APPENDIX

Inquiry on the Effects of Televised Violence:
What Does the Scientific Research Show?

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SUMMARY

The Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") initiated an inquiry and sought public comment on "issues relating to the presentation of violent programming and its impact on children." *Violent Television Programming and its Impact on Children*, FCC 04-175 (released July 28, 2004) ("*Notice*"). In particular, the FCC seeks updated information on research conducted on this issue since the Surgeon General's 2001 report on youth violence and the Federal Trade Commission's 2000 report on marketing violent entertainment to children. The *Notice* asks for informed commentary on more recent studies, and notes that "numerous studies have demonstrated the harmful effects of media violence on children." *Notice* ¶ 7. The *Notice* also says that research has continued "[b]uttressing the conclusion that childhood exposure to media violence lasts into adulthood and increases aggressive behavior." *Notice* ¶ *6.*

For reasons set forth in this report, I disagree with the Commission's characterization of the research in this area. I am a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto. I grew up in New York City, did my undergraduate work at Harvard and my graduate work at Yale. I taught at Stanford and then Columbia and moved to the University of Toronto as chair of the department. My degree is in Social Psychology and most of my work has involved social influence – how people affect each other and are affected by social situations. (My *curriculum vitae* is attached)

In 1981 I taught a seminar on the effect of television violence on aggression. I had read for years that the research demonstrated beyond question that exposure to media violence made

children more aggressive, and I thought it would be interesting to read the research with a group of faculty and students. The class was attended by five graduate students and three or four faculty besides me. We were all amazed to discover that the research did not show what it was usually described as showing. Rather than indicating that exposure to television violence caused aggression, almost all of the studies indicated that there was no effect of exposure on aggression. Some of the studies that were most often cited as showing an effect, actually showed nothing of the kind. I was upset that many psychologists were giving the wrong impression of the research findings. So I spent a year or so reviewing the research, and in 1984 published a paper ("Freedman, 1984"), in the *Psychological Bulletin,* a prestigious journal of the American Psychological Association. In this paper I tried to set the record straight – to show that the research has been cited incorrectly and that, in fact, the scientific research did not support the notion that exposure to media violence caused aggression (what I called the "causal hypothesis"). Since then I have written several papers and given quite a few talks on this subject, always with the same conclusion.

Starting in 1999 I conducted an exhaustive review of all of the available research, and in 2002 I published a book that reviewed all of the evidence (MEDIA VIOLENCE AND ITS EFFECT ON AGGRESSION). On the basis of this comprehensive examination of the evidence, I concluded once again that the scientific research does not support the causal hypothesis.

In response to the Notice, I have been asked to review newer studies of televised violence since 2000, to analyze their findings and to answer some specific questions asked in the Notice. My analysis is set forth in greater detail below. Generally, however, my review led to the following conclusions:

1. The scientific evidence does not support the hypothesis that exposure to media violence causes people to be aggressive. This was true in 2002 when I

published my comprehensive review of the research. The few studies done since then do not add appreciably to the evidence and provide no reason to change that conclusion.

2. Those who argue in favor of the causal hypothesis wrote a review for the Surgeon General in which they presumably presented as strong a case as they could for their position. They have submitted this paper to the FCC as well. The Surgeon General did not accept their review as it stood – and the FCC should not, either. It is a highly selective, inaccurate and biased presentation of the evidence. Indeed, that the review is so flawed is an indication of its weakness.

3. There is no convincing evidence that exposure to media violence causes desensitization to real violence. However, there is too little research to draw any firm conclusions.

4. Defining violence is relatively simple in principle as long as one distinguishes between real aggression and play aggression. However, identifying aggression or violence is often quite difficult because it is very much dependent on the intentions of the actor and the context in which the actions take place. This is especially true in the research, which has used a wide variety of definitions and measures, some of which have little or no relation to real aggression. Thus, relating any policy or actions to the research is highly problematic even if one thought that media violence is harmful (which, to repeat, I do not.).

5. There is no evidence that one kind of portrayal of violence is more or less harmful than another. Any assertions about this are not based on scientific research.

6. By and large, young children can tell the difference between reality and fiction.

7. All of these statements refer to fictional or fictionalized depictions of violence, not to images of real violence in the news or in sports. There is too little evidence to know anything about the effect of media coverage of real violence. However, I would argue that anyone who believes that exposure to fictional violence has harmful effects must surely accept that exposure to real violence must have at least the same kind of effects and probably stronger ones.

THE FCC'S TASK

The FCC is undertaking a review of the scientific research on the important topic of the effect of media violence. This is a difficult undertaking, because it is probably not possible for those at the FCC to read all of the original research themselves. Rather, they must depend on the submissions they receive. Unfortunately, they will no doubt get conflicting descriptions of the state of knowledge. Some argue that the evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that exposure to media violence causes children and perhaps adults to become more aggressive and to commit violent crimes. Others, including me, disagree with that assessment and believe the scientific evidence does not support the idea that exposure to violent media causes aggression or violent crime.

Thus, the FCC presumably will be faced with submissions that directly contradict each other, and the FCC is not in a position to evaluate all of the evidence itself. Under these circumstances, when there are conflicting stories, those who make judgments must depend on the consistency in the statements they receive and on other cues to decide which side to believe. Therefore, in this submission, in addition to making an argument for the position that media violence does not cause aggression, I shall try to point out some obvious flaws and mistakes in statements made by those who take the opposite position. I hope that those who read the various submissions will notice the errors of omission and commission, and will accordingly be less likely to trust the statements by those who make these errors.

Errors in describing the number of research studies

Let me start by echoing the FCC's apparent concern about the enormous discrepancy in the number of research studies cited in various statements on this issue. As the *Notice* points out, there has been great variation in the number of studies cited by those who argue that exposure to

television violence is a cause of aggression. Although some would excuse these errors by saying they were due merely to confusion about what to count, I believe the discrepancy is not a matter of confusion but almost certainly due to lack of knowledge. Consider the statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics ("AAP"). The AAP represents physicians who have the grave responsibilities of caring for our children and advising parents on the medical needs of their children. Surely, this group would never advise parents to give children vaccinations that were not safe or were ineffective or to avoid medicines or foods that had not been shown conclusively to be harmful. Yet the AAP issued a statement (in 2001) stating that exposure to television violence was harmful, and urging parents to restrict children's access to television violence and, indeed, to avoid any television exposure for children under 2 years of age. In making the statement that television violence was harmful, the AAP referred to over 3500 research studies with all but 18 showing a positive relationship (between exposure to violence and aggression). As anyone who is familiar with the research knows, this statement is wildly inaccurate. There are between 200 and 250 separate research studies on this topic (not over 3500), and it is entirely false that only 18 have failed to show a relationship. Moreover, this is not simply a matter of counting all papers rather than just independent research studies. That would be a careless, but perhaps forgivable, excuse. But that is not the reason for the error. In the first place, the statement clearly refers to "research studies." And the reference to the failed studies is not a round number. It does not say about 20 or about 30 – it says 18, which is a precise number. One would assume the AAP has the list of those 18 and could readily produce it. But they do not have such a list, because there is no such list. Their statement is obviously made without any detailed knowledge of the research. Other organizations, including the American Psychological Association, which surely should know better, have made similar though not quite as spectacular

errors when referring to the number of studies. Therefore, I would argue that it is obvious that these organizations have issued their potentially very important statements without knowing the scientific literature. One can only wonder what they based them on, but it certainly was not scientific expertise.

In this context it is worth noting that the errors are always in the direction that would tend to make the statements of harm more impressive. That is, none of these organizations has understated the number of studies that supposedly supported the notion that media violence was harmful, nor overstated the number of studies that failed to support this effect. In all instances of which I am aware, the errors have been to overstate the total number of studies and to understate or even not mention the failures.

The reason for detailing this is that it is only one example, albeit the most extreme, of inaccurate statements about this topic being made by prestigious and presumably careful organizations. It is important for the FCC to note that many such statements have been made that, when considered carefully, indicate that the organization involved does not know the status of the research and is not taking a position based on a rigorous examination of the scientific research. Rather, all too often, important organizations on which people rely, have made statements based on either their intuition or on what others have said.

Although some have stated that the evidence for a causal effect of exposure to media violence on aggression is overwhelming, that is not correct. Indeed, the evidence is weak and inconsistent. This is not the place for reviewing this research again. I reviewed much of it 1984 and did an exhaustive review in 2002 (Freedman, 1984, 2002). After reading all the published research carefully, I concluded that the evidence does not support the hypothesis that exposure

to film or television violence causes children or adults to be aggressive. That review has never been seriously challenged, and I stand by it.

I support my position in several ways. First, I point out that it is inconsistent with what has occurred in society; second, I show that the most recent research does not add much if anything to where things stood a few years ago; and third, I demonstrate the weaknesses, inaccuracies, and outright deceptions in the strongest, most up-to-date review done by those who favor the hypothesis that media violence is harmful.

Decline in rate of violent crime since 1992

Let me put this into the context of what has actually happened in our society regarding crime rates. A decade or so after television became generally available in the United States, the rate of violent crime began to rise and increased sharply until about 1980. (The same happened in Canada). This made many people see a connection between television and violent crime. They argued that violence on television caused children to become more aggressive and desensitized to real violence, and these effects in turn were a major cause of the increase in violent crime. This was a plausible idea, although it should be noted that no similar increase in violent crime occurred after the introduction of television into Europe or Japan, where the programming was just as violent or more so. Nevertheless, those who believed in the effect made vehement arguments about the harmful effects of media violence.

However, one must look at these kinds of major social phenomena over a long period. If television violence caused the increase in violent crime, one should expect the effect to continue. That is, if exposure to media violence in 1965 caused children then to become more aggressive, it should have the same effect whatever the time period. Therefore, we must consider the situation today. Starting about 1990, video games with a lot of violent content became extremely

popular, so that many if not most young males played such games and were not only exposed to violent images but took part in the violence that occurred in the games. In addition, rap music, with its violent content, became very popular about the same time. Thus, since 1990 children in our society have been exposed to violent images in television and film, as well as to violent video games and rap music. If exposure to media violence caused children to become aggressive, it seems reasonable to have expected an increase in violent crime and in violent incidents in schools, and this increase should have occurred especially among younger people.

Yet the opposite has occurred. Not only has there not been an increase in violent crime, but there has been perhaps the most dramatic decrease in our nation's history. This is based on both crimes reported to and by police, and on the victimization surveys which pick up about twice as many crimes. Regardless of which method is used, the rate of violent crime has dropped to the point that by almost any measure it is now below the rate before television was introduced. I have heard people say "yes, but the rate of violent crimes by young people is actually increasing." That is not true. This decrease in violent crime has occurred for all age groups and is, in fact, especially pronounced among teenagers. Moreover, despite a few terrible and highly publicized incidents, the number of homicides in our schools has decreased sharply and is at the lowest level in decades. If media violence causes aggression, there should have been an increase in violent crime in the 90's: that there was a decrease surely is inconsistent with the causal effect of media violence and might be considered an argument against it.

I readily acknowledge that this is not a rigorous, scientific argument. The actual reasons for the decrease could be so powerful that they overwhelmed the effect of media violence. Perhaps if it were not for media violence, the decrease in violent crime would have been ever greater. It is conceivable that the sharpest, most sustained drop in violent crime ever seen would

have been even sharper if only there were no violence in the media. This is theoretically possible, but it certainly requires a stretch of the imagination to believe. Let me put it this way: if violent crime had continued to rise after 1980, there is little doubt that it would have been blamed in part on media violence; that it did not rise but rather sank surely should be considered an argument against the harmful effect of media violence.

Status of the Research

Having put this in the context of what is actually happening to the rate of violence in our society, let me turn to the research. From the research there is one clear finding on which everyone agrees – more aggressive children watch more violent television and films than less aggressive children. The relationship is not strong – somewhere between one and ten percent of the variation in aggression is related to exposure to media violence. So at the most, media violence is not a major factor. But it is very important to remember that this relationship between aggressiveness and preference for violent media provides no evidence of causality. The simplest explanation, the one that must be disproved, is that some children have more aggressive personalities or dispositions than others and that these children like more violent media, play more violent sports, and engage in more aggressive behavior. To demonstrate that violent media *cause* aggressiveness, it is necessary to rule out this simple, intuitive explanation that is almost certainly at least partially true.

Consider that boys and girls differ greatly in both aggressiveness and exposure to media violence. As anyone knows who has ever watched boys and girls in a schoolyard, or had boys and girls in their home, or has read any of the hundreds of scientific papers on the subject, boys are more physically aggressive than girls. It is a fact of life. We know also that boys are much more likely than girls to prefer violent programs and films. There is ample evidence for this if

anyone doubts it. So boys are more aggressive and like more aggressive media. Surely no one would seriously suggest that the reason boys are more aggressive than girls is that boys watch more violent programs. This would be ridiculous and would go against the most basic knowledge of boys and girls. It is not the exposure to media violence that makes boys more aggressive – it is that boys are generally more aggressive in many ways, and that includes liking violent media and acting aggressively themselves.

In the same way, we cannot assume there is any causal relationship between exposure to violent media and aggressiveness. Just as boys are more aggressive and are exposed to more violent media than girls, within both sexes some individuals are more aggressive and are exposed to more violent media than others. That's the kind of people they are. It is logically possible that there is more to it than that. Perhaps exposure to violent media plays some role in making them more aggressive.. But the mere fact that more aggressive children watch more violent media provides not the slightest evidence that exposure to the violent media causes them to be aggressive. That remains to be proven by the scientific research, and it has not been.

Until 2002, there was quite a lot of research (between 200 and 250 separate studies) and little evidence to support the notion that exposure to media violence causes aggression. Some studies provided some evidence consistent with that view, but more did not. Overall, the results were inconsistent, weak, and not at the level one would ordinarily accept as demonstrating a causal effect. There is no need to repeat the review or the detailed analysis, except to make a few general points.

(1)While laboratory experiments provided the best evidence in favor of a causal relationship, this kind of research is deeply flawed due to problems inherent in the artificial nature of the situation. You cannot compare watching a program that someone else chooses for

you and seeing it for a few minutes, with a diet of viewing television programs that the people have chosen themselves.

Another serious problem in all of this work has been the lack of comparability of the "violent" and "non-violent" materials. To show that a violent program has a different effect than a non-violent program, one must make the programs as similar as possible in everything except the presence of violence. If they are not similar, any effects could be due to other differences, such as the fact that violent programs tend to be more exciting and interesting to young boys than non-violent ones. An extreme example of this lack of comparability is a study that compared an exciting, violent prize fight with a travelogue about canal boating. Obviously, the prize fight was more exciting and interesting to these viewers than was canal boating.

Yet another problem that I will discuss more later has been the mostly poor measures of aggression used in this work. It is not easy to measure real aggression, because clearly one cannot allow participants in research to get into fights, and certainly not to hurt each other. Therefore, most of the studies have used what charitably might be called "analogues" for aggression. Since no real aggression is measured, it is difficult and very risky to generalize from the results to the effects on real aggression in the real world.

Finally, the laboratory research involved the almost unavoidable problem of what we call "demand effects." Participants in research always wonder what the experimenter is looking for or expects. When young children (or even college students) are brought into the laboratory, shown a violent film, and then given a chance to act aggressively, they must ask themselves what is going on. Why were they shown that film? Very few studies even attempt to provide a sensible answer. In the absence of an explanation, it is reasonable for the participants to conclude that the experimenter is interested in aggression and wants or expects them to act

aggressively. That is, they feel pressure or "demand" to do what the experimenter wants. Thus, any effects of the violent film could be due to this demand pressure. Surprisingly, very few of the studies even attempted to minimize this problem.

All told, from a purely methodological point of view, the laboratory research has many problems. Because of this, the results of laboratory experiments should be given little weight. In any case, the results of the laboratory experiments were far from impressive in terms of the causal hypothesis. Fewer than half produced supportive results. More to the point, when those that used measures of aggression that had no relationship to real aggression (punching a Bobo doll, thinking of aggressive words, etc.), fewer than 30% found significant effects consistent with the causal hypothesis while over 50% failed to support it. So even if one were to accept the laboratory research as entirely valid, it provides at best weak and inconsistent support for the notion that exposure to violent media cause aggression.

(2) All of methods other than the laboratory experiments produced even weaker results. A large majority of the studies failed to find evidence supporting the causal hypothesis and many produced results clearly inconsistent with the idea that exposure to media violence causes aggression.

(3) Some studies that used innovative methods and considered large-scale effects all found that actual exposure to actual violent television did not increase violent crime.

(4) With the exception of a few small-scale laboratory experiments, there was no evidence that exposure to violent media desensitizes people to actual violence (although it should be said that there is so little research on this topic that no strong statements should be made on either side of the issue.)

ANALYSIS OF RECENT STUDIES

Since 2002 there has been little research on whether exposure to media violence causes aggression. The *Notice* states that research done since then "buttresses the conclusion that childhood exposure to media violence lasts into adulthood and increases aggressive behavior." I disagree with this statement. As far as I know there have been only a few relevant studies published in the last few years, and none of them adds materially to the status of the scientific evidence. I address each of the new studies below.

Huesmann *et al.*, 2003

This paper reports the third phase of a study in which data were collected on children in 1977 and again two years later and then in 1995 when the children were adults. The method is similar to that of other longitudinal studies on this topic. At the first wave of the study, the researchers collected measures of aggressiveness and exposure to media violence, as well as (not typical of all of this research) of identification with aggressive characters in the media and how realistic the children rated the violence in the media. During the last phase, measures were obtained of the adult's exposure to violent media and their aggression. Let me say, as I have always said about this work, that it is very nicely done and one must be impressed by the amount of effort expended to follow people for such a long period. Although one can quibble about some aspects of the method, it is very difficult research to do, and this study does it very well.

Before discussing the results of this study, let me be as clear as I can that they relate to two quite different questions. The first is whether children who watch a lot of violent media are more aggressive than those who watch less. The answer, found in many previous studies as well as in this one, is very simply yes. Children who watch more violent media are more aggressive when they are young, and continue to be more aggressive throughout their lives. I agree with the

description of the results given in the paper's abstract. Childhood exposure to media violence predicts young adult aggressive behavior, as do childhood identification with violent characters in the media and the perception that media violence is realistic. And, although not mentioned in the abstract, childhood aggression also predicts young adult aggressive behavior.

In other words, a constellation of childhood behaviors, preferences and attitudes is related to aggression in childhood and continues to be related to aggression as the children become adults. Although children change a great deal as they get older, aggressiveness seems to be quite consistent. Let me be clear that this does not mean that an aggressive child necessarily becomes an aggressive adult. The consistency is far from perfect, so that many aggressive children become non-aggressive adults, and many non-aggressive children become aggressive adults. What the research shows is that overall aggressiveness appears to be more consistent than almost any other trait that has been studied.

For the purposes of the FCC's inquiry, the most important point is that prediction is by no means the same as causation. Without further data and analysis, there is nothing to indicate that any of these childhood factors *cause* young adult aggression. Rather, it is a fact of life that, just as boys are more aggressive then girls, some boys and some girls are more aggressive than others. And these more aggressive children watch more violent media, engage in more aggressive sports, are more aggressive themselves, and continue to be this way years later.

This leads to the second question, which is whether exposure to violent media has a *causal* effect on aggression. This is, of course, the key question, and it is much more difficult to answer than the first question. As noted above, people who are aggressive when they are young children tend to be aggressive as adults. And aggressive children also tend to watch a lot of violent media. Therefore, if one wants to show that exposure to violent media affects later

aggression, one must take into account that some people are by nature, disposition or early training, more aggressive than others. To demonstrate a causal effect of exposure to media violence, it is necessary to show that among children who are equally aggressive when young, those who watch a lot of violent television become more aggressive than those who watch little violent television. This is difficult to demonstrate. Careful, accurate and complete statistical analyses of the right kind could possibly provide results that are consistent with the causal explanation, though even the best result cannot provide conclusive evidence of causality.

It is important to make this as clear as possible. To provide evidence for causality, it is necessary to rule out what has to be the default explanation, namely that some people are more aggressive than others when they are children and continue to be when they are adults. These people on average have a greater preference for aggressive things than do less aggressive people. So, aggressive children like violent TV and films, play more violent video games, identify with the aggressive characters in the media, and may be more likely to believe that media violence is realistic. It is likely (though I know of little or no evidence for this) that these aggressive people also have more aggressive friends, identify with real-life aggressive people, prefer aggressive sports, and in general whatever the activity or behavior, make more aggressive choices than do less aggressive people. And for our purposes, the key point is that these aggressive people engage in more aggressive behavior of all kinds when they are children and do this throughout life.

