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BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL

"TV or Not TV?"

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Transcript of "TV or Not TV?"

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(Tease. Blank screen.)

VOICE: May I have your attention, please. I know your screen is blank, but there aren't really any pictures to go with what I'm about to say, so you won't be missing anything. Instead, would you just take a good look at your television set...and think. There are more homes in this country with television than there are with refrigerators or indoor plumbing. The average American watches TV for more than six hours each day, and usually with much less thought or analysis than you are probably giving this blank screen right now. As a nation there is only one thing we spend more time doing than watching television -- and that is sleeping.

Television, as we know it, is only about thirty years old. Yet many social scientists feel it has already had more impact on the way we think and act than such inventions as movable type or the automobile. The power embodied in this little box is awesome.

(Music over shots of faces with fixed stares.)

BILL MOYERS (on camera): I'm Bill Moyers. In most homes television has become the other member of the family. The program you're about to see reports what happened when five families in Minneapolis tried to live without it, when they agreed not to watch television for a month. All of us watching tonight will surely wonder, what if it had happened with us?

(BMJ opening.)

MOYERS: If you ever kept a diary, some of your best entries were probably those you borrowed from somewhere else. That is true tonight of my Journal. I did not produce this program, but I would be proud if I had. It was done here in Minneapolis by Jim Hayden of WCCO-TV, a commercial station affiliated with the CBS Network. When I saw it, I knew it deserved a nationwide audience. This is the first of two Journals devoted to television. Next week I'll report on the battle over television advertising to children, but tonight I'm pleased to present this excellent documentary about television's influence on all our lives. The narrator is Dave Moore, host of WCCO's weekly series, "Moore on Sunday."

DAVE MOORE (walking into studio): Good evening. I'm Dave Moore. What you'll be seeing tonight is a television program about television: the effects of watching television violence, television advertising -- the effects of watching any television at all. When we began our research last August the first thing we discovered was that this is a very tough subject to narrow. So for starters, we'll narrow down to commercial network television. That leaves out public TV and local shows, but it still includes the programming ninety-eight percent of you watch for ninety-five percent of the time.

The second thing we discovered: science has a long head start on us. The list of studies and experiments is practically endless -- at

least 2,200 on television violence alone. But in gauging TV's effects on our society the researchers all share one handicap: there's no control group, no comparison community of Americans just like us, except without exposure to television. Well, that started us wondering what life might be like without TV. So we decided to devote a large part of tonight's program to finding out.

(Television serviceman arriving at house and entering.)

MOORE (over shots of serviceman disconnecting television): It's Saturday, October 21st. For five Twin Cities families, this will be the first day of a month without television. A TV serviceman spends the afternoon eliminating any temptation.

SERVICEMAN (at house): Well, let's see, what's the best way to disable it? I suppose we'll just rip the horizontal oscillator module out of it.

MOORE (over shot of telephone canvasser making call): We began last September, selecting names at random from Twin Cities phone directories. In all we made forty-five calls, asking for the head of the household and making our offer: give up watching TV entirely for one month, in exchange for which we shall pay you \$500. Of our forty-five subjects, twenty-seven said no, it wouldn't be worth it.

SERVICEMAN (at house): This is going to hurt.

PATRICIA BELDE: Where shall we go now, Meliss? (Laughs.)

MOORE (over telephone canvassers): Many of the elderly said they were alone, TV their only friend. Others said the programs meant more to them than the \$500. Several hinted that they'd be risking divorce if they eliminated television from their relationship.

SERVICEMAN (disconnecting TV): And if I may, I will unplug it.

YVONNE KRAFT: It's going to be different. (Laughs.) Really different. My TV's on from seven o'clock in the morning till eleven, twelve at night. (Laughing.)

SERVICEMAN: So you are now without a television. I think that's better right now than a lot of programs I see.

MOORE (over subjects logging TV hours): Those who agreed to try our cold turkey experiment were first given diaries to log their TV viewing for a week. Comparing the diaries with our original survey forms, we found nearly all our subjects had underestimated the actual time spent watching TV. Several actually watched more than twice as many hours as they thought they did.

YOUNG MAN: Before I never really thought about it. It was just a calm and normal thing, you know. But now I'm seeing how much I watch it and being on all the time -- yeah, I could say I'm probably addicted to it.

MOORE: We narrowed our prospects down to five, striving to assemble the most diverse cross-section we could. Finally, each signed a pledge -- the promise that no one in the household would watch any television

whatsoever for one month.

SERVICEMAN: Well, we'll see you in thirty days.

WOMAN: You know what to do to put it back together, now.

SERVICEMAN: I'm going to write this down; I don't trust my memory.

WOMAN: (Laughing.)

PAT GESSNER: We are not a family with money, so we really are going to have to develop and use our imaginations. Play outside -- won't that be fun? But you still want your TV?

Mrs. LAURENT: We put off going out at night because we get -- somebody is involved in a program, and then by the time the program is over it's too late and we decide to stay home for the night, where this way I think we will get out to visit more.

YVONNE KRAFT: Bob's staring at the blank TV. (Laughing.)

SERVICEMAN: I don't hold out much faith for people that have to be without a TV. As you know, it's like a death in the family...it really is.

(The Krafts.)

YVONNE KRAFT: Go find your father. He loves you.

GARY KRAFT: How come you're being so nasty?

MOORE (over scenes of Kraft family): Gary and Yvonne Kraft live with their four -- and soon to be five -- children on St. Paul's Nikomas Avenue. Gary is truck driver for GK Express, Incorporated, the small trucking company Gary owns in partnership with Yvonne's father and brother. It's Sunday, October 22nd, the Krafts' first full day without television. Without the usual distraction, homework lingers on into the evening.

