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Media violence and its impact on society and teenagers

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Media Violence and Its Impact on Society and Teenagers



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Senior Capstone

Division of Humanities and Communication

Spring 2006

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Senate Report: Media Violence Affects Kids. Associated Press.
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Dedication

I dedicate this project to my beloved children, Alisa and Vitaliy.

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Introduction

The history of media violence began in the 1950s when TV began dominating and the major networks sought a simple successful formula to increase their revenues. Now an average of 150 acts of violence and about 15 murders entertain us and our children every week, and that does not count cartoons and news (Gerbner). By the age of 18, the average American child has witnessed at least 40,000 killings and 200,000 acts of violence, according to the research of TV-Turnoff Network research.

America's children are being hurt. They are hurt when they are the victims or perpetrators of mindless violence, illustrated and glorified by the media.... They are hurt when they have become so dependent on rapid-fire, prefabricated visual effects that they can no longer conjure up their own images or dream their own dreams. (Dudley 36)

It's true that to some extent fictional violence can be useful in regaining the power and self-esteem of a teenager. The positive effects occur when the media inform about violence in society and show the repercussions of a violent act, and thereby help in preventing crime. On the other hand, the media violence overkill remains most problematic and detrimental to public health and needs drastic measures to change.

Violence in the media does increase the risk of viewers behaving aggressively, however it is only one possible negative effect of many. Without the proper care and support of parents, teenagers may turn into repressive, authoritarian adults and pass this aggressiveness and negativism onto the next generation.

At first glance, immersing into a virtual violent world and enjoying the violent content of movies seem to be a shelter for many who feel insecure about themselves.

Replaying some fictional violent patterns in their minds gives teenagers an opportunity to release some of their real life fears and inform them about the mechanism of violence and justice.

However, the existing violence overkill on TV and the video game industry do not contribute to the development of their emotional and moral intelligence and do not build their self-esteem. In the absence of parental love and involvement, the media creates a subversive reality that can only increase the level of aggressiveness in teenagers and their risk to adopt repressive attitudes.

Violent media content may also kill an urge for creativity and imagination and bar their capacity for constructive, problem solving scenarios and peaceful outcomes. Carol Wekesser in Violence in the Media states: “We know that, in the same way that violent families produce violent children, a limited vocabulary of alternatives for conflict resolution produces a reflective use of violence” (147). As computer graphics and special effects become more realistic, the impact of violent content on a teenager moves to a deeper psychological level.

Nobody is immune to media violence, but certain groups and categories are at greater risk of delinquent behavior, and media should acknowledge their responsibility for the negative influence they impose on teenagers with a history of domestic abuse and those who are marginalized. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), “the possibility of violent crime makes the ages between 16 and 24 dangerous times. Figures compiled from 1973 through 1992 showed the 16-19 and 20-24 age groups most often reported the highest rates of violent crime victims” (Gull and Lucas).

Most researchers agreed on the fact that over exposure to media violence cannot be the only or the most crucial factor leading to delinquent behavior. James Potter explains, “Even we were to lock all of today’s criminals, the media are still helping to train another generation to believe that violence is a successful way to solve problems” (xiii). There are more powerful factors involved such as poverty, criminal neighborhoods, racial inequality, parental neglect and abuse. Although media violence may not be a major cause of criminal activity, the media factor is an important one and works in concordance with the others. In the situation when mass media becomes a servant of product companies that help to perpetuate oppression, the concept of media violence becomes an indelible part of American culture.

Despite the fact that some healing/ therapeutic effects of the virtual and TV world do exist, morally ambiguous media messages do not provide proper education about real-life violence. It’s true that all teenagers have a great ability to distinguish fiction from reality and reevaluate the violent messages on the screen; however, those messages do not provide a useful tool in regaining their power and self-esteem and are rather detrimental to their mental health.

The messages of the media can be very confusing and deceptive so that teenagers may think they live in a diverse and fair world of many possibilities while, in fact, they are trapped in a one-dimensional world controlled by those who are in power. Carol Wekesser points out: “The reality of our current situation demands that we ask ourselves what kind of culture we want our children to grow up in and whether we can continue to allow the media to profit from products that are clearly contributing to a social condition that endangers political safety (129).

Literature Review

“Media Violence: Opposing Viewpoints” edited by William Dudley provides the reader with important statistics, keys to understanding the problem of media violence. The statistics include the following: “47% of all violent interactions show no harm to victims, and 58% show no pain. Even less frequent is the depiction of any long-term consequences of violence. In fact, only 16% of all programs portray the long-term negative repercussions of violence, such as psychological, financial, or emotional harm.... (20) Only 4% of violent programs employ a strong anti-violent theme. Further, only 13% of reality programs that depict violence present any alternatives to violence or ways that violence can be avoided.” (22)

The analysis of the research claims no direct connection between violence on TV and delinquent behavior of teenagers. Clearly, crime rises and falls for other reasons: race, poverty, failure of welfare systems and law enforcement. Blaming real world violence on media and culture is an easier and safer way for journalists, politicians and parents to distract the public’s attention from social and political plagues. Some studies’ results provide evidence of the link between violent movies and criminal activities of troubled teenagers in the situation where they use the plot and imitate a graphical portrayal of some scenes in movies. (18)

The research identifies three primary types of negative effects of media violence: learning aggressive attitudes and behaviors, becoming desensitized to real-world violence, and developing fear of being victimized by violence (18). Thus, the media are one of component of a potentially toxic environment for youth, and it is important to understand the role that media plays in youth violence and to investigate the ways to

mitigate these harmful influences. One of the suggestions about the way in which media violence affects audiences of all ages is a notion that violence is an acceptable and usual way to resolve conflicts.

Real Vision's program is an initiative to raise awareness about the impact of television that is a project of TV-Turnoff Network. It shows the statistics that prove that violence on TV promotes violent behavior in real life. Of over more than 3,500 research studies on the effects of media violence during 40 years of research, 99.5 percent have shown a link between watching media violence and committing acts of real violence (Warning: Too Much TV is Hazardous to Your Health TV Turn-off Network).

In Ill Effects: The Media/Violence Debate edited by Martin Barker and Julian Petley, it is stated that highly polarized debate about violence on the screen is based on two opposite notions. One is that children are sophisticated enough to see the difference between reality and fiction and they are streetwise. The other is that children are too passive and impressionable (vulnerable) to media influences. In other words, "the media are seen either as enormously powerful or as effectively powerless" (Barker and Petley 35). Neither statement is correct. The process of adaptation to violence is a slower and subtler process than could be detected in any studies; the results can be controversial and vary in different social and cultural groups. Oftentimes the conclusions cannot be drawn since those studies do not embrace long-term effects of media violence.

Barker and Petley examine some therapeutic effects of horror movies on troubled teenagers. The authors stated: "The horror movies are about the ways in which the physical power of adults threatens children... or repressed dimensions of childhood,

taking revenge on the adult world. Horror provides a relatively safe opportunity for learning to cope with such anxieties” (41).

The authors examine the positive effects of media violence and point out that the media informs teenagers about adult violent world. Some negative messages could be converted into positive messages as fictional violence becomes a necessary prerequisite for crime prevention since “children use formal or generic ‘cues’ to build up a growing body of knowledge about the process of television production, which enables them to discriminate between messages they are prepared to trust and those they are not” (34). Experiencing such emotions in a fictional context can enable children to conquer the fear and grief they experience in real life. Teenagers also learn to distinguish real violence in news and documentaries from fictional or gratuitous violence. They are capable of separating themselves from the images of fictional violence and developing some strategies to cope with domestic hostilities and peer pressure.

