



The Demon of the Flickering Light

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 10 April, 2004 - 16:42

by **Alan Forrester**



Suppose that somebody told you that if you were exposed to a particular pattern of flickering, coloured lights it would cause you

later to take unwise or immoral actions without being able to control yourself. You might well be sceptical. After all, how a person responds to a pattern of flickering light is dependent on their interpretation of that light.

Consider, for example, a red light. If the red light is on a police car and the person viewing it is a criminal, then it might inspire fear in the criminal because he interprets the red light as signifying that might be arrested. If a person is looking at a flashing red light inside a nuclear power station then it might signify an emergency and might inspire fear.

Conversely it could inspire bravery since the person might think that he must rescue somebody who cannot get out on his own. If the red light is in a bedroom, then it might inspire amorous feelings.

Now suppose the red light spells out the word "kill". Will people tend to go out on killing sprees if they see such lights? Obviously not. Imagine that you live in a flat and your roommate knows you don't like horror films and is mocking you, in which case you might be either annoyed or amused. So even when the light carries a message, how a person responds to it is dependent on their interpretation of it.

Furthermore, a person may change their interpretation of the red light, with or without a message, very rapidly indeed. For example, if the criminal sees that the policemen have come to arrest somebody else, on whom he has planted evidence, then he may reinterpret the flashing on the police car as reassuring. If the red light in the bedroom is on because the bulb has blown and she is replacing it with an unsuitable spare because she has flu, then his interpretation of the red light may no longer make him amorous.

However, now a study from the University of Washington in Seattle **claims** (<http://www.reuters.com/newsArticle.jhtml%3Bjsessionid=LI1OPVZOIB44CCRBAEKSFEY?type=healthNews&storyID=4751344>) that toddlers who watch too much television have attention deficit problems in later life and that parents should limit their child's access to television:

The data from 2,500 children covered by the study found that they watched an average of 2.2 hours per day at age 1 and 3.6 hours per day at age 3. But some watched 12 hours or more.

The ages are significant because brain development continues through those years, the study said.

Already we see conclusions being drawn which have no basis in the study. If brain development is relevant at all, it could equally well be that a bad television programme has *less* effect on people who have no idea what it is about because their brains aren't yet up to it. As usual, psychologists draw conclusions not from experiment but from their own prior assumptions, and then present them as if they were consequences of a corroborated scientific theory.

“This study suggests that there is a significant and important association between early exposure to television and subsequent attentional problems,” said Dimitri Christakis, a physician at Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center in Seattle who headed the study...

“There is a tremendous and growing reliance on television for a variety of reasons. However parents should be advised to limit their young child's television viewing,” Christakis said.

A television programme is a pattern of flickering light (and sound) that conveys certain ideas. So, as we have already seen, how a person responds to it is dependent on their interpretation of it. If a television programme conveys bad ideas then a parent ought to explain why those ideas are bad. Any other stance presupposes that toddlers do not think, which is contradicted by the many things that toddlers learn in their first few years of life.

However, let's go a little deeper. When we look at the **diagnostic criteria** (<http://www.mentalhealth.com/dis1/p21-ch01.html>) for Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), something very disturbing emerges. This set of criteria purports to be an objective, medical diagnosis but the description could not be much further from an objective diagnosis. Take these quotes: “often leaves seat...[when]...remaining seated is expected” and “often talks excessively”. By whom is the seating expected and for what purpose? Since such expectations are subjective what are they doing in a medical diagnosis? Whose standards are being used to judge whether speaking is deemed excessive? Again, is this not a subjective determination that has no place in a medical diagnosis? We could go through the entire diagnosis, but we trust our point has been made. ADHD is not a medical diagnosis, it is a moral judgement dressed up as a medical diagnosis. What is more, it is a moral judgement that favours a bad set of moral standards. An authoritarian creed according to which children should not be given a choice over whether they sit or stand or have a conversation. Children who want to walk around when they wish and have conversations when they wish are entirely sensible, those who wish to stop them are not.

