

Violence on primetime television continues to escalate



From the Director

by Ann Dugger

I recently attended a press conference held by Character Counts! In Jacksonville,¹ at which participants were asked to give their opinion about the high murder and crime rate in our city. There was, of course, a variety of responses, and I thought about some of the factors that contribute to committing these crimes.

I believe that we ARE what we "eat," literally and mentally, that we think about and act on what we see. Every action begins with a thought, and our children are flooded with unwholesome images which directly affect their behavior.

The Parents Television Council recently released a new study on television violence, *Dying to Entertain*, which tells how violence on prime time television has increased dramatically since 1998.²

"This new study shows that violence on television is alarmingly more frequent and more disturbing than anything we've seen before. Children and families who watch primetime network television are treated to a frightening amount and degree of violence. Not only is there more on-screen violence than ever before, the discussions of violent crime are more explicit and the

violence depicted far more graphic," said Tim Winter, president of the PTC.

He goes on to say that medical and social science have proven conclusively that children are adversely affected by exposure to TV violence, yet millions of parents think nothing of letting their children watch such shows.

Experts explain the effects of violence on children: "Given that on average American youth witness more than 1,000 murders, rapes and assaults per year on TV, understanding the consequences of such exposure is an important public health issue. After decades of research and more than a thousand studies, the answer is 'yes,' watching violent content on TV affects youth. Although not all those exposed will commit violent acts, the evidence is overwhelming that viewing high levels of violent programming increases the likelihood of aggression."³

The report states that, over time, violence has shifted from being incidental to the story telling, to being an integral part of the program. And violent scenes increasingly include a sexual element – rapists, sexual predators and fetishists are cropping up with increasing frequency.

Just today I received an email from the American Family Association stating, "Hollywood recently sank to a new low. In the name of art, two sick movies—among others—were presented at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival in Utah. One film, *Hounddog*, features a very disturbing scene showing the character of 12-year-old

Dakota Fanning being raped. The other film, *Zoo*, is about a man having 'unnatural' relations with a horse."⁴

A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that content descriptors are not being used on the vast majority of general audience shows containing sex, violence or so-called adult language. Eight out of 10 of such shows did not receive the V or S content descriptors, and children's programs also contain a significant amount of violence.

The industry's proposed solution – the V-Chip – is ineffective and inconsistent. We need a better solution. Parents must be more aware and involved with their family media consumption. We cannot depend on the program creators, the networks, sponsors NOR our public servants to institute the necessary sweeping changes to protect our children.

Many lawmakers have proposed legislation to curb TV violence, but all attempts to legislatively address this problem have failed on First Amendment grounds. Take an active role in protecting your child. Urge your legislators to regulate this harmful influence on your family. But most of all, know what your child is watching on TV and set an example by choosing not to spend your own time watching these shows.

¹ <http://www.cci.org/>
² Go to ptcealerts@parentstv.org for a complete transcript of the study.
³ Dr. Deborah A. Fisher, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation
⁴ Go to this link to protest sponsorship of these films: <https://secure.afa.net/afa/activism/takeaction.asp?id=232>



He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

—1 John 4:8-11

Faith Corner

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