(Scene of Gary helping son with homework.)

MOORE (over continued scenes of Krafts): In the living room, dusty games and toys have crept from the closets, and the radio fills the void once occupied by a daily ten hours and thirty minutes of television.

GARY KRAFT: Just since yesterday, you know, the TV's on, it's always on, even if we're not watching it. It comes on when they get up in the morning, it goes off when they go to bed at night. You know. And even, like the kids'll steal some of the other kids' toys or something and they'll be mad, and all of a sudden the commercial will come on or the action will change on the show, and they'll stop right there. And then they forget what they're fighting about. And then everything gets back to an even keel again. Now, like today, if they get into an argument today, you know the argument kept growing and growing until it got solved. And that's -- well, maybe it's good and maybe it's bad, but it's nice to have a -- (pointing at television set) -- an intermediate there that kind of stops the whole action. I got to talk to the kids more, and the wife and stuff, I got to take -- but it seems like you got to explain your actions more and pay more attention to their actions and stuff, because they seem to be...like right now they seem to be a lit-

tle bit on edge, you know, it's -- you can't explain it, but you can tell it.

MICHELE KRAFT: It's boring, 'cause you can't watch -- "Family Affair," "The Price Is Right."

GARY KRAFT: But there are all reruns, Shel, you know all them by heart.

MICHELE KRAFT: Uh-uh.

GARY KRAFT: TV is so handy, you know. I come home, and I'm not tired, but I get in here with a cup of coffee and I lay down on the couch in my favorite spot, and I just start watching TV.

FIRST CHILD: No, you start sleeping.

SECOND CHILD: Yeah, you start sleeping.

GARY KRAFT: Nah, not all the time. If the TV wasn't on I'd be doing something else. You know, there's always something else to do. I got an old '48 Ford pickup I just bought, too. And when the snow flies I want to take the fenders off and bang on that a little bit. But when you got -- (points at TV) -- you got the old habit there, it's kind of hard to do.

MOORE: Twenty-four hours without television. The change in daily routine has brought tension. But the Kraft family is talking more, communicating, and making plans to use their time productively. Just the same, the prospect of cold weather and the close quarters that come with it bring little encouragement.

GARY KRAFT: In the summertime it'd be easy, it'd be a piece of cake. But I've got a feeling it's going to be a long thirty days. A long thirty days.

(The Gessners.)

PAT GESSNER: You want to try another one? You going to do that one again?

BEN GESSNER: Ohh!

PAT GESSNER: What happened to Ernie?

MOORE (over scenes): Pat Gessner is a pre-nursing student at St. Mary's College. She lives with her son Benjie on Chicago Avenue in South Minneapolis. Even before her TV was disconnected, when she and Ben watched an average of nine hours, eight minutes a day, she expressed concern -- fears that the time spent with TV would erode her relationship with Ben. She had tried to cut down, she had tried to quit; but found she could not.

PAT GESSNER: I don't like my use of the TV. I feel that I use it sometimes instead of giving direct attention to Ben. When Ben asks for attention and I'm on TV, and the question even comes up, Do I turn it off or don't I? it should be automatic, the TV just goes off; but it's not. And that lends to some guilt feelings.

MOORE (over Pat and Ben watching TV): But Pat expressed even more concern about the control TV holds over Ben.

PAT GESSNER: When my niece stayed over a couple of nights, we watched "The Hulk" on Friday evenings, and shortly after that my son decided that he should be the Hulk, and he'd take the Hulk's stance and he'd growl the Hulk growl...

(Scene from "The Incredible Hulk.")

PAT GESSNER: Well, then he'd start moving the TV across the table, as if he were going to throw it. So we turned "The Hulk" off after the second time he watched it. It's been off for about five months, but we can't control when the commercials come on, and the commercials trigger that again. And just about a month ago he picked up a stool, a kitchen stool, and threw it across the room and broke it.

MOORE (over scenes from "The Incredible Hulk" and violent scenes from other programs): Violence -- an ingredient of two thirds of all prime time television. If you're an average viewer, you'll witness some 18,000 televised acts of violence this year. The public debate over TV violence has had a longer run than "Gunsmoke." A thorough treatment of the saga would fill several programs the length of this one.

The primary focus of concern, of course, is children. (Over shots of children watching TV): What notion are we planting in impressionable minds by portraying a world in which so many human conflicts are resolved with guns and fists? Are we leading the young to expect, even crave, a kind of violence they will probably never encounter in real life -- unless they stir it up themselves?

Dr. Andrew Collins has conducted extensive study of TV and children's behavior. He is an associate professor at the U of M's Institute of Child Development.

Dr. ANDREW COLLINS, Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota: There's a real possibility that children do base some of their behavior -- at least, the kind of behavior they engage in -- on the sorts of things they see in television programs. The thing that makes that something that can't really be ignored is the fact that there are now well over 2,000 studies addressed to this question, and they vary a lot; some of them are very tightly controlled lab studies, some of them are less tightly controlled studies that really come very close to approximating the kinds of situations that kids live and work in every day. And across all those different kinds of studies the evidence is almost unequivocal that there is some relationship between the kinds of television viewing experiences kids prefer to have or typically have and the kinds of behavior they tend to engage in. So for example, kids who prefer violent television are very likely to have a reputation among their friends as people who hit and kick and shove and push.

