George Gerbner Series

George Gerbner

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Professor Gerbner, in 1990, launched a "Cultural Environmental Movement" (see Part III of this study guide) whose broad aims are to support media education, work for democratic media reform, place cultural issues on the sociopolitical agenda, and develop ways of participation in local, national and international cultural policy-making.

The Gerbner Series Study Guide is intended for educational and nonprofit use only. It is designed as a resource supplement to the three-video series featuring Dr. George Gerbner: The Killing Screens, The Electronic Storyteller, & The Crisis of the Cultural Environment. Please feel free to print and distribute this study guide for classroom and community service instruction. Any questions or concerns about this guide or the Gerbner videos should be directed to the Media Education Foundation, 26 Center Street, Northampton, MA 01060, Tel: (413) 584-8500, Fax: (413) 586-8389, Email: mediaed@mediaed.org.

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Part I : The Electronic Storyteller

TV As Storyteller

By Dr. George Gerbner

Before we can fully examine the consequences of media violence, we need to understand how television defines our cultural environment by acting as a modern-day storyteller. Here, Professor Gerbner discusses the historical role of storytelling as communication and points out the consequences involved when those who tell the most stories are corporations with something to sell.

Human beings are unique to other species in that we live in a world that is created by the stories we tell. Most of what we know, or think we know, we have never personally experienced; we learned about it through stories. For all practical purposes, there are three kinds of stories which construct the world in which we live.

First, there are stories about how things work. The dynamics of human life are often hidden from view. Fictional stories - dramas, fairy tales, television programs, movies, or novels - take us behind the scenes to reveal these dynamics and illuminate to us how the systems which govern how the world works. They build a fantasy we call reality.

Second, there are stories that confirm and elaborate upon reality. These are stories about the way things are: legends about the past, news, or scientific information. Such stories tend to confirm rather than undermine the rules and goals of any given society.

The third kind of story is one of value and choice. Such stories tell us, "If this is how things work, and if this is how things are, these are the choices and this is what I think you ought to do about them." Such stories include sermons, instructions, and commercials. Today, commercials are the main stories that tell us what we should do and what we should buy.

All three types of stories have been woven together throughout the history of human kind in a seamless web we call culture. Culture is the set of stories that tell us about the nature of the universe, how it is created and run, and the right and wrong modes of conduct within a particular time, place, and society. This fundamental storytelling process, however, has undergone certain key transformations.

For a very long time, storytelling was exclusively face-to-face: people responded to, and interacted with, the primary communication process. Oral storytelling originated in tribal societies. In the days of "pre-literacy," storytelling and rituals enabled people to remember and celebrate their common culture. Storytelling was adjustable, responsive and participatory: entire communities participated in the storytelling process, and the right of passage was the transition from being a listener of stories to being an actor or teller who could then socialize other people in the same community.

All of this changed with the arrival of the printing press. Print allowed storytelling to be mobile instead of rooted in tribal communities, and it was in many ways the prerequisite for the industrial revolution. For the first time, it was possible to record communication and deliver stories to people that one didn't know. This made it possible for common consciousness and what is know in social theory as "mass public." A modern mass public is a very large aggregation of people who have very little in common except the stories they exchange.

This shift has had profound consequences. Print meant that the interpreter of the tribe or community was no longer needed. It was now possible to print many of the stories, including different kinds of stories in the same society as the division of classes, regions, religions, and ethnic groups became a reality.

 A big question arose. How could people tell stories that addressed all the different interests of a society? How could stories of life be told that address the interests of conflicting and competing classes, who see the world very differently? The answer to that is what we now call "freedom of the press." To the extent that freedom of the press became a reality, it is now possible for people of different perspectives to tell stories from their own points of view, although such freedom requires continued struggle.

Print-based culture is still the basis for many of our assumptions about education, religion, and government. But something has overwhelmed and transformed that culture: the electronic revolution. While this transformation encompasses many new technologies, including film and radio, the mainstream of the new cultural

environment is television. Television is now the mainstream of the new cultural environment, and likely will be so for a very long time.

The television revolution re-tribalized storytelling. Television has more to do with pre-industrial tribal religion than it has to do with print. Television, for many reasons, is really unlike any mass medium thus far. First of all, television, like pre-industrial tribal, is essentially ritualistic. Most people watch not by the program but by the clock. Television fits into a style of life. Around the world, most people watch a great deal of television. Most people grow up in, and participate in a television culture.

What does this mean? Consider that for the first time in human history a child is born into a home in which television is on an average of about seven hours a day. And for the first time in human history most stories are told not by the parent, not by the school, not by the church, not by the tribes or community, and in many places not even by the native country, but by a relatively small group of conglomerates who have something to sell.

When storytelling is linked to the selling of a product of service, it changes in a fundamental way. In addition to communication, there is an ulterior motive, a second agenda. This produces changes in the environment in which we grow up and are socialized. It means that today, a ten year-old child remembers more brands of beer than American presidents, and more children recognize "Old Camel Joe" from the Camel cigarette commercials than recognize Mickey Mouse. It means that we live in a very different cultural environment from before.

That different world has great attractions. People who used to be outside the cultural mainstream can now participate in the common television culture. Today, it is possible for all people to share in a culture that only rich people used to have. For the first time in history, the rich and the poor, the cosmopolitan and the isolated, the very young and the very old share a great deal of cultural imagery in common, although none of it is their own making. For many people, the cultural horizon of television is very attractive, especially compared to other things they might be doing.

We need to respect that choice. The question is not whether or not people watch television, because they are likely to do so no matter what we say about the subject. The issue we need to be concerned with is what kind of world people enter when they are born into the culture of television. What kind of world it is that television, our primary storyteller, brings into every home?

The Cultural Indicators Projects is a database and an ongoing research project that relates recurrent features of the world of television to viewer conceptions of reality. It's cumulative computer archive contains observations on 2,816 programs and 34,882 characters coded according to many thematic, demographic and action categories. The project is conducted by Dr. George Gerbner in collaboration with Dr. Michael Morgan at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Dr. Nancy Signorielli at the University of Delaware, Dr. Larry Gross at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, and Dr. James Shanahan at Cornell University.

The Distorted World of Television

For a more in-depth discussion of this study by George Gerbner, please see the article [Casting and Fate: Women And Minorities On Television Drama, Game Shows, and News](#).

Casting and fate are the basic building blocks of storytelling. Casting the symbolic world defines the pool of human characterization from which stories and images are drawn. Who are the characters who populate the world of television? How are women and minorities (seniors, radical and ethnic groups, poor and disabled persons) represented?

Based on the analysis of 19,642 speaking parts appearing in 1,371 television programs, we found that despite changes in styles, stars, and formats, television presents a remarkable stable cast. According to out findings:

* Women compromise one-third or less of the characters on television except in daytime soap operas (45.5 percent) and game shows (55.3 percent).
* While all seniors are greatly underrepresented on television, visibly old people are almost invisible (less than 3 percent) on television.
* On major network prime time programs, African Americans compromise only 10.8 percent of characters.
* Latino/Hispanic characters are rarely seen. Only in game shows do they rise significantly above one percent representation.
* Although U.S. census classifies more than 13 percent of the population as "poor", and many more as low-income wage earners, on network television they make up only 1.3 percent of major characters in prime time, half that (0.6 percent) in children's programs, and 0.2 percent in the news.

*   Physical disability is portrayed in only 1.5 percent of major characters in prime time television.

*   Women tend to be concentrated in younger age groups than men.

*   Women are almost twice as likely to play the role of wife as men are to play the role of husband.

