

Introduction

It was 1904, and G. Stanley Hall, writing his magnum opus on adolescent development, was concerned about rising crime rates among American youth. He discerned a variety of causes, but one key source of the problem was the media. As Hall saw it, a young man may be induced to commit crimes in part because “his mind becomes inflamed with flash literature and ‘penny dreadfuls’” that portray crime as glamorous and heroic (p. 361). This was not the only problem of youth that Hall attributed to media influences. Johann von Goethe’s 1774 novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, remained popular in Hall’s time—with pernicious effects, according to Hall. “The reading of romance has great influence on the development of youthful passion. Werther has created a distinct psychosis known as Wertherism” (p. 387).

Hall and his contemporaries could hardly have imagined the media environment that today’s children and adolescents experience. The “literature” Hall worried about is still there, but now print media take a back seat to the newer, electronic forms: television, radio, recorded music, movies, mobile phones, electronic games, and the Internet. American children and adolescents use media for an average total of 6.5 hours per day, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation’s landmark 2005 study of 8-to-18-year-olds—more time than they spend in school, far more time than they spend with their families. Totals are similar in other industrialized countries.

The fact that media use has become such a central part of the daily experience of children and adolescents all over the world makes this a propitious time to compile the *Encyclopedia of Children, Adolescents, and the Media*. Because the media children and adolescents use are so diverse, and because media use pertains to so many different aspects of children and adolescents’

development, this was a monumental project, with the two volumes containing a total of 463 entries. There were 4 associate editors and 19 advisory board members, all of them outstanding scholars in media research. A total of 496 authors contributed entries.

Media are pervasive worldwide as part of children and adolescents’ daily experience; accordingly, we sought to make the contents of the encyclopedia international. There are specific regional entries on Asia, Europe, and Latin America, as well as specific country entries for the two most populous countries in the world, China and India, and on Japan, which has been such an important contributor to children’s media worldwide. Many of the other entries contain information drawn from a variety of countries.

Many people today, including many media researchers, share Hall’s concern that the influences of media on children and adolescents are primarily negative, and this concern is reflected in the contents of the encyclopedia. Two of the largest topic categories are gender and sexuality (47 entries) and violence (31 entries). These entries show that the content of the media consumed by children and adolescents is dominated by sexuality and (especially) violence. Anyone who doubts Freud’s theory that sex and aggression are the primary wellsprings of human nature need only spend a day perusing the media environment of the average child or adolescent. Toddlers and children enjoy cartoons wherein the main characters invent humorously creative ways of beating the snot out of each other; girls embrace the models of princess or tart (or princess-tart) offered by cartoon characters and pop stars; boys thrill to electronic games that involve pretending to kill bad guys and aliens; adolescents like best the movies and music that contain the most explicit sexual and violent content.

Although there is little doubt about the content of the media children and adolescents consume, the question of effects has been a challenging one in media research from its inception. Does sexual and violent content influence children and adolescents, or are the children and adolescents who are most attracted to sexual and violent content already different from other children, already more prone to sexual risks and aggression? Different scholars have different answers to this question, and the 37 entries on theories in this encyclopedia offer a variety of takes on it. Still, there is broad consensus among media researchers that media use is not merely correlated with children's development but also influences their development.

I admit that I originally came to this question as a skeptic, having learned in my training as a developmental psychologist to be wary of simple statements of cause and effect. However, eventually I was convinced of the effects of media by the accumulation of evidence—not just correlational or experimental studies but longitudinal studies, field studies, ethnographic studies, and natural experiments—and I believe that most thorough readers of this encyclopedia will be convinced as well, as they read through the entries describing the results of studies that used these different methods. Yes, children and adolescents make media choices based on their individual characteristics, and some more than others prefer sexual and violent content, but the effects of such content on their development are real, and we doubt them at our peril—and our children's peril.

Not only is sexual and violent content a source of concern. Also worrisome is the huge volume of advertising to which children and adolescents are exposed through the media. The 40 entries on advertising offer a wealth of compelling and unsettling details, and like the entries on sex and violence, taken together the entries on advertising leave little doubt about advertising's effects on children and adolescents (and here I can add that, as a parent of twin 6-year-olds who regularly clamor for whatever is relentlessly advertised on the Cartoon Network, I did not need to be convinced). Even schools, formerly places where the barrage of advertising in modern society was kept at bay, have now opened their doors to invite the barrage in, as shown here in entries on topics such as Sponsored Educational Materials and Commercial Television and Radio in Schools.

