



The UCLA  
Television  
Violence  
Report  
1996



UCLA Center for Communication Policy

# **PART I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. Overview**

The past 12 months have been the most momentous period in the history of the television violence issue. A year ago there were no V-chips, television content ratings, minimum air time requirements for educational television or public discussions about the context in which television violence occurs. Now these developments frame the television violence issue.

In September 1995 the UCLA Center for Communication Policy released its first report on the state of television violence. Rather than examining a one- or two-week sample that might contain unusually light or heavy concentrations of violence, the Center thoroughly examined every series, television movie, theatrical film and Saturday morning children's program on broadcast network television. In addition, we monitored every on-air promotion and advertisement aired during this programming. Our report found that while there were positive signs in the areas of network television series and television movies, there were significant problems in the areas of theatrical films shown on television, on-air promotions and children's television.

Last year's report concluded with an analysis of the 1994-95 television season, a series of recommendations that we felt would significantly address television violence and an invitation to the broadcast networks to work with us over the next year on this issue. Upon its release, the four networks promised to carefully study the report and its recommendations and accepted the offer to work together on this very difficult and contentious problem.

While much work remains to be done over the third and subsequent years of this process, we are happy to report that the broadcast networks were serious in their desire to work with us to improve the ways in which they deal with television violence. Each of the networks carefully examined the first report and responded directly to us regarding which recommendations could be easily addressed and which would require much more effort, sacrifice and time. A series of meetings, out of the spotlight and the glare of the press, took place in which the networks frankly described the efforts they were making to address television violence. Subsequently, the Center continued to offer suggestions and recommendations. These discussions were unprecedented in the history of the violence debate. While the networks were tied to the monitoring process and, through their public statements after the report's release, were committed to working with us on the problem, the Center remained fully independent throughout the process. A climate of mutual respect produced, as this second report will demonstrate, some real and tangible progress.

Throughout this period, extraordinarily important events were taking place on the political scene. Late in the summer of 1995 the United States House of Representatives joined the Senate in requiring that V-chips be placed in newly manufactured television sets. The V-chip, invented by Tim Collings of Canada, is an electronic device that addresses a line of the television picture (there are 525 lines) called the vertical blanking interval (vbi). The vbi is the place where the electronic signals for closed captioning for the hearing impaired are found. Each television program can be encoded with a rating or label running from 0 to 5 or, if the motion picture ratings are used, from G to NC-17. Parents can set the V-chip at level 3 or PG-13 and any signals that exceed that rating will be electronically blocked from appearing on the set. The Canadians originally envisioned that the V-chip would only address the area of television violence. By the time the V-chip was field tested, it also included the areas of sexual content and language. In

order for the V-chip to have any usefulness at all, it required the development of a television rating or labeling system.

In the United States a V-chip requirement was included in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 which in February of this year was signed into law. The Act requires television manufacturers to install V-chips in all television sets with screens larger than 11 inches by February 1998. The Act also calls on television programmers to create a labeling system for their programs. If they do not do so by February 1997, the FCC was directed to appoint a non-governmental committee to develop such a system, though the broadcasters are not be obligated to carry that system in their signals. Though a small part of the Telecommunications Act (which opened almost all of America's cable, phone and telecommunications industries to competition), the V-chip requirement was enormously important to the broadcast and cable industries. The broadcasters considered challenging the V-chip legislation in court as a violation of the First Amendment. They were concerned that advertisers would shy away from any programming that had a mature rating and that producers would alter their programming if necessary to ensure a tame rating. Broadcasters were also concerned that the V-chip would give an unfair advantage to pay cable. Broadcasters have to sell every program to an advertiser and therefore live and die by the Nielsen ratings. Pay services such as HBO charge a monthly fee and do not have to sell any of their programming to advertisers. Therefore they do not have to worry about advertisers pulling out of a program.

In his State of the Union address in January 1996, President Clinton invited broadcasters and cable companies to come to a White House Summit on February 29 to discuss the recently enacted Telecommunications Act. Each of the networks and cable companies sent its top executives to the President's summit. Despite their concerns about the V-chip, the broadcast and cable industries decided not to go to court. Instead, they committed to develop by January 1997 a labeling system for television content under the guidance of Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) Chairman Jack Valenti. The MPAA was the organization that developed the well-known motion picture ratings system in the late 1960s.

Since the February White House Summit, the broadcast and cable networks have formed an implementation committee to develop the television labeling system. The committee has met several times throughout the year and is committed to announcing its system by the end of 1996.

In another development regarding television programming, through the spring and summer of 1996 FCC Chairman Reed Hundt attempted to adopt a rule requiring all broadcasters to carry at least three hours of children's educational programming each week as a condition of renewal of their broadcast license. As they are not licensed by the FCC, cable programmers were not affected by this proposal as they were with the V-chip legislation. (Since approximately 70% of the nation now receives broadcast stations through cable, the importance of distinctions between broadcast and cable are becoming less significant every year.)

Though broadcasters claimed they were willing to create new educational programming, they did not like the idea of the FCC imposing a quantitative requirement. It was not until another Presidential Summit on July 29 that broadcasters again came to the White House, and an agreement for three hours of educational children's programming was reached.

In the history of television there has never been a year like the last one. The next year, however, promises to be just as momentous and contentious. The labeling system will be unveiled. It remains to be seen what effects the content ratings will have on the creative community and television advertisers. Broadcasters will begin to air what they consider to be educational programming. Some forces in Congress are calling for even more regulation of television programming. And perhaps most significantly, the audience for the television networks continues to erode as cable's audience increases.

Never could there have been a more important time to monitor the state of television violence. This second report is committed to continuing the significant work of the first report and to injecting into this heated and confusing discussion some much needed light in the form of an objective, comprehensive and accessible analysis of the state of television violence.

## 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 Supreme Court's Miracle decision in the 1950s. To forestall governmental regulation the film industry created its own production standards under the supervision 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 regarding 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 then was printed on the cover of acceptable comics.

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 (called "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, 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”) reported on interviews with television professionals to provide 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 effects-related 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 there were a number of widely publicized crimes 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 report consisted only of reviews of the existing literature and its focus was much broader than that of the 1971 Surgeon General's Report. The two-volume report, Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties, was edited by Pearl, along with Lorraine Bouthilet and Joyce Lazar, also of NIMH.

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 the existence of a link between viewing violence and aggressive behavior could be shown. 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 and expanded, and was 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 that 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 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 original 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 two 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 they, 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.

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 make distinctions 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 taken a look at 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

We did not examine video sources such as CD-ROMs which play on a home computer instead of a television set. Relatively new services, such as Direct Broadcast Satellite (DirecTV, USSB and PrimeStar), use revolutionary delivery systems, but 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, and the CAA (originally)-telephone company venture, Tele-TV--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 gone 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 could be monitored one additional time to look for 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. Every television movie, mini-series, theatrical film and special for the 1996-97 television season was examined. 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 did raise 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 1995 through the end of the May 1996 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 biggest 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. A randomly drawn two-week sample of programming on television stations KTLA (5), KCAL (9) and KCOP (13) was monitored, examining prime time and Saturday morning hours as we did with the broadcast networks.

In January 1995, both 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 and Tuesday nights and added Sunday mornings as well. They then added Wednesday nights in March 1996. WB continued to air on KTLA on Sunday and Wednesday nights and also added 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 1995 list and continued with the lists of November 1995 and February and May 1996. A complete list of the 40 films is in the appendix. In several instances a film such as **Interview with the Vampire** was both a top ten home video (in 1995) and aired on cable television (in 1996). In those instances it was monitored in both forms.

## ***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 are Sega and Nintendo. 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 prime time. 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 in regard to sex, 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. But 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 precluded 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, especially local news, is a problem. 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 recent studies on television violence have criticized stations for airing reports on Rwanda or other strife around the world. 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 do feel that "if it bleeds, it leads." It is our judgment that the network news organizations (ABC, CBS, NBC 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.

## 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, a history of World War II or a biography 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, we do not believe they would 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. Children’s animation 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 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.

Looking at 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 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 assistant project coordinators, Jim Reynolds and Scott Davis, who reported to the project coordinator, Dr. Michael Suman. The project was administered by the associate director of the Center, Marde Gregory, and the administrative specialist, Phoebe Schramm. All reported to the director of the Center, Dr. Jeffrey Cole.

When the monitors reported to work they were 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 scene of violence. 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 and the scene 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 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 Friday night. The first program I examined 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 we 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 between programs which:

- \* contain no violence
- \* raise no concerns because of the appropriateness of the violence in the context of the story
- \* 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 regarding its use of violence is contingent 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 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 seldom alleviates concerns, the lack of an advisory in some instances can raise concerns.

**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 only 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 is the measure of gratuitousness. A frequent 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 is more likely to 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 our 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 context of the show is 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. Last season, one program, **Hard Copy**, repeated the same scene of violence 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 not raise 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 and/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 easily uses violence or does not carefully consider his/her actions, 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. These same considerations also apply to the victim of the violence.

**k. How realistic is the act of violence?** Few viewers expect animation to be very realistic. Shows that contain a "realistic" sense, however, are under an obligation to portray acts of violence close to how they would occur in real life. 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 very 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 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?

**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 consideration is the presence of 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** does contain 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 we were 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.

From a practical point of view, there are four types of programs containing violence:

- 1) Shows that raise concerns and almost everyone agrees they raise concerns. These are shows such as slasher movies. An extreme example is the film **Faces of Death** (even though it has only been available on home video), which is a collection of real people being killed on camera.
- 2) Shows that contain scenes of violence but almost no one would feel they raise concerns. This would include shows like **Home Improvement**, which contains workshop "accidents" within a wholesome family comedy.

These two categories are easy to deal with. They produce near unanimous agreement. Harder to achieve consensus on are:

- 3) Shows that do not have high levels of violence or in which the violence is not graphic, glamorized or gratuitous, but, because of context, the violence does raise concern. These are

shows such as **America's Funniest Home Videos** or theatrical films such as **Home Alone**, which are elaborated upon later in the report. These are the shows that are likely to produce the "Oh, come on" response from some.

4) Shows that contain high levels of violence or very graphic violence, but in which the violence is appropriate to the story and therefore does not raise concerns. This is where **Schindler's List** or the television series **M\*A\*S\*H** fits in. The violence is absolutely necessary to tell the story.

Television violence is a complex issue and everyone approaches it differently. Trying to deal with an equally difficult subject, pornography, 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 Premises and Stipulations

There are some fundamental premises 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 premises should help the reader to understand the monitoring process and the ultimate decisions that have been made. 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 and 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 that there will be a hurricane and that 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 have something violent happen 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 hitting 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 an attractive partner. We learn 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, 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, at least two 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 five 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: **The Last of the Mohicans**, **In the Line of Fire** and **Cliffhanger**. 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** was a model of how to limit excessive violence without affecting the integrity of the story or the film maker's vision. There is a need for the viewer to see the evil villain punished, but there are limits as to how this should be depicted on television.

### ***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 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 this 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 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. 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 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 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 the First Amendment. 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 p.m. period was seen as a time when families could sit down together and watch programming free of most violence and sexuality. But the voluntary effort never really worked. Fox runs **Melrose Place** and **Beverly Hills 90210** at 8:00. Audiences responded favorably to these shows at 8:00 and NBC responded by scheduling its popular adult situation comedy **Mad About You** at 8:00. The following season NBC did the same with **Friends**. CBS ran **Due South** and ABC switched **Roseanne** to 8:00. Most of these shows raised issues involving matters of sexuality which are beyond the scope of this report. In terms of violence, we think that 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 programs. Typically programs with violent themes are appropriately scheduled in the 10:00 p.m. time period. Many of these programs are of high quality and reached new levels of popularity in the 1995-96 television season.

##### ***5. Consequences or punishment must occur within the specific episode for context to have an impact.***

In some shows, the consequences or punishment might not come until several or many episodes later. But the nature of television does not ensure that the viewer who watched a violent act will definitely be watching to see it punished or resolved several episodes or months later. For our purposes the consequences or punishment must occur within a particular episode of the program or movie. While there is no guarantee that the viewer who watched a violent act will be there 15 minutes later when it is resolved, without this assumption there would be no way to allow for normal plot and character development. The only 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.

There has been some discussion over the past year 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.***

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 concerned viewers, especially parents. But many critics, perhaps with a tinge of cynicism, argue that advisories promising scenes of sex and/or violence actually do the opposite of what is intended: they encourage people who might not otherwise watch to do so. In fact, a recent study by Joanne Cantor of the University of Wisconsin suggests that for boys, particularly those aged 10-14, parental discretion advisories and PG-13 and R ratings make movies and programs more attractive. Advisories are designed to provide warnings to concerned viewers, especially parents. 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, such as TV Guide. (It should be noted that there is some reluctance to use advisories because of advertiser concern about what might be perceived as problematic or controversial content.)

#### ***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.

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 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 our 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. **The Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers** uses fast, upbeat music to energize the scenes of combat and involve

the audience, while **America's Most Wanted** uses music to create a sense of foreboding or impending danger. The music on **Murder, She Wrote** serves to downplay the violence of the crime so viewers will instead focus on the mystery. Sometimes the music in **Due South** serves to emphasize and underscore the violence.

#### *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 other dramas, 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. 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. **New York Undercover** frequently uses music and lyrics (as in a music video) as virtually the only sounds accompanying an act of violence. Sometimes the lyrics are relevant to what is on screen and other times they are not. Typically the only sound viewers hear other than the music is that of the violence, usually a gun shot. While some may feel that the music frames the act of violence and gives it a sense of realistic grittiness, repeated monitoring found that it more often minimized a serious act and created a surreal sense of distance from the act and its horrific impact.

We found that the use of sound and music in **America's Funniest Home Videos**, **New York Undercover** 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. 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 **Space: Above and Beyond** and **SeaQuest**, characters shoot futuristic ray guns. Some networks and producers argue that using these kinds of guns is an improvement over regular 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 he or she may grab their real gun. Moreover, 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 and, in most cases, not even that.

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

After reaching a high point in popularity several seasons ago, the reality genre on television seems to be diminishing in appeal. Next season promises to see even fewer reality shows. Within the reality genre, there are shows, such as **Cops** and **America’s Funniest Home Videos**, that use actual footage of a crime or some other incident, and there are shows that re-create situations, such as **Rescue 911**, **America’s Most Wanted**, **Unsolved Mysteries** and **Real Stories of the Highway Patrol**. 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 for the following reasons.

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.

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 process 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

Although other television media are sampled, broadcast network programming is the primary focus of this study. 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

For our analysis, last year's monitoring of the 1994-95 television season now becomes the baseline for this and subsequent television violence monitoring reports. Last year was the first time we compiled data on the nature and extent of television violence. The quantitative and qualitative information from last year's report can be compared to that collected this year. This allows us to make some very important and specific comparisons to evaluate how the broadcast networks are dealing with the violence issue.

**Series** still make up 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 **Roseanne**, **Married with Children**, **Murphy Brown** and **Seinfeld** have continued to attract large numbers of viewers weekly 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, frequently through the entire season, while shows that aired less than four times were monitored each time they aired. Overall 114 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 20 series from UPN and WB were monitored in the same way, and the results can also be found in the following section.

Of the television series we examined, there are five that raise frequent concerns about the manner in which they deal with violence. This compares to nine from last season. These five television series deal with violence in a variety of different ways. 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 each show, its goals and style and the manner in which it deals with violence. Of particular importance is understanding the context in which violence occurs in each of the shows. Shows cannot be adequately compared without explaining the specific nature, style and content of each show. These elements comprise the context of each show in which the violent acts occur. The violence cannot be adequately understood or evaluated apart from these elements.

**Television movies** this year also demonstrate some improvement over the 1994-95 television season. We monitored every television movie that aired during both seasons. While 23 out of 161 television movies, or 14%, raised concerns last season, this year the number raising concerns drops to 10%, or 20 out of 198. Movies that raised concerns usually did so because of a variety of factors, such as lack of advisory, violent theme, violent title or inappropriate graphicness of a scene. Unlike with theatrical films, the networks have complete control over television movies. They decide what movies get made and what the audience will see. Though there are still some television movies that raise concerns, it is clear that some improvements have been made in this area.

**Theatrical films on television** were identified last year as the most problematic type of programming. This season this area of television has witnessed improvement. We monitored every theatrical film on television that aired during both seasons. Of the 118 theatrical films monitored last year, 50, or 42%, raised concerns about their use of violence. This year the percentage drops significantly to 29%, as 33 of 113 theatrical films raised concerns. Theatrical films are made for a different medium and have to be retrofitted for the world of broadcast television. This is a difficult, and frequently impossible, task. As a result, we expected to see little progress this season. While there were still a number of films that contained over 40 scenes of violence, there were fewer of them than last season. In several instances the broadcast networks did not re-run theatrical films they purchased because of the quantity or nature of the violence. There are still a number of problems such as lack of advisories and inappropriate time periods. While the percentage of theatrical films raising concerns about violence has decreased this season, those theatricals that remain still feature the most intense and disturbing violence on television.

**On-air promotions**, more than any other type of television programming, demonstrated the most improvement over the 1994-95 television season. This is where we expected to see the largest improvement and, in fact, our expectations were realized. 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. This season problems in regard to promos were only found in the area of advertisements for theatrical films about to open in theaters.

**Children's television** showed some improvement as well. The number of Saturday morning programs on the four broadcast networks featuring "sinister combat violence" dropped from seven to four. Fewer shows used intense violence or combat as part of their overall theme. Many

shows are not vehicles for combat or fighting, and whatever “violence” is used is very minor. A larger number of shows this season appealed to kids’ imaginations rather than catering to a demand for action. Still, there were four shows that featured sinister combat violence, involving combat as the theme and promising confrontation.

## **B. Prime Time Series**

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

Last season nine programs on the four broadcast networks were found to raise frequent concerns about how they depicted violence while this season the total drops to five. Of the nine programs raising concerns last year, six ran for the entire season and three ran less than ten times. Of this season's five shows with frequent issues, three aired during the entire season and two were broadcast fewer than ten times.

Seven shows from last season raised occasional concerns about violence and five of these ran all season. This year there were eight shows and six of them aired during the entire year.

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

Last year's report indicated that the following shows raised frequent concerns about issues of violence:

**Walker, Texas Ranger**

**Mantis**

**Fortune Hunter**

**VR-5**

**The X-Files**

**Lois & Clark**

**Due South**

**America's Funniest Videos**

**Tales From the Crypt**

Three of these shows, **Mantis**, **Fortune Hunter** and **VR-5**, were canceled and one, **Tales From the Crypt**, aired only once this season. Only one show from last season, **Walker, Texas Ranger**, continued to raise frequent concerns this season and will be discussed shortly.

Two of the shows that raised frequent concerns, **America's Funniest Home Videos** and **Due South**, moved down to the list of shows raising only occasional concerns this year and will be discussed in that section. Two of the shows raising frequent concerns last year did not raise any concerns (frequent or occasional) this year. Those two shows are:

#### **Lois & Clark (ABC)**

In last year's report it was noted that **Lois & Clark** was originally intended as a romantic comedy/drama with much witty dialogue and flirting between Lois and Clark. In its second season last year the plots often took a darker turn with an often threatening tone. In its third season **Lois & Clark** seems to have returned to its romantic and comedic roots and raised no

issues of concern during the season. The decreased amount of violence seems to have had no effect on the show's popularity as its ratings increased slightly this season.

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

Last season this was one of the most difficult shows to monitor. Often the show was exemplary in how it created the mood and tension of violence and conflict without actually resorting to depictions of violence. **The X-Files** used music, lighting and quick edits to simulate violence and often offered a textbook example of how to create unease and suspense without using excessive violence. Many times last season, however, the show did cross the line and raise concerns about its use of violence. This season the show seems to have found a more effective way to portray conflict without the use of violence. Though the images are often disturbing and stressful, they are accomplished through special effects, lighting and music rather than actual acts of violence. Monitored 24 times, this season the show only raised concerns once, while improving its ratings substantially.

Violence is a crucial aspect of **The X-Files**. It is present in every episode we have ever monitored. This is not surprising in light of the fact that the premise of the show revolves around the investigations of violent phenomena. While this opens up the potential for the show to raise contextual concerns due to its heavy reliance on violence, the tone with which the violence is treated, the ways in which it is shown and the role it plays in terms of the story all contribute to make it non-problematic.

Although gruesome forms of violence are typically used to create an ever-present sense of foreboding and danger, actual depictions of violent acts are infrequent. Instead, the program prefers to use graphic images that are the result of violence, clever lighting schemes and ominous music to unsettle audiences and make them squirm in their seats. These creative methods have the commendable effect of implying violence without depicting actual violent acts. An example of this can be found in the episode shown on 11/3/95, in which a man who preys upon lonely, overweight women attacks a woman in her car. Just as this violent encounter begins, the camera cuts to the exterior of the car. The rest of the scene consists of the image of the rocking car and sound effects that let viewers know what is going on without actually showing the gruesome attack.

When a violent act is shown, it always furthers the plot and is invariably portrayed in a realistic manner that shows no more, and is no longer, than is necessary. Also to be noted is that violence in **The X-Files** is always shown with both physical and psychological consequences. An excellent example of this can be found in an episode that aired on 2/23/96 in which a police officer, under the psychic control of a murderer, pours gasoline on and ignites himself. Had the intense scene been treated differently, it could have raised serious concerns. After the fire is extinguished, the man is shown extremely burned, convulsing on the ground. It is very graphic. However, it is graphic only in establishing how awful the act of violence and its consequences are. The entire ordeal is taken very seriously and is not glamorized or glorified in any way. All parties involved demonstrate extreme distress at what has occurred and the physical consequences are explored and portrayed realistically.

Violence in **The X-Files** is always portrayed as an evil that must be stopped. The show successfully achieves a perilous tone without relying on the depiction of violent acts, instead favoring innovative cinematic techniques and the use of graphic images to achieve this end. Although the show frequently revolves around gruesome acts of violence, these acts are almost never shown. When a violent act is shown on-screen, it is always well edited and is no longer than is necessary. However, because of the nature and effect of the disturbing subject matter, the program would benefit from an advisory warning audiences that the following program may be too intense for younger audiences. Otherwise, the program is extremely responsible in its portrayal and treatment of violent content.

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

Last year's report indicated that there were seven television series that raised occasional concerns about how they portrayed violence:

**The Simpsons**  
**SeaQuest DSV**  
**America's Most Wanted**  
**The Marshal**  
**Rescue 911**  
**Unsolved Mysteries**  
**Earth2**

None of these shows moved from the occasional to the frequent list. Of the seven, one, **Earth2**, was canceled. Two of the series, **The Simpsons** and **SeaQuest**, continued to raise occasional issues and will be discussed shortly. Four of the series dropped off the list of shows raising occasional concerns. They are:

#### **America's Most Wanted (Fox)**

In its quest to engage the audience to help capture criminals, **America's Most Wanted** last season occasionally resorted to excessively graphic and disturbing re-creations of crimes. This season the show demonstrated notable improvement in regard to its use of violence and yet it still successfully elicited audience reaction contributing to the capture of criminals (over 425 throughout the life of the show). It managed to do so while raising no concerns about the manner in which the violent criminal acts were depicted.

#### **The Marshal (ABC)**

Last season **The Marshal** raised occasional concerns about the way in which it portrayed violence. Although the show aired sporadically this season, it raised absolutely no issues of

concern and was even commendable in how it resolved some of the action stories without violence.

### **Rescue 911 (CBS)**

Using re-creations to teach audiences how to respond in emergency situations, this show last year occasionally resorted to overly long or graphic images. The show ran on an irregular basis this season and raised no concerns.

### **Unsolved Mysteries (NBC)**

**Unsolved Mysteries** is another show using re-creations. Last year it occasionally used very graphic images or repeated the same scene of violence several times (sometimes just before commercials as a hook) within the same show. This season it raised no concerns.

## ***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. It is important to recognize that they are presented in no particular order. These are the shows that raise more concerns because of a large variety of contextual issues, which were discussed in the criteria section.

### **New York Undercover (Fox)**

Although many of the scenes of violence in this show last year were intense, occasionally graphic and came close to raising concerns, they were an essential part of this urban drama. Ultimately the show, aired in Fox's latest time slot of 9:00 p.m., did not raise concerns. This season yielded substantially different results.

This year the level, tone and character of the violence were considerably heightened and the show did raise frequent concerns about how it portrayed violence. Its use of music during scenes of violence added considerably to the concerns.

**New York Undercover** focuses on the work and personal lives of two undercover detectives, Eddie Torres and J.C. Williams. With the support of a female detective, Nina, who is also Torres' girlfriend, the detectives use their ethnicity and knowledge of the streets to help deal with their cases and the criminals they encounter. More than any other television series, music is an integral part of the show and the lyrics of the music frequently add to the context of the story and its underlying message. Set to hip hop, rap and R&B music, the show captures the pulse of urban America in a way that is not stereotypical or condescending. It is well written and acted and often deals with issues or controversial subject matter in an intelligent and thoughtful way.

A good deal of violence occurs in this show as would be expected in an urban police drama set in New York City. That violence is part of the story is not the concern. It is the manner in which the violence is shown and the way it is often glorified that raise frequent concerns. One technique is used throughout almost every episode. Most episodes open with a sequence that more closely resembles a music video than a scene in a television series. A montage of clips illustrates a violent crime, the resolution of which becomes the focus of the particular episode. Popular hip hop, rap or R&B music always blares during the montage, drowning out all sounds but those of the violence, be they gunfire, punching or groans of pain. There is no dialogue in these scenes but the song lyrics sometimes correspond to the events on the screen. While this technique can sometimes be used to make the violence more dramatic and affecting, stirring up emotions such as shock or horror, it more often has precisely the opposite effect.

The style and message of the music, the lack of any real dialogue and most of the sound effects serve to defuse the real horror of the scene and sometimes even serve to glorify the violence or make it seem worse. Though the producers may claim that this technique is artistic and accentuates the violence, rarely does it do more than make the scene appear unrealistic without genuine emotion or consequences. Rather than feeling disgust or outrage at the horrible violence on screen, audiences are more likely to find themselves engaged by the familiar music, tapping

their toes and bobbing their heads to the pulsating beat. In this way the music trivializes or, in a few cases, glorifies the violence in the program.

One of the best examples of this use of music occurred on 11/16/95. With James Brown's catchy *Poppa Don't Take No Mess* playing loudly over the scene, guest star Ice-T walks over to a man sitting in a car, who is later revealed to be a drug dealer, and shoots him at close range. Then he reaches into the car and cuts off the man's finger with a pair of hedge clippers. It was one of the most graphic images on all of television during the season. The camera lingers on the bloodied, maimed hand. All of this occurs without screams or dialogue with only the upbeat music in the background. All of these cinematic techniques serve to minimize the violence in the scene.

Another example was found on 2/15/96 when a pregnant jogger in a park is shot in the head and robbed while upbeat R&B/hip hop music plays. Once again the audience hears only the music. The rest of the program deals intelligently and responsibly with the crime that has been committed. Although the show explores the issue of the persecution of young black men by the police, viewers are more likely to remember and focus on the opening scene since it is so prominent and glorified compared with the rest of the episode.

As an earlier section of the report suggests, music can be an essential ingredient in either mitigating or aggravating the portrayed use of violence. **New York Undercover** is one of the few shows on television to feature popular music with recognizable lyrics. This may be an important part of the show's appeal to the audience. Although music can warn us of imminent violence or even lessen the need to show graphic portrayals, in **New York Undercover** the pulse and tone of the music and vocals, in addition to the muting of all but the violent sounds, serve to glorify scenes of horrific violence.

Occasionally certain questionable behaviors and tactics are glorified, even when used by the show's protagonists. Moreover, sometimes these acts are even rewarded. On 2/1/96, while investigating a series of arsons, detectives Torres and Williams tie up a corrupt construction contractor, douse him with lighter fluid and threaten to set him on fire if he does not reveal the information they need. Fearing for his life, the contractor talks and the detectives get what they want without expressing remorse or receiving any punishment for their unethical and illegal behavior.

As an urban drama airing at 9:00 p.m., **New York Undercover** deserves some latitude in telling stories about the gritty underbelly of New York life. Last year that latitude was given and the show, although it did contain violence, did not raise concerns. This season the level of violence escalated and became more intense and ugly. Because of the glorification of violence and the use of music that frequently accentuated the violence, **New York Undercover** raised concerns ten of the 26 times it was monitored.

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

The only series to raise frequent concerns both this year and last, **Walker, Texas Ranger** became a big hit for CBS this season. With the popular **Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman** and **Touched by an Angel** as surprisingly effective lead-ins, **Walker** serves as an action showcase

for Chuck Norris' martial arts skills. Though the producers would correctly argue that Norris adheres to a strong moral code in each episode and exercises his considerable combat skills only against deserving villains, each show is filled with many overly long scenes of intense violence.

The signature of the show is the promise of many long fight scenes in which Walker uses any physical means necessary to subdue his adversary. The typical **Walker** features six to 12 scenes of violence, many of which contain much hand-to-hand combat. One episode (1/13/96) was so violent that CBS issued an advisory twice during the program. This episode contained 12 scenes of violence and featured terrorists using many explosives, guns and other deadly weapons. The level and type of violence in some episodes of **Walker** exceeded what was found last season. Guns and other devices more lethal than Walker's fists are more evident this year. An episode on 3/9/96 portrayed a samurai sword fight in which Walker's opponent is slashed three times. After breaking for a commercial, the fight continues, finally ending when Walker kicks his foe off a suspended platform, impaling him on a spike below.

Although Walker is never one to shy away from a fight, he usually reserves punishment for deserving criminals who are about to elude his grasp. In an episode on 11/18/95 Walker comes upon a mob of thugs beating up a mentally disabled man behind a jail. Instead of arresting them, Walker takes on the mob in a graphic fist fight and wins. Then, the punishment meted out physically, Walker lets the attackers go rather than arresting them and allowing the legal system to run its course.

Another **Walker** that strayed from the norm was a 10/14/95 episode which featured more scenes of violence than any other this season. The program, with over 20 scenes of violence, became one in which the entire context of the program was violence and action.

Obviously, the Walker character is highly popular as audiences come to expect him to defend justice by doling out his own form of violent punishment. In many ways, Walker is a character similar to those played by Clint Eastwood or John Wayne. A frequent contextual problem is that the plot mainly serves to string together many scenes of violence portrayed heroically. A more common problem is the standard presence of glorified and prolonged scenes of hand-to-hand combat. **Walker, Texas Ranger** raised concerns 23 of the 27 times it was examined.

### **Kindred, the Embraced** (Fox)

A mid-season replacement, **Kindred, the Embraced** came on the air in April. In keeping with the motif of "vampire chic" inspired by such works as **Bram Stoker's Dracula** and **Interview with the Vampire**, the program is extremely dark and sensualized. It tells the story of warring clans of vampires, some good, some evil, living in secret among the people of San Francisco, and of the cop (played by C. Thomas Howell) who has sworn to destroy them.

In light of the subject matter, it is not surprising that the show features a high level of violence. However, what is most disturbing is the high intensity and exceedingly macabre nature of the violence. In the 90-minute series debut airing at 8:00 p.m. on 4/2/96, the opening scene features three men, who later are discovered to be vampires, engaged in a violent battle on the rooftop of

a building. After several heavy blows are exchanged, the scene culminates with two of the vampires overwhelming the third, pinning him down and plunging a television antenna into his chest. As the police arrive, the killers leap off the building and their victim bursts into flames. The same episode later shows a coroner, under the psychic control of a vampire, slicing open his own wrist with a scalpel as the vampire presses his fanged mouth to the gushing wound.

Other episodes such as the ones on 4/24/96 and 5/1/96 feature more grisly and unsettling violence such as beheadings and more severed wrists. A particularly troubling aspect of the violence in the show is the glorification of the vampires. Portrayed as lushly desirable and intriguing, these extremely violent characters are the most appealing aspect of the program. Both good and evil vampires find themselves embroiled in violent conflict in every episode, usually with each other. Of the seven episodes monitored, **Kindred, the Embraced** raised concerns five times.

### **Space: Above and Beyond (Fox)**

This show--more than any other this season--raised the issue of “tonnage” or a constant barrage of violence. Though the violence is rarely as graphic or intense as what is found in **Walker** or **Kindred**, each episode is filled with non-stop fighting and conflict. Episodes of **Space: Above and Beyond** frequently contain over 15 separate scenes of violence. The show becomes one in which the entire context of the program is violence and action.

**Space: Above and Beyond** is a high-budget, science fiction, adventure drama set in the year 2063 after Earth has been attacked by a hostile alien race. The story is based on the experiences of a platoon of five rookie space Marines who are called into active duty to fight the aliens’ onslaught. With the combination of excellent special effects, the science fiction theme, the young attractive cast and a Sunday at 7:00 p.m. time slot, the show is likely to attract a young audience, including children. In light of this fact, the program seems very much out of place. The story lines are complex and explore the darker side of human nature. There are extended scenes of very intense violence. As many as 19 scenes of violence were found in one 60-minute episode.

