

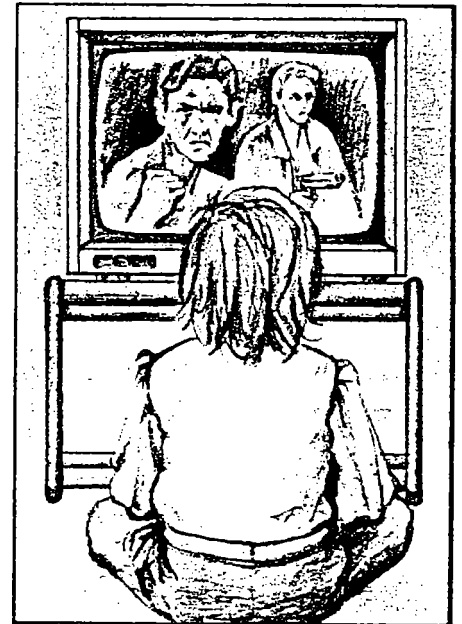
# THE CQ Researcher

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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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*Formerly Editorial Research Reports*

# 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.

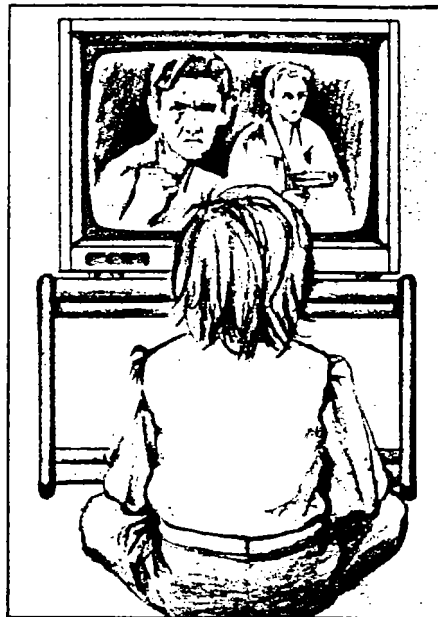
"I thought, boy, he's really stupid, anybody knows that if you get shot it's going to hurt," recalled Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, associate dean of the Harvard University School of Public Health and author of a recent book on violence. "But it dawned on me that what he sees on television is that when 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."<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

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."<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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

Enos (22)  
Sheriff Lobo (22)  
BJ & the Bear (17)  
Hart to Hart (17)  
The Incredible Hulk (16)  
Charlie's Angels (14)  
Hill Street Blues (14)  
Vegas (13)  
Nero Wolfe (11)  
Dukes of Hazard (11)

### Fall 1984

Hammer (55)  
A-Team (54)  
V (52)  
Matt Houston (40)  
Cover-Up (38)  
Fall Guy (37)  
Airwolf (33)  
Hunter (33)  
Street Hawk (31)  
Scarecrow & Mrs. King (31)

### Fall 1992

Young Indiana Jones (60)  
Covington Cross (45)  
The Hat Squad (42)  
Raven (42)  
Angel Street (41)  
Top Cops (38)  
FBI: The Untold Stories (28)  
Final Appeal (27)  
Secret Service (24)  
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."<sup>6</sup>

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).<sup>7</sup>

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."<sup>8</sup>

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."<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> 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."<sup>11</sup>

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."<sup>12</sup>

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."<sup>13</sup>

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."<sup>14</sup>

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."

## 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                |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>1,846</b>     | <b>100%</b>      |

Center for Media and Public Affairs, June 1992

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-

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."<sup>15</sup>

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."<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup>

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<br>per hour | NCTV<br>Rating |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Very High Violence</b>                   |                              |                |
| 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             |
| <b>High Violence</b>                        |                              |                |
| 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             |
| <b>Low Violence (Highly recommended)</b>    |                              |                |
| 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 Koala (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

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 —

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 Falese 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

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.<sup>19</sup>

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



*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."<sup>20</sup>

#### ***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

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."

The National Coalition on Television Violence has created a nine-point proposal for federal regulation of TV violence. It includes:

- a rating system;
- warning "labels" before broadcasts ("The TV show you are about to watch may be hazardous to your psychological and/or physical health due to its highly 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;

William R. Gidycz, Davidson College

• 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."<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup> 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."<sup>23</sup>

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."<sup>24</sup> ■

# 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  
Freedon Force  
Gun Smoke  
Iron Tank  
Kage  
Kid Niki  
Life Force  
MAGMAX  
Mike Tyson's Punch-out!  
Teenage Mutant Ninja  
Xenious the Avenger

## Rated RV

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

## 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.

# 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."<sup>31</sup>

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."<sup>32</sup>

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.'"<sup>33</sup>

### 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."<sup>34</sup>

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."<sup>35</sup>

"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."<sup>16</sup>

"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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> Gerbner testified Dec. 15, 1992, at hearings

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

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

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Testimony before the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, March 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Testimony before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Criminal Justice, Dec. 15, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Speaking in a panel discussion on TV violence at the Harvard School of Public Health, May 11, 1992, published by *Mediascope*, January 1993.

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

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

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *TV Guide*, *op. cit.*

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

<sup>13</sup> Forthcoming APA paper quoted in David S. Barry, "Screen Violence and America's Children," *The Journal of the Writers Guild of America*, West, December/January, 1993, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Oskamp, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Oskamp, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth D. Gadow and Joyce Sprafkin, "Field Experiments of Television Violence with Children: Evidence for an Environmental Hazard?" *Pediatrics*, March 3, 1989, p. 399.

<sup>18</sup> Oskamp, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>19</sup> *U.S. News & World Report*, Feb. 1, 1993, p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Harvard panel discussion, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> *TV Guide*, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 24, 1989.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in *Newsweek*, April 1, 1991, p. 52.

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

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

<sup>28</sup> *The Washington Post*, Jan. 29, 1990.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in *Newsweek*, Dec. 21, 1992.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted by The Associated Press, March 12, 1993.

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

<sup>32</sup> Harvard panel, *op. cit.*

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

<sup>34</sup> Ann Landers column, Feb. 20, 1993.

<sup>35</sup> Harvard panel discussion, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in *The Washington Post*, Nov. 13, 1992.

# Electronic Media

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## TV struggles with violence issues

By THOMAS TYRER  
Staff reporter

LOS ANGELES—With renewed pressure from Congress and advocacy groups, network executives and producers are grappling with the issues behind violence on television.

Last week, the Rev. Don Wildmon's American Family Association and Terry Rakolta's Americans for

Responsible Television launched new salvos at TV for what they say is increasing incidents of violence in programming.

That follows continued efforts by Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., to curb on-air incidents that prompted the Big 3 to draw up their own 15-point violence checklist in December.

The recent pressure has forced the TV industry to step up efforts to

crack down on itself.

But while TV executives are anxious to escape government intervention, they argue that they don't want to commit to a wide-ranging code that ignores the creative nature of programs—one of several issues at stake.

Consider:

- Will the standards apply to the Big 3 alone or will they extend to

cable networks and premium channels as well as syndication?

- Will news or reality shows be held to the same standards as fictional drama and action shows?

- What assurances can be made to protect the creative context of dramas and action series that might use elements of violence?

- Who will have the final say on

(Continued from Page 1)  
how standards are interpreted?

"When it comes time for any sort of application, it's all so vague and so subject to varying interpretations that any codified set of rules will fall of its own weight," says Bill Finkelstein, executive producer of "L.A. Law" and "Civil Wars."

"Anytime you get into a situation where you are dictating creativity, you're going to wind up with lowest common denominator product," adds Dick Wolf, executive producer of "Crime & Punishment" and "Law & Order."

But an aide to Sen. Simon said the producers' concerns demonstrate why the production community should be involved in devising an industry solution.

"The senator believes TV violence is harming children and contributes to violence in society, and study after study has proven it," the aide said.

"There seems to be an emerging consensus, not only among the American public but also in the TV industry that there is a problem," the aide added. "The question is how to address it."

ABC, CBS and NBC responded to Mr. Simon's concerns in December with a 15-point list of dos and don'ts that network programmers privately concede represents a combination of what they've learned through past dealings with producers, advertisers and standards and practices watchdogs.

While the guidelines aren't binding, some in the industry fear that if they don't limit violence on their own, the federal government may step in.

"We understand and the producers understand it is a very, very subjective kind of decision because you have to have some sort of guidelines but ones that can't inhibit the creativity of the programs under discussion," says Beth Bresnan, vice president and assistant to the president of the CBS Broadcast Group and supervisor over CBS's standards and practices.

For now, the most important step is to try to capitalize on a groundswell of support for less violence across the entire medium, insiders say.

TV executives also argue that all factions of the industry—from the theatrical producers whose violent films often wind up on cable's premium channels to children's programmers responsible for Saturday morning cartoons—be involved in setting new guidelines.

"The level of awareness of the harmful effects of media violence has increased tremendously, but there is still a big gap between what television and the other media and the public are doing about it," says Carole Lieberman, chairman of the National Coalition on Television Violence.

Advocacy groups, including the Rev. Wildmon's and Ms. Rakolta's, have also targeted TV violence.

Ms. Rakolta's group last week called for legislation mandating violence standards during children's viewing hours.

However, Ms. Rakolta says the often violent tabloid and reality series, as well as recent crime-based made-for-TV movies, are the real violence culprits—not the network dramas—because they

are inexpensive to produce and appeal to the "darker side of human nature."

"Sex and violence equal money, and the profit margins are huge," she says, "and the bloodiest times are most often during children's viewing hours."

The Rev. Wildmon, whose group ran full-page newspaper ads last week calling for viewer action, did not return calls.

Meanwhile, many in the television industry have high hopes for a Los Angeles conference sponsored by the National Council for Families and Television being planned for this summer.

That meeting, tentatively set for Aug. 2, will be attended by representatives from the Big 3; FBC; cable networks including MTV, Showtime, Arts & Entertainment Network, USA Network, Turner Broadcasting System and HBO; as well as the National Cable Television Association; the Motion Picture Association of America; and top studios such as Paramount Pictures, Time Warner and Twentieth Century Fox.

Among topics expected to be discussed are whether quasi-news programs and reality series, as well as the recent spate of crime-based made-for-TV movies, ought to fall under any new standards.

"The people who are making these decisions about violence in programming should know more about it, because in the area of violence and its impact on society there are so many disparate opinions," says David Grant, executive vice president of network operations and head of standards and practices at FBC.

When it comes to purely fictional pro-

gramming, producers say they're open to curbing violence so long as they're not forced to accept an arbitrary checklist.

"We have to make sure any guidelines put in place are satisfactory, are evenly applied to all, and as writers and producers, we've got to work inside those guidelines," says Stephen J. Cannell, chairman and chief executive officer of Cannell Studios and one of TV's top producers of action shows.

"As long as those guidelines are realistic, it shouldn't hurt viewership," Mr. Cannell says.

Even so, other members of the creative community are more wary, arguing any kind of codified set of violence standards will prove too unwieldy.

"One only has to read any of the Shakespeare plays to know that sex and violence, as well as conflict, are at the heart of drama," says Chris Crowe, executive producer of Paramount Television Group's "The Untouchables."

When the networks came up with their checklist in December, major producers complained that they weren't consulted.

Though most of those guidelines are vague and non-binding, producers take great issue with the seventh point on the list that deals with violence that's "imitable" or "instructional."

Mr. Wolf says that his shows, though largely nonviolent, might be in violation since a real-life criminal could apply the shows' depiction of investigative and legal work to try to escape prosecution.

"Once it's all down on paper, it's a question of who's interpreting all these guidelines," Mr. Wolf says. #

## AMERICA'S MEAN STREAK

IT'S COOL  
TO BE  
CRUEL  
by NINA  
J. EASTON

WHAT THE HELL YOU  
STARIN' AT?!!

### FEATURES

#### THE MEANING OF AMERICA

16

Couples hurl insults on TV dating shows, kids sing songs about killing their teachers, soldiers march to chants about mutilating women: Some call it humor, but America's funny bone is becoming a violent sledgehammer—with disturbingly serious results.

BY NINA J. EASTON

O

K guys, you ready?" All 5 feet, 10 inches of Marki Costello bounces up and down the aisles of a studio audience. With every cheerleader jump, another chunk of dark hair slides out of a barrette and down the back of Costello's black vintage dress. "Now," she yells, "what do you say when the contestants say something about sex?" "Oooo!" her audience roars back. "And what do you say when the husband says something chauvinistic?" A round of staccato "yo-yo-yo's" from the men pours forth, easily drowning out the higher-pitched female "boos."

# The Meanin

This spirited crowd is here today to watch the taping of "That's Amore," a new nationally syndicated game show that airs weeknights in Los Angeles at 2 a.m. on Channel 9 and features bedroom brawls between married couples. It's the job of the audience to egg on the contestants as they fight, to provoke more heated arguments with their "boos" and "woos" and, ultimately, to pick the winner. "You will decide who has the most convincing arguments," booms the breathless male voice-over. "Will it be Norma, who has brought Ray's ex-wife, Belinda, to support her? Or will it be Ray, who has his best friend, Tibor, to back him up?" By now the cameras are rolling, and this audience is as hot for action as Romans in the Coliseum.

Ray, a British man in his 40s who sports a shag haircut, leads off with a complaint that Norma, his American wife, and Belinda, his former wife, compare notes about his sexuality. Norma doesn't disagree, but launches into her own tirade about her husband's torn jeans, his penchant for wearing no underwear and his large sexual appetite, all of which are linked in her mind. The audience goes wild. When host Luca Barbareschi calls for a midway poll and a station break, they reward Norma with 68% of their votes.

By the time Round 2 opens, Norma's ready for blood. Blue eyes blazing, she spews at her husband: "You're a liar, and you have a big mouth." And this: "You are so sickening, you make me want to throw up." And this: "You don't know how to do anything right. You're a walking accident waiting to happen." ("Ooo-ooo!" the audience cheers.)

Ray counterattacks with—what else?—a story about his wife's girth. "My wife, I'm so proud of her. She's lost 80 pounds. But she walks into the supermarket since we started eating normal again, and she takes hot dogs off the shelf and stuffs them in her mouth." ("Ugh!" from the audience.) "When we finally get to the check stand," he continues, "there's no food to pay for, just packages with tags." ("Boooo!") "I've seen it," concurs Ray's friend Tibor. "It's so embarrassing."

Barbareschi calls time and polls the audience. Ray wins, at 77%. Norma

and Ray wrap their arms around each other and beam: For their performance, they earn a second "honeymoon" in Mexico.

If you think this is sick stuff, you're woefully behind the pop-culture curve. In the 1990s, "dissin'" is fast becoming a national pastime. Cutting insults, crude put-downs and vulgar and vicious personal lampoons are dominating mainstream entertainment—even while political leaders urge us to put people first. More than ever, comedy draws the most laughs when it's at the expense of someone else. "Humor has devolved to allow more extreme forms of brutality and insults that are normally perceived of as abhorrent," says Jennings Bryant, director of the University of Alabama's Institute for Communication Research. "It is pushing the bounds of propriety."

Today's personal attacks often are aimed close to home—at family members, girlfriends, co-workers, teachers. In an age of political correctness, these are safe targets, not likely to generate a rash of protest

## Forget the Niceties. Everyone El

from hypersensitive organized interests. So are celebrities, who are fast slipping from their privileged positions with fawning fans and press. Fat jokes are popular; fat people aren't a protected lobby. Sexual put-downs are in; who other than religious zealots would challenge them in the post-sexual-revolution age?

## Permeating Pop Culture, It's Cool

Barbed humor is the staple of relationship game shows. If the couples connect on the popular dating games "Love Connection" or "Studs," sexual innuendoes bubble forth. But if they don't, the insults fly: She was fat, he was cheap, she was cold, he was a bore. "Kiss him? I'd rather make out with a sidewalk," quips one "Studs" contestant.

The producers of these shows shrewdly count on the put-downs to escalate as each contestant's defenses go up.

"That's Amore" producer Walt Case and host-creator Barbareschi claim to put only happily married couples on the air. After the show, Norma and Ray, both born-again Christians, explain that they love each other and were simply drawing on hostile feelings from the early years of their marriage that they have since worked out. "It was all in fun," Norma insists. Imagine a game show that featured *problem* marriages. Apparently, some Hollywood producers already have: One major game-show company is developing a program that would air the grievances of divorcing couples before a live audience.

Fictional characters on contemporary TV shows have a staff of writers to script them, so their insults are wittier, but equally vicious. On Fox's popular "Married...With Children," a running gag of intrafamily ridicule, Al Bundy wonders why his wife Peg didn't marry a man more like her father: "Or weren't there any chronically unemployed social parasites the month you were in your prime?" The satirical variety show "In Living Color" is more reckless, taking aim at black women, gays and even, in an off-color skit about a spastic handyman, the handicapped.

the ire of the Federal Communications Commission and the press, but biting cruelty is also his stock in trade. When Dick Cavett, who recently disclosed his shock-therapy treatment for depression, called Stern's show to lend support in his battles against the FCC, Stern offered this in return: "So how many volts did you take to the head?" One of his ugliest comments was made while his partner read the celebrity news one morning last fall: "Big, fat Kirstie Alley. It's a good thing she had a miscarriage. If she got pregnant, her breasts would be sagging to the floor."

Stern's popularity is skyrocketing: He now airs in 10 cities, including Los Angeles, where he has the top-rated morning show, and he has launched a TV talk show. Radio-industry officials note that other radio talk-show hosts around the country now are borrowing Stern's style.

Even while some commentators complain that PC-ism is choking free expression, American popular culture is rich with examples of misogyny, racism and homophobia. In rap and heavy metal music, especially, women are routinely referred to as bitches and "ho's" (short for whores); gays are faggots. Need some anti-Semitism? The syndicated TV series "Uptown Comedy Club" recently featured a skit about the law firm of "Judacy," where Hasidic lawyers sing, "I really want to sue you. I really want to overcharge you." Rush

# g of America

Over on ABC, "Roseanne" chuckles that she's done her job when her kids say they hate her, or she fantasizes about trading her brood in for a new dishwasher. Meanwhile, Roseanne Arnold's real-life husband, Tom Arnold, stars in the new "Jackie Thomas Show" as an obnoxious TV star who describes colleagues in terms like: "That candy-ass, publicity-sucking little pimple farmer!" (And of the TV critics who castigated her husband's new show, Roseanne offers these choice descriptions: "creeps" and "faggots.") Last fall's Emmy telecast turned especially unpleasant: In the midst of Hollywood's counterattack on the Republicans' own mean-spirited family-values campaign, Diane English—creator of "Murphy Brown," one of TV's saltier put-down artists—burst out: "I couldn't possibly do a worse job raising my kid alone than the Reagans did with theirs."

In children's entertainment, the superhero has evolved into a superbrat. Cartoons feature 6-year-old child-animals who slam

Limbaugh has sunk to disturbing lows on his radio show, such as this tirade against AIDS and abortion activists: "Get out of our schools. Get out of our churches. Take your deadly, sickly behavior and keep it to yourselves."

There's something equally mean about the increasingly violent voyeurism that permeates American TV news and entertainment today—from the airing of domestic squabbles on talk shows like "Geraldo" to last month's shooting of a woman by her estranged husband at a Florida cemetery, captured by a Spanish-language news crew and disseminated nationwide.

Whatever form this invective takes, media researchers call it "psychologi-

## se Has. With Insult and Injury

doors in the faces of innocent characters and maniacally kick villains in the shins. The star of the hit movie "Home Alone 2" is a 10-year-old snot who delights in setting up vicious pranks for the villains, any one of which would, in real life, maim or kill a person. (When was the last time anyone survived a brick to the

## to Be Cruel. By Nina J. Easton

head from three stories up?) The fantasy alter ego of a sweet young woman in "Drop Dead Fred," a video cult favorite with the 8-year-old set, greets her mother with such salutations as, "It's megabitch! Get me the ax! No, get me a chain saw!"

Radio shock-jock Howard Stern's obscenities are what draw



cal violence," and they are concerned that just as hundreds of studies link TV to a more violent society, the decline in civility in popular culture will alter our behavior toward each other. "It's worrisome," says Alvin Poussaint, associate dean at the Harvard Medical School and former consultant to the now-defunct "Cosby Show." "I don't think this is just reflecting reality. It's also part of *encouraging* reality. For a lot of vulnerable people, especially children, this is putting suggestions in their heads, or at least lowering their defenses against impulses they might have." Poussaint also worries that trends in popular culture contribute to an increased difficulty among many young people in discerning right from wrong.

What is the reality that America's tastemakers are helping to shape? More confrontational social relationships, for one. John Murray, head of the Human Development and Family Studies Department at Kansas State University, doesn't permit his children, age 7 and 11, to watch "Roseanne" or "The Simpsons." The many fans of these shows point out that both TV families, despite their heavy reliance on irreverence and insult humor, demonstrate strong bonds of love. But for Murray, who studies the impact of media on children, love hidden beneath a crusty exterior isn't a satisfying rationale: "No matter what else, a steady diet of these shows conveys the sense that it's all right to be mean-spirited to each other. But if you act like that in real life, all you do is anger people. Every office, every department, every class has one person like that, and—fortunately, I guess—they're always the outsider."

At its most destructive, American culture's mean streak holds out the potential to promote even more violence in a society where cutting off someone in the fast lane can mean a bullet to the head. Social graces are not just the stuff of snobbery, notes Judith Martin, author of the syndicated "Miss Manners" column. Holding our tongues, setting internal limits on the views we express to each other, smooths the bumps in a conflict-ridden society. In our zeal to promote "open communication" at any cost—or for any laughs—we've forgotten that, Martin contends. "The total expression of every thought is not desirable," she says. "People are killing each other in the streets over insults and dissin'."

The most chilling side of this mean streak is coming straight from the mouths of soldiers and college students and children. Left to their own devices, without the benefit of network scripts or the restrictions of government censors, they create ballads rife with cruelty and brutality. Sailors at the U.S. Naval Academy march to sadomasochistic tunes that feature sex with corpses and "bitches" cut in half by chain saws. This is one current favorite: "My girl ain't got no eyes/Just two sockets full o' flies/Sometimes I even play a joke/Pull the plugs and watch her choke."

In October, a UCLA fraternity made headlines with songs celebrating the mutilation of women with such props as cheese graters and hot oil. The frat members apparently didn't believe they had anything to hide: They published the lyrics inside an otherwise informational orientation manual.

And on the schoolyards of Los Angeles, third-graders can be heard singing ditties like this (to the tune of "This Land Is Your Land"): "This land is my land, it isn't your land/ I've got a shotgun, and you don't got one/ I'll blow your head off, if you don't get off/ This land is private pro-per-ty."

HOSTILITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN ENGINE OF HUMOR. AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, Sigmund Freud wrote that hostile jokes, like obscene humor, give humans an outlet for a natural emotion that civilized society otherwise forces them to repress. As Americans, we laughed when Moe pulled Larry's hair and told him to "sha-a-a-t up!" or when Abbott smacked Costello upside the head for issuing a dumb wisecrack.

Hollywood's toughest acts were packaged as working-class humor (as if, some-

how, the upper classes were too refined to get angry). In Jackie Gleason's "The Honeymooners," Ralph looks ready to slam his fist into his wife's jaw when he slugs his hand and boils, "One of these days, Alice, one of these days. . .pow!" Archie Bunker unleashed his ridicule not only on his wife, his daughter and his "meathead" son-in-law but also on "coloreds," Jews and anyone else who wasn't a white working-class Protestant like himself.

Ralph Kramden's anger bubbled out of the frustrations of his daily life as a bus driver bored with his life and struggling to make ends meet. Gleason, who created the series, made it clear that he intended the Kramdens' bickering to take place within the context of love, and it did: "Baby, you're the greatest!" he'd say with a bearhug. Audiences saw how the extremes of Ralph's personality got

him into trouble, and they laughed at him, not his targets. Similarly, Archie's insults and racism sprang from working-class frustrations, but, by surrounding him with more tolerant family members, "All in the Family's" writers turned his views—not his victims—into objects of derision.

Most of today's humor and song doesn't reveal any ironic truths about the perpetrator (just as violence in film long ago ceased to comment on the nature of violence). "It's nastier and more personal. And there's very little wit in a lot of this, it's just dumbed-out and gross," complains Michael Medved, author of the 1992 book "Hollywood vs. America."

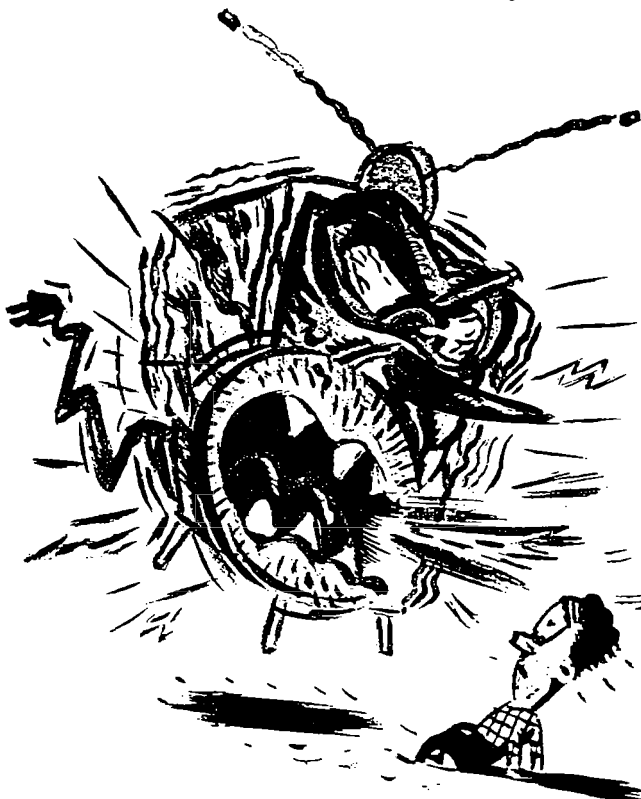
The University of Alabama's Bryant first noticed a turning point in American humor in the mid-1970s, when, as a young faculty member at the University of Massachusetts, he saw the "Mr. Bill" skit on "Saturday Night Live." Mr. Bill was a clay doll whose sole purpose was to be abused—his face pounded, his limbs torn—while audiences roared. "I thought, 'What in the world have we unleashed here?'" recalls Bryant. "There was no cognitive complexity. All you saw was cruelty." Fifteen years later, American audiences have become so inured to cruelty, physical or verbal, that we laugh when the Joker electrocutes his victims in "Batman," and we actually buy the line that the "Terminator" is being compassionate when he shoots his victims in the knees instead of killing them.

When Don Rickles burst onto the national comedy scene in the '60s, lampooning Frank Sinatra and other revered celebrities, his act was new—and shocking. Two decades later, when New York's satiric Spy

magazine first appeared, calling Donald Trump a "short-fingered vulgarian," it, too, was new and shocking, an arrival of much-needed irreverence toward the rich and powerful. But insult humor has a short shelf life; the shock wears off and audiences grow numb—*habituated* is the word researchers use. The purveyors of the satire can respond by adding more dimension to the humor, as Spy has recently done, or they can scream louder, pushing the boundaries of propriety even further, as most of Rickles' comedic heirs have.

It's not hard to figure out what will push buttons in contemporary audiences. Marki Costello isn't a sociologist or marketing executive, but she probably knows this country as well as any of them: One of the game-show world's most prized talent scouts, she interviews potential contestants, thousands of them a year, for "That's Amore" and, before that, for dating-game shows such as "Love Connection." At 26, Costello knows people. She learned the business at the knee of her late mother, who did the same job for game shows in a previous era, and she's the granddaughter of comedian Lou Costello. Costello's conclusion about contemporary culture: "I am convinced that America is dying to love to hate. We thrive off other people's gossip and misery. Humor today makes people laugh because it's shocking. When my grandpa did it, it was clever, it was thought out."

"Married. . . With Children" co-creator Michael Moya tackles the question from a different angle. He sees his shows as an antidote to the overweening and unreal "niceness" of sitcoms like "The Cosby Show." "Personally," Moya says of "Cosby," "I never lived like that or saw people who could work so hard and look so good. We thought, 'There has to be something out there for the rest of us.' So we did the dark side of the American family."



**In the game "Final Fight,"  
players can beat opponents  
by punching, stabbing or lead-  
pipe bashing.**

Magazine staff writer Nima J. Easton last wrote about "The Pogo Prescription." Style editor Rochelle Reed and Times research librarian Janet Lundblad contributed to this article.

Irony and irreverence are particularly appealing to an under-40 audience weaned on "Saturday Night Live" and Mad magazine, as Newsweek media writer Jonathan Alter notes. The motto hanging in the office of one producer sums up a feeling that is widespread among younger TV writers: "No messages, no hugs."

People draw their own lines between funny and offensive. Moyer, for example, calls Howard Stern's radio show "the oinking of a pig" but gives his own show longer rope because the put-downs are directed at fictional characters. Others, such as "That's Amore's" Barbareschi, forgive brutal candor when it is done humorously—as it is on his show—rather than being offered up as some kind of serious social commentary on voyeuristic talk shows. That's actually a line that most of us draw without knowing it: Bryant's studies have found that audiences will even laugh at images of sexual violence when they are presented as comedy.

THAT INSULTS AND CRUELTY ARE THRIVING in popular culture today isn't surprising. Conditions have converged to produce a climate in which this virus multiplies: There are more channels of communication today, and all the information coming through those channels is "more frank, more explicit" than ever before, says Daniel Linz, associate professor of communications at UC Santa Barbara.

And popular culture is tapping a well-spring in modern society that many social observers say is brimming with rage. "During the election, reporters would write about 'voter anger' as if that was somehow separate from culture," says Mark Crispin Miller, professor of media studies at Johns Hopkins University and author of the book "Boxed In." "But the rage is global. Everywhere you look, there is a very striking separatism going on. People are receding into their ethnic or sexual peer groups. There is an anti-cosmopolitan, antisocial movement." In Europe, neo-Nazis are on the rise, and ethnic strife is tearing the Balkans apart.

Much closer to home, in Los Angeles County, hate crimes have tripled in the last four years. Gays, especially, are being targeted for violence throughout the country. Anti-gay ballot initiatives in three states last year unleashed a torrent of gay-bashing, from threatening calls and hate mail to the firebomb killing of a gay man and lesbian in Salem, Ore., in September.

That hatefulness seeped into the presidential campaign last summer, when GOP candidate Pat Buchanan called on his audience to "take back our country" from gays and blacks and "radical feminists" like Hillary Rodham Clinton. Commentators called Buchanan's tirade the meanest prime-time political speech in American history.

More and more, the perpetrators of violent crimes show a chilling lack of remorse. The public was stunned when one of the suspects in the 1989 brutal gang assault on a woman jogging in New York's Central Park explained to police that "it was fun." But just last November, a San Jose teen and two of his friends allegedly hacked to death his best friend's 8-year-old brother, then told police they had planned to rob the house and kill whomever was inside. They had expected the mother to be home, but when they couldn't locate her, they figured the young boy—home sick from school—would do.

Pick your reasons for that collective wrath underlying these frightening events. In the United States, researchers point to sexual repression caused by AIDS, a sagging economy, the breakdown of family and community, and other pressures of modern life. "People are feeling less nurtured, more like there's no one to take care of them," says Carole Lieberman, a clinical psychologist and chair of the National Coalition on Television Violence. "We're the walking wounded. People are feeling more hurt, more needy, more powerless. We're putting on a bravado [front] by being stoic and angry."

Much of the anger in pop culture is directed at women, and many researchers link the trend to the movement of women out of the home and into the workplace. Carol Burke, an associate dean at Johns Hopkins University who specializes in military folklore, notes that brutality and violence have always been a part of the soldier's marching chants. "It was a way of dealing with the fears of wartime

and dehumanizing the enemy," she says. With the jungle warfare of Vietnam, though, the concept of "enemy" broadened, and the chants became more gruesome: "Napalm sticks to kids. . . napalm sticks to ribs."

Likewise, soldiers and sailors have always directed raunchy humor at women. But since the 1970s, Burke has detected a sharp rise in the level of hostility. Sadomasochism and sex with mutilated female corpses are favorite subjects; so is slugging a girlfriend in the face if she gets out of line. "You didn't see things like that before women entered the military," Burke says, "so I can't attribute it to anything but anxiety over women in the ranks." It is within this kind of environment, she notes, that naval officers in 1991 allegedly assaulted 26 women, including fellow officers, in what's become known as the Tailhook scandal.

Burke also detects subtle female-bashing in children's play songs. Children's verse has always been gruesome ("Ring Around the Rosey" satirizes the bubonic plague) and mean (an infant falls out of the tree in "Rock-a-Bye Baby"). But in playground songs today, children celebrate the shooting and maiming of others, particularly teachers. Burke notes that the gender of the teacher in the following rhyme is no accident.

*I shot my poor teacher with a .44 gun  
I didn't even miss her, her class was no fun  
I went to her funeral, I went to her grave  
Everyone threw flowers, I threw a grenade.  
I looked in her coffin, she wasn't quite dead  
I took a bazooka and blew off her head  
I looked in the newspaper, I looked on TV  
I saw her going up to heaven  
So I shot her with a BB.*

TO LOOK AT THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN society's emotional state and the way pop culture reflects it is to walk into a hall of mirrors. Even while acknowledging that pop culture reflects society, researchers also accuse image crafters and tastemakers of intensifying those raw feelings. As Miller puts it, "We are so embedded in the media spectacle that we can no longer say the media simply reflect something. They reflect a reality that they have altered." Contemporary TV and movie plots, Miller and others argue, often encourage audiences to relate to the meanness and violence rather than be frightened or repelled by it. A commonly cited example is "Silence of the Lambs": During the film's ending—not a part of the book—audiences root for serial murderer Hannibal Lecter when he turns his lethal

sights on a particularly obnoxious functionary. Last year's crop of movies—"The Player," "Glengarry Glen Ross," "Unforgiven" and "Reservoir Dogs," among them—writes Newsday film critic Jack Mathews, was especially rife with "loathsome male protagonists."

Increasingly, Miller argues, even advertisers—historically known for excessive sentimentality—are sneaking in appeals to rudeness and selfishness, using characters such as children who don't have to share their candy bars or women who see their beauty and thinness as life's best revenge.

Most well-documented are the links between what children see on television and what they do. It is widely accepted among those who study children and psychology that exposure to TV violence can promote aggressive behavior in young people, particularly if a child's family or neighborhood doesn't sufficiently counteract the influence. That conclusion is based on hundreds of studies, including a 1972 surgeon general's report. One study from the 1970s, for example, compared the playground behavior of children who had watched a steady barrage of "Batman" and "Superman" cartoons with those who watched shows such as "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." The former group was more aggressive and more likely to get into confrontations, while the latter group was more likely to play cooperatively and help their teachers and peers. Later studies also showed a link between adult violence and the TV programs they watched as children or adolescents. One survey found that as many as one-third of violent young felons said they had imitated crime techniques seen on TV.



**Sadomasochism and sex  
with mutilated female corpses  
are favorite song subjects  
in the modern military.**

*Continued on Page 43*

## Mean Streak

*Continued from Page 20*

Experts suspect, then, that it will make some difference that in 1988, children watched a whopping 28 violent acts per hour on their cartoons. And now they can participate in the on-screen violence: In the Supernintendo video game "Final Fight," players use every means at their disposal to kill the video opponents on the screen. If a punch doesn't work, stab him with a knife. In a "Simpsons" video-arcade game, the player gets to watch the opponent crumble to the ground and die.

All of this raises a question that researchers have yet to fully answer: Is it easier to pull the trigger or throw a fist at someone who has already been demonized, or at least dehumanized, in song or humor? Are children more likely to pick on each other or ignore their parents or tell their teachers to shove it if they see that kind of behavior on TV? Researchers can only speculate. Says Leonard Eron, professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Illinois: "The kind of humor that continually denigrates certain parts of the population can't help but build an attitude that it's OK."

IT'S A COLD NOVEMBER morning, and the parking lot of the Hollywood Palace looks like the site of a Harley-Davidson convention. A sea of black leather and beard stubble spills out onto Vine Street toward Hollywood Boulevard. The crowd of 5,000—mostly men in their 20s and 30s—chants "Howard! Howard!" and leers at the near-naked women (including Jessica Hahn) on a makeshift stage in the parking lot. Much of the conversation between the men goes something like this: "Hey, I wanna see that chick come out again and take her top off..."

This is Howard Stern's target audience, the men whom high-risk auto insurers fall all over themselves to woo. These are the listeners who admit their addiction to Stern's show; there are plenty of others who do not—female Ph.D.'s and lawyers and editors and secretaries. A run-

ning joke about Stern's show is the number of people who insist they never listen but can recite every skit.

The crowd gathered in Hollywood took off from work and school to watch Stern stage a mock "funeral" for his chief rivals in the L.A. market—the KLOS morning team, Mark and Brian. It's a publicity gimmick Stern has used before in other markets as he climbs to the top of the talk-show radio heap. The New York-bred Stern got his first big break at a Washington, D.C., station, then moved on to New York's WNBC, where he was fired by a management that liked his high ratings but not how he got them. His new employer, Infinity Broadcasting, couldn't be happier: Stern has made the company's New York station No. 1. His show is now sold to stations nationwide, including L.A.'s KLSX-FM.

Inside his studio at the Palace, Stern conducts a rare "press conference" in which he tells one reporter, "You're so stupid. You're really very stupid. You're too dumb for words." He asks a woman TV producer, "How did you get your job? Have you ever dated anyone in your organization?"

At about 8, Stern, costumed as a king ("of all media" is the gag), is carried to the outside stage in a palanquin by a corps of scantily clad women. Once onstage, Stern guillotines a pair of dummies—fake blood spurts out—while his cohorts lampoon the KLOS disc jockeys with songs like "So Crappy Together."

Aside from his nasty run-ins with the reporters, this affair is mostly harmless juvenile prattle, a kind of frat party for guys who never made it to a university club. The event is tame compared to what Stern pulled in Philadelphia, when he viciously ridiculed competitor John DeBella, culminating last summer in a "Divorce Party" to celebrate DeBella's broken marriage. Stern encouraged listeners to write songs memorializing the breakup; then his producers began wooing DeBella's ex-wife. Annette DeBella finally agreed to appear on Stern's show so he could continue to ridicule his rival. Apparently, though, the woman was more

troubled than she let on during that broadcast: In October, she was found dead in her garage with the car engine running. Philadelphia's coroner ruled the death a suicide.

