

## How Are Other First-World Nations Suppressing the Adverse Consequences of Violence and Youth Sex in the Modern Media Environment?

The recent studies published in *Pediatrics* linking adverse effects among teenagers after exposure to media with high levels of sexual and violent content noted but did not adequately explore and explain the exceptionally high levels of these problems in the United States vis-à-vis other first-world nations.<sup>1,2</sup> The latter are enjoying markedly better levels of societal dysfunction as measured by adolescent gonorrhea and syphilis infections, abortion and pregnancy, and homicide, including school murder sprees,<sup>3-6</sup> although the populations of advanced democracies are exposed to broadly consistent levels of media sexual and violent content.<sup>7</sup> If anything, attitudes concerning sexuality are even more open in some Western nations than in the United States, with greater nudity in public settings and advertising being considered acceptable.

If media exposure is a predominant factor in determining levels of youth sexuality and violence, then the resulting levels of dysfunction should be roughly similar in first-world nations. That they are not suggests that other factors are more efficacious at ameliorating levels of these social ills. Elevated levels of popular religiosity are apparently not among the reliably effective factors, because the United States is the most theistic first-world country, and the levels of dysfunction are unusually low in the least religious nations.<sup>3-6</sup> Because benign socioeconomic conditions strongly suppress the mass religiosity of a country's population, the latter cannot improve the former on a national scale.<sup>3,5,6</sup> The abstinence-only education policies prompted by elements of the American religious right seem to be less effective than the pragmatic comprehensive sex education

(which emphasizes condom use regularly) used in most prosperous democracies.<sup>3,8</sup> Handgun controls may inhibit the worst consequences of physical violence.

Parental action is always important, but what national actions are advisable? It is questionable whether legally or socially controlling media content to the extent necessary to significantly reduce the adverse impact on the population is practical in modern democracies that place high value on the free market of ideas and commerce, all the more so because corporate interests favor minimal restraints on their mercantile efforts.<sup>9</sup> Because most advanced nations have achieved remarkably low levels of these social ills without resorting to suppressing free expression, the American body politic should consider using similar methods including effective sex education, controls on lethal weapons (to the degree allowed by the 2008 Supreme Court decision), and the beneficial socioeconomic conditions that are associated with high levels of income equality and security.<sup>9</sup>

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