

What Role Do Parents Play in the Media Habits and
Possible Problematic Behavior of Their Children

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

in the

Criminal Justice

Program

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2008

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Abstract

The intention of this thesis is to investigate the possible connection between violent media and problematic behavior in juveniles. The connection was tested using three hypotheses. The first hypothesis stated a link between violent films and problematic behavior. The second hypothesis involves the influence of parents on media consumption. The third hypothesis focused on the possible connection between Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) usage by parents and consumption of violent media by children. A survey completed by 39 respondents with children revealed no apparent link between violent media and problematic behavior, a relationship between parents' media influence and children's media consumption, and a decrease in violent media viewership by parents who use MPAA ratings. Future research may benefit from gathering information directly from children about their media consumption.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to introduce the reasons for the selection of this topic, how it relates to the field of criminal justice, and an introduction to the hypotheses that guide the thesis.

This research is timely because of the amount of correlation the American media and the American public has made between violence in the media and violence in American schools, homes and workplaces. Additionally, the Henry Kaiser foundation found a 96% increase in the amount of sexuality on television from 1997 to 2005 (Henry, 2005, p. 4). Research from Busselle (2003), found that as viewership of reality crime programming by parents went up, so did the fears of crime and warnings about it to their children. To state it matter-of-factly, study of the media is important of the possible impact it has on their viewer, their beliefs and their behaviors.

As explained in the abstract, the research question for this thesis is what role do parents play in their children's media consumption and possible problematic behavior. This topic was chosen for several reasons, not the least of which because research has demonstrated an effect on the consumer of media. From Eron in the 1970s (Eron, 1972) to the latest studies by psychological journal (Coyne, S. M., Archer, J., & Eslea, M., 2004), a link between media violence and viewer aggression has been developed.

However, theorists such as Sutherland deny any effect on the individual from media sources (Sutherland, 1939). Sutherland stated that the beliefs of the individual as well as their actions are formulated via their interactions with peers (Sutherland, 1939).

In this regard, the media would be a secondary source of influence. Sutherland held that interactions individuals had with their peers or those they saw as role models were the most important source of modeling. Characters in films or real life individuals (e.g., sports icons, musicians, political icons, etc.) could be conceded as role models. Because of the geographical, realistic and chronological separation between the viewer and the model, however, the influence and impact of these distant role models would be greatly lessened. However, the need for this type of research is still great even in light of this theory.

If parents encourage the viewing and modeling of a violent television show, Sutherland's theory of peer modeling would predict a favorable association with aggressive behavior in the child. Thus, media would play a role in influencing problematic behavior. If, for instance, a parent or especially a peer raises a violent movie character or musician with violent lyrics to iconic or heroic status, a positive association would be made. What makes this significant is that it provides a definition to the child regarding how s/he should interpret the actions of the media figure.

The following chapter will discuss practical examples of how the media or definitions of it can be utilized as a defense for crime and theoretically as an explanation for it. As stated previously, one of two possible explanations for the media as a contributor of violent behavior exists. Either, as suggested by the news media, the media in general can act as an influence to behavior; or, as Sutherland seems to have suggested, parental and peer reactions to the media can influence that behavior. What these explanations suggest for this topic is that regardless of whether or not Sutherland is

correct in his interpretation about media impact; the media as an influence on individual behavior is a practical problem for the criminal justice system.

This topic is significant to criminal justice for some very important reasons. Aside from the research that has been conducted regarding violent media, several cases have revolved around violent media as an influence toward aggressive and even violent behavior. Cases such as the Columbine shootings and the attempted assassination by John Hinkley Jr. have posed to the courts and law enforcement officials to consider whether violent movies, music and video games can actually encourage an individual to become aggressive or violent. These and other cases will be described in more detail in chapter two.

The inherent research question for this thesis is *what role do parents play in their children's media consumption and possible problematic behavior*. This thesis will attempt to answer the research question with three hypotheses:

1. There will be a connection between violent media consumption and childhood problematic behavior
2. The less knowledge parents have of the consumption habits of their children, the more likely their children will have problematic behavior
3. Less MPAA usage by parents will be related to more consumption of violent media by their children

These hypotheses will be utilized to answer the research question, and future chapters will explain the reason for these hypotheses and the expectation of the results.

This first chapter has laid the groundwork for this thesis by examining the research

question, why that question was chosen, why it is important, and how it will be addressed.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter will examine the research that preceded and laid the ground work for this thesis. Past research will be utilized to form a basis for the hypotheses that will be utilized as an attempt to address the research question.

Research has typically indicated media, specifically visual media, can have an impact on behavior. This can lead to an increase in short and long term aggression (Bushman and Huesmann, 2003; Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz, and Walder, 1973) or the “fulfillment of some basic psychological need in the viewer” (Hoorn and Konijn, 2003, p. 250). While research has demonstrated that children understand the concept of imagination by age three or four (Woolley, 1995) and discern reality from fiction, children and adults can still be emotionally affected by what they see on television and in movies (Tan, 1995).

The study of fiction is not a new field, as indicated by the hundreds of papers dedicated to it. The importance of media as a means of influencing personal beliefs is best summarized in Hoorn and Konijn’s (2003) article, *Perceiving and Experiencing Fictional Characters: an Integrative Account*.

The conceptual framework that humans regard as their “real-world knowledge” largely consists of information mediated through stories (e.g., Cinderella, Momotarou the Peach Boy, news items), featuring people they have never met (e.g., politicians) or who do not exist (e.g., faked identities in chat boxes), and broadcasting events they did not witness (e.g., World War II) or that never happened (e.g., a virus hoax). Whether such stories are fictional or not, people learn about the outside world from them and frequently

build up affective relationships with the characters, sometimes undertaking action to seek or avoid interaction (p. 250).

