

**Media Violence:
A Cross-National Comparison of Canadian and Swedish Youth**

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Arts

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Media Violence; A Cross-national Comparison of Canadian and Swedish Youth
Valerie Anne Hiebert

ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades research has increasingly focused upon the relationship between youth media violence consumption and youth aggression. While some studies suggest that media consumption has no harmful effects, other studies suggest a causal relationship. Current policy debates reflect this academic argument. The present research addresses this debate through a comparative, cross-national examination of physical and non-physical aggression of youth in Canada, where there are no legislative restrictions on youth media violence consumption, and youth in Sweden, where media violence consumption is closely restricted by legislation. Rates of physical aggression were compared using the youth crime rates of assault, sexual assault, and murder/attempted murder. Rates of non-physical aggression were compared using youth crime rates of unlawful threat, as well as bullying, bullying victimization, and peer helpfulness rates. All physical and non-physical aggression indicators used (as listed above) were provided by Statistics Canada, the Swedish National Institute for Crime Prevention, and the World Health Organization. In all sixteen years examined (1991 – 2006), and across all indicators, Canadian youth aggression and non-physical aggression rates were higher than those observed in Sweden. This research suggests a cross-national, comparative associational relationship between youth media violence consumption and youth physical and non-physical aggression.

Media Violence: A Cross-National Comparison of Canadian and Swedish Youth

Thesis

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CHAPTER 1

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Over the past 25 years, research attention has been increasingly paid to understanding the potential connections between rates of youth violence and children's exposure to media violence. While some researchers suggest that media violence is not harmful or may even have positive effects (Fowles, 1999; Freedman, 2002; Trend, 2007), others argue that there is not only a significant association between exposure to media violence and aggressive behaviour, but that this link may be causal (Anderson, Berkowitz, Donnerstein, Huesmann, Johnson, Linz, Malamuth & Wartella, 2003; Gentile, 2003; Josephson, 1995; Villani, 2001).

Current policy debates in North America reflect this academic argument. While some lobbying organizations advocate continued protection of freedom of speech and artistic expression, others push for greater restrictions on children's exposure to media violence. With the incidence of school shootings on the rise and increasing public concern about youth violence, the debate increasingly centers on the role of legislation in limiting the nature and degree of media violence accessibility in the public market.

But would such legislation actually lead to a reduction in youth aggression? This question can be addressed through a comparison of youth aggression in a nation where children's exposure is highly restricted to that found in a nation where such exposure is much less controlled.

Purpose of the Present Study

It is the purpose of this study to provide information for policy makers and legislators regarding the issues surrounding youth media violence consumption by comparing youth

aggression in a nation where children's exposure is highly restricted (Sweden) to that found in a nation where such exposure is much less controlled (Canada). This will be done by examining the youth crime rates of both nations. While popular conceptions assume that the structure and implementation of youth justice is directly responsible for the rates of youth crime (discussed in more detail in chapter 3), a brief overview of criminology literature quickly reveals that though "youthful offending may affect the youth justice system...youth justice systems probably have very little impact on youthful offending" (Tonry and Doob: 2004, 20). It is the broader cultural landscapes that shape the cognitive, psychological, and ultimately behavioral ethos of the youth culture, which then translates into youth crime. If, as the research indicates, media violence consumption potentially produces negative, anti-social, and occasionally violent behavior, one would expect to find this reflected in a comparison of the respective youth crime rates of the nations of Canada and Sweden.

The current total number of experimental, correlational, and naturalistic research projects related to media effects conducted by researchers in various disciplines is well over one thousand. These studies have covered a broad range of measurements, factors, and approaches, but there has been no cross-national comparative work to date. To be effective in developing theory and policy, and "being able to make statements about structures larger than an individual or the small group, the social sciences must be comparative" (Peters, 1998:25). Hence, the comparative nature of this research is both unique and particularly valuable to policy makers and legislators who are constantly dealing with how large structures effect individuals and small groups. And while Canada and Sweden differ significantly in their policy approaches to media violence, as nations

they also share many significant similarities which function as ‘controls’ in this comparative study (Olsen, 2002). Both are democratic, “advanced, industrialized, and highly affluent capitalist nations.....[with] standards of living that are among the highest in the world” (Olsen, 2002:10).

Literature Review

From the earliest recordings of human history through to the present, violence has always been a part of human society. The mid to second half of the twentieth century has seen increasing interest on the part of behavioral scientists attempting to understand and explain the human propensity toward violent behavior. Using the term *human aggression*, generally defined as the “intent to cause harm” (Anderson and Bushman, 2002: 28), research has focused on a wide variety of contributing factors ranging from short-term factors such as pain, hot temperatures, alcohol, and the presence of weapons, to long-term factors such as self-esteem/ego threat, aggression cues, and aggressive memory constructs/behavioral scripts (Anderson, Anderson, Dill, & Deuser, 1998; Anderson, Deuser & DeNeve, 1995; Baumeister, Smart & Boden, 1996; Berkowitz & LePage, 1967; Bushman, 1993; Bushman, 1998; Geen & O’Neal, 1969). While it is true that violence is as old as human history, the new expression of human aggression that has garnered considerable public and research attention, as noted above, is that of media violence.

Unlike overt forms of violence such as those studied in the past century, media violence is a covert form of human aggression due to its vicarious nature. The consumer is not a violator, rather merely an on-looker, experiencing the thrills of violence/aggression vicariously. However, the preponderance of media violence research

argues that this vicarious experience of aggression/violence is producing literal aggression/violence.

Two of the primary media that permeate current North American youth culture with images and ideologies of violence are television/film and video games. An overview of the early empirical work examining the effects of media violence (1960 – 1980) on youth behavior appears to show a wide range of seemingly contradictory findings with some research showing little correlation between media exposure to violent images and aggressive youth behavior, and other studies showing a very strong correlation between the two (Josephson, 1995). An understanding of the evolution of media violence explains this seeming contradiction. Studies examining the short and long term effects of media violence first began in the late 1960s, and until the early 1980s showed limited cause for concern, as the strength of the correlation found between media exposure and child aggression varied widely. But in the past two decades there has been a new wave of studies examining the correlation between exposure to media violence and aggressive behaviors and attitudes in youth, and the results of this research have been markedly different from that conducted earlier. What accounts for this? In an environment that is “continually evolving in terms of violent content” (Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2004:8), many of the early studies have become outdated, because they were conducted in an era when “Atari dominated the market [of video games] and the graphic capability of games was very simplistic to the point that video game violence was largely abstract and rarely involved violence between humans” (Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2004:9). Current video game graphics are startlingly realistic, involving first-person engagement with the violence being committed on the screen – that is, the child

playing the game becomes the perpetrator of the violence. This evolution toward increasingly graphic and realistic depictions of violent images is also true of television portrayals of violence.

Since the mid-1980s, three types of research have dominated the field of media violence effects. The first type consists of experimental studies in which research participants are randomly assigned to view violent or nonviolent media and then are later assessed for various forms of aggression. This type of research demonstrates correlation, and occasionally causation, but is often criticized for lack of external validity. The second type of media violence research consists of cross-sectional correlational studies (sometimes referred to as naturalistic studies), which measure existing situations and media consumption habits, thus drawing correlational conclusions regarding the links between media violence and real-world aggression. While this type of research is very strong in external validity, it cannot effectively demonstrate causation. The third type of media violence research consists of longitudinal studies which repeatedly measure media violence consumption patterns and subsequent aggression over a long period of time. Longitudinal studies demonstrate external validity and some degree of causation (Anderson, Berkowitz, Donnerstein, Huesmann, Johnson, Linz, Malamuth & Wartella, 2003; Anderson & Bushman; and Taylor, 2003). This triangulation approach to research, which has produced consistent findings for the past 20 years, is considered to be “one of the strongest research platforms in all of psychology” (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). The collective findings demonstrate strong causal/correlational links between exposure to violent images (television or video games) and both physical and non-physical (verbal, cognitive, anti-social behaviors) aggression in youth and adulthood.

Before the research findings in these areas are examined, definitions of key variables are necessary. *Physical aggression* is measured in the research as “causing harm by direct physical means, such as by hitting, tripping, stabbing, or shooting” (Anderson, Gentile, & Buckley, 2007:13). *Violence* is the most extreme form of physical aggression. On a continuum of physical aggression, pinching and slapping would be at one end, and violent behavior such as shooting or stabbing would be at the other. Craig A. Anderson, one of the most prolific and prominent researchers on media violence, offers a definition of *media violence* that is frequently employed in some form in a large majority of the research: “Violent media are those that depict intentional attempts by individuals to inflict harm on others. An “individual” can be a nonhuman cartoon character, a real person, or anything in between” (Anderson & Bushman, 2001:354).

Exposure to Television and Film Violence and Youth Physical Aggression

In an experimental study (Josephson, 1987) seven- to nine-year-old boys were randomly assigned to watch either a violent or non-violent film, after which they engaged in a floor hockey game while their interactions were observed for physical attacks. The observers did not know which boys had seen the violent or non-violent film. Physical attacks were defined as hitting, elbowing, shoving, tripping, kneeing, and pulling hair. Boys who had scored higher on aggression scales, and had watched the violent film had significantly increased assaultive behavior relative to both the aggressive and non-aggressive boys who had watched the non-violent film (Anderson, Berkowitz, Donnerstein, Huesmann, Johnson, Linz, Malamuth, & Wartella, 2003; Josephson, 1987).

Williams (1986) conducted a unique correlational/naturalistic study in a Canadian town that had no previous television exposure, but which was about to receive television.

Williams measured pre-television and post-television child aggression rates and compared them to those of two similar towns (control groups) which received television throughout the study. Aggression indicators were children's interactions in schoolyard free play, teachers' ratings, and peer ratings. Williams found that child aggression rates increased significantly post-television, strongly suggesting that television viewing is related to aggressive behaviors. Other naturalistic/field studies demonstrate the same aggression increases when television is introduced into a community (Hennigan et al., 1982; Joy, Kimball & Sabrack, 1985).

While such field experiments are rare, a large number of experimental studies have consistently demonstrated causation between watching violent scenes and subsequent short-term aggressive behaviour (e.g. Bushman & Huesmann, 2001; Comstock, 1980; Geen & Thomas, 1986; Zillman & Weaver, 1999). Short-term effects include "priming existing scripts and cognitions, increasing physiological arousal, and triggering an automatic tendency to imitate observed behaviours" (Craig, Berkowitz, Donnerstein, Huesmann, Johnson, Linz, Malamuth, & Wartella, 2003:81). To "prime" is to put something into working order, or prepare it for immediate 'firing'. In the same way watching violent scenes on television or film 'prepares' an individual to act violently.

Although longitudinal studies are less common than those measuring short-term effects, their number is increasing. The first major longitudinal study began in 1960. A representative sample of 856 eight year-olds in New York were surveyed in 1960, and then again in 1970. Level of exposure to media violence at age eight was significantly related to aggressive behaviours at age eighteen (Eron, Huesmann, Lefkowitz, & Walder,

1972). A study conducted in Chicago also demonstrated that viewing television violence between the ages of six and ten predicted young adult aggressive behaviour fifteen years later (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski & Eron, 2003). A study conducted by Johnson et al. (2002) in which young adults were assessed at ages fourteen and twenty-two, demonstrated that “television exposure at 14 significantly predicted assault and fighting behaviour at 16 or 22 years of age, even after controlling for family income, parental education, verbal intelligence, childhood neglect, neighbourhood characteristics, peer aggression, and school violence” (Anderson, Gentile, & Buckley, 2007:29). This study also demonstrated that early television exposure predicts rates of fighting and assault at age thirty.

These types of long-term effects produce “several types of learning processes leading to the acquisition of lasting (and automatically accessible) aggressive scripts, interpretational schemas, and aggression-supporting beliefs about social behaviour” (Craig, Berkowitz, Donnerstein, Huesmann, Johnson, Linz, Malamuth, & Wartella, 2003:81) as well as desensitization and habituation. Three meta-analyses of the effects of media violence consumption have demonstrated both short-term and long term increases in physical aggression due to film and television violence exposure (Hearold, 1986: Paik & Comstock, 1994, Wood, Wong & Chachere, 1991).

Exposure to Video Game Violence and Youth Physical Aggression

Because the rise of violent interactive video games is so recent, its effects have not yet been examined as extensively as those of film violence. However, early findings suggest that the effects of video games on increased aggression might be greater than exposure to TV and film violence. The implications of these findings are compounded by: 1) the

increasing amounts of time children/youth spend playing video games; 2) the greater proportion of violence in video games compared to that in television/film; 3) the “first-person shooter” involvement of the player, which allows the child to ‘hold the gun’, and actively commit acts of violence, shooting aliens, enemies, monsters, and human beings.

The gaming industry has argued that video games have less powerful effects than television because their graphic quality is poorer and the violence is more abstract, and is perpetrated against non-human creatures such as space aliens or robots. (Gentile & Anderson, 2003). However, these arguments are losing credibility in the face of the increasing sophistication and realism of video games of which the primary premise is that of one human being killing another. Researchers have argued that rather than being less harmful, video games are actually more harmful than television violence (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Gentile & Anderson, 2003; Gentile & Walsh, 2002) on the basis of five principles of learning, as described by Gentile and Anderson (2003).

The first learning principle relevant to this issue is that *identification with the aggressor increases imitation of the aggressor*. To play a video game, it is necessary to take the point of view of the aggressor, but it is not necessary to take the view of the aggressor in order to watch television. The second relevant learning principle is that *active participation increases learning*. While television allows for passive participation, video gaming requires active participation in the conduct of violence. The third principle is that *practicing an entire behavior sequence is more effective than practicing only part*. To “kill” a victim in a video game, it is often necessary to go through the entire sequence of purchasing a weapon and ammunition, loading the weapon, stalking the victim, aiming the weapon and shooting. This process is repeated every time the game is played. While

watching television can involve observation of behavior sequences, it does not involve practicing them. The fourth principle is that *repetition increases learning*. While children do not usually watch the same television show repeatedly, they often play the same video games over and over. Moreover, while television violence is only sustained for a few minutes before the scene is changed, in a violent video game the entire process is virtually uninterrupted violence from beginning to end. The fifth principle is that *rewards increase imitation*. In video games, every aggressive act gives the player an advantage, either by eliminating an opponent or accruing points. In the case of television, while vicarious reinforcement of aggression can occur, the viewer is not rewarded directly.

David Grossman (1998), a military expert on the psychology of killing, has stated that video game violence creates the same stimulus-response reactions to shoot or destroy that the army uses to train soldiers to kill instantly without thinking. He also pointed out the classical conditioning aspects of video game violence, noting that, through playing such games, children learn to associate watching and creating images of human suffering and death with their favorite snacks within an enjoyable social context (Grossman, 1998).

Evidence supporting the link between violent video gaming and child aggression is accumulating in studies of school shooters, almost all of whom have been avid violent video gamers (Anderson, Gentile, & Buckley, 2007). In April of 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who murdered 13 people and injured 23 at Columbine High School in 1999, were obsessive gamers. Harris had created a customized version of their favorite game, *Doom*, that included two shooters, unlimited ammunition, shooters that were immune to harm, and victims that could not fight back (Anderson & Bushman, 2001).

Many other school shootings have been linked to violent video gaming. For example: 1) Kentucky, 1997 - Despite having no firearms training, fourteen year-old Michael Carneal shot his victims with considerable accuracy (nine shots in ten seconds, eight of which were hits). He had learned to shoot from the video game *Doom*. The families of the victims filed a lawsuit against 25 entertainment companies (Insight on the News, 1999). 2) Blacksburg, 2007 - Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 people and wounded 25 others at Virginia Tech. He was an avid video game player (The Inquirer, 2007). 3) Red Lake, 2005 - Jeff Weise killed 10 people and wounded seven. He used various video games to plan his attacks (Game Critics.Com, 2005).

Without systematic research, these incidents remain primarily anecdotal and cannot provide conclusive correlational/causal evidence. However, the correlation between the rise of video game violence and violent school shootings over the past fifteen years has drawn considerable attention to this newest form of media violence.

Though not a school shooting, the behavior of Devin Moore also suggests a link between violent video gaming and aggression. In the summer of 2005, in Fayette, Alabama, Moore killed two police officers and a radio dispatcher. Moore, also an avid gamer, with a particular liking for the popular game *Grand Theft Auto* (in which players shoot police and steal cars), stated shortly after his arrest that “Life is a video game; everybody has to die sometime” (fradical.com, 2005).

