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The Ronny Zamora Story: Why TV Was Not to Blame

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INTRODUCTION

The media proclaimed him a "young Charlie Manson" who robbed and murdered his defenseless 82 year old next door neighbor when she caught him in the act of burglarizing her home. The gun he shot her with was hers. The car he escaped in was hers. The money he used on himself and his friends to float a weekend of revelry at Disneyworld was hers.

The defense Ronny Zamora's controversial lawyer, Ellis Rubin, used was that television was responsible . . . that this otherwise docile, law-abiding fifteen year old schoolboy was the victim of "*prolonged, intense, involuntary, subliminal television intoxication.*" The trial attracted much attention worldwide and was televised under Florida's experimental mandate to use television in the courtroom.

This paper is a case study of the boy, television, and the trial based upon the research on television violence, extensive examination and evaluation of witnesses' depositions, courtroom transcripts, official police records, psychiatrists' reports, and extensive conversations with Ellis Rubin.

After many years of studying this case, we submit that this is *the classic* example of the scapegoating of the media by exaggerating their influence and masking the real causes for violence in society. Our intention is not to disprove the television violence/aggression relationship, but rather to present strong support for the position that the defense placed *too* much emphasis on television as a *cause* rather than as *contributing factor* among many others.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

One of the most influential commentaries concerning the media's impact on individuals and society was crafted by Joseph Klapper in his Effects of Mass Communication (1960). Klappers primary thesis: "Mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences" (p. 8), captured the essence of the limited effects paradigm, representing a radical shift from the powerful effects thesis of the bullet theory which dominated the mass communication research landscape between 1920 and 1940.

The following year, Wilbur Schramm's landmark study, Television in the Lives of Our Children (1961) re-affirmed Klapper's posture on the media, concluding:

> For *some* children, under *some* conditions, *some* television is harmful. For *other* children under the same conditions, or for the same children under *other* conditions, it may be beneficial. For *most* children, under *most* conditions, *most* television is probably neither harmful nor particularly beneficial. (p. 1)

While Klapper's and Schramm's research view the media as agents of reinforcement, other forces in our changing society would challenge this posture. It should be noted that Klapper's research was carried out prior to the ascendancy of the television medium and prior to the rise of the television generation who were now living in a radically restructured postwar society. The American landscape had changed from rural to urban, and from an agriculturally-based economy to an industrially-based economy. The long work day of the farmer had become the truncated work day of the industrial worker who had more money to spend and more leisure time in which to spend it. Television swiftly became ensconced as the predominant medium, homogenizing all of America, making us spectators to images of delinquency and crime, civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements, and the

assassinations of our young and vigorous leaders. It took over the socialization of our children, as parents concentrated on their work and their activities outside the home. Meanwhile, other community anchors, notably the church and school, were relinquishing their hold on the social development of children to the ear-shattering sounds and strange words of new and unfamiliar music; to the media; and to peers away from the home and outside of the classroom -- a phenomenon that is even more obvious in our information society today.

And with this arose hoards of critics who attacked the media for their role in fomenting social instability, and for corrupting children, disrupting their lives. Spurred on by cries of outrage, our government funded one major media effects study after another seeking answers to the question of the media's influence on children, first in terms of violence and aggression, and later in terms of a number of other social issues. These investigations -- Violence and the Media: A Staff Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (Baker and Ball, 1969); the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior (1972); and the updated report of the National Institute of Mental Health (1982) reached the conclusion that television violence leads to aggressive behavior by the youthful viewers of such programs. Moreover, the American Psychological Association (1985), after reviewing the evidence on this topic, adopted the position that television violence has a causal effect on aggressive behavior.

Independent researchers continue looking for explanations of the television violence/aggression relationship. A recent commentary by Prothrow-Stith suggests that the findings of Klapper and Schramm over thirty years ago are still relevant in assessing this relationship: "I think that the impact of TV violence is small on most of us, but it's quite large on some of us. And I agree that it is *one* [italics added] of the factors . . . ("The Experts," 1992, p.13).