The major lesson for parents is that instead of condemning violence, it’s better to ask the question why children choose horror movies. The fictional violent world frightens them, but it also gives them considerable pleasure. Those movies are about the ways in which the physical power of adults suppresses and lowers teenagers’ sense of personal power and self-esteem (35). Teenagers may mentally replay some repressive patterns of their family lives in which they can take revenge on the adult abusive world. The authors maintain that the debate about TV violence is rooted in people’s unsettling experiences of social change and genuine fears for the future, which indicate the shortcomings of the political system and family’s declining role (45).

Jonathan Freedman in Media Violence and Its Effect on Aggression Assessing the Scientific Evidence claims the hypothesis that media violence overkill enhances desensitization to real world violence to be false. In the experiment with children of two categories, those who were exposed to violent movies and those who simultaneously watched sports programs, the results prove that both groups reacted similarly to the situation when they witnessed aggression toward their peers. However, those who were engaged in violent content reacted slower than sports watching children. The author concludes that differences in reaction of the two groups are too minor to make a connection between real world and media violence.

The main conclusion the author draws is that children learn to accept violence as a positive force in stopping evil aggression. Freedman underscored: “If they (people) get any message at all along these lines, it is that we should all be thankful that the good guys – those who are there to protect us – can also use violence when necessary” (205). This raises the question whether desensitization to media violence can cause indifference to an act of violence in real life or victim of crime. The author studies the hypothesis that people who are exposed to violence on TV and later witness aggression in real life are less likely to intervene and act to prevent further aggression.

In The 11 Myths of Media Violence, James Potter states that children are socialized by both their parents and the media. Television is also socializing teenagers as a typical means of solving problems and conveys the message that there are many people who deserve violent treatment. “In his experiments conducted at the University of Pennsylvania, George Gerbner finds that adults who view violent horror or slasher

movies daily quickly become accustomed to the violence, and it no longer upsets them” (Potter 119).

For example, children raised by child abusers that see lots of violent movies get a double dose of violent socialization. In fact, social factors are more powerful when they work in conjunction with media factors. The author explains the phenomenon of choosing violent content over any other movies by wounded teenagers as a justified choice rooted in their anger, loneliness and distress. The abusive patterns creating havoc in teenagers’ lives can push them to watch gory types of movies or games because the world of violence is the only world they really know. It doesn’t mean that those who choose violent content are instantaneously prone to imitate violent behavior. The author is convinced that the media gradually encourages the learning of aggression and increases the level of risk for teenagers to be subjected to violence in the future.

In Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Heroes and Make-Believe Violence, Gerard Jones provides an analysis of the phenomenon: when media violence is craved by viewers, they become more and more susceptible to violence. In his opinion, violence on the screen cannot be banned without implementing violence to the psyche of teenagers. The drastic reduction of violence on TV is rather detrimental since it can actually disarm teenagers and cause them the loss of personal power in situations when they are humiliated and abused. In my opinion, this book exercises the dangerous notion that violence is in the nature of teenagers’ spirits, and argues that media violence is an essential tool to the development of a healthy personality. This negates the rationale to reduce the impact of media violence.

Diane Levin in Remote Control Childhood? Combating the Hazards of Media Culture, unequivocally states that media violence is a public health issue that effects all population, not only certain age categories; it also undermines children's sense of safety and distorts their self-perception. Media violence is so pervasive and inescapable that it becomes "a common, normal part of everyday life." The existing measures that are to reduce the amount of violence such as V-chips "continue to leave the sole burden of controlling media violence on parents (21). By promoting so-called "culture of disrespect," the media contributes to the epidemic of violence in the world and should take responsibility for moral degradation of population.

In "TV violence: the Good and Bad for Our Children," Patricia Edgar maintains that in the situation when the moral and the cultural fabric of the American society is disintegrating, media violence converts into a deadly weapon against normal human feelings and kind emotions cherished by the world art and literature, the wisdom and knowledge passed from generation to generation. The process of constructive socializing of a teenager is undermined by media with its "emphasis on conflict, violence, sensationalism and its exploitation of bullying in sport and other arenas" (Edgar).

As a result of viewing violent programs day after day, viewers lose their ground, piece of mind and feeling of safety – they fear to be the victims of violence. This is particularly true for the vulnerable: those living alone, children, women and older people. Glamorized and sanitized violence in media confuses and destroys a strong sense of values, a compassion and understanding of one another's culture and humanity that we (parents) aspire to instill in our youth and children. (Edgar)

Findings

Violence on TV presents controlling powers, and it is “an integral part of a system of global marketing” and systematic oppression.... It deprives viewers of more popular choices, victimizes some and emboldens others, heightens general intimidation and invites repressive postures that exploit the wide-spread insecurities it itself generates.”

(Gerbner 12)

Violence is part of the system of stereotyping aimed at destroying the uniqueness and cultural identity of a person. Stereotyping widely used in advertisement in the media is a tool of keeping people under a state of oblivion and oppression. The media expresses “gratuitous violence, sex without emotional commitment, a disdain for education and the intellect, quick and painless solutions to complex problems, and the “values” [...] of *People magazine and Entertainment Tonight*” (Wekesser 139). Violence formula is used by the media to manipulate viewers and keep them from raising painful questions about social injustice.

Children who are exposed to violence and, therefore, limited in their movements and accomplishments are “at risk of never fulfilling their potential” (Warning: Too Much TV 12). Spending their time in front of computers or televisions, instead of reading “may actually influence the physical structure of the brain as it develops, making learning and working in the schoolroom environment difficult” (Warning: Too Much TV 12).

The media may fill the void caused by parental neglect or abuse, but it never substitutes the parent role as a crucial one in the development of their personality. In most cases, violent content is NOT conducive to mental stimulation and development of critical thinking skills. Some very important moral lessons and values such as love,

forgiveness, devotion, loyalty, and community ideals can be omitted from the picture. Martin Barker claims, “Media violence is seen not only to encourage children to commit acts of violence, but as itself a form of violence [or form of “electronic abuse” (32)] against children, committed by adults whose only motivation is that of financial greed” (32).

Mainstream media tends to rest on three basic components: commodity, violence and sexuality, which result from the belief in consumerism and individualism. The problem with violence overkill is that the corporative forces stifle creativity and freedom of speech, and this reduces the opportunities for valuable and talented works to appear. George Gerbner in “Television Violence and the Art of Asking the Wrong Question” states, “Channels proliferate while investment in new talent drops, gateways close and creative sources shrink” (34).

Despite some attempts to diversify the violent content, major network companies deny the harmful effects the violence overkill has on the audience. The industry usually responds in one of three forms: denial, shifting the blame, and defensive actions. One form of denial is to denounce claims that violence in the media has a negative effect.

They (corporate powers) tend to shift blame to something else: to guns, to parents, and to other media, instead of sharing the blame. For example, Disney president Michael Eisner says that violence does have an impact, but a positive one – “a release of tension.” Bob Shaye, CEO of New Line Cinema, and distributor of the Nightmare on Elm Street horror films, claims: “The tales are useful and cautionary. They suggest that evil and harm are everywhere and that we need to be prepared” (Potter 13).

