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**family**

INTERNATIONAL FAMILY CONFERENCE - II

# Family and Violence

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## Children, family and society: Victims of violence on TV



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## Abstract

Violence towards the family can take place in several forms, whether through the attitudes of one of its members or through the verbal, physical or moral actions of others. The programs and advertising aired on television can also be a cause of moral violence to children and families. This occurs whenever television programs induce children to behave in ways that are harmful to their welfare and healthy development. In this case the victims of the violence are children, their families and the society they are part of, where the effects will ultimately reach. The result of TV programming on the personality of children and adolescents is undeniable, increasing in direct proportion to the amount of time they are exposed. This study is devoted to analyzing the rights children have to ethical development in relation to open commercial TV in Brazil, the effects of programs on their moral education, the negative impacts generated when television does not observe such rights, and finally, some of the recorded effects of the violent content itself.

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## The Purpose of TV in Brazil

Lawmakers in Brazil and the world over are all well aware that the media influences education. This influence is exerted by informational and entertainment programming as well as advertising. In Brazil, officially, all content on open commercial TV (i.e. unrestricted access) must not only comply with the ethical and the social values of the individual and the family (Federal Constitution, art. 221, IV), but preferably have an educational purpose (Federal Constitution, art. 221, I). Often, however, this does not occur in practice. We are thus left with the challenge of monitoring and demanding that broadcasters fulfill their duties, as well as the civil authorities, who can oblige them to do so.

All laws that govern broadcasting in Brazil (for TV and radio) impose on media companies the duty of contributing to the education and moral formation of children and adolescents. Article 3 of the Brazilian Telecommunications Code, Federal Law No. 4.771 from August 27, 1962, states that “broadcasting services have an educational and cultural purpose, even while informative and entertaining, and are considered national interest, and the commercial use of these is only allowed so long as is not detrimental, and ensures the fulfillment of that purpose.” Furthermore, art. 38 requires that concession contracts for broadcasting comply

with this law and that the contracts contain a clause which clearly states: “[...] *the information, entertainment, advertising and publicity services of the broadcasters are subject to the educational and cultural purposes inherent to broadcasting, seeking the best interests of the country* (under letter “d”).” Note: educational and cultural purposes must be present in all information, entertainment and even advertising services.

Another important document that takes this even further is the Children and Adolescent’s Statute, Federal Law n. 8069, from July 13, 1990. The statute mandates that radio and television display *only* - and the law is adamant in the use of this term - “educational, artistic, cultural and informative programs, during the time period scheduled for children and youth.” It is an administrative offense not to comply with schedules according to age classification, or fail to make the age classification known to the public (art. 254).

Violence and sex, displayed abusively on TV, cause significant harm to a child’s formation, and are a true aggression to this target-audience. Thus these issues are recurring in discussions of state agencies, media companies, citizens and third sector organizations regarding the limits that should be set for programs, so that the law is effectively respected, without nevertheless, committing abuse of freedom of speech.

In Brazil, the deleterious effects of the violence promoted in the media on children were officially recognized in two state projects, with the purpose of avoiding the negative effects of this content on children. First, the classification rating process for movies and TV programs, which helps parents or guardians know, before any program is going to be transmitted, whether it is suitable or not for the age of their child or student. One of the rating criteria is precisely the level of violence in the film/TV

show. The rating service is obligatory for all media companies, but is indicative for the parents, who may or may not follow the guidance provided by this service. Thus, before every program is displayed, the minimum age recommendation for the program is communicated visually and in sign language. Certain sexual and violent contents are necessarily restricted to night schedules, when presumably fewer children are watching.

Another procedure adopted by Brazil, but not yet put into effect, was the creation of a law in 2001, to this day not applied, which required TV sets to leave the factory with an electronic system called V-chip - a violence chip - an apparatus for blocking content, in particular, violent media content. This project was inspired by the V-chip from the United States and Canada. However, the v-chip Law, in Brazil, remains ineffective, as we await the popularization of digital TV, which will make the use of content filter easier, as they will be made into *software*.

Following is some information gathered during research that resulted in a doctorate thesis defended and approved at the Faculty of Law, University of São Paulo in 2006, published in 2011 by a leading Brazilian publishing house, entitled “Children’s and adolescents rights in regard to TV”. I believe these will help to elucidate the mechanisms by which television affects a child’s education and show the risks of excessive violence in the process of human development. Such will help to bring a better understanding of the damage that can be caused to a child.

