

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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Office of U.S. Senator Paul Simon

Illinois

ALMANAC.
ALMANAC. More than 96 percent of American homes have at least
ALMANAC. one television set. Television is a major source of
information and influence in children's lives. The
average child spends more time watching television than in the
classroom. ● ● ● According to the Nielsen Index the average
American child watches 18,000 television murders before he or
she graduates from high school. ● ● ● An average child between
the ages of 2 and 11 now views 27.3 hours of television per
week. By age 16, he or she has watched over 20,000 hours of
television.

RESEARCH.
RESEARCH. The report of the U.S. Attorney General's Task
RESEARCH. Force on Family Violence concludes that "evidence
is becoming overwhelming that, just as witnessing
violence in the home may contribute to normal adults and
children learning and acting out violent behavior, violence on
television...may contribute to the same result."

Drs. Leonard Eron and Rowell Huesman of the University of
Illinois-Chicago and other researchers have found that children
with aggressive tendencies tend to watch violent programs and
are more likely to believe that TV violence mirrors real life.

In 1982, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop reported there is a
causal correlation between viewing violence and aggressive
behavior. The National Institute of Mental Health, which had
examined the issue for the Surgeon General, provided testimony
before the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice in 1984 that
a "sizable number of studies did support the inference that
there was a causal connection between the viewing of televised
violence and later aggressive behaviors."

Research has shown three possible effects of viewing television
violence: (1) Children may become less sensitive to the pain
and suffering of others; (2) They may be more fearful of the
world around them; and (3) They may be more likely to behave in
an aggressive or harmful way toward others. -- John P. Murray
and Barbara Lonnberg, "Violence on TV: Do Children Learn From
It?"

The American Academy of Pediatrics' Policy Statement on
Children, Adolescents, and Television finds that "repeated
exposure to televised violence promotes a proclivity to
violence and a passive response to its practice." -- June,
1985.

"In one study, children who had watched a violent television
program were found to be more likely to hurt another child than

BACKGROUND: Television Violence-2-2-2-2-2

were those who had watched a nonviolent program. In non-laboratory settings, children have injured themselves by imitating behaviors viewed on TV. Another study suggested that children may learn to perceive aggressive behavior as normal and acceptable." ● ● ● "Other studies have shown that these findings persist even when factors such as family background are taken into account. In a study of 158 elementary school children from a middle-class suburb, children who watched more violent television programs were rated by their teachers as less cooperative, less successful in interpersonal relationships and less happy; these findings were statistically significant regardless of the children's age, sex, social class, IQ or parents' television viewing habits." -- H. James Holroyd, M.D., Pediatrics, Feb., 1985.

"...35 young men between the ages of 8 to 31 years have killed themselves playing Russian Roulette while imitating a scene from the movie, 'The Deer Hunter,' which they had seen on television." ● ● ● "...the pain of victims and anguish of relatives are rarely portrayed. Thus, the child learns that violence may be a quick and easy solution to conflicts while being deprived of any opportunity to feel empathy for the victim." -- Robert Wharton, M.D, and Frederick Mandell, M.D., Pediatrics, June, 1985.

"In a comprehensive review of the research literature on television content, Signorielli and colleagues concluded that consistently high levels of violence and aggression have been reported in studies of television programming, regardless of the measures used to define or assess violence. They reported that children's television programs are six times as violent as adults' television programs." ● ● ● "Dozens of laboratory studies have consistently demonstrated that children imitate the violence that they have just watched on television." ● ● ● "Despite psychologists' suggestions in the 1950's that watching television violence has a cathartic effect, and thus reduces viewers' aggressive behavior, there are no data from recent years to support that theory." ● ● ● "A special opportunity to assess the impact of televised violence in a community setting occurred with the introduction of television in a small Canadian community that had never had access to television before. The results demonstrated that verbal and physical aggression increased among primary school children in this community after television became available." ● ● ● "One of the few studies that contradicts these findings was conducted by researchers at the National Broadcasting Company. They found the relationship between viewing television violence and aggressive behavior several years later became insignificant when social class was controlled. The study had several important limitations. First, children's aggressive behavior was defined strictly to include only 'physical or verbal acts intended or known in advance to cause injuries to others' and did not include rough play or other unintended aggressive behavior." -- Diana M. Zuckerman, Ph.D., and Barry S. Zuckerman, M.D., Pediatrics.

"American viewers have more access to violent television programming than the citizens of several other nations (Canada, England, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, West Germany and Spain) monitored by the International Coalition on Television. According to TV monitoring by the 88-country coalition, the United States also has the dubious distinction of exporting programs which account for 65 percent of all the violence shown on Canadian, English, Australian and New Zealand television." -- American Family Physician, April 1984.

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VIEWPOINTS

By Paul Simon

Coming Soon: An Act That Should Reduce Television Violence

CHECKED INTO a motel room late one night a few years ago after a long day of appointments in Illinois. I flipped on the room's TV set, hoping to catch the late news. Instead, I saw an actor being sawed in half with a chain saw, in vivid color.

The scene unsettled me that night. I wondered what it would do to a 10-year-old or to a 14-year-old.

When I returned to Washington I asked my staff to gather studies on television violence. They discovered nearly 3,000 scholarly articles and studies.

As I dug deeper I found, first, a remarkable consensus in several research fields about the harm excessive TV violence does to children and adults; second, confirmation that U.S. television is more violent than ever before and may be the most violent of any industrialized society; and third, self-regulation not long ago was an accepted practice in the American television industry, but today it is illegal.

In the 1950s, when television violence was tame compared with that seen today, psychologists tended toward a theory that it had a cathartic effect that reduced viewers' aggressive behavior. Researchers today find no data to support that theory, but find abundant evidence of its harmful effects. The research generally identifies three problems connected with TV violence: Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others; they may become more fearful of the world around them; and they may be more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others.

The American Academy of Pediatrics finds "repeated exposure to televised violence promotes a proclivity to violence and a passive response to its practice." In 1982, U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop reported a cause-and-effect relationship between viewing violence and aggressive behavior after asking the National Institute of Mental Health to review the sizable body of research.

Data published in the New England Journal of Medicine shows graphic depictions of suicide on television are often followed by a dramatic rise in teen suicides. Thirty-five boys and young men between the ages of 8 and 31 killed themselves playing Russian roulette while imitating a scene from "The Deer Hunter," which they had seen on television. And after a televised depiction of the New Bedford pool hall rape was shown, a 12-year-old boy assaulted a 10-year-old girl on a pool table.

Researchers had a unique before-and-after testing opportunity when TV came to a small Canadian community that had never had it before. They found verbal and physical aggression rose among primary school children after television became a part of the town's life.

A study begun on a group of 8-year-olds and pursued for 10 years by Doctors Leonard Eron and Rowell Huesmann of the University of Illinois tried to identify all causes of aggression in childhood: child-rearing practices in the family, neighborhood experiences and other factors. At the end of the 10 years, the single best predictor of violence in those

children, now 18, was what they had watched on television when they were eight — not what their families did, not what their social class was, not any of the other things that were measured.

By age 16, the average American child has seen 200,000 acts of violence on TV, including 33,000 murders. The audience under 16 numbers about 50 million. If even one-tenth of one percent are harmed, we are needlessly impressing 50,000 young people with this gratuitous electronic mayhem.