This is reminiscent of the medieval idea of demonic possession. Back then, when somebody did something the authorities disapproved of, they might say that he was possessed by demons and punish him, supposedly for the good of his immortal soul. In this sophisticated day and age, the authorities deem television and other such new fangled gadgets which convey dangerous ideas like freedom and critical discussion, to be the new demons causing innocent children to stray from the flock. However, there is no demon in the pattern of flickering light on a television screen waiting to sink its claws of light into a child's skull. The light only contains ideas that the authorities dislike and they ought to stop pretending otherwise.

to post comments

Comments

The bad of television

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 12 April, 2004 - 07:27

I wish you were right about the flashing lights of television providing children with ideas of freedom or critical discussion. I doubt it. Children conceive tv as a flashing light for their first year, of maybe two, but when it doesn't move that fast for them anymore they're exposed. They see sexism and violence in a way which often

doesn't enable a parent to explain. Besides that, needs for material goods are awakened. Being visually exposed is a very sneaky but effective way which is used by the commercials to get the message across unconsciously. It's not some ADHD we should be worried about but these bad ideals. Like the girls having to be pretty in a certain way, and a happy family happening to be in a big shiny car and so on. Children can't be critical about it, as most adults can't either.

[to post comments](#)

I love what you say about adh

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 25 April, 2004 - 06:36

I love what you say about adhd! I find it all too true, except of course there are people with it. There are also people who like yellow better than blue, they should invent a pill to "fix" this disorder. The references to the study on television, however, only glaze the surface, and show no real understanding of studies on this. We are not talking about the harm of the message, we are talking about the harm of the way it is delivered. Much as radiation can hurt someone, even though we can't see or feel it, light that we watch, or a child watches, can affect them. (This of course is fallible, as is the theory that a person can get "drunk", but that doesn't mean it should be dismissed without further study) I truly believe human beings tend to act like those around them. If you truly understand brain development, it makes perfect sense that this is more so, the earlier into the brain development stage. So although our ideas of "good" and "bad" may differ, not informing a child that what they view on television is likely to affect them, is irresponsible and controlling, as it is withholding information that they could use to make a decision with. I take studies like this to be written to the general public which, from what I've seen, coerces small children into watching TV, as a baby sitter, because they are given few other entertaining options (look at these books you can't read yet by yourself or watch TV which is a little more self explanatory) Not to mention the violence and "give me" stuff tends to be IMO coerced onto them by lack of choice of what to watch. If there were as many shows available at any time of day as there are books in a library, would they really "choose" to watch violence? I am sure the number of kids who would choose a violent book from a whole library is much smaller than those who would choose to watch a violent show when it came on. I find the TV very controlling, as I don't choose what I watch, I only choose if I watch what someone else has decided to show. I tend to avoid it BECAUSE it makes me frustrated with the level of control someone else has over it. What if food was like TV? How many children under 2 really WANT to watch TV all day? At all (when given other choices that appeal to them)? Yes, we are all different, and so I'm sure there are some. For those who have children who like to watch TV of any age, I would encourage them to try to give them a much wider range of choice (videos give much more choice than preprogrammed - OK does that make anybody else feel "programmed" - TV) than is available just on TV.

[to post comments](#)

Er, what?

Submitted by Alan Forrester on 27 April, 2004 - 01:32

"Yes, it's the ideas that TV conveys that parents dislike, they usually don't pretend on that. Not only bad ideas like "kill kill" but ideas like "buy buy" and other little lies that are hard to contradict."

So it's wrong to buy things?

'Also, I believe if you close a person in a room for a certain amount of time with a red flickering light saying "kill kill" the person is likely to go mad.'

And this is relevant how? We're talking about a pseudojustification for depriving children of television. We're not talking about locking them in a room with a television against their will.

to post comments

Television and Conformity

Submitted by David Deutsch on 27 April, 2004 - 14:16

I find it, frankly, terrifying that this hatred of knowledge and freedom is so prevalent in our society, and these empty, opportunistic arguments purporting to justify it are taken seriously by scientists and lay people alike.

