PS1 for 8/20/87#IS TV SEX GETTING BOLDER?

(BF)TV Guide(end BF) has admitted it. ""The networks (BF)are(end BF) getting more permissive.'' That's the bottom line of a recent article in (BF)TV Guide(end BF) entitled ""Is TV Sex Getting Bolder?'' The magazine answered with an emphatic yes.

Those who don't watch the steamy sex shows on primetime television may have thought that TV was cooling it about sex. After all, hasn't AIDS scared us about casual sex? Don't we hear a lot today about ""values''? And every now and then, doesn't someone say a kind word for monogamy, and even for abstinence until marriage?

Indeed. But that hasn't deterred the TV producers from getting raunchier. (BF)TV Guide(end BF) quotes (BF)Miami Vice(end BF) co-producer Dick Wolf as taking ""pride in exploring TV's sexual frontier.''

(BF)TV Guide(end BF) described a (BF)Miami Vice(end BF) episode in which Wolf ""pushed the outside of the envelope.'' I'll refrain from describing the bedroom and graphic murder scene which (BF)TV Guide(end BF) delicately called ""controversial.''

Conservative and pro-family groups have been complaining that thousands of scenes of implied sexual intercourse are shown on television networks every year. The interesting thing about the (BF)TV Guide(end BF) article is that it quotes industry spokesmen as disputing the count but agreeing ""that television is on an upward curve of permissibility that has steadily increased the amount and types of sexual behavior that can be shown.''

""There's a continuum'' toward more acceptance of sex in television, says NBC's head censor, Ralph Daniels, but he tries to blame it on society. No, Mr. Daniels, society isn't corrupting television; it's the other way around.

""No one disputes that there's been a quantum leap in primetime's

sexual continuum over the past several years,'' led by (BF)Dallas(end BF) and (BF)Dynasty(end BF), shows which are admittedly ""imbued with lust,'' (BF)Hill Street Blues(end BF) and other programs which boast of their ""new sexual realism,'' and sophisticated comedies based on the sexual innuendo and double-entendre. Is that Jerry Falwell talking? No, it's (BF)TV Guide(end BF).

The TV networks employ personnel with the title ""censors'' who are supposed to veto scenes and language inappropriate for the tube. The censors claim that they fought this new permissiveness every step of the way.

But (BF)TV Guide(end BF), with its industry insight, explains what happened, and why decency lost. Censors used to apply a ""doctrinaire'' standard to every program. Certain things could not appear on television, and certain words could not be spoken.

That has now been replaced by what the industry calls a ""situational'' approach. The standard is not decency in action and words, but what they call ""audience expectation.''

The (BF)Cosby Show(end BF) audience doesn't expect bedroom gymnastics, so they don't get it. The (BF)Dynasty(end BF) audience expects ""graphic fooling around,'' so TV obliges.

Network spokesmen deny that they have been influenced by competition from obscene programs on cable TV and video cassettes. It's obvious that (BF)TV Guide(end BF) knows the networks have been influenced not only by the competition but by the desensitization of viewers resulting from the obscene programs a channel or two away.

All three networks have recently gone through a budget-cutting retrenchment. It's no surprise that the department which felt the ax most severely was the censors. CBS cut its staff of censors 50%, ABC 25%, and NBC 20%.

(BF)TV Guide(end BF) discovered by interviews that most TV

producers now just ignore the censors altogether.

Condoms, unmentionable on TV just a year ago, are now discussed not only in late-evening adult shows, but also in early evening sitcoms aimed at kids. Shows discuss what they call ""safe sex.''

The irony of all this is that there are so many good reasons to turn away from raunchy programming: AIDS, concern about teenage pregnancy, and the fact (even admitted by (BF)TV Guide(end BF)) that characters who hop into bed the moment they meet someone are just plain boring.

But (BF)TV Guide(end BF) warns us: ""Don't look for producers to start giving back any of the ground they've gained from the censors. Barring an unforseen conservative backlash, the bounds of permissibility will almost certainly continue to widen.''

Widen? What a forecast! One can hope that the backlash will not be just from conservatives, but will come from the majority of Americans who will demand some standards of decency for the television that invades their living rooms.