

# Media Violence And The Cathartic Effect On Televisuals

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## ABSTRACT

In our modern age, electronic media usage is prevalent in almost every part of the world. People are more connected than ever before with easy access to highly portable devices that allow for media consumption at any time of the day. Televisuals violence deals with two concepts: the real violence present in informative broadcasts, especially in the news, and the fictional violence present in movies, television movies or in TV series. The concept that doing something to “vent” aggression as a method of reducing aggressive feelings and behaviors, such as watching media violence or playing violent video games, continues to enjoy widespread public support despite a lack of empirical support. This paper describes the historical origins of the concept and examines how well these conceptions fit with the modern usage of the aggression catharsis. It is argued that there are four primary flaws with the catharsis hypothesis. First, the metaphor underlying Freud, Breuer, and Lorenz’s conception of aggression is flawed, aggression is not a drive. Second, although Aristotle did use the term catharsis with relation to violent media (plays and poetry), he did not mean that viewing media violence can purge the viewer of aggressive feelings or behaviors. Third, the empirical support is not only lacking, a large empirical base contradicts the catharsis hypothesis. This is seen both in studies attempting to demonstrate catharsis directly and in the broader media violence literature. Fourth, human neuroscience contradicts the catharsis hypothesis, learning is not hindered by viewing something one more time—it is improved.

**Keywords:** Media Violence, The Cathartic Effect, Televisuals

## INTRODUCTION

There are many studies of the effect of media violence on viewers, and over a dozen meta-analyses of the studies. All of these meta-analyses, including those of the critics, tend to find almost identical results Anderson, 2010. That is, they consistently find a small to moderate effect of media violence on aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This empirical consistency has led several prominent public health organizations (e.g., the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, two U.S. Surgeons General, the American Psychological Association, the International Society for Research on Aggression, among others) to conclude that media violence is one causal risk factor for aggression. Nonetheless, despite this general consensus within the public health community, there is still a common belief that playing violent video games or watching violent TV/movies allows people to “vent” their aggressive inclinations and therefore behave less aggressively after playing/watching. This is known as the aggression catharsis hypothesis.

The word Catharsis is derived from the Greek word which is translated as ‘cleansing’ or ‘purification’. Most of the definitions emphasize two essential components of Catharsis; the emotional aspect (strong emotional expression and processing) and the cognitive aspect of Catharsis (insight, new realization, and the unconscious becoming consciousness) and as a result- positive change. Catharsis Theory stands a vital mantle in the discourse on upshots with regard to severity of mass communication and it’s far ranging roots over a time. Catharsis serves as a purifying factor to collective channel sources of information’s such as radio, television, newspapers, and the cyber internet that may inevitably incorporate

unappealing visuals that can be harmful not only for the viewing public but can also be destructive means to the mindset of the most minor fans of the said mass media (Feshbach 1974).

Catharsis is an emotional discharged through which one can achieve a state of moral or spiritual renewal or achieve a state of liberation from anxiety and stress. It is a Greek word that means “cleansing”. In literature it is used for the cleansing of emotions of the characters. It can also be any other radical change that leads to emotional rejuvenation of a person (Feshbach 1974).

The term “catharsis” is use as a metaphor in poetry by Aristotle to explain the impact of tragedy on the audiences. He believes that catharsis was the ultimate end of a tragic artistic work and marked its quality. He further said in poetry, tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of certain magnitude through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.

He further described catharsis as “purging of the spirit of morbid and base ideas or emotions by witnessing the playing out of such emotions or ideas on stage” (Aristotle, 1982).

Breuer & Freud,( 1974) described catharsis as an involuntary, instinctive body process, for example crying. Schultz and Schultz (2004) defined catharsis as “the process of reducing or eliminating a complex by recalling it to conscious awareness and allowing it to be expressed”. Freud, S (1983) also defines catharsis as expressing or getting out of one’s aggressions and anger reduce the feelings of aggression.

However the often debated notion that media violence allows to vent off steam, which leads to a reduced likelihood of aggressive behavior has failed to receive empirical support. The effect of media violence is not limited to aggressive behavior, but as a consequence of violent media usage and attention to problems arise as well as a pro-social behavior decreases .