As I digested these findings I began to ask my-

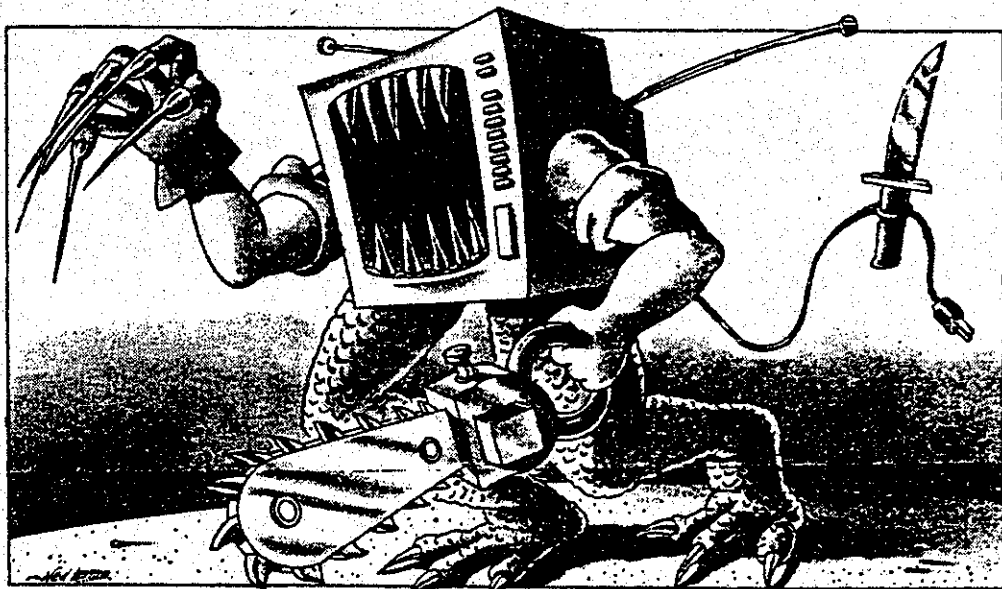
self this question: Is a free society like ours — one that shuns government censorship and has a commercial television industry — powerless to protect itself and its children from the harm caused by excessive TV violence?

After discussions with television policy makers and visits to the networks' divisions of standards and practices, I answered that question with the Television Violence Act, which I expect will soon clear the Congress. The bill gives the television industry the limited exemption from the antitrust laws it needs to legally develop voluntary guidelines on television violence. I first began exploring this approach when a network executive stressed in one meeting that he and his counterparts couldn't even meet to discuss an industry-wide approach to the problem because the antitrust laws prohibit it. His comment intrigued me.

The Justice Department filed a case in 1979 challenging the advertising sections of the National Association of Broadcasters television code on antitrust grounds. The NAB settled the case in 1982 and scrapped the entire code fearing additional antitrust suits based on other portions of the code. This change, coupled with added competitive pressures on broadcasters, has spawned an "arms race" in TV violence from which none will retreat for fear of losing ratings points. As in all arms races, the public is the loser.

I wondered why we couldn't give the industry a limited exemption from the antitrust laws so it could solve the problem itself. As a lifelong civil libertarian, I found the antitrust approach particularly attractive. All the more so because I sit on the Senate Judiciary Committee, which oversees the antitrust laws.

Most in the industry continue to deny TV violence is a problem at all. Ironically, they claim that 25 minutes of exposure to violence has no impact,



Newsday / Ned Levine

while 30 seconds of exposure to a commercial has great impact. The obvious answer is that television sells — whether a political product, or soap, or violence.

In writing the bill, I wanted to focus on entertainment programming only, so I wrote report language and built a legislative history making clear that the exemption is not aimed at the content of news programs. One reason is that entertainment programs tend to glorify violence, while news programs do not.

Like our politicians, television can appeal to the best in us or to our worst instincts. Too often, television today is contributing to a tide of violence. A democratic, pluralistic society can find ways to protect itself against excessive televised violence. It's time for the television industry to forge a partnership with America's families to scale back the atmosphere of violence that is erupting in our communities, on our Main Streets, even in our schoolyards.

'Is a free society like ours powerless to protect itself and its children?'



Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) is a former editor and publisher who has written a weekly column for 41 yrs.

Taking a Glove to Television Violence

Senate Seeks Programmers' Meeting; Rep. Edwards Hits 'Censorship'

By Eleanor Randolph
Washington Post Staff Writer

Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) often recalls the evening he walked into a motel room, turned on the television set and witnessed someone being cut in half with a chain saw.

"Obviously, it was not real. But it was real enough that it bothered me that night," he said later.

The chain-saw movie became the genesis of a bill designed to get the television industry to control what Simon and others see as its aggressive tendencies. The bill passed the Senate 91 to 0, and the House Judiciary Committee Tuesday voted 26 to 8 to send the bill to the floor, probably for debate this summer.

Under Simon's bill, the networks, cable operators and others who control television programming would be allowed to meet and discuss ways to decrease violence on television. At present such a meeting would violate the Sherman Antitrust Act. But Simon wants a three-year loophole to allow television programmers to develop guidelines or standards for what appears on the living-room screen.

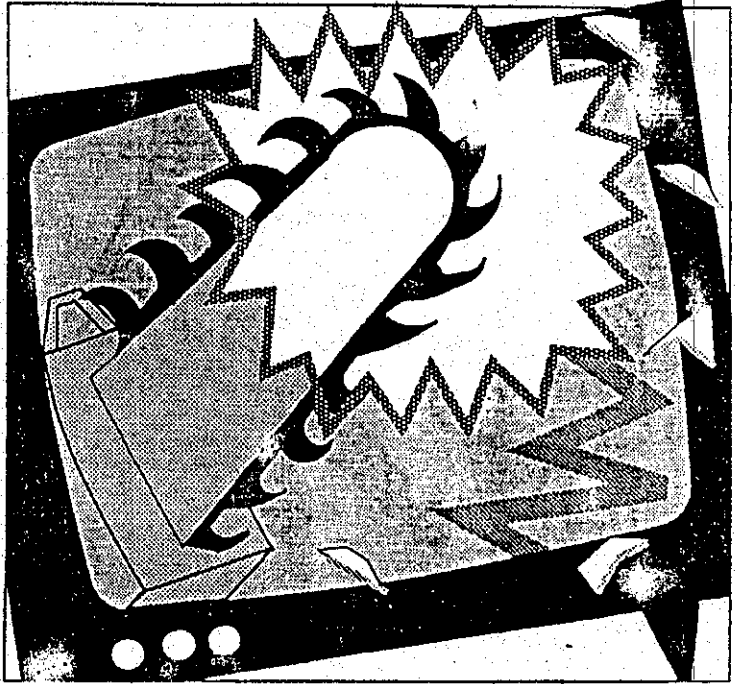
"The plain fact is that violence sells," said Simon. "But I strongly believe a democratic, pluralistic society like ours can find ways to protect itself against undue emphasis on televised violence."

Opponents of the bill suggest that the legislative approach puts Congress in the business of telling the television industry what it should and should not put on the air.

"It's censorship. It is not even a veiled threat. It is a threat by Big Brother, big government in Washington, telling these film producers, 'You do this or else,'" said Rep. Don Edwards (D-Calif.), who voted against the bill in the Judiciary Committee.

"We think this is, on its face, unconstitutional," said Barry Lynn, legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union here.

"It is not the business of the U.S. Congress to try to influence the content of television programming," Lynn said. "That is absolutely forbidden by the First Amendment."



THE WASHINGTON POST

The Senate approved the bill May 31 with an amendment by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) that would allow television representatives also to discuss ways to curb scenes that glorify illegal drug use and portray sexually explicit material. House backers of the bill say they will try to keep the legislation confined to the violence issue and not turn it into a "Christmas tree" loaded with complaints about television programming.

The House Judiciary Committee, where the bill previously died under then-Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.), passed the bill speedily with the support of the new chairman this session, Rep. Jack Brooks (D-Tex.). At this point, the House version allows television programmers to gather to talk only about violence.

Rep. Dan Glickman (D-Kan.), the key sponsor in the House, said that as the father of teenagers, he wanted "to see if we could elevate the content of television" in a way that does not violate First Amend-

ment protections of free press and free speech.

"I don't think this bill has any constitutional problems, nor do most constitutional scholars," Glickman said. "Programmers can get together to talk about this, but there are no mandates. They don't even have to meet. They can talk about the color of the sky if they want to."

Walter Wurtel, spokesman for the National Association of Broadcasters, said that beyond the bill's First Amendment implications, some in the industry have expressed "concerns with an antitrust exemption that doesn't protect the broadcaster from suits by the creative community."

Congressional opponents also make the point that not all violence is bad for the nation's viewers—explaining that they believe it is important for people to see violence such as in Vietnam or in China's Tiananmen Square.

"I think it's good that everybody sees the violence in the Holocaust, for example," Edwards said.

Sex and violence 11 JUL 1989 head complaints by TV viewers

BROADCASTING COUNCIL
BAD LANGUAGE, violence and sex on television are the most common causes of complaints from viewers, according to a report published yesterday.

