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CHILDREN AND TELEVISION VIOLENCE

I. History

I first became interested in the impact of television in the late 1960's when I worked in Washington for the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General on a study of the impact of television violence on children (Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, 1972; Murray, 1973). In this report, I will use that early research as the starting point and context for considering the ways in which our society deals with the issue of television violence.

To begin at the beginning, the official starting date for television in the United States was 1939, at a World's Fair. At the time of the debut, there were mixed reactions to television because it was a little green screen with a constant flicker. There was little to watch and some thought TV would never go anywhere, while others thought it was a marvelous invention. One observer and social critic who captured this divergent view was E. B. White, who wrote in Harper's magazine in 1938: „I believe that television is going to be the test of the modern world, and in this new opportunity to see beyond the range of our own vision, we shall discover either a new and unbearable disturbance of the general peace or a saving radiance in the sky. We shall stand or fall by television, of that I am sure.“ (White, 1938, cited in Boyer, 1991, p. 79)

Well, White was right, we would either win or lose. But, most social scientists paid very little attention to television, and so we have little research available in the United States on the immediate effects of the introduction of television. But, television did not wait for the researchers to begin their studies. The first license was issued by the Federal Communications Commission on July 1, 1941, although development was held in

abeyance by World War II. The first licenses were issued for commercial television stations—I stress that these were commercial stations, not public broadcasting. This is important because television broadcasting in virtually every country in the world, except for the United States, began first as a public system—government-owned or government-sponsored television. Television in the United States began as a commercial enterprise to sell goods and services, while providing entertainment. Only about 20 years later did public broadcasting begin as educational television and then PBS. I will contend that we began this communication medium as a vehicle for selling goods and services, not as a vehicle for informing, enlightening, or broadening horizons, and we have paid a „price“ for this decision in the lack of specialized programming for children.

The first stations were licensed in 1941, but broadcasting as we think of it now did not take shape until the late 1940's. There were a few commercial networks; NBC and the DuMont Network were among the early broadcast systems. However, by the mid 1950's, we evolved the structure that we have in the commercial broadcasting system today, at least the main characteristics of it, into three broadcast networks—NBC, ABC, CBS, to which we have now added a fourth network, FOX. Despite the slow start, broadcasting took off in the late 1940's and diffused throughout the United States in ways that no other invention ever created to date has so diffused. In 1949, only 2% of American households had TV. By 1955, 64% of American households had at least one television set. By the mid 1960's, 93% of American households had a television set. Today, there are very few people (only 2%) who do not have television. In the 1960's, the main reason for not having TV was the fact that they lived in places that could not possibly receive a television signal. That is not the case today; there is not a corner of this country, or a corner of this globe, where a television signal is not available, either by over-the-air broadcast, by cable, or by satellite direct broadcast (see Andreasen, 1990).

But, as television rapidly expanded through the population, so did concern about the effects of television. There were numerous concerns that emerged all at once: concerns about the amount of time spent with television, concerns about violence, and concerns about school performance. One of the most famous concerns that I remember, and one that still floats in mythology, was the concern about television's effect on eyesight. I can remember my mother saying, „Don't sit so close to that television, it's going to ruin your eyesight.“ And, mothers and fathers still say that today—I found myself saying that to our

sons when they were much younger. I am happy to report that the reason I am wearing trifocals has nothing to do with television, and this early concern proved to be harmless. However, the concerns about violence, as well as concerns about the way men and women are portrayed, about how ethnic minorities are portrayed, and various concerns about advertising and other content issues, have continued to this day. But, the concern that we are focused on—and the one that was among the very first concerns to surface—is the issue of TV violence.

II. Violence Concerns

The TV violence concern made its official debut in 1952 with the first of a series of congressional hearings. That particular hearing was held in the House of Representatives before the Commerce Committee (United States Congress, 1952). The following year, in 1953, the first major Senate hearing was held before the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, then headed by Senator Estes Kefauver, who convened a panel to inquire into the impact of television violence on juvenile delinquency (United States Congress, 1955a; 1955b). Senator Kefauver established the model hearing by inviting several panels of experts or interested parties to discuss TV violence. In the typical hearing, there would be a panel of parents and teachers to testify about their concerns about television violence. The next panel was a group of experts from the criminal justice system or general field of social science, followed by a panel of TV executives.

