

Violence and Pornography in the Media

Public Views on the Influence Media Violence and Pornography Exert on Young People

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Modern information technology has transformed the media landscape dramatically over the past decade, offering a steadily swelling flow of material through many new channels. Potentially, we all have access to an enormous array of knowledge and diversions of many kinds. On television, in books, magazines, on the Internet, and in mobile telephones. At the same time, many parents, teachers and policy-makers are concerned about the negative influence they believe media exert on children and adolescents. Such concerns have been voiced as long as mass media have existed, but the concern has grown in pace with developments in media technology.

There are indications that the incidence of violence in society may be related to the abundance of depictions of violence shown on television, video, the Internet and in computer games. Greater accessibility of pornography in today's media is another factor that causes concern about young people's welfare and possible negative impacts on young people's development. For example, what ideas about sexuality does pornography instill? Various measures to limit the distribution of content that is believed to be harmful to children and youth have been discussed. These include both voluntary measures and binding legislation. Dialogues between authorities, media companies and members of the general public have been initiated with a view to establishing consensus on basic principles. These dialogues are taking place at national, regional and international levels.

Article 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides an international framework for policy with regard to such content. Governments that have ratified the Convention are bound "to ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health". Toward this end, the governments should "encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being". In recent

years we have seen a shift in emphasis from ideas about legislative regulation and prohibition toward an emphasis on parents' and other adults' responsibility for the well-being of children and young people. 'Protection' is now understood to be more than a question of keeping children away from certain television programs, but extends to strengthening young viewers in their roles as consumers and users of media.

In the SOM 2004 survey¹ a number of questions concerned questions about public perceptions of the influence media violence and pornography exert on young people, and views regarding various measures that have been proposed to protect children and young people from becoming exposed to harmful content on television and the Internet and in films and computer games are asked.

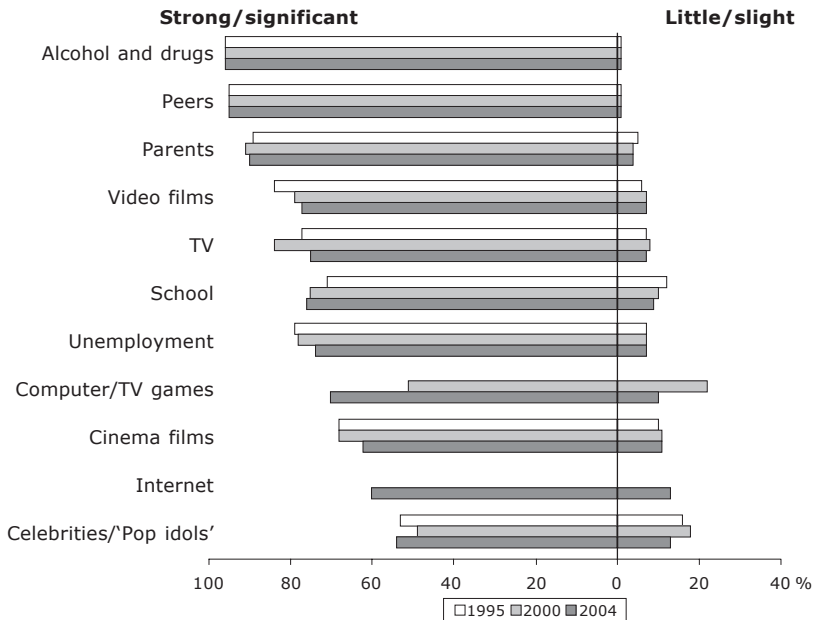
Mass media and the increase in violence in society

The SOM surveys in 1995, 2000 and 2004 have asked essentially the same questions concerning what people believe has contributed to the rise in violence, and particularly the importance they assign to mass media in this regard (Weibull 1996, Carlsson 2001). Other factors asked about, besides media-related factors – video films, television, cinema films, celebrities/ 'pop idols', computer and television games (from 2000 on) and the Internet (new in 2004) – are alcohol and drugs, unemployment, the schools, parents, and peer pressure and influence. The aim is to measure public perceptions of the importance of the respective factors, how the perceptions are interrelated, and changes in them over time.

The three factors that are assigned the greatest importance in relation to violence are alcohol/drugs, parents, and peers. A large majority of respondents (97, 95 and 89 per cent, respectively) believe these factors have a strong or significant influence. The same results were found in 1995 and 2000, as well. These factors are followed by a cluster of factors that include media like video films (77%), television (75%), computer and TV games (70%), but also unemployment (76%) and the schools (74%). Fewer blame factors like cinema films (62%), the Internet (60%) and celebrities/ 'pop idols' (54%). All the factors are mentioned by rather many respondents, and few rate them as having only a slight effect.

On the whole, the the pattern of views appears to be rather similar to that registered in 1995 and 2000. A calculation of balance scores for the different factors shows that the rank-order is roughly the same. A closer examination reveals some changes, however. The top three factors remain stable throughout, whereas unemployment is mentioned less frequently as a factor behind violence in the most recent measure, a change that most likely has to do with fluctuations of the business cycle. The schools are mentioned to roughly the same extent as in 2000. The main differences relate to the importance accorded the media. One factor that is mentioned considerably more in 2004 than in 2000 is computer and TV games. Half the respondents perceived these games to have a strong or signifi-

Figure 1. Factors believed to have a strong/significant influence and little/slight influence on the incidence of violence in society 1995, 2000 och 2004 (per cent).



