

TV Goes PG But Movies Are Still R Rated

Changes in Sex and Violence in Popular Culture 1998-2001

Major findings:

- TV sex fell by 29 percent and TV violence dropped by 17 percent. *Page 2*
- On the broadcast networks, sexual material fell by 27 percent and violence by 11 percent. *Page 2*
- On premium cable, sexual material fell by almost half and violence decreased by two-thirds. *Page 3*
- But basic cable featured just as much sex and 20 percent more violence. *Page 4*
- PG ratings were down among sex-oriented series but up among violent series. *Page 4*
- But the amount of sex and violence in top-grossing movies stayed the same. *Page 5*

This special issue of Media Monitor is the second in a series of reports on sex, sleaze, and violence in popular entertainment. This issue compares the levels of sex and violence in the 2000-2001 television season and the top-grossing movies of 2000 with their counterparts from our first report two years ago.

In 1998, the Center for Media and Public Affairs began a long-term study of popular culture in response to widespread concerns among scholars, professionals and the public that the high incidence of sex and violence in entertainment media was having a damaging effect on the culture at large. The first study covered the 1998-1999 season of first-run broadcast and cable television series, including both network and syndicated fare, and 50 of the top domestic-grossing movies with a release date during 1998. After establishing a baseline, we followed the same procedures for the 2000-2001 television season and 50 of the top domestic grossing movies released in theaters during 2000.

On television, we analyzed the equivalent of two weeks of fictional programming by examining two episodes of every series from randomly selected dates during the 2000-2001 season. Our sample included all primetime series on the ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, PAX, UPN and WB networks. In addition, we looked at two weeks of nationally-available, first run syndicated broadcast series, original series shown on the major cable channels (AMC, Bravo, Comedy Central, F/X, Fox Family, Lifetime, MTV, Sci-Fi, TNN, TNT and

(continued on page 2)

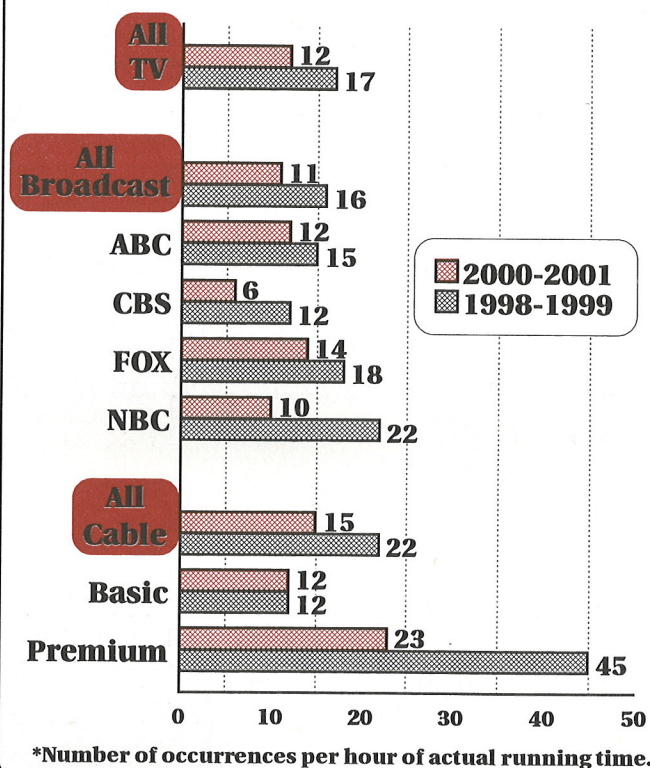
USA) that were aimed at a general audience and original series shown on the premium cable stations HBO and Showtime.

After years of growing alarm over a rising tide of sex and violence in popular entertainment, there is evidence of a change in Hollywood. From the 1998-1999 to the 2000-2001 seasons, the amount of sexual material on television fell by 29 percent, while the amount of serious violence decreased by 17 percent.

