

Media, Technology & Childhood



R E D I S C O V E R I N G C H I L D H O O D

Booklet

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- Every year an average person watches over 21,000 TV advertisements which all carry a similar message "Buy Something, Do It Now" (Korten, 1995).
- By age 11, the average urban child will have watched over 100,000 acts of violence and brutality on TV. Many children are unable to decipher whether the events which they are viewing are real or unreal.

Satellite and electronic media have become a powerful force in our lives today as they shape our attitudes, desires, priorities, relationships, values, sense of identity, modes of reflection, the ways/scales in which we build community, and our perceptions of time and change. In today's world, media has been thoroughly integrated in the fabric of life with television, movies, videogames and computer thoroughly enmeshed in both work and play. The UNESCO Global Study on Media Violence states that "TV has become a major socialization factor and dominates the lives of children in urban and electrified rural areas around the globe" (Grobel, 1998). Richard J. Barnet and John Cavanagh go even further in arguing that the MTV entertainment network, which specializes in pop videos and serves as continuous commercial for a wide array of commercial products "may be the most influential educator of young people in five continents today" (Korten, 1995). Excessive use of television has also been responsible for a variety of different problems amongst which are obesity, aggression, sleep disturbances and fear.

Speaking about media in a theoretical framework, the social learning theory described by Bandura and Walters in 1963, claims that children learn through

observation (Kaiser, 2005). The application of this theory on media yields the outcome that children can learn new behavior from television and other audio-visual media (Kaiser, 2005). Seminal media studies have found out that children reproduce acts of violence that they saw on television in real life especially when no specific adverse consequence was shown of the violent act (Kaiser, 2005). In a specific case study four to six year old children were exposed to aggressive and non aggressive film. It was seen that children exposed to a non-violent film acted more peacefully than children exposed to a violent film (Kaiser, 2005). Among young children media has been responsible to elicit fear responses that are long lasting and are linked to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and may just occur after one exposure only ("Effect of Electronic Media", 2005).

However recent research has overturned the social learning theory. Neurodevelopment research has shown that unlike other organs of the human body, the brain at the time of birth is embryonic in structure ("Effect of Electronic Media", 2005). It develops neural connections within the first 18 to 24 months of the child's life ("Effect of Electronic Media", 2005). These neural connections are stimulated and develop through interaction with parents, caregivers and also through play ("Effect of Electronic Media", 2005). Since screen media does not perform any of these activities, hence pediatricians have weighed the risks of exposing the child to media more than the benefits therefore they have advised children not to watch television from the age of 0 to 2 years ("Effect of Electronic Media", 2005).



It has also been noted that media has an adverse impact on school achievement of the child. It has been seen that children who watched more television at the age of three, four and five have lower grades and were rated as less sociable by their peers at the age of six (Burton, 1979). Watching television takes time away from reading and schoolwork. Besides this, several research studies have shown that children watching television with low violence content still indulge in imaginative play which leads to cultivating the creative potential of the child and builds towards his/her cognitive development while children watching a high content of violence in television do not indulge in play and other constructive activities (Kaiser, 2005). It has also been researched that eating meals in front of the television may lead to less meaningful communication as it is not stimulating as would be in the case of a face to face live conversation ("Impact of Media Use", 2003).

Besides its ramifications on the cognitive development of the child, media also affects the physical health of the child. Children who watch television programs are likely to eat high fat and energy snacks which may put them at a risk of developing cholesterol problems and obesity ("Impact of Media Use", 2003). Advertising is much to blame for this as children are unable to recognize its persuasive nature targeting children for high salt, fat and sugar containing foods ("Effect of Electronic Media", 2005). On the other hand, media also idolizes thin models and children attracted by this prescribed attainment of beauty develop various eating disorders. Physical development of the child is also harmed by the child being potentially addicted by the Internet and sitting in front of the computer for hours on end. This can severely detriment the posture of the child.

The internet though has been thought of being a great source of knowledge and an unlimited learning opportunity for the child, however without adult supervision might be more of a disadvantage rather than potentially being a benefit. Adults do not have any control over the television and on the internet over exposing children to material which is not appropriate for their age. Children are being influenced, manipulated and coerced by the media and are powerless in the face of this onslaught. The media also portrays the story of the successful in the society

climbing the social ladder through deceit, jealousy and cheating. These are wrong values that children learn and which remain with them for the rest of their life. Television is also responsible for the creation of racial prejudices against a target group which promotes hatred amongst children. At the same time, media can also be a very powerful tool for supporting dynamic and diverse forms of learning - every media experience can become an opportunity to learn or to enhance one's learning abilities. It has been researched that watching Sesame Street proves beneficial to the vocabulary development of the child ("Effect of Electronic Media", 2005). Sesame Street has also been researched to enhance the comprehension and thinking skills of the child ("Effect of Electronic Media", 2005).

