

Overexposure to Negative Visual Media among Youth in the United States

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Summary

Children are impressionable during their development. A part of a child's education that is often unintentional and overlooked is their exposure to entertainment. What individuals may not know is how much entertainment affects how one views love and sexual intimacy, violence and treatment of others, or even views of others as people and individuals. The world and perception are shaped by movies. People are what they consume, and they also are what they allow themselves to watch. Movies are not inherently problematic; rather, there is concern about the increasing prevalence of negative content depicted in them. The use of media has increased astronomically and it continues to grow. The cinematic medium possesses the potential to inspire moral values and goodness. However, concern arises when films deviate from the fundamental spiritual and moral themes ingrained in human history, leading to the dissemination of content that may inflict more harm than initially acknowledged.

Key Terms

Violence - behavior involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something.¹

Stereotype - a fixed and *oversimplified* image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.²

Pornography - any depiction of acts in a manner so as to arouse sexual excitement.³

Digital Literacy - ability to find, evaluate, and communicate information using typing or digital media platforms.⁴

Arousal Seeker - An "arousal seeker" is an individual actively pursuing stimulating experiences or stimuli, often seeking arousal or excitement.⁵

Desensitization - to extinguish an emotional response (as of fear, anxiety, or guilt) to stimuli that formerly induced it.⁶

Coitus - sexual intercourse.⁷

¹ Myriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "violence (n.)," accessed November 29, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/violence>

² Myriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "stereotype (n.)," accessed November 29, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stereotype>

³ Myriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "pornography (n.)," accessed November 29, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pornography>

⁴ "Digital Literacy." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_literacy (accessed November 29, 2023).

⁵ (Peer-Reviewed) Mehrabian, Albert. 1975. Journal of Personality 43 (4): 582–90. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6494.1975.tb00723.x.

⁶ Merriam-Webster. s.v. "Desensitize." Accessed December 9, 2023. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/desensitize>

⁷ Merriam-Webster. s.v. "Coitus." Accessed December 9, 2023. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/coitus>.

Extreme Pornography - beyond typical one-on-one sexual intercourse (e.g., public humiliation, incest).⁸

Context

Q: Who is most at risk of overexposure to negative media in the United States?

A: Children in their formative years of development are at particular risk. The young are developing an understanding of the world. Youth are shown to be particularly susceptible to modeling what they view.^{9 10}

Q: What is overexposure to negative media?

A: Overexposure, as far as this paper is concerned is more about being exposed to certain types of content rather than the quantity of content. However, it is acknowledged that the more time spent aggravates problems.¹¹ Specifically, it explores how exposure to movies shapes children's perspectives on love, sexual intimacy, violence, and the treatment of others. Thus, overexposure is the consistent consumption of violence, sex, and negative perspectives when not portrayed as wrong.¹²

Q: When did negative media consumption become an issue for children?

A: While acknowledging historical shifts, such as the doubling of violence in movies since 1950, the paper primarily addresses contemporary concerns. It emphasizes the current era marked by rapid technological advancements, offering unprecedented access to entertainment. The average time in front of a screen has increased to almost 8 hours per day.¹³ By the time a child reaches 8, the average has already reached six hours.

Q: Where is overexposure to negative media most likely to occur?

A: Television, Social Media, and online video applications such as YouTube, and TikTok are

⁸ (Peer-Reviewed) Rothman, Emily F., Courtney Kaczmarzsky, Nina Burke, Emily Jansen, and Allyson Baughman. 2015. "Without Porn ... I Wouldn't Know Half the Things I Know Now": A Qualitative Study of Pornography Use Among a Sample of Urban, Low-Income, Black and Hispanic Youth." *Journal of Sex Research* 52 (7): 736–46. doi:10.1080/00224499.2014.960908.

⁹ (Peer-Reviewed) Rothman, Emily F., Courtney Kaczmarzsky, Nina Burke, Emily Jansen, and Allyson Baughman. 2015. "Without Porn ... I Wouldn't Know Half the Things I Know Now": A Qualitative Study of Pornography Use Among a Sample of Urban, Low-Income, Black and Hispanic Youth." *Journal of Sex Research* 52 (7): 736–46. doi:10.1080/00224499.2014.960908.

