

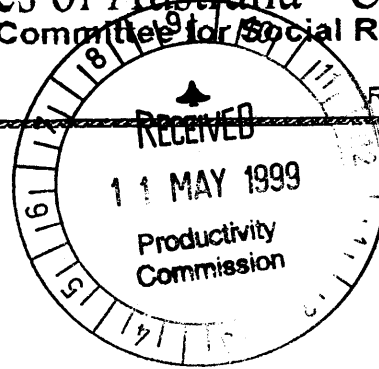


Reformed Churches of Australia - Classis WA

Classical Committee for Social Responsibility

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7th May, 1999.

Broadcasting Inquiry
Locked Bag 2
Collins Street East Post Office
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Dear Members,

This submission is made on the understanding that we are able to comment on Broadcasting from a consumer interest only.

The objectives of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 are laudable. The users of broadcasting services deserve a range of services to accommodate the differing tastes throughout the community. Whatever the services they should always be of a high quality and respecting community standards.

It appears to us that community standards are being broadened all the time and we are not always happy to see this happen. We admit that within the community, our Christian standards would be seen as being of a higher moral level than most. Nevertheless even though we belong to a Christian community, our families are not necessarily immune to what is happening in the world around us. Our children are just as much tempted to try out and engage in practices that could damage their lives forever. That is why the task of guiding children and ourselves to steer away from damaging influences is so great. We are that part of the community that requires wholesome programs on television, good music on radio and an Internet that can be trusted. We do not believe that we should shut ourselves away from the influences of this world. Some sects do just that. Cutting ourselves off from technological advances is depriving ourselves of the good that can be found there and used to our advantage.

We would like to comment on the ABC's Triple J. This station owned by the Australian public is pandering to those in our community who hanker after material of the lowest level. It is most vulgar and unnatural. That anyone would prefer music (so called) that promotes drug use, violence and a whole lot of unmentionable subjects is hard to understand. Some parents are neglecting to pass on to their children the knowledge that responsibility is one of the most important characteristics they should strive to develop in their lives. When parents fail in their task of upbringing, it becomes necessary for someone else to take over. Standards need to be set to protect many young people from themselves.

It also goes that producers of these programs must be aware of their responsibility when putting to air their programs. Programs should build up the integrity of our young people not bring them down to gutter level. Triple J produces a three hour program "3 hours of power" that presents heavy metal rock that promotes violence, killing, suicide and other degrading subjects. Marilyn Manson, Korn, Intestine Baalism and other German Gothic music are some of the tracts played constantly. This is the style of music that has contributed to the killings in Littleton, Colorado and now in

our own city of Perth, where a young man brutally murdered his own Grandmother. Now that the case has come to the Courts, we are hearing the dreadful story of what he has done to his own flesh and blood Grandmother. We can't allow this to continue in Australia any longer. Surely community standards haven't been widened to include this style of music.

Existing broadcasting arrangements are not adequate to meet the needs of the Christian community. There are no Christian church services broadcast on a Sunday. No longer can we tune in to a hymn singing session on radio. Why have these services disappeared in what was formerly regarded as a Christian country? Any TV programs advertised that could look like being of a Christian content are shown anytime between 2 am and 5 am on commercial television. Not a convenient time for most viewers. Is this how the television channels meet their obligations to show x number of hours of religious broadcasts?

Program standards are supposed to be improving. We doubt this very much when we see increased violence, unnecessary sex scenes, bad language, reference to drug use. Young people have the idea that sex before and outside of marriage is the normal thing. They see it in programs like "Home and Away" and "Neighbours" which are supposed to be for teenagers. We hardly ever see programs that promote family values - why are producers making films of this type. We are very appreciative of nature programs that allow us to see the wonders of God's creation. However we like a good story now and then. Codes of Practice are debatable. All classification categories allow for degrees of violence, bad language, sex and nudity and drug use among others. Sex laden and violent films are not exerting a good influence on our youngsters. Even so called "erotica" no longer recognised as "soft porn" is readily shown on the TV screen. Is it any wonder families are falling apart. There is ample evidence that pornography in all its forms has done great damage to societies all over the world.