MOORE (over scenes of violence from TV programs): The theory is that violence begets violence. But the broadcast industry is quick to point out that it's reduced the violent programming, especially following the unfavorable findings of the 1972 Surgeon General's report. Donn O'Brien is vice president in charge of program practices for CBS.

DONN O'BRIEN, Program Practices, CBS: We have all taken -- I can speak for ABC and NBC -- we have all taken the position that there should be no gratuitous violence on television, that the television program should only use violence when necessary to the plot. We do not feel that the violence that is depicted in action adventure programs or in Westerns or in fact in the "Roadrunner" program on a Saturday morning is damaging to our viewing audience.

MOORE (over shots of Annenberg campus): But to shed a new light on what has become a tired argument, we traveled to the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications. The dean is Dr. George Gerbner, the sociologist widely considered the nation's foremost television researcher.

Dr. GEORGE GERBNER, Dean, Annenberg School: Our studies show that television violence occurs at an average of six rate per hour; in children's programming it's sixteen -- used to be twenty-two, now it's sixteen per hour. What that constitutes is not a legitimate dramatic commodity but a cheap industrial ingredient that is mixed into programming; even though it depresses its attraction, it's so cheap and it's so relatively mechanically produced that it is profitable.

MOORE (over Gerbner): But Dr. Gerbner goes beyond the traditional objections to televised mayhem. (Over violent scenes from TV programs): He has computed that on TV roughly half the characters commit violence of one form or another; that one fifth commit crime; that six percent kill someone; and three percent are killed. What does that picture do to the social environment in which we live?

Dr. GEORGE GERBNER: It's not only, and not even mainly, that it makes viewers more aggressive; it makes a few people more aggressive, and that's a problem. But it makes all people more anxious, feel more insecure. So when you ask people, what are your chances of encountering violence on an average weeknight, the heavy viewer who lives on the same street as the light viewer and therefore has the same real-life hazards, exaggerates, overestimates his or her chances, because the heavy viewer seems to have absorbed from television a high level of risk and of danger in life and projected that onto reality.

(The Beldes.)

MOORE (over scene of Patricia Belde playing pool): Less than a week into her month without TV, Patricia Belde visits her parents.

PATRICIA BELDE: The main reason I came over here was because I really didn't have anything else to do at home. Have my parents entertain me, feed me -- (laughs) -- I don't know, I just -- I'm very bored at home now, without a TV.

MOORE: This week Pat's husband, Steve, is working the night shift at the warehouse. While Pat plays pool with her brother, her three-year-old daughter Melissa sits on Grandpa's knee.

GRANDFATHER (looking at book): Where're they going?

MELISSA BELDE: A picnic.

GRANDFATHER: Oh, yeah, what is some of the stuff they've got?

MELISSA BELDE: Apples, balanas....

PATRICIA BELDE: I've been catching up on my rest. Saturday night I think I went to bed at eight o'clock, which is very unusual -- (laughing) -- because there was just nothing else to do. It makes me nervous...it does, it really makes me nervous to know that I can't go turn on my set and sit down and watch TV. It's really nerve-wracking. I find myself sitting

and staring at the blank TV set. I look through the TV Tab every night. (Laughs.) I look through it to see what's going to be on. You know, you can only clean your house so much and you can only read so many books, and it just -- it gets tiring. And...I guess I spend more time with Melissa. I really think I do. Read her books, play games with her, and -- I think we spend more time together, as far as that goes. I'll be thankful to have it back, I'm sure. (Laughs.) Very thankful. Well, then again, maybe I won't. Maybe I'll get used to it and find other things to occupy my time. That could be, too. You never know. I don't think the chances are very good, but...(laughing)...maybe.

MOORE (over scenes from ads for children's toys): It is estimated that the average child sees about 20,000 commercials each year. Often the ads are aimed directly at children. Many adults object to the practice, claiming that among other things we are exploiting a child's lack of self-denial. Among those leading the protest is Massachusetts-based Action for Children's Television. Jean Johnson.

JEAN JOHNSON, Action for Children's Television: Commercials essentially put the child in the middle. The child is used as a salesman to sell to the parents. And in that way television does take advantage of children's vulnerabilities, their lack of experience. And we feel it's a reasonable request to eliminate this practice. The products that are sold to children on television could be sold to adults; you could advertise toys and cereals and candies and the foods, et cetera, to the adult audience, and we have no problem with that.

MOORE (over commercials for Nestle's Crunch, Frosted Flakes, and McDonald's): The concerns center on the food products -- candy, snacks and presweetened cereals -- that consist largely of sugar. Sugar has already been linked to dental cavities and obesity, and although the evidence is not conclusive, medical science is also questioning whether sugar may be a factor in cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and hyperactivity.

In Washington, D.C., the Federal Trade Commission has been formulating recommendations concerning children's advertising. Tracy Westen is Deputy Director of the FTC.

TRACY WESTEN, Bureau of Consumer Affairs, Federal Trade Commission: And the best evidence we have, from pediatricians, child psychologists, teachers and the rest, is that below a certain age -- four, five, six, what have you -- young children cannot tell the difference between a commercial and a program, do not understand that a commercial is designed to sell them something.

INTERVIEWER: What is the purpose of a commercial?

FIRST CHILD: So the other people could get it ready -- the other stuff ready?

SECOND CHILD: Just to show you something really neat to use.

TRACY WESTEN: When they see a television commercial, they will often view the speaker as a parent figure, an adult, even if it's, say, a cartoon dragon. And they will place in that figure enormous trust.

INTERVIEWER: If someone on TV told you something and your teacher or your mother told you just the opposite, which one would you believe?