Given this, almost any measure that involves aggression or violence in childhood will predict to aggressiveness in adulthood. These predictions do not rely on any causal effects – they are due simply to the stability of the aggressive personality or disposition. Therefore, the only way to make an argument for a causal effect of anything that occurs in childhood on aggressive behavior in adulthood, is necessarily to hold constant the aggressiveness of the

children. This is not easy to do entirely, because even the best measures of childhood aggression are far from perfect. But at the very least, all statistical analyses purporting to show a causal effect must eliminate the effect of early aggressiveness.

Unfortunately, the Huesmann paper does not consistently distinguish between the simple relationship between early exposure (or early aggression) and later aggression on the one hand, and the evidence for a causal effect on the other. The most striking instance of this blurring of the lines is Table 5. This table compared adults who as children watched a lot of violent programs with those who watched less. It shows the those who watched the most violent media as children were more likely to engage in various aggressive behaviors as adults. The table and the text suggest that this indicates an effect of exposure, but that is not correct. We know that the most aggressive children also watch the most violent media, so all this table shows is that aggressiveness persists from childhood to young adulthood, which we already know. The same is true for Figure 2, which displays data that are not corrected for childhood aggressiveness. The authors know very well that the table and figure have no relevance to the question of causation, because there is no control for early aggressiveness. The only interesting aspect of both the table and the figure is that, apparently, differences occur only for the very highest viewers of media violence. That is, those who watch the least (the bottom 20%) are no different in terms of young adult aggression than those who watch a moderate amount (the middle 60%). I'll return later to that anomaly and what it might mean.

Most of the analyses are totally or largely irrelevant to the question of causality. We should therefore focus on the only analyses that matter, namely, the multiple regressions shown in Table 6 – 8. Multiple regressions are complex statistical methods of trying to show, in this case, that early exposure to violence is related to later aggression over and above the relationship

of early aggression to later aggression. To repeat, we know that aggression is very stable so those who are aggressive when young are likely to be more aggressive when older. We also know that those who are aggressive when young watch more violent programs than those who are less aggressive. So any relationship between early exposure and later aggression could be due entirely to the relationship between early aggression and early exposure. The multiple regression tries to separate the relationship of early and later aggression from the relationship between early exposure and later aggression.

The second regressions in Table 6 and 7 are the only evidence in favor of a causal effect the authors present. For both males and females, adding childhood exposure to violent media adds a small amount above just childhood aggression to the relationship with young adult aggression. This is the traditional method of trying to show a causal effect, and although the addition is very small, it is significant. Some previous studies have found the same effects and some have failed to find them, so this paper adds nothing striking to the body of research.

I should note, for those interested in statistical details, that the authors have done their analyses somewhat differently from the way they are usually done. The typical method is to enter childhood aggression first and then, making sure that it continues to be entered first, add the exposure measure. That procedure really holds constant childhood aggression and assesses whether adding exposure increases the relationship. For some reason, the authors chose to enter both factors freely in the second analysis. This does not hold childhood aggression constant and, in this case, obviously makes the apparent contribution of exposure greater. It is possible that if the analysis were done the usual way, the increase would not be significant. I think it is an indication of an attempt by the authors to make the results appear as strong as possible.

A more important point is that two other factors also contribute to the relationship – identification with aggressive characters, and the belief that media violence is realistic. And, of greatest importance, all three together (exposure, identification and belief in the reality measure) add no more than any one of them alone. Another analysis, shown in Table 8, indicates an interaction between exposure and each of the other variables, although for some reason, it does not show what happens when one enters all of the interactive terms as would be expected. These interactive effects appear only for males, not for females (that analysis is not shown).

What are we to make of this pattern of results? The authors claim that the results indicate that exposure to violent media makes children more aggressive and that for males, identification with aggressive characters and the perception that the violence is realistic "exacerbate" the effect. (Just why this does not occur for females is not discussed.) However, the fact that these other factors make about the same (or slightly larger) contribution as exposure and that adding all three does not substantially increase the contribution, suggests that these three are highly interrelated. That is, those who are high in exposure are also high in the other factors. Moreover, that the factors contribute in roughly equal proportion suggests they may well measure essentially the same thing, and the most obvious thing they are measuring is disposition to be aggressive. As previously noted, aggressive children watch more violent television and also probably believe it is more realistic and identify more with the aggressive characters. Since no measure of aggression is perfect, it is quite likely that measuring each of these factors separately provides a somewhat better measure of aggressiveness than any one of them alone. That would explain why each of these factors adds a little something to the relationship between early aggression and later aggression – improving the measurement of early aggressiveness would increase the relationship.

Let me put this slightly differently. Whenever you look at the relationship between two measures, its strength depends in part on the real, underlying relationship and in part on how good your measures are. Even if there is a strong relationship, it may appear weak because your measures are less than perfect. If you improve your measures, the statistical relationship should also improve. In reference to this study, I would argue that the measure of early aggression, the measure of early exposure to media violence, the measure of identification with the aggressive characters, and the measure of the reality of the violence, all are related to aggressive personality. Each one measures it to some extent. One might think that the measure by peers of how aggressive the children are would be the best measure, and it may well be. But it captures only what other children observe, is probably affected to some extent by the children's popularity or lack of it, and is obviously not perfect. The children's direct report of exposure to violent media is probably more accurate, since they know exactly what they watch, and their other self-reports may also be less affected by extraneous factors. Assuming they are all slightly different but strongly related indications of the extent to which the children have aggressive personalities, they should each be related to later aggression.

However, because they are strongly interrelated, once you use two of them, adding a third might not make much difference. That is precisely the pattern that was found, and it is entirely consistent with the explanation that the multiple regression is showing merely the relationship between early aggressive personality and later aggression. The fact that the interactive terms also add something is consistent with this explanation, since it is likely that a child who is at the top end on several of these measures is more aggressive than one who is at the top on only one. Indeed, this is supported by the pattern that I described above in which only the top 20% in terms of exposure differ from the others in the likelihood of specific aggressive acts. If exposure had a

causal effect on aggression, one would expect it to be continuous so that the top 20% would be higher than the middle 60%, who would be higher than the bottom 20%. That this does not occur suggests that the measure is meaningful for only the top group (at least in this study – it works differently in other studies). That also may be true of the other measures. If so, combining the measures interactively would take advantage of this rather odd pattern, and would provide a stronger relationship of the early measures with later aggression.

Let me summarize my response to this study. It is very nicely designed and conducted. The results for the simple relationship are straightforward – early exposure to violent media is related to later aggression, as are presumably early aggressiveness, early identification with violent characters, and early belief in the realism of media violence. The results are much less clear and straightforward with regards to the argument for a causal effect. At most, accepting the analyses uncritically as they are presented, the study provides some slight indication of a causal effect that is consistent with that found in other studies but that has often not been found in similar studies. This finding does not change the status of the scientific research.

However, I am doubtful of that result and of that explanation. I believe that a better and more consistent explanation is that the finding shows merely that early aggressiveness is related to later aggression, and that the better your measure of the former, the stronger this relationship will appear statistically. If this interpretation is accepted, the study provides no evidence for a causal effect.

Johnson, *et al.*, 2002

Although this study received a lot of press when it was published, it is quite a step below most of the relevant work. Whereas other studies, including the Huesmann study just discussed, include careful measures of early aggressiveness and of various other factors, this study has no

meaningful measure of childhood aggressiveness, and whereas almost all of the better research included a complex and sophisticated measure of exposure to media violence, this study does not even attempt to measure it, but rather relies on a measure of total television viewing. It is also worth noting that the study focuses on the supposed effect of television viewing during adolescence, whereas virtually all the previous work found little or no relationship between any measure of media exposure during adolescence and aggression. Unfortunately, the results were hyped in a press release by the journal *Science* and then were picked up by and incorrectly described by much of the popular press. The fact is, this study is largely irrelevant to our concerns, since it was not designed to reveal anything about a causal effect of exposure to media violence and therefore does not – and could not – reveal anything about such an effect.

I will not bother reviewing the methodology of this study, since most of it is not relevant. The main finding is that there is a strong relationship between amount of TV viewing at age 14 and aggressive acts several years later; and between TV viewing at age 22 and aggressive acts at age 30. Although this is largely irrelevant to our concerns, it is interesting to note that almost all the other research has reported very low or no correlation between exposure to media violence and aggression during the teenage years, and no study has found any relation between TV viewing in adulthood and aggression. In fact, most of those who write about this assume that whatever effects occur, they happen in the early years. Thus, if anything, the Johnson study's finding confuses even what most of us thought we knew about the relationship between viewing and aggression. On the other hand, since it is total TV viewing and not exposure to violence, perhaps it involves entirely different processes.

The only result of real interest is in Figure 3, which indicates that among those who watch very little TV, there is no difference between those with a prior history of aggression and

those without one in terms of subsequent aggressive acts, whereas there is a large difference among those who watch 1-3 or more than 3 hours a day. However, this is made less impressive and harder to understand by the fact that the difference is greater among those who watch 1-3 hours than among those who watch more than 3 hours. Almost any model of the relationship between viewing and aggression, especially one that involved a causal effect, would assume a greater effect with more exposure. That those who are exposed most show a smaller difference than those who are exposed an intermediate amount, makes it highly unlikely the results are due to a causal effect of exposure. Finally, it must be emphasized that the study measured only total exposure to television, not exposure to violent media, so it is not really dealing with the same issues as the other research. Therefore, rather than providing any clarity or new results to support a causal effect (as was reported in the press), the results of this study are both confusing and irrelevant.

Research on brain activity

There are also some studies using brain imaging techniques and other methods to assess activity in the brain. The use of fMRI and other methods that allow us to observe and especially to localize activity in the brain has been an important part of recent research in many fields. This research is quite interesting, but for the moment, provides no additional information on whether exposure to media violence causes aggression. Several studies have suggested that exposure to media violence, especially to violent video games, is related to frontal lobe activity (Kronenberger *et al.*, in press; Murray, 2002; Wang *et al.*, 2002). I have not managed to get hold of the actual article dealing with MRI, but the press release from the Indiana University School of Medicine describes it in some detail. Assuming the release is accurate, the Wang study involved MRI scans of a small number of teenage boys, some of whom had behavioral disorders,

and some who had no such history. During the scans the boys watched either an exciting but non-violent car racing video game, or a James Bond video game containing violent action. The boys did not play the games, but participated to the extent of pushing a button whenever they thought the main character in the game should take action. There was apparently no measure of how often or appropriately they pushed the buttons, or whether there was any difference in this respect between the groups of boys – the button pushing was included to get the boys involved in the games.

The results were that when watching the violent video game, the boys with the behavioral disorder had less activity in the frontal lobes than those without the disorder. It is not clear exactly what this means, but the frontal lobes are involved in decision-making and behavior control, as well as attention and what is sometimes called executive function. What is perhaps relevant to our concerns is that among the boys without the disorder, those who had been exposed to a lot of violent media also showed different brain reactions to the violent video game from those who had been exposed to less violent media in the past. This is an interesting finding that, as Kronenberger says, indicated that more studies are needed.

There is certainly no indication from this study that playing violent video games *caused* the differences, nor what those differences imply about future behavior. It is very likely the boys who were exposed to a lot of violent media were different from those who were exposed to less, and that it was this difference, not the exposure, that is reflected in the fMRI differences.

I suppose some would like to say that this research suggests that exposure to violent video games causes children to be less affected by violence or perhaps even more inclined to be violent themselves. But it should be clear this research provides no evidence for a causal effect of any kind. That kids who like media violence differ from those who do not is well established.

That they differ in aggressiveness is well established. It should come as no surprise that their brain activity also differs.

However, let us assume simply for the sake of argument that there is a causal effect – that exposure to violent media does affect the brain's reaction to a violent video game. If that were true, it still provides no evidence that the exposure causes these children to be more aggressive. A much simpler explanation is that the James Bond video game was more familiar to them than it was to the others. The frontal lobes are involved in attention. We know that something unfamiliar causes more activation and activity than something that is not familiar. To the extent that these boys were familiar with James Bond and with the James Bond video game, or even similar videogames, the James Bond video game would be expected to cause less activation. Thus, even if one were to be convinced that it was prior exposure that caused the differences in brain function (which frankly seems highly unlikely), there is no reason to believe that the difference had anything to do with aggression. The same effect would be expected for any stimulus or game or film, whether or not it contained violence. That is, the effect could be due entirely to familiarity. While that result would confirm our expectations, it has no implications for anything about aggression or violent behavior.

I did get a pre-publication copy of the study by Kronenberger *et al.* (my thanks to Professor Kronenberger for sending it). This paper reports on what seems to be the first phase of the study that later collected MRIs on the boys, and also is probably the study presented by Mathews (a co-author on the paper that is about to be published) that is cited by the FCC. In this study, boys with or without a behavior problem were given a series of tests that were designed to test executive function. The results were that boys with more exposure to media violence had

weaker scores on executive function, and that this effect was greater for the boys with the behavior disorder. This and the other finding are interesting and certainly should be pursued.

However, as the authors of the paper say, "causal conclusions cannot be drawn from study results." They go on to explain that the relationship could be due to boys with weaker executive function being drawn to media violence, or that the media violence reduces executive function, or that some third factor is the cause. In other words, these results provide no new evidence that exposure to violent television or film affects brain function and therefore they should not be considered as buttressing the case for the causal hypothesis.

SUMMARY OF RECENT RESEARCH

These recent studies do not provide any substantial new evidence regarding whether exposure to media violence causes aggression or violence. Accordingly, they do not affect my view of where the scientific research stood a few years ago. At that time, I was convinced the research did not support the idea of a causal effect and as noted earlier, that assessment is consistent with the lack of increase in the crime rates since the early 1990s. I realize that some of my colleagues take quite a different view of the research, and that some of them have stated the research is so strongly in favor of the causal hypothesis that the argument is over. Some of the strongest adherents to that view have published a long article outlining the evidence. They were asked by the Surgeon General to review the scientific research and this article is what they came up with. In other words, as far as they are concerned, this is the latest word and presumably their strongest argument for the belief that exposure to violent television and film causes aggression. Indeed, one of the authors, who is also one of the most outspoken adherents of the view that media violence causes aggression, submitted this article to the FCC as his position statement. Since the group who wrote this article includes many of those who claim to

know the scientific evidence and think that it shows a causal effect, and since this article is the result of consultations among them and is presumably the strongest case they can make for their position, it seems appropriate to examine the article in detail.

Examining the case for the causal hypothesis – the Anderson *et al.* review

In court, when two witnesses give contradictory evidence, jurors use various cues to decide which to trust. They look for inconsistencies in their statements, for evidence that one of them is concealing information that might weaken his position, for an indication that one of them is distorting the information to make the case stronger, and for outright errors. All of these are indications the person's evidence is not entirely objective and thus not entirely trustworthy. The same is true in a disagreement out of court. Therefore, I would like to demonstrate that this state-of-the-art review of the scientific research by those who believe that exposure to media violence causes aggressiveness has many of the characteristics that ordinarily suggest a lack of objectivity and that the evidence does not deserve to be trusted as stated.

Before dealing with the substance of the article, let me put it into context by considering the authors' note to the article. They write that "in the summer of 2000 the Surgeon General asked the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to establish an expert panel of media-violence researchers charged with the task of reporting on the effects of media violence." Rowell Huesmann organized the panel and served as its chair. The panel met in August 2000, "communicated extensively," and submitted their report in September 2000. The authors note their report was not accepted as written and eventually was not incorporated into the Surgeon General's report the way they desired. They were obviously disappointed, perhaps even upset at this, and they managed to get a version of their report published as this article.

I believe this brief history is an indication of how these experts deal with the complex and important issue of media violence. In the first place, when asked to put together a panel, Huesmann did not include anyone who was on record as being skeptical of the causal effects of media violence or who was critical of the research. Instead, the panel includes many of the most outspoken adherents of the causal hypothesis. Thus, just from knowing the panel members, one would know that there was no effort to produce a balanced review of the research.

Second, consider how carefully they reviewed the research. Having read all of the published research, I know that it is a big job. It took me over a year and I read quickly. Thus, it seems unlikely that all members of the panel had read all 200 plus studies, certainly not with the care necessary to assess them. And if any of them had read them all, it is unlikely that they had done so recently. Nevertheless, in a month after what sounds like one face-to-face meeting, the whole panel was prepared to submit a review of this research that was, they hoped, going to inform and influence the vitally important report by the Surgeon General.

This lack of concern and of careful review is, I believe, typical of the group of experts who make public statements about this issue. They are so convinced media violence is harmful, and so certain they are right, that they do not take any criticisms seriously, nor consider any comments that disagree with them. Moreover, they do not even bother to review the evidence on which they are presumably basing their opinions. Is it any wonder that the Surgeon General did not simply accept their report?

One of the most startling aspects of this article occurs right at the beginning. Although this report was supposed to be an assessment of the research, a statement of the scientific status of the findings, the authors chose not to deal with any of the criticisms or critiques of their position. They note that these already have been answered, so there is no reason to bother with

them. This simply is not true, and even if it were, surely a comprehensive report of this kind should outline the critiques and show how they were flawed. If the criticisms are so weak and flawed, it should have taken little effort to review them. In fact, most of the criticisms have never been adequately answered. I note that my book reviewing all the research was published in 2002. The only cited references that could possibly have responded to it is a non-refereed chapter by Huesmann and Taylor published in 2003. I would have welcomed a serious, point-by-point discussion of my review, but this chapter does not provide one. Instead, it offers a general attack on the objectivity of those who do not support the causal hypothesis and a more specific attack on me. It does not deal in detail with any of my criticisms, but says merely that I have been more critical of studies that support the hypothesis than of those that do not. And my most serious error, according to this chapter, is that I am atheoretical. I am, because the issue is not whether the theories make sense but whether the results support them. Thus, this chapter is by no means a thorough response to the criticisms that I – and others – have made.

Given there has never been a careful response to those who disagree with the causal hypothesis, it is surprising the authors of the Anderson article do not take the opportunity to provide one. But they do not. Instead, they merely state that they have been dealt with. If they had approached this issue with even partially open minds or, for that matter, with a view to presenting a convincing argument for their views, one would have expected them to consider opposing views. That they do not is a great weakness of the report. Seeing this, again is it any wonder that the Surgeon General did not merely accept it as written?

Of course, that they are not careful or rigorous does not mean that they are wrong. It is possible the research is so consistent and so strong it is foolish to question it, and unnecessary to continue to review it. That is surely true of many important questions for which scientific

research has provided definitive answers. Therefore, despite their unwillingness or inability to deal with any criticisms, their review should be evaluated mainly by how it deals with the actual research.

Experimental studies

The report deals first with experiments. In this research, people are exposed to either violent or non-violent programs, and then given the opportunity to act aggressively. The authors summarize this research by saying the studies have consistently shown that youths exposed to violent scenes display more aggressive behaviors (or other effects which are of less interest to this discussion). I disagree. The results have been far from consistent. In fact, more than half the studies have failed to get effects of the kind they describe; and if one takes only those experiments that look at reasonable measures of aggression, the results are even weaker.

The report does not, of course, list all of the experiments and describe their results. It does mention a few as examples which, presumably, the authors of the report considered representative. In considering a disagreement about whether these experiments are or are not consistent, it may be helpful to look at the experiments the authors chose as their examples. The first one is an experiment by Bjorkqvist, with a reference to 1985. This study first came out in print almost 20 years ago, and has never been published in a refereed journal. I have not been able to get hold of it, and I would guess the same is true of most, if not all, the members of the panel. Yet this is the first study they cite. Why not cite a published study that it easy to obtain? There are almost a hundred of them.

The next study they cite is Josephson (1987). This is a good choice in one respect, because the measure is actual aggression in a hockey game. Although hockey lovers and other sports fans might argue this is not real aggression but simply playing hard, I agree with the

authors it is a reasonable measure of aggression. However, their description of the results is neither accurate nor complete. The results are very complicated and overall show no effect of exposure to violence on aggression. In describing the results, the authors of the report ignored the fact that the boys in the study were frustrated either before or after seeing the program (violent or non-violent). For no apparent reason, the pattern of results is quite different for these two conditions. When frustrated before the film, the violence plus cue group was indeed the highest; but when frustrated after the film, this group was the lowest. Since the reason for this is obscure, the fairest description of the results is there was no overall effect of type of film and no effect of cue, whether by itself or paired with a film. A complicating factor, not mentioned in the report, is that by chance the boys in the various groups differed considerably in their initial levels of aggressiveness. When their characteristic aggressiveness is statistically controlled for, the amount of aggression after the violent and non-violent film is the same.

