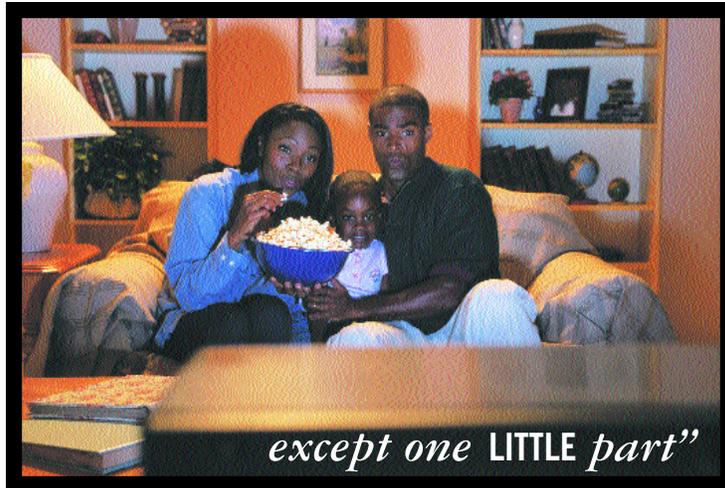


COMMENTARY

“IT’S A GOOD SHOW—



by Glen C. Griffin

“How was the movie?”

“Great—except for one little part.”

“One little part?”

“Well, there was one sex scene, but it only lasted a minute—or so.”

The problem is that “one little part” may effectively teach kids, and others, that it’s okay to play around with sex without bothering to get married.

In movies, sexual content is at an all-time high, and on prime-time television, it has more than tripled in the last ten years. If anyone doubts that movies and TV sell products and ideas, think about the million-dollar Super Bowl ads and the \$37.5 billion sponsors are willing to spend each year for 30- and 60-second TV commercials.¹ Advertisers also pay

large fees for their products to be seen in motion pictures. If these brief exposures didn’t do such a good job of selling products and ideas, sponsors wouldn’t spend so much money on them.

Suppose the hot pizza you ordered arrived with all your favorite toppings—plus a tiny little mouse that had crawled onto it before being popped in the oven. Would you eat this pizza that was perfect except for one little mouse?

And what if someone put just a little date-rape drug into a serving of fat-free frozen yogurt? It doesn’t matter that this

would otherwise have been a healthy dessert if “one little part” was not a scary drug that could fog a person’s brain and wipe out control. Few people would choose to eat something that contained a small dead mouse or a little date-rape drug. Yet many choose to fill their heads, often repeatedly, with movies that have “one little part” that’s disgusting and possibly dangerous.

Years ago a *Wall Street Journal* article explained the effectiveness of repeating brief messages and slogans that people remember for decades, such as “Things

www.screenit.com

This informative movie review web site provides detailed and comprehensive reviews of recent movies and videos. The films or videos are listed alphabetically, and a click of the mouse will display a screen that shows a chart of 15 different categories of possible alerts: Alcohol or Drugs, Blood or Gore, Disrespectful or Bad Attitude, Frightening or Tense Scenes, Guns or Weapons, Imitative Behavior, Jump Scenes, Scary or Tense Music, Inappropriate Music, Profanity, Sex or Nudity, Smoking, Tense Family Scenes, Topics to Talk About, and Violence.

Besides these alerts, a background of the film is given with more details about each of the 15 categories—including descriptions of the sex and nudity, violence, the exact profane language used and its frequency, and an explanation of the imitative behavior. This information and the comments in a section called “Our Word to Parents” makes www.screenit.com an excellent place to check a particular film. Sometimes the information about a film will be reassuring; however, it will often provide good reasons to choose something else to see.

go better with Coke” and “See the USA in your Chevrolet.” Advertising creates familiarity—and familiarity sells. As you think how this effect is multiplied by repetition, keep in mind that teens often see a movie more than once and children often watch favorite videos over and over.

Developmentally, children learn what is acceptable in life by watching the behavior of family members, friends, and others. Sometimes the imitative behavior

children as play “house real that it’s amusing. And sometimes it’s alarming.

