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VIOLENCE ON FILM

Link between viewing, behavior debated

By **BOB DARDEN**

Tribune-Herald entertainment editor

Violence kills. But is violence on the movie or television screen harmful as well?

There is a growing segment in the scientific community that believes today's violent films and television shows have both short-term and long-term effects on a viewer's attitudes toward violence.

Other researchers say the amount of violence shown on the screen is increasing. According to the National Coalition on Television Violence, movie violence has increased 68 percent since 1980 and television violence is up 100 percent.

Obviously, from the group's title, the NCTV has a preconceived outlook. Still, it is revealing that earlier this year NCTV researchers counted 202 acts of violence in *Gymkata*, 146 in *Missing in Action II* and 96 in *Code of Silence*. Not surprisingly, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* was right up there near the top.

And there is no consensus on the affects of violence on viewers. G. William Jones, a Southern Methodist University cinema professor



Billy (Zach Galligan) tries to kill a little monster in *Gremlins*, a film so violent that it spurred the creation of the PG-13 rating

and director of the Southwest Film/Video Archives, for instance, discounts the relationship of screen violence and eroticism and antisocial behavior.

Jones, incidentally, served on the National Commission on Obscenity and Pornography from

1969-1971. His book *Sunday Night at the Movies* deals directly with the relationship of TV violence and sexual images to antisocial behavior.

"Movies will not run children off the track. Many people still hold the 'monkey see, monkey do' phi-

losophy," Jones said, "believing if you show people enough of anything, they will do it. But children receive something like 85 percent of their personality patterns in the first five or six years of life. It's dear old Mom and Dad who have imprinted the child for good or ill with their own values, attitudes and experiences, not the media."

Across campus, Nelson Price, director of public media for United Methodist Communications, categorically disagrees.

"Hundreds of studies prove that television can teach people to imitate and learn violent acts," Price said. "That doesn't mean that every viewer is going to use violence, but the information is there for use. Even if 1 to 2 percent of the audience increases its propensity for violence, that is a significant increase."

According to Price, who has been studying the results of media sex and violence on social attitudes since 1971, the average viewer watches 26 hours of TV per week. Because of the amount of violence, people watching a minimum of four hours per day own more guns, have more locks on

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their doors and go out less at night than national averages.

Price says it is a mistake to totally discount the "monkey do" theory. Following the showing of a recent TV movie, *The Burning Bed* (where Farrah Fawcett, a battered wife, killed her husband by igniting his gasoline-soaked bed while he slept), Price said a number of police departments reported similar incidents.

One study shows that the average American child will watch 18,000 murders on TV by the age of 18.

"How can the value of life be enhanced by seeing 18,000 murders?" Price asked.

"It will be very difficult to turn back screen violence and sexual images. But we have to interrupt the cycle before our society destroys itself."

But does watching men killed or women raped really make the average viewer want to go out and maim or mangle? Researcher Ed Donnerstein at the University of Wisconsin says a recently completed study involving university students would seem to indicate that is indeed the case. After showing male students a heavy diet of films featuring physical and sexual violence against women, the students' attitudes changed. Most were more inclined to believe what researchers call the "rape myth" — that the woman invited the rape or is responsible for provoking it.

The National Institute of Mental Health released a report in 1982 which, according to Price, indicated that there is a causal relationship between media violence

and real-life turmoil in American society.

"The correlation between TV and violence is similar to cigarettes and cancer," Price said. "You can't say that because a certain person smokes, he will get cancer. But because of cigarette smoking, more people will get cancer."

"Three departments of government have determined that there are important harmful effects on normal children and adult viewers," Radecki said. "The United States Department of Justice in 1983, the U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence last September and the National Institute of Mental Health in 1982."

This isn't a new area of concern. The Payne Fund (1928-1933) financed a number of survey studies investigating possible effects of violent movies.

The Hendrickson-Kefauver Hearings of 1954-55 concluded that it was probable that "violent materials are anxiety- and tension-producing," that acts of crime and violence "teach techniques of crime and leave the hostile child to imitate these acts in his expression of aggression ... and blunt and callous insensitivity to human suffering and distress."

Researcher Leonard Berkowitz testified before Sen. Thomas Dodd's subcommittee (1961-64) on juvenile delinquency that "in the absence of any strong inhibition against aggression, people who have recently been angered and have then seen filmed aggression will be more likely to act aggressively than people who have not had those experiences."

The subcommittee's report con-

Concert age limit debated

The Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — A move to prevent children under 13 from attending rock concerts with sexually explicit lyrics brought a heated debate Thursday night before the San Antonio City Council.

Members of the public voiced their views for about three hours before the council began lengthy discussion of a proposal to restrict attendance at concerts at the city-owned Convention Center Arena.

"What we are saying with this is that we as a council do

not approve of blatantly and purposely obscene performances where children are present," Mayor Henry Cisneros said.