Research on violent video game effects, both experimental and longitudinal, has produced results similar to the research on the effects of television and film violence. Irwin and Gross (1995) found that hitting, shoving, pinching, and kicking between boys who had just played a violent video game was significantly greater than among those who

had played a non-violent video game. Anderson and Dill (2000) found that students who had acted aggressively in the past year (hitting, threatening, or attacking with intent to hurt) reported higher levels of violent video game play than less aggressive students. Findings of a two-year longitudinal study indicated that “media-violence exposure at one point in time was positively (and statistically significantly) related to aggressiveness at a later point” (Anderson et al., 2001:91). In a meta-analysis of 35 research reports that examined effects of video game use on aggressive cognition, aggressive affect, aggressive behavior, and physiological arousal or pro-social behavior, “the results clearly support the hypothesis that exposure to violent video games poses a public health threat to children and youths, including college-age individuals” (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). “Long term game players become more aggressive in outlook, perceptual biases, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior than they were before the repeated exposure” (Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2004:9).

An area of media violence effects that remains somewhat understudied is that of sexualized media violence. Spears and Seydegart (1993) point out that much of the research and literature does not recognize violence against women as distinct from other portrayals of violence. The studies that have been done indicate that “women are disproportionately portrayed as victims, that violence against women is often sexual in nature, and that retribution for the aggressor is often absent” (Spears and Seydegart, 1993). This type of “sexualized violence in the media has been linked to increases in violence toward women, [and] rape myth acceptance (Gentile, Saleem, and Anderson, 2007:15).

The evidence of *correlation* between exposure to media violence and violent behavior has been mounting, beginning with the studies of the 1980s, and has reached a point where many well established organizations (American Psychological Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Psychiatric Association) have stated that the relationship between media violence and aggressive behavior is more than *correlational*; based on the consistency and volume of research findings, there is an irrefutable *causal* connection (Anderson, Berkowitz, Donnerstein, Huesmann, Johnson, Linz, Malamuth & Wartella, 2003; Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2004:19).

Exposure to Media Violence and Youth Non-physical Aggression

One of the aspects of media violence research that continues to be misunderstood by the public, and ignored or misrepresented by the media industry, is that of non-physical aggression effects. It is not uncommon to hear someone say, “Just because a kid plays some violent video games doesn’t mean that he¹ is going to run out and shoot somebody”. While this is a significant overstatement of what media violence research suggests in relation to physical aggression, it also ignores an entire aspect of the research – that of non-physical aggression. To reduce the discussion to only physical aggression effects is to dismiss many non-physical aggression effects that have a profound influence on the day-to-day social ethos of youth. Non-physical aggression effects include increased cognitive/verbal aggression, decreased pro-social behavior, and desensitization to violence.

¹ The gender exclusive term is used intentionally here – males play far more violent video games than females.

Cognitive/Verbal Aggression

In a longitudinal study conducted by Lefkowitz, Eron, Walder & Huesmann (1977), children who consumed media violence demonstrated a far greater likelihood of making up lies and stories to get other children in trouble. Dominick and Greenberg (1972) surveyed fourth to sixth graders to ascertain 1) their cognitive willingness to use violence, and 2) their assessment of its effectiveness. They were given various provocative scenarios and asked to report how they would respond. Children with higher levels of media exposure reported a significantly greater willingness to rectify the hypothetical situation through violent means, and also viewed violence more positively in general, than those children who had lower levels of media exposure. After either playing the violent video game *Dactyl Nightmare*, or merely mimicking the movements of the game, Calvert and Tan (1994) asked participants to list their thoughts. Those who had played the actual game had significantly more aggressive thoughts than those who had merely mimicked the movement of it (Anderson et al., 2003).

Pro-social Behavior

Experimental studies assess “children’s responses to perceptually ambiguous stimuli following the viewing of televised violence...[which are] meant to reveal aggressive characteristics induced by the violence exposure” (Kirsh, 2006). Researchers offer a provocation/conflict situation in which fault is unclear, and then ask participants to interpret what has happened. In both experimental and correlational studies the results consistently indicate that youth who have been exposed to media violence (whether immediately prior, or habitual consumption) tend to attribute negative motives to the individuals in the scenario relative to youth who have less exposure to media violence

(Hess, Hess & Hess, 1999; Kirsh, 1998; Vetro, Csapo, Szilard, & Barha, 1998). The behavioral result of hostile attribution bias in real-life circumstances is “cue distortion, which leads aggressive children to interpret the stimulus as an aggressive cue and thus respond aggressively” (Kirsh, 1998:178).

Sheese and Graziano (2005) examined the effects of video game violence on cooperative behavior. They found that participants who had played a violent video game were significantly more likely to exploit their playing partners than were those who played the non-violent video game. In a study conducted by Brady (2007), young adults (age eighteen to twenty) who spent a greater number of hours watching violent movies/TV and contact sports were associated with more favorable attitudes toward “military preparedness/defense, aggressive military intervention, and punitive criminal justice policies” (Brady, 2007:1).

Desensitization

Perhaps the most far-reaching effect of media violence consumption is desensitization, “the process by which youth become less responsive to real-world violence and subsequently more likely to engage in violent behavior themselves” (Kirsh, 2006:221). Based on research findings, Kirsh (2006) outlines three forms of desensitization that result from media violence consumption. *Physiological desensitization* occurs when one’s heart rate, blood pressure, and galvanic skin response do not respond to real-life violence (Cline, Croft & Courier, 1973; Thomas, Horton, Lippincott, & Drabman, 1977). *Behavioral desensitization* is seen when children and youth become less likely to seek out help for, or intervene with, destructive, aggressive violence against one of their classmates (Drabman & Thomas, 1974). *Cognitive and*

emotional desensitization results in pro-violence attitudes and lower levels of empathy (Funk, Bechtoldt-Baldacci, Pasold, & Baumgardner, 2004).

The primary question of concern here is whether children of a violent media culture will not only be more aggressive themselves, but will be slower to intervene in real-life aggressive situations in an attempt to offer aid. Van Evra (2004) conducted a study in which video monitors were installed on either side of a large classroom that showed what was happening at the front of the classroom where the teacher sat reading to his students. An attacker rushed in and started hitting, pushing and arguing with the teacher. When the attack happened the students shifted from watching their teacher right in front of them to watching the attack on the monitors mounted on either side of the classroom. Despite the teachers' shouting and obvious fear, none of the children interfered or offered to help or sought out help. The children later explained that they could see better on the screens because of close-ups and camera angles. The degree of their desensitization was such that rather than responding to the real-life aggression in front of them, the students chose instead to view the attack via the monitors.

Moderating factors

While the evidence suggests a causal relationship between media violence consumption and aggression/violence, the use of the term causal does not mean that "exposure to media violence is either a necessary or a sufficient cause of aggressive behavior, let alone both necessary and sufficient" (Anderson et al., 2003). Anderson et al. (2003) further point out that

no media-violence researcher has ever made such an extreme claim. The 14-year-old boy arguing that he has played violent video games for years and has not ever killed anybody is absolutely correct in rejecting the extreme "necessary and sufficient" position, as is the 45-year-old two-pack-a-day cigarette smoker who

notes that he still does not have lung cancer. But both are wrong in inferring that their exposure to their respective risk factors (violent media, cigarettes) has not causally increased the likelihood that they and people around them will one day suffer the consequences of that risky behavior.

Multiple factors, over a period of time, contribute to aggressive behavior. Media violence is one of those factors.

Furthermore, there are numerous moderating effects related to youth media violence consumption and aggression. Among the more significant are trait hostility and parental monitoring (Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2003). Individuals with greater aggressive tendencies (trait hostility) are likely to increase their aggressive behavior more than those with lesser aggressive tendencies. Parental monitoring, in the form of co-viewing, mediation of media messages, and imposed limits, reduces the aggression effects of media violence consumption. By providing children with awareness of the process in which they are participating and exposing the underlying ideologies, the covert power of media violence is exposed and destabilized somewhat. Other moderator effects are age, gender, intelligence, level of identification with aggression, exposure to real violence, and media content characteristics (Anderson et al., 2003; Van Evra, 2004).

A number of these moderating effects are related to socio-economic status, particularly exposure to real-life violence and parental monitoring. Families with low incomes and those living in poverty often reside in high-crime areas where violence is 'normalized', and do not have the financial opportunity to provide either quality child-care that monitors/reduces media consumption, or the type of education that equips parents and youth to assess, and hence control, the effects of media on themselves or their communities. Thus issues of equality (access to financial stability and education) intersect with questions of vulnerability to media effects.

Theories of Aggression

The theoretical underpinnings of studies on media violence are found in theories of human aggression. Anderson and Bushman (2002) have identified the five main theories of aggression.

The first, *cognitive neoassociation theory*, holds that aversive experiences, such as foul odors, uncomfortable temperatures, pain, provocations, and frustrations will produce negative behavioral effects. According to Berkowitz (1989), exposure to a negative stimulus results in negative affect as evidenced by a range of physical, emotional, and cognitive responses that produce either a flight (fear) or a fight (fight) response. While it is possible that the immediate response remains the primary response, further assessment and appraisal are also possible, and often likely. In such second stage responses “people make causal attributions about their unpleasant experiences, think about the exact nature of their feelings, try to control their feelings and their actions, and so on” (Berkowitz, 1989:69). Aggressive behaviors, emotions, and thoughts, when linked together, form an associative memory structure which serves as the reference point for both the immediate and second stage appraisals. For example, the concept of a gun triggers an associative memory structure which might include related concepts such as shoot, hurt, harm, and kill (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Berkowitz also notes that a latent function of the associative memory structure is that “viewing aggression disinhibits viewers’ controls on aggressive behavior. If the aggression is approved and the disinhibition increases, aggression is more likely” (Van Evra, 2004:97). In essence, what the associative memory structure (in this case, inhibitions against aggressive behavior) does not include is as significant as what it does include.

The second major theory of aggression is *social learning theory*, according to which aggressive responses are learned in the same way that all social behaviors are learned - by watching others or through direct experience. G. R. Patterson's work on family interactions in the development of antisocial behaviors has drawn extensively on social learning theory. Essentially, dysfunctional parenting practices allow dozens of relational interactions in which coercive behaviors are not only permitted, but reinforced. Thus the child learns to use "aversive behaviors to terminate aversive intrusions by other family members. In these families, coercive behaviors are functional" (Patterson, 1989:330). Konijn, Bijvank, and Bushman (2007) employed the premise of social learning theory in their study of male identification with violent characters in video games. Boys who desired to emulate violent video game heroes demonstrated increased aggressive behaviors against their peers.

According to the third theory, *script theory*, social scripts facilitate the definition of a particular situation, and guide behavioral expectations in that situation. For example, when students enter a college classroom there is a specific script that each of them unthinkingly follows (i.e. everyone sits down at a desk or table, takes out note paper and a pen/pencil, and prepares to listen. No student takes the lecture position at the front, or sits/lies down on the floor). A script is a "hypothesized cognitive structure that when activated organizes comprehension of event-based situations" (Abelson, 1981:3). Scripts are very precise: a frequently rehearsed script can be activated and can produce specific behaviors almost instinctively, hence Abelson refers to them as "performative structures" (1981:5). Huesmann (1986) suggests that media violence teaches children aggressive scripts: a frequently rehearsed script, such as repeated scenarios on television or in video

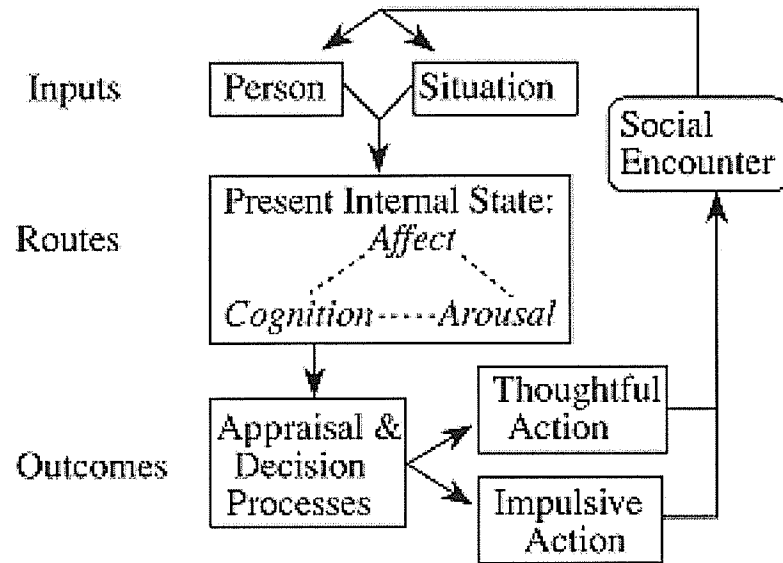
games in which physical aggression is used to solve a conflict, “generalizes across many situations[and] becomes a ‘chronically accessible’ (Anderson and Bushman, 2002:32) script.” This is especially problematic if “only aggressive scripts are acquired during the sensitive period when children acquire a network of behavioral scripts, [because] they can only behave aggressively” (Van Evra, 2004:98). In a study investigating youth imagining behavioral scripts on personal intentions it was found that “the more frequently one imagines oneself in a behavioral script, the more intention change is produced” (Anderson, 1983:293).

Excitation transfer theory holds that when an event has been physiologically arousing and is followed closely by a second physiologically arousing event, the arousal from the first event has not yet dissipated and therefore transfers additional arousal to the subsequent event. According to this theory, the short-term physiological arousal effects of media violence, and video games in particular, is transferred over into subsequent activities.

Finally, *social interaction theory* proposes that an aggressive behavior is consciously used to bring about desirable rewards. Deliberate and chosen “coercive actions can be used by an actor to obtain something of value (e.g., information, money, goods, sex, services, safety), to exact retributive justice for perceived wrongs, or to bring about desired social and self identities (e.g. toughness, competence)” (Anderson and Bushman, 2002:32). For those who have been strongly influenced by media violence scripts, deliberate choices of aggression provide various types of rewards in goods, services, and reputation.

There is considerable overlap among these five theories. *Social scripts* are enacted according to social learning and cognitive neoassociation theories. The associative memory structures of *cognitive neoassociation* can be used to describe the collections of coercive behaviors of social learning theory. The identification of young males with violent media heroes can be used as readily as an example of social interaction theory as it can social learning theory. And the presence of excitation transfer as an influencing variable is possible in all of the other four theories described. Further, as neoassociation theory points out, repetitive short-term effects evolve fairly rapidly into memory structures and social scripts which guide long-term aggressive behaviors. Therefore, it is best not to draw a false dichotomy between short-term and long-term effects, given that short-term effects function as the foundation for long-term effects. While each theory is useful, what is needed is a single, unified theoretical framework.

Anderson and Bushman (2002) have been developing a framework that integrates these existing mini-theories, and their most recent version is called the *general aggression model* (GAM), as outlined below. GAM “focuses on the ‘person in the situation,’ called an *episode*, consisting of one cycle of an ongoing social interaction” (Anderson and Bushman, 2002:34). It is concerned with three aspects of an episode, that of 1) inputs by both the person and the situation, 2) the cognitive, affective, and arousal routes through which the person and situation are shaped and have their impact, and 3) the outcomes of the resulting appraisals and decisions. (see aggression model chart below)



The general aggression model episodic processes
(Anderson & Bushman, 2002:34)

All characteristics that a person brings to the situation are considered person factors, and include genetic predispositions, attitudes, and personality traits. For example, individuals with susceptibility to hostile attribution bias are more likely to respond aggressively (Anderson and Bushman, 2002), males demonstrate far higher levels of violent behaviors than females (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996), and positive attitudes toward violence prepare individuals for violent behavior (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). Violent media reinforce hostile attribution bias (Hess, Hess & Hess, 1999; Kirsh, 1998; Vetro, Csapo, Szilard, & Barha, 1998), are consumed primarily by males (Bettencourt and Miller, 1996), and generate positive attitudes towards violence (Malamuth, 1995; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996).

Situational factors include aggressive cues, provocation, frustration, pain and discomfort, and drugs. Scenarios or objects that prime aggression-related memory constructs, verbal or physical aggression, blocked goals, hot temperatures or loud noises, or alcohol/caffeine consumption have all been demonstrated as increasing aggression

(Berkowitz, 1993; Bushman, 1993; Postma, 1998). The primary situational factor related to media violence is aggression-related memory constructs which are both created by and activated by media violence consumption.

When aggressive concepts become chronically accessible (through repeated media violence consumption) the cognitive route through which person and situation pass is often a hostile one (Brady, 2007; Kirsch 2006; Postma, 1998). Aggressive mood and emotion are also increased by exposure to violent media (Sheese & Graziano, 2005). Arousal from an irrelevant source can increase aggression, and anger from an irrelevant source can be mislabeled and produce misplaced anger-motivated aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Anderson, Gentile, & Buckley, 2007). Media violence consumption triggers excitation that might transfer aggression into non-related scenarios and circumstances.

