

# CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  November/December 2004

## American Television: Marketing Violence to Our Children

Since the introduction of television in the 1950s, more than 3,500 research studies have demonstrated a clear connection between exposure to media violence and aggressive attitudes, values, and behaviors, especially in children. At the Congressional Public Health Summit in July 2000, the leading medical institutions in this country issued a joint statement on the negative impact of entertainment violence on children. These groups all agreed that viewing entertainment violence has several measurable negative effects on children:

1) "Children who see a lot of violence are more likely to view violence as an effective way of settling conflicts. Children exposed to violence are more likely to assume that acts of violence are acceptable behavior." 2) "Viewing violence can lead to emotional desensitization towards violence in real life. It can decrease the likelihood that one will take action on behalf of a victim when violence occurs." 3) "Entertainment violence feeds a perception that the world is a violent and mean place. Viewing violence increases fear of becoming a victim of violence with a resultant increase in self protective behaviors and mistrust in others." 4) "Viewing violence may lead to real life violence. Children exposed to violent programming at a young age have a higher tendency for violent and aggressive behavior later in life than children who are not so exposed."<sup>1</sup>

American children are immersed in electronic and interactive media every day. One of the most comprehensive national public studies examining the media use of young people ages 2-18 found that one-third of children watch from three to more than five hours of TV in a typical day. Thirty-two percent of 2-7 year-olds have a TV in their bedroom, 16% a VCR, and 13% a video game player. Parents report that their children in this age group spend an average of more than three hours (3:09) watching TV every day. Among 8-18 year-olds, 65% of these children have TVs in their bedrooms, 30% with cable/satellite TV, 36% a VCR, and 45% a video game player. Almost half (49%) of all young people have no rules about how much or what kind of TV they can watch. Among those 8 and older, 61% have no rules about watching TV in their homes and report that 95% of the time they are not with their parents while watching TV. Parents of 2-7 year-olds report that 81% of the time they are busy doing something else while their children are watching TV.<sup>2</sup>

Even children under the age of two are highly exposed to TV and other screen media. In a typical day, 68% of all children under two use screen media, spending an average of over two hours in front of a screen daily. More than one-quarter (26%) have a TV in their bedroom.<sup>3</sup> Yet the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under two not watch any television.<sup>4</sup>

By far the most alarming results on the effects of TV violence were found by the National Television Violence Study (NTVS), a three-year landmark study (1994-1997) conducted by media researchers at four universities to inform policymakers and the entertainment industry about the way in which violence is shown on television. The study identified a range of contextual features that determine whether a portrayal of violence may be harmful to viewers. Specifically, a portrayal

that poses a high risk for the learning of aggressive attitudes and behaviors features an attractive character engaging in aggression that seems realistic and morally justified, goes unpunished (no remorse, criticism, or penalty) or is rewarded, and results in minimal consequences for the victim (no visible harm or pain). The effects of such a portrayal are even more high-risk when the violent portrayal occurs within a humorous context.<sup>5</sup>

NTVS's content analysis of televised programming indicated that 60% of all TV programs contain violence. The typical violent program featured at least six violent interactions per hour. Much of TV violence is "glamorized," "sanitized," and "trivialized" with little or no mention of any anti-violence message. Forty percent of violent incidents on TV are perpetrated by attractive role models. No remorse, criticism, or penalty is shown in 71% of violent scenes. About half of the violent incidents on TV show no pain or physical harm to the victim. Violence is portrayed as humorous in 40% of violent scenes and less than 5% of violent programs include any anti-violence message.<sup>5</sup>

*Most disturbing is the finding that children's programs contain more high-risk portrayals of violence that teach aggression than any other TV genre, across all times of the day, from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.* For children under 7, high-risk portrayals of violence are found most often in cartoons featuring heroes perpetrating justified violence that goes unpunished and results in minimal harm to the victim. While older children are likely to understand cartoon depictions of violence as unrealistic, such content becomes more problematic for younger viewers. Children under 7 are especially at risk due to their developmentally limited ability to distinguish fantasy from reality. Younger viewers are likely to perceive fantasy and cartoon violence as realistic and cannot easily disregard fantasy violence as unreal. Thus, young children are particularly vulnerable to imitating and learning aggressive attitudes and behaviors from fantasy portrayals of violence in cartoons. In addition, they have difficulty connecting events in the plot when events do not occur within the same scene. Punishment or negative consequences must occur in the same scene in order for a younger viewer to associate it with the original violent act.<sup>5</sup>

