Violance On Television Cause Aggressive Behavior Essay, Research Paper

An 18-year-old boy locks himself in his room, mesmerized for hours by the corpse-filled video game Doom, while shock-rocker Marilyn Manson screams obscenities from the stereo. Shelved nearby are a video collection, including the graphically violent film Natural Born Killers, and a diary, replicating the unrestrained expressions of hate and death, published on the boy’s personal website. Should this boy’s media preferences be cause for alarm?

The question is not new, but the April 20,1999 massacre of 12 students and a teacher by fellow Columbine High students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold has added urgency to the search for answers. The Littleton, Colorado teenagers reportedly immersed themselves in the same media described above, even producing and starring in their own murderous video before gunning down their classmates, and apparently taking their own lives.

We live in a world of violence — Kosovo, Bosnia, the West Bank, and abortion clinics.

The value of human life has reduced to, simply, a few vital organs in a hollow body. Life is no longer viewed as the sacred and amazing gift that it is. Human life is now only a temporary, useful commodity. And, when it is no longer useful? Well, it can be thrown away, like used Kleenex. This irreverence for life has been a result of numerous hours of senseless violence society feeds into their brains every day. Yet, media representatives defend the entertainment industry, denying any direct link between violent media and violent behavior.

In many peoples’ living rooms, there sits an outlet for violence that often goes unnoticed. It is the television. The children who view it are often pulled into its realistic world of violent scenes with sometimes devastating results.

Much effort has gone into showing why this glowing box, and the action that takes place within it, mesmerizes children. Research shows that it is definitely a major source of violent behavior in children. The statistics prove time and time again that aggression and television viewing do go hand in hand.

Research shows the truth about television violence and children. Some are trying to fight this problem, while others are ignoring it, hoping it will go away with yesterday?s trash. Still, others do not even seem to care. However, the facts are undeniable. The experiments carried out, all point to one conclusion: television violence causes children to be violent, and the effects can be life-long.

Here is the scene: Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and a well-armed Elmer Fudd are having a standoff in the forest. Daffy, the ratfink has just exposed Bugs? latest disguise. Bugs then, takes off the costume and says, “That?s right, Doc, I?m a wabbit. Would you like to shoot me now or wait until we get home?”

“Shoot him now! Shoot him now!” Daffy screams, “You keep out of this,” Bugs says, “he doesn?t have to shoot you now.” “He does so have to shoot me now!” says Daffy. Full of wrath, he storms up to Elmer Fudd and shrieks, “And I demand that you shoot me now!” This is an example of the violence on television that “experts” speak.

One study done by Feshbach and R.D.Singer (1971), suggested that watching television actually decreases the amount of aggression in the viewer. The experiment supposedly proved that the violence on television allows the viewer to relate with the characters involved in the violent act. In doing so, the viewer is able to release all aggressive thoughts and feelings through that relation, causing them to be less aggressive than they would have been without watching the violent television. This is like saying, for example, that a medical student, in his final years at Harvard Medical School, would simply give up studies and say, "Oh, well, what?s the point in going to school to be a doctor, when I can simply watch ?General Hospital? and get the same satisfaction." This of course is absurd, as are the above theologies. These experiments do not live up to good, empirical research.

If one were to ask a child what their favorite television show is, very often the child would respond with a television show that contains a lot of violence. For example, “The Mighty Morphine Power Rangers” and “The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" seem to have become role models worthy of imitation by children. One simply has to walk through a playground during recess, to see these children portraying their favorite violent characters. This aggressive behavior is further demonstrated in classrooms and in the home. Playing “make believe" is really a demonstration of aggressive behavior, because of watching violence on television.

Many studies done, suggest that violence on television does influence the behavior of children. When viewed individually, these studies might seem insignificant, but together they form a powerful giant that indicates aggressive behavior is a result of violence on television.