Immediate appraisals are impulsive actions, while reappraisals are thoughtful actions. Immediate appraisals are automatic, and occur without awareness. Anderson and Bushman use the example of someone who is thinking aggressive thoughts and is then bumped by someone, and immediately assumes the bump was an aggressive act. However, the person who has been thinking that the room is crowded will perceive the same bump as accidental. The current state of the individual produces the immediate response, and in the case where media violence consumption has contributed to hostile attribution, there is an increased possibility of increased aggression. Reappraisal “involves searching for an alternative view of the situation’ (Anderson & Bushman, 2002:41), which may lead to an alternative definition of the situation, or an increased anger response, depending on the particular character/nature of the inputs and routes.

When media violence consumption has affected any of the factors included in the inputs and routes, as described above, the likelihood of aggression increases.

It is helpful to note that, historically, research has differentiated between *hostile aggression* that is affective, spontaneous, reactive, and directed at harming the victim and *instrumental aggression* which is premeditated, proactive aggression not directed at harming the victim (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Anderson and Bushman further differentiate these two categories by goal: *hostile aggression* has a proximate goal, while *instrumental aggression* has an ultimate goal. At the ultimate level, they further differentiate between different types of aggression, thus:

both robbery and physical assault are acts of aggressionhowever, they typically differ in ultimate goals, with robbery serving primarily profit-based goals and assault serving primarily harm-based goals. (Anderson & Bushman, 2002:29)

These distinctions allow for a recognition of both the differences and commonalities between *hostile* and *instrumental aggression*, as well as aggression with mixed motives.

While it will not be the task of this research project to test these theories directly, it is important to recognize that research on media violence consumption both links and overlaps with general theories of aggression.

Having outlined the research on media violence effects in chapter 1, the rest of the thesis is broken into five parts. Chapter 2 outlines the policy approaches of both Canada and Sweden in response to the rising concerns surrounding media violence effects.

Canada's policies regarding youth media violence consumption are minimal and voluntary, and thus lack consequential force. Sweden, on the other hand, has taken the media research findings very seriously, and this is reflected in their extensive regulations,

along with the right to enforce severe penalties if these are contravened. Chapter 3 describes the development of youth justice in Canada and Sweden, tracing their contrasting ideologies and the resulting legislative and programmatic differences. Sweden's consistent welfare state approach has produced a rehabilitative youth justice system while Canada's greater emphasis on protecting society (rather than the youth offender), has resulted in a youth justice system that is considerably more punitive than Sweden's. Chapter 4 sets out the methodology used in comparing the youth crime statistics of Canada and Sweden. It provides definitions of key terms and concepts, compares the relevant crime categories of the Canadian Criminal Code and the Swedish Penal Code used in this study, and discusses specific methodological challenges. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the research, which demonstrate that in Sweden, where youth media violence consumption is severely restricted, aggressive youth crime rates are considerably lower than in Canada, where youth media violence consumption is virtually unrestrained. Chapter 6 explores the limitations of this study, examining the moderating factors of structural gender equality, the legal ban on corporal punishment, and the effects of police reporting behavior on aggressive youth crime and youth crime statistics.

CHAPTER 2

Policy Responses to Research Findings

The primary socializing agents of children have undergone a transition in the past half-decade. While family, education, and peers remain salient, the mass media have gained considerable power as socializing agents in the lives of children and youth. As previously noted, recent research findings overwhelmingly indicate that exposure to media violence is associated with increased physical aggression, cognitive/verbal aggression and relational aggression, as well as increased tolerance of aggression. Further, it is linked to decreased pro-social behavior. Such research findings have led policy-makers to consider the degree of violence to which children and youth are exposed through media and the accessibility of such media to children and youth. Arguments based on research findings conflict with arguments based on freedom of speech and freedom of the market. In Canada, the arguments of freedom of speech and freedom of the market have tended to prevail. But in Sweden, research findings have had a much greater impact on policy related to children's exposure to media violence. This difference in approach between these two nations provides a valuable opportunity to examine the role of policy in addressing the issue.

Policy in Canada

Media violence first emerged as a pressing issue for the Canadian government after the Montreal Polytechnique shootings in 1990 (CRTC, 1996). In 1992, the Canadian Radio-Television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) released two studies on media violence, demonstrating a correlation between media violence and aggressive behaviors,

and asking the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) to develop voluntary violence guidelines. In November of 1992, Virginie Lariviere, a 13 year old girl whose sister was robbed, brutally raped and murdered, presented a petition to the federal government with over 1.5 million signatures calling for a complete ban on television violence. Virginie was convinced that the underlying cause of her sister's rape and murder was media violence. By this point many grassroots advocacy groups had begun to form across Canada, along with one of the largest, *The Action Group on Violence on Television* (AGVOT). In June of 1993, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Communications and Culture released its report, *Television Violence: Fraying our Social Fabric*, calling for, among other things, a classification system for television programs to assist parents in determining viewing choices for their children, that would include "severe and graduated penalties for contravening the regulations" (Communications and Culture Justice Report, 1993:61). On January 1st, 1994, the CRTC accepted the CAB's somewhat revised version of the *Voluntary Code Regarding Violence in Television Programming*. But rather than implement severe penalties for contravening regulations, it announced that compliance with this code would be a condition of license for all privately owned television stations upon license renewal. This marked the first formal implementation of restrictions on television violence in Canada, though it remains primarily a voluntary restriction. The ban called for the elimination of gratuitous or glamorized violence, as well as a watershed hour of 9:00 p.m. before which television programming with violent scenes intended for adults cannot be aired (CAB, CRTC, Stats Canada). Various new anti-violence media advocacy groups continue to emerge, calling for much stricter guidelines and codes, along with the right to penalize those who

disregard media violence guidelines, arguing that very little has actually changed to decrease media violence, despite the voluntary codes now in place. Many of the current advocacy groups focus on equipping the parent to make wise viewing choices for their children, along with further media violence awareness campaigns. Cable television, broadcast from the United States, has also complicated violence guideline issues, and the Canadian government has given considerable energy to negotiating V-chip technology (allows blocking of specific channels) guidelines with the U.S.

The Canadian approach to addressing violence has focused primarily on 1) calling for the media industry to participate voluntarily in the implementation of regulations and guidelines, with no legislation in place to enforce participation, and 2) media literacy campaigns which raise awareness, in hopes of calling parents to monitor more intelligently children's media consumption patterns.

The issue of voluntary self-regulation is premised on the *Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, and interpreted by the *Broadcasting Act* as protecting "freedom of expression and journalistic, creative and programming independence enjoyed by broadcasting undertakings" (Communications and Culture Justice Report, 1993:43). However, some would argue that democracy is the collective agreement that everyone will give up certain rights in order to ensure that everyone, collectively, shares specific fundamental rights, and that "along with every right also comes the social responsibility not to abuse that right to the detriment of others in society" (Communications and Culture Justice Report, 1993:43). For some, giving up the right to access violent forms of media entertainment falls into the category of a social responsibility for the sake of protecting the psychological, and ultimately physical, well-

being of children. For others, it falls into the category of infringing on freedom of expression and personal rights.

The issue of educating the public and parents to become more intelligent guides in controlling their children's media consumption is addressed by Wendy Josephson's extensive report on media violence in Canada. Josephson points out that, while there are certainly things that parents can do to positively affect the outcomes of media on their children, "an entertainment medium that purports to meet the needs of the Canadian public should not be so saturated with potentially harmful content that parents are considered negligent if they don't constantly monitor their children's watching" (Josephson, 1995:56).

Policy in Sweden

"Commercial violence," a term introduced by Nic Nilsson in an article exploring the commercial exploitation of violence, first gained notable attention in Sweden in the 1970's through a campaign initiated by the children's organization, the *Young Eagles*, which was aimed at taking toy weapons and other violent products off the market (Nilsson, 1991:3). In 1978, the Swedish Parliament unanimously agreed that it was time to deal with war toys, asking that such measures be taken on a voluntary basis. In 1979, an agreement was endorsed by almost the entire retail trade, banning all toys with war associations for public sale.

In 1989, the focus shifted to advertising directed at children, as it was believed that children should have the "right to safe zones" (Jacobsson, 2002:1). These safe zones are necessary, said the Swedish Consumer Ombudsman, Axel Edling, because the target groups of media advertising should be able to "distinguish easily an advertisement from

other media content”(Edling, 1999:2), something which children are unable to do. There is an imbalance of power between the consumer and the advertiser when the consumer is a child, and it violates principles of fair play when an advertiser takes advantage of a child’s natural credulity and naiveté. This attitude toward children is the polar opposite to North American advertising experts’ views on children which claim that “children are the brightest star in the consumer constellation, [and therefore] we increasingly see kids through an economic lens” (Ruskin, 1999:2). In 1991 Swedish legislation enacted a complete ban against advertising targeted at children twelve and under and, if violated, an advertiser could be sentenced under the marketing act to varying levels of monetary fines based on company size and revenue (Jacobsson, 2002:2).

In regard to film, in 1911 the National Film Board of Censor was established, and declared that pictures “depicting scenes of horror, suicide or serious crimes....liable to perversely excite children’s imaginations or otherwise to have an adverse effect on their mental development or well-being” (Swedish National Board of Film Classification, 2007), could not be approved. The age of ‘child’ was set at 15. Historically, and currently, all films must be submitted to the *National Board of Film Classification* for approval, and age rankings of 7, 11, and 15 are applied uniformly across the Nordic countries of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. Any film that has not been approved by the National Board is subject to the following as outlined in the Swedish Penal Code (Chapter 6, Section 10c):

Any person who, intentionally, or through gross negligence in the course of business or otherwise for the purpose of making money purveys to a person under the age of fifteen a film, video recording or other technical recording with moving pictures explicitly and realistically depicting violence or the threat of violence towards humans or animals shall be convicted of *illicit purveyance of a technical recording* and sentenced to a fine or imprisonment for at most six months.

The classification board has, and occasionally uses, the power to cut a film entirely (European Commission, 2003:44,48). Board controllers have power of access to cinemas and all pertinent information they might require, as well as the right to invoke police assistance when requested (Nilsson, 1991:7). Film censorship also extends to the video market and, as of 1991, the rental of a video containing realistic portrayals of violence to individuals under 15 years of age is subject to criminal prosecution, with a maximum prison term of two years or substantial fines (Nilsson, 1991:5). There has also been considerable effort put into public awareness campaigns regarding videos, encouraging individual citizens to report all inappropriate video rentals.

In regard to television viewing Sweden applies the same watershed of 9:00 p.m. for all programs containing violence intended for adult viewing. Any films with realistic portrayals of violence or pornographic material must be preceded by an audio warning or must display a warning text on the screen through the entire duration of the film (Regeringskansliet web site, 2005). Sweden currently has two public television stations (SVT, UR) which must submit to Swedish legislation, as well as two TV stations which are terrestrial (TV3, TV5). Current EU regulations require broadcasting agencies to adhere to the codes and regulations of the home country from which they are broadcasting. Therefore Sweden cannot impose national regulations regarding violence on TV3 and TV5. In 1997 a widespread boycott of TV3 and TV5, due to increased commercial pressure on children, effectively limited advertisers' willingness to advertise on these two channels (Jacobsson, 2002:3). During the Swedish EU presidency, there was a period from January to June of 2001 when regulations regarding advertising to

children were “debated hotly” (Jacobsson, 2002:1) in the union, but Sweden was unable to convince a majority of EU members to invoke a universal ban similar to Sweden’s.

The Swedish Consumer Ombudsman states that “ by any international standard, Sweden is an open society” (Edling, 1999,2) with the right to receive and disseminate information being a priority. Nevertheless they are not afraid to provide safe zones for their nation’s children, even if it means that the right to easy and free access to commercial violence, and the ensuing financial gain to be made by those who hold the purse strings of the media entertainment industry, must be significantly restricted.

CHAPTER 3

A HISTORY OF YOUTH JUSTICE IN CANADA AND SWEDEN

Cross-national comparisons of crime are difficult to carry out due to the range of preventative and punitive structures put in place by various countries. Adult systems have greater similarities than youth systems do, as there is considerable consensus about what constitutes adult criminal activity whereas youth justice issues such as age of criminality, youth courts vs. adult courts, and punitive vs. rehabilitative approaches, vary considerably across nations (Tonry and Doob, 2004: 2-3). The result is that cross-national comparisons of youth crime are considerably more challenging to conduct than adult crime comparisons. Thus, before attempting to assess actual youth crime rates between Canada and Sweden, it is important to understand their youth justice systems and the ideologies that inform them.

Canada: Youth Justice History

Canada has gone through a number of significant ideological changes in its approach to youth justice, which have resulted in shifts in laws governing youth justice. Until 1908, youths over 7 years of age in Canada could be tried and imprisoned in an adult court. In 1908, the *Juvenile Delinquents Act* (JDA) came into force, and all youth in Canada over seven years of age fell under its jurisdiction. Maximum age, however, was not uniform across Canada. The federal government was/is responsible for criminal legislation, but the provinces were/are responsible to administer it. As a result, until 1981 when the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was legislated, the maximum age varied across the provinces, generally between 16 and 18. The JDA, though a criminal law, established a child welfare approach to youth justice (Department of Justice Canada, 2006) in Canada.

Doob and Sprott point out three provisions that demonstrate this welfare approach. First, all youth criminal offenses were treated under a single category, that of delinquency.

Second, the JDA specifically required that the delinquent ‘shall be dealt with not as an offender, but as one in a condition...requiring help and guidance and proper supervision’ (JDA, sec. 3[2]). Furthermore,

‘the care and custody and discipline of a juvenile delinquent shall approximate as nearly as may be that which should be given by his parents, and that as far as practicable every juvenile delinquent shall be treated, not as a criminal, but as a misdirected and misguided child, and one needing aid, encouragement, help, and assistance’ (JDA, sec. 3[2]); (Doob and Sprott, 2004).

Third, there were two types of custodial sentences, the local Children’s Aid Society or an industrial school. Once committed to either of these institutions, it was the institution itself that decided when the offender could be released. In other words, the juvenile court released control of them (Doob and Sprott, 2004). As a whole the JDA was characterized by a “child welfare approach that included informal procedures and significant judicial discretion” (Statistics Canada, Youth Justice Legislation; A Chronology, 2005), the primary focus being rehabilitation not punishment.

While the JDA remained essentially unchanged until 1984, the early 1960s brought unrest on many fronts, including dissatisfaction with the levels of youth crime rates that resulted in various committees being formed to examine youth crime. The resulting reports and proposed legislations that followed served to keep youth justice on the political policy agenda. The early 1980s saw the first legislative movement with the age of criminality being raised to 12 (meaning that children age twelve years and under cannot be prosecuted), but significant change happened in 1984 when the *Young Offenders Act* (YOA) came into force. This new act represented a distinct ideological

shift. Under the YOA, youth courts retained full sentencing authority that could not be altered by other institutions. Proportionality became part of the process of sentencing, in which the degree of seriousness determined the length of the sentence. Further, the court could no longer commit an offender into the care of child welfare services (Doob and Sprott, 2004). The end result was “more emphasis on youth responsibility, [and] society’s right to be protected from illegal acts” (Statistics Canada, Youth Justice Legislation; a Chronology, 2005). The child welfare approach had largely been left behind, replaced by a youth justice system governed primarily by criminal law principles.

Despite a more punitive (vs. rehabilitative) approach to youth crime facilitated by the YOA, public perception polls continued to indicate that Canadians felt the youth justice system was too lenient. With increasing pressure to get tough on crime, three amendments were made to the YOA within the first eleven years. The first was to correct technical administrative glitches, the second increased the length of youth court sentences from three years to five, and the third further increased the length of sentences for murder to ten years. (Youth Justice Legislation: A Chronology, 2005). Yet the YOA did not produce the desired results. Problems included overuse of incarceration, youth courts over-used for minor offences, no attention to effective reintegration, disparities in sentencing, and insufficient recognition of the concerns/interests of the victims (Youth Criminal Justice Act: Summary and Background, 2006). Further, various public and political groups continued to lament the increase in youth crime, and the lack of appropriate consequences within Canadian Youth Justice Laws. By 1996 a federal-provincial-territorial task force had provided a review of the YOA which indicated that significant changes were needed. After successive reports and reviews, it was concluded

that an entirely new law was needed. In 2001, after being introduced into the House of Commons in three different legislative sessions, the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, was passed and received final legislative approval in February of 2004. The key objects of the YCJA were:

Clear and coherent principles to improve decision making in the youth justice system; More appropriate use of the courts by addressing less serious cases effectively outside the court process; Fairness in sentencing; Reduction in the high rate of youth incarceration; Effective reintegration of young persons; [and] Clear distinction between serious violent offences and less serious offences (The Youth Criminal Justice Act; Summary and Background, 2006; 17).

