

# Standard deviation

American society moves toward perverted truths in visual mediums

It's a mad, mad, sick, dark, scary, perverted world out there. And the bad thing about the state of America these days is that we have to live here, with this year getting worse. From inappropriate television commercials to adult toy shops, America is becoming an ever-growing, booming industry of perversion. Perhaps the most notable aspect of all these instances is the way they are tied together — by visual mediums. One of the leaders in today's de-

Opinion Editor



JAMES FRANCIS  
Junior English major

viant nation is the rock-music channel MTV. For the past few months, this television station has been running two commercials which deal with sexual innuendo. The problem occurs, however, when these advertisers take the term "sex education" to mean "sex sells."

**Commercial No. One:** The screen is black. Sounds of multiple voices can be heard moaning, grunting and breathing as if depicting a late-night sexual encounter. Suddenly, the acronym "HIV" is

flashed onto the black background and an announcer begins to detail how people can take an in-home HIV test for privacy. As the voice details the cost of the process and explains confidentiality in ordering the test kit, the camera begins to slowly pan back.

The scene that appears in the next few moments displays people in exercise attire, working out in a gym with treadmills, weights and other body-building equipment. At first, a viewer's reaction may be one of humor (i.e., "That's funny — I thought this commercial had people in it who were having sex, but it's only health-fanatics").

But the final message of an advertisement made to show people how they can order a kit for the detection of a life-threatening disease is lost. After the commercial is over and "The Grind" returns to the screen, no one remembers anything at all about HIV or how to test for it in private.

**Commercial No. Two:** The screen is an off-white color. A package shaped akin to a candy bar appears, but the words on it do not read "Butterfinger" or "Hershey." A label with the title "Sheik" runs horizontally across the wrapper; now the audience knows what the commercial is about: condom usage for safe sex. Wrong.

Out of nowhere, the voices of a female and a male can be heard giggling and cooing to-

ward each other. Next, the package peels away at itself and the outline of a condom can be seen rolling downward. The "candy bar" figure begins to shake violently, the peoples' voices begin to moan and scream "Yes! Yes!" and finally, the sound of an alarm clock ringing is heard. The unseen individuals calm down, the "energy bar" package comes to a standstill and an announcer says his line while the words are printed on the bottom of the television screen: "Sheik — only the feeling gets through."

This commercial is not promoting condom use simply because it advertises for a brand-name condom. The only thought that will linger in the mind of anyone who sees this commercial is, "Boy, I sure would like to have sex right now." In this situation, the purchase and use of a condom remains in the back of the brain while an individual solely concentrates on finding someone to engage in a sexual encounter.

