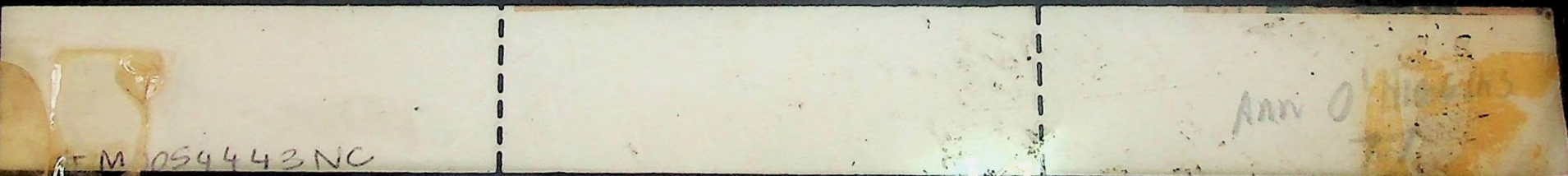
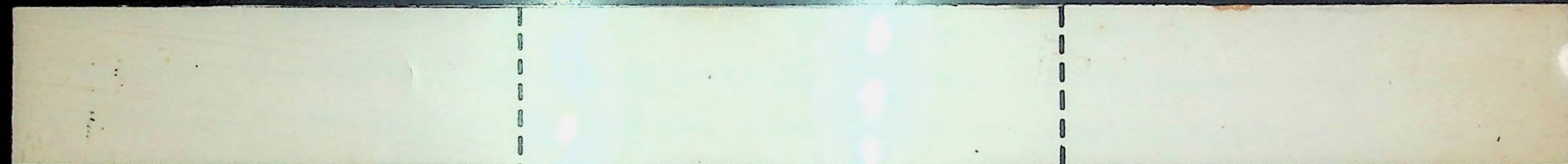


VIOLENCE ON THE SCREEN AND ITS AFFECT ON CHILDREN



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Ann O'Higgins
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'Violence on the Screen'

'Television coarsens all the complexities of human relationships, brutalyses them, makes them insensitive. We've lost our sense of shock, our sense of humanity, that is the basic problem of Television' --- Paddy Chayefsky.

In recent months an air of anxiety and concern has emerged among the general public, about what kind of impact violence on the T.V. Screen is having on younger members of the community. This is not a new concern, as far back as the 1920 & 30, it was also the opinion of earlier researchers into violent films. After analysing the content of five hundred films between 1920 and 1930 one of the researchers wrote "How otherwise can this scarlet procession of criminal acts or attempts be described than as a veritable school for crime. From the many reports to-date about violence on the screen, American, Canadian, English and even Irish, the general public are genuinely concerned, especially when crime and violence are made look so glamorous or camouflaged in such a fashion that these two occupations appear as second nature to their owners. [The abnormal child is a slightly different case] Quote from a report printed in the U.S. News and World Report, February 7 1977 'Proponents of reform believe they can count on a majority of Americans for support. Accordingly to one poll, nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of U.S. adults think that there is too much violence on T.V. more than a score of the 70 prime-time shows are crime dramas and movies that rely on scenes filled with bloodshed as staples in their plots. The most

violent of these still on the air accordingly to a recent survey by the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting 'Starsky and Hutch', 'Baretta', Baa Baa Black Sheep', Hawaii Five-0', Six-Million Dollar Man', Kojak', Police Woman', 'Police Story', Charlies Angels' The study find repeated examples of violence of every kind in popular programmes, among them bombings, plane crashes, rapes, fist fights, murders and beatings.

The prime concern of most critics is the effect of such violence on children. There is still no general agreement on this matter despite years of research. Some surveys however are widely interpreted as signals that violence adversely effects child behaviour. A University of Washington child psychiatrist for example estimates that the average American child has seen 18,000 murders on T.V. by the time he has graduated from high school. Statistics prove that the average child viewing time is about two hours a day, of course the non-school going child can spend a lot more time, and children will watch all sorts of television programmes from Tom and Jerry to programmes riddled with sex, violence, crime, etc., without their parents consent. It is a bit old fashioned to talk about the effects of television on children since many ridiculous prophesias were once made about it, including washings of more divorce, illiteracy, attempted suicides, nightmares, tooth decay. The effect of television is obviously far more intargible. The question whether children imitate things they see on television is also complex. Undoubtedly

