MEDIA VIOLENCE AND SCHOOL VIOLENCE:
THE CONNECTION AND NEWFOUNDLAND
AND LABRADOR'S RESPONSE

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Canada

Running head: MEDIA VIOLENCE

Media Violence: A Key Constituent in the

Causal Matrix of a Violent Society

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Abstract

Violence and bullying are closely connected and exist in mainstream western culture frequently. There are many cultural factors that promote and cultivate such behavior. Included in these factors are mass media influences such as television programming, music videos, sporting and entertainment events, video games and violent content on the world wide web. Children view this media extensively and it can be argued that such viewing is part of the causal matrix of the violence in western society.

Media Violence: A Key Constituent in the Causal Matrix of a Violent Society

The Collins English Dictionary defines violence as:

1. The exercise or an instance of physical force, usually effecting or intended to effect injuries, destruction, etc. . . .

4. an unjust, unwarranted, or unlawful display of force, sep. such as tends to overawe or intimidate (p. 1693).

On the surface, violence in real life would seem to have a negligible effect on most people in our society. The impression is that violence is something we see on the television news, that sometimes occurs in or near a nightclub downtown, maybe at a sporting event like a hockey game, or perhaps in the homes of the families who make use of local transition houses for family violence. Most people generally believe that crime statistics are down, particularly for violent crime.

Scratch the surface though, and the issue of violence becomes more of a reality. In fact, crime rates have pretty much been on the rise from the early sixties, through to a peak in 1991, followed by a decline through to 1997, and again increasing from 1997 to 2001. Thus, the rate of violent crime has actually risen every year from 1962 through to 1991, followed by a seven year decline (hence public perception), but has been on the rise for the last two years for which data is available (Statistics Canada, 2002). Succinctly stated, violent crime rates in Canada have risen during 85% of the past 40 years. Despite what would appear to be a calm very nonviolent society, we have violence in our families

(often unreported and repeated), violence and bullying in our schools, bullying in our workplaces, and violence of an incredible scale in our entertainment and media venues.

There are those in our society who wish to deny the evidence reported throughout the majority of the past forty years, and who feel that the violence in our society is only marginal. They may concede that there is domestic violence as unfortunate as that is, and certainly that there is some violence in the media. However, they will often suggest that media violence is harmless or even serves a cathartic purpose. Those same people would probably say that what we refer to in schools and workplaces is not violence at all. Many feel justified in arguing that violence is not a serious problem in early 21st century western culture.

For the purposes of this paper folio bullying will be defined as it is by Nesbit (1999):

. . . unprovoked abuse, repeated over an extended time, intended to inflict distress (physical and/or psychological) upon a person perceived to be vulnerable, in a one-way exercise of power. The behavior may be initiated by an individual or a group. (p. 26)

The definitions of violence and bullying are similar. It seems that bullying is more inclusive because it includes psychological abuse. It can be argued that the term bullying is often used to somehow lessen the severity of the act, to make it seem like something that is indeed tolerable. This tendency to downplay the impact of bullying is similar in vein to the concept of "boys will be boys", and allows episodes to be shrugged off and swept under the carpet as something less serious than the violence that underlies bullying.

Batshe and Knoff (1994), with regard to the school environment, establish that the term violence should be more broadly defined to include any condition or act that creates a climate in which individual students and teachers feel fear or intimidation, extending beyond the narrow definition of being the victims of assault, theft or vandalism. This latter description would broaden the concept to include bullying in the definition of violence and greatly expand the discussion of violence and safety in schools. Indeed, bullying leads at times to severe violence. Olweus (1991) points out that victims of bullying sometimes totally devalue themselves, and find the experience so overwhelming that they see suicide as the only possible solution.

Having equated violence and bullying as being somewhat synonymous, let us examine beyond the surface of most people's lives in the early 21st century western world. Most people have either been bullied, have been a bully, or have witnessed bullying. Therefore, it can be posited that almost everyone has been affected by an underlying current of violence in the form of bullying.

The purpose of this paper is to explore cultural factors that help promote or even cultivate violence in our society, in general, and specifically, the violence referred to as bullying in our schools. These factors fall under the umbrella of western popular culture and include such components as television programming, music videos, movies, sporting and entertainment events, video games, and violent content on the worldwide web. These factors as a group, will henceforth be labelled "mass media influences." Duncan (1989)

suggests there are several key concepts that provide a framework for understanding mass media and popular culture, including:

1. The media construct reality.

2. The media have their own forms, codes and conventions.

3. The media present ideologies and value messages.

4. The media are business that have commercial interests

5. Audiences negotiate meaning in media. (p. 92)

Nesbit (1999) states that such influences cannot be denied as part of the causal matrix that leads to bullying.

<u>Television</u>

Television is a powerful force in the lives of most North Americans. Whether we refer to it as "the window on the world" or "the boob tube", television has an undeniable effect upon our thoughts and ideas, influencing our perception of the world, the way we relate to other people and life in general. Signoriellie and Bacue (1999) state that television is a strong socializing force and allows us, among other things, to vicariously experience a level of violence that has probably never existed on our planet before. Arnett (1995) argues that, particularly for adolescents, the media is a socialization factor of increased importance as the socialization role of the family is reduced. The Canadian Department of Justice (1996) contends that the mass media has become the most important moral and ethical educator in most children's lives.

The statistics are staggering when we look at the amount of television that children

and adolescents watch. In turn, if we review the amount of violence that is available to be watched, and is being watched by our children, the numbers are sobering. In the United States, the average child or adolescent watches an average of three hours of television per day (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001a). This statistic refers to broadcast television and does not refer to television viewing activities associated with video games or videotapes. Typically, American children begin watching television at a very early age, sometimes as early as six months, and are fervent viewers by the time that they are two or three years old (Murray, 1994). The amount of time that American children spend watching TV (excluding the adolescent portion of the population) reported in the American Association of Pediatrics Policy Statement (2001a) is astounding: an average of 4 hours a day, 28 hours a week, 2,400 hours a year, nearly 18,000 hours by the time they graduate from high school (Chen, 1994). In comparison, they spend 13,000 hours in school, from kindergarten through twelfth grade (Chen, 1994). By the age of seventy, 7 to 10 years on the average, will have been spent watching television (Stasburger, 1993). American children spend more time watching TV than they spend involved in any other activity, besides sleeping (Chen, 1994). By the time the average American child is 6, she will have spent more time watching TV than talking to her father in her lifetime (Devore, 1994).

Television viewing is the primary activity for American children in the hours between school and dinnertime. Nearly 80 percent of the 1,200 children surveyed by the *Yanklovich Youth Monitor* in 1993 reported TV viewing as their usual activity during this

time (as cited in Chen, 1994). Of particular interest, children living in poverty watch even more television than the average child, some up to 7 hours a day. By the time a child from a low social economic status family graduates from high school, he/she may have watched as many as 22,000 hours of TV (Sweet & Singh, 1994). Of note as well, children who have been abused by their parents, children who are emotionally disturbed or have learning disabilities and children of families in distress are prone to watch even more television (Josephson, 1995).

On the surface, the casual observer might consider television to be "tame," and sanitized for children given that foul language is often "beeped" out, most times partial nudity has the pixels scrambled to hide the offending parts, and movies are "edited" for television. Additionally, a casual observer might superficially assume that things that children "should not be seeing" are kept for late hours, after most children who could be affected are long gone to bed. What exactly is being watched on television by children? How much violent content is being watched by children? The answer, quite succinctly, is a lot. By the age of 18, the average person will have viewed 200, 000 acts of violence on television (Huston et al., 1992). Gerbner and Gross (1976) concluded that, in 1967, 81% of all programs contained some violence. They defined violence as physical aggression that includes threats and actual acts of physical harm. Gerbner and various colleagues have replicated this research periodically, and the amount of violent programming in prime time and weekend programming has generally ranged between 70 and 80% (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980). Wilson, Smith, Potter, Linz, Donnerstein,

Kunkel, Blumenthal and Grey (1997) analysed a large sample of programs aired in 1994-1995. They defined violence as physical aggression and concluded that 57% of all programs contained some violence. De Guise and Paquette (2002) found a 378% increase in the incidence of physical violence between 1993 and 2001 after studying situation comedies, non-cartoon children's programming, dramatic series, and films on six Canadian television networks. They found that in 2001 there were 40 acts of violence per hour. In addition, they learned that psychological violence on television recently had increased by 325% from 1999 to 2001.

The International Coalition Against Violent Entertainment (cited in Martinez, 1992) found that cartoons produced in the United States contained 41 violent acts per hour. De Guise and Paquette (2002) also found that nearly 90% of the violent acts occurred before 9 p.m., when many children would be watching television. Astoundingly, children's television is the most violent. The National Television Violence Study noted that 66% of children's programs were found to contain violence compared to 57% of general programming (as cited in Wilson et al., 1997).

Violence on television is scaring our children. Cantor (1998) found that children of all ages develop fear over what they view on television. Younger children, aged two to seven were afraid of scary visual images: vicious animals, monsters, and grotesque, mutilated or deformed characters; stories involving the death of a parent; and stories involving natural disasters that were vividly depicted. Children aged eight to twelve were scared by more realistic threats and dangers, particularly violence, or the threat of

violence that could happen to a child. Older children, aged thirteen and up, were most affected by realistic physical harm or threats of intense harm, molestation or threats of assault, and threats from aliens or occult forces.

One explanation for the higher rate of violence found in children's programming as compared to even general programming might be commercial. Murray (1995) argues that advertisers wish to reach a wide-ranging audience (in terms of developmental level from age two to twelve) with regard to children's programming on which sponsors pay to advertise. Some believe that the only programming considered to hold the attention of the toddler through to early adolescent is fast-paced, fast-actioned violence. Although such programming can be created that is non-violent, it cannot reach the breadth of audience that can be reached with the animated violent type of programming.

It seems that the common perception that there is a sanitized schedule of television programming for children who are in the process of development is a myth. It has been shown that children's programming actually contains more violence than the regular programming. It seems reasonable to speculate that, of the mass media influences, television can be considered the leading contributor to a culture of violence that may be greatly influencing our children, but it is by far not the only influence.