While some of these scenes are impersonal dogfights between spaceships, many are intense scenes of hand-to-hand combat. In an episode that aired on 1/7/96, a malfunctioning cyborg jams the palm of his hand into the face of a doctor knocking him to the ground. The cyborg then kicks the fallen doctor in the face and plunges a knife into his body five times. It is a disturbingly violent and graphic scene for any time and particularly for 7:00 p.m. on a Sunday evening. The length of many of the combat scenes is far longer than required by the story. An episode on 2/18/96 highlights a battle scene that lasts for the entire last half of the program. Thematically this program is about violence, conflict and action. The context of the story contains little else. The time slot, one in which the other three networks carry children’s or news programming, seems particularly ill-suited for **Space: Above and Beyond**. Of the 21 times it was examined, it raised concerns 12 times.

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

Another mid-season replacement, **Nash Bridges** features **Miami Vice**'s Don Johnson as the title character. Bridges is a streetwise San Francisco police inspector with two ex-wives and a rebellious teenage daughter. **Nash Bridges** is a cop show tempering lots of action with a sly sense of humor. In many ways Bridges is a lot like Chuck Norris' Walker although with a more developed, outgoing character. Bridges is both tough and likeable.

The violence in the show is typical for the police-action genre. Each episode is full of guns and fist fights. In the series debut on 3/29/96 there were over 15 scenes of violence in just one hour. In the episode aired on 3/30/96 a Chinese gang breaks into Bridges' apartment, and guns blaze nearly non-stop for the next minute and a half. Another example of prolonged gunfire is found in the episode on 4/5/96 in which the police conduct a drug sting. After the cops burst into the drug dealer's apartment, machine guns and pistols spray bullets back and forth for a full minute before Bridges bashes the criminal unconscious with a fire extinguisher. Although the program is aired at 10:00 p.m. and thus deserves some latitude in its violent content, long and excessive sequences emphasize the violence. Of eight episodes monitored, it raised concerns on three occasions.

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

#### **JAG (NBC)**

An action-oriented detective show with a military theme, **JAG** features the adventures of Lieutenant Harmon Rabb, Jr., a U.S. Navy lawyer in the Judge Advocate General's office, JAG for short. With the help of Lieutenant Meg Austin, Rabb is assigned the duty of investigating cases ranging from murder to drug dealing.

The first problem with **JAG** is the large number of violent scenes, often excessive in length. The second problem is that the combination of the U.S. Navy theme and the quest for justice leads to a glorified use of violence. One episode of **JAG** on 12/2/95 was filled with over 15 scenes of violence. In this episode, as in many others, much of the violence is less about developing the plot than inspiring a sense of patriotism in the audience.

Violence, from hand-to-hand combat to huge explosions to heavy amounts of gunfire, is an essential ingredient in the show. The violence seldom raises concerns due to intensity or graphicness but rather through quantity, glorification, the 8:00 p.m. time slot and scene length. The episode on 4/10/96 contained only one scene of violence but that scene, which occurred near the end and served as the culmination, contained seven separate explosions and much gunfire.

Another violent finale occurred in the episode on 10/21/95 in which the wife of the Thai ambassador tries to kill Rabb. After drugging him, she pulls out a knife and there is a closeup of her slashing his arm. As they struggle, Austin arrives and fights the crazed woman. The two women fight and wrestle each other to the ground until Austin is able to knock the woman unconscious by punching her in the face. This is a fairly typical fight scene for **JAG**.

The use of the upbeat, high-charged, patriotic music in the background of many scenes (reminiscent of old John Wayne war films) creates a sense of excitement and stimulation that glorifies the action on screen. Of the 20 times **JAG** was examined, it raised concerns six times.

#### **American Gothic (CBS)**

Following the success of Fox's eerie thriller, **The X-Files**, **American Gothic** represents CBS's effort to develop an intense program focusing on the supernatural. Like **The X-Files**, it aired on Friday nights at the beginning of the season.

A serial program set in the sleepy community of Trinity, South Carolina, **American Gothic** focuses on the ongoing struggle between good and evil that plagues this seemingly picture-perfect small town. Sheriff Lucas Buck, the show's main character, is a mysterious and wicked being who uses his strange and evil powers to manipulate and punish all those who do not bend to his will. In effect, he holds the town hostage to his capricious personality. His goal is to gain control over his only son Caleb, whom he fathered during a rape, so that he could pass on his legacy of evil. All that stands in the way of Buck's scheme are a reporter, a doctor and the spirit of Caleb's murdered sister.

With this kind of theme, it is not surprising that **American Gothic** was one of the darkest television series broadcast this season. This was its intent and the apparent reason it appealed to its audience. Like **The X-Files**, the heavy supernatural influence added to the overall unsettling feeling of the show and made it seem more violent than the number of scenes would otherwise indicate.

The actual number of violent scenes was never very high, particularly considering its 10:00 p.m. time slot. However, unlike **JAG** or **Space: Above and Beyond**, it was not the number that raised concerns but the macabre and brutal nature of some scenes that raised important issues. In the series debut on 9/22/95, a father viciously hits his mentally deranged teenage daughter over the head with a shovel. Although viewers do not see the shovel's impact, what has happened is clear and it is likely to cause a strong reaction from the audience. Sheriff Buck then enters the room to find the man standing over his daughter with a confused and frightened look on his face, not really comprehending what he has just done. Buck ushers him out of the room only to return and take the girl's head in his hands and twist it, breaking her neck and killing her. The episode was preceded by an advisory, but this type of brutal and malevolent violence, particularly with a child victim, raised considerable concerns.

**American Gothic**'s opening credits often consist of a chaotic montage of scary and violent scenes. For example, at the beginning of one episode the viewer sees in the course of six seconds images of a human skull, a screaming boy, a spilled goblet of blood, a hand choking a woman, the cut-up face of what appears to be a possessed little boy, a demon's face transform into that of a man, a dollar bill splashed with blood, a body being thrown across the room as it is electrocuted, a window being shattered and a man trying to break down a door with a shovel. All of these scenes flash by while jarring, threatening music blares. This opening sequence gives the impression that the program is filled with ugly, violent scenes when in truth only a few of the episodes contained content of concern. Of the 12 times the show was monitored, three episodes raised concerns.

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

A highly stylized melodrama from prolific producer Aaron Spelling, **Melrose Place** focuses on the lives, work and loves of a group of young, attractive residents of an apartment complex on Melrose Avenue. Although it contained some violence that came close to raising concerns last season, ultimately it did not make the list of shows which raised occasional concerns. This season is a different story.

Not only is the violence intensified this season, but also there is much more of it. While most is typical fighting or brawling, some is particularly intense, often depicted in slow motion or accompanied by melodramatic music. In an episode on 9/18/95 the psychotic physician Kimberly stabs a therapist in the hand with a pencil. Although the scene was probably designed to show that Kimberly was at her wit's end, its main effect is to make the audience squirm in their seats. The next episode (9/20/95) features an intense struggle followed by a graphic

shooting. The following episode (9/25/95) uses the same graphic scene to recap what happened in the previous episode.

Occasionally violence occurs in the dreams or fantasies of the characters. On the same 9/25/95 show, Kimberly's former husband Michael dreams of his ex-wife. In his dream she breaks out of her cell in a mental institution and then stabs him with a knife. On 1/15/96 Sydney fantasizes about pushing her sister Jane in a wheelchair into the street where she is graphically and noisily crushed by a fast-moving big truck. The 4/1/96 episode opens with another of Sydney's very violent dreams, this one involving her love interest being attacked by two hitmen. In the course of the scene there is a barrage of gunfire resulting in the death of the two Mafia thugs.

Scenes that last year might have ended with a slap to the face now conclude with characters crashing through chandeliers (10/23/95) or getting hit in the head with a hammer (4/15/96). Violence is present in most episodes of the show and frequently is portrayed in slow motion or with other special effects. Of the 32 times **Melrose Place** was examined, it raised concerns ten times.

### **SeaQuest 2032** (NBC)

The second incarnation of **SeaQuest** in three years, this season the underwater action/adventure show moved into the future, setting the program in the year 2032. The time shift meant that the previous captain of the submarine, Roy Scheider, had to be replaced by a new leader, the tougher-than-nails Michael Ironside.

Last season the plots containing action and violence raised occasional concerns, largely due to its 8:00 p.m. time slot. These problematic plots continued in the new futuristic setting of the show. The concerns this year were never related to the graphicness of the violence but rather to the prolonged and at times intense battle scenes in what is primarily a children's television show. Some of the episodes of **SeaQuest** contained ten or more scenes of violence. Many of the scenes are portrayed as "cool" and exciting. The episode on 11/1/95 contained nine scenes featuring stun guns, knives, a large whip, a metal bar and the ever-present lasers. One of the nine scenes lasted for close to two minutes. **SeaQuest** was monitored ten times, raising concerns on three occasions.

### **Due South** (CBS)

**Due South**, which last season was on the list of shows raising frequent concerns about violence, was downgraded this year to the list of shows raising occasional concerns. Seemingly canceled at the end of last season, this joint Canadian-American production returned as a mid-season replacement program this year.

This is a police show with large doses of humor. The plot concerns a straight-laced Canadian Mountie who moves to Chicago where he is teamed up with a streetwise American cop. The

humorous element arises out of the conflicting personalities and styles of the Mountie and the cop. As a police show, violence is inherent in the theme.

Last year the concerns centered on the 8:00 p.m. time slot; the frequently excessive, long scenes of violence near the end; and some occasional, intense violence that seemed out of context with the light, comic tone of much of the show. These same issues exist this season, though problematic violent scenes are fewer in number and less intense. There are still occasionally long scenes of excessive violence, sometimes lasting well over three minutes. Frequently, the show features unrealistic violence which is very exciting. Characters jump out of windows and dive through glass doors unscathed. Slow motion is often used to intensify scenes of action, such as those in which bodies fly through the air as the result of an explosion. At times the violence is accompanied by lighthearted or exciting music which tends to either trivialize or enhance the act.

One episode on 12/15/95 contained two scenes in which characters are shown being sliced with a knife close-up. Another show on 12/22/95 contained many scenes of violence featuring windows being smashed, punches and fist-fights, kicks, two people being shot, knives, falls, a car collision and a dog attack.

Much of the time the show successfully blends police action with humor. This is basically a lighthearted comedy that sometimes goes overboard in utilizing ugly, graphic and prolonged images of violence. All of these comments aside, **Due South** managed to blend action and comedy with fewer scenes of problematic violence far better in its second season than it did in the first. Consequently it only raised occasional concerns this season on four of the 16 times it was examined.

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

As we predicted, a few people did react with "Oh, come on," to last year's placement of **America's Funniest Home Videos** on the list of programs with frequent concerns. Though not the program or type of violence many social scientists or governmental officials would cite when identifying television violence, we argued last year that the program does raise concerns and we still believe it does.

Midway through the season, **America's Funniest Home Videos** was joined by a sister show, **World's Funniest Videos**. Although the programs have different hosts, their format is identical and both use amateur home video clips. Since the issues they raise are exactly the same, we lump them together for this report while noting that the violence in the videos clips on **World's Funniest Videos** is more intense than on the older, more established **America's Funniest Home Videos**. Though the issues remain, the overall severity of the violence has lessened somewhat, accounting for the program's shift from the frequent concern list to the occasional concern group.

This is still a show about people, frequently children, bumping their heads, falling down or running into things. The video clips are accompanied by exaggerated sound effects and laughing

audience reaction shots which send the message that what viewers see on the screen is really not very serious and does not hurt.

Viewers would probably think it tasteless to laugh when Greg Louganis hit his head on a diving board during an Olympic dive. But they do laugh when the same thing happens to an unfortunate diver in the 1/11/96 episode. Viewers would also be unlikely to laugh had they watched Christopher Reeves being thrown from his horse, resulting in serious injury. But a similar scene, without the injury, in **America's Funniest Home Videos** on 1/18/96 produces laughter.

The episode on 2/1/96 contained videos of a man who hits his head on a pole, a soccer player who runs into a goal post, three consecutive video clips of people hit in the groin and approximately 20 clips of people falling down or running into various objects. On 4/11/96 a heavy basketball backboard falls on the head of a player and, in one of the worst scenes ever, on 4/25/96 audiences laugh as a man stands too close to an open flame and catches on fire.

**America's Funniest Home Videos** continues to air in a Sunday at 7:00 p.m. time slot which historically has been mandated by the FCC for news, public affairs or children's programming. Though the show has shown some improvement from last year, it still presents disturbing videos of violence with no context. The programs raised concerns 11 out of 40 times.

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

**The Simpsons** continues to be one of the most popular satires on television. Last year the show appeared on the list of programs with occasional problems because of intense and grisly violence that, while satirical, was likely to go over the heads of the considerable number of children in the audience of this 8:00 p.m. program. There is no question that the use of bright animation, funny voices and stories often told from the child's point of view all contribute to making this a popular program among children. Adults are usually able to discern satire from reality but children have a harder time doing so.

The concerns about **The Simpsons**, occasional though they be, do not arise from the slaps, kicks, brawling or other staples of animation. Instead they result from the sometimes intense, extraordinarily graphic images--such as dismemberments, stabbings, and beheadings--occasionally found in this satire of America set in the town of Springfield in an unidentified and unidentifiable state.

The best example of the excessive violence is found in "The Itchy and Scratchy Show," a cartoon about an animated mouse and cat. They are characters in the most popular cartoon on Krusty the Clown's after-school cartoon show that Bart and Lisa Simpson watch. Based on cartoon characters Tom and Jerry, Itchy and Scratchy are a spoof of the ultra-violent cartoons many adults grew up watching as kids. They take the extreme cartoon violence and raise it to a new and ridiculous level. Within this context, adults can appreciate the satire. However, children only see Itchy and Scratchy as extremely violent cartoons that Bart, Lisa and even Homer love. Several seasons ago, Marge (the mother) registered her dismay at these violent cartoons and, in a satire of Terry Rakolta (a Michigan mother who campaigned to get violence off of television),

wrote to advertisers protesting their sponsorship of such violent programming. The sponsors listened and the cartoons disappeared, but Marge realized that she had gone too far and had become a censor, which was never her intent. In the subsequent season, Itchy and Scratchy made a movie which was filled with nothing but violence. Last season the cartoon mouse and cat opened a theme park, Itchy and Scratchy Land, "The Violentest Place on Earth." As an adult satire this works. For children, it may be nothing more than ultra-graphic images of violence that are made to appear laughable.

This is not the typical animated violence found in old cartoons in which a character is shot at close range creating a gaping hole in the midsection which is then quickly healed. On 10/1/95 Itchy breaks a bottle and stabs Scratchy in the chest, causing blood to pour out of Scratchy's chest onto the pavement. Other disturbing scenes involve the tormented cat being stabbed in the eye with the Seattle Space Needle (10/8/95) and being set on fire (3/17/96). On 10/15/95 Scratchy's stomach is cut open.

Bart and Lisa are always shown laughing at the gruesome cartoon. The satirical intent is clear to adults but lost on the large number of children viewing. As the report stated last year, **The Simpsons** works as an adult satire and if it were scheduled for adults and had mainly adults in its audience, it would raise few concerns. However, this is not the case. There is no way to ignore or not take seriously these images which are some of the most violent on television. Of the 26 times **The Simpsons** was monitored, the show raised concerns six times.

### **Charlie Grace** (ABC)

Airing on Thursday nights at 8:00 p.m., **Charlie Grace** features Mark Harmon as the title character, an ex-cop turned private detective in Southern California. Trying to capture a film noire feeling with a 90's twist, Grace is a hard-boiled, upright private detective with a sensitive side that is brought out by his almost-teenage daughter.

At its core, **Charlie Grace** is a lighthearted drama with the comedic and action elements that are typical of this genre. The principal concerns raised by the show were the occasional instances of heavy gunplay (10/19/95), fist fights (9/14/95) and glorified violence, particularly for this early time slot. The program would have raised fewer concerns at 9:00 p.m. Of the seven times it was monitored, it raised concerns twice.

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

An in-depth discussion of particular issues in prime time series television follows. It should be noted that several of the matters discussed below were addressed in last year's report. We repeat them this year because, while we have distinguished and addressed new and interesting issues from the 1995-96 television season, several of those that were raised last year are compelling and important enough to warrant continued consideration this year. Several of these issues, when appropriate, have been updated and illustrated with examples taken from this season. However, in instances in which we felt that a better example existed in the first year of monitoring, we were compelled to use it to better illuminate the issue.

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

The 1995-96 season produced some of the best drama ever to appear on television. The overall quality of shows such as **NYPD Blue**, **Chicago Hope**, **E.R.**, **Law & Order**, **Homicide**, **Murder One** 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 how they use violence. The ways in which they portray violence and the lessons that can be learned from these shows will be detailed in the following section.

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 while a program like **Chicago Hope** produces 22 high-quality hours a season, it is an tribute to the talent of the creators and writers. Many episodes of **Homicide** and **Law & Order** are as well written and compelling as some feature films.

##### **b. 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 **Charlie Grace**, **Nash Bridges** and **Due South** are the types of programs that most often feature this blend of comedy and violence. This union of themes 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 have the effect in viewers of lessening their inhibitions against violence by making it appear

less serious than it really is as well as 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. This is of particular concern when it occurs in earlier time slots because of children's greater susceptibility to such perceptual influences.

### c. **Chicago Hope (CBS), E.R. (NBC) and Issues on Medical Shows**

**E.R.** was the breakout hit of the 1994-95 television season. It finished number two in the Nielsen ratings for the entire season last year and this year it finished in first place. 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** was produced by David Kelley, the Emmy Award-winning writer and producer of **L.A. Law** and the creative force behind **Picket Fences**.

Both series run at 10:00 p.m. and raise interesting issues regarding context and definitions of violence. Both are set in hospitals and **E.R.**, of course, is specifically set in an emergency room. It is one of those odd coincidences that both also take place in Chicago. It is not surprising, in light of the producers' intent and approach, that both shows deal with and necessarily show very graphic portrayals of the consequences of violence.

Very early last 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. This is where 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 last 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 problematic violence. 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 contained scenes similar to the one described above. We expect to see scalpels and blood in medical shows as part of the context. In both shows, there was only one case over the past two seasons that raised some concerns, **Chicago Hope** on 10/20/94. In this episode a man walks into the hospital and opens fire with a gun. The scene, in depicting the consequences of the gun fire, uses overly graphic and disturbing images of blood spurting and gushing from the victim's neck. Although the show is based on realistic themes and is intended to demonstrate consequences, the extraordinary amount of gushing blood served more to illustrate special effects than to advance the story. Together the two shows were examined 25 times this seasons and never raised any concerns: an impressive record.

#### d. **3rd Rock From the Sun (NBC) and Comedic Violence**

This is yet another of the new hits of this television season. **3rd Rock** (the Earth is the third planet from the Sun) is about the adjustments a group of aliens must make when they arrive on Earth. It is filled with comedy and social satire about the Earth's strange ways as seen by the aliens. In one episode on 2/6/96, the female alien uses pliers to grab the groin of a chauvinistic mechanic, thereby attracting his attention. This is a scene played completely for laughs which is not meant to be taken seriously. While the extremity of this act was more severe in comparison to the other slapstick acts of violence in the program, it did not raise serious issues with regard to violence. Although this particular scene was not problematic, this points to a noteworthy issue. While comedy does deserve (and gets) some latitude, somewhere a scriptwriter decided that there would be a scene where a character's crotch is grabbed with pliers to make the audience laugh. This incident raises the issue of laughing at people getting hurt. Of all the ways we can be made to laugh, this is the one the producers choose in this episode. Whereas this specific example was not serious enough to be a problem, there exists the potential for inappropriate uses of violence in comedy.

#### e. **Violent Credits**

A handful of shows monitored this season raised issues regarding their opening credits. While two of those programs--**American Gothic** and **Real Stories of the Highway Patrol**--are specifically described elsewhere in this report, we felt that they deserved a more in-depth discussion.

Typically, television programs open with scenes that introduce the story of the ensuing episode or recap continuing story lines. At the scene's conclusion, it moves to the opening credits which usually consist of a montage of clips set to a theme song. In most instances, the principal function of these clips is to gain viewers' interest by establishing the basic premise of the program. Some programs vary their opening credits as the season progresses, only featuring a particular collection of clips for a few episodes. Other programs use the same credits throughout the season.

The opening credits of a handful of series this season raised issues. These programs each frequently feature credits containing as many as ten successive violent images in the course of six seconds. The opening credits for **Walker, Texas Ranger** feature Chuck Norris smashing through the windshield of a car and kicking an object out of the hand of a man, two explosions, Norris' sidekick punching a man and a gun fired toward the camera.

Because of the rapid-fire nature of most credits, little or no context is supplied for these acts of violence. They are little more than a string of violent interactions. This raises an issue similar to one discussed later in the section on promotions, namely, that opening credits of this type use decontextualized violence to sell the program.

In a related issue, at the end of each episode of the program **Deadly Games** (discussed later in the section on the emerging networks), the most violent clips from that episode are featured in its concluding credits. Although this does not raise the same issue of selling the program with violence, it does function to highlight only the most violent aspects of the program. This does represent a new technique in which the purpose of the closing credits of a show is to capture and hold the audience's attention, in this case using violence to that end.

#### **f. Repetition of a Scene of Violence within an Episode of a Series**

This is a technique primarily found on **Unsolved Mysteries** and some tabloid news programs in which an episode may play the same scene of violence three or more times. Some of the tabloid news programs, as evidenced by an episode of **American Journal** on 5/24/96, play the same action or violent scene as many as five times in a single episode. On the 12/8/95 episode of **Unsolved Mysteries**, a team of Oakland police officers is ambushed by drug dealers and a gunfight breaks out. The scene is shown twice. A scene on 11/17/95 in which a man attacks his ex-wife with a knife is shown three times (once as a preview and twice during the account).

While neither of these scenes raised issues of concern with regard to the on-screen presentation of the violence, it is worth noting that the scene of violence was the one they chose to replay. While in the first **Unsolved Mysteries** example cited above we found that this technique lent itself to effective storytelling and to the emphasis of a point, in the other example it was completely gratuitous and only had the effect of showcasing the most violent element of the program.

#### **g. Beverly Hills 90210 (Fox) and Shows That Rarely Contain 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 get used 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 occasionally to expand its themes or move in a slightly different direction?

This issue was raised last season in a **Beverly Hills 90210** episode aired 1/18/95. The show is about the interpersonal relationships of a group of college students attending California University in Los Angeles. Rarely does this show deal with issues of violence, although in the past there have been occasional episodes dealing with timely subjects such as date rape. One of the plot lines of the show last season was the way in which Dylan McKay dealt with losing his fortune to swindlers. The viewer sees him return to alcohol and engage in self-destructive behaviors. Toward the middle of the season, he learns that the couple who stole his money is in a Latin American country. He travels there for a confrontation to recover his wealth.

The entire episode is very much out of character for **Beverly Hills 90210**. Dylan hooks up with a somewhat shady investigator and the show more closely resembles a B-grade detective film than an episode of **Beverly Hills 90210**. The show culminates in a fight scene with fists flying, sword fighting and gun fire. Similarly, a later episode in the season features Dylan, in a hypnotic spell, reliving a past life in the Old West in which there is also gun fighting. Dylan himself is killed in the final scene.

The issue arose again this season in an episode aired on 11/8/95 in which Dylan's wife is mistakenly killed by a bullet meant for Dylan. The scene of violence, which had the potential to be extremely graphic, was very well handled, showing no more than was necessary to the plot. However, the fact remains that this type of violence is more lethal and brutal than viewers might reasonably 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. While the show rarely features much violence, the level of violence must still be fairly non-graphic and tame for it 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 **Beverly Hills 90210** could raise concerns, these particular ones did not.

#### **h. The Fresh Prince of Bel Air (NBC) and "Real Violence" on a Comedy Show**

**The Fresh Prince** is about the character played by the likable Will Smith who lives with his relatives in Bel Air in a show reminiscent of the old **Beverly Hillbillies**. This is a comedy that draws heavily on the considerable talents of Smith who plays off of his rich and stuffy relatives and friends. Although it uses a fair amount of slapstick comedy, it never raises serious concerns about its use of violence.

In a two-part episode last season (2/6/95, 2/13/95), Will was shot. These episodes add a somber and scary note to an otherwise lighthearted show. Even though it was out of character for the show, in no sense does the violence of the shooting raise any concern. It might catch young viewers off guard and add an element of unpleasantness into an otherwise pleasant show. This is exactly the intent of the producers and they do it well. The violence is jarring. Viewers do not expect to see our favorite characters shot, just as they do not expect to see their friends or family members shot. The shooting is not sensationalized and the consequences of the act are seen. Will and his family learn first-hand about the devastating effects of violence. Everything in this "special" episode is an attempt to deal responsibly with violence in our everyday lives.

**M\*A\*S\*H**, for example, was quite effective at this by mixing comedy and the tragedy of violence in a thought-provoking way. While the intrusion of violence into comedies may disturb some viewers, responsibly portrayed violence is exactly the kind of thing television should do more often.

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

Reading the above analysis 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 impressed us with how well they were able to convey 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 while almost never resorting to excessive, graphic images or gratuitous or glorified violence. The work of Steven Bochco, David Kelley, Steven Spielberg and John Wells was 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, **Picket Fences** 12 times, **Chicago Hope** 14 times, **E.R.** 11 times, **Homicide** 22 times, and **Law & Order** 11 times produced only one inappropriate portrayal 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 and 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 we feel is impressive in these shows. The three programs that were commended in last year's report continue to be high quality shows, often with violent themes, that seldom raise concerns about how they portray violence. The three shows repeating from last year are:

### **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 (for network television) 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 and, when it does address violent themes, they are always completely 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. Pushed to the wall by the pressures of their dangerous jobs, the officers struggle and occasionally act brutally when arresting or extracting confessions from suspects.

The show also deals extensively with the psychological causes and consequences of violence. 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 pure 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 and others can benefit by studying its methods.

### **Homicide** (NBC)

**Homicide** contains few scenes of violence and some episodes contain none at all. Frequently scenes are nothing more than already dead bodies that are used to set up a homicide investigation. The show is often a murder mystery that does not even depict the murder. The focus of the program is typically on the investigation and psychological dimensions of the crime and not on 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 its 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, intense and illustrates consequences.

Typically, **Law & Order** will feature one act of violence at the beginning of the show. This is usually the crime which is being investigated, which acts as the story line’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 the season finale airing 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 own job. 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. **Law & Order** substitutes graphic images and realistic consequences that work in tandem to give the program a more violent feel without having to show the violent act. The dramatic edge is provided by the detailed rigors of police investigations, which often create mysteries that the District Attorney's office must solve. Then, the dramatic tension is continued by the atmosphere of the courtroom in which a verdict of guilt or innocence is never predictable. This is a cop show without a lot of violence and yet it has compelling elements that keep its viewers riveted to the show.

In addition to the three shows from last year that deal with violence well, there are four programs that were added to the list:

### **Matt Waters (CBS)**

A mid-season replacement show which ran for six episodes, **Matt Waters** stars daytime talk show host Montel Williams as a strong-willed, moralistic, yet understanding ex-Marine turned high school teacher in the inner city. In each episode Waters provides wisdom and support for his students in dealing with important social issues ranging from domestic abuse to teen pregnancy to racism. Earnestly attempting to capture the richness as well as the grit and danger of urban America, the show thoughtfully deals with any and all of the violence that occurs in the program.

In an episode on 1/17/96, after a drive-by shooting at the school endangers students, Waters teaches them about the problem of becoming desensitized to violence. He takes a group of teenagers to a hospital emergency room on a Friday night where they learn about the importance of life and the destructive effects of violence. In this episode, all of the scenes containing violence were extremely well handled. Nothing was in any way gratuitous or prolonged and it was all contextually relevant to the story.

Although the program is occasionally preachy, **Matt Waters** deserves to be lauded for seriously and responsibly dealing with important social topics, many of which involve violence. Regrettably, the show did not find an audience and was canceled. We hope that more programs will follow in the mold of **Matt Waters** and find an audience.

### **Chicago Hope (CBS) and E.R. (NBC)**

Similar in premise, both **Chicago Hope** and **E.R.** 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, fire 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 result of violence and that the toll on the victims, their families and friends and the doctors themselves is usually devastating.

On the occasions when violence is portrayed within the shows, both **Chicago Hope** and **E.R.** have handled it with commendable gravity and realism. An episode of **Chicago Hope** on 1/22/96 contained the most realistic depiction of an explosion and its consequences that was seen all season. Unlike what was 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. Typically when something explodes on television the explosion is filmed in slow motion from multiple angles as red, yellow and orange billows of fire and smoke unfold across the screen. However, an episode of **Chicago Hope**, in which an extremist anti-abortion organization bombs a clinic, was handled in a manner that in no way glamorized the explosion. 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 typical action manner.

At no time during the season did either program raise any issues in terms of violence. All violence contained in either show 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.

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

One of the first television shows developed by the new studio Dreamworks SKG, **High Incident** is executive produced by Steven Spielberg. A cop show focusing on a group of LAPD officers, **High Incident** follows the police as they patrol the city investigating and solving crimes.

Although it contains more scenes of violence, is more graphic and less gritty than **NYPD Blue**, **High Incident** handles violence in the same commendable way. Emphasizing the development of its characters far more than the violence they face is a defining characteristic of the show. The program portrays violence realistically with long-term consequences. In the debut episode, an officer is gunned down by a motorist. His partner witnesses the attack and is forced to shoot and kill the motorist. The wounded police officer dies as blood pours from his throat. The rest of the episode as well as the next few episodes of the program deal with the heavy emotional toll the policeman's death has on the department and especially on the partner. The devastated partner experiences fear for his life on the job and mourns the death of his fellow officer, so much so that he is forced to see the department psychologist. The entire account focuses on the consequences of the violence rather than the actual incident which only served to establish the story line.

## SUMMARY:

These dramatic series are commendable 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. 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 we have drawn 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 an contextually appropriate manner that rarely, if ever, raises concerns.

## C. Television Specials

This is a new section of the report. Last season there was only one issue that arose in a television special. About midway through the **American Comedy Awards** on 3/6/95 Ellen DeGeneres presented the award for best motion picture comedy. Clips from each of the nominated films were shown beginning with **The Santa Clause**, **Ace Ventura: Pet Detective**, **Four Weddings and a Funeral** and **Forrest Gump**. Then a clip was shown from Quentin Tarentino's **Pulp Fiction**. The clip that was chosen featured John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson in the front seat of a car and a petty criminal in the back seat, held as prisoner. Holding a gun on the hostage, Travolta accidentally shoots him in the face, killing him and splattering massive amounts of blood and brain all over the car.

What was surprising was that such a violent clip was chosen, particularly in a television special with many children as well as unsuspecting adults in the audience. This was especially troublesome because it was included in a sequence of harmless clips taken from films that had family and youth appeal. Ironically, when Travolta and Jackson appeared on late night television talk shows to promote **Pulp Fiction**, they used a completely non-violent clip in which Travolta explains the difference between the McDonald's hamburger menu in France and in America. The clip used in the **American Comedy Awards** show was jarring and inappropriate for the context of the comedy awards and the audience. It was also a problem because there was nothing in the title or format of the show that would cause a viewer to expect a scene of such extreme violence.

Despite the problems cited above, the scene was an aberration and no other specials raised issues of concern. Therefore, there was no reason to focus on them or create a separate section in the report.

This season, however, specials have raised several issues. Two similar specials airing on different networks have raised exactly the same concerns and warrant being identified and discussed in this report. Both of these specials, airing on CBS and Fox, use real and re-created clips of animals attacking and, in some cases, killing and eating human beings.

On 1/25/96 CBS broadcast **The World's Most Dangerous Animals Part I** and on 5/7/96 **Part II**. CBS also broadcast on 5/21/96 **World's Most Dangerous...** On 4/28/96 Fox aired **When Animals Attack** at 7:00 p.m. on Sunday night and then re-aired the show on 5/6/96. All of the specials were almost identical in format and featured a mixture of real and re-created footage of animals attacking people. The programs were reminiscent of the popular home video rental title **Faces of Death** which purports to be actual footage of people caught in the act of dying through falling, electrocution, suicide and, in some cases, from attacks by dangerous animals. Playing to the same morbid human fascination that leads people to gawk at auto accidents, both programs appeal to a perverse and voyeuristic aspect of human nature.

In some cases film footage of the exact same event was used in both programs. Video of a circus elephant in Honolulu going on a wild rampage, attacking several people, was shown in both programs. The scene begins with the elephant going wild and, when the trainer tries to stop the elephant, he is gored and crushed. The scene goes on, showing the elephant punishing and stomping a circus hand, kicking him in the head and tossing him around like a rag doll. The

scene then shifts to outside the circus where the elephant charges another man, sending him flying to the ground. Quite graphic, the video shows a real person (the trainer) dying on camera. At the conclusion of the video clip, the elephant too is killed by gunfire from authorities unable to subdue the rampaging animal. The graphic video is accentuated by the fact that viewers know that what they are watching is real and that the victims are really hurt and, in one case, killed.

Other scenes in the specials show tigers attacking their trainers, bears mauling people, sharks biting divers and pitbulls attacking bystanders.

