

SEMINAR:
MEDIA,
VIOLENCE AND
AGGRESSION.



YOUR TASK: DEBATE THE FOLLOWING QUESTION – TO WHAT EXTENT DOES MEDIA INFLUENCE THE LIKELIHOOD OF VIOLENCE OR AGGRESSION?

- Article 1: Violent media content and aggression.
- Article 2: Media, aggression and the GAM.
- Article 3: Parental monitoring, pro and antisocial behaviour.

THE HISTORY

- A long history of popular fears regarding the effects of violent media is well documented and reinforced in popular culture (Giles, 2010).
- One example is `Child`s play 3`, wrongly associated with the murder of James Bulger in 1993. (Barker, 1997).
- Why are we so willing to link violent TV and film to aggression and violence? What about music lyrics and music video?
- Why are we fascinated by `copycat` acts?
- Are the Media really responsible?
- Individuals who are more likely to act aggressively are `inspired` by the media, but that does not mean that the Media is the cause of the violence... or is it?



CHARACTERISTICS OF THE VIEWER

- Are young children the most vulnerable?
- According to Anderson et al. (2003) and Gentile (2003) they are, and they feel more anxiety during exposure.
- Young children also have difficulty in distinguishing between fantasy and reality.
- How can researchers reliably assess media influence on children and particularly how can they compare age related differences in media effects?
- A further issue is personality. Do violent individuals select violent viewing? This raises an important point regarding INTERPRETATION.
- Research has shown that an adults commentary following violent media, can alter the children`s interpretation of it (Canter & Wilson, 2003).

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- The consequences of violence-
- This is important because it is not often that we see the consequences for the victim. It is not easy to watch, trivialise or ignore unpleasant consequences. Comstock (1985) suggests that it is far more difficult to imitate violence if the pain of the victim is emphasised.
- An additional point is that less than 20% of the acts on TV are punished, yet those acts that are, are less likely to be copied and those that suffer no consequences are more likely to be imitated (Wilson et al., 1997).
- Justified violence is more likely to provide aggressive responses than other violence. Why? (Script theory- Huesmann & Eron, 1986).

SO, THE QUESTION IS... DOES MEDIA VIOLENCE ATTRACT YOUNG PEOPLE?

- Which programmes are most appealing?
- Studies which remove the violence found reduced enjoyment from males but increased enjoyment in females (Berry et al., 1999).
- Weaver & Wilson (2009) edited episodes from prime time TV to create 3 versions;
- 1) graphic violence, 2) sanitized violence, 3) no violence.
- All undergraduate students who viewed the programmes reported enjoying the non violent ones more.



SO, THE QUESTION BECOMES...

IS IT ACTION OR VIOLENCE THAT IS APPEALING?

- Weaver et al. (2011) created four versions of an original cartoon:
- 1) low action, low violence
- 2) low action, high violence
- 3) high action, low violence
- 4) high action, high violence
- These were shown to 128 children. Results indicated that violence had no impact for ratings of enjoyment, but action did (for boys).



CLASSIC STUDIES



- Bandura & Ross (1961, 1963a, 1963b) found that children who were exposed to an aggressive model were more likely to imitate that behaviour. Furthermore, if the model was rewarded with cookies, they were more likely to copy. In fact the only reasons for not imitating was if the model was punished.
- They also reported that children will learn from animated cartoons (cat-lady).
- Importantly, Hicks (1965) made the observation that the behaviour was still evident 8 months later on.

- Coyne et al. (2008) and Scharrer (2005) also found that adolescents exposed to violence in the laboratory engaged in increased aggression.
- Because of the problems associated with laboratory research, field experiments became more popular.
- Steuer et al. (1971) 3-5 year old children were randomly assigned to watch violent or non violent TV shows in school. Children in the violent group showed significantly more physical aggression towards their peers.
- Boyatzis et al. (1995) showed one episode of power rangers to primary school children and observed their behaviour in the classroom. Compared to a control group, the boys committed significantly more intentional aggression (seven times as much).

- What was so important regarding this study, is that the pro social message displayed at the end of each episode is nowhere as powerful as the violence.
- Liss et al. (1983) also highlights the fact that moral lessons are ineffective when couched in violence.
- However,
- Some researchers; Hill (1997) argue that watching violent TV is a `rite of passage` for adolescents.



LONGITUDINAL EVIDENCE

- One of the best ways of testing the chicken and egg problem of violence and exposure to aggression.
- Lefkowitz et al. (1977) found that a preference for violent media at age 8 predicts aggression at age 18.
- Johnson et al. (2002) suggested that higher numbers of aggressive acts, assaults and robberies are committed by those individuals exposed to violent TV in adolescence.
- Huesmann and Eron conducted one of the most impressive longitudinal studies in (1986) for over 22 years. They tested pp`s at 8, 19 and at 30. They reported that early TV preferences predict the number and seriousness of convictions at age 30 even after controlling for IQ, SES and exposure.