Note: Internet was first included in 2004.

cant influence in 2000; four years later the figure had risen to 70 per cent. The Internet was first included as a factor for violence in SOM 2004. Sixty per cent of the respondents say the web has a strong or significant influence. A certain shift away from video films, cinema films and television toward newer media technologies like computer games and the Internet, and celebrities/ 'pop idols' is apparent. All told, the media are accorded greater importance in relation to violence in society today than they were in 2000 and 1995.

In many respects ideas about what is behind the increase in violence in society are the same in different demographic groups. Essentially irrespective of their sex, age and education, respondents believe that alcohol and drugs have a strong or significant effect. Alcohol tops the list in another, comparable study, as well (von Feilitzen & Carlsson 2000). The next-strongest factor is peer pressure, followed by parental influence. Here, too, perceptions are fairly homogeneous. Although perceptions differ regarding the influence of the schools and unemployment on the incidence of violence, views are more or less consonant across subgroups based on sex, age and education. Young people, however, register lower values across the board.

Perceptions of the media-related factors show more marked variation, however. Age turns out to be a strong differentiating factor when it comes to perceptions of the influence of media-related factors. Young people are consistently more likely to assign these factors a less important role, whereas a majority of their elders say they have a strong or substantial influence. These findings largely coincide with those obtained in 2000 and 1995 and are in no way surprising. The younger generation has grown up with many different media and their content. We must bear in mind the *digital generation gap* that characterizes the media landscape today. The younger generation is comfortable with and has mastered media technology down to the last byte and Herz, whereas a considerable portion of the totality of media output remains unknown to a good share of the adult population. The Unknown in new media tends to be perceived as a danger. Time and again we have experienced ‘moral panics’ at the expense of dispassionate discussion (Dahlquist 1998, Drotner 1999).

Interesting, however, is the fact that four years ago hardly any younger respondents felt that computer and TV games had anything to do with violence in society, whereas in 2004, a majority of those aged 15-29 years think that games have a substantial influence. Four years ago, computer games were still a novelty and terra incognita for many, whereas today many in this age group have several years’ first-hand experience of them. That is, the change is more likely attributable to personal experience rather than to impressions from public discourse. A similar tendency, albeit less pronounced, is noted with relation to celebrities/celebrities/‘pop idols’, and 45 per cent of the age group consider the Internet a strong or significant factor.

Table 1. Factors believed to contribute to the incidence of violence in society 2004 by sex, education and age (balance scores)

Factor	Sex		Education				Age				All		
	F	M	Low	Med.-low	Med.-high	High	15-29	30-49	50-64	65-85	1995	2000	2004
Alcohol and drugs	+97	+94	+97	+96	+94	+97	+93	+94	+98	+99	+95	+95	+96
Peers	+95	+92	+95	+93	+94	+95	+90	+93	+95	+97	+94	+94	+94
Parents	+85	+86	+85	+83	+85	+89	+77	+88	+85	+90	+84	+87	+86
Video films	+78	+62	+81	+65	+70	+66	+42	+63	+83	+93	+78	+72	+70
TV	+75	+61	+75	+66	+66	+66	+53	+62	+75	+85	+71	+68	+68
Unemployment	+71	+62	+75	+63	+60	+69	+39	+65	+77	+84	+72	+71	+67
School	+65	+69	+79	+65	+63	+56	+55	+65	+68	+80	+59	+65	+67
Computer/TV games	+70	+48	+70	+55	+60	+54	+35	+53	+71	+80	/	+29	+60
Cinema films	+59	+42	+63	+47	+49	+45	+29	+43	+63	+71	+58	+57	+51
Internet	+59	+36	+58	+44	+45	+44	+25	+45	+57	+64	/	/	+48
Celebrities/Pop idols’	+46	+36	+54	+39	+35	+36	+17	+35	+54	+61	+38	+31	+41
N responses	869-907	808-836	416-450	571-583	319-328	346-354	361-365	519-532	496-517	299-330	1 680-1 743	1 690-1 774	1 690-1 730

Note: The balance score indicates the shares or respondents who have answered “strong” or “significant” influence, minus the shares who have answered “little” or “slight” influence. Thus, the values may range between +100 (all answer “strong”) and -100 (all answer “slight”).

Young respondents also mention the schools in relation to violence less than other age groups in SOM 2004, whereas the schools are more frequently mentioned than previously in other age groups. Patterns of response for other factors are less distinct.

Looking at the differences in responses among women and men, we find more marked differences in the case of media-related factors than others; this applies to all media, but particularly computer and TV games and the Internet, which considerably more women than men feel play a role. Men are considerably more likely to mention celebrities/ 'pop idols' as a contributing factor in 2004 than was the case in 2000.

Looking at education, we find some clear-cut distinctions – the less one's formal education, the more importance one tends to accord the media as a factor that contributes to violence. Several of the media-related factors are more frequently mentioned in 2004 than in 2000. Once again, the increase relates mainly to computer and TV games, while television and cinema films remain at about the same level as in previous measures. The pattern of responses regarding the schools follows essentially the same pattern; patterns relating to other factors are less distinct.

Upon closer examination of the responses we find evidence of the existence of a *media factor* in public perceptions of the causes of violence in society. Factor analysis of all the factors studied produced three principal clusters of explanatory factors: a *media factor* (video films, television, cinema films, computer games, celebrities/ 'pop idols'), a *social factor* (alcohol and drugs, peer pressure, unemployment), and an *institutional factor* (parents, the schools). The factors in each pattern of response are closely interrelated; that is, respondents who consider video games important also mention cinema films and computer games as causes. The same patterns were found in the 2000 and 1995 surveys (Weibull 1996; Carlsson 2001).

