

## **PART I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. Overview**

On October 15, 1996 the UCLA Center for Communication Policy released the second of three annual reports on television violence. Looking at all television sources, but especially broadcast network television, the report found that there had been improvement in the areas of television series, theatrical films shown on television and on-air promotions. The report also found that a new problem regarding reality specials, especially those featuring real footage of animals attacking and in some cases killing people, had emerged. However, despite some new problems, the report found some improvement overall and looked to the third year to see if those improvements represented an aberration or the beginning of a trend.

As the second report was released in the middle of a presidential election campaign, the Center offered to brief both candidates, President Bill Clinton and Senator Robert Dole, on the report's findings. President Clinton held a joint press conference with the director of the Center and praised the findings of the second report. Senator Dole read the report and called it "a study in courage."

In the introduction to last year's study referring to political developments in the television content area in 1996, the report concluded that "there had never been a year like the last one." The report went on to predict that 1997 "promises to be just as momentous and contentious." That prediction proved to be an enormous understatement.

At times it has seemed as if a war had broken out between television programmers on one side and advocates, as well as some members of the government, on the other. The past year has been filled with threats to go to court, to enact more restrictive legislation, to boycott advertisers and even to revoke the licenses of some television stations. All sides claimed to have talked to parents and to represent their interests. It was a very difficult year and, while many of the issues now appear settled, at least for the moment, new issues will surely arise over the next few years.

Within two months of the report's release, the two sides in the television content battle became increasingly contentious. The Telecommunications Act of 1996, which was signed by the President in early February 1996, called for a sweeping reform of the nation's telecommunications business. Significant portions of the bill called for increased or, in some cases, new competition in the telephone and cable industries. For the first time consumers would have choices as to who would provide their local telephone or cable service. The content issues in the television and cable business were most affected, however, by a small provision in the bill requiring television manufacturers to place a V-chip in all television sets larger than 13 inches beginning in the middle of 1998.

The V-chip, developed by Professor Tim Collings of Simon Fraser University in Canada, allows a parent to set the television to block out unwanted programming. Television programmers or distributors must embed the code or label in the vertical blanking interval of a television signal. The V-chip then recognizes the code and blocks out programs that have been selectively coded. Although some called the use of the V-chip a restriction on the First Amendment rights of

broadcasters, Canada, comfortable with this approach to content issues, began field tests of the V-chip. In his last major act as chairman of the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), longtime anti-violence advocate Keith Spicer called for the installation of V-chips in Canadian television sets as one of the ways to combat television violence.

In the United States, the recently enacted V-chip legislation would have no meaning if broadcast and cable programmers did not create a labeling system. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 gave the industry one year to create a system and submit it for approval by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). If the industry did not create a system or if the FCC found it unacceptable, the FCC itself could appoint a panel to develop an independent labeling system. In order to keep the legislation from violating the First Amendment, the FCC could appoint a commission to devise a labeling system, but could not force broadcasters to carry it in their signals.

No doubt, a complicated political and legal drama would have been played out if an independent body had created a labeling system and the television industry refused to use it. But such a potential drama was avoided on February 29, 1996 when the television industry met at the White House and voluntarily agreed to develop a labeling system to facilitate the use of the V-chip. All sides of this contentious issue seemed pleased that a court challenge was averted and that the television industry had agreed to create its own content labels. At the White House meeting the industry announced that Jack Valenti, former advisor to President Lyndon Johnson and longtime head of the Motion Picture Association of America, would chair an implementation committee comprised of leaders in the television industry to devise the labeling system. As head of the MPAA, it was Valenti who in 1968 created the ratings system for the motion picture industry. Those ratings were administered by the MPAA itself and advised parents as to the age-appropriateness of a motion picture. Originally using the symbols G, M, R and X, by 1996 the system had evolved into G, PG, PG-13, R and NC-17.

From the beginning the television industry sent signals that it was likely to create age-based labels similar to those used by the film industry. Valenti's chairing of the implementation committee was further evidence that this was the type of code likely to be developed. Canada, meanwhile, seemed to be moving in a different direction. In the V-chip field trials it was experimenting with a very different system than the age-based one used by the MPAA. Although Canada's entire effort to deal with television content had focused on violence, it was testing a system that dealt not only with violence but also with sex and language. Each of these factors (S,V and L) was rated on a scale of 1 through 5. Therefore a program might have a rating such as V-4, S-2 and L-1. Obviously this was a much more difficult code to administer, although it did provide more specific information for the parent. The question that became paramount in both Canada and the United States was whether the more complicated and information-rich code would mean a more valuable tool for parents, as some believed, or whether it would be so complicated that few would learn or use it.

At the February 1996 White House Summit the industry signaled its commitment to deliver the new labeling system by the end of a year as called for in the Telecommunications Bill. It was clear that most of the children's advocate organizations such as the PTA called for a system similar to Canada's as opposed to the age-based system used by the movie industry. All sides

released supporting polls purporting to represent what parents felt about the issue. During the summer of 1996 many of the advocates and industry critics came to Washington to meet with Jack Valenti and the implementation committee in order to influence the new labeling system.

The industry reminded its critics that its commitment to develop a labeling system was voluntary and that no one, neither advocates nor the government, could compel the industry to do anything. Increasingly it appeared that the television industry was moving toward an age-based system while leading members of Congress and most advocacy groups were calling such a system inadequate. Instead they demanded a content descriptor system like what was being developed in Canada. Both sides appeared to be on a collision course.

This time a collision was not averted and what seemed like warfare broke out when the industry announced the new labeling system on December 19, 1996. Details of the system had leaked and opponents of the new labeling system were ready. The implementation committee announced that it would adopt a system remarkably similar to the movie ratings system. All programming except for news and sports would be rated. In defining news, the implementation committee used a definition almost identical to that used by the Center in its definition of news (which was excluded from the monitoring process). Network magazine shows were considered news while syndicated tabloid shows such as **Hard Copy** were not. All programming except children's would be labeled G, PG, PG-14 or MA (for mature). The major difference from the film ratings was use of a PG-14 label instead of a PG-13 label and no NC-17 label. Children's television would be labeled either Y (acceptable for all children) or Y-7 (recommended for children 7 or over).

Within hours of the industry's announcement, opponents held their own press conference indicating their intention to fight the new system. Those determined to fight included Congressman Edward Markey (D-Mass.), former Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications, longtime critic of television content and the man who moved the V-chip legislation through the House of Representatives.

Looming in the background of the impending battle was the fact that the industry's system needed to be endorsed by the FCC. Critics vowed to take their fight to the FCC while the industry threatened that if its system was not affirmed it would be in court "in a nanosecond." Even with the criticism, the television industry began using its new labeling system in late December 1996 and early January 1997.

Advocates and other critics based their opposition to the then-existing system on the belief that only parents should make decisions as to what was appropriate for their children. What was needed, they claimed, was more information from content descriptors so that parents could make proper decisions. Supporters of the age-based system countered that content descriptors were too complicated and unlikely to be used by the parents who needed them most. All sides produced polls to support their views. Critics also charged that the large majority of network television programming under the age-based system was rated in one category, PG.

The government began to enter the fight. Markey, as mentioned above, had been an early critic. Vice President Al Gore, though he supported the voluntary ratings system at the White House

meeting, sided with the opponents and used his influence to persuade the industry to change its system. The new chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, John McCain (R-Ariz.), also called for content descriptors and a revision of the existing system. In the first few months of 1997 McCain's committee held hearings on the television labeling system. New legislation was introduced to persuade broadcasters to change their system. A bill introduced by Senator Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.), for example, required any broadcaster not using content descriptors to provide a "safe harbor" by not scheduling any inappropriate programming before 10:00 p.m.

More and more pressure was placed on the broadcast and cable industry. A few members of the industry appeared to be weakening in their resistance. One of the first major forces to indicate willingness to adopt content descriptors was Rupert Murdoch's Fox Network. Observers noted that Murdoch had many important issues before the federal government (his News Corporation, of which the Fox network is a part, is one of the world's biggest and most diverse media companies) and that television labels represented only a small part of his interests.

Eventually most of the industry sought a cease-fire to the hostilities through a deal. They would adopt the content descriptors if key members of Congress would agree to a moratorium on all television content legislation for at least three years. In a surprising turn of events, just before the deal was finalized, Canada released its report on the V-chip field trials and announced its intent to adopt a ratings system very similar to the one that the Valenti implementation committee had developed and which was in place. This represented a major shift in Canada's position. It was too late, however, to change events in the United States.

In the summer of 1997 the television industry agreed to revamp its labeling system to add content descriptors. Each program would continue to carry an age-based label and add a S,V or L where necessary. A new content descriptor, "D," was also added to distinguish sexual or adult dialog from sexual depictions.

In a major development, NBC announced that it would not follow the decision of the rest of the industry. It would instead continue to use the age-based system but with greater use of parental advisories. This marked a major split among the television programmers.

The government was unhappy with NBC's defection from the deal, but was nevertheless eager to make the agreement. All networks except NBC agreed to move to a content descriptor system by October 1, 1997 in exchange for a guarantee by key members of Congress that there would be no content legislation for at least three years. Legislators and advocates threatened to apply pressure on NBC to join the agreement.

On October 1 content descriptors began to appear in the upper left-hand corner of the television screen at the beginning of a program. Viewers began to see such labels as PG, DL or PG-14, SV except on NBC where they continued to see only G, PG, PG-14 and MA. One member of Congress even hinted broadly at going after the television licenses of NBC affiliates that refused to change their voluntary labeling system. As of the release of this report, NBC is still holding out and using its own system.

In another development in the television content area, in September 1997 the three-hour educational rule for children's television went into effect. Many of the leading advocates, feeling they got what they wanted in the television content area, moved into the much more difficult area of computers and the Internet where the content is much more graphic and disturbing than what is found on television. There, regulation, even if agreed to, is much more difficult to enforce.

The three-year moratorium offers a chance for a respite in the long television content debate. It is hoped that the television industry will have a chance to fully develop and standardize its labeling system and, even more important, that parents will learn to recognize the labels and use them effectively.

## B. Historical Background

Concerns about media violence have been with us since long before the advent of television. Throughout the nineteenth century, moralists and critics warned that newspapers were the cause of juvenile crime. There was concern that the great flow of stories about crime and vice would lead people to imitate the vividly described immoral behavior. In the 1920s many were alarmed at what they saw as rampant sex, violence and general lawlessness on the movie screen. During that era the motion picture industry was not protected by the First Amendment. This protection did not come until the U.S. Supreme Court's Miracle decision in 1952. To forestall governmental regulation the film industry itself generated production standards under the auspices of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). The man the MPPDA chose to supervise the film industry, Harding Administration Postmaster General Will H. Hays, became so powerful that the organization became known as the Hays Office.

The Hays Office Codes, which discuss sexuality as well as violence, established the following standards governing criminal violence:

1. Murder.
  - (a) The technique of murder must be presented in a way that will not inspire imitation.
  - (b) Brutal killings are not to be presented in detail.
  - (c) Revenge in modern times shall not be justified.
2. Methods of crimes should not be explicitly presented.
  - (a) Theft, robbery, safe-cracking and dynamiting of trains, mines, buildings, etc. should not be detailed in method.
  - (b) Arson must be subject to the same safeguards.
  - (c) The use of firearms should be restricted to essentials.

The codes list brutality, gruesomeness and cruelty to children or animals as repellent subjects. In justifying some of the codes, the Hays Office reasoned that crimes should not:

1. Teach methods of crime.
2. Inspire potential criminals with a desire for imitation.
3. Make criminals seem heroic and justified.

The concerns embodied in the Hays Codes regarding the effects of film images, particularly on the young, led to the landmark Payne Fund studies (1933-1935). These studies concluded that movies contradicted social norms in regard to crime (and sex) and that motion pictures directly influenced youngsters to become juvenile delinquents and criminals. When the production codes finally disappeared in the 1960s, they were replaced by the voluntary rating of motion pictures by the Classification and Ratings Administration (CARA) administered by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). Originally created in 1968 as G, M, R and X, these ratings still exist today, with some changes, as G, PG, PG-13, R and NC-17.

After World War II, there was concern about violence and gruesomeness in comic books such as Tales from the Crypt, Haunt of Fear and Vault of Horror. The comic book industry was attacked for contributing to juvenile delinquency. This led to the establishment in 1947 of the Association of Comic Magazine Publishers, which drafted a code in the 1950s banning, among other things, torture, sadism and detailed descriptions of criminal acts. A seal of approval was printed on the cover of acceptable comic books.

Significant penetration of television into American households began after World War II. By 1960, 150 million Americans lived in homes with television. Homes with children were more than twice as likely to have a television as those without children. By 1960, children were spending more time with television than they were with radio, comic books, babysitters or even playmates. As television became a staple of the American home, concern grew over what effect the medium might have on children. Would it stimulate or stunt intellectual development and creativity? Would it make kids passive or aggressive, callous or empathic? Would it corrupt children by prematurely introducing them to an adult world of sex, smoking, liquor and violence? Or would it make them better able to cope with the real world around them?

Congressional interest in television violence began in 1954 with the creation of a Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, chaired by Senator Robert Hendrickson. Estes Kefauver took over the chairmanship a year later and extended the inquiry. In 1961 and 1962 Connecticut's Thomas Dodd, with support from President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, followed up with intensive hearings leading the three networks to consider a joint effort to reduce television violence. Attorney General Kennedy even promised to protect such an effort against an antitrust challenge, but the President was assassinated and the Attorney General resigned before any action could be taken.

The concerns in the 1950s and early 1960s about the violence in television series focused on television programs such as **The Rifleman** and **The Untouchables**. In 1961 the results of the first major investigation of the effects of television on children in North America were published. Television in the Lives of Our Children (Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lyle and Edwin Parker) presented the findings and conclusions from 11 studies conducted in ten American and Canadian communities between 1958 and 1960. This investigation covered a wide variety of topics and research areas, including the physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioral effects of television on children. The study addressed the most common concern about television: that it contributed to delinquent and violent behavior. The researchers found the content of television to be "extremely violent." Fighting, shooting and murder were common, as were themes of crime. Violence constituted an important part of programs in more than half of the hours monitored.

The researchers argued that television could contribute to violent and delinquent behavior in some cases. This might result, for example, in the case of a child who confuses the rules of the fantasy world, as seen on television, with the rules of reality, or an already aggressive child whose aggression is increased by identifying with a successful "bad" character on television. But the researchers cautioned that television was, at most, a contributing factor in causing violent and delinquent behaviors, or any behaviors for that matter. For example, they noted, "Delinquency is a complex behavior growing usually out of a number of roots, the chief one usually being some

great lack in the child's life--often a broken home or a feeling of rejection by parents or peer groups. Television is, at best, a contributing cause."

Schramm and his associates summed up their conclusions in regard to the possible behavioral effects of television as follows: "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." They also stressed that parents had little to fear from television if they provided their children with a warm, loving, interesting, secure family environment.

The 1960s was a tumultuous decade in the United States. Violent street demonstrations related to civil rights struggles, inner-city turmoil, student activism and antiwar protests shook the country. The rate of violent crime soared. Major political assassinations occurred. Americans saw brutal images of the world on their television sets, including the Vietnam War (dubbed "The Living Room War" by Michael Arlen), the suppression of antiwar demonstrators at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968 and the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. In June 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson, in response to concerns about societal violence and the recent assassinations, convened the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. While looking at all sources of societal violence, the commission devoted much attention to the mass media, particularly television. This effort produced the massive Violence and the Media (1969), edited by Sandra Ball (now Ball-Rokeach) and Robert Baker. The third part of this three-part work focused on entertainment television and the issue of violence. It included summaries of past research assembled by experts in the field and new research prepared specifically for the report.

The media task force was concerned not only with the quantity of violence on entertainment television, but also with its quality. In other words, how was the violence portrayed? Who killed whom? Which weapons were used? Where did the violence take place? Was the violence justified? Were the aggressors rewarded or punished? Were the consequences of the violence fully shown? To conduct a content analysis of entertainment programs on television, the task force chose Professor George Gerbner of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, a leading expert in the study of media violence. Gerbner defined violence as "the overt expression of force intended to hurt or kill."

It is important to reiterate that Gerbner and his staff analyzed both the extent of violence on television and the qualitative nature and context of the violence. They not only quantified what portion of crime, comedy and cartoon shows contained violence, they also qualitatively examined the basic characteristics of the violence and the context in which the violence occurred. They noted, for example, that most violence was portrayed as serious rather than funny, and that most occurred between strangers at close range and involved weapons. They found that the consequences of television violence were unrealistic since little pain or gore was visible. They distinguished the violence of good guys from that of bad guys (good guys were as violent, but did not suffer negative consequences). Among their other qualitative findings were the following: police officers were nearly as violent as criminals; criminals usually received punishment from their enemies or the police rather than from the judicial system; most violence



was committed by young or middle-aged unmarried males; nonwhites and foreigners also committed more than their share of violence (and were usually villains); and violence was usually not punished. Historical setting was another important contextual factor analyzed. While nearly three-quarters of programs set in contemporary times contained violence, almost all programs set in the past and the future contained violence.

From Gerbner's content analysis, the media task force reported what it saw as the basic messages or norms in regard to violence portrayed on broadcast television. Overall, the task force concluded that violence was shown as a useful means of resolving problems and achieving goals. Viewers learned from television that conflicts are best resolved through the use of violence. There was a notable absence of alternative means of conflict resolution, such as debate, cooperation and compromise.

From a comprehensive review of the effects-related research, the task force concluded that television's portrayal of violence was "one major contributory factor which must be considered in attempts to explain the many forms of violent behavior that mark American society today."

The media task force report was criticized for making assertions that were not well grounded in the data. There were many suppositions and conjectures in their conclusions about the effects of violence on viewers. Nevertheless, the work was considered important and stimulated further research.

Many felt that, although the report of the President's Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence pointed to a link between media violence and violence in the real world, a more detailed examination of the issue was desirable. In the political arena, Senator John Pastore (D-R.I.) argued that a "public health risk" might be involved. If television was responsible for making the children of America more aggressive, he asserted, then government might have to pressure the industry to clean up its act. Even if the First Amendment prohibited government censorship, scientific evidence showing a link between television violence and real world violence might be used to convince the industry to restrain itself. With this in mind, Congress appropriated \$1 million to fund research studies focusing on television violence and its effect on children and adolescents.

The result was a massive, six-volume Report of the Surgeon General of the United States (1971), which included extensive reviews of existing literature and specially commissioned research. The project was managed by the Surgeon General and coordinated and administered by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). An advisory committee composed of distinguished scholars was created to draw up conclusions from the Report.

The content analysis in the Surgeon General's Report was again provided by George Gerbner. He compared programming in 1969 with the results of the analyses he had completed for 1967 and 1968. Again, he applied both a quantitative and qualitative analysis. One important conclusion of his work was that television violence was not realistic. The people, relationships, settings, places and times of television violence, he argued, all differed dramatically from those in real life.

Muriel Cantor (“The Role of the Producer in Choosing Children’s Television Content”) and Thomas Baldwin and Colby Lewis (“Violence in Television: The Industry Looks at Itself”) interviewed television professionals to gain insight into how television content was created. The professionals tended to see violence as synonymous with “action,” which they argued was the best tool to keep the interest and attention of viewers, young and old. They claimed that they limited violence to those places where it was contextually appropriate, for example, where it was essential to plot or character development. They insisted that violence was portrayed as immoral unless it was used for self-defense or by law enforcement officials. Heroes only resorted to violence when absolutely necessary and, even then, always obeyed the law. Generally discounting critics, they argued that television violence accurately reflected the real world and cited influences other than television as responsible for the real violence in society. They also criticized parents for blaming television while ignoring their own responsibilities.

In a major study, Robert Liebert and Robert Baron (“Short-Term Effects of Televised Aggression on Children’s Aggressive Behavior”) found that viewing a violent act on television increased the willingness of children to be aggressors in a laboratory situation. Liebert, summarizing the research from his own and other studies within the Surgeon General’s Report, as well as 54 earlier experimental studies, concluded that children who see violence rewarded in the mass media subsequently act more violently themselves.

Monroe Lefkowitz and his associates (“Television Violence and Child Aggression: A Follow-up Study”) conducted a ten-year longitudinal study that found the television habits established by an eight-year-old boy would influence his aggressive behavior throughout his childhood and into his adolescent years. The more violence an eight-year-old boy watched, the more aggressive his behavior would be at age eight and at age 18. The link between his television viewing at eight and his aggressive behavior at 18 was even stronger than the link between his television watching at eight and his aggressive behavior at 8. Carefully controlling for other variables, Lefkowitz and his associates concluded that regular viewing of media violence seemed to lead to aggressive behavior.

This is but a brief taste of the many different studies that constituted the Surgeon General’s Report. Surveying the whole report, the advisory committee concluded, “Thus the two sets of findings (laboratory and survey) converge in three respects: a preliminary and tentative indication of a causal relation between viewing violence on television and aggressive behavior; an indication that any such causal operation operates only on some children (who are predisposed to be aggressive); and an indication that it operates only in some environmental contexts. Such tentative and limited conclusions are not very satisfying [yet] they represent substantially more knowledge than we had two years ago.”

Each of the individual studies within the report can be criticized, especially for methodological flaws. For example, one can question whether findings from a laboratory experiment can be applied to the “real world.” In some instances the sample sizes studied were quite small. In many instances a host of additional variables might account for the correlations found. Moving beyond individual studies, the report can be faulted for its general focus on short-term and direct effects. For example, some critics have argued the most profound influences of television are long-term and indirect. Nevertheless, overall, the accumulation of evidence supported the hypothesis that viewing of violence on television may increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior.

There was some criticism that the conclusions of the advisory committee were overly tentative and cautious. In the 1972 Senate hearings on the committee's conclusions, the Surgeon General himself, Jessie Steinfeld, expressed this view:

While the Committee report is carefully phrased and qualified in language acceptable to social scientists, it is clear to me that the causal relation between televised violence and antisocial behavior is sufficient to warrant appropriate and immediate remedial action. The data on social phenomena such as television and social violence will never be clear enough for all social scientists to agree on the formulation of a succinct statement of causality. But there comes a time when the data are sufficient to justify action. That time has come.

During the 1970s a number of widely publicized crimes were attributed to imitation of televised violence. In 1977 Ronnie Zamora, a 15-year-old Florida youth, was charged with the murder of his neighbor, an 80-year-old woman. His attorney, Ellis Rubin, used "television intoxication" as Zamora's defense, arguing that a steady diet of violent television caused him to act as he did. Believing that television could not be held accountable for the crime, the jury was not persuaded and Zamora was convicted of first-degree murder. At about the same time, in Boston a young woman was beaten to death and burned in a vacant lot by a group of youths. When arrested for her murder, the youths claimed they had gotten the idea for the crime from television the night before. Fearful of the potential effect of television, interested groups began protesting against television violence. The American Medical Association argued that it was a threat to the social health of the country. The National PTA sponsored forums on its effects. The National Citizens' Committee for Broadcasting publicly identified advertisers that sponsored programming with violent content.

In the summary of the Surgeon General's Report of 1971, the advisory committee called for investigation into previously unexplored areas of television's influence, such as its effects on prosocial behaviors and its effects in the home environment rather than in the laboratory. The scientific community responded to this call with a huge outpouring of research. So much information was produced (over 3,000 titles) that Surgeon General Julius Richard suggested that a synthesis and evaluation of the literature be conducted by the NIMH. This project began in 1979 and was coordinated by David Pearl of NIMH. The resulting two-volume report, Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties, edited by Pearl, Lorraine Bouthilet and Joyce Lazar, consisted only of reviews of the existing literature, but its focus was much broader than that of the 1971 Surgeon General's Report.

In the 1970s there was more of an emphasis on field studies, in part because many researchers believed that links between violent programming and aggressive behavior had already been well established in the laboratory. Two field investigations conducted by J.L. Singer and D.G. Singer related children's viewing habits at home with their behavior during free-play periods at day-care centers (Television Imagination and Aggression: A Study of Preschoolers' Play, 1980). Those children who watched a lot of violent television at home tended to exhibit much more unwarranted aggression in free play. A field study by E.D. McCarthy and his associates showed that watching television violence is related to fights with peers, conflict with parents and

delinquency (“Violence and Behavior Disorders,” Journal of Communication, 1975). L.D. Eron and L.R. Huesmann found a significant positive relationship between viewing television violence and aggressive behavior in both boys and girls in the United States, Finland and Poland (“Adolescent Aggression and Television,” Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1980). This study was especially significant because in earlier research the relationship had only been found for boys.

Not all of the research reviewed supported the causal relationship between television violence and aggressive behavior. One significant study that did not was conducted by J. Ronald Milavsky and his associates (Milavsky, Ronald Kessler, Horst Stipp and William S. Rubens, “Television and Aggression: Results of a Panel Study,” 1982). While they did not disagree that viewing television violence was associated with short-term aggressive behavior, their findings concluded that no long-term, cumulative relationship existed.

Some still doubted that a link could be shown between viewing violence and aggressive behavior. Nevertheless, many scientists argued that researchers should move beyond the accumulation of further evidence establishing a link and instead shift the focus to the processes that are responsible for this relationship. Therefore, researchers were urged to develop theories that explain why and how that relationship exists.

Observational learning theory, which deals with the imitation of an observed model, was tested in field studies, elaborated and linked to other factors such as age. Some researchers attempted to link observational learning with how the brain learns and stores information (cognitive-processing psychology). They showed how certain aggressive behaviors may be learned and stored in the brain for future reference. For example, a young viewer watches a violent television episode. Later in life, when a situation arises similar to the one seen on television, the young viewer may retrieve and perform the violent act previously viewed. Included in one study was an analysis of cases in which youths apparently imitated criminal acts they had viewed on television (C.W. Turner and M.R. Fern, “Effects of White Noise and Memory Cues on Verbal Aggression,” presented at meetings of the International Society for Research on Aggression, 1978). In each case, specific visual cues that were present in the television portrayal were also present in the environment in which the criminal act was imitated.

Attitude change theory also received attention. Some of the research suggests that the more violent television a child watches, the more that child tends to have favorable attitudes toward aggressive behavior. This seems to occur largely because viewers who watch a lot of televised violence come to see violent behavior as normal. Some scientists contended that television violence leads to aggressive behavior by overstimulating children. In this regard, some research suggested that aggression can be stimulated by large amounts of action programming, even without a high level of violent content. However, others claimed that children are anesthetized or desensitized by the same overloading process. One study showed that boys who watch a lot of violent television programming tend to exhibit less physiological arousal when shown new violent programs than do boys who regularly watch less violent fare (V.B. Cline, R.G. Croft, S. Courier, “Desensitization of Children to Television Violence,” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1973).

There was some discussion of the catharsis theory which argues that viewing violent behavior serves to “release steam” and dissipate the need or desire to be aggressive. This theory predicts that watching violence on television will reduce aggressiveness. Some have argued that this explains the low levels of social violence in Japan, a country with a high level of media violence. But the Japanese case might be better explained by cultural variables. While one cannot dismiss the Japanese example, most American studies point to an increase in aggressive behavior from viewing violence on television, and thus the available American data tend to contradict catharsis theory.

This is not an exhaustive review of the theories that attempt to explain the relationship between aggressive behavior and television violence. But these theories do indicate that researchers moved beyond trying to establish that a positive relationship exists to the matter of explaining why a relationship exists.

It was also significant that the NIMH report moved beyond the violence issue to deal with many other effects of television. Prosocial behavior was one area that received considerable attention. The report concluded that television portrayals of prosocial behavior, such as friendliness, cooperation, delay of gratification and generosity, can lead to similar behaviors in viewers. Both laboratory and field studies tended to confirm that observational learning applies to good behaviors on television as well as bad, suggesting television’s power as an overall socializing force. These findings support the television industry’s more recent emphasis on showing people fastening their seat belts before driving. Evidence suggests this may have an important effect on encouraging viewers to buckle up. The television industry has made similar strides in deglamorizing the use of cigarettes and alcohol.

Not only did the NIMH report expand the focus beyond the violence issue, it also shifted from examining short-term direct effects to long-term indirect effects. Television was presented as an educator, albeit an informal one, that helps construct the social reality in which we live. The following statement from the summary captures the report’s overall conclusion:

Almost all evidence testifies to television’s role as a formidable educator whose effects are both pervasive and cumulative. Television can no longer be considered as a casual part of daily life, as an electronic toy. Research findings have long since destroyed the illusion that television is merely innocuous entertainment. While the learning it provides is mainly incidental, rather than direct and formal, it is a significant part of the total acculturation process.

Despite the healthy redirection of energy, the popular media uniformly focused on the single conclusion that children who watch violence on television might be influenced to behave aggressively. (For a more thorough review of the television-effects literature, see Shearon Lowery and Melvin DeFleur’s Milestones in Mass Communication Research, 1995, upon which much of the above discussion is based.)

Although research has continued over the past decade, the overall conclusions have changed little. While skeptics remain, most social scientists find the evidence from so many studies compelling. Taken together, the many different studies point to a statistically significant

connection between watching violence on television and behaving aggressively. In 1992 the American Psychological Association issued a report entitled “Big World, Small Screen: The Role of Television in American Society.” The report concluded, “The accumulated research clearly demonstrates a correlation between viewing violence and aggressive behavior. Children and adults who watch a large number of aggressive programs also tend to hold attitudes and values that favor the use of violence.”

Some researchers have gone so far as to assign a numerical value to the connection between violence on television and violence in the real world. Leonard Eron has stated that 10% of societal violence is attributable to exposure to violent television images.

The accumulated scientific evidence is compelling, but the complex relationship between violence on television and violence in the real world must not be oversimplified. Many of the nuances, qualifications and complexities of the research have, out of necessity, been omitted from the foregoing discussion. Scientific evidence strongly suggests that there is a link between violence on television and that in the real world. The degree and nature of that link is not so clear. More of the possible effects are known than the probable effects. It is known that television does not have simple, direct stimulus-response effects on its audiences. It is further known that the way television affects people is influenced by many other factors, including: habits, interests, attitudes and prior knowledge; how individuals and our institutions use television; and the socio-cultural environment in which the communication occurs. Television does not have uniform effects. As television has a different impact on different types of cultures, the same television program has different effects on different people. When the impact of television is discussed or when television is blamed for having caused something to happen, it should never be suggested that television alone is a sufficient cause. Anything as complex as human behavior is not shaped by a single factor. Each behavior is caused by a large set of factors. In different individuals, the same behavior might well be caused by different factors. Given these difficulties, the precise influences of television are very hard to determine.

There are some who think it is a mistake to focus on whether media violence directly causes social violence. These critics argue that long-term indirect effects are of more importance. They believe that the accumulated perceptions and attitudes acquired from watching violent television content over the long term are of greater significance. For example, George Gerbner contends that the wrong question is being asked. “The contribution of television to the committing of violence is relatively minor, maybe 5%. Whereas the contribution of television to the perception of violence is much higher. People are almost paralyzed by fear” (The New York Times, December 14, 1994). Gerbner argues that frequent television viewers tend to suffer from the “mean world syndrome.” They are more likely to overestimate the amount of violence that is actually in the world than those who watch less television. They are more likely to believe the crime rate is rising, whether it actually is or not. They are also more likely to believe that their neighborhood is unsafe and that they might encounter violence there. With these fears, they are more likely to take self-protective measures, such as purchasing and carrying a gun.

Though our study seeks to address the problem of television violence, it also acknowledges the very real danger of making television into a scapegoat for violence in America. A focus on television violence must not divert attention from deadlier and more significant causes:

inadequate parenting, drugs, underclass rage, unemployment and availability of weaponry. Compared to problems of this magnitude, television is a tempting target simply because it is so easy to attack. Television's role in contributing to violence in America must be kept in perspective. It will take much more than sanitizing the television schedule to begin to deal with the problem of violence in America.

Although we have been reviewing the scientific literature on the effects of television violence, this report is not an effects study. The public is concerned about media effects and it is important to know what science says about these matters. The effects research serves as important background information for our study. We acknowledge that television violence is a potential danger. If it were not, we would never have been asked to conduct this study. But our effort is a content analysis of television, with a focus on programming which may raise concerns with regard to violence. We make no independent attempt to draw inferences about the behavior of audience members based on the content of the programs.

The scientific evidence, although valuable, gives the public little guidance in regard to specific television programs. Our contextual analysis attempts to fill that void. To a significant extent, our contextual examination builds on the qualitative analyses conducted by Gerbner and his associates beginning in the late 1960s. Specifically, we expanded upon the idea of delineating the qualitative world of television violence using a detailed contextual analysis of every scene of violence in a program. Every scene is subjected to a whole panoply of contextual criteria as will be described. Ours is the most thorough application of a qualitative contextual analysis of violence on broadcast television to date.

For over a century, the issue of violence in the media has been a prominent area of concern for government officials, academics and the general public. Research has been conducted and conferences convened, but the issue remains as contentious as ever. We hope that our work presented here will serve as an important contribution to mitigating the problem of societal violence.

## PART II. THE STUDY

### A. Background

Concerns about the messages of mass media, particularly television, have come not just from the academic community, but also from citizens and public interest and advocacy groups. Action for Children's Television (ACT), founded by Peggy Charren and succeeded by the Center for Media Education, was a constant thorn in the side of those who resisted quality children's television. The Rev. Donald Wildmon and the American Family Association (AFA) were unhappy with the amount of sex and violence they saw in television and film. In the 1980s Michigan housewife Terry Rakolta, alarmed at what she saw as the negative depictions of family life in **Married with Children**, mounted a well-publicized campaign to inform advertisers about the program content their advertising dollars were supporting. The Center for Media and Public Affairs and The National Coalition on Television Violence have conducted studies examining television violence.

Reacting to criticism from Congress, the scientific community and advocacy groups, the four television networks took a series of steps to address the issue of television violence. Until 1990, antitrust laws prohibited the networks from meeting and working together on any cooperative efforts. Senator Paul Simon (D-Ill.) sponsored legislation that created a special three-year exemption from the antitrust law, thereby allowing the networks to coordinate their policies on television violence. In December 1992, the networks issued a uniform set of 15 guidelines on the subject of television violence. The networks agreed that "all depictions of violence should be relevant to the development of character, or the advancement of theme or plot." Banned were scenes that glamorized violence, that showed excessive gore or suffering and that used violence to shock or stimulate the audience. The networks also agreed to avoid portrayal of "dangerous behavior which would invite imitation by children." Sen. Simon called the agreement "a first big step" in addressing the problem.

Despite Sen. Simon's hopes that the network efforts would eliminate the need for more legislation, the issue of television violence reached a fever pitch during the May 1993 "sweeps" period. The sweeps months of February, May and November are critical periods in which ratings are conducted in every locality. Doing well in a sweeps period enables a station to charge more for advertising. To win a sweeps month, stations and networks air programming most likely to attract a large audience. Such programming often consists of highly popular theatrical films, special episodes of television series and high-profile television movies or mini-series. Sweeps are the most competitive periods of the television year. Network-originated television movies with violent titles and themes in the May 1993 sweeps included the following: **Ambush in Waco; Terror in the Towers; Stephen King's The Tommyknockers; Murder in the Heartland; Love, Honor and Obey: The Last Mafia Murder** and **When Love Kills**. Some of these television movies featured detailed and graphic scenes of murder and other crimes of violence.

National attention was focused on the violent content of broadcast television. Called before the Senate Judiciary Committee, the top network executives promised less violent programming in



the future. At the end of June, the networks announced a plan to place parental advisories at the beginning of programs containing violence and on promotions that feature those programs. The plan was unveiled at a Capitol Hill press conference that included Sen. Simon and Democratic Congressman Edward Markey of Massachusetts. Rep. Markey is a leader in the fight against television violence and was then chairman of the House subcommittee that regulates the television industry. Except when special circumstances warranted different warnings, the advisory would read: "Due to some violent content, parental discretion is advised." Rep. Markey called the agreement "the dawning of a new era."

Throughout the entire summer, the issue of television violence and its effects was hotly debated. On August 2, 1993, the National Council for Families and Television sponsored an Industry-Wide Leadership Conference on Violence in Television Programming. The costs of the conference were underwritten by all four broadcast networks, many cable networks and all of the major Hollywood motion picture studios.

Sen. Simon, the keynote speaker at the conference, recommended ways in which the television industry could positively address the issue of violence:

Some sort of ongoing monitoring of the status of television violence is needed, and I would prefer that the federal government not be involved. If those gathered here would form a committee of respected citizens--perhaps called the Advisory Office on Television Violence--who would employ a small staff, headed by someone who has an understanding of the field, and that committee would report to the American people annually, in specifics, it would indicate a desire to sustain better programming. Those specifics should let us know whether glamorized violence is increasing or decreasing, on each of the broadcast and cable networks, and whether there is an attempt to avoid the time periods when children are more likely to observe. They should tell us what is happening with the independents, affiliates, syndication and with the entire industry....

Sen. Simon put the television industry on notice that if it did not quickly and adequately deal with this issue, there were those in Congress who would. The debate about the respective roles of government and the television industry in addressing television violence continued throughout the rest of the year. Sensing that the political climate might be conducive to legislation regulating their programming, the broadcasters worked hard to convince Congress that they were seriously addressing concerns about violence on the television screen. They pointed to the 1992 guidelines on violence and the 1993 agreement on the use of advance parental advisories as evidence of their important efforts to deal with the problem.

Early in 1994, the broadcast and cable networks reached an agreement with Sen. Simon. If they would each hire an independent monitor as outlined in his August 1993 speech, members of the industry would be given another chance to demonstrate that they could regulate themselves. In the interim he would do his best to forestall any governmental initiatives. In June 1994, Sen. Simon and the broadcast television networks chose the UCLA Center for Communication Policy to conduct the monitoring of broadcast television over the following three television seasons.

## **B. Independence**

Before agreeing to undertake the project, UCLA and the Center for Communication Policy secured an ironclad agreement that the researchers would have total independence in selecting methodology, conducting research and formulating and presenting the conclusions. Neither the Center for Communication Policy nor the University itself would take part in this project if research independence was not guaranteed throughout the entire process. Nothing that follows in this report will have any significance if the issue of UCLA's independence on this project is not so clearly stated that, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, "no honest man can misunderstand me and no dishonest one successfully misrepresent me." This project was, and is, free to raise any issues, examine any programming or move in any direction whatsoever without any interference or guidance from the government, the television industry or anyone else. This is absolute.

That the four broadcast networks are paying for this project raises some issues which should be directly and fully addressed. This is an industry-funded project, not an industry-initiated one. People unfamiliar with the details of the project might see parallels with the tobacco industry studies that have tended to minimize the role of cigarette smoking in causing health problems.

The television networks did not initiate this project. It came about only because of the 1994 agreement between governmental officials and the television industry. Were there not the fear of governmental legislation regulating television programming, the monitoring that we conducted over the past three years probably never would have occurred. Since it is the television industry which is being challenged to do more to address the issue of television violence, it is fitting that it, rather than the taxpayers, pay for the research. We completely support this view as long as there are proper guarantees for independence. After elaborating our own non-negotiable demands of independence in the agreement with the networks, that agreement was reviewed by Sen. Simon's office and by relevant officials on the UCLA campus. We have guaranteed our independence from anyone who might attempt to influence the findings in the following ways:

- \* Once the scope and terms of the agreement were set, they could not be altered by the television networks, no matter how much they might wish to do so. This applies to the entire three years of the project. We were not obligated to communicate with the networks unless we chose to do so.

- \* After the scope of the monitoring was agreed upon, we reserved the right to monitor "any other programming deemed important." In several instances we have exercised this option.

- \* The Center would independently, without interference from the television networks, determine the content of the report and all matters relating to its release.

- \* The networks would not be able to read the report before its public release. After its release, they, like any other party, could issue a response.

To their credit, the television networks have not attempted to change the terms of the agreement or to interfere in any way. Every request for information or explanation has been handled quickly, fully and agreeably. Whenever we have needed information about a specific area of television programming, such as on-air promotions, the networks have always made the relevant

material and staff available to us. What could have become an awkward relationship instead became a constructive one.

Were this report funded by the government, a foundation or the University itself, not one single word would be changed, added or deleted. We knew from the first day of the work that we had complete independence and conducted the project and all of its inquiries with this knowledge consistently in mind. This report is not motivated by a desire to please the television industry, the government or any other interested party. Our commitment is to the standards to which our University is dedicated: a fair and impartial quest for truth.

## C. The Scope of the Monitoring

Although we examined all varieties of television programming, this is primarily an intensive look at broadcast network television. Today's video signals come not only over the air but also through cable, satellites, home video cassettes and even through video game cartridges. Even though there are a number of different sources, each with different rules and obligations under the law, most people still think of anything they watch on the set as "television." Few viewers distinguish between network and syndicated programming or even, in many cases, between broadcast and cable programming. Even fewer make distinctions between programming supplied by the broadcast networks and that supplied by their local affiliates. We approach this study aware of the fact that to most of the world it is all just "television." Therefore, although this is primarily a broadcast network study, we have reviewed all of the following television sources:

- \* The four traditional broadcast networks
- \* The two emerging broadcast networks
- \* Network-owned local stations
- \* Local independent stations
- \* Public television
- \* Basic cable
- \* Pay cable
- \* Advertising and on-air promotions in all of the above
- \* Home video
- \* Video games played on television

Relatively new services, such as Direct Broadcast Satellite (DirecTV, USSB and PrimeStar), use revolutionary delivery systems, but currently their content replicates that of broadcast and cable. Should that change, we will examine their programming in subsequent years. Newer services on the horizon for the next year such as the Disney-telephone company video service, Americast, will also be examined if they introduce new television content into American homes.

### *1. Broadcast Networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC)*

The primary purpose of the study is to examine the content of broadcast network television during the hours of prime time and Saturday morning. We reserved the right to extend these boundaries when necessary and, in many cases, we did so. Even though the audience share of network television has decreased from a high of 90% in the mid-1970s to a more modest 60% in the mid-1990s (and this is now divided among four networks instead of three), a majority of people still spend most of their viewing time watching network television. It is the form that produces the most original programming (with the highest budgets) and it is still the program source most people watch and talk about the next day. When Congress and most of the nation think about television, they are, for the most part, thinking about broadcast network television. Therefore, the monitoring study placed its heaviest emphasis on the four broadcast networks. The project examined every television program scheduled during the hours of prime time and Saturday morning except those shows produced by the networks' news divisions. Those times were as follows:

- \* Monday through Friday, from 8:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. (and later when prime time was extended, as in the case of a long-running theatrical film)
- \* Sunday, from 7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.
- \* Saturday morning, from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

Every regularly scheduled show was monitored at least four times during the television season. Each episode to be monitored was randomly selected. If--after at least four examinations--we found absolutely no violence in a program, it was no longer regularly monitored, although we continued to record every episode of the show. At mid-season shows no longer regularly monitored would be monitored one additional time to determine changes in theme and content. We reserved the right to continue to monitor any show at any time for any reason and in many instances we did so. Shows that ran fewer than four times were examined each time they aired. We examined every television movie, mini-series, theatrical film and special for the 1996-97 television season. We felt that we could generalize about some of the series after a minimum of four viewings, but all one-time-only programming had to be monitored because we could not make generalizations about such programming. Television series that raised issues of violence were monitored more than four times. We continued examining such series until we felt we could generalize about their content. Some shows were monitored for the entire season. The season was defined as running from the premier of a new episode in September or October 1996 through the end of the May 1997 sweeps. (A complete list of all the programming we examined and the number of times it passed through our system is in the appendix.)

## ***2. Independent Stations and Emerging Broadcast Networks***

The economics of the syndication market dictate that a show cannot be successfully syndicated unless it is sold to the second largest American market, Los Angeles. Therefore, we concluded that examining all three Los Angeles independent VHF stations would yield a complete picture of syndicated programming specifically and independent television programming generally. We randomly drew a two-week sample of programming on television stations KTLA (5), KCAL (9) and KCOP (13). Using this sample, we examined non-network prime time and Saturday morning hours as we did with the broadcast networks.

In January 1995 both the WB (Warner Bros.) network and UPN (United Paramount Network) began airing original programs. They intended to compete for the youth niche Fox has been so successfully targeting. This season UPN continued to air in Los Angeles on KCOP on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings as well. WB continued to air on KTLA on Sunday, Monday and Wednesday nights and Saturday mornings. When KTLA and KCOP were airing WB and UPN programs, we treated them exactly like the other four commercial broadcast networks and examined

their programming at least four times. For those periods when these stations did not air original network programming, we treated them like other independent stations, monitoring a sample two-week period.

### ***3. Public Television***

The Los Angeles public television station KCET (28) was monitored for a randomly selected two-week period during prime time and Saturday morning hours.

### ***4. Cable Television***

Eight cable channels (three pay and five basic) were monitored for randomly selected two-week periods during the hours of prime time and Saturday morning. The channels monitored and the reasons for their selection were as follows:

\* Home Box Office and Showtime were selected because of their strong position in the pay cable area. Unlike the broadcast networks, their programming consists of primarily unedited theatrical films, but includes original television movies and other original programming as well.

\* TBS and USA were selected because of their strong position in the basic cable area and because they too run theatrical films, television movies and original programming.

\* MTV, Nickelodeon and The Disney Channel were selected because of their strong appeal to young audiences.

\* TNT (Turner Network Television) was selected because it runs so much original programming.

The eight cable networks monitored were carefully chosen as the ones most closely resembling the broadcast networks or because of their youth appeal. There was little reason to include stations not relevant to the study of television violence, such as C-SPAN, The Weather Channel and The Nashville Network, or other cable channels not significantly different from those above.

### ***5. Home Video***

Although home video replicates theatrical content in most instances (occasionally extra scenes are added), the VCR is attached to a television set and therefore is part of the world of television. We examined the top ten home video rental titles as listed by Billboard magazine each quarter. We began with the August 1996 list and continued with the lists of November 1996 and February and May 1997. A complete list of the 40 films is in the appendix.

### ***6. Video Games***

Our examination was limited to the video games that are played on the television set and therefore can also be construed as a form of television. The two most popular companies producing these cartridge video games have been Sega and Nintendo. By the beginning of 1997 the industry was dominated by Nintendo's Super 64 format and the Sony Playstation. Other game formats requiring computers, CD-ROMs, virtual reality goggles or other special, non-television paraphernalia were not examined. We monitored the top five video games of the year

as listed by the Interactive Digital Software Association. In most instances those games were available in both Sega and Nintendo formats.

## ***7. Additional Programming***

On our own we added programs in the old prime time access rule (PTAR) period and the fringe period from late afternoon until the PTAR period. In May 1994 the Center for Communication Policy conducted a survey of leaders of the entertainment industry with U.S. News & World Report. When asked to name the most violent programs then on television, many identified shows in the access or fringe periods such as **Hard Copy**, **A Current Affair** or **Real Stories of the Highway Patrol**. To see if these charges had merit, we added a wide sampling of earlier time period shows to the monitoring.

## ***8. What We Did Not Monitor and Why***

### **a. Late-Night Programming**

Programming after 11:00 p.m. was not monitored because of the small number of children in the audience at that time and the fact that most original, late-night programming, such as **The Tonight Show** and **Late Night**, was extremely unlikely to raise any issues of violence. Although the independent stations do run theatrical films and made-for-television movies in those periods, this content was accounted for through prime time monitoring.

### **b. Talk Shows**

We have little doubt that television talk shows would top most Americans' list of problematic programming in 1997. While these shows might raise important questions of taste and judgment, especially as to sexual content, rarely do they raise issues of violence important enough to justify their monitoring on the scale of other programming. Occasionally, there is pushing or shoving on these programs (it is unclear whether the producers provoke these altercations or not), and at least

one murder was allegedly linked to a talk show. And, while violence may be discussed, for the most part violence is not depicted on these shows. The issues raised by and associated with television talk shows deserve a clear and intensive examination, but not in a report on television violence.

### **c. News**

The agreement between Sen. Simon and the networks expressly excluded the monitoring of television news. While we understand and respect the First Amendment rights of journalists, we also know that many people feel that news programming contains some of the most serious

violence on television. The May 1994 UCLA-U.S. News & World Report survey clearly demonstrated that many people feel that news shows, especially local news, contain problematic content. We did everything we could to treat the definition of news as narrowly as possible. We did monitor the television tabloid programs.

Each night, many local news programs lead with reports on murder, rape and mayhem. One problem with monitoring television news is that violent stories such as the Rodney King beating or war in Bosnia might be construed as problematic programming. Some studies on television violence have criticized stations for airing reports on world conflicts like those in Rwanda or Algeria. This is a dangerous precedent. To serve as an important source of news and information, broadcasters must be free to report these stories, no matter how unpleasant they are for the audience. But broadcasters should guard against gratuitous images shown merely because they exist as good tape. Many critics argue that “if it bleeds, it leads.” It is our judgment that the network news organizations (ABC, CBS, NBC, MSNBC, Fox News Channel and CNN) rarely pander to those tendencies. In far too many instances local news and syndicated tabloid shows do. We believe a comprehensive study of local news across the country--big markets and small, network owned and operated stations, affiliates and independent stations--should be conducted in the near future.

Interestingly, as the broadcast industry dealt with the content labeling system it faced this same issue and resolved it in the very same way. For the reasons mentioned above, news was exempted from the new labeling system. (For other reasons, live sports telecasts were also exempted). While news was excluded from the labels, the television industry did what we have been doing for the past three years and did not include tabloids in their definition of news.



## D. Methodology

### *1. Rationale and Definitions of Violence*

The rationale and methodology of this monitoring project are based on the belief that not all violence is created equal. While parents, critics and others complain about the problem of violence on television, it is not the mere presence of violence that is the problem. If violence alone was the problem and V-chips or other methods did away with violent scenes or programs, viewers might never see a historical drama like **Roots** or such outstanding theatrical films as **Beauty and the Beast**, **The Lion King**, **Forrest Gump** and **Schindler's List**. In many instances, the use of violence may be critical to a story that actually sends an anti-violence message. Some important stories, such as Shakespeare's Hamlet, the history of World War II or the life of Abraham Lincoln, would be impossible to convey accurately without including portrayals of violence.

For centuries, violence has been an important element of storytelling, and violent themes have been found in the Bible, The Iliad and The Odyssey, fairy tales, theater, literature, film and, of course, television. Descriptions of violence in the Bible have been important for teaching lessons and establishing a moral code. Lessons of the evils of jealousy and revenge are learned from the story of Cain and Abel. Early fairy tales were filled with violence and gruesomeness designed to frighten children into behaving and to teach them right from wrong. It was only when fairy tales were portrayed on the big screen by Walt Disney and others that the violence contained in the stories was substantially sanitized.

The issue is not the mere presence of violence but the nature of the violence and the context in which it occurs. Context is key to the determination of whether or not the violence is appropriate. If parents could preview all television, film and literature for their children, they would not remove all violence regardless of its nature or surrounding context. Parents know that violence can be instructive in teaching their children important lessons about life. What parents would do if they could preview all content for their children is remove or modify the inappropriate or improper uses of violence. Examples of these are applications of violence which glorify the act or teach that violence is always the way to resolve conflict. Our discussions with parents indicate that they know violence is a part of storytelling, but that there are appropriate and inappropriate ways of depicting violence. For example, the consequences of violence should be shown and those persons using violence inappropriately should be punished. We would also note that when violence is used realistically, it is more desirable to accurately portray the consequences than to sanitize the violence in a manner designed to make it acceptable.

Over the years, scientific research has focused both on the quality and quantity of violence on television. For example, the most important and prominent scholar to investigate this issue, George Gerbner, whose work stretches back into the 1960s, conducted extensive quantitative and qualitative analyses of violence on television. Most attention, however, was focused on the quantitative aspect of the content analyses of Gerbner, including his mechanism to determine whether the amount of violence was increasing or decreasing.

Some of the early quantitative research that counted acts was limited in its ability to examine the context of television violence. The same is true of the numerical counts often favored by public interest groups. (Numerical counts generate big headlines but we believe they do not fully address the issue of television violence.) That work required elaborate and exact definitions of violence to determine whether the act was counted or not. It was necessary to decide if verbal violence should be counted or whether comedic violence such as cartoons (what Gerbner calls “happy violence”) would be registered. Everything had to be neatly included or excluded so that the conclusions with regard to the amount of violence would be consistent with the definition of violence.

No matter how well the definitions were drawn, there would be those who felt that some aspect of violence should or should not have been included. Almost everyone has his or her own definition of violence. People have often attempted to validate or invalidate quantitative research based on how much the scholar’s definition resembles their own. Animation for children is a good example of this phenomenon. Consider a cartoon in which a character is hit over the head with a two-by-four, a funny sound effect is heard, the character shakes his head and merrily continues on his way. Some people consider this the worst type of violence because it is unrealistic, there are no consequences and it might encourage children to imitate it precisely because it shows no consequences. Others feel they watched these cartoons growing up and did not imitate them because they knew these cartoons obviously were not “real.” Scholars have had to decide whether to count this type of violence and usually have included it. Anyone who feels this inclusion is silly would reject the entire definition and might ignore the conclusions of the research. The same is true with slapstick humor. Sports programming provides yet another example. Many feel that violent spectator sports such as football or hockey make violence an acceptable or even desirable part of American life. Whether to count unrealistic cartoon violence, slapstick humor or sports within a definition of violence is a difficult decision.

Examining violence within a contextual framework makes these definitional distinctions less critical. There is less need for a narrow definition because the focus is not on inclusion or exclusion in a count. We avoid the problems associated with narrow definitions by defining violence broadly. We put our focus not on establishing a correct, narrow definition of violence, but rather on distinguishing between violence that raises issues of concern and that which does not. Our broad definition includes sports violence, cartoon violence, slapstick violence--anything that involves or immediately threatens physical harm of any sort, intentional or unintentional, self-inflicted or inflicted by someone or something else. More precisely, violence is the act of, attempt at, physical threat of or the consequences of physical force. We also occasionally considered verbal threats of physical violence, although these were of secondary importance. Verbal phrases such as a teenager exclaiming, “If I don’t get home by midnight, my dad’ll kill me,” would only raise issues if the teenager’s father was a homicidal maniac.

Our broad definition might yield high numbers of scenes of violence on a given show. However, unlike many previous studies, this is not our primary focus, which is instead on whether the violence raises concerns within the context of the show. It is possible that a situation comedy such as **Home Improvement** or **3rd Rock from the Sun** might yield several scenes of “violence.” But the nature of the violence and the context in which it occurs might lead us to conclude that none of these scenes raised concerns.

In sum, all violence, in our view, is not created equal. The focus of the project is not on counting the number of acts of violence but on the contextual analysis of each of these acts. We examine acts of violence and the context in which they occur to distinguish between uses of violence which raise concern and those acts which, because of their nature and the context in which they occur, do not raise such concerns.

## ***2. The Monitoring Process***

All of the programming described in the previous sections was videotaped at the Center's headquarters on a daily basis. The television networks and others offered to provide the programming, but we felt it was better and more reliable to obtain the programming on our own. Furthermore, we wanted to examine the advertising, promotions and other content which surround the programs themselves. We were curious to see what material the local stations in Los Angeles inserted into the schedule of programs. Since the local network stations in Los Angeles are all owned and operated by the broadcast networks themselves, we also examined some programming from affiliates in other cities (stations that run network programming but which are independently owned).

During each of the quarters of the 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97 academic years, the Center interviewed students for the position of project monitor. Many of the selected students were affiliated with UCLA's Communication Studies Program, the most academically selective program on campus. From day one, the students were outstanding. The students reported to Scott Davis, project coordinator, and Jim Reynolds, chief researcher, who reported to the research director, Dr. Michael Suman. The project was administered by the two associate directors of the Center, Marde Gregory and Phoebe Schramm. All reported to the director of the Center, Dr. Jeffrey Cole.

When the monitors reported to work they were each randomly assigned a tape to examine for violent content. From the beginning, it was decided that no monitor should specialize in any type or format of programming. No one could pick his or her favorite programs or focus on a specific network, genre or evening in prime time. All monitors watched all types of programming and never knew what they would be monitoring until they reported to work. Logistical reasons dictated that each tape contain two successive days of programming from the same network or channel.