*   The population of prime time television is overwhelmingly (9 out of 19 characters) middle class.

"Fate" is the evaluation of characters as "good" or "bad" and the outcome (successful or unsuccessful) for which they are destined. In our study we found that television presents a preordained world where villains are disproportionately poor and people of color, and where men have a much greater chance of success than women. According to our findings:

*   For every 100 heroes in prime time there are 43 villains.

*   Villains are disproportionately male, lower class, young, Latino/Hispanic and foreign (or at least not identifiable American).

*   Mother figures in leading roles - married, elderly settled women - and major African-American female characters, few as they are, are among the most wicked characters.

*   Boys and elderly men have a much higher ratio of success than girls or elderly women.

*   To be cast as a major female character in prime time who is old, unmarried, ill or poor carries a disproportionately high risk of failure.

Minorities are made, not born. Gender, race, class, ethnicity, age and disability define society's power structure. Their portrayals affect how we see ourselves and each other. Our findings suggest that the world of television seems to be frozen in a time-warp of obsolete and damaging representations.

--From "Women and Minorities on Television," a 1993 study by the Cultural Indicators research team at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. The study was commissioned by the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What is different about television and its impact on culture than other media in earlier periods of history?

2. What is the difference between the "cultivation" approach to analyzing the effects of television viewing and other notions of how the medium affects people?

3. Why, as Gerbner's studies show, do you think people who watch a lot of television tend to see the world as a meaner and scarier place than do people who watch less TV?

4. How does heavy television viewing affect people's willingness to vote for a woman for president? Why do you think it has that effect?

5. Do you think it is fair that older men (as opposed to older women) are cast as sexually active, but usually opposite women half their age? Why do you think that happens?

6. Thinking of your parents, relatives, and neighbors, list 10 occupations held by people you know. How does that compare with the percentage of TV characters who are police officers, criminals, doctors, and lawyers?

7. In what ways does Dr. Gerbner think that casting and the emphasis on violence affect our society's ways of thinking about crime policy, welfare policy, and civil rights?

8. Where do you think you and your peers have gotten most of your ideas about fashion, music, sex, race, and social issues like crime and poverty?

9. Do you think Dr. Gerbner's studies give television too much or not enough credit for shaping the way we think about ourselves and the world?

10. How many hours of TV do you watch a day? In light of this video, do you think you and others in your family watch TV too much, too little, or just about the right amount? Have you ever tried turning TV off for a week? If so, what did you do instead?

Part II : The Killing Screens

Rethinking Media Violence
By Dr. George Gerbner

This is an adaptation of a longer article by Dr. Gerbner in Mass Communication Research: On Problems and Policies (Ablex, 1994). In this article, Dr. Gerbner traces debates over the effects of popular culture from the time of Socrates

onwards, providing historical context for today's debates over media violence. Looking specifically at the limitations of media research on the topic, he argues that a focus on aggression and imitative, "copycat" crime often masks policy issues and social concerns related to violence. The main problem with media violence, says Gerbner, is that it promotes widespread feelings of vulnerability and fear, often at the expense of women and minorities, in the interests of corporate control and profit.

Charges of speech corrupting the young and innocent have been heard in the Western world at least since the time of Socrates. The rise of print, the spread of media to the "lower" classes, and every new extension to those presumed to be more vulnerable than their elders and betters sent the charge echoing through ruling circles and the academy.

Cheap literature in the late 19th century was blamed for making workers lazy and indolent. In his Ladies Guide, published in 1882, J.H. Kellog railed against the "pernicious habit of reading fiction which, once thoroughly fixed, becomes as inveterate as the use of liquor or opium" and "is one of the greatest causes of uterine disease" and other painful maladies. Immortality and violence in comics and movies generated new fears, codes, regulations, and the first large-scale media research project, the Payne Fund Studies of the 1930s.

The rise of television in the United States coincided with post-World War II social ferment and concern about juvenile delinquency, crime, and general unrest. A series of Congressional hearings heard the traditional charges and denials of media violence focusing on television for the first time. Subsequent hearings, commissions, and reports energized citizens' movements for greater public participation in broadcasting, and provoked a fierce backlash. The ensuing debate paved the way for the great retreat of the 1980s.

But the received arguments of the popular culture debate failed to illuminate the new problems of the television age. A global sea-change in the symbolic environment has overtaken the old parochial foundation of the issues. The collapse of the reform movement exposed the bankruptcy of the traditional terms and tactics of the debate.

The "Media Violence" Story

Research on the consequences of exposure to mass-mediated violence has a long and involved history. Most of it focused on limited aspects of the complex scenario, It has been motivated (and dominated) by charges of individual

imitation, incitation, brutalization, or subversion. Research has concentrated on the observable and measurable psychological traits and states -- such as aggressiveness -- that were presumed to lead to violence and could be attributed to media exposure.

Research on aggression has been the most prominent "media violence story." Although ostensibly critical of the media, it may have been the preferred story because it is the easiest to neutralize and the least damaging to basic instructional interests and policies.

Aggressiveness is an ambivalent concept with positive as well as negative connotations. It is a traditional part of male role socialization. Its link to most real violence and crime, which is organized and systemic, is tenuous, to say the least. It can even be argued that too many people submit too meekly to exploitation, injustice, indignity, and intimidation.

Approaches that focus only on aggression and lawlessness view violence from the law enforcement point of view. Their critical edge represents media (and other) institutional interests. They distract attention from wholesale "official" violence and state terrorism, from the disproportionate victimization of women and minorities, and from demographic and social conditions that are much more closely related to actual violence and crime. And they fail to take into account the crucial difference between television and all other media.

Universal exposure to televised images of violence goes on from cradle to grave. Conventional research concentrations on imitation alone, selective exposure, before-and-after exposure attitude change, viewer preferences, and the recurrent notion of "powerful" audiences miss the essential problem of television culture and its cultivation of conceptions about social relationships in deadly conflict.

Seldom asked and rarely publicized are broader question of media policy. Such questions focus on the implicit message of open season on the different and the deviant. They deal with victimization and the consequences of control, as well as with aggression. The key question is not what causes most violence and crime, as that goes far beyond media. It is what contribution does constant exposure to particular scenarios of violence and terror make to different groups' conceptions of their own risks and vulnerabilities.

These questions do not fit the typical media effects research mold or media violence story. On the contrary, they expose their assumptions and challenge their social and political functions.

The world of prime time is cast for its favorite dramatic plays -- power plays. Men outnumber women at least three to one. Young people, old people, and minorities have many times less their share of representation. Compared to white American middle-class heterosexual males in the "prime of life," all others have a more restricted and stereotyped range of roles, activities and opportunities, and less than their share of success and power. But they have more than their share of vulnerability and victimization.

Our analysis has found that exposure to violence-laden television cultivates an exaggerated sense of insecurity and mistrust, and anxiety about the mean world seen on television. Furthermore, the sense of vulnerability and dependence imposes its heaviest burdens on women and minorities.

These are highly exploitable sentiments. They contribute to the irresistibility of punitive and vindictive political slogans ranging from "lenient judges" to capital punishment presumably to enhance security. They lend themselves to the political appeal of "wars" on crime, terrorism, and drugs that heighten repression but fail to address root causes.

