

SIMON TELEVISION VIOLENCE LAW ENACTED DECEMBER 1990

TITLE V—TELEVISION PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

Television
Program
Improvement
Act of 1990.

SEC. 501. TELEVISION PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT.

47 USC 303c.

(a) **SHORT TITLE.**—This section may be cited as the “Television Program Improvement Act of 1990”.

(b) **DEFINITIONS.**—For purposes of this section—

(1) the term “antitrust laws” has the meaning given it in subsection (a) of the first section of the Clayton Act (15 U.S.C. 12(a)), except that such term includes section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act (15 U.S.C. 45) to the extent that such section 5 applies to unfair methods of competition;

(2) the term “person in the television industry” means a television network, any entity which produces programming (including theatrical motion pictures) for telecasting or telecasts programming, the National Cable Television Association, the Association of Independent Television Stations, Incorporated, the National Association of Broadcasters, the Motion Picture Association of America, the Community Antenna Television Association, and each of the networks’ affiliate organizations, and shall include any individual acting on behalf of such person; and

(3) the term “telecast” means—

(A) to broadcast by a television broadcast station; or

(B) to transmit by a cable television system or a satellite television distribution service.

(c) **EXEMPTION.**—The antitrust laws shall not apply to any joint discussion, consideration, review, action, or agreement by or among persons in the television industry for the purpose of, and limited to, developing and disseminating voluntary guidelines designed to alleviate the negative impact of violence in telecast material.

(d) **LIMITATIONS.**—(1) The exemption provided in subsection (c) shall not apply to any joint discussion, consideration, review, action, or agreement which results in a boycott of any person.

104 STAT. 5128

PUBLIC LAW 101-650—DEC. 1, 1990

(2) The exemption provided in subsection (c) shall apply only to any joint discussion, consideration, review, action, or agreement engaged in only during the 3-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this section.

The
National Council for Families & Television
invites you to attend
The Industry-Wide Leadership Conference on
Violence in Television Programming

Monday, August 2, 1993

Beverly Hilton Hotel
Beverly Hills, California

9:00 am - 4:30 pm

Purpose

A major concern of the industry today is the depiction of violence in television programming. To address this important issue, the National Council for Families & Television is bringing together all segments of the broadcasting, cable, production and distribution communities for a leadership conference on television violence.

The conference will focus on nationally distributed entertainment programming. Invited panelists include child advocates and legal, academic, medical and governmental experts.

Attendance is limited to the entertainment industry. This invitation is not transferrable.

Format

Morning Session

Grand Ballroom

Welcome: Marian Rees, Chair
National Council for Families & Television

Opening remarks and morning panels moderator:
Jeff Greenfield, Political and Media Analyst,
ABC News

Panel 1: What The Experts Say
Panel 2: The Children Are Watching

Luncheon

International Ballroom

Keynote Speaker: Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.)

Afternoon Session

Grand Ballroom

A Socratic Dialogue moderated by:
Arthur R. Miller, Professor of Law,
Harvard University

The conference will be covered by credentialed press.

For further information, call the National Council for Families & Television (213) 876-5959.

For press inquiries, call Russ Patrick and Company Communications (310) 471-0073.

Panelists (in formation)

J. Andrea Alstrup, vice president, Corporate Staff, Advertising — U.S.,
Johnson & Johnson

— Peggy Charren, founder, Action for Children's Television (ACT)

Winston H. (Tony) Cox, chairman and CEO, Showtime Networks Inc.

Edward Donnerstein, Ph.D., professor and past chairperson of the
Department of Communication, University of California, Santa
Barbara

Leonard Eron, Ph.D., research scientist and professor of psychology,
University of Michigan

George Gerbner, Ph.D., dean emeritus and professor, Annenberg School for
Communication, University of Pennsylvania

Mel Harris, president, Sony Pictures Entertainment Television Group

Andy Heyward, chairman and CEO, DIC Enterprises

Leonard Hill, executive producer, Hill/Fields Entertainment

Phil Jones, president, Broadcast Group, Meredith Corp.

— Jennifer Lawson, executive vice president, National Programming and
Promotion Services, PBS

Geraldine Laybourne, vice chair, MTV Networks; president, Nickelodeon;
trustee, NCFT

— Carole Lieberman, M.D., chairperson, National Coalition
on Television Violence

— Terry Rakolta, founder, Americans for Responsible Television

— Jeff Sagansky, president, CBS Entertainment Division

— Scott Sassa, president, Turner Entertainment Group

Karen Hill-Scott, Ed.D., child development psychologist; script advisor

Arnold Shapiro, executive producer; president, Arnold Shapiro Productions

Nadine Strossen, president, American Civil Liberties Union; professor of
law, New York Law School

Suzanne Stutman, executive director, Institute for Mental Health Initiatives

— Dick Wolf, executive producer; president, Wolf Films Inc.

Derry
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The National Council for Families & Television, founded in 1977, is a nonprofit, non-adversarial, educational organization which sponsors a major conference every summer focusing on the impact of television on children and families.

NCFT Board of Trustees: Marian Rees, Chair; William Allen, Co-Chair; Marcy Carsey, Co-Chair; Teresa Heinz, Chair Emeritus and Founder; Garth Ancier, John Cooke, Geoffrey Cowan, Ronald R. Davenport, Jane Eisner, Carole Isenberg, Wendy Luers, Geraldine Laybourne, Marvin Mord, Tricia McLeod Robin and Leonard Stern.

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Caging the Beast, Continued

Are the networks serious about curbing violence? An upcoming meeting looms as a key test, as a wary Congress awaits action

By DANIEL CERONE

Ever since Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) turned on a hotel television set in 1985 and saw a movie in which a body was being dismembered with a chain saw, he has been on a personal crusade to clean up violence on television. For several years he compiled mountains of research to give weight to his urgent message: that the alarming rise of violence in society can be directly linked to the rise of violence on television.

In December, 1990, Simon used his information to persuade lawmakers in Washington to pass what amounted to a challenge—signed into law by President George Bush—giving the TV industry three years to clean up its act, or else have the government step in and do it.

After 2½ years of virtual silence, Hollywood is suddenly responding to what Simon says.

The top brass at CBS, ABC, NBC and Fox flew to Washington last month and announced that, beginning this fall, the networks will voluntarily attach parental-advisory labels to TV series and movies that contain what the networks deem to be a high level of violence.

And in two weeks, an unprecedented summit meeting of media minds will take place in Los Angeles when key members of the broadcast and cable TV industries sit down together in a daylong conference, organized by the National Council for Families & Television, or NCFV, to explore the effect of violent TV programming on society—especially children.

Coming in the wake of highly charged congressional hearings on TV violence—during which cable mogul Ted Turner bested even the harshest congressional critic by referring to himself and other TV programmers as murderers—and with the year-end deadline set by Simon's bill only months away, the Aug. 2 conference has taken on nearly epic significance. The networks' warning label has served only to focus greater attention on the meeting, since the tag is aimed at *identifying* violence, not *reducing* it, as the critics insist is necessary.

But conflicting expectations seem certain to undermine any chance of accord.

For Simon and other lawmakers who have been waiting for the industry to act since the law was passed in 1990, the conference represents the end of one phase in a battle against TV violence that has been waged in some form almost since the medium's inception. Many express a desire to see some concrete plan of action emerge. For Hollywood, however, the conference is only a beginning step in defining the problem and the industry's role in it.

"I'm concerned that an unfair burden may be placed on this conference by expecting to find the magic pill in one day," said Bill Allen, president of MTM Television and vice chairman of the nonprofit NCFV. "This is the first time the entire TV

industry will sit down in a room, a rather public room, and look for solutions to violence. Easy and facile solutions might not be the best ones."

That attitude riles industry critics. "I've just lost all patience, and I think everybody else has too," said Rep. John Bryant (D-Tex.). "I don't know why everyone wants to spend the day in a group grope discussing a subject that's obvious to everybody already."

If there was ever an industry in need of a quick fix, this is it. Controversy over the effect of TV violence has snowballed

through Capitol Hill with all the speed and momentum of an avalanche.

Although violence in news and sports is also of concern, the main assault has been on gratuitous, glorified mayhem in entertainment programming—TV movies, theatrical movies and reality-based crime series—that portray people using force to deal with crises. In the last eight months, the attacks have become relentless:

- In November, President-elect Clinton said in a TV Guide interview that he was "mortified" by some of what is shown on television and that Hollywood should take the lead in "deglamorizing mindless sex

and violence." A Times Mirror survey subsequently found that 80% of Americans believe TV violence is harmful to society, and 72% believe there is too much violence in entertainment programming.

- In May, a wave of Democratic politicians convened a dramatic series of congressional hearings on the subject. They were backed by three decades of voluminous research indicating that TV violence leads to more aggressive behavior in some viewers, plus new studies citing a rise in violence on television today. During one of the hearings, acting Federal Communications Commission Chairman James Quello voiced his support for imposing strict limits on when programs with violence could be shown.

- Last month, 19 major organizations, including the National PTA, the American Medical Assn. and the National Council of Churches, formed a letter-writing Citizens Task Force to combat TV violence.

All the while, a growing number of bills have been introduced that—if enacted—seem likely to pit Hollywood against Washington in a monumental battle over First Amendment rights.

- Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), chairman of the telecommunications and finance subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, has proposed a TV-ratings system similar to the one used by theatrical movies and a government-mandated device on new TV sets that would let parents lock out violent programming. Other anti-violence bills seek to toughen the license-renewal process for TV stations, to remove tax breaks for advertisers and to issue a quarterly "violence report card" to shame the programmers and advertisers behind violent shows.

"I'm trying to make it a health issue," said Rep. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.), who authored a bill calling for a presidential commission to seek solutions to the problem. "I think we're at the stage cigarettes were 30 years ago—before the surgeon general issued his study but when there were private studies that started to show quite conclusively that smoking was bad for you."

What Simon essentially had in mind with his 1990 Television Violence Act—which granted the programmers and producers immunity from federal antitrust prosecution so they could meet voluntarily and devise a plan to self-regulate their industry—was a temporary cease-fire between the network, cable and syndication competitors to hammer out an agreement, right down to what kind of violence could be portrayed on the screen.

The networks' first response to Congress came last December, when, in an unusual joint letter to Simon, ABC, CBS and NBC agreed to issue a uniform set of guidelines for the depiction of violence and to convene an industrywide conference about the subject. When the 15-point set of standards was released—including "all depictions of



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violence should be relevant and necessary to the development of character, or to the advancement of theme or plot" and "depictions of violence may not be used to shock or stimulate the audience"—critics quickly dismissed them because they contained no notable differences from the standards already in place at each network.

Similarly, last month's press conference announcing an experimental, two-year "advance parent advisory plan" failed to impress the critics. The advisories will run before and during entertainment programs whose "violent content is unexpected, graphic or pervasive" to help parents make informed decisions about what to let their children watch. Politicians and activist groups say the networks are simply using the labels to abandon their responsibility as caretakers of the public airwaves by tossing the problem back to parents, rather than addressing it through programming.

"The networks have made noises in the past about dealing with this violence problem," Rep. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) said with a sigh. "If you look at the history of this issue, you will see that Congress would focus and the networks would respond with rhetoric. But I don't think anyone is going to be fooled this time. It's got to be more than some catchy oratory at a press conference."

After the cool reception of the parental-advisory labels, the Aug. 2 conference has become what might be the last chance for Hollywood to show Washington its commitment before Simon's grace period runs out in December.

"I think the networks figure that the attention span of Congress is short, that this issue has been battered around for 30 to 40 years, that if they can fly by this period with fairly minimal or modest steps, then Congress will go away and think about something else," Wyden said. "My own sense is that this is the time. The public is up in arms. Congress has extended the olive branch. Now it's time for the networks and broadcast people to show they're serious."

But the networks maintain that they have already demonstrated their seriousness by arranging this conference to raise awareness, by agreeing to affix labels where necessary and by affirming in general their intention to "eliminate inappropriate depictions of violence." They say they are not planning any more joint actions to address the subject before or even after the meeting—although they have not completely closed the door to the possibility. "We can't say *nothing* will happen after the conference," said a senior executive at one of the networks. "Someone may have an idea at the conference that's so brilliant . . . but that's not the idea behind the conference."

The NCFT has been putting on annual TV conferences for 15 years, usually small, two-day retreats in Santa Barbara to sensitize the 100 or so producers, writers and network executives in attendance on how to responsibly portray such subjects as health, education and drug abuse.

This year, network executives asked the organization to independently organize a meeting on violence. The program was compressed to one day to accommodate the nearly 500 members of the broadcasting, cable, production and distribution communities who are expected to attend.

"The essential goal of the violence conference is to educate people about ways in which violence on television is being perceived by viewers and the impact that it's having on viewers," said Geoff Cowan, a public-interest lawyer and lecturer on mass media and law at UCLA who also serves as a vice chairman of the NCFT.

The first morning session at the Beverly Hilton Hotel will call on academics and researchers to explain their studies, to be followed by another morning session to focus on the effects of TV violence on children. The afternoon session will be a sort of Socratic dialogue between TV industry leaders and anti-violence activists. For the first time, the press has been invited to cover the conference.

Cowan hopes the meetings will serve a dual purpose by guiding network executives in what kind of projects they order into production, while suggesting ways for the creative community to avoid showing gratuitous violence. Cowan agrees that having a set of standards simply isn't enough.

"That's not the real problem," he said. "Standards and practices [departments] tell you what to keep out of a movie once you've ordered a movie about a murder. They can all agree what to keep out of the Amy Fisher story, but there is still a problem that all three [major] networks ordered the Amy Fisher story."

"A lot of great human themes deal with violence. The problem with movies for television is not that they have some violence in them, but the themes are themes of current perversity, rather than themes of great human importance. I don't think we would have people in Washington, or in their homes throughout America, complaining about violence in 'Roots' or 'Holocaust' or 'Winds of War,' even though they have significant violence."

MTM President Allen says it is unrealistic to expect that solutions can be found to such vexing problems in a day. "People may come up with very interesting ideas at this conference, which will require some thought and refinement," he argues. "Television is created by a creative process of thought and refinement, and that's how I expect this problem to be dealt with—instead of hoping that by 5 p.m. at

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the close of the conference we can hand out the answer."

David Grant, executive vice president of business operations for Fox, has a lot of questions he would like answered at the meeting: "What happens to kids when they watch violent programs? Is there a difference between action and violence? Is the impact on people the same when a robot blows up as when a person is shot? I want to know those things.

"Violence in dramatic works has been around forever," explained Grant, who says he is making attendance mandatory for many Fox executives. "What we need to do is meld our responsibility with our sense of dramatic creation, and not go nuts one way or another."

The networks have maintained for the most part that they do not show excessive violence—which is why the new parental-advisory warnings are not expected to be seen much in their fall programming. Most of their weekly series are benign comedies, executives point out, and their standards departments edit inappropriate material from drama series and movies.

So the networks seem to be approaching the conference warily. They resoundingly reject the concept of a ratings system or any plan that would dictate what they can or can't put on the screen.

"The decision-making process is subjective, and in a free, democratic society needs to remain so," said Beth Bressan, vice president of the CBS Broadcast Group. "The process is also a creative one. To be too mechanistic in our approach will only inhibit creativity and stop diverse programming."

Christine Hikawa, vice president of standards and practices at ABC, believes the networks have become scapegoats. "Because people are very concerned with violence in society, as we are, we think there's a greater perception of violence on TV," she said.

In addition, Hikawa believes the growth of cable television has added to that perception. "There appears to be more violence on TV because now there are 36 channels to choose from," she explained. "Quite frankly, the networks have less violence than ever before."

According to Sen. Simon, however, many TV executives have privately acknowledged to him over the years that too much violence is coming out of the tube. The dilemma is that violence often means ratings, and if network programmers lose their guts—both on screen and off—then other networks, syndicators or cable services will hold the competitive edge. TV producers, in turn, say they make violent programs because that's what the networks order.

The networks have been much more cautious in recent months as a result of the heightened focus on violence; they're simply not getting credit for the behind-the-scenes decisions they're making.

said Rosalyn Weinman, vice president of broadcast standards for NBC.

For instance, NBC recently created two different versions of a promo for the theatrical movie "Mobsters"—a tame version for the early evening and a more graphic one for late at night. And even though a movie about a substitute teacher killing students would deliver huge ratings, Weinman said, NBC not long ago rejected that exact movie pitch, which was picked up later as a feature film.

"We have been much more careful and sensitive to the [violence] issue," she said. "There have been a lot of discussions about how to filter it down to the program level. And we ourselves are trying to do this in a thoughtful way, and not in a knee-jerk reaction."

If nothing else comes out of the NCFT conference, all agree that there clearly needs to be a better definition of violence if Washington and Hollywood are ever going to come together.

A recent study by George Gerbner, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication, found that the average 16-year-old in America has watched 200,000 acts of violence on TV, including 33,000 murders. The study said that Saturday morning cartoons are among the worst offenders.

For that reason, Geraldine Laybourne, president of the children's cable channel Nickelodeon, has a problem with studies that attempt to quantify violence. She recalls her network once being cited for excessive violence in "You Can't Do That on Television," a slapstick series for kids.

"They said we had the same number of violent acts as a movie of the week that had decapitations," said Laybourne, who is also a panelist at the conference. "They counted a pie in the face the same as a decapitation. To me, it was so ludicrous." Gerbner's "Violence Index" defines violence as any "clear-cut and overt episodes of physical violence—hurting or killing or the threat of hurting and/or killing—in any context."

Another key function the conference may serve is to pull together the broadcast and cable communities. So far, the cable programmers have remained largely unscathed because cable is an unregulated service that people pay to bring into their homes, whereas broadcasters are licensed by the federal government to use the public airwaves.

"Right now there are not very many cable entities out there using any standards or guidelines," sniped CBS' Bressan. "When there are so many cable outlets out there saying, in effect, 'Come watch us because we do not self-regulate,' how much of the television landscape is really going to change? It's very unfair to say the networks should do more when the networks are the only ones who have done anything to date."

As part of an action plan that includes participating in the Aug. 2 conference, cable networks have agreed to develop their own sets of internal standards by the end of the year. A study commissioned by the National Cable Television Assn. concluded in January that "when all kinds of dramatic programs are taken into account, the level of violence on cable-originated programming is about the same as the violence on broadcast network programming."

To the critics, however, that's too little, too late. So too may be the conference.

"I think the underlying reason for this meeting is to call the dogs off, to get the government off their back, to go through the motions of pleasing Sen. Simon," said Terry Rakolta, founder of Americans for Responsible TV, a grass-roots organization that claims 200,000 members. Rakolta, who advocates banning violent programs between 4 and 9 p.m., will be a panelist at the conference.

She sees the whole NCFT event as a smoke screen: "There is a veiled threat of government intervention if they don't come up with something soon."

And what if the industry can't, or won't, come up with a satisfactory solution for the lawmakers?

"The conference is a useful discussion, but I honestly don't have high hopes that the industry, whose behavior is fueled by the competitive juices to win ratings, will ever be able to resist the more sensational, more violent television programming," said Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (D-N.D.). He is one of several lawmakers who expressed a clear intention to go ahead and press legal solutions if the NCFT conference does not yield a firm plan of action.

"I think it's likely that some legislation will move," he said.

Bob Peck, a legal counselor for the American Civil Liberties Union, said that any federal legislation attempting to govern the airwaves won't wash. "It can't, constitutionally," he said. "As soon as they say what people can say, read or see through their television sets, then they're engaging in censorship, which the First Amendment clearly protects against."

The Federal Communications Commission has a regulation prohibiting radio and TV stations from broadcasting sexually explicit, indecent programming between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m., when children are likely to be in the audience, and there has been talk of creating similar legislation for violent programming. But Peck said even the indecency ruling has been tough to enforce in court.

"The fact of the matter remains that the most powerful restraint on television programming remains the viewers," he said. "What they will watch and won't watch has more effect than anything that Washington will pass." □

Daniel Cerone is a Times staff writer.

ABC hot line tips off sensitive subject matter

By Donna Gable
USA TODAY

Beginning Sunday, viewers can call an 800 number to find out what ABC shows they may want to click off.

ABC's Advisory Hotline, 800-213-6222, will be updated twice a week with the title, air date and summary of ABC prime-time programs with sensitive subject matter.

The network unveiled the hot line Monday, a week before the industry hosts a meeting on TV violence. The issue has dominated the fall press tour ongoing in Los Angeles.

Monday, ABC Entertainment President Ted Harbert told critics that his network's movies will be less violent this season. While he defended last May's violent *Murder in the Heartland*, about serial killer Charles Starkweather, "If that movie came to me tomorrow, I don't think I'd pick it up."

Not that ABC will shy away from murder stories, "but we've got to find a different way to do them."

ABC's new adult drama *NYPD Blue* will not have a violence warning, but this advisory: "This police drama contains adult language and scenes of partial nudity. Viewer discretion is advised."

Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., sees the hot line as "another step" in the war against TV violence.

And while labeling is helpful, "The best solution, still, is to scale down the overall levels of violence."

Networks Acknowledge Effect of TV Violence

TV VIOLENCE, From A1

dependent stations or first-run syndicators, which attract about 40 percent of the audience. "We urge the entire entertainment industry to follow our lead," said Warren Littlefield, president of NBC Entertainment. Ted Turner, head of Turner Broadcasting, has agreed to join the warning trial. A television summit conference has been scheduled for Aug. 2 in Los Angeles to discuss the issue.

More than 3,000 studies have been conducted in the past four decades, showing a consistent correlation between "viewing violence and aggressive behavior," according to a recent American Psychological Association (APA) report. By the time a child has finished elementary school, he will have seen 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence, the APA estimated. In addition to aggressive behavior, children also develop increased fearfulness of becoming a victim and become more cautious about violence directed at others, said a recent report by CQ Researcher. For years the entertainment industry maintained that the content of movies and television reflects society more than it influences it. Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) has worked for eight years to get the networks to acknowledge that "inappropriate" violence is bad.

MPPAA President Jack Valenti said at yesterday's press conference that the film and television "creative community" would address violence in a series of small meetings with the producers, writers and directors who develop programs. The goal would be not just a reduction in violence that did not add to the drama, or violence committed without consequence, but what Littlefield called a "proactive" message about violence in society.

"We have done this before," said Valenti. "Four years ago we did it with the use of drugs and with the exhibition of smoking and alcohol consumption. We did it in the depiction of minorities, and in furthering the designated driver theme, and in promoting the use of seat belts in the story line."

Valenti said later that "even if there is only a possibility of a con-

Movies and other prime-time series will be labeled on a case-by-case basis. The show "Top Cops" has been canceled in part because of concerns about violence, said CBS's Howard Stringer. Athletic events, news and children's programming are not considered necessary to label, but the network executives said.