Once assigned a tape, a student would sit at a video monitor and examine the content of the programming. We created scene sheets (attached in the appendix) for the students to use in their monitoring. These sheets allowed each student to "brief" a scene of violence. The sheets asked a series of questions about every violent scene. These questions will be discussed in detail in the criteria section of the report.

After completing scene sheets for the entire program, each student monitor then filled out a program report. This form asked for his or her written summary of the program and the number of violent scenes which required a scene sheet. Some series or movies required over 50 full scene sheets. This was an extraordinarily time-consuming process, but it was necessary to properly examine the violence and the context in which it occurred.

When the student had finished one program, he or she went on to the other programming on the tape. The students filled out separate forms for on-air promotions or advertisements. When the entire tape was finished, it was cued to the violent scenes and the scene and program sheets were prepared for the weekly meeting.

### ***3. The Weekly Meetings***

Once a week, the monitors and the staff met in the monitoring room to examine the programs that had been reviewed. Reporters, writers, producers, television executives, academics, members of advocacy groups and others were occasionally guest observers. Although these meetings often lasted more than four hours, everyone involved felt they were a fascinating and invaluable part of the process.

The highly trained students were an important part of the project. At no time, however, did they have any control over ultimate decisions about, or definitions of, violence. They were trained to include all types of violence in their sheets. We asked students to fill out a scene sheet for any act of violence falling within the very broad definition that we had established. At these meetings a student would sit at a monitor and say something like the following:

I watched Fox on Sunday night. The first program I examined aired at 9:00 p.m. and was **The X-Files**, which contained four scenes of violence. The most intense was the second scene, which aired at 16 minutes into the program. It involved an attack by three aliens on an unsuspecting woman....

The monitor would offer more detail establishing the context. Members of the group would ask questions such as:

- \* What came immediately before?
- \* What were the consequences?
- \* Was the scene necessary to tell the story or develop the character?
- \* Did the violence in the scene need to be as prolonged as it was?
- \* Was the act of violence contextually appropriate?

After a short discussion, the student monitor would show the scene to those at the meeting. Sometimes it would be watched several times. Then more questioning would ensue. The purpose of the meeting was to ultimately decide whether or not the program raised concerns about television violence. (The criteria are discussed in the next section.) Nothing could be declared a problem without a ruling from the director of the Center. In many instances, the senior staff of the Center would review an entire program.

#### **4. Criteria**

Essential to a strong, contextual analysis was the establishment of a set of criteria that could be applied to every scene monitored and clearly understood by readers of this report. From these criteria we could derive a comprehensive understanding of the context of those scenes. The goal of these criteria was to make ultimate distinctions among programs which:

- \* contain no violence;
- \* raise no concerns because of the appropriateness of the violence in the context of the story; and
- \* raise concerns because of the inappropriateness of the violence in the context of the story.

The analyses from the scene sheets coupled with the viewing and discussions from the weekly meetings allowed us to make these distinctions, which underlie the conclusions found in parts III and IV of this report.

As previously indicated, our definition of violence is so all-inclusive that any program deemed to contain no violence is so free of problematic violent content that it would be acceptable to almost anyone. The real burden of our work is to look at those programs that do contain violence and determine whether the violence raises concerns within the context of the story.

The ultimate decision as to whether the program raises concerns depends upon whether the violence is deemed contextually appropriate. This determination is based on the application of the following criteria:

**a. What time is it shown?** Children, who are more likely to be viewing television earlier in the evening, are less able to comprehend context than adults. The earlier the show is aired, the more likely it is for violence to raise concerns. Conversely, the later the show is aired, the less likely it is for the violence to raise concerns. Shows aired at a later time, appealing more to adults, deserve more latitude to use violence to tell the story. Nevertheless, only in a few instances can time slot alone become a decisive factor.

**b. Is an advisory used?** If a program contains scenes of violence, an advisory is considered an important warning, especially for parents and their children. An advisory alone does not excuse all that follows, but it does provide important information for viewers. While an advisory by itself does not always alleviate concerns, the lack of an advisory can, by itself, in some instances raise concerns. In January 1997 broadcast and cable programmers began to use a voluntary content labeling system which, in their view, provided content information and substituted for parental advisories.

**c. Is the violence integral to the story?** Violence historically has been important in the telling of some stories. If violent scenes are included, they should be used to move the story or in some way add to viewers' understanding of the characters or the plot. Violent scenes should not be included solely to attract viewers. Some programs use only one scene of violence but repeat it as many as 11 times. If the same violent scene is shown repeatedly, it must continue to be contextually relevant. Whether the violence was integral to the story is the measure of gratuitousness. A frequently applied test of gratuitousness was whether the integrity of the story

would be compromised if the violence was missing. A character's motivation for using violence and the overall justification of that violence are also important aspects to consider when examining the relevance of the violence to the story. Violence, for example, used by the hero or protagonist tends to be justified. Research suggests that such violence may be more likely to produce acceptance, if not aggressive behavior, in the viewer. This violence is more prone to be imitated and lessens social inhibitions against aggression. On the other hand, unjustified violence could make viewers more fearful.

**d. Are alternatives to violence considered?** Is violence a knee-jerk reaction or do the characters consider alternatives to violence? The use of violence as a well-considered action after other alternatives have been exhausted raises fewer concerns than merely reflexively resorting to violence.

**e. Is the violence unprovoked or reactive?** Do the lead characters resort to violence freely or only when provoked? A character resorting to violence only when provoked raises fewer concerns than a character who instigates the violence or deliberately seeks a confrontation. Self-defense is also considered here.

**f. How many scenes of violence are included and what percentage of the show did they comprise?** This is the closest the research gets to counting. Normally, a judgment is made about a violent act or acts within the context of an individual scene. The number of scenes becomes a concern only when there are so many acts of violence that the show consists of little else but violence. There is no magic number for how many violent scenes are appropriate. "Tonnage" can be a problem when there are so many scenes of violence that they serve as the thread holding the story together. This is seen in some action theatrical films such as the Rambo films and a few television series. Too much violence may desensitize the viewer and/or promote the "mean world syndrome."

**g. How long are the scenes of violence?** The scenes should be as long as they need to be to tell the story. There is no standard for appropriate length. If the scene containing violence seems unnecessarily elongated simply to fill out the time allotted, it may raise concerns. Some series routinely end with scenes of violence as long as five minutes, while some theatricals have violent finales as long as 15 minutes. If the scene continues to add to the story, it is less likely to raise concerns. A related concern is the repetition of the same scene throughout the program. Two seasons ago, one program, **Hard Copy**, repeated the same violent scene 11 times.

**h. How graphic is the violence?** Graphicness in and of itself is not a problem. In **Psycho** it is necessary to see Norman Bates' decomposed dead mother to understand the full depths of his mental illness. In that scene, the graphicness adds something important to the story. If scenes are graphic just to illustrate gore or demonstrate some cinematic special effect, that graphicness may raise concerns. We endorse the networks' 1992 statement which said that graphic violence should not be used to shock or stimulate the viewer. It must have a contextual purpose to avoid concerns. A few of the scenes monitored this season, showing throats being slowly slit or people impaled on spikes,

added nothing important to the story. Graphicness for the sake of graphicness was a frequent problem. Repeated graphic portrayals may desensitize the viewer or promote the “mean world syndrome.”

**i. Is the violence glorified?** Does the story serve to make the violence exciting? Music, sound effects and other techniques can frequently enhance or mitigate the sense of excitement. Are the other characters shown supporting the use of violence? Is the decision to use violence ratified and supported or do the other characters disapprove? What does the viewer learn about the acceptability of violence? Glamorized violence can be seen in the James Bond films, particularly when the acts are accompanied by exciting theme music.

**j. Who commits the act of violence?** Is it a hero or an appealing character with whom the audience identifies or is it an unsympathetic villain who commits the violence? Audiences naturally identify with the hero. If the hero casually or thoughtlessly engages in violence, violence may be affirmed as a desirable tactic. Conversely, a sympathetic character’s reluctance to use violence, or decision to use it only as a last resort and with some measure of restraint, sends an important message to viewers and raises fewer concerns. A hero committing acts of violence, particularly without examining alternatives, such as Dirty Harry or Billy Jack, does raise concerns. In addition, if a character is like the viewer in terms of sex, age, race, etc., the viewer may be more likely to imitate that character.

**k. How realistic is the act of violence?** Few viewers expect animation to be very realistic. Shows that contain realistic depictions of life, however, are obligated to portray acts of violence realistically. Most police shows, reality shows and anything that purports to show life “the way it is” are examined for the realistic nature of violence. A show resembling “real life” in all other ways would also be expected to be realistic with regard to violence. **Grand Canyon**, Lawrence Kasdan’s story about life in Los Angeles in the 1990s, would be held to a standard of realism in its use of violence and it does portray the shooting of Steve Martin in the leg realistically. The same would be true of some war films such as **Braveheart**, but not many contemporary action films. Anything that makes realistic violence seem less serious than it really is may also raise some concerns.

**l. What are the consequences of the violence?** Similar in some ways to the above concept of realism is the concept of consequences of violence. Those shows that portray real life (most urban police shows, for example) should also demonstrate the realistic consequences of violence. Few would expect to see excessive bleeding in a cartoon or situation comedy, but would, in some instances, in a police drama. Here psychological or emotional consequences can be as significant as physical consequences. Studies show that the portrayal of consequences, i.e., pain and suffering, elicits sympathy, inhibits the learning of violent behavior, and decreases the likelihood that the violence will be imitated. An important question regarding the consequences of the violence is whether the violent act is rewarded or punished. Acts of violence that are rewarded are more likely to be imitated and encourage aggressive behaviors.

**m. Is the violence used as a hook to attract viewers?** Is it the promise of violence coming from a promo or theatrical advertisement that is attracting the viewer? Some programming uses



violence as the salable quality of the show. This is true of many martial arts films. In some instances, there is a commercial break just before or in the middle of a scene of violence. Is the violent scene used as a vehicle to ensure the viewer continues watching? Violence used as a hook can raise concerns.

**n. What kinds of weapons are used?** Do characters respond with much more force than is necessary? Do they use unusually brutal weapons designed to inflict the maximum amount of pain and damage? Is the use of excessive weaponry endorsed or glorified? The police in urban dramas such as **NYPD Blue** use realistic weaponry, while the Dirty Harry films are filled with enormous guns capable of overwhelming fire power. Also of greater concern because of possible imitation is the use of ordinary, readily available household implements such as scissors or kitchen knives as weapons.

All of these factors are weighed together. No one factor determines whether a program does or does not raise concerns. For example, the simple use of an advisory does not excuse all that follows. If it did, then the networks could use advisories and air anything under the protection of that advisory. Similarly, a programmer cannot air gratuitous violence at 10:00 p.m. without raising concerns simply because the show aired in a later time slot. All criteria are considered and related to the specifics of the show and, as a consequence, each program is treated uniquely. For example, there are some similarities between **Beavis and Butt-Head** and **The Simpsons** (they are both animated and contain subversive humor) and, therefore, it might be tempting to evaluate them similarly. However, the programs are quite different in the level of satire they use. Moreover, **Beavis and Butt-Head** uses an advisory and runs late in the evening while **The Simpsons** runs at 8:00 p.m. without one. Thus they warrant separate and different treatment.

Another complication occurs when a program contains graphic violence, which by itself does not necessarily mean that a show raises concerns. That decision is based on why the program contains graphic violence and how it is integrated into the story. As mentioned earlier, **Schindler's List** contains graphic violence but because of its historical importance and necessity to the plot, the violence does not raise concerns.

All of the above factors are part of a formula that, when applied, leads to the decision of whether a show raises concerns. We recognize this is not as clean or simple as counting acts of violence. At times when buried in scene sheets or mired in endless discussions applying the above criteria, we longed for the ease of counting. Even though our method necessitated long, difficult applications of standards, we feel it ultimately produced the kind of results people need in order to assess the problem of media violence. We are particularly sensitive to the concerns of parents. Unfortunately, parents in America in the 1990s do not have the time or opportunity to preview all programming for their children. This report aims to provide illumination for parents on the issue of televised violence. In fact, our methods are quite similar to those of a parent previewing television programming for his or her child.

Television violence is a complex issue and everyone approaches it differently. Trying to deal with an equally difficult subject, the definition of obscenity, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart threw up his hands in frustration and declared, "I know it when I see it." Although we sympathize with his dilemma, it is not enough to say that we know problematic violence when

we see it. Our goal is to explain this problem in a way that has meaning for everyone concerned about the issue. Therefore, as readers examine our results section, they will be able to look over our shoulder and evaluate how our decisions were made. Most other research on this issue was written for either the academic community or special interest groups and then interpreted for the public, usually by the media. It is our strong desire that this study--its purpose, methodology and results--be directly accessible and understandable to anyone interested enough to read this report.

## E. Operating Policies and Stipulations

There are some fundamental policies emerging from the aforementioned criteria that must be understood before one can examine whether an act of violence within the context of a story raises concerns. Awareness of these basic judgments should help the reader understand the monitoring process and the ultimate decisions that have been made. It is our desire to make our criteria and premises as clear as possible. Our operating premises have been as follows:

### *1. There is no such thing as an accident in fictional programming.*

In the course of the monitoring, questions frequently arose about accidental violence. Examples of this include a tree falling on someone during a hurricane or someone losing his or her footing and falling down the stairs. Clearly this violence is unintentional and unprovoked. Nevertheless, in the world of fictional programming everything is created by a screenwriter (with input by, and perhaps at the instigation of, the network, producer or director). There are no real “accidents” in these cases. A screenwriter has to decide there will be a hurricane and a tree will fall on the character in a particular way. Then the screenwriter has to decide on the extent of the resulting injuries. In fiction, a screenwriter has a whole range of choices, and the decision to include a violent act is only one of a variety of options. The director also has a variety of options in regard to how to depict the “accident.” Camera angles, musical score and level of graphicness are all within his or her control. (Nevertheless, the motivation of the character is important. In our contextual analysis, accidentally running into a wall is less serious than a character consciously and intentionally striking someone else.)

The obvious exception is non-fiction programming, in which the screenwriter is following a set of facts established by what really happened. Although decisions are still made about how to interpret the actual event, how much dramatic license to take and what to include and leave out, there does not exist the wide variety of choices available in creating fictional programming. In fiction, all violence is the result of writers’ and producers’ decisions that violence should occur.

### *2. Violence is important in character and plot development to establish the bad guy as the bad guy.*

Establishing the villain as a key character in many stories is important. Even stories that virtually no one would find objectionable feature a villain. Disney’s **Beauty and the Beast** needs to establish why Belle could not possibly be interested in Gaston, the handsome muscle man who is determined to make her his wife. Viewers know that Belle is interested in ideas and books and not just a physically attractive partner. We learn of Gaston’s villainous nature when, to the tune of the song bearing his name, he punches innocent townspeople in a bar and acts like an all-around brute. These scenes are necessary to establish what kind of person he is and why Belle will turn her attentions later to the far less attractive but more caring and sensitive Beast. Likewise, in **Schindler’s List**, the commandant of the camp is shown exploding in rage and shooting prisoners without purpose or warning. We also see him shoot random human targets

with his rifle from his balcony. All of this is necessary to demonstrate his character and the evil and vicious nature of the Nazis.

We may respect creators' needs to demonstrate why and how certain characters are bad or evil but this, of course, has its limits. In **Beauty and the Beast**, a family entertainment film, establishing Gaston's brutishness allows him to engage in violence but does not include entitling him to break townspeople's necks or sever their heads. On the other hand, several theatrical films this season contained graphic throat slashings or decapitations, clearly exceeding the demands of character development.

### ***3. Audiences like to see the bad guy "get it good."***

After watching a series for an hour, a film for two hours or a mini-series for as long as six hours, there is a natural tendency for the audience to want to see the conflict resolved and the villain punished or killed--getting what he or she deserves. The worse the villain, the more the audience wants some kind of vengeance, justice or final resolution. Sometimes viewers even want to see the bad guy die a gruesome, brutal death. Everyone has been to a movie theater and witnessed the audience cheer as the bad guy is shot, knifed or impaled. This desire to see the villain suffer and pay for his evil deeds is exemplified by the conclusions of the following theatrical films that aired on broadcast television this season: **Ghost**, **Cliffhanger**, **Passenger 57**, **Patriot Games**, **Speed** and **True Lies**. While each of these films contained an intense climactic scene where the score is settled with the bad guy, those scenes were generally well edited by the broadcast networks. ABC's cut of **The Last of the Mohicans** last season was a model of how to limit excessive violence without affecting the integrity of the story or the filmmaker's vision.

While there is a need for the viewer to see the evil villain punished, there are limits as to how this should be depicted on television. Earlier this season, CBS televised the theatrical film **Ghost**. In this film, the villain arranges for the murder of Patrick Swayze's character and then, later in the film, threatens Swayze's character's widow, played by Demi Moore. There is a dramatic need for the villain to "get it good in the end." And he does. At the end of a fight with the ghost of Swayze's character, he falls onto a window sill where a large shard impales his torso. Even though it is an extraordinarily graphic scene of violence and well deserved in the eyes of the audience, it was excessive and therefore raised concerns.

### ***4. Time slot does make a difference.***

The earlier a program is shown, the more likely children are to be a significant part of the audience. For the networks, prime time television consists of the three hours from 8:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. On Sunday, network prime time begins at 7:00 p.m. On Fox, prime time ends at 10:00 p.m. Until last season, the FCC maintained a Prime Time Access Rule allowing the broadcast networks to program no more than 22 hours of prime time a week. Now that this rule has been eliminated, there may be more hours of network programming in the future.

A network can demonstrate its responsibility by scheduling the more violent programs later in the evening. Such responsibility has been exhibited when prime time has been extended to 11:30 p.m. in order to accommodate a theatrical film with violent themes. (Television movies are produced to run with commercials in a two-hour block. Theatrical films, however, are made for the movie theater with no such constraints and, when commercials are added, they may end up at odd lengths for the purposes of television.) Extending prime time usually incurs the wrath of affiliates, which have turned their 11:00 p.m. news hour into a lucrative franchise with advertising revenues that are not shared with the networks. If prime time were not extended, films with violent themes would have to start at 8:00 p.m. or 8:30 p.m. This has been a particular problem for Fox Broadcasting since it does not have a 10:00 p.m. block of prime time and therefore must start its theatricals and television movies at 8:00 p.m.

Time slot is an important consideration on Saturday morning children's programming as well. Networks schedule the tamest programming at 7:00-8:30 a.m. when the youngest children dominate the audience. When their older brothers and sisters start watching at 9:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m., they see more action and violence. Viewers would not expect to see the most intense programming in the earliest hours and, in most cases, they do not.

In 1975, FCC Chairman Richard Wiley and the broadcast networks tried to establish the earliest hour of prime time as a "Family Viewing Hour." While many in the nation applauded this goal, it had the effect of censoring situation comedies like **All in the Family** and **M\*A\*S\*H**. The creative community filed suit, charging that the rule violated their First Amendment rights. After the courts struck down the hour, the networks announced a voluntary effort to be sensitive to family viewing concerns during the earliest hours in prime time. The 8:00-9:00 p.m. period was seen as a time when families could sit down together and watch programming free of most violence and sexual content. But the voluntary effort never really worked. Today Fox runs **Melrose Place** and **Beverly Hills 90210** at 8:00 p.m. Audiences responded favorably to these shows at 8:00 p.m. and NBC responded by scheduling its popular adult situation comedy **Mad About You** at 8:00 p.m. The following season NBC did the same with **Friends**. Most of these shows raised issues involving sexuality which are beyond the scope of this report.

The networks should be sensitive to the fact that there are a large number of children in the 8:00 p.m. audience. There are other time slots, especially 10:00 p.m. (except at Fox), that can be used for more adult-oriented programs. Typically programs with violent themes are appropriately scheduled in the 10:00 p.m. time period. Some of the occasional concerns raised by ABC's **High Incident** and especially the frequent concerns from NBC's **Dark Skies** were aggravated by these shows' early 8:00 p.m. time slot. On the other hand, had CBS's **Nash Bridges** aired earlier, as it did several times last season, it would have raised more than occasional concerns.

***5. For context to have an impact, consequences or punishment must occur within the specific episode.***

In some shows, the consequences or punishment might not come until several episodes later. But the nature of television does not ensure that the viewer who watched a violent act will be

watching to see it punished or resolved several episodes or months later. In most cases, for our purposes the consequences or punishment must occur within a particular episode of the program. While there is no guarantee that the viewer who watched a violent act will be there 45 minutes later when it is resolved, without this assumption there would be no way to allow for normal plot and character development. An exception to this is the mini-series in which there is a reasonable expectation that the person who watches the beginning installment will also watch the final episode. A similar latitude is extended to some serial dramas where the clear intention is for the issue to be resolved in a subsequent episode.

There has been some discussion over the past few years about whether some viewers, particularly children, need to see the consequences immediately following an act of violence. Not all children may be able to fully discern consequences if they occur later in the program. However, to compel a program to show consequences immediately after a scene of violence is to interfere with the character development and unfolding of the story. Under such a narrowly defined stricture, Sherlock Holmes would be required to immediately identify the perpetrator of a violent crime and see him punished within moments of the crime.

#### ***6. Advisories do what they are intended to do and content labels probably will also.***

There are issues regarding the way advisories are used and whether they are used at all. We would like to see advisories used more often than they are, especially in the case of made-for-television movies. Advisories are designed to provide warnings to viewers, especially concerned parents. But many critics, perhaps with a tinge of cynicism, argue that advisories promising scenes of sex or violence actually do the opposite of what is intended: encourage people who might not otherwise watch to do so. But even if they do encourage some such viewing, we accept them as primarily providing beneficial warnings to prospective viewers. Advisories might be more effective if they were made more available ahead of time in printed materials describing upcoming programming, as is sometimes the case in TV Guide.

It has been our policy throughout the monitoring process that advisories are an important service the broadcasters provide to the viewing audience. We have urged that they be applied more often and more consistently. In June 1993 the broadcasters agreed to make much greater use of these program warnings. The monitoring process has demonstrated that the broadcasting industry has been complying, albeit sometimes slowly, with this agreement. This has occurred as the broadcasting industry has remained fearful that warnings on programs might scare off some advertisers who do not wish to be associated with programs that require advisories.

The issue of the use of advisories has become somewhat clouded since the introduction of a labeling system at the beginning of 1997. It became even more clouded with the switch to a descriptive labeling system by three of the networks in October 1997. Without any labeling system, advisories were the only way parents could be warned about unfamiliar content. In that climate, we felt that networks should be liberal in their use of advisories in the belief that viewers should know what to expect.

Now, labeling systems serve some of the same functions as advisories. The first system which began in January 1997 provided age-based labels on programming so parents could determine whether it might be suitable fare for their child. Content descriptors which began to appear on programs on some networks in October 1997 serve the same purpose, but provide more detailed information. The labels are designed to ultimately trigger possible blocking by V-chips once they are available in television sets beginning in mid-1998. V-chips will not recognize advisories and broadcasters will probably argue that the content labels provide sufficient warning making most advisories superfluous.

Since there has been a labeling system in effect for about two-thirds of the season just finished, it is unfair to compare the use of advisories this season with their use in past years. The use of a “TV-14” label (or perhaps a “TV-14-V”) serves some of the same needs as an advisory. Therefore, while in the past we have compared the use of advisories from one season to the next and called for increased usage, because of the midseason introduction of the labeling system it is no longer possible to make such comparisons. Advisories used to be a good measure of the commitment of some broadcasters to deal with content issues. Now, all broadcasters will be using some sort of labeling system on all of their programming, with the exception of news and sports.

We were, for example, particularly impressed with the way in which NBC handled the broadcast of **Schindler’s List** on 2/23/97. First, even though the film’s violence is contextually appropriate by any standard (it is a textbook case of how context can make graphic violence appropriate), NBC classified it with the first “MA” (mature) rating in the history of network television. Then, director Steven Spielberg introduced his film with his own detailed personal advisory mentioning that he believed the film was too intense for his own young children. Anyone watching this very important and graphic film was properly prepared for what followed. Even with all of these extraordinary precautions, one member of Congress felt that the airing of this film by a broadcast network on the public’s airwaves was an irresponsible act. Fortunately, there was little support for his opinion and within a few days he apologized for his comments.

Also impressive was another on-screen advisory by Malik Yoba, star of Fox’s **New York Undercover**, at the beginning of the episode that aired on 5/8/97. In the advisory Yoba says that “the choices we make will determine the rest of our lives” and that while he “hopes tonight’s episode provokes thought among families and friends, parental discretion is advised.” He then introduces the specific episode of **New York Undercover**, “No Place Like Hell.”

Advisories by the director or star of the program are very unusual. Few programs call for that kind of advisory. They are so unusual that their presence alone commands attention. NBC and Fox should be commended for going an extra step in these unusual cases.

## ***7. Music is a very important part of context.***

Music adds texture to the story and often, in regard to violence, a cue to warn or reassure the viewer. Sound tracks can exaggerate, intensify or glorify the violence on screen. Scary movies are not nearly as frightening without the music, and some viewers turn off the sound during some

scenes to lessen their fright. On the other hand, music can trivialize the seriousness of violence or make it seem acceptable or exciting.

It is impossible to separate the violent shower scene in **Psycho** from Bernard Herrmann's musical score that accompanies it. The music sends a message about the evil and appalling nature of the crime. Similarly, the well known James Bond theme frequently accompanies shootings, chases and other scenes of violence and tends to glamorize or glorify the acts on screen.

Television music is equally important in telling the viewer about what he or she is watching. Light or funny music implies that what the viewer is seeing is not so serious or profound. The same scene of a shooting or stabbing can leave vastly different impressions depending upon the background music. In the monitoring meetings there were frequent discussions about music. We often scrutinized the music to discern the producer's intent or goals. Music helps viewers understand the context of a scene or program.

Some shows use music as an important, if not essential, part of the show. **New York Undercover** uses hip hop, rap and R&B music to establish an urban grittiness. **Power Rangers Turbo** uses fast, upbeat music to energize the scenes of combat and involve the audience, as do **JAG** and **Nash Bridges**. **America's Most Wanted** uses music to create a sense of foreboding or impending danger. The musical score in **The X-Files** is crucial to the creation of a creepy and disturbing mood, while music in **Millennium** adds effectively to the strong sense of disquiet and terror.

#### ***8. Cinematic techniques can also affect the context of violence.***

Many cinematic techniques are used in an attempt to lessen the impact of the violence or to make it seem more artistic. On **Melrose Place** and **Walker, Texas Ranger** and in many television movies, slow motion is used to emphasize or draw attention to an act of violence. Police dramas like **Homicide** use a "stroboscopic" effect to break up the horror of a murder scene. The strobe simulates a police photographer rapidly snapping pictures to create a record of the scene. Visual effects were used frequently this season in **Millennium** to depict violence. Dealing with unspeakable acts of violence far too horrific to even consider showing on television, **Millennium** uses blurry images and fast editing to convey the chaos and horror of violence. Interestingly, when these images are slowed or frozen on a video recorder, very little, if any, graphic violence is evident. The use of red to imply blood and fast movement to convey chaos serve the creative need of the program without depicting the brutal violence. Since it does create a sense of tension in the viewer, some may argue that it is still tantamount to showing the violent crimes. Although this technique often leaves viewers with the impression that they have seen the violent act, we believe that this method is preferable to a more graphic depiction of the crime. A similar technique, blurring the screen during an act of violence, was also used effectively this year on **Dangerous Minds**, a program discussed in the section on commendable shows.

Sound effects also are used in a variety of shows, especially comedies, in an attempt to mitigate the severity and impact of "funny" violence. Such sound effects are a staple of **America's**



**Funniest Home Videos**, where they are used to accompany people getting hit in the head or crashing into objects. **Walker, Texas Ranger** also uses sound effects to add emphasis to punches during fist fights.

We found that the use of sound and music in **America's Funniest Home Videos** and **Walker, Texas Ranger** tends to aggravate the violence and increase concerns, while the use of the flash technique in **Homicide** tends to lessen concerns about the violence in the scene. Therefore, it is not possible to draw hard and fast rules about whether the use of these different cinematic techniques tends to raise or to reduce concerns. Their use is examined on an individual basis. Once again this demonstrates the soundness of the contextual approach to television violence. In many cases the music and sound effects constitute a crucial contextual factor heavily influencing our overall judgment of the violence in the scene.

*9. "Pseudo" guns are only slightly better than real guns, if at all.*

In some television movies and science fiction series, such as **Sliders**, sometimes characters shoot futuristic ray guns. Occasionally, **Lois & Clark**, in keeping with its comic book style, featured outlandish or ridiculous weaponry. Some networks and producers argue that using these kinds of guns is an improvement over conventional guns with bullets and that the futuristic context further fictionalizes the gunplay, in either event making it less realistic and, therefore, less likely to be imitated. This raises an interesting issue since a child cannot grab his or her parents' ray gun, but could grab their real gun. Nevertheless, the scene still involves a gun and shooting and, therefore, we treat these kinds of weapons in the same way we treat real guns. At most, in our judgment, the use of non-realistic weapons represents only a slight improvement over the use of conventional weapons and, in most cases, not even that.

*10. "Real" reality is given more latitude than re-creations.*

Within the reality genre, there are shows that use actual footage of a crime or some other incident, such as **COPS** and **America's Funniest Home Videos**, and there are shows that re-create situations, such as **Unsolved Mysteries** and **Real Stories of the Highway Patrol**. Most of the "shock-umentaries" discussed in detail in the section on specials use both real footage and re-creations.

Shows using real footage need responsible editing and cannot use the fact that "it really happened" to justify showing anything on television. Nevertheless, we did hold shows using re-creations or re-enactments to a higher standard in determining whether their use of violence raised concerns.

In many instances, real film footage comes from actual events in which there is no pre-planned intent to use the tape on television. There is a compelling human interest in seeing the real tape of the real situation with real people. Programs such as **COPS** provide a more genuine view of what police are like and how they handle the pressures of the job than what is seen on shows with actors as police. Since **COPS** is real and uses actual film, we gave it more latitude to make

its case. Still, producers must exercise care in their editing. Even in this “real” universe, many of the live-action reality specials did raise significant concerns about violence, as discussed in the specials section of this report.

Re-creations, however, have all the choices in the world. Unlike “real” tape shows, they hire actors to portray characters. This allows them to influence how viewers interpret the scene. Producers can choose between sympathetic actors who will elicit support and unattractive thugs who will incur anger. Producers of re-enactments can decide how close the camera will get during a crime and whether there should be a gallon of blood or a thimble-full. Producers of “real” tape shows cannot make these decisions; they are limited by what is on the tape. Re-enactment shows have a wide range of options and alternatives not available to the other shows and, therefore, we hold them more accountable for what ends up on the television screen.

## PART III. FINDINGS IN BROADCAST NETWORK TELEVISION

### A. Overview

Broadcast network programming is the primary focus of this study. Although its audience share continues to decline, broadcast network television still accounts for a majority of what is watched on television. The other aspects of the television world--cable, syndication, home video and video games--have been sampled for the purpose of comparison.

Network television has been divided into six areas, each of which was thoroughly examined:

- \* Prime time series
- \* Specials
- \* Made-for-television movies and mini-series
- \* Theatrical films shown on television
- \* On-air promotions and other promotional material
- \* Saturday morning children's programs

This report marks the third consecutive year we have monitored television violence. This year's results, together with the findings from the previous two seasons, allow us to establish a meaningful baseline and draw some important conclusions about the level, type and amount of violence on television. The baseline began with the 1994-95 television season, continued through 1995-96 and now includes the 1996-97 season. The quantitative and qualitative information from the previous years can be compared to that collected this year.

**Series** still comprise the majority of the networks' programming. They are what most distinguish network television from cable and other video media. More people watch television series than any other format. Series such as **Seinfeld**; **Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman**; **The Simpsons** and **NYPD Blue** have continued to attract large numbers of viewers on a weekly basis for many years.

As described in the methodology section, every prime time series in the 1996-97 season was monitored at least four times to determine whether it raised issues of concern with regard to violence. Shows that raised issues continued to be monitored through the entire season, while shows that aired less than four times were monitored each time they aired. Overall, 107 television shows on the four networks were monitored in this way, and a complete listing of each show and the number of times it was examined can be found in the appendix to this report. Another 24 series from UPN and WB, the emerging broadcast networks, were monitored in the same way. The results can be found in a following section.

Of the television series we examined this year, there are two that raise frequent concerns about the manner in which they deal with violence. This compares to nine series that raised frequent

concerns in 1995 and five in 1996. (A complete list of programs for all three years appears in Appendix A.) Of the two programs raising frequent concerns this season, one appeared in all three of our annual reports. The other premiered this season and has been canceled. In 1995 seven programs raised occasional concerns about violence and in 1996 the number increased by one to eight. This year the number raising occasional concerns drops by two programs to six. The efforts of the networks' practices and standards departments have contributed to what we see as positive signs in television series. This report makes a real effort to understand the style, nature and goals of each show and the manner in which it deals with violence. These elements comprise the context of each program and are instrumental in examining the violent acts which occur. The violence cannot be adequately understood or evaluated apart from these elements.

**Television specials**, more than any other category of television, raised many new concerns this year. This is the only area of television programming that is worse at the end of the three years of monitoring. In 1995 there were so few issues in television specials that they did not warrant their own section of the report. The 1996 report found only five specials that raised concerns, but all five dealt with were reality shows featuring real and re-created footage of animals attacking and, in some cases, killing people. The fear that these five specials might signify the beginning of a trend led to a new and separate chapter on specials in the 1996 report. That fear was confirmed as television reality specials featuring graphic footage of death and disaster proliferated greatly in intensity and number. Featuring police shootouts, car chases, near death experiences and, again, animal attacks, specials in this year's report raise serious new issues of concern.

**Television movies** raised concerns about violence at about the same rate as last year. Over the course of the three years of our study, television movies have been one of the formats with relatively few problems with violence. In 1995, 14% of these movies were found to raise concerns about the ways in which they deal with violence. In 1996, the figure dropped modestly to 10% and this year it rose slightly to 12%. The difference over the past two years is statistically insignificant except to demonstrate that the level of problems has stayed somewhat consistent over the three years. We monitored every television movie that aired during all three seasons. This season, every one of the 184 television movies that appeared on the four networks was examined in detail. Movies that raised concerns usually did so because of a variety of factors, such as lack of advisory, violent theme, "tonnage" or inappropriate graphicness of a scene. In contrast to theatrical films, the networks have complete control over television movies. They decide what movies get made and what the audience will see.

**Theatrical films on television** were identified in the first year as the most problematic type of programming. This is still true, although there has been fairly significant improvement. We monitored every theatrical film on television that aired during all three seasons. In 1995, 42% of all theatrical films shown on television were found to raise concerns about the use of violence. Last year the percentage dropped significantly to 29%. This season it rose insignificantly to 30% and, importantly, 57% of the films raising concerns this season were repeats of films shown in previous years. Theatrical films are made for a different medium and have to be retrofitted for broadcast television, an often difficult task. They are also purchased far in advance. While there were still a number of films that contained over 30 scenes of violence, there were fewer of them than in the past two seasons. In some instances the broadcast networks did not re-run theatrical films they purchased because of the quantity or nature of the violence. While the percentage of

theatrical films raising concerns about violence has decreased from the first season, those theatricals that remain still feature the most intense and disturbing violence on television.

**On-air promotions**, out of all of the different types of television programming, have demonstrated the most improvement since the 1994-95 television season. This is where the largest improvement was possible and, in fact, where the largest improvement occurred. Networks were able to create new policies and hire new personnel to deal directly with this important issue. This year there were relatively few on-air promotions featuring only scenes of violence from a television series. Theatrical films shown on television still managed to yield promos full of action, but they contained fewer scenes of violence and were almost never shown during programs or in time periods that would draw a large audience of children. The problems discussed in last year's report concerning advertisements for films about to open in theaters diminished somewhat this season. The only problematic trend in this area this year concerns promos for the live-action reality specials. Filled with many scenes of accidents, disasters or crime, these specials raise considerable issues of concern. Not surprisingly, the promos for these programs raise similar concerns.

**Children's television** was consistent in regard to violence from the second year to the third, with a few hopeful signs on the horizon. The number of network Saturday morning programs featuring "sinister combat violence" dropped from seven in the first year to four last year. This year the number remained at four. While those four still raised concerns, three of them are older programs and only one new sinister combat violence program appeared. We are hopeful this is a type of children's programming that is waning in popularity and that the category may disappear altogether as these older shows run their course. Moreover, most shows on Saturday morning do not feature intense violence or combat and include, at most, very minor violence.

## **B. Prime Time Series**

### ***1. Comparison of This Season's Shows with Last Season***

In the first year of our report (1994-95) nine programs on the four broadcast networks were found to raise frequent concerns about the way in which they depicted violence. Last season (1995-96) the total dropped to five. In what is an important improvement, in the third year (1996-97) the number of series raising frequent concerns drops to two. Both of these series ran for the entire season.

In the first year of monitoring, seven series raised occasional concerns about the manner in which they portrayed violence. Last year the total rose slightly to eight. This year the total drops to six, all of which ran for the entire season.

#### **a. Last Season's Shows Raising Frequent Concerns About Violence**

In the 1995-1996 season the following shows raised frequent concerns about issues of violence:

**Walker, Texas Ranger**  
**New York Undercover**  
**Kindred, the Embraced**  
**Space: Above and Beyond**  
**Nash Bridges**

Two of these shows, **Kindred, the Embraced** and **Space: Above and Beyond**, were canceled. Only one show from last season, **Walker, Texas Ranger**, continued to raise frequent concerns this season and will be discussed shortly.

One of the shows that previously raised frequent concerns, **Nash Bridges**, moved down to the list of shows raising occasional concerns this year and will be discussed in that section.

In the past two seasons, **New York Undercover** has raised concerns primarily due to its trademark "music video" opening, in which contemporary music plays over a montage of clips depicting a crime. Often, this combination has had the effect of glamorizing the violence and detracting from its severity, making it seem stylish and appealing rather than cruel and brutal. Although the rest of the episode may have dealt with issues of violence responsibly and with sensitivity, we felt that the opening segments sometimes raised issues of concern. However, this season, although the program continued to employ the use of the music video sequence, we felt it did so more responsibly. The choices of music, in conjunction with the depictions of the violence, did not seem to glorify the violence the same way it has in past seasons.

#### **b. Last Season's Shows Raising Occasional Concerns About Violence**

Last year eight television series raised occasional concerns regarding their portrayal of violence:

**American Gothic**

**The Simpsons**

**SeaQuest 2032**

**Due South**

**Melrose Place**

**JAG**

**America's Funniest Home Videos**

**Charlie Grace**

None of these shows moved from the occasional to the frequent list. Of these eight shows, four were canceled: **American Gothic**, **SeaQuest 2032**, **Due South** and **Charlie Grace**. Of the four series that continued this season, none raised frequent or even occasional concerns. Looking at the programs that raised occasional concerns last season and dropped off the list this year, the following observations can be made.

#### **The Simpsons (Fox)**

Now the longest running animated program in prime time television history, **The Simpsons** appeared on the list of shows with occasional problems in both 1995 and 1996. Rather than a children's animated program, this show is an adult satire that also happens to appeal to children. **The Simpsons** raised occasional issues not because of slapstick and action typically found in children's programs, but rather because of occasional gruesome violence in some episodes. This violence is usually found in the "Itchy and Scratchy" spoofs of cartoons which are a pointed parody of violent cartoons such as "Tom and Jerry." These feature the sadistic mouse Itchy terrorizing the rather dumb and helpless cat Scratchy. Featuring beheadings, disembowelments and other horrible acts, these scenes which include animated blood and guts are on a level far harsher than what is usually found in animation.

This season **The Simpsons** featured very little of Itchy and Scratchy or any animation that raised even occasional concerns.

A new animated prime time series, **King of the Hill**, premiered on Fox later in the season but raised no violence issues. During the summer the animated **South Park** appeared on Comedy Central with a "TV-MA" (mature) rating, raising issues of violence and taste, although that program was outside the scope of this 1997 report.

#### **America's Funniest Home Videos (ABC)**

Appearing on the list of programs raising frequent concerns in 1995 and dropping to occasional concerns in 1996, **America's Funniest Home Videos**--now one of the longest running series on

television--raised few concerns this year. Though not typically included in discussions about violent television programs, this show previously contained violence that was completely without context. It usually featured both the studio and home audience laughing as real-life people, frequently children, were hit in the head, the groin or elsewhere. Very little of this type of problematic material was in evidence during 1996-97.

### **Melrose Place** (Fox)

One of the two long-running Aaron Spelling dramas (along with **Beverly Hills 90210**), **Melrose Place** raised occasional concerns last year because of some highly stylized action which included characters engaging in prolonged fights and falling off balconies. Often these scenes were accentuated by slow motion and other techniques which presented the violence as glamorous. Few of these techniques were featured in the program this season and therefore **Melrose Place** raised no concerns.

### **JAG** (CBS)

One of the handful of programs that switched from one broadcast network to another this season, **JAG** raised occasional concerns last year due to the amount and glorification of violence in the program. This season, now on CBS, **JAG** contained fewer scenes of prolonged, action-packed violence as when it was on NBC and typically aired in a later time slot. Although some degree of glorified violence is endemic to military action-dramas, **JAG** dealt with the problem successfully.



## ***2. Series Raising Frequent Concerns This Season***

These are the television series that raise the most concerns about the way in which they portray violence. In the three years of our violence reports the number of these programs raising frequent concerns has dropped from nine to five to two. These two shows raise concerns because of a large variety of contextual issues, which were discussed in the criteria section.

### **Walker, Texas Ranger (CBS)**

The most violent series on television in terms of number of scenes, **Walker, Texas Ranger** is the only program that has raised frequent concerns about violence in all three years of this study. The program chronicles the adventures of Texas Ranger Cordell Walker, played by martial arts superstar Chuck Norris. In the past two seasons, the program has proved increasingly successful, last year rating in the top ten shows for the season. **Walker**, which is partially owned by CBS, recently landed one of the biggest syndication deals in television history. This is one of the most popular programs on television and part of CBS's very successful Saturday night lineup. It follows the well-known **Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman** and the successful new series **Early Edition**.

The show's formula has remained relatively unchanged, each week featuring Walker and his fellow officers doling out justice with high flying kicks and punches. The issues raised by **Walker** range from tonnage to graphicness to glorification, and examples of each are in abundance.

On 11/2/96 Walker is forced to confront an old nemesis from the Vietnam War, Randy Shrader, who has become a high-priced soldier of fortune. After stealing a top secret military helicopter to use in a drug smuggling operation, Shrader, in an effort to prove that he was always a better soldier than Walker, tracks him down for a final confrontation. He pursues Walker in the helicopter, blowing up Walker's truck with a missile. Despite the huge explosion and the fact that the truck flips over and is destroyed, Walker climbs out of the wreckage unscathed except for a slight limp. He pulls out a portable rocket launcher and shoots down the helicopter. The two men square off for a final showdown when Walker persuades Shrader to settle things "man to man" instead of by using sophisticated weaponry. The two men put down their guns and viciously beat each other. The fight consists of countless kicks, flips and punches to the head and midsection. Seemingly defeated, Shrader pulls a knife and tries to stab Walker. As they struggle over the knife, Walker has a flashback about Shrader's traitorous actions in Vietnam which led their platoon into an ambush. He then summons the strength to overwhelm Shrader, stabbing him in the gut with his own knife. The scene lasts for over six minutes and is graphic, antiseptic and prolonged. It is also completely glorified by dramatic, patriotic music that plays in the background throughout the entire fight.

The episode on 12/21/96 was noteworthy for a different reason. A special Christmas episode targeted towards a family audience, Walker and his friends have thrown a Christmas party for a group of orphans. When one of the orphans refuses to join in the Christmas spirit, Walker tells the children a story about legendary Texas ranger Hayes Cooper and how he discovered the

meaning of Christmas. The story transports viewers back into the old West with Norris playing the part of Ranger Cooper. Although the show is noticeably less violent than most other episodes, in the final showdown between Cooper and the gang of outlaws he has been pursuing, Cooper shoots six men, none of them fatally. When the leader of the gang, who has been shot in the backside, asks why he has chosen to only wound the men and not kill them, Cooper responds that it is because he “has the Christmas spirit.” This episode, which was clearly tailored to a younger audience than usual, apparently envisions itself as a morality tale. At the end of the episode, the cynical orphan learns Walker’s meaning of Christmas.

Another example of the problems raised by **Walker, Texas Ranger** can be found in the episode on 4/26/97 in which Walker takes on a street gang of crack dealers after a little girl is killed during a drive-by shooting. The girl, who comes back from the dead after meeting an angel, embarks on a mission to bring peace back into her neighborhood which has been under the violent control of the crack dealers. Ironically, despite the reiteration of the message throughout the show that you cannot fight violence with violence, this does not stop Walker from beating up gang members and blowing up a car. This is one in a series of instances in which Cordell Walker appears to relish violent conflict. It is also notable that this episode contains ten scenes of violence.

This show seems to be caught in an unusual dilemma. On the one hand, in order to add a moral dimension, Walker often tries to find alternatives to violence. On the other hand, the producers seem to realize that Walker doling out strong justice, usually with his fists, is an essential element of the program and a feature central to its popularity.

Occasionally, characters other than Walker get involved in the fighting. In the episode on 5/3/97 a female cop under Walker’s command goes undercover as a tutor for a mafia boss’ young son. At the end of the episode, her cover blown, the officer is confronted by the mob boss’ wife. The two engage in a knock-down, drag-out martial arts brawl consisting of many kicks, punches and knees to the midsection. At the end of the fight the victorious officer stands over her fallen foe and says, “Boy, that felt good,” thereby adding to the already glorified and glib treatment of the violence. Adding to the glorification of the scene is that during the fight the mobster’s young son watches, mimicking the combatants’ punches and kicks and rooting for his tutor. After the fight is over, the mob boss discovers the victorious tutor and the son and prepares to kill them. Just as the mob boss is about to shoot the undercover cop, Walker bursts in and engages in a vicious fight with the kingpin and his thugs.

**Walker, Texas Ranger** features more violence than any other series on network television. Largely a vehicle to showcase Chuck Norris’ impressive martial arts abilities, episodes feature as many as 21 scenes of violence in one hour. The violent behavior of Walker is glorified and in stark contrast with the prosocial, frequently anti-violence, themes of the show. The show’s heroes are seldom injured or even fazed by violence, despite the severity of the fights. The consequences of violence, physical or psychological, are never explored. Although many would defend this program as simply an action series, it is action that relies solely on the use of violence and does so in a glorified way. Of the 25 episodes of **Walker, Texas Ranger** that were monitored, 23 raised concerns of violence.

## **Dark Skies (NBC)**

A new program, **Dark Skies** aired on Saturday nights at 8:00 p.m. as the first installment of NBC's "Thrilllogy." A serial program set in the 1960s, it follows the life and adventures of John Loengard and his fiancée Kim Sayers. Loengard discovers the existence of a secret race of hostile aliens known as "Hive." They are waging a clandestine war on Earth by implanting themselves into an increasing number of human beings. Loengard is recruited into the service of Majestic 12, a covert government agency in charge of containing and controlling the alien invasion. But when his desire to let the American public know of the danger conflicts with the policy of silence implemented by Majestic, he seeks to expose both the government conspiracy and the alien threat. Thus, while fleeing from both the government and the aliens, he begins his mission to gather irrefutable evidence of the Hive presence.

**Dark Skies** is a dramatic, science fiction thriller. It is NBC's response to the current interest in aliens and conspiracy theories, in large part brought on by the success of Fox's **The X-Files**. It combines scary aliens with insidious G-men in an attempt to interweave actual events in American history, such as the Vietnam War or the assassination of JFK, into a complicated web of conspiracy. One of the principal issues with **Dark Skies** is its 8:00 p.m. time slot. The 8:00 time period, particularly on a Saturday night, is one that especially appeals to young children. **Dark Skies** always contains violence, much of which is very serious and potentially frightening.

One of the recurring forms of violence found in this program involves the process by which the aliens invade their human hosts. Typical of many alien films (beginning with **Alien**), the Hive infect their prey by attaching themselves to the victim's face and forcibly inserting a tentacle into his or her mouth. While this is not a bloody process, it is obviously a painful one, as evidenced by the victim's screaming and writhing. This is clearly not a typical form of violence and is simply a means to terrify the viewer, a frequent aspect of science fiction. However, it is very intense and extremely frightening.

**Dark Skies** also contains much more realistic, and occasionally very intense, forms of violence. In the season premiere on 9/28/96, when the scientists at Majestic attempt to kill an alien presence within its host, they first forcibly restrain him and pour a chemical down his throat. As they are injecting him in the back of the neck with another chemical, he breaks free of his restraint and thrusts the syringe into a doctor's chest, killing him. An intense fight breaks out in which the host hits several men with a chair and slams them into the glass chemistry equipment. When he wrestles a G-man's gun away, another agent shoots him in the chest. Unfazed, he returns fire and tries to get away. The chemicals finally take their effect and he falls while trying to escape, writhing in pain on the floor. The doctors jump on him and force the needle into his neck, thus destroying the alien presence. Although it is not a terribly long scene, it is very intense and violent, especially for such an early time period.

On 10/26/96 Majestic discovers a Hive operating station and attacks it in hopes of stopping the aliens who are experimenting with mind control through subliminal messages. As the government agents burst in with their guns drawn, a female alien implant steps in front of them. Without comment, they shoot her several times in the torso. The bullets graphically pierce her chest.

Another fairly quick but rather brutal scene can be found in the episode on 11/9/96. Sayers is attacked by an older woman implanted by the Hive. After being thrown to the ground by the woman, Sayers recovers and smashes a fire extinguisher over her head. Again, while it is in self-defense and is very quick, it is also brutal.

In the episode aired on 11/2/96, Loengard locates a secret alien base where his fiancée is being held and breaks into the compound with a large truck. As the alien implants open fire on him, he smashes into one with the truck, sending the body flying backwards through the air. This act is gratuitous and only serves to exaggerate the violence. After he locates his fiancée, he keeps the Hive at bay by shooting a pistol at them. When one crashes through the window of the room, Loengard dumps some other leech-like alien creatures on the attacker which makes him scream in pain. He grabs the attacker's gun and dashes for the exit. He is saved when the U.S. military arrive on the scene.

Only a few minutes into the episode on 1/18/97, a scene occurs that contains some of the most brutal hand-to-hand combat featured in the show. In the scene, a beautiful blonde agent from Majestic dispenses with two armed guards who are protecting Loengard and Sayers with a series of kicks and blows to the head. As she runs up the stairs to warn him, the blonde grabs her and throws her over the railing, knocking her unconscious. When Loengard comes downstairs, he discovers the unconscious bodies of the two guards and Sayers. As he kneels over her to check her pulse, the blonde steps from behind the door and kicks him in the groin. When he falls over, she then picks him up by the throat and chokes him, throwing him backwards onto the floor. Pulling a gun and pointing it at Loengard's neck, she threatens to kill him if he testifies against the fact that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in killing JFK. Although the scene is relatively quick and there is no blood spilled in the ordeal, the attack is surprisingly vicious and the impacts of most of the blows are depicted graphically.

In another instance of extremely brutal violence, on 3/8/97, Loengard is confronted by Sayers, who has become the enemy after being infected by Hive. Hopeful that he may be able to free her from alien control, he reaches out for her hand only to have her smash his with a police baton. As he tries to talk to her, she continues to hit him with the baton, first in the shoulder, then the knee. Unable to divorce himself from the feelings he still has for her, he proceeds to take the punishment as she hits him in the head and the ribs 11 more times. It is surprisingly rough and excessive. It is also antiseptic as the only consequences he suffers are a small cut on his forehead that is not apparent in the next scene and a broken wrist. Four people are killed in the episode.

As stated several times above, for the most part the real issue here is that of time slot. Had the program run at 10:00 p.m. or even 9:00 p.m., fewer of the above scenes would have raised issues. However, the terrifying nature of some and the disturbing intensity of others cause concerns in the 8:00 p.m. hour. Of the 17 times it was monitored, **Dark Skies** raised issues of concern seven times.

### *3. Series Raising Occasional Concerns This Season*

#### **Millennium** (Fox)

There was greater anticipation among fans of **The X-Files** for the premiere of **Millennium** than for any other series during the season. Created by Chris Carter, who is also responsible for Fox's hit show **The X-Files**, **Millennium** airs in **The X-Files'** old time slot of 9:00 p.m. on Friday night. This series tells the story of Frank Black, an FBI criminal profiler who is able to put himself so deeply into the minds of the killers he pursues that he is able to see and understand their thoughts. When Black's family is threatened by an unknown stalker, he suffers a nervous breakdown and leaves the FBI, moving with his family to a sleepy suburb of Seattle. However, unable to block out the horrific visions of the killers' thoughts, he is driven back into his job, working for a mysterious consulting group of former law enforcement agents. Known only as The Millennium Group, they specialize in exceptional criminal cases. In one of those strange coincidences in television, the plot bears a remarkable resemblance to **Profiler**, which premiered on NBC.

Each week, Black finds himself aiding local police departments throughout the Pacific Northwest in the investigation of serial killers. Black is drawn as a dark and brooding character and the only joy in his life seems to come from his loving wife and daughter. The rest of his life is plagued with vicious and violent visions which, while useful in capturing criminals, leave Black trapped in a tortured existence, devoid of any kind of extended peace. Throughout the season, **Millennium** raised issues of concern for a variety of reasons. In fact, because this show raised so many different issues and dealt with them in a wide variety of ways, some commendable and some of concern, this report devotes a considerable amount of time and attention to a discussion of **Millennium**.

Some viewers may be surprised to find **Millennium** on the list of shows that only raise occasional concerns. Because of its malevolent tone and intensely dark storylines, some may feel that this show contains the most disturbing violence on television. However, for a show that revolves around the investigation and capture of serial killers, **Millennium** features a surprisingly small number of violent acts. Rather, the show achieves its objective of scaring viewers and leaving them unsettled through graphic depictions of the consequences of horrific violence. The series premiere provides a good example of this approach.

In this debut episode, aired on 10/25/96, an apocalypse-obsessed killer beheads an exotic dancer and cuts off her fingers. He also buries several men alive after sewing their wrists to their chests and their eyes and mouths shut. The murder of the exotic dancer is portrayed in a montage of chaos, confusion and implied violence. Similarly, the viewer never actually sees the eyes and mouths of the other victims being sewn shut. Instead the victims are discovered alive after the horrible mutilation has occurred. Despite this, the grisly nature of the crimes, coupled with their exceedingly graphic and gory consequences, are enough to warrant concern and raise issues of violence.

Another example of the show's focus on the results of violence rather than on the attacks themselves can be found in the episode aired on 11/15/96. A self-proclaimed "judge of justice"

enforces his own version of justice on the wicked, having one of his followers smash a man over the head with a bowling ball and cut out his tongue with a kitchen knife. In that same episode, the judge instructs another follower to cut off a man's leg and leave him to bleed to death. In both instances, the most violent elements of the murders are never shown. However, viewers are not spared the disturbingly graphic images of the victims' severed body parts which are both shown in a medical examiner's lab. Again, although the violent action was never shown in detail, the graphic aftermath was enough to raise concerns.

In some instances, **Millennium**'s depictions of violence are actually commendable. For example, in the episode aired on 1/10/97, two shootings are handled responsibly. In both cases, just as the killers are about to shoot their victims, the camera angle switches to an exterior shot of the building where the action is taking place. The sound of gunshots conveys what has transpired without resorting to needless portrayals of gore.

Another device used by the show to imply violence without showing it is Black's flashbacks. As he proceeds with his investigations and delves deeper into the minds of the killers, the visions progressively provide him with greater insight into the killers' motivations and psychoses. The flashes are always extremely fleeting, often lasting less than a second, are chaotic and are typically distorted by camera techniques. Yet, precisely because the visions are so quick and obscure, viewers are likely to believe that they have seen more than they actually have. Audiences are typically left with the impression that they have seen a glimpse of the gruesome murder previously described in the program when, in truth, they have not really seen much more than the victims thrashing about and screaming, perhaps with a tint of red suggesting blood.