Yet, very few opportunities for creating a truly 'liberating media' exist. Part of this is because most media is owned by the private sector or controlled by the state and producers tend to view media as vehicle for only one-way transmission of information (the underlying assumption to this is that people are empty vessels). They fail to see that the real power of the media lies in stimulating new forms of creativity, critical reflection, understanding, expressiveness and sharing.

There is an urgent need to address the challenges that are emerging from a media-rich society. At the same time, there is also an urgent need to develop innovative, positive uses of the media to facilitate the learning and empowerment of children.

MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY & CHILDHOOD: A CRITICAL REVIEW

- How are media and technology altering the experiences of everyday life for us and our children?
- How are media & technology changing the children's concepts of self, community, politics, culture, nature, time and distance?
- How do they influence what children learn: to uncover the dichotomy of what they know and what they are capable of knowing?
- Do media & technology serve to homogenize cultural groups or, on the contrary, to maintain diversity?
- In the media rich society, who gains and who loses?



Discourse on Media, Technology & Childhood

Speakers emphasized on the fact that media has had a phenomenal impact on its viewers and it has perpetrated into our lives to such an extent that we resonate the experiences that we see on one of its components; television. Television has also been associated with the projection of everything modern and contemporary. Panelists described modernity as the death of permanence and a feeling of transience, an infusion of novelty in every item and diversity. Increased competition and the rush to have everything instantly, has left individuals impatient so that there is an obsessive need for immediate gratification. This has also had an impact on the existing value systems which have taught forbearance and striving to attain success.

Television has also been detrimental to traditional societal values by transmitting the message that everything is for everybody. It has erased the line between the adult and the child and has left children without a sense of respect for their elders. Speakers also realized that adults have been unable to protect the child from viewing such material on television which is not appropriate to their developmental age. Speakers explained that in the case of books for adults, there is a level of complexity involved which would make them unable for children to understand. However, in the case of media there is no barrier which inhibits children from viewing adult programs. This has severely jeopardized the innocence of children.

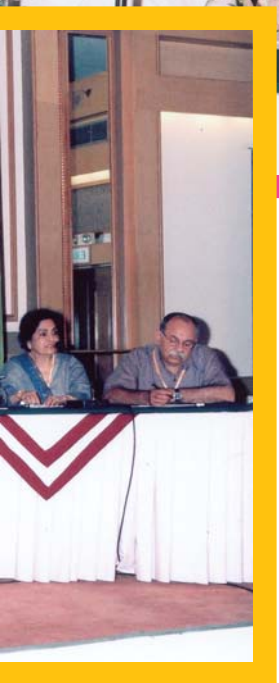
The speakers also stressed on the need to have an educational channel specifically catered for children which acts as an excellent learning tool for children. Some of the speakers blamed the state structure for not paying enough attention to the inauguration of

a channel for children. However, panelists also stressed on the fact that opening an educational channel would yield no outcome since it would again raise issues of the think tank involved behind the channel and their credibility in the proposed effort. They proposed a concerted effort from an individual's end to review and expose children to arts and literature so as to broaden their horizon and bring forth a substantial change.

Speakers condemned television for not recognizing the importance of childhood and portraying the message as if there is no need for living a happy and contented childhood. Program producers are also helpless as even whilst creating programs which specifically cater for children they face stringent censorship controls which hampers any constructive attempt at their end to contribute to the existing dearth of child-centered media. The panelists explained that there is a severe shortage of talent in the country for people producing specifically for children. There are no skilled, trained, artists and writers specializing in children's media. There is not a single channel which is dedicated for children or contributing constructively towards child-centered media.

Speakers also discussed that the proliferation of foreign channels on television has caused further





detriment to the society. The panelists argued that story telling was assigned primal importance in the days of yore, but all stories have become very mechanical and have lost their innocence. The panelists spoke about the infiltration of global media locally and discussed that global media undermines indigenous participatory media which needs to be revived. They proposed that non governmental organizations should come together on this front and make small informal plays and revive street theatre so that children are aware of their cultural heritage while learning simultaneously.

Panelists proposed that learning in programs catering for children should not be regimented but children should learn by engaging fun and play in their exercises so that it is educational as well as entertaining. Speakers laid crucial stress on the need of parents to keep a vigilant guard on the kind of programs children watch. They also proposed that parents could watch television with their children and teach to them the values that were propagated by television and demarcate what is right and what is wrong. They concurred that parents' cooperation is needed to make media into an effective medium.



Prof. Anita Ghulam Ali: *"It is not an understatement to say that today television plays a significant role in influencing our attitudes, desires, priorities, relationships, values, sense of identity and modes of reflection."*



Children, Media & Violence

What Do We Know?

