

CLEAR VIEW

— CONSULTING —

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Children, Adolescents and the Media: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

- I. American children spend inordinate amounts of time interacting with pop/media culture primarily through their screen media devices.
- II. *What influence does media culture have on our children?*
 - A. Not completely responsible for any one problem.
 - B. Our children raised in a multi-device, multi-platform and multi-channel world = anytime, anywhere media.
 - C. Persuasion on such a scale is overwhelming. Media corporations direct competitors for parental control by normalizing certain risky behaviors (Media as “Super Peer”)
 - D. Led to children’s reliance on media for knowledge/guidance rather than parents.
 - E. This has led to “Age Compression” when kids behaving older than they are at earlier ages.
- III. *Media culture’s influence on our children’s use of drugs and alcohol*
 - A. Children’s use of drugs and alcohol complicated to sort out. In addition to media messages is influenced by other factors
 1. Poor self image, poor school performance, family dysfunction, alienation from parents.
 2. Peer influences which are powerful.
 3. Parental influences – also powerful.
 4. Personality – resiliency, temperament, self-control, assertiveness
 - B. Media’s intent on encouraging our children to use drugs and alcohol. Hugely profitable industries that require constant recruitment.
 1. Marlboro Man (1954)/Weekly Reader – sophisticated advertising strategies
 2. 7 myths alcohol advertisers want children to believe.
 3. Cause and Effect vs. Correlation
- IV. *Children as unique audience*
 - A. Children different from adults (less knowledge, experience, more willingness to believe)
 - B. Children different from each other (different ages think and strategize differently)
 - C. Adolescents are different from children (identity formation; increased independence, experimentation, risk taking, importance of peers, puberty)
- V. *What to do?*
 - A. Monitor, control and limit exposure to media. Not always very effective.
 - B. Just say no to all media. Not recommended and won’t work anyway.
 - C. Help nurture “Media Literacy”
 1. Critical thinking skills
 2. Awareness of impact of media on individual’s and society
 3. Understanding of how and why the media system works
- VI. *How to build Media Literacy in your children?*
 - A. Pay attention to and spend time watching and listening with your children.
 - B. Ask open-ended questions to figure out what and how they are thinking.
 - C. Have give and take conversations void of judgment and admonishment.
 - D. Understand you can’t pour the right answer or way of thinking into your children’s head. They must build ideas gradually so may take more than one conversation.
 - E. No one right approach. May have to experiment until crack the communication code.

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Resources

Monitoring the Future Study: Annual data of trends on adolescent drug use.
Funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS): Sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood: Detailed description of existing media regulations and their limitations. www.commercialfreechildhood.org

Defending the Early Years: www.deyproject.org

Media Rating Systems:

TV-www.tvguidelines.org

Movie-www.mpaa.org/ratings/what-each-rating-means

Ratings of movies, games, apps, websites, TV programs, books and music –
www.commonensemedia.org

Action Coalition for Media Education: www.acmecoalition.org

Alliance for Childhood: www.allianceforchildhood.org

American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org

American Psychological Association: www.apa.org

“Beyond Remote Controlled Childhood: Teaching Children in the Media Age”--
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

“Media Education: What Parents Can Do” – www.HealthyChildren.org

“The Media Family: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers,
Preschoolers and Their Parents” – Kaiser Family Foundation

ACTION IDEA

Box 11.3

Sample Form Letter to a Broadcaster or Toy Company/Store

You can organize group action by writing a letter similar to this and distributing copies to others to send in too.

Dear **[TV Broadcaster/Toy Company President/Toy Store Manager]**:

I am a teacher of **[your setting]**. I recently **[watched an episode of this program/shopped at this store]**. I found this **[program/toy/ad/etc.]** inappropriate for young children because **[state what offended you and why]**.

As an educator, I am deeply concerned about the escalating influence of media and technology in our country and the role your **[program/product/etc.]** plays in it. I will tell at least ten others about my concerns with your **[program/product/ad]** and urge them to protect children from it.