Clearly, most of these objectives reflect a leaning towards a welfare approach again, yet information about the new bill that was seemingly 'leaked' by the government prior to its official presentation to the public represented it as being very tough on youth crime. According to Tonry and Doob,

to the uninitiated these provisions could be seen as indications that the new law was going to be tough on youth crime...yet only those who had access to data on Canada's youth justice system would be able to know that these tough provisions were numerically unimportant. Few, if any cases would be affected by them (Tonry and Doob, 2004:231).

Many academics have criticized the bill as being too tough on youths, while political conservatives view it as being too soft on youths. What does seem to be clear is that it has, in fact, changed very little regarding youth justice in Canada relative to the previous YOA legislation. However, as will be discussed below, it did affect prosecution rates.

While Canada began with a strong focus on rehabilitative justice, it has taken a sharp ideological turn resulting in a youth justice structure which is more interested in proportionality and the protection of society than in child welfare and the treatment of the youth offender.

Sweden: Youth Justice History

Carl-Gunnar Janson provides an excellent overview of the development of youth justice in Sweden which reveals that, while Sweden and Canada began with a number of the same concerns, ideologically they grew increasingly dissimilar over time. (The following summary is based extensively on Janson, 2004, and Sarnecki and Estrada, 2004).

Through most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, all Swedish criminals were flogged, fined, executed, or sent to workhouses, with the exception of children under seven years of age. In the mid-nineteenth century, private reformatories were established for young offenders, in order to protect them from living with adult criminals. In 1896 the *Committee on reformatory upbringing* was established, whose report led to a fundamental legislation in 1905 which remains the foundation of the Swedish youth justice system. The age of criminality was set at fifteen, and all death or life-imprisonment sentences were changed from six to ten years, and all other terms were reduced by half for offenders between fifteen and seventeen. Prison sentences of six months or less were replaced by reform care. Municipal Child Welfare committees were established for every school district to care for those under fifteen, but their authority gradually extended to include youth to the age of eighteen who were 1) mistreated and thus in danger of offending, 2) youth who were severely deprived and needed intervention care, and 3) youth whose behavior was so severe that it “required special social measures” (Janson, 2004). This basic division of labour in which the social services were in charge of all children under fifteen, and the responsibility for all youth between fifteen and twenty was shared between social and judicial institutions, remains

in Sweden to this day. In 1935 the *Act on Child Care* legislated an extension of the age defined as 'youth', including young people eighteen to twenty-one years of age. Youth prisons were established (Sarnecki and Estrada, 2004). In the 1940's the municipal social services, which had until then operated independently, became part of the social welfare system, and with it came further emphasis on intervention and the avoidance of imprisonment. This post-war period has been characterized as one "of diversion...[in which] criminal youths should be kept away from correctional treatment in general and prison in particular" (Sarnecki and Estrada, 2004:3), keeping offenders "away from the criminal care system and instead take care of them through the child care system" (Sarnecki and Estrada, 2004:4). A penal code was introduced in 1965 in which intervention was based on the personal circumstances of the individual youth offender. The resulting lack of proportionality (in which severity of offense is reflected in the severity of the sentence) came under criticism at that time, and debate surrounding it has been intermittent, continuing to the present. Through the 1960's, forced care, in which offenders were 'locked' up, either in a prison or reformatory institution, was increasingly seen as anti-productive. While less and less youth were being committed to 'locked' institutions, delinquency in the clientele increased in frequency and seriousness. If the youth was not voluntarily motivated to improve, then improvement would not be forthcoming. Therefore mandatory institutionalization was not helpful. After years of discussion and debate, the *Social Services Act* was passed in 1982, resulting in youth welfare "based on voluntary commitment and mutual understanding" (Sarnecki and Estrada, 2004:4). Forced care could now only be invoked under the *Act with Special Provisions on the Care of Young People* (LVU), and it was determined that "intervention

should not be based on any interest to protect society or any similar aim” (Sarnecki and Estrada, 2004:4). After several years, the debate regarding proportionality rose to the surface once again, and in 1989 the *Commission on Prison Sentencing* was passed, which asked that the judicial consequences of the offense reflect the seriousness of the crime. In a report presented by the *Commission on Juvenile Crime*, 1993, this issue was further reinforced with various proposals that called for clear, established responses to youth crime, and consideration of the protection of society.

While Sweden has gone through shifts in its approach to youth crime and justice - the most recent being the new emphasis on including consideration for the protection of society - these shifts remain very minor thus far in the overall landscape of youth justice. Sweden remains unique because of the high level of involvement and control of social welfare in the judicial process. All youth under fifteen are still, as originally instituted in 1905, the sole responsibility of the social welfare institutions. At fifteen years of age or older (at which time the youth is no longer considered a minor), when court proceedings are deemed necessary, procedural rules are minimal, there are few restrictions on permissible evidence, and the violation is often simply admitted by the offender. Swedish trials in general proceed with an “inquisitorial system” rather than adversarial, and it is this inquisitorial approach that is implemented in youth court, and often produces co-operative proceedings on the part of the offender. Having looked extensively at the development of youth crime in Sweden, Sarnecki and Estrada conclude that despite greater emphasis on protecting society than in the past, “the fundamentally humanist view of youth crime and of measures for young offenders that has been dominant in

Sweden over recent decades appears at least for the moment to remain in tact". (Sarnecki and Estrada, 2004:23).

Comparing Canada and Sweden

In the early 1900s, both Canada and Sweden implemented youth justice legislation that had strong child welfare principles and priorities. However, this ideological alignment was not to remain as sectors of Canadian unrest beginning in the 1960s began to question the efficacy of the *Juvenile Delinquents Act* in terms of its failure to protect society from youth criminals, which eventually resulted in the YOA and subsequent YCJA, both of which increasingly focused on punitive measures as a form of youth crime prevention. In the meantime, Sweden has remained focused on restoring youth offenders. Therefore, currently Sweden remains far more structurally focused on implementing rehabilitative justice than Canada. The differences described above between the Canadian and Swedish youth justice programs and approaches produce a number of challenges to this research which are outlined in the following methodology chapter.

CHAPTER 4 METHOD

The findings of numerous studies have demonstrated that exposure to violent media is associated with higher levels of physical and non-physical aggression in youth. Therefore, laws that restrict children's exposure to violent media should be accompanied by lower levels of physical and non-physical youth aggression. Sweden's laws are more restrictive than Canada's with regard to children's exposure to violent media. It is hypothesized that levels of youth physical aggression and youth non-physical aggression will be markedly lower in Sweden than in Canada.

This research project used two data sets to test the hypothesis: 1) national government crime statistics collected, compiled, and managed by the Canadian and Swedish government justice departments respectively; and 2) self-report data from the *Health Behavior in School Aged Children* (HBSC) survey, collected by the World Health Organization as part of a cross-national, cross-sectional survey administered at four year intervals beginning in 1981.

Measurement of Youth Physical Aggression

Youth physical aggression was measured by prosecution and conviction rates of youth over time in Canada and Sweden. *Prosecution* takes place when, following an investigation, there is adequate evidence that a crime occurred. In Canada, prosecution is defined as occurring "when an accusation against a young person ... has been formally and fully processed in a youth court" (Statistics Canada, 2004). In Sweden, prosecution is defined as occurring "when a person is considered to be suspected after a completed investigation" (National Council for Crime Prevention, 2007:1). *Convictions* result

when, following prosecution, the individual is found guilty by either the court (Canada and Sweden), or the Office of the Public Prosecutor (Sweden). In the Canadian data being used for this study, they are referred to as *guilty*. Prosecution and conviction rates were obtained from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics in Ottawa and from the National Council for Crime Prevention in Stockholm. In the Swedish data being used for this study, convictions are referred to as *persons found guilty of criminal offenses*. Comparable statistical data for both nations was available for the years of 1991 – 2006. Therefore, youth prosecution and conviction rates in Canada and Sweden were examined over a 16-year time period (1991 to 2006) for the following crimes: 1) assault; 2) sexual assault; and 3) homicide or attempted murder.

Definition of “Youth”

An important difference between the Swedish and Canadian youth justice systems is relevant to determining a definition of “youth” in these countries. In Sweden, the minimum age of youth criminality is 15 and the maximum age of youth criminality is 20. In Canada, the minimum age of youth criminality is 12 and the maximum age of youth criminality is 18. The age range in which youth fall under youth justice jurisdiction in both countries is 15 to 17. Therefore, in order to maximize comparability of the Swedish and Canadian data, the crime rates examined in this study include only youth in the age range of 15 to 17.

Definition of an “Offence”

It is possible that an offender may be involved in multiple events of the same nature, or that a single event includes multiple offences. If a principal offence method is

used (in which only the most serious offence is recorded), the overall incidence rates will be lower than if every individual offence of a particular event is recorded. If a serial offence method is used (in which every event of the same type is recorded), the overall incidence rates will be higher than if the same offence is recorded only once. In this study, serial offence data were used in both nations (Swedish National Institute for Crime Prevention, 1998; Statistics Canada, Youth Court Survey, 1991-2003).

Measurement of Assault Rates

There are three levels of assault in Canada's *Criminal Code*: Common Assault, Assault with a Weapon, and Aggravated Assault. These three levels are collapsed into two categories in the Statistics Canada data: Common Assault and Major Assault. Common Assault (Level 1 Assault, section 265, 266) is the least serious. A common assault has been committed when an individual "without the consent of another person, applies force intentionally to that other person, directly or indirectly"². The seriousness of physical injury distinguishes this type of assault from more serious assaults (Statistics Canada, 2007). Major assault is an offence category that includes the higher levels of assault in the Criminal Code: Assault with a Weapon (Assault Level II, section 267³), and Aggravated Assault (Assault Level III, section 268⁴; Statistics Canada, 2007).

² Section 265. (1) *A person commits an assault when*
(a) *without the consent of another person, he applies force intentionally to that other person, directly or indirectly;*
(b) *he attempts or threatens, by an act or a gesture, to apply force to another person, if he has, or causes that other person to believe on reasonable grounds that he has, present ability to effect his purpose; or*
(c) *while openly wearing or carrying a weapon or an imitation thereof, he accosts or impedes another person or begs.*

³ Section 267. *Assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm*
Everyone who, in committing an assault,
(a) *carries, uses or threatens to use a weapon or an imitation thereof, or*

There are two levels of assault in Sweden's *Penal Code*: Assault and Gross Assault. Assault has occurred when an individual has sustained bodily injury, illness or pain that renders him or her powerless⁵. If the assault is particularly serious, it may be considered to be a gross assault⁶.

Therefore, in Sweden both the lower and higher levels of assault include bodily injury, while in Canada only the higher level of assault includes bodily injury. To enhance the comparability of the Canadian and Swedish assault variables, the lower and higher levels of assault were collapsed into a single "assault" variable for both Canada and Sweden. Rates of prosecutions and convictions for assault (per 100,000 youth aged 15 to 17) was calculated for each year between 1991 and 2006, in each country, and plotted on a time trend chart.

(b) causes bodily harm to the complainant

⁴ Section 268. (1) *Everyone commits an aggravated assault who wounds, maims, disfigures or endangers the life of the complainant.*

⁵ Part Two: Chapter 3, Section 5. *A person who inflicts bodily injury, illness or pain upon another or renders him or her powerless or in a similar helpless state, shall be sentenced for assault to imprisonment for at most two years or, if the crime is petty, to a fine or imprisonment for at most six months.*

⁶ Part Two: Chapter 3, Section 6. *If the crime referred to in Section 5 is considered gross, the sentence for gross assault shall be imprisonment for at least one and at most ten years. In assessing if the crime is gross special consideration shall be given to whether the act constituted a mortal danger or whether the offender inflicted grievous bodily harm or severe illness or otherwise displayed particular ruthlessness or brutality.*

Measurement of Sexual Assault Rates

There are three levels of sexual assault in Canada's *Criminal Code*: Sexual Assault⁷, Sexual Assault with a Weapon⁸ and Aggravated Sexual Assault⁹. The determination of sexual assault is based on the meaning of "consent", which is "the voluntary agreement of the complainant to engage in the sexual activity in question" (Section 273.1). Consent does not include submission to the application of force, threats or fear of the application of force, fraud, or the exercise of authority (Section 265.3). Determination of consent is based on a number of factors¹⁰. A belief on the part of the

⁷ Section 271. *Sexual assault*

- (1) Every one who commits a sexual assault is guilty of
(a) an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years; or
(b) an offence punishable on summary conviction and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding eighteen months.

⁸ Section 272. *Sexual assault with a weapon, threats to a third party or causing bodily harm.*

- (1) Every person commits an offence who, in committing a sexual assault
(a) carries, uses or threatens to use a weapon or an imitation of a weapon;
(b) threatens to cause bodily harm to a person other than the complainant;
(c) causes bodily harm to the complainant; or
(d) is a party to the offence with any other person.

⁹ Section 273 *Aggravated sexual assault*

- (1) Every one commits an aggravated sexual assault who, in committing a sexual assault, wounds, maims, disfigures or endangers the life of the complainant.

¹⁰ Section 273.1 (2). *No consent is obtained, for the purposes of sections 271, 272 and 273, where*

- (a) the agreement is expressed by the words or conduct of a person other than the complainant;
(b) the complainant is incapable of consenting to the activity;
(c) the accused induces the complainant to engage in the activity by abusing a position of trust, power or authority;
(d) the complainant expresses, by words or conduct, a lack of agreement to engage in the activity;
or (e) the complainant, having consented to engage in sexual activity, expresses, by words or conduct, a lack of agreement to continue to engage in the activity.

accused that the complainant consented does not constitute a defense if the accused was intoxicated, reckless or willfully blind¹¹.

There are six categories of sexual assault in the Swedish *Penal Code* that are comparable to the Canadian categories above: Rape and Gross Rape¹², Sexual Coercion and Gross Sexual Coercion¹³, Sexual Exploitation and Gross Sexual Exploitation¹⁴.

Because the Swedish rape legislation is intended to be broader than the narrow definition of rape as full penetration, they have numerous categories, and in each of these categories

¹¹ Section 273.2 *It is not a defense to a charge under section 271, 272 or 273 that the accused believed that the complainant consented to the activity that forms the subject-matter of the charge, where*
(a) *the accused's belief arose from the accused's*
 (i) *self-induced intoxication, or*
 (ii) *recklessness or willful blindness; or*
(b) *the accused did not take reasonable steps, in the circumstances known to the accused at the time, to ascertain that the complainant was consenting.*

¹² *Part Two: Chapter 6, Section 1. A person who by violence or threat which involves, or appears to the threatened person to involve an imminent danger, forces another person to have sexual intercourse or to engage in a comparable sexual act, that having regard to the nature of the violation and the circumstances in general, is comparable to enforced sexual intercourse, shall be sentenced for rape to imprisonment for at least two and at most six years. Causing helplessness or a similar state of incapacitation shall be regarded as equivalent to violence.*

If the crime is gross, a sentence to imprisonment for at least four and at most ten years shall be imposed for gross rape. In assessing whether the crime is gross, special consideration shall be given to whether the violence involved a danger to life or whether the perpetrator caused serious injury or serious illness or, having regard to the method used or the victim's youth or other circumstances, exhibited particular ruthlessness or brutality.

¹³ *Part Two: Chapter 6, Section 2*

A person who, under circumstances other than those defined in Section 1, makes someone engage in a sexual act by unlawful coercion shall be sentenced for sexual coercion to imprisonment for at most two years.

If the person who committed the act exhibited particular ruthlessness or if the crime is otherwise considered gross, a sentence of at least six months and at most four years shall be imposed for gross sexual coercion.

¹⁴ *Part Two: Chapter 6, Section 3*

A person who induces another person to engage in a sexual act by gross use of his or her dependent state shall be sentenced for sexual exploitation to imprisonment for at most two years. The same shall apply to a person who engages in a sexual act with another person by improperly taking advantage of the fact that the latter is helpless or in some other state of incapacitation or is suffering from mental disturbance.

If the accused has exhibited particular ruthlessness or if the crime is otherwise to be considered gross, imprisonment for at least six months and at most six years shall be imposed for gross sexual exploitation.

sexual assault is defined as either sexual intercourse or a sexual act. With this same intention, the Canadian Criminal Code's "offence of rape was repealed in 1982 and replaced by sexual assault, which is [also] a broader and more encompassing offence" (Cameron, 2003). It was reclassified as a type of assault in order that the law "focus on the violence committed by the assailant rather than the sexual nature of the offence...in an attempt to emphasize the violent nature of rape" (Tang, 1998), as well as providing a detailed definition and understanding of consent.