Popular Music and Music Videos

I invented violence, you vile venomous volatile bitches

vain Vicadin, vrinnn Vrinnn, VRINNN! *(chainsaw revs up)*

Texas Chainsaw, left his brains all

danglin from his neck, while his head barely hangs on

Blood, guts, guns, cuts

Knives, lives, wives, nuns, sluts

Bitch I'ma kill you! You don't wanna fuck with me

Girls neither - you ain't nuttin but a slut to me

Bitch I'ma kill you! (Lyrics from Kill You as written and recorded by popular rap

recording artist Eminem)

Popular music is the largest global media sector. In 2000, sales reached US $37 billion, with music consumption high among young audiences everywhere (Media Awareness Network, 2003). Listening to music is the favourite after-school activity of 9 to 17 year olds in Canada (Media Awareness Network & Canadian Pediatrics Society, 2003) with fully 83% of this age group engaging in it on a daily basis. Music lyrics have become increasingly explicit, particularly with references to sex, drugs and violence. Additionally, children can more readily access inappropriate lyrical content through the world wide web that conscientious parents may not allow them to purchase. Although considered by some to be a corrupting influence on children since the seminal days of Elvis Presley on the Ed Sullivan show, violent and sexually explicit lyrics such as those by rapper Eminem have the added influence of a relatively new phenomenon, the music video. Short and fast-paced, more than half of music videos contain violence that is often committed against women, and attractive role models are the aggressors in over 80% of such videos (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1996).

Rich et al. (1998) studied 518 music videos on four American cable stations

including MTV. They found 462 violent acts or an average of six violent acts on the 15% of the videos that contained violence. One video by the rock group Guns and Roses contained 37 acts of violence. The researchers found males to be three times more likely to be aggressors than females, with white women often being the victims. Most of the violent scenes included victims that were male only. Women were targets in a total of 8% of the recorded incidents. In addition, Arnett (1992) found that adolescents who were exposed to violent music videos, later expressed a greater acceptance of violence, reported a higher probability that they would take part in violence, and possessed more acceptance of violence towards women when compared to a control group.

Some studies have suggested that heavy metal music creates more of a culture towards violence then other types of music. It was reported that children who preferred heavy metal music had higher levels of reckless behavior (St. Lawrence & Joyner, 1991), higher levels of delinquency as well as lower levels of parental supervision (Singer, Levine, & Jou, 1993) and that a preference for heavy metal may be a significant indicator for alienation, substance abuse, psychiatric disorders, and suicide risk during adolescence (Christenson & Roberts, 1998). Similar to rock music, rap music has also been linked to more overt violence than other musical genres (Rich, Woods, Goodman, Eman, & DuRant, 1998). Exposure to rap music tends to lead to a higher degree of acceptance of the use of violence (Johnson, Adams, & Ashburn, 1995), and is perceived by 47% of mothers in public schools to contribute "a great deal" to violence in schools (Kandakai, Price, Telliohann, & Wilson, 1999). Rich et al. (1998) concluded that

portrayals of violence in popular music videos could distort adolescents' expectations about conflict resolution, race and male-female relationships.

What can be made of this research? Obviously, certain types of music, particularly heavy metal and rap music celebrate violence in ways that are generally unhealthy for all of society and are possibly dangerous for certain elements of our youth. Rich (as cited in Lambert, 1999) claims that the mixture of violent images and popular music is particularly problematic and sneaks up on its audience, arguing that the individual is lulled by the music, and remembers the violence with a warm fuzzy emotion attached to it, created by the song. Additionally through music videos, violence is presented as normative or even desirable behaviour due to the status of the star musicians or actors who are idolized by young viewers.

Video Games

Recently a member of the staff at our school found a downloaded video game on one of the computer units in our Kindergarten to Grade Nine school's computer lab. The game called *Duke Nukem* was a shooting game, that among other things included a practise range for honing marksmanship skills on pornographic posters of women and situations where bonus points could be earned by shooting naked and bound prostitutes and strippers who beg "Kill me."

Grand Theft Auto (1998) is an interactive game in which players take on the role of Tommy Vercetti, who is sent to Vice City by his boss Sonny Forelli to complete a drug deal. Along the way, Vercetti loses the drugs and all his money. With more than 40

"weapons" at their disposal, players can do anything they imagine, including killing police officers and civilians, and beating prostitutes in a series of missions to recover the drugs and money.

The Columbine High School tragedy in Littleton, Colorado is one of the most well publicized recent acts of youth violence. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the perpetrators of the tragedy, enjoyed playing violent video games. Eric Harris had an adapted version of the game *Doom* on his website, where the opposing characters in the game could not shoot back. Additionally, there were two shooters and more weapons than on the original game. Essentially, in April of 1999, Columbine High School was where fantasy became reality, the high school shootings were a well rehearsed and carefully planned event. However, video game makers were quick to deny a connection. Todd Hallingshead, CEO of the company that made *Doom* said on *ABC's 20-20* on a March 22, 2000 program: "Lots of things have violence. Our games are like modern day computer versions of cowboys and Indians"(Stossell, 2000).

Video games are a new and insidious form of media that are being used by an alarmingly high number of youth. Since the early 1970's when *Pong* began it all, electronic interactive games have emerged as one of the most popular forms of entertainment, particularly among adolescents. Funk and Buchman (1996) investigated 900 children in grades 4 through 8 regarding how frequently they played video games. The children reported their game playing at home steadily decreased from grades 4 through 8. Away from home though, the trend was reversed. Arcade playing was reported

by 75% of eighth-graders and 75% of fourth-graders at least once a week. Consistent with earlier research, boys reported playing more video games per week than girls. In a study by Fisher (1995), 25% of adolescents said they visited arcades at least once a week, and 18% at least three times per week. In a similar study by Phillips, Rolls, Rouse, and Griffiths (1995), 77% of children reported sometimes playing video games at home, and 24% reported playing every day. More than 60% of children reported that they played longer than they intended to play. Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, and Brodie (1999) found that 8 to 13 year old boys played an average of 7.5 hours of video games per week.

Anderson and Bushman (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of 35 different studies of violent video games. Their research identified a consistent pattern of results in five areas. First, they concluded that exposure to violent games increases physiological arousal. Studies measuring the physiological responses to playing violent video games (compared with physiological responses to non-violent games) have shown that violent games increase physiological arousal measured in terms of systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure and heart rate. Lynch (1994) has shown that the effect may be even greater for children who are naturally more aggressive. Interestingly, one study (Ballard & Weist, 1996) showed that playing a violent game with the "blood option" turned off resulted in lower systolic blood pressure increases than with the blood turned on.

Secondly, in their review Anderson & Bushman (2001) concluded that violent video games cause at least a temporary decrease in pro-social behavior, and similarly, exposure to violent video games negatively correlates with helping in the real world. Thirdly, the

researchers concluded, that high video game violence is definitely associated with heightened aggression. In fact, they observed that the effect of violent video games on aggression is as strong as the effect of condom use on the risk of HIV infection. Violent video games increased aggression in males and females, and children and adults in both experimental and non-experimental settings.

Similarly, in a fourth observation, Anderson & Bushman (2001) indicated that video game violence increases aggressive thoughts in males and females, adults and children and in experimental and non-experimental settings. A fifth conclusion from their meta-analysis was that violence in video games may also increase aggression by increasing feelings of anger or hostility, again in males and females, in children and adults and in experimental and non-experimental studies.

Research on video games is not as plentiful or documented as that for older, established media, and no longitudinal study on the effects of video games exists. However, existing research does point toward caution with regard to this type of media use. Cook (2000) points out that the more realistic, comic or enjoyable the media violence is, the greater the desensitization. He states that video games that use better graphics capabilities to increase the gore, that reward killing with points and higher levels of gore, and that show spraying blood and mangled body parts are particularly insidious.

Sports Violence

There are generally thought to be two kinds of sports aggression (Leonard, 1988). The first is that which is non-emotional and task-oriented, like blocking and tackling in

football and labelled "instrumental aggression." The second type has harm as it's goal and has an underlying emotional component. It is called "reactive aggression." Fighting or stick fouls in hockey may be considered reactive aggression. Sports violence can be defined as behavior which causes harm, occurs outside of the rules of the sport, and is unrelated to the competitive objectives of the sport (Terry & Jackson, 1985).

Considering hockey's place in Canadian culture, and the serious recognition of hockey in our country, an exploration of violence in the sport seems particularly relevant. shall consider hockey violence specifically,. Gruneau and Whitson (1993) claim that hockey has one of Canada's most significant collective representations - a story that Canadians tell themselves about what it means to be Canadian.

Concern for violence in this sport reached an all time high during the 2002 hockey season when during an NHL playoff game, Boston Bruin defenceman Kyle McClaren runs at, jumps and blind-sides Montreal forward Richard Zednik knocking him unconscious. Again in the NHL during the 2000 season, veteran "tough guy" Marty McSorley chases down Vancouver "tough guy" Donald Braesher and intentionally chops him across the back of the head and neck with his stick. Braesher falls violently and his head slams to the ice. He is unconscious.

In a more local example, during a West Coast Senior Hockey League Game during the 2002 season at the Canada Games Centre in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, Ryburn Brett and Todd Gillingham taunt each other and exchange punches as the crowd of 3500 rises to it's feet in collective excitement - - cheering or taunting. Renowned CBC

television hockey analyst Don Cherry calls this "life's second greatest rush."

Michael D. Smith (1983) concludes that the approval of reactive and instrumental aggression in hockey, and its acceptance by many parents, players, peers, coaches, the media, and fans, may be viewed as products that arouse aggressive sentiments. These forms of violence provide role models of aggressive behavior and place people in situations where aggression works, is rewarded and applauded. This in turn begets more violence.

Many ordinary Canadians, who are appalled at violence in other areas of their life, feel that a fight during a game of hockey is not only to be accepted, but has purpose. Many believe that it actually lessens other types of more serious violence that would appear in hockey if the "cathartic" hockey fight were totally outlawed. This view may very well grant violence a legitimacy in Canadian society, contradictory to values that are held by society outside of the hockey rink. Hockey, where the violence is real, often bloody, and seemingly contagious, never comes with a warning label, and all ages are engaged in it.

Professional Wrestling

What follows is a description of a televised episode of the World Wrestling Federation (WWE) that included the mentioned family members of that organization's founder and chief executive officer Vince McMahon.

