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The Impact of Media Violence on Children and Adolescents as Portrayed Through Four Popular
Media Outlets: Television, Film, Music and Internet

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate violence in today's media and the concerns around this issue, especially with regard to the negative influences various media outlets have on today's youth. Four popular facets of media will be concentrated on: television, movies, music, and the internet.

I. Television

Television over the past few decades has become an integral part of our society. It has forever changed the way that many people across the globe receive information, news and entertainment. Now with a quick push of the button we can be instantly connected to the current events of a country thousands of miles away, as well as the events of our local community just miles down the road. Corporations spend millions to advertise their products on television in the hopes of increasing sales and the face of politics will forever be changed as publicly televised debates and news conferences are seen by the majority of Americans.

Many questions have therefore been raised regarding the impact that content seen on television shows, news broadcasts and commercials, namely violence and violent images, may be having on adults and children. Americans get a heavy dose of media violence. A recent content analysis of more than 8,000 hours of programming on cable and broadcast television in the United States found that about 60% of TV programs contained violence. By the time the average American child graduates from elementary school, he or she will have seen more than 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other assorted acts of violence (e.g., assaults, rapes) on network television. In 1950, about 9% of American homes had TV sets. It didn't take long for television ownership in the United States to increase. By 1955, it was up to about 65%, and by 1965, it reached about 93%. Since 1985, television ownership has been about 98%, and today more than 60% of all children in America are watching TV at 10 a.m. on any Saturday morning

(Bushman & Anderson, 2001). Hundreds of studies focused on understanding the effects of violent television have therefore been conducted in response to these staggering statistics. One longitudinal study revealed that childhood exposure to media violence predicts young adult aggressive behavior for both males and females, including threatening aggression, assault or physical fights resulting in injury, and robbery. It was also found that identification with aggressive TV characters and perceived realism of TV violence also predict later aggression. These relations persist even when the effects of socioeconomic status, intellectual ability, and a variety of parenting factors are controlled (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003). Another study determined that although TV violence was not the only cause of aggressive behavior in a sample of 211 male and 216 female third-graders, its effect was relatively independent and explained a larger proportion of variance than any other single factor studied (e.g., IQ, social status, ethnicity, and parental disharmony) (Eron, Huesmann, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1972). In addition, a number of studies have also determined that those individuals who are exposed to violent television become more desensitized in terms of their emotional and physiological response to portrayals of real-life aggression than those individuals who are exposed to less violent television (Cline, Croft & Courier, 2007; Griffiths & Shuckford, 2002). On the basis of such findings, in July 2000, six major professional societies—the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Psychiatric Association—signed a joint statement on the hazards of exposing children to media violence, noting that “at this time, well over 1,000 studies...point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children” (Bushman & Anderson, 2001).

Although the psychological and sociological community may understand and agree upon the fact that violent television does increase the level of aggression for individuals who are exposed to it, it is important to also consider the cumulative effects that violent television may have on both the individual and our society as a whole. This media influence, because it facilitates aggression, conflicts with others, and clashes with the law and authority, decreases equality of access to opportunity—in schooling, employment, and life chances in general—and creates a deficit in the ability of individuals to constructively cope with life's challenges. These effects may be even greater for those children or adolescents that are predisposed to aggressive or antisocial behavior or that are subject to rigid or indifferent parenting styles (Comstock, 2008). Additionally, one study found among a sample of 31,177 adolescents ages 11, 13 and 15 from a number of different countries that in most weekend TV viewing cultures, frequent television viewers were prone to kick or push another student in addition to verbal forms of bullying, which was not the case in weekday viewing cultures (Kuntsche, Pickett, Overpeck, Craig, Boyce & Gaspar de Matos, 2006). Taking into consideration the fact that so many studies have demonstrated a link between violent television and aggression, as well as the negative impact that becoming a more aggressive individual can have on educational and life outcomes, a number of researchers have written research that propose the use of both effective community and family interventions that may help mediate the relationship between violent television and aggression (L. Rosenkoetter, S. Rosenkoetter, & Acock, 2009; Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005).

Many experts within the field have also begun to question if the increase in exposure to violent television has made our society more violent in general. Although several meta-analysis research studies have been conducted in an attempt to answer this very question, the results

remain inconclusive for the obvious reason that it is nearly impossible to directly correlate violent television and an overall increase in societal violence (Lykken, 1993; Browne Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005). The fact remains however that there is an increase in Americans viewing violent television, which is having an effect on children and adolescents. Professionals in both the school and community setting therefore need to be cognizant of these effects so that the appropriate interventions may be introduced in order to help curb the expression of violent behavior in today's youth.

