

Understanding



Toronto YFC



TODAY'S YOUTH

Spring 2003

Inside this Issue:

The Increasing Wave of Indecency 1 & 4

When Teen Pop Culture Meets Porn 2

Violent Media CAUSES Violent Behaviour 2-3

Child Advisory: Explicit Parental Behaviour 3

Youth Culture Facts:

- A child's first exposure to porn is at age 5 thanks to the Internet
- Porn websites include the 12,000 most commonly used words by children
- 20% of Canadian youths sentenced in courts are female
- Young people ages 15-24 report the highest rates of victimization in Canada

The Increasing Wave of Indecency

Paul Robertson, Youth Unlimited

When you look at this picture, it's hard to believe that I was ever that young or ever that small. It seems like light years ago but I can still remember sitting on the stone fence in front of my grandmother's house with my new air rifle. My dad was working his magic with the old Brownie camera while I sat patiently. This picture still sits in my office and it often takes me back to a distant time when all things seemed black and white.



Certainly photography was black and white in the mid-fifties. Television was black and white as well. We did something really weird as a family back then compared to today. We actually sat in the same room and watched the same TV shows. We only had one TV with four stations to choose from, as did most homes, and I'm never quite sure how we made it without 500 channels and a remote control.

In a lot of ways, morality was pretty black and white as well. My parents instilled in us a deep sense of right and wrong, honesty, and respect for both people and property. As best I remember, those ethics were the same at the neighbours on both sides, and for several homes in both directions. In fact, I'm sure it was as I recall the day John Wallace and I shot off my neighbour's prize tulips with a BB gun!

Granted we had to get pretty close to put the BB through the stem but it was exciting all the same. That is, until the owner came home. He quickly took action to reinstate my father's standard of respect for property by spanking me and sending me home. Walking slowly to my house four doors down, I tried to wipe the tears from innocent eyes before my arrival. Much to my surprise and more so to my horror, my dad was waiting for me with a somewhat disconcerted look upon his face. Just

before he spanked me, he was kind enough to tell me about the phone call from the proprietor of the previously prized tulips. Justice once again prevailed in my little town and in my small heart.

As I study the culture today, I would like to suggest that in most places this deep sense of morality has disappeared. In fact, I would go so far as to say that if you had four "Christian" homes side-by-side, you might find the standards of morality to be very different when it comes to things like modesty in dress, media consumed, language used, and music listened to. It seems that we've moved miles from a culture able to define truth and decency for itself. We now seem to be mired in a land where decency, civility, moral virtue, and respect are on the wane.

Not long ago I stopped into a variety store to pick up a bottle of water on my way to a speaking engagement. I walked in on a 10 year-old boy speaking to the store clerk in a manner that would have brought a death sentence from my father. I'm not exactly sure what the issue was but the language used, complete with words used only by the bottom-feeders of our culture, made me cringe with embarrassment. His physical gestures were threatening but the owner held her ground. Part of me was deeply

When Teen Pop Culture Meets Porn

Alternative rockers **Everclear** pose an interesting question in their latest music video "Volvo Driving Soccer Mom". Lead singer Art Alexakis asks, "Where do all the porn stars go?" The song follows the life journey of one such "young lady" who eventually becomes a Volvo driving soccer mom living in a conventional neighbourhood. Well, according to the latest reports from the front-lines of pop culture, nothing could be further from the truth.

Brian Heidik, winner of "Survivor: Thailand," starred in soft-core movies. Sarah Kozer, a finalist on "Joe Millionaire," acted in bondage videos. Interviews with porn stars were regular fare for Howard Stern's drive-time radio show while he was on in Toronto. Adult stars are crossing over into the movies and even appearing on the TV hit *The Sopranos*. Teenage girls wear T-shirts marked "Porn Star". Pony, an athletic footwear and apparel company, is using porn stars to cultivate a more daring image. VP for Pony, Come Chatrel, says, "When I grew up in the '80s Paris, models were the ultimate feminine ideal. For the 20-year-old kid, porn stars have kind of replaced what models used to represent."