My reading of this study is that it is hard to interpret the results due to their inconsistency and the differences in initial aggressiveness, but taken at face value they do not provide any support for the causal hypothesis, and perhaps directly contradict it. The analysis is available in my book, and a full presentation of the results can be seen in the original article. Suffice it so say, this was an odd choice to make a case for the causal hypothesis. The description of the results is clearly biased, because it overstates the one result that supports their view and ignores all of the results that contradicts their view.

The next two examples were conducted in a natural setting – residential schools for boys. It is surprising these studies were chosen for this report, since they have all sorts of methodological problems that make them highly doubtful from a scientific point of view. Moreover, the results are, at best, inconsistent. The first study (Leyens, *et al.*, 1975) did find that

soon after boys were shown the violent movies, they engaged in more aggressive acts. But the results are deeply flawed because the statistics were improper (as acknowledged by Leyens in the original article but not mentioned by the authors of the review). In addition, those who observed the boys did not distinguish between real aggression and play aggression, a long-standing distinction among developmental psychologists. After watching a violent movie, it would not be surprising if the boys engaged in playful imitation of it. The question was whether they engaged in real aggression, and the study cannot answer that. Finally, the effect on aggression, even if was real aggression, did not carry over even to the next day, and it was not cumulative.

There were actually two other studies (Parke *et al.*, 1977) done by the same group in much the same way. These studies had problems similar to those in Leyens so that any results they found would be hard to interpret. However, I disagree with the authors' description of the actual results. It is not true that these studies "found similar effects of exposure to violent films on overall interpersonal attacks." In fact, the first study found a slight effect that did not last, and the second found no evidence of a causal effect. Since neither these two studies, nor the first one, distinguished between play aggression and real fighting, the authors of the report have no justification for saying these experiments "demonstrate that violent movies can generate serious physical aggression." All these studies were well-intentioned attempts to answer an important question in a real-world setting. Unfortunately, they were not well designed, had far too few cottages to observe, used inadequate measures, and ultimately obtained equivocal results. That the authors of the report have to rely on these studies is an indication of just how weak the research base is for their position.

There have not been many field experiments on this topic, which is too bad, because they could provide the clearest evidence on the question. The authors chose to mention a few from

this limited set of studies. They chose those that, despite their weaknesses, produced the best evidence for a causal effect (which, let me repeat, is not saying much). The authors of this report do not mention any of the other field studies, most of which found no such evidence.

In sum, the authors were very selective in the studies they mention, choosing only those that produced results that at least marginally supported their position and not choosing any that produced negative results. They do not even acknowledge that some studies found non-supportive results. Anyone reading this section of the review would get the impression that every study of this kind, or virtually every study, had found results that support a causal effect of exposure to media violence. This is simply not true, and is highly misleading.

Longitudinal studies

There are a small number of studies that use a method similar to those of the Huesmann study described earlier. These studies observe children at one age, then again when they are older. The idea is to see if the amount of exposure to violent media when the children are young is related to the aggression shown by the children when they are older. In doing this, as noted before, it is necessary to hold constant the children's aggressiveness at the early age, because that tends to be rather stable. So various statistical techniques are used that, in essence, take into account the stability of aggression and then get some indication whether exposure is a factor in later aggression. To repeat, if exposure causes aggression, children who are equally aggressive at one age and watch differing amounts of media violence should differ in aggression years later, with those who watch a lot of violence becoming more aggressive than those who watch less violence.

The review, as usual, presents a highly selective and one-sided description of these studies. It is true the first study they mention (Eron *et al.*, 1972) found some evidence that early

exposure was related to aggressiveness ten years later. In my opinion, this one result is the single, best piece of evidence in favor of a causal effect of media violence, and I have said this before. However, the results of this study are far less impressive than the review makes them sound. In the first place, it is not true that ”aggressive behavior was measured primarily by peer nominations.” That was one method, perhaps the best method, but there were two other reasonable measurements, and neither of them showed an effect. Also, as the review does say, for girls there was no effect of exposure to media violence. One way of looking at this pattern is that there were six possible tests of the causal hypothesis – boys and girls and three measure of aggression for each – and one of them came out (one measure for boys only). One out of six is better than nothing, but it hardly is overwhelming evidence.

The review mentions the study by Milavsky *et al.* (1982), and puts its own spin on it. This is by far the largest study of its kind and one of the most impressive. The authors of the Milavsky study conclude that the results do not support the causal hypothesis, and I think most readers agree with that assessment. True, there are some hints of a relationship between exposure and aggression, but there are almost no significant effects after controlling for early aggression, and most of these disappear after other factors are controlled. Honest scientists can disagree about the implications of this study, but at the very least, it would seem fair to say the results are usually seen as non-supportive. And even those who interpret them as consistent with the causal hypothesis agree the results are very weak. It is remarkable the review's description of this study can leave the reader thinking the study generally provided evidence in favor of the causal hypothesis, when this study is almost always described the opposite way.

The next study the review describes is a very ambitious project carried out in a number of countries (Huesmann & Eron, 1986). The authors of the review say that the results varied

"substantially" between genders and among the countries. That is an understatement. Having said that, they then describe only the results in the United States, and acknowledge that this time (as opposed to the earlier study), the effect was significant for girls and not for boys (a reversal that has never been explained). What the review does not address is just how "bad" the results from the other countries were for the causal hypothesis. Rather than gloss over the results, let us put them on the table. The key question is whether the multiple regression shows a significant effect of early exposure to violence on later aggression after early aggression is held constant.

There was a small significant relationship for girls in the United States and for boys in Poland, a marginally significant relationship for girls in Poland, and a strong relationship for both boys and girls who lived in cities in Israel. There was no significant relationship for boys in the United States, boys or girls in Finland, boys or girls in Australia, boys or girls in the Netherlands, or boys and girls who lived on a kibbutz in Israel. In other words, taking everything at face value and not bothering with the many possible criticisms of the study, there were fourteen tests of the causal hypothesis, and of these five were significant, one marginally significant, and eight were inconsistent with the hypothesis. Moreover, with the exception of the Israeli result, all of the significant relationships were very small. This is hardly the kind of result most people would consider supportive of a hypothesis. I have pointed out serious problems with some of the significant results, especially the one in Israel, and there is no reason to repeat them here. The main point is that rather than providing support for the hypothesis, the results of this study were generally non-supportive.

However, by far the most remarkable feature of the description in the review is that it says there were five countries. This is simply not correct and, I think, displays an obvious bias in reporting. In fact, the study began with six countries. In each of them, the researchers used

much the same method and the plan was for each group to write independent reports of their results. These reports were to be published in a book edited by Eron and Huesmann. Although the results were quite disappointing in most of the countries, the researchers wrote chapters that minimized the negative results and emphasized whatever they could that was more favorable to their position. The one exception was the Netherlands group who wrote a report that in no uncertain terms acknowledged their results did not support the causal hypothesis. Eron and Huesmann asked them to rewrite the report, they said they would not, and so Eron and Huesmann refused to include the chapter in the book. Thus, the study that began with six countries ended up publishing results from only five of them, and the Netherlands group had to publish their chapter on their own. This was clearly a straightforward act of suppressing a result that the editors did not like. But it is perhaps even more amazing that now, years later, the authors of this review have rewritten history. This supposedly objective scientific review has expunged the Netherlands from the study (shades of Orwell's 1984) and now seem to "remember" there were only five countries involved. The results directly contradicted the causal hypothesis; the authors were honest about that – so they no longer exist. I consider this a shocking act by a scientific group, and it is strong evidence of their lack of objectivity.

The review also mentioned the recent Huesmann study that I discussed in detail earlier. One again, it fails to distinguish between those results that control for early aggression and those that do not, thus giving the impression of much stronger results. And the review of the Johnson *et al.* study is totally uncritical. As noted earlier, this study really provides no useful data relevant to the causal hypothesis, because it did not measure exposure to violent media and did not have an adequate measure of early aggressiveness.

There are other longitudinal studies, some of which provide some slight support for the causal hypothesis, and others that do not. The review mentions only those the authors think provide support, and they present the results uncritically. These other studies are, in any case, less good overall than the ones just discussed, so they do not add much to the literature.

In summary, the review's handling of the very important longitudinal research is biased, misleading and in some respects outright incorrect. The results of this line of research have been inconsistent and more non-supportive than supportive of the causal hypothesis. It is perhaps most telling that the major cross-national study conducted by Eron and Huesmann produced results that most people would consider very disappointing for those who believe in the causal effect. And it is most telling of all that the cross-national study included not five countries, but six – the reviewers have conveniently forgotten the Netherlands – an act of omission I consider shameful.

The introduction of television

The selectivity is perhaps even more striking in the section discussing the impact of the introduction of television. It is really unfortunate the review cites the studies by Centerwall and by Williams in this context. Centerwall (*e.g.*, 1989) argued that patterns of violent crime in the United States, Canada and South Africa after the introduction of television provided evidence that television caused violent crime. He pointed out that about ten years after television was widespread in the United States and Canada, the rate of homicide began to increase and more than doubled by 1980. In contrast, no such increase occurred in South Africa where television was not widely available during this period. Therefore, according to Centerwall, television caused violent crime. He went so far as to say that if television had never been introduced into the United States, there would have been 50,000 fewer deaths by homicide. This is nonsense.

Indeed, the authors must realize this, because they make a passing reference to the weaknesses in the Centerwall analysis. Apparently they feel that there are problems with Centerwall's papers. So why do they mention them?

I spent a considerable amount of time in my book showing all of the problems with the Centerwall argument, so presumably the authors of the review are aware of them. Yet they do not refer to any of them. There are many, but let me focus on just a few. First, one cannot compare the United States and Canada, especially as they were during the period 1950-1980, to South Africa during that period. Among other differences, the former were democratic, had free press, allowed public dissent, were not police states, and were not apartheid. The social structures were different and went through great change in the US and Canada, but not in South Africa. Moreover, if one is going to compare countries, it is important to choose more than one as a contrast. As Franklin Zimring and Gordon Hawkins have forcefully pointed out (Zimring & Hawkins, 1997), during this same period, television was also introduced into western Europe and into Japan, and there was no consistent increase in the rate of violent crime in those countries. If anything, this is an argument against the notion that television causes aggression or violent crime.

Second, as the authors of the review allude to, other changes in the United States and Canada could well explain the increase in violent crime. This was a period of massive social change – the sexual revolution, more unwanted children to young mothers, more broken homes, and so on. Any of these factors would be expected to lead to more children who were neglected and deprived, and were thus at risk of getting involved in crime.

Third, careful analysis of the crime statistics indicates that the pattern of increases in crime rates is inconsistent with the suggestion that the increases were caused by exposure to

television. If there were such an effect, one would expect it to appear first among the juveniles who were exposed to television and later among the younger cohorts, all in line with the supposed time-lag between exposure and the effects. None of this occurred as it should have, so the argument does not hold up.

All of these weaknesses and others should be well known to the authors of the article. That they cite Centerwall nonetheless indicates they include it because it "sounds good" even though they know it does not stand up to serious analysis.

Williams (1986) looked at three communities at two different times. At the first time, one community had many television stations, one had only one station, and one had none. A small group of children in each of the three communities were observed at play at the first time and then later, after the third community got one television station. In addition, teachers were asked to rate the amount of aggression shown by the children in their schools. Using the measure of the small groups, the study reported an increase in aggression in the community that had just gotten television and none in the other communities. Using the teachers' ratings, there was no such difference. The observers did not distinguish between real and play aggression – it is uncertain whether the teachers did. Thus, at the superficial level, one measure indicated that aggression increased after the introduction of television while the other measure did not, and we cannot tell if the increase was due to real aggression or just aggressive play.

It probably is not worth getting into all of the details of this study. I mention only two. First, the television station that the community got was the Canadian Broadcasting Company station. At the time CBC carried no cartoons except the World of Disney, no programs early on weekend mornings, and only two police/detective shows a week. As Williams acknowledged, it is likely that CBC programs contained less (I would say far less) violence than those on other

channels. I would think that even for those who believe in the harmful effects of media violence, it requires a stretch of the imagination to think that this level of violent programming could cause a doubling in the amount of aggression, which is what the authors reported.

Second, there was no control and no careful description of other changes in the three communities. These were very small communities in Canada. Even a minor change in the social or economic situation, or even a few aggressive children moving into town, could have had a major effect on the children who were there. For example, at time one, the level of unemployment in the town without television was half that of the other communities. We do not know what it was at time two, but if it increased to become more equal to the other communities, this alone might have increased the level of stress and caused an increase in aggressiveness. This is entirely speculative. I offer it as one example of how changes that are completely irrelevant to the introduction of television might be the cause of an increase in aggression, if indeed one occurred. In sum, this is an interesting case study of communities in transition, but it offers only the weakest evidence in favor of the causal hypothesis.

In contrast, the study by Hennigan *et al.* (1982) that is mentioned in the report looked at almost a hundred cities in the United States. Some of these communities had television at time one, some did not. Several years later, they all had television. The study looked at any changes in the rates of crime during this period. I was surprised to see this study mentioned in the review, because the review seems to mention only research supporting their view and I have always thought that the Hennigan study provided some of the strongest evidence *against* the causal hypothesis. However, the authors of the report characteristically cite only the one result that is at least marginally consistent with their view, namely that the rate of larceny went up in the cities with television compared to the others. What the authors fail to say is that there was no

effect on violent crime and more serious property crimes. That is, in contrast to Williams, who looked at three cities and found a marginal effect, this study which looked at many more cities, found not the slightest evidence of an effect of television on aggression. Indeed, Hennigan *et al.*, argue that the interesting effect on larceny was due to relative deprivation caused by people watching mostly rich or middle class people on television and feeling deprived themselves. This is speculative and one could offer other possibilities. The important point for present purposes is that the authors of the report mention this study (they could hardly leave it out since it is so well known) but fail to acknowledge it provides evidence against the causal hypothesis, not in favor of it.

The report also does not mention the very large study by Himmelweit *et al.* (1965), which interviewed thousands of English children soon after television was introduced. Some of the children had television in their homes, while others did not. Although the measures were largely qualitative, it is worth noting the study found no difference in aggression or delinquent behavior between those who watched television and those who did not. An even larger series of studies by Schramm *et al.* (1961) involved almost 6000 children in the United States and Canada between 1958 and 1960. Most of the results are not relevant to our present concerns, and those that are relevant are somewhat inconsistent. The clearest result is comparable directly to the Williams study in that it compared two communities, one with television and one without. Those in the town without television scored somewhat higher on measures of antisocial aggression. The authors commented this was a slight indication television might serve to reduce antisocial aggression and, in any case, the results provides no support for the idea that television increases aggression. I do not put much faith in these results, because they are not based on very

good measures. Nevertheless, this and Himmelweit are two more studies that found no support for the causal hypothesis.

Finally, an unpublished study by de Konig *et al.* (1980) is, I think, worth mentioning, because it seems to be a very good test of the causal hypothesis. I have not seen this study, but it is mentioned in Liebert *et al.* (1982), a book written by one of the strongest advocates of the causal hypothesis. I included the study in my book because it seemed so compelling, so the authors of the review must be aware of it. This study was conducted in South Africa just as television was being introduced. Children were assigned to watch aggressive programs, prosocial programs, or neutral programs. They watched an hour a day for four weeks. Their aggressive and prosocial behavior was rated before and after this period. In other words, it is an actual experiment in the real world and, as such, is quite impressive.

The results offer no support at all for the causal hypothesis. There were few changes in behavior and few differences among the groups that watched aggressive programs compared to those who did not. There was some tendency for those in the neutral group to decrease in aggression toward peers and those in the prosocial group to increase in aggression toward authority. The aggressive programs produced no changes. None of the programs affected prosocial behavior.

As Liebert *et al.* point out, there are all sorts of explanations for these results. One should not put much emphasis on them. Nevertheless, this is a study in which a large number of children were exposed to aggressive or non-aggressive television for four weeks and there was no indication that exposure to aggressive programs increased aggression.

I mention these studies not because they are so important or because their results are definitive, but only to demonstrate how selective the article is both in which studies it cites and

in how it describes them. If one read only this section of their report and thought it a measured, careful assessment of the research, one would be sorely misled. It is not measured or careful or accurate. Rather it is a highly selective summary that presents a biased and misleading view of the research in this area.

Innovative methods

The paper also leaves out a number of studies that employed innovative methods. These studies have generally not found evidence to support the causal hypothesis. Let me mention just one that I think is quite interesting. Messner (1986) started with the idea that if exposure to violent television causes aggression, greater exposure should be associated with more violent crime. He then argued that areas in which there was greater exposure to violent programs should have higher crime rates. The study used Nielsen data to assess the number of people who were watching the most violent programs at the time in each of 281 metropolitan areas. A score for exposure to violent programs was computed for each area and related to the rates of violent crime and property crime for those areas.

The result was unexpected and quite striking. There was a negative relationship between exposure and each of the four main types of violent crime and for all types of non-violent crime. That is, the *higher* the score for exposure to violent television, the *lower* the rates of all of the crimes. The more people who watched the most violent television programs, the less crime there was in the neighborhood. It is worth noting that other measures were associated with higher crime rates. In particular, the Gini coefficient, which measures the economic disparity in the area, was strongly correlated with rates of homicide, rape, robbery and assault. In other words, the data were reliable enough to show strong relationships that made sense, and the data failed to show any indication that exposure to violent programs increased crime rates.

One can, of course, critique this study on various grounds. It is clever but far from perfect. But as with many of the studies I mention and the review paper does not, this study provides evidence against the causal hypothesis. As I have pointed out many times, if the study had shown that exposure was related to crime rates, one can be certain the result would have been embraced by the authors of the review and used to buttress their position.

Television news

The Anderson review says there is some anecdotal evidence and some research evidence suggesting a contagion effect. However, it concludes there is not much research on this issue, and that some of what has been done has methodological problems. For once I agree with the review and would go even further. Everything in this response deals exclusively with fictional or fictionalized violence. We know virtually nothing about whether real violence as described on television or in film affects aggression. There is almost no research on this and it is exceedingly difficult to study. Suffice it to say, however, that anyone who believes that fictional violence has an effect surely must believe the real thing will have an even stronger effect. The same is true of real violence in sports as shown on television. We do not know what effect it has, but if watching a fictional boxing match increases aggression, surely watching a real boxing match or football game should have a similar – and probably stronger – effect. My intuition about this is that exposure to violence in sports affects how the viewers play those sports (kids who watch their favorite players be extremely rough will probably be rough themselves when they play), but does not carry over to other activities. Exposure to real violence in the news probably has complex effects that conceivably could make some people less aggressive and others more aggressive. In any case, it should be clear these are just personal speculations. Neither my

response nor the Anderson review can say much about these issues, because there is far too little research to draw even tentative conclusions.

Meta-analyses

The review presents an impressive-looking meta-analysis on page 93. A meta-analysis is a statistical method for combining the results of many studies to assess the overall impact of the evidence. It can be a very useful method. However, there are several key issues in using it. First, great care must be taken in how the various studies are categorized when they are entered into the analysis. If a study that found no effect is categorized as showing an effect, obviously the analysis will be distorted. Similarly, it is essential to count all chances to show an effect. If a study includes three measures of aggression and gets an effect on only one of them, the meta-analysis must include all three tries – not just the one that got the effect.

Having carefully analyzed a previous meta-analysis by Anderson and Bushman (2001), I can say I disagreed with many of their decisions, and all of the disagreements would have weakened the effects. So in deciding how much weight to give to a meta-analysis, it is necessary to have the information that went into it. This brings me to the second point, which is that there is no information on this analysis so I cannot possibly respond to it. Third, the meta-analysis is presented as if it already appeared in a journal article. In fact, it was not published in a peer-reviewed article, nor even an article at all. As far as I can tell, it appeared for the first time in a letter to a journal. I have nothing against letters, but their contents usually do not have any scientific status, and should not be cited in a review that is supposed to review the research on an important issue. Finally, the meta-analysis includes research on types of media violence not under consideration by the FCC. Since it includes studies on video games, comic books, and

music, it is not possible to extract information on the effect of televised violence from any effects of the other media. Accordingly, it is largely irrelevant even if one were to accept it.

Summary of Anderson *et al.* review

This review of the research on the effect of exposure to media violence on aggression was meant to be the latest word on this research. The authors presented it to the Surgeon General and to the FCC as their summary statement of the status of the research. *See* Comments of Dr. Craig A. Anderson, MB Docket No. 04-261, filed Sept. 14, 2004. Thus, it seems fair to consider it the best argument they can make.