there have been some crimes or suicides, closely modelled upon certain television incidents, but it cannot be proven that these things would not have happened in any case, though perhaps in a different form. Television procedures often justify violence by saying that it bounces off normal children and that no popular programme could ever exist if it had to take into account the emotional state of a tiny minority, however, a large minority of children could be upset and possibly tempted by a violent programme. The Underwood report on maladjusted children estimated that 8% of school children needed psychiatric treatment at any one time while other Authorities set the figure higher. The question arises what kind of a picture is the child receiving of the adult world from the T.V. screen, is it one of physical violence, intellectual interchange and crime? American children can see a great deal of violence on their screens, Russian children can see almost none. B.B.C. issued a programme policy concerning violence which every character is supposed to recognise and which is reported in (The Pilkington report(1968). In it, it states childrens programmes should not show family quarrels and insecurities, nor other situations that might upset a child's feelings if they are shown in contemporary settings. Portrayal of injury, disablements or embarrassing disabilities is also forbidden. So far as the problem of audience imitation is concerned dangerous examples of easily imitated devilry, tramps or sabotaged bicycles are not to be

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shown and weapons, like coshs and broken bottles are obviously considered more suspect than rifles and revolvers.

On certain networks in America there is a violence content symbol, so that one knows exactly the violence content of a particular show, at any time, (even if they turn on the set half way through a show) This is a very good system for in particular, it allows ^{PARENTS} (them) to choose whether or not a show is suitable for their youngsters to watch. A director of an American Programme in which a boy used a bow and arrow was inundated by letters, mainly from hospitals with patients who had lost eyes from these weapons. Gross brutality by a good charactor is discouraged, as are fights where the details are over emphasised, violence should never be shown for its own sake, but should be an integral part of the story, if it is going to be there at all. Even so the bloody gruesome or vicious must be avoided, fundemental changes cannot be effectuated in a short space of time, nor can children be made good by removing evil out of their experience, charactor is not built that way. For example, one does not get at the basic problems presented by the energetic, adverture thirsty lad by taking T.V. shows, movies or comics away from him. If he has a need for such outlets, he will somehow get to them, and depreviation is no cure.

The repetition on the screen of violent acts could have the effect of setting up a behaviour pattern which might in certain circumstances become a sort of (conditioned reflex) with some types of individual. On the whole children do not translate television experience into action. It may happen in extreme cases, but even the influence of television is small. The results of enquiries conducted by an analogous method in Japan are identical likewise in Canada, where children in a town without television, 'Radiotown' were compared with children in a town with television, 'Teletown', the failure to find any significant difference between television and radiotown on aggression scores, rules out the possible explanation that aggression scores might be an effect on television viewing.

Cartoon violence is not a subject that has aroused any great concern on the part of the public in spite of the fact that cartoons frequently show a higher rate of violent incidents than any other class of programme with the exception of the news. Although cartoons are very popular with children, the Working Party did not think that, generally speaking, and because of their obvious unreality they would be likely to expose any undesirable influence on normal children. However ingenious and unfamiliar methods of inflicting pain or injury - particularly if capable of easy imitation - should not be shown without the most careful consideration. Producers in the U.S. have discontinued a number of the more violent type of cartoon series.

Some of which had been rejected for showing on I.T.V.

Contrary to expectation, it is not the only child or the child whose mother goes out to work, who was a heavy viewer, but the insecure child, in particular, the child who had difficulties making friends with other children - more conflicts, more T.V.?

Is there an indirect effect violence on the screen?

Some researchers have expressed the opinion that violence in the Cinema and on television works above all on a sense of values and 'world view of adolescents. Here too one can try to find a statistical proof, by studying the attitudes of viewers as opposed to non-viewers and those of frequent viewers, as opposed to average viewers.

Before and after studies indicate that television is taking the place of other mass media, and that the installation of a T.V. set brings about a decreasing listening to the radio, reading of illustrated newspapers and visits to the cinema. Television does not bring about a decrease in intellectual activities. The child who watches the television, reads as much as others. The number of books bought by young Americans does not depend in the least on Television. Those studies are confirmed by enquiries made in Japan, Germany and France.

Censorship, Edgar Morn ' Censorship springs from the political taboos of the established order and from magical taboos which push the horror of decaying bodies, the frenzy of the act of love, the nakedness of death and sexuality away into the sacred night.

When young people see dancing, they want to dance, when they see appetising food, drink and sweets they want to eat them. Could it stand to reason that if they see violence on the screen, they acquire a certain taste for it, even if only unconsciously. However, censorship of the arts is a stupid idea, the only conceivable restriction might possible apply to the young, but even the one would be getting it the wrong way round. If one believed that there are teenage gangs because there are films about teenage gangs. There are teenage gangs because there are slums, because there are housing shortage, because there are colonial wars, The T.V. set has nothing to do with it. I believe in giving the public something better than it now thinks it likes, instead of giving the public what it wants. If we give the public what it wants you are running away from responsibility, if you give it something better, you embrace the responsibility, some people would opt for a compromise between the two, that may be the answer.

