

Cultural Environment Movement Media Literacy Project

A proposal for the Prevention of Youth Violence

March 15, 1997

Submitted to:  
Marion Hunt Badiner  
The Roy A. Hunt Foundation  
Suite 630 - One Bigelow Square  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-3030

From:  
Katherine Duncan, Program Director  
The Cultural Environment Movement  
3508 Market Street, Suite B-030  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Cultural Environment Movement  
Media Literacy Project

Overview

This is a proposal from The Cultural Environment Movement in response to the Roy A. Hunt Foundation's solicitation of proposals which address the Prevention of Youth Violence.

The Cultural Environment Movement (CEM), founded by Dr. George Gerbner, is a non-profit coalition of over 150 independent organizations in every state of the U.S. and 57 other countries on six continents, united in working for freedom, fairness, equity, diversity, and democracy in media ownership, employment and presentation. CEM is concerned about the co-optation of our cultural myths, which socialize people into roles of gender, age, class, vocation and lifestyle, by commercial media who have nothing to tell, but plenty to sell. The movement is dedicated to reclaiming this storytelling process for the people and cultures to which it belongs. After a phenomenal, catalyzing founding convention held in March of 1996, it is currently involved in assisting independent media in their respective communities to form alliances furthering their progressive aspirations and providing alternatives to mainstream media sources. It is also solidifying membership within its own coalition and planning for a follow-up convention scheduled for May, 1998.

CEM's mission is based on the research of the Cultural Indicators Research Project, which relates long-term exposure to recurrent features of television to viewer conceptions about the real world, and to actions based upon those conceptions. CI is designed to investigate television's contribution to viewers' conceptions of and responses to a number of issues and topics, such as portrayal of women and minorities, the elderly and the mentally ill in the media. Violence-related findings and indicators have been published most widely (for example, the "mean world syndrome," which states that heavier viewers of television fear the world around them more than light viewers do). CEM thus has an inherent stake in eradicating media violence and its effects on young people.

This can be accomplished in the short-term by sensitizing children to television violence before they learn to imitate it. Television does not teach its viewers to question what they watch, but in three hours, a children's media literacy program created by CEM and CI, and easily duplicable by teachers and other concerned adults, can do just that. After watching videotapes of violent TV programs and discussing the values the program represents as well as how those values would fare in real life, the

audience at schools and community youth centers will readily identify television violence and dismiss it as the unrealistic and damaging myth it is. CEM and CI have the staff, the most important resources, and the experience to implement and produce the program for \$24,533.55, all of which can come from one source because of its low cost.

### Problem Statement

In the last few decades, television has become the mainstream of the cultural environment that affects much of what most people think and do. Public conceptions of and responses to issues, policies, and people can no longer be understood without relating them to their most central, common, and pervasive source. Television is that source.

Cultural Indicators's findings regarding television violence are disturbing: Adolescents watch an average of 28 hours of television per week, or four hours a day. By the age of 18, most Americans will have witnessed 18,000 murders on television. About 31 percent of all television characters and more than half of major characters are involved in violence in any given week. Cartoons are the most violent programs on television, with an average of 25 acts of violence per hour. Violence on television is presented as the major method of problem solving in today's society.

Not only do young people see this, they believe it. "Action-packed" programs (a synonym for violent programs) move so fast that, while children watch, they have no time to question what they see. Nor does television encourage them to do so; the attitude that the camera doesn't lie pervades our society.

Television is not in the business to dissuade that belief, but rather to sell it. Rosalyn Weinman, Vice-president of Broadcast Standards and Practices at NBC, told TV Guide: "We cannot expect any cultural appendage, including television, to look different from the rest of society. It is a reflection. It is a mirror image." The Cultural Indicators Project has proven that this is untrue; while the level of violence in the real world has decreased, violence levels on television have been steadily overstated since 1973.

However, since young people hear the view that media reflect society restated as fact by many different authorities, they consequently expect society to mirror television as well. (In fact, during the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles cartoon craze, parents and teachers found themselves pulling children out of city sewers, where kids had gone to look for the turtles.) Consequently, when

children constantly see television heroes use violence to achieve their aims, and when no alternative methods of problem-solving are presented, they learn to expect that violence will likewise help them solve their problems and achieve their goals.

While we realize that television is only one of the many factors that influence people, it may well be the single most common and pervasive source of certain conceptions and actions. At the conclusion of a study on the effects of television violence on youth, Dr. Leonard D. Eron stated, "There can no longer be any doubt that heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of aggressive behavior, crime, and violence in our society. The evidence comes from both the laboratory and real-life studies. Television violence affects youngsters of all ages, of both genders, at all socioeconomic levels and all levels of intelligence."