In the Canadian statistical data all three levels of sexual assault are collapsed into one category (sexual assault). In the Swedish statistical data, the six categories are collapsed into three. In order to enhance the comparability of the Canadian and Swedish sexual assault variables, all of the Swedish categories were collapsed into a single "sexual assault" variable. Rates of prosecutions and convictions for sexual assault (per 100,000 youth aged 15 to 17) was calculated for each year between 1991 and 2006, in each country, and plotted on a time trend chart.

Measurement of Murder and Attempted Murder Rates

Both Canada and Sweden distinguish between murder¹⁵ and manslaughter, but the Swedish code does not draw as clear a distinction between murder and manslaughter as the Canadian code does. In the Canadian code, a charge of manslaughter is laid when the act occurred *in the heat of passion caused by provocation*¹⁶, while in the Swedish code a charge of manslaughter is laid when the homicide is *less serious*¹⁷. In the statistical data of both nations, murder and manslaughter are collapsed into one category. But the two nations differ in their statistical handling of attempted murder. While Canada retains a separate category for attempted murder, in Sweden “attempts and actually committed offences are shown as one number. . . . the reason for it quite simple – we cannot guarantee the quality of the data when distinguishing between attempts and completed offences (email from Arletta Plunkett, Statistical Division, *The National Council for*

¹⁵SWEDEN: *Part Two: Chapter 3, Section 1. A person who takes the life of another shall be sentenced for murder to imprisonment for ten years or for life.*

CANADA: 229 *Culpable homicide is murder*

(a) *where the person who causes the death of a human being*

(i) *means to cause his death, or*

(ii) *means to cause him bodily harm that he knows is likely to cause his death, and is reckless whether death ensues or not,*

(b) *where a person, meaning to cause death to a human being or meaning to cause him bodily harm that he knows is likely to cause his death, and being reckless whether death ensues or not, by accident or mistake causes death to another human being, notwithstanding that he does not mean to cause death or bodily harm to that human being; or*

(c) *where a person, for an unlawful object, does anything that he knows or ought to know is likely to cause death, and thereby causes death to a human being, notwithstanding that he desires to effect his object without causing death or bodily harm to any human being.*

231 (1) *Murder is first degree murder or second degree murder*

¹⁶ 232 (1) *Culpable homicide that otherwise would be murder may be reduced to manslaughter if the person who committed it did so in the heat of passion caused by sudden provocation.*

(2) *A wrongful act or an insult that is of such a nature as to be sufficient to deprive an ordinary person of the power of self-control is provocation for the purposes of this section of the accused acted on it on the sudden and before there was time for his passion to cool.*

¹⁷ *Part Two: Chapter 3, Section 2. If, in view of the circumstances that led to the act or for other reasons, the crime referred to in Section 1 is considered to be less serious, imprisonment for manslaughter shall be imposed for at least six and at most ten years.*

Crime Prevention, May 9, 2008). A further difference is that Canadian homicide statistics include infanticide, while the Swedish statistics have a separate category for infanticide.

Therefore, in order to enhance the comparability of the Canadian and Swedish murder and attempted murder variables, the Canadian categories of murder and attempted murder were collapsed into a single “murder/attempted murder” variable, and the Swedish categories of murder and infanticide were collapsed into a single “murder/attempted murder” variable. Rates of prosecutions and convictions for murder/attempted murder (per 100,000 youth aged 15 to 17) was calculated for each year between 1991 and 2006, in each country, and plotted on a time trend chart.

Measurement of Youth Non-Physical Aggression

Youth non-physical aggression was measured by the following indicators: 1) prosecution and conviction rates of youth for unlawful threats over a 16-year time period (1991 to 2006); 2) proportions of youth who had been bullied (victims) or who had committed bullying (perpetrators) over a 13-year time period (1993 – 2006)¹⁸; and 3) peer helpfulness rates over a 13 year period (1993 – 2006).

Measurement of Unlawful Threats

Canada’s *Criminal Code* defines the crime of “Uttering Threats” as knowingly uttering, conveying or causing a person to receive a threat of: 1) death or bodily harm; 2) burning, destroying or damaging property of another person; or 3) killing, poisoning or

¹⁸ Rates are not available for every year for each of the indicators used. See p. 52, below for a detailed outline of the years available for each indicator.

injuring an animal belonging to another person (Section 264.1). Sweden's *Penal Code* defines the crime of "Unlawful Threat" as occurring when a person raises a weapon against another or otherwise threatens to commit a criminal act in such a way that the threatened person fears for the safety of his own or someone else's person or property (Part 2, Chapter 4, Section 5).

Both the Swedish and Canadian laws address threats to both body and property. While only the Canadian law includes threats against pets, I have assumed that pets would be considered a form of property in Sweden and would be included as such in judicial decisions concerning the utterance of threats.¹⁹ Prosecution and conviction rates for unlawful threat from 1991 to 2006 were obtained from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics in Ottawa, and from the National Council for Crime Prevention in Stockholm. Rates of prosecutions and convictions for unlawful threat (per 100,000 youth aged 15 to 17) was calculated for each year between 1991 and 2006, and plotted on a time trend chart.

Bullying. Olweus (1999) defines bullying as follows: "a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (p. 10). He describes it as: 1) aggressive and intentional harm doing, 2) that is repetitive, and 3) in a relationship characterized by a power imbalance (Olweus, 1999). Bullying can be *direct* (e.g. open attack on the victim) or *indirect* (e.g. intentional exclusion from social groups). Direct bullying can be physically violent, while indirect bullying is never physically violent.

¹⁹ This assumption is informed by the fact that the Swedish penal code has two separate legislations regarding animals (Chp. 16, Section 10b, and Section 13), neither of which include threats to pets.

Canadian and Swedish bullying rates were obtained from the World Health Organization (WHO) survey of “*Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC)*”, which was conducted in 1993-1994, 1997-1998, 2001-2002, and 2005-2006. These years overlap with the years of 1991-2006, which are the focus of the time-trend analysis of the crime variables portion of this study. The HBSC is a cross-national, cross-sectional survey of 35 countries, carried out at four-year intervals. Three age groups (11, 13 and 15 years) of approximately 1500 respondents each were surveyed. The primary sampling unit was classrooms. Given the “differences in school systems, age of admission to school and levels of retardation and/or advancement of students across countries” (HBSC, 1997/98:4), age was the most reliable way of ensuring equivalency. Age appropriate classes were randomly selected, and “most countries stratif[ied] their samples to ensure reasonable geographical coverage” (HBSC, 1997/98:11). Each nation was asked to include private, public and special schools in their sample selection base, but a small number were unable to do so. A standard questionnaire was administered in the children’s classrooms by specially trained personnel, teachers, and school nurses.

Respondents were told that bullying occurs when a “student, or group of students, says or does nasty and unpleasant things to him or her [i.e. stealing their lunch, hiding their books, etc.]²⁰. It is also bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a way he or she doesn’t like, or when [he or she is] deliberately left out of things” (HBSC, 2004:133). The 2001/02 report outlines the following questions and response options presented to each participant: 1) “How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?”, and 2) “How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school

²⁰ The HBSC survey has a separate question which asks students about their degree of involvement in physical fighting.

in the past couple of months?” (HBSC, 2004:134). The response options were the same for both questions: 1) “I haven’t been bullied (or bullied another student(s)) at school in the past couple of months”, 2) “It has only happened once or twice”, 3) “2 or 3 times a month”, 4) “About once a week”, 5) “Several times a week” (HBSC, 2004:134). The variables of “bullying” and “being bullied” were examined independently.

In the data available from the HBSC, the number of time points at which various indicators are measured (1993/94, 1997/98, 2001/02, 2005/06) ranges from two to four. “Being bullied at least once this school term” and “once in the previous couple of months” is available for 1993/94 and 2001/02 respectively, “being bullied at least twice in the last couple of months” is available for 2001/02 and 2005/06, “bullying others at least once this school term” and “once in the previous couple of months” is available for 1993/94 and 2001/02 respectively, and “bullying others at least twice in the past couple of months” is available for 1993/94 and 2005/06.²¹ Results of the survey, based on

²¹ The following is a detailed outline of the questions, response options, and terminology reported for each of the studies on bullying in the HBSC research reports:

1993/94

Questions

- not outlined in the report. The findings were presented in bar chart form, labeled as outlined below under 1993/94 Reported in Charts

Response Options:

- not outlined in the report

Reported in Charts

Students who were bullied at least once this school term

Students who took part in bullying at least once this school term

2001/02

Questions:

How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?

How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school in the past couple of months?

Response Options:

1) I haven’t been bullied (or bullied another student(s)) at school in the past couple of months; 2) It has only happened once or twice; 3) It has only happened 2 or 3 times a month; 4) About once a week; 5) Several times a week

Reported in Charts

Young people who bullied others at least once in the previous couple of months

Young people who bullied others at least 2 or 3 times in the previous couple of months

percentage of participant answers to each response option, are presented in bar chart form for each country for the years of 1993/94, 2001/02, 2005/06.

Peer Helpfulness. Because media violence consumption is correlated not only with increased aggression, but also with decreased pro-social behavior, a measure of peer helpfulness was included in the present study to examine whether its prevalence varies with exposure to media violence. The measure of peer helpfulness was obtained from the WHO survey of *Health Behavior in School-Aged Children* for the years of 1993-1994, 1997-1998, 2001-2002, and 2005-2006, for three age groups of students (11, 13 and 15 years) in Canada and in Sweden. Students were asked to respond to the statement “Most students in my class(es) are kind and helpful” (WHO, 2004) on a 5-point scale (1 = “strongly agree”, 2 = “agree”, 3 = “neither agree nor disagree”, 4 = “disagree”, and 5 = “strongly disagree”. Results of the survey, based on percentage of participant answers to each response option, are presented in bar chart form for each country for the years of 1993/94, 1997/98, 2001/02, 2005/06.

Young people who were bullied at least once in the previous couple of months
Young people who were bullied at least 2 or 3 times in the previous couple of months

2005/06

Questions:

How often they had been bullied in the last couple of months

Response Options:

As reported in the methods section of the study, responses “ranged from ‘I was not bullied at school in the last couple of month’s to ‘several times a week’”. Give all the details, as you did above.

Reported in Charts:

Who have been bullied at least twice in the past couple of months
Who have bullied others at least twice in the past couple of months

Limitations of the Data Used in the Present Study

An inherent limitation of the Canadian youth crime data relates to the issue of transfers of youth suspects to adult court. Under Canada's *Young Offenders Act*, some youth suspects can be, and are, transferred to adult court. While these cases are included in the prosecutions category of the Canadian youth crime data and the number of youth transfers to adult court are reported in the data, the youth transferred to adult court who are *convicted* are *not* included in the youth convictions data. Therefore, the Canadian data may provide an underestimate of youth crime convictions. I attempted to obtain figures for youth convicted in adult court but they were not made available because of the complexity and cost of linking the records, as well as the potential violation of anonymity that could occur due to the small number of cases involved (email correspondence, Mimi Gauthier, Senior Information Officer, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, May 14th, 2008). To obtain an estimate of the number of youth convicted in adult court, I spoke with Mimi Gauthier, Senior Information Officer for the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (May 13th, 2008). She explained that, under the YOA, when a judge wished to impose a different (and generally more severe) type of sentence than was available under the Act, the youth was transferred to adult court. According to Gauthier, inherent in the decision to transfer the youth to adult court is an informal assumption of guilt, despite the fact that there has been no formal conviction (i.e. youth transfers to adult court usually result in convictions). According to the Canadian Department of Justice, this was one of the primary weaknesses of the YOA – that “a youth could be transferred to an adult court before conviction” (Department of Justice, <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/yj-jj-ycja-lsipa/why-pourq.html>).

Therefore, the numbers of youth convicted in adult court are not available but excluding these cases is likely to result in an underestimate of the actual number of youth convicted of crimes²² To resolve this problem, 95% of youth cases transferred to adult court were counted as convictions in this study to reflect the fact that most, but not all, end in convictions.

In 2001 the YCJA was passed, and in February of 2004 it received final legislative approval.²³ With the YOA no longer in force, one of the effects of the new legislation has been the elimination of transfers to adult court. Therefore, beginning in 2004, the Canadian youth crime data now includes *all* convictions.²⁴

²² Of the various crime variables under study here (Uttering Threats, Assault, Sexual Assault, Murder/Attempted murder) it is the variable of Murder/Attempted Murder rates that is most significantly affected by the transfers to adult court.

²³ For a more detailed description of the process, see Chapter 3: A History of Youth Justice: Canada and Sweden, p.37.

²⁴ Those cases already in process during the time of the legislative change completed their transfer to adult court. Therefore, a few cases appear in the data as transfers to adult court after the YCJA legislation took effect.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS

It was hypothesized that higher levels of youth aggression would be found in Canada than in Sweden, reflecting Canada's less restrictive laws regulating violent media consumption by children and youth. The findings of the present study support this hypothesis: both physical and non-physical aggression were found to be higher among Canadian than Swedish youth.

In any interpretation of the following findings, it should be noted that in Sweden prosecutions result in convictions 48.5% of the time, while in Canada prosecutions result in convictions 41.0% of the time (see Table 1). Therefore, findings showing higher conviction rates in Canada cannot be accounted for by a higher rate of prosecutions leading to convictions in that country.

Youth Physical Aggression in Canada and Sweden²⁵

Rates of Assault by Youth in Canada and Sweden over Time

Prosecutions. Over the 16-year period examined, Canada's average youth assault prosecution rate (1,177.6/100,000) was 100.2% higher than Sweden's (588.2/100,000) (see Figure 1). The Canadian rate was higher than the Swedish rate in every year, and this difference increased over time. Between 1991 and 2002, the Canadian rates were 95.0% higher than Sweden's. Between 2003 and 2006, this difference increased to 112.0%.

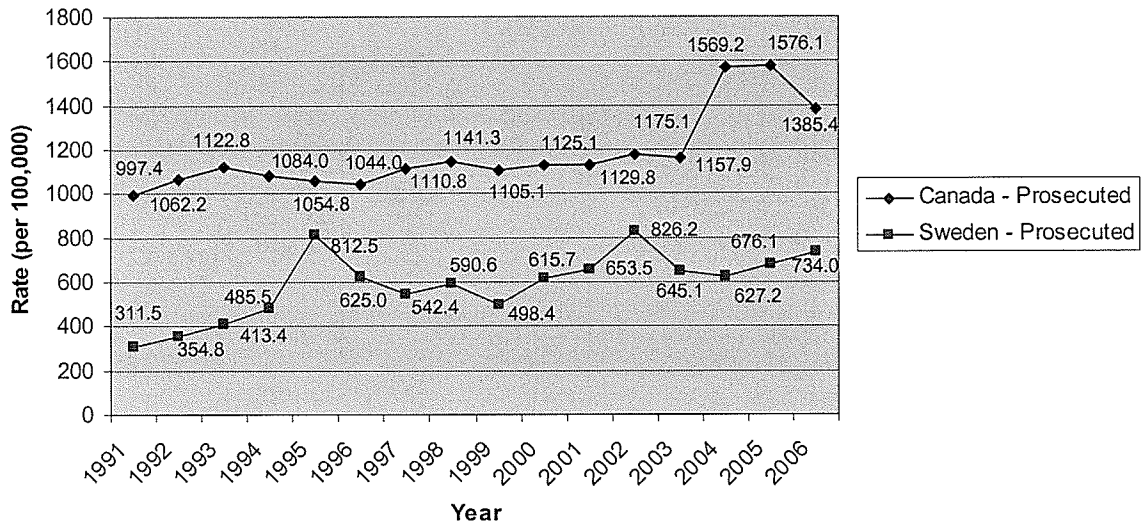
²⁵ All primary data used for the following analyses can be found in Appendix i.

Table 1

Percentage of Prosecutions resulting in Convictions
Canada and Sweden, 1991 – 2006

| | <u>Canada</u> | <u>Sweden</u> |
|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Assault | 53.0 | 76.9 |
| Sexual Assault | 41.0 | 48.2 |
| Murder/Attempted Murder | 33.1 | 36.4 |
| Uttering Threats | <u>37.1</u> | <u>32.6</u> |
| Overall Average | 41.0 | 48.5 |

Figure 1: Rate (per 100,000) of Assault Prosecutions of Persons aged 15-17 in Canada and Sweden by Year



Convictions. Over the 16-year period examined, the average youth assault conviction rate was 41.4% higher in Canada (620.4/100,000) than in Sweden (438.7/100,000) (see Figure 2). The Canadian rate was higher than the Swedish rate in 15 of the 16 years, with the largest difference occurring in 2004 when the Canadian rate (749/100,000) was 89.1% higher than the Swedish rate (396/100,000). Only in 1995 was the Swedish rate (605/100,000) higher than the Canadian rate (584/100,000), but this was the smallest difference found over the 16 years (3.6%).

