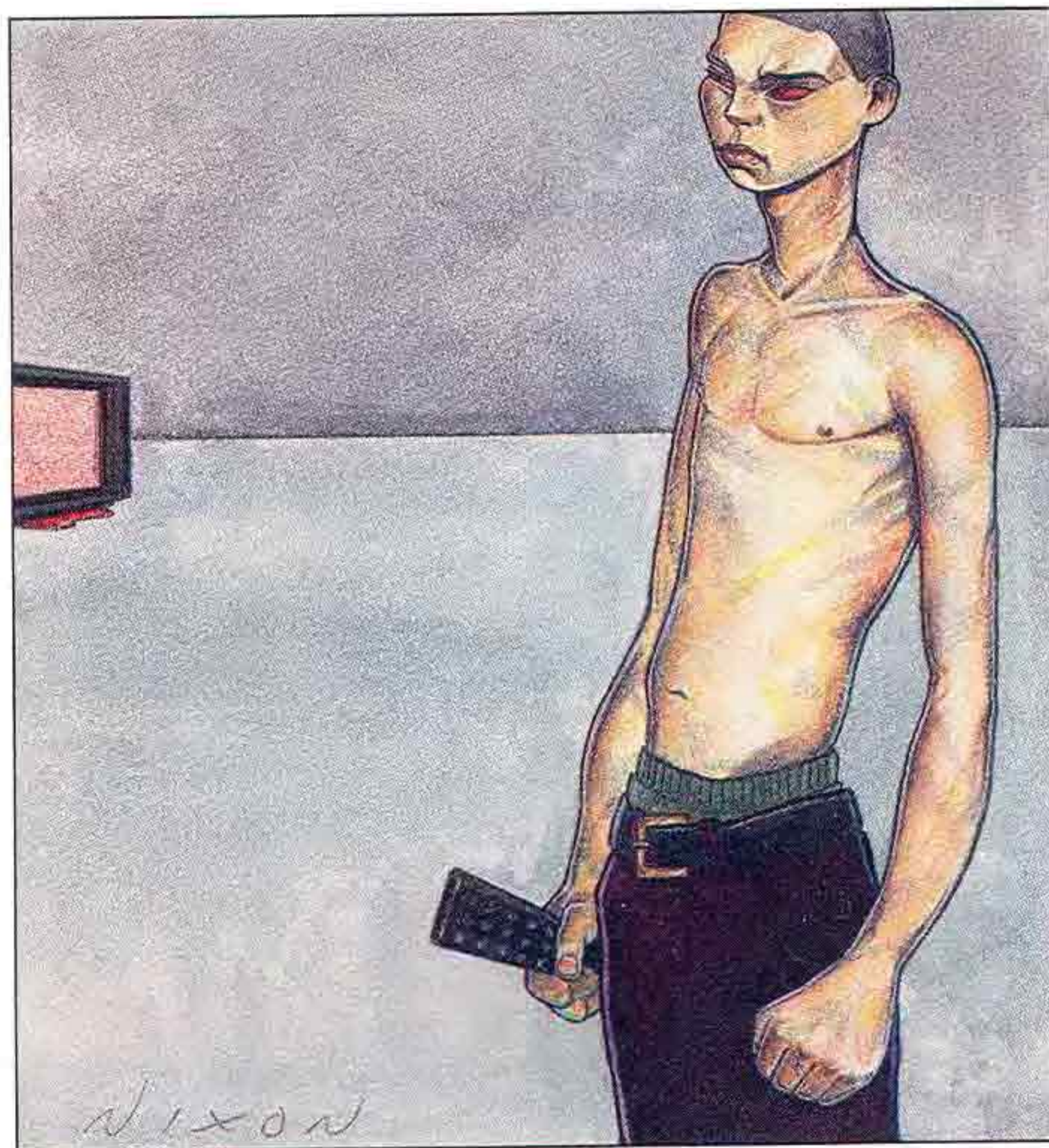


Agressive Children

Do They Become Agressive Adults?

By Angela Bianchi



Butch, the tough-talking, mean-looking bully in the television series, "The Little Rascals," may be a cream puff compared to the knife-wielding six-year-old bullies that can be found in Canadian playgrounds today.