A young man has kidnapped his sister and given her over to the Undertaker, a self-proclaimed "Lord of Darkness." She is brought into a public setting strapped to a cross

protesting, whimpering and screaming, about to be married to the Undertaker. The young lady is rescued by a man who's personal motto is "I just whipped your ass." The son who has become estranged from his family hurls insults towards his father, mother and sister. The son challenges his father to a public fight, but in the wings the father is beaten up by the son's entourage. The father escapes, gives his son a "one finger salute," a kick to the crotch, and beats him into submission. The crowd goes wild in admiration for the father. Cameras regularly scan the crowd of mostly adolescent males. Profane and vulgar signs abound.

Professional wrestling is a strange amalgam of television and live event that includes elements of sport, staged entertainment, sex, popular music, video games, and the internet. It is all of the media previously described; violent, raunchily sexy, slick, loud, boisterous, competitive, scripted, but yet almost cartoon-like. It magnifies the violence of the rest of the other media and markets it. The World Wrestling Federation, now known as World Wrestling Entertainment, markets action figures (obviously not aimed at the mature audience which the programming supposedly targets), cologne, music CDs, videos, video games and pay per view television.

In one of the few studies completed on the effect of professional wrestling DuRant (as cited in Science Blog, 2001) conducted a random sample of 2 228 high school students who were asked how many times they had watched professional wrestling in the past two weeks. Sixty-three percent of males had watched it in that time period and 25% had watched it six or more times. As well, 35.1% of females had watched wrestling with,

9.1% watching it 6 or more times. A study of 370 middle school and elementary teachers (Bernthal, 2003) indicates that 81% of teachers have seen an increase in the viewing of professional wrestling by their students in the last four years. The study also found that teachers considered wrestling to be a major negative influence on students who were fans. Indeed, 8.8% of the teachers indicated that there were no forms of entertainment or television programming more harmful to a child's development than professional wrestling. Results of this initial exploration suggest that, according to elementary and middle school teacher accounts, professional wrestling does indeed have negative consequences in terms of physical, verbal, and attitudinal imitation by children who are regular viewers.

DuRant (as cited in Science Blog, 2001) found that male behaviors associated with watching wrestling include starting a fight with a date, being a date fight victim, gun and other weapon carrying, fighting, chewing tobacco use, non-prescription Ritalin use and driving after drinking. Female viewing of wrestling is associated with starting a date fight, being a date fight victim, gun carrying, carrying a gun at school, other weapon carrying to school, fighting, fighting at school, being injured in a fight, alcohol use, alcohol use at school, marijuana use, Ritalin use and riding with a drinking driver. Also, alcohol or drug use by dating male or female students was associated with viewing wrestling more frequently. Of particular interest was the finding that the relationship between health behavior risks and watching professional wrestling was higher among females than it was among males.

The above work not withstanding, there is a dearth of research on professional wrestling and its possible effects on society in general and children in particular. The research that has been carried out provides reason for alarm and certainly provides the impetus for further work in this area. Professional wrestling as described in the introduction to this section is obviously a product that should not be presented to children because of its gratuitous violence, vulgarity, and abuse -- all associated with blatant sexual overtones. We also know that World Wrestling Entertainment markets to the child audience. Children are watching what should be an adult product and that there is a relationship with a number of undesirable behaviours. World Wrestling Entertainment on its corporate home page markets the success of selling their product to children:

> Our brand of entertainment appeals to a broad demographic audience, with WWE's advertising targeting people ages12 to 34. Through the success of our programming, we have attracted more than 160 North American advertisers by offering sponsors the opportunity to integrate their messages into every WWE property including network television, cable television, syndicated television, pay-per-view sponsorships, live event sponsorships, two monthly magazines and special issues, digital media, in-arena advertising and more. (World Wrestling Entertainment Incorporated, undated)

Conclusion

One can conclude then that popular media abounds with violent ideas, content and images. There is no doubt that staged content for television and movies, video games, music videos and popular music, mainstream sports and professional wrestling (an

amalgam of the preceding), are violent and are being viewed by children. It can be hypothesized that the violence in popular media has a negative social effect prompting aggression, bullying and violence in society in general, and in our schools in particular. A review of school violence and bullying, as well as a careful look at how violence in media affects children and leads to real violence in schools seems merited.

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Popular Media Influences and Violence in Schools

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Abstract

Bullying is a prevalent and often studied problem in schools in western cultures. Situations where bullying occur, characteristics of bullies and victims, factors contributing to bullying, effects of bullying on bullies, victims and peers and gender differences in bullying are some of the issues around bullying that have been researched.

It can be argued that the prevalence of violence in media being watched by children is a major factor contributing to high levels of bullying, aggression and violence occurring in schools attended by children in western cultures.

Popular Media Influences and Violence in Schools

Children are repeatedly exposed to acts of aggression and violence while watching television, while viewing videos, when listening to music with violent lyric content, and while playing violent video games. They are also exposed to both instrumental and reactive violence while viewing and participating in sporting events. Children also watch rehearsed and choreographed aggression and violence in professional wrestling.

Children are bullied in our schools. What can be made of this aggression in our schools?, how prevalent is it?, how serious a problem is it?, and what does the research say about its connection to the steady diet of violence within our society's popular media influences? This paper will review research about bullying, aggression and violence in our schools, and explore the connections between the amount of violence being viewed by children in our society in the media and the violence children are exposed to at school.

Bullying:

Nesbit (1999) defines bullying as:

. . . unprovoked abuse, repeated over an extended time, intended to inflict distress (physical and/or psychological) upon a person perceived to be vulnerable, in a one-way exercise of power. The behavior may be initiated by an individual or a group. (p. 26)

Horne, Glaser and Sayger (1994) suggest that single events may also be considered bullying. It is my opinion, based on my experience as a junior high school administrator, that this is particularly true from the perspective of the victim. Often times a victim may be abused only

once due to unusual circumstances by an individual widely perceived as a bully. Craig and Pepler (1997) indicate that bullying is a form of social interaction. Offered here is a definition similar to that of Nesbit (1999) but would add that bullying is indeed a social interaction and, in terms of the victim, may not necessarily include repeated occurrences. The social interaction is an important part of the definition because often times a bully may be known to teachers or school authorities, and what may appear to an isolated victim or his or her parents to be an isolated conflict, may be part of an ongoing pattern of behaviour on the part of the bully.

It was previously argued that the term bullying is such an overused and tired term that it actually hides some of the seriousness of the actual act. Like the term "hazing," where full scale assaults are sometimes hidden and treated as less serious under the dubious protection of its expansive application, bullying is often thought of as a fact of life, something that will continue to occur until the victim has the courage to "stand up to the bully." It would be better served to refer to bullying as it really is, an act of violence.

The amount of bullying that occurs in our schools is difficult to measure. Nesbit (1999) estimated that 20% of the students interviewed for his research had been bullied. Other studies (e.g., Charach, Pepler & Zieglar, 1995; Lane, 1989; O'Moore & Hillery, 1989; Stephenson & Smith, 1989; Whitney & Smith, 1993) all indicated rates of bullying of at least 20% or more. Based on the research, a conservative estimate of between 15% and 20% of children as being victims of bullying is appropriate. A straw poll of 30 students at a rural Newfoundland seventh grade class, after a wide general discussion of what bullying is, indicated that 33% had been

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bullied in the last 24 hours, 67% in the last week, and 90% in the last month.

Bullying has been generally divided between "direct," in which there is an open attack on the victim and "indirect," in which the bullying takes the form of social isolation (Olwues, 1991). Others, (e.g., Perry, Kusel & Perry, 1988) distinguish between physical and verbal bullying. Charach et al. (1995) indicated that younger children reported more victimization than older children. Additionally, victimization was more often verbal than physical as age increased (Perry et al., 1988).

Research has shown that bullies are both boys and girls with male bullying being more often physical (e.g., Craig & Pepler, 1997; Eron, Huesmann, Dubow, Romanoff & Yamel, 1987; Nesbit, 1999; Olweus, 1993)and female bullying being more often indirect and verbal (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Hoover, Oliver & Hazler, 1992; Nesbit, 1999; Olweus, 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Nesbit (1999) concedes, however, that physical bullying among girls is on the rise.

Bullying occurs mostly at school (Olweus, 1991), and most often on the playground (Charach, Pepler & Ziegler, 1995; Whitney & Smith, 1993) as well as school hallways and classrooms (Charach et al., 1995). It seems that adults often perceive that bullying is more prevalent in unsupervised areas like coming to and returning home from school. Charach, et al. (1995) found that parents cited these unsupervised routes as a more common site for bullying than did students. Newfoundland and Labrador teachers also felt that bullying happened very often outside the school at lunch hour, on the bus, or walking home from school (Nesbit, 1999). Adults seem to perceive that they are more effective than they actually are in preventing the

bullying and violence that occurs in schools, where it is expected that children are safe.

Bullying seems to occur at all ages, but mainly occurs among same-sex peers from ages 4 to 10, but involves opposite-sex peers from ages 11 to 18 (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Additionally, (Pepler & Craig, 2000) found that 11 to 12 year olds reported more bullying than other age groups. Interestingly though, Nesbit, (1999) found that elementary, junior-high and senior-high students viewed the incidence of behavioral categories of bullying: physically assault, verbally abuse, seize possessions, threaten, tease and control almost identically. As well, students identified physical assault as the major component of bullying, linking it, at least in the Newfoundland and Labrador context inextricably with violence.

The research has also given us a composite drawing of both the bully and the victim. True to my personal 15 year experience as an administrator in kindergarten to grade nine schools, they are sometimes the same child. Perry et al. (1988) found that aggression and victimization were orthogonal dimensions. Similar to my experience, they found that most of the extreme victims were also some of the most aggressive children. Olweus (1991) suggested that typically bullies have an aggressive personality pattern combined with physical strength. They are often characterized by impulsivity, a strong need to dominate others and have little empathy with their victims. They are often aggressive towards teachers, parents and siblings and have a more positive attitude to violence and violent means then students in general. Perry et al. (1988) discovered that aggressive children tended to come from homes where the model they learned social processing of information from caused them to initiate and escalate aggressive responding.

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Pepler and Craig (2000) identify a number of factors that may contribute to a child being a bully including individual characteristics such as having a difficult temperament, having attention problems and being hyperactive and family characteristics such as living in a home environment characterized as having aggression, having parents with ineffective parenting skills and living in a family characterized by family stress. Pepler and Craig also identified peer relationships characterized by rejection, marginalization and aggressive peers; and a school environment that ignores antisocial behavior, imposes inconsistent consequences, and allows alienating interactions as factors contributing to a child being a bully.