Rates of Sexual Assault by Youth in Canada and Sweden Over Time

Prosecutions. Over the 16-year period examined, the average rate of youth sexual assault prosecutions was 896.3% higher in Canada (107.6/100,000) than in Sweden (10.8/100,000) (See Figure 3). The Canadian rate was higher than the Swedish rate in every year. While both the Canadian and Swedish rates began to rise in 2003/2004, this increase was considerably larger in Canada than in Sweden.

Convictions. Over the 16-year period examined, the average rate of youth sexual assault convictions was 1005.0% higher in Canada (44.2/100,000) than in Sweden (4/100,000) (see Figure 4). The rate was higher in Canada than in Sweden in every year examined. The largest difference occurred in 1993 when the Canadian rate was 1,230.0% higher than the Swedish rate. The smallest difference occurred in 2003 when the Canadian rate was 652.0% higher than the Swedish rate.

Figure 2: Rate (per 100,000) of Assault Convictions of Persons aged 15-17 in Canada and Sweden by Year

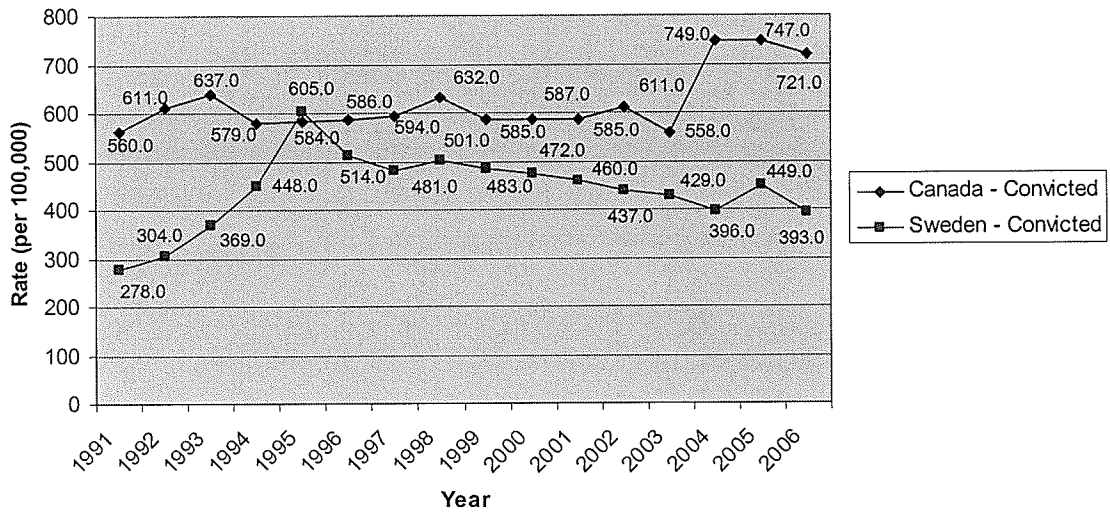


Figure 3: Rate (per 100,000) of Sexual Assault Prosecutions of Persons aged 15-17 in Canada and Sweden by Year

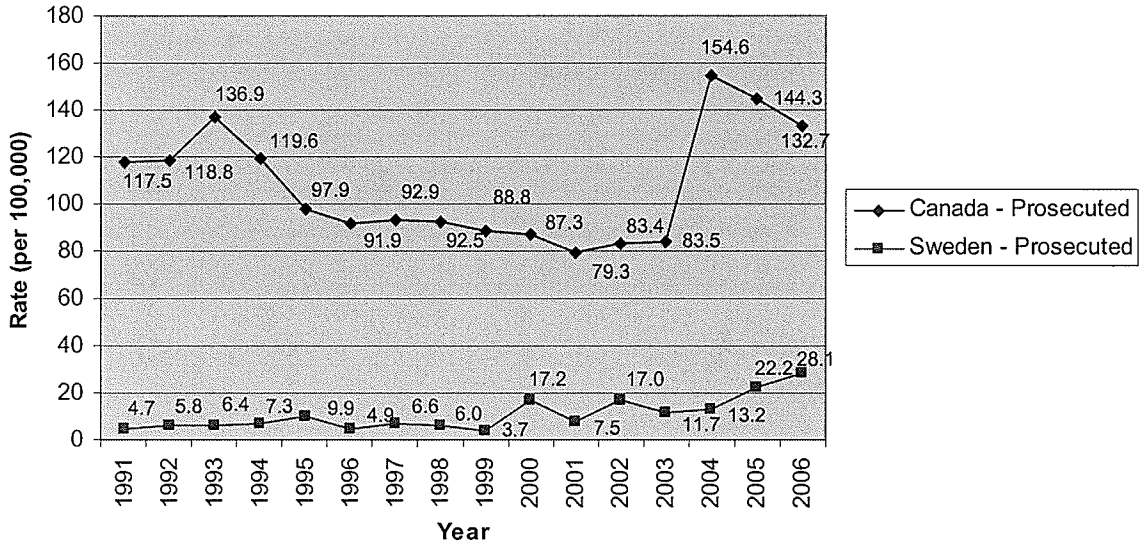
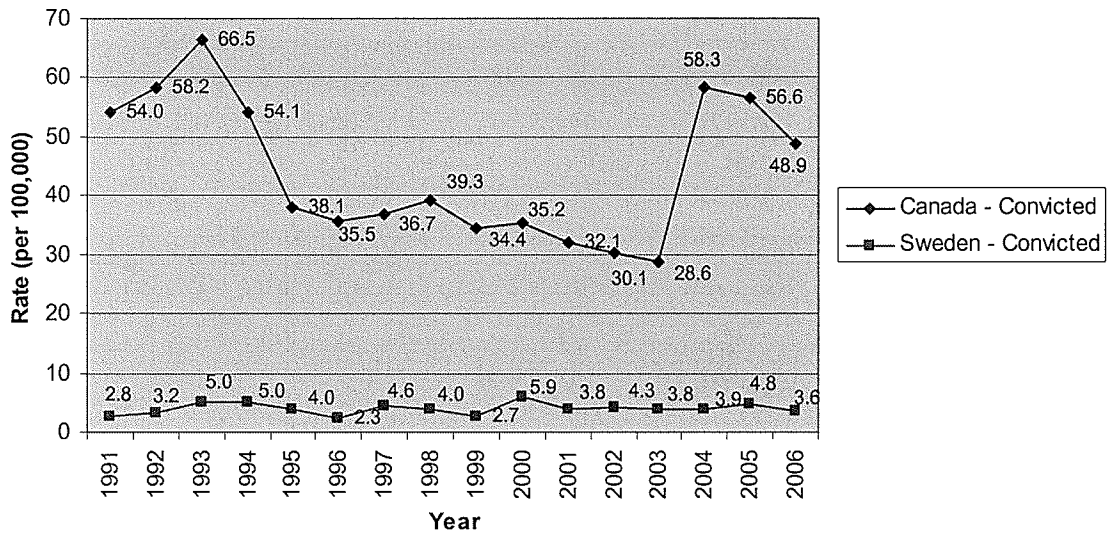


Figure 4: Rate (per 100,000) of Sexual Assault Convictions of Person aged 15-17 in Canada and Sweden by Year



Rates of Murder/Attempted Murder by Youth in Canada and Sweden over Time

Prosecutions. Over the 16 years examined, the average rate of prosecutions for murder/attempted murder by youth was 64.2% higher in Canada (11/100,000) than in Sweden (6.7/100,000) (see Figure 5). Canada's rate was higher than Sweden's rate in 13 of the 16 years examined. Between 1991 and 1999, the average Canadian rate was 185.0% higher than the average Swedish rate. However, in 2001-2002, 2002-2003 and 2004-2005, the Swedish rate exceeded the Canadian rate by an average of 44.0%. In the subsequent two years, Sweden's rate was again lower than Canada's.

Convictions. Over the 16-year period examined, the average rate of youth convictions for murder/attempted murder was 70.0% higher in Canada (3.4/100,000) than in Sweden (2/100,000) (see Figure 6). The between-country difference was greatest between 1991 and 1995, decreased between 1996 and 2000 and decreased further between 2001 and 2006.

The data were re-analyzed to examine the potential confounding effect of youth transfers to adult court in Canada, which are most relevant in the case of Murder/Attempted murder cases. First, all youth transfers to adult court were removed from the Murder/Attempted Murder Canadian conviction data. The resulting average conviction rate over the 16-year study period was still 35.0% higher in Canada (2.7/100,000) than in Sweden (2/100,000). Next, the data were analyzed with 95.0% of youth transfers to adult court included in the Canadian data. The resulting average

Figure 5: Rate (per 100,000) of Murder/Attempted Murder Prosecutions of Persons aged 15-17 in Canada and Sweden by Year

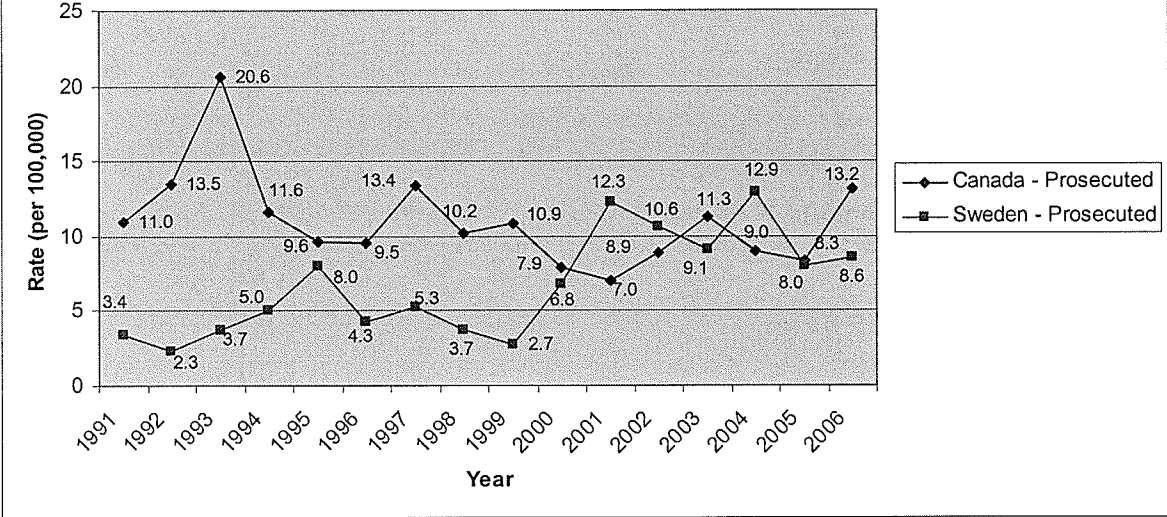
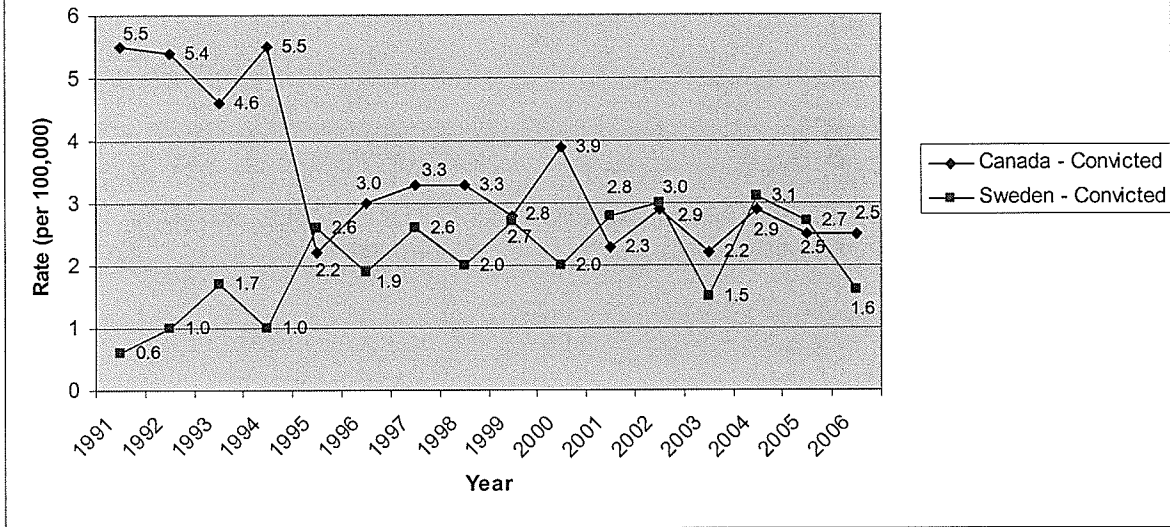


Figure 6: Rate (per 100,000) of Murder/Attempted Murder Convictions of Persons aged 15-17 in Canada and Sweden by Year



conviction rate for the 16-year study period was 70.0% higher in Canada (3.4/100,000) than in Sweden (2/100,000).

Overall Rates of Physical Aggression by Youth in Canada and Sweden over Time

Between-country trends across all physical aggression variables. Over the 16-year period studied, the overall *prosecution rate* for crimes of physical aggression (collapsed across Assault, Sexual Assault, Murder/Attempted Murder) was 114.0% higher in Canada (432.1/100,000) than in Sweden (201.9/100,000). Over the 16-year period studied, the overall *conviction rate* for crimes of physical aggression (collapsed across Assault, Sexual Assault, Murder/Attempted Murder) was 50.2% higher in Canada (222.7/100,000) than in Sweden (148.2/100,000).

Within-country trends for individual physical aggression variables. Canadian *prosecution rates* for Assault and Sexual Assault by youth have increased in the past four years. In Sweden, *prosecution rates* for Sexual Assault have increased markedly in the past four years, while *conviction rates* for Assault have risen only marginally. Canadian *conviction rates* for Assault and Sexual Assault by youth have increased in each of the past four years, although to a lesser extent than *prosecution rates*, while the Swedish rates have remained stable (see Figures 1, 2, 3 & 4).

Canadian *prosecution and conviction rates* for Murder/Attempted Murder by youth have been relatively stable throughout the 16-year period studied (taking into account the small numbers involved in this particular category). Swedish *prosecution rates* for Murder/Attempted Murder by youth began to increase markedly in 2001, although *conviction rates* remained stable throughout the 16-year period studied.

Non-Physical Aggression by Youth in Canada and Sweden²⁶

Rates of Unlawful Threats by Youth in Canada and Sweden over Time

Prosecutions. Over the 16-year period studied, the average prosecution rate for unlawful threats by youth was 72.9% higher in Canada (294/100,000) than in Sweden (170/100,000) (see Figure 7). The Canadian rate was higher than the Swedish rate in every year.

Convictions. Over the 16 years studied, the average conviction rate for unlawful threats by youth was 125.3% higher in Canada (109.7/100,000) than in Sweden (48.7/100,000) (see Figure 8). The Canadian rate was higher than the Swedish rate in each of the 16 years, with the difference increasing throughout this period. The smallest difference occurred early in the period (1993), when the Canadian rate was 42.0% higher than the Swedish rate. The largest difference occurred late in the period (2005) when the Canadian rate was 306.0% higher than the Swedish rate.

Rates of Bullying Victimization among Canadian and Swedish Youth over Time

At each of the three time points available for examination (1993/94, 2001/02, 2005/06), and within each age group (11, 13 and 15), the percentage of students reporting that they had been bullied *at least once in the previous couple of months* was higher in Canada than in Sweden (see Figure 9). Averaged across age groups, the proportions of

²⁶ All primary data used for the following analyses can be found in Appendix ii.