Such studies place many mass communication researchers and social critics in opposing camps, with one group accusing the other of being paid media industry lackeys and the other of oversimplifying complex problems and ignoring alternative causes of violence in America. Also thrown into the argument of overzealously blaming the media have been comparisons of our culture to other cultures such as that of Japan, cited as the only country in the world surpassing America in television violence consumption rates. Moreover, it has been pointed out by critic John Leonard that the Japanese also have their sensational snuff movies and pornographic comic books, yet Japan lags far behind the United States in per capita rates of rape and murder (Leonard, 1994). But scientific research notwithstanding, what is missing in the television effects equation are "habits and behaviors isolated from the larger feedback loop of a culture [ours] filled with gaudy contradictions" (Leonard, 1994, p. 92).

It is not our intention in presenting the Ronny Zamora case to entirely excuse television from having any impact on the minds of young children. Rather, it is the dimension of that impact that concerns us. One researcher has placed this impact in the neighborhood of 0.28 percent (Gitlin, 1994); another, 10 percent (Eron, 1992, quoted in "The Experts," 1992, p. 13); and still another makes the claim that, "Following the introduction of television in the 1950's, U.S. homicide rates doubled" (Centerwall, 1989, p. 651). Berkowitz (1984) concluded that research supported the probability that "only one individual in 100,000 will exhibit overt aggression as a result of the depicted violence [which] means 100 more violent acts will occur in an audience of 10,000,000" (p. 424).

According to Cumberbatch (1989) in his comprehensive review of the research evidence on violence in the mass media, "the overriding inadequacies are primarily conceptual" (p. 47). He points out that one of the biggest problems in research is in the handling of non-significant results -- which rarely make it to

publication. The preponderance of non-significant findings in correlational studies, for example, should immediately flag research community and policy makers, alike, that the conclusion "there are genuine specific effects of mass media violence upon society" may well be erroneous (Cumberbatch, 1989, p. 48). Belson's study (1975), for one, failed to show any evidence that would agree with the findings of many other researchers in that he found heavy exposure to television violence to have no negative impact on the behavior of his male subjects, thereby confirming Cumberbatch's thesis that "the convention of reviewers to consider only significant results is rather misleading" (Cumberbatch, 1989, p. 48).

Minimal work on the prosocial effects of television notwithstanding, we must agree that another conceptual weakness of the research is its focus on television violence as a unidimensional process. Referring to Berkowitz's study (1984), Cumberbatch (1989), stated it would be an oversimplification to name the *aggressor* as the sole factor in the equation of violence as a social problem. He cited a number of provocative questions, viz.:

- Are *victims* more or less vulnerable because of violence on television?
- Are *witnesses* more or less likely to report antisocial behavior or even intervene because of violence on television?
- And what are the effects on the *police*, the *judiciary*, or the *legislature*?
- Do *governments* become more or less active against crime and violence because of violence on television or the public concern over it? [italics added]. (p. 48)

Cumberbatch (1989, p. 48) further suggests that inasmuch as there is so "little evidence on these processes which 'cause' crime and alter the criminal statistics," society would be hard put to decide how these questions should be answered. "'Violence' on television can cover an enormous diversity of acts taking place in *different* contexts for *different* reasons and with quite *different* messages for

different viewers" [italics added] , he concludes (Cumberbatch, 1989, p. 48). Moreover, medium and program genre need to be considered, while at the theoretical level, challenges are being voiced "by the growing tradition of'uses and gratifications' research, which seeks to identify the dynamic relationship that particular individuals with particular needs and world views may enjoy with the mass media" (Cumberbatch, 1989, p. 49).

