



UTILIZING RESEARCH

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Our focus this month is on the role of academic research in media education, health policy, and reform. ACME recognizes that academic research is vital to:

- (1) understand and address the effects of media on our attitudes, knowledge, health, and behavior;
- (2) create and evaluate curricula and programs designed to teach media literacy skills;
- (3) provide policy makers with the information necessary to promote and protect the public health; and
- (4) determine the direction of further media-related health and behavioral research, promoting collaboration between disciplines.

As a coalition of media educators, activists, researchers, and producers, ACME is in a unique position to both support and disseminate media research to the public.

More than 30 years of research establishes clear links between media consumption and individual health and behavior. Tobacco use, alcohol consumption, violence and increased aggression, eating disorders, obesity, and sexual risk-taking are among the many negative health behaviors linked with media exposure. In recent years, our society has imposed limits on tobacco advertising because we have recognized the success of such advertising in recruiting young smokers. Health scientists and public health advocates are beginning to realize the same effect of Hollywood stars smoking on-screen and the initiation of [youth smoking](#). While marketing and advertising professionals have long been aware of media's persuasive power to influence consumers' purchasing behaviors, health care professionals have begun to recognize that media also influences other health behaviors, both positively and negatively.



Not unlike the controversy that tobacco and health research generated some 25 years ago, media and health research appears to be creating a current, similar controversy. In particular, the relationship between media violence and increased aggression has gained recent attention in light of the media coverage of several school shootings. As Drs. Craig Anderson and Brad Bushman discuss in their [American Psychologist \(2001\) article](#), the relationship between media violence and [increased aggression](#) has been well investigated

during the past 20 years, with both the amount of literature and scientific certainty of such a relationship steadily increasing over time. However, news coverage of this research has consistently decreased over time. Hence, the popular press and public opinion still consider the relationship between media violence and increased aggression "debatable," often quoting entertainment industry spokespeople who declare, "there is no evidence," and perpetuate this myth to the general public. (Notice the last line of the following [news article on media violence and aggression](#), released March 2003.)

It is easy to understand why we've seen so little coverage of media and health research, particularly when the findings may reflect negatively on the particular medium. As Ben Bagdikian discusses in [The Media Monopoly](#) (1997), the media have a vested interest in avoiding criticism of its owners. However, one of the real obstacles to disseminating research regarding media and health has been the absence of a central source to both obtain and interpret the research. What is needed is a central source to provide the "evidence" for funding and implementing effective media education curricula and programmatic interventions; informing parents, teachers, and policy-makers about their role in education and prevention; and furthering media and health research. (It could also be useful in providing reporters and journalists with a better understanding of the research.)

ACME members spoke loudly and clearly at the October 2002 summit: "We know the scientific evidence is there...help us get it out to the public." ACME is currently developing plans for a Media and Health Research Resource that will be available from the ACME Coalition website. ACME Board members are working with health and research professionals within our coalition and are benefiting from the advice of doctors and scientists on our ACME Advisory Board, including Craig Anderson, PhD, [Douglas Gentile](#), PhD, Christine Kennedy, PhD, and [Victor Strasburger](#), MD.

If you are interested in learning more about the **Media and Health Research Resource Project** or would like to become involved, please email me at amcucsf@itsa.ucsf.edu. We will provide updates on our progress in future BACME issues and post our findings to the ACME website.

This is a project that is long overdue, and one that will greatly benefit the health and education of our children and families.

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Study links TV violence, adult aggression

Long-term effects seen in girls as well as boys

Associated Press

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Boys and girls who watch a lot of violence on television have a heightened risk of aggressive adult behavior, including spouse abuse and criminal offenses, no matter how they act in childhood, a new study says. Experts say the study is important because it included hundreds of participants and showed the effect in females as well as males. The participants were interviewed at ages 6 to 9 and again in their early 20s, making the study one of the few to follow children into adulthood to gauge the long-term effects of televised violence. The findings are presented in this month's issue of the journal *Developmental*

Psychology by psychologists L. Rowell Huesmann and colleagues at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. Huesmann said televised violence suggests to young children that aggression is appropriate in some situations, especially when it is used by charismatic heroes. It also erodes a natural aversion to violence, he said. He recommended that parents restrict viewing of violent television and movies by young children and preteens. The analysis argued against the idea that aggressive children seek out television violence, or that the findings were due to the participants' socioeconomic status or intelligence, or their parents' child-rearing practices.

The study involved 329 adults who were initially surveyed as children in the late 1970s. Researchers interviewed them again as adults, along with their spouses or friends, and checked

their criminal records. As children, the participants were rated for exposure to televised violence after they chose eight favorite shows from 80 popular programs for their age group and indicated how often they watched them. The programs were assessed by researchers for amount of physical violence. Programs such as Starsky and Hutch, The Six Million Dollar Man and Roadrunner cartoons were deemed very violent. As young adults, men in the study who had scored in the top 20 percent on childhood exposure were about twice as likely as other men to have pushed, grabbed or shoved their wives during an argument in the year preceding the interview. Women who had scored in the top 20 percent were about twice as likely as other women to have thrown something at their husbands. For one or both sexes, these "high TV violence viewers" were also more likely than other study participants in the previous 12 months to have shoved somebody in anger; punched, beaten or choked an adult, or committed a crime or a moving traffic violation. Dennis Wharton, spokesman for the National Association of Broadcasters, noted that not all studies find a relationship between television viewing and violent behavior. "I think the jury is still out about whether there is a link," he said.