Christopher J. Ferguson

Adolescents, Crime, and the Media

A Critical Analysis

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Advancing Responsible Adolescent Development

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Printed on acid-free paper

*This book is dedicated to my son, Roman,
my favorite media-viewing companion.*

About the Author

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Introduction: Crime and the Media

On April 16, 2007 Seung-Hui Cho carried out the worst school shooting in American history to date. On the Virginia Tech campus in Blacksburg, VA, Cho, a student at the university, first shot two other students in a campus dorm. The university administration appeared slow to respond and approximately 2 h later (and after mailing video tapes of himself to NBC) Cho entered Norris Hall and began a 9-min rampage that ultimately left a total of 32 people dead, and 17 wounded. Cho himself committed suicide after he appeared to have run out of targets and police were on the scene.

Soon after the massacre, before even the release of Cho's identity, several pundits began suggesting that violent video games were behind the massacre. Jack Thompson, a Florida lawyer and fervent anti-game activist, stated with conviction that video games were responsible for teaching the perpetrator (as of then unnamed) to become a murderer. Dr. Phil McGraw ("Dr. Phil") appeared on "Larry King Live" to assert that violent video games and other violent media are turning children into mass murderers. *The Washington Post* claimed Cho might have been an avid player of the violent game "Counter-Strike," but later retracted this statement when the information appeared to be faulty.

Of course, suggesting that the Virginia Tech massacre perpetrator was a player of violent video games was an evident "safe bet." Most young males play violent video games (Griffiths & Hunt, 1995). It was therefore a rather startling revelation when the Virginia Tech Review Panel (2007) charged by the governor with investigating the massacre, concluded that Cho was not a player of violent video games, and found no evidence that he had experience with video games any more violent than news media Sonic the Hedgehog. The "exoneration" of video games received considerably less attention than did initial speculation that video games were involved in inciting the Virginia Tech tragedy. Other commentators suggested that Cho may have been influenced by a violent South Korean movie *Oldboy*, due to similarities regarding the use of a hammer in that movie and Cho posing with a hammer in his videotaped manifesto. Ultimately, however, no evidence emerged that Cho had ever seen the movie (Sragow, 2007).

This was not the only controversy surrounding media and Virginia Tech. Soon after the attack, NBC aired the videotaped "manifesto" sent to them by Cho. This tape included some of Cho's rantings and included images of him posing aggressively with weapons. Relatives of victims were understandably upset and the American Psychiatric Association issued a press release requesting that media outlets cease showing the video out of concern that it could spark "copycat" crimes. Indeed, in Cho's video, he mentions the Columbine High School massacre, leading to speculation that media coverage of mass murders may convince disturbed individuals that mass murder is a potential road to fame. NBC defended their release of the tape, stating that their news team had thoroughly evaluated whether to release the video, had done so as sensitively as possible, and had gotten clearance from federal and state authorities.

The Virginia Tech massacre hits upon many of the issues that are relevant to the intersection of crime and the media. Namely:

1. Do forms of violent media such as television, music, video games, or pornography (whether violent or not) lead to the increased prevalence of certain types of violent crimes particularly among youth and young adults?
2. Are youth particularly susceptible to media effects being impressionable or impulsive?
3. Does media coverage of spectacular crimes such as school-shootings risk "glorifying" these incidents and promoting further violent acts?
4. How can the media balance FIRST-AMENDMENT rights with the public's "right to know" about violent incidents, while at the same time being sensitive to the emotional responses of crime victims and victims' families?
5. Do the media present a false impression of rampant youth violence in the USA due to extensive coverage of rare but extreme criminal events?

These questions, and their answers, form some of the integral issues at their heart of debates regarding media and crime.

Most people have opinions about these questions, one way or another, yet all of these issues remain the subject of intense debate, confusion, and uncertainty. Similarly, the public policy implications of these debates engender yet another layer of rancor. For instance, if it were true that violent media caused violent behavior in youth, how would the US government balance the competing needs of protecting its children with also protecting First-Amendment rights? If news media are guilty of overemphasizing violent crimes among youth, giving people a false impression of their commonality, should news media refuse to cover these events? Does the public believing that youth crime is more common than it actually is lead to unnecessary fear of crime, fear of youth themselves, or even irrational and ineffective legislative efforts to combat nonexistent crises? Can a news outlet reasonably be expected to discontinue such coverage if viewers then switch to a "more interesting" news outlet that still covers violent crimes among youth?

In this inaugural chapter of the book I discuss some of the basic issues present in debates about media and crime. This introductory chapter will present some of the basic social, political, and scientific issues that inform, or sometimes misinform,

discussions of media, crime, and adolescence. This chapter will provide a basic framework for the remainder of the book.

1.1   The Politics of Science: The Politics of Violence

A central theme of this book is that politics, science, emotion, and control are all virtually indistinguishable in the field of crime in the media. In this research field, tensions run high, politics and science intersect, and it becomes a Herculean task to attempt to separate fact from fiction, truth from hyperbole, science from agenda. This is particularly true where youth are involved, for most of us have a natural inclination to wish to protect children and adolescents from harm. I'll state upfront that I do not believe that it is humanly possible to write a truly "objective" book about youth and the media. Anyone who suggests that their view is the "objective" one is simply being dishonest with themselves, if not the public and scientific community.

Naturally, media companies such as video game companies and news corporations downplay their role in promoting negative behaviors such as youth violence or fears of crime including misinformation about crime trends among youth. This is nothing new, of course; all manner of industries from cigarettes to oil companies to pharmaceuticals have downplayed research suggesting that their products were harmful. One unique facet about media, however, is that some segments of the media, such as the news, appear to eagerly cover "the sky is falling" reports regarding the effects of other facets of the media such as video games. For example, one recent study found that media violence such as the video game *Doom* and other pop culture elements(such as the Gothic subculture) were the second most often discussed cause of the Columbine shooting in articles published in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004). By contrast less than 1 % of news stories focused on the responsibility and moral character of the perpetrators themselves. The general public is not always aware that there are considerable weaknesses in some aggression research which suggests links between violent media and aggression in youth. For instance, when people learn of a study suggesting a relationship between violent television and childhood aggression, most individuals likely picture kids hitting or biting each other. Many would likely be surprised to learn that these behaviors are seldom studied in media violence research; rather the kids (or adults, often college students) are popping balloons, filling in missing letters to make words, finishing story stems, or giving each other nonpainful white noise as part of a game. In the absence of data suggesting that these behaviors correlate highly with the sorts of "real world" aggressive behaviors among youth that people are concerned about, we just do not know how meaningful this kind of data is.

As noted above, media companies may have a vested interest in promoting beliefs about their products exonerating them from harm. Most people would naturally be suspicious of research funded by media companies. But they are not the only stakeholders with an axe to grind. One of the things to emerge from the recent US Supreme Court regarding violent video games, *Brown v EMA* (2011) which will be

discussed later in the book, was that much of the research used to claim that violent games had been funded by anti-media lobbying groups. This mixing of science and advocacy is worrisome for the objectivity of the data (Grisso & Steinberg, 2008).

This volume will introduce the study of media, crime, and youth research from the "ground floor." As a media and violence researcher myself, I present the research as it is, not a glossed-over presentation of what some scientists, politicians, media companies, or special interests groups would like it to be for their "message" nor necessarily exonerating the media from any questionable motives or practices. The goal is for readers to become better informed to make up their own minds about the ways in which media and crime interact with one another. Whenever possible I would encourage readers to seek out primary sources and read arguments from all sides of the debates on crime and the media.

1.2 The Causes of Youth Violence

Understanding the origins of human violence—and perhaps more poetically human evil—is a central interest for many individuals and one which makes majors in criminology, criminal justice, sociology, and psychology popular on university campuses. In understanding why the science of youth, media, and crime is so politicized it may be helpful to understand that the science of violence is itself highly politicized. Kuhn (1970) argued that dogma develops in all sciences, although social science may have greater difficulties rising above dogma than other sciences because the "probability statistics" used in the social sciences, and definitions of "cause" based on these statistics (as opposed to the consistent results expected in the physical and natural sciences), make it difficult to establish clear criteria for when a theory ought to be discarded. The end result is a theoretical mansion of undead theories that continue to haunt social science long past their natural life span (Ferguson & Heene, 2012). The social sciences have gone through several major dogmatic waves, from Darwinism, to Psychoanalysis, to Radical Behaviorism to Social Learning Theory—and may be gradually on the path back to Darwinism. Nonetheless the adherents of each dogmatic step have been loathe to relinquish the theoretical models in which they have invested. This is part of human nature. However, the result is one pillar of the politicization of violence research: it is an internal pillar from within the scientific community itself, resting on the adherence to cherished beliefs at the expense of empiricism (McIntyre, 2006).

In the social sciences, research on causes of behavior in the latter part of the twentieth century focused mainly on external causes of behavior, mainly learning and socialization. It is not uncommon to hear it suggested that males are "socialized" to be aggressive, whereas females are "socialized" to be less aggressive and perhaps nurturing. A look at the animal kingdom suggests that this aggression difference between the sexes in fact is quite common, with males routinely engaging in aggression over the competition for females and territory (Morris, 1999). The argument from the majority of social science, however, has essentially been that

human have risen above evolution and instinctual behavior, only to come to the same behavioral patterns as our mammalian cousins through the process of social-ization. Several scholars have argued that such perspectives are indicative of the "Standard Social Science Model" (SSSM) which postulates the brain as a general-purpose learning device, devoid of content at birth, with behavior solely a product of subsequent learning (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). Pinker (2002) has argued that this resistance to evolutionary theory is dogmatic to the social sciences and has few parallels in the natural sciences.

This denial of biological and evolutionary influences on behavior can be seen in regards to the study of violent behavior in the social sciences. For instance, until recently, the American Psychological Association's pamphlet on youth violence (American Psychological Association, 1996) stated that "There is no gene for vio-lence. Violence is a learned behavior, and it is often learned in the home or the com-munity from parents, family members, or friends. Children are more aggressive and grow up more likely to become involved in violence—either as a victimizer or as a victim—if they witness violent acts." This pamphlet has since been removed, although a similar pamphlet by the APA (2011) continues to claim violence is solely learned. This latter pamphlet has gone uncorrected despite behavioral genetics research indicating that approximately 50 % of the variance in violent and antisocial behavior can be attributed to genetics (Ferguson, 2008a; Rhee & Waldman, 2002), and that several genes have been implicated in violent behavior (Caspi et al., 2002; Retz, Retz-Junginger, Supprian, Thome, & Rosler, 2004; Thapar et al., 2005). By contrast, as noted in a recent Surgeon General's Report (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2000) the effects of media violence and even family violence on violent behavior among youth are comparatively weak. Certainly, results from behavioral-genetics research come with limitations, such as the generalizability of twin samples, and the homogeneity of adoptive families (see Joseph, 2002 for a critical view). Yet equally certainly there is good research from the neurosciences on the biology of violence. The mismatch between social science's understanding of violence and the available data can best be understood in the framework of Kuhnian scientific dogma.

Genes do not operate in a vacuum. They respond to environmental pressures. For instance one study demonstrated that males who had a specific gene allele on the X-chromosome and who had also been neglected as youth were at greatest risk for antisocial behavior (Caspi et al., 2002). This result fits with the general "nature/nurture compromise" which posits that genes and environment interact to produce behaviors, though this still leaves us with the question of which environmental elements—which can include brain injuries, infections, the physical environment, mating pressures, dominance hierarchies, and more traditional "learning" factors such as family environment and the media—are most important with regard to their interaction with genetics in the production of violent behavior.

Unfortunately, we still do not really know the specific mechanisms by which genes and culture interact. Is culture merely a reflection of underlying genetic dif-ferences in populations historically isolated by geography? If so, cultural differ-ences, including in violent behaviors, may be akin to the differences in beak size

and shape among Galapagos finches; specific environmental pressures have unique influences on underlying population genetics, but culture itself is an effect, not a cause. From this perspective, media violence (and other cultural factors) are results, not causes. We may be attracted to violence because our genes cause us to seek out aggression as a result of aggressive behaviors having been evolutionarily adaptive in past environments (Ferguson, 2008b).

The contrasting perspective is that culture—or socialization—retains unique influential ability, that it is an extra-individual force, separate from population genetics and the behaviors of individuals. Cultural factors, such as socialization influences or the media, can uniquely cause us to behave in certain ways, whether we have gene alleles associated with those behaviors or not.

It can, of course, be quite difficult to differentiate between these forces, genes and socialization (I'll generally avoid the word "environment" as environment includes many nonsocialization influences as mentioned above). For instance, if it is true that the children of abusive parents are more likely to grow up to become violent adolescents (although the recent Surgeon General's report concluded that even this effect is fairly weak; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000) did these children learn to become violent due to exposure to parental violence, or did their parents pass down gene alleles that promote violence to their children? It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish genetic from family learning influences.

1.3 The Misperception of Crime Rates

One area where the media seems to have had a fairly pronounced effect is not so much on human behavior, but with regard to information. Many people may rely on the media as their prime source of information about crime data. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 present data from the federal government (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007) regarding general violent crime rates in the USA over time.

Violent crimes in the USA tend to travel in waves, with previous spikes in the late 1800s and 1930s (Ferguson, 2002). As can be seen in the figures, violent crimes began to increase in the 1960s (a time of social upheaval) and peaked in the 1980s (at the time of a crack cocaine epidemic) and early 1990s before declining substantially. Violent crimes overall are currently at their lowest level since the early 1970s with felonious homicides (that is, murder and nonnegligent manslaughter) at their lowest level since the mid-1960s. In the most recent year data is available as I write this (2010) violent crimes dropped a further 12 % (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011). Rates for youth violence specifically follow these trends. This data *is* reported in the media. However, it is only one piece of information against a backdrop of local and national news that focus on violent crimes, wars, and disasters in general. Although news organizations may not explicitly state that violent crime is on the rise, humans tend to be poor processors of information. The violent crime rates—boring numbers—may get mentioned only once in a while, whereas more powerful images of police responding to violent criminal scenes may lead viewers to
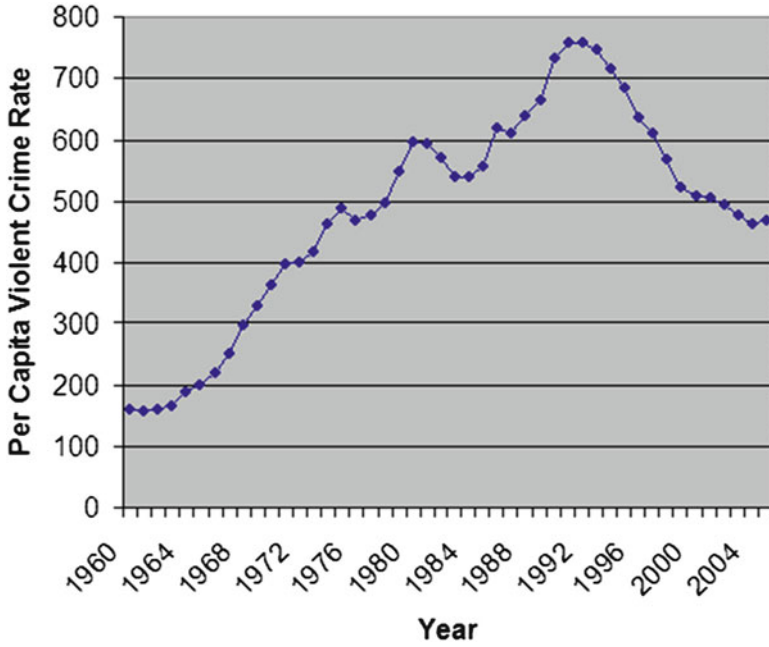
Fig. 1.1 Per capita violent crime rates in the U.S. by year
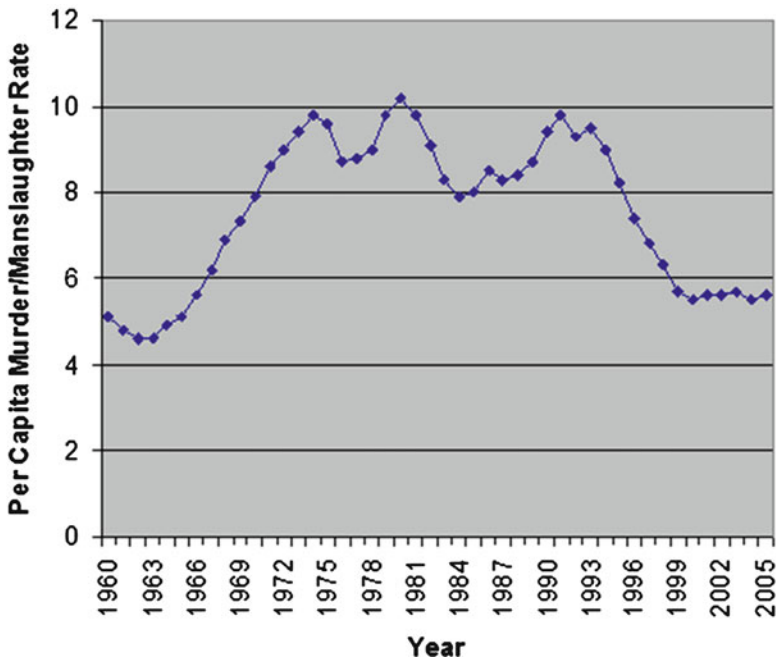
Fig. 1.2 Per capita murder/nonnegligent manslaughter rates in the USA by year

unconsciously conclude that violent crimes are more common than they actually are. For instance, I live in the city of Laredo, TX, which is a relatively low to average city in regards to violent crime rates. In 2006, following a dispute in a parking lot, one young male with an assault rifle chased another young male into a Target store filled with shoppers. Although no one ultimately was hurt, this incident received a considerable amount of local news attention, prompting many people to wonder if they were safe while shopping. Yet the incident was an exceedingly rare one, and none like it has since occurred. Thus public perceptions and the reality of violent crime can often diverge significantly.

I hear many people complain about this state of affairs. Criminologists, not surprisingly, complain about how the media has misled viewers about crime rates by hyping violent crimes. Many nonscientists also complain about news coverage of crime. Some of the complaints echo those of criminologists, essentially involving news media unnecessarily stoking fear in the public. Others lament that news media focus on the negative and not on positive news stories, though several news outlets have tried and failed to promote more positive views. I suspect that our taste for violent news—and indeed violent media more generally—can be traced at least as far back as the Romans who arranged spectacular games around bloody gladiator fights and the execution of criminals. Humans crave violent media, and the media obliges.

We thus have something of a love–hate affair regarding media violence and the general public. The vast popularity of violent themes in media ranging from books (including the Bible) through music, television, and video games up through the news media, attests to our cultural (and almost certainly cross-cultural) appetite for violence (Kottler, 2011). At the same time, at least in the USA, many of us are ashamed by that fascination. The media reminds us of our own darkest impulses, the violent, cruel, and butchering side of our species. We do not like to see that side in ourselves, we do not want to be on the receiving end of it by others, and we like to think that our species can rise above it. We also may be prone to seeing youth as "vulnerable" to negative influences even if we do not detect those influences within ourselves.

Most violence researchers, whether they feel that media violence is a cause or a symptom of violent crime, agree that violence is multivariate in nature and brought on by multiple factors. At the individual level, those may include genes, brain injuries, infections, personality style, family environment, abuse history, endocrine functioning, and peer groups. At the society level, poverty, policing, drug abuse and trafficking, social cohesion, media violence, and community programs among others all may play some role. Many of the variables I have listed at both the individual level (genes, personality, family patterns, endocrine functioning) and social level (poverty, drug patterns, social cohesion) are difficult if not impossible to change, or pose significant ethical issues regarding possible interventions (i.e. do we want government intruding upon our families or, indeed, our genetics?). If we believe that the media contributes either to our fears of violence or, indeed, to violence itself, is it possible to believe that regulating, or indeed, censoring the media may result in at least some reduction of youth violence or at least unnecessary fear of violence? Whatever your feelings may be from a moral, constitutional, or legal standpoint, these are not unreasonable questions from a scientific standpoint.

1.4   What Is Adolescence?

This book focuses primarily on issues related to adolescence. Adolescence is generally viewed as a developmental period between the onset of puberty and the cultural *age of majority* although its use historically and across cultures has varied considerably (Williams & Butcher, 2011). In a recent review Feixa (2011) admirably traces the development of the concept of adolescence across historical and cultural epochs, noting the general plasticity of the term. Many premodern societies did and still do have rights of passage marking the transition from childhood into adulthood, wherein a distinct period of adolescence is deemphasized. Complex ancient societies such as the Greeks tacitly acknowledged a period of *youth* marked by education, apprenticeship and, in the case of monarchies, regencies for monarchs who had not yet reached an age of majority (often 18 even then).

Ariès (1973, as cited in Feixa, 2011) developed the notion that medieval societies did not distinguish between adulthood and adolescence (or even childhood) based in part upon the iconographic depictions of children in art as miniature adults (such as the various portraits of a child Christ with artificially small heads for an infant). Although this view continues to be repeated as a cultural meme, Feixa argues that this was mistaken as many institutions for youth existed in medieval societies, adolescence was considered a period of apprenticeship and regencies remained common.

G. Stanley Hall (1904) is generally credited with beginning the modern scientific study of adolescence. Among other things he is noted for portraying adolescence as a time of storm and stress, a view which remains influential to this day. Adolescence, now typically considered a period ranging roughly from 13–18 (regardless of the onset of puberty which in modern society children may occur prior to this age range). Over the course of the twentieth century numerous laws in Western society were enacted to protect adolescents from various forms of exploitation. So too the twentieth century saw upheavals in the *culture wars* in which older adults disparaged youth culture ostensibly under the guise of "protecting" youth. The protection and legal segregation of adolescence remains a critical component of our cultural history.

In the early portion of the twentieth century, an individual who exited adolescence was typically expected to assume adult roles: get married, begin an occupation, have children, etc. By the second half of the twentieth century it was noted that many such individuals experienced what might be thought of as a *failure to launch*. That is to say, adolescence seemed to be increasingly extended into the early 20s, at very least. Many youth went to university, delayed marriage and children, and ended up moving back into their parents' homes. This observation has led to a newer concept worth noting called *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000). The concept of emerging adulthood is generally viewed as a further developmental stage occurring after adolescence. The increased acceptance of terms such as *adolescence, early adulthood, young adulthood* (the developmental stage following emerging adulthood) point to our development as an ongoing process in which individuals are not easily classified by a specific age.

Juvenoia. Juvenoia, a term coined by David Finklehor (2010) refers to a societal tendency to view adolescents and youth culture with suspicion and hostility. This corresponds fairly neatly to the age old "generation wars" which, as we'll see in a subsequent chapter, can be traced back at least to the Greeks. Generally in juvenoia, older adults (who may have forgotten their own rambunctious adolescence) come to view the current generation of youth as more deviant, less civil, more rebellious, and less empathic than they themselves were. Politicians, scholars, and activists alike may contribute to juvenoia, exacerbating fears of "harm" to juveniles while simultaneously disparaging them.

Juvenoia is closely related to *Moral Panic Theory* (Cohen, 1972; Ferguson, 2010; Gauntlett, 2005) which suggests that societies tend to construct false concerns of harm to segments of the population (often youth) which are then blamed on "folk devils" that the society morally disapproves of. Examples such as panics over Satanic Ritual Abuse, juvenile super predators (Muschert, 2007) and false beliefs in a wave of female juvenile violence (Office of Justice Programs, 2008) fall within this category. The debates over media and video game violence specifically, in which a proclaimed rise in youth violence and aggression failed to materialize have also been viewed through the lens of Moral Panic Theory (Ferguson, 2010; Gauntlett, 2005). Finkelhor himself raises it in the context over current concerns regarding the internet and cyberbullying.

Juvenoia is an important concept to understand for two reasons. First juvenoia can influence not only society but the way in which science is conducted. Scientists are mainly older adults, of course, and given the weaknesses of social science and the statistical methods employed, it is very easy for preexisting beliefs to be reified. Second the language of juvenoia is typically masked by professed concern for youth. The folk devil in question, whether the internet, video games, gangsta rap, etc., which is morally repugnant to older adults is repackaged as "harmful" to youth. Thus the moral nature of these debates may be masked as if a scientific one or public health concern. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it has been observed that scholars have regularly proclaimed the harmful nature of all manner of youth culture, only to be demonstrated as wrong (Kutner & Olson, 2008). Nonetheless, as in the *Brown v EMA* case, such efforts typically involve restricting the rights, free speech, or access to youth culture of adolescence under the guise of "protecting" them.

Are Adolescents Intrinsically Irrational? Beginning with Hall's "storm and stress" view of adolescence (and perhaps extending even further back than that) adolescence has typically been viewed as a period of irrational behavior. In fairness, as a simply facet of youth, adolescents are less experienced than older adults and thus may not benefit from accumulated years of wisdom. However, whether explained as a function of hormones or incomplete brain development, the alleged inadequacies of adolescence are often presented as a biological limitation.

In recent years, much of this discussion has focused on brain imaging studies of youth which have purported to demonstrate evidence that the brains of youth are underdeveloped and thus adolescents may not be fully rational in their decision making. These views were arguably influential in the Roper v Simmons US Supreme Court case in which capital punishment for adolescents was ruled unconstitutional (DeLisi, Wright, Vaughn, & Beaver, 2010). Arguably one of the biggest proponents

for the notion that youth are particularly prone to risk-taking is Lawrence Steinberg (Steinberg, 2007). Steinberg is a well respected (including by this author) psychologist, although he has been quoted stating in juvenoia-esque sense "Well, if kids are as smart as adults, why do they do such dumb things?" (Kotulak, 2006). Steinberg and others argue that imaging studies of the brain show that cognitive control systems, particularly in the prefrontal cortex continue to develop into early adulthood.

However these views have not been without controversy. Males (2009) has been highly critical of the work of Steinberg and others, suggesting such claims of *biodeterminism* regarding adolescent brains and risk taking does not match well with data on youth behavior. For instance Males notes that homicide and accidental death rates are lower for adolescents than for adults, somewhat contradicting the risk-taking theory. Brain imaging studies have themselves been criticized for "voodoo statics" that may be inflating purported relationships between brain imaging and behavior (Vul, Harris, Winkielman, & Pashler, 2009). However, other scholars have vigorously defended such studies (Lieberman, Berkman, & Wager, 2009). Nonetheless the biological underpinnings for the notion of an irrational risk-taking brain remain controversial.

The notion of adolescent risk taking, often used to imply that adolescents are less cognitively sophisticated than adults has seen some revision lately. In an article in National Geographic, Doobs (2011) notes that the differences between adults and adolescents may have less to do with the relative sophistication of their brains and more to do with adaptive responses to differing pressures as each age. For example, youth may drive fast on the highway, an activity which adults perceive as dangerous and risky and thus maladaptive. Thus to the adult eye (and remember most scientists are older adults), such behavior appears to be maladaptive and undesirable. However, as Doobs argues, such behavior may actually function to increase the social status of the teen relative to his peers, and thus is adaptive. Gardner and Steinberg (2005), for instance, find that adolescent risk taking occurs mainly in the presence of same-age peers. Thus youth drive fast, not because they are unaware of the risks, but because the social benefits outweigh those risks. So although driving fast does carry some risks, on the whole the benefits of taking those risks are sufficient enough to warrant them from an evolutionary perspective. This is similar to explanations of greater risk-taking among males than females across all ages (Morris, 1999). In other words, the behavior of adolescents involves relatively rational and adaptive responses to the specific social pressures of adolescents. Because these social pressures no longer apply to adults, adults fail to understand them. The old cliché argument employed by adults for decades "If your friends jumped off a bridge, would you do it to?" probably reflects this fundamental misunderstanding of the different social realities in which adults and adolescents live.

1.5   The Chapters Ahead

This book is about how social scientists have attempted to answer these questions, and the data they have produced. Its goal is to cut past the agendas both of anti-media advocates and the media companies themselves, and examine from the

ground up, based on the data we have available, what we can and what we can't say about the relationship between media and crime. How do we measure aggression, and what challenges do researchers face in applying findings from these measures to real-world acts of violence and aggression? In what ways have trends in media consumption appeared to influence adolescent behavior in the real world? Are there groups of individuals who may be "at risk" for negative outcomes (e.g., violence and fear) as a result of violent media viewing? Does the media actually help to train legions of "super criminals" who have learned to use better techniques and strategies for crime as the result of watching detective or crime shows? It is my hope that this book will leave the reader with a more sophisticated and, indeed, critical understanding of these issues that they can apply to real-life situations ranging from interpreting research on media and crime to careers in criminal justice, policy making, or the legal field.

This book will begin first by examining the history of violence in the media. What parallels can we draw between modern violent media and the public battles of gladiators in Roman coliseums? The next several chapters of the book will examine the way in which youth and crime are presented in the media. Are there really a set of children and adolescents who are evil at the core (e.g., *Omen, The Good Son*)? Is youth violence and delinquency really worse than ever? Does cyberbullying represent a new epidemic of aggression and cruelty among youth?

The second half of the book will examine media effects on behavior, particular youth violence. Specific attention will be paid to television, video games, and pornography, as these forms of media were particularly scrutinized in the latter twentieth century. However other forms of media such as music, comic books, and even violent passages from the Bible will be considered. Does violence in these forms of media really contribute to youth violence? Are school shooters all addicted to violent video games? If we should ban violent video games from children and teens, should we also ban violent Bible passages if these are shown to have similar effects on aggression? Finally, we will consider censorship and First Amendment issues as they relate to violent media and public concerns.

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Chapter 2
A History of Violence in the Media

One of the earliest pieces of literature is the Epic of Gilgamesh, early Sumerian versions of which date back as far as 2000BCE or so (Hallo & Simpson, 1971). This tale follows the legend of the Sumerian king Gilgamesh who, like the King Arthur legends later, appears to have been based loosely on a historical figure. Gilgamesh, according to the tale, is a powerful and harsh ruler who, among other things, forces new brides to have sex with him on their wedding night. The gods send a wild-man, Enkidu, to pester Gilgamesh in punishment, and ultimately the two fight violently, ending in something of a draw. The two men become friends and Enkidu acts as a positive influence on Gilgamesh, softening his more vicious instincts. They proceed to battle demons, tangle with Ishtar, the cruel goddess of love and war whose sexual advances Gilgamesh declines, and search for the secrets of immortality. The story is rife with unapologetic violence and sexual themes. *Gilgamesh* is perhaps the best known of the early Sumerian legends that have survived, but themes of heroic adventure, violence, sex, rape, and cruelty are not uncommon among other Sumerian stories (Hallo & Simpson, 1971). Exactly what the Sumerian people thought of these violent stories is not well known, but their survival alone gives testament to their popularity. Things, for the media, have arguably not changed very much since the time of *Gilgamesh*.

The twentieth century saw an unprecedented explosion of mass media. Prior to the late 1800s, the only form of mass media was literature. Before 1439 with the invention of the printing press, even literature was expensive and difficult to come by. The "average" person through most of history largely had to get by with music and oral storytelling or live action media such as plays or even gladiatorial combats. One might argue that "mass media" at times experienced a little flourish, such as during the proliferation of theaters in Greek civilization, or Coliseum games in Rome. Yet it is safe to say that mass media, in the sense that we have come to know it today, is a comparatively modern phenomenon.

Nonetheless, modern mass media differs from its historical antecedents more with regard to technology than in content. Across history and across cultures, the stories which people have used to entertain one another, whether written or oral,

were saturated with violent and sexual themes, sometimes unapologetically covering topics such as rape or incest that might seem taboo in modern Western society (Trend, 2007).

This chapter concerns itself with the history of violent media. It is sometimes insinuated that modern culture is unusually awash with violent entertainment. In evaluating the modern sociology of media violence and societal reactions to it, it is helpful to understand the history of such phenomena. This chapter is designed to help the reader understand trends in media and mass media consumption through human history.

2.1   Violence in Premodern Media: The Greeks and Romans

Psychology has arguably been at the forefront of efforts to link violent mass media with societal violence, particularly among youth and adolescents. It is perhaps somewhat ironic then, that psychology's "mascot" myth, of *Psyche and Cupid* is a tale rife with themes related to cruelty and sexuality if not outright violence with two young people at the center. The Greek myths in general featured gods and heroes who were deeply flawed, violent, avaricious, and sometimes cruel. Popular stories such as Homer's still commonly studied *Illiad* and *Odyssey* were thickly populated with heroic acts of violence, was well as cruel vicious acts. Greek plays by authors such as Sophocles and Euripides oftentimes included themes of violence, sex, and betrayal, and such plays were widely popular and continue to be produced to the current day.

From this time period we see some of the first negative commentaries on media violence, particularly that in plays. Plato appears to have suggested a ban on plays and poetry out of concern that these art forms could corrupt young minds and cause great harm (Griswold, 2004), although speaking in his dialogues he may only have been portraying common beliefs rather than necessarily endorsing them. Plato seems to be one of the first to put in writing the often-repeated conclusion that children and adolescents, in particular, are unable to distinguish reality from fiction. His mentor, Socrates, appears to have considered even the alphabet itself to be potentially corrupting to the young mind (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967). By contrast Aristotle (who oftentimes seemed to disagree with Plato) argued that music, poetry, plays, and art could have a cathartic effect on the viewer, in effect, causing them to become less aggressive (Aristotle, 2004/350BC). From these two thinkers of antiquity we can already see the two main lines of reasoning regarding media violence. One argues that exposure to media violence can have a harmful effect in promoting aggression and poor mental functioning among youth, whereas the other argues that media violence exposure might lead to relaxation and venting of aggression.

In comparison to modern mass media such as violent movies or video games, the Greek tragedies, despite their dark themes, may seem somewhat tame. The graphic nature of violent acts was limited by the practical realities of putting on a live play if nothing else. However, the Romans infused a new element into violent mass media by presenting popular and well-attended games that involved gladiatorial

combats, which sometimes, although not always, ended with the death of one gladiator, the slaughter of wild beasts, and the vicious public execution of criminals, oftentimes using creative and cruel means (Wells, 1995). Such games were enormous public spectacles, with spectators coming from all social classes and ages. During the time of Nero, the games were altered to include plays, in which condemned men would play the part of characters that died in the play. During the death scene, these individuals would actually be slain (Coleman, 1990). Musicians playing accompanying scores, ticket scalpers, and product endorsements by the gladiators were all common elements of the games. The Roman games take media violence to a level unprecedented in history and rarely seen since. Seldom has the blatant spilling of real blood been permitted solely for the purposes of entertainment.

Not surprisingly, the Roman games were not without their critics. The Roman orator and playwright Seneca argued that attending the games increased aggression and greed (Seneca, 64). Christian writers also wrote about the games. Christian authors such as Tertullian (200) and Augustine (397) comment regarding their potential negative influences on the moral integrity of spectators. Indeed, as Christian moralizing became an early and consistent source of criticism regarding the moral effects of media violence, it is tempting to consider how these religious and cultural beliefs continue to guide the debate on media violence into the present day, particularly as most research on the subject continues to be produces primarily within the Christian-majority USA (see Cumberbach, 2008).

Romans also appear to have continued to believe that speech could have a corrupting influence on youth. For instance one Carneades of Cyrene was expelled from Rome for giving a speech arguing against the virtue of justice, the point of which seems to have been that any position might be convincingly argued no matter how absurd. This point, lost on the crowd, resulted in his immediate ejection from the city in fear that he might have corrupted the youth to engage in immoral behavior (Pagden, 2008).

2.2   Medieval Literature and the Printing Press

With the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the huge organized games and public theatrical displays become somewhat less common. Yet the production of Western literature ranging from *Beowulf* (approximately eighth- to ninth century) to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of England* (1138, featuring the King Arthur legends) to Dante's *Inferno* (1302) to the plays of Shakespeare continued to demonstrate continued human interest in subjects related to violence. The re-emergency of popular plays in the later Middle Ages represents an essential return to the Grecian variant on mass media. Although there was no clear revival of the Roman games, the popularity of jousting tourneys or public executions (which were considered public entertainment) may have largely filled the same role, if in a less organized manner. Public outcries regarding jousting in particular came from the Roman Catholic Church (National Jousting Association, 2008) although these concerns appeared to focus on a variety of issues, from the potential for loss of life to their distracting knights from crusades. Despite attempts to ban the sport, it remained popular into the seventeenth century.

A considerable amount of concern arose over what today would likely be considered an unusual source of alarm: the Christian Bible. The invention of movable type in 1452 allowed for mass printing. Coupled with the brewing religious reformations, a market quickly emerged for non-Latin translations of the Bible. Previously the Bible was only available in Latin, and typically restricted to clergy. Translations of the Bible had been banned as early as 1199 by Pope Innocent III in response to several heretical movements. For instance the English translated Bible produced by William Tyndale (1524) was criticized for purposely mistranslating several words in order to promote anti-clericalism (e.g., anti-Roman Catholicism). Tyndale was ultimately burned at the stake for his translation (Daniell, 2004). It was thought that these translated Bibles would promote moral decrepitude, primarily by turning people away from the Catholic Church toward a heretical view of an individualized relationship with God. Translation, sale, or possession of banned Bibles was oftentimes met with severe penalties, including death.

Case Study: William Tyndale

William Tyndale (1494–1536) was an English biblical reformer and important figure in the Protestant reformation. Tyndale was openly opposed to the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy, believing many Catholic doctrines, such as the admiration of the pope and saints, and the intercession of the church and supremacy of the pope to be heretical to the origins of Christianity. Naturally, this did not endear Tyndale to Catholic hierarchy in England, which was still Catholic during most of Tyndale's life.

Finding much opposition in England, Tyndale traveled to Germany, where Martin Luther's Reformation ideas were influential. There he began his translation of the Bible, beginning with the New Testament into English. These translations were considered heretical and it was alleged that Tyndale purposefully misinterpreted the original texts that he was translating from in order to support his Reformation views of Christianity. Debate continues to rage in regard to the source of Tyndale's original texts and the accuracy of his translations. Henry VIII of England attempted to have Tyndale hunted down, but Tyndale had many supporters in Germany and remained in hiding.

Tyndale was ultimately betrayed by a colleague, possibly to agents of the English king. He was imprisoned in modern-day Belgium, put on trial for heresy and convicted. He was sentenced to be strangled to death. On October 6, 1536, the sentence was carried out and his body then burned at the stake. Nonetheless the influence of his translations continued, having considerable impact on the later King James Bible in English.

The creation of the printing press and movable type with continued improvements over ensuing years made literature available to greater and greater numbers of people, as books became cheaper to print and sell. Literature became, in effect,

the prime source of "mass media." As literature became more common it became more varied, including forms designed to appeal directly to the prurient interest of readers in sex and violence, rather than aiming for any particular literary value. By the sixteenth century "true crime" books began to appear which gruesomely detailed the events of crimes as well as the brutal executions of the offenders (Trend, 2007). These books appear to have satisfied both a public attraction to violent depictions as well as providing a sense of justice and warning to would-be offenders. During the same time period some complained that popular folk songs presented criminals as heroes (Pearson, 1983).

By the seventeenth century books emerged that began to resemble novels. One of the first, and most well-known, is *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, something of a comic piece about a country gentleman who descends into fantasy, believing he is a medieval knight. Though certainly popular then as now, *Don Quixote* was met with a certain disdain about the quality and impact of chivalric romance novels (Kirschenbaum, 2007). By the eighteenth century we begin to see the introduction of the modern novel (Trend, 2007). This time period also sees a new influx of concerns regarding the impact of literature on reader morality. In 1776 one Joseph Hanway, an English philanthropist, stated that newspapers and other "debasing amusements" were responsible for, as he put it, "the host of thieves which of late years has invaded us" (Cumberbach, 2008). The publication of Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela* in 1741 was condemned for its "lewd" content and for assaulting the principles of virtue (Trend, 2007). Through the nineteenth century, novels continued to be a source of concern both with regard to quality and potential impact on readers, particularly women readers who, it was thought, could not adequately distinguish reality from fiction (Kirschenbaum, 2007).

Common and cheap forms of literature increased in popularity in the nineteenth century with "dime novels," cheap oftentimes lurid works that were questioned with regard to their quality as well as their impact. Similarly, "penny dreadfuls," essentially early comic books, begin to emerge, many of them hinging upon violent or horror themes. *Varney the Vampire* (see Prest, 1847 for an archived copy) was one of the early popular stories, following the exploits of a vampire who loathed his own condition. These penny dreadfuls were seen as increasing immorality, particularly among young boys (Cumberbach, 2008).

Concern over the effects of media typically arose from "elite" groups such as politicians and academics, who would use media forms to attempt to explain social problems (Trend, 2007), often implying that the past, pre-media, periods in history were comparatively problem free. It should be noted, however, that archaeological evidence suggests that violence was rather common in even prehistorical societies devoid of modern media (McCall & Shields, 2008). Increasingly, social commentators began to posit the effects of media such as novels and newspapers as being responsible for a disastrous wave of violence and immorality particularly among the young (Trend, 2007). Oftentimes nonelite groups, such as low socioeconomic status (SES) working class children and immigrant groups were seen as particularly vulnerable to the pernicious effects of media violence. Scientific and medical terms were adopted more and more often by social critics to equate their moral beliefs

with scientific reasoning and infuse greater immediacy to the potential problems of violent media. Concerns about media also came to focus increasingly on their alleged affects on young minds in particular.