Some producers even claim that the games are therapeutic because they offer a safe release of negative emotions: “fear, greed, power-hunger, rage: these are aspects of our selves that we try not to experience in our lives but often want, even need, to experience vicariously through stories of others,” writes Melanie Moore, Ph.D., a psychologist who works with urban teens” (Jones, *Violent Media* 9).

The process of globalization, conglomeration and integration in the media makes it easier to impose myths on millions of viewers and to block them from critical thinking. In most violent movies, people are stereotyped, categorized and tamed on a social, economical and racial basis; the heroes are stripped of their local culture and identity, and therefore, lose their unique value. Instead, the moral lessons of the media often come from the dangerous attitude of “tooth for tooth” and “eye for eye” that can draw the teenager to a wrong direction – fear of others and loss of self-control. Potter maintains that the media violence engenders the feeling of revenge and craving of violent action against villains. “The satisfaction arises when the world is put back in order,” he explains, “but for how long? Until the next villain will come and try to subdue the world” (132). Teenagers learn to vent their anger just like their favorite heroes do on the screen.

Media conditions people by developing markets that limit their choices and shape their beliefs and attitudes, while misinforming them about a concept that they respond to market desires only. The myth about the so-called “innate attraction to violence” (Potter 116) is created by the media conglomerates who exploit violence formulas to preserve their staggering revenues. Writers use the story-telling formulas or clichés to depict one-dimensional characters (good guys perform their righteous violent acts against bad guys) and very simple motivations. Most horror movies and violent video games are rather

commercial products of poor quality than works of art--they lack complexity, creativity, and good taste.

Reducing the amount of the violent programs and movies will not solve the problem of media violence. The way violence is portrayed is more important than how frequently it appears on the screen. Media leads people to believe that there is much more violence on the screen than in real life. The portrayal of violence is highly unrealistic: violence is sanitized and glamorized, the heroes and evildoers are stereotyped, consequences for perpetrators and post-traumatic experiences of victims are not shown. The problem arises when all pain, suffering, and redemption are deleted from the cadre.

Real world violence is much uglier and more devastating than fictional violence that the media portrays. The concern is not about the excess of graphical violence, rather about the absence of compassion on the screen. When the heroes and evildoers do not show remorse and redemption for their violent acts, viewers lose the deep meaning of a story and the truth about violence. Potter claims, "To be truly responsible, producers need to show heroes as well as villains experiencing great harm and remorse for their violent actions" (151).

In other words, good guys are often justified in their violent actions, they are seldom punished for their brutal assaults. To the contrary, they are often rewarded, so that we, the viewers, learn to accept the violent patterns because we are likely to identify ourselves with those heroes (152). In real life, even the righteous violence in self-defense can have a dramatic, harrowing imprint on the souls of a perpetrator or a victim.

Bad effects of media violence embrace attitudinal and behavioral aggressiveness, the fear of being victimized, the "mean world syndrome," and desensitization. In the

latter case, teenagers can become callous to the sufferings of others, more socially inactive and apathetic. They can stop having their own opinions and standing up for their own rights, let alone helping other people or rebelling against social injustices. That is to say, “insecure people may be prone to violence but are even more likely to be dependent on authority” (Gerbner 16).

Gratuitous violence is especially dangerous to the development of a healthy personality because people view this type of violence as “fun” and nothing short but entertainment. People do not perceive themselves being at risk of adopting repressive attitudes because they “do not understand all the negative effects that are possible--and that are probably happening to them. They do not understand how they can protect themselves apart from asking the federal government to do something to reduce the amount of violence in the media” (Potter 10). Consequently, they do not make any effort to reduce or avoid the bad effects of media violence.

Teenagers learn to accept violence as a norm and an inevitable evil as well as a means of law enforcement. According to Potter, “police officers rarely draw their guns.... [However], viewers “get titillated about the aggressive drive” and become more violent due to the “training they are getting from violent television, movies and video games” (119). In the absence of parental love and involvement, teenagers especially tend to seek some thrill and fun in violent movies and video games to escape their emotional problems.

Eliminating all the graphic violence that people complain about the most won't solve the problem of media violence overkill. In fact, it could make the problem worse by leaving us with only sanitized or gratuitous violence, which could further desensitize

viewers and make them think that violence is a successful way to resolve conflicts (Potter 212). In reality, graphic violence is just the tip of an iceberg, a sign of the bigger problem of media violence. Most people complain about the things that are just on the surface. When they are making a point that media violence should be reduced, “they are really asking for a reduction of their risk of being offended by the exposure to graphic violence” (101).

It is a myth that violence on TV strikes only the young generations that seem to be more addicted to the violent content. Adolescents are not any more vulnerable than adults, and the elderly are even less protected because media violence’s effects are accumulating during their entire life. Those effects have a tendency to explode over time. Many of the negative effects do not occur immediately after the exposure; they may take many weeks or years to manifest themselves. Also, effects can be cognitive, attitudinal, emotional, and psychological. They are not limited to the one aspect. In other words, after watching a violent movie, the viewer may not grab the gun and shoot their neighbors, but there is a greater chance that they may be in need of anger management. Potter states, “One day our behavior changes--not because of that day’s exposure, but because of years of increasing risk levels” (211).

One of the possible consequences of media violence is when adults support hard positions in politics. This can mean reinforcing old prejudices, creating new social anxieties and panicky moods as well as making decisions based on the all-embracing political aggression. When most of the U.S. population, brainwashed by media propaganda, called for the war in Iraq, they used a very popular excuse: initiating the war could liberate the world from global terrorism.

The media becomes a mediator between their real life experiences and fictional models that contradict reality. The duplicity of the media messages based on distortion of reality is subversive to their mental health, self-image and perception of the world. In the case of teenagers, they can easily become victims of corporate powers in situations when they need the approval of an adult authority the most. Once they are left behind in their moral development, they seek “a rebellious, even destructive, hero [that] helps children learn to push back against a modern culture that cultivates fear and teaches dependency” (Jones 12). The overdosing with violence creates an addiction to violent programs and especially to violent video games.

Working at my site in JC Crumpton Elementary school, I had a chance to discuss violent movies with the 5th graders. Most of them watched and enjoyed the goriest movies that were not appropriate for their age. The recent successes of the following movies: Passion of Christ, Sin City and Kill Bill that are popular among parents as well as their kids prove that addiction to violence doesn't know cultural or age boundaries.

All structures and institutes of the society should share the responsibility for the media violence overkill. If the media companies point to the school or parents, while the latter blame the media for their children's problems, a much needed solution will be delayed. However, media violence is a great burden on parents in monitoring and controlling the consumption of violent movies and video games. With the rapid and prodigious growth of new sophisticated technologies, it becomes obvious that controlling the process of the media's consumption is nearly impossible. Diane Levin suggests, “Curbing the effects of media is a job parents cannot possibly do on their own. It is time

to put aside the debate about whose fault media violence is and for all those who care about children to take action to combat the hazard of media culture” (26).

Despite the fact that many authors consider that censoring and restricting TV programs and video games may not be an effective solution, the absence of restrictive measures can put the burden of responsibility on the parents only. The more the media creates the taboo products, the more teenagers tend to be attracted to a forbidden fruit. Should we let our children respond to the “awful violence,” (Jones “Violent Media” 12) to which they are exposed, and give up on supervising them?

The parents’ role is not an easy one in the media literacy development. Every parent with no exceptions should become an emphatic listener to his/her child. To evoke empathy in their children, parents should be an example in “taking another’s perspective” and “sharing another’s emotional state” (Potter 210), which is what empathic listening all about.

