I. Introduction – A Nation Addicted to Media Violence and the Real Thing

It’s been said, when unaddressed, little troubles can escalate into big ones. Little indulgences too easily blossom into bad habits. Not to be outdone, bad habits that go unchecked can migrate to an addiction. This life-threatening conundrum has special meaning within the tableau of contemporary culture. I’m speaking, of course, about America’s addiction to media violence. A good place to start, awareness of the scale of this lethal problem goes back to a report published in 1999 by the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, titled, “Children, Violence, and the Media: A Report to Parents and Policy Makers.”¹ In it, the Committee starts with a clear picture of how prominent media’s become in our daily existence:

- As a nation, we “enjoy unparalleled material prosperity, personal freedom, and opportunity” (ibid, p. 4).

- Among prosperity’s many forms: 87% percent of our households own more than one TV; about half of all children have TV in their room; 46% percent of households with children allow them access to a TV, VCR, home video game equipment, and personal computer. In 68% of homes that have children, they own a personal computer, and in 41% of those homes children have access to the Internet. For the same period in which the data was taken, on average, children with video games spent about 90 minutes per day playing them (ibid, p. 5).

- More recent data on America’s material prosperity appear in a 2013 report by Common Sense Media², who gleaned much of their data from a Kaiser Family Foundation study. Of relevant note, children between the ages 8 and 18 continue to average about 90 minutes a day playing console games (ibid, p. 8).

Categorically, electronic media have taken over our contemporary lifestyles. And yet never was a time more critical for harried Americans to maintain a balanced lifestyle: By uniformly practicing healthy habits across the life domains of physical, emotional/mental, social/familial, spiritual, financial, occupational, recreation, and personal development; (examples of the balanced lifestyle wheel are available on the Internet). Living-in-balance surrounds us with indispensable agencies for managing our stress, for overcoming personal life challenges, and for successfully navigating through those occasional unexpected rough patches.
But thanks to the portability of handheld media devices our propensity to turn to media for quick release from life’s stresses and challenges is increasing, not the opposite. Opponents argue that all those captivating, media-churned diversions come at a price of derailing especially young people from confronting life’s many character-testing opportunities and eventful challenges that normally spur personal growth.

Instead, modern society’s being e-conditioned to expect media-distributed entertainment to work its magic at the convenient touch of a button or wave of a finger; to inject us with an immediately gratifying rush or high, or jolt, by way of violence, gratuitous sex, and/or comically exaggerated conflict: Simply by selecting the TV drama, movie, music video, video game, or Internet site broker of violence that suits our present need.

Remindful that today’s many convenient, immediate indulgences can prove habit-forming: The cultural lexicon adds to a growing list, binge shopping, gambling addiction, binge eating, binge drinking, Internet addiction, and the irrepressible ‘workaholic’ to name a few. Media violence is perhaps the stealthiest in choosing its targets, who then commit real violence on innocent victims.

Having glimpsed how American lives are trending today, the same Senate Committee on the Judiciary report paints a bleak downside for an upward spiraling craving for media violence. The Committee elegantly states:

- “[O]ur nation suffers from insidious decay...leading [the] industrialized world in rates of murder, violent crime, juvenile crime, imprisonment, divorce, single-parent households, numbers of teen suicide, cocaine consumption, per capita consumption of all drugs, and pornography production” (ibid., p. 4).
- Based on over 1,000 studies over the last 4 decades—including reviews conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, National Institute of Mental Health, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry—the universal conclusion is that “television violence leads to real-world violence” (ibid. p. 6).
- Stealing a moment to ponder America’s newfound dependence on electronic stimulants of all shapes and sizes, noted psychiatrist, Charles Johnston, advises that, [any form of] “Addiction on a broad scale requires more than an addictive substance; it requires as well social circumstances that support the addictive response” (p. 2; my emphasis added). For example, consider the symbiotic nature of the television industry gaining market share in trade for increasing viewer doses of graphic violence. Similarly, cable news ratings flare up with each next deplorable depiction of the unspeakable aftermath of another dark episode of real violence.