Victims of bullying are seen as having few friends (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Charach et al., 1995; Horne et al., 1994; Stephenson & Smith, 1988) as sensitive (Horne, et al., 1994; Olweus, 1991), as overprotected by their parents (Horne et al., 1994, Olweus, 1991), as smaller or weaker (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Stephenson & Smith, 1988), and as having lower grades (Hoover et al., 1992; Olweus, 1978).

Pepler and Craig (2000) also identify a number of factors that may contribute to a child being a victim including individual characteristics such as being socially withdrawn, having an anxious temperament, and having some type of exceptionality; family factors including overprotective parents and family stress; peer factors including aggressive peers, marginalization and rejection; and school factors such as lack of recognition, poor communication and openness around victimization.

Bullying affects all involved in the situation, victim, bully and those witnessing the episode (Ziegler & Pepler, 1993). Nesbit (1999) points out that when bullying creates a school atmosphere of fear even those not directly involved in the situation may suffer from the general terror created and the resulting unsecure learning environment that threatens learning. Whitney & Smith (1993) also indicate that bullying has a damaging effect upon the school atmosphere. DeRosier et al. (1994) suggest that a social contagion may occur focussing negative feelings of a group towards a victim that originated with one bully. Perry et al. (1988) suggests that peers often rebuff both aggressor and victim children thus encouraging increased interaction between bully and victim. Charach et al. (1995) found that a third of peers indicated that they could join a bullying episode. Lochman, White & Wayland (1991) emphasize the role of peers in how adolescents model perception of and response to conflict. Youth who are exposed to less aggressive peers display less aggression, they argue. Similar conclusions were reached by Sinclair et al. (1994) who found children in organized play groups to be less aggressive than those who were not. Craig & Pepler (1997) concluded that the peer group plays a major role in providing reinforcements and contingencies for bullying. Horne et al. (1994) found that bullies are very often well liked by the majority of their peer group.

Victims are obviously affected by bullying that occurs. Besides being victim to actual episodes of bullying with the immediate physical or emotional effects, there is also increased stress and anxiety (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1991) loss of self-esteem and self-worth (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Tattum, 1989; Greenbaum, 1987; La Fontaine, 1991; Olweus, 1991),

interference with healthy social development (Van Acker, 1995) interference with academic development and school attendance (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Floyd, 1985; Greenbaum, 1987; Hazler, Hoover & Oliver, 1992; Horne et al., 1994; Olweus, 1978; Van Acker, 1995) suicide (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Greenbaum, 1988; Oakley, 1994; Sevitt, 1991; Tattum, 1989) and murder (Greenbaum, 1988; Tattum, 1989). Olweus, (1991) found that "former victims had an average or somewhat below average level of criminality in young adulthood" (p. 423). This finding has particular significance when comparing the long-term effects of bullying on the aggressor.

Bullies seem to be exercising power through bullying relationships with peers, as obviously without a victim, and an audience, their exercise of power would be irrelevant. The picture that emerges of the bully from the research is complex and not without large-scale future repercussions for the bully and the society from which the bully emerges.

Horne & Socherman (1996) indicate that characteristics which contribute to the problem of bullying include biological and genetic components. Some children have temperament characteristics that make them more difficult as infants. Batshe & Knoff (1994) indicate that the bully is often subject to physical discipline, parenting that is inconsistent, little supervision and taught few effective problem-solving skills at home. Children are taught to strike back at confrontation, from parents who are hostile and rejecting. Horne & Socherman (1996) found that poor attachment and bonding in the homes of bullies resulted in a lack of empathy development. Olweus (1991) identified four factors in child rearing practices found to be particularly important

in the development of an aggressive personality pattern:

1. The basic emotional attitude of the primary caretaker(s) toward the child during the

years. A negative emotional attitude, characterized by lack of warmth and involvement,

increases the risk that the child will become aggressive and hostile towards others.

2. Permissiveness for aggressive behaviour by the child. If the primary caretaker is

generally permissive and 'tolerant' without setting clear limits to aggressive behaviour

toward peers, siblings, and adults, the child's aggression level is likely to increase.

3. Use of power-assertive child rearing methods such as physical punishment and violent

emotional outbursts. Children of parents who make frequent use of these methods are

likely become more aggressive than the average child.

4. Finally the temperament of the child. A child with an active and hot-headed

temperament is more likely to develop into an aggressive youngster than a child with an

or more quiet temperament. (p.414)

Research by Huesmann, Eron and Yarmel (1987) indicated a correlation between intellectual

deficits and low scholastic achievement and childhood aggression. Van Oostrum and Hovarth

(1997) suggested that children with low intellectual abilities had difficulty learning needed skills

for nonaggressive problem-solving. Horne et al. (1994) found that marital conflict, single parent

households, low income, poor neighborhoods and social norms that condone aggression

contribute to bullying behavior. Kupersmidt, Griesler, DeRosier, Patterson & Davis (1995)

indicated that children living in middle socioeconomic status families somehow gain a protective

effect that provides immunity to acting aggressively. There was no such protective effect for low socioeconomic families. Whitney & Smith (1993) concluded that there is a consistent correlation between social disadvantage to bullying. On the contrary, Olweus (1991) found that there were few and very weak connections between the four factors linked to the development of aggressive personality patterns (cited above) and socioeconomic status.

Craig & Pepler (1997) suggest that bullying by girls may be qualitatively different from male bullying, with female bullying less likely to have an audience and more likely to be a one-on-one relational experience. Nesbit (1999) reported that females are more often considered bullies beyond elementary grades in school. He also suggests that the traditional stereotype of female bullies may be changing, becoming more direct and violent, shaped by media messages, and more like typical male bullies with regard to the use of direct, rather than indirect bullying methods. He cautions though, that the majority of female bullying is still through social exclusion and psychological manipulation.

Nesbit (1999) also paints a graphic picture of the bully vis à vis the victim from research in the Newfoundland and Labrador context. The bully is usually older, or at least the same age, is usually bigger and stronger, (although 1/3 of survey respondents did not perceive a relationship between physical size and strength and being a bully), and is usually male. Horne et al. (1994) indicated that the major characteristic of a bully is a combination of physical strength and an aggressive reaction pattern.

Levels of aggression remain stable over one's lifespan without intervention (Huesmann, Eron,

Lefkowitz & Walder, 1984; Van Oostrum & Hovarth, 1997) and aggression is intergenerational (Floyd, 1985; Greenbaum,1988). Additionally, highly aggressive children tend to become even more aggressive as they age. Eron et al. (1987) reported that bullies identified early in school had a one in four chance of having a criminal record by age 30. Olweus (1991) reported that:

> Approximately 60% of boys who were characterized as bullies in grades 6 to 9 had at least one conviction at the age of 24. Even more dramatically, as much as 35% - 40% of the former bullies had three or more convictions at this age while this was true of only 10% of the control boys (those who were neither bullies nor victims in grades 6 to 9). (p 425)

It would appear that childhood bullying evolves into adult criminal behaviour. It is therefore not just a regular aspect of growing up, that children must confront and deal with as a developmental task. It has costs for society that cannot be quantified.

Unlike Patterson (1982), I feel that levels of aggression may not change as bullies age, but remain consistent. As argued in paper one, there is a tendency to label violence by children as bullying, which somehow negates the seriousness of the incidences. Recently I witnessed a situation at a middle school party. Two students were playing a game of hockey with a rolled up paper ball. A slight female student over exuberantly shot the ball a little too hard and struck an older male student with a reputation for being a bully. He immediately went to the girl, picked her up roughly by the shoulders and slammed her against the chalkboard. Another male student, a friend of the girl, said, "Hey, you can't go pushing girls around like that." The first male student then turned on the boy and punched him in the eye. All students were unaware that I was

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in the room, and I feel that I stopped a much more serious beating. What had transpired very quickly were two serious acts of unprovoked violent assault. Had I not witnessed them, they may never have been reported. In the adult world, similar behaviour would be met with arrest, conviction and probably jail time. Due to those involved being middle school aged students, it was called bullying, the aggressor was suspended from school and referred to the school counsellor.

Developmental Theorists (e.g., Lerner and Kaufman, 1985; Scarr, 1985; and Scarr & McCartney, 1983) assert that children and adolescents actively select the environments that influence their development. It is arguable that most children live in a number of different spheres of influence with the amount of importance of each sphere varying as the children develop. There is a family sphere which would include family life, relationships with parents and siblings, influence of extended family members, and the influence of the family's economic, cultural, religious and social life. There is the also the formal school/organized activity sphere where children learn and are influenced by peers and supervising adults. As well, there is the media sphere where children are influenced by the huge conglomerate that is television, popular music, movies, videos, video games, sporting events, music videos, magazines, books, and the Internet. Finally, there is the unorganized peer group sphere, where children are able to escape adult supervision, make their own rules, shape their own culture and live by a code defined by themselves. All of these spheres co-exist, sometimes blend, sometimes interact, sometimes conflict but exist for most children with varying degrees of influence. Two of them are

represented by physical places, the family home and the school. A third by more nebulous places -- hang-outs, street corners, physical space between school and home, and unsupervised places at school. The fourth, the media sphere does not have a physical form, but exists in all of the other three exerting varying amounts of influence depending on the influencing weight of the other spheres. It can thus be argued that the media sphere, particularly the negative influence of the media sphere, has most impact in the unsupervised/unorganized peer group sphere.

Media violence and childhood violence

Arnett (1995) suggests that debates about the effects of media on children and adolescents are deeply polarized from those who glibly blame media for every social ill to those who just as glibly dismiss all claims of effects of media on youth as being unverifiable. As argued earlier, to choose the second of these alternatives would be just as irresponsible as choosing the first would be overzealous. The sheer size of the media in society and the amount of youth usage, as outlined in earlier would indicate that there is a considerable effect of this media upon our children.

