

Who's Setting Your Values?

TOPIC INTRO

Several weeks ago a Dad rang in during the morning program commenting on advertising during a children's program that he felt was inappropriate for his family. This and other issues like it are hot topics for many parents in today's world.

TV, movies, advertising, ratings, classification and strategies. How do our values affect these areas of parenting? *Should* values affect this area of parenting? *Why* should they? And finally, *what* values? Our own? A collective societal agreement of values? Some external Source of values? Who is *really* shaping what we think and what we choose?

ANALOGY 1

Remember when you were small... long hot summer days and trips to the beach? Dropping the towels on the scorching sand and racing into the water? Body surfing, splashing, getting dumped and dunked (if you had a big brother), laughing, shouting, floating... time passing...

Someone is calling your name... it's your mother... she sounds far away... you look up at the beach where you left your things... she's not there! Where is she? Why has

she moved? Where has she gone? In a few seconds of searching the beach you finally find her and realise it is not she that shifted - but you! So engrossed in the enjoyment of the moment you'd not noticed the shift as you drifted along the beach with the waves.

Values and standards are affected very much the same way. When we don't keep watch for the reference point (the calling parent or the bunch of towels) we don't notice the shift. It takes deliberate thought to remember to keep sight of the reference point by which we measure where we are.

ANALOGY 2

What if you're driving home one day and decide to pop down to the beach for a dip. You know a great spot. No people, no noise no litter no towel. Through the dunes and into the water. Half a peaceful hour later - which track? Which dunes? The car is out of sight. No reference point. No distinguishing markers. Which way to go?

ANALOGY 3

When you first start learning the guitar, pressing the strings over the neck can be very painful.

I was so determined to get the hang of it when I started teaching myself at 15 I would practice for hours till my fingers were swollen and blistered. It didn't; take long though before my fingers started to callous and toughen. Within weeks I no longer felt pain from the strings - and forgot that it had ever been difficult.

Once again values and standards are similar - in that what causes our conscience difficulty will not continue to do so when we persevere in our ways. Our sensitivity becomes calloused over time.

I stopped playing the guitar after I stopped going to Youth Group. Now if I pick up a guitar, my fingers complain within a few minutes.

Tenderness returns when we stop the activity that calluses us.

CLASSIFICATION INFORMATION

So who rates our entertainment?

Films, videos and DVDs are classified by the Classification Board which is part of the Commonwealth Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC). The Board members are employed for the purpose and are broadly representative of the Australian community.

There are six classifications for films and videos:

- General (G)
- Parental Guidance (PG)
- Mature (M15+)
- Mature Accompanied (MA15+)
- Restricted (R18+)
- Restricted (X18+) Contains consensual sexually explicit activity
- Refused classification (RC)

Films are rated according to impact in six key areas - themes, violence, sex, language, drug use and nudity. In a world increasingly difficult to shock, the impact level must be questioned. "Impact" is largely dependent on degree of desensitisation - desensitisation of the audience and surely of a Ratings Board. If your job was to sit in a room for 8 hours a day watching all manner of video content would you not become desensitised?

The main difference between the M and MA 15+ categories is the step up from *moderate* to *strong* impact, and that the first three categories are "Advisory" where the remaining three/four are legally enforceable.

According to the CTI Code of Practice the following is suitable for your children...

Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice
July 2004

G (all ages of children/adults)

2.2 *Sex and nudity*: Visual depiction of, and verbal references to, sexual behaviour must be brief, infrequent, contain little or no detail and be strictly limited to the story line or program context. Restrained, brief and infrequent visual depiction of nudity only when absolutely necessary to the story line or program context.

I wonder when nudity became absolutely necessary to a story line or program context?

PG (over 12)

3.2 *Sex and nudity*: Visual depiction of and verbal reference to sexual behaviour must be restrained, mild in impact and justified by the story line or program context. Restrained visual depiction of nudity is permitted, but only where justified by the story line or program context.

M (over 15)

4.2 *Sex and nudity*: Visual depiction of intimate sexual behaviour may only be implied or simulated in a restrained way. It must be justified by the story line or program context. Verbal references to sexual activity should not be detailed. Visual

depiction of nudity must be justified by the story line or program context, and must not be detailed if in a sexual context.

MA 15+ (over 15)

5.2 *Sex and nudity*: Visual depiction of intimate sexual behaviour (which may only be discreetly implied or discreetly simulated) or of nudity only where relevant to the story line or program context. However, a program or program segment will not be acceptable where the subject matter serves largely or wholly as a vehicle for gratuitous, exploitative or demeaning portrayal of sexual behaviour or nudity. Exploitative or non-consenting sexual relations must not be depicted as desirable.

www.aba.gov.au

Recording what is allowable in the R, and RC ("X - Refused Classification") is more of an education that most listeners/readers require. If you need/want to know more do some internet research on the below mentioned addresses and you'll find all the detail imaginable.

