Columbine Shooting Essay, Research Paper

Columbine Shooting April 20th, at Columbine Senior High School in Littleton, Jefferson County, Colorado, two teenage gunmen entered the school and began shooting. The enormous amount of media coverage that these events typically get serves to perpetuate the same kind of crime elsewhere. I see a major problem in the routine, continual violence that these children see everyday in the news, both print and television, and a responsibility on the part of the media for the type of information that it is exposing to today’s youth. For days after the shooting, US morning news shows built new sets after the Littleton shooting as all the key players – parents, students, police and politicians went from show to show. We in America seem to feel that talking to the media is part of what we do when something bad happens. The media seems to have become part of the healing process. I’m not saying that the media directly caused these acts of violence, but one has to wonder if such an event would have happened were we living in the media environment of the 1950’s. Today’s extensive media coverage is surely fueling the likelihood of the next school shooting by providing a model for the direct expression of violent fantasy. There is no quicker way for a lonely and troubled youth to suddenly gain the attention he desperately seeks than to commit a heinous act that the mass media has demonstrated will get intense coverage, broadcasting the once unknown perpetrators name hundreds of times to the entire nation. It used to be that teenage kids that suffered with extreme depression, because of not fitting in at school, being picked on, getting your heart broken for the first time, committed suicide, and that was a tragedy in itself. Now, it seems as if they’ve decided that if they have nothing to live for, then they might as well go out in a blaze of glory and take other kids with them. Also consider what all this coverage is doing for the self image of the current generation of today’s youth. Instead of thinking of themselves as “Baby Boomers”, “Generation Xers” , they see themselves as some kind of “psycho” generation. A few isolated youths have been responsible for these recent crimes, and people are talking of an epidemic involving all of today’s youth.

I don’t believe that a great majority of people are made more violent by media violence, however I do think that there are people who are more psychologically at risk than others, and that the media does play a role in their behavior. In my opinion these school shootings would be more likely to occur in a society that traffics constantly in extremely violent media images, versus a society where such images don’t occur at all. I don’t know which is worse: two teenage boys gunning down there classmates, or the constant bombardment of the story, by the media. What I think can be done to solve this problem, for one Congress could step up political and legal pressure to more effectively limit and regulate the production and distribution of media violence. The mass media should cover stories like this, but there is no reason for it to be on the front page of every newspaper and magazine in the country. It was tragic, but there are far worse things going on in the world right now. Consumers should know that economic boycotts can be effective when directed toward media excess. Educators and parents, through PTA’s and religious groups can become more active in instituting formal programs of media education that help get young people to think more critically about their media choices. We will never be able to fully understand why this happened in Littleton, Colorado but certain facts about how the media operate and what the media now regularly invite us to be witness to are worthy of consideration. No one can predict or readily prevent the next episode of some sad, alienated person running about with a loaded weapon. But we can do something about children and adults being regularly exposed to media images that can’t help but be imitated by the most at risk members of society while also desensitizing many more audience members to the pain and misery of others.

32b