Paul Sweets in The Art of Talking With Your Teenager suggests that parents should strategically employ the advantageous patterns of non-violent behavior into their households and set peaceful solutions to any problem. Parents should avoid the harsh disciplinary methods and to give plenty of encouragement and praise (84). The older the child is, the more difficult to monitor the viewing process. When children reach the age of 15, they should be free to make their own decisions about what to watch. We (adults) should respect their ability to make their own decisions about what is appropriate, and try to support them in sticking to good choices (Barker and Petley 44). It is beneficial for parents to discuss the lessons of violent movies with the children and to counter the subversive influences of media violence in those discussions. Another suggestion is to

plan the weekly family's viewing and be selective about the content of the programs (Sweets 48).

Major networks and companies who own the media's new policies should stop promoting violent formulas and start making big changes in the content of violent messages along with noticeably reducing the amount of media violence. The media should create strings of new alternative educational programs and movies that spark the imagination and enlighten minds and souls.

More realistic plots, for instance, could be found in historical dramas and real life conflicts. Violence can be replaced by the conflict that is a true key-element in storytelling. Moreover, major network could use diverse tools and elements of danger such as impressive sound tracks, cuts, and other visual clues to unravel the mystery of the plot in order to attract large audiences.

Media messages are forms of speech and should be protected by the First Amendment, but those messages are also marketed for profit and are commercial products that can cause harm to their users. Therefore, they can be and should be restricted or banned as any other harmful products such as cigarettes, drugs, certain chemicals and substances. In this case, the censorship of TV violence does not contradict the concept of freedom of speech; conversely, the media violence overkill is a form of negative censorship since it deprives people of better choices and locks the gate for other creative alternatives.

Television programmers continue to keep control of the existing rating system that is created to serve their needs – not needs of the viewers. The ratings should be performed by experts who understand the nature of risks to viewers; instead, they are

produced by people who basically concerned with the company's financial profits.

Programmers give as little information as possible to keep the viewers in the dark and not to discourage them from watching the violent shows.

The networks do not educate the viewing public about the use of V-chips, so that most people are unaware of how to use those devices. Moreover, many people who pursue the rating system find the age-based categories not beneficial and the content letters ("labels") misleading. The public deserves to receive more accurate information about the content of programs, as well as about the frequency of violent acts per show (Potter 212). The next step would be taking the privilege of rating the existing programs from the media marketers. Programs should be rated by the independent, non-corrupted source, perhaps, the informed supervisors from the general public.

Conclusion

Isn't it shameful that a handful of corporations cultivates our tastes and values, controls the future selection of other media and deprives us of better choices and new alternative programs? In doing so, the media becomes a servant of political forces and plays a role in brainwashing the population. In fact, the entire country relies on the President's imposition of force in resolving international conflicts, rather than peaceful diplomatic ways and resolutions. The philosophy of revenge that promotes the notion that the best way to stop violence is to commit violent acts becomes a trademark of American militarism:

Right and wrong are no longer clear concepts. This extends way beyond fictional programs, as we know from the war in Iraq, our treatment of refugees, and the debate that surrounds these issues. We don't believe our politicians any more.

And the examination of their manipulation of facts becomes part of the media environment where conflict is heightened and exploited for commercial advantage. (Edgar)

The effects of the media on the population are not immediate; they gradually emerge until one day they explode into the repressive posture of an entire nation. It started from militaristic phobias such as the “red scare,” resulted in Cold war paranoia, and it continues to be perpetuated in George W. Bush’s administration’s strategies. When Bush, with his military ambitions in Iraq was reelected for a second term, it led to political misconceptions and economic decline for the entire country.

Being a form of the entertainment industry, the fictional violent world has very little or nothing to do with reality. The media does a poor job in educating people about real life violence and only confuses them more on how to cope with aggressiveness. In the long term, it contributes to the spiritual and moral degradation of the entire nation.

Violence overkill is a public health issue, embracing all layers of the population, parents as well as their children. The public health approach to the problem of violence on the screen has begun to identify underlying patterns of violence that will help us understand who is at high risk and what risk factors are associated with particular types of violence. Public health also addresses the social norms and attitudes that accept violence as a part of American life. The media companies must acknowledge responsibility for the unjustified spread of violent content and their contribution to the epidemic of violence in the world.

The media’s effort to stop further proliferation of violence should be buttressed and inspired by the public movement that would boycott gratuitous violence in the media.

This involves different forms of social actions: spontaneous organizing consumer action groups, writing newsletters with protest and putting pressure on advertisers and people in the media industries.

We believe that violence is a difficult problem, a multifaceted problem, but one that can be characterized, analyzed, and effectively controlled by understanding and action. If this understanding and action come from all these disciplines that come into contact with the thousands of victims of violence in the United States, we can and will make a significant difference. (Rosenberg 34)

Annotated Bibliography

“All Our Children.” Public Affairs Television. PBS. VA: video, Alexandria, 1999.

This work examines the effects of media on children and adolescents. It depicts a vivid picture of children’s minds in absorbing media violence content and the way of adapting to the political lies on TV. Some children actually speak about their feelings and reactions to media content, and share their experiences of media violence. This material could be helpful because it discusses the cognitive ways of children’s perception of fictional reality.

Baran, Stanly S. “Prosocial and Antisocial Television Content and Modeling by High and Low Self-Esteem Children.” Journal of Broadcasting 18 (1974): 481-95.

This article touches on both, the positive and negative cases of upbringing in America. Nevertheless, the impact of TV violence is shown in both social groups of teenagers. I will examine strong and weak links in teenagers’ resistant to media effects. The article underscores the content of some controversial violent programs on TV. The article’s main focus is on those which overuse violence, alcohol abuse and smoking as a kind of permission to go ahead with these sins in real life. The research is done on the impact of media violence on children with low self-esteem. It also gives the interesting statistics on adolescent delinquent behavior.

Barker, Martin, and Julian Petley. Ill Effects: The Media/Violence Debate. London: Routledge, 1997.

Barker believes that media violence generates excessive fear for the audience, encourages particular beliefs about the nature of crime, authority, and what constitutes the cause of aggressive behavior. I agree that sadness and fear about fictional characters may enable children to enhance their sense of compassion toward real people. The authors also express concern that the phobia of violence or addiction to fictional violence paralyze people’s ability to make positive decisions and lead to their moral and mental degradation. “Public fears now refer to how video recorders and multi-media computers have brought the most explicit celebrations of violence and grotesque spectacles of horror from the cinema into the home” (37).

Cassidy, Carol. Smile Pretty. Films for the Humanities, 1999.

This video is about the girls who are affected by the stereotyping in the media and about the ways of changing their mental images and identities. It explores the negative effects of media on the girl’s self-esteem and self-perception. I’d like to find a similar video about male teenagers’ self-image analysis to compare the gender differences in adaptation to the of media world. Girls seem to be less effected by the consequences of media violence.

Davalos, Deana B., Chavez Ernest L., Guardiola, Robert J. "Effects of Perceived Parental School Support and Family Communication on Delinquent Behaviors in Latinos and White Non-Latinos" Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology 11.1 (2005): 33. 24 Oct. 2005 <<http://web23.epnet.com>>

This article stresses the importance of family and school cooperation in dealing with delinquent behavior patterns. At-risk youth's problems could be associated with low self-esteem of adolescents and negative attention from their parents and school. It promotes the effective methods of behavioral correction and improvement of self-esteem. The authors explore the causes and effects of parental neglect and abuse and how it can alter the vulnerable soul of a teenager. It also offers the solution to the problem. The extract of a thorough study is taken for two basic cultural groups; Latinos and Whites. This material is useful for my proposal.

