

The Effects of Crime Dramas on Perceptions of Masculine Aggression

Zackery L. Jackson

Longwood University

Author Note

Zackery Jackson is a major in Communication Studies at Longwood University

Effects of Crime Dramas	2
-------------------------	---

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Acknowledgments	3
Thesis	4-14
Introduction	4
Importance	4
Issues in media	5
Women, acceptance, and aggression	8
Men, acceptance, and aggression	9
Theoretical Grounding	10
Method	11
Results	13
Discussion	13
Limitations	15
Conclusion	15
References	16
Appendix	18

Abstract:

This study focuses on the effects of television crime dramas on perceptions of male aggression. 74 college aged men and women were surveyed online for their perceptions on male aggression along with how many hours a week they viewed crime dramas like *Law & Order* and *CSI*. It was hypothesised that there will be a positive correlation between crime dramas and perceptions of frequency, and acceptance of male aggression. It was also hypothesised that men would have a higher acceptance of male aggression than women. No correlation was found between perceptions of male aggression and viewing crime dramas. It was found that men do find male aggression more acceptable than women. These findings support that more than one factor plays into developing perceptions of male aggression. More research is needed to identify the causes of perceptions of male aggression.

Acknowledgments

This thesis would have not been made possible without the incredible support from my colleagues and advise from my professors. First I wish to thank Ashley Bowles for always understanding that this work came before our school club. Next I would like to express my gratitude to Hannah Lawrence for putting up with my daily question, “So have you worked on your thesis today?” I would also like to thank Dr. Naomi Johnson and Dr. William Stuart, who without their help I would have never been able to develop or execute this research. Finally I would like to thank my editor and friend Jacob Biggs, an English major at Longwood University.

Investigative or police dramas are numerous and are watched by many different audiences. Each may have its own spin on the idea, ranging from lie detection to using archeology to crack the case. One thing they all have in common is violence and frequently sexual violence. *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* has a focus on victims of sexual violence (Wolf 2001). This is mostly done by male characters and not only by the villain. The protagonist also use aggression to get what they want (Scharrer 2001). Such programs simply reflect the nature of television and do not necessarily suggest that people behave that way on a regular basis; however, such violent programming may change or cultivate accepting attitudes towards masculine aggression.

Importance

Recent protests have been popping up all over. Women are dressing in next to nothing and even writing the word “SLUT” on their foreheads, marching through major cities. These marches are called Slutwalks. They are fighting to change rape culture that has put woman as the sole party responsible for preventing rape (Contreras 2011). This idea would not be an issue if it were not for a cultural acceptance of male aggression. Male aggression is violent acts such as, verbal abuse and physical assaults, done by males. For example a man insults another by calling him weak and proceeds to overpower him physically. The purpose of this study will be to understand the effects of watching violent investigative crime drama television on attitudes towards male aggression for college aged men and women. At this stage in the research project, I generally understand the effects of violent television on attitudes towards aggressive masculinity

as cultivating unrealistic perceptions of the frequency and acceptance.

Issues in Media

Literature demonstrates evidence that violent content in media has positive and negative correlations when developing attitudes towards aggressive masculinity. Scharrer's (2001) study on the effects of television violence viewing and self-reports on aggressive behavior, found that men after viewing violent television that self-reports in men and women increased. Scharrer also found that rewards; such as female attention, power, wealth, and respect; that villains and heroes receive due to aggressive behavior. Rewarding both good and evil due to violent behavior may lead people to believe there is no consequence for violence. This is supported by Scharrer's (2005) more recent study on existing trait of hypermasculinity and its effects on aggressive behavior after viewing violent television. Scharrer's research studied men and found that men after viewing violent media tend to be more aggressive if they have existing hypermasculine traits. Research also showed that exposure to violent television may contribute to hypermasculinity in men. Hypermasculinity is a character trait in men that causes an idolization of masculine traits. Scharrer (2001) described masculinity as being composed of three main attitudes. The first being callus attitudes towards sex, which is the idea that a man should sleep with whomever without consequence or care. Perceiving danger as exciting and violence as many are the second and third attitudes respectively.

