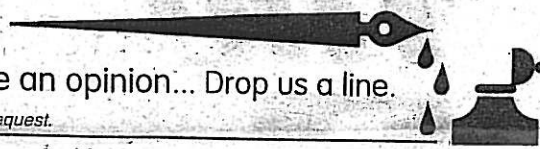


LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Have an opinion... Drop us a line.

**All letters must be signed with address. We will withhold your name on request.*

Kids Are Being Overwhelmed And Over Stimulated By Violence

Dear Editor,

As the Chapter Director for the New Jersey Parents Television Council, I spend much of my time educating the public about the state of media. Between reports of kids plotting to harm teachers, blow up high schools, and posting brutal attacks online, it should come as no surprise that our kids are overwhelmed and over stimulated by violence.

So what are we doing about it?

Last week I paid close attention to what kids and teens may be exposed to on a daily basis. It all started with the brutal murder of a pregnant woman whose baby was stolen from her womb. (Channel-surfing for Elmo led me to an unrated episode of Law & Order: SVU) At Best Buy, flat-screens blared music videos which glorified gangsters, prostitutes and street fighting. At the supermarket, I stood behind a young man who was surfing the internet on his PDA with the speaker turned up. I cringed, knowing that over 33 million U.S. consumers over the age of 12 used their phones to surf the Internet (Reuters, 2007). On the way home, I saw at least three billboards with such blatant agenda-pushing it was almost pitiful on behalf of the advertisers. (I still don't know what they were advertising. Rear-end cleavage?)

Tense from the overstimulation of sex and violence (and it wasn't even noon), I raced home with my toddler and closed the door, sheltering him from the smorgasbord of virtual crap.

And then I thought of other kids.

Some of them can't shut it out. Some of them do homework in homes where video games like Manhunt or Grand Theft Auto are played. Some of them tutor other kids who watch Dexter on YouTube. Some of them watch Gossip Girl, which is raunchier than your average R-Rated movie. Some of them have nannies or babysitters who don't know TV guidelines. The lists go on, and suffice it to say kids are bombarded by the nanosecond with sex, violence, and aggression.

Obviously, television and video games aren't to be blamed entirely. But I feel it's irresponsible to claim they hold little or no role. The influence that media has over youth is not to be taken lightly, especially given youth's susceptibility to suggestion. Teams of researchers at the National Institute of Mental Health and the University of California have learned through magnetic resonance imaging that the brain continues to mature during the teen years, beginning a final push around 16 or 17. Which means the key part of the brain that affects

judgment may not be in place until men and women reach their early 20s. This also applies to decision-making, risk perception and impulse control. With so many of those developing brains being bombarded with violence, it becomes clearer why incidents of aggression are on the rise.

In 2005, the American Psychological Association adopted a resolution recommending that violence be reduced in media marketing and video games. Decades of research indicated that exposure to violence on television and in video games increases aggressive thoughts and behavior and angry feelings among youth. Based on their findings, the APA recommended that the entertainment industry link violent behaviors with negative social consequences. "The Alarming Family Hour" is a Parents Television Council study which details the rise of violence, profanity and sexuality in the 8-9 PM slots on broadcast TV. A sample taste of those findings:

- In 180 hours of original programming = 2246 instances of violence
- Only 10.6% of 208 episodes were violence-free.
- Research shows that perpetrators go unpunished 73% of the time in all violent scenes.

"Use your parental controls" is the typical response I get from the networks all the time. Indeed, these are useless against cringe-worthy fare like Dexter, Family Guy, and most other adult dramas. The TV-14 ratings are so weak it's almost as if they're mocking us. What was once an enjoyable tool of entertainment for the family is now a veritable weapon.

Kids have enough on their plates. Do we really need to be exposing them to sex, violence and aggression? Parents, get the computers out of the bedrooms. Watch every single show your child watches, from cartoon to drama. Know the rules in homes where they hang out. Protect your babies! By doing so, you're investing in them, and showing them how much you care. Their

well-being is worth more than a 30-minute episode on TV, isn't it?

CRYSTAL MADISON