed, and we continue to hear reports of violent acts and aggressive behavior, especially in our schools. This growing level of negative behavior has prompted many educators and communities to look for an explanation. One suggestion often proposed is that our youth learn violent and antisocial behaviors by watching televised violence.

This paper examines over forty years of laboratory and field research on the effects of televised violence on children. The vast majority of studies conclude that televised violence can lead to behaviors such as aggressiveness, desensitization, and fearfulness. These findings were then compared to a study conducted on eight students at Ottawa High School. The purpose was to see if a relationship existed between the amount of televised violence a students watched and some of the behaviors they exhibited at school. The students were given both a survey and an interview to assess their behaviors and feelings regarding this issue. The results found were consistent with previous research. In conclusion, this paper gives recommendations that will help make schools, teachers, and students more aware of the negative impact of televised violence and how to reduce its influence on them and our schools.

CHAPTER ONE: THESIS PROPOSAL

Introduction

Teen violence has become a very important issue to me as an inner city high school teacher. I constantly hear about the tragic outcomes of student violence in the news and read about disturbing acts of violence between children. In my own classroom and school, I have noticed many students who are very aggressive both physically and verbally. Most of them also seem to be desensitized to the hurt they may cause others and put up a very defensive guard, as if they are scared to be harmed themselves. I have often wondered where teens develop such behaviors and attitudes and why they seem to resort to violence as a first resort to resolving conflicts. Although I know that much of the problem may be from what they see or experience first hand at home or on the streets, I wondered how much influence all the violence depicted on television had upon them.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to research the impact of televised violence on children and to interview a select number of students at Ottawa Hills High School to assess the effects on them. If a positive relationship is found, then recommendations will be made for schools to help teachers address this issue and find a way to curb this impact.

Proposal

I will begin my study by surveying what previous and ongoing research shows about the impact of televised violence on our youth. After my research of professional studies on this issue, I will do a casual-comparative study to investigate the possible relationship between televised violence and its negative effects on students at my school. I want to discover if the effects found in the research are impacting student behavior in my school in similar ways to the research and gain some insight into how students feel about this issue.

I will start addressing this issue by giving a survey to eight students in the summer school program who volunteer for the study and have returned permission consents. After each completes the survey, I will briefly interview them to gain better insights into their feelings regarding the impact television has had upon them. More importantly, I will ask them for any recommendations they have for schools to help them better deal with the violence portrayed on television. The information that I find will hopefully shed some light on behaviors problems seen at the high school level and give me ideas to help teachers and students become more aware of the consequences of watching violence on television. I plan to include several recommendations for teachers and schools to help raise student awareness of violence in the television programs they watch, both in their younger and later years, and to help deal with the impact that this medium has had upon them.

The research being done in no way will show or ignore that fact that televised violence is not the only impact on negative behaviors such as student aggression. I

will, however, try to show that there is a casual relationship that does need to be addressed and that we as teachers can help curb its impact.

Background

The increase of violence among our youth, especially as it relates to schools, has become one of America's most pressing issues. Faced with this growing level of violence and its impact on society, many have looked for an explanation to this aggressive behavior. One suggestion has been that our youth learn violent and antisocial behaviors by watching violent television.

Television has become the number one past time for children and teens since its first introduction in 1939. Students currently have grown up with television viewing as a daily routine. According to a Nielsen (1998), in homes with teenagers under eighteen, the average viewing time is 55 hours weekly or about 7 4/5 hours a day. This is actually more than the time they spend in school. By graduation from high school, a student will have spent only about 11,000 hours in school, but between 15,000 and 20,000 hours watching television (Minow and LaMay, 1996).

Even worse than the amount of television children watch, is what is being viewed during these hours. Various studies have been done on content and it has been found that prime time programs average eight hostile acts per hour; with children shows four times as much, and cable television premium channels even higher (Hart, 1992). The research therefore suggests that before the age of 18, the average American teen will have witnessed 200,000 acts of violence on television alone! I believe that continual viewing of televised violence socializes our students in a negative way by

presenting aggressive, anti-social, and even criminal behaviors as everyday usual behaviors. This can then be witnessed in their interactions with one another and authority at the high school level.

This growing realization that this television violence will affect viewers has been brought about by more than 100 published papers representing over 50 laboratory and field studies involving around 15,000 children and adolescents from every type of background. The research demonstrates that our youth are affected in several ways. Watching violent television makes them more aggressive in their interactions with others and their responses to conflict, more afraid of harm being done to them, and more desensitized to seeing violence around them.

Increasing Violence Among Youth

Research has shown that over the years, American teenagers have alarmingly increasing rates of violence. One FBI statistic from 1995 shows that one third of all violent crimes are committed by people under the age of twenty-one (Margolis, 1997). Interestingly, these rates in juvenile violence have increased notably since the 1950's. "The arrest rates for boys ages fourteen to seventeen steadily increased from a level of .4 percent in 1950 to a level of 13.2 percent in 1990. Homicides for non-white males ages fifteen to twenty-four in 1960 were reported at the rate of 5.9 per 100,000, and steadily increased to 19.9 in the early 1990's; the increase was from 43.7 to 109.1 per 100,000 for black males in this age group." (Kalin, 1997, p. 132)

This increase has continued through the years. The US Department of Justice has data showing that between 1985 and 1993 the rate of fifteen-year-old males arrested

for murder increased 207 percent; in 1994, juveniles accounted for 19 percent of all violent crime arrests, and in 1997, approximately 2.8 million children under eighteen were arrested - 2,500 arrested for murder and 121,000 for other violent crimes. This amounts to an average of twenty-one kids every day that kill someone or commit suicide (Hennes 1998).

This propensity for violence seems to be uniquely American. Kalin has shown that homicide rates are approximately twenty times higher here than in most other first-world nations. He also stated as a comparison that it is ten times more likely for an American to murder than a Canadian. So why are there such astronomical figures of violence in youth? Is it just a coincidence that American television, which is the most violent TV in the world, was introduced shortly before this enormous increase? If television is affecting our youth and is manifested in behaviors at the high school level, then what can teachers do to help?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Introduction of Television

The questions posed above have led many to take a look at television as a source of children's introduction to violent acts. Inquiries into the effects of television violence have existed since the days of its introduction. The television was first introduced at the World's Fair in 1939. Even then, an insight to the problems to come was foreseen by the author E.B. White when he told Harper's Magazine in 1938:

I believe that television is going to be the test of the modern world, and in this new opportunity to see beyond the range of our own vision, we shall discover either a new and unbearable disturbance of the general peace or a saving radiance in the sky. We shall stand or fall by television, of that I am sure (in Murray, 1993, p. 115).

This statement was said long before television become as widespread as it is today. In the late 1940's, only two-percent of homes had television. By the 1950's this rose to 64 percent; the 1960's, 93 percent, and today it is estimated 98 percent of American homes have this medium. Of these households approximately 87 percent have more than one television set and fifty percent of all children have one in their room (Goodwin, 1998). A recent study by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2001) found that "32 percent of two to seven-year-olds and 65 percent of eight to eighteen-year-olds have television sets in their bedrooms." More detrimental, a Gallop and Newport poll in 1990 showed that approximately half of American parents set no limits on what their children watch (NTVS, 1996). Due to this

availability to television with no parameters, our children are on the average watching between four to five hours of television each weekday and ten hours on Saturday and Sunday (Kaufman, 1997). It has become the most popular past time activity for youth in our society as they spend more time in front of the television set than in school. By the time this child graduates from high school, he may have watched as many as 33,000 hours of television (Frontline, 1996).

What is Being Viewed?

So what are children watching during all these hours? Unfortunately violence seems to be a major course in TV's programming. According to researchers at University of California Santa Barbara, 57 percent of TV programs contain "psychologically harmful" violence (Kunkel & Murray, 1991, pg. 89). Hanson and Knopes (1993) found that over a course of a week, 48 out of 94 television shows depicted at least one violent act. These 48 shows contained 276 acts of violence in which 99 people were assaulted and 57 people were killed. A slightly higher figure is given by The National Institute of Mental Health, who states that 80.3 percent of TV programs contain violence and that a typical program includes 5.21 incidences (Grossman, 1997).