Given the many concerns about media use among children and adolescents, it is understandable that

adults have organized in various ways to address those concerns. The encyclopedia contains entries on 22 advocacy groups, which comprise a wide range of national and international efforts to improve the quality (or at least minimize the damage) of the media content children and adolescents receive. There are also 39 entries in the area of public policy, showing the many approaches that have been taken nationally and internationally to control what media producers market to children and adolescents. In addition, 23 entries in the area of media education describe the methods that have been developed to teach children and adolescents to be discerning consumers of the media that surround them nearly all day every day, and to recognize and defuse media attempts to manipulate their desires, needs, and consumption habits.

Although the weight of opinion in the entries in the encyclopedia is decidedly in the direction of the concerns and potential negative effects of media, many entries show how children and adolescents benefit from their media use. Television may be mostly a vast wasteland saturated with sex and violence, but the best television provides children and adolescents with an entertaining educator and opens their minds and imaginations to new worlds. Music provides children and (especially) adolescents with materials for building personal and group identities and helps them to manage unruly moods. Movies can provide wonderful, inspiring stories. Mobile phones and email allow children and adolescents to connect to a broad network of friends and family much more often than was possible in the past. The Internet is a portal to an infinite store of information about every imaginable topic. Even print media have retained their power to inspire children and adolescents, as the recent *Harry Potter* craze has demonstrated. Who could have predicted that children and adolescents all over the world would become riveted to a series of 500+ page books about a boy who attends a school for wizards? This example helps remind us that media are, at their best, wonderful sources of enjoyment for children, adolescents, and the rest of us.

Although we sought to be as comprehensive as possible in putting together the two volumes of the encyclopedia, we decided early on not to include entries on specific media characters or performers. There were three reasons for this. First, if we had opened the door to this, it would have been difficult to stop (once we had an entry for Metallica, how could we have denied an entry to Megadeth?). Second, notwithstanding the

enduring popularity of characters such as Tom and Jerry or performers such as Madonna, most media characters and performers popular among children and adolescents have a rather short time in the spotlight. (There was a popular singer a few years ago, Britney something—remember her?) They come and go, and entries on them would already seem dated by the time the encyclopedia was published. Third and most important, the focus of the encyclopedia is on children and adolescents' experiences with media rather than on the specific media products they use. If boys are avid players of the electronic game *Grand Theft Auto*, what is important about this, for our purposes, is their avid involvement in a highly violent electronic game, not the fact that the specific game is *Grand Theft Auto*. Next month or next year, another violent electronic game may come along and supersede *Grand Theft Auto* in popularity, but the important issues pertaining to boys' involvement in violent electronic games will endure.

In closing, I would like to thank the many people involved in producing the encyclopedia. First, my eminent associate editors, Jane D. Brown, Keith Roe, L. Monique Ward, and Barbara J. Wilson. They did a fabulous job of helping me assemble the hundreds of authors for the encyclopedia. Each of them edited many of the entries, and each also contributed at least

one entry. Second, the 19 advisory board members, who suggested many of the entries we included in the encyclopedia and who were also key in assembling the authors for the project. It was a great honor to work with such a stellar group of media scholars. Third, at Sage Publications, the development editors Eileen Gallaher and Diana Axelsen, and Beth Bernstein, the production editor; all of them were extraordinarily capable in administering the project and getting all the entries into good shape, and they were delightful to work with.

Finally, I would like to dedicate my work on this encyclopedia to the memory of my mother, Marjorie Littlefield Arnett, who entertained us throughout my childhood with a wry running commentary on the stupidity and venality of most advertising, no doubt providing me with a “media education” that endures to this day. This is for you, Mom.

—Jeffrey Jensen Arnett
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FURTHER READINGS

Hall, G. S. (1904). *Adolescence: Its psychology and its relation to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education* (Vols. 1 & 2). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.