Nevertheless, **Millennium** does occasionally feature graphic violence and this is when it raises the most concerns. In the opening scene on 3/28/97, a group of medical test subjects is shown having an adverse reaction to a drug treatment. The subjects are driven to psychosis. One man is driven so insane that he presses his own thumbs into his eyes, causing blood to run down from the sockets. The entire scene is very intense, frightening and unnecessarily graphic, particularly as it is the opening scene of the show and comes without warning. This scene is a perfect example of the inclusion of grisly violence, the only purpose of which is to make the audience squirm. The depiction of the man poking out his eyes is gratuitous. Any other self-inflicted injury would have conveyed the same point without being so graphic and disturbing.

In another instance of graphic violence in the episode on 4/25/97, a prisoner, who is earlier seen slitting the throat of a woman, attempts to commit suicide in his cell. He places a previously concealed razor blade to his neck and drags it across his throat. Just after he places the blade on his neck, the camera angle changes to show the scene from behind so that viewers do not see the actual slicing. However, the camera returns to the original angle to show him grasping at his throat as blood pours from between his fingers. This depiction is extremely graphic and gory and was one of the most gruesome scenes of violence on television all year. Although the cutting is not shown, the viewer is left with the feeling of actually having seen it.

Another example of this issue is found in the episode aired on 5/9/97 in which an alleged Russian Antichrist kills his victims by blowing off their faces at point blank range with a shotgun. He then cuts off their fingertips with clipping shears. Although neither the impact of the shotgun blasts nor the actual cutting off of the fingertips are shown, the acts are so brutal and

grisly that they raise concerns even though they are not actually seen. As the killer crouches over his victims, viewers hear the loud, deliberate snipping of the shears clipping off the ends of their fingers like carrots being cut. The mutilated hands are shown after the deed is done as are the bloody shears. It is extremely unsettling and vicious, despite the fact that it occurs just outside of the camera's view.

Some critics might argue that every episode of **Millennium** should raise concerns merely because of the nature of the crimes they feature, regardless of whether the violent acts are shown or not. However, this was not the rationale used in our review of **Millennium**. The public clearly has a fascination with serial killers as is demonstrated by the success of motion pictures such as **Seven** and **Copcat**. The most successful serial killer film of all, **The Silence of the Lambs**, not only was a commercial success, it was only the third film in history to sweep the top five Academy Awards. **The Silence of the Lambs** showed that this subject matter can be skillfully portrayed in a quality film. To call every episode of **Millennium** a problem simply because of the subject matter would be tantamount to censorship, thereby implying that film or television creators are not free to examine these intriguing themes. Therefore, the show was deemed an occasional problem not by the theme of the series as a whole, but rather by the specific handling of specific episodes.

**Millennium** is clearly not a show for children. The premise and storylines are intense and are predicated on horrific, frightening crimes. That being said, some of the crimes are depicted in a contextually appropriate manner while others are exploited through the use of horribly graphic images. It is because of this wide variety of treatments of violence that the show, like its sister program **The X-Files**, raises occasional rather than frequent concerns. Of the 22 times it was monitored, **Millennium** raised concerns six times, five of which are detailed above.

### **Nash Bridges (CBS)**

Last year **Nash Bridges** made its debut as a midseason replacement and ran for only eight episodes. It returned this year for the entire season, airing at 10:00 p.m. on Friday nights. Last season it raised frequent concerns about the manner in which it dealt with violence. In its first full season **Nash Bridges** raises occasional concerns.

**Miami Vice**'s Don Johnson plays the dashing title character, a cool, wisecracking San Francisco police inspector with a heart of gold and a flare for sleight-of-hand magic tricks. His partner and comic sidekick, Joe Dominguez, is played by veteran comedian Cheech Marin. Together the two try to clean up the streets of San Francisco while Bridges tries to find love, maintain friendships with his two ex-wives, watch after his rascal father and raise his teenage daughter.

A lighthearted, action police show, **Nash Bridges** is a modern day **Magnum, P.I.** with perhaps a slightly rougher edge. Replete with smart-alecky one-liners and amusing situations, the program is funny and the characters are extremely likeable. This season there was less violence in the program with a greater emphasis placed on the characters and humor rather than on the violent action. Airing at 10:00 p.m., the program is given more leeway in terms of violence. However, there were several instances this season in which the violence was unnecessarily prolonged for the purposes of titillation rather than plot development.

Frequently, this violence occurred in the opening scene of the program. For example, on 10/4/96 an episode aired in which Bridges and his team take down a crew of high-end thieves. The episode opens with Bridges, Dominguez and another cop rushing to the scene of a bank robbery in progress. As the robbers storm the bank, they brandish high-caliber rifles and pistols, sending the customers to the floor and hitting a guard in the face with the butt end of a rifle. For no discernable reason, one of the robbers snaps and cold-bloodedly shoots a compliant bank patron twice at point blank range, killing him. When Bridges arrives on the scene, the gunfire erupts and continues non-stop for more than two minutes. Midway through the barrage of bullets, the young cop who came with Bridges is shot in the neck. He falls backwards, clutching his neck as blood pumps from the wound. After triggering a smoke bomb, the robbers escape, leaving one dead and one wounded crew member behind. Although this scene is important in establishing how ruthless and coldly efficient these criminals are, the extended length of the scene and the endless hail of bullets are far more than what is necessary to establish this point. The rest of this episode contains no other problems and, in fact, does a good job exploring some of the consequences of the gunshot to the neck of the young inspector. But the opening scene is unduly violent.

In a similar instance in the opening scene of the episode that aired on 12/13/96, Bridges interrupts a jewelry heist at a department store. A prolonged gunfight full of automatic weapon fire ensues and lasts for just under a minute. Two criminals are shot and killed, the second one falling backwards through a large piece of plate glass in slow motion. A third is shot but gets away. The shower of bullets is chaotic and the body smashing through the glass only serves to accentuate the violence of the scene. Also of concern is the conclusion of the scene, in which Dominguez and Bridges are standing over one of the criminals' dead bodies and Dominguez jokes, "I heard the department stores were murder this time of year." This serves to trivialize and make light of the seriousness of the violence that has just occurred.

On 5/2/97 the program opens with another unnecessarily prolonged gunfight between two drug dealers and Bridges and his partner. Midway through the gunfight, a private security team, outfitted with automatic assault rifles and armored cars, arrives on the scene and opens fire on the drug dealers. The gunfire lasts for a minute and a half and no one is wounded in this incident. The violence is neither graphic nor threatening. In fact, it is treated very casually which has the effect of diminishing the severity and impact of the event.

A final example can be found in the episode that aired on 4/11/97. It opens with Bridges talking to a local mafia boss on a private yacht. Unbeknownst to them, a hit squad, sent by an ambitious mafia underling, storms the boat with automatic submachine guns. After dispensing with the boss' guards, they open fire. For a full minute gunfire is exchanged and eight people are killed. While this scene does set up the ensuing story, it showcases an immense amount of violence in the scene. Interestingly, this was again the only scene of the episode that contained any issues of violence.

Frequently, the violence found in **Nash Bridges** is glorified. Always cool under fire, Bridges makes it look easy, never being rattled by heavy gunfire and never showing any sort of fear. All of the characters are very nonchalant about the violence. Occasionally, Bridges is forced to use his fists. In an episode on 2/14/97, when an arms dealer makes an inappropriate comment about Bridges' daughter, Bridges turns around and punches him, sending him flying through the air and



through a glass table. While deserved, the attack is excessive, over the top and glorified. In the episode on 4/25/97, when two mafia henchmen approach him, Bridges picks up a glass pitcher and smashes it on one guy's face. We see the impact and then see Bridges and his friend beat up the two men. Although the altercation is quick, it is very glorified and conveys the message that Bridges, despite his intelligence and friendly demeanor, is not someone with whom one should mess.

Of the 23 times it was monitored, **Nash Bridges** raised issues of violence seven times.

### **High Incident (ABC)**

Debuting last year in early March as a midseason replacement show, **High Incident** was one of the first programs to be developed by the highly touted and greatly anticipated DreamWorks SKG. Executive produced by Steven Spielberg, the program is an ensemble cop show chronicling the day-to-day duties of police officers in the fictional Southern California community of El Camino. Though only six episodes aired last season, the show--though more graphic and less gritty than other serial cop shows such as **NYPD Blue**--intelligently and thoughtfully emphasized the extreme consequences, both physical and psychological, of violence in city life. Also, the program focused more on the development of the characters and their relationships, both in the workplace and in their personal lives, than on the violence of the job. This season, however, in terms of violence, the program took a turn for the worse.

Although last season **High Incident** contained some very serious and graphic violence, less emphasis was placed on the actual violent encounters and more on their effects on the officers' lives. A prime example of this can be found in the series debut in which an officer sees his partner gunned down by a motorist. Forced to shoot and kill the attacker, the officer rushes to his dying partner to find him shot in the neck, blood pouring from the wound. Very intense and also very graphic, the violence was appropriately shocking and also quite affecting. The rest of the episode, as well as several episodes that followed, dealt with the extreme guilt, anger and fear this event caused in the surviving cop. The extremity of the consequences was realistically matched with the severity of the incident.

In contrast, possibly to increase the show's excitement level, this season's violent encounters were stressed much more than their consequences. In the episode aired on 11/7/96, an Asian gang is robbing armored cars. In the first several seconds of the episode two officers arrive at the scene of a robbery in progress. As they approach in their squad car, another car speeds directly towards them, causing them to sideswipe a building. The criminals then open fire on the cops with automatic submachine guns, spraying bullets through the windshield. The cops respond by returning fire, shooting and killing one assailant with a shotgun. As the criminals speed away, gunshots continue to ring out. Although the scene is relatively short, it is full of gunfire and is the first thing audiences see in the episode. Later on in the same episode, two other officers are involved in a prolonged gunfight with the robbers. This scene is longer and much more glorified than the first one, utilizing some slow motion to stress the violence. Two people are killed in the scene and the gunfire blazes non-stop for roughly 45 seconds. The episode later deals with the emotional reaction of one of the officers to having shot someone for the first time in the line of duty, but it does so only tangentially.

A similar instance is found in the episode that aired on 2/13/97, in which several officers engage in a gunfight with a submachine gun-wielding motorist. As the criminal riddles the squad cars with bullets, one officer is hit in the neck and falls to the ground, clutching at his wound. As two officers attempt to save him, two others return fire with shotguns and pistols. The hail of bullets rages non-stop for well over a minute, culminating with one of the officers heroically charging the car and shooting the attacker while the other blows up the car by shooting the gas tank. It is a very long scene of violence, intensified by the nature of the injury suffered by the wounded officer. The use of slow motion, the manner in which the officer risks life and limb to thwart the assailant, and the explosion at the end of the scene all serve to glorify the violence and make it seem extremely exciting. It would be excessive at any time, but is especially so at 8:00 p.m.

Another issue this program raised was tonnage. The episode on 5/8/97 was inspired by the actual events of a North Hollywood bank robbery, in which heavily armed men wearing body armor attempted to shoot their way out of the robbery. The program wished to convey the severity of the situation and the threat posed to police and civilians alike. However, the entire first half of the episode was filled with virtually non-stop gunfire, much of which was glorified. Ultimately, the robbers are both killed, the last one shot in the back of the head. It is an extremely intense episode which becomes even more so when two of the program's main characters are severely injured--one possibly paralyzed and the other left in a coma. The psychological consequences are acutely explored with great emotion. However, despite the powerful exploration of the impact of the violence on the lives of the officers, the sheer amount of extremely real and intense violence (12 scenes to be exact), many of which were several minutes in length, caused particular concerns in an 8:00 p.m. program.

**High Incident** also raised issues of glorification. The episode on 2/6/97 contained two violent scenes that raised issues of violence with regard to the message of the episode. One of the storylines involves an African American officer, Mike, who, while off duty, is severely beaten by a racist white deputy from the sheriff's department. When the deputy threatens Mike's partner unless she remains silent about the beating, Mike hunts down the other cop and attacks him in a coffee shop bathroom, thrashing him and shoving his face into a toilet bowl. It is a vicious, albeit warranted assault. Although he is criticized by both his partner and captain for his actions and reference is made about him possibly losing his job, audiences are left with the impression that, by taking the law into his own hands, he acted heroically in this instance. Despite the fact that his actions were illegal, Mike feels he is being persecuted by an unjust system.

Another storyline in the episode containing a questionable message involves Officer Marsh's effort to clean up a high-crime, low-income neighborhood under the control of a drug dealer named Chino. When Chino kills the son of a woman Marsh has befriended, the conflict becomes personal. At the end of the episode, Marsh finds himself chasing Chino to a building rooftop. There the two wrestle and Chino is thrown over the edge. Marsh clutches Chino's wrist, preventing him from falling to his death. After coercing Chino into confessing to the murder, rather than pulling him up and arresting him, Marsh lets him fall off the building, killing him. Historically, in television and film heroes have frequently found themselves ultimately faced with the decision of whether to let the villain live or die. With few exceptions, the heroes have always realized that by killing the villain or letting him or her die, they will have lowered themselves to the villain's level. Thus, they decide to spare the villain's life. It is notable when Marsh is faced with this same decision and chooses to kill Chino, particularly since he feels no

remorse and faces no consequences. After Chino is allowed to fall to his death, the community comes back to a vibrant life. Clearly, the nature of police drama is changing and the producers wanted to focus on the dilemmas of real cops rather than the cardboard heroes of Jack Webb's **Dragnet** or **Adam-12**. However, in this instance, the moral dimensions of allowing Chino to die are not examined. His death is solely portrayed as a good thing.

At the core of the issues raised by **High Incident** is the time at which it was aired. Last season the show was aired at 9:00 p.m. However, this season, it was bumped up to 8:00 p.m. even as the amount and intensity of the violence were ratcheted up. **High Incident** is an adult-oriented show, dealing with mature themes and intense situations, and would have been much more at home this season in the 10:00 p.m. time period. The change in time and tone for the program proved unsuccessful and the show was canceled at the end of the season. Of the 24 times it was monitored, four episodes raised issues of violence.

### **America's Most Wanted: America Fights Back (Fox)**

At the end of last season, **America's Most Wanted**, the real-life crime program hosted by John Walsh and one of the Fox Network's first hits, was canceled. A cry of protest rang out from many of the show's fans. Law enforcement officials across the country pointed to the program's extraordinary record in assisting in the capture of close to 500 criminals. After a brief hiatus, the series returned this season with a few new twists as **America's Most Wanted: America Fights Back**. Still hosted by John Walsh--himself a survivor of violent crime--the program follows a similar format, with a new, tougher subtitle. In each episode, the program profiles some of the country's roughest and most dangerous criminals and re-enacts their offenses, in hopes of catching the eye of viewers able to help lead law enforcement officials to the at-large criminals. In recent years, in an effort to prove that its system really works, the program has expanded to contain profiles of captures that have been direct results of viewer tips. However, over the course of this three-year study, the program also occasionally has raised issues in regard to its presentations of violent crimes. The first year of this study found the show raising occasional concerns while the second year of the study did not. However, this year it again raises occasional concerns, intermittently glorifying and graphically showcasing excessive violence.

In episodes aired on 1/11/97 and 2/1/97, there is a re-creation of an assault and murder involving two men arguing over an unpaid bet. When one bar patron refuses to make good on a bet over a game of pool, his opponent shoves him. When the pushed man responds by grabbing the other man, he is hit in the face with a pool cue, punched in the face twice, slammed into the bar and punched twice more. In self-defense, he grabs a knife from the counter and slashes his attacker across the forehead just above the eye. This is an important event. Though brutal, it is appropriate to the story and sets up the eventual murder. However, when the man who is slashed follows the other man home and shoots him at close range, the choice of camera angle emphasizes the size of the gun in such a way that it is glorified. The segment was shown again on 2/1/97 after the real-life murderer was caught. While it is important to prove to viewers that their calls are important, showing the entire sequence over again was unnecessary and served no purpose, as the footage sometimes does in helping capture a criminal. Instead it seemed like an opportunity to simply show violent footage again.

Another issue frequently raised by this program is the repetition of scenes of violence. For example, in the episode that aired on 2/22/97, real-life footage of a gun battle between police and two men they pulled over is repeated five times, once as a preview, and four times during the segment. In another segment, a re-enactment of twin brothers viciously beating up an old man is shown three times. In instances such as these, it feels as though the program is showcasing violence in the interest of increasing the action level of the program, not to increase viewer interest in catching the criminals.

Another interesting instance of needlessly upping the level of violence in the program was found on 2/8/97. During a profile on a murderer, a re-enactment of him repeatedly shooting a man in a car is shown. During the re-creation, the narrator informs the audience that the man at large ruthlessly fired nine shots into his victim, killing him on the spot. However, in the re-enactment, the killer fires 14 shots into his victim. While these re-enactments are by no means exact in nature, it seems as though the inclusion of five extra gunshots was simply an effort to increase the violence of the scene.

Two years ago, some of the re-creations were far more graphic than were necessary. This season, there was only one such instance. In the episode aired on 5/3/97, there is a recurring segment titled "Street Smart," in which safety instructor and security consultant Sanford Strong advises viewers how to protect themselves in everyday life. Strong recounts a murder case on which he once worked. The re-enactment tells the story of a newlywed who, while waiting for her husband to come home for lunch, is attacked by a man in their home. When her husband comes home and finds the intruder attacking his wife, he tackles the man. While struggling, the assailant stabs the husband five times in the midsection, killing him. The stabbings are far more graphic than is necessary, showing the blade puncture his stomach three of the five times. Also, each stab is accompanied by an unsettling sound effect which only accentuates the violence. Although the purpose of the segment is to instruct men on how not to deal with intruders in their homes, the scene is excessively graphic. It could have been filmed in a much less troublesome way without compromising the program's message.

Because of the occasionally gratuitous nature of some of the violence--in the form of graphicness, repetition and over-emphasis--it raised occasional concerns. Of the 25 times **America's Most Wanted: America Fights Back** was monitored, it raised issues of violence four times.

### **The X-Files (Fox)**

In its fourth season, Fox's hit show **The X-Files** continues to be one of the most elusive programs on television in regard to violence. Sometimes exemplary in its presentation of violence and sometimes blatantly problematic, the show combines elements of humor, horror and science fiction in a blend that has garnered one of the most loyal cult followings in recent television history. This season in its new Sunday at 9:00 p.m. time slot, **The X-Files** became one of the biggest hits on television. Chronicling the bizarre investigations of FBI agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully, the program revolves around such supernatural and occult topics as alien abductions, government-orchestrated cloning experiments and witchcraft, to name only a few. It has become that rare television phenomenon that has inspired countless imitations, none as successful as the original.

The program always contains violence, most of which is somewhat grisly in nature. Depictions of violence are sometimes quite restrained, utilizing camera techniques and lighting to conceal unnecessary graphicness, leaving much to the audience's imagination. However, in other instances, unduly graphic violence is shown in an effort to unsettle and disturb audiences, usually effectively. Because of the exceptionally grim nature of much of the violence, whether graphic or not, **The X-Files** may raise the most concerns for some viewers. It is not surprising, considering that both programs come from the same creator, that similar issues are found in both **The X-Files** and **Millennium**. In both cases, the shows do not raise concerns solely because of their dark and disturbing themes. As with **Millennium**, occasionally **The X-Files** raises issues of concern with regard to violence.

The sheer brutality of some of the violence in **The X-Files** is of concern. For example, in the episode that aired on 10/11/96, Mulder and Scully are summoned to a small Pennsylvania town to investigate the murder of a deformed baby found buried alive. When they discover that the murdered child was the unwanted offspring of three inbred brothers and their mother, Mulder and Scully try to track down the guilty parties. In a scene approximately half way through the episode, the three brothers--each horribly disfigured by generations of inbreeding--attack the local sheriff in his home. Storming into his bedroom at night, they beat him to death with baseball bats while his wife watches from her hiding place. They then discover and kill her also. Although the entire scene is extremely dark and the impact of the blows is never seen, the sounds of the bats and the image of the victim's blood spreading over the hardwood floor leave little to the imagination. It is a horrifying scene of violence, haunting and grotesque, that is ironically juxtaposed with a 1950s love song that plays over it. Later on in the episode, Mulder and Scully, with the help of the sheriff's deputy, raid the brothers' home. The deputy falls victim to a booby trap and is decapitated, the portrayal of which is restrained and not particularly graphic. However, like several other scenes in this episode, it is still extremely intense and unsettling.

Frequently, **The X-Files** features extremely graphic images devoid of any actual violent act. Typically, they are the result of a violent attack or some strange, supernatural event and are fairly gory. This makes the show appear to contain more violent acts than it really does. An example of this can be found on 1/27/97. This episode was broadcast immediately after the Super Bowl and thus aired at 7:00 p.m. in some markets. Although this episode was also preceded by an advisory--a relatively rare occurrence for this program--it contained very graphic and frightening images that were intense for such an early time slot. The episode revolves around the investigation and pursuit of a man with the ability to regenerate lost body parts. He does this by eating cancerous tumors culled from medical patients. In the opening scene of the episode, the man is decapitated during a car accident. His severed head is shown in several subsequent scenes, one of which takes place as Scully is examining it. As she is about to make an incision, the head's eyes and mouth open. Later in the episode, the villain is shown regenerating an entire other self. It is an intense and graphic scene as he is shown, the blood of his most recent victim smeared around his mouth and all over his naked body. He appears in obvious pain as something is moving under his skin. Finally, his mouth is stretched wide open, as another entire head comes out of it and lets out a haunting scream of pain. It is extreme and grotesque, the stuff of nightmares, and, although not conventionally violent, certainly has a similar impact.

In what was perhaps the most extreme and unsettling bit of graphic violence of the whole season, in the episode that aired on 11/10/96, a satanic plastic surgeon obsessed with vanity possesses other doctors and causes them to commit horrendous acts of violence on their patients. These include liposuctioning a man to death, burning a hole through a woman's face with a laser and pouring acid on another woman's face. Towards the end of the episode, the evil doctor changes his identity by literally cutting off his own face and replacing it with another. He is shown placing a scalpel at the top of his forehead and then making an incision around his face. As he cuts, blood runs from the wound down his forehead. The camera cuts away but promptly returns to show him having sliced all around his visage. He then takes a surgical tool and proceeds to peel off his face, pulling his forehead away from his skull.

Gruesome violence is one of the signature aspects of **The X-Files** and thus it is examined with considerable scrutiny. Most of the time, the program does an excellent job of creating a dark and eerie tone which implies violence without actually showing it. When violence does appear on screen it is usually well done and integral to the story's development. However, when a program like this constantly pushes the limits in terms of content, it is not surprising that it will occasionally cross the line. While the first season of this study found that **The X-Files** raised frequent concerns of violence, last year it raised few concerns. This season contained some of the elements that made it a problem in the first year, however not nearly as often, and therefore falls in the middle of the first two years by raising occasional concerns. Of the 24 times the show was monitored, it raised concerns of violence four times.

### **Sliders** (Fox)

A fantasy adventure program, **Sliders** aired on Friday nights at 8:00 p.m. just before **Millennium**. The show is about the adventures of four friends who "slide" through portals to parallel universes in an effort to find their way back to their home universe. In each new world they inevitably find themselves in precarious situations and are faced with the challenge of surviving.

The genre, writing and time slot of **Sliders** all indicate that it targets a young audience. Very seldom is the violence in **Sliders** very threatening or graphic. However, it is frequently antiseptic and glorified and there is a surprising amount of it.

One of the primary issues raised by **Sliders** is the glorification of the violence. The group's unofficial leader is a young inventor-scientist named Quinn, who is often forced to fend off villains with his fists. In an episode that aired on 11/1/96, the group slides into a desert world where water is the prized commodity. The whole episode is very reminiscent of the post-apocalypse **Mad Max** films. In one scene, as the sliders try to kidnap a water witch from a ruffian desert rat named Cutter, Quinn pounces on his dune buggy and punches him in the face. When Cutter slams on the brakes, Quinn is thrown off the vehicle and the two square off. Cutter pulls out a large knife and begins slashing at Quinn who defends himself with a metal bar. Quinn jabs Cutter in the gut with the bar and then punches him hard twice in the face. The second punch sends Cutter over the edge of an embankment, rendering him unconscious. While the scene is relatively quick, and the villain is dispensed with only two punches, the violence is very

exciting and also very glorified. By attacking Cutter and beating him in a fight, Quinn is painted as a hero.

Another example of glorified violence from this season is found in the episode aired on 3/7/97. The group slides into a world where a drug has turned virtually all its inhabitants into flesh-eating zombies. When Quinn is turned into a zombie, the group is forced to try to find a cure. While exploring a ravaged hospital, they are attacked by zombies. One of the sliders, a female warrior who joined the group in one of the worlds through which they passed, wields a shotgun to fend off the onslaught. When one zombie charges them, she blasts the zombie, sending it flying backwards through the air. The scene is extremely exaggerated in order to accentuate and glorify the violent action. This exaggeration is underscored when another character compliments the slider on her ability to “kick butt.”

In a similar example, in the episode that aired on 5/9/97, the sliders go up against a vampire rock group. When one of the female sliders falls under the spell of the lead vampire Morgan, Quinn is forced to fight him. In their final confrontation, Morgan runs down Quinn on a motorcycle, roughly kicking him to the ground as he blazes past him. Morgan turns and makes a second pass at Quinn, but this time Quinn picks up a wooden spear and jams it into the heart of the charging vampire. Morgan is sent flying backwards off the motorcycle with the spear protruding from his chest. As he lies on the ground dying, Quinn walks up to him and, for good measure, grips the spear and twists it, killing Morgan. This scene is extremely overdone, excessive and glorified and was one of the most problematic from **Sliders** all season. It was surprising to find such an instance of brutal violence in what is essentially a youth-oriented show in a youth-oriented time slot.

Tonnage is also frequently an issue with **Sliders**. Some episodes feature as many as 20 scenes of violence in one hour. This is in large part due to the fact that the worlds in which the sliders find themselves are often violent and hostile. An example of this is the episode that aired on 9/20/96 in which the group slides into a world where they are contestants in a deadly game show where the only way to win is to survive. Obviously, this violent premise gave way to many violent interactions. One in particular, in which the sliders do battle with a squad of laser gun-wielding androids, stands out because of its length and the significant amount of gunfire.

A basic issue raised by **Sliders** is its time slot. Although much of the violence is very unrealistic and in the vein of science fiction, it is also frequently glorified and rampant. Occasionally, some of the violence is a little too intense for the early hour. Of the 25 times it was monitored, **Sliders** raised issues six times.

#### ***4. Interesting Issues in Prime Time Series***

Several issues in prime time series television have been identified and are discussed in-depth below. Several of these matters were addressed in last year's report. While new and interesting issues from the 1996-97 television season have been distinguished and addressed, several of those that were raised last year are compelling and important enough to warrant continued consideration. Where appropriate, several of these previously identified issues have been updated and illustrated with examples taken from the current season. In instances where a better example existed in the previous year of monitoring, it was re-used to better illuminate the issue.

##### **a. The Continuing Quality of the 10:00 p.m. Shows**

Last year's report commented on the extraordinary quality of some of television's 10:00 p.m. dramas. This trend continued as the 1996-97 season produced some of the best drama ever to appear on television. The overall quality of shows such as **NYPD Blue**, **Chicago Hope**, **ER**, **Law & Order**, **Homicide** and Fox's 9:00 p.m. **Party of Five** (the Fox Network does not have a 10:00 p.m. time slot) reached new heights this season.

These are shows featuring vivid, fully drawn, multidimensional characters who have complex personalities that unfold as the season develops. Though these shows frequently contain scenes of violence--as shows dealing with the real world would be expected to--they rarely, if ever, raise concerns about the manner in which they use violence. The following section will detail the ways in which they portray violence and the lessons that can be learned from these shows.

But these are not just shows that deal with violence well. They contain some of the highest quality drama created by Hollywood. Considering that a two-hour motion picture takes a year or more to produce, the fact that a program like **Chicago Hope** can produce 22 high-quality hours a season is a tribute to the talent of the creators and writers. Many episodes of **Homicide** and **Law & Order** are as well written and compelling as the best feature films.

##### **b. The Police as Criminals**

In the history of television, law enforcement officials have almost always been portrayed as "good guys." The passage of time and events such as the Rodney King beating have chipped away at the popular notion of the "by the book," **Adam-12** or **Dragnet** police officer. No longer are all police thought of as moral absolutists, upholding the law above anything else. Instead, they are portrayed in more human terms, subject to all the pressures and difficulties that come with their jobs. Nowhere is this better reflected than on television, where the majority of dramatic series are based on law enforcement.

This season, there were many occasions in which police officers crossed over legal boundaries and were excessively violent with criminal suspects. In the past, dramas might have featured a "bad" cop who, reacting to the pressures of his job or the constant fear of death, goes too far and abuses suspects. Occasionally, a show might even focus on a cop who takes the law completely



into his or her own hands and either passively or actively allows the death of someone under his control.

What is different in contemporary television is that now these actions are sometimes taken by recurring characters whose actions are shown in a favorable, or at least sympathetic, light. All of this is part of a trend to avoid cardboard characters who always do the right thing. Instead these shows attempt to examine the complex motivations and actions of real human beings. Clear divisions between right and wrong are replaced with moral ambiguity and doubt. Some of these cops do the “wrong” thing and everything still turns out well. Parallel to this morally ambiguous world of police is an equally immoral universe of lawyers, working in a judicial system where it is assumed that criminals rarely receive real justice. In this system, the most brutal acts not only remain unpunished, but are also likely to be repeated. Here, where a murderer might laugh at the justice he will never face and is likely to kill again, is it “really wrong” for a cop to shoot a killer in the heart rather than in the leg? This is the type of question that is addressed in modern police dramas.

Last season, in an episode of **New York Undercover**, a criminal played by rap star Ice-T sought revenge on Detective Williams who, in the line of duty, had killed his brother. In retaliation, Ice-T frames Williams for the murder of a drug dealer and attempts to kill his ex-wife and son. At the end of the episode, Williams captures Ice-T and holds him at gunpoint. Defiantly, Ice-T tells Williams that if he doesn’t kill him, he will come after his son. At this critical moment, in a shocking turn of events, Detective Williams shoots and kills Ice-T. It is not rare in television or film for the hero to hold the fate of the villain in his or her hands. In this situation, up until very recently, the hero has always chosen to spare the villain’s life, not wanting to sink to his or her level. Typically, the villain was arrested or made a final move for his or her gun, forcing the hero to kill the outlaw. This latter tactic conveniently satisfied the audience’s desire to see the bad guy “get it good” while keeping the hero’s morality intact. Thus, when Williams, a good cop, murders a man in cold blood and then goes unpunished, the viewer cannot walk away without examining a morally ambiguous situation.

This season there were two more examples of police contributing to the murder of a suspect. One of these is examined in the discussion of ABC’s **High Incident**, a series which raised occasional issues of concern. In the episode on 2/6/97, Officer Marsh, a cop with a tendency towards violence, finds himself holding a drug dealer and murderer, Chino, over the edge of a building. Officer Marsh implies that he is going to drop Chino if he does not admit to a murder. Chino confesses. After hearing his confession, rather than pulling Chino up to safety and arresting him, Marsh instead lets him drop to his death. The clear message at the end of the program is that the life of everyone in the neighborhood improves after the death of the drug dealer. Again, the viewer is presented with a morally ambiguous situation.

In the episode aired 4/25/97, on NBC’s **Homicide: Life on the Streets**, detectives are frustrated over their repeated attempts to arrest a murderous drug kingpin, Luther Mahoney. After witnessing him shoot one of his henchmen and an innocent bystander, Detective Lewis tracks down Mahoney and beats him savagely. However, the tables are turned when Mahoney wrests Lewis’ gun away from him. Lewis is saved when his partner, Detective Kellerman, and a narcotics detective arrive on the scene with guns drawn. Mahoney surrenders, lowering his gun, but laughing defiantly, knowing that he has been able to elude justice countless times before.

Detective Kellerman then, rather than taking Mahoney in, shoots him in the heart, murdering him. Standing over him, Kellerman turns to his fellow detectives and asks, “Anyone got a problem with this?” Both detectives shake their heads no, although the narcotics officer has obvious misgivings.

In both of the above described instances, the police suffer no consequences and, in both instances, their decisions are rewarded. The problems these criminals posed disappear and the world is a better place because they are dead. It is compelling storytelling, particularly in the case of **Homicide**, because the next several episodes explore the impact on the officers involved and their remorse or lack of remorse.

In virtually every show about police work, there is a “loose cannon” character who takes the law into his or her own hands. While this may be an accurate reflection of reality in some instances, these programs sometimes glorify such acts. It is possible that some audiences, disillusioned by perceived high crime rates and the stifling bureaucracy of the legal system, tend to cheer for these characters. Generally, these programs do a responsible job of exploring these characters and their actions. They reflect the fact that police work can be stressful and that sometimes officers may crack under the pressure. Also, most of these programs air in the 10:00 p.m. time slot, attracting adult audiences who can recognize and understand the moral ambiguities involved.

### **c. Does Humor Mitigate “Real” Violence?**

Certain genres of television programming and feature films frequently combine elements of violent action and comedy. This is different from the use of slapstick violence in situation comedies or the hyperbolic “real” violence found in the **Naked Gun** films where the violence itself is the joke. Instead, in these instances, the humor simply accompanies the violence, typically in the form of dry, snappy dialogue during violent encounters. Detective shows like **Spy Games**, **Nash Bridges** and **Mr. and Mrs. Smith** are the types of programs that most often feature this blend of comedy and violence. This union of elements often has the effect of enhancing the characters’ appeal, making them appear cool under pressure. However, it also functions to trivialize the violence, much of which is, in reality, very serious. Incorporating comedy into such dangerous and potentially lethal violence as fist fights, gun battles and car chases makes the violence seem lighthearted and inconsequential. Scientific research and logic indicate that this can lessen viewers’ inhibitions against violence by making it appear less serious and glorifying it. By detracting from the severity and consequences of violence, certain audience members could become desensitized to this type of violence and view it as more acceptable. Because of children’s greater susceptibility to such perceptual influences, this is of particular concern when it occurs in earlier time slots.

### **d. Chicago Hope (CBS), ER (NBC) and Issues on Medical Shows**

**ER** was the breakout hit of the 1994-95 television season. It finished number two in the Nielsen ratings for the entire season this year. Created by author, director and physician Michael Crichton and produced by John Wells, it was the first medical show in years to become popular

and restored much of the lost luster to television drama. **Chicago Hope** is produced by David Kelley, the Emmy Award-winning writer and producer of **L.A. Law** and the creative force behind **Picket Fences**.

Both series air at 10:00 p.m. and raise interesting issues regarding context and definitions of violence. Both are set in hospitals and **ER**, of course, is specifically set in an emergency room. It is not surprising, in light of the producers' intent and approach, that both shows very graphically portray the consequences of violence.

Very early in the first season, we had to deal with scenes of doctors using scalpels to cut into patients. We had to decide whether these were scenes of violence and, if so, how to classify them. It was in incidences such as this that the soundness of the contextual analysis of violence became most apparent. We clearly felt that under no circumstances could a scene with a doctor using a scalpel to save someone's life ever be construed as a scene of problematic violence. Early in the 1994-95 season we saw an episode of **Chicago Hope** in which a doctor makes a long incision into an abdomen during surgery. The camera zoomed in very close and, as the scalpel moved, the viewer could see blood rise to the surface of the skin. It was an extraordinary special effect likely to make many of those watching squirm. While it was an extremely graphic image, it could not be categorized as violence that raises concerns. The context lets us know that this is a beneficial act designed to save a life. The same scene of a scalpel cutting, however, would have been one of the most horrific scenes of violence possible if the knife had been held by a terrorist or a murderer. The difference between a non-problematic violent act and a horrific act of violence has nothing to do with the close-up itself. It is the surrounding context that determines whether the act is interpreted as life-saving or sadistic.

Medical shows frequently contain scenes similar to the one described above. We expect to see scalpels and blood in medical shows as part of the context. Both of these shows were examined 19 times each this season and neither ever raised any concerns.

#### **e. Family Matters and Sister, Sister and Comedic Violence**

In the 11/1/96 episode of **Family Matters**, the popular "nerd" character, Urkel, is transformed into a martial arts champion and leads two small children into a brawl with local gang members. Each of the children, with Urkel taking center stage, proceeds to thrash the gang members with an assortment of martial arts-style kicks and punches. The scene, although a parody of karate movies, is actually surprisingly similar to a scene that would be found in one, complete with enhanced sound effects and high flying kicks. After dispensing with eight thugs, Urkel slams down a metal partition on the back of another foe who he had just thrown into a utility shack. The whole scene lasts for nearly four minutes as the studio audience cheers for the boys.

An example of audiences laughing at characters' injuries can be found in the 9/4/96 episode of **Sister, Sister**. When a male friend climbs up to the girls' second story window at night to apologize for an earlier transgression, they respond by pushing his ladder backwards, sending him falling to the ground. Although this is slapstick and is not meant to be taken seriously, in reality such an act would be terribly dangerous and possibly lethal. In this children's program, the act is never seen as anything more than a convenient and time-tested comedic device.

While comedy does deserve some latitude, somewhere a screenwriter decided that to make the audience laugh there would be a scene in which someone was beaten up in a gang fight or pushed off a ladder. This raises the issue of characterizing serious injuries as being funny.

#### **f. Violence in a Program that Rarely Features Violence**

Sometimes a show that rarely deals with issues of violence will air a program with a violent theme. This raises a very interesting question. The show develops a reputation as one that seldom, if ever, contains violence. Viewers become accustomed to this, rely on it and perhaps it is a major reason they like the show. When, because of violence, a particular episode is out of step with the entire series, is it inappropriate because it is not what viewers expect? Or because the show so seldom raises these issues, is it afforded a measure of latitude to occasionally expand its themes or move in a slightly different direction?

This season, two episodes of NBC's hit show **ER** stand out as containing atypical amounts of violence. This program regularly features the results of violence, as victims of violence are constantly brought in for treatment, but very rarely does the show actually depict violent acts. In the episode that aired on 2/13/97, a nurse from the hospital, Carol Hathaway, is present during a convenience store robbery. When the robbery goes bad, gunfire is exchanged by the criminals and the store owner. The owner is killed and one of the robbers is seriously wounded. One store patron escapes during the gunfight and notifies the police, creating a hostage situation. The situation is resolved when the man in charge of the robbery is shot repeatedly and killed by police. The episode is unusually violent, graphically depicting several shootings. While they are contextually relevant and handled in a thoughtful and intelligent manner, they are much more than regular viewers of the show would normally expect.

Another episode, which aired on 5/1/97, revolved around a ruthless attack on one of the emergency room doctors. As Dr. Mark Greene is washing his hands in a hospital bathroom, he is assaulted by an unseen assailant who slams Greene's head into the sink and then into the mirror. He then punches Greene twice and kicks him. As Greene tries to stand up, he is thrown against the wall and knocked back to the ground where his attacker kicks him in the back and then stomps on his hand. It is a vivid and brutal attack, as realistic and disturbing as any found on television. Because of its realism and the in-depth examination of the physical and mental consequences, which spans several weeks, this episode did not raise issues of concern. However, the fact remains that this type of violence is not what viewers typically expect to see on this program.

Violence is out of character for these kinds of shows, but they deserve a measure of latitude, particularly as they search for new directions and attempt to deal with real life issues in an intelligent manner. Nevertheless, the violence that occurs must still be contextually appropriate for them not to raise concerns. These types of shows are subject to the same general standards to which all shows are held. Though out of character episodes such as those mentioned above in **ER** could raise concerns, these particular ones did not. Also of note is the fact that both of these episodes were rated “TV-14,” although the program is typically rated “TV-PG.”

### ***5. Programs that Deal with Violence Well***

Reading the preceding analyses might give the impression that prime time series are filled with violent themes. In fact, only a few shows this season consistently raised issues about violence. Many shows impressively conveyed conflict and grittiness without resorting to excessive or contextually inappropriate uses of violence. As mentioned earlier, the 10:00 p.m. dramas were particularly outstanding in how they handled violent themes, almost never resorting to excessive, graphic images or gratuitous or glorified violence. The work of Steven Bochco, David Kelley, Dick Wolf and John Wells is especially notable in its sensitive handling of violence. It is encouraging to see that violence can be portrayed so responsibly and thoughtfully.

An entire season of monitoring **NYPD Blue** 21 times, **Chicago Hope** 19 times, **ER** 19 times, **Homicide** 21 times and **Law & Order** 23 times produced no problematic portrayals of violence. Although these shows deal with themes containing violence, they generally do so by portraying violence in a way that is not overly graphic, is relevant to the story and is in a time period suitable for such themes. There is much to commend in these shows. They should serve as models for how to deal with violence in an intelligent and responsible manner. In the following analyses we have tried to explain what is impressive in these shows. Five programs that were commended in last year’s report, **NYPD Blue**, **Homicide**, **Law & Order**, **Chicago Hope** and **ER**, continue to be high quality shows, often with violent themes, that seldom raise concerns about how they portray violence. All of these shows except **Chicago Hope** have been commended in each of the three years of this report. The programs that deal with violence well this season are discussed below.

#### **NYPD Blue (ABC)**

Envisioned as broadcast television’s first R-rated drama, **NYPD Blue** consistently deals with violent themes in a responsible manner. Famous for its use of some semi-nudity and explicit language, the show was never found to be irresponsible in its use of violence. Many people unfamiliar with the show associate it with other police shows containing explicit violence. Those who watch **NYPD Blue** know that it contains little violence. If it does address violent themes, it does so in a manner relevant to the story.

Based on the experiences of New York City Police Department detectives, the show necessarily deals with violence. It would not be possible to portray the lives of New York cops without frequently dealing with violence. Unlike the policemen portrayed on older police shows such as **Adam-12**, the officers are not completely virtuous. Featuring officers pushed to the wall by the

pressures of their dangerous jobs, the show deals extensively with the psychological causes and consequences of violence. The officers struggle and occasionally act brutally when arresting or extracting confessions from suspects.

Violence is depicted as a realistic part of daily life in the city. However, the show is not overrun by guns. The violence, such as slaps or threats, is often born of frustration. Although the police officers frequently consider violent action, they typically demonstrate restraint.

Violence is portrayed as problematic. The police are depicted as human and multi-dimensional characters. The bad guys are not purely evil. This leads to a responsible and realistic handling of violence. The producers understand that it is not necessary to show graphic scenes of violence in order to deal with violence in the show.

Every act of violence portrayed in **NYPD Blue** is contextually appropriate. Nothing is excessive, everything is realistic and the consequences are always shown. **NYPD Blue** is close to a textbook example of how to deal with violent material. Others can benefit by studying its methods.

Although nothing changed this season in terms of the way violence was depicted on **NYPD Blue**, several episodes were especially commendable for their exploration of violence committed by police officers while on the job. Typically, the only on-screen violence occurs when a detective, feeling the pressures of the job and pushed to his wit's end, occasionally crosses the line and physically abuses a suspect during interrogation. In the episode that aired on 1/14/97, Detective Andy Sipowicz is sent in to question someone suspected of a knife attack. The man is suspected of slashing the face of Gina, one of the receptionists who works in the police station. If the suspect confesses, Gina will not have to deal with the terror of testifying in front of her attacker. The station's commander, Lieutenant Fancy, specifically chooses Sipowicz to conduct the interrogation because of his violent character and ability to extract confessions. Knowing what is expected of him, Sipowicz hits the suspect several times in the face and back of the head and finally slams his head down on the table. Fearful for his life, the man confesses to the attack.

Following the interrogation, Sipowicz enters the detectives' locker room where he is confronted by a fellow detective, Greg Medavoy. Medavoy, who had brought the suspect in, had been relieved from the questioning process and replaced with Sipowicz. Obviously upset at what has happened, Medavoy presses Sipowicz about his methods of interrogation, pointing out a variety of bad things that could come out of them: coerced confessions, tainted investigations, even being thrown off the force and sent to jail. What follows is Sipowicz's discussion of what he does, why he does it and the rules he follows. It is not a glamorized account. He points out that before he ever lays a hand on a suspect, he must realize that only he is responsible for his actions and he may ultimately pay a serious price for them. He explains that it is just his way of getting results and not the right method for everybody. It is a thoughtful and compelling conversation that explores the moral ambiguities that police officers face on a daily basis. Their exchange concludes as Lieutenant Fancy enters the locker room to ask who is going to write the suspect's confession. As Fancy enters, he is barely able to look Sipowicz in the eye, his own misgivings about assigning Sipowicz to interrogate the subject apparent on his face. It is truly a remarkable scene that deals with a socially important issue of violence with gravity and intelligence.

In a continuation of this storyline, in a later episode that aired on 2/25/97, Detective Medavoy tries being more physically aggressive with suspects in an effort to get the same results as Sipowicz. While he initially meets with success as he gets a gang member to give up information about a shooting by hitting him in the head with a phone book, he is obviously shaken by his own actions. His partner is also surprised and unsettled by his uncharacteristic outburst. As the episode continues, Medavoy finds himself progressively getting rougher with suspects until it backfires on him when a suspect refuses to give him a statement because of his approach. His partner's anger toward him, in conjunction with his own doubts about his behavior, ultimately lead him to the conclusion that, while sometimes appropriate and effective, roughing up suspects is not for him. Again, the exploration of this idea is well done and responsible. The episode never portrays Medavoy's actions as glamorous or heroic, but rather as awkward as he stumbles through his tough guy act. The portrayal of his behavior is quite realistic, painted in real life shades of gray.

This program reaches a level of dramatic quality usually found only in the best feature films. Thus, it is not surprising to find such complex themes and characters as one does in this show. The result, in terms of violence, is a program which approaches the violence of urban America with sensitivity and truth, dealing far more with the consequences and impact of violence than with its graphic and gory details.

### **Dangerous Minds (ABC)**

The story of an ex-Marine turned high school teacher with a heart of gold, the show stars Annie Potts as the main character Louanne Johnson, affectionately referred to as "Ms. J" by her class. In each episode, Ms. J deals with her multi-ethnic and intelligent but at-risk students as they face many of the social ills that plague urban America: teenage pregnancy, poverty, racial tension and gang violence. Much of this subject matter necessarily involves violence. However, because of the show's prosocial and positive message, the violence is always presented as problematic, an evil that must be stopped.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of **Dangerous Minds** is a cinematic technique used whenever a violent scene occurs on screen. Whenever violence happens, the camera shot becomes grainy and the scene is blurred. The effect of this is that the actual violent act is obscured, diminishing its graphicness, without compromising the severity of the attack or confusing the audience. This camera technique was extremely effective. It indicates a desire for viewers to focus on the message and the plot significance of the violence, refusing to exploit it for the purposes of excitement.

Less preachy and more realistic than last season's **Matt Waters, Dangerous Minds** is a positive show that deals with relevant issues of violence from a thoughtful and prosocial perspective. Although some critics have faulted the show for being overly sentimental, the show is worthy of praise for earnestly handling important, contemporary issues in a manner that is both constructive and genuine. Regrettably, **Dangerous Minds** was canceled at the end of the season.

### **Homicide (NBC)**

**Homicide** contains few scenes of violence. Some episodes contain none at all. Frequently scenes contain no violence other than a dead body that is the basis of a subsequent homicide investigation. Thus, the show is often a murder mystery that does not even depict the murder. The focus of the program is typically the investigation and psychological dimensions of the crime, rather than the graphic and exciting nature of the violent act itself. Like **NYPD Blue**, **Homicide** presents a world in which violence and conflict are prevalent in urban life.

Almost all of the violence is realistic and demonstrates consequences. Frequently, action is taken to prevent violence. **Homicide** effectively avoids gratuitous violence while at the same time portraying the gritty reality of urban life.

### **Law & Order (NBC)**

"In the criminal justice system, the people are represented by two separate but equally important groups: the police, who investigate, and district attorneys, who prosecute the offenders. These are their stories." With this statement, **Law & Order** begins. This is an unusual show which dedicates approximately half of the one-hour program to a police investigation and the other half to the follow-up prosecution of the case. The goal of the show is to depict the justice system in a realistic light. This is achieved through character and plot development which is gritty and intense, and illustrates consequences.

Typically, **Law & Order** features the results of an act of violence at the beginning of the show. This is usually the crime which is being investigated, which acts as the storyline's driving force. Thus, this act of violence is always contextually appropriate (as are all of the other violent acts in the show). More often than not the crime itself is not seen, and the audience is presented with the aftermath of the violent action, i.e., a "dirty dead body." Moreover, the consequences of the violence are dealt with in a commendable manner. One example of the show's admirable portrayal of consequences occurred in the season finale that aired on 5/22/96. In this episode the four main characters are witnesses to a state execution. The remainder of the show is dedicated to how the characters deal with what they have seen: two turn to alcohol, one has a brief affair and the other questions the law and even her career choice. In speaking with one of her old law professors, she says, "What happened this morning will stick with me for the rest of my life."



In attempting to make the show true to life, it occasionally portrays the police as bullying some suspects with threatening language or physical coercion. In one episode, a police officer pushes a suspect during an interrogation. However, these acts are never overdone or gratuitous in nature.

**Law & Order** integrates violence into the plot in a responsible fashion. The violent acts are not heroic, glamorized or prolonged. Instead of showing the violent act, **Law & Order** substitutes graphic images and realistic consequences. This gives the program a more violent feel without having to show actual violence. The dramatic edge is provided by portraying the detailed rigors of police investigations. These investigations often involve mysteries that the District Attorney's office must solve. Then, the dramatic tension is continued by the atmosphere of the courtroom, in which the outcome of the trial is never predictable. This is a cop show without a lot of violence and yet it has compelling elements that keep viewers riveted to the show.

### **Chicago Hope** (CBS) and **ER** (NBC)

Similar in premise, both **Chicago Hope** and **ER** follow the lives and work of doctors in Chicago hospitals. Both are high quality shows featuring strong characters and well crafted stories. Focusing on the treatment of injury and disease, both programs necessarily include a degree of violence as patients are often the victims of attacks, car accidents, fires and other incidents. Sometimes the acts of violence occur in the hospital itself and are directed against the medical staff. Both programs deal with the full consequences of violence, making it clear that death or permanent injury is a frequent result of violence and that the toll on the victims, their families and friends, not to mention the doctors themselves is usually devastating.

On the occasions when violence is portrayed within the shows, both **Chicago Hope** and **ER** have handled it with commendable gravity and realism. An episode of **Chicago Hope** that aired on 1/22/96 contained the most realistic depiction of an explosion and its consequences all last season. Unlike what is typically seen in many theatrical films, the explosion on **Chicago Hope** was in no way stylized or glamorized. It was shown as a horrible event with horrendous consequences. Often when something explodes on television the explosion is filmed in slow motion from multiple angles as smoke and red, yellow and orange billows of fire unfold across the screen. However, in this episode of **Chicago Hope**, in which an extremist anti-abortion organization bombs a clinic, the explosion was handled in a manner that was in no way glamorized. Instead, viewers were confronted with a realistic blast and its effects, thereby achieving a far more dramatic impact than if it had been treated in a manner more typical of action genre shows.

At no time during the season did either program raise any issues of concern in terms of violence. All violence contained in both shows was integral to the development of characters and plot. It was also portrayed in a realistic manner that fully dealt with the consequences of the violence.

### SUMMARY:

These dramatic series are commendable, but not because they avoid dealing with violence. Most comedies do this. What is so impressive about these shows is that they achieve a high level of

grittiness and excitement without overemphasizing violence, but by placing it in an appropriate context. A recommendation that a police or hospital show simply avoid violence would be unrealistic given the demands of the genre. These shows deal with violent themes but consistently do so in a contextually appropriate manner. Some conclusions regarding responsible depictions of violence are as follows:

**1) Violence is a part of city life.** These shows understand that violence does occur in twentieth century urban America. They do not have to invent unusual or unrealistic ways of portraying violence.

**2) The violence must be realistic.** When violence is depicted on these shows, it is never exaggerated, cartoonish or sanitized and the consequences are shown.

**3) Characters who commit violent acts do not do so easily and frequently demonstrate remorse.** Violence does not exist in a vacuum. Rarely do police officers shoot or kill suspects, even guilty ones, and call it a day. Deciding to commit a violent act can be difficult. Often a character struggles with other options before resorting to violence. After committing a violent act, one often undergoes a painful process of self-examination and reflection.

**4) It is not always necessary for the audience to see the violence.** Violence need not always be shown in order to make a point, advance the plot or develop a particular character. Graphically depicting violence is seldom necessary and often serves merely to sensationalize rather than illuminate.

**5) It is more difficult to write and produce these kinds of shows than typical action shows.** These shows require the creation of multi-dimensional characters whose actions are not always predictable. The characters cannot be superficially drawn because viewers have to understand their backgrounds and personalities in order to comprehend their actions. More traditional action shows, on the other hand, can use simplistic characters who reflexively resort to violence as the solution to problems.

These guidelines point to ways in which programs can effectively deal with violent themes in a contextually appropriate manner that rarely, if ever, raises concerns.

## C. Television Specials

In the first year of the monitoring, there was no section in the report on television specials. Of the several dozen television specials during the 1994-95 television season only one or two raised issues of concern. A new section was added last year because of a worrisome trend that started to develop in that season. Although representing only a small fraction of the total number of specials, **The World's Most Dangerous Animals I and II** on CBS and **When Animals Attack** on Fox were heavily promoted and achieved respectable ratings. It was our fear that this was the beginning of a trend that could escalate in the 1996-97 television season. Unfortunately, our fears were well founded.

These specials are a combination of real-life footage and re-creations of animals attacking and, in some cases, killing and eating human beings. The sometimes blurred distinction between the real tape and the re-creation causes confusion in the viewer. There is no question that a morbid human fascination exists with this kind of macabre video tape. Although almost everyone decries motorists slowing down to crane their necks at an automobile accident, almost everyone does so as they drive by. This is a normal, albeit not admirable, aspect of human nature. As was mentioned in last year's report, however, "The programming of a television network should not seek to emulate a car wreck at the side of the road." We also pointed out that even though "Shark Week" on The Discovery Channel--the highest rated week of their season--features shockingly violent images and scary music, viewers also learn about the mating habits and migratory behavior of sharks. Those programs have essentially remained documentaries, despite some admittedly terrifying footage. But many of the specials that appeared this season depict only the terror and carnage.

Concerns about the images in some of these animal specials were first raised in last year's report. These concerns were echoed over the next few months in publications such as the Los Angeles Times and Newsweek as well as several broadcast outlets. These specials contain some of the most graphic and terrifying images to be found anywhere on network television. And, most worrisome of all, this is a trend that seems to have spread. These programs proliferated over the 1996-97 television season. It is our hope that there are now so many that the market has become saturated and the number will begin to decrease. One of the reasons these programs are so popular with programmers is that they are so easy and inexpensive to produce. Over the past season the genre extended beyond animal attacks to include car chases, near-death (or death) experiences, stunts, disasters and shootouts. While last year the report was able to talk about each of these specials in detail, this year there were so many that only a few can be highlighted.

### Animal-Based "Shock-umentaries"

This trend of reality-based shows began with specials about animals attacking and sometimes killing people. There are still many examples of this programming in the current season. This season saw the airing of programs like **The World's Most Dangerous Animals Part III**, **When Animals Attack II**, and **When Animals Attack III**. All three programs raise concerns similar to those expressed about their predecessors in the last report.

**The World's Most Dangerous Animals Part III** aired on CBS on 2/27/97, profiling some of the planet's most ferocious and feared creatures. Although this third installment of the series is not quite as gory as its predecessors, the show still remains a showcase of wild animals mauling and killing their human victims. One of the most violent scenes is a graphic re-enactment of a bear attack which is surprisingly intense and bloody for network television. As a whole, the program raises concerns because of the tonnage of similarly vicious scenes.