The original proposal would have barred children younger than 13 from concerts where certain sexual and violent acts are simulated on stage. The proposal specified sadistic or masochistic sex, rape, incest, bestiality and exhibitionism.

Earlier in the year, the council considered ways of banning objectionable lyrics at rock concerts.

cluded: "On the basis of expert testimony and impressive research evidence, a relationship has been conclusively established between televised crime and violence in antisocial attitudes and behavior among juvenile viewers."

Then, in 1968, Dr. Milton Eisenhower and the National Commission on Causes and Prevention of Violence reported that "the vast majority of experimental studies on this question have found that observed violence stimulates aggressive behavior ... a constant diet of violent behavior on TV has an adverse effect on human character and attitudes. Violence on TV encourages violent forms of behavior and fosters moral and social values about violence in daily life which are unacceptable in a civilized society."

If all of this is true, how does a concerned family know what is

truly violent?

Again, the NCTV is the most visible monitor of violence. The NCTV's staff views and grades all prime-time programs according to violence and anti- or pro-social behavior.

According to an NCTV release dated Nov. 1, "prime-time TV violence continues at the same record levels set last year ... although viewership of violent programming is down."

The citizen watchdog organization reported that there are 13.3 acts of violence on the average hour of prime-time television, and 61 percent of all TV viewing hours feature themes of violence and hostility.

The most violent new show on television is "Lady Blue," which averages 50 acts of violence per hour. The other most violent shows, according to the NCTV:

"A-Team" (with 49 acts of violence per hour), "Hunter" (48 acts), "Miami Vice" (38), "Fall Guy" (38), "Our Family Honor" (36), "The Equalizer" (34), "The Knight Rider" (33), "Stir Crazy" (31), "McGyver" (30), "Spencer for Hire" (28) and "Scarecrow & Mrs. King" (28).

The National Council of Churches recently completed hearings on violent entertainment and concluded that TV violence has a "substantial negative effect" on society and encourages anti-social and aggressive behavior, with serious social consequences.

The NCC joined the NCTV, the American Psychological and Psychiatric associations, the National Education Association and consumer groups in charging that the Federal Communications Commission has been indifferent to the problem of TV violence. The NCC has asked the FCC to require TV networks to adopt a movie and TV program rating system that would warn prospective viewers about the "amount and intensity" of violence before each program.

Last month, Sen. Paul Simon of Illinois said he will submit legislation requiring a 10-second warning before programs high in violence so viewers can be warned of potential harm.

Radecki's proposed warning: "The Surgeon General has determined that violent entertainment has harmful, unconscious effects on normal children and adult viewers. He encourages you to avoid using violence as a means of entertainment."

Even President Reagan has gotten into the act. In a statement in the Oct. 14 issue of *Broadcasting*, Reagan said the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution does not prevent responsible government in such a case, protesting "the flooding of our children's world with glorifications of drugs, violence and perversity."

But even groups concerned with violence doubt that ratings and warnings actually will work. The NCTV was one of a number of groups pushing for what would become the PG-13 rating on the heels of ultra-violent films for children such as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *Gremlins*. Since then, the NCTV has with-

drawn its support for the rating, saying that "PG-13 has become the new R rating."

In light of that kind of evidence pointing to the harmful effects of violence on young minds, why does Hollywood persist in cranking out violent, sexually oriented films?

Producer R. Ben Efraim (*Private Lessons* and *Private School*) says that's what the public wants. He recently told columnist Dick Kleiner that he engaged a major researcher, National Research Group Inc., to ask viewers dozens of questions about movie-going habits and tastes. The study's conclusions, according to Efraim, are revealing:

"A strong plurality of males would like more nudity among girls and more sex scenes. The young females overwhelmingly want to see more of good-looking guys.

"A movie is a product I make according to what the public wants to see. I distribute it in ways to attract customers. Films like *Tender Mercies* may be great art and get wonderful reviews, but very few people will go and buy tickets to see them. I am in this business to make money, not art."

Perhaps the reason, in the end, is always money. Some of this year's biggest-grossing films — *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *Goonies*, *Commando*, *Invasion USA* and *Day of the Dead* — all feature violence as a primary plot device and all were rated R or PG.

First-rate G and PG films like *Return to Oz* and *The Black Cauldron* didn't do as well. Film producers say even people who support the idea of films for the whole family don't go out and support those films at the box office.

The end result is that Hollywood will make many more PG-13 and R films than G or PG films, according to the Motion Picture Association of America. A couple of years ago, Hollywood released 198 R films to only 11 G films. And it is a percentage that seems to be increasing as more families are buying VCRs and staying at home.

And that probably means — according to the NCTV — that unless some sort of congressional action is taken, the amount of graphic violence in the cinema will continue to increase in years to come.