Children and adults often imitate the speech patterns someone v speaks dif

ently. Almost without thinking, people may copy dialects, slang, and language idiosyncrasies from other people. And as it is with children’s play and with speech patterns, so it is with other behavior.

Television, movies, and videos bring several sets of new friends into a child’s home. These “friends” have a profound influence in viewers’ lives. Within hours or days, children, teens, and young adults across the country pick up

patterns, expressions, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior trends from television and movie characters. Is it any wonder that children and others copy anger, temper, and violence from television and movie friends? By the time the average teenager finishes high school, he or she has watched 26,000 murders on television—and who knows how many in movies? Is it any wonder there are so many violent copycat crimes in schools?

Professors Brad J. Bushman and L. Rowell Huesmann have summarized overwhelming scientific evidence that television violence has a significant effect on children’s aggressive and violent behavior. They add that “The relationship between TV violence and aggression is about as strong as the relation between smoking and cancer.”³ Just as some soldiers in battle may become desensitized to the horrors of killing and death, children can become desensitized to violence by watching it on the screen. Citing some excellent research, the authors explain that the more violence children see, the more accepting they are

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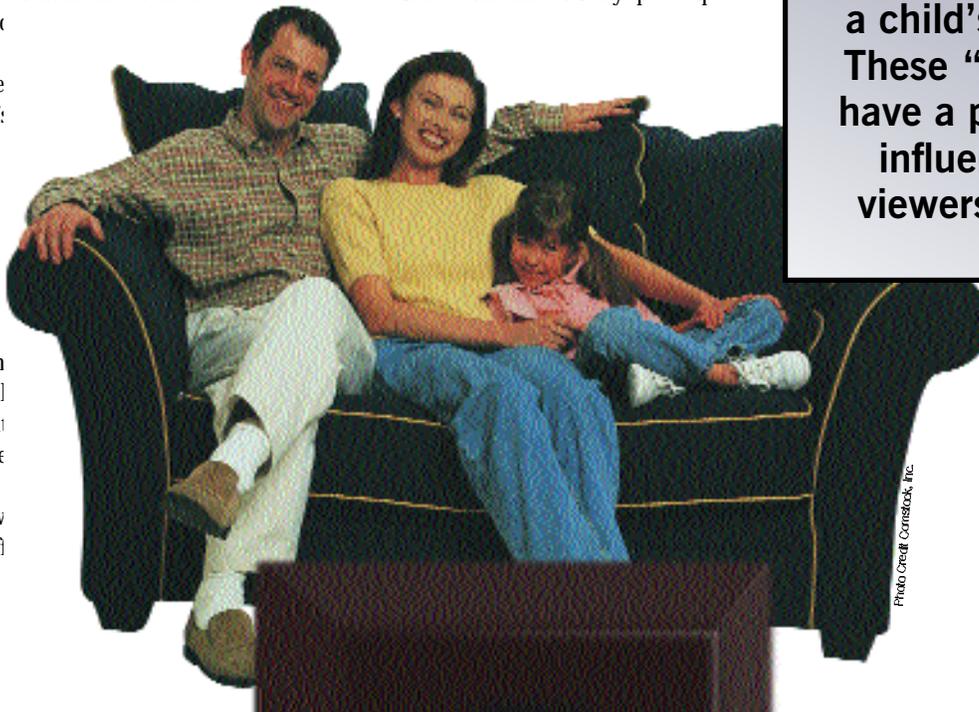


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of aggressive behavior.⁴

And lest one think that on-screen violence can be avoided by choosing G-rated animated films, a recent study by Harvard researchers concludes that “a significant amount of violence exists in animated G-rated feature films.”⁵

A 1992 press release by the American Psychological Association warned, “After review of hundreds of research findings, three major national studies have concluded that heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the significant causes of violence in society.”⁶ This report noted that after more than forty years of research on the link between TV violence and real-life violence, the “scientific debate is over,” adding that “Sexual violence in X- and R-rated videotapes widely available to teenagers have also been shown to cause an increase of male aggression against females.”

More and more popular movies that are otherwise worthwhile contain “one little part” that is not. And since it is so hard to find a movie without gratuitous violence or non-married sex, it’s easy to rationalize that it’s okay to choose a movie that doesn’t have “too much” of these things.