The complaints system is far too complicated for the average Australian. Phoned complaints are not accepted. Each person making a complaint is referred to the relevant Code of Practice - FACTS for commercial, ABC and SBS for their respective Codes. Few people enjoy putting pen to paper to complain, they prefer to talk their problem through. Very few complaints get through to the ABA for a final decision as to whether or not a breach has been made. There has to be a better method of dealing with complaints. Firstly, people need to be made aware of their rights under the Act in relation to Codes of Practice. We would like to see big changes in the method of making complaints that will make it easier for complainants to get satisfaction. If the complaint is of a moral nature it is always dismissed with "no breach has been made".

Please don't make more liberal world trade in audiovisual services. We have enough to fight now. Films of the type of "Lolita" are not needed in Australia. Today's film in the cinema is tomorrow on video and on the TV screen soon after. Video games like Mortal Kombat and others equally violent have the capacity to desensitise our teenagers. Themes of constant killing, pitting their skills to destroy leads to a cold callousness. This fact has been demonstrated at places like Port Arthur, Littleton - Colorado and in Canada.

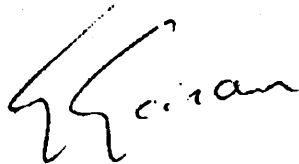
We are not suggesting that violent programs on television, violent lyrics in hard metal rock music are the only factors leading young people astray. Drug use, unemployment and broken families are also contributing factors.

Together all these factors are producing an atmosphere of violence never before seen in the community. We can't point the finger at any one sector of the community for allowing this to happen. Until all people realise and face their responsibilities, and this includes providers of broadcasting services, parents and governments, we cannot expect to see any improvement. Who will be the first group to reverse this situation simply by taking the right kind of action?

Christians are willing to take the lead but we need and deserve the backing of those government bodies that have the power to back us up. Unfortunately the entertainment industry and the making of money appears to be of greater importance. Which is of greater importance - our economy or the happiness and security of our people?

Please consider our suggestions.

Members of the Classical Committee for Social Responsibility
Reformed Churches of Western Australia

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. McArthur', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

Chairman

SOCIETY

Visualised violence: teaching children to kill

Psychologist David Grossman, a retired US infantry officer, who was recently in Australia at the Land Warfare Studies Conference in Canberra, says that humans — like all other species — have a natural aversion to killing their own.

The ability needs to be learned and military forces now routinely use brutalisation and desensitisation to create a soldiery that will kill the enemy.

Unfortunately, violence on television, in films and computer games is — in a subtle and uncontrolled way — doing to young children what basic training does to young soldiers.

The per capita murder rate doubled in the USA between 1957 — when the FBI started keeping track of the data — and 1992. A fuller picture of the problem, however, is indicated by the rate people are attempting to kill one another — the aggravated assault rate. That rate in America has gone from around 60 per 100,000 in 1957 to over 440 per 100,000 by the middle of this decade. As bad as this is, it would be much worse were it not for two major factors.

First, is the increase in the imprisonment rate of violent offenders. The prison population in America nearly quadrupled between 1975 and 1992. According to criminologist John J. Dilulio, "dozens of credible empirical analyses leave no doubt that the increased use of prisons averted millions of serious crimes." If it were not for our tremendous imprisonment rate (the highest of any industrialised nation), the aggravated assault rate and the murder rate would undoubtedly be even higher.

The second factor keeping the murder rate from being any worse is medical technology. According to the US Army Medical Service Corps, a wound that would have killed nine out of ten soldiers in World War II, nine out of ten could have survived in Vietnam. Thus by a very conservative estimate, if we had 1940 level medical technology today, the murder rate would be ten times higher

than it is.

However, the crime rate is still at a phenomenally high level, and this is true world wide. In Canada, according to their Centre for Justice, per capita assaults increased almost fivefold between 1964 and 1993, attempted murder increased nearly sevenfold, and murders doubled.

Similar trends can be seen in other countries in the per capita violent crime rates reported to Interpol between 1977 and 1993. In Australia and New Zealand, the assault rate increased approximately fourfold, and the murder rate nearly doubled in both nations. The assault rate tripled in Sweden, and approximately doubled in Belgium, Denmark, England, Wales, France, Hungary, Netherlands, and Scotland, while all these nations had an associated (but smaller) increase in murder.

There are many factors involved, and none should be discounted: for example, the prevalence of guns in our society. But violence is rising in many nations with draconian gun laws. And though we should never downplay child abuse, poverty or racism, there is only one new variable present in each of these

countries, bearing the exact same fruit: media violence presented as entertainment for children.