In one of the early hearings, a developmental psychologist, Eleanor Maccoby (1954), who was—and is still—a Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, and Paul Lazarsfeld (1955), who was a Professor of Sociology at Columbia University, testified on the effects of television violence. Both of those social scientists noted that, while we really did not have much information on the impact of television (because social scientists were not studying that issue), we did know something about the way films influence children and we could make some suggestions about television. That early testimony initiated a series of congressional hearings on television violence and set a pattern for congressional hearings that have been held to this date. The most recent congressional activity in this area was the February 2, 1995, Children's Media Protection Act of 1995 introduced by Senator Kent Conrad.

There have been many hearings since the 1950's, but there has been only limited change—until recently—because this is a difficult issue. TV violence reduction is fraught with legal complications, with policy pitfalls, with social scientists arguing with each other. Nevertheless, our knowledge base has changed over time and there have been some significant changes in research and landmark reviews of that research.

There were many hearings, but the landmark events that map out where we have been and what we need to do have moved forward from those 1950's hearings. The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence was a presidential commission—established by President Johnson in response to the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King—to assess the role violence plays in our society. This was a broad-ranging national commission, sometimes referred to as the Eisenhower commission because it was chaired by Milton Eisenhower (who, I must say, was a former President of Kansas State University). The Eisenhower Commission issued its report in 1969 -- actually, a bookshelf full of reports, there were about nine or ten staff report volumes. One of those volumes was devoted to media violence, not just television, but media violence. The sections that related to television violence reviewed the research that was available up to that date. The pace of research began to pick up speed in the 1960's with some early studies, which I will describe in a moment. Yet, there was a research base to review in the 1960's, and the conclusion of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence was, and I paraphrase: Yes, from the research that we have, although it is thin and limited, we do know that there is reason for concern about violence in media, particularly violence on television, and particularly the violence on television that is seen by children (Baker & Ball, 1969).

The next landmark event occurred at this point. A very influential Senator, John Pastore from Rhode Island, who was chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Communications, held another hearing. This hearing differed slightly from any of the prior hearings because Senator Pastore included more than the usual parents, teachers, social scientists, and network executives. He added a wrinkle by inviting the Surgeon General of the United States to attend the hearing. When the various panels had testified, he asked the Surgeon General to make some comments. The Surgeon General's Office had just concluded the first reports on smoking and health. At this point, you have to cast your minds back to the mid 1960's. There was quite an outcry over the first Surgeon General's report on smoking

and health, because it indicated that there might be some link between smoking and lung cancer. So, it was this same health officer, the Surgeon General, who was asked to comment on what had been presented at the hearing. And, the Surgeon General responded by placing the TV violence controversy in the same context as the smoking and lung cancer controversy—a public health context.

Now, that was the first time that TV violence had ever been framed as a public health issue. The Surgeon General suggested that he would approach the issue by establishing a panel of scientists and representatives from the industry to review the evidence and to develop a consensus report. And, he got his wish.

A 12-member panel was appointed with distinguished social scientists, professionals in psychiatry and child development, political scientists, and two representatives of the industry. Thomas Coffin, a psychologist who was Vice President for Research at NBC, and Joseph Klapper, a sociologist who was Director of the Office of Social Research at CBS, were among the industry representatives. Senator Pastore did not get his report in one year; it took longer, things always do. But, the funding established 60 research projects around the country, and it took three years to conduct the research and write the report. The report, released in 1972, concluded that violence on television does influence children who view that programming and does increase the likelihood that they will become more aggressive in certain ways. Not all children are affected, not all children are affected in the same way, but there is evidence that TV violence can be harmful to young viewers (Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, 1972; Murray, 1973).

