

- **Dr. Sara Feldman-Schorrig's Sexual Harassment Pages** <<http://pw2.netcom.com/%7Eeschorrig/psych.html>> A psychologist provides information designed to help judges, juries, and the general public distinguish between valid and grossly exaggerated or fabricated sexual harassment claims. She offers a list of links on recent sexual harassment cases, links to her reviews on plays and movies about harassment, and an extensive section called diverse opinions that offers commentary by men and women on harassment issues.
- **Defining Sexual Harassment** <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/law/jan-june98/harassment_4-22a.html> This transcript of a *PBS Online News Hour* report discusses a sexual harassment case involving a female employee of Burlington Industries and provides links to other *Online News Hour* sexual harassment reports, such as harassment in the U.S. army, same-sex harassment, and a debate on the terms of sexual harassment.
- **Sexual Assault Information Page** <<http://www.cs.utk.edu/~bartley/index/sexualharassment>> The Sexual Assault Information Page provides links to information concerning acquaintance rape, child sexual abuse/assault, incest, rape, ritual abuse, sexual assault, and sexual harassment, as well as links to harassment resources at many universities throughout Canada and the United States.
- **Sexual Harassment: It's Not Academic** <<http://165.224.220.66/offices/OCR/ocrshpam.html>> This pamphlet from the Office for Civil Rights articulates different types of sexual harassment situations that can occur in a school environment and offers ways for school officials to combat it.
- **The A-Team** <<http://www.a-team.org>> Comprised of lawyers, trial consultants, psychologists, and medical doctors, the A-Team is an organization whose mission is to help those wrongly accused of child abuse, domestic violence, date rape, sexual harassment, and other gender crimes. Some of their links include articles on science and the law, what to do if you've been falsely accused, and opinions on men's organizations.

Sex and Violence in Popular Culture

The ongoing controversy about explicit sex and violence in movies, television, and rap music has surfaced again with particular urgency. A 1995 *New York Times* article found that "nine out of ten of those polled could think of something bad to say about popular culture, with a large proportion mentioning too much sex, violence, and vulgar language."¹ The reasons for the renewed attacks are not hard to find. Crime and sexual activity among the young have energized the search for a cause, and popular culture is a perennial target. But the extraordinary accessibility of this culture raises new alarms. Never has commercial entertainment been so widely and easily available to the young, the population thought to be most susceptible to its influence.

The debate begins with claims about the nature and extent of that influence. Are some forms of popular entertainment necessarily dangerous and immoral? How much are viewers affected by continued exposure to depictions of explicit sex and violence? Researchers have argued the point for years, but today a majority consensus believes that long-term viewing does, in fact, alter the behavior of certain audiences. In recent years what appear to be copycat crimes have followed the showing of particularly violent films. Experts also debate the relative effects of fictional and real-life images: Which are more corrupting — the graphic creations in movies or the daily reports of real-life horrors in the news?

Not surprisingly, even where agreement exists on the nature of the problem, there is disagreement about solutions. However

¹ Elizabeth Kolbert, "Americans Despair of Popular Culture," *New York Times*, August 20, 1995, sec. II, p. 1.

strongly some critics feel about the dangers of exposure, they argue that the dangers of government censorship may, in the long run, be greater. But if government intervention is rejected, can other solutions — a rating system for television shows and music albums, a V-chip in the TV set allowing parents to block undesirable programs, respect by producers for the so-called family hour, and above all, closer monitoring by parents — guarantee that young people will be insulated from exposure to sex and violence in the media? Most Americans are not optimistic. The *New York Times* poll shows that 63 percent of those questioned believe that ratings alone, for example, will not “keep children from seeing or listening to inappropriate material.”

Of course, popular culture is not the only source of exposure. Movies, television, and music reflect the activities, tastes, fantasies, and prejudices of a larger society. Reducing the amount of sex and violence in the media is certainly easier than reforming a whole society. Still, the question remains: To what extent can any reform in popular entertainment successfully address the problems of teenage crime and sexual activity?

Sex, Violence, and Videotape

IRVING KRISTOL

On March 31, Britain experienced an unexpected cultural shock. That was when Professor Elizabeth Newson, head of the child development unit at Nottingham University, issued a report on violence-rich videos (known in the United Kingdom as “video nasties”) and their effect on children. The report was signed by twenty-five psychologists and pediatricians, all known to be of the liberal persuasion. Its gist is summed up by the following quotations:

“Many of us hold our liberal ideals of freedom of expression dear, but now begin to feel that we were naive in our failure to predict the extent of damaging material and its all-too-free availability to children.”

It then went on: “By restricting such material from home viewing, society must take on a necessary responsibility in protecting children from this, as from other forms of child abuse.”

A storm of controversy ensued, which the American press largely ignored. A Labour member of Parliament introduced legislation to limit the availability of such “video nasties.” The movie in-

dustry was naturally outraged, since so much of their profits come from the subsequent sale of videotapes, and they cried “Censorship!” — which, of course, is what was being advocated. More surprising was the reaction of the Tory Home Minister, Michael Howard, who turned out to be “wet” (we would say “soft”) on this whole issue. He was very worried about all those households without children, whose freedom to watch “video nasties” would be circumscribed.