These effects, specifically the aggressive ones, have some practical examples. John Hinckley Jr.'s assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan, supposedly motivated by repeated viewings of *Taxi Driver*, comes to mind. Additional examples come from the murder sprees of Cody Posey and Devin Moore, both allegedly caused by long hours spent playing violent video games. Whether these cases were truly motivated by violent visual media is debatable. What is important is that modern psychology and years of empirical evidence suggest a correlation between viewing violent films and television and aggression. (Bradley, 2005 and Daniels, 2006)

Research into television and film generally revolves around the question of how that particular medium can influence the thoughts, behaviors and beliefs of the viewer. Major areas of study examine how that medium can change perceptions about crime (Eschholz, 2002; Bond-Maupin, 1998; Busselle, 2003; Cavender, Bond-Maupin and Jurik, 1999; and Eschholz, Blackwell, Gertz, and Chiricos, 2002), how the medium can affect perceptions of sexual norms and specific sexual behaviors (Brown, Halpern, and Engle, 2005; Brown, 2000; Kim, Collins, Kanouse, Elliott, Berry, Hunter et al., 2006; Kunkel, Donnerstein, Farrar, Biely and Rideout, 2007; Tolman, Kim, Schooler, and Sorsoli, 2007; and Ward, 2003), or how the medium can increase the likelihood of aggression in its viewers (Coyne and Archer, 2005; Coyne, Archer and Eslea, 2004; Scharrer, 2005; Eron et al., 1972; and Coyne, 2007).

When looking at television as a medium that can impact the level of viewer aggression, Eron et al.'s classic (1972) work, *Does Television Violence Lead to*

Aggression?, is an example. Their paper focuses on a 10 year follow-up survey of children who were in a previous study. The previous article, *Relationship of Television Viewing Habits and Aggressive Behavior in Children*, assessed the aggression of children who preferred violent television programs in contrast to those who did not (Coyne, 2005). Both the initial study and its follow-up found an increased rate of aggression in males who preferred violent television content. The important link these researchers found was demonstrated by studying the amount of aggression in children and how that aggression varied by the amount of media to which those children were exposed.

Another study conducted by Coyne, Archer and Eslea (2004), *Cruel Intentions on Television and in Real Life: Can Viewing Indirect Aggression Increase Viewers' Subsequent Indirect Aggression?*, focused upon indirect methods of aggression, which can be “verbal, such as gossiping, or physical, such as destroying someone's property” (Coyne et al., 2004, p. 235), and results from media emphasis upon “Intrigue, rumors, and manipulating others” (Coyne et al., 2004, p. 235). The researchers conducted an experiment in a classroom where a ‘researcher’ gave out extremely difficult puzzle tests and berated the participants before insulting them as a group and storming out. The participants were then given the opportunity to show indirect or direct aggression or non-aggression to the offensive researcher by rating his performance. The participants were given several vignettes in which they could choose either a directly aggressive, indirectly aggressive or nonaggressive conclusion. The research found higher levels of aggression in the indirect groups than either the direct or non-aggressive groups. Finally, the research seemed to suggest that the participants would respond to the vignettes (either

directly or indirectly aggressively or non-aggressively) in the manner the vignette suggested.

Another noteworthy research project by Coyne and Archer in 2005 titled *The Relationship Between Indirect and Physical Aggression on Television and in Real Life* studies children aged 11 to 14. The children were asked to list their favorite television programs. The authors analyzed these programs for the level and type of aggression they contained (Coyne and Archer, 2005). The results of the study demonstrated that indirect aggression was related to indirect aggression on television. Girls watched more indirect aggression on television than boys and were more likely to be rated indirectly aggressive.

In her 2005 study, *Hypermasculinity, Aggression, and Television Violence: An Experiment*, Scharrer studied male college students. In her research, Scharrer looked at the aggression of males after they viewed or violent television content. Hypermasculinity can be roughly defined as the extreme end of the male spectrum. This may include disrespecting women, being extremely masculine in appearance or thought as well as thinking or feeling little about romantic encounters (Scharrer, p. 354). Scharrer's methodology consisted of pre and posttest questionnaires that measured levels of aggression before and after viewing either a control video, a video showing hypermasculinity or a video showing violence. The findings of the study demonstrate that while a relationship between hypermasculinity, aggression and television viewing exists, it is a complex relationship within a whole network of male emotions.

Coyne's 2007 study *Does Media Violence Cause Violent Crime?* rounds out the examination of the relationship between television and film and aggression. Coyne looks

beyond the traditional link between media violence and aggression toward a link between media violence and violent crime. Coyne's methodology consists of a comparison of violent crime rates from official data and longitudinal studies concerned with aggression and television (Eron et al., 1972). Coyne's study concludes that there appears to be only a weak link between official violent crime data and the longitudinal studies. Coyne explains this lack of a link is due to stronger environmental factors such as coming from a violent family. It is important to note that other environmental factors need to be examined as well.

In addition to the effects visual media has on aggression, much empirical research has been performed on how such mediums can affect sexuality. These studies are similar to the ones whose focus is on aggression; they typically center on how visual media affects children. In their 2005 study, *Mass Media as a Sexual Super Peer for Early Maturing Girls*, Brown, Halpern and Engle focus on whether it is possible for television and movies to act as a silent partner to young girls, giving them permission to participate in sexual activities at younger than average ages. The Brown et al. (2005) study used two self-administered surveys to determine the biological age and sexual status of adolescent American girls. The study determined that girls who mature (i.e., reach puberty and menstruate) earlier tend to want more exposure to sexualized media than less developed girls. Additionally, their findings indicate that the girls who matured earlier tended to see the sexualized media as approving of teenage sexuality.