FIRST CHILD: I'd probably -- I'd probably believe the TV.

TRACY WESTEN: The question, then, is whether sugar ads aimed at young children are deceptive because they don't disclose the full side of the story. Should we add disclosures into the ads, that tell kids about the health consequences? Or should we simply say, no advertising to kids until they're old enough to understand serious health implications.

JOHN SOMERS, Vice President and General Manager, National Association of Broadcasters: These programs, like "Captain Kangaroo," which everybody will concede, is directed to the preschool child -- the rest of the kids are in school when it's shown -- you're asking that they just be taken off the air.

MOORE: John Somers is vice president and general manager of the National Association of Broadcasters.

JOHN SOMERS: Nevertheless, these children are not the purchasers, they don't have the purchasing power, they don't purchase the groceries at the store, and there is a role for the parent in this whole equation.

TRACY WESTEN: It's easier to sell sugar by selling it to a child than to the child's parent. So it's a little ironic that television first sells sugar to children and then tells us that it's the parent's job to deal with the consequences. Obviously the parents ought to take care of their kids, and that would be the ideal solution. But as one mother said, my vegetables don't sing and dance, and the sugar and candy advertised on television does sing and dance. And moreover, children will spend clearly more time in front of a television set than they will discussing food, nutrition and other questions with their parents.

MOORE (over Milky Way ad): Broadcasters say they need ad revenue to keep up children's programming; and they claim a ban on sugared product advertising would have no more effect on consumers than the existing ban on cigarette advertising. It's a complicated controversy. But there seems even a larger question -- the question about a whole system, a question about values.

TRACY WESTEN: The question is not, what are all the reasons why the FTC should or should not do something about advertising to kids. I think the important question is, what are the reasons for selling products to young children? Why is it desirable? Why do we want that? Why should we build that into our system? If people had sat around thirty years ago and had designed consciously our current system of broadcasting, how many of them would have said, let's make sure that young children see 20,000 commercials a year? Now if they had said that, what would have been their arguments? Why do we want that as a system?

(The Mobleys.)

MOORE (over family at home): Clyde and Cathy Mobley live with their three children on New Brighton's Forestdale Road. Clyde is an insurance salesman.

CATHY MOBLEY: The kids can let us know what they want to do.
(Laughs.)

MOORE: The Mobleys' favorite programs are few, yet the set was in

operation about five and a half hours a day.

CLYDE MOBLEY: There were many times I'd shut the television off and I'd look at my watch and say, Man! What am I doing staying up till one o'clock in the morning? That's crazy. What a waste of time. And even then I'd try to think of the shows that I watched. I can remember back one or two and I can't remember what I watched before that, you know? It's kind of crazy. Oh, yeah, I always -- lot of times I feel guilty. Even just simple little things that should be done, you know, and I just don't do 'em.

MOORE: Clyde's feelings have gone from guilt for watching to nervousness with the silence. He used to work at his desk here in the den. Now he says feelings of loneliness have taken the enjoyment out of it. Meanwhile, nine-year-old Scott says he likes it without TV.

SCOTT MOBLEY: It seems better. I don't know how to explain it. I spend more time outside. Have more fun.

CLYDE MOBLEY: You kind of copped out with TV. I think everybody does. 'Cause I told Cathy, you know, earlier that what we should do is make a list of things that we're going to do for the evening, so that you just don't come home and stumble around each other, you know?

MOORE: Cathy Mobley plans to take up macrame, and Clyde has begun laying plans for a small shed to match their cabin.

CLYDE MOBLEY: If I can occupy my time with something else, hopefully I'll get off of this nervous kick, you know. 'Cause right now it's -- I feel that I'm a little more irritable with family.

(The Laurents.)

MOORE (over Laurent children playing music): The Laurents live on their farm in Hamel, although both parents have other employment as well. Their set logged an average six hours a day, but divided among the family of seven, the Laurents were not heavy watchers. Just the same, thirteen-year-old Jim misses his football, and keeps up with games in progress by calling friends. Ray misses mainly the news, and Mrs. Laurent, who considers herself a night person, misses the sounds of television.

Mrs. LAURENT: No, I know that little noises a lot of times that they do, get on your nerves that you don't hear if the TV is on at night.

MOORE (over shots of family washing dishes): There is one activity that's filled in the evening void around the Laurent household, though -- the dishes.

Mrs. LAURENT: Well, as you could see, tonight it was an hour and a half from when you arrived here since we've gotten through eating, and they weren't done yet. And she had said we have all night to do dishes, there's no hurry. That's all there is! (Laughing.)

MOORE (over montage of television scenes and commercials, and shots of people watching TV): Consider that the real importance of television may not be what we watch, but simply that we watch. Six hours, ten minutes a day for adults, and Nielsen's figures go up every year. Thirty hours a week for children, and that's the average. If you or your child

don't watch that much, others are watching more.

Dr. GEORGE GERBNER: It has more to do with what we think of as tribal religion than it has with the media that are used selectively. It's even a mistake to talk about television by individual programs. Most people don't pick programs and don't view by programs but by the clock. Television fits into a style of life. And whatever fits in -- the number of hours, prime time, late evening, daytime, weekend -- these are the chunks of time that people use.

MOORE (over shots of infant watching television, elderly people watching television): Television is everywhere, present not only in public but even as the tiniest babies are ushered into the social system. It has infiltrated the nursery, the senior citizens' high-rise. It has become part of the sound environment, the motion environment, the thought environment, even within the closest of families.