Over the past six years the number of viewers claiming to have seen or heard offensive material on television has remained constant at about 40 per cent, with older people and women more likely to be offended.

The review of research into public attitudes to taste and decency by the independent Broadcasting Research Unit was commissioned by the Broadcasting Standards Council, the Government's new television watchdog. The council is drawing up a code governing standards of taste and decency on television.

The unit found that little research had been done into how television compared with other social influences as a contributory cause to anti-social behaviour. Information that was available suggested that only one person in 10 saw television as contributing to the increase in violent crime.

Public concern about taste and decency on television, the report said, was only one element of shifting social attitudes on wider moral questions. It warned that opinion polls into taste and decency were often simplistic and

By Simon Midgley

misleading. Sex and violence were often lumped together without any attempt to differentiate attitudes to discrete areas of social concern. Such polls could misrepresent what people thought and could be dangerous if they formed the basis for public policy.

The report said there was no clear understanding of what people found offensive. Sex, violence and bad language were regularly measured, but intrusive interviewing, tasteless comedy and the portrayal of women "could all feature as reasons why four out of 10 viewers are regularly offended".

The unit also published yesterday a study of broadcasting standards — *Quality in Television* — which attempts to reach a broader definition of quality programming than levels of decency or the amount of sex, violence or bad language. The study concludes that quality broadcasting is a matter of variety, range of choice and timing. It is not simply a question of how highbrow programmes are.

Quality in Television, John Libbey, 13 Smiths Yard, Sumnerley Street, London SW18 4HR; £6.34 inc p&p.

Parents turn off 2 NOV 1989 offensive' TV

BROADCASTING COUNCIL

ALMOST seven out of ten parents with school-age children claim to have turned off the television or changed channels because they considered a programme unsuitable, according to the British Standards Council.

Its annual report published yesterday said: "These are not isolated incidents; over four parents in ten claim that they turn off or over at least once a month".

The council, which published a code of conduct alongside the report, refused at this stage to name programmes causing most offence. From next spring it intends taking up matters up with television companies.

The findings were based on 1,320 responses to a random survey of 1,600 people. "One quarter of the population declared that they had been disgusted by something which they had watched on TV in the previous month," the report said.

By contrast, only 3 per cent of the population claimed to have turned off the radio because they were disgusted by an item.

Viewers were most offended by bad taste and sex scenes, which in this research pushed swearing into third place.

The council, chaired by Lord Rees-Mogg and due to be put on

THE INDEPENDENT

By Maggie Brown
Media Editor

a statutory basis with the forthcoming Broadcasting Bill, is placing special emphasis on protecting children in its code of conduct.

The council found that parents of teenage children are uncomfortable with the 9pm watershed when adult viewing is deemed to start, and most wanted it moved to 10pm.

People wanted far better warnings about the content of programmes, including warning symbols on programmes, although the BSC finds this impractical. The code also introduces for the first time in Britain the concept of a 5.30am watershed, when children can be deemed to start viewing.

Lord Rees-Mogg said the research showed the existing broadcasting codes were not always followed, and that lapses occurred. However, he believed BBC and ITV had broadly got it right.

The code tells broadcasters not to transmit anything appearing to tolerate drug-taking, and also warns of the extra care needed in reporting disasters, especially in showing victims and the bereaved.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Congress has no choice but to regulate violence

ELECTRONIC MEDIA expressed dubious anxieties in its editorial of Aug. 7 (Page 16) by trying to dramatize a fictional dilemma in choosing as its title, "Forcing 'voluntary' regulation," a transparent oxymoron, with its observation that the networks, cable, and broadcasters are being invited by the Congress of the United States to do something constructive about the excessive violence that sometimes mars their programming.

Who created this visible mess that now persuades the Congress to offer a means—through removing antitrust barriers—by which some modest remedial action might take form?

The network, cable, and broadcaster programmers themselves, people who willingly compete in a rising escalation of violence by steadily lowering their levels of taste, tolerance, and public responsibility. In a very real sense these programmers conduct a daily verbal and visual assault on the ethical and moral standards that have served society well for generations.

Some people complain vocally. Some write letters. Some make phone calls. Some form pressure groups. Nothing much happens because the people who care about the visual and audio environment in which they and their children live have no effective means through which to register their concern. Except, that is, through appeals to their congressional representatives who recognize the people in a different way than the television industry does: as voters.

What the Congress is offering the televi-

sion industry, through which network, cable, and a broadcaster can participate jointly, is a means through which a modest effort can be made to lessen the tonnage of violence so casually presented as entertainment. No one in government is going to tell the industry how to bring about this change—or any change—the industry is encouraged to try to do this on its own, to spell out some reasonable and sensible boundaries to which all elements can subscribe for the general welfare.

The author of your editorial must have fought off a migraine from the strain of so much muddled circumlocution. The only thing that prevented the migraine from turning into a stroke was his predictable defense on smugly believing he won the argument by wrapping himself in the First Amendment, so often the final refuge of a lost cause, in this case the defense of violence on television.

EM wonders whether it's "possible to set standards for both cable and broadcasting," forgetting that the viewer sees the product of both on the same instrument in the privacy of his home. Cable, despite the editorialist's assertion, isn't bolder because it exercises higher standards than broadcasters; it's precisely because cable is responsible to no one that it literally aims to get away with murder, while broadcasters still pay a modicum of respect to broadcast in the public interest even as they stretch downward their own standards to meet the competition of cable.

EM not only deplores the fact that Con-

gress has been sufficiently aroused to do something about violence, but also—and this with a dose of wishful thinking—laments the fact that the television industry (cable and broadcaster) has exercised so little self-restraint. It's precisely because of the industry's failure to heed the groundswell of concern voiced by many responsible observers—quite apart from a few pressure groups—that has convinced the leaders of Congress to toss out a lifesaver that will permit cable and broadcasters to rescue themselves from wallowing in their own "slime time," to use an apt phrase of Commissioner James Quello's.

It's almost amusing to read that while EM opposes government "meddling" in program content (something the government asserts it will not do) it firmly believes in "self regulation," but not on an industrywide basis. Again, it is precisely because of the failure of the television industry to do just that—self-regulate—that the Congress feels compelled to act. In short, violence is one area in which elements of the television industry need not recklessly compete with each other.

EM raises the question of what if television's leaders (after taking a look at their programming) "decided that violence wasn't a problem"—what then? That's a hypothetical supposition that no one has to take seriously any more than they have to accept the bland assertion—unsupported by fact—that "the bulk of the television industry appears to maintain that violence

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TV created own violence mess

(Continued from Page 10)

isn't a problem." It's just because it is such an obvious problem that Congress felt compelled, after long deliberations, to act. Industry platitudes that no such problem exists are no longer persuasive.

Someone has to have concern about the direction of television programming. Someone has to recognize that the television set, in the home, is not an adjunct of Hollywood's motion picture house, or of a Broadway stage, or a Las Vegas nightclub. Television means home entertainment. That's different in key aspects from the theatrical movie, the Broadway show, the Vegas act. That someone should be the industry itself.

EM expresses concern that cable programmers, basically responsible to no one, might suffer because they would have to meet the same standards of the three major networks. They assert that "the loss will probably be cable's." They forget to note that the real gain will be the general public's.

The truth is that the people have long been aroused by the lack of restraint exercised by most of those distributing entertainment product into America's homes. Advertisers, critics, and social commentators who would like to see both cable and broadcaster elevate their standards have frequently expressed their concern about excessive violence (not to forget gratuitous sexual themes and scenes and the gradual debasement of language) only to be dismissed as part of a meddling fringe of dogooders of no more importance than the more highly vocalized so-called pressure groups. The message was never taken very seriously by the television industry.

But Congress has been listening. Finally, and now, programmers of cable, network, and syndicated shows will have an opportunity to do as a group what each has failed to do on its own—set some tolerable limits of self-restraint.

David Levy
president, Wilshire Productions
Beverly Hills, Calif.