The show did air with an advisory, but it silently scrolled across the screen along with an opening montage, making it very easy for many viewers to have overlooked it.

Many of the factors that make **The World's Most Dangerous Animals Part III** troubling are only amplified in the two sequels to Fox's **When Animals Attack**. It would be extremely difficult to overstate the severity of the violence presented in **When Animals Attack II** (11/3/96, and repeated on 11/18/96) and **When Animals Attack III** (2/17/97). The slight educational value of **The World's Most Dangerous Animals Part III** is entirely absent from either of these two programs. Both programs open with an unusually graphic montage of violence, featuring images of attacks by bears, sharks, alligators, deer, pit bulls and many other animals. Later in each show, violent previews of upcoming footage appear before each commercial break to lure viewers back to the program.

These programs also raise serious concerns because of the way in which they glorify violence. Each show employs the use of ominous music and slow motion to underscore the brutality of each attack. Moreover, in certain instances both shows repeat the most violent portions of an attack as many as four or five times in an apparent attempt to further shock and disgust the viewer. For instance, one of the most graphic scenes in **When Animals Attack III** shows a bull impaling a woman with its horns and tossing her through the street like a rag doll. By the time the segment concludes the attack has been shown no less than three different times.

Another disturbing element in these shows is that they feature real-life footage of animal attacks. Unlike injury or death depicted in other televised formats, viewers cannot comfort themselves with the reassurance that what they are watching is just a fictional story, or that the injuries they are looking at are just the product of a skilled makeup artist. Rather, these shows capitalize upon the opportunity to show extraordinarily gory images of actual injuries. One segment of **When Animals Attack II** features actual footage of a gruesome shark attack, culminating in an extended close-up shot of the victim's bloody, wounded arm.

An argument could be made that shows of this variety could potentially inspire unreasonable fear of certain animals. To varying degrees, **The World's Most Dangerous Animals Part III**, **When Animals Attack II** and **When Animals Attack III** all exploit viewers' fears in the way they present these violent attacks. One noteworthy instance of this effect concerns an attack by a house cat. When it aired on **The World's Most Dangerous Animals Part III**, the attacking cat was portrayed as vicious and deadly. Interestingly, the exact same footage was shown on a different program as a comedic moment when it aired on NBC's **TV Censored Bloopers** (2/22/97).

## Crime-Related Reality Specials

Another variety of reality-based specials this season featured criminal activity that had been caught on tape. Fox aired three such programs, **World's Scariest Police Chases**, **World's Scariest Police Shootouts** and **Video Justice: Crime Caught on Tape**, all of which present a multitude of images that bring to mind George Gerbner's "mean world syndrome."

Attempting to present itself as a warning against trying to outrun police, **World's Scariest Police Chases** showcases a collection of video clips. The program proudly declares that there are "no re-creations." What follows is actual footage of police chases, primarily focusing on the final outcome of each chase--in virtually all cases a violent crash or a pursuit on foot ending in a shootout.

This program raises some concerns because it airs at such an early time, 7:00 p.m. In addition, many of the crashes are shown without any accompanying consequences. Several clips show innocent motorists becoming the victims in these out-of-control pursuits, but do not pay much attention at all to the bodily injury that would undoubtedly result from these violent collisions. As mentioned above, last year's report likened the appeal of reality-based specials to the "morbid human fascination that leads people to gawk at auto accidents." **World's Scariest Police Chases** is the most literal possible example of that statement.

**World's Scariest Police Shootouts** delivers much of what its title promises. The seemingly endless scenes of gunfire and bloodshed in the program become overwhelming after a certain point, leaving the typical viewer somewhat unmoved by what would otherwise be perceived as truly heinous acts. Still, the most extreme images continue to horrify, as in the case of a desperate man who flips his car off the highway and then holds his wife hostage at gunpoint. A standoff ensues, and after several hours he turns the gun on his wife for no apparent reason. As she stands next to him, he fires directly into her chest and the viewer sees the bloody aftermath of his actions. She tries to flee and he fires a few more times at her, but within seconds the police have gunned him down. The entire sequence is astonishingly graphic and intense, made only more so by the fact that it is real.

The third special of this type that raises concerns is **Video Justice: Crime Caught on Tape**. This show tries to make the case that video cameras have become an important weapon in the fight against crime. By the end of the hour, the viewer sees two different policemen hit by oncoming traffic as well as a trio of thugs assaulting and fatally shooting another officer.

All three of these specials share certain elements. They all feature extensive use of slow motion and repeated showings of the most intense pieces of video tape. They also rely heavily on dramatic music and an especially violent opening montage. The minute-and-a-half opening montage of **Video Justice: Crime Caught on Tape** included two shootings; 13 acts of physical violence (punching, kicking, striking with an object); eight instances of shoving, pushing, or struggling; eight threats with a gun; two firings of a paintball gun and one instance of an officer being hit by a passing truck.

## Reality Specials Based on Accidental Violence

Many other of these “shock-umentary” programs center around terrifying instances of accidental violence. One such show is **Close Call: Cheating Death** which aired on Fox on 11/25/96. Featuring footage of boating and helicopter crashes, bungee jumping mishaps and other severe accidents, this program tries to make the point that the line between life and death can be very thin indeed.

Nonetheless, this program raises serious concerns because of the way in which it glorifies many of the horrendous accidents it depicts. One such scene shows a member of a bomb squad leaning over a chamber where a possible explosive is stored, only to have it detonate in his face. The explosion itself is repeated seven different times throughout the program. Many of the repetitions are in slow motion. The camera focuses on the gore following the accident, featuring a close-up of the man’s hand which is missing three fingers as a result of the blast. Interestingly, the excessive graphicness in this scene is followed by a later sequence in which a man, in the process of rescuing his friend from a helicopter crash, inadvertently reveals the top portion of his buttocks, which are digitally blurred. One can only assume that the creators of this program felt that there was no problem showing viewers a man having his face blown up seven different times, but that viewers needed to be protected from the image of a “butt crack.”

This show also raises concerns because several of the segues between segments are comprised of unrelated clips of excessive violence. Examples of these gratuitous images include an indoor bear attack upon an unsuspecting woman, two people falling several stories down a ladder, ski jump accidents and a bull impaling a man on its horns. None of these images are explained or put into any context; rather, they exist simply to shock and titillate.

A similarly violent show, **When Disasters Strike**, aired on Fox on 10/28/96. This show demonstrates the awesome power of nature’s forces, focusing on the aftermath of earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes and fires. One especially disturbing sequence shows a burning high-rise in Sao Paolo, Brazil. The fire completely engulfs the building in flames and traps hundreds of people inside. In their desperate attempt to escape, many of the victims hurl themselves off the building, ultimately falling to their deaths. This unusually disturbing sequence is reminiscent of films like **Faces of Death**, which purportedly show actual footage of people caught in the act of dying by falling, electrocution or suicide. It is also interesting that a very similar scenario, a burning building in a Latin American setting, is shown in a far more appropriate manner on ABC’s **I Survived a Disaster**. This program emphasizes personal recollections of the event rather than gruesome footage.

However, **When Disasters Strike** raises concerns for other reasons as well. A montage of wreckage that introduces a segment on technology is filled with out-of-context scenes of death and destruction such as automobile, plane and boat crashes, as well as people falling to their deaths from hot air balloons. The montage is accompanied by sensationalized, pulsing, tension-building music which detracts from the severity of the violence. Later, an air show disaster is highlighted, showing a collision between two planes that explode and land on the audience. The

language used by narrator Martin Sheen gives some idea of the brutality of the images that accompany it. He states simply, "The fireball instantly incinerates 61 people."

Many of the same issues are raised by Fox's **When Stunts Go Bad**, which aired on 5/14/97. This program purports to emphasize the dangers involved in daredevil stunts, but amounts to little more than sensationalized, titillating carnage. The show features botched motorcycle jumps and fiery car crashes in an attempt to appeal to the same human impulse that drives individuals to crane their necks on the highway to witness an automobile accident. Many of the acts depicted are especially disturbing. A stunt skier accidentally falls down the side of a mountain, flipping 13 times before coming to rest at the base of the incline. In another sequence, a man dies in a bungled Houdini-like stunt as he is literally buried alive under tons of dirt and cement.

Other problematic specials are centered around a different type of accidental violence. Programs such as **TV's Funniest News Outtakes** contain the type of comedic violence that has raised concerns on shows like **America's Funniest Home Videos**. **TV's Funniest News Outtakes**, which aired on Fox on 3/16/97, raises concerns because of graphic images such as a judge at a track and field meet being impaled by a javelin. Astonishingly, this life-threatening scene of graphic violence was played for laughs without any exploration of the consequences suffered by the victim.

Other examples of this type of violence are found in Fox's **Funniest of the World's Funniest Outtakes** (4/13/97) and **Oops! World's Funniest Outtakes 5** (2/23/97). The first of these shows presents a clip of a man dressed in a Scottish kilt singlehandedly attempting to hoist a log into the air. As he loses control of the log, it slips from his hands and clobbers him in the head, knocking him to the ground. He remains motionless for the remainder of the clip. **Oops! World's Funniest Outtakes 5** shows surveillance camera footage of a drunken robber's attempt to hold up a liquor store. Two female employees bludgeon him in the head with glass bottles. As the man bleeds profusely and staggers away, the studio audience watching the clip giggles with delight at this horrific act of graphic violence.

These type of reality-based specials--whether they are based on animal attacks, crime-related brutality or accidental violence--are among the most violent shows on TV. Their proliferation during the last few television seasons represents a disturbing trend in television broadcasting.

Other specials that raised concerns include:

**World's Most Dangerous...** (CBS-8/27/96)  
**World's Greatest Animal Outtakes** (Fox-1/12/97)  
**Close Call: Cheating Death II** (Fox-2/10/97)  
**When Disasters Strike II** (Fox-2/25/97)

## D. Made-for-Television Movies (MOWs) and Mini-Series

Beginning in the 1970s, movies of the week (MOWs) and mini-series became a staple of broadcast network television. Some of the most memorable moments of the past 25 years of television come from this format. Similar in many ways to theatrical films, but specifically written and produced for television, movies of the week and mini-series began as an important forum for the discussion of society's concerns and problems. Earlier mini-series and movies--such as **Roots**, **Holocaust**, **Something About Amelia**, **The Day After** and **The Burning Bed**--not only captured extremely high ratings and many Emmy awards, they also sparked valuable national discussions about racism, the attempted extermination of the Jews, incest, nuclear war and spousal abuse.

Originally intended as "events" in a television world largely comprised of series, they quickly became a regular part of television programming and have lost some of their luster. Television movies abandoned important and provocative themes and soon settled into a "disease of the week" format. At the same time, mini-series, intended to be television's blockbuster events, frequently seemed bloated in length and concept. To satisfy commercial demands and to recover some of their frequently very high production costs, two-hour television movies are stretched into three hours and four-hour movies into six.

One important difference between MOWs and theatrical films is the speed with which MOWs can be brought to the television screen. While a feature film may require one to two years of production, a MOW can be conceptualized, produced and aired in a matter of months, and even less in some cases. Now, many MOWs specialize in bringing very recent events to the small screen. Within months of the resolution of the Amy Fisher case, three networks aired television movies on this sensational story. NBC authorized a television movie on the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas and it was half-way completed before anyone knew whether the followers of David Koresh would get out alive. Whatever the outcome, the television movie would air. Fox aired **The O.J. Simpson Story** during the early days of the trial. Next year promises at least one television movie on the murder of Gianni Versace and perhaps several on the death of Princess Diana.

As discussed in the history section, MOWs and mini-series in the May 1993 sweeps period were a major source of the belief that television violence had reached new heights. Most of the concern, but not all, was focused on the television movies claiming to be "based on a true story."

We went back and looked at earlier MOWs and mini-series programming, including some shows from the May 1993 sweeps, and saw that there has been progress since then. This is an area over which the networks have total control, and advertiser and political pressure may have influenced them to make some changes in this area.

In the 1995 season we monitored 161 television movies and mini-series and in the second year, 198, an increase of 23%. This season the number shrank a bit to 184. There was no sampling with regard to television movies. Every one of the 184 movies was viewed in its entirety and examined to determine whether it raised concerns about its use of violence.



In 1995 23 television movies, or 14%, were found to raise concerns. That figure dropped modestly in 1996 to 10% (20 out of 198). This year the percentage of television movies raising concerns about violence increased slightly from 10% to 12%. Twenty-two out of 184 television movies raised concerns, a statistically insignificant change. In none of the three seasons were the relatively few television movies raising concerns considered a serious source of violence on television. Although many of these films are based on a violent premise, the elements of violence are handled well almost 90% of the time. Last season this was found to be one of the areas of broadcast television most free of problems. There was less room for improvement here than in other areas such as theatrical films, on-air promotions and children's programming. Also of note is the fact that television movies still seem to be the one type of programming for which the networks are most reluctant to use advisories. Although only a small percentage of these movies raised concerns, those that did were usually lacking advisories. This is a situation that only applied to the first three months of the season as the new television labeling system was implemented shortly after the first of the year.

The first part of this section will discuss some particularly relevant examples of made-for-television movies that raise concerns. The second part will delineate some issues and themes which run through most of the programs that raise concerns.

## *1. Leading Examples of MOWs and Mini-Series Raising Concerns*

### **John Woo's "Once a Thief" (Fox-9/29/96)**

A made-for-television movie from acclaimed Hong Kong action movie director John Woo, **Once a Thief** is as close to a big-budget action feature film as one will find in this category of television programming. Airing at 8:00 p.m. without an advisory, the film is about a three-person team of covert, international police who must stop a Hong Kong mafia kingpin from setting up shop in Vancouver before his bank money is seized by the Chinese government. Complicating their mission is the fact that two of the team are not only former members of the crime boss' organization but also his adopted children. Further complicating their mission is the fact that the two male team members both fall for their female teammate and are constantly trying to sabotage and outdo each other as they vie for her affection.

Full of highly stylized, action-packed violence, **Once a Thief** contains many of the directorial elements that have become the signature trademark of John Woo. Showcasing Woo's reputation is obviously the reason his name was placed in the title of the program. Lots of slow motion and freeze frames give the violent scenes tremendous flair, which is reinforced by the extreme number of explosions, shooting matches and scenes of hand-to-hand combat. The highly choreographed, fast-paced fight scenes are flashy and dazzling, making the action seem extremely glamorous and exciting. Much of it is also highly romanticized. All of the characters are very attractive, smooth-talking individuals. Their toughness and nonchalance enhance their appeal and trivialize the severity of the violence.

Containing 30 scenes of violence in two hours, **Once a Thief** has the highest concentration of violence of any television movie this season. Although no one scene is particularly graphic, the sheer amount, glorification and extreme excess of violence in this program make it stand out from other television movies. While most of the violence is so hyperbolic that it is cartoonish, the antiseptic treatment of consequences, in conjunction with the quantity of scenes, raises serious issues of concern.

### **Stephen King's "The Shining" Part III (ABC-5/1/97)**

Boasting the stamp of approval from the prolific horror-thriller novelist, an honor Stanley Kubrick's 1980 feature film version cannot claim, **Stephen King's "The Shining"** was one of the most highly anticipated and promoted made-for-television movies of the season. King, unhappy with Kubrick's film adaptation of his popular novel, bought back the rights and decided to produce his own film version of the book. Broken into three parts, the film stars **Wings** Stephen Weber as the lead character, Jack Torrance--a role made famous by Jack Nicholson--and Rebecca DeMornay as his wife Wendy. When Torrance takes a caretaking job at a remote, vacated hotel in Colorado, his family comes with him, hoping to rebuild the relationships that have suffered because of his history of alcoholism. However, things go awry when he becomes the target of evil spirits. The ghosts in the hotel slowly drive him insane, convincing him to kill both his wife and their son Danny.

Each segment of **Stephen King's "The Shining"** was aired at 9:00 p.m. and preceded by some sort of advisory. The first two installments were prefaced by a voice-over, stating "parental discretion advised," and a statement written in small text across the bottom of the screen, warning of intense subject matter. Only the third part was introduced by an actual advisory warning of "violent content." Even then, it was only written in very small text across the bottom of the screen and could have been easily overlooked. Surprisingly, no spoken advisory was issued for part three, despite the fact that it was by far the most violent segment. While the first two installments of this mini-series were extremely intense and very frightening, they did not raise concerns about violence. They were models of raising viewers' fears and creating a general sense of dread and unease. Although they were both dark and unsettling, very little violence actually transpired in either episode and that which did was well handled and crucial to the plot. However, in the third part, when Torrance is finally driven insane and tries to kill his wife and son, the level of violence increases sharply.

In a prolonged scene in which Torrance chases and tries to kill his wife with an oversized croquet mallet, the violence is exceedingly graphic and brutal. The impacts of several blows with the mallet are shown in graphic detail as he smashes her in the abdomen, knee and head. Each blow makes the audience wince in sympathetic pain as he bludgeons her without mercy. As she tries to escape him, she throws a croquet ball at his head, splitting his forehead open and covering his face in blood. Slowed down but not stopped, he continues his pursuit, only to have her slice open the back of his hand with a razor blade. It is remarkably disturbing, atypical of the violence which is usually found in this realm of programming and far more graphic than is necessary. This type of program, a horror-psychological thriller, can be expected to contain some form of unsettling violence. However, in this instance the overly vivid depictions of brutal, mean-spirited violence raised some important concerns.

### **Friends 'til the End (NBC-1/20/97)**

Suzanne, an obsessively competitive and mentally unstable woman, will not rest until all of her childhood disappointments have been addressed and she has been vindicated. After assuming a new identity, she targets a college classmate who upstaged her years ago at a youth talent show. Suzanne attempts to ruin her classmate's life by appropriating it as her own. In the process of executing her plan, she kills a young man who threatens to reveal her past. While the classmate discovers Suzanne's mental instability and her past (including yet another murder that she committed), the only punishment Suzanne suffers is losing to her rival again in a "Battle of the Bands"-type contest.

While the amount of violence in this film is not troubling, the graphic nature of one particular scene stands out as especially grim. In a darkened alley outside a nightclub, Suzanne kills a young man by hitting him in the head with a brick. Despite the fact that she offers a half-hearted apology to her victim for what she is about to do to him, the blow to his head is extremely brutal. Not only does the audience see a tremendous amount of blood as a result of the impact, but they actually hear his skull crack.

Another reason why this film raises concerns is the apparent lack of punishment that Suzanne suffers for her violent crimes. The viewer is left with a vague sense that perhaps Suzanne's evil deeds will catch up with her, but this is a questionable assumption at best.

Set in a college environment and starring **Beverly Hills 90210**'s Shannen Doherty, this film is very likely to attract a young audience. At the same time, parents who were not aware of the plot may have been misled by the somewhat benign title.

### **Mother, May I Sleep With Danger? (NBC-9/30/96)**

A psychologically disturbed young man kills his girlfriend when he suspects she plans to leave him. He covers up the murder and surfaces two years later in another city where he preys upon a different woman. In order to cover his tracks, he must kill the man whose identity he has stolen. His obsession with his new girlfriend becomes so intense that he refuses to let her leave his life. The girl, aided by her mother, is able to escape and confront her stalker.

This film raises serious concerns due to the sheer volume of violent scenes as well as the gratuitous incidents depicted. The antagonist commits two different brutal murders: one in which he bludgeons his girlfriend with a cutting board and another in which he beats a young man to death in the shower with the porcelain lid of a toilet tank. Some of the violent scenes (a street fight and a rape) are entirely unnecessary to advance the story.

Of further concern is that the deranged killer suffers no legal consequences for his ruthless crimes. In the final scene of the film, the audience sees him with his next apparent victim, sending the message that violence can and often does go unpunished.

This film seems aimed at a young audience because it also centers around college students and stars another **Beverly Hills 90210** star, Tori Spelling. However, the violent nature of the film is not communicated through any type of advisory.

### **Steve Martini's "Undue Influence" Part II (CBS-9/17/96)**

This is the second installment of a two-part mini-series about a lawyer defending his sister-in-law who has been accused of murdering her ex-husband's new wife. The first part of the mini-series did not raise any issues with regard to violence. With the exception of one graphic scene, there was little violence. In the final moments of the film, the viewer learns that the true culprit is the accused woman's son Danny and that she has been withholding her own alibi in an attempt to protect him. In a flashback, Danny enters the victim's bathroom, where he intends to commit suicide before her eyes. She tries to wrestle a gun from his hands, but it goes off and shoots her in the forehead. A thick stream of blood pours onto the bathroom rug as she falls backwards into the bathtub.

Some latitude may be extended to the film because the most graphic scene aired at nearly 11:00 p.m. Taken as a whole, the film shows restraint in many areas. Much of the action is played out

in a courtroom, where the past is recounted in extensive dialogue rather than being shown in potentially violent flashbacks. In addition, a few scenes of gunfire are shown realistically and appropriately. However, the final scene stands out in marked contrast to the general lack of violence featured throughout most of the film. The scene in which a person is shot through the head may shock or dismay viewers given that there is so little violence in the film up to that point.

Another element of the film that raises serious concerns is the lack of punishment for the crime. Once the lawyer learns the truth about his nephew, he and his recently acquitted sister-in-law decide that the boy has already been through enough trauma and mutually resolve to sweep the matter under the rug. It is the ultimate irony that the protagonist, who has so diligently and vocally pursued truth and justice throughout the film, decides to disregard the criminal justice system once he has discovered that the guilty party is a family member. The notion that family bonds or other values can overshadow legal principles is arguably a dangerous message to send.

### **Pretty Poison (Fox-9/24/96)**

A troubled man who has just been released from jail meets Sue Anne, a high school cheerleader, who lures him into a plot to kill her mother. Along the way, Sue Anne senselessly bludgeons a security guard in the back of the head with a wrench. As he lies on the ground with an enormous amount of blood pouring from his head, she decides that her work is not yet done. She rolls him down a hill into a river. She then proceeds to sit on his back and plunge his face repeatedly into the murky water until his flailing arms stop moving. Particularly for a film aimed at a young audience, the depiction of the murder is extremely graphic.

Sue Anne's second murder is presented in an even more intense manner. She shoots her mother at point blank range at the top of a staircase, sending her tumbling backwards. The act itself is already bloody and intense, but is made even more so by the addition of slow motion and music.

Sue Anne's sensuality and coyness enable her to pin both crimes on the ex-con, fooling the entire town into believing that she is innocent. The audience finally learns that Sue Anne murdered her mother so that she could be with the mother's boyfriend.

Perhaps most disturbing of all, the film concludes with Sue Anne entirely escaping punishment. Given that the female lead is a high school cheerleader and the film's star is **Melrose Place's** Grant Show, the film appears to be aimed at a youthful, female audience. In light of the intended demographic, reinforcing the idea that good looks and a devious mind can successfully accomplish even the most sinister scheme is especially troubling.

### **Detention: Siege at Johnson High (ABC-5/19/97)**

Jason, a young man bitter over what his life has become since he failed out of high school, returns to the school to seek revenge. He goes on a killing spree, making sure to murder the one teacher who initially encouraged but ultimately flunked him. A hostage situation results when

Jason sequesters a classroom full of students at gunpoint. After bargaining with the police over the phone, Jason finally releases the hostages and surrenders himself.

Although this film aired with an advisory, it raises issues for a variety of reasons. The most intense scene shows Jason entering the school, randomly terrorizing students and teachers with his shotgun. This especially violent scene lasts well over two minutes. Although the impact of Jason's bullets is not actually seen, the severe consequences of the gunfire are shown. The most gratuitous image is an extended close-up of a victim's blood-soaked hand. Most disturbing, though, is the accompanying soundtrack. Not only does the music serve to intensify the action, but it attempts to justify the insanity of the killer's behavior through the desperate lyrics: "Is anybody listening?" A strangely dichotomous scene results. On one hand, the audience is witnessing powerful images of multiple murders, but on the other hand is lured by the music into feeling a sense of excitement about what is happening, or at least a certain sympathy for the perpetrator.

Sympathy for the killer grows as the film continues. The plot tends to portray Jason more as a misunderstood victim of unfortunate circumstances than as a cold-blooded killer. It is not inconceivable that young viewers, drawn to the film by the high school setting, might see a bit of their own troubled adolescence in Jason.

While it is clear that the story is driven by the violent attack upon the school and subsequent stand-off, there is much room for restraint in the way the story is presented. The violence in the film clearly exceeds what was necessary to tell the story.

### **The Dukes of Hazzard: Reunion! (CBS-4/25/97)**

The cast of the old TV series reunites in Hazzard County only to discover the nefarious plans of Mama Max to convert the swamp into an amusement park. Bo, Luke and Daisy Duke join their other old friends to unravel Mama Max's scheme. The tone of this film is true to the original series, but it is not without scenes that raise concerns about violence.

Not only does the film contain fight scenes that are unnecessarily prolonged, but the violence is exaggerated and antiseptic. Several different bad guys are victims of potentially deadly violence, but emerge relatively unharmed. On two separate occasions, a character is thrown through a pane of glass, yet he suffers only minor injuries.

Beyond these concerns, the violence is also laced with comedic elements that serve to downplay its seriousness. At the same time, the film glorifies violence perpetrated by the good guys. In one instance, the Duke brothers instigate a bar fight simply because they are offended by a remark made to them about their car.

All of this violent material is made especially accessible to a juvenile audience by airing the film at 8:00 p.m., rather than the more appropriate start time of 9:00 p.m.

### **Code Name: Wolverine (Fox-12/3/96)**

En route to a family vacation in Italy, an ex-Navy SEAL named Harry Gordini accidentally intercepts a suitcase full of illegal drugs. The drug lord to whom the suitcase belongs kidnaps Gordini's wife and son. Gordini becomes impatient with the way the police are handling the case and decides to take matters into his own hands. He rescues his family and ultimately leads the authorities to the drug lord. However, in a final frustrating twist, the criminal is released to become a DEA informant.

This final plot twist is not an inconsequential one since the release of the villain supports the idea that crime can and does pay. After all the terror inflicted by the drug lord, he is treated like a king by the government. In addition, this film contains several violent scenes that are extremely intense for broadcast television. One scene that raises serious concerns shows Gordini swimming out to and boarding a yacht where his family is being held hostage. He kills several guards. The depictions are especially graphic. His first victim is shot at close range with a spear gun. The viewer sees the spear protruding from both the front and back of the man's torso. Another victim is killed with a brutal twist of the head that snaps his neck. Even Gordini's wife shows her killer instinct by plunging a knife into the back of yet another of the henchmen.

Despite advisories about the film's violent content, each break into or out of a commercial features clips from the film that entice viewers by playing up its violent and sexual content, without providing any context. As a whole, the film also raises issues of tonnage. So much of the plot involves violence that, without it, there would not be much of a story.

### **The Last Don Parts I, II & III (CBS-5/11/97, 5/13/97 and 5/14/97)**

Shown during the May "sweeps" period and heavily promoted by the network, this three-part mini-series was one of CBS's biggest television events of the season. Based on the novel by Mario Puzo and very much in the style of **The Godfather**, the film tells the story of one of the last great mafia families, the Clericuzios. Danny Aiello plays the title character, a man who is vehemently opposed to his grandchildren becoming killers and adopting his lifestyle. However, despite the Don's struggle to guarantee the security of his family, his grandchildren ultimately get caught up in the family business.

Any film about organized crime must be given some degree of latitude to deal with the harsh realities of this subculture. Credit is due to the network for airing the film with multiple advisories about its violent content--twice in the first two episodes and once during the third episode. Nevertheless, many of the images in the film are extremely intense and graphic.

There are an enormous number of murders throughout the story. Some of them are handled well, but several of them are unusually explicit. One scene in the first installment shows the extermination of an entire rival mob family, following the wedding of the rival family's youngest son. After shooting several guards in order to gain entry to the compound, a group of Clericuzios enters the house and approaches a gathering of several family members in their living room. The Clericuzio mob shoots them all dead at point blank range. Heading upstairs, they storm into the

bedroom of the ailing rival Don. The Don holds a pillow up to his face before they shoot him in the head. The murderers then proceed to the honeymoon suite of the bride and groom. The groom is yanked from his bed, forced to his knees and then ruthlessly strangled. The image of the strangulation is especially vivid and is brought back in a flashback later in the film. Although this scene sets into motion a number of important plot twists, its depiction is much more graphic than is necessary.

In fact, much of the violence seems more like that typically found in feature films. A scene in the second installment of the mini-series shows the Don's evil grandson Dante mercilessly knife a small-time hustler. As the hustler is restrained by bodyguards, Dante repeatedly plunges a knife into the victim's abdomen. A wider shot shows a seemingly endless gush of blood from his abdomen before the victim collapses and dies.

Approximately ten minutes into the same episode, another of the Don's youngest relatives, Cross, "makes his bones" by committing his first murder. He approaches the parked car of his victim and taps on the window. After the driver lowers his window, Cross puts a pistol to the man's forehead and fires several times. A view of Cross shows his face being showered with more and more of the victim's blood with each consecutive bullet.

This type of intense violence is peppered throughout the entire film, raising concerns about all three installments. While the story is a compelling one, the level of graphic violence raises serious issues of concern.



## ***2. Additional MOWs and Mini-Series Raising Concerns***

In addition to the those listed above, the following television movies and mini-series were found to raise concerns about the use of violence:

**Alien Nation: The Enemy Within** (Fox-11/12/96)

**Dark Angel** (Fox-9/10/96)

**Her Costly Affair** (NBC-10/28/96)

**Hijacked: Flight 285** (ABC-1/26/97)

**Home Invasion** (NBC-1/3/97)

**The Lottery** (NBC-9/29/96)

**The Odyssey Part II** (NBC-5/19/97)

**Stranger in My Home** (CBS-2/11/97)

**Sweet Dreams** (NBC-9/16/96)

**Walker, Texas Ranger: Sons of Thunder** (CBS-5/4/97)

## ***3. Issues Raised by Television Movies and Mini-Series***

### **a. Network Television Has More Control Over Made-for-Television Movies than It Does Over Theatrical Films**

The networks have control over television movies from their inception. They decide whether or not to make the movie, they approve the script and they choose whether to include or remove offensive or gratuitous scenes. Theatrical film is a different medium with different types of content and is less accessible to young children. It thus has a greater opportunity to feature more violent fare. Many violent theatricals aired on television need to be edited to meet the standards of that medium, but they cannot always be cut, nor have their scenes changed, without significantly impairing the film's plot coherence. Examples of such films include **Hard Target**, **Terminator 2**, **Under Siege** and **Cliffhanger**. This being the case, it is debatable whether the most violent theatrical films, whether edited or not, are at all appropriate for the broad medium of network television. On the other hand, network television has complete control over television movies and thus is entirely responsible for their content. It is not surprising that the quantity and degree of the violence in television movies is considerably less than that found in theatrical films shown on television.

## **b. Lack of Advisories**

The last two reports have pointed out that the broadcast networks were less willing to use advisories for television movies than for almost any other form of programming. Granted, it is easier for networks to use an advisory for theatrical films that are made by someone else and then retrofitted to television than for programming that is created by the network itself. Both reports called for more use of advisories in television movies.

Some broadcasters feel that the television content labeling system that went into effect early in 1997 served as an adequate substitute for advisories. This position was strengthened for those networks that adopted the revised labeling system with content descriptors on October 1. The first three months of the 1996-97 television season were examined using the same standard applicable in the previous two seasons, namely that advisories serve an important function. Those three months demonstrated a continuing need for more advisories in the television movie area.

Only in a handful of instances did the three original networks introduce a made-for-television movie with a violence advisory. Even in these few cases, the advisories were not always readily apparent, instead only appearing across the bottom of a title screen in obscure, fine print.

In the past, the Fox network has seemed more willing both to preface their television movies with advisories and then to run them several times during the program. Due to the network's lack of a 10:00 p.m. time slot, they must air films at 8:00 p.m., rather than at 9:00 p.m. as the traditional networks do. This season, however, Fox did not use advisories quite as liberally. In fact, there were some very surprising instances in which films were aired on Fox without an advisory. **John Woo's "Once a Thief"** was one of the most violent television movies this season, containing as much violence as many theatrical action films, yet it was not preceded by an advisory.

## **c. TV Movies Contain More Brutal and Graphic Violence than Most Television Series**

Perhaps in an effort to emulate their theatrical counterparts, made-for-television movies frequently include greater amounts of graphic and brutal violence than are found in most television series. With a few notable exceptions, television series rarely feature graphic violence. However, a few television movies this season contained such images as soldiers impaled with spears, a woman shot in the forehead at point blank range, a bodyguard shot through the chest with a spear gun, necks snapped and a woman bludgeoned with an oversized croquet mallet. The topics of many television movies are similar to those of feature films, such as murder, abuse and stalking, and thus lend themselves to some graphic and vicious depictions of violence. Scenes of violence in CBS's **The Last Don** mini-series were reminiscent of those from **The Godfather** in terms of their graphicness and sheer brutality. NBC's **The Lottery** is loosely based on one of the most famous short stories in American literature. In this movie, during a struggle between two men, one is impaled on a spike. Although the actual fight is largely obscured as a swinging lamp casts light on and off the altercation, its outcome is clear: the spike protrudes from the loser's

bloody chest. This type of graphic and savage violence is rarely, if ever, seen in a television series.

#### **d. Ominous and Threatening Titles Promising Violence**

In the past, a large number of made-for-television movies bore ominous or threatening titles implying that the program would be violent, whether or not it actually was. It is readily apparent from a list of the past two seasons' television movies that many of the titles are filled with violence-portending words such as "dangerous," "killer," "fatal" and "death." This season, there was a modest decrease in such menacing titles. However, foreboding terms such as "murder" and "deadly" were still evident. Examples of such deliberately foreboding titles are: **Murder in My Mind**, **In Cold Blood**, **Touched By Evil**, **A Kiss So Deadly**, **A Deadly Vision**, **Murder at My Door** and **Murder Live!** Another interesting point is that, despite their titles, none of the above films raised issues in terms of their presentation of violence. While this is not a terribly important issue with regard to the debate over television violence, it is interesting to note the strategy that it suggests. The people who make these films do not seem to believe that they can capture viewers' attention without making the movie sound dangerous.

#### **e. Misleading Titles**

The first year of this study revealed several examples of titles that were misleading in terms of their violent content. Such innocuous, or even warmhearted-sounding titles as **Gramps** or **Falling For You** conjure images of tender stories of family or romance. Instead, the first was an extremely violent tale of a deranged old man who goes on a killing spree. The second was the story of a serial killer who throws women out of building windows. Last season, there were no examples of such misleading titles. This season, there were two new examples of such titles, **The Perfect Mother** and **Friends 'til the End**. **The Perfect Mother** is the story of an overprotective mother who disapproves of her daughter-in-law and uses her mafia connections to have her murdered. **Friends 'til the End** tells the tale of an insanely jealous college co-ed who tries to take over another student's identity and kills a man in the process. Obviously chosen for their dark irony, it is conceivable that the titles of these films could lead viewers to believe these were sentimental stories of familial relationships and undying friendship instead of tales of murder and betrayal.

#### **f. Is It Really Based on a True Story?**

Many television movies proudly fly the banner "Based on a True Story." They do not mention, however, that many of these movies are, at best, only loosely based on true stories. A preponderance of these "true" stories seem to be about shockingly horrific and depraved atrocities that people commit. Very seldom are these stories about the triumph of the human spirit or heroic deeds. For every story of an inspirational teacher or parent, there are tens of tales about crazed killers, sociopathic personalities or obsessed stalkers. The inclusion of such qualifiers as "Based on a True Story" only reinforces Gerbner's "mean world syndrome,"

according to which people continually exposed to media portrayals of violence perceive society to be much more dangerous and violent than it really is.

#### **g. Violence is Sometimes the Topic of the Movie**

In some instances, the entire premise of a television movie is based on an act of violence. A large percentage of the films in this genre are predicated upon some sort of violent criminal activity. The world of some television movies is a world of murderers, psychotics, stalkers and abusers. Although violence can be a legitimate and frequently constructive story device when treated responsibly, we occasionally found ourselves asking why this particular violent story was chosen as the subject of a film. Arguably, violent acts such as the Heaven's Gate mass suicide or the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman are so inherently fascinating and say so much about our society that they merit dramatization in television movies. However, some subjects featured in television movies during the 1996-97 season seemed to have no relevance or significance. They just seemed to be sensationalized stories of criminal acts.

One sometimes gets the impression that the people who make these movies are searching for the most abysmal and sordid crimes that can be found in the depths of the human experience. Seldom do these stories inspire or uplift. They are depressingly detailed accounts of the worst people in society in the worst possible situations. Examples of this include **The Secret She Carried**, **Every Woman's Dream** and **When Secrets Kill**.

One particular type of violent story in this genre seems to emerge time and time again. Several different television movies that were monitored this season revolved around a deranged stalker hunting an unsuspecting victim. **A Kiss So Deadly**; **Mother, May I Sleep With Danger?**; **Friends 'til the End** and **Her Costly Affair** are all examples of this recurring storyline.

#### **h. Unpunished Violence ("Getting Away With Murder")**

A message conveyed in many different television movies this season is that evil deeds do not necessarily get punished. In the world of some television movies, if one is clever enough or has been through enough hardship already, one can quite literally get away with murder.

This theme is found in Part II of **Undue Influence**, when a young murderer is let off the hook when his mother and uncle agree to ignore the crime he has committed. The decision reflects the belief that the young man has already endured an abundance of mental suffering. Although one could argue that the mother and the uncle have good intentions, the film still communicates the idea that it is acceptable for some vicious acts to go unpunished.

The *femme fatale* in **Pretty Poison** makes the point that if a woman is devious and willing to exploit her sexuality, she can commit multiple murders without penalty. The same moral could be extracted from **Friends 'til the End**. Lest any male viewers feel at a disadvantage, they can learn how to get away with murder by studying the moves of the lead male character in **Mother, May I Sleep With Danger?**, who evades arrest after committing a series of murders and other crimes.

Admittedly, this may be realistic. Many real-life crimes go unsolved or, even if solved, unpunished. One can only speculate that the crimes in these movies are left unpunished as a way to add a provocative plot twist to the end of a film. But added excitement must be weighed against the dangerous messages being sent to viewers.

#### **i. Slow Motion**

The use of slow motion is obviously not exclusive to television movies. Its use has already been examined in the preceding discussion of several television series. But its relevance to television movies, where it raises many of the same issues, is addressed here. Although directors would argue that it is an artistic device used to make scenes more dramatic, what it often does is just prolong and emphasize the violent act.

This technique was heavily used in television movies last season and was commonly found this season as well. Among those films that used slow motion or other cinematic techniques to prolong or accentuate scenes of violence were **Pretty Poison**, **Walker Texas Ranger: Sons of Thunder**, **The Dukes of Hazzard Reunion**, **The Lottery**, **Home Invasion**, **Her Costly Affair**, **When Secrets Kill**, **Quicksilver Highway**, **Buried Secrets**, **Jack Reed: Death and Vengeance**, **Night Sins** and **Sleeping With the Devil**.

#### **j. Appeals to a Youth Audience**

In light of all the violent content that has been observed in television movies, one especially disturbing trend is the apparent targeting of a young audience. Certain television movies are aimed at a predominantly teenage crowd by virtue of their settings and casts. Of those television movies that raised concerns, **Mother, May I Sleep With Danger?**; **Friends 'til the End**; **Detention: Siege at Johnson High** and **Pretty Poison** all take place within the context of either a high school or college environment and feature young celebrities from popular youth-oriented shows. Three of these four films, as well as others such as **Sweet Dreams**, star current or former cast members of **Beverly Hills 90210** and **Melrose Place**.

## E. Theatrical Motion Pictures on Broadcast Network Television

While made-for-television movies were only introduced in the 1960s, theatrical films--films first released in movie theaters--have been an important and essential part of programming content since the beginning of television. Most channels could not afford enough original content to fill a 24-hour schedule. Many went off the air around midnight, but others filled their schedule with old motion pictures that had been sitting in studio vaults. Before television, motion picture studios had nothing to do with their films once they finished their run at the box office. Only a few films like **Gone With the Wind**, **The Wizard of Oz** or the Disney animation classics could be re-released every generation or so. Today, a motion picture studio can sell its films to cable, home video, airlines or television. But back in the 1950s television represented the only real opportunity for studios to further distribute their products.

Thus, theatrical films became an important part of television. They were high-quality productions, the costs and risks of which had already been assumed by the studios. While a blockbuster film would be expensive to license on television, a network knew it was money well spent because the film had already proven itself with the audience. This was in direct contrast to expensive, unproven original television shows, the production costs of which were lost if they did not attract an audience. Theatrical films had already been made, represented substantially less risk and had an established reputation, making them popular with television programmers.

The situation began to change after the emergence of cable television in the 1970s. Before the advent of cable, a film would normally find its way to broadcast television about three years after it was released in theaters. The big films would go first to prime time network television, then to prime time local television and eventually to late night or afternoon on the local stations.

Starting in the 1970s, cable inserted itself between the theaters and networks in the distribution process. HBO began as a pay cable service in 1972, dedicated to running theatrical films shortly after they were seen in theaters. Rather than having to wait several years, the pay cable audience could see films only months after they opened in theaters. Furthermore, as a pay service supported in its entirety by subscribers, HBO ran its recent films uncut and uninterrupted. All of the sex, violence and language of the original could be seen and heard on the home screen, and there were no commercial breaks to interrupt the flow of the story.

Pay cable moved down the distribution chain when home video became a significant force. Pay cable was forced to take theatrical films after they were available for rental or purchase, but still acquired and aired them before they appeared on broadcast television. Subsequently, pay-per-view pushed cable down another notch. Today, the broadcast networks only get a theatrical after it has been seen in the theaters and on airlines, pay-per-view, home video and pay cable. There are very few exceptions. In May of 1995, NBC ran Steven Spielberg's **Jurassic Park** less than two years after it was seen in theaters. NBC, by paying a substantial premium (allegedly \$60 million), was able to bypass pay cable in the distribution sequence. This year NBC went back to

Steven Spielberg and paid for the rights to air his Oscar-winning film of the Holocaust, **Schindler's List**. Not only did Spielberg again bypass cable to go directly to network television, but this time his extraordinary film was shown with only the most minor of cuts and practically without commercial interruption. NBC made the airing of the film a major event in the February 1997 "sweeps" period. Recently, ABC paid a large sum for the rights to Paramount's theatrical film **Mission: Impossible**. Obviously, the networks cannot pay these prices for more than a handful of films.

The fact that broadcast television gets a theatrical film so late in the distribution process means that when a big film comes to television (e.g., **Terminator 2**, **Lethal Weapon**) a substantial portion of the potential audience already has seen the film one or more times in the theater, on home video or on cable. By the time George Lucas' blockbuster **Star Wars** was scheduled on broadcast television, it had been seen by so many people in so many different media that its television ratings were unimpressive. This would have been unthinkable ten years earlier.

Theatrical films represent a real challenge for the broadcast networks that air them. Almost all other programming in their schedule is either created by them or by others who must work with them and adhere to their standards. With all other programming except theatrical films, the networks decide whether it gets made, who makes it, how it is made and edited, and what it looks like. The networks apply their own standards to language, sex and violence. Those who create programming for television know these standards and make decisions accordingly.

Theatrical film is a completely different medium with different standards and First Amendment treatment. The 1952 Miracle decision established motion pictures as a significant medium for the communication of ideas protected by the First Amendment. Currently motion picture content is not regulated by the government. While protected by the First Amendment, television, because of its use of the scarce electromagnetic spectrum and its accessibility to children, is subject to governmental regulation. There is no Federal Communication Commission for the movie industry. The film rating system, administered by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) under the direction of Jack Valenti, is completely independent of the government. Film, while in theaters or on home video, is not subject to the indecency regulations applied to broadcasting. With few exceptions, filmmakers are free to include whatever type of content they want.

In contrast to theatrical film, broadcast television shapes its original programming to the unique world of commercial television. Theatrical films shown on television have to be retrofitted to meet the standards of the much stricter television world. The broadcast practices and standards of the television industry are irrelevant to the production of a motion picture. But when the motion picture is scheduled for television, those standards must be applied after the fact rather than during the production process.

Television networks buy popular films filled with graphic sex, violence and language and then must reshape them for television. As we have come to realize in our monitoring of theatrical films, changing them for broadcast without destroying their artistic integrity is a significant challenge.

The 1995 report on television violence found that theatrical films shown on television contained the greatest concentration of violence in general as well as the greatest concentration of violence that raised concerns. There is a progressive increase in the amount and severity of violence in moving from television series to television movies to theatrical films. This is not surprising considering the greater freedom that film has to appeal to young adults less bothered by this content. In 1995, 42% of the theatricals films shown on television raised concerns about how they depicted violence. Our recommendation was that broadcasters reconsider which films are suitable for network television. Some films with well over 30 scenes of intense violence could not be adequately edited for television, though broadcast practices and standards departments put in a great effort. The network is faced with the dilemma of either removing the worst moments of the worst scenes--thereby leaving a film still full of intense violence--or removing so much of the violence that the film becomes incomprehensible and unsatisfying.

Theatrical films present a problem that is more difficult and takes longer to correct than any other television programming. As stated earlier, this is the only type of television programming over which the broadcasters have no control during the production process. Furthermore, motion pictures are purchased, often in packages, as much as several years ahead of the time they are aired. Many of the theatrical films shown on television this season were acquired several years ago at a cost of many millions of dollars. It is unrealistic to expect commercial broadcasters to refrain from airing such expensive films which they were contractually committed to purchase. Considering this fact, it was impressive and encouraging to see the percentage of films that raised concerns drop from 42% in 1995 to 29% in 1996.

This year, the percentage of theatrical films raising concerns increased slightly to 30%, a statistically insignificant rise. In 1995 we monitored 118 theatrical films on the four broadcast networks. In 1996 this number dipped modestly to 113 and this year it rose to 114. (We examined many more films in syndication, on cable and on home video, which will be compared and discussed in later sections.) Therefore, we feel that although theatrical films still account for the bulk of troublesome violence on television and that there is still room for improvement, the gains made last year have not been lost. Furthermore, over 55% of the films that raised concerns this year are repeats from earlier seasons. More precisely, only 15 of the 34 theatrical films raising concerns this season ran for the first time in 1996-97. It is our hope that as the licenses for these films expire, the percentage of new films purchased by the networks that raise issues of violence will drop even more.

While recognizing some improvement, there are still problems to be examined and corrected with regard to theatrical films. Much of the violence in series and television movies was only of concern because of the time period in which it was shown or because it was too graphic or gratuitous. The number of violent scenes in theatricals and the highly graphic nature of that violence are unlike anything else on television. Some films, which contain several scenes of violence, can be judiciously edited to easily air on television without concern. Many films, however, have so many scenes of violence that they could not possibly be edited enough to run on broadcast television without raising concerns.

In the remainder of this section, we will examine several theatrical films aired on the broadcast networks this past season that raised considerable concerns about violence. Then we will list the



rest of the theatrical films which raised concerns and, finally, we will examine issues arising from theatrical films.

## ***1. Leading Examples of Theatrical Films Raising Concerns***

### **Under Siege** (ABC-10/3/96, CBS-5/21/97)

This action movie, starring martial arts expert and actor Steven Seagal, has aired each of the past three seasons, three times on ABC and once on CBS. The film tells the story of a group of terrorists, led by Tommy Lee Jones and Gary Busey, who take a United States battleship and its crew hostage. Seagal's character is the ship's cook and an ex-Navy SEAL who foils the terrorists' plot and prevents them from using the ship's nuclear missiles.

Based on a violent premise, it is not surprising that **Under Siege** contains a high number of violent scenes. Most of these scenes contain prolonged exchanges of gunfire and show Seagal using his martial arts skills to dispense with terrorists. However, there are also various explosions and other sorts of violent conflict, including a climactic knife fight between Seagal and Jones. The motion picture studio which produced **Under Siege** did not have to be concerned about the large number of violent acts because it was made for a theatrical audience and was rated "R."

Both networks made efforts to try to pare down the violence in this film, shortening scenes significantly and cutting out others entirely. However, with over 30 scenes of violence still remaining, it is clear that only the most graphic moments of the most violent scenes could effectively be removed without rendering the movie incomprehensible to viewers. Virtually no amount of editing could make a film like this appropriate for broadcast television. The very concept behind this film is to exhibit and celebrate violent action and thus too many extremely violent encounters were central to its story. To edit out all or even most of them would totally compromise the picture's design and undoubtedly disappoint Seagal fans in the process.

### **Tombstone** (Fox-9/17/96)

Airing at 8:00 p.m. with several advisories, **Tombstone** is a film about legendary lawman Wyatt Earp. Earp, played by Kurt Russell, and his two brothers leave law enforcement to head west and make their fortunes in Tombstone, Arizona. Upon their arrival, they repeatedly clash with a group of outlaw cowboys that dominates the town and keeps its inhabitants living in constant fear. Compelled to help the innocent townspeople, Earp's two brothers decide to take up peacekeeping again and, despite Earp's protests, accept posts as U.S. Marshals. However, after the cowboys kill one of his brothers and cripple the other, Earp is drawn into the fight to avenge his brother's murder.

In an effort to make this two-and-a-half-hour film fit into a two-hour time slot, and to remove some of the violence, Fox edited **Tombstone** heavily. Many scenes were significantly shortened and others were cut out entirely, almost to the point of making the film difficult to follow. In a Western, pistol-packing gunslingers and shootouts are to be expected. To their credit, the people at the Fox network did an admirable job of removing the most graphic elements of scenes. However, approximately an hour-and-a-half into the broadcast, when Earp decides to take on the cowboys, he goes on a killing spree, gunning down numerous villains in a collection of violent

scenes. The last half hour of the film amounts to a non-stop series of gunfights. Blasting away at the roguish outlaws, Earp and his sidekick Doc Holiday are extremely glorified. At the film's end, in its edited version, it contained 24 scenes of violence, many of which were gunfights that last several minutes. Despite the fact that throughout the film Earp tries to avoid conflict, he ultimately is forced to resort to violence and does so with tremendous zeal. Although the impacts of the gunshots were largely edited out, sparing viewers from the most graphic and gory images in the film, the glorification and sheer amount of violence are enough to raise concerns, especially in light of its 8:00 p.m. starting time.

### **The Mask** (Fox-4/29/97)

One of the films that catapulted Jim Carrey into superstardom, **The Mask** was one of Fox's most promoted films this season. In fact, it was so big that the network centered an entire week of programming around it, adding special effects similar to those in the movie to some of their staple sitcoms. In the film, mild-mannered Stanley Ipkus finds a magical mask. When worn, it unleashes his id and transforms him into a loud-mouthed, magical cartoon character, "The Mask." As *The Mask*, Stanley crosses a group of mobsters and incurs their leader's wrath. When the mask falls into the lead mobster's hands, Stanley must stop him from using its powers for evil. In the end, Stanley foils the bad guys, saves the girl of his dreams and realizes that he does not need the mask to be a success.

A hugely popular film that grossed over 100 million dollars at the box office, **The Mask** is replete with bathroom humor and cartoon antics, targeting a young audience. (The film was later turned into a children's cartoon on Saturday morning.) As it appeared on Fox, the film showed few signs of editing. A few instances of off-color language were omitted and one scene of violence was shortened. However, despite the editing, this latter scene of violence still raises concerns. In the scene, the mobster, Dorian, who is turned into a monster by the mask, attempts to take over the local mob kingpin's racket. Dorian and his henchmen barge into a charity event held at a popular nightclub owned and operated by the mafia boss. They exchange many rounds of gunfire with the boss' henchmen, shooting several of them. When the shooting stops, Dorian, made invulnerable to the bullets by the mask, challenges the boss, who responds by firing many shots into Dorian's torso.

The number of gunshots has obviously been lessened in an effort to reduce the amount of violence in the scene. However, Dorian is still shot six times. Unfazed and using his super powers, Dorian is able to spit the bullets back at the boss, riddling his body and sending him flying backwards in slow motion. In light of the humorous tone of the film, it is a surprisingly graphic and malevolent depiction of violence. The scene continues as Stanley confronts Dorian and fights him for control of the mask. Despite being extremely exaggerated and peppered with funny lines, the fight is still very brutal and many of the blows are especially fierce. It is also quite long, lasting several minutes. Because of the film's reputation as a comedy, particularly one aimed at young or pre-teen children, this violence raises concerns due to its intensity, maliciousness and graphicness. Although most of the 28 scenes of violence were slapstick in nature and did not raise concerns, the scene in question could have benefitted from further editing.

### **The Specialist** (ABC-4/24/97)

A woman enlists the help of an explosives specialist in order to avenge the deaths of her parents who were the victims of a mob hit. The specialist himself becomes a target of a former CIA buddy who is now on the mob's payroll. Not surprisingly, there is no shortage of explosions in this film, many of them heavy on special effects. What is noticeably absent, however, are realistic consequences of the explosions. In one scene, two main characters become the latest victims of the specialist's handiwork. They are together in a one-room cabana when a bomb goes off destroying the entire structure. Yet, as their bodies are removed from the wreckage, the only apparent consequences amount to nothing more than some bruises and a bit of soot on their clothing. Although one of the victims is killed by the explosion, the other survives the blast and appears only a few scenes later, apparently unharmed.

In addition to the unrealistic consequences and the intensity of certain scenes, the tonnage of violence raises concerns. The number of violent acts is quite high and much of the story rests upon the powerful explosions plotted by the protagonist. The level of violence far exceeds that which is normally seen on network television.

The film stars Sylvester Stallone and Sharon Stone, whose characters are drawn together by her desire to exact revenge as well as by their mutual attraction. Their relationship is portrayed as sexy and exciting, serving to glorify the numerous violent acts that they commit. After all of the carnage, inflicted primarily by Stallone's character, the couple blissfully drives off together in their convertible. This is a clear case where the perpetrator of most of the film's violence is portrayed as heroic and even sexy, making the violence itself glamorous.

Despite the fact that **The Specialist** aired with an advisory about its violent content, many scenes are very intense for broadcast television.

### **Three Ninjas** (NBC-9/7/96)

This comical, kid-oriented movie tells the story of three young brothers who learn ninja skills from their grandfather. They put these skills to use when they are kidnapped by the grandfather's evil former partner. The children are ultimately rescued through a combination of their own actions, the efforts of their grandfather and the work of their FBI agent father.

This film raises serious concerns. The theme of the film as well as its broadcast time of 8:00 p.m. on a Saturday night--rather than the more traditional 9:00 p.m.--suggest that it is primarily intended for a pre-teen audience. However, this film contains an inordinately large number of violent scenes and was aired without any type of advisory.

Most of the violent scenes also raise concerns because of the way in which they are presented. The violence is largely cartoonish, dubbed with silly sound effects (very much in the style of **The Three Stooges**) and accompanied by comical music. The net effect is to trivialize the

vicious acts that are being committed by very young children. The violence could also encourage imitation by young viewers by failing to show any consequences and by presenting the violent behavior as “cool” or fun.

A prolonged scene, very reminiscent of **Home Alone**, shows the three boys antagonizing their potential kidnappers. The boys combine their ninja skills and the common household items available to them to cause great harm and injury to a threesome of bumbling crooks. By the time the boys are finished, one of the bad guys has had his fingers slammed in a grand piano, another has had CDS hurled at him as if they were Chinese throwing stars and the third has nearly been strangled with a necktie used as a makeshift noose.

It is even more disturbing that, after having established this tone of comedic violence throughout the entire film, the final showdown between the grandfather and the villain is especially intense and aggressive. In surprising contrast to the earlier playful depictions of violence, the climax contains much more dramatic images involving a sword, guns and even a pepper bomb. The scene is not graphic or gory, but is likely to be too severe for some of the youngest audience members.

A great deal of the story seems to be concerned with showing violence for its own sake. In fact, so much of the plot centers around violence, that removing it would destroy the continuity of the film. This film is arguably inappropriate for broadcast in any form, but at the very least this film should have aired with an advisory warning of its violent content.

