

Media: A Spiral to Violence

One of the most important problems in our society is violence, however the real and most dramatic problem is the increase in the number of violence acts protagonized by children and teenagers. For many years criminal behaviour and violent acts were an exclusive part of the adult world. However, during the last years the borderline between the childhood world and the adult world has disappear and as a result children are also part of this world of violence. One of the most important factors to understand the violence spiral in our society is the media.

The connection between watching or hearing violent programming and aggressive behaviour or violent crime is more than a possibility. According to Denver archbishop Charles Chaput in his speech before the U.S. Senate common sense tells us that the violence has to gone somewhere, and it goes straight into the hearts of our children (Silverman 1).

There are other important factors in the roots of juvenile violence like poverty, gun disponibility or poor parental education. But these factors do not have the dissemination and random access that media has. Media is in all places. You can watch TV at home, read a newspaper in the subway or use Internet at work. Media is a part of our normal life, according to Steve Case chairman and CEO of America Online during 15 years I have been trying to build the medium, build the Internet, making sure it is a part of every day life (Insana).

There are three basic arguments that can be use to explain why the media is so nocive for our kids. These three arguments are, the high number of media spaces that contain violent acts or information, the high number of hours that children pass watching Television or playing with their computers, and the lack of parental control.

1. Media spaces contain a high number of violent acts

Many people are alarmed over media high level of violence and fear that children who grow up with this constant violence are more aggressive and more violent.

According to Deirdre Donahue in a first looking most children enjoy better and more safety lives that their parents. They do not have to be worried about infect diseases and have many opportunities that their parents did not have(Donahue 1). It is easier for children to have a better formation because modern technology allows them to learn many things without leaving their homes, such as internet, personal computers, formative channels. The truth is that many times children's minds cannot distinguish between fantasy and reality, like those of adults. During present times media is becoming more violent and permissive due to is a reflect of our society, but at the same time this image acts like a mirror to the audience. An study released August 31 of 1999 by Parents Television Council found that per hour average of objectionable content has risen 75% in the past year(Gray 4).

Like children have access to an endless list of violent acts they become desensitised to the damaging effects of violence. The children think that violence is a normal component of present world. According to Bob Litcher president of the Centre for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) in Washington on average once every four minutes TV and movie viewers were assaulted by an act of serious violence as defined by the FBI's violent crime index—murder, rape, kidnapping and assault with a deadly

weapon(Streaming Video). Media sources exploit sex and violence because they know that this is what people want to see. The media does not care about the emotional impact on the audience, but only about audience ratings and profits. According to Craig Silverman the moviemakers know that certain kids will want to emulate the violent conduct. They do not care. They make their profits(Silverman 1).

With all these violent acts kids become insensitive to violence and think about it as if it were a normal component of real life. According to The American Psychological Association by time children leave elementary school they have seen an estimated 8000 murders on TV(Donahue 3). It is true that violence in the media is not something new. In the past 40 years many voices criticized newspapers and movies that have a lot of crime and vice in them. Many people were worried about that those stories would lead teenagers to imitate lawless and immoral behaviour. However in last decades the quantity and quality of media sources was a small fraction of the actual number. The number of TVs, VCRs and computers is increasing year after year. Ten years ago to have a personal computer at home was a luxury that only the richest people could afford. Today is strange not to have a personal computer.

The people that are responsible for the incitement of the violence in the media, always defend their freedom of speech. Many critics like president Clinton who has several times has decried indecency on the internet and violence and sex on TV and in movies(Mc Feters 5) are trying to create measures to stop the proliferation of these kinds of programs. However the problem is that according to the Supreme Court the speech advocating violence is unconstitutional only in cases where it is likely to cause imminent action(Shielding an Anti-Abortion Hit List 6). Therefore, many times the only way to control this kind of information is a mutual agreement.

2.High number of hours that children pass in contact with media products

Another important part of the problem is the incredible number of hours that children pass watching TV, hearing music or using Internet. According to a study cited by expert Diane Levin in her book Remote Control Childhood Kids have averaging an astonishing 35 hours a week on television, movies video and computer games(Donahue 2). Since most Americans do not experience violent crime by first hand they use the media to know about violence. People watch thousand of dramatized murders. By this people become desensitised to the damaging effects of aggressive behaviour. In addition most of them feel indifference for the victims of aggressive acts because is something usual.

The childhood that many children experience in the present days is very different from the childhood that their parents lives. A generation ago Children did not watch as much television.

In the past children were more sociable and had more relationship with their neighbourhoods, according to Bill Day a member of the conservative Family Research Council there was a more community raising of the kids. You knew your neighbours (Donahue 4). Today kids are more individualist and as a consequence their normal activities are more solitary than those of the past. This individualism is promoted by media activities because most of the times you do not need another person to be involved in these activities. This number is really dangerous because an average American children will have spent more that a fifth of their life in front of the television or the computer by the age of 18. This is about twice the amount of time that they will spent on school. Our world is changing into a society where personal relations are going to be in a second place for most children, and their knowledge of reality will have a close relationship with the media environment.