Stern rarely talks at length to the press—he wouldn't talk for this story—so it's difficult to explore the motivation behind these pranks. Joe Logan, a Philadelphia Inquirer reporter who closely followed the DeBella affair and has interviewed Stern, believes the highly paid radio personality knows, but doesn't want to acknowledge, the potentially damaging side of his act. "Stern has built up a blind spot," Logan says of Stern, who portrays himself on air as a faithful husband and caring father. "He does not want to face the reality of what he's doing, that he's making it OK to say and do these things."

If that's the case, then he is no different from any of us who laugh at the malevolence of Stern and other entertainers. When it comes to cruel humor, we have a collective blind spot. It makes us passive listeners, sheepishly amused at these appeals to our dark sides, often until they hit too

close to home. There was, for example, the woman who called Stern's show to complain about his "disgusting and very mean" remarks about the inability of children to love adoptive parents as fully as natural parents. She was a regular listener; she was also an adoptive parent.

We don't want to know how invective can influence our behavior. We want to believe that our socialization is somehow isolated from the media that bombard our daily lives. "There is so much cruelty in this world, whether Howard is here or not," says Steve Jasso, a service technician who lost \$22 an hour while attending Stern's event in Hollywood. Then he pauses and adds, "But some people do take it to heart."

Jasso has a good point: Humans are, by nature, aggressive creatures, regardless of tasteless jokes and vicious playground rhymes. And if Freud was right, and hostile humor is a release of natural emotions, isn't it better for Americans to indulge in verbal abuse rather than the real thing? That's one argument posed by UC Berkeley anthro-

pologist Alan Dundes, who wonders what all the fuss is about as he ticks off dozens of examples of cruelty in literary history. "Underlying the veneer of civilization and sophistication, you still have people with very basic desires and drives," Dundes says.

But studies on the influence of popular culture suggest that cruel humor serves as more than a release in modern society. The ubiquitous media pick up on our baser nature, exaggerate it to entertain, and, by spitting it back at us, encourage us to push the boundaries even further. As a result, says Johns Hopkins' Miller, "We're gradually eroding the kinds of social forms and inhibitions that kept [aggressive] compulsions contained."

Before the cycle escalates further, we might do well to consider the advice of Roman statesman and orator Cicero, who wrote at the peak of the Roman empire: "If we are forced, at every hour, to watch or listen to horrible events, this constant stream of ghastly impressions will deprive even the most delicate among us of all respect for humanity." ■

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## TV murder rate climbs dramatically, study says

By Stephen Galloway

A homicide takes place on primetime television once every 78 minutes — that's the conclusion of a study conducted by the National Coalition on Television Violence, a national watchdog organization that has monitored TV violence since 1980.

According to the NCTV's study, conducted by researchers in its Illinois office last fall, the murder rate is up 27% from a year ago, when killings were depicted on average once every 107 minutes.

Dr. Carole Lieberman, chairman of the NCTV, said, "These figures correlate with other studies to show that violence in the media continues to grow. And there is incontestable proof that when there is violence in the media, it has a cumulative effect in causing viewers to become aggressive and desensitized to violence."

Although the report did not differentiate between different kinds of violence (including everything

from actions that might cause bodily harm to homicides), it identified FBC as the prime culprit, averaging 11 acts of violence per hour. CBS was a close second with about nine violent acts per hour.

Individual programs continued to break records, according to the study, which cited ABC's "The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles" as the most violent program on TV, averaging 60 acts of violence per hour. That placed it ahead of "Covington Cross" (45), "The Hat Squad" (42), "Raven" (42), "Angel Street" (41), "Top Cops" (38), "FBI: The Untold Stories" (28), "Final Appeal" (27), "Secret Service" (24), "The Commish" (17), "American Detective" (17), "In the Heat of the Night" (13), "Haunted Lives" (11) and "Unsolved Mysteries" (10).

The study deemed 25% of primetime programming to be violent, by which it meant any program containing 10 or more violent acts. □

# CALENDAR

F2

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1993

## MORNING REPORT

*Arts and entertainment reports from The Times, national and international news services and the nation's press.*

### TELEVISION

**Tracking Violence:** At least 25% of major network prime-time programming was rated "very violent" by a recent study of the Illinois-based National Coalition on Television Violence. The study, which tracked programming during the 1992 fall season, found Fox to be the most violent network, averaging 11 "acts of violence" (hostile acts committed with the intention of hurting another person) per hour. CBS came in second with nine. The study ranked ABC's "The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles" as the most violent network show, averaging 60 such acts, followed by "Covington Cross" (ABC), "The Hat Squad" (CBS), "Raven" (CBS), "Angel Street" (CBS), "Top Cops" (CBS), "The Edge" (Fox), "FBI: The Untold Stories" (ABC), "Final Appeal" (NBC) and "America's Most Wanted" (Fox).

# Ethics

EASIER SAID THAN DONE

1993 Issue 21

**Trustworthiness**

**Respect**

**Responsibility**

**Justice & Fairness**

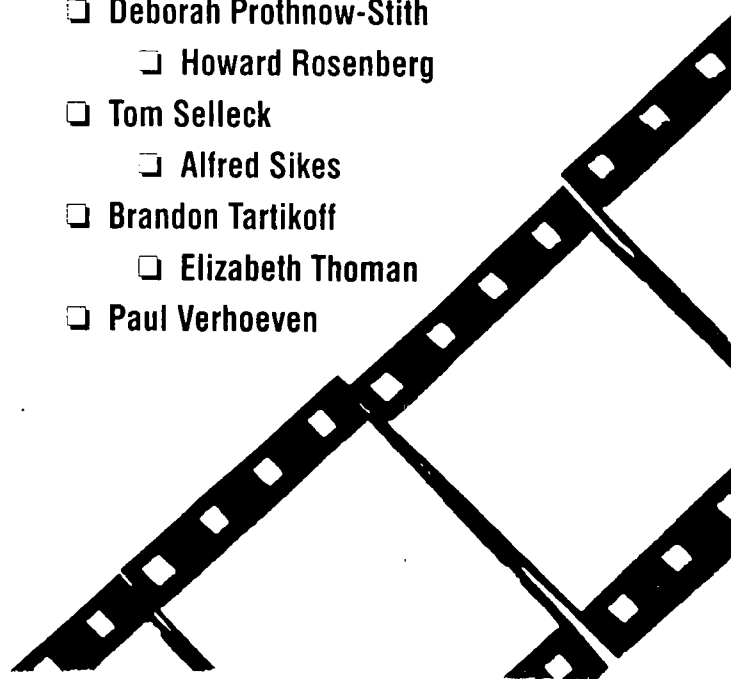
**Caring**

**Civic Virtue & Citizenship**

## **DRAWING LINES** **Restraint, Responsibility** **& The Entertainment Media**

### **With Ideas From:**

- ☐ William Bennett
  - ☐ Jennings Bryant
- ☐ Amitai Etzioni
  - ☐ Danny Goldberg
- ☐ Neil Hickey
  - ☐ Reginald Hudlin
- ☐ Robert Lichter
  - ☐ Carol Lieberman
- ☐ Cardinal Roger M. Mahony
  - ☐ Michael Medved
- ☐ Deborah Prothnow-Stith
  - ☐ Howard Rosenberg
- ☐ Tom Selleck
  - ☐ Alfred Sikes
- ☐ Brandon Tartikoff
  - ☐ Elizabeth Thoman
- ☐ Paul Verhoeven



# Restraint, Responsibility & The Entertainment Media

By Wes Hanson

Turn on the radio. Watch TV. Go to the movies. Glance at billboard and bus-stop posters. And everywhere you hear and see violence, hatred, cruelty, and self-destructive behavior in the guise of entertainment. Funny how society itself seems more and more out of control in these areas.

Naturally, there's been a lot of talk and research in the last few years about whether life is imitating art, if not literally then in response to the powerful media stimulus.

Of course, individuals have to be held accountable for their own behavior and choices. We can't live in a world where assassins can get away with blaming a song, or a diet of Twinkies, for their foul deeds.

But that still begs the question: Why would decision-makers in the entertainment media be exempt from the social necessity for accountability? If anything don't they have a greater responsibility for others because of their vastly disproportionate influence?

We may be thankful there are no censorial laws spelling out such responsibilities, yet in their absence a highly diverse society has trouble defining them. Does that mean anything is okay if it's legal and you have the power and opportunity to do it?

To get some answers, we had a chat about responsibility, restraint and the limits of decency with a group of industry observers and players.

The discussion was not about legal censorship or the artist. In fact, if there was a consensus among the 15 interviewees, people with distinctly different politics and backgrounds, it was that this kind of restraint is a bad idea that creates more problems than it ostensibly solves.

Rather, the discussion was about the commercial enterprise's responsibility for voluntary self-restraint. That is, should responsibility, respect, caring, honesty, and other ethical considerations factor into what the purveyors of our culture decide should be promoted? Where should lines be drawn, if at all? How are these decisions made? How should they be?

Individuals and the ventures they serve arguably already engage in self-restraint. But what passes for self-restraint can be mere self-absorption, something to be exercised only to protect or benefit oneself or the group one identifies with. It is not about caring for others. Decisions about where a line is drawn and when it is crossed may be inevitably highly personal, but at what point do they become valid business decisions?

In answering these questions, many of the participants in this discussion said that intent matters (that is, it's okay to be offensive or destructive if there is a "point" other than profit). The real question to ask would then be: Somebody can always be offended, but why is this story being told this way?

Some of the participants said context is key. To some, anything goes, as long as people aren't involuntarily subjected to what they don't want. To others, the whim of the individual artist is all, regardless. Some hear in the mere discussion of limits a not-so-distant echo of storm-troopers' boots. Others are nervous at the thought of entertainment executives having to wear PC armbands — or perhaps EC, for Ethically Correct.

What follows is not a complete, literal transcript of 15 interviews — much was cut for coherence, organization, and space. Some text was moved to address the relevant topic, and the language of some questions was tightened slightly. The piece should be seen only as a sampling of some ideas on the subject matter.



# Participants



William Bennett

Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute, Wash. D.C.; Co-Director, Empower America; "Drug Czar," 1989-90; Sec. of Educ., 1985-89



Jennings Brvant

Professor of Communication, Director, Institute for Communication Research, University of Alabama, Birmingham, AL



Amitai Etzioni

University Professor, The George Washington University, Wash., D.C.; author: "The Spirit of Community"



Danny Goldberg

Senior Vice-President, Atlantic Records (a division of Time Warner); Chairman, Southern California ACLU Foundation



Reginald Hudlin

Writer, director, producer, Hudlin Bros., New York; director/writer: "House Party"; director: "Boomerang"



Robert Lichter

Co-Director, Center for Media and Public Affairs, Washington, D.C.



Carol Lieberman

Psychiatrist; Chair, National Coalition on Television Violence, Los Angeles, CA, Champaign, Ill.



Cardinal Roger M. Mahony

Archbishop of Los Angeles since 1985; Cardinal, 1991; author: Pastoral Letter To Film Makers And Viewers, 1992



Michael Medved

Co-host, "Sneak Previews" (PBS); author: "Hollywood Vs. America"



Deborah Prothnow-Stith

Asst. Dean, Harvard School of Public Health; author: "Deadly Consequences"



Howard Rosenberg

Pulitzer Prize-winning media critic, *Los Angeles Times*



Tom Selleck

Actor: "Mr. Baseball," "Three Men and a Baby," "Magnum, P.I."; board member, Josephson Institute



Alfred Sikes

Vice President for New Media and Technology, Hearst Corp., New York; Chairman, Federal Communications Commission, 1989-93



Elizabeth Thoman

Founding Editor, Media&Values magazine; Executive Director, Center for Media and Values, Los Angeles, CA



Paul Verhoeven

Film director: "Basic Instinct," "Total Recall," "RoboCop," "Spetters"

anything, you have to dig into your unconscious to get ideas, and the ideas are really only repressed memories...Another example is how...there's a backlash against women having to do with unconsciously feeling threatened by women taking higher jobs. Men feeling threatened about this are producing scenarios where women are getting punished for being strong women. "Women in jeopardy," that was the big thing last season and the season before. Another example is MTV, where there's so much violence directed against women...women in bondage, whips taken to women...One person's life with these memories gets expressed on a screen, and it affects the lives of millions. So, art may imitate the life of that one person, but it's then affecting all of these other lives, which are imitating the art.

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***The idea of impressing your peers has become enormously important...They all desperately want to be artists today. — Michael Medved***

- I would hope to be profitable and not [lock group] Guns N' Roses to kill the bitch even though I loved complaining" — personally I would The model for me in the entertainment industry is being profitable and minimizing the potential offense was the movie "Boyz n the City" where there was violence, but it was painful violence, violence and that's the truth about most violence. A lot of being excited and happy when people are being crushed, you are sad. There's some merit in showing the reality...And the movie was quite profitable.

**Q: Other than money, what factors are considered in making decisions as to what should be presented as entertainment?**

**Carol Lieberman** — Other factors are, are the people involved your friends or family? Do you owe favors to them? The factor that interests me the most is people's unconscious; that's really the strongest factor in deciding what gets made. The writer, the producer, the director — everybody adds their own unconscious interpretation. What factors in the creator's mind, what memories of experiences are in the unconscious of the creator, is what really shapes what gets expressed in the media. One example is a person who has been abused as a child, physically, emotionally abused and then goes on to do horror movies. In order to write or to create

**Mr. Medved** — The idea of impressing your peers has become enormously important...I think the motivation has to do with this desperate need for Hollywood types...the insatiable need for the part of stars in particular but directors and producers, and that motivation is that you are not just diversion. They all desperately want to be artists. I think that to some extent means they are not perceived as commercial but as challenging the public. "Leap of Faith" would be a religion that is, in Hollywood. The term "politically correct" in Hollywood is ruthlessly attacked with "political correctness."

**Mr. Rosenber**

who are in power in the industry as a result of different motivations. Profit is purely ego, self-interest, ethics, the factors. American society is a fine line between the two.

**Q:** What other factors *should* be considered?

**Dr. Lieberman**—If you're writing it for yourself or creating it for yourself, then it can be whatever you want. But if this is something you want to sell to other people, then I think you have to see it as having a purpose in

*You can't be just blindly saying that this will be helpful to society because I think it will, and all of the other information I have to the contrary is not valid. — Carol Lieberman*

## Sex

**Dr. Bryant** — Depiction of things devoid of consequences are potentially very harmful in terms of the

that a lot of critics encourage today, which is that the only art that is worth creating is art that horrifies us or shocks us or startles us in some way.

**Dr. Lieberman** — I think children should be the most protected. A movie about pedophilia could really have very positive consequences if it's portrayed in a way that shows why people do that and what happens to children who are abused in that way. But it shouldn't be allowed to be in something just for the sake of it. I think things having to do with acts towards children wouldn't be acceptable because it would be harmful, the consequences would be harmful, in that more adults would think it's O.K. to engage in sex with children.

I think when someone has a vision...it's important to decide whether you're being self-indulgent in expressing this vision, just because you want to get it out here, or whether it's going to serve some purpose to humanity...I mean, like Madonna...she said, the book that she just published about sex, she wanted people to see that sex should be an important and normal part of life — she wanted to "demystify" sex. I don't know that one can believe her, but to the extent that that's true, and even though some people may have found that book offensive, I think that there was some validity in it.

society. There may be people like Paul Verhoeven who might well say that he thinks there's a purpose to all the violence he produces. He's a very warped person. You can't be just blindly saying that this will be helpful to society because I think it will, and all of the other information I have to the contrary is not valid.

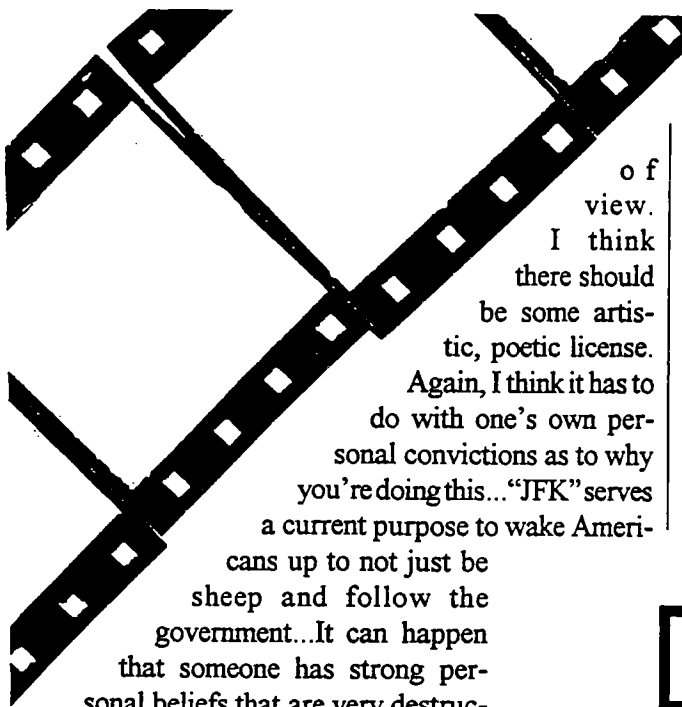
**Cardinal Mahony**—The industry is a public industry. I think the responsibility for common good is a factor

## History

**Mr. Rosenberg** — On one level I was enthralled by "JFK," on another I despised it. I'm deeply offended by people who either distort history or create their own version of history. The way that film was edited it was

example, Mississippi Burning ... bothered me because it didn't give black people enough credit for the civil rights struggle, and it glamorized the FBI.

**Dr. Lieberman** — I think the question is whether the person is stepping over the line by knowingly manipulating the truth in order to get people to believe in his point



o f  
view.  
I think  
there should  
be some artis-  
tic, poetic license.  
Again, I think it has to  
do with one's own per-  
sonal convictions as to why  
you're doing this..."JFK" serves  
a current purpose to wake Ameri-  
cans up to not just be  
sheep and follow the  
government...It can happen  
that someone has strong per-  
sonal beliefs that are very destruc-  
tive. If a person really believed that the  
Holocaust didn't exist, wouldn't that be art if they create  
something to try to get other people to wake up and  
realize this, too?...But it could have very negative  
implications...because it would create a wave of anti-  
Semitism.

## Violence

**Dr. Lieberman** — I would not want kids to see "The Jeffrey Dahmer Story" [on TV]. It could be made by 10 production teams and it would be done 10 different ways. It could come out to be an anti-violence statement or a titillating pro-violence statement. That's where the views and the psychological make-up of people who are doing these things comes into play. It's not the story, per se, or the goal per se, it's how psychologically healthy [the makers] are and how much they care about society.

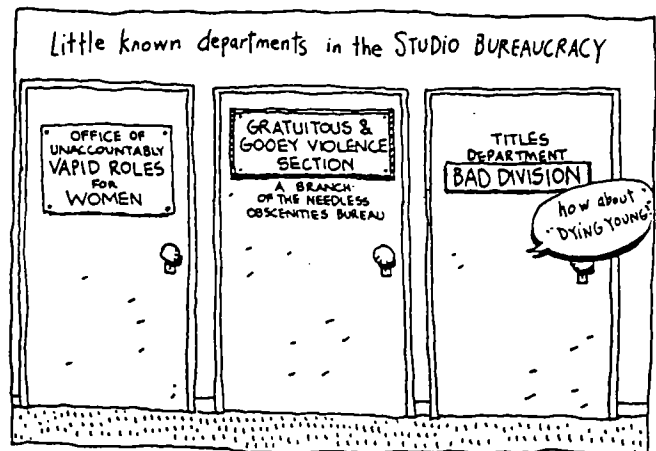
## Religion

**Dr. Lieberman** — If there were studies that showed that showing the cross in urine or masturbating with a cross was going to do something like make people give

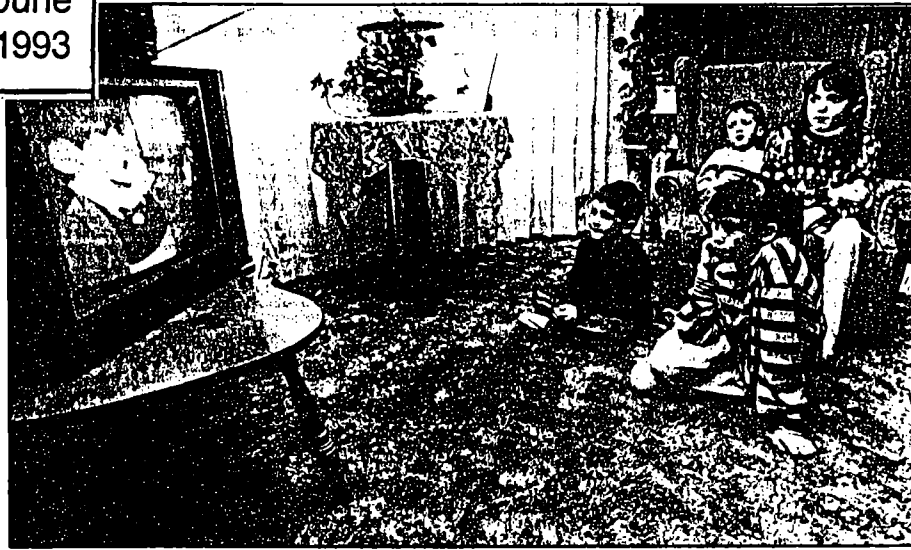
*I would not want to randomly violate some-  
body else's sacred objects. — Amitai Etzioni*

up their religion or make people assault priests, or something...but that isn't the case. People may get offended, but I don't know that it's going to create any real harmful effects other than people being offended. I don't think you can put too many restraints...I think it would paralyze the artist.

**Mr. Medved** — It seems to me that it is proper to identify religious believers as a group in society that is



From the book *SILENT PICTURES: A Skewed Look At Showbiz* by  
Katie Maratta from Lone Eagle Publishing Co. 1-800-FILMBKS



The children of Paul and Dee Charles watch TV shows only after they've been screened by their parents. Timothy, 5; Jessica, 11; (sitting on the floor), Jonathan, 3, and Amy, 9 watched "The Great Mouse Detective," a Disney cartoon movie that passes muster. News-Tribune photo illustration

# Violence, TV and kids:

## Survey points out effects

By Maureen Sieh  
News-Tribune staff writer

A group of Duluth third-graders, asked about their favorite TV show, votes for "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles."

Students in the same class say "Home Alone 2" and "Terminator 2" are their favorite movies.

A 1991 survey by the National Coalition on Television Violence found that 66 percent of suburban children ages 10 to 13 could identify the "Nightmare on Elm Street" movies and character Freddy Krueger.

The survey also showed that only 36 percent of the children knew that Abraham Lincoln was a president of the United States.

More than 3,000 studies have shown that children who watch television violence are more prone to use physical aggression than those who don't. Despite that, televised violence continues to flow into American homes.

"TV is polluting the minds of children and adults by its selling of the new drug — violence," said Carole Lieberman, chairwoman of the National Coalition on TV Violence.

"Just as we need to address the pollution of our environmental resources, we need to address the pollution of our most precious resources: the minds of American citizens. And we need to address it now," Lieberman said.

Lieberman, who testified before the House Judiciary Committee on Crime and Criminal Justice in December, said her group's recent study on prime-time

television found that the Fox Network has the highest number of violent acts per hour followed by NBC, CBS and ABC.

She suggested that networks and cable channels agree on a rating system that would describe the violence content of TV shows and that they should be required to flash a warning before those shows are broadcast.

Although television executives have offered various defenses of their programming, they now admit that TV violence has some effect on aggressive behavior.

In December, the three major networks agreed on several standards they claim would control violence in TV entertainment.

The networks' move is welcomed by officials at their Northland affiliate stations. But the officials said the final responsibility for policing television rests with parents.

"The networks are making a positive statement," said Bruce Miller, president of KDLH-TV, the CBS television affiliate station in Duluth. "They are finally accepting some responsibility. But parents must realize that TV can no longer be a baby sitter. They must monitor what their children watch."

But Lieberman said the new standards are not good enough because they are based solely on value judgments.

To determine what constitutes violent TV programming, the networks and cable stations need an independent review board comprising experts who have background in psychology and violence research.

# Parents try to monitor what their children see

By Maureen Sieh  
News-Tribune staff writer

**P**aul and Dee Charles don't allow their children to watch violent television shows.

Mark DeArrovoa sometimes lets his 12- and 13-year-old children watch TV shows that deal with family violence because he believes there is some value in such shows.

Diane Anderson doesn't let her 7-year-old son watch television alone.

These Northland parents are doing what experts have urged since the apparent link between TV violence and aggressive behavior was established 30 years ago: They are screening the shows their children watch on television.

"When children watch violence, they become aggressive," said Deborah Peterson, assistant professor of journalism at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. "Parents need to be active in selecting TV programs for their children because monitoring TV shows gives them control over what their children watch."

A recent study by Dr. Leonard Eron, a psychologist at the University of Illinois-Chicago Circle and chairman of the Commission on Violence and Youth in Washington, D.C., focused on a group of people ages 8, 19 and 30.

Eron, who testified at a Senate hearing last April, found that children who frequently watched violent TV programs at age 8 were more likely to be convicted of violent crimes when they were 30.

The study also showed that people who viewed more violence as youngsters tended to be more aggressive when drinking as adults and used harsher punishment on their children.

If children continue to watch violence, they begin to think that violence is a way of life, said Dr. Robert Gould, a psychology professor at New York Medical College. He also is a board member of the National Coalition on TV Violence in Chicago.

"A strong message must be sent to parents so that they can become aware of what happens to their children when they watch violence on TV," Gould said. "When children watch too much violence on TV, violence becomes their role model."

Paul and Dee Charles of Duluth have

## GUARDING YOUR KIDS

The American Psychological Association suggests four steps parents can take to make sure their children aren't watching violent TV programs:

■ Watch at least one episode of the programs your child watches.

■ When watching TV with your child, talk about violence that you might see. Discuss why the violence happened and how painful it is. Ask the child how the conflict could have been resolved without violence.

■ Explain to the child that violence in entertainment is not real.

■ Encourage your children to watch programs with characters who cooperate, and care for each other. These programs have been shown to influence children in a positive way.

Here are some other ways to raise awareness about the effects of TV violence:

■ Urge the broadcast, cable and home video industries to adopt a unified ratings system of advisories to parents.

■ Urge TV and cable industry executives to take full advantage of the Television Violence Act, permitting them to work collectively toward reducing media violence.

■ Make TV violence part of the public health agenda (like smoking and drunk driving) by publicizing its perils and effects.

■ Establish courses in "critical viewing skills" as a regular aspect of school curricula to help young people become more discriminating viewers.

been monitoring the types of shows their children watch for the past 11 years.

"We never let our children watch anything that we haven't seen," said 36-year-old Dee Charles. "They don't like to begin watching a movie and then have to walk out because it's so violent and scary."

The Charles' children, ages 3 to 11, enjoy watching "Lamb Chop's Play-Along" and "Sesame Street" on public television. The couple also borrows educational videos from the public library.

"If we give our children a diet of 'Animal Alphabet' (a Disney video that introduces children to animals) they will learn about animals," said Paul Charles, also 36. "But if we allow them to watch 'Rambo' 10 times a day, they could become violent."

DeArrovoa, a Duluth father of three, allows his 12- and 13-year-old kids to watch TV shows in which violence is not the main subject.

"We discuss with our children the problems that resulted in the violence rather than the violence," DeArrovoa said. "We wouldn't let our 6-year-old watch anything with violence in it. But sometimes it's so hard to find anything without violence, that's why we are selective."

But television is not the only source of violence. There are many movies that have violence and children can watch them by either renting videos or going to the theater.

In some cases movies are advertised as good for children, but parents come away

Please see **Violence**, back page

## Violence:

From Page 1B

disappointed when they allow their children to watch them.

DeArrovoa took his children to see "Home Alone 2" and he was disgusted.

"Movies have a tendency to make violent acts OK, and children cannot distinguish between a movie that jokes about a person being electrocuted and what happens in real life," DeArrovoa said. "But as parents, we have to tell our children that violence is not a good role model."

Not enough parents are screening the shows their children are watching, said Nancy Hoene, a consultant on critical viewing skills at WDSE-TV, the public broadcasting station in Duluth.

"Some parents think it's OK to put on the TV while they wash dishes or run to the store," Hoene said. "Parents must see what's on TV. Pay attention to the underlying messages and discuss them with their children."

For working parents, it's sometimes difficult to monitor shows, especially if television is used as a baby sitter.

"But no kid should come home to an empty house or a TV set," said Dr. Carole Lieberman, chairwoman of the National Coalition on TV Violence. "That's asking for trouble. Parents need to develop afterschool activities for their children besides television."

**Meurtre** Aux États-Unis, la télévision a diffusé les images d'un homme tuant sa femme en direct au cours d'une de ces émissions dont les Américains sont friands

# « REALITY SHOW » MEURTRIER AUX ÉTATS-UNIS

**WASHINGTON**  
CORRESPONDANCE SPÉCIALE

N'y a-t-il donc pas de limites à la violence télévisée? Mardi 19 janvier, les téléspectateurs américains ont vu, dans plusieurs journaux télévisés des chaînes aussi prestigieuses que CBS ou NBC, un homme assassiner froidement sa femme. La scène avait été filmée la veille par une équipe de la chaîne hispanique Telemundo à Miami.

Les journalistes avaient rendez-vous avec Emilio Nunez, un homme de 34 ans, pour filmer une séquence de « *Ocurrio asi* » (« cela s'est passé ainsi »), un de ces « reality-shows » dont le public américain est friand. Il s'agit de raconter des tranches de la vie réelle des gens, de préférence dramatiques.

Lundi dernier, le 18 janvier, l'équipe de Telemundo devait donc filmer le chagrin d'un homme dont la fille de 15 ans

venait de se suicider, drame dont il rend responsable son ex-femme. C'est lui qui a, de lui-même, contacté les responsables de l'émission. Pour plus de réalisme, rendez-vous a été donné au cimetière. Les caméras filment Emilio en train de déposer des fleurs sur la tombe de sa fille lorsque deux femmes arrivent. L'homme sort une arme et abat en s'y reprenant à deux fois son ex-femme de 12 balles. Malheureusement, il ne s'agit pas d'une reconstitution. Le drame s'est bel et bien déroulé, « dans la réalité », sous l'œil des caméras. Et certains de se demander si Telemundo ne savait pas que l'ex-épouse viendrait. En tout cas, l'équipe de télévision n'a pas esquissé un geste ou prononcé une parole pour arrêter le meurtrier.

Les producteurs d'« *Ocurrio asi* » ont choisi de diffuser la scène intégrale le mardi. La directrice de l'émission, Fran Mires, n'a pas d'états d'âme. Au

contraire : « Nous avons fait d'un meurtre ordinaire une information internationale. Il fallait le diffuser. Nous sommes une émission d'information et de faits de société. Ce meurtre est une information. De plus, cet homme était armé et dangereux. Il a été pris par la police deux jours après la diffusion de la vidéo. Une partie d'« *Ocurrio asi* » consiste en avis de recherches de criminels. Nous sommes en relation officielle avec le FBI. Nous avons déjà permis de retrouver cinq criminels. »

Trop occupés par la grande fête télévisuelle de l'investiture du nouveau président, les producteurs de télévision et les téléspectateurs n'ont pas prêté grande attention à l'événement qui mérite pourtant de susciter un vrai débat sur les débordements de la violence sur le petit écran : jusqu'où iront les « reality shows »? Y a-t-il une limite à la violence montrée à la télé?

Est-ce le sensationnel qui fait la valeur d'une information? Fallait-il que NBC et CBS reprennent la scène dans leurs journaux?

Il y a six ans, lorsque le directeur du trésor de Pennsylvanie, R. Budd Dwyer, s'était suicidé par balles au cours d'une conférence de presse, seules un petit nombre de stations avaient décidé de montrer la scène. Le public américain est-il à ce point habitué à la violence qu'il accepte aujourd'hui de telles images?

## La spirale de la violence

« Chaque mois, chaque semaine, nous tombons plus bas dans la spirale de la violence », constate le docteur Carole Lieberman, présidente de la coalition nationale contre la violence à la télé. Mais la violence est comme une drogue. Les téléspectateurs deviennent dépendants. Ils ne vont pas demander qu'on arrête. Il faut que la ré-

flexion soit faite au niveau des producteurs. « Aux heures de grande écoute, les grands réseaux (ABC-NBC-CBS) montrent 7,7 actes de violences physiques à l'heure, révèle une étude récente. La moyenne pour les télévisions commerciales locales se situe à 8,6. La chaîne populaire commerciale Fox bat les records : 10,9, à des heures où les enfants ne sont pas encore au lit. Principaux accusés : les dessins animés. Suivis par les « reality shows ». « Plus la personne peut s'identifier, plus la violence est dangereuse, estime Carole Lieberman. Les gens croient de plus en plus qu'ils sont les vedettes d'un film. Dans ce cas, on peut se demander si cet homme aurait tué sa femme s'il n'y avait pas eu une télé pour le filmer? »

En moyenne, les Américains passent vingt-six heures par semaine devant leur écran. Une télévision de plus en plus commandée par les impératifs éco-

nomiques et les fameux « taux d'écoute ». Or les « reality shows », ces émissions où le fait divers s'étale, comme « *Current Affair* » (CBS) ou « *America's most wanted* » (Fox), dans des réalisations peu coûteuses, sont parmi les plus écoutées. Comme on n'hésite pas à mêler réalité et montages, reconstituer avec des comédiens des scènes de délinquance, le public transformé en voyeur ne sait plus très bien s'il a affaire à du réel ou à de la fiction.

Le sénateur de l'Illinois Paul Simon a fait adopter en 1990 une loi qui permet aux grands réseaux d'établir des règles de conduite communes pour limiter la violence. En décembre 1992, les trois grands réseaux ont adopté des principes communs. Mais, en définitive, chaque réseau reste son propre juge. Souvent otage des indices d'écoute.

Marie-Christine RAY

# How Violent Is Kids' TV?

By CAROLYN SUSMAN  
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Chrichtet Mixon finds her spot in front of the television. It's Saturday morning and, like an estimated 8 million to 10 million other children across the country, the 10-year-old is ready to watch her favorite cartoons.

At 10 a.m., *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* devour the small screen from their sewer home on CBS to stomp their archrival, Shredder, and rescue their TV journalist friend, April.

The *Ninjas* proceed with their animated acts of violence, always in pursuit of justice, of course. Chrichtet watches, but seems undisturbed by the hourlong program's constant battling.

"I like the *Ninjas*," she explains, "even though the turtles are going to get beat up. They always come back. But everyone might not see that."

The sixth-grader at Roosevelt Middle School in West

Palm Beach usually watches the cartoons alone. And she includes less violent shows, such as *Bobby's World* or *Garfield*, in her morning viewing.

Only once during this hour of turtle-watching does Chrichtet release a little gasp. The villain, Shredder, is preparing to blow up a satellite that is about to be launched.

"Uh-oh," she whispers. "He hit a button."

Chrichtet's father, Earl, executive director of the Palm Beach County Housing Finance Authority, wanders in and out. He trusts Chrichtet, he says, to make her own viewing choices.

"She knows what's good and bad and what I would approve of."

Like most parents, he wonders about cartoon violence. How much is too much? How much should parents influence their children's choice of programming? Does make-believe fighting lead to real-life aggression?

These questions generated more discussion last month when the three major television networks — CBS, ABC and NBC — agreed to "limit the depiction of violence" in entertainment programming by the end of this year.

The voluntary guidelines include banning repeated depictions of violence for its own sake, prohibiting the glamorization of violence, banishing excessive gore or suffering and barring violence that is used simply to shock or stimulate the audience.

The networks made this move under the prodding of Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., who has championed the cause of reduced violence on television. He authored the TV Violence Act of 1990, which allowed the networks to work together toward regulating TV rough stuff.

"As one might suspect, there is a fairly high correlation between the extensiveness of violence in children's cartoons and their play following exposure to it," says West Palm Beach psychologist Jack Mihalovich, who specializes in working with children and families.

But Ellen Snow of Royal Palm Beach disagrees. Her 7-year-old twins, Chris and John, regularly watch morning cartoons.

"The children don't seem disturbed by them. I'm totally in the belief they think it's entertainment and fantasy. There are no problems with aggressiveness."

In fact, Snow says, she uses the cartoons as incentives for the twins to do chores. They have to complete their work before they watch the programs.

The twins say the violence in programs such as *ABC's Darkwing Duck* doesn't bother them. "I kind of like it," says Chris. "I like funny cartoons."

## Taking responsibility

Beverly Hills psychiatrist Carole Lieberman, chairman of the 3,500-member National Coalition on Television Violence, isn't laughing.

Lieberman presented a 10-point plan in December to the House Judiciary Committee on Crime aimed at curbing violence in the media.

She calls media-depicted violence "the number one health problem in America. I'm not advocating censorship of any kind. But people in the media need to take more responsibility. Over 1,000 studies show there are harmful effects (from watching media-generated violence)."

Florence and Robert Rivas of Boca Raton worry about those effects. They don't permit 6-year-old Cecilia and 5-year-old Alex to watch Saturday morning cartoon shows.

"It isn't so much a matter that they're not allowed," says Florence, who is a board member of the Boynton Beach-based public television station WVEL. "They have a dim awareness that it's out there, but it's not part of their life. They know that there are things they're allowed and encouraged to watch and other things we deem not suitable for children. Sometimes they'll bring the subject up if we don't. Sometimes they'll come to us and say, 'Can we watch this?'"

The Rivases encourage their children to watch public television programs about nature and history, but limit their children's exposure to news programs as well as cartoons.

"You sort of have to screen these days," Florence says. "The rape of the day, starvation in Somalia. We pay real careful attention if we hear something we're not prepared to cope with."

## Harder to insulate

Robert likens their approach to "a couple of Dutch people with our fingers in the dike. With the influences out there, it becomes harder and harder to insulate them. In these formative years, we want their minds to be formed by things we approve of."

Because Florence finds much that is offensive in even Disney cartoons — "A woman should be independent until you can find a man to take care of you" is frequently their theme, she says — Cecilia sneaks peeks at *Beauty and the Beast* at her grandmother's home.

"Mommy won't let us watch TV because we have better things to do," she chirps. "I have friends who watch cartoons a lot, but I'm not jealous."

The guru of children's television, Peggy Charren, who founded Action for Children's Television 20 years



Photo by RICHARD GRAULICH

Chrichtet Mixon, 10, watches the *Turtles* along with less violent cartoons such as *Garfield*.

★ KAPOW! THUDD! ★  
BAM!