It is simply not the case that standards of appearance, clothing, spending patterns or any other aspect of life-style have been narrowed by television, for they have not been narrowed at all. You only have to watch an old movie or read a classic novel to see that lifestyles in all these respects are incomparably more diverse now than they were before television was invented. You only need to look at sub-cultures in which children are forbidden to watch television to see that every one of them has standards of appearance and behaviour that are insanely rigid by the standards of the television-watching sector of our society. And the same is true of every country where television watching has yet to become widespread, or where television really is used as a means of enforcing a monoculture.

to post comments

You're giving me Intermittent Explosive Disorder

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 28 April, 2004 - 04:42

I wonder if anybody has investigated the link between reading these type of studies and **Intermittent Explosive Disorder** (http://allpsych.com/disorders/impulse_control/explosivedisorder.html)?

I have a 14 month old daughter. She enjoys watching TV but is very selective about what she watches, presumably because she doesn't understand most of what she sees. Her favourite movie is *Monsters Inc.* and she likes to watch it on DVD time and time again. Oftentimes she will take the DVD from the shelf and hand it to me as an indication that she wants to watch it. She has clearly learnt a lot from these repeat viewings. She now knows that the action will unfold in a predictable way and can recognise what is coming next. I am not going to deny her this fun and educational experience. And it would be wrong for me to do so.

Isn't it funny that children exposed to television between the ages of 1 and 3 start to show "symptoms" of ADHD some 4 years later?

Brian Scurfield

to post comments

tv and reality

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 31 May, 2004 - 19:45

Television is not real and has mega bucks to pour into advertising and attraction grabbing marketing so why would this type of media be something I should want to allow child to watch unconditionally? Why would anyone want to allow their child to be subjected to this billion dollar advertising gimmick all in the name of "uncensorship" or allowing a child the right to choose? It seems ridiculous to me.

[to post comments](#)

TV is good

Submitted by Alan Forrester on 1 August, 2004 - 01:35

Some person wrote:

'Television is not real and has mega bucks to pour into advertising and attraction grabbing marketing so why would this type of media be something I should want to allow child to watch unconditionally?'

TV allows a child low cost access to lots of great ideas about thw world that child and parent can discuss. It also gives access to may conflicting viewpoints about which people can argue.

It also allows them access to interesting fantasy worlds. Exploring these worlds and their consistency and so on provides valuable practise in exploring new ideas.

I don't understand the relevance of the objection about advertising. If people like television that they are willing to give TV companies money to sponsor the activities needed to make TV programmes, such as good advertising, then why is that bad?

[to post comments](#)

ADHD and chemicals

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 10 August, 2004 - 07:47

well to be totally honest my research into health has shown me that ADHD is not caused by TV but rather by exposure the the chemicals that are used in our environment and in our foods. consider the fact that most people regularly get their homes fumigated with organophosphates which are highly neurotoxic and how that may affect an unborn child. and i know of several cases where this has definately been the case. try looking for multiple chemical sensitivity on the web and you will find a lot of information and think carefully before just strait out blaming TV though the electromagnetic fields they put out are quite bad for you too as are many of our household appliances today. microwaves are some of the worst for it and the actually kill a lot of the nutrients in out food as well

[to post comments](#)

Chemicals and ADHD

Submitted by Alan Forrester on 11 August, 2004 - 00:14

'try looking for multiple chemical sensitivity on the web and you will find a lot of information and think carefully'

A correlation between the presence of chemical and diagnoses of ADHD are irrelevant for two reasons. The first is that ADHD is a rationale for coercion, not a disease. The second is that the correlation in and of itself proves nothing, especially since pesticides are usually present in the environment in quantities so low you would have to live for a million years to get a dangerous dose. However, more to the point, there isn't any known mechanism by which chemicals can give rise to a complex set of behaviours like a child acting bored. The problem-situation in the child's mind can do this.