Dr. Johnston places the root cause of our insatiable appetite for media-violence squarely on a “cultural crisis of purpose” (ibid, p. 2): that we’ve succumbed to the trade-off of neglecting daily pursuits offering real fulfillment in favor of a more instantly-acquired and gratifying pre-packaged rush peddled by media violence (hereafter referred to as MV): A “sense of excitement, potency and significance that is missing from our daily lives” (ibid. p. 1).

And the sad fact is, most people aren’t moved to change their MV-viewing habits, despite oft-cited intimidating numbers of the adverse impact on our society. Seemingly, just hearing the numbers, alone, doesn’t deter most of us from our persistent Bad MV Habit, or BMVH.

Readiness to Cease an Addiction

Change is a lengthy and arduous process. It commands much effort as well as journeying through various stages of readiness to successfully break some bad habit and be forever done with it. Fortunately, a model-for-change exists, that’s been used to successfully break many forms of addiction. Developed by a pair of scientists, Prochaska and DiClemente, the model’s six stages of readiness-to-change help people of bad habits get a new, up-close-and-personal perspective on intimidating those numbers.

II. Readiness to Change a BMVH

Attempts at change reveal how woefully frail human decisiveness really is, as we’re about to see in greater depth. To make the six stages more identifiable to the average individual, each has been given a conventional name, [its formal name being supplied in brackets].
Stage 1: I Don’t Have a Problem (or) I’m Not Part of the National Problem [Pre-Contemplation]

In primetime news, Americans are told they have a BMVH: That they watch too many violence-laced TV shows and movies and the result is an increase in real violence. And just as sure as the next commercial break, many viewers will self-exclude from membership imputed by that claim.

Gretchen Zimmerman and colleagues offer up 3 breeds of ‘un’-ready to attempt change at this first stage: the unaware, the uninterested, and the unwilling.

1) UNAWARE: MV-fans who’re blissfully ignorant about media violence statistics; ‘tuning out’ when numbers are reported (evidence deaf); automatically dismissing stats as irrelevant.

To such persons: Do you still doubt that unlimited viewing of MV has any bearing on yours and your family’s conduct when told that:

a. The American Psychiatric Association found that by age 18 you—and now your children—get exposed to a staggering 16,000 simulated murders and 20,000 acts of violence (ibid, p.5)?

b. On average, your child and your neighbors’ children watch 40 hours per week of violent entertainment—which makes learning how to be violent ‘the equivalent of a full-time job... [and] primes children to see killing as acceptable’ (p.1)?

c. From social learning theory and social modeling we know that people acquire values and new behaviors from societal models and icons. We learn vicariously by observing these influential models and icons; we consciously or unwittingly begin to want to imitate their actions and mannerisms. In our fantasies we may even envision committing acts just as we’ve seen them do. When these are centered on violence, such fantasy simulations can build a volatile ‘how-to’ arsenal of maladaptive retaliations to real/imagined personal slights.

This is relevant, here, because, in business, simulators and simulations are a must for training in industries whose important work-environment cues must be embedded in the classroom experience; learning is greatly enhanced as skillsets get honed on a simulator; self-confidence gets a boost from repetitive practice and feedback; and critical visual-tactile-temporal associations become more concrete: All designed to increase likelihood that learners will transfer their newfound competency to the work environment. As one source was quoted in that same Senate Judiciary report, “We’re not just teaching kids to kill. We’re teaching them to like it” (ibid, p. 9).

d. Current estimates put depictions of violence in about 90% of all movies, in 68% of video games, and 60% of TV shows2 (ibid. p. 7; taken from an original source in the UK)?

e. TV shows that include violence average 6 violent acts per hour2 (p. 8); and violent video games deliver 138 aggressive exchanges in a typical game period2 (p. 8).

