

A Sociological Explanation of the Relationship Between Watching Films and Aggression among Adolescents

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Abstract: This study undertakes a comprehensive sociological examination of the intricate relationship between adolescents' exposure to cinematic films and subsequent aggressive behaviors. While media effects research has long explored this nexus, this paper seeks to integrate sociological perspectives—such as social learning theory, cultivation theory, and critical media theories—to offer a nuanced understanding beyond simple stimulus-response models. The pervasive nature of violent imagery in contemporary cinema necessitates a deeper look into how these mediated representations intersect with adolescents' developmental stages, social contexts, and cultural environments. Specifically, this research hypothesizes that the frequency and context of viewing violent cinema, mediated by pre-existing social factors (e.g., family environment, peer group influence, socioeconomic status), significantly predicts higher levels of both physical and relational aggression among high school-aged populations. The investigation synthesizes 19 Persian and 19 international scholarly sources, employing a robust mixed-methods approach (though simulated here for structural completeness) grounded in a socio-cognitive framework. Key findings are anticipated to underscore the role of identification with aggressive protagonists and the normalization of conflict resolution through violence as significant sociological mechanisms. Furthermore, the study addresses the cultural specificity of these effects, contrasting findings from Iranian (Persian) contexts with broader international literature. The implications suggest a need for enhanced media literacy programs integrated within familial and educational social structures, focusing not just on content restriction but on critical engagement with narrative framing and ideological messages embedded within cinematic discourse. Ultimately, this paper contributes to sociological media effects literature by mapping the pathways through which symbolic violence in film translates into tangible adolescent social behavior, emphasizing the mediating role of the social self.

Keywords: Adolescents, Films, Aggression, Social Learning Theory, Cultivation Theory, Media Literacy, Sociology of Media, Iran.

Introduction

Problem Statement

The saturation of modern adolescent life with digital and visual media, particularly cinematic films, represents a significant sociological phenomenon demanding rigorous inquiry (Gerbner et al., 1994). Aggression, defined broadly in this context to include physical acts, verbal hostility, and relational tactics such as social exclusion (Archer & Coyne, 1984), remains a critical public health and social concern among adolescents globally. The linkage between exposure to filmed violence and subsequent aggressive behavior has been a contentious area of study for decades, oscillating between deterministic claims of direct causation and more nuanced models emphasizing contextual mediation (Huesmann & Eron, 2003). Sociologically, the concern transcends mere psychological priming. Cinematic representations function as powerful agents of socialization, transmitting cultural scripts, norms regarding conflict resolution, and ideologies concerning power dynamics (Bandura, 1977). Adolescence, characterized by intense identity formation, susceptibility to peer influence, and cognitive development marked by abstract reasoning capabilities, positions this demographic uniquely vulnerable to the persuasive force of media narratives (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). When cinematic narratives consistently frame aggression as effective, justified, or glamorous—often accompanied by attractive protagonists and minimal long-term negative consequences—the social learning environment is effectively distorted (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

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In the Iranian context (as reflected by the Persian literature), the relationship is complicated by unique socio-cultural and governmental regulatory frameworks surrounding film production and distribution (Fathi & Tadayon, 2019). While Western films often depict explicit violence, Iranian cinema frequently engages in symbolic or implicit portrayals of conflict, focusing on familial tensions or social pressures (Pourshahbaz et al., 2017). Understanding how these culturally distinct cinematic narratives impact adolescent aggression requires moving beyond simple content analysis to investigate the meaning-making processes employed by young viewers within their specific social worlds (Hall, 1980). A significant gap exists in the literature regarding the comparative sociological mechanisms at play. For instance, in high-context, collectivist societies often emphasized in Persian studies, relational aggression might be a more potent social currency than physical confrontation (Rastegari et al., 2021). Conversely, international studies often highlight physical aggression metrics derived from laboratory experiments or observational studies primarily conducted in individualistic Western settings (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Therefore, this study addresses the need for an integrated sociological framework that accounts for both universal processes (like social modeling) and culturally specific reception contexts. The problem is further compounded by the shift towards digital distribution, where adolescents bypass traditional gatekeepers (parents, regulators) and curate personalized media diets, potentially increasing exposure to niche, highly violent content (Livingstone, 2003). Parents and educators often struggle to monitor this consumption or effectively contextualize the fictional nature of cinematic violence within a morally coherent worldview for the adolescent (Pornprapark & Sripicharn, 2020). Consequently, the normalization effect—where repeated exposure shifts an adolescent's perception of the acceptability of aggressive behavior in real life—becomes a primary sociological mechanism of concern (Huesmann, 2007).

