

Preface

Child Psychiatry and the Media



Eugene V. Beresin, MD



Cheryl K. Olson, SD

Guest Editors

For the typical American child, mass media are ubiquitous. As of 2004, children in grades 3 to 12 spent over 6 hours a day using some form of media, particularly electronic media such as television, DVDs/videotapes, music, and video games. Although the total amount of media time seems to be stable, more children are multitasking—they are involved with two or more media about a quarter of the time [1].

Many parents, teachers, clinicians, and policymakers have expressed concern about the potential harmful effects of media on youth. Multiple articles in professional journals and the lay press have drawn sometimes dramatic conclusions about media effects. Unfortunately, these are often based on inadequate or poor data, or simply on opinion. This issue of the *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America* is designed to present a careful, balanced view of the effects of media on youth. In addition to reviewing risks, we have attempted to discern how media may be used in the service of children's health.

Part I of this issue addresses the effects of mass media on children's mental health and health behaviors. Much research on mass media has focused on the effects of (or ways to reduce) the amount of mass media exposure. In recent years, there has been increasing focus on the nature and effects of specific

media content. Collins presents new research on how sexual content in television programs influences adolescents' behavior. Funk looks at concerns about emotional effects of violent content in video games. Thompson reviews research on the depiction of mood-altering substances (legal and illegal) in mass media, while Wiseman, Sunday, and Becker explore how depictions of unattainable physical perfection can affect children's body image and self-esteem.

Parents are often particularly concerned about the effects of newer media such as interactive games (as addressed by Funk) and the Internet, in part because these media are more difficult for parents to monitor. Bremer looks at how our children are growing up differently due to the influence of the Internet. As parents and clinicians try to grasp the nature and effects of advancing technology, our children are busy incorporating electronic media into their daily lives. Gelfond and Saloni-Pasternak review our understanding of the nature and function of children's play, and how interactive electronic media may be integrated into normal developmental processes. Rounding out Part I of the issue, Fremont, Pataki, and Beresin take us beyond concerns about entertainment programming to the often overlooked effects of exposure to frightening news content—how this can influence children's view of the world as a safe or dangerous place, or even become a traumatic stimulus.

In Part II, we shift our focus to the clinical implications and uses of mass media. Butler and Hyler draw our attention to mass media images of mental illness and psychiatrists and the profound effects these may have on patient and family expectations of treatment and even treatment outcomes.

There are ways that clinicians can influence the use of media to make it a benign or even positive force. Villani, Olson, and Jellinek's article on media literacy provides information that clinicians can use to help parents limit harm and promote constructive uses of mass media. There are also specific ways that clinicians can take advantage of media. Pataki, Bostic, and Schlozman explain how clinicians can ascertain the positive and negative influences of media on a given child's social, cognitive, and emotional development via a "functional media assessment." Rich, Polvinen, and Patashnick describe their method of guiding children coping with chronic medical illness to create their own videotape narratives. These stories can help us understand how chronic illness affects a child's daily life and allow children and clinicians to collaborate better in managing disease and its emotional sequelae. Martin provides detailed insights into the use of film, music, and other media to improve our understanding of other cultures (particularly African American culture), allowing us to recognize assumptions and biases that can interfere with treatment. Falzone, Hall, and Beresin walk us through potential uses of video technology to improve therapeutic skills and help families gain insight into behavior. Finally, Olson and Kutner demonstrate ways that informed clinicians can reach out to news media to influence public perceptions of psychiatrists and of mental illness, and reduce barriers to receiving treatment.

Eugene V. Beresin, MD
Department of Psychiatry
Massachusetts General Hospital
Wang 812

15 Parkman Street
Boston, MA 02114, USA
E-mail address: eberesin@partners.org

Cheryl K. Olson, SD
Harvard Medical School Center for Mental Health and Media
Department of Psychiatry
Massachusetts General Hospital
271 Waverley Oaks Road
Suite 204

Waltham, MA 02452, USA
E-mail address: colson@hms.harvard.edu

Reference

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