### **Impact of television content on the habits of the youth**

Television programs offers models that serve as inspiration for those who are seeking examples to follow in life. This is true of

children. The role models become stronger as the domestic and social models weaken in their exposition of virtues and values which stimulate ethical conduct in the youth<sup>1</sup>. When there is an absence of values lived by parents and in the society close to the child and the adolescent, television fills that gap, shaping mindsets and habits without competition, as Jo Groebbel explains in his Compass Theory.

How does TV influence children to commit violence? When it gives prevalence to stimulating of impulses rather than helping the child develop his reason and will. Thus, it takes advantage of the emotional aspects, feelings and sensations, for purposes that are contrary to the child's best interest.

Education must cause pleasure-seeking impulses to be recognized and guided, by free and rational decision-making, to the values that are most suitable to the individual. This guidance depends on the combination of the ability to *perceive* the greater good (intelligence) and the *desire* (willpower) to act according to this perception, above the immediate desire for pleasure. For this ability to mature we must cultivate the *rational* dimension of the human being, as well as developing his willpower. Decisions motivated by values should prevail throughout the educational process. Children have a right to such an upbringing.

Advertising tends to condition the individual to respond to stimuli without proper assessment of values related to the attitude. The intent is to drive the person to make an immediate decision to buy something. If this affects an adult, how much more would it affect a child! Consumerism induced by advertis-

ing and broadcast programming that reach children and youth misinforms and at the same time causes injury, whenever it encourages behavior that embraces pleasure *here and now*, above any reasonable contemplation. This, following the same logic of seeking immediate personal pleasure, instils an individualistic culture, unaware to the experience of solidary values. In order to protect those who are most naive, the Consumer Code prohibits "advertising [...] that *takes advantage of the lack of judgment and experience of the child*, [...], that is, which is capable of inducing the consumer to behave in a manner that is harmful or dangerous to his/her health or safety "(CRC, art. 37 § 2).

Growing childhood obesity, for example, has become a global concern. The stimulus to eat large amounts at any given time, for example, was nurtured by television advertising and has led young people to grow weaker. The pursuit of pleasure is incited, even when contrary to a person's welfare. The repeated response to such stimuli may lead to the establishment of a habit. This leads to the vicious cycle of eating unnecessarily, purely out of a desire for pleasure. This behavior in advertising is a violation to law and ultimately hurts the child.

On the other hand, laws require that television, be it in the broadcast programming or in advertising, as mentioned before, promote the education of youth. Education means developing the virtues of harmonious coexistence and civility, to the point that, in the name of ethical and social values, those who are educated are able to withstand a desire that stems from a real and immediate need, when in a given situation a momentary sacrifice would be a better course of action: I can go without eating in order to help someone in need. When the educational process is misguided, it is possible that a person will seek pleasure *for* plea-

1. On the need for role models in education, see YEPESSTORK, Ricardo e ARANGUREN ECHEVARRÍA, Javier, Fundamentos de antropología, p. 148-151.

sure's sake, a search that tends to individualism. To be human is to seek to do *good*, with pleasure, if possible, but without pleasure, if not possible.

### Violence on TV in service of consumerism

Consumerism increases as people's appetites become baser. Advertisers have no interest or concern that such appetites be defined by the person in accordance to the values of human society. Advertising, as has been stated, aims at making people take the leap from attraction to decision, without stopping to question the true need or usefulness of a material possession within the context of a plan for greater personal fulfillment. The more pleasure oriented and less capable of in depth reflection the consumer, more vulnerable he becomes to advertising. We live in an era of people addicted to the pleasures of food, sex, and leisure, which generate large amounts of consumption. In this flurry of pleasures, people seek, but to no avail, to satisfy a craving for fulfillment. When a person is stimulated to focus too much on immediate sensory feelings of satisfaction, their progress in the process of attraction to ethical and social values is hampered. This has happened a lot with the new generations, and television has often collaborated with this process.

In other words, it does not matter, from the consumerist perspective, that a person's reasoning prevails, or even that his reasoning be well formed. Once conditioned by the stimulus to consume, the person becomes more vulnerable to advertising and easier to convince. Advertising creates the illusion that happiness depends only on the purchase of consumer goods. Thus, false needs are multiplied. A considerable part of the entertainment that is offered to teens today has the characteristic feature

of taking entertaining activities to the point of exhaustion, the exacerbation of individual pleasure afforded in an instant, disconnected from reality<sup>2</sup>.