### **True Lies** (Fox-2/11/97)

This big-budget action film tells the tale of Harry Tasker, a man who lives a double life as a secret agent and a mild-mannered computer salesman and husband. Suspecting his wife of infidelity, Harry tries to inject some excitement and romance into a seemingly dull marriage. His botched attempt ensnares his wife and daughter in a web of terrorism and reveals his secret life to his family. In the end, Harry and his wife manage to prevent a nuclear disaster and strengthen their marriage in the process.

Some credit should be given to the network for its diligent airing of advisories throughout the film. Nonetheless, this film raises serious issues for several reasons. In order to accommodate its long running time, this film was shown at 7:30 p.m., a time that makes the movie especially accessible to young viewers. In addition, many of the violent scenes are unusually prolonged. One of the most violent scenes aired before 8:00 p.m. and lasted nearly eight minutes. The scene begins with a brutal attack in a public restroom, involving automatic weapons and vicious hand-to-hand combat. At one point in the scene, Harry rips a hand dryer from the wall and smashes it into his opponent’s face. The man is rendered nearly unconscious, but Harry finishes the job by slamming his head into a urinal and leaving him face down in the pool of water at its bottom. The scene continues outdoors with showers of gunfire and an extended chase involving a motorcycle and even a horse.

Also troubling is that nearly all of the violence is entirely antiseptic and often glibly treated. In one scene, a terrorist fires an automatic weapon at Harry's partner in the middle of a crowded street. With only a skinny lightpost as protection, Harry's partner and several spectators surrounding him are left completely untouched by the countless bullets discharged in their direction. This and many other scenes show either no consequences of the violence depicted or, at most, unrealistic consequences.

This film features the type of over-the-top action violence that has become the trademark of its star, Arnold Schwarzenegger. However, it is these same type of images that raise concerns.

### **Interview With the Vampire (NBC-5/3/97)**

Based on Anne Rice's popular novel, this film tells the story of two vampires who prowl around eighteenth century New Orleans, killing unsuspecting victims in their quest to ward off mortality. The story is a compelling one, and given that it centers around vampires, a certain amount of violence is to be expected. However, many of the graphic and prolonged scenes in the film raise concerns.

One of the most gruesome of the many bloody scenes in the film shows a young vampire, Claudia, slitting the throat of one of the other vampires. This brutal murder is followed by the image of an enormous puddle of the victim's blood flowing across the carpet.

Few other films this season feature the types of images seen here. Violence against and perpetrated by children is shown throughout the movie, as is violence involving animals (sucking blood from rats, for instance). Another issue raised by the film is its sporadic coupling of violence and sex. A few of the kills made by the vampires occur within a somewhat sexually arousing context.

A message immediately preceding the film states that the movie has been edited for content. However, the number of violent scenes still seems inordinately large. More extensive editing would be necessary to allow the film to air without raising concerns.

### **On Deadly Ground (NBC-9/22/96)**

Steven Seagal plays a American Indian named Forrest Taft, working for an Alaskan oil refinery. After Taft learns that a series of oil spills are not accidents, but rather the result of illegal procedures and fraud, he wages war against the company. Ultimately, Taft blows up the refinery to put an end to the situation.

The heavy-handed, anti-corporate message and peace-seeking culture with which Seagal attempts to affiliate himself in this film ironically clashes with the enormous amount of gratuitous violence. The film is loaded with violent images such as gunfire, martial arts combat and a seemingly limitless number of explosions. A great deal of the violence is also glorified by very extensive use of slow motion effects.

This film also raises concerns because violence is used in situations where peaceful alternatives exist. Rather than utilizing legal procedures available to him, Seagal's character resorts to terrorism to achieve his goals and faces no consequences. Moreover, many violent scenes are not connected to the plot, but rather seem to exist simply for entertainment value. A bar fight led by Seagal's character is both graphic and prolonged, for no apparent reason other than to torture a bar bully. This film did air with an advisory.

### **Home Alone 2: Lost In New York** (Fox-12/8/96)

In this sequel to the hugely popular film **Home Alone**, through a remarkably similar chain of events, Kevin again finds himself separated from his family for the holidays, this time in New York City. Armed only with his wits and his father's wallet, Kevin takes the Big Apple by storm, getting a suite at the Plaza Hotel and befriendng the owner of New York's finest toy store. Free of his pestering family, Kevin could not be much happier until he runs into his old nemeses from the first movie, the recently escaped Wet Bandits, Marv and Harry. When he learns that the bumbling thieves are planning to rob his friend's toy store, Kevin feels compelled to stop them. Rather than notifying the proper authorities, he instead decides to lure them to an abandoned apartment building and subject them to a series of booby traps similar to those in the first film.

Upon initial review, many people question the notion that either **Home Alone** movie could raise concerns about violence. They assume that, as children's movies, they are merely filled with harmless, cartoon-like violence. However, a contextual examination reveals something quite different.

Even more mean-spirited and vicious than its predecessor, **Home Alone 2** contains surprisingly brutal violence. Despite the children's theme and the perception that the **Home Alone** series is now a perennial Christmas classic, this is actually a mean and ugly film filled with sadistic violence. It is especially troublesome that a child is the perpetrator of this cruel violence. Although it is slapstick and always portrayed as comical, much of the physical abuse Kevin doles out to the unwitting thieves is incredibly cruel and would in fact prove lethal in real life. For example, while standing on the roof of the building, Kevin hurls a brick at the two criminals on the sidewalk three stories below, landing it squarely on Marv's forehead. Despite the severity of the assault, Marv suffers only a red mark and temporary dizziness and appears to be fine moments later.

The ensuing 40 minutes of the film consist of a seemingly endless number of pranks and snares masterminded by the clever protagonist, each one more malicious than the last. In one of the first, Kevin rigs a staple gun to fire industrial staples into the rear, groin and nose of Marv. Later, Kevin arranges for an entire duffel bag of hand tools (wrenches, hammers, etc.) to open and fall on Harry's head. In a subsequent scene, Harry's head is set on fire and he dunks his head into a toilet bowl of kerosene, causing an explosion. In other incidents, Marv has a bookshelf fall on him, is shocked with electricity, has a 100-pound bag of dry cement dropped on his head, and, along with Harry, is hit in the face with a thick piece of pipe. Ultimately, the two thieves are captured when they are covered with birdseed and swarmed by hungry pigeons. These are only a few of the many traps that Kevin sets for his unwitting pursuers. Despite the quantity and

severity of so much of the violence, virtually no attention is paid to consequences. Although the victims do express pain, the degree to which they do so is unrealistic and they show very little evidence of injury.

While much of the violence contained in the original **Home Alone** involved the two burglars falling down and running into things, the violence in this film is much more harsh. So many of the violent scenes are so vindictive and dangerous that it is remarkable that this is intended to be a children's movie. Airing at 7:00 p.m. without an advisory, this film is obviously targeted at a young audience. This is of particular concern due to the fact that Kevin is continually rewarded for his efforts, being portrayed as both clever and heroic. He also seems to have the time of his life torturing his pursuers. This, in conjunction with the fact that many of the tricks Kevin plays on Marv and Harry involve items that would be readily accessible in most homes, raises serious concerns of imitable violence.

While some may feel that this type of slapstick violence is not a problem, and that this is simply funny, cartoon-like violence that appeals to every child's fantasies, we hope it is not every child's fantasy to use his or her wit and intelligence to sadistically torture fellow human beings, even if they are criminals.

This is hyperbolic violence intended to make people, particularly children, laugh. It is never intended to be realistic, but it does send the message that people getting hit in the head with heavy objects or being shocked with electricity is funny. In light of its youthful appeal, this message is especially worrisome and should be at least considered before letting younger viewers watch unsupervised.

#### **Dennis the Menace (NBC-12/28/96)**

**Dennis the Menace** raises many of the same issues as **Home Alone** except that most of the incidents of violence occur as a result of Dennis' mischievous nature rather than careful, calculated planning. Dennis is almost always the unwitting assailant as he accidentally causes pain and misfortune to everyone he meets. His actions, even when they are deliberate, are never punished and are played for laughs. Children would be likely to admire Dennis the way they might admire Kevin in **Home Alone**.

In one scene Dennis accidentally sets a thief on fire. Although he does this by accident, the fact remains that audiences are expected to laugh at the burning of a human being. **Dennis the Menace** contains more than 25 scenes of violence, most caused by Dennis' antics and designed to elicit laughter from the audience. There was no advisory.

#### **Hard Target (NBC-3/24/97)**

A typical Jean-Claude Van Damme action film, **Hard Target** is full of the excessive and graphic scenes of violence Van Damme's fans have come to expect. The film was directed by Hong Kong's most successful action film director, John Woo, now working in the American studio



system. Set in New Orleans, the film tells the story of Chance Budrow, a merchant sailor who discovers that wealthy sportsmen are paying millions of dollars to engage in hunts in which the prey are desperate homeless people. It is a non-stop action film that builds its entire story around violent encounters, which serve as little more than a showcase for Van Damme's impressive martial arts skills.

Preceded by an advisory, the film contains 25 scenes of violence. Some of these scenes are prolonged, extremely graphic and glorified. The opening scene, featuring a man hunted down in the streets of New Orleans, lasts for well over three minutes and includes machine gun fire, an explosion and a man shot in the back and shoulder with arrows. The network's practices and standards department heavily edited the scene to remove the worst moments of violence. However, the nature of the violence remains extremely brutal, especially considering that it occurs in the first few minutes of the film.

In another scene occurring 30 minutes later, Van Damme is assaulted by thugs while investigating a burned-out building. The thugs slip a noose around his neck and beat him with a baseball bat as they attempt to persuade him to leave town. The scene ends with one of the thugs brutally kicking Van Damme in the head. This extremely vicious attack is filmed using slow motion and other violence-emphasizing special effects to accentuate and lengthen the scene. This scene and these techniques are characteristic of much of the violence in the film.

**Hard Target** is an example of the type of action film, filled with dozens of scenes of violence, that would be difficult to be made contextually appropriate for broadcast television, no matter how ambitious the effort to edit the worst moments. The disturbing and unsettling theme of hunting humans for sport necessitates violence, and the role of Van Damme as hero ensures that the violence will be non-stop and exercised without restraint.

**Cliffhanger** (Fox-11/26/96)

**Demolition Man** (Fox-9/8/96)

**Die Hard 2** (CBS-12/29/96)

**The Last Boy Scout** (CBS-4/1/97)

**Lethal Weapon 2** (NBC-3/3/97)

**Lethal Weapon 3** (ABC-5/8/97)

**Nowhere to Run** (ABC-2/13/97)

**Tango & Cash** (ABC- 4/20/97)

**Timecop** (NBC-5/11/97)

These films are grouped together because they raise identical issues. All are big-budget Hollywood action movies featuring marquis celebrities (Arnold Schwarzenegger, Mel Gibson, Bruce Willis, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Sylvester Stallone) in the lead roles. It is also interesting to note that all of them were rated "R" when released theatrically. Each is filled with continuous scenes of protracted, glorified violence. **Cliffhanger** contained over 30 scenes, **Tango & Cash** 30, **Nowhere to Run** 28, **The Last Boy Scout** over 30 and **Timecop** 24. Although in most of these cases the networks did their best to omit the worst elements of violence, the task of making these films free of concerns and suitable for network broadcast would be virtually impossible. To

edit out the violence would be to remove the driving force of the stories. The violence is everywhere and is the dominant characteristic of the film.

In addition, these films tend to present violence as acceptable simply because it is committed by the hero. They also tend to downplay the severity of the violence by interjecting humor into it. For example, in **Lethal Weapon 2**, after Danny Glover's character kills an assassin by shooting him in the forehead with a pneumatic nail gun, and then another by driving a nail into his heart, he dryly quips, "Nailed 'em both." This sort of wisecrack further augments the already glorified violence and makes it seem that much more glib and appealing.

## ***2. Additional Theatrical Films Raising Concerns***

**Batman** (NBC-12/30/96)  
**Batman Returns** (NBC-3/24/96)  
**Clear and Present Danger** (ABC-2/3/97 & 5/17/97)  
**D-2: The Mighty Ducks** (NBC-11/29/96)  
**The Firm** (ABC-2/8/97)  
**Freejack** (ABC-1/30/97)  
**Ghost** (CBS-9/11/96)  
**Patriot Games** (ABC-2/1/96)  
**Passenger 57** (ABC-12/8/96)  
**Ricochet** (ABC-9/15/96)  
**The Shadow** (NBC-2/9/97)  
**The Three Musketeers** (Fox-10/1/96)  
**Unforgiven** (ABC-2/20/97)

## ***3. Issues Raised by Theatrical Films Shown on Television***

### **a. Some films are not suitable for broadcast television**

Violence is so central to the theme and core of some theatrical films that no matter how much they are altered, they could never be made appropriate for broadcast television. An effective edit of some of the films described earlier would require the skill and precision of a highly trained surgeon. It would also leave them very short and without adequate context or a comprehensible storyline. Many of the films that fall into this category have already been described. The Steven Seagal and Jean-Claude Van Damme films are predicated on violence. This is what their fans pay to see in the theaters. There are dozens of violent scenes in each film and taking them out, even if impossible, would serve no purpose. The films would be unrecognizable to those who know them and incomprehensible to those who do not.

**Walker, Texas Ranger** is a television series with violence. The violence is central to the theme as in the films above. However, since **Walker** is made for television, the violence, while still a concern, is far less intense and graphic than that of motion pictures. There is no series currently on television that raises concerns about violence to the same degree that theatrical films do. It is in theatrical films retrofitted for television that we find the most problematic violence.

Some films like **Patriot Games** simply need to be edited further. But there is nothing that can be done with films such as **Hard Target**, **Cliffhanger** and **The Last Boy Scout** to make them suitable for broadcast network television.

Although some question the effect of editing on the artistic integrity of films, we believe that it reflects a network's attempt to act responsibly. However, many of these films are in need of further editing. Some contain so much violence that they cannot be edited sufficiently to air without concerns. **Silence of the Lambs** is a film with a very violent theme that was edited and made appropriate for broadcast television. It contains only a few scenes of inappropriate violence that could be excised without seriously detracting from the basic storyline. The fact that a number of violent theatrical films monitored (such as **Striking Distance** and **Kalifornia**) did not raise concerns demonstrates that some very violent films can be acceptably modified for broadcast television.

The broadcast television networks recognize that some films can never be shown on their airwaves. That is why films such as **A Clockwork Orange**, **The Wild Bunch** and **Reservoir Dogs** have never appeared and recent films such as **Pulp Fiction** and **Natural Born Killers** probably will not appear. They know that violence is so central to these stories and the scenes so graphic and disturbing that no matter how responsibly they edited these films, they still could not be run without raising serious concerns. The violence in **A Clockwork Orange** is integral to the film's theme and message and is an important part of character development. The rape scene demonstrates Alex's brutal nature and why society needs to stop him. The actual rape follows more than eight minutes of violence and attempted rape. As contextually appropriate as these scenes are to the film's whole, the sheer amount and graphicness of the violence make it impossible for a network to run this film, and none has.

The networks have drawn a line about what does and what does not belong. In our view, the "what does not belong" side of the line should also include the action films with approximately 30-50 scenes of non-stop violence. A policy barring the airing of action films with approximately 30 or more scenes of violence would target only a relatively small percentage of films available for broadcast. Many action films do contain fewer than 30 scenes and can be effectively modified for broadcast and run with an advisory.

## **b. The Repeat Factor**

As is shown in the statistical breakdown of the television season, 34 of the 114, or 30%, of theatricals broadcast this season raised concerns of violence. Of those 34 that raised concerns, 19 of them were repeat broadcasts from previous seasons. This means that more than half of them were purchased years ago, before the advent of this study. In fact, 52 of the total 114 theatricals that were monitored this season were repeats, indicating that only 62 of the 114 shown were new broadcasts. Thus, when one examines the 62 new films and sees that 15 of them raised issues, the percentage of new problematic theatricals is 24%. It is interesting to note that half of the issue-raising theatricals were indeed repeats.

Many of the problematic repeats are big-budget, high-profile films such as the **Lethal Weapon** series and Arnold Schwarzenegger films, the rights to which cost networks millions of dollars. In order for networks to get their money's worth, these blockbuster films must air multiple times and are therefore repeated each season. While this does not excuse networks from being held

accountable for their programming choices, it does make it more clear as to why some overtly problematic films are shown time after time, despite criticisms.

**c. Advisories need to be more regularly and effectively applied before and during theatricals**

Advisories are used much more frequently for theatrical films than for made-for-television movies. Perhaps because theatrical films have MPAA ratings and are made by others, the networks are more willing to use advisories when airing them. Over the past three years, we have seen a much greater willingness on the part of the networks to use advisories.

**d. Time periods raise important issues for theatrical films**

The three original networks have a prime time lasting three hours Monday through Saturday and four hours on Sunday. They can start a theatrical at 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. Some theatricals are longer than two hours and, unless they can be extended with commercials (or additional footage) to four hours and broken into two parts, they usually run at 8:00 p.m.

Occasionally, the three older networks will extend prime time 15 or 30 minutes beyond 11:00 p.m. so as to avoid starting a film before 9:00 p.m. This raises strong objections from affiliates who want to air their own sponsors' advertising at 11:00 p.m. rather than the network-carried advertising. It is commendable when the networks extend prime time to accommodate more adult-oriented films. They did this seven times this past season. Prime time was extended for the following films:

**Blown Away** (NBC)  
**Dave** (CBS)  
**Die Hard 2** (CBS)  
**Four Weddings and a Funeral** (ABC)  
**Jurassic Park** (NBC)  
**Lethal Weapon 3** (ABC)  
**Patriot Games** (ABC)

The most significant time slot issue concerns the Fox network. On the one hand, Fox does routinely issue advisories. Yet on the other, it must air all of its films at 8:00 p.m. Like the other networks, Fox runs theatrical films filled with violent themes and scenes. Many are of the type that cannot be sufficiently edited. Airing them at 8:00 p.m. raises special concerns. If and when Fox becomes a network with a 10:00 p.m. prime time hour, this concern will diminish. Until it does, Fox is under a special obligation to use the 8:00 p.m. period appropriately.

## F. On-Air Promotions, Previews, Recaps, Teasers and Advertisements

At their core, on-air promotions, previews, recaps and teasers are all the same thing: advertisements. Unlike conventional advertisements that sell a product not associated with the show, promos are ads for the shows themselves. Aired between and during shows, these “ads” highlight upcoming shows appearing later that night or week. Although this section deals with on-air promotions, previews, recaps, teasers and advertisements, we will frequently use the term “promos” to refer to any material promoting the network’s own programming. Occasionally, it will be necessary to make distinctions between types of promos. Therefore we define them as follows:

- \* On-air promotions are the networks’ television ads for their own programming. These are to be distinguished from other promotions such as a tie-in between a network’s fall schedule and a department store or airline.

- \* Previews are like movie trailers. They are scenes at the end of a show previewing the highlights of next week’s episode. Their purpose is to get the viewer to tune in next time.

- \* Recaps are scenes shown at the beginning of a program from the previous episode or episodes. They remind the viewer of what he or she has seen before or fill in the new viewer on what he or she may have missed. An example of this is: “Previously on **Chicago Hope**...”

- \* Teasers are short clips making promises about what is to be seen. They usually appear at the beginning of a show or movie and are designed to entice the undecided viewer to watch. Some shows also use teasers just before a commercial in the middle of the show to ensure that the viewer returns after the commercial.

Promos represent a high priority for the broadcast networks. The mission of the promotion department is to highlight and sell the product of the network. More than reading television guides or anything else, viewers use promotions to determine whether to watch a series and especially a television or theatrical movie. Viewers first learn of the storyline, a guest star appearance on a series or the theme of a television movie from promotions. They are also used to expose viewers to programs they might not normally watch.

During the summer, the networks spend enormous amounts of money to introduce the public to their new shows for the upcoming season. In the new season, viewers will be bombarded with up to 50 new shows on all of the networks, and it is the job of each promotions department to make sure viewers notice its network’s shows. Frequently using a slogan or theme song, each network develops a theme to introduce its fall shows. ABC’s “We’re Still the One” song, slogan and campaign from several years ago is one of the best known of these themes. Similarly, NBC used “NB See Us” and currently is using the extremely successful “Must-See TV” to promote its schedule. This past summer ABC introduced a somewhat controversial “TV is Good” campaign featuring black letters on a yellow background that attracted much attention, some of it negative. Selling the concept of watching television instead of directly highlighting ABC’s own programming, the campaign used such attention-getting slogans as “Don’t worry, you have billions of brain cells” and “Eight hours, that’s all we ask.”

Blockbuster events which attract large audiences are especially desirable because promos can be used during their airing to sell the schedule. Traditionally, one of the major advantages of bidding successfully for the Summer Olympics is that such a large audience is watching at just the right time of the year for promotion of the new fall schedule. This is why NBC invested close to \$500 million in the 1996 Summer Olympics and over \$1 billion for the next several Olympic Games (not including CBS's broadcast of the 1998 Winter Olympics from Japan). NBC's audience ratings were extremely impressive for the Atlanta games, and it appears that those games served as a successful platform to launch their new shows in the fall of 1996. Promotions also tell viewers a great deal about a network's priorities, including what the networks view as special or important.

From the beginning, evaluating promotions was an important part of the monitoring process. Many television writers and producers complain that they carefully craft their shows to deal with violence responsibly and then are dismayed to see a promotion eliminate all of the context and only feature the violence. We examined several thousand promotions. In 1995, we made site visits to three of the four networks to meet with people involved in making promotions so that we might better understand the process.

Promotions can raise serious concerns, particularly because they feature violence out of context. It is almost impossible for promotions to provide sufficient context for any violence that does occur. By their nature, promotions feature only a small highlight of the upcoming program. Violence as well as sex is frequently featured as the highlight.

Violence is used in many ways in promos as a hook to draw viewers into the program. Viewers see violence in the promos encouraging them to watch. They then see violence in the preview at the beginning of the show. During the show, commercials often interrupt violent scenes or occur just as violence is about to erupt to ensure that viewers will continue watching. All of these promotional efforts demonstrate that networks think that, far from alienating viewers, violence attracts them.

There are logical reasons why so many promotions feature scenes of violence. There is not enough time to explain the plot. So viewers are presented with a series of engaging sounds and images that require little explanation. With so little time, the easiest things to feature are those that require little explanation: violence and sex. The promo becomes little more than isolated and disconnected scenes of violence and sex. Viewers may need context to know why the violence is occurring, but they need little or no context to know that a show will contain action, guns or fistfights. Even promotions for situation comedies occasionally feature what little "action" may actually be in the show. Many jokes need a longer set-up or explanation than is possible in a promo, contributing to the tendency for promos to feature a scene of comedic violence or a sexual reference.

Promotions have an obligation to tell the viewer what the show is about. One would expect violent programs or movies to show some violence in their promotions. Many theatrical film promos do this and, on many occasions, the network includes an advisory in the promo.

Over the three seasons in which we have been monitoring television, many shows that use violence minimally and in an appropriate context end up showcasing the violence decontextualized in the promos. This is a serious concern for several reasons. First, viewers get a mistaken impression of the show. They may believe there is much action and then become disappointed when they find only two or three minimal scenes of violence in the show. Sometimes a promo for a show such as **Law & Order**, a program which would not appeal to fans looking for fights, guns and mayhem, features what little violence there is in an effort to attract these action fans. Furthermore, violent promos are sometimes aired during programs geared for children or on completely non-violent shows. Even shows that are virtually free of violence are promoted by utilizing the merest suggestion of violence that can be gleaned from the program. Clearly, someone is scanning these virtually non-violent shows for anything that could possibly be construed as “action.”

Some of the most compressed and decontextualized violence on television appears in commercials promoting theatrical films opening in the theater. A trailer seen before a film in the theater may last up to three minutes and, while it too features many of the scenes of action and violence, it has sufficient opportunity to give viewers the gist of the story. A 30-second ad on television for a film, however, has substantially less opportunity to tell the story and has a tendency to feature only the violence. There are numerous examples of this which will be detailed below.

### *1. Comparison to the Previous Two Seasons*

The 1995 report speculated that promotions was an easy area for the networks to improve and we were right. In 1996, which was dealt with in last year’s report, there was substantial improvement in all areas of on-air promotions produced by the networks. The only area that still demonstrated a lack of improvement was advertisements for movies about to open in theaters. Produced by the motion picture studios, not the networks, these ads are similar to film trailers except that they are considerably shorter. Many of these ads, but especially the ones for action films, highlight little but violence.

The gains of 1996 were maintained in 1997 and are examined in this report. The level of issues and problems between 1996 and 1997 stayed about the same, still representing significant improvement over 1995. The good news this year was that movie studio ads were somewhat better. The bad news is that promotions for the reality “shock-umentary” specials raised new concerns. The programs themselves raised significant concerns and were discussed in the earlier section on specials. The promotions for those specials also raised new concerns and are discussed in this section.

Promotions, although an essential aspect of a network’s planning and strategy, are not always consciously noticed by the viewers or even, in many instances, by the network executives. Many network executives view series, specials or movies at home or in their offices on videotape free of promotions or commercials. The consistent purpose of the promotion section in this report has been to shine a light on this important area of network programming. This is one of the most



beneficial reasons to have an outside monitor looking at network programming from a different perspective and through a different lens than the networks use to look at themselves.

Just the fact that promotions editors know that someone is examining their work and that the results of that examination will be reported publicly is likely to encourage higher standards in promotions. We felt that this was an easy area to change because the networks directly control promotions. This is an area that they can easily change through their own internal policies.

Conversations with the networks demonstrate that this is exactly what they have done over the past two years. All four networks convened their respective promotions staffs after the publication of the 1995 report. Problems with promotions were discussed in detail and at several networks new positions were added to oversee promotions. Reporting relationships within staff hierarchies were reorganized. The results of those network efforts are evident in the analysis of both the 1996 and 1997 promotions. Once again we feel that this demonstrates the benefit and value of having an outside monitor examine all areas of broadcast television. The focus of our efforts is to identify problems and, in a collaborative way, suggest solutions. This process is exemplified by what occurred in the area of promotions.

It was more difficult both last year and this to find promotions that raised any of the issues discussed in the 1995 report. There simply were far fewer issue-raising promotions. The one exception, as mentioned above, is the promotions for the live-action reality specials. These are identified and discussed in this year's report.

Still, we are impressed at the efforts that have been made over the past two years. In general, this area of network programming is now under control and being dealt with effectively. In reviewing this section, the reader should remember that while we examine all television series, television movies and theatrical films, and can statistically determine what percentage raise concerns, it is impossible to do this with regard to promotions. Tens of thousands of promotions appear every year and this report has found that only a tiny percentage of them raise concerns. This section examines the few specific promotions that still raise important issues of concern.

## *2. Issues Arising from Promotions, Previews, Recaps, Teasers and Advertisements*

### **a. Promos Feature Violence Out of Context**

As previously stated, it is very difficult to incorporate context into a promotion. The goal of a promo is to attract the potential viewer's attention in a very small amount of time. Revealing the storyline takes a great deal of time and is seldom the most effective means for grabbing the viewer's attention. What attracts immediate interest are scenes of exciting action, many of which are violent: car crashes, chases, fistfights and explosions.

Whenever a promotion does tell the story of a show or movie, it has to be careful not to tell too much or give away the ending. This is difficult to accomplish. To create a promo with just the right amount of the premise and plot takes great time and precision. It is far easier and more reliable just to feature action scenes.

In the past the constant barrage of action sometimes seen in promos raised concerns. A viewer watching for an entire evening could see more problematic scenes of violence in the advertisements and promotions than in the programs he or she is watching. Some promos contained only the violence and none of the important contextual elements such as consequences or punishment of the violence.

While violence out of context is still an issue in promotions, the amount of decontextualized violence was not nearly as high as that found in the 1995 report.

Some advertisements and promotions illustrating lack of context:

#### **Passenger 57** (aired during ABC's **High Incident** 12/5/96)

Although this promotion for the theatrical film to be shown on ABC lasts only ten seconds, each second is used to present images of action and violence. The promo opens with Wesley Snipes firing a gun and then crashing his motorcycle through a chain-link fence. The next scene is a woman being held at gun point, followed by Snipes struggling with her assailant. Finally, the promo closes with Snipes performing a karate-style kick at the camera and ends with a fiery explosion. In a voice-over the announcer stresses that "ABC's Sunday is the movie event with non-stop adventure." **Passenger 57** is an action film about the takeover of a commercial airliner. The story is full of violence, but violence with a purpose and a justification, all of which disappear in this very short promo.

#### **Walker, Texas Ranger** (aired during CBS's **The Last Don** 5/13/97)

It is not a surprise that promos for **Walker** feature some of the martial arts stunts for which both Chuck Norris and the show are famous. It could be argued that to promote **Walker** without featuring action could give viewers a false impression of the show. The concern about this short

promo is that it features only karate-style kicks with absolutely no context. The only message the network wants to send is that there is fighting. Accompanying the image of the karate kicks, the announcer tells the audience, “It’s a butt-kicking season finale when Chuck Norris teams up with a world championship kickboxer to crack a killer case.” The earlier section on television series acknowledges that while **Walker** has tried to establish a moral tone and send an anti-violence message, the producers are well aware that violence is the most salable aspect of the show. This promotion confirms that.

#### **When Disaster Strikes** (aired during **Melrose Place** 10/28/96)

As examined in an earlier section, live-action reality specials portray video and film clips of real-life disasters, accidents and tragedies which are highly graphic. In their entirety, these specials do provide some context and frequently interviews with survivors in which the audience learns what really happened. The promos for these specials are completely lacking in context and only feature a collection of action scenes strung together in rapid succession. Promos for these programs also air during time periods when children are likely to be watching.

In this promo for **When Disaster Strikes**, viewers learn that the program is not only about disasters such as fires and tornadoes but also about human tragedy. The promo entices viewers to witness “the most incredible disasters caught on tape” as a plane plummets to the ground, exploding. Next, a victim is seen falling to his death from a burning building. Nowhere in the promo does the viewer see any of the physical or psychological consequences that would contextualize the violence rather than exploit it. The promo contains an advisory for parental discretion.

#### “ABC Action Thursday” Promotion (aired during ABC’s **High Incident** 2/27/97)

In this promotion for several theatricals, ABC uses clips to create a montage for its Thursday night movie billed as “ABC Action Thursday” on the “Action Broadcasting Company.” The clips feature intense and brutal scenes of punching, kicking and explosions, all of which are glamorized through the use of exciting music. Here the major concern seems to be that audiences learn only that the films are full of action and violence. Viewed out of context, these clips support the network’s moniker for Thursday nights.

#### Teaser for **High Incident** (aired at the beginning of **High Incident** 2/27/97)

This year **High Incident** aired at 8:00 p.m. and emphasized action and violence such that it raised occasional concerns. This was evident in the promotions and teasers. In this teaser, every clip contains violence: a man is thrown through a glass window, an officer hits a man in the back and throws him on the ground, a man bleeds from a wound on his abdomen, a young man opens fire on an officer, people fight in a bar, a man is hit brutally in the head and an officer fires at a man. This teaser is a problem not only because it is used as a hook to attract viewers and lacks context, but also because it airs at such an early time in the evening.

Preview for **Burning Zone** (aired during UPN's **Burning Zone** 9/10/96)

In a preview for UPN's **Burning Zone**, a man on fire is shown three times. Each subsequent time the viewer gets a closer look. This preview contains no context and instead only strives to incite terror, challenging the viewer to "enter at your own risk."

#### **b. Violent Promos in Inappropriate Time Periods**

Promotions or advertisements sometimes feature violence during shows or time periods for children, and during programs, particularly situation comedies, that might attract viewers offended by violence. These shows rarely contain any issue-raising scenes of violence. There were few examples this season of violent promos aired during programs appealing to families. Last season there were examples of violent or action promos aired during the **Walton Thanksgiving Reunion** and a few family comedies. While violent promos during a family show are not a problem this year, there are still several examples of violent promos airing in completely non-violent shows. Viewers might sit together in front of the television watching such non-violent programming as **Friends**, **Beverly Hills 90210** or **Wings** and, without warning, be confronted with violent promos. These viewers might have carefully screened a television guide or used their own viewing experience to select a program that does not contain violence. But there is no way the viewer can be protected from promotions or advertisements containing intense scenes of violence that may occur during these programs. We are pleased to report that the first problem mentioned, violent promos during shows geared to children, is an area of concern that has almost disappeared.

One might expect to see more graphic or violent promos on shows that contain violence. A network could reasonably expect that the audience for these shows is more tolerant or accepting of these kinds of depictions. But a promo portraying violent scenes that is aired in the middle of a completely non-violent show raises a particular issue of concern. Some examples follow:

#### **When Animals Attack II** (aired during **Living Single** 11/14/96)

The problem of "shock-umentary" specials yielding promos utterly devoid of context is discussed in the preceding section. This promo features: a dog viciously biting a man's leg, a man struggling as a wild bear clutches him in its mouth, an alligator attacking a man and many similar images. In addition to the issue of a violent promo without context, this promo airs during a completely non-violent program. Viewers of **Living Single**, rightfully expecting 30 minutes of comedy, would be unprepared for this very disturbing promotion. The caveat, "If you watch action, be prepared for action," does not apply in this situation.

**The Long Kiss Goodnight** (aired during NBC's **Friends** 10/3/96, **The Single Guy** 9/26/96 and **Wings** 9/25/96)

Although there were several variations of this motion picture advertisement, all featured only the action. The plot is completely ignored and the promo only features scene after scene of gunfire and explosions. The only information the ad transmits, other than this film is filled with violence, is that it stars Geena Davis and Samuel L. Jackson. Within the several versions, an interesting mix of music and narration makes the violence appear "cool" and fun. One advertisement begins with a grenade being dropped as Davis and Jackson flee the explosion, running through a glass window. Davis uses a machine gun to shoot the ice below, causing it to break for their landing. Suddenly, she is depicted hanging from a cord while again shooting a machine gun. Jackson is then shown making a threat with gun in hand. The scene then changes once again to show a car smashing through a concrete wall. This is followed by a bridge exploding. Not only does the ad lack any context, it ran during completely non-violent programming.

**Once a Thief** (aired during Fox's **Beverly Hills 90210** 9/25/96)

This promotion is filled with gunfire and explosions. It ran during the credits of the non-violent **Beverly Hills 90210**. Even though the program is non-violent, the promo is filled with non-stop action. Interestingly, the promo for the same film also appeared during Fox's **Pretty Poison** on 9/24/96. There it was edited very differently to contain considerably less violence.

### c. Violent or Action Promotions Used for Typically Non-Violent Shows

An interesting phenomenon in the realm of promotions occurs when a non-violent show manages to produce a promotion containing violence, or at least action. This area of concern disappeared almost completely this television season. We had to look long and hard before we could find even a few examples, and those that we did find are tame and minor.

Most television series contain little violence and many that do feature violent scenes do so in a contextually appropriate manner. These shows, influenced and approved by the networks' departments of practices and standards, generally make it on the air without any problems or concerns.

Someone in the promotions process reviews these shows, managing to find the one moment or instant that contains some action. In a drama, this may mean a gun that is drawn but never used. In a comedy, it usually means violence played for laughs such as someone getting punched or falling down. Inevitably, this one scene will make its way into the promo. Devoid of context, the scene usually raises issues of concern. Even the most innocent shows on network television occasionally yield promos featuring acts of violence that lack context and have a different feel than the shows themselves.

These promos are of less concern than those for theatrical films or action shows. But it is important to repeat that someone culls through the material of situation comedies and looks for the most violent scene.

Two of the few examples of this phenomenon are:

#### **Family Matters** (aired during ABC's **Life's Work** 9/24/96)

Though obviously not a serious problem, this promo for **Family Matters** does exemplify the point that someone culls through every moment of a non-violent show to find the one small scene that could be considered "action." This promo features Steve Urkel hanging from the Eiffel Tower in Paris. He screams as he is dropped off the French landmark. The promo ends with Steve in mid-air, leaving the viewer to wonder about Urkel's fate. In the program itself, not surprisingly, Urkel survives the incident unscathed. Once again, this not a very important problem. It is just interesting that this is the one moment featured in the promo.

#### **Chicago Sons** (aired during NBC's **Batman** 12/30/96)

In two different promos for the situation comedy **Chicago Sons**, NBC uses comedic violence accompanied by catchy tunes to promote this generally non-violent program. Though completely good natured and featuring the theme song from the old comedy **My Three Sons**, the promo contains four separate slaps to the head. None is designed to injure, but once again it is significant that, of all the content from a 30-minute sitcom, only this is chosen to promote the program.

### **d. The Problem of Controlling Affiliates**

The four broadcast television networks all have promotions departments that prepare an enormous amount of material to advertise their programming. Not all of the promotional material ends up airing during network-controlled time. The network also sends promotions for its programming to its local affiliates. A network is comprised of several local stations that the network owns (in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago, all of the network-affiliated stations are owned by the network) and approximately 195 independent stations that affiliate with the network.

During the time periods they control, the networks set their own practices and standards for what promos can appear at what times and on what shows. The affiliates, however, are given a small amount of prime time by the networks to advertise and promote their own shows and much more time in other parts of the day to do the same. Often it is the affiliate that schedules a violent promo in a non-violent time slot. When this is done it is impossible for the average viewer to discern whether it was the network or the local station that made the decision.

Networks frequently get blamed for the decisions of the affiliates. Few viewers can tell the difference and, in the larger scheme of things, to most of them it does not make a difference. It is the affiliates that schedule some of the promos just as it is the affiliates that schedule adult talk shows during after-school hours. It is much easier to control something when only four large corporations are responsible. However, when the responsibility is spread over hundreds of large and small stations, the ability to take corrective action is much more difficult.

#### **e. Prosocial Promotions**

The television networks frequently run spots talking about alternatives to violence. NBC has run its “The More You Know” campaign for several years, and Fox has been running its “Under the Helmet” spots.

These spots feature some of the biggest stars on the networks and are expensive to produce. Furthermore, they displace paid advertising time. For that the networks deserve much credit. It is difficult to measure whether spots change people’s behavior or which type of spots are the best to run. There is evidence, however, that they are seen by many people. NBC reports that they have received as many as 3,000 phone calls after some of its “The More You Know” spots. There is absolutely no downside to these public service announcements and the networks should be commended for running them.

## G. Children's Television on the Broadcast Networks

One of the problems television faces is that children may watch any program at any hour of the day, including those programs aimed exclusively at adults. There is evidence that far more children than many people realize are watching television at 9:00 p.m. or even 10:00 p.m. Nevertheless, the broadcast networks have some right to consider the later hours primarily the province of adults. All television programming should not be sanitized because the possibility exists that some children may be watching. There are some times of the day, such as 10:00 p.m. or late night, when parents or guardians can reasonably be expected to supervise or prevent children's viewing.

This section deals with the Saturday morning television programming that is created especially for children. In the earliest days of television, a tradition began establishing Saturday morning for kids and Sunday morning for religion. Just as many kids get up early on Sunday morning, but that television time was generally reserved for religious programs.

The earliest hours of Saturday morning television belong to the youngest children. The shows that begin around 7:00 a.m. appeal to 4-to-6-year-olds. Around 9:00 a.m., the schedule changes to accommodate older brothers and sisters, and more action-oriented shows are broadcast. In all three years of the monitoring, NBC devoted its Saturday morning schedule (after news) to live-action programming for teenagers.

Children's television has long been controversial. To combat what she felt was over-commercialized and poor children's programming, Peggy Charren formed Action for Children's Television (ACT). Her approach was never to pressure for the removal of specific programs but rather to encourage the airing of higher quality shows. Heeding the challenge, public television filled what it saw as a vacuum in the area of children's programming, particularly programming for very young children. **Sesame Street**, **The Electric Company** and **Mister Rogers' Neighborhood** became staples of many children's daily morning routines.

In 1990, Congress passed the Children's Television Act, which promised to ensure that there would be quality programming for children. The act's passage prompted Charren to pass her mantle to The Center for Media Education, which continues to advocate for children's television. Unfortunately, many in the television industry defined "educational programming" differently than the sponsors of the legislation, and today children's television is as controversial as ever. During the summer of 1996 the Federal Communications Commission announced that it would require each station to air at least three hours of educational programming geared to children each week and that this requirement would become part of the license renewal process. Several outside organizations, including the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Policy Center under its dean, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, announced that they would help determine what qualifies as educational children's television. The new three-hour rule became an official requirement in the fall of 1997.

Saturday morning children's programming on network television is dominated by the new player, the Fox Network. NBC has gone out of the business of creating Saturday morning programming for young children. It airs **The Today Show** followed by the teen-oriented, live-



action programs **Saved by the Bell** and **California Dreams**. Last season the new UPN and WB networks made their first foray into the area of children's television.

There has also been much discussion in the 1990s about the effects of Saturday morning programming on children. While the attention focuses on everything from sex and gender roles to commercialization, the most vocal concern has been about the effect of violence. One show in particular, **The Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers**, has been singled out by some as an example of violent children's programming that kids imitate. Although Fox argues that **The Power Rangers** is no different than other Saturday morning programs, it has been a lightning rod for much attention and criticism.

As this section details, we have broken children's television into three categories: slapstick, tame combat violence and sinister combat violence. Though a few shows may not perfectly fit these categories, or may straddle two classifications, most children's programming can be adequately classified within these three categories. The press, advocates and others have picked up on the label "sinister combat violence." While there are issues and concerns in the other two categories, the programming in this category raises the most concerns with the most people. Sinister combat violence is where dark, malevolent violence is found. Historically, there has been a difference of opinion on the possible negative effects of cartoons like **Bugs Bunny**, which contain slapstick violence such as anvils falling on characters' heads. The research community has been divided on this type of content. While it has always been our contention that the sinister programming raises the most concerns, we have also paid considerable attention to the shows in the slapstick category. The most need for improvement is found in the sinister programming.

In the 1995 report, seven programs on Saturday morning were identified in the sinister combat category. In 1996 the number of shows featuring this type of violence dropped to four. This season the number remains at four. It is important to note that three of the four are holdover shows from last year's list and have been on the air for some time. It is not likely that these shows, several of which are very popular, would be radically changed once they are established hits. What is encouraging, however, is that only one new sinister combat show premiered this season. It is our hope that once the "old" sinister shows run their course in a year or so, the problem with this type of programming, the one that raises the most concerns, will disappear.

Because it appears that the popularity of the sinister format may be waning and that the problem's end may be in sight, we now devote more attention to the issues raised in slapstick programming. Again, to some viewers, slapstick violence represents no problem at all. To others, however, it does raise concerns.

Children's television, far more easily than prime time fare, fits into a formula. Many prime time shows are more variable in their content, sometimes interweaving comedy, drama and violence. These shows have to be monitored a large number of times to get a handle on them. Children's programs, on the other hand, tend to repeat the same themes and patterns each week. Children seem to be more comfortable with and desirous of repetition, familiarity and predictability. Indeed many parents report that their children can watch the same animated movie on video tape over and over again. Despite this fact, children's programming was examined with considerable scrutiny.

After examining the networks' Saturday morning schedules, we developed categories for the various types of violence in the shows. A reminder: NBC does not broadcast for young children on Saturday morning. Its teenage programming raises no concerns in the area of violence. Our three classifications of violence for Saturday morning programming are slapstick, tame combat violence and sinister combat violence. Recognizing the importance of children's programming and the fact that these are programs that parents are much less likely to see, we discuss and analyze every Saturday morning children's program aired on the networks.

### *1. Slapstick*

Slapstick comedic violence has been watched by children on television and in movies for generations. Typified by the classic Warner Bros. cartoons such as Bugs Bunny and the Roadrunner, this type of violence is lighthearted and hyperbolic with comedy as the main theme and purpose. The slapstick cartoons of 1996-97 are tamer than those of the 1950s and 1960s. The slapstick is never realistic with regard to the violent actions themselves or the consequences of these actions. This genre of violence, while occasionally mean-spirited, is not designed to be taken seriously by viewers, no matter what age.

Little of the "lethal if it were real" type violence which appeared in the 1950s and 1960s is found in today's slapstick cartoons. Instead, tamer fare such as tripping, bumping into things, pinching and the occasional overdone punch are far more the norm. There are no shotguns or pistols as one used to see in the hands of Elmer Fudd or Yosemite Sam. There is very little of characters being hit over the head with umbrellas or anvils as Granny used to do to Sylvester or the Roadrunner to Wile E. Coyote. There are almost no instances of explosives being used. All in all, it is a much gentler cartoon universe. However, the one exception to this trend can be found in the new cartoons produced by Warner Bros. **Animaniacs**, **The Sylvester and Tweety Mysteries** and, to a lesser degree, **Freakazoid!** and **Earthworm Jim** (which are discussed in the following section on the emerging broadcast networks) all continue to feature the harsher, more destructive types of slapstick violence. However, they too do not feature such realistic and lethal weapons as shotguns or pistols. In large part, those have been eliminated from the cartoon world.

Examples of cartoons that feature slapstick violence are:

#### **Ace Ventura: Pet Detective (CBS)**

An animated rendition of a popular Jim Carrey film, this series chronicles the adventures of the zany pet detective Ace Ventura and his monkey sidekick Spike as they travel the globe tracking down lost animals. With each adventure comes new bungling villains, each one ultimately falling victim to Ace's wacky antics.

The types of violence contained in the show mainly consist of characters running into things or falling down, many times with the impact occurring off screen. There is occasional fighting between characters. However, such instances are typically represented by a whirling cloud of

dust with fists and feet emerging from the melee, all of which are completely slapstick and never serious. Rather than focusing on the conflicts between Ace and his foes, the program relies more on Ace's unorthodox behavior and large doses of bodily function-based humor to keep audiences entertained. Seldom does Ace inflict harm on his enemies. Instead, it is mostly through their own mistakes or Ace arresting them in some bizarre fashion that the conflicts are resolved. Despite the relatively high number of violent acts contained in each episode, they are mostly pokes, light pushes and pratfalls.

### **Bailey Kipper's P.O.V. (CBS)**

**Bailey Kipper's P.O.V.** is a live-action program about a young boy with a flair for filmmaking and his experiences with his family. By placing "spyballs"--tiny secret cameras--throughout his home, Bailey records the activities of his parents, sister and younger brother. He then takes the footage, adds his own special effects and edits it into a weekly video diary. Each week, Bailey and his family deal with a situation that teaches them a lesson about life.

The program is virtually free of violence. It is only featured in the form of clips from classic silent films that Bailey edits into his own video to illustrate a point. These examples are so quick and few in number that they raise no concerns and barely deserve to be mentioned.

### **Beakman's World (CBS)**

A live-action, educational show, **Beakman's World** is hosted by the wild and wacky scientist, Beakman. Part Mr. Wizard, part **Seinfeld's** Kramer, Beakman, with the help of his lab assistant Phoebe and an overgrown rat named Lester, answers viewers' questions about science. With a large array of sound effects (many of which sound suspiciously like bodily functions) and a smattering of slapstick violence, the program interjects a large degree of humor into informative programming. As mentioned above, the program does contain some slapstick violence, most of which is directed toward Lester; however, it is trivial.

### **Bone Chillers (ABC)**

A live-action show based on a successful series of children's books by Betsy Haynes and Daniel Weiss, **Bone Chillers** is a goofy comedy about four freshman at Edgar Allen Poe High School. An appropriately bizarre and spooky academy, Edgar Allen Poe High is run by the fiendish Principal Pussman and is the site of regular ghostly and supernatural activities, ranging from a ghoul infestation to a monster fly posing as a cafeteria worker. In each episode, with the aid of a trollish custodian who lives in the basement, the four friends put a stop to the evil and save the school.

Despite its creepy look, the show is remarkably lighthearted and free of violence. Comedy is the principal thrust of the show. There is menacing action that occurs in the form of the youths being chased by the monsters. No one is ever injured and the only violence that does take place is an

occasional trip or poke in the ribs. When the students are forced to combat the insidious creatures, they use extremely unrealistic and ludicrous weapons such as a special monster-sucking vacuum or mustard. The program raises no issues of violence at all. In addition, at the conclusion of each episode, in a pro-educational segment, Haynes encourages the audience to think up and write their own stories.

### **Brand Spanking New Doug (ABC)**

**Brand Spanking New Doug** is the story of Doug Funnie, an average sixth grade boy who faces the typical adventures and challenges that are part of growing up: an older sister with whom he often fights, parents who are too overprotective, crushes and school bullies. The program features much less violence than most programs on Saturday morning. Each episode contains some sort of life lesson or pro-social message which Doug reflects upon at the end of the show. These range from the importance of friendship to why children should listen to their parents. Occasionally, some slapstick violence does occur, such as a basketball coach being hit in the head by an errant pass, but all of it is so minor that it raises no issues at all.

### **Bugs Bunny & Tweety Show (ABC)**

An hour-long collection of the classic Warner Bros. cartoons featuring the likes of Bugs Bunny, the Roadrunner and Tweety Bird, this show raises some of the most serious concerns in the slapstick area. Each cartoon within the anthology is roughly five minutes long and is full of violence, all of which is intended to be humorous. The violence typically occurs as one character tries to hunt or eat another, only to then fail due to his or her ineptitude and the prey's superior cleverness.

Although the violence is completely hyperbolic and the characters are typically not human, many of the tools of violence featured in these cartoons are realistic objects that are accessible in many homes. In addition to the ridiculously oversized slingshots, cases of dynamite and falling anvils that are trademarks of these cartoons, the use of knives, shotguns, pistols and hatchets is also frequently featured. Although these weapons do cause harm in the program, the consequences are far from realistic. Characters recover from shotgun blasts immediately, suffering no lasting effect. They also often fall from high places, have large objects fall on their heads, are hit by cars, get doors slammed in their faces and incur a variety of other physical injuries from which they immediately recover. Although the hyperbolic nature of the violence is intended to be humorous, it is conceivable that, for some younger or more impressionable viewers, it could lead to false perceptions of the consequences of violence. When considered in conjunction with the fact that violence is always rewarded and portrayed as funny, this raises the concern of children imitating the violent behaviors they see on screen.

Interestingly, of all the slapstick cartoons, many of these older ones contain the most questionable violence. In a couple of instances, there also seems to have been a modicum of editing done by the networks, perhaps to eliminate some of the more gratuitous violence. In any

case, of all the slapstick violence featured on Saturday morning, this program contained the most issues.

### **C-Bear and Jamal (Fox)**

This cartoon follows the life and times of a ten-year-old African American boy named Jamal and his magical, hipster teddy bear, C-Bear. Living in South Central Los Angeles with his grandparents and widower father, Jamal faces the issues and struggles inherent in growing up, ranging from the acceptance of his father's return to dating, to learning that telling the truth is important but so are people's feelings. With C-Bear as his companion and conscience, Jamal learns lessons about life and growing up.

There is very little violence in **C-Bear and Jamal**. What violence does exist is clearly slapstick and minor, such as C-Bear being knocked over by a door or taking a small tumble. There is never an intent to harm and the violence is always accidental. The comedy in the show centers not on the slapstick violence but rather on the antics of the characters. The show does a good job of dealing with real issues in an entertaining way without relying on violence.

### **Casper (Fox)**

This new incarnation of the classic cartoon is very much like the original with regard to violence. It contains only minor instances of slapstick violence such as pokes, pinches, grabs and pushes. Such acts are typically reserved for Casper's three rowdy uncles who abuse but never injure one another. The most extreme cases involve acts such as one of the uncles turning into a hammer and hitting another uncle on the head. Because they are ghosts, they immediately return to their shape and are uninjured.

The violence, in addition to being slapstick and minor, is used to contrast how sweet and friendly Casper is in comparison to his uncles. Their incessant bickering and brawling only serve to illustrate their oafishness and cast them in a negative light. Like the original, **Casper** does not raise any issues of problematic violence.

### **Eerie, Indiana (Fox)**

This live-action series originally aired briefly several seasons ago in another network's prime time lineup but resurfaced this season as part of Fox's Saturday morning schedule. The show is about a young boy named Marshall who moves from the big city to Eerie, Indiana, a small town that he describes as the "center of weirdness for the country." In each episode, Marshall encounters some supernatural or peculiar phenomenon, such as Bigfoot eating out of trash cans, a mummy coming out of the television into Marshall's living room and possessed ATM machines, that are part of everyday life in Eerie.

Primarily a comedic show with vaguely spooky overtones, **Eerie, Indiana** contains very little violence. The small amount it does contain is mild slapstick or standard roughhousing among

young boys. The only instance of potentially harmful violence that was depicted in the program occurs in the episode in which a mummy escapes from the television and stalks Marshall and his friend Simon on Halloween. Marshall subdues the mummy by whacking him over the head with a shovel.

Most episodes of **Eerie, Indiana** contain elements of the paranormal, but never in a serious or threatening manner that might frighten viewers. Despite the supernatural overtones, there is almost no violence and that which it does contain raises few issues of concern.

### **Jungle Cubs (ABC)**

Featuring younger incarnations of the animal characters from Disney's animated film **The Jungle Book**, **Jungle Cubs** is a comedic cartoon that contains some very mild slapstick violence. In each episode, the cubs find themselves in some adventure or sticky situation that they must resolve by the show's end. Since the animals are all very young, their hunting skills are undeveloped, thereby eliminating the threat of serious violence. Instead, most of the violence occurs in the form of accidents or pranks the cubs play on one another. Consequences of violence typically go unexamined and no one is ever seriously hurt. Occasionally, the cubs must face the dangers of the jungle, avoiding predators or hostile creatures. But even these encounters are very tame and are typically resolved with very little violence. Although Sher Khan, the tiger cub, does have a propensity for violence, it is simply accepted as an inherent character trait in tigers. Each episode contains very few scenes of violence and those it does contain are of little consequence.

### **Life With Louie (Fox)**

Based on the adventures of stand-up comedian and author Louie Anderson, **Life With Louie** is an animated depiction of the trials and tribulations of Anderson's middle class suburban childhood. Typically focusing on the interactions between Louie and his father, a U.S. Army veteran with a propensity for hair-brained ideas, the program examines life with a dry, comedic perspective that always concludes with some moral or life lesson. There is almost no violence in the show, as it relies more on the dialogue and eccentricities of the characters as its comic inspiration than on the modicum of slapstick violence it occasionally contains.

### **Twisted Tales of Felix the Cat (CBS)**

This new version of the classic **Felix the Cat** cartoon is much more surreal than its predecessor. A series of short segments, the program features the assorted adventures of the title character as he regularly finds himself in sticky situations armed only with his mysterious and magical bag of tricks. Although there is some conflict between characters in the program, the small amount of violence contained in the show is slapstick and usually is not borne of the conflict itself. Rather, the violence is typically the result of accidents such as characters running into or having objects fall on them. When such incidents do occur, they are extremely hyperbolic. For example, in one

segment, heavy objects such as a safe, a bus, a piano, a refrigerator and an enormous peach repeatedly fall on the head of a down-on-his-luck gambler. Emphasizing just how down on his luck he is, the repetitious blows do him no harm at all. Felix is also sometimes the victim of such mild violence as stumbles and falls; however, it is never very serious. Overall, the program contains only a small amount of violence. Instead, the program's source of humor is the peculiarity of its characters and the situations in which they find themselves.

### **The Lion King's Timon and Pumbaa (CBS)**

Based on two of the most popular characters from Disney's motion picture **The Lion King**, **Timon and Pumbaa** is a comedic cartoon that lacks the action elements that are typical of Disney's animated films. The show chronicles the adventures of the two title characters as they wander through the African savannah, typically looking for grubs and other sustenance. Timon, the meerkat, is the wild and crazy, scatterbrained leader of the duo, while Pumbaa, the warthog, is his more considerate, albeit dim-witted, compatriot. Together, the two find themselves in a variety of predicaments, ranging from competing in the "Mr. Pig Contest" to hunting a wily bookworm throughout the bookshelves of a library.

Entirely comedic, the program relies heavily on bathroom humor and slapstick violence to entertain its viewers. The violence is very typical of that found in many slapstick cartoons, featuring characters who are hit over the head with oversized mallets and clubs, run into things and have heavy objects fall on them. Although some of these assaults are slightly malicious, they are treated cheerfully and the show's tone is always upbeat and lighthearted. With only one exception, characters always emerge from violent incidents uninjured and, at most, momentarily fazed. Only after a cruise ship and its anchor fall from the sky and land on them are the characters shown in traction at a hospital. Even then, Timon and Pumbaa are only slightly hindered as their frenetic pursuit of the bookworm continues throughout the hospital.

