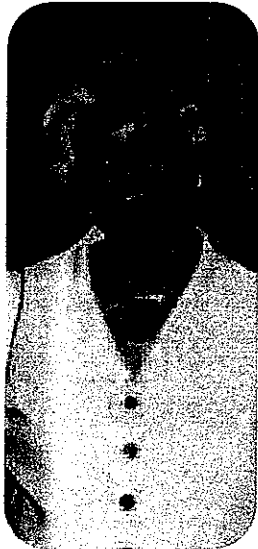
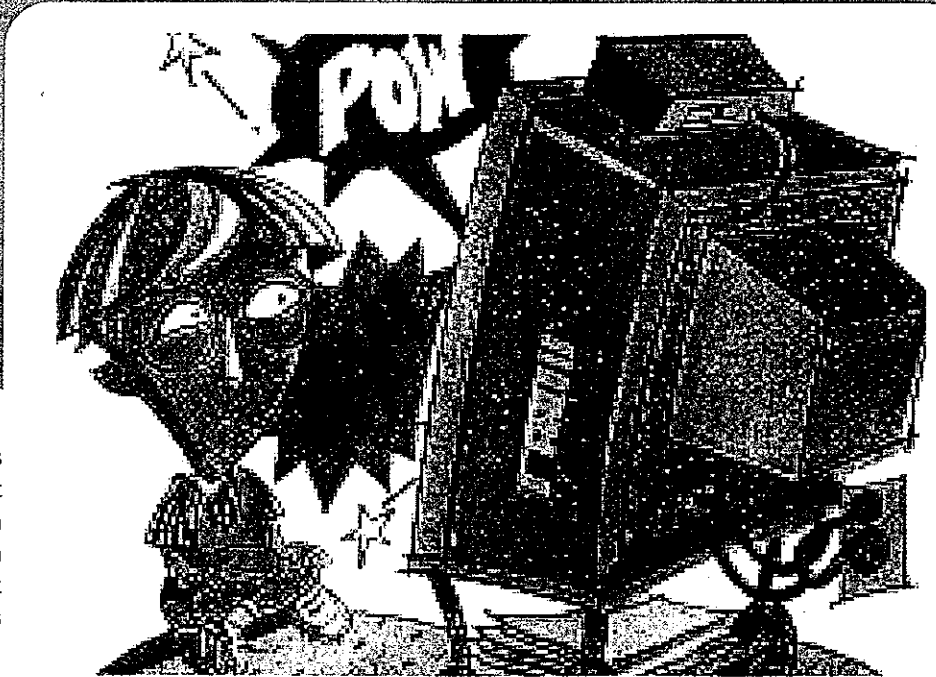


PAWNS IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC FORCES



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Youth violence is arguably the biggest and most important issue facing the world today



At a Conference co-ordinated by Canadians Concerned About Violence In Entertainment (C-CAVE) at the University of Toronto, Canada in 1984, C. Everett Koop, U.S. Surgeon General at the time, called it one of the most serious and urgent mental health problems facing the world.

Since then, of course, things have gotten much worse. In recent decades there has been a worldwide explosion of violent crime. Per capita assaults in Canada alone went up almost fivefold between 1964 and 1993. In September, 2001 it was reported in Canada's *The Toronto Star* that the city now has over 200 youth gangs. Similar conditions involving youth gangs are now prevalent throughout most large urban centres around the world.

Marginal dips in homicide rates compared to aggravated assaults are meaningless. Although medical advances in the past fifty years have managed to lessen the rate at which violence is successfully killing people, they have failed to reduce the extent to which violence is used to resolve conflict in the first place. In fact, the United States now has the highest rate of imprisonment of any industrialized nation in the world.

Where is all of this taking us?

Children are our canaries in the coal mines. Escalating youth violence is an indicator of where we are headed as a society if we do not begin to take seriously mounting evidence, empirical and otherwise, that movies, TV and video games, in particular, are conditioning children to be violent, unaware of the consequences and, in actual fact, teaching them the very mechanics of killing. Video

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games are especially pernicious because arcades, frequented by young people, are more removed from parental vigilance and supervision

than, for example, television sets. Also, their interactive nature essentially makes them "murder simulators". They have given rise to the increasing

prevalence of what U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel, David Grossman calls AVIDS (Acquired Violence Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

Other harmful effects such as desensitization, fear of violence - real and imagined, anxiety and insecurity are intensified and, as a result, further mitigate human progress toward a culture of peace and long term social sustainability. Also, there is the growing problem of obesity and heart disease for young people as a result of too much sedentary activity and not enough exercise.

A blue print for action on the part of all sectors of society is now required which goes considerably beyond the usual emphasis on what parents can do. Consistent viewing rules for children and discussion of the content is, of course, always helpful but a much more effective strategy would be for young people to avoid videogames as entertainment entirely because even more benign ones will eventually help the player to develop an appetite for more violent ones.

Much more vigilance on the part of society at large is required if we are to seriously address

the culture of violence that is now spreading throughout the world, whether it is manifested in high school shootings, "funk balls" in the

slums of Brazil where hoards of teenagers meet regularly in "Mortal Kombat, or terrorist attacks on World Trade Centres, fuelled by the 270 or so films on such mayhem produced and distributed by around the world by Hollywood in the

last two decades alone.