### Objectives

There are two available paths to interrupt the link between television violence and violent behavior in youth. One way, which is CEM's ultimate goal, is to change television programming itself to offer more stories told by more people about real events in our culture. Interrupting the link immediately, however, is essential, or today's youth will become adults who know no difference between their own cultures and the one mass media sells.

What we can do in the meantime, therefore, to interrupt the link, is to change the audience's perceptions of television. Teaching adolescents to question the source, the behavior and the values they see on television will cause them to critically analyze what they might learn before they learn it.

By the end of a three-hour media literacy course, our audience will critically consider the characters and behaviors they see on television, apply values to the programs they watch, and decide if it matches the lifestyle they would choose. Moreover, they will recognize that television violence is overestimated and overglorified, and is not an accurate reflection of their communities or the wider world. The number of violence scenes they recognize in a video clip they watch at the beginning of the course will rise at least 25 percent when they watch the same clip at the end of the course, and they will have become more apt to apply value and meaning to the violence than merely watch it.

## Procedures

CEM receives many inquiries from parents, teachers and concerned adults seeking methods to counter the effects of media violence on the adolescents in their lives. One woman, Laurie Hughes, wrote, "I teach in an all-girls high school in San Francisco. Do you have any information geared toward high school students? I am looking for ways to open their minds to the brainwashing by the media." Rachelle Hickey of Plano, Texas wrote, "I am starting a parents' media literacy group. Do you have any resources available to tell us where to start?" While we refer these requests to the few existing media literacy videos, we regret that such videos are priced beyond the means of many school districts, youth centers and families. Additionally, they are but one more televised event that cannot counter, in so short a time, the hours children spend watching regular programming.

Developing a "Media Literacy and Critical Awareness Program Development and Coordination Project" is thus one of the recommendations on CEM's 25-point "Agenda for Action" approved at our Founding Convention in March 1996. CEM aims to develop a short, affordable, easy-to-teach media literacy program that interacts with children, operating on the adage, "Tell me and I'll listen, show me and I'll learn, involve me and I'll understand." Our course will engage its audience easily because we'll simply be asking them to do something they already enjoy every day: watch TV. However, to prevent the audience from getting too absorbed in what they see to critique it, we'll add worksheets, discussion and video analysis to the activity.

CEM has the perfect resource with which to develop a media literacy program: the Cultural Indicators Project. Since 1967, CI has been rigorously training students and other young people to code television programs (that is, to evaluate them by applying numerical value to standard questions and answers regarding the show) based on program characteristics and character attributes such as goals, values, health, sexual interaction, career, and actions. CI also codes drug and alcohol use as well as violence and consequences. Over a three week training period, coders learn to objectively identify 244 separate themes, subjects, issues and aspects of television programs. By the end of the training, coders have claimed that television "has been ruined" for them, because they can no longer watch without analyzing it. CEM will translate this project, complete with video archives, the coding instrument, and the coder training method, into a three-hour lesson that anyone can teach and understand.

One hour a day for three days, three CEM or CI employees will travel to Philadelphia community youth

centers such as Colorado Community Youth Program, Norris Square Neighborhood Project, Philadelphia Youth Advocate Program, and Teen Haven to present the course to interested youth, having scheduled the program in advance with an adult. (The number of kids in the audience may remain flexible with this program; there is no limit). Each day, we will show the children videos, engage them in discussion, and assign questions to ask themselves while they are watching television at home that evening.

- Day one: We will show a tape of a cartoon from CI's video archive and ask the audience to write down every act of violence they see in the program, then ask them to come to an agreement on how many violent acts there actually were. Because cartoons combine violence with humor, and because there are no consequences to violence in cartoons, violent acts will go unrecognized, and children will understate the actual number of violent acts. To end the discussion, we will give the children CI's definition of violence, hand out their own coding instrument (complete with program characteristics and character attributes), and ask that they perform the same activity when they watch television that evening.

- Day two: The second lesson will involve values and reality in the discussion. We will ask the audience the following questions regarding the programs they watched the previous evening: "What did you see? What values did it portray? How did it make you feel? Do you agree with what you saw?" We'll share with the audience statistics that CI has found regarding television's comparison with reality (for example, average police officers pull their guns from the holsters less than one time in their careers, but heavy viewers of television estimate this happens once a night). We will also point out that, though children see one murder an hour on television, most of them have never seen a murder in real life; yet they believe we live in a violence-saturated society. To further their "at-home" training, we'll ask them to pay special attention to who the victims are and who the perpetrators are during their evening viewing; and what the violence they see accomplishes.