The networks expect to lose money as a result of the warning label, the executives said, because advertisers may be wary of shows labeled violent.

The key questions that may be answered during the two-year warning label trial are: What is gratuitous violence, and how is it eliminated—or at least reduced—without making the shows so boring that the thrill-

sated viewing audience will click their sets off? "It's all subjective," Valenti noted.

"We don't want to turn the vast wasteland into the dull wasteland," said Stringer, who seemed the most skeptical of the five executives at the press conference. "When anyone starts talking about the next step, I start to get nervous. It is the nature of violence and the absence of consequences that we are concerned about. We have, in effect, depersonalized violence. There is no grief, no remorse, no feelings. That's the kind that sends a message to children that it's okay."

The "next step," according to Markey, is the easy availability of the so-called "V-Chip" that would al-

low a viewer to block out certain programs to prevent children from watching them. The warning label, which should be published in programming guides in advance of the shows' air dates, would make it possible for a parent (at least a technologically literate one) to sit down on a Sunday afternoon and block out all the programs in the coming week that she did not want her children to watch. Markey will be holding a hearing at 9 this morning in the Rayburn Building to examine this technology, which is currently available but not required, as well as the warning label initiative.

The TV Violence Act, sponsored by Sen. Simon, exempted the networks from antitrust laws for three

years ending next December so they could jointly develop a way to deal with violence. Last December the networks agreed to some joint principles on the depiction of violence, but that was not enough. At a hearing this past May, Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio) warned the same panel of network presidents that "if you just do nothing, and if you just tell us you're doing something while giving us the May sweeps . . . we're going to come down harder on you than you would like us to do."

That day the executives had shown up with their new fall schedules, which appear to include fewer shows that depend on shooting and slashing, and acknowledged that some of the offerings during the May ratings sweep—such as "Murder in the Heartland" and "Ambush in Waco"—were less than great art.

While some anti-violence activists said the advisory label was a meager effort to deal with televised blood lust, industry executives were also criticized by Hollywood producers. They say the warning label could be the first step toward censorship and render the networks less competitive against the no-holds-barred cable industry.

Markey said the warning system was "admittedly crude," but, coupled with the V-chip blocking system, would "empower" parents to reduce the number of violent acts children are exposed to. He noted that in both the 1950s and 1960s, hearings had been convened to examine television violence, and that "once the hot flare of congressional attention turns elsewhere, violence in television tends to increase." Nonetheless, he has high hopes for this initiative. "I'm an optimist," he said.

Warning: TV Violence Is Harmful, Networks Concede

By Megan Rosenfeld
Washington Post Staff Writer

In announcing yesterday that violent television programs will be labeled with a parental advisory heads of the four major networks and the motion picture association acknowledged a point they had long disputed—that gratuitous and glamorized mayhem on television affects viewers.

"This is the dawning of a new era," said Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.) at an unusual Capitol Hill

press conference yesterday with the heads of CBS, NBC, ABC, Fox Television and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). "For the last 40 years the debate has been whether violence on television affects antisocial behavior. Today we put an end to that debate."

Facing continued pressure from Congress and anti-violence lobbying groups, the network heads have gradually conceded over the past year that the research may be correct—that television could be a factor in the dramatic increase in mur-

ders, assaults and illegal weapon sales in this country. The networks came up with the advisory label as an alternative to a rating system similar to that followed by the motion picture industry, or to monitoring by the Federal Communications Commission.

The warning label unveiled yesterday says simply "Due to some violent content, parental discretion advised." Hammered out with at least 15 revisions in a series of meetings and conference calls during the past seven weeks, according to one in-

dustry source, the notice will appear before a program begins, during the midpoint station break and on promotional material. Each network's "standards" department will decide independently which shows to label. The only other measure the networks organized was a series of meetings announced by the MPAA to raise consciousness among the people who create programs.

The agreement to label is for a two-year "trial" and does not currently include the cable industry, in-
See TV VIOLENCE, A8, C-1

The Networks Run For

To avoid a warning label, violent shows are getting toned down—or dropped

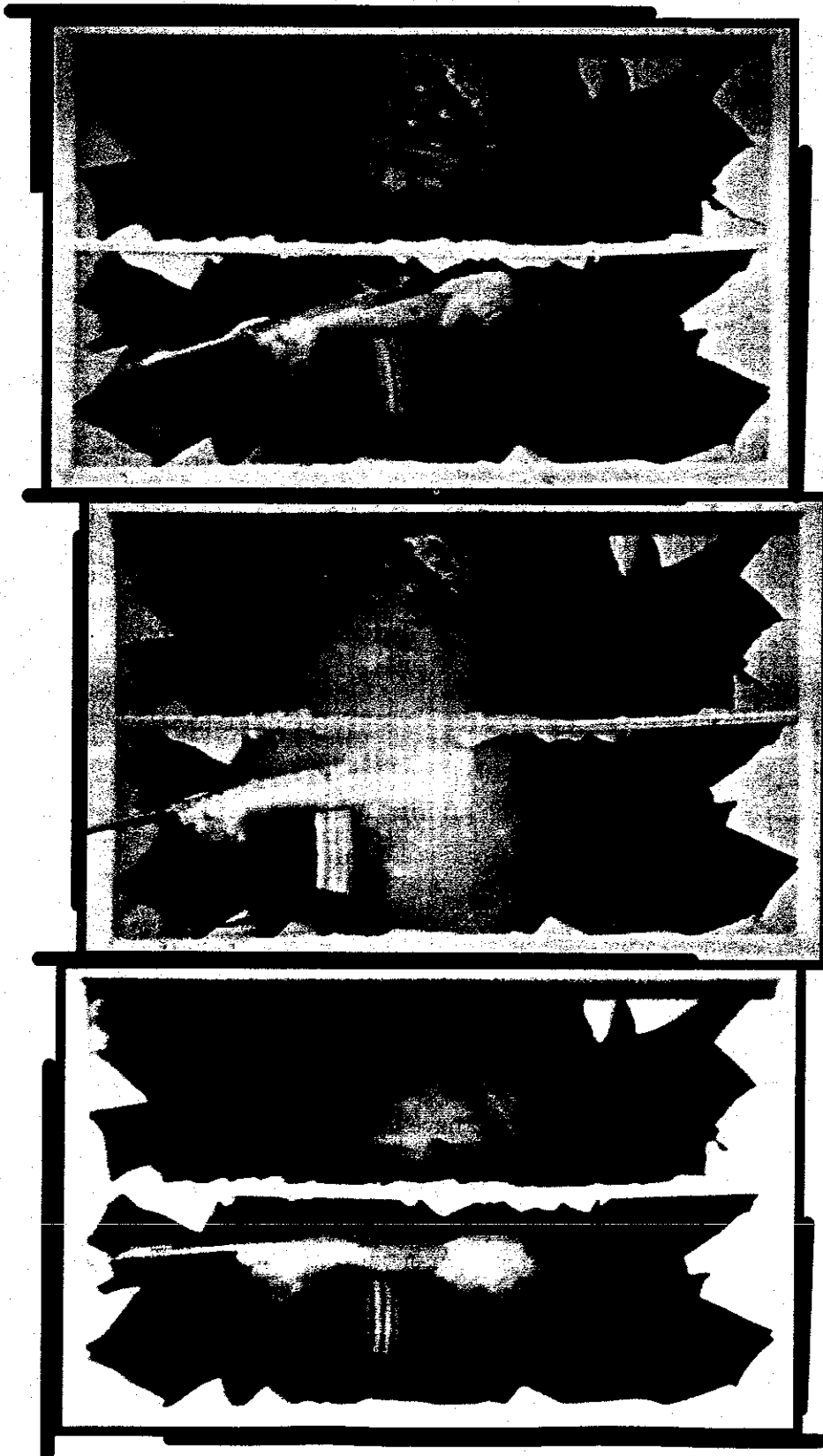
By RICHARD ZOGLIN

PRODUCER JOHN LANGLEY WAS screening a rough cut of his new Fox network show *Cop Files* a couple of weeks ago, and he wasn't happy. In one scene, a female police officer surprises a burglary suspect in a warehouse; he attacks her savagely, then she shoots him in self-defense. When Fox censors objected to the violence, Langley was forced to make drastic excisions. "It was absurd," he says. "The pressure was on us to de-emphasize the attack, so you wound up showing her shooting him without any motivation." Langley, like many others in Hollywood, knows the reason for this outbreak of squeamishness: the networks have suddenly got religion on the subject of violence.

After several rounds of congressional hearings that aired concerns about violence on TV, the four networks last month announced a joint response. Starting in September, they will attach a warning label—DUE TO SOME VIOLENT CONTENT, PARENTAL DISCRETION ADVISED—to shows with high levels of mayhem. Over the past two weeks, network executives have trooped before junketing TV journalists in Los Angeles to stress their concerns about violence—and assert that they aren't the only ones to blame. Next Monday a heavy-weight lineup of TV producers, network executives and other industry bigwigs will meet to explore the violence issue at a daylong "summit conference" sponsored by the National Council for Families and Television.

Initial reaction to the networks' labeling plan was predictably skeptical. Critics, from conservative watchdog Terry Rakolta to earnest newspaper columnists, complained that the warning label was a cop-out, a Band-Aid solution that would not reduce violence but would simply point out more clearly where to find it. But as production for the new season gets under way, the impact of the new label is shaping up as substantial, maybe even crippling. The Clean Up Your Network

Blasting away in NBC's *Ambush in Waco*



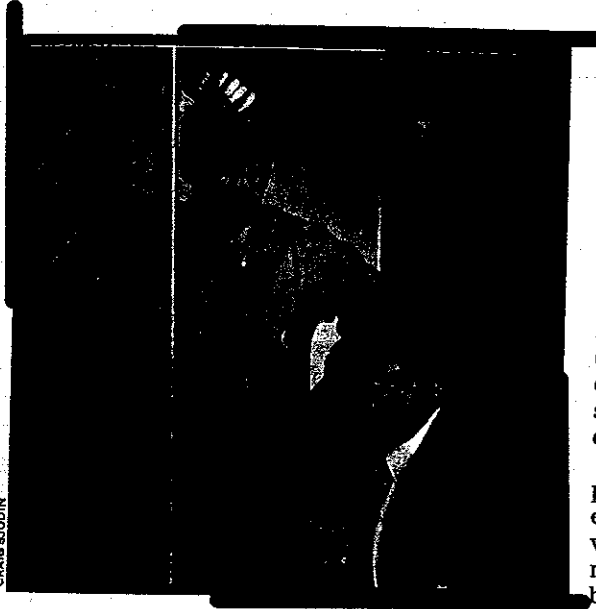
or Cover

campaign may help make TV safer for kids, but it will almost certainly make network programming even blander than it already is.

The irony of the current outcry is that it comes at a time when violence on the networks is at a low ebb. Five, 10 or 15 years ago, the prime-time schedules were packed with turbulent crime shows like *The A-Team*, *Miami Vice*, *Hunter* and *Hill Street Blues*. These have all but disappeared, replaced by sitcoms, magazine shows and "soft" dramas like *L.A. Law* and *Northern Exposure*. Violence is largely confined to a few reality shows, *Cops*, *America's Most Wanted*, and true-crime TV movies—which are abundant but whose violence looks positively prim beside the brutality of any *Lethal Weapon* sequel or Schwarzenegger extravaganza.

Still, faced with public concern about the effect TV violence might be having on young viewers, the networks have vowed to scrub their houses even cleaner. The label itself may turn out to be sparingly used. Network officials say few, if any, of their regular series will be so branded; only Steven Bochco's racy new cop show for ABC, *NYPD Blue*, has been singled out as likely to get a weekly warning. In general, the label will be applied on a case-by-case basis to certain TV movies and individual episodes of regular series.

The real question is whether a "V" label—like an R or NC-17 rating for feature films—will become a stigma that be avoided at almost all costs. The fear is that advertisers, always skittish about controversial



David Caruso and Dennis Franz of *NYPD Blue*

ing these advertisers support violence."

Producers are justifiably worried about the chilling effect this could have on provocative programming. "Once you get advertising redlining, you'll have a debilitating effect on some of TV's most powerful dramas," says Dick Wolf, executive producer of NBC's *Law & Order*. "When *Law & Order* started, we did episodes on subjects like abortion-clinic bombings. In this current environment, I don't know if those would ever have gotten made." The network standards-and-practices departments are already increasing their vigilance. "We're used to dealing with Standards & Practices on a daily basis in terms of language and violence," says Langley of *Cop Files*. "But they've become even more cautious recently." ABC Entertainment chief Ted Harbert, speaking to affiliates in June, promised that the network would "work to keep the violence to the absolute minimum" this fall. George Vradenburg 3d, executive vice president of Fox Inc.,

with rear nudity, relatively rough language ("You pissy little bitch"), and some strong violence. In the face of affiliate discomfort—roughly a third of ABC station executives polled at a recent network meeting said they might not run the show—Bochco said he would consider making some changes: "I'm trying to be sensitive to the concerns without compromising the show."

The anti-violence campaign may have an even greater impact in the shows that viewers won't see. All three networks have said they will back off from their overzealous pursuit of true-crime movies of the week. ABC, which drew fire for its two-parter in May about 1950s mass murderer Charles Starkweather, has turned

down a proposed TV movie about 1960s mass murderer Richard Speck. Critics may cheer at the demise of this tawdry TV-movie crime wave, but good films may get hurt in the process. ABC had planned to air the explosively violent (and Oscar-winning) film *Goodfellas* this season, complete with an introduction by director Martin Scorsese in which he asserts the film is not a glorification of violence. In the current climate, the network has decided to pull the film from this season's schedule.

Meanwhile, network executives are complaining loudly about being made scapegoats for a larger problem in society. "The TV networks are a lot easier target than the National Rifle Association," notes CBS Entertainment president Jeff Sogansky. He and others point out that most TV violence is found not on the networks but on syndicated shows like *The Untouchables* and *Highlander*, and on cable channels, which are still free to air whatever they want. Not to mention video games, rented movies—and, of course, real life. "There's nothing more violent than watching the 11 o'clock news at night, and nothing more toxic," contends Peter Guber, chairman of Sony Pictures Entertainment. "Baby Falls Out of Window! Tune in at 11! We have to apply the same standards to all visual images—not just what we call entertainment, but news, information and reality-based programs."

The controversy over whether TV violence truly affects the way people act will continue to roil, with little chance of being resolved conclusively. For now, however, those alarmed by violence have the upper hand. Until viewers raise new alarms by tuning out in search of more stimulating entertainment, network TV seems headed for a dull, discreet stretch. —Reported by Georgia Harbison/New York and Jeffrey Ressler/Los Angeles

"Advertisers will be lemming-like in their avoidance of these programs."

programs that might inspire a letter-writing campaign or an advertiser boycott, will be scared off by any show that carries the label. Madison Avenue veterans think they will. "Advertisers will be lemming-like in their avoidance of these programs," says Gene DeWitt, president of his own New York City media management firm, "because advertising on them will just be asking for trouble." Asserts Betsy Frank, a senior vice president of Saatchi & Saatchi: "You are shining a spotlight on certain programs and on advertisers who are supporting those programs. In effect, it's say-

ing "increased attention not only to the depiction of violence but also to whether there are appropriate ways to resolve conflicts without using violence." One CBS show has already been affected: *Walker, Texas Ranger*, a western starring Chuck Norris that premiered in the spring, will be less violent when it returns to the fall schedule, network programmers say.

The program drawing the most scrutiny is *NYPD Blue*; it is an admitted effort by Bochco, creator of *Hill Street Blues*, to do network TV's first R-rated series. The pilot episode contains a steamy sex scene

THE VICTIMS OF TV VIOLENCE

Do you despair at the sight of the youngster in a trance in front of the television set? You are not alone. With sets turned on in the inner city for 11 hours a day, with video, pay per view and multiplying cable channels, TV has become the closest and most constant companion for American children. It has become the nation's mom and pop, storyteller, baby sitter, preacher and teacher. Our children watch an astonishing 5,000 hours by the first grade and 19,000 hours by the end of high school—more time than they spend in class. The question more and more concerning parents, psychologists and public officials is this: What is all this viewing doing to them?

The greatest impact is on preadolescent children who do not yet have the capacity to gauge what is real and what is not. To them, TV is a report on how the world really works. There may be a comic side to it. One Indiana school board had to issue an advisory that there is no such thing as the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles that the children had been crawling down storm drains to reach. But there is nothing amusing about the perception children gain from TV that violence is the easy solution to many problems, employed by good characters as much as bad and always leading to a happy ending.

The concern is that in later life, those conditioned to violence will intuitively continue to regard it as exciting, charismatic and effective. Consider how pervasive it is. By the age of 18, according to one estimate, a youngster will have seen 200,000 acts of violence on TV, including 40,000 murders. *TV Guide* looked at 10 channels on one normal 18-hour day and found 1,846 individual acts of violence—and every hour of prime time carries six to eight acts of violence. Violence has become normal, the Pied Piper to lure the vulnerable to a darker world.

The youthful world has become dramatically more violent. Consider this piece of anecdotal evidence turned up by CBS News: The seven top problems in public schools in 1940 were identified by teachers as talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, cutting in line, dress-code infractions and littering. By 1980, the seven top problems had been identified as suicide, assault, rob-

bery, rape, drug abuse, alcohol abuse and pregnancy.

It is hard to avoid the judgment that TV, an acronym for too violent, has become an integral part of this problem. Research suggests that it increases physical aggression in children, such as getting into fights and disrupting the play of others. Does this increase in aggression contribute to the explosion of criminal violence? Many argue that it does. They point to studies such as one demonstrating that children who watched a lot of TV violence at 8 years of age have a higher propensity to commit violent crime by age 30, including the beating of their own children.

There are those who argue that TV violence is a cathartic rather than a stimulant. Indeed, precise malign connections may be difficult to prove. But common sense dictates that the effect cannot be good. Some 80 percent of Americans feel that TV violence is harmful to our society and that there is too much of it in our entertainment. The burden of proof should fall on those who continue to promote violence and use it as entertainment.

The TV networks recently made a concession by providing a rating system to alert viewers to impending violence. It is a gesture, but that is all it is. It identifies the violence but it does

not remove it. It puts the onus on the parents—and parents do have a duty to protect their children from the brutalizing effect of nightly sluggings. But parents cannot do it all, given absences for work and for travel; that many children watch TV in their own rooms, and that the alert system excludes cartoons, cable, videos and so forth.

The alert system is no more than a beginning, a recognition but not a resolution. The minimum next step is to take advantage of the technical capacity to manufacture TV sets with a computer chip that will allow parents, unilaterally, to block off programs carrying the V rating—just as we now mandate sets to help the deaf. And with that should go an earnest effort by the creative controllers to take the V out of much more of their television. It is not a happy prospect that a commercial Big Brother could substitute for the Orwellian Big Brother. ■

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Hollywood
still doth
protest too
much, while
the stats on
video violence
pile up.
by Carl M.
Cannon

TIM ROBBINS AND SUSAN SARANDON IMPORE THE nation to treat Haitians with AIDS more humanely. Robert Redford works for the environment. Harry Belafonte marches against the death penalty.

Actors and producers seem to be constantly speaking out for noble causes far removed from their lives. They seem even more vocal and visible now that there is a Democrat in the White House. But in the one area over which they have control—the excessive violence in the entertainment industry—Hollywood activists remain silent.

This summer, Washington was abuzz with talk about the movie *Dave*, in which Kevin Kline stars as the acting president. But every time I saw an ad featuring Kline, the movie I couldn't get out of my head was *Grand Canyon*. There are two scenes in it that explain much of what has gone wrong in America.

Kline's character has a friend, played by Steve Martin, who is a producer of the B-grade, violent movies that Hollywood euphemistically calls "action" films. But after an armed robber shoots Martin's character in the leg, he has an epiphany.

"I can't make those movies any more," he decides. "I can't make another piece of art that glorifies violence and bloodshed and brutality... No more exploding bodies, exploding buildings, exploding anything. I'm going to make the world a better place."

A month or two later, Kline calls on Martin at his Hollywood studio to congratulate him on the "new direction" his career has taken.

"What? Oh that," Martin says dismissively. "Fuck that. That's over. I must have been delirious for a few weeks there."

He then gins up every hoary excuse for Hollywood-generated violence you've ever heard, ending with: "My movies reflect what's going on; they don't make what's going on."

This is Hollywood's last line of defense for why it shows murder and mayhem on the big screen and the little one, in prime time and early in the morning, to children, adolescents, and adults:

We don't cause violence, we just report it.

Four years ago, I joined the legion of writers, researchers, and parents who have tried to force Hollywood to confront the more disturbing truth. I wrote a series of newspaper articles on the massive body of evidence that establishes a direct cause-and-effect relationship between violence on television and violence in society.

The orchestrated response from the industry—a series of letters seeking to discredit me—was something to behold.

Because the fact is, on the one issue over which they have power, the liberals in Hollywood don't act like progressive thinkers; they act like, say, the National Rifle Association:

Guns don't kill people, people kill people.

We don't cause violence in the world, we just reflect it.

kids

Passing the buck in Tinseltown

BY MICHAEL KRASNY



For seven years, Michael Krasny hosted a successful West Coast radio talk show widely recognized for discussing serious issues and showing respect for callers. Krasny left his commercial program to move to public radio in February 1993. Many saw Krasny's departure from commercial radio as symbolic of the industry trend toward sensationalism and controversy—and away from public trust and responsibility.

Mother Jones commissioned Krasny to explore the trend toward excess, particularly excess violence, in the entertainment industry. Film and TV producers, directors, and writers claim that they want to create works of artistic and social value, yet too often what we—and our children—see is only blood and gore. How can we reconcile the First Amendment with the cost to society of viewing such violence? And to what extent are these individuals responsible for the repercussions of their violent movies and television shows? Krasny asked a few players for their thoughts:

BRIAN GRAZER, Ron Howard's partner, has produced more than twenty movies. "Most of my films have been sweet-spirited: *Parenthood*. *Splash*. *My Girl*. I'm proud of them. Others I'm not so proud of. I learned a big lesson with *Kindergarten Cop*. No one objected to the violent confrontation scene, and there was no problem with it in our focus groups. Then I showed it to my five-year-old, and all of a sudden, reflexively, I put my hand over his eyes. I knew at that point that we'd made a mistake. It was too late to cut the scene, but I would cut it now.

"Usually bad movies aren't hits. I don't see Freddy Krueger [*Nightmare on Elm Street*] movies, and I wouldn't want my kids to see them. I don't know why people make such movies. They're sick."

BOB SHAYE, chief executive officer of New Line Cinema, is responsible for the *Nightmare on Elm Street* horror films. "There's an almost sardonic or dour humor to Freddy Krueger [the *Elm Street* killer], especially to fantasy horror buffs. The tales are useful and cautionary. They suggest that evil and harm are everywhere and that we need to be prepared. They're not intended for kids.

"We create a product. People buy it or they don't. It pains my aesthetic judgment, but I often feel a good movie is one that makes money. My interest is in entertaining people. *The Killers* and *Batman*? Too much for kids. I can draw my lines. Not everyone can."

SAM HAMM shares screenwriting credit for *Batman* and *Batman Returns*. "It was probably a bad idea to excite small children to see *Batman Returns*. The tie-in to McDonald's was the idea of marketing people.

"But I'm ambivalent about all of this. I can remember being scared as a kid at horror films and developing a craving for that sort of thing, but that's what may form imagination in a strong way and that's what creates narrative and inner life. It teaches you to look for stuff that's not safe in the art you enjoy later on.

"I'm not arguing to expose kids to *Friday the 13th* movies or porno, but I feel there's too much caution about what kids see. Gravitating toward the forbidden is a natural part of growing up.

"I'm dubious of stimulation and effect, wary of speaking of anyone's experience but my own. I knew as a kid very clearly the distinction between real violence and cartoon or film violence. I'm waiting for the legions of those affected by what they see to give testimony."

VIVIENNE VERDON-ROE directed the documentary film *Women For America, For The World*. "I can't go to most popular movies without checking them out with friends first, because I can't physically sit through [violent ones]. My body will not allow it. People really ought to think about the effects. They may not faint like I do, but they're getting desensitized to violence, and it contributes to the social violence of gangs and the like.

"It's incredibly difficult when there are so few alternatives. Teens go to movies because there's often nothing else for them to do, and if they are gruesome or bad movies, no one in society seems to be saying so.

"I'm not an insider. I'm not living down there. But I know enough. It's all money. Everything's money. It's horrible."



RICHARD DONNER directed the *Lethal Weapon* movies, *Superman*, *The Omen*, and *The Goonies*, among others. "If people see gratuitous violence in any of the *Lethal Weapon* movies, I wonder if they've seen

the same movie. It's entertainment. That's my obligation. I brought social issues into the *Lethal Weapon* movies, like when Danny Glover's family comes down on him for eating tuna, or the 'Stamp out the NRA' sign up in the LA police station. In the last one the daughter wears a pro-choice T-shirt.

"You've got to prove [a connection between film violence and real violence] to me. Movies do provoke. I won't do gratuitous or animal violence. We went a little too far in the first *Lethal Weapon*, but I wanted to move more after that

THE FIRST CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS INTO THE EFFECTS OF TELEVISION VIOLENCE took place in 1954. Although television was still relatively new, its extraordinary marketing power was already evident. The tube was teaching Americans what to buy and how to act, not only in advertisements, but in dramatic shows, too.

Everybody from Hollywood producers to Madison Avenue ad men would boast about this power—and seek to utilize it on dual tracks: to make money and to remake society along better lines.

Because it seemed ludicrous to assert that there was only one area—the depiction of violence—where television did not influence behavior, the television industry came up with this theory: Watching violence is cathartic. A violent person might be sated by watching a murder.

The notion intrigued social scientists, and by 1956 they were studying it in earnest. Unfortunately, watching violence turned out to be anything but cathartic.

In the 1956 study, one dozen four-year-olds watched a "Woody Woodpecker" cartoon that was full of violent images. Twelve other preschoolers watched "Little Red Hen," a peaceful cartoon. Then the children were observed. The children who watched "Woody Woodpecker" were more likely to hit other children, verbally accost their classmates, break toys, be disruptive, and engage in destructive behavior during free play.

For the next thirty years, researchers in all walks of the social sciences studied the question of whether television causes violence. The results have been stunningly conclusive.

"There is more published research on this topic than on almost any other social issue of our time," University of Kansas Professor Aletha C. Huston, chairwoman of the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Television and Society, told Congress in 1988. "Virtually all independent scholars agree that there is evidence that television can cause aggressive behavior."

There have been some three thousand studies of this issue—eighty-five of them major research efforts—and they all say the same thing. Of the eighty-five major studies, the only one that failed to find a causal relationship between television violence and actual violence was paid for by NBC. When the study was subsequently reviewed by three independent social scientists, all three concluded that it actually did demonstrate a causal relationship.

Some highlights from the history of TV violence research:

- In 1973, when a town in mountainous western Canada was wired for television signals, University of British Columbia researchers observed first- and second-graders. Within two years, the incidence of hitting, biting, and shoving increased 160 percent in those classes.

- Two Chicago doctors, Leonard Eron and Rowell Huesmann, followed the viewing habits of a group of children for twenty-two years. They found that watching violence on television is the single best predictor of violent or aggressive behavior later in life, ahead of such commonly accepted factors as parents' behavior, poverty, and race.

"Television violence affects youngsters of all ages, of both genders, at all socioeconomic levels and all levels of intelligence," they told Congress in 1992. "The effect is not limited to children who are already disposed to being aggressive and is not restricted to this country."

- Fascinated by an explosion of murder rates in the United States and Canada that began in 1955, after a generation of North Americans had come of age on television violence, University of Washington Professor Brandon Centerwall decided to see if the same phenomenon could be observed in South Africa, where the Afrikaner-dominated regime had banned television until 1975.

He found that eight years after TV was introduced—showing mostly Hollywood-produced fare—South Africa's murder rate skyrocketed. His most telling finding was that the crime rate increased first in the white communities. This mirrors U.S. crime statistics in the 1950s and especially points the finger at television, because whites were the first to get it in both countries.

By the age of
eighteen, the
average child
has witnessed
eighteen
thousand
simulated
murders on TV.

Bolder than most researchers, Centerwall argues flatly that without violent television programming, there might be as many as ten thousand fewer murders in the United States each year.

• In 1983, University of California, San Diego, researcher David P. Phillips wanted to see if there was a correlation between televised boxing matches and violence in the streets of America.

Looking at crime rates after every televised heavyweight championship fight from 1973 to 1978, Phillips found that the homicide rate in the United States rose by an average of 11 percent for approximately one week. Phillips also found that the killers were likely to focus their aggression on victims similar to the losing fighter: if he was white, the increased number of victims were mostly

white. The converse was true if the losing fighter was black.

• In 1988, researchers Daniel G. Linz and Edward Donnerstein of the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Steven Penrod of the University of Wisconsin studied the effects on young men of horror movies and "slasher" films.

They found that depictions of violence, not sex, are what desensitizes people.

They divided male students into four groups. One group watched no movies, a second watched nonviolent, X-rated movies, a third watched teenage sexual-innuendo movies, and a fourth watched the slasher films *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the 13th Part 2*, *Maniac*, and *Toolbox Murders*.

All the young men were placed on a mock jury panel and asked a series of questions designed to measure their empathy for an alleged female rape victim. Those in the fourth group measured lowest in empathy for the specific victim in the experiment—and for rape victims in general.

THE ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE IS OFTEN MORE COMPELLING THAN THE SCIENTIFIC studies. Ask any homicide cop from London to Los Angeles to Bangkok if television violence induces real-life violence and listen carefully to the cynical, knowing laugh.

Ask David McCarthy, police chief in Greenfield, Massachusetts, why nineteen-year-old Mark Branch killed himself after stabbing an eighteen-year-old female college student to death. When cops searched his room they found ninety horror movies, as well as a machete and a goalie mask like those used by Jason, the grisly star of *Friday the 13th*.

Ask the families of thirty-five young men who committed suicide by playing Russian roulette after seeing the movie *The Deer Hunter*.

Ask George Gavito, a lieutenant in the Cameron County, Texas, sheriff's department, about a cult that sacrificed at least thirteen people on a ranch west of Matamoros, Mexico. The suspects kept mentioning a 1986 movie, *The Believers*, about rich families who engage in ritual sacrifice. "They talk about it like that had something to do with changing them," Gavito recalled later.

Ask LAPD lieutenant Mike Melton about Angel Regino of Los Angeles, who was picked up after a series of robberies and a murder in which he wore a blue bandanna and fedora identical to those worn by Freddy, the sadistic anti-hero of *Nightmare on Elm Street*. In case anybody missed the

toward a less real and more comic-book effect, despite the great reaction we had.

"Public trust comes into filmmaking. The filmmaker is ultimately accountable. I can defend my own work only on personal grounds. If I'm a provocateur of anything, I hope it's good emotion and humor. Censorship is in the ratings system. It works."

CALLIE KHOURI won an Academy Award for her screenplay of *Thelma and Louise*. "I have a hard time with violence just to entertain, but I believe it can be very effective in getting a point across. I resorted to it

in my film, but there was a conscience to it. *Thelma and Louise* felt they had done something wrong, and there were big consequences—including psychic consequences.

"Outlaw movies have always been a catharsis for men, but denied to women. I was extremely frustrated with the literal interpretation of *Thelma and Louise*. Doesn't anyone read anymore or understand metaphor? The film was supposed to be complex, without easy answers, and with flawed characters. I thought when Louise shot that guy that there'd be dead silence in the theater. That scene was written carefully: it was an attempted rape, and I wanted to make what she did wrong. And yet people cheered. I was stunned."



LESLIE MOONVES is head of Lorimar Studios, often called the fifth network, which produced the TV movies "Jack the Ripper" and "Deliberate Strangers" (about serial killer Ted Bundy), as well as shows that Moonves has considerably more pride in, such as "I'll Fly Away" and "Home Front." "I'd love to do another 'I'll Fly Away,' but the corporate bosses won't let me. When you



get burned with quality programming you get gun-shy—you feel you need to stick to the shows that make money. You know what the problem is? Network change. Somebody like Bill Paley [former chairman of CBS] used to say that he didn't care if he got a twelve share, because there was a public trust and social responsibility to put on an 'I'll Fly Away.' GE buys a network, and you've got a different agenda.

"Network presidents don't keep their jobs based on the number of Emmy awards. Let's face it: there is more sensation and violence because it works. The movie of the week has become the killer of the week story.

"Do we have a responsibility to our public? Of course. I honestly don't know what to do about it. How's that for an answer?"

JOE ESZTERHAS has written the scripts for such major Hollywood films as *Betrayal*, *Jagged*

Edge, *Basic Instinct*, and *Sliver*. His work has been criticized as sexist and homophobic. "I don't like to be a Monday morning quarterback on my own work."



DAWN STEEL became the first woman to head a major studio when she was made president of Columbia Pictures in 1987. During her career, she has worked on such films as *Top Gun*, *Beverly Hills Cop II*, *Casualties of War*, *When Harry Met*

Sally, and *Look Who's Talking*. She now runs her own production company. "I believe I've never made a movie in bad taste or with excessive violence. But for profit, I've had to make movies not from my soul. If I want to make a film for passion, I have to make it for less money.

"I'm more cynical about the violence in LA than about violence in our business. It's unanswerable whether movies reflect the culture or vice versa. I monitor my kid's movies and won't let her see what's not appropriate for her. There's no way you can censor any movie in this country that's being made. That's our First Amendment."

MATT GROENING is creator and executive producer of the TV hit "The Simpsons." "Anytime you visualize something, it's difficult not to glorify it. Every antiwar film is pro-war, because its violence is stylized and an audience can be removed from it and enjoy it. Stylistically, violence is almost invariably glorified, even when you have an anti-violent point of view. Look at *Platoon*. Violence is invariably used in movies and TV as punctuation, and it does have a numbing effect on people after a time.

"Most TV, most movies, really, are less pernicious than tedious and boring. What's bad for kids is bad storytelling. Tell better stories."



BARRY DILLER, ex-chief executive officer and chairman of Fox and Matt Groening's former boss, now heads QVC Network. He couldn't disagree more with Groening about television's being mostly bad. "I can't imagine why he would say that. Pound for

pound, the hour and half-hour television series are very good. There's a lot of junk, but much more in the movie business, the record business, even legitimate theater. It's snobbery to call a show like 'Roseanne' lowbrow or vulgar. It's funny and interesting and has a good moral value and tone.

significance of his disguise, Regino told his victims that they would never forget him, because he was another Freddy Krueger.

Ask Britain Home Secretary Douglas Hurd, who called for further restrictions on U.S.-produced films after Michael Ryan of Hungerford committed Britain's worst mass murder in imitation of *Rambo*, massacring sixteen people while wearing a U.S. combat jacket and a bandoleer of ammunition.

Ask Sergeant John O'Malley of the New York Police Department about a nine-year-old boy who sprayed a Bronx office building with gunfire. The boy explained to the astonished sergeant how he learned to load his Uzi-like firearm: "I watch a lot of TV."

Or ask Manteca, California, police detective Jeff Boyd about thirteen-year-old Juan Valdez, who, with another teenager, went to a man's home, kicked him, stabbed him, beat him with a fireplace poker, and then choked him to death with a dog chain.

Why, Boyd wanted to know, had the boys poured salt in the victim's wounds?

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

NUMEROUS GROUPS HAVE CALLED, OVER THE YEARS, FOR CURBING TELEVISION violence: the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (1969), the U.S. Surgeon General (1972), the Canadian Royal Commission (1976), the National Institute of Mental Health (1982), the U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence (1984), the National Parents Teachers Association (1987), and the American Psychological Association (1992).

During that time, cable television and movie rentals have made violence more readily available while at the same time pushing the envelope for network TV. But even leaving aside cable and movie rentals, a study of television programming from 1967 to 1989 showed only small ups and downs in violence, with the violent acts moving from one time slot to another but the overall violence rate remaining pretty steady—and pretty similar from network to network.

"The percent of prime-time programs using violence remains more than seven out of ten, as it has been for the entire twenty-two-year period," researchers George Gerbner of the University of Pennsylvania Annenberg School for Communication and Nancy Signorielli of the University of Delaware wrote in 1990. For the past twenty-two years, they found, adults and children have been entertained by about sixteen violent acts, including two murders, in each evening's prime-time programming.

They also discovered that the rate of violence in children's programs is three times the rate in prime-time shows. By the age of eighteen, the average American child has witnessed at least eighteen thousand simulated murders on television.

By 1989, network executives were arguing that their violence was part of a larger context in which bad guys get their just desserts.

"We have never put any faith in mechanical measurements, such as counting punches or gunshots," said NBC's Alan Gerson. "Action and conflict must be evaluated within each specific dramatic context."

"Our policy," added Alfred R. Schneider of ABC, "... makes clear that when violence is portrayed [on TV], it must be reasonably related to plot development and character delineation."

Of course, what early-childhood experts could tell these executives is that children between the ages of four and seven simply make no connection between the murder at the beginning of a half-hour show and the man led away in handcuffs at the end. In fact, psychologists know that very young children do not even understand death to be a permanent condition.

But all of the scientific studies and reports, all of the wisdom of cops and grief of parents have run up against Congress's quite proper fear of censorship. For years, Democratic Congressman Peter Rodino of New Jersey chaired the House Judiciary Committee and looked at calls for some form of censorship with a jaundiced eye. At a hearing five years ago, Rodino told witnesses that Congress must be a "protector of commerce."

"Well, we have children that we need to protect," replied Frank M. Palumbo, a pediatrician at Georgetown University Hospital and a consultant to the American Academy of Pediatrics. "What we have here is a toxic substance in the environment that is harmful to children."

Arnold Fege of the national PTA added, "Clearly, this committee would not protect teachers who taught violence to children. Yet why would we condone children being exposed to a steady diet of TV violence year after year?"

Finally there is a reason to hope for progress.

Early this summer, Massachusetts Democrat Edward Markey, chair of the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee on telecommunications, said that Congress may require manufacturers to build TV sets with a computer chip so that parents could block violent programs from those their children could select.

He joins the fight waged by Senator Paul Simon, a liberal Democrat from Illinois. Nine years ago, Simon flipped on a hotel television set hoping to catch the late news. "Instead," he has recalled many times, "I saw a man being sawed in half with a chainsaw, in living color."

Simon was unsettled by the image and even more unsettled when he wondered what repeatedly looking at such images would do to the mind of a fourteen-year-old.

When he found out, he called television executives, who told him that violence sells and that they would be at a competitive disadvantage if they acted responsibly.

Why not get together and adopt voluntary guidelines? Simon asked.

Oh, that would be a violation of antitrust law, they assured him.

Simon called their bluff in 1990 by pushing through Congress a law that allowed a three-year moratorium on antitrust considerations so that the industry could discuss ways to jointly reduce violence.

Halfway through that time, however, they had done nothing, and an angry Simon denounced the industry on the Senate floor. With a push from some prominent industry figures, a conference was set for this August 2 in Los Angeles. (See action card between pages 16 and 17.)

This spring, CBS broadcast group president Howard Stringer said his network was looking for ways to cut back on violence in its entertainment, because he was troubled by the cost to society of continuing business-as-usual.

"We must admit we have a responsibility," he said.

Jack Valenti, the powerful head of the Motion Picture Association of America, wrote to producers urging them to participate in the August 2 conference. "I think it's more than a bunch of talk," Simon said. "I think this conference will produce some results. I think the industry will adopt some standards."

The federal government, of course, possesses the power to regulate the airwaves through the FCC, and Simon and others believe that this latent power to control violence—never used—has put the fear of God in the producers. He also thinks some of them are starting to feel guilty.

"We now have more people in jail and prison per capita than any country that keeps records, including South Africa," Simon says. "We've spent billions putting people behind bars, and it's had no effect on the crime rate. None. People realize there have to be other answers, and as they've looked around, they have settled on television as one of them."

Maybe Simon is right. Maybe Hollywood executives will get together and make a difference.

Or maybe, like Steve Martin's character in *Grand Canyon*, producers and directors from New York to Beverly Hills will wake up after Simon's antitrust exemption expires December 1, shake off the effects of their holiday hangovers, and when asked about their new commitment to responsible filmmaking, answer:

"What? Oh that. Fuck that. That's over. We must have been delirious for a few weeks there." □

Carl M. Cannon is the White House correspondent for the Baltimore Sun.

"TV movies are crummy. 'Hard Copy' is a lying, thieving, lowlife program of hideous, cynical purpose. It's not serious television. There are only a few tabloid shows, but they speak loudly.

"I think you look at society, and you see what is reflected on television in terms of violent action. Absolutely, [there is too much violence]. But we can be thoughtful and reasonable and change that, reduce it. I think plans over the last few years will help. Senator Simon's work with the networks will help."

PHILIP KAUFMAN co-wrote and directed *The Wanderers*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and *Henry and June*, and wrote and directed *The Right Stuff*. "There is a fascist edge to a lot of the violence we see. I'm in favor of pushing the envelope, but when you push it in romance or eroticism you get an NC-17 rating. It's easier to get an R rating if you use senseless violence, because the ratings board is largely conservative and embraces violence before sex."



JOSH BRAND, along with his partner, has produced the TV hits "St. Elsewhere" and "Northern Exposure." "If something gets a high rating, say, 'The Amy Fisher Story,' then advertisers pay more money. Now, did the networks create the audience for it, or do they pander to what the audience wanted? Is it okay to pollute the emotional and spiritual environment?"

"Now there are studies [that show] that violent images don't affect people, just as the tobacco industry has studies showing that cigarette smoking doesn't cause cancer. And they use the First Amendment to evoke their rights and get into this study versus that study, and the whole thing becomes a wash, a miasma of moral mud. But I think that there is absolutely no question that the profusion of these kinds of images has a negative effect, not only on children but on human beings in general.

"But regulations are dangerous, particularly when dealing with the free expression of ideas. I do believe that some of those ideas are like pollutants, but there isn't one thing you can do. A panacea doesn't exist."

Although there may be no panacea, we must still look for solutions. How would you resolve the conflict between excessive violence in entertainment and the protections guaranteed under the First Amendment?

Write to Mother Jones, 1663 Mission St., 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103. Or fax us at (415) 863-5136.

Michael Krasny is currently the host of San Francisco radio station KQED's "Forum," a weekly talk show. Priscilla Yamin of Mother Jones and Karen Daar contributed research to these interviews. □

news from

PAUL SIMON

U.S. SENATOR

December, 1992

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ILLINOIS

'Big Three' Television Networks Agree on Joint TV Violence Standards Under Simon's TV Violence Act

In a breakthrough for movement toward industry-wide efforts to reduce violence on television, U.S. Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., Friday announced Dec. 11 that ABC, CBS and NBC have agreed to joint standards on entertainment TV violence that will guide programming on the networks.

The networks invoked the antitrust exemption in the two-year-old Television Violence Act to draft and implement the standards, which draw upon their separate existing guidelines. The Television Violence Act, authored by Simon, exempts the television industry from antitrust limits to allow industry self-regulation to scale back depictions of violence in entertainment programs, through development of common standards. The law covers broadcasters, the cable industry and those who produce TV programs. Simon cites the "overwhelming" body of research that shows excessive violence on TV harms children and contributes to real-life violence in society.

Simon also announced that the three networks will convene an industry-wide conference on TV violence in Los Angeles next year to discuss further steps, and that Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, has agreed to participate. The networks say their joint standards are an attempt "to break this stalemate" over industry use of the Simon laws before the clock runs out on the antitrust exemption in December, 1993.

STANDARDS FOR THE DEPICTION OF VIOLENCE
IN TELEVISION PROGRAMS

ISSUED BY ABC, CBS and NBC
DECEMBER 1992

Preface

The following Standards for the Depiction of Violence in Television Programs are issued jointly by the ABC, CBS and NBC Television Networks under the Antitrust exemption granted by the Television Violence Act of 1990.

Each Network has long been committed to presenting television viewers with a broad spectrum of entertainment and information programming. Each Network maintains its own extensive published broadcast standards governing acceptability of both program (including on-air promotion) and commercial materials.

These new joint standards are consistent with each of the Network's long-standing preexisting policies on violence. At the same time they are set forth in a more detailed and explanatory manner to reflect the experience gained under the preexisting policies. While adopting and subscribing to these joint Standards, each Network will continue the tradition of individual review of material, which will necessitate independent judgments on a program-by-program basis.

The standards are not intended to inhibit the work of producers, directors or writers or to impede the creative process. They are intended to proscribe gratuitous or excessive portrayals of violence.

In principle, each of the ABC, CBS and NBC Television Networks is committed to presenting programs which portray the human condition, which may include the depiction of violence as a component. The following Standards For The Depiction Of Violence In Television Programs will provide the framework within which the acceptability of content will be determined by each Network in the exercise of its own judgment.

STANDARDS FOR DEPICTION OF VIOLENCE IN TELEVISION PROGRAMS

These written standards cannot cover every situation and must, therefore, be worded broadly. Moreover, the Standards must be considered against the creative context, character and tone of each individual program. Each scene should be evaluated on its own merits with due consideration for its creative integrity.

- 1) Conflict and strife are the essence of drama and conflict often results in physical or psychological violence. However, all depictions of violence should be

relevant and necessary to the development of character, or to the advancement of theme or plot.

- 2) Gratuitous or excessive depictions of violence, (or redundant violence shown solely for its own sake), are not acceptable.
- 3) Programs should not depict violence as glamorous, nor as an acceptable solution to human conflict.
- 4) Depictions of violence may not be used to shock or stimulate the audience.
- 5) Scenes showing excessive gore, pain or physical suffering are not acceptable.
- 6) The intensity and frequency of the use of force, and other factors relating to the manner of its portrayal, should be measured under a standard of reasonableness so that the program, on the whole, is appropriate for a home viewing medium.
- 7) Scenes which may be instructive in nature, e.g., which depict in an imitable manner, the use of harmful devices or weapons, describe readily usable techniques for the commission of crimes, or show replicable methods for the evasion of detection or apprehension, should be avoided. Similarly, ingenious, unique or otherwise unfamiliar methods of inflicting pain or injury are unacceptable if easily capable of imitation.
- 8) Realistic depictions of violence should also portray, in human terms, the consequences of that violence to its victims and its perpetrators. Callousness or indifference to suffering experienced by victims of violence should be avoided.
- 9) Exceptional care must be taken in stories or scenes where children are victims of, or are threatened by acts of violence (physical, psychological or verbal).
- 10) The portrayal of dangerous behavior which would invite imitation by children, including portrayals of the use of weapons or implements readily accessible to this impressionable group, should be avoided.
- 11) Realistic portrayals of violence as well as scenes, images or events which are unduly frightening or distressing to children should not be included in any program specifically designed for that audience.
- 12) The use of real animals shall conform to accepted standards of humane treatment. Fictionalized portrayals of abusive treatment should be strictly limited to the

legitimate requirements of plot development.

- 13) Extreme caution must be exercised in any themes, plots or scenes which mix sex and violence. Rape and other sexual assaults are violent, not erotic, behavior.
- 14) The scheduling of any program, commercial or promotional material, including those containing violent depictions, should take into consideration the nature of the program, its content and the likely composition of the intended audience.
- 15) Certain exceptions to the foregoing may be acceptable, as in the presentation of material whose overall theme is clearly and unambiguously anti-violent.



THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

Senator Lights Fire Under TV Industry Over Violence

By Louise Sweaney

Staff Writer of the Christian Science Monitor

WASHINGTON

TELEVISION violence, long a lethal staple of industry programming, has begun to crest again as a subject of public and congressional concern.

This week's TV Guide, the national magazine covering the industry, contains a section devoted totally to violence on the tube. Heather Jordan, a spokeswoman for the magazine, says it did its own study of violence over 10 sitcoms in the Washington area, started it with a symposium of sports, and is running the results in the Aug. 22-28 issue.

Sen. Paul Simon (D) of Illinois, author of the Television Violence Act, is so outraged by the saturation of violence in TV that he is talking about calling for hearings on the subject. "We may very well have a hearing after the first of the year. His subcommittee on constitutional rights would hold such a hearing," Senator Simon says. "I think

the American people are not going to simply sit by and say, 'Well, if they're not going to regulate themselves, we're just not going to do anything about it.' I think there is going to be a demand for some type of action. And I think we have to be very careful in this field because we don't want violations of the first amendment."

When Simon began his study of TV violence, he asked industry representatives to work together to curb that violence. He started his campaign after being horrified by a feature film on TV of a chain-saw massacre.

He told industry spokesmen that there had been over 100 studies of the relationship between violence on TV and violence in society, that 85 of them were substantial, and that both the surgeon general and the Institute of Mental Health had issued studies on it - finding violence on TV is causing violence in society.

Industry representatives told him they couldn't do anything about it because to get together and establish standards would violate the antitrust laws. Undaunted, he then introduced spe-

cial legislation, which passed, giving them a three-year exemption from such laws.

A year and a half later, he is still waiting to see what the networks are going to do. He has heard that they have had two meetings in the last year and a half. The most recent one was July 24. An ABC source confirmed that meeting, saying that it included representatives of ABC,



SEN. PAUL SIMON, SPEAKING AT A HEARING IN 1993.

SENATOR SIMON: He's outraged about violence on TV and threatens to hold hearings in 1993.

CBS, and NBC. Julie Hower, an ABC spokeswoman, said: "They agreed to agree, and are now in the process of trying to draft language which will be edited and circulated actively. They're hoping to reach conclusions in the next couple of months."

"They're working on trying to create some statements of principle," she said. "We [the networks] already have departments of standards and practices, which review every program before it goes out over the air. We don't see this kind of standards and practices review evident anywhere on cable."

Simon says: "My hope is that both the networks as well as the independents and cable will pay attention to this. But clearly one of the alternatives is some kind of Federal Communications Commission action."

The FCC does have a great deal of power over individual stations (the threat of revoking individual licenses of their licenses, for instance....)

Figy Laramie, spokeswoman for the National Cable TV Association, says it has already acted:

"The cable industry's response to Senator Simon's bill was to commission a study by Dr. George Gerbner, one of the foremost experts on television violence." She says they hope to be able to share the results of the survey with Senator Simon this fall.

National Association of Broadcasters spokesman Doug Willis says his organization held meetings on the subject starting in June 1990.

"Our broad statement of principles is a document saying 'Violent sex and violence do not belong on television.' That's all that we can do without court challenges on antitrust."

As to a ratings system with a V for violent programs, Simon says: "Congress doesn't have the power to institute a ratings system, but the industry could begin it with voluntary standards." They could draw up such a code in "30 hours," he says.

"The problem is one of will. What we need is the CEOs of ABC and NBC and CBS saying to their people 'Let's be responsible citizens. Let's get together and establish standards.'"

VIEWPOINTS

By Paul Simon

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

Coming Soon: An Act That Should Reduce Television Violence

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-

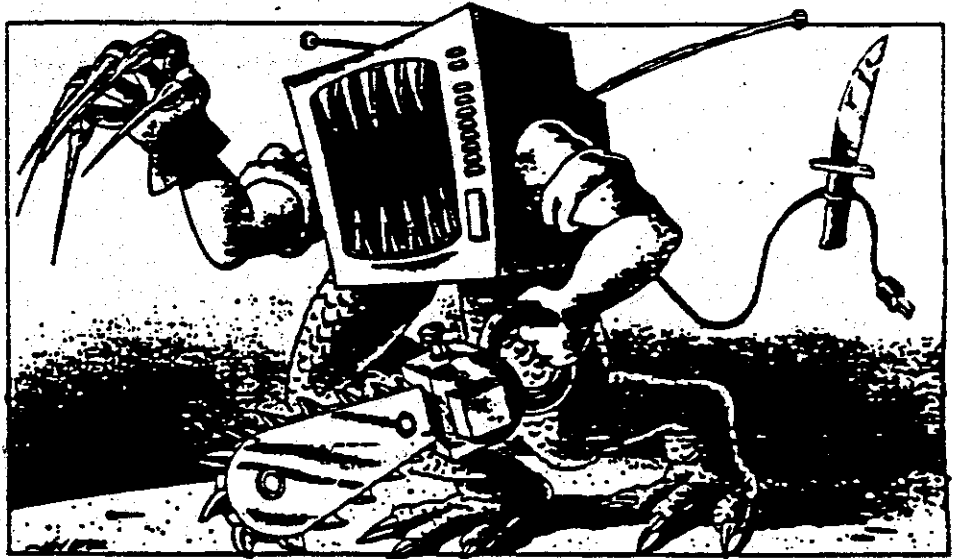
self this question: Is a free society like ours — one that shuns government censorship and has a commercial television industry — powerless to protect itself and its children from the harm caused by excessive TV violence?

After discussions with television policy makers and visits to the networks' divisions of standards and practices, I answered that question with the 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 expressed 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 / Bob 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.

MEDIA

Critics Zero In on TV Violence

By Fred Elft

Special to The Christian Science Monitor

NEW YORK

TELEVISION violence — the gratuitous, graphically ugly, often sadistic kind — is under attack, and TV broadcasters are paying close and even anxious attention.

A meeting of top executives in the movie, broadcast-TV, and cable industries is planned for August in Los Angeles to examine the issue and the steps that might be taken to at least partially resolve it.

Last December, seeking to defuse the avalanche of criticism, the networks agreed on a number of vaguely worded standards aiming to cut down on violence and on scenes that "depict violence as glamorous."

Self-regulation urged

The Hollywood conference has been called at the instigation of Sen. Paul Simon (D) of Illinois, who has been in the forefront of those pointing to the growing incidence of violence on the small screen (and the big one, for that matter) and urging the broadcasters to find some means of regulating themselves when it comes to the production of violent incidents in drama.

"I have hopes, not expectations for that meeting," Senator Simon told the Monitor, "My hope is that there will be a general consensus that we really do have a problem that we have to deal with in a responsible way."

"I hope that this conference will create a general atmosphere that recognizes, on the part of all the people who have such influence on the public, that there is a responsibility to move away from the pattern of violence that we have."

There are top people in the television business who are sharply aware not only of the prevalence of violence and the growing objections to it, but also of the impact it has on viewers, particularly young ones. Unbridled violence has become an integral part not only of action drama, but also of the cartoon fare for the very young.

Children's shows are frequently interrupted by commercials featuring violence and brutality in trailers for forthcoming adult action movies.

"There is a cynicism in this society, and it is hard to believe that we may not have had some role in it," said Howard Stringer, president of the CBS Broadcast Group, at a recent Industry conference called by Wertheim Schroder and Variety, the trade publication.

"At CBS, we are going to become much tougher on violence in our lineup this fall," he said. "It is the chill of violence that worries me, not so much the physical action. It is the callousness involved and the role we have in shaping the attitudes of young people to their victims. Gratuitous violence has to be erased from the network. We must admit our responsibility."

It is the impact on the young that particularly concerns many of those who have watched the rise in the level of violence on TV. They perceive it as harmful not only because it is seen stimulating and encouraging aggressive acts, but also because the steady drumbeat of on-air violence threatens to desensitize youngsters to the pain of those on whom it is inflicted, and it diminishes their sense of reality and responsibility.

A survey run in Washington last year by TV Guide on 10 local

stations found no fewer than 100 violent scenes per hour. One-third of the violence involved life-threatening assaults. During an 18-hour span, the survey noted 1,846 individual acts of violence.

The American Psychological Association estimates that the average youngster will see 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of brutality by the time he or she finishes elementary school. The association finds a definite correlation between TV violence

told the Schroder/Variety symposium: "I am an implacable foe of censorship by any group, self-appointed or elected or otherwise. We must not tell creative people how to tell their stories."

The creative process, Valenti pointed out, "is so fragile, so easily shattered. I would like to direct a creative person to soften a violent scene and still get the same kind of impact."

Public awareness

Senator Simon, unlike others who favor a stronger approach — "If self-regulation doesn't work, let's legislate" — would prefer television cleaned its own house. "I don't want to get into the delicate First Amendment area," he says. "Ideally, we can solve the problem without the heavy hand of government, without setting a precedent which we may regret later."

The American public is sharply aware of the negative influence of violence on television. A recent Times Mirror survey found that 72 percent of Americans surveyed said there was too much of it on entertainment programs; an equal percentage of parents reported turning off the set to protect their children from it.

Television executives, preferring not to be quoted by name, acknowledge that violence exists in TV drama programming because of the perception that it attracts viewers.

They are somewhat pessimistic at the prospects for a serious diminution of on-screen violence precisely because of the commercial aspects of it at a time when the networks are having trouble financially. "The networks will just pay the necessary lip service," observed one.

and aggressive behavior.

However, the practical success of the August conference clearly is not a foregone conclusion. Jack Valenti, the president of the Motion Picture Association of America, which represents the major Hollywood studios (who supply the vast majority of our television programs), sees a "political problem," but expresses the hope that the movie industry can tackle violence "as we did earlier in the case of drugs and alcohol on the screen."

At the same time, Mr. Valenti



SIMON: The Illinois senator has set up an August conference in Los Angeles on TV-film violence.

Senator Simon sees an inconsistency in the public's attitude when it comes to violence on TV. "It's the same inconsistency I face in the Senate," he says. "The public wants lower taxes, but more services and the elimination of the deficit. The same thing with violence: The public objects to it, and yet it is somehow fascinated by it."

James Quello, the temporary chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, has warned that an aroused viewing public might ask Congress to legislate against excessive violence. Outspoken Sen. Robert Byrd (D) of West Virginia has indicated that it could eventually be considered a violation of the public trust on the part of the networks.

It is precisely this threat of censorship that worries men like Valenti and others who look back on Hollywood's long and fierce struggle against it. The networks don't deny that they have the legal means to do something about the abundance of violence on the air. They can act under Senator Simon's TV Violence Act, exempting them from antitrust limits and allowing them to establish common rules. The law runs out in December 1993.

US-overseas differences

Katherine Malatesta, who sells Westinghouse's famous Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles series, underscores the difference between the United States and the rest of the world.

"At home, we don't get many objections to violence in our shows," she says. "American kids are used to it. But abroad, it's a very different story. The BBC in Britain wouldn't buy the Turtles unless they could edit out some of the violence."

"It's that version that we sold to the rest of the world. Otherwise the Turtles wouldn't have done nearly as well."

Americans frequently edit programs for export to accommodate the international distaste for violence. "Over there they hate it, but are quite willing to accept sex on TV. We are the exact opposite," observes Brian Lacy, who markets the Zodiac company's animated series.

While there are objections to violence in entertainment shows, it occurs more often in the so-called "reality" programs that offer news footage or skillful, realistic recreations.

"TV news portrays violence but does not glamorize it," Simon says, "but entertainment shows do just that. That is where the problem is, and that is the pattern we must move away from."

July 17-23
89¢

HOT-

SPECIAL
Hollywood
ISSUE

Showdown

Bullets will still fly. Thugs will still kill. Fists will crunch against noses—as always. But this fall, finally, parents eager to steer kids away from such familiar if disquieting images on broadcast television will get some long-delayed help.

Just how much help remains unclear. And just why Hollywood decided that this was the time to lend a hand to parents is a question worth asking. Still, a startling united front suddenly emerged last month with the announcement by ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox that beginning next season, programs containing violent scenes will carry warning messages in the form of parental advisories. TV violence won't go away, of course, any more than printing the Surgeon General's warning on every cigarette package stopped all smoking. But at least viewers will be forewarned.

And the networks will be off the hook. Or will they? The new initiative required an unusual degree of cooperation among the competing broadcasters, a unanimity forged by their mutual recognition that TV violence does indeed have ill effects, and by a shared need to do something in the face of

For TV
VIOLENCE

For the first time, Hollywood and Washington are joining forces to limit the endless Bang! Pow! and Slash! of television fare. Question is: What weapons will they use?

By Neil Hickey



Clockwise from upper left: Scenes from "Stephen King's It"; "Murder in the Heartland"; Kung Fu: The Legend Continues; "Total Recall"; FBI: The Untold Stories; The Untouchables (above); and "The Hidden" (center).

mounting criticism and possible Congressional legislation.

How successfully the collaborators defused the violence issue will be seen Aug. 2, when a "summit conference" on TV violence convenes in Los Angeles. ▶



CHEERS

A special huzzah for the television industry finally addressing the violence issue seriously (see story, page 16). Guidelines for the new advisory system are still being worked out, so we're not sure what the real impact of a program-labeling plan will be. But the networks' decision to do *something* to facilitate parents' monitoring of their kids' TV watching may be an initial step in the right direction.



MANAGE THE NEWS WITH A FEW MORE LITTLE ARCH-SHOULDERING STARS. (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) GARY BARTIS, DANIEL WATSON/ABC, [unreadable]

The mass meeting will draw together more than 400 broadcast and cable officials, program makers, legislators, academicians, and members of watchdog groups, who will examine all the options for reducing violence, and ask some tough questions about the networks' announcement.

Still, it's "the dawning of a new era," and a wonderful first step, according to Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.). Most Hollywood programmers, he points out, now concur that violence in the media helps cause real violence—and are eager to cooperate in devising solutions to the problem. CBS president Howard Stringer told 1000 CBS station executives in a May speech that the medium should no longer "deny blindly the reality of television violence.... Death stings, pain hurts, loss devastates, fear terrifies.... Murder, even fighting, is not poetic or balletic. It is ugly and clumsy. Violence is vile." He won a standing ovation from his fellow broadcasters.

This new and welcome urge among TV people to reform has not happened spontaneously. Far from it. Leading up to the June 30 announcement and the August conference has been an unprecedented string of hearings in both the Senate and the House of Representatives in which the industry has been jolted as never before. A parade of witnesses pummeled the medium for dragging its feet on dealing with violence.

Dr. Leonard Eron, a psychology professor at the University of Michigan, sounded a clarion call: "Ladies and gentlemen of the Senate," he said, "the time has come for you to act. The TV industry has demonstrated...that it cannot or will not regulate itself." Cable mogul Ted Turner delivered a furious attack on his broadcast colleagues. Congress should forge a strict standard on violence for broadcasters and, if they resist, "ram

it down their throats," he thundered.

At hearings a few weeks earlier, Rep. Markey declared himself "discouraged" that TV people had given only lip service to the Television Violence Act of 1990, which paved the way for the networks to create some tough new guidelines. Instead, he complained, "another May sweeps finds us mired in murder and mayhem." Clearly, Markey said, the industry "has not gotten the message." To prove it he cited a study by the Center for Media and Public Affairs (commissioned by TV GUIDE for a special issue on violence last Aug. 22) that found more than 1800

*Cable mogul
Ted Turner
delivered
a furious
attack on his
colleagues.*



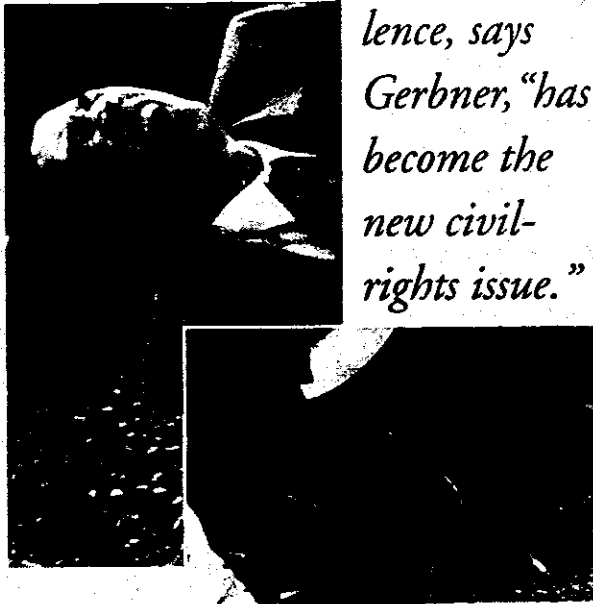
violent acts during one 18-hour period of television.

The floodgates were open. Violence was suddenly the hottest subject in television. Lawmakers and public officials of every stripe began checking in with schemes to bring the television industry to heel once and for all: Sen. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.)—describing May as "one of the bloodiest months in TV history"—announced a nationwide petition drive calling for a violence ratings system for prime-time TV, children's programs, and movies. The expected lists of names would be delivered to the Aug. 2 Los An-

geles meeting. Masterminding the petition drive, Conrad said, would be a newly minted body called the Citizens Task Force on TV Violence.

Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) and Rep. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) introduced legislation to require the FCC to publish quarterly reports listing the acts of violence on prime-time, Saturday morning, and cable programming, and the names of the sponsors of those shows.

Underlying it all was the growing conviction



Media violence, says Gerbner, "has become the new civil-rights issue."

among lawmakers and regulators that the government would indeed step in if the industry didn't police itself. At the FCC, acting chairman James Quello said that Congress should give his agency authority to regulate TV violence as "a necessary next step." And the person who has been at the forefront of the anti-violence movement more than any other public official, Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.), hinted that if the fall TV schedules didn't show authentic improvement, "we're going to have to look at alternatives."

Into that atmosphere came the June 30 four-network announcement on warning labels. Lawmakers and activists were generally pleased with that news, but some felt that the advisories were too

tame a remedy. Others were concerned because children's cartoons will not be labeled. Rep. Markey said he still hoped for a lock-out box that would let parents block channels and programs deemed too violent. Sen. Simon said, "We're not suggesting no violence...we're suggesting no *glamorization* of violence." Networks worried that advertisers will not sponsor shows—even worthy ones—that contain the disclaimer. *The New*

York Times wrote off the advisories as a "mild slap," and said the networks would still get away with murder. Still other critics wondered if a "V" label would only attract unsupervised children.

So the question remains: What is different this time from all previous occasions when Congress and the public were up in arms over media violence, only to have promises made and then fade from view? "It is different now," says George Gerbner, professor at The Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. "It's like adding heat to a pot of water. For a long time it seems that nothing happens, and then all of a sudden it starts to boil—and it boils over."

Media violence, he says, has become "the new civil-rights issue." After "many years of semi-dormancy," Gerbner says, the current interest by government and the public was sparked by last August's special issue of TV GUIDE, which bore the cover line, "Is TV Violence Battering Our Kids?" and, he claims, "directly stimulated public debate and the current series of Congressional hearings."

Whatever the source, it now seems possible that a good-faith effort by Hollywood and the networks exists—even if forced—and that all parties may intend (for the first time in television's history) to build on that foundation to help spare children—and adults—exposure to the meaner forms of media mayhem. ■

'V' for Violence: Ten Talking Points

Ten questions we—and many of our readers—believe the Aug. 2 TV violence summit must address:

1. *Parental advisories are a good step, but what are their guidelines, and will they be uniformly applied?*

We need a full definition of TV violence—any act of aggression, or one depicted in graphic detail? What is “gratuitous” violence? What is violence that “glamorizes”? Until now, anonymous network “standards and practices” people decided what’s OK or not. Should this process now be public, spelled out?

2. *Not all parents can supervise their children’s viewing. What technology exists to help parents lock out programs labeled violent?*

Rep. Ed Markey’s proposed chip in TV sets would let viewers “lock out” programs labeled “V” for violent. Might this lead to rigid labeling, programming, or viewing decisions—*Roots* lumped together with a gratuitous shoot-em-up series? Are there other solutions in the offing that give parents control more flexibly, with more information?

3. *What about cable? Some pay channels show violent movies, uncut, that may run around the clock.*

We cable viewers don’t always distinguish between network, basic-cable, or even pay-cable shows; we just flip around with the remote. So do our kids, despite our best efforts. But we *pay* for premium cable: Should there be time-of-day restrictions, or none at all?

4. *What about syndicated reruns?*

In TV GUIDE’s study last year, an independent station showing mostly reruns had the most violent over-the-air shows. Should station managers take responsibility? Should syndicators?

5. *What about violence on national news? On prime-time magazines? On*

local newscasts? On tabloid shows?

At one extreme, showing war, crime, or disaster is a necessary part of keeping citizens informed, young or old; at the other, “news” violence is presented as rowdy entertainment. Who will spell out the difference? Should anyone try?

6. *Cartoons were exempted from advisories. Why?*

It may seem silly to those of us brought up on Tom & Jerry, but studies have shown that “violent” cartoons can adversely affect the very young.

7. *How about the rest of TV? Promos for violent shows and movies? What about music videos?*

Again, TV GUIDE’s study showed these were contributors to TV violence.

8. *VCRs are in most of our homes today. Are the present “advisories” for movies sufficient to guide parents in renting tapes for home TV viewing?*

Parents often debate whether an R-rated film is a “hard R” or a “soft R,” or if a movie rated PG-13 in 1993 is the same as PG-13 in 1983. If TV is looking to clean its house, should the movie biz, too?

9. *If advertisers boycott good shows labeled violent, will fewer good shows be made? Could this have a chilling effect on creativity and innovation?*

Sure could. That’s why we should think carefully about overly simple, black-and-white solutions. CBS chief Howard Stringer warned—self-servingly but correctly—against turning a “vast wasteland” into a “dull wasteland.”

10. *Isn’t the ultimate question, “What can we do about the frightening level of violence in U.S. society, rather than just on TV?” Should we take this moment in our national life to ask not merely what we can take off TV, but what we can put on TV to affirmatively help this cause?*

—The Editors

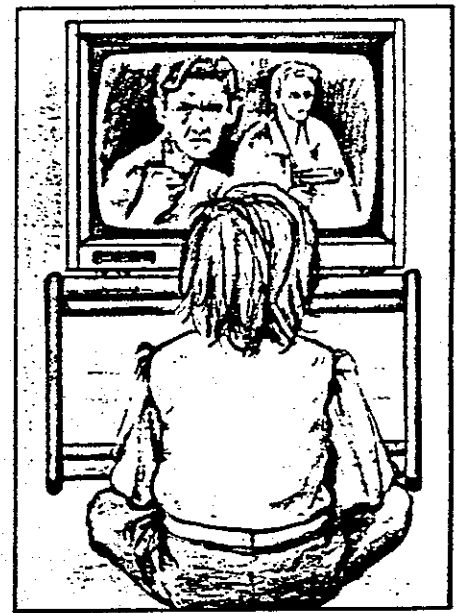
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TV Violence

Will Hollywood tone it down — or face regulation?

THE AVERAGE AMERICAN CHILD WATCHES 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school — thanks to the miracle of television. Suggestions of a link between make-believe TV violence and aggression in real life have been raised since television's formative years in the 1950s — and always dismissed by the TV industry. But recently the three major networks signed a first-ever joint statement outlining practices aimed at reducing violence, and the cable, video and film industries are showing signs of cooperating. Some in Congress are encouraged and maintain hopes that change will come about voluntarily, without the need for federal regulation. But anti-violence activists and scholars of television accuse the industry of merely paying lip service to the problem.



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TV Violence

BY CHARLES S. CLARK

THE ISSUES

The young gunshot victim in the Boston hospital emergency room astonished his doctors. He expressed surprise that his wound *actually* hurt.

"I thought, boy, he's really stupid, anybody knows that if you get shot it's going to hurt," recalled Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, associate dean of the Harvard University School of Public Health and author of a recent book on violence. "But it dawned on me that what he sees on television is that when the superhero gets shot in the arm, he uses that arm to hold onto a truck going 85 miles an hour around a corner. He overcomes the driver and shoots a couple of hundred people while he's at it."

With American children glued to the TV for an average of 27 hours each week (in the inner city it's often 11 hours per day), the American Psychological Association (APA) now estimates that a typical child will watch 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school.

But in 1991 alone there were 25,000 murders in the United States. Coming at a time when the homicide rate is rising six times faster than the population, a longstanding debate — does TV violence cause actual violence? — has taken on a new urgency.²

"There has never been a situation like this," George Gerbner, dean emeritus of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications, told a congressional panel in December. Children "start viewing as infants. Most of the stories they hear are not told by the parents, the school, the church, neighbors. They are told by a handful of conglomerates who have something to sell."³

The stories they tell in living rooms



across the country are as familiar as Arnold "The Terminator" Schwarzenegger taunting, "Hasta la vista, baby," or Clint "Dirty Harry" Eastwood growling, "Make my day." A full 25 percent of the prime-time shows in the 1992 fall season contained "very violent" material, according to the National Coalition on Television Violence (NCTV), a Champaign, Ill.-based monitoring and advocacy group. (See list, p. 168.)

The year 1992 set an all-time record for violence in children's shows — 32 violent acts per hour. That compares with six violent acts per hour during prime time, according to researchers at the University of Pennsylvania. The nightly dose of splattering blood, rapes, car wrecks and screaming victims on TV tripled during the 1980s, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. (See story p. 170.)

What sets today's TV apart from the 1960s and, say, the routine machine-gun volleys of Chicago mobsters and FBI agents on "The Untouchables" is the proliferation of formats — cable, pay-per-view, VCRs

— bringing an array of feature-length movies into the home. "The access to violence is different nowadays," says Edward Donnerstein, a professor of communications at the University of California-Santa Barbara. "There's lots of unsupervised TV-watching, and households often have two TVs."

Also new is a trend toward "reality-based" made-for-TV movies and tabloid news and video shows ("Top Cops," "Hard Copy," "A Current Affair" and "I Witness Video") based on actual news events, many of them involving re-enactments of real crimes or replays of actual violence captured on tape by amateur camcorder operators. Still other violent images come from promotions and commercials for feature films, many of them R-rated. A New York psychotherapist recently wrote in *McCall's* magazine about how his young daughter had trouble sleeping after she was confronted — during a "family" program — by an advertisement showing the terrifying slasher Freddy Krueger from "Nightmare on Elm Street."⁴

Today's high-tech violence — achieved easily with computerized special effects — is aimed at a sophisticated young audience with increasingly high expectations for rapid-paced action. Hence a major source of the problem as measured by anti-violence advocates is the perennial head-smashing on children's cartoons. A national survey of elementary school teachers found that the popular "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" causes confusion between fantasy and reality. "Several children really thought it was OK to use physical violence with other children because [the turtles] do that," a teacher reported.⁵

Children in the inner city, who dodge bullets on the way home from school, are most affected by the culture of TV violence, says Leonard Eron, a

Prime Time, High Violence

Prime-time TV violence has increased markedly since 1980, when the two most violent shows each registered only 22 incidents of violence per hour. In 1984 and 1992, several programs racked up more than 40 violent incidents per hour, led by the action-packed Young Indiana Jones.

Fall 1980	Fall 1984	Fall 1992
Enos (22)	Hammer (55)	Young Indiana Jones (60)
Sheriff Lobo (22)	A-Team (54)	Covington Cross (45)
BJ & the Bear (17)	V (52)	The Hat Squad (42)
Hart to Hart (17)	Matt Houston (40)	Raven (42)
The Incredible Hulk (16)	Cover-Up (38)	Angel Street (41)
Charlie's Angels (14)	Fall Guy (37)	Top Cops (38)
Hill Street Blues (14)	Airwolf (33)	FBI: The Untold Stories (28)
Vegas (13)	Hunter (33)	Final Appeal (27)
Nero Wolfe (11)	Street Hawk (31)	Secret Service (24)
Dukes of Hazard (11)	Scarecrow & Mrs. King (31)	The Commish (17)

Source: National Coalition on Television Violence

University of Michigan psychology professor and longtime researcher on TV violence. "The child who has been watching programs with primarily aggressive content comes away with the impression that the world is a jungle fraught with dangerous threats, and the only way to survive is to be on the attack."

But the potential impact on young viewers, according to Harvard University developmental psychologist Ronald G. Slaby, goes beyond increasing the so-called aggressor effect (the heightened likelihood of violent behavior). Youngsters also experience a victim effect (increased fearfulness about becoming a victim) and a bystander effect (increased callousness toward violence directed at others).

In Congress and among advocacy groups across the political spectrum, alarmed citizens have taken up TV violence as a mobilizing issue. Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, a New York City-based liberal group, led a campaign this January to pressure the NBC television network to air a public service announcement about domestic violence during coverage of the Superbowl, citing some

studies asserting that violence increases on the day of the big game. "We are outraged!" shouted full-page ads in newspapers across the country placed this February by the Tupelo, Miss.-based American Family Association. The conservative group attacked movies, records, music videos and TV for profanity, nudity, sex, violence and killings, asking, "Is it any wonder violence is epidemic?"

The public appears to agree there's a problem. A Times Mirror poll released March 23 found that 72 percent of Americans think TV entertainment shows contain too much violence. And a 1990 Gallup Poll showed 63 percent agreeing that TV shows that depict crime and violence encourage crime.

TV executives haven't ignored the complaints. This December, NBC, CBS and ABC produced an unprecedented joint statement outlining their policies intended to minimize violence and keep it in proper context (*see below*). But the networks also reiterated their decades-old rebuttal of the body of research linking TV violence to real violence, and blamed cable and independent stations for most of the violence. "Of

the 10 most-watched programs on television among children and teenagers, eight are situation comedies, which do not contain any violence." Rosalyn Weinman, vice president for standards and practices at NBC, told the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Criminal Justice Dec. 15.

Industry veterans also maintain that the content of programming has been and always will be in the hands of the public. "Television and motion pictures are market-driven," says Del Reisman, president of the Writers Guild of America, West. "If people don't go, the picture won't be made."

Civil libertarians have weighed in seeking to discourage Congress from interfering with First Amendment rights. "TV networks are free to make their own decisions," says Robert Peck, head of the Washington office of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). If the television industry is toning down violence "in response to congressional pressure, we're concerned."

Finally, defenders of the current TV menu point out that violence has been a central element of human drama for centuries. "Of course there was blood in fairy tales, gore in mythology, murder in Shakespeare," retorts Gerbner. "It is a violent world."

"But, the historical, limited, individually crafted, selectively used and often tragic symbolic violence has been swamped by 'happy violence,' produced on the dramatic assembly line and discharged into the mainstream of our culture. Happy violence shows no pain or tragic consequences. It is a swift and easy dramatic solution to many problems, employed by good characters as much as bad, and always leading to a happy ending."

Whether big changes take place in television violence will hinge largely on the following issues:

Does television violence lead to real violence?

In the mid-1980s, 13-year-old Juan Valdez of Manteca, Calif., confessed to

murdering a friend's father. Having kicked, stabbed, beaten and choked the man with a dog chain, the boy was asked why he also poured salt on the victim's wounds. "Oh, I don't know," he replied, "I just seen it on TV."

The suggested link between small-screen violence and flesh-and-blood violence is perhaps the most examined of sociological questions. It has prompted as many as 3,000 studies in the past four decades in numerous countries, though only a few hundred have added new information.

In a wide range of surveys and field and laboratory studies, researchers have examined the reactions of children to scenes showing a man who gets rewarded with candy if he punches an inflatable "Bobo the clown" standup toy. They have compared children's aggressiveness after they have been shown cartoon combat featuring Bugs Bunny, Woody Woodpecker and Tom and Jerry and gentler shows such as "Lassie." They have examined the increase in homicide rates immediately following televised boxing matches. They have examined the increase in suicide rates following TV dramas about suicide. They have examined changes in the homicide rates in communities that suddenly acquired television, as in apartheid-governed South Africa and an isolated Canadian town in the 1970s (scholars christened it "Notel").

The upshot, according to a variety of experts and advocates, is an overwhelming consensus of some causal effect, with measurable increases of 3-15 percent.¹¹ In the words of a recent American Psychological Association (APA) report, "the accumulated research clearly demonstrates a correlation between viewing violence and aggressive behavior — that is, heavy viewers behave more aggressively than light viewers."¹¹

That summation was echoed by a new National Research Council study of violence, which also asserted that violent offenders are characterized by a low IQ, bullying, hyperactivity, low empa-

thy, erratic discipline, neglect, lack of nurturance and "abnormally frequent viewing of violence on television."¹²

University of Washington psychiatrist Brandon S. Centerwall, writing last June in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, reported that the arrival of television in South Africa coincided with a doubling of the murder rate. During the "critical period" of pre-adolescent childhood, he explained, exposure to TV violence has a particularly profound impact: "Whereas infants have an instinctive desire to imitate observed human behavior, they do not possess an instinct for gauging a priori whether a behavior ought to be imitated. They will imitate anything."

The University of Michigan's Leonard Eron, who chairs the APA Commission on Violence and Youth, has spent 36 years researching TV violence. His unique longitudinal studies beginning in 1960 traced the same group of 875 boys and girls from age 8 to age 30, examining crime rates and personal characteristics. He found that those who watched more violent TV were convicted of more serious crimes, were more aggressive under the influence of alcohol and more often used violence to punish their own children, who in turn showed signs of aggressiveness. "What one learns about life from the television screen seems to be transmit-

ted to the next generation," Eron says.

To experts such as Eron, Donnerstein and Slaby, "the scientific debate is over" on the effects of TV violence, and it is time to move on to decide what should be done. Because of quibbles by a few naysayers, who argue that measured effects are too small or the related anti-social behavior too trivial, a solid body of research on violence, the three write, has "for decades been actively ignored, denied, attacked and even misrepresented in presentations to the American public, and popular myths regarding the effects have been perpetuated."¹³

To UCLA psychologist Seymour Feshbach, the quibbling is classic stonewalling. "An unrealistic need for more definitive research," he writes, "may be used as a mechanism for delaying policy change, much as administrators often turn over troublesome issues to committees as a method for delaying action."¹⁴

Robin Crews, a professor at the University of Colorado who heads a group of activist academics called the Peace Studies Association, says, "I don't know anyone in peace studies who doesn't think ads, TV and movies in a very significant way affect violence against women and violence

Continued on p. 171

Who Are the Killers and Victims?

Characters portrayed as mentally ill are the most violent and most highly victimized group on TV, with 70 percent involved in violence and 20 percent portrayed as killers. Sixty percent of all men and 42 percent of the women are involved in violence.

	Involved in violence	Killers	Killed	For every 10 killers, number killed
Men	60%	11%	5%	4.5
Women	42%	4%	3%	7.5
"Mentally ill"	70%	20%	20%	10.0

Source: Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania. Dec. 14, 1992

One Viewer's Violence Is Another Viewer's Action

The definition of violence "will always be a subjective judgment based on individual perceptions and sensibilities." Beth Waxman Bressan, vice president of the CBS Broadcast Group, told the House Crime and Criminal Justice Subcommittee in December.

The fact that one viewer's violence is another's dramatic action has led many in the television industry to complain about the ways anti-violence activists measure the problem. "Accidents, such as a man falling on a banana peel, are counted as acts of violence in the most widely used violence counts," says Horst Stipp, director of social and developmental research at NBC. "Slapstick comedy routines like the Keystone Kops, or even a magic trick directed at an unwilling person is interpreted as a violent act."†

Some activists agree. "Some rate the violence level by the number of violent acts without measuring the intensity and context," notes Marcy Kelly, president of Mediascope, a Los-Angeles-based nonprofit research organization. "Car crashes, for example, shown in the film [about the founding of Mothers Against Drunk Driving] would be counted as violent acts."

When *TV Guide* commissioned the Center for Media and Public Affairs in Washington to monitor prime-time programs for violence, it used the following definition: "Any deliberate act involving physical force or the use of a weapon in an attempt to achieve a goal, further a cause, stop the action of another, act out an angry impulse, defend oneself from attack, secure a material reward, or intimidate others." Not included were acts of unintended, or accidental violence, violence in sports and violence by animals in nature shows.††

At the National Coalition On Television Violence (NCTV), monitors are trained to count "physically violent hostile acts committed with the intention of hurting another person," according to Research Director Chitra Vemuri. Different weights are assigned to each type of violent act: a slap or a push, for example, is assigned a 1 while a murder or suicide is ranked as a 5. Accidents, verbal assaults and property damage are not included in the counts, and monitors' judgments are regularly tested by a backup monitor.

NCTV's rating system, however, is also subjective. A

modified version of the Motion Picture Association of America film ratings, it assigns films an overall rating that factors in the context of the violence and whether the overall message is pro- or anti-violence. "If one character shoots another, it can be very different from when another [person] shoots that character," says Carole Lieberman, NCTV chairperson. A lot depends on "whether the villain is punished and whether the hero has a glamorized lifestyle."

If the sex and violence are in the story line and are handled appropriately, "we add a 'constructive factor' in our monitoring," says the Rev. Billy A. Melvin, chairman of the Christian group CLEAR-TV. "We know violence, sex and profanity are part of life, but things are getting more graphic. They used to show the sound of a gun and then a dead body. Now they show the bullet entering the head and the brain on the wall."

At the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications, the Cultural Indicators Project produces The Violence Index. It defines TV violence as "clear-cut, unambiguous and overt episodes of physical violence — hurting or killing or the threat of hurting and/or killing — in any context," according to Prof. George Gerbner. Two trained coders have to agree that an act is violent. Gerbner's staff takes separate measures of the percentage of programs containing any violence, the rate of violent scenes per program and per hour and the per-

One Day's TV Violence

	Number of Scenes	Percent of Total
Serious Assaults (excluding use of guns)	389	21
Gunplay	362	20
Isolated punches	273	15
Pushing/dragging	272	15
Menacing threat with weapon	226	12
Slaps	128	7
Deliberate property destruction	95	5
Simple assaults	73	4
All other types	28	1
Total	1,846	100%

Center for Media and Public Affairs, June 1992

centage of major characters involved in violence, either as perpetrators or victims or both.

"Violence is a social relationship, a demonstration of power," Gerbner says. "It's who can do what to whom and get away with it. Cartoons are the most controversial and effective demonstrations of power, with humor as the sugar-coating pill."

As for the charge that his project counts slipping on a banana peel as a violent act, "That was invented by an NBC executive 25 years ago," he says.

† "Media Violence: Are Standards for TV and Film Possible?" a panel discussion produced by the Harvard University School of Public Health, May 11, 1992.

†† "Is TV Violence Battering Our Kids?" *TV Guide*, Aug. 22-28, 1992, p. 81.

Continued from p. 169

by gangs. The burden of proof needs to fall not on those trying to show a positive correlation, but on those who continue to promote violence and use it as entertainment."

Television executives, however, continue to characterize the research on violence as inconclusive. "The issue is so complex," says former 20th-Century Fox Film Corp. Chairman Barry Diller. "It's not appropriate to deal with this in some superficial way. . . . I don't think we know enough yet."¹⁵

Networks cite an NBC-sponsored study published in 1982 that found no correlation between television violence and actual violence (though some scientists say the data were misinterpreted). The networks also point to the work of University of Toronto psychologist Jonathan L. Freedman, who argues that the mountain of research on violence has produced unconvincing results. Not only are researchers undecided over whether personal anger is a precondition for violence by TV viewers, he says, but "experimenter demand," or bias, for positive results, may be a factor.

Viewers "watch a mixture of violent, nonviolent, real and fantasy, exciting and boring, news and fiction programs," Freedman writes. "The question is how this mixture of programs affects the children, or more specifically, how the effect of this mixture would differ from one in which the violent programs were omitted."¹⁶

Other scholars point with irony to the fact that some studies of such "pro-social" TV shows as "Sesame Street" have been found to increase aggressive behavior as much as violent shows. "Encouraging children to watch 'wholesome' television is not the solution to ameliorating conduct problems and would appear on the basis of the available evidence to be counterproductive," wrote one team.¹⁷

The general public, though willing to accept a link between TV violence and crime, does not believe that TV vi-

olence is the main source of society's horrors. In 1990, a Gallup Poll showed only 1 percent of the public considered television the main cause of crime, while 60 percent blamed drugs and 6 percent a breakdown of family social values. Yale University psychologists Jerome and Dorothy Singer, longtime students of children's TV, argue that the networks themselves contradict the argument that TV has no impact on behavior. A network executive, they note, once testified before the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in praise of a child who had seen the Heimlich maneuver demonstrated on TV and went on to use it to save a choking person.¹⁸

If TV has no effect on its viewers, asked Rep. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., at the hearings he conducted in December, "how do we explain the billions of dollars spent each year on commercial advertising?"

Is the television industry adequately addressing the problem of violence?

On Dec. 11, 1992, four days before a scheduled House field hearing in New York City on TV violence, the three major networks broke decades of precedent and released a joint statement outlining their policies on violence. "Conflict and strife are the essence of drama, and conflict often results in physical or psychological violence," it said. "However, all depictions of violence should be relevant and necessary to the development of character, or to the advancement of theme or plot."

The networks' statement vowed to limit gratuitous, excessive or redundant violence, glamorous depictions of violence and replicable, unique or "ingenious" methods of inflicting pain or injury. Realistic portrayals of violence in children's programs were to be avoided, as were gratuitous depictions of animal abuse. Caution was urged in scenes where children are victims and themes, plots or scenes mix sex and violence. And the networks advocated

showing the consequences of violence and scheduling programs with an eye toward the likely audience.

The statement was amplified at the hearings, during which network standards-and-practices officers explained how it was intended as a model for the rest of the industry that could "break the logjam" that has stymied progress on reducing violence. They also explained how feature films are carefully reviewed before being broadcast on TV.

"We estimate that we demand edits [of] up to 40 percent of the original submissions of R-rated movie commercials," said Christian Hikawa of Capital Cities/ABC. "We will even, on occasion, reject certain films as too violent to advertise." In cartoons, "We do not permit realistic weaponry or imitable gratuitous interpersonal violence. Moral messages in our children's programs are concrete."

Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., sponsor of the 1990 law giving the networks an antitrust exemption to permit joint action against violence, applauded these "initial steps." "Television can appeal to the best in us or the worst in us," he said. "Television entertainment violence too often does the latter. We have reason to hope for substantial improvement." In addition, Simon's press secretary, David Carle, explained that the joint statement, plus an accompanying plan to organize an industry conference on violence, raised hopes that the cable and film industries would join the anti-violence efforts. "It puts us light years ahead of where we were last year," he said.

But to many academics and anti-violence activists, the statement was merely a rehash of the current policies, a set of "pious platitudes, with no teeth," in Gerbner's phrase. "All it is saying is that without these guidelines, the situation would be much worse."

Carole Lieberman, the Beverly Hills psychiatrist who heads the National Coalition on Television Violence, calls the new standards "utter nonsense. Lo

Rating Cartoons for Violence

Children's cartoons are among the most violent shows on television, often exceeding 24 acts of violence per hour and earning high violence ratings from the National Coalition on Television Violence.

	Acts of Violence per hour	NCTV Rating
Very High Violence		
Dark Water (Fox)	109	XV
Cookie's Cartoon Club (WGN)	100	RV
Tom and Jerry Kids (Fox)	88	RV
Dragon Warrior (Syndication)	85	XV
Looney Tunes (Nickelodeon)	80	RV
G.I. Joe (Syndication)	78	RV
Bugs Bunny and Pals (TNT)	68	RV
Toxic Crusaders (Syndication)	63	RV
Capt. N. & Super Mario Bros. (NBC)	58	RV
Police Academy (Syndication)	58	RV
High Violence		
Wizard of Oz (ABC)	29	RV
DuckTales (Syndication)	29	RV
Beetlejuice (ABC)	28	XV
Popeye (Family Channel)	27	RV
Fantastic Max (Syndication)	26	RV
Dinosaucers (Family Channel)	26	RV
Chip 'n Dale's Rescue Rangers (Syndication)	26	PGV
Cartoon Express (USA)	25	RV
Midnight Patrol (Syndication)	24	RV
Inspector Gadget (Nickelodeon)	24	RV
Low Violence (Highly recommended)		
Camp Candy (NBC)	8	PG
Babar (HBO)	7	PG
Muppet Babies (CBS)	6	PG
Madeline (Family Channel)	3	G
David the Gnome (Nickelodeon)	2	G
New Kids on the Block (ABC)	1	PG
Davey and Goliath (Syndication)	1	G
Little Women (HBO)	0	PG
Little Koula (Nickelodeon)	0	G
Get Along Gang (Family Channel)	0	G
Maya the Bee (Nickelodeon)	0	G
Lunch Box (Disney Channel)	0	G

Source: National Coalition on Television Violence

whether to show two bullets or one, whether to use blood or not — is a matter of opinion, she says. The women who head the networks' standards and practices departments have no background in research about violence, she adds. "They are puppets who take direction from network superiors."

The University of California's Donnerstein says the networks deserve some credit for putting their policies in writing after years of denying the effects of TV violence. But he emphasizes that the Big Three should no longer absorb all the blame when there are VCRs, pay-per-view services and hundreds of channels of cable TV.

Representatives from the non-network television industries were represented at the House hearing. The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) emphasized that its 25-year-old film rating system factors in violence along with sex. Witnesses pointed out that the Video Software Dealers Association offers a pledge to parents to help prevent the sale or rental of R- and X-rated films to minors.

Cable officials described results of a new study the industry had commissioned from George Gerbner, concluding that there is less violence on cable-originated children's TV programming than on the networks. They spoke of technological advantages that allow cable consumers to supervise children's viewing. With the available parental "lock box" — which must be offered by all cable companies under the 1984 cable deregulation act — and "with the advent of "addressability" technology, parental control has taken a major step forward," said Patricia Fales of Cablevision Systems Corp. The addressable device allows each subscriber to program his own converter to prevent designated shows from being received. "However, the technology requires an actively engaged parent to make the programming decisions involved," she said.

Winton Cox, chairman of the Showtime premium channel, said the

and behold, after all these years, the networks unabashedly flaunt the fact that this is simply a written version of what each standard and practices department has been using all along. It's obvious what they've been doing is not

good enough."

Lieberman, who testified in December that children's minds are being "polluted by the drug of violence," complains that the language is deliberately ambiguous. Each judgment —

movies his channel shows are carefully screened for violence and their contents described in a program guide along with their ratings. "The protections offered to viewers by the subscription process itself," he said, "coupled with the scheduling and communications efforts of the premium networks, safeguard against unwanted exposure."

Critics, however, note that few parents are capable of such detailed control over their children's viewing habits. They disparage the cable industry's study of cable-originated programming by noting that the majority of cable programs are non-original, often-violent feature films. And monitoring has shown time and again, they contend, that what TV executives say is going over the airwaves is not always borne out.

Notwithstanding the vows that violent commercials are not shown during children's programming, *U.S. News & World Report* recently sampled 50 hours of network programming in the late afternoon or early evening. It found 12 questionable ads, including one for an episode of "In the Heat of the Night" in which a troubled girl gives birth to a dead baby. The magazine also sent children into video shops to rent such adult movies as "Basic Instinct" and "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" and found that video dealers were not enforcing policies against underage rentals.¹⁹

And as Marvin Kitman, TV critic for *Newsday*, points out, the new guidelines refer only to new programming and not to old programs made under previous policies. Kitman told a congressional hearing he doesn't trust TV executives to live up to their obligations because they've been saying for years that they have been. "The net-

works are like serial killers," he says. "Their programs are the equivalent of writing with lipstick on the mirrors in our homes: Stop me before I kill again."

Though hopes have been raised by the networks' new promise of cooperativeness, in the academic community mistrust runs deep. "The television industry is not in the business of selling programs to audiences," Centerwall writes. "It is in the business of selling audiences to advertisers. Issues of 'quality' and 'social responsibility' are

do not do any harm. I say, 'There is no question about the harm. The question is how are we going to deal with this problem in a free society?'"

All the players in the violence debate profess respect for First Amendment rights to free speech. But that hasn't prevented huge disagreements over what constitutes censorship and the degree to which the television industry should be free to determine its own treatment of violence. "I don't want to see anything more that looks

like censorship, no matter whether you call it business decisions or whether you call it taste," *New York* magazine TV critic John Leonard said in a *TV Guide* forum. "I think violence and sex and political dissent are all in bed together, and if you start messing with one, you end up messing with the rest of them."

William F. Gidycz, Davidson College



Researchers say children's aggressiveness increases measurably after viewing the cartoon violence of Bugs Bunny, Tom and Jerry and Woody Woodpecker, compared with "Lassie" and similarly gentle shows.

entirely peripheral to the issue of maximizing audience size within a competitive market — and there is no formula more tried and true than violence for reliably generating large audiences."²⁰

Are proposed cures for TV violence worse than the disease?

When network executives try to tell Sen. Paul Simon that research on TV violence is inconclusive, he says they "remind me of the Tobacco Institute people who come in here and say they have research that cigarettes

violent content");

- ingredient labels used in publicity for shows;
- warning labels on TV ads;
- a staff psychiatrist or researcher at each network or cable channel;
- public service announcements about the harmful effects of violence;
- a ban on violent programming offered in government institutions such as jails and hospitals;
- tax breaks for networks, cable channels and production companies that fund research on violence;

• and a public health campaign in schools that addresses violence the way current programs deal with drunk driving.

Proposals for a violence rating system do not impinge on freedom of speech, asserts Centerwall. "It is not reasonable to address the problem of motor vehicle fatalities by calling for a ban on cars," he says. "Instead, we emphasize safety seats, good traffic signs and driver education. Similarly, to address the problem of violence caused by exposure to television, we need to emphasize time-channel locks, program rating systems and education of the public regarding good viewing habits."²¹

Others have proposed that the FCC regulate violence in the same way it polices indecency — using fines and withholding licenses. Harvard's Slaby says that requiring stations and cable networks to reduce violent programming and increase non-violent shows as a condition for license or contract renewal "would *not* restrict or alter the presentation of any violent program, as protected under the First Amendment. Rather it would promote a broader range of non-violent alternative programs from which viewers would be able to choose."

Such proposals would be welcomed by veteran children's TV writer Gene Ayres, whose Santa Fe, N.M.-based enterprise, Future Wave, prepares scripts for non-violent shows. "When these ideas are brought up inside the industry," he says, "they always roll out the First Amendment as if it's under threat. But they don't ask the difference between what's offered to children and adults. Those who resent [such proposed regulation] don't have responsibility for small children."

Labels, ratings and public service announcements, however, have yet to be embraced by Congress. Simon, as a former journalist, wants to protect the purity of free speech and prefers getting the players to sit

down and talk, says his press aide Carle, in the manner of "an arms control meeting."

Nor do the proposals sit well with longtime children's TV advocate Peggy Charren. "If you tell everybody, 'Hey, this program is going to be terribly violent and scare the wits out of you,' you'll get every teenager in America watching it," she says.²² Charren has warned that "the potential for closing down free speech in this country from ideas — liability for speech — is so horrendous that I'd rather put up with violence on television."²³

There is fear, even among anti-violence activists, that calls for a government crackdown risk encouraging what is seen as the censorship tendencies of the religious right, which, critics say, is more preoccupied with sex in media than with violence. "The religious people are getting so much power," says Lieberman. "We will have censorship some day if that happens."

The Rev. Billy A. Melvin is chairman of Christian Leaders for Responsible

Television (CLEAR-TV), a 1,600-member coalition that uses consumer boycotts of advertisers to pressure networks to reduce sex, violence and profanity. He says such criticism of the religious right masks attempts to censor his group. "We're bringing an idea into the marketplace," he says. "TV is destructive to the quality of life. We can do better and must do better for our children and our children's children."

A solid majority of the public, according to a 1989 *Los Angeles Times* poll, opposes a government crackdown on TV violence. Nearly half the respondents blamed TV audiences for the violence because they create the demand. But 71 percent favored a violence rating. "People do not see programming [sex and violence] as so affecting their lives that they're willing to give up their freedom for it," said Neil Malamuth, a communications professor at the University of Michigan. "It's a basic philosophy of American culture that we want independence and freedom."²⁴ ■

BACKGROUND

Early Concerns

The first suspicions that the miracle of television might be a mixed blessing arose soon after the medium's debut as a popular pastime in 1947. The number of youths being arrested, which had declined immediately following World War II, rose dramatically, according to Justice Department statistics, from 31,750 in 1948 to 37,259 in 1951 to 149,806 in 1953 to 234,474 in 1956.

In June 1952, the first congressional hearing ever on violence in radio and television and its impact on children was held by the House Subcommittee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. In 1954,

Sen. Estes Kefauver, D-Tenn., chairman of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, opened a series of hearings on the effects of media violence. Following a sample viewing of TV's current cops-and-robbers fare, a British media expert told his panel that such shows would never be broadcast in England. And Clara Logan, president of the National Association for Better Radio and Television, called U.S. TV crime shows "mental poison" to youngsters.

In a pattern that would be repeated in later decades, network officials testified to the importance of industry self-regulation. ABC Vice President Robert Hinckley said he didn't believe TV "is a thing remotely approaching a factor in our problem." Russia and New Zealand, with limited or no TV facilities,

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Chronology

1950s *Rise in youth crime and juvenile delinquency prompts congressional hearings on television violence.*

June 1952

First congressional hearings on violence in radio and television and its impact on children and youth held by House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Subcommittee.

1954

Sen. Estes Kefauver, D-Tenn., chairs hearings of Judiciary Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency on role of TV shows in youth crime. Networks say no link.

1960s *Urban violence prompts more congressional hearings and government funding of research on TV violence.*

1961

Kennedy administration Federal Communications Commission Chairman Newton N. Minow tells National Association of Broadcasters that American TV is a "vast wasteland."

1967

University of Pennsylvania begins monitoring television programming.

1969

Formation of Boston-based Foundation to Improve Television.

Sept. 23, 1969

Report of National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence cites TV violence as contributor to society's violence problem.

1970s *Surgeon general's study prompts more congressional hearings; academic studies proliferate; court cases examine liability of TV in cases of real violence.*

1972

Surgeon general's report on violence cites evidence of link between screen violence and aggressive behavior.

1975

National PTA adopts resolution demanding that networks and local TV stations reduce the amount of violence in programs and commercials (reaffirmed in 1989).

1976

American Medical Association's House of Delegates calls TV violence an "environmental hazard."

1979

In *Zamora v. CBS et al*, parents of a Florida 15-year-old convicted of murdering a neighbor unsuccessfully sue all three networks for negligence for failing to prevent him from being incited to imitate TV.

1980s *Reagan-era deregulation gives media free rein; cable TV, VCRs and rise of independent networks diminish power of networks to control violence on TV.*

1980

Founding of National Coalition on Television Violence.

1982

National Institute of Mental Health study says there's a clear consensus on link between TV violence and aggression.

September 1984

Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence says evidence is overwhelming that TV violence contributes to real violence.

1984

American Academy of Pediatrics Task Force on Children and Television cautions physicians and parents that TV may promote aggression.

1985

American Psychological Association Commission on Youth and Violence notes research showing link between TV violence and real violence.

1990s *Networks issue a joint statement of policies on TV violence, made possible by an anti-trust exemption passed by Congress. Anti-violence advocates step up pressure.*

1990

Simon-Glickman Television Violence Act gives three major networks an antitrust exemption so they can formulate joint policy on violence.

1991

Newton Minow declares: "In 1961, I worried that my children would not benefit much from television, but in 1991 I worry that my children will actually be harmed by it."

1992

American Psychological Association study shows research on link to real violence is ignored and calls for federal policy to protect society.

Dec. 11, 1992

Days before House hearings, the three major networks release joint violence policy and agree to an industry-wide conference.

Music Videos That Flirt With Violence

With their images of scantily clad women wearing lustful expressions and hurling themselves at nonchalant rock stars, MTV videos send out confusing and possibly harmful messages to the 57.3 million American households that receive MTV.

That's the thinking of Sut Jhally, a communications professor at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, whose criticisms of the popular videos have brought him face to face with the New York City-based cable network.

Seeking to raise his students' consciousness of the effects of television imagery, Jhally several years ago assembled "Dreamworlds: Desire/Sex/Power in Rock Video," a 55-minute collection of highlights from 165 rock videos featuring superstar performers such as Motley Crue, Billy Idol and Rod Stewart.

Since students often were sidetracked by the pleasures of the music, Jhally substituted his own somber soundtrack and spliced in dramatic footage from the hit movie "The Accused," namely the scene (based on a true story) showing actress Jodie Foster being gang-raped on a bar-room pinball machine. He also added his own narration and a jarring recitation of statistics: "A woman is raped every six minutes," and "One in four women will be raped in their lifetime."

The result is a disturbing video critique of the way music videos use sex to sell recordings, ultimately dehumanizing women and possibly encouraging violence, according to Jhally.

The majority of MTV videos portray "the dreamworld of the adolescent male," where women are often sex objects or nymphomaniacs, he says. And though outright violence is not common on MTV, it is implied in the whips and the chains and the scenes in which women don't really mean no when they say it, he says. "Because women are presented as thinking only about sex, they don't object when they're handled," he says. "They don't object when they're touched even by someone whom they have just met. The messages don't have to be violent to encourage certain behavior. What is more important is that such images are seen as normal."

Jhally cautions that he is not arguing that MTV causes violence, noting that the roots of violence are complex and multiple. But such videos "help cultivate attitudes that in some instances may lead to certain types of behavior," he says. "The more TV you watch, the more you think the world is like TV. And you tend to act on the stories you have access to."

To promote his compilation, Jhally sent out brochures to colleges around the country. He has sold some 1,300 copies thus far (at \$100 for institutions and \$50 for individuals), with proceeds going to a nonprofit university trust fund.

MTV contends, however, that Jhally has violated its copyright by taking advantage of the "fair use" doctrine. The subsidiary of Viacom International Inc. in 1991 threatened to sue if he didn't destroy all remaining copies of "Dreamworlds." Jhally, in turn, says MTV is ignoring his contention that the video network is threatening legal action to silence substantive criticism of its product. "They are boxed in and hoping it will go away," Jhally says.

Meanwhile, MTV has continued to breed controversy. On Sept. 18, 1991, Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., took to the floor of the Senate to attack it as a reprehensible influence on children. "The central message of most of these music videos is clear," he thundered. "Human happiness and fulfillment are experienced by becoming a sociopath and rejecting all responsibility. If we in this nation continue to sow the images of murder, violence, drug abuse, sadism, arrogance, irreverence, perversion, pornography and aberration before the eyes of millions of children... we should not be surprised if the foundations of society rot away." And a 1992 study by the Washington-based Center for Media and Public Affairs found more violence on MTV than on the three major TV networks combined.

But at least one study has suggested that overt violence on MTV is a turnoff rather than an allure. When 400 male and female students at Oakland University in Rochester, Minn., were asked by psychologists to watch different music videos, the more violent videos made viewers feel more angry, fearful and aggressive, but less sexual, than less violent videos.†

"Our biggest beef with MTV is not that it's more violent or sexually degrading than other channels," says Thomas Radecki, former chairman of the National Coalition on Television Violence, "but that it's all mixed together so a viewer can't pick out a particular time period that you know there's going to be no sexually degrading material."‡

A 1992 study of 750 MTV videos by the coalition found that violence had increased in the past six years, averaging 20 acts of violence per hour. More than 60 per cent of the videos contained explicit violence, suggested violence, degrading sexual portrayals, sexually suggestive themes, profanity, smoking, and/or alcohol consumption, the study said. The most violent video: Guns 'N Roses' "You Could Be Mine."

†Christine Hall Hansen and Ronald D. Hansen, "The Influence of Sex and Violence in the Appeal of Rock Music Videos," *Communication Research*, April 1990, p. 212.

‡Quoted in *Christian Science Monitor*, Aug. 6, 1991.

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have major juvenile delinquency problems, he noted. An ABC script director said that TV adventure stories might even prevent delinquency by serving as "a release" for children's aggression. An FCC official testified against censorship, and a representative of the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters said broadcasters had set up a code to help arrange programs addressing the topic of youth crime.

In 1956, one of the earliest studies on TV violence reported on 4-year-olds who were asked to watch an action-packed "Woody Woodpecker" cartoon. They were found to be more likely to hit and harass other kids and break toys than a control group that had watched the more peaceful "Little Red Hen."

The Senate held more hearings about TV's effects in the early 1960s, but the problem of violence reached undeniable crisis proportions following the mid-'60s urban riots in Los Angeles, Newark and elsewhere. It was in 1965, psychiatrist Centerwall observes, after the first of the television generation had become teenagers, that the biggest surge in U.S. homicides occurred.

This was a time when the airwaves were giving kids scenes of "The Three Stooges" poking each other in the eye. "ABC was the major crime center in the country," *Newsday's* Kitman recalls with sarcasm. "They had had much success with such educational TV series on machine gun usage as 'The Untouchables.' They were pioneers in the Bang-You're-Dead school of programming with such ungratuitous, unviolent programs as 'Route 66' and '77 Sunset Strip.'"

Movies also became more graphic. When the groundbreaking "Bonnie and Clyde" was released in 1967, *New Yorker* critic Pauline Kael wrote, "The dirty reality of death — not suggestions but blood and holes — is necessary. It is a kind of violence that says some-

thing to us; it is something that movies must be free to use."²⁵

Government Action

The government took action. Along with the American Medical Association, it funded the Cultural Indicators Project at the University of Pennsylvania, which began monitoring television programming for violence. President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed a commission to study the roots of urban unrest. It would find that TV watching, while not the specific cause of society's violence, was a contributor. Bills were offered in Congress to prohibit TV violence, study the issue more and offer grants for improving children's TV, but none became law.

In 1969, Sen. John O. Pastore, D-R.I., petitioned the surgeon general to investigate the effects of TV violence. "What is at stake is no less than our most valuable resource — the hearts and minds of our young people," he said. While the top government doctor went to work, the Foundation to Improve Television, a new Boston-based group of business, academic and community leaders, filed a petition in 1970 demanding that the FCC ban "fictional violence and horror" programs at a time when children are likely to view them. The FCC postponed a decision pending the surgeon general's report.

The same year, the foundation also joined with some Washington, D.C., mothers of small children in a lawsuit against CBS Enterprises, the Television Advertising Representatives and the FCC to block broadcast of a TV rerun of the program "Wild, Wild West." An appeals court declined to overturn a lower court's decision denying the petition on the ground that the plaintiffs hadn't exhausted remedies at the FCC. While the foundation "does not expect or hope to become a board of censors," said its presi-

dent, Massachusetts education Commissioner William S. Abbott, it hopes to "further the development of an open, free society by proving that television entertainment is not the private domain of a few people intent on broadcasting for profit at our children's expense."

Surgeon General's Report

In 1972, the surgeon general released the five-volume report, "Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence." Its controversial conclusion was that there is a causal effect from TV violence, but primarily in children presupposed to be aggressive. The report prompted Pastore to begin hearings in March.

For years "various groups have pointed to TV violence as a negative influence on human behavior," testified Rep. John M. Murphy, D-N.Y., "but they were lulled into inaction with promises from the industry that there would be a diminishment of violence."

As in the 1950s, the networks came out in force, promising to address the problem. CBS/Broadcast Group President John A. Schneider pointed out that the surgeon general had argued for only a small effect in comparison with other causes of violence. "It is not clear what the net effect would be if broadcasters simply changed the quantitative balance between violent and other kinds of shows," he said, "since people hunt and choose the kinds of stimulus material they want — and violent material is very popular." For its part, ABC promised to eliminate cartoons that depend solely on action not comedy, look more carefully at its overall balance of violence and budget \$1 million for four years of research.

The National Association of Broadcasters warned that government regulation would be "dangerous and unwise." FCC Chairman Dean Burch declined to regulate violence, saying it was not for the FCC to "make fundamental programming judgments."

Imitating TV Violence?

By the mid-1970s, network TV was racking up new scores on the gore meter. CBS's 1976 grim two-nighter "Helter Skelter," a drama on the Charles Manson cult killings, drew top ratings. A Canadian royal commission that year argued for a causal link between TV violence and aggression. In 1976, the American Medical Association's House of Delegates passed a resolution saying that TV violence "threatens the health and welfare of young Americans," and committed the AMA to remedial action.

It was in 1979 that two major court cases brought TV violence to the front pages. In *Zamora v. CBS et al.*, the parents of a 15-year-old Florida boy convicted of murdering a neighbor sued all three networks for negligence. They said the industry had failed to prevent their son from being incited to imitate violence on TV. They lost. In Rhode Island, a similar case stemmed from a May 23, 1979, broadcast of "The Tonight Show." A professional stuntman on the show had announced that he would "hang" host Johnny Carson on stage. After a noose was placed around the comedian's neck, he was dropped through a trapdoor and, of course, emerged unharmed. But young Nicholas DeFilippo, apparently viewing the stunt from home, was found dead with a rope around his neck in front of a TV set tuned to NBC. In their suit against NBC for "negligence, failure to warn, product liability and intentional tort-trespass," his parents testified that their son regularly watched Carson. They also lost.

Debate over the issue, however, continued apace. When the R-rated 1978 anti-Vietnam War movie "The Deer Hunter" was shown on national TV, some 29 incidents of people imitating the famous Russian Roulette scene were reported, 26 of which were said to have caused deaths. The youngest victim was 8 years old.²⁶

At around that time, the National PTA passed a resolution demanding from networks and local stations "a

reduction in the amount of violence shown on television programs and commercials during the entire day, with particular attention to viewing hours between 2 p.m. and 10 p.m. and weekend morning hours, when impressionable children and young people are most likely to be watching." If self-regulation doesn't work, the group said, it would demand that the FCC establish and enforce regulations limiting violence.

The '80s Explosion

Despite the studies, congressional hearings and court cases, the government did not challenge the networks' demands for self-regulation. What had changed, however, was the arrival of consumer activists and protest groups, which began putting pressure against programs seen as sexist, anti-gay, anti-Christian, or dangerous to national security. By the early 1980s, writes Kathryn C. Montgomery of the Washington-based Center for Media Education, more than 250 advocacy groups were working to change TV, and industry officials declared at a conference that the pressure groups "must now be recognized as a permanent part of the television environment."²⁷

Even more important, the explosion of new technologies — cable and VCRs primarily — combined with Reagan-era deregulation to remake the media landscape, in particular, reducing the once-mighty clout of the three networks. Political momentum for a crack-down on violence dissipated. A relaxation of FCC requirements helped increase the amount of violence: A study by the Universities of Pennsylvania and Delaware would show that children's shows that in 1980 featured an average of 18.6 violent acts per hour would by 1990 rack up 26.4 violent acts every hour.²⁸

In 1982, the National Institute of

Mental Health produced a follow-up to the 1972 surgeon general's report: "Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties." The conclusions were more far-reaching, arguing that TV violence affects all children, not just those predisposed to aggression. ABC responded by saying that TV violence had gone down in recent years. CBS called the government researchers "uncritical" and said the report was put together by individuals "who came to it with publicly identified positions on the role of television in society."

Congressional Action

It was in the mid-1980s that Sen. Paul Simon happened to flick on the TV in an Illinois motel and see an actor being sawed in half with a chainsaw. This led the outraged Simon to introduce the Television Violence Act, which was finally passed in 1990 with backing from the National PTA, the American Psychological Association and the Academy of Pediatrics. The bill granted the three major networks a three-year exemption from the Sherman Antitrust Act so they could pursue a joint agreement on curbing TV violence. It did not require the networks to act, but encouraged them.

"We should not and cannot dictate the content of television programming," said the bill's House sponsor, Rep. Dan Glickman, D-Kan. "An obstacle to a voluntary reduction in violence by the networks is that, in this intensely competitive business, it is commonly held that violence sells. Each network is reluctant to take unilateral steps to reduce violent programming for fear of slipping in the ratings."

The bill was opposed by the ACLU, which called it "a wholly inappropriate and unconstitutional effort to shape the content of American television." Leading the floor opposition was Rep. Don Edwards, D-Calif.,

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Video Games and Push-Button Aggression

Nothing altered childhood more visibly in the 1980s than the arrival of the age of Nintendo. Children huddling around the TV engrossed in *Deadly Towers*, *Guerrilla War* or *Mighty Bomb Jack* became a familiar sight, fueling the debate over simulated violence and its link to the real thing.

Research on the effects of video games is still in its infancy, but some authorities speculate that pulling triggers in interactive electronics may be more conducive to aggression in children than the passive viewing of a television show. "It's a matter of practice," says Leonard Eron of the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. "The more a child practices, the more apt he is to use" the skill he's practicing.

In December 1989, the National Coalition On Television Violence (NCTV) released its monitoring results on 176 Nintendo games. It concluded that 80 percent contained "harmful violence," a substantial increase from several years earlier. The coalition slapped its X rating for extreme violence on 44 percent of the games and cited 27 academic studies of video games, 22 of which found harmful effects. "Players can now launch nuclear missiles, initiate revolutions and toss grenades into Asian villages," read an NCTV statement. "Combat is often one-on-one and exceedingly graphic. The final step takes players beyond the war theme — into the realm of gang warfare. Instead of battles between the 'good guys' and the 'bad guys,' there is now a significant lack of 'good guys.'"

Bill White, director of advertising and public relations at Nintendo's Redmond, Wash., office, says the Japanese man-

ufacturer is very concerned about the issues raised by the coalition. "But the reality is there is no scientific evidence linking video games to aggressive behavior," he says. "Our games feature lots of good versus evil. It's no different from Grimm's fairy tales, which are widely accepted."

Nintendo, which racked up \$4 billion in sales last year, follows standards modeled on the film rating system of the Motion Picture Association of America and the standards and practices principles used at the three major TV networks, White says. The standards prohibit exceptional violence, negative stereotypes and depictions of drugs, alcohol or tobacco.

Video games are violent, says Patricia Marks Greenfield, a psychology professor at the University of California-Los Angeles, because that is what attracts boys, who make up 65 percent of the market.†

Mental health professionals have taken both sides in the debate, many arguing that video games affect individual children differently. Psychiatrist Joseph Cassius of Memphis, Tenn., says the games "can develop a sense of proficiency without fear of conflict. Many children who are afraid to compete with others are not afraid with the video."

But, Cassius adds, "We are the parents, and we have the power. We can decide that we don't want to reinforce a child's disposition to aggression. But if he's a fairly mellow kid, playing an aggressive game is not going to change his personality."‡

†Quoted in *The Boston Globe*, Feb. 8, 1993.

‡Quoted in *The Washington Post*, Dec. 10, 1990.

Nintendo games rated XUnfit have "constant, graphic violence," XV games have "high levels of very harmful violence," and RV games require players to "become more violent to win."

Rated X (unfit)

Adventures of Bayou Billy
 Castlevania: The Vampire Strikes Back
 Deadly Towers
 Double Dragon
 Gauntlet
 Ghosts n' Goblins
 Guerrilla War
 Kung Fu
 Metroid
 Mighty Bomb Jack
 Ninja Kid
 Operation Wolf
 Solomon's Key
 Spoon
 Star Voyager
 Strider
 Tiger Heli
 Wizards & Warriors
 Worldrunner

Source: National Coalition on Television Violence

Rated XV

Airwolf
 Amagon
 Bionic Commando
 Break Thru
 Quest
 Cobra Command
 Evil Empire
 Defender
 Dragon Power
 Freedom Force
 Gun Smoke
 Iron Tank
 Kage
 Kid Niki
 Life Force
 MAGMAX
 Mike Tyson's Punch-out!!
 Teenage Mutant Ninja
 Xevious the Avenger

Rated RV

Athena
 Blades of Steel
 Bobble Bubble
 Clu Clu Land
 Commando
 Excitabike
 Gotcha!
 Gyromite
 Ice Climber
 Karnov
 Mach Rider
 Mario Bros.
 Popeye
 Rad Racer
 Renegade
 Skate or Die
 Spy Hunter
 Robo Warrior
 Super Mario Bros.

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 who called it "indirect censorship, clear and simple. . . Broadcasters understand the tremendous power of

Congress. . . The message from 'Big Brother' to TV executives is clear: 'If you don't comply — watch out!' ■

CURRENT SITUATION

Pressuring the FCC

When the networks released their joint standards in December, Sen. Simon predicted that progress in reducing violence should be evident in the fall programming for 1993. But Rep. Schumer, while applauding the move, noted that the networks had rushed out their statement only days before his hearings in order to "have something nice to say." He said the statement alone wouldn't solve the problem and that he would like to see a violence rating system. He plans to "consider legislation if the networks won't do it voluntarily."

The networks, however, added in a letter that "the amount of violence on television cannot be adequately addressed unless other segments of the industry join us." Cooperation from the cable and film industries and the independent networks such as Fox is expected to materialize at an industry conference on television violence planned for this summer in Los Angeles.

Meanwhile, in January the National Cable Television Association released results of a new study showing relatively little violence on cable-originated programming. "We believe that the depiction of violence is a legitimate dramatic and journalistic representation of an unavoidable part of human existence," the cable association said. "We also believe that the gratuitous use of violence depicted as an easy and convenient solution

to human problems is harmful to our industry and society."

Critics asked why the study did not examine violence in non-original feature films, to which cable association spokeswoman Peggy Laramie responded that violence in feature films has already been studied and that her group's plan was to "look at what cable brought to the mix." The group has promised a follow-up study.

The Foundation to Improve Television, though dormant since the mid-1970s, was recently reactivated to mount a campaign to get the FCC to crack down on TV violence. Late this March it plans to formally ask the regulatory body to make license renewal contingent on stations showing no programs containing an "excessive amount of dramatized violence" between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. The petition also is expected to ask for advance viewer advisories and visual warning signals during programs with violence, a ban on ads or promotions with dramatized violence, a ratings system for violence and additional guidelines to be developed by the FCC in consultation with the industry.

The foundation argues that countries such as Canada, France, Great Britain, Sweden and Australia have taken action, fining television companies that broadcast violence during children's hours. It is working with business leaders and community groups to provide information and legal advice to send a "powerful message" to the TV industry.

The FCC, which received 79 complaints about violence in 1992 and 85 in 1991, does not police the amount of violence on America's TV stations. A spokesman cites Section 326 of the 1934 Federal Communications Act,

which prohibits censorship. If the FCC were to regulate violence in the way it regulates indecency, he says, Congress would have to pass a statute. "All we can do," said James H. Quello, interim chairman of the FCC, "is mention in a speech that Hollywood and cable and the networks are actually flooding the airwaves with too many violent programs, and some of these kids are starting to imitate the violence they see."³⁰ Quello applauds the work of Americans for Responsible Television, founded several years ago by Michigan housewife Terry Rakolta, who became offended at vulgarity on the TV show "Married...With Children," and who has also launched a campaign to persuade Congress to limit TV violence.

The National Coalition on Television Violence continues to release its regular rankings of the most violent shows. Its February list tagged the Fox network as the most violent broadcast network, with 11 violent acts per hour. "We were stunned," said Betsy Hoffman, Fox vice president for publicity, noting that the shows the coalition is counting include "America's Most Wanted" and "The Edge." "'America's Most Wanted' is responsible for the capture of 243 fugitives," she says. "It's the one show dedicated to ending violence. 'The Edge' is a parody and satire of violence. Their whole claim is ridiculous."

In Santa Fe, the scriptwriters working for Future Wave are nearing the production phase of a non-violent children's cartoon called "Astrocops." It uses a former Los Angeles police officer as a consultant. "The challenge of being non-violent can bring out the best in writers," says Gene Ayres, who's written more than 50 cartoon episodes for such shows as "Scooby Doo" and "The Smurfs." "It's more interesting if you don't do the expected — the slug in the jaw and the hero who's faster on the draw and bigger than the bad guy. We're not asking the industry to kill Bugs Bunny, just to provide an alternative."

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At Issue:

Should the television industry do more to curb depictions of violence?

LEONARD D. ERON

Professor of psychology, University of Michigan
FROM "MEDIA VIOLENCE: ARE STANDARDS FOR TV AND
FILM POSSIBLE?" HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
PANEL DISCUSSION, MAY 11, 1992.

a recent summary of over 200 studies, published in 1990 offers convincing evidence that the observation of violence, as seen in standard everyday television entertainment, does affect the aggressive behavior of the viewer. . . .

What can be done? As soon as the suggestion for action comes up, the TV industry raises the issue of censorship, violation of First Amendment rights and abrogation of the Constitution. For many years now Western European countries have monitored TV and films and have not permitted the showing of excess violence, especially during child viewing hours. I have never heard of any complaints by citizens in those democratic countries that their rights have been violated. But in the U.S., youth violence is a public health problem, so designated by the Centers for Disease Control (and Prevention). . . . No one is claiming that TV violence is the sole cause of the epidemic. However, it is certainly *one* of the causes, and one which we at least can do something about. Is it too much to ask the industry to police itself? It has done so before with some success.

I don't favor censorship and I am jealous of my First Amendment rights. But I don't think some serious self-regulation and monitoring by the TV and film industry is a threat to our constitutional rights.

It would be appropriate for the FCC to require stations to document what they have done to lower the violence in their programming before their licenses are renewed. . . .

In the spring [of 1992] we had to face the implications of the uncontrolled violence in Los Angeles. TV cannot escape its share of the responsibility for this outburst. We know that children living in the inner city watch more TV than other children. Children living in the inner city are increasingly surrounded by violence — at home, in the neighborhood, on the way to and from school. They are constantly dodging bullets, cowering in hallways, hiding under tables, because the streets are so dangerous from drive-by shootings and other violence. They spend more and more time indoors watching TV.

And what do they see on TV? More violence. This validates what the children have seen in the neighborhood, it makes violence normative — everyone's doing it, not just in their neighborhood but all over. TV represents violence as an appropriate way to solve interpersonal problems, to get what you want out of life, avenge slights and insults and make up for perceived injustices.

DEL REISMAN

President, *Parents Group of America, West*
FROM "MEDIA VIOLENCE: ARE STANDARDS FOR TV AND
FILM POSSIBLE?" HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
PANEL DISCUSSION, MAY 11, 1992.

the only way to significantly reduce violence, or the threat of violence, in storytelling is for networks and cable to simply not order series or special films which are, virtually by definition, inherently violent, such as action-adventure, crime, futuristic melodrama, etc., and use instead the softer genres, such as we see on the networks now, shows such as *Homefront*, *Sisters*, *Northern Exposure*, and so on. Not a very realistic possibility, however.

Networks, as you know, follow. They do not lead. Networks react to social change and community standards. I *know*. I have served as a story editor on many weekly series. Story editors scan the headlines, searching for ways to paraphrase the truth and put it into fictional form. . . .

I believe that additional guidelines for violence should not be called for because they will simply reduce the actual sights of some violence but not the threatening storytelling that builds to it, and therefore such guidelines would be a crumb thrown to those who believe in a causal relationship.

I believe that writers should continue to tell the stories of our time. Abuse in the home toward children, or parents, or grandparents is out of the closet now, thanks to its dramatization on television. Child custody struggles, in which the losing parent literally kidnaps a child, at last is before the American public as the serious social problem that it is. Fictional television has seen this dramatized frequently. Gay bashing has found its way from the dark alleys of our cities to the films of both weekly series and movies-of-the-week. The violence on the home screen *follows* the violence in our lives.

We've lived with Broadcast Standards for 40 years, fighting the departments frequently, losing most of the fights, but reacting positively as networks followed changes in community standards from the days of no "hells" and no "damns" to today's relatively explicit language, frank relationships and open dramatizations of dysfunctional families. Writers want to involve audiences in our stories. Writers are family people, too. We're parents and children and siblings and grandparents and grandchildren. We are community-minded and we care deeply about the world around us. We are as shocked and concerned by what is happening on our streets, on our schoolyards, in our classrooms and in our homes, as any of you. We agree on very little but we do agree on fundamentals, such as freedom of expression and freedom from censorship, the official kind and the unofficial kind which induces self-censorship.

TV News: Violence Is Part of Our World Tonight

"If it bleeds, it leads," goes the cynics' view of television news. But now stations that start off newscasts with generous doses of gore and mayhem are being held responsible for their role in feeding Americans their steady diet of television violence.

The issue was dramatized in January after a North Lauderdale, Fla., station aired footage of a man shooting his ex-wife at their daughter's grave. Emilio Nunez's deadly act was taped by a stunned camera crew for the Spanish-language station, which had been alerted to a possible confrontation. Stations around the country aired the shooting, and many were taken to task.

Los Angeles Times TV critic Howard Rosenberg slammed the use of the "unnecessary" and "valueless" footage, even wondering whether the station had set up the confrontation. "The self-serving hucksters snapped it up, capitalizing on tragedy for the sake of creating unforgettable ghastly TV," Rosenberg wrote.† He noted that Channel 2 in Los Angeles, whose news director reportedly urges his editorial staff to "scare viewers to death," had used the arrest of Nunez as a pretext for rebroadcasting the tape a few days later.

At Los Angeles' Channel 5, News Director Warren Cereghino defended the footage, saying it aptly illustrated "unfortunate domestic violence and emotion escalating to such a violent level." The news producer at LA's Channel 9 justified the airing by saying it was part of the "ethical debate" on whether such visuals should be shown. Other news executives noted that the scene wasn't gory and didn't show blood or contorted faces. But some stations that used the tape later apologized.

In an era when real-life violence — be it the Persian Gulf War or the police beating of motorist Rodney King — are commonly caught by cameras, viewers' tolerance for grisly sights is clearly being expanded. "But a Gulf war is only once in a while," notes University of Pennsylvania communications Professor George Gerbner. "The

everyday crime the media cover is more graphic and appeals to the sensational and the spectacular. It adds to the general sense of vulnerability" among the population.

Some observers feel that local news coverage of violence often glorifies the bad guys. "When a cop gets blown away," complains *Newsday* TV critic Marvin Kitman, "his killer gets more coverage than the cop's funeral on TV news."

Many critics of TV violence, however, make clear distinctions between entertainment and news. "There are people who say, 'Well, if you are going to take off violence [from television], then you are going to have to remove Bosnia from the television news,'" Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., told the Senate last June. "The reality is that violence on the news does not glamorize violence. Entertainment violence glamorizes violence."

"News violence is a tough call and should be handled case by case," says Edward Donnerstein, a professor of communications at the University of California-Santa Barbara. "You don't want to sanitize the world; there are horrors out there."

"As soon as you try to draw lines" about what should be shown on TV, says Robert Peck of the American Civil Liberties Union, "you affect news and information that people need to have."

Faced with the twin obligations of reporting the truth and keeping ratings high, TV news departments are unlikely to establish formal rules about reducing violence. But producers with dramatic footage have been known to finesse the problem with an advance warning. When circus tightrope walker Karl Wallenda plunged to his death in 1978, news anchors didn't prevent viewers from witnessing the event. But many anchors somberly warned, "Some of you may not wish to watch."

† *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 22, 1993.

In Los Angeles, the nonprofit group Mediascope is putting on workshops, seminars and public education campaigns — often on location in Hollywood studios — to promote a more accurate and balanced depiction of violence in films and TV. The group has received a \$675,000 grant from the Carnegie Corp. of New York City, as well as a contract with the Department of Health and Human Services.

Mediascope is also working with film schools to encourage a code of ethics

and promoting the need for research on the effects of violence that is up-to-date and practical. "The research community sees the entertainment media as negative," says Mediascope President Marcy Kelly. "The media dismiss the research. There's a need to come together and bridge the gap." Much of modern TV violence is highly unrealistic, she adds. "There are no consequences. You don't see children who've lost their parents, parents who've lost their children, people who can't walk, who've lost

their homes because of nine months spent recuperating. You just see this unbelievable aggression, and then they cut to the hero at a cocktail party!"

"The whole issue is very circular," she continues. "The writer will say, 'That's what the producer wants me to write.' The producer will say, 'That's what the network wants.' The network will say, 'That's what the advertisers want.' The advertisers will say, 'That's what the public wants.' The question is, how can we break the circle?"

OUTLOOK

What Can Be Done?

If television had never been invented, society would have been spared 10,000 homicides, 70,000 rapes and 700,000 assaults, hypothesizes psychiatrist Centerwall.

On the other hand, "By having television entertainment with adequate sex and violence," argues Jib Fowles, a University of Houston-Clear Lake media studies professor, "Americans are nightly able to empty their subconscious; aggressive fantasies produce tranquil minds."¹

The reason TV viewers gawk at faked violence like passersby rubbernecking at an auto wreck is because "males are taught a lot of things to embrace — be strong, not to feel, see power at all costs, win/lose, be a soldier — they're all presented as appropriate male attitudes," says peace studies Professor Crews. "Most of it is nurture, not nature. It's a social reality that is constructed."

"The male demand for violent entertainment comes about not because males innately want to see violence, but because these shows put forth strong male role models," says Harvard's Prothrow-Stith. "Men are looking for heroes. They look for men who are effective. And in watching television, particularly if there's not a father in the home, you find the male heroes are presented in terms of violent action."²

Actually, violence doesn't seem so popular if you look at the top-rated shows,* which are predominantly sit-

coms, says Gerbner. But, he adds, "Violence travels well, unlike humor," which means that Hollywood is likely to continue producing more violence as its products are marketed overseas because it needs no translation.

Activists at Harvard and elsewhere have argued that the movement against TV violence should take a cue from the anti-smoking, anti-drunken-driving and environmental movements, all of which have had success in winning cooperation from scriptwriters, producers and directors in Hollywood to highlight their causes. But creative people wield limited power in the entertainment industry. Hollywood writer and actor Ben Stein says: "I remember so many times coming [to the Warner Bros. lot] and pitching [scripts to executives]. Pitching and thinking, 'I've got to sell this, no matter what, I have to sell this, I've just got to sell this. It doesn't matter. Ask me to put in a scene of torturing nuns, I'll do it. I'll do anything to make this sale.'"³

Alternatives for Parents

On a personal level, the American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended that parents limit children's TV viewing to one to two hours per day. The National PTA advises parents to watch children's favorite programs as well as the news with their children, discuss the violence, explain how violence is faked on entertainment shows and encourage children to watch programs with characters who cooperate with each other rather than fight.

Advice columnist Ann Landers recently recommended, when a reader complained about sex and violence on TV, that viewers call local stations with their complaints. "I, too, deplore the garbage on TV, but it is vitally important that we not interfere with the rights of those who like it," she wrote. "Written protests to the sponsors are effective, but the most immediate censor is simply to use the off button."⁴

Beth Waxman Bressan, CBS Broadcast Group vice president, recently testified that her network receives upwards of 600,000 pieces of mail each year but that less than 1 percent complain about violence. On the other hand, at least one sponsor of cable programming, Time-Life Books, recently withdrew its ad for a series of books on crime featuring serial killers Ted Bundy, Charles Manson and Richard Speck because of viewer complaints about poor taste.

"If I were a parent or a PTA group, I'd pick up the phone and call the local TV station," says Doug Wills, a spokesman for the National Association of Broadcasters. "The programming manager there doesn't want to alienate his audience, and it is in his interest to be responsive for competitiveness reasons." In general, Wills adds, "with some exceptions, such as the three recent movies on the Amy Fisher case that made executives uncomfortable, most of television meets the viewing needs of the public and doesn't set out to offend anyone."

TV critic Kitman says the solution to TV violence is for the networks to use their power to produce hour-long Michael Jackson or Madonna specials with the message that "only creeps carry guns."

More important, says children's activist Peggy Charren, "we need public policy to focus on the root causes of violence in this country. Poverty is what you fix if you want to do something about violence."⁵

"Other countries find us strange," says Donnerstein. "Violence is as American as apple pie. But sex and profanity upset people the most. There's an outcry if you show partial nudity, but viewers don't care if people get hacked up."

The best chance for a federal effort against TV violence would come if the issue were taken up by first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton or a group like the Children's Defense Fund, says scriptwriter Ayres. "A heavy-

*The top 20 network prime-time shows during the week of March 8, according to the A.C. Nielsen Co., were: "Home Improvement," "60 Minutes," "Men Don't Tell," "Coach," "Roseanne," "PrimeTime Live," "Rescue 911," "Murder, She Wrote," "Seinfeld," "Cheers," "20/20," "Northern Exposure," "Murphy Brown," "Full House," "Dr. Quinn," "Medicine Woman," "Unsolved Mysteries," "People's Choice Awards," "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air," "The Simpsons" and "Day One."

weight political lobby would be needed because the industry will fight tooth and nail."