The next landmark report was the 1982 study from the National Institute of Mental Health (1982). This review was a ten year follow-up to the Surgeon General's report. The conclusion: Now with 10 years of more research, we know that violence on television does affect the aggressive behavior of children—and adults for that matter—and there are many more reasons for concern about violence on television. „The research question has moved from asking whether or not there is an effect to seeking explanations for that effect.“ (National Institute of Mental Health, 1982, p. 6)

The next report was in 1992 from the American Psychological Association Task Force on Television and Social Behavior (Huston, et al, 1992), which concluded that 30 years of research confirms the harmful effects of TV violence. These conclusions were reaffirmed

by the American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth (1993; Eron & Slaby, 1994).

How are we affected? There seem to be three major avenues: Direct effects, Desensitization, and the Mean World Syndrome:

The Direct effects process suggests that children and adults who watch a lot of violence on television may become more aggressive and/or they may develop favorable attitudes and values about the use of aggression to resolve conflicts. The second effect, Desensitization, suggests that children who watch a lot of violence on television may become less sensitive to violence in the real world around them, less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others, and more willing to tolerate ever-increasing levels of violence in our society. The third effect, the Mean World Syndrome, suggests that children or adults who watch a lot of violence on television may begin to believe that the world is as mean and dangerous in real life as it appears on television, and hence, they begin to view the world as a much more mean and dangerous place.

III. Violence Research

There is research evidence to support all three types of effects—Direct, Desensitization, and Mean World—and each may operate independently of the other. For example, one study, conducted by Aletha Huston-Stein and her colleagues (Stein & Friedrich, 1972), assessed the effects of viewing either violent or prosocial (nonviolent) television programming. In this study, about one hundred preschool-aged children enrolled in a special nursery school at Pennsylvania State University were divided into three groups and were assigned to watch a particular diet of programming. The children watched either a diet of Batman and Superman cartoons, a diet of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, or a diet of neutral programming (programs designed for preschoolers that contained neither violence nor prosocial messages). Huston-Stein and her colleagues observed the youngsters on the playground and in the classroom for two weeks to assess the level of aggressive and helpful behavior displayed by these children. Then, the children viewed the program diet one half hour a day, three days a week, for four weeks. They watched 12 half-hour episodes of the diet to which they were assigned.

The researchers found that the youngsters who watched the Batman and Superman cartoons were more physically active, both in the classroom and on the playground. Also,

they were more likely to get into fights and scrapes with each other, play roughly with toys, break toys, snatch toys from others, and get into little altercations. No mass murders broke out, but, they were simply more aggressive and had more aggressive encounters. The other group, the group that had watched Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, was much more likely to play cooperatively with their toys, spontaneously offer to help the teacher, and engage in what might be called „positive peer counseling.“ In this latter instance, the focus of the Mister Rogers' sessions was similar to „peer counseling“—being kind, being sensitive to others needs, and being concerned about others feelings. For example, Fred Rogers might suggest that if someone looks sad, you could say, „Gee, you look sad today, are you feeling okay? Do you want to go play or do something.“ The group that watched the neutral programming was neither more aggressive nor more helpful. However, what is interesting about this study is that it shows both sides of the coin: What children watch does affect how they behave, both positively and negatively.

There is a wide range of studies (see Murray, 1973; 1980; 1994; Paik & Comstock, 1994), similar in scope to the Huston-Stein project, that addresses the short-term effects of viewing violence. However, one of the longer-term studies—indeed, one of the longest-term studies—is the work of Leonard Eron (1982; Eron & Slaby, 1995), who, in 1963, began his study by assessing the development of aggression in third graders, eight year olds, in a small upstate New York town. In the course of the study, he asked children to report on their television viewing and other things they liked to do, as well as their ratings of the aggression of other children. He also interviewed teachers and asked them to indicate who in the classroom was more aggressive or less aggressive, and he obtained information from parents about children's television viewing and the parent's home discipline and family values. He conducted that study when these youngsters were eight years old and wrote a report about the aggressive behavior of the eight year olds, noting in passing that there was a relationship between children's level of aggressive behavior and their television viewing. Children who reported, or whose parents reported, that the youngsters preferred and often viewed more violent programs were more likely to be the ones nominated by their peers and teachers as more aggressive in school. He followed up on these youngsters 10 years later, when they were 18 years old, and again found a relationship between TV viewing and aggression. However, the most interesting, and strongest, relationship was between early television viewing at age 8 and aggressive behavior at age 18. He concluded that there were some long-term effects of early