The research by Kim, Collins, Kanouse, Elliott, Berry and Hunter et al., (2006), *Sexual Readiness, Household Policies and Other Predictors of Adolescents' Exposure to Sexual Content in Mainstream Entertainment Television*, has goals similar to the Brown

et al., (2005) article. In addition to trying to discover if an interest in sex resulted in seeking out sexual media (rather than the reverse), the authors also wanted to see how the policies of the household affected television viewing. The paper utilized a test/retest telephone survey over a one year period and involved a national telephone survey. The population sampled consisted of boys and girls from 12 to 17 years of age. The survey supports the 2005 Brown study, finding a link between interest in sex and viewing sexualized media. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the research discovered that household television policies had an impact on the amount of sexualized television viewed by adolescents.

While there seems to be ample evidence by many articles that visual media will increase delinquency and early sexual exploration in juveniles, one study has found an interesting effect these mediums have. Tolman, Kim, Schooler and Sorsoli looked at the link between television viewing and sexual experiences in their 2007 paper *Rethinking the Associations Between Television Viewing and Adolescent Sexuality Development: Bringing Gender into Focus*. By surveying 11 to 17 year old boys and girls from two schools in the northeastern United States, the authors discovered that sexual objectification of women and lack of commitment by men in television shows resulted in less sexual activity among girls. While the study reports finding no other significant link, their primary conclusion is an interesting result and potentially a reverse of what researchers have come to expect.

With a link between sexuality in media and juvenile sexual activity now established, some data about the levels of sex on television can be presented. The Henry J. Kaiser foundation released its report on sexuality in television titled "Sex on TV 4" in

2005. The report was based on content analysis of roughly 1,000 hours of television content (Henry, 2005, p. 1). The data yielded revealed that the “number of sexual scenes per hour on television rose from 3.2 in 1998 to 5.0” (Henry, 2005, p. 3). In addition, the finding demonstrate a “96% increase in sexual scenes from 1998” (Henry, 2005, p. 4). The study also indicates that one-third (35%) of the sexual content was talking only, while another third (35%) consisted of sexual behaviors (Henry, 2005, p. 4). The remaining third of the programming analyzed contained no sexual talk or behaviors. Of the sexual behaviors in the programming observed, 11% were of sexual intercourse while the remaining 24% were of “non-intercourse sexual behaviors” (Henry, 2005, p. 4).

The Kaiser foundation cautions that while there has been a dramatic increase in sexuality on television, there has also been a slight decrease in talk about sexual safety and sexual consequences. While there was a six percent increase in this type of discussion from 1998 to 2002, there was a one percent drop from 2002 to 2005 (Henry, 2005, p. 5). More startling in the Kaiser report is the drop in discussion of sexual safety in programming that involved teenagers. Again, there was a change from 1998 to 2002 with an overall 16% increase. There was also a nine percent drop in those safety discussions from 2002 to 2005. The Kaiser foundation did find one area of sexual safety discussion that remained stable: sexual safety discussion in situations that involved sexual intercourse (Henry, 2005, p. 12). From 1998 to 2002, there was a 12% increase and from 2002 to 2005 a one percent increase in this type of discussion.

There is one final area that researchers primarily focus on when television and films are concerned. This area is how these mediums can affect the viewer’s perceptions of crime and criminality. The general hypothesis of these studies is that television and

film viewing will increase a fear, expectation and presumed occurrence of crime in the viewer. The studies, however, also demonstrate interesting phenomenon where perceptions of criminals are concerned.

In her 2002 article, *Racial Composition of Television Offenders and Viewers' Fear of Crime*, Eschholz performed a content analysis of twenty-six television crime programs and a random telephone survey. The essential question being raised in her research was how television would affect fear of crime in its viewers. The results showed that black viewers tended to have an increased fear of crime based upon the frequency of television crime programs they watched. White viewers, meanwhile, tended to have an increased fear of crime when more black characters were introduced. For the white viewers, according to Eschholz, frequency of viewing was not as important as it was for black viewers.

Another contribution in the area of crime perception comes from Bond-Maupin's (1998) paper *'That Wasn't Even Me They Showed: Women as Criminal on America's Most Wanted'*. The research consisted of a content analysis of several episodes of the reality crime program America's Most Wanted (AMW), which consists of re-enactments meant to aid in the capture of escaped felons or fugitives. Bond-Maupin was interested in how woman were presented in the television show, and in forming a generalized archetype for AMW's female felon. The analysis revealed that in comparison to other television programs, AMW presented women offenders as older and more ethnically diverse. Additionally, the research suggested that female offenders on AMW were motivated by greed, used sex as power and were not subject to control by men (Bond-Maupin, 1998, p. 43). Additionally, Bond-Maupin observed that the female offenders

“did not hurt others to protect themselves or their children, to feed a drug addiction, to please a lover, or to retaliate for abuse... they were natural criminals who rejected most aspects of femininity in favor of ruthlessness, selfishness, and insensitivity to others” (p. 43).

While one of Bond-Maupin’s papers focused on how women are portrayed as offenders, another paper she co-authored focuses on how television presents women as victims. In Cavender, Bond-Maupin and Jurik’s paper, *The Construction of Gender in Reality Crime TV*, (1999), the researchers focused on how female crime victims were portrayed on *America’s Most Wanted*. The research here too was drawn from several episodes of *America’s Most Wanted* (AMW). The results demonstrate that “the women who appear on AMW are usually white and relatively young... these women are defined by their selfless sociability, by their fragile relationships with intimates, by their motherhood and by their physical beauty” (Cavender et al., 1999, p. 659). Their conclusion about the ‘reality’ of AMW is just as poignant: “bad things happen to women who go out alone, who are gullible (apparently a feminine trait), and who trust the wrong men. ...The world is a dangerous place for women on AMW” (Cavender et al., p. 659).