Both True and False

And then, inevitably, there were the unreconstructed liberal academics, who kept insisting that no one had ever proved a causal relation between TV violence and aggressive behavior by the young. This was both true and false. It was true in the sense that such clear-cut, causal relations are beyond the reach of social science — there are simply too many other factors that influence youthful behavior. It was false because there is an abundance of circumstantial evidence that points to the existence of such a relation — circumstantial evidence so strong as to raise no reasonable doubt in the minds of ordinary people, and of parents especially.

In the Spring 1993 issue of *The Public Interest*, Brandon Centerwall, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Washington, summarizes much of this circumstantial evidence. He focuses on research findings on the effect of television when it was introduced to rural, isolated communities in Canada and when English-language TV came to South Africa in 1975, having previously been banned by the Afrikaans-speaking government. In all such instances there was a spectacular increase in violent crime, most especially among the young.

Professor Centerwall also notes that when TV was introduced in the United States after World War II, the homicide rate among whites, who were the first to buy sets, began to rise, while the black homicide rate didn't show any such increase until four years later.

Statistical studies of the relation between youthful aggressiveness and TV can be deceptive, Professor Centerwall explains, if they focus on the overall, average response — which, indeed, seems weak. But aggressive impulses, like most human phenomena, are distributed along a bell-shaped curve, and it is at the margin where the significant effect is to be observed: “It is an intrinsic property of such ‘bell curve’ distributions that small changes in the average imply major changes at the extremes. Thus, if an exposure to television causes 8 percent of the population to shift from below-average aggression to above-average aggression, it follows that the homicide rate will double.”

Professor Centerwall concludes that “the evidence indicates that if, hypothetically, television technology had never been

developed, there would today be 10,000 fewer homicides each year in the United States, 70,000 fewer rapes, and 700,000 fewer injurious assaults. Violent crime would be half what it is."

So the evidence for some kind of controls over television (and tapes) is strong enough to provoke popular and political concern. It is certainly true that any such controls will involve some limitations on the freedom of adults to enjoy the kind of entertainment they might prefer. But modest limits on adult liberties ought to be perfectly acceptable if they prevent tens of thousands of our children from growing up into criminal adults. And it is the children we should be focusing on. The violence-prone adults, especially at the pathological fringe, are beyond our reach and, in most cases, beyond all possibility of redemption. It is the young people — especially those who have not yet reached adolescence — who are most affected by television, as all the studies agree.

Something will surely be done about this problem, despite the American Civil Liberties Union and other extreme interpreters of the First Amendment. In Britain, Mr. Howard has reluctantly agreed to propose appropriate legislation, propelled by a powerful consensus among Tories, the Labour Party, the Liberal Party, the media, and popular opinion. There is little doubt that, in the United States, a momentum for similar action is building up. How politicians will respond to it remains to be seen. But the idea that our popular culture can have malignant effects upon our young, and upon our society in its entirety, seems to be an idea whose coming cannot be long delayed.

And if there is a connection between our popular culture and the plague of criminal violence we are suffering from, then is it not reasonable to think that there may also be such a connection between our popular culture and the plagues of sexual promiscuity among teenagers, teenage illegitimacy, and, yes, the increasing number of rapes committed by teenagers? Here again, we don't really need social science to confirm what common sense and common observations tell us to be the case.

Can anyone really believe that soft porn in our Hollywood movies, hard porn in our cable movies, and violent porn in our "rap" music is without effect? Here, the average, overall impact is quite discernible to the naked eye. And at the margin, the effects, in terms most notably of illegitimacy and rape, are shockingly visible.

Clearly, something must be done to lower the temperature of the sexual climate in which we live. And whatever is done, it will of necessity limit the freedoms of adults to indulge their sexual fantasies. Most of us will not mourn the loss of such freedoms, but — as with violence — there are those who will loudly protest any such rude "violation" of our "civil liberties."

Censorship, we will be told, is immoral — though no moral code of any society that has ever existed has ever deemed it so. Besides,

we will be told further, it is ineffectual. Well, those of us who have lived in a slightly chillier sexual climate have survived as witnesses to the fact that it is not so ineffectual after all. True, censorship makes a difference only at the margin. But, and this cannot be repeated too often, it is at the margin where the crucial action is. This is as true for sexual activity as it is for economic activity.

Invitation to Promiscuity

The most common (hypocritical and politically cowardly) response to the problems generated by our overheated sexual climate is that these are something parents have to do something about. But parents cannot do it on their own. They never have been able to do it on their own. Parents have always relied on churches, schools, and the popular culture for help. Today, no such reliance is possible.

The mainline churches, still intoxicated with a vulgarized Freudianism, have discovered that sex is good and repression is bad. The schools hand out condoms to adolescents while timidly suggesting that they ought to limit their activity to "responsible sex." This is nothing less than an official invitation to promiscuity. The culture, meanwhile, is busy making as much money as possible out of as much sex as possible.

No, the government, at various levels, will have to step in to help the parents. And it will do so despite the anticipated cries of outrage from libertarians, liberal or conservative. The question, and it is no easy question, is just how to intervene. That is the issue that is now up for serious discussion.

The Myth of Television Depravity

MICHAEL HIRSCHORN

A nationwide *New York Times* poll two Sundays ago reported that 21 percent of those surveyed blame television for teenage violence, compared with only 8 percent who believe the breakdown of the family is the cause of the trouble. To solve this putative problem, the Senate has passed legislation requiring violence-screening technology in all new television sets, and conservatives would like to see prime time declared a violence-and-sex free zone. As best I can tell, the effect of this radical change would be about . . . zero.