The study of television violence deals with two concepts: the real violence present in informative broadcasts, especially in the news, and the fictional violence present in movies, television movies or in TV series. The real violence present in the news is often justified by television producers through the necessity of a warning that should make the public defend themselves or avoid acts of violence. In reality, this act of presenting violence in a spectacular, sensational manner is economically motivated. The competition between channels, the desire to attract audience and advertising determined the presence of violence in a spectacular dramatized manner that first of all speculates human sensitivity and, in order to do this, they recur to sophisticated ways that make the best of the artistic, narrative, linguistic and iconic resources of the television discourse (Moreno, 1946).

The catharsis effect mechanism is decoded through that, that in their daily life, people are confronted with frustrating situations which can lead to acts of violence. The catharsis offers liberation from these frustrations through imaginary participation in acts of violence and aggression present on television.

The ones who are most exposed to the negative effects of media violence are children who, according to psychologist Albert Bandura, (2004) do not have the capacity of realizing if something should be imitated or not because they do not have the knowledge and the values that should underlie their discernment. By watching the same film or television show a child will understand the message differently in comparison to an adult. Therefore, watching a big number of acts of violence induces to the child or the teenager the idea that violence can be a normal way of living. The world is seen through Manichaeism; any confrontation has a positive and a negative character, a winner and a loser.

Catharsis theory has played an important role in the discussion about the effects of violence in the mass media for many years, (Violence as media content and its effects). The theory is used in communication research, it implies that the execution of an aggressive action under certain conditions diminishes the aggressive drive and, therefore, reduces the likelihood of further aggressive actions. The crucial point in catharsis theory is that the observed aggressive actions do not necessarily need to be executed in reality- it can instead take place in the actors fantasies or in the media (symbolic catharsis).

With the worsening materials used by the media as of late, the existence of catharsis in the middle of it serves as like a redeeming cleansing sponge that acts as a scouring element to pools of murky world of Mass Communication. The implementation of the assertive measures of the Catharsis supposition may lessen the alarming push of vulgarities and misgivings and misconstruing of mass media. However, it may not certainly be rendered literally, but it can likely be manifested in a performer’s mental inventiveness (Brill, 1995).

In our modern age, electronic media usage is prevalent in almost every part of the world. People are more connected than ever before with easy access to highly portable devices (e.g., laptops, Smartphone's and tablets) that allow for media consumption at any time of the day. Unfortunately, the presence of violence in electronic media content is almost as prevalent as the media itself. Violence can be found in music, television shows, video games, and even YouTube videos. Content analyses have shown that nearly all media contain violence, irrespective of age rating Linder, et al, 2009. It is therefore important to ask: What are the consequences of pervasive exposure to screen violence? One consequence of media violence exposure, hotly debated by some in the general public, is increased aggressive behavior. This relationship was investigated in many studies using experimental, longitudinal or cross sectional design. These studies are summarized in meta analyses, which support the notion that media violence increase the likelihood of acting aggressively. This link can be explained by an increase of aggressive thoughts, a more hostile perception of the environment and less empathic reaction to victims of aggressive behavior.

### **Violence as a TV show**

Researches regarding the consequences of television aggression and violence have proven that the feeling of isolation common to big TV consumers has increased, the tendency to redraw from reality has become stronger and the phenomenon of alienation from the community of those strongly depended on media has become more pregnant. This research had as basis three premises: the cathartic effect thesis, the violence elicitation thesis and the consolidation effect thesis. The most criticized are the aggression and violence displayed in entertainment shows where the violent act is promoted as a justified normal component of civilized models.

Other studies draw the attention on the fact that violence is much more baleful when it is repeatedly displayed in TV broadcasts or articles. Thus the influence of violence present in the products displayed by mass media is an insidious step-by-step cumulative process whose effects are neither directly visible nor immediate.

The television channels, which are always in search of rating, exploit isolated conflicts that are of no importance, but which shock through the trivial language both parties use.

Most of the tabloid shows in the Romanian television (*Happy Hour, Acces direct, Drept la int , Can Can TV*) emphasize the confrontations between two or more so called stars leaving behind the causes of the conflict and through a mobilization effect the scandal is presented as an "event". This kind of coverage often becomes some sort of publicity, even if it's a bad one, some so-called stars resorting to media so as to remain one way or another in the public's attention.