- Day three: We'll begin the discussion again by asking what the children learned the previous evening. By objectively counting the victims and perpetrators, they'll have seen that "bad guys" use violence to no avail, whereas "good guys" use violence and get what they want. This will launch us into a discussion about the truth in this idea. We will ask the audience, "Do you get what you want when you use violence?" "Is violence the only way to solve problems?" We'll explain why television presents a distorted view of violence. Finally, we'll show the same cartoon presented on day one, and ask the children to recode

it according to what they've learned. We expect the number of violence scenes they count to rise dramatically.

We will conduct the class in three different locations throughout Philadelphia, evaluating its effectiveness and adjusting it to be more effective between each session. At the conclusion of three sessions, we will not only have taught a number of children to analyze television violence before they imitate it, but we will have amassed the experience and tools to duplicate the course in an easy-to-teach and easy-to-learn format, complete with videos of violent television programs, a list of what violent scenes are in the video and how to compare them to the real world, coding sheets for the audience's use, and instructions on how to teach the course. We will then put together 30 initial media literacy packets and distribute them free of charge to interested CEM affiliates, such as start-up media literacy groups formed by parents with the desire to inoculate their children against television, but without the packaged resources to do so. The packets will be easy to duplicate for further distribution beyond the initial 30.

### Evaluation

Three methods to evaluate the program will be implemented.

- 1) A pre- and post-test of the children in the audience by viewing a cartoon and counting the violence scenes before and after the media literacy course. The number of violence scenes they identify will increase by at least 25 percent. Additionally, a questionnaire at the end of the course will assess what they have learned from it.
- 2) After each class session, we will solicit evaluations from the adults responsible for the audience, as well as the audience itself, complete with what we did best, what we can improve, and how effective the class was overall. We will use these evaluations to refine the course for the next session.
- 3) The finished product (booklet, coding sheets and videos) will contain an evaluation checklist for users to return to us following the course's implementation, including questions such as, Were the instructions easy to follow? Were they flexible enough to suit the audience? Was the video a suitable instrument for instruction and discussion? We will use the evaluations to refine the course before further duplication and distribution.

### Key personnel involved in the program

Katherine Duncan is the Program Director of CEM. Because CEM is a coalition of independent organizations, Ms. Duncan serves as the hub between their activities and the initiator of CEM's own programs (with the help of the Board of Directors). During the Media Literacy Project, she will direct its implementation, schedule the course at schools and community centers, co-teach the course, write the instructional booklet, and distribute it to interested organizations.

Brian Linson, Jennifer Luk and Mariaelena Bartesaghi are Research Associates at Cultural Indicators Project. They assist in development of the CI research coding instruments, hire, train and supervise a full-time staff of television research coders, and manage and assist in the analysis of the resulting data. Ms. Bartesaghi is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. Mr. Linson is an Arts and Sciences graduate alumnus of the University of Pennsylvania. Both have worked at the CI research project since 1992. Ms. Luk is completing her Bachelor's degree from the School of Arts and Sciences of the University of Pennsylvania, having begun working at CI in 1994. During the Media Literacy Project, they will design the student's coding worksheets, edit a videotape of violent programs to use in class, and share their knowledge with the students.

Michele Holley, Diane Bangley and Gisela Gil-Egui are Cultural Indicators Project research coders. Having been trained to recognize media violence among other things using CI's coding instrument, they are expertly qualified to teach it to others.



3/20/97

## Background

The Cultural Environment Movement (CEM) is a non-profit coalition of independent organizations and individual supporters in every state of the U.S. and 57 other countries on six continents, united in working for freedom, fairness, gender equity, general diversity, and democratic decision-making in media ownership, employment and representation.

CEM was founded in 1991 by George Gerbner Ph.D., Dean Emeritus of the Annenberg School for Communication. Dr. Gerbner sought to organize individuals and organizations concerned with a historic shift. For the first time in human history, a child is born into a home where television is on an average of more than seven hours a day. Therefore, most of the stories to most of the children most of the time are no longer told by parents, schools, churches or anyone in communities that have something to tell, but by a small and shrinking group of global conglomerates that have something to sell.

That shift has altered the way our children become socialized and the way we govern our societies. Dr. Gerbner began to trace that shift in 1967, and has been mapping its consequences in his Cultural Indicators research project ever since. CEM was founded when research of other cultural manifestations, and the repressive nature of the "culture wars" advocated by some organizations, made a "liberating alternative" of independent citizen action ever more pressing.