Some of the video re-creates animal attacks on humans. One such re-enactment in **The World's Most Dangerous Animals** depicts a woman being attacked by a crocodile. Viewers see the woman swimming in an African river and then the camera cuts to the lurking reptile. Suddenly the animal attacks, biting down on the woman's arm. Screaming, the woman is pulled under and billows of blood cloud the water. A man comes to help the woman and, as he is pulling her from the river, the image of the crocodile's mouth clamped down on her bloody arm is shown on screen. Ultimately, the woman loses her arm but keeps her life. As she is shown staggering away from the scene of the attack, the camera returns to the crocodile's menacing grin as it lies in wait for its next victim.

These specials are filled with dozens of images of ferocious animals attacking human beings. **When Animals Attack** was preceded with a strongly worded advisory: "The following program contains graphic real-life footage of animals attacking humans. Viewer discretion is strongly advised." The advisory was repeated after the opening sequence and near the end of the program, before the elephant attack. While the use of advisories is necessary and appropriate, it is not sufficient to alleviate concerns. It is also important to note that the Fox special aired at 7:00 on Sunday night, a time when the audience is likely to be filled with many children.

The CBS special **The World's Most Dangerous Animals** also issued an advisory: "Certain images in our program may be disturbing to some viewers." This advisory, however, rather than being issued in full screen or spoken, was scrolled quickly at the bottom of the screen. The other CBS special, **World's Most Dangerous...**, ran the same advisory in the same manner.

These are frightening and disturbing programs. While there is admittedly a human fascination with this kind of programming, these are just showcases for exploitative video footage of people being attacked and occasionally killed. The programming of a television network should not seek to emulate a car wreck at the side of the road.

The Discovery Channel also exploits this human interest in animal violence. The highest ratings for Discovery occur during "Shark Week." While the documentaries featured during "Shark Week" contain interviews with people attacked by sharks and offer many images of menacing sharks, they also offer scientific insight into what is known about sharks. They are not merely videos and re-creations of sharks attacking people. The Discovery Channel's documentaries may appeal to some of the same instincts that attract viewers to the dangerous animals specials, but they offer more than shot after shot of carnage.

The dangerous animal specials on CBS and Fox this season are programs that, more than just scaring children, are likely to terrify them. While almost all of the content featuring violence on

broadcast television is fictional, a fact that can serve to reassure the audience that what they are watching is “just a story,” this is not the case with these specials. Some of these specials were rerun on their respective networks.

### **The People’s Choice Awards**

An interesting violence issue arose in one of the most unlikely of places, **The People’s Choice Awards**, which aired on CBS on 3/10/96. This is an awards show that uses Gallup polls to determine the public’s favorite stars, movies and television programs. Part of this year’s program was a “Lifetime Achievement” award given to actor Michael Douglas. Preceding the award to Douglas was a montage of some of his most memorable acting roles. One of the clips came from one of his best known films, **Fatal Attraction**. The selected scene shows Glenn Close, believed to be drowned in a bath tub, lunge to life and attack Douglas, only to be stopped when Douglas’ wife, Anne Archer, shoots Close in the chest with a revolver.

It is both very intense and graphic. What is most interesting, however, is that in a montage tribute to Michael Douglas, it is a scene that barely shows Douglas and absolutely does not showcase his acting talents. Surely many other scenes in the film would have done a better job of serving as a tribute to Douglas. The scene is, however, one of the most violent in the film and that appears to be the reason it was selected. One is left with the feeling that the opportunity to highlight a very violent scene was considered more important than assembling an appropriate tribute to Michael Douglas.

## D. Made-for-Television Movies 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 slavery, 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 inflated in length and concept.

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 sensationalized 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 season promises at least one television movie on the Unabomber and his solitary life in a Montana shack, and probably one or more on the explosion of TWA Flight 800.

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 fact-based 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.

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

Last year 23 of 161 television movies were found to raise concerns, a rate of 14%. This year, despite the significant increase in the number of television movies, 20 were found to raise concerns, a rate of 10%. Clearly, there has been some improvement in this area of television programming. It is encouraging that while the number of television movies increased, both the number and the percentage of films causing problems dropped. 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. Yet, this year's study reveals that there has been some improvement. 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 almost always lacking advisories.

The first part of this section will discuss some particularly relevant examples of programs 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 That Raised Concerns*

### **Streets of Laredo** Parts I & II (CBS-11/12 and 11/14/95)

Based on a novel by Larry McMurtry, **Streets of Laredo** was a two-part sequel to **Lonesome Dove**, one of the most successful and memorable mini-series in recent television history. **Lonesome Dove** was one of the very few television movies ever to be developed into a television series which now runs in syndication. Set in Texas during the 1880s, **Streets of Laredo** stars television veteran James Garner as Captain Woodrow Call, an ex-lawman turned bounty hunter on the trail of a 19-year-old Mexican murderer named Joey Garza.

Aired on two non-consecutive nights, first at 8:00 p.m. and then at 9:00 p.m., **Streets of Laredo** ran for a total of five hours during the November “sweeps” period. Both parts were preceded by an advisory warning of violent content. On both nights the advisory ran again after the first commercial break. Although this was one of the very few times that any of the networks issued an advisory for a television movie, there was so much extremely graphic and prolonged violence in this program that it still raised concerns. This was one of the few television movies that contained the quantity and quality of violence usually found only in theatrical films shown on television.

The three-hour first part contained 22 scenes of violence. These scenes ran the full spectrum of violence from mild pushes and grabs to full-fledged fist fights and shootings. In one of the most graphic scenes of the entire season, and certainly for television movies, 75 minutes into the program the character Billy, played by George Carlin, shoots off a man’s ear with a rifle. As the victim stands in stunned disbelief, viewers see a large chunk of his ear dangle from the side of his head while blood pours down his collar. The man does not even appear very injured, only surprised. Billy, still pointing his rifle at the man as he moves toward him, cuts off what is left of the ear with a Bowie knife. He takes the remnant of the ear and shoves it into the victim’s vest pocket telling him, “Could just have easy been your stinkin’ heart.” It is a horrific, graphic and glorified scene of violence that did not have to be so extreme to make its point.

The second part, beginning at 9:00 p.m., contained fewer scenes of violence. However, the nature of the violence in those scenes, as might be expected in the concluding part, was more extreme than in most of the scenes in the first part. In the opening scene of Part II, a crazed and vicious killer named Mox Mox strikes a little boy across the face and then pours fuel on him and his younger sister as he prepares to set them on fire. The two children are saved when Captain Call shows up and shoots Mox Mox and five members of his gang. The scene is very long and graphic as viewers see the bullets perforating the villains’ chests. The thought of children being burned alive, even though it did not happen, created a very dark and disturbing tone throughout the scene.

The same episode contained an extremely intense scene in which a woman is forced to amputate Call’s leg with only a Bowie knife and a rock. Although this is an example of violence to save a life and the actual amputation is not shown on screen, it was extremely intense. In the climactic scene, the killer Joey attempts to drown his brother and sister. When his mother attempts to stop him and bring him to reason, they struggle and Joey plunges a knife into her chest and then her

stomach. Both stabbings are shown on the screen and the piercing of the stomach is shown close-up. It is an extremely graphic scene and, as mentioned earlier, uncharacteristic of a television movie.

In the discussion of whether **Streets of Laredo** raised concerns about violence, important consideration was given to examining the program within the context of the Western genre. Viewers are familiar with Westerns from the time they are little children. There is an expectation that this genre will contain men wearing holsters and carrying guns. It is also expected that there will be gunfights and morality battles between good and evil. This criticism of **Streets of Laredo** does not mean that a broadcaster should not be able to make and air a Western. Great latitude is given due to the fact that violence is inherent to the theme of most Westerns. The problem with **Streets of Laredo** is that the violence is so graphic, so plentiful and so much more vicious than is necessary to tell the story.

### **Gridlock** (NBC-1/14/96)

When robbers strike New York City's Federal Reserve Bank and take hostages, it is up to David Hasselhoff to stop them in this action/adventure television movie. Hasselhoff plays renegade cop Jake Gorski, whose girlfriend Michelle, played by model Kathy Ireland, is one of those taken hostage during the heist. In a story very similar to that of the feature film **Die Hard**, Hasselhoff infiltrates the building and, after much action, single-handedly defeats the small army of villains.

**Gridlock** had the feel of a toned-down theatrical action film. Airing without an advisory, the television movie contained 27 scenes of violence, the highest number found in a two-hour television movie this season.

Never raising any serious concerns with regard to the issue of graphicness, **Gridlock** instead raises concerns over the amount and purpose of the violence. This is a good example of a program with so much violence that the entire context of the film becomes violence. At 27 scenes across two hours, with commercials factored in, a scene of violence occurs at an average of every four minutes. If most of these acts were mild, such as grabs or pushes or even an occasional punch, this would not be a major source of concern. However, this is not the case. Most of the scenes contain fist fights, gun battles, explosions and other forms of serious violence. Just about every type of violence found in an action television movie can be found in abundance in **Gridlock**.

This is a television movie that could have used an advisory. As an action story in the mold of a **Die Hard**, it is likely to attract a young audience. Considering that the theme is about violence and that violence forms much, if not most, of the context, an advisory definitely would help better inform responsible parents.

### **Generation X** (Fox-2/20/96)

Loosely based on the Marvel comic book "The Uncanny X-Men," **Generation X** is an action-filled, cartoonish television movie chronicling the adventures of six teenage mutants. The

mutants are selected to attend a special crime-fighting school that will allow them to use their super powers for the benefit of society. While developing their skills and powers, they attract the attention of an evil, diabolical scientist who wishes to extract mutated cells from their brains and inject them into himself, thereby gaining super powers.

The comic book familiarity and the similarity to other popular programs such as **X-Men** is likely to attract many children to this television movie. The 8:00 p.m. starting time further increases the likelihood that children will be watching.

This is another television movie that raises concerns because of the tonnage of the violence. Containing over 20 scenes in two hours, there is much action violence in **Generation X**. Also causing concerns is the lack of an advisory, the intensity and glorification of the violence and the length of several violent scenes.

In the climactic scene, just as the mad doctor attempts to drill into the skull of one of the mutants, he is attacked by the other mutants. A chaotic fight breaks out as each of the mutants uses his or her special skill to try to kill the villain. Within the scene there is a surprisingly fierce kick to the doctor's gut that seems especially mean-spirited when compared to the other types of cartoonish violence that occur throughout **Generation X**. It seemed particularly inappropriate considering that the kick was so intense and that it appears in a program appealing to children.

The violence in **Generation X** rarely raises issues of graphicness. The movie raises concerns about its use of violence because of the intensity, tonnage and glorification of the violence, the lack of an advisory and the fact that it is targeted to children. The violence in **Generation X** is similar to that found in the "sinister combat violence" category that applies to some children's television.

### **It Was Him or Us** (CBS-11/21/95)

The ominous title of this television movie accurately describes a story about an abusive, psychopathic boyfriend who, when his girlfriend tries to leave him, takes her and her family hostage. The subject of abuse in a relationship, whether toward a spouse, a lover or a friend, has been a common theme of television movies over the past two seasons. Reflecting society's increasing concern over abusive relationships and pathological behaviors such as stalking, these television movies are frequently based on true stories and reveal the tortured details of these troubled relationships gone bad. **It Was Him or Us** is a good example of this type of television movie and other examples will follow shortly.

Richard Grieco plays Gene, the estranged boyfriend of Carrie, while Ann Jillian is featured as Carrie's mother, Peggy. The second half of the television movie depicts the insanely jealous and obsessive Gene taking Carrie and her family hostage in their own home and threatening to kill them.

Most of the early scenes of violence, though large in quantity, raise few concerns of intensity or graphicness. Most are of grabs or kicks and there is an occasional punch. There are also quite a

few scenes in which Gene points a gun at and threatens to kill someone but does not actually complete any act of violence.

It is the final scene, however, that raises considerable concern about the way in which the violence is portrayed. It is obvious from the unfolding of the plot that violence will occur in the resolution of the story. That is expected. That it is so brutal, intense and accentuated by slow motion is not expected and serves only to emphasize and prolong the violence that ends the story. Just as Gene is about to kill his girlfriend and turn the gun on himself, the mother sneaks up behind him and shoots him five times. Although the impact of the bullets is not seen, the scene is, as already mentioned, filmed in slow motion and therefore prolonged. Serving as the dramatic payoff at the end of a tortuous and unpleasant story, the scene nonetheless seems glorified and the accompanying music only serves to emphasize this.

This is a typical example of a trend in television movies: an unpleasant story predicated on some of the most depraved and perverted crimes found in recent human experience. Although there may be merit in providing people with insight into these types of relationships, **It Was Him or Us** was filled with violence and seemed to use the sordid details of the plot to glamorize the story rather than to provide a warning.

### **Beauty's Revenge** (NBC-9/25/95)

Another example of a television movie dealing with love turned violent, **Beauty's Revenge** stars **Melrose Place's** Courtney Thorne-Smith as Cheryl, a mentally unstable young woman obsessed with a man named Kevin. Cheryl's obsession with Kevin turns violent when he refuses to leave his girlfriend for her. The girlfriend, Beth, played by Tracey Gold, becomes the target of Cheryl's wrath and ultimately is murdered by her in an effort to gain Kevin's love.

Although **Beauty's Revenge** is predicated on violence, its subject matter could be considered to be important and provocative. It would be possible for the program to achieve its goal as a thriller while responsibly dealing with this subject matter. Unfortunately, this did not occur.

One of the recurring themes of the movie involves Cheryl's violent fantasy life. Typically her fantasies were played out on screen as if they were really happening in the story, only to end abruptly as the scene returned to real life. This serves to let viewers know that the violent scene they just saw only happened in Cheryl's twisted imagination. Two such scenes raised concerns. The first, occurring 12 minutes into the story, depicted Cheryl suddenly grabbing Beth by the neck and forcing her head into a sink filled with water. The camera's point of view then switches to show Beth's contorted face underwater as she struggles to free herself. It is a very brutal and disturbing scene because of its length and because viewers see her face as she is drowning. That it is immediately revealed to be a fantasy does not mitigate the concerns about the scene. In the second fantasy, Cheryl picks up a pair of scissors and repeatedly stabs a receptionist in the chest. The impact of the scissors is not shown and the scene is filmed with a stroboscopic effect. Still, it is a scary and overly intense scene, especially as the victim clutches at her wound as blood pours through her hand.

Close to 90 minutes into the film, Cheryl actually kills Beth. After an argument, Cheryl climbs into the back seat of Beth's car and chokes her to death with a strap. It is a scene of ruthless violence that is shown in its entirety. Interestingly, the very same scene was shown at the beginning of the film but in a very different way. The first time the murder was shown, viewers see Cheryl attack Beth. But then the camera cuts to the exterior of the car while choking sounds let the audience know what is happening. It was an equally effective yet far less graphic means of portraying the murder.

**Beauty's Revenge** is based on a true story. That the producers are bound to the fact that Beth is murdered does not mandate that the death has to be shown with excessive graphicness. The earlier depiction of the murder demonstrates better than any critique that the crime can be portrayed in a way that does not irresponsibly shock and horrify the audience. This is another example of a television movie focusing on the most despicable and violent elements of humanity in a manner that does not inspire thought but rather morbid titillation.

#### **An Unfinished Affair** (ABC-5/5/96)

Another example of a movie about a jilted lover turning into a psychopathic killer, **An Unfinished Affair** stars **Beverly Hills 90210's** Jenny Garth as Sheila. Sheila is a younger woman who has an affair with Alex, a married man whose wife is diagnosed with terminal cancer. When Alex discovers that his wife will live and that he still loves her, he ends the affair. Spurned, Sheila seeks revenge. In retribution, she withholds a valuable silk screen that Alex loaned her and then seduces and tries to frame his son for murder. Finally she tries to kill both Alex and his recovered wife.

One of the scenes contained a very brutal and graphic stabbing. Sheila confronts a man who has been blackmailing both her and Alex. When the man turns away from her, Sheila twice plunges a knife into his back. As the man falls dead to the floor, the camera zooms in on the extremely bloody knife. A premeditated act, the killing is part of her plan to frame Alex's son for the blackmailer's murder. This was an unnecessarily graphic scene that could have been handled very differently. The return of the camera to the bloodied weapon serves only to accentuate the violence and does not add anything to the story.

#### **Divas** (Fox-9/19/95)

Telling the story of four female singers, **Divas** examines the difficulty of trying to get a record deal and make it in the music business. The film's central character is the singers' manager, Monty, who juggles family and financial problems and a romantic interest in one of the divas as he attempts to build a musical career for himself and the group.

Obviously violence is not the central theme of the film and there are only a few scenes of violence. What is surprising is the intensity and brutality of one of the scenes. Monty is angry that a man he set up on a date with one of the singers tried to rape her. He tracks down the attempted rapist in a pool hall where, after a brief verbal exchange, he jabs the man in the gut

with a pool cue. He then proceeds to brutally beat the man, punching and kicking him while he is on the ground. Finally several patrons of the pool hall pull him off the severely beaten man. Although it could be argued that the attack was morally and dramatically (though not legally) justified and that it established Monty's strong feelings for the woman who was attacked, the violence was excessive, prolonged and glorified. This is especially true considering that there was so little violence in this film.

The music business theme and the lack of an advisory both promise a film that viewers might expect would be free of the type of scene described above. The brutal fight scene, while integral to the story and the development of Monty's character, could have been considerably shorter and less graphic without injuring the plot. Any viewer watching the promotions for the first few minutes of the film would not expect to see the pool hall scene. It can be argued that a Jean-Claude Van Damme or Steven Seagal film, though loaded with violent scenes, makes it clear from the beginning that it contains much violence. This kind of film almost always contains an advisory to further prepare the audience for the content of the story. **Divas**, with no advisory and seemingly without violent content, may shock or dismay those who watch this television movie.

#### **A Face to Die For** (NBC-3/11/96)

Yet another story of love gone bad, **A Face to Die For** contains only a few intense scenes of violence, although its theme is centered on rage and violence. As a young girl, Emily is in a serious car crash that kills her father and leaves her face horribly scarred. Her feelings of self-loathing and despair do not end until a man, Alec, comes along and tells her that he loves her. Soon, however, Alec convinces Emily to steal from her boss and to cooperate in a robbery to cover his mounting gambling debts. Emily is caught during the robbery and goes to jail to cover for Alec while he gets away with the money. In jail she realizes he was using her and never really loved her, but instead was in love with her beautiful sister Sheila. While in prison she sees a plastic surgeon who reconstructs her face and makes her beautiful. Determined to get back at Alec, she assumes a new identity and becomes a famous fashion designer. When she discovers that Alec married her sister and has turned into a wife-beater, she concocts a plan to settle all scores. Alec soon discovers Emily's true identity and in the final scene attempts to rape both Emily and her sister. Emily, however, has brought a gun with her and in the final struggle pulls it out and, in self-defense, kills Alec.

There are acts of violence ranging from punches, kicks and hair pulling to the final shooting. The final scene was filmed from a variety of angles and features slow motion which further lengthens the depiction of the violence. **A Face to Die For** ran without an advisory.

## ***2. Other MOWs and Mini-Series Raising Concerns About Violence***

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

**The Babysitter's Seduction** (NBC-1/22/96)

**Deadly Pursuit** (NBC-1/8/96)

**Dead Man's Walk Part II** (ABC-5/13/96)

**Ed McBain's 87th Precinct: Ice** (NBC-2/18/96)

**Face of Evil** (CBS-4/9/96)

**A Family of Cops** (CBS-11/26/95)

**Fugitive Nights: Danger in the Desert** (NBC-10/15/95)

**Hijacked: Flight 285** (ABC-2/4/96)

**Remember Me** (CBS-11/19/95)

**Summer of Fear** (CBS-4/3/96)

**Terminal** (NBC-2/12/96)

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

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

Television movies are a format the networks control from their inception. They can decide whether or not to make the movie, they have script approval and they can 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 and thus has a greater opportunity to feature more violent fare. While many violent theatricals aired on television need to be cut to meet the standards of that medium, they cannot always be cut nor can their scenes be changed without significantly altering the film or damaging viewers' understanding. 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 are at all appropriate for the broad medium of network television in whatever form. At the same time, 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.

Possibly in response to last year's finding that relatively few television movies raised concerns (14%) while a much higher percentage of theatrical films did raise concerns (47%), there were many more television movies on the four networks this season and no increase in the number of theatrical films. And many of the theatrical films that did run this season were reruns of films already purchased by and aired on the networks.

#### **b. Lack of Advisories**

Last season, the three traditional networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) used advisories only twice during the entire season for television movies and mini-series. This season there was a modest increase in the number of advisories used for television movies. Still, this is an area in which there is room for improvement in coming seasons. Our monitoring indicated that there was a clear need for more advisories. Many of the titles listed or described above contained themes of violence or very graphic or intense scenes. Many needed advisories.

The use or non-use of an advisory frequently made an important difference in the determination of whether a television movie raised concerns. Many of the television movies listed above would not have raised concerns if there had been an advisory and only one, **Streets of Laredo**, would still have raised concerns had it had an advisory.

The Fox network seems to have a different policy with regard to the use of advisories. This is undoubtedly due to the lack of a 10:00 p.m. network hour and the fact that all movies must begin at the earlier hour of 8:00 p.m. Fox is much more willing to use advisories and frequently runs them several times during a program to alert those who might have started watching after the

beginning of the show. It would be preferable, however, if Fox would add an hour of prime time and begin both its television movies and theatrical films at 9:00 p.m.

### c. TV Movies Contain More Graphic Violence than Television Series

Perhaps in an effort to appear more like theatrical films, television movies and mini-series contain more graphic scenes of violence than television series. The topics of many television movies, such as murder, abuse or rape, lend themselves to more graphic violence. But, in addition, the producers opt to depict these crimes more graphically than they do in most series.

Five television movies featured brutal stabbings: **An Unfinished Affair**, **Streets of Laredo Part II**, **Face of Evil**, **Beauty's Revenge** and **The Babysitter's Seduction**. Two contained men being beaten with pool cues: **A Family of Cops** and **Divas**. **Terminal** had a scene with an impalement, a vicious form of violence usually reserved for theatrical films. Gun fights and bullet wounds are more graphic and gory than those found in television series as evidenced by: **Hijacked: Flight 285** and **Dead Man's Walk Part II**. Other examples of intense violence can be found in **Fugitive Nights: Danger in the Desert** and **Ed McBain's 87th Precinct: Ice**, both of which featured people getting their throats slashed, the first with a knife and the second with a straight razor.

### d. Violence is Sometimes the Theme of the Movie

In some instances, the entire premise of the television movie is based on an act of violence. A large percentage of the films in this genre are predicated upon some sort of criminally violent activity. The world of some television movies is a world of murderers, psychotics, rapists 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 MOW. Some might argue that violent acts such as the Jim Jones' People's Temple massacre in Guyana or the Texas Cheerleader Mom are so inherently fascinating and say so much about our society that they easily justify being made into television movies. However, some of the subjects we saw featured in television movies during the 1995-96 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: **It Was Him or Us**, **An Unfinished Affair**, **Face of Evil**, **Beauty's Revenge**, **Deadly Pursuit**, **The Babysitter's Seduction** and **A Face to Die For**.

### e. Unpunished, Acceptable Violence

A message conveyed by some of the television movies this season is that violence can be used to finally resolve a long term, difficult problem even though the life of the person committing the act is not in immediate danger. This becomes a perverse form of “self-defense” where a character can make up for years or decades of abuse or mistreatment by illegally taking the life of the person who has tormented him or her. The final act of violent resolution not only goes unpunished, it is usually glorified and shown to be not only appropriate but also completely justified.

A good example of this issue can be found in **The Deliverance of Elaine** (CBS-4/10/96). This television movie stars Academy Award nominee Mare Winningham as the title character and Lloyd Bridges as her overly repressive, mentally abusive father who has been confined to a wheelchair. Elaine has given up her life to be her father’s caretaker and has consequently foregone many of life’s important experiences, foremost of those being love and a family. When she learns of a dark secret in her father’s past, Elaine realizes she has given up her life for a man she hates and chooses to kill her father.

At the end of the television movie, Elaine does kill her father, gets away with the crime and leaves her old life behind to begin a new one. Although the town sheriff knows of Elaine’s guilt, he chooses to look the other way and allow her to have the life she never could have had under her father’s control. This raises important issues regarding lack of consequences and punishment for what is premeditated murder.

In this story, Elaine suffers no consequences for the killing and is rewarded with a new life. Elaine could have simply left her father rather than killing him. The act of murder is dramatically treated as self-defense even though Elaine’s life is not in danger.

The issue in **The Deliverance of Elaine** is not the depiction of the killing. The scene is very well handled and raises absolutely no concerns by itself. The message of the movie that killing an abusive parent to get on with your life is acceptable is what raises concern.

### f. Ominous and Threatening Titles Promising Violence

A large number of made-for-television movies have ominous or threatening titles that imply that the show will be violent, whether or not it actually is. Anyone reading a list of this season’s television movies (see appendix) will immediately see that many of the titles are filled with words such as “dangerous,” “killer” or “killing,” “death,” “deadly” and “fatal.” This raises an interesting issue about the general philosophy of those who title these movies. It seems they do not believe that they can capture viewers’ attention without making the movie sound dangerous. Examples include those movies that raised concerns, and many that did not such as: **Her Deadly Rival, Murderous Intent, Inflammable, Deadly Whispers, The Cold Heart of A Killer, Summer of Fear, Bloodlines: Murder in the Family, Terror in the Shadows, Eyes of Terror, Dead by Sunset, Deadly Pursuit, Deadly Web, Voice from the Grave, Terror in the Family** and others.

### **g. Misleading Titles**

This was one of last season's most interesting issues in television movies. While some films with violent titles were relatively non-violent, two of the most violent television movies of the 1994-95 season had seriously misleading titles promising innocent family fare. **Falling for You** and **Gramps** promised content very different from what was delivered. This was a particular problem given the fact that these shows lacked advisories. Had there been advisories, viewers would have learned that the misleadingly titled movies **Falling for You** and **Gramps** contained intense acts of violence. Starring likable celebrities Jenny Garth and Andy Griffith and lacking advisories, these stories appear to be about falling in love and a kindly old grandfather.

Happily, an examination of 198 television movies this season found that misleading titles were no longer a problem. While there are still many television movies with violent titles that do not raise concern, this year there were no television movies that did raise concern that had misleading or innocent sounding titles.

### **h. Television Movies from Violent or Action Prime Time Series**

This season also witnessed a decline in violent television movies based on action television series. In many instances last season, especially the **Walker, Texas Ranger** movies, this became an opportunity to "turbocharge" an action show, present it as a special episode and include more scenes of heightened violence. Frequently the hero faced an even more sinister opponent than in the regular television series. This season there were no **Walker** television movies and two television movies based on the former action series **Alien Nation** did not raise concerns. This season also saw several television movies based on non-violent television series such as **Project: Alf** and **A Walton Thanksgiving**. Not surprisingly, neither movie raised any concerns.

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

Many television movies proudly fly the banner of "Based on a True Story." They do not mention, however, that many of these movies are, at best, loosely based on true stories. These "true" stories always seem to be about the most shockingly horrific and depraved tales of the atrocities that people commit. Very seldom are these stories of triumph over adversity or heroic deeds. For every inspiring teacher or parent, there are tens of crazed killers, sociopathic personalities or malevolent villains. (The very ugly picture of the world that emerges brings to mind George Gerbner's "mean world" scenario.)

### **j. Slow Motion**

The use of slow motion is obviously not exclusive to television movies. Its use has already been examined in television series. However, slow motion definitely finds its way into the genre of television movies where it raises the same issues as in series. Although directors would argue that it is an artistic device used to make the scene more dramatic, what it often does is just prolong and emphasize the violent act.

This was a technique commonly found in television movies last season and it was still heavily employed this season as well. **It Was Him or Us, A Face to Die For, Hijacked: Flight 285, Beauty's Revenge** and **Terminal** all used slow motion and other cinematic techniques that prolonged and accentuated scenes of violence. In **A Face To Die For** another special effect was used to heighten the violence. When the villain is killed in the movie's climax, the camera shows his body falling through a glass table from four different angles. This technique, combined with slow motion, served both to emphasize and prolong the violence.

## 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. Until 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** 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 a 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. Until 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 the sex, violence and language of the original could be seen 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. 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's 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 10 years earlier.

Theatrical films represent a real challenge for the broadcast networks that run them. Almost all other programming in their entire schedule is either created by them or by others who must work with them and adhere to their standards. With all other programs except theatrical films, the networks decide whether they get made, who makes them, how they are made and edited, and what they look like. The networks apply their own standards to language, sexual scenes 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 Miracle decision of 1952 clearly established that motion pictures are a significant medium for the communication of ideas and are therefore protected by the First Amendment. Currently the content of motion pictures 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 is completely independent of the government and is administered by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) under the direction of Jack Valenti. Film, while in theaters or on home video, is not subject to the indecency regulations applied to broadcasting. With few exceptions, film is free to make whatever type of content it wants.

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 adapt to 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 sex, violence and language issues and then have to redesign 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.

While the earlier sections of this report have detailed the concerns raised by television series and made-for-television movies, we believe that modest improvement has occurred in these areas. Once again, this is the programming over which the networks have complete control. In response to political and public criticisms and pressures of the past few years, there have been important changes in this network-controlled programming.

Last year's report concluded that a large majority of the violence on broadcast television that raises concerns can be found in theatrical films. That is still true this year, but the picture is improved. Most of the gruesome, gory and truly gratuitous violence is still found in theatrical

films, particularly action films. But there is considerably less of it this year on broadcast television. Last year's conclusion that theatrical films contained frequent problems was so compelling and unambiguous that broadcasters had to make some changes in what they purchase and program.

Theatrical films represent a problem that is more difficult and takes longer to correct than any other television programming. As discussed 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 not to air such expensive films which they were contractually committed to purchase. We expected to wait several years before seeing many of the serious problems diminish in theatrical films shown on television.

Therefore, it is impressive to see some substantial improvement in the 1995-96 television season. Last season, we monitored 118 theatrical films on the broadcast networks. (We examined many more in syndication and on cable and home video, which will be compared and discussed in later sections.) Of the 118 films examined last season, 50, or 42%, were found to raise concerns about their use of violence. This season only 29% of the theatrical films were found to raise concerns about violence. While this is still a high figure, it represents substantial improvement for one television season. One might conclude that the broadcasters showed fewer problem films because they simply aired fewer films. But this is not the case. The number of theatrical films monitored this season, 113, is only a few less than the total last season. This year 33 films raised concerns compared to 50 last year. Fourteen of the 33 films raising concerns this season were repeats of films that ran last season. These are films that were already paid for and the network had licensing rights to show again. Only 19 of the films that raised concerns ran for the first time this season.

While recognizing 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 somewhat excessive. The highest concentration of violence occurs in theatrical films on television. The number of violent scenes and the highly graphic nature of the violence are unlike anything else on television. Some films, which contain several scenes of violence, can be judiciously edited to air easily 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.

The violence on television series usually consists of fist fights, pushing, falling or, occasionally, some shooting. Theatrical films are where one sees decapitations, impalements, throats being slashed or other horrific violence.

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. Some Theatrical Films That Raise Concerns*

### **Hard Target** (NBC-5/18/96)

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 in his movies. The film was directed by Hong Kong's most successful director of action films, 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 nonstop action film that builds its entire story around violent encounters and serves 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 the man being shot with arrows multiple times in the back and shoulder. 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 uses 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 nonstop and exercised without restraint.

### **Bram Stoker's Dracula** (Fox-11/7/95)

**Bram Stoker's Dracula** is a rich and lavish film that adds a highly passionate and romantic twist to the horror tale made famous by the old monster movie starring Bela Lugosi. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola, the film stars Winona Ryder, Keanu Reeves, Gary Oldman and Anthony Hopkins.

Essentially a dark love story, the film is filled with gore as the vampire Count Dracula tries to win the affection of Mina, the reincarnation of his true love who committed suicide hundreds of years earlier. When Mina's fiancée, Jonathan, discovers Dracula's dark secret, he and a group of men hunt down the vampire.

In the final climactic scene, the men confront Dracula in the courtyard of his mountaintop refuge. In this final battle scene Jonathan uses a dagger to slit the throat of the evil vampire. As Dracula reels from the attack, another man plunges a large blade into his heart. It is an extremely violent and graphic scene in which a close-up of the severed throat is seen on screen. Blood pours from the wounds of the mortally wounded Dracula as he retreats into his castle to die. There, Mina, who has fallen in love with Dracula and who has also been transformed into a vampire, jams the blade through his torso and, to put him out of his agony, beheads him off screen. As Mina drives the knife through his upper body, the camera zooms in on the bloody blade shooting out of his back. It is an extremely savage scene full of excessively graphic and gory images, many of which could probably never be made suitable for broadcast television.

The film aired on Fox at 8:00 p.m. As discussed earlier, Fox does not have a 10:00 p.m. time slot and must begin all theatricals at 8:00 p.m. Because of this, three advisories were issued. No number of advisories could mitigate the extremely brutal nature of the film and the over 30 scenes of violence. The film also raises the issues of sympathizing with the violent vampire and the glorification of brutal acts of carnage. Similar to the character in **Interview with the Vampire** (described later in the report), the vampire is portrayed as an unfortunate, broken-hearted victim rather than as the extremely violent killer he really is. As one might expect in such a highly stylized vampire film, some of the scenes contain a disturbing mixture of violence with sex.