Because of the inner mechanisms mentioned above, televised media, alongside its ability to enrich its audience, possesses the ability to damage the development of affection, intelligence, will and freedom of children and adolescents, in their formative years.

Television presents stimuli to children and youth and causes feelings and responses without commitment to educating the inclinations of sense with values that promote the integral development of personality. The content the child is exposed to influences the child's affective sphere and encourages him to experiment attitudes. For this reason what is promoted must be considered according to a pedagogical purpose.

The educational process aims to train the individual to act freely and responsibly in society. The free choice of virtue perfects the character and matures the individual. It forges citizens. The choice for vice perverts this very freedom and imprisons the person to a habit that harms him physically, psychologically, morally and socially. "The enemies of freedom today (...) are habits that are not easy to recognize because they derive from our hidden complacency"<sup>3</sup>. A complacency which has often been cultivated by television programs and advertising. This system is an aggression towards the individual in a vulnerable stage of his development.

2. Cf. YEPES STORK, Ricardo and ARANGUREN ECHEVARRÍA, Javier, *Fundamentos de antropología*, p. 449.

3. Cf. INNERARITY, Daniel. *Libertad como pasión*. Pamplona: EUNSA, 1992, p. 15.

## The high human cost brought by violence on the audience

Through television programs, children can be encouraged to imitate behaviors and lifestyles at times harmful to themselves and in flagrant conflict with the values and standards of the parents. In this sense the TV interferes with education. Thus, items I and IV of art. 221 of Brazil's Federal Constitution require the operators of televised media to give preference to educational and cultural content in their programming schedules, and respect the ethical and social values of the individual and family. Television programs, when it fails to adhere to these imperatives, abuses its powers and causes harm to the child, the family and society.

The table below brings together some of the concepts exposed. In it, the right to full instruction with themes of philosophy and anthropology, the functions of television and pedagogy. The table is useful for understanding the injuries caused by abuse or misuse of the purpose of the media.

Fields of Study	Intelligence	Will	Affection
Corresponding Philosophical Science	Gnoseology	Ethics	Aesthetics
Objects of Attraction	Truth	Goodness (Values)	Beauty
Personal Actions (examples)	To know, think, ponder	To want, deliberate, decide, love	To feel, appreciate, be delighted
Reductionist Postures	Rationalism	Volunteering	Sentimentality
Types of education directly involved	Formal education (school)	Ethical education	Arts Education
Effects of the lack of instruction	Loss of ability to understand oneself and the world	Weakening of the exercise of freedom and love: a weaker willpower, not directed towards values.	Hypertrophy caused by the pursuit of pleasure. Overvaluation of the act of having over that of being. Consumerism.
Close association with the purpose of TV	Inform	Educate	Entertain
Results of the Integral Instruction	Acquisition of information relevant to understanding themselves and the world	Development of virtues and the full exercise of freedom	Educate emotions and subject them to ethics

## Television programming and distortion of ethics

When television, be it through the programming or through advertising, encourages postures inadequate to ethical instruction, i.e., when it promotes conduct based on poor values, and associates these to some appetite for consumption (and hence,

immediate gratification), it miseducates. By distorting information to transform events into spectacles, it impairs a critical appraisal of the facts. This reflects on the habits of children and youth. Because of this power, the responsibility of television is aggravated. When the desire to sell exceeds the interest of promoting the development of children and youth, aggressions will easily impact the sensibilities of the non-emancipated individual. TV fails to fulfill its lawful obligation.

Two decades ago, Americans perceived the growth in childhood obesity to be caused by television advertising. Prompting children to eat high-calorie products, and in increasing quantities, a culture of excessive intake of high-calorie products were created, without stopping to reflect on the expediency of this attitude<sup>4</sup>. The physical damages that arose from this attitude are numerous. Moreover, they generated the habit of intemperance, which is an addiction in which the person cannot resist an immediate pleasure and ends up damaging his own personality, if not also his physical health.

Television programming should give preference to the purpose of education above inducing consumer interest (Federal Constitution of Brazil, Art. 221, I). It can eventually harmonize between both interests, without ever defeating the preferred purpose of educating, i.e., leading one to experience values appropriate to full maturation and healthy interaction in social life. Television should help make people free and contribute to the common good. That is, to simply be more human.

