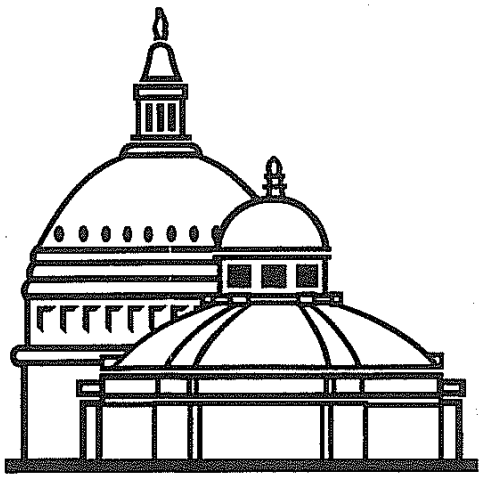

CRS Info Pack

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TELEVISION VIOLENCE
IP 476T

The continuing debate concerning the effects of television violence has recently generated a new round of congressional and public interest. Parents believe that television has glorified violence and fear that their children are receiving a message that violence is an accepted way to resolve conflict. Congress is now addressing this issue with hearings and legislation.

Legislative proposals include: requiring the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to evaluate and report on violence in TV shows; requiring that all television sets sold in the United States include a "V-chip," capable of electronically blocking all violent shows; requiring ratings of TV shows similar to the motion picture rating system; and more.

There are questions concerning implementation of many of these proposals. Who will rate the shows? If shows are rated, will the ratings apply to cable programs? Just what is a "violent" act? Is cartoon violence to be included with all other violence? If a V-chip is required, just how will it work? Does a V-chip system amount to a restriction of free speech and thus raise First Amendment issues? What will these proposals cost?

This Info Pack contains articles and CRS reports addressing the issue of violence on television.

Members of Congress who want further information on this topic may contact CRS at 7-5700. Constituents may find additional information on this topic in a local library through the use of *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, Public Affairs Information Service *Bulletin* (PAIS), and various newspaper indexes. Books on this subject may be identified through the library's catalog or the most recent edition of *Subject Guide to Books in Print.*

We hope this information will be helpful.

Congressional Reference
Division

0194

Source: *Washington Post,* February 2, 1994, pp. A1, A12.

Broadcast and Cable TV to Name Violence Monitor

By Ellen Edwards
Washington Post Staff Writer

Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.), anti-violence initiatives by cast and cable networks, sai terday that he will "resist" ai islation on the issue in the c session of Congress.

But several of Simon's leagues said they would co their own efforts to pass le tion, dashing the hopes of t dustry that its action would

Do Not Film

he initiative was indicative of al turn in our culture. . . . If get old television films and s out, you will see that smok- a very common habit, heavy ng is very common. We have ed, and in the process we changed our culture. The is starting on violence. It not mean that immediately rs are going to see any dra- change. But broadcast has ly moved significantly, and s moving also."

ion had been considering leg- n to require that television nitored by the National Insti- f Mental Health.

: cable industry went some- urther than the broadcasters yesterday in confirming plans for a violence ratings system and endorsing "viewer discretion technology," which would allow people to block certain programs.

All but one of the major cable networks that could be affected by

See VIOLENCE, A12, Col. 1

CRS Report for Congress

Violence on Television: What Can Technology Do?

Technology and Information Policy Section
Science Policy Research Division

July 27, 1993

The Congressional Research Service works exclusively for the Congress, conducting research, analyzing legislation, and providing information at the request of committees, Members, and their staffs.

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VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION: WHAT CAN TECHNOLOGY DO?

SUMMARY

In recent years, both the amount of violence on television and the statistics for violent crime have increased tremendously, and many people have begun to question whether there may be a causal link between these two facts. Numerous studies and reports have been done to determine the effect of television viewing on later violent actions, and most seem to conclude that violence on television leads to an increase in aggressive behavior.

In order to control the excessive violence on television, two possible solutions have recently been considered and discussed. Some propose the adoption of a violence rating system; others suggest the installment of technological blocking devices; and still others recommend the employment of both innovations.

A violence rating system, by assigning ratings to those shows deemed excessively violent, could help parents make informed decisions about their children's viewing. Technologically, a violence rating could be encoded into the vertical blanking interval of a television signal and then decoded by a device in the television set and written on the screen. Before a rating system is adopted, however, one must first resolve a number of questions, such as who will assign the ratings and how specific those ratings should be.

A blocking device, used either in conjunction with a rating system or by itself on a program-by-program basis, would also empower parents by allowing them to block violent shows from view on the TV screen. Just as with the rating system, however, blocking technologies raise various questions and concerns. Among them are questions of technological difficulty, First Amendment restrictions, cost, and applicability to cable and other non-broadcast delivery systems.

Interest over the years on the issue of TV violence has prompted various congressional hearings and a number of legislative initiatives. So far, the only relevant legislation to be passed was the Television Violence Act of 1989, which allows members of the television industry to come together and discuss television violence without violating the antitrust laws, and the Television Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990, which mandated the installation of technological devices in every new TV set for the purpose of closed captions for the hearing impaired. Finally, the four television networks came together on June 30, 1993, and adopted an Advance Parental Advisory Plan whereby they agreed to broadcast an advisory before the presentation of any violent programs or its promotional materials.

Congressional options include doing nothing, requiring a violence rating system to be adopted, mandating that blocking devices be installed in all televsion sets, or pursuing a combination of these previous alternatives.

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VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION--A CAUSAL LINK?

Statistics on Television Violence and Violent Crime

For many years, researchers, legislators, and parents have been concerned about the preponderance and effects of violence on television. It is estimated that children watch an average of 5 hours of television a day, and that by the time they finish elementary school, they will have witnessed 8000 murders and 100,000 violent acts on their TV screen.[2] Studies also show that there are 5 violent acts per hour on prime time television and between 20 and 25 violent acts per hour in children's programming, particularly in children's cartoons. According to Fred Hechinger, from the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, children will have watched 22,000 hours of television by the time they finish high school, which is almost double the amount of time they will have spent in the classroom. By the age of 18, these children will have seen on TV almost 18,000 murder scenes and 800 suicides.[3]

At the same time, the crime rate in the U.S. has soared over what it was many years ago, with homicide counts continuing to exceed those of most other nations. In 1991, there were 1,911,770 violent crimes, (offenses of murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) reported in the U.S. as compared to 834,900 violent crimes in 1972. Relative to population differences, the violent crime rate increased from 401 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1972 to 758.1 per

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[1] This report was prepared by Michelle R. Silverstein, intern in the division, summer of 1993. For further information contact David B. Hack, Analyst in Information Science and Technology.

[2] American Psychological Association. Big World, Small Screen: The Role of Television in American Society, 1992. From testimony of Senator Paul Simon, Hearing on TV Violence. House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance, May 12, 1993.

[3] Hechinger, Fred. Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992, as cited in testimony of Senator Paul Simon. Hearing on TV Violence. House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance, May 12, 1993.

100,000 inhabitants in 1991.[4] According to CBS News, "In 1940, the seven top problems in public schools as identified by the teachers were: talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in halls, cutting in line, dress-code infractions, and littering. In 1980, the top seven problems in public schools were: suicide, assault, robbery, rape, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and pregnancy."[5]

This tremendous increase of violence and crime can be attributed to any number or combination of factors, including but not limited to the increase of weapons and drugs on the streets, exposure to violence in the home, the presence of anger or incitement, or a life of poverty and little educational achievement. In addition to these other causes, however, many people also blame the horrific crime rates on the increasing pervasiveness and acceptance of violence on television.

Research Studies and Findings

Numerous studies have been done to assess the impact of TV violence on subsequent violent behavior. Research and reports from the Surgeon General (1972), the National Institute of Mental Health (1982), the U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence (1984), and the American Psychological Association (1985) all declare that violence on television does lead to an increase in aggressive behavior. An even more expansive study by Dr. Leonard D. Eron studied the TV viewing habits and behavior of 875 children in a rural New York county at the ages of 8, 19, and 30. After controlling for various factors, Eron concluded that the more a subject watched television at age 8, the more serious were the crimes he was convicted for at age 30. Another study, completed by Brandon S. Centerwall, looked at the relation between the introduction of television and homicide rates in the United States, Canada, and South Africa. Centerwall looked at the homicide rates from 1945 to 1974 and noted a 93-percent increase in the United States, a 92-percent increase in Canada, and a 7-percent decrease in South Africa. Because television was introduced in Canada and the United States in the early 1940s and not in South Africa until after 1975, Centerwall claims that the presence of television caused the noted increase in violence and homicide rates.[6]

While many researchers spend time trying to prove a causal link between TV viewing and violent behavior, others simply point to the psychological impressionability of little children as a reason for reducing TV violence. Many argue that, up to the age of 4, most children cannot distinguish between fantasy

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[4] U.S. Dept. of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Crime in the United States 1991. Aug. 30, 1992.

[5] CBS News, as quoted in TV Guide's Symposium and Study on Violence in Television, p. 4.

[6] Centerwall, Brandon. Television and violent crime. Public interest. (111) Spring 1993, p.56-71.

and reality on television. Therefore, they do not understand that the violence they see on television is not a prescription for real life. Also, Centerwall claims that children are born ready to imitate adult behavior, and because they cannot distinguish between good and bad before a certain age, their first and deepest impressions are that violence is a permissible part of everyday life. Though children know better as they grow older, he claims, they may still revert, in moments of severe stress, to their most basic sense of the role of violence in society and the impressions they gained in their earliest years.

On the other hand, however, some writing has been done that points to an opposite conclusion. Jonathan L. Freedman, in his paper on TV violence, examines the body of research that has been completed on television violence, including laboratory experiments, correlational studies, and field experiments. Looking at everything together, Freedman concludes that, while there may still be a link between TV violence and violent behavior, the research to this date does not conclusively prove it to be true. Freedman points out that much of the evidence for a casual link is inconsistent in that sometimes a relationship was found while just as many times it was not. Therefore, Freedman claims, researchers' conclusions that a link exists demonstrate that "individuals and the field as a whole have been predisposed to believe in the effect. I certainly am not suggesting any conspiracy or collusion or deliberate bias. But it is entirely natural to be more open to evidence that supports one's beliefs than to evidence that contradicts them."[7]

Television as a Commercial Medium

To reinforce the argument favoring a causal link, many people also point to the advertising market as evidence that television has the power to influence people's behavior. If the many advertising executives and large corporations who advertise on TV did not believe that television could persuade, they would not spend millions of dollars every year to research and produce their unique, eye-catching commercials. However, if television can influence people through commercials, they say, then it must also be able to influence people through its more lengthy programs, including those with excessive violence. Senator Simon once remarked, "Many in the television industry argue that TV violence does no harm. They are essentially claiming that exposure to violence in a 25-minute program has no impact, while exposure to a 30-second commercial has great impact. The obvious answer is that TV is a powerful sales medium, whether the product is soap or violence."[8] Hollywood producer Lawrence Gordon stated a similar argument in an issue of the New Yorker. He said, "I'd be lying if I said that people don't imitate what they see on the screen. I would be a moron to

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[7] Jonathan L. Freedman. Television Violence and Aggression: What Psychologists Should Tell the Public. in Psychology and Social Policy. Ed. Peter Suedfeld and Philip E. Tetlock. New York: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation.

[8] Senator Paul Simon, as quoted in TV Guide Study and Symposium on Violence on Television, June 2, 1992.

say that they don't because look how dress styles change. We have people who want to look like Julia Roberts, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Madonna. Of course we imitate. It would be impossible for me to think that they would imitate our dress, our music, our look, but not imitate any of our violence or our other actions."[9]

Other Effects and Solutions

Finally, researchers point out that excessive TV violence may cause a number of other negative effects besides or in addition to increased aggression. Some have mentioned a "victim effect" whereby people become extremely fearful of the outside world and take up arms to prevent assault or attack. Others talk about the "bystander effect" which causes people to become desensitized to violence and perhaps watch it passively on the streets or allow it to occur before them as though it were a normal, everyday event.

TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS OFFERED

In order to help curb this problem of television violence, a combination of technical solutions have been recently developed and proposed. Discussed most often is a two-part program made up of a rating system and a technological blocking device, which, when put together, would empower parents to protect their children from excessive TV violence.

Violence Rating Systems

If developed, a rating system would assign some sort of violence rating or evaluation to all shows presented on the television set. Similar to the Motion Picture Association of America's (MPAA) policy of assigning a rating to every movie before it is released, the TV rating system would attempt to review every show before it airs, thus enabling parents to make informed decisions about what shows may or may not be appropriate for themselves or their children to watch.

What Rating Systems Are and How They Work

Once a rating has been determined for each show, this rating can be transmitted into the home by means of the vertical blanking interval (VBI) in every television signal. Each television signal, whether sent by broadcast, cable, or some other medium, has 525 lines available for sending information. However, it only needs 504 of these lines to transmit a television picture, thus leaving 21 free or empty lines between the displayed frames on the screen; this invisible portion of the television signal is known as the vertical blanking interval. When a TV set reads the signal that is being broadcast to it, it scans

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[9] Gordon, Lawrence. In testimony of Senator Paul Simon. Hearing on TV Violence, House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance, May 12, 1993.

down the lines in an interlaced format, which means that it unites first all the odd lines and then the even lines. All lines are visually fused by human eyes into the picture we get on our screen. Normally, the lines of the VBI are not programmed, and hence are not viewable when the TV set displays the picture to the viewer. However, with special technology, textual or other information can be encoded by the programmer into the VBI and then decoded by equipment in the receiving television set into characters that appear on the screen.

If a violence rating system were to be adopted, broadcasters and others could use the VBI to transmit the ratings for various shows into the home. Those on the programming side would incorporate a visual rating into the VBI of the television signal and TV sets in the home could be equipped with the proper devices to decode such information and then display it on the screen for parents to see and evaluate. The technology for incorporating violence ratings into the VBI is similar to that used for closed captioning for the hearing impaired. Closed captioning consists of a series of subtitles or captions encoded into line 21 of the VBI, usually with white characters on a black background. When properly decoded, closed captioning displays in writing the dialogue of a TV show, thus enabling the 28 million people in the country who are hearing-impaired to watch and understand programs that they otherwise may have missed out on. Of course, a rating system could also be implemented without such technology, by simply assigning ratings to shows and then perhaps printing up a list for distribution, or announcing them verbally before each program, or displaying them visually on the regular broadcasting field. However, the technology of incorporating rating codes into the VBI is still an important consideration because it is the only method that can be read by a computer chip or blocking device.

Benefits and Concerns

Parental Empowerment. Those in favor of adopting a rating system believe that violence ratings will give parents a greater opportunity to preview what their children watch on television and, in turn, empower them to make judgements about what their children may or may not be allowed to see. Supporters argue that in today's society, more and more parents work, and, in fact, most families have two working parents. As a result, most parents often do not have the time to sit and read through a TV guide every week to determine which shows are or are not appropriate for their children to view. Therefore, they say, the adoption of a violence rating system could give parents more insight into the content of television programs and the degree of concern they might place on particular shows.

Assignment of Ratings. At the same time, however, there are also many questions and concerns that must be resolved before such a rating system could be adopted. To begin with, a decision must be made as to who will actually determine the ratings for particular shows. Should each individual network or station make the judgements for its own particular shows or should an impartial review board evaluate all the programs produced by each and every station? Either way, the ratings system poses a number of problems. If each individual

network appraises its own telecasts, many people fear that, in order to stay competitive, they will each underrate the number of violent programs on their schedule. While a review board may then be more objective, it also encounters its own difficulties. The major problem would lie in the sheer volume of television programs to be reviewed--it is likely that no one organization would have the time or capacity to watch and rate every show on television.

Possible Rating Scales. In addition to the question of who would assign the ratings to television shows, there is also the question of how specific those ratings should be. While some people recommend labeling shows with a simple "V" for violence, others encourage adoption of a more specific scale of measurement. One example would be rating shows on a numerical scale, with those programs portraying a greater degree of violence receiving a higher number than those displaying less. Other alternatives include placing shows in more descriptive violence categories depending on the type of violence portrayed and the circumstances in which it takes place. There has been no resolution as to which method is superior because, while a "V" rating system is criticized for its lack of discrimination between shows, the more complex systems are criticized for having too much discrimination. In other words, people say the "V" label does not give parents enough information to make informed decisions about particular programs, while at the same time, they say that a more complex system allows whoever is administering the ratings to make powerful judgements about the violence and content of specific shows.

Another important consideration in the adoption of violence ratings deals with the question of uniformity. Many people claim that a rating system will work only if the methods adopted by every party are uniform and consistent; if not, the system will add more confusion rather than clarity. In order to begin making a system uniform, however, there first needs to be a consensus over the definition of violence that will be used, because at the moment, people have been defining violence in strikingly different ways.

Applicability to Cable. Lastly, if a rating system were to be adopted, questions would also be raised over its applicability to cable as well as broadcasting. First of all, if violence ratings were attached to shows on broadcast television and not on cable, complaints about fairness and competition between the two mediums would very likely emerge. However, even if ratings were attached to both television media, the adoption of such a system might cause greater harm to broadcasters than to cable operators. Whereas cable companies earn their revenues primarily from subscriber fees, broadcasters rely completely on revenue from advertising, revenue which may very well decrease on programs given high violence ratings. If advertisers believe that there will be smaller audiences for specific shows as a result of a violence label, they clearly will not want to spend as much money advertising on those particular programs as they had before. As a result, broadcasters relying on commercial revenues may suffer financial burdens that their cable competitors may not have to bear.

Blocking Device Technology

What Blocking Devices are and How They Work

In addition to a rating system, many people suggest that solving the problem of violence on television will require some sort of technological blocking device. Such a device, whether a hardware chip built into the TV set or a lockbox attached to the outside, would enable parents to block out either certain programs or certain channels from view on the TV screen.

Most of the blocking technologies developed so far work in either one of two ways. Some are engineered to identify a set of ratings or symbols already programmed into the TV signal and then to block out all programs or channels labeled with a specified symbol. Others allow parents or consumers to assess TV shows individually and then block out only those programs that they themselves choose and specify.

Some technologies in the former category read the already established MPAA movie ratings and then have the ability to block all movies at or above any rating the parent chooses. For example, if a person programs their set to the R-rated movie level, the system will block out all R-rated or X-rated movies and will leave untouched all lower rated movies such as G, PG, and PG-13. A similar system was developed for and has been used in satellite broadcasting since 1986. The satellite system identifies programs based on ratings, currently the MPAA movie ratings, and then allows parents to use a password to block all programs at or above a certain rating level. While these systems make use of the current MPAA movie ratings, various other technology alternatives have been proposed that would work in conjunction with a new system of violence ratings. Representative Markey has suggested the idea of a V-chip which could be installed into every TV set and which would enable parents to press one button at the beginning of the week and block out all violent, or V-rated shows, for the entire rest of the week. Such a technology would work by scanning the violence ratings already programmed into the VBI and then blocking out, upon command, all those shows and programs with a particular violence rating.

In addition to those technologies that would use a pre-programmed rating scale to block out violent programs, other technologies being developed give parents the power to block out specific shows of their choice, regardless of their rating or category. Such a mechanism would enable people to create a personal schedule in which they may, for example, block out one show on Monday, two on Tuesday, and perhaps none on Wednesday. The adoption of a violence rating system, rather than being incorporated into the technology itself, would simply serve as a resource to which parents could look for information about the violent content of certain shows. With such a system, parents would be making decisions on a program by program basis and they would have the complete freedom to block out some violent programs while still keeping a number of others.

Benefits and Concerns

Parental Empowerment. Overall, the reasoning behind a technological blocking device, like that for the rating system, lies in the fact that such a device will give parents greater control over what their children watch on television. Whereas a rating system will, by itself, allow parents to determine which shows may or may not be appropriate for their children to watch, only a blocking device will give them the power or tools to exercise those decisions. Supporters of a technological solution emphasize the fact that parents are working more and are often not at home; therefore, they say, simply knowing which programs are violent or inappropriate is no longer enough to enable parents to prevent unwanted violent material from entering their home. A blocking device, however, would enable parents who cannot monitor their children all day to still retain some control over what is shown on their television set. According to Representative Markey, the use of such technologies maintains both the rights of broadcasters to speak and program freely on their airwaves and the rights of parents to regulate the amount of violence coming into their homes.