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Anti-violence Viewers Strike Back'

The I.T.V. code on Violence in Television Programmes.

October 1971.

The Working Partys second interim report of the working party on the portrayal of violence on Independent Television-

It noted that the code has provided a valuable guide for resolving questions concerning the portrayal of violence which arise in the regular and detailed discussions that take place between the Authorities Officers and the Production Staff in the companies. These discussions cover the detail of script proposals and the selection and editing of required materials as well as the timing of programmes and the avoidance of an over concentration of violent material.

VIOLENCE IN CARTOONS:

Cartoon violence is not a subject that has aroused any great concern on the part of the public in spite of the fact that cartoons frequently show a higher rate of violent incidents than any other class of programme with the exception of the news.

IN DEFENCE OF CONTROVERSIAL R.T.E. SHOWS

EVENING Herald APRIL 20th 1977

On arrival home from work I was somewhat taken aback to read more criticism of RTE programmes, and in particular, of Niall Toibin's shows and "The White House" from some Sligo readers (Herald 23/3/77) who even suggested that the Taoiseach should have a look at them.

I find it unusual that much of the criticism of the above-mentioned programmes should come from viewers who receive only one channel and who are at present clamouring for multi-channel viewing. The thoughts of what might happen were they to receive other channels are mind-boggling.

A number of points my fellow countrymen and women failed to take into account. The programmes were home-produced and experiments in broadcasting. The language was pretty common and demonstrative of that used among real live characters. Do ye shy away in guilt from the reality? Does your anger stem from the fact that institutions held dear to our hearts were "knocked" and also that these "situations" could never arise in Ireland. Popular institutions will always be "knocked."

I noticed that the writers shied away from "knocking" programmes that had a lot of "fantasy" violence in them, e.g. "Kojak", incidents that may not happen in Ireland.

What can these critics do when they get multi-channel viewing? Damn all, because the criticism is of a trivial nature, pathetic in the way it seeks the Taoiseach's intervention, as if he had nothing better to do.

The abuse of alcohol and tobacco, the dirt of our streets, the pollution of rivers and streams I consider to be more "obscene, perverted and pornographic" than these shows.

To the Sligo readers who attached their name to the letter

in question may I say your concept of morality is distorted and your criticism is a typical reaction to a fellow-countryman who seeks to try something different. There was nothing constructive in your criticism, just the same old "It's riddled with filth, pornography, perversion and obscenities." I presume you are minors and do not know the meaning of these words.

G. GRIFFIN

25 Ardagh Grove,
Blackrock.

Starsky and Hutch

banned by RTE

APRIL 22nd 77.

By MICHAEL BROPHY

TV's tough-guy cops, Starsky and Hutch, have been banned from RTE screens.

The hard-punching, smooth-talking Los Angeles policemen who have been making it to the top of the BBC ratings are being kept out of Montrose because of their violence.

The American producers of the Starsky series have now agreed under pressure, mainly from the BBC, to eliminate some of the violence from their shows—but they have warned that their popularity may suffer.

And now television's other big law makers—Kojak and The Sweeney included—have been told by the programme buyers both here and in Britain to tone down their tough shows or have them left on the sales shelves.

The violence in the shows has now become so concentrated that both RTE and the BBC have been forced to drop planned episodes of shows like Kojak and the Rockford Files.

But the first to suffer a total ban has been Starsky and Hutch—already beamed into Ireland on the BBC wavelengths.

RTE executive, Bill Harpur—the man responsible for buying the station's film materials—rejected the series during a sales conference in Cannes.

And ever since the show made a hit on BBC he has been plagued by letters—mostly from children—to get the show here.

"This is one show that I refused to accept because of its violence," he said today. "I found it totally objectionable but one of the sad things is that the people who write to me demanding that RTE buy it are mostly children."



Paul "Starsky" Glaser . . . slams TV producers.

"One thing must be remembered," he added, "we do not buy these types of series for children and the David Soul who has made it a pop singer is a very different person from the one who appears in Starsky and Hutch."

"These two television personalities seem to be acting way outside the normal operational field of policemen and the tragic thing about it is that they are so attractive to young people and they can bring violence to the screens easier by making it more attractive."

"We did not buy the show when it was first offered and we have no immediate plans to change our minds," he added.

Kojak, The Sweeney, McCloud and even Jim Rockford are now being threatened with retaliatory action by the world's TV channels, finally rebelling against the toughman image projected through the shows.

A number of Kojak shows have been dropped by RTE because of their violence and under the terms of the contracts the producers do not get paid.