4. "The mature personality makes choices based on its convictions, not simply on fashion. Those who decide based solely on successful role models, are subject to massification and let others decide for them". Cf. YEPES STORK, Ricardo & ARANGUREN ECHEVARRÍA, Javier, Fundamentos de antropología, p.151.

## The violent content in the media: its impact on the educational process

Children and adolescents are sensitive to the behavior dictated on TV and easily influenced by its content. Becoming captive to the values spread insistently by the media. In this sense the media can enhance or impair development. Thus parents, exclusively responsible for the task of raising their children, may require, with the support of the legal structure, that television broadcasters show due respect to their power and duty to educate, whenever there is interference in this process.

Psychology, sociology, pedagogy and anthropology in the second half of the twentieth century, have devoted themselves to studying the phenomenon of the conformation of the human conduct based on the impact of television and have found that media violence increases aggressiveness in children and adolescents, because it serves as a behavior guide.

During the years 1996 and 1997 UNESCO developed a context study on the impact of media violence on children. The study brought together experts and field researches, coordinated by Jo Groebel, a professor at the University of Utrecht. Among the scientific theories that explain the effect of violence in the education of young people, in the *compass-theory*, by Groebel, the media serves as counselor to the youth, especially when other means of training lose strength and do not constitute a standard of conduct for the individual. The behavior of the young viewer is directed by television when he lacks solid examples to follow in family and school. According to the *compass-theory*, when an act of cruelty is shown on TV as a common attitude, the simple act of "kicking" someone, by comparison, may seem to the youth as

an almost innocent form of behavior<sup>5</sup>. In times when the family and educational institution are in crisis, the responsibility of TV is greater in the formation of the youth.

In the United States of America, the American Medical Association (AMA), prepared and published in 1996 a *Medical Guide on Violence in the Media - A Physician's Guide to Media Violence*. Among the entities that signed the Guide are: (1) American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, (2) American Academy of Pediatrics (3) American Medical Association, (4) American Psychiatric Association, (5) American Psychology Association, (6) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (7) National Institute of Mental Health, (8) The Ministry of Health.

This document brought together findings from studies of different research centers in the areas of pediatrics, psychology and psychiatry. According to the Guide, the great influence of television on children's development is due to the juvenile learning mechanism. From their earliest days, children develop skills and take in values by observing others. Babies absorb information like "sponges" and develop language by imitating their parents. They imitate models of their environment in order to learn to think, feel and act in the world<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, children assimilate values from their surroundings. They observe, imitate, and experiment attitudes. In this gradual winnowing of the attitudes they test the reactions of the public, they formulate their judgments

about what is and what is not important in life, what is valuable and what is not. Even the way children wear adult clothes illustrates how they handle their attitudes: they put on the behavior that they observe.

The time spent with electronic media - television, video, computer and electronic games, consumes the largest portion of the child and adolescent's time. One must recognize that television has come to have shared responsibility for the formation of many children and adolescents, personalities, regardless of parents' wishes. According to the Medical Guide, in 1996 the average American child spent 28 hours a week watching television, which led to the conclusion that, within one year, school age children spent twice as much time watching TV as in the classroom.

The AMA Guide found that the influence of family, religion and school on the intellectual, emotional and moral development of a child was significantly reduced and, "in terms of time spent, TV has now become the greatest influence, followed by ever growing impact of other means of communication." In 1996, the average American family kept the TV turned on for about seven hours per day and 60% of them had the TV on during meals. In addition to this, busy parents would use the television as a "nanny" of sorts, entertaining their child at low costs.

When analyzing specifically the adverse effects generated by the violent content of TV programs, the authors of the Medical Guide emphasized that the majority of producers and broadcasters were not concerned with educating, but limited their objective to the generation of profit. "TV broadcasting is paid for by advertisers who have products and services to sell. The more people watch certain programs (the higher the ratings), the more

5. Cf. GROEBEL, Jo. *Percepção dos jovens sobre a violência nos meios de comunicação de massa*. Brasília: UNESCO, 1998, p. 20.

6. Cf. WALSH, David; GOLDMAN, Larry S.; BROWN, Roger. *Physician Guide to Media Violence*. s/l: American Medical Association, 1996, p. 7. Disponível em: <<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/386/mediaviolence.pdf>> Acesso em 28 de setembro de 2005.