Killing is unnatural

Before retiring from the military, I spent almost a quarter of a century as an army infantry officer and a psychologist, learning and studying how to enable people to kill. Believe me, we are very good at it. But it does not come naturally; you have to be taught to kill. And just as the Army is conditioning people to kill, we are indiscriminately doing the same thing to our children, but without the safeguards.

After the Jonesboro, Arkansas, school killings, the head of the American Academy of Pediatrics Task Force on Juvenile Violence came to town and said that children don't naturally kill. It is a learned skill. And they learn it from abuse and violence in the home and, most pervasively, from violence as entertainment in television, the movies, and interactive video games.

Killing requires training because there is a built-in aversion to killing one's own kind. I can best illustrate this from drawing on my own work in studying killing in the military.



We all know that you can't have an argument or a discussion with a frightened or angry human being. Vasoconstriction, the narrowing of the blood vessels, has literally closed down the forebrain — that great gob of gray matter that makes you a human being and distinguishes you from a dog.

When those neurons close down, the midbrain takes over and your thought processes and reflexes are indistinguishable from your dog's. If you've worked with animals, you have some understanding of what happens to frightened human beings on the battlefield. The battlefield and violent crime are in the realm of midbrain responses.

Within the midbrain there is a powerful, God-given resistance to killing

your own kind. Every species, with a few exceptions, has a hardwired resistance to killing its own kind in territorial and mating battles.

When animals with antlers and horns fight one another, they head butt in a harmless fashion. But when they fight any other species, they go to the side to gut and gore. Piranhas will turn their fangs on anything, but they fight one another with flicks of the tail. Rattlesnakes will bite anything, but they wrestle one another. Almost every species has this hardwired resistance to killing its own kind.

When we human beings are overwhelmed with anger and fear, we slam head-on into that mid-brain resistance that generally prevents us from killing. Only sociopaths — who by definition don't have that resistance — lack this innate violence immune system.

Throughout human history, when humans fight each other, there is a lot of posturing.

At the Battle of Gettysburg, of the 27,000 muskets picked up from the dead and dying after the battle, 90 percent were loaded. This is an anomaly, because it took 95 per cent of their time to load muskets and only five per cent to fire. But even more amazingly, of the thousands of loaded muskets, over half had multiple loads in the barrel — one with 23 loads in the barrel.

In reality, the average man would load his musket and bring it to his shoulder, but he could not bring himself to kill. He would be brave, he would stand shoulder to shoulder, he would do what he was trained to do; but at the moment of truth, he could not bring himself to pull the trigger. And so he lowered the weapon and loaded it again. Of those who did fire, only a tiny percentage fired to hit. The vast majority fired over the enemy's head.

During World War II, U.S. Army Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall had a team of researchers study what soldiers did in battle. For the first time in history, they asked individual soldiers what they did in battle. They discovered that only 15 to 20 percent of the individual riflemen could bring themselves to fire at an exposed enemy soldier.

That is the reality of the battlefield.

Only a small percentage of soldiers are able and willing to participate. Men are willing to die, they are willing to sacrifice themselves for their nation; but they are not willing to kill. It is a phenomenal insight into human nature; but when the military became aware of that, they systematically went about the process of trying to fix this "problem." From the military perspective, a 15 percent firing rate among riflemen is like a 15 percent literacy rate among librarians. And fix it the military did. By the Korean War, around 55 percent of the soldiers were willing to fire to kill. And by Vietnam, the rate rose to over 90 percent.

Desensitisation

How the military increases the killing rate of soldiers in combat is instructive,



because our culture today is doing the same thing to our children. The training methods militaries use are brutalisation, classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and role modelling.

Brutalisation and desensitisation are what happens at boot camp. From the moment you step off the bus you are physically and verbally abused: countless pushups, endless hours at attention or running with heavy loads, while carefully trained professionals take turns screaming at you. Your head is shaved, you are herded together naked and dressed alike, losing all individuality. This brutalisation is designed to break down your existing mores and norms and to accept a new set of values that embrace destruction, violence and death as a way of life. In the end, you are desensitised to violence and accept it as a normal and essential survival skill in your brutal new world.