2.3   The Advent of Motion Pictures

The late nineteenth century saw the advent of film media, now making visual depictions of violence available to mass audiences. In particular, film tricks began to make possible a host of gruesome effects that were difficult to reproduce in plays. Thomas Edison produced a brief film, *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* in which a woman is shown having her head lopped off. James Williamson's *Attack on a China Mission Station* from 1900 presents a longer continuous sequence in which British missionaries are violently attacked by Chinese Boxer rebels. *The Great Train Robbery* became one of the most famous of these early films, and is noted for its high level of violence and for ending with the villain firing his pistol directly into the camera (Kutner & Olson, 2008). Early films were largely unregulated with regard to content and considerable violence and even nudity were certainly not unheard of. Interestingly, this early period of unregulated cinema was met with a comparable downturn in violent crimes within the USA (Ferguson, 2002).

Despite the fact that the emergence of film did not engender a wave of violence, concerns about its impact quickly emerged. The purported effect of this new media on adolescent minds was an issue of particular concern. In response to early governmental efforts to censure film media, film companies responded by forming the National Board of Review (NBR), whose primary purpose was self-regulation of violent and sexual content. Films which contained excessive violence or sexual imagery were failed by the NBR. This early regulatory effort took place during a general period of moral panic over the effects of media, alcohol, immigrants, and other perceived assaults to conventional morality (Trend, 2007). It is tempting to wonder whether concerns about media violence, drug or alcohol use, sexuality, immigration, and other "moral" issues occur together in consistent patterns throughout history. For instance concerns regarding movies in the 1930s co-occurred with the temperance movement and a backlash against the "flapper" movement of the 1920s where young people may have appeared particularly rebellious to society's elders. Concerns about television in the 1980s occurred alongside the "War on Drugs," anti-immigration movements, and antipornography movements. Moral crusades of this sort appear to be rooted in the sense of "inerrancy" of a particular set of beliefs…or more plainly the view that some groups have that their moral beliefs are correct, and those of other groups are wrong (Sherkat & Ellison, 1997).

The advent of film set off an explosion of mass media, as film as followed by radio, mass-produced music, television, commercially available pornography in various forms, and finally video games and other "interactive" media such as the Internet. Surprisingly, although it is generally assumed that the consumption of media violence increased across the twentieth century, there is no research that actually

empirically examines media violence trends regarding actual violent content across time, nor is there any research examining the degree to which media violence trends are predictive of violence in society, data on which would be the cornerstone of any argument that media violence relates to societal violence.

Media companies in the USA have generally moved to head off unfriendly legislation by offering to police themselves. Although this practice may sound dubious in efficacy, in the early twentieth century, the result was the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America board (also called the Hays commission after its director Will Hays). The Hays Code (1930) stated that "Hence, though regarding motion pictures primarily as entertainment without any explicit purpose of teaching or propaganda, they know that the motion picture within its own field of entertainment may be directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking" and provided the foundation upon which the content of films was regulated through the 1960s. Graphic depictions of violence, the techniques of murder or other crimes, smuggling and drug trafficking, the use of liquor (unless required by the plot), revenge, safecracking, train robberies, adultery (which was not to be presented as an attractive option), inter-rational relationships, sexually transmitted diseases, nudity, and even "lustful kissing" were all forbidden or strictly controlled under the Hays Commission. The Hays Commission was an internal attempt by the motion picture industry to regulate itself and, far from proving to be a self-serving interest, it greatly restricted the kinds of sexual and violent depictions permissible in films. One of its more infamous acts was in taming the cartoon character Betty Boop from a carefree, scantily clad flapper into a wholesome husbandless housewife in a full dress, which naturally doomed the comic.

Social science research regarding the adverse effects of films began in roughly the same period of the 1930s. Perhaps most famous of these were the Payne Fund studies (Blummer, 1933) which purported to find a link between movie viewing and juvenile delinquency. Setting the stage for debates that would occur over the next century, critics of the Payne Fund studies noted the lack of control groups, difficulties in validly measuring aggression, and sampling problems as limiting their usefulness (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). Taking a "blank slate" approach on child development, the Payne Fund studies provided considerable fuel to the fire of belief that media exposure could harm youth.

Concerns over the impact of violent media on youth violence resurfaced in the 1950s for several reasons. Youth films such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) were seen as promoting juvenile delinquency (Trend, 2007). Despite violent crime rates in the 1950s reaching historic lows, concern over the insidious effects of media became part of a culture paranoid over communism and other "anti-American" influences. A psychiatrist, Dr. Frederic Wertham, published a book called *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954/1996) which claimed that comic books were a major cause of juvenile crime. Although Wertham's book was anecdotal rather than based on empirical research, it touched off considerable concern, which ultimately came to the attention of the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency. Rather than risk open censorship, the comic book industry, like the movie industry, volunteered to rigidly self-regulate, a move which doomed many comic books with violent content.

2.4   The Rise of Television

As television ownership became more prevalent during the 1950s the potential for visual mass media to reach audiences consistently increased considerably. Radio had already been popular, and some radio shows included violence, although this was narrated, not viewed directly. Television, like movies, was a visual media foremost; unlike movies television could be viewed every day, for hours at end, for ostensibly no cost at all. The potential for viewers to greatly increase their diet of mass media, and violent media specifically, was apparent. Shows with violent content, including Westerns such as *Bonanza* and *Have Gun, Will Travel* and crime shows such as *Dragnet* quickly became popular. As the advent of widespread television consumption in the 1950s was followed, in the USA, by a precipitous rise in violent crime a decade and a half later, many commentators were given to wondering whether the introduction of television—and violent television specifically—might partially explain the rise in violent crime in the USA beginning in the mid-1960s (e.g., Bushman & Anderson, 2001). Yet this violent crime rise appears to have been fairly unique to the USA, with other countries introducing violent television seeing no similar violent crime rises (Ferguson, 2002). The example of the island of St. Helena provided an interesting opportunity to test the effects of introducing television. St. Helena received television access for the first time in 1995. Aggression in schoolchildren was tracked for the period just before and just after television's introduction (Charton, Gunter, & Coles, 1998). Rather surprisingly, aggression among school children *decreased* in the 2-year period following the introduction of television. Nonetheless a more long-term follow up might produce different results.

Criminologists tend to discuss the crime increases beginning in the 1960s (which ultimately declined beginning in the 1990s, see Federal Bureau of Investigations, 1951–2011) as due to multiple factors including civil strife and the counterculture movement, the Vietnam War, racial disparities, a downturn in the economy, increased poverty, and increased availability and trade in illicit drugs, among other factors (see Savage, 2008). Nonetheless the apparent correlation (which has not been actually demonstrated statistically) between the increased use of television in the 1950s and increased crime in the 1960s became fodder for the debates on the impact of violent media.

Probably the single most influential group of studies relating to the media violence debate were the "Bo-bo Doll" studies of Albert Bandura (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961, 1963). There are actually numerous variations on these sets of studies, but in brief they had children (males and females) watch adults (also males and females) either in real life or in filmed sequences engage in a series of highly novel acts against a bo-bo doll (and inflatable toy doll which is designed to be boxed or hit). So, for instance, the models would sit on the bo-bo doll and punch it in the nose, or whack it with a mallet. The researchers then irritated the children by showing them a host of toys that they were not allowed to play with before bringing them to the test room with the bo-bo doll. Children who had seen an adult model these behaviors

(either in real life or in film) were more likely to engage in similar behaviors. Although the bo-bo doll studies are not media violence studies per se, they purport to demonstrate that aggression can be imitated by children. Clearly, these results would potentially be generalizable to television and other media forms.

However, there are limitations to the bo-bo doll studies that are important to acknowledge (see Gauntlett, 1995). First, the effects appear to be small overall and evaporate very quickly. Secondly, the "aggression" in the study was directed at an object, not another person, and it remains unclear if the studies' results can be generalized to real-life aggression against people. Related to that is the concern that the entire situation is contrived; after all, one might ask, what else are you supposed to do with a bo-bo doll other than hit it? Third, it is unclear whether the children were necessarily more motivated to engage in aggression in general, as opposed to mimicking *specific* aggressive acts. In other words, overall aggressive behaviors may not have changed much, but the style of the aggressive behaviors might have been altered due to the novel kinds of aggressive behaviors presented. Fourth, it is unclear that the children were necessarily motivated by aggression, as opposed to aggressive play or even the desire to please the adult experimenter. Children are quite used to being given instructions by adults and they may arguably have simply viewed the models (who were adults) as instructors telling them what to do. In other words, the children may have even believed that they might be scolded or punished if they didn't follow the model's lead. Lastly, in a subsequent paper, Bandura (1965) found that showing the model being punished for attacking the bo-bo doll decreased modeled behaviors in child participants. Yet the punishments themselves appeared to involved considerable aggressive behavior. As described in the original text (Bandura, 1965. p. 591):

> For children in the model-punished condition, the reinforcing agent appeared on the scene [this occurs after the children watched the model hit the bo-bo doll] shaking his finger menacingly and commenting reprovingly, "Hey there you big bully. You quit picking on that clown. I will not tolerate it." As the model drew back he tripped and fell, and the other adult sat on the model and spanked him with a rolled up magazine while reminding him of his aggressive behavior. As the model ran off, cowering, the agent forewarned him, "If I catch you doing that again, you big bully, I'll give you a hard spanking. You quit acting that way."

From this description it is reasonable to wonder what we can conclude when it appears that children are willing to imitate nonviolent aggression against an object, but viewing violence against an actual person inhibits their aggression. However one interprets the meaningfulness of the bo-bo doll studies, there is little doubt that they had considerable impact on the television violence debate.

Beginning in the late 1990s, televisions began to become equipped with V-chip technology. This technology allowed viewers to block shows with violent or sexual content, based on ratings so children and adolescents would be unable to access such content. The V-Chip is only used by a minority of parents however (15 % according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004), leading to debate as to why. It may be that parents are unaware of the V-Chip, or do not know how to use it, or that they are aware of the V-Chip but do not feel it is necessary for them to monitor their children's viewing habits. A follow up Kaiser Family Foundation study (2007)

found that the majority of parents felt competent in monitoring their children's viewing habits, whether or not they used the V-Chip. Meanwhile, the conservative activist group *Parents' Television Council* (2007) has condemned the V-chip, suggesting that the ratings are too lenient regarding violent and sexual content.

2.5   The Age of Video Games

Video games began to appear in the 1970s, entering homes with the release of the Atari 2600 console in 1977. Most early games were of low technical quality, although machine on machine violence (e.g., *Space Invaders*) was a common theme. The pixilation of early machines such as the Atari 2600 made representing humans difficult, although *Raiders of the Lost Arc* (1982), while arguably somewhat clunky, was one of the first to include person on person violence. In arcades the game *Death Race* (1976), which involved driving a car over humanoid "gremlins" had earlier raised considerable controversy. On personal computers and game consoles, games such as *Swashbuckler* (1982), *Chiller* (1986), *Castle Wolfenstein* (1981) and *Spy vs. Spy* (1984) began introducing person on person violence into games, at differing levels of graphicness (*Chiller* for instance, was far more graphic than, say *Spy vs. Spy*). Nonetheless, controversy over these games remained somewhat minimal, perhaps eclipsed as they were by the controversies over the paper-and-pencil role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons* (see Cardwell, 1994) which some argued might lead to aggression, Satanism or psychosis in youth. Oddly, as *Dungeons and Dragons* is even more interactive than early video games in that players actually take on the role of their characters, little research has examined the potential impact of *Dungeons and Dragons,* although there appears to be little evidence that the emergence of the game touched off a youth violence wave let alone schizophrenia or Satanism.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, video games increased in technological ability, allowing for better and more graphic representations of humans and humanoids, as well as displays of brutal injuries. The first, arguably, was *Street Fighter* (1987) followed by *Mortal Kombat* (1992) and *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992) and, finally *Doom* (1993). All of these games received considerable criticism for the high levels of violence included as well as their graphicness. The activist David Grossman (1995) argued that video games with violence functioned like Army simulators which improved shooting ratios among infantrymen. Grossman argued that soldiers during WWII were relatively unlikely to fire their weapons in combat, prompting the Army to use simulators to "train" soldiers to shoot at human targets. However, it should be noted that Grossman fails to acknowledge that it is difficult to compare the WWII, poorly trained (relative to the modern professional army) conscript soldier, firing semiautomatic weapons, to the modern professional, volunteer, highly trained soldier using automatic weapons in a meaningful way.

Yet Grossman's fears appeared realized during the Columbine High Massacre in 1999 when adolescents Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed 12 students, a teacher, and themselves. Harris and Klebold had been avid fans of *Doom*
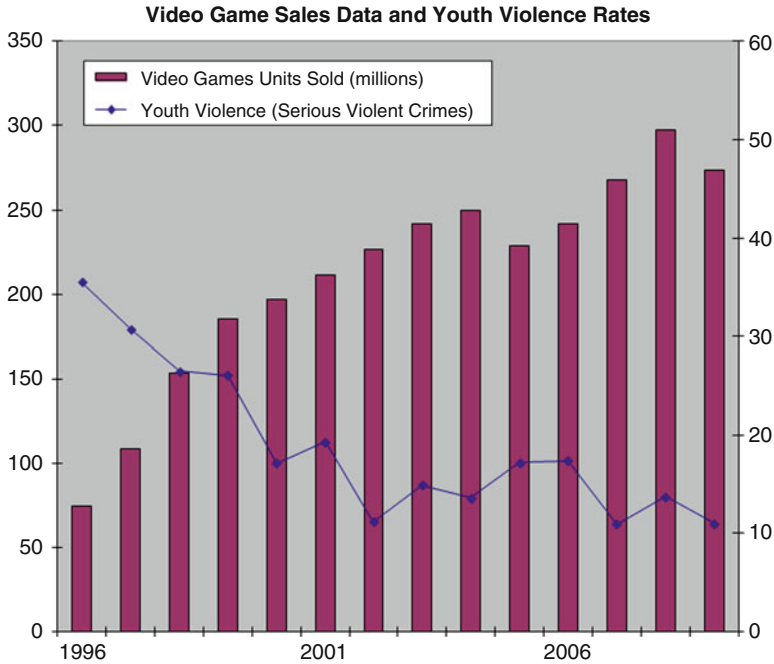
Fig. 2.1 Youth violence and video game sales data. *Note*: The correlation coefficient for this relationship is $r = -0.95$

(although they had not designed levels of *Doom* that appeared like their high school as had sometimes been reported).

Congressional hearings on the impact of video games in the 1990's sparked the video game industry to form the Entertainment Software Ratings Board to rate all video games for violent and sexual content. The ESRB provides content labels for all games, effectively following the self-regulation efforts pioneered by the motion picture and comic book industries. The ESRB ratings system has received approval from the Federal Trade Commission (2007) with the caveat that video game companies refrain from marketing adult-rated titles to minors. However, the advocacy group National Institute of Media and the Family in their "Video Game Report Card" (NIMF, 2007) had been critical of the ESRB, claiming that the ESRB ratings are not strict enough. At the same time, not surprisingly, game makers sometimes complain that the ESRB is too strict. Exactly what standards should be used to rate media remains highly subjective. The ESRB shot back that it was the NIMF report that was flawed, and inconsistent with the FTC's generally supportive appraisal of the ESRB (Gamepolitics, 2007). The NIMF has since ceased to operate.

As the controversy over video games increased, paradoxically the rate of violence in the USA (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1951–2011) including among youth (Childstats.gov, 2011) decreased, as presented in Fig. 2.1. School shootings, despite receiving increased attention, were also on the decline (see also Bureau of

Justice Statistics, 2008 for university crime data) contrary to the perception of many in the public. It was observed that almost all young males play violent games (Griffiths & Hunt, 1995) questioning the meaningfulness of "links" between violent video games and some school shooters. A report by the US Secret Service and US Department of Education (2002) found that, far from being heavy consumers of violent media, school shooters appeared in general to have fairly average to low-average interest in such media, and that an interest in violent media was not a good predictor of school shootings.

At the beginning of the new millennium considerable controversy remains over the proliferation of violence on television, movies, music, and new media such as video games and the Internet. It is unlikely that the controversies over media violent impact are to be resolved in the near future, or that consensus will be reached regarding the importance of media violence as a causal contributor to societal violence.

2.6   Conclusion

Violence in entertainment has been a perennial facet of media since the beginning of human history. The best evidence suggests that humans, across cultures and epochs, have had an interest in violent entertainment, constrained only by the availability of delivery systems for mass media. So too, however, conservative elements of society have often criticized violent entertainment in various forms as potentially corrupting of youth. As such, we can understand current debates about violent entertainment, whether or not they have merit, as part of a long-standing debate and struggle between elements of society attempting to control of constrain the flow of entertainment media, often as a part of larger social agendas. Understanding this history of media violence helps set the stage for our coverage of current debates on this topic.

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Chapter 3
Media Portrayals of Crime and Youth

On the crime show *CSI*: *Miami* and similar television programs, violent crimes are commonly committed in beautiful settings, among the rich and well connected. Murderers and drug deals drive classy cars and wear expensive, if excessively pastel, suits. Beautiful young women are as likely to be murderers as anybody else, and no one…crime victims or criminals, is unattractive. Similarly, the police officers and lab technicians investigating crimes are all in the prime of youth and health, wear the trendiest clothes, and are undeniably pretty or handsome. Not a single police officer cracks an off-color joke about criminals or crime victims. Television homicides are oftentimes premeditated and cleverly covered up, with clear and practical motives such as money or sexual jealousy. To truly jazz things up, the occasional serial murder can be counted on to come along and play a sinister game of cat-and-mouse with the detectives.

Going into a typical police department or jail with these kinds of high expectations one would likely be quite disappointed. Naturally, shows such as *CSI: Miami* and the many other crime shows on the air are intended to entertain, not inform. Compare the images of *CSI: Miami* with a "real life" crime show such as *Cops,* which follows real police officers interacting with real criminals in a semi-documentary format. *Cops* itself is highly edited, because a "real life" show based on average looking cops arresting low-income drunk and disorderly men and women would likely not carry on for long without some editing to jazz things up. I happen to live in Laredo, TX and so it is interesting to watch my city depicted in *Borderland: Laredo* a recent "real" police show. Granted, both the cops and most of the criminals in that show are very average looking, and there is little doubt Laredo is the entry point for many of the drugs entering the USA. But Laredo is also generally a low-crime, peaceful city and it is interesting to see the distinction between television and reality.

This chapter examines the way in which both crime and adolescence has been portrayed in modern media. Given the mismatch between how fictional media portrays crime, and the circumstances of actual violent crime, media consumption may distort perspectives and beliefs regarding crime frequency, motivation, offender

characteristics, and cause. Some researchers have expressed concern that media depictions of crime may result in the *cultivation* of distorted beliefs about crime among viewers. Such distorted beliefs may lead to unnecessary anxieties about crime victimization, misallocation of crime fighting or other social resources, potential damage to constitutional rights of due process, or prejudices against minority groups who are portrayed as crime perpetrators. Similarly, inaccurate portrayals of youth may fuel generational divides, and moral panics about youth.

This chapter concerns itself primarily with the following main issues:

1. Begin by discussing data on real-life violent crime to form a framework against which media depictions can be compared.
2. Discuss the mismatch between crime in real-life and crime in the media, with regard to frequency, trends, and racial minority participation.
3. Cover research regarding the "cultivation hypothesis" that beliefs about crime are shaped by fictional media viewing.
4. Discuss the portrayal of racial minorities in fictional crime media and
5. Examine the portrayal of youth in fictional crime media.

By addressing these issues we can develop and understanding of how the media interacts with and shapes both our view of crime and of youth.

3.1 Violence in Real Life

Murder She Wrote was a popular television program running from 1984 to 1996 featuring Angela Landsbury as a mystery writer who oftentimes solved real murders in her fictional hometown of Cabot Cove, Maine. In the show, Cabot Cove was said to have a population of around 3,500 citizens and it is estimated that 2 % of the population of the town were killed off during the run of the series (Barron, 1996). To put that in perspective, on a nationwide scale, that would be equivalent to half a million people being murdered in the USA each year (the current figure in recent years has actually been about 15–16,000). Viewers might have wondered why citizens stayed in a town with such poor odds, particularly when most citizens were of high socioeconomic status (SES). Murderers were oftentimes over 40, usually Caucasian, of high SES and often female. Elderly, high SES women probably do, on occasion, premeditate murder for a variety of motives. Yet shows such as *Murder She Wrote* may present a distorted view of violent crimes in several notable ways including:

1. Overestimating the proportion of female perpetrators.
2. Overestimating the proportion of wealthy or well-to-do perpetrators and victims.
3. Overestimating the average age of crime perpetrators.
4. Overestimating the sophistication of motive, planning, and execution of the typical violent crime
5. Overestimating the frequency of violent crime overall.
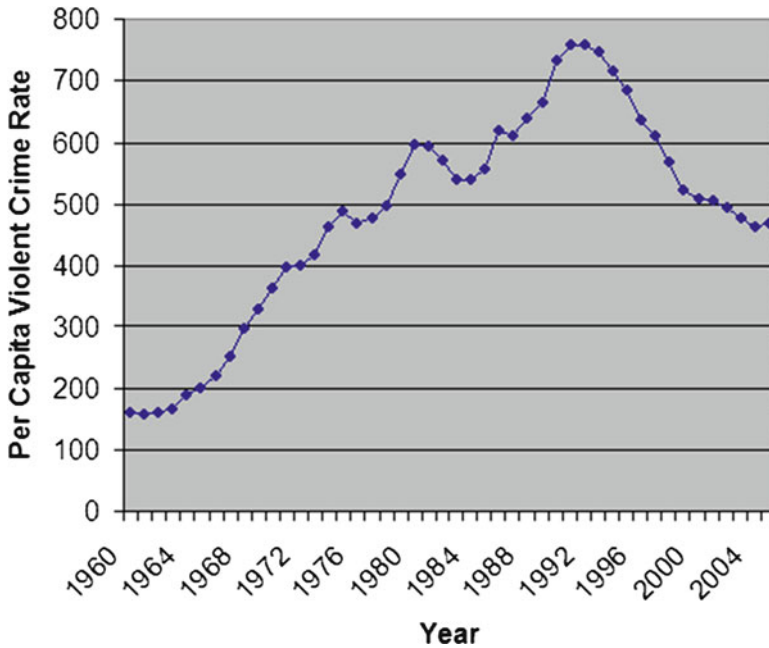
Fig. 3.1 Per capita violent crime rates in the USA by year

Put simply, these types of shows portray homicide in a way that does not reflect the reality of the crime.

Before discussing the way that the media portrays violent crimes, we need to briefly consider the "reality" of violent crimes in order to have some perspective. Like most human behavior, it is somewhat difficult to offer true generalizations as there are oftentimes exceptions. Regarding the incidence of homicides, in recent years approximately 15–16,000 people per year in the USA have been murdered (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 1951–2011). This figure represents a significant decline from peak years during the early 1990s when nearly 25,000 homicides occurred on an annual basis. The USA has been in a precipitous decline in violent crimes in general, with the country becoming safer than at any time since the 1960s. As presented in Chap. 1, Fig. 3.1 presents long-term trends in violent crimes generally, while Fig. 3.2 presents long-term trends in murders and nonnegligent manslaughter cases. Even the violence surges in the 1980s and early 1990s were part of a broader pattern in the USA with similar violence surges occurring in the 1930s and late 1800s (Ferguson, 2002; National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, 1969). The FBI data may be biased, as it uses figures only from crimes reported to the police. Nonetheless, data from anonymous victimization surveys in the USA and most other Western nations agree that an international downswing in violent crimes in highly industrialized has been taking place for almost two decades (Childstats.gov, 2011; Nicholas, Kershaw, & Walker, 2007; van Dijk, van Kesteren, & Smit, 2007). Perhaps most important to the current book, rates of youth violence
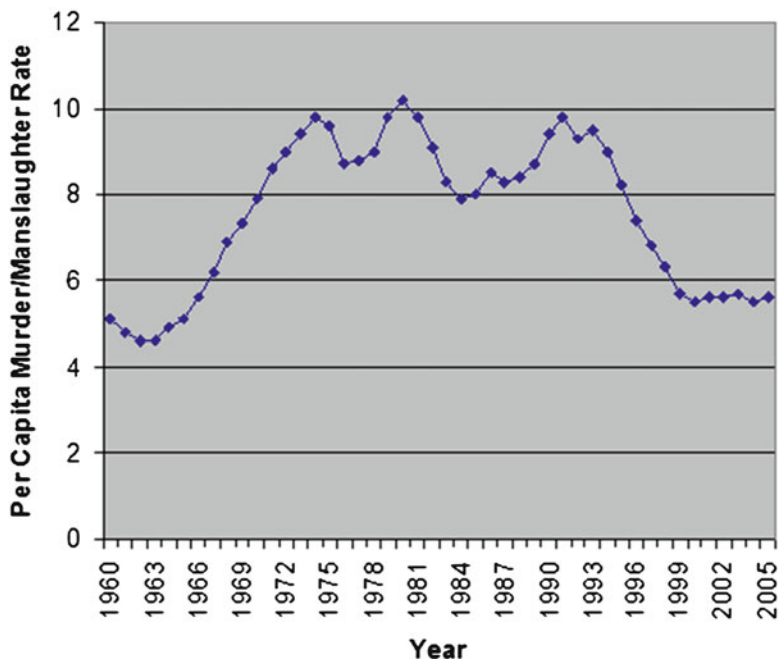
Fig. 3.2 Per capita murder/nonnegligent manslaughter rates in the USA by year

have followed this trend, declining precipitously to 40-year lows whether measured by victimology data (Childstats.gov, 2011) or via youth arrests data (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2010). That said, approximately 8 % of homicides are committed by individuals under the age of 18. 32 % of homicides are committed by individuals under the age of 22. Nonetheless, most homicides are committed by non-teens.

Violent crime surges of the past have typically followed considerable social upheavals. The 1970s saw increases in racial and social tensions, and a plunging economy. The 1930s saw Prohibition and the Great Depression. It is likely that this general trend in US crimes will continue, with periodic rises and falls. As with the current economic downturn (as of this writing in 2011), young males tend to be particularly hard hit by social pressures, and tend to be most active in social unrest.

Who commits violent crimes, and who are the victims? The characteristics of these groups are actually quite similar (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Most perpetrators of violent crimes (88 %) are male, as are most victims (76 %). Most perpetrators and victims alike are between the ages of 14 and 34. Minorities, particularly African–Americans, are overrepresented among both crime perpetrators and crime victims, most likely due to the relationship between SES and crime. That is, generally speaking, violent criminals are more likely to come from neighborhoods that are low SES and high in poverty (Criminal Justice Research Center, 2006). Indeed the majority of violent crimes are committed by low SES perpetrators against individuals of a similar disadvantaged background. Criminals most often don't travel out of their home neighborhoods to commit crimes—crime is opportunistic.

Homicides in the media are often portrayed as well-planned clearly motivated affairs. In reality, most homicides are more spontaneous and poorly executed. Most homicides are due either to arguments, whether between romantic partners or even something as trivial as two young males looking at each other the "wrong way" in at a party or club, or are committed during the commission of another felony crime such as a robbery (Schwartz, 2009). Laboriously premeditated homicides are comparatively uncommon. Even gang-related homicides, another media staple, are comparatively uncommon, accounting for just 9 % of male and 1 % of female perpetrated homicides (Schwartz, 2009). Indeed the motives for many homicides are shockingly trivial, with little practical gain for the homicide perpetrator. Many homicides are instigated by the victim. Victims of homicide oftentimes began the argument or fight that ended in their death. Most homicides are also cleared quickly, usually within 48 h, although the number of solved homicide cases has been dropping over the last several decades from a high of approximately 90 %, to approximately 70 % today (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2010).

Despite the fact that violent crimes in the USA have been declining over the past 20 years, the USA remains more violent than comparable Western countries such as Germany, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand (Ministry of Justice, 2002). Why the USA remains so high in terms of violent crimes in comparison to other countries is not well understood.

3.2   Violent Crime in the Media

The fundamental purpose of media, with the specific exception of the news media, is not to inform, but to entertain. It should not be surprising that crime in the media differs from crime in real life. Nonetheless, entertainment media may unwittingly inform people's views about real life crime. Even the news media, through their focus on particular types of stories and not others in their quest for ratings, may influence people's perceptions of crime, particularly related to the prevalence of crime and fear of crime victimization. This chapter's focus is on violent crime in fictional entertainment media. Specifically, we examine research related to the effects of fictional crime media on beliefs about crime prevalence and involvement of minorities in violent crime.

3.3   How Much Violence Is There in Fictional Media?

Answering the question "How much violence is there in the media?" can be difficult, as it hinges upon definitions of violence itself. The World Health Organization defines violence as:

> The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. (World Health Organization, 2002).

This is probably as reasonable definition as any, and we'll proceed with this definition. However, it is important to note that different individuals or groups may disagree over the specific behaviors that constitute "violence." Most of us would agree that shootings, knifings or beatings constitute violence, but what about verbal abuse or excluding others socially, or depriving a social group of food or resources needed to survive?

Merely defining a term is not sufficient if measurement of that term does not adhere to the definition. For instance, some individuals may not consider cartoons, or the kinds of comedic physical aggression found in some shows, to truly amount to "violence." Statistics about the prevalence of violent in the media are meaningful only in the context of how violence is defined in a particular study. It is important that individual studies are read carefully to see how violence is defined.

The National Television Violence Study (NTVS, National Television Violence Study Council, 1998) examined the prevalence of violent acts in fictional television media. Conclusions from the NTVS included:

- Approximately 60 % of television programs contain violence of some kind, inclusive of comedic or cartoon violence.
- Violence in entertainment media often has unrealistically few consequences, such as characters demonstrating little if any pain in response to violent attacks. Wile E. Coyote's reactions to being hit on the head with an anvil or blown up are typical of this point.
- 40 % of violent acts on television are presented as humorous. Cartoons, in particular, are a common source of comedic violence.
- 71 % of violent acts include no remorse or punishment or penalty (this includes violent acts by law enforcement officials and other "good guys".)

Thus, the NTVS concludes that media portrayals of violence are common and the NTVS often puts this in stark terms, although one could argue the NTVS at times seems naïve regarding the social context and intent of media portrayals of violence.

Some are concerned that youth and adults alike watching such frequent depictions of violence on television may begin to believe that violence in society is as common as violence on television. The concern is that viewers will begin to believe that what they view in fictional media is representative of real life. This can promote distorted beliefs about crime, and heightened fears about crime victimization.

The NTVS uses a fairly broad meter for what constitutes "violence." The NTVS definition of violence includes any threat or act intended to harm another animate being, in some cases including talking about violence. Such a definition incorporates acts such as throwing pies in a comedic movie or other "slapstick" acts of physical humor. These acts are not consistent with the WHO definition of violence. Similar problems exist in assessing other media. For example, in a video game involving football, does tackling or blocking constitute "violence?" The actions are part of a mutually consenting sports competition, in which the goal is to perform maximally at the sport, not to cause injury. On the other hand, the fights that break out during a hockey video game (or real hockey match!) would indeed constitute "violence" according to the WHO definition.

One study reported that violent content is common in E-rated video games (Thompson & Haninger, 2001), a category of games rated as acceptable for young children. This study examined a convenience sample of 55 commercially available E-rated games. An undergraduate student played each of the games and raters examined the recorded game play for violent content. The authors concluded that 64 % of E-rated games such as *Q*Bert, Sonic Adventure, Super Mario Bros, The Legend of Zelda*, and *Donkey Kong 64* included some intentional violence. This finding seems alarming until it is noted that the definitions used are broad enough that primitive first generation video games involving spaceships or monsters shooting at each other such as *Space Invaders* or *Pac Man* could fit this definition of a "violent game."

It is usually assumed that violent content in the media has increased over time, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Yet this belief has not yet been empirically studied. Nonetheless, it is probably true that this is the case, particularly as new media forms such as television and video games have been developed in recent decades without substantively removing past media forms. With the advent of cable television, video games and the internet, the availability of violent media has undoubtedly increased across the twentieth century.

3.4 Types of Media Influence

Most actual criminal arrests are for relatively minor crimes. Looking at the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, we can see that minor thefts (larceny), property crimes, burglaries, and auto thefts predominate among crimes (FBI, 2010). Murders and nonnegligent manslaughter cases account for less than 1 % of all crimes. Violent crimes overall account for approximately 12 % of crimes. On television, murders account for approximately one quarter of crimes portrayed, with violent crimes more generally, including rape, assault, and kidnapping, accounting for almost 90 % of crimes portrayed on television (Surette, 2007). It is clear, then, that television, and presumably other media, including books (Durham, Elrod, & Kinkade, 1995) are heavily weighted toward portrayals of serious violent crimes. This is hardly surprising; after all, a police drama centered on vandalism and petty larceny would scarcely draw in the viewers.

The media provides two main potential influences. These are important to understand and contrast when examining the issue of media effects. These influences are:

- Information. Information is just what it sounds like: by watching the media a viewer learns about a particular topic. The media you see may never have intended to be informative per se, and indeed you might have learned something that in fact is erroneous. Yet this kind of transaction is fairly passive requiring no active motivation on the part of the viewer. Examples would include:

  – Bleach can be used to destroy DNA evidence.
  – Traces of blood evidence can remain even after a thorough cleaning.
  – Serial arsonists will often stand in the crowed watching a fire they set burn a building down.

None of these pieces of information make a person more inclined to commit a crime. They could make a criminal better at committing crimes he or she already would commit.

Along these lines it is important to understand that the influence of marketing and advertising is more informative than behavior changing per se. In other words, advertising's power is not in making people buy things they don't already have an inclination to buy, but rather in directing people toward specific brands. The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines marketing as:

> Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large. (AMA, 2007)

The customers are thus active judges of information provided by marketers, not passive recipients programmed to want random products. It certainly is true that the information provided by advertisements and marketing can, at times, be misleading, misinformative, or outright fabrications. Yet advertising is sometimes compared to fictional media along the idea of "If the advertizing industry spends X bazillion dollars a year to change people's behavior, why doesn't all media change people's behavior?" This line of argument presents a poor reasoning for exactly what it is that advertizing does. A person is unlikely to buy cola, or something similar, unless he or she has tasted it, in the past and enjoyed it. Advertizing makes that cola enjoying person more inclined to choose a brand they identify with such as Coke or Pepsi, and eschew lesser known, potentially cheaper brands. Advertizing, then, does not create massive behavior change, or shape people's core personality or beliefs. It does nudge people in the direction of particular product *brands* the result of which can be windfall profits for those brands (see Kotler & Keller, 2009).

• Behavior change. Significant behavior change involves the media changing the core personality or motivations of viewers, usually via social learning. This differs from informational influence. While there is little controversy over whether the media provides information, there is considerable controversy over whether the media changes core behaviors among adolescents. For instance, if in watching a television show about sexual behavior the narrator says that "62 % of high schoolers report having sex before graduation" (which actually represents a significant decline over time; Childstats.gov, 2011), an easily absorbed statement, will it influence the viewer's perceptions of teenage sex? Certainly it has provided a statistic which the viewer learned and can repeat to others. How do efforts geared at actually changing sexual behavior work? Despite decades of abstinence messages, the majority of youth continue to have sex before reaching their twenties (Abma, Martinez, Mosher, & Dawson, 2002). An evaluation of abstinence-only and abstinence messages in combination with information about contraception finds that such programs have little impact on in the onset and frequency of teen sexual behavior (Kirby, 2007). In other words, the biological drives to have sex easily override the social message of others including strangers on television. At the same time, the same evaluation finds that providing

information on something teens already want (i.e., avoiding sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy) can have at least a modest effect as evidenced by increased condom use. Thus, social and media messages can be effective when informing people how to do something they already want to do, but are less successful when attempting to change core motivations, personality traits or values. Put more simply, the media does not appear to be very effective in getting people to do things that they didn't already want to do.

3.5   The Cultivation Hypothesis

The Cultivation Hypothesis suggests that television and other media have become a primary source of information and dictate how we view the real world (Gerbner, 1969; Tamborini, Mastro, Chory-Assad, & Huang, 2000). For instance, the cultivation hypothesis would suggest that individuals who consume a lot of media featuring violent crimes may begin to believe that violent crimes are common and ever increasing. This is sometimes called the *mean world* belief…that threats and violence are common in the world (Hawkins, Pingree, & Adler, 1987). Somewhat anecdotally, in my own classes in forensic psychology, I note that many students are surprised to learn that violence in the USA (as well as in Canada and most other Western countries) is declining and has been for some time. When I ask students how many believe that violent crime among youth is on the rise in the USA, approximately two thirds regularly raise their hands. From this it is not hard to speculate that generational divides between adolescents and older adults may also be cultivated by media. Stereotypes of each group may be highlighted in media portrayals, increasing rather than decreasing generational differences. For instance, many older adults continue to believe that mental health and behavioral outcomes for modern youth continue to decline, despite considerable evidence to the contrary (Ferguson, 2008a).

There remains much controversy over the cultivation hypothesis. Most of the research has focused on individuals' fear of becoming a crime victim, rather than perceptions of how crime rates have changed over time. One early study suggested that television viewing, including exposure to crime dramas specifically, was not related to fear of crime or the perception that crime is more prevalent than it actually is. By contrast, television news reporting of crime was related to increased fear (O'Keefe & Reid-Nash, 1987). This study consisted of a probability community sample of adults living in the Midwest. Respondents were asked about their frequency of viewing crime dramas and television news, as well as reading newspapers. Respondents were also asked to rate the dangerousness of their neighborhood, how concerned they were about crime, and preventative measures they used to protect themselves from crime, such as installing extra door locks. No effects were found for viewing television crime dramas, and only weak effects found for television news.[1]

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[1] $\beta = 0.10$

A separate study found inconsistent results, such as that exposure to crime dramas may increase estimates of crime in the real world, but that this does not transfer to other attitudes such as fear of crime (Hawkins et al., 1987). In this study, four separate samples of adults and adolescents from the USA and Australia were included. Participants reported on their total television viewing or kept diaries about shows that they had watched, and asked to report on their beliefs about violence and crime. Overall results were weak and inconsistent, in many cases disconfirming or contradicting the authors' hypotheses. Television viewing of crime dramas was weakly related to overall frequency estimates of violent crime, but not consistently related to other beliefs about or fears of crime. Other early research suggested that increased television viewing was related to distorted views about crime more generally (Carlson, 1985; Lewis, 1981). By contrast, other researchers found that this relationship vanished once actual crime rates in the viewer's local neighborhood were controlled (Doob & MacDonald, 1979). In other words, actual knowledge about real crimes committed in the viewers' neighborhoods was a confounding variable in studies of the cultivation hypothesis. People who lived in more violent neighborhoods tended to watch more violent crime drama, and estimate that violent crimes were more common. Far from representing a cultivation effect, this merely was a reflection of the social reality in which these viewers lived.

One early article attempted to resolve some of the conflicting findings seen in early research on cultivation and fears of crime (Heath & Petraitis, 1987). In their first study, the authors randomly sampled adults from the USA using random telephone dialing. Respondents were asked to report how often they viewed crime dramas and the frequency of violent crimes in their home city and in a large distant city in which they did not live. Results suggested that viewing crime dramas was not related to personal fear of crime in the immediate environment, but did inflate estimates of crime in the distant city. In their second study, the authors replicated these findings with an undergraduate sample, achieving similar results. These results suggest that, if the cultivation hypothesis does have any influence, it is only for distant, abstract urban environments with which individuals are not familiar. It should be noted that results even for the distant urban environments were weak.[2] Overall results such as these suggest that the influence of crime dramas on fears of crime is weak at best.

More recent research has generally not supported the view that viewing crime dramas increases fears of crime (Grabe & Drew, 2007). Grabe and Drew used random telephone dialing to randomly sample a group of adults in Indiana. Respondents reported their rate of viewing crime dramas, reality police shows and television news. Respondents also estimated the likelihood that they would be victims of several types of crimes in the coming year. Overall, no relationship was found between viewing crime dramas and reality police shows and estimates of personal crime victimization.

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[2]r values between 0.12 and 0.20

Exposure to television dramas depicting violent crimes seems to be a weaker predictor of fear of violent crime and overestimates of violent crime rates than is exposure to television news (Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2004). A recent study found that viewing television crime dramas was not related to total crime frequency estimates, and only weakly related to estimates of violent crime (Hetsroni & Tukachinski, 2006). This study surveyed Israeli university students. As with most other studies of the cultivation hypothesis, participants were asked to report on crime dramas they had watched and their estimates of violent criminal acts in the real world. They found that some individuals do indeed overestimate real-world crimes, yet the authors concluded that this was not due to viewing television crime dramas. The authors surmise that the relationship between viewing television crime dramas and the development of beliefs about real-world crime is more complex than suggested by the cultivation hypothesis.