Technological Difficulty. Just as with a violence rating system, the concept of a technological blocking device also raises a number of important questions and concerns. To begin with, there is the issue of technological difficulty. On the one hand, in order for the device to work as a parental control, it must be sufficiently complex so that the children being shielded from TV violence are not able to figure out how the system works and then manipulate and reverse the blocking. In today's society, many people claim, kids are becoming more and more technologically proficient. They suggest, therefore, that blocking systems be equipped with some sort of control mechanism, such as an activation and deactivation password that parents must program and without which the system cannot work. On the other hand, however, the technology also needs to be simple, easy, and user-friendly, or a large percentage of the population may not take the time or the energy to learn how to use it. There are many people today, it seems, who have still not learned how to program their own VCRs, and hence, would very likely shy away from any sort of new, complex technology.

First Amendment Issues . In addition to these technical issues, a combined rating system and blocking device also raise First Amendment concerns. Many people, though concerned about the violence on television, fear that the adoption of such a system may eventually lead to greater restrictions on speech. While today the ratings categorize violence, they say, tomorrow the ratings may work to reduce sexual content, bad language, or even politically incorrect speech. Others complain that the majority of violence shown on television is seen on the news and that any attempt to restrict the communication of news and information would be a deviation from the fundamental goals of the First Amendment.

Costs. Before adopting a violence control system, other issues must be addressed as well. For example, there is the question of costs, both how much and who will pay for it. If the Government were to mandate or if TV set manufacturers were to voluntarily decide that all future sets be equipped with

some sort of chip or blocking technology, the costs of such a change are likely to be passed on to the consumer. Will consumers be willing to pay this extra cost? In the case of closed captioning, the technology was estimated to cost an additional $25 per TV set, but when actually engineered, it ended up costing only $5 per set. Some say that perhaps the anti-violence technologies being developed will follow a similar pattern of cost reduction, or, even more significantly, if the functions of these violence devices can be incorporated into the already existing closed captioning technologies, then perhaps cost might not need to be an issue at all.

(In addition to possible costs from the technology itself, there may also be costs that emerge from the establishment and maintenance of a ratings review board, should one be established. Similarly, one should also note that various costs may accrue to the industry if it chooses or is forced to formulate its own individual ratings.)

Applicability to Different Media. Just as with the rating system alone, the blocking technologies also produce questions about their applicability to different television media. Should people be able to block shows on cable and pay premium movie channels the same as they would for regular broadcasting stations? Whereas broadcasting intrudes into the home without the public being able to control what stations their TV set is able to receive, cable and premium pay channels work quite differently. In order to receive cable programming, a household must contact their local cable company and then pay for their cable package. Consumers make a clear choice when they decide to purchase such programming; therefore, many argue that blocking technologies or laws mandating blocking do not serve the same purposes in cable as in broadcasting. Because there is choice involved in deciding to receive cable, they say, one should not be quite as surprised by the content of programs that enter one's home. This argument can be carried even further to pay premium movie channels, such as HBO or Showtime. In these cases, the consumer decides, based on the content of each channel, whether or not to purchase that particular service. Whereas the argument for cable rests on the choice to buy a cable package, the argument for pay channels is even more specific in that it rests on the choice to receive an individual station or program.

Basically, the reasoning follows that if people are not satisfied with the violent content of either these pay channels or of their cable package, they already have the means to block them by simply canceling their subscriptions. Lastly, because broadcasters receive their licenses from the Government and because they are one of a limited number of people and firms granted the right to use the scarce spectrum resource, many people adhere to the belief that broadcasters can be subjected at times to stricter rulings and controls, and in this case specifically to controls for excessive violence. On the other hand, however, others argue that in buying a basic cable package, the consumer does not make a choice as to what channels he will receive--it is either all or nothing--and therefore, he may be just as surprised by the violence he sees and just as needy of a blocking device as he would be for regular broadcast television.

Along the same lines, one must also consider these blocking technologies in the face of an increasingly changing, multi-channeled world. The development of fiber optics and other technologies may enormously increase the channel-carrying capacity of all the television distribution media, and as a result, create an entirely new communications background. In such a situation, perhaps the possibility of assigning ratings to every TV show or of blocking shows on a program by program basis would be completely overwhelming and no longer practical.

Blocking on a Blanket or Program by Program Basis. One final factor to be considered is whether or not, if a violence controlling system is implemented by either the industry or the Government, shows should be labeled with a "V" and blocked together or blocked on a program by program basis. Those in favor of a uniform "V" blocking system stress the fact that parents today no longer have the time to study every program in the weekly guide, and therefore, they need the simplicity of this system. Also, many point out that a V-chip technology, where parents can push one button for the entire week, should prevent people from being scared away by technology. On the other hand, those who support a program by program blocking system claim that every show should be judged on an individual basis, for even though a particular show may be violent, a parent may still determine that its morals and themes make it appropriate for their children to watch. A V-system, instead, simply wipes out every violent show without any individual considerations. It should be mentioned, however, that with a V-chip technology, one does have the power to go back and unlock individual V-rated shows that were canceled with the entire bundle.

AFFECTED GROUPS

Overall, there are many groups of people dealing with the problem of TV violence who may be affected by these new technologies. First, many parents have been angered by the violence their children watch on television and are looking for a means, technologically or legislatively, to reduce or contain it. Both the rating systems and the blocking devices appear to meet these important goals. In a recent USA Weekend magazine survey getting responses from 70,000 readers, 73 percent said they were in favor of a violence rating system and 68 percent said they would support a proposal mandating that TV sets be equipped with a blocking technology.[10]

In addition to parents, various Senators, Representatives, and State Legislators have also taken an interest in these new violence-reducing technologies. Both on the Senate and House sides, concerned representatives have held hearings on the issue of TV violence and have discussed various steps that can or should be taken to help solve this growing problem. The new rating

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[10] USA Weekend News Release. Readers Support TV Violence Rating System, Blocking Device. USA Weekend Survey Shows, to be published July 31-Aug. 1, 1993.

and blocking technologies have appealed to Members of Congress as they consider what can be done to reduce gratuitous violence.

Broadcasters, on the other hand, have many concerns about the two technological systems. In terms of ratings, they seem to prefer an inside rating system whereby each network or station would rate its own shows rather than send them to a universal review board. They often mention the limited time between the taping and airing of many shows as a reason why a review board would not work for a violence rating system. As for a blocking device, broadcasters clearly favor the option of program by program blocking over its opposite, the blanket blocking system. With program by program blocking, broadcasters feel ensured that consumers will review a specific show at least once before deciding to block it out.

ALTERNATIVES TO TECHNOLOGY

In place of a technological solution, there are various other possibilities for dealing with the problem of excessive TV violence. One suggestion would be to have a rating system without any sort of blocking device. Parents and other consumers could look at a published list of ratings and then simply use those ratings as a guide for monitoring their children's viewing. Others have proposed economic solutions whereby television stations reduce their violent programming as a result of financial pressure. Representative Kennedy claims that TV advertisers, if joined together voluntarily, could exercise enormous influence over the television industry and the violent content of many of its programs. Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, has offered a different solution. Mr. Valenti proposes that TV violence be addressed by the people on the creative side of television production. He suggests organizing the writers, actors, and other creative talent into a guild to discuss the subject of TV violence and perhaps find ways to change the situation from the inside.

CONGRESSIONAL AND INDUSTRY ACTIONS

For a number of years, Congress has been concerned about the issue of TV violence. Subcommittees in both Houses have held extensive hearings on this topic, the first one in 1952, to determine both the depth of the problem and what can be done about it.[11] More recently, the 101st Congress took a step towards dealing with this problem by passing the Television Program Improvement Act of 1990 (P.L.101-650).[12] Sponsored by Representative

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[11] U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. Hearings on H. Res. 278, 82d Cong., 2d Sess., June 3-5, 26, Sept. 16-17, 23-26, Dec. 3-5, 1952. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1952, p. 1.

[12] This Act was originally introduced in the House as H.R. 1391, the Television Violence Act of 1989. It was introduced in the Senate as S. 593. The Television Program Improvement Act of 1990 became law on Dec. 1 as part of

Glickman and Senator Simon, this Act exempts members of the television industry from the antitrust laws of the Clayton Act for a period of three years for purposes of joining together in an attempt to solve the problem of TV violence. More specifically, the Act states that:

> the antitrust laws shall not apply to any joint discussion, consideration, review, action, or agreement by or among persons in the television industry for the purpose of, and limited to, developing and disseminating voluntary guidelines designed to alleviate the negative impact of violence in telecast material.

Though the industry did not take advantage of these exemptions in the beginning, the four networks, ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox got together on June 30, 1993, and adopted an advance parental advisory plan. Under this proposal, the four networks all agreed to broadcast an advisory saying "Parental Discretion Advised" before all series, movies, and specials with excessively violent content. In addition, for any program a network decides to label with an advisory, all promotional material for that program, such as press releases, printed ads, and broadcast commercials, will also contain a parental warning. Though each network will review and label its own programs, they will all attempt to follow certain guidelines and then evaluate their success after a period of two years. The antitrust exemptions will also allow the networks and members of the television industry to all meet together on August 2, 1993, for an industry-wide conference on television violence. Similar to the broadcast networks, the cable industry, as a result of the antitrust exemption, was able to get together on July 29, 1993, and adopt an advisory plan as well. Fifteen cable networks agreed to broadcast the advisory before violent programs, including violent movies.

Another piece of legislation relevant to the subject of TV violence and technical devices is the Television Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-431), an Act which mandates the installment of closed captioning technology in all new and imported TV sets after July 1, 1993. Introduced by Representative Owens as H.R. 4267 and passed by both Houses as S. 1974, the Television Decoder Circuitry Act became law on October 15, 1990. In order to help the 28 million people in the United States who are either deaf, hearing-impaired, or experiencing some hearing loss, the Act requires that:

> apparatus designed to receive television pictures broadcast simultaneously with sound be equipped with built-in decoder circuitry designed to display closed-captioned television transmissions when such apparatus is manufactured in the United States or imported for use in the United States, and its television picture screen is 13 inches or greater in size.

Previously, anybody wanting to receive closed captioning had to purchase a TeleCaption decoder to attach to their TV set. The Television Decoder Circuitry

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the Judicial Improvements Act of 1990.

Act is important to the debate over TV violence because it demonstrates the type of action Congress may take regarding the implementation of violence technology. For example, Congress may choose to mandate that all TV sets be manufactured with specific blocking capabilities. In addition, some say that the technical devices installed in TV sets for closed captioning could also be used to implement new anti-violence policies. In other words, some of the new anti-violence proposals could make use of the equipment that has already been paid for and installed for closed captioning, thus reducing the price and the burden of technical solutions to TV violence.

Most recently, the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance held hearings in May and June 1993 to discuss both the subject of TV violence and Representative Markey's two-part proposal for reducing such violence. Representative Markey has suggested a voluntary violence-rating system run by the industry itself in conjunction with a requirement that TV sets "be equipped with a coding system that allows parents to block out violent programs with the touch of a button." On July 1, 1993, Representatives Schumer and Roukema introduced H.R. 2609 which would authorize $1 million to set up and maintain a one-year presidential commission to study the problem of TV violence. The commission would be made up of the Attorney General, the Surgeon General, 12 people from the entertainment industry, 6 experts on public health, crime prevention, or education, and 8 people who are either parents or children or members of community groups.

POLICY OPTIONS

In the future, Congress may choose to follow one of a number of alternatives in the debate over TV violence. To begin with, Congress can decide to do nothing at all, to remain uninvolved in the situation. The reasoning for such a decision may be based on various beliefs. For example, Congress may decide that it has still not seen enough conclusive evidence to prove that TV violence and violent crime really do form a harmful, causal link. On the other hand, even if Congress does believe that the two are interrelated, it may remain uninvolved on the basis of the belief that the Government should not get involved in this First Amendment, content-based area. Or, in a different sense, it may simply believe that the best solution would be to leave the problem to the industry itself, trusting industry to develop and deploy such anti-violence aids as the public truly wants.

Congress may also decide to do nothing for a specified period of time, after which, if the situation has not improved on its own, it may begin to take further action. For instance, some recommend giving the industry a two-year trial period in order to see the results of its August conference and allow their advisory plan to take effect.

If Congress instead decides that regulation is necessary, there are several approaches it can take. First, Congress can propose a requirement that all broadcasters rate their programs on some sort of violence scale. Legislation

could further require that these broadcasters transmit their ratings over the VBI so that those people who want to use technology to block TV shows may be able to do so. Only if a rating is sent as part of the TV signal, in the VBI or otherwise, can it be read by the computer chips that form the basis of many of the proposed blocking technologies.

Rather than requiring the transmission of ratings, another possibility would be for Congress to mandate, as it did for the case of closed captioning, that all TV sets be manufactured to contain some sort of blocking technology. In this case, the equipment would be available to everyone and people could use their discretion as to when and how much to use it. Finally, Congress could decide that the best solution is a combination of both measures, and it could propose legislation mandating both the adoption of a rating system and the inclusion of a blocking device.

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such technology have signed on to the program, the exception being the USA Network, whose schedule includes a significant number of violent movies. A cable industry spokesman said talks are still underway with USA on the subject.

The four broadcast networks have refused to endorse any such legislation, although privately officials say they would accept a voluntary system of "VCR-minus." Such a system would allow viewers to program their VCRs to block out individual programs.

Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.), who has sponsored the so-called V-chip legislation to require the technology to block all programs rated as violent, and who embraced the cable industry initiative at a press conference earlier in the day, said late yesterday that he disagreed with Simon on the need for legislation.

"Unless the broadcasting industry accepts some rating system along with some sort of violence-chip block voluntarily, I don't believe legislation is avoidable," he said. "You can't work through a 500-channel universe with a VCR-minus."

Markey said that although monitoring "is an important component in an overall package, when taken alone it's totally inadequate." He said the monitor's report would be a "one-day event, and then there are 364 other days."

On Monday Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) introduced a Senate version of Markey's V-chip bill. Dorgan has also introduced a bill that would require a quarterly report card on television program content. He said he will press that bill, but shift monitoring responsibility from the FCC to an independent group.

And Sen. Ernest F. Hollings (D-S.C.), who has introduced a bill to prohibit the airing of programs with violent content during times when children are likely to be watching, will press ahead with that bill, according to a member of his staff. He said Hollings is likely to hold more hearings on the issue.

"We are looking for ways to reassure people that as an industry we take this issue seriously," said CBS Senior Vice President Martin Franks at yesterday's news conference. "We accept our corporate and personal responsibility, and therefore legislation is unnecessary. If people go ahead and legislate, then we will take stock of what our situation is at that time."

Tony Cox, chairman and CEO of Showtime and the spokesman for the cable industry at the news conference, played down the split between broadcasting and cable on the ratings system and the V-chip. "Broadcast and cable are all part of the television family," he said. "I think it's much better that we sit here and try and figure out ways to work together than to try a line in the sand."

Simon said the monitoring would be paid for by the industry, but stressed that he had assurances from its representatives that the monitor would be independent and would have some "stature." There were no details on how the system would work, although the announcement stressed that the analysis would be "qualitative" rather than "quantitative." In other words, the system would consider actions that might be regarded as violent in the context of the program and not simply tabulate such actions without regard to meaning.

While cable spokesmen said yesterday that they hoped the same monitor would review both cable and broadcast programming, broadcasters said privately that they thought it was more likely the two industries would have separate monitors.

Source: *Washington Post,* January 22, 1994, pp. A1, A8.

TV Networks Agree to Use Of Monitor

Outsider to Review Program Violence

By Ellen Edwards
Washington Post Staff Writer

The four broadcast networks yesterday reached an agreement in principle to use an independent monitor to review their programming for violent content.

The agreement comes just days before Congress returns with the regulation of television violence high on its agenda, and just as the major cable networks have agreed to the use of such a system.

The cable agreement was contained in an 11-point plan that also calls for the development of a violence ratings system and endorses technology that would allow viewers to block programs rated as violent from their television sets.

The networks have been unwilling to support the latter two initiatives because they believe in part that such moves would cause advertiser defections.

The network accord, which was finalized in a conference call yesterday by executives of NBC, CBS, ABC and Fox, still must be approved by the heads of the networks. That approval is expected in the next few days, and a formal announcement is likely early next week.

Decisions as to who will run the system, how that person (or organization) will be chosen and to whom he will report are still to be worked out. It is unlikely, however, that the

See NETWORKS, A8, Col. 1

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networks will employ the same monitor as the cable industry.

In addition, sources say the monitoring system will be a "qualitative rather than quantitative" assessment of network programming. In a quantitative assessment, actions that are deemed violent are simply tabulated without regard to context, which means that cartoons and cop shows are given equal weight.

The effectiveness of the monitoring system is believed to rest on the fact that annual reports will be made public; and that the threat of negative reactions from advertisers and the public will keep the networks in line.

Network executives are likely to present the plan early next week to Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.), who has been pushing for such a monitor system.

Simon, reacting earlier yesterday to both the cable initiative and the likelihood of the broadcasters' agreement, said he believed such action would alleviate the pressure for legislation to regulate TV violence.

He said, however, that he would prefer that cable and the broadcasters use the same monitor to ensure a consistent approach.

Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), who introduced legislation on the so-called V-chip—the technology that would enable viewers to black out certain programming—said yesterday that he believed legislation would be inevitable if the broadcast networks did not join the cable industry in approving the technology and a ratings system.

"It's all about advertising," Markey said. "That's what this whole debate boils down to. . . . Violence sells."

He said of the V-chip: "Even if a small percentage of parents used the technology, the networks will see declining ratings for violent programs. The result will be less violence on television."

Still, the acceptance of a monitoring system is a major step for the four net-

works, which have resisted it for months, saying their own standards and practices operations are doing the job.

Broadcasters have debated fiercely among themselves whether a monitoring system would decrease the likelihood of legislation. ABC and CBS have been more receptive to the idea, with NBC and Fox more resistant.

Since last summer the networks have been taking any steps they thought would help ward off congressional action. They believed then that they had satisfied lawmakers' push for action when they agreed to air parental advisories before shows with violent content. It was their understanding, sources say, that Simon would then give them two years to let the advisories work and see what other action they took before pursuing further congressional inquiry.

But Susan Kaplan, an attorney on Simon's staff overseeing television violence issues, said, "I never heard him say that, and I know that wasn't his view. . . ."

Simon yesterday termed this week's initiatives "a significant shift." He said he believed the monitoring system would ensure that network programmers continue to show less violence on the air.

He said the V-chip was "not something that in my opinion is essential," adding that the V-chip is "not a substitute for reducing violence on television."

The tensions between the four networks and the cable industry were reflected to some degree in the networks' reactions yesterday to the cable plan for regulating violence.

Julie Hoover, ABC's vice president of corporate communications, said, "We are delighted that the cable industry has adopted some of the things we have been doing," referring to ABC's Department of Broadcast Standards and Practices, as well as to the network's scheduling of programs. She added, "Virtually all our programs are rated G."

Hoover said that ABC already has a ratings system in place in the form of detailed advisories, such as the one that appears before the series "NYPD Blue."

Richard Cotton, NBC executive vice president and general counsel, struck a similar tone: "We always believed that the most important step that can be taken is for [the cable industry] to adopt standards that the broadcast networks have had for years."

Cotton also said, "From our perspective network programming is the least violent of any commercial programming that's on TV."

CBS Senior Vice President Martin Franks said, "We applaud cable for coming up to our standards and we congratulate Senator Simon for bringing cable to that point."

A spokeswoman for Fox said the network would not comment on the cable plan until executives had seen it in writing.

Editorial assistant John F. Maynard contributed to this report.

Source: *Washington Post,* January 21, 1994, pp. A1, A20.

Cable Networks Agree to Regulate Violence

Industry Plan Calls for Ratings System, Monitoring, Advisories

By Ellen Edwards
Washington Post Staff Writer

The major U.S. cable networks have approved a plan to regulate violence in their programming, days before Congress returns with the issue simmering on its front burner.

The plan, a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Post, mandates the development of a violence ratings system for cable programming and the use of an outside monitor to report annually on violent content. It also endorses technology that would allow viewers to block programs rated as violent from being seen in their homes.

The plan applies pressure to the broadcast networks to join in, particularly on the ratings system—pressure that is unlikely to be appreciated.

