

The Effects of Internet Use, Violent Music and  
Lyrics, and Violent Video Images on Social  
Connectedness, Internalized Aggression, and  
Memory Recall.

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# **The Effects of Internet Use, Violent Music and Lyrics, and Violent Video Images on Social Connectedness, Internalized Aggression, and Memory Recall.**

## **Introduction**

The following three article summaries may at first glance appear to be unrelated to some degree with regard to adolescent development. The purpose of these analyses is to raise this question:

Are the combinatorial effects of the internet, violent television and video programming, and violent musical lyrics affecting our children's cognitive development by hindering their ability to socialize properly on a personal level, control aggressiveness, and absorb environmental information when angry?

## Summaries

### **Internet Paradox: A Social Technology That Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well-Being?**

American Psychologist September 1998, Vol. 53, No. 9. 1017-1031

Robert Kraut and Vicki Lundmark, Michael Patterson and Sara Keisler, Truidas Mukopadhyay, William Scherlis

#### **Overview:**

There are two schools of thought with regard to the beneficial and or detrimental effects of the Internet and it's impact on society. One argument is that increased Internet use causes social isolation from genuine social relationships such as family communication and local community interaction. This view draws the image of a person "hunkered down" in front of their computer terminal engaging in communication with total strangers through a "socially impoverished medium " resulting in "weak " social bonds.

The opposing view infers that the Internet leads to more and better social relationships because of it's wide reaching potential, overcoming geographical boundaries, and the inconvenience of illness, schedule, or stigma. This view also cites that people may find groups of others on the web whom share common interests thus forming social bonds through similar attributes. Indeed, both these arguments pose valid reasons and provoke challenging debate.

This longitudinal study examined the social and psychological impact on 169 people in 79 households during their first 1 to 2 years online. The Internet was used extensively for communication. The use of the Internet if compared to watching

television, appears as though they both are very much time displacement oriented, however the Internet does differ in that it is interactive.

## **DATA**

Demographic characteristics, social involvement, and psychological well being were measured via a pretest questionnaire before the participants were given access to the Internet. After 12 to 24 months the participants completed another questionnaire containing the same measures

## **Results:**

Changes in both social involvement and psychological well being were noted. Teenagers in particular were shown to be the most frequent users of the Internet. Greater use of the Internet was positively correlated to declines in family communication. Social circles were affected in that while relationships at a distance increased, local social circles decreased.

Depression, stress and loneliness were also measured as an indicator of psychological well being. The results showed that people who used the Internet more, subsequently reported larger increases of loneliness. Life stressors appeared to increase as participants reported a greater number of daily life stressors. Finally, depression was also associated with greater use of the Internet.

In conclusion this study shows that Greater use of the internet was associated with small but statistically significant declines in social involvement, increased loneliness, and

detrimental effects on psychological well being through increases in depression  
loneliness and stress.

## **Article 2: Exposure to Violent Media: The Effects of Songs With Violent Lyrics on Aggressive Thoughts and Feelings**

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2003, Vol. 84, 960-971  
Craig A. Anderson and Nicholas L. Carnagey, Iowa State University  
Janie Eubanks, Texas Department of Human Services

### **Overview:**

This study examined the effects of violent song lyrics on the mediation of aggressive thoughts and feelings. As far back as ancient Greece, theories of aggressive thoughts and feelings were studied. At that time one theory was proposed which more or less says that the process of experiencing aggressive thoughts and emotions would have the effect of decreasing subsequent thoughts and emotions. This process is today referred to as venting, and although supported by Freud and others, has been debunked in several media domains.

Four decades of evidence support the theory that exposure to violent media is causally related to subsequent aggression related thoughts and feelings. However these studies primarily focussed on visual media such as violent TV and video programs.

This study focuses however on musical lyrical content and its effects on increases of aggression. Past research has shown that males who viewed violent but non-erotic music videos were more prone to accept violence as a tool for dealing with interpersonal problems. The video portion of the song may be more conducive to this effect and as such the question is that if the media consisted of the musical and lyrical content alone, would there also be an increase in aggression?

Music and lyrics alone leave more to the imagination thus allowing the listener to fill in the blanks with their own schemas and relative life experiences. This may have a balancing effect on the outcome.

Another aspect of the study was to investigate the possibility of balance or extinction of the aggression if humorous lyrics were introduced into the songs or if a humorous or non-violent song followed the violent song.

## **DATA**

Five separate experiments were performed which tested for parameters such as

Experiment #1: Self reporting data as to whether violent songs produced higher levels of state hostility (agitation)

Experiment #2: A word pairing test was used to determine if violent lyrics changed the perception of words such that after listening to the lyrics a person might associate the word "stick" with the word "spear", as opposed to "stick " and "branch" which might have occurred before the violent lyrics were introduced.