Something very similar to this de-

sensitisation toward violence is happening to our children through violence in the media — but instead of 18-year-olds, it begins at the age of 18 months when a child is first able to discern what is happening on television. At that age, a child can watch something happening on television and mimic that action. But it isn't until children are six or seven years old that the part of the brain kicks in that lets them understand where information comes from. Even though young children have some understanding of what it means to pretend, they are developmentally unable to distinguish clearly between fantasy and reality.

The *Journal of the American Medical Association* published the definitive epidemiological study on the impact of TV violence. The research demonstrated what happened in numerous nations after television made its appearance as compared to nations and regions without TV. The two nations or regions being compared are demographically and ethnically identical; only one variable is different: the presence of television. In every nation, region or city with television, there is an immediate explosion of violence on the playground, and within 15 years there is a doubling of the murder rate. Why 15 years? That is how long it takes for the brutalisation of three-to-five-year-olds to reach the "prime crime age." That is how long it takes for you to reap what you have sown when you brutalise and desensitise a three-year-old.

Today the data linking violence in the media to violence in society are superior to those linking cancer and tobacco. Hundreds of sound scientific studies demonstrate the social impact of brutalisation by the media.

Classical conditioning

Classical conditioning is like the famous case of Pavlov's dogs you learned about in Psychology 101: The dogs learned to associate the ringing of the bell with food, and, once conditioned, the dogs could not hear the bell without salivating.

The Japanese were masters at using classical conditioning with their soldiers. Early in World War II, Chinese prisoners were placed in a ditch on their knees with their hands bound behind them. And one by one, a select few Japa-

nese soldiers would go into the ditch and bayonet "their" prisoner to death.

This is a horrific way to kill another human being. Up on the bank, countless other young soldiers would cheer them on in their violence. Comparatively few soldiers actually killed in these situations, but by making the others watch and cheer, the Japanese were able to use these kinds of atrocities to classically condition a very large audience to associate pleasure with human death and suffering. Immediately afterwards, the soldiers who had been spectators were treated to sake, the best meal they had had in months, and to so-called comfort girls.

The result? They learned to associate committing violent acts with pleasure.

The Japanese found these kinds of techniques to be extraordinarily effective at quickly enabling very large numbers of soldiers to commit atrocities in the years to come.

After the Jonesboro shootings, one of the high-school teachers told me how her students reacted when she told them about the shootings at the middle school. "They laughed," she told me with dismay. A similar reaction happens all the time in movie theatres when there is bloody violence. The young people laugh and cheer and keep right on eating popcorn. We have raised a generation of barbarians who have learned to associate violence with pleasure, like the Romans cheering and snacking as the Christians were slaughtered in the Colosseum.

The result is a phenomenon that functions much like AIDS, which I call AVIDS—Acquired Violence Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS has never killed anybody. It destroys your immune system, and then other diseases that shouldn't kill you become fatal. Television violence by itself does not kill you. It destroys your violence immune system and conditions you to derive pleasure from violence. And once you are at close range with another human being, and it's time for you to pull that trigger, Acquired Violence Immune Deficiency Syndrome can destroy your midbrain resistance.

The third method the military uses is operant conditioning, a very powerful procedure of stimulus-response. A benign example is the use of flight simula-

tors to train pilots. An airline pilot in training sits in front of a flight simulator for endless hours; when a particular warning light goes on, he is taught to react in a certain way. When another warning light goes on, a different reaction is required.

One day the pilot is actually flying a jumbo jet; the plane is going down, and 300 people are screaming behind him. He is wetting his seat cushion, and he is scared out of his wits; but he does the right thing. Why? Because he has been conditioned to respond reflexively to this particular crisis.

The military and law enforcement community have made killing a conditioned response. This has substantially raised the firing rate on the modern battlefield. Whereas infantry training in World War II used bulls-eye targets, now soldiers learn to fire at realistic, man-shaped silhouettes that pop into their field of view. We know that 70 to 80 percent of the shooting on the modern battlefield is the result of this kind of stimulus-response training.

Now, if you're a little troubled by that, how much more should we be troubled by the fact that every time a child plays an interactive point-and-shoot video game, he is learning the exact same conditioned reflex and motor skills.

In the military and law-enforcement worlds, the right option is often *not* to shoot. But you never, never put your quarter in that video machine with the intention of not shooting.

Role models

In the military, you are immediately confronted with a role model: your drill sergeant. He personifies violence and aggression. Along with military heroes, these violent role models have always been used to influence young, impressionable minds.

