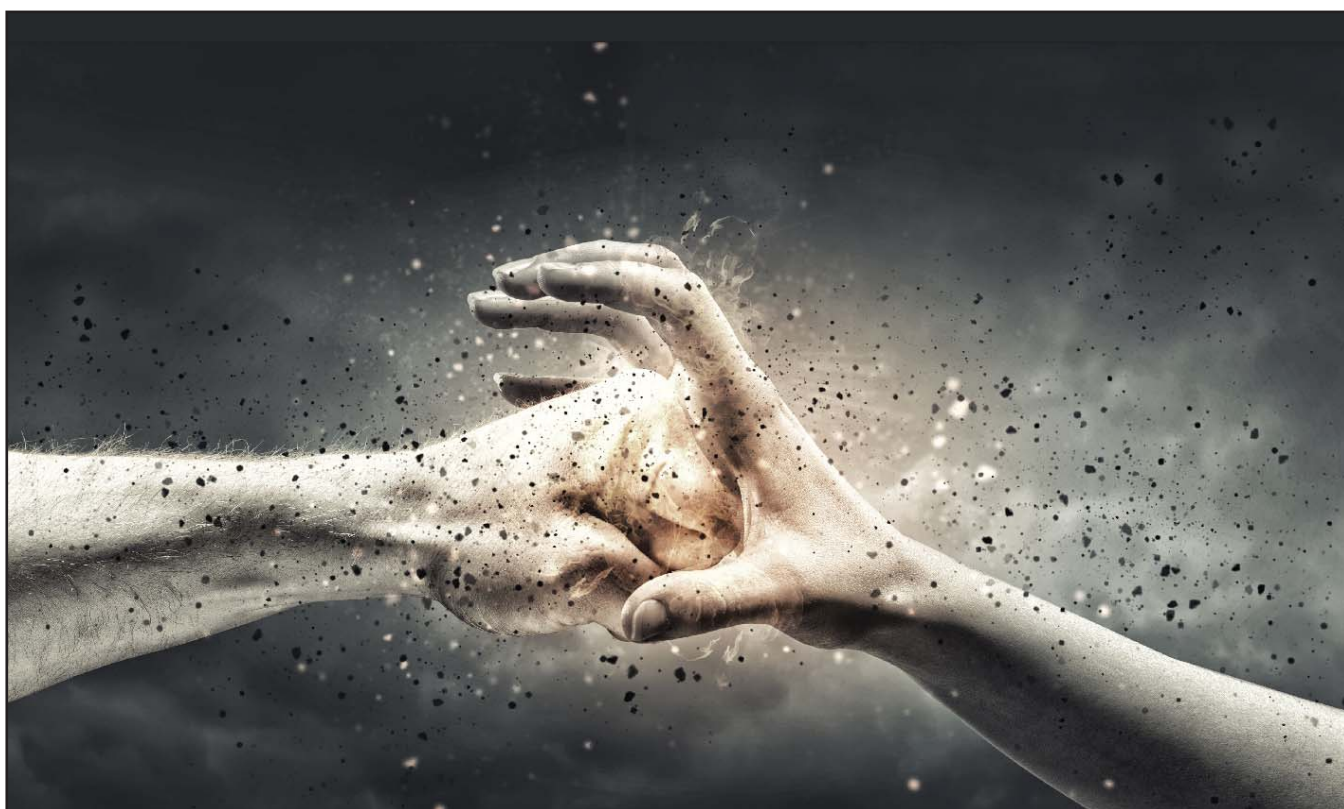




“A DRESS REHEARSAL FOR TRAGEDY”



Violence, Gun Violence, and TV Content Ratings on Prime-Time Broadcast Television

Parents Television Council
Mini-Study Released
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INTRODUCTION

On Wednesday, February 14, 2018, at Marjory Stoneman Davis High School in Parkland, Florida, a young gunman murdered 17 students and wounded 14 more in what, sadly, is only the most recent of the school and other violent shootings that have plagued our nation in recent years.

This shooting, together with other high-profile mass shootings like those at Las Vegas, Sutherland Springs, San Bernardino, Virginia Tech, Columbine, and others have resulted in widespread public debate about gun ownership and increased regulation of such ownership; increased enforcement of current gun ownership laws; and about mental illness, including how those who suffer from it can be prevented from harming others.



And finally, at long last, there is also an increase in debate, or at least increased public dialogue, about graphic violence in entertainment, and the effect such violence may have on consumers of media, particularly children and teens. As we face a broader culture of violence in America, the question arises: what is the entertainment industry doing to color that dialogue?