### **The Firm** (ABC-5/19/96)

Based on the highly popular thriller by lawyer and author John Grisham, **The Firm** stars Tom Cruise as Mitch, a top law school graduate who goes to work for a prestigious but mysterious Southern law firm. Mitch soon learns that his firm is linked with one of the biggest mafia organizations in Chicago and will kill any lawyer who takes this important information to the police.

In a particularly violent scene one hour into the film, two hitmen working for the firm confront a detective looking into the suspicious deaths of two of the firm's attorneys. When Eddie, the detective, refuses to cooperate, one of the hitmen shoots off his right ear. When he continues to resist, they shoot him again, this time in the shoulder. In a final act of defiance, Eddie manages to shoot one of the hitmen in the knee with a gun strapped to the bottom of his desk. In a blaze of gunfire, the hitmen riddle Eddie's body with bullets, killing him and splattering his blood on his secretary who was hiding under the desk through the entire scene.

Although the scene is far from one of the most graphic of the season, it is extremely long and torturous. The extreme brutality with which the hitmen play cat and mouse with Eddie is more troubling psychologically than the graphicness of the violence that is typical of action films.

Running for three hours, **The Firm** began at 8:00 p.m. on Sunday night. Considering the early start time, it is surprising that the film did not contain an advisory. Overall, the film contained 13 scenes of violence, a modest amount for a three-hour thriller. Though the number of scenes did

not compare with the totals of other action films described in this section, the above scene was brutal and graphic enough to warrant an advisory.

### **Edward Scissorhands** (CBS-10/31/95)

A romantic and off-beat fairy tale about a socially backward teenager with scissors for hands and his introduction into an intolerant society, **Edward Scissorhands** contains moralistic messages about acceptance and understanding. It stars Johnny Depp as the title character and Winona Ryder as Kim, the daughter of Edward's surrogate family who ultimately falls in love with him. The film is full of the bizarre and surreal images found in other Tim Burton films such as **Batman** and **Ed Wood**.

This film contains only four scenes of violence, two of which are accidental. It is the final scene that raises some important concerns. In that scene Kim's abusive ex-boyfriend Jim chases and attacks the peaceful Edward, angry at him for being different and for stealing his girlfriend. Jim pulls out a gun and shoots at, but misses, Edward. Just as Jim is preparing to shoot him again, this time at close range, Kim intervenes by pulling on his arm. This causes him to miss and shoot the ceiling which falls on Edward. Jim then kicks the fallen Edward repeatedly in the ribs and beats him with an iron rod. When Kim attempts to intercede again by hitting Jim with a board, he strikes her and kicks her off of him. Finally, in self-defense and to protect Kim, the normally non-violent Edward uses one of his scissor hands as a weapon, brutally stabbing Jim in the stomach and pushing him out of the window. It is a surprisingly dark and violent end to what had been thus far a nonviolent film.

The entire look, feel and story line of the film is like a fairy tale and therefore likely to attract children. Because of this, it is surprising that there was not an advisory at the start of the film. Anyone watching would not expect violence in the film and parents previewing the first few minutes with their children would find nothing to suggest the violence with which the film ends.

Throughout the film Jim taunts the sympathetic Edward and by the end of the film viewers want to see him "get it good." All of this is integral to the story. All that is needed is an advisory.

### **Cliffhanger** (Fox-2/13/96)

This is a Sylvester Stallone action thriller about a team of murderous hijackers searching for the \$100 million they lost in the Rocky Mountains during a plane crash. Stallone plays a mountain climbing ranger who rescues people in distress. Throughout the film, the villains ruthlessly kill anyone who gets in their way and they attempt to kill Stallone as he continually thwarts their efforts to recover the stolen money.

Full of explosions and scene after scene of peril, *Cliffhanger* aired at 8:00 p.m. and contained three advisories. There were over 30 scenes of violence in the film, many of which were glorified for the purpose of making them more exciting. These scenes run the gamut from threats at gunpoint to fist fights and impalements. In one particularly graphic scene, Stallone is held at gunpoint by one of the hijackers. In order to save himself, he attacks the man, slicing open his

leg with an ice axe. The act is shown at very close range and is very explicit. In the scene that follows, the wounded villain pursues Stallone into a cavern where they engage in a fistfight. The fight is heavily edited and could not be edited any further without rendering the scene incomprehensible. Still, the fight scene ends with Stallone impaling his enemy on a stalactite. It is an extremely violent series of events.

The last half hour is filled with little else but action and violence. This is another of the action films for which network editing can only remove the worst moments of the worst scenes. There remains a context composed primarily of excessive and frequently glorified violence.

### **Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story** (NBC-3/3/96)

**Dragon** is the story of Bruce Lee, the legendary martial arts film star whose life was tragically cut short. At its core a drama dealing with issues of racism and overcoming adversity, the film contains occasional action scenes in which Lee engages in extremely brutal fights with other martial artists. Presented as historical fiction, the film frequently strays from real events and takes on a feel that is far more reminiscent of one of Lee's karate films rather than a documentary biography.

In one of the film's opening scenes, the young Lee takes on an unruly group of obnoxious and offensive American soldiers. Although Lee's actions are committed in self-defense and to teach the thugs a much needed lesson, the violence is extremely glorified and it is apparent that Lee is enjoying thrashing the drunken soldiers. The scene lasts for over two minutes and involves a wide array of martial arts fighting techniques.

Later in the film, the brother of a man Lee has crippled in a fight seeks vengeance and attacks him on the set of one of his films. It is an extremely long fight in which many martial arts skills are employed. Just as the attacker is about to drown Lee in a deep puddle of mud, Lee shifts the balance of the fight and subdues the angry brother, almost killing him in the process. Sequences in the scene are filmed in slow motion and use sound effects that amplify and emphasize the violence.

A two and a half hour film, it aired at 8:30 p.m. There were more than 15 acts of violence in the film.

### **Under Siege** (ABC-2/25/96)

This is a film with a violent theme and constant violent action. Starring laconic action hero Steven Seagal, **Under Siege** is about a group of terrorists led by Tommy Lee Jones and Gary Busey who take over an aircraft carrier and threaten to use its nuclear weapons unless their demands are met. Seagal plays a former CIA operative working as a cook who foils the terrorists' plot and saves the carrier and its missiles.

It is an excessively violent film. There are gruesome, detailed shootings and stabbings accompanied by other acts of mayhem, all of which are central to the plot. By the time the two bad guys meet their end the audience is delighted to see them suffer as they are brutally finished off.

The film contains over 50 scenes of violence, far more per hour than found in any series or television movie. 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 would be rated "R."

ABC did a noble job of trying to edit **Under Siege** for broadcast television. Scenes were pared down considerably, some of the worst acts were edited out and some scenes were completely cut. But there was no way they could remove enough to make it free of concerns. There were far too many scenes of violence which were central to the story. This film would not be understandable to its viewers, and many Seagal fans would be disappointed by the lack of action, if those violent scenes were cut.

We know of no way that this film could be edited sufficiently so that it could run without raising concerns about violence. It did run with an advisory at 9:00 p.m.

### **The Last Boy Scout** (ABC-10/29/95)

Bruce Willis plays a disgraced former government agent working as a cheap detective. He teams with ex-football player Damon Wayans to investigate corruption in professional football. Basic to the story are a large number of very intense scenes of glorified violence. The very violent character Willis plays is shown to be cool and suave. This is underscored by co-star Wayans' admiration of his actions.

**The Last Boy Scout**, with over 30 scenes of violence, is excessive and graphic. This film, which contains football violence, raises an interesting issue. A case could be made that football is an American institution and therefore socially sanctioned. There is no question that, at its core, football is a violent game. But "real" football is televised live with no control over what will happen. A case can be made that either football should be protected from criticism or that it glorifies violence and should be condemned.

However, in a film about football all the scenes are scripted. A writer has to decide what will happen and a director has to decide how graphic it will be. These scenes are not real. Therefore, we held them to the same standard of violence to which all other scenes in a film are held. In one football scene on the field a player pulls out a gun and shoots another player. Last season's **Necessary Roughness**, a film primarily about football, raised fewer concerns than **The Last Boy Scout**.

Almost every scene in the film contains violence. Many were prolonged and ugly. This is yet another film that could not possibly be edited enough to air on television without raising

concerns. The amount of violence is excessive and the glorification only exacerbates the problem. ABC ran an advisory.

### **The Rookie** (ABC-4/21/96)

ABC extended prime time until 11:30 to run this film. This is an unusual action that incurs the anger of affiliates. This film was heavily edited in another noble effort to make it fit the standards of broadcast television. Unfortunately, the effort was unsuccessful, as it would be impossible to eliminate gratuitous scenes of violence from the film.

“Bad boy” Charlie Sheen plays a rich kid who becomes a rookie cop. He is teamed with Clint Eastwood, his hardened, cynical partner. The movie is wall-to-wall violence, containing over 40 scenes. The violence here too is glorified as the viewer cheers when Eastwood commits acts of violence.

There are obvious signs of editing. The network tried to make the film appropriate for broadcast. However, it is simply not possible to take enough of the violence out of this film. ABC aired several advisories.

### **Marked for Death** (CBS-12/5/95)

In another Steven Seagal film, the actor this time plays an ex-drug agent taking on Jamaican drug lords who have marked him and his family for death. Many of the scenes are very long and drawn out. It is a very typical action film distinguished only by a heightened level of violence. It contained fewer scenes than many of the films described above, but two of the scenes were particularly graphic and shocking.

Five minutes into the film, Seagal is buying illegal drugs in a Mexican brothel when a fight breaks out. The gory scene is filled with knives, guns, punches, kicks and shootings and it lasts a full two minutes. Far more graphic than is warranted by the story, the scene could have been edited without damaging the plot.

The second problematic scene occurs at the end and lasts for six minutes. It is a very long and continuously graphic finale which begins with one of the characters holding the severed head of a Jamaican drug lord. (Strangely, last season we saw the decapitated head of another Jamaican drug lord in another film shown in local syndication, **Predator II**.) A long fight and chase ensue with Seagal chasing the bad guy, who after much intervening violence is thrown down an elevator shaft and impaled on a long piece of metal. The camera lingers on this image.

Nothing could be done to edit this film sufficiently for broadcast television. It is filled with graphic images of disturbing violence and constant action. It ran with two advisories.

**Demolition Man** (Fox-1/9/96)  
**Die Hard 2** (CBS-3/12/96)  
**Last Action Hero** (ABC-3/17/96)  
**Lethal Weapon 2** (CBS-1/21/96)  
**Lethal Weapon 3** (ABC-4/25/96)  
**Nowhere to Run** (ABC-11/5/95)  
**Out for Justice** (NBC-3/25/96)  
**Passenger 57** (ABC-5/16/96)  
**Tango and Cash** (CBS-3/31/96)  
**Terminator 2** (ABC-1/7/96)

These movies are grouped together because they continue to raise the same issues. All are big-budget Hollywood action films with big stars (Arnold Schwarzenegger, Mel Gibson, Bruce Willis, Steven Seagal, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Wesley Snipes and Sylvester Stallone) in the lead roles.

They are all filled with many scenes of continuous violence. **Lethal Weapon 3** contained 21 scenes, **Terminator 2** 29, **Demolition Man** 16, **Tango and Cash** 30, **Last Action Hero** 20, **Nowhere to Run** 28 and **Out for Justice** 22 scenes. Once again, a valiant effort was made so that these films might be suitable for television. **Terminator 2** alone must have occupied the efforts of film editors for months. There simply was nothing that could be done. The violence is everywhere and is what these films are all about.

These films tend to present violence as acceptable because it is committed by the hero. They also tend to mitigate the seriousness of the violence by interjecting humor into it. For example, in **Demolition Man** when Sylvester Stallone's character smashes the villain (played by Wesley Snipes) over the head with a television, he quips, "You're on TV!" Much of the violence in these films is exciting and glamorous. All of the films should have and did contain advisories.

**Home Alone** (NBC-11/23/95)  
**Dennis the Menace** (NBC-11/25/95)  
**Ernest Rides Again** (ABC-12/30/95)

**Home Alone** is one of the top box-office films of all time. How can a children's film possibly raise concerns about violence? While many will argue that this is a cartoon-like kids' film filled with Christmas spirit and worthy of becoming a holiday tradition, a contextual examination of the violence tells another story.

Macauley Culkin plays a young boy, Kevin, accidentally left behind at home by his parents in their rush to prepare for a trip to Paris. Kevin lives every child's fantasy and nightmare: he is home alone. The first part of the film is indeed a kid's film as the young Kevin adapts to life on his own. We watch him use aftershave, not knowing it will burn, and try to convince a store clerk that he really is an adult and able to use a credit card.

Toward the end, the film becomes violent when two burglars try to break into Kevin's house. In order to foil the break-in, Kevin sets up elaborate schemes to stop the burglars. While these scenes are played for laughs, they are filled with extremely sadistic and mean-spirited acts of violence which never show consequences. In fact, Kevin is rewarded. Watching Kevin torture these burglars is really the appeal of the film.

Kevin's actions begin modestly as he shoots the intruders with a BB-gun. The violence progressively becomes more mean-spirited and vindictive throughout the movie. At one point he pours water on the stairs causing the burglars to slip and fall. When one of the criminals falls, a crowbar lands on his head. In another scene, an iron falls on the head of one of the burglars who then proceeds to step on a nail. The violence continues to escalate as Kevin rigs a blowtorch to burn the bad guys' heads. They continue to slip and fall throughout the movie, and in one scene, both are hit in the head with great force by paint cans. Later on, one gets stung by a tarantula and finally the old neighbor comes to the rescue and bangs the intruders on the head with a shovel.

Many will argue that this is a funny, cartoon-like film that appeals to every child's fantasy. While we understand this, 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 burglars.

This is violence intended to make people laugh. It is never intended to be realistic, but it sends the message that people getting hit in the head with a crowbar or burned by a blowtorch is funny, especially if it is the result of an ingenious booby trap. NBC ran **Home Alone** at 8:00 p.m. without an advisory.

**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 by 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 immolation 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.

**Ernest Rides Again** is also filled with comedic violence, usually at the expense of the Ernest character. Much of the violent action is irrelevant to the story and only serves to keep the targeted child audience interested and stimulated. There are dozens of gun shots, many people knocked unconscious and, in a scene that is questionable at best, Ernest's mouth is caught on a fish hook.

**Ernest Rides Again** is not a film that contains vicious, ugly violence. It is, however, a film filled with violent acts, the consequences of which are rarely shown. It did not contain an advisory.

## *2. Additional Theatrical Films That Raise Concerns*

**Batman Returns** (NBC-3/24/96)

**Consenting Adults** (ABC-2/29/96)

**The Crush** (Fox-9/6/95)

**Final Analysis** (NBC-12/31/95)

**In the Line of Fire** (Fox-3/3/96)

**Mad Dog and Glory** (ABC-1/25/96)

**Mo' Money** (Fox-9/5/95)

**Patriot Games** (ABC-2/1/96)

**Sidekicks** (NBC-12/23/95)

**Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III** (ABC-2/24/96)

## *3. Issues Arising out of Theatrical Films 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 story line. 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, if not 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 such as **The Firm** simply need advisories. Others like **Patriot Games** need to be edited further. But there is nothing that can be done with films such as **Hard Target**, **Marked for Death** 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 because it contains only a few scenes of inappropriate violence that could be excised without seriously detracting from the basic storyline. The fact that

a good number of violent theatrical films monitored 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 attempted rape and violence. 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.

We would also never expect to see a pornographic film such as **Deep Throat** on television because of the explicit sexuality. If a network editor tried to edit **Deep Throat** to remove the sex we would be left with a plot so confusing and weak that no one would watch it. The same point applies to many violence laden films. These films either have too many scenes to edit or, if edited, they would be reduced to shells of their former selves.

The networks do accept the fact that they should not air some theatrical films. They 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 and run with an advisory.

#### **b. 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. Last year, of the 50 theatrical films we felt raised concerns, 22 or 44% did not use advisories. This year, 10 of the 33 (30%) theatrical films raising concerns did not issue advisories. This demonstrates a greater willingness to use advisories on films calling for parental caution.

As discussed previously, advisories alone would have made a difference with **The Firm** or **The Crush**. We can find no explanation for how films such as **Edward Scissorhands**, **Batman Returns** and **Final Analysis** could run without an advisory. They are far more violent than many films that did contain advisories. Last year the film **Deceived** raised concerns primarily because of the lack of an advisory. This season ABC reran **Deceived**, this time with an advisory, and it did not raise concerns.

Fox, because of its earlier starting time for films, uses advisories much more liberally than the other networks. Advisories are used consistently on Fox and are likely to be spoken or printed three times during the course of a movie. Although Fox does freely issue advisories, it would be preferable if it added an hour of prime time and began its more violent theatrical films and television movies at 9:00 p.m. rather than at 8:00 p.m.

### **c. 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 not to have to start the 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 nine times this past season. Prime time was extended for the following films:

**City Slickers** (ABC)  
**Indecent Proposal** (ABC)  
**Jurassic Park** (NBC)  
**Last Action Hero** (ABC)  
**The Last of the Mohicans** (ABC)  
**Lethal Weapon 3** (ABC)  
**Patriot Games** (ABC)  
**The Rookie** (ABC)  
**Terminator 2** (ABC)

Of the networks that extended prime time to accommodate a theatrical film, ABC was responsible for eight of the nine times. ABC is to be commended for being the network most willing to ensure that action films are shown as late as possible in their schedule. Last season CBS ran the two-and-a-half hour **Silence of the Lambs** at 9:00 p.m and extended prime time 30 minutes for the film. This season CBS reran the film but instead started it at 8:30 p.m. and ended it at 11:00 p.m.

The biggest time slot issue concerns the Fox network. On the one hand, Fox does routinely issue advisories. Yet on the other, it is forced to 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. Running 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.

\* 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 story line, 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 the networks, and it is the job of each promotion 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.

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 there are so many hours available at

exactly the right time in the summer to promote the new fall schedule. This is why NBC invested close to \$500 million in the summer 1996 Olympics and over \$1 billion in the next several Olympic Games (not including CBS's broadcasting 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 the context and only feature the violence. We examined several thousand promotions. Last year, 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 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 definition, 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 rather than alienating viewers, violence attracts them to the program.

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. The promo becomes little more than isolated and disconnected scenes of sex and violence. With so little time, the easiest things to feature are those that require little explanation: 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 fist fights. 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.

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 intermittently

dispersed through 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 frequently are run during programs geared for children or on completely non-violent shows. Even shows that are virtually free of violence are promoted 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 Last Season*

The section of promotions in last year's report concluded that this was probably an easy area for the networks to correct and we were right. This season there has been substantial improvement in all areas of on-air promotions, with the exception of advertisements for theatrical films which are not produced in house by the networks.

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 sanitized of promotions or commercials. The purpose of the promotion section in last year's report was to shine a light on this important area of network programming. This is one of the most beneficial reasons to have an outside monitor who looks at network programming from a different perspective and through a different lens than the networks use to look at themselves.

Just the fact that promotion 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 did. All four networks convened their respective promotion staffs after the publication of last year's 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 this year's promotions. Once again we feel this demonstrates the benefit and value in 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 this year to find promotions that raised any of the issues discussed in last year's report. There simply were far fewer issue-raising promotions. The on-air promotions that still raise some important concerns are found in the area of advertisements for theatrical films. These are identified and discussed in this year's report.

Still, we are impressed at the efforts that have been made over the past year. In general, this area of network programming is now under control and being dealt with effectively.

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

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

As has been discussed, it is very difficult to incorporate context into a promotion. The goal of a promo is to grab the potential viewer's attention. Revealing the story line takes a great deal of time and is seldom the most effective means for grabbing the attention of viewers. What grabs viewers' immediate interest are scenes of exciting action, many of which are violent: car crashes, chases, fist fights 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.

The constant barrage of action seen in promo after promo raises concern. A viewer watching for an entire evening is typically bombarded with many more problematic scenes of violence in the advertisements and promotions than in the programs he or she is watching. This bombardment usually contains only the violence and none of the important contextual elements such as consequences or punishment of the violence.

Some of the best examples of this problem can be found in advertisements for theatrical films about to be released. Many of the most popular and expensive theatrical films feature action and adventure. Many of them contain a large number of very graphic violent scenes that are part of the basic story. When these films appear on television at some time in the future, many of these scenes of intense violence will be edited out. The network faces the dilemma of airing advertisements for films in movie theaters that contain scenes of violence that would not be allowed in regular network programming. Advertisements for some of the most talked about films of the past year fall into this category: **Assassins**, **Broken Arrow**, **Judge Dredd** and **Rumble in the Bronx**, to name just a few.

Some advertisements and promotions illustrating lack of context:

#### **Assassins** (aired during ABC's **Coach** 9/26/95)

This is a violent ad for a violent film. It follows a McDonald's ad geared to young children about a young boy. Although the **Assassins** advertisement lasts for only 28 seconds, it is divided into 37 different clips. The ad moves at break-neck speed and only conveys that the film contains an extreme amount of violence. The only information provided by the announcer is, "In any business you have to fight to stay on top but, for an assassin, the competition can be murder." Though catchy, the narrative provides little context for the film. The advertisement features guns in 22 scenes as well as several shootings, breaking glass and at least three explosions.

It is impossible to discern from the ad anything about the film other than that it is full of violent action. Its quick-cutting style and abundance of guns and explosions only serve to numb the viewer. It is a jarring juxtaposition to the situation comedy **Coach**.

#### **Under Siege** (aired during ABC's **A Case for Life** 2/18/96)

A somewhat violent promotion for ABC's airing of this Steven Seagal theatrical film, it appeared during a television movie that was about a woman's pro-life stance. Although the promo contains many scenes of action and the use of guns, it is considerably tamer than what was seen on the four networks last season. While the promo makes an attempt to convey some of the context of a nuclear warship taken hostage, it is still filled with guns, fights and explosions.

#### **Judge Dredd** and **Glass Shield** (aired on ABC's **NYPD Blue** on 12/12/95)

An advertisement for the simultaneous release of these two films on home video, this promotion also features non-stop action from the two films. It is impossible to discern any context or story line, other than the promise of intense, graphic action and violence. All the viewer is told about Judge Dredd is, "Judgment Day has come to video. Sylvester Stallone lays down the law in this non-stop action hit." Then viewers see and hear Stallone say, "Throw down your weapons or be prepared to be judged." A man holding a large gun fires and responds, "Judge this!!" Then the announcer concludes, "In the future, justice goes by one name... Judge Dredd." In all, the viewer sees 24 clips of gun fights, explosions, fist fights and other types of action. This makes up the first 15 seconds of the double video ad.

The second half, for **Glass Shield**, conveys even less context or story. The announcer reveals that "Ice Cube and Lori Petty star in a no-holds-barred action thriller." Little else is apparent about **Glass Shield** other than that it is filled with gun play, broken glass and action.

#### **Broken Arrow** (aired during CBS's **Rescue 911** on 2/15/96)

Another ad for a forthcoming theatrical film, this too is filled with explosions, guns and fighting without providing any of the film's context. The viewer learns nothing except that there will be violence. Clearly, producers of films such as this one must believe that their stories and plot lines are of little interest to the movie-going public. There is no way to distinguish this action film from others, except by the stars and the quantity of explosions. This advertisement ran during a non-violent show that appeals to children.

### **Lethal Weapon and Cybill** (aired during CBS's **A Promise for Carolyn** on 1/16/96)

This was one of the most creative on-air promotions seen all season. Through an unusual juxtaposition of humor and action, the impact of the violence in this promo was diffused. This cleverly promoted both **Lethal Weapon II** and CBS's popular sitcom starring Cybill Shepherd, **Cybill**.

The promo begins as a typical action film advertisement by showing the stars of the film. The announcer says in an action-filled voice, "GIBSON, GLOVER," and then adds, "CYBILL?" juxtaposing the comedy actress with the action stars. Scenes from **Cybill** are intercut with scenes from **Lethal Weapon** to create the impression that the sitcom is actually an action film. After Gibson and Glover are shown shooting their guns, Cybill is seen in her backyard with an out-of-control hose that is a humorous counterpart to the action stars' guns.

This is an extremely effective way to showcase the action in **Lethal Weapon II** while at the same time poke fun at it by integrating it with **Cybill**. It is a highly creative, welcome change from what is usually used to promote action films.

### Bell Helmets Advertisement (aired on NBC's **Fresh Prince** on 11/20/95)

This is a very unusual advertisement. All that is heard during this ad is a person whistling off-screen. On screen are the words, "Humans are the only species with the ability to reason. And sometimes, they even use it." These words appear around scenes of people wearing helmets in serious motorcycle, race car, bicycle and boat accidents. The first violent scene features a race car crashing off the track, flipping several times and bursting into flames. Then a motorcyclist wearing a helmet falls off his bike and bounces on the pavement. In the third clip a man on a bicycle crashes and rolls on the ground. Then another motorcyclist flies into the air and crashes on the ground. The viewers see several more violent accidents. Then the Bell Helmets name appears on the screen accompanied by a helmet-covered brain and the slogan, "Courage for your head." This ad demonstrates that violent scenes can be used to make a positive statement, here about safety and individual responsibility.

### **b. Violent Promos in Children's or Other Inappropriate Time Periods**

It is not uncommon to see promotions or advertisements featuring violence during shows or time periods aimed at children. These promos are run on shows that rarely contain any issue-raising scenes of violence. A family might sit together in front of the television watching such family-oriented programming as **Rescue 911** or **Fresh Prince** and, without warning, be confronted with violent promos. These families 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 protect him- or herself from promotions or advertisements containing intense scenes of violence that may occur during these programs. Happily, we saw far less of this problem this season than last. This 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:

**It Was Him Or Us** (aired during CBS's **Walton Thanksgiving Reunion** on 11/17/95)

Although containing relatively few scenes of violence, this promotion seemed an ill-suited choice to air during a Walton family Thanksgiving reunion. Advertising a television movie based on a violent theme (see television movie section), the promo contained a scene of someone smashing in a car's windshield with what appears to be a baseball bat and another scene of a woman holding a gun. It is an intense, fast-paced ad that is very violent.

**The Cold Heart of a Killer** (aired during CBS's **Can't Hurry Love** on 1/8/96)

Another violent promo, this one aired during CBS's situation comedy, **Can't Hurry Love**. The promo for **The Cold Heart of a Killer** features a man on a sled hitting a tree at high speed, guns and several menacing scenes of a large knife poised for attack.

**Halloween** (aired during ABC's **Hocus Pocus** on 10/28/95)

This promotion for a very violent slasher film was not aired by the ABC television network, but rather by its locally owned station, KABC. This is a problem that was seen several times last year during **ABC's Family Movie**.

The promo contains several scenes of intense violence featuring knives and a terrified woman in a closet about to be attacked. This promo demonstrates some of the problems the network faces in dealing with on-air promotions. **Halloween** was not even shown on the ABC television network. The local station, KABC, scheduled the film after the 11:00 p.m. news. The local station, however, does get several spots in prime time which it uses to promote its purely local schedule. These promotions are inserted into prime time without the knowledge or consent of the television network. While this is done all the time by independent affiliates, it is easily controlled in this case, since ABC owns both the network and the local station. This same problem was seen several other times this season, for example, when KABC promoted **Nitti the Enforcer** during **Encino Woman** (on 4/20/96) and when it promoted **Street Crimes** during **The Legend of the Ruby Silver** (on 1/13/96).

**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. 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 having 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. This area of concern also disappeared almost completely this television season. We had to look long and hard before we could find even a few examples, and those were tame and minor:

#### **The John Larroquette Show** (aired during NBC's **JAG** on 9/23/95)

Although not a serious concern, this promotion for the non-violent **John Larroquette Show** managed to find two instances of physical action to feature. The first shows Larroquette punched squarely in the face and the second shows him being kicked by an angry woman.

These scenes are not problems, but they were the only moments of physical comedy in a 30-minute program and they found their way onto this on-air promotion.

#### **Ellen** and **The Drew Carey Show** (aired during ABC's **Champions of Magic** on 5/6/96)

Once again, these are not serious scenes of violence, but someone sifted through 60 minutes of programming and found two moments of physical action to feature in this promo. The scene from **Ellen** warns, "It's the wedding disaster of the year," as **Ellen** in her bridesmaid's dress punches a man in the face and then pushes him away from her. It is played completely for laughs. The clip from **Drew Carey** shows a man pushing his hand into **Carey's** face. It too is played for laughs.

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

The four broadcast television networks all have promotion 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. Many times it is the affiliate that will schedule 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 which schedule some of the promos just as it is the affiliates which 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” 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 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 spots 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 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 4-6 year olds. Around 9:00 a.m., the schedule changes to accommodate older brothers and sisters when the more action-oriented shows are broadcast. Both last year and this, 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. 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 now require 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 they believe qualifies as educational children's television.

Saturday morning children's television is dominated by the new player, the Fox Network. Entering the children's programming arena in 1990, the ratings of the Fox Children's Network exceed that of all the other networks combined. 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**. This season the new UPN and WB networks have 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 in children's programming. 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 emulate. Although Fox argues that **The Power Rangers** is no different than other Saturday morning programs, it has become a lightning rod for much attention and criticism.

As in the other areas of broadcast television, the 1995-96 season saw an improvement in children's television. Fewer shows raise serious concern about the way they portray action and violence. There will be a direct comparison to last season after the 1995-96 season is examined.

We monitored children's television programs exactly the same way we examined prime time television. Every show was watched a minimum of four times. 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.

After examining the networks' Saturday morning schedule, we developed categories for the various types of violence in the shows. A reminder: NBC does not broadcast for kids on Saturday morning and its teenage programming raises no concerns in the area of violence. Our three classifications of violence in Saturday morning programming are slapstick, tame combat violence and sinister combat violence.

### *1. Slapstick*

This is the slapstick comedic violence that has been watched by children on television and in movies for generations. Typified by the classic Warner Bros. cartoons such as Bugs Bunny or Wile E. Coyote and Roadrunner, this type of violence is lighthearted and hyperbolic with comedy as the main theme and purpose. The slapstick cartoons of 1996 are tamer than those of the 1950s and 1960s. The slapstick is never realistic with regard to the violent actions themselves or the consequences. 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 and 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 destructive weapons as shotguns or pistols. In large part, those have been eliminated from the cartoon world.

Examples of cartoons that feature slapstick violence are:

### **Winnie the Pooh (ABC)**

Not surprisingly, this newest incarnation of **Winnie the Pooh** is a virtually non-violent cartoon. The small amount of violence that is present is always slapstick, typically accidental and never mean-spirited. The most serious instance of violence monitored in this program occurred when Pooh and his friends, frightened by a horror movie, imagine themselves to be pursued by a vicious “slusher.” In a paranoid panic, they set a trap for the “slusher” to which their unfortunate friend Eeyore falls victim, resulting in a piano falling on him. This act is heard but not seen. Only the aftermath is shown (Eeyore beneath the rubble of a smashed piano). This is frequently the way in which more extreme violence is portrayed in the show. More typical of the type of violence in this show is Pooh bumping into trees and Tigger pouncing on his friends.

### **Dumb and Dumber (ABC)**

**Dumb and Dumber** is an example of a cartoon version of a popular movie. Each episode features the two main characters, Harry and Lloyd, accompanied by their pet beaver, in some new sticky situation. Many times they are pursued by someone who wants to do them harm. Inevitably Harry’s and Lloyd’s stupidity proves to be their greatest asset as it generally leads to the resolution of the very problem it got them into. Like the movie, the cartoon contains slapstick violence. It is typically accidental and never causes harm. For example, in an episode aired on 12/2/95, both Harry and Lloyd dream that they are “sumo gladiators.” In the dream, Harry knocks Lloyd down with a pugil stick, reminiscent of the program **American Gladiators**. Lloyd is not hurt and complains, “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up.”

### **Bump in the Night (ABC)**

Not a cartoon, **Bump in the Night** is a claymation production. It features the adventures of Mr. Bumpy (a loud-mouthed but good-spirited monster who lives under the bed) and his friends Molly Coddle (a rag comfort doll) and Squishington (a blue thing you put in the toilet). The obnoxious and oftentimes gross Mr. Bumpy is accompanied by the level-headed Molly and mild-mannered Squishington as each episode finds them facing some sort of minor dilemma. For example, in an episode on 11/11/95, Mr. Bumpy’s rotting teeth come out of his mouth and try to bite him and the others, only to be stopped when Mr. Bumpy takes a toothbrush to them. The

show is completely comedic, principally features slapstick and a smattering of tame combat violence and raises no issues. Occasionally, the program also features some educational aspects. In an episode on 12/2/95, Mr. Bumpy explains gravity and provides a brief profile of life in Japan.

### **The Bugs Bunny and Tweety Show (ABC)**

This program is an hour-long showcase featuring the classic Warner Bros. cartoons. It is obviously slapstick violence and raises all of the same old issues that cartoon violence is famous for. What is interesting is that watching these older cartoons demonstrates how slapstick violence in cartoons has changed in recent history (see discussion in the introduction to the slapstick category). In the cartoons featured in **The Bugs Bunny and Tweety Show**, characters are frequently bombarded with what would be, in real life, extremely harmful, even lethal, violence. Examples are Porky Pig being hit in the head with the dull end of an axe blade, Sylvester the cat falling off a building and into an open manhole, Elmer Fudd and Yosemite Sam shooting hunting rifles and pistols at Bugs Bunny, and Bugs Bunny shooting an arrow into the rear end of another rabbit.