Dietz and Strasburger (1991) reviewed the research of the previous 20 years with respect to the effects of television on the cognition and behavior of children and adolescents. They concurred with the widely accepted premise that children gain knowledge, learn behaviours and have their value systems significantly shaped by exposure to media. The National Television Violence Study (Federman, 1996, 1997, 1998) concluded that television violence contributes to antisocial effects on viewers, and that the three primary effects of watching television violence

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are: learning of aggressive behaviours and attitudes, desensitization to violence and fear of being victimized by violence. It was also found that not all forms of media violence posed the same degree of risk for these harmful effects. This research linked contextual factors with the harmful effects of violent media exposure. Basically, it was concluded that an attractive perpetrator, humour presented with the violence and the presence of weapons were associated with learning aggressive behaviours and attitudes. Graphic and realistic violence was associated with fear of being victimized and humour and graphic violence were associated with desensitization to violence.

In a review of more than 3500 research studies that explored the association between media violence and violent behaviour, Grossman & DeGaetano, (1999) found that 99.49% showed a positive relationship. An American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement (2001) states that the issue has been studied using population based epidemiologic investigations, cross- cultural studies, experimental and natural laboratory research, and longitudinal studies. Meta analysis of this data has shown that the strength of correlation between media violence and violent behavior is stronger than that of calcium intake and bone mass, lead ingestion and lower IQ, condom non-use and sexually acquired HIV infection and lung cancer and environmental tobacco smoke. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2001) is convinced of a connection. They have concluded that although media violence is not the sole factor contributing to aggression, antisocial attitudes and violence among children and adolescents, it is an important risk factor.

North American research that connect violence and media consumption in youth include the

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longitudinal research led by Leonard Eron (e.g., Eron, 1982; Eron & Slaby, 1994; Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz & Walder, 1984) and research led by George Gerbner (e.g., Gerbner, 1987; Gerbner, 1988; Gerbner, 1990; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994) at the University of Pennsylvania.

Eron (Eron, 1963; Eron, 1982; Eron & Slaby, 1994) began his work in 1963 by looking at aggression in 875 third graders in a small upstate New York town. He had children describe their personal television viewing habits and their ratings of the aggression of other children. He also interviewed teachers about student's aggressiveness and obtained information about individual children's viewing, and family values and discipline through their parents. He noted a relationship between the children's levels of aggressive behaviour and their viewing of violent television programming. Ten years later, following up with 436 of the same subjects, Eron again found a correlation between violent TV viewing and aggression. Interestingly, though, there was an even stronger connection between the aggressive 18 year olds in the study and their viewing of violence as eight year olds. Eron later followed up with 198 of these students as 30 year olds and found there was a relationship between the early viewing of television violence and violent crimes such as aggravated assault, child abuse, spouse abuse and murder. However, Rhodes (2003) has argued that this, the most celebrated of Eron's research, was actually based upon just three boys from the original 1963 sample.

Gerbner's research (e.g., Gerbner, 1987; Gerbner, 1988; Gerbner, 1990; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994) stretching over 25 years has recorded and analysed the content of

prime time and Saturday morning television. Recently, these researchers have begun to explore television viewing and the viewer's perception of the world. They argue that those who watched more television think that the world is a "meaner scarier place," consistent with the images they see on television. These results are consistent across education levels, income levels and gender. Terming this the "Mean World Syndrome," Gerbner (1990), found that those who watch more television are more likely to overestimate their risk of being victimized by crime, believe their neighbourhoods to be unsafe, believe fear of crime is a serious personal problem, and assume that the crime rate is increasing, even when it is not. Canadian researchers Gosselin, de Guise, & Paquette (1997) found similar results with the exception that the Canadian subjects did not feel more fearful.

Comstock (1991) argues that violence that is viewed on television makes behaviour that might otherwise seem abnormal appear normal. In a review of over 3000 studies, he identified a variety of factors that increase aggressiveness due to exposure to violence in media. These included the portrayal of violence as being justified; rewards for, or at the very least, lack of punishment for aggressive behaviour; situations created to encourage aggressor identification, and making the violence similar to real life by creating real life-like cues in the portrayal of the violence. Other factors identified by Comstock (1991) included portraying violence so realistic that it no longer appears to be fiction, removing consequences from the portrayal of the violence such as pain, sorrow or remorse; portraying the violent behaviour as motivated by the intent to inflict harm or injury; creating violence so as it is not distasteful; violence with numerous

victims; as well as violence that is out of context with respect to the events that lead up to it.

Josephson (1995) states that children watch and understand television at different ages in different ways depending on a number of factors including their attention spans, the way they process information, the amount of mental effort they invest and their own life experiences. It is incumbent upon future research to look at aggressiveness, bullying and violence with respect to children as well as explore the links to popular culture and the mass media to examine how children of different ages watch and understand the media.

Josephson (1995) states that children become viewers of television by around two-and-a-half years old. It is at this time that they begin to pay more attention to television, extract some meaning from it, and are likely to imitate what they see and hear on television. They are attracted to things that move fast. Later, at what she terms as pre-school age (3 - 5 years), children take on an exploration approach, searching for meaning in content and are especially attracted to vivid production features such as rapid character movement, rapid changes of scene and unexpected sights and sounds. Fast moving images and vivid production features are often elements of cartoons which both toddlers and pre-schoolers are attracted to. Cartoons are often very violent in content.

The research also presents that ages 6 - 11 is a critical period for understanding the effects of television on aggression. Children now have the attention span and cognitive ability to follow continuous plots, make inferences about implicit content and to recognize motivations and consequences to characters' actions. However, because they are investing less mental effort into

watching television, they may be compromising their ability to deeply process the information being viewed and may merely react in an unfocused superficial way. At this age, children begin to expand their viewing repertoire into more adult-oriented programming, develop a taste for horror stories, and are also more likely to become more tolerant of violence in the real world.

From ages 12 - 17, Josephson (1995) argues that children continue to remain unfocused in their television viewing but are more capable of high levels of abstract thought and reasoning. Generally they now watch less television (and much less with their families) as they branch out into other mediums particularly listening to music. A smaller percentage of children at this age are more likely to believe in the reality of television, identify with its violent heroes, fantasize about aggressive-heroic themes and be more aggressive. However, it is suggested that there is a tendency to challenge conventional authority at this age, and that superior abstract reasoning abilities make another small percentage of adolescents susceptible to imitating some forms of television violence, crime and portrayals of suicide.

Josephson (1995) concludes that violence in the media does not account for all aggressiveness in children but that violence on television leads "at risk" children to be even more aggressive. Although this group may be a minority of television viewers they are probably a majority of childhood aggressors.

Arnett (1995) argues that media is a new source of socialization for our children in addition to traditional sources such as the family, school, community and the legal system. He argues for a typology of media use for adolescents that describes it in terms of entertainment, identity

formation, high sensation, coping and youth-culture identification. Entertainment refers to adolescents using media for fun. Identity formation refers to using media for the cultivation of one's values, abilities, and hopes for the future as well as gender-role identification. High sensation refers to the intense and novel stimulation that appeals to many adolescents and comes in particular media forms like movies, video games, rap and heavy metal music and videos. Coping refers to the use of media by adolescents to relieve and dispel negative emotions. Youth culture identification refers to the aspect of modern mass media that allows many adolescents to feel connected to a larger peer network, unifed by youth specific values and interests. It also refers to formation and identification with youth subcultures such as neo-fascist skinheads in Europe, or skateboard enthusiasts in North America. Another point articulated by Arnett (1995) is that unlike other principal socialization sources, the media does not have the interest of passing on the established social order to the next generation. Mass media has one goal - - it is profit motivated.

This typology has relevance for paper three in this paperfolio. Without doubt, the violence that children witness in our society in the mass media does have an effect upon them. The violence watched ameliorates conditions that create a climate of violence in our schools and other areas where bullies, victims and peer groups congregate and interact. Technologies such as V-chips, restrictions imposed by parents and all other safeguards aside, children will be exposed to violent and developmentally inappropriate media. Arnett (1995) argues that parents are unlikely to succeed in restricting an adolescent's media use if the adolescent is determined to

avoid the restrictions. A sizeable segment of the answer is in education. Youth need to be aware of the purposes for which the media they are consuming are intended. A typology of media use creates a framework upon which to develop both safe school, anti bullying programs in concert with media literacy and awareness programs. In addition to programs that promote a message of violence prevention and respect in schools, it is incumbent upon schools and teachers to prepare their students with education in media literacy that explains how mass media works, its psychological impact and how it may have an affect both on actual violence in their environment and upon their perception of violence.

This paper has reflected upon the violence in two of the major environmental spheres which our school-age children live. The unsupervised peer group sphere and the mass media sphere. The violence in one affects the other. One can only expect the levels of violence and sensation to increase in mass media. We must provide the best programs and services to all our children in the school setting if we are to successfully combat and neutralize the effect of media violence, while at the same time encouraging a culture of respect and care.

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Running head: MEDIA EDUCATION

The Role of Media Education in Newfoundland and Labrador's

Response to School Violence

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Abstract

Newfoundland and Labrador began, in 1995, a *Violence Prevention Initiative* that includes the provincial Department of Education's *Safe and Caring School Initiative*. Included in the *Safe and Caring School Initiative* is *The Safe and Caring Schools Action Plan* started after a Provincial Forum on school bullying in the spring of 2002. Among other things, *The Safe and Caring Schools Action Plan* includes an element of resource provision.

Either provided as resources, or highly recommended for Newfoundland and Labrador schools are four resources: *Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Ministry of Attorney General, 1998), *Focus on Harassment and Intimidation: Responding to Bullying in Secondary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2001), *Trevor and the Bully* (Morris & Hoffe, 2002) and *Cooperative Discipline* (Albert, 1996). Another program widely used in Newfoundland and Labrador is the *Drug Abuse Resistance Education* (*DARE*) program (Los Angeles Unified School District, 1996) as presented to many schools in our province by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC).

Although all valuable educational resources with many features of merit, none of these resources directly address the prevalence of media violence that Newfoundland and Labrador students need to properly understand and combat the pervasive and arguably insidious effects of violent media.