Given what years of research—literally thousands of studies—informs us about the effects of media violence on our children, we must ask ourselves, why are we as a society marketing violence to our children? American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education member Dr. Michael Rich points out, "The young people of this country drink in media, all day, every day. What would we do if we discovered that the water our children drank was full of factors toxic to their physical and mental health? The question for consumers and producers of media is simple: in what kind of environment do we want our children to grow up?"<sup>6</sup>

Televised entertainment violence is clearly a serious public health issue for our nation's children. Millions of dollars are spent each year in funding violence prevention efforts while our children steadily consume a diet fat with aggression and violence: TV, movies, DVDs, CDs, computers,

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video games, and commercialized toys. Yet where is the logic in expecting our children, indeed our whole society, to be kind, compassionate, peace-loving people when we constantly gorge and infect ourselves with the sights and sounds of anger and violence? The more of it we consume, the greater our appetite grows, and the more money we spend on attempting to contain an appetite of trauma that is out-of-control.

Too often our society blames parents for violent tragedies such as the Columbine High School shootings in 1999. We call the children who commit such violent acts “freaks” and ask, where were the parents? The burden of responsibility for monitoring the exposure of our children to harmful and dangerous influences is unrealistically placed on parents. Of course parents have a responsibility to protect and socialize their children, *but parents cannot do it alone.*

The Advisory Council to the NTVS spoke to a commonly held attitude that seems to perplex our American culture: “The Council recognizes the difficulty of balancing the best interest of children in the audience against the best interests of a society that guarantees freedom of expression to all.”<sup>6</sup> Should there be balance? Aren’t we really talking about the best interests of children vs. the best interests of adults? Why do we expect parents to put the best interests of their children’s well-being regularly above their own, but not our collective culture?

Children are highly impressionable by virtue of their immature and incomplete developmental status. We call them the “formative years” for a reason. “*If one 30-second television commercial can sell a bar of soap, what do you think the 14,000 murders that occur during prime time in one television season are selling?*”<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the best advice for all of us is to learn to turn the TV off and to “turn on” to more relationships within our families.

#### Elaina Riley, LISW

*Elaina Riley holds a master of social work degree from the University of Iowa. Elaina provides counseling to children and adolescents in the Center’s C.O.O.L. program.*

<sup>1</sup> Joint statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children, Congressional Public Health Summit. (2000, July 26). Retrieved October 2, 2004, from the American Academy of Pediatrics, Media Matters Web site: <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/jstmtEVC.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Rideout, V.J., Foehr, U.G., Roberts, D.F., & Brodie, M. (November, 1999). Kids and Media at the New Millennium: A Comprehensive National Analysis of Children’s Media Use. Retrieved October 4, 2004, from the Kaiser Family Foundation, Program for the Study of Entertainment Media and Health Web site: <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=13265>

<sup>3</sup> Rideout, V.J., Vandewater, E.A., & Wartella, E.A. (2003, October 28). Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers. Retrieved October 4, 2004, from the Kaiser Family Foundation, Program for the Study of Entertainment Media and Health Web site: <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=22754>

<sup>4</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education. (2001, February). Children, Adolescents, and Television [Electronic version]. *Pediatrics*, 107(2), 423-426.

<sup>5</sup> Federman, J., ed. (1998). *National Television Violence Study, Vol. 3*. Retrieved on October 4, 2004, from University of California, Santa Barbara, Center for Communication and Social Policy Web site: <http://www.ccs.ucsb.edu/execsum.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Rich, M. (2000, July 26). Public Health Summit on Entertainment Violence. Retrieved October 2, 2004, from The American Academy of Pediatrics, Media Matters Web site: <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/rich-mediaviolence.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> DeBenedittis, P., & McCannon, B. (n.d.). Television Violence and Our Kids. Retrieved October 4, 2004, from [http://www.medialiteracy.net/pdfs/tv\\_violence.pdf](http://www.medialiteracy.net/pdfs/tv_violence.pdf)