### **What-a-mess (ABC)**

One of the least violent programs in the ABC Saturday morning line up, **What-a-mess** is a cartoon about a dog named "What-a-mess." The show features only very small doses of violence, all of which are slapstick in nature. Such incidents as What-a-mess tripping on a roller skate or another dog grabbing him by the scruff of the neck is as serious as the violence ever gets on this show.

### **Adventures of Hyperman (CBS)**

Aired in the network's earliest time slot, **Hyperman** is a lighthearted, comedic cartoon about a dimwitted, but good-natured, super hero from outer space and his dog sidekick, Studpuppy. In each episode, Hyperman protects Earth from some silly threat, usually an evil plan concocted by one of his several enemies. The show always contains some educational aspect delivered in the form of Hyperman's far more intelligent friend Emma giving him a lesson about Earth. For example, in an episode on 12/9/95, Hyperman learns a lesson about the dangers of ultraviolet rays and also about meteorology. The violence contained in the program is clearly slapstick with occasional elements of tame combat violence (to be discussed below). The slapstick usually takes the form of Hyperman running into something or an object falling on him or one of the villains. It does not usually pose any sort of issue. However, some of the slapstick does reach a more moderate level of intensity. For example, in an episode that aired on 11/25/95 the evil villain Introbe's sidekick, Kid Chaos, is hit in the face with an iron and repeatedly smashed over the head with an oversized mallet. While this is obviously played for laughs and Chaos is not seriously hurt by the assaults, the violent act is more severe than is typical in slapstick programming.

### **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 plains of Africa. Timon, the meerkat, is the wild and crazy scatterbrained leader of the duo while Pumbaa, the warthog, is his more level-headed and thoughtful supporter. The violence in the show is nothing but slapstick and does not raise any issues. It is never mean-spirited and is typically accidental. Also, to the program's credit, it often contains some pro-social theme about helping others.

### **Santo Bugito (CBS)**

**Santo Bugito** is one of the least violent cartoons in the CBS Saturday morning lineup, if not all of Saturday morning. A comedic cartoon, the story revolves around the inhabitants of an insect colony in Texas called Santo Bugito. In each episode the group of bugs deals with some kind of minor dilemma such as when a crooked mosquito attorney cons everyone into suing one another, or when the colony fears that a family of killer bees will move into their peaceful town. Each dilemma is dealt with in a peaceful manner and any violence that does occur is slapstick in nature and raises no issues at all.

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

This is a new rendition of the classic cartoon **Felix the Cat**. Similar to the old cartoon, the show chronicles Felix's various adventures, but with a surreal twist. It is indeed, as the title indicates, more "twisted" than its predecessor. Most of Felix's adventures include a more sinister, threatening villain than is typical of comedy/adventure cartoons. This is largely due to the more demented edge now present. It also contains a degree of violence, usually slapstick in nature. Sometimes mild fighting does occur. However, even this combat is generally composed of slapstick. No issues are raised by this program.

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

Another one of the cartoon versions of a Jim Carrey film, **Ace Ventura: Pet Detective** is a comedic show, employing a healthy dose of bodily function humor and very little violence. All of the violence that does exist is slapstick and none of it presents any issues of concern.

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

This is an educational program featuring Beakman, a wacky scientist who answers questions mailed in by viewers and explains why things work the way they do. Beakman is assisted by his two friends, a woman and an overgrown rat. **Beakman's World** contains a strong element of slapstick humor, some of which is mildly violent but of no concern.

### **Garfield and Friends (CBS)**

This show features the adventures of Garfield the cat and his friends. It contains minimal violence that is exclusively slapstick and poses no problems.

### **Casper the Friendly Ghost (Fox)**

This new incarnation of the classic cartoon is very much like the original with regard to violence. It contains only small amounts of minor slapstick violence. Typical fare includes ghosts pinching and stretching one another abusively but in a way that does not appear to harm or hurt.

### **Bobby's World (Fox)**

An animated program based on a character from comedian Howie Mandell's stand-up routine, **Bobby's World** follows the escapades of an imaginative little boy named Bobby. The program seldom contains any violence. When it does, it is always slapstick. The program raises no issues of concern.

### **Eekstravaganza! (Fox)**

A comedic program about a hair-brained cat named Eek, this program also features two other cartoons. One is about dinosaurs, and the other is about a mysterious life form made up of dirty clothes named Klutter. All of the programs showcase only slapstick violence, none of which presents any issues of concern.

## ***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 to wrap up the show. 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:

### **Free Willy** (ABC)

Based on the popular film and its sequel, **Free Willy** centers around young Jesse and his whale companion, Willy. Jesse and Willy are part of a conservationist group that sails around the world protecting the environment and saving animals threatened by civilization. There is very little violence and that which does occur would be classified as tame combat violence. There is also an educational aspect to this program, which always contains pro-environmental messages.

### **Reboot** (ABC)

This is the most action-oriented cartoon in the ABC Saturday morning line-up. Created with computer animation, **Reboot** is visually fascinating and possesses some of the highest production values in all of Saturday morning children's programming. The setting for **Reboot** is Mainframe, a fictional world that exists within a computer that is inhabited by various programs and bytes of information. In each episode, the main character Bob, a "guardian program," and his friends Dot Matrix and Enzo, work to protect Mainframe from the evil plans of the two principal villains Megabyte and Hexidecimal. Both Megabyte and Hexidecimal are extremely sinister villains who wish to destroy Mainframe and recreate it in their own images. Although some may argue that **Reboot** contains educational elements in its use of technical computer jargon, it is, at its core, an action/adventure program that only uses the jargon to interest children and promote the futuristic feel of the show.

In terms of violence, classifying **Reboot** is difficult because it features some fairly intense scenes of combat between good and darkly evil characters, thereby making it like a sinister combat violence program. However, more in the fashion of tame combat violence, these battle scenes are not characterized by non-stop, prolonged fighting. In some instances, violence is avoided altogether by working things out verbally as was done in an episode aired on 3/2/96. Sometimes violence occurs within the context of a computer game in which Bob will compete. However, the heroes do not exhibit any zeal for combat nor is the violence prolonged or lethal.

Beyond the fight scenes, **Reboot** features interesting story lines and characters, as well as some comedic aspects. There are not any real issues in this program other than that violence always does occur within the story, usually once in the middle of the program and again at the end; and that the extremely evil villains, particularly Hexidecimal, could be scary enough to frighten very young children.

## **Hypernauts (ABC)**

This is one of the most interesting programs in the Saturday morning line-up. Rather than featuring animation, it consists of exclusively live action and would be best characterized as “Star Trek for kids.” Appearing in ABC’s last Saturday morning time slot, it clearly targets older children as is evidenced by the more sophisticated story lines and developed characters. The program chronicles the adventures of a group of teenage astronauts from the future called Hypernauts as they travel through space with their alien compatriot Kulai. Together, the Hypernauts attempt to warn the rest of the universe of the Triad Armada, an imperial armada bent on conquering the universe. While violence does exist in some episodes, the show does not rely on it.

The program often uses fast-paced chase scenes instead of violence in order to achieve a high degree of action. The occasional violence that does occur is usually similar to that found in “Star Wars,” involving spacecrafts exchanging laser fire in a dogfight. Because a few episodes of the program do involve somewhat intense scenes of violence, which can become slightly prolonged, it cannot be labeled non-violent. The violence is relevant to the story and is not “violence for the sake of violence.” In one episode, aired on 3/2/96, the wise Kulai, who serves as an advisor to the other Hypernauts, delivers an anti-violence message. After one character expresses delight at the awesome power of a new weapon, Kulai declares that “weapons are the weakest defense of all.”

## **Aladdin (CBS)**

Although violence is not used throughout each episode, **Aladdin** usually features a violent conflict in the middle of the episode and always ends with a climactic battle scene. The cartoon is slightly darker than other Disney cartoons such as **The Little Mermaid** (no longer on network television) and **The Lion King’s Timon and Pumbaa**. In each episode, some sort of evil threatens the kingdom of Agrabah and it is up to Aladdin and his friends to stop it. Some conventional forms of violence do occasionally occur such as sword fights and fist fights. However, more often the violence is comprised of the genie and other magic beings “zapping” one another with non-lethal force. The slightly darker tone of the program, as well as the heavier emphasis on conflict, seems designed to appeal to the older children entering the audience as the morning progresses.

## **The Mask (CBS)**

**The Mask** is one of the three cartoons this season based on a Jim Carrey movie. Little more than a cartoon version of the film, the story is about Stanley Ipkus, a shy, mild-mannered bank employee who, when he wears a magical mask, is transformed into a wild and crazy, clownish “superhero” called “The Mask.” As “The Mask,” Stanley wards off evildoers with an array of bizarre objects. Hand-to-hand combat and conventional weapons are never used. The conflict always contains heavy elements of slapstick. “The Mask” always employs goofball tactics that embarrass and subdue rather than injure his foes. The only issue that arises here is that the

violent behavior of “The Mask,” albeit outlandish, is glorified, whereas the mild-mannered, non-violent disposition of Stanley is frequently mocked and characterized as wimpish.

### **Spiderman** (Fox)

Based on one of Marvel Comics’ most popular comic books, **Spiderman** became a part of the Fox Kids line-up midway through last season and has quickly become one of Saturday morning’s most popular cartoons. Chronicling the adventures of the web-spinning superhero, the program features story lines which span several episodes.

The program is full of wall-to-wall action. Most of the violence is committed by Spiderman’s enemies as they try to stop the superhero. Spiderman always stays one step ahead of the villains, dodging blows and spinning webs to stay out of harm’s way. Ultimately, the hero prevails, wrapping up his foes in a bundle of webbing and leaving them to the proper authorities.

True to its action/adventure genre, **Spiderman** is oftentimes fast paced, with the battle and chase scenes comprising a very large portion of the show. However, uncharacteristically for its genre, the characters are surprisingly human. Peter Parker, Spiderman’s true identity, is a college student who struggles with the real-life problems of romantic relationships, caring for his elderly Aunt May, getting good grades, and paying the bills, all the while being a superhero. He is an extremely likable character with a good disposition who does what he does to help society, not because he likes to fight.

The violence itself is not like that of other action-oriented cartoons either. There is far less emphasis on punching, kicking or other forms of hand-to-hand combat. Instead, there is far more laser gun fire and explosions, which Spiderman is usually evading. Seldom the aggressor, Spiderman never tries to severely injure or kill his opponents, only tie them up and subdue them. It is also commendable that Spiderman never tries to take the law into his own hands and always leaves his captured enemies to the proper authorities.

All in all, **Spiderman** demonstrates how an action-packed cartoon can be entertaining and popular while not raising serious issues of concern. The one time in which the program did venture into the realm of sinister combat violence was on 10/7/95, when the X-Men were guest stars.

### **The Tick** (Fox)

This show combines elements of fighting typical of superhero programs with a comedic, satirical twist, creating a spoof of the genre. The Tick is a seven-foot tall, 400-pound, blowhard crime fighter whose small brain is in stark contrast to his huge muscles. With the help of a moth-suited former accountant turned sidekick named Arthur, the Tick battles offbeat super villains such as Chairface, Mother of Invention and Proto Clown. For example, Proto Clown is an enormous monster clown designed to be the funniest clown in the world, but with one small problem: he

hates to be laughed at. The program is comedic and it only uses the combat to make audiences laugh. The satire is hard to miss and the violence is never very threatening.

### **Goosebumps** (Fox)

Originally only an occasional member of the Fox Kids line-up, **Goosebumps** has moved into a permanent time slot on Saturday morning. A live-action program based on the popular children's books by author R.L. Stine, the show is best described as "**X-Files** for kids." It combines creepy stories with high production values to create a very scary children's show. Preceded by a special Goosebumps advisory which reads "Goosebumps is rated GB-7 because it may be too spooky for children under 7," each episode tells a new story about young teens and the mysterious and eerie predicaments in which they find themselves. In the end, no one is ever hurt but, in the style of such shows as **The Twilight Zone**, the program typically ends with some sort of bizarre twist, designed to leave the viewer at least mildly unsettled.

Currently the most popular children's show on television, **Goosebumps** is a well done show that lives up to its name by giving viewers the promised goosebumps. It is dark, thrilling and a little bit disturbing without ever showing anything more violent than someone grabbing another person. Instead, because of the show's intensity, one often has the impression of pending violence or danger without any violence actually occurring.

### **3. Sinister Combat Violence**

These are the programs that raise the greatest concerns with regard to 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 the program and the plot only provides 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. This is where 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 than necessary and feature much more hand-to-hand combat and more 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.

We found four Saturday morning programs that fell into the category of sinister combat violence. They are as follows:

### **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (CBS)**

This is the most problematic program in the CBS Saturday morning lineup. It contains much hand-to-hand combat, usually combining punching and kicking with a wide array of weapons including numchuks, swords, staffs and laser guns. Without the fight scenes, this program would be considerably shorter in length and probably of little interest to its current audience. The turtles always solve their problems with fighting and always seem to enjoy it, sometimes egging on their opponents. It is clearly violence for the sake of violence.

### **Masked Rider (Fox)**

A new live action program from the makers of **Mighty Morphin Power Rangers**, **Masked Rider** chronicles the adventures of Dex, an alien prince sent forth to protect Earth from the evil forces of Count Dregon. On Earth, Dex is taken in by a kindly suburban family and in each episode learns more about Earth's culture and customs. Whenever Dregon unleashes one of his evil "insectivores," Dex transforms into the Masked Rider, a bug-like, sword-wielding warrior proficient in martial arts, and does battle with the creature.

Very similar in style and premise to **Mighty Morphin Power Rangers**, **Masked Rider** possesses some subtle differences which make it less problematic. Fight scenes between the show's hero and the monster are considerably shorter than those found in **Power Rangers** and also rarely show the impact of blows. Consequently, battles in **Masked Rider** consist of a lot of jumping around. Also, during the fights lasers are typically fired and many explosions occur sending characters flying backwards through the air. Although at first glance, these shows might seem remarkably similar, there are distinct differences that make one a much greater concern. While the fight scenes in **Masked Rider** are definitely an integral part of the show's appeal to children, the program places less emphasis on the violence and does not illustrate it as graphically. However, it is still a program built around violent conflicts. Although **Masked Rider** is definitely a sinister combat violence show, it is the tamest show in the category.

### **X-Men (Fox)**

Another cartoon based on an enormously popular Marvel Comic book, **X-Men** is a cornerstone of the Fox Kids Saturday morning line up. The series revolves around a renegade team of mutant superheroes, each one possessing some super-human ability which allows them to be

proficient warriors. The stories span several episodes and in large part are derived from the actual comic book.

The heroes are extremely dark and brooding. The only apparent joy in their lives comes from the frequent battles they engage in against some supernatural enemy. The quintessential example of this can be found in the character of Wolverine, the most popular and glorified individual on the team. He is a brutal warrior, equipped with razor-sharp claws with which he zealously attacks and tries to tear apart his foes. Frequently, he expresses his extreme enthusiasm for engaging in combat.

Episode after episode, the **X-Men** engage in prolonged, fast-paced battles featuring laser guns, power beams, explosions, punching and kicking, swords and other bladed weapons. Few physical consequences are ever explored as both heroes and villains alike attempt to destroy rather than merely defeat one another. The characters and the violence are very threatening with a strong malevolent undercurrent running throughout the show.

Although the violence within the program is extremely fantastic, with lots of laser beams and futuristic technology, the sentiment which surrounds the conflict condones and celebrates the viciousness of the characters and their violent behaviors.

### **The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers and Power Rangers Zeo (Fox)**

Possibly the most famous children's program on the air, **The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers** has spawned a number of other live action children's programs featuring martial arts. However, **Power Rangers** has managed to remain on the top of the hill, continuing to be a very successful show. Much of the initial fervor that surrounded the program has subsided. In an attempt to recapture some of the excitement that once was, the program reinvented itself midway through this season as **Power Rangers Zeo**.

Featuring new cast members with different costumes and greater strength and fighting abilities, the new and improved Rangers face a new, more powerful enemy, the Machine King and his mechanical minions. As was the case in each episode of the program's previous incarnation, the villain sends assorted monsters and his humanoid henchmen to Earth in an attempt to destroy the Rangers, thereby clearing the way for him to take over the world. Without fail, the Rangers are initially overwhelmed by the monster and are forced to regroup and form a new strategy. When they meet again, in a final confrontation, the Rangers defeat the monster who is then, through the technology of the Machine King, enlarged and reinvigorated. It is at this point that the Power Rangers call upon their "Zords," enormous fighting robots which they then pilot to do battle with the larger, more powerful creature. The super-sized beings then clash and the Power Rangers inevitably emerge victorious.

Although there are some differences in the actual production of the programs--for example, improved production values in **Power Rangers Zeo**, an occasional different style of filming fight scenes and a greater comedic influence in the new rendition--the two versions of the program raise the same issues in terms of violence. Namely, the violent activity is the crux of the

show. This is evidenced by the lengthy scenes of combat that showcase heavy amounts of punching and kicking accompanied by invigorating and exciting music. The violence is extremely glorified and is always shown without consequences. The Rangers never appear to take physical conflict very seriously and, while not necessarily inviting it, never seem to try to avoid it.

Despite the fact that **Mighty Morphin Power Rangers** and **Power Rangers Zeo** are classified as sinister combat violence, we realize that calling these programs “sinister” seems to be a misnomer. The bright colors and extremely good-natured dispositions of the heroes make this program appear to be anything but sinister. However, this is indeed the best classification for these programs because they are little more than vehicles designed to showcase martial arts combat and are thus “violence for the sake of violence.” Peppered with moralistic messages about such topics as gender roles, teamwork and cooperation, the program attempts to teach young viewers important pro-social lessons about being good people. But it does so in a format that almost ensures that the lessons will be overshadowed by exciting violent interactions.

Also of issue is the fact that the program is live action rather than animation. This, coupled with the multi-ethnic composition of the team, makes it all the more likely for children to view the Power Rangers as role models worthy of being emulated. While this may be good in terms of social attitudes, it may also be detrimental in terms of dealing with conflict, for in each episode the heroes solve their problems with violence.

The problem is that these shows, which appeal to so many young children, are totally driven by combat. When we asked children what they like about **The Mighty Morphin Power Ranger** and **Power Rangers Zeo**, they did not respond that they appreciate the lessons about teamwork and cooperation. They inevitably said that they like the fighting.

#### ***4. Shows with Little or No Violence***

It is only fair that several shows be singled out for their constructive messages and lack of violence. The programs that contain no violence are:

##### **Fudge (ABC)**

This program is a live-action adaptation of the popular series of children’s books written by Judy Bloom. It features no violence at all and always contains some pro-social message for kids.

##### **Really Wild Animals (CBS)**

This program is a documentary-style nature show tailored for younger audiences. It features scenes of various types of animals in their habitats around the world. The only violence in this program is that which occurs in nature. None of the scenes, which typically consist of predators pursuing and eating other animals as part of the food chain, are particularly graphic or excessive. The program raises no issues.

### **Where on Earth is Carmen San Diego? (Fox)**

Featured in the network's earliest Saturday morning time slot, **Where on Earth is Carmen San Diego?** is based on a popular educational computer game that is frequently used in schools to teach geography. An action/adventure cartoon, the story revolves around Zak and Ivy, a brother and sister team of junior detectives who are in constant pursuit of the world's greatest thief, Carmen San Diego.

In each episode, the junior super sleuths chase Carmen around the world trying to thwart her plans and arrest her. Carmen is a non-violent character who seems to enjoy the game of cat and mouse between her and the duo. For the most part, fighting is virtually non-existent. However, in an episode that ran on 3/23/96, when challenged by two of Carmen's henchmen, Ivy suggests to Zak that they act like their "favorite TV action stars" and then delivers a flying kick to one of the thugs. But this is the most violent the program ever gets and, compared to most other programs, it is negligible.

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

Based on the comedy 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 determined to run his house with the same order that he ran his platoon, the program takes a dry, comedic look at life. There is virtually no violence in this show. The program relies more on dialogue and the quirks of life as its source of comedy than on what little slapstick violence it might contain. The show always incorporates some small kernel of wisdom, a little moral life lesson.

### **Attack of the Killer Tomatoes (Fox)**

Loosely based on the 1970s camp classic film of the same name, this cartoon is virtually non-violent. The only weapons used in the show are flying tomatoes. The basic plot of the program is that Chad and Tara, with the help of Chad's Uncle Wilbur, try to stop the mad scientist Doc Gangreen from taking over the world with his armies of killer tomatoes. The only thing which might be called violent is the act of killer tomatoes throwing themselves at people.

## ***5. Comparison to Last Year's Television Season***

The number of children's television programs featuring sinister combat violence on the four networks has dropped from seven to four. Of the seven sinister combat shows from last year, four are no longer part of the Saturday morning lineup. Three shows on this year's list are holdovers from last year and one of them has evidenced slight improvement. In no way is the

Saturday morning situation getting worse. In fact there are some promising signs and developments that encourage us to believe that next season the picture may be even brighter. As mentioned earlier, the broadcasters have agreed to a minimum of three hours of educational programming per week, and it is very likely that some, if not most, of that programming will end up on Saturday morning.

Sinister combat violence shows make up a smaller part of Saturday morning than last year. Shows with no violence and those featuring slapstick make up an increasingly large part of children's programming. On the whole this is a positive development.

We also noticed that cartoons are getting smarter. A larger percentage of them have incorporated some educational or cultural elements into the programs. Possibly the result of the success of Fox's **The Tick**, cartoons have attempted to become more sophisticated and have developed a smarter, drier sense of humor. This has the effect of entertaining on multiple levels of sophistication and of appealing to a wider array of age groups. It is a positive development that younger children can be entertained by non-violent or tame television along with their older brothers and sisters and, possibly, even their parents.

## H. The Emerging Broadcast Networks: UPN and WB

For many years television was dominated by the three television networks, ABC, CBS and NBC, which divided the national viewing audience among themselves. 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 platform 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** or **Totally Hidden Video** could use the same sets each week and 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 benefited 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 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 1996 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 did establish 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 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.

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 (now 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 **E.R.**, would be better placed on the WB network rather 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 been initially 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 the extraordinarily successful **Star Trek** franchise controlled by Paramount. **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. This season WB expanded to two nights per week and UPN to three nights. Like the Fox network in its early days, both

networks tried to attract younger audiences. This season UPN created some action programming that was somewhat more intense than what is found on the other networks. Next season both UPN and WB will focus more on comedy and, as Fox did in its early days, produce more programming starring and created for African Americans. In 1996 it still is not clear whether the two newest networks will survive and become successful. Many analysts believe that the two will eventually merge. 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, now owns CNN, TBS, The Cartoon Network and TNT after its new merger with Turner.

## ***1. Findings on UPN and WB***

As mentioned earlier, WB runs comedy almost exclusively. Although some of those comedies feature physical action, there were no issues of concern in the WB network comedy series. WB also airs a drama, **Savannah**, that was monitored 11 times, raising concerns only once.

### **a. Series Raising Frequent Concerns**

Unlike WB, UPN runs a considerable number of dramatic series. Some of these series did raise concerns. It is not surprising that as a new network trying to get noticed, UPN's dramas have a harder edge than those found on the other broadcast networks. This is something of which UPN is well aware. In fact, UPN's promotions tout the back-to-back programming of **The Sentinel** and **Swift Justice** on Wednesday night as "Lethal Wednesday." Using the same methodology that was applied to the broadcast networks, we found that four UPN television series raised frequent concerns. They are:

#### **The Sentinel**

Debuting in March in the 8:00 p.m. time slot, **The Sentinel** is the first hour of UPN's self-described "Lethal Wednesday." An action-oriented cop show, it chronicles the exploits of police detective Jim Ellison, a former U.S. Army captain whose sensory perceptions have been honed to perfection while living in isolation in a jungle in South America. Back in the city, with the assistance of an anthropology student/sidekick, Detective Ellison uses his amazing abilities to catch dangerous criminals and uphold the law.

Characteristic of its genre, **The Sentinel** is full of action and violence. Typically containing about eight scenes of prolonged and glorified violence in each episode, the show is very intense for its early time slot. Heavy gun play and multiple fist fights occur throughout the program so that the pace and feeling of danger never diminish. In the opening scene of the 4/10/96 episode, two characters drive into a gang's drug lab, pull out machine guns and shoot everyone there. The first victim is shown convulsing backwards as bullets riddle his body. It was one of the most graphic shootings seen in a television series all season. The problem is compounded by the fact that it occurred just after 8:00 p.m. After gunning everyone down, the two men proceed to douse the drug lab with gasoline and blow it up. While the scene had important and dramatic relevance to the story, the explicitness and graphic detail added little.

**The Sentinel** appears to follow a standard formula using several violent encounters to set up and maintain an increasingly dangerous situation, culminating in one intense, long fight scene between Ellison and the villain. Many of these scenes could be minimized or in some cases eliminated without damaging the story. To do so, however, would alter the program's *raison d'être*, which is based on these violent interactions. Of the eight times **The Sentinel** was monitored, it raised concerns seven times.

## Swift Justice

The second hour of UPN's "Lethal Wednesday" line-up, **Swift Justice** is an action drama. The program follows the exploits of Mac Swift, a discharged cop who becomes a private investigator, taking on cases that the police cannot handle. With the use of his old police connections and some strong-arm tactics, the daring and dapper Swift helps to get desperate people out of desperate situations.

One of the more violent series on television, **Swift Justice** contains a great amount of gunfire and fighting. In the debut show (3/13/96), the opening scene features a team of police raiding a drug operation. An extremely long gun fight breaks out, lasting four and a half minutes. In this lengthy scene, 11 people are shot and there are also 11 explosions. Many of the explosions were filmed in slow motion, accentuating the violence. All of this occurs before the opening credits. The scene has nothing to do with the rest of the episode. It only serves as an introduction to Swift, a no-nonsense ex-cop who is quick to take on and dispose of bad guys. This episode was preceded by an advisory warning of violent content.

Another episode on 3/20/96--which carried an advisory simply warning, "Viewer discretion advised"--opened with Swift preparing a wide assortment of guns for battle, breaking into a building, throwing a guard down a flight of stairs, slipping a noose over another guard's neck, and punching and choking a third guard into unconsciousness. He then ties up and threatens the three men, Russian roulette-style, until they divulge the information he needs. The scene finally ends when Swift puts his gun to the guard's head and pulls the trigger, finally revealing that his gun is unloaded. This scene, more than almost any other this season, advocated and glorified vigilante justice.

Although the stories that surround the violence of **Swift Justice** are frequently engaging and well done, the extremely glorified, very prolonged and often excessively brutal acts of violence raise as many concerns about violence as any series on television. The promotions for the show call Swift, "A hero so different, only one rule applies. No rules." It is clear that the violent and lawless actions of this glorified hero, quite willing to take justice into his own hands and to dispense punishment as he sees fit, raise some special concerns. Sometimes the program carries an advisory warning of violent content and sometimes it cautions viewer discretion. Most of the time, however, the program carries no advisory. The program was monitored nine times and raised concerns six times.

## Deadly Games

This program also airs at 8:00 p.m. Another action/adventure program, **Deadly Games** raises issues for different reasons than most other series. Appealing largely to children, the show tells the story of Gus, a young scientist who accidentally releases villains from a video game into the real world. With the help of his ex-wife, Gus tries to destroy a different bad guy each week until he finally reaches the main villain, Jackal. The format is similar to that of a video game in which players do battle against increasingly powerful enemies until they win by defeating the leader of the evil forces.

Outlandish in its premise and its portrayal of violence, **Deadly Games** is surprisingly comedic despite its ominous title. Because of this, the show would not be construed as serious or very threatening. What is of concern about the show is the violence of the premise and the lack of any consequences.

The theme of the program calls for violent interaction in each episode as Gus and his ex-wife try to destroy the lethal computer villains. Although the opponents are, in fact, video game creatures come to life, they look and act like human beings, albeit ones with strange, evil powers. In keeping with the video game theme of the show, each creature must be destroyed by some unique means ranging from being sprayed with brake fluid to being shot with a bit from a dentist's drill. Many of these methods of eradication are not terribly menacing and are sometimes amusing. However, in a two-part episode that began on 10/3/95, the villain could be defeated only by being shot in the chest with an arrow, a very real form of violence. Despite the extremely violent nature of this act, it was treated with the same lighthearted tone with which all the other, less brutal methods of execution were handled. In one scene the bad guy is shot directly in the chest with an arrow, which is seen protruding from his torso. The villain, though perturbed, is not hurt and continues with his actions. The unrealistic and nonchalant portrayal of what happens when one is shot by an arrow is troubling, particularly for a young audience. From a child's perspective, there is nothing unrealistic about that arrow to the chest. It is no different than if it had happened to a real person in a real act of violence.

The program is constructed around glorified violent interactions between Gus and the villains. Frequently, the villains kill innocent people as they carry out their evil plans. No psychological effects are ever explored. The average episode contains about ten acts of violence. Although many of the scenes are cartoonish and unrealistic, some are surprisingly intense. Very accessible household items are often used as weapons, in a program that appeals to young people. **Deadly Games** was examined 11 times and raised concerns on five occasions.

## **Cop Files**

An occasional series, **Cop Files** ran three times this season, twice at 9:00 p.m. and once at 9:30 p.m. Hosted by **Shaft's** Richard Roundtree, the program uses re-enactments of dramatic encounters between police and criminals. The show's look, style of narration and interviews with involved officers make it seem like a reality program such as **Real Stories of the Highway Patrol** or **America's Most Wanted**. However, the message at the beginning of the program advises: "The following stories are inspired by actual cases. In some instances, events have been changed for dramatic purposes." This program uses the style and techniques of reality programming but combines them with fictional elements. Obviously, **Cop Files** uses re-creations rather than actual film or tape.

Each monitored episode contained scenes of violence that raised concerns. Often prolonged and set to tense music, some scenes of the police apprehending criminals had the dramatic feel of a **Walker, Texas Ranger** episode. In an episode on 1/30/96, officers from the sheriff's department conduct a drug bust on a group of cowboy drug dealers. The bust contains several fight scenes which include diving tackles, kicks to the face and powerful punches.

Some of the depicted violent acts were quite graphic. Also on 1/30/96 criminals open fire on two police officers who had been pursuing them. After one cop is shot twice, the criminals are gunned down. Both criminals convulse as bullets pierce their bodies. Although the scene was relatively brief, it was one of the most graphic shootings in a series this season.

While it is clear that some violence is necessary to illustrate the danger the police often face, **Cop Files** is far more excessive and graphic than is called for by that dramatic need. Once again, it is important to realize that these are embellished re-creations of “real events.” The producers have many options about how to alter the story and how graphic to make the violence. Of the three times the show was monitored, it raised concerns all three times.

There were no programs on UPN that raised occasional concerns.

#### **b. Theatrical, Made-for-Cable and Television Movies**

There were no movies shown on the WB network. UPN ran five movies of various origin and four raised concerns about violence. They are:

##### **Body Bags (10/31/95)**

Broadcast on UPN on Halloween, **Body Bags** is a movie originally made in 1993 for the Showtime cable channel. An anthology of three horror stories that are introduced by a ghoulish mortician, the film aired at 8:00 p.m. and was preceded by an advisory that warned: “The following program contains scenes which some viewers may find objectionable. Discretion is advised.” Some of the scenes in **Body Bags** were extremely violent and graphic.

Similar in feel and theme (including the ghoulish host) to **Tales From the Crypt**, the gruesome **Body Bags** was even more grotesquely violent. The film contained over 40 graphic images and violent scenes.

The first vignette tells the story of a female gas station attendant’s battle to the death with a satanic, machete-wielding serial killer. She saves herself when she crushes the killer by lowering a car on him with a hydraulic jack. The second narrative is about a man who undergoes hair transplants to remedy baldness. Unfortunately for him, the implants turn out to be alien larvae which grow out of control and attack the man. In a graphic scene a doctor cuts open the arm of a patient revealing a mass of worms growing inside him. The third and final story relates the tale of a baseball player who undergoes an eye transplant after a car crash. He receives the eye of a serial killer, causing him to see the awful crimes committed by the killer. This brings him to the brink of insanity and he ultimately tries to resolve his dilemma by gouging out the eye with a pair of scissors. Although the scissor’s impact is edited out, it is still a horrific, disturbing scene of violence.

UPN purchased this cable movie just as other networks purchase theatrical films. It is the broadcaster's responsibility to edit very violent movies (or those filled with sex and mature language) created for another medium. **Body Bags**, like some action theatrical films, would be difficult to edit sufficiently for broadcast television.

### **Rainbow Drive** (1/16/96)

Another made-for-cable movie, **Rainbow Drive** is a film noire set in Los Angeles. It stars Peter Weller as a homicide detective who uncovers a police conspiracy while investigating a murder. In over his head, Weller's character becomes a target and must expose the villains before they kill him.

Airing at 8:00 p.m., **Rainbow Drive** was preceded by an advisory calling for parental discretion. There were two issues that raised concerns in this movie. The first concern was raised by a graphic photograph of a woman whose throat was slashed. An extremely graphic and vivid image, it could have been shown briefly. Instead, the camera lingers on the picture, emphasizing its violent nature.