In the last few years, pornography has slithered its way into cultural legitimacy for several reasons – standards for morality have changed, access to the internet now puts it in our homes, both pop music and porn are big industries in a new marriage, and it now lends an aura of danger and intrigue for the artists associating with it.

Using porn stars in music videos has become just another way to prop up sagging sales and draw in even more unsuspecting teenagers. In 1999, Canadian pop punk group Blink 182 featured porn queen Janine Lindemulder as eye candy on the cover of their break out CD "Enema of the State." The multi-platinum album sold over 5 million copies. Other alternative rockers such as Kid Rock, Marilyn Manson, Limp Bizkit, Sugar Ray and Metallica have also featured similar stars.



"Enema of the State" CD Cover

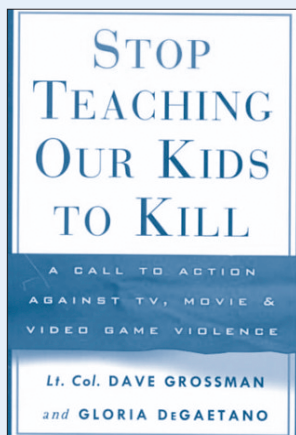
Pirate magazine cover girl, Gina Lynn, landed the lead role in the music video for Eminem's "Superman". The Grammy award winning singer and pop culture icon also features porn star, Jenna Jameson, in "Without Me". Others in the genre that have used porn

performers in their music videos include DJ Quik, Mary J. Blige, Snoop Dog, N.W.A., and Jay-Z. This should be especially disturbing to parents given a significant portion of the rap fan base is made up of teens and children.

So what's the impact on our young people? First, it probably perks the curiosity of some young boys and a few girls who might want to explore further these adult stars. As the porn industry sees it, having our kids visit their websites is good for business. Second, it reduces further the world of love to nothing more than sex for sex sake. No wonder our kids have reduced it to a recreational sport without commitment and purpose. Third, it powerfully communicates that sex outside of marriage is value worthy of their emulation. After all, when you are bombarded continuously with these images, it seems natural to get involved.

And what can parents do? First, keep an eye on what your kids are consuming when it comes to media. Sit in and watch a little MuchMusic, check out the movies they are going to see (screenit.com), read *RollingStone* magazine, talk with them about their favourite TV shows. Second, talk with your kids about the values portrayed in their music and how it compares to those you are trying to instill in them. Third, take time to get them involved in other more worthy activities such as sports, hobbies, and volunteerism. Finally, if you have concerns about the Internet, check out netaccountability.com for the best in web protection for you and your kids.

Violent Media CAUSES Violent Behaviour



THERE ARE OVER 3,500 STUDIES IN THE UNITED STATES AND AROUND THE WORLD THAT HAVE EXAMINED WHETHER THERE IS AN ASSOCIATION BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO MEDIA VIOLENCE AND SUBSEQUENT VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR.

All but 18 have shown a positive correlation between media exposure and violent behaviour (American Academy of Pediatrics). In light of this fact, you would think that Hollywood would wake up and smell the gun smoke. However, they continue to suggest that they are not part of the growing problem of carnage in our culture.

It's the same kind of logic the cigarette industry used for years. It was a good approach until scientists were able to find a direct link between the toxins in tobacco and physiological damage done in the lungs. End of argument. Now, the same thing has happened in the violent media industry. Brain cells fall victim to the power of playing violent video games.