2) UNINTERESTED: When faced with compelling evidence, some people might rationalize that the evidence heard was wholly exaggerated; their denial ever at full throttle, they may even non-

chalantly defend their bad habit, boasting numerous overrated benefits from continuing their habit, at the same time downplaying all promulgated reasons for discontinuing it.

To such persons these questions need an answer: Does your claim of an inconsequential BMVH bear out when reviewing your history of handling violent situations? Same question, if drugs or alcohol were involved? On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being absolutely sure: How sure are you that you’ve full control of impulses to commit violence if confronted by a situation where violence is obviously socially inappropriate?

3) UNWILLING: Here, the bad habit strikes closest to home. This Stage-1 variety digs in their resistant heels, vehemently rejecting being labeled a media-violence addict; rebuffing any notion that they cannot sustain long periods of complete abstinence from MV. To such persons this question is apt: If you took a 2-week break from watching all forms of MV, could you endure that reasonably short course? Or would you cave to watching several choice TV show and movie favorites?

Stage 2: I’m on the Fence, Undecided (Ambivalent) About What to Do [Contemplation]

This second stage makes eluding a bad habit real, viscerally driving closer to home. For it is
here that psychological ambivalence and emotional turmoil set in. There’s no established order for how people confront this stage, but it may unfurl something like this: A person acknowledges they might (or do) have a problem with viewing too much MV; they may even astutely admit they’re contributing to the nation’s collective neglect of MV’s adverse impact on American society.

So, they may informally decide to compare the pros and cons of changing from their ‘possible bad habit’ (many in this stage are wavering between clearly ‘do vs. don’t’ have a problem).

Creating a pros/cons list sharpens the focus on what the personal costs of terminating their habit look and feel like. They’re likely to experience some sense of loss over the thought of denying themselves of something that ‘everyone else gets to enjoy.’ What, they do the stand-up thing while the rest of the world has its way?

one’s BMVH may reawaken the torment of ambivalence all over again. Giving them a pressing choice: They can embrace ambivalence as a catalyst that urges them toward determination to make changes; or they can deem it a curse if they cannot escape a deep sense of personal compromise and self-blame. It’s safe to surmise that the majority of Americans occupy this second stage in their MV viewing habits.

Do you agree or disagree that you’re stuck in Stage-2, when

1) As far back as 1999, a joint survey by USA Today, CNN, and Gallup found 73% of Americans believe TV to be partly culpable of juvenile crime?  

2) In that same timeframe, a Time/CNN poll found 75% of 13 to 17 year-olds attributed part of the blame for the Columbine shootings to watching TV shows and movies—and likely the company of unsupportive peers; you’d cast a boycotter’s vote against violent programming and movies and hope ratings and box office sales are negatively impacted by you and likeminded others, pressuring the media to tone down violent content. You’d then turn to one/more stimulating alternative forms of entertainment and balanced lifestyle activities; you’d feel empowered and good about supporting a national drive to prevent future generations from being overexposed and socially-conditioned to media and real violence. [Add your own personal ‘pros’ to this list.]

5) The ‘cons’ side: You get to retain all ties to popular violence-studied television programs, movies, and video games; and also the companionship of likeminded peers.

### The majority of Americans occupy this second stage in their media-violence viewing habits.

So a natural, initial recourse in the graduated change process is to procrastinate on deciding what going forward personally means. Over a short (or long) period, Stage-2 individuals may waffle between tentatively deciding to change, then thinking they’d better not make the attempt.

However, the longer they procrastinate, the easier it is to let the nagging necessity of ‘doing something’ to then fade from conscious foreground; to try not to think about any personal values and integrity being compromised.

Nonetheless, not to be lightly dismissed, those hard-to-ignore cues on the ‘cons’ side of maintaining Internet violence? With 66% of those polled blaming violence on movies, television, and music?  