For a pertinent analysis of the violence displayed in entertainment shows and especially of the symbolic violence we should also bear in mind the **mental contagion** (Zamfir & Vișeanu, 1998) which establishes the spread and generalization among the masses of a psychological state, ideas, attitudes and feelings. This display has a more or less involuntary character and acts especially on the unconscious level. Among the psychological states spread through mental contagion we encounter panic, anger, exaltation, etc. The leveling of the interior mood is accomplished through three mechanisms:

- i. Imitation – the tendency of each person to do the same things as the others;
- ii. Suggestibility – a state in which people become receptive to the images, directions and statements of others;
- iii. Circular reaction – a process in which others' emotions are felt by someone with a bigger intensity, after which they are rapidly resented to others who feel them even more intense.

Nowadays television encourages **empathy** which is a phenomenon of cognitive and affective approach towards a concrete subject (in our case, the viewer) that goes until the point of identification and role substitution.

Empathy can be defined as "the substitute imagination through which a person assumes the perceptions, judgments and emotions of another person in a determined situation from a series of situations" (Zamfir & Vișeanu, 1998). Violence results from the fact that the viewer assists to a scandal unrepresentative for the public and whose base isn't solid enough.

In other situations false representations are created around certain subjects through the generous space they're allocated. Although the event is an obscure one and the protagonists have no authority in any domain, the techniques used by the producers give importance to the moment and leaves the viewer the impression that the subject is truly relevant. Furthermore through repeated display, provoking headlines and spectacular images the subjects remains in the viewer's mind although his/her interest in the matter may be minimum.

### **Application of the Theory**

Catharsis theory has been applied in the media such as TV reality show. Many people achieve their dream by joining TV reality show such as "Winfrey Oprah ", Reality show "and others. And what is more interesting, mostly the winners of the TV reality show become so famous and they end up building amazing careers in all spheres of life. Moreover, the catharsis theory has been applied in dramas and movies. For instance, if people watch horror movies such as "Doom Seekers" they would feel frightened and scared. They would still remember the frightening scenes even though they watched that drama or movie long time ago. To reduce their fright, they need to watch calm films such as "Coming to America" by Eddie Murphy, Blood Money a Nigerian movie (Nollywood) they would feel calm and peaceful.

### **Criticism of the Theory**

Bushman (2002) admitted that 'venting anger' does not help to reduce anger and should not be used in therapy. Jemmer (2006) argued that traumatic experience, if repeatedly relived in catharsis, can be relearned and become harmful. Bohart (1980) demonstrated that expression of anger does not produce the relief or anger reduction. According to Kennedy- Moore & Watson (1999), the ineffectiveness of 'venting anger' are generalized to all cathartic experiences, therefore catharsis based therapeutic techniques are claimed to be ineffective. Scheff (2001) stated that an extremely important point that effectiveness of catharsis in therapy depends on balancing the past distress and feeling of safety and support in the present. Scheff (2001) argued that in cases of major repressed traumatic events verbal recall alone is not sufficient for a permanent positive therapeutic change. The repeated somatic-emotional discharge of grief, fear, and anger with appropriate distancing and support are important components for success.

Violence can be seen frequently every day. It does not matter if we are children or adults, we can be aggressors, victims or witnesses of an aggression. The genetic material, the family and the social entourage, but also the lack of an authentic cultural and social values system justified by the economical and transition crisis induce panic, incertitude, insecurity that push us towards aggressive behavior that can be triggered in any moment. While books, newspapers, the radio and the telephone are means of linguistic communication, the television, whose name, through the prefix "tele", means seeing from afar, brings in front of the public images from every corner of the world and leaves the voice, the word in the background. Therefore "the viewer is more like a viewing animal than a symbolic animal" (Sartori, 2006).