Dr. GEORGE GERBNER: Forty-five percent of American homes eat dinner with the television set on. I think that's an amazing statistic. Dinnertime used to be the family time and family talk. Now, when you do that with the television set, an interesting thing happens. You can still talk, but you're talking about something that's outside your own family, that's outside your own community, that's brought in; you are communing in the presence of a great corporate religion coming in through a pulpit which is in every home, with tireless messengers sending out centralized messages, and that makes the experience and the common basis of discourse for most people a kind of wholesale product.

MOORE (over shots of faces staring at television): Often we sit, eyes straight ahead, unspeaking, zombie-like before the hypnotic shapes and colors dancing on the face of a box filled with tubes and transistors. A household appliance that pacifies our children, occupies our minds, and commands our intimate friendship.

WOMAN: Soap operas are like friends in my home. They talk to me every day, I follow their problems....

CATHY MOBLEY: The only reason I miss it is that it is a pacifier for the children.

CLYDE MOBLEY: I guess it's kind of like a companion; because if the wife was down here I could sit and talk to her while I was working over there and leave the TV off.

WOMAN: I mean, it takes your mind off of a lot of things, that's why I like TV, too, you know, you don't sit there and think.

MOORE: Even beyond the obvious mechanical differences, television is a medium unlike any we have ever known.

Rose Goldsen is a professor of sociology at Cornell University. She is also social science advisor to the Ford Foundation and author of The Show and Tell Machine, an analysis of television's social impact.

ROSE GOLDSSEN, Sociologist, Cornell University: I remember, say, during the Vietnam years, we would be watching the news, and Walter Cronkite would say 2,000 people were bombed to hell and gone in Cambodia with napalm. And I would want to run out into the street and say, "Did you hear? 2,000 people bombed!" Instead of which people say, "Would you pass the

salt." "Would you like another cup of tea?" "Johnny, get your elbows off the table." In contrast to movies, where you are invited to invest your emotions in what's going on on the screen, television is received in the kind of situation which invites you to detach your emotions.

MOORE (over campus shots): The past few years have brought concern over a decline in college entrance exam scores -- SAT's. A special committee investigating the cause of the decline turned up a number of possible social causes, one of which is television.

(Over young people in classroom): Many educators feel the very nature of television watching interferes with learning. Some preliminary scientific study suggests that extensive use of TV may even make subtle changes in the way the brain processes information. Although there is disagreement, some say even educational programs such as "Sesame Street" offer little to the child because of the rote method of learning employed.

Bill Hobson is Social Studies Curriculum Director for the Hopkins School District.

BILL HOBSON, Curriculum Director, Social Studies, Hopkins, Minnesota: Everything that we know about learning in terms of learning theory indicates that to get lasting learning to take place you've got to have an active learner, you've got to get him involved emotionally, you've got to get him involved physically; and yet television is so passive. And what will that mean in future years? What will it mean to language development? What will it mean in terms of active participation as a citizen in a society?

DAN CONRAD, Teacher, Eisenhower High School: The attention span of students lasts about as long as a regular TV program goes between commercials, but you have them about twelve minutes and then if you don't change your activity somewhere along the line, you lose them.

PAT SOLEN, Special Education, Eisenhower High School: I resent it greatly. I resent it as an educator. It's hard to get kids to read when they can sit in front of the tube. And I notice it a great deal in reading skills, and I'm very concerned with that as a special educator.

MOORE (over children playing): Perhaps more than any other social force in history, television has redefined childhood. (Over kids watching TV): An estimated five hours a day tied to the tube. Realizing the quieting effect TV has on children, many parents put it to work as a baby sitter. And just as that practice has reduced parental contact with the child, there is evidence that it has heightened the child's attachment to the television.

INTERVIEWER: If you had to choose between keeping all your toys or keeping your TV set, which one would you choose?

FIRST CHILD: The TV set.

SECOND CHILD: The TV.

THIRD CHILD: The TV.

INTERVIEWER: If you had to choose, would you rather give up your friends or give up your TV?

FIRST CHILD: My friends forever.

SECOND CHILD: Give the TV up -- I mean, my friends up.

THIRD CHILD: My friends. (Laughs.)

INTERVIEWER: If you had to choose, would you rather give up watching TV forever, or talking to your father forever?

FIRST CHILD: Talking to my dad.

SECOND CHILD: It's hard. My dad.

THIRD CHILD: Give up TV forever.

FOURTH CHILD: Giving up my father.

FIFTH CHILD: The TV forever.

SIXTH CHILD: Give up talking to my dad forever.

SEVENTH CHILD: Maybe the TV; maybe.

MOORE: Children, however, aren't the only ones who can become dependent on TV. Nick Johnson was an FCC commissioner for seven years. Today he heads the National Citizens' Communications Lobby.

NICHOLAS JOHNSON, National Citizens' Communications Lobby: Television can very usefully be thought of, it seems to me, as a narcotic, as an addictive behavior. The dosages tend to be increased over time....

GARY KRAFT: You know, it was getting to where we'd be pulling that thing down the hallway at night, taking it to bed with us, you know, and then setting the timer on it to go off at midnight. You know. After we were asleep already.

NICHOLAS JOHNSON: There is a lapse of reality while you're in this state. You're not conscious of external reality.

PAT GESSNER: I have a nine-year-old niece who gets so absorbed in TV that you literally have to physically touch her or yell in her ear to get her attention.

NICHOLAS JOHNSON: It's hard to remember after the drug experience what was happening during the drug experience.

CLYDE MOBLEY: Cathy'll ask me to go to the store, I won't even feel like getting up and doing that you know. I just sit and watch television. And the next day I can't even tell you what I watched.

