

The Dangers of Television

Author: Amazing Discoveries™

Publish date: Jan 5, 2011

Summary: Beware of the television's abilities to hypnotize, alter moods, and even cause depression.

There may be an object in your home that you unwittingly allow to lead you into a type of hypnotic trance. If you are like the average American, several rooms in your house are equipped with an object that you focus your eyes on. It flickers every few seconds, and can produce a hypnotic-like trance. It is one of the most popular devices of our time—the television set.



More than 96 percent of American homes have at least one set.ⁱ Jerry Mander found that although there are many ways to be hypnotized, a number of experts defined hypnotism in such a way that television aptly fits the description. The classic setting for TV watching is similar to a typical environment for hypnotism induction—a darkened room, a flickering light (the TV set) as a single-minded focus, and freedom from outside diversions.ⁱⁱ

People watch programs provided by TV stations, cable companies, satellite networks, videos, and DVDs. The range of programming is diverse—movies, documentaries, sit-coms, sports, music, education, nature, news, *ad infinitum*. Does what you watch have any effect on your mind and character? It clearly does. From the standpoint of both depression and the frontal lobe, the most disturbing aspects of television relate to the veritable explosion of both sexual content and violence.

Television, Sexual Arousal, and Depression

Some adults may argue about whether sensual imagery is increasing on television. Consider the effect that the growing amount of televised sexual content is having on American young people. Documentation shows that television's erotic influence is so pervasive that it increases sexual activity in teens and younger children. Studies show that the age of first sexual intercourse significant decreases due to the influence of TV. The more television watched the lower the age for that first sexual encounter. Not only do studies show it, children themselves report that television encourages them to take part in sexual activity at a young age.ⁱⁱⁱ

The growing use of sexuality in the media is viewed with consternation by many segments of the population. More “open-minded” individuals often label those concerns as narrow and puritanical. However, those who are truly concerned about sexually explicit material—whether it be delivered through the medium of TV, magazines, the internet, sexually suggestive novels, or even a walk on a populated beach—appear to be on very solid footing when it comes to the effect of sexuality on depression.

For years, sexual arousal has been linked to stimulation of the right side of the brain.^{iv} Research suggests that the area particularly stimulated by sexual arousal is the lower part of the right frontal lobe.^v The frontal lobe is probably the last place you would want to stimulate if you want to treat or prevent depression, because depression tends to be characterized by a relatively greater level of activity in the right frontal lobe compared to the left.

I am concerned about the very casual attitude that most Americans have towards sex. Much of what passes for acceptable attire and acceptable behavior on primetime shows (and commercials) appears calculated to sexually arouse the viewer. The research is clear as to where the problem lies—it is sexual arousal.

Each individual can determine for himself whether that line is being crossed. My guess is that if most of my depressed patients are honest, that line is crossed more than once during the course of a typical evening of television viewing.

Recent research from UCLA revealed that young women exposed to “one or more significant childhood adversities” were more likely to become depressed when exposed to stressors. The childhood adversities included things like family violence, parental mental health problems, and alcoholism.^{vi} This is not an isolated study. There is a growing body of research linking stressful early life experiences with an increased risk of depression.^{vii} However, other research indicates that a “significant childhood adversity” may come into the home via the television set.

In 1994, a series of case histories was presented in the *British Medical Journal*. In an initial article and two follow-up letters, seven different children were described who experienced major psychological trauma after viewing a single disturbing television program called *Ghostwatch*.^{viii,ix} The 90-Minute pseudo-documentary was staged production which featured a family who was being violently victimized by ghosts. The show ended giving the impression that viewers were at risk of similar violence from these spirits.



The seven children viewers described in the *British Medical Journal* consequentially experienced an array of psychological problems that seriously disrupted their lives and the lives of their families.