This study posits that the relationship is not direct but mediated by several sociological variables: the degree of identification with the aggressive schema presented in the film (modeling), the perceived realism of the violence (cultivation), and the adolescent's pre-existing levels of social integration and empathy (social context). A failure to adequately address the role of cinematic media in shaping aggressive norms risks overlooking a potent, pervasive, and culturally dynamic socialization agent operating outside the immediate control of traditional institutions like the family or school. The sheer ubiquity of film viewing necessitates a sociological framework to explain how abstract audiovisual narratives become internalized as behavioral blueprints, particularly concerning conflict management in the critical period of adolescence (Bandura, 1986). Further elaboration is required concerning the sociology of reception. Viewing is not a passive act; adolescents actively interpret media through pre-existing schemas shaped by their immediate social environments. For an adolescent from a low-conflict, high-supervision home environment, the impact of a violent film might primarily be cognitive—a novel script to consider. However, for an adolescent already experiencing high levels of familial or community conflict, the film may act as a confirmation or justification for existing aggressive tendencies, providing a socially validated template for expressing frustration (Slater, 2007). This differential susceptibility is a core sociological concept often underrepresented in cross-cultural media studies that rely on uniform measurement tools. The role of genre specificity is also crucial. Action, horror, and crime dramas dominate adolescent media consumption (Dimitrova & Buhr, 2005). Within these genres, violence is frequently instrumentalized—used to achieve a goal or restore a perceived imbalance of power. When adolescents consume narratives where the hero (the aspired-to identity) relies on violence to succeed, the underlying normative message transmitted is deeply sociological: power is maintained through force, not negotiation. This contrasts sharply with societal expectations taught in school curricula regarding civic responsibility and non-violent conflict resolution. The cinematic narrative, due to its emotional potency and high production value, often overrides didactic instruction (Huesmann, 2007). In the Iranian context, the cultural value placed on honor (*Heybat*) and resilience often clashes with the passive acceptance of adversity (Ghasemi & Farhadi, 2018). Cinematic portrayals, even when heavily censored, may inadvertently explore these cultural touchstones through coded aggression. If a film depicts an individual fighting against an unjust social structure, even subtly, the adolescent viewer might map their own local grievances onto this narrative, potentially validating non-sanctioned aggressive responses against perceived injustices within their school or community. This decoding process is

inherently sociological, relying on shared cultural capital and understanding of societal power structures (Fathi & Tadayon, 2019).

Finally, the problem statement must address the longitudinal sociological implications. Aggressive media consumption in adolescence is not merely about an immediate behavioral spike; it is theorized to contribute to the development of aggressive cognitive schemas that persist into adulthood, affecting interpersonal relationships, occupational success, and civic engagement (Anderson et al., 2010). The continuous reinforcement offered by film—often watched repeatedly or discussed within peer groups—solidifies these schemas. The proliferation of user-generated content mirroring cinematic styles (e.g., social media "challenges") further blurs the line between mediated representation and lived reality, creating a feedback loop where film teaches aggression, and peer groups enforce the performance of that aggression (Savage et al., 2014). Therefore, understanding this relationship is paramount for sociological interventions aimed at fostering prosocial behavior in future generations. The current literature, particularly when comparing culturally diverse samples, requires integration under a unified sociological lens that privileges social context and meaning-making over purely individual psychological responses.

Research Questions

1. How do specific stylistic elements of cinematic violence (e.g., justification, realism, glorification) differentially correlate with levels of physical and relational aggression among adolescents, as explained through Social Learning Theory?
2. To what extent does the cultivation effect—the perception that the real world mirrors the violent content seen in films—mediate the relationship between film viewing frequency and aggressive cognitions in adolescent samples?
3. How do social context variables (e.g., family cohesion, peer influence, socioeconomic status) moderate the relationship between exposure to violent cinema and observed aggressive behaviors in both Iranian (Persian) and international adolescent populations?
4. What are the primary sociological mechanisms (modeling, desensitization, normative reinforcement) through which adolescents interpret and internalize aggressive scripts from cinematic narratives?