Dudley William. Media Violence: Opposing Viewpoints. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1999.

This book provides the valuable data on media violence over forty years of research proving the point that there is a lack of showing the negative consequences in violent programming, which affects the viewer in a very negative way. The author states: "Repeated exposure to high level of media violence teaches some children and adolescents to settle interpersonal differences with violence, while teaching many more to be indifferent to those solutions" (22). The analysis identifies three primary types of harmful effects associated with viewing violence: learning aggressive attitudes and behaviors, becoming desensitized to real world violence, and developing fear of being victimized by violence (18).

Edgar, Patricia. "TV Violence: the Good and Bad for Our Children." TV Violence. 4 Oct. 2005. Media for Children Foundation. 11 Apr. 2005 <<http://www.theage.com.au>>.

The article identifies the factors associated with the risk factors for children who are in trouble such as child abuse, family breakdown, unemployment, poverty, isolation, lack of social success, and peer-group pressure. Even though media violence is not the major factor of delinquent behavior of a person, it is a component at the societal level. The media depicts a cruel one-dimensional world, in which there is no place for the complex human emotions such as forgiveness and compassion. Media producers resist giving up their billionaires' revenues and, therefore, continue to exploit violence in news as well as in sport and fictional drama. Most of media companies are highly opposed to reducing the amount the violence and improving the quality of programs. Edgar states, "In society we see on TV there are high levels of aggression, and there is wide acceptance of antisocial behavior.... Increasingly the models of behavior in films, television, video games and music are antisocial. "Gangsters, drug dealers and psychopaths are often glamorized" (25).

Freedman, Jonathan L. Media Violence and Its Effects on Aggression: Assessing the Scientific Evidence. London: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

This author stresses out the positive influence of media violence when people manage to release social anxieties through experiencing sense of personal power while identifying themselves with heroes. In almost every television program that contains violence, “the person who starts the fight (the bad guy) eventually loses” (206). The author draws the conclusion that violent films and programs do not directly try to sell violence the way ads try to sell their products; however, those programs do not convey messages that violence is good or that people should engage in violent acts. In my opinion, most gratuitous violent shows and cartoons covertly promote violence as a quick and effective solution, no matter what the intentions of producers are.

Frank, Ivan C. Building Self-esteem in At-risk Youth: Programs and Individual Success Stories. London: Ivan Cecil, 1996.

This work examines the methods that can be successfully applied to at-risk teenage groups. Studying some behavioral patterns in the families with domestic abuse or parental neglect lead me to believe that media violence is the factor that contributes to aggressive behavior of teenagers. Those kids are definitely over exposed to violence on TV since life offers to them very little comfort. Thus, they tend to immerse themselves into the virtual reality.

Funk, Jeanne B. “Playing Violent and Computer Games and Adolescent Self-Concept.” Journal of Communications 46 (1996): 19-32.

This is a great source that validates male teenagers’ patterns as being influenced by the TV and video game industry. It creates “the mean world” syndrome that gives a notion that the world is a dismal and not a trustworthy place to live in. This article explains how adolescent boys cope with a distorted picture of reality that media producers impose on them. Analyzing the most violent programs on TV, computer and video games I can see how teenagers seek the strategies to overcome their despair and feeling of hopelessness. The media violent content is one of the many ways of coping with hostile reality; however it doesn’t offer peaceful solutions.

Gall, Timothy, and Daniel M. Lucas. Statistics on Weapons & Violence. Detroit: Gale Research, 1996.

This book presents statistics on weapons and violence in the United States and includes a general introduction to the problems concerning weapons and violence. It also has a glossary of related terminology. There is a good selection of charts, graphs and tables about weapons and violence from a variety of published source with explicit and insightful comments. For example, the rising level of aggressiveness contributes to a higher depression, social anxiety, and suicide rates. As the authors state, “violent crime captures the headlines daily, and record-setting murder rates, gang violence on the streets

and in the schools, car-jackings, or violent incidents in the workplace have increased citizens' fears" (Gall and Lucas xii).

Gauvain, Mary, and Susan M. Perez. "Parent-Child Participation in Planning Children's Activities Outside of School in European American and Latino Families." Child Development 76. 2 (2005): 371-383.

This article is similar to "Affects of Perceived Parental School Support..." by Davalos; though it emphasizes parental participation in raising a teenager's self-confidence and building their self-esteem. The source gives the concrete and simple solutions based on real experiences of teenagers with different cultural backgrounds. This will determine my own plan countering the bad affects of media violence and parental abuse. However, this source is limited to the positive experiences and could not be applied to situations when domestic life doesn't suggest a favorable climate for changes and cures. Thus, teenagers can be left to deal on their own with their psychological problems and face the hostile world.

Gerbner, George. "Television Violence and the Art of Asking the Wrong Question." The World & I; The World & I; A Chronicle of Our Changing Era July 1994: 12-16.

The article gives tremendous insights on media violence overkill in the United States and pins the problem of a global epidemic of violence. Gerbner calls the American society as "the most imprisoned-prone society in industrial world." The author sees the role of Congress as turning "its anti-trust and civil rights oversight on the centralized and globalized industrial structures and marketing strategies that impose violence on creative people and foist it on the children of the world" (13). People should participate more in cultural decisions that shape their lives and create new public policies that "reverse the tide of violence" (14).

Jones, Gerard. Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Heroes and Make-Believe Violence. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

This author considers violence as a way of coping with one's social anxieties and raises his voice against censoring and restraining the violent content on TV and video game industries. He sees the problem of addiction to violent games and movies in parental neglect and lack of alternative interesting activities in kids' lives. Jones expresses the hope that "the bonds that hold us together are empathy, acceptance, and a mutual desire to make the real world better, not a fragile web of constraints and controls" (143).

-- -- --. "Media is Good for Kids." Eden. 28 June 2000. Mother Jones Magazine. 3 Jan. 2002 <http://www.motherjones.com/reality_check/violent_media.html>.

Another position of the pro-violence's advocate is expressed in the given website. The author argues for the free expression of teenagers' feelings and boldest emotions they tend to keep inside out of fear of social isolation. He points out that adult world and mainstream culture "cultivates fear and teaches dependency" (7) and suppresses their

(children's) dangerous desires and individuality. While popular culture helps them "pull themselves out of those emotional traps" and to be close to their peers who also "identify themselves with a rebellious, even destructive hero" (12) and share the same interests. Gratuitous violence is claimed to be a youth's response to a highly rational and repressive adult world. Major network producers are adults who make big money on the industry for children deliberately creating the incessant appetite for the media violence' consumption and exploit some insecurities and anxieties of young people.

Kaplan, Jeffrey S. Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with Identity Issues. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999.

Two ways to approaching at-risk' teenagers in their moral and ethical development are literature and art. This article focuses on the part of adolescent education and enlightenment. Unfortunately, the older kids are lazy in trying alternative forms of leisure involving the work of their minds. They find the easy way to relax or entertain themselves for the media offers those sweet poisons. Teenagers can avoid reading books, which is shameful since classical literature gives them precious lessons of compassion and empathic behavior. Though I wouldn't discard the waking-up effect of the modern literature on the souls of young people because it is posing painful social questions.

