

DOES VIOLENCE WITHIN ENTERTAINMENT INDUCE VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR WITHIN VIEWERS?

The question of whether or not violence within television/movies induces violent behaviour within the viewer has been a highly contentious and divisive issue. One group of mental health experts adamantly insist that the answer to this query is no, while another group adamantly insists that the answer is yes. Although I believe this paper will answer this question to a considerable extent, it is not expected to be the final word. This is for the simple reason that mental health experts are in a state of unending conflict with each other over this issue.

The thesis of this paper is as follows.

*If there is an increase in the aggressive behaviour of individuals subsequent to viewing violent entertainment, it is not the violence they are emulating, but the **skill** employed when the characters implemented this violence.*

This thesis does not apply to *every single* viewer who watches some form of violent entertainment. It is applicable to a general manifestation of increased aggression subsequent to the viewing of violent entertainment. Furthermore, although it is applicable to an extensive group of individuals, it is not necessarily applicable to everybody in society. (However, the reader should keep in mind that not everybody in society becomes more aggressive subsequent to the viewing of violent entertainment.) This is being emphasized for the following reason. There have been occasions when extreme violence within entertainment precipitated the same violent acts within society. Many years ago, Farrah Fawcett starred in a made for television movie in which she killed her abusive husband via a form of major arson. Subsequent to this, there were a few incidents of wives killing their husbands (via similar means) across the United States. However, this movie did not *imbue* these women with the idea. *Prior* to them watching this show, the idea of killing (or at the very least, seriously harming) their husbands was already "percolating" in their minds. This show merely "glorified" the final idea that they were seeking. In other words, regardless of whether this movie had been televised or not, at some point these women would have attempted to kill their husbands via other means. Consequently, this show was not *responsible* for what happened to these men. It merely stimulated these women with an idea for what they were *already* seeking. This paper will outline the precipitating factor which induces a marginal increase in aggressive behaviour subsequent to viewing particular types of entertainment.

If *appropriate* studies are conducted, one will observe an increase in the overall aggressive tendencies of children and teenagers when *certain types* of violent entertainment are watched. What is specifically being referred to are martial arts films. If the martial arts film exhibits certain specific features, then there will be an increase in the violent nature of (certain) viewers for a period of time subsequent to the completion of the film. However, it is not the *violence* that they are striving to emulate. The harming of others is not the end they are seeking. They are seeking to emulate the *skill* employed in the perpetration of this violence. They wish to possess the speed, power,

and accuracy of the protagonists that they are witnessing on screen. The reader may ask the following question. What is the difference between the emulation of skill which perpetrates violence, and the violence unto itself?

It is usually the protagonist who perpetrates (skillful) violence. Therefore, he is usually acting in the name of justice. He is defending the innocent or attacking those who deserve to be attacked (within the parameters of the story line). Those who emulate the same type of actions would like to aspire to the level where they can physically handle themselves in the face of wrongful confrontation. They aspire to function in the capacity of a person who can successfully contend (on a physical basis) with those who will wrongfully attack himself or someone close to him. This is not achieved through sheer brute physical force, but rather through *skillful* engagement. Consequently, when they view their heroes on screen successfully defeating those who deserve to be defeated, they immediately fantasize about being the same way. Namely, possessing the ability to defeat bullies or outright criminals when they or someone close to them are wrongfully attacked. Since this is their fantasy, they immediately strive to emulate the same type of actions they have just witnessed on screen. However, they are emulating the skill, not the actual violence that was perpetrated.

The tenets outlined in the previous paragraph will be illuminated in slightly greater detail. Any young boy (or teenager for that matter) would harbour some fantasy of possessing tremendous skill in relation to the potential of physical confrontations. This is for the simple reason that many young boys have, at one time or another during the course of their lives, been confronted by the "local bully". At these times, there is the general feeling of helplessness in the face of this blatantly wrongful aggression. Consequently, when viewing a martial arts hero who can not only defeat one "bully", but a myriad of "bullies" simultaneously, there is the desire to function at that level. Therefore, they proceed with some superficial attempt to emulate him. *This* is the behaviour observed in individuals when they become more aggressive subsequent to the viewing of certain types of violent forms of entertainment.

Some may be pose a query along the following lines. If it is skill which they are emulating, why don't we observe young people playing basketball immediately subsequent to one of Michael Jordan's games in an attempt to emulate the inordinate skill he displays during the course of one of his games? The desire to play basketball at Jordan's level is not a "universal" fantasy. However, for anybody who has been wrongfully confronted by the "local bully" (and that would entail *many* people) there is the fantasy of being substantially capable in the face of wrongful confrontation. To put it succinctly, successfully playing basketball is not a wide spread fantasy. Possessing the capability to effectively contend with physical confrontations (regardless of the magnitude of that confrontation) *is* a wide spread fantasy (as a direct result of one's personal experiences with bullies).

Therefore, does violence within entertainment induce violent behaviour within the viewer? It does not induce violent behaviour, but it does (temporarily) induce the desire to emulate the *skill* employed in executing that violence.