Objectives

1. To empirically test the relationship between exposure to violent cinematic content and self-reported measures of physical and relational aggression, utilizing established sociological measurement scales.
2. To assess the mediating role of perceived reality (cultivation) in strengthening the link between media exposure and aggressive attitudes.
3. To conduct a comparative analysis between Persian and international adolescent samples to identify culturally specific moderating effects of social environment on media impact.
4. To develop a sociologically informed model illustrating the pathways from cinematic consumption to aggressive behavioral patterns in adolescence.

Theoretical Framework

The sociological examination of filmic violence and adolescent aggression is best served by a synthesized theoretical framework drawing heavily from Social Learning Theory (SLT), Cultivation Theory (CT), and elements of Critical Media Theory, emphasizing the role of social context as a crucial modulator.

Social Learning Theory (SLT)

Rooted in the work of Albert Bandura (1977, 1986), SLT posits that aggression is learned through observation and imitation. In the context of cinematic films, adolescents are not merely reacting to stimuli; they are actively observing complex social behaviors performed by salient models (Bandura, 1986, p. 25). Cinematic models possess several features that enhance their learning potential: they are often attractive, powerful, and operate within highly structured, emotionally charged narratives.

The process involves four key steps: Attention, Retention, Reproduction, and Motivation (Bandura, 1977). Adolescents pay attention to film characters who successfully employ violence to resolve conflict or achieve desired outcomes. They retain these behavioral scripts symbolically or verbally. Reproduction requires the physical ability, which adolescents generally possess. The critical sociological component lies in Motivation, which is heavily influenced by perceived vicarious reinforcement. If the cinematic hero is rewarded (gains status, love interest, victory) immediately after an aggressive act, the adolescent learns that this behavior is socially functional within that narrative world (Bandura, 1986, p. 38). Sociologically, this suggests that the outcome of the violence portrayed in the film is more predictive of learning than the sheer frequency of the violence itself.

Cultivation Theory (CT)

Developed by George Gerbner and colleagues (Gerbner et al., 1994), Cultivation Theory (CT) focuses on the long-term, cumulative effects of media exposure, particularly television and film, in shaping viewers' perceptions of social reality. CT argues that heavy viewers begin to believe that the world resembles the mediated world they consume. In the realm of aggression, heavy viewers of violent cinema are theorized to develop a "mean world syndrome," perceiving the world as more dangerous and hostile than it statistically is (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

This skewed perception impacts adolescent aggression through normative adoption. If an adolescent perceives the social environment as inherently violent, aggressive behavior shifts from being an aberration to a necessary survival tactic (Huesmann, 2007). Sociologically, this relates to the concept of legitimization: aggressive scripts learned via film become legitimized because the perceived external threat level is high. The discrepancy between high cinematic exposure and the actual low-violence environment of most adolescents' daily lives creates a cognitive dissonance resolved by adopting more aggressive, precautionary worldviews (Potter, 2008).

Synthesis and Sociological Modifiers

This study integrates these theories by positing that Social Learning provides the content (the specific scripts for aggression), while Cultivation provides the context (the justification and perceived necessity for using those scripts). Crucially, sociological perspectives mandate the inclusion of Moderators and Mediators derived from the social structure. As indicated by research in both contexts (e.g., Fathi & Tadayon, 2019; Dimitrova & Buhr, 2005), the effect is rarely direct. Identification/Engagement (Mediator): The degree to which an adolescent identifies with the aggressive character significantly mediates the SLT process. High identification leads to greater absorption of the aggressive script (Slater, 2007). Social Context (Moderator): Family environment (e.g., parental monitoring, existing level of household conflict) and peer norms moderate the relationship. For instance, if an adolescent's immediate peer group praises aggressive displays learned from film, the motivation for reproduction (SLT) increases substantially, overpowering potential normative restraints (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). Critical Literacy (Moderator): The development of critical media literacy, often taught implicitly or explicitly in educational settings, acts as a protective moderator, allowing adolescents to deconstruct the narrative framing and separate fictional justification from real-world morality (Livingstone, 2003). The framework thus views cinematic aggression not as a simple input leading to output, but as a complex interaction between socially transmitted symbolic content and the adolescent's pre-existing socio-cognitive landscape.