The Role of Media Education in Newfoundland and Labrador's Response to School

Violence

In "Media Violence: A Key Constituent in the Causal Matrix of a Violent Society"

and "Popular Media Influences and Violence in Schools" (paper one and paper two of this

paper folio) evidence was presented indicating the power of media in the lives of

children and the relationship between bullying behaviour and the media. This paper will

review the resources presently prescribed or being commonly used in the Newfoundland

and Labrador school system, and make the argument that the role of the media is largely

ignored.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador began, in 1995, a *Violence*

Prevention Initiative in which the province's Department of Education is a partner. The

vision of the initiative is that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador will live in safe,

caring communities where there is an inherent respect for each other and where violence

is unacceptable. In an attempt to uphold its partnership, to be pro-active in addressing

violence issues and to promote safe and caring learning environments, the Student

Support Services Division of the Department of Education has created a *Safe and Caring*

Schools Initiative. This effort included the formation of the Safe and Caring Schools

Advisory Group at the Department of Education, the convening of a Provincial Forum on

School Bullying held in the spring of 2002, and the creation of a provincial action plan

labelled *The Safe and Caring Schools Action Plan.* The provincial action plan included

the following elements: policy, public awareness, resource provision, professional

development, funding, youth involvement and parental and community partnership.

This paper will focus on the resource provisions of the action plan, particularly the British Columbian resources which have been supplied to all schools in the province, either *Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Ministry of Attorney General, 1998), or *Focus on Harassment and Intimidation: Responding to Bullying in Secondary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2001). Other resources and programs referenced by the Newfoundland and Labrador action plan that will be reviewed here are *Trevor and the Bully* (Morris & Hoffe, 2002) and *Cooperative Discipline* (Albert, 1996). In addition, this paper will review the *Drug Abuse Resistance Education* (*DARE*) program (Los Angeles Unified School District, 1996) as presented to many schools in Newfoundland and Labrador by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC).

Included in *12 Anti-bullying Thoughts to Keep in Mind* (Nesbit, 2003), a part of the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education's Safe and Caring Schools Provincial Action Plan web site, is the thought that: The media is rife with glorified bullies who use counter-aggression packaged as "justifiable violence." These powerful negative models must be addressed through education.

I think it will become obvious as the aforementioned resources are reviewed, that this link between violence and media influence seems to have been overlooked in the provincial action plan. I believe that a quality anti-violence school program cannot ignore media violence and that resources need to be developed and universally implemented in

Newfoundland and Labrador's schools in media education to ensure success of the goals of our province's *Violence Prevention Initiative*.

Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE)

DARE was developed as a cooperative effort between the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Los Angeles Police Department. It is stated that the program differs from other traditional school-based drug abuse programs in that rather than only presenting the harmful effects of drugs, *DARE* emphasizes the need for students to recognize and resist the pressures (labelled "subtle and many" by the program) that influence children to experiment with drugs, gangs and violence. The program is offered in Newfoundland and Labrador Schools by both the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and has been offered in Canada since 1993. At the rural kindergarten to grade nine school in which I am an administrator, the *DARE* program is being offered to grade six students. The focus here will be on the grades 5 and 6 part of the program. This is the primary thrust by the RCMP utilizing *DARE* in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador as well as in Canada.

The *DARE* program includes a program binder for the delivering police officer, a promotional video, a cassette tape of a rap song promoting the goals of the program, and a student workbook. The program identifies bonding as being linked to what are termed protective factors such as family, school and community. It references using preventive strategies that foster the development of resiliency to the risk of problem behaviours as major goals. The preventative strategies include the development of social competence, self-esteem, empathy, sense of purpose, independence, and the development of

communications, decision making and conflict resolution skills. Identification of positive alternative activities to destructive behaviours is also an important focus.

The *DARE* program was presented at our school by an uniformed RCMP officer who made weekly visits of an hour duration to the grade six classroom delivering one of seventeen prescribed lessons. The presenting officer had been specially trained in the content of the *DARE* program as well as basic teaching techniques and cooperative learning strategies. The program has been written to reinforce learning outcomes in curriculum areas such as health, social studies and language arts. It seeks to provide education through a model of partnership with family, school and community, and includes activities to involve parents and community members. The lessons presented were entitled: Introducing *DARE*; Understanding the Effects of Mind-altering Drugs; Consequences; Changing Beliefs about Drug Use; Resistance Techniques - Ways to Say "No"; Building Self Esteem; Assertiveness: A Response Style; Managing Stress without Taking Drugs; Reducing Violence; Media Influences on Drug Use and Violence; Making Decisions about Risky Behaviour; Saying Yes to Positive Alternatives; Positive Role Modelling; Resisting Gang and Group Violence; and *DARE* Summary: Taking a Stand. The program concluded with a Culmination graduation Ceremony.

On the surface, it is quite tempting to speculate that a program developed in the city of Los Angeles would have little to offer within the Canadian context and even less for rural Newfoundland and Labrador children. However, this is not the case. Generally *DARE* does provide presentation and reinforcement of a number of learning outcomes for the Newfoundland and Labrador elementary health curriculum. These include outcomes

relating to drug education, self-esteem, response styles, stress, decision making, exploring and labelling feelings and peer pressure. Additionally there are process outcomes in Language Arts in the Newfoundland and Labrador curriculum that are met through activities in the *DARE* program. The novelty of having a police officer deliver the program, particularly if he or she is skilled in doing so, and the development of a positive relationship between the police officer, the children, school, parents and the community is a further benefit. The need for such regimented, rich instruction in drug education at the elementary level prompts further research.

DARE is particularly interesting for two reasons. First of all, it has an anti-violence as well as an anti-drug message, and it does reference media influences with respect to both drug use and violence. For students in grade six at my school, this was one of the very few references to media having an influence upon violence in their schooling, and may very well be the only reference they will experience at least until high school.

The two specific lessons from the *DARE* program (grades 5 and 6) which are pertinent for this paper are Lesson 10: Combatting Media Influences on Drug Use and Violence and Lesson 14: Resisting Gang and Group Violence. Lesson 14 for Newfoundland and Labrador is largely out of context, as it mostly relates to organized gangs that are not readily apparent in our area. By adapting the message of the lesson to apply to more loosely formed peer groups, and bullying and intimidation that occurs by peer groups, this lesson does provide some anti-violence/ anti-bullying education. Though somewhat adaptable, a lesson more suitable for the local context would be more appropriate for the anti-violence message being espoused in this lesson.

Lesson 10: Combatting Media Influences on Drug Use and Violence has a stated purpose of helping students develop the understanding and skills needed to analyse how the media can influence the way people think, feel and act about drug use and violence. The lesson begins by identifying the difference between commercials and public service announcements (PSAs) and providing examples of each. Instruction is then provided indicating that the media tries to influence our minds and the choices we make, including choices about drug use and violence. It is then offered that media messages are cleverly portrayed and not necessarily completely factual. Students are presented with seven advertising techniques and encouraged to suggest examples of each. The techniques offered are: Bandwagon - everybody does it; snob appeal; personal testimony; public service announcement; sex appeal; having fun; and comparison with similar products. A host of channels of communication for such techniques are then suggested. Students are invited to read a story entitled "Unmask the DJ" where products are being promoted using less than factual approaches through the various techniques. Students re-write the DJ's messages into factual public service announcements.

Considering the power of the media in the lives of children, as indicated in paper one: *Media Violence: A Key Constituent in the Causal Matrix of a Violent Society*, and the relationship between media violence and violence and bullying at school, as referenced in paper two: *Popular Media Influences and Violence in Schools*, this is a token inclusion in dealing with media influences in the lives of children. Considering that it may very well be all that children encounter, prior to high school, it borders on the shameful. The material considers only commercial advertisements rather than the more

damaging actual effects of programming. It pays homage only to the purposeful

manipulation of advertising and not the more subtle, more pervasive and more damaging

reality of television programming, movies, music videos, video games and violent

sporting events. That being said, our two policing agencies should be congratulated on at

least recognizing that media does have an influence upon the way children think, feel and

act. A beginning, but definitely not enough.

Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities

This program was the result of the British Columbia government's Safe Schools

Initiative, begun in 1997, to address issues of student safety in British Columbia's schools

and communities. The development of the *Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for*

Elementary School Communities (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Ministry

of Attorney General, 1998) was phase two of the initiative and was released in November

of 1998. *Focus on Harassment and Intimidation: Responding to Bullying in Secondary*

School Communities (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Safety

and Solicitor General, 2001) was a further effort of the British Columbian Safe Schools

Initiative and was released in 2001.

The earlier released British Columbia Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public

Safety and Solicitor General (1998) is certainly the more prescriptive of the two,

exploring the nature of bullying for primary and elementary students, providing a

detailed seven-step procedure for creating a school wide plan, and offering interventions

for specific bullying situations, as well as 23 well written lesson plans to teach related

concepts and skills in the classroom. The lessons are divided by grade level with separate

plans for grades four to seven, but combined common plans for kindergarten and grade one and grades two and three. The lessons are further divided into two segments at each grade grouping. Foremost, the lessons are arranged into three modules, defining bullying, the school plan and dealing with bullying. The lesson plans are further classified across each of the grade levels into categories of mental well-being, child abuse prevention, and safety and injury prevention. Additionally, there is a listing of resources provided to support implementation of a school-wide anti-violence plan.

Section one allows for a short review of the research into the nature of bullying. In ten pages this section of the program gives an overview of bullying and bullying behaviours, describes the extent of bullying in schools from both a Canadian and international perspective, and discusses victims and bullies, all the while being careful not to label individuals but referring to the traditional bully as children who bully, and the victim as children who are bullied. Gender differences in bullying are explored as well as the role of the peer group in the bullying situation. The role of adults and the efficacy of school-based interventions are also referenced. In outlining what creates a successful program, this section cautions that effective programs are those that are well planned and multi-faceted, use a team approach, are curriculum linked, include codes of conduct, have specific intervention guidelines, include measures for support, provide opportunities for monitoring and evaluation, and have built-in community support as a key component.

Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Ministry of Attorney General, 1998) includes a prescriptive step by step plan for building a school-wide plan for bullying

prevention. During the provincially sponsored inservice held on March 9, 2004 for District Three administrators and guidance counsellors, I had the opportunity to discuss this procedure for developing the plan with two other administrators and three guidance counsellors from a variety of school settings. We concluded that this was an excellent guide for creating an efficient, community supported school-wide anti-violence program. The plan as offered was clear, focussed, prescriptive, well thought out and sequential. The steps of establishing a working group, involving parents, involving students, creating a school statement, building a supervision plan, developing a response plan and implementing and monitoring the plan were logical and comprehensive. It was felt by our group, that if proper effort were put into the plan as suggested, a school-wide anti-violence strategy could be developed that would be well planned, multi-faceted, use a team approach, be curriculum linked, include codes of conduct, have specific intervention guidelines, include measures for support, monitoring and evaluation, and have built in community supports. The administrators and counsellors in our discussion group who discussed the seven step plan were all wary of the suggestion to include students at this age level in the working group given that it does most of the work in developing, facilitating, implementing and monitoring the school plan.