# Are cartoons too violent for kids?

CARTOONS/from 1D

## KEEPING COUNT ON CARTOONS

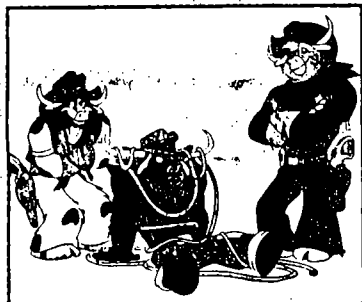
The *Palm Beach Post* reviewed cartoons that aired Dec. 19 from 9 to 11 a.m. on ABC, CBS and the Fox Network. NBC no longer shows Saturday morning cartoons. The competition among the networks has become so great that CBS' *Garfield* told his audience, 'Don't bother checking NBC, kids; they're not running cartoons anymore.'

As has been the case for decades, cartoon violence generally has no physical consequences: A bookcase falls on a *Ninja Turtle* and he gets up and brushes himself off. *Darkwing Duck* walks into a plane, looks stunned, but quickly recovers.

We found more than 120 acts of violence in the 10 shows airing during those hours. The most violent were *EEK! the Cat* on the Fox Network, *Tom & Jerry* on the Fox Network and the *Ninja Turtles* on CBS. *Garfield* was the only cartoon character without violence.

### ABC

**The Wild West C.O.W.Boys of Moo Mesa:** They 'clean up the territory,' keeping evil on its toes. 'A Western with cows. **TOTAL INCIDENTS: 8**



The C.O.W.Boys of Moo Mesa repressed neighbors, one has to wonder who's weirder,' says a press release on the show. **TOTAL INCIDENTS: 13**

**Darkwing Duck:** A heroic duck who battles evil, but leaves his daughter, Goslin, home alone. **TOTAL INCIDENTS: 10**

**Goof Troop:** Stars Disney character Goofy as a single father with an 11-year-old son. Welcome to the '90s. **TOTAL INCIDENTS: 5**

**The Addams Family:** Based on the Charles Addams characters. 'They struggle to maintain their demented ways, but when compared to their

### CBS

**Garfield & Friends:** The lovable cat who's smarter than his owner. He manages to win back his owner's house, which has been taken by a swindler, without any acts of violence. Pure brain power. The second part of the show, however, is about a pig friend named Orson who is very unkind to a forgetful duck.



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

**TOTAL INCIDENTS: 0**

**The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles:** The show most lambasted by health professionals for its violent ways. Martial arts is everything. Beverly Hills psychiatrist Carole Lieberman calls the show 'insidiously dangerous.'

**TOTAL INCIDENTS PER HALF HOUR: 17**

### FOX NETWORK

**Tom & Jerry:** A new twist on an old, violent, favorite.

**TOTAL INCIDENTS: 20**

**EEK! the Cat:** A feline with a high tolerance for violence, he leads the list of those who get bombed, shot and blown up.

**TOTAL INCIDENTS: 25**

**Tiny Toons:** Looney critters who also get their fair share of being eaten by sharks and shot by guns.

**TOTAL INCIDENTS: 15**

**Taz-Mania:** The freaky Tazmanian devil goes wild. **TOTAL INCIDENTS: 8**

ago, thinks the recent show of cooperation between the networks in forming guidelines against violence is fine.

But she thinks they are taking the wrong long-term approach, and she's concerned about the agreement fostering government censorship.

"I think that, in a democracy, you can't make day and night suitable for kids. I feel the same way about indecency. One person's idea of indecency is another's sex education. You can't have 500 channels all for kids."

The key, Charren, said, is to offer alternatives to children, for parents to be aware of what programs their children watch and to regulate the programs accordingly.

"I know (Sen.) Paul Simon cares about the Constitution as much as I do. But we have to remind ourselves that choice is the name of the game in a public institution. The problem, then, is access to choice."

Censorship, she said, isn't the answer.

"If the networks were telling their suppliers they want more of these shows like *Brooklyn Bridge*, or specials on hunger in America, they'd get it. If they told the animators who put those dumb programs together Saturday morning — where multiculturalism is different colored ducks — that they want something different, they'd get it."

How do the networks decide what to air and which cartoons are suitable?

At Turner Broadcasting System and the Cartoon Network, Michael Lazzo makes those decisions. And, he says, he rarely hears from boss Ted Turner that he's made a wrong choice.

What is considered violent or threatening behavior can be subjective. Lazzo has the option to edit cartoons to make them agreeable. Some of the older classics, like *Tom & Jerry*, and even *Daffy Duck*, can regularly be edited.

"Just a bop on the head, we'll leave it in there. If there's gun play and threatening images, we'll take it out. If there is any question when we screen these things, we'll probably take it out."

Suicide is a forbidden topic and Lazzo reviewed two cartoons where the characters contemplated self-destruction.

"With *Tom & Jerry*, most of the time they chase each other around. In one, Tom is despondent over lost love. He's sitting on the railroad tracks and he doesn't look like he's about to move. We decided to keep it off the air. In that particular case, we felt we couldn't edit it out. The whole cartoon was despondent, not funny."

"There are instances where we'll edit out if we can. In *Mexican Joy Ride*, Daffy is a bullfighter. He exasperates the bull to the extent the bull pulls out a gun and puts it against its head. We edited. We show the bull becoming exasperated and leave it at that."

Cartoons like *Ninja Turtles* were rejected for airing.

"It has action, adventure, a certain amount of violence. We felt Ted wouldn't be too keen to have that type of programming on the air."

Says ACT's Charren: "Getting (networks) to write (guidelines) down is good, but they were written with the threat of government action. I worry a lot about the government saying precisely what you can and can't do in programming. The first step may be to take off programming that makes everybody nauseous, but after that, it could be *MacNeil/Lehrer*."

# DAILY VARIETY

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1992

## Panel urges tougher violence regs

BY RICHARD HUFF

NEW YORK—Calling TV violence America's No. 1 health problem, panelists testifying before a House subcommittee yesterday called for better labeling of television programs containing violence and tougher network and cable standards.

Representatives from the networks and cable, meanwhile, denied there was any connection between rising violence rates in the

### Another view on violent TV, page 23

country and the amount on television, but admitted there could be better broadcast standards throughout the industry.

"Our addiction to violence on the screen is manifesting itself by violence in our streets in epidemic proportions ... and we must do something about it," Carole Lieberman, M.D. of the National Coalition on Television Violence testified.

According to Lieberman, a recent NCTV study found that Fox Broadcasting had the highest number of violent acts out of the four networks, followed by NBC, CBS

and ABC. She explained that regular series were not as much the culprit when it comes to violence but movies were.

### 'Lives torn asunder'

Lieberman, a psychiatrist, said she has "seen patient's lives torn asunder by irresponsible television—especially by its glamorization of violence."

Lieberman suggested that censorship was not the answer in curbing television violence, but that perhaps such things as a ratings system, ingredient labels, warning labels, and a public service campaign were.

All of the panelists appearing at the hearing agreed that while the television networks did air some violent programming, it was cable programmers who are most responsible for the amount of violence on the air.

Yet according to a TV Guide study entered as evidence, local independents were the purveyors of the most violence followed by TBS, HBO, USA Network, MTV, Fox, CBS, ABC, NBC and PBS. Winston (Tony) Cox, chairman and CEO of Showtime Networks Inc., said that his company was concerned with children being ex-

posed to television violence and that it was a topic the industry needed to address.

The hearing was held a day after the Big Three jointly announced that they had worked together to create a better program practices and broadcast standards rule book.

### Network reps

Appearing before the panel for the networks were Dr. Rosalyn Weinman, VP of broadcast standards and practices at NBC; Beth Waxman Bressan, VP and assistant to the president at CBS and Christine Hikawa, VP of broadcast standards and practices at ABC.

Each of the network representatives said they do not believe that network television is a contributor to the acts of real world violence but were concerned with the way violent acts are portrayed on the air. As a result, each stressed that programs and commercials go through rigorous editing and viewing.

More important, the network representatives maintained that they cannot rid the TV world of violence alone. It will take a commitment from all programmers, cable and broadcast, to get a better grasp on television violence.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Dec. 13-19



GUN CONTROL: "Bodies of Evidence" consultants Ed Arneson and Randy Walker, from left, work with series star Lee Horsley.

## Reality Checkers

BY LIBBY SLATE

When the producers and writers of the CBS daytime soap "The Bold and the Beautiful" recently introduced the new character of compulsive gambler Jack Hamilton, they did not need to research the role through a

group such as Gamblers Anonymous. Instead, they called upon the services of their in-house psychiatrist: Dr. Carole Lieberman, who for about 18 months has been on staff as a consultant to "B&B" and its sister show, "The Young and the Restless."

TV series have long asked experts for advice and tips, to ensure accuracy. But as television is tackling in-

creasingly complex and varied subjects, technical consultants are considered critical to many programs and movies. Most sought after are medical and police experts.

For Lieberman, a Beverly Hills psychiatrist, it began in 1980 when she was a member of the Southern California Psychiatric Society Speakers Bureau, which provides free phone consultations to scriptwriters and other creative personnel. Six years ago, she launched her private consulting business and has since worked on dozens of television projects.

"Years ago, there was more of a need to call a consultant regarding mental illness when writers had a technical problem, such as if there were a psychiatric illness or hospitalization," she says. "Now there's more of an awareness of motivation on a psychological level, in part because of the many more shows like Oprah and Sally Jessy Raphael—society is becoming more aware of why people do what they do."

For the soap operas, Lieberman reads every script and faxes or phones detailed notes to the writers. For non-soap projects, she sometimes tries to solve story problems by analyzing the writers themselves if she senses that the problem directly relates to an issue in the writer's own life and that the writer will be receptive.

The accurate media depiction of both the emotional and physical aspects of having a disability is one of the missions of the Media Access Office, which was created in 1980 as a liaison between the media/entertainment industry and the disabled community. Based in Panorama City, the office seeks to dispel negative stereotypes of people with disabilities—including about 46 million Americans—in favor of positive images, providing technical assistance regarding disability portrayal and issues.

On an episode last season of "Jake and the Fatman" for instance, in which Jake became romantically involved with a woman in a wheelchair, the writers called the office for advice regarding sexuality and disability. "People hear these things, like disabled people can't have sex," says administrative manager Jill Roberts. "She and Jake didn't actually have sex, but they discussed it openly. So the episode became an education for Jake"—and by extension, for viewers as well.

The office also provides casting referrals for disabled performers in speaking roles, such as the 50-some-

thing wheelchair-using woman on an episode of NBC's "Seinfeld" and a hearing-impaired woman on ABC's "Doogie Howser, M.D.," and as extras, among them an "FYI" staffer on CBS' "Murphy Brown" who uses a wheelchair.

A bit more dangerous line of consulting is provided by "Call the Cops," a company of four SWAT-team veterans and one homicide detective created three years ago to advise on all facets of police work, from barricaded suspects to uniforms, from undercover work to court testimony. Their credits include a Tom Selleck-produced pilot and features such as "Terminator 2" and "Point Break"; at least one member is now on the set of each episode of the CBS series "Bodies of Evidence" (returning to the air Jan. 6).

"We're there to save time and money getting the script right," says Ed Arneson, an LAPD sergeant in charge of a "special problems" unit in South Los Angeles. "[Supervising producer] James Conway might call as he comes up with ideas. He'll say, 'Do policemen do this?' We might come up with ideas that make the story more plausible."

Sometimes total accuracy is sacrificed for visual dramatics, notes LAPD Officer Randy Walker. "They always have the police car lights going when they shouldn't be. When you've been [at a crime scene] for 20 minutes and the dust has settled, we turn the lights off. But it looks good on film. And sometimes the impact of a bullet is overplayed. In reality, you can't always tell if you've shot someone, because you might not be able to see the blood through their clothes."

The policemen instruct cast members on shooting techniques and other aspects of cop duty. "Actors' biggest fear seems to be handcuffing," Arneson reports. "If the cuffs aren't being shown on camera, we tell them just to click them behind the [suspect's] back."

This being Hollywood, it seems inevitable that the technical advisers would themselves get into the act—literally. Lieberman has hosted radio and cable television shows, while the police officers have appeared as cops when requested by the director. The "Call the Cops" team also has an agent for two scripts they have written. After all, says Arneson, "We read about 50 to 75 scripts a year that are submitted to us for advice. We figured we could do at least as well as those."

Free-lance writer Libby Slate is a frequent contributor to TV Times.

HEARING ON HOW TO MASSAGE THE MESSAGE

# Television Violence Takes a Beating

By Diane Werts

STAFF WRITER

**L**IKE CIGARETTE smoking, televised violence may be an American habit whose widespread acceptance can best be curtailed through education, not legislation.

Even longtime critics of the impact of TV mayhem on real-life violence agreed, at a House subcommittee hearing into the subject yesterday in Manhattan, that their efforts must focus less on government intervention and more on public outreach, as the simple three-network broadcast business has mushroomed into a much more complicated media environment.

A "cultural environmental movement" would make viewers more aware of the cumulative effects of violent programming, said George Gerbner, who studies the impact of television for the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. That awareness could translate into a rejection of televised violence, much as tobacco has become less socially accepted as its dangers have increasingly been publicized — all without the government stepping in and possibly stepping on citizens' freedom of choice.

TV violence needs to be recognized as "the Number One health problem in the country," said National Coalition

on Television Violence chairperson Carole Lieberman. She argued for "better educated media consumers" to help battle this "new drug." Other academics, TV executives and media critics (this newspaper's Marvin Kitman and TV Guide's Neil Hickey) echoed the call during the morning-long hearing convened at the Jacob Javits Federal Building by Rep. Charles Schumer (D-Brooklyn) of the House judiciary subcommittee on crime.

While Schumer maintained that "the dirty little secret of all of this is that the public likes the stuff," Gerbner said that supposition "simply has no evidence behind it." Instead, "Violence is imposed on people who do not seek it out, because of global marketing considerations." In a sort of pro-violence self-censorship, he says, Hollywood "imposes formulas on writers" and "stifles creativity" because action translates to lucrative foreign markets easier than drama or humor.

Most of that violence is seen not in TV series but in theatrical films shown on the small screen, and it appears most often on independent broadcasters and cable channels. Network standards and practices executives from ABC, CBS and NBC noted that Gerbner's studies show the much-maligned networks actually are the least violent of TV programers. / ■

CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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## COVER STORY

# Three women, three stories

*How their grief turned to action against violence*

BY ANDRÉ PICARD  
Quebec Bureau  
Montreal

THREE years ago, Virginie Larivière was content to play with her dolls and watch Ninja Turtles cartoons with her little sister.

Heidi Rathjen was an engineering student who had secured a good job and was excitedly planning a postgraduation trip to Europe. Suzanne Laplante Edward was a proud suburban mom revelling in her daughter's academic and athletic success.

Then violence — brutal, unexpected male violence against women and girls — ripped gaping holes in their cozy worlds.

Mrs. Laplante Edward's daughter, Anne-Marie, was one of 14 women shot to death at Montreal's École Polytechnique on Dec. 6, 1989. Ms. Rathjen entered the fray as the only woman student leader at that school. And this year, Miss Larivière's 11-year-old sister was raped and murdered.

The women's stories are battlefield testaments of what a House of Commons subcommittee has bluntly described as the war against women.

They come from different backgrounds and generations — a 53-year-old stay-at-home mother, a working woman of 26 and a 14-year-old junior high school student.

But they reacted to tragedy in almost identical fashion, channeling their grief and anger into action and leadership.

Please see T00 — A8

# 'Too much violence ... we've had enough'

• From Page A1

As they and other Canadians mark the third anniversary of the Polytechnique tragedy, Virginie, Heidi and Suzanne say they will continue to look beyond the motives and minds of those who kill, and seek to eradicate the root causes of violence.

"Each has dedicated herself to promoting non-violence. Each has decided that lighting a candle once a year, or donning a ribbon, is not enough. Each is evidence that individuals can make a difference — a strong and poignant voice swelling the rallying cry: 'Never again.'"

On the morning after the Polytechnique killings, a front-page photo in the Montreal Gazette told the story as words could not. It showed a dead student slumped in a cafeteria chair, with a police officer behind her tearing down festive decorations reading Happy New Year.

"Since then, much has been said about Marc Lépine, the man who killed the 14 women and injured 13 others with his semi-automatic rifle in a barrage of hatred.

"But less is heard of the victims and the response of their families and friends — a reaction that has been important in keeping the broader issues in the headlines, and spawning grassroots action.

"The unidentified woman in the photo, shot four times as she ate supper, was 21-year-old Anne-Marie Edward.

"I took four bullets to the heart that day," Mrs. Laplante Edward says. She mourned quietly at first. But then — angry over the senselessness of the death and the lack of a concrete political response — she spoke out, in an open letter signed by 122 members of the victims' families.

"We realize that guns are not the only factor leading to violence in our society," it said. "However, we believe that easy access to guns and lack of control of their use is a contributing factor to this rising violence. We, the parents and families of the victims, are living with the inadequacies of the legislation every day."

"At the time, Mrs. Laplante Edward says, she was a "typical complacent, suburban, middle-class Canadian" in Pierrefonds, Que. "I wrote a lot of letters in my head that I never sent because I never thought things would affect me personally."

"She not only put pen to paper, but began to publicly articulate her no-nonsense, pull-no-punches views on gun control, sexism, violence on television and political inaction — views she believes are shared by many Canadians.

"I am not an expert, just a mother. Just an ordinary Canadian who had never given guns the slightest thought until Dec. 6, 1989," she told a parliamentary committee reviewing gun-control legislation.

"She went on to tell the uneasy politicians what the statistics could not: When a Canadian dies of a gunshot wound, somewhere a mother's heart is shattered.

"Anne-Marie had just become a member of the university's alpine ski racing team; she was buried in her team uniform. Like most 21-year-olds, she was bursting with hopes and dreams. "Only a man could stop her. A man with a gun," Mrs. Laplante Edward says.

"She started the lobby group Victims of Polytechnique for Gun Control, which recently became an education-oriented charity called the Foundation of the Victims of Dec. 6 Against Violence. Its *raison d'être* is summed up by a poster that hangs over Mrs. Laplante Edward's desk.

"Fourteen women died in Montreal Dec. 6, 1989; 97 women died in domestic violence in 1988 in Canada," it reads. "First mourn, then work for change."

From 1977 to 1988, an average of 1,455 people died in Canada each year from gunshot wounds. This included an average 1,128 suicides, 186 homicides and 101 from accidents and other causes.

Last year a record 753 people were murdered in Canada. Of those, 270 were shot to death, half of them with handguns. Montreal registered 106 killings, the most of any Canadian city.

Eighty-five Canadian men killed their wives last year.

Heidi Rathjen candidly admits she was drawn into the aftermath of the Polytechnique tragedy because she was a busybody — and the only woman on the student board of directors at the engineering school. "They had 14 women dead so they needed a girl to be involved," she says wryly. "It was an image thing."

As Canadians struggled to comprehend the extent of



Virginie Larivière, left, took a petition against television violence to Parliament Hill. Suzanne Laplante Edward spoke out after her daughter was killed. Heidi Rathjen quit an engineering career to lobby for gun control.



(Canadian Press)

the killings and their message about the level of misogyny and violence in the country, Ms. Rathjen went to work.

Despite being hobbled by a cast after a knee operation (most people assumed she had been injured in the shooting), she became a key contact for the journalists who

Ms. Rathjen felt betrayed and bitter. "Sending the bill to a special committee was a complete insult to the memory of the victims, and it was a real slap in the face to all women. It was illogical and infuriating to see that the gun lobby could triumph over public will."

She quit her job, and dedicated herself full-time to lobbying and education on gun control. Today she is executive director of the Canadian Coalition for Gun Control, which includes the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Toronto Board of Education and the Quaker Committee on Justice.

The most frustrating aspect of her work is what Ms. Rathjen calls the "daily struggle for survival." About 95 per cent of Canadians say they favour what the coalition does — better licensing, stricter storage rules for guns and stricter penalties for abusers of weapons — but that support doesn't translate into resources. "We're still considered controversial, so people are reluctant to give us money."

In a morbid twist, the only money Ms. Rathjen had to live on for the first months of her crusade was a \$3,000 donation from Alfred Dallaire Inc., the funeral home that buried the victims of the massacre. A \$10,000 grant from the City of Toronto allowed the coalition to stay alive, and a \$5,000 research contract obtained recently from the City of Montreal will allow Ms. Rathjen to draw a part-time salary for the first time.

Also annoying, Ms. Rathjen said, is that she tends to be treated as frail and emotional rather than taken seriously.

"This may surprise people, particularly at this time of year, but I'm not motivated by the deaths of 14 women at Polytechnique," she says. "I put that tragedy behind me a long time ago."

"Gun control is a rational, sensible cause. Weapons can be restricted, and by doing so fewer people will die and be injured by gunshots."

"It's not an emotional thing. If anything, I'm driven by my engineering mentality that tells me that you can't leave a project unfinished."

The project, she says, remains unchanged and simple. "We're giving a voice to the silent majority. And we will be successful when we drown out the loud minority, the gun lobby."

A study by the Justice Department found there are 5.9 million firearms in Canada, in nearly 2.2 million homes. More than one million of those weapons are "restricted."

A sexual assault is committed in Canada every 17 minutes, and 90 per cent of the victims are women.

Half of the sexually assaulted women are under 17.

The last time Virginie Larivière saw her 11-year-old sister Marie-Eve alive, the two girls were watching television. The younger girl ran off to the store on an errand and never returned. On March 7, in suburban Laval, she was abducted, sexually assaulted and murdered by a man who is still at large.

## FINDING FAULT

The National Coalition on Television Violence is a watchdog in the United States that monitors glamorized violence on TV. The following programs were singled out during a spring 1991 prime-time survey.

| The Top 10                       | Acts of violence per hour |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 Young Riders (ABC)             | 55                        |
| 2 Flash (CBS)                    | 45                        |
| 3 In the Heat of the Night (NBC) | 42                        |
| 4 Black Jack Savage (NBC)        | 33                        |
| 5 Top Cops (CBS)                 | 30                        |
| 6 MacGyver (ABC)                 | 27                        |
| 7 America's Most Wanted (Fox)    | 27                        |
| 8 Toon Nite (CBS)                | 26                        |
| 9 American Detective (ABC)       | 26                        |
| 10 DEA (Fox)                     | 22                        |

flocked to Montreal from around the world. She organized a memorial for the dead and planned a mass funeral for the victims that was attended by thousands of mourners, from the Prime Minister on down.

"It was therapeutic to do all that work," she says. "I didn't have a lot of time to think about the deeper implications of the shootings, so I didn't feel helpless like a lot of women."

When the interest of other students began to wane, she stepped in to lobby for stricter gun-control legislation. When a 550,000-name petition was delivered to Parliament, the government snapped to attention, promising to move swiftly to curb access to firearms.

"At that point, I figured I had done my part," Ms. Rathjen says. "I honestly thought we had done all we could." She spent the summer in Europe on a solo backpacking trek and returned to a high-paying job as a Bell Canada engineer.

But in November, 1990, gun-control legislation was sidetracked in an internal Conservative caucus dispute. It became apparent that the new law would not be in place before the anniversary of the Polytechnique massacre the next month.

"My sister has gone to sleep; she's with the angels," Miss Larivière says. "But for her and all the other children I want to say there's too much violence, that we've had enough."

Her consciousness-raising was as brutal as they come. Staring down at her sister in a coffin, she wondered how and why anyone could kill.

"Then, what came to mind was all the violence on television. I thought that maybe people don't understand any more that death is real. I thought that maybe if all the violence and death stops on TV, maybe it will stop in real life."

Less than eight months later, the Grade 8 student from St-Polycarpe, Que., strode confidently onto Parliament Hill with a petition bearing the names of 1.3 million Canadians who share her view that television violence has to be severely curtailed if systemic violence against women and girls is to stop.

Formerly, like many teen-agers, Miss Larivière didn't give violence on TV a second thought. Sheepishly, she admits she used to be a fan of Arnold Schwarzenegger and his bloody Terminator movies, and a regular viewer of rock-'em-sock-'em cartoons like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

Today she cites from memory academic studies that make parents shudder. An average child of her age has witnessed 18,000 television murders, and watches 22 hours of television each week. "It's our babysitter, and our role model."

She can also tell you that killers like Marc Lépine love so-called action movies, and she tosses out as food for thought these numbers: 106 people are slaughtered in the movie Rambo III, while 264 die during the 90-minute Die Hard II. The Ninja Turtles show features an average of 100 acts of violence an hour.

Miss Larivière is proposing a limit of 15 acts an hour during programming watched by children, punitive taxes on violent programs and commercials that run during their broadcast (with the proceeds financing non-violent alternative programs), as well as broadcast warnings saying violence poses a health risk.

She has abandoned the Terminator in favour of Cinderella, and she is encouraging Canadians to switch off violent programs and to telephone broadcasters to say they have done so.

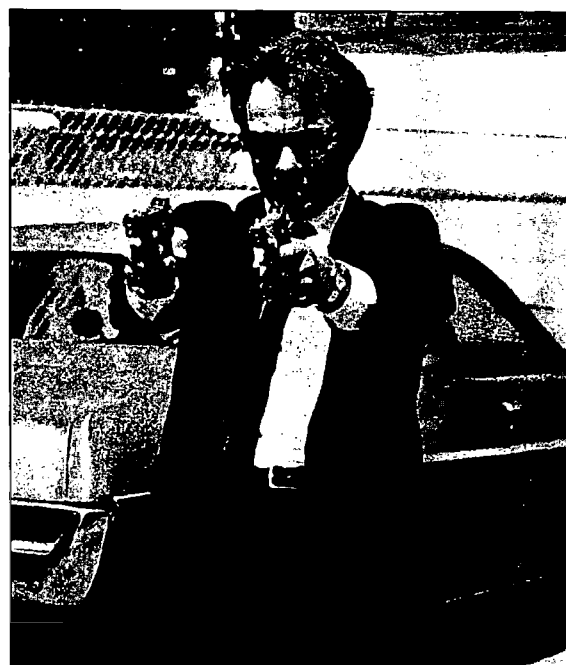
Despite her confidence and maturity, Miss Larivière has begun to fear for the safety of the next generation. "I hope that my daughters will live in a better world, a safer world. Not like today's, where your risk being attacked, where everyone risks being attacked."

Unlike the older women, who have felt the sting of sexism and seen violence repeated time and time again, she is convinced that the end is in sight — that there will not have to be many more commemorative ceremonies for women victims of violence.

As a result, she has already chosen a career. She wants to be a therapist — a healer of wounds, a repurifier of scars.

VIOLENCE

# Making a Killing



*Gunplay-and-gore  
sells at the boxoffice,  
but is it contributing  
to the decline of  
America's cities?*

BY STEVEN GAYDOS

**THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER**

62ND ANNIVERSARY ISSUE



HIGH-CALIBRE HEROES:  
 "DIRTY HARRY,"  
 "RESERVOIR DOGS"  
 AND "THELMA & LOUISE"  
 EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT  
 TO BEAR ARMS.

**T**he late comedian-prophet Lenny Bruce observed that if you showed a man and woman making love in a movie, you could get in trouble, but if the man were hacking off the woman's arms, you'd be home free. If Bruce were still alive, he'd see that you can show a lot more of both today, but the freedom granted to Hollywood filmmakers has led to new dilemmas that have taken us far beyond yesterday's narrowly framed questions of censorship and creative expression.

Is Hollywood killing our society with too many films and too many TV shows that feature too much violence, that is too explicit, is too intense and too unrelenting? Or is violence in the arts, as some have argued, a release of pent-up tensions and angers, and therefore, cathartic and healthy?

Is violence addictive, with Hollywood supplying the junk that feeds the spiraling crime statistics? And what about the protection of filmmakers' rights? How could the film masterpieces of artists like Sam Peckinpah, Akira Kurosawa, Stanley Kubrick, et al. have been created if watchdog groups were barking at their heels?

If you think there are easy answers to these questions, you haven't been listening to the thundering debate. And if you think the question is irrelevant, you haven't watched the zipping up of a body bag enshrining an innocent 10-year-old caught in gangwar crossfire, or felt the pain of loved ones grappling with the random violence that makes life in our cities an increasingly dangerous proposition for all of us.

Until October, clinical psychologist Lynn Swanson enjoyed her work with former gang members at the Hollywood Canteen youth outreach program on Hollywood Boulevard. The stories that Crips and Bloods

told her about Hollywood's effect on the meanness of their streets disturbed her, but she knew those tales taught valuable lessons that would assist her in her efforts to help mend lives. As for Hollywood, Swanson had worked in the entertainment business herself, and her husband, psychotherapist Leonard Manzella, was once a successful film actor. But her feelings about Hollywood film violence began to shift, modified by newly discovered street attitudes and events to unfold.

"You know that film, 'Colors'?" a young ex-Crip asked her. "That film did more to recruit new gang members than anything we could do for ourselves."

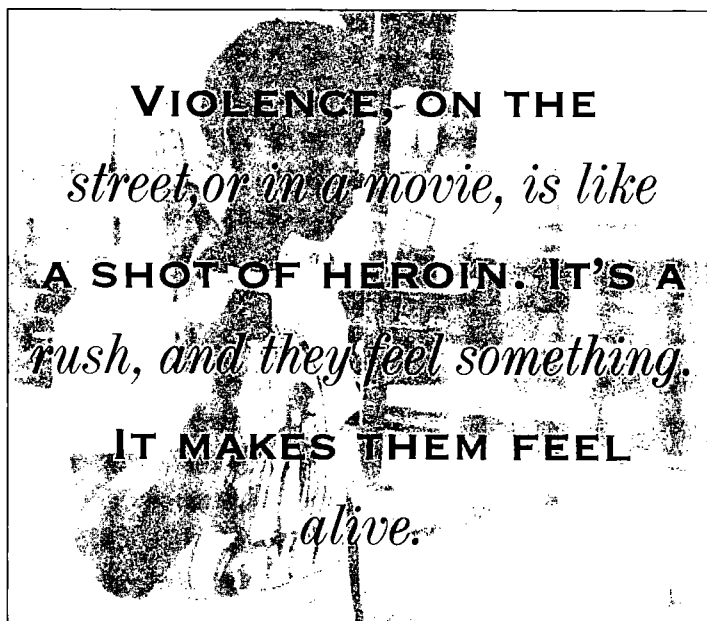
Swanson says she grew to understand how gang warfare became "the only form of recognition available" for many of the inner-city youths. She says that her "kids" told her how Hollywood films helped them "learn how to commit crimes better," and how, in these violent times, "kids gain status by how many dead bodies they've seen, and how coldly they've been able to handle it."

Last month, the violence that Hollywood casually portrays in abundance and the news wearily reports every day changed from an artistic expression, or a dry statistic, to a life-and-death personal

drama. One of the youthful members of the program went over the edge, pulled a knife, and put the life of one of Swanson's co-workers right on the line.

"Thank God, I was able to talk him down, and get him out of the building," says Swanson, still shaky from the ordeal. "But that was it. I had to stop working there. I'm not going to help anybody if I'm dead."

Later that week, Swanson attended the premiere of the acclaimed new film "Reservoir Dogs," and she knows her feelings about the



JEAN-MARC GIBOUX

extreme stylized violence of the movie have been colored by her work.

"How will my clients view that film?" asks Swanson. "It will be seen as another notch in their belt, as a sign from Hollywood that it's cool to continue their activities. If you look at this clinically, it's real clear. Where these kids are coming from, they exist in a clinical state of extreme depression. Violence, on the street, or in a movie, is like a shot of heroin. It's a rush, and they feel something. It makes them feel alive. And just like a heroin addict, they need more. So in effect, you have a lot of people walking around, addicted to violence."

Swanson isn't alone in her evaluation. A 1992 survey called "Big World, Small Screen" by the American Psychological Assn. reported that "since 1955, about 1,000 studies, reports and commentaries concerning the impact of television violence have been published. ... The accumulated



DID "COLORS" SERVE AS A PRIMER FOR SOUTHLAND GANGS?

research clearly demonstrates a correlation between viewing violence and aggressive behavior — that is, heavy viewers behave more aggressively than light viewers."

How much is too much? The National Coalition on Television Violence reported earlier this year that music videos on MTV averaged 20 acts of violence per hour.

Its report also listed the most violent primetime entertainment on television, listing shows by acts of violence per hour.

"The Young Riders" ran roughshod over the list, with 55 acts of violence per hour. "The Flash" followed with 45, "In the Heat of the Night" a close third with 42, and so on. But these television programs are practically

pacifist manifestos compared to big-screen offenders logged by the NCTV. Monitoring the television broadcasting of hit films, they put Arnold Schwarzenegger's "Commando" at the top of the hit list, with 129 violent acts per hour. Sylvester Stallone's "Rambo" fought hard for second position, with 104.

Is this a fair way to judge Hollywood product? The president of NCTV, psychiatrist Carole Lieberman, says she's "against censorship," but like Lynn Swanson, Lieberman thinks it's important to understand the effect of violent images.

"Violence is a drug," says Lieberman, "and it takes a stronger and stronger dose to satisfy the person who craves it. The idea that violence is cathartic has been refuted over and over. Studies have shown that people who watch violence are more agitated and disturbed after they've seen it. It's not too complicated — it's complex, perhaps — but

there's a simple bottom line. The filmmakers have freedom and they should have freedom. But far more studies than we need have proven that screen violence does beget real violence.

"And the people who make these films and shows have to start understanding why they're doing it, and stop. Otherwise there won't be anybody left in front of the TV to watch anymore."

Then Lieberman throws out a question that should cause a few producers and stars more than a little discomfort.

"Since the entertainment industry is in its own little world, living far from downtown L.A., behind their gates, I wonder if things will change when they are more impacted. When their cars are taken away from them at gunpoint, or when a gun that's taken into their kid's private school kills someone close to them, I wonder if then they'll pay attention to these 1,000 studies."

With intense and often violent



"BONNIE AND CLYDE" MADE ARMED ROBBERY SEXY AND CHIC.

films like "The Exorcist," "The French Connection," "Sorcerer," "Cruising," "To Live and Die in L.A.," and his newest, a drama about a serial killer, "Rampage," on his resume, Oscar-winning film director William Friedkin is no stranger to controversy, or questions of artistic freedom and license.

In Friedkin's view, "There is a

difference between the works of filmmakers like Sam Peckinpah and Akira Kurosawa, for instance, or artists like George Grosz, who make people conscious of the brutality that occurs on the local, state and federal levels. Those artists were not trying to exploit violence. But now, a great many people are making films that only mirror the stylistic externals of a

Peckinpah, because they've witnessed his success, and taken what they think is the reason for that success. And our culture is programmed by a handful of people who, in my experience, don't show the slightest bit of moral concern."

In the same way that Friedkin can shift the moral ground under your feet in a film, he quickly shifts the discussion away from a condemnation of violence to a broader assault on Hollywood culture.

"TV networks and studios produce work that reflects the taste and values of people who run them, and I don't imagine a guy running a network asking, 'Should I show a guy getting shot? How much should I show? How many bullets?' The only concern is putting something on that works."

While the NCTV protests the violence on MTV, Friedkin burrows deeper into the impact of the

*Continued on page 96*

## VIOLENCE

### MAKING A KILLING

*Continued from page 66*

massively influential pop music cable channel. "MTV," says Friedkin, "reflects the most popular culture today. And what does it show? Negative, downtrodden, brutal images of American life. This must be what young people are seeing. They've been given a

done by the networks, the real desensitizing is done by them, and not because of violence, but because it's stupid.

"The people who do the programming," says Friedkin, "welcome the protests against film violence. Because the protests are taking the people away from the real undermining of our society that is caused by the rest of the



DE PALMA'S "SCARFACE": RELENTLESS BLOODSHED

world where their leaders have failed. And as excessive as it is, it is representative of what these recording artists — and I use the word *artists* advisedly — are feeling. The great majority of them are just following the social trends."

When pinned down to the question at hand — is film and television violence desensitizing and damaging our society? — Friedkin bolts up in his chair and grabs his morning newspaper. "You know what's desensitizing and destroying our society?" he asks, eyes blazing, trying to nail this point to the wall. He says he has the answer in his hands, pointing to the television listings.

"The fall lineup! That's what's destroying us!" He scans the listings. "Hard Copy." "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air." "Blossom." "You Bet Your Life." "Murphy Brown." "The real harm is being

product that makes a mockery out of real life, and never shows real human relationships."

When you can find an issue that brings together William Friedkin and Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, Archbishop of the Los Angeles Catholic Diocese, you know the moral weather has grown stormy.

In the Cardinal's recent Pastoral Letter, "Film Makers, Film Viewers: Their Challenges and Opportunities," he tunes into Friedkin's wavelength when he observes that "television is a ratings-driven business" and "the motion picture industry ... is driven by the boxoffice. It makes what its executives think the people will want to see."

And Friedkin's placement of the problem of film violence in the larger context of "stupid" Hollywood product that "never shows real human relationships"

### CUBA GOODING JR.



*Good movies should broaden our awareness and encourage us to think by portraying social and political issues we wouldn't normally experience. Many of these films expose the violence that really exists in our society, and it's important to deal with these issues even if it makes us feel uncomfortable.*

*"Boyz N the Hood" is a film that helped to enlighten the general public about inner-city culture, which has never before been portrayed from an "insider's" perspective. For those living in the "hood," I hope we made the point that violence is not the answer to inner-city problems.*

*This project encouraged me to continue to help people to communicate positive messages through my work.*

— G.C.

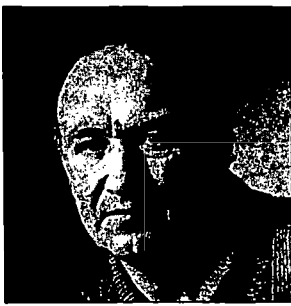


### DOUG MCHENRY AND GEORGE JACKSON

*Hollywood is at its best when it both entertains and informs. Films like "Gentleman's Agreement," "Boyz N the Hood" and "New Jack City," which highlight issues but also entertain, are examples of what Hollywood does best. It has made us aware of many different points of view and has increased our respect for the ultimate humanity of fellow human beings.*

— G.C.

## GENE HACKMAN



*Hollywood is not a town with a shortage of moral dilemmas. One of these is how to weave a defensible morality into a tale about immoral people, something that comes up often because we have such traditional interest in stories about violent or evil people. It is important to know that the filmmaker can find a moral position even if the characters cannot. This is an assurance I look for when asked, as we all are, to deal with violent characters. I particularly admired the way Clint Eastwood, as director and producer, and David Webb Peoples, as screenwriter, held themselves to this measurement in making "Unforgiven."*

—G.C.