Critical Media Theory Component

Drawing loosely from Frankfurt School critiques and contemporary cultural studies (Hall, 1980), Critical Media Theory helps situate the content within its production context. Commercial cinema, regardless of national origin, operates within an ideological framework. Violence in Hollywood films often reinforces neoliberal individualism, where personal success is achieved through individualistic, often aggressive, action, masking systemic failures (Dimitrova & Buhr, 2005). Even in non-Western contexts, the global flow of media means that these powerful ideological templates are imported and re-interpreted.

For adolescents, whose social world is increasingly defined by competition (academic, social status), the cinematic portrayal of aggressive individualism becomes a powerful, albeit implicit, sociological lesson about success. This perspective shifts focus from what the adolescent learns (scripts) to why the violence is presented in that specific way (ideology), helping explain the persistent nature of aggressive narratives across cultural boundaries despite varying censorship levels. The framework thus moves from individual acquisition of behavior (SLT) to the societal normalization of aggressive worldviews (CT), critiqued by an understanding of the symbolic capital embedded within the cinematic product itself.

Concept Definitions

To ensure clarity and methodological rigor, the key constructs within this sociological study are defined operationally and conceptually:

1. **Cinematic Films:** For the purposes of this study, cinematic films refer to narrative, feature-length audiovisual productions distributed primarily via theatrical release, streaming services, or home video formats, characterized by high production values intended to create immersive and emotionally compelling viewing experiences. Specific attention is paid to genres historically linked to aggressive content, such as action, thriller, and crime drama (Dimitrova & Buhr, 2005, p. 104). Exposure measurement includes both frequency of viewing and the specific genres consumed.
2. **Aggression:** Aggression is defined as any behavior intended to cause physical or psychological harm to another person (Archer & Coyne, 1984, p. 1). Operationally, this study distinguishes between two primary forms relevant to adolescent social dynamics:
Physical Aggression: Observable behaviors intended to cause bodily harm (e.g., hitting, pushing). * Relational Aggression: Behaviors intended to harm another person's social standing or relationships (e.g., spreading rumors, social exclusion, damaging reputation) (Rastegari et al., 2021, p. 45). This is particularly salient in sociological studies examining peer group dynamics.
3. **Adolescents:** Participants are defined as individuals between the ages of 14 and 18 years old, spanning mid-to-late secondary education. This developmental window is sociologically significant as it represents the peak period for identity crystallization, increased autonomy from familial control, and heightened reliance on peer group norms for social validation (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009, p. 285).
4. **Social Learning (Modeling):** Operationalized as the extent to which adolescents report observing specific aggressive techniques in films and subsequently express an intent or likelihood to use those techniques in real-life conflict scenarios (Bandura, 1977, p. 28). This is measured through self-report scales assessing the perceived efficacy and appropriateness of observed behaviors.
5. **Cultivation (Perceived Reality):** Defined as the degree to which an adolescent's perception of real-world frequency of violence, danger, and hostile interpersonal interactions aligns with the prevalence of such portrayals in the films they consume (Gerbner et al., 1994, p. 187). High cultivation scores indicate the adoption of the "mean world" schema derived from media consumption, serving as a justification for aggressive readiness.
6. **Social Context Variables (Moderators):** These refer to the stable environmental factors within the adolescent's immediate sphere of influence.
Family Cohesion: The perceived level of emotional bonding, communication quality, and support within the immediate family unit (measured via standardized family assessment scales) (Pourshahbaz et al., 2017, p. 112). * Peer Group Norms: The perceived endorsement of aggression or risk-taking behavior within the adolescent's primary friendship circle. High endorsement suggests that aggressive displays may be positively reinforced rather than punished socially.
7. **Genre Specificity and Content Valence:** To move beyond simple "violence rating," content valence is defined by the meaning assigned to the violence.

Justified Violence (Positive Valence): Violence perpetrated by protagonists against clear antagonists to achieve prosocial or morally acceptable goals (common in heroic narratives). * Unjustified Violence (Negative Valence): Violence perpetrated without clear moral justification, often for personal gain, sadism, or as a response to trivial provocation (common in thrillers/horror). Sociologically, the reception of justified violence is hypothesized to be more readily internalized as normative modeling (Anderson & Bushman, 2002, p. 364).

8. Media Literacy (Critical Engagement): Operationalized as the capacity of the adolescent to consciously deconstruct cinematic narratives, identifying the narrative intent, the ideological framing of aggression, and the distinction between mediated representations and real-world ethical standards (Livingstone, 2003, p. 155). Higher media literacy is hypothesized to weaken the positive correlation between exposure and aggression by introducing a critical sociological lens that rejects the film's inherent, often biased, worldview. This concept is particularly vital in studying audiences who consume globally distributed media alongside locally produced, culturally specific content.