Surprisingly, the programs that are especially designed for children, such as cartoons, are the most violent of all programming. In a 25 year study led by George Gerbner, the number of violent acts on television over this span was observed. In the fall of each year, they videotape all Saturday morning and prime time programming for one week to analyze its content. With regard to violence, they found that there are

five violent acts on the average committed during every hour of prime time television and 20 to 25 violent acts committed every hour of Saturday morning children's programming (Gerner, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1993). Some children could therefore be watching 95-125 acts of violence on television every week. War cartoons, like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and G.I. Joe can make these statistics even higher. Elaine Landau (1990) found that "a typical war cartoon show averages 41 acts of violence per hour, with an attempted murder every two minutes." (p. 14) William Goodwin (1998) stated "A five year study by the American Psychological Association found that the average child witnesses 8,000 murders and 100,000 other acts of violence on television by the seventh grade." (p. 98) These figures are important because it has been shown that many people, particularly children, have a difficult time distinguishing between television's portrayal of reality and what is actual real (Gerner, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1993).

The Amount of Televised Violence

Unfortunately, several studies have shown that violence on television has notably increased over the last 25 years. Our children have become the victims as this translates into an unbelievable amount of viewing of violence throughout the years. In the years between 1992 and 1996 alone, studies have shown that TV violence increased over 70 percent (CMPA Archive, 1995). In addition to the number of violent acts per hour that can be seen, today's youth have increasingly easier access to view violent television. Cable television gives youth even more access to violent shows and reruns. The Center for Media and Public Affairs surveyed a day's TV

programming in Washington, DC in 1996. They identified 1846 violent scenes on cable television. The most violent periods were between six to nine a.m. with 497 violent acts (165.7 per hour) and between two to five p.m. with 609 (203 per hour) (Kalin, 1997). These are times of highest viewing by children, before and after school.

The amount of violence also varies according to the broadcast programming. In several studies, violence levels were found to be highest on Home Box Office and USA and most heavily concentrated in their movies and cartoons (NTVS, 1996). The show times and channels seem to actually be aimed toward our youth. More alarmingly, it was found by the Federal Trade Commission that 80 percent of the R-rated films shown, which are high in violence, were specifically targeted to children under the age of seventeen. In the case of one marketing plan for a violent, R-rated movie, the goal explicitly stated by the marketers was to “find the elusive teen target audience and make sure everyone between the ages of twelve and eighteen was exposed to the film.” (Sparks, 2001, p. 82)

Is There a Link Between Televised Violence and Aggression?

Government Studies

It can be concluded that there is a great deal of violence being shown on television and readily available for our youth to view, but the question remains, is there a link between their violent behaviors and the violence they see on television? Numerous studies, both governmental and independent, have addressed this issue of a relationship between TV violence and real crime.

Television violence concern made its public appearance in 1952 with the first of a series of congressional hearings. In 1953, the first major Senate hearing was held before the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, who gathered a panel of social scientists, parents, teachers, and TV executives to inquire into the impact of television violence on behavior of children (Murray, 1995). During one such hearing, a developmental psychologist, Eleanor Maccoby, testified that even though not many studies had been done in that area, social scientists did know how films influenced children and could accurately make suggestions about television (Maccoby, 1954).

In the 1960's the pace of research on the topic of television and violent behaviors began to pick up as it gained more public attention. In 1968, the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence concluded from studies done in this area that "Yes, from the research that we have, although it is thin and limited, we do know that there is reason for concern about violence in the media, particularly violence on television, and particularly the violence on television seen by children." (Baker & Ball, 1969, p. 12)

In the early 1970's, TV violence was for the first time framed as a public health issue when the Surgeon General was invited to a hearing. After listening to concerns, the General responded by placing the TV violence controversy in the same context as the smoking and lung cancer controversy of that time (Murray, 1995). The Surgeon General approached this issue by establishing a twelve member panel of distinguished social scientists, television industry representatives, political scientists, and professionals in psychiatry and child development to review evidence and develop a

report. Over a three year span, this group established 60 research projects around the country (Murray, 1996). After reviewing the research conducted by this group, the Surgeon General released a report in 1972 which concluded that violence on television does influence children who view that programming and does increase the likelihood that they will become more aggressive in certain ways. It stated, “the casual relationship between televised violence and antisocial behavior is sufficient to warrant appropriate and immediate remedial action.” (Murray, 1973, p. 475)

The next major report was the 1982 study from the National Institute of Mental Health who did a ten-year follow up on the Surgeon General’s report. They stated in their conclusion that: “Now, with ten more years of research, we know that violence on television does affect the aggressive behavior of children – and adults for that matter – and there are many more reasons for concern about violence on television.” (Murray, 1996, p. 3) Another report, in 1992, by the American Psychological Association Task Force on Television and Social Behavior extended this finding by concluding that now 30 years of research confirmed harmful effects of TV violence (Huston et al., 1992). Therefore, 42 years after the first concern was voiced, the findings still held true. In 1994 Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders warned:

By portraying violence as the normal means of conflict resolution, the media gives youth the message that violence is socially acceptable and the best way to solve problems. After years of research, we know that a correlation exists between violence on television and aggressive behavior in children (in Goodwin, 1998, p. 64).

Independent Research

Experimental Studies

Besides governmental agency investigation, researchers have done thousands of independent studies since the 1950's on the link between violent television and behaviors in children. A major initial experimental study of the relationship between television violence and aggressive behavior was conducted by Bandura (Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1963) on young children. In his study, a child was presented with a film of a person who kicked and punished an inflated plastic doll. The child was then placed in a playroom and any incidences of aggressive behavior were recorded. The results of this early study, as well as another one similar to this conducted on adolescents by Berkowitz later that year, indicated that children who had viewed the aggressive film were more aggressive in the playroom than children who had not observe the film (Murray, 1995). The latter studies were criticized on the grounds that "the aggressive behavior was not meaningful within the social context and that the stimulus materials were not representative of available television programming", however "subsequent studies have used more typical programs and more realistic measures of aggression, but basically Bandura's early findings still stand." (Felson, 1996, p. 110)

Another early study by Baron and Liebert (1972) looked at a child's willingness to hurt another child after watching aggressive or neutral television programs. The investigation was done on two groups, five to six and eight to nine-year-olds. The neutral program was of a track race and segments of "The Untouchables" were

shown for the aggressive programming. After viewing, the children were placed in a setting with another child who was playing. The main findings were that children who viewed “The Untouchables” demonstrated a greater willingness to hurt the other child.

Field Studies

From the above studies, it seems clear that children were displaying aggressive behavior as a result of brief exposure to televised violence. The question is, however, if the increase in aggressiveness observed in these experimental settings would also be observed in field studies.

A field study conducted by Stein and Friedrich (1972) assessed the effects of viewing either violent or nonviolent television programs by studying 100 preschool aged children at the University of Pennsylvania who were divided into three groups and assigned to watch a particular diet of programming. The children watched either “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood”, “Batman” and “Superman” cartoons, or neutral programming which contained neither violent or prosocial messages. To begin, the preschoolers were observed in the classroom and on the playground for two weeks to assess the level of aggressive and helpful behavior displayed by them. Then the children viewed the programs for three days a week, one half hour a day, for a total of four weeks. All observations were conducted while children were engaged in daily school activities.

The researchers found that children who watched the “Superman” and “Batman” cartoons were more physically active on the playground and in the classroom. In

addition, they were more likely to get into fights and squabbles with one another and play rough with, break or snatch toys from one another. The group who watched Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood was more apt to offer to help the teacher, play cooperatively, share their toys, and positively interact with one another. These behaviors were the focus of Mr. Rogers' programming: being kind, sensitive to others needs, and being concerned about others feelings. The last group, who watched the neutral programming, was neither more aggressive nor more helpful. This study was one of the first to help show that children's behaviors, whether it be positive or negative, are affected by television (Stein & Friedrich, 1972).

More studies similar to the above were carried out and found consistent results. George Gerbner, also at the University of Pennsylvania (Robinson, 1972) examined 100 preschoolers were observed both before and after viewing television. Some watched cartoons that had a lot of aggressive and violent acts in them, and others watched shows that didn't have any kind of violence. The researchers noticed a real difference between the kids who watched the violent shows and those who watched the nonviolent ones. "Children who watch the 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 the nonviolent programs." (Sparks & Sparks, 2001, p. 84)

Another study, done by Robinson and Bachman (1972), worked with slightly older children. They found a relationship between the number of hours of television viewed and adolescent self-reports of involvement in aggressive or antisocial

behavior. Nine to thirteen-year-old boys and girls were given situations such as the following: "Suppose that you were riding your bike down the street and some other child comes up and pushes you off the bike. What would you do?" (p. 198). The response options included physical or verbal aggression along with options to reduce or avoid conflict. He found that the physical or verbal responses were selected by 45 percent of the heavy-television-violence viewers compared to only 21 percent of the light-violence viewers.