- Studies show that even one to two hours of daily television viewing by school-aged children has a significant harmful effect on academic performance, especially reading.
- Potential adverse effects of excessive exposure to media include: increased violent behavior; obesity, decreased physical activity and fitness, increased cholesterol levels and sodium intake; repetitive strain injury (video computer games); insomnia; photic seizures; impaired school performance; increased sexual activity and use of tobacco and alcohol; decreased attention span; decreased family communication; desensitization and excess consumer focus.
- Children play games which are commercialized. Children this age are unaware of it. 81 per cent of the children in this age group who play product-centered games say these games are “just games,” not advertisements.
- Almost all (94 per cent) of students’ top 50 sites include marketing material.
- Young children are most at risk for the harmful effects of media violence.
- Fifty-five percent of children usually watch television alone or with a friend, but not with their families.
- By the time they are 10, the majority of the television children are watching are shows geared for adults.
- Children average approximately 30 hours per week of screen time-including TV, video games and videos. In rural areas the average is lower but on a rise for TV and movie watching.
- Heavy TV viewers, by watching readymade images, are less imaginative, more aggressive, and are more likely to have attention problems, and become aggressive later in life.
- Viewing media violence can make children more aggressive, fearful, disrespectful and insensitive to the effects of violence.
- Playing violent video games has been directly linked to increased aggressive behavior. Most of the top-selling video games (89%) contained violent content, almost half of which was of a serious nature.
- Toys linked to violent media encourage more violent play, which takes the place of imaginative and creative play.
- The average child sees approximately 5,000 murders and 80,000 other violent acts by the end of elementary school.
- Longitudinal studies tracking viewing habits and behavior patterns of a single individual found that 8-year-old boys, who viewed the most violent programs growing up, were the most likely to engage in aggressive and delinquent behavior by age 18 and serious criminal behavior by age 30.
- 66% of children’s programming had violence. Of the shows with violent content three-quarters demonstrated unpunished violence and when violence occurred 58% of the time, victims were not shown experiencing pain.
- Nearly 75% of violent scenes on television feature no immediate punishment for or no condemnation of violence.
- Media violence is especially damaging to young children (under 8) because they cannot easily tell the difference between real life and fantasy.



Source:

www.asu.edu

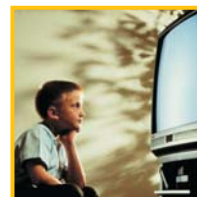
Tuned into Violence: Children & the Media, (Unpublished Paper), Lovell, M. (2000)

www.okcdrb.ouhsc.edu

(Canadian Paediatric Society, 1999)

What Can You Do?

- Plan family viewing in advance - give children a choice of what to watch.
- Move the TV so it is not at center of family life or in a child's bedroom.
- Consider a child's developmental level to determine what is appropriate.
- Limit children's viewing to minimum.
- Restrict violent videos and movies.
- Offer other options to children – play games, read, be creative and active or they can just have thinking time.
- Encourage and model ways to play that do not involve violence.
- Watch TV with the children and talk about the programs.
- Obtain as much information as possible about the content of programs.
- Point out that while an actor may not actually be hurt or killed, such violence in real life results in pain or death.
- Refuse to let children see shows known to be violent.
- Change the channel or turn off the TV when offensive material comes on. Explain why.
- Call or write to TV stations/producers to express your opinions- when offended and when pleased.



Source:
http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/television/talking_to_kids_tv.cfm

Technology & Childhood

Technology Can Be Hazardous to Children

Excessive and premature use of technology such as computers, video games and television during childhood exposes children to a range of developmental and physical risks

Potential Hazards of Technology Include:

Physical Hazards

- Muscular injuries
- Visual strain and myopia
- Obesity and other complications of a sedentary lifestyle
- Possible side effects from toxic emissions and electromagnetic radiation

Intellectual Hazards

- Lack of creativity
- Stunted imaginations
- Impoverished language and literacy skills
- Poor concentration, attention deficits
- Too little patience for the hard work of learning
- Plagiarism
- Distraction from meaning

Emotional and Social Hazards

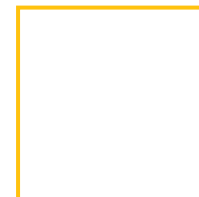
- Social isolation
- Weakened bonds with teachers
- Lack of self-discipline and self-motivation
- Emotional detachment from community
- Commercial exploitation
- Deprivation of relationship with nature and the real world

Moral Hazards

- Exposure to online violence, pornography, bigotry, and other inappropriate material
- Emphasis on information devoid of ethical and moral context
- Lack of purpose and irresponsibility in seeking and applying knowledge



Source:
www.asu.edu
Tuned into Violence: Children & the Media, (Unpublished Paper), Lovell, M., (2000)
www.okcdrb.ouhsc.edu