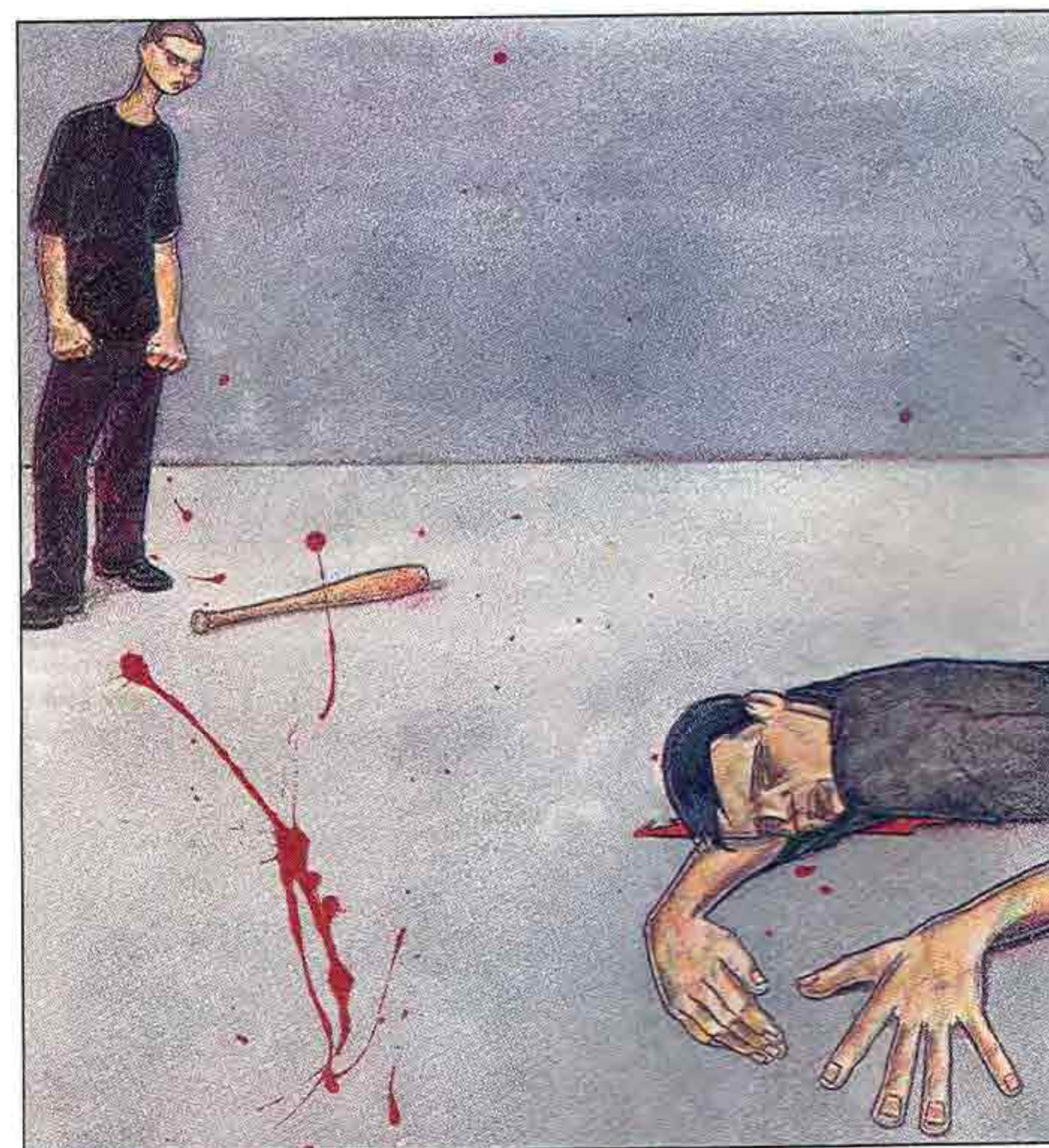
York psychology professor Debra Pepler is a contributing author to "Violence and Youth," a recent report put out by the American Psychological Association (APA). She says her own investigation into bullying on school playgrounds has come up with some horrifying data.

Pepler's findings are a result of her work with the Toronto Board of Education, with whom she's developing an anti-bullying program.

Part of her research required videotaping and monitoring behaviour of school children in city playgrounds and, although she was prepared to expect some degree of aggressive behaviour, Pepler was sometimes shocked by what she witnessed.

"There were boys and girls, no more than six-years-old, pulling out knives in a playground," she says. "And the fact of the matter is, they knew they were being watched."

"If the things I saw happen in



those playgrounds happened to adults, you'd charge them with assault," she adds.

Aggressive behaviour in children continues to be a major problem concerning school administrators and psychologists, who fear that aggressive behaviour in children is on the rise.

And television has been identified as a main source which encourages this aggressive behaviour, says Pepler. "This is especially the case among children who already live in abusive or aggressive households," she says.

An APA report states that "risk of involvement with violence increases with exposure to violence in the mass media, but not it alone." There are inherent factors that cause aggression as well. And an aggressive child will unfortunately become an aggressive adult.

Statistics released by the APA report on television viewing are disturbing: "In prime time hours there are five to six violent acts (committed) per hour, and 20 to 25 violent acts per hour on Saturday morning children's programs."

"Aggression is about as stable as an IQ," says Pepler. "An aggressive child at eight (years-old) will be an aggressive adult."

But although North Americans have been monitoring television violence and its effects on young viewers, there's still no positive proof that watching violence will cause you to become violent, says Beth Seaton, a feminist media critic and a communications scholar at York, who is presently studying the effects of tabloid television on viewers from a feminist perspective.

"I don't want to say that television is wonderful, but statistics really only serve politicians who want to score points with voters, by blaming the ills of society on television," Seaton says.

"Children are more likely to turn into zombies than become aggressive [from watching TV]," she says. "I don't want to give parents a list of do's and don'ts, but they should be controlling what their children watch. They should be asking themselves, 'why is the show being shown now, who are the advertisers, and what cultural content does it offer?'"

Understanding that it's often difficult for parents to know what their children are

watching on television, Pepler suggests parents sit down with their kids and discuss the violence they're watching.


"Power Rangers, for example, has a pro-social message, that in effect tells children that it's okay to be aggressive if they're out to solve a problem," says Pepler.

Even though it's convenient to blame television for encouraging aggressive acts, parents are ultimately responsible for their children's aggressive behaviour, says Pepler. The home environment is still the first place where behaviour is learned.

"If not caught early, aggression can compound itself," says Pepler.

Aggressive girls, who don't change through the maturing process, are more likely to get involved in early sex and accept or expect date rape, adds Pepler.

If progress is to be made on this front, school is where the biggest impact will be felt, Pepler adds.

"We've done a wonderful job educating children about the environment. We can also teach them how to solve problems in a non-aggressive way," adds Pepler. 



Debra Peplar