NICHOLAS JOHNSON: It's very painful, there are withdrawal symptoms associated with giving up the television watching experience.

PATRICIA BELDE: It really makes me nervous to know that I can't go turn on my set and sit down and watch TV. It's really nerve-wracking.

(Montage of distorted TV scenes and commercials.)

MOORE (on camera): What is being suggested is not that you stop watching television, just that you be selective, that you take what you feel is

right for you or your family and leave the rest. The danger is that as you sit there seeing and hearing a whole universe through the tube you'll forget to see or hear one another. In fact, if you're not sure this program is really for you, start a good habit. There's the switch -- have a nice chat. We'll understand.

GARY KRAFT: Well, the first week was bad, you know, 'cause the kids were used to it and everything. But now I don't think it's going to be on that much, to be honest with you, when we can turn it back on again. We haven't even actually missed it.

YVONNE KRAFT: Well, what do you think, Shel, do you like it without the TV?

MICHELE KRAFT: Yeah.

YVONNE KRAFT: Do you miss it?

MICHELE KRAFT: No.

YVONNE KRAFT: Dawn, do you miss it?

DAWN KRAFT: No.

GARY KRAFT: Well, to be honest with you, I was shocked at my daughter's report card. I was really shocked with it. But Dawn, I thought she wasn't going to do so good.

(To daughter): I thought you were having problems with spelling.

DAWN KRAFT: I am.

GARY KRAFT: How come she gave you a commendable, then?

DAWN KRAFT: I don't know.

GARY KRAFT: I like it. Best thing that ever happened to us.

MOORE: The Krafts say they've done nothing special to pass the time -- except add a member to the family, two-week-old Jeffrey, born into a household without television. Gary and Yvonne say they do miss a couple of programs, but Yvonne says her house has never been cleaner. And she'd like to see the TV go for good; that its temporary absence has brought happy times.

YVONNE KRAFT: When I was in the hospital my mom and dad were down here, and Gary sat with popsicle sticks and built a flatbed trailer with my three-year-old son. Out of popsicle sticks. And Mom said she couldn't get over how he sat with those popsicle sticks and made a flatbed trailer. (Laughing.)

(The Mobleys.)

MOORE (over family at play): Not long after the first week without TV the Mobleys say they began to adjust. There have been some changes. Clyde's sprouted a beard, says he's reading more; sold his desk by the TV in the quiet of the den. The whole family notices they're using rooms in the house they hardly ever used before. Cathy finds she enjoys the after-school hours of help around the house. Clyde works later into the evening

without the TV to bring him home. And stays up as late as ever, but he says his relationship with the children has deepened.

CLYDE MOBLEY: But I think it's affected our lives quite a bit, really. Scott, my nine-year-old, just the other day said, "I suppose when we hook up the TV again we won't be playing games like this anymore" -- because we didn't do much of it before. The two-year-old -- two-and-a-half-year-old, Daniel, he just loves to "play trucks, Dad?" you know. Never asked me before. Figured I was preoccupied, I suppose, or too busy.

MOORE (over montage of sexual TV scenes): There's been a good deal of criticism lately about sex on television. Many feel there's too much of it. But more and more the critics of television -- even some within the industry -- are saying the problem is not too much but rather the way sex is presented: usually with a leer, a snicker. The role of women on television is changing. They've moved out of the home and into the forefront. But some say the reason for that is only to allow viewers a more enticing look at their forefronts.

NICHOLAS JOHNSON: It's interesting to note what happens now when the violence levels decline. Because what they need is another cheap trick. The only thing they can't give us is quality drama, because that tends to make the commercials look fraudulent, it tends to provide more interest in the programming than in the commercials, it gives the programming a higher quality level than the commercials, so we need some other cheap trick to hold us through the commercial break. And so what they're using now is what we call sexploitation or the jiggly shows, or whatever now, that are coming out.

DONN O'BRIEN: ...very concerned about how women are portrayed on television and try to make sure that they are reflected as being other than just in the household. I think we reflect women as a mirror of society, in many ways; and there's certainly attraction in putting good-looking women on television, and there's certainly attraction in putting women in bathing suits. Again, I don't think it can be the main thrust of any program, but I think it's a legitimate creative use of talent.

MOORE (on camera): At this point, what we'd like to present is neither a controversy nor gospel but an opinion, an idea about a whole system. It's been said television doesn't do ideas very well...but we're going to try anyway.

(Over scenes from various crime dramas): Television is a business dependent on attracting large audiences. Over the years certain programs have proven better at that than others. Success is likely to be duplicated; it's only logical. What is left, after time, are the kinds of programs that keep you seated and comfortable so you will see the commercials. Here are some formulae that seem to do that:

The bad guy never wins.

Human conflicts are resolved often through violence, always within thirty minutes to an hour.

Men are powerful, self-sufficient; women are pretty, dependent, good people, but a little dingy.

(Over shots of major network buildings): These formulae were not thought up by bad people, nor are those people necessarily any more greedy than you or I. They're just trying to run a profitable business. The problem is that...

Dr. GEORGE GERBNER: People often say that television is mere enter-

tainment, that it is superficial, that it is repetitive, and that therefore it is not to be taken very seriously. Well, we believe, and our research provides ample evidence for the fact that just the opposite is true. Don't forget, people today are born into a room in which television is already a furniture and a moving image and a constant sound and part of the environment; they grow up with it. Television is the great universal storyteller of our times. And most of its stories, particularly fiction and drama, which I think are the most important, tell children and ourselves how the invisible forces of life and society really work. You can discount the plot, but you remember what social types, what human types, tend to succeed against what other human types. This becomes a view of reality for most people, and they act accordingly; and in many ways, since they act accordingly, since to them this kind of a setup seems normal, to a large extent it becomes real.