LEGAL TIMES

LAW AND LOBBYING IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

LEGAL TIMES • WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 25, 1989

POINTS OF VIEW

OPINION AND COMMENTARY

Better Television Without Big Brother

BY
STUART N. BROTMAN

Remember seeing what looked like the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval on your television screen? Those were the days when the models in TV commercials didn't lounge around in their underwear and when the cameras in cop dramas cut away from the actual gory horrors of crime. That seal of approval actually signified that the station subscribed to the Television Code formulated by the National Association of Broadcasters, an industry group. But in 1982, the courts agreed with the Justice Department that the Television Code, a voluntary set of guidelines on programming and commercial practices, violated the antitrust laws—which is why you haven't seen that distinctive graphic lately.

Now, however, Congress is about to reverse course by allowing broadcasters once again to develop programming self-regulation, at least with respect to reducing television violence. This summer, the House of Representatives passed the Television Violence Act by a lopsided vote, and the Senate enacted a similar bill. Both proposals are aimed at allowing broadcasters to meet collectively to discuss how violent programming on television can be voluntarily curtailed. The Senate version would allow broadcasters to discuss how to exert better control over sexually explicit programs as well as those

that portray illegal drug use. Within the next few weeks, the bills will be reconciled into a final version, which President George Bush is expected to sign into law.

The bills would waive the existing antitrust bar on broadcaster self-regulation for three years, until 1992. During that period, broadcasters would be expected to develop concrete plans to scale back televised violence, probably by formulating a new television code. Neither bill includes any sanctions for failing to meet or adopt guidelines about televised violence or for failing to enforce them. Nor do they define what constitutes "violent" programming. In effect, broadcasters will be empowered to do something—or nothing—about the problem of televised violence.

But just how closely will Congress and its regulatory agency, the Federal Communications Commission, be watching? Some members of Congress, including Reps. Don Edwards (D-Calif.) and Howard Berman (D-Calif.), believe that the likely outcome of the proposed new law will be government censorship rather than self-restraint. Supporters of the legislation counter that this type of criticism is speculative at best and is the chord usually struck by those who see Big Brother lurking around every corner.

Real Fears

The legislation is a good idea, but its supporters may be too glib about dismissing the censorship fears. Fifteen years

ago, then FCC Chairman Richard Wiley, under pressure by Congress to do something about televised violence, told the Illinois Broadcasters Association that "if self-regulation does not work, governmental action to protect the public may be required—whether you or whether I like it." A little more than a month after this speech, representatives from the three networks met to discuss the problem, with Wiley and his staff members taking an active role in the meeting.

The networks soon agreed to a list of specific proposals to reduce sex and violence on television. Later, the industry as a whole adopted these proposals through amendments to the Television Code. Wiley reported to Capitol Hill that a solution had been created, and no congressional action was taken.

Wiley, however, was taken to court. His role in helping the broadcasters to adopt their own guidelines was challenged by civil libertarians and the Hollywood creative community as a violation of the First Amendment's prohibition on government interference with freedom of speech. The courts ultimately threw the matter back to the FCC, which released a report in late 1983 saying that Wiley and his staff did nothing to coerce or intimidate broadcasters to change their ways.

By then, the courts also had broken up the Television Code, so that, for the broadcasters, the point was moot. The lesson to be learned here, though, is sim-

ple: If the Television Violence Act is to be effective as a law, Congress should reduce any temptation to stray beyond the honorable intent the bills express. Only then can broadcasters be able to begin the dialogue again about how best to reduce television violence without any hint of government interference.

Stuart N. Brotman is a Boston-based communications lawyer and management consultant. He is a fellow of the Lenberg Washington Program in Communications Policy Studies, Northwestern University, and the editor of The Communications Deregulation Source (Artech House, 1987).

Sikes urges formation of TV code

By ADAMI BUCKMAN

Staff reporter

New York—Federal Communications Commission Chairman Al Sikes, in his first major address to broadcast and cable executives here, last week urged the industry to set its own program standards.

Mr. Sikes said such standards would send a signal to legislators that broadcasters don't need the government's help in setting content restrictions.

"Freedom's enemy is irresponsibility One way Americans have sought to preserve freedom is by initiating voluntary standards. It gives peer group members a way to measure their prospective actions and encourages responsible conduct," said Mr. Sikes, who spoke at an International Radio and Television Society luncheon here last Wednesday.

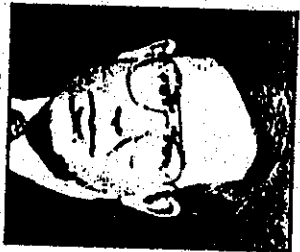
The luncheon was attended by dozens of high-ranking industry executives, including the presidents of the three major TV networks.

Earlier, Mr. Sikes told reporters at a pre-luncheon news conference that he felt the content issue would be best addressed by "a peer-group initiated effort" on the part of broadcast associations and their members.

National Association of Broadcasters spokesman Bob Hallahan said last week that NAB's executive committee discussed the possibility of establishing a set of TV and radio programming standards at a meeting Sept. 17, the day after last month's radio convention.

That discussion came after Mr. Sikes made a similar call for program standards in an address during NAB's annual radio convention in New Orleans last month.

The NAB executive committee agreed that the NAB staff



AL SIKES
FCC chief

(Continued from Page 3)
would "assess the feasibility" of a study on standards, Mr. Hallahan said.

Among other things, the staff will try to determine if there is sufficient support from NAB members for such an effort and whether such standards would satisfy legislators, he said.

In addition, the staff will try to determine the legality of establishing standards, said Mr. Hallahan, who noted that programming codes established years ago by NAB to govern the amount of commercials stations aired per hour were declared illegal by the courts in the early 1980s.

TV network executives who heard Mr. Sikes' speech last week wouldn't say whether they support an industrywide effort to develop programming standards.

Network executives pointed out that they already have programming standards. "We're already doing it," said one executive who requested anonymity.

Mr. Sikes admitted at last Wednesday's news conference that defining so-called indecent speech "is complicated. I realize it's a slippery slope."

However, in his luncheon speech, he indicated that the commission is studying ways to regulate so-called adult radio and television programming by focusing on ways to relegate such programming to specific time periods.

"The courts have ruled that airing of indecent programs can be limited to a time when there are children in the listening or viewing audience, for example," he said. "So we will be looking further into this point."

On other issues, Mr. Sikes told reporters that the FCC is studying the Cable Communications Act of 1984 and other regulations governing cable TV to see if regulatory amendments need to be made in response to the changes in the cable industry since 1984.

He said he expects the commission to issue a report on cable TV regulation some time next year. #

The way it was'

CHICAGO—The Tribune shares Sen. Paul Simon's concern about growing violence on television. In a recent editorial, you observed, "Anyone who takes a night's cruise around the channels needs a calculator to tote up the corpses not to mention those who are shot, stabbed, choked, crushed and blown up, but somehow survive."

But The Tribune and Sen. Simon part company about his proposed remedy. His bill (passed with strong bipartisan majorities by both the Senate and the House) is perceived by The Tribune as "censorship through the back door."

I suggest this is a misunderstanding of the Simon bill.

For many years, broadcasters were free to establish guidelines and standards on a variety of subjects, including the number of commercials. The Justice Department attacked these guidelines as violations of the antitrust laws. The federal courts knocked out the guidelines. This was a sad day for television viewers, because the result is more and more commercials, and less and less restraint on televised violence. Our government's short-sighted view thus short-changed our children.

All the Simon bill does is go back to the situation as it existed prior to our government's attack on broadcasters' own guidelines. The Simon bill would allow broadcasters, as in the past, to devise their own voluntary standards to elevate broadcasting.

Does the bill violate broadcasters' 1st Amendment rights? The American Civil Liberties Union says the bill is government's "nose under the tent." I would say it is taking government's nose out of the tent.

The Simon bill is not a magic potion for what ails television, but it is a small spoonful of useful medicine.

Newton R. Minow

Voice of the people

The need for restraint on TV violence

WASHINGTON—The Tribune and I differ on the bill I have introduced to allow the television industry to develop its own voluntary guidelines on television violence.

The mounting level of violence on television is more than "appalling" and "insulting," as The Tribune describes it; it is a clear and present danger to our children. Unmentioned in your editorial is any reference to the overwhelming research evidence now available that shows today's levels of TV violence are harming children and contributing to the rising tide of violence in society.