An early study, by Leibert and Baron (1972), also investigated young children's willingness to hurt one another after viewing aggressive or neutral programs. They came up with the same conclusion: "Children who viewed the aggressive programs demonstrated a greater willingness to hurt another child." (p. 4)

Studies in Natural Settings

The studies like the above clearly show that youth exhibit increased levels of aggressive behavior as a result of an exposure to televised violence in both laboratory and field studies, but can this heightened aggressiveness observed in experimental settings be observed in natural settings? Research that helps answer this question comes from studying children's behavior after introducing TV in remote areas.

A study done by Williams (1986) and her colleagues looked into the impact of televised violence on the behavior of children both before and after the introduction to television in a Canadian community. Two years after television was introduced to the city of Notel, Canada, physical aggression – biting shoving and name-calling - in children in the area increased 160 percent. Another study has shown that once

television arrived in South Africa in 1975, the homicide rates, which had been on the decline, increased 130 percent in twelve years (Kaufman, 1997).

Brian Centerwall from the University of Washington examined the effect of the introduction of television in the United States. He found that urban areas acquired television before rural areas and that their homicide rates increased earlier. He also found that households of whites generally acquired television sets before households of blacks, and their homicide rates also increased earlier (Felson, 1996).

The relationship between the introduction of television in these three different countries upon its society is summed up by Centerwall who found:

Ten to fifteen years after television was introduced on a mass scale in the United States, Canada, and South Africa, homicide rates at least doubled in each country, even though television wasn't introduced at the same time in each country (in Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 14).

There may be other factors that contribute to increase in violence, however these studies show that television does has a negative impact.

Long-Term Studies

There are also several other studies of long-term effects from watching televised violence at a young age, the most prevalent of these being done by Leonard Eron and his colleagues. Even though this has not been extensively investigated, there are indications of childhood viewing having negative influences into their adolescence and early adult years. In 1968 at the University of Illinois, Eron found that 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. Eron began his study by assessing the development of aggression in eight-year-olds in a small upstate New York town. In the course of his investigation, he asked children to report on their television viewing, other things they liked to do, and their ratings of aggression of other children. He also interviewed teachers and asked them to indicate who was more aggressive or less aggressive in the classroom, and he obtained information from parents about children's television viewing at home.

The results of the study on these eight-year-olds showed that there was a relationship between children's level of aggression and their television viewing. He followed up on these youngsters when they were eighteen years old, ten years later, and again found a relationship between TV viewing and aggression. The strongest link was found to be related to the amount of viewing at age eight and the aggressive behavior at age eighteen. He concluded that present aggressive behavior was a long-term effect of viewing violent television at an early age (Murray, 1995).

In the 1980's Eron followed up on these children as young adults, at age 30. Most interestingly, he found that there was a relationship between early television viewing and arrest and conviction for violent interpersonal crimes; spouse abuse, child abuse, murder and aggravated assault (Eron, 1992). This connection was only observed from viewing as a young child and showed no relationship to their present viewing on their behavior. "The results indicated that preference for television violence at age eight was significantly related to aggression at age eight ($r=.21$), but the preference for television violence at age eighteen was not related to aggression at age eighteen ($r=.05$)." (Murray, 1993, p. 124) A 1992 report by the American Psychological

Association Commission on Violence and Youth agreed with Eron's finding by stating that "the behavior patterns established in childhood and adolescence are the foundation for lifelong patterns manifested in adulthood." (APA, 1993, p. 15) They added that children with "emotional, behavioral, learning, or impulse control problems may be more easily influenced by TV violence. The impact may be immediately evident in the child's behavior or may surface years later." (p. 17) A statement from the American Psychological Association (1998, p. 20) sums up the studies on long-term effects:

Children's exposure to violence in the mass media, particularly at young ages, can have harmful lifelong consequences. Aggressive habits learned early in life are the foundation for later behavior. Aggressive children who have trouble in school and in relating to peers tend to watch more television; the violence they see there, in turn, reinforces their tendency toward aggression, compounding their academic and social failure.

Factors that Lead to Aggression

Through various studies such as those surveyed above, there has been shown a relationship between televised violence and aggressive behaviors. This led many to take a closer look at the content of the violent programming and ask what factors in violent programming seem to cause this increase in aggressive behaviors?

The way violence is depicted seems to play an important role in the effects that it causes. The context in which most violence is presented on TV has been found to create great risks for viewers. A study by Belson (1978) helped show which types of violent programs have the most influence on youth. He interviewed 1565 adolescents who were a representative sample of thirteen to seventeen-year-old boys living in

London. The boys were interviewed on several occasions about the extent of their exposure to a selection of violent programs during 1959-1971. The level and type of violence in these programs were rated by a panel. Each boy's level of violent behavior was determined by a self-report of how often he had been involved in any of a list of 53 categories of violence over the previous six months. He found that 188 of the 1565 boys (12 percent) were involved in ten or more acts during the six-month period. When Belson compared the behavior of boys with high exposure of televised to those who had lower, he found that high violence viewers were involved in serious violent behavior. He also concluded that serious interpersonal violence is increase by long-term exposure to programs in which violence seems to be thrown in for its own sake, not necessarily for the plot; programs featuring fictional violence in a realistic nature; violent westerns; and programs in which violence is presented as being in good cause (Belson, 1978).

Based on his review of over 3,000 studies, George Comstock found these additional factors on television to elevate negative behaviors: rewarding or lack of punishment for those who act aggressively; portrayal of violence as justified; violence with numerous victims; violence that erupts among friends, allies, or members of a gang; violence that does not stir distaste; violence in which consequences are lowered, such as no pain, sorrow, or remorse; protagonists who display great strength and power to defeat weak victims; portrayal of violent behavior as motivated by the intent to inflict harm or injury, and violence that is portrayed with sufficient realism as to evade classification of fiction (Caldrin, 1997).

When additional research was done on aggression and televised violence, similar results were found. The National Television Violence Study concluded, after examining 2500 hours of programming of more than 2,693 shows, that perpetrators go unpunished in 73 percent of all violent scenes; 47 percent of violent interactions show no harm to victims, 58 percent show no pain, and only four percent of violent programs emphasized an anti-violent theme (MNTS, 1996). From 1994-1997 data gathered from almost 10,000 hours of programming made the research done by the National Cable Television Association the largest and most detailed analysis of television content ever examined. They concluded that more important than the actual violent acts themselves that they found in 60 percent of the programming was that the violence was portrayed in the contextual manner that earlier research suggested would increase the likelihood of negative effects on viewers. The NCTA found that more than one-third of violent scenes featured "bad" characters that were never punished; 70 percent showed no remorse or penalty at the time the violence occurred; 40 percent of all violence included humor; more than 50 percent of these scenes studied showed no pain cues; more than 50 percent of the violent incidences would be lethal or incapacitating if they occurred in "real life" (UCLA, 1996). More disturbing, especially for younger viewers, is that they found 40 percent of the violence was perpetrated by attractive or hero role models. This aspect of TV that is glamorized teaches that violence is a solution, not a problem. This message seems to be clearly received by young viewers.

The primary age group that is killing and being killed today are major consumers of media which shows violence as an effective solution to problem solving. When a character is insulted, he punches the offender; when a character fears a devastating secret is about to be told that he is hiding, he silences the informant; when a character has injustice done to him, he seeks violent revenge. Even if the television character has a “good” reason for acting violently (like for protection), this does not make young children less likely to copy the aggressive behavior than when there is not good reason for the violence (Liss, Reindhart, & Fredrikson, 1983).

Violent Acts Being Copied

Many times children learn how to be aggressive in new ways from violent shows and they will copy what they see. Bandura (1986) argued that television can “teach skills that may be useful for committing acts of violence, and it can direct the viewer’s attention to behaviors that they may not have considered.” (p. 18) This information may give direction to those who are already aggressive in nature. Such a modeling process could lead to more severe forms of aggression. It could increase the frequency of violent behaviors if children who are motivated to harm someone chose a violent method they saw on television (Felson, 1996). The phenomenon of children committing homicides through imitating what they saw on violent television has been linked to such films as “Natural Born Killers”, “Child’s Play 3”, “The Basketball Diaries”, and “Reservoir Dogs”, as well as the “World Wrestling Federation” (p. 25).