Looking for multiple chemical sensitivity also strikes me as rather desperate. The larger the number of chemical you look at the greater the chance that you will think you see a correlation where there is only random noise. There was a television show I saw once in which a bloke went around leaving tape recorders in empty rooms claiming to hear the whispers of dead people in the sounds recorded on the tape. Naturally, all of these 'dead people' only spoke a couple of words and none of them seemed capable of managing a full sentence. This chap found patterns because he wanted to find them, not because they actually existed. Similarly, if you just look for a correlation rather than having a specific theory in mind that would rule out some patterns and not others you're bound to find something that looks meaningful.

to post comments

television is a drug

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 2 November, 2004 - 18:02

it's one of the ways that the domination system of gov & big business keeps the masses stupefied.

most children's shows are obviously more about turning the children in to tiny consumers than about presenting an entertaining &/or edifying story. and it's not just the commercial breaks; the shows themselves are often nothing but commercials for this or that stuffed animal or action figure or what-have-you.

the more we feel free to buy buy (within our economic capabilities)the more we mistake this for real freedom & the less unsatisfied we'll be with this modern life--at least until we need to make another purchase.

meanwhile the companies own us. they provide us with our wage-slave incomes & then they take it from us with all this meaningless stuff which, by the way, we could do without or grow or make ourselves if we weren't made so lazy & so helpless by their tactics.

& this works just fine for the gov who doesn't have to worry about all us consumptive, listless couch potatoes rising up in revolt to the injustices of their capitalist/war machine/repressive society.

to post comments

caution with correlations

Submitted by LF (not verified) on 10 February, 2005 - 22:35

I do not doubt the findings of the University study. I am willing to assume that their statistics are accurate, that higher/lower rates of TV viewing predict higher/lower rates of ADHD in later childhood. There is no reason to doubt their basic data (unless emotional reasoning causes you to doubt what you don't like). However, their INTERPRETATION of the data is more than a bit premature.

Any basic introductory course work in research methodology will hit you over the head with this point "a correlation does not imply causation". That is to say, from survey or observation, we can know that two variables are associated but this does not imply that one causes the other to happen.

The correlation between TV viewing and ADHD diagnosis may be due to many possible reasons, such as: a) early TV viewing leads to later symptoms of ADHD b) children diagnosed with ADHD simply LIKE TV more than other kids, therefore watch it more even in early childhood c) children diagnosed with ADHD are more "difficult" so their parents use TV as a babysitter more frequently d) a certain parenting style causes children to have more ADHD-type behaviors AND allows more TV viewing e) exposure to ____ (fill in the blank, such as Wonder Drug X) causes both ADHD and a propensity for TV viewing f) and so on

Where the University researchers went wrong is not in finding the connection, but in their suggestion that one of the various possible conclusions was the correct one. The only way to really know if TV causes ADHD is to do a properly controlled experiment with randomized assignment of young children to specific levels of TV viewing. Somehow I don't think this controlled research sounds practical, leaving things up in the air.

PS: Freedom and critical discussion on TELEVISION?! All I can say is hmmm, I must be missing some channels.

to post comments

You are missing some channels

Submitted by Alan Forrester on 7 June, 2005 - 12:34

LF wrote:

Freedom and critical discussion on TELEVISION?! All I can say is hmmm, I must be missing some channels.

Parents can critically discuss the content of programmes with their children after watching the programme, if the child is interested.

Aside from Sarah's observations on the merits of TV soap operas, other TV programmes have merits too. *The Simpsons* and *South Park* both raise controversial issues with different characters taking different views. CNN and Fox News often have different interpretations of the same event. Then there are history programmes which sometimes present different interpretations of the same set of historical events. The freedom and critical discussion aren't quite as wide as they are on the internet, but that's primarily an issue of how expensive it is to make TV programmes.

to post comments

Southpark is awful show i

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 9 April, 2006 - 23:43

Southpark is awful show i would.nt want any child watching that

to post comments

this is interesting stuff

Submitted by Sebastan (not verified) on 25 September, 2006 - 02:41

this is interesting stuff indeed. the not so illumined elite have devised the utter destruction of our species and we as a collective have bought into it hook,line,and sinker.

to post comments

Cause of ADD and ADHD

Submitted by [L K Tucker \(not verified\)](http://VisionAndPsychosis.Net) [.\(http://VisionAndPsychosis.Net\)](http://VisionAndPsychosis.Net) on 23 May, 2007 - 03:38

There is a problem of human physiology discovered when it caused mental breaks for office workers in the 1960's. The cubicle was created to deal with that problem and where they are used the mental breaks stopped.

Too-close side-by-side seating in classrooms is the same design problem.