Yet, it is deeply flawed. It is not the state-of-the-art review it is meant to be, nor a balanced presentation of the scientific literature. Instead, it is an extremely biased, selective and often inaccurate argument for a position that presumably the authors believe in so strongly they did not bother to do an adequate review of the research, or perhaps were afraid to present such a review. I think that it is telling that this is the best this group of experts can do to make a case for the causal hypothesis. Their review, with its selective citations, inaccurate and partial descriptions of the research, and reliance on studies that they acknowledge have problems, is a clear indication of the weakness of their position.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ASKED BY THE FCC

The *Notice* posed a number of specific questions, which are addressed below:

Does exposure to media violence cause desensitization?

It has sometimes been suggested that even if exposure to media violence does not make people aggressive, it may make them insensitive to real violence. This would obviously be a very serious matter. The authors of the review agree that exposure causes desensitization, but they take a moderate stance on whether this has been fully proven, and on whether it leads to

aggressive behavior. I agree with them there has been far too little research on this issue to draw any firm conclusions. However, my tentative conclusion is different from theirs.

First, it seems likely that exposure to violent images in the media makes people less sensitive to subsequent violent images in the media. What was startling or shocking the first time, becomes less so the second or tenth time. We get used to types of images and our reactions become less extreme. This is true of almost all images and it seems reasonable to assume that it happens with violent images also.

Second, I do not believe that exposure to media violence desensitizes people to real world violence. There are a few, small-scale studies that provide some evidence that this occurs, but other similar studies did not get this effect. Of greater importance, several large-scale studies found no indication of desensitization. Perhaps the most convincing result was that by Belson (1978). Belson strongly believed that exposure to media violence caused aggression. However, with a large sample of boys he found no relationship between exposure to violent media of any kind and what he called callousness toward violence. Thus, the results of this study provide evidence that contradicts the notion that exposure caused desensitization to violence. Overall, the limited amount of evidence suggests to me that exposure to media violence does not cause desensitization to real world violence. However, let me repeat this is a tentative conclusion based on relatively little scientific research.

How should we define violence?

In principle, violence (or aggression) can be defined as any act that is meant to cause physical harm (I am leaving out other kinds of aggression, although they may also be of concern). The target of the act is usually a person, but I suppose it could be any animal; and if the story involves only animals, obviously they have to be the targets. Hitting a chair is not

aggression or violence, because no living entity is harmed or is meant to be harmed. In my definition, I say "in principle" because it is not always easy to decide whether an act is meant to cause harm. As noted earlier, child psychologists have long distinguished between real and play aggression. Boys often engage in what is called "rough and tumble play" which involves wrestling, falling to the ground, clinging to each other and so on. Sometimes one of the boys gets hurt, but as long as that was not the intention, it is not aggression in the usual sense of the term. Football players hit each other, sometimes very hard. But they are playing a game, albeit a rough one. I do not believe that in general they intend to cause harm to the other person – to break a rib or a leg. They are simply doing what is required in the game and that involves physical contact. Although some would disagree, I would not consider these actions in contact sports to be aggression. Dentists sometime hurt us, but they do not mean to harm us so their actions are not aggressive. If someone violently pushes someone else out of the way of a speeding car, the act may hurt or even harm the person who was pushed, but it is not aggressive because the intention was to help, not harm. Thus, in one sense, as long as one can distinguish between acts that are intended to cause harm (real aggression or violence) and those that are not (play aggression), defining violence should not be difficult.

However, if one is going to relate any conclusions to the research, the definition of violence or aggression becomes extremely murky. This is because aggression has been defined in so many different ways and because many of them do not fit the definition I gave above. The best studies have measured aggression by observing children's interactions and rating whether their acts are aggressive. Unfortunately, most of these studies have not distinguished between real and playful aggression, so we do not know if the boys (they are mostly boys) meant to hurt each other when they wrestled or were merely having fun. Despite this, direct observation of

actual behavior is clearly the best measure of aggression, because it at least involves real behavior toward other real people. Other measures of violence that are less good but have at least some relationship to real violence are those that have people acting as teachers and when "learners" make mistakes, the teacher pushes a button that supposedly delivers electric shock or loud noise. Although the teachers do not mean to harm the other person, if they really believe they are giving shocks or noises, at least it is unpleasant.

On the other hand, some measures have little or nothing to do with real violence. A series of studies (*e.g.*, Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961). defined aggression as punching a Bobo doll. These are inflated plastic dolls with big noses. If they are punched, the doll goes over and then bounces back up. The dolls are meant to be punched. Certainly no harm is intended, and none could possible be done. It is as if one were to define aggression as kicking a football. That would be silly. Footballs are meant to be kicked; the kicker is not trying to hurt the football; it is obviously not aggression. In the same way, Bobo dolls are meant to be punched. Punching them meets none of the criteria of real aggression.

One of the silliest measures of aggression comes from an early study on this issue (Mussen & Rutherford, 1961). Young children were asked: "If I had a balloon, would you pop it?" The answer to this double hypothetical question was scored as aggressive if the children said that they would pop it.

Other measures though less silly have even less to do with actual aggression. An example is based on how many words with aggressive content people give. Some studies (*e.g.*, Bushman, 1998) found that after seeing a violent program, people were more likely to have aggressive thoughts, and he presented these results as if they meant that violent programs caused aggression. I would have thought that everyone could agree that thinking about aggression or

violence is not the same as behaving aggressively. Presumably we always think about what we have just seen, so that whatever the content of a program, it will be more salient just after exposure. But that does not mean there is any relationship with actual aggression. I am thinking about violence and aggression as I write this, but I don't feel the slightest inclination to act violently. The members of the FCC who are involved in this investigation are probably also spending lots of time thinking about violence, but that surely does not mean that they are more violent than they were before the investigation began.

In summary, it is not difficult to define aggression and violence but from a practical point of view, it can be very difficult to identify it. And it is especially difficult to relate real aggression to the research, since so often the research has involved at best metaphors for aggression rather than the real thing and at worst, measures that have little relationship to real aggression or violence. Those who argue for an effect of exposure on aggression have been quite uncritical of the measures used in the research. They have cited any study that they think supports their position, regardless of the measures used. Yet many of the measures have so little to do with aggression or violence that they should not even be included in the review of the literature.

Do different types of portrayals of violence have different effects?

I do not believe that any type of portrayal causes people to become aggressive, so in one sense, this is a moot point. But it is worth discussing, because it shows once more how little emphasis there has been on the actual research findings. The National TV Violence Study is a very valuable survey of the amount and kinds of violence depicted on television. However, it collected no data of any kind on the behavior of those who view television, and no data about the effects of types of portrayals. Thus, the study provides no evidence of how violent television

affects viewers or whether different types of violence have difference effects. Despite having absolutely no scientific data on which to base claims, the authors of the study have made pronouncements about what kinds of portrayals are the most harmful. These pronouncements have no scientific basis and should be ignored.

Nevertheless, since they have made these pronouncements, let me deal with them. There is no evidence that media violence that shows consequences is any different in its effect on the viewer from media violence that does not show consequences. Moreover, from a theoretical or intuitive point of view, one could make an argument either way. If there are no consequences, perhaps the viewer will not realize how serious violent acts can be and will therefore be more likely to engage in them. Alternatively, if there are consequences, perhaps the viewer will see that violence can be effective and in the appropriate situation will act violently to achieve a desired effect. You may prefer one notion to the other, and there are probably other possible lines of thought. The fact is we have no idea about the effects and no strong theoretical or logical reason to expect one effect or the other.

There is no evidence that violence that is regretted by the actor has less effect than violence not regretted, nor any evidence that violence which is justified differs in its effect from violence that is not justified. Again, one could argue either way on these issues. In a typical television program or film, the good guys (the police, FBI, Spiderman) are using violence to fight evil and the good guys eventually win. These heroes (good guys) usually do not regret using the violence, because they feel it is justified. So from the point of view of the authors of the TV violence survey, these programs should be the most harmful. Yet an obvious reaction by the viewer could be that the bad guys started the violence and only these defenders of justice used violence in response, so the lesson is that you should never start violence because you will

get punished and only those who are appointed to defend us should use violence themselves. Thus, it seems reasonable to think these programs will be the least harmful since they teach a good lesson. Or maybe the violence study people are right, and this kind of violence has a worse effect than when a civilian gets so frustrated by his family situation that he gets into a fight with his neighbor, who has done nothing wrong, and then regrets the fight. This latter case involves unjustified violence that is regretted, but if there were any bad effect of exposure to violence, I would have thought the latter instance would be worse. Since there is no evidence one way or the other, we cannot tell.

What about violence committed by attractive characters with good qualities that might make them role models for children? One might think these portrayals of violence committed by attractive people would lead to more imitation and therefore more aggression by children. But life is not that simple. As noted above, the real question is what message the children take from the program, if any. One possibility is that the children say "If Spiderman can be violent, so can I." This would be bad. Another possibility is that the children say: "The bad guys started the violence and Spiderman beat them. I sure wouldn't want to start violence." That might be good. Another possibility is that the children say: "When bad guys are violent, the good guys in society who are supposed to deal with it, may use violence also. Since the good guys win, I sure won't start anything and since I'm not one of those special kind of good guys, I won't get involved either." That would be even better. Perhaps different children take different messages so the net result is no effect on aggression. Or perhaps almost all children know that this is fiction, not life, and they do not take any message from it. They do, of course, tend to imitate the moves – karate, martial arts, and so on – but that is just play.

Can children under eight years of age distinguish between fiction and reality?

It is conceivable there are some children under eight who have some difficulty with some material in deciding whether it is real or fictional. A six-year-old walking into the room and seeing scenes from a real war may have trouble distinguishing it from seeing similar scenes from a realistic movie. Adults might have the same problem, although they would quickly be able to tell the difference. But by and large, children much younger than eight have surprisingly sophisticated knowledge of the world. The notion that a normal eight-year-old cannot tell that the Roadrunner and Coyote is fiction is ridiculous.

More generally, let me repeat that we do not know much about what kinds of portrayals of violence have what effects. Anyone is free to speculate, but it would be a mistake to believe any statements about this have any substantial scientific support.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The scientific evidence does not support the hypothesis that exposure to media violence causes people to be aggressive. Those who argue otherwise present a highly selective and biased review of the research.

2. There is no convincing evidence that exposure to media violence causes desensitization to real violence. However, there is too little research to draw any firm conclusions.

3. Defining violence is not an especially difficult problem as long as one distinguishes between real aggression and play aggression.

4. There is no evidence that one kind of portrayal of violence is more or less harmful than another. Any assertions about this are not based on scientific research.

5. By and large, young children can tell the difference between reality and fiction.

6. All of these statements refer to fictional or fictionalized depictions of violence, not to images of real violence in the news or in sports. There is too little evidence to know anything about the effect of media coverage of real violence. However, I would argue that anyone who believes that exposure to fictional

violence has harmful effects must surely accept that exposure to real violence must have at least the same kind of effects and probably stronger ones.

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Kahan, D. & Freedman, J. L. (June 2001)The influence of expert testimony on juror reasoning about confession evidence. American Psychological Society meeting, Toronto, June 15.

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Invited Lectures (recent)

Freedman, J. L. Unequal justice in the justice system. Invited symposium Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, June,28, 2002

Freedman, J. L. Media violence and aggression. Cambridge lectures. Cambridge University, July 2001

Freedman, J. L. Invited participant and speaker in conference on video games held at the University of Chicago, October 26 -28, 2001.

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Invited participant and discussant New Developments in Communications Law and Policy. Sponsored by the Law Society of Upper Canada, April 26-27, 2002.

Freedman, J.L. (June 2004). Does media violence really cause aggression? International Perspectives on Crime, Justice and Public Order, Bucharest, Romania.

EXHIBIT 1

VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA – CONNECTION OR CAUSE?
First Amendment Center, 580 Madison Avenue, New York, NY
May 1, 2001[*]

Ken Paulson: Good evening. While we are waiting for our panel to assemble - we're just short one, he's right around the corner, I understand, there we go. Some people insist on dramatic entrances. [laughter] Some people are more candid than others. [laughter]

My name is Ken Paulson. I am the executive director of the First Amendment Center and I am delighted to welcome you here. I would appreciate it, while we have the lights up, if you could raise your hand if you have not been here to the First Amendment Center since January 1. If you would just raise your hand, we would appreciate it. Wonderful, that's wonderful news.

We have only been here since January 1, but we were here in a previous incarnation as Newseum New York and the Media Study Center. Since January 1, we have dedicated all our resources to promoting discussion about free speech, freedom of press, freedom of religion, the right to petition and the right to assemble, and we hope you all had a chance to look at the exhibit outside tracing the history of the First Amendment right of assembly, petition, and protest in this country.

The First Amendment Center is funded by the Freedom Forum, a non-profit, non-partisan organization. Our whole mission is a-political, all we're here to say is that James Madison had an awfully good idea more than 200 years ago and society's the better for it if we honor the ideas that the founding fathers put into place at that time. And there is always the temptation to retreat from those freedoms because there is always somebody somewhere offending us, and it's important to retain our passion for free speech in this country and that's why we're here.

[*] As webcast on freedomforum.org May 1, 2001. Because this transcript is based on webcast, some spellings of proper names are phonetic.

We do programs here several nights a week, often, and I wanted to mention to all of you there are brochures outside. There's also a mailing list, and if any of you have an interest in signing up for future events. I know a good number of you came out tonight because you had gotten our mailing. Please sign up. We are growing. We have a full slate of events and we'd love to have you join us on a regular basis.

I would like to mention some upcoming events tomorrow night at 6:30 p.m., same location, a gentleman named Eric Nuzum will present an audio video show on his new book, "Parental Advisory Music Censorship in America." And we were privileged to act as research and resources for him on that book, so I think that will be a lot of fun.

Next week we have two special programs. We have an ongoing partnership with the Whitney Museum here and when we do those partnerships it's called "The Whitney Dialogues First Amendment Center." This is a live television taping and we'll feature legendary choreographer Bill T. Jones in discussion of free speech and dance.

On Thursday, May 10, we have First Amendment scholar Charles Hains, who will moderate a discussion of the impact of President Bush's faith-faced initiative. And we have a tremendous panel for that week and invite you all to join us for that.

Some of you may have seen the television show we do. It's called "Speaking Freely." It's on MetroArc's 13. It's in 2 million homes in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey - virtually everywhere but like a 2 square mile area in Manhattan. So those of you who live in that area actually need to come and see the show live. The best way for you to see it – on May 18 we have two shows – one is playwright Edward Albee will be here at 11:00 a.m. and those of you who are fans of Rap know "Public Enemy" – we are privileged to have Chuck D here at 3:30

p.m. on May 18. So if you stay all day you will have the full cultural experience – from Edward Albee to Chuck D. So we invite you to join us on a regular basis.

That concludes my public service announcement. We are delighted you are here. I now would like to introduce a colleague who has made a great difference in the field of the First Amendment. He, like us, shares the viewpoint that people of good faith can differ on important issues involving free speech, but the most important thing is that everybody has the right to speak out on those issues and that's what you will hear tonight. Our moderator today is a man who spent 31 years as a professional journalist including being the former associate editorial director of *USA Today* and to me, the single most important job is that he helped found the First Amendment Center. He was the first executive director of the First Amendment Center and set the tone for all that was to follow. He also writes a terrific weekly column full of passion, anger, and outrage – not necessarily in that order. [laughter] Which you will find at our website www.freedomforum.org. Please welcome our moderator tonight – Mr. Paul McMasters.

[applause]

Paul McMasters: Thanks, Ken and let me add my welcome to Ken's. A great group here tonight and we're so pleased to have you. We're in the presence of – I probably shouldn't say a miracle – but it sure looks like one because on March the 6th when we were originally scheduled to have this program, we had the "unblizzard," the blizzard that never did materialize. But we cancelled it before it arrived or didn't arrive, anyway, and it's something of a miracle that we had gotten this particular group together. If you look at their schedules and the kinds of things they are involved in, you can imagine what a task Ann Young, our program director, had in getting them together on one day, but to cancel and then get them together on a subsequent

date is beyond miracle as far as I am concerned. So we're very pleased that they could join us for this important program tonight.

I don't think it's a surprise or news to anyone in this audience that Americans are transfixed with the idea of violence today. It is a very worrisome issue in our midst with the school shootings, with a sort of generalized anxiety about crime and violence that has been with us for quite some time which seems to keep bubbling more and more often. We seem to have a media saturated with scenes of violence whether it is TV movies, music video, games and those old standbys, books and comic books. This phenomenon has obviously caught the attention of a lot of people – important people in our society – researchers, policymakers, medical and psychological groups, activist groups and most importantly, ordinary mothers and fathers out there who worry about what their children are being subjected to and what the impact of that might be on them.

Two significant questions have come out of this sort of discourse and are the ones that we are going to focus on in our discussion this evening. The first is: Is there a causal or some other sort of link between violence in the media and violence on the street or actual violence; and the second: If so, what can or should we be doing about it? We are fortunate, as I say, to have assembled truly thoughtful voices on this issue from a variety of perspectives. We are not doing any prepared presentations tonight. We are going to ask a couple of questions up here, have some conversation to get the ball rolling, but we want to include you as part of this conversation also. And I daresay that we have a host of experts in the audience as well as up front. I notice that my good friend, Bob Corn-Revere, a Washington, DC attorney and expert on the First Amendment, won a case before the Supreme Court not long ago having great First Amendment ramifications. Bob along with Gail Markels of the – I'll never get it right Gail – but it's the

Interactive Digital Software Association that these are the folks who work on video games rating and trying to give information to parents about video games. Also, Joan Burton, the executive director of the National Coalition Against Censorship. Chris Finan, American Booksellers Association's Foundation. David Horowitz of the Media Coalition. And many, many more out there who really care about this issue and are knowledgeable about it, and I think we will have a great conversation with those folks involved.

I would like to introduce the panelists and then we'll get right to it. On my far left and your right is Jeff McIntyre. Jeff is a Senior Legislative and Federal Affairs Officer for the American Psychological Association and a real veteran of this particular issue and the more general issue of the impact of media on children. He testifies before Congress, he has been a member of a government taskforce working on various issues and was very much a part of the FCC's work on getting the V-chip installed in television. Jeff testified most recently on this subject before the Senate, and we are most anxious to hear his perspectives on this because his organization is one of those that signed on to a statement saying that there is a link between media violence and violence, and there is a need for action and a cause for concern.

Next to Jeff is a wonderful author and historian, Richard Rhodes, who has written more books than I can read, I think, but a Pulitzer Prize finalist in history with "Dark Sun" and then he won the Pulitzer Price for general non-fiction with "The Making of the Atomic Bomb." Richard is with us tonight because of his article not long ago, "The Media Violence Myth," which confronted some of these issues rather directly in ways that hadn't been talked about that much in the media lately, and has a fascinating perspective to share with us this evening.

Then, next to Richard is Marjorie Heins. And Marjorie is, if she'll forgive me, the real reason that we are here tonight because Marjorie has just completed two major works. One is a

white paper on media violence which I hope that you picked up. It's the feature of a report that the First Amendment Center has done on this whole issue of media violence and it works as white paper for people who are doing research, journalism and that sort of thing. You may have also noticed that Marjorie has got a new book out – it just came out this month – with a wonderful title of *Not In Front of the Children*, which is all about a larger topic of harmful to minors doctrine and the law as well as violence. So we are most pleased to have Marjorie here to give us the sort of an overview of what this whole topic is about.

Dr. Edward Hill, on my immediate left, is a family physician from Tupelo, Mississippi, and so much more than that, although I think that's probably your most acclaimed title. He is a member of the Board of Trustees for the American Medical Association, which like the American Psychological Association, is one of those groups that have endorsed the idea that media violence does have a link to real violence, and that physicians especially have a public trust in trying to do something about that. Dr. Hill has been on the Board of Trustees of AMA's Council on Legislation and served as its Vice Chair from 1995 – 1996. and in addition to caring very deeply about this topic, has got a lot of expertise in it as a member of the Board of Trustees and in his role at the AMA.

So without further ado, let's get right to some questions of the panelists that will get the ball rolling, and please feel free to take issue with one another and not wait for my questions if feel constrained to say something right away. I'd like to start with Marjorie, though if I could, to just sort of give us some sense of why you got into this topic and why you think it's an important for us to be addressing, Marjorie.