## ANJELICA HUSTON



*When I was driving to Warner Bros. during the riots to join other industry individuals who wanted to make a statement, all I saw were movie billboards featuring hand guns. A*

*Mel Gibson movie with guns. Enormous guns on other billboards wherever I looked. Taking that into account, shouldn't we be concerned about what our young people are seeing every day?*

*Besides violence, we exploit sex. The trend is toward demystifying everything to a point of lovelessness, which can't possibly lead to higher thoughts, dreams or ideas. Whoever is in the public eye has a responsibility to share the best of ourselves, and not throw dirty laundry in the public's face.* —G.C.

mirrors the Cardinal's pastoral letter, which places relationships at the top of the list of problem areas in Hollywood entertainment and violence last on the list.

"Tension, even conflict, between individuals and groups is inevitable," writes the Cardinal, arguing against censorship, but he goes on to add more questions to the debate. "Is the violence demanded by the story? Is it presented as a desirable way to solve problems and resolve conflicts?" And his final question goes to the heart of the concern being raised by mental health experts like Swanson and Lieberman: "Is there a danger its viewers will be desensitized to the horror of violence by seeing it?"

Screenwriter, playwright and Pulitzer Prize-nominee James Ragan confronts these issues as director of the Professional Writing Program at the University of Southern California. Like many others engaged by the debate about film violence, Ragan worries about "so much murder and gunplay, and graphic representations over and over," and like Friedkin, he cites television news as a prime contributor.

"CNN has instant imaging, which reads as instant truth, but is it always the truth?" asks Ragan.

"All this unedited graphic material," he complains, "is juxtaposed against pizza commercials, and the gravity of man's inhumanity to man is then seen as just another image."

Ragan finds our exportation of unrelentingly violent films a "disturbing aspect" of Hollywood. He says that his extensive travels abroad have demonstrated that "whether it's China, Czechoslovakia, Russia, wherever you go, America is seen as a violent nation. We export this image of ourselves overseas in our films and television programming, and this is compounded by the foreign culture's disdain for films with dialogue.

"It is natural," he continues, "when there are language differences, to want only action. But the result is America is viewed as a culture of violence."

Best-selling novelist Warren Adler has sold plenty of work to Hollywood, most notably perhaps the violent Michael Douglas-Kathleen Turner black comedy hit "The War of the Roses," and most recently, the \$2 million price-tagged "Private Lives." He is a man who knows what sells, and what works for Hollywood. And he sees a grave danger in what he calls "Hollywood's paranoia to get asses in the seats."

"There cannot be any government regulations," Adler says, "but there must be personal responsibility and common sense. The people who put out gratuitous violence should look into their own lives, and into the lives of their own children. It shouldn't be just about making a buck."

He contrasts movies like Peckinpah's "The Wild Bunch," which Adler calls a masterpiece, with the majority of today's violent films, which he calls "cartoon violence."

Filmmakers, he says, are right about "conflict being essential, but wrong about violence. There are all kinds of violence, including emotional and psychological, but the gratuitous gore and blood is exploitative, and it's very cynically designed for an adolescent market."

If the excessive violence in Hollywood film and television runs the risk of harming society, there's another hazard that seems to lurk ominously around every corner. Read a page of Michael Medved's new book, "Hollywood vs. America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values," and you'll see that guardians of popular taste wait in many wings. They have names like Rev. Donald Wildmon, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell.

And watch what happens when they add their voice to this debate.

You'll see a Battle Royal that will make "The Wild Bunch" look like "Mary Poppins."

*Steven Gaydos, programming chairman of the L.A. Film Critics Assn., co-scripted Monte Hellman's extremely violent film "Iguala."*

## POISONING

CATHERINE ANN VELASCO *Journal Times*

**A**re you being poisoned by your television?

No, we're not talking about electronic rays emitting from your box, but the programs you watch. Experts say viewers don't realize TV can affect the way we think, feel and behave.

Television plays on our emotions and works on the subconscious, making us more aggressive and narrow-minded, say some advocates for better television programming. They believe TV can shape our opinions about success, what our bodies should look like, what we should wear and how we should act.

Some experts maintain that television can make us more violent and less empathetic to crime and give us stereotypical images of women and minorities.

Television is the common denominator in American households; in an average household, it's on 7½ hours a day with a viewer watching it four hours a day, said Lana Rakow, an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

Television has become America's primary storyteller, Rakow said. "Storytelling helps us figure out what our culture is all about and our role in it."

But white males

still tell most of the stories, she said, causing programming to be less favorable to women and minorities.

Some groups like Media Watch, based in Santa Cruz, Calif., say women are often shown as sexual objects and victims of crime.

By the time an average student graduates from high school, he or she will have seen 22,000 murders on TV, according to Ann Simonton, Media Watch coordinator and founder.

And over a lifetime, the average person will have witnessed 80,000 TV murders, noted Dr. Carole Lieberman, psychiatrist and chair of the National Coalition on Television Violence, based in Champaign, Ill.

How does that affect us?

Studies have shown that television murders make people less empathetic to crime.

"We become so used to seeing human life being destroyed that we don't really care about these people as human beings," Lieberman explained.

"The worst part is that it enters our subconscious. We don't remember where we got the ideas, but it originated through the images and stories portrayed by the media."

About 95 percent of the research done has shown that TV violence has harmful affects, particularly on children, Lieberman said.

Studies of children show an increase in fighting, harming animals, arguing, selfishness and disobedience after being exposed to violent cartoons.

An average cartoon shows 20 violent acts an hour. Among the offenders are Batman, X-Men, G.I. Joe, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Beetlejuice.

In Beetlejuice, for instance, the lead

### MORE INFO

If you want to learn more about how to improve television, contact the following:

- National Coalition on Television Violence, P.O. Box 2157, Champaign, Ill. 61825.
- Media Watch for Improving Women's Image in Media, P.O. Box, 618, Santa Cruz, Calif. 95061.

# TV/Used as scapegoat

character consistently enjoys carrying out violent acts of revenge, said Chipra Vemuri, associate director of the National Coalition on Television Violence.

Yet there are those who say people use television as a scapegoat.

Television doesn't have a huge effect on viewers, said Mike Havice, associate professor of broadcast and electronic communications at Marquette University.

TV can put things on the public table or agenda, but it doesn't cause people to act, he said.

In one study, researchers looked at what people did after viewing the television series "Roots." Contrary to the producer's first beliefs, people's prejudice and bigotry didn't dissolve.

"TV puts it on table, it doesn't mean people are going to eat it," Havice said. "It just means it's on the table."

Rakow, too, says television isn't to blame for all the violence.

"We obviously live in a culture that is very violent," she said. "However, there are other cultures that are more violent without TV. We were violent before TV, so we can't blame it all on TV."

Television, especially commer-

cials, can also make people feel dissatisfied with themselves. Viewers tend to feel bad if they can't afford to get the products advertised.

"Kids feel if they don't have the newest toy they won't be popular," Lieberman said. "It goes all the way to adulthood from the neatest car to the most expensive jewelry."

Commercials also tend to bruise women's self-esteem as they try to measure up to models in commercials, Rakow said.

Soap operas tell people, mostly women, how to interact socially, how to dress, how to furnish their homes and how to acquire socially desirable qualities, added Tomas Lopez-Pumarejo, assistant professor of communication at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

"Soap operas do not necessarily reflect the best interest of women, but rather a stereotype of what their concerns and tastes are," Lopez-Pumarejo said. "It does not necessarily reflect the reality of women, but rather the imperatives of the consumer market. It's not what American women want, but what advertisers want."

People need to remember television is advertiser-driven, he said. Soap operas are used as bait to expose people to advertisements. In the first soap opera, "Paint of

Dreams," the characters talked about Montgomery Ward products during an informal conversation over a cup of coffee.

"Television affects people's decisions and perceptions of the world, but they are not as passive as the industry wants them to be," he said. People use television as a model but don't necessarily follow it from A to Z.

And it's not only TV that affects us, but radio, film, billboards and other forms of media, he noted.

What are the solutions?

"Everyone needs to cut the amount of time they watch TV and be more selective," said Lieberman.

Kids shouldn't have TV sets in their rooms, parents should watch TV with them and people should watch less violent shows, she added.

Vemuri, of the National Coalition, suggests watching PBS programs, which are not only educational but innovative.

"Our main concern is that people need to be more critical viewers of the media," said Simonton of Media Watch. "They need to be more concerned consumers. There is little or no analysis of television. People are fed a steady diet of sex and violence."

**Are  
You  
Being**



# **Poisoned By TV?**

**Can television brainwash you—make you more aggressive and narrow-minded and less satisfied with your mate? Studies say yes. The question is how to use television *safely*, so as not to fall victim to its toxic effects.**

**I**T'S A FAMILIAR EVENT IN HOUSEHOLDS across America: A family huddled together in the living room, munching on popcorn or pizza, chugging soda or beer, all eyes trained on the flickering images emanating from the box. Perhaps they are picking out the new Miss America from the ten semifinalists or are arguing about whether to watch the early election returns on CNN or tune in to a rerun of *Cheers*. They could be cheering on their team in the N.C.A.A. basketball championships or gathered for the latest episode of *Murphy Brown*, *Who's*

*the Boss?*, or *Rescue 911*.

Sometimes the TV viewer is a solitary individual: a young, single career woman, home after a long day at work; she warms a frozen dinner, plops on the couch, and plays the day's episodes of her favorite soaps that she had taped to watch at night.

Regardless of our lifestyle, television is the common denominator, the great common thread in our diverse, sprawling nation, where scenes like these play out daily—in Midwestern suburbs and urban ghettos, in rural Appalachia and

by **Wanda  
Urbanska**

# New Woman

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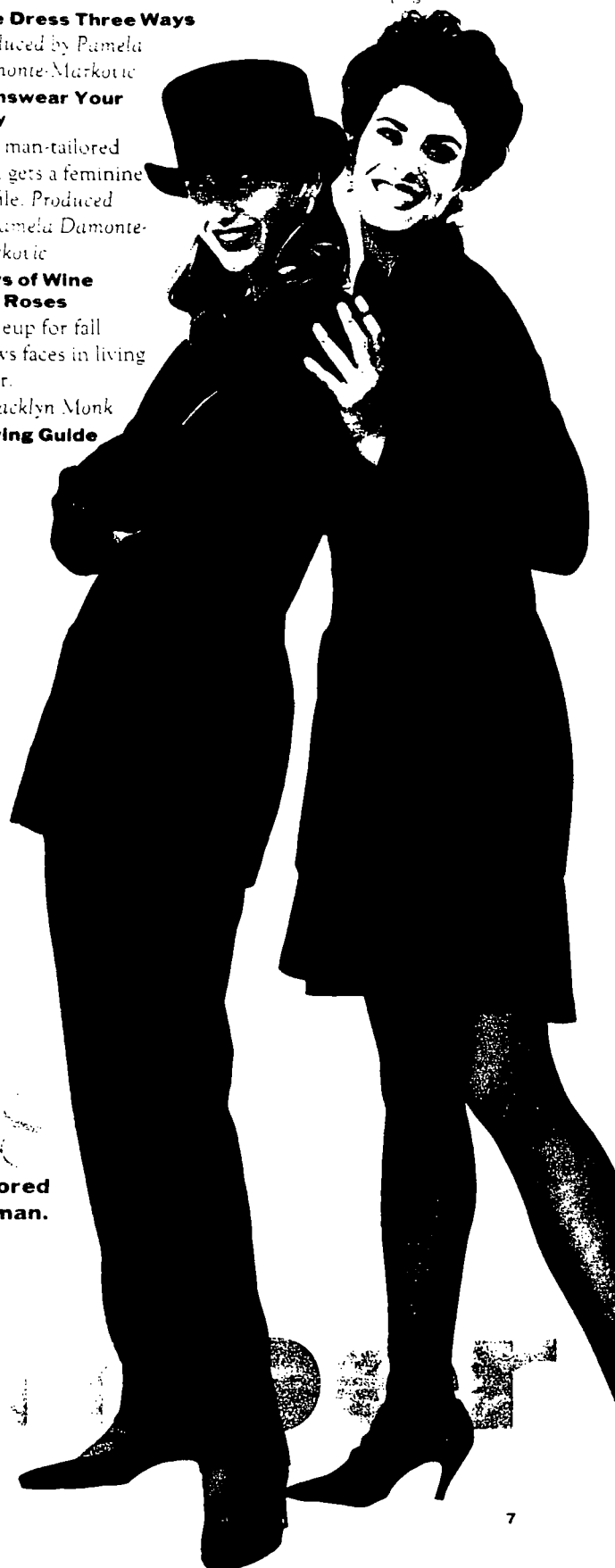
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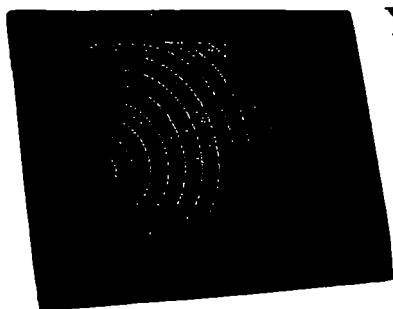
**Man-tailored for a woman.**

Self-Discovery

coastal California, across racial, economic, and class lines.

America's premier form of home entertainment, television keeps us abreast of the news, weather, and sports. It is a baby-sitter to youth, a solace in old age, a companion when lonely or bored. And it is a powerful national trendsetter, as last year's Senate Judiciary Com-

mittee hearings on Clarence Thomas's appointment to the Supreme Court testifies. Anita Hill's charges of on-the-job sexual harassment sparked a national debate on the topic as the number of viewers riveted to the televised testimonies went through the roof.



## You will probably watch 80,000 TV murders in your lifetime.

tee hearings on Clarence Thomas's appointment to the Supreme Court testifies. Anita Hill's charges of on-the-job sexual harassment sparked a national debate on the topic as the number of viewers riveted to the televised testimonies went through the roof.

The average American watches four hours of TV and cable programming daily, according to Nielsen Media Research in New York City, with women watching more than men and all of us succumbing to "couch potatodom" more in winter than summer. Found in 99 percent of all homes, the "electronic hearth" has become so central to our daily experience that we can hardly imagine life without it.

But while we acknowledge our dependency on television, by and large we fail to recognize the extent to which TV viewing can affect the way we think, feel, and behave. Television plays on our emotions and goes to work on the unconscious. (Advertisers, after all, spend billions of dollars each year based on the premise that what viewers see will inspire them to act.) TV messages, piped into our psyches over time, may help shape our opinions about how our bodies should look; how the sexes should interact; what constitutes the material trappings of success.

But even if we weren't so susceptible to the offerings of the small screen, to TV's version of reality, the sheer act of watching passively for hours can spell trouble.

### Not Just Another Murder

Some of the most disturbing conclusions regarding TV's noxious effects

have come from studies of viewers' reactions to violence. For starters, we are routinely exposed to a staggering number of violent scenes on television. By the time the average student graduates from high school, she will have seen 22,000 TV murders, according to Ann Simonton, coordinator of the Santa Cruz, California-based Media Watch, which is dedicated to improving women's media images. Over the course of a lifetime, the average person will have witnessed 80,000 murders on television, says psychiatrist Carole Lieberman, M.D., chairperson of the Champaign, Illinois-based National Coalition on Television Violence (N.C.T.V.). "And with the advent of pay cable and VCRs, people are bringing into the home much more violent and sexually degrading material than has ever been available before." Whether or not we like to admit it, these images exert a powerful impact on our unconscious.

The more violent scenes we watch, the more we internalize the frightening,

## Sound Bites and Photo Opportunities

Television has become the purveyor—and some would say the nemesis—of American democracy. Today Americans get the majority of their political information from television. "Viewing becomes your form of political involvement," says Montague Kern, Ph.D., assistant professor of communications at Rutgers University and author of *30-Second Politics: Political Advertising in the Eighties*. Many Americans vote based on the candidates' "performance" on television.

Nontelegenic candidates need not apply. Moreover, TV coverage of political campaigns may distort a candidate's message by reporting only superficial "sound bites" that can be plugged into two-minute segments. If a candidate states a point indirectly or allegorically, she puts herself at a disadvantage. Further stymieing political discourse is the fact that

distorted world of television, says Kathryn C. Montgomery, Ph.D., director of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Media Education. "Even though in real life for most rape and murder victims the perpetrator is someone they know, on TV, a stranger is lurking around every corner. It makes us fearful. It's called the 'mean-world syndrome.'"

There is also evidence that prolonged exposure to TV violence can hinder the viewer's ability to cope with personal frustration and conflict. According to Dr. Lieberman, for every hour of violent material consumed, the viewer will become less and less able to control his or her temper at home.

Perhaps most troubling is the research conducted by Daniel Linz, Ph.D., professor of communications at the University of California, showing that after continued exposure to sexually violent "slasher" films, male viewers exhibit decreased empathy for real-life rape victims. "Even those not likely to rape a woman are less likely to be sympathetic to someone who's been raped," says Linz, "and more likely to treat the incident cavalierly." If sexually violent movies like *Friday the 13th* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (and their many sequels) were not such staples on cable television, we might have less cause for concern. But N.C.T.V. estimates that at least one slasher film on average is shown every week on cable television, with more being shown around Halloween. Pay-cable channels, like HBO, tend

footage filed by a network reporter is usually stage-managed by the campaign with all "the visuals that will make it lively," says Kern. In addition, "all candidates have taken a television seminar that teaches them you must be safe and unoriginal," former CBS correspondent Daniel Schorr has written. "So you can't have a de Gaulle or a Churchill, maybe not even a Franklin Roosevelt anymore."

The potential danger of this kind of coverage is all too clear. It "reduces the political dialogue to simplistic clichés—that's damaging to democracy," explains Kathryn C. Montgomery, Ph.D., director of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Media Education and author of *Target: Prime Time*. Instead of seeking a sharp analysis of the issues, the networks focus their attention on the score. In other words, which candidate is winning in the election "play-off" that day.

to be the worst offenders.

Moreover, even the more sanitized portrayals of violence against women on network television in such shows as NBC's *In the Heat of the Night* and Fox's *America's Most Wanted* and highly rated made-for-TV movies like *The Rape of Dr. Willis* and *She Said No* produce a similar effect among viewers.



## Television depicts a man's world told from a man's point of view.

One study indicates that repeated exposure can even cause women viewers to become desensitized to female victims of violence.

Another insidious vehicle for violent programming is the kiddie cartoon, which studies show can have a powerful impact on the behavior of impressionable youngsters. The average cartoon, for instance, shows 20 violent acts per hour, or two and a half times as many as on prime-time television, according to a recent study by N.C.T.V. Among the most egregious offenders are *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Beetlejuice*, and *The Pirates of Dark Water*. According to N.C.T.V., the Discovery Channel is "the only nonviolent cable network," with PBS and the Disney Channel generally positive.

Though cartoon characters seldom die as a result of slapstick violence, studies of children show an increase in playground fighting, arguing, selfishness, disobedience, and cruelty to animals after they've been exposed to violent cartoons. According to the American Psychological Association, longitudinal studies show that children who watched a lot of TV violence at age 8 were more likely to engage in acts of aggression as adults. And among those subjects later arrested for crimes, researchers found that the more frequently the subjects watched television at age 8, the more violent their crime.

One researcher goes so far as to say that fully half of all homicides committed in the United States can be attributed to the culture of violence promoted on television. If we didn't have television, says Brandon S. Centerwall, M.D., psychiatrist and epidemiologist in Seat-

tle, "it's likely there would be ten thousand fewer homicide deaths per year in the U.S." Dr. Centerwall's calculations are based on a study of homicide statistics in the United States, Canada, and South Africa that was published in 1989 in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*. Homicide rates declined slightly in South Africa from the mid-1940s to

mid-1970s while they were doubling in the United States and Canada. But between 1975—when television debuted in South Africa—and 1987, the homicide rate among white South Africans soared 130 percent.

### You've Not Come a Long Way, Baby

Murder and mayhem are not the only deleterious fare served up by television. If you assume that most female TV characters are superwomen on the order of Murphy Brown—or at least dynamos à la Roseanne or Jessica Fletcher on *Murder, She Wrote*—think again. Television remains, quite literally, a boob tube, with women jiggling and wiggling their way through programs—a sad state of affairs that carries potentially dangerous repercussions.

Television depicts a man's world, told from a male point of view, with women overwhelmingly portrayed as sex objects and second-class citizens. A yearlong study of women on prime-time television conducted in 1990 by The National Commission on Working Women (N.C.W.W.) in Washington, D.C., reveals that most women seen on television are attractive, white, young, and often scantily clad. Based on an analysis of 555 characters in 80 TV series on the three major networks and Fox, the report shows that—with a few high-profile exceptions—virtually all of the leading roles on television belong to males. Men are the movers and shakers pushing stories to their resolution, while women portray supporting characters, such as girlfriends, wives, secretaries, and, in some cases, junior partners. Women of color and women

over 40 are few and far between.

Still, female visibility on television "has definitely increased in the last twenty years," says Sally Steenland, author of the N.C.W.W. study. The number of recurring female characters on prime-time network television is now 43 percent, up from one third a decade ago.

However, when you throw in news shows, commercials, reruns, and cartoons (where male characters outnumber females 11 to one), female representation on television drops. Phyllis Yes, Ph.D., professor of art at Lewis & Clark College and coproducer of the video "Women Seen on Television," a content analysis of two full days of programming and commercials on the three major networks, found that women get only 30 percent of the overall airtime, while men continue to dominate with 70 percent.

How does this limited and limiting picture affect women viewers? Although no studies have probed this precise question, it stands to reason that with television continuously spewing forth programming in which women are rarely commanding or heroic, a retrograde message is relentlessly drummed into viewers' heads. If female characters on television are applauded for man-crazy, compliant, or just plain stupid behavior (like the teenage nymphomaniac Kelly Bundy on Fox's hit *Married... with Children* or the ditzy Carlene on CBS's *Designing Women*), it follows that teenage girls who are developing their sense of self—and adult women who are grooming theirs—would internalize these messages. "Not any one image on TV with a weak or bimbo female is the end of the world," says Yes, "but when you put it on hour after hour, month after month, year after year, it becomes an insidious kind of role model." Perhaps the skyrocketing demand in the last ten years for plastic surgery and face-lifts, as well as our unnatural quest for thinness, have as their root these improbable feminine models on television.

Becoming fixated on unrealistic standards of physical attractiveness can also hinder women in the dating game. Heavy TV viewers can find their expectations of men distorted by glamorized depictions of the opposite sex on television. By and large, men on television are "portrayed as more appealing than the men we're involved with," says Dr. Lieberman. Who could match Ted Danson's snappy come-ons on *Cheers* or Mark Harmon's crime-fighting finesse on NBC's *Reasonable Doubts*. Dr. Lieberman is convinced that

this unrealistic portrayal of men on television has contributed to women being attracted to "Mr. Wrong"—exciting, unreliable Peter Pans instead of the more stable, loving types.

What's more, television can cast its long, blue shadow over our sex lives, selling the idea that the one-night stand remains a viable option in the age of AIDS and that sex, like microwave popcorn, should "work" every time. "TV promotes the episodic idea of sex," says William J. Doherty, Ph.D., professor of family social science at the University of Minnesota. "It's not part of any long-term, committed relationship." TV sex is invariably risk-free and transcendent; the man is never impotent, the woman never unaroused (unless, of course, she's being raped)—portrayals that may cause viewers' own sex lives to suffer by comparison. Further, research demonstrates that after seeing extremely attractive men and women on soap operas, individuals' estimation of their own partners' attractiveness tends to drop.

### TV Addicts and the Passive Principle

But even if we limited our TV diet to such worthwhile offerings as *Masterpiece Theatre* and *National Geographic* specials, the act of watching for extended periods of time, of zoning out in front of the tube, and the failure to engage in other more physically and mentally stimulating activities can hurt more than one might suspect.

According to Robert Kubey, Ph.D., associate professor of communications at Rutgers University, TV watching leaves viewers feeling more passive than almost any other waking activity. In *Television and the Quality of Life: How Viewing Shapes Everyday Experience*, Kubey and coauthor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi report that TV watching puts viewers in a daze that makes it hard to shut off the set and leaves a lingering lassitude. When comparing watching television to other diversions, such as reading and sports, the researchers found that—contrary to what you might expect—after you've finished watching television your mood tends to be worse than before watching; your concentration is reduced; and you're less relaxed.

Some people cross over the line to become quite literally TV addicts, turning to television as a surrogate for human relationships when they're anxious, lonely, or depressed. Recent studies by Robin Smith Jacobvitz, visiting assistant professor of psychology at the Univer-

sity of New Mexico, have found that 2 to 12 percent of all viewers describe themselves as "addicted to television." Though factors vary, Jacobvitz says that people who watch television "on average fifty-six hours per week" share many similar dependency traits of alcoholics and other addicts. "Such individuals tend to approach TV as an escape mechanism and as a sedative," she says, "but they lose control over their watching and can't bring themselves to turn it off even if they want to."

The writer Pete Hamill has gone so far as to draw a connection between our society's dependence on television and our drug epidemic. "Drugs provide an unearned high (in contrast to the earned rush that comes from a feat accomplished, a human breakthrough earned by sweat or thought or love)," he writes in *Esquire*. "The drug plague also coincides with the upspoken assumption of most television shows: life should be easy."

Blessedly, the vast majority of us are not drug abusers or TV addicts. For us, TV viewing is a lesser problem, but one well worth watching.

Of course, we the viewers cannot claim to be innocent and ignorant bystanders, or helpless victims of TV's machinations. We do have the power to turn off the set if we don't like what we see and the freedom to choose whether or not to take a news item at face value or to remain skeptical until we've checked other sources. Our best defense against becoming captive couch

potatoes who allow distorted, potentially toxic images to flood our minds indiscriminately is to reduce our consumption and exercise viewer discretion in the programs we and our children do watch.

Instead of four hours, N.C.T.V. suggests we keep it to one hour of non-violent television daily. "This is especially important if you have children, as you're setting yourself up as a role model," says Dr. Lieberman. And, of course, we should be quick to shut off any material that we find offensive or distasteful.

The good news is that to date we're doing just that. Between October 1986 and October 1991, we Americans reduced our consumption of network prime-time programs by a whopping 25 percent—turning to such alternatives as VCR tapes and quality cable networks like the prowomen Lifetime Television, Discovery, Disney, and CNN. And network executives are scrambling to find ways to bring back viewers—including reducing violence.

Clearly, most of us are not ready to go cold turkey, to give up our TV sets altogether. But once we realize that the power is in our hands, that we can take back control and end the voluntary brainwashing, we may once again find television to be a welcome friend rather than a hostile stranger. □

Wanda Urbanska is coauthor of *Simple Living*.

## How You Can Make Television Better

**You can take steps to improve what goes on the air. By urging producers to eliminate sexism, stereotypes, and glamorized violence on network television, by supporting public television and quality cable channels, by working to incorporate media-education curricula in the schools, you can improve the images that come into our homes.**

**If you want to learn more about how to improve television, contact the following:**

■ **National Coalition on Television Violence**

Box 2157

Champaign, IL 61824

(310) 278-5433

■ **Media Watch for Improving Women's Image in Media**

Box 618

Santa Cruz, CA 95061

(408) 423-6355

■ **Center for Media and Values**  
1962 S. Shenandoah St.

Los Angeles, CA 90034  
(310) 559-2944

**To order the video *Women Seen on Television*, contact:**

**New Dimension Media**  
85803 Lorane Hwy.  
Eugene, OR 97405  
(503) 484-7125

**You may also write directly to the head of entertainment at each network to make suggestions and offer criticisms.**

■ **ABC TV**

2040 Ave. of the Stars  
Century City, CA 90067

■ **CBS-TV**

7800 Beverly Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90036

■ **NBC**

3000 W. Alameda Ave.  
Burbank, CA 91523

■ **FOX Broadcasting Company**  
Box 900  
Beverly Hills, CA 90213

I Killed Like  
Robocop

# New York Newsday

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## Just Like the Movies

By Curtis Rist

STAFF WRITER

In trying to explain his motive for killing six women, confessed killer Nathaniel White — like so many murder suspects before him — turned to the movies.

In his case, it was the 1985 futuristic horror movie "Robocop," which he said he saw just before his first murder in 1991.

"I seen him cut somebody's throat then take the knife and slit down the chest to the stomach and left the body in a certain position," he said.

"With the first person I killed," he

said of Juliana Frank, 29, "I did exactly what I seen in the movie."

For years, the link between graphic violence in the media and violence acted out in real life has been a source of controversy. Some researchers claim to have found a direct correlation between certain brutal acts and the songs, television shows, or movies from which they were copied.

In "Robocop," a seriously wounded cop undergoes a transformation where his limbs are disembodied and replaced with robot components. The robot cop is then set to patrolling the city, foiling crimes, including an attempted rape in

which the woman's clothes are cut from her body. To Dr. Carole Lieberman, a psychiatrist and chairwoman of the National Coalition on Television Violence, a non-profit watchdog group, the movie contained a "quality of alienation" that lacked any feelings for either the killer or the victims.

"It may well have pushed him over the edge," she said of White.

The central image in the movie is the transformation into the robot, which Lieberman described as "the quality of not being human."

"I think that's the key," Lieberman said of White. "This person probably

felt very alienated from people, from other humans, and did these murders without any feelings.

"Perhaps in this case he was identifying with those feelings, those automatic, unstoppable feelings," she said.

But Aimee Dorr, a professor of education at the University of California at Los Angeles, said it would be wrong to assume that simply watching a violent movie would provoke violence in viewers.

"Most people watch 'Robocop' and go on with very mundane, non-violent lives," she said.

## DO MOVIES, MUSIC TRIGGER VIOLENT ACTS?

# Imitators Under The Influence of Art

By Steve Garbarino

**A**T A TIME when police groups are protesting Ice-T's heavy metal song, "Cop Killer," and Vice President Dan Quayle is decrying television's "Murphy Brown," last week an accused serial killer cited the "RoboCop" movies as a factor in his alleged crimes.

The six murders of which Nathaniel White stands accused are not the first acts of violence possibly committed under the influence of art.

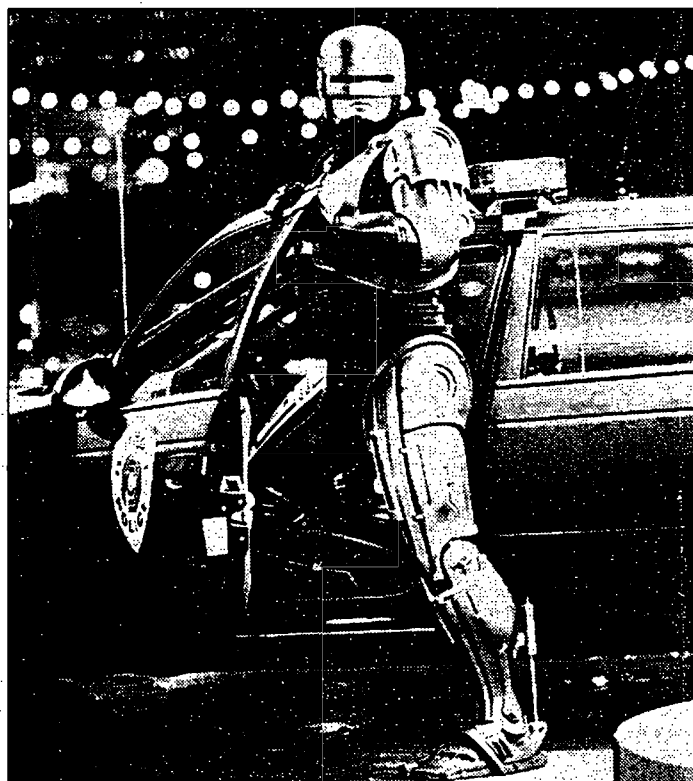
Music by the Beatles allegedly spurred Charles Manson's killing spree. For John Hinckley, it was the 1976 film "Taxi Driver" that triggered his attack on Ronald Reagan. The lyrics of Judas Priest and Ozzy Osbourne were blamed for commanding several suicidal teens to "do it." Clint Eastwood's "Magnum Force" provided the murder recipe — Drano — for the Utah killers in the Ogden Hi-Fi Shop Massacre. And a rash of Russian roulette fatalities were said to have been spurred by a depiction of the lethal game in the 1978 Vietnam War epic, "The Deer Hunter."

White told WNBC last week, "The first girl I killed was from a 'RoboCop' movie." Referring to a character named Cain in "Robocop II," he said: "I seen him cut somebody's throat then take the knife and slit down the chest to the stomach and left the body in a certain position. With the first person I killed I did exactly what I saw in the movie."

Coincidentally, two other life-imitating-art murder cases have recently resurfaced in the news. A new documentary, "Dream Deceivers," which opened at Film Forum after being shown on PBS, recalls the 1985 Nevada incident in which James Vance, then 20, and Raymond Belknap, 18, shot themselves, allegedly inspired by songs on an album by the British heavy-metal act Judas Priest.

The parents of the two young men later claimed in a liability suit Judas Priest and their record company that hidden messages in the band's songs — specifically the words "do it" on the band's 1978 album "Stained Class" — had spurred the pact that resulted in the immediate death of one and the death of the other three years later.

And on July 28, William Andrews, one of two men convicted of killing three people in a mode they said imitated a murder scene

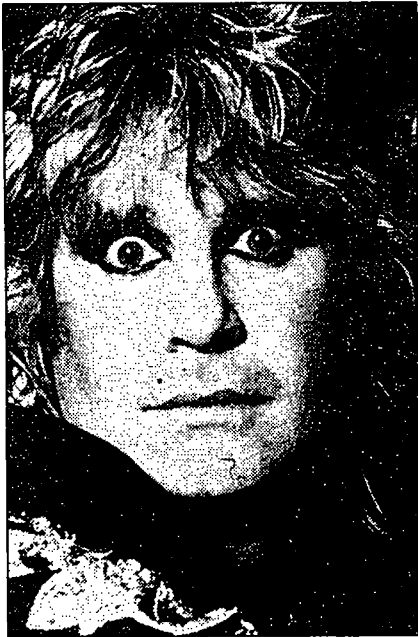


in the 1973 film "Magnum Force," was executed by lethal injection in Utah. During a hold-up of an Ogden, Utah, stereo shop, Andrews and Pierre Dale Selby had forced five employees and customers to drink liquid Drano. In "Force," a pimp kills a prostitute by making her drink the product.

The first well-publicized instance of life imitating art may have been the Manson Family murders. During the 1969 trial, Manson divulged that songs from the Beatles' untitled "white album" — such as "Helter Skelter" and "Piggies" — provided inspiration for the killing spree.

# When Life Imitates Art

IMITATORS from Page 39



Movies such as 'RoboCop,' left, and lyrics of singers like Ozzy Osbourne, above, have allegedly inspired acts of violence.

heavy-metal singer Ozzy Osbourne. The boy's father found a cassette of Osbourne's "Blizzard of Ozz" — including the song "Suicide Solution" — stuck in his pickup's tape player. His family filed a suit contending that the music incited the boy to take his life.

The Osbourne album was the subject of another teen-suicide case, in 1984, in which a 19-year-old boy also shot himself in the head, allegedly after listening to the singer's music for five hours.

In other cases:

A 25-year-old Australian trampled his 59-year-old mother to death in 1987, as Bob Dylan's song "One More Cup of Coffee" played in the background. The man told police that the music had given him the strength to kill her.

Also in 1987, a department-store employee shot his boss 28 times, and then attempted suicide, claiming that a 1967 episode of "Star Trek" spurred his actions. The film "Rambo," which he claimed to have seen more than 20 times, also was said to have influenced him.

The suicide in 1986 of a 16-year-old Georgia boy who shot himself in the head was blamed on music by

Please see **IMITATORS** on Page 42

Television has provided plotlines for imitators as well. The 1984 airing of the movie "The Burning Bed," about the real-life story of a battered wife who doused her husband's bed with gasoline and lit it while he slept, spurred two similar acts of violence.

Less than an hour after watching the show, which starred Farrah Fawcett, a Milwaukee man soaked his wife with gasoline in their garage. He later said that he was just trying to "scare" her. And after watching the TV film, a Columbus, Ohio, woman repeatedly shot her live-in boyfriend, who she claimed was abusing her like the husband in "Bed."

In 1974, a 9-year-old girl was sexually assaulted with a broom handle on a deserted San Francisco beach by four other children, who later said they had seen it done on TV in the 1974 Linda Blair women-behind-bars movie, "Born Innocent."

The most highly-publicized case of life imitating art involved John Hinckley, who patterned himself after disturbed "Taxi Driver" Travis Bickle, played by Robert De Niro. Hinckley said that he had seen the film at least 15 times. He also dressed like the vigilante character, kept a diary, and became infatuated — like Bickle — with actress Jodi Foster, who played a prostitute in the film. When Foster did not respond to his correspondence, Hinckley allegedly tried to gain her attention by shooting Ronald Reagan.

When the question of liability has come up in court, as in the cases involving Judas Priest and Osbourne, judges have cleared the artists in the deaths, citing their First Amendment rights.

In the Vance case, the judge ruled that alleged subliminal "messages" were not intentional, but "a chance combination of sounds." And in both Osbourne cases, judges ruled there was no evidence to indicate the lyrics were meant to inspire listeners to kill themselves.

Carole Lieberman, a psychiatrist and chairwoman of the National Coalition on Television Violence, is one expert who is convinced that violence in the media can influence people to imitate it. "There is no question in my mind that every act of violence that is committed today has been influenced at least in part by violent media," she asserts.

However, others argue that a person would have to be already mentally disturbed to be influenced so easily.

"No matter how powerful the visual depiction on the television screen, no 'normal' person would ever be moved to this kind of behavior," said Lawrence Freedman, a University of Chicago forensic psychiatrist, interviewed after the "Burning Bed" attacks. Added UCLA psychiatrist Louis J. West: "Millions of people saw it, and they didn't burn their spouses." / ■

Staff writer Carolyn Brook contributed to this story.

Steve Garbarino is a free-lance writer.

**PG\***  
PARENTAL GUIDANCE



Warner Bros.

**TAKE A SHOT:** The blockbuster hit *Batman Returns* has some parents worried about its violence.

## AIMED *at kids?*

■ Critics and parents say the under-13 crowd needs guidance before seeing the violence and sex that can be in movies such as *Batman Returns*.

By SABRINA MILLER  
Times Staff Writer

**T**he scene: It is a dark and gloomy night in Gotham City. A young woman passing through an alley is grabbed by an ominous-looking man who begins to attack her. Out of nowhere, a sleek vixen in shiny black latex and inch-long, razor-sharp metal claws appears.

The mysterious woman with luminous, saucer-like blue eyes commences to whale into the man, martial-arts style, flattening him and foiling his attack. She finishes her attack with a quick, deep slash across the man's face.

As the blood flows from his sinister cheeks, she declares, "I am Catwoman, hear me roar!"