Through the years, there have been several copycat incidences that seem to link televised violence to real life violence. In 1974, a nine-year-old girl was attacked and raped by four teenagers on the beach imitated from a scene in "Born Innocent". In 1977, a fifteen-year-old boy killed his elderly neighbor during a burglary attempt he saw from shows like "Starsky and Hutch" (in the trial concerning this incidence, television was actually named as an accessory to the crime). In 1993, a five-year-old boy set fire to his two-year-old sister. The mother claims that her son got the idea from watching MTV's "Beavis and Butthead" (Twitchell, 1993). Most recently, the movie "Scream", in which a slasher draped in black and wearing a mask continues to inspire replica murders in both America and Europe. The same month, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry released its policy on media violence last year, a twenty-four year old with no criminal record or psychiatric history dressed himself in a mask and long black robe and stabbed a fifteen-year-old school girl thirty times. He told police the murder was premeditated and motivated by the "Scream" trilogy (AACAP, 1999). Violent incidences such as these have continued to fuel the issue of the effects of televised violence on real life violence.

Why the Impact?

Why do these violent programs have such a huge impact on children? According to a cognitive priming approach, the aggressive ideas in violent films can activate other aggressive thoughts in viewers through their association in memory pathways (Berkowitz, 1984). When one thought is activated, other thoughts that are strongly connected are also activated. Immediately after a violent film, the view is prepared to

respond aggressively because a network of memories involving aggression is retrieved (Felson, 1996). Huesmann (1986) gives a similar argument. He suggests that children learn problem-solving from their observations of other people's behavior. The scripts they learn are cognitive expectations about a sequence of behaviors that may be performed in a particular situation. Frequent exposure to violent scenes may lead children to store scripts for aggressive behaviors in their memories. These may then be recalled in a later situation if any aspect of the original situation they saw is present.

An increased level of aggressiveness as a result from the scripts they store can contribute to more problems in school such as academic failure and peer rejection. The student who is unpopular, experiencing academic problems, and acting aggressively is most likely to fantasize about aggressive scenes on television, identify with aggressors, and believe the violence they view on television is real (Hughes & Hasbrouck, 1996). These children, in turn, are more likely to act aggressively after viewing television violence:

The violence they see on television may re-assure them that their own behavior is appropriate or may teach them new coercive techniques, which they then attempt to use in their interactions with others. Thus, they behave more aggressively, which in turn makes them even less popular and drives them back to television. The cycle continues with aggression, academic failure, social failure, violence viewing, and fantasizing about aggression mutually facilitating each other (in Huesmann, 1986, p. 137).

The effects of watching TV violence are not only limited to aggressive attitude and behaviors as the previous research reviewed has shown. Two other effects on

viewers are summarized in a report from National Television Violence Study (1996): becoming desensitized to real world violence and developing a fear of being victimized by violence - also known as the “Mean World Syndrome”.

Desensitization

Desensitization suggests that children who watch a lot of violence on television may become less sensitive to violence in the real world around them, less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others, and more willing to tolerate the ever-increasing levels of violence in our society. Children who are heavy viewers of televised violence may “lose the ability to emphasize, protest, and to become distressed by real life acts of violence”. They are found to be “less aroused by violent scenes than those who watch only a little and are also less bothered and less likely to see anything wrong with it.” (Kalin, 1997, p. 25) An example of this is shown in several studies where children who watched a violent program instead of a nonviolent one were less quick to intervene or to call for assistance when, soon afterwards, they saw younger children fighting or playing destructively (Caldrin, 1997). In addition to becoming less anxious and sensitive about violence, someone who becomes desensitized to violence may be more likely to engage in violence (Rule and Ferguson, 1986).

Hough and Erwin (1997, p. 412) found through their research that:

Repeated exposure to television violence has been implicated as a major factor in the gradual desensitization of individuals to such scenes. It has been argued that this desensitization, in turn, may weaken some viewers’ psychological restraints on violent behavior and their fear of social disapproval.

Mean World Syndrome

Another effect, “The Mean World Syndrome”, suggests that children or adults who watch a lot of violence on television may begin to believe that the world is as mean and dangerous in real life as it appears on television, and therefore they begin to view the world as a much more mean and dangerous place (AACAP, 1999). There have been numerous studies in regard to this. One was conducted by a research group in 1982 led by George Gerbner at the University of Pennsylvania. He believed that one of the real dangers of pervasive TV violence is viewer’s growing perception that the world is a mean and dangerous place. After twenty-five years of studying the content of prime time and Saturday morning television, Gerbner and his colleagues began to explore the relationship of the amount of violent television a viewer was exposed to and their perceptions of the world. They found that the amount of television viewed predicted levels of fearfulness. Heavy viewers (four plus hours of viewing per day), as opposed to light viewers (one hour or less a day), were “much more fearful of the world around them, much more likely to overestimate their level of risk, and to overestimate the number of persons involved in law enforcement.” (Murray, 1993, p. 112) They found that regular exposure to television could contribute to people’s sense of vulnerability, dependence, anxiety, and fear. These people feel a greater need to protect themselves, they buy more guns, more watchdogs, and more burglar alarms and locks. They are more insecure and more apprehensive about their safety, and they also grossly overestimate the national crime rate (Caldrin, 1997). Clearly there are different risk levels across the country when considering a person’s

upbringing, environment, and experiences, but those who watched more television were found to be more fearful than those who watched less. Because of their research, Gerbner (1993) began to develop the notion of the Mean World Syndrome: watching a lot of television determines your perceptions of the risks of the world because there is so much violence in television. Bandura (1986) also claimed that television distorts knowledge about the threats and dangers present in the world. His research complemented Gerbner's by showing that heavy television viewers were more distrustful of others, and they tend to overestimate their chances of being criminally victimized. Most interesting about these studies was that the viewing and fearfulness relationship held across education levels, gender, and income levels.

Televised Violence and Stress

In addition to the effects televised violence has on aggression, desensitization, and a child's view of the world, other studies have shown that televised violence also causes stress. Byron Reeves of Stanford University conducted studies of television viewers' electrical brain activity. He found that the nervous system prepared for a physical response, showing that the brain responded to television scenarios as if they were real (Healy, 1990). Our brains are very sensitive to sudden noises, quick movements and perceived danger. Because there is a natural reaction to this and no outlet for it when we watch television, the viewer may develop over activity, irritability, or frustration. With no acceptable way to release the extra energy created by the adrenaline pumped into the muscles, children viewing violence may constantly

move or fidget. This behavior may label them as 'hyperactive, ADHD, ADD, or even emotionally impaired.

Summary

From over 40 years of research surveyed above, one can clearly see reasons for concern about the issue of the effect of televised violence on our youth. It has been concluded through various laboratory and field experiments that violence on television does lead to aggressive behavior by children and teenagers who watch the programs. Not all children become aggressive, of course, but the correlations between violence and aggression are positive. Eron (1992) in his Congressional testimony provided a strong summary of the many years of research on this issue:

There can no longer be any doubt that heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of aggressive behavior, crime, and violence in society. The evidence comes from both laboratory and real-life studies... The effect is not limited to children who are already disposed to being aggressive and is not restricted to this country. The fact that we get the same finding of a relationship between television violence and aggression in children in study and after study, in one country after another, cannot be ignored. The casual effect television violence on aggression, even though it may not be very large, exists. It cannot be denied or explained away... We have come to believe that a vicious cycle exists in which television violence makes children more aggressive and these aggressive children turn to watching more violence to justify their own behavior (p.1).

More alarmingly, over the years there continues to be a rapid increase in the availability and types of violent programming available to our youth. The majority have television sets in their own rooms, which are not being regulated, and they have more access to violent adult programming with technology such as digital cable and satellite. At increasingly younger ages they are being exposed to and taught that

violence is a preferred method of solving problems and settling disputes. As long-term studies have shown, the results of this exposure is being seen through their adolescent years with stronger aggression being displayed as they mature.

In addition to the connection between televised violence and aggression, research demonstrates other negative effects such as desensitization, fear of the world, and even physical stress. Children learn to become accustomed to seeing televised violence and are more likely to tolerate real life violence when they see it. They are fearful of having violent acts done to themselves and even start to see the world through pessimistic eyes as a dangerous place. It is no wonder why our youth, who have been found to spend more time in front of the television than in school, are hurting one another, being antisocial, fearful of their world, or even killing one another. As Linda Jessup, the Executive Director of Parents Encouragement Program, bluntly put it:

If our goal was to raise children to become murderers, how could we do it more effectively than we are now? We take youngsters in their most impressionable years, systematically desensitize them to cruelty in front of the television set, and – with the help of 8,000 state-of-the-art murder scenes by the time they finish elementary school - teach them that killing is just good, clean entertainment (in Kane, et al., 2000).

CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT REPORT

Introduction

Increasing violent behaviors in our youth have been seen across the United States and witnessed in our schools. This has led many researchers to look for causes for this disastrous epidemic. The research surveyed in Chapter Two shows that televised violence has been found to cause a number of negative effects on our youth and can be an important reason for the violent behaviors they often exhibit. To begin to face this issue, we must be aware of its influence on the students of our schools, make others aware of this influence, and implement ways to combat its harmful effects.