Marjorie Heins: Thanks, Paul. It all started when I was working for the American Civil Liberties Union as a First Amendment lawyer and we would – this was in the 1990's – and there

was a pretty steady stream of censorship legislation that was coming out of Congress culminating in the Communications Decency Act of 1996, which essentially banned indecent communications on the Internet, a rather broad concept. We also were constantly confronting school censorship, library censorship, in local communities and the justification was very frequently "we've got to protect kids from bad stuff," and it was very hard to get behind that to get courts or the general public for that matter to think about "what is this concept of harmful to minors" really about. Is it about ideas and morality and proper moral development of youth, or is there really any scientific or medical basis to think that we can pinpoint whether its sexual content, violent content, antireligious content, or anything else in the world of modern ideas that actually could be shown to have psychologically harmful effects? And so I started getting interested in the whole subject, and to make a long story short, eventually left the ACLU and began work on *Not In Front of the Children*. And of course, an important element that I had to confront was the social science literature on media violence and there's a chapter in the book *Media Effects* from which I excerpted and revised and condensed and added to produce the white paper.

Paul McMasters: Dr. Hill, I'd like to hear from you next because I believe you had a family practice for 27 years, so the issue of violence and children is not just an abstract thing to you that you have not just studied the social science, but you have seen some of the effects of it in your own profession. Could you give us some sense of how you view this issue and what you think needs to be done about it?

Dr. Hill: First, my background is a rural family practice in a very poverty-stricken part of the deep South. My introduction to the whole issue had to do with delivering 12- and 13-year-old children and wondering what could be done about it. Some might consider that a form of

violence. I certainly did. I became very involved in what I thought was very logical and very prudent. And why would anybody not want to fund it and do it which is comprehensive pre-school through 12 health education, which would deal with the issues not only of violence but all the other social issues that drive probably 70 percent of our healthcare costs in this country – teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, sex and suicide, and so forth. So that's how my interest was – probably why I became so interested in it.

I still believe to this day, 40 years later, that what we have not done in the solution is absolutely education, education, education. It's got to be the solution. We have as a society and as a country – it appears to me we have not been committed to that at all as it relates to the social issues that drive healthcare costs where as we have been fairly well committed to English, social studies, history and math and science. And so I think that's been a shortcoming in the entire issue of violence and we're not going to wipe out violence.

And another thing I want to make very clear is that the American Medical Association has no policy that could be construed as promoting or recommending censorship of any kind. We did sign onto a statement with the Senate hearing that – and said that we felt like the volume of violence that is portrayed in the entertainment industry has a direct relationship to behavioral problems with violence. You must remember how our policy is developed. Our policy is developed by 500 physicians throughout the country who meet and debate and argue this as much as our Congress argues and sets policy that we, of course, follow.

Up to until the time I read Marjorie's paper, I was fairly comfortable with the research that we were presented with at the American Medical Association. I have become less comfortable. I still don't believe that I am necessarily wrong. I just believe none of the research has been done yet or the right kind of research and maybe we cannot do the right kind of

research in the right context. I suspect that's true because of social issues. But we are still very concerned about – not causality as much as we are concerned about context and volume of violence and sexuality in the entertainment industry and the media. But the solution is – you would have to be a simpleton not to know what the solution to the problem is. It's what I call prenatal through 12 comprehensive health education in this country – funding it and financing it. We have not gotten a commitment from the Congress or from society to do that and we have to build a consensus and build a critical mass in the public to make Congress do anything sensibly as you all are very well aware.

Paul McMasters: Jeff, it makes sense to go right to you from what Dr. Hill has said. Are you convinced there is a causal link between media violence and actual violence?

Jeff McIntyre: Not to sound too Clintonesque, but how do you define causal? [laughter] I think one of the difficult things in this debate has been a problem in just that term – causal – unfortunately, that when we use the term causal, a lot of folks think that that is something that can be used in a predictive sort of way. When we use it in social science context, generally what we see is that in the roots of violence, and we have to kind of get away from your traditional cause-and-effect model when we talk about violence, because there is nothing in the roots of violence prevention that aims at one thing. Even Dr. Hill's talking about comprehensive health education as we approach the issue of violence prevention in the U.S. and world-wide. I think – there are instances where media can be the mitigating factor in an act of violence. We live in an age where the culture of violence is so rife in young people's lives and so target-marketed towards them in their everyday lives that we have to take a step back. We see based on the research from Don Roberts at Stanford University last year that kids soak up non-academic media anywhere from about 2-1/2 to as much 10-1/2 hours a day. About 16 to 17 percent or so

rated it the highest category of 10-1/2 hours a day. Messages are learned that way. Jack O'Laney is very renowned for coming out and saying this isn't rocket science. One thing does not cause the other. If you watch television, it does not make you go out and commit heinous crimes. On the other hand, what we are seeing is very simple as well is that the more you are exposed to something, the more likely you are to pick it up. We are concerned about children's exposure to violence in whatever context and we know that there are certainly degrees of that. But we don't want to see it overplayed in any way in any one given area. We know there are problems with context and the volume of violence that's out there. We know that there are problems with gun violence, access to handguns. We know that exposure to violence in a domestic situation – if the child witnesses domestic violence situations occurring in their house – that that is as much of a problem. What we are talking about is the picking up of prevailing norms for a child and we think that the current media culture certainly does contribute to that.

Paul McMasters: Richard, that sounds awfully sensible to me, especially when you get causal redefined a bit, how do you react Richard and Jeff?

Richard Rhodes: Define causal to include correlation which it doesn't, then you can say almost anything about causal. It's hard to know where to begin with this gray statement. Let me begin in a very simple place. The homicide rate in medieval days was 10 times as high as it is in modern America. It didn't have any media, surprisingly enough. What did they have? They didn't have police, which means they had to decide their disputes themselves. Common people didn't have access to courts of law. They did have extraordinarily brutal child rearing practices, much more brutal than is common in America today, although there are pockets of truly medieval brutality within families. The idea that we today are then transfixed with violence is very interesting. We live in the most peaceful time in the history of the species, evidentially,

based on those numbers, and yet we find ourselves most concerned about violence. I am not sure why that is but I think it is clear to me that we are concerned about media violence because when people act violently, having no other explanation for it, one explanation that seems logical is that they saw it on television. This explanation has been used down through the centuries for whatever media is the popular media as opposed to the sophisticated media.

It was argued against Penny Dreadfuls in England in the 19th century and Punch and Judy shows. It was argued against the novel in the 18th century, which was supposed to corrupt young women. It was argued vehemently in the mid-20th century against comic books, which many of you here will remember which just fell off the map the day the debate was finished in Congress, because they all went G-rated and we all stopped reading them. And by the way, we didn't most of us grow up to be violent despite that. Television is the latest bugbear, and more recently than that, the Internet and video games.

Finally, I think you have to go back and look at the science that has been done or what passes for the name of science in this field. I did this at great length. It is most of the most boring bodies of literature I have ever explored. I looked at what was there. It talked to experts. I challenged the people who made media violence claims in the scientific literature. Others have done this as well. Jonathan Freedman, a professor at the University of Toronto, a psychologist previously at the Columbia University, did a thorough investigation of every study published in English in this field of media study and concluded essentially that there was nothing there.

Well, maybe more research would find it, but this research has been going on now for 40 years. It's been a very extensive investigation and the numbers that have turned up have been correlations at best. Some of them as I discovered in investigating them have been essentially fraudulent, and I can support that statement and would be glad to. I think finally this turns out to

be a great diversion for politicians who are able to stand up and make claims and statements and then go home quite secure that any action is protected by the First Amendment, so they don't have to do anything about it. I think it's easy to blame the media for the claims of unusual violence that we've been seeing lately in public schools, but it's very clear to me looking into the literature and criminology, truly causal studies, not simply correlational, that the cause of violence is indeed single and clear. It is the brutalization of children, some of whom – not all of whom, some of whom – decide as a result of those personal experiences with violence, that violence is the way to defend themselves, and having done that and having heard from others that they are afraid of them now, they decide that violence is the way to achieve whatever end they chose to achieve. That's the evidence from criminology and I think it simply blows out of the water the whole media violence debate.

Paul McMasters: Let's say Richard is right, Marjorie, how come that message not only doesn't get picked up by folks like ourselves but august organizations like the AMA and the American Psychological Association that have spent a lot of time looking at this social science and looking ……

Marjorie Heins: I wish I knew. I think you have to understand the politics of TV violence. There's actually an interesting book I came across while I was research *Not In Front of the Children* called *The Politics of TV Violence*, and it really started at the very beginning of TV, and as Richard mentioned before that, it was other media and it is evidentially very politically attractive for politicians to seize upon this issue. It's what one of my intellectual heroes, Henry Jenkins, who's an expert in the media and communications, and has a more nuanced approach to the effects of the culture in media on our minds than the school of psychology that looks at it narrowly, the narrow kind of cause-and-effect, and tries to test it in a laboratory. It's what Henry

calls “shifting from real solutions to social problems,” like education, to the “symbolic terrain,” where you can grab headlines by attacking the media, and you never even really define what you mean by violence, which is a vast subject, and then you set up commissions and you fund. You fund studies and psychologists who are trained in a social science experimental tradition that looks to numbers and equations, which in some areas is very useful for establishing realities about sociology and psychology, but I believe in the area of development of human personality and something that is as complex as aggression, these quantitative studies are not as Dr. Hill said “ever going to give us the answers.” But the politics of it draws the funding, and the funding draws the research, and so the research has been overwhelming geared toward a hypothesis that there is this direct cause-and-effect relationship, and even with that disproportionate funding going to this particular school of psychology that Jonathan Freedman has exhaustively shown in a forthcoming book which Richard mentioned – but the results are very poor.

Neither the laboratory studies, nor the correlational studies, nor the attempt at what’s called longitudal studies correlations, over time have demonstrated anything close to scientific certainty, which doesn’t mean that all kinds of media don’t have real effects on us. They do. But they are just different effects depending on what the individual person, child or adult, brings to the TV show, the cartoon, the comic book, the video game, what experiences that person, that child has had, genetic makeup, community, a whole host of factors that go into how that particular individual is going to process a particular piece of art or literature or entertainment that has violent content and, of course, what the message is, what the context is – is it Shakespeare, is it Schindler’s List, is it a comic book, is it a war movie, is it an adventure movie, what is the message and what is the context?

Paul McMasters: I think that is an excellent explanation of why policymakers or politicians, as you put it, arrive at where they are on this issue. But I happen to be tapped into the First Amendment community pretty well who worry about the causal effect between this debate and regulation of the media, and I have to tell you that there was a great sucking sound, if you will, when the American Psychological Association and the American Medical Association said: "Hey, we're signing on to this science" because they are not the politicians. They are not the headline grabbers. These are people who are sober and sophisticated and supposedly know how to read the science. So, Dr. Hill, would you tell us why the AMA chose to make this – choose sides in this

Dr. Hill: And sometimes used by the politicians.

Paul McMasters: Right, right.

Dr. Hill: And quite often.

Paul McMasters: That will happen when you have a press conference with Senator Brownback. [laughter]

Dr. Hill: We try to balance that, because we try to use them also. So it's a contest so the conclusion, of course, is that the politicians are the problem again. [laughter] I don't doubt that or dispute that, or I don't think anyone would argue that it is part of the problem. I think we felt very comfortable with the research that we were aware of. That's why we signed on. But there were political reasons for signing on. We're looking for a champion in Congress that will be willing in the long run to back our desire for funding of comprehensive school health in this country. And we haven't found that champion yet but we are looking for him. There are five federal agencies who have large health education budgets. Some of them don't use it for much health education: the Department of Defense, Agriculture, Education and one other have large

budgets for health education. What our dream of seven years ago was to have those funds put into a single pot and have them utilized by states and school districts who are willing to follow a certain criteria for developing or using curriculum for school health. Much as we have done with highway funds in this country and successfully build highways. We haven't found that champion yet, so some of our reason was political and some of it was true belief that our science department signed off on what was good science. I question that, of course, and I have. But I still believe that all the science is not in.

We are in the infancy of early brain development research and very much in the infancy. And we are not funding that very well either. We are in the infancy of what the human genome project will really do. We are in the infancy of what will come after PET Scans are going to do when we look at childhood development from birth through the teenage years. So I think the research, again, is in its infancy on early brain development, I think we may find that we weren't so far off but we have not found that yet because we haven't been able to do the research. So that's the political reason and the practical reason. Very interesting about early brain development research – it's a little bit more practical.

Some of the social sciences now are doing research, of course, with pilots and various industrial people to see why they make decisions the way they are made when they are fed certain information. Why I am doing that in a training program with doctors, right now, where we have anthropologists and psychologists and psychiatrists and social scientists make rounds with us as we take care of patients on wards in the morning and watching the learning process to see if we can improve the way that residents make decisions about caring for people and we are getting a lot into some of these issues of development.

Richard Rhodes: Decision-making is at the center of people learning to be violent.

Dr. Hill: Exactly.

Richard Rhodes: They are coached. They are told repeatedly by people who they recognize as violent authority figures that they have a personal responsibility to use violence to settle disputes. Violence is a decision. Violence is a choice. It results from perhaps these adverse childhood experiences. I think without question, it does. But ultimately it's something people decide. This is so different from the prevailing medical and psychological model of violence which I think again has to have been arrived at because we live in a society where so very few people are violent. That people don't know why those particular people end up being violent. It's easier to think that they are pathological, rather than to think they have learned from their social experiences a way to behave that's successful for them, however unsuccessful it looks from the rest of us.

Paul McMasters: Jeff, in reading your testimony before the Senate, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it sounded as if you would favor some regulation of the media in order to curb what you consider a very, very real source of harm to our children.

Jeff McIntyre: Not to put intent into your question, but one of the leading qualifications of the social sciences and psychologist's qualifiers which I am having to give a few examples of this evening, we do not wish from an organizational standpoint to curb the amount of violence that is available in the media right now. What we wish to do is to give parents more information so they can make the decision on their own about what their kids should see.

When I originally encountered this debate, stemming from the Telecommunications Act of 1996, when the V-chip was first introduced, we were told to get together with the industry and hammer out a ratings plan that would be agreeable both to the industry and then to the participating groups that were called on by the members of Congress to go on and negotiate with

this. Ourselves, the AMA, the Children's Defense Fund, the National PTA, those sorts of groups went together for this.

We got a huge backlash from the religious right on this. They were really concerned – this was the time in history where Ellen DeGeneres' show was doing really well in the ratings at this time, and it was all the fervor of the religious right to get this thing knocked off the air and in fact, the episode of Ellen where she actually came out of the closet. They raised such a stink about this and major advertisers pulled their money from this. Now I have sent some real radicals to the negotiations that we were involved with at the time because they thought "Well, you mean if we label a show this way, advertisers are going to pull their dollars because people don't like what's on there?" And suddenly, the tone of the negotiation changed quite a bit for us.

We consider ourselves in the public health community very much the middle ground on this. We do not want to ban, we do not want to censor, any of this content. We would actually like the industry to stop their – what we feel – is a form of censorship to parents in the material that is out there. We think we need a better movie rating system. We think that the movie rating system done by CARA and by MPAA right now is mostly a marketing tool, and that we can certainly use more information geared towards parents to be able help them make healthier decisions for their own individual kids.

This is really what it boils down to, and I don't know if I am quite ready to go to a Mr. Rhodes violence-is-rational argument that he is making, but it really is – I'll say this as well, in reading Marjorie's piece for this and also some pieces from her other book, *Sex, Sins and Blasphemy*" you can pay me for the plug later, [laughter] I find myself agreeing with everything that everybody is saying, but just coming to a different conclusion on this sort of stuff. What we have found is that the industry does target young kids. That is a marketing tool and I don't think

anybody for certain products questions that, and that was the result of the most recent Federal Trade Commission hearing. We feel like they can do a better job and find labeling in giving information. We think that is an agreeable middle ground to disbanning our censoring.

Marjorie Heins: I don't think the American Psychological Association can get off the hook quite that easily. And I appreciate the very nuanced and reasonable things you have said, and appreciate that you don't believe that the V-chip law amounts to censorship. We can debate that but it's a little off the point. But the point is that this professional organization has through the years made much less nuanced statements than you have about the issue of causation, and it has said and encouraged the kind of political grandstanding that we see all the time from the Senator Liebermans of the world, and that prevents us from getting to real educational solutions.

And just let me read a couple things. Testimony of Jeff McIntyre of the Senate hearings last year. Regarding the joint consensus statement of the 4 or 5 professional organizations. "What we absolutely know to be true in the public health community regarding children's exposure to violence in the media." Terms like "absolutely" to claim that based on research there is a proven causal relationship. Nothing equivocating, nothing explaining that probabilistic causation, social science, is not what we think of as scientific causation.

And let me go back to the APA's 1993 Violence and Youth Psychology's Response. "There is absolutely no doubt that higher levels of viewing violence on television are correlated with increased acceptance of aggressive attitudes and increased aggressive behavior." Well, there are some correlations, but that says nothing about what causes what, whether people who for a variety of reasons are inclined toward violence or attracted to violent entertainment maybe because it may have a cathartic effect or whether there is some third variables as for example, infant studies that have been done of heavy metal music by a psychologist named Jeff Arnett

who says "Yes, there is a correlation between kids who are aggressive or acting out and that preference to heavy metal music," but the cause of this factor is the third variable. It's the penchant for sensation seeking metasomething and the predisposition of these kids.

Ok, so there's a correlation, says the APA. Fine so far. Talks about some major national studies and then a sentence later, "Hundreds of studies we arrive at the irrefutable conclusion that viewing violence increases violence." So they jump from correlations to a statement about causation in absolute terms that is simply not justified and that kind of – just the third example – the joint statement last year "Many thousands of studies have proved the causal relation between media violence and real world violence or aggression." Well, there aren't many thousands of studies. There are a couple of hundred studies. You can say "What does it matter, a couple hundred studies is a lot." Well, putting aside the fact that the couple of hundred studies don't show very much, just the fact that these professional associations would be careless enough with their numbers to confuse what are a couple of thousand articles and chapters and summaries and reports based on a couple of hundred studies, that they would make that kind on confusing inaccurate statement is an illustration, I think, of a kind of sloppiness - that we should want our professional associations to do better and be more accurate and I think if they were, that would really help us move past this kind of symbolic terrain to something that would really help kids.

Paul McMasters: I invite your questions, just hold up your hand and I will pull you into the conversation. It's just getting good up here and we would like …. [laughter]

Richard Rhodes: ….the debate is going on at the time when the violence rates in America are declining radically from a high of 10.4 homicides per hundred thousand in 1981. We are now down to, I think it is, 5…. under 6 percent. So if there's a correlation, if we're playing correlation here, it's the other way.

Jeff McIntyre: I'd like to speak to that briefly that Mr. Rhodes' statements of how we live and the most peaceful society of history may certainly be true but violence is still certainly a problem in many areas of society right now. Homicide is the leading cause of death for young African American males. It is also the leading cause of death for young African American females. If you are under the age of 18, regardless of what race you are, it's in the top 3 causes of death for you.

Richard Rhodes: Do we think they watch more television than white young people?

Jeff McIntyre: Probably not. Actually the studies show the opposite of that based on income level.

Paul McMasters: I went to the trouble of naming some of you people in the audience at the beginning. I know who you are, I know where you live. I'll ask you questions if you don't ask questions. [laughter] So please join in if you wish. I'm intrigued by a sort of a dance there, Jeff, about the regulation of the media. Would you include the things that you think need to be done as far as the media is concerned. Would you include in that sports programming, news programming, non-violent programming?

Richard Rhodes: Sports programming is never included in these studies. [unintelligible] we consider violent. [laughter]

Paul McMasters: But in the regulation such as you wanting more elaboration of the movie rating code and the television rating, to what does it extend and to what effect do you think it would have?

Jeff McIntyre: Pure and simple, we just like to get more information out there about the programming. It doesn't matter what the programming is. We'd just like to see more

information given with enough notice that parents can be able to make up their own minds without being told by the industry whether their child should watch it or not.

Paul McMasters: Marjorie?

Marjorie Heins: Well that's not entirely correct because the V-chip law specifies what Congress has disapproved of – what kind of content has to be rated – and it's violence, sex and other indecent content which the Motion Picture Association responded with its supposedly voluntary rating system interpreted to mean vulgar language. Now there could be a lot of disagreement among parents as to what might harm young viewers' psychological development. I don't think there's any consensus that vulgar language is particularly harmful provided that there's a family context for it.

Jeff McIntyre: Forgive me for interrupting. That's not quite as I understood it as it happened at the time – that the V-chip was actually put into effect – the V-chip itself was a violence chip which was what the "V" stood for.

Marjorie Heins: But the statute identifies more than violence.

Jeff McIntyre: When we went into the ratings negotiation with the industry for the television ratings, since we are talking about the V-chip, we specifically went in and said "We've got to label violence. That's all we care about. We've got to label violence." The industry – when I say the industry here, I mean to infer the Motion Picture Association of America, the National Cable Television Association, and the National Association of Broadcasters – when we were negotiating with those three groups, they were very interested to start including other aspects in this as well, and we feel like they actually included a larger segment. They included sex, or sexuality, I think as it's defined as . . .