television viewing on later aggressive behavior. In the 1980's, Eron again followed up on these children as young adults, at age 30. Now, he found that there was a relationship between early television viewing and arrest and conviction for violent interpersonal crimes; spouse abuse, child abuse, murder, and aggravated assault. This study is not without controversy, but there is sufficient evidence to convince some researchers that there is a long-term effect of early violence viewing on later aggressive behavior.

With regard to the issue of the Mean World Syndrome, there have been numerous studies conducted by a research group at the University of Pennsylvania, led by George Gerbner (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1990; Gerbner, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1993). For more than 25 years, this group has studied the content of prime time and Saturday morning television. In the fall of each year, they videotape all prime time and Saturday morning television for one week and then provide a detailed analysis of the content of that programming. With regard to violence, the findings indicate that, over the years, there are about 5 violent acts committed during every hour of prime time television and 20 to 25 violent acts committed every hour of Saturday morning children's programming. Of course, the levels of violence have varied somewhat over the 20 years of monitoring, particularly in the area of children's television programming. However, it should be noted that violence in children's programming dropped to its lowest level, 13 acts per hour, in 1973 -- the year following the release of the 1972 Surgeon General's report that identified a link between TV violence and children's aggression. Also, violence on children's television reached its highest level in 20 years, about 32 acts per hour, in 1980-81 when the Federal Communications Commission was discussing the „deregulation“ of children's television.

In later studies, Gerbner and his colleagues began to explore the relationship of the amount of television viewing and viewers' perceptions of the world. For example, the researchers would ask questions about viewers' perception of risk in the world: How likely is it that you are going to be the victim of a violent crime in the next six months? How far from your home would you be willing to walk alone at night? Have you done anything recently to your home to increase it's security—added burglar alarms, changed locks—in the past six months? What percentage of the workforce do you think is involved in law enforcement activities? The researchers found that the amount of television viewed predicted fearfulness—heavy television viewers (those who watch four hours or more each day), as opposed to light viewers (those who watched an hour or less per day), were

much more fearful of the world around them, much more likely to over estimate their level of risk, to over estimate the number of persons involved in law enforcement. There are obviously different risk levels in different areas of the country, but those who watched more television were more fearful than those who watched less television. Also, there are special sub-groups, such as the elderly, that were more fearful who also tend to watch more television. And so, the research team began to develop the notion of the Mean World Syndrome: Watching a lot of television determines your perceptions of the risks of the world because there is so much violence on television. Also, it was interesting that this viewing and fearfulness relationship held across education levels, across income levels, across gender—rarely do you find research results in the social sciences that play out in the same way across education, gender, or income levels.

One other finding from the analysis of television content is that there are certain groups that are more likely to be victims on TV. The typical perpetrator is a white male in his 20's or 30's, described as in the prime of life, with a lot of money but no visible means of support. The principal victims have tended to be female, non-white, foreign born, and elderly. That pattern has changed somewhat over the years (Berry, 1988), and it's changing still, but often it is the case that there is a heavy victimization of non-white, foreign born, elderly, and female individuals on television.

IV. Policy Shifts

The broad area of children's television has been a very sensitive issue for Congress and the FCC (Kunkel & Watkins, 1987) because there is extensive and intensive public concern. And, within this broad area of concern, television violence is the most explosive. What can we do about TV violence? I would contend that we know enough about TV violence to warrant action. We know that there is a relationship between TV violence and changes in attitudes and behavior. As noted earlier, the three main types of effects are: 1) direct effects—increased aggressive behavior or willingness to use violence; 2) desensitization—increased acceptance of violence as normal; and 3) Mean World Syndrome—increased fearfulness and a belief that the real world is as dangerous as the television world.