THE CASE OF RONNY ZAMORA

Ronny Albert Zamora was born out of wedlock in Costa Rica in 1962. His mother, Yolanda, was disowned by her father because of Ronny's illegitimacy. When Ronny was three, Yolanda decided to come to the United States to make a better life for herself and her son. She left Ronny in the care of friends until she established herself in New York City. When Ronny was five, his mother sent for him. She married Francisco Zamora and the young couple struggled to make a life for their family. Because both Mr. and Mrs. Zamora had to work and could not afford a babysitter, they placed Ronny in front of the television set, asking a neighbor to check on him occasionally. Ronny watched TV from morning until night, and learned the English language by doing so.

As Ronny grew older, his heavy television viewing continued. His tastes "matured" from Superman to scary movies and police dramas. As a teenager, Ronny asked his mother to convince his stepfather to shave his head so he would look like his idol, Kojak.

When Ronny was thirteen, his best friend, Scott, drowned after falling through the ice in a skating accident. Ronny had jumped into the water to try to rescue Scott, but was unable to hold on. "That night, Ronny dreamed he had pulled Scott out. The vision was so real he woke up feeling that was what had happened. He went to school and asked everyone where Scott was. He was ridiculed by his

classmates, or avoided by those who felt he had snapped" (Rubin, 1989, p. 36). According to Mrs. Zamora, after the drowning, "Ronny had changed completely. He was not the same person I knew. . . . He was losing his mind or something" (Rubin, 1989, p. 55). Ronny felt responsible for his friend's death. He was depressed. He began to skip school and refused to do his homework. Instead, he would stay home and watch TV. Soon thereafter, Mr. Zamora accepted a job in Florida and moved his family to Miami Beach, with the thought that Ronny might be better off away from the environment which had made him so unhappy.

Several months after the move, on June 4, 1977, Ronny and a new friend, Darrell Agrella, were trying to figure out how they could get some extra money to have a party. While they were talking, Ronny heard a cat screaming and thought someone might be breaking into his next door neighbor Elinor Haggart's house.

> Ronny decided to be "Kojak" and investigate a "B&E" - pseudo-police/ television parlance for "breaking and entering." At some point in their investigation, Ronny and Darrell decided to transform themselves from good-guy cops to bad-guy robbers. Elinor Haggart arrived home and caught them in the act. Since she knew Ronny, she viewed him as a naughty boy and said she would have to tell his parents. What happened next, and how Elinor Haggart ended up being shot with her own gun, took months and many doctors to determine. But as each new revelation was discovered, it all fit the same bizarre psychological pattern -- a rare diagnosis that was almost impossible to believe, but seemed an inevitable result of our high-tech society. (Rubin, 1989, p. 29)

Ellis Rubin was asked by the Zamora's to represent their son, now charged with the murder of 82 year old Elinor Haggart. Psychologists and psychiatrists, Rubin said, had led him to a defense strategy that, as it turns out, ultimately gained him international prominence, and at the same time brought to the forefront the

question of the effects of televised violence on subsequent behavior: that Ronny Zamora " . . . was suffering from and acted under the influence of prolonged, intense, involuntary, subliminal television intoxication . . . . Through the excessive and long-continued use of this intoxicant, a mental condition of insanity was produced" (Fowles, 1982, p. 2). In order for Ronny to be found insane, presiding Judge Paul Baker told the jury they must determine that Ronny, at the time of the commission of the crime, did not know right from wrong and could not appreciate the nature and consequences of his acts.

Rubin had been warned in pre-trial that evidence showing the effects of television viewing on people in general would not be allowed. But he was unable to present proof that Ronny was insane without basing it on the controversial television angle. Rubin questioned Margaret Hanratty Thomas, who, at the time of the trial, had written approximately fifteen articles published in academic journals exploring the effects of television violence on adolescents. When she was unable to cite a case in which television had been determined to be the cause of a murder, Judge Baker refused to allow her testimony. As a result, Rubin felt that the heart of defense was "cut out and emasculated" (E. Rubin, personal communication, Nov. 1990).