Michael Hirschorn was the executive editor of *New York* magazine when the essay from which this excerpt is taken appeared on September 4, 1995.

is remarkable, in fact, how consistently prime-time television dwells on the very issues the conservatives complain are being ignored by Hollywood: how to raise children, how to keep families together, what to do with aging parents, how to construct a meaningful life when money is short and both parents must work. Have you seen MTV recently? The network considered literally satanic by many conservatives is now almost completely devoid of the T&A that made it so controversial a few years ago.

Watched as a block, prime-time TV shows yield a remarkably consistent message: They are dramas and comedies of coping, far from the merry subversion of families that top conservative media critic L. Brent Bozell III says is "all the rage" now. The harried Roseanne and husband Dan making do with little money and a touchingly infirm grasp on how best to be parents; Grace from *Grace under Fire* finding her way as a single mother; the cops on *NYPD Blue* (those butt shots are pretty much a thing of the past) earnestly dramatizing the conflicting demands of family and work, competence and ethics — these are among the most popular shows in America, and to accuse television of subverting family values without considering this mainstream programming means someone is either not doing his homework or just doesn't care.

Consider *ER*, the runaway hit of last season. In a single episode the following happens: overworked boyfriend worrying how to show a girlfriend's son that he cares; two doctors debating whether a patient should be given an expensive medical test; a brother and sister, amid many tears, telling their mother she must go into an old-age home; a doctor telling a poor mom without health insurance that he'll treat the daughter anyway; an illegal immigrant worrying about being treated because she fears being deported; the poor mom watching her daughter almost die; a married fortyish woman desperately trying to get pregnant; a character taking in her troubled pregnant sister. At show's end, the black actor Eriq La Salle, playing the son who has put his mother in a home, is shown massaging her feet and looking over the family photo album. The old lady tells her doctor son: "Your talent is God's gift to you. What you do with it is your gift back to God." Could there be a purer family-values moment?

Family values make their way even into the single-New Yorker sitcoms. On *Seinfeld*, where much of the comic friction comes from the fact that every character on the show is venal, solipsistic Jerry helps his grandmother open a bottle of ketchup, then helps his mother get back \$50 his bad uncle Leo has owed her for fifty years.

Ellen, a kind of distaff *Seinfeld*, opens with a fur protest that's played for anti-PETA ridicule. "Everyone here is passionately dedicated to the cause," Ellen says. "Could one of you introduce me to the girl without the bra?" counters the Arye Gross character. Ba-dum

dum. One guy has made sandwiches for the protest — "lettuce, tomato, and seal pup. I call 'em my club sandwiches." The self-righteous organizer slaps him. He retorts: "There's one thing I love about you political extremists. It's your ability to laugh at yourselves." Ellen gets arrested at the protest. Her friend never comes to help her because, she says, "I was on my way to the fur department, then I saw these great little shoes." After several wacky plot twists, thirtysomething Ellen ends up in the custody of her silly suburban parents, and there are jokes about eating your vegetables. It's a nightmare, and Ellen tries to sneak out with her parents' car. They call the police and have her arrested again. The judge is astonished. "You called the police on your own daughter?" he asks. Ellen stands up for her parents, and this time they all end up in jail. It turns out to be something of a bonding experience: They may quarrel, but they're all willing to go to jail for one another. Out the next day, they drive home singing Steppenwolf's "Born to be Wild" together.

On *Mad about You*, a popular (but not top ten) show about a prosperous, happily married Manhattan couple, Jamie learns that her mom was briefly on television and that her aunt Lolly consorted with a number of famous fifties comedians up in the Catskills. On *Grace under Fire*, Grace's father-in-law has a heart-bypass operation, and Grace must get the whole family, including her terrifying mother-in-law, through the ordeal. She promises Dad-in-law that if he dies, she'll let Mom-in-law live with her — even though Grace is no longer married to his son. Son and daughter-in-law exchange tearful professions of love. Meanwhile, the couple who are Grace's best friends decide whether to keep trying to have a baby or to adopt.

Is there a more wholesome group of kids than the cute boys and girls on *Friends*? They are all white and hetero; dress well; have nice haircuts; work hard; and rarely smoke, drink, or have sex. They are, as Michael Kinsley once said of Al Gore, an old person's idea of young people.

Dole Depravity Score

Casual sex — None; discussion on Roseanne of what to do about the fifteen-year-old D.I., whose trouble in school is caused, it turns out, by the fact that he gets spontaneous erections. Gratuitous violence — No violence of any sort. Mainstreaming deviancy — None; except for the singles on *Seinfeld* and *Friends*, virtually everyone else on the top ten is either conspicuously married or in a family (and Disney hasn't even taken over ABC yet). Slurs against religion — None. E.T. syndrome (subverting parental authority) — None. Kids do what Mama and Papa say in *Grace*, *Roseanne*, and *Home Improvement*, where zestily insensitive dad Tim Allen is clearly hipper than his three generi-boys. Attacks on the free-enterprise system — The

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Roseanne episode ends postmodernistically with her talking to an actor playing the network censor, proposing a number of names for erections ("raising the drawbridge," "standing up for democracy") while the increasingly exasperated network official keeps repeating "No." She finally points to a camera, revealing to him that all her lines in fact are already being broadcast. He looks over his shoulder in shock and says, "Is that on? Aw, shit!" The expletive is beeped out and his mouth is pixelated. It's the funniest moment on prime time. *would girls ask about erections?*

would kids wonder why the dad would be funny?