For thirty years, CI has monitored more than 3,000 programs and 35,000 characters on Prime Time television and Saturday morning Children's TV. CI has compared television's portrayal of images of women and minorities; sex-role stereotypes; occupations; aging; mental illness; violence and victimization and other issues to the Nation's actual demographics and cultural environment. What emerges from CI analysis is a portrayal of the Nation's and world's culture on Prime Time TV that is vastly different from reality and strikingly unfair to women and minorities.

During the 1990's, as George Gerbner continued to speak and lecture on the work of CI and the need for CEM, it became clear that many organizations shared CEM's concern about the growing influence of television on the Nation's and world's culture. Because of this interest, CEM convened its Founding Convention in 1996 to enable organizations to share their concerns and to begin establishing a common agenda.

## Vision and Mission

CEM's vision is to help US citizens and eventually the world's populations recover control of the stories being passed from generation to generation. A

recent Diversity Index developed by the CI project shows the extent of which a television season falls short of representing the true diversity of the American scene. CEM seeks to liberate television from its most debilitating marketing constraints so that the creative people producing programs and news can more freely reflect the Nation's actual demographic and cultural diversity - programming where people can tell and see their own stories fairly.

Just as Earth Day signaled the joining of many organizations and individuals' deep concern about the degradation of the world's physical environment, CEM intends to spawn a similar scale awakening about the Nation's cultural environment.

### **Current Initiatives**

In 1996, more than 267 delegates from fifteen countries met at CEM's Founding Convention to create its first Agenda for Action, the People's Communications Charter, and the Viewer's Declaration of Independence. Fifteen working groups, representing a broad cross of US and international organizations, identified 25 Action Steps for CEM and its affiliates to pursue. CEM intends to devote approximately two years to start four key initiatives of the Agenda for Action: Education and Information Exchange, Advocacy and Outreach, Organizational Development and Strategic Planning, and Applied Research. The initiatives will run parallel because they complement each other.

#### **A. Education and Information Exchange**

As an early and central thrust of its mission, CEM seeks to inform and educate the public and relevant organizations about the Cultural Environment Movement and the underlying information and conclusions of the Cultural Indicators Project ~~at the Annenberg School~~. CEM proposes the following three projects:

① Creation of a PBS series with Bill Moyers as host. CEM might title the series One For One, with an appropriate subtitle including the word "storytelling." The fifteen working group topics developed at the Founding Conference could form themes for the series. Working group topics included, for example: Who is telling the stories? Telecommunications, Concentration and Media Monopoly; Educational imperatives: School Support, Media Literacy and Critical Awareness; Health promotion and Damage Prevention: The Cultural Frontier; Labor Under Attack: Jobs, Work and Image; Children, Youth, Aging and the Family: Media from Cradle to Grave; Women and Men: Gender Issues and Sexual Orientation; etc.

- Development of a video course with an accompanying book of readings suitable for use at the high school and college. The videos would be designed expressly to be easy for teachers to learn and teach. The goal of the series would be to make students critically aware of the messages of television and of the role of television as purveyor of culture. It would avoid duplicating videos and books already made to teach students of communication, culture and media literacy, instead aiming to teach students of every discipline in the cultural environment how their subject of study is affected by television.

- ⊙ Creation of a publications program including 1) Quarterly publication of CEM's newsletter, *the Monitor*; 2) expansion of CEM's Web site; and 3) a directory and resource compendium of 750 to 1000 organizations whose mission and work complement CEM. Volunteers could collect and organize much of the information. Part time staff and/or professional support could produce the directory. In developing its directory, CEM will seek advice from other organizations' experiences in assembling and marketing similar directories.

## **B. Advocacy and Outreach**

CEM needs to mount a strong advocacy and outreach program to organize people and affiliated organizations into a strong, collaborative group, able to influence prime time and Children's programming. This group must be cohesive enough to mobilize, in unison and on short notice, to respond to and prevent pending actions adverse to the cultural environment. To this end, CEM proposes the following initiatives:

- CEM seeks funds to underwrite approximately half the Program Director's salary in the first year to enable her to identify and begin mobilizing CEM affiliates and other organizations pursuing complimentary missions. Based on the first year's experience, CEM might expand the outreach and advocacy position to full time in year two.