We must learn to avoid the "pimp logic" that "we only get what we want", promoted by media apologists who claim constitutional protection for endless strategizing in board rooms on how children can be seduced into buying their products, literally from the time they are first born. Instead, zero tolerance is needed for this socially corrosive accommodation of business as usual with no strings attached. The lunacy of relying on "voluntary industry self-regulation" must be compared to how other toxic products are treated on the market - products like cocaine, tobacco and guns which cannot be legally sold to children.

Concerned parents and young people need to support emerging initiatives in all countries whether these are legislative proposals to curb children's access to violent cultural products, tougher penalties for those who market such products to children or the

imposition of higher taxes on violent media such as video games.

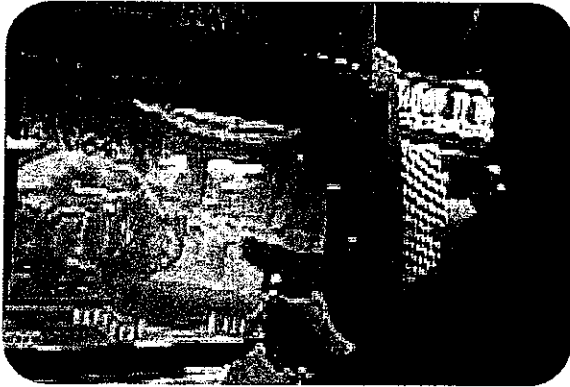
In a free market economy, the law is an especially effective teacher because it provides for civil liability as a way of curbing industry recklessness, irresponsibility and lack of accountability. Regular publication of lists of the top 10-20 companies who benefit from selling violence to children would also be a useful guide for anyone wanting to address the problem by making smarter choices in how they spend their leisure time. It would also make an interesting and educational project in media literacy for young people. Not to be overlooked is the golden opportunity we all have during election campaigns to ask candidates what they intend to do about the problem, particularly when they are seeking re-election.

We need more emphasis on the development of industry codes of conduct in countries where they do not yet exist and better adherence

in places like Canada where they do exist. In other words, the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council www.cbsc.ca/english/codes/violence.htm and all such Councils in the world, should hear from anyone displeased with television programming in any way, shape or form.

Precedents are already established in several countries. But before such codes of conduct can work in any country, whether these apply to violence, sex

role stereotyping, foul language, sexual exploitation or racial profiling, either in advertising or the programs themselves, more vigilance from governments is required to ensure that



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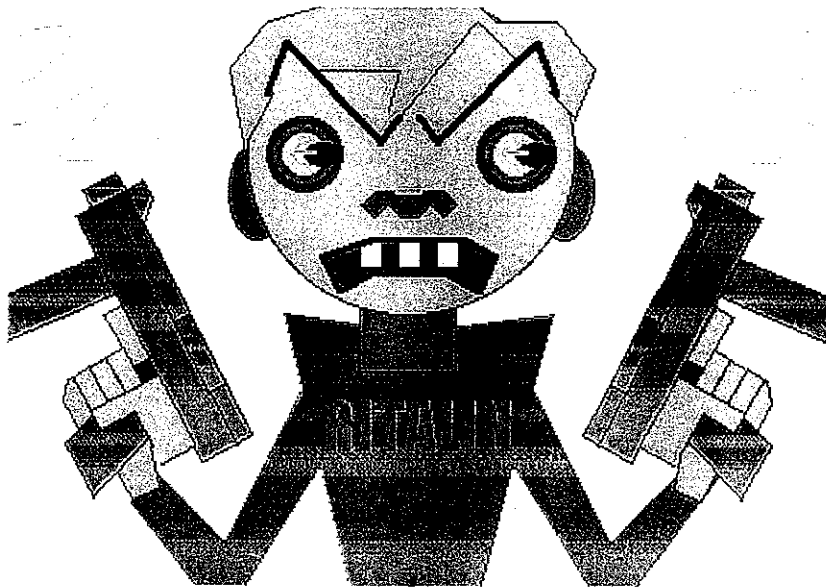
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media industries actually adhere to them. In Canada, the regulatory body responsible for such adherence is the CRTC. In the U.S., it is the FCC. Most developed democracies around the world have similar Commissions set up to regulate on behalf of the public interest.

Much has been said over the years about the need for both government and industry regulation within the media industries. To expect voluntary compliance from councils set up by industry, with out government appointed watchdogs - now the prevailing practice in most cases - is tantamount to insanity, sometimes defined as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.



TRAGEDY & RECOVERY



On the other hand, there is a great deal that young people, themselves, can do to address the problem of media violence. There is, of course, the need to resist peer pressure to conform to the consumption patterns of violence saturated popular cultural products that aggressive marketeers are counting on with their tunnel vision on the bottom line. By, themselves, choosing to indulge in more wholesome, life enhancing and less culturally polluting forms of entertainment - young people can send a clear signal to the corporate captains of the media at large that they refuse to be pawns in the global economic forces that threaten us all with long term environmental unsustainability. 

Rose Dyson is an independent media consultant with a doctorate in adult education completed in 1995 at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She also has a background in counselling, drama and psychiatric nursing. Since 1986 she has chaired Canadians Concerned About Violence In Entertainment and is an External Research Associate at the LaMarsh Centre on Violence And Conflict Resolution at York University, Toronto, Canada. Her expertise is widely

sought by the mass media and her best selling book, *MIND ABUSE: Media Violence In An Information Age* published by Black Rose Books in Montreal, Quebec www.web.net/blackrosebooks includes over 55 recommendations on how the problem of media violence can be addressed in all sectors of society. It is available for \$19.95 and can be purchased in any book store or by phoning 1-800-565-9523. rdyson@oise.utoronto.ca