



The UNESCO

International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen

at Nordicom, Göteborg University

NORDICOM
Nordic Information Center
for Media and Communication
Research

Göteborg, Sweden, May 5, 1997

Dear Colleague,

We are writing to you to announce the opening of a new global information clearinghouse on children and media violence.

The possible consequences of depictions of violence, particularly in visual media, and particularly among children and youth, are a subject of widespread concern. They have been debated, within the research community and in society at large, for years.

In response to this concern, UNESCO saw the need for an **International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen**. UNESCO and the Swedish government have entrusted the task of building up such a Clearinghouse to Nordicom – the Nordic Information Center for Media and Communication Research – at Göteborg University in Göteborg, Sweden. Our work started in January 1997.

A prime purpose of the Clearinghouse is to provide a forum where all aspects of the relationships between media violence and young people can be penetrated in the light of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Greater knowledge will, it is hoped, contribute to more effective policies and practices worldwide. Toward this end the Clearinghouse will serve organizations, institutions, media and interested individuals around the world. The enclosed brochure outlines our activities in greater detail.

The Clearinghouse will be highly user-oriented. By building up an international network of contacts, publishing a periodical newsletter and yearbook we seek to facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge relating to children and media violence between researchers, policy-makers, media practitioners, voluntary organizations, teachers, and others. We also plan to make our database available on-line and to make use of Internet.

We sincerely hope that you will want to join the Clearinghouse network. Your participation would be greatly valued. As a contributor you will receive our publications (in English) with the contributions of other network participants from all parts of the globe. Membership in the network is free of charge.

The value of the Clearinghouse rests in the breadth of its coverage and the commitment of its participants. In short: the more relevant information we gather, and the more who contribute, the better our services.

International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen

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The information we seek may, for example, be data on recent or current research relating to children, youth and media violence; data on young people's media access and use; global, regional and national agreements and measures relating to young people and the media; regulatory models; successful media education projects; and positive initiatives to counter media violence (including alternatives to such content). Notices concerning upcoming events, seminars and conferences are, of course, of particular interest – as are reports from past such events. We are grateful for receiving relevant publications, documents and materials and look forward to your contribution (if possible, two copies of each, please!).

We are also anxious to reach other groups, institutions and interested individuals in your surroundings, who you believe may wish to contribute to and/or partake of the network's services. Feel free to share the enclosed information with others. Please also note the space on the enclosed form for 'nominations' of interested parties, which we will promptly follow up.

We look forward to hearing from you, not least regarding any requests or suggestions you may have concerning Clearinghouse services. We can be reached by a variety of media (see overleaf).

And we hope that you will come to appreciate our efforts – as a means of making your own work known in wider circles, as a way to keep abreast of others' work, and as a source of inspiration for new initiatives to combat gratuitous screen violence.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Ulla Carlsson', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ulla Carlsson
Director

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Cecilia von Feilitzen'.

Cecilia von Feilitzen
Scientific Co-ordinator

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International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen

The Nordic Information Center for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom) has set up an international clearinghouse on children and violence on the screen. The Clearinghouse receives financial support from the Government of Sweden and UNESCO.

The Clearinghouse is to contribute to and effectivize knowledge on children, young people and media violence, seen in the perspective of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our prime task is to make new knowledge and data known to prospective users all over the world. Cumulative knowledge is prerequisite to both fruitful research and constructive policy and practice in an age when the economic and cultural importance of the media already looms large and continues to grow day by day.

The International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen informs various groups of users — researchers, policy-makers, media professionals, teachers, voluntary organizations and interested individuals — about

- research findings concerning children, young people and media violence,
- ongoing research on children and media violence,
- children's access to mass media and their media use,
- training and courses of study on children and the media,
- positive alternatives to media violence, and
- measures and activities which aim to limit gratuitous violence on television, in films, and in interactive media.

The International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen publishes a yearbook which contains both scientific articles, summaries of ongoing research, notices of new titles, statistics, surveys of measures and legislation, and constructive alternatives to violence. Information of a more topical nature is provided in a Clearinghouse newsletter.

NORDICOM

The feasibility of starting an information clearinghouse on the subject of children and media violence was discussed at an international conference in Lund, Sweden, in September 1995. This conference was organized by the Swedish National Commission for UNESCO in co-operation with the Swedish Committee for UNICEF. The subject was of particular interest to the Swedish Government. In early 1996, Nordicom, *the Nordic Information Center for Media and Communication Research*, was contacted and asked to participate in the establishment of a Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen.

Nordicom, founded as an organ of Nordic co-operation over twenty years ago, works in both national and international arenas. Information about current research activities and research findings in the Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden — is spread among the Nordic research community as well as to policy-makers, media practitioners, journalists, information officers, students, teachers and interested members of the general public through a variety of channels. Nordicom publishes periodicals, books, catalogues of current research, surveys of the literature, statistical compendia, bibliographies, offers on-line services from its database, and so forth.

Nordicom also works to keep research colleagues and media professionals in other countries abreast of Nordic research in the field and establishes and maintains links between Nordic and international research bodies and institutions. Nordicom Review, a semi-annual journal, reaches subscribers in more than 100 countries in all parts of the world.

Nordicom monitors developments in the media sector throughout the Nordic region. This joint Nordic information service will serve users in the Nordic countries as well as in Europe and other parts of the world. The core of this effort is the generation of comparative Nordic media statistics. Nordicom is party to several collaborative projects relating to the media and cultural policy in Europe.

The Clearinghouse

A fundamental starting point for Nordicom's work to build up the Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention states the right of children to information, but also to protection from information which might threaten their well-being and personal development. This is the perspective in which violence should be considered.

Research findings on children and media violence to date may appear overwhelming and confusing, and the Convention would appear to be an excellent tool for establishing conceptual clarity in this area of study.

Article

17

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

"States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

To this end, States Parties shall:

- (a) Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of article 29;
- (b) Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources;
- (c) Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books;
- (d) Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous;
- (e) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of articles 13 and 18."

Scope

The Clearinghouse collates and documents studies of violent representations in televised fiction, in television news and current events programming, in feature films, in video and computer games, as well as in images and texts available via Internet, etc., and other telematic media.

The prime focus rests on what might be called 'problematic violence', i.e., violence that serves as a destructive model for solving conflicts or establishing the perpetrator's power, control or status, for giving vent to frustrations and anger, and violence as 'cult'. One of our principal tasks is to clarify and make known the findings of research regarding the influences and meaning of media violence.

The Clearinghouse also documents measures taken to reduce the amount of detrimental violence in television programmes and films as well as instances of affirmative action which show positive alternatives to media violence.

Services

Essential to the work of the Clearinghouse is the establishment of an *international network* with 'hubs' in Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa, Asia, the Arab world and Australia. The Clearinghouse should have the character of a 'network central'.

This international Clearinghouse is *user-oriented*, which means that our services are offered in response to demand and are adapted to the needs of our clients.

The Clearinghouse publishes a *yearbook* which consists of a thematic section with scholarly and survey articles, and a descriptive section featuring catalogues of current research, current literature, comparative statistics, media education programmes, affirmative action, legislation and regulations, etc.

A *newsletter* offers news briefs, specialized bibliographies, notices of new publications, abstracts of current research, regional overviews, and seminar, course and conference information, etc. In short, the newsletter provides information of a topical nature.

In these ways, and as a forum for interested individuals and organizations, the object of the Clearinghouse is three-fold: to attract attention to the question of violence on the screen and its role in the lives of children and young people, to stimulate initiatives and activities to combat gratuitous violence, and to help provide a better basis for policy in the field.

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