In the next day or two the plan is expected to be approved by the few remaining cable networks that have not already endorsed it. It will then be presented to the four broadcast networks with the hope they will join in. At the same time, members of Congress who have been active on this issue will be briefed, including Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.), who has long pushed for an independent monitor of television violence, and Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.), who has introduced legislation on the so-called V-chip, the technology that

See CABLE, A20, Col. 1

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would enable viewers to black out certain programming.

Network representatives have said they are highly unlikely to accept a ratings system, in part because it could cause a drop-off in advertising. They assert cable is less likely to be hurt by advertisers' discontent because it is subscription-based. However, cable sources say the ratings system would not be workable if the broadcasters do not agree to it, because the four major networks account for about 60 percent of the total television audience.

The Satellite Network Committee of the National Cable Television Association signed off on the document—titled "Voices Against Violence"—last weekend in Los Angeles, and it has been approved "enthusiastically" by the association's board, sources said. Its approval has been spearheaded by Michael Fuchs, chairman and CEO of HBO, and Tony Cox, chairman and CEO of Showtime, according to a source.

Torie Clarke, a spokeswoman for the cable association, yesterday confirmed the contents of the plan and the timetable for its dissemination.

The timing is hardly accidental—when Congress returns next week it is expected to take up the issue of regulating TV violence with some vigor. Cable sources said yesterday that they do not think this plan will ward off legislation, but it could help moderate it.

The cable plan, consisting of 11 points, is not specific about how the monitoring or ratings system would work, with leaders saying details will be determined over the next several months. Sources said they are much closer to specifics on monitoring than on ratings.

The document calls for a ratings system that would "have the participation and support of the entire television industry, including the broadcast networks and independent stations." The broadcasters have said in the past that they are unlikely to agree to a ratings system and have been unsupportive of the V-chip, which would require a ratings system to function.

They may be more likely to accept

a monitoring plan, though some network sources think the broadcasters would prefer to adopt a separate monitor from cable. ABC and CBS are said to be somewhat more receptive to the development of a monitoring system, while NBC and Fox are somewhat more skeptical about its effect.

Some broadcasters believe such a system would do nothing to head off legislation and would simply become another problem for them to deal with.

The other eight points in the cable plan are:

- a parental advisory system, already in effect on cable and originated by the broadcast networks last summer, that airs warnings before the start of programs with violent content;
- the adoption of standards and practices "to govern the use of violence in programming." The broadcast networks have all had large standards and practices operations for years;
- "responsible scheduling" to avoid the airing of violent programs when children might be watching. Cable has been widely criticized for not doing this, while the broadcast networks have generally restricted such programming to the hours after 10 p.m.;
- the "exercise of greater care in the placement and content of promotional ads for programs with violent content." Both cable and broadcast television have been under attack for airing ads that highlight the violence in programming, and for showing those ads when children are viewing in large numbers;
- the creation of an anti-violence education campaign funded by the cable industry;
- educational efforts as part of Cable in the Classroom, the industry's national educational alliance, that would teach viewers to look at television more critically, in particular as it depicts violence;
- the creation of "Voices Against Violence Week," with cable programming devoted to anti-violence themes;
- the creation of programming by individual cable networks to address violence.

A preliminary version of the plan was presented to Simon in a meeting with cable leaders several weeks ago, and broadcasters, who had a separate meeting with him the same day, were taken by surprise. Simon was said to be very receptive to it. Staffers from the association and Simon's office had been scheduled to meet yesterday to hammer out initial specifics of the monitoring plan, but the bad weather forced a postponement until today or early next week.

Insiders say cable leaders may not have included the four networks from the beginning in part because they were angry that the broadcasters had left them out of the initial agreement to air advisories. The two segments of the industry are intense rivals and there remains some animosity from bitter battles they fought last summer and fall over retransmission consent.

Source: *Washington Post,* October 29, 1993, pp. B1, B4.

VIOLENT VS. VAPID?

As Legislation Looms, TV Execs Fear Creativity Will Be Victim

By Ellen Edwards
Washington Post Staff Writer

It's Development Season in L.A., and there's a definite chill in the air.

Writers and producers say the threat of legislation to regulate violence on television has caused them to censor themselves as they make their preliminary pitches to the networks for shows to air next fall. They're angry that their congressional critics admit they don't even watch much network television, and that they lump it together with cable, syndicated programs and movies.

They warn that the consequences of Washington's actions may mean television will be even more bland and more sitcom-filled, with fewer and fewer adult dramas. "There's no functional difference between censorship and the threat of censorship," says Barbara Hall, who was co-executive producer of "I'll Fly Away." And so, not surprisingly, they are speaking out.

"It's paralyzing the creative community," says Leonard Hill, an independent producer with more than 30 made-for-TV movies to his credit.

"You can feel it in town," says Andy Schneider, executive producer of CBS's relentlessly nonviolent "Northern Exposure." "Everybody's afraid."

Rosalyn Weinman, NBC's vice president for broadcast standards and practices, said the programming executives at NBC are "seeing many producers censoring themselves. That's different. That's very new. And depending on your perspective that's either terrific or quite frightening."

She says NBC tells producers to make all their pitches and let the network decide what gets a green light, although she admits violent programs are not exactly in favor.

And the cause of it all, say a number of writers and producers, is Washington. Janet Reno's testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee last week, in which she said she saw no constitutional impediment to three bills under consideration, only ratcheted up the tension.

Says Hill, who has worked in programming at both ABC and NBC: "A bunch of Washington opportunists are jumping on the bandwagon with a bogus campaign that reeks of McCarthyism. It's like saying to a newspaper, 'If you don't

See VIOLENCE, B4, Col. 1

TV's Nervous Producers

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cover the gangs, they'll go away.' They're aiming at the wrong target."

Television writers and producers interviewed this week seemed overwhelmingly angry at being Washington's focus, saying time after time that Congress is taking the easy way out in focusing on violence in network television while ignoring cable and syndication, which none of the legislation would affect, as well as larger societal issues such as gun control.

And they say they are flabbergasted that a parody of a barroom brawl on CBS's "Love & War" was held up at a hearing last week as an example of violence.

Diane English, "Love & War's" executive producer, said in a statement that the episode's intent was to satirize violence on television and that it "accomplished exactly what we intended it to. Senator [Conrad] Burns thought the episode was funny. Senator [Ernest] Hollings thought it was offensive. . . . If they can't agree about content, how can anyone expect to legislate it?"

Steven Bochco's "NYPD Blue" on ABC has been the recipient of much of the ruckus lately, more for sexual content than for violence, but audiences have embraced it enthusiastically, making it the first obvious hit of the season.

Bochco, the show's executive producer, says he has not been pressured to make changes, but added: "Beyond my bias or selfish interest, I have a real philosophical concern about the current furor. I can't help feeling a little cynical about the politicians making hay over a very easy issue. For them it's a no-brainer. . . . They appear unlikely to pass [even] a benign crime bill because of a watered-down gun control provision. And instead they want to shake their sabers at us."

Bochco, whose credits include "Hill Street Blues" and "L.A. Law," says he has had no conversations with anyone in Congress.

"Nobody really wants to talk. Everybody is just interested in sound bites. . . . Government has come to accept the unacceptable—homelessness, hunger, a degree of criminal activity we don't even act on. In amongst all that rubble, to point a finger at television seems not to be addressing the primary cause of our worst social issue."

But he is quick to acknowledge that television influences people. "I am not an idiot," he says. "It's a mass medium. Twenty million people a week watch it. It would be naive to say television has no impact."

The critically acclaimed "I'll Fly Away," which deals with the violence of the civil rights movement, couldn't be made in the current climate, says its producer.

Bochco says the most violent show he has done is "Hill Street," which ran on NBC from 1981 to 1987, and that he had one rule: "Violence always had a consequence. It was frightening. It made you puke. You had nightmares. It would mess up your life. We might have 10 seconds of mindless violence and four episodes of dealing with the consequences of those 10 seconds."

Paul Schulman, whose Manhattan-based company buys $175 million each year in network time for advertisers, says he's more excited about "NYPD Blue" as a place for advertisers than he has been about any show since "L.A. Law."

"It's a great show," he says. "It just stands alone. . . . If you've got an action-adventure movie opening on Friday and you're not [advertising] there on Tuesday, you've made a huge mistake."

But Schulman acknowledges that the climate has changed. "There are things that got made a few years ago that would not get made now," he says. "Sponsors are very wary of environment. They will just stay away from gratuitous violence. . . . It's the most advertiser-friendly schedule since I started buying in 1961."

In fact, "NYPD Blue" has not yet attracted the major mainstream advertisers, but Bochco says, "I don't think ABC cares who pays the $2 as long as they get the $2." He says Congress should stay out of programming decisions and let the viewers decide. "I've had my brains beat out in the marketplace," he says, "and I've had some success in it. I love it. I really do."

Dick Wolf, executive producer of NBC's "Law & Order," says that in four years the police officers on his show have never fired their weapons, but in the current climate he worries about reaction to certain types of shows rather than the shows themselves.

"The potential exists," he says, "for these shows, the highest level of television, the dramas, to be destroyed by this legislation because ad agencies are sheep. They will avoid warning labels like the plague. . . .

"I would hate to live in a television environment where there was no 'Hill Street,' no 'Picket Fences,' no 'Law and Order,' no 'NYPD Blue.' "

Hill, the independent producer, says he had a conversation recently with an ABC executive who had just seen a movie he did four years ago for the network called "Nitti: The Enforcer," about Frank Nitti's takeover of the mob. "He said, 'It's too bad we couldn't do that today.' "

He says that two years ago, "shows that would have been a buy, now they say, 'That's an advertising problem for us. That's a Washington problem for us.' The campaign is underinformed and nearly hysterical, and people have sponsored it without watching network television. . . . It is the new political correctness of Washington to bash network television as if it were the cause of violence in society."

Barbara Hall of "I'll Fly Away," the critically acclaimed show on NBC that moved in reruns this year to PBS, says she thinks that show wouldn't get made this year because it showed the graphic violence that accompanied the civil rights movement.

"We showed KKK violence, very upsetting violence," she says. "I don't think we'd be able to do that this year."

Robert Nathan, the supervising producer on NBC's "Law and Order," says he is organizing a group of writers and producers to come to Washington to

make their side of the story known. "We would like to talk to senators and congressmen who don't make the distinction between pay cable and network television," he said. He said they want to go from office to office to tell them that with legislation, "You are about to make a mistake of enormous proportions."

Audiences, he says, have shown a real appetite for good drama in the past six to seven years, but he is concerned about the networks' reaction to Washington. "Will they, even on a marginal level, say this show has a *possibility* of violence or worse, a *possibility* of controversy? . . . You start to crush creativity left and right."

Others make the point that there are fewer and fewer violent shows on network television. Stan Rogow, executive producer of CBS's new "South of Sunset," says his hero, a private investigator in Los Angeles, isn't a gun-toter because "I don't like guns. . . . I grew up in the '60s. My dear, dear friends of 25 years have to watch what I do. And I have to talk with them."

Rogow, who also has "Shannon's Deal" and what he describes as the "emotionally violent" "Middle Ages" in his past credits, says real-life violence has an effect on the production of the show. "It's hard to find a place to shoot that's gang-free," he says. "The cops advise us, and say don't even think of shooting there at night. . . . Everybody knows what the graffiti on the wall means. It means it's gang territory."

Rogow calls Congress's attack on television "a colossal smoke screen . . . because the other issue is just too big to get around—why people get violent."

" '20/20' gets a 34 share for a story about a wife cutting off her husband's penis," says Rogow. "I haven't seen anything that approached that [on network prime-time entertainment shows]. There's a public appetite in a commercial market, and somebody is saying, 'You can't do that.' "

As for the charge that movies are greater offenders than television when it comes to portraying violence, NBC's Weinman says that the network is being considerably more cautious in buying theatrical movies to air, and is editing heavily when they have any violence.

"And in most cases these are movies that have already been seen by millions of people," she said. "We know we could get a really big kid audience if we put on Freddy Krueger movies. But we won't. And nobody will."

David Wolper, whose "Roots" is often cited as depicting the kind of violence that is acceptable, says he agrees that movies are far worse than television, and echoes the widespread concern in Hollywood that their congressional critics don't watch television and tend to lump all television together.

The violence he depicted in "Roots" and other productions, he says, was historical rather than contemporary violence, unlikely to motivate anyone to violent action.

"It's not violence [Washington is] interested in," he says. "It's violence that may influence people."

Stamping Out TV Violence: A Losing Fight

Forty Years of Hand-Wringing

***1950s**—Children jump off roofs emulating hero of syndicated TV's 'Superman' series; star George Reeves warns children on air not to try to fly*

'The Untouchables' 1956-60

***1968**—National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence indicts TV, based on review of research*

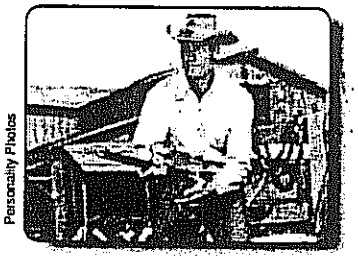
***1972**—Surgeon General's five-volume report links TV and aggressive behavior*

'Miami Vice' 1984-89

***Dec. 1992**—Three networks announce their standards, forswearing gratuitous violence; later they agree to include an advisory before strong programs*

***June 1952**—First congressional hearings addressing violence on TV-House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Subcommittee*

***1954**—Networks testify about TV violence before Sen. Estes Kefauver's Judiciary Subcommittee to investigate juvenile delinquency*



'The Rifleman' 1958-63

***1977**—Advertisers like General Foods pull commercials from violent network shows*

***Oct. 1993**—Five-year-old sets trailer on fire, killing sister; mother blames MTV's animated 'Beavis and Butt-head.' MTV denies responsibility, but removes references to fire and moves show to later time period*

'Beavis and Butt-head'- 1993

By Elizabeth Jensen
And Ellen Graham
Staff Reporters of The Wall Street Journal

When Attorney General Janet Reno took television broadcasters to task last week for violent programming, it was but the latest round in 40 years of government sword-rattling over the medium's power over children. Despite decades of anguish, however, neither the government nor programmers have figured out what to do about televised violence.

Violence on television, and risky copycat behavior, is as old as the medium itself. The original 1950s "Superman" series incited a few children to leap off rooftops in imitation of the soaring star, helping set the stage for the first congressional TV-violence hearings. Today, much of the violence on television has moved away from network series onto news and newsmagazine shows and, especially, onto cable, where movies and music videos often glorify and eroticize brutality.

TV violence has traditionally been measured quantitatively, by researchers who count incidents of real or threatened physical injury. This essentially gives equal weight to Bugs Bunny bopping Elmer Fudd with a carrot and an Uzi-armed psychopath picking off a terrorized and helpless victim.

Most such analyses show a fairly stable level of prime-time violence over the past 25 years — or five incidents per hour, says University of Delaware researcher Nancy Signorelli, though she adds that the most recent study found mayhem in fewer shows. Many critics, however, believe there is a more dangerous qualitative change toward violence that seems more realistic and more glamorous.

"We need to get beyond simple counts of physical injury and look at the context," says Edward Donnerstein, professor of communications at the University of California at Santa Barbara. He draws a distinction between violence in acclaimed miniseries like "Roots" or "Holocaust," and gratuitous brutality shown in movies like "The Terminator" or "Friday the 13th," which are shown unedited on pay-cable channels. The latter kind of violence is what is so troubling to policy makers and viewers, he says, lamenting that content analysis of television still doesn't measure the type of violence being shown.

Michael Dann, a veteran network programmer who started at NBC in 1950 and ran CBS Entertainment in the late 1960s, has testified nine times before Congress on television violence, defending everything from Westerns to police shows. He argues that series television is less violent today than at any time since the 1950s. What has changed, he suggests, is reality. Not only is society itself more violent today, but "local news, network news, the front page of the newspaper and magazines" reflect that violence back into the nation's living rooms. "I have never seen so much real-world coverage of violence, separate from entertainment programming, as now," he says.

The endlessly replayed video footage of

Please Turn to Page B8, Column 5

Source: *Wall Street Journal,* October 26, 1993, pp. B1, B8.

Years of Attempts to Stamp Out Violence on Television Have Failed

Continued From Page B1

the Rodney King and Reginald Denny beatings in Los Angeles are obvious examples of brutal reality footage. Dr. Donnerstein observes that, unlike gratuitous fictionalized violence — calculated to elicit cheers from audiences — such news programming depresses most viewers. "We see the real injury, and people are bothered," he says, "and that's a much, much different situation."

Together, ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox devote nine prime-time hours a week to news magazines, up from just two hours a decade ago. Crime is a frequent topic on such shows. Fox, a unit of News Corp., also has a slate of "reality" shows, including "America's Most Wanted" and "Cops," which also are credited with occasionally apprehending criminals. Local stations' news programs are filled with crime stories, as are promotional spots teasing late-night newscasts. All add to the perception that prime-time is violent.

When it comes to entertainment shows, ABC, CBS and NBC have only a handful of series that contain sporadic violence. Among them are "NYPD Blue" from ABC, a unit of Capital Cities/ABC Inc., and "Walker, Texas Ranger" from CBS Inc.'s CBS network. One reason: In recent years, situation comedies have delivered better Nielsen ratings than action-adventure shows.

A list of children's top-10 prime-time shows in 1982-83 contained four adventure programs, including NBC's exceedingly violent "A-Team." Today, by contrast, the kids' top-10 list includes only sitcoms.

Amy Fisher and David Koresh

Currently, the most violent content found on the networks is in lurid made-for-television movies, chronicling everything from the saga of Amy Fisher to the government's siege at cult leader David Koresh's Waco, Texas, headquarters. But even these are not as violent as many of the uncut movies shown on cable, where standards-and-practices executives (the industry's in-house censors) tend to give producers more creative freedom. It is also mostly on cable that reruns of old Westerns and police dramas have found new life. Cable network Comedy Central is even parodying the uproar over violent television: On Oct. 30, it plans to launch "Drive-In Reviews," rating the most-violent moments on film.

Network executives at last week's hearing on the issue were frustrated by the number of questioners who prefaced their remarks with, "I don't watch much television, but . . . "

"All we're asking for is to be scrutinized for what we put on the air," says Rosalyn Weinman, vice president of broadcast standards and practices at General Electric Co.'s NBC. She adds that the network is fully prepared to defend its programs. But she adds: "We're being tarred with the brush of the entire media landscape, of which we're a small part, and the part with most checks and balances."

Blame 'Bonnie and Clyde'

David Bianculli, television critic for the New York Daily News, thinks Ms. Weinman has a point. Washington isn't making a sufficiently clear distinction between programming on the networks, syndication and cable, he says. Taking broadside potshots at televised violence, he says, "is a no-lose situation for politicians. There's no lobby saying violence is good." (Recent polls show that more than 80% of the public is concerned about media violence.)

Network-TV violence peaked in the 1980s with "Miami Vice," reruns of which are aired today in syndication, Mr. Bianculli says. He and other media watchers blame cable and its unedited Hollywood movies for the violence problem. The original early-1960s network series "The Untouchables" was about as raw as either TV or movies got up to that time, Mr. Bianculli says. But a few years later the film "Bonnie and Clyde" was released, and Hollywood took a quantum leap beyond TV in violent content — a lead he says movies have held ever since.

The University of California's Dr. Donnerstein believes the issue of TV violence has assumed its current urgency because of the medium's intrusiveness in the home. "The big change in the past decade is children's access to cable, video on demand, rental videos and other media through the TV box," he says.

A number of legislators appear determined to find ways to regulate TV violence, particularly on the broadcast networks, despite obvious First Amendment hurdles. Among the current proposals: Providing a "safe harbor" that excludes violent shows while kids are likely to be watching; ordering the Federal Communications Commission to force broadcast station licensees and cable franchisees to label shows containing violence or unsafe gun practices; and instructing the FCC to issue quarterly report cards on the levels of violence on TV.

Attorney General Reno raised eyebrows when she testified last week that the proposed bills would be constitutional. Robert S. Peck, legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, argues that none of the bills would pass constitutional muster; he cites a long list of cases to back up his point.

Amid the clamor, the Daily News's Mr. Bianculli offers some historical perspective: Back in the 1920s, it seems that a furor arose over a child who had killed his father with a carving knife after watching a silent movie. Of the incident, G.K. Chesterton wrote at the time: "This may possibly have occurred, though if it did, anybody of common sense would prefer to have details of that particular child, rather than about that particular picture."