“I can handle it,” a teenager once told me.

“I’m not sure I can,” I answered in all seriousness.

I said this because our memories are likely to store images about sex and violence for a long time. Joseph Fielding Smith said that even though we may have lapses of memory, “In reality we cannot forget anything.”⁷ Randal A. Wright puts it this way: “Think of the best movie you’ve ever seen that had just one bad scene. Now think specifically of what the bad scene was. Can you still recall it or have you totally forgotten the inappropriate scene?”⁸ Chances are that those images are there, ready for instant recall.

When you or I become involved in a story, we are likely to imagine ourselves as a character in that story. Indeed,

escaping from everyday problems while our imaginations play someone else’s exciting role is one reason people enjoy reading stories and seeing shows. When this happens, a person vicariously does what his or her movie character does, good or bad. If a person chooses to relate to a grossly violent hero or heroine in a show, he or she imagines being violent. If

sex”—meaning that it’s under the covers or somewhat obscured, but often leaving little to the imagination.

Another way some movie reviewers give a pass to sexual content is with the code words “brief sex”—as if to say a short length of exposure makes it acceptable. One may wonder “How brief is brief?” while remembering how effective brief

Some helpful, free online resources provide background information about movies and videos so we can choose decent movies and exclude those we want to avoid.

someone watches a passionate bedroom scene, it’s easy to imagine doing what one is seeing. On the other hand, people who identify with a worthy character in an uplifting movie may imagine themselves doing helpful, kind, and good things. Because doing something to do it in real life careful of the role (and our children

Moreover, in when so many movies, and television programs are filled with sex and gratuitous violence, what used to be shocking is becoming more and more accepted. Desensitization of movie reviewers accept non-married cohabitation without hesitation. And many give shows a pass even if there is on-screen sex especially if it’s what the industry calls “simul-

television commercials are in selling products. Another current term that many reviewers use to describe a film’s sexual content is “discreet sex.” In reality, there is no “discreet” sexual immorality.

The standards of decency have



Photo Credit: Corbis/Bettmann, Inc.

and more gross violence, blatant sexual talk, and open sex play have crept into popular TV shows and films with ratings that used to be relatively innocuous.

The generally accepted movie rating system completely misses the point about what is decent. The ratings are also undermined by a major flaw of labeling what's appropriate according to age. From the ratings, one would think a 13-year-old should be able to handle sexual content that is inappropriate for a 12-year-old who is a few days or a month younger. The system's designers must have imagined that when a person reaches the age of 17, magical abilities suddenly appear in the brain making it possible to cope with explicit sex and gruesome violence. This is nonsense. The more you think about it, the more ludicrous it becomes. In reality, if something is

garbage for 8-year-olds, it's garbage for 12-year-olds, 16-year-olds, 18-year-olds—and all of us.¹⁰

Steamy bedroom scenes are always inappropriate—for a person of any age. And to say that watching various levels of sexual intimacies under the covers is appropriate for 13-year-olds, while seeing such activities without covers or clothing is appropriate for 18-year-olds, is the height of intellectual arrogance and

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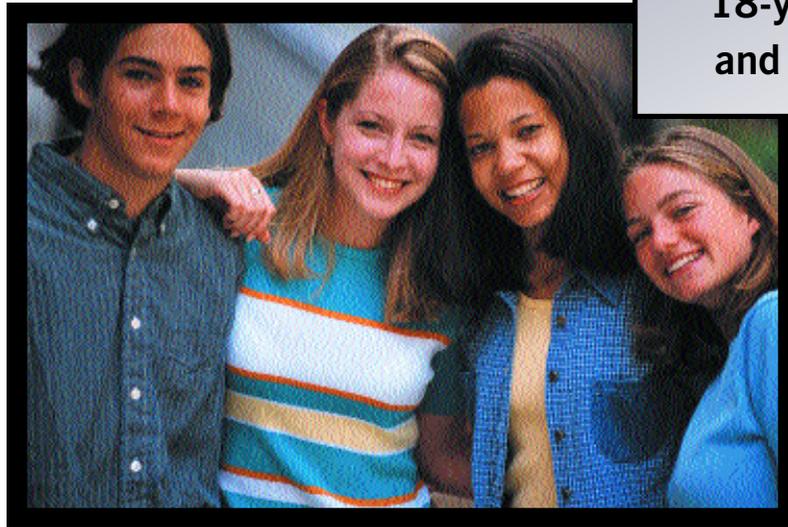