As indicated above, research suggests that the influence of viewing television crime dramas, and related fictional depictions of violent crimes in other media, on perceptions and fear of crime is weak at best. Effect sizes found in cultivation research, particularly related to crime estimates and fear of crime, are small overall. More importantly the effects of cultivation largely disappear when other variables are considered (Hirsch, 1980; Potter, 1993).

Comparatively little research has looked at another interesting possibility: that media portrayals of adolescents could result in cultivation of attitudes about adolescents in older adults. Could the impression that adolescents are feckless, irrational, impulsive, and in need of firm guidance by adults be guided by news or fictional media? Or are such media merely responding to older adults a priori beliefs? Unfortunately I am aware of little research that has addressed this question.

In summarizing the data on the cultivation hypothesis we find that:

- Watching crime dramas produces weak to no influence on people's fear of personally becoming a crime victim.
- Watching crime dramas may slightly increase people's perception of violent crime frequency in an abstract sense. People do not fear personally becoming crime victims, but may believe that crime is more common than it is in distant urban environments. These effects appear to be small.
- Cultivation effects vanish, once actual crime rates in the viewers' neighborhoods is controlled.

As such, overall, cultivation effects, at least from fictional media, are weaker than proponents of the cultivation hypothesis might have expected.

These rather weak results for the cultivation hypothesis may come as something as a surprise and bear explanation. In part, this result may be understood by examining the medium of transmitting information about crime. With crime dramas, neither the producers of the shows, nor viewers, expect the medium to have the transmission of accurate information as its primary goal. Crime dramas and related media are clearly fictitious and don't claim to be real-world depictions of actual events. In other words, viewers can easily tell "fact from fiction." Most viewers know better than to rely on fictional media to develop factual beliefs about the world. Most of the research

done on the cultivation hypothesis has been conducted with adults or adolescents, who would be expected to be capable of abstract thought and critical thinking (Piaget, 2001). Research suggests that even children as young as three can reliably distinguish fact from fiction (Skolnick & Bloom, 2006; Woolley & Van Reet, 2006). Although violent crimes may seem common on television, this does not translate into much effect regarding estimates of crime perpetration in the real world. This may seem obvious, but it must be remembered that much of the concern about media effects in general hinges upon variations of social modeling theory (see Chap. 2) wherein viewers are relatively passive consumers of information.

One other explanation for the seemingly weak influence of fictional depictions of violence on attitudes and beliefs regarding crime may relate to desensitization specificity. Desensitization refers to the concept that as individuals are exposed to a phenomenon, they gradually exhibit less and less emotional response to that phenomenon. So, for example, the first time a viewer witnesses someone brutally murdered in a movie he or she may find it to be frightening or shocking. By the one-hundredth time, it may seem relatively "ho-hum" and it takes more to cause fright. This may be one reason that some media becomes more violent over time, as it takes more violence to produce the desired effect such as excitement or horror-movie fright. It is oftentimes assumed that this process of desensitization to fictional violence will generalize to real life violence, although research on this is fairly scarce. For instance, most research on desensitization focuses on physiological reactions to media violence, but don't demonstrate that reduced physiological arousal translates to different beliefs about crime victimization (e.g., Carnagey, Anderson, & Bushman, 2007; Cline, Croft, & Courrier, 1973). By contrast it may be true that desensitization is specific. This means that while you are watching fictional depictions of violence, you gradually get desensitized to violence in this form. Yet, you also are aware that you are watching fictional depictions. An incredibly violent movie such as the *Saw* series may ultimately get only a modest startle or fright response out of you. Nonetheless, watching violence when you know that real persons are being injured, or indeed, seeing violence occur in your own life right in front of you, can still generate intense emotional reactions, including fear, dismay or even trauma.

As an anecdotal example, I occasionally teach a course entitled "Psychology of War." Students are warned upfront that some combat footage is included in the class. Regularly I show the opening sequence from *Saving Private Ryan,* an intensely violent and graphic scene of warfare. Students typically watch quietly, with great interest, and naturally express appropriate sympathy for the experiences of front-line combat troops in the ensuing discussion. Their reaction to the movie is sympathetic, but not terribly invested. By contrast, showing footage of actual combatants being hit by gunfire, though typically grainy and much less graphic, elicits a much more emotional reaction. Even watching infrared footage from an AC-130 gunship pounding human targets on the ground, which looks like an old 1970s video game in quality of graphics, leaves students quite disturbed. Similarly, though people may have become quite accustomed to watching violence and mayhem in movies, television, and video games, watching tapes of the 9/11 terrorist attack or terrorist beheadings of individuals such as Daniel Pearl created considerable anxiety, fear and trauma, specifically because these incidents were real, not fictional.

It may simply be that because people are aware that the images they watch in crime dramas are fictional, they do not use the shows to form opinions, feelings, or beliefs about crime in the real world. Our minds may process information differently, depending on how we evaluate the intent of the source. In other words, people are able to distinguish fiction from reality.

3.6   The Presentation of Minorities in Crime Media

One concern that is often raised about media depictions centers on the way in which minorities, particularly Latinos and blacks, are represented (Mastro, 2003). As with portrayals of crime in general, much of the research in this area focuses on news media rather than on crime dramas, and this is discussed in the next chapter. Concern remains that minorities are underrepresented as positive role models in fictional media, and overrepresented as negative role models such as criminals and drug users (Ferguson, 2008b). Certain ethnic groups seem to be overrepresented in depictions of criminals and this kind of common negative portrayal raises concerns that they may foster negative stereotypes of these ethnic minorities in the general population.

Not surprisingly, one group that is often stereotyped in the media is Italian–Americans. There is a long history of mafia related media from *The Godfather* through *The Sopranos* depicting Italian–Americans as heavily involved in mafia organizations. Of course there is some historical precedent to this, with the Italian crime families of the twentieth century being at the forefront of organized criminal organizations (Messina, 2004). Yet other ethnic groups including Irish, Jewish and blacks were also involved in organized crime at different points in history and see relatively little attention in mafia films. Moreover, the vast majority of Italian–Americans are not involved in mafia organizations. There is concern among some that, while Italian–Americans are "Caucasian," because of mafia related media depictions they may be stigmatized and experience prejudice similar to non-Caucasian minority groups (Messina, 2004). There is little evidence to suggest that Italian–Americans are at a clear economic or social disadvantage in US society so this concern does not seem borne out. More recently, other groups, particularly recent immigrants from Eastern European countries such as Russia and Albania, also seem to be seeing increased attention regarding their affiliation with organized crime in crime dramas such as *Law and Order*.

Although some portrayals of certain Caucasian sub-groups such as Italians or Irish may irritate some who view them as stereotyping, greater attention has focused on minority groups who are considered to be socially and economically disadvantaged in the USA. In particular much research attention focuses on Latinos and blacks. Native Americans are also a group for which concern is expressed, given their historically disadvantaged status in North America. Native Americans tend to be portrayed, if stereotypically, in a positive light, as wise and in tune with nature and themselves. Latinos and blacks are portrayed more often as criminal, dysfunctional, and violent.

Latinos and blacks are underrepresented in the media altogether. In recent years about 6.5 % of characters on television were identified as Latino (Ferguson, 2008b). This is approximately half of the proportion of Latinos in the US population (US Census Bureau, 2003). Part of this discrepancy may be due to characters on television that are of ambiguous ancestry (meaning that the proportion of characters that are clearly identified as one ethnicity or another may not add up to 100 %), yet the television media is clearly underfocused on Latino characters. Many academics who study media presentations of ethnic minorities suggest that Latinos continue to be more often presented as perpetrators of crime, low income, functioning in less prestigious jobs, and tend to speak with thick accents more often than Caucasian characters. Thus, the portrayal of Latinos on television tends to be more negative than for Caucasians.

Similar issues have been found for portrayals of blacks (Eschholz, 2004; Eschholz, Mallard, & Flynn, 2004; Poindexter & Stroman, 1981). Representations of blacks have been increasing in the media over time, yet the tendency remains to render them as undereducated and overly involved in crime. One study of the popular crime drama series *Law and Order* and *NYPD Blue* found that blacks are more often portrayed as offenders than whites, and less likely portrayed as attorneys, and that black offenders are more likely to be depicted in handcuffs than white offenders (Eschholz et al., 2004)

This disinclination to include minorities in television and other media, particularly in a positive light, appears to generalize to crime-related media as well. As discussed earlier, crime dramas tend to focus on white against white violence. At the same time there are many more positive portrayals of whites in addition to a few criminal white characters. By contrast, although media depictions of minorities are fewer overall, when they occur they tend to be more likely to represent minorities in a negative light, including as perpetrators of violent crimes. In fairness, it should be mentioned that this is not entirely an inaccurate representation. For instance, in 2005, blacks were seven times more likely to be homicide perpetrators and six times more likely to be homicide victims, per capita, than whites (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Similarly, it is generally agreed that Latinos are likely overrepresented in actual criminal populations as well (Ferguson, 2008b). Despite this real-life parallel, continued negative portrayals of minorities run the risks of perpetuating an existing problem, increasing prejudice and decreasing minorities' esteem in their own cultures.

The evidence is pretty clear that media portrayals of Latinos and blacks tend to continue to portray these two groups as highly involved in criminal behavior (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). Thus, we see that, compared to actual offender data, whites make up a much higher proportion of offenders in television crime dramas, but when minorities such as Latinos and blacks are represented, it is more typically in offender roles. This situation presents a somewhat complicated situation in relation to the Cultivation Hypothesis. We might expect viewers to think that most offenders are white, yet that nonetheless, most individuals of minority groups are offenders.

There is some indication in support of the Cultivation Hypothesis in relation to perceptions of minorities as highly involved in crime. For instance, reality-based police shows such as *Cops* have been demonstrated to increase estimates of blacks' involvement in violent crimes (Oliver & Armstrong, 1998). More research needs to

be done in this area and it remains difficult to tease apart the influence of media from other factors that may influence stereotypes. There does seem to be some evidence that representations of minority figures as criminals may at least reinforce existing stereotypes of minority groups.

3.7   Adolescents in the Media

In many ways debates over media are reflective of intergenerational struggles between society's elder's and youth. Society elders, perhaps experiencing a dose of juvenoia (Finklehor, 2010), fret about "kids today with their music and their hair", perceiving current youth as more dysfunctional than previous generations, even when data do not support such claims (see for example, Ferguson, 2008a, 2008b). The youth, in return, see the elders (at least those who vocally complain about youth) as out of touch and hostile. Ironically, the youth of one generation simply become the elders of the next, repeating this cycle.

In most of this chapter we consider how violence has been portrayed in the media, but what about youth themselves? This issue is explored in depth in the next chapter, Jamieson and Romer (2008) argue that representations of adolescents in the media exploded in the latter half of the twentieth century as adolescents came to drive much of the market for media, and the internet gave adolescents increasing opportunities to produce their own media content. Of course much of the news media focus on the negative aspects of adolescents, and tend to highlight their alleged vulnerability to harm or which have repeated "moral panics" about youth (the "More and more" school of news media, as in "More and more teens are doing X" or "Youth today watch more and more media…," "Adolescent girls are more and more often involved in violence…" etc.,) which is discussed in another chapter. But what about fictional media?

Most research has focused on potential harm of media to adolescents. Relatively little scholarship has looked at this puzzle from the opposite direction. How do adolescents shape the media itself, particularly given so much of the market for modern media is driven by adolescents? Are adolescents being shaped by the media, or are adolescents shaping the media? This is a return to the old "chicken and egg" question of whether the media shapes us or we shape it.

Unfortunately, comparatively little research has examined the media from this direction, and there has been no much research examining portrayals of adolescents in the media. In part, this may be because teens remain relatively undervalued as members of our society. Thus, how they are portrayed in media has not been an issue of concern for scholars. Nonetheless, I argue that portrayals of adolescents fall within a few recognizable lines.

Realism. It should be recognized there are some shows that appear to do their best to present both older adults and youth realistically and fairly. Both sets of individuals are treated with respect, and potential flaws noted. The adult/child dynamics

portrayed in shows such as (contemporary in 2011) *The Killing* or *Law and Order: SVU* probably fit best within this category. *My So Called Life* a drama from the 1990s also received critical acclaim for this approach. This approach seems most common with story and character driven dramas.

Rebel Without a Clue. The second approach, and one which appeals particularly to teens themselves, portrays the younger generation positively and the older generation negatively. Youth are portrayed as generally complex, "with it" and wise, whereas older adults are generally two-dimensional stereotypes, clueless or deliberately obstructing of youth. Helpful older adults may exist but are more exception than norm. This type of media is most inclined to address the generational divide in a hostile manner. The old film *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* is probably a good example of this type of film and of course generations ago the rock band The Who typified this approach in music claiming to "Hope I die before I get old" (the surviving members are in their late 60s as of this writing). Such media may give teens an outlet to express frustrations with the older generations attempting to curb their culture and restrict their freedoms.

Disneyfication. The third approach treats the generational divide in a more humorous, less hostile manner. Youth are generally treated as more fun-loving, serious about school, and generally positive in intent. Older adults may include a mixture of "out of touch" and "hip" characters, but older adults are generally portrayed as helpful in intent if sometimes mocked for being culturally out of date. In general, conflict between the generations is deemphasized, treated as something humorous and indulged by both older adults and youth. Many Disney shows (hence the name) such as *Hannah Montana* or *Wizards of Waverly Place* fit within this motif. Such shows arguably allow teens a humorous outlet for intergenerational struggles while maintaining an image of teenage "purity" that allows older adults to approve.

Teen Psychopath. The final set lean more toward the elder view of teens as irresponsible, reckless and lacking in empathy. Sometimes this may be presented in a humorous format such as in the Bart Simpson character in *The Simpsons*. Or teen social life may be presented as Darwinianly vicious as in *Mean Girls*. Older adults themselves probably are attuned more to negative messages about teens in news media than to fictional media, so even these films and shows may market toward teen audiences themselves. Some, however, reinforce the notion of teens as inherently susceptible to media effects and thus may play into older adult fears. *Mazes and Monsters* was one such example, of youth (including Tom Hanks) being led into delinquency and psychosis by a *Dungeons and Dragons* like role-playing game. The film tapped into a moral panic which existed at that time that players of such games would be unable to distinguish the fantasy of the game from reality.

In this sense fictional portrayals of teens in various ways tap into conflicts between generations, either treating them seriously or with humor. Teen psychopath portrayals may further tap into conflict between teens themselves. Some films may reflect societal panics about media effects themselves. To just what extent these panics is discussed in subsequent chapters.

3.8   Concluding Statements

It is widely acknowledged that fictional media is not very accurate in its portrayals of crime, either in regard to common types of crimes committed, who commits them, why they commit them, or how police respond to such crimes. Although fictional depictions of crime may result in some faulty beliefs about crime prevalence and involvement of racial minorities, the evidence does not support fictional depictions of crime as a leading factor in the formulation of individual beliefs about crime. As we have discussed, it may be that most individuals are able to distinguish the fictional message of crime media from real-life crime, and thus fictional depictions of crime have little effect of beliefs or behavior. The potential remains that these mechanisms for distinguishing fact from fiction may not apply to news media or other "real life" depictions of crime. It is to news media that we turn in the next chapter.

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Chapter 4
Adolescents in the News Media

On January 14, 2010, 15-year-old Phoebe Prince committed suicide after experiencing a day of bullying and harassment at school. Her case and that of others like it such as Megan Meier have prompted a national discussion on bullying and cyberbullying that is both long overdue and ironic. I say ironic because our national fascination with bullying among adolescents comes during a time period where bullying is already on a national decline, not increase (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, & Hamby, 2010). The case of Phoebe Prince is worth examining for, aside from being a personal tragedy for her family, it raises questions about the ways in which the news media portray adolescents and discuss adolescent behavior.

Phoebe came to the USA in September, 2009 along with her mother and siblings, from Ireland. Her father, a British national, remained behind. Phoebe appears to have been a charming and sociable young girl. Indeed, one of the narratives to emerge from the case is that Phoebe may have been too successful with some of the high school boys, leading to jealousies and conflict with at least two groups of girls (Bazelton, 2010). In particular, Phoebe briefly dated 18-year-old Sean Mulveyhill, and, after their breakup, informed his on-again off-again girlfriend Kayla Narey about their relationship. Sean became angry at Phoebe for discussing these matters with Kayla.

In December Phoebe struck up a friendship with another 18-year-old male student, Austin Renaud. He too had a girlfriend, Flannery Mullins. Although Austin denied having a sexual relationship with Phoebe, Flannery nonetheless became jealous of their friendship and turned on Phoebe.

Increasingly both groups of teens confronted Phoebe, often in harsh terms. She was picked on for her Irish background, being called things such as "Irish slut." Sean and Kayla appear to have been behind the worst event, occurring on the day of her suicide. On that day Phoebe was subjected to a series of taunts. One of them wrote "Irish bitch is a Cunt" on a library signup sheet, and she was verbally taunted with calls of "whore" and "slut." As she walked home from school that day, a friend of

Sean and Kayla yelled "whore" at her from a moving car and threw an empty drink can at her. She went home, and texted a male friend about her misery. The friend tried to console her but it was to no avail. Phoebe hung herself in the stairwell.

Six teens including Sean, Kayla, Austin, and Flannery were charged in the case (Austin and Sean with statutory rape). The teen who had thrown the can was charged with assault with a deadly weapon. Most others were charged with charges related to criminal harassment, stalking and civil rights violations (due to commenting on Phoebe's Irish heritage). The DA in charge of the case, Elizabeth D. Scheibel, accused the school district of ignoring the widespread bullying (Boston Herald, 2010), which the school district denied. Ultimately the teens involved plead guilty to lesser charges and received probation and community service.

The narrative I described above is that most often contained in news reports of the case. The Phoebe Prince case and a handful of others involving bullying, particularly involving teen girls or gay male teens, have greatly accelerated our national discussion of bullying behavior. Cases such as that of Phoebe Prince have pushed most states to pass stricter anti-bullying legislation, although some groups feel at least some of this legislation and research may be more trendy and "feel good" than practical (National School Safety and Security Services, 2010).

Others (e.g. Bazelton, 2010) argue, however, that the narratives that cycle through news reports are often incomplete and polemical rather than informative. For instance Bazelton notes that while the narratives of the Phoebe Prince case fall neatly in what I would call the *Mean Girls* narrative of teen female behavior, they often overlook crucial details in the case. For instance, Phoebe appears to have had a considerable history of mental health problems, including self-cutting, depression, and suicidal behaviors prior to the bullying incidents on record, or even her coming to the USA. This is not to diminish the culpability of some of the youth involved in this case, nor the tragedy of Phoebe's death, although it does point to the Phoebe Prince case as being more complex than that often shared in news narratives. Bullying is a trendy topic in the news and this has, not surprisingly, spread to the research and activist community. In many ways, this is welcome; however, it is often observed that "trendy" or "hot" topics, even within the research community are often the product of serious errors in knowledge (Ioannidis, 2005).

With this in mind, the current chapter concerns itself with several issues related to news portrayals of adolescents and crime:

- Why do news media highlight certain cases as "high profile" while ignoring others?
- Does the news media report information accurately?
- What effect do news media reports of adolescents and crime have on the beliefs of viewers?

In examining these issues we will get a fuller idea of the impact of news media on both the way crime is portrayed, and the way adolescents are portrayed more generally. This will provide some insights into societal understandings and misunderstandings of youth violence.

4.1   How Does the News Media Portray Crime?

As discussed in Chap. 3, most people appear to understand that fictional portrayals of crime are fiction and not necessarily representative of real-life crime. Thus, the effect of fictional crime media on consumers appears to be fairly minimal. However, news media portrays real criminal news events. As such, the mechanisms that people use to distinguish "fact from fiction" may not apply to news media. Ostensibly the news media report on "real life" events, and events portrayed in the news media are representative of society itself. Yet, how accurate are the news media in portraying crime?

One thing that must be understood upfront is that, while news media ostensibly report "facts," their lifeblood is effectively no different from that of fictional crime dramas or other fiction. In other words, the news, like other media, is dependent for survival on ratings, sales, and viewership. This fundamental reality has influence on the kinds of stories that news media select to report on. This has less to do with irresponsible reporting, although that can certainly happen as well, and more to do with the realities of the marketplace. The news media report on the kinds of stories that people like to hear about. Naturally, this may not be a representative sample of all the possible news stories available in society.

Not surprisingly, news media tend to focus on more "sensational" crime, including violent crime being generally favored over reporting nonviolent crimes as well as a preference for crimes with either bizarre elements, or those with exceptionally sympathetic victims (Surette, 2007). The result can be mistaken beliefs on the part of the public about the frequency or nature of actual crimes, particularly as a majority of people use the news as a primary source to form their views about crime (Dorfman & Schiraldi, 2001). The way news media present crime could potentially lead to distorted impressions of crime among news consumers.

The report of one multi-organization partnership, including the American Bar Association's Juvenile Justice Center, the Juvenile Law Center, and National Council on Crime and Delinquency, noted several issues with news reports of violent crimes (Dorfman & Schiraldi, 2001):

- Violent crimes are disproportionably represented in news stories.
- Coverage of crime stories has increased while actual crime rates have fallen. This is true for crimes involving adolescents as well as adults.
- Unusual crimes get more coverage than "typical" crimes. This includes interracial crimes in which victims are white, even though most violence is intraracial.
- African-American youth in particular are overrepresented as perpetrators of crime, and underrepresented as crime victims.
- Youth are oftentimes represented as perpetrators of crime, despite that youth make up a minority of crime perpetrators and youth violence has been declining.

From this the authors conclude that news media present a false impression of crime in general, particularly as pertains to minorities and youth. The authors recommend more balanced reporting, although, as noted above, this may be difficult when market forces place greater value on some stories over others. There seems to be a general favoritism in the news for "bad" news as opposed to "good" news.

4.1.1 Missing White Girl Syndrome

Missing White Girl Syndrome (MWGS) refers to the news media and society's fascination with violent crimes occurring particularly with white, affluent, physically attractive, morally upstanding girls (and women). Criminal cases such as those involving Polly Klaas, Madeline McCann, Elizabeth Smart, or Natalee Holiway, all girls or college-age youth who disappeared or were murdered (of those listed only Elizabeth Smart was later found alive) receive national and oftentimes international media attention. Meanwhile similar cases involving non-white girls, boys, or men receive comparatively little media attention. This phenomenon draws upon issues related to race, gender, social class, and society values.

Case Study 1: Natalee Holloway

Natalee Holloway was an 18-year-old American youth on a high school graduation trip to Aruba along with other kids from her high school. While in Aruba the teens are alleged to have engaged in wild partying and drinking. She was last witnessed outside an Aruban night club on May 30, 2005 with local Joran van der Sloot and two of his friends. She did not show up the next morning for her return flight to the USA and her luggage and passport were found in her hotel room.

Her disappearance set of an intense search by Dutch (Aruba is owned by the Netherlands) and American authorities. Her family also flew to Aruba and significant media attention was devoted to the case. Holloway was a young, photogenic woman. Suspicion quickly focused on van der Sloot and his two friends, whose stories about what happened that night kept changing. They acknowledged meeting her but the circumstances of how, when and where they dropped her off or whether sexual contact had occurred changed. Their stories initially implicated other men who were detained, then released.

Meanwhile the search for Holloway or her body continued, involving scores of searchers and even F-16 jets. Numerous tips lead effectively nowhere and the rewards were offered for information leading to her return or identification of her remains. Van der Sloot and his friends were detained again several times, although ultimately released as no conclusive evidence linked them to a crime and Holloway's body was never recovered.

Van der Sloot had settled on a story that he had left Holloway on a beach by herself, alive. He was subsequently caught on film stating that she had begun convulsing while in his company and died, her body buried by a friend of his. He later recanted this story, saying he was under the influence of marijuana when he told it. Further twists and turns occurred in the case, but although suspicions continued to hover over van der Sloot, neither he nor anyone else

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was ever charged with the crime. In 2010 he attempted to extort money from Natalee's mother in exchange for revealing the location of her body and the circumstances of her death and was charged in the USA with extortion in that situation. Van der Sloot confessed in 2010 to killing another young woman in Lima, Peru where he remains incarcerated as of this writing. As of this writing the disappearance of Natalee Holloway has not been solved.

The case of Natalee Holloway is indicative of the MWGS in that international media attention became focused on the plight of a single, Caucasian, pretty youth. Even within the USA many young girls go missing under differing circumstances on any given year. Even were we to eliminate the majority from consideration as runaways or noncustodial parent kidnappings, most disappearances of youth which may be potential homicides do not garner significant media attention. Internationally in many areas of the world deaths of female youths are at a much higher rate than in the USA, yet most of these deaths remain anonymous. Thus, the criticism is maintained that attention to potential homicides of youth tend to be limited to photogenic and usually Caucasian females.

Although race appears to be one element of MWGS, it is important to note that, as most cases involving non-white female victims receive little media coverage, most white female victims of violent crime do not receive much media coverage either. Thus, MWGS is not a privilege that is extended to the majority of white female children or youth. Most of the victims who receive extensive coverage are also physically attractive, or cute if they are little girls. Most beneficiaries of MWGS are also financially affluent; few come from blue-collar or low-income backgrounds (see Jewkes, 2004). Most also are "morally upstanding" citizens. That is to say, girls with a history of behavior problems arguably are less likely to receive much notice.

Some have argued that the MWGS reflects our society's fascination with "damsels in distress" (Robinson, 2005). From this perspective the particular victims that are highlighted are chosen, consciously or unconsciously, for their qualities which are representative of innocence. Thus, our fascination with their deaths or kidnappings stems from our own desire to protect innocence, particularly as represented by the "ideal" female and dismay when these protective efforts fail. In other words we indeed place greater value on particular victims, though consciously we may be loathe to admit it, as these victims are more "innocent" than others. Male victims, minority girls, or girls from less-affluent backgrounds, or with visible human weaknesses, do not fit this bill. It is my guess that, as our culture becomes more racially integrated and accepting, more minority girls will find their cases receiving greater media attention. Yet I suspect that issues related to class and value based on perceived innocence, as indicated by the absence of behavior problems, legal problems, drug use, welfare status, or even single parenthood, will be with us for some time.

4.2   How Accurately Does the News Media Report on Crime?

As noted earlier, as with fictional depictions of crime, news depictions of crimes involving youth overwhelmingly focus on violent crimes. Indeed, coverage of violent youth crimes appears to be on the rise, despite that the actual incidence of violent crimes has been decreasing (FBI, 1954–2010). For instance in recent years there has been extensive coverage of bullying cases among youth despite that bullying has been declining for at least a decade (Finkelhor et al., 2010). As noted, this focus probably reflects typical news related ratings wars and the pressures of the marketplace. In other words, news outlets have to "thrill" their audiences to keep them loyal, particularly when increasing numbers of viewers are turning to the Internet for their news. Although news media usually do report on actual data of violent crimes, these numbers, mentioned only occasionally, may get lost against a constant backdrop of reported violent crimes, particularly when kids are involved. Local nightly news may particularly give residents the impression that local violent crimes among youth are common. However, if the broadcasting area draws upon a large municipality or even many small municipalities, it may not be difficult for local news to report a steady diet of violent crimes, given the size of the local population. Other local news outlets may report on crimes occurring in nearby big cities in order to maintain the steady flow of violent crime news. Given some youth now post bullying incidents and assaults online on sites such as YouTube, the visibility of such incidents has increased markedly despite the actual incidence of such behaviors decreasing. It is true more kids than ever are posting videos of assaults on the Internet simply because they could not do so at all 10 or 15 years ago as the technology was not available.

The result is that viewers may subsequently overestimate the actual incidence of violent crimes among youth both locally and nationally. Research indicates that many members of the public believe that violent crime rates are increasing, not decreasing (Doob, Marinos, & Varma, 1995). Indeed news media and politicians alike may tend to focus on statistics inflating violent crime rates (Niskanen, 1994) particularly where youth are involved. Rare crimes, in particular, may see fluctuations in their rates that clever statisticians may use to make dramatic claims. For example if City A has 10 youth homicides 1 year, then 13 homicides the next year, a politician can claim that "youth homicides in our city have risen 30 % in the last year" which sounds dramatic until one understands the data underlying the statistics. A change of three or so victims in either direction in a city of, say 200,000 is fairly negligible (except to those victims!), and likely due to normal fluctuations rather than any particular societal influence.

This tendency for the news media to over focus on rare but titillating crimes involving youth may explain recent focus on *Knockout King* a "game" in which youth assault random strangers to demonstrate their power to other youth. There has been much attention to this phenomenon in St. Louis, which may (or may not) have seen a rash of such incidents in the past few years (STLToday.com, 2011). From news reports, this phenomenon appears to involve youths traveling in packs who

assault strangers, in attempt to show off for their peers. Usually the youth involved are low functioning, low SES youth. News reports of this phenomenon have often taken a frightening tone, implying a rash of new behavior (e.g., Mann, 2011). Academics have been critical of this view however (see Tucker, 2011), noting that youth assaults are both rare and nothing new, and youth violence has been decreasing, not increasing. Even the use of terms like "knockout king" or "knockout game" can be traced to the early 1990s and it is unclear whether this term was coined by youth or by news reporters.

The issue likely has less to do with any malfeasance on the part of the news media and more to do with the ways in which humans process information. Indeed the news media typically will report on crime trends, even reductions, as reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigations (1951–2010). However, they also may give considerable attention to pundits who expound upon violence "crises" without being burdened by facts. For instance, in the 1990s it was not uncommon to see juvenile violence described as a "national crisis" (e.g. Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1996). Much was made of a supposed epidemic of female juvenile youth violence in particular (Alder & Worrall, 2004). Yet during this time, violence rates among youth, male and female, were actually decreasing (Childstats.gov, 2011).

The salacious details about such crises, whether real or imagined, make excellent fodder for news media, of course. Including the opinion of an "expert" (although news media sometimes consult the opinions of individuals with little expertise in the matter at hand) in a news broadcast lends the air of credibility to a supposed crisis, although experts oftentimes vary widely in their opinions, and the social science community is arguably as given to dogmatic wrong turns as any other. Such expert opinions are oftentimes combined with shocking, yet anecdotal footage of specific crimes to lend emotional impact to reporting on a supposed crisis. It has been observed that the news media is an important contributor to the moral panic cycle in which false crises are widely discussed in the media (Gauntlett, 2005) (Fig. 4.1).

Moral panics often form along pre-existing societal beliefs. The media reports on these concerns, contributing initially to the panic, and adding to public calls for research on the topic. Of course, the research that is being demanded is research to support the existing belief, not research to contradict it. It is more difficult to get a grant when arguing in one's grant application that an issue is "no big deal." Some scientists eagerly produce "research on demand" while others may be critical of this research. Research supportive of the moral panic is accepted without question (or thorough examination), whereas research suggestive that little problem exists is typically ignored (or at best, criticized and discarded). In at least one recent court case on video game violence, it was pointed out that even some social scientists have "cherry picked" data which support the panic view, ignoring unsupportive research (ESA & IRMA v. Blagojevich, Madigan and Devine, 2005). The media dutifully reports on the most negative results, as these results "sell" to an already anxious public. Politicians seize upon the panic, eager to be seen as doing something particularly as it gives them an opportunity to appear to be "concerned for children." The media's motive for doing so is to gain ratings. People tend to pay
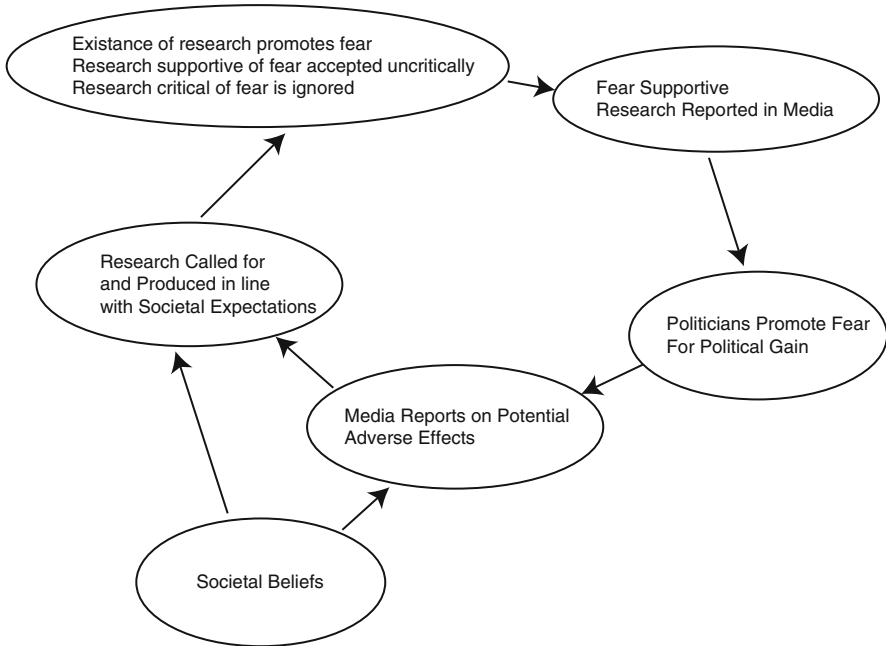
Fig. 4.1 The moral panic wheel

more attention to issues which are pressing, immediate concerns…hence the over-use of words such as "crisis" or "epidemic," rather than statements arguing for calm. The end result is a distorted public belief in exaggerated or even imaginary crises.

4.3 The Follow-Through Failure Effect

Sometimes the investigation of a crime outlives the news cycle's ability or willingness to follow the story. Many violent crimes are of "modest" interest…interesting enough to make an appearance on local news, but not interesting enough to become long-term media spectacles. In such cases, the viewing public may learn the initial details of a crime, but never find out how the investigation turns out. Arguably, for cases that are of "modest" interest, if they are not solved within 24–48 h after initial reporting, the odds of the final outcome being reported in the news media diminishes substantially.

The results can be misleading to the public for two main reasons. First, the public may be left with the impression that a higher number of cases go unsolved than is actually the case. Although a case may be unsolved when initially reported, it may be solved soon after, but the resolution goes unreported in the news media. This may create the impression that police have difficulties in solving violent crimes, or that there are a higher percentage of "master" criminals (those who are able to go unpunished) than is actually the case.

Perhaps more damaging is when an initial suspect is identified in the news media, but that suspect is later exonerated. If the news cycle has moved beyond the particular case, the exoneration of a former suspect may go unreported. As such, the former suspect's colleagues and associates may continue to believe that he or she may have committed the crime. As such, individuals may continue to live under a cloud of suspicion, long after the real perpetrator has been caught and even convicted. Case study 2, regarding the Duke Lacrosse rape case, involving numerous youth falsely accused of gang rape, is a classic "Trial by media" case which can have similar long-lasting repercussions for the accused.

4.4   Trial by Media

A guilty suspect is more interesting than an innocent suspect. News media are aware of this phenomenon, and thus may select news stories focusing on information that implies that a suspect may be guilty. Even the information reported in such stories may be unfairly selected. For instance, a recent article in the Lancet medical journal highlights a case in which journalists may have selectively interpreted ambiguous statistics to claim that a British surgeon was incompetent in treating breast cancer patients (Wright, Bradley, Sheldon, & Liford, 2006). Many experts appear to have disagreed with the journalists' interpretations of the statistics. However, as journalists essentially control the news flow, they can control what side of a story the public gets to hear. This is the phenomenon of *trial by media* in which a suspect's guilt is implied through selective media coverage. As juries are usually drawn from the population of individuals likely exposed to relevant local news coverage, this phenomenon has the potential of tainting jury pools and influencing trial outcomes themselves.

The issue of trial by media involves several legal issues: the free press, right to privacy, libel laws, and right to a fair trial. In the USA the rights of a free press to remain uncensored by government is ingrained in the Constitution. There are limits on the free press as pertain to legal cases, although they exist in something of a state of flux. For instance, courts may issue *gag rules* or *gag order* either prohibiting participants in a trial from speaking with the media, or preventing the media from discussing specific elements of a case. The constitutionality of the latter example, a gag order on the media itself, remains a debated issue (e.g. Nebraska Press Association v. Stuart, 1976; Sheppard v. Maxwell, 1966).

In the *Sheppard v. Maxwell* case, the Supreme Court found that pretrial media coverage tainted the jury pool and deprived the defendant of a fair trial. In this case Sam Sheppard was accused of bludgeoning to death his wife. He was subjected to intense media for months leading up to the trial, including a televised 3-day inquest in front of numerous spectators in a gymnasium. Names of the jurors during the trial were publicized and they began receiving calls about the case. The jurors were also not sequestered or shielded from the media scrutiny. Reporters were positioned near the defendant during the trial, preventing him from having private counsel with his attorney. The Supreme Court found that this scenario precluded the defendant's

right to a fair trial (Sheppard v. Maxwell, 1966). The latter case addressed a court order limiting pre-trial press coverage of a brutal multiple murder in order to assure a fair trial for the defendant. In this case the Court ruled that the pretrial gag order violated the First Amendment and was impermissible. The problem with the court order in the Nebraska case was that, rather than shielding the jury from the media, the court ordered a "prior restraint"; that is the court ordered the media not to report certain information about the case at all. The bar for "prior restraint" or outright censorship of the media is very high and was not met in this case as the trial judge did not adequately consider alternate methods to ensure a fair trial.

In some cases the media may voluntarily censor themselves. For instance in rape or child sexual abuse cases, the media typically does not reveal the identities of alleged victims. However, the media is typically under no legal obligation to refrain from doing so (Cox Broadcasting Corp et al. v Cohn, 1975). Although confidentiality laws may prevent court personnel from releasing the names of rape or abuse victims, the media continues to enjoy First Amendment rights to disclose these names although, out of respect for the plight of rape and abuse victims, they typically do not do so (Beloof, 2005; Berlin, 1996). However, some states such as Florida, have specifically designed laws meant to shield victims' identities from media publication (Berlin, 1996). In the past, such laws have had difficulty surviving constitutional challenge.

Case Study 2: The Duke University Lacrosse Case

In March of 2006 Crystal Gail Magnum, an African-American student at North Carolina Central University who also worked as a stripper, accused several members of the Duke University Lacrosse team, who were mainly white and from privileged backgrounds, of raping her at a party. Magnum alleged that she and another ethnic minority stripper had been called to the party at which much alcohol was consumed, only to be taunted with racial slurs. The strippers left the party but also got into an argument. Police were called when Magnum refused to leave the other stripper's car. She was taken to a mental health facility by police where she alleged she had been raped by the Lacrosse players at the party.

The story fed easily into narratives of race, gender and white male privilege and quickly the accuser garnered much sympathy. The team coach was forced to resign and the remainder of the season cancelled. A group of 88 Duke faculty members signed an ad implying that they believed a rape had occurred and connecting it with wider sexism and racism at Duke. A second group of 17 Duke faculty later sent a letter of support to the accused players expressing concern that they had not been given due process and may have experienced hostility by some faculty despite not having been convicted of a crime.

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The lead prosecutor, Mike Nifong made numerous statements to the press implying that the evidence against the Lacrosse players was solid. In fact, DNA evidence exonerated the players and the case began to disintegrate. DNA evidence from multiple other males who were not the accused Lacrosse players were found during testing, although this evidence was initially withheld by the prosecution. The accuser, Ms. Magnum acknowledged having taken alcohol and other drugs, and also had a history of mental health problems. Inconsistencies in differing versions of her story also reduced her credibility.

In 2007 the prosecutor, Mike Nifong was disbarred and sentenced to a day in jail for dishonesty and fraud in his representations of the case to the court. Soon after, the case against the Lacrosse players was dropped and they were declared to be innocent. Magnum was not charged with filing a false report, apparently due to her mental issues. Magnum continued to have legal problems including an alleged 2011 assault in which her boyfriend died, a crime for which she remains in prison as of this writing. Several lawsuits have been filed by Duke Lacrosse players against the city, Mike Nifong, the university and others involved in the case.

This case presents an excellent example of trial by media, given the intense scrutiny that the Lacrosse players came under during the initial stages of the investigation. As often happens in crimes involving sex, the accused were essentially *presumed to be guilty* in much of the coverage (including the ad by Duke University faculty). An accusation of rape or sexual abuse can follow someone for years or life, even if charges are dropped.

4.5   What Effects Do the News Media Have on Viewers?

As discussed in the previous chapter the Cultivation Hypothesis (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) suggests that media viewers gradually develop beliefs about the world that are based on their consumption of media. Put somewhat simplistically, if you watch a lot of media involving crime, you may begin to believe that such crimes are commonplace. If you watch lots of news coverage of bad youth behavior, you may begin to believe today's youth are nothing but hooligans even where data suggests otherwise. As noted in the previous chapter, the literature on entertainment media was generally not supportive of the cultivation hypothesis. One possible explanation is that entertainment media consumers understand that what they are watching is fiction, and know not to base their beliefs upon fiction. However, the news media purports to report *real* crime. It is then possible that research on news media might produce stronger effects on beliefs, than research on entertainment media.