The answer is simply this: Hollywood, and particularly the television industry, is offering America's children a nightly blueprint, or dress rehearsal, for the violence that is committed in the nation's school halls with troubling frequency. Hollywood stands at the



very nadir of hypocrisy: so many voices in Hollywood, from actors to writers to producers, loudly condemn gun violence; but are unwilling to condemn their own industry for promoting a culture of violence.

It is unquestionable that media violence influences viewers, particularly children and teens. In addition to the many

individual studies that identify the influence of violent media on children, in the year 2000, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, American Psychological Association, American Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Psychiatric Association issued a joint statement declaring that “reports from the Surgeon General’s office, the National Institute of Mental Health, and numerous studies conducted by leading figures within our medical and public health organizations point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children. The conclusion of the public health community, based on over 30 years of research, is that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children.”

And increasingly, greater amounts of media violence are accessible to younger children. The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania released a study, published in the December 2013 issue of *Pediatrics*, which found that gun violence in the top-grossing PG-13 movies exceeded the amount of gun violence in the top-grossing R-rated movies – thus subjecting children and teens to more gun violence than was found in films restricted solely to adults.

The Parents Television Council has researched the volume and degree of violence on television a number of times; and has now reported twice after the slaughter of innocent children inside their schoolhouse. In the wake of the tragic school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, then-Vice President Joe Biden met with entertainment industry executives to discuss the issue of media violence and the role it plays in tragic, real-life violence. The industry claimed they act responsibly, pointing to the existence of the V-chip and TV content ratings as proof that parents had all the “tools” necessary to protect their children from graphically violent and harmful program content. To test the industry’s veracity, the PTC recorded and analyzed every program on prime-time broadcast television for a one-month period from January 11-February 11, 2013, following the industry’s meeting with the Vice President, in order to monitor just how responsibly the industry was behaving, and to assess the effectiveness of parental tools.

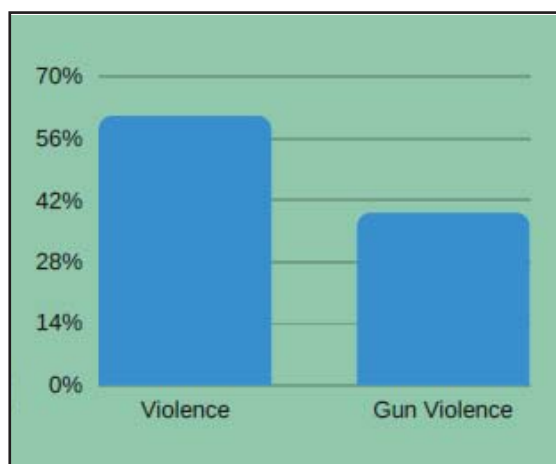


PTC research found that nearly half the shows in the study period contained violence; nearly a third contained violence and guns; and every single program that contained

violence or gun violence during the study period was deemed to be appropriate for children aged fourteen or younger.

Recently, in the wake of the October 2017 mass shooting in Las Vegas, the PTC replicated our previous study, to see whether the situation had changed in the past five years. In this study, we examined the November 2017 “sweeps” period for the same factors as the prior 2013 study. The results were striking:

- In 2013, there were a total of 392 episodes of programming in the study period; in 2017, there were 287.
- In 2013, almost half (49%) of the shows in the study period contained violence; in 2017, well over half (61%) contained violence.
- In 2013, almost a third (30%) of the programs contained violence and guns; in 2017, over a third (39%) did.
- In 2013, 7% of the shows studied contained violence, but no “V”-descriptor in their content rating (necessary to screen out violence with the V-chip); in 2017, double that amount (14.6%) did.
- In 2013, there were a total of 934 violent scenes in the study period; in 2017, there were 1,080.



So, in 2017, the total number of violent incidents in one month of television, the percentage of programs containing violence, the percentage of programs containing violence and guns, and the percentage of violent programs with ratings that didn't adequately reflect the program's level of violence, all increased – in spite of the fact that ***there were fewer episodes of entertainment programming aired in the study period in 2017 than in 2013.***

Due to the 2017 study period falling mostly during November, when the World Series, the beginning of the NFL football season, and several awards shows took airtime away from regularly-scheduled comedy, drama, and reality series, fewer episodes of

entertainment programming aired than in the 2013 study period, which ran from mid-January to mid-February.

Our findings are deeply troubling. In fact they demonstrate that forces in Hollywood are doing the very opposite of what is “responsible” when it comes to the marketing and distribution of violent media. Violence and gun violence are increasing proportionally on the publicly owned airwaves at times when children are likely to be watching; and that violent programming is being increasingly marketed as appropriate for children to consume.