Sex on TV

Most of the decline in sex took place on the four major broadcast networks - ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX - whose shows attract by far the largest audiences. Overall, the amount of sexual material dropped 27 percent on broadcast series, from 15 to 11 instances per hour, while remaining steady on basic cable at 12 per hour. The sharpest drop came at NBC (-56%) as a result of the departure of such series as "Suddenly Susan" and "Mad About You," and the cooling down of the heavy-breathing on its hit series, "Friends."

Hourly Rate of Sexual Content*



Sexual Material -- Top Ten Broadcast TV Series

of Scenes

200

1998-1999

175 Scenes

Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer	UPN	24
Friends	NBC	24
Love Boat: TNW	UPN	19
That '70s Show	FOX	18
Ally McBeal	FOX	17
Cupid	ABC	17
Family Rules	UPN	17
Will and Grace	NBC	15
Suddenly Susan	NBC	12
Just Shoot Me	NBC	12

2000-2001

144 Scenes

Girlfriends	UPN	25
Gary & Mike	UPN	20
Law & Order: SVU	NBC	18
First Years	NBC	15
Ally McBeal	FOX	12
Ed	NBC	12
Sammy	NBC	11
Two Guys and a Girl	ABC	11
Dawson's Creek	WB	11
Michael Richards Show	NBC	9

The end of the series "The Nanny" contributed to the sharp drop in sexual content on CBS (-50%), which was already the least sex-oriented of the major networks. CBS viewers, on average, saw one reference to or incident of sex every five minutes in 1998-1999 vs. one every ten minutes in 2000-2001.

Premium cable registered an even sharper drop for sexual material (-49%) than broadcast TV. The downward trend reflects Showtime's abandoning much of the erotic programming that dominated 1998-1999's list of most sexually oriented shows on cable. Whereas "Beverly Hills Bordello" topped the list for raunch in 1998-1999 with over one sexual reference or image every minute, Showtime's top-place offering for 2000-2001,

"Lady Chatterly's Stories," contained only one sexual reference or image every two minutes. Four of the most sex-oriented cable shows came from basic cable, led by MTV's "Undressed" in the number two spot. But the material on the premium channels was more graphic.