Views on the influence of media violence

Many researchers have studied the issue of violence in the media and its influence on audiences, and several plausible interpretations of findings have been offered (Carlsson & Feilitzen 1998; Feilitzen 2001). No unequivocal answer as to how much media violence may influence children and young people is apparent, however. Many different and complex situations and factors are at play. The media may be one among many factors that contribute to the increase in violence. That media violence exerts some influence on viewers' sensations, feelings, thoughts, preferences and frames of reference is generally accepted, but that is not to say that it necessarily leads to manifest aggression and acts of violence. The influence can, however, be both powerful and lasting (Frau-Meigs 2004). This suggests that the focus of research should be broadened and trained more on the role of mass media in children's socialization and cultural upbringing than on media influences per se (Feilitzen & Carlsson 2004). This impression is reinforced when considering the SOM data.

Are young people influenced by violent content in the media?

SOM 2004 asks both about people's views about the influence of media violence and about the respondent's personal experience of such influence. A majority of the respondents consider the violence in computer and TV games (75%), reality television (67%) and feature films/TV drama (65%) very or somewhat harmful to children and young people. More say "somewhat harmful" than "very harmful" except in the case of computer and TV games, where the reverse applies. In the case of violence in documentaries, news and cartoons, however, the result is different: about 60 per cent say that violence in these kinds of programs is not harmful. Very few respondents have no opinion.

Table 2. Views as to how harmful different kinds of media content are for children and young people 2004 (per cent)

	Very harmful	Somewhat harmful	Not very harmful	Not at all harmful	No opinion	Total %	N
Computer/TV games	38	36	16	4	5	100	1 749
Reality TV	28	39	23	4	6	100	1 723
Feature films/TV drama	24	41	27	4	4	100	1 740
News	10	27	49	11	4	100	1 724
Cartoons	13	22	42	17	6	100	1 724
Documentaries	9	25	49	12	4	100	1 711

More women than men think that media violence, particularly in computer games and reality television, is harmful to young people. Among 15- to 29-year-olds, 75 per cent of young women think that the violence in computer and TV games is very or somewhat harmful to young people; among men of the same age the figure is 43 per cent. Meanwhile, we know that boys and men predominate among those who play these games (*Nordicoms Mediebarometer 2004*). The older the respondent, the more likely he or she considers depictions of violence harmful to some extent. Significantly more among the eldest respondents answer "very harmful" than younger respondents do.

Only slight distinctions are found between education groups, except in the case of reality television and cartoons. Considerably more highly educated respondents consider violence in these kinds of programs harmful to children and young people than respondents with little formal education. Other studies have found that parents with little formal education tend more than others to consider animated cartoons inappropriate for young viewers, but the most decisive factor for whether or not parents consider cartoon violence harmful is their habit of viewing (or not viewing) the programs with their children. The most frequently mentioned reason why cartoons are considered inappropriate is the violence in them. (Feilitzen 2004)

How do young people react to violence in the media?

SOM 2004 inquired about respondents' first-hand experience of various kinds of influence from violence on television and in films and computer/TV games. The influences asked about were a greater propensity on the part of young people to commit acts of violence, to display aggression, feelings of anxiety and fear, a distorted perception of reality, and weaker feelings of empathy. A strong majority, 64-75 per cent, of the respondents felt there were influences on all these dimensions. Fully three-quarters of the respondents say that depictions of violence in audiovisual media distort reality perceptions, and on this dimension more people responded "strongly" (40%) than "significantly" (35%). The relationship was the reverse with respect to other dimensions. Most respondents express a view; few express neutrality.

Table 3. Views based on personal experience on the extent to which exposure to media violence (TV, film, computer/TV games) influence children and youth 2004 (balance scores)

Influence	Sex		Education				Age				All
	F	M	Low	Med.-low	Med.-high	High	15-29	30-49	50-64	65-85	
Distorted perception of reality	+65	+51	+67	+51	+57	+59	+30	+50	+74	+78	+58
Anxiety and fear	+60	+33	+59	+38	+44	+50	+10	+39	+68	+71	+47
Propensity to commit acts of violence	+54	+34	+55	+40	+45	+36	+9	+38	+60	+70	+45
Lack of empathy	+50	+37	+55	+33	+42	+46	+6	+33	+62	+72	+43
Manifest aggression	+44	+28	+52	+29	+30	+32	-4	+27	+54	+68	+37
N responses	896-605	829-836	439-452	580-583	326-328	351-355	363-364	530-532	507-513	324-335	1 326-1 744

Note: The balance score indicates the shares or respondents who have answered "very great extent" or "great extent", minus the shares who have answered "little extent" or "very little". Thus, the values may range between +100 (all answer "very great") and -100 (all answer "very little").

Nearly 70 per cent of respondents say that media violence increases young people's propensity to commit acts of violence and to experience anxiety and fear. Somewhat fewer, 64 per cent, feel that it contributes to aggressive behavior. SOM 2000 included a similar question, and although the phrasing differed slightly, the results are similar. The Swedish public are more convinced that media have a negative influence on young people than research to date has been able to demonstrate.

More women than men, and more people with little formal education than highly educated people, feel that the media have a negative influence on young people. The differences are even more marked between age groups. The eldest age group shows the highest frequencies on all dimensions. Nearly 80 per cent of the eldest say they have personal experience of media-inspired aggressive behavior on the part of young people; the corresponding figure among the youngest is just over 40 per cent. It should be noted that on the other dimensions young respondents' views

that media violence has a strong or significant influence rested around 50 per cent; 61 per cent of the youngest say that violence in the media contributes to a distorted perception of reality. In all probability, these views are based on personal experience.