Among the symptoms and signs described were depressed mood, nightmares, fear of the dark and of sleeping alone, difficulties in concentrating, impaired memory, “persistent intrusive thoughts and images of the traumatic event [the TV show],” raised levels of anxiety, panic attacks, and irritability. I would not be surprised if some of these youngsters later experienced an increased incidence of major depression following this stressful life event.

We do not yet have hard evidence of a connection between violent television viewing and depression. The lines of evidence are in place, but a definitive study has yet to be undertaken to conclusively bring the previous research into a fully congruent picture. The documented connection between life stress and future depression, and the fact that violent television viewing can be a significant stressor, certainly implies the connection between violent television viewing and depression.

Other Dangers Television Poses to the Brain

Although the content you view exerts powerful effects on your mind, the medium of television itself also appears to have profound mental effects. Independent of content, evidence suggests that merely watching most television programs is detrimental to the frontal lobe. This deleterious effect appears to be the result of the scene-switching work in most programming.

The technical problem with the filming technique is referred to as a “rapidly changing scene of reference.” The average television program (or video or DVD) changes its reference every three to five seconds. The perspective from which you are viewing the event suddenly changes from camera to camera many times each minute, whether you want it to or not. The frequent camera switching and scene changes that viewer passively experiences is thought to be the critical factor that brings about the frontal lobe suppression during the viewing process. This is in sharp contrast to how we normally view the world around us. We see real life scenes from one perspective (where we are located at the time of the event). We can change our perspective only by voluntarily moving, and then we are limited by means of transportation.

Dr. Morris cites television’s rapid change of reference as contributing to a hypnotic-type effect.^x Dr. Thomas Mulholland looked at children’s EEGs (brain waves) as they watch their favourite television programs. The researchers assumed that since these programs were their favourite shows, the kids would be mentally involved with what they were viewing and would experience a continual shift between alpha brain wave activity and beta. Instead, after just two or three minutes of the show, they sat back and stayed almost entirely in an alpha pattern. This meant that while they were watching they were “not reacting, not orienting, not focusing, just spaced-out.”^{xi}

Very few television programs (less than one percent) are truly educational. Within a minute of watching any television program you can determine if the program will detract or enhance frontal lobe activity. True education will not only convey information but will also enhance

particularly the front-middle and left prefrontal cortex of the frontal lobe. If the scene of reference stays the same for thirty seconds or a minute, you can be sure that the program is educational.



Most C-Span programs, some Discovery Channel programs, and many 3 ABN programs (specializing in spiritual and health programming) are examples of informational programs conveyed via a slow or perhaps no scene of reference change. This allows full analytical abilities of the viewer to be operative while receiving the information. One additional benefit of such programming is that prolonged “eye focus” associated with hypnosis tends not to occur while receiving this information. Since there is no rapid scene of reference change, the eyes do not have to unnaturally stare at the television, but will often leave the set, and look around the room while still receiving and analyzing the information.

Dr. Herbert Krugman, a brain wave researcher, has gone on record saying, “Television is a communication medium that effortlessly transmits huge quantities of information [to the viewers] not thought about at the time of exposure.”^{xii} Dr. Erik Peper, another influential brain wave researcher and writer, once said, “The horror of television is that the information goes in, but we do not react to it. It goes right into our memory pool and perhaps we react to it later, but we do not know what we are reacting to. When you watch television you are training yourself not to react and so later on, you’re doing things without knowing why you’re doing them or where they came from.”^{xiii}

Under the influence of television, the frontal lobe cannot function at its full capacity. The brain does record information: sight, memory, and emotions are all functioning well. Nevertheless, the brain no longer critically analyzes the information. Terrible scenes can be depicted, but the viewer tends only to laugh or shrug them off. Normally, if those kinds of events happened in real life the individual would be appalled. Even this is changing as people become more desensitized through exposure.

