

The Differing Portrayal of Violent Crime by Collins and the Media

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In an average individual's daily life, they are presented with diverse situations which unfold in a never-ending chain of events, however, as a general rule very little violent crime is ever encountered (Collins, 2008). This concept of an individual infrequently encountering violence is generally supported by crime surveys conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and Federal Bureau of Investigation which identify that the chance of being victimized by violent crime are near record lows for the last two decades (Kneebone & Raphael, 2011). Accordingly, while the actual chances of encountering violent crime are somewhat dependent upon an individual's participation in risk-prone activities as well as the geographic area in which they live, the portrayal of violent crime in the media is in stark contrast to the theory by Collins (2008) that violent confrontations are the exception and not the rule.

Literature Review

The increasing prevalence of violence in the video gaming industry aside, the distortion of real-life violence is generally associated with the motion picture and television industries. The glorification of violent acts in films and sensationalistic reporting of violent crime in television news creates an unrealistic portrayal of violence in the minds of most individuals (Collins, 2008). However, in reality, what the majority of individuals fail to recognize is that violence is not an automatic response to a confrontational situation, but rather an emotional release of pent-up tension and fear (Collins, 2008). Nevertheless, research studies have generally concluded that exposure to violence in the media increases the tendency for aggressive behaviors (Media Violence, 2009). While this may very well be the case, the portrayal of violent crime the media is generally inconsistent with the manner in which violence erupts during everyday life (Ferguson, 2002, Collins 2008).

Violence in the Motion Picture Industry

The top-grossing motion pictures for each year of the past two decades have consistently depicted routine violence ranging from discrete acts to gross body mutilations (Jenkins, Webb, Browne, Afif & Kraus, 2005; Granderson, 2013). While motion pictures can arguably be considered to be escapist entertainment, directors are more likely to minimize the dull and mundane events of everyday life to dramatize and expound upon criminal acts involving violence (Collins, 2008). In stark contrast to this portrayal of violent crimes in movies, Collins (2008) identifies that individuals are more inclined to avoid violence rather than aggressively pursue a violent confrontation. However, the perception of a film hero or heroine is not typically thought of as an individual who avoids violent confrontations at all costs and seeks to reach a negotiated mutual resolution to a problem.

Amid government pressure to reduce violence in movies, motion picture executives have continuously opposed content regulation arguing that the industry is only providing a product that the public wants to view (Granderson, 2013). Albeit a product which not only contributes to increased aggressive behaviors but promotes the use of violence as an effective and justifiable method of resolving everyday problems (Gunter, 2008). Many films evidence examples of this premise, however, over the last twenty years, films directed by Quentin Tarnation have consistently been characterized by the gross portrayal and glorification of violent crime. In a recent interview publicizing the movie, *Django Unchained*, Tarantino reaffirmed his position that movie violence is not realistic (Alexander, 2013). However, in actuality, it is this unrealistic portrayal of violence as an instantaneous response to conflict situations that fail to depict the manner that the commission of a violent act overwhelms rational thought processes and exerts somewhat of a hypnotic influence upon an individual (Chapko & Revers, 1976; Collins, 2008).

Violence in the Television News Industry

Accepting the premise that violence in motion pictures is presented as fictional escapist entertainment, there is no denying the fact that violent crime reported by the television news media is based on real-life events. In modern history, the reporting of real-life violence in television news has markedly increased since the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Walma, 2004). In this regard, the issue with the television news media is not whether or not violence should be reported, but rather the increasingly sensationalist manner in which violence and violent crime are depicted (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001). In some instances, live television news reports are seemingly more intent upon increasing viewership rather than promoting responsible journalism when reporting violent crimes (Heath & Gilbert, 1996). Collins (2008) identifies that this active approach to journalism has made it possible to capture violence as it happens. However, the sensationalistic nature of television news typically only reports the culminating violence of a given situation and, to a greater extent, fails to provide in-depth reporting of the escalating tension and fear which preceded a violent outburst. Even when the television news media does depict the conditions which ultimately result in acts of violence, depicting the long-term escalation of tension and fear is not very engaging and, therefore, holds little in the way of entertainment value. More significantly, raw video footage is generally edited to allow subsequent reporting of an event in a more engaging and sequential manner (Collins, 2008). An example of both sides of the news media reporting spectrum was readily observable in the impending preparation and subsequent impact of Hurricane Katrina in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana. The news media reported dutifully in the days preceding the hurricane and provided live footage of the aftermath. However, while news crews had ready access to the immediate area of downtown New Orleans,

neighboring parishes where ninety percent of housing was destroyed were inaccessible due to the ravages of the flooding brought on by the hurricane and restrictions imposed by public officials (Kelman, 2007). The live video footage shown by the news media provided an insight into the dangerous and deplorable conditions in the inner city and significantly contributed to an understanding of the tension and fear experienced by victims as well as emergency responders. However, after the days of the disaster, reporting tended to focus only on the violent confrontations associated with looting and other criminal acts using edited footage that omitted in-depth insight into the situation as a whole. This reporting of a situation where only the culminating event is shown fails to accurately depict the underlying conditions or motivations that precipitated a criminal act or emotional outburst of violence (Collins, 2008).

Conclusion

Daily life as depicted by the motion picture industry and news media is seemingly filled with the existence of violent crime in every aspect of society. The motion picture industry portrays violent criminal acts in a highly edited exaggerated manner over the course of an approximate two-hour period. Due to time constraints, the news media reports violent criminal acts in a more compressed format that generally only depicts the culminating or more sensational acts of violence. The critical element of violence that is ignored, or at best minimized, by both the motion picture industry and news media is the escalating tension and fear which Collins (2008) identifies as a precursor to a violent outburst. There is no arguing that violence does exist in society. However, contrary to motion pictures and media portrayals, confrontations that escalate to the point of violence are very rare (Collins, 2008). Perhaps more significantly, not only is it unusual for an individual to be confronted by violence, most individuals employ all available means at their disposal to avoid violent confrontations (Collins, 2008).

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