While the two prior papers have focused on how television presents offenders or victims, the final two papers will focus upon how television and films can impact fear of crime and *attitudes toward police*. The first article, by Busselle (2003), *Television Exposure, Parent’s Precautionary Warnings, and Young Adults’ Perceptions of Crime*, consists of a survey of both students in their first semester of college and their parents. The question the research sought to answer was how television viewing affected the perceptions of crime by students and their parents and whether warnings from parents

about crime affected their children's perceptions of crime. The results demonstrated that female students were more likely to receive warning about crime than their male counterparts. However, these warnings did not appear to influence the student's perceptions of crime.

The final paper focusing upon visual media's impact on the viewers' perception of crime comes from Eschholz, Blackwell, Gertz, and Chiricos (2002). Their paper, *Race and Attitudes Toward the Police*, (2002), focuses on how the attitudes toward police of various racial groups are impacted by reality crime television (e.g., *America's Most Wanted*) viewing. The authors define attitudes toward police as either general (approval of police overall), or specific (beliefs and trust in various police functions) and could vary from high to low (Eschholz et al., 2002, p. 329). The research was based upon a survey of adult residents of a southeastern metropolitan community. The survey asked respondents about their attitudes toward police and how much reality crime television they watch. The results showed that only whites and those viewers with no college education tended to have more positive attitudes toward police after viewing reality crime television programs.

Beginnings of the current MPAA

Jack Valenti is the former head of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). He writes about the beginnings of what the current MPAA looks like on the MPAA website. The article, *How It All Began*, documents the very beginnings of Valenti's reign until its current incarnation (Valenti, 2008). He states that:

“By summer of 1966, the national scene was marked by insurrection on the campus, riots in the streets, rise in women's liberation, protest of the young, doubts about the institution of marriage, abandonment of old guiding slogans, and the crumbling of social traditions” (Valenti, 2008, p. 1).

Valenti's theory is that the protests and social change caused by the 1960s young adults brought strain upon the American status quo. The shootings at Kent State University which would occur in 1970 as well as the apparent inability of the young and their elders to reach agreement on major issues caused national strife. Valenti further notes that American film was just one more American institution that was close to breaking under this new pressure.

Valenti states that early in his career as director of the MPAA he was struck by the continuing issue of censorship that he faced:

“The first issue was the film "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf," in which, for the first time on the screen, the word "screw" and the phrase "hump the hostess" were heard. ... We talked for three hours, and the result was deletion of "screw" and retention of "hump the hostess," but I was uneasy over the meeting (Valenti, 2008, p. 1)”.

The meeting caused concern for Valenti for several reasons. The first reason, Valenti states is that “it seemed wrong that grown men should be sitting around discussing such matters” (Valenti, 2008, p. 1). Valenti seems to be hinting that it should not fall upon the MPAA review board to censor and delete parts of films. Valenti also states that it seemed a new challenge was just a day or week away: “Moreover, I was uncomfortable with the thought that this was just the beginning of an unsettling new era in film” (Valenti, 2008, p. 1).

While the old ways of dealing with film violence and sexuality (e.g., censoring and editing submitted films) seemed to be the permanent standard, Valenti had other ideas:

“This time it was Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and the Michelangelo Antonioni film "Blow-Up." I met with MGM's chief executive officer because this movie also represented a first - the first time a major distributor was marketing a film with nudity in it. The Production Code Administration in California had denied the seal of approval (Valenti, 2008, p. 1)”.

This new concept – nudity in a film – was one that Valenti intended to use to deconstruct the old system. Because it was such a new concept, the old standard was not able to deal with it properly. Thus, Valenti felt it was time to stop the old ways of the MPAA and form a new concept.

Valenti felt that the old system was flawed because it was meant to censor the general public from violence and nudity. That was the fundamental reason for removing the old system. In Valenti’s view, it was the job of the MPAA to protect children specifically, not the public generally. That belief was upheld when

“Finally, in April 1968, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutional power of states and cities to prevent the exposure of children to books and films that could not be denied to adults (Valenti, 2008, p. 1)”.

Valenti used this practical issue for theoretical application. With the judgement in hand, Valenti was ready to demonstrate that “the old system of self-regulation, begun with the formation of the MPAA in 1922, had broken down (Valenti, 2008, p. 1)”.

Creation of a new system

Valenti knew that in order to change the old system to a new one, he would need the support of the individuals who were responsible for all film revenue at that time – theater owners.

“By early fall, I was ready. My colleagues in the National Association of Theatre Owners joined with me in affirming our objective of creating a new and, at the time, revolutionary approach to how we would fulfill our obligation to the parents of America” (Valenti, 2008, p. 2).

After removing the old system, Valenti then “announced on November 1, 1968 the birth of the new voluntary film rating system of the motion picture industry, with three organizations, NATO, MPAA, and IFIDA [International Film Importers and Distributors of America], as its monitoring and guiding groups” (Valenti, 2008, p. 2).

These organizations decided upon four ratings for films:

- G for General Audiences, all ages admitted;
- M for mature audiences - parental guidance suggested, but all ages admitted;
- R for Restricted, children under 16 would not be admitted without an accompanying parent or adult guardian; (later raised to under 17 years of age and varies in some jurisdictions);
- X for no one under 17 admitted.

These particular ratings were created in an attempt to impress upon parents the age group the MPAA found appropriate for the films. Valenti further explains that “our original plan had been to use only three rating categories, ending with R” (Valenti, 2008, p. 2). The films that were submitted were reviewed by the MPAA in the old way, but now

there would not be any editing or censoring done by the organization. Instead, the MPAA would assign a rating to the film and it would be released as is. Additionally, “anyone not submitting his or her film for rating could self apply the X or any other symbol or description, except those trademarked by the rating program” (Valenti, 2008, p. 2).