Haridakis' (2006) study on predicting television viewers' aggression in men and woman based on personal traits had contrasting results from Scharrer. Haridakis (2006) found the impact of violent media is dependent on individual characteristics such as experience with

crime. Haridakis studied men and women, ages 18 to 40. The study found that women with lives controlled by others tend to be more aggressive than others, while men who have experienced crime, such as a mugging, are more aggressive than others.

In Scharrer's (2001) earlier study she concluded that frustrations and provocations of daily life with the addition of violent media helps maintain a cultural perspective of personal aggressive behavior as normative. This brings to question whether or not a change in media alone would create a change in culture. As Haridakis (2006) found, personality plays a large role in how people are impacted by violent media. This is also supported by Scharrer's (2005) finding that when men with hypermasculinity viewed realistic portrayals of callousness towards sex did not increase that attitude in the viewer.

In Capella, Paul, and Rapp et al. (2010) study on the effects of sexualized violence in advertisements on acceptance of sexually aggressive behavior, it was found that moderately violent advertisements were more acceptable and caused more positive attitudes towards sexualized violence than advertisements that were considered to be highly violent. The study surveyed men and women ages ranging from 16 to 40. Young people overall had a higher level of acceptance than adults. This suggests that higher levels of violence push consumers away from buying into a brand. The idea that high levels of violence create a negative perspective of the media is supported by Scharrer's (2005) more recent study in which that more realistic portrayal of carelessness towards sex did not increase enjoyment in viewing. This supports that many television shows continue to push the envelope and become more and more explicit though it may not bring increased viewership.

Media that depicts sexualized violence, and stereotypes concerning men and women may

not be profitable to producers of the media. Capella et al. (2010) found that teens are more susceptible to being influenced by sexually violent advertisements towards accepting attitudes of sexual aggression. This has obvious negative consequences such as continuing to spread rape myths. Rape myths are stereotypes asserting the ideal that woman want to be sexually abused despite verbal protests (Capella et al. 2010).

Linda Zayer (2010) conducted a study on the development of masculine ideologies portrayed in advertisements. Zayer (2010) found three archetypes personifying men's negative view of certain advertisements. These were "The Player", "The Slob", and "The Partier". The player archetype is a man who uses women solely for sexual enjoyment. The slob is unattractive and messy. The partier is a man who drinks excessively and is irresponsible. The study found that advertisements that contained these archetypes received a negative reaction from middle-aged men (Zayer 2010). This coincides with Capella et al. (2010) findings that older viewers are less likely to find sexually aggressive behavior, or "player" behavior, as acceptable. In contrast, Zayer (2010) found eight archetypes in advertisements that middle-aged men found to be ideal. Advertisements depicting attractive men, risk taking, responsibility, hard work, adventure, athleticism, individuality, and physical strength were perceived as positive ideals of masculinity. Although research has shown which advertisements are effective all of these archetypes still appear in today's advertisements Capella et al. (2010) also found supporting evidence of media's attempt to be more shocking to capture audience attention. Capella et al. (2010) research concluded that advertisements with sexualized violence were more noticeable, but brought on a negative attitude towards the company the advertisement represented.

Portrayals of violence do not necessarily benefit media and young people are more

susceptible to changes in perception (Capella et al. 2010). Research argues that the effect of violent television could be based on existing personal traits or it could be inadvertently creating or strengthening aggressive tendencies (Haridakis 2006); Scharrer 2005). Television advertising has archetypes of portrayed men, both negative and positive (Zayer 2010). Media's portrayal of violence is very likely contributing to perception of male aggression.

Women, acceptance, and aggression

Avigail Moor (2010) conducted a study to find out the reasons why women dress in revealing clothes and what men thought the reasons were. Moor (2010) discovered that less than two percent of women in her study dressed in a revealing manner, because they wanted to be touched or stared at by men. Strangely enough, people like the Canadian police officer that sparked the world wide "Slut walks" still believe that a woman should not dress scantily if they want to avoid sexual assault. Capella et al. (2010) examined the link between exposure of media and acceptance of rape myth. Although it was not nearly as high as male acceptance, it was still present. Capella et al. (2010) used an AIV scale to determine this. AIV is the accepted interpersonal violence scale, which measures beliefs about violence against women based on answers to questions identifying acceptance of violence.