The University of Indiana Medical School (www.indyrad.iupui.edu/) study suggests that repeated exposure to violent video games is desensitizing the brain. This results in children who can no longer understand the real effect of violence. Researchers, using magnetic resonance imaging, were able to show that during game playing there was decreased activity in the frontal lobes; that part of the brain which controls emotions and impulses. These brain changes were most apparent in teens who were heavier users of violent media.

continued on page 3

**Dave Grossman,
friend of Youth
Unlimited and
Director of the
Killology Research
Group in Jonesboro,
Arkansas summarized
the findings this way:**

- > Media violence stunts/retards kids' brain development - kids with violent TV, movie and game exposure had reduced cognitive brain function.
- > Media violence makes kids violent – aggressive behaviour was associated with a higher degree of violent media exposure.
- > Media violence makes violent brains – violent media exposure had an effect on normal kids that made their brain scans the same as kids with documented, diagnosed Aggressive Behaviour Disorder.
- > Violent video games are bad for kids – violent video games had the same negative effect on kids' brains as violent TV and movies.

As video games move toward a virtual reality that will be indistinguishable from real life, violent video games and similar genres of media are bound to continue drawing a young audience. There is no doubt that this form of entertainment can have a detrimental affect on our young people. Chances are they are not playing or viewing this type of media in your home but don't forget to find out what they are involved with when in the homes of other people. You may be surprised.

Child Advisory: Explicit Parental Behaviour

Before the T ball game even started, a parent entered the playing field to protest loudly that the opposition team had too many fathers on the diamond helping their kids learn the game. He wouldn't permit the game for the five and six-year-olds to continue until the umpire removed one of the fathers. A loud argument ensued among the adults, the young players were confused and frightened by the commotion, and yet another incidence of explicit parental behaviour was recorded in the history of Canadian sport.

Beginning in the early eighties, the face of amateur sport began to stray from the premise of fair play and fun for all. The mood in the stands began to change as parents became more hostile and critical of everything unfolding before them. No longer could you trust the referee to be fair or your own child's coach to do the job properly. Instilling a love for the game was exchanged for winning at all costs. For many kids, the embarrassment brought on by their parents was too much and many have left organized sports altogether.

In the city of Brampton, BY-LAW #161-83 was enacted in 1983 to assist in the overall management of sports programs through the implementation of proper control regulations. Part of their public relations campaign states, "Through public awareness and enforcement of the By-Law, it is our intent to promote appropriate behaviour... actions such as the harassment of an individual, be it a participant, coach, convenor, activity official, or another spectator

will not be tolerated."

The poster then goes on to describe the "good behaviour" guidelines based on the acronym BEHAVIOUR. It includes being a good role model, respecting others, abstaining from verbally assaulting others, and a reminder to parents that "children do not play to entertain adults." What a comment on our current culture; many cities now have to regulate the actions of parents in order to ensure a safe and healthy environment for our children. Some jurisdictions actually require parents and guardians to sign a behavioural contract as part of registering their kids for sports.

And it isn't just the parents' actions that are of concern. Edmonton Minor Hockey Association instituted their "For the Love of the Game" awareness program which required all players, coaches, officials, and referees to sign commitments to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the game.

In December 2002, the Canadian Hockey Association introduced the "Relax, It's Just a Game" promotion. The advertisements encourage parents to think about what it would be like if their kids pressured them the way they pressure their kids. One radio spot is a conversation at the din-

ner table, where a child informs her mother that her meat loaf does not cut it. Dad is going to start on dinner next week, says the daughter, while the mother pleads for another chance. The campaign comes at the same time of a growing number of violent hockey parent incidents. It also comes as referees are leaving the game in droves no longer able to put up with ill-treatment from enraged parents (www.canadianhockey.ca/e/home.shtml).

"... many cities now have to regulate the actions of parents in order to ensure a safe and healthy environment for our children."

One American study by the National Alliance for Youth Sports (1995) said that one could expect 5 percent of a crowd of parents to get out of line during an event. A similar study conducted in 2000 said you could expect 15 percent of the crowd to cause a raucous. A study conducted by Sportingkid magazine (March 19, 2003) reported that more than 84 percent of respondents had personally witnessed parents acting violently (shouting, berating, using abusive language) toward children, coaches and/or officials during youth sporting events. More than 80 percent of parents believe this violent and inappropriate behaviour is becoming epidemic.