Changing tack now...

A couple of years ago I had an email discussion with a person that had shown a PG video in our daughters

presence that we had not given permission for and had reason to be concerned about due to nudity.

I included an article from a website with whose comment I agreed. The other person in turn responded with a website that they drew information from. They responded to the article I sent by zeroing in on the things they found the most laughably conservative, and I searched the website link they sent me for things I found outrageously liberal and theologically unsound!

There were actions and attitudes on both parts that were both valid and not.

It was valid for both to look for the extreme that the others opinion was drawn from. This is a way of seeing the extent of a persons beliefs and how deeply this system affects their behaviour. For instance, if you belong to a weekend nudist club, I won't be sending our child to your house to play on a weekday as I will not know when this belief may manifest itself in your home away from the club, and possibly in the presence of my child. The extremes of our beliefs impact many other facets of life. (Not every extreme is bad by the way!)

There are two reasons this same behaviour between that person and I was *not* valid.

- First these extremes were not representative of the individuals concerned - we both drew from other

sources to support our belief. (Anyone can find 'experts' and even Scripture verses to support a belief - no matter how off track from God's heart for us this belief may be).

- Second, both were seeking validation of a personal opinion rather than a guiding truth. Validation of self is dangerous. We can have the best and most reputable validation under the sun and still be wrong. Looking for guiding Truth can also be dangerous because we *just might find it* - and be compelled to change our opinion!

CHANGES TO CLASSIFICATION AND RATINGS IN RECENT YEARS

There have been a number of changes to television and film ratings over the last few years. The documents that detail these changes are well worth a read and can be found on the websites listed below.

Change 1 - 2003

More permissive guidelines for the classification of films came into effect. These guidelines for the first time made way for both nudity and drug use in G rated entertainment. Already permitted prior to 2003 in G ratings were both 'very mild coarse language' and 'very mild and discreet sexual activity'.

Change 2 - 2004

PG time zones extended to half an hour earlier on weeknights - now 7 pm instead of 7.30 pm and on weekends now from 10 am instead of 7.30 pm.

Change 3 - 2005

New Guidelines for the classification of Films and Computer Games.

All of these documents are available online. The links can be found in this article on the Sonshine website or if you don't have internet at home visit a local library and use the internet there to view.

Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice
www.aba.gov.au/contentreg/codes/television/documents/CodeofPractice-July2004.pdf

Office of Film and Literature
www.oflc.gov.au

WA Education Department - Statement on Video Classification
policies.det.wa.edu.au/Members/e4002033/policy.2006-01-23.0997620288/

Other helpful websites
www.youngmedia.org.au
www.family.org.au/update/2003/u20030305.html
www.capalert.com

ANOMALIES

A couple of interesting extras of note to parents...

One:

Programs deemed 'Educational' may be exempt from ratings. This means a school may not see it necessary to inform or gain permission to screen this content to your child. The viewing that relates to Sex Education should be of particular interest to parents as this is an area where disregard for Christian values and the primary role of parents will often take place.

Do you believe an "educational" cartoon could be pornographic? One particular mother I know does (and I agree) - after her daughter in a mixed gender class viewed cartoon depictions of sexual behaviour. Was she warned? Informed? Asked for permission? Provided an alternative? No.

Two:

I was speaking with a Dad in the Eastern States recently who mentioned that their church had wanted to screen a portion of "The Passion of the Christ" at Easter time. Going through the correct channels and finding out about copyright permissions, they found that portions of video content intended for screening are to be *resubmitted* and *reclassified* according to the specific content being shown. This reclassification is to then be communicated to the intended audience before viewing.

What portions of video content are your children being shown under the banner of education - without classification (through exemption or possible copyright infringement), without information as to their educational benefits and without your consent?

WHAT'S YOUR REFERENCE POINT?

Most of us like to think we've arrived at our opinions all by our selves yet each of us is to some degree a product of our times.

Do the programs/films we watch reflect values consistent with those we hope to transmit to our children?

What are my reference points?

- How I feel?
- What I think?
- Enjoyment/entertainment value - "It's a good story" (strangely - similar is said of the articles in Playboy)
- Do you have an external regulator? (Faith or moral base)
- If you are a Christian, what principles from the Bible regulate/impact your viewing? See End Notes.

WHY SO DRAWN TO TV?

Why are we so drawn to the TV? To the movie culture? I'm interested in your answers - here are a few of my thoughts...relaxation, escapism (not having to THINK), routine, habit, social norm etc

A friend once told me that the word amuse means the opposite of "to muse" - muse being "to think"!

We all want some 'down time'. I know I do. After a full on day of activity and talk, a thousand questions and a few dozen problems I really look forward to some moments of veg-out time at the end of the day.