The concern about TV violence has a long history and was forcefully enunciated as early as 1961 by the then Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Newton

Minow, in his inaugural address to the National Association of Broadcasters. To prepare for that address, Minow had spent a week watching television. Minow's report on this viewing took the following form:

„When television is good, nothing—not the theatre, not the magazines or newspapers—nothing is better. But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air and stay there without a book, magazine, newspaper, profit-and-loss sheet, or rating book to distract you—and keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland. You will see a procession of game shows, violence, audience participation shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, western bad men, western good men, private eyes, gangsters, more violence, and cartoons. And, endlessly, commercials—many screaming, cajoling, and offending.“ (Minow, 1961, cited in Barnouw, 1975, p. 300)

This address was recorded by history as the „vast wasteland“ speech, and it became a symbol for television in the 1960's. Minow was to revisit the vast wasteland 30 years later in 1991. Now, speaking as the former chair of the FCC on the thirtieth anniversary of vast wasteland, he observed:

„In 1961, I worried that my children would not benefit much from television, but in 1991, I worry that my grandchildren will actually be harmed by it.“ (Minow, 1991, p. 12)

However, other FCC chairpersons did not agree with Minow's assessment, and the spirit changed in the 1980's. Mark Fowler, who was appointed in 1981 as the new FCC Chairman, also was asked to give his inaugural address to the National Association of Broadcasters. He approached the task in much the same way as Newton Minow; he sat down and watched a lot of television. But, his view was different. When Chairman Fowler spoke to the NAB, he said, in effect, When I looked at television, I saw a vast richness—a rich array of programming, a rich array of opportunity—I did not see a vast wasteland. He suggested that this richness did not require regulation. He observed in an interview in the Washington Post (Mayer, February 6, 1983, p. K-6) that we don't regulate washing machines, we don't regulate dishwashers, television is just another home appliance, it's just a „toaster with pictures.“

The two FCC policy statements or „viewpoints“ (vast wasteland and toaster with pictures) produced dramatically-different outcomes. Broadcasters were so surprised by Newton

Minow's vast wasteland speech that they ultimately agreed to assign large parts of the UHF spectrum to public broadcasting. Mark Fowler's „toaster with pictures“ speech resulted in a deregulation of children's television (Geller, 1988) that led to an increase in the amount of advertising on children's television and a violence index rating on Saturday morning children's television that jumped to the highest level of violence in 20 years of monitoring: 32 violent acts per hour.

Now, we have a new Chairman of the FCC who has said on several occasions that he is concerned about the amount of violence on television and has called for a „New Social Compact“ to change children's television. The new Chairman, Reed Hundt, noted in a speech to the American Psychological Association in August 1994:

„I am joined in my deep concern about TV violence by many members of Congress. I have discussed the topic with Senators Hollings, Inouye, Simon, Dorgan, Congressman Markey, and many other Members of the House and Senate. In fact, it is one of the issues most frequently raised in my discussions with Congress, and it was the topic of the first question that was addressed to me at my confirmation hearing before the Senate Commerce Committee. ... Television has a significant impact on children's lives. That impact is only going to increase as our technology matures and true, interactive video replaces simple television viewing. Social science has documented that television can be an effective educational tool, especially for young children, and our public policies must ensure that this positive potential does not escape us.“ (Hundt, 1994, pp. 10-13)

It is too early to assess the impact of this „New Social Compact“ viewpoint on public policy, but in April 1995, the FCC promulgated a rule-making procedure (Federal Communications Commission, 1995) that would enhance the implementation of the Children's Television Act of 1990. In the proposed rules, broadcasters would be required to air three hours of educational programming for children each week. Thus, we have moved from the „vast wasteland,“ to the „toaster with pictures,“ to the „New Social Compact.“

V. Actions

Can we change the nature of children's television? I believe the answer is yes, and it would seem that there are three areas or levels in which we can bring about some changes: home, school, and industry.

