



Why Those Who Observe Violence Behave More Violently

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Introduction

- It is a pleasure to be here today, although the message I want to deliver is not a pleasant message. The telecommunications revolution of the 20th Century has created a new environment for our children. In this environment television, videos, and movies have assumed central roles in socializing our children while parents have lost influence. For better or worse the mass media are having an enormous impact on our children's values, beliefs, and behaviors. In particular, the widespread portrayals of violence in dramatic programs is having an insidious effect. Hundreds of studies have confirmed that exposing our children to a steady diet of violence in the media makes our children more violence prone. The psychological processes involved are not mysterious. Children learn by observing others, and the mass media provide a very attractive window for these observations. For many children the greater tolerance for violence that they learn from TV and movies and the scripts for violent behavior that they acquire from TV and movies will not be very noticeable because of other countervailing factors in their lives. But media violence does affect every child.
- Are these effects temporary? Unfortunately no. Research shows that the more aggressive child usually grows up to be the more aggressive adult. Adults may be resistant to influence from what they watch in the media as adults, but their adult social habits have been affected by what they saw when they were children.
- If this is true, you may say, why are there so many voices that won't accept these truths? Well, if one does not want to believe a truth about human behavior, one can always focus on exceptions. No single study is ever perfect particularly in the social sciences. A few researchers have made a reputation for themselves by burying the body of studies indicting media violence under a sand pile of supposed flaws, and a myth has arisen that there is not a consensus among researchers. In actuality there is a clear consensus that media violence stimulates aggression. But media violence is an enormous financial success. Violence attracts viewers, and violence is cheap. Even well intentioned people find it difficult to sacrifice concrete financial success for abstract moral advancement.
- What has led me to these conclusions? Let me give you a little background.

Aggression & Violence

- Key Facts
 - Aggressive behaviors are behaviors INTENDED to harm another human. Violent behaviors are physically aggressive behaviors that would seriously harm the other person
 - Individual differences in aggressiveness appear early in childhood (by age 3) and are pronounced by middle childhood
 - On the average, the more aggressive child grows up to be the more aggressive adult even into late middle age

Why would a tendency to behave aggressively or non-aggressively remain even partially stable throughout life?

- To a great extent because the social cognitions, emotional reactions, and decision processes that control social behavior, once established, remain relatively constant throughout life.
 - Established by genetic, physiological, or other personal predisposing factors
 - Established through learning
 - Conditioning
 - Observational learning

What are the consequences of the fact that adult aggressiveness is affected to a great extent by childhood aggressiveness?

- Anything that makes a child more aggressive (even in not very serious ways) as a child (e.g., exposure to violence) also increases the risk that child will behave more seriously aggressively and violently as an adolescent and adult!

Types of Media Violence

- TV violence
 - Dramas
 - News
 - "Body bag" journalism
 - Sports
- Movie Violence
- Music Videos
- Video Games
- Internet Displays

Violent Films & TV

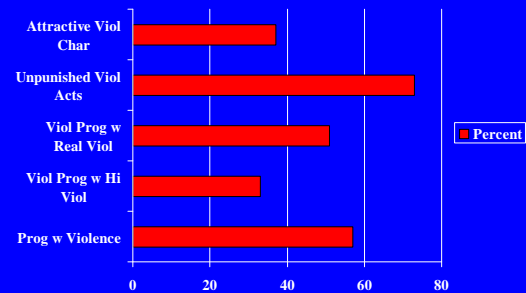
Sudden Impact

X

Differential Characteristics of Media Violence

- ❖ Bloody & Gory or "Clean"
- Humorous or Serious
- Realistic or Fantastic
- Rewarded & Justified or "Damned" & Punished
- Makes you "feel good" or makes you "feel bad"

Violence on TV: UCSB Study (1995)



Violence in TV dramas

- By the time a American child is 12 years old the child has:
 - Viewed 10 years of 2-4 hours/day of violence
 - Viewed at least one murder every day (average is .5/hour)
 - Viewed at least 3,650 murders, but perhaps as many as 10,000

"The most violent ghetto isn't in South Central L.A. or Southeast Washington D.C.; it's on TV. About 350 characters appear each night on prime-time TV, but studies show an average of 7 of these people are murdered every night. If this rate applied in reality, then in just 50 days everyone in the United States would be killed and the last left could turn off the TV."