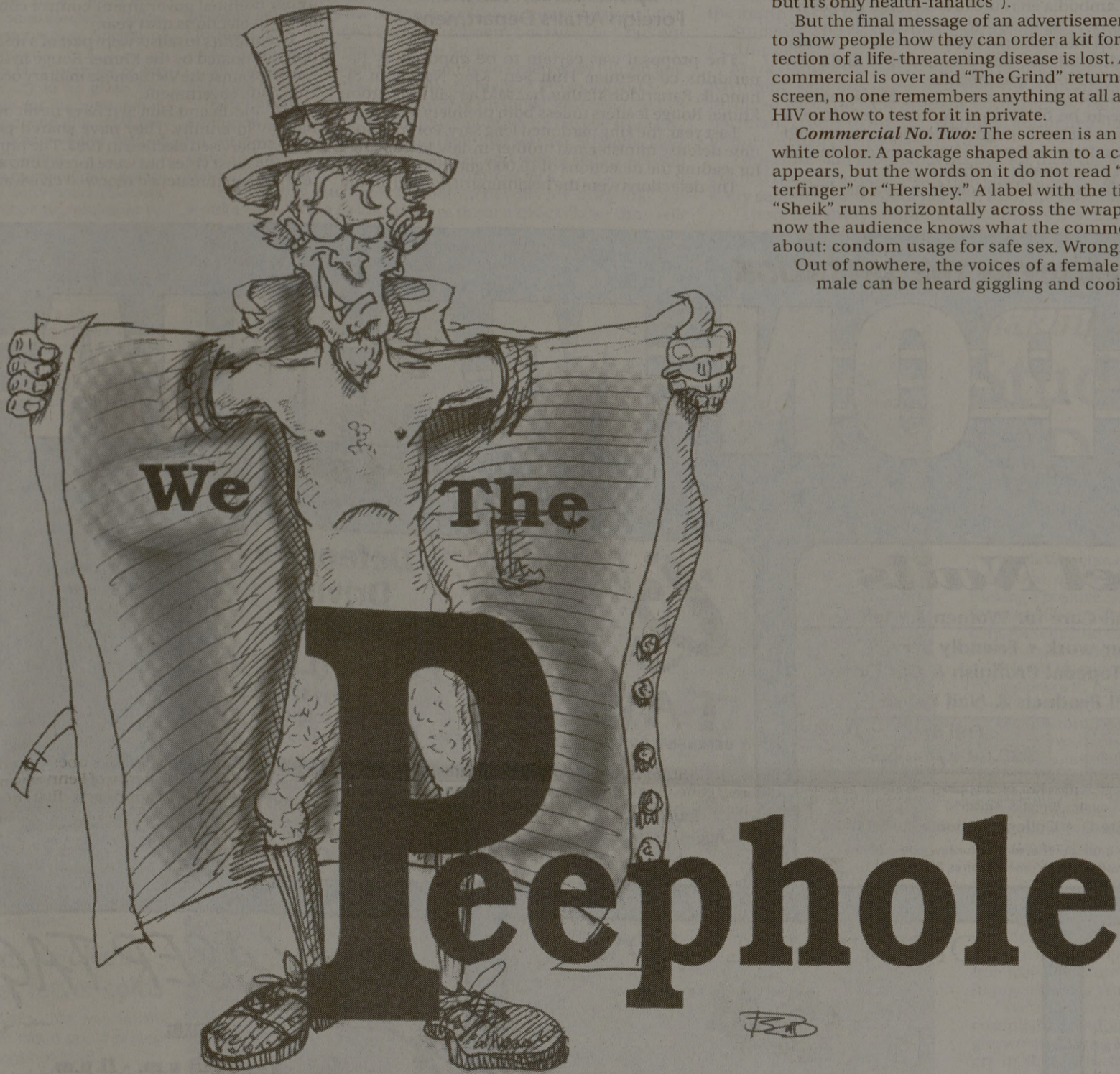
But television is not the only visual medium promoting sex inappropriately — the film genre has been doing the same thing for years. In the latest installment of the Batman films, *Batman and Robin*, the characters of Robin (Chris O'Donnell) and Poison Ivy (Uma Thurman) encounter each other many times in this PG-13 rated feature, which multitudes of children are sure to see. In one of their meetings, Robin asks Poison Ivy to give him a sign that he can trust her. The response was simple, yet too adult for young ears to hear: "How about slippery when wet?"

Although the prevalent mediums are visual, the term "visual" does not have to mean "electronic visual," as in film and television. American marketing uses perverse visual illustrations on the covers of books, CDs and magazine advertisements.

Anne Rice's book *Lasher* has a simple cover which displays her name and the title. Toward the bottom half, however, there is a cutout section in an oval shape that allows a buyer to see a small portion of an inner cover as well. Turning to the inside, there is a detailed drawing of men and women scantily clad, some without clothes at all. Anne Rice might be a great writer, and her books might make for entertaining films, but people must stop and wonder what got them to read this particular book of hers — the title, the author's reputation or the inside cover.

It's true that sex sells — all an individual has to do is visit a local bookstore and look at magazine racks with certain issues placed behind others, wrapped in plastic where only the title can be seen. If this seems too general and grand-scale, take a drive down Texas Avenue until it merges with University Drive. On the corner, there is a neon-red sign which reads, "Adult Video." And although there might not be anything wrong with people who shop at this "entertainment store," the question arises of whether its location should be placed so close to major roads — strategic locale for business, yes, but too perverse for children to see and question the contents of the shop.

American citizens must take heed of these warning signs toward the downfall of society. Although instances of sexual perversion and wrongful allure may not be at a level high enough to warrant total panic and mayhem, there are enough occurrences in the nation today where the idea of sex is being used in a deviant manner.