To see if students at Ottawa Hills High School were being impacted by televised violence consistent with findings, a study was done with eight volunteers. The purpose of this study was to see if a relationship existed between the amount of televised violence a student watched and some of the behaviors exhibited at school. Each student was given a survey and interviewed to determine the ways in which they felt they were affected in the areas of aggression, desensitization, and fearfulness as discussed in Chapter Two. After being surveyed, each was briefly interviewed. Survey and interview results from both the survey and interview will be discussed in this chapter and recommendations that will make teachers and students more aware of the negative impact of televised violence and how to reduce its influence.

Participants

To begin my research, I went to an Ottawa Hill's summer school classroom that a colleague was teaching and explained my study to the class. I asked for eight male volunteers who watch quit a bit of television. I gave each of these students a permission consent form to bring home to their parent or guardian to sign. All consent forms were returned by the end of the week.

The participants consisted of eight African American males from tenth and eleventh grades. I chose all males because I wanted to follow previous research which has shown that the males have consistently displayed more aggressive behaviors in studies and tend to watch the more violent programming. I also asked for only moderate to heavy television viewers, as opposed to those who didn't watch much television, so I could assess the effects on this population, especially since my sample size was small. These two variables, along with the fact that all volunteers were African American (which represents the majority of my school's population), helped add consistency to my study. The names students chose for themselves were: Tony, Troy, Cory, Tyrone, Antoine, Jerome, Markus, and Darren.

Design of Study

Procedure

All participants in the study were brought down to the school's media center during a one-hour period. Students were spaced out in the room to allow for privacy, and they were again told about the study and its purpose. Each student was then presented a survey that was divided into five parts and consisted of a total of 50

questions. They were given directions to choose the most appropriate answer in each category and to be completely honest. Any question that they did not want to answer could be skipped, however they were reminded that their answers would be strictly confidential, keeping their true identities anonymous.

After a student completed the survey, they were brought into a separate area in the media center. Here they were briefly interviewed on five questions that supplemented the survey about television and violence. Notes were taken as they answered questions, and their answers were repeated back to check for accuracy. Each of the eight students was interviewed in the same manner.

Instrumentation

Part One of the survey consisted of a series of nine questions whose purpose was to assess the student's availability to television, access to programming, and amount of time watching television. This allowed me to get a good background on their television watching, both now and when they were younger. Questions asking about their viewing habits as third graders were asked because research has shown that the strongest correlation between televised violence and aggression was shown between their viewing habits at an early age and their behavior in their adolescent years (Murray, 1995). By assessing their viewing habits in Part One, I could then begin to look for consistency in their answers with what research has shown about heavy to moderate television viewers.

Part Two asked students how concerned they were about a situation happening to them on a scale of one to five. One being "not worried at all" and five being "very

worried". Examples of the ten questions asked in this category include: getting shot, stabbed, beat up, getting something stolen, being attacked walking home at night, and being the victim of any crime. These were asked in relation to what research has found that children who watch televised violence tend to think of the world as a mean and dangerous place, have an exaggerated sense of crime in the world, and that they are more fearful of having crime done to them.

Part Three asked the student to circle a number between one and five depending on how bothered they were by a certain circumstance they saw in a movie and in real life. Scores were from one, that they were "not bothered at all", to five, that they were "extremely bothered". The twelve scenarios given included: seeing someone hurt, hearing a verbal fight, seeing a bad guy murdered, seeing a person tortured, seeing a car accident, and seeing innocent bystanders get hurt. The purpose of this section was to address the research findings that children who watch televised violence tend to become desensitized to crime and cruelty in the world around them. I asked questions concerning both movie and real life to see if there was a difference in what bothered them. Research has said that the more violent programming they watch, the more "immune" to it not only on television itself, but in real life (Kalin, 1997).

In the survey section Part Four, the participants were questioned about when a given aggressive behavior is acceptable to them. Again, a scale was use from one to four, one being not appropriate, two sometimes, three often, and four always appropriate. Samples questions include: to hit someone back who hit you, to use

revenge, to defend yourself, to kill a criminal, and to swear at someone who made you angry. In this part, I wanted to see if the aggressive behavior they saw on television made them believe that it was appropriate to use in certain situations.

The last section, Part Five, students were asked to assess their own aggressive behaviors as it applied to a school situation. I wanted to see how much aggression they have actually shown and acted upon. Questions asked how many times, if ever, they were placed in time out due to swearing or aggressive behavior; physically threatening another student or teacher; getting into a verbal or physical fight at school; and vandalizing or stealing. This section could give good insight into the violence that is actually seen at school with relation to their televised violence viewing habits. The survey instrument used can be found in Appendix B.

After students completed the survey, each one was then taken to the attached computer lab to be interviewed one-on-one. Questions asked were directed at the above four categories, but allowed me more insight about how they felt about certain issues. The last interview question dealt with a very important aspect of this study: to find out what students themselves recommended schools could do to help them become more aware of how television affected them and how to help them with this problem. A list of the interview questions asked can be found in Appendix C.

Results and Analysis

In the survey part of this study, I did not intend to prove that there is a connection between heavy televised violence viewing and certain behaviors since research has repeatedly shown this casual relationship. I did, however, want to see if this viewing

was affecting students at Ottawa Hills in the same ways. I took the data given by each of the eight students in Part I and summarized what they answered. In Part Two through Part Five, I found the average of all the responses given for each part.

Of the eight students surveyed, seven of them had television sets in their bedrooms with four of them having just basic cable, three of them with cable plus movie channels, and one that had satellite. This represents what research has shown about the increasing availability of violent programming to our youth. With regards to the amount of time each of these students spend watching television, three watch eight to twelve hours of television during the school week, three watch thirteen to sixteen hours, one seventeen and twenty hours, and one watches between twenty-one and twenty-five hours during the week. The weekend viewing was also heavy with four watching twelve to fifteen hours, three sixteen to twenty, and one over twenty hours. All eight of these students would be considered moderate to heavy viewers according to research which states that “children in the studies who watch over thirty hours of television on an average week were regarded as heavy viewers in research done in this area.” (Felson, 1996, p. 108)

The next five questions were asked to analyze how much exposure to violent programming these students had. All eight participants stated that they watch less television now than when they were a third grader, a time when research says the child is most influential (Murray, 1993). Four watched two to three hours of Saturday cartoons at this age, two four to five hours, and one watched six to seven hours. As research has shown, cartoons have the highest rate of violent acts per hour (Goodwin,

1998). Also at this age, all eight said that they were allowed to watch “R” rated movies, with over half of them being allowed to watch them regularly. From Part One, we can clearly see that all eight of the participants have high access to and been exposed to violent television programming.

The overall results of Part Two, which asked about their violent concerns, gave the average answer to violent scenarios as a 3.60. This shows the students have a moderate to high concern that a violent circumstance will happen to them. This is consistent with the “Mean World Syndrome” explained in Chapter Two.

Part Three, which dealt with the extent that they were bothered by a certain violent scenario or scene, yielded an average of 1.75 “in a movie” and 3.12 “in real life”. The 1.75 shows that students are not bothered by violence they see in a movie, whether it is murder, blood, accidents, or torture. A 3.12 says that they are more bothered by seeing the above things in real life, however on a scale of one to five, with five being extremely bothered, this is rather low. This figure agrees with the desensitization that has been found in studies which states that “children who watch violence over and over on television are more apt to tolerate and not be bothered by seeing violence in their everyday world.” (Kalin, 1997, p.24) This desensitization plays an important part in the amount of aggressive acts that children themselves display. Rule and Ferguson (1986) found them to be more likely to engage in violence and these results can be noticed in Part Five.

The appropriateness of aggressive behavior was questioned in Part Four and it was found that the average answer, a 2.80 showed that students believe it is often

appropriate to use violent actions. This way of dealing with conflict is exactly what research has shown is an influence of televised violence. Children look to their heroes who use violent methods to solve crime or to get what they want as an acceptable way to deal with conflict (Caldrin, 1997).

The last section of the survey, Part Five, asked about the kinds of aggressive acts they have done in school. The results are as follows: three students have been placed in time out due to swearing or aggressive behavior one to two times, four students in time out three to five times, and one student over six times for these actions. Five students admitted physically threatening another student three to five times, and three students over six times. Five said that they never physically threatened a teacher or school worker, and three stated that they have one to two times. Three of them also said that they have gotten into verbal fights at school between three and five times and five of them over six times. Physical fighting at school never happened to two of the students, and one to two times for five of them, three to five times for one student. When asked about ever breaking or vandalizing any school property, five said that they never did, while three admitted doing this one to two times. One student stated that he never stole from another student or teacher, four had done this act one to two times, and three stole three to five times. Most alarmingly, the last question showed that four students admitted bringing a weapon to school with intent to hurt someone.

