
Understanding the Mindset of a Person with a Personality Disorder

Interview

This topic of research has been such a prominent one in the past few decades with every nationally reported act of youth violence only bringing more emphasis to it. However, even with all the studies conducted in regard to the repercussions of violence consuming entertainment and the media, I find there is still too high a level of ambiguity to generate any concrete conclusion. The various areas of the topic make it difficult for researchers to coordinate a study that would unfold what exact, if any, repercussion is being caused, such as the different forms of media, age groups, other risk factors, personality traits, etc. Yet despite this lack of certainty, there are theories that claim media violence to directly affect a person's level of aggression and even explain the way in which it does so. According to L.R. Huesmann, his study found that experiences with TV violence at a young age projected aggression for men and women in adulthood. On the contrary, there are researchers who state that no evidence sufficiently supports these claims. Paul Adachi and Teena Willoughby concluded from their research studies that the competitive aspect of video games is at fault for increasing aggressive behavior, not the violent content.

What support do these contrasting researchers propose?

Huesmann found the effects of television and entertainment violence to be long-term and believed they unveil long after a person is initially exposed to it. He explained that when people identify with characters in the media, it is more likely that they will accept any aggressive behavior they display as normality. His conclusions root from an earlier longitudinal study of a group of very young participants that he performed a follow-up on once they reached adulthood. Based on any records of a criminal history, he found that those who had experienced the violence in entertainment during their early years of development were far more likely to have committed a crime as an adult. However, the effects on a person's level of aggression from one specific type of entertainment violence, video games, were found to be short-term reactions by Adachi and Willoughby. Their reports informed that no other experiment prior to theirs had ever isolated the competitiveness factor when comparing the effects of violent and non-violent video games. After doing so, they used video games that were equal in both difficulty and pace of action to record the responses of the research participants. They found that the competitive games generated more aggressive responses, regardless of the level of violence. Their finding proposed the possibility of an increase in heart rate to be the mechanism behind the

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aggression.

Aside from video games, are there any specific forms of media or entertainment that pose higher possibility of an effect on violence?

Many, especially parents, would assume it to be television shows or films. The violence in entertainment today is tremendous to the point that the audience sometimes goes without being phased by it. However, it is the news media that may provide the strongest evidence of a connection to the acts of violent perpetrators. The contagion effect is a phenomenon that refers to the inclination humans experience towards mimicking an action of another person reported on the news, in their environment, etc. An example of this was the wave of school shootings that began with the initial 1997 tragedy in Mississippi with a 16 year-old boy. Another school shooting was reported a few months later, followed by another, which made the abnormality of the events clear and then indisputable when shootings continued to be reported. This is not to say that news reports of violence are at fault for the behavior of aggressive youth. Although all of the shooters are known to have had an extreme interest in the shootings that had previously been news stories, the troubled youth shared other characteristics. Much like any behavior, there is no single causal factor responsible for a certain behavior. If there is one thing that researchers must agree on, it is that even if mass media violence contributes to an increase in aggression, it is in combination with other risk factors for violent behavior.

Juveniles on Trial

Delinquent behavior in adolescents can present difficulty for court systems in effectively and accurately serving the justice it is intended to. Psychologists have been working for several years to explain the causes of juvenile delinquency and making efforts towards creating methods to change the direction of such young deviants. They have found that the variation among juveniles in regard to the development of their delinquency is significant when determining the most reasonable approach in handling their cases. Terrie Moffitt illustrates a theory that identifies four developmental paths that lead to criminal behavior in juveniles.