METHODOLOGY

PTC Entertainment Analysts examined all original prime-time broadcast programming airing between October 26 and November 22, 2017 (the “November sweeps” period). Sporting events, news programming, and awards shows were not included. Counted were:

- Total # hours original entertainment programming
- Total # episodes
- Total # episodes containing violence
- Total # of episodes where violence occurred, but the episode’s content rating did not contain a “V” descriptor
- Total # of violent scenes
- Total # of scenes in which guns were present
- Total # of scenes of gun violence (in which guns were present and fired at human beings)

In counting violence, scenes of medical procedures, such as surgery, were not counted. “Total # scenes guns present” included scenes where guns were shown or brandished, but not fired (e.g., soldiers carrying their weapons, or police officers preparing to enter a dangerous area with guns drawn), or where they were fired, but with no intention of harming living beings (e.g., soldiers doing target practice at a gun range), in addition to scenes of guns being fired with the intention of inflicting harm. “Total # scenes gun violence” includes all scenes where guns were fired at human beings with the intention of the target being injured or killed.

KEY FINDINGS

During the November 2017 “sweeps” period, there were a total of 287 original episodes that aired on the broadcast networks in prime-time. Of those 287 episodes, 175, or almost 61%, contained some form of violence, and 112 episodes, or 39%, contained violence and guns.

Within the 175 episodes that included violence and aired in the November 2017 “sweeps” period, there were 1,080 scenes containing violence.

Of those 1,080 scenes of violence, there were 463 scenes that included guns. Therefore, almost 43% of violent scenes included guns.

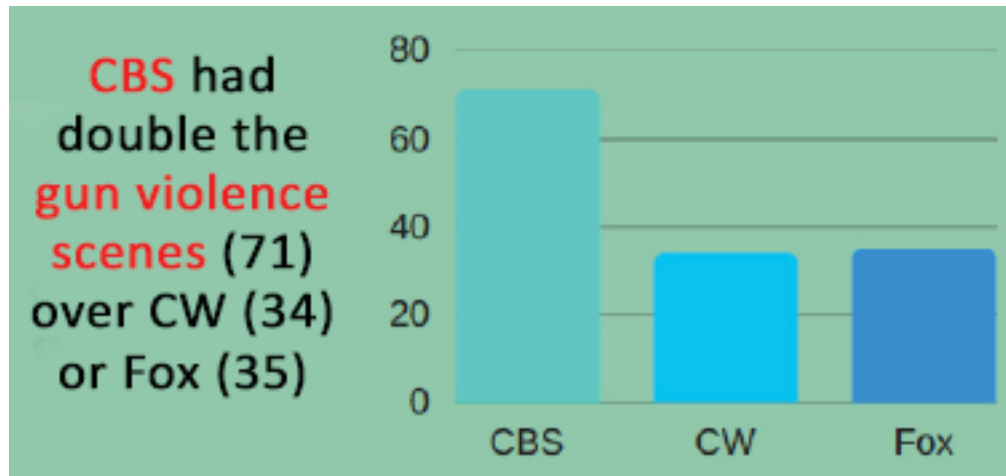
Of the 1,080 scenes of violence, 183 scenes, or 17%, included guns being used to inflict harm on others; but frequently, a single *scene* of “gun violence” included multiple *instances* of people being shot. Thus, these numbers actually **understate** the number of victims of gun violence on prime-time broadcast TV.



The network with by far the most violent programming was CBS, with 386 scenes of violence in the “sweeps” period -- over than a hundred more than the next most violent network, Fox, with 254. Coming in third was the CW with 184 scenes of violence. (This amount of violence is notable, as the CW airs only two hours of prime-time programming per weeknight and none on weekends, unlike the other four networks.)

NBC and ABC programming contained less violence than the other networks in 2017; but CBS, NBC, and Fox programs contained substantially more violence in 2017 than they did in 2013.

CBS also had the most scenes of gun violence, involving human beings injured or killed by gunfire. CBS' 71 scenes of gun violence were double the number on most other networks, which had around 35 (NBC 37, Fox 35, CW 34) except for ABC, which had only six. This can be explained by CBS' heavy schedule of crime procedurals, and ABC's greater emphasis on family-themed comedies.



Every program was rated TV-PG or TV-14, meaning that the television networks determined every single program to be appropriate for a child aged 14 or younger. The “V” content descriptor was absent on almost a quarter (24%) of the shows that contained violence.

Of particular concern was the lack of “V” descriptors, denoting violence, in the content rating of some networks. Of the instances where violence was present but no “V” descriptor was used, on ABC, NBC and Fox, such instances occurred primarily on comedies (where the violence was usually mild); and in no case on any of those networks was a gun fired where no “V” descriptor was present.