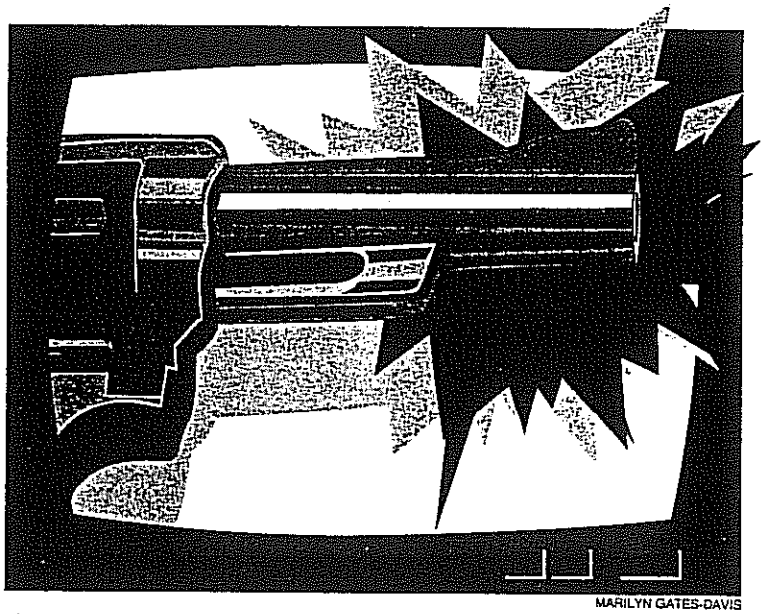
Source: *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, September 4, 1993, pp. 2338-2341.

COMMUNICATIONS

TV Violence: Hill May Not Wait For More Industry Action

Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., a longtime defender of free speech rights, flipped on his television in a hotel room in La Salle County after a long day on the campaign trail in 1984 and knew he had seen enough: a person being murdered with a chain saw.

It was a scene so grisly and devoid of entertainment value that it drove the former newspaperman, upon his election, to take a lead role in reining in television violence, even at the risk of being a liberal accused of advocating censorship.



MARILYN GATES-DAVIS

Studies show a link between TV violence and street violence. Congress, which may not be satisfied with recent industry measures, has struggled to address the problem without trampling First Amendment rights.

In 1990, President George Bush signed into law a provision Simon authored that gave the major broadcast networks three years to take voluntary steps to curb depictions of blood and gore on American television screens. In June, Hollywood responded to that effort by promising to tone down TV violence and air new advisories about programs unsuitable for children.

But judging by the fall lineup of legislation introduced that would further curb violence on TV, Congress is not about to let the industry off that easily.

Lawmakers eager to cast votes against violence will have plenty of opportunities to do so this fall, ranging from one bill giving the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) the power to define "violence" to another requiring television sets to include a computer chip that would allow viewers to block objectionable TV shows.

The bottom line for TV executives: Unless they take further voluntary steps, beyond their new parental warnings, lawmakers will be all the more eager to step in — a possibility that worries Simon and others who are wary of trampling First Amendment rights.

By Mike Mills

> **"We are opposed to any commission made of mortals who are going to tell creative people what is right or wrong."**
>
> *Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America*

"The answer really rests with the industry," said Simon. Hollywood, he said, "has to make a greater show of seriousness than has been shown up to this point."

Simon does not want legislation and has hinted that he would oppose bills that go too far. Instead, he wants the industry to take voluntary steps, including setting up a citizens' group to monitor the level of violence on television. He also calls for self-restraint by writers and producers, more leadership on the issue from executives and the elimination of violence-laden promotions for television shows.

Many broadcasters and cable programmers seem amenable to the watchdog group idea, but Hollywood writers and producers are incensed: They fear a revival of the climate of censorship that enveloped the industry from 1922 to 1945 when the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, run by entertainment lawyer and former Postmaster General Will H. Hays, required a "purity seal" on all productions.

For an industry accustomed to fending off attacks from the political right over depictions of explicit sex on television, it is all the more shocking to Hollywood that liberals such as Simon would be asking them to relinquish control over their product.

"We are opposed to any commission made of mortals who are going to tell creative people what is right or wrong," said Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America. He denounced what he called "this gradual, slow, remorseless intrusion by the government into the content of television."

But many outside Congress fear political momentum could force the issue to its extreme and lead to legislation so broad as to restrict TV content.

Because there is simply no political constituency in Congress for violence on television, lawmakers are left with little reason to vote against any bill that purports to curb it. Martin D. Franks, Washington vice president for CBS Inc., said he harbors an "apocalyptic" fear that lawmakers will roll the array of bills pending in Congress on the issue into one big measure to restrain TV.

"Other than Paul Simon, I cannot find a single member who has even suggested he might oppose [television violence] legislation," Franks said. "At

Congress and TV: A Chronology

1950s — Rise in youth crime and juvenile delinquency prompts congressional hearings on television violence.

- **June 1952:** First congressional hearings on violence in radio and television and its impact on children and youth are held by House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Subcommittee.
- **1954:** Sen. Estes Kefauver, D-Tenn., chairs hearings of Judiciary Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency on role of TV shows in youth crime. Networks say no link.

1960s — Urban violence prompts more congressional hearings and government funding of research on TV violence.

- **1961:** Kennedy administration Federal Communications Commission Chairman Newton N. Minow tells National Association of Broadcasters that American TV is a "vast wasteland."
- **1967:** University of Pennsylvania begins monitoring television programming.
- **1969:** Formation of Boston-based Foundation to Improve Television.
- **Sept. 23, 1969:** Report of National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence cites TV violence as contributor to society's violence problem.

1970s — Surgeon general's study prompts more congressional hearings; academic studies proliferate; court cases examine liability of TV in cases of real violence.

- **1972:** Surgeon general's report on violence cites evidence of link between screen violence and aggressive behavior.
- **1975:** National PTA adopts resolution demanding that networks and local TV stations reduce the amount of violence in programs and commercials (reaffirmed in 1989).
- **1976:** American Medical Association's House of Delegates calls TV violence an "environmental hazard."
- **1979:** In *Zamora v. CBS et al.*, parents of a Florida 15-year-old convicted of murdering a neighbor sue all three networks, unsuccessfully, for negligence in failing to prevent him from being incited to imitate TV.

1980s — Reagan-era deregulation gives media free rein; cable TV, VCRs and rise of independent networks diminish power of networks to control violence on TV.

- **1980:** Founding of National Coalition on Television Violence.
- **1982:** National Institute of Mental Health study says there is a clear consensus on link between TV violence and aggression.
- **September 1984:** Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence says evidence is overwhelming that TV violence contributes to real violence.
- **1984:** American Academy of Pediatrics Task Force on Children and Television cautions physicians and parents that TV may promote aggression.
- **1985:** American Psychological Association Commission on Youth and Violence notes research showing link between TV violence and real violence.

1990s — Networks issue a joint statement of policies on TV violence, made possible by an antitrust exemption passed by Congress. Anti-violence advocates step up pressure.

- **1990:** Simon-Glickman Television Violence Act gives three major networks an antitrust exemption so they can formulate joint policy on violence.
- **1991:** Minow declares: "In 1961, I worried that my children would not benefit much from television, but in 1991 I worry that my children will actually be harmed by it."
- **1992:** American Psychological Association study shows research on link to real violence is ignored and calls for federal policy to protect society.
- **Dec. 11, 1992:** Days before House hearings, the three major networks release joint policy on violence and agree to hold an industrywide conference.
- **June 30, 1993:** The four major TV networks announce their agreement to air parental advisories when shows the networks deem violent are aired. Fifteen major cable networks announce July 29 that they will join in the policy.

SOURCE: CQ Researcher, "TV Violence," by Charles S. Clark, March 26, 1993

the moment I assume everything could be law by Columbus Day."

Forty Years of Debate

The average American child watches 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school, according to a much-cited study by the American Psychological Association.

Since the advent of television in the late 1940s, as many as 3,000 studies have examined links between TV violence and real violence. *(Box, this page)*

One of the most controversial, a 1972 report by the U.S. surgeon general, concluded that there is a causal relationship between TV violence and acts of violence, but only in children presupposed to be aggressive. Since then, other studies have found broader links between TV and actual violence.

For the last 40 years, the issue has waxed and waned in the public consciousness, with Congress threatening to legislate tough content controls and the broadcast industry promising self-restraint. The proliferation of TV competitors, from cable television to satellite channels to rental videos, has only boosted pressure on Congress to act.

Attention is only magnified by a congressional deadline set in the 1990 provision by Simon. The provision, which was attached to a federal judgeships bill (PL 101-650), gave the broadcast networks a three-year antitrust waiver allowing them to get together and agree on voluntary steps to reduce violence on television. That waiver expires Dec. 1. *(1990 Almanac, p. 374)*

In response, the four major networks — NBC, ABC, CBS and Fox — on June 30 announced their agreement to air parental advisories when shows the networks deem violent are aired. The 15 major cable networks announced July 29 they would join in the policy.

It was the most television has ever bowed to congressional pressure in 40 years of debate on the issue. But critics immediately dismissed the advisories as merely a token gesture. For one thing, the programmers themselves will be responsible for deciding which shows merit warning labels. And children's programs or morning talk shows such as "Oprah" or "Geraldo" would not be affected, only shows airing during nightly prime-time schedules.

The 'V-Chip'

Edward J. Markey, D-Mass., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance, called the parental advisories "a good first step."

He then introduced a second step: a bill (HR 2888) that would require every new television set sold in the United States to be equipped with a computer chip that would allow viewers to disable their TVs from receiving programs that are given a "V" rating by broadcasters or cable programmers to warn parents of the show's violent content.

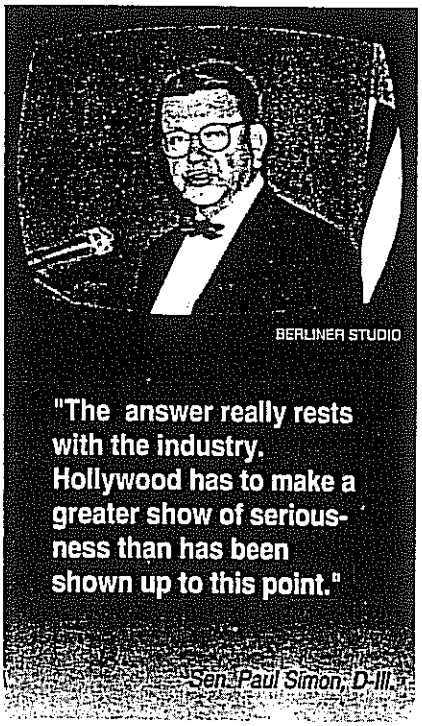
The bill straddles the edge of congressional control over program content. It does not require that broadcasters or cable operators send the electronic signal needed to allow televisions to automatically block V-rated programs.

But should broadcasters refuse to do so, the Markey bill stipulates, the device still would give consumers the option of blocking out channels and time slots of any programs they deem too violent.

Markey's bill has won endorsements by such luminaries as former Kennedy administration FCC Chairman Newton N. Minow and cable industry titan Ted Turner.

"Unless you keep the gun pointed to their heads, all you'll get is mumbly, mealy-mouthed B.S.," Turner testifed at a Markey hearing this summer. Television industry officials, he added, "just hope the subject will go away."

Critics of the Markey plan range from broadcast and movie-industry executives who fear a loss of advertising revenues to TV violence opponents who say many families either cannot afford new televisions or lack the skills to program their sets to block certain programs. Even Peggy Charren, the children's television advocate who along with Markey prompted Congress to enact new program standards for children's television, said she opposes any congressional action on the violence issue, preferring instead that parents simply shut televisions off.



George Gerbner, dean emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication, who since 1967 has conducted the longest continuing surveys of television violence, called the V-chip "a terrible idea" because it does not reduce the amount of violent programs.

"To say we should trust the industry to flag programs they think are too violent is kind of silly. It's like the fox guarding the chicken coop," Gerbner said.

Rather, he said, violence can be reduced only by applying government, marketplace and interest-group pressures on the industry to offer more diverse types of programming rather than appealing to the basest mass-market interests.

Markey's proposal, while perhaps the most visible, is by no means without competition.

Time-Slot Restrictions

On Aug. 5, the day Markey introduced his bill, Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Chairman Ernest F. Hollings, D-S.C., offered a bill (S 1383) that would direct the FCC to limit violent programs to certain time slots when children will be least likely to be watching, much as the agency now limits "indecent" broadcasts. Several courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have upheld the FCC's right to restrict what it deems indecent.

Hollings calls his bill "the least restrictive means by which we can limit children's exposure to violent programming."

Other bills include efforts by:

- Sen. Byron L. Dorgan, D-N.D., and Rep. Richard J. Durbin, D-Ill., that would require the FCC to file quarterly "violence report cards" to provide the public with information about the frequency of violence by each television program and its sponsors (S 973, HR 2159).
- Rep. John Bryant, D-Texas, (HR 2837) that would require the FCC to establish standards of acceptable levels of violence on television and radio shows, including cartoons.

Television industry executives say the Bryant effort treads the closest toward government control of television content.

- Joseph P. Kennedy II, D-Mass., (HR 2756) that would require the FCC to set up a toll-free number for the public to call with complaints, comments, and suggestions regarding television violence. The FCC would be required to publish summaries of the comments quarterly and to forward them to the cable or broadcast station that aired the violent program.

The comments and complaints would be weighed when broadcasters' licenses are up for renewal.

- Rep. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., (HR 2609) that would set up a presidential commission to report within one year on ways to curb TV violence. The group would include the U.S. surgeon general, attorney general, repre-

sentatives from the entertainment industry, crime and education experts and parents.

Hollywood Is Adamant

Rather than face the wrath of restrictive legislation, Gerbner predicts that the television industry — broadcasters, cable executives, producers and writers — will soon take further voluntary steps toward curbing TV violence.

"The leaders of the industry are going to do what they can to avoid any kind of legislation," Gerbner said. "It seems to me that as long as they move forward and provide some evidence of progress, there's only a very slight chance of any other legislation going through."

But Valenti is adamant that no such further "progress" is warranted. He continues to dismiss decades of studies pointing to what most academics involved with the issue now take as a given: that TV violence does have an impact on the aggressive behavior of those who view it.

Valenti maintains that there is little gratuitous violence on nighttime television, save for perhaps the occasional movie of the week. Network officials agree, and are promoting their new fall schedules as containing few, if any, examples of the kinds of violence critics rail against.

Faulting 'Porous' Research

"The research as we have examined it is very porous, very loosely fibered and does not withstand scrutiny," Valenti said. "It's a terrible dilemma. I want to respond to what Congress is saying, but where, first of all, is this violence taking place? And what is the definition of 'violence'?"

Simon and other critics of TV violence liken Valenti's dismissal of the correlation between television violence and street crime to the tobacco industry's practice of disputing research linking smoking with cancer.

Simon has been talking with Valenti and others in the industry, but the senator is not optimistic about being able to fend off restrictive legislation by crafting new voluntary steps to curb violent programming.

"All or none of these [bills] might pass," Simon said at a rare meeting of industry representatives and TV violence critics Aug. 2. "I can tell you that none of the sponsors of these initiatives is losing votes back home with these ideas." ■

Source: *Washington Post*, August 5, 1993, pp. C1, C4.

Congress Takes Aim At TV Violence

Bills Would Require 'V-Chip,' Regulation Of Fiction Programs

By Ellen Edwards
Washington Post Staff Writer

After months of hearings on television violence and veiled threats to the industry, members of Congress this week are taking the step most feared by the networks—introducing legislation to impose controls.

Rep. John Bryant (D-Tex.) on Tuesday introduced a measure that would require the Federal Communications Commission to establish regulations to reduce violence on television. It calls for fines for any violations and would require that when a station's license comes up for renewal, the FCC take into account its efforts on the issue.

A second bill, to be introduced today by Reps. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) and Jack Fields (R-Tex.), would mandate that every television sold in the United States contain the so-called V-chip, the technology that would allow a viewer to block out programs classified as violent by the networks.

"The floodgates have opened," said David Carle, press secretary to Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.). Simon has been one of the Hill's most outspoken critics of violence on television. Several observers said they believed Congress had been waiting to see what happened at Monday's industry-wide conference in Beverly Hills, Calif., and that it now appears lawmakers are ready to take their own

See CONGRESS, C4, Col. 1

Assault on TV Violence

CONGRESS, From C1

action. The networks' agreement to air advisories before programs they consider violent has apparently not been enough to appease congressional critics.

"At Paul Simon's hearing six weeks ago [Ohio Sen.] Howard Metzenbaum said, 'Do something or else,' said one network executive yesterday. 'They just skipped to the 'or else.' "

Network executives who asked not to be identified said they believe favorable sentiment for both the bills makes prospects for passage good. "Nobody is going to lose points back home by going after television violence," said one.

Said another, "It's like being against motherhood and apple pie. It's a shorthand for 'Are you for violence or against it?' "

The networks are worried about First Amendment issues and continued attempts by Congress and advocates of a variety of causes to control the content of programs. "We hear from these people every day," said one network executive.

The networks are also concerned that any program carrying an advisory or rated as violent would lose advertisers.

Bryant, a moderate who was an active supporter of the Children's Television Act of 1990, said that while it was "fair to be concerned" about the First Amendment, he saw no problems in that area because the regulation of broadcasting is different from issues of free speech. He said the regulations would apply only to fictional programming, not news or documentaries.

"It's so clearly in the public interest to put a stop to this that it overrides any objection that we shouldn't interfere," Bryant said yesterday. "It's become a life-or-death, safety-or-threat issue. I would very much like to have left it to the networks, but it's clear they're not going to do anything."

He said the networks have done almost nothing after "we moved mountains" to get an antitrust exemption so they could meet to talk about violence. "They did nothing about it until there were hearings on the matter. Their guidelines are more than ineffective."

The Markey bill would require that every television include technology allowing viewers to block any single program or group of programs that the networks have rated as violent. There are no guidelines for how to determine what is violent or any instructions that any particular program must be rated.

Simon said through a spokesman that while he hasn't opposed the idea of the V-chip, "my preference is for industry self-regulation and not federal action." Of the Bryant bill he said, "It crosses farther into First Amendment territory than anything proposed so far." Simon shocked the conference on Monday by calling for the industry to establish an independent office to monitor violence on television and said he would evaluate its progress after 60 days.

Patricia J. Matson, a spokeswoman for ABC, said, "We would hope Congress would defer any legislation until they have had the chance to assess the effectiveness of any measures we already have in place."

She said the network had "serious reservations" about any "content legislation, no matter how well intended."

She said, for example, that ABC has established an 800 number to tell callers about any ABC programs that carry advisories and that in its first four days, the network had received 4,500 calls.

James H. Rowe, an NBC spokesman, said that while the network "applauds" Markey's concerns, it "agrees with Sen. Simon that voluntary steps and not legislative fiats are the way to go. The proposed legislation is not simply an empowerment tool for parents because it will undoubtedly extend the reach of government into TV programming in a manner that may have a host of unintended consequences.

"However well-intentioned, his legislation would undoubtedly condemn any network program carrying an advisory, whether it was a historical drama on the Civil War or the Holocaust, or even a modern-day program on such vital issues as date rape and domestic violence."

A spokesman for CBS said the network would have no comment on the Markey measure until it was actually introduced.

Source: *Electronic Media*, August 2, 1993, pp. 1, 12.

Station managers:

Television is too violent

By DIANE JOY MOCA
Staff reporter

LOS ANGELES—By an overwhelming majority, TV station managers say television is too violent, according to a recent survey conducted for ELECTRONIC MEDIA.

Though most surveys on violence focus on viewer reaction, the exclusive EM poll concentrated for the first time on the attitudes of local broadcasters.

Conducted two weeks ago by Greene Marketing Group, the poll questioned 100 general managers across all regions of the country and all market sizes.

The result: 74 percent said there was too much needless violence on the small screen.

"I think there is some gratuitous violence we're subjecting our consumers to," said Tim Bever, general manager of CBS affiliate KBCI-TV, Boise, Idaho.

"I think theatrical features that go on television (are among the worst offenders). Some of the network fare is a little rough," Mr. Bever said.