Researchers seem to have picked up on this possibility, as within recent years at least, there appear to be more articles focused on news media than entertainment media, at least as far as the cultivation hypothesis is concerned. As might be expected the research generally suggests that the effects for news media might be stronger than

for entertainment media. For example, exposure to negative news events appears to increase consumers' perceptions of the risk posed to themselves by those events (Daly & Chasteen, 1997). The effects appear to be short lived, with recent news events exerting the greatest influence (McCombs & Gilbert, 1986). Exposure to negative news may also increase fear and anxiety in viewers (McNaughton-Cassill, 2000), although the effects are small and seem to pertain mainly to those who are already prone to irrational beliefs about the world. Indeed, far from being a general effect, or one which is passive, research suggests that particularly groups of individuals may be vulnerable to cultivation beliefs about crime, whereas the larger segment of the populace may not be affected. For instance, people living in urban areas, the unemployed, women and prior crime victims are most likely to have their fears of crime influenced by media reports (Smolej & Kivivouri, 2006). Indeed crime victims themselves may respond particularly negatively to news reports of their own victimization, particularly when news reports contain factual inaccuracies (Maercker & Mehr, 2006).

Coverage of rare but spectacular crimes such as the Columbine Massacre in 1999 in which two youths killed 12 students, a teacher and themselves, may be instrumental in perpetuating "moral panics" about crime that are out of proportion with real risks. For instance the Columbine Massacre may have sparked off fears of a new breed of juvenile "superpredators" that never materialized (Muschert, 2007). Note that even the word "superpredator" appears to have been chosen to instill maximal fear in news consumers. Ironically the same issue has been said about concerns about media violence effects themselves, with news media whipping up fears about media violence effects that are wildly out of proportion with actual data on youth mental health (Grimes, Anderson, & Bergen, 2007). Fears about waves of female juvenile offenders, serial murder and child stranger abductions may also be inflamed in a similar manner, despite criminological data that such crimes are relatively rare. The cultivation effects of the news media may be strongest when erroneous beliefs are exploited by politicians, special interest groups or even social scientists who wish to enforce a particular moral agenda on the wider populace (Ferguson, 2008a). Youth are very often at the center of such moral panics, given the protected role they have in society as well as cyclical patterns of adult suspiciousness of youth. In other words, cultivation effects may be less due to passive viewer effects, and rather due to the active efforts of special interest groups to sell a particular moral message. Many groups may seize upon the perceived vulnerabilities of youth, in particular, to stoke fears in adults and parents in particular (Grimes et al., 2007). Note that these risk factors overlap, so that a person with all of these (an urban, non-employed, female former crime victim) is most likely to be influenced by crime related news in regard to fear of crime.

In short the following conclusions are made about the influence of news media on crime belief and fear:

1. The effects of news media on crime beliefs are stronger than for entertainment media. Nonetheless these effects remain weak overall, with certain specific groups particularly at risk.
2. Previous crime victims may be particularly likely to have their crime beliefs influenced by news media, probably because they are already primed to believe that crime is common due to their own victimization.

3. Gender appears to be related to the news media's influence on crime beliefs with women more likely to be influenced by news media. This may be because of women's heightened concerns about crime victimization, despite that men are more often violent crime victims than women.
4. "Moral panics" may, at times, ensue due to news coverage or rare but spectacular violent crimes such as school shootings or serial murder cases. Passive viewership alone does not appear to be sufficient to create a moral panic, but rather must involve active involvement of politicians, social scientists and special interest advocacy groups in maintaining public fear.

As such, news media appears to have more potential to influence viewer attitudes and beliefs about crime, overall. Nonetheless effects are not necessarily monolithic.

4.6   Race and the News Media

One issue that gets much attention is that of portrayals of race in news coverage of crimes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, entertainment media unrealistically focuses on high-SES, white and even female perpetrators of violent crime, despite the fact that men, low-SES individuals, and minorities tend to be overrepresented in actual crime data. Although minorities are overrepresented among criminal populations, news coverage of minorities as criminal perpetrators appears to be even greater and out of proportion with real differences (Dixon & Linz, 2000).

Research suggests that news coverage of racial minorities as perpetrators of crime may influence racial stereotypes of minority groups, particularly blacks and Latinos as crime perpetrators (Dixon & Azocar, 2007; Oliver & Fonash, 2002; Valentino, 1999). These effects generally appear to be weak however, with inconsistent results and a somewhat concerning tendency of some authors to explain away null findings that do not support their hypotheses (e.g. Dixon & Azocar, 2007). These results are also somewhat difficult to tease apart from real discrepancies in minority representation in real-world crime data. Is stereotyping of minorities as perpetrators of crime due to the overrepresentation of minorities in news reports or is it due to actual overrepresentation of some minority groups among criminal populations? Though evidence does suggest that the news media overrepresents minority crimes, is this the source of minority stereotyping, or is stereotyping due to the "real state of affairs?" Thus, the evidence available thus far remains insufficient to determine whether news media are a prime cause of racial stereotypes in society (Ferguson, 2008b).

4.7   Portrayals of Adolescents in News Media

Compared to racial issues relatively little scholarship has examined the issue of misrepresentations of adolescents in the media. As described earlier in the book, Finkelhor (2010) has described the phenomenon of juvenoia, including a tendency

for news media to focus on worst case scenarios of youth, or globalizing specific incidents of youth misbehavior while ignoring the broader context of general youth behavioral health. For instance, at the time of this writing I have seen recent headlines proclaim alarm over supposed involvement of teen girls in group sex, and the notion that one-third of youth have been arrested, both claims that conflict with general youth trends regarding sexual and criminal behavior. Of course the USA has millions of teens (and millions more live in Europe and elsewhere) so it is never hard to find a handful of cases of teens acting badly. However, these can come to represent adult attitudes toward youth more generally.

Adam Thierer (2011) has written eloquently on this topic where he notes this tendency to "sell short" the next generation stretches back through history. We tend to whitewash over the foibles of our own generation's past, while refusing to credit the current generation. Further we tend to assume that the current generation of youth is far more fragile than we were at a similar age. Thierer postulates this may have something to do with parenting. As youth ourselves we perceive ourselves as in control and are aware of media influences (or lack thereof) on our behavior. By contrast as parents we invest mightily on our youth and take a defensive posture which is understandable. Having less control over our children's behavior, we may perceive what influence we have as fragile and thus are more likely to respond with hostility toward other sources of influence, whether real or imagined.

The news media has considerable appetite for news stories which portray teens as inferior to adults, particularly behaviorally or cognitively news. At the time of this writing fMRI studies have been particularly popular in the brain. fMRI is an imaging tool which uses heavy magnets to take pictures of the brain in real time which are able to reveal the activity of the brain by monitoring blood flow. Such studies have typically given differing groups of individuals a task while imaging their brain activities to see which areas are functioning. Differences between two groups purport to highlight differences in thinking between those groups (Steinberg, 2007). Although MRI and fMRI are of use in medicine, their use in research has sometimes been controversial (Vul et al., 2009). The statistics employed in such studies are not always of certain validity and scholars' interpretation of what differences in functional utility may mean behaviorally often illuminates as much about what the scholars expected to find as it does human behavior. For instance, we see lower activation of the prefrontal cortext in individuals who have damage to this region, damage which may put individuals at higher risk for aggression and poor impulse control. We also see less activation of this region in people who are simply bored. Thus, differences in activity in this regions can be interpreted alarmingly ("these people are disinhibited toward acting aggressively") or non-alarmingly ("these people are bored") depending, essentially, on the whim of the scholar.

Thus, it is not uncommon to see misuse of brain imaging data in the news media and by some scholars, proclaiming alarmist brain related findings about youth that are not appropriate (Males, 2009). The popular notion that youths are essentially programmed to be riskier probably falls within this category. For example one pediatrician claimed in a news interview that adults "need to

understand that teenagers are neurologically programmed to do dumb things" (Huffington Post, 2011). Whimsically, this exaggerated and nonsensical claim invites one to wonder whether some pediatricians are programmed to say dumb things. Nonetheless such exaggerated claims are music to the ears of journalists. They also fall well within perennial cycles of older adults' eagerness to disparage youth. This does not mean that fMRI studies are without value. However, it does argue for greater care and conservativeness among scholars communicating their results to the press. Although journalists are often the source of misinformation on science, I have seen plenty of press releases from scholars that made exaggerated claims of their own findings that would never have survived peer-review (unlike original manuscripts that are published, press releases on those publications are not peer-reviewed).

4.8   Concluding Statements

As noted in this chapter, the news media does tend to present a biased sample of real-life crime news events. In particular, news media focuses on violent crimes, sensational crimes, and crimes involving high-status and attractive women as victims. There is some evidence that news media consumption may affect the crime beliefs of some, although not all, individuals. Individuals who are previous crime victims as well as women and the unemployed are particular susceptible to news reports changing their beliefs. There is some evidence to suggest that news portrayals of minorities as perpetrators of crime may influence stereotypes of minorities, although these effects are weak and inconsistent. It is also difficult to separate the influence of news media from actual demographic trends in crime perpetration.

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Chapter 5
The CSI Effect

Released in 1991 the film *Silence of the Lambs* rocketed to popular and critical acclaim. The film featured the efforts of an FBI trainee played by Jodie Foster to investigate a series of murders with the "help" of convicted serial murderer Hannibal Lector. The show featured portrayals of FBI profilers and rendered serial murderers themselves as incredibly sophisticated death machines. Never mind that the film's portrayals of serial murderers or FBI profilers weren't necessarily accurate (see Hickey, 2005). Arguably the film set off a mass wave of interest among youth in becoming FBI profilers, far out of pace with actual demand for such careers (becoming an FBI profiler is essentially like wishing to become a rock star…it can happen, but it is pretty rare).

If *Silence of the Lambs* could be said to have opened a modern floodgate both on violent crimes and on forensic careers, the television show *Crime Scene Investigation* (*CSI*) and its various spin-offs and copies has continued the torrent. Although *CSI* has been widely criticized for its misleading depictions of forensic analysis, the show has been immensely popular since its 2000 pilot episode. In my own classes, students mention *CSI* often (more so now than *Silence of the Lambs*), and cite the show as an influence in their own interest in forensic and law enforcement careers. In efforts to emulate the success of the highly technical *CSI* franchise, other networks have turned to other fields of science such as forensic anthropology in *Bones*.

The term "The CSI Effect" is generally used by legal authorities, academics, and the mass media to refer to the concern that shows such as *CSI* may be leading jurors to unreasonably demand convincing forensic evidence (usually as opposed to eyewitness testimony) in criminal cases. The availability and reliability of actual forensic evidence may be much less than implied by results obtained by characters on the shows. However, shows such as *CSI* have also been linked to several other possible phenomena, which sometimes also are referred to, if less often, as the CSI Effect.

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the alleged influence of science-driven law-enforcement shows on each of these phenomena including:

1. The influence of science-based crime dramas on the number of youth seeking employment in law enforcement careers.
2. The influence of science-based crime dramas on the expectations of jurors in criminal cases for reliable forensic evidence to support a criminal charge.
3. The influence of science-based crime dramas on the sophistication of young criminals themselves, who may learn countermeasures to investigative techniques by watching these crime dramas.

This chapter will concern itself with the CSI Effect in all its permutations noted above. This chapter will examine evidence regarding the degree to which crime shows have influenced the way that people perceive the legal system, whether in terms of evidence expected in trials, available careers, or ways of beating evidence collecting techniques.

Before discussing the CSI Effect in all its permutations it is important to note one thing upfront. The CSI Effect is a recently new issue of discussion among legal authorities and researchers. Although speculation is abounding, relatively little research has yet been done to establish the existence of the CSI Effect. Nonetheless it is an interesting and potentially important topic, and one worthy of discussion.

5.1 The Influence of Crime Shows on Career Choice

Many adolescents struggle with deciding on a career path on which to spend multiple decades of their lives. Arguably, relatively few people relish the idea of a desk job shuffling papers from one box to another. Therefore jobs which promise adventure, excitement, and prestige can become high demand. For instance, the popularity of the James Bond books and movies has resulted in many individuals applying for employment with the British Secret Intelligence Services (MI-6) in hopes of finding a career that will recreate the flair and daring-do of the Bond films (Dunphy, 2008). Teens may naturally have relatively little information about the actual careers behind these media depictions and have unrealistic expectations.

Youth interest in forensic psychology and law enforcement careers appears to have spiked in the 1990s, following the release of *Silence of the Lambs* (Huss, 2001). Not surprisingly, movies such as *Silence of the Lambs* are not particularly bound to present law enforcement or "forensic psychology" careers accurately, and youth may be disheartened to learn the differences between the reality of forensics careers and media portrayals of those careers. For instance, criminal profiling is an interest to many youth. However, relatively few law enforcement agencies regularly employ "profilers" (Holmes & Holmes, 2008). The work of a typical forensic psychologist is less likely to involve "profiling" than it is a wide range of activities from assessing mental illness in inmates, to assisting with jury selection (Weiner & Hess, 2005). To the extent that criminal profiling focuses on serial murder cases, there

simply aren't that many serial murder cases in the United States to warrant large numbers of criminal profilers (Hickey, 2005). Although the Federal Bureau of Investigation does employ a small number of criminal "profilers" as part of their National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, these individuals are usually agents experienced in other areas of criminal investigation (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008).

The crime show *CSI* and its offshoots have touched off a second wave of youth interest in forensic careers, this time more broadly that merely "profiling" jobs. *CSI* features a cast of (naturally) good-looking investigators who collect and analyze evidence using scientific techniques, and also interrogate suspects. Many of the *CSI* characters also carry weapons and appear to be sworn officers. As such the *CSI* tech job presented on the show appears to combine traditional crime scene technician duties with those of a traditional police detective. In reality, those roles are largely distinct and the majority of crime scene technicians are not sworn police officers.

The *CSI* series is oftentimes criticized for its unrealistic portrayal of crime investigations (MacDowell, 2005). Main critiques involve the use of crime scene technicians in traditionally uniformed police or detective activities such as interrogating suspects or conducting raids, an unrealistic availability of forensic evidence for criminal cases, and the brief time necessary in the shows required to get results from forensic analyses. Naturally, a show in which viewers had to wait weeks to find the results of individual test results would hardly be a gripping drama, so some of these critiques may have unrealistic expectations about the media's ability to hew strictly to reality. Since *CSI* has been released, departments of criminal justice have seen interest and enrollment grow, and many universities have begun to develop forensic science degrees or minors (North Florida News Daily, 2008).

It is important to note that true "CSI" jobs are science heavy, requiring chemistry, biology, physics (arguably the exact courses some students go into the social sciences to avoid). When youth are considering enrollment in a forensics degree program, they should be careful to be sure that such a program places a heavy emphasis on the sciences required for such a job. More information on typical program requirements can be found at the American Academy of Forensic Sciences web-site which is cited in the references below (American Academy of Forensic Sciences, 2008). Unlike profiler jobs, crime technician jobs are expected to remain in high demand.

Research detailing the impact of shows such as *CSI* and similar shows on criminal justice and forensic science is speculative and most of the evidence for this effect is from testimonials of faculty members making connections between the shows airing and increased youth demand. It is a reasonable hypothesis, yet it is important to note that it remains speculative and we really do not know the impact of crime dramas on adolescent interest in policing and law enforcement careers. It is possible that any correlation that exists between the two may actually be caused by underlying "third" variables, such as an overall increased interest in policing within the population. If the population of US adolescents became more interested in policing in general, it is reasonable to expect that crime dramas and criminal justice and forensics degrees would all become simultaneously more popular, despite no real influence of the shows on career decisions.

Other shows have capitalized on *CSI*'s success by finding niche forensics-related careers to emphasize. One notable example is *Bones*, which is loosely based on the career of forensic anthropologist Kathy Reich, who also acts as a producer for the show. *Bones* does a better job, arguably, of distinguishing the forensic science careers of the scientist characters from investigative careers, although the show adjusts for this by including an FBI agent as a main character. The lead forensic anthropologist character, Temperance Brennan (who writes novels featuring an anthropologist named Kathy Reich) is allowed to ride along with her FBI agent partner on investigations and participate in suspect interviews, although she is not allowed to carry a side arm, despite her frequent requests. Put briefly, forensic anthropology involves identification of skeletonized or decomposed human remains in assistance of legal cases. Forensic anthropologists may also provide evidence of cause of death or time of death, although these determinations are technically made by medical examiners. While forensic anthropology is certainly an interesting field, it is also a comparatively rare one, with only 59 individuals certified by the American Board of Forensic Anthropology (2008).

5.2   The Influence of Crime Shows on Juror Expectations

In a crime drama such as *CSI* increased focus is placed on the scientific evidence, including DNA, weapon analysis, and ballistics, which link a particular individual to a given crime. Oftentimes on these shows, the physical evidence linking a perpetrator to a crime is overwhelming and irrefutable, clearly pushing far beyond a reasonable doubt. In reality, however, many criminal trials persist on evidence which is thinner, and oftentimes flawed (Tyler, 2006). Some prosecutors have complained that shows such as *CSI* have raised the bar for criminal prosecutions, making juries less likely to convict unless offered clear error-proof forensic evidence. This phenomenon is that which most often linked to the term *CSI Effect*, and it is one that we will discuss in some depth.

It should be noted that the phenomenon of science-based crime shows potentially influencing jurors is not necessarily a new one. The crime show *Quincy* which ran from 1976 to 1983 featured a forensic pathologist (i.e. medical examiner) who was instrumental in solving crimes. It is possible that jurors might have thought that detailed and case-cracking pathology reports should be commonplace in competently run murder investigations. Although adolescents are too young to be jurors, of course, adolescents who are raised on a heavy diet of crime shows might theoretically be expected to be more prone to this CSI Effect on reaching the age of maturity. However, research documenting this does not yet exist.

It is generally understood that juries can be impressed by scientific evidence, although they do not necessarily find such evidence essential (Dartnall & Goodman-Delahunty, 2006). Crime dramas such as *CSI* tend to present scientific evidence as superior to nonscientific evidence such as eyewitness testimony and confessions (Smith, Patry, & Stinson, 2007). Although prosecutors may deplore this fact, it is not entirely unreasonable. Eyewitness testimony has long been known to have reliability problems (Kassin, Tubb, Hosch, & Memon, 2001; Loftus, 1983). Similarly the accuracy of child witnesses, even in regards to crimes in which they are the

alleged victims continues to be controversial (Quas, Thompson, & Clark-Stewart, 2005). Even some confessions appear to be given falsely, due perhaps to pressure during police interrogations or desire to protect a third party (Kassin, 2008).

Case Study

On May 4, 2001 actor Robert Blake and his wife Bonnie Lee Bakley went out for dinner together. After leaving the restaurant, Blake allegedly realized that he had forgotten a handgun at his booth and returned alone to get the handgun. He left his wife in their car alone. Returning to the car moments later he found his wife bleeding from a gunshot wound to the head. She died soon after.

Blake and Bakley marriage was said to have been somewhat unconventional. Bakley had been married nine previous times and was said to have a reputation for taking advantage of rich men and celebrities. Details emerged that Bakley had a criminal record and a somewhat sordid personal past. She appears to have run some kind of business in which she mailed nude pictures of herself to men and promised to meet them, while bilking them of their money. She married Blake after becoming pregnant with his child, although she had initially thought that the child's father was Christian Brando, son of Marlon Brando.

Eyewitnesses contradicted Blake's story about returning to the restaurant to retrieve his gun. No one had seen him return and the booth he and his wife had occupied had been bussed very quickly after they left without any gun found. Blake declined to take a polygraph test, asserting that he was too distraught. His home was searched, and he was subjected to a gunshot residue test, all to no avail. A weapon, a Walther PPK, was found that proved to be the murder weapon, but it could not be traced back to Blake.

On April 20, 2002, almost a year after the murder, Blake and his bodyguard were both arrested in the murder of Bonnie Lee Bakley. Central to the decision to make the arrests appears to have been testimony by two of Blake's former stuntmen that he solicited them to act as hit-men in murdering his wife. Blake was initially remanded to jail without bail, and appears to have experienced considerable distress while in jail, complaining that his lawyers would not allow him to grant interviews to the press. Blake was finally allowed bail in March, 2003. In October, 2003, conspiracy charges against Blake and his bodyguard were thrown out, but murder charges stood.

Ultimately Blake was acquitted of the murder. Both stuntmen who accused Blake of soliciting them for murder were found to be unreliable with long histories of substance abuse and mental illness. Due to Bakley's sordid mail-order porn business, it was found that multiple men might have the motive to murder her. No conclusive physical evidence was found linking Blake to the crime. Despite the holes in Blake's own story, some have suggested that it was the absence of physical scientific evidence which did much to doom the Blake murder trial (Tyler, 2006). In cases involving competing motives between a criminal defendant and other third parties, the Blake case highlights the potential importance of science-based forensic evidence to jury decisions.

In previous chapters we have seen that crime dramas, by and large, are not very effective purveyors of information. The general impact of viewing crime dramas on opinions of violent crime appeared to be minimal. By contrast, news media portrayals of crime appear to influence some, but not all, individuals' beliefs about crime. This seemed to boil down to people's basic ability to distinguish reality from fiction, at least in a general sense. People generally seem capable of discarding information purveyed by fictional crime drama, in the knowledge that such information is fictional. By contrast, news media purports to be factual, and thus people may perceive it and accept it as such, despite news media's focus on spectacular rather than mundane crimes. If crime dramas are generally poor purveyors of information, why should we worry much about the CSI Effect?

One possibility is that, although crime dramas are generally portraying fictional events, shows such as *CSI* and *Bones* may present the scientific techniques as factual. It is as if the shows claim that, although the plots are fictional, the science depicted is real (and the shows do sometimes make such claims). Characters within the show may reference journal articles from which the techniques they're using have been developed, although of course those supposed journal articles may themselves be fictional. Characters may appear to back up their techniques with impressive sounding statistics or scientific explanations. Some shows, such as *Bones* may claim to be based on the real-life work of actual scientists. Thus, although the show is fictional, it may wrap itself in a veneer of scientific truthfulness. Viewers may discount the crime itself as dramatic fiction, but assume the scientific techniques used are based on reality. Of course, there are some limits to this explanation: a setting which was clearly science fiction would likely have little impact. The movie *Minority Report* is one such example. Despite fancy scientific explanations for how psychics floating in translucent goo are able to predict crimes that have not yet happened, juries still are not waiting for them to show up at criminal trials. Many, perhaps most viewers of science oriented crime dramas may retain a healthy dose of skepticism regarding what they watch, but it is possible that a few may be swayed by what looks like factual depictions of science, and these individuals may ultimately show up on juries.

It should come as no surprise that prosecutors are complaining most about the CSI Effect (Thomas, 2006). Although there is not nearly unanimous agreement, a significant proportion of prosecutors believe that they have lost at least one case due to the CSI Effect, when they believed that the evidence was sufficient for conviction. Of course it is not enough to take prosecutors' word for it. Blaming the loss of a case on a media phenomenon beyond their control is obviously self-serving, and it is not up to prosecutors to decide when the facts of a case warrant conviction, that is for a jury to decide. Just because a prosecutor claims that a jury "got it wrong" does not mean that they did.

Whether or not prosecutors are correct about their concerns regarding the existence of a CSI Effect, many claim to be altering their professional behavior in order to reduce the potential influence of the CSI Effect on jurors (Stinson, Patry, & Smith, 2007; Thomas, 2006). Steps prosecutors may take to off-set the CSI Effect may include providing instructions to juries regarding the differences between crime shows and reality, including more forensic evidence that once would have

been unnecessary, eliminating jurors with unrealistic expectations during voir dire, and including "negative" expert witnesses to explain why certain kinds of forensic evidence were not necessary.

Thus, there appears to be a fair amount of concern among prosecutors regarding the CSI Effect, although it is possible that the CSI Effect may at times benefit prosecutors as well (Tyler, 2006). In particular, jurors familiar with scientific crime dramas may hear that there are astronomical odds against DNA evidence and other kinds of forensic evidence being wrong. Of course such odds assume that there is no human error to worry about, or even deliberate human manipulation of the results. For instance in 2003 the DNA laboratory for the Houston Police Department was closed after botched DNA tests falsely incriminated several individuals. Subsequent investigation revealed failures at all levels of the DNA lab, ranging from poor funding, poor quality control to a leaky roof that was left unfixed (Bromwich, 2005). The FBI crime lab has also experienced scandals involving technicians who have either mishandled evidence, or deliberately given false testimony about lab results (Associated Press, 2003). These issues about the quality of forensic evidence could potentially be minimized by crime dramas which present such evidence as infallible.

To date there remains relatively little actual empirical research regarding the potential influence of the CSI Effect on jurors. The impact of various phenomena on potential jurors is typically assessed through use of mock trials. Various samples of individuals, either from the general community or (more likely) college students are measured on some variable, then asked how they would decide the verdict of a mock trial, usually featuring actors and presented on video tape. Mock trials are not without flaws, as they do not capture the urgency of real trials, and may not involve a true jury process, yet they do provide one window on jury decision making.

In one study of the CSI effect, study participants were asked to rate the frequency of their viewing of CSI-like shows (Podlas, 2006). They were then asked to read a description of a rape trial in which only eyewitness testimony, not forensic evidence, was available. Finally they were asked to render a verdict and note the basis of their verdict. Although lack of forensic evidence was a common explanation for not rendering a guilty verdict, it did not seem to matter whether participants were frequent CSI viewers or not. Both frequent and infrequent viewers were equally likely to render non-guilty verdicts.

In a second study found some relationships between crime-drama viewing and perceptions of evidence and defendants, although no relationships were found between crime-drama viewing and likelihood of rendering guilty verdicts (Reardon, Morales, Cooper, & O'Neil, 2006). The authors presented a second study with similar results, namely that viewing of science-based television crime dramas had no influence on juror decision making (York, O'Neil, & Evans, 2006). Both of these papers were fairly small in scope, however, correlational in nature and hadn't gone through the full peer-reviewed process of a scholarly journal. Although they were presented at a scholarly conference, one must be honest in noting that many scholarly conferences accept most papers submitted to them. I say this not with the intent of maligning these paper, rather to point out that comparatively little research on the CSI Effect has appeared yet in scholarly journals.

Working in Canada, other authors have found somewhat more complex effects (Smith, Stinson & Patry, 2007). For example, in one correlational study, the authors found that watching shows such as *CSI* and *Law and Order* were related to favorable impressions of scientific evidence, but were not necessarily related to impressions of nonscientific evidence. In other words, such shows did not seem to affect the value of nonscientific evidence such as eyewitness testimony in the eyes of potential jurors, although it did increase the value of scientific evidence. The authors suggested that this effect is causal, as they asked some participants to view episodes of *CSI* provided on DVD in their own homes where as other participants were not assigned to view *CSI*, and return once the episodes had been viewed. As with the correlational study, participants assigned to view *CSI* had more favorable ratings of scientific evidence. Although this suggests a causal effect, the experimental manipulation, as it occurred in participants' homes outside the control of experimenters, was not well-controlled. The outcome of these studies also is on perception of evidence, not on willingness to convict, per se, and other studies have already noted that these phenomena appear to be unrelated (Reardon et al., 2006).

Again it should be emphasized that this is a fairly thin amount of scientific data on which to make a conclusion about whether the CSI Effect is "real" or not. Most of this is done with college students, and the developmental pathways in adolescents have not been explored. However, on the basis of the evidence available, it appears that prosecutor concerns about the CSI Effect are overstated. Again, the CSI Effect may be seized upon by prosecutors eager to explain away criminal cases that did not result in conviction. It remains possible that jurors may be more savvy about forensic evidence than before, in part due to watching science-based crime dramas. However, this increased savoir-faire does not appear to be translating into a net loss for prosecutors.

That having been said, the available research evidence regarding the CSI Effect is simply too thin to make any kind of reliable conclusion. Larger and better conducted studies may ultimately reveal more substance as to a CSI Effect on juror decision making.

5.3   The Influence of Crime Shows on the Creation of Juvenile Superpredators

In the subtitle for this section I include a somewhat loaded word "superpredator," as fears of juvenile superpredators have been the source of moral panics for decades. For instance the Columbine Massacre of 1999 in which 12 students and 1 teacher were murdered by 2 juveniles has been credited with touching off a moral panic about juvenile superpredators (Muschert, 2007). Similarly US society has recently been fascinated with serial murderers as superpredators and, while most of these are adults, some have been adolescents (Hickey, 2005). By and large, concerns about superpredators or violent crime generally have not been consistent with crime data from the USA and elsewhere. At the time of this writing, over the past two decades,

adolescent crime rates in the USA, Canada, the UK, and most other Western countries have fallen dramatically (Childstats.gov, 2011; Nicholas, Kershaw, & Walker, 2007; van Dijk, van Kesteren, & Smit, 2007). Mirroring these recent concerns about the development of superpredators is the concern that science-based crime dramas may be teaching criminals how to avoid detection by law enforcement officials (Patry, Stinson, & Smith, 2008).

Even if crime dramas do not have much influence on aggression or adolescents' proclivity to commit crime, the potential effect of crime dramas on the criminal sophistication of individuals who have already decided to commit crimes is still plausible. After all, we have seen that there is some evidence that some media sources can convey information even if they do not necessarily change basic motivations or personality. The argument here is not that crime dramas cause noncriminals to become criminals, but rather that they teach mediocre criminals how to become GOOD criminals. For instance crime dramas from *NYPD Blue* to *Law and Order* to *CSI* have, to varying degrees, tried to depict real police and investigative procedures. In this sense they differ from the comparatively stylistic depiction of policing in older shows ranging from *Dragnet* to *CHiPs* which were less concerned with realism in their depiction of policing. For instance, *Law and Order* and *NYPD Blue* frequently depicted realistic interrogations, at times discussing interrogation strategy and the likely impact such strategies might have on suspects. Naturally the "good cop, bad cop" routine has become a bit of a cliché in the media, but other more sophisticated techniques such as the Reid technique may also be depicted (Buckley, 2006). Presumably the reason that "good cop, bad cop" has become such a cliché is that it is so easily recognizable. It stands to reason that suspects savvy in crime dramas, may be quicker to note the use of interviewing strategies and, as such, less likely to fall for them.

Similarly the *CSI* franchise is built upon documenting forensic analyses techniques, ranging from DNA analysis, gunshot residue, blood spatter analysis, etc. It is entirely possible that violent youth, either in planning a crime, or in cleaning up after a crime, may remember elements that they've seen in *CSI*. For instance adolescents may not have been aware of gun shot residue, or the need to wash their hands thoroughly after firing a weapon. They may similarly have been unaware of the usefulness of bleach in destroying DNA evidence, or disposing of bodies in running water such as rivers to wash away trace evidence (perhaps by repeating these details here I am contributing to this aspect of the CSI Effect myself!).

The exact influence of shows such as CSI on youth criminal sophistication is hard to document. As of 2007, the latest data available at the time of this writing, the rate of violent crimes perpetrated by adolescents, including murders in the USA, remains at the lowest level since the 1960s, a representing a significant decline in violent in the USA since the peak rates in the early 1990s (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1951–2007). As such we can be quite sure that crime dramas have not increased the frequency of violent crimes among adolescents. Whether such shows have influenced the sophistication of those crimes that are committed is more difficult to document, either for or against. For instance, the number of homicides that have been solved (whether adolescent or adult perpetrated) has declined from roughly 90 % in the 1960s to around 60–70 % currently (Schwartz, 2009). Arguably this could, in part, be due to

increasing sophistication on the part of perpetrators. However, alternative explanations are plentiful. For instance, this change in the clearance of homicides may be attributable to homicides occurring in cities rather than in rural areas, where clearance rates remain high (Schwartz, 2009). Historically, most homicides, whether among youth or adults, occurred between people who knew each other. The rise in gang- and drug-related violence in urban environments as well as violence between strangers in general occurring in increasingly large urban environments may explain this drop in homicide clearances better than *CSI*-related shows.

Ultimately we do not know why certain homicides go unsolved. Naturally if a criminal successfully avoided detection by using techniques gleaned through a show such as *CSI*, we might never learn about it for that very reason. How would we know if she/he is never caught?

Fears about juvenile superpredators have sometimes resulted in a variety of intense security measures in schools, ranging from metal detectors to "zero tolerance" policies. The Columbine Massacre produced something of a surge of interest in school security although items such as metal detectors remain a rarity (National School Safety and Security Services, 2012). Zero tolerance policies generally involved mandatory heavy penalties for even relatively minor infractions, removing administrator or teacher's leeway to consider the context of an infraction. For instance youth who brought a small ceremonial knife important to their culture to school, or who forgot a fish cleaning knife in their backpack would be treated similarly to someone who purposefully brought a weapon to school with the intent to threaten others. An investigation of such policies by the American Psychological Association (2008) found that evidence for their efficacy was low and they might in fact be counterproductive. Nonetheless such policies remain very popular with many school districts as they present the appearance of "getting tough" with youth violence.

Despite the common fears about juvenile superpredators and school shootings, the hysteria appears mainly misplaced. For instance shootings and homicides on school campuses have been declining, not increasing, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2010). This further highlights the common gulf between the public's perceptions of adolescence and the realities of adolescent behavioral health.

In conclusion, much speculation exists about the potential impact of crime dramas on phenomena related to the criminal justice system. Arguably, such shows may have promoted undergraduate student interest in criminological careers, some of which do not exist or are hard to obtain. The influence of the CSI Effect on other issues such as criminal sophistication or jury expectations have been more difficult to demonstrate empirically. As of yet, it does not appear evident that the CSI Effect has had a profound influence on our criminal justice system.

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Part II
Research on Media as a Cause of Crime

Chapter 6
Television Violence

Television, as a media form, has enjoyed a particular dominance and penetration of media use in the USA and many other industrialized nations. Unlike other media forms from movies to books to gladiatorial combat, television has historically been essentially free and easily accessible from one's own home. As a result adolescents can watch hours of television every day, greatly increasing their media consumption. Not surprisingly, television has received greater attention and scrutiny than have other media forms. The "boob tube" as some dubbed it, has been linked with a variety of social ills particularly among adolescents from violence to obesity to declining academic performance. Only in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century have video games and now social media begun replacing television in the public consciousness and scientific research.

This chapter focuses on the issue of whether television violence promotes aggression or violent behavior in adolescents. Several main issues are addressed including the following:

1. The history of television and violence in the USA and elsewhere.
2. An examination of television violence research methodology.
3. A critical examination of research supporting or contradicting the belief that television promotes aggression and violence in adolescents.
4. A discussion of the sociology of media violence research itself, examining how ideology and dogma have influenced the research field and claims made by television and other media violence researchers and how this relates to moral panics focused on youth.

As such this chapter examines evidence for television's influence on adolescent criminal and aggressive behavior, but also the sociology of television research and how prevailing social attitudes toward media can influence public and scholarly discussions.

6.1   A History of Television and Violence

Commercial television has been available since the 1930s, although television only became widely popular in the years following World War II (Abramson, 2003; Elliot, 2006). By the 1950s a plurality of homes owned at least one television set, and by the 1960s almost all homes did. In the 1950s Westerns quickly became the most popular television shows (Kutner & Olson, 2008). Multiple violent acts, shootings, stabbings, fistfights, etc., were a regular feature of these shows. Although such early television Westerns were not as graphic as many modern television shows, particularly those available on cable television, the frequency of violence was very high. In fact the very absence of graphicness has been criticized by some scholars (National Television Violence Study Council, 1998) as potentially promoting aggression in adolescents as the result of not demonstrating the negative effects of violence.

Television very rapidly spread across the developed world with most industrialized nations making commercial television available by the 1950s. Developing or third-world countries introduced television slower and there are still some spots where commercial television is unavailable although these are relatively few in number (Abramson, 2003). Of course just because television is available does not mean that the penetration of television, that is the per capita ownership of television sets, is equal everywhere. Particularly in third-world or developing countries, the cost of a television set may still be prohibitive for the majority of citizens.

As noted by the National Television Violence Study Council (1998) violence on television remains quite common. It is less clear whether the frequency of violent acts on television have changed over time since the Westerns of the 1950s. The Parents' Television Council (PTC) has suggested that violent acts during primetime viewing rose quickly between the years 1998 and 2002 (Parents' Television Council, 2002). In this study analysts examined all network broadcasts during prime-time television for 2-week periods in 1998, 2000, and 2002. They conclude that both the frequency and graphicness of violence increased over this period. However, the report provides scant information on the methodology of how such a count was done, how analysts were recruited or trained, and what kinds of acts were noted as "violent." The PTC has also historically been a "watchdog" group dedicated to sounding the alarm about alleged negative television violence effects. As such, they might be expected to promote somewhat alarmist concerns. To date, no independent review of television violence has either confirmed or necessarily contradicted the PTC study. Given the low amount of information about their methodology that the PTC provides in their report, it is not possible to draw meaningful conclusions from it.

About 20 years after the widespread dissemination of television in the USA, violent crime rates began to rise precipitously. Beginning in the late 1960s to early 1970s, violence in the USA rose to a peak in the early 1990s before plummeting once again (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1951–2011). It appeared, thus, that violence in the USA rose significantly several decades after the introduction of television. Researchers began to use this information as support for the belief that television violence increased violence rates in society (Bushman & Anderson, 2001; Centerwall, 1989).

One study compared homicide rates in the USA and Canada with those in South Africa, where television was introduced in 1975 (Centerwall, 1989). Centerwall concluded that violence rates in South Africa following the introduction of television rose, mirroring the alleged effect in the USA. Canadian violence rates also appeared to rise although not nearly as high. Centerwall failed to note that violence in the USA rose at a time of great social upheaval, racial inequity and racial strife, and a considerable economic downturn. Similarly violence in South Africa rose during a period in which conflict over Apartheid reached a peak. In other words there were other more pressing historical events that explained violence increases rather than television. In research methods parlance, this is referred to as a "history effect," when historical events intrude and distort the behavior of individuals. History effects, such as these, can lead to reduced internal validity of studies and researchers may draw the wrong conclusions from their results.

A follow-up analysis on data from four other countries, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan noted no relationship between the introduction of television and violent crime rates in those countries (Zimring & Hawkins, 1997). One naturalistic study examined aggression in school children after television was introduced to the isolated island of St. Helena in the South Atlantic (Charlton, Gunter, & Coles, 1998). St. Helena received satellite transmission of television in 1995 for the first time, providing an excellent opportunity for a naturalistic study of childhood aggression. Researchers examined the playground behavior of kids for aggressive behaviors before television was introduced and for several years afterward. Results indicated that the introduction of television had no effect on childhood aggression.

The belief that increasing violence levels in the early 1970s through early 1990s is evidence for a television effect continues to be cited in some psychology textbooks (e.g., Myers, 2008). Oddly, the fact that US violent crime rates, and youth violence rates specifically, have returned to late 1960s levels receives considerably less attention by anti-television researchers and advocates (Fig. 6.1).

Since violent crime rates have begun to fall, anti-media scholars have begun to suggest that violent crime rates are unimportant (e.g., Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Heusmann & Taylor, 2003). Yet when violent crimes appeared to work in favor of such theories they were readily invoked, as late as 2001 (Bushman & Anderson, 2001). Naturally it is true that any correlation between violent television and violent crime rates should never have been interpreted as evidence for a causal relationship. In particular it was puzzling why television would take approximately 20 years to produce a violent crime rise. A delay of several years, even a decade, may have made sense as children aged into adolescents and then adults. Violence on television was common as early as the 1950s. However, recent suggestions that the *decline* in societal violence rates is unimportant for the media violence hypothesis are both hypocritical and scientifically lazy. If anti-media researchers conclude that violent television or other media violence produces socially relevant violence, the impetus is on this theory to demonstrate real-world effects in society. At present times, despite that television violence has, if anything, increased as the PTC themselves have suggested, societal violence is on a precipitous decline. Although correlation does not equal causation, this does effectively rule out the existence of a youth violence epidemic, which has been the core concern of many anti-television activists.
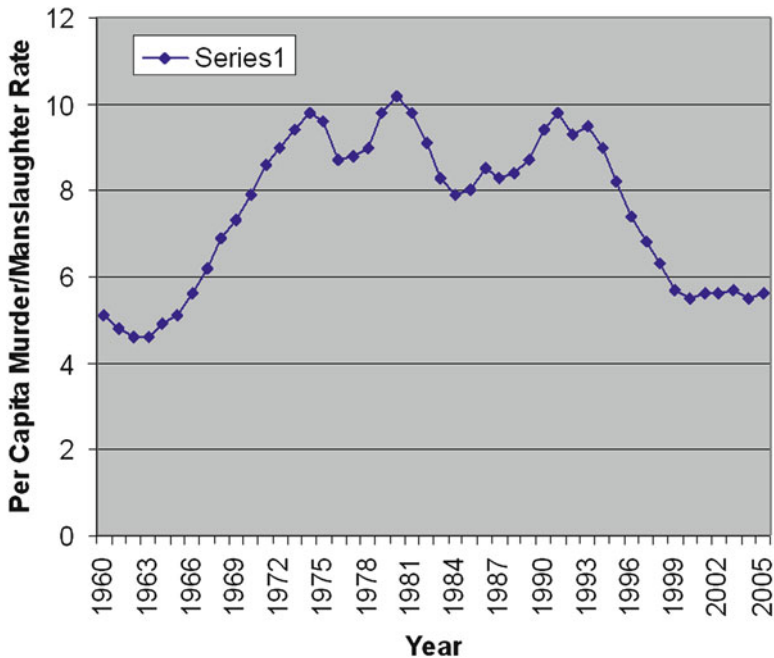
Fig. 6.1 Homicide rate trends in the USA

On balance the evidence, both cross-nationally, and across the criminological history of the USA, does not support the view that television was responsible for the violent crime rise between the early 1970s and early 1990s. Most likely this rise in violence was due to other factors including social and racial strife, increasing poverty, a declining economy, the advent of the crack cocaine trade and reduced funding for policing. Similarly, the reduction in violent crime seen since the 1990s also is not likely to be related to television or other media phenomenon.