- In addition, they did a three year study of 1,000 children from 5 countries. Despite different crime rates and TV programming, the findings were in the expected direction except for in Australia, and was the same for girls and boys.
- Finally, although the evidence was strongest for early exposure leading to violence, there was some indication of the reverse being true.
- This led Huesmann and Eron to conclude that the precise direction is not crucial as the relationship is probably reciprocal.
- Likewise, Slater (2003) regards the relationship as mutually reinforcing.
- The most recent 15 year longitudinal research from Huesmann and colleagues (2003) supports the idea that both boys and girls are influenced by violent media. 500 children were interviewed and revisited 15 years later. Unlike their early research both boys and girls were equally influenced, because of the acceptance of assertive females, and because of increased violence female characters.

WHO IS MOST AT RISK?



- Definitely not all individuals under the same level of risk.
- Certain messages are more likely to pose a risk...
- These are `moderating variables`
 - The nature of the violent message (Wilson et al., 2002)
 - Personal characteristics of the child (Bushman & Huesmann, 2006; Gentile et al., 2004)
 - Environmental factors (Vanderwater, Lee & Shim, 2005)

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

- Morrison (1999) interviewed adults and children regarding their understanding of violence and found clear distinctions between playful violence (cartoons) depicted violence (graphic and bloody scenes) and authentic/ naturalistic violence.
- Morrison reported that we base our violence judgements on:
 - 1. how real or convincing the violence is
 - 2. whether or not the violence is justifiable.



ASKING THE YOUNG THEMSELVES

- Hagell & Newburn (1994) believe that this is what we should be doing. They interviewed young offenders with violent records and found that these individuals watched less TV and film, demonstrating a lack of engagement with violent media.
- Savage & Yancey (2008) conducted a meta-analysis and concluded that not one study tested hypotheses using meaningful measures, accurate D.V.s or accurate measurements of exposure to violent media.

VALUE SYSTEMS AND CULTURE

- Our value systems and culture have an impact-
- Schlesinger et al (1998) interviewed 88 men regarding their responses to violent films; the men from `rougher` backgrounds (used to fighting) were more excited by realistic film violence and less likely to label a behaviour as violent if seen as a justifiable punishment.
- Likewise, Gunter (1985) found British audiences viewed knives as more violent than guns. Why?



VIDEO GAME VIOLENCE (VVG)



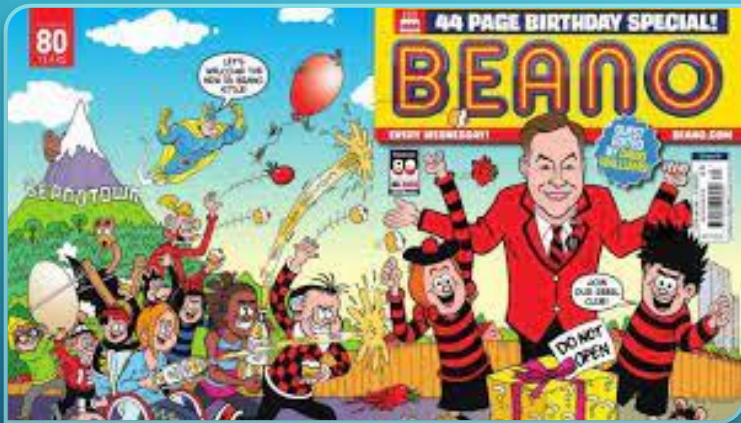
- An extension of violent film or media or not?
- There are different forms of psychological processing occurring with each activity.
- In gaming, the player is in control of his or her responses. This is different to passive viewing of film. Anderson et al., (2004, 2007) studied children and university students and found that on subsequent learning tasks, aggression could increase by 40%!
- However, Ivory & Kalyanaraman (2007) explored the realism of video games and the subsequent effects. They reported no effects on the aggression measures, only an increase in physiological arousal and excitement.

THEORIES OF MEDIA VIOLENCE:

SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

- One early study (Lovaas, 1961) showed nursery children either violent or non violent cartoons. Then they received 2 toys to play with, a doll that had a lever to hit with and a ball that passes through a maze. The violence exposed children chose the hitting doll toy more frequently to play with.
- Obviously there is the work of Bandura (1961, 1963, 1965), and Bandura referred to this as `disinhibition` because it weakens the normal constraints on behaviour.
- More recently, Bandura (2009) refers to it as abstract modelling as the child is generating a new rule and accompanying behaviour.

COGNITIVE PRIMING (BERKOWITZ, 1984, 1994)



- Stimuli in the media can elicit or activate aggressive thoughts, which in turn 'prime' closely related thoughts, feelings and behaviours stored in memory.
- Thus for a short time following exposure, a person remains in a state of activation; a readiness to react, where thoughts and behaviours are at the forefront.
- For example Berkowitz (1973) found that children who read a war comic were more likely to use aggressive words in a sentence construction task, than those who read a neutral comic.