MAIL CALL

## Flag burning, protests deserve recognition

Response to John Lemons' June column:

Lemons and I are in agreement about one thing: flag burning should not have been outlawed by Congress. Our respective reasonings, however, are very different. Lemons claims flag burning is not worth the attention paid to it, and that it is only a "despicable action" comparable to a temper tantrum thrown by petty individuals.

What he fails to note is that flag burning is a very powerful form of protesting all the social ills he mentions in his column. People who burn the American flag do so because they know the high esteem that large part of our culture holds for it — they know the effect it has on people.

These individuals burn the flag because they want the government to sit up and notice them in order to do something about a country that encourages death and destruction.

Although we both think flag burning should be legal, Lemons shouldn't be so quick to

regard it as too unimportant to warrant congressional attention. No form of protest is unimportant. All the time spent by Congress was not wasted.

The members have certainly been very busy violating the Constitution. Just because Lemons does not understand a person's reason for protesting does not give him license to go around attaching labels on people with more problems than he can probably fathom.

I highly doubt that Native Americans of this country, who have used flag burnings (as well as hanging an upside-down flag) to protest their abhorrent treatment, would agree to Lemons' assessment of them as "childish arsonists." Lemons talks of priorities, and The First Amendment should be right up there alongside tolerance.

Collin M. Conoley  
Class of '99

## Parental guidance safeguards Internet

In nature, species adapt to particular environments to guarantee success. In American business, the environment quickly embraces every new species of media as soon as it climbs out of the entrepreneurial ocean.

It didn't take the business world long to realize that the World Wide Web — the highly graphical and most accessible portion of the Internet for the common household consumer — was the equivalent of the Monolith from 2001 for the business world. It's considered commonplace to see Web addresses trailing the bottom of commercials on billboards or television. Somewhere along the way, it became profitable to promote advertisement on the Web. Contests, freebies and other tantalizing offers lure Web surfers on an hourly basis to divulge their name, address and other personal information in exchange for promotional giveaways.

Unfortunately, activist groups claim this new form of soliciting has attracted a great number of children to type their privacy away to panderers offering everything from gift certificates to big-screen televisions. Privacy groups want the government to lay down "strict regulations" for Web sites to ensure that young users get "parental permission" before giving away private information; this is no surprise. The current climate surrounding the protection of children from evil assumes parents are either too stupid or too lazy to turn off the television or radio, or now, the computer. It seems easier to have Washington protect our children from media.

President Clinton has ordered a task force to review the rising prominence of electronic commerce. The committee, whose members

will release a report on July 1, has allowed several sections of the report to be read early except for the portion detailing children's right to privacy when exploring the Internet.

It will be interesting to see what this report details. Based on the history of federal government involvement in high-tech media, a slew of red tape and restriction may be poised to hit computer screens everywhere.

In an effort to avoid federal presence in the last non-regulated domain, service providers such as CompuServe and America Online are trying to orchestrate industry-based self-policing, which the White House currently accepts and encourages.

Ira Magaziner, former architect of the Clinton health-care plan and now leader of the task force, has little faith in the market to solve this growing problem.

"If the industry doesn't do it, we may have to legislate," Magaziner said in a CNN report. Magaziner displays the traditional authoritarian attitude toward free-market ingenuity. Legislation, whether voluntary by the businesses or mandatory by the Federal Government, will not work at all without parental responsibility.

The Internet is different than a television set or a radio. When tuned to a station on television, any commercial or program broadcast on that station enters the viewers home. If the viewer does not like the program, he or she always can change the channel. Parents can keep their children from watching an undesirable program by monitoring children's viewing habits.

Telling a child "no" once in a while really does work — that is, if it's backed up with action. But even the most vigilant parents might have trouble screening undesirable commercials from children.

Columnist



STEPHEN LLANO  
Senior history major

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class, and phone number.

The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

The Battalion - Mail Call  
013 Reed McDonald  
Texas A&M University  
College Station, TX  
77843-1111

Campus Mail: 1111  
Fax: (409) 845-2647  
E-mail: Batt@tamv1.tamu.edu

For more details on letter policy, please call 845-3313 and direct your question to the opinion editor.