6.2   Empirical Research on Television Violence

Research on the effects of television violence began within a decade after the popularization of television itself in the 1950s. In one of the earliest studies Eron (1963) examined the correlational relationship between the television viewing habits of 689 third-grade students in New York. The children's parents reported on their television viewing habits. Researchers rated whether the television shows included violence or not. Aggression was measured via peer-nomination. In other words children in the classroom rated each other on aggression. Watching television violence was slightly correlated ($r = 0.10$) with peer-nominated aggression for boys but not for

girls. Total television viewing, as indicated by the child's mother was negatively related to aggression although this relationship also was weak ($r = -0.09$). Although the author noted that a correlational study cannot determine causality, the author claimed that the support of the Bandura bo-bo doll studies allows for causal inferences to be made. The Bandura studies and weaknesses of these studies that limit their utility for understanding television violence were covered in Chap. 2. As such Eron's claims of causality were probably premature. Aside from attempting to imply causality from a correlational study without considering alternate explanations, Eron also makes a number of important errors that set the stage for common problems with television violence studies. These errors include:

1. *Invalid measure of aggression*. In measuring aggression, Eron relies on children nominating other children. This process assumes that children can be insightful, accurate and unbiased in rating one another. All of these assumptions are questionable at best. There is considerable risk that any such measure might turn into a "popularity contest" rather than a valid rating of aggression. During Eron's, 1963 study there simply was little evidence suggesting that such peer nomination measures were valid. More recently it has been found that validity coefficients for peer nominated aggression are very poor (Henry & Metropolitan Area Child Study Research Group, 2006).

2. *Failure to control for "third" variables*. The Eron study essentially presents bivariate relationships between television viewing and "aggression." However, other relevant variables are not controlled. Examples include genetics, personality and family violence exposure, as well as peer effects and mental illness. It could easily be, for instance, that aggression is genetically inborn (see Ferguson, 2010) and that more aggressive individuals seek out more aggressive television. Without controlling for important third variables it is impossible to know if any correlation between television and aggression is meaningful, or just the byproduct of other underlying processes.

3. *Inconsistent results are ignored.* Eron finds a correlation for television violence and aggressive behavior for boys but not girls. He also finds that overall television viewing is *negatively* related to aggression. Overall this is a muddled, mixed bag of results, the implications of which are not clear. Particularly when the results are weak overall (see below) it is possible that all of these results are rather meaningless and have no practical significance. Instead Eron chooses to focus on the one outcome (boys and television violence) that supports his hypothesis and ignores or explains away outcomes that do not support his hypothesis.

4. *Failure to interpret effect sizes*. As noted earlier the effect size even for boys and television violence is very weak ($r = 0.10$). This effect size is as close to zero as possible without being zero, implying that television violence is related to only 1 % of the variance in aggressive behavior. Effect sizes that are this small run the risk of being a statistical artifact or the product of publication bias (Ferguson, 2007a). Even if we were to assume that Eron validly measured aggression, it is unlikely that such a small effect would be noticeable in real life.

5. *Mistaking correlation for causation*. That correlational studies are not sufficient for making causal claims is such a basic tenant of statistics that it is one of the first things taught in introductory statistics classes. Nonetheless researchers from many fields who are advocating for a potential belief may be tempted to make causal claims when they are not warranted. Unfortunately Eron makes such an attempt, drawing on the Bandura studies to do so. Given the considerable weaknesses of both sets of studies, this claim is certainly unwarranted. Particularly given the very weak effects and poor methodology of Eron's study, much greater caution should have been employed.

Laboratory studies quickly attempted to fill in the blanks regarding causal attributions that correlational studies could not make. Early laboratory studies suffered fairly obvious and considerable weaknesses. The Bandura studies (Bandura, 1965; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961, 1963) as discussed in Chap. 2 did not really study television to begin with, set up rather blunt demand characteristics for child participants, and obtained rather puzzling results that children would imitate models beating a bo-bo doll, but not models actually beating other humans. Other studies found it difficult to adequately match violent and nonviolent media representations. For instance, in one study researchers compare an exciting video of a boxing match against a dull video of boats moving down a canal (Berkowitz, Corwin, & Heironimus, 1963). The outcome easily could have had less to do with the boxing match increasing aggression as it did the poor participants randomized to watch canal boats struggling to remain awake.

Problems with laboratory measures of aggression quickly surfaced. As may be obvious, it is unethical to provoke research participants into engaging in serious aggression or violent criminal acts in the laboratory. Developing good aggression measures that are ethical, yet have good criterion related validity for "real life" aggressive and violent behaviors has proven challenging. Some aggression outcome measures were clearly poor substitutes for actual aggression. Some have included asking children if they would like to pop a balloon, despite that no balloon was actually present (Mussen & Rutherford, 1961), or asking college students if they would like to have a graduate student confederate (who had just insulted them) as an instructor in a course (Berkowitz, 1965). The use of bo-bo dolls that are meant to be hit as substitutes for interpersonal violence was always problematic. For instance one study found that results from bo-bo doll studies did not generalize to real interpersonal aggressive behaviors (Kniveton & Stephenson, 1975). Somewhat more intuitive measures of aggression involved delivering either electric shock or, less convincingly, non-painful white noise bursts to an opponent in a reaction time game. By and large even the best laboratory aggression measures have been found to be highly artificial, and lacking in criterion validity regarding real life aggressive behaviors (Ferguson, 2007a; Ferguson & Rueda, 2009; Ferguson, Smith, Miller-Stratton, Fritz, & Heinrich, 2008; Freedman, 1996, 2002; Ritter & Eslea, 2005; Savage, 2004, 2008; Tedeschi & Quigley, 1996, 2000). Some media violence researchers continue to argue that such measures can be valid (Anderson & Bushman,

1997; Anderson, Lindsay, & Bushman, 1999; Giancola & Zeichner, 1995). Predictably, most of the defense of such measures originates from authors who have used them extensively and whose research depends on their validity, whereas most of the criticism comes from researchers who prefer not to use such measures.

At about the same time as the Eron study, another study suggested that viewing television violence may be *cathartic*, that is to say, that aggression would be reduced by watching television violence (Feshbach, 1961). The catharsis view has enjoyed periodic support in biology, where instinctive drives such as sex and aggression are thought to require periodic release (Lorenz, 1963). From the catharsis perspective, media violence could provide an opportunity for such a release for viewers. In Feshbach's study college students were assigned to watch either a violent or nonviolent program. Half of the college students in each group were insulted prior to watching the program. Participants who watched the violent program, had fewer aggressive attitudes or cognitions than those in the nonviolent program group, particularly when they had been previously insulted. Although these results provide a contrast to Eron's study, it should be noted that the aggression measures used are no better than in other media violence studies.

6.3   Critical Mass in the 1970s?

Research on television violence picked up pace somewhat in the 1970s. Eron's (1963) study was updated in 1972 with a longitudinal analysis (Eron, Huesmann, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1972). The same children from the 1963 study, now teenagers, were reexamined. Results were perplexing and contradictory. First television viewing habits when the individuals were in third grade did not predict their viewing habits as older teens. Current television violence exposure did not predict current levels of aggressiveness. Television viewing habits during third grade predicted aggression in teenage years for boys only, not girls. The aggression measure used was an updated version of Eron's questionable peer-nomination scale, with no validity data provided. The authors conclude that their evidence provides support for a causal relationship between early television viewing and later aggression, but their results are rather inconsistent, fairly weak, and somewhat baffling, given the null results for girls altogether, early television viewing and current viewing, and current viewing and current aggression. Indeed such a mixed bag of results provides little confidence in any subsequent conclusions and it appears that the authors have merely focused on the results which were most supportive of their preexisting hypotheses and ignored the remainder. It is not surprising then that this study was soon criticized for its methodological flaws and the audacity of making causal conclusions from correlational research (Becker, 1972; Howitt, 1972; Kay, 1972).

One common concern about television violence studies, particular experimental studies, was that they lacked external validity. In other words experimental studies were too artificial and did not generalize well to the real world. For instance in

Chap. 2 we have discussed the various validity problems with Bandura's bo-bo doll studies. One study, attempted to correct for this problem by examining boys with behavior disorders in residential treatment facilities (Feschbach & Singer, 1971). In this study, some residential houses were randomly assigned to watch only violent television programs, whereas others were assigned to watch only nonviolent shows. Surprisingly, boys living in the homes assigned to watch violent programs were *less* aggressive after 6 weeks than were boys in the houses assigned to watch nonviolent shows. Aggressive behaviors in this study were rated by adult supervisors who best knew the boys. Feshbach and Singer argue that their results support the catharsis hypothesis. However, it could also be that boys in the nonviolent group were frustrated because they were prevented from watching their favorite nonviolent shows (although any boys who wished to were allowed to drop out of the study). It is also not clear that the violent and nonviolent shows were well matched, a consistent problem for television and other media research. Violent shows tend to be more exciting than nonviolent shows, for instance. Nonetheless, results from Feshbach and Singer do not support the causal hypothesis of television violence.

One often cited study is that by Friedrich and Stein (1973), which implies that children who watch violent programs (such as *Batman* or *Superman*) are more interpersonally aggressive. The authors included five measures of aggression (including one composite of two of the basic aggression measures) and provide a number of analyses to attempt to support this view. Generally the results did not support the hypothesis that exposure to violent programs increased any form of aggression, including hitting other children, verbal aggression or fantasy aggression. The only significant finding was an interaction between initial aggressiveness and violent programs. However, had a Bonferonni correction for multiple analyses been appropriately applied (it was not) this finding would not have been significant. Furthermore once gender was added to this analysis, this interaction was no longer significant. Thus, once gender is properly controlled, there were no significant findings to suggest that exposure to violent programs resulted in more violent behavior.

As such by the early 1970s even leading studies on television violence continued to be poorly constructed, used invalid aggression measures and produced inconsistent and weak effects. Nonetheless many authors interpreted their results as strongly supportive of the causal hypothesis that television violence viewing increased aggressive behavior. The culmination of this research was a report by the US Surgeon General in 1972 which concluded that the evidence was definitive that television violence was one cause of aggression and violent behavior, although the report noted that television violence was a weaker cause than other factors (US Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television & Social Behavior, 1972). As such it would appear that the debate was settled back in 1972. Yet, apparently this was not the case. Scientific criticisms of the causal hypothesis of television violence continued. In fact in a second report almost 30 years after the first, the Surgeon General would back off of the claims made in the 1972, expressing much less certainty about the role of television violence as a cause of youth violence (US Department of Health & Human Services, 2000).

6.4   Uncertainty Develops in the 1980s

It would certainly be untrue to suggest that the causal hypothesis of television violence lost popularity in the 1980s. Yet, it became increasingly evident that studies of television violence continued to labor under difficulties with methodology, problems developing valid aggression measures and inconsistent results that had plagued such studies in the 1960s and 1970s. Several major studies were conducted in the 1980s in order to try to bolster the causal argument of television violent effects, but all were subsequently found to have glaring problems and results that were inconsistent. Perhaps of greater concern, inconsistencies, weak results, and methodological limitations were oftentimes covered up by study authors in an effort to promote an increasingly alarmist causal position (Freedman, 2002).

One issue that was raised by some critics of the causal view of television violence and aggression was that varying nations that shared similarly violent television, had wildly different violent crime rates and patterns. Specifically, although violent crimes spiked in the 1980s and early 1990s in the USA, violent crime spikes remained absent in other industrialized nations with violent media such as Western Europe, Canada, and Japan. Heusmann and Eron (1986) attempted to address this issue by examining the link between violent television viewing in aggression cross-nationally. Children in the USA, Poland, Finland, Israel, Australia, and the Netherlands were followed for 3 years. Aggression was once again measured using peer-nominated aggression. In this study, the link between television violence and aggressive behavior, once examined using multiple regression, proved unreliable, demonstrating significance only for American girls, and Israeli city children (but not children in an Israeli kibbutz), yet not for boys in the USA, girls in Poland or Finland, or children of either gender in Australia, the Israeli kibbutz, or the Netherlands (Moeller, 2001; Wiegman & Kuttschreuter, 1992). The authors, perhaps disappointed with these results, then formed an odd composite measure by combining television violence exposure with a personality measure regarding interest in aggressive role models. As such the predictor variable is no longer television violence exposure, but an odd composite measure that is difficult to interpret. Boys in Finland and Poland showed a significant relationship between aggression and this odd composite measure of television exposure and identification with more aggressive role models, but tellingly showed no correlation between aggression and television violence exposure itself. As such the results from the current study are inconsistent, but overall offer little support for the hypothesis that television violence causes aggression. Tellingly the Dutch scholars involved in the study appear to have pulled out of the study, given concerns over the conclusions made by Heusmann and Eron (1986). The Dutch authors published their results separately (Wiegman & Kuttschreuter, 1992).

More broadly, an examination of violence rates across countries notes that other nations such as Canada, Japan, England, Finland, Australia, etc., which share our rates of violent media consumption (as Heusmann & Eron, 1986 agree), have widely different violent crime rates, and even within a single country such as the USA,

different ethnicities experience much different crime rates (World Health Organization, 2002). Thus, different nationalities, and even subgroups within the USA, are experiencing very different rates of violent crime, despite having essentially the same media violence consumption levels.

Another longitudinal study conducted in the early 1980s attempted to control for stability in aggression in examining the relationship between television violence and later aggression (Milavsky, Kessler, Stipp, & Rubens, 1982a). Once again, peer-nominated aggression was used, although in this study, physically aggressive behaviors were given higher weight. Results provided little evidence for a relationship between television violence viewing and aggression. A follow-up analysis on delinquency (Milavsky, Kessler, Stipp, & Rubens, 1982b) similarly found little relationship for television violence exposure with the onset of delinquency. It is possible that by focusing on the onset of delinquency rather than total number of delinquent acts, the authors may have missed real effects, although others have argued that this is unlikely (Savage, 2004).

By the 1980s, skepticism of the causal view of television violence among the scholarly community appeared to increase somewhat. Probably the most famous criticism of television violence research was by Jonathan Freedman (1984, 1986). Freeman argued that the research on television violence produced weak and inconsistent results, which study authors themselves had all but covered up in promoting the causal hypothesis. Freedman argued that there was no cumulative effect for television violence viewing, and that no particular age groups were vulnerable to the effects of television violence. The low validity of aggression measures used was a problem particularly for laboratory aggression measures. Other scholars debated Freedman's conclusions, although he maintained his position in the face of criticism (i.e., Friedrich-Cofer & Huston, 1986).

Guy Cumberbatch became another early and frequent critic of television violence studies (Cumberbatch & Howitt, 1989). Mirroring many of the concerns of Freedman, Cumberbatch questioned the validity of consistency of results on television violence. Demonstrating a cultural divide, Cumberbatch's theories in England, where Cumberbatch worked, received wider acceptance to the point that many British scholars consider the causal hypothesis of television violence to have been debunked (e.g., Gauntlett, 2006). In the USA, the causal hypothesis of television violence has retained considerable influence despite decades of criticism.

6.5   The Turn of the Millennium Meta-Wars

Although research on television violence continued into the 1990s, two important phenomena began to occur during this decade. First, a shift in interest away from television and onto video games became apparent in the literature. Secondly, the focus began to turn away from individual studies of television violence and onto meta-analyses. It is not uncommon in many research fields, and television violence is no exception, to find somewhat inconsistent results. Meta-analysis is one

statistical tool that can be employed in order to attempt to make sense of the confusion. Briefly a meta-analysis attempts to combine the effect sizes of all of the existing studies in a research field into one lump sum. Individual studies finding results in different directions may cancel each other out, but if there is a trend in the research, it may be revealed by the end result of a meta-analysis. In other words meta-analyses attempt to answer the question "All things considered, what does the research say?"

On the surface it may seem as if meta-analyses are an excellent way of coming to some conclusion regarding the combined results of a research field. Although meta-analyses are a potentially useful research tool, they do have some limitations which reduce their ability to provide solid answers (Bobko & Stone-Romero, 1998). It is important to understand them before discussing meta-analytic results. Major concerns about meta-analyses include the following:

1. *Publication bias*. Generally, journal articles prefer to publish articles which demonstrate statistically significant results. Articles with null results, meaning those that purport to demonstrate no effect, are much less likely to be published. Accumulated over time, this can provide a false picture of a phenomenon in reality. Since null results are seldom published, the relationship between two variables looks more solid than it actually is. Traditionally, meta-analyses of television violence have either neglected to test their results for publication bias, or have relied solely on the Fail-Safe-N, which tends to underestimate publication bias.

2. *The Inclusion of Unpublished Studies*. One way authors of meta-analyses have attempted to reduce the effects of publication bias is to include unpublished studies in their analyses. However, there is no listing of unpublished studies, so authors of meta-analyses have to search for them. Arguably this search itself injects a lot of potential bias into meta-analyses, as meta-analytic authors may be selective in how they search (i.e., not asking critics for any unpublished papers) or study authors themselves may suppress null results that conflict with their views on the topic. Including unpublished studies that have not been peer-reviewed and are of unknown quality also potentially violates the homogeneity assumption of meta-analyses (e.g., Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). Accordingly some experts have begun to caution against the use of unpublished studies in meta-analyses (Cook et al., 1993; Ferguson, 2007a; Smith & Egger, 1998).

3. *Junk In Junk Out*. The "junk in junk out" phenomenon points to the fact that meta-analyses are not able to analyze the *quality* of the included studies. Indeed it is generally assumed that the study authors will screen the included studies for quality. However, combining studies of mixed quality into a meta-analysis merely passes the flaws of a given research field on into the meta-analysis itself. Particularly as some have criticized television violence studies as displaying consistent methodological flaws across studies, this may be an issue for meta-analyses of television violence.

Exactly how many studies there have been of media violence effects on aggression is an issue of some dispute. Perhaps the most striking claim is that by the

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) testimony before congress (Cook, 2000) that "Since the 1950s more than 3,500 research studies in the USA and around the world using many investigative methods have examined whether there is an association between exposure to media violence and subsequent violence behavior. All but 18 have shown a positive correlation between media exposure and violent behavior." Similar statements from the American Psychiatric Association and American Psychological Association provide scientists and laypersons alike, who are not familiar with the literature, the impression that thousands of conclusive studies exist. Although no reviews conducted by researchers familiar with the field make such claims, neither have they been vocal in challenging this misconception.

Freedman's (2002) review of the literature noted that there are actually approximately 200 empirical studies of media violence effects (granted probably increased somewhat in the decade since 2002). This is still an impressive number, although nowhere near the figure cited by the AAP. Of greater concern, however, is that of the studies available that conduct empirical research regarding a link (correlational or causal) between media violence and actual violent behavior, more than half of them failed to support this link. From this analysis it appears that, far from being "unequivocal," the research is highly inconsistent. Most meta-analyses of media violence generally and television violence specifically agree that the total number of studies is probably between 200 and 400. It should be noted that this number includes many non-peer-reviewed studies including book chapters, dissertations and theses, unpublished manuscripts of various sorts, etc. If the number were limited instead to only peer-reviewed journal articles, it would undoubtedly be much lower. Most of these studies do not directly measure aggressive or violent behavior, but rather use indirect means, the validity of which has been called into question (Freedman, 2002; Ritter & Eslea, 2005; Tedeschi & Quigley, 1996).

One of the most influential meta-analyses of television and media violence is that by Paik and Comstock (1994). The authors combine a wide variety of studies of media violence effects, using many different kinds of measures of aggression. Tellingly, most of the studies in their analyses did not directly measure aggressive behavior. This is an important point, as one of the findings of Paik and Comstock's analysis that is often ignored is that the validity of the aggression measure has a large impact on the resultant effects. Better measures of aggression produced weaker effects in relation to television and media violence. In other words, the better job study authors did in measuring aggression, the less effects for television violence were found. Overall, Paik and Comstock reported an effect size of $r = 0.31$ across all studies, or approximately 9 % of the variance in aggressiveness. However, in studies that measured minor physical aggressiveness toward another person (such as giving electric shocks or noise bursts in a laboratory study), the effect size dropped to $r = 0.23$ or about 5 % of the variance in aggressiveness. When criminal violence was specifically considered the effect size was only $r = 0.10$, or 1 % of the variance. Note also that these results are not corrected for potential publication bias, nor take into account methodological problems with the studies. Paik and Comstock also give equal weight to small studies as large studies. As publication bias is more likely

for small studies, this has a tendency to artificially increase effect size estimates. As such, from this meta-analysis, we can see that the effects of television violence on aggression are very small, particularly when only measures of aggressive behavior or criminal violence are considered.

Other meta-analyses of television violence have generally found smaller effects than that of Paik and Comstock. For instance Hogben (1998) finds $r=0.11$ for the relationship between television viewing and all aggression measures, no matter how closely they approximate actual criminal violence. Bushman and Anderson (2001) find results ranging between $r=0.14$ and $r=0.2$. Note that these effects are for general measures of aggression, not violent crime, which tends to get even weaker effects.

One recent meta-analysis of television violence on aggressive behavior has been conducted by Savage and Yancey (2008). Savage and Yancey take greater care than previous meta-analyses to limit their study to only articles that directly measure aggressive behavior, rather than using indirect measures such as surveys, filling in the missing letter of words, etc. Ultimately they find little evidence for a relationship between television and media violence viewing and aggressive behavior.

The most recent meta-analysis of media violence effects (including television and video games, which were analyzed separately) was by Ferguson and Kilburn (2009). Ferguson and Kilburn actually examine some of the common criticisms of television and media violence research, including the misuse of unreliable and invalid measures of aggression and failure to control for "third" variables. Each of the studies included in their analysis was evaluated on these issues for whether they addressed them (i.e., by using better aggression measures or controlling adequately for related variables such as family violence), or left them unaddressed. They found that studies that used better methodologies produced lower effects than did those with weaker methodologies. Publication bias also proved to be a serious issue for studies of media violence in their analysis. The overall effect size for media violence on aggressive behavior was $r=0.08$. Ultimately the authors concluded that this was not sufficient to demonstrate a link between media violence and aggressive behavior.

Across all of these meta-analyses we can see that television violence viewing has little effect on aggressive behavior, particularly violent criminal behavior. The strongest result was from Paik and Comstock (1994), with $r=0.31$, although this is for aggression measures of questionable validity, does not correct for publication bias, and gives too much weight to small studies. Most other meta-analyses agree that this figure is certainly too high. Nonetheless even such an outlier figure suggests that only 9 % of the variance in aggression can be correlated with television or other forms of media violence. Most other figures suggest that the actual effect size is closer to 1–4 % and may simply be zero. The bottom line is that effect size estimates from all of the meta-analyses, including Paik and Comstock's figures for physical aggression and criminal violence, agree that television and other media violence exposure is a weak predictor, at best, for actual aggressive acts in the real world. Table 6.1 puts these effects in some perspective, in comparison with other effect sizes seen in criminal justice research, as well as a couple results from medical research to give further perspective.

Table 6.1 Effect sizes in medical and criminal justice research

Relationship	Effect size (r)
Smoking on lung cancer	0.90
Genetic influences on antisocial behavior	0.75
Salk vaccine on polio prevention	0.74
Self control and perceptions of criminal opportunity on crime	0.58
Protective effect of community institutions on neighborhood crime	0.39
Violent video game playing on visuospatial cognitive ability	0.36
Firearms ownership on crime	0.35
Incarceration use as a deterrent on crime	0.33
Aggressive personality and violent crime	0.25
Poverty on crime	0.25
Childhood physical abuse and adult violent crime	0.22
Child witnessing domestic violence on future aggression	0.18
Television violence on violent crime	0.10
Violent video game playing on aggressive behavior	0.04
Parental spanking on child aggression	0.03

Note: Data from Baumrind, Larzalere, and Cowan (2002); Block and Crain (2007); Ferguson (2007b); Ferguson et al. (2008); Francis et al. (1955); Kizman, Gaylord, Holt and Kenny (2003); Paik and Comstock (1994); Pratt and Cullen (2005); Pratt and Cullen (2000); Wynder and Graham (1950)

6.6   Television Violence, Smoking, and Lung Cancer

In the early twenty-first century, several scholars made the spectacular claim that the link between television violence and aggressive behavior was as good as that as between smoking and lung cancer (Bushman & Anderson, 2001). This claim has, at times, been repeated by other scholars (e.g., Huesmann, 2007). The link between smoking and lung cancer, although correlational in humans, is considered among the strongest in medical science. For instance male smokers are approximately 23 times more likely to develop lung cancer than male nonsmokers. For females the number is smaller, about 13 times more likely (American Cancer Society, 2008). According to the American Cancer Society, about 88 % of lung cancers can be attributed directly to smoking (with most of the remainder likely due to other carcinogens such as asbestos, or genetic conditions). To claim that television violence outcomes are equivalent would mean that 88 % of violent crimes could be attributed to television violence viewing, or that viewers of television violence, particularly males who commit most violent crimes, are 23 times more likely to commit violent crimes than are non-viewers. Such a claim appears to be quite unlikely. Dramatic claims of certainty such as those made by Bushman and Anderson are quite rare in the social sciences. As such Bushman and Anderson's claims deserve close scrutiny.

The argument boils down to statistics. Remember above how we discussed the effect size results from various meta-analyses. We noted that the highest effect

size was found in Paik and Comstock's (1994) analysis, with $r = 0.31$. This would suggest that watching violent television causes about a 9 % (by squaring the r value and multiplying by 100) increase in aggressiveness. Even Paik and Comstock's analyses note that this figure is likely too high, as data for physical aggression and violent crime were much lower. Other meta-analyses agree that the number should be lower. Nonetheless Bushman and Anderson select this high figure of $r = 0.31$, *ignoring the much lower figures of r = 0.14–0.2 found in their own meta-analysis,* as the figure to represent television violence effects. Bushman and Anderson then try to calculate the effect size for smoking and lung cancer based on an old 1950s study (Wynder & Graham, 1950). Bushman and Anderson calculate an effect size of $r = 0.4$ for smoking and lung cancer. In other words smoking increases the odds of getting lung cancer by 16 %. Bushman and Anderson, also calculate effect sizes r for other medical effects such as passive smoking and lung cancer, condom use and HIV infections, asbestos exposure and laryngeal cancer, etc., all of which they calculate as less than the effects than for media violence.

The problem is that many medical studies do not represent their data in terms of the Pearson r. Instead they use something called Relative Risk or Odds Ratio. This is represented by the American Cancer Society's statistic claiming a 23 times elevation in lung cancer risk for male smokers. It turns out that Relative Risk or Odds Ratio and Pearson r do not easily translate into each other (Rosenthal & DiMatteo, 2001). Trying to translate from Relative Risk to Pearson r tends to dramatically deflate effect sizes estimates, something that has been known for some time (e.g., Crow, 1991; Ferguson, 2009; Hsu, 2004; Kraemer, 2006). In other words Bushman and Anderson make their claim by dramatically underestimating the effect size for smoking and lung cancer, as well as other medical effects, and dramatically overestimating the effect sizes for television violence, by selecting Paik and Comstock's figure of $r = 0.31$ over even their own data.

Looking at the data on smoking and lung cancer, we can see that certainly there is no parallel to television violence. Most criminologists would certainly agree that television violence exposure is not the root cause of 88 % of violent crimes. That these claims have been allowed to survive for so long without closer scrutiny suggests that the field of television violence has not been adequately peer-reviewed and may have become dangerously corrupted by political ideology and scientific dogma (Grimes, Anderson, & Bergen, 2008).

Since these meta-analyses, a few studies have attempted to tackle the issue of television violence effects on adolescents, while fixing some of the problems of previous work. Mainly using correlational or prospective designs, these studies used better validated measures of youth aggression, violence and bullying, and controlled for other important confounding variables such as personality, peer effects, family environment, and mental health. Generally studies using these improved methods have generally found that, with other important factors controlled, television violence effects on adolescents appear to be minimal (Ferguson, 2011; Ybarra et al., 2008). Further, this absence of effect for television violence on aggression appears consistent cross culturally (Ferguson, Colwell, Mlačić, Milas, & Mikloušić, 2011).

6.7   Famous Television Violence Cases in the Courts

When criminal defendants are caught committing crimes, particularly violent crimes, it is not uncommon for them to attempt to deflect blame onto others, including their victims, their parents, society in general, and of course the media. Several court cases have received attention due to attempts by criminal defendants or others to explain violent criminal actions on exposure to television violence.

Perhaps one of the most famous cases is that of Ronnie Zamora. In September of 1977 Zamora, a 15-year-old Costa Rican boy living in Florida broke into the home of an 82-year-old female neighbor. Zamora's intent, ironically enough, appears to have been to steal her television set, and she was killed during the robbery attempt. Zamora was quickly arrested and put on trial for murder, burglary, robbery, and possession of a firearm. As the evidence against Zamora was conclusive, his trial attorney elected to claim that Zamora was legally insane. Specifically, Zamora's attorney claimed that he experienced "television intoxication." The trial judge appeared skeptical of this claim and limited testimony by scientific witnesses as well as by Telly Savalas, star of the TV show *Kojak* The insanity defense was unsuccessful, and Zamora was sentenced to life imprisonment, although he was ultimately paroled in 2004. In subsequent appeals Zamora claimed that he had been denied sufficient counsel, and that his attorney had damaged his insanity defense by linking it to the notion of "television intoxication." These appeals were unsuccessful.

In 1998, 12-year-old Lionel Tate battered to death a 6-year-old girl who was being babysat by his mother. Tate stomped on her liver so hard that it began bleeding leading to her death. He also caused numerous other injuries to her including a fractured skull and rib. Tate claimed that he had merely been playing with her and accidentally killed her while trying to demonstrate a wrestling move that he had seen on television. At the time of the killing, Tate was said to be approximately 165 pounds, while his victim was between 45 and 50 pounds. Tate's mother, a Florida police officer, turned down a plea bargain that would have resulted in a 3-year sentence for second degree murder for Tate. In his trial Tate's lawyers claimed that he was mimicking moves seen on television, and was unaware that he was harming her. The jury quickly rejected this defense and believed evidence that he had been aware that he was causing her serious harm. Tate was subsequently convicted of first degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. An appeals court overturned his conviction and he was released in 2004 on parole. He was arrested for armed robbery in 2005 and sentenced to 30 years in prison for violating probation and the robbery.

In 1993 Darcy Burk accused the cable television show *Beavis and Butthead* of inspiring her 5-year-old son to set a fire which killed his toddler sister and destroyed the family mobile home. *Beavis and Butthead* had aired at least one episode of the show where the title characters state that fire is cool. Although the show and its producer *MTV* received much criticism, it was never clear that the child was motivated to set the fire by the show, or even that the family home had been wired for cable. Nonetheless *MTV* promised to avoid fire references in further episodes of the show.

Unfortunately criminals hoping to avoid responsibility as well as parents seeking explanation for the behavior of their children, oftentimes, turn to television as an excuse for wrongdoing. The appeal of such an approach is obvious; blame is deflected away from oneself or one's parenting skills, and passed on to the media. Thus far, in the majority of criminal and civil cases involving television violence as a cause of criminal or tragic behavior, the influence of television violence has not been successful as a defense or source of blame.

6.8   Conclusions

The issue of television violence and its impact on aggressive and violent behavior among adolescents has been a highly emotional and politicized debate. Unfortunately, much of the emotion, hysteria, and hyperbole over television violence effects that exists in the public debate have infected the scientific community. As seen in this review, social scientists have oftentimes exaggerated the links between television violence and aggression, ignored negative results from their own studies, and falsely compared television violence effects with smoking and lung cancer. Although the search for television violence effects on adolescents was always a logical one, it appears to have been corrupted by pressure to find effects rather than conduct objective science. That the resultant science nonetheless demonstrates weak effects, if any, argues that the impact of television violence on subsequent aggression among adolescents is negligible. Data on youth violence and violent crime trends in the USA and other countries provides further evidence that increasing violence on television is not resulting in increasing societal violence among adolescents.

Although the debate on television violence is far from over, the attention it receives appears to have been reduced in recent years. In all likelihood this is because the focus has shifted away from television and onto the newest form of violent media, video games. We examine the research on violent video games in the next chapter.

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Chapter 7
Video Games

From their earliest days, video games made use of violent content and thus quickly captured public controversy regarding media violence. Video games became commercially available in the 1970s both in arcades and through home game consoles such as the Atari 2600. Most early games featured rather primitive graphics and thus there were technological limitations on the amount of graphic violence possible in early video games. Machine on machine violence such as spaceships shooting each other (i.e., *Space Invaders, Asteroids, Missile Command,* etc.) was very common in early games. Human like representations were comparatively difficult to achieve with the pixilation of early video games. Thus, although video games were entering the public consciousness as an object of controversy, they arguably did not fully steal the scene from television until graphics dramatically improved in the 1990s.

The first major controversy over violence and death in video games occurred with the release of a game entitled *Death Race* in 1976. Based on a movie of the same title, the game featured the player driving a car who would score points by running over screaming gremlins. Unfortunately, due to the primitive graphics of the time, the gremlins vaguely looked like humans. Setting the stage for decades of panic, pundits began to discuss the possible negative effects on adolescents of playing video games, partially in response to the controversy generated by *Death Race*. Sales of the game *Death Race* itself may have been harmed by the controversy, although overall, this early controversy is credited as partially creating publicity for video games more widely, resulting in increased sales overall.

The shooter game *Bezerk* generated some notice, being credited as the first game to actually kill several teens when Jeff Dailey (age 19) and Peter Burkowski (age 18) each had heart attacks while playing the game in 1981 and 1982 respectively. Naturally, the game itself had not done anything to cause the death of the players per se, and the timing of their heart attacks was likely coincidental. Nonetheless, the death of two young players during game play increased the notoriety of games at the time.

Popular game platforms such as the "shooter" genre (e.g., *Castle Wolfenstein*) and role-playing games (e.g., *Final Fantasy*) began to emerge in the 1980s. As graphics slowly improved and game play began to feature more human-on-human violence, controversy over violence in video games continued. Anti-media activists were particularly concerned about the interactive nature of video games, suggesting that such games may increase aggression more than television was alleged to do, although such concerns were never well supported by empirical data. Storylines also became more complex and artistic, and demographics changed, with adults increasingly becoming the target audience of many games. Thus, although games such as *Castle Wolfenstein* which provoked great controversy in the 1980s might seem harmless and quaint by today's standards, they have been replaced by increasingly graphic and sophisticated games.

Once the violent content of video games became more realistic, criticism of such games increased. Games from the early 1990s such as *Streetfighter, Mortal Kombat* and *Doom* portrayed increasingly bloody consequences of violence and increasingly garnished criticism from society's elders. The 1999 mass murder at Columbine High School, in which 2 avid *Doom* players killed 12 students, 1 teacher and themselves, acted as a focal point for society's concerns about video games. Some critics began positing the existence of juvenile "super predators" who, raised on violent media, would set off waves of violent crime. Oddly enough, this period, in which video games with violence and death themes surged in popularity, rather than sparking a generation of "super predators" saw precipitous declines in youth and general societal violence to levels not seen since the 1960s. Indeed, looking at the data on youth violence and video games sales data for the years 1996–2009, the only years that both sets of data are available, we find that the relationship between youth violence and video game sales is $r = -0.95$, almost perfect, but in the wrong direction (childstats.gov, 2011; Entertainment Software Association, 2007) (Fig. 7.1).

This chapter concerns itself with the issue of video game violence and whether video game violence does or does not influence player aggression, particularly in youth. As with television violence research we also consider the social and cultural issues that fueled panics over video game influences and may have driven many scholarly discussions on the topic.

7.1   Measuring Aggression in Video Game Research

Some scholars (e.g., Gauntlett, 2006; Grimes, Anderson, & Bergen, 2008) have posited that anti-media research has formed something of a cottage industry, providing low-quality research on demand which fuels societal panic over violent media. If this perspective is accurate, media researchers began to turn off of the issue of television and onto video game violence in the 1990s.

One issue that is worth addressing up front is how video game researchers measure aggression. It is probably not surprising that video game researchers adopted many of the methodologies employed by television researchers when measuring aggression. As noted in Chap. 7 these have historically included measures such as
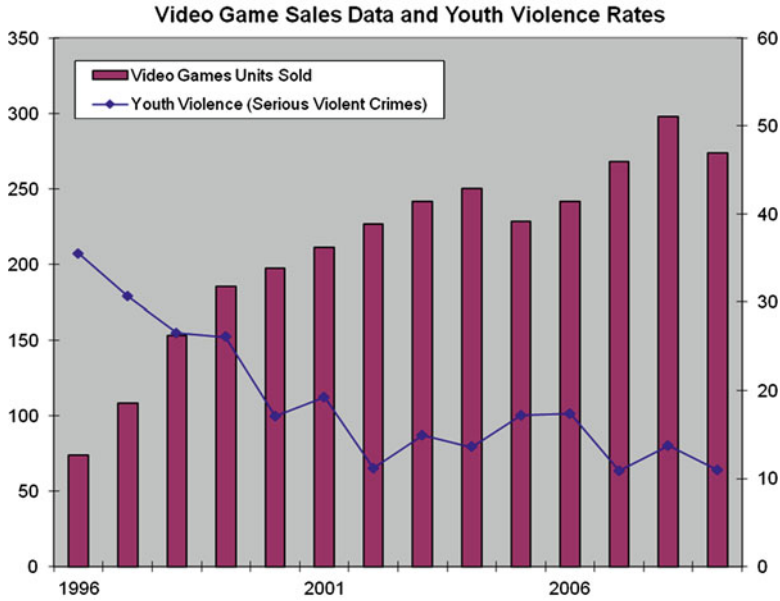
Fig. 7.1   Youth violence and video game sales data

peer or teacher nominations of aggression, filling in missing letters of words, giving likeability ratings of other people, etc. Questions have persisted regarding the validity of such measures.

One relatively new addition to video game research was an experimental aggression measure called the modified Taylor Competitive Reaction Time Test, or sometimes just called the "noise blast" test (TCRTT; Anderson & Dill, 2000; Ferguson, Rueda, Cruz, et al., 2008c). After being exposed to either a violent or nonviolent game, research participants are told that they will play a "reaction time" game against a human opponent. In this game participants are instructed to press the mouse button as quickly as they can whenever a central square on their screen turns red. They are told that their opponent is also trying to press their mouse button quickly at a connected computer in a separate room. Before each trial, the human participant is told that he/she can set a "noise blast" punishment for their opponent should their opponent lose. This noise blast can be set (from 0 to 10) both in terms of loudness and duration. Even the loudest settings are not painful to the human ear, rather more irritating like the white noise of a television set. Naturally their opponent is also supposedly setting punishments that the research participant will receive should they lose the match. The punishments can be reset after each match and there are approximately 25 matches in total.

In reality, of course, there is no human opponent, and the participant is just playing against the computer. In theory, people who set louder and longer noise blasts for their supposed opponent are behaving aggressively. This is not really a measure of violence, since the noise blasts obviously are not damaging, but how does it function as a measure of aggression? It seems intuitive, but despite years of use, the measure

has never been shown to be predictive of real-world aggression, let alone violent crime. Indeed several recent studies with the TCRTT have found that it is not a valid measure of aggression or violent behavior (Ferguson & Rueda, 2009; Ferguson, Smith, Miller-Stratton, Fritz, & Heinrich, 2008d)

One problem with the TCRTT is that, in much of its past use, it has not been used in a standardized way. There are actually many ways of measuring "aggression" with this test…you could measure the number of punishments that are above a certain arbitrary level (say 8 out of 10) or you could take the mean of all 25 matches…or you could just use the mean after win trials, or the mean after lose trials…with a little creativity you could likely think of dozens of ways to use the test to measure aggression, and this is not a good thing. For example, Anderson and Dill (2000), Anderson and Murphy (2003), Carnagey and Anderson (2005) and Bartholow, Bushman and Sestir (2006) all use a modified version of the TCRTT in a variety of different ways to measure "aggression." Indeed even one of the above authors uses the TCRTT differently across studies. This means that the test lacks standardization. Without being standardized researchers can measure aggression however they want and, indeed, can pick the outcomes that best support their hypotheses and ignore outcomes that do not support their hypotheses. This is not a trivial issue, as recent scholarship has revealed that this kind of methodological flexibility can results in scholars publishing "anything as significant" (Lebel & Peters, 2011; Simmons et al., 2011).