3) Parents: Is tolerance of your teens’ exposure to MV worrisome when you’re told that a 2003 survey (conducted in tandem with a two-year follow-up) of students’ behavior found that increased volume of teens’ measured exposure to MV predicted subsequent increases in real aggression? (p. 2)?

4) To get your pros/cons list started: On the pros-side of kicking your violence-viewing habit: You’d plan to forego viewing favorite violence-rated TV shows and movies—

---

Stage 3. I’ve Got To Make Some Changes (Determination-Preparation)  

This stage is about sensing a degree of ownership in our bad habit. About the issue of personal accountability and the petrifying unknowns that come with it. Since you’re only
one person in a nation of several hundred million viewers of MV, it’s easy to downplay personal responsibility; arguing that one’s contribution at best is likely to have a negligible effect; a flimsy excuse feigning strength by claiming no one else appears to be raising their voice against violence.

But that line of reasoning is fallacious: What encourages MV to move from electronic screens to real life moments is the scale of acceptability we the people have bestowed on it: By virtue that societal acceptance of violence is empowering by its large numbers; violence has been granted official sanction by the American people. It’s become an unspoken norm by sheer viewing consensus.

At this third stage, personal readiness to change from a BMVH may loosely unfold along this line of thinking, feeling, and action:

1) The MV-follower accepts this much about their likely bad habit (still not totally convinced): They intend to do something about it, however tentative their approach might be. Their intention is in its embryonic stage, so they’re still a ways off from making any committed change; as well, there’s the pressing issue of degree-of-ownership of the problem: How firm they are about acknowledging that their BMVH impacts those dearest and closest, and by societal extension, affects people they don’t even know.

2) They sit down with pen and paper and more formally attempt objectivity when listing two non-nonsesce sets of pros and cons: the pros and cons of violence-free viewing habits; the pros and cons of MV-viewing habits. Each option has both favorable and unfavorable impacts. They then do a little assessment and soul-searching:

By assigning a weight value of importance to each item listed in their 2 pros/cons lists, yields them a quantitative value total for the two pros and the two cons. The two sets of totals display the relative weight of importance their current need to change represents. This painstaking effort enables a sharper insight into what the best long-term outcomes really are; not just for them but for family and others who occupy their immediate world.

3) Based on degree of problem-ownership and self-confidence, they might proactively research alternative ways of using their MV-viewing time; likewise for affected family members; they might outline ideas and steps for instituting specific personal and/or household changes in TV- and movie-viewing habits. [Total resolve is probably too obscure at this early phase of change. But they’re invested.]

4) They may enact the plan, or perhaps get a jump on their intended start-date by taking a few small, tentative action steps to experience what a ‘changed me’ looks and feels like. Fearing possible failure, they might naturally seek social support from biological family, friends, even colleagues who’ve good listening or mentoring skills.

Important to note, here, is that a lapse of returning to viewing MV is natural: We’re testing the water temperature before we jump into the deep end; we’re researching a new set of behaviors that help avoid the rut of relapsing to those former MV-viewing habits. So if at first it’s timidly only the toes-in-the-water test of change, that’s OK: There’s less shame if they lapse; less effort wasted if they fail to complete some improvement goal.

5) It is what follows after a lapse/relapse that is critical to advancing to Stage-4 of readiness-to-change. How will you evaluate a lapse? Do you become more determined to make your plan achievable? Do you invest more forethought into techniques and scintillating undertakings for avoiding MV? Do you assess social support and new activities as equal-to, or more fulfilling, than what you’d formerly derived from MV?

If you do lapse:

It’s what you do, constructively, about it that’s important

Advertising analysts can predict consumer behavior from ads placed in electronic media and then accurately project sales volumes.