— Michael Medved, Film Critic



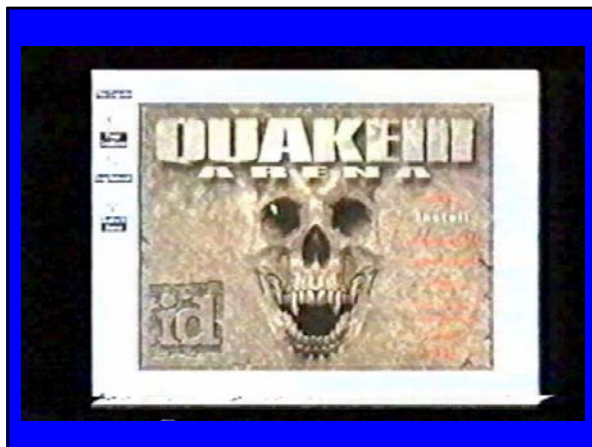
Violent Video Games

Video Games Use – Recent Data from Kaiser Family Foundation (2003)

- 92% of 2-17 year olds play video games
- On any given day, 30% will play
- If they play, the average time is 1 hour
- Time playing *increases* with age to college years
- 14.8% of college students in 1999 played video games at least 6 hours per week and 2.5% play more than 20 hours per week
- Boys play more than girls
- Minorities and low SES play more

Favorite Games

- How many children report that their favorite video game is a violent one (Buchman & Funk, 1996)?
 - 73% of Boys!
 - 59% of Girls!
- Examples:
 - Quake
 - Grand Theft Auto



Video Game Use, Ratings, & Parental Control

- 90% of 8-12 year olds say their parents have "never" checked the ratings their games
- 89% say their parents have never limited the time they can play
- Only 1% say their parents have ever prevented them from purchasing a game because of its content

The Relation between Observing Violence and Behaving Violently:

- 1) Observing Others Behaving Aggressively or Violently Stimulates Aggressive and Violent Behavior in Children and Adults in the Short Run
- 2) Repeated Observations of Others Behaving Aggressively and Violently Changes Children So They Behave More Aggressively and Violently in the Long Run including after They Grow Up To Be Adults!

Through what psychological processes does observing violence increase the risk of violent behavior?

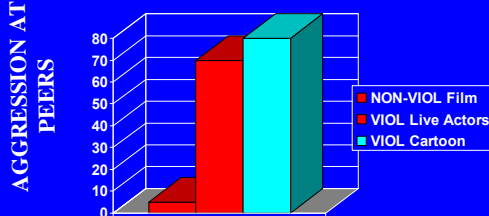
- Situational Stimulating Processes (short term)
 - 1) By priming aggressive schemas, scripts, and beliefs.
 - 2) By increasing arousal which may be misattributed to something else
 - 3) Because viewers copy ("mimic") behaviors they see
- Observational Learning Processes (long term)
 - 1) Through the encoding ("imitation") of schemas, scripts, and beliefs promoting aggression.
 - 2) By desensitizing viewers emotionally to violence

Short Term Imitation and Priming Studies

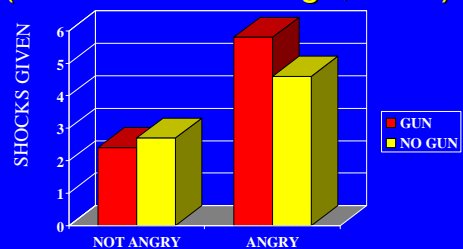
Does exposure to violence cause increases in aggression in the short run?
Does priming play a role?