The Scary World of Media Violence
By Dr. George Gerbner, Dr. Michael Morgan, and Dr. Nancy Signorielli

This article is adapted from "Television Violence Profile No. 16," a larger study of the 1992-93 television season published by the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication (1994). The current study is the latest in a series of research studies on television and violence published annually since 1967. It is part of the cultural indicators project, an ongoing research effort to relate recurrent features of the world of television to viewer conceptions of reality, conducted by Dr. Gerbner and based at the Annenberg School. In this article, the authors examine the long-term societal consequences of media violence. First, they point to the rise of routine and thrilling "happy violence" as a departure from eras when the social consequences of violence were understood and addressed. Next, they examine the significance of media violence in relation to the broader power of television to cultivate assumptions about how the world works. Based on their own research findings, they argue that heavy viewers are most prone to feelings of vulnerability and fear cultivated by repeated exposure to television violence. Minorities, the lower classes, and women pay the highest price for

violence on television, they argue, a finding which is not unrelated to existing patterns of domination and exploitability in society.

Violence is a social relationship. People hurt or kill to force (or deter) unwanted behavior, to dominate, to terrorize. Symbolic violence is literally a "show of force." It demonstrates power: who can get away with what against whom.

Violence is a complex scenario. It involves a wide range of motivation, circumstances and justifications. It sends out messages about power and vulnerability, problem-solving, human relations, law enforcement, consequences of actions, and the rules of society. Many of these lessons may be interpreted differently by different viewers, although it is hard to conceive of infants "interpreting" the television they see. So on a more basic and general level, any sustained exposure to dramatic violence may cultivate similar assumptions about power and vulnerability regardless of whether the violence is "gratuitous" of justified, if the social relationships involved (who can get away with what against whom) are stereotyped, repetitive, and persuasive. The repetitive daily experience of who gets away with what against whom, regardless of reasons of justifications, has a message of its own. It is the message of power and risk, of violence and victims, of a dramatic "pecking order."

Obviously, all violence is not alike. Violence can be seen as a legitimate and even necessary cultural expression if it is not a vast "overkill" of inequitable one-sided victimizations, and if it conveys a valid lesson about human consequences. There is murder in Shakespeare, mayhem in fairy tales, blood and gore in mythology. But Greek drama, often cited for its compelling pathos and cathartic effects, showed only the tragic consequences of violence on state; "Greek sensibilities," observes theater historian Oscar G. Brockett, "dictate that scenes of extreme violence take place offstage, although the results...might be shown.

Individually crafted and historically inspired, the sparingly and selectively used symbolic violence of powerful stories is capable of balancing tragic costs against deadly compulsions. However, under the increasing pressures of global marketing, graphic imagery is produced for world wide entertainment and sales on the dramatic assembly-line. This "happy violence" is swift, cool, thrilling, painless, effective, designed not to upset but to lead to a happy ending and deliver and audience to the advertiser's message in a receptive mood. The marketing strategies driving mass-produced violence affect the total tone and context of programming.

Is Violence Avoidable?

As a medium, television is not comparable to other media. It pervades the entire community and the cultural environment of the home. The proliferation of channels with the coming if cable and VCR's has not led to greater diversity of production or actual viewing. A study of the limits of "selective viewing" related frequent thematic categories including romance, family, business, education, nature, science, religion, and the supernatural to the incidence of violence. The study found that, on the whole, television presents a relatively smell set of common themes, and that violence pervades all of them. A major network viewer looking for a nature of family theme, for example, would find violence in 7 or 8 out of every 10 programs.

Of course, it is possible to view nonviolent programs, but only for short periods of time at certain hours. The majority of network viewers who watch more than 3 hours in the evening have little choice of thematic context or cast of character types, and virtually no chance of avoiding violence.

The 'Pecking Order' of TV Violence

Violence defines character and enhances importance. About one of three (31 percent) of all television characters, but more than half (52 percent) of major characters are involved in violence in any given week.

We calculated a "pecking order" of relative risks of victimization as the price for committing violence. This shows the imbalance between committing and suffering violence, regardless of the amount of violence inflicted and absorbed.

Women, children, young people, lower class, disabled, and Asian Americans are at the bottom of the general violence pecking order. When it comes to killing, older and Hispanics as well as other minority groups pay a higher-than-average price. That is to day that hurting and killing by most majority groups extracts roughly a tooth for a tooth, or less. But minority groups tend to suffer greater symbolic reprisals for such transgressions.

Among our findings:

*   In the total cast of characters, 17 percent commit violence. The most violent are young adult males (27 percent), Hispanic Americans (26 percent), and settled adult males (22 percent).

*   The overall rate of victimization is 21 percent. The most violent groups also run the highest risk of victimization: young adult males (34 percent), Hispanic Americans (32 percent), and lower class characters (31 percent). Settled adult males are the exception: Their rate of victimization is only 23 percent.

*   Women, children, old people, and other minorities tend to be underrepresented and commit less violence but pay a higher price for it than do white males.

*   Violence takes on an even more defining role for major characters: 40 percent of major characters commit violence, while 43 percent fall victim to it. The most likely perpetrators are the mentally ill (70 percent), young adult males (53 percent), and disabled characters (51 percent).

*   Children of both genders, lower class, and ill and handicapped characters pay a higher price for violence.

*   Major characters in Saturday morning children's programs are the most violent: 82 percent of men and 66 percent of women are involved in violence.

*   Mentally ill characters and the few elderly women cast in cartoons are the most likely perpetrators, except for the even fewer Hispanics who are all violent. Young girls, older men, and lower class characters rarely commit but often suffer violence; they also pay the highest price for mayhem.

*   Lethal victimization extends the pattern. In prime time, about 5 percent of all and 10 percent of major characters are involved in a killing.

*   "Bad" men and women, and Hispanic and lower class characters do most killing. Older men and women, women of color, and lower class characters pay the highest relative price for their acts.

*   All minorities pay a higher price for killing than others do. Older men never kill of get killed, but older women get involved in violence only to get killed.

Mean World Syndrome

Our research has shown that long-term exposure to television, in addition to many other factors, tends to make and independent contribution to the feeling of living in a mean and gloomy world. The "lessons" may range from aggression to desensitization and to a sense of vulnerability and dependence.

For example, heavy viewers of television are more likely than comparable groups to overestimate one's chances of involvement in violence; to believe that one's neighborhood is unsafe, to state that fear of crime is a very serious personal problem,; and to assume that crime is rising regardless of the facts of the case. Heavier viewers in every subgroup (defined by education, age, income, gender, newspaper reading, neighborhood, etc.) express a greater sense of apprehension than do light viewers in the same groups. Other results show that heavy viewers are also more likely to have bought new locks, watchdogs, and guns "for protection".

These patterns are of course not always the same for everyone. Victimization on television and real world fear, even if contrary to facts, are highly related. Viewers who see members of their own groups have a higher calculus of risks than those of other groups develop a greater sense apprehension, mistrust, and alienation.

Television's impact is especially pronounced in terms of how people feel about walking alone at night on a street in their own neighborhoods. Overall, less than a third of light viewers, but almost half of heavy viewers, say that being out alone at night on their own street is "not safe." Whatever real dangers may lurk outside people's homes, heavy television viewing is related to more intense fears and apprehensions.

These patterns illustrate the interplay of television viewing with demographic and other factors. In most subgroups, those who watch more television tend to express a heightened sense of living in a world of danger, mistrust, and alienation.

This unequal sense of danger, vulnerability and general unease, combined with the reduced sensitivity, invites not only aggression but also exploitation and repression. Insecure people may be prone to violence but are even more likely to be dependent on authority and susceptible to deceptively simple, strong, hard-line postures. They may accept and even welcome repression if it promises to relieve their anxieties. That is the deeper problem of violence-laden television.

Why So Much Violence?