¹⁰ Shedlosky-Shoemaker, Randi, Kristi A. Costabile, and Robert M. Arkin. 2014. "Self-Expansion through Fictional Characters." *Self & Identity* 13 (5): 556–78. doi:10.1080/15298868.2014.882269.

¹¹ (Peer-Reviewed) Muppalla, S. K., Vuppalapati, S., Reddy Pulliahgaru, A., & Sreenivasulu, H. "Effects of Excessive Screen Time on Child Development: An Updated Review and Strategies for Management." *Cureus* 15, no. 6 (2023): e40608. doi: 10.7759/cureus.40608. PMID: 37476119; PMCID: PMC10353947.

¹² The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "Chapter 26: Building the Kingdom of God in the Last Days." Teachings of Brigham Young. Accessed December 9, 2023. URL:

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-brigham-young/chapter-26?lang=eng#title2>

¹³ Zippia. "Average Screen Time Statistics: How Much Time Do We Spend on Screens?" Accessed December 9, 2023. URL:

<https://www.zippia.com/advice/average-screen-time-statistics/#:~:text=The%20average%20American%20spends%207,of%20screen%20time%20per%20day.>

the major culprits for grabbing time from youth.¹⁴ Most of this time is spent on personal cell phones at home and at school.¹⁵ The United States rates of media consumption are higher than in other countries.¹⁶

Q: What are the main types of media addressed in the report??

A: Television and movies currently have a large quantity of research and are therefore the focus. As short-form video content found on YouTube Shorts, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram increases in popularity, more studies will be done to quantify their effect. These media are spending more time consumed and should therefore merit consideration.

Contributing Factors

Inadequate Parental Guidance

Parents lack of knowledge and consequential lack of guidance concerning children's media consumption is a significant contributor. Parents are often not fully informed about the content their children are exposed to, allowing unrestricted access to potentially harmful material especially on unregulated platforms. Improved parental involvement and awareness are essential to mitigating the negative impact of media on adolescents.¹⁷

Technological Advancements and Increased Screen Time

The rapid growth in technology, offering unprecedented access to entertainment, has led to a surge in media consumption among youth.¹⁸ With the average time spent in front of screens reaching almost eight hours per day, the escalation of screen time increases the negative consequences associated with media exposure.¹⁹ The invention and current prevalent access to personal cell phones and almost universal internet access further amplifies the challenge.

¹⁴ Zippia. "Average Screen Time Statistics: How Much Time Do We Spend on Screens?" Accessed December 9, 2023. URL: <https://www.zippia.com/advice/average-screen-time-statistics/#:~:text=The%20average%20American%20spends%207,of%20screen%20time%20per%20day>.

¹⁵ Richards, Ian. "When Does Watching Porn Become a Problem?" Welldoing. Accessed December 9, 2023. URL: <https://welldoing.org/article/when-does-watching-porn-become-problem>

¹⁶ Zippia. "Average Screen Time Statistics: How Much Time Do We Spend on Screens?" Accessed December 9, 2023. URL: <https://www.zippia.com/advice/average-screen-time-statistics/#:~:text=The%20average%20American%20spends%207,of%20screen%20time%20per%20day>.

¹⁷ (Peer-Reviewed) Al-Ali, Nahla Mansour, Hadeel Said Yaghy, Khulood K. Shattawi, and Noha M. Al-Shdayfat. 2018. "Parents' Knowledge and Beliefs about the Impact of Exposure to Media Violence on Children's Aggression." *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 39 (7): 592–99. doi:10.1080/01612840.2017.1422201.

¹⁸ Zippia. "Average Screen Time Statistics: How Much Time Do We Spend on Screens?" Accessed December 9, 2023. URL: <https://www.zippia.com/advice/average-screen-time-statistics/#:~:text=The%20average%20American%20spends%207,of%20screen%20time%20per%20day>.