Views on pornography and explicit sex in the media

It has often been observed that a greater number of television channels, some distributed via satellite and cable, and the Internet have meant a greater incidence of scenes and programs that are pornographic or explicitly sexual. Some researchers speak of an ongoing cultural process, whereby pornography is becoming part of everyday life and in some cases even an idealized element in our cultures (Knudsen & Sørensen 2004). Films and images that would once have been considered pornographic are openly accessible today via numerous media and channels. What constituted pornography some twenty years ago is perceived quite differently today, particularly among young people. Some of the pornography that is available on video and the Internet contains elements of violence. The forms such violence takes important components in the social order that would keep women subordinate to men.

Sex scenes and sexist messages are encountered not only in television programs and on the Internet, but also in advertising, music video clips, the tabloid press and magazines. Many researchers have taken an interest in the role media play in an ongoing intimization and sexualization of the public sphere.

It is increasingly as sexual beings that we are addressed, whether the message has to do with our choice of bank, shampoo, shaving cream or television program. And the formula is nearly always the same: young women in inviting poses flatter an imagined male gaze and impress on the imagined man behind the gaze the importance of being attractive, desirable. An indication that being desirable is a widely valued trait among young women today is a clearly increasing eagerness to display oneself. The 'pin-up' ideal has become a form of validation: I am worth others' gaze. More and more frequently, we are enticed into voyeuristic pleasures. Reality television programs promise that we will follow people to the toilet, see them break down and cry, fight, drink and (above all) have sex (Hirdman 2004).

Researchers and other initiated observers believe that attitudes toward sexuality have changed, as have sex habits. Consumption of pornography is on the rise, due in part to the medialization of sexuality. A review of the research literature on young people and sexuality (Forsberg 2000) found an increase in the consumption of pornography among young men and women alike; 70 per cent of the men and 50 per cent of the women had all partaken of pornography in one form or another in the media. There are also many indications that consumption of pornography is also closely related to different forms of sexual experimentation.

The influence of pornography and sex scenes in the media

When SOM 2004 asked respondents, "To what extent do you think pornography and sex scenes have a negative influence on children and young people," eight of every ten respondents answer either "to a great extent" or "rather much" in connection with pornographic films; over 50 per cent answered "to a great extent". Considerably more women than men hold this view. Only slight differences are to be noted between age and education groups. There is, in other words, a good measure of consensus around the view that porno films have a negative influence.

Seven of ten feel the same about pornography on Internet websites. Here, too, there is a marked difference between women and men. We also find a greater share highly educated respondents than people with little formal education among those who feel that pornography exerts a negative influence. When it comes to the Internet, young people, aged 15-29, express largely the same views as other age groups. In the case of all other program categories, the eldest respondents show the highest scores, and the youngest, the lowest scores on a scale from negative influence "to a great extent" down to "little or not at all".

Table 4. Views on the extent to which pornography/sex scenes in selected media content have a negative influence on children and youth 2004 (per cent)

	Greatly	Rather much	Rather little	Very little	No opinion	Total %	N responses
Porno film	52	28	9	3	8	100	1 754
Websites	40	32	9	3	16	100	1 726
Reality TV	28	36	21	7	8	100	1 718
Music videos	21	33	25	10	11	100	1 714
Feature films/TV drama	19	32	33	9	7	100	1 731
TV commercials	17	24	35	14	10	100	1 713

A majority of the respondents say they believe that pornography and sex scenes in reality TV (54%) and feature films/TV drama (52%) have a negative influence on young people to a great or rather great extent. The patterns of response are quite distinct: the values are higher among women, highly educated and elder respondents. Those who watch 'docusoaps' several times a week express basically the same views as those who seldom or never watch them. We note a rather substantial difference in views between young women who frequently watch the programs and young men who do the same. More than 60 per cent of the women aged 15-29 answer that pornography and sex scenes in 'docusoaps' exert a negative influence on children and young people, whereas the corresponding figure among men of the same ages is 40 per cent. This is notable inasmuch as heavy consumers of a given genre generally register lower-than-average values when it comes to negative influences of the genre in question.

In the case of television commercials, views tend toward the opposite: about half the respondents say that sex in commercials influences young viewers “rather little” or “very little”. Women and the eldest age group are, however, considerably more negative than others in their estimation of the influences of pornography and sex in TV commercials on young viewers.

How are young people influenced by pornography and sex in the media?

SOM 2004 also asked respondents about possible consequences of exposure to pornography and sex scenes on television, in films and on the Internet. Does it lead to more sexual violence, changes in sexual behavior among adolescents, distorted conceptions of men’s and women’s sexuality, more knowledge about sexual relationships, weakened self-confidence among the young, greater tolerance of sexual expressions?

Over 80 per cent of the respondents think that pornography and sex scenes in the above-mentioned media strongly or significantly distort young people’s ideas about women’s and men’s sexuality; the same number feel that they lead to changes in young people’s sexual behavior. A larger share of women and older respondents think so, whereas the share of young people, especially young men, is smaller than in other groups.

Somewhat fewer, 72 per cent, believe that this kind of content leads to more sexual violence. Here the differences are more marked, with a larger share among women and older respondents sharing this belief than other groups. Young people doubt there is any relationship, but among young people there are marked differences between the sexes: 67 per cent of young women believe that pornography and sex scenes lead to more sexual violence, compared to 40 per cent among young men.