The American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National PTA and Surgeon General C. Everett Koop agree. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania found not long ago that the earliest prime time hour—when the most children are watching—had become the most violent hour on television.

There's no mystery about why television exposes viewers to an increasing level of violence. Violent images build ratings. Broadcasters today face unparalleled competitive pressures. At the same time, earlier self-restraint mechanisms have been either outlawed or discarded. The FCC has stepped further out of the picture through deregulation, and the networks have severely scaled back their in-house "standards and practices" departments.

This new environment has spawned an "arms race" in TV violence from which none will retreat for fear of losing ratings points to the competition. In this race, losing ratings points means losing revenue. But as in all arms races, the public loses.

Until recently, broadcasters had much wider self-regulatory powers than my bill proposes, and they used them prudently and with little

controversy. I do not recall any concern expressed by The Tribune, for example, about the "Television Code" that most stations subscribed to.

Stricter interpretations of antitrust laws now make such guidelines impossible. My bill only restores a part of this earlier authority, for limited purposes and a limited time. It grants this authority to all parts of the industry—broadcasters, cable and producers—and is directed at entertainment programming only, not news programs. One reason is because entertainment programs tend to glorify violence, while news programs do not.

Many in the industry still argue that violence on television does no harm, despite the weight of the evidence. They claim that 25 minutes of exposure to violence has no impact, while 30 seconds of exposure to a commercial has great impact. The obvious answer is that television sells—whether a political product, soap or violence.

As a lifelong civil libertarian, former journalist and current chairman of the Subcommittee on the Constitution, I've taken great care in the four years I've worked on this bill to frame a solution that in no way restricts freedom of speech. I do not want government censorship. Any guidelines would be industry-written and voluntary. I've consulted with many of the nation's leading constitutional scholars and have found agreement to the bill's soundness on 1st Amendment grounds.

Like our politicians, television can appeal to the best in us or to our worst instincts. Too often, television today is indirectly contributing to the violence in our society. A democratic, pluralistic society like ours can find unintrusive ways like this to protect itself.

U.S. Sen. Paul Simon

Mixed reactions to violence standards plan

Networks oppose congressional plan of industry guidelines on programming; some producers think the idea is one whose time has come

Reacting to efforts by Congress to get the entertainment industry to develop a set of guidelines addressing violence, and possibly sex and drug abuse in TV programming (see page 69), broadcast and cable network executives questioned the need for such guidelines, citing the separate policies they have in place.

Some producers agreed that current standards, and the give and take between program producers and networks, provide adequate checks and balances for what gets on the air. However, other producers applauded Congress's attempt to force the industry to address an issue which some see as a growing public concern.

At ABC, a company spokeswoman said the network felt "the legislation is not necessary." The proposed legislation would partially exempt networks and producers from antitrust laws, to the extent that they would be allowed to meet and try to develop guidelines concerning the portrayal of violence, and possibly sex and drug abuse, on television.

"We have effective standards in this area that operate very well," said the ABC spokeswoman, outlining the network's position. "We don't feel an antitrust exemption is either necessary or desirable."

David Levy, a Hollywood producer-writer, and executive director of the Caucus for Producers, Writers and Directors, disagreed. Speaking of networks generally, he said, "they may have mechanisms in place, but they do not deal with these issues adequately. The problem is," he said, "one

segment of the entertainment industry breaks through [with excessive violence, sex or abusive language] and competitors feel they have to match that with their own titillating action or excessive violence."

Levy cited one example—an episode of NBC's *St. Elsewhere* (canceled a year ago), where a doctor dropped his pants, mooned the camera with his bare behind and told another doctor to "kiss my ass." That, said Levy, "is a producer getting away with murder—the murder of the English language, and the murder of all these standards the networks say they have in place."

Levy's comments, he said, reflected his own feelings and not those of the Caucus. Jamie Kellner, president, Fox Broadcasting Co., said there is "a very fine line between what gets on the air and what does not. You try to be as responsible as you can, but let creative people have an outlet to demonstrate ideas. I doubt these kinds of things can be legislated or handled in a code. You need responsible executives looking at these issues at each stage of program development, from concept to broadcast."

Statements from both NBC and CBS reflected a similar view—that mechanisms already in place are adequate checks for what goes on the air. An executive at NBC, wishing to remain anonymous, acknowledged that in some instances, programs or segments have aired that perhaps should not have.

"There were two scenes in [last season's mini-series] *Favorite Son* that many people took exception to," the source said. "And *Sex Tapes* was disgusting, although much of the lurid behavior was referred to off-screen. The point is, we program well over a thousand hours of prime time programming each year and the vast majority airs without complaint. To us, this sounds like a call to other [media outlets] to get some standards in place."

Indeed, cable has largely gone unregulated in this area, either by the FCC or any sort of voluntary industry code. "They let films run the way they are made," unlike local broadcast stations that are required to edit sexually explicit scenes or language, or face FCC-imposed penalties.

Last week, however, cable executives were not clamoring to embrace Congress's proposed legislation any more than the broadcast networks were. "I'm not so sure an antitrust exemption is really necessary," said Henry Schleiff, chairman and chief executive officer of the broadcast and entertainment groups at Viacom International, which owns Showtime, The Movie Channel, MTV, Nickelodeon, and VH-1.

Ultimately, said Schleiff, "the viewer is the censor. They have guided us in the past and will guide us in the future." Viacom's cable networks do not have separate program standards departments, said Schleiff. "But viewer tastes and sensitivities are clearly factors in each program we produce, buy and schedule for air. We have a hearing every day before 92 million households."

Officials at NBC and ABC said they would take part in industry discussions if Congress specifically asked them to. A CBS spokesman said: "We don't oppose it [the legislation], we just don't understand the need for it."

The CBS spokesman said the network's position had not changed since network vice president Beth Waxman Bressan testified before the House Judiciary Committee in May on the issue. At the time, Bressan said: "It would certainly be more difficult for an industry committee to deal with the myriad questions of taste and audience preferences than it would be for any industry member to do on its own."

But some producers took issue with the stand that the networks are doing enough. Jim McAdams, a producer with Universal Television, who served as executive producer of *The Equalizer*, said network efforts to deal with the violence issue have been "reactive and not totally responsible." Congress's approach, he said, appears "sensible...the key words being voluntary and producer participation."

McAdams questioned whether the entertainment industry was doing enough to "make a positive comment about how violence can be curtailed. And in a way, television has a sort of parental position in all this. It often says more to the kids than their parents say to them in a lifetime."

Other producers believe the current give and take between producers and networks on content issues works well. "You come to a pretty good compromise," said Zev Braun, executive producer of CBS's *Tour of Duty*. "My criteria has always been good taste. And if you can persuade the standards and practices people that certain scenes are there to get a point across and not for purposes of titillation, it's been my experience they will go along."

-SM

Networks: Antiviolence bill won't alter shows

By Kenneth R. Clark
Chicago Tribune

NEW YORK—The four networks' reaction to a television anti-violence bill now pending in Congress is unanimous: If it becomes law, they'll go through the mandated motions, but no one expects any substantive changes in programming.

The bill, approved 399-18 last week in the House, would waive the Sherman Antitrust Act and permit television programmers to develop universal guidelines aimed at curbing violence in story lines.

A similar measure, sponsored by Sen. Paul Simon (D., Ill.), was passed by the Senate in May. Both bills now go to a conference committee.

Officials of ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox Broadcasting all expressed willingness to participate in industry talks, but all said their existing standards-and-practices divisions do an adequate job of screening scripts for excessive violence. They noted that the proposed legislation forces them to do nothing beyond discuss the subject with one another.

"Our position is that the legislation is not necessary," said Julie Hoover, vice president for corporate affairs at ABC. "We have effective standards in this area, and we don't feel an antitrust exemption is either necessary or desirable."

At one time, when CBS, NBC and ABC commanded more than 90 percent of the television audience, the networks drafted a common standard setting voluntary limits on the number of commercials that could be run in an hour, but a federal judge struck the guidelines down as an antitrust violation. The networks since have been barred from common action on any project.

Beth Bressen, vice president of programming practices at CBS, worried that if no sweeping universal standard emerges from proposed talks in an increasingly fragmented television industry, more restrictive legislation might follow.