Using similar logic, what do you suppose an exposure-to-violence average of 16,000 simulated murders & 20,000 violent acts predicts for a certain percentage of 18 year-old viewers’ personal behavior? Even more, as you’re likely 50/50 (on the fence) about MV, would YOU be willing to make a clean break from conventional practice and no longer view media-based violence if:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 4. I’m Taking Steps, Making Some Changes [Action]</th>
<th>% Willing in Making a Clean Break</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your spouse or significant other wants to make the break and forsake MV altogether?</td>
<td>50   60  70  80  90  100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your children say they’re willing to reject MV based on an honor code?</td>
<td>50   60  60  80  90  100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America’s poll numbers showed a decrease trending in viewer ratings for violent-content programming?</td>
<td>50   60  70  80  90  100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad case scenario: You stood beside a friend or neighbor who laid flowers at the murder scene of their loved one?</td>
<td>50   60  70  80  90  100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you could be moved so strongly in the immediate presence of a friend/neighbor’s deepest grief: How much confidence can you therefore reassign to making a clean break from MV violence, knowing full well that Americans just like you and your friends and neighbors have suffered through such an ordeal?</td>
<td>50   60  70  80  90  100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage 4. I’m Taking Steps, Making Some Changes [Action]

This stage is about the concept, transition-management: about how well a person enacts his or her Stage-3-crafted plan; and also how positively engaged they remain in their effort to turn the corner on becoming a changed person.

Regarding the loss of giving up their former habit: The time has come to openly and emotionally acknowledge that the old MV-habit formally ends now. This advice we get from William Bridges’ defining work on the phases required to successfully negotiate the change process, or simply, managing transition.7

Taking active steps usually involves a three-pronged attack: (1) Persons going through change, implement their Stage-3 plan’s steps, which are designed in hope of preventing their slipping back into old MV-viewing patterns: Emphatically, people and situations of high risk for relapse. (2) Their plan may include attempts to modify some combination of the frequency, intensity, and duration of exposure to MV; however, this early in the change process, such a scheme plants them on a slippery slope for sure.

(3) They actively participate in replacement alternatives that sway their attention from former BMV-viewing habits—what Bridges refers to as the neutral zone of their transition process. This can prove to be arduous work, as alternative positive and personally-fulfilling activities—the pros of change—need to be more compelling than the thrills and convenience of the old habit. If they don’t put adequate work into making the transition a success, then personal moments of skepticism may override their arrival at a satisfying outcome.

For some, there’s a need to publicly announce their change intentions to others. They may be seeking support and respect in their decision to decline MV-viewing altogether. The idea is solid, for sure, as long as they’re careful about whom they seek support from, and how confidently they’ve stated their case.

According to Bridges’ transition model, when we begin to accept that we’ve indeed changed, and that our energy and focus is mainly on the new pattern of behavior we’ve refashioned, then we’ve crossed a threshold; we stand inside a new beginning.7 So, a BMVH-recovering person is justified in trusting his or her new skillsets and avoidance practices are working effectively. By this point, they’ve become true believers that the benefits of change far outweigh those of the former status quo.

Stage 5. I’m Sticking to My Plan and So Far It’s Working [Maintenance]

Despite whatever new habits have been put in place, the former MV-buff remains vulnerable to being bitten by the ubiquitous MV-bug. S/he needs to protect what they’ve worked so hard and sacrificed so much to achieve. It becomes self-evident that they need to set new ground rules for themselves and their family (which will be addressed shortly).

For example: Practicing vigilance toward movie choices at the cinema as well as cable television shows and movies; about what children are allowed to be exposed to when on playdates and stay-overs at friends’ houses—including ap-
propriate videogames and Internet access.

At this stage, some people sense a shift in identity: Since they’ve come to exclude most things considered violence-endorsing, it now feels totally ‘in character’ for them to find MV personally unappealing, even repugnant.

And if their media-viewing habits should slip on occasion, their resolve is apt to be strong enough to let it go and learn from it: They’re committed to perfecting their new viewing habit, which strengthens their resolve that much more.

Unlike with alcohol, smoking, gambling, drugs, sex and other addictions, a BMVH relapse is much less self-destructive and less difficult to recover from: Because relapse in the aforementioned types of addiction generally land the person back in the pre-contemplation stage, where they revisit cycling through the change process all over again.