Violence Viewing Causes Aggression at Peers (Bjorkqvist, 1985)

- Nursery school children

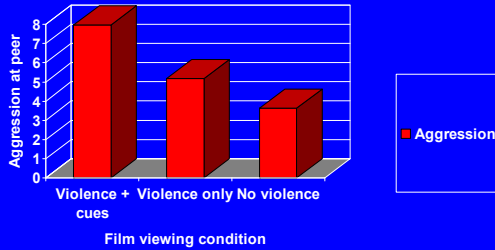


Short Term Priming: Guns as Cues to Aggression (Berkowitz & LePage, 1967)



The Effect of Priming

(Josephson, 1987)



Is there any special reason to be concerned about violent video games as compared to violent TV and movies? Why?

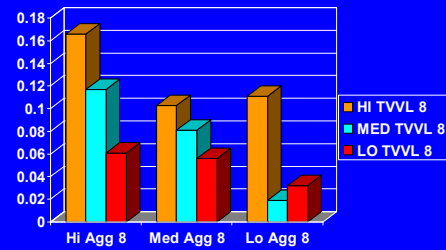
- YES
 - Video games combine observational learning and desensitization with operant conditioning. The player is reinforced for simulated violent acts.
 - In fact, the army uses violent video games to train soldiers to decide to shoot quickly

Longitudinal Studies:

What happens to children who are exposed repeatedly to media violence as they grow up?

TV Viol Exposure at Age 8 vs Aggression at Age 18 for 184 Boys

(Eron, Huesmann, Lefkowitz & Walder, *American Psychologist*, 1972)

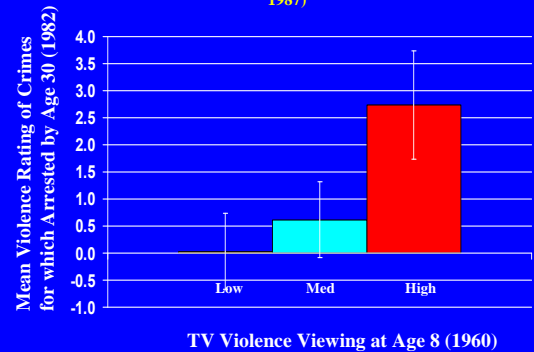


Mean Scores on Age 8 Variables for Males Arrested for Violent Crimes by Age 30. (Columbia County Study, Derived from Huesmann, Dubow & Eron, 2003, *Criminal Behavior & Mental Health*)

Age 8 Variable	Never Arrested for Violent Crime (N=308)	Arrested for Violent Crime (N=24)	t-statistic
Peer-Nom Aggression	14.40	22.20	2.48**
Peer-Nom Popularity	22.40	20.30	.63
Child's IQ	102.80	94.30	3.06**
Parental Disharmony	9.29	9.88	1.02
Parental Punitiveness	16.90	20.80	2.18*
Number Children	3.65	4.55	2.04*
Par Church Attend	2.31	1.38	2.78**
Parents' Authoritarianism	28.10	29.50	1.35
Parent-Child Dissimilarity	6.69	7.33	1.45
Par Lack of Ed	4.29	4.97	2.34*
Child's Violent TV	6.95	14.33	2.49**