"The fear with a bill of this sort is that if Congress perceives that nothing successful is coming out of talks, they will then legislate in some manner that will actually interpret our programming," she said. "One of the main problems would be: How do you define violence and

punch in the nose equivalent to a murder? How do you quantify these things?"

Pressure to curb violence in programming recently has come from groups as diverse as Rev. Donald Wildmon's Christian Leaders for Responsible Television, the United Church of Christ, the American Academy of Pediatric Medicine and the U.S. Justice Department.

"We have a democracy when it comes to television programming," Bressen said. "Several times a night, when people push their remote-control buttons, they are voting. If the public thinks there is too much sex or too much violence on television, they turn it off and go somewhere else."

But she feels the networks must be doing something right. Last year, she said, CBS received more than 600,000 letters from viewers and only 92 of them were about violence.

Brad Turrell, senior vice president and spokesman for Fox Broadcasting, said the well-publicized furor about violence on TV is responsible for congressional action, but he doubted if it would result in anything more restrictive than a demand for talks among competitors.

"There's a climate out there right now that is focusing a lot of attention on the way shows are being evaluated," he said. "In that climate, where a number of special interest groups are trying to censor some material, it doesn't surprise me that this bill would come before Congress now instead of two years ago. But I don't think anyone who is a firm believer in the Constitution—and certainly we would hope our legislators are—would be for strict censorship in any way."

Beth Comstock, manager of corporate communications for NBC, agreed.

"It's a very loosely worded piece of legislation, which doesn't require us to come to any conclusion," she said. "I think it's more or less an attempt by Congress to send a message. But as a network, we find it kind of troublesome whenever government tries to participate in our programming policy and practices."

Comstock said it was unlikely the industry could reach a consensus in this area.

"Our needs are different that those of the cable community," she

Drawing Boundaries on Indecency

SUMMARY: Fed up with "shock radio" and sex and violence on television, consumer groups are complaining to the FCC and pressuring sponsors of these programs. Congress is trying to persuade or compel broadcasters to regulate themselves. If they do not, government regulation may be the next step.

My name is Tom Leykis. This is Talk Radio KFI-AM 640," boomed a familiar voice on radios throughout Los Angeles at 11 a.m. April 8: "What's the grossest thing you ever put in your mouth? Let's leave genitalia out of the program today." Needless to say, the discussion did not stay off that topic for very long as eager fans of the show did their best to outgross each other.

Other topics on the "Tom Leykis Show," typical of the blue radio that has proliferated in the 1980s, include a woman's description of masturbating her dog, which was said to make gurgling noises in response, and a talk with Jim Boyd, founder and president of Hung Jury, who discussed the sizes of famous private parts, including those of Warren Beatty, Milton Berle, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

If the intent of radio personalities like Leykis, New York-based Howard Stern and Doug "Greaseman" Tracht in Washington, who sometimes greets listeners with "at your cervix," is to shock and outrage their audiences, it seems they have succeeded. Particularly among parents, worried about the effects of such talk on tender ears, concern has been growing. Last year, 3,500 of them filed complaints with the Federal Communications Commission, which according to the Communications Act of 1934 can fine a station \$2,000 to \$20,000 for broadcasting indecent material.

In Congress, concern with the prevailing tendency to pander to the lowest common denominator on radio and television has prompted lawmakers to look for ways to compel or persuade broadcasters to aim for higher standards. After all, not only are they in possession of the most powerful means of communication devised by man, notes Alan Pearce, president of Information Age Economics, a Washington-based telecommunications research firm, they also "have a higher calling than crass commercial interests. They are licensed to broadcast in the public interest. They are trusted with a public resource."

In May, the Senate unanimously passed a bill to restrict violence, sex and the glam-



Stern shocks and outrages listeners.

far. Prime time has degenerated into sleaze time, and the American people are fed up," noted Republican Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina, who added that he was downright embarrassed to watch television with his wife in the same room. A similar bill, which restricted only violence, passed the House of Representatives last summer, and a conference that will report to Congress Jan. 23 is trying to resolve the discrepancies between the two.

Violence and indecency were also much on the minds of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee during autumn hearings to confirm FCC Chairman Alfred C. Sikes and two commissioners, Andrew C. Barrett and Sherrie Marshall. The legislators questioned the three at length about what they planned to do about indecency on the airwaves and strongly urged them to take an active role in regulating the industry. One of Sikes's first actions as chairman was to ask the National Association of Broadcasters to find a way to curb the proliferation of the raunchy, racy and often racist radio shows that have become known as "shock radio" and to establish a voluntary code of behavior to eliminate the worst excesses of television and radio.

orization of drugs on television. The bill, introduced by Illinois Democrat Paul Simon, would for three years waive antitrust restrictions that currently forbid broadcasters to discuss programming among themselves so that broadcasters could regulate themselves.

"Obviously the networks have gone too

A broadcast code dealing primarily with the allocation of commercial time existed years ago, but it was found to violate antitrust laws in court in 1983. This autumn, under Sikes's direction, the association canvassed its members and set up an in-house working group to deliberate on the



Rivera; the number of stations carrying his show has shrunk significantly.



RICHARD KOZAK/INSIGHT

Sikes asked broadcasters to adopt a voluntary code of behavior to curb abuses.

feasibility of establishing a code of conduct. The results of their work will be presented at a board meeting in January.

The approach of the FCC under President Bush marks a change of course, says Joseph J. Reilly Jr., president of the New York-based conservative watchdog group Morality in Media Inc. The policy of Reagan-appointed Chairmen Mark S. Fowler and Dennis R. Patrick was largely characterized by a hands-off approach, by deregulation rather than regulation — though Fowler often speaks out in favor of reining in some of the worst offenders — that critics say allowed broadcasters to get away with violations of existing regulations against obscenity and indecency on the air.

"The FCC . . . had fallen asleep at the switch," says Reilly. "It was quite obvious that the FCC had ceased doing what it was supposed to do, and now under its new chairman it gives every evidence of [doing it again] with vigor and with insight and a very cogent and logical approach."

As a number of broadcasters have discovered, a new age seems to have dawned. "It's like being on the Starship Enterprise and going through a time warp," says Michael Disney, vice president of WIOD-AM in Miami. "All of a sudden there is a different interpretation of the rules without any advance warning."

Much to its dismay, the station received a \$10,000 fine, the largest of four the commission doled out Oct. 26, for songs played on the late-morning "Neil Rogers Show" with titles like "Penis Envy" and "Walk with an Erection." The commission also investigated several other radio stations for possibly broadcasting indecent material during daytime hours, an action seen as a warning to all broadcasters.

On television, several factors conspired to make the 1988 season particularly gory and prurient, provoking current legislative

efforts. The networks were facing competition from cable networks, which are not bound by the same content restrictions, and they were forced to sometimes desperate extremes to recapture audiences after the stale fare of reruns forced by a lengthy writers strike. At the same time, looking for ways to cut costs, the networks reduced their standards departments.

The result was that the crucial November 1988 ratings "sweeps" period (when advertising rates are determined) developed into a no-holds-barred cornucopia of the unsavory. Since then things have calmed down. The most recent sweeps period was unusually subdued. The giant-mouthed Morton Downey Jr.'s show has bitten the dust, and the number of stations carrying the less abusive, though no less lurid, Geraldo Rivera has shrunk significantly.

The most important factor in this turnaround, according to analysts, has been a change in public mood and the pressure from consumer groups. "The name of the game is dollars, and if you talk dollars, they listen," says the Rev. Donald Wildmon, president of the American Family Association. Pressure groups include Wildmon's, whose supporters keep a vigilant eye on network programming, taping it, filing complaints with the FCC and organizing boycotts against sponsors of shows they say undermine Christian and family values. "The networks know we are here and what our concerns are," says Wildmon, whose efforts persuaded Pepsi to drop a commercial featuring pop star Madonna. At the moment, the organization, which says it has a mailing list of 300,000 and more than 400 chapters nationwide, is boycotting Clorox Co. and Mennen Co., which Wildmon describes as "two leading sponsors of sex, violence and profanity on television." Among other programs, Men-

men sponsors "Tour of Duty"; Clorox sponsors "Midnight Caller."