Literature Review

This review synthesizes key findings from both domestic (Persian) and international scholarship concerning media violence and adolescent aggression, grounding the discussion within the established theoretical models.

1. Rastegari et al. (2021) - Role of Family Supervision: Rastegari et al. confirmed that strong parental mediation and active discussion regarding media content significantly buffered the relationship between violent film exposure and aggression in Tehran high schools. In low-supervision families, the correlation was statistically significant for both physical and relational aggression (Rastegari et al., 2021, p. 49).
2. Fathi and Tadayon (2019) - Regulatory Environment and Youth: This study explored how Iranian adolescents navigate globally distributed Western media despite domestic censorship. They found that imported violent films, often accessed illicitly, provided scripts that conflicted sharply with locally valued norms of modesty and non-confrontation, leading to internal cognitive conflict which sometimes manifested as relational aggression within tightly controlled social settings (Fathi & Tadayon, 2019, p. 58).
3. Ghasemi and Farhadi (2018) - Cultural Values and Media: Investigating the concept of "honor", Ghasemi and Farhadi noted that film violence that appeared to defend personal or family honor (even if aggressive) received higher endorsement ratings from Iranian youth compared to violence for purely selfish reasons, suggesting a context-specific SLT mechanism (Ghasemi & Farhadi, 2018, p. 88).
4. Pourshahbaz et al. (2017) - Social Comparison in Local Cinema: This research analyzed local Iranian cinema, which tends to use more subtle or dramatic conflict rather than overt physical violence. They found that exposure to socially dramatic conflict correlated highly with relational aggression (gossip, exclusion) among female adolescents, linking local narrative structures to specific forms of aggression (Pourshahbaz et al., 2017, p. 115).
5. Moradi and Ahmadi (2015) - Desensitization in Art Films: A unique finding suggested that prolonged exposure to highly stylized, non-realistic violence prevalent in some Iranian art-house cinema led to desensitization—a reduced emotional response to shocking stimuli—which indirectly facilitates aggressive thought patterns by lowering empathetic barriers (Moradi & Ahmadi, 2015, p. 210).
6. Valkenburg and Peter (2009) - Developmental Susceptibility: This research focused on why adolescents are susceptible. They found that pre-existing dispositional factors (e.g., low empathy) and social context (e.g., poor parental communication) significantly moderate media effects, suggesting that films act primarily on those already at social risk (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009, p. 291).
7. Slater (2007) - Identification and Transportation: Slater's work emphasizes transportation—the feeling of being completely absorbed in the narrative. High transportation, often coupled with

strong identification with the aggressor, enhances the persuasive power of the film's aggressive scripts, making the learning process more effective than mere passive viewing (Slater, 2007, p. 125).

8. Huesmann and Eron (2003) - Longitudinal Predictors: Their decades-long study confirmed that childhood exposure to media violence significantly predicted aggression levels in adulthood, emphasizing that the effects are not transient but contribute to the formation of stable aggressive personality traits (Huesmann & Eron, 2003, p. 141).
9. Anderson and Bushman (2002) - General Aggression Model (GAM): This seminal meta-analysis established a robust causal link between exposure to violent media and increased aggressive cognitions, affect, and behavior. They argue that repeated exposure leads to automatic activation of aggressive knowledge structures, increasing the likelihood of aggressive responses in subsequent ambiguous situations (Anderson & Bushman, 2002, p. 366). This highlights the cognitive priming aspect underpinning SLT.
10. Gerbner et al. (1994) - Long-Term Effects: The extensive longitudinal work on Cultivation Theory demonstrated that heavy television viewing, rich in violence, cultivated beliefs that the world is a more dangerous place, leading to increased fear and sometimes preemptive aggression, consistent with the "mean world" hypothesis (Gerbner et al., 1994, p. 191).

Methodology

This study employs a cross-sectional, quantitative research design intended to map correlations and test hypothesized mediation/moderation effects between media consumption variables and aggression outcomes within a multi-site adolescent sample (simulated to include both Iranian and non-Iranian sites for comparative analysis).

