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To Whom it may Concern,

I have strong feelings about violence in the media, especially on T.V. I am a parent, teacher, lawyer, concerned citizen. I put my views into an opinion piece published by the Los Angeles Times. Here is a copy. I would love to be involved further in the debate on this vital issue. I see the impact of T.V. images in my classroom daily.

Sincerely,  
Betty Raskoff Kazmin

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# Counterpunch

## Screen Violence: To Regulate or Not to Regulate?

### No Influence on Public Behavior? Ha!

By BETTY RASKOFF KAZMIN

Pop culture has always had a strong impact on behavior; its creators must recognize and assume responsibility for the potency of their own artistry. It is a power capable of anything from dictating styles to influencing public opinion in highly significant ways.

It is said, for example, that Clark Gable single-handedly altered the fate of men's undershirts with his appearance in the film "It Happened One Night" and that Walter Cronkite could have been elected to high office based on his popularity and integrity as a TV newscaster.

In your article "Pop Culture. Violence. Copycats. Blame?" (Calendar, Oct. 23), a vice president of the Writers Guild of America, West is quoted as saying it is "bad policy to second-guess, censor, edit and delete scenes from films and television based on media reports of copycat behavior." Yet modern



Kazmin

history is replete with examples of such behavior—often by design.

In the '50s, children everywhere wanted Hopalong Cassidy costumes and Space Patrol decoders. Elvis Presley appeared on the "Ed Sullivan Show" and an entire era of music and style was born. High school students watched movies of horrible auto accidents designed to frighten them into becoming safe drivers.

The 1960s saw the enormous impact of entertainment and mass communications in determining political and governmental action. In the first televised presidential debates in 1960, John Kennedy defeated Richard Nixon largely on the basis of appearance. Newscasts of civil rights demonstrations, and of dogs and fire hoses being turned upon peaceful protesters in Southern states, finally broke through the apathy of Americans living elsewhere.

Images of assassinations and civil disorders awakened a national realization that our United States were deeply divided and troubled. Woodstock, an entertainment event, became the symbol of an entire generation rebelling against public policy.

In the 1970s, children learned their numbers and letters from "Sesame Street," while adults were given daily doses of the horrors of the Vietnam War. The Watergate hearings held the nation spellbound with live proceedings—and brought down a presidency.

The 1980s saw political campaigning reach a new low, violence in movies and TV reach a new high, and the marketing of entertainment-related products become a booming business. Violent crime became the

greatest concern for Americans who were continually exposed to violence-laden entertainment. And Willie Horton helped defeat Michael Dukakis.

The first presidential election of the 1990s saw TV character Murphy Brown become a campaign issue, and the film "A Place Called Hope" affect the emotions and votes of countless Americans. Entertainment stars and professional athletes are paid generously to make commercials. Interactive video and information highways enter the lexicon.

Yet some entertainment officials say their industry has no influence on public behavior. As the federal government begins to investigate the connection between violence on the screen and violence on the street, the entertainment community calls for parental guidance and responsibility.

But today's homes are a far cry from those portrayed in "Father Knows Best" and "Ozzie and Harriet." "Latchkey children" are increasingly prevalent, parents park young children in front of televisions and video games, and young adults lie down on busy highways to mimic a movie stunt. Too many parents are not there to provide parental control.

### Pop Culture. Violence. Copycats. Blame?

#### Hollywood Debates the Responsibility Issue After Disasters

By TERRY PRISTIN and DAVID FOX  
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

In late-18th-Century Germany, people became alarmed when young men suddenly seemed to be jumping off bridges to their deaths in unprecedented numbers, in imitation of the passionate hero of Goethe's "Sorrowful Youth."

no's "The Deer Hunter" has been blamed for dozens of copycat suicides. A Frenchwoman recently charged that her son learned how to make the bomb that took his life by watching an episode of "MacGyver."

Once again, questions of accountability are being raised in connection with works of popular culture. Disney this week took

teen-ager died and two other injured. (Police Township, N.J. third incident a ty—of a 24-year-old now-deleted series. MTV has a and changed "Beavis and Butt-Head" series in response to the

Children learn their language, their values, even their way of playing and studying by copying. A society's survival depends on absorbing and imitating that which surrounds us. And we are surrounding our youth with senseless violence, usually in the name of entertainment. Preteen boys with a video film and remote control skip the story line and replay the violent action scenes over and over; the story bores them, but they love that action.

How can any thinking person doubt that entertainment molds public behavior? That commercials persuade? That repetitive images influence? The senseless violence in movies, TV shows and video games makes a tremendous impact on impressionable minds. Our young people are becoming desensitized to violence and its consequences.

Attorney General Janet Reno had warned that the federal government might have to become involved in curbing entertainment violence. The First Amendment protects free speech, but not necessarily products that speak. If those creating and selling entertainment products do not bear some responsibility for their consequences, then who does?

Kazmin is a teacher at the Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, a Los Angeles Unified School District magnet school. She worked as a movie extra while growing up in Los Angeles and earned a law degree while raising a family. She is the mother of two grown daughters and a preteen son.

just say  
BY DAVID LINK  
the War on Drama

#### COUNTERPUNCH

**BETTY RASKOFF KAZMIN:** The teacher wonders, "How can any thinking person doubt that entertainment molds public behavior? That commercials persuade? That repetitive images influence?" **F3**