II. Movies

Movies are yet another form of media in which youth are exposed to violence. When considering the rating system, one might believe that this issue is dealt with on every level except parental control; the government and industry have done all they can, so it is now in the parents' hands. However, this is an illusion. Consider that many DVDs are released without a rating, leaving the parent unarmed with information about whether or not to let their child view the movie. On the other hand, if the movie is actually rated, it is very possible that any teenager could rent any movie at any video store without being asked for verification of age. There are also those instances in which children or adolescents have sleepovers or get-togethers where there is little parental supervision, or maybe a lower standard of supervision than a child's custodial parent would prefer. This provides another setting in which an underage youth could view a violent movie. Yet another way that kids can see movies that are rated too mature for them is at the movie theater. Most movie theaters only require that you purchase a ticket and show it at a main booth in the front. Once past that booth, the movie-goers are usually free to wander into the movie of their choice.

Aside from all of these factors, which are mostly outside of the movie industry's power, the movie industry itself has been cited for some questionable acts when it comes to violence in movies and today's youth. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has released seven reports to date concerning the industry's practices of marketing violent entertainment to children, with the latest one titled "Marketing Violent Entertainment to Children: A Sixth Follow-up Review of Industry Practices in the Motion Picture, Music Recording, and Electronic Game Industry" (2009). According to the FTC, one way violent movies are marketed to children is by having popular children's foods, toys, and other products as promotional tie-ins with the movie. There are also several ads for violent movies placed on websites that are popular with underage children. The movie studios place these ads there as well as trailers that have no age-restriction in order to view them. When it comes to promoting their movies in video stores, ratings for the movies are found in small print on the lower back of the movie, where it is not ideally displayed for the consumer. As stated previously, more and more movies are being released with no rating at all. There are several movies that are unrated and actually use the "Unrated" label to try and convince more consumers to buy or rent the movie.

The FTC released its first report on this matter in 2000, and has been analyzing data for each report released. This information is gathered from random surveys to consumers by telephone and at shopping malls, marketing documents that were submitted by members of the industry, movie industry websites, ad-monitoring services, and by using undercover "mystery shoppers" (FTC, 2009). One thing has turned for the positive for the movie industry in the eyes of the FTC for the report released in 2009: the percentage of underage persons denied entrance into a violent film went up dramatically since the first report in the year 2000. According to the same report, a negative is that video stores continuously fail to monitor the age of persons

renting or purchasing movies. The FTC has brought all of these issues before Congress and would like to see any children's product tie-ins removed from violent movies, more careful use of advertisements online and restriction of trailers that can be viewed, better enforcement of age restrictions from movie theaters and video stores alike, and easier to locate display of ratings on movies. One potential problem the FTC has noted is the question of how to enforce age restrictions when consumers can purchase or rent violent movies online.

In addition to all of the previously stated information, it is useful to know *why* watching violent movies is restricted for underage children. According to Media Awareness Network, an online media and internet education resource, studies have shown at least three ways violent movies affect children (2009). First, fear is increased. One way this can be noticed is when a child has a nightmare after watching a violent or scary movie. Secondly, watching violent movies can desensitize children to violence in real life. And finally, watching violent movies can increase aggressive behavior in children. If children are scared, they may respond aggressively. Or, there is always the possibility that children are attempting to mimic the aggressive/violent behavior they have seen in a movie. Parents should exercise extreme caution in choosing what movies their children are allowed to watch, and should always have a good idea of what the content of each movie is. Although movie ratings do not always emulate the personal rating preference of every parent, they are definitely a start, and every parent should be aware of what the ratings mean. The ratings as listed on the FTC's website are as follows:

G (General Audience):	All ages are permitted to view the movie.
PG (Parental Guidance Suggested):	The movie contains some mildly inappropriate language and violence.
PG-13 (Parents Strongly Cautioned):	Some material has been deemed not suitable for children, as there are mature themes and a scene of violence.
R (Restricted):	Any person under the age of 17 must be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian, as there is a lot of inappropriate language, strong and bloody violence, strong graphic horror, or strong graphic gore.
NC-17:	No person under the age of 17 is permitted to watch the movie.

(FTC, 2009.)

It should be noted that while these ratings are in place on several movies, some movies do not have ratings at all, and could fall into any one of these categories in the rating system. This is particularly a good reason why parents should be aware of the content of a movie before allowing their children to watch it.