Figure 7: Rate (per 100,000) of Unlawful Threat Prosecutions of Persons aged 15-17 in Canada and Sweden by Year

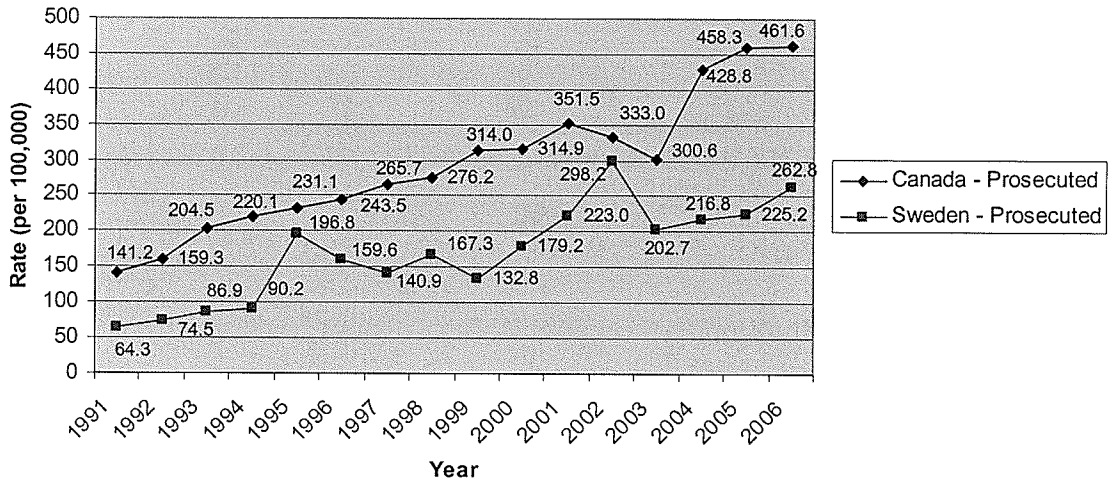


Figure 8: Rate (per 100,000) of Unlawful Threat Convictions of Persons aged 15-17 in Canada and Sweden by Year

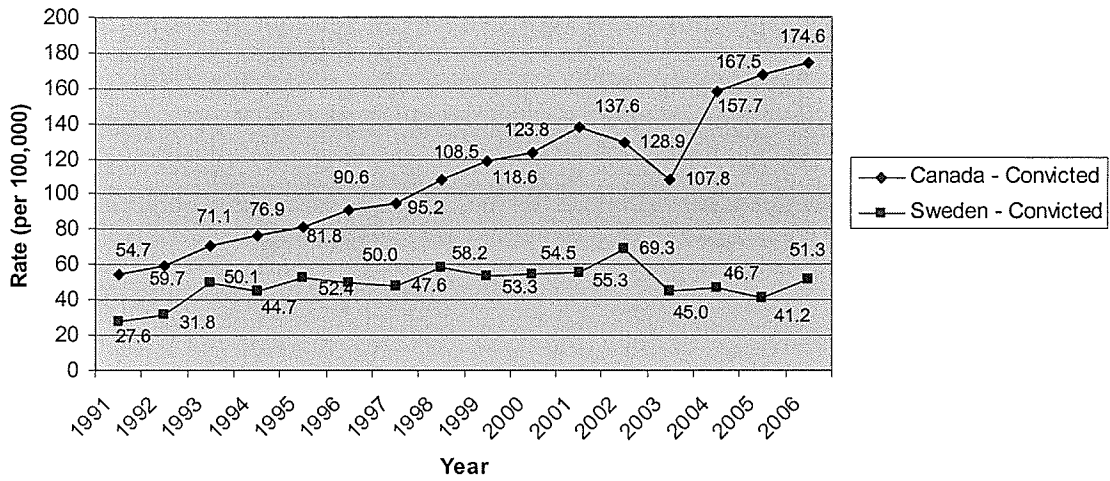
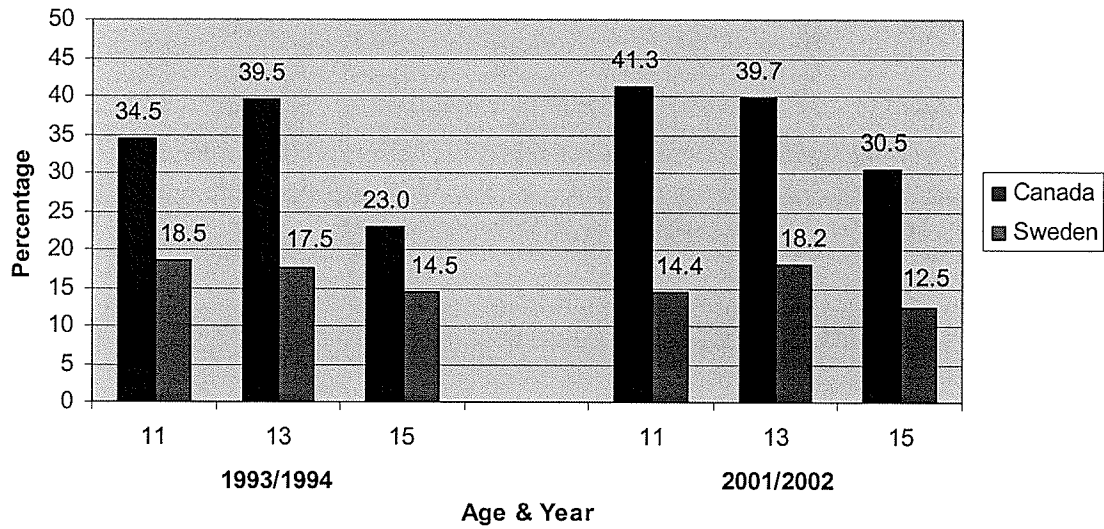


Figure 9: Percentage of Young Persons Who Were Bullied at Least Once in the Previous Couple of Months in Canada and Sweden by Age & Year



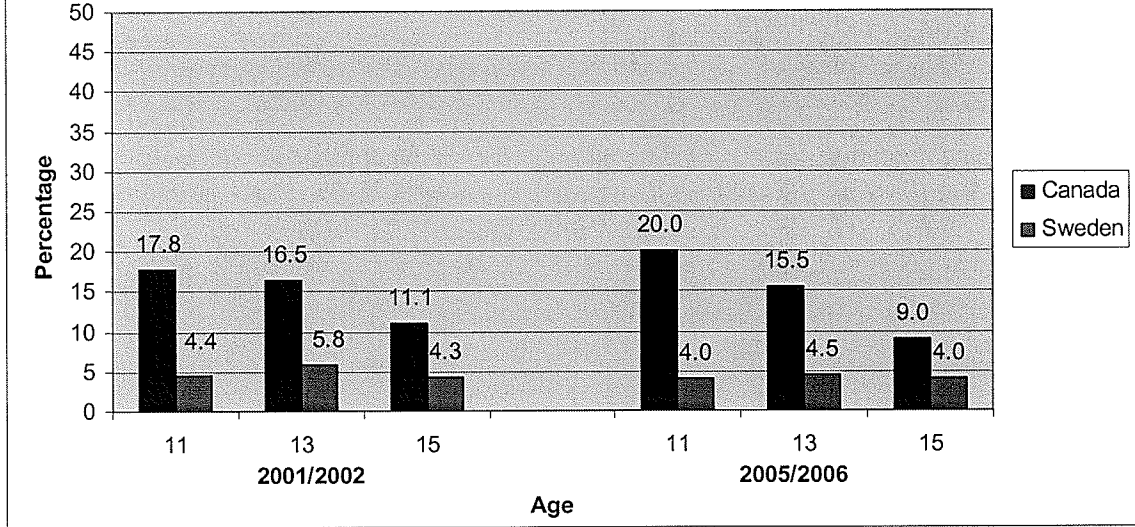
Canadian youth who reported being *bullied at least once in the previous couple of months* in 1993/94 and 2001/02 were 32.3%, and 37.2%, respectively. Averaged across age groups, the proportions of Swedish youth who reported being *bullied at least once in the previous couple of months* in 1993/94 and 2001/02 were 16.8%, and 15.0%, respectively. Averaged across age groups and time periods, the proportion of Canadian youth who reported being bullied at least once was 34.8%, while the proportion in Sweden was 15.9%.

At each of the time points available for examination (2001/02 and 2005/06), and within each age group (11, 13 and 15), the percentage of youth reporting that they had been *bullied at least twice during the previous couple of months* was higher in Canada than in Sweden (see Figure 10). Averaged across age groups, the proportions of Canadian youth who reported being *bullied at least twice in the previous couple of months* were 15.1% and 14.8%, respectively. Averaged across age groups, the proportions of Swedish youth who reported being *bullied at least twice in the previous couple of months* were 3.4% and 4.2%, respectively. Averaged across age groups and time periods, the proportion of Canadian youth who reported being *bullied at least twice in the previous couple of months* was 15.0%, while the proportion in Sweden was 3.8%.

Rates of Bullying by Canadian and Swedish Youth over Time

At each of the two time points available for examination (1993/94, 2001/02), and within each age group (11, 13 and 15), the percentage of youth reporting that they had *bullied others at least once during the previous couple of months* was higher in Canada

Figure 10: Percentage of Young Persons Who Were Bullied Two or More Times in the Previous Couple of Months in Canada and Sweden by Year



than in Sweden (see Figure 11). Averaged across age groups, the proportions of Canadian youth who reported *bullying others at least once during the previous couple of months* in each year were 35.0%, and 42.0%, respectively. Averaged across age groups, the proportions of Swedish youth who reported *bullying others at least once during the previous couple of months* in each year were 18.2%, and 14.1%. Averaged across age groups and time periods, the proportion of Canadian youth who reported *bullying others at least once in the previous couple of months* was 38.5%, while the proportion in Sweden was 16.2%.

At each of the two points available for examination (2001/02, 2005/06), and within each age group (11, 13 and 15), the percentage of youth reporting that they had *bullied others at least twice in the previous couple of months* was higher in Canada than in Sweden (See Figure 12). Averaged across age groups, the proportions of Canadian youth who reported *bullying others at least twice in the previous couple of months* were 12.2% and 9.2%, respectively. Averaged across age groups, the proportions of Swedish youth who reported *bullying others at least twice in the previous couple of months* were 3.2% and 3.3%, respectively. Averaged across age groups and time periods, the proportion of Canadian youth who reported *bullying others at least once in the previous couple of months* was 10.7%, while the proportion in Sweden was 3.3%.

Figure 11: Percentage of Young Persons Who Took Part in Bullying Others at Least Once in the Previous Couple of Months in Sweden and Canada by Age & Year

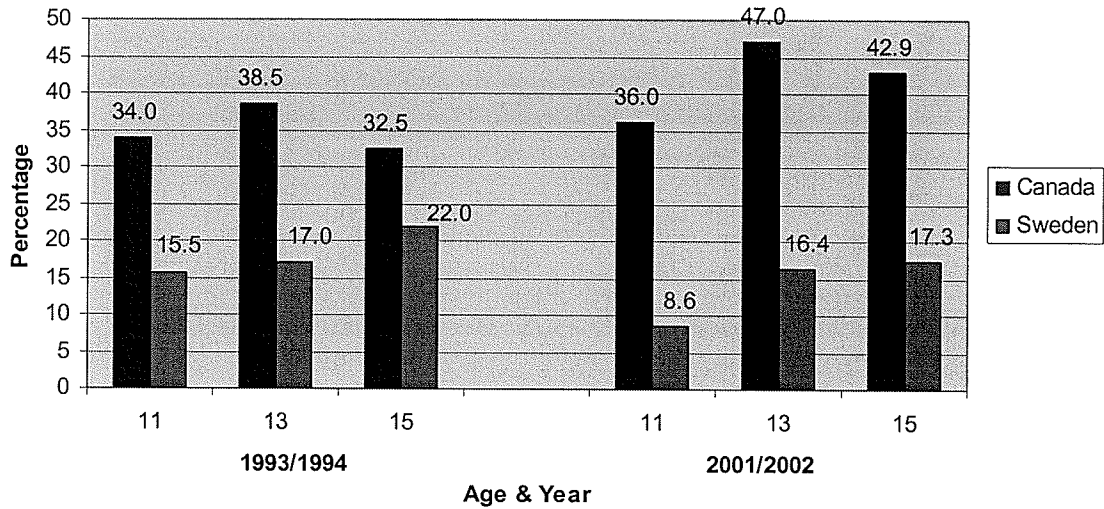
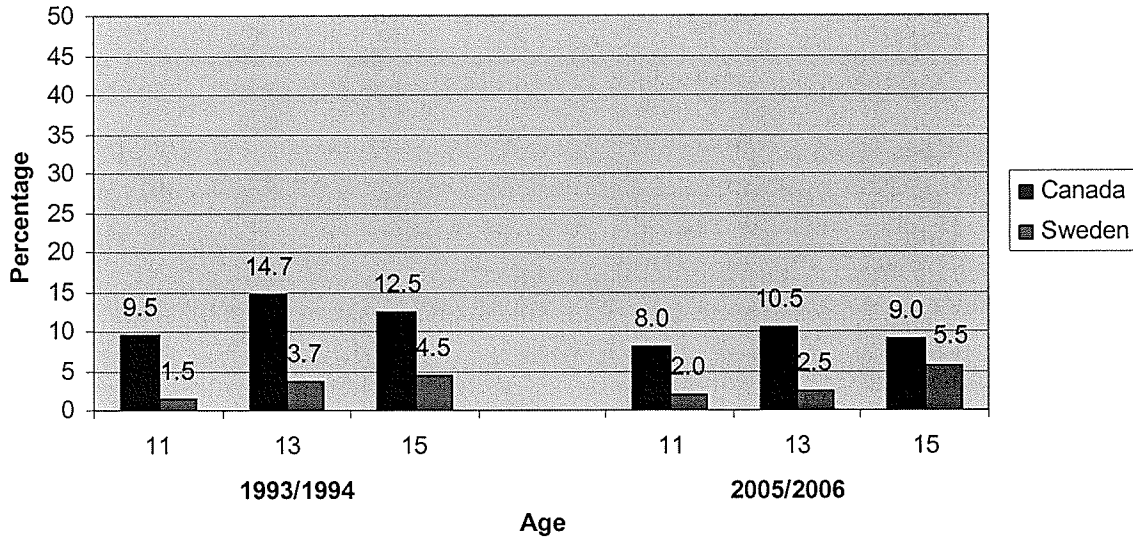


Figure 12: Percentage of Young Persons Who Took Part in Bullying Others at Least Twice a in the Previous Couple of Months in Canada and Sweden By Year



Rates of Peer Helpfulness among Canadian and Swedish Youth over Time

At each of the four time points examined (1993/94, 1997/98, 2001/02, 2005/06), and within each age group (11, 13 and 15), the percentage of youth agreeing that most of the students in their classes are kind and helpful was lower in Canada than in Sweden (see Figure 13). Averaged across age groups, the proportions of Canadian youth who agreed that the students in their classes are kind and helpful were 51.0%, 48.8%, 64.0% and 60.2%, respectively. Averaged across age groups, the proportions of Swedish youth who agreed that the students in their classes are kind and helpful were 68.6%, 76.8%, 76.7 & and 80.5%, respectively. Averaged across age groups and time periods, the proportion of Canadian youth who agreed that the students in their classes are kind and helpful was 56.0%, while the proportion in Sweden was 75.7%.

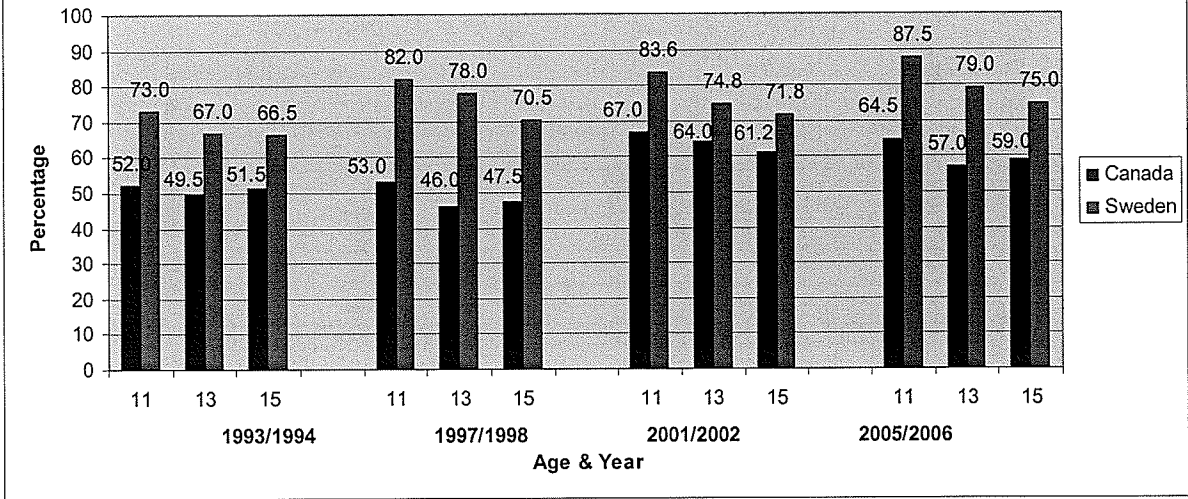
Overall Rates of Non-Physical Aggression by Youth in Canada and Sweden over Time

Between-country trends across all non-physical aggression variables. Over the 16-year period studied, the overall rate of non-physical aggression (collapsed across uttering threats, bullying, and being bullied) was 152.6% higher in Canada (24.75%) than in Sweden (9.8%). Over the 13-year period studied, the overall rate of peer helpfulness was 35.2% higher in Sweden (75.5%) than in Canada (56.0%).

Within-country trends for individual non- physical aggression variables.