Despite how you respond—whether by laughing, apathetically staring, averting the eyes in disgust, or a hundred other ways—scenes are indelibly imprinted upon the mind. When you see a rerun once it begins you know you have seen it before. The memory is there, although the last time you saw it your frontal lobe was not any more active than it is this time. ^{xiv}

Video Games are No Different

The same hypnotizing brain activity that occurs while watching television also occurs while playing video games.

Consider this excerpt from an article on a popular gaming website:

Prolonged time playing video games could cause people to lose concentration, get angry easily and have trouble associating with others, a Japanese professor's research has suggested.

In a survey conducted by Akio Mori, a professor in Nihon University's College of Humanities and Sciences, it was found that the longer people spent playing video games, the less activity they showed in the prefrontal region of their brains, which governs emotion and creativity.

What is even more worrying is that according to the study, brain activity in the people who continually played games **did not recover** in the periods when they weren't playing games (emphasis added).^{xv}

Games on video consoles or the computer not only damage our minds, but simply waste our lives away. Time is our most precious asset, and we are to use it for the glory of God:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and world lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present age (Titus 2:11-12 NKJV).

For more information on video games, brain activity, and violence, watch Little Light Ministries' film [Artificial Atmosphere](#).

Well over a decade ago there were more than 3000 scientific studies published on the effects of television on the mind.^{xvi} Research continues on the interrelationship. More than 500 books have been written on the subject. It is one of the most well researched subjects in our culture, yet most people have little awareness of TV viewing's solemn consequences.

Television news programs often publicize lifestyle-related scientific studies, but little is said about the studies done on the effects of television on the mind. We cannot expect the television industry to reveal the truth about itself, but we do not have to remain uninformed.

Six decades after David Sarnoff, President of RCA, unveiled the first television at the 1939 World's Fair, it is time to ask, what is television doing to our country? More specifically, what is television doing to me?

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any (1 Corinthians 6:12 NKJV).

The apostle Paul tells us that we need to be watchful to not be brought under the power of anything other than God. Although television might not be bad in itself, its use is rarely beneficial to us and we need to be careful about falling into its power.

- i. D. Zuckerman, B. Zuckerman, "Television's impact on children," *Paediatrics* (February 1985): 233-240.
- ii. J. Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York, NY: Quill, 1977): 194-196.
- iii. E. Hundt, Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, delivered before the National Press Club, (Washington, DC: July 27, 1995).
- iv. D. Tucker, S. Dawson, "Asymmetric EEG changes as method actors generated emotions," *Biol Psychol* (August 1984): 63-75.
- v. S. Stoleru S, et al., "Neuroanatomical correlates of visually evoked sexual arousal in human males," *Arch Sex Behav* (February 1999): 1-21.
- vi. C. Hammen, R. Henry, S. Daley, "Depression and sensitization to stressors among young women as a function of childhood adversity," *J Consult Clin Psychol* (October 2000): 782-787.
- vii. S. Daley, C. Hammen, U. Rao, "Predictors of first onset and recurrence of major depression in young women during the 5 years following high school graduation," *J Abnorm Psychol* (August 2000): 525-533.
- viii. D. Simons, W. R. Silveira, "Post-traumatic stress disorder in children after television programmes," *BMJ* (February 1994): 389-390.
- ix. M. Baillie, A. Thompson, C. Kaplan, "The terror of television. Anxious children at greater risk," *BMJ* (March 12, 1994): 714.
- x. F. Morris, as quoted in J. Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York, NY: Quill, 1977): 197.
- xi. J. Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York, NY: Quill, 1977): 210.
- xii. H. Krugman, as cited in J. Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York, NY: Quill, 1977): 209.
- xiii. E. Peper, as cited in J. Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York, NY: Quill, 1977): 211.
- xiv. A. Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York, NY: Random House Inc., 1970).
- xv. ["Study Suggests: More Game Less Brain," www.megagames.com \(September 7, 2002\).](http://www.megagames.com)
- xvi. E. Rubinstein, "Television and behaviour. Research conclusion of the 1982 NIMH Report and their policy implications," *American Psychologist* (1982): 820-825.