In all, 75 witnesses testified in the case. The many doctors who had examined Ronny, both for the defense and the prosecution, found Ronny had serious psychological problems that had been plaguing him for years. A sentence completion test administered to Ronny before the trial included the following responses, among others: I regret . . . being born. I feel . . . like a target. My greatest fear . . . is life. My mind . . . is all screwed up. The future . . . may never come for me. Sometimes . . . I feel like killing myself. I hate . . . life (E. Rubin, personal communication, Nov. 1990).

Defense witness Dr. Helen Ackerman, a prominent child specialist, discovered through her examination of Ronny that he was depressed, maladjusted, and suicidal

(Ackerman, 1977, p. 32). She summarized her assessment of Ronny in a report to Ellis Rubin following the conclusion of the trial:

> The client has had a long history of emotional disturbance with no therapeutic intervention. Said client has a punitive step-father and a mother who tolerates physical punishment towards her children. His step-father "hits first and asks questions later." [...] The subject has had long -term self-destructive motivation and has sought to be killed by risk-taking . . . from childhood into adolescence. He has experienced unusual perceptions and visions. The subject has a limited value on his own life and therefore could not be expected to value anyone else's life very much. [...] He is fearful but not actually remorseful over the murder incident. (H. Ackerman, personal communication, Oct. 21, 1977)

Ackerman concluded that Ronny was a very sick boy who should have gotten help ten years earlier.

Mrs. Zamora had in fact taken Ronny to a counselor just a few weeks before the murder when he was caught smoking marijuana with Darrell Agrella and the two were suspended from school. (A school administrator recommended that Mrs. Zamora keep Ronny away from Darrell, who had a police record at age 14.) Dr. Jack Jacobs " . . . administered a battery of psychological tests and concluded that although Ronny was of average intelligence, he was confused, depressed, and 'interprets his world in a hostile manner' " (Rubin, 1989, p. 26). Ronny was also suicidal. In explaining why, Mrs. Zamora stated that Ronny told her:

> . . . he just couldn't help it, that we were very strict at home, that we had taken him away from the youth center . . . that my husband punished him continually . . . that he was not allowed to go out with, you know to the movies

> and some other things, that he felt that there was nothing else for him to do but kill himself." (Saltz, 1977, p. 5).

Mr. Zamora did not take Jacob's diagnosis seriously. He felt Ronny was simply trying to hurt Mrs. Zamora by making her suffer. Mrs. Zamora, however, said that Ronny was "never mean before. He was very, very warm, and I just couldn't understand how he had changed in a matter of a year" (Saltz, 1977, p. 5). Jacobs recommended that Ronny and his family go into psychotherapy.

Dr. Walter Reid, another defense witness in the trial, found Ronny to be a classic sociopathic personality, denoting a person who is "emotionally cool, callous, has little in the way of remorse or guilt, has little or no ability to feel for other people" (Saltz, 1977, p. 5). Expanding on this, Reid stated that a sociopath might know that something was right or wrong, but that his behavior might not be affected by that understanding (Saltz, 1977, p. 6). Reid had no doubt Ronny knew right from wrong at the time of the shooting.

Ronny's own assessment of the events of June 4, 1977, revealed under truth serum (administered illegally to Ronny by Dr. Michael Gilbert), suggests that Ronny himself knew that his actions were wrong. Ronny was holding a gun on Mrs. Haggart as she showed him photographs of her family:

> And then I started thinkin' . . . what was I gonna do? I'm sure the lady had identified me. I was gonna get in trouble for robbing Mrs. Haggart's house and that was that. And I was going to get the daylights beaten out of me . . . . Then Darrell, uh, while scramblin' through some kinds of crates, or some boxes of jewelry, he found the gun. . . . So I took the gun and I went, you know, to the coffee table and I started playing around. I could even have killed myself. I should've. And I was pointing the gun to my head, to my stomach, my legs, to my arms, oh, I put it in my