### **Media Violence and the Cathartic Effect**

Is viewing violence cathartic? The large amount of violence in the mass media is often justified by the concept of catharsis. The word catharsis comes from the Greek word *katharsis*, which literally translated means "a cleansing or purging." The first recorded mention of catharsis occurred more than one thousand years ago, in the work *Poetics* by Aristotle. Aristotle taught that viewing tragic plays gave people emotional release (*katharsis*) from negative feelings such as pity, fear, and anger. By watching the characters in the play experience tragic events, the negative feelings of the viewer were presumably purged and cleansed. This emotional cleansing was believed to be beneficial to both the individual and society.

### **Modern media violence**

The idea of catharsis as the "venting" of a drive isn't what the term meant when it was initially applied to media and media violence. The term catharsis (κάθαρσις) was discussed by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. The earlier Platonic view of music, plays, and poetry was that they held a dangerous power, because they could indulge the emotions. Because media often described acts of morally inferior people making unwise choices, and that viewers received pleasure from watching them, this could inculcate poor values.

“For they must beware of change to a strange form of music, taking it to be a danger to the whole...”  
“Yes,” I said, “since it’s considered to be a kind of play and to do no harm.”  
“It doesn’t do any either,” he said, “except that, establishing itself bit by bit, it flows gently beneath the surface into the dispositions and practices, and from there it emerges bigger into men’s contracts with one another...” Bloom, A. (1968)

Aristotle shared the Platonic goal of creating men of good character, but he disagreed that shielding people from poetry (which included music and plays, the mass media of his time) was a valuable method for achieving it. He agreed that poetry had powerful emotional effects, but did not feel that emotions were of low character or to be necessarily avoided. The emotional effects of media were a key point for him. In the *Poetics*, he includes catharsis in his definition of a tragedy:

*A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.* McKeon, R.1941

It is unclear from this mention of catharsis that Aristotle really means something about the viewer Brown, L.A.2013. Because he seats catharsis within the definition of tragedy, and the *Poetics* is about literary critique, he may intend catharsis only to mean the pleasure that is received from having a play reach its appropriate conclusion. Dramatic tension is built up in and during the play, and catharsis is achieved for the story by reaching a resolution that feels satisfying. Given, however, that he references specific emotions being aroused, it is perhaps more likely that he does mean something about the viewer. Assuming it is about the viewer, it is critical how one translates the word κάθαρσις. Traditionally, scholars have tried to find a direct and literal translation, and have used either purgation or purification. The purgation interpretation is rooted in medical usage of healing or curing the body and purification is an interpretation in a moral sense of cleansing the spirit.

Although most people tend to interpret Aristotelian catharsis as purgation, this interpretation seems particularly awkward, especially in the light of his broader writings. What would it mean to purge emotions of fear or pity? He notes that these emotions need to be aroused by the play, which is the opposite of removing them (more will be said about these emotional requirements later). Aristotle was almost certainly not referring to merely eliminating particular emotions through tragedy. If his broader goal is to create moral and just people, then removing pity seems to be antithetical to that end. Translating catharsis as *purification*, in contrast, fits very well with Aristotle’s goal to create men of good character. In this context, purification is part of the process of finding the middle between emotional extremes. This middle way, or mean, is a core foundational aspect of virtue to Aristotle. As he states in the *Ethics*: [Virtue must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate. I mean moral virtue; for it is this that is concerned with passions and actions, and in these there is excess, defect, and the intermediate. For instance, both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue. Similarly with regard to actions also there is excess, defect, and the intermediate. Now virtue is concerned with passions and actions, in which excess is a form of failure, and so is defect, while the intermediate is praised and is a form of success; and being praised and being successful are both characteristics of virtue. *Therefore virtue is a kind of mean*, since, as we have seen, it aims at what is intermediate.

We can now understand better what Aristotle means when he says a tragedy can “accomplish its catharsis of emotions”. By demonstrating the damage that unbridled emotions can have, viewers can learn about the dangers. By feeling extreme emotions that are aroused by the tragedy, it allows one to experience them in a third-person manner, such that the viewer will not act upon them and therefore act unvirtuously. This ability to feel the extremes and view the consequences acted out by an actor or poet allows the viewer to begin to find the mean between the extremes. Assuming for now that Aristotle was

accurate, he makes it clear that the story must be told in a very specific manner in order to help viewers find the middle path via catharsis, Four requirements are\ described below (although there are more):

(A) The plot must be constructed according to very specific rules:

