

## SOCIETY

and moral supports for family life" have weakened and that "opportunities for distraction and entertainment outside the family have become greater." Hence, parents are simply paying less attention to their offspring. Good parents are needed to raise good kids.

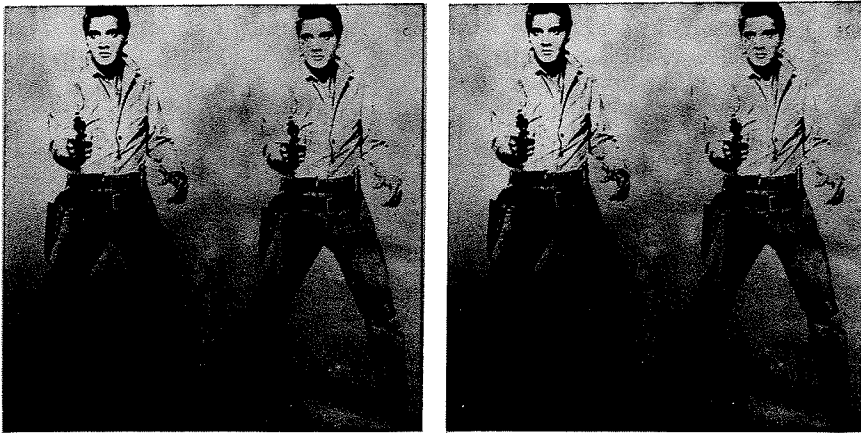
### *Superstars' Fat Salaries*

"The Economics of Superstars" by Sherwin Rosen, in *The American Scholar* (Autumn 1983), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

Are top baseball players, television news anchors, or rock singers worth the millions of dollars they can earn each year? Yes, argues Rosen, a University of Chicago economist.

Just a few decades ago, such figures were simply "stars." Today, they are called "superstars," an apt inflation in nomenclature, says Rosen, given the vastly expanded audiences they can reach thanks to the growth of television, movies, and records.

Not all vocations produce superstars. In those that can, minute increases in talent produce immense leaps in productivity. A football running back who is half a step faster than the rest will gain more yards and score more touchdowns, and his shoes couldn't be filled by any of a dozen slightly slower peers. The tiny increase in speed is worth an enormous increase in pay. By contrast, a salesman who is twice as success-



*Elvis Presley, one of the first modern superstars, as immortalized in 1964 by Andy Warhol, an early superstar of the art world.*

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ful as his competitors is worth exactly twice as much and no more.

When there is no substitute for that last iota of talent (or box-office drawing power), competition is intense. Sorting out the legions of U.S. high school and college basketball players produces only 250 National Basketball Association pros (average NBA salary: \$250,000). Then, the superstars are culled from the stars. On the men's pro golf tour, Rosen notes, the top five money winners "have annual stroke averages that are less than five percent lower than the 50th or 60th ranking players, yet they earn four or five times as much money."

This disparity may not be "fair," writes Rosen, but from an economic standpoint it is inevitable. Television and other mass media magnify superstars' drawing power many times over. Why should viewers settle for mere stars when a superstar is just a turn of the dial away?

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**PRESS & TELEVISION**


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### *In One Ear, Out the Other*

"What Do Readers Digest" by John Robinson and Mark Levy, in *The Washington Journalism Review* (Oct. 1983), 2233 Wisconsin Ave. N.W., Suite 442, Washington, D.C. 20007.

The national news media seem to have an annoying penchant for beating stories to death—for example, Nancy Reagan's china. But according to Robinson and Levy, researcher and journalism professor, respectively, at the University of Maryland, journalists should stick with some stories much longer than they do now.

Last May and June, the authors surveyed 1,070 adults—526 in "news savvy" Washington, D.C., and 544 nationwide—to learn how knowledgeable they were about the top news stories of the day. The researchers found much ignorance.

At a time when newspapers and TV newscasts were daily reporting on the Reagan administration's hostility toward Nicaragua's Sandinista regime and on U.S. support for the regime in neighboring El Salvador, fewer than one in six of the respondents could say which side the United States favored in both strife-torn countries. More than half of those who gave an answer thought that Washington was friendly or neutral toward the Sandinistas.

What those surveyed *did* tend to remember, the authors say, was "human interest" news. Nearly all of them knew that Sally Ride, America's first woman astronaut, was aboard the Space Shuttle orbiting the Earth in June. Four out of five knew that homosexuals were the likeliest victims of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Yet even being a "name in the news" was no guarantee of recognition: Fewer than half of the respondents could identify Polish Solidarity leader Lech Walesa and even fewer knew who Yuri Andropov was.

"It is not the public's job to be on top of the news," Robinson and