TV Isn't Violent Enough

MIKE OPPENHEIM

Caught in an ambush, there's no way our hero (Matt Dillon, Elliot Ness, Kojak, Hoss Cartwright . . .) can survive. Yet, visibly weakening, he blazes away, and we suspect he'll pull through. Sure enough, he's around for the final clinch wearing the traditional badge of the honorable but harmless wound: a sling.

As a teenager with a budding interest in medicine, I knew this was nonsense and loved to annoy my friends with the facts.

"Aw, the poor guy! He's crippled for life!"

"What do you mean? He's just shot in the shoulder."

"That's the worst place! Vital structures everywhere. There's the blood supply for the arm: axillary artery and vein. One nick and you can bleed to death on the spot."

"So he was lucky."

"OK. If it missed the vessels it hit the brachial plexus: the nerve supply. Paralyzes his arm for life. He's gotta turn in his badge and apply for disability."

"So he's really lucky."

"OK. Missed the artery. Missed the vein. Missed the nerves. Just went through the shoulder joint. But joint cartilage doesn't heal so well. A little crease in the bone leaves him with traumatic arthritis. He's in pain the rest of his life—stuffing himself with codeine, spending his money on acupuncture and chiropractors, losing all his friends because he complains all the time. . . . Don't ever get shot in the shoulder. It's the end. . . ."

Today, as a physician, I still sneer at TV violence, though not because of any moral objection. I enjoy a well-done scene of gore and slaughter as well as the next viewer, but "well-done" is something I

rarely see on a typical evening in spite of the plethora of shootings, stabbings, muggings, and brawls. Who can believe the stuff they show? Anyone who remembers high-school biology knows the human body can't possibly respond to violent trauma as it's usually portrayed.

On a recent episode, Matt Houston is at a fancy resort, on the trail of a vicious killer who specializes in knifing beautiful women in their hotel rooms in broad daylight. The only actual murder sequence was in the best of taste: all the action off screen, the flash of a knife, moans on the sound track.

In two scenes, Matt arrives only minutes too late. The hotel is alerted, but the killer's identity remains a mystery. Absurd! It's impossible to kill someone instantly with a knife thrust—or even render him unconscious. Several minutes of strenuous work are required to cut enough blood vessels so the victim bleeds to death. Tony Perkins in *Psycho* gave an accurate, though abbreviated, demonstration. Furthermore, anyone who has watched an inexperienced farmhand slaughter a pig knows that the resulting mess must be seen to be believed.

If consulted by Matt Houston, I'd have suggested a clue: "Keep your eyes peeled for someone panting with exhaustion and covered with blood. That might be your man."

Many Americans were puzzled at the films of the assassination attempt on President Reagan. Shot in the chest, he did not behave as TV had taught us to expect ("clutch chest, stagger backward, collapse"). Only after he complained of a vague chest pain and was taken to the hospital did he discover his wound. Many viewers assumed Mr. Reagan is some sort of superman. In fact, there was nothing extraordinary about his behavior. A pistol is certainly a deadly weapon, but not predictably so. Unlike a knife wound, one bullet can kill instantly—provided it strikes a small area at the base of the brain. Otherwise, it's no different: a matter of ripping and tearing enough tissue to cause death by bleeding. Professional gangland killers understand the problem. They prefer a shotgun at close range.

The trail of quiet corpses left by TV's good guys, bad guys, and assorted ill-tempered gun owners is ridiculously unreal. Firearms reliably produce pain, bleeding, and permanent, crippling injury (witness Mr. Reagan's press secretary, James Brady: shot directly in the brain but very much alive). For a quick, clean death, they are no match for Luke Skywalker's light saber.

No less unreal is what happens when T. J. Hooker, Magnum, or a Simon brother meets a bad guy in manly combat. Pow! Our hero's fist crashes into the villain's head. Villain reels backward, tipping over chairs and lamps, finally falling to the floor, unconscious.

Handshakes all around. . . . Sheer fantasy! After hitting the villain, our hero would shake no one's hand. He'd be too busy waving his own about wildly, screaming with the pain of a shattered fifth metacarpal (the bone behind the fifth knuckle), an injury so predictable it's called the "boxer's fracture." The human fist is far more delicate than the human skull. In any contest between the two, the fist will lose.

The human skull is tougher than TV writers give it credit. Clunked with a blunt object, such as the traditional pistol butt, most victims would not fall conveniently unconscious for a few minutes. More likely, they'd suffer a nasty scalp laceration, be stunned for a second or two, then be extremely upset. I've sewn up many. A real-life, no-nonsense criminal with a blackjack (a piece of iron weighing several pounds) has a much better success rate. The result is a large number of deaths and permanent damage from brain hemorrhage.

Critics of TV violence claim it teaches children sadism and cruelty. I honestly don't know whether or not TV violence is harmful, but if so the critics have it backward. Children can't learn to enjoy cruelty from the neat, sanitized mayhem on the average series. There isn't any! What they learn is far more malignant: that guns or fists are clean, efficient, exciting ways to deal with a difficult situation. Bang! — you're dead! Bop! — you're unconscious (temporarily)!