CONDITIONS WHICH ENHANCE PRIMING

- 1) Emotional state (Berkowitz, 1990). If we are in a negative state we are more likely to be primed as we are in a state of readiness (flight or fight).
- 2) Justification (Berkowitz, 1994). If violence is portrayed as morally proper it reduces inhibition.
- 3) Cues in the environment (Jo & Berkowitz, 1994). These remind people and act as triggers to reactivate and sustain thoughts and behaviours.
- However, priming only works on previously learned behaviours, so ...

SOCIAL INFORMATION PROCESSING (HUESMANN, 1998)

- This explains how we develop and maintain behaviour in the form of scripts.
- Information regarding what is likely to happen, how to respond and what is the potential outcome.
- They guide behaviour and aid problem solving and are gained via experience and exposure.
- Once a young child is exposed to high levels of violence or aggression they develop a script that aggression is the way to deal with a situation. Once learned, the script is trialled and learned and therefore reinforced.
- The more it is used the more accessible it becomes and in turn can be triggered by many cues.

A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE



- Three developmental differences separate infants from junior school age children:
- level of perceptual processing,
- fantasy and reality, and
- concrete to inferential processing.
- In adolescence, metacognitive thinking and adolescent egocentrism play important roles.
- Young children are focused on appearance, sound and action (perceptual boundedness; Springer 2001), whereas older children can focus on the function of scenes, events etc. (Tversky, 1985).
- Older children can be more selective, searching for cues, motives and goals relative to the plot.

COMPREHENSION OF REALITY AND FANTASY



- The young tend to attribute life to inanimate objects, create imaginary friends or talk to TV characters. By age 4 or 5 they can understand whether or not TV is representative of real life by the violations of physical reality (Dorr, 1983).
- However, fantasy characters can still be powerful role models. It is only by 7 or 8 that they begin using multiple cues to judge reality (Wright et al., 1994).
- As they get older they think about how `possible` the behaviour may be, and by the teenage years they reason in terms of how `plausible` the actions or events may be (Dorr 1983).

ADOLESCENT EGOCENTRISM

- Adolescence is the time for experimenting with identity, moving away from parental guidance and shifting towards peers. Adolescents are confronted with decisions involving risk and can appear invincible at times.
- Egocentrism is manifested by a preoccupation with one's own thoughts and experiences (Greene et al., 2002) and the underestimation of one's own risk.
- Lower processing and activity in the frontal cortex is found in adolescence and when exposed to entertainment violence they often show poorer executive control (Kronenberg et al., 2005).

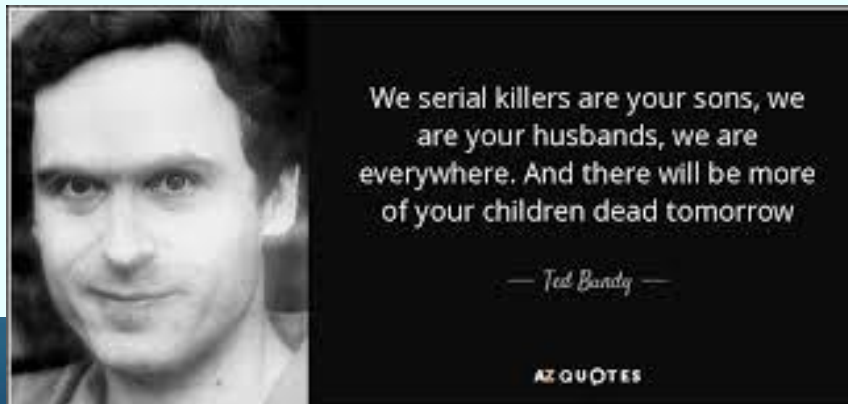


CAN WE BE DESENSITISED?

- Reduced emotional responsiveness.
- Repeated exposure/viewing can affect our responses and arousal. Habitual consumers of violent screen arousal show low levels of arousal when watching violent movies (Krahe et al., 2011).
- Even within a single programme GSR and heart rate decrease over time during exposure to prolonged violence (Lazarus et al., 1964).
- Farr (2012) argues that this is the reason for the increase in violence in media.
- Children and adults are less emotionally aroused by scenes of real life aggression if they previously watched a violent drama compared to a non violent programme (Thomas et al., 1997).
- Violent video games have the same effect. Carnagey et al. (2007) Students played a violent game for 20 minutes then watched a graphic tape of real life violence. There was less physiological arousal than control group.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT...

- Whilst we can be re-sensitised, does this happen in realty?
- We are constantly exposed to violence, do we have a chance to recover?
- Have we become desensitised without realising?
- Is this a cultural shift?
- Violent pornography?



CONCLUDING COMMENTS...

Media violence is not likely to be the sole cause of adult or youth aggression, nor is it likely to be the single most important contributory factor.

However, exposure to violent or aggressive media can lead to priming violent behaviour immediately after an encounter.

Moreover, repeated exposure is predictive of long term aggression into adulthood.

Girls tend to favour relational aggression, whereas boys will demonstrate a preference for physical behaviour.

Early childhood exposure poses the most risk to future aggressive acts.

REFERENCES FOR YOUR ACTIVITY:

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- Article 2: Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2018). Media violence and the general aggression model. *Journal of Social Issues*, 74(2), 386-413.
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