Much-cited in this report, the Senate Committee on the Judiciary’s report further directs its readers to what may aptly be labeled key maintenance principles for avoiding MV (ibid. pp. 18-19); these principles were first published by the American Medical Association in 1996:

1. Parents and guardians set a good example by not viewing media-violence programming.
2. [Emphasizing a balanced lifestyle] prevent[s] the television from becoming the focal point in your home.
3. House rule (HR) #1: TVs are turned off during mealtimes.
4. HR #2: Children are limited to 1 or 2 hours of TV-viewing per day (based on age).
5. HR #3: Set aside family viewing for programs deemed worthwhile.
6. HR #4: Screen for MV in TV programs appearing just before toddlers’ bedtimes.
7. HR #5: Do not use media (TV/videos/video games) as a surrogate babysitter; ensure that appointed babysitters don’t fall into that trap as well.
8. HR #6: When young children see violence in a cartoon or in a news segment, help them recall any personally-experienced (i.e., witnessed) harm in their recent past: How it made them feel, how visceral the pain was, the toll of any loss incurred, and prolonged hurt suffered before full-recovery was established. Then help them understand how MV at best visually captures the carnage but skims over the emotional and real suffering/ loss that you just explored in depth. Stress how the dignity of human life gets cavalierly diminished by gratuitous violence.
9. HR #7: Instruct children how media and marketing experts apply deception-strategies to lure us to buy all kinds of things; that they are adroit at arousing our interest, our emotions, and our pop-culture values—then ‘hooking us’ into wanting what they’re promoting. Use several violence-spiked TV and motion picture ads as guinea pigs for discussing the ‘magnetic attraction’ elements used to get kids’ attention, and why it’s important to reject such attempts as both devious and impotent.

Stage 6: I’ve No Interest in Media Violence Anymore, No Urge to Return to It [Termination]

A vast majority of people recovering from an addiction are content enough to reach Stage 5 and maintain their altered lifestyle. Only a minority of recovery successes actually make-the-final-cut by peaking at Stage 6, where the psychological connection to MV is completely severed. It is these two stages—5 and 6—who have the wherewithal to take curative steps against MV to the next level: Society at large. To drive MV out of America’s central focus and rightly dump it at the periphery of daily living.

The Moral Imperative of Playing Fair with Numbers

In law an EDIE defense (everyone does it excuse) for denying self-blame gets no traction; in most cases defendants lose. But let’s step onto moral ground—say, when MV addicts tout EDIE so as to spread blame and shirk personal responsibility—that excuse remains indefensible. Major EDIE-proponents defiantly affirm they’re absolved of blame by virtue of the sheer number of Americans perpetuating a BMVH. But such an exculpatory claim barely squeaks by condemnation because of an incontrovertibly hard fact that won’t go away: LARGE DOSES OF MV INSTIGATE INCREASES IN REAL VIOLENCE. MV is contraindicated for any society claiming itself to be civilized, mentally healthy, and peace-loving. The American psyche can’t have it both ways: Exist on a rich diet of MV and meanwhile expect those atrocious numbers on real violence to somehow fall.

To play morally fair with the numbers, Americans would have to join together to make a pact. For example, through use of social media, forums, Internet blogs, etc., they urge one another to take an active role—gaining strength-in-numbers: with MV becoming déclassé in the eyes of a national majority.
A national push might be a ‘3-D’ attack on MV: (1) campaigns to reduce popular demand (vox populi). By publicly discrediting American acceptance of over-the-top graphic displays of violence as immutably surefire blockbuster fodder. By dissociating ourselves—friends, family, social groups—through boycotting of violence-rated entertainment.