“...the Plot must be not simple but complex; and further, that it must imitate actions arousing fear and pity...It follows, therefore, that there are three forms of Plot to be avoided. (1) A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, or (2) a bad man from misery to happiness. The first situation is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious to us. The second is the most untragic that can be; it has no one of the requisites of Tragedy; it does not appeal to the human feeling in us, or to our pity, or to our fears. Nor, on the other hand, should (3) an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness into misery. Such a story may arouse the human feeling in us, but it will not move us to either pity or fear; pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves....There remains, then, the intermediate kind of personage, a man not preeminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment...The perfect Plot, accordingly, must have...the change in the hero’s fortunes...from happiness to misery; and the cause of it must not lie in any depravity, but in some great error on his part”

(B) For catharsis to occur, two critical emotions *must* be aroused, fear and pity. Aristotle notes that these can be aroused by either Plot or Spectacle (e.g., special effects), but he also makes it clear that the feared action doesn’t need to be seen. It can happen off stage. Furthermore, he states that Spectacle is less artistic and could be used just to “put before us that which is merely monstrous” and not productive of fear and pity.

(C) Beyond inducing fear and pity, however, he notes that it is critical *how* the “tragic pleasure” of fear and pity are aroused. The conflict should arise *between friends* (rather than among enemies or combatants) for it to be truly tragic and arouse the proper emotions. Furthermore, the conflict should arise out of a mistake, not from any hostile intent. Aristotle notes that if the plot is not constructed carefully and correctly, it gets the wrong emotional responses, such as shock and revulsion McKeon, R. 1941.

(D) Fourth, the characters must be of a certain type to get the right kind of response for achieving catharsis. “In the Characters there are four points to aim at. First and foremost, that they shall be good...what a personage says or does reveals a certain moral purpose; and a good element of character, if the purpose so revealed is good....The second point is to make them appropriate. The Character before us may be, say, manly; but it is not appropriate in a female Character to be manly, or clever.

The third is to make them like the reality....The fourth is to make them consistent and the same throughout; even if inconsistency be part of the man before one for imitation as presenting that form of character, he should still be consistently inconsistent....The right thing, however, is in the Characters just as in the incidents of the play to endeavor always after the necessary or the probable....Tragedy is an imitation of personages better than the ordinary man... McKeon, R.1941.

Therefore, to arouse fear and pity, the characters must be noble, good, appropriate, realistic, and consistent. The importance of this can be seen when we revisit Aristotle’s broader theory of emotions. Aristotle felt that emotions were important in making correct decisions and in forming a good character. As quoted above from the *Ethics*, he makes it clear that it is important to learn to feel the correct emotion the correct amount at the correct time toward the correct object Janko, R. 1987.

Furthermore, it is important to feel the emotions lightly. If one feels them too strongly, we will make inappropriate decisions, which will injure our character. For example, the person who feels too much fear is a coward and the person who feels too little is foolhardy.

One of the main factors in building good character is to develop the settled disposition to feel emotion correctly Janko, R. We become good by habitually doing good, so by feeling emotions correctly (the mean between the extremes), we make correct decisions, and do the right things. In the *Ethics*, Aristotle notes that finding the mean between the extremes is difficult, and is grasped by perception, not by reasoning. For this reason, plays and poetry have an ability to help viewers perceive the feelings and their meaning in a way that rational cognition cannot.

To Aristotle, poetry (including music, speeches, and plays) has the educative function to form good character. By representing pitiable and terrifying events, tragedy arouses pity and fear, giving these

