

mass media are just another source interpreted along with others in terms of practical contexts and purposes. He believes that the mass media have a positive opinion-forming role in our modern society:

The mass media do not distort reality, but rather provide a discourse — an institutional mode of classifying and interpreting reality — that helps people to construct their own organizational realities. Mass media stories are therefore not accepted by people directly and uncritically, but rather are part of people's strategies, struggles, and pleasures in the production of meaning in various contexts. Exposure to mass media is therefore not a source of distorted thoughts and bad behaviour, as the "evil causes evil" fallacy has it, but a means of constituting and articulating attitudes to and versions of crime, law, and justice.²⁹

If we are to measure violence in television programming the first requirement is to define television violence. Based on an accepted definition of violence, standards can be put in place and classification and monitoring systems can be established. Research into the definition, classification and measurement of violence in Canadian television programming is seriously lacking as Committee members learned during their public hearings. The lack of both a definition and a classification system was raised by many of our witnesses, amongst them Rose Dyson, Chair, Canadians Concerned About Violence in Entertainment:

We should have a responsible classification system, which will be used by review boards, either at a provincial or at a national level, and developed to dovetail or harmonize with codes on violence, which the broadcasters come out with for television programming, or cable companies or pay-TV. All of those people should have to adhere to a universal code.³⁰

While American research into the measurement of television violence is plentiful, caution must be exercised in the application of American findings to the Canadian scene. Committee members were told that Americans are more preoccupied with insults to religion, coarse language and sexual themes in television programming, than they are with violence. Keith Spicer, Chairman of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), spoke of the differences between our two countries:

We all know that the Americans don't perceive violence in quite the same way we do. The talks I've had with my friends at the FCC and the American broadcasting industry convince me that when you ask them about the violence problem, they will literally say, "What violence problem?" They are more concerned with what they call indecency, which means sex and bad language.³¹

In the United States, the National Coalition on Television Violence (NCTV) has been monitoring television violence since 1980. NCTV has adopted both an objective and a subjective system to rate television programs. The objective system is used to rate television programs according to a violence numerical score. The subjective system, which recognizes that not all violence is harmful and which is based on the rating concepts of the Motion Picture Association of America, uses letters to rate movies, videos and television programs.