## C.O.O.L. Corner

Children Overcoming the Obstacles of Life

### TURN OFF the ELECTRONICS and TURN ON RELATIONSHIPS!!!

- ▶ Limit television viewing to 1 – 2 hours daily. Do not allow children younger than two years of age to watch television.
- ▶ Establish healthy television viewing habits in pre-school years.
  - ▶ Programs should be geared to the age of the child.
  - ▶ Programs should be nonviolent and educationally oriented, such as programs that reinforce communication and pro-social skills.
- ▶ Use pre-recorded programs if there is nothing appropriate on television at a given time.
- ▶ Watch television with your children and evaluate the shows together to find out how your children are interpreting what they see and to help clarify misinterpretations.
- ▶ Encourage other activities, such as reading, playing outside, creating with all sorts of materials, helping in the kitchen or with other chores, playing structured games.
- ▶ Talk with other parents. Support each other in forming constructive limits on television viewing.

## Warm Reception for Autism Expert

The *Autism ~ Hope and Healing* presentation by James Murphy, D.O., and Kari Hallweg, P.A., of Cornerstone Progressive Health out of Omaha, NE, drew an enthusiastic crowd of 110. The evening of September 21<sup>st</sup> found a mix of clinicians and parents of autistic children gathered in the new spacious facilities at Plymouth Congregational Church for a presentation that included extensive information on an integrative approach to treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders. Dr. Murphy discussed how he incorporates nutrition, homeopathy, osteopathy, as well as environmental and biochemical considerations into his approach to this disorder. Comments from those who attended included “It is so difficult to always be going by trial



Kari Hallweg, PA, and Dr. James Murphy with Grace Percival, C.O.O.L. counselor

and error, while time passes by.” “Dr. Murphy seemed hopeful that a lot of the problems could be resolved. His enthusiasm was wonderful.” “The material presented was eye-opening.”

## Educational Events for the Community

The Center is once again sponsoring free community education events this fall to explore the variety of complementary therapies available in the Des Moines community. The fall series is focusing on *Health, Healing, and Other Mysteries*. The events are free, but please call or e-mail the Center to let us know you will be attending or to obtain further information (274-4006 or [info@dmpcc.org](mailto:info@dmpcc.org)). These events are made possible through a grant from the Community Innovation Fund of the Greater Des Moines Community Foundation.

**Tuesday, November 9, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.**

**Kathy Adams, A.R.N.P.**

*Integrative Imagery: Opening to Inner Wisdom*

Integrative Imagery is a potent vehicle for opening to our inner wisdom and realizing our innate healing potential. During this session, Kathy Adams will explore several applications of imagery for health promotion and spiritual growth and will give participants an opportunity to personally experience imagery.

Kathy Adams has more than 25 years of professional nursing experience. She is currently a psychiatric nurse practitioner at Broadlawns Medical Center. Kathy is certified in integrative imagery through the Beyond Ordinary Nursing program sponsored by the AHNA. This event will take place in the Burling Room at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, 4126 Ingersoll Avenue, Des Moines.

**Tuesday, December 7, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.**

**Cindy Chicoine, A.C.S.W., L.I.S.W., L.M.T.**

*Labyrinth Walks: Journeying into the Sacred Center*

During this session, Cindy Chicoine will share information about the labyrinth and how it can support our health, well-being, and spiritual search. A labyrinth is an ancient symbol of spiritual seekers, bringing together bodily movement and the journey to our spiritual depths. An opportunity to walk a canvas labyrinth path will be provided at the end of the session.

Cindy Chicoine is a licensed clinical social worker and a licensed massage therapist. She has over 25 years experience in supporting others in their healing. Cindy has a private healing arts practice in Des Moines. This event will take place at the College of Massage and Healing Arts, 3601 Douglas Avenue, Des Moines.



MANifest is a program for men facilitated by male counselors, built around weekend retreats and Saturday workshops. MANifest is for men of all ages and from every walk of life. Lowell Houts, D.Min., and Mike Sears, Ed.D., facilitate all MANifest programs.

### Men and Sex ~ November 6, 2004

Saturday, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Henry David Thoreau once said, "I lose my respect for the man who will make a coarse jest about sex, but when asked to speak seriously on the subject remains silent." Gym classes, locker rooms, and maybe an extremely awkward "birds and the bees" talk with a parent are the sum of most male experience with sexual discourse growing up. The "Men and Sex" workshop will provide an opportunity for men to explore the sexual/emotional connection and enhance their understanding of themselves as sexual human beings. The cost of the workshop is \$50 (includes lunch). Please call the Center to pre-register.