Women can be more aggressive after viewing violent television if they are externally controlled (Haridakis 2006). People who are externally controlled are those whose choices are generally made by others. Although much of this is contradicted by Beneneson, Carder, and Geib-Cole's (2008) research on young children's differences in play-style based on sex. Beneneson et al. (2008) found that young girls find less enjoyment in violent television and favor

a non-aggressive play-time by viewing behavior and holding interviews. This leads back to Capella et al. (2010) discussion on advertisements portraying woman as wanting aggressive and even abusive behavior emphasizing that this is, of course, is not a reality.

Men, acceptance, and aggression

Men are typically more aggressive than woman after viewing violent media. Scharrer (2001) and Haridakis (2006) both came to the same conclusion, but for different reasons, Scharrer (2001) found that the pre-existing trait of hypermasculinity as the main contributor to aggressiveness. Haridakis' (2006) research revealed that men who have experienced crime and watch television for enjoyment are more aggressive than others.

When viewing sexualized violence in advertising young men had the highest AIV (Capella et al.). 2010). This may be due to boys finding aggressive play as early as four years old. Research also found that boys preferred occupations involving violence such as soldier or policeman instead of astronauts and fireman (Benenson et al. 2008). This attitude is surprising because Zayer (2010) found that traits such as hard work, adventure and responsibility to be traits men found desirable. This may be due to the age difference in study participants.

Although this study is limited by its age range, research provided insight on how men may be more susceptible to a change in perception than women (Capella et al.). It also shows that certain media portrayals of men range from greatly positive to very negative (Zayer 2010).

Research involving men, women, and media is extensive. Some studies found that it is in men's nature to be aggressive (Benenson 2008) or that it may be women who are controlled by

husbands who have aggressive tendencies or people develop aggressive attitudes from personal traits (Haridakis 2008). Other research found that media plays a large role in aggressiveness (Scharrer 2001). The research lacked how media can change men and women's perceptions of masculine aggression. This study will focus on this gap specifically.

Theoretical Grounding

Cultivation theory, conceived by George Gerbner (Griffin 2008) is the idea that repetitive viewing of media can cultivate attitudes or perceptions of people, ideals, and culture. For example, if someone watches television ten hours a week they will be more likely to view the world as dangerous. Mean world syndrome is the perception of the world as conniving and unforgiving created by the viewing of violent media. This will help identify patterns in research based on the amount a participant views investigative crime dramas.

This research has a focus on difference in sex, but not gender. Gender is the sexual orientation of a person, such as heterosexual and homosexual. Sex is biological, based on a combination of chromosomes such as XX and XY (Wood 2009). This study shall look at the difference between perceptions of people based on sex.

Method

H1: The more a subject views crime dramas, then they will be more likely to perceive male aggression as a common occurrence.

H2: The more a subject views crime dramas, then they are more likely to perceive aggressive traits in

men as attractive

H3: Male viewers will have a more positive perception of male aggression than female viewers.

Survey was targeted towards college aged students 18 to 24. A total of 100 participants finished the survey, half male and half female. The survey was distributed online through multiple social media outlets, such as Facebook and also snowballing electronic mail using a link to the survey. It was not a requirement of subjects to watch television crime dramas as non-viewers were used as a control.

Subjects individual perceptions of frequency male aggression and perception of male aggression as positive or negative. A survey was used as the simplest way to quantify the subjects perceptions. The survey consisted of 16 items. This approach will show statistical differences between multiple variables. Fourteen items on the survey were statements where participants answered using a seven point likert scale based on level of agreement. Survey was taken online and took 8 minutes to complete. Survey items were developed using the mean world index (Rubin ET. AL. 2004) and the Accepted Interpersonal Violence scale (Burt 1980). For full survey view Appendix A. The mean world index was found to be more reliable, the more items were used. Many researchers have used this scale since its conception by George Gerbner (Rubin ET. Al 2004). In multiple past studies the mean world index was valid when finding differences in perceptions of heavy and light viewers (Rubin ET. AL. 2004). For full survey view appendix A.