Some kids laughed. Others winced. And this was one of the movie's milder scenes.

Welcome to the make-believe world of *Batman Returns*.

This summer's blockbuster hit, which grossed more than \$100-million in its first two weeks, has some parents worried that *Batman Returns* is too violent and their kids don't know it's make-believe.

"From seeing the first *Batman* we expected it

(the sequel) to be violent," says Janet Hill-Hazlett, who saw the movie at Tyrone Square Mall with her husband and two sons. "Because we were expecting it to be violent, we talked about it before we saw the movie and afterward."

The numerous, flashy fight sequences and the whip-cracking Catwoman's overt sexuality were among the objections Hill-Hazlett, of Seminole, had to her 9- and 10-year-old sons seeing *Batman Returns*.

"It just seemed to glorify the evil characters and downplay Batman. That would be one of the differences between the first movie and this one," says Hill-Hazlett, who enjoyed the first *Batman*.

Her comments echo that of other parents and watchdog groups across the country who believe that the movie is simply not for children, and the hype of its advertising and marketing is misleading.

Like its predecessor, *Batman Returns* was accompanied by a promotion deal with McDonald's and mass marketing of lunch boxes, candy, pajamas and toys, all geared toward children. After all, the Batman of yesteryear, created by Bob Kane, was a kid's comic strip.

In Kane's version, Catwoman and Batman always had a love interest, but not quite as confusing or intense as portrayed in the 1992 Hollywood version. Here, Catwoman has transformed into a complex, post-modern femme, torn between good and evil.

"(The movie) didn't really have a plot. There was a lot of exploding, but it didn't really have a plot. I still liked it though. I figured a lot of people would be killed," says 9-year-old Kent Hill, Hill-Hazlett's son. "It didn't really scare me, but you

Please see **GUIDANCE 4D**

## Guidance from 1D

kind of wondered, 'How could they survive (the explosions)?' "

The movie's PG-13 rating by the Motion Picture Association of America means that parental guidance is strongly suggested, and that children under 13 cannot see it without a parent or guardian. The MPAA has not received complaints from parents about the movie's content, says MPAA Public Affairs Director Charlene Soltz.

Some scenes were a bit raunchy, says Crystal Hudson of St. Petersburg. But, she'd take her three children, ages 8, 4 and 1, to see it again.

"I didn't really think it was too violent or too bad," she says. "It had some sexual overtones, and I thought some of the language and some of the things Catwoman did were a little out of line. But I think the kids probably didn't understand what that meant anyway."

Decked out in a Batman baseball cap, and a light blue Batman T-shirt and short set, Hudson's 4-year-old son David pipes in, "It was good! Catwoman was trying to stick Batman in his stomach!" referring to one of many fight scenes where Catwoman jabs the Caped Crusader with her hazardous claws.

Visitors from Kentucky Eddie and Cindy Craig also did not object to their children, 8 and 10, seeing *Batman Returns*.

"I don't think it was really that bad at

all," says Cindy Craig. "It definitely wasn't any worse than anything else they've seen, like on TV."

"They can tell the difference between what's real and what's not," says father Eddie Craig. "I don't think it confused them at all."

But when Craig asked 10-year-old son Andy about the movie, the boy answered sheepishly, "Well, sometimes I thought it was a little bit of both. It seemed like it was real and make-believe."

Managers of AMC theaters at Tyrone Mall say viewers have griped that the movie wasn't as good as they thought it would be, but few have complained that it was inappropriate for children.

"I actually did have one woman complain to me about the violence — but she said it was inappropriate for her father, who was about 70 or 80 years old," co-manager Carolyn Spratt said, laughing.

"I don't understand what the big deal is," says 10-year-old David Hilton of Gulfport, whose older sister Barbi took him and three cousins to see the movie. "It's just a movie."

Seventeen-year-old Barbi Hilton says her parents "begged me to take them to see this. If they thought something was bad about it, they wouldn't have wanted them to see it. It is just a movie."

Studies by the American Psychological Association and the Surgeon General contend that there is a correlation between television and motion picture violence and aggressive behavior in children.

These kids might think the violence in *Batman Returns* is no big deal, but their parents will be surprised at the negative effect it and other movies and television shows that show violence will have on them in the long run, says Carole Lieberman, who chairs the National Coalition on Television Violence.

"There is so very little that is redeeming about *Batman Returns*," says Lieberman, a psychiatrist from Los Angeles. "It's unfortunate that hundreds, no, millions of children are going to see it this summer because it's the 'in' thing to do. Parents will be shocked when they observe their children's aggressive behavior as a result of the violence in this movie."

The coalition, founded in 1980, is an educational and research foundation that monitors violence in television and motion pictures and is committed to decreasing it.

Lieberman also thinks that aspects of the film other than its physically violent scenes are equally disturbing and have been overlooked. For example, she cites a scene in the film's opening in which the Penguin's parents dump the infant into a body of water.

"This is very disturbing because it tells kids that if they don't look a certain way, or if they cry too much, this is what can happen to you," she says.

"I thought the movie was very mature, maybe okay for a 16-year-old, but not small kids," says Ruth Wright, who saw *Batman Returns* with her husband and two children.

Agreeing with his wife while holding

their sleeping 3-year-old son, Russell Wright Sr. commented, "It was a little long, and he just got tucked out at the end. But he really enjoyed it."

The Wrights felt that Russell Jr. was more excited about the first *Batman* movie. His sister, 9-month-old Kristin, slept through most of the movie.

"This one left a lot to be desired because it was probably a little bit mature for him," says Russell Sr. "I think he's just excited about the name *Batman*; that's why he liked it. It's just a movie that's supposed to be a thriller, that's all."

A recent National Public Radio show, "Is that real blood on Hollywood's hands?", dealt with media violence and featured Judith Reisman, president of the Institute for Media Education in Arlington, Va.

"This movie is clearly not for kids," Reisman said. "Are we supposed to be stupid? Here's this . . . woman in black latex cracking her whip, and we're not supposed to know that this implies S & M? Who do these guys who make these films think they're fooling?"

Reisman, author of two books on the effects of media sex and violence on children and a report on child pornography for the Justice Department, has not seen the movie. But "I've seen enough from the commercials and the trailers to know that it's garbage," she said. "They keep making these monster films and it just gets worse and worse. They know exactly what they're doing."

"It definitely had tones on the violent

side," says Jolene Mamber of St. Petersburg, who who viewed the movie with her family. "In fact, on one part, Carlin came and got up on my lap and I think it was because of the violence in there. I kind of feel like I had to reiterate to her that this wasn't real, but this was a fantasy and Batman is not real."

Seven-year-old Carlin says she liked Catwoman, "but I kind of wished she was on the good side."

"It was pretty neat, but I don't think it was too appropriate for children because of the language and the violence," says Carlin's brother, David, 12. "I wouldn't want to go back and see it."

The Mambers say they felt so inundated with *Batman* hype that coming to see the film was almost a given.

"We didn't even pay any attention to the rating because it was *Batman*," says Jolene Mamber. "Not only was it violent, but it had the sexual thing, too, which kids probably don't need to see."

Adds dad Dave Mamber: "There's so much media attention to it that it would have been hard to tell them they couldn't see the movie. You're just blitzed with *Batman*. It's hard to escape it."


The Washington Post


*Essay*

# Making a Killing

Movie Violence: Will It Be the Death of Us?

By Rita Kempley  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Asking the entertainment industry about the effects of violence on viewers is akin to asking the tobacco lobby if smoking can kill you. You come away convinced that an act of violence a day is like a medicinal apple—a kind of psychic roughage that encourages you to expel your aggressive tendencies oh-so-harmlessly into the ether. Even if that's the case, just look at the state of the ether: our cosmic consciousness tells us this crumbling, quaking, warring planet is a sewer.

Violence is a growing part of our daily lives, even if we live in the suburbs and it's only the neighbor who goes nuts, shoots the wife and kiddies and buries them in the basement. Never mind the suicide of urban America, where folks die on their stoops for a breeze in August. For plenty of good reasons, we are all scared silly—an optimum situation for the scoundrels, hypocrites and even well-meaning preachy types who purvey mayhem to the moviegoing masses.

As Wes Craven, the creator of "Nightmare on Elm Street," once told this newspaper, "Horror films are the cinema of the disenfranchised—people on the edge." Craven was musing on the fact that Hispanic and black teens form more than 60 percent of the audience for the genre. But we are all on the edge now, aren't we? All of us more receptive to films that deal in psychotic victimization. Witness the rash of stalker movies—the latest of which is "Unlawful Entry," a paranoid screed aimed at the white leather sofa set in Beverly Hills.

A "Fatal Attraction" knockoff, this one is not about career women wrecking the precious American family,

See ESSAY, G4, Col. 1

ESSAY, From G1

but about authority gone mad, I tell you, mad. It's not about killing cops, but cops who kill—a notion every bit as disturbing as the one advocated by rapper Ice-T, whose recording "Cop Killer" from Time Warner Inc. drew the president's fire last week: "I... stand against those who use films or records or television or video games to glorify killing law enforcement officers," Bush said. "It is sick."

Yeah, it's enough to make you hurl your Goobers. But what about all the blondes killed in showers, the wise guys whacked over their rigatoni, the innocents slaughtered so Arnold Schwarzenegger can ripple his muscles?

It's the rare movie that doesn't turn on violence. Chain saw sequels and Stephen King adaptations aside, recent examples include "The Fisher King," "Ghost," "Grand Canyon," "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle," "The Silence of the Lambs," "Thelma & Louise," "Fried Green Tomatoes," "The Player," "Basic Instinct," "Alien³" and "Batman Returns." Bush, it should be noted, had access to prints of "Lethal Weapon 3" and "Batman Returns." Whether he and Barbara peeked at either of these films, in which cops are killed but not by rap singers, only the First Viewers know for sure.

Carol Lieberman, chairman of the National Coalition on Television Violence, called Bush's comments hypocritical: "I wonder how many cops Arnold Schwarzenegger killed in 'Terminator,' and then the president rewards him by making him a national role model by naming him head of his committee on physical fitness."

# Movie Violence

The administration's assault on Ice-T is symptomatic of a mutually beneficial tussle between those who govern and those who govern entertainment. At least once a week, one blames the other for the end of what's left of North American civilization. It's Dan Quayle vs. Murphy Brown, Bill Clinton vs. Sister Souljah, Jay Leno vs. Dan Quayle (the veep is alleged to be recycling Jay's jokes), Spike Lee vs. George Bush, Oliver Stone vs. the entire government. That way nobody asks any of these boogers any pertinent questions. And nobody's held accountable. Maybe it's time to apply the Japanese slogan: Fix the problem, not the blame.

Tim Robbins, who plays a studio executive who murders a screenwriter in the Hollywood satire "The Player," takes on political hypocrisy in the upcoming "Bob Roberts," which he wrote and directed. Here, Robbins stars as an unscrupulous candidate who beats the polls by pretending to be crippled in a faked assassination attempt. "The Player" and "Bob Roberts" are linked in that each exposes a slick, likable media manipulator empowered by his crime.

At the Cannes Film Festival premiere of "The Player," director Robert Altman pointed out that most of the movie posters that decorated the town's main drag featured "guns and [breasts]." He noted that sex and violence sells, and that an industry CEO "only thinks of making enough money to fill his own swimming pool before he gets fired."

As the titillation threshold rises, notably more screenwriters are involving women in the slaughter, variously motivated by bisexuality, feminism or female balding. True, more and more women are buying and learning to shoot handguns. So it is possible to cite the chicken vs. the egg. The real question seems unanswerable: Who is egging on whom?

Lieberman believes that violent movies create their own audiences—many of them no doubt incarcerated. "There are close to a thousand studies on all kinds of entertainment—TV, movies, videos games, war toys, comic books, music—that show a 95 percent causal link between violent entertainment and subsequent harmful behavior. . . . The studies that don't show this are studies funded mostly by TV networks."

Naturally, Jack Valenti, president and CEO of the Motion Picture Association of America, disagrees. As for these studies, he says, "It's kind of like a murder trial—the defense hires a psychiatrist who positively swears that the defendant is sane, and the prosecution hires a psychiatrist who positively swears the defendant was insane. I'm not aware of any group of studies that can verify a causal relationship, like the one linking smoking and cancer, between aggressive behavior and what one sees."

People are looking for scapegoats, he says. For instance, a Christian coalition last week launched a protest against McDonald's for its tie-ins to the PG-13-rated "Batman Returns," charging the movie is ultra-violent. "Movies are an easy target," Valenti says, "which is not to say I don't find a lot of movies to my taste."

He says there are plenty of nonviolent options. Such as "Hook" (a sea captain menaces starving orphans), "Fried Green Tomatoes" (a preacher shields a murderer) and "Housesitter" (a pathological liar stalks an architect). We will not quibble with "Father of the Bride" and "Driving Miss Daisy."

Vis-a-vis that, James Cameron of "The Terminator" and "Aliens" once noted that "if all there was to do was go see 'Driving Miss Daisy,' people would still cut off people's heads with chain saws, because it's in people's nature."

Indeed, violence is as old as proto-slime. It has been celebrated from Beowulf to RoboCop. The hero has a thousand faces, most of them splashed with gore—whether it's Rambo making Cong slaw or the farmer's wacky wife cutting off the tails of the three blind mice with her carving knife. Storytellers, from the Brothers Grimm to the Brothers Coen will tell you violence is not only an easy way to set your hero in motion but an easy way to hook the audience. Our blood boils even as conscience recoils.

At least "Batman Returns," for all its excesses, has a message: It emphasizes the "difficulty of duality." That's how Batman puts it to the newly evolved Catwoman, a mild-mannered secretary when she is not scaling skyscrapers dressed like a dominatrix. Literally thrown out the window by her evil polluter boss, she comes back from the dead to avenge

sex crimes against women, a whip-wielding cross between Lash Larue and Anita Hill. Like Robin Williams's homeless prophet in "The Fisher King," like Patrick Swayze's loving haunt in "Ghost," like Harrison Ford's plugged lawyer in "Regarding Henry," she is reborn through catastrophic injury.

Michael Medavoy, the chairman of TriStar Pictures, commented on the scene in "The Fisher King," the shooting of the street prophet's wife, at a recent conference on "Violence in America—The War at Home." "I tried to tell the director the scene went too far," said Medavoy, whose wife, Patricia, chairs the group that sponsored the event. "I wrote him a letter: 'I'm not going to tell you to cut it, I'm just telling you what I think.' And he didn't change any of it."

He added that he had said the same thing to a number of directors, but that doesn't mean he's altogether against mayhem. "To make the claim that movies are responsible for violence is ludicrous."

David Lynch takes it a step further: "Films are a safe place to experience violence," he said after the Cannes premiere of "Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me," a film that concerns sexual and physical abuse of women and children. Citing censorship, he said it's more "dangerous to tackle movies for causing violence while not doing anything to stop it."

Thanks to Dave, "Wild at Heart" star Nicolas Cage is free to knock bits of brain all over the opening scene because somebody insults Laura Dern, his girl. And as we know from "Unlawful Entry," it's A-OK to kill for your woman.

In any case, women and children have been taking an increasingly active role in violent films, either as a sorry side effect of political correctness or as an accurate reflection of the headlines. It started with "RoboCop 2," in which an 11-year-old drug dealer is brutalized, and also surfaces in "Batman Returns" when the Penguin reinvokes the biblical plague against the Egyptians, setting out to slay all of Gotham's firstborn.

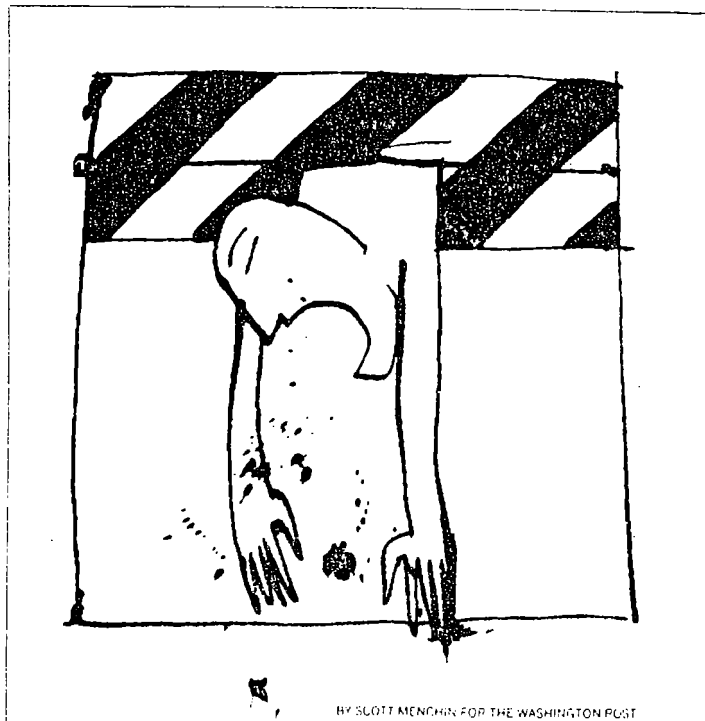
A victim of neglect, the psychotic Moses was placed in a basket as a babe and tossed by his parents into the sewer (Gotham's ulcerating id, one supposes) from whence he emerges to become—you guessed it!—a political candidate. He couldn't be more vile, but the gullible Gothamites flock to the fish-eating fiend like dumb gulls. They don't mind when he fondles a campaign lovely, they don't mind when he nearly bites off his spin doctor's

nose. The lessons for kiddies, one guesses, is that you can gnaw proboscis without spiting your face.

"Batman Returns" and "Lethal Weapon 3" are the summer's big winners so far, grossing \$96.8 million in two weeks and \$127.3 million in seven weeks, respectively. Richard Donner, the progenitor of the explosively entertaining "Weapons" pix, told the New York Times that he attributed the success of the first film—and one extrapolates the next two—to the way he approached the inherent violence. "Sure, there were a lot of deaths, but they died like they died in westerns. They were shot with bullets, they weren't dismembered."

Curiously enough, Donner took aim at the National Rifle Association in the first "Lethal Weapon," then tuna consumers in the second and fur wearers in the third. "Only Animals Should Wear Fur . . . Except Tasteless Pigs" is the motto on a truck featured in one of the movie's high-speed chase scenes. Tasteless? Pigs? Come on, who's oinking whom?

Despite the ever-increasing body count of Donner et al.'s work, it has become increasingly difficult to find suitable enemies to sacrifice to our growing blood lust. "Patriot Games," another stalker movie, incidentally, sets Harrison Ford against the IRA (not the good old shillelagh-waggers but the extremist fringe—the real nuts). The truth is we no longer need the old reliable Indians, Gooks, Japs, Nazis and Commies. We are, as Lawrence Kasden's "Grand Canyon" points out, committing suicide.



BY SCOTT MCEHIN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

# Some parents may wish televisions were dead

By Deborah D. Heldman  
Tribune-Star Staff Reporter

If you are like a lot of parents, you plopped your kids down in front of the television set Saturday morning and, without much thought, turned on cartoons.

You are concerned about television violence, but figure cartoons are pretty safe. Besides, the parade of animated shows keeps the kids out of your hair for a few hours, giving you time for housework or another hour of sleep.

But not all cartoons are good for kids. Especially those "party-dude heroes in a half shell."

Yes, watching those pizza-loving martial-arts experts, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, can spell big trouble for your kids, according to the National Coalition on Television Violence.

In fact, coalition Chairman Carol Lieberman says the Turtles have the dubious honor of being the most violent Saturday morning cartoon show.

"We have seen a rash of problems in nursery schools. The kids come in kicking," Lieberman said. "You don't need to be a researcher to see the impact it has on children. A lot of joking goes on with the violence; it makes kids think violence is fun."

"The show is aimed toward the young group," she said. "They grab the attention and love of the child, then they do violent things. They are good guys, but they use a lot of violence."

And it's not just the Ninja Turtles who are popular — but violent — characters with the recently-potty-trained to reading-and-writing set.

Jeanette Frey, an instructor at Indiana State University's child-care program, hears a lot about Freddie Krueger — the sinister slasher with the knife-like fingers of "Nightmare on Elm Street" movie fame — from her 4- and 5-year-old pupils.

"I wonder what effect that will have on them when they grow up?" said Frey, whose child-care center stresses non-violence to children.

It's not just Frey's pupils who talk about



**"There was a study conducted that showed more kids know Freddy Krueger than the president of the United States."**  
**Carol Lieberman**

the sinister character.

"There was a study conducted that showed more kids know Freddy Krueger than the president of the United States," Lieberman said.

And all that violence — whether it be from the Ninja Turtles, Krueger, cop shows, gory movies or even video games — has an effect on children, Lieberman said.

"There have been close to a thousand studies involving movies, television, Nintendo, video games and cartoons, and in 95

percent of the cases there have been measurable harmful effects, including a propensity for violence. Children become fearful of the world, have nightmares, fear that other kids will do harm. They can become desensitized to violence," she said.

And it is not just Lieberman's group that believes a diet of television and movie violence has harmful effects.

The National Institute of Mental Health released a study in 1982 — an update of a 1972 study of television violence by the U.S. Surgeon General Scientific Advisory Committee — that showed, again, a link between negative behavior and television violence.

Among other things, the 1982 study "Television and Behavior: 10 Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the '80's" strengthened the findings of the earlier study of a "causal relationship between televised violence and later aggressive behavior."

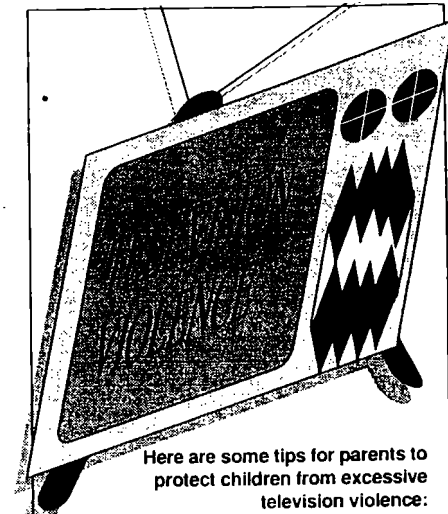
Included in the institute study was the findings of an independent study funded by the Columbia Broadcasting System that showed "consistent associations between heavy television viewing of violent programs and unwarranted aggressive behavior in free play" of 3- and 4-year-old children in day-care centers.

But Sgt. Jerrold Arney, head of the Terre Haute Police Department's Juvenile Division, is not convinced television violence causes children to grow into violent adults.

He does believe children should not view "slasher movies" or other shows and movies that depict violent crimes. Children are very impressionable and think they can do things they see on television "like hitting people over the heads like on the cartoons," he said.

"Slashing and dismemberments are done by some truly sick people," Arney said of the proposed link between criminal behavior and television violence. "I think it [television violence] only affects children who already have a problem. If guns [and other signs of violence] on television shows had an effect, why are there not 100 times the murders? If you are going to eliminate television violence, you will have to go all the way back to Popeye."

Arney does believe, however, that children



**Here are some tips for parents to protect children from excessive television violence:**

- Pay close attention to the programs children are watching.
- Set limits on the time they watch television.
- Refuse to let them watch violent shows and change the channel when something violent comes on, explaining to the child what is wrong with the program.
- Point out characters are not really hurt or killed and acts like this in real life result in pain or death.
- Disapprove of the violent episode in front of children, stressing the behavior is not the best way to solve the problem.
- Encourage your child to watch programs with characters that help and care for each other.
- When renting a video, ask the clerk about violence in the movie.

Tribune-Star/Denise Henderson

with problems are more likely to be affected by the portrayal of gangs that are sometimes glorified by the media.

"We see kids emulate a gang," Arney said. "They do a lot of small-time stealing and vandalism. Criminal mischief-type things."

And he believes the shows on television about fraud and other white collar crime "give people ideas."

Lieberman said there is "no doubt some children are more affected than other kids" by television violence.

"Kids growing up without parents around or [those whose] parents who are violent tend to be more affected by the media," she said. "But there are still effects on every child, to some degree."

Arney said the issue of television violence "boils down to one thing: parents."

"Parents need to take the time to explain to the kids, all the way to Popeye, that if you hit, it hurts someone. If parents would spend time with the children, a lot of problems would be eliminated."

# Experts differ on TV's impact on nation's morals

By Larry Witham  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Television fiction can influence a viewer's real-world decisions, but it depends on the frequency of viewing, age and discernment of the watcher, media experts and psychiatrists say.

While several studies show that television violence encourages violent behavior, the tube's sway over lifestyles and morality is more complex to prove, they said.

"Television is one of many factors," said George Gerbner, dean emeritus of the Annenberg School for Communications. "It is contributing more than ever [to moral decisions]. The influence is pervasive."

The debate was raised anew Tuesday when Vice President Dan Quayle cited the birth of an illegitimate child to popular TV character Murphy Brown as a bad moral influence on society.

"We've been so mesmerized by television and movies that we've made celebrity figures out of the people involved," said Dr. Carole Lieberman, a Beverly Hills psychiatrist who advises script writers. "It's not only the stories but the actors who influence us."

When Robert Young played "Marcus Welby, M.D." on television, people approached him in public to ask medical advice, she said. When soap

opera stars are pregnant in the script, viewers send them baby booties, and those who suffer scripted accidents receive get-well cards, studies show.

"People watch soap operas to find out information to solve problems in their lives," Dr. Lieberman said. "The images and dialogue go into the mind and then when you face a real-life situation they are drawn on to find out what to say or do."

While television can indeed be inspirational — Dr. Lieberman views Murphy Brown as an inspiring role model for working women — she said real people can rarely do what fictional characters achieve. "If a woman in the ghetto says, 'Murphy Brown has done it so I can do it,' there are going to be problems," she said.

To most viewers, Murphy Brown's decision to have an illegitimate child "will stand out as an exception," Mr. Gerbner said. "For people who are already predisposed to that kind of activity it may act as a trigger mechanism."

Fictional lives on television can gradually set social standards, said S. Robert Lichter, who has done years of content studies of prime-time television as director of the Center for Media and Public Affairs.

"Television and movies and the recording industry determine what is socially acceptable behavior," Mr.

Lichter said. "It's a pervasive trickle-down influence."

If it were not, he added, such celebrities as Magic Johnson and Madonna would not be automatic national symbols for moral issues. Movie producers have admitted their moral influence, he said, by dropping the glamorous drug-use scenes once common in films of the 1960s and 1970s.

Advertising on television also proves its influence on human behavior, said Dr. Steven E. Hyler of the New York State Psychiatric Institute.

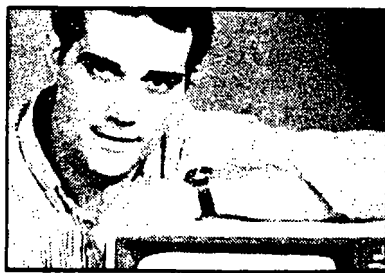
"If there wasn't some correlation, they wouldn't spend millions of dollars to put advertising on," he said. "Much of it is subliminal message."

He said television programming is most influential on children and adolescents. "With Murphy Brown it is an adult show," he said. "But then it depends on what parents are letting their children watch."

The Rev. Donald Wildmon, president of the American Family Association, said his monitoring of television content has not yet measured how Hollywood presents single-parent families in comparison to two-parent families. But through 1991, according to one study, prime-time shows on the three major networks depicted 10,218 sexual incidents — 93 percent of them outside marriage.

# New Haven Register

180TH YEAR, NO. 84; NEW HAVEN, CONN., TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 1992; NEWSSTAND 50 CENTS



**JOE AMARANTE**

ON TELEVISION

## Blood-spattered TV shows take toll on society

**I**N a photo from his movie, Arnold Schwarzenegger stands confident, muscles and veins bulging, in a menacing pose with a machine gun.

In a still from the NBC-TV film "Siege at Marion," women and children hold handguns, ready for an assault by an unseen enemy.

Like our city streets, the mass media have become so violent a stage that even ads for TV programs boast instruments of sudden death.

A Cheshire woman took time to send us the above magazine clippings of ads for "action" movies on state broadcast stations.

"It is no wonder," Frieda Stegerwald wrote, "that impressionable young people are led to believe that guns solve many of life's problems."

There is ample research to back up that statement, according to Jerome Singer, professor of psychology and child study at Yale (and a renowned TV researcher with his wife, Dorothy).

"There is a great deal of use of guns in this medium — they don't really use knives, do they?" he said.

His often-quoted research shows that children who watch many action/adventure shows are more aggressive and violent in their behavior with other children.

"The research comes down strongly that kids will imitate what they see on television," Singer said. "And if guns are available, then they will use them as they see on TV."

Singer said the commercial networks attempted this TV season to tone down violence in prime time. Straight cop dramas are harder to find, "but there's still plenty of violence on TV."

There are more than enough syndicated tabloid shows, graphic movies and the new rage — "reality" crime programs — to keep violence front and center for a nation hooked on TV.

**The facts:** Recently the American Psychological Association released a report on the pervasive effects of TV on viewers, especially children. It included:

■ The average child witnesses 8,000 TV murders and 100,000 other acts of violence by the time he or she graduates from the sixth grade.

■ Cable TV and videotapes provide more access to graphic violence (including sexual violence) than broadcast TV. So the boom in cable and video since 1980 has spread the problem.

"Violence is the new drug in America," said psychiatrist Carole Lieberman of Beverly Hills, Calif. "As with other addictions, the body builds up a tolerance, so the same amount doesn't get you high after awhile."

TV's 50-year history is filled with Westerns' stylized gunplay, war shows such as "Combat" and trivialized shootings in sitcoms such as "Get Smart."

But today's use of weapons on TV cuts across all time periods and genres. Children can see realistic-looking slayings on any "Top Cops," "Hard Copy" or "America's Most Wanted."

Lieberman, who is also chairwoman of the National Coalition on Television Violence (a group that counts violent acts in TV shows and movies), said even news shows are showing more violent images because "people aren't as titillated anymore" by anything less graphic.

**Male viewers:** Rod Bacon of WTXH-20, general manager of the state station that ran "Bloodsport," "Death Wish IV" and "Rambo II: First Blood" during February, at the time explained the carnage by saying, "Men love violent movies. . . . We do great ratings with them."

Lieberman has an interesting reply to that statement and to the ads and TV promos of confident-looking men holding automatic weapons.

"The weapons are phallic symbols. Men, especially in this recession, are feeling powerless and impotent. They're getting more of a charge out of watching other men carry guns."

By cashing in on gratuitous violence, TV has blood on its hands. The medium, like society, should be urged to end its love affair with guns.

# TV

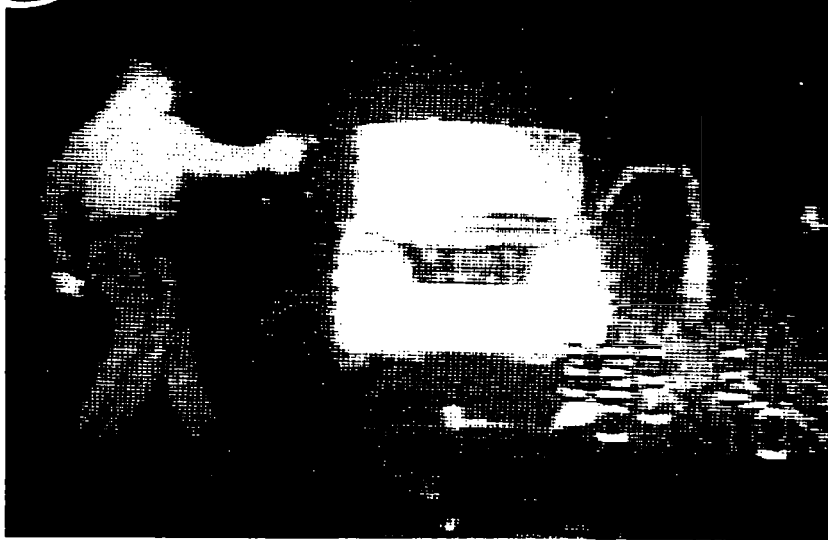
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April 4-10  
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OF SEXY

After airing the video of police officer  
**Darrell Lunsford's** death, *I Witness*  
Video showed this successful arrest

# SHOCK TV



Dana Hickey for TV Guide

**A new reality show,  
*I Witness Video*,  
gives us the ultimate  
eye-opener: death  
and disaster on  
tape. It may be the  
start of a very  
scary trend.**

By Stewart Weiner

**O**n Sunday, Feb. 23, at 8 P.M., broadcast television embarked upon a new era. That evening, for the first time in TV history, a major network started programming death as entertainment. Tuning into NBC's *I Witness Video*, startled viewers saw the replay of murders that had been captured by amateur camcorders. It was a pivotal moment in reality programming.

TV has been edging toward this moment for years. We had the "based on a true story" movies, the "docudramas," and the "reenactments." But *I Witness Video* took America's infatuation with realism into a new twilight zone.

What the unexpectedly large audience saw during *I Witness Video* was deeply

unsettling. The show opened with the story of constable Darrell Lunsford, whose beat was a lonely stretch of Texas highway popular with drug smugglers. Lunsford, figuring he should have some kind of record of his arrests, had installed a video camera next to the rearview mirror in his car. And so he came to tape his own death. Three men, mostly off-camera, took Lunsford's life last January. The incident—and, fortunately, the murderers—were recorded on the tape.

*I Witness Video* showed the tape three times—once in slo-mo. And that was only the *beginning* of the show. Possibly the most disturbing portion of *I Witness Video* occurred during the segment featuring Mike Silva, a helicopter pilot for a Denver news outlet. Working with cameraman Jim Stair, an airborne Silva spotted a speeding getaway truck and set off in pursuit. For a moment, it was thrilling to watch. Until, that is, the car plowed into an innocent bystander. Viewers, still reeling from the shock, then witnessed a chase that culminated in a police shootout that rendered the suspect lifeless, his head dripping blood onto the side of the hijacked truck.

There's no debate that the camcorder has had a dramatic effect on news-gathering. With some 16 million camcorders in American hands today—and that number increases by several million each year—it's unlikely that a large event could occur *anywhere* without its being captured on tape. Amateur videophiles have taken us to a plane crash in Evansville, Ind.; through the jungles of Central America; into Rob Lowe's Atlanta hotel room; and onto the streets of Romania. We were there in Los Angeles when motorist Rodney King got beaten to a pulp by members of the L.A.P.D.

The "tabloid" programs have made this real stuff a staple of their programming for years. "The story that launched *A Current Affair* featured an amateur video," recalls David Lee Miller, a re-

porter with the show since its inception. "A sheriff in Kansas rented a video camera, shot some racy footage of himself and his wife, and returned the camera to the video store without taking out his tape. It became a *cause célèbre* in the town and the basis for a story we did."

But what makes *I Witness Video* new is that the show presents these images not in a news or even *newslike* context: *I Witness Video* presents footage as entertainment. With the Texas and Denver stories, a line has been crossed. We see real, live people killed on-screen strictly for our amusement. When the pedestrian was hit by the car, says pilot Mike Silva, "I realized those were not actors, those weren't stuntmen. This was real!"

**G**iven the nature of this footage and the dramatic way it was presented, *I Witness Video* drew a hefty crowd that Sunday night. The negative reviews the show received before it aired apparently had little effect on viewership. They did have an effect on NBC, however.

"I was heartsick when I read those reviews," admits Jeffrey Gaspin, the network executive in charge of development, who defends the show as a successful hybrid of both entertainment and news. "I worked closely with both Michael [Gartner, the head of NBC News] and Warren [Littlefield, head of entertainment] in developing the show." (As yet, neither division is claiming total paternity.)

*I Witness Video*'s honchos swear that no enhancement is made to the picture or the sound, yet the program swells with the kind of production values more in keeping with a network miniseries presentation. There is, for example, a soundtrack composed by Gary Remal Malkin that serves to build up the drama: when the show is repeated April 5 (a new episode airs April 8), note how the soundtrack throbs with a synthesizer pulse during the Denver car chase. "I

wanted to freeze the picture just before the guy was hit by the car," says Gaspin. He was outvoted. "The truth is, that whole scene goes on for nine more horrible seconds; we cut from it right away. The rest was totally unwatchable."

Some argue that what made it to the screen was unwatchable: Carole Lieberman, for example. Lieberman, a Beverly

Hills psychiatrist, is chairman of the National Coalition on Television Violence. "I have a problem with the whole concept of this show," she says. "We're so conditioned to seeing life through a camera that we've lost touch with the reality of life. We have become desensitized."

"A good example is the San Francisco earthquake footage, with those poor people in the car going down through the bridge. The first time I saw it, it was a horrifying image. The 10th time, it wasn't so horrifying."

Lieberman is also concerned about the show's effect on impressionable young minds: "Children have enough trouble figuring out what is real and what is fantasy without this."

The show has other critics.

"I think the whole thing is a time bomb," says Edwin Guthman, the Pulitzer Prize-winning former national editor of the *Los Angeles Times*. He's referring to the possibility that, in order to land on a reality program, a person might be tempted to *stage* reality.

The possibility of such fraud is not remote. "For less than \$2000, you can buy a camcorder and a VCR," says *Video Magazine's* editor, James M. Barry, "and you can do basic editing and have a lot of fun. Look at today's television commercials.

They have Louis Armstrong talking to Elton John for diet Coke."

*I Witness Video's* executive producer, Terry A. Landau, doesn't dismiss the possibility of fraud, but she does find it pretty far-fetched. "The events we cover are ones that have appeared on the nightly news," she says. "We don't just take the video out of an envelope and toss it on the air."

Still, even Landau sees the potential for a dark side. "I have a whole heap of stories that have come in that I wouldn't touch. The television anchor who blew his brains out; we looked at that. The Korean grocer who shot the little girl in L.A. The

teenage muggers in Washington, D.C. Unless we can find some context, we're not going to produce that stuff." But someone else might. Imitators anxious to cash in on a trend may not be so fussy about taste.

We may even find out that Americans don't have the stomach for this much realism. Take Robert Aeberle, for example. This past February, a C-130 transport plane flew over Aeberle's Evansville, Ind., home and crash-landed into a hotel and restaurant nearby. Aeberle grabbed his video-camcorder and went to the scene. Afterward, he says, his family persuaded him to sell the resulting footage to CNN.

But Aeberle has mixed feelings about the experience. "When I got to the crash site and discovered that people were killed," he says. "I saw folks coming out on stretchers. I couldn't shoot that. It just wasn't right. I don't feel comfortable with the \$250 I got from CNN. I haven't even spent it yet." ■



Cops and robber: a helicopter newsman taped the violent end to a harrowing police chase.