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www.moviepicks.org

This web site is an excellent place to find out about good movies, videos, and TV shows that are not contaminated with sex or gratuitous violence. Suggestions and reviews about current movies and videos that meet a high standard of morality and character building can be found on moviepicks.org—as well as suggestions and commentaries about older films available on video.

Because interests vary, videos are categorized under drama, real stories, comedies, musicals, family, and children. And since the standard of decency is the same for all categories, anyone seeking uplifting entertainment can feel confident that movies, videos, and television programs found on moviepicks.org will be good—noting that language or other problems are mentioned in the commentaries.

Reviews about movies and videos don't appear on this web site if they don't meet a high standard of decency as set by the American Family League because the staff, national advisory board, review teams, and student interns don't want to put gross thoughts in their own minds from reviewing such films.

The [moviepicks](http://moviepicks.org) web site also provides tips about worthwhile programs and outstanding new movies that are upcoming on television.

Information about the American Family League's CAMIE awards for outstanding movies and television programs that reflect Character And Morality In Entertainment can be found at www.CAMIEawards.org.

Note: The author is president of the non-profit American Family League, Inc., which manages the moviepicks.org web site.

poor judgment. Those involved in the movie rating system just don't get it.

A 9-year-old who saw a blockbuster movie, in which teenagers were having sex, reassured her grandfather that the unmarried sex by the teen-age heart throbs was okay because "they loved each other." This is the sad new standard of acceptability that children and teenagers are learning today from seeing non-married sexual encounters in movies and on television.

No wonder so many teenagers, and even younger children, are playing around with sex, sleeping together, and cohabiting. It's time to teach children and teenagers that sex is for marriage and that infatuation and physical attraction are not love. It's time to help them choose uplifting, entertaining, and decent movies instead of ones that are not. Look for uplifting movies that help build character, not weaken it. Good motion pictures can entertain while teaching lessons on overcoming adversity, solving life's problems, and living moral lives.

Obviously, on-screen sexual encounters, with or without clothing or covers, are inappropriate. But so are shows without on-screen sex but whose characters are cohabiting without marriage, reinforcing this mistaken idea. Shows that model cohabiting without marriage, along with inappropriate sex-education that teaches kids anything is acceptable as long as no one gets pregnant, are major contributors to this misguided lifestyle.

So, how can one sort out entertaining and decent movies from those filled with filth? In searching for decent films, some can be eliminated quickly by looking at the title, tag lines, or previews, which often give plenty of clues that a movie is inappropriate. Movie reviews that give a heads-up about films that contain sex, nudity, and violence can help scratch a film from consideration—even when reviewers give the film an enthusiastic endorsement. Photos and descriptions on video and DVD packages can sometimes help exclude a film—but packaging often

doesn't provide assurance that a show is appropriate. Word-of-mouth recommendations are sometimes helpful, but may be misleading unless they come from someone who understands that "one little part" can sell destructive ideas.

Some helpful, free online resources provide background information about movies and videos so we can choose decent movies and exclude those we want to avoid. The web site www.screenit.com provides detailed information about movies and videos that have been produced in the last few years—good and bad.