Asked to choose the worst offender of four options—basic cable, broadcast, syndication and local news—65 percent of those surveyed picked basic cable.

Local news received the best marks of the four, with only 13 per-

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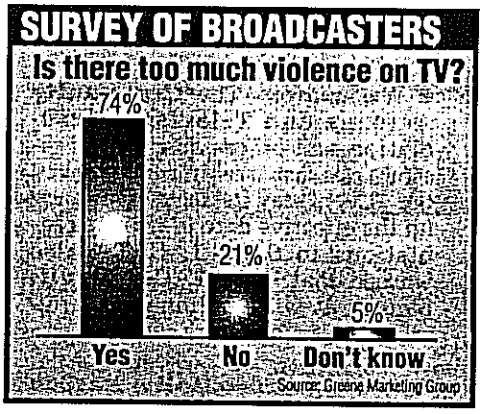

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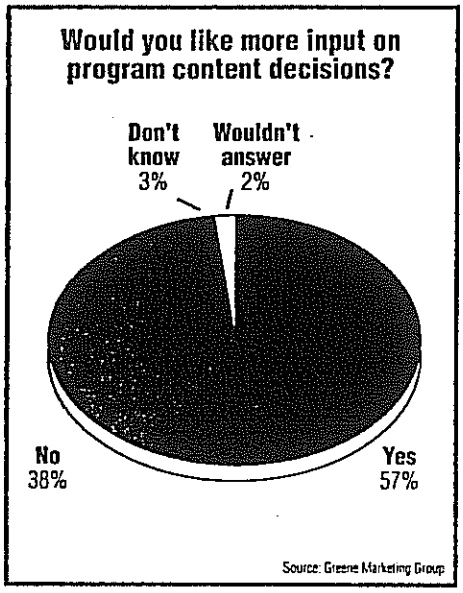
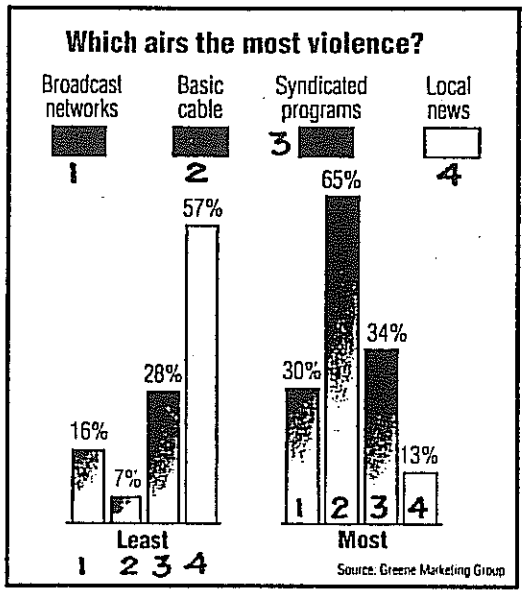
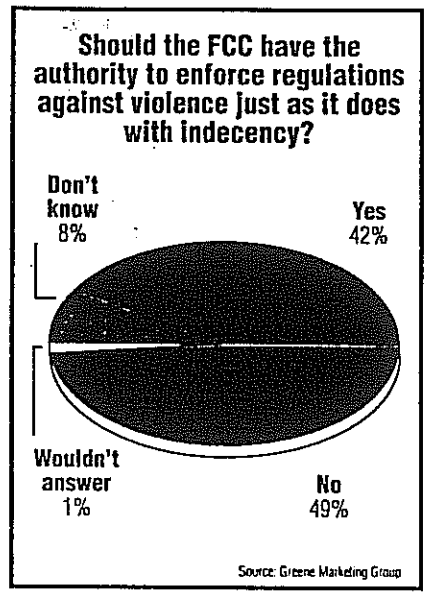
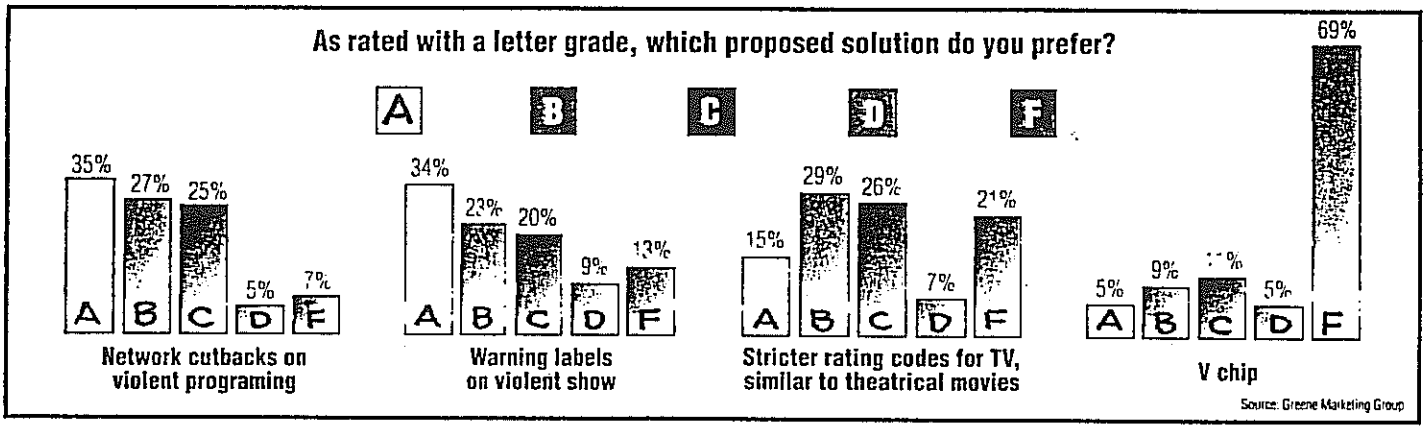








(Continued from Page 1)

cent citing it as the biggest source of violence on television.

"The focus on the networks doesn't do justice to the violence question. I think the networks are doing a fairly good job of regulating violence," says Jeffrey Marks, general manager of NBC affiliate WLBZ-TV, Bangor, Maine.

"I don't think that the people who are observing violence are taking the time to differentiate the different types of television they see," said Robert Davis, general manager of NBC affiliate KMTR-TV, Eugene, Ore.

"I think cable has proliferated more of a violent element in programing, and over-the-air broadcasting has had to air more violent programs to be competitive," says Patrick North, general manager of independent KPHO-TV, Phoenix.

A majority of general managers—55 percent—say they have refused or would refuse to air a program that they deemed too violent.

Mr. North said he has opted not to show certain movies on KPHO.

"I think it's tougher for the independents because we do have to compete," he said.

"As long as there are disclaimers and we let the audience know there's violence, they can choose to watch it or not."

But Michael Fisher, president and general manager of FBC affiliate KTXL-TV, Sacramento, Calif., says he has never blocked a program.

"Televisions don't shoot people; guns do," he said.

"It is a powerful medium. We can do a lot. We've certainly edited some programs, and we've run disclaimers," he said.

"But I can't remember the last time, or the first time, that somebody complained to me about violence on this television station."

Attitudes were divided over the Federal Communications

Commission involvement in the issue of violence.

Almost half—49 percent—of general managers polled said the FCC should not have the authority to enforce regulations against violence as it does with indecency. However, 42 percent said the commission should have that authority.

"Government's track record is as questionable as what you see on TV," says KBCI's Mr. Bever.

"A lot of them deal from an emotional base; a lot of them are reactionary to the squeaky wheel rather than what is the populace. We don't need their intervention."

Here are some other highlights of the poll:

While close to half—44 percent—of general managers surveyed said they would like to see rating codes for television similar to those used for theatrical movies, 74 percent were opposed to the so-called V-chip, a device that theoretically could be installed in new TV sets to block out violent shows.

While 57 percent said advisories are a good solution, 18 percent said the answer is to leave all decisions solely in the hands of the consumer.

And when it comes to the most violent show on network television, "Cops" was the top vote-getter, cited by 27 percent of those responding to the question.

"The Untouchables" tallied 10 percent of that vote, and made-for-TV movies tied with the yet-to-premiere ABC series "NYPD Blue" at 6 percent.

When taking into account all programing, pay cable was named most often, by 14 percent of respondents, as carrying the most violent programing.#

Source: *Electronic Media*, August 2, 1993, pp. 23.

Networks customizing advisories on violence

By DIANE JOY MOCA
Staff reporter

LOS ANGELES—The broadcast networks, as well as TBS Superstation and Turner Network Television, have all agreed to begin placing advisories on their programs to warn parents about violence or other content inappropriate for children.

Though viewers will start to see more advisories than ever in the past, these warnings will not all look the same.

According to the Advance Parental Advisory Plan adopted on June 30 by ABC, CBS, NBC and FBC, a general advisory will state: "Due to some violent content, parental discretion advised."

It will be placed at the beginning of programs and after some commercial breaks, as well as on all related promotions and ad material.

Each broadcast network will determine on its own which programs receive an advisory, though all four agreed on several broad standards.

The plan says advisories may be used because of the overall level of violence; the graphic, unexpected or pervasive nature of the violence; the tone, message or mood of the program; the context of the violent depiction; the composition of the intended audience and the time period it is shown.

The advisories will begin appearing on broadcast network movies, miniseries, specials and series (which will be evaluated on an episode-by-episode basis) at the start of the fall season.

At the end of two years, the networks will collectively evaluate the success of the plan and make appropriate changes.

At that time each network will determine whether or not to continue using the warnings.

The plan asks all distributors, including networks, syndicators and local stations, to be responsible for placing advisories on their fare.

Nearly a month before the broadcast networks announced their plan, the Association of Independent Television Stations unanimously approved its own advisory plan suggesting that all independent stations place advisories where appropriate on programs (especially theatricals), and on all related promotions and ad material.

Five advisories are offered by the plan, with the most involved stating: "The following program involves realistic portrayals of human behavior, including acts of violence, which may be disturbing to children. Parental discretion is advised."

Both plans indicate that the advisories are not intended to discourage program distributors from editing out gratuitous violence and in fact encourage the networks and stations to scrutinize and cut out violence more than ever.

ABC is creating three basic advisories: one to indicate violence, one for mature themes such as sexuality and one for adult language.

TBS and TNT have also agreed to abide by the guidelines spelled out in the broadcast networks' Advance Parental Advisory Plan.

Their advisory will say: "This movie contains violent material which may be unsuitable for children. Parental discretion advised."

Each network is producing its own warning that will contain the "production look of the appropriate network," according to Bob Levi, executive vice president of program administration at Turner Entertainment Networks.

He said it was "highly unlikely" anything other than a movie would require an advisory.#

Source: *Electronic Media*, August 2, 1993, pp. 12, 20.

How the 'V-chip' plan would work

By RUSSELL SHAW
Special to ELECTRONIC MEDIA

By the end of this year, the Electronic Industries Association will adopt voluntary technical standards that, among other functions, may make it possible for future TV sets to block out reception of violent programing or other objectionable material.

The proposed "V-chip" capability is being backed by Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce telecommunications subcommittee.

Ted Turner, president and chairman of Turner Broadcasting System, has also backed a similar technological solution.

An ELECTRONIC MEDIA survey of TV station executives found that 74 percent said the V-chip isn't the solution to the question of violence on television, which is the subject of an industrywide conference in Los Angeles today.

The V-chip capability would actually tie in to a broader Extended Data Service technology, approved last year by the Federal Communications Commission.

EDS signals contain program information, emergency alerts and promotional announcements, and are carried

(Continued on Page 20)

(Continued from Page 12)
in the vertical-blanking interval that separates each of the 525 lines of on-screen video signal used in the NTSC broadcast standard.

In current technology, each interval—visible to TV viewers as a thick black line when a screen "jumps" or "rolls"—is 42 lines deep. Some of those lines can support 30 information characters per second.

Vertical-blanking interval lines currently in use contain material like program titles and network affiliation and closed-captioning information.

Despite the increased use of the 42-line vertical-blanking interval, there are still more than 20 available lines for use.

The EIA proposal would reserve three lines in the remaining inventory to transmit program ratings information, similar to theatrical ratings, which would likely be in ASCII characters.

With V-chip technology, yet-to-be-developed software inside the TV set would detect incoming ASCII characters corresponding to objectionable ratings, and would scramble reception of the incoming signal.

Much of the specifics have yet to be developed, including the precise way set owners would configure their equipment to intercept these signals at given times.

There are also unanswered questions about password encryption which would provide security as well as flexibility should parents wish to view programing they would ordinarily block for their children.

Whether the ratings information would be broadcast at the beginning of the program, or intermittently throughout is another issue that has not yet been resolved.

EIA officials say that transmitting a "V" code only at the beginning of a program would not lock out viewers who tune in after the program starts.

Because V-chip design is in its early stages, none of the set manufacturers have any immediate plans to incorporate the feature into new sets.

If V-chip capability only becomes available through circuitry incorporated into new sets, it would not become available to households unless they bought a new TV.

This has led some to tout that access control's most promising future lies in building this capability into set-top converters rather than hard-wiring it into TV sets.#

Source: *Washington Post*, July 30, 1993, pp. G1, G6.

Cable to Air Violence Warnings

15 Networks Agree To Parental Advisory

By Ellen Edwards
Washington Post Staff Writer

The major players in cable television, following the lead of the broadcast networks, yesterday agreed to air a warning to parents on violent programs.

Fifteen networks—including HBO, Showtime, USA, the Disney Channel, MTV, Nickelodeon, A&E, the Discovery Channel and the Turner Entertainment Networks—accepted the advisory, which could be applied to anything shown on cable, including movies. The criteria for determining what is violent will be left up to each network.

While the agreement was endorsed by Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.), one of Capitol Hill's most vocal critics of television violence, he said in a statement that "labeling violence is more of a bandage than a real cure. The best solution still is to reduce the overall levels of violence on television."

The action, announced by the National Cable Television Association, comes just days before an industry-wide conference on television violence to be held in Los Angeles. "You want to come in with something concrete agreed upon," said one cable spokesman.

The networks and the producers of television programs are doing all

See CABLE, G6, Col. 1

Cable Adopts Advisory

CABLE, From G1

they can to head off any congressional restrictions. They are particularly afraid that Congress might require a "V-chip," a device within a TV that parents could activate to blank out any programs that the networks coded as violent.

The cable label, identical to what the broadcast networks have adopted, will say: "Due to some violent content, parental discretion advised." Networks are free to go beyond this basic language; HBO, for one, is likely to make its advisories more explicit, perhaps describing the acts of violence.

Like movie ratings, the label is an attempt at self-regulation by an industry that has come under widespread criticism in the last several months, especially after the unusually bloody May ratings sweeps.

In fact, its effect may be very limited. Many of the cable networks already air a variety of disclaimers. HBO and Showtime, for example, show the Motion Picture Association of America ratings for feature movies, as well as advisories for sex, violence and language. HBO has carried disclaimers for 15 years, said spokesman Quentin Schaffer. He said the spy movie "Blue Ice," which will air this fall, would carry a disclaimer, as does the "Tales From the Crypt" anthology.

On Showtime, the film noir series "Fallen Angels," which begins Sunday night, will carry a "mature advisory," said McAdory Lipscomb Jr., senior vice president for corporate affairs.

MTV spokesman Carole Robinson said every video submitted for airing is reviewed by a standards committee, and "gratuitous violence is not something you would see on MTV." The network has occasionally aired warnings in the past, she said.

The USA Network has carried advisories warning of mature subject matter or adult situations for about 10 years but has never had a violence warning, according to spokesman Dan Martinsen. He said no programs have yet been designated to carry the new advisory.

Peggy Binzel, director of government affairs for Turner Broadcasting, said although her network edits movies "heavily" for violence, some might still merit the warning. She cited some Clint Eastwood movies as an example.

"Pretty soon labels will get so ubiquitous that we will pay as little attention to them as we do to the warnings on tobacco advertising," said Peggy Charren, founder of the watchdog group Action for Children's Television, who has criticized labeling as ineffective.

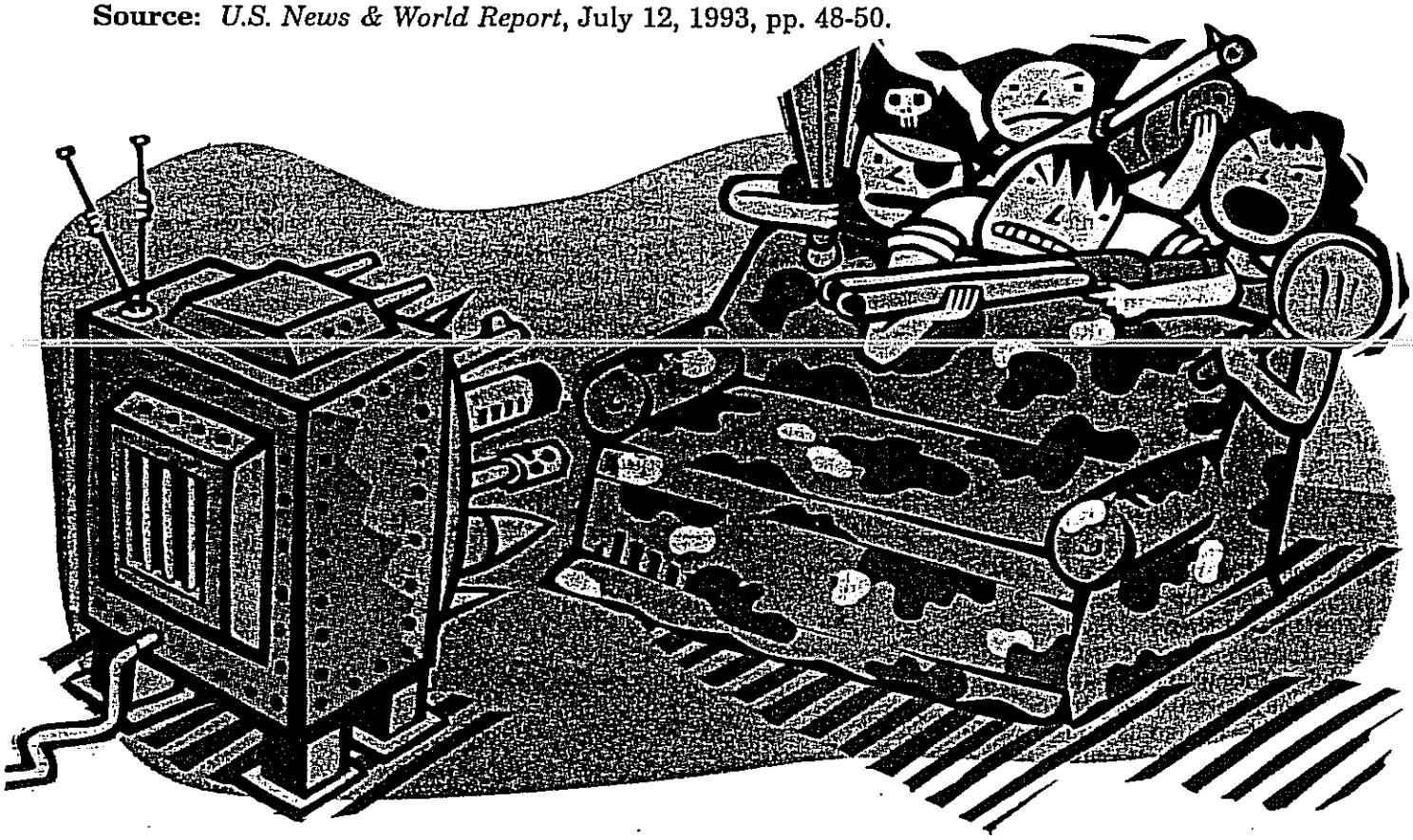
Cable has long been viewed as a worse offender in airing violent programs than broadcast television. A recent study commissioned by the National Cable Television Association showed that to be true for cable-originated dramatic programs, but not for children's shows.

The study excluded any programs or movies that were not made specifically for cable, such as feature-length movies, which are often considerably more violent than other fare and are the staple of some cable networks. The study was done by George Gerbner of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication.

Lipscomb said the cable networks were not invited to join the broadcast networks when they made their original announcement, though they were encouraged to do so afterward. He said he thought that because cable has aired advisories for years, "a number of the broadcasters felt they had to catch up with cable in informing their viewers."

Representatives of cable companies have been meeting under the Television Violence Act, sponsored by Simon, which waived antitrust laws to permit discussions on the subject.