In an attempt to trace the root of this issue of violence in movies and children being exposed to it, the reasons why there is so much violence shown in movies in the first place should be looked at. A film expert from Virginia Tech, Stephen Prince claims that violence was first introduced in movies to actually deter real-life violence (Sally Harris, undated). He states one example being death in the movies. In the early years of movie viewing, death was portrayed onscreen unrealistically, with no blood or gore and a simple, quick death. Some movie directors chose to portray death as more realistic to show movie-goers just how bad violence can be in the hopes that consumers would shy away from violence in the real world. Prince claims

that this “back-fired” and has essentially desensitized consumers to violence in the real world. One might wonder why, after this revelation might have come to light for most of the movie industry, would they continue to put violence in today’s movies? One reason suggested by the Media Awareness Network is that violence is synonymous with action, and action movies sell well in foreign markets. Action movies require less work, time, and money to translate than do comedies, dramas, and documentaries. This all translates to money as a top priority for the movie industry.

III. Music

There has been a lot of conflicting research about the influence of media on the violent tendencies and actions of the youth. Some researchers have gone as far as stating that there is unequivocal evidence that media violence increases the likelihood of aggressive and violent behaviors in young people that have both immediate and long term effects (Anderson, Berkowitz, Donnerstein, Huesmann, Johnson, Linz, Malamuth, & Wartella, 2003). It has been reported by Anderson, et al. (2003) that there are several long-term effects of violence in media including learning processes of aggressive scripts, interpersonal schemas, aggression supporting beliefs about social behavior, and reducing the normal negative emotional response associated with violence. The latter is more commonly referred to as desensitization. One of the biggest challenges for those that believe that modern media is having an aversive effect on the youth is the fact that youth are accessing media at an ever increasing rate that is already higher than ever.

Music is one of the oldest forms of human expression and may be the oldest of the modern forms of human media. In modern times music has gone through a rapid change in lyrics, instrumentation and presentation. It is widely accepted that popular music is often denigrated by adult society. Music such as jazz and rock and roll were believed to have

contributed to a decline in teens' moral structure in the 1940s and 1950s. Rock is often charged with perverting the youth and being an undermining force to Christian moral values (Gardstrom, 1999). Music has changed from the melodic love songs of Luther Vandross to the sexually explicit lyrics of the 2Live Crew in just a decade. It has gone from the uplifting rap of "Self Destruction" by the Hip Hop All Stars to the violent gangster rap of NWA. The two main genres of music at the center of the debate over the negative effects that music has on the youth are rap and heavy metal.

Heavy metal is an offshoot of mainstream rock and roll music that was popularized by Led Zeppelin in 1969. Metal is characterized by a pounding beat, high pitched vocals that are sung or shouted, and distorted electric guitars that give the music its "metal" sound (Gardstrom, 1999). Modern rap music was first popularized in the 1970s by the Sugar Hill Gang's song "Rappers Delight." Rap music has since grown to become one of the most powerful voices to speak for urban culture in the world. Ironically, rap music (gangster rap in particular) spilled out of the inner cities and has an audience of more suburban white males than any other listening group. It is characterized by disconnected beats, usually a strong bass line, and rhyming lyrics usually containing many slick similes and metaphors. Rap and heavy metal music among other genres like country and grunge, to a lesser extent, have been blamed for many antisocial behaviors including violence, theft, promiscuity, and drug use (Baker, 2008).

There have been numerous studies that show links between music and violent or antisocial behavior. In one study, African American teens were randomly assigned to a group that watched either videos containing sexually subordinate images of women or a group that did not watch videos. When asked about their attitudes afterwards, the teens that watched the videos expressed greater acceptance of dating violence. In a related study in which African American

males were exposed to violent rap music videos, they showed a greater endorsement of violent behaviors to resolve hypothetical conflict situations (Anderson et al., 2003). Another study exposed undergraduate males to four different groups. One group was exposed to videos with violence and no erotica. Another group was exposed to violence with erotica, erotica with no violence, and the fourth group was exposed to no violence or erotica. The results revealed that the group that was exposed to the violence with no erotica was significantly more frustrated and angry than the other three groups (Smith, 2002). A 2001 study found that college students who prefer rap and heavy metal music reported more hostile attitudes than students who preferred other types of music. Heavy metal listeners had more negative attitudes towards women, while rap music fans were more distrustful of other people overall (Anderson et al., 2003).