MOORE (over scenes of TV violence): Here's just one example. Dr. Gerbner mentioned earlier how TV violence affected our view of the real world. But he says it also portrays a social pecking order. Violence represents power. Gerbner observes that television violence is committed mostly by American white middle-class males. Women are most often victims. When non-whites are involved, they are usually shown casting the first stone, or bullet, and are eventually done away with by the white middle-class male hero.

Dr. GEORGE GERBNER: Most societies tend to control people by inducing them to fear the more powerful groups in society. Television has streamlined, encapsulated and put this system on the assembly line with great industrial and technological efficiency. So that violence, by demonstrating power, by making people respect or fear power differentially, sets up a social hierarchy and becomes an instrument of social control.

MOORE (over ads for products based on TV characters): To experience television's social control, the critics say, it's no longer even necessary to turn on the set.

ROSE GOLDSSEN: You can buy bedsheets and pillowcases with Farrah Fawcett-Majors stamped on them. You -- did you see on Halloween, the children go out, they're wearing the costumes and the masks of these people. They put on -- these personas.

CATHY MOBLEY: What are you going to be for Halloween, Daniel?

DANIEL MOBLEY: See, I'm going to -- look at that one, Mom!

CATHY MOBLEY: Do you want to be the Hulk?

DANIEL MOBLEY: Yeah!

ROSE GOLDSSEN: You can buy socks with Telly Savalas on them! People wear the stuff on their bosoms. My prediction is the day will come when we tattoo it on our very bodies! Mass merchandised modes of being, is what we're talking about. Television enters the home, the television goes on hours and hours per day; the support system is much vaster.

Dr. GEORGE GERBNER: People say, You can turn it off, can't you? But this is no longer a realistic question. Even if you do, you live in a world in which nine hundred ninety-nine out of a thousand people don't. And they make that world for you. If you don't get the effects of tele-

vision directly, you get it through other people.

ROSE GOLDSSEN: So we are talking about the power to control culture. Now, whether you like it or not, that's your business, but you never voted for it. And this country is dedicated to the proposition of the division of powers, not the concentration of powers.

(Scene from "Network." People yelling from balconies, "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it any more!")

MOORE (over faces of people watching "Network"): Power -- and concentration of power. That's what the movie "Network" is all about. More than anything else, that is what makes television so different from other media. The critics are frustrated because television is so powerful, yet unlike magazines, books, movies and newspapers, it defies individual control.

(Over shots of major network buildings): There are only three theatres, and they're almost identical. We don't make the selections at the library. We don't even get to turn the pages.

Dr. GEORGE GERBNER: This is the challenge to democratic theatre. Right now three men have the power. Until recently, until Mr. Silverman came along, we didn't even know their names. But they in effect have the power, or most of the power, to determine the reality of the vast majority of the American people; the stories of a nation are the basic process by which human behavior is formed...by which how things work in life are learned. And if you can control the storytelling, you don't have to worry about who makes the laws, because then you can control the behavior -- either stabilize or change or modify -- and I think television is doing that, probably most in the direction of stabilizing, of maintaining, of inducing a fear of change, of making people more anxious and fearful and more rigid and more brittle, and therefore more dependent upon the power of others than they otherwise might be.

(The Beldes.)

MOORE (over Belde family playing cards): It's November 19th, just twenty-four hours until TV is restored at the Beldes', and four other Twin City households. It won't be a moment too soon for this one.

STEVE BELDE: We can't wait till we get the TV. We've been bored enough at times where we actually went over to our mother-in-law's house and got some old catalogues, you know, Christmas catalogues or something -- used to sit around here and go through looking at the catalogues for Christmas stuff, you know, just for something to do. It's getting hard to find any more stuff to do. These cards are practically wore out from playing them so much.

MOORE: Throughout the month the Belde household grew increasingly tense. Steve's cigarette smoking jumped from a half a pack to a pack a day, and at least once he came close to throwing in the towel.

STEVE BELDE: I came home from work and I was going, "Patty, I'm going to cheat, I've got to watch some fights, I've got to watch some fights tonight, there's no -- I'm going to cheat, and I hope they don't give us a lie detector test after it, 'cause I'm going to watch them." And I think I went out and I played racquetball or something.

PATRICIA BELDE: It was awful. (Laughs.) It was. And I would never

do it again. It seems terrible to, you know -- be like this. It actually, you know, I kind of think, "God, what's the matter with me?" But it's hard.

SERVICEMAN (connecting television): Well, it's supposed to work now, but you never know.

MOORE (over shots of serviceman connecting televisions of subjects): November 20th -- the end. Thirty days without television over, for five families.

PAT GESSNER: I hear sound.

MOORE: Pat Gessner had hoped this month to come closer with Benjie and to break the spell she felt TV held over her. She says she's done both.

During the month the Mobleys said they felt more like a family. Clyde built part of that shed for their property up north, but he goofed somewhere. He's tearing it apart now.

The Kraft household quickly returned to business as usual, although like just about all the families, they've made a resolution.

YVONNE KRAFT: It's going to be off more. (Laughs.) See right now how noisy it is? You got the TV going, they're sitting there watching TV. It was just nice without it. You just don't need it on.

MOORE: The Laurents seemed by far the least affected by TV's absence, yet definitely noticed a closing of the communication gap.

