

The Entertainment Trap

by Vicki Griffin

William Wordsworth wrote that some people had a "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation."¹ Like an overly salty meal that produces insatiable thirst, uncontrolled television exposure seems to create an increased but unsatisfied craving for more.

The average U.S. home has the TV on six to seven hours a day. When TV time is combined with playing video games, many teens are spending 35–55 hours in front of the television every week, according to a study by the American Academy of Pediatrics.²

Social scientists like Robert Kubley and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi verify that television addiction is more than a metaphor. "Most of the criteria of substance dependence apply to people who watch a lot of TV."³ Recent reaction to the Super Bowl half-time show awakened America to the fact that the entertainment industry understands the addictive nature of television and appears to be intent on burning increasingly questionable images into our brains at potentially toxic doses.

Although people will say they watch TV to relax, ironically, it is more likely than any other leisure activity to leave people passive, tense, and unable to concentrate.⁴ In fact, prolonged viewing leaves people in a worse mood than when they started watching.⁵

In addition to fostering boredom and restlessness, many studies have linked excessive TV viewing to obesity, physical inactivity, increased severity of asthma, increased stress hormone production, weakened immunities, and elevated blood pressure. It is also associated with negative psychological characteristics and numerous attention, behavioral, and learning problems.⁶

Seattle pediatrician Dmitri Christakis surveyed 1,300 children ages one to three and found that the more time kids spend with media the more trouble they have concentrating and paying

attention. His conclusion is that the highly intense stimulation in media appears to mesmerize the kids. Every hour of TV viewing per day increases the odds of having attention problems by 10 percent.⁷

Why not pull the plug long enough to consider some great alternatives to watching television? Ask God to help you follow the principles of Philippians 4:8 and Psalm 101. Then enjoy the many healthy, rewarding, and life-giving activities available for your leisure time.

1. Richard Winter, *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 2002), 38.
2. V. Strasburger and F. Donnerstein, "Children, Adolescents, and the Media in the 21st Century," *Adolesc Med* 1 (2000:11): 51–68.
3. R. Kubey and M. Csikszentmihalyi, "Television Addiction Is No Mere Metaphor," *Scientific American* 2 (2002:286): 74.
4. R. Kubey and M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Television and the Quality of Life: How Viewing Shapes Everyday Experience* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc, 1990).
5. *Ibid.*
6. Jane M. Healy, *Endangered Minds: Why Children Don't Think and What We Can Do About It* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, Inc.).
7. See

www.common sense media.org/information/index.php?article=latestresearch.

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