Many proponents of the argument that music and music videos promote violence are basing their arguments loosely on Bandura's social learning theory. This theory asserts that people's anti social and aggressive responses are a result of early experiences in life from parents and other significant adults in their life (Bandura, 1977). In other words, children pattern their lives after the adults that they depend on to take care of them. One theory is that in an ever-increasing society where many parents are absent from their children's lives for large periods of time, and children are devoid of positive parental role models they seek out other role models. Many people believe that the media provides those options for our youth. For a lot of youth who are more vulnerable, they may choose to model themselves after the negative images that they see portrayed in music videos or in the songs that they hear in gangster rap or heavy metal lyrics (Gardstrom, 1999). Another model that is similar to this one is the excitation-transfer model that suggests that youth are directly influenced to do what they hear in songs because they get excited by what they hear in the songs and attempt to transfer what they hear into their own real

life (Gardstrom, 1999). This model only applies if the subject is already in a mood that supports the music.

There are differing views about the influence that music has on violence, however. There are some that reject the notion that music is a causal factor when it comes to violent behavior. Although studies have found a relationship between the two some suggest that music preference is more indicative of preexisting emotional vulnerability. This means that musical preference may represent behavioral tendencies that are already within the subject (Baker, 2008). This places an opposite spin on the argument of violence and music and forces people to look within themselves to answer the question of why they are attracted to violent music if they are not already inherently violence prone.

In a study that investigated the perceptions of juvenile offenders and the role that music played in it, only 4% believed that there was a connection between listening to music and their deviant behaviors. Most of them believed in a reflection-rejection theory, that rejects music and music videos as a cause of violence, but believe that music only mirrors what is happening in real life (Gardstrom, 1999). The respondents in large part reported preferring a particular type of music because they could identify with it or because they felt that it gave them a look into real life on the streets that they were curious about. Another theory proposed called “Drive Reduction Theory” states that music serves as an expressive vehicle or an outlet for emotions, thus reducing the likelihood of a person actually doing some sort of deviant or violent behavior themselves (Gardstrom, 1999). This theory implies that people are like steam kettles and sometimes the pressure inside us can build up to a critical point. This theory suggests that music, whether violent or not, acts as a non-harmful way to release that pressure and feelings such as anger, hostility or anxiety that build up inside of us.

Defenders of rap music believe that the genre as a whole is taking a bad name for what only a small part of rap music is doing. A study of deviant behaviors amongst French Canadian Adolescents broke the rap genre down into four subgenres including American rap, French rap, hip hop/soul, and gangsta/hardcore rap (Miranda & Claes, 2004). Of these subgenres of rap, gangsta or hardcore rap is the most controversial and the one at the center of most debates in the U.S. and abroad. The study revealed that French rap, which was pioneered by poor African immigrants into the ghettos of France, had the highest link to deviant behaviors. One of the most important features of this study was that it pointed out that in most studies that try to claim that rap music is responsible for deviant behaviors they almost never account for the influence of the subject's peers. They also do not consider in their research designs the effect of other types of media that are concurrently influencing these youth. Thirdly there are very few attempts by rap critics to evaluate the importance that rap fans actually give to lyrics. This is an important question because it has been shown that music listeners process the lyrics and music of songs separately (Miranda & Claes, 2004).

One major issue that critics of violent music have raised concerns about is the marketing and availability of mature content media to children and teens. According to a Federal Trade Commission report on marketing violent entertainment to children, the industry still advertises music with a parent advisory label on television shows that are viewed substantially by children. Also, many retailers sell music with warning labels on it to teens. The study found that 7 in 10 underage shoppers were able to buy music with warning labels on it without a problem. The report did not find any specific targeting of children, but did find numerous accounts of ads for explicit content music on shows that are popular with teens (FTC, 2009). The world of music videos on television as well as modern conveniences like iPods and internet music have made the

availability of music virtually limitless for our youth. There are whole television channels devoted to music listening and music video watching such as MTV and VH1. Other networks such as BET have a high rate of music videos included in their programming as well. Studies showed that 15% of music videos contained violence in them across all networks (Smith & Boyson, 2002). The same study that investigated violence in music videos also showed that videos on MTV were more likely to contain violence than videos on CMT, BET or VH-1. There was a disparity in the ethnicity portrayed on the differing channels with MTV showing more white performers and BET showing more black performers. Whites were more likely to be the perpetrators and victims of antisocial behavior than blacks. Rap music videos were more likely to show grabbing and clutching as aggressive behaviors, but no differences were observed in the amount of beating, stabbing, or shooting across genres. And keeping consistent with earlier reported findings rap and hard rock videos were almost twice as likely to feature violence as compared to country, adult contemporary, and rhythm and blues videos. Finally the study reports almost equal amount of violence between rap and heavy metal videos.