Some 62 per cent of all respondents believe that sex scenes and pornography on television, in films and on the Internet weaken young people’s self-confidence/self-respect. The only distinction noted is that between women (72%) and men (56%). Views on this point are otherwise fairly homogeneous. Interestingly, as many as 60 per cent of the men who watch ‘docusoaps’ several times a week say that such content can weaken young people’s self-confidence/self-respect.

Influences that are more decidedly negative are more widely endorsed than influences like “more knowledge about sexual relationships” (29%) and “greater tolerance of sexual expressions” (27%). More young respondents mention these possible effects than others, particularly the influence on knowledge. Among the most positive respondents are young men who regularly watch reality TV programs. Otherwise, we find no greater differences between men and women on this dimension.

Several studies have shown that young people tend to turn to the media for information about sex, love and relationships. It is a well established fact that they tend not to turn to their parents (Buckingham & Bragg 2003).

Table 5. Views on the extent to which pornography/sex scenes on TV and websites and in films influence children and youth 2004 (balance scores)

Influence	Sex		Education				Age				All
	F	M	Low	Med.-low	Med.-high	High	15-29	30-49	50-64	65-85	
Distorted conception of men's and women's sexuality	+82	+54	+72	+63	+69	+72	+55	+68	+73	+78	+69
Changes in sexual behavior among adolescents	+77	+56	+67	+62	+65	+76	+59	+65	+66	+80	+67
More sexual violence	+69	+34	+65	+46	+47	+51	+28	+45	+61	+78	+52
Weakens self-confidence/self-respect	+54	+24	+41	+35	+40	+45	+21	+44	+45	+46	+40
Greater tolerance of sexual expression	-34	-27	-12	-29	-40	-49	-28	-44	-37	-2	-31
Youth know more about sexual relationships	-31	-35	-15	-31	-42	-50	-23	-47	-40	-8	-33
N responses	889-911	824-840	430-458	581-585	324-326	353-537	360-363	529-535	505-515	315-338	1 713-1 751

Note: The balance score indicates the shares or respondents who have answered "very great extent" eller "great extent", minus the shares who have answered "little extent" or "very little". Thus, the values may range between +100 (all answer "very great") and -100 (all answer "very little").

Still, it is clear that many young people feel that the media in many respects have influences that may be regarded as negative. These views have been formed in a time when the bounds between the private and public spheres are in flux, by a generation that has had access to computers, the web, satellit/cable TV, video and cell phones practically since infancy. Young people are far more familiar with new media like the Internet, with its risks as well as its positive potentialities, than their parents are. Parents know rather little about how their children use these new media. The difference between what parents think their children are doing on the Internet and what they actually do was revealed by the European SAFT project (SAFT 2002, 2003). This generational gap means that young people interpret media content in a context that differs more from their parents' frame of reference than ever before. The gap also adds a measure of urgency to the question of what happens when commercial media and channels present pornography as something positive, whereas a more troubled and moralizing attitude prevails in society as a whole.

What measures to reduce the negative impacts of violence and pornography in the media is the public prepared to accept?

How to limit and prohibit the spread of harmful content – depictions of violence, pornography, offensive advertisements, stereotypical and disrespectful depictions of young people, women and minorities, hate-mongering messages, and so forth – through legislation and self-regulation has been debated for many years. Over the past decade, however, emphasis has shifted from legislation and prohibitions toward a focus on the responsibilities of parents and other adults.

While the media are believed to cause some problems, they are also valued as social and cultural resources. An often raised question is whether children are helpless victims or are actually capable of meeting the challenges contemporary media present. In this context, the importance of media literacy, of knowing how the media are organized, how they work, and how they influence their audiences, is often mentioned. It is a question of strengthening children and youth in their role as consumers of media content so that they can use the media and keep a level head. Overall, it is a matter of enhancing young people's critical faculties as well as enabling them to express themselves in many different ways, by means of sound, image and word. More and more people are coming to understand the value of media education in school curricula. In the European Union, for example, there is widespread agreement that the schools should assume responsibility for ensuring that children's media culture is incorporated into the curriculum. Not only theoretical knowledge, but hands-on experience is envisaged.

Various EU documents define protection of minors as a matter of the *public interest*. Underlying this concept is the presumption that children are more impressionable, less critical and therefore more vulnerable than adults inasmuch as they have little experience and thus poorly developed frames of reference to guide their judgment. Therefore, it lies in the public interest to protect children from things like harmful media content until they have become more experienced and more mature. Certain kinds of depictions of violence are thought to be harmful.

All the EU instruments in the area are consonant as to the assignment of responsibility for European children's well-being. First and foremost, responsibility for protecting young people from harmful media content rests with the adults – parents and others – in children's surroundings. But these adults need help in the form of both political decisions and initiatives on the part of the media industry, e.g., codes of ethics and rules that require the industry to assume its share of responsibility vis-à-vis children and youth. Proposed measures include the drafting of criteria whereby content may be classified and the establishment of consumer relations offices to field and follow up complaints.