The current state of the MPAA

Currently the MPAA has added an added an additional rating to the system. This rating was added because “the board found that the M category (mature) was regarded by most parents as a sterner rating than the R (restricted) category” (Valenti, 2008, p. 3). Valenti felt that this situation needed to be remedied because the information was utilized by parents to make viewing decisions. “To remedy this misconception, the rating was changed from M to GP (general audiences, parental guidance suggested). A year later the name was revised the name to its current label, PG: (parental guidance suggested)” (Valenti, 2008, p. 3). However, this change from mature to parental guidance suggested was not the only change made. Valenti and the MPAA felt that it was in the best interest of parents to further subdivide the rating. “In July of 1984 the PG category was split into two groups - PG and PG-13” (Valenti, 2008, p. 3).

There occurred two final changes in the early 1990s that made the MPAA as it is today. “First, the board began giving brief explanations of why a particular film received R ratings” (Valenti, 2008, p. 3). This first change can be seen in movie previews today. In this instance, in the box where the rating is given an explanation is also given. This explanation might be because of strong language, violence, nudity or extended sex scenes “The second, change was in the X category which became NC-17 (no one 17 and under

admitted)” (Valenti, 2008, p. 3). Valenti felt that the rating of X might inadvertently cause an individual to not see a film because it was believed to be immoral or shunned. With the new NC-17 rating, Valenti believed that the true purpose of the MPAA – to guide parents – would be served.

Usage of MPAA ratings

Valenti contends that the MPAA ratings are in wide usage today, citing that National Association of Theater Owners “estimates that the majority of the theater owners in the nation observe the rating system” (Valenti, 2008, p. 4). Additionally, while video cassettes and Digital Video Discs are not bound by the MPAA, distributors of these materials have chosen to use the rating system on their products.

“The Video Software Dealers Association (VSDA), which is the major trade association for video retailers in the United States, has adopted a "Pledge to Parents" which strongly endorses the observance of the voluntary movie rating system by video retailers” (Valenti, 2008, p. 4).

Valenti also believes that the MPAA ratings work and are used by parents because of the results of polls from the Opinion Research Corporation of Princeton, New Jersey. “The latest poll results show that 76% of parents with children under 13 found the ratings to be "very useful" to "fairly useful" in helping them make decisions for the movie going of their children” (Valenti, 2008, p. 4). Valenti concludes that while the “rating system isn't perfect but, in an imperfect world, it seems each year to match the expectations of those whom it is designed to serve - parents of America” (Valenti, 2008, p. 4).

Criticisms of the MPAA

Several scholarly journal articles and mass media pundits have criticized the MPAA ratings as being either ineffective or biased against either sexuality or violence. In his 2002 article, *Contemplating Ratings: an Examination of What the MPAA Considers 'Too Far' for R and Why*, for the International Communications Association, Ron Leone found that the MPAA gave a rating of X or NC-17 for films and scenes containing sexuality more than for violence.

Additionally, in the 2006 film, *This Film Not Yet Rated* by Kirby Dick, interviews with several filmmakers who had interacted with the MPAA demonstrated that films rated NC-17 or unrated would be shunned by a large percentage of theater owners. To avoid the rating, the filmmakers would need to make changes suggested by the MPAA to receive a less severe rating. In this sense, the MPAA was a de facto censor of films, even though there was no longer any censorship de jure.

This second chapter has looked at the research that this thesis is based upon. This research helps to explain the reasons for the chosen hypotheses as well as a general expectation as to how the research will flow.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will examine the particular methodologies that are used in the thesis. The research question, hypotheses, design, explanation of the instrument, sample and analysis usage will be explained.

Research Question

As stated in chapter one, the research question for this thesis is *what role do parents play in their children's media consumption and possible problematic behavior.*

This research question was chosen because it allows for the examination of possible explanations for media as an influence into problematic behavior. These explanations are that the media has an influence on behavior by itself and that behavior may be influenced via parental media consumption or oversight of media consumption of their children.

Hypotheses

As explained in chapter one, three hypotheses will be utilized to address the research question. These three hypotheses are:

1. There will be a connection between violent media consumption and childhood problematic behavior
2. The less knowledge parents have of the consumption habits of their children, the more likely their children will have problematic behavior
3. Less MPAA usage by parents will be related to more consumption of violent media by their children

The first hypothesis was chosen because it allows for the examination of the possibility that the media acts as an influence on childhood behavior. This essentially means that whenever an individual (i.e., child) experiences something in the media, that exposure increases the likelihood that the child will imitate that viewed behavior.

The second hypothesis was chosen because it allowed for an examination of the alternative explanation of the media as an influence on behavior. As Sutherland stated, the media would play a lessened role on behavior when compared to parents and peers. If this is the case, this hypothesis was intended as a way to detect that explanation. As such, parents with less influence on media consumption would likely have children with more behavioral problems.

The final hypothesis is intended to help ascertain whether the sample population utilizes the MPAA. If the MPAA is truly a method that can help to deter unfavorable media definitions by preventing consumption in the first place. If this is the case, as the MPAA insists, then parents who use the MPAA should have children with less behavioral problems.

Method

In order to assess the media consumption of both children and their parents, a research design that allowed an examination was needed. While several methodologies exist, the questionnaire method was chosen because it affords several advantages as a data gathering device.

First, the questionnaire allows the research subject to answer questions of a personal nature with minimal risk of perceived judgment by the researcher. When asked a

personal question directly by a researcher about finances or sex for instance, the respondent may respond in a less truthful but more “acceptable” manner. Because the questionnaire is anonymous at the source, the research subject can answer honestly without fear of offending the researcher. Secondly, the questionnaire method is more convenient than an interview because it allows respondents to respond in their own time and place. Finally, the questionnaire is more cost effective and allows a larger sample with fewer researchers involved than an interview or focus group method.

Instrument

When first conceptualizing the instrument to be used for this thesis, several variables needed to be gathered. Because the thesis focuses upon media consumption, it was important that the instrument include data about the types and with what frequency the sample population utilized media. For films, for instance, the population was asked about four films which their children may or may not have seen. These four films were chosen because they matched up to several of the MPAA’s ratings, but were also popular in their genre and as a whole. Additionally, because the thesis focuses on how media or media control affects children, it was necessary to obtain normative behavioral variables. Variables such as childhood behavioral problems both with school and the law were assessed for this purpose. Finally, general demographic data was gathered to better understand the sample being studied. Questions about the respondent’s sex, age, education level and information about their children were asked for this purpose.