"Truth-in-advertising" laws eliminated many absurd commercial claims. I often daydream about what would happen if we had "truth in violence" — if every show had to pass scrutiny by a board of doctors who had no power to censor but could insist that any action scene have at least a vague resemblance to medical reality ("Stop the projector! . . . You have your hero waylaid by three Mafia thugs who beat him brutally before he struggles free. The next day he shows up with this cute little Band-aid over his eyebrow. We can't pass that. You'll have to add one eye swollen shut, three missing front teeth, at least twenty stitches over the lips and eyes, and a wired jaw. Got that? Roll 'em . . .").

Seriously, real-life violence is dirty, painful, bloody, disgusting. It causes mutilation and misery, and it doesn't solve problems. It makes them worse. If we're genuinely interested in protecting our children, we should stop campaigning to "clean up" TV violence. It's already too antiseptic. Ironically, the problem with TV violence is: It's not violent enough.

TV Causes Violence? Try Again

IRA GLASSER

To the Editor:

In "Look to Television's Role in Youth Violence" (letter, June 1), Paul Kettl, a professor of psychiatry, cites research that shows a statistical correlation between the rise in the rate of homicide in the United States and the onset of television. He cites his own research, which shows, he states, that "Children who watch more than two hours of television a day are especially at risk" of having "behavioral problems."

He doesn't say if this finding applies to all children or what else may be going on in the lives of those children with behavioral problems. Nor does he say whether the research implicates all television watching or only certain programs or perhaps the news. Although never said explicitly, the implication is there to draw: Watching too much television may turn your kid into a killer. And indeed your headline draws that conclusion.

But such conclusions misuse and misunderstand the nature of such research. The kind of research Dr. Kettl cites is called epidemiological research. This consists of observing groups of people and then showing statistical associations between their life-styles or behavior and what happens to them later. Scientists know, as the public often does not, that such epidemiological research tells us nothing about cause and effect.

For example, some early epidemiologic research showed a statistical association between heart disease and the number of television sets a person owned. But this did not mean that owning more than one television set caused heart disease. Clinical trials demonstrated that cholesterol, but not the number of television sets one owned, was causally related.

Similarly, one could show that the rate at which grass grows correlates with the number of drownings. As one increases, so does the other. But that's because both are caused by warm weather. One would not seek to reduce the number of drownings by buying lawn mowers.

Yet that is precisely what is being suggested to curb violence. "Television is the cause," many people will falsely conclude after reading about such statistical associations.

Television? Not drug prohibition, or the easy availability of guns or the loss of hope or relentless deprivation? No, we don't want to address those intractable problems. But dealing with television is easy. We can censor it. We can threaten to pass laws regulating when certain programs can be shown. We can decide, as a Florida hotel chain did for its rooms, to block reception of local television news that covers crime zealously (news article, June 3).

Finding scapegoats and diverting our attention from real and difficult problems is not new. But as we are not so gullible as to believe that we can reduce drownings by cutting the grass or have healthier hearts by limiting ourselves to owning one television, let us also not leap to the conclusion that watching too much television makes people killers. No studies show such a cause-and-effect connection. Homicide is a tad more complicated.

Ira Glasser

Teen Violence Spawned by Guns and Cultural Rot

ALBERT R. HUNT

There has been a predictable political response after the rash of tragic killings by children at schools from Springfield, Oregon, to Jonesboro, Arkansas.

Liberals cry for tougher gun-control laws: If only these deranged youths didn't have easy access to guns, many of these atrocities wouldn't happen, they say.

Conservatives place much of the blame on popular culture; Hollywood and television are overwhelmingly violence-oriented, the argument goes, and the music industry is a real villain for pandering to the worst instincts of kids by glorifying sexual obscenities and bestial brutality.

Both arguments are exaggerations. Some of these teenage perpetrators don't fit into any stereotypes. *Slate*, Microsoft's always interesting online magazine, noted that Kip Kinkel, the teenager in Springfield who killed his parents and two schoolmates, came from a good family that tried to teach him how to use guns safely and didn't give him easy access. His only known entertainment vices were cartoons. Others are simply mentally unbalanced kids, a type that has

always existed: Luke Woodham, the seventeen-year-old Pearl, Mississippi, kid who killed his mother and a classmate, testified that demons instructed him to do it.

More importantly, however, both sides also make important points. There is room for common cause, say some diverse but very smart people who worry a lot about violence: politicians like Senator Joe Lieberman (Democrat, Connecticut) and Bill Bennett, a prominent Republican, and scholars like criminologist John Dilullo and psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint.

"The music pounds and pounds with messages of violence and degradation of women; if you talk to people on the streets, they will tell you this is public-enemy number one," says Mr. Dilullo of Princeton University. But he also suggests that for any antiviolence program to work, "You have to make it impossible for kids to get easy access to guns."

Similarly, Dr. Poussaint, who teaches at Harvard, notes that easy access to guns "makes the problems much worse. Gun defenders say you could still murder with a knife but one kid I was interviewing pointed out that you can't have a drive-by shooting with a knife." But he also believes the culture's romanticization of violence — in movies, television, and music — "certainly contributes to a general disregard for authority; children see or hear this over and over again and they become a little bit more numb to violence."