Marjorie Heins: The Congress required them to do that.

Jeff McIntyre: . . . language and then another category, which we really struggled with called "dialogue." And "dialogue" comes off most exclusively from trying to get a grasp, and frankly this was a bone thrown to NBC to try to get them as part of the agreement, that we had a hard time coming up with adult material as such. The industry was saying that you really needed to rate certain things, that they got a lot of pressure about that didn't involve violence or sex or language necessarily. And the example that was used for that most infamously is the Seinfeld masturbation episode. What they never actually say anything, but it's still obviously a pretty adult content.

Marjorie Heins: What is masturbation is subject only for adults.

Jeff McIntyre: It's not 6 year olds.

[unknown]: My name is [unintelligible] and I am a playwright. You say that violence has gone down. I'd like to know what you are comparing it with. And I'd like a comparison between today and 1940.

Jeff McIntyre: [Laughter] I wasn't born . . . [laughter]

Richard Rhodes: Actually there were two peaks of homicides per hundred thousand in the United States in the 20th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, all of western Europe and the United States had reached a level of only 1 per hundred thousand, the lowest being recorded since records were kept or construed. Then violence – homicide – the only number that I think is really solid because you know when someone's dead – but what rape constitutes, what robbery constitutes, these tend to have different definitions at different times – homicides started to go up in the United States, not surprisingly, after the First World War and reached a peak, I think it was around 9 or 10 per hundred thousand in the 1930s. So probably in 1940 it was still fairly high. Higher certainly than it is today. It declined during the Second World War radically

for the simple reason that these young men were off fighting the war. Young men are the most violent group in our society. It started to go up again after the Second World War. Went up and down a little bit during the 50's. Went up radically for reasons no one's quite sure of, but it may be related to the introduction of drugs and drug dealing into our society. Reached a peak in 1981, as I said, and has been declining sharply ever since. So there's no correlation between the real acts of violence in this society and exposure to any particular media which I think is a very important point.

Paul McMasters: Got a question here. Wait for the microphone and please give your name, if you don't mind, because we are web casting it.

Charlie Spencer: My name's Charlie Spencer. I am here as an individual. With all due respect to the honorable members of the panel, I have a feeling that they and I are living on different planets. When did we hear about "road rage" as much as we do now? When did – the most feared call that any police officer in the United States has is a domestic violence call. People beating each other up in the same family and so forth and so on, etc. School shootings. When did you hear about that? In New York City now, police officers and police cars are parked outside the schools in the morning and in the afternoon and there are police officers inside. Now, I am not suggesting that 50 percent of the population is behaving violently. Of course not. But more than a few are and we know it. And with all due respect to any surveys that are taken, and I don't want to seem like one of those people who says "don't confuse me with the facts." [laughter] I do want the facts. But in spite of the research we have and so forth and so on, there's a disconnect somehow here. There is plenty of violence. We all know we have to be careful when we are in a crowd or when we go out and this and that and so forth and so on.

And as far as the media are concerned, I spent time in the media, been involved it. It's a double edge sword. Media can be wonderful, and it is wonderful. But at the same time we are being supersaturated with violent presentations in entertainment and so forth and so on. On top of all of which the news programs we know are not a slice of life. An old saying in the newsrooms now is that "if it bleeds, it leads." The news is skewed toward violence. Everything is skewed toward violence.

Ok, we don't want censorship but I do want is what has been suggested here and Dr. Hill suggested it, too. Let's have some education in various forms so that the public can be aware of what they are seeing, and sense it, and be able to resist and not be overwhelmed and swayed by it. I mean what contributes? We all know that what influences behavior is people's values and their standards. Parents, no matter how loving and caring they are now – and every child is not fortunate enough to have loving, caring parents – but even the loving, caring parents have a reduced and diluted impact upon their own children because of outside forces, largely the media which are influencing their children. And I have said enough. Thank you.

Paul McMasters: Dr. Hill, as somebody who spends a lot of time with parents and children, we haven't talked a lot about the parental role and you have spoken eloquently about the role of education. But what about parental responsibility and the parent's role in this whole issue.

Dr. Hill: We have to define what the traditional family and parental role is now compared to 1940. It was quite, quite different. And I don't remember the figures, but the single parent with children who works now is the common denominator and not the exception, so consequently, our whole concept of parenting, unfortunately, has not changed with the culture, with the parental culture. That's why I am so interested in the schools and I certainly don't want

to dump social problems on the schools. I'm not one of those people, but I feel very confident that we've got to have outlets somewhere besides parents to address these problems with children.

You all know, you have grandchildren, probably some of you, and children and both parents, if there are two, work. If there's one, one works. If the children are not parented the same way, I'm not saying any worse or any better than they were in the past. And we haven't addressed that very well. Sure, parents have enormous responsibilities. I believe that the modern-day parent, even a single parent, has a greater sense of and greater desire to be a better parent than my parents were and my grandparents were. That goes against traditional thinking, I know. But I think that's quite true. I think our parents today, middle-age and young parents, are actually better parents. But they are under an enormous amount of stress that they never experienced 20 or 30 years ago. So that's why the solution has got to be a more of a societal solution than - the public schools happen to be an arena that we can accomplish some of that.

Paul McMasters: Marjorie, we haven't really addressed it in concrete or specific terms and we've got one more question over here, but while we're getting a microphone to this lady here, could you tell us what the First Amendment's imperative is here? We are talking about the media having a role here in the public mind, whether the social science says it or not. Certainly, I think public opinion is very soundly in that corner. What does that say for political figures like Senator Lieberman, Senator Brownback, Senator McCain, and others who are very eager to pass laws to push along that self regulation of the media that seems to be implicit in the FTC reports. What is the First Amendment problem?

Marjorie Heins: I'll only answer that if you'll also let me take a minute to respond to the gentleman. Well, the First Amendment protects freedom of expression, obviously, and but

the Supreme Court has said repeatedly "that's not an absolute" and has caused that exceptions. For the most part the exceptions are identifiable harm to an identifiable category of individual, usual a single individual as in the cases of defamation or a libel suit, can be shown. The one big exception to that is the kind of censorship that has been most pervasive in this country and in England from where we get a lot of our tradition. Obscenity law. And there the justification for the exception to the First Amendment is basically morality. And their perception of societal harm to the tenor of society and attitudes about sexuality.

Arguments to extend that obscenity exception to violence have been made and in a couple of cases, municipalities have passed ordinances explicitly tacking violence, content of one kind or another, onto the obscenity law which has a sort of three part test of the material to be unprotected by the First Amendment as the last series. Value and appeal to prurient interest and so forth. So it is a very broad and vague test even for sexual content and when you stretch it to violent content, it's even broader and vaguer. Those attempts by municipalities have not been successful. The courts have said that violent content, unless it rises to the level of incitement, to an eminent act of lawlessness, is protected by the First Amendment.

But to get back to the social issues for just a minute. I think there is certainly good reason to be concerned about youth violence. And I think the primary reason that youth violence in this country is so often fatal is the lack of gun control. I think there is also reason to be concerned about the culture. But I think we ought to be clear that we're not talking about scientific proof – that's either established or ever likely to be established – that any particular category of entertainment or even any particular single show can have a proven causative effect on what is obviously a very complicated phenomenon. And we ought to be clear. We're not talking about science and causation, we're talking about attitudes and intuition and to some

extent common sense and parental experience and physician experience. So how do we address concerns about the culture. I mean, I frankly think that it is of more concern that kids are sitting as couch potatoes in front of a TV set or computer screen which is likely to lead to obesity and lack of social skills, than I am concerned about the particular message in the show that they are watching. But yes, there's reason for concern about the culture and it would be great if we could have media literacy training funded in our public schools to help kids negotiate the culture and think critically about the messages they are getting, not only from TV shows but from advertising and it would be great to have better funding of public broadcasting.

Dr. Hill: Let me just get to the question of the numbers. These aren't survey numbers. These are FBI reports collected from police departments of actual crime. So when I say homicide is declining, I'm not saying we took a poll, it is declining in the United States. The question really is why there's such a disjunct between our personal perceptions of violence and the actual violence in our society and I don't know the answer to that question. It's probably the media.

Richard Rhodes: Dr. Hill, I can't resist this. Back in November of 2000, there was a commission report released called the Commission for the Prevention of Youth Violence and it was a Robert Johnson funded report that took 18 months of investigation by a nursing public health and 9 medical organizations. They happened to be one of those and we received the grant. That's why I was involved in it. This piece takes every aspect of youth violence and every segment of society and makes recommendations and makes specific recommendations about what each part of society can do from parents to courts to schools to media, gun violence issues in this report. I'm hawking the report – it's free if you'll give me your card, I'll send it to you.

But I think it offers a balance of what we can do as a society and as a culture to continue to address the violence.

I personally think violence – there are fewer guns in school, fewer knives in school, fewer fights after school in the last three to fours years – because of all of these things that are going on in communities across this country. We had open hearings in several cities across the country. We invited in victims of violence and perpetrators of violence and listened to them and parents and kids, mostly kids. We had focus groups with children all over the country and then invited the "experts" and the public health violence people in and did this report. What we found is a common denominator in every program that could demonstrate reduction in violence was a single individual or a small group of individuals in a community – and by a community I may mean two blocks or I may mean six counties – that were committed over a long period of time to having a one-on-one relationship with "at risk children." Every single time it worked. Every single time it worked. And there's where the shortcoming is with physicians and with nursing and the public health and with society. And that's what we've got to solve. I'd love for you to read that report, though.

Paul McMasters: Final question here, real quickly, comment or question?

Mary Giordin: I'm Mary Giordin. I'm on the faculty of New York University in the Department of Culture and Communication and Media Ecology. And I'm a big proponent of media literacy. Just a brief overview – media literacy for the people that are not familiar with it. It was a movement that started in the 1930's in England to educate children from pre-school through high school in the importance of looking at all forms of media and understanding the subliminal messages so they are not manipulated. I do not believe in censorship. The minute

you prohibit somebody from seeing – you know, you prohibit a child from seeing something – he's going to want to see it even more. We all know that, psychologically.

So what I am saying is the education, you know, I support very much what Dr. Hill is saying, but the media literacy movement, and I am sure that now they seem to be fighting among themselves, which I think is so tragic because I have been trying to bring communication skills into high schools for many, many years. I have done a tremendous amount of volunteer work on this with, Dr. Hill said this, ability of children and especially teenagers to be able to talk to people, to build their communication skills and have someone listen. If they're not a really strong family. If the parents aren't there but the community, which you are saying, this ability to build into the community structure, because I find what I've done with at-risk high schools, with at-risk teenagers over the country, is this ability for them to talk about how they feel about things and have somebody listen to them and this is what diffuses the bomb and keeps the kids from getting into, so they're not acting out whatever violence they may feel.

If you want to go back to emotional maturity or go back to emotional intelligence which again, is a wonderful thing. But it's the education. But it needs to be at every level. Because if they are not coming out of a solid family where they have that ability to discuss things with their family, as we say the social skills, I see it with my students at NYU, they have no ability to communicate. They don't even know what the word conceptualized means. I don't know how they got out of high school. This ability to watch television, apart from the violence, is this ability that people sit around watching the boob tube and they don't talk to each other. They don't converse and they don't communicate. So all of these things need to be addressed, but I think the media literacy and health education, all of these things, comprehensive programs within the educational system at the earliest age. And, of course, I'm not going to get into all the

studies that you are familiar with, but I'd like to address the issue of the media literacy which you did talk about. Thank you very much.

Paul McMasters: Thank you. Anybody have a quick response there? I've overruled myself with some advice from the audience here to take one more question. So if you have a comment?

Richard Rhodes: If we prevent the brutalization of children there would be no violence in this country. Period.

Jeff McIntyre: I don't disagree that the absence of brutalization of children – to come out against that statement is to come out for brutalization. [laughter] I'm really not prepared for it tonight. [laughter] But the common theme here, one of the things I would really like to emphasize here, is that while we all in this sort of presentation elaborate on a lot of the differences that we have. One of the things that's common here is that we all think youth violence and violence in society is a problem and needs to be addressed. What we have said in various ways that among the roots of violence, especially youth violence, are complex. And that's the thing that I really want to emphasize in this as well and so to say that if we got rid completely of the brutalization of children that we would have no violence, I think there'd be a little shortcoming in that. I think if we get rid of access to handguns, we'd get rid of violence completely, well not quickly, not quite, and the same goes for substance abuse and domestic violence and all that sort of stuff. But all of these are certainly contributing aspects.

Paul McMasters: Yes sir.

Bob Carpenter: Just one very quick question.

Paul McMasters: Would you give us your name.

Bob Carpenter: Bob Carpenter, activist, retired, 38 years. Just one real fast question. Nobody has used the word "institutional violence." I mean institutional violence seems to be ok. It's accepted on the evening news. So I think there is a correlation from of when, for example, the Gulf War, when that was on the television, on a constant basis, and it was not put down, to say the least. It was accepted. So what is your opinion on this. What is the correlation between it's ok to have war and to kill vis-à-vis what the children play with the video games and so forth. I think there is a correlation. I think young people, they want young people to accept what they've done militarily in the past and possibly in the future and there is a subliminal thing here, in my opinion, and I just wanted your comments, is possible.

Paul McMasters: Who wants to tackle that, or perhaps one of the issues that is of interest or related institutional ed to that is the debate over televising the execution of Timothy McVeigh. What about this, we've been focusing on the media being to blame for violence in our society. Is there an institutional – how does it rank with other institutions in our society – as seeming to sanction violence, or is that too big a jump.

Marjorie Heins: It reminds me of the debate over Bob Kerry that we've been reading about this week. There was this squad who murdered a dozen or so . . .

Unknown: alleged

Marjorie Heins: . . . children and they talk about women and children, women can be soldiers, but in this case it appeared they weren't. But what about all tons of napalm that were dropped. Somehow the pilots of that plane are not complicit because it's, whether it's institutionalized violence or more sanitized. Yeah, I agree with you and but, I don't think the answer to – it would be nice to have news that wasn't always as it bleeds, but I don't think shutting down what's on the news is going to help [unintelligible] political problems, and the

more news and information we get, and the more ability we get to talk about it – institutionalized violence – the more sensitized hopefully the population will be.

Paul McMasters: Richard?

Richard Rhodes: Institutional violence is, of course, a problem. But the scientific evidence that I have seen and credit about how individuals become violent is that they must have personal violence experience, and you don't get that from reading about it or hearing about the Gulf War. However much that has other value issues, I would just add in general that I think this discussion gets disconnect from, for example, your response and others in the audience, because what we're really taking about are cultural issues, value issues, as opposed to talking about violence, which may well be something else, I think it is. It is understandable that you might not agree with what you see of media influence on children. The world has changed enormously and it is changing. I know one media expert who suggests that the media in the 20th century has slowly begun to replace religion in the sense that it's the place where people go now for common values and to feel connected with each other. Young people, especially. That's a very threatening thought when you think about it and I'm not surprised that there are cultural issues, but I wish we could be clear that there is no scientific evidence, at least I find credible, and others who are experts, also don't find it credible, that the media as such violence makes you violent. You have to have experience to become violent.

Paul McMasters: It's my sad duty to have to call this to an end. Any final quick words from any of the panelists that is something you are burdened with and didn't get a chance to say. Dr. Hill?

Dr. Hill: No, I'm not burdened with anything. [laughter] The discussion could go on about the responsibility or irresponsibility of the institutional violence that is reported and he

didn't get into that and I don't want to. [laughter] Also, we didn't talk about post-traumatic stress syndrome which is intimately related and that's another enormous issue, enormous issue that we don't even recognize very well. It's so pervasive. We don't even recognize it. We won't get into that, it's a whole other . . .

Paul McMasters: Jeff, anything?

Jeff McIntyre: Very quick, I mentioned to Richard at the start of this, that I really was looking forward to this symposium tonight because we had found in political discussions and in discussions with industry that there had been a real lack of substantive conversation about both the nature of the research and about the true First Amendment concerns inherent in this debate about media violence, about V-chip TV ratings and whatnot. So it is very heartening to be able to have this Socratic dialogue tonight and to see as many people that have come out to show support and show interest in this. We do, from APA's standpoint, we do so much great work for the First Amendment community with the ACLU and other groups around civil rights, around prejudice, around so many issues that are close to both of our community's hearts that it's nice to be able to reach and to be able to talk to each other about this sort of stuff. So mostly just thank you for having us.

Paul McMasters: Richard?

Richard Rhodes: I think they already did.

Paul McMasters: Marjorie, would you like to round it up.

Marjorie Heins: Sure, I think this has been a very productive conversation. I would urge the professional associations to be much more scrupulous when they talk about media violence and so-called scientific proof and perhaps we can all get together and unite behind a common agenda of media literacy and sexuality education.

Paul McMasters: We attempted to start the conversation on a little different plane with this program this evening and I hope that starts a little different way of thinking about this whole issue on your part. I can't tell you how much we appreciate your coming out tonight and participating in this conversation and let's give a big hand to these experts.

EXHIBIT 2

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PTC RETRACTION TO WWE AND TO THE PUBLIC

Media Research Center (MRC), Parents Television Council (PTC), Dr. Delores Tucker, Mark Honig and I have in the past made statements regarding so-called wrestling deaths—children killed by other children alleged to be mimicking "professional wrestling" moves they saw on television. We made such statements to members of MRC and PTC, the media, advertisers on World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) *Smackdown!* program, retailers that sell WWE-related toys and merchandise, public officials and the public. MRC and PTC also produced a videotape as part of a fundraising campaign in connection with its "National Campaign to Clean Up TV Now!", which advanced the notion that the murder of Tiffany Eunick was caused by the influence of professional wrestling on Lionel Tate. The videotape included interviews with Lionel Tate's lawyer advancing the notion that the murder of Tiffany Eunick, the victim, was directly caused by the impact that professional wrestling had on Lionel Tate.

We based our statements on media reports and source information. We now believe, based on extensive investigation and facts which have come to light since making those statements, that it was wrong for MRC, PTC, their spokespersons and myself to have said anything that could be construed as blaming WWE or any of its programs for the deaths of the children. Simply put, it was premature to reach that conclusion when we did, and there is now ample evidence to show that conclusion was incorrect. I now believe that professional wrestling played no role in the murder of Tiffany Eunick, which was a part of our "Clean Up TV Now!" campaign, and am equally convinced that it was incorrect and wrong to have blamed WWE or any of its programs for the deaths of the other children.

Because of our statements, PTC, MRC and the WWE have been in litigation since November 2000. WWE vigorously advanced its position that neither it, nor "professional wrestling" lead to these deaths. WWE also contended that MRC, PTC, their spokespersons and I had misrepresented the number of advertisers who withdrew support from WWE's Smackdown! television program after receiving communications from the PTC, some of which regrettably connected the WWE and *Smackdown*! to the deaths of children. As such, WWE exercised its right to initiate this litigation, during which facts came to light that prompted me to make this statement.

By this retraction, I want to be clear that WWE was correct in pointing out that various statements made by MRC, PTC and me were inaccurate concerning the identity and number of WWE *Smackdown!* advertisers who withdrew support from the program. Many of the companies we stated had "withdrawn" or pulled their support had never, in fact, advertised on *Smackdown!* nor had any plan to advertise on *Smackdown!* Again, we regret this error and retract any such misleading statements.

Finally, concerning the statements about child wrestling deaths, it was wrong to have stated or implied that WWE or any of its programs caused these tragic deaths. Specifically concerning the Lionel Tate case, recent developments lead us to believe that others and we were given, and relied upon, false information provided by parties close to the case. The information that we were given and relied upon may have been designed to make a national example of the Florida murder trial, pinning the blame on WWE. For example, we were told by a source that Lionel Tate was watching a WWE program when he assaulted Tiffany Eunick. In fact, Lionel Tate was watching the "Flintstones" and a cartoon entitled "Cow and Chicken." We were also told, by a source, that Lionel Tate killed Tiffany Eunick while executing a wrestling move unique to a WWE character called the "Stone Cold Stunner." We have since learned that this was not true, nor was there any evidence that it was true.

It is now well documented that after the Tate trial concluded, the presiding Judge said that it was "inconceivable" that Tiffany Eunick's injuries were caused by Lionel Tate mimicking wrestling moves. Indeed, since the trial ended, Lionel Tate's new lawyers have filed court papers in which they admit that the "wrestling defense" was, in their words, "bogus." Given these facts, WWE was within its rights to be angry at the MRC, PTC, their spokespersons and I for contacting WWE's advertisers to go beyond complaining about WWE content but passing along accusations which we now know were false. Because I feel a simple retraction is not sufficient, I have personally extended my apology to Vince McMahon and the WWE on behalf of MRC, PTC, Dr. Tucker, Mr. Honig and me. Through this letter, I now make this apology public and specifically directed to the advertising community that has in the past, is currently or may in the future consider advertising or sponsoring WWE programming.