On CBS, it was a different story. On CBS, multiple episodes in which gun violence against people occurred – including action series *SEAL TEAM*, *SWAT*, *NCIS: Los Angeles*, and *Scorpion* -- failed to carry a “V” descriptor, amounting to 18% of the network's total number of episodes containing violence.

The CW was, by far, the worst in terms of rating violent content appropriately. Fully half of CW programming containing violence did not carry a “V” descriptor in its content rating. In the November 2017 “sweeps” period, the CW showed episodes of *Supernatural*, *Arrow*, *DC's Legends of Tomorrow*, and *The Flash*, each of which contained multiple scenes of gun violence, yet which did not have a “V” descriptor in its content

rating. The amount of improperly-rated violence on the CW is of particular concern, as CW programming is explicitly targeted at teenage and young adult audiences. Both CBS and CW also were substantially worse in accurately rating their violent programs in 2017; while in 2013, neither network aired violent programming without a “V” descriptor, in 2017 both did.

Comparing the results of the current 2017 study with those of the one in 2013, the amount of violence on prime-time broadcast TV, the number of episodes containing violence, the number of episodes containing guns and violence, and the number of episodes containing violence, but on which the “V” descriptor was not used, all increased – even as the number of episodes analyzed decreased.



Table 1**Violence, Gun Violence and V-Descriptors***November 2017 'sweeps' (October 26-November 22, 2017)*

Network	Total # Episodes w/ Violence & Guns	# Episodes Rated PG	#Episodes Rated 14	"V"-des. Present	"V"-desc. Not Present
ABC	11	6	5	9	2
CBS	38	9	29	32	6
NBC	14	0	14	14	0
Fox	30	4	26	29	1
CW	19	2	17	13	6
TOTALS	112	20	91	96	15

Table 2**Ratings on Episodes Containing Gun Violence***November 2017 'sweeps' (October 26-November 22, 2017)*

Network	Total # Hours	Total # Episodes	Total # Episodes Containing Violence (W/Guns)	Total # Episodes Violence (W/ No "V"- desc)	Total # Violent Scenes	Total # Scenes Guns Present	Total # Scenes Gun Violence
ABC	60	66	27 (11)	8	77	20	6
CBS	69	83	50 (38)	13	386	177	71
NBC	51	49	26 (14)	5	179	107	37
Fox	39	49	42 (30)	1	254	84	35
CW	40	40	30 (19)	15	184	75	34
TOTALS	259	287	175 (112)	42	1080	463	183

Table 3**Violence, Gun Violence, and V-Descriptoirs***November 2017 'sweeps' (October 26-November 22, 2017)*

(Highlighted numbers denote increase in 2017)

Network	Year	Total # Episodes	Total # Episodes W/ Violence & Guns	Total # Episodes Violence W/ No "V"-desc.	Total # Violent Scenes	Total #Scenes Gun Violence
ABC	2013	91	27	15	98	97
	2017	66	11	8	77	6
CBS	2013	92	57	0	322	131
	2017	83	38	13	386	71
NBC	2013	82	10	11	118	13
	2017	49	14	5	179	37
Fox	2013	83	24	3	188	44
	2017	49	30	1	254	35
CW	2013	44	21	0	208	80
	2017	40	19	15	184	34
	2013	392	121	29	934	305

CONCLUSION

In the programming it shows during prime time, when children are most likely to be in the viewing audience, the broadcast television networks offer America’s teenagers and children a nightly “dress rehearsal” of violent acts. Children are being fed a steady diet of graphic TV violence – and, in particular, bloody gun violence – that is being marketed to them by the entertainment industry. And the most diligent of parents are being led to believe that the violent programming is appropriate for young viewers.

The conclusion is clear and unavoidable:

On a nightly basis, the publicly-owned airwaves are a toxic environment awash with depictions of violence and gun violence.

Despite the spate of tragic events in recent years, violence and gun violence on prime-time broadcast television have actually increased proportionally since the horrific shootings at Newtown five years ago. And that is not even taking into account the far greater violence routinely visible on cable, satellite, and internet streaming offerings, which typically are far more heavily-laden with violent content. As a result, the problem of television violence is even greater than this report suggests.

