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The Three Stooges

The first television show that I recall our son George paid any attention to was Peter Pan. He was around two and a half, and he chortled and very much enjoyed the whole show. I recalled how much I had enjoyed the movie my grandmother took me to, everything, that is, except for the menacing Captain Hook. I recalled clapping with the other children to prevent Tinker Bell from disappearing. George clapped to save Tinker Bell, but he didn't seem at all bothered by Captain Hook. He simply appeared to be delighted with the whole show.

Consequently, I was not prepared the next morning to find George standing on the back of the sofa in the living room with one foot extended and both arms raised out and above his head. I persuaded him to jump into my arms instead of flying off into the room as he believed he could. We had the first of many discussions of the unreality of TV.

Often when I hear about the violence with which our children are bombarded today on TV and in the movies, I recall, in the "good old days" when my sons were very young, two other shows the children liked to watch, Popeye and The Three Stooges. They weren't convinced that Popeye's spinach represented the way to strong muscles, but they occasionally emulated Popeye's prowess in smashing Wimpy (the hamburger guy) by hitting him on the top of the head. Somehow the only effect when George tried that maneuver on Roland was an angry, tearful Roland, objecting to a fist crashing him atop the head.

Another TV menace, I learned, existed in the slapstick Three Stooges show. I several times saw children playing on our driveway, obviously influenced by what they'd seen Curly, Moe, and Larry do. They like to pop each other on the head, but they especially enjoyed trying to poke another child in the eyes with two fingers extended at eye width. Most of the time, the menaced child would get his extended hand perpendicular to his eyes in time to frustrate the eye-poker. And the influence of Popeye lingered, too. Finally, Paul and I decided to divert our boys from watching the cartoon and the slapstick Stooges. In fact, he passed a family "law" that George and Roland were to turn the dial away from either show.



They were surprisingly obedient about the shows, although they occasionally griped about not seeing them when "everyone" else did. One day I realized that we had never said anything about their watching the forbidden shows at someone else's home. Since most of the play among the neighborhood children was at our house or in our yard, I didn't worry about them. I decided that it was continuous, repeated watching that made them think that the small screen activity was all right in real life.

Years later when I asked them about what shows they watched at their friends' houses, with slightly shamed faces, they admitted that the other parents didn't object, so they had watched whatever was on the screen at other homes. They assured me that they didn't see anything wrong with the shows. Maybe not. But repeated watching was what I objected to.

I really believe that the constant repetition of watching violence, most of which is far worse than anything Popeye or Larry, Moe, and Curly did, is where the menace of violence on the TV screen exists. And I'm not sure what Paul and I would do with young children today. I guess we'd have to be firm in limiting the amount of television they see, substituting reading, talking, and playing games for the always ready TV entertainment.