The subsequent section on responding to bullying situations is again clear, focussed and prescriptive. Responding is defined as actions performed upon encountering a bullying situation. Roles of first and second responders are defined. The first responder is the staff member who witnesses and intervenes in a bullying incident or who first receives the report of bullying. The second responder may be an administrator or guidance

counsellor who gathers more information, ensures student safety, contacts parents and applies an intervention strategy. The program goes as far as to supply questions for deciding whether bullying has occurred or not, and then questions to ask the victim to ensure the gathering of proper information. There are also prescriptive step by step actions with procedures and even questions for both the first responder and the second responder to ask. Additionally, bullying behaviour is broken down into three levels with suggested actions to take if the incident is a first sign of bullying (Level I), where bullying behaviour is repeated (Level II) and when the bullying behaviour is frequent or serious (Level III). The sections includes forms and even protocols for involving the police or child protection services.

Each of the 53 lesson plans offered in *Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Ministry of Attorney General, 1998) is well organized, including lists of new vocabulary and required materials in the margins, a section setting the context of the lesson, and the instructional approach to use. Also included is an insight and understanding section indicating what is to be learned in the lesson, a detailed lesson script, suggested additional activities and an assessment activity.

The lessons generally follow the modules of defining bullying, the school plan and dealing with bullying and provide activities designed around mental well-being, child abuse prevention, and safety and injury prevention. They are also graduated in terms of sophistication from kindergarten to the lessons for grade six and grade seven. Spirally developed so they provide ample review of concepts and skills mastered and reinforced

the previous year, they provide for further sequential growth and skill development. For example, in kindergarten the contrast in the ideas of tattling and telling is introduced and defined in a developmentally appropriate way by using puppets and telling stories. Tattling is defined as a negative behaviour while telling is considered positive. In grades two and three tattling and telling are defined within the context of student rights and responsibilities, concepts that can be made meaningful for older children. The lessons for grades six and seven do not identify the terms tattling and telling per se, but focus on providing students with the information to decide when it is appropriate to report bullying and attempts to debunk students' myths about not telling about bullying. Again, rights and responsibilities are part of the discussion, but determining threats to personal safety enter into the discussion as well as deciding whether reporting is "cool" or not. Again, the level of sophistication of the intent of the lesson increases with the age group that it is intended for in a way that is appropriate for each of the age levels. The program is effective in this regard.

Generally then, *Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Ministry of Attorney General, 1998) appears effective in providing quality developmental lesson plans for anti-bullying programs, provides a general review of what bullying is, offers a prescriptive model for building collaborative anti-violence/anti-bullying programs, suggests a plethora of additional resources with a guide to responding to bullying.

What the resource does not do is offer help in educating students about the media as an agent in the context of bullying that we find in our schools. The contribution that the

media has made towards the problem of bullying in our schools is ignored in all areas of the resource. Schools might want to supplement the use of this resource with materials and education providing for the awareness of the amount, seriousness and consequence of media violence in our society in general and in our schools in particular.

Focus on Harassment and Intimidation: Responding to Bullying in Secondary School Communities

Focus on Harassment and Intimidation: Responding to Bullying in Secondary School Communities (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2001) is the second of the British Columbian resources and is prescribed for the Newfoundland context in junior and senior high school. This program was intended to provide secondary schools with the theoretical background and process models and tools required to make positive change toward a caring school learning community that is free of harassment and intimidation. Interestingly, the resource rarely refers to bullying, stating that intimidation and harassment "refer to the more complex and often more intense experience of students at secondary level." (p. 7) *Focus on Harassment and Intimidation: Responding to Bullying in Secondary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2001) provides for a comprehensive multi-faceted approach to the subject by encouraging and supporting the following six elements:

- facilitation of an in-depth understanding of harassment, intimidation, and bullying in secondary school communities

- assessment of a school community culture

- development of an action-oriented, school-wide strategic process that addresses policy and procedure development, program implementation, teaching, and immediate incident response

- consideration of existing promising practises as part of the development of a plan

- use of current research and relevant school-based information as integral parts of the planning process

- development of and appropriate use of a continuum of responses to incidents of harassment and intimidation (p. 4).

The resource is divided into eight chapters with an "Introduction;" a chapter labelled "Understanding" which reviews theory and research into bullying and harassment; and four chapters labelled "Taking Action: Preparing for Action;" "Taking Action: Developing Policies and Procedures;" "Taking Action: Teaching" and "Taking Action: Responding." *Focus on Harassment and Intimidation: Responding to Bullying in Secondary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2001) concludes with "What Others Have Done: Promising Practices" and a strong list of "Supporting Resources."

The resource identifies four elements in a cyclical process for preparing for action. These include (1) Building a leadership team, (2) Assessing for Action, (3) Developing a Vision and (4) Creating a Plan. Although presented in this order for the first run-through of the cycle, any of the elements may be revisited, as needed, subsequent to the initial implementation. In Building a Leadership Team, it is suggested that all stake-holders be

involved including school and district staff, students, parents, members of the local community, police and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Assessing for Action is the second step in the suggested process cycle and refers to taking stock of the school culture and the individuals within it. An included inventory is not considered as a questionnaire, but as a starting point for rich discussion in a number of contexts within the school community. Collecting further data through checklists, internal assessment of things such as office referrals, town hall type meetings, and surveys and questionnaires is directed toward completing the picture. Following the Development of a Shared Vision among the leadership team the authors suggest the real work begins with a seven step process of Creating the Plan.

These steps are identified as developing value statements or guiding principles, analysing initial assessment data, developing a communication plan, developing a list of supports, holding goal-setting sessions, holding strategy sessions and celebrating the successes. Though not as prescriptive as is the process for developing a school-wide plan in *Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Ministry of Attorney General, 1998), the process here is comprehensive, cooperative, and seemingly operational. It provides a basic framework to bring stakeholders on side to create a multi-faceted, vision-inspired, comprehensive plan to deal with secondary school harassment and intimidation.

In the chapter labelled "Taking Action: Developing and Evaluating Policies and Procedures," schools are given a road-map to either develop appropriate policies and procedures in addressing harassment and intimidation or to evaluate policies and

procedures that have already been developed. This is an excellent guide to policy development for schools for any issue or concern where policy would be helpful, not just in the area of violence prevention. It includes a school policy development flowchart and a list and explanation of policy components. Additionally this segment includes an evaluation instrument for school wide plans dealing with harassment and intimidation.

The chapter labelled "Taking Action: Teaching" in *Focus on Harassment and Intimidation: Responding to Bullying in Secondary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2001) focuses on a series of generic instructional strategies suggested to help create a safe and welcoming learning environment. These strategies include such things as an effectively thought through arrangement of the physical environment, use of a variety of tasks and activities, presenting concepts in multi-sensory and multi-modal ways, use of advanced organizers, inclusion of social skills content, holding class meetings, employing a process focus, modelling respect, setting clear behaviour expectations, maintaining order, and avoidance of power struggles and reward-and-punishment tactics.

These teacher tried-and-true methods may seem obvious to an educator experienced in promoting safe and caring learning environments. However, I believe it is worthwhile to include them in this resource and to make the connection between these successful instructional strategies and school environments which promote lesser degrees of harassment and intimidation.

The lesson plans included within this section of the resource are designed to extend concepts included in the elementary resource, *Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program*

for Elementary School Communities (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Ministry of Attorney General, 1998). Lessons are well organized with outcomes cross-referenced to outcomes in the prescribed curriculum areas (British Columbia Curriculum), suggested time-lines, lists of materials, sketchy lesson scripts and assessment strategies. The eight lessons included are entitled: "Managing Emotions," "Role Play," "Literature Study," "Making Schools Safer," "Self-Portrait," "Celebrating Differences," "The Legal Issues," and "Media and the Perception of Youth." They are developmentally progressive from "Managing Emotions," aimed at grade eight students through to "Media and the Perception of Youth," aimed at grade eleven students.

Of most interest in terms of this paper, is the lesson plan entitled "Media and the Perception of Youth." It is the only place in this resource where reference is made to the media. This particular lesson explores how communication media influence the way that youth are perceived. Students in this lesson, examine the nature of bias, stereotyping and point of view in reporting. The objective is to hopefully move from being powerless in relation to mass media in terms of being passive consumers. Unfortunately, the media examined is restricted to news media. Students analyse and critique news reports about youth from television, radio, magazines, newspapers, and news-oriented web sites.

It is unfortunate, that this lesson (and for that matter the entire resource) chooses only this narrow aspect of media for discussion and critique. Although pertinent and not without efficacy, the lesson fails to investigate the variety of media areas identified in paper one as particularly related to violence in general and school violence in particular. I had hoped to see students critically look at programmed television and movie violence,

violence in music and music videos, video game violence, and violence in sporting and entertainment events such as professional ice hockey and wrestling. Instead, the rather narrow venue of news media was scrutinized. Although disappointing, in terms of subject matter, it is at least a beginning in terms of relating mass media to the issues of violence, bullying, intimidation and harassment.

From a positive, but unfortunately irrelevant perspective in relation to our province, this lesson plan (Media and the Perception of Youth) does cross-reference learning objectives from a British Colombia course named "Communications 11." Here, a number of outcomes are referenced that would be pertinent to countering some of the influence which media may have on school bullying and violence. Unfortunately, from a Newfoundland and Labrador perspective, these outcomes are not part of our curriculum. Additionally, including them as late as the second last year of high school is arguably too late to have much of a positive impact on bullying through the majority of school years. The most important outcome referenced here is, "Identify ways in which mass media influence individual perceptions and social behaviours." (p. 85)

The last "Taking Action" section of the resource is entitled "Taking Action: Responding" and provides foundation elements of an effective response, a comprehensive response model for use as a guideline in the development of a customized, school-wide plan and sample scenarios that explore application of the response model within the school-wide plan. The responding model includes assessing the behaviours of the aggressor, victim, and bystander in terms of frequency, pervasiveness, severity, and duration of the intimidation/harassment episode and includes the actions of stopping the

behaviour, naming it, reporting and/or recording it, assessing it, resolving it, and following it up. The resolution options explored include two restorative components, peer mediation and school community forums.