emotions harmless exercise, helping the viewer learn how to find the mean in their emotional responses, and thus become more virtuous in their characters. With this relief comes the cathartic pleasure. Aristotle also suggested that catharsis can be achieved through comedy (although his book on comedy has been lost). What we do know from his extant writings is that for it to work, comedy needs to be based on the ridiculous, which he defined as a kind of error neither painful nor destructive. If injuries are sustained (physical, emotional, or psychological), the injuries must have been done in ignorance, without harmful intent. Returning to the translational issue of purgation versus purification, it makes little sense to say that comedy *purges* us of pleasure or humor. It seems much more likely that he means one could *purify* the extremes of passions (emotions) and actions by witnessing absurdities. If we take this analysis as the starting point for understanding catharsis, it is clear that modern media violence could not achieve the catharsis of aggression. Aristotle repeatedly notes that catharsis requires feelings of fear and pity. Considering violent action/adventure movies from an Aristotelian perspective, there is certainly much Spectacle and its attendant fear response, but there is usually no pity aroused. Instead, most violent media arouse fear and revenge motivations, or fear and anger. The “bad guy” does something bad, the “good guy” fights with him, and ultimately wins. We do not pity either character, although we may feel fear or shock. If we consider violent video games, the player is rewarded for committing the violence, and feelings of anger, hostility, and enjoyment are aroused. Thus, modern media violence is not designed in the ways necessary to produce the cathartic emotions. Arousing fear and pity alone, however, is not sufficient—they must be aroused by an undeserved misfortune to a noble person. In most action/adventure movies, the “bad guy” is shown to deserve what he gets, and the “good guy” usually isn’t the person who has the tragic thing happen to him. Furthermore, the tragic thing is supposed to be created by the hero's error, not by any depravity. In most action/adventure movies and almost all horror films, the horrible actions are caused by a depraved individual. Furthermore, the tragic occurrence is supposed to happen between friends or family members, who do not intend any harm, but have harm occur through error. Aristotle clearly states that the plot must be constructed thus if catharsis is to be achieved—the injuries must come from accidents or errors, and be between friends. If bad things happen to the bad guy, that’s justice, which produces a positive feeling rather than fear and pity.

Note also that in most of today’s comedy shows, much of what passes for funny are people being sarcastic or hitting each other, rather than being mistakes “not productive of pain or harm to others” (McKeon, R.1941)

In violent video games, the plot usually tends to justify the violent actions. When the plot does not justify the actions (c.f., the *Grand Theft Auto* game series), the motivations for violence tend to be due to what Aristotle would consider depravity, or at least are not out of error while trying to achieve moral good. In summary, although Aristotle was indeed discussing catharsis occurring from viewing media (including both violent and humorous media), modern media violence does not follow the rules necessary for catharsis to occur. They do not follow the correct Plots nor do they engage the correct emotions to achieve catharsis. It should also be noted, however, that the likely accurate Aristotelian definition of catharsis as purification is not what is usually meant by the modern aggression catharsis hypothesis, which assumes that viewing violence purges the viewer of aggression (as in the hydraulic metaphor discussed earlier). Therefore, Aristotle did not mean catharsis as a reduction in aggressive feelings or behaviors, and even if he had, modern media violence are not constructed in the way to achieve it.

### **Future Development of The Theory**

Bullough (1912) discussed that a work of art, such as theatre, needed to be at an aesthetic (optimal) distance from emotion, neither too far (over distanced) nor too close (under distanced). Theatre would make people to identify with some of the characters. Furthermore the identification must be to the point that they react to the play as if what is happening to the characters is happening to them. Thus, cathartic messages can be conveyed through play, by watching how the characters act in the play like in real life situation. Also, movies and dramas that have cathartic messages make people feel more relaxed and pleased whenever they watched them., emotions such as fear, anger, grief and shame, which are ordinarily

painful, can be experienced as increasing not only the interest of the audience, but also providing pleasure.

A film released in 1999, directed by David Fincher, starring Brad Pitt, Edward Norton and Helena Bonham Carter, *Fight Club* movie is best fitted an example for this type of theory. The film is all about lawlessness and unutterable mayhem, so to speak. In the movie, an anonymous “voice-over” played by Edward Norton, suffers from insomnia. Taking part in a club of testicular cancer patients, he gained his very own catharsis after deceiving the patients making them think that he also endures the same ailment, after he lost his house in a sordid blast. He then called a soap merchandiser portrayed by Brad Pitt whom he met on a flight home. Tyler asked him to punch him in the face. Their duel with a clash of bare fists carried on until it has provoked men to construct a “Fight Club” headed by Tyler wherein they can indulge in brawling for leisure purposes. A certain substance abuser known as Marla, portrayed by Helena Bonham Carter, tries to contact the “voice-over” but ends up with sexual engagements with Tyler. This movie is all about mental manipulation wherein a sly “controller” eventually found himself the one who got apparently being controlled in the end.