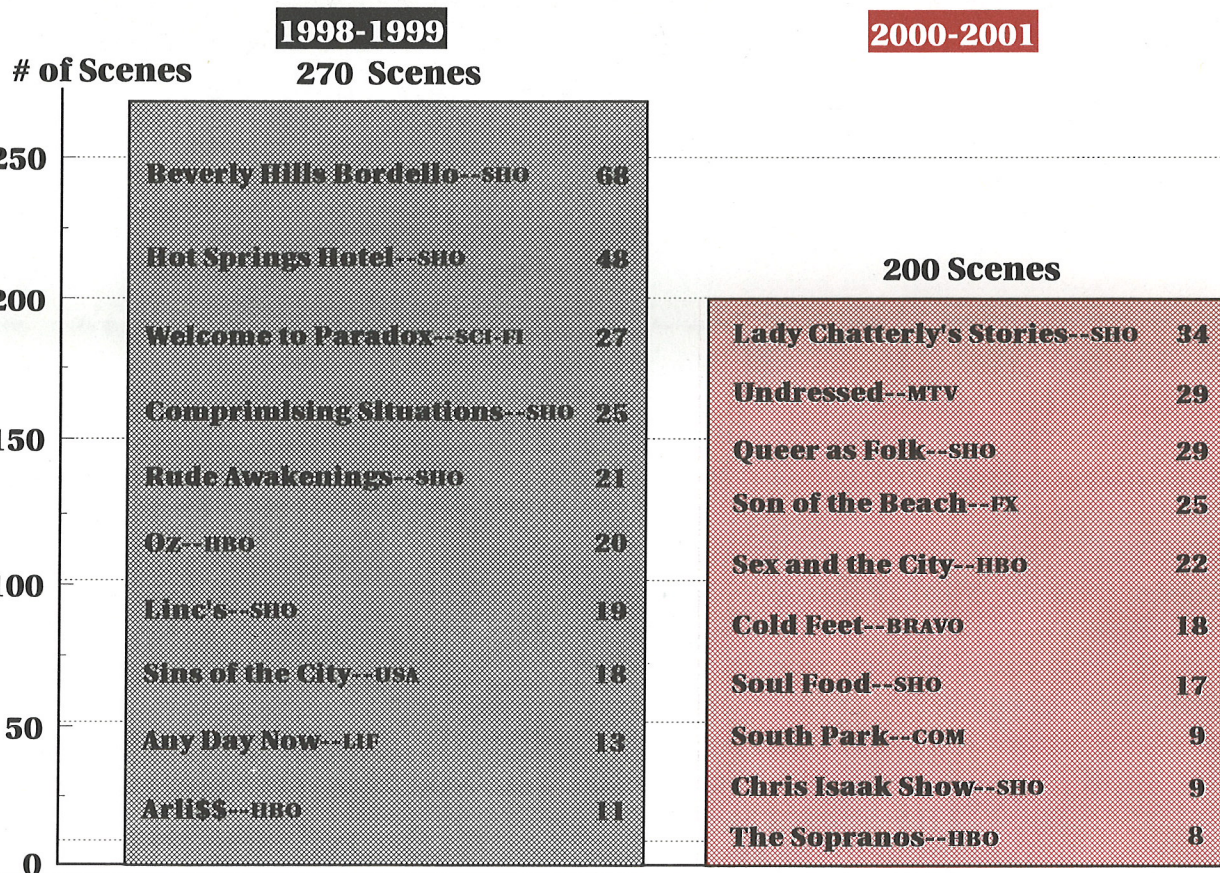
On television as a whole, the amount of sexual material dropped from 17 scenes per hour in the 1998-99 season to 12 scenes in 2000-2001, or about one every five minutes versus one every three and a half minutes. Of all the networks, NBC aired five of the ten most sex-oriented shows in 2000-2001. However, the number one series was UPN's "Girlfriends," which averaged 25 scenes of sexual material per episode.

A common criticism of television's parental rating system is that programs with frequent sexual and violent content are often rated as PG. Our study found that the industry had tightened its standards this time around. In 1998-99, 45 percent of the 20 most sex-oriented broadcast and cable series were rated PG. In the 2000-2001 season the proportion had dropped to 30 percent.

Violence on TV

The violent acts referred to in the text and tables are limited to serious violence - that is, acts that could reasonably be expected to cause significant injury or death to

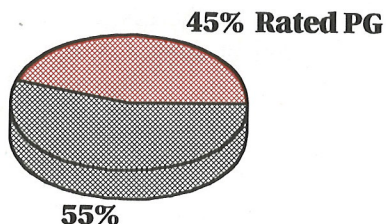
Sexual Material -- Top Ten Cable TV Series



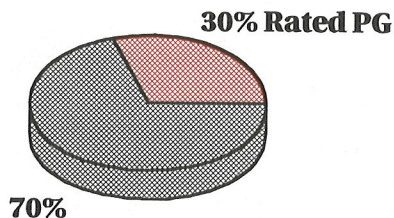
Percent of Series with PG Rating

Most Sex-oriented Series

1998-1999

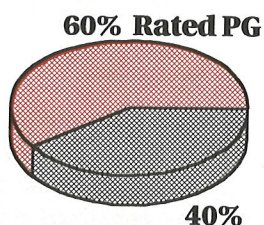


2000-2001

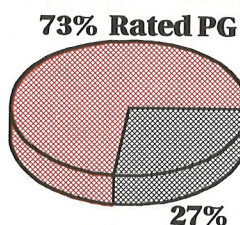


Most Violent Series

1998-1999



2000-2001



Based on parental rating system of broadcast and cable television series.