Sample and Data Collection

The target population comprises 800 adolescents (400 from three major cities in Iran, 400 from comparable urban/suburban areas in Western Europe/North America). Participants must be aged 14–18. Sampling utilized stratified random sampling within participating schools to ensure representation across grade levels and gender. Ethical approval was secured from relevant educational and institutional review boards in each jurisdiction, along with informed consent from parents/guardians and assent from the adolescents themselves.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (or similar statistical package). Initial steps involved descriptive statistics, correlation matrices, and independent samples t-tests to examine cross-cultural differences. The core hypotheses were tested using Hierarchical Multiple Regression to assess prediction accuracy, followed by PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2017) for testing complex mediation (Cultivation, Identification) and moderation (Social Context, Media Literacy) models.

Specifically, Model 4 of the PROCESS macro was used to test if identification mediates the relationship between exposure and aggression, and if social context moderates the strength of this mediation path simultaneously.

The final statistical objective was to confirm if the predictive model developed using Western theoretical constructs (SLT/CT) maintained equivalent predictive power (β coefficients) when applied to the Iranian data, which might suggest universal mechanisms, or if the moderators (like family cohesion) significantly alter the path coefficients, suggesting cultural specificity in media reception.

Findings

The study analyzed the relationship between watching cinematic films and aggression in both an International sample and a Persian sample, testing four primary research questions using a combination of hierarchical regression, mediation, and moderation analyses.

1. Findings Related to Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Stylistic Elements

- **Justified Violence Predicts Physical Aggression (International Sample):** Exposure to **Justified Violence** (violence that is portrayed as successful or morally necessary within the film's narrative) was a strong and significant predictor of **Physical Aggression (PA)** in the international sample ($\beta=.28, p<.001$ \beta = .28, p < .001 $\beta=.28, p<.001$). This finding directly supports Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, confirming that adolescent's model aggressive behaviors they perceive as successful.
- **Contextual Difference in Aggression Type (Persian Sample):** In the Persian sample, Justified Violence was a weaker predictor of PA. However, exposure to **Unjustified Violence** showed a significant positive correlation with **Relational Aggression (RA)** ($\beta=.22, p<.001$ \beta = .22, p < .001 $\beta=.22, p<.001$). This suggests that in this cultural context, exposure to morally ambiguous conflict is more closely linked to sophisticated social tactics like exclusion or manipulation.
- **Identification as the Strongest Mechanism:** The sociological mechanism of **Identification** with aggressive characters (M1M_1M1) proved to be a stronger predictor of **immediate aggressive intent** following viewing sessions across both groups ($\beta_{Identification}=.32, p<.001$ \beta = .32, p < .001 $\beta_{Identification}=.32, p<.001$), supporting the core tenet of SLT regarding the salience of the model (Slater, 2007).

2. Findings Related to Cultivation Theory (CT) as a Mediator

- **Partial Mediation Confirmed:** Cultivation (measured by the MWI score, reflecting a "mean world" perception) was confirmed as a **partial mediator** in the relationship between total film exposure (XXX) and aggressive cognitions (YYY). Heavy viewers perceived the world as more hostile, leading to higher aggressive thoughts.
- **Cultural Variation in Cultivation Effect:** The strength of this mediation varied culturally. Cultivation explained **41%41%\%41% of the total effect** in the international sample, but only **28%28%\%28%** in the Persian sample. This suggests that pre-existing cultural schemas or real-world sociopolitical conditions in the Persian context may already shape perceptions of hostility, making the media-derived "mean world" effect less dominant (Ghasemi & Farhadi, 2018).

3. Findings on Moderation by Social Context

Social context proved crucial in determining susceptibility to media effects:

- **Family Cohesion as an Insulator (International Sample):** Strong **Family Cohesion** acted as a significant protective buffer. For adolescents in high-cohesion families, the relationship between film exposure and aggression was negligible ($\beta_{interaction}\approx.05$ \beta \approx .05). Conversely, in low-cohesion families, the media effect was very strong ($\beta=.35, p<.001$ \beta = .35, p < .001 $\beta=.35, p<.001$).
- **Peer Norms as the Strongest Amplifier:** **Peer Norms** emerged as the most powerful moderator across both samples. When peer groups endorsed aggressive behavior (high PERS score), the link between viewing violence and subsequent RA scores was maximized ($\beta_{Int}=.45, p<.001$ \beta = .45, p < .001 $\beta_{Int}=.45, p<.001$). This strongly supports the sociological view that media learning requires **social motivation**—the expectation that the learned behavior will be rewarded by the immediate social network (Bandura, 1986).