Messrs. Lieberman and Bennett have teamed up to try to focus public scrutiny on what they term "cultural rot," ranging from gangster-rap music to Jerry Springer's television show. They have embarrassed some major corporations, like Seagram's, by spotlighting how they reap big profits from these obscenities. Mr. Bennett, the conservative icon, says, "It's just dumb not to recognize how dangerous it is to so easily put guns in kids' hands."

Of course there are larger societal problems. But while violence in general has declined over the last several years, it is rising among teenagers, and certainly any short-term efforts to address this should focus on both guns and popular culture.

Movie actor Charlton Heston, the new president of the National Rifle Association, insisted this week that the school shootings were "a child issue, not a gun issue." Does Mr. Heston think that the people killed in Jonesboro would have been just as vulnerable to a bow and arrow? Or does he believe the four-year-old in Greensboro, North Carolina, who shot and killed his six-year-old neighbor in April is a "child problem"?

Next week the most important antigun legislation of this session will be offered by Democratic Representative Carolyn McCarthy, a suburban New York nurse and mother who got into politics after her husband was killed by a crazed gunman on a commuter train. The measure would crack down on dealers who sell to kids, require

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manufacturers to make safer guns, and penalize adults who allow children easy access to a firearm that is then used to kill or injure someone.

The gun lobby, with its huge campaign contributions, is convinced Republican congressional leaders will thwart this initiative. They probably are right, but some politicians may pay a price, as did Ms. McCarthy's NRA-backing predecessor. Polls indicate strong support for such measures.

There's also a growing public backlash against the plethora of violent movies, television, video games, and music. David Walsh, director of the National Institute on Media and the Family, notes that it's estimated the average American kid has seen 200,000 acts of violence on television by the time he or she graduates from high school. Try to take your kids to a movie that is devoid of violence or sex. Or just look at some of the graphic violence in the best-selling video games.

Nothing is more offensive than some of the music. After Mitchell Johnson, thirteen, and Drew Golden, eleven, killed five people and injured ten at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, one of the teachers conducted an exhaustive survey. The results showed that Mitchell Johnson was a fanatical devotee of two gangster-rap artists, the late Tupac Shakur and Bone Thugs & Harmony. Both are full of vulgarity, degrading to women, and advocate blasting people with guns. In the three-school survey, a majority of kids listened to these groups and said their parents didn't have a clue as to their lyrics.

Bill Bennett and Joe Lieberman know there are clear First Amendment issues here and wisely don't advocate any bans. But they want to embarrass those who produce this trash. "The weapon of choice for our side is shame," says Mr. Bennett. "We have to be ashamed instead of this anything goes crap."

Defenders of this rot insist there is no reliable data that links violence to culture. That flies in the face of common sense. If Frank Sinatra songs make people feel romantic and John Phillips Sousa makes people feel patriotic, then the obscene violence of shock rocker Marilyn Manson or gangsta-rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg might encourage impressionable and troubled teenagers to feel perverted or violent.

Violence Never Solved Anything, but It's Entertaining

HOLMAN W. JENKINS JR.

The stock market is jittery. Poverty stares us in the face. At least we still have violent programming on TV, but some would take even this solace away from us.

A debatable sociological wisdom crept into the law with the 1996 Telecommunications Act. Children who watch violent television are at risk of becoming aggressive and violent themselves. Adults who steep themselves in the local news develop an exaggerated fear of the world, the so-called mean world syndrome.

As one of the many scholars plying this vein has noted approvingly, "policymakers are taking the position that television programmers should provide warnings to make viewers aware of the risks of watching certain shows." Because we are programmed by TV, we need the V-chip to reprogram our programmer.

Certainly television has wrought changes in the world, but before asking how it has reshaped human nature, how has human nature shaped television?

Since it became popular to denounce the "wasteland" in the early 1950s, surprisingly few have asked basic questions about the supply and demand for violent programming. The standard critique assumes supply without demand: The audience is dumbly trapped before the show, which is calculated to lift them to a higher state of "arousal" in order to become more receptive to the messages of advertisers.

Now we have the benefit of an economist looking at all this, James Hamilton of Duke, whose new book is *Channeling Violence: The Economic Market for Violent Television Programming*.

It turns out that broadcasters are neither as dumb nor as smart as the standard critique paints them. Pollsters constantly reiterate that Americans find TV "too violent," but combing more finely through the data one finds a substantial minority of dissenters, the people who actually watch violent TV. In Nielsen speak, these are males age eighteen to thirty-four, females age eighteen to thirty-four, and then males age thirty-five to forty-nine. There is demand after all, and it comes from young adults of both sexes.

That broadcasters are prepared to oblige them is no mystery. These viewers are advertisers' most valuable and elusive

demographic group. Young adults are out building lives and careers. They are just developing the brand attachments that will last a lifetime but are seldom to be found in front of a TV where marketers can reach them.

Advertisers pay richly to reach youthful consumers. Ted Turner, who can often be heard denouncing television violence from a podium, has given us Saturday Night Nitro on TNT — whole evenings of delicious violence aimed at young adult viewers. Even when competing against *Monday Night Football*, 65 percent of the movies on TNT contained violence. The rest of the year 92 percent contained violence.