Of greater concern was the brutality and viciousness of a fight scene that occurred about 90 minutes into the story. While the character Gallagher is watching a video, a man wielding a club attacks him from behind. The ensuing conflict is excessively brutal, featuring several ferocious punches and a kick to the groin. The scene concludes when Gallagher uses the assailant's own knife to stab him in the gut.

The movie ends with a very prolonged (over four minutes) chase and fight scene between Gallagher and the villains, ending with Gallagher killing everyone. All three of the scenes are contextually necessary, but they are handled in way that makes them excessively lengthy and gory.

### **Harrison: Cry of the City** (2/27/96)

A made-for-television movie, **Harrison: Cry of the City** is a crime drama about a retired British inspector who reluctantly decides to go to work for a high-powered lawyer. The lawyer is defending a drug dealer accused of murdering a revered narcotics officer. Running at 8:00 p.m. without an advisory, the film contained one scene of violence that raises concerns. The scene occurs one hour into the movie and features two men who get involved in a bar fight. After several punches are exchanged, one of the men is restrained by the other patrons of the bar. While he is being held, the other man severely beats him. The scene is unnecessarily long and brutal. Even when the point of the scene had been well made, the violence continued without contributing anything more to the story. **Harrison: Cry of the City** is an example of a film that would not have raised concerns if this single scene had been better edited.

### **Star Command (3/11/96)**

Another made-for-television movie on UPN, **Star Command** is a science fiction, space adventure that tells the story of a group of ensigns who recently graduated from a military academy. They are called into duty to combat five alien ships sent to destroy the inhabitants of an Earth colony on the planet Meraz. Airing at 8:00 p.m. without an advisory, **Star Command** contained many typical sci-fi space war scenes. There are some scenes of violence, however, that go too far. Some of these scenes feature hand-to-hand combat. One includes a man hanged in a torture scene that occurs in virtual reality.

In another scene, one of the ensigns is discovered to be a traitor when he attempts to initiate an unauthorized missile launch sequence. Three of the other officers try to stop him. What follows is a fairly prolonged, glorified fight scene that includes some vicious punches and kicks as well as brutal chokings and electrocutions. Although the overall tone of the violence is unrealistic and not very ominous, much of the violence was very exciting. The show should have been prefaced with an advisory. This program is likely to appeal to a young audience due to its time slot and science fiction fantasy theme. Much of the story relied on the heavy use of violence.

### **c. Children's Television**

At the moment UPN does not schedule children's television on Saturday morning but instead has become the first network to air programs on Sunday morning. WB, like the other networks, does run 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 seven programs monitored, three featured slapstick violence, three contained tame combat violence and only one featured sinister combat violence.

#### ***1) Slapstick***

##### **Sylvester and Tweety Mysteries (WB)**

This new Warner Bros. cartoon features Sylvester and Tweety Bird, along with Hector (a brutish bulldog and protector of Tweety), as both pets and members of Granny's team of private investigators. The group of super sleuths travel around the world, solving mysteries and thwarting bad guys and their nefarious plans. Less about the mystery and more about the hijinks which befall the characters, the show features a great amount of slapstick comedy, almost always at the expense of Sylvester. These unfortunate events typically happen to Sylvester as a result of his attempts to eat the adorable little Tweety Bird. Such assaults as being smashed over the head with objects like umbrellas, signs and jumbo hammers are typical punishments which befall Sylvester. He is also frequently blown up, run over by vehicles, punched by Hector and, in general, pummeled, never suffering any sort of real consequence.

In one episode, which aired on 1/20/96, Sylvester is repeatedly bashed with meat tenderizing hammers by several Japanese cooks who mistake him for a large fish. In the same episode,

Granny heartily whacks Hector, Sylvester, Tweety and the villain with the base of a microphone stand in an effort to break up a fight and subdue the villain. All of the violence is clearly played for laughs. As seems to be the case in all of the Warner Bros. cartoons which feature the classic characters, it is more destructive and violent than other slapstick cartoons, which tend to feature tamer forms of slapstick such as bumping into things and tripping.

### **Animaniacs (WB)**

One of the first of the new breed of Warner Bros. cartoons, **Animaniacs** has become the cornerstone of Warner Bros.'s animated programming. The program appears in the form of a showcase of vignettes featuring an array of 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 every episode, the threesome escape the confines of the tower to wreak comedic havoc and goof around on the lot. Other recurring characters are Skippy and Slappy (a cranky squirrel with a bad attitude and her sweet-hearted nephew) and Mindy and Buttons (a sweet but troublesome little girl and the dog that minds her).

Slapstick violence abounds throughout the program but it is also coupled with a very strong sense of wit, satire, and intelligence. The program is interesting and humorous on multiple levels and this appeals to a wider range of ages than most other cartoons. As appears to be the case with most Warner Bros. animated programs, the slapstick violence is more severe than is to be found in other slapstick cartoons. In an episode monitored on 2/3/96, the Animaniacs smash a piano and an anvil over the head of an enraged Attila the Hun. When neither seem to phase him, they finally blast him in the face with a cannon. As an example of the self-awareness exhibited by the program, two fuddy duddy network censors surface to condemn and reprimand the Animaniacs for their extremely violent behavior, claiming that it is too violent for children to watch. Instead they offer up a cloyingly cute cartoon as an example of what is suitable for young viewers. The smart aleck Animaniacs are obviously bored with the warm fuzzy programming and the censors ultimately turn on each other, pummeling one another in order to demonstrate what is inappropriate for children. This skit effectively mocks and belittles the issue of violence in children's programs and proffers the message that the debate that surrounds the matter is propagated by stuffy buffoons who are making a big deal out of nothing.

### **Pinky and the Brain (WB)**

**Pinky and the Brain** combines a wry wit with elements of slapstick comedy, resulting in a product that entertains on multiple levels and appeals to older audiences as well as children. The program features the adventures of two lab mice, one a power hungry genius bent on world domination (the Brain) and the other an unwitting idiot (Pinky), who attempt each night to enact one of Brain's sinister but ill-fated plans to conquer the world.

Virtually all of the violence, both accidental and intentional, is slapstick in nature. Accidents often befall Brain as some part of his master plan goes amiss. Just as often, violence occurs when Brain physically punishes Pinky for his stupidity, hitting him on the head or tripping him, none of which Pinky seems to mind. In one episode Pinky even goes so far as to claim to actually

enjoy the abuse, furthering his character as being stupid. Again, the slapstick violence found in this Warner Bros. cartoon is more severe than that found in cartoons on other networks. In an episode on 2/3/96 a carnival showman throws knives at Pinky and Brain. This example is offered in support of the assertion that WB's slapstick cartoons contain more violence than the slapstick cartoons carried on other networks.

## **2) *Tame Combat Violence***

### **Freakazoid! (WB)**

This cartoon chronicles the comedic adventures of Dexter, a teenage computer geek who, while surfing the Internet, was transformed into a wacky, wild, goofball superhero named Freakazoid. Whenever one of Freakazoid's multitude of not-so-menacing villains threatens to wreak havoc on society, Freakazoid comes to the rescue. The ensuing battles are lighthearted and extremely comedic, satirizing the superhero genre of programming. The program is funny in an offbeat, sophisticated and self-conscious way. For example, in an episode aired on 1/20/96, Freakazoid takes on a sidekick, Handman, to help him do battle with his enemy, the Lobe. In one scene, Handman saves Freakazoid from imminent peril and dispenses with the Lobe with several punches. The joke is that Handman is just Freakazoid's own hand with a face drawn on it.

Although the program contains violent conflict, its focus is comedy and therefore it is best classified as tame combat violence. The slapstick violence of the program is more extreme than that found in slapstick programming on other networks. Violence such as tanks firing, missiles being launched, and heavy objects falling on people do appear in the show. For example, in an episode aired on 10/21/95, a network censor appears on screen to assure viewers that no one was injured in the preceding scene. As soon as those words leave her mouth, an anvil falls from the sky and lands on her head. This scene is repeated two more times within the episode.

### **Earthworm Jim (WB)**

Based on a popular video game of the same name, **Earthworm Jim** is a cartoon about an ordinary earthworm who, by some stroke of luck, has a super-spacesuit fall on him, thereby giving him super-strength and fighting abilities, not to mention arms and legs. With his new abilities and appendages, Jim defends the universe from a variety of arch-enemies, such as Bob the Fish, Evil the Cat, Pscrow and Professor Monkey-for-a-Head. There are fight scenes in which the hero is glorified and weapons are used (usually Jim's phaser gun), but those scenes are always deliberately overblown and slapstick. The villains are never killed, only stopped from committing their evil deeds, and no serious physical consequences are ever shown.

## **Space Strikers (UPN)**

This program is about an intergalactic battle set in the future. The struggle is between the evil minions of a half-man-half-machine villain named Master Phantom and the crew of the military space cruiser, the S.S. Nautilus, piloted by the heroic Captain Nemo. Virtually all of the violence that occurs in the program is in the form of laser fire exchanged between spaceships, none of which raise issues. The heroes are all virtuous characters who frequently exhibit compassion and utilize quick thinking in order to avoid violent conflict. However, in a few instances this season, the program featured more extensive and threatening violence that would best be classified as sinister combat violence due to its darker and more lethal nature. Nevertheless, these instances were the exception rather than the rule and, consequently, **Space Strikers** is best described as a tame combat violence program that occasionally pushes the envelope and raises some issues.

### ***3) Sinister Combat Violence***

## **Teknoman (UPN)**

A serial cartoon set in the future, **Teknoman** tells the story of the battle between Earth and invading alien spider crabs. Earth's only hope of fending off the hostile alien onslaught lies in a young man named Slade who possesses the ability to transform himself into the superhero called Teknoman. Teknoman is an armor clad warrior armed with heavy artillery and a futuristic spear-like weapon. Originally a Japanese "anime" cartoon that was edited and broadcast on American television, this program features very complex story lines and characters, all of which revolve around violence. The program is about violent conflict and, despite being edited for American television, is still full of violence. Chaotic space battles and scenes of hand-to-hand combat abound in this show. Because of the cartoon's dark theme, battle scene after battle scene and characters whose sole purpose is to fight and destroy, this cartoon fits into the category of sinister combat violence.

## **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 1995-96 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 area in which we used any sampling and even here this 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 to 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 easier for the government to regulate 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 violence in their programming 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 fact that theatrical films make up a larger portion of those channels' programming. Previous sections of this report show that this is where most of the violence is. Even when comparing the same films, 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 than the networks and edits them somewhat less than the networks. This may be because local stations do not have the large practices and standards department 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. 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) prime time with syndicated or local shows, now with UPN programming three nights and WB two, they program nine nights. This figure will continue to shrink. The situation is similar in New York and Chicago.

**Public television** is full of drama, films and documentaries, but practically no programming raises any issues of concern.

**Cable television** also runs more theatrical films than do the broadcast networks. Since pay cable channels do not edit their films, they contain more violence than is found on broadcast network television. 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. 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. Also of note is the fact that pay cable runs fewer original shows than the broadcast networks do.

**Basic cable** also runs theatrical films raising concerns about violence. These films are less likely to be as edited as much as the same films shown on the broadcast networks. More graphic and gory scenes of action-film violence are found on basic cable. Basic cable has far fewer original series than the networks, but they are more likely to raise concerns.

**Home video** runs 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. The games featuring deadly combat, such as **Mortal Kombat III**, 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, it was ensured that we would examine all significant non-network programming that is produced. We examined two-week samples of prime time and Saturday morning programming of the following stations:

**KTLA Channel 5.** KTLA is affiliated with the WB network on Sunday 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 crux 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. Other than when the network schedules programming, these stations act as local stations and buy their own programming 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 the various versions of **Star Trek**, **Baywatch** and theatrical films. 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 **Lonesome Dove** 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 other independent stations to produce their own original programming. The syndication market, which used to be 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 **Star Trek** or **Baywatch** 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 departments of broadcast standards and practices deciding what gets made and ensuring that programs meet network 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, which raises the issue of a large audience of children. Although many of these shows should run an advisory, none do. The following programs would be classified as raising concerns if aired on the broadcast networks:

### **Lonesome Dove: The Outlaw Years**

This is a syndicated version of the Larry McMurtry epic novel that became such a hit as a mini-series on CBS several years ago. Episodes of **Lonesome Dove** typically contain ten or more scenes of violence, several of which are graphic. In the Los Angeles market **Lonesome Dove** ran as early as 4:00 p.m. and as late as 10:00 p.m. On the four occasions the show was examined, it never used an advisory, although it was clearly in need of one.

The scenes of violence featured in the episodes we monitored included graphic shootings (showing the impact of the bullets), a man cutting open his hand, a disturbing scene of a hanging, and many other similar acts.

### **Hercules: The Legendary Journeys**

**Hercules** became a major hit in syndication this season and then spawned a spin-off described below. Last year's report identified **Hercules** as a series with concerns about violence and this continues to be the case. As might be expected in a series that is based on the adventures of a warrior, much of the violence is glorified. The program is about fighting and every episode features glamorized combat. Some fights are extended and gory. The violence features weapons such as fists, clubs, branding irons, swords, rocks and whips. This is a cartoon-like action/adventure show. The major reason it raises concerns is its glorified portrayal of combat.

### **Xena: Warrior Princess**

A spin-off from the very successful **Hercules**, **Xena** occasionally appears on Hercules' show and he sometimes visits hers. In the two times **Xena** was monitored, it was considerably more violent

than Hercules. One episode contained over 15 acts of violence. Like Hercules, Xena never shies away from a fight and combat is the central theme of the program. Xena, too, is a warrior well-trained in lethal fighting techniques. Both programs use music and some lighthearted comedy to make the action and violence seem more acceptable and less serious. Though much of the violence is not brutal or graphic, it is constant throughout the program. Each episode is full of threats, kicks, punches and martial arts fighting. In one program there is a scene in which a supernatural power comes out of a treasure box and burns a villain to a crisp. In other episodes, a man is impaled on an axe and a sword is shoved into the groin area of a man.

## **Babylon 5**

A science fiction, action program filled with special effects, **Babylon 5** shares many common traits with the **Star Trek** syndicated series. Both times **Babylon 5** was monitored it featured more violence than was necessary to advance the plot. While the action and violence is rarely gory, some of it features close-ups of blows to the head and other forms of combat. Some scenes are needlessly prolonged.

## **The Hitchhiker**

The Hitchhiker serves as the host for this anthology series about right and wrong and the cruel twists of fate that befall those who act immorally. In one episode of **The Hitchhiker** a woman seeks revenge against the plastic surgeon who makes a mistake, horribly disfiguring her face. At the end of the program she evens the score by slicing his face apart with the tool of his trade, a scalpel. The final scene was very graphic, disturbing and filled with tremendous amounts of blood. The clear message of the show is that it is all right to take the law into your own hands if your cause is just. This very brutal episode ran at 7:00 p.m. without any advisory.

## **Real Stories of the Highway Patrol**

Unlike the one-hour dramas just described above, **Real Stories of the Highway Patrol** is a 30-minute reality show. It uses re-creations to feature crimes from the case files of various state highway patrols. It is a cross between **America's Most Wanted** and **Cops**. The entire show is about criminals and the violent acts they commit.

As a show that uses re-creations, **Real Stories** raises the recurring issue of how graphically to illustrate the crime. Frequently the violence in the re-creation is excessive and seems more likely to sensationalize the crime than to offer any real understanding to the viewer or any assistance to law enforcement.

Several of the re-creations are horribly excessive, graphic and prolonged. One program was about a man who robbed a gas station convenience store. The attendant is shot twice at close range. The camera clearly shows the impact of the bullets into the man's chest. The scene is then repeated a second time in black and white.

It is not unusual to see eight or nine very brutal acts in this 30-minute show. Another significant issue in the program is the content of the opening credits. The credits change every few episodes and one night they showed a man in flames jumping out of a car window, an officer hitting a suspect in the face with the butt of a rifle, an officer aiming his rifle at someone, an officer tackling a suspect, a man throwing an object at a car, an officer holding a suspect at gunpoint, an officer slamming a suspect onto the hood of a patrol car, and several other violent acts. All of this takes place in the course of 18 seconds. Even nonviolent episodes open with such violent credits.

Graphic shootings and other forms of intense violence are a staple of this program that runs between 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. without an advisory.

### **Kung Fu: The Legend Continues**

This syndicated program is an updated version of **Kung Fu**, which starred David Carradine. In this incarnation, Carradine works alongside his son Peter, a police detective. This new version seems to focus less on the spiritual message and more on fighting. In the show, both father and son are martial arts experts, and these talents are showcased often during each episode. Each of the shows monitored contained several scenes of violence, and many of these are prolonged fight scenes featuring karate-style punching and kicking. Unlike the previous incarnation, **Kung Fu: The Legend Continues** often features scenes that involve guns and other weapons. The show also continues to run opening credits which highlight a wide array of violent action: men brandishing handguns, men being kicked in the face and stomach, and even one man being kicked through a plate glass window (which is seen in slow motion).

### **Renegade**

A show about a loner who rides a motorcycle, **Renegade** compresses many scenes of mean-spirited violence into its one hour. Most of the time the violence is not very graphic. However, the program is about little other than violence. While most individual violent scenes are not excessive, the sheer quantity of scenes per episode is. Most of the scenes of violence feature confrontations between good and bad guys and are almost always settled with a large number of punches.

Note: Several syndicated magazine shows such as **Hard Copy** and **American Journal** did not raise any serious issues of violence. However, when they did cover a story involving violence, such as the case of a teenage boy attacking innocent citizens with a paint gun, they tended to show the not-very-intense scene more times than was necessary. And when **Entertainment Tonight** or **Extra** showed a clip from an upcoming film, it was often one of the more action-packed or violent moments. But, again, none of these clips were violent enough to raise concerns.

Made for syndication programs that raised no concerns about violence in the two-week sample were:

**American Journal**  
**Baywatch**  
**Baywatch Nights**  
**Coast Guard**  
**A Current Affair**  
**Entertainment Tonight**  
**Extra**  
**Hard Copy**  
**Inside Edition**  
**Star Trek: Deep Space Nine**

## *2. Theatrical Films on Local Stations and in Syndication*

Of the nine theatrical films that were monitored on independent stations, six 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 and high intensity films appear in syndication than on the networks. The films that did not raise concerns were **Mayflower Madam**, **War of the Roses** and **Empire of the Sun**--although the last could have used an advisory.

All of the films that did raise concerns were action dramas. Although many action films raised concerns when aired on the broadcast networks, these films ran with far less editing on local television. It is unclear whether this was due to the absence of a large practices and standards staff, or to the more conservative standards required to market a film nationally as opposed to selling it in local markets. Violent films running locally clearly contained more intense and graphic violence than those that raised concerns on the networks. The films that did raise serious issues were as follows:

### **Death Wish 4**

A sequel to the first three **Death Wish** movies, Charles Bronson reprises his role as “good citizen” Paul Kersey, handing out his own special form of justice to those who violate society’s rules. Although the violent criminals are all punished, the man who exceeds the limits of the law to punish them, played by Charles Bronson, is glorified. The violence early in the film is used to demonstrate the evil of the gang members. It is part of their character development, but, like everything else in this film, it is far too excessive and repeatedly covers the same ground. The film is little more than a barrage of violence saturating the screen. Whatever point it tries to make about the ambiguity of violence and the thin line between right and wrong is lost in a flurry of bullets and bloodshed. It is doubtful that fans of this movie are interested in the discussion about who is the true criminal. Instead, viewers’ attention is completely dominated by the fighting and killing.

The local station did issue an advisory.

### **Tightrope**

**Tightrope** is a Clint Eastwood film in which he plays a character similar to Dirty Harry investigating a killer who strangles young women. The film contains more than ten scenes of violence--one of which features a woman being strangled who fights back by stabbing her attacker with a pair of scissors--most of which are not overly graphic. What is of concern is the theme of this film which centers on horrible violence. **Tightrope** definitely could have used an advisory.

### **Allan Quatermain and the Lost City of Gold**

This film is about an adventurer, Allan Quatermain, who encounters many dangerous people and situations as he searches for his brother and a lost city of gold. This film is similar in spirit to the **Indiana Jones** films. Quatermain seems unable to solve any problem without resorting to violence. There are approximately 16 scenes of violence and the final scene lasts for over ten minutes. The story is filled with shootings, lion attacks, people getting hit in the face with rocks and many fist fights.

The film raises the issue of tonnage and features many different types of violence. There was no advisory.

### **King Solomon's Mines**

Another of the Allan Quatermain films, this movie raises the same issues as above. This time Quatermain helps a woman search for her missing father and King Solomon's Mines. He encounters a wide variety of villains, including Nazis who are continually trying to kill him. The film contained over 30 scenes of violence, raising the serious issue of tonnage. Somewhere between 50 and 80 people are killed in the story. Not surprisingly, scenes in which Quatermain resorts to violence are glorified and very exciting. As with the aforementioned film, all kinds of attacks and fighting are present in the story. This film also did not contain an advisory.

### **One Good Cop**

This movie is about the stress inherent in the life of a policeman. Michael Keaton is married, broke and caring for the three children of his partner killed in the line of duty. Out of desperation he robs a drug czar to get the money he needs to support his family. **One Good Cop** is a dark and ominous film. There are ten scenes of violence, including one in which a female cop kicks a drug dealer in the knee with her high heel. Many scenes involve characters with guns pointed at their heads, who are in some cases shot and killed. All of this violence, coupled with the criminal

act on the part of the protagonist (a cop), raises concerns about the use of violence. These concerns were aggravated by the lack of an advisory.

## **Rocky 5**

Another sequel, this film stars Sylvester Stallone in his fifth outing as the famous prizefighter. This time Rocky, who faces potential brain damage if he fights again, has lost all of his money to a crooked accountant. He becomes the mentor to a young fighter named Tommy Gunn. It is expected that **Rocky** films will have a final fight scene and it is that scene that causes concerns in this film. The final fight scene, unlike in the earlier films, does not occur in the ring. Rocky must defend the honor of Gunn and accepts a challenge to fight in the street. The resulting scene is excessively graphic, brutal and lasts for six minutes. Everything about this street fight is glamorized and music adds to the excitement. It is a bloody, unrelenting and disturbing scene. No advisory was issued.

### ***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. One of the stations runs infomercials on Saturday morning. Both UPN and WB run some children's programming, but UPN is the first ever to run this type of programming on a Sunday morning. The findings on WB's and UPN's children's programming can be found in the earlier section.

The only children's programming aired on a non-network channel was on KCAL, a station owned by Disney which must be sold now that Disney has acquired ABC's owned and operated stations, including KABC in Los Angeles. Two programs, **Sing Me a Story** and **Bill Nye the Science Guy**, are completely non-violent and raise no concerns. Falling into the slapstick category are **Dennis the Menace** (the animated version) and **Gadget Boy and Heather**. There are no programs in the tame combat violence area but one program, **King Arthur and the Knights of Justice II**, falls into the sinister combat classification. The program was driven by mean-spirited combat violence. One episode began with a two-minute fight scene. The acts of violence are glorified. One scene depicted an arrow fired into a villain's forehead.

## **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.

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 for 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 the 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 have 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 created a network need to attract huge audiences and tended to 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. It was in the area of children's television that public television had its biggest impact. 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 enhance 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 remarkably free of violence.

### *1. Documentaries and News*

Documentaries comprised a much larger percentage of programming on PBS this year than last. Although many documentaries deal with stories that are likely to include some violent footage such as war, there were absolutely no issues of concern in any of the news or documentary programming.

A considerable number of documentaries were broadcast during the two-week sample. These shows usually involve actual film footage, some of which may include images of violence. A one-hour program, **American Cinema** examined the process of making movies through the eyes of directors and writers and used clips from some of their films. Although there are scenes of violence, such as clips from **Raging Bull** and **Casablanca**, all were contextually appropriate. A two-part story on Mexican-American history, **Chicano** portrayed nothing more intense than a protester being dragged by police during a demonstration. A **Nova** episode "Abducted by UFOs" featured clips from space invader movies that did not raise concerns. Another **Nova** on "Warriors of the Amazon" also raised no issues. The documentary **The New Explorers** contained historical footage of nuclear explosions. **Hollywood 90028**, a story of kids on the streets of Hollywood; **Great Drives**, Maria Conchita Alonso's automobile trip examining the sights on the way to Key West; and **Things That Aren't Here Anymore** contained no scenes of violence at all.

A two-part **American Masters** on the life of Edward R. Murrow used historical war footage from Murrow's days in London. An episode of **Frontline**, "Angel on Death Row," the real story of the killer from **Dead Man Walking**, raised no issues even though it contained an advisory. Three other documentaries, **American Experience's** "Spy in the Sky," **Unfolding Story** and **Sailing the World Alone**, also were free of any violence. The only program containing scenes of violence that were created specifically for that program was **Roman City**, a documentary on ancient Rome. The show contained a cartoon of a battle in ancient Rome, a drawing of a gladiator hitting his opponent with a trident and a re-enactment of an unsuccessful knife attack on Julius Caesar. The violence in all three images was minimal, appropriate to the story and raised no issues of concern about violence.

### *2. Arts and Entertainment*

This category includes original productions, concerts and performer showcases. 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.

Only one program in the entire two weeks of PBS raised any issues whatsoever, **Mystery** on 2/29/96 featuring "Promised Land Part II." Part I ran immediately before the second part. One

scene in Part II is surprisingly violent, especially for PBS. A criminal who is holding a teenage girl at gunpoint shoots a police officer and then is himself shot and killed. Before the shooting, the lead character unsuccessfully negotiates for several minutes without any weapon. The actual scene of violence is fairly minimal and uses restraint, but we do see blood splash and a character reacting in horror. What partially mitigates this intense scene is the focus on the emotional pain and consequences caused by the shooting. The violence was handled appropriately but no advisory was issued. Interestingly, a later installment of **Mystery** on 4/11/96 contained some fairly explicit sexual images and did contain an advisory.

An interesting issue regarding promotions was evident in Part I of the **Mystery** series on 2/29/96. The promotion immediately preceding the program contained a gunshot, yet that gunshot never appeared in the program.

Neither an episode of **Great Performances** nor the episodes we monitored of the **Masterpiece Theatre** series entitled "Bramwell"--about a female doctor running an infirmary during the nineteenth century--raised any issues. The only theatrical to appear during the monitoring period was John Boorman's **Hope and Glory**, his semi-autobiographical story of a little boy coming of age during the second World War in Britain. While containing some war violence and other scenes of action involving young children, they were all contextually appropriate and raised no issues of concern.

### *3. Nature and Science*

While there were acts of violence in some of these shows, they were never a central part of the story and never raised any important issues. **Nature** ran three documentaries, on lions, cats and chimpanzees, that contained nothing more graphic than an image of a cat with a lizard in its mouth, a lion hunting a zebra, and chimps fighting. None of the other nature or science shows raised any concerns about violence.

### *4. Saturday Morning Children's Programming*

Children's programming on public television includes **Sesame Street**, **Reading Rainbow**, **Barney and Friends**, **Puzzle Place**, **Story Time** and **Kate and Orbie**. Several scenes in **Sesame Street** showed characters, usually the Muppets, arguing. In one scene two Muppets argue over a toy truck and one pulls it from the other. The show makes an important point about the need for sharing. During **Puzzle Place** a child cries when he is left out of preparing his grandmother's recipe. Although the child is angry, the focus of the program is on his hurt feelings and how the other children should be more sensitive. There were no issues of violence in any of the programs.

## 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 the network 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 broadcasting is available in more than 99% of American households.

Cable challenges broadcast by offering content not available 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 offering full nudity for years. Words routinely used in movies and stand-up comedy on 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 that the programming does or does not raise concerns in its native cable environment, but whether the programming 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, the smaller audiences, the pay cable universe and other contextual factors.

There are currently over 70 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 Nashville Network. 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 examined media violence, and, therefore, issues surrounding sexuality, nudity and language did not enter into the report's conclusions. The eight cable networks examined over a two-week period are as follows:

**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 is a pay cable channel (although it is in a transition to basic cable), while 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 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.

Late in the summer of 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 looks at the majority of these channels can see that they run much more explicit programming than is seen on the networks. They have more freedom and work within a completely different business and regulatory structure. The intent of this section of the report is to examine ways in which cable and broadcast differ in content and to see whether that content would raise concerns if broadcast on the television networks. This is, we believe, the best way to compare the content of cable with that of broadcast television.

### ***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 recent 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**, **Tales from the Crypt** and **The Larry Sanders Show** became an important part of HBO programming. Sports, especially boxing, also became a regular part of the menu. HBO offered a forum to stand-up comedians 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 where 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 are still the main staple of HBO's programming. Seventeen films were monitored in the two-week sample and, of these, 11 would raise concerns about violence if run on broadcast television. These 11 are as follows:

#### **The Getaway**

This was monitored on home video last season and, as a film on pay cable, is unchanged. A remake of the Sam Peckinpah classic about a husband and wife on the run from both cops and criminals, it is extremely graphic and violent. In one scene a man's hand is pierced by the long spike of a message holder, and there are numerous scenes of shotgun blasts and falls from buildings. Violence, particularly toward the end of the film, is unrelenting. The film is about nothing but violence and would not likely appear on broadcast television without significant editing.

#### **48 Hours**

This is a comedy-action buddy film starring Nick Nolte and Eddie Murphy. Nolte plays a renegade cop while Murphy plays the convict with whom he teams up to track down a deadly villain and a lot of money. Glorified and frequently very brutal, this film features a shootout in a motel involving prostitutes. This scene stands out as one of the more disturbing and intense gun battles on screen, largely because so many innocent people are killed. **48 Hours** would need to be edited (and has been) before it appeared on the networks.

#### **Silence of the Hams**

A slapstick take-off of **The Silence of the Lambs** and **Psycho**, all of the violence is hyperbolic and meant to be taken as a joke. The violence involves actions such as slamming a door on someone's hands or hitting someone with a bowling ball, all shown with comic effect and

without consequences. This film could likely appear on broadcast television with minimal editing.

### **Fists of the North Star**

This movie is a live action adaptation of a popular Japanese animated film about two futuristic warriors who fight over land and a woman. The violence is extremely graphic. The story contains one bloody scene after another, including long martial arts fights, people being burned alive, exploding heads and blood-spurting bodies, in addition to the more conventional violence of shooting and stabbing. This is the archetype of the film that might be impossible to edit for network television.

### **Guardian Angel**

This film is about a female martial arts star out to exact vengeance on the woman who killed her husband. Filled with glorified, exciting violence, the film raises serious concerns. Violence fills the story from beginning to end. Emphasis is placed on violence such as kicks to the head and bullets piercing a body. The scenes of violence are prolonged and seem never-ending. This is another film that probably would be impossible to sufficiently edit for broadcast.

### **Silent Fall**

A psychiatrist investigating the violent deaths of a mother and father has only their traumatized son to help provide him with clues to what happened. Flashbacks to the murders are well handled, but the final scene, where the psychiatrist is attacked repeatedly and left for dead in an icy lake, would likely be edited before appearing on network television.

### **Natural Born Killers**

This is another of the pay cable movies that appeared in last year's report on home video. Oliver Stone, the film's director, argues that the film is really a satire of the way in which the media glorify violent criminals. Whether to shock the audience and/or to make Stone's point, the film is filled with horrific, grisly violence. There are many prolonged, detailed scenes of violence featuring a wide array of weapons. In the end, the criminals go unpunished and are definitely glorified. This is a film unlikely ever to appear anywhere but on pay cable.

### **Possessed by the Night**

A bizarre animal, preserved in a jar, wreaks havoc on anyone who brings it into his or her home. Most of the film is simply eerie and much of the violence involves tame martial arts fighting. It is the final scene that raises serious concerns, however, as the body count begins to rise. Several

people die of graphic gunshot wounds, and a husband, under the influence of the “jar,” attempts to strangle his wife until she throws the jar in the fire.

### **Enemy Mine**

This is a science fiction adventure about a pilot who crashes on an unknown planet and discovers a friendly alien. Some of the space battles near the end are prolonged and graphic and would likely be edited for network broadcast.

### **Just Cause**

A Harvard professor looks into the case of a man who says he was wrongly accused of rape and murder. The end of the film contains a scene in which the wife and daughter of the professor have been kidnapped. A brutal fight scene ensues. **Just Cause** would likely receive some editing before it appeared, as it probably will, on broadcast television.

### **Interview with the Vampire**

A stylized story about two vampires whose egos and personal battles clash through several centuries. The film features many gruesome close-up scenes of people being attacked and drained of their blood. There are scenes of two “good” vampires being very painfully scorched in the sun and one “bad” vampire being burned alive. The film would likely receive substantial editing before being shown on the commercial networks.

### **The Celluloid Closet**

This documentary chronicles the film portrayal of homosexuals and their culture from the inception of the medium to the current time. Not surprisingly, the documentary utilizes numerous film clips, which in most cases are well handled. However, a clip from the 1980 theatrical **Cruising** crossed the line. The scene shows a man plunging a knife into the back of another. The victim writhes in pain as blood pours over his shoulders. While the scene illustrates the movement of homosexual characters in the early 1980s from “victims to victimizers,” the scene is far too intense and graphic for broadcast standards.