Definitions of content that may be 'harmful' to children, youth and, in some cases adults vary, however, between countries, which means that many proposed measures arouse strong feeling. In short, the policy area is controversial. Co-regulation and self-regulation have clearly become the remedy of choice in recent years; both Swedish and European documents stress that media should

The legal framework in the European Community (EU) for the protection of minors from harmful media content

- The Directive, *Television Without Frontiers* (adopted in 1989 and amended in 1997), calls upon broadcasters to take measures to ensure that their program output is not detrimental to the physical, mental and moral development of minors. The Directive also points to the responsibility of parents and other adults to guide and control children's exposure to television fare. The Directive is currently undergoing a revision that has been under way for several years. A draft put forward in December 2005 includes the Internet and other digital media.
- A Recommendation on the Protection of Minors and Human Dignity (1998) includes all the new electronic media and calls upon broadcasters and operators of on-line services to develop new methods to enhance parents' control over their children's use of the media, e.g., the introduction of a Code of Ethics. In other words, self-regulation. Two evaluations of the implementation of the Recommendation by Member States have been reported, in 2001 and 2003. After the second of these, the Commission in 2004 proposed a supplementary recommendation "on the protection of minors and human dignity and the right of reply in relation to the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and information services industry" (European Commission, AV Policy, press release 04/598).
The proposed supplement, an attempt to meet the rapid pace of technological development, makes reference to media literacy and media education programs, institutions for collaboration between regulators and self-regulating institutions, and systems of classification of content and other measures designed to counteract and prevent "discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age in all media" (http://europa.eu.int/comm/avpolicy/regul/new_srv/pmhd_en.htm).
- One of the goals of the *Community Action Plan on Promoting Safer Use of the Internet* (2005) is to combat illegal content (monitoring, hotlines, etc.), control undesirable and harmful content (software solutions, e.g. filters), and promote a safer environment (self-regulation), plus measures to raise users/consumers' awareness.

take greater responsibility for protecting children and young people. The idea is that self-regulation – and co-regulation – will make it possible to reduce reliance on laws and public regulation, which quickly become outdated due to the rapid pace of innovation in media technology and are not easily amended.

'Self-regulation' can mean different things but is generally taken to mean protective measures relating to content that is legal, but can possibly be harmful to children and young people. Measures in this category include: information to users/consumers (e.g., at point of sale of technical equipment and on websites); product information (via warning texts, a light our sound signal, descriptive labelling and/or classification of content, systems for checking the age of the user); support to parental control (e.g., by limiting access to certain websites, filter software); and following up complaints.

For obvious reasons, the degree of self-regulation varies between media. There is a direct correlation between the extent of legislation in a given area and the presence of self-regulatory initiatives, as a comparison of television and the interactive entertainment industry reveals. Media that have existed a long time also are better organized when it comes to policy issues and internal codes of ethics, etc. Consumer pressure can bring about change. It is a well-established fact that, left to their own devices, media companies themselves will not change their ways, unless it returns a profit.

Swedish legislation

TV

Radio and Television Act

The Swedish Radio and Television Act applies to channels that originate in Sweden. Today these are SVT1, SVT2, TV4 and their auxiliary channels, digital and otherwise. The definition of corporate domicile is somewhat equivocal, however, and in time more channels may come under the law. The basis for all national regulation of television is the Community Directive, *Television without Frontiers*.

The Act instructs channels to bear in mind "the dominant position the medium enjoys" when scheduling programs that have violent content. In practice, the channels are restrictive about airing violent fiction earlier than 9 PM, and documentary records of acts of violence before 7 PM.

Since 1999, television programs that contain explicit or prolonged depictions of violence must be preceded by a warning in sound and picture or accompanied by a warning in the picture throughout the program.

The legal restrictions on depictions of violence mentioned below also apply to television programs.

Films and Video

The Film Censorship Act

All films and videograms that are intended for public screening in cinemas or public gatherings must have the prior approval of the Film Censorship Board. This is an exception to the Freedom of Expression Act, part of the Swedish Constitution, which otherwise forbids prior censorship.

The Film Censorship Board sets lower age limits for admission to films according to the content. There are four categories: Suitable for children; From 7 years; From 11 years; and From 15 years. The Board can require certain scenes to be cut, or deny entire films approval for public screening.

The Penal Code and the Freedom of Expression Act

"Technical recording" in the sense of the law means all forms of moving pictures, regardless of medium or carrier.

Illicit depiction of violence

Penal Code, ch. 16 para. 6b: "Persons who depict sexual violence or coercion with the intention of distributing the image or images, unless circumstances justify the depiction or distribution, shall be fined or sentenced to prison for up to two years. The same applies to graphic or detailed depictions in motion pictures of gross abuse of human beings or animals that are intended for distribution or distributed to others."

Illicit distribution

Penal Code, ch. 16 para 10c: "Persons who deliberately, or through gross negligence in professional or other commercial activity, distribute a film, videogram or other motion picture that includes images showing detailed, naturalistic depictions of acts of gross violence toward, or threat of violence toward human beings or animals shall be fined or sentenced to prison for up to six months."

Perversion of minors

Penal Code, ch. 16 para 12: "Persons who distribute a text, image or technical recording, the content of which can have a brutalizing effect or otherwise seriously impact on minors' moral upbringing, shall be fined or sentenced to prison for up to six months."

Translator's note: The above quotations are not official translations, but reflect the sense of the law. The official translation of the Code is currently unavailable due to revision.

The Internet

Falls under the Freedom of Expression Act. The general principle is that anything that is not condoned in other media is not condoned on the Internet.

Self-regulation

Computer and TV games

Sixteen European countries, Sweden among them, have adopted the age classification and labeling system, PEGI (Pan-European Game Information). PEGI is a branch initiative that recommends appropriate age limits for computer and TV games. For further information see www.pegi.info

What kinds of measures does the Swedish public find acceptable?