Don't Highway for TV Guide

# Her say

## In TV's 'jep' trend, viewer is victim too

**M**y love affair with television was severely tested during November, one of the so-called "sweeps" periods, when advertising rates are determined by the month's ratings. All the networks are putting on what they think will draw viewers, particularly females, to the tube. What I saw was enough to send me in search of a new pastime.

Never have I seen so many victimized women as I did watching the made-for-TV movies during the sweeps. It's as if all the network executives got together and said, "How many different ways can we portray women as poor, helpless and brain-dead?"

A recent issue of Newsweek magazine reported that "of the approximately 250 [made-for-TV movies] set for this season, nearly half show women undergoing—and overcoming—some form of physical or psychological mistreatment." The magazine reports that in Hollywood, these television shows are known as "jep" or "women in jeopardy."

In two of the cases I saw, "False Arrest" starring Donna Mills and "Locked Up: A Mother's Rage" starring Cheryl Ladd, the plots centered on women imprisoned for crimes that were committed by their husbands or boyfriends.

Of course, Mills and Ladd don't figure that out right away. First, they endure endless prison beatings—at the hands of other women, of course—and suffer countless emotional scenes with their children who are going crazy while their mommies serve time.

In "The Rape of Dr. Willis," Jaclyn Smith portrayed a surgeon who was raped. She comes face-to-face with her attacker when he ends up on her operating table for emergency surgery. He dies and she must defend herself against charges she didn't try to save him.

As if those weren't enough, the promotions for "In A Child's Name" promised the horrifying tale of a dental hygienist who is beaten to death by her husband who says he killed her because she was abusing their baby.

Oh, and we can't forget "Posing," which told the real-life stories of three women at crisis points in their lives who decided one way to deal with their problems was to pose for Playboy.

It's pretty predictable, really. If the women are the ones doing the suffering, then the men are the ones doing the victimizing. And in most of the cases, the women emerge victorious, having learned they can't trust anybody and have only themselves to rely on.

Even more predictable is the tendency of local stations to want to follow their network lead-ins by promoting such late night news reports as "Women Stalked," "A Very Private Practice" or "Posing: The Real Story."

The name of the game is ratings. It should be noted that as news director at WBBM-TV I sanctioned titles like "Elvis: Is He Really Dead?" and "Does Sex Sell?" as tie-ins to network shows. But where do we draw the line? If women in danger is hot at the networks, then by all means we're going to see more of it—unless viewers help draw the line for them.

The "jep" trend started in Hollywood where, not surprisingly, most network and studio executives as well as scriptwriters, are men. Newsweek estimates that 5 percent of made-for-TV movie writers are female.

Carole Lieberman, a Beverly Hills psychiatrist and a script consultant for network programs, says the writers of "jep" movies are often oblivious to the subtle messages these shows send out. "The message is that it is still a male-oriented society and that to solve your problem you have to do it the way men want you to do it or sacrifice a major portion of your life, which may include your femininity," Lieberman says.

Why do women supposedly like to watch these movies? According to Lieberman, "Most women can identify with the concept of being in jeopardy in some way in their lives and they are trying to learn to cope."

One way of coping, for me anyway, is to change the channel the next time there's a poor, helpless and brain-dead woman on the tube. Phone calls of protest to the networks rarely reach the person responsible for the programming. Letters do go into a public file, which is read by the Federal Communications Commission. Still, the best way to get a message across to a network is by tuning out. By keeping my remote control handy, I can move on to more palatable mindless fare and let the network executives know that it's their silly programs that are in jeopardy.



*Colleen Dudgeon*

Colleen Dudgeon, former news director for WBBM-TV in Chicago, is a free-lance writer.

# L.A. LIFE

Daily News

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## DANGEROUS LIAISONS

Kim Basinger's "Final Analysis" character is one in a long line that goes back to Glenn Close's unhinged Alex from "Fatal Attraction."



*The movie battle of the sexes  
turns increasingly violent*

PAGE 18

# ARTS

## & ENTERTAINMENT

# Fatal box-office attraction

*Hollywood's not-so-cheap thrills establish film trend*

By Bob Strauss  
Daily News Film Writer

In the heat of passion for safe investments and big payoffs, Hollywood is under suspicion of having committed love crimes. In the final analysis, the movie industry stands accused of a fatal attraction to exploiting audiences' basic instincts.

Can you spot the titles of seven recent or upcoming sex thrillers in the preceding paragraph? They are "In the Heat of Passion," "Under Suspicion," "Love Crimes," "Final Analysis," "Accused," "Fatal Attraction" and "Basic Instinct."

And they are just the tip of a movie-trend iceberg that mixes eroticism and danger more intensely than ever before.

This current cycle — which includes everything from courtroom dramas, psycho-on-the-loose screamfests and every permutation of the classic crime of passion model — was kicked off around 1985 by the surprise success of "Jagged Edge."

Two years later, another nail-biter starring Glenn Close, "Fatal Attraction," went through the box office and collective psyche roof. Both films established the basic paradigm of the modern sex thriller: Someone commits a breach of professional and/or personal ethics, unleashing a libidinous monster that will destroy them or those they care for unless the he- or she-demon is destroyed first.

The financial success of these films, naturally, led to more of the same.

Three of last year's biggest hits — "Sleeping With the Enemy," "Silence of the Lambs" and "Cape Fear" — reinforced the notion in a recession-wary Hollywood that the combination of those crowd-pleasing staples, sex and violence, was the closest thing to a sure bet that there is these days.

This year's first blockbuster, "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle," bears out that wisdom. Though primarily a battle between a young mother and a vengeful nanny, the film's plot is incited by a molestation, and part of the family-busting baby sitter's strategy is to entice her boss's husband and breast-feed her infant.

Over the last few years, we've been assaulted with movies along the lines of "Sea of Love," "Internal Affairs," "Presumed Innocent," "Wild at Heart," "Something Wild," "Shattered" and "The Comfort of Strangers." Most delivered



Patrick Bergin and Sean Young appear in "Love Crimes," a new sex thriller from director Lizzie Borden.



Nick Corri and Sally Kirkland star in the low-budget, psycho-erotic "In the Heat of Passion," which will open Feb. 21.

the chills and thrills their suggestive titles promised, and most made their producers good money.

Which is why, well into the foreseeable future, we can look forward to such titles as "Single White Female," "Sessions," "Traces of Red," "Unlawful Entry," "Indecent Proposal" and "Body of Evidence"

(starring Madonna!). There's even a half-animated feature, "Cool World," in which Kim Basinger faces the threat of dangerous sex with a cartoon character.

"Final Analysis," in which Richard Gere plays a psychiatrist drawn into a murder scheme by the sultry sister act of Basinger and Uma

Thurman, opened Friday. "In the Heat of Passion," starring Sally Kirkland, and "Under Suspicion" with Liam Neeson and Laura San Giacomo are scheduled for release later this month.

And in March, "Basic Instinct," the controversial thriller about rough cop Michael Douglas's horizontal investigation of bisexual writer-possible ice-pick killer Sharon Stone, will open to a cacophony of protest from gay-rights activists, censorship advocates and heaven knows who else.

Of course, there always have been erotic thrillers. Most of Alfred Hitchcock's output combined psychological dysfunction, titillation and terror; so has Brian De Palma's.

In the '70s, every year or so brought a high-profile production that linked sex with violence ("Taxi Driver," "Looking for Mr. Goodbar"); while throughout much of the last decade, slasher films exploited brutality against women.

But only the film noir cycle of the 1940s and '50s matches the current trend for frequency and variety of sex- and danger-themed movies. Mostly black-and-white crime films

# Sex, thrills and celluloid: some chilling comparisons

| Film                             | Fun couple                              | Ethical lapse                                                                                   | Punishment                                              | Moral                                                                       |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Fatal Attraction"               | Michael Douglas and Glenn Close         | He has an affair with a crazy single woman.                                                     | Boiled rabbit.                                          | Don't have affairs with crazy women who are less attractive than your wife. |
| "Silence of the Lambs"           | Jodie Foster and Anthony Hopkins        | She lets a brilliant, psychopathic cannibal into her mind to help her catch another mad killer. | Bitten faces.                                           | Women make good FBI agents, even if the really dangerous psycho gets away.  |
| "Cape Fear"                      | Robert De Niro and Nick Nolte           | He intimidates a professional lawyer.                                                           | Bitten faces.                                           | A man's tattoos can tell you a lot about him.                               |
| "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle" | Rebecca De Mornay and Annabella Sciorra | Didn't check references.                                                                        | Alienation of your family's affections.                 | Stay away from male gynecologists.                                          |
| "Final Analysis"                 | Richard Gere and Kim Basinger           | Bedding his therapy patient's sister.                                                           | Made pals for an elaborate murder scheme.               | Blondes are trouble.                                                        |
| "Basic Instinct"                 | Michael Douglas and Sharon Stone        | Falling in lust with the main suspect of your murder investigation.                             | Angry protesters and renewed cries for film censorship. | Changing the X rating to NC-17 was a pointless exercise.                    |

Compiled by Bob Strauss

## Thrillers

Continued from Page 18

rich in aberrant psychology, nightmare imagery and destructive passion, noir movies capitalized on the postwar public's deepest personal fears.

Noir classics like "Double Indemnity," "Out of the Past" and "Gilda" played on the guilt returning soldiers felt about the violence they had committed in the line of duty.

They also exploited the men's double-edged resentments against their home-front sweethearts: American females were, for the most part, sexually more inhibited than the women soldiers met in Europe and the Pacific, but not enough so to prevent their boyfriends and lovers from speculating about what they'd been doing for four years.

For their part, droves of women who had entered the war-effort work force suddenly found society pushing them back into the kitchen. That resentment, too, could be displaced at films rife with controlling femmes fatales and disastrous male-female relationships.

A quick look at today's social landscape reveals a psychological minefield at least as threatening as the one following World War II's; fertile ground, in other words, for planting screen fantasies that equate passion with doom.

"The association of violent themes with sexual themes is coming about because of a number of factors in society's unconscious mind," observed Dr. Carole Lieberman, a Beverly Hills psychiatrist, film and TV show technical adviser and host of KWNK-AM (670) radio's "Real Talk About Real Life." "One of these factors is AIDS. In fact, sex has been linked with danger and destruction for the past 10 years because of AIDS. But since it's hard to portray the actual disease in (entertainment) media, writers are visualizing it in metaphorical ways."

Dr. Robert Berger is one of those writers. Eight years ago, the forensic psychiatrist — who has analyzed the likes of punk rock casualty Sid Vicious and John Lennon's assassin, Mark David Chapman, at New York's Bellevue Hospital — worked out the story for "Final Analysis" with then-aspiring screenwriter Wesley



Hollywood makes big money off films like "Final Analysis," with Richard Gere with Kim Basinger.

Strick (who went on to write, among others, Martin Scorsese's id-charged remake of "Cape Fear").

Berger agreed that the AIDS scare provides a subconscious receptiveness to sex thrillers.

Like Lieberman, Berger feels that the past several decades' reevaluation of gender roles, resulting male-female power struggles and concurrent difficulties in maintaining love relationships are all metaphorically addressed by sex thrillers.

According to Berger, worsening social conditions such as homelessness and street crime also contribute, but he feels it basically boils down to the classic Freudian link between sex and violence, aggravated by a kind of cultural hypocrisy.

"We have been fed somewhat liberated notions about sex, while on TV and in the news, we are confronted with a tremendous amount of acting out and violence in our society," Berger said. "We think we're sophisticated enough to be comfortable about these notions of sex and violence. The reality is, I don't think we really are."

"These kinds of fantasies and urges exist in all of us, and they're

**This current cycle — which includes everything from courtroom dramas, psycho-on-the-loose screamfests and every permutation of the classic crime of passion model — was kicked off around 1985 by the surprise success of "Jagged Edge."**

repressed. But the more our psyches are stimulated with these impulses without really going anywhere — we can't act it out and don't really feel comfortable talking about it — the more it gets bottled up. There is really only one place in our society where we can have a catharsis of these kinds of feelings, even if we're barely aware of them at the superficial level, and that's at the movies."

Berger feels that the very form of the psychological thriller lends itself to this specific result.

"The way they're presented is somewhat sexual in itself," he said. "It's voyeuristic, you gradually watch the unfolding of individual dynamics. We're hanging onto the plot to find out what hap-

pens next, very much like we'd be watching a stripper take off her clothes. It's very safe for someone to say that it's the thrill of the mystery that turns them on, when it's actually touching a button in their endorphin system or something that is very similar to the one that's touched sexually."

While he acknowledges the power of their psychosexual subtexts, "Analysis" director Phil Joanou also attributes these movies' popularity — among audiences and filmmakers — to their generally superior narrative qualities.

"People who go to movies a lot or watch a lot of TV are miles ahead of almost every show they see," Joanou observed. "But thrill-

ers only work if they have reversals. The thriller is now more successful than ever because it offers surprises that a lot of our entertainment doesn't anymore.

"Also, as a filmmaker, the genre offers me an opportunity to do interesting things with and get good performances from actors because they're generally playing lots of gray areas. Things aren't what they seem to be in these movies, so they get to play lots of layers."

Actress Sally Kirkland, who received an Oscar nomination for her performance in "Anna," agreed with Joanou. The low-budget "In the Heat of Passion," which is scheduled to open on Feb. 21, is her first sex thriller in a career that has spanned 53 films. She says the genre can offer actresses more interesting characters than the usual Hollywood fare.

"Over and over, they want you to play decoration in a male story, or you're dumb or everything about you is predictable," Kirkland said of the majority of roles actresses are offered. "I act when the psychology of what the woman does and says interests me. In 'Passion,' I like that she's a psychiatrist, that she's in an older woman-younger man relationship. The bottom line is that I like roles that allow me to do an incredible range of acting. This did."

To conclude on a fitting note, Lieberman and Berger gave differing assessments about the effects the new cycle of sex thrillers may have on people.

"In general, films that link sex with gratuitous violence are dangerous because viewers may unconsciously store the image of the idea of violence as an option," Lieberman said. "So, when someone is feeling angry or frustrated toward their sexual partner or (the opposite sex) in general, they could act out on these images and ideas, maybe not even remembering where they got them from."

"A small percentage of the population with limited controls and very serious pathology will interpret almost anything as a stimulus for acting out," Berger said.

"I don't think these movies increase that. They do, however, increase personal kinds of tension. I would like people to come out of a sexual thriller asking themselves, 'What is exciting me about that?' and 'What do I see in myself from that?' rather than just, 'Whew, they were sick.' That response could be genuinely therapeutic."

## TELEVISION

# Whip Me, Beat Me . . .

. . . and give me great ratings. A network obsession with women in danger

BY HARRY F. WATERS

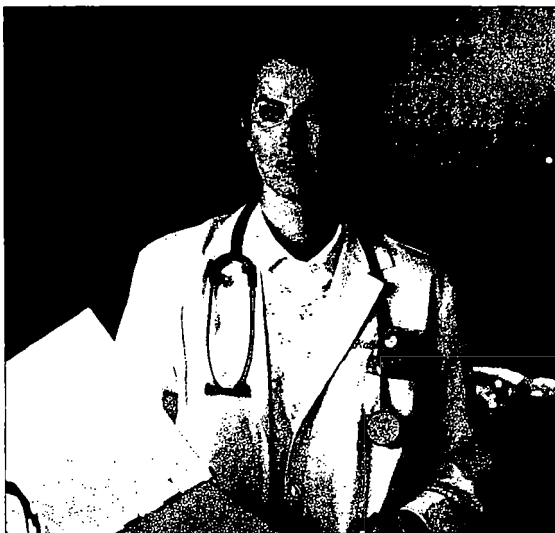
It's a case of serial sexual harassment: a dozen TV movies about women in jeopardy in the month of November alone. In NBC's "Deadly Medicine," a female pediatrician faces the loss of her practice, her family and her freedom when she's unjustly accused of murdering one of her infant patients. In ABC's "The Woman Who Sinned," a philandering housewife is falsely accused of bumping off her best friend, then chased around her house by the real killer. The messiest fate, however, awaits an innocent young dental hygienist in CBS's "In A Child's Name." She's beaten to death by her dentist husband, who tells the police—lying through his you-know-whats—that he caught her sexually abusing their baby.

What do women want? Network programmers have been asking themselves that ever since they discovered that sponsors regard female viewers as their prime targets. Now, it appears, the networks have arrived at a curious consensus: what today's women want, at least from their made-for-TV movies, is to watch other women suffer—especially if the sufferer ultimately emerges victorious.

Depictions of women in jeopardy (or "jep," as they say in the biz) aren't exactly new. Farrah Fawcett set the mold in 1984 when, in "The Burning Bed," she played a battered wife who winds up torching the gasoline-soaked bed of her sleeping husband. Though the film pulled huge ratings (and inspired at least three real-life domestic assaults), the jep genre didn't really take off until the production of TV movies exploded. Since nobody knows how to create a hit series anymore, everybody's cranking out those high-rated, two-hour "made-fors": their number has tripled in the last five years. And of the approximately 250 set for this season, nearly half show women undergoing—and overcoming—some form of physical or psychological mistreatment. When network honchos listen

to a movie pitch these days, the first thing many say is "Where's the jep?" (The second is "More jep!") As for viewers, the genre's blessings seem as mixed as the messages it's sending them.

**Men are a menace:** Eager to enhance TV's reputation for fairness and balance, the purveyors of jep portray contemporary men as homicidal husbands (ABC's "False Arrest"), abusive lovers (NBC's "Wild Tex-



PAUL DRINKWATER

as Wind"), alcoholic fathers (ABC's "Keeping Secrets"), sadistic sons (CBS's "My Son Johnny"), psychotic doctors (ABC's "Deadly Intentions"), sex-crazed hospital orderlies (CBS's "The Rape of Dr. Willis"), even diabolical college professors ("CBS's "Victim of Love"). When the genre's males aren't oppressing women directly, they're messing up their children. Rape is a popular device. NBC's "A Mother's Justice" presents a woman so obsessed with nabbing her daughter's rapist that she puts her own body on the line. Wrongful imprisonment is another. In CBS's "Locked Up: A Mother's Rage," a single mom gets framed by her drug-dealing boyfriend and, while serving time, learns that her three kids have fallen apart.

The males-are-beasts axiom comes with a corollary. Since women can no longer count on men to rush to their rescue, they're saving themselves. They take charge of their own cases and reverse their bum raps. They cajole, demand, infiltrate,



investigate and settle scores. They literally push back. "The Woman Who Sinned" dispatches her homicidal pursuer with a fatal shove off her balcony. And pity the man, however well meaning, who resists them. Here's the falsely accused pediatrician in "Deadly Medicine," asking the district attorney for help: "I'll be damned if you're going to say no to me!"

**Older is smarter:** As the female audience ages along with America, the merchants of jep are casting older actresses in their most

flattering lights. Among those portraying women who vanquish adversity this season are Jessica Tandy, Doris Day, Olympia Dukakis, Gena Rowlands and Betty White. Most of them win through guile. Case in point: NBC's "The Story Lady," which stars Tandy as a classy widow whose excitement about hosting a children's story hour on network TV quickly vanishes when she's cheesily exploited as "Granny Good-

**Even the famed knew pain:** If anything activates a programmer's saliva glands more quickly than a "fact based" tale of jep, it's one with an actress re-enacting her own real-life traumas. Ann Jillian graphically depicted her struggle with breast cancer. Patty Duke gave us the dark side of child stardom, suffering sexual abuse and manic-depressive illness. Suzanne Somers not only relived her degradations from an alco-

to the toll-free number flashed at the end of Suzanne Somers's "Keeping Secrets." "Most wanted to share the pain of living with an alcoholic," says Somers. "And sharing can be the beginning of healing."

All that uplift, however, comes at a potentially grim price. Studies have shown that heavy viewers of TV violence—and the jep genre reeks with it—overestimate the odds of being victimized in their own lives. "They exhibit an exaggerated mistrust of strangers, the urge to buy a new lock or a gun," says George Gerbner, dean emeritus of the Annenberg School for Communication. "I call it a 'mean-world syndrome.'" Such fears, Gerbner's studies have found, are especially acute among today's women viewers. While that's partly attributable to the rising rate of violence against women in real life, there's a more artificial explanation. For every female perpetrator of violence on TV, there are half again as many female victims.

The possibility that jep films are helping to turn women into cringing paranoids doesn't faze Steve Krantz, the executive producer of "Deadly Medicine." "Though I hate the notion," says Krantz, "it's prototypical of women's role in society to see themselves as victims. So there's a high identification factor." Others blame the excesses of jep on the industry's lopsided balance of power: less than 5 percent of TV-movie writers are female. Carole Lieberman, a Los Angeles psychiatrist and media consultant, suspects that "as men feel more threatened about women gaining power in the TV workplace, putting women in jeopardy fulfills their sadistic fantasies about maintaining control." Then again, as Lieberman observes, some of the scariest jep films are created by women. "A lot of them feel anger toward other women in television who are getting more attention or who are more sexually desirable," she says. "It's a clear example of *jalousie de femme*."

Obviously, we're in murky waters. But to a TV reviewer exposed to a ton of this stuff, one thing seems clear. The real violence that the jep genre does to women is to patronize their intelligence. With its unyielding embrace of happy endings, it proclaims that women aren't mature or sophisticated enough to sit for anything more realistic. At least the disease-of-the-week epidemic left behind a "Brian's Song." Of course, to tinker with the genre's conventions is to risk undermining its ratings. Then video-movie makers might find themselves echoing the female mystery writer who, in a recent jep flick, was ordered to can her favorite character. "I'm terrified," she replied, "because now I'm going to have to come up with something new."

For the people who run television, there could be no crueller form of jeopardy.

With **LYNDA WRIGHT** in Los Angeles



AARON RAPOPORT—ABC



RICHARD CARTWRIGHT



CHARLES WILLIAM BUSH

**Victims of bum raps:**  
(From far left)  
*Veronica Hamel* in 'Deadly Medicine,'  
*Donna Mills* in 'False Arrest,' *Jaclyn Smith* in 'The Rape of Dr. Willis' and (above)  
*Cheryl Ladd* in 'Locked Up: A Mother's Rage'

heart." Determined to escape her contract, she discovers she can be fired for doing anything illegal. So, on the day before Christmas, she deliberately gets caught shoplifting. (Needless to say, her grandchildren are horrified.) In another twist on the genre, an older woman will team up with a younger one to get her way. ABC's "Last Wish," for instance, dramatizes journalist Betty Rollin's best-selling account of her agreement to help her terminally ill mother end her life.

holic father, she also replayed her own smarmy behavior as a dysfunctional adult, including her arrest for check forging. All three, of course, managed to overcome.

What's wrong with these pictures? Nothing and everything. If viewers indeed emulate what they see, few sights could be more salutary for women than that of gutsy, resourceful females figuratively untying themselves from the tracks. Nor should the genre's educational impact be ignored. Tens of thousands of viewers responded

# Popular Music Promotes Violence

by Haven Bradford Gow

Sword & Trumpet  
September 1991

Music critic Michael Snyder points out that music indeed can have either a positive or negative effect on our thinking and behavior. This is the way he puts it: "Music *does* have an effect on our emotions, our state of mind, even—in some cases—our physical condition. Music can quell depression, inspire one's thoughts and actions or bring a tear."

According to Dr. Diane Medved, a child psychologist in Los Angeles, Calif., much of today's popular music encourages and glamorizes violence and anti-social behavior: "Teen music has always been kind of rebellious against adults, but now it's a lot stronger and uses much more violent language that encourages aggression."

Dr. Carole Lieberman, an assistant professor of psychology at UCLA, echoes the above sentiments: "In all media, I think there has been an increase not only in violence, but violence associated with the degrading treatment of women. Not only is it clearly a result of young men being fed images in such a way as to make them feel this behavior is glamorous and cool, but the music encourages young women to believe they *deserve* this sort of treatment."

In applying moral and religious criteria and standards to evaluating music, we must pay attention to these questions: Does the content of a song promote premarital or extramarital sex? Does it encourage drug or alcohol abuse? Does it present a dehumanizing view of women, children and sex? Does it encourage racial and religious bigotry and hatred? Does it promote a negative

or positive philosophy of life and man?

If a song promotes negative attitudes about sex, marriage, family and human life, says Michael Snyder, the song cannot be "an expression of love toward either God or fellowman, which Jesus described as the ultimate responsibility of us all. If a song includes blasphemous comments about God, it does not express love toward God and again can result in destructive behavior. It too must be rejected."

Psychiatrists Dr. Frank Osanka and Dr. Sarah Lee Johann, coauthors of *Sourcebook on Pornography* (Lexington Books), insist that heavy metal and satanic rock music and lyrics can cause moral, social and psychological harm; they observe that "The violent lyrics and images in some rock videos are pornographic. . . . Many rock stars, who are idolized by teens and pre-teens, use pornographic rock images and lyrics. . . . Through their music, videos and comments in magazines, [they] glorify sexual behavior between unmarried kids, promote sexual violence, encourage drug and alcohol abuse, promote suicide and glorify the occult."

Some examples:

- \*Motley Crue's "Shout at the Devil" album glorifies violence against women. One song talks about killing a woman and watching her turn blue. Another song glamorizes rape.
- \*The group WASP (We Are Sexual Perverts) has an album with obscene songs. Typical concert features of WASP are (1) tying a nude woman onto a torture rack and simulating the

cutting of her throat and (2) beating a naked woman over her head until blood drips down over her body.

- \*One song by Price glamorizes and promotes incest.
- \*One Nasty Savage song talks about a "sweet and innocent" girl who really craves being beaten with a whip.
- \*An album called "Virgin Killer" features an 8-year-old girl who is sexually abused.

Clearly, much of today's heavy metal, rap and satanic rock music promotes an anti-Christian worldview and philosophy of life, man, society and sex; it undermines Judaic-Christian moral and religious standards; it denigrates the sacredness of sex, marriage, family and human life through its espousal and glamorization of premarital and extramarital sex, violence, drug and alcohol

abuse, suicide, rape, incest and child abuse.

On the other hand, the great music of Bach, Vivaldi, Handel, Hayden and Mozart motivates us to think about and see the noble side of life and human beings; it inspires us to pursue that which is noble, virtuous and spiritually beautiful; it puts us in a frame of mind conducive to noble and virtuous thoughts and deeds.

Clearly, a distinction indeed does exist between true art and trash. And Michelangelo observed that "Nothing makes the soul so pure, so religious as the endeavor to create something perfect; for God is perfection, and whoever strives for it, strives for something God-like. True (art) is only an image of God's perfection."

# WHAT ARE TODAY'S FILMS SAYING TO OUR KIDS?



There's no denying it, we live in a culture of visual images and sound bites and many of us wonder about their impact on young people. But these days there's a growing consensus among psychologists and parents that movies are sending out all kinds of wrong messages.

"I think one of the things films do negatively is make girls feel that they can never be pretty enough," says Dr. Diane Medved, a Los Angeles psychologist specializing in marriage and child rearing. "The ideal figure that's always presented on screen is a body that's only available to 5 percent of the population. That chesty, pencil-thin physique teen girls are aspiring to is something most physically can't achieve."

Dr. Carole Lieberman, a UCLA assistant professor of psychology who specializes in media, agrees. "Seeing actors so thin has helped cause an increase in eating disorders at younger ages," she reports. "A recent study of sixth graders found a large majority of them were overly preoccupied with their weight."

This doesn't necessarily lead to a future population of thin adults. "A lot of times these kids get so discouraged trying to get down to what they think that 'ideal' weight is, they get depressed, give up and eat to excess," adds Lieberman.

Teen-age girls aren't the only ones receiving pernicious messages about their physical presence.

### Macho Image

"Young males are affected because they're trying to live up to the cool macho image they see on the screen," says Medved. "They feel they need to be macho in order to be popular or successful."

Forty years ago, you could tell the villains from the heroes by the hats they wore. Now the "bad guys" are usually the less attractive characters. The biggest sin in Hollywood today appears to be losing your hair or being fat.

"The heroes are just a little bit better morally than the villains, but a lot pret-

tier," comments Lieberman.

But that's not the only problem. "Today's film heroes are the characters who have shot the most people," adds Lieberman. "I think this is helping to create more non-caring teens. Teen-agers are a very vulnerable, sensitive group. This is a very important period of their lives, where they're trying to find their identity, but if they only have insensitive heroes to identify with, then they're more apt to become that way and give up their hopes and dreams."

Film critic Michael Medved agrees the problem is not just skin deep.

"I think you really have to character-

**The biggest  
sin in  
Hollywood  
is a bad  
appearance.**

ize today's motion pictures as *amoral*, not *immoral*," he says, "because they are not sending any moral messages, or at best sending a message that having any concern with morality is unfashionable and unattractive."

And he adds: "I'm fairly alone in the following opinion, but I'll make it anyway. I think a fairly clear indication of the degradation of Hollywood came in the 1980s with the tremendous popularity of 'Raiders of the Lost Ark.' Everyone said: 'Oh, isn't this great. It's just like the films of the '30s and '40s, but to me there was one very big difference. In the old films, Indiana Jones would have been doing what he did just to beat the Nazis and save America, but in the '80s version he did it to advance his career."

"In the past, one of the qualities often associated with heroes was selflessness, but there's nothing selfless about want-

ing to become a famous archaeologist. That's a quality that you almost never see any more."

According to the Michael Medved, the 1990 Academy Awards, more notably than any other year in history, featured "creepy losers" as heroes.

"Witness the four characters who were honored when the actors portraying them won Oscars," he says. "Kathy Bates won for her portrayal of a sadistic fan in 'Misery.' Jeremy Irons won for his role as a man who allegedly attempts to kill his wife in 'Reversal of Fortune,' and Joe Pesci won for his chilling performance as a mobster in 'Good Fellas'."

"That character was one of the most hateful characters ever seen in motion picture history," Medved continues. "Of all the winners, the only one who was vaguely sympathetic was Whoopi Goldberg's character in 'Ghost.' And, underneath it all, she was still a con artist."

### Moral Relativism

This kind of filmic moral relativism has serious consequences.

"The problem with not showing any difference between right or wrong is it then looks like every behavior goes because no behavior is more or less admirable than others," says Diane Medved.

High-school teacher Wiley A. Hall in a letter to the Christian *Movieguide* newsletter recently recalled a first-hand experience with this situation.

He describes a typical class day when he's trying to get the kids' attention and happens to mention that he thinks drug dealers are bad people.

One young lady defiantly disagrees. When Hall questions whether she is serious, the teen-ager explains that, in her view, drug dealers are only trying to make money like everybody else.

When Hall raises the issues of violence, sickness and wasted lives, the whole class rallies to the girl's defense, and a heated debate over the pros and cons of the drug trade ensues.

"The fact is, these kids were neither horrified, nor contemptuous. They were



**John Turturro (center), Mel Smith (right) and Bob Nelson star in "Lame Ducks," a dubious group who help a dowager try to found a ballet company.**

making excuses for drug deals," Hall points out in his letter. "This was an intellectual thing, too, since I doubt if any of them were personally involved in drug dealing."

Many of today's movies ("Good Fellas," "Godfather III") are filled with omnipotent "bad guys" who appear to spend their time living life in a grand manner, keeping company with beautiful women and occasionally killing people who get in the way of business.

"Many films popularize these characters and make teens think these drug lord jobs are more prevalent and therefore more acceptable than they really are," adds Dr. Medved.

If you think there is no mere coinci-

dence about the media's obsession with crime and violence and the fact that the number of 14- to 17-year-olds who were arrested in 1990 was 30 times what it was in 1950, then you won't be surprised to learn that the experts interviewed for this article believe there may be a strong connection between the portrayal of sex in films and the increase in pregnant teen-age girls.

### **Out-of-Wedlock Births**

Since 1960, the rate of out-of-wedlock births in this country has increased by 500 percent, and it is estimated that one out of 10 teen-age girls will become pregnant in 1991. Additionally, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control recently re-

ported that more than a quarter of American females have engaged in sexual intercourse by age 15 — five times the rate that prevailed as recently as 1970.

Dr. Lieberman believes the movies are definitely sending some dangerous signals about marriage and family life to teens.

"There are a lot of movies that have to do with single people raising children," she points out, such as "Three Men and a Baby" and "Look Who's Talking." Keep in mind the producers of these messages often come from divorced or split-up families themselves. Often through making these films, they are attempting to work out some of their own problems they have as single parents trying to cope."

Many in the entertainment industry argue that they're only giving the public what it wants, and, if people object to the message they're getting, then they should exercise their right to avoid that film. If something is offensive, the industry moans, tune it out, but don't interfere with artistic expression.

"Hollywood stands by an individual filmmaker's rights to say or do anything he or she so wishes, so I say the best way to change the message Hollywood is sending is to make it clear that, if they continue to send those messages, they're going to lose money because the public will stay away," says Medved. The public may start to boycott the movies anyway if Hollywood continues to increase movie ticket prices beyond reason.

To sum up the situation, the bad news may be that films really are sending out a different version of what constitutes acceptable behavior than parents would like their children to be exposed to. The good news is that most younger teens can no longer afford to go to the movies very much, so they wait for the videos to come out — and home videos can be much more easily supervised by concerned parents.

*Mary Hardesty frequently reports on the entertainment industry.*

# Video Violence



Buster Dean / Chronicle

John Robinson, 19, shoots the bad guy in the Mad Dog McCree video game.

By LOUIS B. PARKS  
Houston Chronicle

**P**ISTOL in hand, the young man waits tensely, watching the men in the saloon. Suddenly, someone goes for a gun. The youth fires. His foe spins around and crashes to the ground.

Before the young gun can savor his kill, two more bad guys slap leather. They both bite the dust.

The youth progresses from saloon to corral to sheriff's office, shooting scores of cowpokes along the way. Each kill adds new points to his score. When he misses, an undertaker appears to chide him for his error.

The *Mad Dog McCree* game the young man is playing in the Celebration Station game room is not your ordinary video

## First-person action blurs barrier between game, reality

game. In place of a small video screen, *Mad Dog McCree* boasts a giant projection unit. Instead of tiny computer-generated figures, real actors play the enemy. When the player makes a kill, he's actually dropping "real" people, some of them nearly life-size.

It's technically impressive, but there's something more intriguing — and contro-

versial — about *Mad Dog McCree*: The player is the hero.

In most video games, the player is represented on screen by a computer image. The player controls the image but is electronically distant from the action.

In *Mad Dog McCree*, the player holds a gun in his hand. Actors look straight at him and talk to him, person to person. If a bad guy shoots first, killing the player, there is no imaginary stand-in figure to die. The player is "killed" by the game ending.

*Mad Dog*, marketed by Betson Enterprises of New Jersey, is not the only video game using real actors.

Another is Sega's *Time Traveler*, in which the player looks into a dark "hole" to see hologram images of actors. The 3-

See VIDEO on Page 4F.

# Video

Continued from Page 1F.

D effect is so lifelike it seems you could reach in and touch the tiny players.

Both games use a laser-disc to store hundreds of variations.

Fun? Sure. It's exciting to imagine yourself outwitting and out-shooting real "cowboys."

But while the use of live actors as kill objects is part of the attraction, it's also disturbing to some observers of the industry. Games like *Mad Dog* blur the barrier between game and reality, they say.

Carole Lieberman, a Beverly Hills psychiatrist who specializes in the effects of media on people, says the difference between the two may not be clear to some impressionable young people.

"When children who don't have power in real life are able to push some buttons and make characters explode or die, they get high on this power," she said. "They get the idea when they do this in a game to win, maybe they can do this in the real world to win."

-A frightening thought, considering some video games equate killing with success. Conversely, failure to kill results in failure at the game.

Lieberman points out that the military uses video games to train soldiers for combat. "It (violence) becomes so much easier to do in real life after hours of practice," she said.

But Jason Rich, the author of *A Parent's Guide to Video Games*, isn't as concerned. He said most games, even the violent ones, clearly separate fantasy and reality.

"Most of the games are people killing monsters, or spaceships shooting spaceships," Rich said. "It's a step back from reality. Even when it is people killing people, usually the people have super powers, so it's not realistic."

Video columnist Chip Carter, who shares a byline with his 6-year-old

**'Even when it is people killing people, usually the people have super powers, so it's not realistic.'**

**Jason Rich**

son, Jonathan, says he doesn't necessarily think home video games are becoming more violent, but he does believe they at least look more realistic.

"You can have blood spurting out of a character now. What concerns me is that game makers seem content to churn out this endless series of guys with guns, rampaging through cities and jungles, blowing people away without hesitation. We're looking for games where you don't shoot, don't hit."

The progression toward more realistic games is a logical one. As home-video games approach the quality of arcade games through the new 16-bit (large memory) technology, arcade makers attract customers by giving them something they cannot get on their home systems. Major home-video game makers say they have an unwritten policy against graphic violence (as well as racism, politics and other controversial themes), which creates an attractive opening for arcade games.

Robert Betti, executive vice president of Betson Enterprises, contends *Mad Dog* is "no different from watching a John Wayne western on TV."

"The only difference is, this is first-person. There's no blood; there's no violence, I mean, compared to everything else on TV."

"It is a violent society, let's face it," he said.

Rick Monsees, owner of Video Game Services, which distributes arcade videos, does not like the violence level in some games, but he believes a child's background is a more important factor than the games.

"I have two kids and I'm not really concerned with the games," Monsees said. "I think they know what's real and what's not. Although when a kid has a bad home life, he might not know the difference."

"When I was a kid, it was toy soldiers. We cut the arms off and put them in sand and said they got run over by a tank. The violence is not any different, just the technology."

**O**N A TYPICAL WEEKDAY, A half-dozen scripts appear in Richard Walter's mailbox. "I'm a tremendously influential soul," brags the director of UCLA's screenwriting program. "Through the advice I've given to writers, I think I've collectively reached a billion people during the last 15 years."

Richard who?

Don't feel alone if you've never heard of him.

One studio executive calls critics-for-hire like Walter "the car mechanics of the film business. What they do isn't very glamorous or even interesting to talk about, yet it's polished words that start the ball rolling." While they may be unsung (and often sworn to secrecy for fear of trampling delicate egos), script doctors are now considered vital members of the moviemaking fraternity.

"If you're investing \$750,000 to a million dollars in a script, you want to feel that it is very close to being a movie," says Bill Horberg, senior vice president of production for Paramount Pictures, who frequently seeks the expert opinion of outside wordsmiths.

Writers and producers—even directors and story editors—are willing to invest as much as several thousand dollars in procuring the advice of someone like Linda Seger, who's spent the past six years "identifying, analyzing and helping solve elusive script problems.