All these survey questions correspond extremely well with the research that was found and summarized in Chapter Two. The students at Ottawa Hills that I studied who are heavy television viewers display all three of the main affects that research

has shown televised violence to attribute to: aggressive thoughts and behaviors, fearfulness of the world around them, and being desensitized to violence.

In the interview part of my study, I wanted to see how aware students were of the impact televised violence had upon them and what some of their recommendations would be to help students and schools address this problem. The first question asked if they ever thought about if the violence they see on television affects them. All but one student answered that they haven't thought about it. Tony said that he had watched a news report on it one time and heard about some studies being done and that it was "bad for kids to see this stuff they put on TV", however, he wasn't sure if he agreed because he said that kids should know the difference between what is real and what is not. Several of the other students said they haven't really thought about it until now.

When asked where they think they learn to deal with conflicts, question two, Cory stated that "by what we see around us and how people around us deal with things", I then asked him if he thought that television had an influence since that is how people around us deal with things. He agreed that it could be, however, he said that everyone knows the difference between real life and fake. What he said he meant was that we learn how to deal with things by seeing real things. Markus said that he believes how a person is raised teaches them how to deal with conflicts. "If their family goes to church and is religious they know how they are supposed to deal with things". I asked him if television can teach other ways to deal with things that may be a bigger influence than family and he agreed that it could. Tyrone also stated that he

learned to deal with conflicts by the people around him. He concluded that, "I guess the people around me could learn from television and that is where we learn from, but I never really thought much about it". All eight agreed that what they see around them and how others deal with conflict influences how they do. What was most interesting though, is that they never thought much about the influence that television had in this, but they could see how it could influence.

The third interview question asked if they believed violence on television that they watch may be a cause for them getting into trouble in school or acting aggressively. Jerome and Cory both said that they think that everyone tries to blame violence in schools on different things, but they thought it was mostly how kids were raised by their parents. I asked them if the parents of kids are not around, does TV raise them in any way? Jerome said he never thought of TV as raising him when he went home after school and watched TV everyday till his parents got home from work, but he admitted that it could because he "spent more time with TV than talking to his parents".

The other six students believed that violent television could be the cause of violence in schools. Antoine stated, "I think a lot of kids learn how to do bad things from TV. I think TV puts ideas in their head of ways they can get at people or things they can do on the low to not get caught". He continued:

I can't say that I have gotten in trouble because of TV, I never really did anything I saw on it, but I know that I been in trouble at school because of swearing which a lot of shows have a lot of.

Tony said that someone he knew brought a knife to school hidden in a way that they saw on *Boston Public* and that he “guessed that a lot of students might learn things that eventually cause violence”. Darren said that he knows that many people see “shootouts and things on TV, like with gangs, and it looks so easy. I don’t think a lot of kids realize that when you shoot or get shot its for real”. He went on to say TV makes violent things look even fun sometimes, and that usually it is okay to do bad things if you are on the “good” side. He stated that “bad guys get what they deserve”.

The forth question asked if they thought schools should do anything about the issue of televised violence since research has found that there is a relationship between viewing and some negative effects such as increased aggression. Seven of them agreed that schools should help students learn about this impact, and one disagreed saying that “schools already try to do too many things and there really isn’t any way to stop kids from watching this kind of TV shows, its fun and everyone likes to see the action”. Antoine, who agreed schools should do something if there is this impact, felt that “it should be in the hands of the government to stop producers from making or showing these really violent films, but that politics would probably not ever allow that to happen”.

The final question was the most important and beneficial. It asked for recommendations of how schools could curb the impact of televised violence and how it affected students. Seven of the eight students gave at least one recommendation, and these are outlined at the end of the next section.

Recommendations

A growing number of researchers, social scientists, and the government officials have studied and become more aware and concerned about the effects of televised violence on our youth, and it is now time to recognize its importance in education. Our students need the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and insights to ask questions, make choices, and challenge what they see on television. Educators need to remain knowledgeable about the effects of television, including violent and aggressive behavior, educate parents about these effects, and help implement comprehensive media-education programs that deal with the issue of televised violence.

My first and most important recommendation is to make teachers aware of this issue. A survey can be given to teachers to assess how much they know about this issue, but I predict that many will assume that televised violence does have an effect, but they do not know in what ways. The next thing I suggest is planning an in-service on effects of televised violence on our students and give important research facts such as those stated in this paper. Understanding the viewing habits of our students - what they watch and how they react - can help build some insights into some of their often puzzling behaviors that are witnessed at school.

After the staff has become aware of this issue, then a plan needs to be made to help our students become aware of a past time they probably think little about doing. One recommendation for schools is to establish a media literacy course as part of their curriculum. Felson (1996) explains, "Media literacy education teaches ways to analyze the carefully constructed codes and conventions of media and how it affects

one's understanding of his or her world.” (p. 103) Thoman (1999, p. 50) further summarizes that:

Media literacy is the ability to create personal meaning verbal and visual symbols we take in every day through television. . . . It's the ability to chose and select, the ability to challenge and question, the ability to be conscious about what's going on around us – and not to be passive and vulnerable.

Media literacy as it relates to televised violence is important because it encourages critical thinking in a media-dominated age, offers new ways of engaging students in learning, and it makes connections between school and life (Schwarz, 2001).

Several major organizations producing materials for use in programs such as these, or for lessons within already established curriculum, are the Center for Media Education, Center for Media Literacy, Mediascope, National Alliance for Nonviolent Programming, and National Telemedia Council. One interesting new program has been developed by the Center for Media Literacy that addresses the violence issue to use as a general educational intervention is called “Beyond Blame – Challenging Violence in the Media”. This can be an excellent addition to classes such as Health, Social Studies, or Language Arts to help students question what they see and be aware of its impact on them. Thoman (1999, p. 4) highlights:

We may not be conscious of it, but we are all constantly trying to make sense of what we see, hear, or read. The more questions we can ask about what we are experiencing around us, the more alert we can be about accepting or rejecting messages.

Teachers and schools need to also make parents aware of the impact television violence may be having on their child. Especially, as noted earlier, when over 50% of parents do not regulate what their child watches, and over 80% of parents are not in

the room when their children are watching violent shows (AAP, 2001). There are many suggestions that can be given to parents, such as limiting their child's total viewing time to no more than one to two hours of quality programming a day; removing television sets from children's bedrooms; monitoring the shows that their children are viewing; viewing television shows with their children and discussing the content; and being aware of the programming they are watching in front of or with their children. With regards to the latter, Peters (1991) found that when parents and children watch together, it is more likely to be a program that the adults prefer which can mean that children are exposed to violence in crime shows that adults have chosen to watch. Parents should also encourage alternative entertainment for children, including reading, athletics, or hobbies.

The students I interviewed were asked if they had any recommendations to help them and their peers deal with the effects of violent television. Several of them suggested some very helpful programs and lessons. One of these included having the schools develop a Peer Mediation Program. Troy said that his brother, who goes to school in a different state, has this program at his school and it has helped him deal with conflict better. He said that students don't always know how to react to conflicts they have, and that violence seems to be the easiest way to cope. Schools need students who are trained to help other students deal with issues in a non-aggressive way. Students need a mediator that they can talk to and turn to when problems arise at school. I thought this was an excellent suggestion, and could be a great way for students to learn that solutions to conflicts with others does not need to be dealt with

in the violent manners they see over and over on television. Peer Mediation Programs have been established in many schools and have proven very successful. Contact information regarding this recommendation can be found in Appendix D.

Tony suggested that teachers give extra credit for reading books that related to the subject they were learning, and leave a list of books that they could chose from. He said:

When I am reading, it is hard to watch television, and by giving extra credit it gives me a reason to not sit in front of the TV and to chose a book instead. Often times I watch TV just because there is nothing else to do. I would choose a book if it meant I was getting credit for it.

Darren was extremely interested in the statistics of the amount of televised violence shown; he did not think many people even thought about how many violent acts they saw when they watched a program. He thought it would be a good idea for the teacher to have them do a study on the number of violent acts on different shows over a long period of time and compile the data. I thought this would work extremely well with an algebra class or statistics and be very interesting to students as well as creating an awareness of what they are viewing.