3.Parental control

Since the media became a normal fixture in most homes and works many people (parents, politicians, educators) worry about its effect on our society and most particularly on children. President Bill Clinton urges teens to turn off the television and not to listen to gansta rap (McFeatters 5). But many parents still do not realize how dangerous media is. They are unconcerned about media violence and dissemination.

Most claim that a child can distinguish between fantasy and reality like adults can do. In contrast other parents have demanded more power to control the stream of media into their lives 24 hours a day. The proliferation of cable channels and Internet as well as the growing numbers of family headed by a single adult or two working parents have made it more difficult for parents to be in control of their children's viewing habits. According to

Deirdre Donahue many parents most frightening issue today is the sense that they cannot shield their children from outside influences deemed undesirable (Donahue 2).

The most serious and dangerous programs are violent cartoons and children's programs. The problem with this programs is that they are aimed at an audience of children and teenagers while containing really violent material. Although the characters are often animated, they may become role models for children who have difficulty to distinguish between reality and fantasy. The two popular shows South Park (a show that presents 8 year old boys talking about sex, death and violence); or Beavis and Butthead are perfect examples. Michael Melded, a social commentator and radio talk show host, says parents feel that they are fighting against a culture that is hostile(Donahue 3). One of the most concerned with this problem is president Bill Clinton who has spent hours urging parents to read to their children, make sure their kids get their vaccinations and monitor their children homework. He wants a law to let parents have time off from work to visit their children's classrooms(McFeatters 5). Clinton is trying to give parents and their children opportunities to pass more time together to build a relationship that can minimize the effects of media violent programs.

As explained the media creates a dangerous environment for our children. However, the problem is not only that the media is violent or that children watch a lot of television. The real problem is the proveable correlation between violence and the Media. According to Craig Silverman with VCRs and computers, adolescent boys can play with their weapons and violence all day and all night. Is it any wonder that Harris and his buddies made their own violent videos in their Columbine video class?(1).

Television can increase aggressive behaviour among viewers in several ways:

- The first is that watching violent programs overstimulates viewers and increases their levels of excitation and agitation.
- Secondly, children learn how to behave through imitation. Television characters are possible role models for this imitation.
- Finally watching violence desensitises viewers and makes them more tolerant to accept aggressive and violent behaviour

Some children have problems to differentiate between fiction and reality. Something that for an adult is easy can be difficult and perhaps impossible to a kid. According to Sissela Bok, a philosopher and best-selling author repeated exposure to violent pictures not only encourages aggression but troublesome forms of passivity against violent behaviour in children and adults (Marx 5). For children that can difference between fiction and real life the problem is the modern technology that allow active participation in graphically enhanced violence(Silverman 2).

Another big problem is that some children try to emulate their favourite movies and characters. In 1998 the Louisiana Court of Appeals led a lawsuit against the makers of Natural Born Killers. The plaintiff was a shooting victim of criminals who emulated the movie's homicidal heroes(Silverman 2). In this movie, directed by Oliver Stone and based in a script By Quentin Tarantino (two of the most recognized directors among teenagers in the present days) two adolescent lovers go on a murder rally through the American roads, executing random strangers to appear in the news media. The most interesting point of the movie is the attraction that their senseless violence has for the media. Unfortunately the judicial system must defend the first amendment, freedom of speech. Consequently the only way to cut violence from media is through a mutual agreement. According to Steve Case everybody is a part of the problem. And collectively we need to work together, not just in a few hours in one day but over the next few months and years try to make sure every aspect of society really is safer(Insana).

In a different case the parents of three students killed in a Kentucky school shooting filed suit Monday against 25 media companies. They argued that the confessed killer Michael Carneal, then 14, was influenced by

violence in the media to open fire on classmates during a prayer meeting. (Puente 3).

There are a lot of examples of criminals who imitated or were influenced by media. The common pattern to all of them is a failure to differentiate between reality and fiction. Media environment is a part of their lives and they try to be a part of it. To do it they model their behaviour on the actions of their preferred characters. Our children have access to information that must be reserved for adults because only adults can really understand and make good use of it.

Another dark point of the media is the possibility that the Internet allows access to dangerous information. The dark side of the Internet is frightening, because in it people do not simply watch violence: they describe, plan and rationalize it. According to George Batsche, a school psychology professor at the University of South Florida and co-director of the university's Institute for School Reform the internet allows kids to interact with others who share similar feelings and can make them feel it is OK to seek revenge (School find teaching bullies to respect others is crucial to curbing violence).

On the Internet one can find nazi symbols, descriptions of how to make a bomb, discussions of death and anarchy, and other dangerous information. The access to most of this information is simple and special skills are not required to obtain it.

Certainly we can conclude that we live in a society almost overwhelmed by senseless violence. Common sense shows, a direct correlation between violence in the media and violent behaviour. The problem is that there is a lot of violence in the media and our children pass too much time in front of a television or playing computer games. Violence in the media and Internet are ruining our children in many ways. The only way that we have to stop this bad influence is create environments where adults and children can be together exchanging information and learning about each other's. Like Bill Clinton likes to say the power of example to change the behaviour of Americans is enormous (McFeatters 2).

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