- ⊙ CEM seeks support to underwrite conferences that can build a national CEM agenda. The first conferences will gather to plan Days of Action, to coincide with The Media Education Foundation's National TV Turnoff Week in April 1999. CEM seeks \$ in order coordinate and publicize the activities of more than 200 organizations expected to participate.

## **C. Organizational Development and Strategic Planning**

CEM seeks support for its small staff and office overhead for a two year period and to create an effective and efficient five year organizational plan that can direct the organization's growth.

- CEM requests \$131,000 for fiscal years 1997 and 1998 to sustain its core staff and retain professional support for program development and fund raising. For a copy of the budget see Appendix A: CEM Operating Budget on page . For a description of the roles and responsibilities of CEM staff see Appendix B: Job Descriptions.

- CEM requests \$\_\_\_\_\_ in order to develop a five year organizational plan. CEM's strategic intent is to develop a plan that will enable the organization to be self sustaining through the proceeds of its conferences, membership dues, and earned income from the proceeds of the sale of Cultural Indicators Research and .....

*Discuss in Hall*

D. Applied Research

CEM seeks funds to support its affiliates who are engaged in academic research that relates to its mission. Complimentary research on existing projects; support of new research at the graduate or doctoral level on issues affecting CEM's work; and marketing surveys could apply.

Specific projects under consideration include the following:

⊙ National Phone Survey: Research before CEM's second conference, Spring 1998

A National survey of the American public, sponsored by CEM and a publication like the Utne Reader or American Demographics, could poll a representative cross section of the American public on their views of the media and how the public is represented. The information gained from the survey would provide important baseline data for CEM's second national conference scheduled in the Spring of 1998.

- International Media Survey: Research before the Paris Conference Spring 1988

With UNESCO, CEM would look at the influence of North American-based television programming on European and third world culture with the intention of expanding the research to other countries at a later date. CEM could compare information gained from this research with information gained through the National Phone Survey done in the United States.

- Case Studies: A series of cases showing how programming is selected for prime time TV could present how the variety of media professionals, communications attorneys, unions, accountants, mainstream and alternative video and other producers decide what programming will be on prime time TV. The series could be developed in different settings in the United States and abroad.

17

(E) CEM Awards, Scholarships and Internship Programs

CEM proposes a series of awards to individuals and institutions that are doing excellent and novel work to contribute to fairness, equity and truthfulness in broadcasting. CEM envisions the following awards:

- Quality in broadcasting for alternative, non-profit television stations and programs, including adult prime time and children's programming.
- Achievement by media advocacy organizations in programs and projects furthering the accomplishment of CEM's mission.
- Innovative research furthering the world's appreciation and understanding of the role of television in society.
- Scholarship and internship awards for graduate level research and innovative programming for television.

In order to execute its awards program, CEM would establish a Board of Directors committee(s) to develop criteria for selection of award winners.

BUDGET

CEM Media Literacy Project

<u>Item</u>	<u>Total Requested</u>
<b>I. Personnel</b>	
<b>A. Salaries and Wages</b>	<b>\$17,340.00</b>
(1) Program Dir. @ \$12/hr x 15 hrs/wk x 21 wks	3,780.00
0	
(2) Research Associates (3) @ \$12/hr x 15hrs/wk x 21 wks	11,340.00
(3) 3 Coders @ \$8/hr x 10 hrs/wk x 8 wks	1,920.00
0	
(4) Office manager @ \$7.50/hr x 40 hrs	300.00
<b>B. Fringe Benefits</b>	<b>\$4402.42</b>
(1) Health Insurance @ 1 x 2 mos x \$146.42/mo	
292.84	
(2) Social Security @ 12.4%	2150.16
(3) Medicare @ 2.9%	502.86
(4) FICA @ 4.8%	832.32
(5) Unemployment insurance @ 3.6%	624.24
<b>II. Non-Personnel</b>	
<b>A. Rental of office space (1 month)</b>	<b>\$</b>
930.13	
<b>B. Purchase of Equipment</b>	<b>\$1225.00</b>
(1) Portable television	450.00
(2) Two VCRs @ \$300 each	600.00
(3) 35 Video cassette tapes @ \$5 each	175.00
<b>C. Printing</b>	<b>\$ 186.00</b>
(1) worksheets - classes	36.00
(2) instruction packets (30)	150.00
<b>D. Travel</b>	
(regional rail lines: \$10 round trip x 27 trips)	\$ 270.00
<b>E. Postage (30 priority mail packages @ \$3 each)</b>	<b>\$ 90.00</b>
<b>F. Telephone (\$360/month x 25%)</b>	<b>\$ 90.00</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$24,533.55</b>