Next, are some Stage 6-examples that individuals could initiate against MV at local, regional, and national levels (Stage 5-level persons are equally encouraged to pursue these).
- Organize boycotts of violence-laden TV shows, movies, music, and video games.
- Post blog critiques of the cons of America’s continued dependency on MV and how it teaches youth and adults to inappropriately resort to violence.
- Form interdisciplinary coalitions to brainstorm innovative mechanisms for putting the message out there; unite with clerics, youth associations, neighborhood and school groups, anti-violence societies, and other networks sympathetic to a MV-ridance cause.
- Send regular and e-mail letters to TV and film industry bigwigs and luminaries, condemning excessive portrayals of violence in their respective programming and movie content; make yourself (or group’s voice) heard to: Writers, producers, studio execs, actors, and actresses.
- Willing and able leaders would campaign for petition signatures and send copies of signed petitions to-scale-down-MV to TV, film, video-game producers, requesting they offer more non-violent alternative entertainment.
- Involve youth in local forums addressing issues of (a) access to MV, (b) brainstorming opportunities for healthier entertainment and recreational alternatives, and (c) protesting at local MV-outlets that sell indiscriminately to all ages.
- As a joint effort, peer-to-peer youth groups and parent-to-youth groups sponsor forums on frank discussion of why MV has to end, why America needs a major attitude adjustment that rejects the addictive use of violence.
- Encourage youth to use the Internet and social media to innovatively create documentaries, vignettes, etc., against MV, specifically designed in the vernacular of their generation.

Many decades ago, unsuspecting Americans got hoodwinked into Hollywoodesque violence of the ‘ooh cool!’ ‘ooh gory,’ and ‘ooh scary’ varieties. Over time, the depictions and aftermath of violence got realer and ever more shocking.

Today’s fixation on a hardcore violent reality has outstripped humans’ hardwired-capacity to endure repeated depictions of violence and be 100% immune from acting on states of heightened arousal and aggressive tendencies. That acknowledgment is long overdue and the appropriate answer to it is to voluntarily scale back.

**In Conclusion: Making Sense from Atop the Fence**

You’re On the Fence and Leaning Toward? – At minimum, readers of this report should by now be firmly rooted in Stage 2 of readiness-to-change. With that (this Report) fence as your metaphoric tipping point: Are you still leaning more toward Stage-2 contemplation of being part of a national problem? Carrying not a whit about its impact on people next door, across the street, cross town, or in the next state over?

Or are you leaning the other way, toward Stage-3 preparation/determination to personally do something about your relationship with MV? Now that you’ve considerable insight into the process of change, by all means, allocate some quality reflective time to yourself and significant others, and decide.
Before you decide, a few crucial points and considerations as final thoughts:

1. This report addressed MV as a significant contributory risk factor, where other factors also play a part in determining actual violence. In a fairly recent American Academy of Pediatrics article® the authors explicitly clarify in relative terms the harsh reality that exposure to MV injects into our daily lives: “The strength of association between [MV] and aggressive behavior found in meta-analyses [studies] is greater than the association between calcium intake and bone mass, lead ingestion and lower IQ, and condom nonuse and sexually acquired HIV infection, and is nearly as strong as the association between cigarette smoking and lung cancer — associations that clinicians accept and on which preventive medicine is based without question” (ibid. p. 1497, my emphasis added).

2. Violence Jumping Venues – like a virus jumping from host-to-host and across species, violence appears just as dexterous. L. Rowell Huesmann refers to “new venues for social interaction (text messaging, e-mail, chat rooms, etc.) in which aggression can occur and youth can be victimized — new venues that break the old boundaries of family, neighborhood, and community”9 (p. 1).

He goes on to say, “The best single predictor of violent behavior in older adolescents, young adults, and even middle aged adults is aggressive behavior when they were younger.” [A fact psychologists know all too well.] “Thus, anything that promotes aggressive behavior in young children statistically is a risk factor for violent behavior in adults as well” (ibid. p. 2).