At the home level, we can encourage greater awareness of the influence of television on children and enhance understanding of ways that parents and teachers can help children use TV effectively. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service at Kansas State University (Murray & Lonborg, 1995) has produced a parent guide publication on this topic. This guide is a review of some of the concerns about television and children and provides suggestions for parents in using television in a constructive manner. One of the straightforward techniques for use at home that is very effective is viewing along with your children and talking about what they see on television. With very young children talking about how violence is faked and what would happen if you actually did some of those things that you see on television is a very basic intervention. Such interventions, at the personal or family level, can lead to enhanced understanding of television's influence and more effective use of this medium.

At the school level, interventions such as advocating for the inclusion of media literacy courses in school systems can be very effective. These „critical viewing“ programs help children understand how television works and the process of effects. There are many very effective programs, but, in the case of media literacy addressed to the violence issue, one interesting new program has been developed by the Center for Media Literacy (1995). Called „Beyond Blame—Challenging Violence in the Media, a Multimedia Literacy Program for Community Empowerment,“ this program is one that a school system or a community agency might use as a general educational intervention. Another approach to enhancing public awareness is working with parents and communities to address television violence as a public health issue. There has been a long history of public advocacy concern about television violence (Kunkel & Murray, 1991; Montgomery, 1989), and there are several major organizations—Center for Media Education, Center for Media Literacy, Mediascope, National Alliance for Nonviolent Programming, and the National Telemedia Council—that are producing materials for parents and community organizations. One such videotape, *The Kids are Watching*, from Mediascope (1993) is very effective in stimulating discussion of the impact of TV violence.

Finally, there are industry and government activities that might be undertaken to change children's television. The Children's Television Act of 1990 did set some limits on the amount of advertising in children's programming and did set some expectations that stations applying for license renewal will have to explain how they have served the

educational needs of children in their broadcast area. And, the FCC is now thinking about elaborating that by including quotas (Federal Communications Commission, 1995), such as one hour per day of children's educational television.

Another approach, which is more voluntary than regulatory, involves working with the industry to introduce changes in the role that advertising plays in supporting children's programming. One might encourage advertisers to shift their support of children's programming from advertising to underwriting. Sponsorship of children's TV would then shift from advertising to enhance corporate income to underwriting to enhance corporate image.

Why recommend a shift from „income“ to „image?“ The rationale for this change begins with the observation that Saturday morning children's television is currently a mass-audience format and there are few age-specific, targeted educational programs. One of the reasons for this absence of age-specific programming is the need to generate programming that will fit advertisers' needs for a large audience of 2- to 12-year-old children. One result is the large number of violent cartoons. For example, we have noted that there are about 25 violent acts per hour in Saturday morning programming directed at children. And, one might ask, why does Saturday morning programming look the way it does? Why is it as violent as it is, and what is the relationship to advertising? One of the reasons for cartoon programs on Saturday morning is the fact that advertisers want to get a maximum return on their program, and they need to have the largest possible audience. The only way this can be done is to accumulate the audience from 2- to 12-year-old children. When advertisers talk about the child audience, they are not talking about 6 year olds or 4 year olds, they are talking about that entire range of childhood from 2 to 12 years. The only format that will hold the attention span of the large, heterogeneous audience is fast-action, fast-paced programming—animated programming. And so, Saturday morning programming contains fast-action, fast-paced cartoons that tend to be violent. You can create fast-paced, fast-moving, nonviolent programming—Sesame Street is an example—but, it is difficult to create such programming for a broad age range. Therefore, we are likely to have fast-action, fast-paced, highly-violent cartoons because they hold the attention of a broad age range of 2 to 12 year olds. However, if we moved from advertising supporting corporate „income“ to sponsorship supporting corporate „image,“ there would be no need to assemble a huge audience and the nature of

programming might change. For example, one might find advertisers underwriting specialized, age-specific programming that is targeted to particular interest areas of a highly-differentiated child audience.