mouth, some other stuff, stupid stuff. I pointed it at Mrs. Haggart with no intention. I pointed at the ceiling, I pointed at the piano. I pointed at the door, anything that looked big enough to hit. So Darrell, . . . he said, "All right, Ronny, let's get it over with." I said, "What do you mean, 'Let's get it over with'?" I said, "you, you get it over with . . . . So he went over to another room. He brought out a pillow and it smelled kind of clean . . . . I was wonderin', "what, is this kid crazy or somethin'?" So then he took [the pillow] halfway and he folded the other half and he said, "you're going to have to muffle the sound." And I was just playing along with him, didn't want to seem stupid. I said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah," And he went around the house searchin', closing windows, shades, lamps, whatever. And I said, "Well, I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to kill nobody!" He goes, "Somebody gotta do it." I said, "Not me. You get into trouble, killing somebody." He said, "I robbed the house, I got all the valuables. I found the $450. I found the gun, which can bring us about $50. I found just about everything." . . . And he goes to me, "You gonna kill her." "No, I ain't," I said. (Rubin, 1989, p. 34)

Ronny was afraid that Mrs. Haggart would call the police, despite the fact that she said she would not if the boys would leave and not take anything. Darrell then told Ronny Mrs. Haggart would testify against them.

So I said, "Oh no, this lady's determined. What am I gonna do? Mom will -- oh boy, robbin' a lady's house, that's too much. . ." and that's when the gun went off . . . . I was just holdin' it tight. I don't know why. I was scared and before I knew it, I mean, it happened so fast . . . I covered my ears . . . . I stayed sittin on top of the coffee table. I was still thinking what I was going to tell my mother for robbing the lady's house. I had a feeling she was going to go over and tell my mother . . . . When I said,

"Get up," she didn't want to get up. And then I got scared and I said, "A gun, a bullet, oh no." So then I pictured the little scene in my mind of her getting up, sayin," "get out of here," and I'd just voom, out of that house. . . . (Rubin, 1989, p. 35)

As it turns out, Dr. Gilbert was the only witness to assert that Ronny was insane at the time of the shooting. He stated that Ronny's condition was in great part attributable to the fact that he had watched so much television and had seen so many killings that "this develops a concept, an attitude, a distortion of reality, . . . that the shooting of a person is of no greater significance . . . more significant than the swatting of a fly" (Rubin, 1989, p. 56). Gilbert attributes this desensitization to the "sanitized" nature of television violence presentations which fail to show the consequences, pain, and suffering of violence for victims and the families of victims. Television, according to Gilbert, had given Ronny "an unrealistic concept of what death by shooting is. It's not real. It's distorted" (Rubin, 1989, p. 56).

Gilbert classified Ronny as emotionally unstable, immature, and exhibiting sociopathic behavior or traits. And he stated that, at time of offense, Ronny did not know the difference between right and wrong and could not appreciate the nature and consequences of his actions (Gilbert, 1977, p. 61), thereby establishing Ronny's "insanity." Among the factors contributing to Ronny's condition were Mrs. Zamora's marriage when Ronny was five years old, his adoption by his stepfather, and the punitive and rejecting relationship he had with his stepfather. To these factors, Gilbert added Ronny's exposure to television, which far exceeded the average child's viewership (Saltz, 1977, p. 6).

Gilbert goes on to explain that Ronny's pulling the trigger was a conditioned response. Through his exposure to television, Gilbert said, Ronny ". . . has been conditioned that the proper thing -- or the thing to do -- is to shoot. He has no

conscious awareness, intention, volition . . . of what he is doing. But the trigger finger reflexly contracts over the trigger and the gun goes off" (Saltz, 1977, pp. 7-8).

Dr. Charles Mutter disputed Gilbert's claim that Ronny killed Mrs. Haggart as a conditioned reflex:

> If this individual saw programs where people were killing, and that they became rewarded from this, and that this was a pleasant, pleasurable experience and they were only good consequences, they would get a lot of money, they would get a lot of food, they would be praised, and he saw this repeatedly over and over again, then I think that would be conceivable. But that's not what happened, in fact, with him . . . .
> (Mutter, 1977, p. 1743)

Such statements would seem to refute the application of social learning theory to the Ronny Zamora case. The characters who commit murder in television dramas are held to the traditional moral codes of our society and are punished -- not rewarded -- for their actions. Mutter went on to say that he knew Ronny had viewed a considerable amount of television, including violent programs, but that Ronny clearly understood the consequences of the commission of violent or aggressive acts.