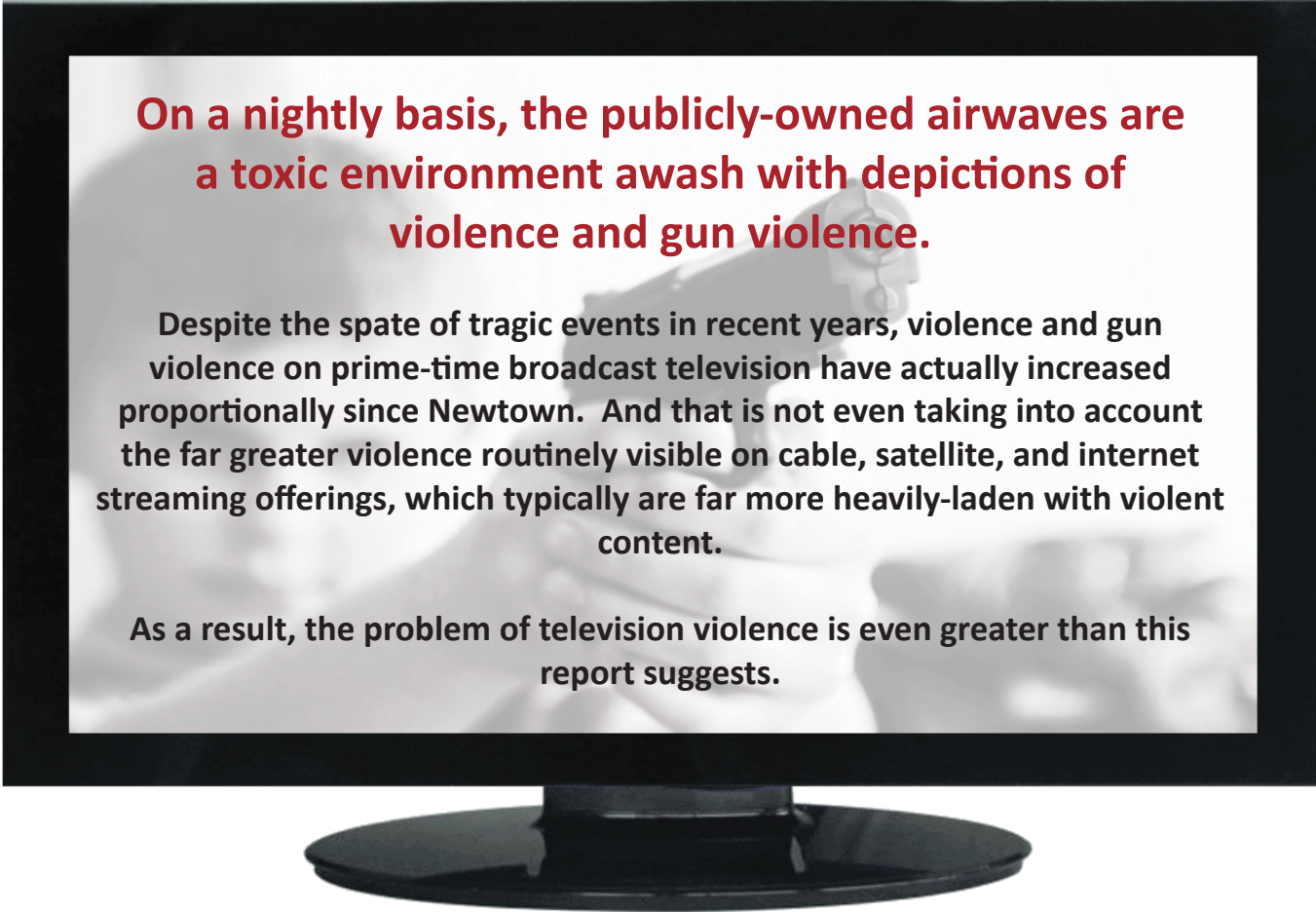
Because of the ever-increasing violence on broadcast television, and because it is marketed – and rated – as safe for children, the Parents Television Council is calling for two major changes in the American media: a reduction of graphic violence and gun violence on television; and a genuine reform of the TV content ratings system.

The PTC has repeatedly called on the governing body for of TV content ratings system – *the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board* – to make the TV ratings system more accurate, consistent, transparent and publicly accountable; but our calls have fallen on the very same deaf ears that control the system and game it to their advantage. TV content ratings



are determined by each respective network, and the system's oversight is administered entirely by the same people who assign inaccurate content ratings to begin with, it is impossible for the system to protect children as it was intended. The TV content ratings system needs to be overhauled so it truly serves the needs of parents and families, and not to provide cover for the industry.

Hollywood continues to be blind to the media culture they have created -- a media culture awash in blood, guns, and gore. But as the tragedies of Parkland, Newtown, and more show, it is long past time for the networks to open their eyes, see what they have wrought, and work to reform it.



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