

To be sure that the counselling process is effective, supervision after a session is essential. Such supervision is best undertaken in a group, so that other members of the APA teams will be able to profit from the teaching as well.

If a psychiatrist or psychotherapist would like to join this exciting venture of bringing barefoot psychiatry into the community in a field notoriously lacking in resources please contact me as soon as possible. I must add that I am not yet sure whether it will be possible to pay an honorarium to the therapist who volunteers to take on this responsibility, but we are currently appealing for funds for this and I have good hopes of a positive response.

DALE BECKETT

Please reply to: Dr Dale Beckett, APA, 56 New Oxford Street, London WC1A 1ES.

Violent videos

DEAR SIRS

Professor Sims and Dr Melville-Thomas (*Bulletin*, December 1985, 9, 238–240) mention that the research of which their own study formed a part 'was clearly politically sensitive'. One can only agree that there are obvious dangers in associating scientific research with campaigns, particularly when there is insufficient time to attempt more than a superficial study—although I have no hesitation in giving due deference to the opinion of colleagues working in child and adolescent psychiatry.

The impetus for the research described and cited in the *Bulletin* came from an *informal* group within which it was decided to sponsor an enquiry privately funded by individuals and the Churches. The description 'a Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry' could be considered misleading as the group was not an *official* representative Parliamentary sub-committee with a brief to inform. Dr Clifford Hill (sociologist) agreed to direct the enquiry and produce proposals for research. It was later decided to set up an academic working party to implement these ideas and in July 1983 a list of names was approved which included those of Professor Sims and Dr Melville-Thomas as medical members. In the same month Mr Graham Bright had announced the intention to introduce a Bill to control the availability of video films.¹ Dr Hill notes that it was decided to keep the Academic Working Party entirely separate from the sponsoring body and from any political or campaigning influence. The methodology and aspects of the subsequent reports relating to children's patterns of viewing (*Video Violence and Children, Parts I and II*)^{2,3} have been criticised in a book⁴ edited by Martin Barker (Senior Lecturer, Communication Studies) and elsewhere.

Dr Hill has commented on the significance of these reports in the following terms: '... a turning point in the life of this nation. This battle that we are in now is not just against flesh and blood as the Bible says but it is against the principalities and powers that are attempting to sweep

this country into the moral sewer that is beginning to flow through this Nation to sweep us towards destruction... but I believe you know that God is sounding a trumpet call if you like to the Christians in this Nation, to enter into battle for the spiritual and moral soul of this nation. What we need to remember though is that it is not our battle, but it is God's battle'.⁵

Reference to the work described by Professor Sims and Dr Melville-Thomas appeared in the popular press, also in florid style, for example: 'Violence fuelled by Video Nasties'... 'Video nasties are poisoning the minds of Britain's teenagers. According to experts, rioters and child batterers are typical of a generation fed on a diet of pornography and violent videos... and the next generation could be overwhelmed by the revolting diet of sexual horror and brutality'.⁶ This conclusion is somewhat at variance with that drawn from case studies within psychiatry: '... our findings based on the cases given to us merely hint at what effects might be happening in children and adolescents, particularly those of vulnerable disposition'.⁷

The political consequences of that contemporary mood—in the form of a Bill with the potential power of censorship (Governmental) well beyond that necessary to deal with images of violence of the type described—is now with us. It remains to be seen how it will be interpreted.

Presumably few will mourn the loss of nasty videos or wish to have the risk of children in general being exposed to them. The issue is where such matters can be placed in a hierarchy of stressors and how its availability should be influenced. Academics have an important function in clarifying the issues involved, to comment, perhaps, on anomalies, hypocrisy, and the history of the over-valued idea, and to dissociate themselves with reason from the unsupported.

I have never seen a nasty video.

D. H. BOWKER

9 Sunningdale Drive
Bramhall, Stockport
Cheshire

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- ⁴BARKER, Martin (ed.) (1984) *The Video Nasties, Freedom and Censorship in the Media*. London: Pluto Press.
- ⁵BBC, Radio 4, Interview, "Sunday", 26 February 1984.
- ⁶*Daily Mail*, 17 October 1985, page 9.
- ⁷BARLOW, G. & HILL, A. (eds) (1985) *Video Violence and Children*. Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton.