

Mime-Version: 1.0

Date: Wed, 20 May 1998 12:18:37 -0400

From: Cherie_Harder@brownback.senate.gov (Cherie Harder)

Subject: Commerce Hearing

To: ggerbner@nimbus.ocis.temple.edu (Dr. George Gerbner)

Status:

TV
Newswatch
RATINGS
Senator
Murray
Elizabeth
-
winning - Parents

had a
electric
music
complaint
own
mail
TV
companies

Not put
labels -
during
ownership
record
companies
contracts

Dear Dr. Gerbner:

It was good to talk to you earlier today; here is some additional information about the upcoming hearing.

The hearing will be held Tuesday, June 16, from 2-4pm in the Commerce, Science and Transportation hearing room. Senator McCain is the chair of the Commerce Committee, but Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS), with the consent of Sen. McCain, will chair this hearing.

The purpose of this hearing will be to examine the extent to which parental advisory labels on music with violent and/or misogynistic or obscene lyrics are effective -- that is, the extent to which they inform parents, affect consumer behavior, affect retailer behavior, etc. A few questions which may be considered: do lyrics help inform parents or do they give industry a license to be "as bad as they want to be"? Are labeled albums marketed to the very group (children) they are supposed to warn? Have parental advisory labels affected teen music preferences? There may also be some discussion of the lyrics themselves, and what their impact on young people is.

agreed -
Yes

If you would like more information on Senator Brownback or on the hearing "Music Violence: How Does It Affect Our Youth? An Examination of the Impact of Violent Music Lyrics on Youth Behavior and Well-Being in the District of Columbia and Across the Nation" which he chaired last November, you may log on to his web site at www.senate.gov/~brownback

You will receive a formal invitation to testify from the Senate Commerce Committee shortly. You will be asked to submit copies of your testimony to the Commerce Committee around 48 hours ahead of the scheduled hearing. (The invitation will tell you to submit 100 copies; if you can get our office a couple of copies a day before the Committee deadline, we can make the copies here.) Please send me your mailing address and fax number so the invitation can be sent as soon as possible. It would also be helpful to have a bio.

If you have suggestions on other witnesses for this hearing, please let me know. And feel free to contact me with any additional questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Cherie Harder
Domestic Policy Director
Office of Senator Sam Brownback
phone: 202-224-6521
fax: 202-228-1265

CHERIE_HARDER@BROWNBACK.SENATE.GOV

To: Cherie_Harder@brownback.senate.gov (Cherie Harder)
From: George Gerbner <ggerbner@nimbus.temple.edu>
Subject: Re: Commerce Hearing
Cc: Brian Linson <cemad@libertynet.org>
Bcc:
X-Attachments:

Dear Ms. Harder:

Here are some thoughts:

1. MUSIC VIDEOS

We could get numbers counting:

- Violence as a theme in videos
- Sex as a theme in videos
- For comparison "family" as a theme
- Percentage of characters involved in sex interaction in videos.
- Percentage of characters involved in violence
- Same with alcohol tobacco and drugs.

2. EXPLICIT LYRICS LABELS on RECORDS

They shift the burden onto parents while freeing record companies from responsibility.

They make records more attractive to youth.

Merchants report better sales on music with warnings.

They aren't legally enforced. A child need only assure the merchant of their parent's consent, and only if he feels there's a need to ask.

Labels allow certain issues to be ignored. If it is illegal to market tobacco to kids, why would there be no labels on songs that speak favorably about smoking and drinking? (I have a list of song lyrics mentioning tobacco.)

3. GLOBAL MEDIA MONOPOLIES

They reduce accountability.

Marketing concerns are pushing out higher ideals.

Music videos are a marketing tool for record sales. Global monopolies force music video makers to make music videos for global market. The violence in music videos is necessary to reach a global marketplace which needs easily translatable images.

Media monopolies lack diversity in ownership. These are male-owned companies. Where are the women's stories in all this violence?

4. ALCOHOL & TOBACCO.

Time Warner owns magazines, which promote movies they make, which promote soundtrack albums they make which are all promoted in the tv shows they make. Seagram's also owns movie, tv, and record companies. We have seen that Seagrams, Bertelsmann, and Time Warner appear to be making music videos which promote alcohol and tobacco as happy, risk-free lifestyle features.