¹⁹ (Peer-Reviewed) Bahnweg, Erica, and Hatim Omar. "Effects of TikTok on Adolescent Mental Health and Wellbeing." *Dynamics of Human Health* 10, no. 1 (2023): https://journalofhealth.co.nz/?page_id=2905. ISSN 2382-1019.

Lack of Media Literacy Education

The lack of guidance extends to a gap in media literacy. It is rare in households and schools. Without the critical skill of media literacy, adolescents are left to fend for themselves as they navigate a slew of media daily.²⁰ Because of this children and adolescents may be more susceptible to the influence of negative portrayals in movies and other forms of entertainment.²¹

Negative Consequences

#1: Accessibility to Desensitizing Violence

Frequent exposure to violent and unsympathetic content has been shown to decrease the ability to connect with the emotions and struggles of others.²² This can lead to selfishness and detachment. These attributes inhibit healthy social connection which is critical to well-being.²³ Moreover, the prevalence of violence in movies is increasing. It has more than doubled since 1950.²⁴ This leads to increased hostility and anti-social behavior.²⁵

The consequences of viewing violence in film is not restricted only to the individual viewer but also the wider public because violent media consumption has been shown to increase violence in children.²⁶ This revelation should make any parent more wary of what they let their kids watch. Currently, parents are typically not fully aware of the content their child consumes. When parents are more aware their children benefit.²⁷ Adolescents feel can feel violence is less of a big deal than it truly is. Hurting someone becomes less weighted. It inhibits them from understanding others feelings and impacts

²⁰ (Peer-Reviewed) Shedlosky-Shoemaker, Randi, Kristi A. Costabile, and Robert M. Arkin. 2014. "Self-Expansion through Fictional Characters." *Self & Identity* 13 (5): 556–78. doi:10.1080/15298868.2014.882269.

²¹ (Peer-Reviewed) Seel, John. 1997. "Plugged in, Spaced out, and Turned on: Electronic Entertainment and Moral Mindfields." *Journal of Education* 179 (3): 17. <https://search-ebscohost-com.byu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=pbh&AN=377512&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

²² (Peer-Reviewed) Mrug, Sylvie et al. "Emotional and Physiological Desensitization to Real-life and Movie Violence." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 44, no. 5 (2015): 1092–1108.

²³ (Peer-Reviewed) J., Holt-Lunstad. "Why Social Relationships Are Important for Physical Health: A Systems Approach to Understanding and Modifying Risk and Protection." *Annual review of psychology*, 2017. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29035688/>.

²⁴ (Peer-Reviewed) RA., Mrug S;Madan A;Cook EW;Wright. "Emotional and Physiological Desensitization to Real-Life and Movie Violence." *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 2014. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25326900/>.

²⁵ (Peer-Reviewed) Anderson, Craig A. 1997. "Effect of Violent Movies and Trait Hostility on Hostile Feelings and Aggressive Thoughts." *Aggressive Behavior* 23 (3): 161–78. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1098-2337(1997)23:3<161::AID-AB2>3.0.CO;2-P.

²⁶ McLellan, Faith. "Do Violent Movies Make Violent Children? - The Lancet." *The Lancet*, 2002. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(02\)07705-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(02)07705-X/fulltext).

²⁷ (Peer-Reviewed) Al-Ali, Nahla Mansour, Hadeel Said Yaghy, Khulood K. Shattnawi, and Noha M. Al-Shdayfat. 2018. "Parents' Knowledge and Beliefs about the Impact of Exposure to Media Violence on Children's Aggression." *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 39 (7): 592–99. doi:10.1080/01612840.2017.1422201.

their ability to communicate and build relationships.²⁸ It can also cause them to become arousal seekers. This tendency encourages more violent media consumption.²⁹

#2: Perpetuation of unrealistic Stereotypes

Shallow characters and assumed stereotypes lead to the normalization of unfortunate and unhealthy life choices, which are particularly dangerous for impressionable youth. Teenaged characters are often portrayed as being very sexually active, alcoholic, and addicted to drugs. Drug addiction can cause a dysphoric connection to one's physical body and can lead to poor physical care later in life.³⁰ Screen addiction is associated with problematic alcohol use in adolescents.³¹ Alcohol has a myriad of deleterious effects.³² They tend to be put into categories of either geek or popular.³³

Several issues arise from this in particular the normalization and polarization it creates. Youth put themselves and others into boxes—"cool" or not. The lack of exposure to the diversity and richness of people which movies have a particularly keen ability to utilize for good is damaging to youths' perception of the world.

