

Leighton Whitaker, Ph.D., P.C.
Diplomate in Clinical Psychology
220 Turner Road, Wallingford, PA 19086-6037
(610) 565-7643

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George Gerbner, Ph.D.
234 Golf View Road
Ardmore, PA 19003

*Called 2/25/98
will have the
next step.*

Dear Dr. Gerbner:

The enclosed pages (About the Author, Preface, Chapter 1 beginning, and Outline) reflect my thoughts so far about how we might structure a general market book. Some of your publications are already very adaptable for this purpose, for example your Nieman Reports Fall, 1996 article and "The Journal" article "Images that Hurt: Mental Illness in the Mass Media." Others are highly relevant but would need at least moderate rewriting as well as careful integration into a highly coherent and readable book narrative emphasizing and updating the most salient findings.

Further on, beginning with Chapter 6, a good deal of new writing is probably needed to explore the deeper implications of your findings by relating what has already been said to important current cultural phenomena such as the "fast food," and "sound bite" mentality, and sensationalistic programming, all cultivated by commercial hucksterism, that dominate the media and have in common the short-circuiting of active, critical thinking. I would be especially interested in contributing to those chapters since much of my research on thinking disorders seems germane.

I look forward to talking with you about this proposed start.

Best regards,

Lee

**Who is Telling Your Children Stories?:
What You Need to Know and Do about the Media
by George Gerbner**

About the Author

George Gerbner, Ph.D. is presently Bell Atlantic Professor of Telecommunication at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. From 1964 through 1989 he was Professor and Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. He has also taught and lectured at many other universities in the United States, Greece, Hungary, Italy, and Egypt. His research projects have won support from many foundations, agencies, and other organizations including the President's Commission on the causes and prevention of violence, the United States Commission on Civil Rights, and the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior.

He is a well known author of many articles and books, and has been editor of the Journal of Communication and chair of the editorial board of the International Encyclopedia of Communication.

Born in Hungary, Dr. Gerbner came to the United States in 1939. During World War II he served with distinction in the United States Parachute Infantry and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and received a field commission and the Bronze Star for service behind enemy lines. Married in 1946 to Ilona K. Gerbner, they have two sons and five grandchildren.

Preface

If you care about what is happening to your children, or yourself, or you care about what is happening to your world, you need to know about the impact of overwhelming media influences in your home, movie theaters, video games, and all around you. Most of what you need to know is in this book. The author, Professor George Gerbner, has spent virtually all of his long professional and scholarly life thoroughly studying these influences. His findings and advice have been sought by universities, corporations and legislators, including the United States Congress, as well as media scholars around the world.

This book integrates and summarizes his findings so that intelligent readers everywhere can grasp exactly how the media -- through television especially but also movies, newspapers, and magazines -- is a powerful manipulative force in your life. The media culture has been influencing you, your children and virtually everyone else to think, feel, and behave in mostly negative ways. What you will learn from this book is essential for you to lead your own life instead of being overwhelmingly impacted by people who only want to sell you something and do not have your well-being at heart.

As you read, you will learn first just what these negative influences are, and how television, movies, and other media have been programming you and everyone else. Second, you will learn what you can do right now and in the future to improve your life and the lives of everyone else you care about. What to do will become clear as you learn what is needed and exactly what practical steps toward improvement you can take in your home, in your community, in your country, and in the world. Your understanding and constructive action in relation to the media will make a positive difference immediately as well as in the years ahead. Together with others who care, you can improve the media.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Like most of us, you probably want to be entertained and distracted from worries while settled into a comfortable position, so that you can recover from your day. We tend to do that easy thing. We pick up our remote control and press the "on" button. Perhaps, we select a certain channel, or we rapidly flip through the channels looking for something that grabs our attention. If so, the program had better be eye-catching right away. Like many people, we may become very frustrated because, no matter how many channels we can view, and no matter how eye-catching or sensational the program, very few programs offer anything worth our time and attention. So, after searching and viewing, often we come away with little or nothing that is entertaining, let alone satisfying or helpful. That result may seem harmless. All we have done, apparently, is to waste our time in what may be a frivolous but seemingly harmless way. Insofar as we actually watched for a while, however, or even just had the television on in the background, we may have subjected ourselves to a noxious or even toxic influence.

Now, try a little experiment with your television set. View television with an active, questioning mind during prime time, eight to nine p.m. any night. Try one channel after another, for a few minutes each. Observe and think about what message is being sent to you. Do the stories show you creative ways to deal with life's challenges and conflicts? Is there an overemphasis on violence relative to the violence we encounter in real life? Do the programs very often show violence as the way to deal? Are the consequences of violence honestly portrayed, or is the violence "sanitized" so as not to show the realistic consequences? Are the comedies actually funny? Or do they come with "canned laughter" that is supposed to give you the illusion that they are funny? Are you learning about the enormously rich variety of people and cultures in the world and what they are really like? Or do the programs underrepresent, for example, women, people of color, the poor, older people, handicapped people, and people from other countries? How is sexuality represented? Is sexuality most often associated with affection and respect? Or is it usually associated with violence and disrespect?

What are you being programmed to think, feel, and do? Are you and your children learning anything useful? Or, are you and your children being steeped in various kinds of morbidity?

Chances are that even this little experiment covering just one prime time hour of one evening of television has given you some impressions, but you can't draw firm conclusions. Now consider that the work done by George Gerbner and his colleagues has systematically examined tens of thousands of television programs in terms of all of these questions and arrived at answers to all of them plus other more profound questions about the effects of television viewing.

Suppose you can learn, in the space of this book, what has required a professional lifetime of systematically studying the influence of television, movies, and other media such as newspapers and magazines. You will know the precise answers to many important questions, including those we just raised. But you will also begin to realize a pattern of answers to much larger, more profound concerns that you may not have realized have closely related causes and dynamics.

Why is television generally the arid wasteland that critics and so many other viewers say it is? Why are there so few good programs? Why can't we do better? Who owns the airways and why? Who is doing the programming and what are their motives? Why do so many people have at least one, and sometimes two or three or more television sets in their homes when they get so little from them even if they have access to fifty or more channels? Why is it that the average child watches television seven hours a day? Why can't young Johnny or Jennifer read? Why are today's entering college students, who represent the "television generation," more materialistic, less committed to education, and more bored than older generations of college students? Why, increasingly, do we have so many college graduates who are illiterate? Why do we have a growing epidemic of "attention deficit disorders" first observed in children and now observed persisting into adulthood? What has made the proliferation of drug prescriptions for children in the United States so great that it has come to the critical attention of the the United Nations? Why are mind-altering drugs prescribed so much in our nation for adolescents and adults, and why are they so easily accepted? Why, here in the United States, do we depend so much on alcohol and other drugs?

Why do we have an accelerating rate of obesity among both children and adults? Why do most people, children especially, get so little exercise? How have we come to rely so much on unhealthy "fast food," instead of nutritious food, on "sound bites" instead of meaningful speech, and on sensationalistic instead of truly informative newspapers and magazines? Why are our movie theaters being invaded more and more by "bugs, drugs and thugs" as a recent New York Times article observed? And why do most video games, such as virtually all those featured in theater lobbies, have killing as the game's objective?

Can such major concerns as these be answered in part by understanding the influence of television, movies, video games and other "harmless diversions?" We think, yes!

Outline

Who is Telling Your Children Stories

About the Author

Preface

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Chapter 7 Answering the Deep Questions: Long-term Effects on Values and Behavior:

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Chapter 10 What to Do in Your Home and Community Immediately

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