Humans quickly learn to consciously ignore detected movement in peripheral vision to be able to continue to concentrate but we do not have voluntary control of the brain system that subliminally detects movement in peripheral vision.

This problem is called Subliminal Distraction in the field of Design.

There is little exposure in classrooms compared to unprotected business offices because students do the same things at the same times. There is rarely human traffic walking beside a student who is concentrating to a level of slight dissociation. But some exposure will happen.

This is probably the source of ADD, ADHD, and Indigo Children.

VisionAndPsychosis.Net is a psychology project about Subliminal Distraction.

to post comments

you miss the point. They are

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 13 October, 2007 - 00:14

you miss the point. They are saying that the brain possibly becomes rewired, so to speak. It's not exactly flashing lights, its that the images do not appear in 'real time.' The stimulation is excessive and the brain learns to adjust to it.

to post comments

A Medical Disorder Called ADHD

Submitted by [CS \(not verified\)](http://www.adhdquestionsandanswers.com) on 12 March, 2008 - 05:42

A very interesting read. It certainly provides parents and educators another point of view as to the real cause of ADHD.

to post comments

Truth about negative phenomena

Submitted by [a reader \(not verified\)](http://www.truthofpsychosis.com) on 13 April, 2009 - 08:52

I would like to say, as someone who has suffered with psychosis in the past that no matter how much we are told that we have a mental illness we know after reading scripture that it is an affliction that we suffered from and not mental illness. ADHT and other labels are all man made for the benefit of giving a name for a diagnosis, thus being able to supply drugs to that person, to the benefit of the pharmaceutical industry. The fact that we have a labelling system for the brain is laughable. Many of these toxins like seroquel and depakote should be given to the children of psychologists so they can see the permanent damage being done to them. I succeeded in being healed, not cured, as I refused all my drug treatment at the time of my affliction. I knew what I had from "Day one". The mental health department is beginning to take note of spiritual afflictions even though it denies God. If I said I was healed by singing, reading a book and getting on my knees every day you would say I am nuts.....but if you would only read scripture and find there are healing powers available and that Satan is using tv and the internet for it's resources of sinful material, then you would be doing justice to the sufferer. What right have unbelievers got to impose their lack of knowledge, or Western Society knowledge on sufferers ? Sufferers do not lie. They have no reason to lie. I suggest that psychologists study physics and theology and religious history and archaeology. Oxygen, nitrogen, air, electricity, gravity and magnetism all are accepted but not seen. What is the problem of belief here ? Spiritual affliction has no more relevance to mental illness any more than an Englishman has to learning Kung Fu. Do you think that people were less intelligent centuries ago because they did not have our technology ? Would you trust a seventy five year old aspirin or a five thousand year old herb tried on trillions of people ? Then there is something amiss..... Demons do exist. Get real and do your non-Western society research.

to post comments

What exactly makes you think

Submitted by [a reader \(not verified\)](#) on 3 January, 2010 - 21:16

What exactly makes you think we're not being given depakote and seroquel? Try looking around the web for the phrase "children of psychologists" (for extra credit, swap in "psychiatrists") and see what you find.

I'll help you along the way: lots of broken people. You haven't got the worst of it. You may have been born with whatever neuroses you were given, but I guarantee it wasn't from birth and continuing through to the death of your parents.

Good luck with that self-pity.

(trillions of people, chuckle..)

to post comments

ADHD

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 18 April, 2010 - 04:49

"However, more to the point, there isn't any known mechanism by which chemicals can give rise to a complex set of behaviours like a child acting bored."

Not true. Damage to known parts of the frontal lobe of the brain (say from strokes or head injury) predictably recreates attention-deficit symptoms, including impulsivity and easy boredom.

There are many excellent conjectures explaining this phenomena including that frontal lobe nerve centers inhibit limbic activation of the brain, and limbic activation can cause strong emotionality and impulsivity. Failure to inhibit the limbic system, because of frontal lobe damage, causes impatience and emotionality.

It is coercive to deny a child access to medications that can help him or her focus and concentrate better, if he or she needs it to focus and concentrate.

It is illogical to assume that because a child has a medical diagnosis (like ADHD or diabetes) that the diagnosis should not be given because the parent can then use it to hurt (coerce) the child.

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