### Male/Female Communication ~ January 15, 2005

Saturday, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Communication is the key to successful relationships. Men and women often perceive the world quite differently and their styles of processing and communicating information reflect these differences. "Male/Female Communication" workshop will raise participants' awareness of male/female communication styles and equip participants to understand and respond more clearly to the significant women in their lives. The cost of the workshop is \$50 (includes lunch). Please call the Center to pre-register.

Look for more information about these workshop or the facilitators on our website, [www.dmpcc.org/support/support.html](http://www.dmpcc.org/support/support.html).

**Save This Date!**

**Friday, February 25, 2005**

**Effectiveness in Ministry: Fueling the Fire**

Workshop for clergy, chaplains, lay ministers, and caregivers

## Object Relations Theory in Clinical Practice

Object relations theory provides a bridge between individual psychodynamic and systemic ways of understanding the problems people bring to psychotherapists. This makes it a valuable tool for adding depth and breadth to an understanding of personality development and the complexity of human interactions in couples, families, and larger organizations.

This seminar will explore personality development from an object relations perspective with emphasis given to utilizing this theory in clinical practice. Class presentations, reading assignments, and examples of case material provided by the instructor and class members will provide the material for discussion.

**DATES:** December 10, 2004 –  
March 4, 2005

**TIME:** Fridays, 8:30-9:45 a.m.

**LOCATION:** Classes will be held in  
the seminar room at  
Des Moines Pastoral  
Counseling Center  
550-39th Street, Suite 100,  
Des Moines, IA 50312

**COST:** \$200.00

**REGISTRATION DEADLINE:**

November 29, 2004

**THE INSTRUCTOR:**

J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D., is director of professional education at Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center and Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Behavioral Medicine at Des Moines University. He is a licensed clinical psychologist, pastoral counselor, and marriage and family therapist. In addition to his clinical practice at the Center, Dr. Means is the author of *Trauma & Evil: Healing the Wounded Soul* published by Fortress Press.

*The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center is an Iowa Board of Social Work Examiners approved provider #0087 and Iowa Board of Behavioral Science Examiners approved provider #AS98-13. This course is approved for 12.5 hours of continuing education credit. To register, call or e-mail the Center (515) 274-4006 or [info@dmpcc.org](mailto:info@dmpcc.org).*

## New Staff at the Center: Angela Clark-Hanify, M.A.



We are pleased to announce the addition of Angela Clark-Hanify, M.A., to the Center staff. Angela is a licensed mental health counselor who will be working with adults and adolescents. She practices psychotherapy from a variety of theoretical perspectives, but most commonly from the Bowenian and Existential theories. Depression, anxiety, grief, HIV/AIDS, sexual orientation, low sexual-desire, personal growth, family of origin, acculturation, self-injury, and social acceptance are some of her special interests. In addition she is very comfortable working with Latino and Bosnian populations.

Angela has a master of arts in Mental Health Counseling from the University of Northern Iowa. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Wyoming. She is a member of the American Counseling Association and is a Nationally Credited Counselor.

## Holiday Gifting

Making a gift to the Center puts care and compassion at the core of your holiday giving.

A holiday gift with real thought would be to remember or honor those on your gift list through a memorial or tribute gift to the Center. Making such a gift extends your care and esteem far deeper than material objects.

Any gift to the Center – memorial, tribute, or outright contribution – would benefit those less fortunate that may be having a difficult time emotionally at the holidays. Call Kathleen Murrin at the Center to help with gifting at the holidays (274-4006).

## Gift Certificates with Thoughtful Purpose for the Holidays

Are you beginning to think about holiday gift giving? Are you looking for a unique gift with purpose and meaning for some special persons in your life? Consider the gift of relaxation, peace, and health promotion through Healing Touch. Gift certificates are available through the Center. Contact Kathy Reardon, R.N., M.S., Certified Healing Touch Practitioner (274-4006).

[www.dmpcc.org](http://www.dmpcc.org)

Visit the Center's website for more information on the Center's counseling services and staff, special events and classes.

## CONNECTING

is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, interfaith, not-for-profit organization. For over 30 years, the Center has been providing counseling and educational services to adults, families, adolescents, and children for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in West Des Moines, Altoona, Ankeny, and Urbandale.  
Editor: Kathleen Murrin

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