As parents and grandparents, let's remember that change will only come when we realize it's not about winning and losing. It's not about living your wasted dreams through the life of your child. It's not about our kids making it to the big times and all the money that comes with it. It's about developing a love for sports through enjoyable experiences and positive character development. Do your part. Be a good sport.



The Increasing Wave of Indecency

continued from page 1

saddened by what I saw; another part of me wanted to... well, let's not go there.

What is really going on with our kids? What are the causes for such moral decline? Who or what is to blame? Where are we headed? Is there anything we can do to change the course? In a recent Public Agenda report, "Aggravating Circumstances: A Status Report on Rudeness in America" Americans (and Canadians I believe) seem to be "particularly concerned about the discourteous and disrespectful conduct of children and they hold parents primarily responsible for the phenomenon" (Public Agenda, April 2002).

The report goes on to say that most people surveyed said that parents don't invest the time and energy needed to instill good behaviour in their kids. However, nearly all parents feel that try as they might, societal forces, especially those in media and music, weaken their efforts. And who can argue with that?

Our young people are hard pressed to find any icon of virtue in their pop culture.

Indecency sells. Sexuality moves products. Pushing the envelope is the name of the game.

Recently, Christina Aguilera, unquestionable idol to many kids, appeared completely nude on the cover of RollingStone (November 14, 2002) with only a guitar to hide her private parts. Below her name, the cover story is subtitled, "Inside the Mind of a Dirty Pop Princess".

And when it comes to sex, it's just not our teens that are being targeted. A friend of mine was quite surprised to find a tag inside her 9 year-old daughter's pants which were marked with the words "Listen to your crotch. It knows." It also contained a website address. When she checked it out she found not only clothes but witchcraft, occult, and porn related items in the promotional section of the site.

"Our young people are hard pressed to find any icon of virtue in their pop culture."

Chuck Colson reported in his BreakPoint commentary on September 16, 2002 that such places as GapKids were selling terry-cloth bikinis for pre-teens and Sears was carrying metallic-looking bras and bikini underpants labeled "Girl Identity" in its girl section. In Canada, a seven-year-old girl accessed a hard-core porn site by typing in the internet address printed on her T-shirt. All of this leaves us astonished and angry as parents.

When it comes to explaining the abundance of rudeness in our society, parents also mentioned the decline of values and morality, a declining sense of community, and fewer people who are even willing to question rude behaviour. They also believed that rude behaviour is now so common that some people have just stopped being nice (Public Agenda).

> Christina Aguilera

So what can we do as parents and grandparents with children growing up in this new reality?

FIRST, BE A CULTURE COMMANDO.

When engaging the enemy, there is nothing like a human intelligence report. Tune into 30 minutes of MuchMusic, read a teen magazine, listen to a pop radio station while you drive, sit and watch TV with your kids, visit a video arcade, go to the latest movie to which teens are flocking. It's good to be familiar with the combat zone.

SECOND, BE A "LIFE" MODEL.

In an age of imagery, kids are starving for real-life, moral models to follow. I can remember as a child learning to write by tracing over the letters that my mom had written in my book. After the tracing, I had to learn to make the shapes on my own but having had the pattern set for me; it sure was a lot easier. Too many kids don't have "life" models. Your life may not be perfect but chances are it's healthier than what the culture has to offer. If your children are in the process of "tracing" your life, do your best to stay within the lines.

THIRD, CULTIVATE CONSISTENCY.

One of the things the culture teaches our kids is that it is OK to waver on standards depending on how you "feel" about a situation. To the best of our ability, we need to stick to our standards even if this means confrontation. Too many parents today are afraid of their kids and waffle on discipline for fear of having their children do something even more outlandish. I think just the opposite is true. I believe they are looking for someone who enforces healthy boundaries consistently even if it makes things uncomfortable.



Paul Robertson is the youth culture specialist and Director of Church and Family Resources for Youth Unlimited.

To book a speaking engagement call: 905-453-7991