The PTC can have its concern with the content of WWE's television programming – though these concerns have been reduced significantly over the past years as a reflection of WWE's changed standards. But nowhere in that debate, including in the correspondence and statements to the advertising community, should there have been any discussion of "wrestling" deaths. I regret this happening, it

wasn't fair to WWE. And I say this emphatically: Please disregard what others and we have said in the past about the Florida "wrestling" death. Neither "wrestling" in general, nor WWE specifically, had anything to do with it. Of that I am certain.

Sincerely,

L. Brent Bozell, III

cc: Vince and Linda McMahon

EXHIBIT 3

The Media Violence Myth

By Richard Rhodes

I

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, pale, lean and a little goofy in a bad suit, struts the stage of a high school auditorium somewhere in Arkansas, his home state. He's a man on a mission, a smalltown Jimmy Swaggart, swooping and pausing and chopping the air. He's already scared the fresh-faced kids in the audience half to death, and the more scared they look, the wider he grins. "Before children learn to read," he lobs in one of his rhetorical flash grenades, "they can't tell the difference between fantasy and reality. That means everything they see is real for them. When a three year old, a four year old, a five year old sees someone on TV being shot, raped, stabbed, murdered, for them it's real. *It's real!* You might just as well have your little three year old bring a friend into the house, befriend that friend, and then *gut 'em and murder 'em right before their eyes"* — some of the kids in the audience wince — "as have them watch the same thing on TV, watch someone being brutally murdered on television. For them it's all real. Television is traumatizing and brutalizing our children at this horrendously young age."[1]

A retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel with an M.Ed. in counseling, formerly an ROTC professor at the University of Arkansas, Grossman left the Army to dedicate himself to saving America from what he calls the "toxic waste" of "media violence" that is "being pumped into our nation and our children," the "electronic crack cocaine" of television and video games that he claims are "truly addictive." He's riding a bandwagon. Columbine turned it into a victory parade. Three days after Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold murdered thirteen of their schoolmates and then killed themselves, President Bill Clinton cited Grossman by name and endorsed Grossman's video-games-teach-kids-to-kill thesis in his weekly radio address. The Republicans have known since their log cabin days that the media are evil, but after Columbine, even Democrats like Connecticut's Joe Lieberman signed on. The American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Surgeon General and other prestigious institutions have all endorsed the theory that violent media make kids violent. It's a solid cultural consensus.

Grossman speaks to hundreds of organizations every year, from schools and colleges to Rotary Clubs, police departments and veterans' groups. He's an effective speaker and polemicist. "We live in the most violent era in peacetime human history," he sets up his audiences. If someone reminds him that the murder rate was eight times as high in medieval Europe as it is in modern America, that murder rates have been declining steadily in the Western world for the past five hundred years,[2] he claims it's an illusion. "Medical technology saves ever more lives every year," he says. "If we had 1930s medical technology today, the murder rate would be ten times what it is." He claims that people are trying to kill people ten times as often as they used to do back when there were no police and no common access to courts of law, but that modern emergency medicine is masking the increase.

Now and again, as Grossman recites his litany, his narcissism breaks through. He's from Jonesboro, the Arkansas town where eleven-year-old Andrew Golden and thirteen-year-old Mitchell Johnson pulled their school fire alarm on March 24, 1998, and shot down fifteen schoolmates and a teacher as the victims exited the building into the schoolyard, killing five and wounding eleven. After the shootings, Grossman says, "the media were out interviewing everybody and his dog." Unable to resist a superlative, he adds: "We had the highest concentration of media per capita at any point in American history up to that time." He's already briefed his high-school audience about a study which he claims proves that when nations get television broadcasting, their murder rate doubles after a fifteen-year time lag (time for the little television-traumatized killers-in-training to reach adolescence). *Why don't you know that?* he challenges the kids. Because it isn't on television, he says: "If you ask the television industry about the link between violence on television and real-world violence, they'll lie."

With the media packed shoulder-to-shoulder in Jonesboro, Grossman thought that the mountain had finally come to Mohammed. But it wasn't to be. "They were interviewing everybody," he complains, "and here they've got this guy, this Grossman guy, who's this *expert* on violence, he wrote the book, he travels around the world training people. That would be a great interview, right? And I was on Canadian national TV, Australian national TV, I was on the BBC, newspapers and magazines around America were interviewing me." But not on U.S. national television. One of the major network news shows did seek him out, Grossman goes on. "'Wow,'" he claims they told him, "'here's a story we gotta get. We want to interview you.' I said, 'Great! I wanna be interviewed! But here's what it's all about: You've got to realize that every major medical and scientific body in the world has identified the fact that at least *50 percent* of the responsibility for violent crime lies on *your* shoulders.'" Long pause. The kids are with him. They already know the punch line. "They said, 'Well, thank you very much. If it's okay with you, we'd really rather not.'"

It's easy to believe that violence is getting worse: We hear about it all the time. It's easy to believe that mock violence in media is influencing behavior: What other violence do suburban kids see? Without question, popular culture is a lot more raucous than it used to be. It's a wild pageant, and it scares the culture police. But however many national leaders and prestigious institutions endorse the theory, it's a fraud. There's no evidence that mock violence in media makes people violent, and there's some evidence that it makes people more peaceful.

To start with, take a look at Col. Dave's claim about improved medical technology saving potential homicides. Of 1.5 million violent crimes in the U.S. in 1998, 17,000 were murders. Of the remaining number, according to the FBI, only 20,331 resulted in major injuries (the rest produced minor physical injuries or none at all). So if all the assault victims with major injuries had also died — improbable even with 1930's medicine — the 1998 U.S. murder rate would only have been double what it was — that is, would have been about 13 per 100,000 population rather than 6.3. But even 13 is well below the 23 per 100,000 murder rate of 13th-century England, the 45 per 100,000 of 15th-century Sweden, the 47 per 100,000 of 15th-century Amsterdam. We don't live in "the most violent era in peacetime human history"; we live in one of the least violent eras in peacetime human history.

Jib Fowles, a slight, handsome media scholar at the University of Houston at Clear Lake, worked his way through the media effects literature carefully and thoroughly when he was researching a book on the subject, mischievously titled *The Case* for *Television Violence*, which was published last year. Although Grossman and others are fond of claiming that there have been more than 2,500 studies showing a connection between violent media and aggressive behavior (the number actually refers to the entire bibliography of a major government report on the subject), the independent literature reviews Fowles consulted identified only between one and two hundred studies, the majority of them laboratory studies. Very few studies have looked at media effects in the real world, and even fewer have followed the development of children exposed to violent media over a period of years.

In typical laboratory studies, researchers require a control group of children to watch a "neutral" segment of a television show while a test group watches a segment which includes what the researchers believe to be violent content — an actor or a cartoon character pretending to assault other actors or cartoon characters. Both segments are taken out of context, although sometimes the children watch entire shows. After this exposure, the researchers observe the children at play together or interacting with toys to see if they behave in ways the researchers consider aggressive. Aggression may mean merely verbal aggression, or rough play such as pushing and shoving, or hitting. Hitting is a rare outcome in these experiments; the usual outcome is verbal banter or rough play. Since the researchers, by the very act of showing the tapes, have implicitly endorsed the behavior they require the kids to watch, and further endorse the kids' response by standing around counting aggressive acts rather than expressing disapproval or intervening as a teacher or parent might do, the experimental arrangement is not exactly neutral.

Even so, the results of their laboratory experiments have been inconclusive. In some studies "aggression" increased following the "violent" television viewing; but in other studies the control kids who watched a neutral segment were more aggressive afterward. Sometimes kids acted up more after watching comedy. Boys usually acted up more than girls, but sometimes it was the other way around. "In the majority of cases," two investigators who reviewed a large number of laboratory studies found, "there was an increase in negative behaviors in the postviewing interval for both aggressive and non-aggressive television material."[3] Contradictory results such as these prove, at best, no more than what everyone already knows:

that watching movies or television can stir kids up. They certainly don't prove that watching television makes children violent. They don't prove anything about the real world, Fowles argues, because they're nothing like the real world.

The best-known real-world study of the effect of television viewing on violent behavior is probably the one a Seattle psychiatrist named Brandon Centerwall reported in 1989. It's the basis for Grossman's claim in his standard stump speech that "with very few exceptions, anywhere in the world that television appears, within fifteen years the murder rate doubles." As usual, Grossman exaggerates; Centerwall's study limited its findings to three countries. To see if television influences the murder rate, the psychiatrist took advantage of a natural experiment: the fact that television broadcasting began in the U.S. and Canada after 1945 but not in South Africa, where the Afrikaans majority government banned it until 1975.

Centerwall graphed the murder rates for whites in Canada and the U.S. from 1945 to 1974 against television-set ownership and compared them to the white murder rate in South Africa during the same period. "White homicide rates remained stable [in South Africa]," he reports, but "in two control populations, Canadian and U.S. white homicide rates doubled following the introduction of television."[4] On the basis of this seemingly spectacular finding, Centerwall issued a call to arms in the prestigious *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1992, spinning out his doubled murder rates into even more spectacular claims: "If, hypothetically, television technology had never been developed, there would today be 10,000 fewer homicides each year in the United States, 70,000 fewer rapes, and 700,000 fewer injurious assaults."[5]

Two legal scholars at the University of California at Berkeley, Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon Hawkins, refuted Centerwall's findings in a 1997 book, *Crime Is Not the Problem: Lethal Violence in America.* Zimring and Hawkins point out first that there are awkward problems with Centerwall's basic assumptions. How can television set ownership tell you anything about murder rates? Isn't television program *content* supposed to be the issue? And comparing white murder rates in the U.S. and Canada with white murder rates in South Africa, where whites represent fewer than five percent of the murder victims, is probably comparing apples and oranges.

Zimring and Hawkins tested Centerwall's theory more fundamentally by looking at homicide rates in four other industrial democracies — France, Germany, Italy and Japan. They found that the incidence of murder in those countries either remained more or less level (Italy) or actually declined (France, Germany and Japan) with increased television exposure. These counterexamples, they write, "*disconfirm* the causal linkage between television set ownership and lethal violence for the period 1945-1975."[6]

I sent Zimring and Hawkins' analysis to Centerwall for comment. He hadn't seen it before, but he told me he'd heard similar arguments. He was quick to offer reasons why he was right and the legal scholars were wrong. He said he interpreted the French and Italian graphs as confirming his theory — he thought they showed a longterm upward trend. Germany he acknowledged was different, "but since many other European countries that I didn't include in my paper had increased homicide rates, it doesn't bother me all that much." Japan isn't a Western country, Centerwall reminded me, arguing that "culture overrides television if it has a mechanism for dealing with physical aggression."

To explain the recent declines in homicide in the U.S. and England despite continuing and even increasing exposure to media, Centerwall redrew the theory of his study, claiming that it really should have been a two-factor model, factoring in not only television exposure but also economic conditions. Economic conditions affect the murder rate, he said: It goes up in bad times and when times are good it goes down. He said the television effect eventually saturates, after which its influence on the murder rate is steady-state. Thus, he claimed, rising postwar prosperity probably retarded somewhat the influence of television on the murder rate. Then, when that influence saturated, further prosperity kicked in to bring the rate down. He pointed to a particularly dramatic drop in English homicide rates between 1978 and 1981 as evidence of the success of Margaret Thatcher's economic policies, which he said had increased per capita income in England by 80 percent.

I passed along Centerwall's explanations to Franklin Zimring at Berkeley. In an emailed response Zimring barely restrained his scorn. Since Centerwall's theory is generated by U.S. and Canadian data patterns, he wrote, "it should be tested elsewhere." One way to do that is to look at U.S. and Canadian data after 1975. After 1975, it turns out, despite the continuing and increasing exposure to television, the homi-

cide rates leveled off and declines. Centerwall claims the television effect saturates. “Why and how this might be,” Zimring responds, “is anybody’s guess” — that is, Centerwall offers no evidence for his saturation theory; it looks like something he made up to explain why the data don’t fit his model. Zimring added that he’d never seen any evidence that economic conditions immediately impact homicide rates, but in any case, “the big drop in English homicide rates was between 1978’s high and 1981’s low. Mrs. Thatcher took office in 1979.” Causes are supposed to precede effects, but homicides were already declining before the British economy improved.

As for culture overriding television in Japan, Zimring wrote, “says who, and when?” The French murder rate trends upward between 1980 and 1985 and then trends downward, “but all of this leaves French homicide in 1990 at 35 percent lower than it was in 1960” when Centerwall’s theory would predict it to double. Italy, similarly, “goes up in the 1970s, drops back from 1981-1986, and then goes up again. How this pattern fits the Centerwall thesis is his secret.” Centerwall told me he based his claim that other European countries also experienced doubled murder rates (a claim Grossman also makes) on Interpol data. Wrong data, Zimring advised: “Most Continental countries report homicide and attempted murder together, which led our current drug czar to assert recently that Holland had a higher homicide rate than the United States. But even General McCafferty would not use Interpol data, which is unaudited and notorious.” In conclusion, Zimring wrote, “the off-hand and ad hoc quality of the responses that you report reinforce my disinclination to buy a used car from Dr. Centerwall.” Yet Centerwall’s theory has been a mainstay of American Medical Association and Congressional claims that television violence is destroying American youth.

Psychiatrists have been prominent players in the media violence controversy; though they have no special training in assessing broad social trends, people take them seriously because they’re medical doctors. An illustrious predecessor of Brandon Centerwall’s, the psychiatrist Frederic Wertham, indicted comic books in the 1940’s and 1950s as fervently as Centerwall has condemned electronic media. (Every popular art form — the novel, the circus, Punch ‘n Judy shows, comic strips, movies, rock ‘n roll, video games, now the Internet — starts out condemned as trash. One generation’s trash is the next generation’s art form.) Wertham had worked with juvenile delinquents in New York City in the immediate post-World War II years when juvenile delinquency was on the rise and Congress was looking for answers much as it looked for answers in the 1970s and 1980s when the homicide rate was going up. “If it were my task, Mr. Chairman, to teach children delinquency,” he testified before a Congressional committee in 1954, “to tell them how to rape and seduce girls, how to hurt people, how to break into stores, how to cheat, how to forge, how to do any known crime, if it were my task to teach that, I would have to enlist the crime comic book industry. Formerly to impair the morals of a minor was a punishable offense. It has now become a mass industry. I will say that every crime of delinquency is described in detail and that if you teach somebody the technique of something you, of course, seduce him into it. Nobody would believe that you teach a boy homosexuality without introducing him to it. The same thing with crime.”[7]

In those days being gay was believed to be a serious mental illness, and Wertham was convinced that Batman and Robin were a blatantly homosexual couple created to entice new recruits. (Robin, he wrote, “is buoyant with energy and devoted to nothing on earth or in interplanetary space as much as to Bruce Wayne. He often stands with his legs spread, the genital region discreetly evident.”)[8] The psychiatrist thought Superman was a fascist and worried that the muscular Krypton native gave children “a completely wrong idea of.basic physical laws” by leaping tall buildings at a single bound.[9] He called comic books “the marijuana of the nursery.” Like Grossman and Centerwall, Wertham demonstrated that literal-minded humorlessness is a requirement for media bashing, but Congress and the public took all this unsupported slander seriously. The comic book industry, which published 130 million copies a month, including at least 30 million devoted to crime and horror, capitulated after the 1954 Congressional hearings and thereafter published only G-rated stories. Fortunately for popular culture, the writers and artists laid off at EC Comics, the hardest hit when the industry crashed, went on to found *Mad* magazine.

Medical authorities, medical organizations and state and federal legislators have awarded statistical studies of media violence broader endorsement than Dave Grossman’s exaggerations or Brandon Centerwall’s purblind graphs. Statistics are said to correlate when they change together. When Centerwall showed the U.S.

murder rate and U.S. television-set ownership increasing during the same period of years, he was graphing a positive correlation between those two variables. If one variable had gone down when the other went up (as Centerwall claims murder rates and income do), that would be a negative correlation. That two variables correlate doesn't necessarily mean they're influencing each other; they may both be changing because of some third factor, or the change may be simply coincidental. Raincoats and umbrellas appear on the streets in increasing numbers on certain days of the year (a positive correlation), but raincoats aren't influencing umbrellas: Both appear because their owners believe it might rain. Correlations by definition can't reveal the cause of anything. They're simply interesting information which can sometimes offer clues about where to look for a cause.

The most celebrated correlations in the annals of media violence studies emerged from longterm investigations of aggression in school children conducted across twenty-two years (from 1960 to 1982) by psychologists Leonard D. Eron and L. Rowell Huesmann, both now professors at the University of Michigan (Huesmann joined the investigations in 1970). According to David Pearl, who administered media research at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), when the U.S. Surgeon General appointed a committee to review research on television violence at the beginning of the 1970s, Eron and Huesmann's investigation "was a key study leading to the Surgeon General's Committee conclusions."[10] Two decades later, when Congress passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996 which requires all new television sets to be equipped with a V-chip enabling parents to block out programs they don't want their children to see, the text of the Act implicitly invoked Eron and Huesmann's findings to justify its intrusion: "Studies have shown that children exposed to violent video programming at a young age have a higher tendency for violent and aggressive behavior later in life than children not so exposed.."[11]

Eron himself has candidly called the television violence component of his longterm aggression studies "the tail that wags the dog." He said he and his colleagues "got a lot of financial support through [investigating television violence]" — hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars, in fact — but that doing so had not been part of his original research agenda, because he didn't think it was important.[12] "More than 35 years ago," he reminisced in 1995, "when I started to do research on how children learn to be aggressive, I.was skeptical about the effects of television violence."[13] In 1960, Eron and his colleagues began studying 875 third graders — boys and girls eight or nine years old — in rural Columbia County in upstate New York. They wanted to identify what childhood experiences correlated with mental health problems later in life, and they decided to use aggression as an marker, since it was something they believed could be measured objectively. They asked the children who started fights, who got into trouble, who said mean things. They questioned parents and teachers. They measured popularity, anxiety, IQ and family values. One measure they recorded almost as an afterthought was how much violent television each third grader watched.

In 1963 Eron reported finding a correlation between aggressive behavior at school (as estimated by classmate peers) and violent television watching at home. A correlation only emerged for boys; there was no such connection for girls. To further confuse the issue, kids who watched the most television overall turned out to be the least aggressive.[14] Eron calls the finding for boys "unsuspected." He adds: "We didn't have too much confidence in the finding by itself" — nor should they have, given the zero finding for girls and the negative correlation overall. "You couldn't tell by these data alone," Eron explains, "whether aggressive boys liked violent television programs or whether the violent programs made boys aggressive — or whether aggression and watching violent television were both due to some other third factor."[15] Nor had the federal government yet become interested in the problem. Eron's requests for grant support were turned down twice in the 1960s by the NIMH and once more by another government agency.[16] But in 1970, when the Surgeon General's committee noticed the 1963 positive correlation for boys, it realized that the Columbia County third graders would now be graduating from high school, raising the possibility that a correlation between childhood exposure to violent television and adult aggression could now be measured. So the NIMH awarded Eron's team, now including Rowell Huesmann, a grant of $42,000, the first of several lucrative grants, and the psychologists were able to locate and reinterview 436 of the original 875 subjects. (The money the Surgeon General granted for such speculative media studies — $1.5 million in all — was gouged from the NIMH budget by eliminating or postponing the construction of community mental health centers, at a time when mental institutions were being closed all across America and tens of thousands mental patients were being turned out onto the streets.[17])

In their followup, Eron and Huesmann found a correlation of .31 between boys' preference for violent television at age 8 (based on their mothers' estimates) and their peer-rated aggressiveness at age 18. In other words, the psychologists found that a preference for viewing mock violence on television in the third grade might account for 10 percent (the square of the correlation) of the childhood influences that led the boys to become aggressive adults.

