

Watching the detectives

By Brian Lockhart

I read a very interesting article recently that involved an interview with a former Central Intelligence Agency operative.

Television, he said, is the 'greatest propaganda tool' ever invented.

It's in almost every home and pretty much everyone watches it daily for either news, entertainment, sports, or whatever other garbage the networks are producing during the daytime viewing hours for the terminally dull who think 'The View' or 'The Maury Show' contain entertaining programming.

This CIA agent wouldn't say exactly how the agency uses television to influence opinion, but he did imply that it works 'and it works well.

People believe what they see on screen 'either the big screen or the little screen. Companies don't spend millions of dollars on Super Bowl ads for no reason.

If Oprah Winfrey wore a donut pinned to her head as a hat during one of her shows you can be sure within a few days thousands of women would be sporting chocolate dips or Bavarian creams from Tim Hortons as headpieces.

A lot of people, most notably those involved in producing television and movies, claim that these productions don't influence people to any degree.

However, speech patterns alone show the influence movies have on the public.

At one time, profanity was generally kept to certain places or cultures 'hence the term 'swears like a sailor.' It wasn't used in common conversation and certainly not what was then considered 'polite society.'

You were judged on your speech in a way that defined your level of sophistication, upbringing, and education.

Starting in the 1970's, movies suddenly did a subtle shift with a few bad words that were tossed into movies for emphasis. By the '90's, some movies (see Goodfellas 'count 321) were noted for how many times the 'f-bomb' was dropped in the space of two hours. Now, just about every movie with the exception of ones produced for pre-teens is filled with profanity for comedy, drama, and everything in between.

The result can be heard in shopping malls, arenas, any public place where the 'f-word' is now used as a verb, an adjective, noun, or just to fill in a sentence for no particular reason, and not just by a single group of people 'it's now very common.

If movies can influence an entire generation or two's way of speaking, what else can the big screen manipulate?

In a recent survey by a U.S. company trying to figure out how much we are influenced by media, they found that only 17 per cent of people could name just three justices of the U.S. Supreme Court, yet 59 per cent of those same people could name all of the Three Stooges.

It is estimated that by the time an average kid finishes elementary school they have seen around 8,000 murders on TV. By the time they are 18, it's 200,000.

While murder in television and movies may be entertainment for some, those killings are two-dimensional acts played out on a screen without finishing with the real-life consequences of taking a life.

Violence has always played a part in the movies; however, the level of violence has gone from being a part of a story line to that of a main feature of the film.

Humphrey Bogart plugged a few guys on screen with his snub-nosed .38, but it was always in self-defence and as a part of a story.

Bang 'the bad guy falls down dead and the cops arrest someone' end credits.

That has changed to story lines where killing for the sake of killing is the main selling point and doing it in graphic detail has become the norm.

Director Quentin Tarantino orders fake blood for his movies by the 45 gallon drum. The more blood the better. The more killings packed into a 120-minute screenplay the more the audience cheers.

Is it any wonder mass shootings have increased along with the same pace as violence on television, movies and even video games?

While the Academy Awards on Sunday night pretended to be festival of congratulations, there was of course the underlying 'me too' movement that was a part of the event.

If Hollywood was really concerned about problems in society, they would do a lot more self-examination of what they are producing and the effects it has on society.