Dr. William Corwin concurred with Mutter, stating that Ronny ". . . apparently was quite aware of what he was doing and deliberately entered into a situation which involved a crime . . . " (Corwin, 1977, p. 1795).

Assistant District Attorney Richard Katz also refuted Gilbert's conditioned reflex explanation in his closing statement:

> A conditioned reflex is an automatic thing. And what this defendant did was not automatic. It was something that he weighted and talked over and did everything he could until he realized he had no choice but to execute Mrs. Haggart. And that's what he did. He knew right from

wrong. He muffled the sound of the gunshot. And when he was done, he and Darrell Agrella wandered through the house, wiping off their fingerprints, doing the best that they could to avoid detection in this case. (Katz, 1977, p. 1872)

Mutter contended that Ronny was able to distinguish right from wrong. When Darrell was going to beat Mrs. Haggart to death with a hammer, Ronny said, "I didn't want him to do that. . . . That was wrong. (Mutter, 1977, p. 1755). Mutter did state that Ronny had a sociopathic, or anti-social personality, that he had difficulty learning from past experience, low frustration tolerance, and an ability to rationalize his behavior. He was emotionally immature, somewhat self-centered, would do things but not accept responsibility for them, and had little if any sense of remorse or guilt. (Mutter, 1977, pp. 1735-1737).

Dr. Corwin pointed out that almost everyone who examined Ronny found him to be a sociopath, prone to lying, twisting the truth to meet his own needs, lacking a conscience, and unconcerned about the rightness or wrongness of their acts. If faced with the fear that Mrs. Haggart would call the police, one way to stop that from occurring would be for him deliberately to shoot her (Corwin, 1977, p. 1796).

Even though Gilbert had also stated on record that Ronny knew right from wrong (Gilbert, 1977, p. 45), Rubin was still hoping to build his case for television intoxication, and he was relying on Gilbert as his star witness. Rubin and Gilbert discussed the testimony for months. "Dr. Gilbert assured me he was going to tell the jury that Ronny had a diminished sense of right and wrong from watching television, and could not separate television fantasy from reality" (Rubin, 1989, p. 46).

In the courtroom, Headley asked Gilbert if Ronny knew right from wrong before the day of the shooting. Rubin explains what transpired:

Dr. Gilbert said yes. I sat up in my chair. Headley asked if Ronny knew

right from wrong when he entered the house, when he was given the gun, and when he was holding Mrs. Haggart at bay. Dr. Gilbert said yes to them all.

> I was dying. Dr. Gilbert appeared to be flip-flopping on what he had told me for the past three months.
>
> Headley continued. He asked the doctor if at any point Ronny didn't know right from wrong. Finally, Dr. Gilbert gave the right yes answer. He said that during the two or three seconds when Ronny squeezed the trigger, he momentarily lost his sense of right and wrong. (Rubin, 1989, p. 46)

According to Rubin, the "three seconds of insanity" defense "might work with a husband coming home and finding his wife in bed with his best friend, but I felt it was ridiculous in this case" (Rubin, 1989, p. 46).

Corwin is also quick to shoot down Gilbert's three-second theory:

> It is completely unlikely that in the space of a brief period like one to two or three or four or five seconds, the time which it would take to pull a trigger, which, in itself, requires some effort and conscious volition, it was completely unlikely that he would be, at that moment, legally insane. (Corwin, 1977, p. 1795).