Two of the paths Moffitt formulated both include antisocial behavior that is temporary and perhaps due to the situations or environments that adolescence entails. Those who fall under this category are referred to as adolescent limited offenders and are separated by whether this temporary behavior ceases upon early adulthood or if it continues on into early adulthood before ending. These offenders partake in crimes that reward them in some form, yet they possess the ability to end their behaviors upon realization of the consequences that could potentially outweigh the rewards. The other two categories contain juveniles who demonstrate permanent antisocial behavior, yet are differentiated by the early or late on-set of such behavior. These life-course persistent offenders are characterized by Moffitt's theory as individuals who were not

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provided with the means to obtain positive social and interpersonal skills throughout their development. Her research found that this is generally due to either a combination of peer rejection and the frustration of parents or teachers that causes them to give up on the child or other circumstances that may include: disruption in fetal brain development, lack of affection, abuse, birth complications, etc. Life-course persistent offenders are also likely to further develop neuropsychological deficits, such as temperament or cognitive abilities.

Entirely aside from developmental paths leading to criminal behavior, it is key to bear in mind what all adolescents lack when authorities respond to their unlawful actions: fully matured minds. In fact, the American Psychological Association used this understood truth as a platform when submitting an amicus curiae brief that would ban the execution of any person under the age of 18 due to a death penalty sentence. They included references to experts whose research had revealed characteristics in adolescents exempting them from the scale by which adult crimes are weighed, such as impulsivity, risk-taking, and low account of long-term and short-term consequences. It also provided brain scans that showed physical evidence of the ongoing brain development that continues into early adulthood. The APA ultimately claimed the severity of the death penalty to be unjustifiable when applied to cases of adolescents being evaluated in an adult-targeted approach.

With the inclusion of juveniles, the image of a criminal instinctively carries a strong connotation similar to that of a villain for many citizens. However, as the governing judicial system of the country, it is the responsibility of the court to see the essential factors that differentiate the actions of a juvenile from those of an adult perpetrator. It is also essential that the court recognize the potential for improvement in these young lives. Through all the contradicting research surrounding this topic, there is consistency in this potential that exists for these deviant, yet developing adolescents.

A Child Psychopath

The label “psychopath” arguably carries more weight than any other term in the field of criminal justice. The person its definition illustrates is one unlike the rest of the people in the world, due to a combination of features and characteristics that simply do not allow him or her to be. In addition, it is well known among experts that this category of criminal is extremely resilient to treatment. In the case of children, the likelihood of being tried for a criminal charge as a juvenile, as opposed to an adult, instantly lessens if the possibility exists of he or she being a “juvenile psychopath.” However, the validity of this claim would be questionable.

There is controversy surrounding the term, due to psychologists’ limited knowledge on how exactly the characteristics of an adult psychopath would relate back and appear in a child or adolescent. Studies have reported findings that indicate this term to be factual, yet the tests that

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have found these results are few and insufficient in order to make any accusations with certainty. It is due to this that the act of authorities using this term raises an ethical concern among psychologists. Labeling a child as a juvenile psychopath holds the potential of having him or her transferred to an adult court system instead of juvenile. Furthermore, even if the child was kept in the juvenile court system, a placement in a treatment center with providers who see no purpose in treating the lost cause of a “psychopath” would then transpire. Even more severe, prior to the Roper v. Simmons ruling by the Supreme Court, the label of a psychopath on a juvenile in many states put the accused adolescent at a higher likelihood to be sentenced to the death penalty. Although the ruling in 2005 removed this possibility, the ethical concern surrounding the misuse of the term still exists.

Treatment of Psychopathy Indicators in Children

Although it is generally understood among the field of behavioral sciences that psychopathy in adults is not treatable, this conclusion is not shared with children or adolescents who exhibit features of psychopathy. Psychologists have found that psychopathic features in children and adolescents are often due to deficits in their emotional and cognitive skills, which result in their antisocial behavior. As a mental health professional, it is important to understand the importance of tailoring treatments to the specific indicators and deficits a child is demonstrating. Hundreds of clinical psychologists have reported treating young patients who possess psychopathic features and seeing successful results within an average time frame of one year. Furthermore, they have discovered effectiveness in reward-based approaches to the treatment of these psychopathic indicators, as opposed to approaches that involve fear or punishment. This is especially true in children displaying conduct issues. In addition, other studies have found treatment programs that incorporate a focus on family members and outside group involvement to augment the success of these treatment programs.

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