### **Secrets of the Crypt Keeper's Haunted House (CBS)**

This is a live-action, children's game show featuring the Crypt Keeper, the ghoulish host of the gruesome HBO series **Tales From the Crypt**. Set in the Crypt Keeper's haunted house, the contest combines quiz show elements with physical challenges as two teams of pre-teenage boys and girls compete against each other to win prizes such as computers or sets of encyclopedias. Although the physical challenges all have a mildly sinister and violent undertone --for example dodging "fireballs" (actually just foam balls) fired from the mouth a large computer-generated skull, doing battle with a virtual reality skeleton and solving word puzzles in a room with shrinking walls--the show contains no actual violence and simply seeks to play upon many children's natural fascination with the macabre. The only issue that the program may raise is that the fiendish and grotesque Crypt Keeper may be a little frightening to very young viewers.

## ***2. Tame Combat Violence***

This is a necessarily broad category that contains the types of violence that are typical of adventure-comedy cartoons, in which the violence usually stems from a battle between the forces of good and evil. It is generally used to establish the conflict in the story and then again in the climax. Examples of tame combat violence include somewhat threatening chase scenes that result in little, if no harm; fight scenes in which the emphasis is placed on evading attacks and any other relatively innocuous conflict in which good battles evil. Though some scenes may be prolonged in order to achieve a degree of excitement, the action or comedic aspect, not the violence, is the crux of the program. Unlike in sinister combat violence, characters in this category do not fight eagerly without considering alternatives, and the shows do not have a dark, malevolent look or feel.

Examples of these shows are:

### **Big Bad Beetleborgs (Fox)**

In this live-action show from the makers of **The Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers**, three children possess the ability to transform into the comic book superheroes, the Big Bad Beetleborgs. Using a haunted house as their headquarters, the Beetleborgs are befriended by a wild and wacky ghost named Flabber and several dim-witted, comedic versions of classic horror movie monsters. As the Beetleborgs, the children protect humanity from the evil ambitions of the Magnavorgs, a group of bumbling creatures who wish to destroy the Beetleborgs and take over the world. In each episode, in an effort to demolish the heroes, the Magnavorgs magically summon monsters from the Big Bad Beetleborg comic books to do battle with them.

Although the Beetleborgs do engage in battle in every episode, there is surprisingly little violence in this program. Unlike in **Power Rangers**, violent conflict is neither glorified nor the thrust of the show. **Big Bad Beetleborgs** is a much more comedic show, emphasizing the bumbling antics that go on in the haunted mansion more than the fight scenes. The entire feeling of the show is more comedic and less action-oriented than other live-action shows of this genre.

When the Beetleborgs do fight Magnavorg monsters, the scenes are surprisingly short and harmless, typically lasting only 10-15 seconds. The impacts of blows are generally obscured by words that appear on screen such as "POW," "Oops!" or "BAM" in a manner very similar to that of the old **Batman** TV series. Also, the Beetleborgs occasionally resort to non-violent methods when fighting off monsters. For example, in one episode, the Beetleborgs tickle a Magnavorg into submission. Also of note is that rather than killing or injuring their foes, the Beetleborgs use a special ray gun that sends monsters back into the comic books from which they came.

Despite the show's premise, there is surprisingly little violence in **Big Bad Beetleborgs**. That which does exist is brief and mitigated by the words that appear on screen. The overall tone of the program is extremely light and comedic and further distracts viewers from the violence that occurs.



## **Gargoyles: The Goliath Chronicles (ABC)**

This cartoon chronicles the lives of a clan of gargoyles living in an American metropolis. Though fierce-looking and capable of tremendous destruction, the gargoyles are a noble and intelligent lot who come to life at night, but turn into stone at sunrise. Despite their virtuous nature and constant good deeds, the gargoyles are feared and hated by most of humanity and are forced to seek refuge with their wealthy industrialist friend Xanatos. With his help, and the aid of their other human friend, police detective Elisa Maza, the gargoyles fight crime and evade persecution, hoping someday they will be accepted by mankind and welcomed into society.

Due to the crime-fighting aspect of the show, as well as the persecution of the gargoyles by a hate-mongering vigilante group known as the Quarrymen, **Gargoyles** necessarily contains violence. Combined with its dark and ominous tone, it would seem that this program is obviously a sinister combat violence show. However, largely due to the characterization of the gargoyles, and in particular their leader Goliath, the show does not raise issues of violence.

The program is surprisingly sophisticated for Saturday morning and the gargoyles are well drawn characters with a deep appreciation for peace and justice. They regularly deal intelligently and thoughtfully with the very human problems of social acceptance, scapegoating and wishing to be someone else. The gargoyles never initiate violence and only resort to it in self-defense or to protect others. Instead, human characters are typically responsible for the violence in the program, using guns, lasers and electrically charged hammers to try and kill Goliath and his band. With few exceptions, the only weapon the gargoyles rely upon is their extreme strength.

The use of violence in **Gargoyles** is never glorified and instead casts a negative light on those responsible for it. The show's protagonists are rational, sensitive creatures who are put in violent situations by those who seek to destroy them. Although there is a darker feel to the program and it contains a slightly higher level of violence than most tame combat violence shows, the violence is used to deliver a pro-social, anti-violence message in a manner that children will not regard as patronizing.

## **Goosebumps (Fox)**

A live-action anthology series based on the popular children's books by author R.L. Stine, **Goosebumps** is best described as "**The X-Files** for kids." Combining creepy stories with high production values, the program creates a very menacing and foreboding sentiment without relying heavily on violence. Each episode tells a different story of two or three young teens in some sort of bizarre, paranormal predicament. Preceded by an advisory that warns of material that may be too "spooky" for younger viewers, the program delivers the promised goosebumps with an assortment of creepy crawlies and sundry fiendish characters. Similar to shows such as **The Twilight Zone** and **Alfred Hitchcock Presents**, episodes frequently end on an ominous note with some twist that implies that the danger may not in fact be over.

Despite its dark and scary tone, **Goosebumps** contains less violence than almost any other show on Saturday morning. Well done, it is both thrilling and slightly disturbing with nothing more

violent than someone grabbing another character. Rather, it is the grave and intense tone of the program that portends violence, giving viewers the impression of danger or pending violence without any violence actually occurring.

### **The Mask (CBS)**

In its second season, this animated version of the hugely popular Jim Carrey film remained unchanged from its first season in its treatment of violence. The program, like the movie, follows the adventures of mild-mannered Stanley Ipkus who, when wearing a magical mask, is transformed into a green, mischievous and loud-mouthed cartoon character called The Mask. As The Mask, Stanley uses his ridiculous and humorous super powers to fight crime and do battle with villains.

Although the program's theme is totally comedic, relying heavily on slapstick violence, because of its premise there is some violent conflict between The Mask and his foes. The hero himself is in no way malicious, resorting to rather tame, comedic forms of violence such as "atomic wedgies." He seldom, if ever, attempts to inflict physical harm on anyone, preferring instead to utilize outrageous and humorous tactics to quell wrongdoings. However, he is often the victim of tremendous amounts of abuse such as being blown up or punched across the city. Even in the face of such attacks, The Mask's attitude remains consistently irreverent and unfazed by the violence. In the few episodes in which The Mask does not clash with a villain, the level of violence remains fairly low and inconsequential. Although the bulk of the violence featured in **The Mask** is slapstick, much of it typically occurs in the context of a fight and is thus best classified as tame combat violence.

### **Mighty Ducks (ABC)**

A Disney cartoon founded on the popularity of the Mighty Ducks professional hockey team (owned by Disney), this program is about a team of alien duck freedom fighters who pursue an intergalactic criminal, Lord Dragonus, through a cross-dimensional gateway into our universe. On Earth, the ducks become a successful professional hockey team and valiantly protect the planet from being taken over by Dragonus and his reptilian crew.

Although the program infuses a great deal of humor into the action, **Mighty Ducks** is first and foremost an action/adventure show. The ducks are muscle-bound soldiers with specializations in weapons and hand-to-hand combat. They are virtuous and intelligent, but are constantly drawn into violent confrontations by Dragonus. Though they show no particular zeal for combat, they certainly do not try to avoid it and never treat it with much gravity.

Battle scenes are typically set to exciting music and consist of the ducks exchanging laser fire with and shooting exploding hockey pucks at Dragonus' henchmen. When they engage in fistfights, much of the fighting is brief and done off screen. No one is ever seriously hurt except in one episode in which the ducks' leader sacrifices himself to save the others. Although this cartoon certainly pushes the boundaries of tame combat violence, and occasionally crosses them,

it is lacking the darkness and malevolent edge that characterize sinister combat violence programs. It does, however, contain more violence than is typical of tame combat violence and frequently raises issues of glorification.

### **Spiderman** (Fox)

An animated series based on one of Marvel Comics' oldest and most popular superheroes, **Spiderman** joined the Fox Saturday morning lineup two seasons ago and quickly became one of its most popular shows. Chronicling the adventures of the wall-crawling superhero, the show features intricate storylines, derived from the actual comic books, which span several episodes. Serving as a guardian of the city, Spiderman swings through the skyscrapers of New York City thwarting the evil plans of villains such as Venom, the Kingpin and the Green Goblin.

As is typical for this genre, action is the driving force of the show. While the level of action is typically achieved and maintained through the use of violence, **Spiderman** walks a fine line between tame combat violence and sinister combat violence. What distinguishes the program from sinister combat violence shows is the nature of its protagonist. Unlike other superheroes featured in action-oriented shows, Spidey shows no zeal for combat and prefers to work from a distance, dodging attacks and using his webbing to subdue villains. Occasionally he is drawn into hand-to-hand combat and punches are exchanged, but only rarely and in self-defense or to protect others. Although there are a number of violent scenes in each episode of **Spiderman**, most of them consist of Spidey evading explosions, laser blasts and the sundry attacks of supervillains instead of traditional hand-to-hand combat. Throughout these assaults he always maintains his characteristic good nature, which is evidenced by the fact that he never tries to kill or seriously hurt his opponents, only web them up and leave them for the proper authorities.

Another difference in the portrayal of Spiderman is the attention paid to his non-superhero identity, Peter Parker. Parker is a college student who is faced with real problems of looking after his elderly Aunt May, doing well in school, paying the bills and finding love, all of which are complicated by his secret identity. This gives the cartoon a more human dimension that places a higher value on the positive qualities of Peter Parker than on Spiderman's ability to fight.

Typically, when other Marvel superheroes, such as Wolverine or the Punisher, make occasional "guest appearances" on the show, the program takes a darker, more violent turn and begins to resemble sinister combat violence shows. However, these instances are exceptions rather than the rule and Spiderman often opposes these characters' more violent tactics.

### **The Tick** (Fox)

A sophisticated spoof of the superhero cartoon genre, **The Tick** chronicles the absurd and comedic exploits of a seven-foot-tall, 400 pound, pea-brained crime fighter with a flair for the dramatic, named the Tick. With the aid of his moth-suit-wearing, accountant-turned-sidekick, Arthur, the Tick saves the world from such laughable supervillains as The American Mustache and Chairface. Although there is some fighting in the show involving punches and laser guns, it

is always exaggerated for the purposes of comedy rather than action and is never lethal. No one is ever seriously hurt and altercations frequently occur off-screen.

The violence in the program is typically as ridiculous as the Tick's attempts at profundity and only serves to escalate the show's comic value. For example, as The American Mustache wreaks havoc on the community by attaching itself to innocent bystanders' upper lips in an effort to find its long lost love, The Russian Beard, the Tick saves its victims by spraying them with shaving cream and attempting to shave The Mustache. In another episode that takes place in a nightclub exclusively for superheroes, the Tick is forced to battle Barry, a "wannabe" superhero who gets into the club because his brother owns it. Barry picks a fight with the Tick because Barry also has chosen "the Tick" as his superhero moniker. The humor of the situation is augmented by the presence of a former gun-toting super-vigilante turned pacifist, who tries to mediate the conflict with his therapist's advice while suppressing his own ultra-violent impulses.

Everything from his blowhard musings to the over the top violent confrontations the Tick gets himself into indicate **The Tick's** satiric intent. The violence is not glorified or emphasized unless it adds to the parody. It raises no issues of concern.

### ***3. Sinister Combat Violence***

These are the programs that raise the greatest concerns about the treatment of violence. This form of cartoon violence is characteristic of action-oriented programs that are combat driven. Fighting is the main attraction or purpose of these programs and the plots only provide justification for the combat. While this is not a new genre in Saturday morning programming, the dark overtones and unrelenting combat in these shows constitute a fairly recent trend. In these shows mean, vindictive violence occurs with little to counter the message that violence is an appropriate solution to a problem. The warriors are often portrayed heroically and their actions glorified.

Sinister combat violence shows are similar to tame combat violence shows in that they always contain a battle scene between the forces of good and evil. Nevertheless, sinister combat violence shows are far more mean-spirited and typically have a considerably more exciting feel to them provided by, among other things, a driving, rock music background. The heroes or "good guys" in these programs are valued for their toughness rather than their virtues, such as sense of humor or kindness, and are made "cool" by their warrior status and ability to destroy enemies. Violent behavior is always the defining element of these characters. These shows also draw out the violent scenes much longer and feature much more hand-to-hand combat and lethal forms of violence than the tame combat shows. In these programs, the focus is on the battle scenes which make up a large portion of the show.

While concerns may be raised in the other two categories of cartoon violence, depending on the particular program and the age of the child, it is our contention that sinister combat violence raises the most serious and immediate concerns. It is violence for the sake of violence. It rarely couches the violent acts in any suitable context. The message is: fight.

Four Saturday morning programs fall into the category of sinister combat violence. They are as follows:

### **Project G.e.e.K.e.R. (CBS)**

Set in an apocalyptic future world, **Project G.e.e.K.e.R.** revolves around the exploits of three friends, a streetwise thief named Lady MacBeth, a talking dinosaur named Noah and a super-powered, amorphous being called Geeker. The focus of the program is on the protection of Geeker, whose creation was commissioned by an evil industrialist named Mr. Moloch who sought to use him as a weapon. However, before Geeker's warrior mentality could be programmed, Lady MacBeth and Noah stole him away from Moloch's lab, rendering Geeker a super-powered, but sweet-hearted goofball. In each episode, Noah and Lady MacBeth try to stop Moloch's efforts to recapture Geeker and turn him into a weapon of mass destruction.

**Project G.e.e.K.e.R.** is a difficult program to classify because of its unique combination of themes and styles. Although much of the program features Geeker's wacky antics, they stand in stark contrast to the rest of the program's dark feeling. Lady MacBeth's character is extremely violent and has to be frequently restrained from initiating conflict by the more rational Noah. Possessing a robotic arm that is equipped with a variety of weapons, Lady MacBeth is the type of person who shoots first and asks questions later. Although Noah is more pragmatic and looks for peaceful solutions to problems, he too is often driven to fight as their group is continually assaulted by Moloch's mutant henchmen. Ironically, the least violent character in the show is Geeker, who in fact is capable of the most destruction but only resorts to using his powers in defense of his friends or innocent bystanders.

Although the show contains a substantial number of violent conflicts, they are typically interspersed with instances of Geeker's lighthearted frivolity, thereby undermining the sinister element of the program. Despite this, the fact remains that much of this show revolves around glorified, action-packed violence such as laser gun fights and hand-to-hand combat. The comedic influence of the program's title character does soften the menacing tone of the program, but is not enough to dismiss some of the issues it raises.

### **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (CBS)**

Although the overall level of violence in this animated program seems to have diminished slightly this season compared to last, the focus of the program continues to be on the Turtles fighting. In an effort to keep viewers' interest, the show introduced several new elements this season. These included a new, more menacing villain, special mutating powers for the Turtles, and a new human sidekick named Carter. The ability to mutate is of particular interest because of its impact on the show's level of violence. When the Turtles and Carter mutate, they are turned into stronger, less intelligent, more violent versions of themselves. Thus, not surprisingly, when the characters mutate the amount of violence in the show rises sharply.

Although the tone of this program is not very sinister due to its heavy infusion of comedy, the driving force of the show is violence. Music, wisecracks made by the Turtles and multiple fight scenes in every episode convey the message that fighting is exciting and trivial. A wide variety of weapons are used by characters, ranging from laser guns to poles, swords, and fists. The heroes of the program, though intelligent and funny, are most highly prized for their ability to fight and they appear to enjoy beating up their enemies. Thus, although it is much less ominous than other sinister combat violence programs, it still raises issues of glorification and centers around a violent theme.

### **Power Rangers Zeo and Power Rangers Turbo (Fox)**

Midway through last season, **Power Rangers Zeo** replaced **The Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers**. In a similar fashion, this season, on the coattails of the feature film of the same name, **Power Rangers Turbo** replaced **Zeo**. Although all but one of the characters stayed the same, the Rangers were given new powers, vehicles and costumes to assist them as they face a new, more insidious villain, Divatox, and her hordes of "Piranhatrons." Despite these changes, the show's look, concept and formula remained virtually the same. With her nasty minions, Divatox, like those enemies that came before her, is bent on the destruction of the Power Rangers, and is perpetually sending her troops and monsters to demolish them and torment their hometown, Angel Grove. Each episode follows a remarkably similar blueprint, as the Rangers initially fight Piranhatrons and one of Divatox's monsters and barely beat them, thereby causing them to retreat and regroup. Just when all seems well in Angel Grove, the monster returns for one last climactic battle. Inevitably, just as the Rangers have the monster on the ropes, Divatox magically "super sizes" it to mammoth proportions. Overwhelmed, the Rangers are forced to "shift into turbo," calling upon futuristic, all-terrain vehicles that piece together to form a super fighting robot. Piloting the robot, the Rangers vanquish the monster, leaving Divatox to come up with a new monster in the next episode. Within this model are ample opportunities for violent confrontations between the Rangers and Divatox's hordes.

Although there are some minor differences between **Zeo** and **Turbo**, the two incarnations of the **Power Ranger** series raise exactly the same issues of concern. Neither program is at all menacing or even particularly sinister, featuring bright colors, good natured heroes, some comedic relief and bumbling villains. However, the amount, glorification and realistic forms of violence featured in every episode of the program have made it a frequent, central focus of the debate over violence in children's programs.

Featuring drawn out scenes full of martial arts-style punches and kicks, **Power Rangers** is, at its core, a show about fighting. Although most episodes contain some moral or life lesson the characters learn through their encounter with Divatox, the driving force of the program is the multiple scenes of hand-to-hand combat between the Power Rangers and their foes. This is evidenced by the length of the fight scenes (many of which are as long as five minutes), the very stylized manner in which they are presented and the exciting, fast-paced music that plays in the background. It is not uncommon for there to be as many as three or four such scenes in one episode, amounting to at least two-thirds of the program.

Although the Power Rangers themselves are all upstanding, good natured, moral characters with a healthy respect for justice, they are principally valued for their ability to fight. Despite the staggering number of times they are punched and kicked in the legs and torso, and sometimes even the head, not to mention the punishment they regularly dole out, the Rangers never suffer any kind of physical consequence from all their fighting. They often seem to enjoy it, challenging their enemies and never exhibiting any reluctance to enter into battle.

One noteworthy difference between **Turbo** and **Zeo** is that in **Turbo** there seems to be more instances in which the Rangers fight out of costume. Although this may be minor point, for some viewers this may make the violence seem more realistic because it is committed by humans rather than costumed superheroes. It is unlikely that **Power Rangers** deserves all of the blame and negative press it has received for supposedly causing children to imitate the violence it showcases. But because it is live action and thus easily imitated and the heroes are so admired by so many viewers, the messages it sends about violence do raise some serious issues of concern.

### **X-Men (Fox)**

Another animated series based on a popular Marvel comic book, **X-Men** has been one of the cornerstones of the successful Fox Kids lineup on Saturday mornings. Chronicling the exploits and adventures of a team of super powered mutants, the show features extremely complicated storylines, many of which span several episodes and are taken from the pages of the actual comic book. Perhaps the darkest children's show on Saturday morning, **X-Men** deals with complex themes of social rejection and intolerance. Despite the fact that the X-Men and other mutants like them are persecuted and hated by mankind, they choose not to retaliate, instead using their powers to battle the evil forces that wish to perpetuate human fear of mutants. In this respect, the X-Men exhibit a strong sense of morality. However, in other ways, they are more suspect.

Although some episodes of **X-Men** contain few scenes of violence, most rely upon them heavily. The show emphasizes numerous fight scenes in which the mutants use their powers as weapons of destruction and maintain a high level of violence. Scenes of violence are extremely prolonged and are replete with vivid depictions of hand-to-hand combat and exchanges of laser fire. In addition to the use of more fantastic mutant abilities, more realistic weaponry, such as swords, knives and daggers, are also regularly featured in battle. The majority of the violence is characterized by a malicious and malevolent undertone, particularly that which is committed by one of the show's most popular characters, Wolverine, whose razor sharp claws and belligerent personality make for an extremely brutal and violent antihero. Unlike the other Fox-Marvel collaboration, **Spiderman**, the X-Men typically try to kill their foes rather than simply subdue them. Though possessing a strong sense of justice, some of the characters are morally ambiguous and have very mean-spirited dispositions. Scenes of violence are frequently unnecessary and their inclusion is indicative of the show's core appeal to its audience. The physical consequences of the numerous violent confrontations are seldom examined, although the fantastic nature of the heroes and their powers provide a default explanation as to why this is the case. Some psychological effects of violence are explored in greater depth than is typical of cartoons. However, they seldom, if ever, result in the consideration of non-violent resolutions to problems.

Ultimately, extreme violence appears to be as commonplace and acceptable as conversation to these characters.

Although most of the violence in **X-Men** is completely unrealistic and impossible to imitate, the sentiment and attitude behind it is not. The manner in which the heroes embrace violence as the only means to resolving problems potentially sends the message that violence is not only justified, but enjoyable. The celebration of brutal characters such as Wolverine and the focus on violent encounters belie the occasional pro-social messages of non-violence proffered by other characters in the show. For these reasons, **X-Men** raises some of the most serious issues of concern in all of children's programming.



## H. The Emerging Broadcast Networks: UPN and WB

For many years television was dominated by the three television networks, ABC, CBS and NBC. Although there was talk of a fourth network for many years, it remained just talk until the emergence of the Fox network in the mid 1980s. Rupert Murdoch's purchase of half, and then all of Twentieth Century Fox, and then Metromedia (which had stations in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, as well as other markets) gave the Australian businessman the production and distribution platforms to launch a new network.

Although there was a fear that the new Fox network might only purchase programs produced by its own Twentieth Century Fox production arm, the new network sought out the best programs it could find, regardless of where they originated, even if they came from rival studios. With a much smaller network of affiliates, at first Fox was unable to compete head-to-head with the more established television networks. However, Fox distinguished itself in at least two ways. First, it used a higher concentration of "reality" programs which were filmed in video and much cheaper to produce than most of the scripted comedy or drama found on its competitors. Some of the early Fox shows such as **America's Most Wanted** and **Totally Hidden Video** could use the same sets each week. Others such as **COPS** did not require a large staff of writers. The second way that Fox distinguished itself was with an irreverent attitude and with programming that was much more "on the edge" than that of ABC, CBS or NBC. Fox was doing what had proved successful for the motion picture business, i.e., focusing on a young audience. While the traditional networks tried to create programming that appealed to all age groups, Fox concentrated on young audiences, and particularly urban and, in many cases, African American audiences.

Fox knew that comedies such as **Married With Children** were unlikely to appeal to older audiences. The new network was willing to create programming that appealed almost exclusively to younger audiences. Fox also created more programs featuring African Americans than any of the other networks. Shows such as **In Living Color**, **Martin** and **Living Single** became important elements of the Fox lineup and were partially responsible for its success. Fox also benefitted from the disastrous 1988 writers' strike. The strike lasted so long that the other networks were forced to air reruns as many as three times. While Fox was also airing reruns, the initial audience numbers for those shows were so low that, as the strike continued, the audience turned to the Fox reruns in order to view what was for them original entertainment. Many of the people who sampled Fox programming for the first time in 1988 liked the attitude and style of the Fox network.

In the 1990s Fox programming such as **The Simpsons**, **Beverly Hills 90210** and **Melrose Place** continued to attract the young, urban audiences that advertisers value. Fox was already a viable competitor with the other networks by the time it added NFL football and secured the stations owned by New World as affiliates (causing chaos for the other networks as they scrambled to find new affiliate homes for their programming and ended up, in several cases, on UHF). In 1997 the Fox network is able to charge advertisers a premium for its young audiences. Even though it still runs only 15 hours of programming a week (unlike the 22 hours a week on the other networks), Fox proved its critics wrong and established a successful fourth network.

As Fox became successful with its network, other important events unfolded, causing concern in the entertainment industry. Fox's network was already owned by one of the most prominent motion picture and television studios, Twentieth Century Fox. In the summer of 1995 another large studio, Walt Disney, purchased Capital Cities, which owned the ABC television network. At the time CBS was also apparently for sale (it was eventually purchased by Westinghouse) and many large companies were looking at NBC. There was concern at Warner Bros., MCA/Universal, Sony and Paramount that their competitors were acquiring television networks, one of the best forms of television program distribution, while they were not. There was also concern that ABC and Fox, which bought their networks' programs from any production source, might begin to favor programming from the production arms owned by the parent company. This would represent a substantial problem by leaving the studios with fewer places to sell their products. Moreover, after a ban of about 20 years, repeal of the financial interest and syndication rules meant that networks could begin to own their own programming and share in the enormous profits of those shows that stay on long enough to enter the syndication system. Networks had clear financial reasons to favor their own programming over that of their production competitors. The studios that did not own networks began to realize that they needed a guaranteed distribution system or they might find themselves in real trouble.

These studios also saw, through the example of Fox, that it was possible to build small networks that primarily appealed to niche markets. It took the Fox network several years to be able to program all seven days of the week and, as mentioned above, it still does not program as many hours as the older networks.

Recognizing the important changes in the market, Paramount (owned by Viacom) and Warner Bros. (owned by Time Warner) felt the need to create their own television networks. This represented potential problems for the established networks. Theoretically, Warner Bros. could argue that two of its biggest hits, **Friends** and **ER**, would be better placed on the WB network than on NBC. Though those programs would forego the enormous exposure found on the larger, better known NBC, undoubtedly some, if not much, of those show's audiences would follow them to Warner's WB and help establish the new network. So far this has not happened, probably because Warner does not want to forsake the immense syndication profits those shows will receive by becoming hits on a traditional network. Nevertheless, the fact that it could happen causes concern for those established networks.

In January of 1995 Viacom and Chris-Craft Television (a large multiple station owner) established UPN (the United-Paramount Network) and Warner Bros. created the WB (Warner Bros.) network. Ironically, Viacom had initially been created when, because of the financial interest and syndication rules, CBS was required to spin off its successful syndication arm. UPN began broadcasting on two nights a week. While most of its original programming was canceled, UPN's network was anchored around Paramount's extraordinarily successful **Star Trek** franchise. **Star Trek Voyager** immediately attracted great interest and attention to the UPN network and viewers learned where it was on the dial. WB began with one night of programming, mostly comedies.

The original lineups for the two networks were largely unsuccessful. Last season WB expanded to three nights per week (Sunday, Monday, and Wednesday) and UPN to three nights as well

(Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday). This year both networks continued to program three nights a week. Next year both will further expand to four nights a week. Like the Fox network in its early days, both networks are trying to attract younger audiences. In its first season UPN created some action programming that was somewhat more intense than what is found on the other networks. This season both UPN and WB focused more on comedy and, as Fox did in its early days, produced more programming starring and created for African Americans. In 1997 it still is not clear whether the two newest networks will survive and become successful. What is clear is that, with the enormous clout and financial resources of Viacom and Time Warner behind them, the two networks will have every opportunity to establish themselves. Viacom already owns MTV, Nickelodeon, TV Land and Showtime, while Warner, which already owned HBO and Cinemax before its new merger with Turner, now owns CNN, TBS, The Cartoon Network and TNT.

## ***1. Findings on UPN and WB***

Last season there were four series on UPN that raised frequent concerns about violence and none on WB. The four on UPN came from a total of six hours of programming while the four broadcast networks air 81 hours of programming and produced only five series raising frequent concerns. This season the number of series on UPN in the frequent category has been reduced by half to two while WB contributed its first series raising frequent concerns. Even with UPN's improvement, it still has as many series with frequent problems as the other four networks combined. Coupled with the one series from WB, these two new networks have more series (three) with frequent violence issues than ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC combined. On a more positive note, these two networks have no series raising occasional concerns while there are still six such series on the other networks.

### **a. Series Raising Frequent Concerns**

In its first full year of programming last year, UPN aired mostly dramatic series. WB filled its schedule with situation comedies and only one drama. This season there is a greater mix of both formats on each network. Some of these series did raise concerns. It is not surprising that in efforts to get noticed, UPN's and WB's dramas have a harder edge than those found on the other broadcast networks. Last season UPN even exploited this edge by labeling its back-to-back Wednesday night programming of **The Sentinel** and **Swift Justice** "Lethal Wednesday." Using the same methodology that was applied to the broadcast networks, two UPN programs and one WB program raised frequent concerns. They are:

#### **Buffy the Vampire Slayer (WB)**

Inspired by the campy feature film of the same name, **Buffy the Vampire Slayer** debuted midway through the season on the WB. Airing at 9:00 p.m. and preceded by an advisory warning of "action scenes which may be too intense for younger viewers," the show revolves around a high school sophomore named Buffy and her two best friends Willow and Xander. As the program's opening credits explain, Buffy is the "chosen Slayer" for her generation, a birthright which charges her with the duty of fighting off the hordes of vampires that migrate to her hometown. Assisted by her trainer and the school librarian, Mr. Giles, Buffy faces a host of demons, monsters and vampires, dispensing with them using an impressive array of punches, high-flying kicks and wooden stakes.

True to its inspiration, **Buffy the Vampire Slayer** combines comedy, action and horror to produce a program that is fun but oftentimes scary. The juxtaposition of Buffy's warrior character and a high school setting provides ample opportunity for humor as she struggles to balance her life as a teenager with her responsibilities as the Vampire Slayer. This sense of humor often detracts from the otherwise serious violence that occurs regularly in the program, mitigating it in some respects, but also trivializing it to a degree. A prime example of this can be found in the episode on 3/31/97, in which Buffy fights a muscle-bound vampire at a funeral home. Just as the vampire appears to have cornered Buffy, the boy she had been on a date with earlier in the evening shows up and hits the vampire with a metal tray. Angered by the

interference, the vampire slams the boy's head against a piece of metal, apparently killing him. Buffy becomes infuriated, and begins beating the vampire senseless with an array of kicks and punches, all the while yelling at him, "You killed my date!"

The program occasionally contains graphic violence as well. In an episode on 4/14/97, Buffy shoots a female vampire in the torso with a crossbow. The bolt is shown protruding from the chest of the vampire who laughs it off and wrenches it out. In an episode aired on 5/5/97, an animated ventriloquist's dummy repeatedly plunges a kitchen knife into the back of a demon, finally killing it when he drives the knife through its heart. In the episode on 4/28/97, a demon named Moloch the Corrupter is depicted nonchalantly snapping the necks of two teenage boys. In that same episode, a teenage boy is shown carving the letter "M" into his forearm with an Exacto knife.

The show's lighthearted sense of humor oftentimes belies the dark and malevolent theme of some episodes. For example, the episode on 5/5/97 revolved around the capture and destruction of a demon who was killing students and cutting out their hearts and brains with a butcher knife. Although the audience never sees any of the organs being removed, the very idea is quite dismal and disturbing, particularly for a program that has a large appeal to young audiences.

The length of some scenes of violence also raises issues of concern. Fights involving hand-to-hand combat frequently last up to three minutes and feature graphic punches and kicks. Although exaggerated in number, each blow is presented realistically. The violence is also extremely glorified and is shown without any consequences. Because Buffy is fighting against purely evil creatures she should be afforded some degree of glorification. But, the program occasionally goes too far in this regard. In sum, her principal function in the program is to fight, something she often does with a casual indifference.

Despite the program's advisory and 9:00 p.m. time slot, **Buffy the Vampire Slayer** is very likely to attract young viewers. For this reason, the glorification, graphic nature and multitude of scenes raise concerns. Of the ten times this program aired, it raised issues four times.

### **The Burning Zone (UPN)**

A psychological thriller, **The Burning Zone** is a program that revolves around a government agency similar to the Centers for Disease Control that investigates and controls bizarre viruses and other disease-related phenomena. Each week, a crack team of doctors, headed by Dr. Daniel Cassian, tackles a new life-threatening plague that has sprung up somewhere in America. These scourges range from violence-inducing chemicals to meteors that transform people into zombies. Airing at 9:00 p.m. without an advisory, the program combines elements of Fox's **The X-Files** with the feature film **Outbreak** in an attempt to frighten and entertain viewers. The illnesses often occur due to clandestine experiments or plans to destroy humanity, opening the door for violent conflict between the team of doctors and a variety of insidious forces.

Although the bulk of the violence that occurs in the show is unrealistic and usually the effect of an affliction, there is some "traditional" violence in each episode, typically in the form of

gunfights. The more traditional violence is generally prolonged and antiseptic, often resulting in little bloodshed but many deaths.

Again, most of the violence in **The Burning Zone** consists of the graphic side effects of disease. The most repulsive example of this can be found in the episode aired on 2/4/97, in which recipients of illegal and unorthodox cancer treatments suffer rapid bone degeneration, causing a condition akin to exaggerated osteoporosis. Thus, victims' bones shatter under minimal pressure. In the opening scene of the episode a woman is shown swimming in her pool. As she attempts to climb out, her forearm snaps with a loud crack under the weight of her body. The audience sees her fall back in the pool screaming in pain as the camera closes in on a bone protruding from her broken flesh. Her shin subsequently splinters in a similar fashion and again the camera shows a close-up view. She sinks below the surface and drowns as viewers hear multiple other breaks. Later in the episode, an unsuspecting jogger suffers a similar fate, his leg breaking off just below the knee. Both instances are extremely graphic and are obviously designed to make viewers squirm in their seats. The graphicness of the incidents was far more than was necessary for the plot. These are among the most unpleasant scenes of violence monitored this season on network television.

Other excessively vivid images of violence can be found in episodes that aired on 9/3/96, 9/24/96 and 1/28/97. These featured, respectively, a prolonged image of a man ignited with flame throwers and burning to death, multiple victims combusting internally and exploding into flames and men burned alive with acid. Each of these incidents could have been filmed differently so that the violence was not so horrifically graphic.

**The Burning Zone** also contains examples of exceedingly brutal violence. In the episode that aired on 5/20/97, a corrupt prison warden and doctor use inmates as guinea pigs to test a pacifying drug. However, the results of the experiment go terribly awry when prisoners become more aggressive and go berserk. In a scene that occurs early in the program, a test subject attacks his cell mate and beats him brutally. While this does indicate the degree of dementia victims suffer under the chemical's influence, the length of the scene and the sheer viciousness of the assault are much more than was necessary to make the point. The scene culminates with the prisoner's eyes rolling back in his head and his scalp splitting in two, the ultimate and unnecessarily graphic side effect of the experiment.

Although the intent of these vivid and violent images is to disturb viewers, they are portrayed far more graphically than the stories dictate. Of the 17 times it was aired, **The Burning Zone** raised issues of concern five times.

### **The Sentinel (UPN)**

Returning for its second season, **The Sentinel** continued to air at 8:00 p.m. on Wednesday nights and also continued to make the list of UPN programs raising frequent concerns about violence. Of UPN's four series on the list last year, **The Sentinel** was the only one to be renewed this season. Although last season it was the first half of UPN's self-described "Lethal Wednesday," its lineup partner, **Swift Justice**, was canceled this season. Instead, **Star Trek Voyager** was

aired in the 9:00 p.m. slot. An action-oriented cop show, **The Sentinel** chronicles the exploits of police detective Jim Ellison, a former Army Ranger whose sensory perceptions have been honed to superhuman levels while living in isolation in the Peruvian jungles. Back in civilization, with the assistance of an anthropology graduate student-sidekick, Detective Ellison uses his abilities to fight crime and uphold the law.

The principal issue raised by **The Sentinel** is that of time slot. Characteristic of its genre, the program regularly contains six to ten scenes of prolonged, intense and lethal violence. Although the characters and storylines of the program are more developed than others in this genre, much of the show consists of heavy gunplay and fistfights between Ellison and criminals. While most of these scenes are relatively quick and some of the violence occurs off screen, each episode typically concludes with a prolonged scene of conflict in which Detective Ellison violently dispenses with the villains. These scenes are often set to exciting music which has the effect of glorifying the violence and making it appear appealing.

**The Sentinel** frequently raises issues of tonnage. Episodes sometimes contain a dozen or more scenes of violence in an hour. While some of these scenes contain quick and insignificant types of violence, many of them are surprisingly brutal and prolonged for the time slot, lasting as long as five minutes. Multiple fistfights, explosions and exchanges of gunfire maintain the fast pace and feeling of peril.

As mentioned above, some of the violence is surprisingly brutal and graphic. An example of this is in the episode that aired on 9/25/96, in which a police captain is viciously pistol-whipped across the face by a rogue sheriff. He is then punched repeatedly and shot in the leg. Similarly, in the episode that aired on 4/30/97, a teenage boy who witnesses a crime is brutally smacked across the face with a pistol, splitting open his forehead and causing blood to run down his face. On 2/26/97, Ellison subdues his opponent by smashing him over the head with a fire extinguisher. In the opening scene of the same episode, a man walks into a café and opens fire on its patrons with an Uzi. As glass shatters and bullets fly in slow motion, the violence of the encounter is emphasized.

Violence is often accentuated in **The Sentinel**. In an episode that aired on 4/30/97, a man falls from the roof of a building onto a car below. He falls in slow motion and the impact of his body onto the car's roof is shown from five different angles, prolonging the violence and ensuring that the audience sees the bad guy "get it good." Explosions are frequently filmed in a similar manner, exploiting and highlighting the violence.

In the episode that aired on 11/20/96, Ellison squares off with a ruthless drug dealer. The two exchange several punches and kicks to the face and torso until the criminal brandishes a knife. When the criminal charges him, Ellison clotheslines him so hard that the man flips in the air and lands unconscious.

Although some violence is crucial to action programs such as **The Sentinel**, much of what is featured in this program is too intense and prolonged for 8:00 p.m. Gunshots and punches are frequently more graphic than is necessary and much of the violence is excessive. At a later time slot **The Sentinel** would not raise as much concern. Of the 22 times it was monitored, **The Sentinel** raised issues 14 times.

## **b. Theatrical and Made-for-Television Movies**

There were no movies shown on the WB network. UPN ran three movies of various origin and all raised concerns about violence. They are:

### **Hollywood Confidential** (UPN-4/14/97)

This made-for-television movie centers around a firm of private detectives with colorful pasts who investigate the seedy side of Hollywood. The film raises concerns primarily because of the glorification in its most violent scenes. For example, an attack in an alley upon one of the female investigators is made more intense through the use of slow motion and especially fast-paced music. Violent flashback scenes are glamorized by being presented in slow motion as well as in black and white. Although the number of violent scenes is not unusually excessive, almost every act of violence occurs just before a commercial break, presumably as a way to lure the audience into staying tuned.

### **Them** (UPN-10/8/96)

In this made-for-television movie, aliens have invaded Earth in order to isolate a protein possessed by humans which the aliens need for their survival. They open a water filtration plant in the Pacific Northwest that serves as their headquarters and subdue their many victims by implanting worms in their ears.

Graphic violence is prevalent throughout this film. Less than 15 minutes into the broadcast a woman is hunted by one of the aliens who appears in human form. She hits him with a lamp and flees, then tries to shoot him with a pistol. The bullets go right through him. Finally, he grabs her head, zaps her with lightning and sends her flying into a neon motel sign, electrocuting her. This type of intense violence, coupled with other frightening images such as translucent, electrified alien bodies, may be too severe for a film airing at 8:00 p.m. without an advisory.

### **Carlito's Way** (UPN-2/25/97)

This theatrical film tells the story of an ex-gangster released from prison, intent on giving up his former life of crime and pursuing his dream of retiring to the Bahamas. Despite his plans, he is pulled back into the gangster scene and ultimately murdered.

Given the subject matter of this film and the lawless subculture in which it takes place, a certain amount of violent content is to be expected. Credit should be given to the network for airing and repeating an advisory. However, the magnitude of the brutality in **Carlito's Way** far exceeds that which is typical of broadcast television. The very first scene depicts a fatal shooting at point blank range. The ruthlessness only escalates from there. By the end of the movie, the viewer has



witnessed countless shootings, a savage stabbing and the slitting of a man's throat. The film is certainly a compelling one and may arguably depict the gangster lifestyle realistically, but its violence is extremely graphic and intense.

### c. Children's Television

While UPN does not schedule children's television on Saturday morning, it has become the first network to air children's programs on Sunday morning. WB, like the other networks, runs children's programming on Saturday morning. We applied the same system of classification as was described in the preceding section on Saturday morning programming to the UPN and WB cartoons. Of the 13 programs monitored, six featured slapstick violence, five contained tame combat violence and two featured sinister combat violence. Last year, the first in which the new networks programmed for children, there were only seven series aired. Of those seven, three fell into the slapstick area, three were considered tame combat violence and one was classified as sinister combat violence. Like last year, the following is a discussion and analysis of all of the Saturday morning children's shows that aired on UPN and WB.

#### *1) Slapstick*

##### **Animaniacs (WB)**

One of the first and still most popular of the new breed of Warner Bros. cartoons, **Animaniacs** is the cornerstone of the "Kids' WB" lineup. The program consists of vignettes featuring a wide array of odd and amusing characters. The central figures are the Warner brothers, Yacko and Wacko, and their sister Dot, all of whom live in the water tower on the Warner Bros. studio lot. In each episode, the threesome escape the confines of the tower to wreak comedic havoc and goof around on the lot. Other recurring characters include Skippy and Slappy (a cranky squirrel with a bad attitude and her sweet-natured nephew) and Mindy and Buttons (a darling but danger-prone little girl and the dog that watches over her).

In the tradition of the classic Warner Bros. cartoons, slapstick violence abounds throughout the program. It is also coupled with intelligence, satire and a sophisticated sense of humor, parodying a wide variety of subjects including Disney's **Pocahontas**, Hollywood awards shows and famous works of literature. The show's wit and humor work on multiple levels and appeal to a wider range of ages than most other cartoons on Saturday morning.

As appears to be the case with most Warner Bros. animated programs, the slapstick violence is more severe than that found in other slapstick cartoons. In a Slappy the Squirrel segment that aired on 10/5/96, after receiving a bad review from caricatures of film pundits Siskel and Ebert, Slappy and Skippy seek revenge, repeatedly blowing up the duo with an assortment of explosives. Their vengeance also includes kicking and punching them, liposuctioning Ebert's gut and sending the two out the window of a skyscraper. Despite the fact that the victims always return battered and bruised, but not seriously harmed, the maliciousness and vehemence with which the two squirrels terrorize the men is extreme. Another example of excessive violence that

occurs regularly in the program is characters being hit over the head with huge mallets or other heavy objects. Although this sort of violence is obviously hyperbolic and overdone for the purposes of comedy, it is more brutal and severe than most other slapstick cartoons.

### **The Daffy Duck Show (WB)**

This is a new anthology program that features classic Warner Bros. cartoons, many of which star the title character, Daffy Duck. Each episode contains three full-length cartoons and one animated short, all of which feature the sophisticated sense of humor and slapstick violence that are Looney Toons trademarks. Although much of the violence is committed with malicious intent, it is always treated lightheartedly and comedically. Most of the violence in these classic cartoons is more severe and brutal than that found in modern fare and raises the most issues of concern with regard to slapstick violence. Fights, punches, falling objects and explosions are all portrayed humorously and with little consequence. In addition, the cartoons also tend to feature more realistic weapons such as shotguns and hatchets. In a cartoon that aired on 12/7/96, Porky Pig's pet dog chases Daffy around the house with a hatchet, repeatedly swinging it at him. When the ruckus wakes Porky up from a nap, he grabs the hatchet and chases the dog with it.

Usually Daffy is the victim of the violence, typically as a result of his ill-fated schemes and narcissism. Although some consequences are shown, they are fleeting, unrealistic and only included for comedic purposes. For example, when a large bulldog pounds Daffy on the head with his fist, a large lump rises on Daffy's head and he speaks incoherently. Unlike ABC's **Bugs Bunny & Tweety Show**, the cartoons shown in **The Daffy Duck Show** exhibit no signs of editing.

### **The Mouse and the Monster (UPN)**

**The Mouse and the Monster** is a slapstick comedy cartoon about a mouse named Chester and his best friend, a monster named Mo. Mo was created by a mad scientist, Wackerstein, who wanted to implant the brain of a famous classical pianist in his head so that the pianist's music would live on forever. Chester saves Mo and they run away. The program revolves around the duo's efforts to stay out of the clutches of Wackerstein and his creepy wife Olga.

**The Mouse and the Monster** is a wholly comedic program with very little conflict in it. Most of the violence is the result of Wackerstein's ill-fated, bumbling plans or Olga venting her frustrations on her husband. No attention is ever paid to physical consequences of violence. However, the entire program is so lighthearted and ludicrous that such efforts would seem out of place. There are some acts of violence that, in real life, would prove very serious and potentially could raise issues, such as Olga hitting Wackerstein on the head with a golf club. However, such examples are not frequent and do not have a very malicious feel to them. Since the show is so unrealistic and does not contain much violence, it is unlikely that anyone would feel it raises issues of concern.

## **Pinky and the Brain (WB)**

**Pinky and the Brain**, similar to other Warner Bros. cartoons, features a combination of slapstick comedy and a sophisticated wit, creating a show that appeals to audiences both young and old. The show is about a duo of lab mice who have each been subjected to gene splicing experiments. While this has turned Pinky into an idiotic lunatic, it has made Brain into a power-hungry genius bent on world domination. Each episode revolves around the pair's attempts to execute one of Brain's new and ridiculous plans for taking over the world.

Two types of violence typically occur in **Pinky and the Brain**. Accidental violence occurs when part of Brain's plan inevitably goes awry or Pinky makes a mistake. Typically, this results in objects falling on Brain which only add to his mounting frustrations over Pinky's incompetence. The other form of violence occurs when Brain physically punishes Pinky for his stupidity by hitting him or shoving him. Although this sort of mistreatment seems to belie their friendship, in an episode that aired on 11/30/96, Pinky explicitly says he actually enjoys the abuse, furthering his character as a half-wit. Both types of violence are slapstick and played for comedic purposes and never result in any injury. Altogether, the violence featured in **Pinky and the Brain** is less severe and less frequent than that found in **Animaniacs**.

## **The Sylvester & Tweety Mysteries (WB)**

This program features the classic Warner Bros. characters Sylvester the cat and Tweety Bird, along with Hector the bulldog, as both pets and members of Granny's world-class team of private investigators. The group of super sleuths travel the globe solving crimes and recovering stolen artifacts. Less about the mysteries and more about the hijinks the characters get themselves into, the program features a large amount of slapstick comedy, almost always at Sylvester's expense. These unfortunate and injurious events typically befall Sylvester as a consequence of his perennial attempts to eat Tweety. Many times, the violence is perpetrated by Hector who is charged with the duty of protecting Tweety and who frequently punishes Sylvester for his wrongdoings. Abuses such as being hit over the head with objects like umbrellas, oversized mallets and boulders regularly befall Sylvester. He is also frequently blown up, run over by vehicles, punched by Hector and, in general, pummeled, never suffering any sort of realistic consequence.

In the episode that aired on 10/5/96, the team goes to Pamplona, Spain to search for a stolen periscope. When they arrive, the town is preparing for the annual running of the bulls. For much of the episode, Sylvester is chased and tormented by a pack of bulls that repeatedly jab and poke him in the backside with their horns. Although this would not be humorous in real life, the violence here is clearly played for laughs as audiences chuckle at Sylvester's perpetual bad luck. As seems to be the case in many Warner Bros. cartoons, especially those which feature classic characters such as these, there is more exaggerated and potentially dangerous slapstick violence than in most other modern day slapstick cartoons. However, the violent acts are never particularly mean-spirited and are often portrayed as accidental.

## **Waynehead (WB)**

This is an animated account of TV and film star Damon Wayans' story of what it was like to grow up as an African American in Harlem. It revolves around a fourth grade boy named Damey Waynehead, who struggles with insecurity and the taunts of others because he must wear a large, unsightly orthopedic shoe and leg brace. A comedic show, the program contains minimal amounts of violence, deriving most of its humor from the neighborhood children's favorite pastime of "doing the dozens," an organized game of insulting each other.

The little slapstick violence **Waynehead** does contain consists of typically minor shoves, trips and falls. One recurring slapstick joke centers around a neighborhood dog that has only three legs. Waynehead and his friends frequently bump into the unfortunate pooch, Tripod, and accidentally knock him down. In the episode that aired on 12/7/96, Waynehead is tormented by a bully who challenges him to a fight. Not standing a chance against the much larger bully, Waynehead talks him in to a war of words, daring him to a dozens contest instead of a physical confrontation. When the bully breaks his word and attacks Waynehead, he accidentally runs headfirst into Waynehead's heavy shoe and knocks himself unconscious, thereby demonstrating that violence can result in embarrassment. In each episode, through his experiences Waynehead learns a moral or life lesson such as this. These also include messages about peer pressure, being sensitive to other peoples' feelings and self-acceptance.

## ***2) Tame Combat Violence***

### **Earthworm Jim (WB)**

Based on a popular video game of the same name, **Earthworm Jim** chronicles the adventures of its title character, an earthworm. One day he has the good fortune of having a super spacesuit fall on him, thereby giving him super strength and a "really big gun," not to mention arms and legs. With his new abilities and limbs, and the help of his sidekick Peter the Puppy, Jim defends the universe from a number of bizarre archenemies including Bob the Fish, Professor Monkey-for-a-head, Evil the Cat and Queen Slug-for-a-butt.

Although there are a number of battles in each episode between Jim and his foes, they are always deliberately hyperbolic and humorous rather than action-packed. Scenes of violence are seldom prolonged and, though slightly glorified, not problematic. The overblown and dramatic nature of Jim, in conjunction with his oddball enemies, indicate the show's tongue-in-cheek design. Jim never tries to kill his enemies, only to thwart their evil plans. In the episode that aired on 10/5/96, he even sits down to a friendly game of poker with Bob the Fish. Ultimately, the show contains mostly slapstick violence with some elements of action-adventure, thereby making tame combat violence the most appropriate classification.

## **Freakazoid!** (WB)

This spoof of the superhero genre revolves around the adventures of its lead character Dexter, a scrawny, teenage computer geek. One day, while surfing the Internet, Dexter was sucked into cyberspace and turned into Freakazoid, a wacky, wild goofball of a superhero. The catch is, Freakazoid does not seem to possess any real super powers. Whenever any of Freakazoid's not-so-menacing archenemies threatens to wreak havoc on society, Dexter transforms into the superhero and saves the day.

Although **Freakazoid!** is classified as a tame combat violence show, its primary emphasis is on comedy rather than action. Extremely lighthearted and strangely offbeat, the show possesses a sophisticated and self-conscious sense of humor that jibes with its satiric purpose. An example of this can be found on 9/28/96, when Freakazoid sneaks into a foreign prison to rescue his family. Just as he is winding up to punch a guard, the camera very conspicuously pans up. The audience hears several blows and the camera pans back down to reveal Freakazoid standing over the unconscious guard. Across the bottom of the screen a caption appears which reads, "Guards knocked unconscious thus far... 3." Both the camera movement and the caption demonstrate the show's awareness of itself and the debate surrounding violence on television.

Though much of the violence featured in **Freakazoid!** is slapstick, there is some fighting between the forces of good and evil. No one is ever injured and the emphasis of the program is more on Freakazoid's peculiar antics than on the show's violence. For these reasons, **Freakazoid!** is best classified as tame combat violence.

## **Jumanji** (UPN)

The children's book by Chris Van Allsburg is the basis of this new animated adventure series popularized in the feature film starring Robin Williams. The title refers to a magical board game that two children, Peter and Judy, stumble across while exploring their attic. Upon rolling the dice, they are transported to the fantastic and perilous jungles of Jumanji. There they are befriended by Alan, a man who has been trapped in Jumanji since he played the game 23 years before. With Alan's help, Judy and Peter survive the dangers of the jungle and solve the riddles that allow them to return home. However, Alan remains trapped in Jumanji, unable to solve his riddle. Each day, Judy and Peter return to Jumanji to try to help Alan find his way back to our world.

Because Jumanji is an extremely hostile environment, full of bloodthirsty natives, man-eating plants, wild animals and the vicious hunter Van Pelt, the three protagonists are constantly in jeopardy. This naturally leads to a higher number of violent scenes per episode than is typical for tame combat violence shows. However, the nature of the violence provides the rationale for the show's classification.

Most of the violence in **Jumanji** shows the heroes being chased by animals and attacked by carnivorous plants. The heroes never initiate any of the violence, only using it in self-defense or to give themselves more time to solve the riddle. Although there are many close calls, Alan,

Peter and Judy are never injured in these attacks. Because Jumanji is a magical land, its inhabitants never seem to suffer injury either. The most menacing recurring villain is Van Pelt. A ruthless hunter, Van Pelt is determined to add Alan's head to his trophy collection. Toting a large elephant gun and a nasty attitude, he is in constant pursuit of Alan, Peter and Judy, blasting away whenever he sees them. Although no one is ever hit, the use of such a realistic gun (rather than some sort of ray gun) is unusual in children's programming.

Although there are some examples of comedic slapstick violence in the show, it is primarily an action-adventure program. As such, the violence is crucial to maintaining the pace and action of the program. However, **Jumanji** falls within the tame rather than the sinister category because of the types of violence that are featured and the fact that the heroes typically try to avoid violence.

### **Road Rovers (WB)**

Slightly more violent than **Earthworm Jim**, **Road Rovers** is a new cartoon about a scientist who discovers a way to turn dogs into "Canine Sapiens," super dogs that can talk and walk upright. With this technology, he forms a team of six such creatures called the Road Rovers, who are regularly called upon to save the world.

Like the **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**, **Road Rovers** is an action-oriented, superhero show that is not meanspirited. However, the difference is that **Road Rovers** does not rely on violence as much as the **Turtles** and its heroes are not warriors. Infused with many comedic elements, **Road Rovers** is a relatively lighthearted show that relies on a small amount of violence to maintain its action. Although there are several scenes of violence in each episode, the attacks are blatantly humorous and benign. For example, one of the Rovers' tactics for defeating enemies is to bite them on their backsides. Only the Rover named Colleen is a fighter, possessing martial arts skills. However, even these abilities have a comedic aspect to them. As she kicks, she always yells something random and bizarre, such as "Macarena!" or "Sharon Stone." All in all, the emphasis of **Road Rovers** is on comedy rather than action and thus the violence, though always present, is minimal.

### **Superman (WB)**

A new cartoon this season, **Superman** debuted on the "Kids' WB" network amidst much anticipation and fanfare. Chronicling the life and adventures of DC Comics' archetypal superhero, **Superman** is a very stylized, dramatic cartoon, featuring storylines that sometimes span several episodes. Although the first several episodes deal with the story of Superman's birth, how he came to this planet and the discovery of his super powers, later episodes recount his exploits thwarting various evils that threaten the city of Metropolis.

Featuring a style of animation similar to Fox's **Batman**, **Superman** is decidedly brighter and less menacing. The stylized animation and sophisticated storylines of both cartoons are obviously designed to appeal to older audiences as well as young viewers. This may in part

explain the slightly harder violent edge and darker villains both shows feature. However, a factor differentiating **Superman** from **Batman**, and one of the reasons **Superman** is typically only a tame combat violence show, is each show's characterization of its hero. Whereas Batman is presented as a dark and brooding vigilante who seems to enjoy thrashing villains, Superman is a much less tormented individual who never acts in anger, but only in the name of justice. Also, Superman never uses his powers to injure human beings, only super-powered villains or machines. Batman regularly beats up people.