A large part of the problem of regulating the airwaves is embedded in American law, which prohibits both obscenity and censorship, a conflict that has no prospect of easy resolution, says Donald M. Gillmor, professor of journalism and mass communications at the University of Minnesota. Since the 1978 Supreme Court ruling in the so-called "seven dirty words" case involving comedian George Carlin, indecency has been defined as "language or material that, in context, depicts or describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium, sexual or excretory activities or organs." That definition, First Amendment activists argue, is vague and relativistic.

Equally confusing is the fact that different standards can apply at different times of day. Though Congress, in October 1988, passed legislation requiring the FCC to adopt a rule against indecent broadcasts 24 hours a day, the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit stayed implementation last January, noting that the rule can be applied only during daytime hours when children are likely to be in the audience.

On top of that, almost every time the FCC acts to implement indecency regulations, the agency is sued by groups ranging from the American Civil Liberties Union to Action for Children's Television for violating First Amendment rights.

However, the recent rash of protests indicates that strong sentiment exists to clean up the industry one way or the other. For his part, Sikes advocates that broadcasters get together and reestablish their own code of regulation without interference from the government. Many in Congress, such as Republican Rep. Dana Rohrabacher of California, agree the broadcasters should have first crack at drawing up guidelines. "The main goal is to protect children from exposure and exploitation," the congressman says, "and if the industry can set its own standards, that is the best way to go."

While skeptics note that in broadcasting the bottom line reigns supreme and is likely to continue to do so, many are hoping that broadcasters will reach the conclusion that self-regulation is in their best interest. They will be closely watched. But if they fail to establish solid, agreeable and enforceable standards on their own, or if the new guidelines do not go far enough, then this hot issue promises to ignite all over again.

— Helle Bering-Jensen

Focus

Violent Verdict

Connecting TV and Real-Life Aggression

By Carl M. Cannon
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

After 13-year-old Juan Valdez confessed to being one of two teenagers who ambushed the father of a friend in his own home where they kicked, stabbed and beat him with a fireplace poker and then choked him to death with a dog chain, the cops in Manteca, Calif., still had one question.

Why, after all that, police detective Jeff Boyd asked, did they pour salt in their victim's wounds?

"Oh I don't know," the youngster replied with a shrug. "I just seen it on TV."

For more than a generation, the United States has debated the effects—especially on children—of the massive doses of television violence the nation feeds itself every day and every night.

During that time, Congress and the federal government have been paralyzed on the question of mandating any reductions in television violence, caught between defenders of the First Amendment and those who put faith in the marketplace as the best regulator.

But the evidence on television violence is in. And it comes in many forms.

It comes in studies—more than 3,000 of them—almost all of which show that children who watch television violence are more prone to use physical aggression than those who don't.

It comes in somber warnings from child psychologists who can tell after one visit which preschool-age children watch violent television and which do not.

It comes in the configurations of the corpses, mutilated by disturbed teen-agers to resemble victims in slasher movies that find their way onto television.

Finally, it comes in the emotionless testimony of violent youngsters who may not realize they are fingering an accomplice.

"Oh, I don't know. I just seen it on TV."

In 1989, the majority of professionals working with children believe that the time for debate on TV violence is over.

"Our children should not be sold down the road to profit," exhorted Robert Kubey, a Rutgers University professor. "And yet, daily and weekly, on American television, the best interests of our children are being sacrificed to profit."

When he testified before a Senate subcommittee, Kubey recounted the escapades of a show called "Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling," featuring phony female wrestlers who have been known to bring chain saws and blowtorches into the ring with them.

"We would never allow a baby sitter or a teacher or a stranger to tell a story to a child about a person who tries to blowtorch the face of another person," he said. "But somehow when this story is told graphically on television, the people who produce and disseminate the story need not answer to anyone."

Over the years, television industry executives have offered various defenses of their programming, an effective one being that government censorship is a greater evil than violent television dramas.

"We do not believe that the delegation of such broad authority over television programming to any organization would serve the public interest, particularly if that organization had the imprimatur of a government body," Alfred R. Schneider, an ABC vice president, recently told Congress.

"Daily and weekly, on American television, the best interests of our children are being sacrificed to profit."

—professor Robert Kubey

However, other points raised by the networks are dismissed by child advocacy groups, none more so than the networks' denial that they show gratuitous violence:

■ The networks have maintained that they are meeting the needs of the public, and that this is what ratings are all about. However, children's advocates say children are entitled to protections above and beyond those offered by the marketplace.

■ The networks have insisted that parents can—and should—monitor what their children watch. However, the PTA and other groups concede that millions of parents haven't always lived up to this responsibility. Millions of children are left home alone every day because of economic necessity; in fact, many parents rely on television to keep them there.

■ Finally, the networks have maintained that despite a "correlation" between television violence and increased aggressiveness in children, television might not be the "cause."

To those in the scientific community, this last contention amounts to an outright refusal to squarely face up to the academic findings about violence.

Of the 85 major studies into the effects of television violence, only one concluded that television violence did not cause increased aggressiveness in children. It was paid for by NBC.

"The NBC study was reviewed three times by independent researchers," said Brian Wilcox, an official with the American Psychological Association. "And all three concluded that the network-hired researchers misinterpreted their own evidence and that NBC's own data actually showed a causal relationship between television violence and increased aggression in children."

The most ambitious research has been done by two Chicago clinicians, Leonard D. Eron and Rowell L. Huesman, who looked at the same children for 22 years. They concluded that watching violence on television was the single best predictor of violent or aggressive behavior—ahead of such factors as parents' behavior, poverty and race.

Both men and women who had watched high levels of television violence at age 8 consistently had a higher chance of committing violent crimes at age 30, they found. In addition, the more television violence people watched as children, the more likely they were to engage in child abuse and spouse abuse as adults.

"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," they wrote. "The effect is not limited to children who are already disposed to being aggressive and is not restricted to this country."

A study in Canada showed that after television was introduced for the first time to a town, the objectively measured incidents of aggression—hitting, shoving and biting—among first and second graders increased 160 percent.

The studies date to 1956 when 24 children, aged 4, watched a "Woody Woodpecker" cartoon with violent action and a peaceful "Little Red Hen" cartoon. The children who watched "Woody Woodpecker" were found to be more likely to hit and verbally accost other children, to break toys or engage in destructive behavior during free play.

This same phenomenon was observed and catalogued again and again by researchers over the next three decades. It was confirmed by a blue-ribbon commission appointed by the U.S. surgeon general in 1972, by the Canadian Royal Com-

mission in 1976, by the National Institute of Mental Health in 1982 and by the U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence in 1984. It also was the conclusion of hundreds of researchers, most of them working independently, at scores of the United States' most prestigious universities.

And as the number of the opponents and the evidence from the studies kept mounting, so did the bodies of the murder victims on prime-time television: The 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. slot, once known as the "family hour," now is the most violent of all, according to University of Pennsylvania researchers. By the time the average child graduates from high school, he or she will have watched 18,000 simulated murders on television.

"There is more research on this topic than on almost any other social issue of our time," said University of Kansas professor Aletha C. Huston, co-director of the Center for Research on the Influence of Television on Children. "Virtually all independent scholars . . . agree. We keep pumping children with the messages that violence is the way to solve their problems—and some of it takes hold."

Cable television and video-cassette recorders have made the problem much more dire, recent research suggests, because the worst kind of films for impressionable young people appear to be "slasher films," a genre of horror movies in which violence is graphic, glorified and directed against women.

Many law enforcement officials believe these movies prompt more copy-cat killers.

Last year, Angelo Regino, 18, of Los Angeles, was convicted of a series of robberies and shootings—and a murder—in which he wore a disguise identical to that of Freddy Krueger, the sadistic killer in the horror film "Nightmare on Elm Street." According to testimony, Regino told one of his victims, "You know who I am, don't you? I'm Freddy from 'Elm Street.'" Regino then told the man to run, and as he did, he fired six shots at him.

Mark Branch, 19, of Greenfield, Mass., killed himself after being charged with the stabbing death of an 18-year-old college student. Along with 90 horror movies, police found a machete and a goalie mask like those used by one of his heroes, Jason, the grisly star of "Friday the 13th."