Sample

In order to ensure that the data being measured was relevant to the needs of the thesis, a particular sample was needed. Because of this, it made better sense to use a purposive (nonrandom) sample rather than a random sample. The purposive sample's representativeness is limited.

The sample that was selected revolved around parents and their children, and thus approximately forty parents with children under the age of sixteen comprised the sample obtained for this thesis. The parents were chosen based on availability and proximity to one another. Additionally, this indicates that the sample had parts from both convenience and snowball methodologies. A snowball method of sampling allows for the research to start with a small group of individuals. This small group informs other people they know of the study. This allows the researcher to reach a larger audience than originally intended with the use of the first part of the sample as a "middle-man."

The surveys originated with friends and family who passed the instrument around to their friends and so on. These friends and family gave the surveys out to coworkers at the Department of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences at Youngstown State University and Saint Elizabeth's Health Center.

Of the 75 surveys given out, 39 were returned and analyzed. With a response rate of approximately 52%. 27% of the respondents fell within the 51-55 age group, while another 22% responded that they were 46-50 years of age. The remaining 47% percent of the population fell between the ages of 20-45.

Concerning education, 35% of the population had a high school education, while another 17% had gone to college, but not finished. A further 32% of the respondents had

graduated from college. A final 12% of those who took the survey stated that they either had attended or graduated from some advanced educational program such as a graduate school.

The data included the home life of the participants, especially any relationships they may be involved in. 75% percent of the respondents were married at the time of the survey, while another 17% were divorced. A remaining 5% of the sample were either single or widowed. While all respondents had children, the number of children per respondent varied greatly. The average respondent had over four children, however the survey only took into account the first three children because of space limitation. The first child of the average respondent was approximately as likely to be male as female and was generally around the age of 15. On average, the second child of the respondent was twice as likely to be female as male, and generally fell between the ages of six and nine. The third child of the average respondent was roughly one-point five times as likely to be male as a female and had a mean age of roughly 13 years of age. It is important to note, however, that only 11 of the 39 respondents admitted to having had a third child. Thus, any subanalysis within the data would be too small for statistical purposes.

Table 1		
(N=39)		
Item	Response	Percentage
Age	20-45	47%
	46-50	22%
	51-55	27%
Education	High school	35%
	Some College	17%
	College	33%
	Some Graduate School	3%
	Graduate School	10%
Marital Status	Married	75%
	Divorced	17%
	Single	3%
	Widowed	3%
Child Custody	Has Custody	77%
	Does Not Have Custody	3%
	Has Joint Custody	10%
Number of Children	Average of 4.6	

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable within this thesis is childhood behavioral problems. These problems may include truancy, detentions and suspensions from school.

Independent Variables

The independent variables that will be looked at for this thesis are media consumption and parental influence. These variables will change across the sample as some parents will have a greater ability to control what their children see and listen to and how they interpret it.

Analysis

The final section of this chapter is dedicated to discussing how the data gleaned from the survey participants will be analyzed. While advanced analytical methods are available, simpler methods will be utilized because of the small size of the dataset and the needed interpretation of said data.

The first hypothesis of this thesis is that there will be a connection between the films that a child has seen and any behavioral problems that that child may have. This hypothesis is inherently important to the research question because it seeks to determine if there is indeed a connection between violent media and behavioral problems within the sample population. This hypothesis was analyzed by comparing the movies that a child had seen according to their parents and any behavioral problems that child has. Cross-tabulation analysis will be utilized to look for a grouping of particular films and particular behavioral problems.

The second hypothesis within this thesis is that as parental influence of child media consumption decreases, childhood behavioral problems increase. This hypothesis is very important because it looks at parental involvement rather than media alone as a source for behavioral problems. The questions about parental media knowledge will be recoded as a single yes or no variable. This variable will then be compared via bivariate correlation to each of the behavioral problems.

The final hypothesis utilized to answer the research question of this thesis looks at the media consumption habits of both parent and child. By examining whether the movie viewing habits of the child can be influenced by those of the parent, an additional observation about parental impact of child media consumption can be made. Cross-tabulation analysis on the films parents list as their favorites and films their children have seen will be performed.

This chapter has introduced the method utilized as well as the sample discovered via the method as well as any particular statistical analysis that will be utilized in later chapters. The following chapter will present the results of the survey.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter will examine the results of the analysis performed on the data gained from the surveys distributed to the sample population. More detailed conclusions will follow in chapter five.

The first hypothesis addresses a link between childhood media consumption and childhood behavioral problems. By recoding behavioral problems into a separate variable counting total problems per respondent, it was possible to create an aggregate picture of each respondent's behavioral problems. This picture was then compared via cross-tabulation analysis to each film the child had seen. On average, the child of a respondent had a 55% chance of having seen any of the films on the survey. Of these films, *101 Dalmatians* had the highest number of viewers, while *Boys Don't Cry* had the fewest. The result of this hypothesis demonstrates that there is no apparent connection between violent films and violent behavior within the sample population.