However, **Superman** is a show that features large amounts of prolonged and glorified violence. Each episode revolves around the hero fighting some insidious force and ultimately prevailing. In addition, although the violence is obviously exaggerated because of the hero's powers, it consists of realistic types of violence such as punches, kicks and gunfire. Some might say that the violence is also antiseptic since Superman is never seriously injured. Ultimately, **Superman** varies from tame combat violence to sinister combat violence depending upon the amount and character of the violence in a particular episode. Sometimes the sheer quantity and intensity of the violence raise issues of concern.

### ***3) Sinister Combat Violence***

#### **B.A.D. (UPN)**

**B.A.D.**, an acronym which stands for Bureau of Alien Detectors, is about a crack team of soldiers assigned to the secret detail of containing and destroying hostile aliens on Earth. Led by Sergeant Ben Parker, the team consists of five agents, each one possessing a special skill that helps in the battle against the aliens.

An action-oriented show, **B.A.D.** revolves around violent conflicts between its heroes and menacing aliens. The show's protagonists are a humorless lot who are principally characterized by their brooding natures and desire to "kick alien butt." This is consistent with the menacing and intense tone that permeates the program. Consisting principally of heavy amounts of laser gunfire and alien attacks, scenes of violence are almost non-stop throughout the show and occasionally result in characters being killed. This latter point is especially surprising since characters are virtually never killed in children's cartoons. Although none of the violence is especially graphic, the emphasis on it, as well as the sentiment behind it, raises issues of concern.

#### **The Incredible Hulk (UPN)**

Another children's show based on a Marvel Comics superhero, **The Incredible Hulk** is a violent program with a very dark look and feel. Dr. Bruce Banner was mutated by gamma rays in a lab explosion. Whenever he gets angry, he is turned into the Incredible Hulk, a primitive, green-skinned monster with infinite strength and a propensity for "smashing" things. Hunted by a military who seeks to destroy him and a nefarious evil genius called The Leader who wishes to steal his super strength, Banner is constantly on the run, trying to find a cure for his condition.

Similar to most superhero action shows, **The Incredible Hulk** contains a large quantity of violence. Numerous fight scenes occur throughout each episode. They mainly consist of prolonged laser blasts, explosions and exchanges of punches. Although Hulk is characterized as a misunderstood victim of others' fear, his primal nature lends itself to excessive amounts of conflict. The program's dark look and feel contribute to an intensity that pervades each scene of violence.

Although Hulk possesses no weapons other than his incredible strength, the military typically attacks him with guns, laser beams and other weapons designed especially to combat him. In the instances in which Hulk battles other super beings such as The Mighty Thor, Ghost Rider and The Abomination, most of the violence consists of throwing powerful punches and large objects at each other. In both cases, no one is ever hurt seriously and no physical consequences are shown. However, more attention is paid to the psychological consequences than is the case in most other sinister combat violence shows. Bruce Banner feels tremendous remorse for the Hulk's destructive ways. Despite this fact, violence is the central theme of the program and each episode is little more than a showcase for fighting and destruction.



## **PART IV. FINDINGS IN OTHER TELEVISION MEDIA**

Broadcast network television is the major focus of this study. Every television series, made-for-television movie and theatrical film shown on broadcast television during the 1996-97 television season was monitored. There were no exceptions. Every series was examined at least four times and many were examined for the majority of the season or the entire season. Series were the only category in which we used any sampling and even there sampling was minimal. The number of hours examined and the minimal amount of sampling used place us in an excellent position to make a definitive analysis of the broadcast network season. None of that analysis is subject to problems of whether we sampled a typical week or an exceptional week.

From the beginning, we intended our analysis of local, syndicated and public television, as well as cable, home video and video games, to be supplemental to our broadcast network focus. Our goal was to offer a comparison with the broadcast networks to see if the content differed and, if so, in what ways. The supplemental programming was sampled in order to provide a snapshot of the content necessary for this comparison. Local stations, syndication and programming aired during the old Prime Time Access period were all examined for two randomly selected weeks. Eight cable networks and public television were also monitored for randomly selected two-week periods. The analysis of home video was based on the top ten rental titles each quarter during the past year. The top five video games of the year were also examined.

This sampling allows us to make informed and, we believe, intelligent judgments about this programming. But it does not allow us to make the definitive analysis we conducted in the broadcast network area.

It is all too common in the media world for broadcasters to claim that all the real problems in regard to sex and violence are in cable, or for cable programmers, in defense, to cite their higher level of First Amendment protection and pitch the bulk of the burden of reform back on broadcasters. Everyone easily faults the video game industry as one of the major sources of violence.

Our goal is not to place blame or responsibility for any of the media content problems on any particular medium. Each of these industries has different levels of protection and freedom. Some are subject to greater governmental regulation than others. Some are easier for parents to control than others. Using broadcast television as the base, we looked at other programming such as pay cable, not to judge whether that programming raises concerns for cable, but rather to see whether the its would raise concerns if judged by the standards we applied to broadcast television. For example, we look at an HBO or Showtime program to decide whether ABC, CBS, Fox or NBC could appropriately air the same program. The violence contained in the program might be of no concern in the world of pay cable, but of great concern in the broadcast network world. We use this approach of asking whether concerns would be raised if broadcast television standards were applied for all programming, including cable, home video and video games.

Local and cable television does contain more programming raising concerns about violence than is found on the broadcast networks. This is primarily due to the fact that theatrical films make up

a larger portion of those channels' programming. Previous sections of this report demonstrate that theatrical films raise the most concerns about violence. Even when comparing the same films on each medium, we find that they tend to be edited more thoroughly and raise fewer concerns on broadcast network television than on basic cable or local television. Of course, pay cable does not edit its films.

The status of the non-network television media can be summarized as follows:

**Local television** raises more concerns than broadcast network television, both in its theatrical and original programming. As mentioned above, local television runs more theatrical films and edits them somewhat less than the networks. This may be because local stations do not have the large practices and standards departments found at the networks. Syndicated series also raise more concerns on a percentage basis than network series do. Syndicated series are mostly one-hour dramas, a format much more likely to contain violence than half-hour network comedies. This season 11 of 32 series created for syndication raise concerns about violence. This is a percentage far greater than that which is found on broadcast network television. Furthermore, these syndicated dramas also run in many different time periods throughout the country, including daytime when children may be in the audience. Even in a large city like Los Angeles with many television stations, prime time syndication is playing a smaller and smaller role each year. Of the three non-broadcast network stations in Los Angeles, two are now part-time affiliates of the emerging broadcast networks, UPN and WB. Whereas these two channels used to program all 14 nights (of our two-week sample) of prime time with syndicated or local shows, now, with both WB and UPN programming three nights, they independently program eight nights. This trend will most likely continue.

**Public television** is full of dramas, films and documentaries, but practically none of this programming raises any issues of concern.

**Cable television** also runs more theatrical films than the broadcast networks. Since pay cable channels do not edit their films, they contain more violence than is found on broadcast network television. Also of note is the fact that pay cable runs fewer original shows than the broadcast networks do. When pay cable airs original series with violence, that violence is likely to be much more graphic and raise considerably more concerns than the original programming of the networks. Our job is not to evaluate whether running unedited scenes of violence on a pay service is a problem, but instead to compare the content of the two media. Generally the issues raised in cable television have remained fairly consistent over the past three years.

**Basic cable** also runs theatrical films raising concerns about violence. These films are less likely to be as heavily edited as the same films shown on the broadcast networks. More graphic and gory scenes of film violence are found on basic cable. Basic cable has far fewer original series than the networks, but these series are more likely to raise concerns.

**Home video** features content mostly identical to that found in movie theaters. Over half of the videos examined would raise concerns if aired unedited on broadcast television. This area was also studied to provide a comparison with the content of broadcast television, not to make judgments about the environment of home video.

**Video games** represent a world that is different from other television programming. Games featuring deadly combat, such as **Duke Nukem**, raise considerable concerns about violence. Most games, however, display scenes of tame combat, such as characters chasing or bumping into each other.

## A. Local Independent Television Programming and Syndication

This category includes all the programming that appears on broadcast television, except for public television, that is not controlled by the networks. Los Angeles is the second largest television market in the country after New York. No program can be successful unless it is sold in the Los Angeles market. Therefore, by monitoring local and syndicated programming in Los Angeles, we ensured examination of all significant non-network programming that is produced. We examined two-week samples of prime time and Saturday morning programming on the following stations:

**KTLA Channel 5.** KTLA is affiliated with the WB network on Sunday, Monday and Wednesday nights. On those nights, we treated its schedule as network programming, which is discussed in the previous section.

**KCAL Channel 9.** This station runs news during all Monday through Friday prime time hours so its programming was examined on weekends only.

**KCOP Channel 13.** KCOP is affiliated with the UPN network on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday nights. On those nights we treated its schedule as network programming, which is discussed in the previous section.

**KCBS Channel 2, KNBC Channel 4, KABC Channel 7 and KTTV Channel 11.** These are the network owned and operated stations. Their prime time and Saturday morning programming is the core of broadcast network television and is examined in detail in the previous sections. Networks also program daytime, late night and sports schedules for their stations, but this programming is beyond the purview of our study. During the times when the networks do not schedule programming, these stations act as local stations and air programming most of which is purchased in the syndication market. We looked at the syndicated programming that is scheduled before and during the former Prime Time Access period.

This sample allowed us to pick up original syndicated programs on the independent stations, such as theatrical films and the various versions of **Star Trek** and **Baywatch**. The programming on the network stations in the non-network time slots was comprised of game shows, entertainment and news magazine shows and original syndication such as **Xena: Warrior Princess** and **Real Stories of the Highway Patrol**. This section of the report focuses on programming that, if run on broadcast network television, would raise concerns about violence. We divided the content into original programs for syndication, theatrical motion pictures and children's television.

### *1. Original Programs for Syndication*

Fifteen years ago, syndication largely consisted of reruns of old network television series. As independent stations grew stronger in the 1980s they began forming ad hoc networks with one another to produce their own original programming. The syndication market, once every producer's second choice after the broadcast networks, soon developed new appeal. Game shows

such as **Wheel of Fortune** and **Jeopardy**, and entertainment news and tabloid programs such as **Entertainment Tonight** and **Hard Copy**, became enormously successful in the world of syndication. Syndication now competes head-to-head with the networks in the area of original series, particularly dramas. Now the producers of a new **Baywatch Nights** or **Xena: Warrior Princess** can sometimes make more money selling their program to local stations than to a network. Occasionally, syndicators even produce made-for-television movies and mini-series for independent stations.

Unlike the broadcast networks, those programming syndicated shows have no large broadcast standards and practices departments that decide what gets made and ensure that programs meet certain standards. Every station makes decisions as to what is acceptable and whether anything should be cut, but they are forced to do this work with small staffs and even smaller budgets.

As compared to network programming, a much higher percentage of original syndicated programming raises concerns about the use of violence. Many of these syndicated shows are aired much earlier in the day than network shows, making it likely that the audience includes many children. Of the 32 original series examined in the syndication areas, 11 raised concerns about the use of violence. The following programs would be classified as raising concerns if aired on the broadcast networks:

### **The Adventures of Sinbad**

Inspired by the enormous success of **Hercules** and **Xena**, **Sinbad** is an action-adventure show which raises considerable concerns about its use of violence. Set in fifth century Baghdad, the show chronicles the adventures of Sinbad and his crew as they sail the seven seas. Although the characters all are highly moral, they do not hesitate to fight. The shows monitored contained as many as ten prolonged scenes of violence in an hour. The scenes usually feature Sinbad and his group dispensing with bad guys with an array of punches, kicks and sword fights. The fighting is extremely glorified, always portraying Sinbad as very heroic. In an episode that aired on 4/12/97, Sinbad battles a man on a rooftop and ultimately slashes his gut. Despite the sometimes brutal character of the violence, much of it is very antiseptic. Rarely are any consequences displayed. Airing at 3:00 p.m. in Los Angeles, **Sinbad** is likely to be seen by many children.

### **Baywatch Nights**

A spinoff of the very popular **Baywatch**, this program has a more threatening look and feel than its predecessor. In this spinoff, David Hasselhoff is a private investigator by night, solving cases on the Southern California streets, in addition to policing the California coast in the daytime. This show raises concerns because, for an early time period, there is an excessive amount of violence. The program's use of graphic violence as a hook also raises issues. For instance, in one of the episodes monitored, four of the show's seven violent scenes--including vicious attacks on children by a wolf-like creature--took place before the title credits.

## **FX: The Series**

This series follows the exploits of a special effects artist whose talents are marshaled to solve crimes and catch villains. The program presents an interesting issue in that much of the violence it contains is presented as being “unreal.” For instance, the viewer may see a grisly gun battle, but will then learn after the fact that the shootout was staged as part of a film that was being shot. Still, **FX: The Series** raises serious concerns because the severity of the violence depicted is not necessarily mitigated by the fact that “it isn’t real.” This rationale could be used to justify virtually any type of action or violence. Moreover, much of the violence is glorified with the use of slow motion and is needlessly prolonged. Certain acts are surprisingly heinous, including a man having both his hands chopped off with a machete and another man getting hit in the face with a cleaver which lodges squarely between his eyes. Yet another reason this program raises issues is that the violence is often used as a hook and is often shown without any context. Both episodes monitored began with an unusually brutal sequence that had nothing to do with the ensuing plot. Finally, the violence in **FX: The Series** may be especially worrisome as the show airs as early as 2:00 p.m. in Los Angeles, a time slot sure to have quite a few youngsters in the audience.

## **Hercules: The Legendary Journeys**

Although raising fewer concerns than in previous years, this program continues to be problematic in its depictions of violence. As might be expected in a series that is based on the adventures of a warrior, much of the violence is glorified. Every episode features glamorized combat, often in ways that are antiseptic. The weapons featured in **Hercules** also lend themselves to fighting that is especially fierce, such as fists, clubs, branding irons, swords, rocks and whips. Although the depictions of violence have improved over the three years of monitoring, there is still room for improvement in this show.

## **The Outer Limits**

Based on the old TV show of the same name, this program tells eerie tales of the bizarre and inexplicable. It raises concerns for several reasons, most notably the tonnage of violent scenes in many episodes. Some of the violence is lethal and surprisingly brutal. In the episode that aired on 4/20/97, the program opens with a scene in which a woman hijacks a truck, shooting both its passengers in the head at point blank range. Although the scene is shrouded in darkness and not particularly graphic, it is extremely vicious. Like many other syndicated programs, **The Outer Limits** also raises concerns because it airs in an early time slot.

## **Poltergeist: The Legacy**

This program is a syndicated and somewhat edited version of a Showtime series of the same name. As its title suggests, this series falls into the horror genre, often featuring creepy or scary images. For example, in one of the monitored episodes an elderly woman is severely beaten and then hanged, and the aftermath of an apparent stabbing is shown in gory detail.

## **Real Stories of the Highway Patrol**

This reality-based series focuses on actual incidents encountered by state troopers and highway patrol officers across the country. The program has raised issues of concern in all three years of the monitoring process. The show raises issues from its start: the opening montage which accompanies the title credits depicts several intense images, such as a motorist leaping from his car as he is engulfed in flames and an officer beating a suspect with the butt of his rifle. The most violent parts of the program occur within the context of staged re-creations of selected incidents. Interestingly, these often feature the actual officers involved. The most violent parts of each re-enactment--usually a shootout between suspects and law enforcement--are often glorified through needless repetition of footage, slow motion and the use of black and white images. An argument could easily be made that this type of programming might contribute to the "mean world syndrome."

## **Real TV**

This program showcases exciting, funny and often violent video clips that come from hand-held video cameras. The scenes highlighted range from high-speed chases and various car crashes to **America's Funniest Home Videos**-style clips. An episode that aired on 11/7/96 raises serious concerns about violence. In this episode, a man shoots his wife and then attempts to take his own life before being gunned down by authorities. The scene is then shown again in slow motion with a close up of the woman. The viewer sees the bullet's impact very clearly. This image is accentuated by the addition of a gunshot sound effect to the slow motion replay. The scene was shown three times during the segment. Although the producers would more than likely make the argument that this is a compelling piece of footage that the public has a right to see, it would seem that their intent was to titillate and frighten the audience. **Real TV** elected to use a verbal advisory before the footage was shown. Yet, interestingly, the scene of the man shooting his wife had already been shown in a preview before this segment. While **Real TV** was not as disturbing as some of the specials discussed in a previous section, it did use footage that was also seen in some of these programs.

## **Tarzan: The Epic Adventures**

Based on the writings of Edgar Rice Burroughs, **Tarzan** is the story of the man-king of the jungle, orphaned at birth and raised by apes. This action-oriented show contains a fair amount of violence. There are still several scenes per episode which are prolonged and glorified. In the episode that aired on 11/17/96, Tarzan battles a villain in a brutal fistfight that culminates with Tarzan stabbing the man. The scene lasts over one-and-a-half minutes. However, the episode examines the consequences of violence as Tarzan learns that revenge does not bring satisfaction. Nonetheless, the length and glorified nature of the scenes raises concerns. Airing at 5:00 p.m. in Los Angeles, **Tarzan: The Epic Adventures** raised concerns both times it was monitored.

## **Viper**

In many ways reminiscent of the old television show **Knight Rider**, this series follows the adventures of a team of experts who use the special features of their futuristic car to solve crimes and right wrongs. As one might expect from the show's premise, the program is loaded with gunfire, explosions and special effects. These raise concerns primarily because of their antiseptic nature. In an episode that aired 4/13/97, three incredibly brutal deaths occur, but are not dealt with in any substantive way. In addition, the series raises issues by glorifying much of the violence with fast-paced music and slow motion. It is not uncommon for an episode to begin with the most violent scene in the show as a way to hook viewers. Like many other syndicated series, **Viper** is more accessible to a youth audience since it sometimes airs at 1:00 p.m. on Sunday in Los Angeles.

## **Xena: Warrior Princess**

A spin-off from **Hercules**, **Xena: Warrior Princess** was identified in last year's report as a series that raised concerns about violence. This continues to be the case. Living in the "Golden Age" before the time of the Greeks and Romans, Xena is a former villain turned heroine who works to "free people from tyranny and injustice." Much like Hercules, Xena rarely shies away from a fight and combat is prevalent throughout the show. A typical episode contains numerous scenes of hand-to-hand combat, featuring punching, kicking and swordplay. Xena often displays super strength, punching villains so hard that they fly through the air. In the episode that aired 4/12/97, Xena and her partner dispense with a horde of drunken men in a glorified fight containing many of the elements of combat discussed above. Glorified and unrealistic, **Xena: Warrior Princess** raised concerns both times it was monitored.

Original syndicated series which raised no concerns about violence in the two-week sample are as follows:

**Access Hollywood**  
**American Journal**  
**Babylon 5**  
**Baywatch**  
**Beach Patrol**  
**Bounty Hunters**  
**The Cape**  
**Coast Guard**  
**Entertainment Tonight**  
**Extra**  
**Fire Rescue**  
**Flipper**  
**Hard Copy**  
**High Tide**  
**Inside Edition**



**LAPD: Life on the Beat**  
**National Geographic**  
**Psi Factor**  
**Star Trek: Deep Space Nine**  
**Strange Universe**  
**Two**

## ***2. Theatrical Films on Local Stations and in Syndication***

Of the ten theatrical films that were monitored on independent stations, five would have raised concerns if aired on the broadcast networks. This is a higher concentration of problematic films than was found on the networks. More action films with intense violence appear in syndication than on the networks.

All of the films that did raise concerns were action dramas. Although many action films raise concerns when aired on the broadcast networks, these types of films typically run with far less editing on local television. It is unclear whether this is due to the absence of large practices and standards staffs or to the more conservative standards required to market a film nationally as opposed to locally. Violent films running locally clearly contain more intense and graphic violence than those that raise concerns on the networks. The films that raised serious issues are:

### **Death Wish 2, Death Wish 3 and Death Wish 4**

One in a series of films featuring Charles Bronson as an architect seeking revenge for the violence he suffered in his own life, **Death Wish 2** raises serious concerns due to the graphic violence it contains. After his maid and daughter are both raped and murdered, Bronson's character, Paul Kersey, embarks on a vigilante mission to eliminate the gang members who perpetrated the violence. The violence in this film is extremely problematic, most notably because Kersey's killing spree is portrayed as justifiable revenge for the crimes committed against his daughter. Moreover, Kersey feels no remorse or hesitation whatsoever and receives no punishment of any kind for the heinous acts that he commits.

The film opens with a radio broadcast reciting unrealistic and exaggerated crime statistics, presumably to rationalize Kersey's subsequent need to take the law into his own hands. At the same time, the police are portrayed as either inept and ineffective or as co-conspirators in Kersey's vigilantism. One scene shows a group of New York cops discussing their decision to not prosecute Kersey for the murders he committed in the original **Death Wish**, but instead to ask him to just stop killing.

On a related note, **Death Wish 3** and **Death Wish 4**, both of which were discussed in previous reports, aired again this year and were found to be problematic for many of the same reasons mentioned above.

## **Missing in Action**

This Chuck Norris action film stands out as one of the most blatant cases of glorified violence in the sample of syndicated theatricals. Norris plays Colonel James Braddock, a former POW in Vietnam who was held and abused for seven years. He eventually escaped and is now on a violent, no-holds-barred mission to rescue his fellow MIAs. Although a movie about war might be expected to contain a certain amount of violence, this film is entirely centered around the violent activities of its protagonist. In fact, this film is so saturated with severe violence that it probably could not be made suitable for broadcast by editing.

Most of the violent scenes are extremely prolonged and antiseptic. Braddock is fired upon by hundreds of enemy soldiers yet never once is hit by a bullet. The violence in the film also raises serious issues because it is glorified. In one especially brutal scene, a threesome of Vietnamese soldiers fires an explosive at Braddock's raft, tossing him into the delta. The soldiers giggle with delight at their sure-fire aim and Braddock's bad luck. However, Braddock has the last laugh as he emerges from the water with his machine gun and viciously shoots them all in slow motion. So much of Braddock's aggressive retaliation is indiscriminate that it appears to represent only violence for the sake of violence.

## **Willow**

This film takes place in a fantasy world in which a baby, destined to overthrow an evil queen, must be delivered to safety by a band of unlikely heroes. Despite what sounds like a family-oriented premise, the movie is filled with acts of brutal violence. Even for a good vs. evil struggle where the viewer would expect some degree of conflict, the combat in **Willow** is especially fierce. In a world of sorcerers and castles, the variety of violence consists of sword battles, hand-to-hand combat, the dumping of vats of hot oil on helpless crowds and attacks by two-headed monsters. In one particular sequence, one of the heroes uses a magic wand against a troll, reducing his attacker to a grisly, lifeless pile of flesh. The depiction is unusually graphic, showing the troll's skin peeling back and objects protruding from its exposed brain. In the film's climax, the heroes storm the evil queen's castle. A major battle ensues in which numerous characters engage in prolonged scenes of swordplay, culminating in a dual between the lead hero and a demon warrior. The hero vanquishes the warrior by graphically running him through with a sword multiple times. Music is used liberally to enhance the impact of the violence and rarely are consequences shown.

Theatrical films on local stations and in syndication that did not raise concerns about violence in the two week sample are:

## **Gone with the Wind Parts I and II**

**Grease**

**M. Butterfly**

**Showboat**

### *3. Children's Television*

Facing overwhelming competition from the broadcast and cable networks for children's attention on Saturday morning, local stations in Los Angeles do little to compete. In fact, only one non-network channel aired children's programming.

**Disney's Sing Me a Story** contains some minor slapstick violence which raises no concerns. **Madison's Adventures** features some tame animal violence similar to that found in **National Geographic** documentaries. Another show that contains minimal slapstick violence, **Bill Nye the Science Guy**, has a strong educational focus. However, two other programs fall into the category of sinister combat violence. **Eagle Riders** and **Dragonball Z** both contain images of mean-spirited, glorified fighting. One episode of **Eagle Riders** shows a hero viciously throwing metal stars in the faces of different villains.

## B. Public Television

In the 1920s, the young industry of broadcasting was regulated by the Department of Commerce and its secretary, Herbert Hoover. It was not at all clear how the new field of radio would be supported and who would pay for its programming. One option was to let the government own and control radio and underwrite the costs of programming. While this is the system used today in many countries around the world, it was unacceptable to most Americans because government control of radio would permit it to censor information it did not want citizens to hear and was inconsistent with the principles underlying the First Amendment.

A second alternative was to let those who were interested subscribe to radio programming and their fees would provide the economic foundation for radio. This funding mechanism was ultimately how pay cable became an important force in American life. A third alternative was to allow companies to buy radio time for a fee so they could sell their products. These monies would support broadcasting.

Advertising flourished and provided the economic structure for radio and then television. The goal of broadcasters was to attract the largest possible audience in order to be able to charge advertisers as much as possible to air their messages. From the beginning, almost all broadcasting was designed to appeal to large audiences. Networks were created so that programming could reach the entire country. (Without a network, a signal could not reach beyond the local metropolitan area in which a station was based.)

To meet the goal of capturing large audiences, broadcasters endeavored to create programming accessible and understandable to the largest possible audience. In practical terms, this meant no Shakespeare, ballet or opera, few documentaries and much popular entertainment. Radio, and then television, were enormously successful in creating programming that millions of people wanted to hear and see.

The problem with the system was the lack of an incentive to create educational or other programming less likely to appeal to large audiences. Economics compelled networks to attract huge audiences and give short shrift to programs that appealed to more specialized interests. While the needs of many people were met, the needs of some were not.

Public television was created to meet some of the needs not met by commercial broadcasting. It was not dependent on advertiser support or the need for enormous audiences. Public television was free to create high-quality programming regardless of whether it garnered high ratings. Public television had its biggest impact in the area of children's television. Programs such as **Mister Rogers' Neighborhood** and **Sesame Street** became a regular part of children's lives.

Public television was always envisioned as an alternative to commercial television. While its ratings are small compared to the commercial networks, it fills an important void. Over the past few years PBS and its supporters have feared that Congress might cut funding for public television programming because of what some critics argue is its elite, liberal bias. Forced to contemplate operating without any governmental support, PBS has increasingly turned to the use of pledge drives to gain support from its audience and enhanced the role of corporate

underwriting. It now appears that governmental funding for PBS is secure, at least for the moment.

We examined public television because this monitoring project looks at the entire world of television. Public television provides an interesting opportunity to examine whether the absence of advertiser pressure or demand for high ratings produces programming less dependent on violent themes.

Practically nothing monitored on public television during the two-week sample even comes close to raising concerns about violence. Some shows contain elements or scenes of violence, but they are usually so minimized or contextually appropriate that they are of little concern.

Programming on public television can be divided into four areas, three in prime time and one on Saturday mornings: documentaries and news, arts and entertainment, nature and science and children's programs. All four types of programming were found to contain little, if any, violence.

### *1. Documentaries and News*

Much of the programming on PBS continues to be in the form of documentaries. Although documentary programming sometimes requires the use of violent footage such as that containing war scenes, none of the programs aired during the monitored period raised any concerns.

A two-part series, **Vote for Me: Politics in America**, which describes politics and campaigning in America, contains some violent images. One segment that discusses negative ad campaigns shows a fictional spot for the Federalist party that might have aired if television had existed 200 years ago. The ad manipulates images such as riots, sword fighting and burning buildings in an appeal to voters to defeat Thomas Jefferson. However, this violence is neither prolonged, glorified nor graphic and is entirely appropriate within the context of the program.

Only one other documentary contains images that are even mildly violent. **With God on Our Side: Rise of the Religious Right in America** shows only minor violence in the arrest of anti-abortion protestors and raises no concerns.

All other documentary programming contains no violence at all. **Wild World** portrays the plight of threatened elephants of the Addo Elephant Park, **Great Railway Journeys** takes Buck Henry through parts of Argentina by train, and an episode of **Frontline** presents an update on Hillary Clinton's classmates from Wellesley's graduating class of 1969. Other non-violent documentary programming includes: **Visiting with Huell Howser**, **California Gold**, **Danny Boy** and **Huchooseday: Traditions of the Heart**.

## *2. Arts and Entertainment*

This category includes original productions, concerts and performer showcases as well as one feature film. Acts of violence are rarely featured in these productions. When violence is part of a show it is usually contextually appropriate. Restraint is evident everywhere.

The only program on PBS that raised any issues at all in last year's report was the popular show **Mystery**. This year, an episode of **Mystery** did show a few mild acts of violence including a woman tripping and falling down a set of stairs, but it did not raise any issues.

An episode of the **Masterpiece Theatre** series entitled "Bramwell" follows a female doctor running an infirmary during the nineteenth century. It raises no concerns.

The only feature film in the sample, **Enchanted April**, tells the tale of four women with very different personalities and backgrounds who spend a month together at a vacation retreat in Italy. The few acts of violence in the film are so minor that they are nearly unnoticeable (for example, one of the main characters pricks her finger on some grass). This film raises no concerns.

Among the other entertainment programming that is not problematic is **Caesar's Writers**, a tribute to and reunion of Sid Caesar's former writing staff, and **Jackie Mason: Look Who's Laughing**, a performance of stand-up comedy by the well known comic.

The monitoring period also featured performances by several musical artists, including **John Tesh**, **Stevie Ray Vaughn**, **Harry Belafonte**, the dance troupe **Riverdance** and the **Cincinnati Pops**. None of these programs raise any issues in regard to violence.

## *3. Nature and Science*

While there are acts of violence in some of these shows, they are never a central part of the story and never raise any issues of concern. In fact, one program in particular demonstrates that violence, when necessary to the plot or theme of a program, can be presented responsibly. An episode of **Nature**, documenting the various ways in which plants and animals have been helpful in solving crimes, features re-creations of a handful of violent crimes. In one instance, a woman falls backwards over a coffee table and is wrapped and dragged away by an attacker; in another, a thirteenth century Chinese field worker is attacked from behind and killed by another man. Both re-creations are handled very well. Neither one is overly graphic or prolonged, yet the essential details of each crime are effectively communicated.

The only other program in this category that depicted any type of violence is an episode of **Nova**, which showed various aspects and uses of lightning. None of the depictions raise concerns and, in fact, the program demonstrates responsibility in showing how dangerous lightning can be. Two health-related programs, **More Straight Talk on Menopause and Women's Health** and **Straight Talk on Prostate Health**, contain no violence at all. Other non-violent programming includes **Eyewitness: Prehistoric Life**, which traces the origins of life on Earth by looking at the

creation and destruction of various life forms, and **New Explorers**, which describes the state of the endangered manatee.

#### ***4. Saturday Morning Children's Programming***

Saturday morning public television programming included **Sesame Street**, **Reading Rainbow**, **Newton's Apple**, **Barney and Friends**, **Puzzle Place**, **Storytime**, **Tots TV** and **Big Comfy Couch**. All of these shows are designed for pre-school children. In addition, each has an educational component and features a culturally diverse cast. None are animated, although **Reading Rainbow** and **Storytime** feature animated elements of the books which are read. Some of the shows include adults and children or adults as children, some feature puppets and some integrate puppets with children or adults. In all of these shows there was only one instance of violence. In this instance a muppet is hit on the head with different vegetables on **Sesame Street**. Consequences are shown as the muppet reacts in pain and the show also makes the point that vegetables are good for eating. Other themes which are presented by more than one show are sensitivity to the feelings of others, basic scientific explanations of everyday phenomena and the importance and enjoyment of reading and learning. There are no issues of violence in this programming.

## C. Cable Television

Cable television began in the 1940s with a very simple purpose: to bring television signals to those who could not receive them with rooftop antennas due to mountainous terrain. As broadcast television became an important part of American culture, people living in areas blocked by mountains or other geographic barriers were denied the opportunity to watch television. Cable television, wiring the signal into homes, offered these people a chance to become television households. It is ironic that cable, the medium that would become so important in shrinking the broadcast audience, began as a medium that increased the strength and penetration of broadcast television.

Cable also offered the hope of greater channel capacity. The number of over-the-air broadcasting channels had always been limited by the scarcity of the electromagnetic spectrum. Cable did not use the electromagnetic spectrum and, therefore, imposed no inherent limit on the number of channels. As the physical cable improved and eventually became fiber optic, there were few limits to the number of potential cable channels.

Although cable possessed the promise of great channel capacity, it was a promise that was unrealized until the 1970s. This all changed with the advent of Home Box Office (HBO), which was introduced to cable systems in 1972 as a channel offering uncut, uninterrupted movies available long before they would appear on broadcast television. HBO demonstrated that there was a large potential audience for this programming. In 1975, HBO gambled on a new and revolutionary technology and put its signal on a satellite 22,300 miles above the Earth. This radically new distribution system allowed HBO to reach a national audience.

Satellite distribution was the spark that introduced a whole new host of players with original programming to cable. HBO soon faced competition in presenting recent theatrical films from another movie channel, Showtime. With so many available channels, cable networks were able to offer very specialized programming to more narrowly focused audiences. By the late 1980s, there were channels programmed exclusively for news, music, religion, shopping, governmental affairs, sports, weather and different ethnic groups.

Individual cable channels knew they could never compete head-to-head with broadcast television. Cable as a whole competes with broadcast, but even the single most successful cable channel could not gather more than a fraction of a network's audience. Broadcast television was, and still is, the medium that can appeal to everyone at the same time. It is still the only delivery system that can offer the whole nation at once to advertisers. The largest cable channels are still not available in millions of homes, whereas broadcast television is available in more than 98% of American households.

Cable challenges broadcast by offering content unavailable over the air. The first way it does this, as discussed, is through more specialized programming. But it can also offer programming that the networks, trying to appeal to everyone, cannot offer. Many critics today are shocked at the "semi-nudity" on **NYPD Blue**, but cable has been presenting full nudity for years. Words routinely used in movies and stand-up comedy on pay cable cannot even be considered on



broadcast networks. Films like **Friday the 13th** and **Nightmare on Elm Street**, which have never appeared on network television, are regularly shown on cable. If cable did nothing more than replicate broadcast television, it would not exist. Cable must offer different programming and it does.

This project examined programming on eight cable networks for purposes of comparison to programming on the broadcast networks. The goal was not to determine whether the programming does or does not raise concerns in its native cable environment, but rather if it would raise concerns if it aired on broadcast television. A determination about the appropriateness of programming on cable itself would have to consider the greater freedom from regulation and the smaller audiences in the pay cable universe.

There are currently over 100 cable networks. Many of them have no relevance to a study about media violence, especially channels such as C-SPAN, the Home Shopping Network, the Weather Channel and the Food Channel. Our study concentrated on eight cable networks that most resemble broadcast networks, appeal to children or teenagers or create significant amounts of original dramatic programming. This project examines media violence and, therefore, issues surrounding sexuality, nudity and language did not factor into the report's conclusions. The eight cable networks examined over a two-week period are:

**HBO** and **Showtime**. Like the broadcast networks, both run many theatrical films as well as original made-for-television movies and series. Both are leaders in pay cable.

**The Disney Channel**, **Nickelodeon** and **MTV** (Music Television). All three appeal to young audiences, especially Disney and Nickelodeon. Disney, which began as a pay cable channel, has now largely switched to basic cable. The other two are advertiser supported. All run some original programming.

**USA** and **TBS**. These are the two cable channels closest in format to a broadcast network. They run a mix of theatrical films, television movies, sports, some series and more.

**TNT** (Turner Network Television). TNT runs theatrical films as well as some original television movies and mini-series.

All of the monitored cable networks except TNT run children's programming on Saturday morning. TNT runs programs with an Old West theme.

In 1996 the Federal Trade Commission approved the merger of Time Warner and Turner Broadcasting System. Now, of the eight major cable stations examined in this report, three are owned by the newly enlarged Time Warner.

Anyone who examines the majority of these channels can see that they run more explicit programming than is seen on the networks. They have more freedom and work within completely different business and regulatory structures. The intent of this section of the report is to examine ways in which cable and broadcast differ in content and to see whether the content of cable would raise concerns if broadcast on the television networks.

## ***1. Home Box Office (HBO)***

Founded as a movie channel by Time Inc. (now Time Warner) in the 1970s, HBO is the largest pay cable channel in the country. In the beginning, HBO ran almost nothing but recently released theatrical films. As other pay movie channels emerged, such as Showtime, The Movie Channel and Cinemax (created by Time Inc. as a companion channel to HBO), HBO began diversifying into other types of programming. Original television series such as **Dream On**, **Perversions of Science**, **OZ**, **Arli\$\$** and **The Larry Sanders Show** became an important part of HBO programming. Sports, especially boxing, also became a regular item on the menu. HBO offered stand-up comedians a forum in which they could showcase their talents without having to curtail their language or subject matter. However, it has been in the area of television movies that HBO has especially excelled. HBO has been able to successfully tackle serious and historical subjects in such television movies as **The Tuskegee Airmen**, **Rasputin**, **Indictment: The McMartin Trial** and even the semi-serious **The Late Shift**.

### **a. Theatrical Films**

Theatrical films continue to be the mainstay of the HBO prime time lineup. Seventeen films were monitored during the two-week sample period and 15 would raise concerns if they aired on broadcast television. The films raising concerns are:

#### **Big Bully**

Rick Moranis and Tom Arnold star in this dark comedy about a man returning to his hometown to teach, only to be tormented by a bully from his high school days. While much of the violence is minor slapstick, one lengthy scene is very mean-spirited. In the scene Arnold's character torments Moranis with a nail gun and a blow torch. This scene would need to be edited significantly before airing on broadcast television.

#### **Blue Thunder**

Roy Scheider stars as a good cop who uncovers a plan within the LAPD to use an experimental helicopter for illegal activity. While there is not a large amount of violence in the film, several scenes are prolonged and, in several cases, more graphic than is necessary. In a scene five minutes into the film, a suspect in a liquor store robbery is shot in the shoulder and the viewer sees the graphic impact. The film would require editing before airing on broadcast television.

#### **Darkman II: The Return of Durant**

In this sequel, Darkman returns to stop his archenemy Durant from developing a weapon that would fuel a local gang war. The film is filled with more than 30 scenes of violence, which

comprise the bulk of the movie. Most of the violent scenes are prolonged and graphic, making this movie one that would be difficult to edit sufficiently for broadcast television.

### **The Dentist**

A successful dentist loses his mind and goes on a killing spree after he discovers his wife in a lustful tryst with the pool man. The main concern with this film is that the scenes are extremely graphic and gory. In the most horrific scene, the dentist slits the throat of the pool man and then repeatedly slashes his abdomen, causing blood to spray everywhere. The dentist then forcibly extracts his adulterous wife's teeth and cuts out her tongue, the results of which are depicted graphically. Because its plot deals with little besides violence, this film would be nearly impossible to edit sufficiently for broadcast television.

### **Eye for an Eye**

When a mother's 17-year-old daughter is raped and murdered and the police cannot bring the culprit to justice, she takes the law into her own hands. The film contains two rape scenes. Although the camera angle emphasizes the chaos of the situation in both cases, both scenes are especially intense and somewhat bloody. In the final scene, the mother guns down the rapist in her home and the impacts of several bullets are shown in graphic detail. Despite these scenes, the bulk of the film explores the effects of the violence on the family and what drives the mother to seek revenge. This film would need minor editing to air on broadcast television.

### **Fair Game**

Supermodel Cindy Crawford stars in this film about a civil attorney involved in a nasty divorce settlement. As part of the settlement, Crawford's character demands that her client receive certain items of property including a boat. Unbeknownst to her, the boat is being used by former KGB agents to steal money. The movie is filled with violence from beginning to end as the KGB tries to dispose of Crawford's character. In the most graphic scene, a man riding with a KGB agent is shot in the crotch and then the back of the head. The viewer sees blood splatter across the windshield. This sets off a shooting spree in which several men are graphically shot. Because violence plays such a predominant role in the film, it would be difficult to edit it sufficiently for broadcast television.

### **The Godfather Part II**

This is the compelling sequel to the Academy Award-winning original of the same name. The film chronicles Vito Corleone's rise through the ranks of the Mafia and the subsequent transfer of power to his son. As might be expected in a gangster film, there is a considerable amount of shooting and killing. However, given the film's more than three-hour running time, the number

of violent scenes (13) is relatively small. Most of the violent scenes are short and deal with consequences in a contextually appropriate and intelligent manner. However, a few of the shootings and a particularly graphic near-evisceration with a knife would require editing before the film would be suitable for broadcast television.

### **The Juror**

Demi Moore plays a juror in a mob conspiracy trial who is pressured by associates of the defendant to deliver an acquittal. While the film did not have a large amount of violence (only eight scenes in a two-hour film), several scenes were brutal enough to warrant concern. In a scene one hour and 40 minutes into the film, the villain blows up another character in a car and shoots several others. The depictions are especially graphic. In the climactic scene, Moore shoots the villain several times with a pistol. Although these scenes are integral to understanding the plot and character, the film would require editing before airing on broadcast television.

### **Out for Justice**

Steven Seagal is a cop bent on revenge in this action-packed film. As in all Seagal films, there are more than 20 scenes of Seagal doing what he is famous for, beating up bad guys. Most of the scenes are prolonged, glorified and graphic. During the climax of the film, Seagal blows off the lower leg of a man with a shotgun and kills the lead villain by stabbing a corkscrew into his head. Perhaps most troubling, however, is the fact that Seagal's character suffers no punishment for his actions. Although this is a film that would be difficult to edit sufficiently for broadcast, several stations have tried. The film aired twice on broadcast during the first two years of the study and raised concerns.

Three other big budget, action-oriented films with big name stars in the leading roles aired on HBO. **Assassins**, **True Lies** and **Virtuosity** all contain as many as 30 glorified scenes and would be all but impossible to edit sufficiently for broadcast.

### **Profile for Murder**

A jealous former law school classmate attempts to frame a wealthy businessman for a series of brutal murders. For the most part, the violence in this movie is not excessive or graphic, especially given the plot. However, the last scene is a bit prolonged and glamorized. A woman shoots the villain twice in the chest and he falls through a glass window to his death. The scene would need to be edited considerably before it could air on broadcast television.

### **Strange Days**

As the world approaches the twenty-first century, virtual reality has replaced narcotics as the newest addictive substance. Lenny, a local black market peddler of "the wire," gets mixed up in

a murder plot involving the police, a political activist and his former girlfriend. This science fiction film is filled with action from beginning to end and contains more than 35 scenes of violence. Several scenes contain brutal murders and one depicts a graphic and unsettling rape. The film climaxes with a brutal fight between Lenny and his best friend, featuring shooting, punching, a graphic stabbing and Lenny's friend falling to his death from the top of a hotel. This is yet another example of a film that would be difficult to edit sufficiently for broadcast television.

### **Vampire in Brooklyn**

A vampire from the Caribbean comes to Brooklyn looking for the last of his kind, a young woman who is half-vampire, half-human. This dark comedy starring Eddie Murphy is at times far more violent than many viewers might expect. The movie contains more than 25 scenes of violence. While many of these are minor scenes of grabbing, pushing, and shoving, there are several that are lengthy and graphic. In a scene ten minutes into the film, Murphy's character rips the heart out of a local street thug and then proceeds to dismember the thug's accomplice. Other scenes contain brutal punches and shootings. This film would need heavy editing before it could air on broadcast television, and could also benefit from an advisory warning for those who might assume that the film is basically a comedy.

The films that could air on broadcast television with little or no concerns about violence were:

### **Down Periscope White Man's Burden**

#### **b. Television Movies**

Only one original HBO movie aired during the sample period. About a mad doctor who genetically engineers an almost invincible monster, **DNA** is loaded with violent scenes that are prolonged and occasionally graphic. In one scene, viewers see the vivid depiction of the monster ripping through a man's chest with its claw and then dragging him away. The climactic scene contains more than five minutes of gunfire which, combined with the other violent scenes, make this a film that would be difficult to edit sufficiently for broadcast television.

#### **c. Original Series**

During the two week sample, HBO aired three original series. **The Larry Sanders Show**, the Emmy-winning program about a talk show host, is violence-free. **Tracey Takes On...**, Tracey Ullman's show of sketch comedy, contained only a few minor slapstick scenes and raised no concerns.

The third program, **Tales From the Crypt**, raises a few minor concerns about its use of violence. Based on the horror comic books of the 1950s, the show tells moralistic albeit violent

stories of right and wrong. In one episode, there was a graphic shooting that would need to be edited before the program would be suitable for broadcast television.

HBO also aired two specials during the sample period, programs chronicling the making of the theatrical releases **Airheads** and **Fair Game**. Both programs contain interviews with the films' stars and feature clips from the movies and raise no concerns with respect to violence.

#### **d. Comedy**

Several stand-up comedians, such as George Carlin and Adam Sandler, were showcased during our two week sample. HBO also aired two political satire specials, **Not Necessarily the Elections** and **Thirty Seconds Over Washington**. In all cases these programs were free of violence.

#### **e. Saturday Morning Programming**

Early morning programming on HBO consists of several animated programs: **Animated Hero Classics**, **The Neverending Story**, **Testament: The Bible in Animation** and **The Wizard of Oz**. While some of the programs have a darker tone than might be expected, they all contain minimal amounts of violence that is contextually appropriate. HBO also aired three films on Saturday morning during the sample period: **Bebe's Kids**, **Miss Evers' Boys** and **Racing with the Moon**. None of these three films raise concerns of violence. Early morning programming consists of animated fairy tales like the popular **Happily Ever After** and **The Neverending Story**. The little violence these shows contain is tame, minor and raises no concerns.

## ***2. Showtime***

Showtime, like HBO, runs uncut theatrical films. While Showtime does create some original programming, it contains less than HBO and relies more on films.

### **a. Theatrical Films**

During the prime time hours of the two-week sample, Showtime ran 17 theatrical films. Of these, 13 would raise concerns on broadcast television if they were not edited. These films include:

#### **Backdraft**

This visually impressive 1991 theatrical is Ron Howard's tale of two brothers who battle fires and each other in pursuit of an arsonist. The majority of the violent scenes involve the fighting of fires. However, one of the scenes depicts a fairly graphic, albeit nonfatal, impalement that would require minor editing before it could air on broadcast television.

#### **Blown Away**

An Irish terrorist escapes from prison determined to destroy the life of a former associate who has left his radical past behind. While the total number of violent scenes does not raise concerns, the climactic scene is prolonged and graphic. In the scene, the hero pulls several nails out of his leg and stabs the villain in the neck. The scene would need to be edited before airing on network television.

#### **The Dark Dancer**

A renowned professor of psychology and female sexuality, who moonlights as a strip club dancer, gets involved with a student who is suspected of a series of murders. While there are not that many violent scenes in the film, several are very graphic. In a scene 30 minutes into the film, a man's throat is slashed and blood splatters onto his car window. The graphic scenes would require significant editing before this film could be shown on broadcast television.

#### **Fatal Combat**

A megalomaniac decides that there is not enough violent programming on television, so he creates his own station where fighters battle to the death. In addition to thematic problems, this film is loaded with more than 40 scenes of violence. The scenes, typically involving hand-to-hand combat, are prolonged and often glorified. If all of the violence was edited out of this film there would not be anything left.

### **Johnny Mnemonic**

This film stars Keanu Reeves as a courier in the not-so-distant future with the capacity for storing computerized information in his head. He is pursued far and wide when his cognitive cargo is the cure for a life-threatening disease. Containing more than 20 lengthy scenes of violence, the film is comprised of little else. It also contains exceptionally brutal acts such as decapitations, electrocutions and dismemberment. Clearly, this is a film that would be difficult, if not impossible, to edit for broadcast television.

### **Last Man Standing**

A detective uncovers a trail of corruption that leads to his own captain. He risks the lives of his family and himself in order to expose these wrongdoings. While there are only 11 scenes of violence in the film, most of them are glorified and prolonged, lasting up to three minutes. A scene six minutes into the film features a lengthy shootout in which several men are killed. This shootout is followed by a chase that culminates with two men falling through a glass window into a swimming pool. Other scenes are very antiseptic. This film would be difficult to edit for broadcast television.

### **Men of War**

A group of crooked businessmen hire a mercenary group to take over an island, only to have the leader of the group side with the indigenous population and wage an all out war. There is not much to this film beyond the 35 scenes of violence. Graphic shootings and stabbings, and lengthy scenes of hand-to-hand combat make this film nearly impossible to edit sufficiently for broadcast television.

### **Mo' Money**

Two con-artist brothers get involved in a credit card scam that gets out of hand and ultimately threatens both of their lives. There is a considerable amount of violence and action for a film that many might have assumed was a light comedy. The final scene is over ten minutes long with several graphic gunshots, a fistfight and a hanging. This film would likely require heavy editing before airing on broadcast.

### **Never Talk to Strangers**

This psychological thriller is about a female psychiatrist who believes she is being stalked, only to realize that she suffers from multiple personality disorder as a result of childhood abuses by her father, and, in fact, has been stalking herself. The final shootout is especially graphic and



gory as the psychiatrist shoots her father in the groin. Due to its graphic nature, this film would need editing before appearing on broadcast television.

### **The Shawshank Redemption**

Tim Robbins stars in this tale of a banker who is sent to prison for a crime he did not commit. He befriends several inmates who come to admire his ability to get things done in spite of a ruthless warden and merciless group of prison guards. Of the eight scenes of violence in this film, all are used to establish character or develop the plot. Moreover, the violence is not prolonged or portrayed in a glorified manner. However, a scene an hour-and-a-half into the film depicting the shooting of a prison inmate is a bit more graphic than what normally appears on broadcast television, and would need minor editing.

### **The Silence of the Lambs**

In this 1991 Academy Award winner, a young FBI agent enlists the help of a psychotic criminal in order to track down a serial killer. As stated in the 1995 report, several scenes in this film are more graphic and intense than would normally be shown on broadcast television, especially the escape of Hannibal Lecter from the police. However, the film did air in edited form that year on broadcast television and did not raise concerns.

### **Under the Hula Moon**

An escaped convict takes his brother's wife hostage in order to get south of the Mexican border. The only scene that raises concern in this film is the climax which features a lengthy fistfight between the two brothers. The fight is graphic and glorified and would need substantial editing before airing on broadcast television.

### **The Usual Suspects**

Keyser Söze, a criminal mastermind thriving in anonymity, contrives a clever and tangled plot to kill the only man who can identify him. There is a great deal of violence in this film, much of which appropriately furthers the plot. Some scenes, including a flashback of Keyser Söze killing his own wife and children, are especially dark and brutal. This film would require considerable editing in order appear on broadcast television.

The following films could air on network television without raising any concerns about violence:

**Dangerous Minds**

**Dead Man Walking**

**Leaving Las Vegas**

**The Run of the Country**

## **b. Television Movies**

Showtime ran six made-for-cable movies during the prime time hours of the two week sample. Four of these films could not be shown on broadcast television without raising concerns. They are:

### **Dead Man's Gun**

A story set in the Old West, this made-for follows a revolver as it changes hands among several men. Although there are 14 scenes of violence, most of these are of well handled shootouts or minor fistfights that do not raise concerns. However, one scene did raise concerns because of its graphic and brutal depictions of shootings. In the scene, a man is shot, leaving a gaping hole in his chest. While he writhes in pain on the ground, his killer fires a final round into the man's head, the results of which are vividly depicted. This scene would clearly need to be edited before airing on broadcast television.

### **Showgirl Murders**

A young woman devises a manipulative scheme to make money. It culminates in the death of three people including her ex-boyfriend. A scene depicting a very brutal stabbing would require editing before being suitable for broadcast.

### **Marquis de Sade**

A chilling tale from director Roger Corman, this film details the life of the man for which sadism is named, the Marquis de Sade. As is typical of Corman films, there is quite a bit of sexually explicit content and violence; often the two are mixed together. There are scenes explicitly depicting rape, beheadings, graphic gunshots and a man being burnt alive. Clearly, this film would require an enormous amount of editing before appearing on broadcast television.

### **When the Bullet Hits the Bone**

A cynical emergency room doctor decides to take on the mob in order to rescue a woman in trouble. The amount of graphic, intense and gratuitous violence in this film raises serious concerns. Also troubling is the repeated mixture of violent and sexual content in scenes that are marginally relevant to the plot, especially one scene which shows a woman cutting herself with a knife in the shower. A wide shot reveals that her naked body is covered from head to toe in her own blood. It would be nearly impossible to broadcast this film on network television.

The two made-for-cable films that did not raise any concerns in terms of violence are:

**Down Came A Blackbird**  
**The Pathfinder**

### **c. Original Series**

Four original programs aired during the sample period. Two of these programs, **Bedtime** and **Sherman Oaks**, do not raise any concerns in terms of violence. A science fiction program that raised concerns last year, **The Outer Limits**, was monitored once this year and does not raise concerns. The one show that raises concerns is **Poltergeist: The Legacy**.

Based loosely on the movie **Poltergeist**, this original production chronicles the work of a group called "The Legacy," dedicated to protecting the human race from hostile paranormal activity. One episode of the show contains seven scenes of violence, the majority of which are integral to the plot's development. However, a scene 20 minutes into the show in which a nurse stabs her hand with a message spike is extremely graphic. In the climactic scene, the villain is electrocuted and impaled on a shard of glass. The scenes would need to be edited to be acceptable for broadcast television. **Poltergeist: The Legacy** was monitored twice during the sample period and raised concerns once.

In addition, Showtime aired two specials during the sample period. **Clip Notes**, which previewed upcoming films, and **Sex and the Silver Screen** both utilized clips from feature films. Neither show raises concerns about violence.

### **d. Saturday Morning Programming**

The early morning hours of Showtime's programming consist largely of animated shows such as **Richard Scarry**, **Paddington Goes to the Movies** and **Treasure Island**. These shows contain slapstick or minor acts of violence that do not raise concerns. Showtime also aired two movies in the Saturday morning slot: **Mad Love** and **A River Runs Through It**. While not specifically intended for children, neither film contains violence that raises concerns.

### ***3. The Disney Channel***

The Disney name is famous around the world for family entertainment, and The Disney Channel offers an opportunity to view this kind of programming around the clock. The array of offerings on The Disney Channel is surprisingly diverse. Disney's animation is a staple of the channel, coming in half-hour and one-hour episodes as well as in theatrical films, both classic and new. Television movies and theatrical films appealing to an older audience are shown in the prime time hours. Also broadcast later at night are specials and educational shows ranging from documentaries to science programs.

Almost all of the monitored programming reflects Disney's commitment to wholesome family programming and raises no concerns. Many of the programs are entirely free of violent content. For the most part, the violence that does occur is appropriate within the context of the show and does not raise any issues. Three exceptions, which are discussed later, do raise issues partly due to the audience to which Disney normally caters--namely, children.

The only series aired during the monitoring period was **Avonlea**, which contained no violence at all.

As mentioned earlier, The Disney Channel offers a wide variety of made-for-cable movies, made-for-television movies and theatrical films. The overwhelming majority of these films deliver wholesome family fare that is at most minimally violent and does not raise concerns. The non-problematic films included in the sample are: **Tom and Huck; The Black Hole; The Three Lives of Thomasina; The Flintstones Meet the Jetsons; Heavyweights; Real Genius; The Santa Clause; Splash; Splash, Too; A Boy Named Charlie Brown; The Happiest Millionaire; The Jungle Book; The World's Greatest Athlete; Picture Perfect; Balto; Felix the Cat; Gus; The Great Outdoors; Magic Island; Labyrinth; You Ruined My Life; Can't Buy Me Love; Just Like Dad** and **Much Ado About Nothing**.

One of the three films that raises mild concerns is **Dune**. Although most of the film is free of violence, some scenes are rather graphic. The most notable of these is the climactic scene which contains a dagger fight culminating with the loser getting stabbed in the throat. Although the violent scene occurred almost three hours into the film and was slightly edited, it was still surprisingly brutal.

