

MTV Delivers Incessant Sleaze

Written by Robert ID811

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Approaching the first anniversary of Janet Jackson's famed wardrobe malfunction, a study released Tuesday criticized MTV for the "incessant sleaze" of steamy programming aimed at young people.

During one week last March, the watchdog Parents Television Council said it counted 3,056 flashes of nudity or sexual situations and 2,881 verbal references to sex.

"MTV has clearly chosen to cater to the lowest common denominator, to offer the cheapest form of programming to entice young boys ... dangling forbidden fruit before their eyes," said Brent Bozell, PTC president and conservative activist.

MTV labeled the report unfair and said the group ignores the network's public service efforts, like its Emmy-winning "Choose or Lose" campaign on the presidential election.

An independent analyst said the findings shouldn't come as any surprise to people who watch MTV regularly but would be eye-opening to people who don't just like the MTV-produced Super Bowl halftime show did when exposed to a large audience on CBS last year.

"There are a lot of things that most rational parents of 12-year-olds would be uncomfortable with their children consuming," said Robert Thompson, director of the Center for the Study of Popular Television at Syracuse University.

The group decided to look at MTV's programming after the Jackson incident and picked the network's annual "Spring Break" week (featuring rap, hip-hop and rock artist) of shows to study.

In an episode of "One Bad Trip," MTV depicted a human sundae competition where men licked whipped cream placed on women's bodies with a cherry for each breast. In "Spring Break Fantasies," five women in swimsuits rubbed lotion on a man, using more than their hands. An episode of "Room Raiders" showed a man looking through a woman's underwear drawer and commenting on what he finds.

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The parents group said MTV's reality programs have even more sexual content than its music videos.

During the week, the PTC said it recorded 3,127 instances of profane dialogue "bleeped" out and another 1,518 other instances of unedited rough language.

MTV spokeswoman Jeannie Kedas said the network follows the same standards as broadcasters. MTV reflects the culture and what its viewers are interested in, she said.

"It's unfair and inaccurate to paint MTV with that brush of irresponsibility," she said. "We think it's underestimating young people's intellect and level of sophistication."

Besides the "Choose or Lose" campaign, MTV won a Peabody Award last year for the "Fight for Your Rights" series that focused on issues such as sexual health and tolerance, she said.

Thompson said the report offers valuable consciousness-raising, particularly when many children have televisions in their bedrooms that aren't monitored by parents. He said, though, that it's dangerous to leap to a conclusion that MTV's programs influence young people's behavior.

The PTC has frequently monitored the broadcast networks for sexual content, bad language or violence. MTV has roughly three times as many incidents throughout the day as ABC, CBS, NBC or Fox do at 10 p.m., when standards are generally loosened because most children have gone to bed, Bozell said.

"I have done thousands of these studies over the years and I knew these numbers would be troublesome," Bozell said. "I had no idea it would be this bad."

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His group favors requiring cable and satellite companies to offer "a la carte" programming, giving customers a chance to pick and choose which networks to buy. MTV is generally included in basic cable packages that most customers get whether they want it or not.

"The incessant sleaze on MTV presents the most compelling case yet for consumer cable choice," Bozell said.

Bozell acknowledged that the PTC could be criticized for singling out MTV's spring break week, a particularly hormonally charged time for college students. But he said that was fair game because MTV uses it as a showcase for new programming.

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