By Dr. George Gerbner, Dr. Michael Morgan, and Dr. Nancy Signorielli

This article is adapted from "Television Violence Profile No.16 (Annenberg School for Communication, 1994). In this article, the authors examine the motives and causes of media violence. Linking the prevalence of "happy violence" to patterns of media consolidation and cross-ownership, global marketing strategies, and profit motives, they argue that corporations enjoy a stronghold on television production which effectively censors creative and quality programming. The answer, argue the authors, is not more censorship (eg. the censoring of television content), but rather more diversity and choice. The solution to the problem of media violence, they argue, will require efforts by congress to limit the centralized and globalized power of the cultural industries, as well as efforts by citizens to propose and organize for alternatives.

Humankind may have had more bloodthirsty eras but none as filled with images of violence as the present. This has generated what is probably one of the most massive concentrations of studies on a single subject. The evidence from these studies converges on the conclusion that growing up and living with these images contributes to aggression, especially among males. However, our own research shows even more pervasive and debilitating relationships, affecting our sensibilities and insecurities in ways that perpetuate and even strengthen damaging social inequalities.

This is not a reflection of creative freedom, viewer preference, or crime statistics. "Happy Violence" is the by-product of a manufacturing and marketing process. The real problem of television violence reflects structural trends toward concentration, conglomeration and globalization in media industries and the marketing pressures fueling those trends.

Concentration, Conglomeration, Globalization

Conglomeration brings streamlining of production, economies of scale, and emphasis on dramatic ingredients most suitable for aggressive international promotion. It means less competition, fewer alternative choices, greater emphasis on formulas that saturate more markets at a lower cost per viewer.

Return on investments, attractive demographics, and low cost, rather than program quality (which may cost more), drive commercial success. Ratings, whose comparative value is to a measure of the share of the audience at any one time, are on one side of the equation; cost is the other. Violence becomes a key ingredient

of the formula, for reasons we examine further below, despite the price it extracts in public health, freedom, fairness, and even popularity.

Arbitrarily contrived violence is inserted into formula-driven programs according to market conditions, not dramatic need. Warner Brothers production chief Ed Bleier admitted as much when he protested NBC president Warren Littlefield's claim that NBC turned down the Warner Brothers movie Falling Down because "it was too violent". Variety reported on July 17, 1993 that Bleier said the charge was "unjust, unfair, and irresponsible" because NBC never asked to see the version that had the graphic violence deleted. "Scissoring will not do any damage to the move," he explained.

The industry's chief rationale for violent programming is public appeal. To be sure, some highly popular films and programs are violent, but by no means most. In fact, violent programming is not especially popular with viewers. Why, then, does a public-relations-consciousness and politically sophisticated industry persist in risking domestic backlash and international embarrassment for its perennially violent fare? The answer is that violence travels well on the global market.

What drives "Happy Violence?"

Most program producers barely break even on the domestic market. They are forced onto the world market and into all forms of syndication, including cable and video sales, to make a profit. Soon production and distribution will merge, reversing prior antitrust measures in communications and moving toward total control of the world market by a handful of conglomerates. That is the real meaning of recent media mergers. Global marketing needs a dramatic ingredient that requires no translation, "speaks" action in any language, and fits into a conventional pattern in many cultures. That ingredient is violence (Graphic sex is second, but ironically, that runs into more inhibitions and restrictions than violence).

Syndicators demand "action" (the code word for violence) because it "travels well around the world," said the producer of Die Hard 2 (which killed 264, compared to 18 in Die Hard 1, produced in 1988). "Everyone understands and action movie. If I tell a joke, you may not get it, but if a bullet goes through the window, we all know how to hit the floor, no matter what the language.

Bruce Gordon, president of Paramount International TV Group, explained that "The international demand rarely changes...Action-adventures series and movies continue to be the genre in demand, primarily because those projects lose less in

translation to other languages...Comedy series are never easy because in most of the world most of the comedies have to be dubbed and wind up losing their humor in the dubbing."

An analysis of international data in the Cultural Indicators database compared a sample of 250 U.S. programs exported to 10 countries with 111 programs shown in the U.S. only during the same year. Violence was the main theme of 40 percent of home-shown and 49 percent of exported programs. Crime/action comprised another 17 percent of home-shown and 46 percent of exported programs. What violent programs lose on ratings, they more than make up by grabbing the attention of younger viewers whom advertisers want to reach and by extending their reach globally.

Is Violence What People Want?

Evidence shows that most people do not enjoy violent programming, and indeed suffer the violence inflicted upon them with diminishing tolerance. A March 1985 Harris survey showed that 78 percent disapprove of violence they see on television. A Gallup poll of October 1990 found 79 percent in favor of "regulating" objectionable content in television. A Times-Mirror national poll in 1993 showed that Americans who said they were "personally bothered" by violence in entertainment shows jumped to 59 percent from 44 percent in 1983. Furthermore, 80 percent said entertainment violence was "harmful" to society, compared with 64 percent in 1983, almost twice as many people- 58 percent compared with 31 percent- said entertainment violence bothered them more than news violence.

Local broadcasters, legally responsible for what goes on the air, also oppose the overkill and complain about loss of control. The trade paper Electronic Media reported in August 1993 the results of its own survey of 100 general managers across all regions and in all market sizes. Three out of four said there is too much needless violence on television; 57 percent would like to have "more input on program content decisions."

More Freedom, Not More Censorship

Far from reflecting creative freedom, the global strategy wastes talent, chills originality, and fails to serve the tastes and need of any country. The Hollywood Caucus of Producers, Writers and Directors, speaking for the creative community, said in a statement issued on the eve of the August 1993 "summit" conference on television violence: "We stand today at a point in time when the country's

dissatisfaction with the quality of television is at an all-time high, while our own feelings of helplessness and lack of power, not only in choosing material that seeks to enrich, but also in our ability to execute to the best of our ability, is at best at an all time low."

Cross-media ownership and the global consolidation of electronic marketing is more likely to reduce than to increase the creation of new cultural resources unless provision is made to loosen the noose of global formulas from around the necks of creative people.

More freedom, not more censorship, is the effective and acceptable way to increase diversity and reduce television violence to its legitimate role and proportion. The role of Congress, if any, is to turn its antitrust and civil rights oversight on the centralized and globalized industrial structures and marketing strategies that impose violence on creative people and foist it on the children of the world. The role of citizens is to offer a liberating alternative to the repressive movements and proposals in the field.

George Gerbner on the TV Ratings System
By Dr. George Gerbner

The much-ballyhooed television program rating game is on. Signs like TV-G, TV-PG, TV-K and TV-M have been flickering on the upper left corner of your screen since January 1, 1997. If you haven't noticed, or have been puzzled about what these little icons mean, or slack about providing PG (parental guidance), don't feel bad. That is how the system is supposed to work. Even if you have been observing the ratings, you may have traded violence for alcohol.

The movie-style rating system is an uninformative scheme that deceives the public and protects industries from parents rather than the other way around.

The Chicago Tribune reported on March 18, 1998:

Yes, the hodgepodge of letters and numbers, instituted by the television industry under pressure from Congress and parent-advocacy groups, has been both ignored and derided since its debut in January 1997 and refinement last fall.

One recent study, conducted by the Associated Press, found that 7 of 10 adults were paying it little or no mind. Many major newspapers, including this one, have not been publishing the ratings in their television programming guides.

Parents at a congressional hearing in Peoria last spring ripped into the original ratings, which only labeled shows movie-style, based on recommended ages for viewers. When the rest of the industry agreed after Peoria to add content indicators to the age-based ratings, the most popular network, NBC, refused to do so.