The most important independent variable of the method was the amount of time spent watching television crime dramas. This identified participants as light and heavy viewers. This was be measured by simply asking participants if they watch crime dramas and if so how many

hour a week do they watch them. Those who do not view crime dramas were used as a control. This is independent variable for hypothesis 1 and 2. The dependent variable for hypothesis 1 was the perceptions of the frequency in which men are aggressors. Statements were given in which frequency of male aggression is apparent, and then participants were asked to answer passed on level of agreement on a seven point scale. The dependent variable for hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 3 was the perceptions of male aggression as positive. Like the previous variable statements were given and participants were asked to answer based on level of agreement. The questions were worded to identify male aggression as acceptable. The independent variable in hypothesis 3 was the participants sex. This variable was identified by asking the participants to reveal their sex as male or female.

The issue of acceptance of masculine aggression is not the sole responsibility of media, men, or women, but our culture as whole. Although media may cultivate attitudes, much of the research analyzed personal characteristics that cause aggressive attitudes or the media influence on male aggression. The research takes a broader look at this cultural issue and attempt to find a correlation between viewing frequency and perceptions of masculine aggression.

Results

H1 and H2 were proven incorrect, while H3 was correct. For hypothesis one a Pearson product-moment correlation was performed to determine if a relationship existed between amount of crime dramas consumed and perceptions of the frequency of violence by men using modified mean world syndrome index called Mean Men World index. No statistically

significant correlation was found $r(62) = -.176, p < .179$.

For the second hypothesis another Pearson product moment correlation was performed to determine a relationship between the amount of crime-dramas consumed and a positive acceptance to male interpersonal violence using Burt's (1980) Accepted Interpersonal Violence Scale $r(62) = -.115, p < .377$.

For the third hypothesis a t-test was used to determine if men and women differ in their perceptions of acceptable male violence. Men ($n=23, M= 18.00$) were likely than women ($n= 38, m = 14.24$) to perceive male violence as acceptable $t(59) = 3.329, p < .002$

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find a relationship between crime drama consumption and perceptions of male aggression along with discovering if men or women find male aggression acceptable. Below is the interpretation of the survey results.

H1. The first hypothesis was a heavy viewer would perceive male violence as more frequent than light or non viewers. This was not supported. This finding directly relate to Haridakis (2006) findings, stating that individual traits play a larger role in causing aggressive behavior. The study results show that individual traits develop perceptions and not just the viewing of a type of television show as the first hypothesis predicted. Scharrer (2005) found that men after viewing violent television did not display increased in acceptance in regard to interpersonal violence.

H2. The hypothesis that heavy viewers would be more likely to perceive male aggression

as a positive trait was not supported. This goes against the findings of Capella et al. (2010) that stated men and women had a stronger acceptance of interpersonal violence after viewing advertisements that contained sexualized violence. Capell et al. (2010) also found that the older the person is, the more likely they will be influenced by images of violence. The participants of my study ranged from 18 to 24, so it is not surprising that not many were heavily influenced by crime dramas.

H3. As expected, men did have a more accepting view of interpersonal violence than women. This is also supported Capella et al. (2010) finding on differences in acceptance of interpersonal violence. This also shows how issues of perceptions of sexual violence should be discussed with men at a younger age, and how males are more likely to believe rape myths as true.

Although two of the hypothesis were proven untrue this study still provided valuable insight. It shows that many factors play into how we view male aggression. Finding what causes people to accept male aggression as normal or positive will help find a way to change perceptions on sexual violence. This study shows that men harbor some of the more positive feelings of male aggression which shows that although society teaches that women are responsible from protecting themselves from sexual violence, it is men who must be educated on what rape and other forms of sexual violence actually are.

Limitations

The fact that this study did not find a direct correlation between perceptions of male

aggression and viewing crime dramas, may be due to certain limitations with the research. The number of participants, lack of heavy viewers, and time allotted likely affected the results. A total of 74 participants took the distributed survey, all of them college aged students. I believe a large sample towards the hundreds, without age limitations, would have provided different results. A major downfall of the research was a lack of heavy viewers. This had a negative effect on the results and did not provide a clear view of the research. If more time was allotted to collect data, a larger sample would have been taken, perhaps significantly changing the results. I recommend that future studies cover a broader scope of media, and not just one genre of television. A study covering both violent movies and television would provide deeper insight into how perceptions of male aggression are developed.

