

Sean Sebourm
Ethics
David Turner
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New Perfect Paper

A Look at the Lack of Ethics in Children's Entertainment

In this paper, I will argue that excessive violence in media directed toward children is ethically wrong. First, I will establish that children are exposed to violent material in the media. Secondly, I will show that violent media negatively affects children. Thirdly, I will explain why exposing children to excessive violence is ethically wrong. Lastly, I will give an objection to my claim and explain how this objection is not successful.

I will begin by showing how children are exposed to violence in the media. Exposure to violence comes through several different media sources. Television is the first of these that I will discuss. Children spend more time watching television than any other activity, except sleeping (Media1222). It is estimated that American children watch television an average of 28 hours per week, and by the age of 18 they will have viewed 16,000 "simulated murders" and 200,000 violent acts (Muscarl 585; Media1222). Between the years of 1995 and 1997, the National Television Violence Study examined 10,000 hours of aired television and concluded that children's shows contained the most violence (Media1222). Television has replaced parents and the family as the primary source of learning for American children.

Movies are another media source that exposes children to violence. In a report given in 2000, The Federal Trade Commission found that "80% of the R-rated films studied were specifically targeted to children under the age of 17" (Sparks 56). The marketers of one violent R-rated film stated that their goal was to "make sure everyone between the ages of 12 and 18 was exposed to the film" (Sparks 56). Some parents do

not allow their children to view R-rated films; however, children are still exposed to violence through G-rated films. Some studies show that G-rated movies contain a “significant amount” of violence (Muscarelli 587).

The newest and most disturbing form of media that exposes children to violence is the video game industry. There are several different types of video games, but violent video games are the favorite among American children. A poll conducted in 1996 by Bushman & Frank found that 59% of fourth grade girls and 73% of fourth grade boys preferred playing violent video games (Anderson 354). Violence in video games was introduced in the 1990's with the release of games such as *Mortal Kombat*, *Street Fighter*, and *Wolfenstein 3D* (Anderson 354). A study by Craig Anderson and Brad Bushman of Iowa State University found that 10% of American children between the ages of 2 and 18 spend more than one hour playing video games each day (Anderson 354). Video games are growing in popularity and becoming an everyday part of the lives of American children.

Now that I have established that children are constantly exposed to violence through the media, I would like to show that violent media negatively affects children. Children learn social skills through imitation. Albert Bandura of Stanford University conducted research in 1963 on the role of imitation in childhood learning. He found that children imitate the behavior of adult models. He also found that “...film-mediated models are as effective as real-life models in transmitting deviant patterns of behavior” (Bandura 61-62). In other words, a child will mimic behavior seen on film, or television, just as if he or she had witnessed the behavior in person. Bandura's findings show that children learn by what they see others doing. Over 3,500 studies have been conducted to

assess the effect of violent media on children (Muscarello 589). Research has shown correlations between exposure to media violence and several mental health problems in children. One problem is that overexposure to violence causes children to believe that violence is an accepted and effective way of dealing with stress or conflict. Rather than talking through a dispute, violence in the media teaches children to fight and overcome an opponent by using physical force. Children who are exposed to excessive violence have also been shown to view the world as a “mean” place. Children with this view of the world grow up thinking that everyone is their enemy. This might explain the increase of children who are carrying guns. Researchers also believe that children who are exposed to violence become desensitized to the feelings of others. When a violent act is shown, it rarely shows the consequences or feelings of the victim. Instead it glorifies the dominance of the perpetrator. I believe lack of sympathy or understanding for a fellow person’s feelings and well-being is the worst of these negative effects.

Another alarming affect that hasn’t been studied in depth is the influence of violent video games. Video games are different from television because the child actively uses violence in a virtual setting. A child watching television is passively participating; whereas, video games allow the child to actively participate in the violence he or she sees. Because of the newness of this genre, research has been limited. Some early research has shown that “exposure to violent video games is correlated with aggression in the real world” (Anderson 357). I believe that it has an even greater influence than television. Video games give children the opportunity to practice violence. The young man from Paducah, Kentucky who shot and killed some of his

classmates was described as shooting them “as if they were popping up on a screen” (Muscari 588). The influence of video games on children should be investigated further.