Children are sponges during their beginning years, and soak up their surroundings. A study done by Albert Bandura (1963) , demonstrates how easily viewing aggression can influence a child. He and his colleagues observed preschoolers in a contrived situation, which included aggressive behavior. His study consisted of four groups. A control group set up for this experiment, contained children who had not witnessed any events involving a Bobo doll, a toy clown. The other three groups had witnessed Bobo being verbally and/or physically abused by different figures. These figures included a live model, a filmed model, and a female dressed in a cat costume. All the children had been irritated, by taking away their toys. This made the children more prone to use aggressive behavior. The children were than put in a playroom with the Bobo doll. Out of the four groups that were involved, three exemplified aggressive behavior toward the Bobo doll. The exception was the control group that had not witnessed any violence. This experiment supports the theory that after observing violent behavior, children are more likely to imitate the aggressive acts of the characters involved.

In addition, a study conducted, demonstrated how children become desensitized to violence. Divided into two groups were forty-four boys and girls, in third and fourth grade. One group saw a violent western movie, and the other group did not see any movie. Afterwards, the children were asked to “baby-sit” two younger children by watching them on television. The two children on the television became progressively violent toward each other, and this is where the experiment gets interesting. Researchers found the children who had seen the western movie waited longer to get an adult to help the two violent children, than did the children who had not seen a movie. This suggests that the children who had been predisposed to violent behavior, accepted the behavior they witnessed between the two children they were baby-sitting, as more “normal.”

Think of a large tub filled with steaming, hot water. If you tried to jump in all at once, it would be unbearable and you would get out quickly. We have learned to start out slow, dip only our toe in, until we have slowly submerged our entire body. We become desensitized to the hot water, by slowly exposing our sensitive body to the water a little bit, slowly, over a long period.

This type of desensitization shows in society today. Every night on the news, we are plagued with horrible pictures and gruesome stories of violence and terror, but we rarely become shocked by any of it. This could very well be because exposure to so much violence on television in the past, especially during childhood, has caused us to be immune to this disease. Children who witnessed violence may then come away from the experience thinking that violence is acceptable, and they may be more likely to re-enact televised situations in the future.

The other side may say that effects on children?s behavior are limited and temporary, but there is strong evidence supporting quite the opposite. Studies done by the top networks on television, demonstrate the negative, long range, effects excessive television watching has had on children, by citing how they behave as adolescents.

Just as a baby robin observes its mother to learn how to fly, children copy the actions of their favorite television character. Children emulate these "heroes" as a result of this admiration. By viewing violent television programs as real and acceptable, children are extremely likely to re-enact violence in their own lives. Unfortunately, society seems to condone these aggressive characteristics, which further confuses children. Until regulations ban these violent programs, children will continue receiving negative influence and eventually, "fall from the nest."

Television is not the sole factor in causing aggression; there are many factors. However, television is one of the greatest factors that cause aggressive behavior in children. A violent home, that includes two parents fighting twenty-four hours a day, can influence a child’s behavior. If a child is constantly beat with scenes of aggression between adults, that are his/her role models, then he/she may also exhibit aggressive behavior. Children can witness violence in many places besides television. A child can witness an argument between two people in a public place, and then re-enact the scene at home. Even in a simple supermarket parking lot, violence is evident. Two adults fighting over a parking place could be violent towards one another. All of these instances could affect a child’s behavior and cause them to act aggressively. None of the actions that the child witnessed was on a television screen.

The Social Learning theory is the main argument for the side arguing that violence on television leads to aggression in children. The social learning theory claims that children copy violent scenes from television, believing that this type of behavior is acceptable. All people are individuals; therefore, it is difficult to characterize behavior. Obviously not every child who watches “Mighty Morphin Power Rangers” will act aggressively after the show. However, research has provided that they are likely to act in an aggressive manner.

It is impossible to ignore the enormous mountain of data supporting television leading to violence. Violence on television can create aggressive behavior.

Fixing the problems of children and television violence is not easy. They are many factors to consider and people to convince. This raging fire will, no doubt, never go away and continue to grow as the years go by. However, there are measures that can be taken to prevent the children from ever being exposed to such things. The entertainment industry should be held accountable for the images they choose to air. Our government needs to pass stricter regulations and harsher censorship on the content, shown on television and movies. After all, what is the world going to be like when the people, who are now children, are running the world?