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Should We Censor Violence in the Media?

The elephant as portrayed in Disney's children's movie, *Dumbo*, and seen performing circus tricks has long been a happy childhood memory.

... recent reports of out-of-control, gangbanging, interspecies-raping teen elephants in Africa were sobering. Orphaned by hunters, raised in a preserve absent of adults, they began terrorizing their neighbors once they were released into the larger preserve. It smacked of *Clockwork Orange* for the pachyderm world. The workers in the preserve had to bring in adult bull elephants to bring the teenage marauders into line. Elephants have a complex social system and parental control is imperative to keep order. (Fischhoff, para. 54-55, 1999)

Like the teen elephants, the increase in violence committed by young men has also brought a wake-up call to our society. What has caused such an increase in violence? The answer is not a simple one since such a large percentage of children are experiencing neglect, intrafamilial violence and a lack of parental control. Correcting a pattern of such magnitude cannot be solved easily. One major influence is electronic media, which has brought into these children's homes images that reinforce these patterns of violence. The impact violence in the media has on these children and the important role it plays in the violence they then inflict on society is enough to make censorship for young children's media a necessity.

To understand the source of social violence, one must understand the effects of intrafamilial violence and the impact abuse and neglect have on children. Violent adults develop their patterns of violence from their own childhood experiences of intrafamilial

violence. “The vortex of violence” (Perry, para. 8, 1996) is continued generation to generation as the developing brain of children of each new generation adapt to the persistent threat at home. Violence in the media is a new aspect of this vortex. Children raised in homes where violence is the model view violence in the media as reinforcement of what they have experienced at home. Children raised in healthy homes and communities who watch violent media view the world as a much more dangerous place than it really is but are not likely to respond violently because of the influence. In both cases children experience unnecessary trauma and inaccurate views of the world.

With child abuse and neglect costing Americans “258 million dollars a day” (Levine, para. 2, 2001), reality tells us that far too many children are in the category of those experiencing intarfamilial violence and neglect due to lack of healthy parental involvement.

Thousands of scientific studies have been presented to verify the connection between violence and media violence, but they have only been able to show a casual relationship between the two. The definition of scientific research and the reality of allowing someone to commit violent acts in a laboratory setting make the research almost impossible. But, in fact, there is no need to go so far to come to an honest and clear conclusion. One simply has to look at how children learn.

Children are influenced by media --they learn by observing, imitating, and making behaviors their own. Aggressive attitudes and behaviors are learned by imitating observed models. Research has shown that the strongest single correlate with violent behavior is previous exposure to violence...Titillating violence in sexual context and comic violence are particularly dangerous, because they associate positive feelings with hurting others. (Committee on public education, para. 9-10, 2001)

As television and other forms of electronic media become increasingly more

violent, children by the age of eighteen are subjected to scenes of murder, while they sit comfortably in their own homes. This can be anywhere from “20,000 to 75,000” (Perry, para. 4, 1996) different acts of murder viewed by millions of children each day.

Children as old as eight are uniquely vulnerable to violent media because they have difficulty telling the difference between fantasy and reality. We have all seen children imitate the attitudes and behaviors of characters such as Batman, but what about imitating some of the behavior in videos commonly displayed on MTV or in the television show South Park?

Children learn by observing and trying out "behavioral scripts." Repeated exposure to violent behavioral scripts can lead to increased feelings of hostility, expectations that others will behave aggressively, desensitization to the pain of others, and increased likelihood of interacting and responding to others with violence. (Committee on public education, para. 13, 2001)

Each interaction, whether real or fantasy, is stored by a child’s brain. Then it is used to update the child’s view of the world. The rational part of the brain that is able to think through issues, rather than simply react, takes “twenty years to develop” (Niehoff, para. 12,1999). Therefore children, particularly children under eight, have little ability to change and control responses to input.