"I may save a company \$100,000 or more if they follow my suggestions on cutting unnecessary scenes," claims Seger, author of *Making a Good Script Great* and a consultant on such recent films as *Romero* and *The Long Walk Home*. Most recommendations are structural in nature, calling for strengthening of characters or clearer plotting. Clients are

## SCRIPT PRESCRIPTIONS

often the independent production firms that can't afford full-time story departments, said to cost major studios as much as \$1 million a year.

Because much of their consulting is done in confidence, script doctors are reluctant to talk openly about the specific projects they've worked on. However, Walter vividly recalls his initial reaction to the early version of *River's Edge* by Neil Jimenez, one of the many UCLA alumni who've come back to former professors for advice.

"I thought the first 20 pages of the script were some of the best writing I'd ever read," Walter confides, "and the last 100 pages were miserable. If I were assigning a grade, I'd have given it a C-minus." What began as a tale of perverse loyalty abruptly turned into a murder mystery, Walter recalls. "Neil couldn't make up his mind which story he was writing, so he wrote both." Jimenez wound up following Walter's suggestion and rewrote the script to emphasize how a strange, unspoken alliance among a group of young people somehow prevented them from openly discussing a hideous killing.

"Writers ask me how a schizophrenic would act and speak, or how a child might respond to an earthquake," says Carole Lieberman, a \$150-an-hour script consultant and practicing psychiatrist. "*Fatal Attraction* is about a spurned lover's irrational obsession. *Postcards From the Edge* deals with addiction and mother-daughter relations," she points out. "More movies are using psychological themes than ever."

Walter is less worried about accuracy than helping writers tell good stories. Script doctors, he says, "have an enormous impact on what the public sees, but audiences don't pay \$7.50 to see the truth. What they're paying for are sweet, seductive lies." —Richard Mahler

# ILLUMINATIONS

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, THOUGHTS AND TRENDS




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## FILM

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# Fighting violence is tough

By Paul Wood

Violence in films and on television continues to increase despite the efforts of a national group based in Champaign which rewards "pro-social" works with its Gandhi awards.

"I'm afraid we haven't turned it around," says Dr. Thomas E. Radecki, a Decatur psychiatrist who heads the National Coalition on Television's Champaign headquarters.

The NCTV this week released its second annual Gandhi awards for films that encourage peaceful and healthful approaches to life problems. This is the first year winners are actually presented with statues; staff member Chitra Vemuri had them made in Italy.

Carole Lieberman, a Beverly Hills, Calif., psychiatrist, will make arrangements to deliver the awards, with Robin Williams and Jane Fonda garnering best actor and best actress.

"We haven't invited them yet, but we plan on a reception in April," she says.

Williams' film, "Awakenings," was named the most pro-social film of 1990 for its sympathetic portrait of men and women with profound neurological disorders. Fonda's "Stanley and Iris" was a runner-up for "accurately portraying the constraints and insecurities experienced by illiterate people and raising social awareness to their problem."



WILLIAMS

Also runners-up were "Longtime Companion," "a realistic drama about individuals coping with personal traumas during

the early years of the AIDS epidemic," and "Weapons of the Spirit," a French documentary about hiding Jews from Nazi persecution.

NCTV also notes films it is not happy with.

"Delta Force II" was noted for its violence; NCTV staffers counted 182 acts of violence per hour. "Marked for Death" and "Predator 2" shared the honor.

Steven Seagal, star of "Marked for Death," was named most violent actor. The most violent actress nod went to Kathy Bates for her role as "a mean-spirited and vindictive fan of a best-seller novelist in 'Misery.'"

"Ironically," an NCTV press release points out, "Bates has been nominated for an Academy Award for the same film."

"Last year was not a bumper year for pro-social films," Radecki says. "The film industry seems to go on its merry way." Violence was up 20 percent in last year's film according to a count by NCTV live-in staffers, who count each act of violence.

Radecki says there were films he did like that promoted pro-social values most of the time but failed in one aspect. For instance, "Avalon" was a loving portrait of an immigrant family that Radecki enjoyed.

"But there was an awful lot of puffing on nicotine and even if cancer takes 20, 30 years down the road to show up, they could have found some way to smoothly work it into the film," he says.

Radecki says he was sometimes torn on making the judgments. "Dances With Wolves," this year's most Oscar-nominated film, was praised for sympathy to the plight of Native Americans in the 1800s, but "failed to get an award due to its repeated and unrealistic portrayal of violence as necessary and successful."



## PUTTING AN END TO VIOLENCE

*"...an encounter with 'Killbots' turned a day of shopping into an evening of frantic fright and terror... In a bloodthirsty spree, shopping bags are used as 'chopping' bags by the mechanical maniacs to carry their fresh cut cadavers and lifeless limbs..."*

**T**his, readers, is not a tasteless joke, but a gruesome promotion for a TV show that recently crossed my desk. I try to understand why any producer would create this type of visual trash, but I am unable to comprehend it.

There is no place in our increasingly violent society for programs such as this one. As a nation, we have become immune to the effects of violence in the media, and as individuals, all too often we look the other way when offensive shows invade our homes via TV, radio or unrated videos.

Of course we have the option to turn off any offensive program, but how can we constantly monitor what our children

are seeing and hearing? Most youths, especially teenagers, have easy and unsupervised access to radios and televisions. Kids, as most parents have learned, are attracted to what is for-

**People who are creating,  
producing and airing  
repulsive programs are  
undermining the  
values of society.**

bidden. When a parent says "No" to a show that contains explicit violence, sex or profanity, you can be sure a curious child will find a way to see it.

According to Carole Lieberman, M.D., M.P.H., a psychiatrist who specializes in

media consultations, "Study after study has shown that violence in media causes people, especially children, to become more aggressive (aggression increases 50 to 100 percent) after each exposure. And, in a number of cases, specific people copy acts of violence that they saw on television and in movies."

"It used to be thought that violence had a cathartic effect on viewers," says Lieberman, "but that theory has been disproven. In fact, newer studies show a longer-term effect. Most older studies measured play directly after a child was exposed to a violent scene. Of even more concern, recent studies show kids who are rated to be bullies are more likely to have more antisocial behavior even eight years after heavy violent viewing exposure."

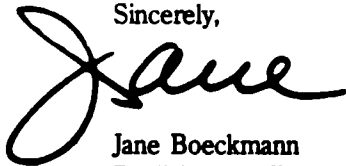
People who are creating, producing and airing repulsive programs are undermining the values of society. A society cannot exist without values, and if today's values are what we are measured

by, it is very sad, indeed.

A while back, there was a television show called "Garbage Pail Kids" that was so repugnant, angry parents protested and had the show cancelled. Parents and consumers have a responsibility to ensure that our families can see wholesome shows that promote healthy behavior. The way to make this happen is to see that advertisers and sponsors hear our voices. Remember, every letter sent to an advertiser is regarded as being representative of thousands and thousands of viewers.

Why continue to allow violent programs to enter your home like an uninvited guest? Isn't it time to do something about it?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jane". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a trailing flourish.

Jane Boeckmann  
Publisher and Editor In Chief

## RADIO NEWS &amp; NOTES

FRED SHUSTER

## Radio regular urges consumers to cast critical eye on media



Script consultant and psychiatrist Carole Lieberman wants listeners of her Friday morning segment of talk-radio KWNK-

AM's (670) "Morning Magazine" to better evaluate the movies and television shows they watch.

"In general, people in the entertainment industry are exploiting and polluting the minds of society for financial gain, similar to the way some industries exploit and pollute natural resources," Lieberman said in a telephone interview Friday.

"What I find mind-boggling is people in the (entertainment) industry who have young children and somehow believe that what they are doing is not harming the minds of their audience. They think it's not going to affect their own families. That's utter nonsense. By the time their children are 10 years old and the world is that much more violent, there'll be gangs coming into Beverly Hills."

Lieberman, who can be heard from 7:15 to 7:30 a.m. every Friday on KWNK, specializes in the effects of media on society. She has been a script consultant on television shows and feature films and is an occasional spokeswoman for the Champagne, Ill.-based National Coalition on Television Violence.

"People need to be aware of what profound effects so-called entertainment is having on their



*Dr. Lieberman—"For many, many people, TV is the strongest influence on their lives. A psychological consultant should be part of the crew for each show."*

minds," she said.

On Friday's "Morning Magazine," which is hosted by Rick Joyce, Lieberman examined the current Dutch thriller "The Vanishing" and discussed the state of foreign films in America.

"Why do Americans always seem to want happy endings," she asked.

When consulting on a script, Lieberman tries to deglamorize violence and suggest alternatives. Among the shows she has worked

"very depressing that so many people were willing to see it and enjoy it. It was kind of a modernized fairy tale based on the Cinderella story.

"I'm not saying everything has to be a documentary, but we would connect more to the characters if what was being portrayed was more reflective of real-life feelings."

on are the soap opera "The Young and the Restless," "Murder, She Wrote" and "Webster."

Lieberman believes feature films and television shows have the ability to "cause someone to pick a mate based on an actor or a character. We are affected in much more subtle ways, too. We're seeing so many distortions in the media, the sexes don't know how to relate to each other."

As for the recent hit film "Pretty Woman," Lieberman said it was

# Daily News

# Los Angeles Times

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MINDY SCHAUER / For The Times

Derek Wong, left, and Sean Clark, both 3, are avid Ninja Turtle fans. They're surrounded by a year's worth of Derek's Turtle toy collection.

## Turtle Trouble

■ **Children:** Some parents believe Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles encourage aggression. Others say the Turtles are just harmless fun.

By KATHLEEN DOHENY

Unlike some 3-year-olds, Derek Wong of West Los Angeles rarely fussed in the morning about having to go to day care. Part of the reason, acknowledge his parents, Debbie and Rholan Wong, was Derek's beloved ritual.

First, he would switch on the television and settle down to watch the "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" cartoon over breakfast. Then he would pull on one of his six Ninja Turtle T-shirts, put on Turtle socks and shorts, and grab a stuffed Turtle toy or a Turtle sword. Slicing it through the air, he would climb gleefully into the car, exclaiming, "Turtles fight with honor!"

Like many other toddlers, Derek had fallen under the spell of the pizza-loving, sword-carrying reptiles that have enjoyed the limelight ever since last spring's blockbuster movie of the same name.

Until his day-care provider lowered the boom with a new decree.

"We're saying goodbye to the Turtles," she recently announced to her 12 charges. "No more Turtle T-shirts or

Please see TURTLES, E2

# TURTLES: Bad Examples?

Continued from E1

toys; no more words like 'cowabunga [a Turtle favorite].' Turtles are fine at home, but not at Mary's."

In an interview, Mary Alvidrez, a West Los Angeles child-care provider, said: "My decision was based on the children's actions, the way they were playing. They would play Turtles and imitate them. They got a little carried away. The older kids would do karate on the younger ones. They were very much into fantasy play."

Some other Southern California day-care centers and preschools also are waging war against the reptiles, concerned that Turtle play is sparking violence and aggression.

Some day-care centers and schools have banned Turtle wear and toys. Others forbid Turtle weapons, but allow children to wear shirts and other gear. Some ration Turtle power, allowing children to show off their favorite Turtle toys one or two days a week at "share" time. And anti-war activist Jerry Rubin, director of the Los Angeles Alliance for Survival, is offering Teddy bears to kids who turn in their Turtles ([213] 399-1000).

To complicate matters, parents, child-care providers and psychologists don't see eye-to-eye on the effects of the swashbuckling teenage mutants. Some think nothing short of a Turtle ban is enough; others see little difference between the animated Turtles and the cowboy-and-Indian games of yesteryear.

On one point most would agree: Turtles are more pervasive than the Roy Rogers and Dale Evans gun-and-holster sets of the '50s and '60s. Since the Turtles first debuted in the comics in 1984, merchandising has taken off. There are Turtle action figures and accessories, computer games, videos, stuffed animals and bubble gum.

"The toy trade projects sales of more than \$200 million this year," said Diane Teigiser, director of marketing for Playmates Toys Inc. in La Mirada, the licensee for Turtle action figures. "Last year, we sold \$110 million just in Turtle action figures and action figure

accessories."

Prime fans are boys ages 3 to 8, but the "heroes in a half shell" also claim little girls and older children as fans.

The story is an enticing one to young minds. Four pet turtles dropped into a sewer are covered with radioactive goo and transformed into teens with unlikely names: Leonardo, Donatello, Michaelangelo and Raphael. They're taught the ways of the Ninja warrior by Splinter, "the biggest rat ever to face a trap." Their enemies are a collection of mutant characters called the Foot Clan—Bebop, Shredder and Rocksteady among them.

It's overkill, claimed Dr. Carole Lieberman, a Beverly Hills psychiatrist and UCLA assistant clinical professor of psychiatry who supports a Turtle ban. "Kids become more violent in reaction to the Turtles," she claims. "It gets other kids more riled up and play turns more aggressive."

Other behavior experts propose a middle ground, reasoning that a ban might make the reptiles even more irresistible to children. The swashbuckling Turtles aren't much different than the cowboys or soldiers of years past, said Gary Emery, a Los Angeles psychologist.

But Lieberman points out what she sees as a crucial difference. "Ten or 20 years ago, parents were around more to give kids values, to comment about the violence [children encountered]," she said. "These days, many kids are playing with these toys in a vacuum. And kids are often angry to begin with because they are left alone."

"A toy does not cause a child to be violent," countered Teigiser of Playmates Toys. "Children are going to act out their aggression whether with their toys or their fingers."

The Turtles may be taking more than their fair share of blame for rambunctious behavior, agreed Emery. "Certain developmental behaviors will occur no matter what," he said. "These Turtle fans may be simply using a cultural artifact to act out a developmental task—in this case, to run around

and act a little crazy." It's akin, Emery contends, to the teen rebellion that comes later.

Other experts—and some parents—also worry that young Turtle fans may have difficulty distinguishing reality and fantasy.

"I think Derek thinks the turtles are real," Rholan Wong admitted. "We'll be driving down the street, and he'll see a manhole cover and want to go down [into the sewer] with the Turtles." Added Bob Clark, another parent of a 3-year-old Turtle fan: "Sean does the same thing."

"At 3," Lieberman said, "some kids are still struggling with [the separation of] fantasy and reality. These turtles are interacting with live people. How are kids supposed

**'I think Derek thinks the Turtles are real. We'll be driving down the street, and he'll see a manhole cover and want to go down [into the sewer] with the Turtles.'**

RHOLAN WONG

to understand the [difference between the] costumed and the real people? In the movie, they have adults going down into the manhole. How is a 3-year-old supposed to know this is a joke?"

Teigiser doesn't see a problem. "The Turtles are very tongue-in-cheek," she said. "They spoof the super heroes. They fight for truth, justice and a larger slice of pizza. There's a strong element of humor that appeals to kids. They pick up on it immediately."

To stem possible confusion and to quell aggression, perhaps a policy of moderation is best, suggested Irene Goldenberg, a UCLA family psychologist.

"Certainly, I think a child should not play with any single toy constantly," she said. "It's not creative. But as long as kids are playing with Turtles in an interactive way along with other kids, I don't think

they are much different than the toy soldiers of a different age. Every toy seems to be offensive to some group. The Barbie doll, for instance, is offensive to some feminists."

Goldenberg's suggestion seems to be working at the Teddy Bear Preschool in Burbank, where children occasionally are allowed to play with Turtles. "We considered a Ninja Turtle ban," said Nan Orlandi, the school's director. "We did notice our kids' behavior getting more aggressive [after Turtles became popular]. They were trying to kick and hit."

After much discussion with parents and children, Orlandi struck a compromise: "Children can only bring Ninja toys on 'share' days, two days a week. We tell them to keep the Ninja weapons at home. And we don't allow Ninja Turtle movies. Some parents said they don't want their kids to see them."

A policy of moderation is also in effect at the YWCA in Glendale, said Mallory Fessler, director of child care for the 100 summer camp children and 18 preschoolers there. Kids are not prohibited from wearing Turtle gear, but neither are they encouraged to take part in Turtle play. "We usually discourage them from playing Ninja Turtles," Fessler said. "There's no creativity."

Rationing Turtle play makes sense to Judy Hall, an Anaheim marriage and family therapist. "Parents have to take responsibility for providing balanced input," she said. "Kids need a variety of toys. Be alert for the impact of toys on behavior."

What's appealing about the Turtles, she said, is the element of rebellion, the fantasy and all the action. And toddlers tend to look up to the Turtles, some parents observe, simply because they are teen-agers.

On the plus side, some parents say there are educational benefits to Turtle play. Each Turtle wears a different color face mask, and some children learn colors from Turtle-watching, parents say.

Personal hygiene, often not a priority for toddlers, can improve, Rholan Wong found. "Derek never wanted to take a shower until he saw Raphael taking one," he said. "Now if we could only find a photo of a Turtle brushing his teeth."

# 'Turtles' leaves some shellshocked

By Susan Wloszczyna  
USA TODAY

Yes, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles are four wise-cracking pizza addicts who know how to have a good time. But these new kings of the box office also know how to shell out the violence.

Adults who accompanied kids to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* this weekend may have gotten a little too much bang for their buck. "The kids seemed to like it, but I thought there was too much violence and stealing," says Bea Gotham, 62, of Ramona, Calif., who took grandson Kristofer, 6. "It should have been rated PG-13. But there were laughs and the turtles were cute."

"It was awfully violent, an hour and 45 minutes of karate," says Joel Isaacson, 43, of Beverly Hills, Calif., who brought daughter Stephanie, 7.

Diane Nestor of Brooklyn, N.Y., who took sons Willie, 6, and Benjamin, 9, agrees it was violent, but "they hate Disney. I took them to see *The Little Mermaid* and they were bored. They thought she was a nerd."

Other grown-ups enjoyed it. Carol Barker, 36, of L.A., says she was "surprised it's as good as it is. They show a lot of personality for tortoise shells."

Some experts think the humor can't mask the violence, though. Carole Lieberman, a Los Angeles psychiatrist who specializes in violence in the media, feels that even with no bloodshed or gore, the turtles "glorify battle. Two-thirds of the movie is violent. The rest of the story is a thin plot."

While she feels children shouldn't see the movie, she suggests that if they do, "parents should go, too, and talk after so that kids understand that violence isn't honorable, that there are other solutions."

Martin Greenburg, a La Jolla, Calif., psychiatrist who works with violent children, thinks it's too simple to blame kids' emotional problems on one movie. "In our society, there's a total cultural condoning of violence."

## He put the zip in the script

Todd W. Langen may be a hero to some, a villain to others. He (along with Bobby Herbeck) wrote the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movie script. While theaters this past weekend were assaulted by rabid turtle fans, some parents and critics have been voicing concern about the violence in the PG-rated film.

"Well, you can't please all the people all the time," says Langen. "Some have said there's too much action, others say there's not enough."

The screenwriter, 30, who received an Emmy nomination for the decidedly non-mutant *The Wonder Years*, says he considers the movie "purely cartoon violence. We made sure we broke up the major action sequences with humor to cut the intensity."

One scene that was toned down: villain Shredder falls into the trash compactor of a garbage truck. "We were going to build it up more with crunching sound effects and sparks flying, but then thought it might be a little too graphic."

He agrees parents should go with their children. "The presence of parents is a moderating influence. After you see an exciting film, kids have to get re-oriented. Parents should ease them back to reality."

Meanwhile, parents may be facing other worries. Says Karen Brown, 27, of Brooklyn, who went with daughters Tamika, 3½, and Tarina, 5½: "I only get bothered when they try to do things in the house, like ninja-kick my lamp."

Contributing: Gordon Bean, Mark Collins, Mary Cresse.

► Box-office champ, 1A

USA  
TODAY

Life

TUESDAY, APRIL 3, 1990



COMBAT READY: April O'Neil (Judith Hoag), Leonardo, left, and Donatello protect a wounded Raphael from attack in 'Turtles.'

## Moviegoers shell out \$25.4M for 'Turtles'

By Susan Wloszczyna  
USA TODAY

*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* has taken the nation's movie theaters hostage.

The first live-action film starring the comic-book reptile warriors took in \$25.4 million on 2,006 screens its first weekend, the largest non-summer and non-holiday opening ever. Previous record: *The Hunt for Red October* with \$17.2 million on 1,225 screens.

Being on almost double the usual screens and a sea of product tie-ins boosted *Turtles*. Lobbies overflowed with kids in turtle costumes, shouting the "Cowabunga!" war cry.

According to figures re-

leased Monday by Exhibitor Relations Co., only last summer's *Batman* and *Ghostbusters II* made more money in their first three days. *Batman* made \$42.7 million, *Ghostbusters II* \$29.47 million.

The movie earned mixed reviews, but young fans of the syndicated TV cartoon show gave it a thumbs-up.

► "It looked like they were going to jump right out of the screen," says Kief Wilson, 6, of San Diego.

► "I wanna go again," says Willie Nestor, 6, of Brooklyn.

Says Daryl Smith, a Los Angeles theater manager: "Even adults have come back twice."

► Reaction to violence, 5D

# Los Angeles Times

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1990

## MORNING REPORT

*Arts and entertainment reports from The Times, national and international news services and the nation's press.*

### TV & VIDEO

**Jason, Freddy May Help Violent Teens:** Teen-agers who exhibit violent behavior are being treated with more violence—albeit televised violence—in the office of Dr. Jeffrey M. Turley, a child psychiatrist and fellow at the University of Virginia. To keep his unruly clients in line, Turley relies on Jason, the warped goattender of "Halloween," and Freddy Krueger of "Nightmare on Elm Street." The psychiatrist found the so-called slasher films helped a 14-year-old boy, who axed the interior of his family's home, deal with his feelings of anger. But Dr. Carole L. Lieberman, a psychiatrist for the National Coalition on Television Violence, says she has misgivings about this treatment because she believes "these kinds of movies stimulate aggression."



Jason



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Tuesday, December 5, 1989

# Set children's TV ground rules before tuning in, expert says

By SHERI GRAVES  
Staff Writer

The time to make rules about watching television is before the child is sitting in front of the TV, says a UCLA psychiatrist who specializes in the effects of media on society.

"Children are not receptive to parents switching off the set in the middle of what they consider their favorite show," said Dr. Carole Lieberman, a spokeswoman for the National Coalition on Television Violence.

The first rule parents should make, she said, concerns the number of hours a child may spend in front of the TV. She recommends one hour per day for weekdays and two to three hours per day for weekends. "And, that's the maximum!"

These are Lieberman's guidelines for parents:

- Go through the TV Guide with your children at the beginning of

the week to decide which programs they will watch during the allotted time. Then, make a day-by-day schedule of which programs they will watch, what time they're on, and which channel. "This provides an opportunity for parents to explain why they think certain programs are valuable and why others aren't," said Lieberman. Say no to anything that is expected to depict violence or pornography.

- Make it clear that the television will not be turned on until after all homework is done.

- Do not watch television during the dinner hour. "Families use TV to avoid communicating with each other," said Lieberman. "When they do this, family members become alienated from each other. Don't let TV take the place of parents asking their children how their day at school was and things like that."

- Plan to watch television with

your children. Don't just send them off to watch it alone. When the program is over, discuss the material that was portrayed in the TV show and how it does or does not relate to your lives.

- Plan alternatives to television. If the children aren't going to be watching TV, what will they be doing? "Parents need to help their children get into activities that will be nourishing, such as music lessons, organized sports, neighborhood games and reading" said Lieberman. "One alternative should be that parents spend time doing activities with their kids."

- Don't expect children to respect the "Do as I say, not as I do" philosophy. If you're going to limit the number of hours your children can watch TV, you're also going to have to limit your own television viewing, at least until after your children have gone to bed.

# Activists protest 'Nightmare 5' in nationwide campaign

By Kathy Lo  
Staff Writer

Los Angeles activists joined a nationwide protest against violence in films Friday at Westwood's Mann National Theater.

They protested after the opening of the film *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child*, where phantom Freddy Krueger, the series's main character, invades people's dreams to kill them. "We came to protest this one

now particularly because all Freddy films are typical of the violent films in society," said UCLA Assistant Professor of Psychiatry Carole Lieberman.

She and members of the Los Angeles Alliance for Survival, National Coalition On Television Violence and National Organization for Women (NOW) also demonstrated against the film's violence against women and alleged anti-abortion stance.

Most of the film-goers, however, disagreed with the protesters. Film promoter Mike Ryan said the protest was pointless and served no

constructive purpose.

The protesters saw the film's first showing, before hosting a press conference outside the theater.

"It's more horrible than I ever thought," said Jerry Rubin, head of AFS, a peace activist group. "This movie has so much violence and manipulation (that it) desensitizes people to the real horrors of life."

Lieberman said the film's subtle messages pitted children against parents.

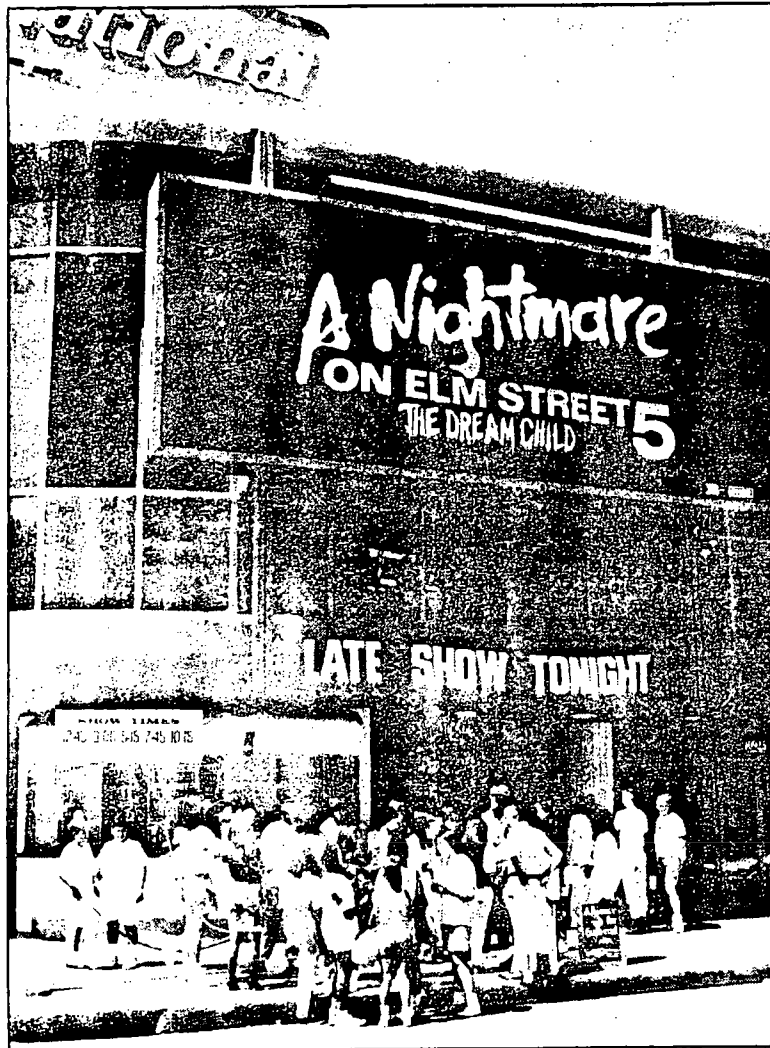
"There's a lot of anger Freddy has towards his mother. This causes more violence and resent-

ment between parents and children at a time when more violence is going against parents than ever before," she said.

But 11-year-old film-goer Buddy Brakha said the movie teaches children a lesson. "(The movie) is trying to tell you what not to do — not to be a psycho and not to do bad things."

NOW protested against the violence towards women. "The repeated depiction of violence against women perpetrated by Freddy fosters acceptance of vio-

See **FREDDY**, page 7



DHANU PANCHAL

Protesters answer questions outside theater.



DHANU PANCHAL

UCLA professor Carole Lieberman (left) and activist Jerry Rubin (right) protest the movie.



# Taking Aim At Violence On Television

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Bill would set limits, but  
at what cost to Constitution?

## Prime time trauma

The National Coalition on Television Violence ranked these as the most violent prime time shows on network TV for the fall 1988 season. Rankings are based on the number of acts of violence per hour as recorded by coalition members.

| Programs                     | Violent acts |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| Miami Vice (NBC)             | 54           |
| The Equalizer (CBS)          | 51           |
| Crimes of the Century (ABC)  | 50           |
| Paradise (CBS)               | 46           |
| Something Is Out There (NBC) | 38           |
| Nightwatch (ABC)             | 30           |
| Mission: Impossible (ABC)    | 28           |
| Simon & Simon (CBS)          | 26           |
| Sonny Spoon (NBC)            | 23           |
| Midnight Caller (NBC)        | 23           |
| <b>Others</b>                |              |
| Hunter (NBC)                 | 21           |
| Wiseguy (CBS)                | 20           |
| MacGyver (ABC)               | 18           |
| L.A. Law (NBC)               | 2            |
| Alf (NBC)                    | 1            |
| The Cosby Show (NBC)         | 0            |



Freddy Krueger brings his "Nightmare on Elm Street" gore to one of two new slasher series.

By Richard A. Ryan  
News Washington Bureau

8/13/89

**W**ASHINGTON — Sen. Paul Simon didn't sleep well the night he watched a man being cut in half with a chainsaw.

After an tough day of campaigning for his Senate seat in 1984, the Illinois Democrat checked into a motel in an Illinois town. Sitting back to relax, he clicked on the television. Then, in "living color," he was confronted with the blood-spattering, chainsaw scene.

"Obviously, it was not real," Simon recalled. "But it was real enough that it bothered me that night."

It also was enough to set Simon on a five-year campaign to reduce violence on television, an effort that has won enough converts to trigger congressional action.

The Senate and House passed legislation to relax anti-trust laws enough to permit the television industry, including the three major networks, to jointly develop voluntary guidelines for controlling the level of television violence. Such cooperative action is currently prohibited under terms of the Sherman Anti-trust Act.

**THE TWO** chambers must still settle the differences between their separate bills when Congress returns next month from its summer recess. In addition to violence, the Senate version asks for guidelines to reduce the level of explicit sex and illegal drug use now shown on TV.

Most congressional observers, including representatives of the television industry, expect a bill to be passed and signed by President Bush this year.

But that's where the agreement ends. Congressional supporters hope the measure will spur the television industry to voluntarily reduce the level of violence.

Some members of Congress and some constitutional scholars said that while the measures would require the industry to develop guidelines, they carry an implied threat that Congress would take further action if the industry does not cooperate.

"We think this is, on its face, unconstitutional," said Barry Lynn, legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union. "It is not the business of the U.S. Congress to try to influence the content of television programming. That is absolutely forbidden by the First Amendment."

Please see Violence/28A

# Violence

## TV curbs pose constitutional threat, many say

From page 25A

Eight members of the House Judiciary Committee, including Detroit Democrats John Conyers and George Crockett, said in a report the legislation represented "indirect censorship, clear and simple."

**SPOKESMEN FOR** the three major networks contend the bill is unnecessary and unlikely to produce much beyond a few meetings.

Martin Franks, CBS Washington vice-president, said it is unlikely cable television operators, whose fare is often considerably more violent and risqué than that on network television, will agree to tamper with their successful format.

"Part of the reason cable has had the dramatic growth it has is that it is obviously offering what viewers desire — violence and sex," Franks said.

"In the best of worlds," added Beth Comstock, an NBC spokeswoman, "the groups will meet and raise a few good points for discussion but not come to a solution. But I think even that is optimistic."

Lawmakers concede chances for a dramatic change in television programming are slim. But still, they reason, they have to try.

"This bill is a little bit like chicken soup when you're sick," said Kansas Democratic Rep. Dan Glickman,

the primary House sponsor of the bill and a 1966 graduate of the University of Michigan. "It may help. It can't hurt."

**CROCKETT WAS** the only Michigan congressman to vote against the bill. Three were not present for the vote: Conyers; Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth; and Guy Vander Jagt, R-Luther.

Television violence has been a public concern since the late Tennessee Sen. Estes Kefauver held congressional hearings on the topic in 1954. The advent of cable television has brought a rapid escalation of TV gore.

Anti-violence activists were given added impetus recently with the introduction of two syndicated programs — *Friday the 13th* and *Fred's Nightmares* — modeled after highly profitable slasher movies.

David Boyd, a spokesman for the National Coalition on Television Violence (NCTV), called the shows two of the "most brutal and extreme" on television. The group is organizing a boycott against the sponsors and stations airing the programs.

Last fall, NCTV rated the once popular but now discontinued *Miami Vice* as the most violent on network television. *The Equalizer* was not far behind. Because NCTV counts all acts of violence in monitoring programs, its rating system is discounted by some. The group's 1988 fall listing of "high violence" programs included *Murder, She Wrote*, a relatively tame mystery program and *Magical World of Disney*.

**STILL, THERE** are numerous examples of truly violent programming.

George Gerbner, until recently dean of the Annenberg School of

Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, said his studies found an average prime time television viewer sees six to eight acts of violence and two murders in one evening.

**Dr. Carol Lieberman**, a Beverly Hills psychiatrist, said intense competition motivates cable and network stations to air programs "that lure viewers rather than inspire them."

"Viewers are lured to programs of sex and violence because of their natural sex and aggressive drives," she said. "(Dr. Sigmund) Freud discovered this around 1900. Now we're seeing Freud's discovery proved by the Nielsen ratings."

**STUDIES DATING** to a surgeon general's report in 1972 have suggested a causal link between television violence and aggressive, destructive behavior by viewers.

The American Psychological Association, urging a reduced level of television violence, stated in a resolution:

"The conclusion drawn on the basis of 25 years of research ... is that viewing televised violence may lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children."

Other supporters of reduced violence include the American Academy of Pediatrics; the American Medical Association; the National Institute of Mental Health; the surgeon general of the United States; and the National Parent-Teacher Association.

Simon's proposal came after a Federal Court declared network cooperation on programming a violation of anti-trust statutes. During the 1970s, the networks agreed to provide a "family hour" of entertainment between 8 and 9 p.m. But a group of creative artists sued the

networks, contending their cooperative effort was a violation of antitrust laws — and the court agreed.

The Annenberg studies show the family hour time slot is now the most violent period on TV.

Simon's legislation, which he successfully guided through the Senate in 1985 and again in 1987, removes the anti-trust obstacle. Both times before, the bill was stymied by House Judiciary Committee Chairman Rep. Peter Rodino, D-N.J., who insisted the bill was unconstitutional. Rodino since retired and the bill passed the House 399-18 Aug. 1.

**GERBNER CALLED** the passage "a timid but positive first step."

The industry's failure to respond, he said, is likely to trigger grass roots activity against advertisers similar to that of Terry Rakolta, the Birmingham woman so offended by the sexual content of the Fox network's *Married With Children*, she persuaded the sponsoring company to withdraw its advertising.

Chrysler Corp. Chairman Lee Iacocca recently warned television writers they face the loss of Chrysler advertising if they continue the emphasis on sex and violence.

"I got dangerously close to saying, 'I am the censor ...' Iacocca said in an interview published last week in USA Today. "And if you keep screwing around with this sex and violence to where people turn off their sets ... you're not getting my money."

Franks, the CBS vice-president, argued the ultimate judge of television content is the viewer.

"We face an election three or four times every night," he said. "If people switch off a program for whatever reason — a comedy that is not funny, a show that is too violent, or a show that doesn't have enough sex — we have lost that election."

# NCTV boycotts 2 'violent series'

By Joe Bensoua  
TELEVISION CRITIC

The National Coalition on Television Violence is calling for a nationwide boycott against stations and advertisers promoting what it calls "TV's two most violent series": "Friday the 13th" and "Nightmare on Elm Street: Freddy's Nightmares."

Both syndicated shows take their titles from popular horror movies. Paramount's "Friday the 13th" airs at 7 p.m. and midnight Saturdays on KCOP/Channel 13, and Lorimar's "Freddy's Nightmares" airs at 12:30 a.m. Sundays on KHJ/Channel 9.

KHJ reportedly will not renew the series this fall, but phone calls to both stations were not returned.

Thomas Radecki, a Champagne, Ill.-based psychiatrist and research director for NCTV, is calling for a boycott of all programming on these stations until the shows are taken off the air. He calls "Freddy's Nightmares" the "most violent and sadistic program that we have ever monitored, and 'Friday the 13th' is not far behind."

Carole Lieberman, a UCLA psychiatrist for 10 years and a technical consultant for the TV and film industry for seven years, has debated a former producer of "Freddy's Nightmares" twice and complains that he is typical of creators of violent TV shows.

"Although they are aware of studies that point out that violent entertainment promotes violence in real life, they choose to ignore it for financial profit," said Lieberman, the West Coast spokeswoman for NCTV.

A consultant on soap operas and such prime-time series as CBS' "Murder, She Wrote" and NBC's "Empty Nest," Lieberman is convinced violent programs are having an ill effect on society.

"A major danger stemming from watching this kind of programming is that people learn to solve their problems by violence," she said. "Another problematic effect is that we become desensitized to escalating depictions of violence such as forced sex with Satan, suicide, castration, rape and the killing of parents."

Lieberman said satanism is on the increase in television scripts.

"In an attempt to be surrealistic, writers are increasingly choosing themes related to devil worship and acts of violence we haven't seen on screen before, including the eating of feces."

"People often ask, 'Is art imitating life or life



Robert Englund as Freddy Krueger in "Freddy's Nightmares" on Channel 9.

imitating art?' but each side escalates and reflects on the other. When we see an increase in devil worship, the killing of parents and violence toward women, we see the same subjects on these shows. It's not a coincidence."

Lieberman said she is optimistic the boycott will work, noting that "Freddy's Nightmares" has already been taken off the air by a Canadian station.

"I think the public is becoming more aware each year of the danger of violent programming," she said. "And they're becoming more responsive in trying to get programmers to do something about it."

"The problem is that there is an audience for this kind of material or they wouldn't be making it. Parents are just not spending enough time with their children to teach them why they should or should not watch certain kinds of shows."

PepsiCo, Warner-Lambert (Dentyne, Trident, Certs), 7Up, General Mills, Coors, Nestle's and Philip Morris (KoolAid, Cool Whip) top the list of 33 advertisers NCTV is targeting for boycott.

"Isn't it interesting that the U.S. Army advertises on these shows?" asked Lieberman, noting the two series are popular with young males.

"It actually happens frequently that the armed services advertise on violent TV shows. ... You

don't think that's a coincidence do you?

"Another interesting development is the dating services that advertise on these shows, but what they're attracting is young men aroused to violence, particularly violence directed at women."