I hope you share my concerns about promoting the well-being of children. I urge you to play a role in promoting positive media and technology for children in homes, schools, and the wider society by changing what you are doing **[in your program/products/etc.]** and by investing your resources **[in media/technology/toys/etc.]** that promote the healthy development of children.

Sincerely yours,

ACTION IDEA

Box 11.4

Letter to the Editor From a Distressed Parent

Here is a letter to a newspaper editor written by a parent after an unfortunate family movie outing. It provides another example of the kind of issue you or parents can address with local media outlets.

To the Editor:

I recently took my 5-year-old son to see **[name of movie]**. I decided to take him after reading a very favorable review of the movie in your paper in which it was described as "good, clean family fun."

I found the movie neither clean nor fun. There were many violent scenes. The adults in the movie were made to look like fools. And the children exhibited mean-spirited and racist behavior toward others. Throughout, my son kept asking me why the main characters (children) kept doing such mean things.

I have been hearing about more and more studies that show the negative effects media can have on children. Parents are told it is their job to decide what media is appropriate and not appropriate for their children. I try very hard to take this job seriously. I rely on the reviews in your newspaper to help me make decisions. You have let me down. How many other parents were also misled by your review?

I hope that, in the future, you will find reviewers who have the knowledge about children that it takes to review movies with the best interests of children and their parents at heart.

Sincerely yours,

Supporting Legislation for Media Literacy in Schools

Since October 2011, the Massachusetts Legislature has been considering a Media Literacy Bill that would require media literacy to be taught from kindergarten through high school in all Massachusetts public schools. An advocacy group, Massachusetts Media Literacy Consortium (www.massmedialiteracyconsortium.com), proposed the legislation and now works for its passage. At the legislative hearings for the bill, at which many educators, researchers, and advocates testified, I spoke in support of the bill, representing the interests of young children. Here is my testimony:

I am a Professor of Education at Wheelock College in Boston who has spent the past 25 years researching the impact of media and technology on children from birth to 8, and teaching media literacy courses to teachers and parents around the world. I have written eight books, including *Remote Control Childhood*, *Teaching Young Children in Violent Times*, and *So Sexy So Soon*.

Harmful Lessons

Media has transformed childhood. Forty-two percent of children from 0 to 8 have a television in their bedroom (Rideout 2011). Children ages 8 to 18 now spend more time glued to screens than doing anything else but sleeping, and that time continues to increase rapidly (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010). Media is teaching children many social, emotional, and intellectual lessons caring adults do not want them to learn and which children do not have the cognitive abilities to resist (Levin 1998).

1. **Violence.** Starting at very young ages, violence, in both programs and products linked to them, is the common fare for boys. In its Policy Statement on Media Violence, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2009) has concluded that children's exposure to media violence contributes to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, and fear of being harmed. The AAP strongly supports media literacy education for children to counteract the harm being caused by media violence.
2. **Sexualization.** Sexualized behavior and appearance is the common fare in media programming for girls (Levin & Kilbourne 2009). Almost from birth, girls see images that tell them that how they look and what they buy determines their value. This contributes to eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression, and mean-spirited behavior (American Psychological Association 2010).
3. **Commercialization.** Marketing to children through the media is a \$17 billion a year business. Children 2 to 11 see more than 25,000 advertisements per year (Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood 2013a)—many of which promote violence for boys and sexualization for girls. In addition to further escalating harmful lessons about gender roles and how people treat each other, these ads promote an unhealthy focus on buying instead of achievement as the source of success and happiness.

Media Literacy: Right From the Start

By *not* providing media literacy education in our schools, we have given media producers and marketers too much control over today's children's education.

Parents cannot fight the forces of media in their children's lives on their own. They need the help of teachers, who have been trained to promote the optimal development and learning of children and are thereby best suited to counteract the onslaught of today's media.

Children also need the help of schools. Too often they are left to their own devices to make sense of the harmful content they see. Too often as children try to figure out what they see, they are lured away from the other vital lessons schools are responsible to teach, such as literacy and math.

Requiring media literacy in Massachusetts's schools right from the start will make a real difference in children's lives and go a long way to improving their social, emotional, and intellectual well-being.

Thank you for considering this most important bill. I strongly urge you to pass it.