Developing Technology Awareness

- Slow down: honor the developmental needs of children.
- Relationships with the real world come first: make sure that children have opportunity to develop close human relationships, and do not let computer time steal from informal play time.
- Parents should actively supervise any form of exposure that children have with technology so as to minimize the aggressive aspects and maximize the creative, imaginative potential.
- One of the best ways for you to minimize any negative effects from these messages is to teach your kids to think critically about the technology they are using.
- Talk about what they think about technology in particular. Is there violence? Does it contribute to the plot of the show? Do they find it exciting? Scary? Why?
- Be cautious: introduce tools and technologies to children with mindfulness.
- Teach children to refuse to treat living things as machines.
- Restrict the illusion of technological destiny amongst children the design and use of technologies stem from human choices, involving profound questions of ethics.
- Everyone deserves a voice in technology choices – especially those who most directly bear the consequences.
- Let children know that solving our most pressing social and ecological problems depends more on developing socially responsible behavior than designing dazzling new technologies.



Question & Answer Session

Q: What is the significance of story telling for children? Is the media reviving the art of story telling?

A: Cinema 40 years back was about children. The stories that were told before centered on the importance of nature and what pleasure one derived from exploring nature. Today stories have become very mechanical and teach wrong values such as hatred and deceit which does not harm the individual but also has societal repercussions. There should be an attempt to resuscitate informal media such as street theatre. This is where one can exhibit their creative potential. Small, informal plays should also be done on a regular basis. If the media are sincere with their work, there will be a remarkable change in a period of five years.

Q: In the past family values were glorified. But they have been degraded and trampled upon in the existing production of dramas. What effect does this have on family life and children today?

A: Channels are just working on the premise to earn money. They are producing meaningless stuff which neither teaches nor presents any learning opportunity for the society. Today's production of dramas is just imitating the work that has been produced by foreign channels. They have portrayed

women quite negatively. This detracts the respect that women are given in society. We have an aesthetic sense and are potentially creative also, but sadly we are not producing quality work.

Q: Is there any potential in those acquiring media education?

A: There is a great clash between those who are in authority and have their vested interests and those who are equipped with knowledge and want to do creative work. Those having power want producers to dub existing programs like Sesame Street. Thus producers do not have a platform to exhibit their creative potential. Programs like Sesame Street do not cater for the audience in our part of the world. We do not have the skills, talent or the expertise to produce programs specifically catering for young children. However there are people who are now acquiring specific education in this regard. This is still on a very small scale.





Q: Will a channel specifically featuring educational programs for children be able to challenge the satellite channels on the quality front?

A: There exist various institutions involved in training the youth specifically in the production of programs, such as the National Academy of Performing Arts (NAPA). So there is potential for launching a new channel which specifically caters for children. However, there exist other major issues which obliterate the inauguration of such an endeavor in the true sense in which it is envisioned. To elaborate on this, television programs are broadcasted after going through a certain mechanism. Before the programs are aired they are rated by Gallup and based on these ratings programs are allocated funds by corporations. However programs focusing specifically on children promoting education in an interactive way do not get that high a rating and subsequently do not get enough funds to be transmitted on television.

All the television channels show is children with violence, which is a detriment to the society. There should be a consolidated effort from all ends so as to bring an educational channel for children to the forefront.

Q: What is the solution for constraints or censorships that producers face in creating programs?

A: Powerful media houses need to coordinate their efforts, join hands with each other and make meaningful programs. This also requires an effort from non governmental organizations. They can also contribute to voice their opinions against this so as to create a wider audience which condemns the existing quality of programs and supports those programs which are closer to our cultural milieu.

References:

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"Impact of Media Use on Children and Youth". Canadian Pediatric Child Health.2003.
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"The Effects of Electronic Media on Children Ages Zero to Six: A History of Research- Issue Brief" The Kaiser Family Foundation.2005.
www.kff.org



Rediscovering Childhood

Also included in this series

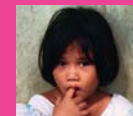
- Gain an understanding on what childhood is ideally meant to be and learn about the challenges of childhood in today's world.
- Explore the role of traditional and modern social institutions i.e. family, community and schools on children's intellectual and social development in today's consumer society.
- Examine the detrimental impacts of economic development and corporate led globalization and learn about the importance of replenishing traditional knowledge systems, social relationships, and wisdom frameworks for childhood and children.
- Review the challenges and opportunities for Early Childhood Development in Pakistan.



Introduction to the
Symposium & Conference



Social Institutions
& Childhood



Globalization,
Development & Childhood



Early Childhood
Development in Pakistan

This booklet is based on the discourse held during the
Symposium on *'Rediscovering Childhood'* & Conference on *'Early Childhood Development in Pakistan'*

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