"VIOLENCE METER"

And yesterday, BBC managing director Alasdair Milne admitted the British station had been operating its own "violence meter" over the past year.

All the leading TV cop shows have been censored and some shows have been dropped altogether.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'Starsky and Hutch'

fans object to dictation
 APRIL 20th 1977 EVELYN HICARD

This letter is in reply to the article written by Michael Brophy on Starsky and Hutch in the Herald, Fri April 16.

Who does Mr. Bill Harpur think he is, rejecting such a good show as "Starsky and Hutch." We object to someone dictating to us what to watch. There is a knob on the television that says "on-off" and we can dictate to ourselves what we watch or do not watch.

It is stated that he said: "This is one show that I refuse to accept because of its violence. I found it totally objectionable." He also says, "We do not buy these types of series for children," after he stated that it was children writing in demanding that "Starsky and Hutch" be shown. Perhaps he thinks that sixteen, seventeen, eighteen-year-olds would be better off looking at "Kitty and the Red Shoes"?

Programmes like "Charlie's Angels," "The New Avengers" are escaping this new censorship, perhaps because they have the presence of beautiful young women. Maybe is Starsky and Hutch were two women detectives they would also escape this censorship? It seems to us that the programmes being hit with this censorship are all programmes in which men play the main parts.

A matter for licence holders?

I read in the Herald that Mr Bill Harpur has decided that certain TV shows are too tough for us to look at. Does he not think that some of the sex scenes in what are allowed in, are not more harmful to children than a tough police story?

Would he not think that it might be a good idea to ask the licence holders what they want? After all they are paying the piper, so they should have some say in the matter.

KOJAK

We think that Mr. Harpur has a wrong view altogether of Starsky and Hutch. As David Soul and Paul Glaser have repeatedly stated: "The show is about two people, two human beings, who do have a deep friendship for each other." Joseph Warr, the producer of the show, said: "I picked Starsky and Hutch because the relationship between the two guys was very effective," and we personally think that David Soul and Paul Glaser really bring this across to the viewers.

But, of course, Mr. Harpur must be totally blind not to see this. We would like to know just how many episodes of "Starsky and Hutch" Mr. Harpur has seen? Did he place his judgment on only one episode or did he see the whole series? This is puzzling us very much indeed.

As to the other article on Paul Glaser saying the show was a comic strip and that it was too violent, was it taken into consideration that Paul Glaser only said this because he wants to leave the show and he has made no secret of his real motive which is his eagerness for a movie career. We don't think so.

Maybe Mr. Harpur should have gone to Cannes in 1976 with his eyes open because we are sure he regrets his decision as he turned down a top-rate show which would have got RTE a lot of wanted and needed viewers.

Anyway, we won't give up yet, we still hope that some day Starsky and Hutch might appear on our own home channel and that we do not have to depend on the British BBC channels any more.

One last point we would like to make is that after rejecting "Starsky and Hutch" on the grounds of "too violent," RTE has the gall to serve up the unprecedented repeat of Hawaii Five-O as one paper said, so come on Mr. Harpur, bring something new to our screens.

MISS A. GRACE AND MISS K. PRICE

94 Strandway Rd.,
 Crumlin,
 Dublin 12.

Siting of camps for itinerants

I would like to comment on the letter you printed from Mrs. Muriel Seavers. I am a Finglas man who knows the area and I say that Mrs. Seavers is not living as near to the first itinerant site as she says. The new site is twice as near to our houses as the old site is to her house.

There will always be class distinction all over the world and Finglas is no different. Only this week there was the story about the plan for a new Labour exchange that would not be allowed to be built in the posh area of Dun Laoghaire.

The majority of the itinerants are camped in a field adjacent to the private houses area which so happens to be where the priests of the parish live. They went to help the itinerants as long as they live well away from their posh area. This is a way of saying, build a second site, but never dream of building it in our posh area.

I agree with Mrs. Seavers about the vandalism, but say it is not the youths of Finglas who own the roaming horses that are always loose. They ride these horses but would not be able to do so if owners tied up their horses at night.

There is never any money for helping the poor of the parish, but money is provided to build itinerants' campsites who are far from being the poor people we are led to believe. I don't mind them being helped, but at the moment they are treated like kings and queens.

COMMON WORKING CLASS
 TAXPAYER.

Want 'Starsky and Hutch'

Regarding your recent story in the Herald on Starsky and Hutch I was most annoyed to read that R.T.E. are trying to stop the programme being shown on our channel. I, like some, have piped television and can see the programme on other channels, but there are some girls, like myself, who adore Starsky and Hutch, so please is there no way the programme could be shown on R.T.E.?

MARIE HUGHES
 551 Carnough Rd.,
 Cabra West, 7.