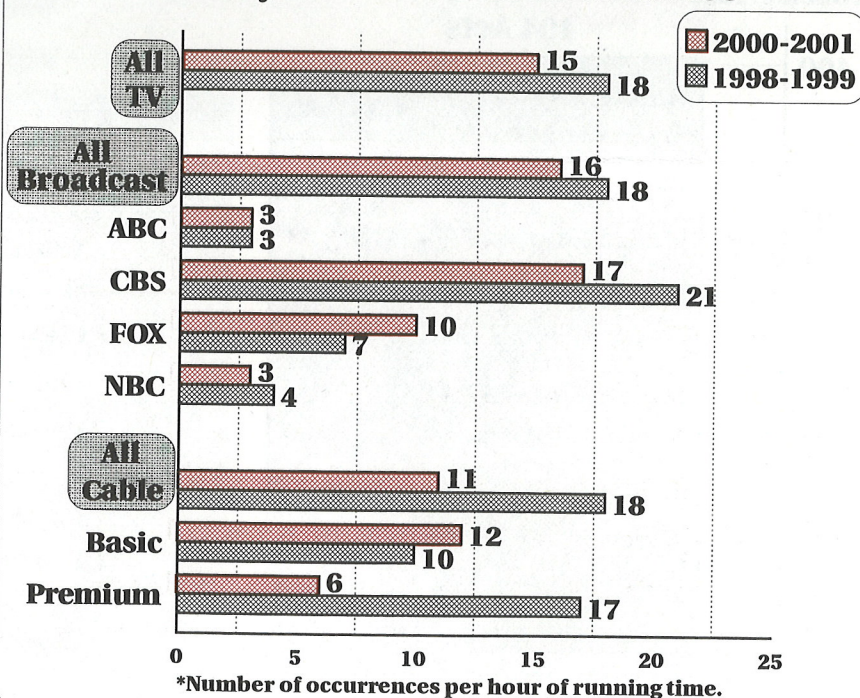
This trend was weakened by a 20 percent rise in violence on basic cable, largely due to the introduction of shows like TNN's "18 Wheels of Justice" and the Sci Fi channel's "Farscape" and "Good vs Evil." But it was reinforced strongly by a 65 percent decline in violence on premium cable series.

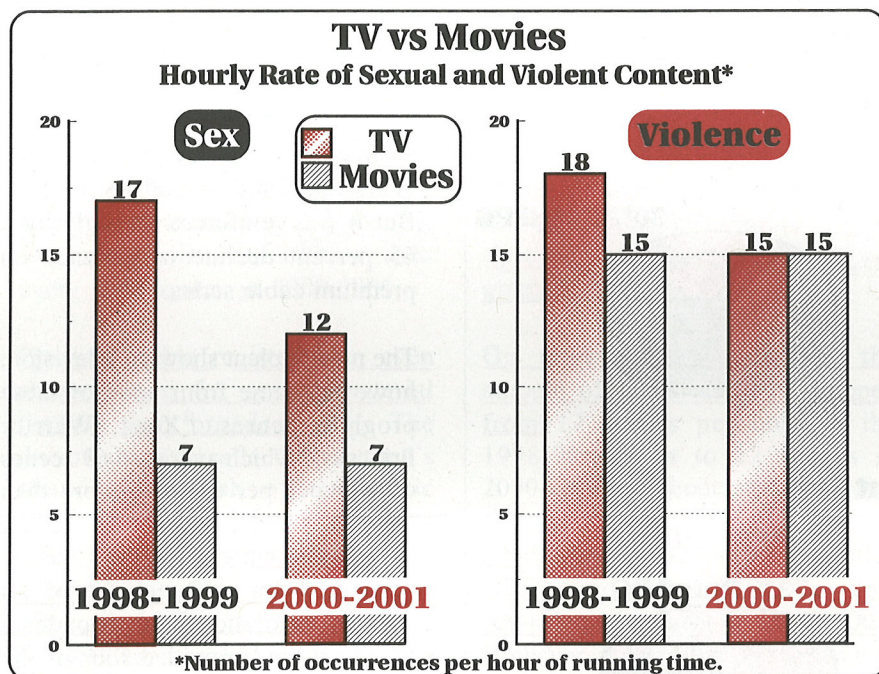
The most violent show on television, however, came from none of these program genres. "Xena: Warrior Princess," which averaged 63 scenes of violence per episode, more than one per minute, was shown in first run syndication. This venue accounted for 42 percent of all serious violence on broadcast television and provided four of the five most violent shows on television in the 2000-2001 season. Although much of the serious violence in television entertainment is now consigned to this fringe area, parents get little guidance from the industry's rating system in monitoring this material.