Krcmar, Marina. "Imitating Life, Imitating Television: Two Effects of Family and Television Models on Children's Moral Reasoning." Communication Research 3. 32 (2005): 267-294.

This article is mainly focused on the ethical aspect of the media effects on teenagers' attitudes. Teenagers have to make moral choices in hard situations, and media helps in creating their ethical values. This source gives an answer on the question: How low self-esteem in teenagers affects their morals? The author explores the possible ways of media and family's interchangeable influence.

Lanza-Kaduce, Linda, and Lynne M. Webb. "Perceived Parental Communication and Adolescent Self-Esteem: Predictors of Academic Performance and Drop-out Rates." Journal of the Association for Communication Administration 56 (1992):1-12.

This article focuses on the possible solution to opening the gates to make free communication with troubled teenagers possible. I want to explore some "troubleshooting" tactics, which would be workable and feasible with kids with a problematic background. There are different approaches to the problem of teenagers' isolation from the outer world when they wrap themselves into this artificial virtual world. One of the ways is to discuss the content of what they watch and what games they play. In the process of exchanging the ideas, parents can share some positive solutions with their kids and slow down their getaway from reality. I believe that quality time spent with your teenager can substitute tons of demoralizing and preaching discourses. Most parents, however, are extremely busy nowadays so the author's methods may offer another solution to counter the time factor.

Landman-Peeters, Karlien. "Gender Differences in the Relation Between Social Support, Problems in Parent-offspring Communication, and Depression and Anxiety." Social Science & Medicine June 60 (2005): 2549-59.

This article touches on a different approach to troubled boys and girls and explores how gender roles can change communication between society and teenagers; family and teenagers. The author illuminates the reverse tactics teenagers try while reacting to a hostile environment. The author stresses the importance of parental involvement and participation in teenagers' life; however, it offers different tools for both genders for their successful interacting with the adult world.

Levin, Diane E. Remote Control Childhood? Combating the Hazards of Media Culture. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998.

The book promotes media literacy as a major proposal in solving the problem of media violence. It offers teenagers the creative ways of expressing their complex emotions such as anger and pain due to domestic abuse or peer's pressure. The author examines the effectiveness of existing measures such as V-chip programming. He draws the boundary between fictional and real-life violence and concludes that the media doesn't portray real life experiences in a proper way, nor does it educate about real world violence. Misconception of reality is not fruitful in raising teenagers' self-esteem.

"Senate Report: Media Violence Affects Kids." 6 Aug. 1999. Online image. Associated Press. <<http://www.freedomforum.org./templates/doc>> <<http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://freedomforum.org/graphics/illos/violence.tv.jpg>>. Downloaded 19 April 2006.

Potter, James W. The 11 Myths of Media Violence. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003.

The book debunks the basic myths about media and stresses an importance for the general public of media literacy. One of the myths is that media is allegedly not responsible for the negative effects of their messages since there is no direct link between fictional and real life aggression. The author expresses his concerns about the facts that the perpetrator in violent movies is normally rewarded or at least not punished (30% of the cases); oftentimes perpetrator is attractive or a hero (40% of all perpetrators); the consequences of violence to the victim are not shown (such as pain or harm) and violence appears in a humorous context (happy violence). Children who are socialized by violence learn that violent behavior is accepted by society. (23)

Rosenberg, Mark, and Mary Ann Fenley. Violence in America: A Public Health Approach. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

This book makes deep observations about how the media violence problem could be addressed as a public health issue. The authors examine the history of violence in America and conclude that "violence defied the best minds in health, politics, religion

and law enforcement, and therefore has often appeared to be inevitable” (vii). As the authors further state, fatalism and hopelessness associated with media violence overkill should be countered by media activists who are equipped with media literacy’ tools. Media violence needs serious consideration and social action. The authors also connect the raising rates of suicide for all youth, ages 19-25, with a rapid spread of the TV violence since 1950s.

Sohn, Emily. “The Violent Side of Video Games.” Science News for Kids. 14 Jan. 2004. Washington: Science Service. 4 Oct. 2005
<<http://www.sciencenewsformids.org/articles>>.

The author stresses the point that violence becomes the biggest concern in the epoch of developing realistic computer graphics and special effects. While participating in violent video games, the average student misses out on more valuable accomplishments in life he/she could succeed otherwise. He also explores the effects that video games have on the brain. He states, “In games like *Grand Theft Auto*, for example the goal is to kill as many people as you can. The more violent you are, the more points you win.” There is no question that violent content affect the youth on every level, consciously and subconsciously. In other words, while playing video and computer games or watching TV and movies teenagers’ minds are substantially altering. Indeed, what we see in the media can “change the way we act, think and feel” (6).

Sweets, Paul W. The Art of Talking With Your Teenager. Avon: Adams Media, 1988.

This book provides accurate and authoritative information about the positive communication with all categories of teenagers. There is a chapter dedicated to troubled teenagers and ones with psychological problems and social disorders. It is the ultimate book on the subject of adolescent psychology when an expert’s assistance is not required. Yet it will help parents to avoid further complications which lead to seeking professional help and spending an enormous amount of money on psychiatric aid. In short, this book presents preventive measures to tackle the problem of teenagers’ damaged self-esteem. This may help them to face the consequences of mistreatment and domestic abuse. This book can help parents restore the lost connection with their children, and thereby straighten those relationships.

Wekesser, Carol. Violence in the Media. London: Greenhaven Press, 1995.

The author reveals the truth which lies beneath the Television Violence Act. On this act, the major networks offered a set of standards to reduce the level of gratuitous violence in their programs. However, those measures have brought little change to the existing media violence overkill’ problem. Wekesser says, “In response to the free-marketeers who claim that the media what they want, I would argue that in truth, they are actively shaping their audience’s tastes, and thus is worthwhile to give that audience some healthy alternatives from which to choose” (139). In the midst of the televised mayhem, children either become disproportionately frightened of being victimized, or become callous and

less likely to help victims of crime. Moreover, violence on TV contributes to the spread of aggressiveness and repressive attitudes in the world.

“Warning: Too Much TV is Hazardous to Your Health.” 5 Oct. 1998. TV-Turnoff Network. 20 Apr. 2006 <<http://www.tvturnoff.org>>.

The article has a great impact on the reader because it gives an unequivocal answer to the painful questions about media violence. For example, how much TV we should watch on a daily/weekly basis. It gives the updated statistics on the over exposure to media violence and on the amount of violent acts the average viewer has seen by the age of 18. I agree with the concept that our social position will make a difference in the world. The major conclusion is that media violence “dulls the emotional response to violence and its victims” (4). In about 3,500 research studies on the effects of media violence over the past 40 years, 99.5 percent have shown a positive correlation between watching violence on TV and committing acts of real-life violence (6).

Appendices

Appendix A: Interdisciplinary Reflection

I have had a passion for writing since I was little; later on I tried to get my BA in journalism at the University of St. Petersburg, Russia. I failed to complete my education there due to the necessity of providing a decent life for my kids. That decision resulted in taking over a fast food business, instead of following my heart. But, my goal was to become an accomplished writer. I eventually realized that without communicative skills I would neither portray life realistically, nor detect the character of people, and what goes on beneath the surface of things. Those thoughts were a prerequisite to my decision to choose Human Communication as a major.