#3: Sexual Activity

Youth also develop an unhealthy understanding of what love and romance look like at a critical time when their hormones are new and highly active. Teens who engage more frequently with sexual or pornographic media are two times as likely to have had sexual intercourse in their early teens.³⁴ Early age for first coitus increases the likelihood of depressive symptoms.³⁵ Adolescents who do view pornographic, including extreme

²⁸ (Peer-Reviewed) Mrug, Sylvie, Anjana Madan, Cook, Ernest W. 3rd, and Richard A. Wright. "Emotional and Physiological Desensitization to Real-Life and Movie Violence." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 44, no. 5 (2015): 1092-1108. doi: 10.1007/s10964-014-0202-z. Epub 2014 Oct 19. PMID: 25326900; PMCID: PMC4393354.

²⁹ (Peer-Reviewed) Xie, Guang-Xin, and Moon J. Lee. 2008. "Anticipated Violence, Arousal, and Enjoyment of Movies: Viewers' Reactions to Violent Previews Based on Arousal-Seeking Tendency." *Journal of Social Psychology* 148 (3): 277-92. doi:10.3200/SOCP.148.3.277-292.

³⁰ Kemp, Ryan. 2009. "The Lived-Body of Drug Addiction." *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis* 20 (1): 120-32. <https://search-ebscohost-com.byu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=pbh&AN=37585689&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

³¹ (Peer-Reviewed) Ko, Chih—Hung, Ju-Yu Yen, Cheng—Fang Yen, Cheng—Sheng Chen, Chih—Chi Weng, and Cheng—Chung Chen. 2008. "The Association between Internet Addiction and Problematic Alcohol Use in Adolescents: The Problem Behavior Model." *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 11 (5): 571-76. doi:10.1089/cpb.2007.0199.

³² (Peer-Reviewed) Ryan, Sheryl A., and Patricia Kokotailo. 2019. "Alcohol Use by Youth." *Pediatrics* 144 (1): 1-14. doi:10.1542/peds.2019-1357.

³³ Media Smarts. "Movies - the Concerns." MediaSmarts. Accessed November 4, 2023. <https://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/general-information/movies/movies-concerns>.

³⁴ (Peer-Reviewed) Brown, Jane D., Kelly Ladin L'Engle, Carol J. Pardun, Guang Guo, Kristin Kenneavy, and Christine Jackson. 2006. "Sexy Media Matter: Exposure to Sexual Content in Music, Movies, Television, and Magazines Predicts Black and White Adolescents' Sexual Behavior." *Pediatrics* 117, no. 4 (2006): 1018-1027.

³⁵ (Peer-Reviewed) Jamieson, LuanneK., and TerranceJ. Wade. 2011. "Early Age of First Sexual Intercourse and Depressive Symptomatology among Adolescents." *Journal of Sex Research* 48 (5): 450-60.

pornographic, content are more likely to engage sexually and use what they have viewed as an example of how to engage sexually.³⁶

Best Practices

Common Sense Media

Common Sense Media develops an online database that informs parents and any interested party about the specific content featured in a film or TV show enabling greater awareness. Common Sense Media empowers parents to be able to know what their children are watching. They cover content such as violence, sex, nudity, and language. They encourage and aid kids to engage with entertainment responsibly. They have a four-star rating from Charity Navigator due to their excellent work and transparency.³⁷ Common Sense Media is helping enable thoughtful supervision of children's media choices. Their service is helping parents to be aware and empowered to support their children and themselves.