...the Huesman and Eron study on cumulative effects of TV watching and real-world criminality. In their study, however, watching violent TV did not correlate with real-world violence or criminality when measured concurrently at ages 8 and 30. No, it correlated with violence watching at eight and criminal behavior at 30. In effect, media exposure created scripts not impulses. (Fischhoff, para. 45, 1999)

If a child comes from a healthy home with strong, positive parental involvement, then violence in the media might disturb them, but they are not likely to act on it. But those children who have experienced abusive childhoods, and are bombarded with the

media's super real images have stored them as "behavioral scripts" (Committee on public education, para. 13, 2001) they see violence as the solution for conflicts, and that is where the danger lies.

In an ideal world, censorship would be unnecessary because the media would not understate the impact of violence to increase their profits as they did in the "relationship of second hand smoking and lung cancer." (Bushman, para.10, 2001) Unfortunately, reality requires those who admit to the destructive effect of the media step in and attempt to limit the impact with censorship. It is a matter of the community protecting its young. We, as a nation, need to select and censor the entertainment time of our young who are unable to cognitively tell the difference between reality and fantasy. Therefore censorship of the media, for children under eight, should be the first step in this process. Hopefully, the influence will make it unnecessary to censor more. If there is no censorship in the media then we will come to live with "rogue teen elephants" (Fischhoff, para. 54, 1999) terrorizing our lives, or better yet, we can choose the path of responsibility and protect our young.

Should We Censor Violence In The Media To Protect Children?

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Plaintiffs - Appellants, v. TERI KENDRICK, et al.,

Defendants - Appellees

No. 00-3643

In the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit

On Appeal From a Judgment of the United States District Court for the Southern District
of Indiana, Indianapolis Division

Submitted November 8,2000

**BRIEF *AMICI CURIAE* OF SCHOLARS AND AUTHORS IN THE FIELD OF MEDIA
AND COMMUNICATIONS IN SUPPORT OF PLAINTIFFS-APPELLANTS: HENRY
JENKINS, RICHARD RHODES, JIB FOWLES, ROBERT HORWITZ, ELLEN
SEITER, DONNA GAINES, VIVIAN SOBCHACK, CONSTANCE PENLEY**

Retrieved on November 23,2002 from
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ARGUMENT

SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES HAVE NOT ESTABLISHED THAT VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT CAUSES HARMFUL EFFECTS IN CHILDREN OR ADOLESCENTS

- A. The Limitations of Media Effects Research*
- B. Misrepresentations and Misinterpretations of the Research*

CONCLUSION

CENSORSHIP BASED ON UNPROVEN ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT HARMFUL EFFECTS MAY BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE

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(This article suggests that if we were to censor the media, then we might as well censor the Bible. The Bible contains topics such as adultery, hatred towards others, issues regarding homosexuals, and violence which are issues we are wanting to censor in the media. They state that it would be impossible to find 1000 studies, as advocates of censorship refer to, that would unequivocally prove that violence in the media is linked to aggressive behavior in children. These studies are based on their patient's aggression rates and not on actual performed violence. Therefore health professionals, child advocacy groups and scholars are not doing their part by correctly recording their studies, in fact by doing this, they are just wasting their time and hurting their theory. The studies also do not address the issues of dysfunctional families, abuse, and unnecessary cruel discipline, which are difficult issues to correct in society but are at the root of most violent behavior.)

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(Violence in the media is not actually a problem as some see it to be. Factitious facts about violence in the media have occurred over the years. Through different studies, scientists have watched the patterns of children when exposed to different level of violence on TV. Some research has been recorded that very few children acted with any kind of aggression and in fact, the children who watched a more comedic show tended to be more hostile. Another disturbing fact is that few studies include research on the effect

in the real world nor do they followed the children over years to see the long-term effect. Another issue stems around acts of murder on TV and in movies. Since murder is the main form of violence seen in the media it is believed that it correlates to an increase of murders in society. This is not substantiated. In fact, based on reports from the FBI we live in one of the least violent eras in peacetime history.)

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(There have been studies concluding that seeing violence on TV and in movies does have a negative effect, but there are other studies with far more evidence that concludes that seeing violence in these forms has no harmful effect. Also studies have been conducted that conclude that children seeing violence on television tend to be far more aggressive when they are older, but this study is inaccurate and distorts the truth.)