the victim. Such acts of serious violence also dropped substantially, although not as sharply as sex. In 2000-2001 television averaged 15 violent scenes per hour, a 17 percent decline from the 1998-99 average of 18 scenes per hour.

Once again, there was a solid decline (11%) in broadcast series, which account for the bulk of all shows. The most significant decline on broadcast networks came at CBS (down 19%) as a result of the disappearance of such series as "Magnificent 7," "Martial Law" and "Sons of Thunder" - all of which contained substantial violent content. NBC was down 25% but from a very low base. "Dark Angel," a post-apocalyptic drama starring a young, genetically engineered soldier accounted for a large part of the 42 percent increase in serious violence on FOX.

Hourly Rate of Serious Violence*



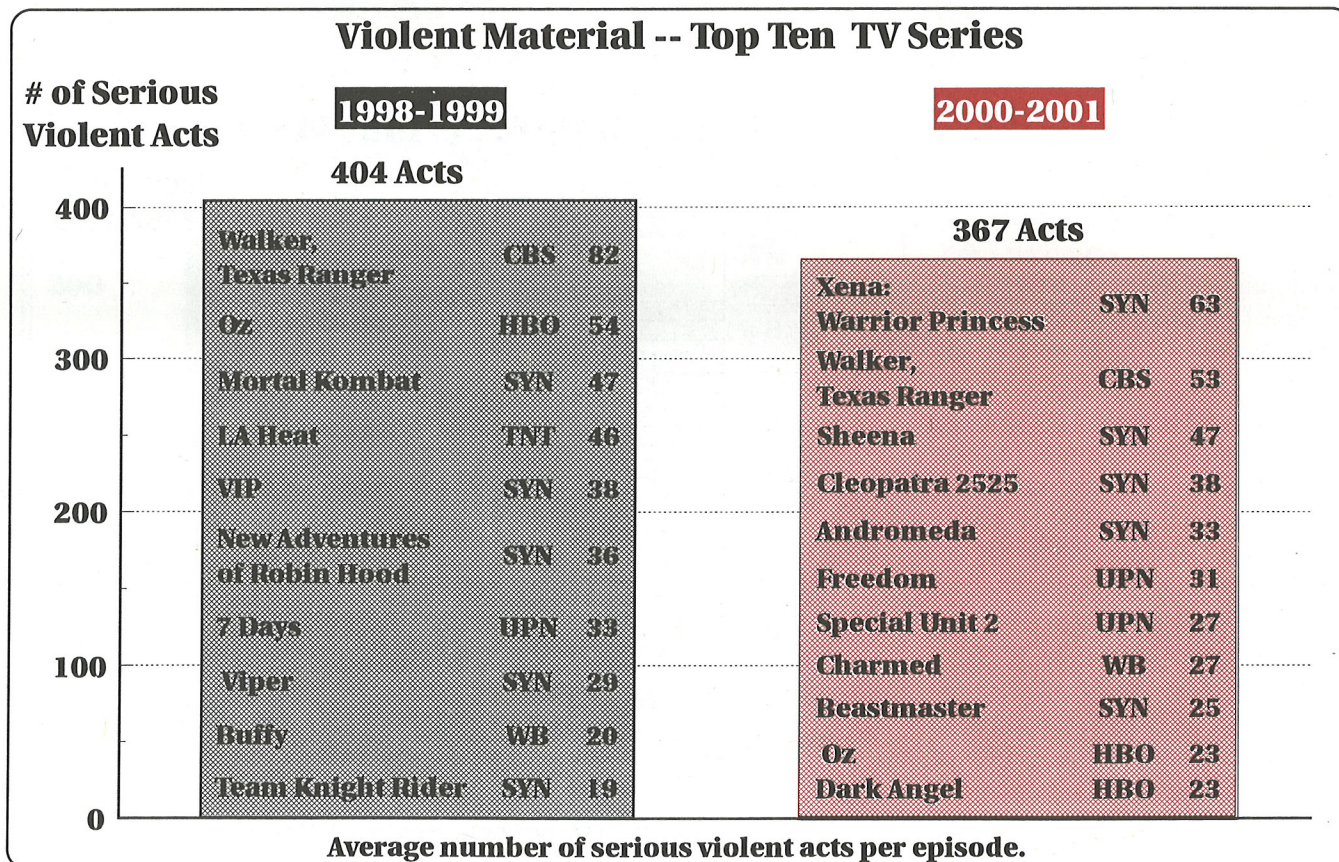


At a time when the most sex-drenched shows got more likely to receive TV-14 or TV-MA ratings, the high-violence shows moved in the opposite direction.

Seventy-three percent of the most violent shows identified in our studies received PG ratings compared to 60 percent two years earlier.

Movie Sex and Violence

Whereas television entertainment showed consistent declines in sex and violence, feature films were just as consistent in their lack of change. The 50 top grossing films that we viewed averaged identical rates in 1998 and 2000, with seven scenes of sexual material and 15 scenes of violence in both years. This put feature films exactly equal to television in the rate of violence portrayed but considerably below the small screen in the rate of sexual material. Because feature films are aimed at such segmented audiences, however, the use of averages can be misleading. In 1998 the ten most violent films contained 63 percent of the serious violence in all 50 films sampled. In 2000, this figure