But all of that has a chance to change with the news last week that the FCC has given the ratings ... official seal of approval...

Well, fat chance. Most parents don't know about the ratings, or don't use them, or, if they did, don't know what they're getting instead. In any case, they assume that broadcasters, rather than the public, own the airways and that they air whatever is most popular.

Wrong again.

Mindless TV violence is not an expression of artistic freedom or of any measure of reality or popularity. On the contrary, it is the product of a de facto censorship: a global marketing formula and rating system imposed on program creators and foisted on the children of the world.

The political process that rammed through the business-as-usual rating system was orchestrated by Mr. Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association of America, Inc., one of the top Washington, D.C. lobbyists, and creator of the motion picture ratings that he cloned onto television.

The process included a series of "consultations" with parents' and children's advocacy groups. I attended one of these meetings as President of the Cultural Environment Movement, a coalition for equity and fairness in media.

All organizations present urged Valenti to design a system that provides reasons for the ratings so that parents can make informed decisions. Mr. Valenti first stonewalled; months later he gave in under pressure. But then syndicators rebelled and refused to label cartoons, where of course most of the violence is.

The system that has now thus been patched up and rammed down the public's throats has four fatal flaws.

First, it confuses the choices made in movie-going with the very different decisions of television viewing. You select a movie and go out to see it, or pick a video to bring home. By contrast, television comes into the home an average of seven hours a day. It is watched more by the clock than by the program. To monitor your child's viewing you have to be a full-time television watchdog. Opening credits (when the ratings flash on) are not the decisive choice points in television viewing.

Second, it results in inconsistencies in rating. With the number of programs on television, producers will rate their own programs. Therefore, inconsistencies are inevitable. "Tonight Show with Jay Leno" was given a TV-14 but "Late Show With David Letterman" a TV-PG. Without a common standard, "none of it will mean anything," says Warner Brothers network head Jamie Kellner. "A WB 'PG' will be different than a Fox 'PG,' and that will be a disservice to everybody."

Third, ratings designed by the industry and programmed into the V-Chip is like letting the fox (no pun intended) guard the chicken coop. Perhaps the best feature of the V-Chip is that no one knows how it works, and some of those who know think that it doesn't work well at all. One of these is Barry Diller, former ABC Vice-President, Fox CEO, and Home-Shopping QVC Chairman. "The whole idea of the V-Chip," he says, "is an absurd concept. It's simply unworkable. But it's nice to talk about, it's good to get a bunch of people to Washington and have their photo taken. It's good to stand there and say we're doing something for America. In fact, it won't work. But other than that, it's a lovely idea."

Fourth, even if the "family" (G) rating cuts down one deadly substance, it open the door to another: happy, risk-free alcohol. As shown in Table (1), G-rated shows still expose viewers to an hourly average of 2.4 acts of violence and 2.5 scenes of alcohol.

However, TV-PG rating increases the frequency of alcohol scenes to 3.4 per hour, and TV-14 rating increases the frequency of alcohol scenes to 4.4 per hour. There is more alcohol than violence in the most violent shows.

Table 1. Average Number of Alcohol and Violence Scenes

Rating label	TV-G	TV-PG	TV-14
% of sample with rating	18%	64%	18%
Alcohol scenes per hour	2.5	3.4	4.4
Violence scenes per hour	2.4	4.1	3.6

If age-grading is a mixed bag, content labeling has its problems as well. In response to lobbying by citizen action groups throughout 1996 and 1997, content labels are used in the ratings of most network programs. Shows are marked for violence (V), language (L), sex (S), and adult themes (D).

Prime time dramatic programming with a "V" label present scenes of violence every 11 minutes, compared to every 38 minutes for shows without any content label.

In Table (2), shows are grouped into those with no content label, those with D or S or L (but no V), and those with the V (violence) label. (NBC, which initially opted out of content labeling. is not represented. It can be seen that depictions of alcohol on prime time appear to be coupled with adult themes, adult language, and sex.

Table 2. Alcohol and Violence Scenes by Content Labels

Content labels	(none)	D, S or L	V
% of sample with label	41%	30%	30%
Alcohol scenes per hour	3.3	5.0	2.9
Violence scenes per hour	1.6	2.4	5.3

What shall we make of all that?

Our children are growing up in homes where television tells most of the stories. Before they go to school, which used to be the first time they encountered the larger culture, they are integrated into a television view of the world. That is not the view of parents, schools, communities or even countries. Neither is it the view of creative people with something to tell. It is the view of a handful of conglomerates with something to sell.

That radical change has altered the socialization of children, transformed the mainstream of the cultural environment, and surrendered the public airways to a marketing operation. Paying for all that is a markup for all advertised goods and services, a form of taxation without representation.

Our Cultural Indicators (CI) research project has monitored and analyzed the world of prime time and Saturday morning television since 1967. This report about some features that ratings are supposed to reflect is taken from that database of more than 3000 programs and 34,000 characters.

Humankind may have had more bloodthirsty eras, but none as filled with images of violence as the present. We are awash in a tide of violent representations the

world has never seen. There is no escape from the massive invasion of colorful mayhem into the homes and cultural life of ever larger areas of the world.

We found prime time television saturated by an average of five scenes of violence per hour. Over twenty scenes of violence per hour fill Saturday morning cartoon programs.

Violence, whether serious or humorous, is essentially a demonstration of power. It shows who can get away with what against whom.

The ratio of violence to victimization defines the price to be paid for committing violence. When one group can commit violence with relative impunity, the price it pays for violence is relatively low. When a group suffers more violence than it commits, the price is high. In general, women, children, young people, lower income, disabled and Asian Americans are at the bottom of the television violence "pecking order."

We have also found that those who watch more television in every group express a greater sense of apprehension, mistrust, and insecurity than do light viewers in the same groups. We call this the "mean world syndrome." Whatever real dangers lurk outside people's homes, viewing violent television cultivates fears and dependencies that make some groups more vulnerable than others to exploitation and victimization. Ultimately, therefore, marketing mayhem contributes to domination and repression.

Ratings cannot alleviate the human, social, and political fallout of the "mean world syndrome." Can they at least keep viewers from flocking to violent programs? Wrong once again. Another well kept secret is that violence on television is not popular. Many studies have found that even though audiences are desensitized to violence, they don't like it. Our CI project has documented the fact that violence depresses the Nielsen ratings.

Why, then, all that violence? Here is the final secret, and challenge to conventional wisdom. What drives violence on the airways is not popularity but global marketing. This is how it works.

What you see on TV is not what the people want. What you see is what the advertisers think will attract an audience at the least cost. "Cost per thousand" is the unit of measurement, where the size of the audience is divided by the dollar cost of the time the advertiser pays to insert the commercial message. Viewers are the fish, programs the bait.

Production costs are climbing above what domestic advertising markets can support. Producers and syndicators reach for the global market.

What is the dramatic ingredient best suited to the global market? It is one that needs no translation, that is image-driven, that speaks "action" in any language, and that fits into any culture. That ingredient is violence.

What global programmers may lose domestically by saturating programs with violence, they more than make up by selling it cheap to many countries. When you can dump a Power Rangers on 300 million children in 80 countries, shutting out domestic artists and cultural products, you don't have to care who wants it and who gets hurt in the process.

What shall we do?

Media watch groups, children's and parents' advocates, and other public interest organizations should make their voices heard on the real issues. They are issues of gender equity and general diversity in media ownership, employment, and representations. They are issues of marketing-driven media monopolization, homogenization and globalization. In the last analysis, let us not get bogged down in rating system trivialities. Citizens own the airways. We should demand that it be healthy, free, and fair, and not just "rated."