The second film that raises concerns is **Ernest Goes to Camp**, which follows the exploits of a dopey camp counselor in charge of a pack of juvenile delinquents at a summer camp. This film contains an inordinate number of violent scenes (32), many of which could be easily imitated by children (fingers slammed in a window; shoes set on fire; kicking, grabbing and slapping). Much of the violence is cartoonish and antiseptic. For example, a group of construction workers showered with explosives and flaming arrows emerges relatively unscathed. Too often this film presents serious, potentially lethal violence as inconsequential and comedic.

The third film that raises concerns is the theatrical release **Kazaam**, starring Shaquille O'Neal. The film tells the story of a problem child, Max, who rebels against his single mother and is often antagonized by bullies at school. In his quest to find his biological father, Max runs into trouble with some thugs with whom his father is dealing. Max is able to navigate his way through all of these problems with the help of a genie who befriends him. Some of the violence in the film is necessary to the plot's development and is contextually appropriate, but there is much that is extraneous and inappropriate as well. The intensity of some of the scenes is also troubling given that the film is aimed at a younger audience. For example, in one of the final scenes the genie, Kazaam, becomes angry at a group of thugs for having killed Max. Kazaam kicks, punches and throws the men around and then dispenses with their leader by squashing him into a ball and slam-dunking him into a metal chute. The violence in the film is often glorified through music and special effects. The film also sends confusing and inappropriate messages to children by mixing fantasy violence with real violence and by depicting characters who choose violence as an alternative over other non-violent means of resolving situations. Had this film been geared toward an adult audience, these issues would likely be of no concern.

All of the shows in the Saturday morning lineup contain some minor violence, but do not raise concerns because the violence is either contextually appropriate or is minimally slapstick. The programs in the sample consisted of the following series: **Mouse Tracks, Tale Spin, Quack Attack, Goof Troop, Chip 'N' Dale Rescue Rangers, Amazing Animals, Really Wild Animals** and **Animal Adventures**.

Although there are some instances where the violence shown on The Disney Channel does raise concerns, this is principally due to the fact that the channel draws a large youth audience. Overall, The Disney Channel's programming is noticeably free of violent content, especially when compared with other sources of programming examined in this report.

#### **4. Nickelodeon**

Nickelodeon also has a reputation for programming that is family-friendly and virtually free of violence. In all three years of this violence study, the network has largely lived up to that reputation. While some of its animated programming may have a harder edge than that found on The Disney Channel, this is mainly due to the network's effort to also attract a young teen audience by cultivating a "hip" image.

Prime time programming on Nickelodeon consists primarily of "classic TV" that was part of broadcast network lineups during the 1960s and 1970s. In the two week sample of "Nick at Night," **Happy Days, I Love Lucy, The Munsters, The Mary Tyler Moore Show, Rhoda, The Odd Couple** and **Taxi** were monitored. With few exceptions, these shows rarely feature any acts of violence. Although they may feature an occasional act of physical comedy, it is always appropriate within the context of the show and of no concern. The "Nick at Night" concept has been so successful that Nickelodeon has created an entire channel dedicated to classic television called TV Land.

In addition to classic TV, Nickelodeon has created a wide array of original programming, both animated and live action, which airs during prime time hours and is aimed at the youth and pre-teen audiences. These shows, which feature pre- and early teens in the leading roles, often deal with many of the problems that young adults face today. The programming is appealing, smartly written and raises no issues of violence. While an occasional episode may feature a scuffle or physical comedy, the acts are all minor and relevant to the plot. In fact, an episode of **The Secret World of Alex Mack** that aired on 2/27/97 sent an anti-violence message. Instead of fighting with a school bully, Alex talks her way out of the conflict. Ultimately, all of the children at the school unite in her defense. The following programs also did not raise concerns about violence:

**All That**  
**Are You Afraid of the Dark?**  
**Hey Arnold!**  
**Kablam!**  
**Keenan & Kel**  
**My Brother and Me**  
**Real Monsters**  
**Space Cases**  
**The Wubbulous World of Dr. Seuss**

Saturday morning programming on Nickelodeon is also predominantly non-violent. While shows like **Doug, Rugrats** and **Tiny Toon Adventures** do contain a few slapstick scenes of violence, they are all minor and appropriate within the context of each show. However, the one show raising concerns that airs during the Saturday morning lineup is **Ren and Stimpy**.

Airing at 11:30 a.m., **Ren and Stimpy** is about a dog and cat who live together and manage to get themselves into some interesting situations. Imbued with much of the irreverent spirit of **The Simpsons**, the animated show features crude humor and at times graphic violence. In the episode that aired on 3/1/97, Stimpy is tear-gassed, causing his eyes to pop out and tears to pour out of the sockets. As is the case in most cartoons, the characters suffer little permanent injury. It is

clear that the violence is exaggerated and unrealistic; however, the sometimes graphic nature of the show is clearly out of character with the rest of the network's programming.

## 5. *Music Television (MTV)*

MTV is one of the most controversial channels available on basic cable. While it is a mainstay for many young adults, the station has also been accused of contributing to moral depravity and a decline in values on television. Both loved and hated, MTV single-handedly created the demand for music videos in the early part of the 1980s. The channel also pioneered the use of computer graphics, which are seen in its on-air promotions and logos. Throughout the 1990s, MTV has moved to create more diverse programming, featuring variety and reality-based series, news, documentaries, animation and sporting events. Perhaps responding to criticism that it has drifted from its original intent to show music videos, MTV has created a spin-off station, M2, that features music videos 24 hours a day.

Although MTV appeals to youth, its target audience is older than that of the youth-oriented programming on Nickelodeon or The Disney Channel. A majority of the programming would be lost on a viewer under ten. The criticisms directed at the station, such as those referring to sexually explicit content or the debasing of women, are less prevalent today than during the initial years of the station. An analysis of MTV's programming must take into account the context of the channel as a whole and what the station's brand name (much like Disney or Nickelodeon) means to the viewers.

### a. Music

While music accounts for a shrinking proportion of MTV's overall programming, it still comprises the majority of programming in prime time. During our two week sample, **Jams Countdown**, **Prime Time**, **Yo!** and **Unplugged** were monitored. The first three programs show videos (**Yo!** exclusively features rap and hip-hop) while **Unplugged** features artists playing live acoustic versions of their hits. **Prime Time** presents a wide array of music videos, some of which raise a few issues.

"Peaches" is a song by the alternative band Presidents of the United States of America, a group with a penchant for humorous lyrics. Their video concludes with a parody of kung fu movies, featuring quite a bit of punching and kicking. The action is outrageous and clearly hyperbolic, but this could be lost on younger viewers. The video for "Greedy Fly," a song by the grunge band Bush, is the most graphically violent music video monitored during the past three years. The video is an artistic, albeit dark, depiction of the inner struggle between good and evil. In the climactic fight scene, "evil" rips the wings off the back of the angelic "good." Viewers hear the joints popping as blood splatters across the screen of a television. In a later scene, flies burrow out of the arm of a man and blood pours from the gaping wound. In all, this video may leave even some of the most jaded of viewers unsettled. Several videos by Marilyn Manson and Nine Inch Nails, while containing no actual acts of violence, have a dark tone and various graphic images that could be frightening to younger viewers.



## **b. Reality-Based and Variety Series**

Five years ago, MTV's programmers put a 1990s spin on the **An American Family** concept when they created the immensely popular **Real World** series. Intended to be completely non-fictional, the program examines how well a group of total strangers handles day-to-day life while living together for six months. The show has been based in major metropolitan cities: New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, London and, this past year, Miami. The format has been so popular that it has yielded a spinoff series, **Road Rules**, which features a group of young adults traveling together. Neither of the two programs raises any concerns about violence.

In addition to reality-based programming, MTV has several variety series airing in prime time. During our sample we monitored two: **The Rodman World Tour** and **The Jenny McCarthy Show**. **The Rodman World Tour** features the escapades of Dennis Rodman and his special guests. This program is free of violence. **The Jenny McCarthy Show** features sketch comedy. While some of the skits contain acts of minor physical comedy, they are all appropriate within the context of the show and raise no concerns.

## **c. Game shows**

One game show aired during the two week sample: **Singled Out**. Essentially a 1990s version of the ever-popular **The Dating Game**, the show features young men and women selecting a date through a frequently humorous process of elimination. Not surprisingly, this program is completely free of violence.

## **d. Comedy**

MTV has its own version of **Candid Camera** called **Buzzkill**. Three young men travel the country looking for unsuspecting victims for their pranks and practical jokes. While the show contains marginal amounts of violence, the acts fit within the context of the featured practical joke and are used for humorous effect.

## **e. Sports**

Sports broadcasting, like much of the other programming on MTV, does not fit the usual mold. Two sports programs aired during our two week sample: **MTV's Rock-n-Jock** and **MTV Sports**. **Rock-n-Jock** pairs sports and entertainment celebrities in a basketball game benefitting the Pediatric AIDS Foundation. **MTV Sports** profiles high-risk "extreme sports" activities such as sky diving, in-line skating and snowboarding. The one episode monitored featured cross country biking. Several crashes were shown to illustrate the inherent danger of the sport. Neither show raises any issues in terms of violence.

## **f. Documentaries and Specials**

Several documentaries aired during the sample period. **Smashed** and **Straight Dope** looked, respectively, at the perils of underage drinking and drug abuse. Both programs were intelligent, informative and were virtually violence-free. **Tupac Shakur-In His Own Words** examined the tragically short life of the slain rapper, using old interview footage and clips from movies in which he starred. Interestingly, MTV chose to show non-violent footage from films in which violence was prevalent. This creative choice is commendable.

Specials on MTV are generally related to the premiers of movies. During the sample period, specials aired for the premiers of **That Thing You Do** and **Howard Stern's "Private Parts."** Each special features interviews with the stars of the films and preview clips, none of which raised concerns. **Star Wars: An MTV Movie Special** looks at the 20-year anniversary re-release of the film and what it has meant to the genre of science fiction. Several scenes from the film are shown that highlight battle scenes and light saber duels. However, these scenes are what **Star Wars** is about and must be seen in order to understand the movie.

#### **g. Animation**

Animated programming on MTV is decidedly not for children. **Beavis and Butt-Head** is perhaps the most famous and controversial program the channel has ever aired. Parodies of the stereotypical MTV viewer, Beavis and Butt-Head are a pair of moronic, social misfit buddies who watch videos and get into trouble. Known for crossing the line, the subject material is often crude and tasteless. Most of the episodes monitored contain scenes of Beavis and Butt-Head beating each other up. In one episode, Butt-Head tries to pierce Beavis' ear by using a compass and a drill. This scene would have raised considerable concerns if it had aired at an earlier time slot or in the morning when a higher proportion of children are in the audience. However, during the sample period, the program aired no earlier than 10:00 p.m. **Beavis and Butt-Head**, aired in a time slot when few children are in the audience, does not raise concerns.

## **6. TBS (*The Atlanta Superstation*)**

TBS was the first of the Turner cable channels. Now that Turner has joined Time Warner, even more channels are on the way. TBS is very different from other cable channels in a rather significant way: it is licensed as a local UHF station, WTBS, in Atlanta. This means that it is regulated like a broadcast station rather than a cable channel and, therefore, must serve the public interest, convenience and necessity. In the 1970s, Turner transformed both broadcasting and cable by taking his over-the-air Atlanta station and beaming it up to a satellite to create a “Superstation.” He took WTBS, with its weak signal, and transformed it into a national television station.

Turner was able to broadcast the games of Atlanta’s baseball and basketball teams on TBS because he owned the teams. Over the years, TBS has developed like a network, with a mix of different programming types. It runs far fewer original programs than a network and more theatrical films. In 1985 Turner purchased from MGM one of the biggest and best movie libraries in the world, and that library has become a source of much programming on all of the Turner cable channels. Turner runs more television and theatrical films than any other source on television. The Turner networks air over 700 films per month and, now that the company has merged with Time Warner, that figure is sure to rise. TBS also runs more documentaries than the broadcast networks. Ted Turner’s interest in both scientific exploration and the environment is well represented by the National Geographic and Jacques Cousteau documentaries.

TBS is also different from other cable channels because it does not have separate East and West Coast feeds. Almost all cable networks use two separate transponders on the satellite so their programming can appear “at the same time” on both coasts. While the East Coast feed is used to send a program out to the East at 8:00 p.m., the other feed sends out the same program three hours later to the West. The result is a schedule that resembles that of a broadcast network. TBS, since it also exists as an over-the-air station, must send all its programs out at the same time. Therefore, the definition of prime time differs with TBS. A program that begins at 6:00 p.m. in Los Angeles is simultaneously playing at 9:00 p.m. in the East. Accordingly, some programs may raise concerns because they appear too early in one time zone, while simultaneously raising fewer concerns at the later hour in another time zone.

### **a. Theatrical Films**

During the two-week period TBS was monitored, it ran 21 theatrical films. Of these, seven would raise concerns about violence if shown on a broadcast network, including:

#### **Big Trouble in Little China**

In this film, Kurt Russell plays a truck driver who helps save his friend’s fiancée from an evil, supernatural being. The being wants to become mortal by marrying and then sacrificing her. This

film raises serious issues of concern because of the antiseptic but brutal nature of many of the violent acts. Though tongue in cheek, many of the sequences are prolonged and glorified. In the few instances in which consequences are shown, they are unrealistic. This film could only be aired on network television after substantial editing.

### **Desperate Hours**

A man indicted for murder has a love affair with his lawyer, who participates in a plot to help him escape from prison. The escaped murder suspect holds a family hostage while he waits for his attorney. Although many of the violent scenes in the film are relevant to the plot's development, a few are overly graphic and gratuitous. The climactic scene, in particular, shows police gunfire that is excessive and unrealistic. With some minor editing, this film could be shown on a broadcast network.

### **Flight of the Intruder**

After being traumatized by the pointless deaths of several fellow servicemen, a Navy pilot flies his own covert mission to bomb Hanoi. Although it is not surprising to find that violence plays a prominent role in a war movie, this film raises issues due to the graphic nature of certain key scenes, most notably a needlessly explicit stabbing of a North Vietnamese soldier. This film could be made suitable for broadcast television with some minor editing.

### **Flowers in the Attic**

After a mother of four is left penniless following the death of her husband, she moves her family into her parents' home. Though her parents had previously disowned her, the mother plans to win back the love of her wealthy and dying father. However, her scheme ultimately results in the confinement and suffering of her children as well as her own gruesome death. This film is intense and disturbing. While the violence is not glorified, its central role in the story raises concerns. The hanging of the mother is shown from different angles, exemplifying the mood and intensity that the film tries to build through violence. This film could be aired on broadcast television by editing this one scene.

### **The Lost Boys**

A divorcee and her two sons move to a coastal town which, unbeknownst to them, is inhabited by a group of vampires. The oldest son falls under the vampires' influence and can only be released from their spell by killing the head vampire. Although it aired with an advisory, this film raises concerns because of its unnecessarily graphic depictions. Moreover, many of the scenes are prolonged and glorified, especially the climax of the film depicting the demise of several vampires. This sequence features scenes of burning and melting skin, multiple

impalements and an exploding head. With editing, this film could suitably air on broadcast television.

### **Running Scared**

Before retiring, two Chicago police detectives are determined to capture a drug-dealing, long-time nemesis. The sheer volume of violence in this film (27 scenes) is the primary concern. However, almost as troubling is the very cavalier attitude toward violence displayed by the film's two main characters. This is especially so when the film is aired at 7:35 p.m. on the West Coast, when the audience might contain a large number of children. Editing would be required before airing this film on broadcast television.

### **The Perfect Weapon**

A master of martial arts returns to his hometown to avenge his friend's murder, and in the process must take on the Korean mafia. Despite an advisory which claimed that the film had been "edited for content," the violence in this film is excessive and graphic. Many of the scenes are prolonged and glorified, relying upon slow-motion, music and sound effects to underscore the brutality. Violence is even used as a form of barter in this film, as the protagonist offers to allow an eager threesome the chance to fight him "full contact, no protection" in exchange for information. Airing this film on broadcast television would require major editing.

Of the theatrical films monitored, those that could be aired on a broadcast network without any changes are:

**Attack Force Z**

**Close Encounters of the Third Kind**

**The Forgotten**

**Harry and the Hendersons**

**Helter Skelter**

**Legal Eagles**

**Nuns on the Run**

**Play Misty for Me**

**Rain Man**

**They Only Kill Their Masters**

**Tough Love**

**Valley Girl**

**The Vanishing**

**Weird Science**

### **b. Other Prime Time Programming**

Several different documentary-style programs aired, none of which raised any concerns. **National Geographic Explorer** investigates the natural world, while **The Power of Angels** and **Haunted** deal with the supernatural. **The Incredible Life and Times of Robert Ripley** presents a biography of the famed entertainer. The only prime time series that aired on TBS during the monitoring period, **Matlock**, raised no issues. Although the episode of **Matlock** monitored contained five scenes of violence, they were all handled well and were not graphic.

### **c. Saturday Morning Programming**

The Saturday morning lineup on TBS consisted of several animated programs including **Taz-Mania**, **Tom and Jerry's Halloween**, **Bugs Bunny's Halloween**, **The Jetsons** and **Scooby Doo**. Most of the violent scenes contained in these programs were slapstick. Two theatrical films aired on Saturday morning during the monitoring period, **Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure** and **Airborne**. Both films contained minimal amounts of violence that were appropriate within their contexts.

## **7. The USA Network**

In both look and feel, the USA network is the closest thing to a broadcast channel available on basic cable. With original series, made-for-cable movies and theatrical motion pictures accounting for the bulk of the prime time hours, programming very closely parallels that of the four major networks. Reaching 70 million homes, USA is one of the most successful cable stations. But much of the programming, both original series and movies, contains scenes that are far more intense than what is found on broadcast television.

### **a. Theatrical Films**

Five theatrical films aired during our two week sample. Three would raise concerns if shown on broadcast television. The two not raising concerns, **Kindergarten Cop** and **Mr. Baseball**, are lighthearted comedies containing minor acts of violence. They could air on broadcast television without editing. The three films raising concerns are:

#### **Cape Fear**

A remake of the 1962 classic, **Cape Fear** is about a recently released ex-con who vows to make life a living hell for the family of the lawyer whom he blames for sending him to prison. Even though much of the abuse is psychological, the last twenty minutes is full of intense physical violence. In the climactic scene, viewers see a brutal fist fight and the villain being burned alive. With some editing, this film could be made suitable for broadcast television.

#### **Hellbound: Hellraiser II**

The second twisted tale in a series from horror guru Clive Barker, this theatrical tells the story of a young woman who re-enters hell in a search for her deceased father. Airing at 7:00 p.m. on the West Coast, the film is filled with extremely graphic violence from beginning to end. In one scene, the viewer sees a man torn apart with meat hooks. Other acts of violence include neck slashings and decapitations. While there is clear evidence of editing, this is the archetype of a film that would be impossible to edit sufficiently for broadcast television.

#### **Terminator**

Coining the phrase "I'll be back," this 1984 theatrical starring Arnold Schwarzenegger is about a cyborg from the future who is sent to kill an unsuspecting woman. Action and violence is non-stop throughout the film. In a scene a little more than an hour into the film, the cyborg storms a police station, shooting and killing everyone in his path. This film would require significant editing before airing on broadcast television.

## **b. Made-for-Cable Movies**

Only two made-for-cable movies aired during the sample period, and neither raised concerns about violence. **We the Jury**, a film about the trial of a woman accused of killing her abusive husband, was free of violence. In **Any Place But Home** a young couple kidnaps the son of a wealthy businessman. Although there were 12 scenes of violence in the film, they were all well handled and used to develop the plot. The film also aired with an advisory.

## **c. Original Series**

USA aired seven original series during the sample period and three raised concerns about their use of violence. All of the series contained scenes of violence, but differed significantly in the ways they treated the violence. The series raising concerns are:

### **La Femme Nikita**

Based loosely on the 1990 French film, this program is about a young woman serving a life sentence for a crime she did not commit. She is coerced into working for “Section One,” a highly secret anti-terrorist group that works outside the boundaries of the law. There is quite a bit of fighting and gunplay in this show. Much of the action is antiseptic and glorifies the heroine. In one episode, the heroine crashes through the ceiling of a room, kicking the gun out of the hand of a man ready to kill a hostage. Others shoot the remaining terrorists. Although the violence is not continuous throughout the show, its violent premise and failure to depict any real consequences would raise frequent concerns on broadcast television.

### **Pacific Blue**

This action show revolves around police officers who patrol a beach strip on bicycles. The show contains quite a bit of action and violence. The main concerns raised by this program are the quantity of violence--as many as ten scenes--and the glorified nature of the violence in those scenes. They were often unrealistic and accompanied by music, making the violence look and feel very exciting. This show also does little to examine the consequences of the violence.

### **Renegade**

This action program stars Lorenzo Lamas as an ex-cop on the run. After being framed by his fellow officers, he works as a bounty hunter. The show is filled with glorified violence that is unrealistic and lacks consequences. Lamas’ character is often involved in big fight scenes and shootouts. As mentioned in last year’s report, the plot of **Renegade** is rarely about anything other than violence.



**Silk Stalkings**, a program that raised concerns last season, was monitored five times and did not raise any concerns during this year's sample period. Last season this detective-thriller often relied on very graphic images and violent climaxes to further the storyline. This season the show appears to have toned down the use of graphic images. The violence used was integral to the story and not excessive. Other original programs that aired on USA during the sample period and did not raise issues in terms of violence are:

**The Big Easy**  
**Duckman**  
**Weird Science**

#### **d. Saturday Morning Programming**

The early Saturday morning hours of USA's programming are dedicated to infomercials and WWF wrestling. The children's programming consists largely of cartoons airing after 11:00 a.m. Three of the four programs monitored fall into the sinister combat violence category: **Street Fighter**, **Mortal Combat** and **Savage Dragon**. All of these action-adventure shows focus on martial arts fighting. The fight scenes are frequently unrealistic and very glorified. **Wing Commander Academy** also contains violence, but falls into the tame combat violence category. The emphasis in this show is not on hand-to-hand combat and the characters often express remorse for their actions.

## **8. *Turner Network Television (TNT)***

Created as a venue for Turner Broadcasting's vast library of films, TNT's programming consists largely of theatrical and made-for-television movies. Since its inception, TNT has also financed and/or produced several large scale productions. However, the channel has also become a venue for sports, including NBA basketball, boxing and WCW wrestling. But in general, the standard TNT prime time lineup is dominated by films. Like TBS, TNT does not have a separate East Coast and West Coast feed and therefore runs its programming at one time for the entire country.

### **a. Theatrical Films**

Sixteen films aired on TNT during the two-week sample period, and all of them contained some violence. Several of these films monitored ran violence advisories much like those on network television. Of the 16 films that aired, five would raise concerns if they aired on network television. Those films are:

#### **Dragonslayer**

A sorcerer's apprentice takes on the challenge of slaying a dragon, but soon realizes that he has taken on more than he can handle. As expected from the fantasy-adventure genre, there is plenty of action and violence. While no single scene stands out as a problem, there are more than 20 scenes of violence in this two-hour film. Some of the violence is graphic, such as the dragon blowing fire on a foe. In addition, several scenes of combat are lengthy. However, this film could be made suitable for broadcast television with minor editing.

#### **Exorcist II: The Heretic**

In the sequel to the 1973 hit theatrical, a priest investigates the causes behind a girl's demonic possession. The main issue with this film is that, in several scenes, the violence is far more graphic than is necessary to tell the story. In one scene, the priest steps on a bed of spikes that pierce through his foot. In the film's climax the priest rips the heart from a demon's chest in order to save a child. These images are extremely graphic and grisly, even for cable. To the channel's credit, it ran four advisories for adult content during the film. At a later time slot (the film aired at 7:30 p.m. on the West Coast) and with minor editing, this film could air on broadcast television.

#### **The Fog**

This 1980 horror film from director John Carpenter is about a small California coastal town haunted by the inhabitants of a 100-year-old shipwreck. While there are only seven scenes of violence, one occurring 18 minutes into the film is extremely brutal. The viewer sees one man stabbed through the mid-section by a sword and several others mutilated with a large fishermen's

hook. In the final scene, a man is decapitated. Although both scenes are integral to the plot, they would require some editing before being aired on broadcast television.

### **Night of the Living Dead**

In a remake of the 1968 cult classic, several people barricade themselves inside a house in order to avoid a horde of brain-eating zombies roaming the countryside. This film is filled with virtually non-stop violence from beginning to end. In the first ten minutes alone, a zombie is stabbed in the hand with a metal rod and a man's head is crushed on the side of a tombstone. In addition to the numerous fistfights in the film, zombies are shot frequently in the head. TNT ran three advisories with the film. However, even with advisories, it would be difficult to edit this film sufficiently for broadcast television.

### **Swamp Thing**

In this film based on the DC comic book, a young scientist develops a formula which transforms him into the "Swamp Thing," a half-man, half-plant creature. He endeavors to keep the formula away from an evil genius while, at the same time, saving the woman he loves. Despite the seemingly high number of violent scenes (27), most of them involve minor acts of aggression that do not raise concerns. Many are chase scenes which may feature gunfire that misses its target. However, in a scene occurring in the second hour of the film, the Swamp Thing's arm is chopped off by a henchman with a machete. The Swamp Thing then kills the man by squeezing his head until blood gushes out of his mouth. This film would likely be edited before airing on broadcast television.

The theatrical films airing during the sample period that raised little or no concern with regard to violence are:

**Batteries Not Included**  
**Coal Miner's Daughter**  
**Communion**  
**The Exorcist**  
**Fire and Sword**  
**Gettysburg**  
**Gone with the Wind**  
**Harry and the Hendersons**  
**Poltergeist 2**  
**The Quiet Man**  
**Serpico**

## **b. Made-for-Cable Movies**

TNT aired two made-for-cable movies during the sample period. In **Mother Trucker: The Diana Kilmury Story**, a female trucker organizes a movement against the Teamsters Union and their questionable practices. The film contains only a few acts of violence, all of which are handled well and integral to the story. The second movie, **The Hunchback**, an adaptation of Victor Hugo's timeless tale, did raise some concerns. A few scenes are slightly more graphic than is necessary for the plot's development. In one scene the villainous priest Frodo stabs one of the king's advisors. The viewer sees a close-up of the knife twisting in the advisor's gut as blood pours from the wound. In another scene later in the film, Quasimodo is hit over the head with a cat o' nine tails, causing blood to stream from his forehead. In both instances minor editing would be needed before this film could air on broadcast television.

## **c. Specials**

Only one special aired during our sample period, **Inside the Academy Awards**. The show featured clips from several movies nominated for Oscars this year, including **Fargo**, **Sling Blade** and **The English Patient**. In all instances, these selected clips were not overly violent and did not raise concerns.

## **d. Saturday Morning Programming**

The TNT Saturday morning lineup is not geared toward children. The early morning hours feature the Western action-adventure shows **Brisco County Jr.**, **How the West Was Won**, **Lazarus Man** and **The Wild, Wild West**. The police drama **In the Heat of the Night** also aired once during the sample. Typical of these genres, the programs all have some degree of violent content, usually fistfights or an occasional shootout. In most instances, these scenes are integral to the plot and rarely portray violence in a glorified or graphic manner. However, one episode of **Lazarus Man** contains a graphic gunshot that does raise concerns, mainly because of the 9:00 a.m. time slot.

## D. Home Video (Rentals)

Home video, an industry that barely existed 15 years ago, now generates revenues exceeding box office ticket sales. Home video is heavily dependent on the publicity and promotion surrounding a motion picture's release in theaters. While there has also been very successful non-theatrical home video content, such as exercise tapes and old television shows, most of the home video rental business comes from theatrical films.

Home video is divided into the purchase and rental markets. More and more people are purchasing home videos rather than renting them. Prices for purchasing videos tend to be either in the \$13-\$20 range or over \$80. Increasingly, blockbuster motion pictures such as **Independence Day** and **The Lion King** are offered for sale at \$15. Coupons for special promotions lower the price even more. Nevertheless, there seems to be a limited number of films that people want to own. The Disney animation classics and very popular films do well in the purchase market. Most viewers rent their home videos at their local video store.

In the areas of sex, language and violence, home video offers at least one level of protection for children not available in the other television distribution systems. Home videos are not available by merely clicking on channels on the television set. The viewer has to make an active decision to go to a video store, select a film and rent it. The situation varies from store to store, but young children often cannot easily rent films because a cash deposit or, more frequently, a credit card is needed. Ideally, the video is watched in whatever room and at whatever time the parent decides. Films with sex or graphic violence can be viewed when the children are asleep. The video is small enough to be hidden or locked away from children who should not watch it. These controls have significantly contributed to the growth of pornography in the home video market and the spread of that material into CD-ROM.

With few exceptions, the content of theatrical films on home video exactly duplicates what is seen in the theater. When this is true, the MPAA rating is still applicable and can guide viewers as to the content of the video. Occasionally, the home video differs from what is seen in the theater. Sometimes additional footage is added to the film. Motion picture studios belonging to the MPAA require directors and producers to deliver to them films that will be rated no stronger than "R." In some cases, scenes have to be edited or completely eliminated to receive the "R" rating. Home video provides an opportunity to restore these scenes. But in most cases, home video replicates theater content.

Although home video is a system directly linked to the film business, the videos are shown on a home monitor and become part of the television system. Therefore, home video becomes a part of this monitoring project. We examined the top ten home video rental titles each quarter as determined by Billboard magazine. The monitoring began with an early August 1996 list and continued every three months in November, February and May. While we arbitrarily chose the initial week in which to begin, we were bound by the lists that followed at three-month intervals.

Once again, the goal of monitoring video rentals is not to determine whether these films raise concerns about their use of violence in their native environment of home video, but rather to determine whether they would raise concerns if shown in the same form on the broadcast

television networks. Film is a medium that especially targets an adolescent and young adult audience more tolerant of graphic or intense violence. As a result, one would expect many of the most popular video rentals to be action films that feature violence as part of the story. In 1995, 22 out of 40 home videos would raise concerns if shown without change on broadcast television. Last year 24 out of 40 videos would need to be edited, if this could be done sufficiently, before appearing on the networks. This year the total number that would not be broadcast without minor or significant changes increased slightly to 25. Interestingly, of the 24 films in 1996 that would not appear on network television without change, six, or 25%, have titles promising action or intense themes. This year, of the 25 films in the same category, only two have such titles (**Rumble in the Bronx** and **A Time to Kill**). Of the 15 that would not raise concerns about violence, not one had a violent title. Note: This year there are 39 films rather than 40 on the home video monitoring list because **Fargo** appeared as the third most rented tape in November 1996 and was still in the ninth position in February 1997.

Some of the films could be easily modified or edited to air on broadcast television without raising concerns. These films do not feature violence throughout, but do occasionally use violent scenes to develop the storyline. The length and most graphic moments of these scenes could be edited for broadcast without affecting the integrity of the story. **A Time to Kill**, based on John Grisham's first novel, is about a black man accused of murdering the two white men who raped his daughter. Both the rape and the murder are central to this story about justice and racism in the South. The few scenes of violence could be easily edited for broadcast television.

Also requiring minor editing for broadcast television is **Courage under Fire**, starring Meg Ryan and Denzel Washington. This story, about the first woman to win the medal of honor in combat, contains scenes of war used to establish the drama in the film. **The Craft**, a story about four high school girls who become fascinated with witchcraft, contains one very intense scene at the conclusion that would need to be edited before broadcast. **The Arrival**, starring Charlie Sheen, is about aliens coming to Earth. One scene, in which an alien's arm is cut off and shatters, would likely require a small amount of editing.

Several of the home video rentals are action films similar to those described in the broadcast television section on theatrical film. These movies are dominated by violent action, containing as many as 20-40 scenes of violence. It is impossible to edit out the problematic violence without removing huge portions of the film or destroying its storyline. These films in their unedited form raise more concerns about violence than any appearing on broadcast television. **Broken Arrow**, starring John Travolta and Christian Slater, is the story of a soldier who plans to detonate the nuclear bomb he stole from a military jet. Containing more than 35 scenes of intense violence (it is directed by popular Hong Kong action filmmaker John Woo), it is filled with fights, explosions and shootings. One man is sliced apart by the blades of a helicopter. Although it will be a likely choice to air on broadcast television, editing it sufficiently will prove a Herculean task and will considerably shorten the film. **Escape from L.A.** also contains more than 30 scenes of violence and raises some of the same issues. Reprising the role he made famous 15 years ago in **Escape from New York**, Kurt Russell is sent on a search and destroy mission that produces countless dead bodies. A dead man is pinned to a wall with knives, another man is gunned down after missing a basketball shot and a third man is decapitated with shears. This film would also require substantial editing. With even more scenes of violence (42), **The Long Kiss Goodnight**

stars Geena Davis in the type of action role usually reserved for men. In this film, throats are slashed, a needle is stuck in a man's eye and a man's neck is broken. The final scene is filled with even more carnage. **The Rock**, which is about a terrorist takeover of Alcatraz starring Sean Connery and Nicholas Cage, contains fewer scenes of violence, but these are very intense and graphic. In a scene in which several Navy S.E.A.L.S. are killed in a mass shooting, one is graphically shot in the head. In later scenes, a knife is thrown into a man's throat and a man thrown through a window is impaled on a rusty fence pole. The last 20 minutes of the film contain little else besides intense action. **Fled**, with 28 scenes of violence, raises the same issues.

All of the above-mentioned films are the type of action movies that are frequently purchased by the broadcast networks. They will be very difficult to edit without interfering with the integrity of the story. The broadcast practices and standards departments will be working overtime to prepare these films for network television.

Four of the films that could not appear on broadcast television without raising concerns about violence bring forth some interesting issues about different types and styles of violence. These films warrant more detailed discussions. They are:

### **Casino**

The story of a Las Vegas casino from distinguished director Martin Scorsese, this very violent film makes the point that violence is a normal and natural part of the lives of the mobsters who run the casino. There are well over 20 scenes of very brutal and ugly violence that are used to establish the nature of the characters and the lives they lead. This film raises some of the same issues one would find in **The Godfather**. To tell this story without the intense violence would not only be hedging the truth, but also imply that these ruthless gangsters are better people than they really are.

In scene early in the movie, a man caught cheating in a casino is taken by security to a back room. His hands are smashed with a hammer to teach him a lesson. The message the viewer receives is that the casino, rather than relying on the police, enforces its own rules. Later, one of the gangsters has his head placed in a vice which is then tightened. Ultimately his throat is slashed. In the climactic scene, several men are shot in the head and another is suffocated, while one of the lead characters and his brother are beaten and buried half-alive. This is not violence for the sake of violence. It has a point and is an essential part of the story. Nonetheless, this is an extraordinarily brutal film that would be heavily edited before airing on broadcast television.

### **Rumble in the Bronx**

The film that sent martial arts expert Jackie Chan and director John Woo to the top of Hollywood's "A" list, **Rumble in the Bronx** is somewhat different from typical action films. As viewers of the film are likely to know, Jackie Chan performs all of his own stunts. The film is filled with nonstop action and violence, almost all of which is glorified. Most of the action showcases Chan's martial arts skills and involves kicking and punching.

Filled with the humor sometimes found in the **Die Hard** or **Terminator** films, **Rumble in the Bronx** never takes itself seriously. Although the violence is never instigated by Chan, fighting is an essential element of his character. Therefore, this film does raise many concerns, making it extremely difficult to edit for broadcast television.

## **Fargo**

The winner of the 1996 Oscar for best actress and original screenplay, **Fargo** is an intensively violent story about a kidnapping that horribly backfires. The film contains several very graphic scenes of shootings featuring much blood. In one scene, one killer turns on his accomplice and kills him with an axe, feeding his body into a wood chipper. In this disturbing scene, the audience sees only a leg protruding from the wood chipper.

Despite the horrible violence, this is actually a dark comedy about the cultural quirks of life in the rural Midwest. Not only would it be difficult to remove the graphic violence from the film, to do so would be to stray from the artistic vision of the film's creators, Joel and Ethan Coen. This film is what it is and, for that reason, will probably never appear on broadcast television. If it did air, it would need to be heavily edited.

## **Heat**

The much anticipated film starring both Robert De Niro and Al Pacino, and directed by **Miami Vice**'s creative leader, Michael Mann, **Heat** is the story of a bank robbery gone awry. Caught in the middle of the robbery, the criminals engage in a full-scale quasi-military battle with the police, who are seriously outgunned. The pivotal gunfight after the foiled robbery lasts over ten minutes. Bullets fly everywhere and the scene is filled with graphic footage. In addition to the gunfight, there are several scenes of execution-style shootings that vividly depict the bullets' impacts on the victims' bodies. As in **Casino**, the violence is essential to the story. However, since it is concentrated in just a few scenes (even though one is very long), it probably could be edited for television.

The other home video rentals that would raise concerns on network television are:

## **Extreme Measures**

### **Fear**

### **Get Shorty**

### **The Ghost and the Darkness**

### **The Island of Dr. Moreau**

### **The Juror**

### **Kingpin**



**Lone Star**  
**Primal Fear**  
**Sleepers**  
**12 Monkeys**  
**William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet**

The home videos that do not raise concerns about violence are:

**The Birdcage**  
**Chain Reaction**  
**The Chamber**  
**Dead Man Walking**  
**The First Wives' Club**  
**James and the Giant Peach**  
**Leaving Las Vegas**  
**Mr. Holland's Opus**  
**101 Dalmatians**  
**Phenomenon**  
**Tin Cup**  
**The Truth About Cats and Dogs**  
**Twister**  
**Up Close and Personal**

## E. Video Games

The video game business, like home video, is a relatively new industry. In the last 20 years video games have become an important force in the media world. In the early days of video games, most were played at commercial machines in restaurants and other places of business. Then video arcades opened and attracted many young customers.

Video games spread from the arcades to units that attached to consumers' televisions and did not require coins to play. The industry has gone through much turmoil. Atari, a highly successful company in the early 1980s, has today become a minor force (though it is still competing in the 1990s with a new system). The standard has been 16-bit machines and that market has been divided between Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo. The equipment for this format attaches to a television set and becomes part of the world of television. Most titles have been licensed to both platforms, but some are developed by one of the companies and thus are not available to its competitors. **Donkey Kong Country 3**, a game developed by Nintendo and a top seller this past year, is not available on Sega.

The video game business is currently going through another transformation. Compared to new systems that are becoming available, the current 16-bit standard is slow and offers only adequate graphics. With the addition of CD-ROM technology, there is a move to 32- and 64-bit machines, such as the 3DO or CD-I systems, as well as the Sony Playstation. During the holiday season of 1996, Nintendo's Super 64 platform was one of the biggest selling gifts in the nation. This transition to new and better formats is causing great confusion in the industry as consumers are not yet sure which systems will survive and therefore which systems they should purchase. The whole business is changing and the only thing that is clear is that the economic stakes are high, as customers are certain to purchase much hardware and software. Many observers of the industry believe that the platforms connecting to traditional television sets will eventually be completely replaced by CD-ROMs or DVD-ROMs attached to computer systems. A significant move in that direction has already occurred, and for the first time in the monitoring process, a CD-ROM video game has been examined.

Although video games appeal primarily to young people, many of the users cannot afford the equipment without financial assistance from others, usually their parents. The current price of the hardware for the less expensive systems begins at around \$100. This is more than most kids can afford. More complex systems cost as much as \$300. The software can also be expensive. While there are less costly titles available, the most popular games cost about \$50.

Because of the high costs compared to television or home video, parents are almost always a primary part of the purchase process in video games. Kids simply cannot acquire the hardware or most of the software without help. Parents must acquiesce in their children's desires by giving them the money for the equipment or buying the titles they want.

Since the parents are usually part of the purchase process, they have an obligation to become informed. It is their responsibility to find out about a game and how it is played. Almost any video game store will demonstrate the game. Parents should not passively hand over the money for the games or acquire the video packages without investigating them. More so than with any

other media system described in this report, parents have a responsibility and an opportunity to learn about the video games that interest their children.

To help with this parental role, the video game industry has developed a rating system. Devised by the Entertainment Software Rating Board for the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA), the ratings are administered by Dr. Arthur Pober. As of summer 1997, video games are rated for one of five audiences:

**EC:** Early Childhood titles that do not contain material parents would find inappropriate.

**KA:** Kids to Adult titles that may contain minimal violence or some crude language.

**T:** Teen titles are for those 13 and older; they may contain violent content, strong language or suggestive themes.

**M:** Mature material for ages 17 and older; these products may include more intense violence and language with more mature sexual themes.

**A:** Adults only titles; these may include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence and are not to be sold to those under 18 years of age.

This ratings system deals with different levels of violence. The IDSA is addressing parents' concerns in a responsible way. The ESRB has rated over 2,000 video game titles. It maintains a Web page (<http://www.esrb.org>) and an 800 number (800-771-3772) for parents or anyone else seeking ratings or further information.

In 1995 it was noticed that, whether by accident or design, a number of retailers had placed a price tag over the games' ratings. An unscientific sample of retail stores in the Los Angeles, New York and Washington areas indicates that over the past two years this occurred less frequently.

All of the other forms of media discussed in this report have some relation to each other. Theatrical films, for example, become the content of home video, cable and network and local television. Television series become the content of the syndication marketplace. While video games do attach to the television set and become a part of the home television environment, they are really a very different part of that world. Some game titles, however, do come from television programs and, on at least one occasion, a video game, **Mortal Kombat**, has been made into a motion picture (although many motion pictures are made into video games). We looked at video games in a very tangential way and do not imply that our findings apply to all games in the industry. We did, however, look at the most successful games.

We examined the six top-selling video games of the year as compiled by the NPD Group--which, according to the IDSA, is accepted as the best source of retail sales data. The NPD Group's listings separate games by type of game system. Ignoring the distinctions between different game systems, we established the list of games to be monitored as follows:

**Super Mario 64**  
**Donkey Kong Country 3**  
**Madden NFL '97**  
**Duke Nukem 3D**  
**Wave Race 64**  
**Tekken 2**

There is great similarity between last year's list and this year's. **Super Mario 2** was on the previous list and now the list of best-sellers is headed by **Super Mario 64** designed for the new 64-bit platform. Last year **Donkey Kong Country 2** topped the list of best-sellers and this year continued in the number two position. But because last year's report talked about **Donkey Kong Country 2** and also because **Donkey Kong Country 3** was in the number three position this year, only the latter game was examined. Similarly, this year, **Madden NFL'96** was replaced by its newer version called, not surprisingly, **Madden NFL'97**. Therefore, three of the games from this year's list appeared, in earlier versions, on last year's list. This is the first year of this study in which a version of one of the most violent games, **Mortal Kombat**, did not appear.

Some critics have argued that video games, by their very nature, encourage violent behavior. They make the case that the act of pulling some kind of trigger or pushing a button is like shooting a gun. They also argue that chasing and destroying anything, even a friendly little blob as in **Pac Man**, is tantamount to hunting and then killing. While we understand the rationale behind this argument, we are not persuaded that all video games, by their nature, encourage violence.

The categories created for assessing children's programming, slapstick, tame combat violence and sinister combat violence, apply well to these games. In dealing with video games, a new category, sports, could be created, but those games usually fit into the tame combat violence category. The only sports game we examined, **Madden NFL '97**, allows the user to play a video game version of football and falls into this category. It is not a particularly violent game except, as in football, players bump into and tackle each other. There are grunting noises but no blood or visible injury. No matter how hard a player tries to tackle, the result is always the same. **Madden NFL '97** is rated KA. Martial arts games, where characters bleed and can be killed, would not be considered as part of the sports grouping.

Most of the rest of the games (like many of the Saturday morning shows) fall into the tame combat violence classification. In these games, some kind of minor confrontation is part of the conflict. These confrontations, however, neither involve weapons nor killing. Instead, the victim may simply disappear or fall off the screen and out of the field of play. If there is fighting it is, as the category name suggests, tame. The game environment usually has bright colors and graphics, carnival-like background music, and simple-looking, clearly animated characters that are small in relation to the screen size. **Donkey Kong Country 3** (rated KA) and **Super Mario 64** (rated KA) both fall into this tame combat violence category. These games would not raise concerns about violence except possibly for the youngest audiences. **Super Mario 64**, based on the new 64-bit standard, produces superb, colorful graphics. The "violence" is never more serious than Mario falling down and seeing stars. **Wave Race 64** is a jet ski game also rated KA. The object

is to win the ski race. A skier may hit an object in the water, but this never causes injury and never is the object of the game to inflict harm. It is impossible to damage the jet ski or to harm the skier in the course of playing the game.

Two titles fall within the sinister combat violence category, **Tekken 2** and **Duke Nukem 3D**. These are the games in which the goal is to injure or kill characters. The characters tend to be larger than in the tame games, allowing for greater detail to be shown in combat. Methods of fighting tend to be more elaborate and far more lethal in nature. A much wider variety of fighting techniques and options is available. For example, rather than just punching an opponent as might be found in the tame combat games, in sinister combat games a character has a selection of different, distinctive punches, some of which are more lethal than others. Players learn the ins and outs of fighting. These games also tend to be much more graphic; blood and disfigurement are often evident. Interestingly, the characters in these games have backgrounds and identities described in the instruction manual. Every character or fighter has his or her own distinct personality, thereby making them seem more human and the game more realistic.

**Tekken 2**, rated “Teen,” is a somewhat realistic fighting game. This martial arts game focuses on hand-to-hand combat and typical of the genre, the fighters are large and appear very lifelike (they resemble those found in Japanese anime). These fighters are all either attractive or sinister looking, but in either case they appear to be very cool. The female fighters in the game all wear tight, revealing clothing and one even fights in high heels. The backgrounds and identities of the fighters in this game are described in the instruction manual, thereby making them seem more human and the game more realistic.

Typically, the object in this genre of game is to severely injure or even kill your opponent (as was the case in the past with the **Mortal Kombat** series). In the **Tekken** series, the object is clearly to subdue rather than kill the opponent, which is either another player or the computer. Opponents punch and kick each other until one character loses strength and falls over. The impact of hits are illustrated with “dust clouds”; there is no blood shown during the game nor codes that exist to make the game more graphic. However, a skilled player can utilize any of the more than 18 attack moves to subdue an opponent, such as piledrivers, some of which unique to specific fighters. Sounds include grunting and the cracking of bones. Several of the fighters wield swords that can be used to stab an opponent if a player presses the right combination of buttons. However, even this maneuver yields no blood. The ultra-graphic finishing moves that exist in other combat games are not present here. When one character “KO’s” his or her opponent, the game replays the final blow from different angles in slow motion and then shows the winner perform a short victory dance.

**Tekken 2**, like **Tekken** before it, is extremely glorified and portrays fighting as fun and exciting and the overall object of the game is to beat opponents senseless. While not as graphic as the **Mortal Kombat** series, the **Tekken** series still raises concerns about its use of violence.

The video game raising the most serious concerns this year was **Duke Nukem 3D**. This marks the first foray into examining a video game on CD-ROM. In the past monitoring has been restricted to platforms that attach to a television set. However, since this is the last year video games will be examined and this is clearly the format of the future, this report does look at the best-selling CD-ROM game of the year.

Basically an updated version of the best-selling **Doom**, the game contains sinister combat violence seen from a realistic and engrossing first-person perspective. A rating of “Mature” is also accompanied by descriptors warning of animated violence, animated blood and gore and strong sexual content. The screen displays a three-dimensional view of whatever lies before the protagonist, Duke, with his weapon of choice at the bottom of the screen. Duke’s arsenal is quite impressive: a Glock pistol, shotgun, grenade launcher, pipe bomb and sundry other weapons. Armed to the hilt, Duke’s task is to save the Earth from menacing alien invaders and mutant pigs in LAPD uniforms. Duke advances from level to level killing everything in his path. Although the context of the game itself is inherently violent, perhaps the most troubling aspect of the game is what happens to the aliens and pig police when they are shot.

When Duke shoots either an alien or a pig policeman, blood splatters and the victim screams in pain. Depending on the weapon chosen, it may take one or several shots to bring the creature down. Once killed, the creature falls to the ground with a final scream and lies in a pool of blood. A skilled player can shoot a creature just enough times to see it choke on its own blood before falling to the ground. With certain weapons, such as the pipe bomb, the results are especially graphic: blood flies everywhere, along with eyeballs and large chunks of flesh. Duke clearly enjoys his work, often adding flip remarks such as “Damn, I’m good” or “What a mess” when he kills someone.

Besides Duke, the only other human beings in the game are female prostitutes and strippers. A player has two options when encountering these women: he or she can offer money to the women (at which point they will “flash” their breasts) or shoot them. When they are shot, the level of graphicness is the same as in the rest of the game. Despite the fact that the women do not pose any threat, a player can kill these women without any significant game penalty. Much like the trash cans and toilets on each level which can be used for target practice, the women serve merely as cannon fodder.

Although no blood codes exist to make the game more graphic, they are hardly necessary. However, there is a “parental lock” which enables parents to eliminate the women and the more extreme gore from the game. Interestingly, the default position for the game is to have the lock off, and turning it on would require a fairly techno-savvy parent who would have to navigate through several menus. Even with the parental lock on, the premise of the game remains the same: to shoot and kill anything in Duke’s way without facing any consequences.

Most video games now are under the umbrella of rating systems. There have been some extremely violent games, including some on CD-ROM, that involve terrorizing women. The worst of the games are as bad as critics and parents fear. Our hope is that the video game environment will continue to improve as parents assume their responsibility in the video game purchase process and learn and use the rating system.

## **PART V. CONCLUSIONS**

This is the third and final report on television violence based on the 1994 agreement between the four broadcast television networks (ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC) and Senator Paul Simon. The basis of the unusual political deal was that if Senator Simon, then a leading force in the television

content debate, would do his best to forestall legislation on such things as V-Chips and ratings, the broadcasters would allow an independent monitor to examine the violence in their programming.

Much has changed since that agreement was made. First, Senator Simon is no longer a member of Congress. He announced that he would retire at the end of his term in 1996 and is now teaching at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. In another major development, the ownership of two of the networks has changed hands since 1994. CBS was sold by Laurence Tisch to veteran radio broadcaster Westinghouse and the Walt Disney Company acquired ABC. NBC remains a part of the colossal General Electric Company and the Fox network is still a part of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation.

Since 1994 the audience for network television has continued to seriously erode. The emergence in 1996 of two new broadcast networks, UPN and WB, further splintered television audiences. Over the years the audience that left network television had traditionally gone to other television distribution channels, such as syndication, independent stations or cable networks. And now a new competitor has emerged. There are early signs that some of the audience is leaving television altogether, especially for computers and the Internet.

In hindsight, the agreement between the networks and Senator Simon did not achieve its original goals. Television content legislation was not avoided. The years between 1994 and 1998 saw the enactment of V-chip legislation, a war over the television content labeling system, threats to go to court and further threats to consider revoking television licenses and, eventually, a deal to move to a content descriptor system by all except NBC as of October 1, 1997. We believe that if in 1994 the broadcast networks could have seen the subsequent three years in a crystal ball, they never would have agreed to an outside monitor independently examining television violence.

Even though the 1994 agreement between Senator Simon and the networks did not achieve its original goals, we believe that this report, stemming from that agreement, did fulfill its promise. We also believe that the broadcast networks, government and advocates view this project as important and successful. Much has been gained from the relationship between the Center for Communication Policy and the broadcast networks on the violence issue over the past three years.

From the very beginning the Center viewed the monitoring process as a public policy project, not as a purely academic study. We did not want to study the issue from the sidelines. We wanted to establish a constructive dialog with the industry, advocacy groups, government officials and all interested parties in order to provide tangible solutions for the problem. At the conclusion of this process, we wanted to release a report that the industry could respond to and use. The violence issue had been studied and talked about for over 30 years. We felt that agreement to monitor television offered a tangible and timely opportunity to make real progress on the issue.

Based on the nature of the monitoring deal and the fact that this was not an industry-initiated project, we insisted on the need for meeting regularly with the broadcasters both in New York and Los Angeles. It was only through regular contact and discussion with each network that we believed we could move past the defensiveness and knee-jerk reactions to past studies and

actually work with the broadcasters to improve the content of television. The role of Senator Simon insuring the independence of the Center gave us a unique and unprecedented opportunity to do so.

We did meet regularly with the television networks. Not surprisingly, they were somewhat defensive at first and some of the initial meetings were slightly awkward. We believe that gradually the broadcast networks came to understand that the Center did not have a political agenda and that we were trying to deal with this issue as fairly as possible. From that view they seemed to realize they had an unusual opportunity, after 30 years of criticism from the outside, to address this problem in a fresh and constructive way.

At the release of the first report in 1995 the broadcasters probably felt we were too critical in our assessment of the problems of television violence. That report found some problems across the board, especially in theatrical films shown on television and in on-air promotions. There were also problems in television series, children's television and, to a lesser degree, in television movies. In years past, the broadcasters would have most likely responded to the first report by criticizing its overall conclusion that there was too much violence on television. However, in meetings after the release of that report (meetings that were required under the unique nature of the contractual relationship), the broadcasters came to better understand some of our criticisms and we better understood their position.

Both sides were quickly able to move beyond their differences to deal directly with the report's recommendations. This was a first in the history of the television violence debate. The success of these discussions resulted in the establishment of mutual respect among the Center and the broadcast networks. The second and third years of the process proceeded much more smoothly than the initial year. We were able to bring problems discovered in the monitoring process immediately to each network's attention. Rather than having them respond when a report was issued nearly a year later, in some cases problems were dealt with in a matter of days. This benefitted everyone in the process.

Gradually, we received calls from television producers and executives at other broadcast and cable networks for input on some of their problems in dealing with violence. We always considered it our role to deal as fairly and directly with the problems as possible. The second report, released in 1996, documented some real and important progress in the efforts to deal with television violence. This year's report found that almost all of the gains from the first to the second year had been sustained in the third year. This report also found continued progress in the area of television series along with some new concerns about television specials.

Now, at the end of the three-year process, we would like to believe that the broadcast networks feel it has been beneficial to have an outside and independent monitor looking at their television programming. We feel that enormous strides have been made in dealing with the content issues over the past three years. There is no doubt that the efforts of the government, the advocates and the broadcasters themselves have been important in dealing with the issues. We would also like to believe that the monitoring process has contributed to dealing with some of the problems.



The relationship we developed with the broadcasting industry has been different from that of other academic institutions or outside monitors. We do believe that the results of the past three years have indicated that the type of arrangement we have developed is the best way to deal with the content issues.

Also crucial in effectively dealing with these issues was insuring that our results were accessible to everyone who might be interested in them. One of the major benefits of qualitative research reported in a clear and simple fashion is that one does not need an advanced degree in communications research to understand the report or its findings. Everything we found is clearly explained in our reports. Readers can easily understand the basis of the judgments and agree or disagree with the results. Nothing is hidden or obfuscated in numbers and charts. This is a document that does not require interpretation.

From the beginning it was never our desire to create a franchise studying television violence. Our original agreement with the broadcasters clearly indicated that we would spend only three years reporting on violence in such a comprehensive manner. If the networks wanted to continue looking at violence at this level after three years, we promised to help train our replacements.

As a result of the agreement in the summer of 1997 there will be a three-year moratorium on legislation on television content issues. During that three-year period the labeling system will begin to take hold and V-chips will be activated in some television sets. Already the three-hour rule for children's television has been implemented. It is clear that convergence between computer technologies and television will be the next major development on the television stage along with the move to digital and high definition television. The complex issues are not going away. They are just growing in number and complexity.

In this context, we feel that there is an important need for an outside independent monitor of television. While we were not willing to merely continue the violence work of the past three years, we are willing to continue working with the broadcasters as an outside and independent monitor, looking at this new and wide array of difficult issues. Not surprisingly, even though the reports of the past three years have been limited to violence, in our meetings with the networks a much wider variety of issues and concerns arose. We are enthusiastic about moving beyond the extremely important but narrow area of television violence to the larger environment of television. Early in 1998 we will announce a new agreement to produce a highly accessible and practical report dealing with a much broader range of issues. It is our strong hope that other broadcast networks, television production studios and cable networks and programmers will embrace and become involved in the new work.