Today the media are providing our children with role models, and this can be seen not just in the lawless sociopaths in movies and TV shows, but it can also be seen in the media-inspired, copycat

aspects of the Jonesboro murders. This is the part of these juvenile crimes that the TV networks would much rather not talk about.

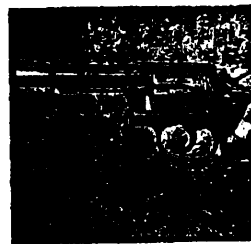
The lineage of the Jonesboro shootings began at Pearl, Mississippi, fewer than six months before. In Pearl, a 16 year-old boy was accused of killing his mother and then going to his school and shooting nine students, two of whom died, including his ex-girlfriend. Two months later, this virus spread to Paducah, Kentucky, where a 14-year-old boy was arrested for killing three students and wounding five others.

A very important step in the spread of this copycat crime virus occurred in Stamps, Arkansas, 15 days after Pearl and just a little over 90 days before Jonesboro. In Stamps, a 14-year-old boy, who was angry at his schoolmates, hid in the woods and fired at children as they came out of school. Sound familiar? Only two children were injured in this crime, so most of the world didn't hear about it, but it got great regional coverage on TV, and two little boys in Jonesboro, Arkansas, probably did hear about it.

In the days after the Jonesboro shootings, I was interviewed on Canadian national TV, the British Broadcasting Corporation, and many US and international radio shows and newspapers. But the American television networks simply would not touch this aspect of the story. Never in my experience as a historian and a psychologist have I seen any institution in America so clearly responsible for so very many deaths, and so clearly abusing their publicly licensed authority and power to cover up their guilt.

The networks will stick their lenses anywhere and courageously expose any thing. Like flies on open wounds, they find nothing too private or shameful for their probing lenses — except themselves, and their share of guilt in the terrible, tragic crime that happened here.

— This article was adapted from a lecture given at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, in April last year.



THE WEST AUSTRALIAN TUESDAY MARCH 16 1999

7

Judge links crime to TV violence

Community relies on family to reinforce community values

■ By Grace Malatesta

TELEVISION and computer games are exposing children to violence and disrespect to others, according to WA Chief Justice David Malcolm.

He said technology was challenging the role of the family in a child's development.

Speaking at a crime prevention conference last night, Justice Malcolm said the family was the key to reducing crime. But the changing face of Australian society in the past 30 years had placed families under increasing pressure.

"The pace of change and the ease with which new technologies can be purchased means there is little time to reflect on how that change is affecting the family," he said.

"Family meals which might have traditionally been eaten together are now often eaten while the television monopolises conversation.

"Television and other forms of entertainment can have a significant effect on how children see the world and learn what is appropriate behaviour."

But he was not suggesting that television and computers in the home should be banned.

"They can hold significant benefits for a child's development," he said.

Justice Malcolm said that as a community we relied on the family to reinforce community values. But parents had less time for their children because of expectations placed on them by

employers and workmates. "The innumerable studies which have been conducted on children and juvenile offenders tell us that the family environment is often at the very heart of the problem and is, therefore, one of the principal causes of crime," he said.

"They also tell us that the best approach is early intervention to identify children and families at risk and step in to help and support them before the child turns to crime.

"We need to involve the family in any strategy addressing the causes of crime," he said. "We also need to emphasise the need for the community to focus on crime prevention rather than punishment."



'Television ... can have a significant effect on how children see the world.'

— Justice Malcolm

Justice Malcolm said crime could not just be prevented by security measures such as car immobilisers. Getting tough on crime did not appear to be achieving the desired results.

"Locking up offenders will always have its place because of the seriousness of the offence or the need to protect the community but it cannot and does not of itself prevent or reduce crime," he said.

Despite WA courts imposing longer jail terms for armed robberies, the number committed in 1997 rose 72 per cent. Ministry of Justice figures showed up to half of WA prisoners would re-offend.

The community emphasis on arresting and jailing criminals also carried

a big financial strain. The estimated combined budget of the WA Police Service and the ministry was \$713 million. The estimated cost of keeping one juvenile in jail was \$481 a day, or \$175,565 a year, and for an adult it was \$172 a day or \$62,780 a year.

Justice Malcolm was speaking at a conference hosted by the City of Gosnells on designing safer communities.