One of the most interesting parts of *Responding to Bullying in Secondary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2001) is the section entitled Promising Practices. Based on 13 criteria consistent with the spirit and content of this resource , the *British Columbia Safe Schools Working Group* selected secondary school and district initiatives that had a unique approach to intimidation and harassment. This part of the document outlines initiatives that run the range from programs focussing on drama activities; peer counselling type programs; puppet plays developed by older students for younger ones; day-long student designed awareness days; development of anti-violence activity books by older students for younger students; students creating anti-harassment and anti-violence radio and television commercials; to a program developed around the ideas of respecting yourself, respecting others, respecting learning, and respecting property. Promotional ideas like 4 R's for pizza promotions and posters are included. There is an emphasis on community partnership, comprehensiveness, curriculum connectedness and a focus on awareness, intervention and protection.

Also included in the initiatives is a helpful transcription of a round table discussion by individuals from each of the promising practices sites included in the resource. Participants responded to a set of focus questions including: how did you get started?, what were your program goals?, how do you define harassment and intimidation?, what is

your overall approach?, how do you keep people involved?, how do you encourage student involvement?, how do you use communication initiatives?, how is partnership important?, what kind of support do you look for?, what has worked well and why?, what has not worked well and why?, how do you respond to incidents in your school?, do you have any tips to share with others?, how would you like your initiative to develop? and have you made a difference?.

These questions are answered in a straight forward manner with bulleted responses from different individual respondents. This is a valuable part of this resource, as it allows anyone with the interest (or mandate) to establish an anti-intimidation/harassment program in a secondary school the opportunity to explore the thoughts of leaders of promising programs attempting to achieve this goal. I was especially impressed with the section prompted by the question, What has not worked well? Participants here "pulled no punches," and raised a number of difficult issues that I feel could have been further dealt with in the resource as a whole. One particularly intriguing area for me was the issue of complaints against teachers. The participant responding to the issue by suggesting that it was a minefield, but did not offer particular advice about how to proceed with the issue.

A further issue brought to the forefront was that of homophobia and misogyny, but again, suggestions were not offered as to ways of dealing with the issues. These issues were brought forward to the committee responsible for the resource and they should have been referenced and elaborated on either in this section of *Responding to Bullying in Secondary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Ministry of

Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2001) or somewhere else in the resource.

Furthermore, there was no mention or reference to media violence, either in the

descriptions of promising practice sites or in the question and answer part of this section.

Trevor and the Bully

Trevor and the Bully (Morris & Hoffe, 2002) is a children's storybook published by

the Grand Falls-Windsor, Newfoundland Committee Against Violence (one of six

regional committees formed as part of the Provincial Violence Prevention Initiative began

in 1995). This resource identifies different types of bullying and looks at the issues of

children who bully, children who are bullied, and their peers. It is suggested as a

discussion tool for parents and others who work with children. It was supplied to all grade

two classrooms in Newfoundland and Labrador in the form of a "big book" as well as

several smaller texts in February, 2003.

Trevor and the Bully (Morris & Hoffe, 2002) is a story about a primary student

named Trevor who is being bullied by another boy (Russell) through threats, extortion,

name-calling, and having his belongings stolen. Another peer, Cindy, feels sorry for

Trevor, explains to him that he is being bullied, what a bully is, and several strategies to

alleviate Trevor's problem. Trevor talks to his mother and his teacher about the problem.

Perhaps unrealistically the bully disappears as soon as Trevor makes up his mind to do

something about the situation.

Trevor and the Bully is an admirable effort by the Central Newfoundland Violence

Prevention Initiative, serving as a good starting point for a discussion about bullying with

primary children. The story is not as fully developed as it could be, and is rather simplistic in terms of plot and unrealistic in terms of outcome. It was probably an expensive initiative, when six months subsequent to the supply of this resource to provincial schools, *Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities* (British Columbia Ministry of Education and Ministry of Attorney General, 1998) was supplied to all primary schools. *Trevor the Bully*, while somewhat valuable is redundant when compared with the depth and breath of the program developed and purchased from British Columbia. There is no mention of the media in this resource. No doubt, Russell would have learned some of his intimidation and physical harassment from carefully choreographed aggression witnessed on television. If the expenditure of this funding (placing Trevor the Bully in all primary schools cost $14 000) was more strategically planned it could have been targeted at areas that the two major resources (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 1998, 2001) were weak in addressing. I would argue that resources specifically earmarked for media education would have been a much more justifiable area for resource allocation.

Cooperative Discipline

Included in the *Safe and Caring Schools Action Plan* is reference to an approach entitled *Cooperative Discipline* as developed by Albert (1996). In fact, fifteen Newfoundland and Labrador educators were trained in Cooperative Discipline across all eleven school districts. This was designed to bring the program back to provincial

schools as part of plan to have Newfoundland and Labrador School's become safe and caring.

Synthesizing the research and theories of Rudolf Dreikurs, Alfred Adler, Weilliam Glasser and Eric Berne with classroom and special education teacher experience, the *Cooperative Discipline* (Albert, 1996) approach offers an interesting mixture of sound psychological theory and practical tips, skills and strategies, with the expressed twin goals of creating safe, orderly and inviting classrooms and increasing student self-esteem.

Albert's (1996) approach begins with three basic concepts of behaviour. She offers that students choose their behaviour, they fulfill the paramount psychological and emotional objective of needing to belong through their behaviour, and that student misbehaviour is oriented towards achieving either attention, power, revenge or avoidance of failure. More specifically, she points out that all students have the potential to move towards more positive choices of behaviour, and it is often teacher behaviour which facilitates growth in this potential, or results in more negative choices on the part of students.

Additionally, to achieve the need to belong in the school community, all students need to feel capable of completing tasks in a manner suitable to the expectations of the school, they need to believe that they have a successful connection with their classmates and teacher, and that they are making significant contributions to the group. Albert (1996) calls these three needs (to be capable, to connect and to contribute) the three Cs of *Cooperative Discipline*. She points out that the key to creating, in students, a sense of capability, connection and contribution is a process of encouragement. As well, Albert

(1996) further explains that identifying which of the four goals of misbehaviour (attention, power, revenge or avoidance of failure) that the student is trying to achieve is central to responding with the most effective intervention.

Albert (1996) continues after outlining the premises, foundation and philosophy of *Cooperative Discipline* to the practical aspects of the program where characteristics of the four goals of misbehaviour are explored along with numerous strategies to effectively deal with the misbehaviour. In addition, the program offers strategies for increasing students sense of capability, connectedness and contribution. The book concludes with sections on implementing a classroom code of conduct, encouraging conflict resolution, establishing a school action plan, and involving students and parents as partners. A strong set of appendixes are included with a number of pertinent tables, examples and forms for implementing a *Cooperative Discipline* approach. Albert (1996) also includes a worthwhile bibliography. The rationale for choosing the *Cooperative Discipline* approach as a part of the *Safe and Caring Schools Initiative* is not given justification. It leaves one to wonder how and why it was chosen. Although replete with the many strategies and recipe type tips that teachers like to utilize, there is no research offered as to its effectiveness as a program in making schools safer, reducing incidents of student misbehaviour or helping with the problems of bullying/harassment/intimidation. Albert does, however, offer this sage advice: "Before you dismiss the concepts and this book, however, follow this suggestion and do what I do: Pretend that the concepts are true" (p. 22).

On her publisher web site (American Guidance Service Publishing, 2000) Albert

makes reference to the fact that Short (1988) indicates that a student-centered environment incorporating teacher-student self-esteem and a sense of belonging is a more effective method of reducing behaviour problems than punishment. My speculation is that because Cooperative Discipline promotes these concepts it does have some research legitimacy.

Another publisher web site (American Guidance Service Publishing, undated) offers that there is a connection between *Cooperative Discipline* and research-based school success factors from various studies. Basically, the site lists the premises of the *Cooperative Discipline* approach and seeks to connect it to academic research that legitimizes it. For example, Fifer (1986) argues that an effective classroom discipline system involving cooperative interaction between teachers and students greatly reduces misbehaviour. Obviously, it is not difficult to find academic references that value such "motherhood" issues promoted in the *Cooperative Discipline* approach such as high quality student teacher relations, parental involvement, and improved student self-esteem. The idea that you can find research supporting ideas and concepts within a program is not necessarily research promoting a program's efficacy.

Additionally, the same web site (American Guidance Service Publishing, undated) offers the success of a field test as lending validity to the effectiveness of the *Cooperative Discipline* program. Unfortunately, the data included here refer only to experience reported by educators with introduction to and training in the program, and does not offer any pre or post treatment data to support adopting the program.

There is a dearth of research concerning the merits of the *Cooperative Discipline*

approach to student misbehaviour. It is disappointing that this resource is recommended by the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education in Newfoundland and Labrador Safe and Caring Schools Committee, and the fact that resources were expended in training individuals to disseminate the program provincially. Before a program is recommended and implemented one would expect that its efficacy could be validated.

Additionally, the media is represented in the *Cooperative Discipline* approach as another factor that is not within the school's sphere of influence in much the same manner as social problems like drug abuse and unemployment. This perception is unfortunate, as media education is indeed a way of changing student's perceptions of the media and helping them understand the influence that media has upon them. As previously argued, an in disagreement with Albert's position, media is an area of leverage where student misbehaviour can be mediated. Even if *Cooperative Discipline* is not ideally suited for dealing with this particular area, Albert should have identified it as an area of concern -- one in which educators have leverage. Additionally, recommendations of effective ways and resources for media education should have been suggested.

In conclusion, the power of the media is a serious concern in the lives of children that we educate. In many of its forms it is a corrupting and insidious force. It has been linked to bullying and violence in schools worldwide.

In Newfoundland and Labrador our prescribed curriculum rarely references the issue of the media, particularly in terms of it relation to violence. New resources being implemented are also negligent with respect to media education and the role of media in violence in society in general and in schools in particular.

The media's role in the violence in society no doubts needs further research before a direct causal relationship is proven. However, the current evidence points to the media as a causal factor of societal violence. Meanwhile, it is incumbent on the field of education to evaluate current evidence and prescribe better curriculum and resources to help investigate and combat the effect of media violence -- a serious threat undermining the effectiveness of current anti-violence initiatives.

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