In November, then-President-elect Clinton told *TV Guide* that makers of films and TV programs "could, without undermining their artistic integrity, have a major new impact on the way people view the world.... There's no question the cumulative impact of this banalization of sex and violence in the popular culture is a net negative for America."¹⁶

"When I first came to Los Angeles and warned of the effects of TV violence," says the NCTV's Lieberman, "I thought they'd say 'Oh, OK, we'll fix it.' But 10 years later, I'm still beating my head against the wall. The people here are literally getting away with murder." ■

Notes

¹ Quoted in *TV Guide*, "Is Violence Battering Our Kids?" Aug. 22-28, 1992, p. 8. Prothrow-Stith's book, *Deadly Consequences: How Violence Is Destroying Our Teenage Population*, was published in 1991.

² Figures taken from a special report on violence in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, June 10, 1992.

³ Gerbner testified Dec. 15, 1992, at hearings

on TV violence held by the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Criminal Justice.

⁴ Ron Taffel, "Making Your Child Feel Safe in a Scary World," *McCall's*, February 1993, p. 60.

⁵ See Nancy Carlsson-Paige and Diane E. Levin, "The Subversion of Healthy Development and Play: Teachers' Reactions to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles," *Day Care and Early Education*, winter 1991.

⁶ Testimony before the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, March 1992.

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⁹ Carl M. Cannon, "Violent Verdict: Connecting TV and Real-Life Aggression," *The Washington Post*, Sept. 19, 1989.

¹⁰ Stuart Oskamp (ed.), *Television as a Social Issue*, (1988), p. 190.

¹¹ Quoted in *TV Guide*, *op. cit.*

¹² Albert J. Reiss Jr. and Jeffrey A. Roth, editors, *Understanding and Preventing Violence*, (1993) p. 7.

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¹⁴ Oskamp, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

¹⁵ Quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1992.

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¹⁸ Oskamp, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

¹⁹ *U.S. News & World Report*, Feb. 1, 1993, p. 65.

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²⁴ Quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 24, 1989.

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²⁶ Robert Wharton and Frederick Mandell, "Violence on Television and Imitative Behavior," *Pediatrics*, June 1985, p. 1121.

²⁷ Kathryn C. Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time: Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment Television*, (1989) p. 6.

²⁸ *The Washington Post*, Jan. 29, 1990.

²⁹ Quoted in *Newsweek*, Dec. 21, 1992.

³⁰ Quoted by The Associated Press, March 12, 1993.

³¹ Jib Fowles, *Why Viewers Watch: A Reappraisal of Television's Effects*, (1992) p. 244.

³² Harvard panel, *op. cit.*

³³ Panel discussion directed by Independent Feature Project/West, Oct. 20, 1990, published by *Mediascope*, Oct. 1992.

³⁴ Ann Landers column, Feb. 20, 1993.

³⁵ Harvard panel discussion, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Quoted in *The Washington Post*, Nov. 13, 1992.

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A communications professor now working with the Center for Media Education explores the rise of advocacy groups that began pressuring the television industry during the 1970s, addressing such issues as sexism, gay bashing and anti-Americanism on TV.

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Pristin, Terry, "Soul-Searching on Violence by the Industry," *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1992.

A Hollywood journalist reports on inter-industry conflict over the risks of portraying violence, noting many of the obstacles facing those who propose remedie .

"Violence on Television: A Symposium and Study Sponsored by the Editors of *TV Guide*," *Editors of TV Guide*.

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Jackson, Robert L., "Cable vows to tackle issue of violence on TV," *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 28, 1993, p. A14.

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Ingersoll, Brenda, "Dramatic re-enactments may hurt kids," *Detroit News & Free Press*, Dec. 6, 1992, p. C1.

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Silver, Marc, "Troubling TV ads," *U.S. News & World Report*, Feb. 1, 1993, pp. 65-67.

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Dennis, Everette E., "Mounting a campaign against

media illiteracy," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 8, 1992, pp. B1-B2.

Dennis argues that viewers must understand that the media form a powerful social institution with the potential to foster violence.

Perkins, Joseph, "Tawdry search for ratings," *The Washington Times*, Jan. 17, 1993, p. B3.

Perkins comments on the three TV networks' made-for-television movies about "trollop-cum-attempted murderess Amy Fisher" and says the networks are only interested in "exploiting violence and mayhem for ratings and profits."

Stark, Steven, "Prime-time criminals," *Boston Globe*, Jan. 4, 1993, p. 11.

Stark decries the glorification of persons who commit "spectacular" crimes by the media via television movies and quasi-news programs, noting the cases of Mark David Chapman, who shot and killed John Lennon, and teenager Amy Fisher, the "Long Island Lolita" who shot the wife of her alleged adult lover.

Braxton, Greg, "TV described as being catalyst for lawlessness," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 22, 1992, p. A31.

Live TV coverage of the Los Angeles riots was a catalyst for further looting and violence, according to the special panel investigating police response to the civil unrest.

Braxton, Greg and Steve, "Fla. killing shocks L.A. viewers," *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 21, 1993, p. F1.

Many viewers called to criticize the Los Angeles TV stations that showed a man shooting his estranged wife in a Florida cemetery.

Freeman, Mike, "LA.'s local news takes to the streets," *Broadcasting*, May 4, 1992, p. 11.

When violence erupted in South-Central Los Angeles following the verdict in the Rodney King trial, local TV stations offered graphic live transmissions of it. Other coverage of the riots, looting and fires is discussed.

Kolbert, Elizabeth, "Killing shown on TV prompts debate," *The New York Times*, Jan. 22, 1993, p. A10.

The decisions by TV news shows around the nation to broadcast a videotape of the brutal killing of Maritza Nunez has prompted calls of outrage.

Rondell, Avital, "Haunted TV: Rodney King/video/trauma," *Artforum*, September 1992, pp. 71-73.

The beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers is examined in relation to TV's representation of violence and crime, making them a media event.

Waters, Harry F., "America's ugliest home videos," *Newsweek*, June 15, 1992, pp. 59-60.

The proliferation of shows that air home video recordings of murders and other grisly events for viewing is discussed.

Weiner, Stewart, "Shock TV," *TV Guide*, April 4, 1992, pp. 30-32.

"I Witness Video" is discussed for its impact in bringing harrowing, real-life incidents to U.S. TV audiences.

Legislation

Foisie, Geoffrey and Randy Sukow, "Schumer wants violence rating for TV shows," *Broadcasting*, Dec. 21, 1992, pp. 38-39.

House Crime and Criminal Justice Subcommittee Chairman Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., has proposed special warnings or a ratings system, like that used for films, to alert parents about violence levels on TV shows.

Hodges, Ann, "TV violence can be dangerous," *Houston Chronicle*, Jan. 24, 1993, p. Z11.

Hodges comments on an initiative by Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., aimed at making TV networks restrict the violence that they allow to be broadcast on their programs.

Kurtz, Howard, "Clinton takes shot at Hollywood, TV," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 13, 1992, p. A4.

President-elect Clinton says he is "mortified" by some of what is shown on TV and that Hollywood should take the lead in "deglamorizing mindless sex and violence."

Rosenberg, Howard, "Conferences won't end TV carnage," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 1, 1993, p. F1.

Rosenberg discusses the proliferation of TV violence, despite the 1990 Television Improvement Act.

Network response

Goodman, Adam and Robert L., "Networks to limit violence," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Dec. 12, 1992, p. A12.

The nation's three largest television networks have agreed on voluntary standards to limit TV violence.

Hodges, Ann, "Rallying cry at CBS is family values," *Houston Chronicle*, Jan. 14, 1993, p. E1.

The TV networks are responding to complaints about too much sex and violence on TV programming by softening their plot lines and adding more romance.

"Violence-free TV," *Denver Post*, Dec. 17, 1992, p. B12.

An editorial says that while anti-violence guidelines adopted by the three major television networks look good in theory, they probably won't have much effect.

Regulation

Ostrow, Joanne, "Those who value free speech say tune out TV violence," *Denver Post*, Dec. 12, 1992, p. A21.

Ostrow opposes the regulation of violence on TV for fear of infringing on the First Amendment and concern over who creates the guidelines.

Shah, Sonia, "Couch potatoes like big guns," *Nuclear Times*, Winter 1991, pp. 41-42.

The epidemic of TV depictions of violence and harassment has bred a generation of hostile, alienated, paranoid Americans. The effects of TV violence and the difficulty of regulating levels of violence on TV are discussed.

Research and studies

Brady, Diane, "The power of 'cowabunga,'" *Maclean's*, Dec. 7, 1992, p. 50.

The American Psychological Association states that TV violence can encourage aggressive behavior.

Clark, Kenneth R., "Yes, TV violence is awful, but what's the cure?" *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 25, 1992, p. 1.

Kenneth R. Clark discusses case studies that indicate that TV is a prime factor in the increase of U.S. violence.

Johnson, Bill, "Exposure to on-screen violence harms our children," *Detroit News*, Jan. 8, 1993, p. A8.

Johnson comments on the proposed reduction in TV violence, concluding there is a link between excessive violence on TV and real-life aggression.

Price, James H., Elaine A. Merrill and Michael E. Clause, "The depiction of guns on prime time television," *Journal of School Health*, January 1992, pp. 15-18.

The role of violence on prime-time TV was assessed by studying two weeks of regular prime-time programming on four major networks (ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox) for scenes in which guns were either used or displayed.

Vobejda, Barbara, "Home alone, glued to the TV," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 10, 1992, p. A3.

Millions of American teenagers spend much of their free time without supervision, a Carnegie Corporation study has found, issuing a bleak description of young people who rarely read but often devote themselves to watching television and involvement in drugs, gangs, violence and sex.

And now, a word from a Mother

THE WASHINGTON POST

SUNDAY, JULY 18, 1993

**Forget the First Amendment.
When it Comes to TV Violence,
All I Care About
Is Protecting My Kids.**

By Megan Rosenfeld
Washington Post Staff Writer

Two weeks ago I was sent to the Capitol Hill press conference at which the major networks announced their new plan to label violent television shows. It was a last-minute assignment, and I grabbed the only note pad I could find in the house. Once I sat down in the crowded and tension-filled hearing room in the Dirksen Senate Office Building, I turned to the top page of the note pad and found a drawing by my 9-year-old son—of a beautifully detailed weapon carefully labeled "infinity war mutant bounty gun."

So, guys, I said to myself as I leaned back and looked at the suits lined up at the microphone, tell me about violence on TV.

There has been a lot of moaning in reaction to these labels. One side, the anti-violence lobby, says they're a palliative, a crumb tossed at the mob to stall legislators from actually regulating the airwaves, a license to produce even more violence as long as it's labeled. The other side, the so-called "creative community" and the civil liberties dogmatists, is crying about artistic freedom and the First Amendment. Labeling, they say, is the first step down the slippery slope of censorship. "I think we are being enormously scapegoated," producer Dick Wolf ("Law & Order") told this newspaper. "If you listen to Congress, it's [as if] television is the root of all social ills in this country."

Oh, please. I find myself curiously unmoved by television producers covering themselves with a First

Amendment flag. As far as I'm concerned, they have abrogated their rights to freedom of speech by being so resolutely unconcerned about the impact of what they put on television. That includes the 100,000 acts of violence, ranging from a "menacing threat with a weapon" (226 examples in one day's monitoring by the Center for Media and Public Affairs) to "serious assaults excluding use of guns" (389 incidents), that the average child will have watched by the end of elementary school. Too often, television is not about pro-

tecting speech, it is about protecting a business, and pretending otherwise is foolish.

The much-lauded Steven Bochco is offering a new series this fall on ABC, "NYPD Blue," which, it has been widely predicted, will "push the edge of the envelope" of profanity, nudity and artistic violence. This show is often cited as the work of a highly creative mind that could be hindered by the imposition of taste standards, even the puny one of labeling. I'm sure that Bochco will be just artistic as all get-out, but what happens when he gets bored with the show, as

See VIOLENCE, G5, Col. 1

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he did with "L.A. Law," and leaves it in the hands of lesser mortals? We'll be left with a flabby envelope and no art.

We have an unfortunate tradition in this country of putting the "rights" of adults before the needs of children. You can see that demonstrated every day in courthouses, classrooms and social work bureaucracies everywhere. Television is no exception: Every socially useful change that has been made in recent years—like the elimination of cigarette and liquor advertising or identifying the early evening hours for "family" viewing—has been forced down the networks' throats. Somehow, I am not convinced that they want to use the First Amendment in my family's interest.

"The whole issue is very circular," Marcy Kelly, president of a watchdog and education group based in Los Angeles called Mediascope, told

Let's segregate all the violent shows on one channel—the V Network. If that works, we can move on to the Stupid Sitcom Network, the Humiliating Game Show Channel and the Grotesque Talk Show Broadcasting System.

CQ Researcher. "The writer will say, 'That's what the producer wants me to write.' The producer will say, 'That's what the network wants.' The network will say, 'That's what the advertisers want.' The advertisers will say, 'That's what the public wants.' The question is, how can we break the circle?"

Well, I have a few ideas.

911" and "Unsolved Mysteries"—that could conceivably be classified as violent. Most of the top-rated shows are sitcoms or newsmagazines—in other words, just programs that consist of tasteless jokes, sexual and racial stereotypes, and the occasional thoughtful, well-researched exposé. But not violence.

A Times-Mirror survey of more than 1,500 adults released last March found that 80 percent thought that television violence—whether on the networks or cable—was harmful to society, compared with 64 percent who thought so in 1983. The number who thought it was "very harmful" (as opposed to just plain harmful) increased from 26 percent to 47 percent. The most frequent viewers of violent programs were those under the age of 30.

Do people watch violent shows because they want violence or because that is what's there? If television producers really confronted the issue, they would have to admit that throwing another fistfight or choke hold into the script is an easy way to create tension and drama, while doing it with words and nonviolent plot twists is much harder. I suspect it is the "creative community" that is addicted to violence, not the viewers.

One way to find out how big the audience for violence really is would be to segregate all the violent shows onto one channel—the V Network, we'll call it—which would be available to cable subscribers, for a fee. If that works we can move on to the Stupid Sitcom Network, the Humiliating Game Show Channel and the Grotesque Talk Show Broadcasting System, and make things a lot easier for the consumer.

At the press conference, it was interesting to hear the big network cheeses refer to their own children as they pledged to serve up more programming they are not ashamed of. Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.), who is the anti-violence point man on this issue, also spoke about a CBS meeting he'd been told about in which one executive asked the others, "Would you like our children to be watching these programs?" Howard Stringer (CBS) mentioned his 5-month-old and Warren Littlefield (NBC) his three children, to demonstrate how genuine their concern is about the quality of television. Funny how people feel differently when it's their own kids.

Whenever I interview people in the film or television business I always ask them if they restrict or monitor their child's television watching. They always say they do (maybe just to seem like better par-

And when asked about the question of violence on television, he said, "There's nothing we can do about it except continue to be critical. To protect our children we must be hypocrites."

I guess that's me.

I am not a person who wants to eradicate all trash on television. Nor

the day that my kids don't ask, "Can I watch TV?" And then, "Why not?"

I could use some help. I feel as if I spend too much time as a parent censoring and saying no, and fighting off the unceasing lures thrown out by the Howard Stringers of the world.

Network executives sold advertising on the premise that commercials would prod us lowly viewers to buy products, but refused to admit that the programs surrounding the commercials could possibly influence anyone to do anything.

do I think Looney Tunes should be listed among the most violent shows, as the National Coalition on Television Violence does. I have friends, and even relatives, who write for and act on television, and other friends who would love to do so. I am happy to assert my responsibility as a parent and issue dictums that make my children think I am Cruella de Vil. I know that little boys will draw pictures of guns, and always have drawn pictures of guns, regardless of how much violence they see on television. And I do not think a television show causes someone to go out and commit murder; it just gives them an excuse after the fact.

But I admit it: If there were such a thing as the Taste Police, I would want to be the chief. We all think we know what's best, especially when it comes to our children. And tell me, have the presidents of NBC, CBS, ABC and the schlock-specialists at Fox Broadcasting done such a great job of looking out for our interests?

I have always believed that television is a tool you should teach your children to master, not avoid, because it is unavoidable. Throwing it out is a solution, but that doesn't teach children to make choices. In my household, we don't allow television on school nights, for example, and we try to limit it at other times. But the pill of the black box in the corner is always there, and rare is

A technological aid—a device that would allow me to block out programs I expect to be inappropriate—fills me with a combination of dread and curiosity. I will never buy those 500 channels we are being promised (aren't you glad some of our best minds are working on giving us that television breakthrough instead of conquering world hunger?). But spending some of my rare non-working hours programming a week's worth of television blockage is not my idea of quality time.

A call to Circuit City elicited the information that I can now buy a television with a "parent control capability." I could program when it would turn on and off, and block out some channels. This would cost me only between \$600 and \$700. Perhaps Dick Wolf or Steven Bochco would like to buy me one.

My stepson told me someone has invented a bicycle-powered television, which would certainly cut down on viewing in our household. I'm not sure it really deals with the violence question, however.

So, for now, I'll take the labels. I would prefer that the creators of television would produce less violence (and less garbage in general), but perhaps this initiative will help make that happen. It is, at least, an acknowledgment that what they put on the air really does affect human life, and for that I am grateful. Previously, network executives sold advertising on the premise that commercials would prod us lowly viewers to buy products, but refused to admit that the programs surrounding the commercials could possibly influence anyone to do anything.

I hope the industry, including the cable operators and independent producers who refused to sign on to the two-year labeling experiment, will take seriously the companion plan to sensitize producers, writers and program developers to violence. The objective is to do for violence what they did for seat belts, drug use and cigarette and alcohol consumption—glamorize the good stuff and downplay the bad.

There is a real possibility that nothing will change. In that case I will have no choice: I will have to take the television out and throw a bomb at it. I sure hope nobody else will be hit by the flying debris.

RECENT COMMENTS ON TELEVISION VIOLENCE as of July 1992

"Violence: Merely Entertaining or Mainly Evil?" Dr. Carole Lieberman, Los Angeles Times, May 15, 1992

"We readily accept that children learn the alphabet from 'Sesame Street,' why can't we accept that they learn the ABCs of murder and mayhem from gratuitously violent entertainment?"

"Violence sells. So does crack cocaine. Does that make it O.K.?"

"Individual writers, producers and executives feel overwhelmed by the concept that what they write, produce or choose to air could change the likes of millions of people, so they deny the power of their work to avoid a responsibility they often feel ill-equipped to handle?"

"Television and Violence: The Scale of the Problem and Where to Go from Here." Dr. Brandon S. Centerwall, The Journal of the American Medical Association, June 10, 1992

"In light of recent research findings, in 1990 the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a policy statement: Pediatricians should advise parents to limit their children's television viewing to one to two hours per day."

"Whereas infants have instinctive desire to imitate observed human behavior, they do not possess an instinct for gauging a priori whether a behavior ought to be imitated. They will imitate anything, including behaviors that most adults would regard as destructive and antisocial."

"...up through ages three and four years, many children are unable to distinguish fact from fantasy in television programs and remain unable to do so despite adult coaching. In the minds of such young children, television is a source of entirely factual information regarding how the world works."

"In a national opinion poll, 43 percent of adult Americans affirm that television violence 'plays a part in making America a violent society,' and an additional 37 percent find the thesis at least plausible (only 16 percent frankly disbelieve the proposition.)"

"...the epidemiologic evidence indicates that if, hypothetically, television technology had never been developed, there would be 10,000 fewer homicides each year in the United States, 70,000 fewer rapes, and 700,000 fewer injurious assaults."

"Issues of 'quality' and 'social responsibility' are entirely peripheral to the issue of maximizing audience size within a competitive market-and there is no formula more tried and true than violence for reliably generating large audiences that can be sold to advertisers."

"Children's exposure to television and television violence should become part of the public health agenda, along with safety seats, bicycle helmets, immunizations and good nutrition."

Fateful Choices, Fred M. Hechinger, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992

"It is estimated by the time youngsters graduate from high school, many of them will have watched television 22,000 hours, compared to only half that number spent in school. By eighteen, young people will have been exposed to as many as 18,000 televised murders and 800 suicides."

An average of 80.3 percent of all television programs contain violent acts, and a typical program includes 5.21 such incidents.

Deborah Prothrow-Stith, an assistant dean in Harvard's School of Public Health, "calls for a movement like that fueling the anti-smoking and drunk driving campaigns ... Television and movies should portray the pain and suffering, the bad outcomes of violence."

**"Big World, Small Screen: The Role of Television in American Society,"
American Psychological Association (APA), 1992**

The rate of violence on prime-time television is about five to six incidents per hour, whereas the rate of violence on children's Saturday morning programs is 20 to 25 acts per hour.

The average child witnesses 8,000 murders by the time he/she graduates from elementary school and witnesses more than 100,000 assorted acts of violence.

"Many of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in our society are also the heaviest users of television, in part because television is a default option used when other activities are not available."

**"Does Media Violence Beget the Real Thing?" Jeremy Iggers, Minneapolis
Star Tribune, June 13, 1992**

Almost twenty years ago, sociologist Rose Goldsen of the University of Pennsylvania warned that America is engaged in the world's first coast-to-coast experiment in behavior modification, and no one can foretell what the consequences will be.

"...(Rose Goldsen) wrote an essay in which she argued that viewers of television violence experienced a pattern of alternating stimulation and abrupt interruption (caused by commercials) that closely resembles the desensitization techniques used by psychologists to modify behavior. After repeated treatments with these techniques, said Goldsen, even the strongest psychological connections can be broken down."

"Contemporary heroes and villains are different The enemy is usually totally vicious and depraved, and in some cases not human. The hero's job is not to bring the villain to justice, but rather to destroy him or it."

"In a world where the violence that looks real is really just make-believe, and the real violence is made to look like a game, can we expect people to have a serious understanding of the meaning of violence?"

**"TV, Film Link to Reality of Violence," Diego Ribadeneira, The Boston Globe,
May 12, 1992**

"Any form of legal restriction should not be attempted and would not be attempted and would not work because of the threat it would pose for the First Amendment."
— Edward Donnerstein, a professor in the department of communication at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

"No one is claiming that television violence is the sole cause of this epidemic" of youth violence, said Leonard D. Eron, a professor of psychology at the University of Illinois in Chicago. "However, it is one of the causes and it is one that something can be done about. Is it too much to ask the television industry to police itself?"

**"Just Another Murder, Just Another Show," Judy Mann, The Washington Post,
May 13, 1992**

"In the report, Deborah Prothrow-Stith, an assistant dean in Harvard's School of Public Health, told of a 13-year-old who was hospitalized for a gunshot wound: "He was surprised because it hurt."

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

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 86-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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