In our estimation, and certainly in the judgment of the jurors, Gilbert's three-seconds of insanity theory provided the exclamation point to a defense that swiftly disintegrated. Headley admitted, "There is no question in my mind that television influences children. The question is whether it makes them insane" (Lievano, 1977, p. 93). While he staunchly proclaimed that Ronny *consciously* participated in all of the events leading up to and including the murder, he admitted that Ronny's mental health had been deteriorating for a number of months prior to the shooting. He

even went so far as to connect this deterioration with the event of Ronny's friend Scott's drowning, which took place fully fifteen months before the murder of Mrs. Haggart (Lievano, 1977, pp. 151-152).

Rubin, for his part, all but concurred with Headley, seeming at times to be plunging a knife into the heart of his own defense:

> . . . from a statutory standpoint, many of the doctors had not found Ronny "legally " insane. For the most part, they felt he knew right from wrong. In addition, all the doctors felt he was fit to stand trial meaning he understood the consequences of the proceedings and was able to recall details to help me with his defense. These determinations again hark back to television. In its stereotypical world, television presents strong images of right and wrong when it comes to murder. Although virtually everyone kills on the action dramas, it's usually good guys killing bad guys." (Rubin, 1989, p. 42)

His closing arguments were lame. He said, "Of course, Ronny knew right from wrong . . . ." But he was ". . . a sociopathic personality who couldn't refrain from doing wrong, and he didn't care whether he did wrong" (Rubin, 1977, p. 1862). Rubin put the murder in the context of the thousands of murders Ronny had seen on television -- "a reaction that he imitated, or a conditioned reflex" (Rubin, 1977, p. 1862). Ronny had reached the breaking point. His inner turmoil took over, and the years of repressed frustrations at the hands of a punitive and unforgiving stepfather caused him to "snap" (Rubin, 1977, pp. 1891-1892).

In his closing argument, Headley stated:

> My God. Where have we gotten when someone can come into a court of law and, with a straight face, ask you to excuse the death of a human being because the killer watches television?

The defense in this case could have just as easily have been too

> much violence from reading the Bible, too much violence from reading history books. too much violence from reading the papers. Unfortunately, we do have violence in this world, and we're exposed to it. But exposure to that violence does not make you legally insane, or we're going to have free license to do whatever. (Headley, 1977, p. 1923).

CONCLUSION

After only two hours of deliberation, the jury found Ronny Zamora guilty as charged. While we agree that television did not cause Ronny to commit murder, we must also agree with researcher Jib Fowles that television may have sustained Ronny in his estrangement from the mainstream of American life (Fowles, 1982). Indeed, as TV critic Leonard (1994) writes,

> Television is always there for us, a 24-hour user-friendly magic box grinding out narrative, novelty, and distraction, news and laughs, snippets of high culture, remedial seriousness and vulgar celebrity, an incitement and a sedative, a place to celebrate and a place to mourn, a circus, and a wishing well. (p. 94)

Claiming that "It's not TV that's killing people . . . ," Leonard points to a host of societal problems in need of remedial attention, e.g., ". . . guns and drugs and cuts in federal aid to big cities, and we've allowed our public school system to degenerate ("The Experts," 1992, p. 15).

We believe the insightful commentary of Ronald Slaby warrants serious consideration:

> I think public education on violence through TV is the missing ingredient. There are good suggestions on how to teach the public

about guns, alcohol, drugs -- and their relation to violence. The media can play a major role consistent with other public health areas. [. . .] The crime is that TV has such potential that it's not using to try to solve this problem of violence. ("The Experts," 1992, p. 22)

Finally, returning to the subject of conceptual weaknesses in research studies as introduced in our literature review, we must voice our concern with the failure to do justice to the hypothesized psychological processes operating in any mediation of television violence; the failure to really grapple with the political uses of violence in the mass media; and lastly the failure to closely analyze the evident public concern over mass media violence (Cumberbatch, 1989). In the case of the latter, perhaps this conference (as well as the other conferences on TV violence over the past few years) is taking a giant step towards narrowing the gap between researchers and practitioners -- to meet on the common ground of equally sharing responsibility.

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