7.2   Measuring Video Game Violence

Another issue that arises is how to measure violence in the video games themselves. Older television violence studies oftentimes provided lists of common television shows and had independent raters rate them for violent content. This was a fairly reasonable procedure before the advent of cable television, with a stable repertoire of shows on a small number of networks. With video games, such a system is not feasible. Video games are much more numerous, are constantly being released and have relatively short shelf-lives, aside from a few of the most popular. Games available may also differ by platform. Xbox, PlayStation, and Nintendo platforms may each offer somewhat different game options, and these collectively differ from those available on the PC (the Mac tends to offer the fewest game options and is an atypical gaming platform). Developing a stable content analysis of common video games is not realistic. The gaming universe simply changes too quickly. It is also unclear if the opinions of academics, who bring their own particular biases, are necessarily a more accurate judgment of what is "violent" than anyone else's. At present, some scholars have advocated use of the ESRB rating systems as a measure of violent content (Ferguson, 2011; Kutner & Olson, 2008; Lenhart et al., 2008).

Thompson and Haninger's (2001) attempt to rate E-rated games provides just one such example. The authors claim that violence is common in E-rated games, although their operational definition of violence is broad enough to include a number of very mild games such as *Space Invaders*. Is *Space Invaders* a violent game in the same manner as *Grand Theft Auto* is?

Most video game researchers are left with two options for rating video game violence.

- Participants rate the games. Under this option, used often in correlational studies, participants list the games that they play and rate them themselves on violent content. The obvious weaknesses to this approach is that it allows each participant to use their own definition of violence.
- Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) ratings are used. In this option, participants detail which games they use, but violence ratings are based on the ESRB classification system. This provides a somewhat more systematic and reliable database, and ESRB ratings are continuously updated.

Neither option is entirely satisfactory of course, although having participants rate the games themselves introduces unnecessary subjectivity and could result in demand characteristics or hypothesis guessing.

7.3 The ESRB

The ESRB was formed in 1994, partly in response to controversies over violent fighting games such as *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter*. The ESRB was founded by the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) in an effort to self-regulate content and avoid possible government intervention. In this respect the video game industry has mirrored similar self-regulation efforts of the movie, television and even comic book industries.

The ESRB provides ratings ranging from "EC" for early childhood to "AO" for adults only. The AO label tends to be used most often for sexually themed games (essentially computer pornography). The most violent games such as *Grand Theft Auto* tend to get "M" ratings for mature, which is one step below AO. The ESRB also provides content descriptors explaining the content that warranted the rating. The ratings and content descriptors are displayed on the box of all commercially available games. The ESRB and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) have also jointly produced a parents' guide to understanding the ratings (ESRB & PTA, 2008). The ESRB ratings are presented in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 ESRB ratings

EC	Early Childhood. Content is appropriate for all children 3 and over and contains no objectionable material
E	Everyone. Suitable for children aged 6 and over. May contain mild comedic or fantasy violence
E 10+	Everyone 10+. Suitable for children aged 10 and over. Mild violence without graphicness, may contain mild suggestive themes (i.e., bathroom humor)
T	Teen. Appropriate for 13 and over. May contain frequent person on person violence with minimal blood or gore. Infrequent strong language and suggestive themes may also be present
M	Mature. Appropriate for 17 and over. Intense violence with blood and gore. Sexual themes or strong language may be present
AO	Adults Only. Appropriate for 18+ only. Intensive violence, often with sadistic or sexualized themes. Explicit sexual themes or nudity. Unsimulated gambling
RP	Rating Pending. Usually used for game advertisements before game rating has been completed

Some watchdog advocacy groups such as the National Institute on Media and the Family (NIMF) expressed skepticism of the ESRB ratings (NIMF, 2005). Nonetheless, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has found that voluntary enforcement of the ESRB ratings by retailers has been highly successful (FTC, 2008). The FTC (2007) and Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF, 2007) have found that parents are satisfied with the ESRB ratings. Ultimately the NIMF began supporting the ESRB ratings as well (NIMF, 2008). The NIMF's alteration in support occurred after the group puzzlingly began to accept funding from the ESRB despite previously having been a staunch critic. NIMF ultimately closed its doors in 2009.

In my own research (Ferguson, 2011) I have found the ESRB rating system to be reliable and valid. As part of this study, to test the validity of the ESRB ratings, two research assistants, who were non-gamers and who were blinded to the ESRB ratings of the games, played a set of video games and rated them for violent content using a standardized rubric. Not only did the raters agree highly with each other but their composite scores correlated with the ESRB ratings at $r = 0.98$ suggesting the ESRB system is highly valid for violent content. Of course there are other forms of potentially objectionable content in video games and we did not test for these, but for violent content the ESRB system appears to be an effective rating system.

7.4   Comparing Violent and Nonviolent Games

Regarding research on video games, one difficulty, particularly for experimental studies of video games, is selecting violent and nonviolent games to compare that differ only on the dimension of violent content, but are otherwise the same in regard to playability, enjoyment, competitiveness, excitement, task involvement, etc. This has been an issue which has plagued video game researchers for years, potentially doing harm to the internal validity of many video game studies. This was an issue for television studies as well, as it was noted that violent shows tended to be more exciting and popular with males (Freedman, 2002). Similarly, violent and nonviolent games may differ on many levels, not just on violent content. For example, consider the first-person-shooter game *Medal of Honor* and the mental rotation puzzle game *Tetris*. Both are popular games, one violent, one not, but they differ on many levels including:

- Intended audience (e.g., young versus old, male versus female)
- Excitement level
- Ease of mastery
- Presence of storyline
- Task involvement (e.g., vanquishing foes versus solving a puzzle)
- Predictability of gameplay
- Frustration level provoked
- Time-on-task required (i.e., how long does one need to play the game to get a satisfactory experience from the game)

With so many between-game differences, it would be impossible to ascribe any differences in players, if observed, to violent content.

Many games provide unpredictable gameplay experiences. *Grant Theft Auto* provides an example. The series is criticized for allowing numerous antisocial acts such as beating up prostitutes or shooting police officers. However, these acts are not required as part of the game. In other words they are player initiated. One player may choose to engage in such antisocial acts, whereas another may complete the game without engaging in such acts. As an unusual example, the storyline of the violent game *Fallout 2* can be completed without engaging in any violence. Thus, it is harder to regulate the violence exposure experimental participants get from violent games than from violent television shows.

Violent games, on average, are more difficult to learn. Many nonviolent games involve relatively simple controls that are easy to master, whereas violent games may require complex tutorials before gameplay even begins. Given that most experimental studies of video game violence cut off gameplay after anywhere between 10 and 45 min, this is an important point. Cutting off participants learning a violent game so early may catch them at a point when they are still learning the game, and as such relatively frustrated, whereas the participants in the nonviolent game are happily playing along with a sense of mastery. Any different could be falsely attributed to the violent content of the games when in fact it is due to content mastery.

Several studies have now begun to examine these phenomena. These several studies have sought to do a better job matching video games on their level of competitiveness (Adachi & Willoughby, 2011; Valadez & Ferguson, 2012) or difficulty (Przybylski, Rigby, & Ryan, 2010). These studies have thus far found that, when violent and nonviolent games are more carefully matched, no aggression effects are found in laboratory experiments.

7.5 Studies of Violent Video Game Effects

One of the most commonly cited studies of violent video game effects is that by Anderson and Dill (2000). This study appears to be influenced in part by the Columbine High Massacre, as the authors refer to it directly, suggesting (perhaps inadvertently) that the results of their study are generalizable to school shooting incidents. Anderson and Dill conducted two studies reported in their paper. The first was a correlational study which examined the relationship between violent video game playing and self-reported violent crime in 227 undergraduate students. Participants reported on video games they had played and rated their violence in the games themselves. Overall, the authors found a positive relationship, although the effect for violent video games interacted with innate aggression and gender. Specifically, innately aggressive males demonstrated greater correlations between violent video game playing and violent crime than did other groups. Thus, the results suggest that while a relationship between violent video games and violent crime exists, "third" variables, such as innate aggression and gender, may influence this

relationship. Unfortunately this study did not control for variance due to exposure to family violence or genetics. One plausible explanation not examined in this study (nor in most correlational studies of video game violence) is that exposure to family violence may be related to both the commission of violent crimes and a preference for violent video games. Thus, it would be useful to know whether violent video game playing possesses any unique shared variance with violent crime commission once family violence exposure is controlled for.

Anderson and Dill's second study was experimental, randomizing college students to play either the violent game *Wolfenstein 3D* or the nonviolent game *Myst.* Aggressive behavior was measured using four separate indices derived from the TCRTT. The authors found a small but statistically significant effect for playing violent video games on one of the four outcome measures, but no effect for the other three. Unfortunately the authors failed to employ a standard statistical correction for multiple analyses called a Bonferonni correction. Had they done so, even the fourth outcome would have been nonsignificant. Results ultimately demonstrate little evidence for a causal relationship between video game violence and aggressive behavior. Several weaknesses to Anderson and Dill's experimental study are readily apparent, weaknesses that have been generally difficult to overcome in the literature. These include the following:

1. The use of an aggression measure with poor validity for serious aggression.
2. Unclear match between Wolfenstein 3D and Myst.
3. Failure to control for multiple analyses.
4. The authors selectively interpret the one outcome that suits their hypotheses and ignore three outcomes that do not.
5. The authors inappropriately link their results to school shooting incidents, despite that they do not measure relevant behavioral data.
6. The aggression measure used was poorly standardized.

The plethora of weaknesses in this study, as such, prevents us from discerning much useful from its results.

Ferguson, Rueda, Cruz, et al. (2008c) sought to examine some of the same issues as Anderson and Dill (2000) using several improvements. Ferguson et al. also conducted both an experimental and correlational study. For their experimental study, they used a standardized and reliable version of the TCRTT with only one aggression related outcome, rather than four. *Medal of Honor*, a violent game, was compared to *Myst 3* a nonviolent game. Results indicated no significant difference between game conditions on aggressive behavior, and an effect size statistically no different from zero. Ferguson et al. (2008a) conclude that there is no evidence of a causal relationship between violent game play and aggressive behavior. However, their study uses the same questionable aggression measure. Indeed, later work from the same lab ultimately revealed that the TCRTT is not a valid measure of physical aggression or violent crime and should not be generalized to these behaviors (Ferguson & Rueda, 2009; Ferguson, Smith, Miller-Stratton, Fritz, & Heinrich, 2008d). Ferguson et al. also express dissatisfaction with the comparison of *Medal of Honor* and *Myst 3* noting the ongoing difficulties in satisfactorily comparing violent and nonviolent games. As noted earlier, later better research controlling games more

carefully has produced largely null effects (Adachi & Willoughby, 2011; Przybylski, Rigby, & Ryan, 2010; Valadez & Ferguson, 2012).

In their correlational study, Ferguson et al. (2008) examine the impact of playing violent video games once other variables including aggressive personality and family violence are controlled. They found that exposure to family violence during childhood and aggressive personality traits were predictive of self-reported violent criminal behavior. Exposure to violent video games was not predictive of violent behavior. Ferguson et al. ultimately concluded that their studies found neither correlational nor causal evidence of any relationship between violent video game playing and aggressive or violent behavior.

Other researchers have attempted to tinker somewhat with the TCRTT in hopes that it could be made more generalizable to aggressive behavior. Konijn, Nije Bijvank, and Bushman (2007) examined the impact of playing violent video games on young boys. Their study was similar to those described above, except that the boys were told that setting the noise blasts of the TCRTT at the highest levels would actually cause hearing damage to their opponents. In other words the authors attempted to suggest to the boys that they could actually cause physical damage to others using the TCRTT. The authors found that boys who played a violent game were more likely to select these supposedly damaging noise levels. However, when a personality variable, namely, identification with aggressive role models was controlled, the direct impact of video games became negligible. In other words, the boys' personalities determined their aggressive behaviors, not the video games that they played. There are other issues with the Konijn, Nije Bijvank, and Bushman paper that limit its utility, namely:

1. They introduce yet another unstandardized version of the TCRTT.
2. The authors provide no evidence that the boys believed the cover story. Boys probably would have been suspicious that authority figures would allow them to cause hearing loss to other boys. Also the boys would have heard the highest noise blast levels themselves under the TCRTT's normal programming. When the noise blasts did not damage their own hearing, it would have been obvious that they would not have damaged another boy's hearing either.
3. The authors ultimately provide no evidence that this newly modified version of the TCRTT correlates with physical aggression or violent behavior.
4. Several of the "nonviolent" games that the authors test (*The Sims 2, Tony Hawk's Underground 2, Final Fantasy*) have actually received ESRB content descriptors for violence. As such, the authors appear to have unsatisfactorily distinguished nonviolent from violent games.

Thus, as with the Anderson and Dill (2000) study, the arrangement of weaknesses in this study great limit the degree to which it can inform debates in this area.

The release of the Nintendo Wii, with its motion activated controller raised fears that players physically "practicing" violent acts with the controller would be particularly prone to increased aggression. Markey and Scherer (2009) examined this concern by randomizing players to play violent games with a regular controller and violent games using the Wii motion activated controller. Results indicated that the type of controller had no effect on subsequent aggression, reducing worries about

the motion activated controller. The authors found also that only small numbers of individuals high in preexisting psychological problems were negatively affected by game play. Most participants experienced no change in aggression.

In summation, experimental studies of violent video game effects have not provided a consistent pattern of evidence for causal effects. To a large degree, this is simply because so many of the studies are of such poor quality with obvious and major limitations. Nonetheless, too often, they have been generalized to real-world phenomena such as youth violence with little regard for their limitations.

As for correlational studies, one of the largest was by Kutner & Olson (2008; also see Olson et al., 2007). The authors surveyed approximately 1,200 school aged kids and correlated their use of M-rated violent games with a variety of aggressive behavioral outcomes, including bullying behaviors. The authors found an inconsistent pattern of results. M-rated game play was associated with small increases of some aggressive behaviors and null effects for others. Children who played no video games whatsoever were actually the most aggressive. All of the effects found were very small. As such the authors concluded that there was not enough evidence of a pattern of association between violent video game playing and aggressive behavior in children. It is worth noting that the author's original report (2008) failed to control adequately for "third" variables such as family violence, gender, or the child's innate personality. A follow up analysis controlling for family support, stress level, aggressive personality as well as other variables found that video game violence was not predictive of delinquent or bullying behaviors once these variables were controlled (Ferguson, Olson, Kutner & Warner, in press).

Williams and Skoric (2005) conducted a brief longitudinal study of violent video game effects. Two hundred and thirteen adult participants were randomized to either play a violent on-line video game or to a control group which did not play the game. After 1 month of play, participants were asked to report upon their aggressive behavior in relationships, specifically verbal aggression. No differences between violent and nonviolent video game playing groups were found. This study is limited in that the longitudinal period is very short, and the measurement of aggression does not extend to physical aggression.

A more recent longitudinal study examined the effects of playing violent video games on aggression in the USA and Japan (Anderson et al., 2008). Child respondents rated games then they play, and also reported on aggressive attitudes. Participants were then reevaluated several months later. A very small relationship was found between video game violence exposure at the beginning of the study and aggressiveness a short time later. Specifically video game violence exposure accounted for between ½ and 2 % of the variance in aggressiveness, very close to zero. Several limitations of this study suggest that the influence of violent games may be even lower, notably:

1. The authors fail to control for important "third" variables such as family violence, genetics, or peer influences. As we have seen in previous research (e.g., Ferguson, Rueda, Cruz, et al., 2008c; Ferguson et al., 2008a) once these variables are adequately controlled, the relationship between violent games and aggression typically drops to zero.

2. The authors use poorly validated measures of aggressive behavior that do not correlate well with violent or aggressive behavior.
3. The authors inappropriately claim that their results are relevant to the issue of youth violence, despite that they did not measure youth violence. The authors also raise the issue of youth violence while failing to note that youth violence has fallen to 40-year lows during the period in which violent games have become increasingly popular.

More recent longitudinal studies using children and teens have not supported the results of Anderson et al. (2008), (Ferguson, 2011; von Salisch, Vogelgesang, Kristen, & Oppl, 2011). Both studies improved on previous designs by considering the mediating impact of other important risk factors as well as using better validated outcome measures. Thus, results from longitudinal studies have not been consistent in showing negative outcomes.

Thus, as with experimental studies of violent video game effects, correlational studies have offered little evidence of a relationship between violent video games and aggressive or violent behavior. Recent reviews by both the US government (US Secret Service and US Department of Education, 2002) and independent researchers (Ferguson, 2008) have concluded that violent video game playing is not predictive of extreme violence, particularly school shooting incidents with which they are commonly linked in the media. Both reviews found that school shooters, if anything, have less interest in violent video games than do nonviolent boys. Violent video games are played by almost all boys (Olson et al., 2007) perhaps in the range of 90 % (Griffiths & Hunt, 1995). As such noting that a particular violent boy has played violent video games is not particularly illuminating as almost all boys, violent or not, play games. This would be akin to "linking" violent behavior with wearing sneakers. Many violent criminals indeed wear sneakers…but so does most everyone else who is nonviolent. Similarly government reviews by the US Supreme Court (Brown v EMA, 2011) which are discussed at length in the last chapter, and the Australian (2010) and Swedish (2011) governments have similarly found that the research on video game violence and aggression is inconclusive at best, and besotted with methodological problems.

7.6 Do Violent Video Games Have Positive Effects?

Not all of the research on violent video games have focused on negative effects. A small, but growing body of literature has begun to examine potential positive effects of violent video games.

The largest and most promising of these areas is that of visuospatial cognition. Visuospatial cognition involves mental tasks dealing with visual manipulation and processing. Such tasks are important for careers ranging from engineering and architecture to surgery.

Green and Bavelier have conducted several studies (2007, 2006, 2003) in which they have randomized undergraduate students to either play a violent or nonviolent

video game. They then asked the participants to complete a visual scanning and attention task. The authors have consistently found that people who are gamers in real life outperform non-gamers. Similarly participants randomized to play a violent action game outperform those who are randomized to play a nonviolent but highly interactive video game. Effect sizes for their research were of moderate size, far outstripping those found in aggression research.

Feng, Spence, and Pratt (2007) noted that men tend to outperform women on spatial attention tasks, and gamers tended to outperform non-gamers. The authors were curious whether practicing with a violent video game would erase the gender disparities in visual spatial performance. Undergraduate participants were randomized to play either a violent (*Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault*) or nonviolent (*Balance*) video game, and then tested on their spatial attention and mental rotation ability. For participants who played the violent game, visuospatial abilities improved and gender differences evaporated.

Ferguson, Cruz, and Rueda (2008b) examined the impact of violent video game playing history in real life on visual memory. Undergraduate participants were shown an abstract figure (the Rey Complex Figure) for 1 min, and then asked to draw it from memory. Respondents were asked to also draw six common objects (bicycle, eyeglasses, revolver, videogame controller, brassier, make-up compact) from memory. These drawings were then independently rated by two scorers on accuracy and detail. Participants who were frequent video game players generally, and had higher exposure to violent games specifically, outperformed non-gamers on these visual memory tasks. Similarly Rosser, Lynch, Caddihy, Gentile, Klonsky, and Merrell (2007) found that surgeons who played violent video games were better at surgical procedures than those who did not.

Results for violent video games and visuospatial cognition are both more consistent and much stronger than for aggression as an outcome. This leads us to two questions:

1. Why do violent video games improve visuospatial cognition more than do nonviolent games?
2. Why do violent video games improve visuospatial cognition, while having little to no impact on aggression?

The first of these questions, frankly, has not been answered. It is possible that the tension and speed of action in violent games may provide an environment in which speedy cognitive processing is necessary, where as nonviolent games are less able to provide such an environment. Thus, it may not be the violence, per se, that promotes visuospatial development, but rather other aspects of game play which are more common to violent than nonviolent games.

As to the second question, this goes back to issues we have discussed earlier in the book. For violent games to influence aggression they must cause a fundamental change in a person's personality, motivations and core beliefs. To influence visuospatial cognition requires no such innate change, it is a mere practice effect. Consider, as a cross-example, that practicing at the target range with a rifle will

gradually make a person a better shot. There is no evidence that such practice is likely to cause the same person to use that rifle to shoot someone. As such, mere practice effects are much easier to convey than are personality/motivation shifts.

However, it is important to note that the research on visuospatial cognition has come under recent criticism as well. Scholarship by Boot and colleagues (2011) concluded that the research on video games and visuospatial cognition suffers from many of the same methodological problems as has the violent literature. Similarly the recent experiment by Valadez and Ferguson (2012) found that when games were carefully matched on variables other than violence, they produced neither aggression effects nor increases in visuospatial cognition. Thus, I must raise the possibility that people (including scholars) may have overreacted to the introduction of video games both in regard to potential harm, and the potential promise for benefits.

There is research to suggest that violent video games may have other positive uses including assisting medical patients adhere to treatment (Kato, Cole, Bradlyn, & Pollock, 2008), increasing civic engagement (Ferguson & Garza, 2011; Lenhart et al., 2008) meeting social and esteem needs (Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006), and use in education (Steinkuehler, 2008; Steinkuehler & Duncan, 2008; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; VanDeventer & White, 2002).

7.7 Meta-analyses of Violent Video Game Effects

As with television violence effects, researchers have attempted to use meta-analysis techniques to examine the influence of violent video games. The first of these by Anderson and Bushman (2001) and updated in 2004 by Anderson alone included both published and unpublished studies of violent video games and found that these studies overall indicated a small but significant effect on aggressive behavior. Several limitations of this meta-analysis limit interpretations of these findings however. First the authors attempt to include unpublished studies but this has been recognized as problematic for some time (Cook et al., 1993; Smith & Egger, 1998). There is not central repository for unpublished studies, so attempting to collect them tends to add more bias into meta-analyses than it does help them. Unpublished studies that are found and included in the analysis will likely be very different than those that are not found. This also violates the homogeneity assumption of meta-analysis, that included studies be methodologically similar. Including unpublished studies also exacerbates the *junk in/junk out* phenomenon of meta-analysis. Put simply, meta-analyses have no way of judging the quality of included studies. If poorly conducted studies are included in the analysis, the analysis itself will be highly biased. The authors also fail to control for *publication bias* or the tendency for statistically significant studies to get published at higher rates than studies with null findings. Publication bias can make a research field look much more consistent than it actually is.

Sherry also examined the influence of video game violence on aggression (Sherry, 2001). Sherry found only a very small relationship between video game

violence and aggression[1] and was tentative in his conclusions. Sherry noted that the effects for video games appeared to be much smaller than for television. In a later follow up, Sherry was more conclusive in deciding that the current research on video games offered no support for the belief that exposure to violent video games leads to aggressive behavior (Sherry, 2007). Sherry noted that the available evidence suggested that, if anything, aggressiveness decreased the longer players were exposed to video games in experimental designs. This is probably due to the frustration effect discussed earlier, that players randomized to play violent games are initially frustrated as they learn the controls, but become increasingly calm as they learn the game.

Ferguson (2007a), in a more recent meta-analysis found that the effects seen in video game violence research were largely explained by two factors:

1. Publication bias. Once publication bias was controlled, video game violence effects dropped to zero effect.
2. The use of unstandardized aggression measures. Unstandardized measures can be used "willy nilly," giving researches a lot of freedom in selecting outcomes that match their hypotheses while ignoring those that do not. The historic use of the TCRTT is one such example. Ferguson found that, not surprisingly, when these measures were used, the resultant effect sizes were larger. Better, standardized, and reliable measures of aggression produced much smaller effects.

In other words, the violent video game effects that have been seen in some of the literature are due more to problems with the literature and study methodologies than due to any actual effect of video game playing. Ferguson concluded that there was neither correlational nor causal evidence for video game violence effects on aggression.

In a second meta-analysis Ferguson compared the effects of violent video games on aggression to effects on visuospatial cognition (Ferguson, 2007b). Ferguson found that both research fields suffered from publication bias effects. Once these were controlled, the influence of video game violence on aggression was near zero.[2] By contrast, the effects of violent video games on visuospatial cognition demonstrated moderately strong effects.[3] As such, this meta-analysis offers strong evidence that the influence of violent games on visuospatial cognition is much stronger than for aggression. Both the Anderson (Anderson et al., 2010) and Ferguson (Ferguson & Kilburn, 2009) groups produced later meta-analyses, although the conclusions of both groups did not change and the results remain in dispute.

Overall the research on video game violence is weak, inconsistent, and fraught with methodological and measurement problems. Despite pretty strenuous efforts to find effects by some researchers, little evidence for a relationship between video game violence and aggressive behavior has emerged. If anything, as noted earlier,

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[1] $r = 0.15$

[2] $r = 0.04$

[3] $r = 0.36$

as violent games have become more common, youth violence has plummeted. Although there is no reason to believe that video games are responsible for this decline in youth violence, we can be sure that video games have not caused youth to become more violence.

7.8   Why Do the Kids Play: Engagement and Addiction

Through all of this debate and discussion about the effects of video game violence on youth violence, surprisingly little research has examined the question of why kids play in the first place. Most kids now play at least some video games, although boys play more games and more violent games than girls (Ferguson, 2011; Lenhart et al., 2008). The obvious answer is that they are fun of course, although the interaction between games and players is probably a bit more complex than that.

As we can see, most of the research on video games (and other media violence) comes from what is sometimes called the hypodermic needle model, the idea being that media is injected into passive viewers more or less like a shot. In other words video game violence is something *done to* children, who are passive helpless recipients (indeed much of the politics and even scholarship on the topic adopts this tone). However, other scholars have argued that adolescents are active in the process of selecting and processing media including video games. This view is sometimes called the *uses and gratifications* approach (Sherry et al., 2006). The uses and gratifications approach suggests that young players are active in selecting media that fits their mood or needs, or perhaps helps them reach a mood state they would like to reach. From this perspective, media effects are much more subtle, complex and interactive than under the traditional social science hypodermic needle approach. Viewers are an active and important part of the media experience, not merely passive vessels waiting to be filled with all manner of negative messages. This approach would also assume viewers can largely distinguish reality from fiction, and process information accordingly, a view largely supported by research even with young children (Wooley & Van Reet, 2006).

Along the same lines, self-determination theory suggests that players use video games to meet basic human needs such as for competence, autonomy and socialization (Przybylski, Rigby, & Ryan, 2010). Kids then, play video games to meet needs that are not being met well in their real lives. So a player may look to a game to feel power and control that is lacking in his or her real life, or even simply to make and interact with friends. In a recent study with Cheryl Olson (Ferguson & Olson, 2013) we found that this basic model fit well with children's reports on why they were motivated to play video games. Children played mainly for fun, socialization as well as to relieve stress.

Of course some adolescents play video games too much, to the point that they neglect other responsibilities such as school, exercise or family. This issue is called either pathological gaming or video game addiction. As of yet it is not recognized as an official disorder although most scholars agree a small minority of children

overdo it (Desai et al., 2010; Ferguson, Coulson, & Barnett, 2011). Given it is not an officially recognized diagnosis, there remains much debate on how to properly measure the phenomenon, how prevalent it is, and whether it is something unique or merely the produce of underlying mental illness. Although debate remains, a recent meta-analysis suggested the prevalence is approximately 3 % of gamers, and that it is most likely the product of underlying mental illness, not a unique phenomenon to gaming (Ferguson et al., 2011). Further, hours spent gaming does not seem to be a good predictor of problems. It appears that many gamers can play for fairly long hours without neglecting other responsibilities. Thus, it is important to distinguish addicted players who experience negative outcomes from *engaged* players who may play long hours without experiencing negative outcomes (Charlton & Danforth, 2010). Some research suggests that *addicted* players may show increased aggression, whereas *engaged* players do not, no matter whether the games they play are violent or not (Desai et al., 2010).

7.9   Important Legal Cases Involving Video Games

Violent video games have been subject to an extraordinary amount of legislation attempting to censor or ban their sale to certain groups or in certain countries. In the USA, this legistlation has typically focused on minors, although in many other countries (Germany, Australia, and of course many non-democracies), certain games may be banned altogether. Video game legistlation is discussed in the final chapter of this book along with legistlative efforts aimed at other media. The cases discussed here examine situations in which violent video games were blamed for heinous crimes, or other tragic circumstances.

Devin Moore. On June 7, 2003 Devin Moore was arrested by Alabama police officer Arnold Strickland for stealing a car. Moore had never been in trouble with the law before, and was initially cooperative when brought to the police station for booking. Suddenly, Moore grabbed Strickland's pistol and shot him in the head, then shot a second officer responding to the shooting. He then walked down the hall, shot a police dispatcher five times killing him, and escaped in a patrol car. He was subsequently captured and is said to have told police "Life is like a video game. Everybody's got to die sometime" (CBS News, 2005). Speculation began that playing the violent game *Grand Theft Auto* had "taught" Moore to become a murderer. However, the judge rejected the influence of *Grand Theft Auto* as a defense during the criminal trial. During the trial it emerged that Moore had a troubled upbringing including alleged physical abuse. He was ultimately convicted and sentenced to death.

The families of two of the victims sued the makers of *Grand Theft Auto* and the PlayStation console. Florida attorney and anti-game activist Jack Thompson became involved in the case. Thompson's behavior during the case has been controversial, including accusing the judge presiding of unethical behavior and alleged harassment of defendants, lawyers and the judge in the case. Ultimately Thompson's behavior contributed to his 2008 disbarment. The civil case has since languished without clear decision.

The Virginia Tech Massacre. On April 16, 2007, Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA became the site of the worst mass school shooting in history. At 7:15 a.m. two students, Emily Hilscher and Ryan Clark were shot and killed in a dorm. These shootings, like the rest, appear to have been fairly random.

Seung-Hui Cho, the shooter, then mailed video tapes he had taken of himself ranting and posing with weapons to NBC. Two hours passed between the initial shootings and the final massacre in Norris Hall. Virginia Tech has been criticized for failing to adequately warn students about the initial shootings of Hilscher and Clark.

Cho entered Norris hall wielding two handguns and chained shut the main doors. He climbed to the second floor and began the second, much more deadly portion of the massacre, shooting faculty and students in their classrooms. Nine minutes later 30 people were dead (for 32 dead total) and 17 had been wounded. There were individual stories of bravery during the shooting such as Professor Liviu Librescu who barricaded a classroom door with his own body while most of his students were able to escape through a window. Librescu was killed after being shot through the door. Police responded to the scene swiftly but had difficulty bypassing the chained doors. As police entered the building, Cho killed himself with a gunshot to the head.

Within hours of the massacre, before the name of the perpetrator had even been released, several pundits had begun suggesting that violent video games were behind the massacre. Jack Thompson, a Florida lawyer and anti-video game activist blamed video games for teaching children to kill. Dr. Phil McGraw ("Dr. Phil") appeared on "Larry King Live" to assert that violent video games and other violent media are turning children into mass murderers. The Washington Post included a paragraph suggesting that Cho might have been an avid player of the violent game "Counter-Strike," and then quickly removed that paragraph without explanation.

None of these assertions proved true however. In fact, in the final report by the Virginia state review panel commissioned by the Governor, Tim Kaine, video games were entirely and specifically exonerated. Cho, it turned out, was not a gamer. In fact, unusual for a young male, there was little evidence to suggest that he played video games at all, aside perhaps from the nonviolent game Sonic the Hedgehog (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). The review panel stated that "He was enrolled in a Tae Kwon Do program for awhile, watched TV, and played video games like Sonic the Hedgehog. None of the video games were war games or had violent themes. He liked basketball and had a collection of figurines and remote controlled cars" and "Cho's roommate never saw him play video games." There were other indications that all was not well with Cho: a long history of mental health problems, and stalking behavior toward two female students. Yet if Cho was odd in any respect to video game playing habits, it is that he played them rarely and violent games not at all.

Brandon Crisp. The story of Brandon Crisp is not one about violent crime, but rather a tragic death in which video games became embroiled. It highlights the speed with which media will sometimes blame video games for negative outcomes, even in cases in which the evidence is sparse.

Brandon Crisp, age 15, disappeared from his family home in Canada on October 13, 2008 following an argument with his parents about the time he was spending playing the video game *Call of Duty 4* on his Xbox. Crisp decided to leave the house,

packed a backpack with a few things, and rode away on his bike. Witnesses say they saw him a short distance away in woods near his home. His bike had apparently broken, and later was found abandoned. His parents reported him missing the next morning and an intense search for Crisp began, capturing national attention in Canada, as well as the USA. A reward for his return is offered by a local newspaper an. Microsoft. The news media began to speculate on several video game related angles:

1. Video game addiction. Crisp's parents had noted that his running away had been sparked by arguments over the Xbox. Although such arguments between parents and children are likely very common in healthy children, certainly some kids may engage in video game playing at the expense of other important activities. To this author's knowledge, no information such as declining grades or avoidance of social activities, has emerged that would indicate compulsive video game playing in Crisp's case, although such information may merely have been kept private. One train of through was that Crisp may have run away or even committed suicide as a result of his arguments with his parents over the Xbox.
2. Online predator. An alternative concern was that Crisp had met an adult sexual predator online while playing *Call of Duty 4* and may have contacted that individual following the flight from his family home. Crisp might either have been staying with that individual willingly or had been kidnapped by that individual. Microsoft began to assist police in identifying people that Crisp may have interacted with online.

Sadly, Crisp's body was found by hunters on November 5, 2008. His body was found not far from his home and near to where his bike had been abandoned. A postmortem exam found that Crisp had died from chest injuries consistent with a fall from a tree. In the end Crisp's death was a tragic accident unrelated to video games.

7.10   Concluding Statements

The topic of video game violence has been subjected to an intense debate in both the public and scholarly community in past years. At present, it increasingly appears as if the data does not support a link between video game violence and youth aggression. As with previous moral panics, issues in this field tell us more about society's reaction to new media than they do new media themselves.

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Chapter 8
Other Media

Through the latter half of the twentieth century, most public and scientific concern centered on the alleged deleterious effects of television, pornography (to be discussed in the next chapter), and video games. Other media, including movies and radio in particular, have comparatively faded from view despite that objectionable content including violence has probably risen over times in these media as well as those that receive more attention. Specific movies such as *Natural Born Killers* or radio shows such as *Howard Stern Show* may be criticized for their crass content. Overall, as video games take the forefront of public and scientific discourse other media, perhaps even television and pornography, are slipping to the backburner.

In the current chapter we consider several forms of media that have received less attention in modern research including movies, cartoons, comic books, music, and religious writings. Most of these areas, at least in recent decades, have been eclipsed by concerns about television, video games, and pornography. Yet, they occasionally garner attention and concern. This chapter considers whether research indicates such concerns are merited.

8.1 Movies

As noted in Chap. 2 movies were probably the first modern mass media in the twentieth century to receive widespread public and scientific consideration. The Payne Studies and the Hays Code were just two of the major highlights reflecting concern in some circles that violent and objectionable content of movies might lead to behavior problems in youth. By the second half of the twentieth century the focus had switched to television. Both research on and concern about movies dropped off. Not surprisingly, this led to significant relaxation in censorship of movies in the latter half of the twentieth century, with the Hays Code being replaced by the current ratings system presented in Table 8.1. The movie ratings which have been

Table 8.1 Movie ratings system

G	General Audiences. No objectionable content
PG	Suitable for children with parental discretion. Some mild objectionable content
PG-13	Suitable for children above the age of 13. Moderate objectionable. Possibly violence, some language, or mild nudity
R	Suitable for teens with parental supervision. Under 17 not admitted without a guardian present. Significant objectionable content including graphic violence, strong language, graphic nudity, and sexual situations
NC-17	Under 17 not admitted. In practice, usually reserved for sexually explicit films, although some films with highly graphic violence, torture, etc., may also warrant this rating
X	No longer used by legitimate motion pictures. Used only unofficially by the pornography industry

developed by the Motion Picture Association of American (MPAA, 2012) have undergone some changes over time. When first developed in 1968, movie ratings had four potential classifications, G, M, R, and X. The rating M for mature was intended for all audiences, although many viewers mistook it to be sterner than the R rating (MPAA, 2012). As such it was changed to GP and finally PG. The PG-13 rating was added in 1984 due to objections that some PG movies had significant nudity, language, or violence. Finally the X rating was dropped when it was co-opted by pornographic films. The X rating was not initially meant to indicate pornography per se. Other nations have their own ratings systems. Some, like France, are operated by government ministries (CNC, 2008). Others use voluntary ratings systems similar to the USA.

Ferguson and Kilburn (2009) found that most recent research articles examining the issue of media violence and aggression examined either video game violence or television. Violence in movies was a distant third, possibly indicating relative lack of interest in this older media. As with other forms of media, this meta-analytic review found little evidence of a relationship between viewing violent movies and aggressive behavior.

As with other forms of violent media, consumption of violent movies by adolescents is very common (Worth, Chambers, Nassau, Rakhra, & Sargent, 2008). One recent Icelandic study surveyed college students on self reported violent film consumption, acceptance of violence, and personality variables (Sigurdsson, Gudjonsson, Bragason, Kristjansdottir, & Sigfusdottir, 2006). The authors found that individuals who were more accepting of violence in general were more likely to consume violent films. This study did not link such consumption with aggressive behavior, however, and is correlational in nature.

One study of 150 elementary students surveyed students on their consumption of violent movies and video games and their effect on empathy and pro-violence attitudes (Funk, Baldacci, Pasold, & Baumgardner, 2004). Results were inconsistent. No relationship was found between movie violence exposure and empathy, but a small relationship was found between movie violence exposure and pro-violence attitudes. However, the study is correlational in nature, and did not examine aggressive behaviors. Thus, this study is unable to demonstrate a link between movie violence viewing and aggressive behaviors.

One study compared the self-reported consumption of violent films of males with schizophrenia institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital who had a history of violent behavior against controls without such a history (Guy, Mohan, & Taylor, 2003). Results indicated that violent males did not differ from nonviolent controls in their consumption of violent films, although they did report greater enjoyment watching such films. These results suggest that consumption of violent films played little role in the development of violent behavior for these men. It should be noted that results from an incarcerated psychiatric population cannot be generalized to the general population, however.

In one of few recent studies of film violence to attempt to actually study aggressive behavior, Zillman and Weaver (1999) randomized college students to watch either violent or nonviolent films over a 4-day period. On the final day of the experiment, some of the participants were insulted by a research assistant. Subsequently the participants were provided with an opportunity to rate whether the research assistant should be rehired for a future job. Naturally, those participants who had been insulted by the research assistant were less likely to offer a positive recommendation. However, participants who had watched violent movies as compared to nonviolent movies turned in slightly more negative reviews. Of course the mismatch between turning in a job recommendation and committing a violent crime is rather obvious. The "aggression" in this case, following an insult, is both nonviolent and justified. As such results from this experiment cannot be generalized to serious aggression or violent behavior. If we remember the issue of "demand characteristics" it is also possible that the college students were able to guess that, following 4 days of watching violent films, they were expected to behave more aggressively.

Unfortunately few other recent research studies have examined aggressive behavior specifically as a consequence of watching violent films. There simply appears to be comparatively little research in this area, at least recently. Most of the research studies of movie violence do not examine aggressive behavior in a valid way. There is little reason to think that research studies that examine television would necessarily differ from those on movie violence. As the effects seen for research on television violence have been weak and inconsistent, there is little reason for greater confidence regarding movie violence effects.

Probably the film which has attracted the most attention in recent years as potentially inspiring copycat crimes is *Natural Born Killers*. The film follows the violent exploits of a young couple who murder indiscriminately. The film loosely parallels the real life case of Carol Ann Fugate and Charles Starkweather. In the film the murderous couple becomes folk heroes and is portrayed rather sympathetically.

Attempts have been made to "link" *Natural Born Killers* with real life crimes. One of the most famous cases was that of Florence Rey and Audrey Maupin, a young French couple who went on a sudden murderous spree. Hijacking several cars in succession, the young couple shot to death several French police officers and a civilian. Ultimately the couple were stopped by a police roadblock and shot. Maupin died and Rey (who had not done the actual shootings) was sentenced as an accomplice. The connection with *Natural Born Killers* appears to have been created

in the news media given the similarities between the French couple and the couple in the film. To date, no evidence has emerged to indicate that Maupin or Rey had even seen the film. The couple did have a history of legal problems and associations with anarchist groups (New York Times, 1994).

In the USA, *Natural Born Killers* was held accountable in a lawsuit regarding the crime spree of Sarah Edmondson and her boyfriend Benjamin Darras. The couple killed one man, and then shot and paralyzed Patsy Byers. Byers subsequently filed suit against the movie's director Oliver Stone and Time Warner Entertainment. As has been the case with most lawsuits in which a link between media violence and actual crimes is asserted, the case was dismissed (BBC, 2001).

8.2 Cartoons

Technically cartoons may themselves either be television shows or movies. They are occasionally singled out in the research literature and deserve some special mention here. Particular attention is paid to cartoons as the majority are developed with children in mind. Some cartoons both on television (e.g., *Family Guy, South Park*) or movies (e.g., *A Scanner Darkly* which used rotoscope over live actors) are developed with adult audiences in mind. They may receive particular criticism from anti-media activists who mistake cartoons as exclusively marketed toward children. Anime refers to a specific kind of Japanese-influenced animation that is often adult-oriented containing considerable violence. Anime cartoons have a significant following in the USA and other countries. The anime style can be recognized by characters with large eyes, multicolored hair, exaggerated expressions and movements. There is even a specialized kind of Japanese-influenced cartoon pornography called Hentai.