The catharsis effects mechanism is decoded through that, that in their daily life people are confronted with frustrating situations which can lead to acts of violence. The catharsis offers liberation from these frustrations through imaginary participation in acts of violence and aggression present on television.

#### **Catharsis effect and media**

The sociologists’ studies (Rieffel,2008) have identified three theories regarding the framing and the approach of the media violence in television:

- a. The aggression theory that includes four types of effects:
  - The catharsis effect through which the aggressive and violent urge is released;
  - The effect of social learning, of getting close and imitating the violent act and the violent “heroes”;
  - Unrestricted – encourages the aggression trigger and the violent act without any restrains ;
  - Stir and imitation that represents the direct instigation towards violent behaviour.
- b. The desensitization theory that has two types of effects:
  - The individual emotionality is reduced to stimuli represented by acts of violence and as a consequence indifference towards real or media violence appears;
  - Violence becomes common which means that the reactions to the surrounding violence is attenuated and even accepted;
- c. The fear theory that includes two effects-processes:
  - The incubation process that consists in the progressive settling of the feeling of fear and insecurity;
  - The cultivation phenomena that has as a result the mistaking of “world reality” with “media reality” which has a high content of violence.

The catharsis effect mechanism is decoded through that, that in their daily life people are confronted with frustrating situations which can lead to acts of violence. The catharsis offers liberation from these frustrations through imaginary participation in acts of violence and aggression present on television. The term catharsis comes from the Greek word *katharein* which means to clean, but also from the term *kathares* which means purity, cleanness. The catharsis is defined as a sublimation of emotions, liberation of *Maria Florea / Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 92 ( 2013 ) 349 – 353 351 passions through art. From a psychiatric point of view, the catharsis is a therapeutic effect obtained through a release of a repressed feeling.

Wolfgang Michaelis argues that when dealing with the catharsis hypothesis we must differentiate between two directions. The first belonged to the Greek philosopher Aristotle who claimed that man purifies his/her emotions by representing his/her own problems in the tragedy. This idea was taken by the Austrian psycho-analyst Sigmund Freund who tried to demonstrate that the inner pressure decreases once an aggressive act is completed.



The second direction in the catharsis theory was laid down by Konrad Lorenz, a well known Austrian ethologist, who won a Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1973. Lorenz sustains that the probability of doing new acts of violence is smaller after an aggressive activity. All these studies have shown that there are a series of variables that influence the cathartic effect. The experiments made have shown considerable differences determined by sex, based on hormonal reasons, but the conclusion was that the pressure can be cut back through friendly behaviour or through liberation.

Another theory argues that the aggressive acts lead to catharsis only when they are accompanied by rage (Eibl–Eibesfeldt, 2009). The lack of emotional implication, also known as cold aggression, increases the probability of the aggressive act to repeat itself. On the other hand, the pressure produced by instigations is cut back if the instigation seems to be justified. Eibl-Eibesfeldt claims that the tendency to attack is also minimized by the presence of a third person who determines the cease of insults. The concerned person is pleased, especially when the mediator tells him/her that the aggressor has been punished.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although the aggression catharsis hypothesis has great appeal and popular support, the evidence suggests that it is not a valid concept in psychology: (1) Aggression is not a drive that must be vented, so the underlying Freudian assumption is incorrect. (2) Even if we accept that Aristotle meant something about purging negative emotions through viewing media violence, modern media violence is not constructed in the way he said is necessary to achieve catharsis. Furthermore, purification is likely a much more correct way of translating κάθαρσις than is purgation, so even if Aristotle was entirely correct, viewing media violence would not reduce aggressive feelings but instead should teach us the dangers of acting on them (assuming the media portrayed it correctly and did not glamorize the violence). (3) In the hundreds of studies of media violence, catharsis has not been shown to work—rather the opposite has been demonstrated repeatedly. Furthermore, studies specifically designed to demonstrate catharsis have also failed to support it. (4) Finally, given the way the brain works, catharsis does not even make sense. We do not become less likely to learn something by practicing it, reading it, or seeing it one more time. Every repetition *increases* learning.

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