"In his life of acting out Jason, he had to have a final chapter, and he couldn't have a final chapter unless he did what Jason did—commit murder," said Greenfield police chief David McCarthy. "That's why this crime was committed."

Representatives of the three major networks all express dismay at such material, but independent stations have adapted weekly television shows from both of these movies. One episode of the television version of "Friday the 13th" depicted a doctor's daughter being accidentally infected from a cursed syringe, which causes her to need human blood to survive. Her doting dad picks up young women and takes them home where he murders them by draining their blood and brain fluid, which he gives to his daughter. She eventually kills her father by biting him in the neck and throwing him over a balcony.

In addition, the themes of the slasher films also are prevalent on commercial television.

But it was the access by children to the original slasher movies that created a backlash. It is being led by Illinois Sen. Paul Simon, who tells a story of checking into a hotel one night and turning on the television.

"All of a sudden, in front of me, in living color, someone was being sawed in half by a chain saw. It bothered me that night. And I wondered what happens to the 10-year-old who sees something like this."

Simon sought an audience with various network officials. He recalls being told, "We air violence because it sells. We'd like to cut back, but we can't afford to if our competition doesn't. We can't get together with them and voluntarily do it because it's a violation of the federal anti-trust laws."

So Simon proposed legislation exempting the networks from the anti-trust laws if they get together and discuss ways to lessen television violence. His bill has passed the Senate twice, but not the House.

Meanwhile, the networks and the producers have continued not only making more and more violent shows but also exporting American television violence to other nations where it has had similar effects.

In England, Belgium, Finland, Holland and other countries, researchers have observed the same phenomena of children becoming physically violent and verbally abusive after being exposed to violent American-produced television programs. Police from Thailand to Britain reported instances of copy-cat killings by youths who had watched American programming.

Until recently, academics have shied away from estimating how much of the violence in society is due to television, primarily because they have believed that other, harder-to-measure, variables might be more important factors than television.

This is beginning to change, however. So ingrained is violence in television programming that even the Christian Broadcasting Network-owned Family Channel was rated the most violent network on weekend days by the National Coalition on Television Violence for its schedule of cowboy shoot-em-ups.

Alarmed Family Channel officials invited NCTV founder Thomas E. Radecki to come to Virginia Beach and talk. "We explained that we see the Westerns . . . almost as morality plays," said Family Channel spokesman Earl Weirich. "You know who the good guys are, you know who the bad guys are, and you know darn well who's going to win."

But Radecki adds, "They admitted they couldn't envision Jesus or the apostles walking down Main Street with a six-shooter. But they are making a lot of money on them, and they didn't change."

How Parents Can Help

Although no less a source than Captain Kangaroo dismisses the overall state of current commercial TV as "disastrous to any thoughtful person," a handful of authorities on children's television suggest the following:

- Restrict the amount of time your children are allowed to watch TV. Studies show that, on average, once children surpass 10 hours of viewing per week, the average child's reading and math scores drop.

- Watch television with your children and emphasize the positive values of the show.

- Guide your children toward educational programs. Studies indicate that preschoolers who watch educational shows learn to read faster and retain more than those who watch entertainment.

- Steer your children to read books on the same subjects as shows that interest them.

- Avoid violent shows. Young children are less likely to make a connection between, say, a murder at the beginning of a show and the incarceration of the killer at the end of the show.

Networks to Censors: Take A Walk

Audience erosion from cable, home video, pay TV a factor.

NBC airs more than 2,000 hours of programs per year, not counting news or reruns, and those shows in turn generate about a quarter of a million viewer letters annually on what the network calls "regulatory" matters—questions of taste, propriety and fairness that might, in a more aggressive era in Washington, have led to hearings on a license challenge. For that reason, NBC and its rivals traditionally have

employed dozens of people to oversee "program standards and practices."

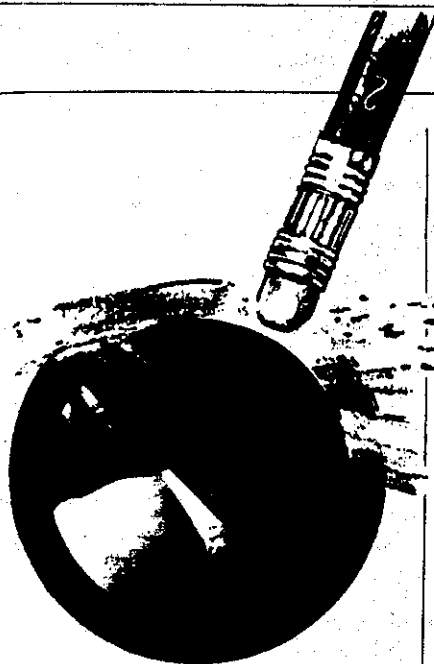
Starting this season, however, NBC will have just four "editors," two on each coast, to review all the scripts and finished product for those 2,000-plus hours. In short, the era of self-censorship at the networks is all but dead. Judgments about what is fit and ready for prime time—or any other daypart—will be made by the producers themselves, and by program-department executives whose main function is to deliver better ratings.

Sums up one of NBC's soon-to-be departed: "There is going to be a new bottom below which I don't think anyone could possibly fall. Mediocre shows will be more free to rely on locker-room language and gratuitous violence to hype themselves to success. Docu-drama will be a lot more drama than docu. And there is an inherent conflict of interest, because the programmers who are supposed to enforce standards are both en-

couraging the producers to get better numbers and building the contacts to get their own next jobs. How tough can someone be with Universal when he expects to be working there in a couple of years?"

To be sure, self-censorship doesn't always work. CBS let *The Atlanta Child Murders*, with its dubious attack on the prosecution of Wayne B. Williams and slurs on the police and political leadership of Atlanta, slip through. ABC aired *The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald*, which virtually endorsed any and every doubt about the Warren Commission, no matter how mutually contradictory.

NBC is not alone in cutting censors, although its "downsizing" seems to be the most sweeping yet. And the most cynical, for its announcement was paired with a plan to seek more in-show promotion of specific advertisers' goods and services, with the producer and the network sharing a fee when, say, Michael J. Fox is seen drinking Pepsi. That



the chief censor, Al Schneider, has said only that his network "is obviously studying these developments closely."

Privately, his colleagues scotch rumors that he will quit or be pushed, but predict sharp cuts and say the department's position has already been eroded. Says a longtime promotion executive: "In the old days, we used to say that Schneider did not even report to Elton Rule, but only to God. We have new owners and a different president now, and his function is a much lower priority."

Although the Hollywood community chafed at network censorship as unwarranted artistic intrusion by inexperienced and untalented bureaucrats, the purpose of the standards had little to do with art or, for that matter, social responsibility. They were established for sound economic reasons, and are now being phased out for precisely the same motive. Stern self-censorship averted government intervention and gave edgy executives something constructive to point to when summoned to testify before Congress about TV's effect on decency and values. Now, however, the Federal Communications Commission has all but abandoned con-

tent supervision on the dual grounds of First Amendment rights and increased diversity of program sources. Meanwhile, that diversification—through syndication, cable, pay television and video cassettes—gives a majority of viewers the chance to choose racier material than the networks would allow. Increasingly, they have, as the ever gloomier network Nielsen reports show. Says an ABC executive: "Of course this change in standards has to do with cable. Why should we compete with one hand tied behind our backs?"

Agrees an NBC honcho: "Bob Wright, who is getting the company into the cable business, asks why the network should work under restrictions that cable is not under." And network executives agree that once one of the Big Three saved money and increased its competitiveness by relaxing standards, the others had to follow suit. The biggest potential losers: affiliate stations in conservative parts of the country, who may find that the new permissiveness actually costs rather than gains viewers. Said the departing NBC executive: "What it all means depends on whether the public really cares. I guess we'll find out."

WILLIAM A. HENRY III

kind of paid plug dates to the days of radio and has turned a tidy profit for movie studios in recent years.

CBS actually led the way with a series of cuts, the latest eliminating a vice presidency in charge of practices and standards; the pivotal change, in the view of insiders, was a decision some months ago that episode-by-episode supervision of content was no longer necessary with established series. At ABC,

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