With adolescents having unlimited access to music these days maybe the critics are focusing on the wrong questions. Instead of focusing on what is in the content of the music they choose to listen to, maybe critics should ask why young people listen to what they listen to. One answer to that question is that adolescents make use of media for the following five reasons: entertainment, identity formation, sensation seeking, coping, and youth culture identification (Miranda & Claes, 2004). Many people may not like it, but in many cases the music of the youth is angry, disrespectful, and reveals hatred for people who are different for many various reasons. Perhaps instead of trying to change or control the music, our concern should switch finding solutions for the attitudes, hatred and problems expressed in the music.

IV. Internet

Alongside television, the use of computers and the internet have increased rapidly over the past several decades. Today, approximately 80% of adolescents own at least one form of new media technology, and they are using this technology with increasing frequency to text and instant message, e-mail, blog, and access social networking websites (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). The internet not only provides significant benefits for children, such as research access, socialization, entertainment, and a communication tool with families, but it also connotes negative aspects such as violence, pornography, “hate” sites, isolation, predators, and commercialism.

Children often imitate what they've seen, read, or heard. Albert Bandura translated this into a group of behaviors that were involved in the observational and modeling processes (1977). As a part of the social learning theory, we know that modeling may encourage previously forbidden behaviors. It is postulated that children may learn that violence is a useful and appropriate way of solving one's problems. According to a 2002 study, the place children were most likely to use the internet was in the home, rather than at a library or school: 20% of children ages 8 to 16 had a computer in their bedroom, of which 54% had internet access (Wartella, O’Keefe, & Scantlin, 2002). In the hustle and bustle of our fast paced society, many parents use the computer as a quick, go-to babysitter. However, parents may often be led to believe that if their child accesses sites that require an 18 and over age verification they will not be able to view any of the material. Unfortunately, it is not a difficult task for the adolescent to discover loopholes even in this. With so much unlimited access to the Internet, many professionals within the field are becoming concerned that adolescents are becoming desensitized to the ever increasing amount of volatile depictions on the internet. Today our children are not only

desensitized by seeing violence on the internet, but violence has become a popular theme across a variety of internet sites.

Little research has been done on pornography and the internet newsgroups, although it has become a very controversial topic. Internet pornography exposure among adolescents seems to be widespread. Barron and Kimmel (2000) compared sexually explicit stories on internet newsgroups with printed and video pornography. They found that the content of pornography is more violent on the internet. It is a parent's worst nightmare to know that their adolescent may be accessing some of the same material that causes these same parents to blush. Many of the creators behind these sexually violent sites are turning a big profit, thanks to featured advertisements, videos, and offering saleable merchandise such as t-shirts. It is possible to see numerous websites relating to violent pornography just by entering the word "torture" in any search engine.

Violent pornography exposure may be more prevalent among individuals who are characterized by a greater acceptance of interpersonal violence or antisocial behaviors (Malamuth, 1981). In an interview the day before his execution in 1989, serial killer Ted Bundy explained how pornography set him on the path to murder. At the age of 13, he came across pornographic magazines in a dump near his home. He was captivated by those magazines, and as time went by he gradually began using more explicitly sexual and even violent pornography. There finally came a point when pornography could not stimulate him any further (Montaldo, undated). The National Council on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity estimated there are 2 million sexually-addicted internet users, many of whom spend 15 to 25 hours per week viewing pornographic websites (Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health [SASH], 2003). Statistics

from Ropelato (2006) found that the 12-17 age group is the largest demographic consumer of internet pornography, and that 80% of 15-17 year-olds admit to multiple exposures.

Malamuth (1981) classified 29 male students as sexually force-oriented or non-force-oriented on the basis of their responses to a questionnaire. These students were then randomly assigned to view either a rape version or a mutually consenting version of a slide-audio presentation. All subjects were then exposed to the same audio description of a rape read by a female. After the 29 male students had been exposed to the rape audio tape they were asked to try to reach as high a level of sexual arousal as possible. Self-reported sexual arousal during the fantasy period indicated that those students who had been exposed to the rape version of the first scenario, created more violent sexual fantasies (Malamuth, 1981). Boeringer (1994) found that higher exposure to violent internet pornography is significantly related to engaging in sexual aggression and believing oneself capable of sexual violence.

The results of the above studies are a small representation of the impact that violent internet pornography may have on many of its viewers, as well as how easily accessible this information and these images are. Parents of children and teens alike are not able to monitor what their child is accessing on the internet 24 hours a day/7 days a week. However, there are at least two steps parents can adopt. First, the computer can be placed in a visible area of the home where it would be easier to monitor the time and content of the internet connection. In an interview with children, the overall reaction was that it is the parents' responsibility to monitor and regulate the use of the internet (Clements, 1995). Secondly, parents take the initiative to educate their children about responsible use of the information and images that can be so easily accessed on the Internet today.

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