*p < .05 **P < .01

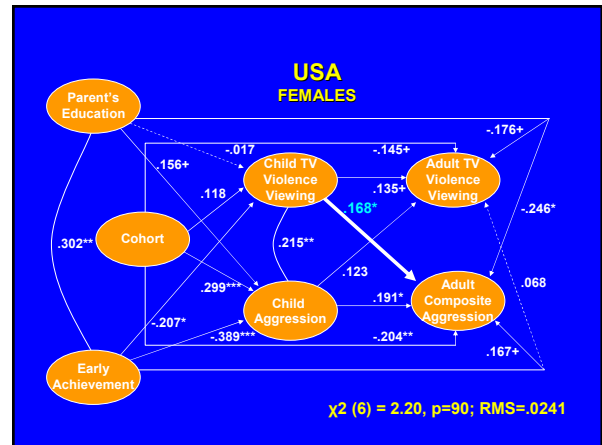
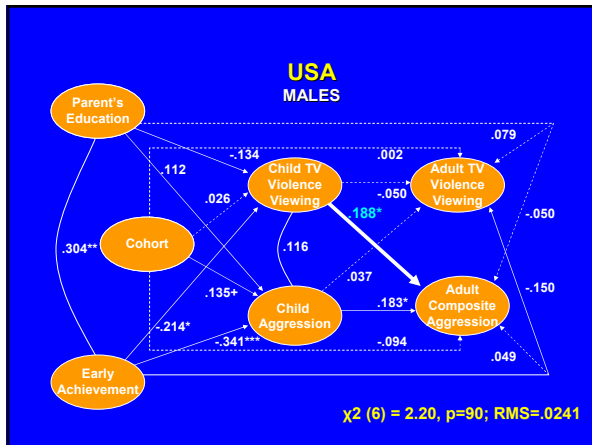
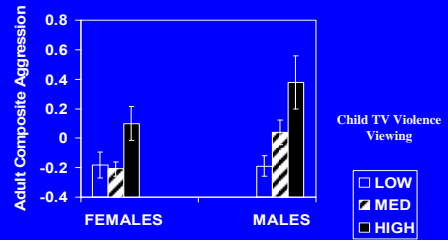
Males' Violent Crimes by Age 30 Relate To Their Age 8 TV Viol Viewing (Columbia County Study, Huesmann, *J Social Issues*, 1987)



Correlations of Age 48 Aggressive Cognitions with Age 8 TV Violence Viewing for MALES

Age 48 Measure	Correlation with Age 8 TVVL
Normative Beliefs Approving Agg	.26*
Projective Test of Aggression	.25*

Oak Park Study: Aggression at Ages 21 to 25 Is Predicted by TV Violence Viewing at Ages 6 to 10



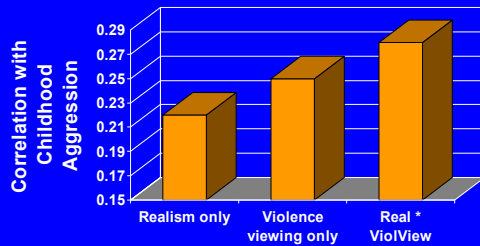
Differences in Frequency of Spouse Abuse and Serious Physical Aggression in Past 12 Months for High Childhood Violence Viewers Compared to Other Children

	MALES			FEMALES		
	Hi Viol Viewers (N = 31)	Other Viewers (N=122)	Sig.	Hi Viol Viewers (N = 36)	Other Viewers (N = 140)	Sig.
Spouse Abuse:						
Pushed, Grabbed or Shoved Spouse	41.7%	22.2%	p < .05	34.6%	21.2%	n. s.
Thrown Something at Spouse	20.8%	14.8%	n. s.	38.5%	16.5%	p < .02
Serious Physical Aggression:						
Respond by Shoving the Person	68.8%	50.4%	p < .05	68.6%	43.2%	p < .01
Punch, Beat, or Choke Another Adult	21.9%	16.9%	n. s.	17.1%	3.6%	p < .01

Differences in Frequency of Crimes and Traffic Violations in Past 12 Months for High Childhood Violence Viewers Compared to Other Children

	MALES			FEMALES		
	Hi Viol Viewers (N = 31)	Other Viewers (N=122)	Sig.	Hi Viol Viewers (N = 36)	Other Viewers (N = 140)	Sig.
Criminal Behavior:						
Self-report. Crime in Last Year	62.5%	53.4%	n. s.	48.6%	25.9%	p < .01
State report. Convict.	10.7%	3.1%	p < .03	00.0%	00.0%	n. s.
Driving Behavior:						
Self-report. Moving Traffic Violations	87.5%	76.3%	n. s.	80.0%	57.6%	p < .01
State-report. Moving Traffic Violations	60.0%	39.4%	p < .01	28.9%	28.4%	n. s.