Source: *U.S. News & World Report*, July 12, 1993, pp. 48-50.



Warning shots at TV

The networks' new system won't stop mayhem or quell public anger

And now, from the folks who this season brought you three versions of the Amy Fisher-Joey Buttafuoco story, quickie movies on the David Koresh shootout and the World Trade Center bombing, bizarre brutality in "Wild Palms" and infanticide in "Murder in the Heartland," comes this startling concept for the fall: "Due to some violent content, parental discretion advised." The explicit warning adopted last week by ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox network executives is new, but it arises from a fear that has gnawed at Americans since the first days when Robert Stack, playing Eliot Ness, shot it up with gangsters every week in "The Untouchables" in the 1950s. As the (Milton) Eisenhower Commission put it in 1969: "We are deeply troubled by the television's constant portrayal of violence . . . in pandering to a public preoccupation with violence that television itself has helped to generate."

The problem is that the warning system won't cover much of the mayhem on the tube. Only one regular-season show, Steven Bochco's "NYPD Blue," will contain the warning—and that was decided *before* the networks staged last week's Capitol extravaganza. Presumably, the warning will also be slapped on a handful of movies. But it will not be applied to: cable station offerings, which in "adult" programming have an even bloodier tinge than network shows; independently produced shows like the new "Untouchables"; children's TV shows, which in the 1990-91 network season reached a historically high 32 violent acts per hour during network weekend TV (chart, Page 49); any newscasts, including local TV news, which in many cities has become a near ceaseless chronicle of gore and reality-based TV shows like "Cops."

Another shortcoming is that each network will decide for itself when to issue an advisory. There will be no uniform standard for what constitutes worrisome violence. "The advisories will have absolutely no effect," predicts David Abbott, director of the Boston-based Foundation to Improve Television, an antiviolence advocacy group.

"Happy violence." There has been a long-running debate about whether this saturation of media violence, including the routine barbarity in movies, video games and comic books, is causally connected to the actual level of violence in modern culture (story, Page 50). Whatever the linkage, there is now widespread agreement that the public understanding of violence—especially that of children—has been recast over time. "The historically limited, individually crafted, selectively used and often tragic symbolic violence [of fairy tales, myths and Shakespeare] has been swamped by 'happy violence,'" argues critic George Gerbner. "Happy violence shows no pain or tragic consequences. It is a swift and easy dramatic solution to many problems."

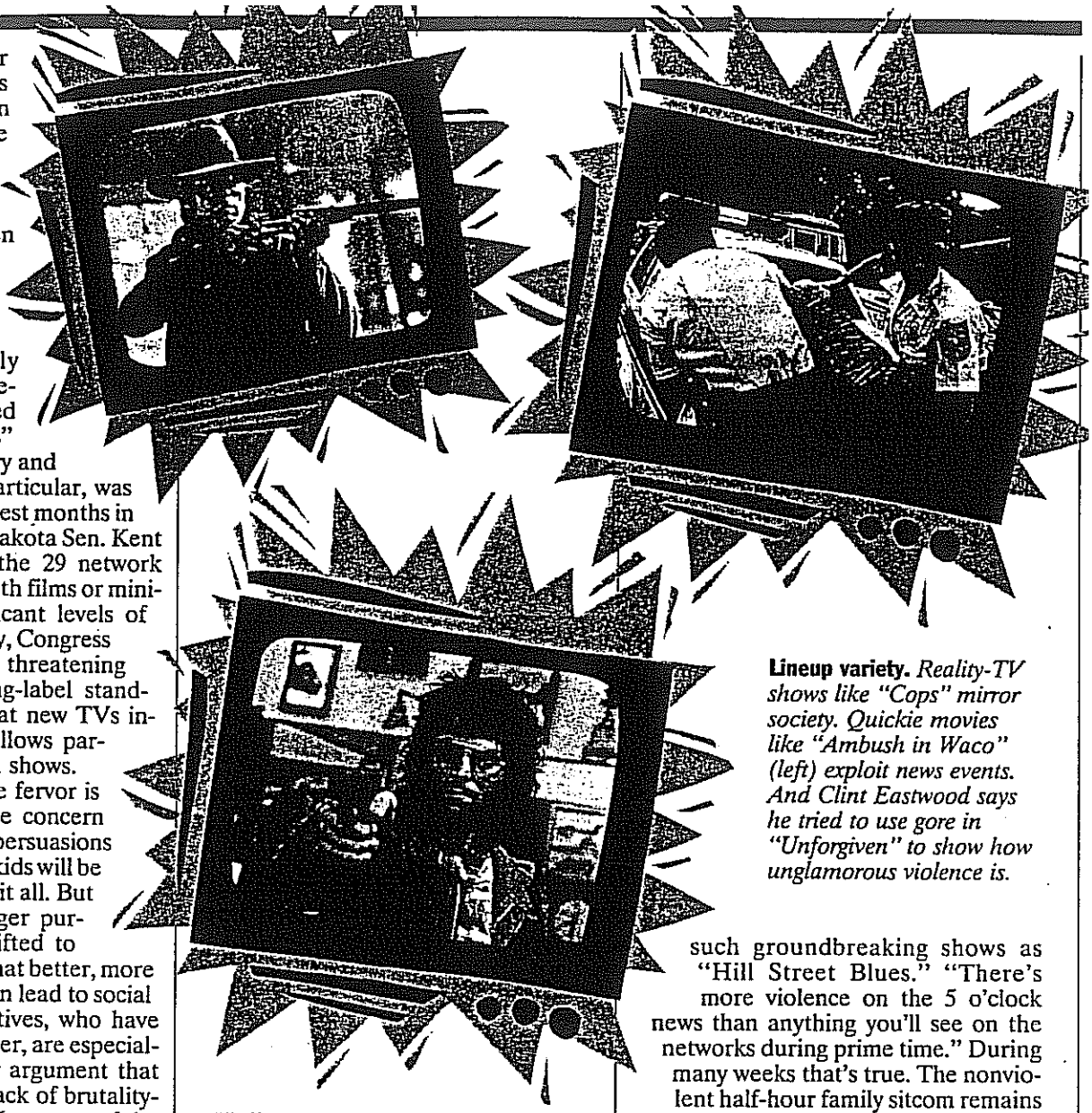
Whatever the scientific truth, there has been a surprising convergence of

ILLUSTRATIONS: ROBERT ZIMMERMAN FOR USN&WR

opinion in the past year that media violence abets the real violence on America's streets. The urgency of the current debate began after the trauma of the Los Angeles riots last year as then Vice President Quayle and others attacked Hollywood for its loose morals. It was fueled by an especially bloodthirsty run of made-for-TV movies that aired during ratings "sweeps" periods last fall, February and May. The last one, in particular, was called "one of the bloodiest months in TV history," by North Dakota Sen. Kent Conrad because 18 of the 29 network movie slots were filled with films or miniseries containing significant levels of violence. Not surprisingly, Congress is getting into the act, threatening everything from warning-label standards to requirements that new TVs include technology that allows parents to block out certain shows.

Turned off. Driving the fervor is the increasingly assertive concern among parents of all persuasions who fear most that their kids will be warped or frightened by it all. But adults also embrace larger purposes. Liberals have drifted to the cause on the theory that better, more positive media images can lead to social improvement. Conservatives, who have been in the trenches longer, are especially anxious to press their argument that Hollywood is run by a pack of brutality-loving libertines. Fully 96 percent of the 70,000 persons who recently responded to a write-in survey by *USA Weekend* said Hollywood executives glorify violence and an equal number said they had switched off a show before it ended because of its violence.

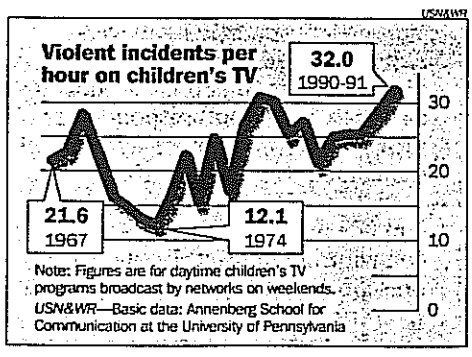
One especially intriguing alliance is helping galvanize the crusade—the budding cooperative work between gun advocates and gun controllers. The Center to Prevent Handgun Violence has set up a Hollywood office to press for a more realistic portrayal of the devastating consequences of gun violence—for example, that a gun victim can end up permanently paralyzed in a wheelchair. The National Rifle Association would like to see guns used more responsibly, as well. "It galls us that every night we get lectured by ABC, NBC and CBS News, and then they go to their entertainment programming and show all kinds of gratuitous violence," says NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre.



Lineup variety. *Reality-TV shows like "Cops" mirror society. Quickie movies like "Ambush in Waco" (left) exploit news events. And Clint Eastwood says he tried to use gore in "Unforgiven" to show how unglamorous violence is.*

Hollywood's response has been a strange admixture. One ingredient is contrition. "Wild Palms," the exotic miniseries produced by movie director Oliver Stone, for example, was so gruesome that just two days after it aired, CBS Broadcast Group President Howard Stringer found himself promising a Senate subcommittee, "Definitely, we're going to do better."

Another ingredient is defiance. "This is a bogus issue," says Bochco, creator of such groundbreaking shows as "Hill Street Blues." "There's more violence on the 5 o'clock news than anything you'll see on the networks during prime time." During many weeks that's true. The nonviolent half-hour family sitcom remains the staple of network programming, especially in the upcoming season.



Hypocrisy. Of course, no media executive's reaction to public concern would be complete without a dose of hypocrisy. In a *mea culpa* before the House telecommunications subcommittee on June 25, Ted Turner, chairman of CNN and TBS, said TV executives who put violent programs on the air were "guilty of murder as far as I can see. They all are. Me, too." This worthy sentiment comes almost five months to the day after TBS ran this promotional ad a week before the Super Bowl: "No football? No problem. A day of unnecessary roughness, personal fouls and sudden death." The featured films included the standard ferocious fare of Chuck Norris, Jean-Claude Van Damme and Clint Eastwood.

Most intriguing of all Hollywood's responses have been attempts by some to make violence morally instructive. Eastwood said his Oscar-winning Western, "Unforgiven," was designed to

PHOTO INSETS (TOP LEFT) PHOTOFEST; (TOP RIGHT) FOX BROADCASTING; (BOTTOM) GLOBE PHOTOS

"preach that it isn't glamorous to take a gun; it isn't glamorous to kill people; it isn't pretty." (Yet his next film, "In the Line of Fire," due out this week, is sure to inspire outrage because it centers on a madman's attempt to assassinate the president.) Even more daring, perhaps, are the hopes of Albert and Allen Hughes, the 21-year-old twins from Detroit who created the most graphically brutal film of the season, "Menace II Society." In that film, gunshot victims appear on the screen almost every 15 minutes. The victims are filmed convulsing, salivating and in every other dimension of agony. The reason, according to Allen: "We make *realistically* violent scenes that almost make people want to turn their heads when they see it. You bring [youths] in [the theater], you appall them, you make them sick from the violence." Agrees Albert: "That really messes with people."

Advertiser fallout. In Hollywood, though, ethical issues usually fall victim to the bottom line. And these days, economic currents provide the most hope against purveyors of violence. ABC's made-for-TV movie "Murder in the Heartland" was so violent that advertisers deserted it in droves, costing the network several million dollars. NBC has reportedly rejected two projects for next season—a sequel to its Koresh movie and a TV-showing of Michael Douglas's "Falling Down"—because of fear the violence may incite criticism. "This is an industry based on trends," says independent producer Jennifer Alward. "The networks are turning away from violence. The buzzword these days is 'family trauma stories with an edge.' "

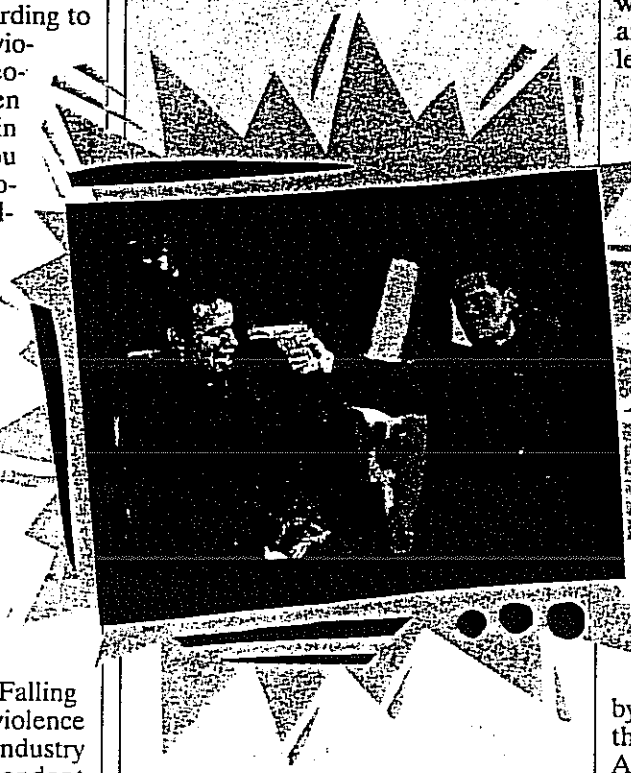
To promote the new antiviolence ethos, President Clinton's staff and key congressional figures are reportedly considering convening a gathering this fall to which they would invite big corporate advertisers and encourage them to withhold support for blood-stained shows, *U.S. News* has learned. In a paradoxical way, this all could strengthen the efficacy of the network warning system. The mere threat of a warning being slapped on a show might be enough to deter the producers and advertisers. And, these days, the deterrence of violence—real and in the media—is what everybody craves. ■

BY HARRISON RAINIE, BETSY STREISAND AND MONIKA GUTTMAN WITH GORDON WITKIN

CASE STUDIES

Science looks at TV violence

After more than 1,000 scientific studies, the notion that violence portrayed in popular culture has an impact on behavior is finally coming through—although the picture is still a bit fuzzy. Research shows that not all kinds of violent depictions are equally harmful, not everyone is affected in the same ways and, ironically, the most influential displays of violence may be those that reinforce the moral message of right over wrong.



Impact. *Does this inspire aggression?*

Punching back. The clearest evidence comes from lab studies showing that depicted violence can lead to a short-term rise in aggressive behavior. In a series of landmark studies in the 1960s, psychologist Leonard Berkowitz of the University of Wisconsin found that college students who had seen a clip of the bloody boxing match in the film classic "Champion" responded to provocation much more aggressively than students who had not seen it.

Field studies also suggest that violent TV may lead to more-combative behavior in children. In one study, preschoolers given a monthlong diet of violent "superhero" cartoons exhibited more-aggressive play than a group shown episodes of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" or documentaries. Another study of a remote Canadian town showed that aggressive behavior in kids rose after the town gained access to television broadcasting. A long-term study found a link between children who preferred to watch violent programs as 8-year-olds and their propensity to commit violent crimes by the age of 30.

Still, the leap from scientific studies to the real world is tricky, says sociologist David Phillips of the University of California at San Diego, who found that the U.S. homicide rate briefly increases by nearly 10 percent several days after a nationally televised heavyweight championship fight. "It's like watching rain fall on a pond and trying to figure out which drop causes which ripple," he says. Obviously, not every child who watches violent images becomes a criminal—and there is little evidence of long-term effects on youngsters whose first exposure to violent TV comes after age 12. Research also suggests that kids are far less swayed by violent cartoon characters than they are by the violence of live actors. And sometimes, images of violence elicit sympathy. When one group of Berkowitz's subjects was told the losing boxer died as a result of his beating—thus making the consequences of the violence more vivid—its aggressive response was lower.

The real danger of violence in popular culture may result from the fact that it sometimes reinforces existing prejudices. The most aggressive responses in Berkowitz's study, for instance, arose in those subjects who were told that the loser was an abusive man. Apparently, seeing images of a bad person being violently punished motivated viewers to mete out harsher punishments of their own. That's when the primordial urge for vengeance can get pushed too far.

BY WILLIAM F. ALLMAN

PHOTO INSET: PHOTOFEST

Source: *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 1993, pp. A1, A6. (National Edition)

Networks' Plan to Label Violent Shows Criticized

By ROBERT L. JACKSON
and DANIEL CERONE
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

WASHINGTON—Staunch opponents of TV violence criticized a parental advisory plan offered by the major television networks on Wednesday while television executives defended it against accusations that it does not resolve the problem.

Lawmakers and activists who have pushed hard in recent months for a dramatic reduction in the level of TV violence, which they contend is directly related to violence in society, said the network labeling plan is not enough.

"It's like having a chemical company paint their smokestack red to say here's where the pollution is being emitted," said Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (D-N.D.), one of at least half a dozen members of Congress who have threatened measures bordering on censorship if the industry fails to police itself.

Adding to the skepticism about the plan's effectiveness was the networks' contention that none of their current series are violent enough to warrant the label, although they expect an occasional TV movie and one new police show on ABC, "NYPD Blue," to carry it.

"Under the guise of 'empowering' parents, the industry is avoiding its own responsibility for the violent content of the entertainment it produces," said Rep. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.). "The networks, cable and film industry efforts should be focused on lowering the amount of violence on TV and reducing children's exposure to it."

Executives from NBC, ABC, CBS and Fox defended the plan at a Washington press conference, however, hailing it as a major move to give parents "timely information

Please see VIOLENCE, A6

Continued from A1

about depictions of violence" that will help shield children from the harmful effects of televised mayhem.

They were joined by two leading lawmakers concerned about the psychological impact of violent programming on children—Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) and Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.).

In a joint statement, the networks said the parental advisory plan—which is to be given a two-year test—adds to "the ongoing commitment of each network to eliminate inappropriate depictions of violence on television."

Beginning with their programming this fall, the networks will label violence-prone shows with an eight-word advisory: "Due to some violent content, parental discretion advised."

Each network will decide for itself when to issue the advisory. It will run at the beginning of the program and during commercial breaks, and also will be included in advertising and promotional material for the program.

Warren Littlefield, president of NBC Entertainment, rejected criticism that the networks could not regulate themselves regarding the amount of violence they portray on TV.

"There was one research group that said our recent 20th anniversary special of "Laugh In" was too violent," he noted. "Well, 40 million viewers saw that program and we didn't get one complaint it was too violent."

Simon, chief sponsor of 1990 legislation that frees industry officials from antitrust sanctions to work out voluntary guidelines by the end of this year, called the parental warning label "a significant step in the direction of assuring that a powerful medium can be

a force for good in our society."

Markey, chairman of a House subcommittee that has conducted hearings on television violence, said the industry's decision to label its most violent shows marked "the dawning of a new era" in which the television industry no longer is challenging findings by psychologists and others that violence-prone programs strongly affect young viewers.

Both, however, said more action is needed.

Markey said he will continue to push for enactment of legislation requiring manufacturers to equip new television sets with a "blocking" mechanism allowing parents to screen out shows they deem unsuitable for their children.

"In today's world of two working parents, it's unrealistic to believe that Mom or Dad can be sitting with their children whenever they're watching TV," Markey said at the press conference.

Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Assn. of America, joined in the press conference and said the movie industry would cooperate in the plan where films are shown on television.

Valenti noted that an industry-wide conference would be held in Los Angeles on Aug. 2 to discuss further measures, and that a series of meetings would take place "during the next several months" to solicit support from writers, directors, producers and TV-movie developers to eliminate gratuitous violence from televised dramas.

There were conflicting reactions to the plan in the advertising community, where some applauded it and others predicted problems.

"How far will they take this?" asked Kenneth Olshan, chairman of New York ad giant Wells Rich Green BDDP. "I suppose they could brand the 'Wizard of Oz' as being violent."

Reuters

Jack Valenti, Motion Picture Assn. of America president, said the movie industry would cooperate in the plan where films are shown on TV.

Olshan said a violence warning for TV shows could clearly scare advertisers away from any show "that has the brand on its forehead."

But the chairman of the ad industry's largest trade organization said the new warnings could help viewers and advertisers make better decisions. Many advertisers now hire outside specialists to advise them about violence in specific TV shows.

"It is annoying to many advertisers to have to screen each show, and this could help eliminate some of that," said John O'Toole, president of the New York-based American Assn. of Advertising Agencies.

Opponents, however, insisted that the plan is too conservative.

