

Television viewing and aggression: Some alternative perspectives

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The effect of media violence on behavior is not only an interesting psychological question but is also a relevant public policy and public health issue. Although many studies have been conducted examining the link between violence on TV and aggressive behavior, most of these studies have overlooked several other potentially significant factors, including the dramatic context of the violence and the type of violence depicted as well as the race and ethnicity of the viewers.

In a new study appearing in the September issue of *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, psychologists Seymour Feshbach from the University of California, Los Angeles and June Tangney from George Mason University investigated the effect that exposure to violent TV programs has on negative behavior in children from different ethnic backgrounds.

To investigate this connection, the psychologists conducted a study that evaluated TV viewing habits, intelligence, and behavior in 4th, 5th and 6th grade children. To assess these qualities, the children's parents and teachers completed behavioral questionnaires detailing the children's aggression, delinquency and cruelty. The children took IQ tests and completed surveys indicating the TV programs (which were later categorized as violent or non-violent by the researchers) they had watched during a seven day time period.

The results showed a positive relationship between the amount of violent TV watched and negative personality attributes among white males and

females and African-American females. Interestingly though, while there was a correlation between watching violent TV and lower academic performance in African-American males, these boys did not exhibit increased aggression or lower IQ.

The authors speculate that perhaps for African-American males, viewing TV (including violent programs) may play a different role than for white males and African-American and white females. The researchers noted, "The data raise the possibility that processes competing with or overriding the aggression stimulating or aggression modeling effects of viewing violence on television may be more salient for African-American males." For example, viewing TV shows where violent behavior is punished may inhibit feelings of aggression to a greater degree in African-American males. In any case, additional research is required to assess the effects on African-American males of viewing TV aggression.

The authors also suggest that when studying the effect of TV violence on aggression, researchers and policy makers must recognize "the need for a more general conceptualization of the effects of exposure to TV violence, one that takes into account personality differences, ethnic differences, the social context in which TV is viewed, variations in the dramatic context, and other potentially significant moderating factors."

Source: Association for Psychological Science

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