Perceiving violent shows as "true to life" increases correlation of violence viewing with aggression in boys
(200 USA 6- 11-year-old Boys in Oak Park Study)



Perception of Realism of portrayed violence

- Can kids tell the difference between reality and fantasy?
- NY Study (Huesmann & Eron, 1986) found:
 - 45% of first graders, 29% of third graders, 7% of fifth graders thought Charlie's Angels showed life "just like it really is"

Sample

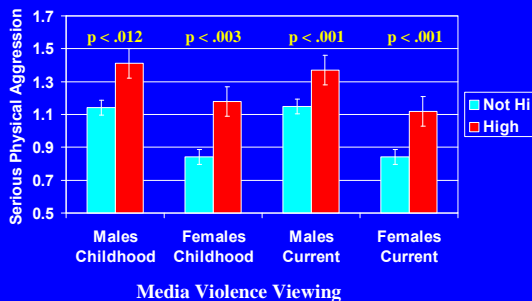
- 820 Participants in adolescent sample were interviewed in one hour "one on one" interviews (parents & teachers interviewed as well)
 - High risk high school students: N = 430
 - 222 female, 208 male
 - 46% minority
 - Adjudicated adolescents: N = 390
 - 103 female, 287 male
 - 45% minority

Severe Physical Aggression

Now we would like to ask you how often SINCE YOU'VE BEEN A TEENAGER you have done certain things.

	Never (a)	Once (b)	A few times (c)	A lot (d)
How often have you slapped or kicked someone?	0	1	2	3
How often have you punched or beaten someone?	0	1	2	3
How often have you choked someone?	0	1	2	3
How often have you threatened or actually cut another person with a knife or threatened or shot at another person with a gun?	0	1	2	3

Mean Serious Physical Aggression (0 to 3 scale) of High (Upper 25%) vs. Not-High Media Violence Viewers



Percent of High and Low Violence Viewing Participants who have "choked someone" while a teenager

	Females			Males		
	Hi Viol View	Not Hi	Sig Diff?	Hi Viol View	Not Hi	Sig Diff?
Childhood Viol View	32.1%	25.0%	ns	60.0%	46.2%	.009**
Current Viol View	37.5%	23.2%	.013*	63.6%	45.0%	.000***

Percent of High and Low Violence Viewing Participants who have "threatened or actually cut another person with a knife or threatened or actually shot at another person with a gun" while a teenager

	Females			Males		
	Hi Viol View	Not Hi	Sig Diff?	Hi Viol View	Not Hi	Sig Diff?
Childhood Viol View	21.8%	16.9%	ns	35.8%	28.1%	.111
Current Viol View	31.3%	14.9%	.001***	41.3%	26.8%	.003**

Predicting Current Violent Behavior from Childhood and Current Exposure to Media Violence while Controlling for Parent's Education with Males

Variables/step	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β
Step 1 Sample (0=HS, 1=Delq)	.288***	.282***	.295***
Step 2 Childhood media violence Current media violence		.144** .097*	.142** .095*
Step 3 Parent's Education			.044
R ² change for step	.083***	.038***	.002

Predicting Current Violent Behavior from Childhood and Current Exposure to Media Violence while Controlling for Parent's Education with Females

Variables/step	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β
Step 1 Sample (0=HS, 1=Delq)	.441***	.411***	.412***
Step 2 Childhood media violence Current media violence		.118* .114*	.119* .114*
Step 3 Parent's Education			.008
R ² change for step	.195***	.034***	.000

Another Sample

Inmates from one male and one female prison in state of Indiana, USA

	Mean age	White	Black	Other
Males ($n = 149$; 64% violent offenders)	27.34 (4.75)	67	75	6
Females ($n = 184$; 34% violent offenders)	28.08 (3.86)	117	53	3

Note: Ethnicity/race information missing for 1 male and 11 females.