TV companies can charge for commercial slots”<sup>7</sup>. For this reason television seeks to capture the public’s attention and keeping it for as long as possible. Thus, TV stations began competing for audience, appealing to lower means in the process. It is at this stage that the appeal for violence comes in, as it is “highly effective in provoking a response. Violence is universally understood and valued, crossing geographical and cultural boundaries effectively, a decisive advantage in enlarging the potential market for a TV program”<sup>8</sup>.

Since the beginning of television, violence has been an ingredient for capturing the viewer’s attention<sup>9</sup>.

“The [scientific] literature is broad enough to allow for a meta-analysis, a set of statistical procedures which allows the inclusion of data from many studies. COMSTOCK and Paik media researchers undertook this meta-analysis and reported that there is a clear cause and effect relationship between exposure to media violence and aggressive attitudes and behavior. Professor Aletha Huston, University of Kansas, stated before Congress that nearly all researchers agree that there are evidences that television can cause aggressive behavior”<sup>10</sup>.

7. Cf. WALSH, David; GOLDMAN, Larry S.; BROWN, Roger, *Physician Guide to Media Violence*, p. 13.

8. Cf. WALSH, David; GOLDMAN, Larry S.; BROWN, Roger, *Physician Guide to Media Violence*, p. 13.

9. Cf. TAVARES, André Ramos. Liberdade de informação e comunicação: conteúdo, limites e deveres relacionados. *Cadernos de Direito*. Piracicaba. V..3. n. 5. p. 46-66. dez. 2003, p. 62.

10. Cf. WALSH, David; GOLDMAN, Larry S.; BROWN, Roger, *Physician Guide to Media Violence*, p. 13. On the next page of the guide a brief showcase of some of the studies that lead to such conclusions can be found.

“In 1992, Doctor Brandon Centerwall, Master of the School of Public Health,

The Medical Guide also draws attention to video games, which appeal to violence: the technology and the violence offered in games increases, many of them produced in the wake of violent popular movies. This market moves billions of dollars worldwide and is geared towards children and young people. Game creators boast of realism in the violence they simulate. In 1995 and 1996, when the Medical Guide came to the fore, the best-selling games

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University of Washington, collected demographic data from various countries and found that homicide rates doubled from 10 to 15 years after the introduction of television, even when television had been introduced at different times in each of the sites examined. The rapid increase occurred only after television arrived and cannot be explained by other social factors. A 1986 study examined the changes that occurred in a remote town in Canada, which bought television for the first time in 1973. This was many years after the rest of the country already had television. The behaviors of students in first and second grades were studied and measured objectively. The rate of fights, pushing and biting among these children grew by 160% after two years of having television sets in their homes. A 22-year longitudinal study by researchers at the University of Michigan, Leonard Eron and Huesmann L. Rowell reported a direct correlation between the amount of violent entertainment viewed by middle-class children and the subsequent anti-social aggressive behavior. Researchers found that even a child who was not aggressive by the age of 8, but viewed a substantial amount of violent TV programs, became, at age 19, more aggressive than others of the same age who had not watched the same shows. Importantly, children who were more aggressive did not initially select more violent programs than the less violent children. Analysis of the content of television shows that the average American child will witness over 200,000 acts of violence on television, including 16,000 murders before he or she reaches 18 years of age. TV programs for children contain about 26 violent acts per hour. On average, during prime time, five violent acts will be witnessed. MTV has at least one occurrence of violence in over 50% of their videos. The recent National Study on Violence on Television created a profile of television programs in a wide range of channel types. Fifty-seven percent of all programs contained violence, as well as 66% of programs for children. In programs with violence, one third had nine or more violent acts and approximately 3/4 demonstrated unpunished violence. When there was a violent action, 58% of the time the victim was not shown experiencing any pain”. Idem, p. 14-15.

were *Mortal Kombat*, *Mortal Kombat II* and *Doom*, in successively more violent versions, where the player must defeat his opponent with cruelty. “These games are particularly compelling, since users are active rather than passive, and are rewarded with higher scores by committing more mutilations”<sup>11</sup>.