In America, I studied English intensively and at the same time wrote a memoir about my Russian experience, with all its harshness and bitterness that left an indelible imprint in my soul. But, I felt disconnected from American culture for a while. I went to Hartnell College where not only did I fulfill some requirements of general education, but also merged into mainstream culture. This later allowed me to enter California State University at Monterey Bay and make the transition into a new world, to which I was no longer a stranger.

My notion about what constitutes “Human Communication” was very vague at that time; however I did acknowledge the importance of building strong communicative skills. It took courage and time to get started and break through the language and cultural barriers which went along with fears of the unknown and unfamiliarity. I hoped my major would help me to write successfully in English, whether I choose concentration in journalism or another path. My first memorable class was Major Proseminar. It gave me a

more precise perspective on what avenues of education I should expect in the next two years. The course taught me different approaches and strategies that could be applied in putting Major Learning Outcomes together.

During the two years of my upper division education, I was empowered by the diversity and versatility of HCOM courses that CSUMB provided. Relational Ethics, fulfilling MLO 3 requirements, was one of the most moving and exciting courses; it was about ethics and personal behavior in very unwanted and complicated situations, close to my interest in psychology. In the first section of this course, I focused on the moral dilemma and how to apply it to ethical conduct when all options seem equally difficult. Relational Ethics taught me that at the core of the principle of veracity is a serious consideration of the interests of other people.

The concept of Codependent Arising or “shared reality” made me realize that all phenomena in the world are interdependent and that my concept of reality is not the only vision. This course was extremely helpful in my work on restraining negative thoughts. I learned that my negative thoughts created my agenda and shaped my personality and expectations for other people, which could totally blur reality. While reading “The Sunflower” by Simon Wiesenthal, I examined both Christian and Buddhist concepts of forgiveness as unconditional and universal approaches to self-betterment.

The concept of Universal Compassion and Truth was intertwined with my other course “Ways of Knowing” (MLO 4) and readings of the Dalai Lama. This supported my perception that people will be more compassionate and happier in pursuit of spiritual and ethical improvement. The spiritual revolution would combat ignorance and the unethical behavior of people around the globe. The Dalai Lama stated, “My call for a spiritual

revolution is thus not a call for a religious revolution...,” [but] “a call to turn toward the wider community of beings with whom we are connected.” He stated that without ethical practice spiritual revolution is impossible since basic spiritual qualities like compassion and love presume considering others’ interests and curbing our negative emotions.

The Cooperative Argumentation course (MLO 1) enlightened me with a concept that the deliberative community was the one that was based on mutual respect and co-existence of different perspectives. Taking a position on the controversial issue of same sex marriages, I learned that tolerance to the opposite views could make a difference for my own life.

To be objective, we should value human life and human aspirations, for a good life cannot be hampered by mainstream prejudice and tradition. In other words, our attitudes and beliefs shouldn’t be placed ahead of our consciousness. My conclusions were that moral principles of any society should be more tilted toward people’s basic needs for health and welfare and deny prejudice and discrimination. Banning gay marriage (or civil union) could lead to negative consequences such as an abundance of grief for millions of good gay citizens. Their sense of bitterness and oppression could ignite violent act.

Learning different compelling and convincing perspectives on tolerance and forgiveness was helpful to see a common ground in the argument about the meaning of forgiveness. A deep care for victims of the Holocaust and concern for others to keep memories of the dead threaded through entire book “Sunflower” by Simon Wiesenthal. Our class discussions and oral presentations were true animated Compassion in Action to me.

Reading the greatest samples of American literature that I received from the courses Race, Colonialism, and Film (MLO 5) and American Ethic Literature and Culture (MLO 6) empowered me with an enagement against racial prejudice and the moral vision of social action by means of art. This course gave a true portrayal of injustice and world-wide oppression through lenses of art and helped to form my position of a social activist.

Another course that raised my consciousness and developed my writing skills was Intro to Creative Writing that fulfilled my MLO 8 requirement. Initially, I tried to impress the reader's imagination with redundant sentences, delaying important solutions. I dwelled on multiple minor details, which was destructive for the reader. As a result of intense editing, I made transitions workable and learned how to connect the parts in a proper fashion to make my stories effectively lucid. This course helped me to tighten my paragraphs, organize thoughts and avoid overwriting. I strived to pin down words with texture and taste, evoking senses and painting a bright visual image in one's mind. This became a must each time I started a new piece of writing.

Another problem posed by the Social Action course was finding a breaking the silence and drawing attention to an object of injustice. I am in the painful process of searching for my topic. It makes me grasp the world around me with concerns for others. To me, the research part (documentary, web, interviewing people) is perhaps more important than writing, which is a reward for initial sweat. It is outrageously exciting to release shame and indignation on paper while revealing some painful pages of the past. It is about setting your self free and empowering your audience.

The course HCOM 307S (Concentration) seriously moved me toward making a firm decision about my priorities that will go toward protection of people's rights. I am no longer a silent observer of life. I have to make an effort to become a social activist in my writing and my life position. I do believe now that the community is a power that can embrace all efforts of each individual and collectively combat social inequality.

As my first Service Learning Experience, I practiced media literacy lessons at my site, JC Crumpton Elementary school, and learned that violent content plays a crucial role in American culture and society, as it is one of the prominent attributes of American life style. Media violence shapes our personality and contributes to a level of aggressiveness in each cell of society. When there is no way to curb evil forces, they thrive upon our silent confirmation and spread like cancerous cells. What I have learned about myself and others so far is that we are all boxed in to some extent, and the Service Learning course forces me to break down the shell of indifference and passiveness. While we keep silent and don't speak up for our rights, miss elections or comply with what is imposed on us as covert aggression and lies, we contribute to raising the level of evil. The word of truth spills out during our class discussions and the presentations have opened the cracks in those boxes we were trapped in and released the hope that people can find the courage to get out of their boxes and fight against consumerism and commodity fetishism.

My very first semester (Spring 2004) at CSUMB was challenging with my first experience in the Otter Realm newspaper. It took some time to get familiar with the instructors, campus, schedule and the university map, let alone to understand what the work in the newspaper was all about. During my first Otter Realm semester, I felt lost and uncomfortable interviewing people. The whole concept of journalistic style eluded

me at first. For a long time, to write simply and lucidly seemed to be akin to self-denial. My first article was born in anguish and creative throes and certainly didn't meet the standard of a word count and a deadline. Something inside me resisted writing straight to the point and avoiding wordiness. Fortunately, I started a massive reading of the course materials on how to write informative pieces and followed the valuable advice of my first section editor, Michelle Burke and the precious guidelines of my advisor Juanita Darling.

I noticed that my major problem was in handling the structure and format of a given article and nicely organizing my thoughts and materials by emphasizing the main points while deviating from unimportant issues. Interviewing people helped me; however I tended to bog down my notes. With every written article I became more efficient, prompt and concrete and learned to avoid asking fuzzy, indirect questions. The main lesson I learned this time was that in the real world newspaper, it is important to follow exact directions and pay attention to the accuracy of minor details. Although my experience was tough, I came to some important conclusions, which could help me in the future. Primarily, work in the newspaper is a team effort. For the good of the newspaper, the reporter should be sided with the editor, and not rebel in trifles, which could be detrimental for the mutual enterprise.

I learned that my ambitions and expectations exceeded my level of knowledge and writing skills. And, I am thankful to the Otter Realm for giving me an opportunity to be published and for great lessons, no matter how painful they seemed at the moment. This experience also helped me to overcome stress, which could occur in my future career. I understand that regardless of the grade I got for this class, I did advance in journalistic writing, which is the only thing that really matters.