Mr. Hamilton says broadcasters don't aim their violence at younger children, and advertisers don't reward broadcasters for young children in the audience. Their viewing is an "externality," like pollution. But someone might have said the same about adult viewers back when the Big Three networks forced everyone to sit through the same programs.

Thanks to technology and the proliferation of channels, audiences have been freed to go their separate ways. Cable, especially premium cable, has become the violence medium, while violence has dropped steeply on the major networks.

The action-adventure genre has all but disappeared, with the sorry exceptions of CBS's *Walker, Texas Ranger* and ABC's new *Vengeance Unlimited*. The networks base their survival hopes on compiling the last large audiences in television-land, so they fill up our evenings with newsmagazines and sitcoms — shows that attract young people without driving other viewers out of the room.

Why does the younger demographic have a special taste for violent programming? We can at least speculate.

Dolf Zillmann, a psychologist at the University of Alabama, has been one of the few paying attention to the viewer's perspective. Among his several contributions, he has shown that teenagers swarm to horror flicks so the boys can demonstrate their manly unflappability and girls can demonstrate their vulnerable desirability. Boys and girls who fulfill these roles are rated as more sexually desirable by their peers.

Young people, as they set about making room for themselves in the world, are especially full of anxiety about whether good guys or bad guys triumph in the end. Nor are they burdened unduly by a sense of proportionality. Mr. Zillmann points to a program in which a lawyer cheats an old lady out of her savings. The audience's sense of poetic justice is no less fulfilled by "seeing him burn and die in a crash" than seeing him receive a fine and disbarment.

Mr. Hamilton, the economist, supplies buttressing evidence when you consider that the young are less discriminating in matters of taste. Unsurprisingly, the more stars *TV Guide* awards a film, the

less violent the film is likely to be. Violent shows are often bad shows. A lousy producer working with a bunch of mediocre writers and actors is going to resort to cloddish violence to dramatize what would otherwise have to be rendered by more literary means.

Criminologists have long noted that homicide becomes rarer among elite social groups as those groups make greater use of lawyers. TV seems to be evolving in the same direction. Lawyer shows are proliferating on the networks. Boilerplate courtroom drama may be replacing shoot-em-up as the preferred formula for resolving conflict.

Those who worry about television may sincerely dream of society becoming a nicer, less competitive place. Children do sometimes mow down their school chums, acting out a scene they may have seen on cable. But claiming we have to reprogram the media watched by 99.99 percent of us to influence the behavior of 0.01 percent is to be rendered helpless by a much smaller problem.

Only sick minds are interested in plotless violence. A British censor once explained his methods by saying he made certain cuts "because we were worried about a very few people who might be vulnerable to being influenced by playing one particular scene in that video repeatedly in their home."

These "very few people" surely exist in the audience, but making television the issue only avoids the question of how we could be doing a better job of identifying the homicidally mentally ill before someone gets hurt.

A Desensitized Society Drenched in Sleaze

JEFF JACOBY

I was seventeen years old when I first saw an X-rated movie. It was Thanksgiving in Washington, D.C. My college dorm had all but emptied out for the holiday weekend. With no classes, no tests, and nobody around, I decided to scratch an itch that had long been tormenting me.

I used to see these movies advertised in the old *Washington Star*, and — like any seventeen-year-old boy whose sex life is mostly theoretical — I burned with curiosity. I wondered what such films might be like, what awful, thrilling secrets they might expose.

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And so that weekend I took myself to see one. Full of anticipation, nervous and embarrassed, I walked to the Casino Royale at 14th Street and New York Avenue. At the top of a long flight of stairs, a cashier sat behind a cage. "Five dollars," he demanded — steep for my budget, especially since a ticket to the movies in the late seventies usually cost \$3.50. But I'd come this far and couldn't turn back. I paid, I entered, I watched.

For about twenty minutes. The movie, I still remember, was called *Cry for Cindy*, and what I saw on the screen I'd never seen — I'd never even imagined — before. A man and a woman, oral sex, extreme close-ups. The sheer gynecological explicitness of it jolted me. Was *this* the forbidden delight hinted at by those ads? This wasn't arousing, it was repellent. I was shocked. More than that: I was ashamed.

I literally couldn't take it. I bolted the theater and tumbled down the steps. My heart was pounding and my face was burning. I felt dirty. Guilty. I was conscience-stricken.

All that — over a dirty movie.

Well, I was an innocent at seventeen. I was naive and inexperienced, shy with girls, the product of a parochial-school education and a strict upbringing. Explicit sex — in the movies, music, my social life — was foreign to me. Coming from such an environment, who *wouldn't* recoil from *Cry for Cindy* or feel repelled by what it put up on that screen?

But here's the rub: Dirty movies don't have that effect on me anymore. I don't make a practice of seeking out skin flicks or films with explicit nudity, but in the years since I was seventeen, I've certainly seen my share. Today another sex scene is just another sex scene. Not shocking, not appalling, nothing I feel ashamed to look at. Writhing bodies on the screen? Raunchy lyrics in a song? They may entertain me or they may bore me, but one thing they no longer do is make me blush.

I've become jaded. And if a decade and a half of being exposed to this stuff can leave *me* jaded — with my background, my religious schooling, my disciplined origins — what impact does it have on kids and young adults who have never been sheltered from anything? What impact does it have on a generation growing up amid dysfunctional families, broken-down schools, and a culture of values-free secularism?