rose to 71 percent of all serious violence. This shows that most serious violence is concentrated in a few high-violence films, and the level of concentration is increasing. The most violent films of 2000 were The Patriot with 159 violent scenes, Gladiator, with 110, Mission Impossible II with 108, and Shanghai Noon with 99.

Finally, the parental ratings based on these content categories were virtually identical in 1998 and 2000. Among the ten movies with the

most sexual material, six were rated R and four PG-13 in both years. In 1998 the ten most violent movies were evenly split, with five receiving R ratings and five PG-13. The 2000 list saw a slight shift to six R ratings and four PG-13's. Among those receiving PG-13 ratings were Mission Impossible II and Shanghai Noon, both of which featured roughly one scene of violence per minute of running time.

Our results show that popular culture is not necessarily on a

permanent and steeply downward slide. Even before the surge of pro-social sentiment that swept through Hollywood after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, television had taken at least a tentative step back from the entertainment industry's recent philosophy that nothing succeeds like excess.

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Editors: Dr. S. Robert Lichter, Dr. Linda S. Lichter

Research Director: Daniel Amundson

Research Fellow: Trevor Butterworth

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Assistant Project Director: Raymond Shank

Research Assistants: Kenichi Serino, Matt Curry, Alex Carrera

Production and Graphics: Raymond Shank

Managing Director: Linda Ladas, Christine Messina-Boyer

Director of Circulation: Keith Bundy



Center for Media and Public Affairs

2100 L Street, N.W. Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20037
Phone (202) 223-2942
Fax (202) 872-4014

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