Conclusion

If views on male sexual aggression do not enough people will take action. The specific parts of our culture that create these perceptions is important to to discovering ways to change our society's "rape myths". Although my research found no direct correlation was found between viewing crime dramas and perceptions of the frequency and acceptance of male aggression, it was supported that men are more likely to find male aggression is acceptable. This phenomenon supports the idea that multiple factors play a role in developing perceptions of male aggression- not just one type of media.

References

- Benenson, J. F., Carder, H. P. and Geib-Cole, S. J. (2008). The development of boys' preferential pleasure in physical aggression. *Aggressive Behavior*, 34:154–166. doi:10.1002/ab.20223
- Burt, M. (1980). Cultural myths and supports for rape. *Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology*, 38(2), 217-230.
- Contreras, R. (2011). Cop's rape comment sparks wave of 'SlutWalks' *msnbc.com* Retrieved November 3, 2011, from http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42927752/ns/us_news-life/t/cops-rape-comment-sparks-wave-slutwalks/#.TrNRTrLKk5s
- Capella, M. L., Hill, R., Rapp, J. M., & Kees, J. (2010). The impact of violence against women in advertisements. *Journal of Advertising*, 39(4), 37-51. doi:10.2753/JOA00913367390403
- Griffin, E. A. (2008). Cultivation theory. *A first look at communication theory* (7 ed., pp. 356-370). Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education
- Haridakis, P. M. (2006). Men, women, and televised violence: Predicting viewer aggression in male and female television viewers. *Communication Quarterly*, 54(2), 227-255
- Moor, A. (2010). She dresses to attract, he perceives seduction: A gender gap in attribution of intent to women's revealing style of dress and its relation to blaming the victims of sexual violence. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(4), 115-127. Retrieved October 30, 2011, from <http://www.bridgew.edu/SoAS/jiws/May10/Avigail.pdf>
- Scharrer, E. (2001). Men, muscles, and machismo: The relationship between television violence exposure and aggression and hostility in the presence of hypermasculinity. *Media Psychology*, 3(2), 159-188.

Scharrer, E. (2005). Hypermasculinity, aggression, and television violence: An experiment.

Media Psychology, 7(4), 353-376. doi:10.1207/S1532785XMEP0704_3.

Rubin, R. B., Palmgreen, P., & Sypher, H. E. (1994). *Communication research measures: A*

sourcebook. New York: Guilford Press.

Wolf, D. (2001). *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* [Television series]. Los Angeles: USA.

Wood, J. T. (2009). *Gendered lives: communication, gender, and culture* (8th ed.). Belmont, CA:

Thompson/Wadsworth

Zayer, L. T. (2010). A typology of men's conceptualizations of ideal masculinity in advertising.

Advertising & Society Review 11(1), Retrieved January 22, 2011, <http://muse.jhu.edu/>

3. Answer each of the following based on level of agreement.

	Strongly disagree	disagree	slightly disagree	neutral	slightly agree	agree	strongly agree
Men today shouldn't use an eye for an eye and loath for a loath as a rule of living .	<input type="radio"/>						
A wife should move out of the house if her husband hits her .	<input type="radio"/>						
Sometimes the only way a man can get a cold woman turned on is to use force .	<input type="radio"/>						
Women find it attractive when men are rough sexually with them .	<input type="radio"/>						
A man is never justified in killing his wife .	<input type="radio"/>						
Many times a man will be forceful with a woman because she's just playing hard to get .	<input type="radio"/>						

4. Do you watch crime dramas such as Law & Order, CSI, and NCIS? If so, how many hours a week do you watch?

- Does not watch
 less than 1 hour
 1 hour
 2 hours
 3 hours
 4 hours
 5 hours or more

5. Are you male or female?

- male
 female

Thank you for participating in this study. If you or someone you know is in an abusive relationship please contact the Longwood Health Center at 434.395.2102 or contact a local counseling service. For ways to identify abusive relationships visit <http://www.theredflagcampaign.org/>.