Next, I would like to discuss why I think exposing children to excessive violence is ethically wrong. I believe it is wrong for two reasons. First, it does not coincide with Thomas Aquinas’ revision of Aristotle’s Natural Law Theory. In the Summa Theologica, Aquinas states that the “education of offspring” is an inclination that nature has taught to humans (Kreeft 516). Therefore, teaching our children is natural and ethical. However; teaching our children to ignore the feelings of others, among other things, is not ethical. Aquinas also states that we should “...avoid offending those among whom one has to live” (Kreeft 516). Violence is an obvious contradiction to this virtue. Therefore, by teaching children, or allowing them to be taught, that violence is acceptable is not education of our offspring; it is destruction.

Thanks,
for applying
principles learned
in class.

Secondly it contradicts the “golden rule”. The “golden rule” is seen in most philosophies throughout the world, such as Buddhism, Christianity and Humanism. Personally, I take the golden rule seriously and use it to make decisions in my life. If I were in a dispute with someone, I would not use violence against them because I would not want it used against me. Therefore, violence is not ethical because it violates the golden rule. Teaching children to be unethical is unethical itself. Many people in the entertainment industry entirely blame parents for what their children do. It is true that parents are mainly responsible for their children’s actions. However, the entertainment industry needs to take responsibility for the influence that their products have on children. Influencing people to do the wrong thing is unethical. For instance, I believe, like most, that stealing is unethical. It would be unethical for me to tell a child to steal candy from a

store. Even though I did not steal the candy, I am acting unethically because I prompted and encouraged the unethical behavior. The media is doing the same thing when they expose children to violence.

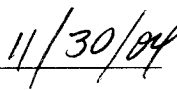
Lastly, I would like to present an objection to my argument and explain how it is wrong. Some argue that violence in media, especially video games, is a good way for children to release frustration and aggression in a virtual world rather than the real world. Supporters of this idea point to recent drops in youth crime rates as support for their claim (Sullivan 8). Yet, this teaches children that violence is an acceptable way to deal with stress, even if it is in a virtual world. One of the shooters from Columbine High School changed one of his video games so that it resembled the homes of those that he hated (Muscarelli 598). His release of aggression in the virtual world was not enough; therefore, he released his aggression in the real world and killed several of his classmates. Many people in the video game industry state that violent games do not encourage aggressive behavior. Doug Lowenstein of the Interactive Digital Software Association states that "There is absolutely no evidence, none, that playing a violent video game leads to aggressive behavior" (Anderson 353). Mr. Lowenstein is right, for now. Extensive research has not been conducted in this area. Despite that, I would like to give an example of how video games affect children, as well as people. I am 22 years old and have a fair grasp of reality. However, I was playing a racing game last week and suddenly noticed that I was driving differently. I was weaving in and out of traffic as if I were trying to gain an imaginary first place. I knew that I was no longer playing the game, but still found myself acting as if I were. Now imagine if I played this game (or games like it) every day for three years. I think my driving in real life would resemble, or

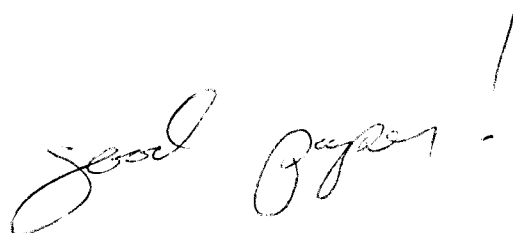
at least be influenced by, the way I drive in the game. Constant repetition and exposure would change the way I drive. In my mind, driving on I-30 would be like driving in the Indy-500. Violent video games affect children the same way.

In closing, I would like to point out that media violence is not the only factor that contributes to aggression and violence in young people. Environmental, biological and many other factors contribute to this growing problem. The reason that violence in the media is discussed so much is because it is one factor that can be easily changed. I believe that the entertainment industry needs to take responsibility for the affects that their products have on society. I feel that I have competently justified that violent media directed towards children is ethically wrong. Unfortunately, just because people know that something is wrong does not prevent them from doing it. My hope is that we, as a nation, will learn our lesson before it is too late.

I hereby attest that this work is entirely my own, and that in its creation I have not violated the National Park Community College policy on Academic Dishonesty.







Works Cited

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