Cory said that the school or area should have a type of “Teen Center” were kids could go to play basketball, cards, games, etc. in the evenings or on the weekend. He said that a lot of times he “just sits and watches TV because I have nothing else to do.” He admitted that most of the shows he watches are violent because the other ones are “boring” to him, not that he likes to actually see people hurt.

Antoine made the point that people watch what shows are placed on the television and the best thing would be for the producers of shows or the networks to stop putting as many violent shows on the television. He suggested that we “maybe write the government or broadcasters and let them know how it affects kids.” He said that in his government class he learned that “if we want changes then we can influence the higher officials to do them, with a lot of signatures and time.” I strongly agreed the industry level should be making changes in light of the research outlined, however, this is a powerful issue when it comes to how much money they make on the violence these violent shows.

Both Troy and Markus suggested creating an Internet site to make students aware of the problems that watching violent television can cause. They talked about having students be able to add to the site shows that they like that are non-violent and ideas of activities they can do besides watching television. Troy said that he would add a “chat room where kids could meet and talk to one another instead of watching television.”

The above are all very powerful and useful recommendations to help students, teachers, and parents become more aware of this issue and to address its affects.

Murray (1995, p. 8) summarizes the importance of dealing with televised violence:

I believe the most useful approach to be a multilevel, systematic change in the way American society is willing to deal with media violence. The changes must take place at the home, school, and industry levels. These changes must include educational programs - for both parents and children – that are designed to enhance understanding of television’s influence on children and the role that parents can play in moderating that influence.

He goes on to add that there must also be changes in the television industry “that will reduce the incidence of violence in programming and increase the positive influence of television.” (Murray, 1995, p.8) Several resources that can be used to develop programs and to help inform others about televised violence , such as videos, books, curricula, and organizations, can be found in Appendix D.

Conclusions

This study confirmed my suspicions that students at Ottawa Hills were being affected by televised violence consistent with research summarized in Chapter Two. They felt that the world was a mean and dangerous place by their concern with being a victim of crime, they were bothered very little by the violence they saw on television and in real life, and they often used or would use aggressive behavior to solve conflicts in their lives. This fearfulness, desensitization, and aggressiveness displayed by our youth manifests itself in behaviors we observe at school that have often puzzled us as educators. The results of over forty years of research as well as the behaviors we witness should be a warning to us that action needs to be taken. The question, therefore, of whether televised violence affects our students now needs to be changed to “What can be done to help?”

The biggest impact we can have regarding televised violence is to create an awareness within our schools. I was surprised by the number of responses in the interviews in this study by students who declared that they never thought about the impact of televised violence on them. The most profound statement from one of the students affirmed:

We get told about bad stuff affecting us all the time like alcohol, drugs, eating bad food, smoking, but no one has ever mentioned television programs except for the fact not to sit too close to them for our eyes. At least we know about the others, and if we choose to do them after we know, it's our own fault. But if no one tells us of what television shows can do to us, then that's worse. I don't want something making me scared of the world and paranoid or being violent, especially if it gets me in trouble at school. I never thought about it doing stuff like that to me, I just watch shows because they are exciting or I am bored. My parents even told us as kids to go sit down and watch TV and didn't care what we watched. They even watch violent shows with us, sometimes ones they pick out!

This awareness that we need to produce should encompass not only students, but educators and parents as well. Only an informed society who understands the impact that televised violence has on our youth can bring about the change that is needed to address this mounting problem.

Recommendations given in this paper are by no means exhaustive, but are a start. I would suggest conducting a similar study to the one done in Chapter Three with students at any school. This should be done not to just confirm what research has shown, but to make students aware of this issue and illicit recommendations from them on ways to help. It is critical to keep in mind, however, that when talking to students about television they may develop a defensiveness as we attempt to tell them what to think about the pastime they most often engage in. Rather than trying to correct, trivialize, or dismiss a student's interpretation, it is valuable to try to provide questions and ideas for students to explore this topic in a non-threatening and non-judgmental way. The long-term benefit of this is to have them begin questioning things they see and making sound decisions about what they watch on their own.

This is especially important since they are not only exposed to televised violence, but violence in video games, magazines, comics, and music.

It is important to remember that while televised violence may not be the only factor leading to behaviors such as aggression, it is a significant one. One that schools can have more of an impact on than factors such as their upbringing or their predisposition to violence. It is time to address this issue and help our youth to become informed consumers of not only messages they receive on television, but all forms of media where violence can be found. As Thoman (1999, p. 6) meaningfully stated, our goal must be to help our students become “competent, critical, and literate in all media forms so that they control interpretation of what they see or hear, rather than let the interpretations control them.”

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APPENDIX A



GRAND VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY

1 CAMPUS DRIVE • ALLENDALE, MICHIGAN 49401-9403 • 616/895-6611

July 26, 2002

Bobbi Jo Kenyon

Grand Rapids, MI 49504

RE: Proposal #02-222-H

Dear Bobbi Jo:

Your proposed project entitled **Televised Violence: Effects on Student Behavior** has been reviewed. It has been approved as a study, which is exempt from the regulations by section 46.101 of the Federal Register 46(16):8336, January 26, 1981.

Sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

Paul Huizenga, Chair
Human Research Review Committee

APPENDIX B

STUDENT SURVEY

This survey is being done to assess television viewing background and some behaviors and attitudes that may be connected to these viewing habits. The survey is completely confidential and should not have your name on it anywhere. It will be used for a research paper in a college graduate class. Thank you for your time, and please answer each question honestly. *You may choose not to answer any question on the survey.*

Age _____ Grade _____

PLEASE CIRCLE THE APPROPRIATE ANSWER

PART I

1. Do you have a television set in your room? Yes No
2. What type of programming do you have in your room or house?
No cable Just basic cable Cable plus movie channels Satellite
3. During the school week, about how many hours of television do you watch?
0-3 hour 4-7 hrs 8-12 hrs 13-16 hrs 17-20 hrs 21-25 hrs over 25 hrs
4. During the weekend, about how many hours of television do you watch total?
(Sat. and Sunday)
0-3 hour 4-7 hrs 8-11 hrs 12-15 hrs 16-20 hrs over 20 hrs
5. As a 3rd grader (9 years old), do you feel you watched more or less hours of television every week?
More than now Less than now About the same amount
6. At that age, about how many hours of Saturday cartoons did you watch regularly?
0-1 hour 2-3 hrs 4-5 hrs 6-7 hrs over 7 hrs
7. About how many rated R movies do you watch in an average month?
None 1-4 movies 5-9 movies 10-14 movies 15-20 movies 21-25 movies over 25
8. As a third grader, did you watch rated R movies? Yes No
9. If yes, about how often? Once in a while Regularly Very often

PART II

How concerned are you that each of the following circumstance will happen to you on a scale of 1-5?

1 – Not at all concerned 5 - Very concerned

1. Getting shot	1	2	3	4	5
2. Getting stabbed	1	2	3	4	5
3. Getting beat up	1	2	3	4	5
4. Getting in a physical fight	1	2	3	4	5
5. Getting something stolen from you	1	2	3	4	5
6. Having someone break into your house	1	2	3	4	5
7. Being attacked while walking at night	1	2	3	4	5
8. Getting brutally hurt	1	2	3	4	5
9. Being the victim of any crime	1	2	3	4	5
10. Having someone close to you physically injured due to a crime	1	2	3	4	5

PART III

To what extent does each of the following scenes bother you in real life and on television?

1 - Not bothered at all 5 - Extremely bothered

	IN A MOVIE					IN REAL LIFE				
1. Seeing someone murdered	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
2. Seeing someone in a physical fight	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
3. Seeing blood	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
4. Seeing a bad guy brutally hurt or murdered	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
5. Seeing a good guy brutally hurt or murdered	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6. Seeing innocent people hurt (bystanders)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
7. Seeing women hurt	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
8. Seeing someone's body part get taken off	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
9. Seeing a car accident	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
10. Seeing torture done to a person	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
11. Seeing things blown up or destroyed	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
12. Hearing people verbally fight (with swearing)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

PART IV

When do you feel it is appropriate to use aggressive behavior?

1 – not appropriate 2 – sometimes appropriate 3 -often appropriate 4 - always appropriate

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. To hit someone back that hit you | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. To defend yourself with a weapon | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. To hit a child or woman, any circumstance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. To swear when you are angry | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. To kill someone purposefully | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. To fight to stick up for someone | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. To get revenge for something someone did to you | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. To kill a criminal or “bad guy” | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. To steal something you want and cannot afford | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. To kill instead of be killed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. To swear at an adult that made you mad | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

PART V

Have you displayed any aggressive behaviors in a school setting?