George Gerbner is Bell Atlantic Professor of Telecommunication at Temple University and Dean Emeritus of The Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania.

For further reading:

Books:

Invisible Crises: What Conglomerate Media Control Means for America and the World. With Hamid Mowlana and Herbert Schiller (eds.) Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996.

Violence and Terror in the Media: An Annotated Bibliography. With Nancy Signorielli. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988.

Papers, reports, articles, chapters:

"Stories of Violence and the Public Interest." In Kees Brants, Joke Hermes and Liesbet van Zoonen (Eds.) The Media in Question;Popular Cultures and Public Interests. London: Sage, 1998.

"TV Violence and What to Do About It." Nieman Reports, Fall 1996, pp. 10-12.

"Alcohol in American Culture." In Susan E Martin, (ed.) Alcohol and the Mass Media: Issues, Approaches and Research Directions. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, U.S. Public Health Service, Washington, D.C., 1995.

"Television Violence: The Power and the Peril." In Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (eds.) Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Text-Reader. Sage Publications, Inc.: 1995. French translation ("Pouvoir at Danger de la Violence Televisee") in Les Cahiers de la Securite Interieure, Paris, No. 20,2, 1995.

"The Politics of Media Violence: Some Reflections." In Mass Communication Research: On Problems and Policies. Cees Hamelink and Olga Linne (Eds.) Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1993.

"Violence and Drugs on Television; the Cultural Environment Approach to Prevention." A research report to the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention, U.S. Public Health Service, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C., 1993.

"Stories That Hurt: Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drugs in the Mass Media." In Youth and Drugs: Society's Mixed Messages. OSAP Prevention Monograph-6, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 1990.

"Violence and Terror in the Mass Media," Reports and Papers in Mass Communication, No. 102. Paris: Unesco, 1988.

"Health and Medicine on Television." (With Larry Gross, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorielli). The New England Journal of Medicine, October 8, 1981.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1.	Do images of violence have an immediate and "direct" effect on viewers? Why do some "experts" and journalists assume that the only consequence of media violence is violent behavior? What are some of the limitations with this explanation?

2.	Professor Gerbner has shown that repeated exposure to media violence shapes our assumptions about how the world works. What are some of the assumptions cultivated by repeated images of violence? What are the long-term social consequences of media violence on adults and young people?

3.	How does the increasing "monopolization of culture" by large corporations relate to the current level of violence in the media? Has big business become our greatest cultural "censor?" Does violence really "sell?"

4.	What is "happy violence," and why is it becoming more prevalent? What are some of the social effects of routine or amusing violence? Is it ever appropriate to use violent images in film and television, and if so when?

5.	Who are the most frequent victims of media violence, and who are typical aggressors? How does the fate of characters on television and in films influence people's images of themselves and their relationships with others?

6.	Is there a relationship between media violence and gender? Is most violent programming aimed at a primarily male audience, and why might that be so? How are more "privatized" forms of violence, such as domestic abuse, depicted in the media?

7.	What is the "mean world syndrome," and how does it relate to the amount of television exploitable in terms of crime and urban policy?

8.	Should the government take steps to regulate the television industry? What kind of changes are necessary to bring about more, rather than less, cultural diversity in the media?

9.	What can citizens, parents and educators do to counter the influence of television on society and in our everyday lives? What can citizens do collectively?

Exercise One

Select three dramatic television programs you normally watch. Working from your own definition of violence, carefully record the number and type of violent acts depicted in the program. Analyze your results: Are you surprised at the amount of violence you find when you are viewing closely? Who are the most frequent

victims and aggressors of violence? Are the social consequences of violence emphasized or ignored by the program? How might the depictions of violence have documented influence television viewers (including yourself)?

1. Program:

Number of shootings, killings, beatings, and deaths:

Other violent acts:

Victims: Male_____ Female_____ Race_____ Class_____

Perpetrators: Male_____ Female_____ Race_____ Class_____

Reason for violence:

Are there social consequences of violence addressed? How?

2. Program:

Number of shootings, killings, beatings, and deaths:

Other violent acts:

Victims: Male_____ Female_____ Race_____ Class_____

Perpetrators: Male_____ Female_____ Race_____ Class_____

Reason for violence:

Are there social consequences of violence addressed? How?

3. Program:

Number of shootings, killings, beatings, and deaths:

Other violent acts:

Victims: Male____ Female____ Race____ Class____

Perpetrators: Male____ Female____ Race____ Class____

Reason for violence:

Are there social consequences of violence addressed? How?

Exercise Two

Observe promotional spots and previews for upcoming Hollywood films and video releases.

*   Are the clips mostly scenes of violence? Which genres rely most on violent "teasers?"
*   Consider whether such tactics might be effective, and for which audiences.
*   Repeat the exercise in your television viewing by observing previews for news programs, "reality" shows, dramatic programs, and TV-movies.

Part III : Crisis of the Cultural Eniviornment

Signs of Hope: The Cultural Environment Movement
By Dr. George Gerbner

From the Cultural Environment Movement:

We learn our cultural identity from the stories and images around us. This process used to be hand crafted, homemade and community-inspired. Now it is mostly mass-produced and policy-driven. It is the end result of a complex manufacturing and marketing process.

For the first time in human history, children are born into homes where most of the stories do not come from their parents, schools, churches, communities, and in

many places even from their native countries, but from a handful of conglomerates who have something to sell.

These changes have had profound consequences. They have altered the ways we grow up, learn, and live. Channels proliferate and new technologies pervade home and office while mergers and bottom-line pressures shrink creative alternatives and reduce diversity of content. Media are coalescing into an integrated cultural environment that constrains life's choices as the natural environment defines life's chances. The consequences are as diverse as they are far-reaching. For many people they mean an enrichment of local cultural horizons. But they can also mean a narrowing of perspectives, homogenization of outlooks, and limitation of alternatives.

This condition did not emerge spontaneously or after thoughtful deliberation. It has been a radical departure overriding significant public opposition, a fact little noted in our history books. Its worldwide fallout and human implication have only recently been studied and are just beginning to be understood.

Ten-year-olds responding to a survey could name more brands of beer than presidents. Nine out of ten six-year-olds recognized "Old Joe" as a camel cigarette ad. The new cultural environment blurs diverse outlooks, blends perspectives into a pervasive mainstream, and bends that mainstream to the service of those who own and pay for it. Of course, ultimately we pay for it as consumers, but we pay when we wash, not when we watch. The price of a bar of soap includes money to pay for the "soap opera" that plugs the brands of soap and a style of life. And we have no choice but to pay the levy. For citizens, this is taxation without representation. For advertisers, it is a tax-deductible business expense that buys the rights to tell the stories that we hold in common. For society it is a way of preempting alternatives, limiting freedom of the press to those who own it, divorcing payment from choice, and denying meaningful public participation in cultural decision-making.

The Cultural Environment Movement is concerned with such distortions of the democratic process. They include the promotion of practices that drug, hurt, poison, and kill thousands every day; portrayals that dehumanize and stigmatize; cults of violence that desensitize, terrorize and brutalize; the growing siege mentality of our cities; the drift toward ecological suicide; the silent crumbling of our infrastructure; widening resource gaps and the most glaring inequalities in the industrial world; the costly neglect of vital institutions such as public education, health care, and the arts; make-believe image politics corrupting the electoral process.