□ □ □

# A nation on edge: Culture of violence infects life in U.S.

## Everyday rudeness, growing crime rate permeate society

By Annie Nakao  
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

• *Ellen Palmer died at the wheel of her car after crashing into an AC Transit bus in downtown Oakland last summer. Less than 12 hours later, two teen-age friends of the grieving family — in an act of revenge — ambushed another AC Transit bus, spraying it with more than a dozen shots from a rifle. Driver Billy J. Givens was killed, and three passengers wounded.*

• *In a well-heeled Oakland Hills neighborhood, a man put up large outdoor lights that were too bright and irritating to his neighbor. The neighbor took a BB-gun and shot out the lights. The man*

*installed stronger, brighter lights. In a rage, the neighbor shot them out again. The mini-war didn't end until cops, attorneys and the small claims court took over.*

• *In one South Bay courtroom, a man is overheard complaining to an attorney about the large number of lawsuits being filed in a case. "Countersue," says the attorney.*

From attitudes like "my lawyer can beat your lawyer" to the twisted deeds of mass murderers like Stockton killer Patrick Purdy, Americans today appear to be living in a society on edge. Settling disputes means striking back — sometimes in violence, some sociologists say.

"It's this 'don't crowd me,' 'get out of my face' attitude," said Michael Rustigan, professor at San Jose State University's administration of justice department. "It's a hardball society. ... There's a readiness to strike back. You know,

[ See VIOLENCE, A-12 ]

SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER

Sunday, February 5, 1989

★ ★ ★

## VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION



"Miami Vice" scores as the most violent program on TV with 21 acts of mayhem per hour.



"Cosby" contains no acts of violence, as is true of "A Different World," "ALF" and "Who's the Boss?"

## Violence cutting across U.S. society

'Don't get mad — get even.'

Rustigan, who is writing a book about violence in the 1980s, says the growing adversary nature of today's society ranges from "everyday rudeness we're all experiencing" to the startling rise in crime and, in particular, mass murders.

"You have to put homicide and mass murder somewhere on this continuum of retaliation, to win out, to get the last lick," he said. "But the mentality behind the gunman is also behind the lawsuits: that you have to settle disputes as tough as possible. You even had former President Reagan talking like that. It's part of the cultural ethos of the 1980s."

### Epidemic of violence

Dane Archer, a UC-Santa Cruz sociologist, said that while incivility and rudeness are a quantum leap from actual violence, he concurred there is an "epidemic of violence in this country not found in others." Archer, citing U.S. and New Zealand homicide rates, said: "If the death rate from Caesarean sections was 50 times higher here than in New Zealand, we'd have a presidential commission. But we've adapted to these astronomical rates of violence in this country."

Indeed, the national homicide rate has nearly doubled since the early 1960s. Overall serious crime in America — homicide, rape, robbery and assault — has nearly quadrupled since 1960.

Violence has reached such proportions that in 1986 Congress and the surgeon general created a special section at the federal Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta to track injuries because of violence.

Like Rustigan, Arnold Goldstein, director of Syracuse University's Center for Research on Aggression, said violence has gone up in direct proportion to the decline

of what he called "pro-social" behaviors: empathy, caring, sharing, altruism and cooperation.

Sociologists have long tied the rise in violence to factors such as the breakdown of the family and community, urban density and poverty.

### The victim complex

Rustigan said a major factor in the recent rise of crime, particularly mass murder, is the "victim complex," in which those who feel wronged by society feel justified in seeking revenge. Goldstein cited a "steady diet" of violence on television and the "200-year-old love affair with guns."

A study by the National Coalition on Television Violence revealed that by the time an American is 18, he or she will have watched 32,000 murders and 40,000 attempted murders on television. TV now averages 12 acts of violence per hour, the study said.

While the long-term effects of such viewing is undetermined, studies have shown that children are more violent in play after watching such programs.

"I think the media is both a reflection and a stimulant of society," said Carole Lieberman, assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at UCLA and a spokeswoman for the television coalition. "What's happening is that children are getting stimulated by all this violence in the media and the world. Children see their parents getting cut off on the roads and everybody yelling. There just seems to be an undercurrent of violence in their daily lives. And the message they seem to get is that the answer to violence is violence."

Among the biggest contributors to this message, she and others say, are the Rambo-type avenger heroes that are prominent on television and in movies.

### The proliferation of guns

But experts say the biggest environmental factor linked to the increase of violence is the proliferation of guns.

David Spiegel, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford University, said: "I'd say the big picture is not getting better or worse, but some of the worst things that have ever happened in human history have been happening in this century, not because people are nastier, but because our technical ability to commit mayhem has increased."

"The commercial interests and political extremists who think there's some great democratic virtue in having a bunch of dangerous weapons throughout the country are responsible for the capacity of deranged people to wreak havoc on everyone else," Spiegel said.

Archer, whose study of homicide rates in 110 countries was published in a 1985 book, agreed that guns are a major factor in American violence. He said the U.S. homicide rate is 30 times that of England.

"Undoubtedly, conflict does occur in England," Archer said. "The difference is that a drunken fight in a house won't escalate to a fatal incident."

### Seeking protection

As more criminals obtain guns, so does the segment of the population that wants protection, experts said.

"We're all geared up for retaliation, and that produces a reaction," Rustigan said. "You have a society that's very much on edge, ready to lash back."

Conflict resolution programs like the Conciliation Forums of Oakland, which mediate neighborhood disputes, can help greatly, Rustigan said.

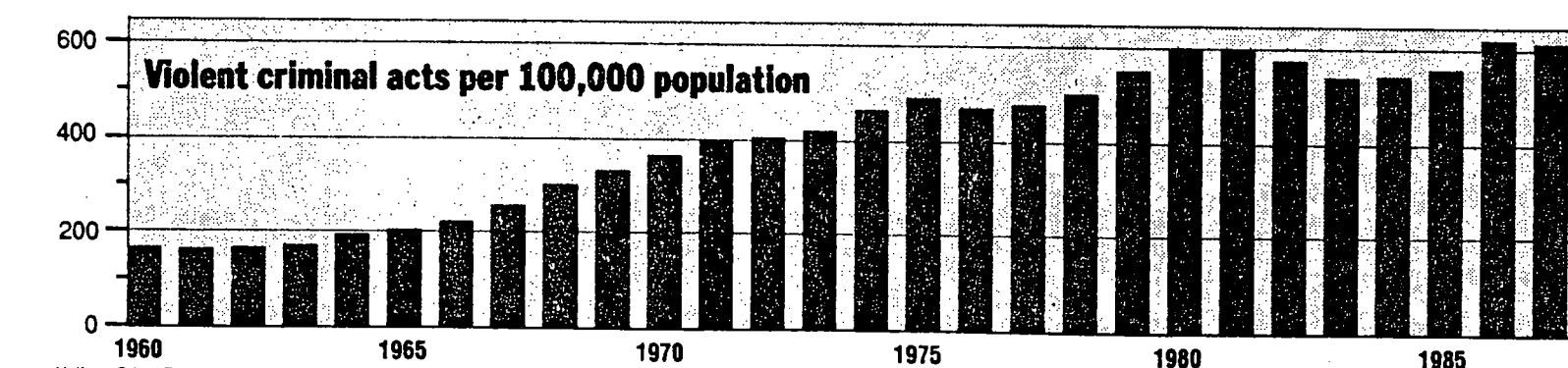
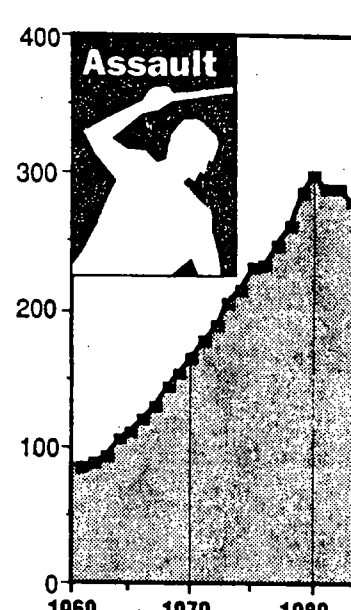
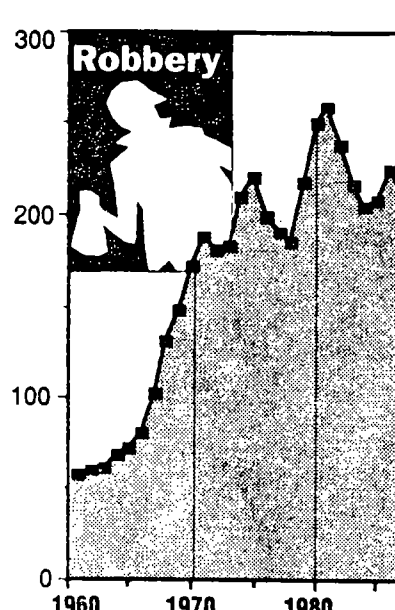
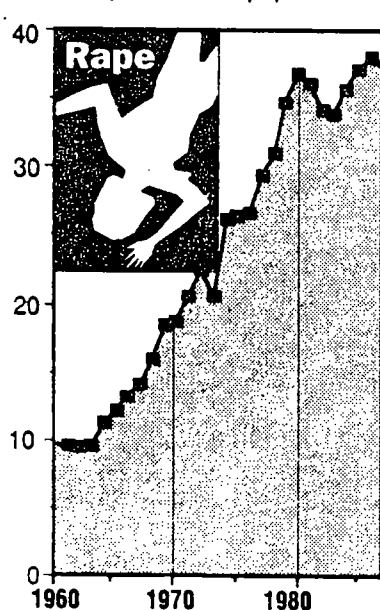
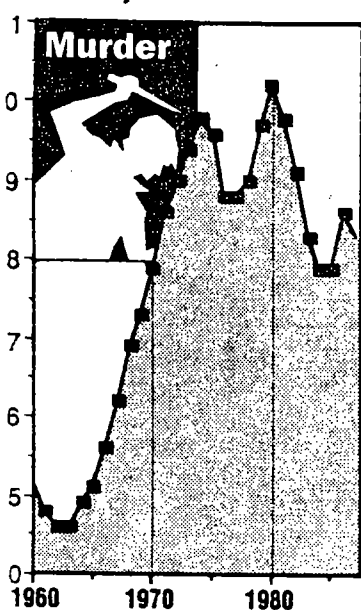
Richard Cowan, the forums' executive director, said the program — which helps mediate disputes from parking conflicts to barking dogs — operates in Oakland neighborhoods and three city high schools.

"There are an awful lot of disputes that on the face of it are minor but can easily escalate like wildfire into something big," Cowan said.

Spiegel said that while the

# Violent Crime

Incidents per 100,000 population



Source: Uniform Crime Reporting FBI

## How they rank

| Network           | Pct. high violence | Violent incidents per hour |
|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| HBO               | 86                 | 33                         |
| USA               | 85                 | 25                         |
| WTBS              | 66                 | 43                         |
| WGN               | 65                 | 24                         |
| Showtime          | 58                 | 20                         |
| Cinemax           | 55                 | 20                         |
| ABC               | 40                 | 9                          |
| Fox               | 33                 | 8                          |
| CBS               | 30                 | 7                          |
| CBN               | 26                 | 10                         |
| NBC               | 25                 | 10                         |
| Nickelodeon       | 21                 | 10                         |
| Lifetime          | 21                 | 10                         |
| A&E               | 15                 | 20                         |
| PBS               | 9                  | 4                          |
| Disney            | 5                  | 3                          |
| Discovery Channel | 0                  | 2                          |

SOURCE: National Coalition on Television Violence; survey conducted in summer 1987 and spring 1988

## Prime-time TV

### High violence

|                       | Violent incidents per hour |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Miami Vice            | 31                         |
| Hunter                | 23                         |
| The Heat of the Night | 22                         |
| The Equalizer         | 21                         |
| NBC movie average     | 20                         |
| Wiseguy               | 15                         |
| MacGyver              | 14                         |
| Tour of Duty          | 13                         |
| Beauty & the Beast    | 13                         |
| ABC movie average     | 13                         |
| CBS movie average     | 11                         |

### Some violence

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Moonlighting      | 7 |
| Murder, She Wrote | 7 |
| Matlock           | 6 |
| Dynasty           | 4 |
| Hooperman         | 4 |

## Low violence

|                 | Violent incidents per hour |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Night Court     | 2                          |
| Falcon Crest    | 2                          |
| thirtysomething | 2                          |
| Cheers          | 2                          |
| Golden Girls    | 1                          |
| Family Ties     | 1                          |
| LA Law          | 1                          |
| Dallas          | 0                          |
| Designing Women | 0                          |
| Newhart         | 0                          |
| Kate & Allie    | 0                          |
| Who's the Boss? | 0                          |
| Cosby Show      | 0                          |
| Hogan's Family  | 0                          |
| Different World | 0                          |
| 227             | 0                          |
| ALF             | 0                          |

Source: National Coalition on Television Violence; survey conducted Jan. 2 through March 25, 1988.

"mood of the times" isn't directly linked to violence, he contended that the Reagan era "has been one of self-righteous selfishness. I'm not particularly proud of the 1980s. The symbol has been the yuppie, ambition and acquisitiveness. Concern for colleagues, the poor or weak hasn't been high on anyone's agenda list. I don't know if you

could link it directly, but the bigger the underclass, the bigger the group of people who are disadvantaged and more likely to turn to crime and violence."

Rustigan agreed that "we need a kinder, gentler society — President Bush picked up on that rightly. I think people recognize it emotionally. In a sense, we have to chill out,



## FRIDAY THE 13<sup>TH</sup>

*Series rakes in profits amid protests of gross misconduct*

By JIM BENSON  
Daily News Staff Writer

The teens who flock year after year to see a macabre killer named Jason Voorhees — and the studio that keeps bringing him back — can sum up their feelings for the stream of gory "Friday the 13th" flicks in one word: gross.

Paramount executives define the word differently than the young, loyal audience that loves to laugh, applaud and scream at the relentless bloodletting.

The studio has grossed more than \$172 million in box-office receipts from the first six movies — the most successful horror series of all times — and millions more from home video, pay cable, syndication and a popular season-old spinoff TV series.

Now comes "Friday the 13th Part VII — The New Blood," which opens in 1,600 theaters nationwide today. This time, Jason, with an all-new look after being chained at the bottom of a lake for years, encounters a teen-ager who can destroy him with her powers of telekinesis.

The distressed teen musters all of her powers just to stay alive after accidentally setting Jason free. She creates fires, blows floors open, causes a house to explode and a pier to collapse.

"Jason now faces someone able to seriously hurt him," producer Iain Paterson conceded.

### Hurt the myth of Jason

Paramount is worried that exposure in the media can hurt the myth of Jason. When Kane Hodder, the latest in a long line of little-known actors to play Jason,

consented to an interview, it was on the condition that he not be asked what it's like to play the part of the killer. The studio reportedly stipulated that anything that could reveal what Jason is really like could hurt the character's image.

Will part seven prove to be Jason's unlucky number?

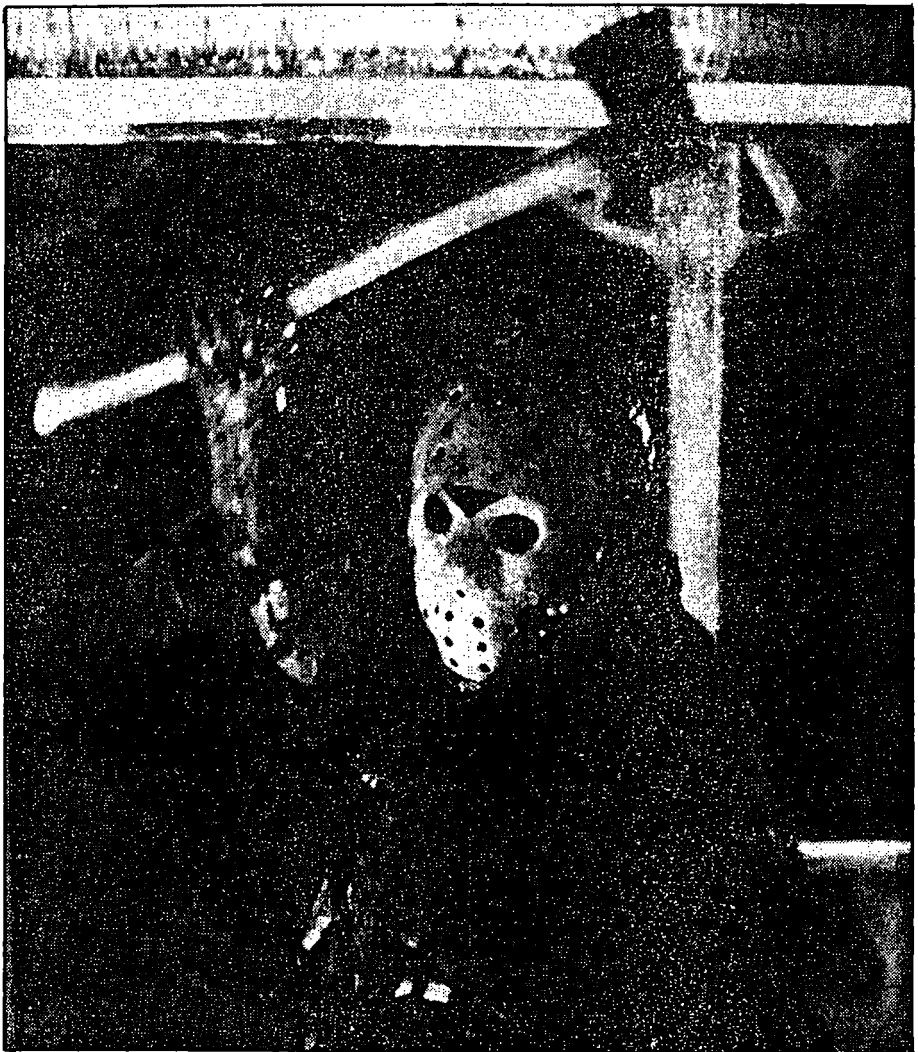
Not as long as there is more money to be made, acknowledged Sidney Ganis, president of worldwide marketing for Paramount's motion-picture group. Given its astronomical profits and low overhead — which has been estimated at anywhere from \$3 million to \$12 million per picture — that could be a long while.

In recent years, the box-office take for the "Friday the 13th" movies has dropped, from a high of \$39.7 million for the original picture in 1980 to \$19.4 million for the sixth in the series, titled "Jason Lives," in 1986.

But Paramount hopes to reverse the trend with this latest release by following the lead of two other sequels — parts three and four — that performed better than any of the other remakes. The reason, of course, is the Friday-the-13th release date, which gives the film's marketers a big promotional tie-in, Ganis said.

It takes more than hype to bring back the film's die-hard fans, however. Even the man who started it all is baffled by the movie's cult following.

"I don't quite understand its success," said Sean Cunningham, who created, produced and directed the first film in the series. "Paramount has consistently made the same film over and over again (nearly) every year, like lemmings. Kids go back, and



In "Friday the 13th Part VII — The New Blood," above, Jason holds an ongoing grudge — and an ax. Above left, Jason leaves a violent calling card for Tina, played by Lar Park Lincoln.

they know exactly what to expect — and they get what they're promised. It's a ritual, like spring break."

The idea for the name "Friday the 13th" poked into Cunningham's head while he was trying to devise a title for, of all things, a children's show.

"I figured if that was the title of a feature film, I could sell that," he said. "It was never intended to be anything but a way to keep the lights on. As it turned out, it happened to be my admission to the club."

### Follows same story line

"Friday the 13th" hasn't veered much from its original story line about gruesome murders at Camp Crystal Lake, where most of the crystal (and knives, hatchets, etc.) can be seen sticking through the torsos and heads of sex-crazed camp counselors.

See, Jason holds a grudge. It seems he drowned while his counselors, who were supposed to be on duty, were off on a tryst. Now this indestructible creature in a hockey mask is armed to the teeth and ready to exact a little revenge.

Cunningham thought it would

be better to leave his creation in the capable hands of Paramount — never dreaming it would be such a financial success — and he sold the rights to the movie studio. He has gone on to make other films, including his latest, titled "Deep Six," but has never been able to come up with a hit to match "Friday the 13th."

The studio, meanwhile, went on to create six more films without him, the second picking up where the original left off: in a hospital room with the sole survivor from the camp, Alice, telling disbelieving police that Jason is still somewhere in the lake.

Part two begins with Alice at an emotional breaking point after having a series of violent dreams about her murderous experiences, which included separate bouts with Jason and his mother, Mrs. Voorhees.

One night, when Alice opens up the refrigerator for a bedtime snack, she finds Mrs. Voorhees' severed head, replete with demonic smile on her lips, staring back. An arm snaps out and grabs Alice, and an ice pick is thrust at her face, through the base of her nose and out the other side.

The story picks up five years later with a new cast and crew of

lustful teens at work and play, while the prowler, a.k.a. Jason, is out to avenge the death of his mother. One by one, he slashes, bashes, cuts, mutilates, stabs, grabs and generally dismembers everyone he can get his hands on.

### Death greatly exaggerated

It appeared Jason had met his end in March 1984, when Paramount released "Friday the 13th — The Final Chapter," but the little guy proved he had staying power — both at the box office and in the lake.

He never would have survived if his life depended on the critics. His attacks on amorous teens were nothing compared to the ravaging given the series by film writers, who had a field day ripping apart the movies' repetitive plots and heavy emphasis on gore. In January 1986, Roger Ebert put "Friday the 13th Part II," on his all-time hate list, which included nine other films with "Part II" in their titles. At the same time, Gene Siskel named 10 films that he never wanted to see again, and five

# 'Friday'

Continued from Page 10

"Friday the 13th" films made the list.

Headlines appeared in newspapers across the country that read, "Jason Becoming Horrifyingly Old," "A Distorted View of Humanity" and "Frightful Friday."

The original "Friday the 13th" that propelled Cunningham into the limelight had a young, mostly male following eight years ago. He suspects that many of those same fans today are in their mid-to late-teens and now bring their girlfriends with them to partake of a little innocent, deadly fun.

"Essentially, it's a social event for laughing and having a good time," he said. "It's like going on a roller coaster . . . If you ride by yourself, it's not fun. If you go with 10 other kids, it's better."

Some, however, question whether these movies wind up "desensitizing" young people to violence.

Dr. Carole Lieberman, a Beverly Hills psychiatrist who often consults with people in the media to provide psychological insights into their work, takes the filmmakers to task. Although Lieberman said that she finds nothing wrong with well-done horror movies that seek to scare the audience by tricking it — such as the original "Jaws" — she questions the constant, repetitive violence

characterized by the "Friday the 13th" films.

"It is so easy to make it gorier," she said. "But you have to be real clever to make it scarier. It's the difference between being creative and trying to get more money."

Despite a barrage of attacks from critics over the years, Jason and his colleagues in terror from the "Halloween" and "Nightmare on Elm Street" school of filmmaking have remained incredibly popular.

The reason, according to Lieberman, is that they offer the young audience a chance to get in touch with their feelings in a protected atmosphere.

Another reason for their success, Lieberman reasoned, is that "people often walk around like zombies these days trying to numb themselves to the pain they see around them and the hurt they feel inside themselves. They lose touch with feeling alive. Horror movies are a way of poking themselves to feel something — even if that something is terror."

The fright films, she said, "bring on a combination of pain and pleasure that follows the principle of hitting your thumb with a hammer so you forget your headache. We each have many headaches that can be temporarily relieved by the pleasure and pain of horror movies."

The newest camp counselors at fictional Crystal Lake will be lucky if they have heads left to ache at the end of this latest sequel.

# National coalition fights violence in films

By **HELLE NIELSEN**

Staff Writer

The National Coalition on Television Violence will step up its work against violence in Hollywood movies because 59 percent of 1987 movies it surveyed contained high levels of violence, NCTV officials said Monday.

"Forty percent of television violence comes from film entertainment," said Thomas Radecki, research director for NCTV. "The most intense, sadistic and gruesome violence on TV has skyrocketed with

the advent of cable and videocassette rentals, and it has been reaching younger ages."

NCTV surveyed 133 movies released in 1987 and 59 percent of these contained violence "likely to have some harmful unconscious effects on normal children and adults," said a coalition press release. The coalition found 18 percent of the movies to be "unfit for human consumption."

Radecki said "The Running Man" was an example of such a movie.

The movie featured 146 acts of

violence per hour, including a character's head being blown apart and a chainsaw death, along with stabbings, beatings and shootings, he said. The "bad guys" were portrayed so that audiences derive pleasure from seeing them murdered, Radecki said.

Radecki said this entertainment desensitizes viewers, causing violent and anti-social behavior.

"We estimate that violent entertainment accounts for between 25 and 50 percent of anger and violence, by establishing and reinforcing a subculture of violence on a daily basis," he said.

NCTV researcher Carole Lieberman said movies have a profound effect, because they tend to glamorize violence.

"The image on the screen is so much more powerful than what you read," Lieberman said.

Eli Rubinstein, an adjunct professor in mass communications research at the UNC journalism school, said that while it is impossible to measure in numbers the harm caused by television violence, TV violence does affect viewers.

"You cannot put figures on it or say that any one individual was caused to commit violence by watching violence on television," Rubinstein said. "But it does have an effect."

Rubinstein served on a 1972 task force set up by the U.S. Surgeon General to study TV violence and

social behavior, which found that children who watch four or more hours of television each day are more likely to show aggression than children who watch less television, he said. An update study in 1982 confirmed the 1972 findings, he said.

However, Rubinstein said, movies are less likely to be as pervasive as television, because people do not watch movies as often as they do television.

Some researchers dispute the research linking violent behavior to television and movie violence, arguing the research isn't good enough, Rubinstein said. But while they are reputable researchers, they are a minority, he said.

Both Radecki and Rubinstein cited a study which has followed a group of 800 people for 22 years as evidence that large consumption of television violence causes violent behavior.

The subjects who watched the most television violence clearly showed increased aggressive behavior, Rubinstein said.

Radecki said the NCTV supports legislation presented by Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., which would give the TV and cable industries a three-year exemption from anti-trust laws, allowing them to join efforts on the problem.

But the NCTV would prefer legislation requiring television stations to do public service announcements warning against the harmful effects, Radecki said.

"I don't see a necessity for congressional censorship," he said. "Educat-

ing people is a better approach

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## Psychiatrist curbs kid vid violence

By STEVE SANDERS

The controversial, action-charged "Captain Power" animated series has added a psychiatrist to the production staff in a move to address concerns about the effects of violence on young viewers.

Media consultant and psychiatrist Carole Lieberman has been recruited by "Captain Power" executive producer and creator Gary Goddard who noted, "When you have a high action show, it's important to balance the action and adventure with an awareness that our audience includes young viewers."

The series has generated controversy due to a high amount of on-screen violence, coupled with an interactive format which allows children to "shoot" villains during the program by aiming at bright orange dots on the screen. "Captain Power" is TV's first live-action "television-to-toy" interactive program.

"Captain Power" was the top-rated weekly children's syndicated series during the November 1987 sweeps period according to Nielsen, and is the fourth-rated overall children's syndicated program. It currently airs in over 200 domestic markets and has been sold for broadcast or home distribution to 46 foreign countries.

Lieberman told The Hollywood Reporter that her involvement with "Captain Power" began when she studied the show and became concerned by the show's amount of violence, which was the subject of a study conducted by the National Coalition on Television Violence.

"The image of a kid coming home to an empty house, sitting in a dark room and shooting at a television set is a very disturbing one," she noted.

"There are studies, 43 out of 47 to be exact, that show when a child is exposed to violent toys or media, the child becomes more aggressive in the period of time following. New studies show that the more aggressive a child is when he is young, the more likely he is to stay that way as a teenager and as an adult. There are great implications from this exposure to violence," stated

Lieberman.

The media consultant wrote a letter to Goddard which resulted in his bringing her on board on an hourly basis (at \$75 per) as a psychiatric script consultant, a function Lieberman had been performing for several years.

Upon reviewing scripts and tapes of the show, Lieberman — to her admitted surprise — discovered many "positive things" about the series and assessed that the program did "show teamwork and values" particularly in each episode's "B" storyline.

The psychiatrist suggested that the orange dots (the target for the viewer's interactive gun) be moved as often as possible away from the bodies of the villains to inanimate objects, such as computer pads, to allow children to "do something productive" in aiding Capt. Power's fight for good rather than promoting violence against others.

Lieberman also stated that the series will also be decreasing the amount and length of violence by trimming the running time of the battle scenes during the program.

These changes — along with the shift in the target "bull's-eye" areas — will remain true to the style of the fast-paced "Captain Power" format and will be utilized in varying degrees. According to Lieberman, the suggestions have been implemented in some of the last episodes produced for the current season and will affect all entries of the second season as well.

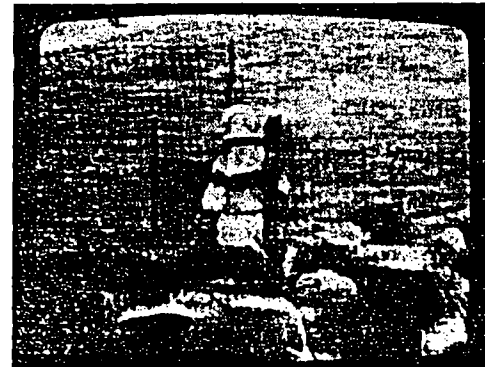
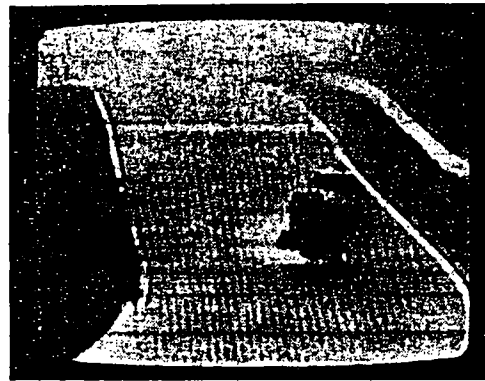
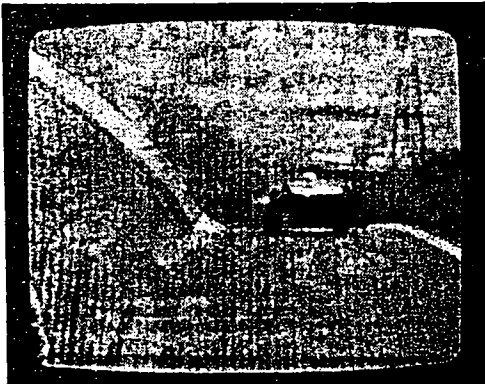
"My role in 'Captain Power' is not that of a censor," insisted Lieberman. "I want to work with the writers and creative team to enhance the characters. Human elements and positive stories don't have to take second place to action, nor do you have to sacrifice any excitement."

"The result is an exciting half-hour of innovative programming that doesn't jeopardize young viewers' psychological development," she stated.

"I would like the show to have a lot less violence," Lieberman noted. "But at least if they cut down the violence and increase the positive themes and the show still gets high ratings, it will be a great model for other shows to follow."

## COVER STORY

## SUNDAY L.A. Life



A Formula Two race car takes flight, returns violently to earth and explodes in scene from "Havoc IV," a video of wild moments in motor sports. The driver walked away without injury.

## Death on video



"Faces of Death" tapes show human and animal killings; "Of the Dead" depicts funeral practices.

## Violent views of the other side of life show an interest in overkill

By LEWIS BEALE  
Daily News Staff Writer

Say hello to the Grim Reaper. He and his buddies, Destruction, Devastation and Dismemberment, are big hits at the local video store.

Thanks to a series of tapes that include scenes ranging from the slaughter of baby seals to Formula One racing car crashes, the simulated violence of the silver screen is beginning to look like so much Pabulum. Just check out these delicacies:

"Faces of Death," a gruesome tape first released in 1983, now has spawned two sequels. The videos feature actual human and animal killings, including TV news disaster outtakes that were deemed too gruesome for broadcast, an electric-chair execution, autopsies, a bridge-jump suicide, sharks ripping humans apart, even the killing of monkeys in a restaurant where fresh monkey brains are on the menu. MPI Home Video, the Oak Forest, Ill., firm that distributes these tapes, claims that to date they have racked up total sales of 100,000 units for the trio, at a cost of \$59.95 per cassette for "Faces of Death I" and \$69.95 for its sequels.

Not to be outdone, MPI has also released "Of the Dead," a Belgian documentary that examines funeral practices around the world. The tape includes scenes of body preparation in mortuaries, a body melting inside a cremation chamber, catacombs with mummified remains and such esoteric acts as Filipinos sewing shut the eyes of the dead before their interment. Released in 1984, "Of the Dead" has sold 15,000 cassettes at a unit price of \$59.95.

And then there are the crash tapes. Grand Prix and lody cars, Formulas One and Two, power boats, motocross, stock cars — you name it, there's a tape out there that features its destruction. Key items here are the "Havoc" series of videos (there are now six, the last of which has sold 15,000 copies in the last four months), distributed by Tarzana-based Power Sports Video, and "The Accident," released by Classic Family Entertainment of Chatsworth.

## Outer limits

"These tapes represent the outer limits of the video business," said Steve Apple, executive editor of the Video Insider, an industry trade magazine. "There's only one place you can see these films, and that's at home."

Apple's comment is right on the money, for there is no doubt that, like tapes showing explicit sex, the sale and rental of death-and-destruction tapes is booming because they allow people to indulge their voyeuristic tendencies in the privacy of their own homes.

"It's curiosity, plain and simple," said Jaffer Ali, vice president of marketing for MPI Home Video, explaining the appeal of these tapes. "Death is something we're all going to share."

"I believe that humankind likes fast sequences of things, gore and excitement," added Joe Levin, general manager of Power Sports Video, "especially when it's not happening to you."

Dr. Calvin Frederick, a professor in the Department of Psychiatry at UCLA, puts it another way. "In this era of violence, and worldwide violence, I think we are, and have become, a violent society. These tapes are symptoms of that phenomenon."

This mentality is certainly nothing new. Accidents and other disasters have always attracted their share of rubberneckers, and fiction films featuring violence and extreme gore are a staple of the industry. Since "Faces of Death" and the "Havoc" series are documentaries, however, their appeal can probably be traced back to the year 1962, when an Italian filmmaker named Gualtiero Jacopetti released "Mondo Cane," the first in a series of increasingly grotesque films about bizarre, lurid and cruel rituals and practices from around the world.

## Disgusting and compelling

Jacopetti, a former journalist and magazine editor, recognized almost instinctively that depravity is both disgusting and compelling. Although mild by today's standards — scenes included people eating dog meat and an African king who forced his wives in order to fatten them up — "Mondo Cane" proved an enormous box-office success, spawning a pop record hit ("More," which rose to No. 8 on the charts) and several sequels. More important, with the 1966 release of "Africa Addio" (retitled "Africa — Blood and Guts"), with its scenes of tribal slaughter, sacrifice and other bloodthirsty behavior, Jacopetti made a significant advance on the long march toward explicit cinematic violence.

What Jacopetti couldn't show in the '60s, the "Faces of Death" tapes have brought into the living rooms of the '80s. According to MPI Home

Continued on Page 5

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Video's Jaffer Ali, the initial "Faces of Death" tape, released in 1983, sold poorly (1,500 units the first year) until word-of-mouth and a wire-service story about the nature of its contents combined to create a sales phenomenon: 20,000 units in three months in 1985.

According to Ali, the scenes in the videos come from a variety of sources, including repellent wildlife footage provided by noted nature filmmaker Bill Burrud. "None of these scenes are staged, and no one was killed or hurt in the making of these tapes," said Ali.

Bill Burrud, reached at his Los Angeles production company, said all three tapes were produced by his son John and did in fact contain outtake footage from his "Animal World" series, seen on the Disney Channel. Burrud said the first "Faces of Death" was released in 1980 in Japan as a theatrical feature and grossed \$6 million in that country.

Burrud said, "I hang my head a little bit in shame" when he thinks about some of his footage being on the "Faces of Death" tapes. But he also feels that they are misunderstood.

"If someone listens to the narration of that show (the first tape)," said Burrud, "and I don't think anyone really has, it's actually a fair narration. It isn't pro-violence. And at the end of the film, there's a birth sequence. Life is a cycle."

### Criticism, defense

Ali, who claimed that most of the criticism of the tapes has come from animal-rights groups, was also quick to defend them from their detractors. "The narration (of the tapes) is against animal slaughter and senseless violence," he said. "The point is that the sanitized violence you see in the 'Rambo' movies or 'Death Wish' is more damaging to the psyche; it becomes much more acceptable. They use violence as an acceptable alternative, whereas 'Faces of Death'

*"In this era of violence, and worldwide violence, I think we are, and have become, a violent society. These tapes are symptoms of that phenomenon."*

**Dr. Calvin Frederick**

UCLA Department of Psychiatry

shows it's unacceptable. The message of anti-violence in 'Faces of Death' seems to be missing in the analysis."

What's not missing in the analysis is the fact that both the "Faces of Death" and "Havoc" series seem to have a strong appeal to teen-agers. In fact, the "Havoc" series was produced and edited with the lower end of the demographic spectrum in mind. "We picked up material that is very exciting," said Power Sports Video's Joe Levin, "but we also tried to keep a low profile about fatal accidents, so we could orient the tape towards the younger audience, people aged 16 to 30."

"Havoc" is certainly tamer than "Faces of Death." Although the tapes contain some awesome crackups — including driver Niki Lauda's famous fireball explosion at the Nurburgring in 1976 and the 1955 Le Mans crash that killed more than 80 spectators — most of the sequences feature non-fatal spinouts, flips and crashes of all types. Nevertheless, the fact that all of these tapes are tops with teens seems, according to some observers, to say a lot about teens in particular, and society in general.

"Adolescence is a time when people feel inner turmoil," said Carole Lieberman, a medical doctor and media script consultant. "When they (adolescents) see this turmoil projected in some way, a part of them connects with this, feels reassured that other people are feeling what they're feeling. These videos connect with powerful unconscious sexual and aggressive drives."

"Teen-agers seem to be attracted to things like horror films and heavy-metal music that may flirt with death," added Frederick. "It represents kind of a rebellion against the establishment; there's a kind of excitement to be able to flirt with death and still master it."

Lieberman feels that this obsession with death and the forbidden goes even deeper. "Everyone is struggling with their sexual and aggressive drives," she said, "and there is a natural human curiosity to see forbidden things. But the alienation of society is an increasingly important factor here. Society has gotten more violent, and people have gotten more alienated from each other."

Some observers contend that the existence of tapes such as "Faces of Death," which have generated relatively little attention or media controversy, says a lot about sexual hypocrisy in America.

"I think the video industry is a little embarrassed (by these tapes)," said the Video Insider's Steve Apple, "especially because of the current trend on the part of the religious right and the Meese Commission to ban sexually explicit films, and these films are allowed to go out there. I don't advocate censorship, but it's ironic that (the tapes are) allowed to exist without the uproar of these people."