5. MUSIC LYRICS AREN'T AS BIG A PROBLEM AS MUSIC VIDEOS.

Music is a personalized selective process with consumer choice determining content. Television is much more crucial. It is an environment whose content is determined by a small group of corporations. The viewer has no choice, and with televised music videos, the only option is to watch a conglomerate-controlled station which plays the same few videos over and over again.

Please let me know if any of the above may be of interest. .

6/10/98
Brian well
send
↙

For a tangentially relevant piece now in press, read the following. (The Figures will not survive e-mail. Can fax if interested.

DEADLY CHOICE: VIOLENCE OR ALCOHOL

Uses and Abuses of TV Ratings

By George Gerbner

The much-ballyhooed television program rating game is on. Signs like TV-G, TV-PG, TV-K and TV-M have been flickering on the upper left corner of your screen since January 1, 1997. If you haven't noticed, you're in good company. The movie-style rating system is an uninformative scheme that deceives the public and protects industry from parents rather than the other way around.

If you have been puzzled about what these "advisories" mean, or lax about following them, or slack about providing parental guidance when you see TV-PG flashed on the screen, or just blinked and missed it, don't feel bad. That is just how the rating system is supposed to work.

The Chicago Tribune reported on March 18, 1998:

"Yes, the hodgepodge of letters and numbers, instituted by the television industry under pressure from Congress and parent-advocacy groups, has been both ignored and derided since its debut in January 1997 and refinement last fall.

" One recent study, conducted by the Associated Press, found that 7 of 10 adults were paying it little or no mind. Many major newspapers, including this one, have not been publishing the ratings in their television programming guides.

" Parents at a congressional hearing in Peoria last spring ripped into the original ratings, which only labeled shows movie-style, based on recommended ages for viewers. When the rest of the industry agreed after Peoria to add content indicators to the age-based ratings, the most popular network, NBC, refused to do so.

" But all of that has a chance to change with the news last week that the FCC has given the ratings ... official seal of approval..."

Well, fat chance. Most parents don't know about the ratings, or don't use them, or, if they did, don't know what they're getting instead. In any case, they assume that broadcasters, rather than the public, own the airways and that they air whatever is most popular.

Wrong again.

Mindless TV violence is not an expression of artistic freedom or of any measure of reality or popularity. On the contrary, it is the product of a de facto censorship: a global marketing formula and rating system imposed on program creators and foisted on the children of the world.

The political process that rammed through the business-as-usual rating system was orchestrated by Mr. Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association of America, Inc., one of the top Washington, D.C. lobbyists, and creator of the motion picture ratings that he cloned onto television.

The process included a series of "consultations" with parents' and children's advocacy groups. I attended one of these meetings as President of the Cultural Environment Movement, a coalition for equity and fairness in media.

All organizations present urged Valenti to design a system that provides reasons for the ratings so that parents can make informed decisions. Mr. Valenti first stonewalled; months later he gave in under pressure. But then syndicators rebelled and refused to label cartoons, where of course most of the violence is.

The system that has now thus been patched up and rammed down the public's throats has four fatal flaws.

First, it confuses the choices made in movie-going with the very different decisions of television viewing. You select a movie and go out to see it, or pick a video to bring home. By contrast, television comes into the home an average of seven hours a day. It is watched more by the clock than by the program. To monitor your child's viewing you have to be a full-time television watchdog. Opening credits (when the ratings flash on) are not the decisive choice points in television viewing.

Second, it results in inconsistencies in rating. With the number of programs on television, producers will rate their own programs. Therefore, inconsistencies are inevitable. "Tonight Show with Jay Leno" was given a TV-14 but "Late Show With David Letterman" a TV-PG. Without a common standard, "none of it will mean anything," says Warner Brothers network head Jamie Kellner. "A WB 'PG' will be different than a Fox 'PG,' and that will be a disservice to everybody."

Third, ratings designed by the industry and programmed into the V-Chip is like letting the fox (no pun intended) guard the chicken coop. Perhaps the best feature of the V-Chip is that no one knows how it works, and some of those who know think that it doesn't work well at all. One of these is Barry Diller, former ABC Vice-President, Fox CEO, and Home-Shopping QVC Chairman. "The whole idea of the V-Chip," he says, "is an absurd concept. It's simply unworkable. But it's nice to talk about, it's good to get a bunch of people to Washington and have their photo taken. It's good to stand there and say we're doing something for America. In fact, it won't work. But other than that, it's a lovely idea."

Fourth, even if the "family" (G) rating cuts down one one deadly substance, it open the door to another: happy, risk-free alcohol.

□

As shown in Figure (1) and Table (1), G-rated shows still expose viewers to an hourly average of 2.4 acts of violence and 2.5 scenes of alcohol.

Figure 1. AVERAGE NUMBER OF ALCOHOL AND VIOLENCE SCENES

TV-G TV-PG TV-14

However, TV-PG rating increases the frequency of alcohol scenes to 3.4 per hour, and TV-14 rating increases the frequency of alcohol scenes to 4.4 per hour. There is more alcohol than violence in the most violent shows.

Table 1. AVERAGE NUMBER OF ALCOHOL AND VIOLENCE SCENES

Rating label	TV-G	TV-PG	TV-14	
% of sample with rating		18%	64%	18%
Alcohol scenes per hour		2.5	3.4	4.4
Violence scenes per hour		2.4	4.1	3.6

If age-grading is a mixed bag, content labeling has its problems as well. In response to lobbying by citizen action groups throughout 1996 and 1997, content labels are used in the ratings of most network programs. Shows are marked for violence (V), language (L), sex (S), and adult themes (D).

Prime time dramatic programming with a "V" label presents ~~11~~ scenes of violence every 11 minutes, compared ~~with~~ every 38 minutes for shows without any content label.

□

In Figure (2) and Table (2), shows are grouped into those with no content label, those with D or S or L (but no V), and those with the V (violence) label. (NBC, which initially opted out of content labelling, is not

Figure 2 ALCOHOL AND VIOLENCE SCENES BY CONTENT LABELS

No label D or S or L V

represented.) It can be seen that depictions of alcohol on prime time appear to be coupled with adult themes, adult language, and sex.

Table 2. ALCOHOL AND VIOLENCE SCENES BY CONTENT LABELS

Content labels	(none)	D,S,L	V	
% of sample with label	41%	30%	30%	
Alcohol scenes per hour	3.3	5.0	2.9	
Violence scenes per hour	1.6	2.4	5.3	

What shall we make of all that?

Our children are growing up in homes where television tells most of the stories. Before they go to school, which used to be the first time they encountered the larger culture, they are integrated into a television view of the world. That is not the view of parents, schools, communities or even countries. Neither is it the view of creative people with something to tell. It is the view of a handful of global conglomerates with something to sell.

That radical change has altered the socialization of children and transformed the mainstream of the cultural environment. Alone in all the democratic countries, it has surrendered the public airways to a marketing operation, with devastating consequences. Paying for all that marketing (with a levy added to the price of every advertised good and service, whether we use it or not) is a form of taxation without representation.

Our Cultural Indicators (CI) research project has monitored the world of prime time and Saturday morning children's programs for the last thirty years. So let's take violence as an example of one feature that ratings are supposed to reflect.

Humankind may have had more bloodthirsty eras, but none as filled with images of violence as the present. We are awash in a tide of violent representations the world has never seen. There is no escape from the massive invasion of colorful mayhem into the homes and cultural life of ever larger areas of the world.

We found prime time television saturated by an average of five scenes of violence per hour. Over twenty scenes of violence per hour fill Saturday morning cartoon programs.

Violence, whether serious or humorous, is essentially a demonstration of power. It shows who can get away with what against whom.

The ratio of violence to victimization defines the price to be paid for committing violence. When one group can commit violence with relative impunity, the price it pays for violence is relatively low. When a group suffers more violence than it commits, the price is high. In general, women, children, young people, lower

income, disabled and Asian Americans are at the bottom of the television violence "pecking order."