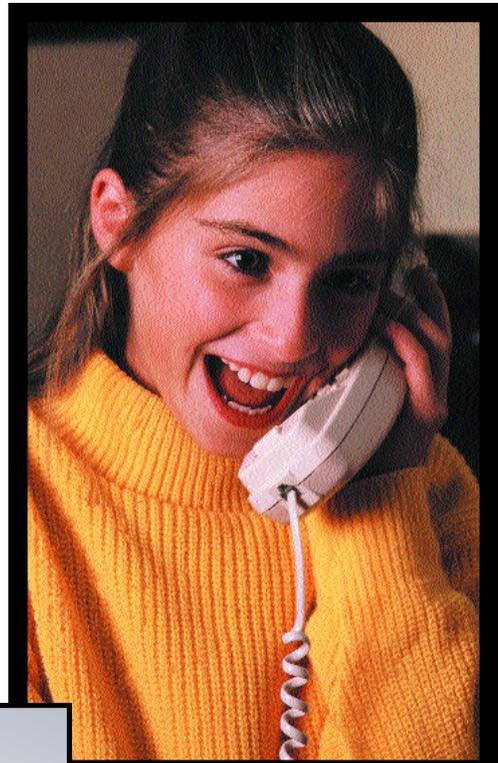


Photo Credit: Comstock, Inc.

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to watch
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but finding
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Another web site, found at www.mediaandthefamily.org rates the level of violence, fear, illegal/harmful, language, nudity, and sexual content in movies, videos, television programs, and video games according to age, using green, amber, and red icons. Parents can find a wealth of information on this site. However, if one's standard is that a show should contain no inappropriate sexual messages, the site's amber warnings about the sexual content of many movies and television shows should more appro-

priately be red warnings—meaning they are not appropriate for teenagers or anyone.

For those who want to find entertaining and decent films without any inappropriate sexual content, www.moviepicks.org is a resource created by the American Family League, Inc. This web site provides suggestions for movies, videos, and television programs that are entertaining and decent, with a high standard of morality that excludes shows where there is cohabiting or non-married sex without consequences.

It's fun to watch good shows—but finding them is time-consuming and difficult. And it's easy to be misled into seeing movies that are supposedly good—except for "one little part" that may be as effective in selling inappropriate behavior as radio and TV spots are in selling products.

The bad news is that there is more sex and violence on screen than ever before—and these shows are filling kids' heads with destructive ideas that can lead to destructive behavior.

Much of the foul language on televi-

sion programs and videos can be filtered out with a TV Guardian profanity filter that works on the closed-caption track to clip out obscenities (for more information go to www.tvguardian.com). Of course, a language filter cannot remove inappropriate visuals and the story lines of many shows are so bad that eliminating the crude words in them is not enough.

Many wonder why edited films that exclude inappropriate scenes are not made available to the public. The technology exists to do this. Already, many DVD releases contain versions of a film in several languages. Many could just as easily be marketed without inappropriate bedroom scenes or gratuitous violence. Some of the editing done on films for television or the airlines has turned unacceptable shows into ones that are decent. Unfortunately, the movie industry has not allowed the showing, distribution, or sale of these edited movies. The industry's policy is hard to understand.

Michael Medved, the well-known film critic, and Robert D. Cain, the director of research for the Screen Actor's Guild, analyzed the box office revenue figures of

released in 1991 and found that "R-rated films generate substantially less revenue, return less profit, and are more likely to flop than films aimed at teen and family audiences."¹¹

Even if on-screen sex scenes were edited out, as they are in some airline-edited shows, some films would fail the standard of not promoting non-married sex. However, for those films that are outstanding except for a few moments that could be clipped out, individuals can edit these scenes from videos they buy. Or until the industry provides the option of purchasing already-edited films, a service used to edit one's own videos is available from www.EditMyMovies.com and by some local video businesses.

The entertainment industry is not likely to change overnight. But efforts are being made by a number of individuals and businesses to make airline and edited videos and DVDs available. And many are working quietly behind the scenes to encourage writers and producers to create entertaining and decent films and

ams.
 a good news is that every once in a while a great show comes along that is both entertaining and uplifting. Now it's up to us to choose wholesome entertainment for ourselves, lest we become desensitized—and as parents, youth leaders, professionals, and friends, to help children and others find uplifting and decent entertainment. mf

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other resources for family films, filters, and editing

- www.familyfilms.com
- www.familysafemedia.com
- www.bristonefilms.com
- www.EditMyMovies.com
- www.familytv.com
- www.tvguardian.com

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7. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man, His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973).

8. Randal A. Wright, *Why Good People See Bad Movies*. (n.p.: National Family Institute, 1993).

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