Impact

The boom in access to entertainment due to technological advancements has brought more entertainment to the fingertips of more youth and children. Common Sense Media has been active during this period of exponential growth. Its growth as a platform has increased the quality and breadth of its capacity for impact. Youth spend more time with media than any other activity besides sleep.³⁸ With this increasing need Common Sense Media has created educational materials for use in schools and by families to teach responsible digital literacy and citizenship. A majority of schools in the US now use it. Their nationwide reach has extended beyond classrooms too, Common Sense Media has been an advocate for child privacy and safety in the online world. The organization has pushed for legislation and policies that protect children from inappropriate content and data misuse on digital platforms.³⁹ Common Sense Media researches media use among children and families. Their studies contribute valuable insights into trends, challenges, and opportunities in the ever-evolving media landscape. They have highlighted the effect on sleep, the frequency of use, and notifications. They have also provided useful information regarding the lack of privacy children have online. This research informs both parents and policymakers. Common Sense research has been cited in congressional hearings, in proposed legislation, and in the State of the Union

³⁶ (Peer-Reviewed) Rothman, Emily F., Courtney Kaczmarzky, Nina Burke, Emily Jansen, and Allyson Baughman. 2015. "Without Porn ... I Wouldn't Know Half the Things I Know Now": A Qualitative Study of Pornography Use Among a Sample of Urban, Low-Income, Black and Hispanic Youth." *Journal of Sex Research* 52 (7): 736–46. doi:10.1080/00224499.2014.960908.

³⁷ Common Sense Media. "Donate." Common Sense Media. Accessed November 4, 2023. https://www.commonsensemedia.org/donate?page_manager_page_variant_weight=-6&override_route_name=entity.node.canonical&base_route_name=entity.node.canonical&page_manager_page=node_view&page_manager_page_variant=node_view-panels_variant-csm_blog.

³⁸ Rideout, V., Peebles, A., Mann, S., & Robb, M. B. 2022. "Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021." San Francisco, CA: Common Sense.

³⁹ Common Sense Media. "Research." Common Sense Media. <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research> (accessed November 29, 2023)

address, and is frequently cited in the national press.⁴⁰ Adolescents who are less exposed to sexual media are less likely to engage in coitus at an inappropriate age.⁴¹

Gaps

As the prevalence of online short-form videos continues to rise⁴², Common Sense Media currently lacks a framework for evaluating videos that young individuals frequently encounter. TikTok is consumed on average for 1.5 hours daily by adolescents.⁴³ Given that adolescent brains have underdeveloped pre-frontal cortexes it is highly plausible that time on these and other unregulated applications without responsible input can make young people particularly vulnerable. A large portion of TikTok users are struggling with mental health disorders.⁴⁴ Although Common Sense Media is far from obsolete it will need to continue to advance with technology. The technological environment renders this challenging due to the speed with which technology advances.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Common Sense Media. "20 Years of Impact." Common Sense.

<https://www.commonsense.org/20-years-of-impact/> (Accessed November 29, 2023)

⁴¹ (Peer-Reviewed) L'Engle, Kelly Ladin, and Christine Jackson. 2008. "Socialization Influences on Early Adolescents' Cognitive Susceptibility and Transition to Sexual Intercourse." *Journal of Research on Adolescence* (Wiley-Blackwell) 18 (2): 353–78. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2008.00563.x.

⁴² Mosby, Albert. "Short-Form Video Statistics." Yaguara.

<https://www.yaguara.co/short-form-video-statistics/#:~:text=Consumers%20find%20short%2Dform%20videos,rate%20among%20social%20media%20platforms> (accessed November 29, 2023)

⁴³ Rothwell, Jonathan. "Teens Spend an Average of X Hours on Social Media Per Day." Gallup, October 13, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/512576/teens-spend-average-hours-social-media-per-day.aspx>

⁴⁴ (Peer-Reviewed) Bahnweg, Erica, and Hatim Omar. "Effects of TikTok on Adolescent Mental Health and Wellbeing." *Dynamics of Human Health* 10, no. 1 (2023): https://journalofhealth.co.nz/?page_id=2905. ISSN 2382-1019.

⁴⁵ "Accelerating Change." Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accelerating_change#:~:text=An%20analysis%20of%20the%20history,progress%20\(at%20today's%20rate\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accelerating_change#:~:text=An%20analysis%20of%20the%20history,progress%20(at%20today's%20rate)) (accessed November 29, 2023)