During your high school years, have you ever....

1. Been placed in time out due to swearing or any other aggressive behavior?
Never 1-2 times 3-5 times over 6 times
2. Physically threatened another student?
Never 1-2 times 3-5 times over 6 times
3. Physically threatened a teacher or school worker?
Never 1-2 times 3-5 times over 6 times
4. Got into a verbal fight at school (no touching)
Never 1-2 times 3-5 times over 6 times
5. Got into a physical fight at school?
Never 1-2 times 3-5 times over 6 times
6. Broken or vandalized any school property?
Never 1-2 times 3-5 times over 6 times
7. Stolen any item from another student or teacher?
Never 1-2 times 3-5 times over 6 times
8. Brought a weapon to school (any item with the intent to hurt someone with it)
Yes No

APPENDIX C

POST SURVEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you ever think about if the violence you see on television affects you?
2. Where do you think you learn how to deal with conflicts that you may have with other people? Do you think television has a role in this?
3. Do you believe television has any impact on the violence we see in schools?
4. Do you feel that the violence you have watched on TV has made an impact on the amount of aggressive behaviors and trouble that you have gotten into in school? Do you think schools should do something about this impact?
5. What suggestions do you have for schools to help students learn about the impact violence has upon them or to help students deal with problems they already have due to this exposure?

APPENDIX D

RESOURCES ON TELEVISED VIOLENCE

VIDEOS

Media Mayhem: More Than Make Believe. (1994). 30 minutes.
Helps young people understand that media violence does not reflect reality.
NEWIST/CES 7, Studio B, University of Wisconsin/ Green bay, Green Bay, WI
54311; (800) 633-7445, \$50 rental, \$195 purchase.

Investigating Reports: Primetime Violence. (1994). 47 minutes.
A documentary on the debate over violence on TV.
A&E Network, P.O. Box 2284, South Burlington, VT 05407; (800)423-1212, \$23.90
purchase.

The Killing Screens: Media and the Culture of Violence. (1994). 55 minutes.
A conversation with violence researcher Dr. George Gerbner.
The Media Education Foundation, 26 Center St., North Hampton, MA 01060;
(800)659-6882, \$97.50 purchase.

Violence in the Media. (1994). 120 minutes.
Features experts on the topic with updates on legislation, research, and ideas for
parents and community action.
Ecufilem, 810 12th Avenue, Nashville, TN 37203; (800)251-4091, \$28.70 purchase.

Think About It: Understanding the Impact of Television Violence. 22 minutes. This
video explores the effects of television violence as it considers three aspects: links
between screen violence and real-life crime, exaggerated fears, and the historical use
of movie violence, as well as looks at the effects media violence can have on young
people. A 48-page discussion guide accompanies the video. For more information, or
to order the video, visit the Active Parenting Publishing website:
www.activeparenting.com

ORGANIZATIONS

National Alliance for Nonviolent Programming. 1846 Banking St., Greensboro, NC
27408; (910)370-0407.

Center for Media Literacy. 1962 S. Shenandoah St., Los Angeles, CA 90034;
(310)559-2944. Website: www.medialit.org

National Coalition on Television Violence. 247 S. Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills, CA 90212; (310)278-5433.

National Foundation to Improve Television. 60 State St., #3400, Boston, MA 02109; (617)523-6353.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION

National Academy for Mediation in Education. 205 Hampshire House/ University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003; (413)545-2462

The Conflict Center. 2564 S. Yates St., Denver, CO 80219; (303)936-3286.

Educators for Social Responsibility. 23 Garden St., Cambridge, MA 02138; (617)492-1764.

MEDIA LITERACY CURRICULA

Taking Charge of Your TV. A free 20-page booklet that offers tips on critical viewing that can help parents and teachers improve the quality of a child's television viewing habits. NCTA, 1724 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036, (202)775-3629.

Project LOOK SHARP. Supports the integration of media literacy into classroom curricula at all grade levels and instructional areas, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of media education in schools. This organization works directly with teachers to both help students and to foster a relationship between educators using media literacy in their classrooms. Project LOOK SHARP offers workshops, a quarterly newsletter with general information, a resource library containing extensive media literacy materials, as well as an archive of television programs, and speakers available for talks, lectures, etc. (607)274-3110, or visit the website: www.ithaca.edu/looksharp/

Media Matters. Launched in 1997 to help pediatricians, parents, teachers, and children become more aware of the influence that television, movies, computers, video games, the Internet, advertising, and popular music have on child and adolescent health. The Media Matters Resource Kit contains a campaign overview, AAP policies and brochures on the issues surrounding the media, articles, lists of resources, and background materials on media and related health issues. (847)434-7870 or visit the website: www.aap.org

National Institute On Media and the Family. Offers educational tools and materials to help parents, teachers, and community members understand the influence of the media. The website describes resources, including MediaWise, an interactive multimedia tool to provide educators, parents, and communities with ideas about what can be done regarding the media's influence on children. The kit features the following: a leader's guide, participant workbook, MediaQuotient (a computerized personal media report), education videos, handouts, activities and action plans. The website also features a ratings section for television, video games, and movies. (888)672-5437 or visit their website: www.mediafamily.org

POLICY STATEMENTS

Violence in Electronic Media and Film. (1993). National Council of Churches, NCC, 475 Riverside Dr., #572, New York, NY 10115; (202)870-2377, free.

TV Violence: Fraying Our Social Fabric and Scientific Knowledge about TV Violence. (1993). CRTC, Public Affairs, Ottawa, ONT, KIA0N2; (819)997-0313, free.

Television, Violence, Children and the First Amendment: Can They All Get Along? (1994). The National PTA, 330 N. Wabash Ave., #2100, Chicago, IL 60611-3690; (312)670-6782, free.

BOOKS

Deadly Consequences: How Violence is Destroying Our Teenage Population and a Plan to Begin Solving the Problem. Chapter 3. (1991). Harper Perennial, Box 588, Keystone Industrial Park, Scranton, PA 18512; (800)331-3761, \$12.

The Early Window: Effects of Television on Children and Youth. (1988). Pergamon Press, 660 White Plains Rd., Tarrytown, NY 10591; (914)524-9200.

Big World, Small Screen: The Role of Television on American Society. (1992). University of Nebraska Press, 312 N. 14th St., P.O. ox 880484, Lincoln, NE 68588; (800)755-1105, \$12.

Classroom Combat: Teaching and Television. (1983). Educational Technology Pubs, 700 Palisade Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632; (201)871-4007, \$34.95.

TV Tactics: How To Help Kids Use Television Wisely
TV Tactics, TVSM, Inc., 309 Lakeside Drive, Horsham, PA 19044; (800)440-TVSM.

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY
ED 695 Data Form

NAME: Bobbi Jo Kenyon

MAJOR: (Choose only 1)

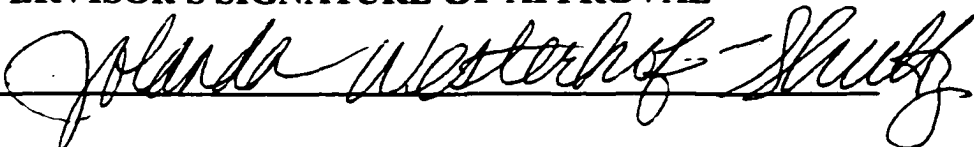
<input type="checkbox"/> Ed Tech	<input type="checkbox"/> Ed Leadership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sec/Adult
<input type="checkbox"/> Elem Ed	<input type="checkbox"/> G/T Ed	<input type="checkbox"/> Early Child
<input type="checkbox"/> Elem LD	<input type="checkbox"/> Sec LD	<input type="checkbox"/> SpEd PP
	<input type="checkbox"/> Read/Lang Arts	

TITLE: The Effects of Televised Violence on Students

PAPER TYPE: (Choose only 1) **SEM/ YR COMPLETED:** Summer 2002

Project
 Thesis

SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE OF APPROVAL



Using the ERIC thesaurus, choose as many descriptors (5 – 7 minimum) to describe the contents of your paper.

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. television | 6. television viewing |
| 2. aggression | 7. media effects |
| 3. violence | 8. antisocial behavior |
| 4. media | |
| 5. desensitization | |

ABSTRACT: Two to three sentences that describe the contents of your paper.

This paper reviews what research has found about the effects of televised violence on our youth. They have found children to be affected in areas such as aggression, desensitization, and fearfulness of the world. A survey and interview conducted on eight students in this study shows consistent findings with research in these areas. The paper is concluded with recommendations that will help make schools, teachers, and students more aware of the negative impact of televised violence and how to reduce its influence.