The parental advisories may even inflame the problem by driving up ratings for violent programming, suggested Terry Rakolta, founder of the advocacy group Americans for Responsible TV.

"The advisories will make it a lot easier for kids to find the stuff," said Rakolta, who wants to remove all programming with violence from the airwaves during hours when children are most likely to be watching—4 p.m. to 9 p.m.

The networks are not the first to suggest a labeling system. Jim Hedlund, president of the Assn. of Independent TV Stations, said his trade group last week sent out suggested advisories to its 300-member stations to accompany the host of syndicated action-adventure series and theatrical movies, which tend to contain more violence than network offerings.

"The networks were simply proposing to do what we already decided to do. Welcome aboard," said Hedlund. "I'm somewhat disappointed that they didn't place a call to us to see if we wanted to be a part of this."

Jackson reported from Washington and Cerone from Los Angeles. Times staff writers Bruce Horovitz and John Lippman in Los Angeles also contributed to this story.

Source: *Electronic Media*, March 22, 1993, pp. 3, 30.

Quello joins fight against TV violence

By DOUG HALONEN
Washington bureau chief

WASHINGTON—Firing a warning shot across the television industry's bow, Federal Communications Commission Chairman Jim Quello last week announced his support for escalating efforts by activists to curb TV violence.

In addition, Mr. Quello endorsed a legislative proposal that would give the FCC the same enforcement authority over violent programing that it already has over indecent programing.

"We've got to do something about this excessive violence," said Mr. Quello, in an interview last week.

"We're desensitizing society. Kids are now beginning to imitate what they see on TV," the chairman added.

Mr. Quello also specifically endorsed an ongoing effort by Terry Rakolta's Americans for Responsible Television to win legislation that would oblige the agency to crack down on violent programing during children's viewing hours.

Ms. Rakolta formally pitched the proposal in a letter to House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman John Dingell, D-Mich., last week.

"Society and our children are suffering due to the irresponsible use of our public airwaves by network moguls," the letter said.

As of press time, an aide said the lawmaker had not decided whether to sponsor such a bill.

Nonetheless, the FCC's Mr. Quello made clear that Ms. Rakolta will be able to count on his support.

"If she gets the legislation introduced, I will support the concept and we'll enforce it," Mr. Quello said.

(Continued on Page 30)

Quello to fight TV violence

(Continued from Page 3)

Mr. Quello added that he was well aware that his position would not please "First Amendment absolutists."

However, he said there is sometimes a conflict between the First Amendment and the agency's duty to ensure that the public interest is served.

"If the First Amendment rights conflict with the public interest, as far as the FCC is concerned, the public interest should prevail," Mr. Quello said.

Ms. Rakolta's letter asserts that the American Medical Association, the National Institute of Mental Health and other groups have concluded that "childhood watching of TV violence is directly related to criminally violent behavior later on."#

Source: *Washington Post*, April 7, 1992, p. E5.

Primal Screen

Kids: TV Violence & Real-Life Behavior

By Don Oldenburg
Washington Post Staff Writer

The 8-year-old New York girl was used to getting her way with the TV remote control. But when she persuaded her parents to rent the video "Child's Play 2," an R-rated horror movie about a possessed doll named "Chucky" that maims and kills, for days afterward she pleaded at bedtime that her mother check under the bed and keep the lights on.

Her parents dismissed it as "normal" fears," no different than the willies they used to get watching werewolf and chain-saw flicks. That was until they chanced upon their daughter measuring her grip around her little brother's neck. "She wasn't really trying to hurt him," says the mother now, "but it did make me stop and think."

A 15-year-old suburban Maryland boy says he watched police shows and "played guns" with neighbor kids when he was younger. Among his friends were kids who wanted to be cops some day so they could shoot people like on television and Hulk Hogan fiends whose choke holds and full nelsons got old fast.

Lately, real-life seems to have caught up with the TV fantasies for him. He was attacked by punks from a nearby high school a year ago. Toughs hanging out in school hallways mimicking the macho rhetoric of MTV rap artists intimidate him. Talk of guns stashed in lockers bothers him.

"I guess you could say TV takes its toll on a lot of people," he sighs.

Researchers have been saying as much, with the preponderance of evidence from more than 3,000 studies over two decades finding that violence portrayed on television influences the attitudes and behavior of children who watch it. Justice Department figures showing the youth arrest rate for murder, manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault increased by 16 percent between 1989 and 1990 have turned up the volume of that message recently.

In late February, the American Psychological Association (APA) released a task force report, five years in the making and heralded as the most comprehensive look ever at the role of television in society. Titled "Big World, Small Screen," it estimated that the child who watches an average two to four hours of television daily will have witnessed 8,000 murders and 100,000 other acts of TV violence by the time he leaves elementary school. "Television can cause aggressive behavior and can cultivate values favoring the use of aggression," it concluded. The task force called for a federal TV policy "protecting citizens and society from harmful effects."

Last Tuesday, psychologist Leonard Eron, a research professor emeritus at the University of Illinois, delivered a harder-hitting indictment of America's favorite pastime at the U.S. Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs hearing on violence and the media. "There can no longer be any doubt," he said, "that heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of aggressive behavior, crime and violence in society."

Channeled Aggression

Researchers, however, only now are beginning to tune in to which youngsters couched obediently before TV are most "at risk."

Not every child mesmerized by on-screen violence (about five violent acts per hour prime-time; 26.4 violent acts per hour on children's programming, including cartoons) grows into a troubled adolescent or sociopathic criminal. And those headline-grabbers that do (the 12-year-old Florida boy who set himself ablaze imitating his favorite Motley Crüe video; the 13-year-old California murderer who confessed his idea to pour salt on his victim's wounds came "from TV") tend to convince parents that violent programming affects only other people's children. But despite a fuzzy picture of who is most vulnerable, researchers have determined that "bad kids" aren't the only ones.

"It is the crucial question that has never been answered: Are some children more likely to be affected negatively by violence on television than others?" says Diana Zuckerman, a Washington psychologist and a member of the APA Task Force on Television and Society.

Zuckerman says she saw the negative conditioning of TV violence in a 1981 study in which she worked with third-, fourth- and fifth-graders. Without knowing what TV shows their students regularly watched, teachers at the school rated the children on a variety of measures—including aggressiveness and violence. Zuckerman and her colleagues meanwhile documented the kids' TV-viewing habits by hours and content.

"These were upper-middle-class elementary school kids who were functioning very nicely," says Zuckerman. "There was a definite relationship between what they watched and how they behaved."

Among the questions asked of the students: Had they ever imitated the violence they saw on television? "Most of them said they did," says Zuckerman. "Mostly things like, they'd watched some program on the TV and then they'd hit their little sister."

But if all children are potentially at risk, some researchers fear most for those whose community and home environments already overdose them with violence. "Children in the inner city, children who live in the high crime areas, kids who are on their way home from school who have to dodge bullets," says Eron, chairman of APA's Commission on Violence and Youth, "these are the ones who are most affected.

"Watching TV violence for those kids validates that kind of behavior. They see it on television and think it's happening all over and it's normative. They don't see any other alternatives. Kids who live in middle-class suburban areas are affected too. But [the violence] is not as central to their lives."

Carol Beck says she sees that influence among her students at Brooklyn's Thomas Jefferson High School. If bitterness rings in Beck's words when talking about the negative impact of television, videos and films on children, there's good reason: In the five years she has served as principal at the school located in a neighborhood

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where children are jolted from sleep by the sound of gunfire, where sirens and angry voices are the norm, 50 of her students have been killed in street violence.

"The many decisions our young people make regarding behavior, dress, future aspirations, and nourishment for their bodies are shaped by forces outside of the home," she testified at the Senate committee hearing last week. "Our children are the end result of the saying that 'The media is the message' [*sic*]. Our children are being brainwashed by the constant and insidious violence portrayed in the media."

TV Guidance?

Thirty years ago, when Eron began researching how children learn to be aggressive, he was skeptical that television could have such a deleterious effect. He believed it probably had no greater impact than did Saturday afternoon westerns of his youth or traditional though violent fairy tales of childhood. But a survey he conducted in 1960 of 875 third-graders and their parents in a semi-rural New York county changed his mind.

Looking for clues as to how parenting practices related to children's violence at school, Eron unexpectedly uncovered a link between violence on the TV shows the boys watched and their aggressive behavior at school.

Returning 10 years later to reinterview more than half of the original subjects, Eron discovered a striking connection between the boys who viewed violent TV shows at age 8 and their aggressiveness at 19. Controlling other variables (IQ, social status, etc.), he also found that boys who had ranked low on aggression 10 years earlier but watched violent television turned out "significantly more aggressive" than boys who originally ranked high on aggression but didn't watch violent shows.

Two years ago, Eron revisited those subjects. Most were about 30 years old. Looking into additional data such as criminal records, he found "no relation to what they were watching at age 19 and how aggressive they were at 19, or at age 30," he says. "But there was a strong relation between what they watched at age 8 and their aggressive behavior at age 19 and at age 30."

If the staying power of TV's violent messages is alarming, so is a tangential finding from the study that serves as a major clue to what kids are at risk: "The more hours of television the children watched when they were 8 years old," says Eron, "the more serious were the crimes they were convicted of by the time they were age 30, and the more aggressive they were under the influence of alcohol, and the more severely they punished their own children."

Adjust That Dial

To profile who's at risk, researchers are trying to define the psychological dynamics at work when children fine-tune their minds to programs that range from reenacted murders on "America's Most Wanted" to Wiley Coyote flattened like a pancake on "Roadrunner" cartoons.

The most risky age range for TV violence is from the youngest viewers up to ages 8 to 10, they believe. Until children reach the double digits, says Eron, "they find it very difficult to differentiate what's real and what's not real on TV. After age 10, they know pretty much what's not real and it has less effect on them."

Young children tend to rehearse mentally the sequence of behavior they see on television over and over. "By seeing these displays of violence, by fantasizing about them, they rehearse them and they are more likely to understand them as normal behavior," says Eron, clarifying that TV violence is one of many "contributing factors" to today's violence. "It teaches them ways of solving interpersonal problems . . . and contributes to the development of certain attitudes and norms of behavior."

Last month, the National Behavioral Science Research Agenda Committee, a mental health coalition attempting to identify areas of national concern, reported that "children who watch a great deal of violence on TV are less likely to recoil at the violence of others . . . That some children choose to watch violent television programs and are influenced by them, whereas others are not, suggests some characteristics of children that make them more prone to the attractions of violence."

One of those characteristics is a predisposition to aggressiveness. "The research on media violence suggests that those children already with a history of aggressive behavior that's recognized by peers and teachers are the kids who search out violent material, identify more with violent characters, and are most susceptible to this type of programming," says psychologist Edward Donnerstein.

A professor of communications at the University of California at Santa Barbara, Donnerstein's research focusing on sexually violent material has found some "very disturbing" effects extending into the teenage years that aren't necessarily blatant. "The notion that I watched a lot of violence on TV and never killed anybody doesn't mean there aren't other effects," he says. "We don't say everybody is going to go out and commit a rape, but they certainly might have a different attitude about victims of rape, or about what rape is. They might be desensitized about violence and have a callous attitude toward victims of violence which, given the events of our times, we should be concerned about."

To expect a child to recognize actions portrayed on television to be wrong or unreal is expecting too much, says Zuckerman. "The tricky part is that what you or I think is a horrible turn-off might unfortunately for some impressionable children strike them as neat or awesome.

"The concern is about imprinting or engraining the association of sex with violence in the impressionable minds of children whose limited life experience can't counter the influence. . . . Some kids may be learning what they think is appropriate behavior from these programs."

Staying Tuned

Leonard Eron cautions that other characteristics also put children at risk. Those who are socially less popular and those who aren't good students seem to be affected more—especially when combined with an already aggressive nature. "Kids who are aggressive don't get along so well with other kids so they don't spend so much time with them," he says. "But they do spend more time watching TV. And if they don't find schoolwork satisfying, they spend more time watching TV."

Emphasizing that "a whole host of factors" contribute to increasing the

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risks of watching TV violence, Donnerstein says "effect-size" estimates attribute between 5 and 15 percent of kids' aggressive behavior to television's influence. "That's a lot," he says. "And most of this research has been done with traditional programming. What has changed in the last five years is access to cable, to pay-per-view. Children have an easier time being exposed to very graphic material. A film rated 'R' that once was only in a theater has a great chance of being seen by children at home now. So we're really talking about a much more violent content that's only beginning to be looked at.

"The strange thing is we don't know what the effect of this will be. For some kids, it will be very powerful stimuli. These possibilities exist now much more than they did a decade ago."

What Parents Can Do

What frustrates researchers is that despite alarming findings over two decades, the message that violent TV programming affects children's attitude and behavior is largely ignored and often denied by those in the best position to control the problem—parents.

The solution is not "all or none." Research indicates that while children who spend a lot of time in front of the TV set do poorly in school, those who spend moderate time watching TV actually perform better than those who watch none at all. So, realistically, parents need to learn not how to ban their children from watching TV, not how to censor the violence and sex and glamorous beer ads and bad attitudes portrayed on the screen, but rather how to cut the losses. The key to that, researchers believe, is being there when your child watches television.

Some pointers from the experts:

- "If you start talking about it with your children, they really do start thinking about these issues," says Kansas State University psychologist John P. Murray, author of "Using TV Sensibly," a brochure available free by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to HDFS—TV, Kansas State University, Justin Hall, Manhattan, Kan. 66506-1403.
- "Too often adults think it is impolite to interrupt a TV program, to comment on it," says Murray, "but it's the best way to get your message across in a comfortable environment rather than preaching."
- "The whole idea would be to make it a less passive activity," says psychologist Diana Zuckerman, coauthor of "Use TV To Your Child's Advantage" (Acropolis Books, $9.95). "It can be made a shared experience where you learn important lessons. If parents talk to their kids, ask them 'What do you think happened there?' 'What are the alternatives to behaving like that?' You can teach kids how to be skeptical about the TV commercials they watch, how to tell the difference between reality and fantasy, how to think of alternative solutions to the ones they're seeing on TV."
- Teach your children that when they're watching TV, says Zuckerman, "They aren't playing 'Candy Land,' or jumping rope, or reading, or learning to share with other kids. Even if they're watching all great TV programs, they would still be missing out on all those other parts of growing up—like playing."

—Don Oldenburg

So ..e: *Public Interest*, Spring 1993, pp. 56-71.

OUR CULTURAL PERPLEXITIES: V

Television and violent crime

BRANDON S. CENTERWALL

CHILDREN ARE born ready to imitate adult behavior. That they can, and do, imitate an array of adult facial expressions has been demonstrated in newborns as young as a few hours old, before they are even old enough to know that they have facial features. It is a most useful instinct, for the developing child must learn and master a vast repertoire of behavior in short order.

But while children have an instinctive desire to imitate, they do not possess an instinct for determining whether a behavior ought to be imitated. They will imitate anything, including behavior that most adults regard as destructive and antisocial. It may give pause for thought, then, to learn that infants as young as fourteen months demonstrably observe and incorporate behavior seen on television (Figure 1).

The average American preschooler watches more than twenty-seven hours of television per week. This might not be bad if these young children understood what they were watching. But they don't. Up through ages three and four, most children are

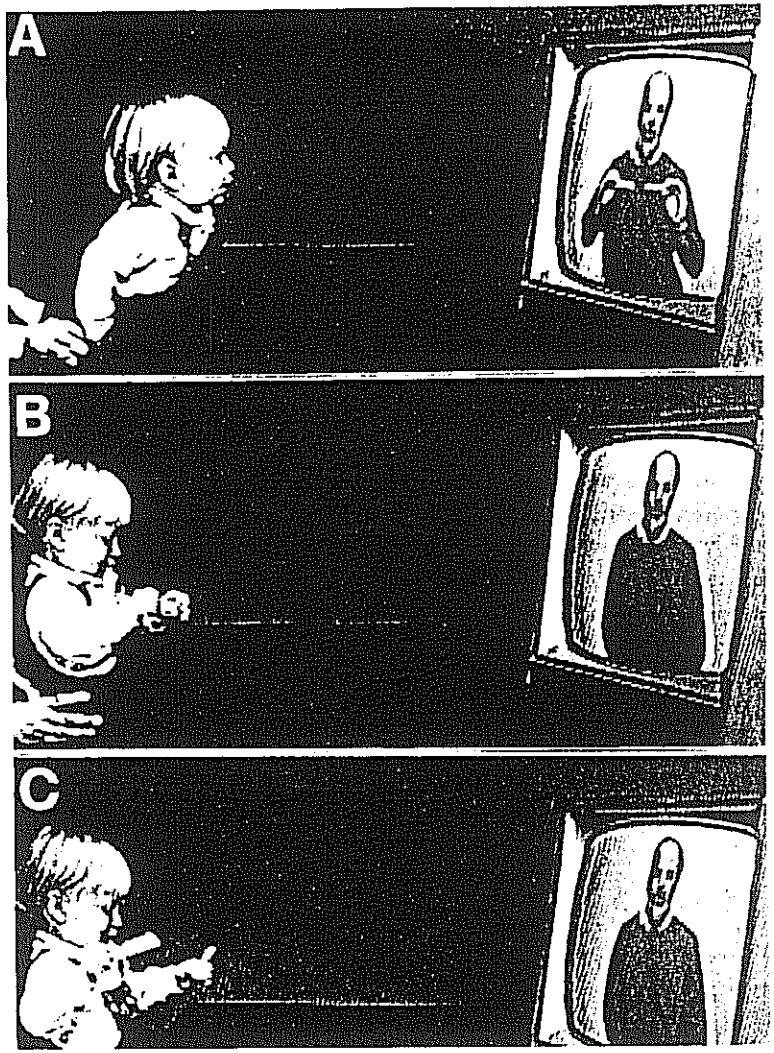

Figure 1. This series of photographs shows a fourteen-month-old boy learning from a television set. In photograph A the adult pulls apart a novel toy. The infant leans forward and carefully studies the adult's actions. In photograph B the infant is given the toy. In photograph C the infant pulls the toy apart, imitating what he saw the adult do. Sixty-five percent of infants exposed to the instructional video could later work the toy, as compared to 20 percent of infants who were not exposed. (Reprinted by permission from Andrew N. Meltzoff, "Memory in infancy," *Encyclopedia of Learning and Memory.* New York: Macmillan, 1992. Photo by A. N. Meltzoff.)

unable to distinguish fact from fantasy on TV, and remain unable to do so despite adult coaching. In the minds of young children, television is a source of entirely factual information regarding how the world works. There are no limits to their credulity. To cite one example, an Indiana school board had to issue an advisory to young children that, no, there is no such thing as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Children had been crawling down storm drains looking for them.

Naturally, as children get older, they come to know better, but their earliest and deepest impressions are laid down at an age when they still see television as a factual source of information about the outside world. In that world, it seems, violence is common and the commission of violence is generally powerful, exciting, charismatic, and effective. In later life, serious violence is most likely to erupt at moments of severe stress—and it is precisely at such moments that adolescents and adults are most likely to revert to their earliest, most visceral sense of the role of violence in society and in personal behavior. Much of this sense will have come from television.

The seeds of aggression

In 1973, a remote rural community in Canada acquired television for the first time. The acquisition of television at such a late date was due to problems with signal reception rather than any hostility toward TV. As reported in *The Impact of Television* (1986), Tannis Williams and her associates at the University of British Columbia investigated the effect of television on the children of this community (which they called "Notel"), taking for comparison two similar towns that already had television.

The researchers observed forty-five first- and second-graders in the three towns for rates of inappropriate physical aggression before television was introduced into Notel. Two years later, the same forty-five children were observed again. To prevent bias in the data, the research assistants who collected the data were kept uninformed as to why the children's rates of aggression were of interest. Furthermore, a new group of research assistants was employed the second time around, so that the data gatherers would not be biased by recollections of the children's behavior two years earlier.

Rates of aggression did not change in the two control communities. By contrast, the rate of aggression among Notel children increased 160 percent. The increase was observed in both boys and girls, in those who were aggressive to begin with and in those who were not. Television's enhancement of noxious aggression was entirely general and not limited to a few "bad apples."