Can we afford not to think *at all* about what we take in via the small screen?

One of the reasons I like TV is that you get to be together with family in think-free time. There's not a lot that achieves this. Books are solitary, reading aloud is fun - but 'work', puzzles and games etc require interaction and thinking. These are activities I am 'for' but just every now and then it's nice not to have to!

All I'm really saying is that I don't see it necessary to give TV up completely, just to be more discerning, harder to please, and to have other interests and hobbies that can fulfil the need to relax at least for a portion of your time. We don't have to watch it just because it's there.

We don't have to watch a movie just because we usually do, We don't have to see the latest movie just because it's out and we don't have to leave it on if we find our new 'selection criteria' indicates this is not the best thing for us!

STRATEGIES

- Some families choose not to have a TV at all. This can be a great option!
- Some families choose to have a TV but not to plug the ariel in - with this option they can have complete control over their viewing with their choice of videos/DVD's. This too is a great option and provides opportunity for critical thought through the movies that are viewed and the accompanying advertising.

These two options really can work and don't need to cause rebellion or disobedience when children go to the homes of others as long as there is understanding of the moral reasons why and a healthy family identity is being maintained.

- Some families allow TV with boundaries and choices about programming. Sometimes a program is not what you expect it to be and teaching, discussion and/or the choice to switch off or over is needed. The development of discernment is just that - a process. (This is the category we are in).

Some specifics in the way our family manages this are:

- First and foremost - clearly communicated boundaries around the Television and its use. In our family no child - even the nearly 15 and 16 year olds may put it on without checking first. This is a courtesy issue rather than an obedience issue at their age. They know the family values. Younger ones are either given permission or must ask first. There are times of the week when we have no TV (Mon-Thurs). This is about giving space for higher priorities to happen (play, homework, interaction). None before school.

Having family guidelines like these doesn't need to be rock solid. The guideline is to serve me not to be a pain in the neck. If there is a reason to make it different for a particular day then I do - as long as that is not the norm. Otherwise we don't have a standard we have a farce.

For younger ones to watch alone the timeslot must be 'safe'. If there is a good program at a less 'safe' timeslot they may only watch in the company of parents or perhaps with one of the older kids. This way there is example and accountability in learning to:

- Close eyes
- Turn away
- Sing!

- Mute the ads
- Turning off during the ads
- Discussion during ads about the ads or the program itself
- Sometimes the only thing that remains is just to turn off
- Another alternative is to tape the program and fast forward the ads when you watch it with the children

This area also needs a strong family identity in order for young people to maintain outside the home. As parents too we need to have understanding that sometimes they will likely succumb to the pressure of the moment and work the issues through with them

A strong family identity will help a child say "our family doesn't watch this" or "I don't think my parents would want me to see this"

Are there families with other strategies? Please input!

There is some value in providing feedback to television stations, writing letters etc. The most value is probably at times when classification guidelines are under review. These days, the guidelines are so broad that complaints are largely not going to lie beyond the realm of what is already allowable.

I did find another website listing complaints to TV stations and how they were dealt with. Which complaints were upheld and what was done about it. (Training, recognition of incorrect classification, explanation of technical faults and a number of mentions of networks taking measures to guard against future occurrences)

There were also a couple of encouraging statements like the following:

Viewer complaints play an important role in the self-regulatory process. Stations regard telephoned and written comments and complaints about their service as valuable feedback on their programming, and as an essential element of their responsiveness to the community.

The Code gives particular importance to written complaints about Code matters. A written Code complaint triggers a station's complaint investigation process, which must meet the strict timetable requirements set out in the Code.

Commercial Television
Industry Code of Practice
Annual Code Complaints Report
2004/2005

The most important strategies are the ones you will make and live to in your own home with your own children.

Setting a high standard and placing great value on areas of life worthy of honour and dignity.

SO, WHO'S BEEN SETTING YOUR VALUES?

Is it the same people that:

- ...say it's OK to watch X rated content in the NT and ACT but not in other parts of Australia?
- ...say "justified by context" - nudity, implied sexual activity, mild coarse language and drug use are OK in a G rating?
- ...allow explicit text on magazine covers at supermarket checkouts?
- ...say there's an appropriate place for sex, sexuality and nudity in advertising?
- ...allows a rating for actual (as opposed to simulated) sexual activity in a legitimate rating system?

Whatever has happened to "honour the marriage bed and keep it holy"?

Hebrews 13:4 Honour marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband.

This is not to paint the picture that sex or nudity is evil or bad - but it is to say there is honour due these areas of life which is sadly missing in their treatment from the entertainment culture. I've said it before on the program but it's worth saying again - there are things

God never intended us to see outside of our own marriage bed.

PR 30:18-19 "There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden.

1CO 12:23-24 ... the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment.