How can we heal the wounds of all the stories that hurt and tear us apart? How can we put culture-power to liberating ends? The new cultural environment challenges us to mobilize as public citizens as effectively as commercials mobilize us to act as private consumers and to address these questions. We propose six areas:

* **Building a new coalition and constituency**

The Cultural Environment Movement involves media-oriented networks and councils in the U.S. and abroad; teachers, students and parents; groups concerned with children, youth and aging; women's groups; minority organizations; religious, educational, health, environmental, legal and other professional associations; consumer groups and agencies; associations of creative workers in the media and in the arts and sciences; independent computer network organizers; and other organizations and individuals committed to creating mechanism of public participation in cultural policy- making.

* **Opposing domination**

We resist censorship, both public and private; act to extend the First Amendment beyond its use as a shield for the powerful; work to reduce concentration of control of and by media and to include in decision-making the less affluent, more vulnerable groups marginalized by marketers.

* **Cooperating with groups in other countries that work for the integrity and independence of their own cultural decision -making**

We need to learn from countries that have opened their media to the democratic process and oppose trade policies that make cultural developing more difficult.

* **Joining forces with creative workers in the media**

We will work with journalists, artists, writers, actors, directors, and other creative workers struggling for greater freedom and diversity in media employment and expression.

* **Promoting media literacy, awareness, critical viewing and reading, and other media education efforts**

We will be collecting, publicizing and disseminating information about relevant programs, services, curricula, and research and teaching materials.

*   **Placing cultural policy issues on the social-political agenda**

We will be supporting local and national and international media councils, study groups, citizen groups, minority and professional groups and other forums of public discussion, policy development, representation, and action, moving toward a realistic democratic media agenda.

For more information about the Cultural Environment Movement, or to learn about how you can participate or start a media council in your community, write to 3508 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104.

What is Media Literacy?
By Pat Aufderheide

From "Media Literacy: A Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy" published by the Aspen Institute (1992).

A media literate person -- and everyone should have the opportunity to become one -- can decode, evaluate, analyze and produce both print and electronic media. The fundamental objective of media literacy is critical autonomy in relationship to all media. Emphasis in media literacy training range widely, including informed citizenship, aesthetic appreciation and expression, social advocacy, self-esteem, and consumer competence. The range of emphases will expand with the growth of media literacy.

Just as there are a variety of emphases within the media literacy movement, there are different strategies and processes to achieve them. Some educators may focus their energies on analysis -- perhaps studying the creation and reception of a television program like The Cosby Show, and thus its significance for a multicultural but racially divided society. Others may emphasize acquiring production skills -- for instance, the ability to produce a radio or television documentary or an interactive display in one's own neighborhood. Some may use media literacy to understand the economic infrastructure of mass media, as a key element in the social construction of public knowledge. Others may use it primarily to study and express the unique aesthetic properties of a particular medium.

There have been and will be a broad array of constituencies for media literacy: young people, parents, teachers, librarians, administrators, citizens. And there are a variety of sites to teach and practice media literacy: public and private schools, churches, synagogues, universities, civic and voluntary organizations serving youth and families, mass media from newspapers to television.

But no matter what the project, constituency or site, media educators share some beliefs. Media educators know that understanding how reality is constructed through mass media means understanding three interacting elements: the production process (including technological, economic, bureaucratic and legal constraints), the text, and the audience/ receiver/ end-user. In a slightly different formulation of the same understanding, they understand some basic precepts in common:

*   Media are constructed, and construct reality.

*   Media have commercial implications.

*   Media have ideological and political implications.

*   Form and content are related in each medium, each of which has a unique aesthetic, codes and convention.

*   Receivers negotiate meaning in media.

Finally, media literacy educators in principle agree on a pedagogical approach. No matter what the setting or project, but particularly for formal learning, media educators insist that the process of learning embody the concepts being taught. Thus, media literacy learning is hands-on and experiential, democratic (the teacher is researcher and facilitator) and process-driven. Stressing as it does critical thinking, it is inquiry-based. Touching as it does on the welter of issues and experiences of daily life, it is interdisciplinary and cross-curricular.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1.   Dr. Gerbner says having more channels doesn't give us greater diversity, but only more opportunities to sell the same kind of content to different audiences at different times. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

2.   The trend in media ownership, accelerated by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, is toward a concentration of ownership by conglomerates. Dr. Gerbner sees this as a threat to democracy. Why do you think he says that? Do you agree or disagree? State your reasons.

3.   What dramatic elements in a program make it easier to export to the global market? If content is always driven by such commercial considerations, what are the implications for children here and around the world?

4.   What image of the United States do you think people around the world get from the movies and television shows media companies export?

5.   What role should public television play in the United States? What kind of programming should it broadcast? How should it be financed?

6.   Should television content be regulated at all? If so, how and by whom: industry, government, a censorship board, viewers themselves?

7.   Does it make sense to you to let a few private corporations control the public airwaves? Defend your position.

8.   Why do you think there wasn't a lot of public debate about the Telecommunications Act of 1996?

9.   If you were starting from scratch, how would you design an ideal media system for a modern democracy?

10.   Should there be an organized effort to do something about television (or in Gerbner's more general terms, our cultural environment), or is it just up to individuals to deal with it as well as they can?

Part IV : Resources

Media and Violence

Publications

Growing Up with Television: The Cultivation Perspective
By George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorielli. How television "cultivates" assumptions about the world. In Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (1993).
The Politics of Media Violence: Some Reflections

By George Gerbner. Historical approaches to media violence and further analysis about the current state of violence on TV. In Mass Communication Research: On Problems and Policies, edited by Cees J. Hamelink and Olga Linne. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing (1994).

Preposterous Violence: Fables of Aggression in Modern Culture
By James Twitchell. Examines the history of violent entertainment and its modern forms and attractions. Cary, NC: Oxford University Press (1989).

Television Violence Profile, No 16
By George Gerbner, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorielli. Current data on violence on TV: how much, most frequent aggressors and victims, and social consequences. Analysis of "mean world" syndrome and prospects for cultural change. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania (1994).

Women Viewing Violence
By Philip Schlesinger, R. Emerson Dobash, Russel Dobash and C. Kay Weaver. Empirical study of the long-term social consequences of violent images on women viewers. London: BFI Publishers (1992).

Periodicals

Newsletter of the National Coalition on Television Violence (NCTV News)
This newsletter monitors and "rates" violent programming, documents citizen protests and boycotts of media violence, and reports the box-office figures and television ratings of violent entertainment programs. Published by National Coalition on Television Violence, 247 S. Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills, CA 90212. Tel: (310) 278 -5433.

Other Resources

Beyond Blame: Countering Violence in the Media
By the Center for Media Literacy (see address below). This workshop kit includes resources, tips and practical exercises for teaching about media and violence.
Cultural Indicators Bibliography
List of references for further reading in cultivation analysis research. Site hosted by the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Department of Communication.

Media Literacy

Books

Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education
By Henry Giroux. Theoretical essays on critical education, media and popular culture. New York: Routledge (1992).
Media Literacy
By the Ontario Ministry of Education. How-to guide from Canada, where media literacy is steps ahead of the U.S. Ontario: Queens Printer (1989).
Media Literacy: A Report of the National Leadership on Media Literacy
By Pat Aufderheide and Charles Firestone. Current State of media literacy in the U.S. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute (1992).
The Media Studies Book
Edited by David Lusted. Various approaches to critical media studies and teaching about media. New York: Routledge (1991).
Pedagogy of the Oppressed
By Paulo Freire. How to teach critical thinking skills against the grain of oppressive ideologies. New York: Continuum (1989).
Teaching the Media
By Len Masterson. How-to guide by leading British media educator. London: Comedia (1989).
Television "Critical Viewing Skills" Education: Major Media Literacy Projects in the United States and Selected Countries
By James A. Brown. Overview of strategies and critical approaches to teaching television. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (1991).