Assessing this famous correlation, Jib Fowles points out that Eron and Huesmann had looked at two other measures of adult aggression besides peer reports: self-reports and the results of psychological tests which they administered. These two other measures *did not* correlate significantly with age 8 television preference. Nor did any of the three measures correlate for girls. Another research team, Fowles says, might conclude from such a poor showing — only one of six possible correlations turning out to be significant, and that one only weakly — that their data failed to support their theory. Eron and Huesmann chose instead to highlight the one correlation that might. "It is difficult to believe," Fowles concludes, "that a study with such a weak single finding has been taken so seriously by so many thoughtful people."[18]

A bold, savvy psychologist at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, David Sohn, points to even more damning problems with Eron and Huesmann's famous correlation. If watching television is influencing an eight-year-old boy to be aggressive, Sohn argues, you would expect such influence to be more intense at the time than ten years later. But the correlation Eron and Huesmann found between age 8 TV exposure and aggressive behavior at the same age was only .21 — 4 percent. Ten years later, despite years of intervening experiences, the correlation of *age 8* exposure with age 18 aggression had grown to .31. How could that be? Influences weaken as time passes and other experiences intervene — they don't strengthen. Even more weirdly, Sohn points out, the correlation *disappears* in between: a partial sample of 64 boys in the study, reinterviewed in the mid-1960s, revealed *no* correlation between age 8 exposure and aggressiveness at age *13.*[19] Which would mean that an eight-year-old's TV exposure influences his aggressiveness immediately, has no measurable influence five years later, then mysteriously reemerges five years after that to influence an 18-year-old's behavior even more than it did when he was eight — an obvious absurdity.

So I looked up Rowell Huesmann at the University of Michigan and asked him about the mysterious loss of correlation at age 13. Rather than defend the failure of the study to find a measurable correlation, the professor of psychology blamed the anomaly on mistakes by his colleagues. "The little 8th-grade data they had collected was incomplete and clearly biased," Huesmann asserted in his response. "Once I joined the project in 1970 as Analysis Director, I argued successfully against analyzing or reporting at all on the 8th grade data."[20] With a larger, "unbiased" sample, he added, the .31 correlation that turned up at age 18 might also have shown up in thirteen-year-olds. It's equally possible, of course, that it might not. The fact remains that the partial sample correlation at age 13 — published in 1972, *with Huesmann's name on the paper* — was effectively zero.

Despite these serious problems, Eron and Huesmann's investigation had hatched a result the NIMH could use to get media-muzzling Senators off its back, and the psychologists were encouraged to continue their followup studies with taxpayer support. "In 1980-82," Huesmann emailed me, "we .tracked down and reinterviewed as many of [the] boys [in the Columbia County study] as we could. We interviewed 198 males from the original 1960 sample of 436." By then the boys were 30 years old. A few of them had been convicted of violent crimes. Huesmann worked his statistical magic and came up with some impressive correlations.

In 1986, officially representing the American Psychological Association, he reported his team's new findings proudly to the Senate Judiciary Committee. "Because the National Institute of Mental Health was generous enough to give us funding," Huesmann told the senators, "we were able to go back 10 years later and 22 years later and track down these subjects, most recently in 1982 when these subjects were now 30 years old. We were able to look at the extent to which their early television viewing behavior related to their adult aggression and criminality..What we found was a strong relation between early television violence viewing and adult criminality. Television viewing in and of itself related to adult criminality, regardless of what the children were watching. But more specifically for boys, *there was a strong relation between early violence viewing and later adult criminality."*[21] To make that twice-mentioned "strong relation" vivid, Huesmann presented the senators with a bar graph — "simply intended to be," he explained to me in his email, "a visual illustration of the correlation between age 8 TV violence viewing and adult criminality." The bar graph measured "Seriousness of Criminal Convictions by Age 30" on a scale of 1-10

against “Boys’ Preference for Violent Television at Age 8.” It showed three stark black bars stepping up from low preference (4.23 on the seriousness scale) to medium preference (4.71 on the seriousness scale). The high preference group at 9.71 almost doubled in seriousness of criminal convictions, bumping the 10 limit.[22] The clear implication was that an eight-year-old who watches mock violence on television is likely to grow up to be a rapist or a murderer.

Needless to say, Huesmann’s bar graph was high drama and a call to arms. To the senators and the assembled press, it looked like clear evidence that how much violent television a boy watches in childhood will correspond closely to how heinous a violent criminal he will turn out to be two decades later. Since 1986, Huesmann has made that claim repeatedly. In 1996, defending his work in the *Harvard Mental Health Letter* under a headline calling media violence “a demonstrated public health threat to children,” he claimed that his 1982 study found that “boys who spent the most time viewing violent television shows at age eight were most likely to have criminal convictions at age 30.”[23]

But Huesmann has been curiously selective about where he reports his TV violence/criminal conviction finding. It went unmentioned in the final report on the 22-year aggression study that he and Eron published in the prestigious journal *Developmental Psychology* in 1984. Not one of the team’s media violence findings appears there, not even the celebrated .31 correlation. Instead, the report affirms what psychologists have long known about aggressive behavior: that early aggressiveness predicts later violence and that violence runs in families. (Which doesn’t make it hereditary. There’s strong evidence that violence is learned behavior, and violence begets violence.) All the final report says about television, lamely, is that “examples of aggressive behavior are abundantly available in the media as well as at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.”[24] Watching violent television goes unmentioned. Evidently Eron’s initial skepticism about the effects of television violence was justified.

Why should Huesmann’s “strong relation” between violent television viewing and adult criminality have dropped out of his and Eron’s final summary of twenty-two years of scientific investigation? The likeliest reason is that the independent scientists who reviewed the report when it was submitted to *Developmental Psychology* (in the evaluation process known as peer review) did not think the data justified the two psychologists’s conclusions.

And what was that data? Huesmann has never published the crucial numbers that would make it possible to judge the significance of his age 8 violent television/age 30 violent criminal convictions correlation. The dramatic bar graph he showed to the Senate Judiciary Committee, with its low, medium and high TV violence bars plotted against seriousness of criminal convictions, doesn’t give the number of boys for whom the two measures correlate. I found a clue to this puzzling omission in a paper Huesmann and a colleague published in a book Huesmann edited in 1994. The paper, portentously titled “Long-Term Effects of Repeated Exposure to Media Violence in Childhood,” works all sorts of statistical sleight-of-hand to try to prove that watching TV turns boys into violent criminals. But buried in the text is a remarkable admission: “Unfortunately, the sample on which this conclusion was based was very small because of technical difficulties..While the results are significant, they mostly reflect the behavior of a few high violence viewers and must be treated very cautiously.”[25] Scientists are supposed to publish their data so that their claims to discovery can be checked, but even while grudgingly admitting that his data had problems, Huesmann chose in this 1994 book not to reveal the numbers.

I wondered what he was hiding. When I emailed him I bluntly asked him for the numbers. The answer was incredible. “The correlation between [age 8 TV violence viewing and adult violent crime],” Huesmann wrote me, “was entirely due to 3 boys who committed violent crimes and had scored high on age 8 TV violence viewing.” Three boys! Huesmann’s team had identified New York State records for 145 boys from the original age 8 study. Of these, 66 had committed crimes, but only 24 had committed violent crimes. The “technical difficulties” which Huesmann mentioned in his 1994 book, he now explained, were that “just 3 of the 24 boys arrested for violent crimes had contributed TV violence data [at age 8].” It happened that “all three had scored high on age 8 TV violence viewing.” With serious violent crimes in adulthood and high TV violence scores in the third grade, the numbers on these three boys — *the only boys with criminal convictions for whom age 8 TV data existed* — poison the entire 145-boy sample. As Huesmann himself acknowledged, “if just these three boys had behaved differently, all the significant results could have vanished.” David Sohn puts it differently. “For 142 of the individuals,” he wrote me after reviewing my correspondence with Huesmann, “there is no relationship between TV violence at age 8 and arrests for violent

crime. Huesmann knew from the very beginning that he did not have enough cases with data for the two key variables to permit a meaningful analysis. He does the analysis anyway and conceals the crucial facts about having only three cases. Of course, what he should have done is not to use such inadequate data."

But Huesmann went even farther. He made up a bogus bar graph that deliberately misrepresented his findings and used it to influence the Senate Judiciary Committee to pass a law intended to limit creative expression on television. With age 8 violent TV viewing data on only three boys with criminal convictions, he had no factual basis for presenting "Low" and "Medium" bars. All three boys scored "High" on TV violence viewing. The graph is a fraud.

II

The sociologist Howard Becker categorizes media violence zealots like Dave Grossman, Brandon Centerwall, former Vice President Dan Quayle and former U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett as "moral entrepreneurs."[26] Part of their hostility, Jib Fowles argues, is simple snobbery, although surveys reveal that the affluent and the highly-educated watch about as many hours of television every week as everybody else. A deeper reason for their hostility is fear of losing social control. Thinking about the role of modern mass communications in social control, Fowles realized that entertainment media have come to satisfy many of the needs that religion used to fulfill: giving people a common frame of reference, a common community with which to identify and a safe place within which to experience emotional release. "The mass media comprise a new social institution," he told me. "And not only is it new, but it seems to be eating into the traditional social institutions of religion, community, family and so on. All these institutions are shrinking with the exception of education and mass media. We're choosing to integrate ourselves in very different ways and largely through the mass media." It shouldn't be surprising, then, that the moral entrepreneurs — the guardians of the traditional institutions — have led the attack. Blaming the media for criminal violence is one campaign in an ongoing turf war.

Fowles was stuck by the contrast between the negativity of the moral entrepreneurs and the immense popularity of entertainment media. That popularity in itself argued against negative effects and in favor of positive effects. The media scholar wondered if any social science studies had turned up positive responses to watching television, including violent television. After a thorough search of the literature he found several which did. They were hard to find; though they were first-rate studies, they were seldom referenced because they disputed the reigning paradigm that television is bad for you.

In one thorough and careful field study, a highly respect psychologist named Seymour Feshbach had controlled the television viewing of some 400 boys in three private boarding schools and four boys' homes for six weeks, limiting half the boys to programs high in violent content and the other half to nonaggressive programs. Trained observers judged aggression levels in the boys before and after the controlled viewing period. "No behavioral differences were reported for the adolescents in the private schools," Fowles summarizes Feshbach's findings, "but among the poorer, semidelinquent youths, those who had been watching the more violent shows were calmer than their peers on the blander viewing diet." Feshbach concluded that "exposure to aggressive content on television seems to reduce or control the expression of aggression in aggressive boys from relatively low socioeconomic backgrounds."[27] When Fowles interviewed Feshbach about this impressive finding, Feshbach interpreted it to mean that fantasy served the cause of self-control. "Television fantasies," he told Fowles, "supplement a person's own imagination, and help him discharge pent-up aggression in the same way that dreams and other products of the imagination can do."[28]

Fowles also located a definitive refutation of Eron and Huesmann's supposed "criminal violence" finding. He calls the little-noticed study by sociologist Steven F. Messner of the State University of New York at Albany "broad-based and most remarkable."[29] Messner set out to determine if "population aggregates with high levels of exposure to violent television content also exhibit high rates of criminal violence."[30] He took his list of "violent" television shows from content analyses developed by the National Coalition on Television Violence (NCTV), an antiviolence advocacy group which counts "violent acts per hour."

Messner next collected Nielsen ratings for the shows on the NCTV list, which estimated their audience size — their popularity — in a number of U.S. metropolitan areas. He then looked up F.B. I. crime rates for those areas for criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault. His final step was to match up crime rates in the metropolitan areas against the popularity of "violent" television shows in the same areas.

"The results are quite surprising," Messner wrote in his understated conclusion. "For each measure of violent crime, the estimate for the level of exposure to television violence is negative.. In other words, [metropolitan areas] in which large audiences are attracted to violent television programming tend to exhibit *low* rates of violent crime."[31]

Messner offered a simple explanation for his finding: When people are home watching television, they're not out committing violent crimes. And since they're home watching television, burglars can't rob their houses. He even checked his burglary prevention theory. Rates in areas where violent television was popular turned out to be lower not only for burglary but also for auto theft and larceny (simple theft) as well.

I contacted Messner to ask him how his study had been received by the media effects community. He described submitting it to a major sociology journal, where it collected mixed peer reviews and was ultimately rejected. One hostile reviewer criticized it as "a mechanical exercise in which the author routinely applies a packaged program to a set of data," adding scornfully, "After all, the ultimate goal is not to generate a pretty story and an apparently significant set of findings, but actually to find out something real about society."[32] Do I hear Rowell Huesmann's sarcasm in this slashing anonymous assault? The study was ultimately published in the journal *Social Problems*. "As near as I can tell," Messner emailed me, "it never did generate much reaction, either positive or negative."[33] He was happy to hear that Jib Fowles had singled it out for praise.

"This whole episode of studying television violence," Fowles concluded when we talked, "is going to be seen by history as a travesty. It's going to be used in classes as an example of how social science can just go totally awry."

Fowles found support for the idea that entertainment media serves for emotional release in the work of a predecessor media scholar, Gerhardt Wiebe, who was dean of Boston University's School of Public Communication.[34] Wiebe proposed that the function of the entertainment media is to ease the stresses of socialization, defined as "the process by which an individual becomes a member of a given social group." Being socialized means being molded and changed — from a rebellious adolescent to a productive, conforming adult, from a self-directed private individual before and after work to a group-directed employee during working hours — and such transformation is stressful. Television and other entertainment media work to relieve that stress. "All kinds of Americans," Fowles writes in his 1992 book *Why Viewers Watch*, "in all states of mind, turn to the medium for the balm it provides. The most troubled are perhaps the most aided. For the segment of the population that has been crushed by the real world, and has had to be removed from it, television is clearly a boon. Anyone who has visited an institution where humans are confined knows that television exerts a calming, beneficent influence..The administrators of hospitals, prisons and asylums realize that their charges can be highly volatile or depressed, and that television is an efficient, nonchemical means for easing their torments."[35]

Wiebe defined three kinds of messages that media send. *Directive* messages come from authority figures and "command, exhort, instruct, persuade." Directive messages seldom get through, Wiebe observes; since the people at home control the remote, they tend to switch channels or downgrade directives into *maintenance* messages — the routine communications which support the knowledge and beliefs people already have. Thus programs on specialized subjects — Greece, say, or transvestite culture, or World War II — tend to draw audiences who already know about those subjects rather than the uninformed.

The primary function of the entertainment media, Wiebe proposes, is to supply *restorative* messages, which allow people to restore themselves "from the strain of adapting, the weariness of conforming." Restorative messages are "the adult counterpart of youthful protest and retaliation against authority figures" which appear "spontaneously, and apparently inevitably, as an antidote for the strictures of organized living." Restorative messages feature "crime, violence, disrespect for authority, sudden and unearned wealth, sexual indiscretion, freedom from social restraints." Their themes, Wiebe observes brilliantly, "seem to

make up a composite reciprocal [that is, a negative counterset, an antidote] of the values stressed in adult socialization." Rock music, rap, movies like *Natural Born Killers* or *Pulp Fiction,* lurid music videos, video games and any number of "violent" television programs are evidence in support of Wiebe's insight.

Because the essence of restorative messages, as Wiebe argues, is "token retaliation against the establishment," censoring the protest and the violence and substituting what social scientists call "prosocial" programming will simply cause viewers to turn elsewhere for the restorative messages they crave. Wiebe's characterization of restorative programming as "token retaliation" makes it clear why establishment institutions and the moral entrepreneurs who speak for them are so quick to condemn entertainment media, particularly when rising juvenile delinquency rates, school shootings, teenage pregnancies and other problems panic them with fears that socialization might be breaking down: Uncomfortable already with the feeling that new social institutions are emerging to replace them, they're seized with the fear that the peasants might actually take the programs seriously and storm the barricades of their authority and privilege. One of their defensive maneuvers has been to employ social scientists to "prove" that entertainment media are dangerous. Sadly, to the perversion of their science, the social scientists have complied, although the First Amendment has limited the effectiveness of their assaults.

Media performances serve vicariously to intensify and then resolve tension, carrying away in the process all sorts of psychic detritus. They make it possible to put on a hero's armor, slay dragons and then hang up your armor and be yourself. Fowles calls the procedure "mental cleansing and redemption."[36] At their most basic, entertainment media take the psychic garbage out.

The whole thrust of socialization across the past thousand years in Western culture has been toward reducing private violence in order to foster more effective social interaction in an increasingly complex and interdependent society. This movement, which historian Norbert Elias calls "the civilizing process," has advanced by internalizing the social prohibition against violence, and with that prohibition has come an advancing threshold of revulsion against violence. People who are seriously violent take pleasure in their violence. As people moved away from malevolence toward civility, the pleasure of doing violence was gradually displaced by the pleasure of seeing violence done — such as watching public executions and attending cockfights, bullfights and bare-knuckle boxing matches.

The pleasure of seeing violence done has in turn gradually been displaced by today's pleasure in seeing *mock* violence done in sports and in entertainment. Thus the increasing revulsion against bullfighting, hunting and boxing and the interdiction of public executions. More recently even mock violence has come under suspicion, especially as fare for children (who used to be taken to see public executions to show them why they shouldn't misbehave). So media violence has come to be tolerated more than endorsed. When real violence breaks out — the rise of juvenile delinquency in the 1950s, the riots and assassinations of the 1960s, the rash of white-on-white school shootings in the later 1990s — revulsion at media violence intensifies, and the mandarins of psychology and sociology trot out their statistical charts.

But there is no good evidence that taking pleasure from seeing mock violence leads to violent behavior, and there is some evidence, as Jib Fowles found, that it leads away. Bottom line: To become violent, people have to have experience with real violence. Period. No amount of imitation violence can provide that experience. Period. At the same time, mock violence can and does satisfy the considerable need to experience strong emotion that people, including children, build up from hour to hour and day to day while functioning in the complex and frustrating interdependencies of modern civilization. So can comedy; so can serious drama; but young males especially (and even not-so-young males) evidently take special satisfaction in watching mock violence, whether dramatic or athletic. "Whatever the relation of this need may be to other, more elementary needs such as hunger, thirst, and sex," concludes Norbert Elias, ".one may well find that the neglect of paying attention to this need is one of the main gaps in present approaches to problems of mental health."[37]

A New Jersey teenager, Joe Stavitsky, responded to an attack on video games in *Harper's* magazine after Columbine with an eloquent letter in their defense. "As a 'geek,'" Stavitsky wrote, "I can tell you that none of us play video games to learn how (or why) to shoot people. For us, video games do not cause violence; they prevent it. We see games as a perfectly safe release from a physically violent reaction to the daily abuse leveled at us." Stavitsky, whose family emigrated from Leningrad when he was four to escape a communist dictatorship, concluded his letter with some pointed advice to the moral entrepreneurs. "The so-

called experts should put away their pens," he advised, "and spend more time with their children or grandchildren, or better yet, adopt a child who has no home or family. Because there's only one sure way to prevent youth violence, and that is by taking care of youth." We do not take care of youth when we deny them entertainment which allows them to safely challenge the powerlessness they feel at not yet controlling their own lives and then to find symbolic resolution. Entertainment media are therapeutic, not toxic. That's what the evidence shows. Cyber bullets don't kill.

Notes

1.. All quotes from Dave Grossman's speech are tran scriptions from his videotape "Teaching Kids To Kill."

2.. Rhodes (1999), p. 216.

3.. Gadow and Sprafkin (1989), p. 401, p. 402.

4.. Centerwall (!989), p. 15.

5.. Centerwall (1992), p. 3061.

6.. Zimring and Hawkins (1997), p. 243.

7.. Twitchell (1989), p. 143.

8.. Twitchell (1989), p. 152.

9.. Twitchell (1989), p. 153, p. 154.

10.. HR 83, p. 46.

11.. Quoted in Fowles (1999), p. 126.

12.. Quoted in Fowles (1999), p. 35.

13.. Eron (1995), p. 84.

14.. Fowles (1999), p. 35.

15.. Eron (1995), p. 85.

16.. Cater and Strickland (1975), p. 47.

17.. Cater and Strickland (1975), p. 21.

18.. Fowles (1999), pp. 36-37.

19.. Cf. Lefkowitz et al. (1972), p. 55, Table 8, item 11.

20.. Huesmann 13 March 2000 email, p. 11.

21 My emphasis

22.. Cf. S. 2323, p. 95.

23.. Huesmann and Moise (1996), p. 2.

24.. Huesmann et al. (1984), p. 1133.

25.. Huesmann and Miller (1994), p. 169.

26.. Gauntlett (1995), p. 107, citing Howard Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, New York: The Free Press, 1963.

27.. Fowles (1997), p. 30. (Feshbach quoted in Fowles, op. cit.)

28.. Quoted in Fowles (1992), p. 142.

29.. Fowles (1997), p. 48.

30.. Messner (1986), p. 218.

31.. Messner (1986), pp. 223-224.

32.. Steve Messner 2/24/00 email, pp. 2-3.

33.. Messner, op. cit., p. 3.

34.. Wiebe (1969).

35.. Fowles (1992), p. 54.

36.. Fowles (1992), p. 87.

37.. Elias (1986), p. 89