With regard to violence, the following films would be able to air on broadcast television as they appeared on HBO without raising any concerns:

**Exit to Eden**

**Nell**

**Star Trek: Generations**

**Trading Places**

## Trapped in Paradise

### b. Television Movies

Only one original HBO television movie aired during the two-week sample period. **Soldier Boyz**, an action/adventure story about a special troop in Vietnam, featured all the violence one would expect in a war genre film. Shootings, explosions and a high body count make this a film that would require editing before airing on network television.

### c. Original Series

HBO's original series contain elements that cannot be included in the broadcast networks' programming. **The Larry Sanders Show**, **The Dennis Miller Show** and **Russell Simmons' Def Comedy Jam** all contain language that is not heard on commercial television. **Dream On** also contains scenes with nudity. However, none of them raise any issues of concern with regard to violence. Tracey Ullman's show, **Tracey Takes On...**, contains only slapstick and minor scenes of violence.

Several specials, including the comedy special **Paula Poundstone Goes to Harvard**, a promotional segment **First Look: The Juror** and an ice skating special **Ice Princess**, were shown during the two-week sample period. None raised any concerns in regard to violence.

### d. Children's Programming

Early morning programming consisted of animated fairy tales like the popular **Happily Ever After** and **Neverending Story**. The little violence these shows contain is tame and minor and raises no concerns.

Three theatrical films aired on Saturday morning during our sample period. Two of these, **Soul of the Game** and **Major League II**, presented no concerns about violence. The third, **Philadelphia Experiment II**, was extremely violent. A science fiction fantasy about a time machine that helps create an alternate fascist future for the United States, this is a graphically violent and gory film. This movie would not appear on a broadcast network in the evening without substantial editing and therefore seems very out of place at 10:45 a.m. on a Saturday morning.

## **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**

Showtime ran 20 theatrical films during the prime time hours of the two-week sample. Of these 20, 16 would raise concerns on broadcast television if they were not edited. These films are as follows:

#### **Dream Lover**

A strange thriller about a man whose wife is not who he thinks she is, this is an intense, though not excessively violent film. However, several sequences, particularly a climactic strangulation scene, would probably be edited somewhat before airing on broadcast television.

#### **The Puppet Masters**

This is a science fiction fantasy in the spirit of **The Invasion of the Body Snatchers** about octopus-like creatures who attach themselves to the backs of humans and control their actions. In the second half of the film there are seemingly endless gun battles and fist fights between human slaves and regular humans. The action and violence are nonstop. This film would probably be substantially edited before it appeared on broadcast television.

#### **Deadly Past**

Much of the violence in this film about a love triangle and a pile of cash is surprisingly well handled, until the final shootout, where the villain is ultimately dispatched by being smashed in the head with a shovel. This intense scene would likely be edited for broadcast.

#### **The Principal**

A drama about a new principal in an extremely violent inner-city high school, **The Principal** features a continuous stream of fights, chases and beatings from beginning to end. While no single scene is especially graphic or intense and the hero does not kill the leader of the student gang, this film would undergo significant editing before appearing on commercial television.

## **Bad Company**

A thriller about a freelance spy agency, this movie contains two distinctively violent sequences. In one, a man is ambushed by two of his employees and killed. In another, these same two employees shoot each other. These two sequences are graphic and intense and would probably be edited.

## **Hard Bounty**

This Western is about a bounty hunter who becomes the owner of a saloon where his prostitute girlfriend works. The trouble begins when a sinister killer rides into town. Typical western violence and shootings are seen throughout **Hard Bounty**. Rapes and strangulations of prostitutes also appear in the film. This film would probably need editing before being shown on broadcast television.

## **Scorned**

A woman whose abusive, cocaine-snorting husband commits suicide when he is passed over for promotion decides to take revenge on the man who does get the job. Most of the violence is implied until the final scene. The "scorned" widow ties the man's wife to a bed and begins to torture her with a knife. The man bursts in and although he pushes her out a window, she is not killed. Though not overly graphic, the film would probably be edited somewhat for network television.

## **The Color of Night**

A psychiatrist (Bruce Willis) takes over the support group of a murdered colleague in an effort to help find out who killed him. Several of the killings would require editing before this film could air on broadcast television, particularly the climax in which the murderer is shot in the head with a nail gun.

## **Terminal Velocity**

A sky diving instructor investigating the death of one of his students stumbles onto a police investigation of some hard core criminals. Typical big-budget action violence abounds, and a gruesome electrocution and impalement of one criminal occurs at the end. This film would need significant editing to air on network television.

### **Direct Hit**

A career hitman develops a conscience on his final job and flees with his sympathetic target. Certain scenes of violence are well handled and intimate; others, in particular the intense gun battles at the beginning and end of the film, are purely gratuitous and overly graphic. This film would be difficult to edit sufficiently for broadcast television.

### **The Quick and the Dead**

A mysterious female gunslinger comes into town in the Old West, and all hell breaks loose when the town's evil sheriff sponsors a shooting contest. The movie features typical Wild West violence, highly glorified by director Sam Raimi's constant camera movements. This film would require some editing before airing on broadcast television.

### **Legends of the Fall**

This is an epic family saga of love and honor in the early part of the twentieth century. Most of the violence is contextually appropriate and central to the plot, but because of certain scenes--such as a World War I battle that proves fatal to one brother--it would probably require editing before airing on broadcast television

### **Kalifornia**

A graphic story of a serial killer and his unwitting travel companions in the style of **Natural Born Killers**, **Kalifornia** contains many scenes of grisly and graphic violence. This is a film that probably could not be sufficiently edited for broadcast television.

### **Navy SEALs**

A team of highly trained Navy S.E.A.L.s attempts to rescue hostages in the Middle East. This film contains standard combat violence that is not particularly graphic. It is a prime example of highly glorified violence--since, after all, these men are doing their killing in the name of God and country. This film also has a problem with tonnage. **Navy SEALs** would require editing before airing on network television.

## **Short Circuit 2**

Mostly slapstick and tame, this tale about a charismatic robot and the trouble he gets into, would, because of more extensive violence in a few scenes, require only minimal editing before airing on broadcast television.

## **Total Recall**

Arnold Schwarzenegger stars as a man whose memory has been replaced and who has to travel to Mars to regain his past. An extremely violent science fiction fantasy with Schwarzenegger's style of glorified violence, this film would require extensive editing before being aired on broadcast television.

These films could air on network television without raising any concerns about violence:

### **Mixed Nuts**

### **Philadelphia**

### **The Road to Wellville**

### **A Simple Twist of Fate**

## **b. Television Movies**

Showtime ran three made-for-television movies during the prime time hours of the two-week sample. Two of these films could not be broadcast as is without raising concerns.

### **Marshal Law**

A man must defend his family when a gang of murderous youths trap them in their far-off, mostly empty housing complex. This film is designed to show as much violence as possible, and it delivers from beginning to end. Every shooting and killing is extreme and unnecessarily disturbing. One scene in which a criminal is shot through the chest, splattering blood on his girlfriend's face, is especially gruesome. It would be almost impossible to edit this television movie for broadcast television.

### **Woman Undone**

A woman accused of murdering her husband tells the story of how their marriage crumbled. In one scene Mary McDonnell shoots her husband out of mercy as he is burning to death in the car with which he was trying to kill her. This climactic scene is very intense, though not as graphic as it could be. Still, this television movie would have to be edited before it was comparable to those shown on broadcast television.

## **Mrs. Munck**

An extremely dark comedy about an unhappy, married woman dishing back abuse to her wheelchair-bound husband, this film is intense and upsetting due to its subject matter. However, the violence is rarely gratuitous. It could probably air on broadcast television with few if any changes.

## **c. Original Series**

One original production was monitored. **The Outer Limits**, based on the old series, is an anthology of ironic and disturbing science fiction tales. It contained several violent scenes in the four episodes monitored, but they were well handled within the context of the story.

In addition, two profile pieces on stars Lawrence Fishburne and Sharon Stone, which ran as a companion to films in which these actors starred, contained minimal violence in the form of clips from their films. Comedian Brett Butler appeared in a half-hour comedy special which did not contain any violence.

## **d. Saturday Morning Programming**

Saturday morning programming consisted largely of animated shows for children, such as **Richard Scarry**, **Owl TV** and **Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle**. These were completely free of any concerns about violence.

### *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. Programming of The Disney Channel is far more diverse than non-subscribers might realize. Ever present is Disney's animation, which comes 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. Concerts, such as the one by Dwight Yoakum which aired during the two-week sample period, also play an important role in attracting adults to the channel. Also broadcast later at night are information shows ranging from documentaries to science programs.

Almost all of the programming we viewed was consistent with Disney's commitment to wholesome family programming and raised no concerns. Most of the programming is free of any violent content. With only one exception in our two-week sample, the little violence that did occur in the programming is relevant to the context of the show. It rarely raises even minor concerns and only then because it is aired on The Disney Channel.

The following programs aired in prime time contained either no violence or violence that was minor and contextually appropriate: **The American Legacy** series, including **Thomas Jefferson**, **The Pursuit of Liberty** and **George Stevens: D-Day to Berlin**; **Remembering Marilyn**; **Cary Grant: A Celebration**; **Jimmy Stewart**; **Inside Out**; **The American Teacher**; **The Best of Disney**; **The Best of Abbott and Costello**; **Tom Petty: Going Home**; **The Making of the Hunchback of Notre Dame**; **Rotten Ralph**; **Avonlea**; **Dwight Live**; **Rudolph and Frosty: Christmas in July**; **Mousterpiece Theater: Hawaiian Holiday** and **The Swamp Fox: Birth of the Swamp Fox**.

Disney airs some made-for-cable movies, some made-for-television movies, and many theatrical films. The vast majority of these are family friendly, with at most minimal violence that is contextually appropriate. Our sample included the following such non-problematic movies: **Goodbye Miss 4th of July**, **Golden Will: The Silken Laumann Story**, **The Sword in the Stone**, **Rescuers Down Under**, **A Far Off Place**, **Felix the Cat**, **Misty**, **King of the Wind**, **A Cry in the Wild**, **The Adventures of Huck Finn**, **The Diary of Anne Frank**, **Pillowtalk**, **The Muppets Take Manhattan** and **Angels in the Outfield**.

Our sample included a number of historically based movies that had a fair amount of violence, some of which was rather intense. **Davy Crockett** (19 scenes of violence) and **Davy Crockett and the River Pirates** (16 scenes of violence) both deal with Davy and his friends' adventures on the American frontier in the early nineteenth century. One would expect a fair amount of violence in such historical adventure tales, and here such violence is shown as being part of the rough and tumble life on the frontier. In **Davy Crockett** conflict with Indians and Mexican soldiers is central to the tale and necessarily involves scenes of violence. The violence included here is not graphic, gratuitous or glorified. It is, however, somewhat antiseptic. In **Davy Crockett** the viewer does not see the blood and gore that would actually result from gunshots and tomahawk blows. **Davy Crockett and the River Pirates**, a more lighthearted adventure, also adds a comedic element to its violence. One could criticize Disney for erring on the side of the antiseptic as opposed to the

realistically graphic and brutal, but it is probably the most appropriate route given the family audience Disney is pursuing. It is necessary to show the violence because it is very relevant to plot and character development. At the same time it is probably best not to scare the kids with too much viciousness, blood and gore.

Two other historically based movies, **The Guns of Navarone** and **Nightjohn**, contained advisories suggesting parental discretion because they might be inappropriate for children. The advisories were probably included because some of the violence in these movies is more intense and graphic than that found in the Crockett movies. But all of the violence is strongly tied to plot and character development and did not raise concerns. **Nightjohn** contains a particularly intense scene in which a slave's finger is chopped off with an axe. This pivotal scene, in which we do not actually see the finger being cut, provides an excellent example of how intense, contextually appropriate violence can be shown without having to resort to gore and graphicness.

One movie in the sample, **D2: The Mighty Ducks**, does raise some issues of concern in regard to violence. This movie contains 25 scenes of violence. Most of the violence is hockey violence, including pushing, tripping, falling, checking and running into the glass and goal posts. Some of the checking is very vigorous, and some of it is done with a sense of malevolence. The movie goes beyond showing that violence is merely part of the game. The violence is also often depicted as being "cool" and fun. The movie's finale is filled with glorified violence. Here the Ducks take on the team from Iceland which is coached by "The Dentist," so called for having removed so many of his opponents' teeth during his short and notorious NHL career. Two of the Ducks have come to be known as the "Bash Brothers," so called for obvious reasons. In the finale they put on "bad boy" headgear while yelling "party!" They smash one opponent into the glass and clothesline another to exciting background music. They bash their heads together at their success. Another Duck gets into a fight with an Icelander. The crowd applauds after he punches the opponent, and he is dubbed the third "Bash Brother" for his efforts. The Icelanders are violent, too. One who gets penalty time for hitting a Duck with his stick quips that it is "well worth it." The third "Bash Brother" repeats this line when he is thrown into the penalty box. Another Icelander maliciously downs a girl Duck. A boy Duck sticks up for her by stating that where he comes from ladies are treated with respect. To this the girl replies, "I'm no lady, I'm a Duck," and pushes the Icelander down on the ice. After all this violence the Ducks' coach gives a speech before the last period on how the Ducks are not goons or bullies and should not sink to their opponents' level. They go out and win, although not without some very rough, though no longer malevolent or glorified, play. The evil Icelander coach is discredited by his own players, and then even he, "The Dentist," shakes the hand of the Ducks' coach and congratulates him at the end. Both coaches' late recognition of sportsmanship does not compensate for the amount and tone of the violence. This film appeals to children and was not preceded by an advisory.

The Saturday morning programming consisted of the following series: **Pooh Corner**, **Mother Goose Stories**, **The Little Mermaid**, **Duck Tales**, **Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers**, and **The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show**. None of these shows had violence that raised concern. **Pooh Corner**, **Mother Goose Stories** and **The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show** contained no violence. The other shows contained only minor tame combat violence and lighthearted slapstick.

Unlike almost any other source of programming examined for this report, The Disney Channel is, for the most part, remarkably free of violence. Because little programming even contains violence, it is unnecessary in most instances to examine if the violence raises concerns within its context.

#### *4. Nickelodeon*

Nickelodeon also makes a promise that its channel is violence-free and suitable for the entire family. It too generally delivers on that promise. Some of Nickelodeon's animation and children's programming have a slightly harder edge than Disney's. This is probably due to its efforts to appeal to somewhat older audiences and to an attempt to be more cutting-edge. Nickelodeon rarely raised any concerns about violence.

Weekday prime time is filled with old network situation comedies. Most of these shows featured in **Nick at Nite** are from the 1960s and 1970s and never raise any violence issues. Shows such as **I Love Lucy**, **The Dick Van Dyke Show**, **The Mary Tyler Moore Show**, **Rhoda** and **Taxi** rarely feature any violent scenes. Although there is occasionally a scene of physical comedy or slapstick (particularly on **Lucy**), it is always appropriate within the context of the show and of no concern. Recently Nickelodeon has spun off the **Nick at Nite** concept of classic television programs into an entire cable channel, TV Land.

The prime time Nickelodeon show that does occasionally raise concerns is **Ren and Stimpy**. Containing some of the irreverent spirit of **The Simpsons** (it has even been featured on **The Simpsons**), **Ren and Stimpy** is full of crude and sometimes graphically violent scenes. The issue here, as with The Disney Channel, is the context of the channel as a whole, which promises a consistent level of family entertainment.

Irreverent in spirit and undeniably weird, **Ren and Stimpy** features a dog and cat who live together. They live normal lives, but do disgusting things and have disgusting mishaps. Like in most cartoons, no permanent harm or damage ever really occurs. One episode of **Ren and Stimpy** contained punches, hands being bitten and smashed, and someone getting hit in the head with a dart. Clearly this is slapstick and unrealistic violence but it is also highly graphic and unpleasant.

Nickelodeon's Saturday morning programming also is largely free of violence. The violence in those shows that do have some violent scenes is all minor and completely acceptable within the context of the show and time period. While some animated shows like **Tiny Toon Adventures**, **Rugrats** and **Doug** sometimes contained slapstick violence and the occasional skirmish and fighting, on the whole there was little in these shows to raise concerns.

## 5. *MTV (Music Television)*

MTV is one of the most controversial channels on television. Decried by critics, adored by fans, MTV almost single-handedly created the demand for music videos. Music was the mainstay of MTV for most of the 1980s. The channel also was a pioneer in the use of computer graphics, which are featured in its on-air logos and promotions. In the 1990s MTV has moved away from just featuring music and has created original real-life dramas, animation, news, documentaries and even sports programming.

Although MTV appeals to youth, its intended audience is much older than that of Nickelodeon or Disney. MTV was created to be controversial and, not surprisingly, it is. The issues in videos that earned the wrath of early critics, such as sexual themes and images of women as objects, are less in evidence in the 1990s. An analysis of MTV's programming must take into account the context of the entire channel and what MTV's brand name (like Disney's) means to the viewers. Perhaps responding to criticism that MTV has drifted away from its original intent to show music, MTV recently announced plans to create a spin-off station (to be known as M2). Over the years, MTV has consistently served as a whipping boy for people wishing to attack moral depravity in popular culture. But actually MTV demonstrates some civic responsibility by airing some public affairs and news programs.

### a. **Game Shows**

During this past season, MTV aired two different game shows: **Singled Out** and **Sandblast**. In **Sandblast** people have to compete in two-person teams on a beach and perform interesting physical challenges in order to win. While there is plenty of action, there is no real violence. **Singled Out**, a 90's version of **The Dating Game** in which young men and women are paired up through a process of elimination, is completely violence-free.

### b. **Sports**

**MTV Sports**, while concentrating on "extreme" sports (non-conventional, high-danger sports), is not violent. It does, however, occasionally depict people performing extremely dangerous acts. Interestingly, when the subject was in-line (Rollerblade) skating, a good chunk of time at the end of the program was devoted to showing a surgical operation on a particularly unpleasant injury resulting from an accident.

### c. **Documentaries**

Four years ago, MTV put an updated spin on the old **An American Family** concept with their Generation X-aimed show **The Real World**. Completely non-fictional, this documentary show depicts the life of a small, extremely varied group of 18- to 24-year-olds living together. The show began in New York, then moved to Los Angeles, followed by San Francisco and, this past year, London. In addition to these four separate series (known as **The Real World I, II, III, IV**),

a spin-off series about a group of young people traveling across the U.S. called **Road Rules** aired last year as well. Visually similar to another non-narrated reality program, **Cops**, these two shows did not raise any concerns about violence.

#### d. Comedy

MTV also has its own sketch comedy show, **The State**, and its own candid camera prank show, **Buzzkill**. The episodes we monitored did contain marginal amounts of violence. But the violence was clearly used for satirical effect.

#### e. Music

**Primetime** airs on MTV every weekday evening beginning at either 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. This show presented a wide and varied array of new videos, several of which did present some issues. "Peaches" is a song by Presidents of the United States of America, a slyly satirical band with a penchant for humorous lyrics. Their video, directed by Francis Ford Coppola's son, concludes with a parody of Kung-Fu movies as people dressed in ninja outfits attack the band members. The action is outrageous--for example, the lead singer does a backflip 20 feet into the air to land on a tree branch--and quite funny. "California Love" by 2Pac--the highly successful rap artist who is as well-known for his brushes with the law as for the large number of records he sells--is a simple song about partying in California. The video, however, is an extended dream sequence directly mimicking the Mel Gibson **Road Warrior** films. There are racing vehicles, explosions and fist fights. Never too intense, the violent images are difficult to connect with the song. In another video, "Steve Polychronopolous" by comedian Adam Sandler, the lead character from the song--a real jerk of a guy--goes around causing people trouble, thereby leading to physical confrontations. It is well handled, not glorified and fits into the context of the song.

#### f. Animation

Animation on MTV is a decidedly adult affair. In addition to the old staple, **Beavis and Butt-Head**, MTV expanded their repertoire this season to include two shows with very mature themes: **Oddities** and **Aeon Flux**. These new shows raised concerns about violence.

Beavis and Butt-Head continue their satirical ways. A mockery of a type of MTV viewer so subtle that most of them think it is funny, Beavis and Butt-Head are a pair of social-misfit, idiotic friends who watch videos and get into trouble. Most of the violence we monitored consisted of Beavis and Butt-Head doing what they do best--beating each other up. On one occasion, a special episode airing at 7:00 p.m. on a Sunday contained some violence that raised concerns, albeit minimal ones. Other than that one time, **Beavis and Butt-Head** aired no earlier than 9:30 p.m. If it had aired earlier or in the morning, it would have raised more concerns. As targeted toward adults, however, **Beavis and Butt-Head** did not raise concerns.

**Aeon Flux** and **Oddities** are more difficult to classify. Both grew out of an earlier MTV animation anthology, **Liquid TV**.

**Aeon Flux** is a futuristic, abstruse show about a very tall, physically adept female spy operating in foreign lands and planets. It is never completely clear where or when any of the action is taking place, and many characters have a definite alien appearance. Drawn in a visually distinctive "Japanimation" style, **Aeon Flux** is clearly adult programming. Aeon, the lead character, dresses like she just stepped out of an S&M parlor, and sexual innuendo runs rampant. The show revolves around adventure and action; Aeon is constantly barely escaping death.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon for people on **Aeon Flux**, both good and evil, to be killed or maimed on screen. Near the end of one episode, an acquaintance of Aeon attempts to escape her violent country. She is captured by machines, however, and her legs are amputated.

**Oddities** is a showcase for one of several different animated series about freakish people or aliens in freakish circumstances. Most of the episodes monitored were from "The Head," about a young man who has a friendly and resourceful (though sinister-looking) alien residing in his severely overgrown head. The show has a dry, ironic sense of humor.

The show can be quite violent. One episode, in which the alien's brother comes to visit and brings trouble into their lives, not only features several scenes of fighting with kicks, punches and strangleholds but also another alien's arm being melted off by a laser gun. Furthermore, two different creatures are executed by being jettisoned into space.

**Oddities** is a problem mostly due to its early running times. Several episodes--including the one described above--appeared prior to 8:00 a.m. on Saturday mornings.

## **6. TBS** (*The Atlanta Superstation*)

TBS was the first of the Turner cable channels. Now there are five others and more on the way. TBS is very different from other cable channels in a 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 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 a month and, now that the company has merged with Time Warner, that figure is sure to rise even further. 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. 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 12 theatrical films. Of these, seven would raise concerns about violence if shown on a broadcast network. Most of the films contain a great deal of action. The eight that would raise concerns on a broadcast network are the following:

## **Delta Force and Delta Force II**

These two separate films, airing consecutively on the same night, are both about a highly trained anti-terrorist squadron which performs heroic deeds--in one, rescuing a plane full of hostages, and in the other, re-capturing a druglord. Both films are similar in tone and in the concerns they raise. The violence is extremely and needlessly graphic, glorified and excessive in quantity. The violent scenes are so prolonged that violence itself becomes the context of the film. In the sequel, one scene lasted for 20 minutes.

## **Class of 1984**

A new teacher at a tough high school is determined to nail the leader of a gang of drug-dealing troublemakers. This movie, starring Perry King, contains violence that is excessive, graphic and glorified. More troublesome is the tone and type of violence--King's character kills three students, and clearly the message is fight violence with violence.

## **Surf Ninjas**

Two young teenage boys discover that they are the heirs to a throne of a far-off land, but first they must join their uncle to conquer its despotic leader. Less graphic than the films described above, **Surf Ninjas** raises concerns because it is targeted at young boys. Airing without an advisory at an early hour (7:00 p.m.), it contains a large quantity of glorified violence that clearly sends a disturbing message. It would probably be edited to a degree before appearing on broadcast television.

## **The Protector**

Two New York cops, one Asian-born, the other local, go to Hong Kong to break up a heroin ring and rescue a kidnap victim. The major concern here is the amount of violence in the film. Though somewhat absurd and exaggerated, most scenes are not overly graphic, but the constant stream of shooting, kicking and killing is excessive.

## **Gymkata**

Based on the novel *The Terrible Game*, this low-budget action film stars champion gymnast Kurt Thomas as a man who combines gymnastic techniques and martial arts to fight his way through a deadly hunt in which he is the prey. Containing 30 scenes of violence, many of which are fist fights, the film contained two advisories and aired at 9:00 p.m. Although the fight scenes are choreographed to the point of being unintentionally comedic, they are very long and glorified and would require considerable editing before being suitable for network broadcast.

## **Metalstorm: The Destruction of Jared-Syn**

A science fiction film set in a post-apocalyptic world and aired at 9:00 p.m., **Metalstorm** centers around the pursuit of a maniacal villain bent on ruling the world by a fearless hero named Dogen. As Dogen endeavors on his quest, he encounters multiple obstacles in the form of monsters and evil henchmen. Although much of the violence is very overblown and hokey, it is nonetheless long and occasionally excessive. In one scene approximately one hour and 15 minutes into the film, an evil henchman throws a spiked ball into the forehead of Dogen sidekick. Dogen responds by blasting them in the guts with a laser pistol and tearing the mechanical arm off of one of them. It is more graphic than would appear on network television and would require some editing.

Theatricals that could be aired on network without any changes are:

**The Breakfast Club**  
**Children of a Lesser God**  
**Footloose**  
**Steven King's Cat's Eye**  
**Tender Mercies**

### **b. Other Prime Time Programming**

Well made, socially significant documentary programs like **National Geographic Explorer**, **Jacques Cousteau** and **Network Earth** air frequently. In addition, the classic series **Perry Mason** included some minimal violence, but it was well handled and restrained. Also, two episodes of **Little House on the Prairie** aired. There was no violence in either episode.

### **c. Saturday Morning Programming**

**Stephen King's Graveyard Shift** would raise concerns at any time it was aired. With a large number of prolonged scenes, this horror story about a monster lurking in an eerie old textile mill is very intense. Graphic and gory images are frequent and the body count is high, characteristic of Stephen King films. This program was especially problematic given that it aired at 9:05 a.m. in Los Angeles.

## 7. *The USA Network*

The USA Network is the closest thing on cable to a broadcast television network. Its mix of programs, theatrical and television movies, and original series very nearly parallels that of the networks. USA is among the most successful of the cable networks. It reaches more than 60 million homes. Much of the programming on USA, both the films and the series, contains more intense action than is found overall on the broadcast networks.

### a. Theatrical Films

Four theatrical films were monitored during the two-week sample period. Of these four, two would raise issues of concern if shown on broadcast television. The two films presenting problems this year were both about cops pairing up with dogs. **Turner and Hooch** was a breezy comedy that contained a surprising amount of violence. Plus, the violence itself was surprisingly brutal. **K-9**, starring Jim Belushi, raised more serious concerns. Also a light comedy, this film began an hour earlier and still contained no advisory. Violence is consistent throughout the film, ending in a surprisingly graphic climax. The other two theatrical films shown during this period, **An Officer and a Gentleman** and **American Gigolo**, contained some well handled violence, the consequences of which were shown. The adult subject matter in both films presented no problems.

### b. Television Movies

USA ran two made-for-television films during the sample period, and one of them raised concerns. **Evil Has a Face** told the story of a sketch artist who helps put together a composite drawing of a serial child molester--who, it turns out, is the stepfather who molested her years before. The climax can only be described as very brutal, as the sketch artist (adult victim) stabs her stepfather repeatedly in the chest. We hear the noise as the knife enters flesh, and the camera cuts to a closeup. Finally, the stepfather lies bloodied and dying on the floor, the knife protruding from his chest.

### c. Series

USA aired seven different series during the period we sampled. Of these, four raised no issues with regard to violence. **Weird Science** is a slapstick, teen-oriented, half-hour comedy based on the 1985 film. **Campus Cops** is a slapstick, teen-oriented, half-hour comedy. **Duckman** is a satirical animated program about a caustic talking duck (**Seinfeld**'s Jason Alexander). Aimed at adults and filled with sophisticated humor, and airing no earlier than 10:00 p.m., it occasionally contains scenes which could present a problem, for example, a duck being burnt at the stake. But **Duckman** is a slapstick cartoon targeted to an audience that understands the satire. **Pacific Blue**,

which aired only once during the sample period, is an action-cop show. While filled with action, the show did not raise any issues.

Three other shows did raise some concerns. **Silk Stalkings** is a cop-thriller show which pairs a man and a woman who solve crimes. Of the three times it was monitored, it raised concerns twice. Violent images, often seen just before a commercial, were almost always used as a hook. Additionally, the climax is always violent--frequently ending with the death of the villain.

Another series, **Highlander: The Series**, has one of the most brutal premises of any show. This series is based on the Sean Connery film of the same name about a secret race of immortal swordsmen who can only be killed by being beheaded with a sword. In one episode three people are killed in 20 seconds at the beginning of the show; two are shot by the villain, and one is stabbed in the heart.

**Renegade** (also described in the syndication section) was monitored twice and raised concerns both times. Lorenzo Lamas stars as a renegade-type ex-cop on the run who consistently gets a chance to perform good deeds and save people. With glorified violence without consequences, this series raises frequent concerns.

#### **d. Saturday Morning Programming**

Saturday morning consisted largely of cartoons airing after 11:00 a.m. **Street Fighter**, **WildC.A.T.S.**, **The Savage Dragon** and **The Exo Squad** are all action/adventure cartoons. They fall into the sinister combat violence category. There is frequent, typically unrealistic fighting in all of the series. **C/Net Central**, a news program about the computer industry, was also monitored once and found to be non-violent.

## 8. *TNT (Turner Network Television)*

Turner Broadcasting introduced TNT after it achieved success with TBS and CNN. Created as a venue for Turner's vast library of films, TNT consists almost exclusively of theatrical and television movies. Since its beginning, TNT has financed or produced many large scale original productions. Some examples are discussed below. Since the creation of TNT, Turner has also developed two additional networks--one for its film library, Turner Classic Movies, and the other for all of the Hanna-Barbera product it owns, The Cartoon Network. Each channel has its own programming specialization. The specialization of TNT is action movies. Like TBS, TNT does not have a separate East and West Coast feed and therefore runs its programming at one time for the entire country.

### a. **Theatrical Films**

Of the 14 films monitored on TNT in the two-week sample period, six would raise concerns if shown on the broadcast networks. Several of the other eight films come close to raising concerns. All of the films contain scenes of violence, but treat them in a variety of different ways. The films that would raise concerns on the broadcast networks are as follows:

#### **Private Wars**

This 1993 crime drama tells the story of a Los Angeles community which, with the help of a former police officer, battles a group of street thugs who are attempting to scare residents out of their homes. The film is filled with violence from start to finish. Of the 19 scenes of violence, many are prolonged and excessive. In a scene that occurs 20 minutes into the film, a local shop owner is burned alive after thugs fire a grenade into his store. The final scene contains more than five minutes of nonstop violence, including heavy gunfire and martial arts fighting (punching and roundhouse kicks to the head). Because violence plays such a large role in the story, this film would be difficult to edit without leaving significant holes in the plot. TNT did run three advisories with the film.

#### **Karate Cop**

Broadcast immediately after **Private Wars**, this futuristic action/adventure film contained more than 20 scenes of violence. The film contained elements similar to those of the previously mentioned film, such as numerous scenes of hand-to-hand combat, featuring karate style punching and kicking, and heavy gunfire. In a scene approximately 20 minutes into the film, a henchman wrenches the neck of a teenage girl, breaking it and killing her. The climax of the film features more than five minutes of intense fighting, with slow motion used to highlight several brutal punches and kicks to the face. Even though the show began at 10:00 p.m. West Coast time, a fairly late time slot, TNT elected to run three advisories with the film. However, the violent nature of the film would make it difficult to edit sufficiently for broadcast television.

## **Extremities**

This 1986 theatrical starring Farrah Fawcett is the story of a woman who is attacked in her home by a rapist, but manages to escape and turn the tables on him. Given the subject matter of the film, one would expect violence to play a role in the plot. It is not the presence of serious violence that raises issues, but the length and intensity of the scenes that would become a problem if aired on broadcast television. The entire second half hour of the film depicts the psychological and physical torture that the rapist inflicts on the woman: grabbing her by the hair, slapping her in the face, even placing a belt around her neck and dragging her around the house. When the woman finally breaks free from the man, she throws boiling water on him and hits him in the face with a frying pan. Ultimately, Fawcett's character exacts a confession out of the rapist by putting him through the same torture that he put her through. These scenes are very realistically portrayed and are not glorified or gratuitous. Moreover, the film does show the severe psychological consequences of sexual assault. However, some of the scenes depicted would be hard for adults to watch, let alone younger viewers. It aired with three advisories.

## **The Parallax View**

A 1974 theatrical starring Warren Beatty, this political thriller investigates the assassination of a state senator. The film deals with a murder and three minutes into the film the senator is shot in the back twice, causing blood to splatter on a nearby window. This scene is integral to understanding the story and must be seen by the audience, but is probably too graphic to be aired on network television without some editing.