Canadian and Swedish prosecution rates for unlawful threats rose steadily over the sixteen years examined, although at different rates. Canadian conviction rates have more than tripled during the sixteen years examined (54.7/100,000 to 174.6/100,000) while Swedish rates have not quite doubled (27.6/100,000 to 51.3/100,000). Canadian and

Figure 13: Percentage of Young Persons Who Agreed That the Students in Their Class(es) are Kind and Helpful in Canada and Sweden by Age & Year



Swedish bullying/bullied rates for each age group measured (11, 13, and 15) changed very little during the 13 years examined, though Swedish rates indicate a slight decline that Canadian rates do not. The greatest increase was found in Canadian rates of 15-year-olds who had bullied once, where the rates rose from 32.5% in 1993/94 to 47.0% in 2001/02. The greatest decrease was found in Swedish rates of 11-year-olds who had bullied once, where the rate decreased from 15.5% to 8.6% (see Figure 11). Averaged across age groups, Canadian and Swedish Peer Helpfulness rates rose slightly during the thirteen years examined (Canadian increase of 51.1% to 60.2%, Swedish increase of 68.8% to 80.5%).

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to address the question of whether the degree to which youth have access to violent media is related to the level of youth aggression in a society. This research has clearly demonstrated that in Canada, where youth access to violent media is virtually unrestricted, youth engage in considerably higher levels of physical and non-physical forms of aggression than do Swedish youth, whose access to media violence is highly restricted. On every physical aggression indicator measured (assault, sexual assault, and attempted murder/murder), and on every non-physical aggression indicator measured (unlawful threat, bullying, and peer helpfulness), Canadian youth consistently demonstrated higher levels of aggression. The types of physical and non-physical aggression for which this difference was most pronounced were sexual assault and unlawful threats respectively.

The Present Findings in the Swedish Context

While the data collected and analyzed for this study clearly support the hypothesis, the findings must be understood within the context of Swedish social policy more broadly. The general character of Swedish society, with its emphasis on the collective good facilitated by the state, permeates all aspects of Swedish society. It is exactly this socio-political approach to achieving well-being for the people of its nation that has resulted in the high degree of control over youth consumption of violent media in Sweden. Within this broader social democratic political context, additional factors can be identified which need to be taken into consideration in interpreting the present findings.

These factors include structural gender equality and the law banning corporal punishment of children.

Structural gender equality. Of the four crime indicators measured in this study, the greatest rate disparity between Canada and Sweden was found in the category of sexual assaults; Canada's sexual assault prosecutions were 896.2% higher than Sweden's, and Canada's sexual assault convictions were 1005% higher than Sweden's. Because violent media images are often sexualized, they can contribute to the sexualized nature of real-life violence against women (Gentile, Saleem, and Anderson, 2007; Spears and Seydegart, 1993), so there is reason to expect that restricting access to such images would reduce the sexual assault rate. However, it is likely that other factors also influence the disparity in sexual assault rates between Canada and Sweden.

One such factor is the structural gender equality that exists in Sweden, manifested in the structure of the electoral process and resulting parliament. A number of Swedish political parties have quota systems which ensure a percentage (40 to 50%) of female members. Those parties that do not reach their quota employ aggressive affirmative action programs (Friedenvall, 2003:4). Swedish political parties also employ a "zipper-style" system in which men and women are evenly alternated on party electoral lists (Friedenvall, 2003:5).

Moreover, Sweden's Riskdag (Parliament) is formed through proportional representation. Of the 349 seats, 310 are fixed constituency seats, based on the number of voters in each. The remaining 39 are flexible, and are used to determine "the best possible proportional distribution of seats between the parties" (Riksdag, 2008). This system has been of great importance in facilitating an increase in female parliamentarians

over past decades. Currently, the female membership of the Riksdag is one of the highest in the world at 47% (Riksdag, 2008), while Canadian Parliament female membership is 21% (Canadian Parliament, 2008).

Within political science, it is generally accepted that male-dominated parliaments do not give equal weight to the concerns of males and females (Wangnerud, 2000:67).

Anne Phillips, as quoted in Wangnerud, points out that

there are particular needs, interests, and concerns that arise from women's experience, and these will be inadequately addressed in a politics that is dominated by men. Equal rights to a vote have not proved strong enough to deal with this problem; there must also be equality among those elected to office (Wangnerud, 2000:67).

The 'politics of presence' in Swedish parliament has functioned to bring female concerns into the policy making arena, perhaps the most important of which is the fact that "women have historically contributed to putting greater emphasis on the social welfare aspect of politics" (Wangnerud, 2000:86). This has resulted in the "democratization of everyday life" in Sweden as evidenced by a multiplicity of family friendly legislation on various fronts (e.g., high quality, flexible daycare programs; generous maternity and paternity leaves; paid time off work to care for sick children). While Canada, like Sweden, is a welfare state, it falls far short of the Swedish standard in these areas. The comprehensive and sophisticated structural and ideological constructs that advocate and protect gender equality in Sweden likely contribute to the comparatively low sexual assault rates found in that country.

Corporal Punishment Legislation in Sweden. Corporal punishment has been associated consistently with increased levels of aggression in childhood and youth, as well as a greater tolerance of violence (Durrant and Ensom, 2004). Therefore, it might be

expected that in a society where corporal punishment has been reduced, youth violence would also be reduced.

In Canada, the legal justification for corporal punishment in Canada's *Criminal Code* has remained unchanged since 1892:

Every school teacher, parent, or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction toward a pupil or child, as the case may be, who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable in the circumstances (Section 43).

In contrast, the Swedish government repealed its legal justification for corporal punishment in 1957 and explicitly banned all corporal punishment in 1979. The Swedish *Parenthood and Guardianship Code* states that:

Children are entitled to care, security and a good upbringing. Children are to be treated with respect for their person and individuality and may not be subjected to physical punishment or other injurious or humiliating treatment (Chapter 6, Section1).

While virtually all Swedish children were corporally punished in the 1950s, today such an experience is rare in Sweden (Durrant and Janson, 2005). Canadian parents are significantly more likely to physically punish their children than Swedish parents (Durrant, Broberg and Rose-Krasnor, 1999), and to have positive attitudes toward this practice (Durrant, Rose-Krasnor, and Broberg, 2003). Given the association between physical punishment and child aggression, it is likely that the higher rate of physical punishment in Canada has contributed to the higher level of aggression found in the present study.

The Vagaries of Youth Crime Rates

There are multiple factors that effect crime rates generally, and youth crime rates in particular. The behavior of crime reporting, the influence of the media, and political policies/campaigns all intertwine in a complex relationship of influence.

Crime reporting behavior. It is generally understood among criminologists of most nations, including Sweden, that public perceptions and political pressures/legislation influence the crime reporting behaviour of individual citizens, individual police officers, and the development and implementation of policing programs. The result is “judicial and policing practices [that are] all too often unsystematic and incomplete” (Estrada, 1999:25). The unsystematic nature of judicial and policing practice is especially true in the case of crimes committed by youth because “the violations of young people may be more easily forgiven by victims, witnesses, and the police” (Gabor, 1999; 385) than those of adults. Conversely, political/media influence on public perceptions of youth crime may also result in an overestimation of perceptions of rates of youth crime. In a Canadian study of trends in youth crime and police response, Carrington and Moyer (1999) noted that “the observed increase in the per capita rate of young persons charged with offences reflected a change in the police propensity to charge young persons, rather than in the criminal behavior of young persons” (p. 4). Varying perceptions of youth crime, and of the appropriateness of various responses to youth crime (both socially and politically), influence reporting choices, making it difficult to ascertain accurate youth crime rates. Of the crime rates examined in this study, murder is the least susceptible to being influenced by the pressures that produce variations in crime reporting. A dead body is an objective fact, and there can only be as

many prosecutions, and potential convictions as there are dead bodies. Unfortunately, because Sweden collapses murder and attempted murder in their statistical data, it is not possible to compare only the murder rates of Canada and Sweden. However, it is worth noting that in comparing the murder/attempted murder rates, though they demonstrate the lowest difference in crime rates between Canada and Sweden relative to the other crime rates measured, the difference is nevertheless substantial (Canadian prosecutions were 64.2% higher than Sweden's, and Canadian convictions were 70% higher than Sweden's).

Justice System and Media Influences and Responses. The convergence of political and media pressure produces change in how the justice system itself handles youth crime. This can be observed in the Swedish prosecution rates during the 1980s when attention focused on juvenile crime in Sweden that “blew up suddenly and the media presented an emotionally charged image for the public and the authorities to react to” (Estrada, 2001:652).²⁷ The result was the *Commission on Prison Sentencing* in 1989 (as described in Chapter 3), which called for greater emphasis on protecting society and less emphasis on treatment of the offender. It has become clear that this period did not change the overall direction and emphasis of Swedish youth crime, but political/media pressure did create a short term effect which is reflected in the number of youth crime prosecutions during that time (Estrada, 2001).

The effects of political and media pressure also can be seen in Canada during the beginning of the twenty-first century. The present findings show that prosecution rates for assault, sexual assault, and unlawful threats all begin to rise quite dramatically in 2004. Yet this substantial increase is not matched by an increase in conviction rates. As

²⁷ Unfortunately, data for the indicators used in this study was not available for the 1980s.

discussed in Chapter 3, increasing public concern with rising youth crime in Canada, which received significant media exposure (and was possibly created by the ideological underpinnings of the media itself) was one of the primary moving forces behind developments that resulted in the YCJA, which was passed in February 2004. The considerable public/political pressure and media attention surrounding the YCJA, which was represented by the government as being very tough on youth crime, appears to have significantly influenced Canadian youth crime prosecution rates.²⁸ However, if the years 2004 to 2006 are excluded from the overall average of ratios of the time trend analysis (see Table 2), Canada's prosecution and conviction rates for these three indicators continue to remain considerably higher than Sweden's.

²⁸ There is no equivalent rise in Murder/Attempted Murder prosecution rates, which is likely explained by the small numbers, and the very serious nature of this particular crime type, which is far less likely to be influenced by the vagaries of police reporting behavior.

Table 2

Ratio (per 100,000) of Prosecutions and Convictions of Persons aged 15 – 17
Canada and Sweden, 1991 – 2003

| | | <u>Canada</u> | <u>Sweden</u> | <u>Canadian % higher</u> |
|-----------------|---------|---------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Sexual Assault | Prosec. | 99.3 | 8.4 | 1,082 |
| | Convic. | 41.8 | 4.0 | 945 |
| Assault | Prosec. | 1,100.8 | 567.3 | 94 |
| | Convic. | 593.0 | 444.7 | 33 |
| Unlawful Threat | Prosec. | 258.1 | 155.1 | 66 |
| | Convic. | 96.6 | 49.2 | 96 |

Accuracy of crime data. Sweden often appears to have very high levels of crime in cross-national comparisons because “Swedish crime statistics cover a very wide range of offences and include crime types that are not covered by the statistics of other countries” (National Council for Crime Prevention, 1998:2). In conducting the present study, I found that Sweden’s statistical data bases are also more comprehensive, up-to-date, and available than Canadian statistics. In fact, referring to the data available through the Youth Court Survey that were used in this study, Statistics Canada reports that

it is suspected that there is some under-coverage but the extent of this under-coverage is not known. No estimation procedures have been developed to adjust the published data. Internal controls make it possible to identify those courts that have not reported at all but it is not possible, with an audit of court files, to determine whether reporting courts have reported 100% of the charges adjudicated (Youth Court Survey, 2006-2007).

Therefore, it is possible that Swedish youth crime rates are over-reported/prosecuted and Canadian youth crime rates are under-reported/prosecuted, in which case the present findings would underestimate the difference between the Canadian and Swedish rates.

Limitations of the Present Study

While every attempt has been made to secure the academic robustness of the research reported here, there are limitations that must be acknowledged. First, in the context of criminology studies, it is generally understood that when examining crime statistics, the closer one is to the event itself the greater the validity and reliability of the data. Thus, crimes known to the police are more valid than persons charged, and persons charged are more valid than persons convicted, and persons convicted are more valid than persons incarcerated (Linden, 2009). Thus, the most accurate data for a study of this type

would be victim surveys and/or police reporting rates. Unfortunately, though both Canada and Sweden conduct limited studies on police reporting rates and the occasional victim survey, neither nation maintains a comprehensive data base of police reporting rates or victim survey rates. Therefore, the available data closest to the crime events that are comprehensive, valid, and reliable, are the prosecution and conviction rates that were examined in the present study.

Second, in sociological research, it is always best to be cognizant of the dissonance between the ideal versus the real. While Sweden legislates severe restrictions and punitive measures regarding youth access to violent media (the ideal), it remains an open question to what degree these laws are actually enforced within the interplay of the market and justice systems of Sweden (the real). This distinction between the real versus the ideal also applies to the criminal codes of the respective nations. While the ideal is that all aspects of the criminal code are enforced equally (which is what has been assumed in this research as various sections of the respective criminal codes have been collapsed for accurate comparison), it remains possible that certain aspects of either nation's criminal codes are in reality largely obsolete, and no longer enforced. The complexity of accessing accurate information to inform the question of the ideal versus the real in the context of law enforcement is considerably beyond the parameters set for this particular research study, yet the results of this study must be read in light of the potential dissonance produced by the real versus ideal challenges that most social science research faces.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study has demonstrated, based on the behavioural differences between Canadian and Swedish youth, that there is an association between youth media violence consumption and youth aggression. Given 1) the cross-national uniqueness of this work within the current platform of media violence research, and 2) the strong findings of this research in terms of differences between aggression rates in Canadian and Swedish youth, it seems clear that further research is needed, and that it would be best if that research could be designed to address the two significant limitations of this study.

Ideal vs. Real. The results of this study are somewhat vulnerable to how each nation conceives and enforces their respective legislations regarding youth media violence consumption. Sweden's restrictions on youth access to media violence are severe (the ideal), but it remains an open question to what degree these laws are actually enforced (the real). Therefore, an examination of the enforcement of legislative policies, in which questions of the reporting of contraventions, and the actual punitive measures enforced, would provide important information about the relative strength/weakness of the associational nature of youth media violence consumption and youth aggression in both Canada and Sweden. .

Two Phase Survey-Experimental Design. A more direct comparative measurement of media violence consumption, dealing directly with the subjects under study, would move this research from an associational nature to a correlational/causal nature. This could be accomplished via a two phase study outlined as follows. Phase one would be a cross-sectional survey of youth in both Canada and Sweden in which information is collected regarding the hours spent consuming media, the types of media

being consumed, trait hostility, peer relationships/behavior, and aggression supporting beliefs. In phase two of the research the youth surveyed would be divided into two groups, those with high levels of consumption (experimental group) and those with low levels of consumption (control group). Studies which measure internalized cognitive aggression scripts by observing reactions to provocative scenarios would be replicated (Dominick and Greenberg, 1972; Kirsh, 2006). Further, a blind lab experiment would also be conducted in which the youth participating understand themselves to be part of a study measuring hand/eye co-ordination and video gaming, when in reality hostile attribution bias would be tested by creating some type of ambiguous frustrating situation, and their responses to this situation recorded.

The advantage of the two-phase design is that, firstly, Swedish and Canadian gamers are in direct comparison to each other, both those who are high level consumers and those who are low level consumers. Secondly, the experimental nature of the second phase of the design allows for the possibility of correlation and/or causal implications. Thirdly, it gets around the idea vs. real conundrum. Whatever degree of media violence the youth of the respective nations actually consume will be measured against each other.

Conclusion

The findings of this research indicate that in Sweden, where youth media violence consumption is severely limited, youth crime rates are substantially lower than they are in Canada, where youth media violence consumption is virtually unlimited. However, no social phenomenon exists in isolation, and the link between violent media consumption and youth aggression is certainly no exception. Structural gender equality, the law

banning corporal punishment and the vagaries of youth crime statistics are all potential explanatory factors needing further study.

However, as predicted by the substantial research platform on media violence, the findings of this research do indicate a strong correlation between youth media violence consumption and youth aggression. Canadians have, for a number of decades, continued to express concern regarding the increasing levels of youth violence in Canada, asking Canadian legislators to ‘crack down’ on youth offenders. Yet criminologists have long observed that youth justice systems have little influence on youths who offend (Tonry and Doob, 2004: 20). Rather, it is the broader cultural landscapes that shape the cognitive, psychological and, ultimately, behavioural ethos of the youth culture. This research adds to the body of knowledge that strongly suggests that youth media violence consumption is *one* of the contributors to the current youth culture landscape that produces aggressive youth behaviours. Evidence of the association between media violence consumption and aggression continues to accumulate. This study has found the same association even when examined at a comparative, cross-national level. On the basis of these findings, the Canadian government needs to urgently undertake an investigation of the media violence legislation and enforcement implemented by the Swedish government and learn from that model new ways of protecting youth, and thus, society at large, from violence.

No society that feeds its children on tales of successful violence can expect them not to believe that violence in the end is rewarded.

Margaret Mead, 1972

(Maggio, 2006)

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