In another Canadian study, Gary Granzberg and his associates at the University of Winnipeg investigated the impact of television upon Indian communities in northern Manitoba. As described in *Television and the Canadian Indian* (1980), forty-nine third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade boys living in two communities were observed from 1973, when one town acquired television, until 1977, when the second town did as well. The aggressiveness of boys in the first community increased after the introduction of television. The aggressiveness of boys in the second community, which did not receive television then, remained the same. When television was later introduced in the second community, observed levels of aggressiveness increased there as well.

In another study conducted from 1960 to 1981, Leonard Eron and L. Rowell Huesmann (then of the University of Illinois at Chicago) followed 875 children living in a semirural U.S. county. Eron and Huesmann found that for both boys and girls, the amount of television watched at age eight predicted the seriousness of criminal acts for which they were convicted by age thirty (Figure 2). This remained true even after controlling for the children's baseline aggressiveness, intelligence, and socioeconomic status. Eron and Huesmann also observed second-generation effects. Children who watched much television at age eight later, as parents, punished their own children more severely than did parents who had watched less television as children. Second- and now third-generation effects are accumulating at a time of unprecedented youth violence.

All seven of the U.S. and Canadian studies of prolonged childhood exposure to television demonstrate a positive relationship between exposure and physical aggression. The critical period is preadolescent childhood. Later exposure does not appear to produce any additional effect. However, the aggression-enhancing effect of exposure in pre-adolescence extends into adolescence and adulthood. This suggests that any interventions should be

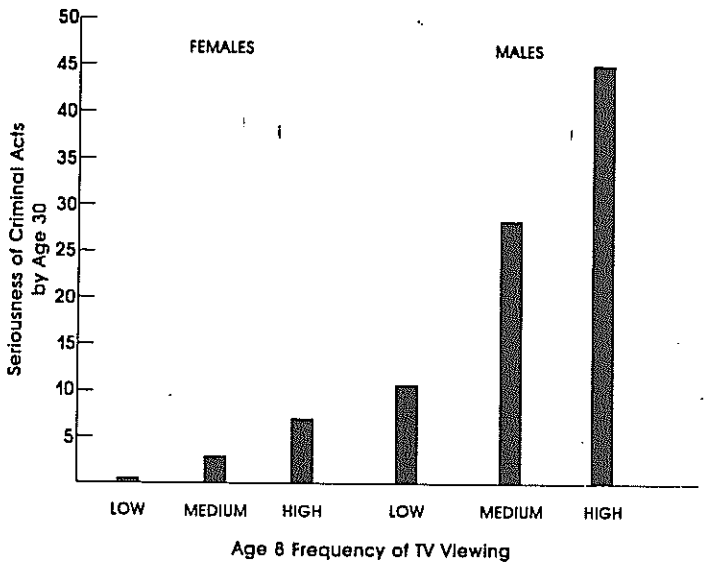

Figure 2. Relationship of television viewing frequency at age eight to seriousness of crimes committed by age thirty. Columbia County Cohort Study, 1960-1981. (Reprinted by permission from Leonard D. Eron and L. Rowell Huesmann, "The control of aggressive behavior by changes in attitudes, values, and the conditions of learning," *Advances in the Study of Aggression.* Orlando, Florida: Academic Press, 1984.)

designed for children and their caregivers rather than for the general adult population.

These studies confirmed the beliefs of most Americans. According to a Harris poll at the time of the studies, 43 percent of American adults believe that television violence "plays a part in making America a violent society." An additional 37 percent think it might. But how important is television violence? What is the effect of exposure upon entire populations? To address this question, I took advantage of an historical accident—the absence of television in South Africa prior to 1975.

The South African experience

White South Africans have lived in a prosperous, industrialized society for decades, but they did not get television until 1975 because of tension between the Afrikaner- and English-

speaking communities. The country's Afrikaner leaders knew that a South African television industry would have to rely on British and American shows to fill out its programming schedule, and they felt that this would provide an unacceptable cultural advantage to English-speaking South Africans. So, rather than negotiate a complicated compromise, the government simply forbade television broadcasting. The entire population of two million whites—rich and poor, urban and rural, educated and uneducated—was thus excluded from exposure to television for a quarter century after the medium was introduced in the United States.

In order to determine whether exposure to television is a cause of violence, I compared homicide rates in South Africa, Canada, and the United States. Since blacks in South Africa live under quite different conditions than blacks in the United States, I limited the comparison to white homicide rates in South Africa and the United States, and the total homicide rate in Canada (which was 97 percent white in 1951).† I chose the homicide rate as a measure of violence because homicide statistics are exceptionally accurate.

From 1945 to 1974, the white homicide rate in the United States increased 93 percent. In Canada, the homicide rate increased 92 percent. In South Africa, where television was banned, the white homicide rate declined by 7 percent (Figure 3).

Controlling for other factors

Could there be some explanation other than television for the fact that violence increased dramatically in the U.S. and Canada while dropping in South Africa? I examined an array of alternative explanations. None is satisfactory:

• ***Economic growth.*** Between 1946 and 1974, all three countries experienced substantial economic growth. Per capita income increased by 75 percent in the United States, 124 percent in Canada, and 86 percent in South Africa. Thus differences in economic growth cannot account for the different homicide trends in the three countries.

†The "white homicide rate" refers to the rate at which whites are the victims of homicide. Since most homicide is intra-racial, this closely parallels the rate at which whites commit homicide.

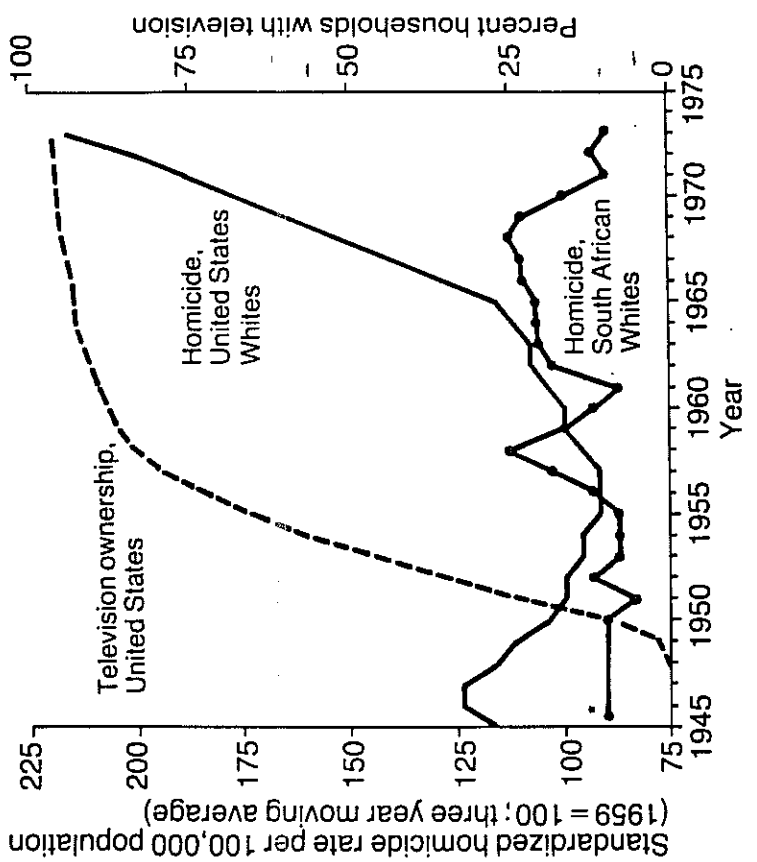

Figure 3. Television ownership and white homicide rates, United States and South Africa, 1945 through 1973. Asterisk denotes 6-year average. Note that television broadcasting was not permitted in South Africa prior to 1975. (Reprinted by permission from Brandon S. Centerwall, "Exposure to television as a cause of violence," *Public Communication and Behavior*, Vol. 2. Orlando, Florida: Academic Press, 1989.)

• ***Civil unrest.*** One might suspect that anti-war or civil-rights activity was responsible for the doubling of the homicide rate in the United States during this period. But the experience of Canada shows that this was not the case, since Canadians suffered a doubling of the homicide rate without similar civil unrest.

Other possible explanations include changes in age distribution, urbanization, alcohol consumption, capital punishment, and the availability of firearms. As discussed in *Public Communication and Behavior* (1989), none provides a viable explanation for the observed homicide trends.

In the United States and Canada, there was a lag of ten to fifteen years between the introduction of television and a doubling of the homicide rate. In South Africa, there was a similar lag. Since television exerts its behavior-modifying effects primarily on children, while homicide is primarily an adult activity, this lag represents the time needed for the "television generation" to come of age.

The relationship between television and the homicide rate holds *within* the United States as well. Different regions of the U.S., for example, acquired television at different times. As we would expect, while all regions saw increases in their homicide rates, the regions that acquired television first were also the first to see higher homicide rates.

Similarly, urban areas acquired television before rural areas. As we would expect, urban areas saw increased homicide rates several years before the occurrence of a parallel increase in rural areas.

The introduction of television also helps explain the different rates of homicide growth for whites and minorities. White households in the U.S. began acquiring television sets in large numbers approximately five years before minority households. Significantly, the white homicide rate began increasing in 1958, four years before a parallel increase in the minority homicide rate.

Of course, there are many factors other than television that influence the amount of violent crime. Every violent act is the result of a variety of forces coming together—poverty, crime, alcohol and drug abuse, stress—of which childhood TV exposure is just one. Nevertheless, 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.

The television industry takes a look

The first congressional hearings on television and violence were held in 1952, when not even a quarter of U.S. households owned television sets. In the years since, there have been scores of research reports on the issue, as well as several major government investigations. The findings of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, published in 1969, were particularly significant. This report established what is now the broad scientific consensus: Exposure to television increases rates of physical aggression.

Television industry executives were genuinely surprised by the National Commission's report. What the industry produced was at times unedifying, but physically harmful? In response, network executives began research programs that collectively would cost nearly a million dollars.

CBS commissioned William Belson to undertake what would be the largest and most sophisticated study yet, an investigation involving 1,565 teenage boys. In *Television Violence and the Adolescent Boy* (1978), Belson controlled for one hundred variables, and found that teenage boys who had watched above-average quantities of television violence before adolescence were committing acts of serious violence (e.g., assault, rape, major vandalism, and abuse of animals) at a rate 49 percent higher than teenage boys who had watched below-average quantities of television violence. Despite the large sum of money they had invested, CBS executives were notably unenthusiastic about the report.

ABC commissioned Melvin Heller and Samuel Polsky of Temple University to study young male felons imprisoned for violent crimes (e.g., homicide, rape, and assault). In two surveys, 22 and 34 percent of the young felons reported having consciously imitated crime techniques learned from television programs, usually successfully. The more violent of these felons were the most likely to report having learned techniques from television. Overall, the felons reported that as children they had watched an average of six hours of television per day—approximately twice as much as children in the general population at that time.

Unlike CBS, ABC maintained control over publication. The final report, *Studies in Violence and Television* (1976), was published in a private, limited edition that was not released to the general public or the scientific community.

NBC relied on a team of four researchers, three of whom were employees of NBC. Indeed, the principal investigator, J. Ronald Milavsky, was an NBC vice president. The team observed some 2,400 schoolchildren for up to three years to see if watching television violence increased their levels of physical aggressiveness. In *Television and Aggression* (1982), Milavsky and his associates reported that television violence had no effect upon the children's behavior. However, every independent investigator who has examined their data has concluded that, to the contrary, their data show that television violence did cause a modest increase of about 5 percent in average levels of physical aggressiveness. When pressed on the point, Milavsky and his associates conceded that their findings were consistent with the conclusion that television violence increased physical aggressiveness "to a small extent." They did not concede that television violence actually caused an increase, but only that their findings were consistent with such a conclusion.

The NBC study results raise an important objection to my conclusions. While studies have repeatedly demonstrated that childhood exposure to television increases physical aggressiveness, the increase is almost always quite minor. A number of investigators have argued that such a small effect is too weak to account for major increases in rates of violence. These investigators, however, overlook a key factor.

Homicide is an extreme form of aggression—so extreme that only one person in 20,000 committed murder each year in the United States in the mid-1950s. If we were to rank everyone's degree of physical aggressiveness from the least aggressive (Mother Theresa) to the most aggressive (Jack the Ripper), the large majority of us would be somewhere in the middle and murderers would be virtually off the chart (Figure 4). It is an intrinsic property of such "bell curve" distributions that small changes in the average imply major changes at the extremes. Thus, if 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. The findings of the NBC study and the doubling of the homicide rate are two sides of the same coin.

After the results of these studies became clear, television industry executives lost their enthusiasm for scientific research. No further investigations were funded. Instead, the industry turned to political management of the issue.

The television industry and social responsibility

The television industry routinely portrays individuals who seek to influence programming as un-American haters of free speech. In a 1991 letter sent to 7,000 executives of consumer product companies and advertising agencies, the president of the Network Television Association explained:

> Freedom of expression is an inalienable right of all Americans vigorously supported by ABC, CBS, and NBC. However, boycotts and so-called advertiser "hit lists" are attempts to manipulate our free society and democratic process.

The letter went on to strongly advise the companies to ignore all efforts by anyone to influence what programs they choose to sponsor. By implication, the networks themselves should ignore all efforts by anyone to influence what programs they choose to produce.

But this is absurd. All forms of public discourse are attempts to "manipulate" our free society and democratic process. What else could they be? Consumer boycotts are no more un-American than are strikes by labor unions. The Network Television Association is attempting to systematically shut down all discourse between viewers and advertisers, and between viewers and the television industry. Wrapping itself in patriotism, the televison industry's response to uppity viewers is to put them in their place. If the industry and advertisers were to actually succeed in closing the circle between them, the only course they would leave for concerned viewers would be to seek legislative action.

In the war against tobacco, we do not expect help from the tobacco industry. If someone were to call upon the tobacco

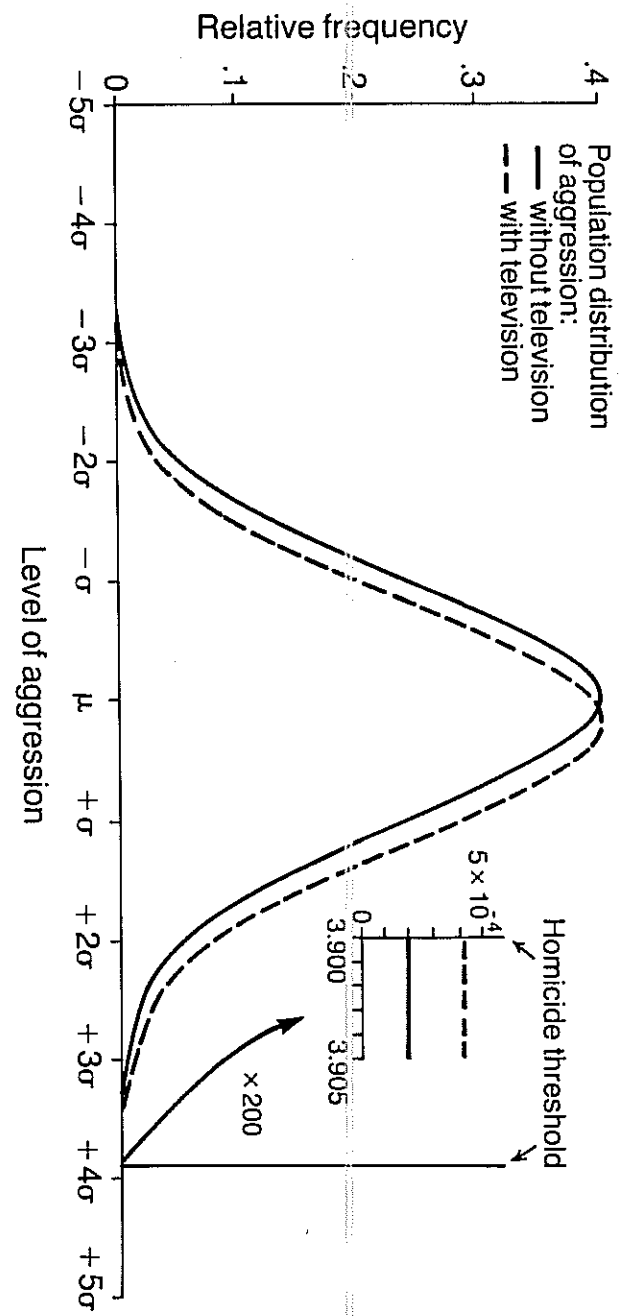

Figure 4. Relationships between television, aggression, and homicide in the general population: a model. (Reprinted by permission of Academic Press.)

industry to cut back production as a matter of social conscience and concern for public health, we would regard that person as simple-minded, if not frankly deranged. Oddly enough, however, people have persistently assumed that the television industry is somehow different—that it is useful to appeal to its social conscience. This was true in 1969 when the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence published its recommendations for the television industry. It was equally true in 1989 when the U.S. Congress passed an anti-violence bill that granted television industry executives the authority to hold discussions on the issue of television violence without violating antitrust laws. Even before the law was passed, the four networks stated that there would be no substantive changes in their programming. They have been as good as their word.

For the television industry, issues of "quality" and "social responsibility" are peripheral to the issue of maximizing audience size—and there is no formula more tried and true than violence for generating large audiences. To television executives, this is crucial. For if advertising revenue were to decrease by just 1 percent, the television industry would stand to lose $250 million in revenue annually. Thus, changes in audience size that appear trivial to most of us are regarded as catastrophic by the industry. For this reason, industry spokespersons have made innumerable protestations of good intent, but nothing has happened. In the more than twenty years that levels of television violence have been monitored, there has been no downward movement. There are no recommendations to make to the television industry. To make any would not only be futile but could create the false impression that the industry might actually do something constructive.

On December 11, 1992, the networks finally announced a list of voluntary guidelines on television violence. Curiously, reporters were unable to locate any network producers who felt the new guidelines would require changes in their programs. That raises a question: Who is going to bell the cat? Who is going to place his or her career in jeopardy in order to decrease the amount of violence on television? It is hard to say, but it may be revealing that when Senator Paul Simon held the press conference announcing the new inter-network agreement, no industry executives were present to answer questions.

Meeting the challenge

Television violence is everybody's problem. You may feel assured that your child will never become violent despite a steady diet of television mayhem, but you cannot be assured that your child won't be murdered or maimed by someone else's child raised on a similar diet.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents limit their children's television viewing to one to two hours per day. But why wait for a pediatrician to say it? Limiting children's exposure to television violence should become part of the public health agenda, along with safety seats, bicycle helmets, immunizations, and good nutrition. Part of the public health approach should be to promote child-care alternatives to the electronic babysitter, especially among the poor.

Parents should also guide what their children watch and how much. This is an old recommendation that can be given new teeth with the help of modern technology. It is now feasible to fit a television set with an electronic lock that permits parents to preset the channels and times for which the set will be available; if a particular program or time of day is locked, the set will not operate then. Time-channel locks are not merely feasible; they have already been designed and are coming off the assembly line.

The model for making them widely available comes from closed-captioning circuitry, which permits deaf and hard-of-hearing persons access to television. Market forces alone would not have made closed-captioning available to more than a fraction of the deaf and hard-of-hearing. To remedy this problem, Congress passed the Television Decoder Circuitry Act in 1990, which requires that virtually all new television sets be manufactured with built-in closed-captioning circuitry. A similar law should require that all new television sets be manufactured with built-in time-channel lock circuitry—and for a similar reason. Market forces alone will not make this technology available to more than a fraction of households with children and will exclude most poor families, the ones who suffer the most from violence. If we can make television technology available to benefit twenty-four million deaf and hard-of-hearing Americans, surely we can do no less for the benefit of fifty million American children.

A final recommendation: Television programs should be accompanied by a violence rating so that parents can judge how violent a program is without having to watch it. Such a rating system should be quantitative, leaving aesthetic and social judgments to the viewers. This approach would enjoy broad popular support. In a *Los Angeles Times* poll, 71 percent of adult Americans favored the establishment of a TV violence rating system. Such a system would not impinge on artistic freedom since producers would remain free to produce programs with high violence ratings. They could even use high violence ratings in the advertisements for their shows.

None of these recommendations would limit freedom of speech. That is as it should be. We do not address the problem of motor vehicle fatalities by calling for a ban on cars. Instead, we emphasize safety seats, good traffic signs, and driver education. Similarly, to address the problem of television-inspired violence, we need to promote time-channel locks, program rating systems, and viewer education about the hazards of violent programming. In this way we can protect our children and our society.

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