Table 2						
Child has seen	Yes	No	Unknown			
<i>101 Dalmations</i>	75.0%	22.5%	2.5%			
<i>Jurassic Park</i>	85.0%	12.5%	2.5%			
<i>House of Wax</i>	7.5%	90.0%	2.5%			
<i>Boys don't Cry</i>	5.0%	92.5%	2.5%			
Child has played	Yes	No	Unknown			
<i>Mario Party</i>	45.0%	50.0%	5.0%			
<i>Postal 2</i>	0.0%	95.0%	5.0%			
<i>Soldier of Fortune 2</i>	7.5%	87.5%	5.0%			
<i>Gears of War</i>	5.0%	90.0%	5.0%			
Child has had	Yes	No	Unknown			
Detentions	15.0%	82.5%	2.5%			
Suspension	2.5%	95.0%	2.5%			
Expulsions	0.0%	97.5%	2.5%			
Fights	2.5%	95.0%	2.5%			
Drug/Alcohol Problems	0.0%	97.5%	2.5%			
Poor Grades	7.5%	90.0%	2.5%			
Other Problems	12.5%	85.0%	2.5%			
Parental Knowledge of	Great Deal	Some	Little	Very Little	No Attempt	Unknown
Film	57.5%	35.0%	2.5%	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%
Video Games	57.5%	35.0%	0.0%	2.5%	0.0%	5.0%
School Experiences	75.0%	15.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%
Parental Influence of	Great Deal	Some	Little	Very Little	No Attempt	Unknown
Film	67.5%	20.0%	2.5%	2.5%	5.0%	2.5%
Television	55.0%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	2.5%
Music	42.5%	37.5%	15.0%	0.0%	2.5%	2.5%
Video Games	50.0%	32.5%	7.5%	2.5%	5.0%	2.5%

Table 3			
	<i>Problem Average</i>		
	<i>1 Problem</i>	<i>5 Problems</i>	<i>No Problems</i>
<i>101 Dalmations</i>			
Seen -	7	1	26
Not Seen -	2	0	3
<i>Jurassic Park</i>			
Seen -	6	1	23
Not Seen -	3	0	6
<i>House of Wax</i>			
Seen -	0	0	3
Not Seen -	9	1	26
<i>Boys Don't Cry</i>			
Seen -	0	0	2
Not Seen -	9	1	27

The second hypothesis within this thesis is that as parental influence on media consumption decreases, behavioral problems within the sample population will increase. In order to search for the possibility of this connection, an average of the four questions concerning media influence was created. The higher this average, the lower the influence the parent has on their child. On average, the respondents had an influence level of 1.6, between “a great deal of influence” and “some influence”. This average was compared via bivariate correlation to the average of behavioral problems. This correlation demonstrates a strong positive correlation between these two variables. While this would

appear to demonstrate a null result of the hypothesis, it is important to recognize that as the parental influence decreases, the influence average decreases. This is because of the coding procedure during data analysis. What this positive correlation demonstrates is that as parental influence decreases, behavioral problems increase. Therefore, the hypothesis is supported by the data.

Table 4	<i>Pearson's r</i>	Significance
	0.81	0.63

The final hypothesis within this thesis aims to determine whether or not MPAA usage by a parent will affect violent media consumption by a child. This hypothesis was tested by comparing the MPAA variable to the films seen by children of the respondents. The results of this analysis demonstrate that as MPAA usage goes up, viewership of violent films actually goes down. While this supports the hypothesis, it is important to recognize that very few of the respondents actually had children that saw the more violent of the films. Because of this, a sampling bias could be a possible reason for this result.

Table 5	<i>Pearson's r</i>	Significance
MPAA Usage and Viewership of <i>101 Dalmations</i>	0.19	0.26
MPAA Usage and Viewership of <i>Jurassic Park</i>	0.17	0.29
MPAA Usage and Viewership of <i>House of Wax</i>	-0.33	0.40
MPAA Usage and Viewership of <i>Boys Don't Cry</i>	-0.17	0.30

In Table 4, a negative correlation indicates a decrease in film viewership when MPAA usage increases. A positive correlation indicates an increase in film viewership when MPAA usage goes up.

The following chapter will introduce some problems associated with this thesis as well as some general conclusions about the results. Finally, several ideas for future research projects to continue this research will be made.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

This chapter will provide a summary of the findings within this thesis and will form conclusions about their meaning. Additionally, these findings will be tied into past research and limitations about the research method and results will be given. Finally, possible future research steps will be given as well as examples about the value of this thesis.

The results of the first hypothesis demonstrate that within the sample population, there is no clear connection between violent or “R-rated” films and childhood behavioral problems. This is in direct contrast to some of the prior research, which demonstrates that violent television can lead to aggressive behavior. The results do support Coyne’s 2007 study, which demonstrates that violent television does not necessarily lead to violent crime.

The second hypothesis in this thesis attempted to determine whether parental influence on media exposure is related to childhood behavioral problems. Research, such as Busselle’s 2003 article, *Television Exposure, Parent’s Precautionary Warnings, and Young Adults’ Perceptions of Crime*, demonstrate that female college students are more likely to receive warnings about crime from their parents, because of their parents’ exposure to “crime television.” The findings within this second hypothesis do not match up to Busselle’s results. According to the results, as parental influence goes up, behavioral problems go down.

The final hypothesis, which seeks to look at MPAA usage and how it affects childhood exposure to violent or “R-rated” films, is based in part on research utilized by the MPAA itself. According to the MPAA, “76% of parents with children under 13 found the ratings to be “very useful” to “fairly useful” in helping them make decisions for the movie going of their children” (Valenti, 2008, p. 4). Ninety-percent of the sample responded that the MPAA was either very useful or fairly useful when choosing films appropriate for their children. As such, this hypothesis can be seen as a direct tie-in to the MPAA research. The results of this hypothesis demonstrate that as MPAA usage goes up, violent or “R-rated” film viewership by the children of the population goes down.

While this research demonstrates some interesting phenomenon, it does have several limitations. First, the sample cannot be generalized to the American viewing public. The sample is not diverse when considering behavioral problems, and thus a smaller chance for correlations exists. Additionally, the survey did not separate the children of the respondent, so it was impossible to decipher which child had what behavioral problem. Additionally, any behavioral problem experienced by the child could have ranged from non-violent to violent. For instance, a detention or suspension could have been caused by skipping school just as easily as it could have been caused by a fight. Finally, the respondent sample pool was rather small.