Another UNESCO publication - *Children and media violence* – highlights this situation, and concludes that there is a need to curb the miseducation provided by the use of violence as a technique for holding attention to programs<sup>12</sup>. Many of today’s cartoons exploit violence in excess. Advertising and public TV shows directed at minors should not incite violent behavior. However, children and adolescents are constantly subjected to a barrage of aggressive actions, including in electronic games, bloody fights, refined cruelty, excessive exposure to scenes of savagery, cases of gratuitous outrage and contempt and foul language.

Although the official classifications for the more violent films are not successful, as would be desired, in keeping young people away from such feature films, scholars on the subject have called attention to the even worse effects of becoming lax in these ratings, which facilitates increased violent content in movies for children and youth. Thus, if on one hand the classification does not guarantee total effectiveness of control over what children and teenagers watch, on the other it somehow serves to alert parents to the nature of the content. It is also a fact, observed by certain researches, that some children grow more interested

11. Cf. WALSH, David; GOLDMAN, Larry S.; BROWN, Roger, *Physician Guide to Media Violence*, p. 15

12. Veja-se CARLSSON, Ulla; FEILITZEN, Cecilia Von (orgs). *A criança e a violência na mídia*. Brasília: UNESCO, 1999.

in films that are rated for older people, including those that are more aggressive, as they are more easily attracted by the lure of acting out of bounds<sup>13</sup>.

### Moral effects of violent media: violence and insensitivity

According to collected studies, what would be the effect of violence on the behavior and attitudes of children and young viewers?

The first impact is the stimulus to imitate *behavior*, because observation and imitation are the main forms of learning for children and adolescents. Research shows that at 14 months of age infants already imitate what they watch on TV, both the positive social behavior and the aggressive and violent behavior. “For small children this includes the imitation of comics and cartoons, which is not distinguished from real violence. Programs like *Power Rangers* and the *Ninja Turtles* are examples that demonstrate this phenomenon.”<sup>14</sup>.

Other information that influences the establishment of role models worthy of imitation for children, are the *violent heroes*.

13. Some reasons for the decreased effectiveness of the ratings of films not recommended for minors are: (1) trailers presented in mass advertising arouse curiosity and are shown at times slots accessible to audiences with minors, increasing their desire to watch such productions, (2) some parents do not select the films they take their kids to watch, regardless of ratings and reviews, (3) in many theaters public access is not restricted to those who are not of the recommended age range; (4) film rental stores, where films later arrive, do not control the withdrawal of films by those who are below the recommended age limit. See WALSH, David; GOLDMAN, Larry S.; BROWN, Roger, *Physician Guide to Media Violence*, p. 15-16.

14. Cf. WALSH, David; GOLDMAN, Larry S.; BROWN, Roger, *Physician Guide to Media Violence*, p. 16.

**Children imitate models that are presented to them**, especially those which generate greater empathy. For this reason, aggressive heroes are more harmful than violent villains.

Negative effects can also result from *rewarded violence*. The violence, when valued and shown to be effective, gives children the idea that aggressive behavior is rewarded in society. This increases imitation of this behavior in real life.

The exposure of *justified violence* is also harmful. “The violence tends to be more imitated if it contains the implicit message that it is *justifiable to resort to violence as long as you believe it is your right*. What child does not believe to be right in a situation of conflict?”<sup>15</sup>.

Several of the effects reported in the American Guide coincide with studies prepared by UNESCO<sup>16</sup>.

Another adverse effect is **the numbing, the deterioration of the child’s sensitivity**. Feelings should be affective responses to real stimuli. Frequent exposure to stimuli that provokes strong emotions without the corresponding casual reality, leads to desensitization. Constant exposure to the brutality in the media weakens the public’s ability to react in the face of violence. There is a kind of fatigue of the affective powers, which in turn require greater stimulus in order to react. Moreover, there is a decrease in personal reactions in the face of violence, which affects the increased lack of solidarity to the victims of violent attacks.

Another effect on behavior shown by doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists and pediatricians Americans, is **increased fear**. The

scenario of violence portrayed by the media turns the world into a frightening place for juvenile viewers, more impressionable than adults. Children are especially affected because they do not have the ability to discern between what is fictitious and what is real. Over time this stimulation towards fear produces the *cruel world syndrome*. The Guide warns that “exposure to a single movie, television program or news report can result in emotional depression, nightmares or other sleep-related problems in many children”<sup>17</sup>, particularly the younger ones. **Frightened children are more likely to become victims or perpetrators**.