Relation of high Violent Media Exposure in childhood and adolescence to specific aggressive behaviors:

"How often did you punch or beat someone?"
(0 = "never" to 3 = "a lot")

	% "never"	% "a lot"
LOWEST 67% on violent media exposure ($F=142$, $M=120$)	22.9%	31.3%
HIGHEST 33% on violent media exposure ($F=24$, $M=17$)	7.3%	46.3%
p-value Effect-size (d)	$p < .004^{**}$ $d = 0.48$	

Relation of Violent Media Exposure in Childhood and Adolescence to Specific Aggressive Behaviors:

"How often did you threaten or actually cut another person with a knife or threaten or shoot at another person with a gun?" (0 = "never" to 3 = "a lot")

	% "never"	% "a lot"
LOWEST 67% on violent media exposure	57.9%	9.6%
HIGHEST 33% on violent media exposure	39.0%	24.4%
p-value Effect-size (d)	$p < .013^*$ $d = 0.44$	

Childhood Violent Media Exposure also Predicts Type of Crime among Convicted Criminals (violent vs. non-violent)

Significant Predictors in Yellow	Odds Ratio of Violent Crime
Sex (0=female, 1=male)	2.284**
Antisocial behavior-childhood	1.046
Severe physical agg-adolescence	1.242*
Violent Media Exposure- childhood	1.803**
Violent Media Exposure -adolescence	0.989
Neighborhood Viol-childhood	1.195
Neighborhood Viol-adolescence	0.982
Educational Attainment	1.073
Psychopathology (BSI)	1.049
Psychiatric History	1.015
Alcohol/drug problems	0.830**

Summary

- Exposure to violent TV, videos, movies, and video games in earlier childhood (and concurrently) is related to an increased risk for criminally delinquent and violent behavior in adolescence, mostly independently of parent SES, neighborhood violence, intellectual abilities, or psychotic or psychopathic tendencies.
- The concurrent relations seem to be stronger for females while the longitudinal relations seem to be stronger for males

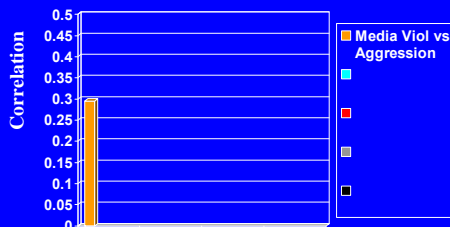
Conclusions

- Exposure to violent media during childhood and adolescence is consistently related to serious violent and non-violent antisocial behavior in young adult offenders.
- Childhood exposure to violent media predicts violent offender status even in the presence of other common risk factors, and are better predictors than all measured risk factors except for gender and alcohol/drug use.

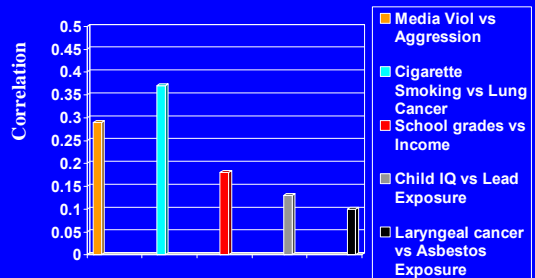
Policy Implications

Is the effect of exposure to violence on violent behavior big enough to be considered a “public health threat?”

The average size of the statistical correlation between violent behavior and a youth's exposure to media violence (Paik & Comstock, 1994)



A COMPARISON of the media violence correlation with other social risks that have been studied scientifically





Fifty Years of Studies

- "... it is clear to me that the causal relationship between [exposure to] televised violence and antisocial behavior is sufficient to warrant appropriate and immediate remedial action... .. there comes a time when the data are sufficient to justify action. That time has come."

— Jesse Steinfeld, Surgeon General of the United States

March 1972