SOM 2000 included a question designed to find out what the public thought of different kinds of measures that might be taken to protect children and young people from harmful influences of violence on TV, in films and on the Internet. About then, the EU was beginning to draft policy on the issue, and Sweden had taken an active interest in it, as well. For one thing, during the Swedish presidency a conference of experts was convened to discuss the issue. The responses to the question in the SOM survey confirm that the Swedish people, too, are very interested in different ways to protect children from the harmful influence of media violence.

The same question in SOM 2004 included pornography in addition to media violence. New in the 2004 survey, respondents were asked to rate various measures in a scale, ranging from “very effective” to “very ineffective”, whereas the scale in 2000 asked whether measures were good or bad. Some of the measures were also defined more precisely. As a consequence, responses to the question in the two surveys are not entirely comparable.

In 2000, the vast majority of respondents preferred measures that tend toward self-regulation and help parents make decisions about programs – measures like recommended age limits, rating and labelling, information to parents, and on-air warnings before and during programs. All these measures are informative rather than restrictive (like, for example, obligatory vetting). A high degree of covariance was noted between the measures, age limits, labelling and on-air warnings. That is, essentially the same people advocated all three. More than three respondents in four also endorsed the adoption of codes of conduct by the media industry.

When the question was changed to deal with effectiveness of the measures, a different rank-order emerged. Besides a change in the rankings, the 2004 frequencies are also generally lower, and many more respondents respond neutrally, “neither effective nor ineffective” than was the case in 2000. It seems that it is considerably more difficult to decide whether a measure is effective or ineffective than whether it is good or bad.

Codes of ethics (“codes of conduct” in EU terminology) in the media industry are the measure that most respondents in the 2004 survey, 74 per cent, rate as effective. That is roughly the same share that felt that they were a “good” measure in SOM 2000. Thus, taking into account the differences due to the change in the question, we may conclude that public confidence in this kind of measure has grown. It is also a sign that consumers are more inclined to demand that the media themselves take responsibility for their program policies.

Information campaigns directed to parents also receive a strong vote of confidence; 68 per cent of the respondents consider them a “very effective” or “fairly effective” measure. We find other informative measures like recommended ages, labelling of program content and on-air warnings at the low end of the order.

Approval of more restrictive measures like obligatory vetting and technical filters that can block specified content is fairly widespread. Just under 60 per cent of the respondents consider legislation that would allow vetting “very effective”

Table 6. Views on the effectiveness of measures proposed to protect children and youth from violent and pornographic content in selected media: TV, films, websites and computer games 2004* (per cent)

Measure	Very effective/ Fairly effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	Very/ Fairly ineffective	Total %	Balance
Media industry codes of ethics	74 (77)	19 (19)	7 (4)	100	+67 (+73)
Information to parents	68 (78)	23 (18)	9 (4)	100	+59 (+74)
Obligatory prior censorship	59 (66)	26 (21)	16 (13)	100	+ 43 (+53)
Technical filters to block certain content	57 (48)	28 (24)	14 (28)	100	+43 (+20)
Obligatory media education in school	51 (64)	37 (29)	12 (7)	100	+39 (57)
Labelling of explicit content	52 (82)	32 (15)	15 (3)	100	+37 (79)
Audio/visual warnings before transmission	52 (78)	30 (17)	18 (5)	100	+34 (73)
Classification/labelling of appropriate minimum age	49 (85)	32 (11)	18 (4)	100	+31 (81)

Note: The responses were given on a 5-point scale: Very effective measure; Fairly effective measure; Neither effective nor ineffective measure; Fairly ineffective; Very ineffective. "Very" and "Fairly" ratings at each end of the scale have been combined in the table. The number of responses to each part of the question varied between 1669 and 1705.

* In SOM 2000 the scale had the following heading: Very good measure; Rather good measure; Neither good nor bad; Rather bad measure; Very bad measure. The scores from 2000 are given in parentheses.

or "fairly effective"; technical filters are the only measure that receives more widespread support, 57 per cent, in SOM 2004 (effectiveness) than in 2000 (good).

Half of the respondents consider obligatory media education as an effective measure in a time when a number of researchers and other experts have urged protective measures of this kind. Measures that are discussed more in terms of risk management and public health strategies than as responses to media influences (Potter 2004).

Besides the change in the question, the differences in the public's rankings noted between 2000 and 2004 may also have historical causes. In recent years a number of widely publicized violent crimes have occurred in which minors, even very young children, have been involved, both as victims and as perpetrators. Greater support for more coercive measures might reflect a higher overall level of concern. A shift of public attention from broadcast media toward the Internet might explain the more widespread emphasis on filters.

We note marked differences between men's and women's attitudes toward the different measures. Women are considerably more favorable to obligatory censorship and filtering, but to industry codes of ethics, as well. Women would appear to be more inclined to endorse prohibitive measures. Men appear to be more doubting of the measures suggested and respond "neither effective nor in-

Table 7. Ratings of various proposed measures to protect children and young people from media violence and pornography in selected media: TV, films, computer games and websites 2004 (balance scores)