Other industry level initiatives might include further development of the parental advisory that the television networks began implementing in 1987. The „viewer discretion“ warnings that have been attached to prime time movies since September, 1987 have been shown to have some influence in reducing viewership among the 2- to 11-year-old audiences. Hamilton (1994), conducted an analysis of audience rating data for network movies carrying viewer discretion advisories broadcast during the period September 17, 1987 to September 26, 1993. He found that movies carrying the warnings lost 59 ratings points among children 2 to 11. This translates into 222,000 fewer children—or a 14% drop in average audience rating for this age group—for movies that contained viewer discretion warnings. There were no changes in viewership for teens or adults. These findings suggest that parents are sensitive to the warnings and will act on the information provided concerning program content.

A related development being considered by the industry is the possible rating of violence levels on television programs and the potential coordination with electronic screening devices known as „V-chip“ technology. While there is no clear agreement on the implementation of ratings and screening technology, some members of Congress have suggested legislation that would require the FCC to mandate the inclusion of an electronic circuit, or V-chip, in all new television sets. This technology is rather similar to the circuitry required for decoding „closed-caption“ program signals. In this instance, the industry would transmit a signal concerning the violent content and parents could program their television set to block programs containing the identified signal. The successful implementation of this type of intervention would require the participation of the industry in rating and coding programs and the involvement of parents in responding to these ratings. Although there are questions about the impact of this V-chip approach, there is evidence from the Hamilton (1994) study that parents may be responsive to viewer warnings in relation to young children.

VI. Conclusions

There are reasons for concern about the impact of television violence. Social scientists have studied and discussed this issue for almost 40 years. During this period, hundreds of studies and numerous national reviews and reports have confirmed the potential harmful effects of televised violence. The major reviews and interpretations of research have included the Surgeon General's study in 1972, the NIMH report in 1982, and the American Psychological Association reports in 1992 and 1993. Each of these reports confirms the need to address the issue of TV violence but questions remain about the most efficient and effective process.

I believe the most useful approach to be a multilevel, systemic change in the way American society is willing to deal with media violence. The changes must take place at the home, school, and industry levels. These changes must include educational programs—for both parents and children—that are designed to enhance understanding of television's influence on children and the role that parents can play in moderating that influence. Also, there must be changes in the television industry, both voluntary and regulatory, that will reduce the incidence of violence in programming and increase the positive influence of television.

All of these changes are do-able. All of these changes are worthwhile. Many of these changes are in process, and many can be expedited with community and industry support. The combined influence of voluntary changes in the ratings or parental advisories offered by industry and FCC leadership in implementing the Children's Television Act of 1990 should result in fewer violent programs and greater numbers of educational and entertaining programs.

Industry leadership in the past resulted in major changes in children's television. The CBS initiatives in the mid 1970's, following the Surgeon General's alarm about TV violence, led to the development of five cartoon series that shared a common goal—educating, while entertaining, young viewers. Probably the most famous series in this set of five was *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*, which was based on the life of Bill Cosby. However, other series in the collection, such as *USA of Archie*, *the Harlem Globtrotters Popcorn Machine*, and *ISIS*, all made important contributions to children's intellectual and emotional development. Reviewed in the CBS report *Learning While They Laugh* (Columbia Broadcasting System, 1977), the research demonstrated that these were very

effective educational programs that captured the imagination and provided entertainment for young viewers.

We have achieved success in the past when we have combined the creative talents of producers and broadcasters in response to the challenge of public concern about children's television. Now is the time to reinvigorate that creative partnership to enhance the intellectual and emotional development of our youngest citizens. We have demonstrated that children can learn from television and we have demonstrated that they can „learn while they laugh.“ All we need is the firm resolve to develop new approaches to strengthen the positive role of television in our children's lives.

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