We have also found that those who watch more television in every group express a greater sense of apprehension, mistrust, and insecurity than do light viewers in the same groups. We call this the "mean world syndrome." Whatever real dangers lurk outside people's homes, viewing violent television cultivates fears and dependencies that make some groups more vulnerable than others to exploitation and victimization. Ultimately, therefore, marketing mayhem contributes to domination and repression.

Ratings cannot alleviate the human, social, and political fallout of the "mean world syndrome." Can they at least keep viewers from flocking to violent programs? Wrong once again. Another well kept secret is that violence on television is not popular. Many studies have found that even though audiences are desensitized to violence, they don't like it. Our CI project has documented the fact that violence depresses the Nielsen ratings.

Why, then, all that violence? Here is the final secret, and challenge to conventional wisdom. What drives violence on the airways is not popularity but global marketing. This is how it works.

What you see on TV is not what the people want. What you see is what the advertisers think will attract an audience at the least cost. "Cost per thousand" is the unit of measurement, where the size of the audience is divided by the dollar cost of the time the advertiser pays to insert the commercial message. Viewers are the fish, programs the bait.

Production costs are climbing above what domestic advertising markets can support. Producers and syndicators reach for the global market.

What is the dramatic ingredient best suited to the global market? It is one that needs no translation, that is image-driven, that speaks "action" in any language, and that fits into any culture. That ingredient is violence.

What global programmers may lose domestically by saturating programs with violence, they more than make up by selling it cheap to many countries. When you can dump a Power Rangers on 300 million children in 80 countries, shutting out domestic artists and cultural products, you don't have to care who wants it and who gets hurt in the process.

What shall we do?

Media watch groups, children's and parents' advocates, and other public interest organizations should make their voices heard on the real issues. They are issues of gender equity and general diversity in media ownership, employment, and representations. They are issues of marketing-driven media monopolization, homogenization and globalization. In the last analysis, let us not get bogged down in rating system trivialities. Citizens own the airways. We should demand that it be healthy, free, and fair, and not just "rated."

George Gerbner is Bell Atlantic Professor of Telecommunication at Temple University and Dean Emeritus of The Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania.

For further reading:

Books

Invisible Crises: What Conglomerate Media Control Means for America and the World. With Hamid Mowlana and Herbert Schiller (eds.) Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996.

Violence and Terror in the Media: An Annotated Bibliography. With Nancy Signorielli. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988.

Papers, reports, articles, chapters

"Stories of Violence and the Public Interest." In Kees Brants, Joke Hermes and Liesbet van Zoonen (Eds.) The Media in Question; Popular Cultures and Public Interests. London: Sage, 1998.

"TV Violence and What to Do About It." Nieman Reports, Fall 1996, pp. 10-12.

"Alcohol in American Culture." In Susan E Martin, (ed.) Alcohol and the Mass Media: Issues, Approaches and Research Directions. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, U.S. Public Health Service, Washington, D.C., 1995.

"Television Violence: The Power and the Peril." In Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (eds.) Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Text-Reader. Sage Publications, Inc.: 1995. French translation ("Pouvoir at Danger de la Violence Televisee") in Les Cahiers de la Securite Interieure, Paris, No. 20,2, 1995.

"The Politics of Media Violence: Some Reflections." In Mass Communication Research: On Problems and Policies. Cees Hamelink and Olga Linne (Eds.) Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1993.

"Violence and Drugs on Television; the Cultural Environment Approach to Prevention." A research report to the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention, U.S. Public Health Service, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C., 1993.

"Stories That Hurt: Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drugs in the Mass Media." In Youth and Drugs: Society's Mixed Messages. OSAP Prevention Monograph-6, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 1990.

"Violence and Terror in the Mass Media," Reports and Papers in Mass Communication, No. 102. Paris: Unesco, 1988.

"Health and Medicine on Television." (With Larry Gross, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorielli). The New England Journal of Medicine, October 8, 1981.