Future research would do well to get information from both the parent and the child when considering media exposure and childhood problems. Thus, self-report data would be useful to ascertain whether media exposure influences behavior. Additionally, a larger sample size with more representative aspects would allow for more generalization of data and possible inclusion of more behavioral problems. Finally, future research

should separate each child within the data so that behavioral problems can be traced back to the child rather than the family.

This research is especially important to the field of criminal justice and criminology because it allows the practitioner and theorist to have another tool. In criminology, tools are those concepts or ideas that can help to explain and predict criminality. When an offender enters the criminal justice system, for instance, a cross-section of their life could be made. This cross-section might demonstrate that the individual uses drugs, comes from a violent home and a poor neighborhood or has parents who broke the law.

These factors allow the practitioner to apply a variety of ‘tools’ to explain the offender’s behavior. Tools could be theories such as those of the Biological or Classical schools. Tools could also be new concepts such as the research question posed in this theory or those beliefs held by the news media and individuals. If criminal behavior can be explained by exposure to media or by parental involvement in media, then this research can prove very useful.

This final chapter has looked at the hypotheses and their results at a closer level as well as some limitations that lessen their impact. Additionally, future research recommendations were made with the hope that the limitations of this research as well as the lessons learned from it could be applied to additional research.

Appendix A

Youngstown State University

Department of Criminal Justice

Informed Consent Form

Dear Survey Respondent:

We are conducting a study “What role parents play in the media habits of their children”. In this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire. Your participation should take about twenty 10 to 15 minutes. There are no risks to you posed by this study. All participation is anonymous, so that no one will be able to identify you when the results are recorded and reported.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without negative consequences. If you wish to withdraw at any time during the study, simply do not fill out the questionnaire. Please feel free to contact Edward Orona, Director, Office of Grants and Sponsored Programs, 330-941-2377 or eorona@ysu.edu.

This study has been approved by YSU’s Institutional Review Board.

I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of the description as outlined above. I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate.

I wish to participate

I have already taken this survey

Participant’s name (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix B

Mathew Smith Thesis Survey

1. How useful do you find the MPAA film rating system (e.g., G, PG, PG-13, R, NC-17)?

- A. Very useful B. Fairly useful C. Fairly useless
D. Very useless E. I do not use this rating system to make film choices

2. Which rating systems are factors in your decision to allow or not allow your child access to a particular form of media? (circle all that apply)

- A. MPAA film ratings
B. Explicit content warnings on music
C. ESRB ratings on video games (e.g., EC, E, E10+, T, M, AO)
D. TV Parental Guidelines (e.g., TVY, TVY7, TVG, TVPG, TV14, TVMA)

3. Please list three of your favorite films/movies.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. Please select the films that your child has seen from this list: (circle all that apply)

- A. 101 Dalmatians B. Jurassic Park C. House of Wax D. Boys Don't Cry

5. How familiar are you with your children's film viewing habits?

- A. Very familiar B. Somewhat familiar C. Somewhat unfamiliar
D. Mostly unfamiliar E. Very unfamiliar

6. From this list, what games have your children played? (circle all that apply)

- A. Mario Party B. Postal 2 C. Soldier of Fortune 2 D. Gears of War

7. How familiar are you with your children's video game playing habits?

- A. Very familiar B. Somewhat familiar C. Somewhat unfamiliar
D. Mostly unfamiliar E. Very unfamiliar

8. How familiar are you with your children's school experiences?
- A. Very familiar B. Somewhat familiar C. Somewhat unfamiliar
D. Mostly unfamiliar E. Very unfamiliar
9. How much influence do you have on your children's movie watching habits?
- A. A great deal B. Some C. Little D. Very little
E. I do not try to influence the movie viewing habits of my children
10. How much influence do you have on your children's television watching habits?
- A. A great deal B. Some C. Little D. Very little
E. I do not try to influence the television viewing habits of my children
11. How much influence do you have on your children's music listening habits?
- A. A great deal B. Some C. Little D. Very little
E. I do not try to influence the music listening habits of my children
12. How much influence do you have on your children's video game playing habits?
- A. A great deal B. Some C. Little D. Very little
E. I do not try to influence the video game playing habits of my children
13. What problems have your children had while growing up? (circle all that apply)
- A. Detentions B. Suspension C. Expulsion D. Fighting
E. Drug/Alcohol problems
F. Other, please specify (e.g., vandalism, curfew violations, etc.) _____
14. How many children do you have? _____
15. What is the gender and age of your first child? A. Male B. Female Age _____

16. What is the gender and age of your second child? A. Male B. Female Age _____

C. I do not have more than one child

17. What is the gender and age of your third child? A. Male B. Female Age _____

C. I do not have more than two children

18. Do you currently have custody of your children?

A. Yes I have custody B. No, I do not have custody C. I have joint custody

19. What is your current marital status?

A. Married B. Divorced C. Separated D. Single/Not married E. Widowed

20. What is the highest level of schooling that you have completed?

A. Less than a high school degree B. High school degree

C. Some college D. College degree

E. Some graduate school F. Graduate degree

21. What is your age?

A. Less than 20 B. 20-25 C. 26-30 D. 31-35 E. 36-40 F. 41-45 G. 46-50

H. 51-55 I. 56-60 J. 61-65 E. Over 65

22. Please provide any comments that you feel we should know about being a parent, children's media habits, and children's behavior.

Thank you for your time and responses!

Please return your completed survey in the postage-paid return envelope.

Appendix C
Youngstown State University
Subjects Review Committee
Approval Letter

Dear Dr. Hazy and Mr. Smith:

The revisions to your protocol "What Role Parents Play in the Media Habits of their Children" have been reviewed and approved. You may begin collecting data for this study. You will receive an official memo in campus mail.

Cheryl Coy, Secretary
Human Subjects Research Committee

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