

Violence in the media

*“Never was a culture so
filled with full-color images of
violence as ours is now.”*

George Gerlsner

Man has always been attracted to spectacles of violence. In the times of the ancient Romans, slaves and convicts were forced to fight wild animals to their death in front of roaring crowds. Even if our society appears less blood-thirsty for live violence, nevertheless, the fictional violence in modern culture is staggering.

Public outcry against media violence is specially focused on the rising levels of violent crimes among children and adolescents. It is a fact that police everywhere have to deal with escalating incidences of juvenile offences like the wave of school shootings in the USA, which occupied the limelight for a long time. Many studies indicate that the viewing of violence undoubtedly has long-term effects. Viewers will mimic violence as they see it on the screen. This is called the copycat effect. The desensitization effect refers to the adaptation of viewers to a certain level of on-screen violence so that an even more glory depiction of violence is needed to shock them. The victim effect occurs when constant exposure to violence in the media leads viewers to believe that violence is everywhere and that they must be afraid.

For decades, experts have warned that television, movies, music and other forms of entertainment media are desensitizing young people to violence and death. Murder, rape and physical assault are common fares in movies and award-winning television dramas and some popular music genres have taken to glorifying sex, violence, murder and even suicide. Even ‘family’ films are tainted with Quentin Tarantino’s type of breezy approach to brutality. Day by day, computer games are becoming horrifically realistic and vicious. An entire type of game called ‘first person shooters’ encourages the player to dismember monsters and kill people. The strongest impacts are on the youngest viewers who do not yet understand the distinction between

illusion and reality. Media violence creates a reality of its own that may crowd out our real reality.

Media moguls, enriched by promoting these violent fantasies deny any blame for society's degradation. They argue that those who copycat violence are already prone to violent behaviour because of their environment and that, in any case, they only mirror what already exists in society. This is a view that makes abstraction of the individual's moral responsibility in the construction of a sane society. By and large, it is also the responsibility of parents to shield their children's characters and personalities from deleterious influences. They must visit the record stores in their area and browse. This will reveal what is for sale. They may discover, for instance, that some labels already have warnings.

To the list of those who should be responsible could be added social workers, psychologists, religious leaders, policy makers and so on. Eternal vigilance is the price we have to pay for our freedom because some are constantly trying to be freer than others.