Violence And Television Essay, Research Paper

Television Violence and Children

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What has the world come to these days? It often seems like everywhere one looks, violence rears its ugly head. We see it in the streets, back alleys, school, and even at home. The last, the home, provides to be a major source of violence. In many peoples’ living rooms there sits an outlet for violence that often goes unnoticed. It is the television, and the children who view it are often pulled into its realistic world of violent scenes with sometimes devastating results. Much research has gone into showing why children are so mesmerized by this big glowing box and the action that takes place within it. Research shows that it is definitely a major source of violent behavior in children. The research proves time and time again that aggression and television viewing do go hand in hand. The correlation between television violence and children has been shown. Some are trying to fight this problem. Others are ignoring it and hoping it will go away. Still others don’t even seem to care. However, the facts are undeniable. The studies have been carried out and all the results point to one conclusion: Television violence causes children to be violent and the effects can be life-long.

The information can’t be ignored. Violent television viewing does affect children. The effects have been seen in a number of cases.

In New York, a 16-year-old boy broke into a cellar. When the police caught him and asked him why he was wearing gloves he replied that he had learned to do so to not leave fingerprints and that he discovered this on television. In Alabama, a nine-year-old boy received a bad report card from his teacher. He suggested sending the teacher poisoned candy as revenge as he had seen on television the night before. In California, a seven-year-old boy sprinkled ground-up glass into the lamb stew his family was to eat for dinner. When asked why he did it he replied that he wanted to see if the results would be the same in real life as they were on television (Howe 72).

These are certainly startling examples of how television can affect the child. It must be pointed out that children watching violent television directly caused all of these situations. Not only does television violence affect the child’s youth, but it can also affect his or her adulthood. Some psychologists and psychiatrists feel that continued exposure to such violence might unnaturally speed up the impact of the adult world on the child. This can force the child into a kind of premature maturity. ?As the child matures into an adult, he can become bewildered, have a greater distrust towards others, a superficial approach to adult problems, and even an unwillingness to become an adult? (Carter 14). Television violence can destroy a young child’s mind. The effects of this violence can be long lasting, if not never-ending. For some, television at its worst, is an assault on a child’s mind, an insidious influence that upsets moral balance and makes a child prone to aggressive behavior as it warps his or her perception of the real world. Other see television as ?an unhealthy intrusion into a child’s learning process, substituting easy pictures for the discipline of reading and concentrating and transforming the young viewer into a hypnotized non-thinker? (Langone 48). As you can see, television violence can disrupt a child’s learning and thinking ability which will cause life long problems. If a child cannot do well in school, his or her whole future is at stake.

Why do children like the violence that they see on television? “Since media violence is much more vicious than that which children normally experience, real-life aggression appears bland by comparison” (Dorr 127). The violence on television is able to be more exciting and enthralling than the violence that is normally viewed on the streets. Instead of just seeing a police officer handing a ticket to a speeding violator, he can beat the offender bloody on television. However, children don’t always realize this is not the way things are handled in real life. They come to expect it, and when they don’t see it the world becomes bland and in need of violence. The children then can create the violence that their mind craves. The television violence can cause actual violence in a number of ways. As explained above, after viewing television violence the world becomes bland in comparison. The child needs to create violence to keep himself satisfied (Dorr 127). Also the children find the violent characters on television fun to imitate. “Children do imitate the behavior of models such as those portrayed in television, movies, etc. They do so because the ideas that are shown to them on television are more attractive to the viewer than those the viewer can think up himself” (Brown 98). This has been widely seen lately with the advent of the Mighty Morphin’ Power Rangers. Young children cannot seem to get enough of these fictional characters and will portray them often. The main plot of the Power Rangers is that an evil witch creates monsters and the Power Rangers punch and kick the monster with an arey of moves. Finally the Power Rangers use their much stronger robots to defeat the monster and save the earth from distruction. Most of the show centers around action and adventure, but at the end of the show there is kind of a ?moral of the day?. This segment only lasts about a minute, and children often don?t watch this because the ?exciting? part is over. Another reason why television violence causes violence in children is apparent in the big cities. “Aggressive behavior was more acceptable in the city, where a child’s popularity rating with classmates was not hampered by his or her aggression” (Huesmann 166). In the bigger cities, crime and violence is inevitable, expected and, therefore, is left unchecked and out of line.

Much research into the topic of children and television violence has been conducted. All of the results seem to point in the same direction. There are undeniable correlations between violent television and aggression. This result was obtained in a survey of London schoolchildren in 1975. Greensberg found a significant relationship between violence viewing and aggression (Dorr 160), In Israel 74 children from farms were tested as well as 112 schoolchildren from the city of Tel Aviv. The researchers found that the city children watched far more television than their farmland counterparts. However, both groups of children were just as likely to choose a violent program to watch when watching television. The city children had a greater tendency to regard violent television programs as accurate reflections of real life than the farm children. Likewise, the city boys identified most with characters from violent programs than did those living on the farms (Huesmann 166). The government also did research in this area. They conducted an experiment where children were left alone in a room with a monitor playing a videotape of other children at play. Soon, things got “out of hand” and progressive mayhem began to take place. Children who had just seen commercial violence accepted much higher levels of aggression than other children. The results were published in a report. “A Surgeon General’s report found some Preliminary indications of a casual relationship between television viewing and aggressive behavior in children’” (Langone 50). In other research among U.S. children it was discovered that aggression, academic problems, unpopularity with peers and violence feed off each other. This promotes violent behavior in the children (Huesmann 166). The child watches violence, which causes aggression. The combination of aggression and continued television viewing lead to poor academic standings as well as unpopularity. These can cause more aggression and a vicious cycle begins to spin. In yet another piece if research children who watch a lot of violent television were compared to children who don’t. The results were that the children who watched more violent television were more likely to agree that “it’s okay to hit someone if you’re mad at them for a good reason.” The other group learned that problems can be solved passively, through discussion and authority (Cheyney 46). The most important aspect of violence in television is preventing it. There are many ways in which it can be prevented, but not often are many carried out. These solutions are easy to implement, but are often overlooked because of commercial purposes. One such solution is to “create conflict without killing.” Michael Landon, who starred in and directed “Little House on the Prairie” managed to do so in his programs. His goal was to put moral lessons in his show in an attempt to teach while entertaining. On the program “Hill Street Blues” the conflicts are usually personal and political matters among the characters. Although some violence does occur, the theme is not the action, but rather its consequences (Cheyney 49). Perhaps the most important way to prevent children from watching television violence is to stop it where it starts. The parents should step in and turn the set off when a violent program comes on. The parents are the child’s role models from which he learns. If he can learn at an early age that violence on television is bad, then he can turn the set off for himself when he is older. Education should start at home. Fixing the problems of children and television violence isn’t easy. There are many factors that have to be considered and people to be convinced. This problem will, no doubt, never go away and continue to get worse as the years go by. However, there are measures that can be taken to prevent the children from ever being exposed to such things. After all, what’s the world going to be like when the people who are now children are running the world?

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