Mrs. LAURENT: You took more time to listen to the children and everything.

MOORE: And finally, the Beldes. A time to rejoice, for them. Steve said he discovered reading, but in all today marked the end of a month pacing the floor and staring wishfully at the TV Guide.

STEVE BELDE: I don't know how to explain it. If I had to say it some way, it's kind of like, let's say -- it's kind of like getting an old buddy back in the house again.

MOYERS (over freeze frame of Steve Belde): That's how matters stood last November. We've asked some of the participants in the experiment to come back and tell us if their families' lives have changed since the missing picture returned.

Pat Belde, was anything permanently changed by your experiment?

PATRICIA BELDE: Yes, I got pregnant during the time. (Laughing.) So I guess that's a pretty big change.

MOYERS: Did you go right back to your old ways of viewing when the experiment was over?

PATRICIA BELDE: Yes, I think we did. I don't think it really changed our TV habits at all. We were happy to have our TV back.

MOYERS: Could you do it again?

PATRICIA BELDE: Maybe for more money I could, but -- (laughs) --

not for \$500, because I enjoy my TV. I really do.

MOYERS: Why? Why do you need television so much?

PATRICIA BELDE: Well, mainly because we can't afford to, you know -- I mean, we spent a lot of money during that time that we didn't watch TV, and we just...

MOYERS: Doing what?

PATRICIA BELDE: Well, going to movies, going out to eat, just, you know, little things, and everything costs money. So I think it cost us a lot not to watch TV, and I like to just relax and watch it when I want to. I'm not saying that I'm a, you know, TV addict, but I enjoy it when I can watch it.

MOYERS: And it does provide an entertainment service to you.

PATRICIA BELDE: Oh, yes; at certain times of the day, yes.

MOYERS: Clyde Mobley, what do you feel is the most lasting result of the experiment?

CLYDE MOBLEY: Well, the most lasting result, I think, is on me. I -- like I said, I became more aware of my children and the fact that I was shutting them out. I do work a lot of hours, and when I am home there's not an awful lot of time that I have to spend with them. So it's not only in just playing chess or games with my nine-year-old, but my three-year-old. It's important, I think, at this point in his life that I spend more time to mold and create him rather than have him patterned after my nine-year-old or the neighbor kids.

MOYERS: Or the television set.

CLYDE MOBLEY: Or the television set, right.

MOYERS: Gary Kraft, during the broadcast you said, "I've got to talk to the kids more, and the wife." Are you doing that now?

GARY KRAFT: Yeah. We talk and stuff, and talk things out more than what we used to.

MOYERS: More than before the experiment.

GARY KRAFT: Yeah; before I'd just say, "Leave me alone," you know, "I'm relaxing." Now -- now we gotta talk it out 'cause they won't let me relax, 'cause they know how it was when the TV was off.

MOYERS: You mean when the experiment ended and television came on again, you didn't resume the habit of flopping down on the couch.

GARY KRAFT: Oh, I still -- well, no, I sit in a chair more now, I don't flop on the couch like I used to.

MOYERS: You said that turning off the television set was the best thing that ever happened to your family. Do you feel that way now?

GARY KRAFT: Oh, yeah. I would do it again. It's kind of a hassle

even having it around, actually, but it's nice to have it there.

MOYERS: Why?

GARY KRAFT: It's kind of like a crutch. You know, like if something doesn't go right, if something goes wrong, you can come home and just sit down and just watch the television and kind of blank everything else out, you know; you don't -- you can forget about your problems.

MOYERS: You don't watch it as much as you acknowledge its presence.

GARY KRAFT: Right. We don't watch it as much, but we still use it like a radio, like we did before.

MOYERS: What do you think are the lasting effects on you and your family of the experiment?

GARY KRAFT: The lasting effects are I've got to help the kids more with their homework now. I never used to -- if they goofed up with their homework I'd just send them to their mother; well, now I've got to sit down with them. They'll corner me, they won't let me alone until I do it, you know, 'cause I did it when the TV wasn't on. And just sitting down and talking to them. If I've got a problem with something, me and my wife talk about it more now than what we used to. You know, like if I'd come home and I was grouchy, and she'd say, "What's the matter," I'd just say, "Never mind, leave me alone, give me a cup of coffee," I'd go in and lay down on the couch, drink my coffee, smoke my cigarette and watch television. Ten-thirty I'd get up and go to bed and that'd be it. The next day everything'd be fine, but it never is fine. Now we talk about it as soon as I get home, you know, if something ain't right. TV can be a sickness, but you gotta cure it yourself.

MOYERS: One of my teachers in Texas warned his classes, "Something gets everybody. Be careful what gets you." Television seems to have us. There is no convincing evidence yet that it has made us less an energetic or innovative people; but all those hours spent with television are hours not spent with conversation, community life, hobbies, political chores, play, children, or neighbors. At the Moyers household we decided that television has a place. But only after first things first and only as a family affair. I confess, it's an uneasy peace, because entertainment today has achieved the status of a right. And television is always beating on our consciousness trying to get in. Once I thought the most important political statement we could make about television was to turn it off. But television can instruct, inform and inspire as well as distract, distort and demean. And turning it off rejects the good with the bad. My family wants its voice added to the summons for quality, and I urge you to speak up, too, in every way possible. This marvelous medium, with all its potential for laughter and light, is worth fighting for. Or in matters of popular culture, we and our children will become strangers to excellence. I'm Bill Moyers. Good night.

(Closing credits over distortions of program and commercial segments.)