If sex- and violence-drenched entertainment can desensitize me, it can desensitize anyone. It can desensitize a whole society. It can drag us to the point where nothing is revolting. Where nothing makes us blush.

And what happens to an unblushing society? Why, everything. Central Park joggers get raped and beaten into comas. Sixth-graders sleep around. Los Angeles rioters burn down their neighborhood

and murder dozens of their neighbors. The Menendez boys blow off their parents' heads. Lorena Bobbitt mutilates her husband in his sleep. "Artists" sell photographs of crucifixes dunked in urine. Pro-life fanatics open fire on abortion clinics. Daytime TV fills up with deviants. The U.S. Naval Academy fills up with cheaters. The teen suicide rate goes through the roof.

And we get used to all of it. We don't blush.

The point isn't that moviegoers walk out of Oliver Stone's latest grotesquerie primed to kill. Or that Geto Boys' sociopathic lyrics ("Leavin' out her house, grabbed the bitch by her mouth / Drug her back in, slam her down on the couch. / Whipped out my knife, said, 'If you scream I'm cutting,' / Open her legs and . . .") cause rape. The point is that when blood and mayhem and sleazy sex drench our popular culture, we get accustomed to blood and mayhem and sleazy sex. We grow jaded. Depravity becomes more and more tolerable because less and less scandalizes us.

Of course, the entertainment industry accepts no responsibility for any of this. Time Warner and Hollywood indignantly reject the criticisms heaped on them in recent days. We don't cause society's ills, they say, we only reflect them. "If an artist wants to deal with violence or sexuality or images of darkness and horror," said film director Clive Barker, "those are legitimate subjects for artists."

They are, true. Artists have dealt with violence and sexuality and horror since time immemorial. But debauchery is not art. There is nothing ennobling about a two-hour paean to bloodlust. To suggest that Snoop Doggy Dogg's barbaric gang-rape fantasies somehow follow in the tradition of Sophocles' tragic drama, Chaucer's romantic poetry, or Solzhenitsyn's moral testimony is to suggest that there is no difference between meaning and meaninglessness.

For Hollywood and Time Warner, perhaps there no longer is. The question before the house is, what about the rest of us?

THINKING AND WRITING ABOUT SEX AND VIOLENCE IN POPULAR CULTURE

Questions for Discussion and Writing

1. Kristol defends a limited censorship of popular culture. Summarize his reasons. Would any of the writers in Chapter 15, Freedom of Speech, agree with him?
2. Hirschorn claims that prime-time TV shows reflect sound moral values. Do you agree, or do you think his examples are too selective? Can you think of popular TV shows that do not reflect sound values? If so, what do they reflect?

3. Although Oppenheim is writing about violence and Jacoby is writing about sex both their claims are based on a shared assumption. Explain it, and decide whether it is valid.
4. What evidence do you find in these essays that establishes a cause-and-effect relationship between TV violence and youthful crime? What fallacy does Glasser see in the arguments attempting to prove a relationship?
5. What examples of "cultural rot" does Hunt provide? Can you give more examples? Or do you think he is exaggerating?
6. Why does Jenkins think we should resist trying to "reprogram the media"? Do you agree with his explanation for teenage attraction to violent films? If not, do you have other explanations?
7. Several authors contend that TV or movie violence is not to blame for youthful crime. What causes do they suggest?
8. What ironic comment is the cartoonist making about studies of TV violence?

Topics for Research

Violence in selected TV shows: justified or unjustified?

Sex on TV: what message?

The significance of Gangsta Rap

Survey of studies on the effect of TV and movie violence

Influence of music videos and sports events on youthful behavior



TAKING THE DEBATE ONLINE

- **Legal Issues Surrounding Violence in the Media** <<http://www-honors.ucdavis.edu/html/violence/web.html>> This site, created by a University of California-Davis honors student, explores some of the legal issues surrounding media violence. It includes an interview with the director of the television crime series *Profiler*, a mock trial debate, a First Amendment handbook, media violence handouts, and more.
- **Parental Choice in Television Programming** <<http://www.fcc.gov/vchlp/legislation.html>> These excerpts of the V-chip legislation are provided by the Federal Communications Commission, an independent government agency whose mission is to encourage competition in all communications markets and to protect the public interest.
- **Profits or Prestige: Sex and Violence in Feature Films** <http://web.syr.edu/~jlmcquiv/film_sv.html> This thoroughly researched essay by James McQuivey at Syracuse University explores some of the reasons that film producers in Hollywood rely on sexual and violent content. It ends with a series of charts and graphs that try to track and analyze box office receipts, Academy Award nominations, and violent content.
- **Media Scope: Media Policy Clearinghouse** <<http://mediascope.org/mediascope/clearing.htm>> This site contains an extensive collection of resources about media, including film, television, the Internet, electronic interactive games, and music.
- **Media Watch** <<http://www.medlawatch.com/main.html>> Media Watch, an organization whose goal is to challenge abusive stereotypes and other biased images commonly found in the media, provides these links to media-related news stories, videos, and an archive of past content.
- **NCTV: National Coalition on Television Violence** <<http://www.nctv.org/NCTV%20Images/Contents.html>> The National Coalition on Television Violence provides information on blocking devices, community action, recent news briefs, and a list of links to other organizations whose mission is to end TV violence.