Mime-Version: 1.0
Date: Mon, 1 Jun 1998 15:07:42 -0400
From: Cherie_Harder@brownback.senate.gov (Cherie Harder)
Subject: Re[3]: Commerce Hearing
To: George Gerbner <ggerbner@nimbus.ocis.temple.edu>
Cc: Brian Linson <cemad@libertynet.org>,
"Harriet K. Goodheart" <hgoodhea@thunder.ocis.temple.edu>,
Peter <pwirth@ican.net>
Status:

Dear Dr. Gerbner:

Thank you for the kind wishes; vacation was as carefree and happy as could be hoped. As to your questions: although our office will be publicizing the event, you should feel free to do your own press as well (in fact, we encourage it). Our press releases will focus on the hearing itself (some of them may only include the names and titles of witnesses); you may want to send releases that emphasize your background, research, and expertise in this area.

As far as coordination, we'll be happy to send you copies of press releases, and would appreciate being sent copies of the media that you receive and notice of TV interviews (we'd like to tape interviews and stories relating to the hearing). Most of the press work for the hearing will be handled by Sen. Brownback's press secretary, Erik Hotmire. We have not yet sent out press releases, but have already started to field calls from various media outlets, and are expecting extensive coverage. Feel free to call with any questions.

Sincerely,

Cherie Harder

To: Cherie_Harder@brownback.senate.gov (Cherie Harder)
From: George Gerbner <ggerbner@nimbus.temple.edu>
Subject: One more point
Cc:
Bcc:
X-Attachments:

One more point to make is that the monopolization and gonglomeratiation (cross-media) ownership is reducing diversity and choice. When the same companies own TV, music, and distribution channels, you have a large multiplying effect on what used to be minority targeting. Parents are concerned not so much because the phenomena are new but because it is becoming harder to escape even for the selective buyer/visers. gg

To: Cherie_Harder@brownback.senate.gov (Cherie Harder)
From: George Gerbner <ggerbner@nimbus.temple.edu>
Subject: Re: One more point
Cc:
Bcc:
X-Attachments:

> Hi

My mailing address:

234 Golf View Rd.
Ardmore, PA 19003

>
> Dear Dr. Gerbner:

> Would you mind sending me your mailing address? The formal
> invitations should go out soon, but I don't have a street address or
> zip code for you. Thank you.

> I will call you next week to give you an update on the hearing, other
> witnesses, etc.

> Cherie Harder

> _____ Reply Separator _____

>Subject: One more point
>Author: George Gerbner <ggerbner@nimbus.ocis.temple.edu> at internet
>Date: 5/20/98 04:52 PM

>
>
>One more point to make is that the monopolization and conglomeratiation
>(cross-media) ownership is reducing diversity and choice. When the same
>companies own TV, music, and distribution channels, you have a large
>multiplying effect on what used to be minority targeting. Parents are
>concerned not so much because the phenomena are new but because it is
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>
>
>George Gerbner
>Bell Atlantic Professor of Telecommunication
>Temple University, Philadelphia. Tel/fax 610 642 3061
>E-mail:ggerbner@nimbus.temple.edu

X-Sender: pwirth@pop.rochester.ny.us.ican.net
Date: Tue, 09 Jun 1998 12:54:53 -0400
To: George Gerbner <ggerbner@nimbus.ocis.temple.edu>
From: Pete Wirth <pwirth@ican.net>
Subject: Re:
Cc: cemad@spruce.libertynet.org
Mime-Version: 1.0
Status:

>George,

I just got off the phone with Cherie Harder who works at the Senate Commerce Committee.

I e-mailed her a copy of your bio and the list of reporters who I send press release to.

I haven't seen any material yet on your presentation in DC so I think this is the best way to handle it. I leave for NY Thursday morning and won't be back in my office until Monday morning.

Cherie did mention that they would like a 100 copies of your presentation. I believe I saw an e-mail message saying they would xerox it if they got it in time.

Cherie said that Virginia Pounds is the person to contact for xeroxing. Her no. is 202-224-1251. Cherie said she would also be willing to run interference if you need any assistance. her no. is 202-224-6521W, 703-812-9304 H.

I also spoke with Marcia Stevenson from the radio show The Source Report. She said she spoke with you and faxed directions for the interview on Tuesday, June 16 at 10:30M. Her no. is 703-413-8436 if you need to reach her.

I think that does it for now.

Pete
CC. Brian