

Encyclopedia of
MEDIA VIOLENCE

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Further Readings

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SOCIAL ISOLATION

Social isolation occurs when a person achieves less social interaction than he or she desires. Social contact is a basic human need, and the hierarchy of needs developed by psychologist Abraham Maslow requires some form of social connection at every level, particularly the “belonging” stage. However, sometimes people cannot connect with others, leading to social isolation. It is important to differentiate between the terms *social isolation* and *social exclusion*, because they are not interchangeable. Professor of political science Brian Barry has distinguished these two concepts by stating that social isolation is nonparticipation in the institutions of mainstream society, while social exclusion occurs because of powers beyond an individual’s control (e.g., terminal illness). Social exclusion could, in turn, lead to social isolation by greatly reducing the level of achieved social contact, which may drop below levels of desired social contact. For this reason, social exclusion is considered in this entry.

This entry first examines social isolation occurrence in relation to new media technology and video games. It then discusses the relationship between social isolation and media violence.

Social Isolation and New Media Technology

Media researchers have often been concerned with negative effects, and media technology would appear to be a culprit in social isolation, as seen in work

such as that by Robert Putnam. More recent studies on new media technologies and social isolation have had mixed findings. Some research suggests that cell phones and the Internet have increased social isolation, while other research shows a decline in social isolation due to such technologies. Given the social nature of new media and its ability to connect individuals, the latter finding makes intuitive sense, although mediated networks may lead to social isolation in the physical sense and less meaningful contact.

Sora Park (2012) has discussed the ways multidimensional digital media literacy (the ability to access, understand, and create online media) is related to social exclusion. It was reported by Park that social exclusion relates mostly to the ability to create and participate in the digital world. Individuals may feel excluded if they are unable to post comments in an online forum or if they are restricted from doing so. If excluded, an individual’s desired social contact could go below the achieved social contact and lead to social isolation. This social exclusion could be mitigated, though, through education and other efforts to create greater social connection. It seems that the key to eliminating social isolation in digital settings is for people to have access to technology, understand how it is used, and most important, participate.

Social Isolation and Video Games

A common notion about individuals who are deemed “video gamers” has been that they spend their time playing video games in social isolation. It may come as a surprise to some that many participants in online video games spend a lot of time socializing during play. Researchers Jeroen Jansz and Maarten Grimberg (2005) interviewed gamers who were engaging in a local area network (LAN) party and found that a common motivation to play video games is the social aspect. Participants stated that playing cooperatively or competitively with other people makes the game less predictable and more fun. Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), in which a large number of players participate in a game set in a virtual world, have become extremely popular. The social interaction among gamers while playing games like *World of Warcraft* is not limited to rudimentary text—by using voice-chat programs (e.g., Teamspeak, Ventrilo, Mumble, Skype), many online gamers can engage in real-time communication while playing games. Gaming consoles such as Xbox and

PlayStation also can take advantage of the Internet, allowing people to play games online with others and communicate via a headset and microphone. Therefore, social isolation may be rarer during current video game play than it was during the early years of these games.

Social Isolation and Media Violence

Research has stated that two major sources of vulnerability to effects of violent media content are personality predispositions and social and developmental factors. In a study conducted by Michael Slater and colleagues (2004), these factors were used as moderating variables between the use of violent media and aggressiveness. For personality predispositions, a measurement for sensation seeking was used. For social and developmental factors, measurements for alienation (school, family, peers) and victimization were used. The sample consisted of 2,550 students from 20 middle schools. The results showed that participants who reported a higher sense of alienation from school also reported higher violent media use and overall aggression. However, alienation from family and peers were not significant predictors. Results also revealed that participants who reported having a higher sensation-seeking personality and were prone to victimization reported higher violent media use and overall aggression. If one feels alienated, there is a good chance that desired social contact is below achieved social contact, leading to isolation. If alienation and isolation are seen as relatively similar concepts, this study showed that alienation and isolation may result in greater violent media usage.

Researchers David Bickham and Michael Rich (2006) found that the more time children between the ages of 6 and 12 spent watching violent television, the less time they spent engaging with friends. The authors proposed that viewing violent television may lead to social isolation, which, in turn, leads to more violent program viewing. The reverse could also be happening: perhaps social isolation encourages viewing of antisocial, violent television viewing. Regardless of directionality, this relationship is clearly problematic. Because of this potential link, Bickham and Rich recommended that children's violent television viewing be limited to optimize social development and health.

Conclusion

The emergence of social media and other interactive technologies offers new opportunities to

connect with others. To increase social contact through technology, however, a person must be able to create messages and communicate effectively. Without these skills, it is very possible that one's achieved social contact will plummet below his or her desired social contact, causing a sense of social isolation despite numerous tools to make contact happen. Additionally, the use of technology for communication may still lead to feelings of social isolation if people are not engaging in much in-person, face-to-face interaction. Use of passive media like television should continue to flourish, and this type of media use seems most prone to causing social isolation, given its one-way nature. The potential link between social isolation and violent behavior is worthy of continued attention.

Michael Kurtz and Paul Skalski

See also Media Education and Media Literacy; User Trends Toward Aggressive Games; Uses and Gratifications Perspective of Media Effects

Further Readings

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SOCIAL LEARNING FROM MEDIA

Many models showing how preschool and school-age children learn from television have focused on the learning and imitation of violent behaviors. Arousal