Another distorting effect of violent media content is an **increased appetite for violence**<sup>18</sup>. The numbing increases the tolerance and appetite of the viewer for more violence: the more violence they watch, the more they want. Some of the research that supports the conclusions of the Guide demonstrates that the sequels of action movies (think of *Rambo I, II and III* or the *Terminator I, II and III* film series) almost always have more violence in previous episodes.

According to research, the more *realistic the violence*, the greater the attraction and the worse its impact on children. Police shows and sensationalistic shows, for example, hold the audience’s attention longer.

Media violence also cultivates a *culture of disrespect*.

“According to the Psychologist David Walsh, perhaps the most damaging effect of the constant state of violent entertainment aimed at children is creating and sustaining a culture of disrespect.

15. Cf. WALSH, David; GOLDMAN, Larry S.; BROWN, Roger, *Physician Guide to Media Violence*, p. 16.

16. Cf. GROEBEL, Jo. *Percepção dos jovens sobre a violência nos meios de comunicação de massa*. Brasília: UNESCO, 1998, p. 34-35.

17. Cf. WALSH, David; GOLDMAN, Larry S.; BROWN, Roger, *Physician Guide to Media Violence*, p. 16

18. Cf. WALSH, David; GOLDMAN, Larry S.; BROWN, Roger, *Physician Guide to Media Violence*, p. 17

Violent behavior in itself is the ultimate act of disrespect. For every young person who takes a gun and shoots someone, there are thousands of others who do not. But they are disrespecting each other, pushing, pulling, hitting and kicking with increased frequency. This makes it easier to cross the lines between those behaviors. The result is that we redefined the way we treat each other<sup>19</sup>.

The information brought by the Medical Guide for 1996 were restated in 2001, in another study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics<sup>20</sup>.

Uncontrolled violence and sex can strongly affect the sensitivity of the youth. Images of violence have various effects on young people and suggest the imitation of attitudes in proportion to the appearance of reality and the insistent repetition<sup>21</sup>.

Televised scenes that lead to the imitation of conduct contrary to virtues, by bringing about disproportionate and habitual effects on those who lack the resources to properly discern their ethical content, are forms of aggression, prohibited by Art.19 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Children, ratified by Brazil on September 24, 1990. Children's rights to education are violated and **they are prevented from spending time on the development of their personalities**. The broadcasting of pornography together with physical violence brings about even worse effects.

19. Cf. WALSH, David; GOLDMAN, Larry S.; BROWN, Roger, *Physician Guide to Media Violence*, p. 17

20. Cf. AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS. Committee on Public Education. Children, Adolescents, and Television. *Pediatrics*, v. 107, n. 2, p. 423-426, February, 2001.

21. Cf. SGROSSO, Gabriella Catalano. *Funzionedeimezzi di comunicazione nella formazione del minore*, p. 179.

Another challenge in the violence broadcasted in an unbalanced manner on television is in **the difficulty to differentiate between what is and is not imaginary**, a judgment that is sometimes difficult for the child, made easier when parents watch TV with their children and instruct them, something that becomes rarer every day<sup>22</sup>.

To protect the moral welfare of children and adolescents from television, Gabriella Catalano SGROSSO suggests some measures that are found in many legal texts. They are:

- 1) requiring that programs aimed directly at this public do not incite violence,
- 2) establishing different time slots on TV based on the age of the potential viewers, rating the films and only allowing their transmission if they are suitable for the respective age groups, and
- 3) providing conditions and empowering parents to exercise the authority and duty of controlling what their children watch during broadcast programming slots directed to children, as well as controlling children's access to TV so they are not surprised and harmed by programs improper to their development<sup>23</sup>. None of this is in itself new and these measures are in perfect synchrony to what was stated in previous sections, according to the findings of several U.S. professionals.

22. Cf. SGROSSO, Gabriella Catalano. *Funzionedeimezzi di comunicazione nella formazione del minore*, p. 180.

23. In 1984, the Recommendation n. R (84) 4 by the European Council recognized that parents hold the responsibility to exercise the powers and duties meant to ensure the moral and material welfare of their children, in particular, taking care of them as individuals and keeping them company regularly, ensuring their education, legal representation and the administration of their goods. See SGROSSO, Gabriella Catalano. *I FUNZIONE Mezzi di comunicazione nella formazione del minore*, p. 181.

## Notes

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