



How much could media violence affect me? I was surprised.

NAME WITHHELD

“Come on, Dad,” I pleaded. “It’s only rated that bad for violence. A little fake fighting isn’t going to hurt us.”

My 16-year-old cousin and I weren’t in the habit of asking to see movies rated for older audiences. We were good kids, active in seminary and our priest quorums. But we had both heard how great this movie was and how many awards it would win. Besides, we’d been told there was no sex, no innuendo, no nudity, and very little swearing. That’s all of the bad stuff, right?

My dad wasn’t seeing it that way. Finally he changed tactics. “Fine,” he said. “You know what’s right and wrong. You do what you feel is right.”

Church leaders have told us not to watch inappropriate movies, and in our family the rule was we could not watch R-rated movies. (In the United States an R rating requires an adult to accompany anyone under 17.) I guess I had been trying to get my dad to say it was all right for my cousin and me to see the movie so I could do what

I wanted and not feel guilty. Instead, he had placed the decision squarely on my shoulders.

Well, he didn’t say no. And besides, it was only a little violence.

After my cousin and I saw the movie, I felt awful. I thought I felt bad because of the movie’s rating, so I promised myself I would never watch another R-rated movie again. But later after watching a somewhat violent movie (though its milder rating allowed teen audiences), I realized I had



Just a Little VIOLENCE?

that same awful feeling.

What happened? Hadn't I done the right thing by choosing a movie with a milder rating? Maybe it wasn't just a movie's rating that mattered. Maybe it was the violence itself. But could violence really affect me that much?

When I pulled out my wallet-sized *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet, I was surprised I had missed such an important point before. Under "Entertainment and the Media," it says, "Avoid anything that is vulgar, immoral, violent, or pornographic in any way."



STAYING NEAR THE SPIRIT

“The standard is clear. If something we think, see, hear, or do distances us from the Holy Ghost, then we should stop thinking, seeing, hearing, or doing that thing. If that which is intended to entertain, for example, alienates us from the Holy Spirit, then certainly that type of entertainment is not for us.”

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “That We May Always Have His Spirit to Be with Us,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 30.

Still, I resisted. “OK,” I told myself, “maybe there are people who are affected by violence, but I know it’s not real. And yes, some movies are pretty graphic, but a little bit never hurt anybody, right?” All of a sudden I wasn’t so sure.

Then came the stinger. Right after telling us to avoid violence, the pamphlet says, “Commit to keeping God’s standards.”

Ouch. I was guilty. Sure, I could rationalize that I was choosing the right by avoiding vulgarity, immorality, and pornography. But was keeping *most* of God’s standards good enough? Was I truly committed if I wasn’t willing to keep all of them?

It didn’t matter what the movie was rated, and it didn’t matter that there was only a little violence. It had been enough to offend the Spirit. And if that’s the case with movies, could the same principle hold true

with other things? Maybe there are some words that offend the Spirit even if they aren’t swear words, and maybe some music offends the Spirit even if the lyrics aren’t bad.

When I committed to being more selective about the things I watched, played, read, said, and listened to, within days I could feel a difference. I didn’t realize how desensitized I had become to the influence of the Spirit.

When I cut back on my diet of violence, I found it was easier to control my temper, and I didn’t fight as much with my brothers. I noticed that, while my language wasn’t foul, cleaning it up made a big difference. Best of all, I could feel the Spirit more strongly.

It taught me that “just a little violence” is more than the Spirit wants to see. **NE**

MEDIA VIOLENCE

Watching violent movies and television shows can affect you no matter what they’re rated. For more than 30 years, Church leaders have been warning against watching violence. In 2000, leaders in the United States’ medical community also spoke up with the following statement:

“Well over 1,000 studies . . . point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children. The conclusion of the public health community, based on over 30 years of research, is that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior” (“Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children” [July 26, 2000], <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/jstmtevc.htm>).

