

The Guiding Teacher: The Media

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17 years

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With his eyes glued to the television set, little Johnny sits and absorbs all of the seductive messages that the television sends his way. Whether it is recognized or not, the television teaches little Johnny about life and what values he should live by. *Violence, Johnny, Violence*, the television hisses at little Johnny. Flooded with battle scenes, little Johnny's mind begins to drown in the mixed messages the television had depicted. His thoughts now center on danger, fury, and aggression; this causes little Johnny to pick fights at school, to argue with his parents, and to torment his fellow students. Rapidly, Johnny grows older with the television as his guiding teacher. Before anyone can tell what has gone wrong with little Johnny, John, the mature, immoral student of the television takes control. John no longer watches his violent cartoons; he watches the adult shows that his parents would never let him watch if they were aware of the activities that occurred on these shows. Instead of learning about violence, John now learns about drugs, sex, liquor, and cigarettes. John, having gained all the confidence and knowledge he needs from his teacher, goes forward into the world trying to find his first girlfriend. By now, John is indistinguishable from his former self; he has morphed from lovable little Johnny into a desensitized John.

Television and the media in general are eroding the foundation of morals in America. Social problems are erupting all over the country: school shooting and rape and abuse and racism and discrimination and hate and teen pregnancies and drugs. The responsibility that the media has in teaching and raising children must be tempered by involved parents as well as stimulating activities.

Promoting sex and sexual behavior is the media's newest specialty: "66 percent of all new cases of sexually transmitted diseases occur in people between the ages of 15 and

24” (Ravich 76). No one can deny the impact sexually transmitted diseases have and have had on the youth in this country. However, the cause of such promiscuity is up for debate or interpretation: “Greeson and Williams (1986) found that adolescents exposed to music videos on MTV were more likely to agree that premarital sex was OK for teenagers than were those who did not see the videos on MTV” (Ravitch 76-77). The strong correlation between seeing or hearing sexual material from the media and sexual relationships during the teenage years cannot be refuted. Simply, the media exposes the teenager to sexual acts, and then the teenager models the actions portrayed through the media. Hidden in these sexual actions and relationships, which the media is attributed to, is the progression and amplification of sexually transmitted diseases. The increase in sexual relations that the media exposes teenagers to creates a greater spread of sexually transmitted diseases because of the increase in sexual relations. The problem associated with sex and the television does not stop here, however. Prevention of sex through the media has not occurred:

Although sexual content seems to be more prevalent on television, messages of risk (unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS) and responsibility (abstinence, condom use) across the overall landscape of television programming are not (Ravitch 71).

Thus, the overall effect of the media is creating an image of the pleasures of sexual relations without a counterargument for why sexual relations are harmful. This creates a false sense of security in the minds of teenagers; the teenager feels as if he/she can have sex without any repercussions. Then, the teenager is slammed with all of the negative side effects of sex after it is too late for the teenager to change his/her behavior. A more preemptive position is needed to stop teenage sexual relations before the negative side effects have a chance of being ushered into the lives of teenagers.

The perversion of the media even leads to dating abuse and rape to the point where the subordinate partner bows down to the wishes of the dominate one: “Kalof’s results (1999) reveal that undergraduate females are marginally more accepting of interpersonal violence after exposure to a video with sexual and gender stereotypical imagery than are those undergraduate females exposed to a video devoid of such content” (Ravich 77). Abuse, the concept of two supposed friends, lovers, soul mates, partners, or romantics beating, destroying, killing each other, has become an immense threat in today’s society. Yet, portrayals of abuse are now commonplace on the television: “60 percent of programming on MTV links violence to degrading sexual portrayals” (Ravitch 49). This extends on the fact that teenagers are becoming more aggressive with one another; aggression is even being exhibited as a method of sexual stimulation and pleasure. However, teenagers are not shown how much aggression or how little aggression is appropriate. This leads to an increase in the amount of teenagers that go beyond the limits of civility and acceptability and into the territory of abuse and neglect. The raw emotion of the assaults between the “lovers” or “soul mates” shreds both the hearts and souls of both individuals in the relationship, but these individuals have become desensitized to the damage they cause upon each other. Furthermore, the fact that the subordinate partner, in most cases the female, will submit to the abuse because of learned behaviors from the television causes loss of breath, just as the girl loses breath under the pressure from the abuser’s hands.

The babysitter, the electronic media, also causes aggressive behavior in students, other than dating abuse. With the babysitter, the average kid spends about 5.5 hours a day, 2 hours and 46 of which is with the television (Ravitch 9, 66). Over the course of

this time the kid is exposed to a lot of violent interactions: “Out of all genres, children’s programs feature the highest rate of violent interactions per hour (13.37)...superhero programs have 28.1” (Ravitch 69). Study after study has proven that aggressive, violent shows, even cartoons, increase aggression and violence in the viewers of the shows. In one such experiment, two schools were studied. In one school the teachers taught anti-media messages and in the other the teachers taught the regular curriculum:

Over the course of the school year, children in the intervention school reduced their verbal aggression on the playground by about 47 percent (an average of about one fewer verbally aggressive act every 10 minutes) and reduced their physical aggression on the playground by about 37 percent (an average of about one fewer physically aggressive act every 11 minutes) compared to children in the control school (Ravitch 203).

Clearly, the media plays a direct role in the increase of violence, but reducing the amount of media used by a child caused a reduction of violent behavior after the reduction of television as well. This proves there is hope for possible alternatives to the media; it is not too late to reverse the effects of the media on the minds of children. Students can be taught and shown that the television is not the best option for them. Instead, activities like sports, board games, and other intellectually, cognitively, or physically stimulating activities can and will work for the benefit of the children.

In addition to the external effects of the media, the media also harms the mental and cognitive processes of children. For example, symptoms of fear and anxiety come from violent movies and television programs: “...Television leads to stress, anxiety and fear among children leaving far reaching impacts on their personality” (CITY 2004). At a young age, children do not understand the difference between reality and fiction – for example, some kids believe that when someone dies in a movie, he/she dies in real life. So, in the case of violent movies it is common for children to believe that a lot of people

actually die: “By renting just four videos - *Total Recall*, *Robocop 2*, *Rambo III*, and *Die Hard III* - a child would witness 525 deaths” (Ravitch 49). In the case of these four videos, the kid is exposed to violence and numbed to the consequences and effects of violence. Furthermore, the realism of the media causes the children to imitate what they see on the television. This leads to the increase in violence, stress, sex, anxiety, and fear. Children feel as if everything that they see on the television is real, true, and right. For this reason, kids begin to fear that they will be harmed in a similar way characters are harmed on television. They feel that someone is out to get them. For example, horror films are filled with violence and are sometimes broadcast during the middle of the day – at a time when a child could easily watch. The film grasps hold of the child with suspense and fear. Afraid to be in the dark, the kid loses sleep and loses hope of being happy in life. The feeling of security that comes with carefree innocence vanishes from the child’s mind. Also, kids become desensitized to the violence on the television (APA). They feel as if the right decision or action for them is to harm a fellow student. They feel as if sex is an everyday event that everyone is partaking in. This is because the media shows the students that sex and violence are common decisions that every student uses and turns to. Also, students that are exposed to the media feel as if their fellow classmates are more aggressive:

To assess peer perceptions we modeled our survey on the peer nomination method developed by Eron, Walder, and colleagues. Children were asked to place a check beside the names of their classmates in response to fifteen questions...Consistent with our hypothesis, over the course of the school year, peer ratings of aggression increased significantly less for children in the intervention school versus those for children in the control school, a relative reduction of about 16 percent (Ravitch 200-201).

This experiment shows that students feel frightened and paranoid after being exposed to violence via the media. Kids model the media and learn to be scared because of the media.

In order to break free of the binds that the media has wrapped around youth, society must first recognize the “TV should not be used as a babysitter” (CITY 2004). When society dwindles down to a fiber of being that uses the television as the main source of entertainment and knowledge, society has lost control over all of the adolescents that are nurtured by the television. Society instead must turn into a place in which parents develop and maintain control of the viewing habits of their children. In particular, parents must have accurate and reliable information on what shows contain violence, sexual messages, and vulgar language: “The television industry is not correcting itself to the satisfaction of parents” (Time 2007). When, the television industry is not restrained, it is the responsibility of the people to revolt by turning off the television. The media industry profits off of the selling of sex, violence, and drugs on the airwaves. This is because programs receive funding for the amount of viewers each particular program has; also the programs that receive the most viewers are the programs that use violence and sex to satisfy the viewers’ id, pleasure principle. By turning off the television, one would be sending a clear message to the media producers that media cannot glorify sex and violence. In order to stop the moral degradation in society, the collective people must take a stand. Turn off the television. Instead, read a book. Book a flight to an exotic land. Watch a play or musical. Play football or soccer with friends. Write a letter of poem. Visit a neighbor. Volunteer at a local humane society and spend time with animals. Satisfy cravings for “reality programming” by going out into the “real

world.” Chase rainbows. Listen to a symphony. Repeat after rinsing (December 2007). The world is filled with many additional, beneficial, benevolent activities that children could be focusing on instead of the media. Yet, kids have maintained a focus on the television screen, and the parents have not received adequate information to determine what the best option for their children is. The V-clip is highly ineffective (Time 2007). The media provides a minuscule amount of information to parents. Not very many parents even understand the V-clip let alone figure out how to use it. With current standings, it is impossible for parents to make sound, thought-out decisions about the media and its alternatives. The media can not be trusted to make the best decisions for the children: “(Parents) are the only individuals in the world who can be expected to put the interests of their children before anything else” (Ravitch 13). This implies that the parents must be given accurate and reliable information about the programs that the media offers. The parents have the children’s best interest at heart, not the media. Therefore, the parents need to make decision about the children and the programming for children, not the media.

In answer to this idea, the media companies say, “1st amendment.”

However, the Supreme Court has held many times that speech and messages that cause harm to a person are not protected under the first amendment right to free speech. The common example is that a person is not allowed to scream “Fire” in a crowded building, but “the parallels with violence are obvious” (Time 2007). When, speech and expression has an effect of harming an individual, the speech act itself must be stopped in order to protect the innocence of those who cannot protect themselves.

In a world filled with violent, sexual, and vulgar messages, the guiding media hardened and numbed little Johnny into the tough mean John who was aggressive and angry. Now, if little Johnny had grown up in a world in which the media was an afterthought and activities like monopoly, soccer, boggle, swimming, baseball and tag dominated fun time, then Johnny would have grown up to be a well rounded, caring human being. Johnny would still grow up into a John, or course, but this John would be a productive, healthy member of society.

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