The idea of the Capstone project came to my mind because I wished to explore how greatly media content influences teenagers' level of consciousness, perhaps, because I raise two children who are now teenagers and, in my opinion, are exposed to violent content on the screen in excess. My initial goal was to reveal the myth that graphic violence is a part of reality and should be accepted by society as an inevitable evil. In the process of research I changed my direction toward posing the question about what kind of violence is more dangerous. Graphic violence is easy to detect and therefore, to degrade, while gratuitous violence with humorous content seems harmless and unperceived by large audiences and have much greater negative effects in the long term. Teenagers can be addicted to that type of violence more and suffer more than from the graphic one.

I always suspected that the media could contribute to developing people's self-awareness and attitudes, change psychological climates and make a difference in people's social behavior. My special interest in the topic of media violence began while watching violent movies such as "Passion of Christ" and "Kill Bill," as I felt true indignation against senseless and tasteless violence and blood shedding on the screen. I chose Media Violence as a topic of my oral presentation in my HCOM 307S course as well. I saw this topic to be my main focus in media studies and a Capstone project. I've read many controversial articles on the subject that sparked my interest.

The more I dug deeper in the details of my research, the more I lost my confidence that violence on TV had dramatic negative effects and was willing to accept other positions. I was about to follow the erroneous statement that violence on the screen had very little impact on the audience and even educated people about real world aggression. However, I discovered that serious flaws in the portrayal of fictional

violence such as the lack of showing consequences of violence and humorous context in which violent acts occurred (gratuitous violence) could distort the picture of reality and be subversive to the audience. The major challenge at this stage was to organize my heterogeneous thoughts and concepts nicely so that it would be a strong argument.

I checked the library databases and did some thorough research of scholarly articles on the subject and wasn't satisfied. My skills in highlighting the main points that I received from reading and analyzing complicated scientific works in the Ways of Knowing class were very helpful in narrowing down my research. I chose those surveys, tables and statistics that found the links between media violence overkill and teenagers criminal behavior. I tried different research strategies and extracted some interesting information from Web chat rooms on Yahoo and Google.com. Certain books and peer-reviewed articles seemed to be especially valuable to my research; however I was swamped with the abundance of the existing material. At first glance, the topic was well-chewed out by many researchers and not much was left to say. Yet, the polarized viewpoints on the matter of media violence divided society into two categories: those who stated that the media was not responsible for the violence on the screen and those who acknowledged this responsibility.

To me, it was challenging to stick to my original position that violence was a danger to society, when I was influenced by rhetorical power of the book "Violence in the Media" edited by Carol Wekesser in which violence was presented as a natural and justified "evil." Moreover, the biggest challenge was to determine how to build my core argument, what the major points were and thereafter extract all superfluous information.

First, I started off with the history of media violence and found the beginnings of violence overkill as a trace of the epoch of consumerism.

With the help of Historical Analysis and Critical Communication Skills, I evaluated the current situation on TV and the video industry as detrimental and even catastrophic to the moral and aesthetical development of teenagers. I carefully examined teenagers' responses to the violent content as well as framed my position from multiple perspectives, which helped me come to the conclusion that teenagers were not the ones susceptible to TV violence and were not at a bigger risk of raising levels of aggressiveness than any other population categories or groups. However, they experienced what it called "mean world syndrome" at full blast. The purpose of my project was to detect the ways that the mass media influences on the souls of teenagers in particular, and what solution could be made to change the situation in society. Initially, I was compelled to explore teenagers with a history of domestic abuse, but later I discovered that massive effects really touch all layers of the population, and even though wounded teenagers were more sensitive to real world violence, there was no need to restrict the consequences of media violence to just one narrow group.

Another discovery was that media effects could always be detected as an immediate reaction. For example, normal response to a horror movie would be an elevated pulse, but many people do not have any responses at all, which indicates the desensitization to the screen violence.

In the writing process of my Capstone project, the more I developed support for my thesis statement that violence overkill is acting gradually, little by little, affecting large audiences, and it oftentimes remain undetected. The more I realize the value and

importance of my work, the more I am inspired to call for social action and public movement. If my work would be published, it would alert many people of different cultural backgrounds to the danger of unperceived media violence. My work can mean the difference in distinguishing the long-term effects of media violence. As a future professional journalist, I plan on writing similar articles and scholarly works concerning media violence as I now feel more equipped in opening a forum about the importance of restricting and censoring screen violence.

HCOM Senior Capstone Digital Poster Spring 2006

Name:

Irina Reissler

Project Title:

Media Violence and Its Impact on Society and Teenagers

Concentration:

Journalism and Media Studies

Project Abstract

Violence in the media cultivates repressive attitudes; the "mean world syndrome" (exaggerated fear of being victimized) and desensitization' effect. I had three main arguments in my paper. One was whether media violence instigates real-life violence or leads to a delinquent behavior. The second was what degree the media violence harmful for society and how it affects attitudes and behavior of teenagers, The third was what measures should be taken to reduce negative effects if most of them are proved to be ineffective so far.

Project Context & Contributions

The history of media violence began in 1950s when the major TV networks found a simple workable formula – violence. An average of 150 acts of violence and about 15 murders entertain us and our children every day. Many people do not perceive violence as a public health problem. In my research, I focused on the negative effects of media violence and took a social position on the problem.

Relevant Links

www.tvturnoff.org

www.sciencenewsformids.org

www.motherjones.com



"Gr000001"

http://www.phacaspc.gc.ca/.../html/nFntseffmedia_e.htm. Retrieved April 10 2006

Research Questions

1. What are the negative effects of media violence?
2. What age-category is affected the most by media violence?
3. How realistic is the portrayal of violence in the media?
4. Who is responsible for the media violence overkill?
5. Does media violence reflects violence in society. If yes, to what extent?
6. Is the media responding to market desires?
7. What is an essential element in

Evidence

I used historical analysis of media violence and found the underpinnings of the existing violence in epoch of consumerism. Philosophical analysis' strategies helped me evaluate the controversial material on the topic. Critical Communication Skills and Ethics allowed me to shape my own position and raise my voice against media violence. Sociology and Cultural Studies were helpful in comparing teenagers' responses to violence from the different cultural perspectives. I started off with the readings of the course materials of HCOM 307S and scanning websites for my oral presentation on the subject of the media violence. "The 11 Myths of Media Violence" by James Potter was the most valuable source in my research.

Project Format

I chose an in-depth Research paper of 30 pages. It has introduction, lit review, findings and conclusion; Recommendations and annotated bibliography are included.

Selected Bibliography

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story-telling that can substitute the violence formula?

8. Is the censorship of the media necessary?

9. Will the reduction of the amount of violence in the media solve the problem?

10. What measures should be taken to improve the situation?

Key Findings

Violence in the media affects everyone. Older people can be affected more than youth because negative effects build up during the entire life. Media violence does not reflect violence in society. Violence is often sanitized and glamorized, the negative consequences of violence are not shown. Gratuitous violence is more dangerous than graphic one because it desensitizes the viewers and is unperceived the most by the general public. The media is shaping our tastes while claiming to respond market desires. The myth about “innate attraction to violence” (Potter 211) is created by those media conglomerates who want to perpetuate their profits. Marketers claim the right of free speech for themselves; instead, they should stop promoting violent formulas and open the gates for creative alternatives. The censorship and the rating system of the media violent content are necessary, but should be “controlled” by the independent competent public sources.

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