3. In the aforementioned 2009 American Academy of Pediatrics article (Point #1) by Victor Stasburger and colleagues, mention is made of an earlier (2004) study finding that 98% of pediatricians believed MV affects children’s aggression. The article—an AAP policy statement on MV—goes on to say, “Prolonged exposure to such media portrayals results in increased acceptance of violence as an appropriate means of solving problems and achieving one’s goals” (ibid. p.1496). Now imagine an entire culture thinking this way, (as Points 6 & 7 delineate).

4. MV as a Risk Factor to Public Endangerment – While it’s obvious that multiple risk factors determine when violence occurs, some factors are more influential than others; i.e., they increase likelihood that violence will occur. Extensive meta-analytic studies combine all sorts of past research and then apply sophisticated statistical analysis to obtain an average size of the difference between the mean aggression scores of subjects exposed to various components of MV against those of MV-unexposed control subjects. The result is an effect size. According to the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), effect sizes for meta-analytic studies of MV generally range from \( r = .15 \) [MV had a low impact on aggression] to \( r = .40 \) [MV had a moderate impact on aggression]10 (p. 2).

5. In Fairness to Naysayers: (A) Researchers, Ferguson and Kilburn refute all previous meta-analyses of MV’s impact on real violence. They conducted their own meta-analysis and got an association between exposure to MV and aggressive behavior \( (r = .08, \text{ zero or negligible impact}) \)11 (p. 759). They argued that previous studies obtained higher effect sizes due to ‘publication bias.’

In a similar vein, among opponents of the effectiveness of the stages of change model seen throughout this report, after a review of research on the model Whitelaw and colleagues conclude “there exist a relative paucity of sufficiently strong supportive evidence.”12 (p. 707).

6. ‘Citicide’ – The word coined to describe implicitly-sanctioned citizen-on-citizen killings, which attests to an underlying national fait accompli mindset by having let ourselves become culturally conditioned to accept murder and other extreme acts of violence as an integral part of America’s virtual identity, as so copiously represented in film, television, video-games, and music media.

7. Extending Point 6 further: At the point of violent release of strong emotions, today’s aggressor perceives little or no existential difference between his/her real expression of violence and those propagated by MV. The question is moot as to which imitates which—life vs. art?—because America’s cultural milieu and media’s violence-riddled version of it have merged into one.
8. Returning to Dr. Johnston’s earlier point, that where there's addictive behavior, there are social circumstances undergirding it. If America turns a blind eye to *citicide* as an acceptable outgrowth of MV, then expect more violent business-as-usual in the months and years to come: In trade for the next MV-fix from writers and producers, MV-viewers will be equally complicit in their endorsement of more instances of *citicide* by reason of MV-brainwashing on the national level.

9. Pursuits of realism in MV have resulted in what social learning theory might brand a *learned irreverence toward the sanctity of life*. While writers and TV and movie producers strive to depict reality in its crudest and basest of human forms of expression—the stuff that earns actors and actresses nominations for those prestigious awards—they and their anticipatory audiences fail to discriminate a perilous line separating re- respect from disrepect for humanity. The ‘Adult’ rating whimsically anoints all who watch as mature enough to make that distinction and not be attitudinally swayed to cross over to a disrespectful worldview of fellow members of our species.

10. Americans have deleteriously come to be insensate to their country's most exigent issues: Almost daily, telltale crisis-level numbers cited by the media are interesting but far from alarming enough to stir the inert, dilatory masses into action. Just the opposite, anything of urgent need predictably precipitates inaction (media’s over-saturating cry-wolf obsession): More study, more talk, more talk show controversy, more stalling. Hence, this nation’s worst woes carry on. But we can’t allow that to happen with the MV issue.

11. Grass Roots Change – The MV-issue cannot be solved by law. It’s a cultural matter—people caused and sitting squarely on the shouldered of the people's accountability. Only through strength-in-numbers (detailed in Stage 6) can Americans collectively prod entertainment moguls to significantly trim violence from our nation’s entertainment diet, and make our culture renascent of that of the pre-television era.

References