Violent acts are commonly portrayed in cartoons, including those aimed at children (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008; Kirsh, 2006). However, the violent acts portrayed are typically minor in comparison to television programs or movies (Kirsh, 2006). Some have argued that the humorous elements of many cartoons may serve to mask the violent elements (Potter & Warren, 1998). Viewers may be unaware that they are watching a program with significant violent content. Unfortunately little research has examined the potential impact of the mixture of humor and violence on children (Kirsh, 2006).

Coyne and Whitehead (2008) have argued that aggression in television and cartoons can be divided into two forms, both of which are important to consider. These two forms of aggression can be delineated as follows:

- Direct aggression: Physically aggressive or violent behavior intended to cause immediate physical harm. Hitting, kicking, biting, stabbing, shooting etc., would all be directly aggressive.
- Indirect aggression: Involves more subtle social efforts at aggression. The intent is still to cause harm to the other person, although often social harm rather than physical harm. Spreading rumors, revealing secrets, malicious gossiping, all would be examples of indirect aggression.

   The authors analyzed the amount of indirect aggression in popular Disney cartoons. The authors concluded that indirection aggression in animated Disney films was lower than direct aggression, and typically portrayed negatively.

   The methodology of cartoon research strongly mirrors that of television research. In one of the earliest experimental studies, children were randomized to watch either a violent *Woody Woodpecker* cartoon or a nonviolent cartoon (Siegel, 1956). Children were then observed and rated on aggressive acts while playing with a second child. The following same children were brought back the following week and observed in the opposing condition (i.e., kids who had watched the violent cartoon now watched the nonviolent cartoon). No differences in aggressive behavior toward other children were found between violent and nonviolent cartoons. It may be, however, that the exposure to cartoons in the laboratory was too short to demonstrate effects, or that children's real-life exposure to violent cartoons was constant across both conditions and thus a short exposure could not demonstrate effects. Nonetheless, similar results were found in other studies of comedic cartoons with violence (e.g., Hapkiewicz & Roden, 1971).

   One study examined correlations between frequency of viewing cartoon and movie violence and teacher reported aggressive behavior (Aluja-Fabregat and Torrubia-Beltri (1998). Frequency of viewing cartoon violence was not associated with aggression in either boys or girls. Movie violence was slightly associated with aggressive behavior in boys but not girls. Taken together these results suggest that direct exposure to cartoon violence has no relationship to aggressive behavior. The authors did find that boys who reported the highest enjoyment of violent cartoons were slightly more likely to be aggressive.[1] In other words, the personality of the boys may be related to increased aggression, as well as increased enjoyment of viewing violent cartoons, but actually frequency of viewing violent cartoons did not result in increased aggression. Some cautionary notes are worth mentioning about this study. First, the authors did not control for other relevant variables such as family violence. Thus, even the only significant media effect result, for boys with movie violence, may be explained by other variables. Also, the aggression measure used, teacher ratings, has demonstrated low validity in other studies (Henry, & Metropolitan Area Child Study Research Group, 2006). Similar results were found by Ellis and Setyra (1972) using a 5 min exposure, with similar problems regarding the confusion of aggressive behavior and aggressive play.

   Silvern and Williamson (1987) took baseline measurements of preschool children's aggressive behavior and then randomized them either to watch the violent cartoon *Road Runner* or to play the "violent" video game *Space Invaders* for 6 min. On the next day the two groups were switched and the children were exposed to the opposite media as the day before. On each day the aggressive behavior of children was observed during free play with peers. The researchers concluded that both media forms increased aggression from baseline. Multiple problems with the study limit its interpretation however. No no-violence media control group was included

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[1] $r = 0.23$

in the study. The 6-min exposure is too brief to have much effect. It is unclear if the observers were actually rating aggressive behavior or merely cooperative and mutually enjoyable aggressive play. Kirsh (2006) also notes that forcing the children to play with the same peers and same toys over multiple days may have frustrated the children explaining any increases in aggression better than the media exposure.

From these studies of cartoon violence we can conclude several things.

- Little evidence links exposure to cartoon violence with aggressive behavior.
- Exposure times in some research studies have been too short to demonstrate much effect.
- Aggressive behavior and aggressive play are confused in some of the studies.
- Innate personality traits may lead some children, particularly boys, to report enjoying violent cartoons more, and engage in aggressive behavior.

Thus, although cartoons ranging from *Bugs Bunny* through *Family Guy* have often been the source of criticism, little evidence suggests children imitate behaviors seen in them to the point of reaching a public health concern.

Kirsh (2006) suggests that comedic elements in many cartoons may offset the influence of violent content. Viewers may simply not recognize comedic violent acts as violent. This may be the case, although evidence in favor of the influence of non-comedic cartoons is not much more encouraging. Overall some scholars have concluded that the potential influence of cartoons is minimal, that young children can distinguish the moral implications of violent acts witnessed in cartoons, and that any imitative behavior is short-lived only and playful in nature rather than aggressive (Peters & Blumberg, 2002).

8.3   Comic Books

As noted in Chap. 2, comic books were at the center of controversy regarding media violence effects. Some early researchers suggested that comic books could have cathartic like effects, reducing behavioral problem in children (Bender & Lourie, 1941). By the 1950s, this view was out of fashion. The psychiatrist Dr. Frederic Wertham, published *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954/1996), claiming that comic books were causing juvenile delinquency. Wertham's claims got the attention of congress although the comic book industry engaged in self-censorship and the storm died down. With the MPAA's 1968 rating system, greater amounts of violence, sex, language, and nudity began to appear in films under the more restrictive R and X (later NC-17) ratings. The relaxation of self-censorship by the movie industry opened the door for other media industries to follow suit. The self-censorship that comic books had endured for several decades began to come undone. By that time, television was the central focus of media debates, and little attention was lavished on comic books.

Many current comic books do contain considerable adult themes including graphic acts of violence (Kirsh & Olczak, 2002a). In one of the few studies of comic

books violence Kirsh and Olczak (2002a) randomized college students to read either a nonviolent comic book or an extremely violent comic book. The students then read a set of scenarios in which either direct or indirect aggression had occurred, but the intent of the perpetrator was unclear. For instance stories might include a child being hit in the back with a ball or not being invited to a party. Respondents were asked to judge the intent of the perpetrator and the degree of retaliation that was appropriate. Results indicated that respondents who had read the extremely violent comic book were slightly more likely[2] to interpret the scenarios as intentionally more aggressive than those who had read the nonviolent comic book. This study is interesting and well done, but does display some weaknesses that limit the interpretations of the results, namely:

1. The study was conducted on nonviolent college students rather than children.
2. The study does not measure aggressive behavior as an outcome. There is no reason to believe that individuals who interpreted the scenarios as more aggressive would be prone to greater aggression themselves. In other words, the outcome is not a valid measure of aggressive behavior.
3. There is significant potential for demand characteristics. Demand characteristics are a threat to the validity of a study in which participants are able to guess the hypothesis and consciously or unconsciously change their normal behavior to provide experimenters with the results the participants think the experimenters want. Demand characteristics are an issue for many media violence studies, as well as many studies outside of media violence. In particular, given that the participants were students in a *psychology* class, they may have been informed about media violence research and easily guessed the study hypotheses.
4. The resulting effect was very small and should not be overinterpreted.

Thus, research on comic books such as in this study, perhaps not surprisingly, displays many of the same strengths and weaknesses as other media research.

The same authors conducted a second, similar study (Kirsh & Olczak, 2002b). In this second study the focus was exclusively on indirect aggression. Once again undergraduate college students in a psychology class read scenarios in which one child engaged in an act of indirect aggression (e.g., children at a lunch table stop talking when a peer sits down with them). Prior to reading the scenarios, the participants had read either an extremely violent comic book or a nonviolent comic book. They were asked to rate the aggressive intentions of the perpetrators and how much retaliation was appropriate. Once again a small effect[3] was found for the violent comic books on judgments of the scenario. This study has the same strengths and weaknesses as the above study.

Unfortunately few other published peer-reviewed studies of comic book violence exist. There are no studies linking comic book reading to violent behavior.

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[2] $r = 0.20$
[3] $r = 0.24$

8.4 Music

The issue of violent and sexual content of music lyrics has received some attention in recent years. Music has been one genre that has perennially found itself at the center of controversy. During the twentieth century:

- Jazz music was criticized during the 1920s for contributing to a culture of immorality.
- Rock and roll, in its various forms including heavy metal and punk, were criticized for sexual, rebellious and sometimes violent lyrics.
- Hip hop and some pop music has been criticized for sexualized lyrics
- Gangsta rap has been criticized for lyrics with strong violent, sexual, misogynistic, or drug related content. For example the 1980s rap group NWA invited controversy with songs such as "Fuck Tha Police." Critics contended that the song encouraged violence against law enforcement, whereas defenders claimed the song highlighted tensions between minorities and law enforcement.

Numerous music artists have found themselves at the center of controversy, some of them sued over allegations that their lyrics caused listeners to engage in violent or suicidal behavior. In one famous case, musician Ozzy Osbourne was sued by the parents of a young man who committed suicide while listening to one of his albums.

Case Study 1

In 1984 19-year-old John McCollum shot himself in the head with a .22 caliber rifle while listening to an Ozzy Osbourne record. His headphones were reportedly still on at the time of the shooting. McCollum had a history of substance abuse problems and depression. His parents subsequently filed a civil suit against Osbourne alleging that his music in general and the song "Suicide Solution," which appeared to advocate suicide, was responsible for inciting McCollum to suicide. McCollum's parents asserted that Osbourne should have been aware that music such as his had the potential for influencing emotionally disturbed individuals and thus was civilly responsible for damages.

The song "Suicide Solution" contains lyrics that appear to consider alcoholism as a slow method of suicide. Some reports suggested that the song is a tribute to Bon Scott, the lead singer of Australian band AC/DC who had died from alcohol poisoning. At issue were a set of somewhat garbled and unscripted lyrics that may or may not have said "Get the gun and shoot" or something along those lines, although the exact content has been subjected to much debate and confusion. Generally, however, the song does not appear to advocate suicide.

The court case against Osbourne was dismissed on First Amendment grounds. Even if Osbourne had advocated suicide, he had a constitutional right to do so.

It is not uncommon for victims of tragedies to search for third-parties to blame. This is a fairly normative and common human response. Families of suicide victims and crime perpetrators alike naturally wish to deflect feelings of guilt they themselves have. Unfortunately, it also does much to deflect responsibility from the actual individuals who make choices to harm themselves or others.

In 1985 Tipper Gore, wife of former vice-president Al Gore and four other woman formed the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) to pressure the recording industry to voluntarily put warning labels on albums with explicit lyrics, including those with violent or sexual content. The PMRC took a strong "media effects" position, arguing that the lyrics in music and images in music video would simultaneously frighten children and lead to increases in violence, rape, sadomasochism, suicide, masturbation (the Cyndi Lauper song "She Bop" was particularly singled out) and Satanism.

The PMRC was also concerned about alleged backwards lyrics, also called *backmasking* and accused bands ranging from Iron Maiden to Styx of including backmasking on their albums. In 1990 the band Judas Priest was sued for the suicide deaths of two young men. Allegedly the band had included the backmasked words "do it" on one of their albums. The suit was dismissed. Vocalist Rob Halford later commented that including subliminal messages on their albums inciting their fans to kill themselves was absurd. If they were going to include subliminal backmasked messages "Buy more of our records" would have been a more apt choice.

The PMRC succeeded in getting hearings before the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation committee, and also succeeded in getting some stores such as Wal-Mart to refuse to sell albums with explicit lyrics. Ultimately the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) agreed to put parental advisory stickers on some albums voluntarily. Much skepticism remains regarding whether the stickers are terribly effective. They may give albums a certain "forbidden fruit" quality and actually increase sales…ironically encouraging musicians themselves to include more explicit lyrics. The PMRC itself has also been exposed to considerable criticism for its advocacy of censorship and "nanny state" politics.

One article reported on a series of small studies of undergraduates who were exposed to music with either violent or nonviolent lyrics (Anderson, Canagey, & Eubanks, 2003). Students were asked to report either how hostile they were feeling, or complete word pronunciation or word completion tasks such as filling in the missing letters of words. Small effects were found for listening to violent songs. However, several important limitations of this study are worth noting. First, these studies were conducted with nonviolent college students who may have been able to guess the study hypotheses and adhere to demand characteristics. Secondly, and more important, no measures of aggressive or violent behavior were included as outcome variables. Other studies have found opposite results, with no effect for violent lyrics on mood (Ballard & Coates, 1995; St. Lawrence, & Joyner, 1991), although these have similar problems as the Anderson, Carnagey, and Eubanks (2003) paper.

Another study found somewhat mixed results (Wester, Crown, Quatman, & Heesacker, 1997) exposed male undergraduate students either to sexually violent rap music or to the same music without lyrics. White students were specifically chosen given the belief that white students are unlikely to listen to rap (although it is not clear that this is true) and thus would have little previous exposure to such music. No effects were found regarding students' attitudes toward women. However, students exposed to the violent lyrics did report having more adversarial relations with their female partners. Limits of this study include the small ($n=60$) undergraduate sample and absence of measures of aggressive behavior. Other studies have found small effects for watching violent music videos on hostile mood

(Johnson, Adams, Ashburn, & Reed, 1995a; Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto, 1995b) although once again effects are small and there is an absence of valid measures of aggressive behavior.

Fischer and Greitemeyer (2006) attempted to correct for this oversight with several studies including a laboratory of aggressive behavior. In these studies the "hot sauce" aggression measure, involving the administration of spicy sauce to confederates, who ostensibly must then taste the sauce was used as the aggression measure. Both men and women exposed to lyrics that were negative toward the other sex administered more hot-sauce to opposite-sex confederates. Unfortunately, the hot-sauce aggression measure has been specifically criticized as lacking validity (Ritter & Eslea, 2005). As with other studies in this area the use of undergraduate students and potential demand characteristics also limit the generalizability of the results.

Other research has found that music can reduce aggression in real-life situations (Wisenthal, Hennessey, & Totten, 2003). The authors of this study randomized adult drivers either to listen to music or to remain in silence during commutes. The authors found that drivers listening to music reported lower aggressive feelings during traffic congestion than did those who drove in silence. Although this provides a rare real-world glimpse into the influence of music on aggression, the study is limited in several respects. First the authors did not distinguish music with violent lyrics from that with nonviolent lyrics. Furthermore, drivers in the "silence" group may have been frustrated due to being prevented from engaging in their normal music listening behaviors. In other words, drivers who prefer silence may not see similar increases in aggressive feelings. Finally, once again, no measure of aggressive behavior was offered.

Although expressing concern about the increased explicitness of rock and rap music lyrics, the American Academy of Pediatrics has noted that no studies have demonstrated cause and effect harmful effects of music lyrics exist (AAP, 1996). As noted by the AAP, this may be in part because, much of the time, the lyrics are too hard to decipher in the first place.

8.5   Religious Writings

It is no secret that many religious writings such as the Christian Bible contain significant passages containing violent content. Some have argued that religion and religious texts may increase violent behavior when religion appears to sanction violence (e.g., Juergensmeyer, 2003). Few empirical studies have examined this issue, although at least one article has attempted to link reading the Bible with increased aggressive behavior (Bushman, Ridge, Das, Key, & Busath, 2007). The researchers report on two studies, one at Brigham Young University (a predominantly Mormon university with a high proportion of students who believe in God) and one study in the Netherlands. In both studies, participants read violent passages from the Old Testament. The passage was obscure, one that most students would be unlikely to recognize. Half of the participants were told that it was from the Bible, the other half from an obscure scroll. Half of the students read a version that included passages in

which God appears to approve of retaliatory war and killing of other groups. The other half did not read the violence sanctioning passage. Participants then completed the "noise blast" TCRTT discussed in previous chapters. Those who read the passage suggesting that God sanctioned violence delivered slightly louder noise blasts than those who did not read this passage. Effects were very small, particularly for the Brigham Young University study[4] although results for the Dutch study were only slightly larger.[5] The weaknesses of this study should be readily apparent. Nonviolent college students were used. The potential for demand characteristics are high. The TCRTT used has been well documented to have validity problems as a measure of aggression (Ferguson & Rueda, 2009). Thus, its results should be taken with a considerable grain of salt.

The Bushman et al. (2007) study is important for another reason, however. This study, using passages from the Bible as the "violent media" and using methods similar to other media violence studies finds effects that are on order with those of television and video games. Given that cultural conservatives make up a considerable proportion of those who advocate the censorship of violent media from children, if Bushman et al. are to be believed, this censorship should extend to portions of the Bible itself. The Old Testament is replete with violent depictions, and the central event of the New Testament is the explicit torture and execution of Christ. Those who endorse media violence research vis-a-vis the censorship or television or video games risk finding themselves in a hypocritical position if they do not extend this view to religious writings such as the Bible as well, if those writings contain significant violent content. By contrast if one concludes that one set of this research is seriously flawed, it must be flawed for all forms of media, not just religious writing.

8.6 Conclusions

As television and video games have absorbed most of the attention of media violence researchers, other forms of media have received considerably less research. In examining what research does exist, several conclusions can be reached:

- Results from most other forms of research are inconsistent at best.
- The use of actual measures of aggressive behavior are less frequent for other media than for video games and television.
- The research itself appears to follow societal panics. In other words, as society panicked about the potential effects of television, and then video games, these forms of media received considerable research attention, whereas other media were ignored. This observation fits with concerns by some scholars that media violence research largely responds to and is influenced by societal moral panics (Gauntlett, 1995; Grimes, Anderson, & Bergen, 2008).

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[4] $r = 0.11$

[5] $r = 0.26$

- Whatever one's opinion is of media violence research, its effect extend not only to media of social concern such as television and video games, but also to socially endorsed media, particularly the Bible. One cannot separate one's feelings about one set of media from another.

Although other forms of media get less attention than television, video games and pornography, the same pattern of strengths and weaknesses can be seen within them. Indeed, what is most interesting is how the same pattern plays out over and over. Societal concerns about a new media predate scholarly efforts. Initial scholarly efforts often demonstrate significant methodological weaknesses, yet often they are quickly promoted to the status of public health concerns. Gradually, however, society becomes increasingly comfortable with the new media and concerns die away. Scholars who made the most extreme statements, such as Wertham in the case of comic books, are often left holding the bag.

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Chapter 9
Pornography

Probably few forms of media have aroused as much interest and controversy as pornography. Much of this concern has, naturally, focused on the potential influence of pornography on the developing minds of youth who may be exposed to it. For decades politicians, conservative religious figures, scientists, and the general public have debated the possible effects of pornography on rape and sexual assaults, attitudes toward sexuality, promiscuity, and attitudes and violence toward woman. Unlike most other forms of media discussed in this book, most pornography is not violent. Although pornography depicting rapes, assaults and even homicides (although true "snuff" films are largely an urban legend) does exist, most pornography consists of depictions of nude adults or adults engaging in consenting and, typically, mutually enjoyable sexual activity.

Pornography and the somewhat related term *obscenity* have historically been difficult to define. For the purposes of this chapter pornography is defined as:

- Any media involving explicit nudity or sexual activity that is designed solely for the purposes of sexual arousal without other artistic motives.

This is not a perfect definition. Many R-rated movies including nudity or sexual situations are not considered pornography, even though they might technically fit into the above definition. Some films with explicit hard-core sex such as *Caligula*, *Baise Moi* or *9 Songs* do have artistic pretentions.

Obscenity is a legal term and covers materials, media, and speech which are considered highly objectionable and potentially not protected under the First Amendment in the USA. However, the USA has no clear guidelines for what media constitutes obscenity, and standards may vary from time to time and jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Child pornography, however, is one form of media that has consistently been considered obscene and not offered First Amendment protections. In the case of child pornography, the issue is pretty straightforward: the making of such pornography inherently involves the harm of minors who are sexually exploited or abused. By contrast the US Supreme Court has ruled that pornographic images that *appear* to depict minors but which, in fact, do not (i.e., virtual child pornography,

which may involve legal adults posing as if minors, or cartoon or computer generated figures) are Constitutionally protected (Ashcroft v. The Free Speech Coalition, 2002). In 1957 Samuel Roth was convicted of sending nude images of adults through the mail as part of a mail-order business. His case reached the Supreme Court in Roth v. United States (1957). The gist of the Roth decision stated that obscenity was any material that an average person, employing community standards, would consider to be objectionable, having only prurient, not artistic merit.

Difficulties with the *Roth Standard* are rather self evidence. Who gets to decide what the community standard is? Differing communities within the USA have very different standards. Some books and authors with considerable literary merit including James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence were labeled as obscene by some. The Roth Standard was replaced by the *Miller Standard* in 1973 (Miller v. California, 1973), in which obscenity was further defined as:

1. Media in which the average person employing local community standards was found to appeal to only prurient interests.
2. Said material has an undue interest in nudity, sex, or excretory functions.
3. Said material has no redeeming social value.

An improvement, perhaps, but again leaves much to the subjective interpretation of the individual who supports or condemns pornography's right to exist.

In Miller v. California, the Supreme Court specifically noted the distinction between obscenity and pornography. "Obscene" material is material which is repugnant or disgusting to the senses. Clearly if nude images of adults or adults engaged in consensual sexual behavior is popularly consumed, in a technical sense, it does not meet the definition of "obscenity" as such media must clearly be appealing to the senses of many members of the community. As such, the Miller case, while still employing the vague "community standards" guideline, nonetheless provided most forms of pornography considerable First Amendment protections. In a legal sense, obscenity is still used primarily to refer to sexually oriented media, although mainly extreme forms such as child pornography or bestiality to which most members of US society would show revulsion or disapproval.

Probably the most famous definition of obscenity occurred during the case of Jacobellis v. Ohio (1964). Jacobellis had been arrested and fined for showing the mildly erotic French film Les Amants, which the state of Ohio had attempted to ban as obscene. The conviction was overturned by the Supreme Court with one judge, Justice Potter Stewart saying about the definition of obscenity "I have reached the conclusion, which I think is confirmed at least by negative implication in the Court's decisions since Roth and Alberts, that under the First and Fourteenth Amendments criminal laws in this area are constitutionally limited to hard-core pornography. I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But *I know it when I see it*, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that" (emphasis added).

The word pornography itself comes from the Greek words *porne* for "harlot" and *graphia* for "writing" (Miller v. California, 1973). Pornography has occupied center

stage in the "culture wars" between those who advocate censorship or restriction of certain sexual or violent media, and those who call for greater First Amendment protections for all media. Critics or pornography have expressed concern that pornography may be associated with several important negative outcomes including:

1. Increased prevalence of sexual assaults.
2. Negative portrayals of women resulting in increased violence toward women.
3. Marital and sexual problems due to unrealistic sexual expectations.
4. Increased promiscuity, risky sexual behaviors, or earlier sexual behaviors among youth.

As the purpose of this book is to examine the intersection between media and crime among youth, issues #3 and #4 will be left to others to debate.

This chapter concerns itself with the issue of pornography's relationship to violent crimes including rapes and physical assaults against women particularly relating to the influence of the pornography on the developing minds of adolescents who may be exposed to pornography despite its adult intent. This chapter examines the controversies over pornography in the public sector, legal efforts to address pornography, and research on pornography's effects.

Case Study 1: Ted Bundy

Ted Bundy (birth name: Theodore Robert Cowell) has been one of the most famous twentieth century serial murderers for his brutal string of rapes and murders of young women. Prior to his death, Bundy placed partial blame on his actions on early exposure to pornography. Although such a claim may have been self-serving, it provided considerable fuel for antipornography crusaders in the 1980s. What follows are the details of his case.

Generally, Bundy's upbringing does not involve the horrible physical or sexual abuse one might hypothesize that a serial murderer must have been exposed to. Nonetheless, the circumstances of his parentage are somewhat unusual. His mother was young and unmarried when she gave birth in 1946. In order to avoid the stigma of an unplanned pregnancy, Bundy's biological mother pretended to be his sister throughout his early life, leaving her parents, Bundy's grandparents, to play the role of his parents. Bundy only found out about the deception during his late teens. Although no evidence of abuse in the family is reported, Bundy later claimed that his grandfather was bullying and could fly into violent rages. As a teen Bundy was shy and introverted, experienced some minor trouble with the law (the records were expunged), and later reported being fascinated with sex and death early on in his life.

During college, Bundy was something of an underachiever. His girlfriend Stephanie Brooks (a pseudonym used to protect her real identity) eventually became frustrated with his lack of drive and broke off their relationship. After the loss of this relationship, Bundy worked hard to become more successful,

(continued)

becoming socially and politically active and gaining admittance to law school. He began dating Brooks again and proposed to her late in 1973. Soon after she accepted his proposal and broke off the relationship harshly and without explanation. At this point Bundy became engaged in the murder of young women.

Beginning in Washington State, Bundy began attacking young women, oftentimes bludgeoning or strangling them to death. His brutal acts of violence included rape or necrophilia. One of his favorite methods of attack involved beating his victims repeatedly in the head. His victims tended to be young, slender, and attractive. Reportedly, Bundy used clever tactics to gain the sympathy of some of his victims such as appearing to struggle with heavy books or a broken-down car while wearing a cast on one arm (a tactic borrowed by the film *Silence of the Lambs*). The killings meanwhile moved on to Utah and then to Colorado.

Bundy's violent spree began to unravel in Utah, when Bundy attempted to kidnap Carol DaRonch. Posing as a security guard, he told DaRonch that her car had been broken into and offered to take her to inspect her car and fill out a report. He produced a badge and offered to drive her to police headquarters. Instead Bundy drove away from the police headquarters and stopped the car in an isolated spot. Although he pulled a gun on her, DaRonch managed to escape and flag down a passing motorist, while still wearing handcuffs that he had forced on her. Bundy escaped being caught this time and continued killing women for the time being. Nonetheless, DaRonch was to become an important witness later.

In 1975 Bundy was pulled over for a traffic violation. While inspecting his car police noticed that the passenger seat was missing and that within the car were a crowbar, handcuffs, a ski-mask, and other suspicious paraphernalia. Bundy was arrested and soon identified by DaRonch as the man who had tried to kidnap her. Soon, police found other evidence linking him to many of the murders and disappearances. Hairs matching several victims were found in his VW Bug. Impressions in the skull of one victim matched the crowbar found in his car.

In 1976, Bundy was put on trial for kidnapping DaRonch and convicted. Facing a murder trial, Bundy decided to represent himself and was granted unsupervised time at a courthouse library to plan his own defense. On one such outing he jumped out of a library window and escaped but was soon apprehended. Seven months later he escaped again, crawling up through the ceiling of the jail and leaving through a janitor's apartment. This escape was more successful than the first.

His identity and criminal history known to police, Bundy travelled down to Tallahassee, Florida as a wanted man. In January of 1978 he entered the Chi Omega sorority house on Florida State University campus. Most of the women were out for the night, although a few were home. Bundy killed two, Lisa Levy

and Margaret Bowman, while they were sleeping, beating them in the head with a log and strangling them. Levy was also raped and bitten so badly that one nipple was nearly severed from her breast. A third woman was injured but survived, and a fourth saw Bundy as he left the house, a ski-mask covering his face.

Bundy still managed to elude police for a short time. His last victim was 13-year-old Kimberly Leach, much younger than most of his victims. Her decomposed body was found 8 weeks after she went missing. Bundy was arrested soon after, driving a stolen VW Bug. Leach's blood was found in a van Bundy had been previously using, and Bundy's biological material was found in her underwear. A shoe print matching Bundy was also found near her body dump site. Bite marks on Lisa Levy's body were found to match Bundy's teeth. He was put on trial for murder, convicted, and sentenced to death in Florida. During the sentencing phase for the Kimberly Leach trial, Bundy married a female admirer.

Bundy attempted to appeal his convictions but was unsuccessful. He later admitted to the killings and stated that, in fact, there were more dead women that had yet to be identified. He offered to help authorities find the bodies in exchange for avoiding the death penalty. The authorities were not interested.

Just prior to his execution, Bundy gave an interview which received considerable attention. Bundy claimed that exposure to pornography (he claimed that his grandfather kept a considerable collection of pornography), particularly violent pornography, had helped mold his personality. Naturally, these claims were highlighted by antipornography activists. His claims must be taken with some grain of salt, however. They are impossible to verify, and Bundy had a history of manipulating authorities to get attention and try to improve his legal status. Bundy may have hoped that his last minute claim of being a victim of pornography may have resulted in a last minute stay of his execution. If so, this did not work. Bundy was executed January 24, 1989.

9.1 A Brief History of Pornography in the Late Twentieth Century

Humankind's prurient interest in sexual depictions is nothing new. Various forms of erotic art can be found in archaeological specimens from ancient Greece and Rome, Hindu and other Asian cultures, as well as throughout Africa and Medieval and Renaissance Europe. The *Kama Sutra* is one early Indian text detailing explicit sexual practices (Burton, 1883). Sculptures of individuals engaged in explicit sexual activities were not uncommon among Grecian and Roman artifacts. During the Renaissance many painters experimented with nudes and erotic images, and writers such as the Marquis de Sade explored erotic literature.

Pornography, as it is currently understood, is largely a product of Victorian England (Sigel, 2002). From this time forward laws were increasingly enacted to restrict the availability of pornography to the general public. The same time period saw the advent of photography and motion pictures, both medium with natural appeal to individuals interested in pornography. For most of the late nineteenth and twentieth century, pornography was produced underground as "stag" or "blue" films. Such films were generally amateurish, and possession of such films could result in arrest. By the 1950s and 1960s, however, Supreme Court cases such as Roth v. United States (1957) and Miller v. California (1973) were gradually limiting censorship restrictions to *hard-core* pornography, that is, pornography showing oral, vaginal, or anal penetration.

The censorship of hard-core pornography was soon challenged as well. The 1969 "documentary" *Pornography in Denmark* was released in the USA. Although the film depicted sexual penetration, as a "documentary," it could lay claim to redeeming social value, and thus escaped the label of "obscenity" (Corliss, 2005). True pornographic films quickly followed including *The Devil in Miss Jones*, *Behind the Green Door* and *Deep Throat*. *Deep Throat*, about a young woman whose clitoris was located in her throat with predictable behavioral results, was released in 1972 and quickly achieved relative success and critical acclaim for a pornographic film. Although the performance of several other pornographic films had been ignored by police, the mayor of New York City ordered the movie house showing *Deep Throat* to be closed. A judge upheld the city's ban on *Deep Throat* commenting "This is one throat that deserves to be cut" (Corliss, 2005). The film was banned in other communities as well, and finally one of the actors in the film, Harry Reems, was convicted of charges involving conspiracy to distribute obscene material across state lines. On appeal, the charge against Reems was overturned. Using the newer Miller test, *Deep Throat* was not considered to be obscene. The result was a significant expansion in the First Amendment protections afforded to pornographic films. The pornographic film industry quickly blossomed and expanded becoming a lucrative business.

In the 1980s with pornography becoming widely available, particularly in VHS format, a significant backlash to the availability of pornography began. Part of the *culture wars*, a term which broadly refers to efforts by some groups to censor violent and sexual media and other groups to oppose such censorship, concerns about pornography's effects on viewers saw an unusual alliance between conservative Christian leaders and some feminists (e.g., Dworkin, 1981). In the mid-1980s then President Ronald Reagan commissioned a government inquiry into the effects of pornography on youth development and other outcomes. Attorney General Edwin Meese headed the commission, which some felt was padded with antipornography crusaders such as Father Bruce Ritter (who later was involved in a scandal involving alleged sexual activity with male residents of a Christian shelter) and James Dobson of Focus on the Family (Wilcox, 1987). The Meese Commission invoked considerable controversy before its results were even released (e.g., Hertzberg, 1986). Predictably, the Meese Commission concluded that there was a causal link between viewing pornography and sexual violence toward women (Attorney General's

Commission on Pornography, 1986). Two members of the commission, Becker and Levine, were critical of the commission's general findings (Linsey, 1998). According to those who wrote the report, viewing porn changes perceptions of "typical" sexual behavior, trivializes rape, promotes rape myths, and directly leads to male aggression toward women. Though the Meese Commission acknowledged that these effects were particularly prevalent for violent porn, these conclusions were generalized to include all pornographic material. The commission recommended that obscenity laws be strengthened and the ability to sell or purchase pornographic materials be curtailed. Though the Meese Commission has supporters among academic psychology (e.g., Page, 1990), a number of psychological researchers have spoken out against the commissions conclusions.

Linz, Donnerstein, and Penrod (1987) questioned the causal link between pornography and male sexual violence proposed by the Meese Commission. Regarding male sexual violence, Linz et al. noted that research suggests that violent pornography, as well as "slasher" films, promote rape trivialization and rape myths, but nonviolent pornography has not been demonstrated to increase male sexual aggression. In fact, as noted by Palys (1986), nonviolent pornography tends to depict few acts of sexualized aggression as well as egalitarian sexual relationships between males and females. Linz et al. suggest that the effects of pornography on the causation of male sexual aggression toward women are negligible.

Aside from some convenience stores removing pornographic magazines from their shelves, the Meese Commission did little to stop of increased availability of pornography. By the 1990s several changes in the pornography industry began to raise new concerns. The first of these was the spread of pornography on the Internet. Pictures and movies could now be assessed in the privacy of one's own home, often for free (pay Internet sites often offer free "teasers" to entice subscribers). Not only did this increase the availability of pornography to adults, but it also raised concern that pornography would become increasingly available to youth. Rather than furtively sneaking peaks at men's magazines in bookstores or searching for their parents' hidden collection of pornography, adolescents could simply look for (or even receive without intending to look for) pornography without the knowledge of their parents.

The second change in pornography in the 1990s was the surge in popularity of what might be broadly called *Gonzo porn* (the term is not related to the Muppet, for the record). Gonzo porn drops all pretense of storytelling and plot and displays simple explicit sex, usually with longer scenes than traditional porn and more intense sex. In gonzo porn it is not uncommon for one of the participants to also hold a handheld camera, and the participants commonly make reference to the viewer, looking into the camera or participating in an initial question-and-answer interview session. Gonzo porn is much cheaper to produce and has expanded the number and breadth of pornographic films available. As individual sex scenes can "stand alone" rather than be incorporated into a full-length movie, gonzo porn proved to be a convenient match for Internet porn. By the twenty-first century, some pornographic Web sites such as Youporn.com developed to allow individuals to upload amateur pornographic films of their own, and made these films freely accessible.

In response to parental concerns about adolescents' access to Internet pornography, several companies began to market screening programs such as *NetNanny* to prevent access to pornographic material. Such programs tend to be imperfect, however, both blocking nonpornographic material such as that related to legitimate topics including sexual education, breast feeding, gay rights, etc., and sometimes allowing some pornography through. Congress also made several attempts to regulate the availability of pornography to minors on the Internet. In 1996, congress passed the Communications Decency Act, which would have criminalized knowingly making pornographic material available to minors. Essentially, this act would have placed responsibility in the hands of Web owners to verify the age of everyone who visited their Web sites. This act was struck down as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union (1997). The concerns were that the law was too vague in defining "indecent and obscene" speech, and placed too many potential restrictions on potential communications among adults (as children can often find ways to pose as legal adults, such as by using their parents' credit cards, it was unclear how Web sites might truly police the age of visitors).

The Child On-Line Protection Act (1998) followed soon after and was immediately struck down by the Supreme Court on similar constitutional grounds. Finally in 2000 congress passed the much watered down Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA), which only required schools and libraries to purchase computers with protection software blocking pornographic sites. CIPA had no influence on home users, and also allowed that libraries could turn off the blocking software at the request of adult patrons. CIPA was challenged by the American Librarians Association on the grounds that filtering software blocked numerous non-pornographic sites. However, as the bill allows for libraries to turn off the software at the request of adult users it was found to be constitutional in 2004 by the Supreme Court. Many Internet sites require visitors to certify that they are of at least 18 years of age. Many sites require no further proof of age, although the certification places the impetus of wrongdoing on the person visiting the site rather than the site itself. Viewers cannot claim that they "stumbled" onto the pornographic site unknowingly as they were initially warned of its content.

9.2 Research on the Effects of Pornography on Violence Crimes

Regarding the potential influence of pornography, whether nonviolent or violent, on sexual assaults and violence against women there are three basic possibilities, all of which have their advocates:

1. Pornography increases the rate of sexualized violence
2. Pornography has no effect on sexualized violence
3. Pornography decreases the rate of sexualized violence

As some scholars have noted, the evidence from research is inconsistent at best (Dwyer, 2011; Segal, 1994). It is worth nothing that, although the catharsis hypothesis has struggled for acceptance in other areas of media violence studies, it has

gained at least equal footing with the other alternatives in debates about the effects of pornography on sexualized violence (D'Amato, 2006). The argument for this view suggests that individuals who are predisposed to engaging in sex crimes such as rape may use pornography and subsequent orgasm through masturbation to vent their sexual drives and, at least temporarily, reduce the urge to engage in sex crimes. The opposing standard social science model view suggests the opposite, namely, that viewing pornography, particularly violent pornography, may desensitize viewers to sexualized violence increasing risk. Although there may be some disagreement on this point, both models would likely agree that individuals who are *already predisposed* to sexualized violence are most likely to be influenced by porn, either for good or for bad. Individuals who are not predisposed to sexualized violent activity would experience fewer effects from viewing porn at least in this regard.

Given that knowingly disseminating pornography to minors is a crime, this places considerable limitations on the research evidence, particularly as adolescents are involved. Researchers cannot conduct randomized controlled laboratory studies with adolescents and pornography, as such studies would, themselves, be illegal. As such, most laboratory studies are done with adult college students. Correlational studies have fewer such restrictions, although correlational studies of youth also remain in short supply. As such although our interest is mainly on the impact of pornography on the developing adolescent mind, we are reliant mainly on studies of other populations, particularly college students.

As noted, the evidence regarding pornography's effects are mixed, and the kinds of results obtained depend on the type of study methodology. Malamuth and Ceniti (1986) tested the effects of viewing violent or nonviolent pornography on male college students' aggressive behavior in a laboratory and self-reported likelihood to rape. Their study is particularly interesting as they studied long term effects. Forty-two men were randomized to be repeatedly exposed to either violent pornography (soft-core films or narratives including scenes of rape or sadomasochism) or non-violent pornography (also soft-core, but showing only consenting activity) or a non-pornographic control condition. Participants were repeatedly exposed ten separate times over a 4-week period. After the exposure period was over, participants were invited to participate in what they thought was an unrelated experiment on ESP. They were told to project mental images though their mind to a female confederate. If the female confederate responded with the wrong choice, the participants could deliver punishing noise bursts, the intensity of which they could. Participants were also asked to fill out questionnaires regarding their rape proclivity, anger toward the female confederate and desire to hurt the female confederate.

In the abstract of their paper Malamuth and Ceniti state "Exposure to the violent or nonviolent pornographic stimuli was found to affect laboratory aggression." Unfortunately, reading their results section suggests quite the opposite. The authors conducted a set of bivariate correlations between the outcome variables (likelihood of rape, anger, desire to hurt, noise burst intensity). At the end of the experiment these variables achieved small correlations between them.[1] These results appear to be

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[1]With r values between 0.32 and 0.37.

irrespective of viewing condition and thus tell us nothing about the effects of exposure to pornography. Nonetheless, these results appear to be the sole basis for the authors' claim in the abstract to have found effects. By contrast, the authors found no difference in likelihood to rape between the violent or nonviolent pornography conditions, or the non-pornographic controls. Similarly no significant effects were found for the noise burst aggression measure, or anger toward or desire to hurt the female confederate. In other words, although the noise burst aggression measure is of dubious validity, neither violent nor nonviolent pornography viewed long term, influenced likelihood to rape or aggressiveness toward woman. This paper also provides yet another example of the danger of reading only the abstract of scientific papers. Reading the abstract one would be led to believe that effects were significant and consistently indicated a negative influence from viewing pornography. In fact, the opposite was true: the effects *were* consistent, but in demonstrating no relationship.

In one classic study of pornography effects 156 college males were randomized to watch either an R-rated "slasher" film mixing sex and violence or an R-rated sex film without violence or a nonviolent pornographic film or a no-film condition (Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1988). Participants were then asked to rate their anxiety and depression as well as sympathy toward a victim in a rape trial. Results indicated that individuals who had watched the violent "slasher" film were less anxious or depressed related to other groups, although why this is negative is up to some debate. Results for other variables were somewhat more mixed. According to the authors, although pretest rape attitudes (i.e., how accepting participants were of rape myths prior to the study) predicted sympathy toward a rape victim, the effects for randomized exposure was not significant. However, the authors interpret a "trend" as supporting their hypotheses. Results for rape empathy were also mixed. No effects were found for the randomized exposure, but a small interaction between exposure and number of exposure sessions were found which the authors interpret as supporting their hypotheses. Post-hoc analyses were also conducted revealing no significant effects for pornography exposure on rape victim empathy. A small[2] but significant effect was found for rape sympathy, with the "slasher" film group expressing greater rape acceptance than other groups. As with Malamuth and Ceniti (1986) the authors, in their abstract, interpret their results in a manner highly suggestive of consistent effects demonstrating the harmful causal influence of violent pornography. However, a close look at their results reveals small and inconsistent support for their hypotheses at best.