Influence	Sex		Education				Age				All
	F	M	Low	Med.-low	Med.-high	High	15-29	30-49	50-64	65-85	
Media industry codes of ethics	+76	+57	+62	+63	+66	+79	+50	+70	+70	+75	+67 (+73)
Information to parents	+66	+52	+55	+56	+63	+64	+42	+61	+61	+73	+59 (+75)
Obligatory prior censorship	+59	+26	+41	+42	+40	+50	+31	+41	+44	+60	+43 (+53)
Technical filters to block certain content	+53	+32	+44	+41	+39	+49	+31	+45	+44	+51	+43 (+20)
Obligatory media education in school	+42	+34	+50	+33	+38	+33	+26	+34	+41	+58	+39 (+57)
Labelling of explicit content	+43	+31	+48	+35	+33	+29	+27	+33	+37	+54	+37 (+79)
Audio/visual warnings before transmission	+41	+26	+46	+35	+26	+25	+30	+34	+30	+45	+34 (+73)
Classification/labelling of appropriate minimum age	+33	+29	+46	+30	+21	+23	+14	+25	+33	+58	+31 (+81)
N responses 2004	858-887	810-818	420-435	566-576	319-325	344-350	356-361	520-528	492-502	294-314	1 669-1 705

Note: The balance score indicates the shares or respondents who have answered "very great extent" eller "great extent", minus the shares who have answered "little extent" or "very little". Thus, the values may range between +100 (all answer "very great") and -100 (all answer "very little").

* The balance scores for SOM 2000 are given in parentheses. In SOM 2000 the scale had the following heading: Very good measure; Rather good measure; Neither good nor bad; Rather bad measure; Very bad measure.

effective" more frequently than women. Education groups show a similar pattern of response: Highly educated respondents tend to endorse restrictive measures more than those with little formal education. Approval of all the proposed methods is higher among low education groups. Information campaigns that target parents constitute an exception here, too.

Age correlates positively with confidence in the various measures. The largest differences between age groups concern recommended ages, information to parents, and obligatory vetting; the least age-related differences are noted for on-air warnings and technical filters. On the whole, however, the rankings are the same among all age groups.

Relatively many of the youngest respondents, too, endorse technical filters that block transmission of specified content. Legislation to permit obligatory vetting receives the same support as in 2000, which (again because of the change in the question itself) indicates an increase in support among 15- to 29 year-olds.

Summary

For decades mass media have aroused fears as to the influence they may have on children and young people. In recent years the volume of media output has mushroomed, and public anxiety about media influence has reached new heights. Today, not only media violence, but pornography and explicit sex on the Internet and satellite/cable television cause concern. Many see a relationship between what the media show and the rising incidence of crime and antisocial behavior in society at large.

A majority of the population believe that depictions of violence in computer games, reality TV, feature films and TV drama are harmful to minors. As for first-hand experience of how violence on TV and in films and computer games affect young people, a majority say they have observed that young people tend to have “distorted perceptions of reality”, a propensity for violent behavior, feelings of anxiety and fear, and aggressive behavior. But when asked what they believe the causes of these problems may be, mass media are not the “prime suspects”. Instead, the vast majority of the Swedish public – irrespective of sex, education or age – point to social factors like alcohol and drugs and peer pressure as the principal causes. This pattern remains unchanged since previous surveys in 1995 and 2000.

That the media do exert influence, alongside social and institutional factors, is clear. The media, particularly computer and TV games and the Internet, are also assigned greater influence in 2004 than in 2000, and more young people say that computer and TV games influence violence in society than in 2000.

A majority also believe that pornography and explicit sex scenes have a negative influence. A majority feel that these kinds of media content lead to a “distorted conception of women’s and men’s sexuality”, “changes in young people’s sexual behavior”, and “more sexual violence”. Negative influences are cited much more widely than influences that might be taken as positive, e.g., “more knowledge about sexual relationships” and “greater tolerance of sexual expressions”. These latter influences are most commonly cited by young people, particularly young men.

When the Swedish people are asked their opinion of various measures designed to protect children and young people from the negative influence of media violence and pornography and sex on television, in films and computer games, and on the Internet, they express confidence in industry codes of ethics and information campaigns directed toward parents. Legislation to permit vetting of program content and technical filters of specified content are also widely believed to be effective. Young people have traditionally questioned the wisdom of restrictive measures, but in the most recent measure they rate them as effective. A possible explanation may lie in recent trends in media output, with new kinds of programs and more widespread use of the Internet. Today, young people have a different, richer experience of the media; it may also be that traditional kinds of informative measures directed to parents have proven to be relatively futile. It will be very interesting to follow the trend in young people’s opinions on this subject in coming few years.

The findings of SOM 2004 show that public concern that some kinds of media content have negative influences on children and young people is at least as widespread with respect to pornography and explicit sex scenes as with respect to media violence. Decidedly more women than men, and more older respondents than young, feel that the media do exert a negative influence. Women are much more inclined to support restrictive measures to shield young people from violence and pornography in the media – measures that are the responsibility of government and the media industry.

In extension of these findings, there is reason to reflect on how the media may affect the rise in violence in contemporary society. How violence and sex are depicted, and how victims and perpetrators are depicted. And not least, how responsibility for the acts is assigned. How do the media – and pornography in particular – define what is masculine, what is feminine? That is, to what extent do the media contribute to sustaining a social order in which women are subordinate to men? The media mirror reality, yes, but they also contribute to constructing hegemonic definitions that all too frequently are depicted as self-evident – as natural, all-pervasive and invisible as the air we breathe.

Note

1. The SOM Institute is managed jointly by three departments at Göteborg University: the School of Public Administration, the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (JMG) and the Department of Political Science. Annual surveys of Sweden and Western Sweden form the core of the Institute's work. Both are mail surveys and involve 6000 respondents between the ages of 15 and 85. The questionnaires cover a broad range of issues relating to society, the media and public opinion. Responsible for the questions asked about media violence and pornography is Nordicom in cooperation with the Swedish Media Council.

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