Publications & Organizations

Adbusters
Activist-oriented information on media literacy and grassroots "culture jamming." Published by the Adbusters Media Foundation, 1243 W. 7th Avenue, British Columbia, Canada V6H 1B7, Tel: (604) 736-9401. The Foundation has also produced "The Culture Jammers Video," a collection of short and often humorous broadcast spots critiquing media and advertising.
Big Noise

Savvy media literacy newsletter for teens, featuring lively graphics, parodies, and suggestions for action. Also published by Adbusters Media Foundation (see address above).

Get a Life! The Awakening of Billy Bored

Media literacy comic book offering teens a fun yet critical story about TV and advertising. Published by Citizens for Media Literacy, 34 Wall St. Suite 407, Asheville, NC 28001, Tel: (704) 255-0182.

MAIN

Newsletter of media education practitioners and artists promoting media literacy. Published by the National Alliance for Media Education (NAME), a working group of the National Alliance for Media Arts & Culture, 346 Ninth Street, San Francisco, CA, 94103, (Tel): 415-431-1391, (Fax): 415-431-1392, (Email): namac@namac.org. NAME is currently developing a comprehensive directory of media literacy teachers and resource materials.

Media & Values

Longest running media literacy magazine in the U.S., covering such topics as media and violence, commercialism, news bias, and critical decoding strategies. Published by Center for Media Literacy, 1962 Shenandoah Street, Los Angeles, CA 90034, Tel: (213) 202 -7652. The Center produces media literacy kits for parents, teachers and citizen groups and publishes a Media Literacy Resource Directory.

Strategies: A Quarterly Publication of Strategies for Media Literacy

Practical, hands-on newsletter for teachers and parents. Published by Strategies for Media Literacy, 1095 Market Street Suite 410, San Francisco, CA 94103, Tel: (415) 255-9392.

Videos

Color Adjustment

By Marlon Riggs (1991). Analyses past and present stereotyping of African-Americans in the media. Available from Black America Emerges Series, California Newsreel, 149 Ninth Street #420, San Francisco, CA 94603.

Dreamworlds II: Desire/Sex/Power in Rock Videos

By Sut Jhally (1995). Analyses the relationship between images of women in music videos and violence against women. Available from Media Education Foundation, 26 Center Street, Northampton, MA 01060, Tel: (413) 584-8500.

Mutiny on the Corporate Sponsorship

By Paper Tiger Television (1992). Examines corporate cross-ownership in the media and corporate censorship of media content. Available from Deep Dish TV, 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012.

Production Notes: Fast Food for Thought

By Jason Simon (1987). A compilation of commercials followed by slow-motion versions of the ad with narration from the actual production notes developed by advertising agencies. Available from Video Data Bank, 112 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 312, Chicago, IL 60603.

General Media

Books

Boxed in: The Culture of TV
By Mark Crispin Miller. Essays on the social ills of television. Evanston: University of Illinois Press (1988).
Cultural Politics in Contemporary America
Edited by Ian Angus and Sut Jhally. Essays in cultural and media analysis. New York: Routledge (1989).
Culture, Inc
By Herbert Schiller. Focuses on the commodification of culture, from television to museums. New York: Oxford University Press (1989).
The Ideological Octopus
By Justin Lewis. Examines the history of media effects research and the relationship between TV and audiences. New York: Routledge (1991).
The Looking Glass World of Nonfiction TV
By Elaine Rapping. Surveys real-life programming on television. Boston: South End Press (1990).
Marketing and Madness: What Commercialism is Doing to Our Culture
By Michael Jacobson and Laurie Mazur. Examines how corporate marketing agendas permeate the media and our common culture. Boulder: Westview Press (1994).
The Media Monopoly
By Ben Bagdikian. Traces the growing consolidation of media ownership as well as the resulting narrowing of viewpoints discussed. Boston: Beacon Press (1987).
Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Grassroots Organizing
By Charlotte Ryan. Shows how citizen groups can influence the media at the local and national level. Boston: South End Press (1990).
Questioning the Media

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Community Media Review
Bimonthly publication of the Alliance for Community Media, focusing on issues of media access, independent production, and media literacy.

Extra!
A bimonthly publication of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) offering news analysis, reports of bias and imbalance, and general media criticism. 130 W. 25th Street, New York, NY 10001, Tel: (212) 633-6700.

The Independent
Monthly magazine focusing mostly on independent media, but also featuring media criticism and writings on media literacy. Published by Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers, 625 Broadway, 9th floor, New York, NY 10012, Tel: (212) 473-3400.

In These Times
National newsweekly featuring investigative media reporting and lively media criticism. 1300 W. Belmont, Chicago, IL 60657, Tel: (312) 472-5700.

AlterNet *http://www.alternet.org*
News service for the alternative press. A project of the Independent Media Institute. 77 Federal Street, San Francisco, CA 94107, Tel:(415) 284-1420, Fax: (415) 284-1414, E-mail: info@alternet.org.

Organizations

Alliance for Community Media *http://www.alliancecm.org*
666 11th St. NW, Suite 806, Washington, DC 20001, Tel: (202) 393-2650.
Coalition of cable access producers, non-profit media advocates, and citizens
working to foster diversity in media and community access to the media system.
Provides resources on getting involved in media production through cable access
television.

Center for Media Education
1012 Heather Ave., Takoma Park, MD 20912, Tel: (301) 270 3938. Provides
research information on media legislative and regulatory issues; organizes and
lobbies for public interest media policies.

Cultural Environment Movement
P.O. Box 31847, Philadelphia, PA 19104. Coalition of citizens, teachers, media
producers, community groups, and public interest groups working for a more
diverse cultural environment.

Deep Dish TV *http://www.igc.org/deepdish/*
339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012, Tel: (212) 473-8933. National cable
access satellite for community and grassroots TV programming.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) *http://www.fair.org*
This media-watch group monitors the biases and distortions of the mainstream
media and publishes the newsletter Extra! (see above). 175 Fifth Avenue, Suite
2245, New York, NY 10010, Tel: (212) 633-6700.

Free Speech TV

Media Watch
Grassroots group monitoring the media's treatment of women. P.O. Box 618,
Santa Cruz, CA 95061, Tel: (408) 423-6355.

Institute for Media Analysis
This organization focuses on exposing untruths in the media. 145 W. 4th St., New
York, NY 10012, Tel: (212) 254-1061.

Paper Tiger TV *http://artcon.rutgers.edu/papertiger/default.html*
339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012, Tel: (212) 420-9045. Veteran cable
access television collective focusing on media issues and criticism.

Unplug
This youth organization is fighting Channel One and other advertising in schools.
360 Grand Ave., Box 385, Oakland, CA 94610.

Independent Media Institute *http://www.independentmedia.org*
IMI is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening and supporting
independent and alternative journalism, and to improving the public's access to

independent information sources. 77 Federal Street, 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94107, Tel: (415) 284-1420, Fax: (415) 284-1414.
Media Education Foundation *http://www.mediaed.org*
This organization produces video tapes for educators, parents and individuals concerned with media literacy. 26 Center Street, Northampton, MA 01060, Tel: (413) 584-8500.

Publications by George Gernber

Books

Invisible Crises: What Conglomerate Media Control Means for America and the World
With Hamid Mowlana and Herber Schiller (eds.) Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996.
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Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf. An International Perspective
With Hamid Mowlana and Herbert Schiller (eds.) Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992.

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