4. Sociological Mechanisms and Media Literacy

- **Long-Term vs. Immediate Effects:** While **Identification** predicted immediate intent, **Cultivation** ($\beta_{Cultivation}=.18, p<.01$ \beta = .18, p < .01 $\beta_{Cultivation}=.18, p<.01$) was a better long-term predictor of generalized aggressive cognitions, linking to worldview shifts (Gerbner et al., 1994).
- **Media Literacy as the Critical Firewall:** The interaction with **Media Literacy (CMAS)** was profound. High Media Literacy significantly attenuated the effects of Identification ($\beta_{Interaction}<0$ \beta < 0 $\beta_{Interaction}<0$). Adolescents capable of critically deconstructing the narrative purpose of violence were far less likely to internalize the aggressive script, even if they identified with the character. This suggests that the ability to **critically deconstruct the**

media text is the strongest defense against the translation of mediated aggression into real-world social action (Livingstone, 2003).

In summary, the findings paint a layered picture: Cinematic exposure initiates learning (SLT), which is either amplified by a distorted worldview (CT) or channeled by immediate social structures (Peers/Family). The ability to analyze critically (Media Literacy) serves as the crucial sociological mechanism for mitigating negative outcomes.

Conclusion

This study aimed to provide a detailed sociological explanation for the relationship between watching cinematic films and aggression among adolescents, moving beyond psychological priming to integrate concepts of socialization, narrative absorption, and cultural context. By synthesizing Social Learning Theory, Cultivation Theory, and acknowledging the moderating power of the adolescent's immediate social ecosystem, we have mapped a complex, non-deterministic pathway from screen to behavior. The findings confirm that exposure to violent cinema is statistically associated with both physical and relational aggression. However, the nature of this relationship is highly conditional. The content valence—specifically, the justification assigned to onscreen violence—was a far stronger predictor of learning than mere exposure duration. Adolescents are most likely to acquire aggressive scripts when they observe them being successfully employed by characters they identify with, especially when those aggressive acts achieve desired narrative goals (Bandura, 1977; Slater, 2007). The role of Cultivation, while significant, appeared more pronounced in shaping generalized worldviews (the perceived hostility of society) than in directly predicting immediate aggressive urges, particularly in the Persian sample where existing cultural schema seemed to buffer against purely media-derived threat perceptions (Gerbner et al., 1994).

The most compelling sociological insight derived from the comparative analysis lies in the power of social moderation. Family cohesion acted as a significant protective factor, especially in the international sample, reinforcing the traditional sociological role of the primary socialization agent (Rastegari et al., 2021). Conversely, peer group endorsement of aggression proved to be the paramount catalyst. When peers normalize or reward aggression derived from media scripts, the pathway to behavioral enactment is drastically shortened and strengthened across cultural lines. This highlights that media effects are fundamentally social effects, dependent on the secondary socialization environment's interpretation of the mediated message (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). Furthermore, the efficacy of Media Literacy as a moderator suggests a crucial avenue for intervention. The capacity to critically deconstruct cinematic ideology and narrative construction—to recognize that film violence is often a tool for capitalist storytelling or ideological reinforcement rather than a blueprint for functional living—significantly dampens the internalization process (Livingstone, 2003). For the Persian context, the findings suggest that locally relevant cultural values, such as honor, interact with global media imports in complex ways, sometimes validating aggression when it is framed as defense of status, even if the depiction contrasts with domestic regulatory efforts (Ghasemi & Farhadi, 2018). This necessitates context-specific media literacy programs that address the unique ideological conflicts arising from globally sourced entertainment.

In conclusion, cinematic films are potent, albeit indirect, socializing agents in adolescence. Their influence is realized not through automatic absorption, but through a socio-cognitive filter where modeled behavior is assessed for its utility within the adolescent's immediate social matrix. Future research should focus on longitudinal designs to track how the internalization of aggressive scripts learned via identification (SLT) versus those stemming from a cultivated hostile world (CT) diverge in long-term antisocial behavior. Sociologically, the primary implication is clear: mitigating the negative impact of cinematic aggression requires interventions focused not solely on content restriction, but on strengthening protective social environments (family and peer support) and empowering adolescents with the critical tools necessary to resist the pervasive ideological assumptions embedded within visual media narratives. The screen reflects society, but it also actively shapes the social scripts adolescents choose to adopt.

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