## **The Deer Hunter**

A winner of five Oscars, this 1978 theatrical takes a hard look at three men's lives before, during and after war duty in Vietnam. While the movie only contained 14 scenes of violence during the four hours that it ran, several scenes are lengthy and very intense. In the most gripping scene, occurring one hour and 45 minutes into the film, the lead characters are forced to play Russian Roulette by their Vietnamese captors. After several pulls of the trigger, one hostage turns the gun on the Vietnamese, shooting one in the head and, in the resulting pandemonium, shooting the remainder of the guards. In a second scene much later in the film (3 hours and 44 minutes), one of the characters does shoot himself in the head playing the "game," creating a gutwrenching end to the film.

As mentioned before, several of the scenes are lengthy and fairly graphic, but they are integral to the plot and must be seen in order to understand the film. Moreover, all of the scenes are realistically portrayed and do not attempt to glorify any of the violence. The film clearly deals with the psychological effects of the torture on the three men. TNT also ran six advisories with the film, which would prepare any viewer for the violent content, but this film would still need some editing to air on the broadcast networks.

## **Young Sherlock Holmes**

This 1985 theatrical tells the story of Conan Doyle's fictional investigator in his early life. It covers his introduction to Watson and his first case. The film contained a surprising amount of violence, with more than 20 scenes in two hours. Most of the portrayals of violence are well handled and integral to the plot. However, the film's climactic scene is more than five minutes long and somewhat out of character with the rest of the film. The scene features hand-to-hand combat, a woman being immolated, some gunfire and a lengthy sword fight between Holmes and the film's villain. While there is no single act that is particularly graphic or excessive, the scene as a whole is lengthy enough to warrant concern. With minor editing and the addition of an advisory, this film would raise few concerns on broadcast television.

The films monitored on TNT this season that raised little or no concern with regard to violence are as follows:

**The China Syndrome**  
**Close Encounters of the Third Kind**  
**The FBI Story**  
**The Goodbye Girl**  
**The Hunter**  
**Operation Pacific**  
**Three Came to Kill**  
**Who's the Man?**

### **b. Television Movies**

Two television movies ran during the sample period. One of them, **Crash Course**, raised no issues of concern about violence. The other, **Strays**, about a family that moves into a country home only to discover that it is infested with ferocious stray cats, did raise concerns. One scene is particularly excessive, featuring a large cat attacking the father of the family. The battle concludes with the man electrocuting the feline. The film has a very dark and eerie tone and, to appear on broadcast television, would need minor editing.

### **c. Specials and Other Programming**

During the sample period, TNT aired one special in prime time, **Inside the Academy Awards**, and a profile of the legendary actor Clark Gable, **Clark Gable: Tall, Dark, and Handsome**. In both cases, the shows used film clips which contained minor acts of violence that raised no issues.

#### **d. Saturday Morning Programming**

As mentioned in last year's report, TNT runs a Saturday morning lineup that is not geared toward children. The schedule features the Western action/adventure shows **How the West Was Won**, **The Wild, Wild West**, **Brisco County, Jr.** and **Lazarus Man**. Typical of the genre, these shows all have some degree of violent content, usually fist fights and the occasional shootout. With few exceptions, the scenes are integral to the plot and are not excessive or graphic. However, one episode of **Brisco County, Jr.** (5/18/96) did raise some concerns.

## 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 attendant to 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, large motion pictures such as **Jurassic Park** or **The Lion King** are offered for sale at \$15. Coupons for special promotions lower the price even more. Nevertheless, there seem 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. The monitoring began with an early August, 1995 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 if they would raise concerns if shown in this form on the broadcast television networks. Film is a

medium that appeals to an adolescent and young adult audience which is 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 use violence as part of the story. It is not surprising that of the 40 home video rental titles examined over the past year, 24 would raise concerns if shown on broadcast television. Last year 22 out of 40 videos raised concerns about violence. More than a few of the home video rentals have titles which promise action or intense themes. Of the 24 films that would raise concerns on the networks, six, or 25%, have action or violent titles. The six that do are **Kiss of Death**, **Murder in the First**, **The Quick and the Dead**, **Die Hard with a Vengeance**, **Assassins** and **Mortal Kombat**. Of the 16 that would not raise violence concerns, only one, **To Die For**, had a somewhat violent title.

Some of the films could probably be easily modified or edited to eliminate concerns on broadcast television. These films do not use violence throughout but do contain scenes of violence. The length or intensity of these scenes could be changed for broadcast without affecting the integrity of the story. **The Shawshank Redemption**, the story of a man wrongfully imprisoned for the murder of his wife and the friendship he develops with a fellow prisoner in the midst of barbaric conditions, would require only minor editing before it could be shown on broadcast television. The film contains two graphic scenes of violence that could be edited without interfering with the integrity of the film.

Though it is extremely unlikely that **Showgirls** will appear on broadcast television for reasons of sexuality, it raises relatively minor concerns about violence and the offending scenes could easily be modified for network television. **Congo**, an action thriller about gorillas in Africa, contains battle scenes toward the end that are slightly graphic, but which could also be easily modified.

Several of the films fall into the action category described in the broadcast television section on theatrical film. These films contain 20-40 scenes of violence that combine to form a context primarily composed of violent action. It is impossible to edit out the problematic violence without removing huge portions of the film or destroying its ability to tell the story. These films raised more concerns about violence than any that appeared on broadcast television. The home video titles that fall into this category feature the same stars and themes. It is questionable if they could ever be shown on the broadcast networks without raising concerns about violence. **Die Hard with a Vengeance** is the third installment in the **Die Hard** series, starring Bruce Willis as a New York cop who always finds himself matched against ingenious criminals and terrorists. Like the first two films, it is full of action and violence. Little of it is very graphic, but there is always lots of fighting and shooting. **Die Hard 3** contains well over 20 scenes of violence and, like many action films, it would be difficult to edit without losing important parts of the story. **Assassins**, starring Sylvester Stallone and Antonio Banderas, is, as its title promises, filled with a great deal of violence. Containing over 20 scenes of violence, the film graphically depicts shootings in slow motion as well as many other intense scenes of violence. This is central to its appeal and it would be fruitless to try to remove all the violent scenes.

**Judge Dredd**, with close to 40 scenes of violence, is another action film starring Sylvester Stallone that raises issues of tonnage. The story surrounds the efforts of Judge Dredd to clear his name by proving that he is not guilty of the crime with which he is charged. Stallone plays

Dredd, a futuristic law enforcer who serves as cop, judge and executioner, all in one. As might be expected in a story that comes from a comic book, few of the scenes are very intense or graphic, but the sheer quantity of the violence would make it very difficult for the film to be shown on broadcast television.

Five 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:

### **Pulp Fiction**

This extremely controversial film starred John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson as a pair of hit men. Directed by Quentin Tarentino and occurring in a non-linear time frame, the film is about glamorized and highly stylized violence. Brutal acts of violence, even though they demonstrate consequences, are often played for laughs. When a man in the back seat of a car is accidentally shot in the head and blood and brain explode all over the rear window, the reaction from the viewer is supposed to be laughter. There are many intense and extremely graphic scenes of violence. It would be nearly impossible to edit this film for broadcast television and to do so would strip the story of its art and the director's vision.

This is one of the few films that is unlikely to ever appear on broadcast network television. There are simply too many scenes of terrible violence and the story as a whole is about horrendously violent people. It would be impossible to take the violence out of the film without destroying the entire story. It would be equally difficult to edit the scenes. The director makes his point through the use of extraordinary violence, and toning those acts down would change the meaning of the story. The director made this film for theatrical release and eventually home video. It is not a film for broadcast television.

### **Seven**

**Seven** features two cops, played by Brad Pitt and Morgan Freeman, who track down a sadistic serial killer, played by Kevin Spacey, who commits grisly murders against people guilty of the seven deadly sins. The scenes of the killings are extremely bloody and graphic. Although the scenes of violence are few in number, their sheer gruesomeness as well as the horrific nature and details of the crimes make this film unlikely to ever be seen on broadcast television. The film sets a tone that creates uneasiness in the viewer. The most disturbing scene of all, at the conclusion of the film, does not rely on anything more than suggestion to make its point.

### **Braveheart**

**Braveheart** won the Academy Award for best picture and earned its director-star, Mel Gibson, the best directing Oscar as well. The story of Scottish rebel William Wallace, the film is filled with many gruesome scenes of battle that show knives entering bodies and throats being slashed.

Though the final scene depicts a disembowelment, it is well handled and essential to the integrity of the story. **Braveheart**'s problem with regard to broadcast television is that it contains so many intense and graphic scenes of battle and that it would be difficult to edit them out of the story. In all likelihood **Braveheart** will appear on network television, requiring detailed attention from a practices and standards department.

### **Hideaway**

This film is about man who recovers after "being dead" and finds himself mentally linked to a crazy killer who is after his daughter. Based on the book by Dean Koontz, the film stars Jeff Goldblum and is filled with extraordinarily graphic and violent scenes. This is one of the most intense films witnessed during the entire monitoring season. It raised very serious concerns about violence. In one scene, after murdering his mother and sister, a man impales himself on a knife. As he kills himself with a knife, the weapon is shown as it graphically enters his chest and blood flows out of his body. In later scenes throats are graphically slashed and a woman is stabbed in the eye. There are over 20 scenes of horrible, prolonged and disturbing violence. **Hideaway** is a film that is unlikely ever to be edited for broadcast television.

### **Copycat**

Another graphic story of a serial killer, **Copycat**, like **Seven**, is extremely graphic and intense. The film stars Sigourney Weaver, and six minutes into the story her character is attacked by a man in a public restroom, slipping a noose around her neck and hanging her. When a police officer happens upon the attack in progress, the killer puts a gun to his head and a knife to his throat. For a moment he considers how to kill the policeman and ultimately chooses to both shoot him and slit his throat. It is an extremely graphic and violent scene.

The killer slashes another police officer's throat on screen later in the film. He also brutally beats a man to death. In the film's finale the killer is very graphically shot through the head. This is a story about horrendous violence. Consequently it contains so many scenes of brutality that it would be difficult to ever air on broadcast television.

The other home video rentals that would raise concerns on network television are the following:

**Devil in a Blue Dress**

**Drop Zone**

**First Knight**

**Interview with the Vampire**

**Just Cause**

**Kiss of Death**

**Legends of the Fall**

**Mortal Kombat**

**Murder in the First**

**The Professional**  
**The Quick and the Dead**  
**Species**  
**The Usual Suspects**

The home videos that did not raise concerns were:

**Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls**  
**Apollo 13**  
**Babe**  
**Billy Madison**  
**Circle of Friends**  
**Clueless**  
**Crimson Tide**  
**Dangerous Minds**  
**Disclosure**  
**Dumb and Dumber**  
**Junior**  
**Little Women**  
**Major Payne**  
**Nobody's Fool**  
**Outbreak**  
**To Die For**

Even though **To Die For** was based on a violent crime--an aspiring anchorwoman arranging for her husband's murder so she could be free to pursue her career--the actual scene of death was exemplary in how it was handled. What could have been a gruesome or gory scene interfering with the satirical nature of the film was instead filmed from the victim's point of view and furthered the plot without resorting to depicting excessive violence. It is a model of how such scenes of violence can be portrayed.

## 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 very 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 not available to its competitors. **Donkey Kong Country 2**, a game developed by Nintendo that was the number one seller of the past year, is not available to Sega.

The video game business is currently going through another transformation. The current 16-bit standard offers only adequate quality graphics and is slow compared to what is becoming available. 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. 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.

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 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 the game and how it is played. Almost any video store will demonstrate the game. Parents should not passively hand over the money for the games or acquire the video packages without investigating. 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 1996, 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 is a system that deals with different levels of violence. The IDSA is addressing parents' concerns in a responsible way. The ESRB has rated close to 2,000 video game titles and 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.

Last year 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 this year 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. 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:

**Donkey Kong Country 2**  
**Mortal Kombat III**  
**Toy Story**  
**Madden NFL '96**  
**Super Mario World 2**

## **Killer Instinct**

There is great similarity between last year's list and this year's. Last year **Donkey Kong Country** topped the list of best-sellers and this year the list is headed by the sequel, **Donkey Kong Country 2**. **Mortal Kombat II** was replaced on the list by **Mortal Kombat III** and **NBA Jam**, a basketball game, was replaced by **Madden NFL '96**, a football game.

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 anything, even a friendly little blob as in **Pac Man**, is tantamount to hunting and then killing. While we understand the philosophy behind this argument, we are not persuaded that all video games are, by their nature, violent.

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 '96**, 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 '96** is rated "KA." Martial arts games 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 classification. In these, some kind of minor confrontation is part of the game. 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 2** (KA) and **Super Mario World 2** (KA) both fall into this tame combat category. These games would not raise concerns about violence except possibly for the youngest audiences. **Killer Instinct** is a combat game similar in some ways to **Mortal Kombat**. It is rated "T" for teens and contains the descriptor "animated violence" and "animated blood and gore." Even with the combat motif, **Killer Instinct** does not fall into the sinister combat violence category. Unlike tougher games, there are no finishing moves, the combat is not as realistic and there are no grossly violent techniques.

The third category, sinister combat violence, contained one title, **Mortal Kombat III**. These are the games in which the goal is to injure or kill the opponent (another player or the computer). 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 distinctive personality, thereby making them seem more human and the game more realistic.

Some studies show that parents believe video games contain horrible violence and bring out aggressive and disturbing behaviors in their children. **Mortal Kombat III** (and **I** and **II**) is the game that sustains this belief. It contains the type of brutal violence about which many parents are concerned. It is sinister combat violence and even pushes that category to the edge.

**Mortal Kombat** comes in a variety of formats: video arcade, home video games, computer software and, in August 1995, a motion picture. **Mortal Kombat III** comes with the Mature (“M”) rating and the descriptors “realistic violence” and “realistic blood and gore.”

**Mortal Kombat** is a very realistic combat game. Players choose which character they wish to portray. There are 14 playable characters from which to choose and one additional character that can only be accessed with a secret code. Two of the 15 are women. Each character has special moves and skills that are described in the instruction manual.

A player enters combat against another player or the computer. The combat is brutal and realistic, involving vivid sounds and special moves. As the opponent is beaten, there is no doubt that the confrontation will end in death as the computer encourages the victor to “FINISH HIM.” The game is about brutal combat and players spend hours mastering combat moves and techniques.

What parents and many others do not know, however, is that there are special “blood codes” available that take the game to a higher and extraordinarily graphic and violent level. These codes are not in the instruction manual and parents would not know about them. A player in **Mortal Kombat I** achieves this higher level by pressing buttons in a special sequence. Both **Mortal Kombat II** and **III** have special moves that are published in video game magazines and on the Internet. The articles reveal special moves not described in the manual that allow players to rip off arms and watch them spurt blood. They also teach how to impale one’s opponent on hooks, slash an opponent’s throat, cause an opponent’s body to explode, or decapitate him or her. It is the most shocking and grisly violence imaginable.

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 AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. Conclusions**

This report was not intended to merely add another study on television violence to the hundreds already conducted. That has been done and, in many cases, it has been done well. What attracted us to this work was that the broadcasters were committed to the monitoring process. Through an annual public report and discussions throughout the year, we believed we could address this important issue in a new and potentially effective manner.

Over the years, academics, advocacy groups and interested persons have conducted research on television violence. Broadcasters usually scrutinized the conclusions or methodology in order to refute the findings or discredit the work. Some of the previous work has been conducted by people or organizations with personal, political or religious agendas, using unsound methods or unreliable samples to prove what they already believed to be true. Others conducted important, sometimes groundbreaking, work only to find that it was not fully understood or appreciated by those working in television who could best implement the results of the research.

The monitoring of broadcast network television violence conducted over the past two years has been distinct from any work that came before. Through the arrangement with Congress, the broadcasters are tied to this project. The fact that we have met with them over the past year to discuss our work and its findings has meant that they had to carefully examine the report and discuss its conclusions. Any misconceptions or misunderstandings were quickly identified, clarified and settled. Our communication with the broadcast networks was not by press release, television interview or academic journal. The process Senator Simon created allowed us to communicate directly with the networks so as to meaningfully and effectively deal with these issues.

Each network took the findings of last year's report very seriously. At the networks, each page of the report was color-coded, annotated and cross-referenced and then placed in a three-ring binder. Each section, such as those on promotions or theatrical films, was distributed to the relevant departments of the networks. Each network provided an in-depth response to the substance of the report and its findings and recommendations. Though these discussions were frequently heated, they were always constructive and conducted on both sides with a desire to learn from each other and make real progress on the violence issue. Comments in conversations demonstrated that all of the networks had carefully read and evaluated the report and were completely familiar with all of its content.

The discussions with the networks were open, comprehensive and constructive. In the conclusion of last year's report we noted that:

The problem has been that programmers and their practices and standards departments have no one to talk to about these issues other than themselves, except for advocates whom they see as lacking

objectivity or simply furthering their own cause. Hence, the need for an independent, outside monitor, not beholden to the networks, to the advocates or to the government.

Over the course of the year we came to realize how true this was. We believe that the broadcasters as well came to recognize the value of an outside monitor. Though they did not fully agree with all of our findings, they were willing to discuss any aspect of television programming. In some areas, such as on-air promotions, they fully reviewed their policies and created internal changes (such as new policies, reporting relationships or additional personnel). This year's report demonstrates that these changes effectively dealt with the problem. Other programming areas will be slower to change and are discussed in detail in this year's report. Never once, however, did we find any of the four networks unwilling to examine any part of their programming or to make any member of their staff available to answer our questions. At some of the meetings throughout the year, as many as 18 network executives, from the president of the company or the network to the heads of all of the departments, attended the discussions.

Throughout the year we also received calls from at least half a dozen producers of programs that were identified in last year's report as raising concerns. In only one instance did those producers call to complain about the way their show was examined. In all other instances the producers felt that because we named shows, dates and specific issues, they could understand the basis of our criticism and agreed with it. Several mentioned that our analysis of their show mirrored internal production discussions. Several producers felt that the criteria of last year's report were clear enough to begin to incorporate them into their own production process. Most of these shows demonstrated mild to significant improvement over the course of the second season.

While much work still needs to be done and this report demonstrates that some new problems, such as television specials, have emerged, the overall message is one of progress and improvement.

Last year's report showed that television series raised relatively few concerns in the area of violence. In the world of television series, violence usually means punching or kicking or, less often, shooting. Here the violence is sometimes unnecessary or runs too long but it is seldom graphic or overly intense. Last year, nine television series on the four broadcast networks raised frequent concerns. This season the total drops to five and, of those, two ran for only a few episodes during the season. Considering that series are the staple of prime time television, the overall picture is not one of excessive violence.

Television movies were also relatively free of concerns about violence. Television movies, while sometimes about violent crimes, typically handle the violence well. Last year 14% of television movies raised concerns about violence. This year the figure drops modestly to 10%.

Theatrical films shown on television were where the real violence was found last season. Not only was there more violence than in series or television movies, but the violence also was far more intense and graphic. It was not uncommon to find grisly shootings, throats being slashed and even impalements or decapitations. This year, theatrical films are still where the most intense and disturbing violence is found. However, the number of theatrical films that contain this kind

of intense violence has dropped in just one season. Last year 42% of all theatrical films shown on television raised concerns. This year the overall total is 29%. This is an area in which we expected to see little improvement over the first year. Networks buy their theatrical films in packages, sometimes several years in advance, and usually air each film several times. If the networks were to be influenced by our findings in theatrical films at all, we did not expect to see that influence for several years until all films already purchased had been aired. Nevertheless, for whatever reason, we saw important improvement in the first year. Still, this is the area in which most of the serious television violence remains.

On-air promotions is the area in which we did expect to see significant improvement. As described in the promotions section, this is an area over which the networks have complete control and can quickly institute changes in policy. During this past year, policies were changed and on-air promotions improved significantly. While we were quickly able to find dozens of examples last season of non-violent shows yielding action promos or violent promos in inappropriate time slots, it was far more difficult to find similar examples this season. Some problems, such as responsible shows yielding promos containing violence taken out of context, almost disappeared this season. We believe that if broadcasters continue this year's policies, this should almost completely deal with the issue of on-air promotions. Violent action films still produce violent promos but they are handled better and aired at more appropriate times. The one important problem that still remains in the promo area is advertisements for films about to open in the movie theater. These "mini-trailers" are still filled with countless scenes of violence, almost always completely out of context. Although the networks bear ultimate responsibility for airing these ads, the problem can best be dealt with by the motion picture studios or advertising agencies that produce them. These ads will be a priority for the third year of the monitoring process.

Children's television is also an area that demonstrated some improvement, and the creation of the three-hour educational rule should accelerate this trend. The area of greatest concern is "sinister combat violence" in which heroic characters eagerly resort to violence that is glorified and the center of the program. Last year there were seven shows on the four networks that featured this type of violence. This year there were four. We were encouraged by some of the new programs that seemed to find alternatives to violence or fighting and that were even able to add some educational components. Now that there is motivation to create quality educational children's television, it is our hope that children's television will continue to improve over the coming season.

Despite the overall progress, there are two disturbing issues arising in the 1995-96 season. Television specials emerged as a new area of concern. While the overall percentage of specials raising concerns is quite low, the success of several programs that contain real and re-created footage of animals attacking and, in some cases, killing people raises considerable concerns. Of greatest concern is that the success of these programs (which ran five times last season) will spark imitation. Perhaps, in order to be noticed, these imitations will become even more graphic or shocking. Also of concern is the frequent use of violence on one of the new broadcast networks, UPN. It alone aired four television series that raised frequent concerns while the four older networks together had five shows raising such concerns. The discrepancy becomes even more dramatic when one considers that UPN programmed six hours altogether while the four

broadcast networks combined programmed 81 hours. For the 1996-97 season UPN has changed most of its programming and next year's report will examine the effects of those changes.

Despite the above reservations, the message of this year's report is still one of some progress and improvement. While we believe that the monitoring process has contributed to some of the progress, there are also other important factors.

First, the government has played a significant role in the television violence issue. Concerns about television violence have become bi-partisan. Both men running for the presidency in 1996, Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, have made television violence an important issue in their campaigns. They have correctly read the public's concern and focused attention on it. The President has called two summits at the White House and former Senator Dole has made two major speeches on the topic. Congress has also paid great attention to the violence issue. Congressman Ed Markey has been an unrelenting advocate of the V-chip and children's television, both as Chairman of the House Telecommunications Subcommittee and, since 1994, as its ranking minority member. The efforts of retiring Senator Paul Simon have been instrumental in raising political awareness of this issue, and those efforts resulted in television monitoring and this report. The actions of Senators Ernest Hollings, Joseph Lieberman, Byron Dorgan and Kent Conrad have also focused attention on the issue. FCC Chairman Reed Hundt has been an important force in dealing with television violence and, especially, children's television. In Canada, home of the V-chip, recently retired Chairman of the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunication Commission (CRTC) Keith Spicer has been a tireless champion of improving television for children and his final report on the issue was entitled "Respecting Children."

All of this political action has demonstrated that this is an issue of great concern. The involvement of these government officials clearly shows that this is an issue that is not going away and that it resonates with the American public. Poll after poll unambiguously indicates that this is an area the American people care deeply about and want to see changed.

The networks themselves, however, have proved to be important agents of change. First, they have read the handwriting on the wall. Last year's report stated that there was something to be said for holding their feet to the fire on this issue. They have felt the flames. It would be wrong, however, to create the impression that the networks have responded only because they have felt great pain or fear great risk. The networks are full of highly intelligent, caring people who are concerned about the world their children will live in. When they can remove themselves from the extraordinary competition of their industry, they too want to make programming less violent and more friendly to families. While we frequently hear them complain about competitive pressures, especially from cable, never once have we encountered a network executive who does not care about the effect of the programming his or her network airs or who cynically feels that violence is simply a competitive tool to be used without consequence.

Television continues to be something about which everyone has an opinion. The next year promises changes in the world of television for every American. Parents hope that the new labeling system will provide them with more information about the television programs their children watch. The creative community is concerned that these changes may stifle the creative

process. Networks are concerned about the effects of the labeling system on advertisers and their ability to ward off a continued erosion of their audiences.

It is essential to repeat that much still needs to be done. It is the purpose of the next report to ensure that the gains of the past season are solidified and continue for subsequent seasons. The monitoring process represents one of the best and most effective ways of dealing with television violence.

## **B. The Status of Last Year's Recommendations**

Last year's report concluded with a set of ten recommendations to the broadcast networks and one recommendation each for the creative community, the government, affiliates, schools, parents and even kids. In order to assess the effectiveness of last year's report and to outline the work that still needs to be done, we will reprint each of the recommendations in italics. Each recommendation from last year is followed by an evaluation of how it was dealt with by the broadcast networks this year and the work that still needs to be done. In addition, we issue two new recommendations for the 1995-96 television season. The Center for Communication Policy continues to be prepared to discuss any aspect of this report and to fully work with the networks in implementing its recommendations.

### **To the Broadcast Networks:**

*1. **Scheduling:** Programs containing violent themes or images should be programmed in the later hours of the prime time schedule, specifically 9:00 p.m. or later. Special attention should be paid to what has been a trouble spot: Sunday evening. Action theatricals and television movies should be run as late as possible. Until Fox schedules a 10:00 p.m. hour of prime time, it should be especially vigilant in this area, continuing its liberal use of advisories.*

With one exception, the series raising frequent concerns ran at 9:00 p.m. or later. However, quite a few of the series raising occasional concerns continued to run at 8:00 p.m. and, in some cases, even earlier. While these series raise fewer problems, they would benefit from later scheduling. With the exception of Fox, television movies and theatrical films ran at 9:00 p.m. There is still an important need for Fox to program a 10:00 p.m. hour of prime time so that its films do not have to begin at 8:00 p.m. Fox did, however, continue its liberal use of advisories. Beginning with the 1996-97 television season, one network, CBS, scheduled the 8:00 hour as "family friendly programming." While this is an encouraging development, it remains to be seen if CBS will be able to compete successfully with the other networks and cable with "family friendly programming."

*2. **Promos:** The networks should re-examine their policies regarding promos. Attention should be focused on the lack of context in promos, the time periods and shows during which the promos run and how non-violent shows can produce action promos. All promos and theatrical advertisements should be reviewed by the practices and standards department.*

The networks did review their policies regarding promotions and made significant progress in dealing with this issue. This year's monitoring found very few promotions for the network's programming that raised concerns. Advertisements for theatrical films about to be released continue to raise concerns, and the networks should work on this problem with the motion picture studios.

**3. Theatrical Films:** *Rethink which films cannot be made suitable for broadcast television, especially action films with 30-50 scenes of violence. These are the films that are nearly impossible to edit. Even if they are edited, little of the story would be left. Continue and expand the practice of extending prime time hours for difficult films.*

Fewer theatrical films (29% this year as opposed to last year's 42%) raised concerns about the use of violence. This area is still where most of the "real" violence on broadcast television is found. The networks need to continue their policies of editing out the worst moments of violent scenes and continue to consider whether some films are unsuitable for broadcast television.

**4. Children's Television:** *Examine those shows that feature combat as the highlight of the program. Study those shows that attract children and maintain their interest without using extensive fighting.*

Fewer children's shows featured "sinister combat violence" and more contained alternatives to fighting, as well as educational aspects. The FCC rule calling for three hours of educational programming a week for children represents an important effort in dealing with this issue.

**5. Television Movies:** *Some crimes and other dramatic stories are so compelling they must be told. But many television movies are about crimes and only serve as a vehicle for violence without a larger context or purpose. These stories do not always need to be told. Be careful about unnecessarily violent titles. Advisories should be much more liberally applied.*

There was modest improvement in the area of television movies over the past season. Next year's schedule promises fewer television movies about sensationalized crimes or stories that feature the worst of human experience. The number of violent titles dropped significantly this year. Advisories still need to be more consistently applied to television movies.

**6. Advisories:** *Advisories serve an important function for parents. They need to be applied much more consistently, especially to television movies and theatricals. This is much less a problem for series. Fox has shown that liberal use of advisories does not alienate viewers or advertisers.*

As mentioned above, more television movies need advisories. This season saw a much greater willingness to use advisories for theatrical films and television specials.

**7. Tonnage:** *A few shows contain so many scenes of violence that the overall context of the show is violent. These programs are in the greatest need of better writing to find plot devices other than just violence to move the story. This is a particular challenge to development executives.*

This recommendation still stands with regard to the writers of some series and, although they are in a different industry, to the writers of motion pictures. Fewer television series this season featured so many scenes of violence that the overall context of the show became violence.

*8. **Cinematic Techniques:** Emphasis should be paid to techniques that can overly accentuate scenes of violence. These include music, close-ups, slow motion and sound effects. All these techniques can improve a scene, but often are used just to enhance the violence. These are not merely incidental areas of television. Reality programs using re-creations are under a special obligation to be careful in the area of technique.*

This year's report continued to examine which of these techniques mitigated violence and which aggravated it. Of greatest concern this season was the use of music in minimizing the real impact of violence in a story. This year's report points out which shows use music, slow motion or special effects in a manner that raises concerns.

*9. **Practices and Standards:** Recognize that these departments are an inexpensive investment for the networks' own peace of mind. The executives who run these departments at all four networks are extremely knowledgeable and should have unimpeded access to the highest levels of senior management. Except in very rare instances, these departments should have the final say on the treatment of issues of violence. To program standards executives: apply to yourselves the standards you would apply to your competitors.*

The practices and standards departments continue to serve as the "conscience" of the networks and provide a very valuable service in applying standards. Our observations show that they continue to have an important influence with the upper management of the networks and are respected as important arbiters of taste and judgment. Our conversations with these executives show that their internal discussions of standards in television often parallel our own internal dialogue.

*10. **Shows That Deal With Violence Well:** Examine how these programs can feature conflict, crime and tension without resorting to contextually inappropriate scenes of violence. Identify the qualities that make these shows successful.*

Many of the 10:00 p.m. dramas are, in our judgment, of higher quality than those aired at any other time in the history of television. The list of shows that deal with violence well has more than doubled this year. It is very encouraging that these shows can deal with issues of violence so well and, at the same time, earn consistently solid or high ratings.

### **To the Television Creative Community:**

Recognize the risk that violence in television and film can be used to substitute for good writing. The best writers and producers in television can create characters and compelling stories without unnecessarily filling the program with scenes of violence. Through your own organizations such as The Caucus for Producers, Writers and Directors, the guilds and the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences hold meetings and discussions on issues related to the use of violence:

showing consequences, graphicness, the need for context and techniques to avoid over reliance on scenes of violence. Include the network's development executives in these discussions.

### **To the Government:**

Understand the important role you play in the issue of violence in the media. Do not underestimate your power to shape public opinion. As much as possible, speak to the television industry with one voice. Use your powerful voice to encourage, persuade, cajole and, when necessary, threaten. Recognize when progress is made. The television violence issue needs sustained leadership from the government. Broadcasters should not have to fear that all understandings and arrangements disappear after every election or change in government.

### **To Affiliates:**

Put pressure on the networks. Let them know what programming you do not like or which is unsuitable for your area. Do so with examples and with detail of the format, themes or scenes of violence you do not consider suitable. In conjunction with the network's practices and standards department, create your own standards for network promotions and your own local and syndicated programming. Network promotions designed for 10:00 p.m. or later should not be run on your station in the afternoon or very early evening.

### **To Schools:**

Media literacy should never replace social studies or science in the curriculum. But television is an important part of students' lives. Teachers should ask their students about what they watch and how accurately it reflects their lives. Discussions of how television deals with gender and racial stereotyping, depictions of historical events and social trends can all be incorporated into existing lesson plans. Teachers can be more media literate and include these concepts in their teaching.

### **To Parents:**

You cannot watch all television with your children, but you can occasionally watch your child watch television. You can ask them about what they watch. What lessons are they assimilating? Can they distinguish between animation and live action? Do they realize that they can settle disputes without resorting to violence? Why do they like some television characters and not others?

Make your views known to television stations and broadcast networks.

**To Kids:**

Question what you watch on television. Discuss what you watch with your parents. When you do not understand something or it seems confusing, ask about it. Compare the world of television with the world you live in. If there are differences, why do you think this is so? How do your favorite shows deal with conflict and with people fighting? Ask yourself: how would you change television? You, too, make your views known to television stations and broadcast networks.

## C. New Recommendations

In addition to renewing some of last year's recommendations, we issue two new recommendations for next season.

*1. UPN and WB:* We hereby extend an invitation to UPN and WB to join the monitoring process. They both consider themselves broadcast networks, now collectively program six nights of television each week and have begun to attract audiences. This year's study shows that one of the new networks airs programming that raises concerns about television violence. As broadcast networks competing for the same advertising revenue and audiences as the other four networks, they should consider this work part of their broadcast responsibility. We would be delighted to fully brief them on our methods and results and hope to include them as participants in next year's study. We hope the new networks and their corporate owners, Viacom and Time-Warner, recognize the importance of this process.

*2. The Monitoring Should Continue:* By any measure this has been a successful effort. This year's report demonstrates that the process of an annual public report, followed by discussions of the report's findings, has been an important contributing factor in dealing effectively with the television violence issue. We believe that much has been gained by having an independent, outside monitor examine the world of television violence and then report its findings. We believe that the networks would agree that this process is useful. If it is continued each year, the monitoring has the potential to make an important difference in addressing an issue that has been contested for over 40 years. The overwhelmingly positive response of the networks, creative community, advertisers, advocacy groups and academics to this monitoring process, coupled with the improvement from the first season to the second, all clearly establish the need for continued monitoring.

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