

After Newtown, 'The Following' Is New Low for Television

The Following is a new show by Kevin Williamson, the writer behind the *Scream* movie series. Appearing on Monday nights in the 9 p.m. EST time slot, the TV show's premise, according to IMDB, is "a brilliant and charismatic, yet psychotic serial killer communicates with other active serial killers and activates a cult of believers following his every command."

"At a time when real-life killings are at an all-time high around the country, the depiction of such events as entertainment is without question a terrible step for Williamson to take," says Ted Baehr, publisher of *Movieguide: The Family Guide to Movies and Entertainment*.

The Christian Film and Television Commission, of which Baehr is chairman, has compiled more than 34 years worth of research on the impact of media on society.

Despite the serial killer's role as the antagonist in the plot, the television show still depicts many gruesome killings. Many may ask why Williamson decided to continue the airing of this show in the midst of growing concern over **media violence**, as well as a rising number of school and public shootings.

In *The Following*, Kevin Bacon portrays Ryan Hardy, a retired FBI agent brought back in to help recapture an escaped serial killer, Joe Carroll, played by James Purefoy. This serial killer is not your average murder. Rather than a despicable grunt, he is a highly educated professor who considers his murders a work of art, and soon develops a cult following of others via social networking who are dedicated to his twisted view of art and beauty.

Purefoy describes his murderous character as “the most terrifying killer to hit the small screen” and “deeply, deeply frightening,” while Williamson is quoted describing the show as “emotional horror.” None of these statements point toward a show that will provide entertainment to the growing number of victims’ families across America.

The Following contains scenes of many dead bodies with horrific wounds, the worst of which include a half-naked woman publicly stabbing herself in the eye, a dead, eyeless woman hanging upside down as blood drips from her face, and the protagonist breaking the fingers of a man with his bare hands. These scenes are only a handful of the myriad violent images contained in this show.

“*The Following* not only is inappropriate for families due to its excessive violence,” Baehr adds. “It is offensive to the victims of many shootings across America, from Clackamas, Ore., to Newton, Conn., and to the recent shooting at Lone Star College.”

The Following isn’t a cable-run show in a late time slot; it’s on one of the largest television networks, Fox, in a prime-time slot. Running directly after *Bones*, a crime show with questionable glimpses of mutilated bodies, but with drastically less actual violent action, *The Following* is in dangerous territory for family viewers.

The benefits of *The Following* end with the fact that it does blatantly depict good versus evil. “It’s a cop chasing a bad guy. I’m not glorifying killers,” Fox Chairman Kevin Reilly is quoted as saying. This is true, and Movieguide seeks to celebrate such good versus bad scenarios. But the level of violence is so extreme that Movieguide cannot back the show, despite its usual faith in Fox programming.

Fox network typically does not have a reputation for violent television shows, and is more known for family-friendly shows

like *Glee* and *The X-Factor*. However, Kevin Williamson's show is a departure for a television station that Movieguide typically holds in high esteem.

"Why couldn't *The Following* have been toned down, in light of recent national events?" Baehr asks. "The producers of *Gangster Squad* went the extra mile to change a scene filmed which eerily mimicked the events surrounding the Aurora, Colo., shooting, but Kevin Williamson could not give America the same benefit."

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