A further study examined the effects of mildly erotic and explicitly erotic films on 72 male college students (Ramirez, Bryant, & Zillman, 1982). Participants were randomized to watch slides that were nonerotic, involved nudity, or involved explicit sex. Aggression was measured by offering participants an opportunity to rate the performance of a research assistant who had helped with the procedure. In some cases the research assistant had provoked the participant by accusing them of not cooperating. Participants who were exposed to explicit sex reported being more

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[2]$r = 0.20.$

annoyed by the experiment and were more likely to rate the research assistant negatively, particularly when provoked.

One further study was highly critical of these previous studies (Fisher & Grenier, 1994). The authors report on two experiments in which male college students watched nonviolent pornography, violent pornography with positive outcomes (the woman eventually enjoys the act), negative outcomes (the woman does not enjoy the act), or neutral stimuli. After viewing the stimuli, respondents reported on their acceptance of rape myths, attitudes toward women and acceptance of violence and, in the second experiment, were given an opportunity to deliver brief electroshocks to a female confederate in an adjoining room. No effects were found for either violent or nonviolent pornography. This study has many of the same strengths and weaknesses of the other studies discussed, but demonstrates the unreliability of effects. The authors were critical of other scholars claiming reliable effects.

Despite some weaknesses, experimental studies of pornography effects are probably the most consistent in ostensibly demonstrating negative effects, particularly for violent pornography (Allen, D'Alessio, & Brezgel, 1995) at least in comparison to correlational studies. However, the effects, even for violent pornography, appear to be small, temporary, and difficult to generalize to actual real-world events of sexualized violence. Laboratory studies of pornography effects have been observed to share some common weaknesses (Mould, 1988) including the following:

1. As discussed elsewhere, laboratory measures of aggression commonly used are of poor validity.
2. Samples, particularly college student samples, may be subject to demand characteristics, guessing the hypothesis of the study and delivering results that they believe the experimenter wants.
3. Most laboratory studies use college student samples. Although some college students do engage in rape, college students are a relatively low-risk population. Thus, it is difficult to generalize results from college students to populations of rapists or other sexualized violence perpetrators.
4. No laboratory studies examine adolescents. This is for understandable legal reasons, yet makes it difficult to generalize any results to adolescents.
5. It is difficult to see how the brief exposures to pornography in the laboratory stand out against the participants' consumption of pornography in real life. Most studies do not control for real-life pornography consumption.
6. Some dependent measures used such as attitudes toward women, rape proclivity have obvious "wrong" answers (e.g., "A woman will begin to enjoy sex forced upon her, even if she initially resists, true/false"). Such measures are highly influenced by social desirability, meaning that respondents may not be honest in their responses. The validity of such measures is, thus, sorely limited.
7. Effect sizes are generally small and overinterpreted. Disconfirming evidence is commonly ignored in favor of evidence that supports the hypothesis (e.g., Malamuth & Ceniti, 1986).

As such, we must be generally cautious when interpreting the results of laboratory studies.

Correlational studies tend to produce significantly more mixed results. In correlational studies, different groups of participants are often compared on their pornography consumption. For instance college students may be compared to rapists or child molesters in regard to current consumption, first age of consumption, and frequency of consumption. It is important to note that such data is self-report and thus all results must be taken with a grain of salt.

In contrast with experimental studies, many correlational studies find that pornography consumption may have a *protective* effect against sexual violence perpetration. In numerous studies, sex offenders have been found to have used *less* pornography, and been exposed to pornography later in life than non-offenders (Becker & Stein, 1991; Goldstein & Kant, 1973; Kendall, 2006; Nutter & Kearns, 1993; Walker, 1970). However, other studies using college students only, have found that pornography use may be associated with increased self-reported sexual aggression (Malamuth, Addison, & Koss, 2000; Vega & Malamuth, 2007) although results have not been consistent (Garos, Beggan, Kluck, & Easton, 2004). In their study Garos et al. (2004) find that pornography is *protective* of negative attitudes toward women than in other words, consumers of pornography had more positive attitudes toward women than people who did not consume pornography. However, pornography consumers may be more prone to *benevolent sexism* which involves beliefs that women should be protected from harm. Other studies, particularly with the general populace, demonstrate no relationship between pornography consumption and negative attitudes toward women (McKee, 2007). Thus, it is not possible to draw clear conclusions on this issue.

In assessing the risk of recidivism among 341 child molesters, the influence of pornography use on criminal recidivism was mixed (Kingston, Federoff, Firestone, Curry, & Bradford, 2008). Pornography use was not found to be a predictor of recidivism for all types of crimes, nor was pornography use a predictor of recidivism for sexual crimes. However, pornography use was weakly associated with recidivism for violent crimes such as assaults. The type of pornography used, whether conventional or "deviant," was unrelated to criminal recidivism. Despite a weak relationship between pornography use and violent crimes, results offer little support for the belief that pornography increases risk for further sex crimes among convicted offenders.

9.3   Porn Consumption and Sexual Assault Victimization

One other area of debate is whether porn availability has been associated with increases in sexual assault victimization or decreases. During the 1970s, due to First Amendment protections, pornography first became widely available. At the same time, rape rates increased. Then, as Internet pornography burst onto the scene, rape rates rapidly fell. Numerous attempts have been made to make sense out of this data without clear consensus.

Early on Baron and Straus (1984) conducted an analysis of subscriptions to popular men's pornographic magazines and reported rape rates across the 50 US states. They found a moderately strong correlation between pornography consumption and rape rates. These results have generally not been replicated however. A contradictory

finding by Scott (1985) found that viewing "semi-hard-core" pornographic magazines such as *Hustler* were not correlated with rape rates, whereas "soft-core" magazines such as *Playboy* or *Penthouse* were. As *Hustler* arguably portrays women in a less favorable light than *Playboy*, this finding is surprising. Further, rape rates were not correlated with other adult entertainment outlets such as adult bookstores or nude dancing, though rape rates were correlated with neutral stimuli such as the circulation of magazines such as *Field and Stream*. These findings highlight the problem inherent to forming causal links from correlational observations. Specifically, correlations between pornography and sexual assaults may be due to artifacts or third variables. Other similar attempts to correlate pornography consumption and rape rates have produced nonsignificant results (e.g., Gentry, 1991; Scott & Schwalm, 1988). One other study found that neighborhoods with adult media stores had lower crime rates than matched neighborhoods without such stores (Linz, Paul, Land, Ezell, & William, 2004).

Data on rape rates and consumption of pornography in national studies provides more consistent evidence for the belief that pornography *reduces* rape and other sexual crimes. For instance, the decriminalization and increased consumption of pornography in Denmark in the 1960s led to decreases in sexual assaults (Ben-Veniste, 1971; Kutchinsky, 1973). Court (1984) challenged these early observations, concluding that he found evidence for a cross-national association of pornography use and rape-rates, but his claims have not been replicated. For instance Abramson and Hayashi (1984) note that Japanese rape rates are lower than those in Western cultures despite the high available of sexually violent material in that culture. This was confirmed in an empirical study that as pornography became increasingly available in Japan, rape and sex crimes rates went down (Diamond & Uchiyama, 1999). This is particularly interesting given that Japanese pornography is particularly known for violent and other deviant content. Similarly, contradicting Court (1984), Kutchinsky examined pornography consumption and rape rates in West Germany, Denmark, and Sweden and concluded that as pornography consumption increased in all three countries, rape rates either decreased or stayed at a consistently low level. The USA was the only exception with rape rates there in the appearing to increase when pornography became increasingly available in the 1970s.

Even in the USA, that trend has now reversed with rape and sexual assault rates plummeting once Internet pornography became widely available. Figure 9.1 presents data for the years 1988 through 2005 comparing the number of hard-core pornography titles released in the USA to rape victimization statistics. Neither set of data is necessarily perfect. The data on hard-core titles unfortunately does not extend back past 1988, which does not allow for showing earlier trends. Rape rates are taken from the federal governments National Crime Victimization Survey, which is an anonymous survey and thus superior to reported rape rates. Nonetheless it may be that many individuals may decline to report rapes that actually occurred even in an anonymous survey. However, that is not more likely to be true now than in the past. The data on pornography comes from Family Safe Media's data on pornography availability. The latter data set limited the years available for the chart to 1988–2005. As can be seen, as pornography became increasingly available (data on pornography sales in units sole essentially mirrors the data on titles), rape rates went
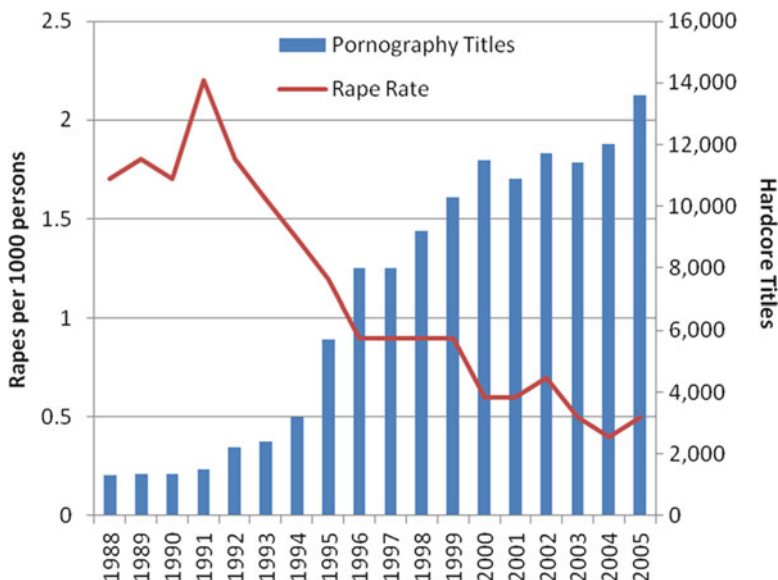
Fig. 9.1 Trends in pornography availability and rape in the USA 1988–2005

down in the USA. Although data on pornography availability were not available prior to 1988, rape rates held reasonably steady in the period between 1973 and 1988. As such there would appear to be little correlation between rape rates and the burgeoning pornography industry during that time either. We can see that pornography's availability is certainly not leading to an increase in rape rates. In fact the rates of rapes reported in the mid 2000s are the lowest on record since at least the 1960s (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006).

   Taken together, data on the consumption of pornography and rape rates in the USA and in countries in Western Europe and Japan appear to rule out pornography as a contributing factor to rape rates, as least as causing an increase. By contrast, the data appear to argue for the reverse, namely, that increased pornography availability is associated with declining rape rates. As such, the real-world data are a better fit for the catharsis hypothesis. This mirrors similar trends to violence in the media and violent crimes in the USA and elsewhere. As we have gotten more violent media and more pornography, violent crime and rape rates have gone down precipitously. One important limitation is that the real-world data are correlational in nature and cannot be used to infer causality. There may be other factors at work, changes in society that have led to more liberal views toward the media as well as decreased criminal activity. Or the limit time frames in which data are available may be misleading with the current trends more coincidence than anything else. However, even if we cannot use real-world data to conclusively confirm the catharsis hypothesis, we certainly can use it to rule out the belief that pornography has contributed to sexual assaults and rapes.

9.4   To What Extent Do Adolescents Consume Pornography?

Until the recent past, adolescents' opportunities to view pornography were limited. Many people (particularly males) have stories about the lengths they went through to gain access to pornography as youth, which also notes that much pornography exposure in youth is not accidental. However, as noted earlier, the Internet revolution has made pornography widely available and there are few restrictions in place to prevent adolescent access to such material aside from parents' own vigilance. It is reasonable to assume that youth today have more exposure than ever to pornography, but what data do we have on this?

One recent, large, Swiss study (Luder et al., 2011) provides some answers to this. The authors found that pornography exposure was much more common among males (74 %) than females (36 %), although for both genders much of this exposure was identified as "accidental" (coming across pornographic Web sites unintentionally). Only 29 % of males and 1.4 % of females reported deliberating search for pornographic Web sites in the past 30 days. It is worth noting that this data is self-report, and its possible both genders may be underreporting pornography use. However, deliberate use of pornography by teens appears more common among males than females. Interestingly, contrary to many concerns, pornography exposure was not correlated with risky sexual behavior among teens. Other studies both qualitative (Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010) and quantitative (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005) have come to similar conclusions. Thus, although some adolescents do seek out pornography, particularly males, it is probably not as widespread a behavior as might be imagined. Ybarra, Mitchell, Hamburger, Diener-West, and Leaf (2011) further found no link between viewing nonviolent pornography and sexual aggression among youth. Seeking out violent pornography was, perhaps not surprisingly, related to other problems, although this may reflect internal problems with the adolescent in question, rather than anything causal related to pornography itself.

9.5   Conclusions

In this chapter we have examined three basic types of information regarding the influence of pornography on sexualized violence: experimental data, correlational studies and real-world data. Although results are mixed, at best, we can make a few conclusive statements.

1. The best support for the belief that pornography, particularly violent pornography, contributes to sexualized violence comes from experimental studies. However, these are severely limited by the samples and methodologies employed, including aggression measures of poor validity. These studies are also less consistent in demonstrating effects than their authors often claim.
2. Data from correlational studies is mixed and hampered by outcome measures with clear "right" answers, and thus subject to social desirability. However,

evidence suggests that sexual offenders report using less pornography and being exposed later than non-offenders. By contrast college student samples tend to find small but significant correlations between pornography consumption and sexualized violence related outcomes. Exposure to pornography does not appear to influence rape myth acceptance in correlational studies (Allen, Emmers, Gebhart, & Giery, 1995).

3. Real world rape data clearly does not support the belief that pornography contributes to rape in a negative sense. Rather data in the USA, Europe, and Japan supports the catharsis hypothesis that pornography is inversely related to rape. However, as this data is correlational in nature it is not possible to make a causal attribution.

4. As violent pornography is exceedingly rare, at least in mainstream pornography (Monk-Turner & Purcell, 1999) it unclear how pressing a concern the effects of violent pornography truly are.

Having lived through the decade of the Meese Commission, it is my casual observation that the furor over pornography has died down considerably. This perhaps reflects the awareness that pornography and rape rates do not coincide. Pornography has also gradually lost some of its stigma, particularly among younger generations. Although debate and controversy regarding the effects of pornography are likely to continue into the foreseeable future, interest in pornography as a source of crime appears to be slowly waning. This, of course, is the typical cycle, as new media replace old media as a source of concern.

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Chapter 10
Public Policy, Censorship, and First Amendment Issues

Whether or not concerns about media influences on adolescents are accurate, they have commonly led to legislative efforts to censor or regulate the distribution of media with offensive content, particularly to minors. This issue is particularly true for adolescents who may often have both the financial resources and gumption to purchase media without their parents' knowledge or consent. Thus, legislative efforts, particularly those focused on youth, have typically been faced with balancing several competing interests. First, does the state have a compelling interest in protecting adolescence for potentially "dangerous" media content? Second, do adolescents have free speech rights including the right to consume media of their choosing? Third, how are adolescents' free speech rights to be balanced with parents' rights to be informed of the content of media their children are consuming? Fourth, do efforts to curtail the access of minors to objectionable content inadvertently also curtail adults' access to the same material?

This chapter concerns itself with public policy, legislative and court efforts as they pertain to the access of adolescents to media. This chapter focuses particularly on public policy within the USA and other industrialized, democratic nations. This chapter also focuses mainly on efforts beginning in the latter half of the twentieth century, as earlier efforts have been covered in Chap. 2. As such, we examine how industrialized democracies attempt to balance purported public health concerns (whether real or imaginary) against free speech rights.

It is important to understand upfront that even industrialized democracies differ in their approach to media censorship. Although some degree of free speech protections are assumed under the democratic process, democratic nations often struggle with the balance between free speech and the need to "protect" certain citizens seen as "vulnerable" (which currently means youth, mainly, although once was thought to include women and non-whites). The result is considerable variation in permissible censorship between nations. In some nations, such as Austria, reprehensible political speech such as denial of the Holocaust is illegal. In other nations, such speech may be seen as equally reprehensible, although protected. Advocates of free

speech often state that it is not possible to truly protect free speech unless one is willing to protect repugnant, reprehensible speech with which one fully disagrees.

That having been said, the first Amendment of the USA is probably among the most comprehensive free-speech protections offered even among democratic nations. Americans are often surprised to find government censorship in other democratic nations, having taken their own free speech protections for granted. This does not mean that this always translates to more liberal media. For instance, a viewer is more likely to come across profanity or nudity in broadcast television in the UK than in the United States, despite the former country having a government sanctioned censorship bureau. Nor does it mean that all speech is protected in the USA. For instance, child pornography is illegal for rather obvious reasons, as is speech intended to directly incite violence, fraudulent communications, false advertisement, the dissemination of classified government information, perjury, and defamation of character.

Those used to the first Amendment protections in the USA might be surprised by illegal speech in other democratic nations. For instance hate speech directed at ethnic or religious groups, while deplored but tolerated in the USA, is illegal in some other democracies. As noted, denial of the Holocaust in Germany or Austria is one such example. Many democratic nations have laws on the books making it a crime to "insult" the national flag or anthem or public officials ranging from monarchs and prime ministers through police and bus drivers. In some nations such as France it is illegal to present drug use as positive, laws which potentially could be used against legalization movements. Some nations such as Greece or Malta make insults toward Christianity or other religions illegal. In other nations, such as the UK, it is technically illegal to use profanity in public, although these laws are typically enforced in the context of public disturbances with arrests made only after a warning to desist. It pays to understand the local laws before one opens their yap.

Discussions and debates and free speech and media content tend to focus on the push and pull between speech rights and the perceived need to protect society or certain members of society (i.e., youth) from certain kinds of media. This involves multiple issues including community standards as well as research data. Given that research data on media effects tends to be, at best, muddled, often discussions fall back on community standards and "common sense."

10.1 Media Regulation in the USA

As noted in Chap. 2, the USA has experienced repetitive cycles of concerns over new media, which typically fade with time. However, during the early stages of the introduction of new media, the industry and government often face off regarding content and potential regulation. With the constitutionality of media regulation by government not always clear, government and industry may face off in a kind of game of chicken. Most often this has resulted in some form of compromise in which the industry agrees to monitor and regulate itself, either specifically restricting certain content or providing warning labels or ratings for more mature content.

In several cases such as the Hays Code and the Comics Code Authority, this involved industry self-imposed censorship.

More recently, however, the trend has been for industry to volunteer to provide content or ratings labels to inform media consumers about potentially objectionable content. The movie industry's move from the Hays Code to the MPAA ratings system (the familiar, G, PG, PG-13, R, NC-17), as well as new ratings systems or warning labels for music, television, and video games fall in this category. It is important to emphasize that these are all *voluntary* industry ratings systems. In the USA they carry no actual force of law, but rather are voluntarily enforced by theater owners, video game retailers, etc. Or put more simply, if a police officer happens to notice an 8-year-old child alone in an R-rated movie, there is nothing the police officer can do. The police officer has no legal right to ask the child to leave, or to arrest or fine either the parents or theater owner. This is an important point many in the general public do not realize.

Probably the epitome of the ratings systems remains the MPAA system, which represented a voluntary replacement of the Hay's Code. The MPAA system has gone through several iterations. For instance, in 1984 the PG-13 rating was added in response to films like *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* which many felt was too violent for young children but not violent enough to get an R rating. In 1990 the NC-17 rating was added to replace the X rating which had become associated with pornography. Most mainstream release films voluntarily submit to the MPAA ratings, although it is not, strictly speaking, required (although a film without an MPAA rating is unlikely to be distributed to mainstream theaters).

The MPAA system is one of the more faithfully used ratings systems to date (FTC, 2009). However, it is sometimes criticized on several grounds. Long-time movie critic Roger Ebert, for instance, suggests that MPAA system is obsolete, focusing too much on sex and too little on violence and failing to distinguish between films which are and are not offensive (Tassi, 2010). Ebert also notes that R ratings may actually attract rather than detract youth viewers, something known as the *forbidden fruit* effect, a well known psychological phenomenon in which denying someone something only makes them want it more. Of course any rating system used to restrict access would be equally prone to the forbidden fruit effect.

A further concern about the MPAA is *ratings creep* in which more and more objectionable material is allowed into lower rated films over time. Thompson and Yakota (2004), for instance, found a higher incidence of objectionable material in films rated G (for general audiences including young kids) across the 1990s through 2003. However, although this plays into the culture wars, it is less clear this is necessarily a bad thing. For instance, in the 1950s even depicting married couples sleeping in the same bed was considered so objectionable that the lead characters in *I Love Lucy* a married couple both in real life and on television were depicted sleeping in separate twin beds. Such depictions today seem comical. Community standards change over time and ratings change with them. However, each generation experiences what I call the *Goldilocks Effect*. Essentially each generation thinks the generation before were too rigid and conservative in their approach to media, where as the youth that come after them are too loose and liberal. Each generation thinks it got media *just right*.

10.1.1 The Parents Music Resource Center

By the 1980s the loosening of restrictions on media content was all too clear and worried some activists and cultural conservatives. Music and rock music in particular had long been criticized for sexual innuendo and pushing limits, but by the 1980s all pretenses had ended and many lyrics included profanity and explicit sexual references. A group called the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) began an effort to regulate the sale of explicit music to minors.

The PMRC included many well-connected Washington women such as Tippy Gore the wife of future vice president Al Gore. The PMRC were concerned with a wide range of content in music lyrics, ranging from sexual and violent content to profanity and occult references. The PMRC wished to create a ratings system similar to the MPAA system for music. In the mid 1980s they attracted considerable attention to their cause, particularly given their connections to Washington DC elite. They published a list of the "Filthy Fifteen" songs they considered most offensive which included "She Bop" by Cyndi Lauper (for masturbation references), "We're Not Going to Take It" by Twisted Sister (for violence) and "Into the Coven" by Mercyful Fate (for occult references).

The recording industry (the RIAA) agreed to include explicit lyrics warning labels (the Parental Advisory Label) on albums and CDs. Nonetheless, the PMRC moved forward with Senate hearings in 1985 to begin public discussion of the issue. Witnesses were called on both sides of the debates regarding the potential influence of music on listeners. Typical concerns regarding the "glorification" of sex and violence were raised. However, musicians called to testify including Frank Zappa, Dee Synder of Twisted Sister, and John Denver (who the PMRC may have thought would be on their side) all eloquently argued against censorship and the potential for media to be misinterpreted by moral crusaders.

The explicit lyrics warning label was the only result of the PMRC's efforts, and it remains a voluntary system of the RIAA. However, the effectiveness of the Parental Advisory Label remains in doubt. The Federal Trade Commission found that, although display of the warning label was present, it was not very well enforced by music retailers (FTC, 2009). Particularly as music moves increasingly online, even voluntary enforcement of the ratings system may prove difficult.

10.2 Violent Video Game Legislation

Despite concerns about media violence, relatively little movement occurred in the latter half of the twentieth century to impose government regulation on violent media. Issues with violence on television (as well as sex) led mainly to the television V-chip (which allows for parental filtering of objectionable media) and another voluntary ratings system. Manufacture of televisions with the V-chip was mandated under the Telecommunications Act of 1996. However, for all the furor over television content, consumers themselves appear to have been relatively unconcerned.

Subsequent analysis of the V-chip has revealed that few parents use it (Federal Communications Commission, 2007; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004). The unpopularity of the V-chip is speculated to be due to multiple factors: unfamiliarity with it, frustration over difficulty in using it; and disinterest in what it could do. By the time the V-chip was fully implemented, violent crime in the USA had already begun its downswing and the notion that violent media and societal violence went hand in hand began to come into doubt (Freedman, 2002).

Video games introduced new technology and new fears. Unlike television, video games were interactive which led to beliefs among some that they might be more likely to have harmful influences. The culmination was a test case for the regulation of violent content that saw a California law seeking to restrict the sale of video games with violent content tested before the US Supreme Court.

California's attempt to regulate the sale of violent video games to minors followed a line of similar failed attempts in other states (Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Washington) and cities in Indiana and Missouri. Each time such legislation was proposed it was challenged on both constitutional and evidentiary grounds and ultimately struck down by the courts. Concerns were raised by the courts not only with the selective attention of the legislators but also the scholarly community as in one case (ESA, VSDA and IRMA v. Blagojevich, Madigan and Devine, 2005) the court found that even scientists were selective in ignoring work contrary to their personal views:

> With regard to their conclusions, Dr. Goldstein and Dr. Williams noted that Dr. Anderson not only had failed to cite any peer-reviewed studies that had shown a definitive causal link between violent video game play and aggression, but had also ignored research that reached conflicting conclusions. Dr. Goldstein and Dr. Williams noted that several studies concluded that there was no relationship between these two variables. They also cited studies concluding that in certain instances, there was a *negative* relationship between violent video game play and aggressive thoughts and behavior (e.g., initial increases in aggression wore off if the individual was allowed to play violent video game for longer period). (ESA, VSDA and IRMA v. Blagojevich, Madigan and Devine, 2005, pp. 14–15)

This was similar to the bias the court found among legislators weighing the regulation of video game violence (ESA, VSDA and IRMA v. Blagojevich, Madigan and Devine, 2005, p. 16):

> Finally, the Court is concerned that the legislative record does not indicate that the Illinois General Assembly considered any of the evidence that showed no relationship or a negative relationship between violent video game play and increases in aggressive thoughts and behavior. The legislative record included none of the articles cited by Dr. Goldstein or Dr. Williams. It included no data whatsoever that was critical of research finding a causal link between violent video game play and aggression. These omissions further undermine defendants' claim that the legislature made "reasonable inferences" from the scientific literature based on "substantial evidence."

As such, biased reporting of research evidence has been a problem among both scholarly and legislative proponents of censorship.

State assemblyman (later State Senator) Leland Yee, a child psychologist was the individual who first proposed California's law banning the sale of the most violent video games to minors. State advocacy associations for the pediatrics and

psychological professions joined in supporting the law as did some anti-media "watchdog" groups. The state and the groups supporting it did not merely argue that video game violence might lead to minor forms of aggression, but rather that violent behavior and even damage to the brain could result from playing violent video games. The law passed through the state legislature and was signed into law by then-governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2005. Stores violating the law by selling violent games to minors would have faced a $1,000 fine for each occurrence. Violent video games were required to place a clearly marked sticker above and beyond the exiting ESRB ratings on their covers. Not surprisingly, the software industry immediately filed a lawsuit to block implementation of the law. US District Judge Ronald Whyte agreed to a preliminary injunction. In his ruling, like previous court decisions, he again questioning the research evidence. He eventually ruled for the software industry, granting a permanent injunction in 2007. The state of California appealed the decision to the ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. A panel of judges ruled for the software industry in 2009 (VSDA, ESA v Schwarzenegger, 2009). Once again, the court was extremely critical of the existing research, noting most came from a single scholar (Anderson) and stated:

> In sum, the evidence presented by the State does not support the Legislature's purported interest in preventing psychological or neurological harm. Nearly all of the research is based on correlation, not evidence of causation, and most of the studies suffer from significant, admitted flaws in methodology as they relate to the State's claimed interest. None of the research establishes or suggests a causal link between minors playing violent video games and actual psychological or neurological harm, and inferences to that effect would not be reasonable.

To this point, none of the states had been successful in pushing the issue to the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS). However, in 2009 then-governor Schwarzenegger made the decision to appeal the case to SCOTUS, despite doubts the court would even consent to hear the case, given agreements among the lower courts. However, SCOTUS agreed to hear the case in 2010. This decision by SCOTUS to hear the case surprised many. The unanimity of the lower courts as well as the decision by SCOTUS not to carve out violence as an exception to free speech in the earlier United States v Stevens case pertaining to animal "crush" videos (2010; These involved sexual fetish videos of women crushing small live animals to death under stiletto heels) fueled speculation that SCOTUS may have been signaling a willingness to carve out violence, at least in video games, as a new category of unprotected speech (Denniston, 2010a).

The SCOTUS case attracted considerable attention, including numerous amicus briefs on both sides. In addition to supporting briefs from two activist groups, California was supported by 11 other states as well as a brief authored by State Senator Yee and cosigned by the California chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the California Psychological Association and approximately 100 psychologists and medical scholars. The EMA was supported by approximately 27 separate briefs. Many of these were from media industries (ranging from movies to comic books) but also included briefs from groups concerned with the first amendment, legal scholars, the American Civil Liberties Union and National Youth Rights

Association, the Entertainment Consumers Association (representing video game consumers), the Chamber of Commerce of the USA, and the Cato Institute. Nine states and Puerto Rico sided against California in an amicus brief as did a group of 82 social and medical scientists who felt that California had misrepresented the research in supporting the law.

Arguments were held on November 2, 2010, and although opinions appeared divided among the justices, the court appeared to question the notion violent games "harmed" minors. They also expressed skepticism that games were different from other media, and whether the California law was properly worded, narrowly tailored or least restrictive. Several of the justices did appear concerned about violence in video games, particularly Justices Roberts, Alito and Breyer, which led some speculators to suggest that SCOTUS might strike down the California law but leave an open door for a more narrowly tailored law (Denniston, 2010b).

The degree of tension within the scientific community over these issues attracted notice when two signers of State Senator Yee's amicus brief supporting California joined with a lawyer to publish an essay in a law review critical of the other amicus brief of scholars (Pollard Sacks, Bushman, & Anderson, 2011) claiming that the scholars supporting California had published more research on the topic and thus were the true experts. However, this analysis did not deal with the substance of the two briefs. The Pollard-Sacks, Bushman, and Anderson paper amounted mainly to ad-hominem attacks and appeals to authority, not a comprehensive review of data. Furthermore the Pollard-Sacks paper was subsequently reviewed by scholars who were not involved in either amicus brief (Hall, Day, & Hall, 2011). Hall et al. concluded that the methodology of Pollard-Sacks et al. underestimated the expertise of the scholars on the Millet brief, and otherwise ran counter to proper scientific inquiry. However, this unfortunately incident documents how even scholars can become emotionally enraptured with a moral issue to the point they deviate from normal scientific discourse and procedure.

SCOTUS announced their decision on Brown v EMA on June 27, 2011. In a 7-2 decision (Justices Alito and Roberts concurring, but appearing more open to a narrower law than the majority; Justices Breyer and Thomas dissenting), the majority opinion written by Justice Scalia stated that video games enjoyed full First Amendment protections, that youth enjoyed considerable First Amendment protections that could not be legislated away easily, that the research on video game violence was "unpersuasive" and could not reach strict scrutiny, and that attempts to regulate violence would have to meet strict scrutiny. No door was left open for a narrower law.

Echoing concerns among some researchers regarding the poor quality of aggression measures used in many studies SCOTUS noted the disconnect between "aggression" as used in many of the studies and how it is perceived in the general public:

> One study, for example, found that children who had just finished playing violent video games were more likely to fill in the blank letter in "explo_e" with a "d" (so that it reads "explode") than with an "r" ("explore"). App. 496, 506 (internal quotation marks omitted). The prevention of this phenomenon, which might have been anticipated with common sense, is not a compelling state interest.

This further demonstrates how "aggression" measures commonly used in laboratory studies may sound impressive in the abstract when non-scholars are only told that the outcome is "aggression." Upon seeing the actual aggression measures used, many individuals in the general public are actually not impressed.

By contrast Justices Alito and Roberts assented, but did express concerns about violence in video games and were willing to consider less restrictive means to control such content. Justice Breyer also appeared convinced by causal arguments regarding video game violence but expressed frustration regarding what to do with conflicting social science data. Justice Breyer appeared convinced by California's argument that interactivity of video games makes them different from other media stating "the closer a child's behavior comes, not to *watching*, but to *acting out* horrific violence, the greater the potential psychological harm" despite there is no consensus view on this even among scholarly advocates of the causal position. Justice Breyer's conclusion appears to have been based upon his efforts to assemble lists of supporting and non-supporting research studies. The majority opinion were dismissive of Justice Breyer's efforts stating "we do not see how it could lead to Justice Breyer's conclusion, since he admits he cannot say whether the studies on his side are right or wrong."

The upshot of the Brown v EMA case is that the US Supreme Court declined to open up violent media to potential government regulation. Thus, it is firmly established that the government cannot regulate violence in the media, at least in the USA.

10.3 The Regulation of Sexual Content

Brown v EMA undoubtedly ranks as a considerable win for advocates of free speech, for the first time making it clear that government regulation of violent content in media would be unconstitutional. But what about sexual material or profanity? The USA has considerably more tradition of limiting sexual media. Bans on pornography were only declared unconstitutional in the 1970s (with the exception of obscenity and child pornography). Before the 1990s nudity or profanity on US television was almost unheard of. But by the 1990s this began to change.

One of the progenitors of this trend was the crime drama *NYPD: Blue* which featured much more profanity and occasional nudity than had been the case previously on US television. This show is sometimes credited as being one of the reasons for the creation of the anti-media advocacy group *Parents Television Council* (Poniewozak, 2008). Perhaps most famous was a nude scene occurring in an episode called *Nude Awakening* in 2003 in which a female actresse's buttocks were visible. The FCC, responding to complaints by the Parents Television Council fined ABC, the network that produced the show, $1.4 million in 2008, although this decision was subsequently thrown out by the Second Circuit court in 2011 for constitutional reasons.

Other issues that emerged had to do with "fleeting expletives" as well as unscripted nudity. Several celebrities such as Bono, Cher, Nicole Richie, and even Vice President Joe Biden have uttered variations of the word "fuck" either in live awards shows or on live broadcast news channels (in Biden's case). Once again, the FCC moved to fine stations for fleeting expletives and this was struck down by the

circuit courts. This was ultimately heard by the US Supreme Court in Federal Communications Commission v Fox Televisions Stations (2009). In this case SCOTUS sided with the FCC, although it did not decide the constitutional issues. In effect, SCOTUS kicked this issue back to the circuit appeals courts.

This returned the issue back to the Second Circuit Court which once again ruled in 2010 that the FCC's policies were too vague and chilling to speech. The FCC appealed to SCOTUS who readdressed the issue in Federal Communications Commission v Fox Televisions Stations (2012). Choosing something of a middle ground, SCOTUS agreed with the second Circuit Court that the FCC's guidelines were too vague and hadn't explicitly covered the "fleeting expletives" at the center of the case. The FCC also seemed to be selective in implementing its own rules, not levying fines for expletives or nudity in Stephen Spielburg movies such as *Saving Private Ryan* and *Schindler's List* which had been shown on broadcast TV without editing. Nonetheless, SCOTUS affirmed the FCC's ability to regulate, at least in principle, sex and profanity on broadcast airwaves. However, the rules for such regulation needed to be clearer than they had in the past.

It is worth noting that the issue at heart for the SCOTUS cases involving sex and profanity is in regard to the FCC's ability to regulate such content on *broadcast* airwaves. That is to say, airwaves owned by the government itself. Media which is provided through private distribution, ranging from cable TV to Internet streaming to movies, cannot be regulated by the FCC. Thus, it is not uncommon to see everything to full-frontal nudity to considerable profanity on cable TV or the movies. Ironically, the FCC's insistence on regulating broadcast airwaves may simply hasten the push for content to be delivered through alternate pathways such as cable and, increasingly, the Internet.

The SCOTUS decisions in Brown v EMA and final FCC v Fox cases also set up an odd distinction between violence and sex/profanity. SCOTUS has essentially declared violence off limits to regulation, but allowed for regulation of sex/profanity albeit only on government broadcast airwaves. Why such a distinction has been made is not always clear. Although the research evidence was central to the Brown v EMA case, it does not appear to have mattered much in FCC v FOX. In that case even the federal government acknowledged they could not provide research evidence that exposure to sexual situations or profanity *harmed* young viewers. Rather the decision seems to have hinged, as much as anything, on tradition. No tradition for regulating violent content exists in the USA, but we do have a tradition of regulating sex and profanity, even if standards have been gradually liberalizing over the past few generations.

10.4   Regulation of Media in Other Liberal Democracies

Naturally, different nations have differing approaches to freedom of speech. Nations under some form of authoritarian control may simply censor whatever they wish, and I will spend less time on these nations accordingly. More interesting is to examine how freedom of speech and media regulation is addressed in other liberal democracies given that some degree of freedom of speech is at the heart of democracy.

Students from the USA are often surprised to learn that many, perhaps most, other liberal democracies have some form of institutionalized government censorship or regulation of media. In some cases such as the British Board of Film Classification, an independent body may be given statutory authority for the regulation of media. By contrast the Australian Classification Board is more closely linked to the government. However, most liberal democracies have some form of regulation authority given statutory authority by the government.

That having been said, this does not always mean that other nations are more conservative in what they allow in their media. For instance, Americans are often surprised by the amount of sex and nudity allowed on European television, even broadcast channels. Even in the staid UK, you can see occasional nudity on commercials, let alone television shows, although such nudity is typically played for laughs rather than sexual stimulation.

By contrast, other nations have regulations governing content that may seem shocking to Americans. For instance, some countries such as Germany or Australia have outright banned some of the most violent video games. That is to say even adults have not been allowed access to such games, let alone children. In Australia, the government has recently edged toward fixing this, introducing a new R18+ rating for the most violent games so adults can access them, although as of this writing, implementation has been slow and strained. Germany, by contrast, appears resolute on its exceptional censorship regime. These examples highlight how fragile free speech rights can be even in liberal democracies.

10.5 What Free Speech Rights to Adolescents Have?

One issue at the heart of many of the efforts to restrict access of minors to objectionable content is that of what free speech rights minors enjoy. Do adolescents have the right both to say whatever they wish and consume whatever media they wish, at least within the bounds applied to adults? Or do youth have fewer free speech rights than adults? Obviously, in many respects adolescents are treated differently under the law. Although laws vary by country, restrictions on adolescent smoking, drinking, voting, and even curfews are not uncommon. Can the free speech rights of adolescents be curtailed to a greater degree than for adults?

Here again, the issues are complex. Some adolescent behaviors have been restricted due to perceived public health concerns. In the case of smoking and alcohol use, for instance, the public health issues are well documented, but that has not been the case for media effects. Or, put in US legal terms, the issue of media effects has not been able to pass *strict scrutiny* which means that a compelling public health interest has not been documented.

The courts do recognize that adolescents' speech rights may be curtailed under some circumstances, however. For instance, in the case of Morse v Frederick (2007) SCOTUS ruled that schools had a compelling interest in restricting students' speech rights at campus events, particularly when such speech could be

reasonably interpreted as supporting behaviors that would go against public health. In this case a high school student, Joseph Frederick, had unfurled a banner reading "Bong hits 4 Jesus" at a school event watching the Olympic torch go by. The principle of the school seized the banner and suspended Frederick. Frederick filed a civil rights lawsuit that went to SCOTUS. In a split 5-4 decision SCOTUS ruled that, because the speech occurred in the context of a school event, the school had legal right and compelling interest to restrict this speech, particularly given its drug use implications.

However, in Brown v EMA, SCOTUS ruled that adolescents did indeed have broad free speech protections, and that government could not restrict access to violent material unless a compelling interest could be demonstrated, which it could not. Thus, limitations on adolescents' free speech, at least within the USA, are restricted to compelling interest on school grounds. Or, put simply, youth may have to be careful what they say in school, but have great latitude elsewhere.

Also at issue regarding free speech protections is what is called a *chilling* effect. This occurs when regulations or censorship of media to minors might result in unintended restrictions to adults as well. Much debate over this took place in the 1990s when Internet pornography became widely available. Naturally, pornography access is restricted to minors. In the 1990s the US government attempted to pass several laws requiring online pornography distributors to check the age of individuals accessing their Web sites, usually by having them provide a credit card number, even if the pornographic images were freely available. SCOTUS struck down the majority of these laws, arguing that requiring adults to present a credit card to check their age could have a chilling effect. Or put another way, many adults prefer to use pornography anonymously, and requiring them to run a credit card would be chilling on their free speech rights. As a consequence, although schools are required to use Internet filters for objectionable content, there are few barriers between minors and Internet pornography other than a voluntary certification of adult age.

10.6   Concluding Statements

The struggles over free speech are always the tug of war of freedom versus the need or perceived need to protect society. We understand that some forms of speech, whether shouting "fire" in a crowded theater when no fire exists, or child pornography, require restriction, given the rather obvious harm generated by such speech. Debates occur when the harmfulness of a particular kind of speech is less clear, or where perceptions of harm and personal morality become intertwined. At present freedom has been on a gradual winning streak, although undoubtedly debates will continue into the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, despite various efforts to regulate or censor various forms of media, the general cross-national trend has favored fewer, not more restrictions. This probably reflects increasing awareness that media has not touched off the kind of public health issues anti-media advocates often profess. However, whether this trend will continue into the future remains to be seen.

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