Experiment #3: A word pronunciation test was administered to detect changes in intonation, inflection, and volume of words spoken before and after the violent lyrics was introduced.

Experiment #4: Utilizing the same tests as above, the experiment was to determine if songs with both violent and humorous lyrics produced similar or mediated results as seen in the previous tests.

Experiment #5: Is the same as in experiment 4 except that a different but non- violent song followed a violent song.

The study used seven violent songs and eight non-violent songs performed by seven artists. At least two songs per artist were used and each artist presented on violent song and one non-violent song.

## **Results:**

Short term effects: After listening to the songs there was a marked increase in aggressive thoughts and feelings. Violent songs inspire aggressive thoughts and feelings

and can influence perceptions of ongoing social interactions thus negatively tainting the understanding of the individual's immediate environment.

This result would serve to further disprove the "venting theory", which would dictate that listening to violent music would calm a person down.

Long term effects are related in that repeated listening to these songs may in fact alter a person's personality. This occurs because an agitated person will project his or her attitude and influence into their social environment. As such, peers, family, teacher, and others will react to this perceived hostility in an adverse way, further isolating the individual.

Without mediation or "balance" from other sources, the individual's isolation increases; the person will retreat to some isolated area and perhaps repeat the behavior of listening to these songs. This will cause the aggression to continually grow and personality changes may occur.

The silver lining in all of this is that the study did show that the negative effects of these songs could be "balanced" and even negated by the injection of humorous lyrics and or the subsequent listening to a non-violent song.

### **Article 3: Effects of Television Violence on Memory for Commercial Messages**

Journal of Experimental Psychology, 1998, Vol. 4, No4, 291-307  
Brad J. Bushman, Iowa State University

#### **Overview:**

It has long been assumed by advertisers that violence sell products. Their theory is that people like to watch violence and as such more people watch violent programming. It would follow then that the more people watching the more people would see their advertisements. The question arises however, if watching a commercial is that same as absorbing the commercial's content. This study examines the effect of violent TV programming and the retention of information from commercial advertising after the exposure.

#### **DATA**

2080 students participated in three experiments.

Experiment #1 tested for Brand Name retention after viewing a violent scene vs. a non-violent scene.

Experiment # 2: Is an expansion of #1 in that it included brand recognition tests and tested memory for detailed information from the commercial.

Experiment #3: tested for the effect of anger on the retention of content of the commercial message. In other words, does anger distract the viewer on some level that it impedes the absorption of the commercial message content?

#### **Results:**

In experiment #1 the participants who viewed the non-violent video recalled more brand names than those who watched the violent video did. They also recalled more of the commercial details than the latter. Thus in this experiment, the memory of those who viewed the violent videos were impaired.

Experiment #2 achieved the same results including brand name recall data, which followed the same correlative path as the other test results.

Experiment #3 tested the hypothesis that anger causes cognitive processes to shift into a repair mode, thus reducing attention to the outside stimulus. The results showed this to be the case. Anger impaired memory for commercial messages.

Thus, during the time that the commercial advertisers were hoping that viewers would be absorbing the commercial messages, the viewers may actually be focused on themselves, trying to calm the anger brought on by the recent violent scenes. If a person is not paying attention during this "repair" time, then it follows that they will not retain much information with regard to the advertiser's commercial.

### **Conclusion:**

These three articles, while somewhat diverse in their emphasis and specificity of study, and are interesting in their own right as individual papers but even more-so if viewed in combination. I feel that this summary presents an idea that could lead to the understanding of one possible dynamic that takes place as we grow through adolescence. Why is it that teenagers are often so angry, defiant, and depressed through feelings of social isolation?

This is a problem that has been increasing over the last several decades. With that in mind, as adolescents become more and more cognizant in their development, might the use of the Internet be setting the stage for teenagers to withdraw from their families and local social involvement as an escape? If teenagers are becoming social recluses in real time in their immediate physical environment what kinds of socialization is in fact taking

place? Could it be that the television, music video, and the Internet are socializing our children instead of one on one communication and family connectedness? If so what is to become of our children as they develop into adults?

Teenagers are exposed to thousands of violent murder scenes each year, music videos and lyrics portray a world of violence and hatred of government, women, and race just to name a few. Does the combination of reduced social skills with increased aggressiveness mean that our children's personalities will become more and more violent? How can society change this trend? How can parents enforce stricter rules on what their children witness via the various media without provoking anger in the child?

Since anger has been shown to reduce the ability to retain information, how can parent's properly discipline these isolate depressed angry aggressive children?

Many studies have shown that punishment does not work, could this be because during the conflict with the parent (*who the child has not been communicating with because of the internet*), and has become more aggressive (*due to the violent nature of his or her preferred media*), is not listening to the parent because he or she is angry and is not paying attention anyway (*because the focus is on themselves to repair their present condition*)?