

CENSORSHIP OVERVIEW

It is...often true that one man's vulgarity is another's lyric.

—The Supreme Court (Cohen vs. California, 1971) as interpreted by Monica McCabe criticizing those condemning the song "Cop Killer" by Ice-T.

Who decides which songs get played on the air waves? Who defines pornography? Who writes our children's textbooks? Who decides what to place in public libraries? These questions lead to further questions about censorship and freedom of speech. When does the free market system stand on the First Amendment to exploit the rights of others? Should this be stopped, or is the possible exploitation of others a risk worth taking for the sake of freedom? Is the continuing secularization and demoralization of America due in part to deconstructionism and the weeding out of religion in our schools' history textbooks? Is it more important to be politically correct and use all-inclusive language in our schools to ensure the impossibility of the disastrous repetition of historical injustices committed against certain peoples?

American society blanketly deems the "religious right" as anyone who is for censorship of certain media and information; anyone who opposes censorship is labeled as the "far left". However, arguments for and against censorship emerge from both liberal and conservative camps depending on what is being argued. For example, WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) is a left, anti-pornography, feminist group maintaining that violence to women is directly related to pornographic media. Yet, an equally feminist left group, FACT (Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce), argues that censoring pornography is not the solution to ending such violence; they view such censorship as harmful to public freedom. On the other spectrum, conservative author Paul C. Vitz argues in his book, *Censorship: Evidence of Bias in Our Children's Textbooks*, that conservative family values and religious history are being eliminated from children's textbooks.

The issues are complicated, especially when "right" and "left" lines are inappropriately drawn, and when there are potentially large economic ramifications. Often, the primary reason that the media mention people or issues is the marketability of the subject. Staci Bonner of *Seventeen* magazine reports:

MTV seems to have contradicting rules for deciding what videos to play. The depiction of a woman as a sex toy in a video by Warrant received heavy rotation, while a socially conscious video by Public Enemy that has a man in a simulated electric chair was never played.

The interests of one party will undoubtedly infringe on the interests of another; what is lucrative for one party will often exploit another. Everyone is affected by censorship. Whether one seeks to protect one's children or defend one's own rights, it is vital to be knowledgeable about the rights and responsibilities surrounding censorship.

The following references were used for this topic discussion:

* McCabe, M. (1992, October 3). The government did crack down on 'cop killer'. *Billboard*, 104 (40), 8.

* Vitz, Paul C. (1986). *Censorship: Evidence of bias in our children's textbooks*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books.

* Bonner, S. (1993, January). As seen on tv. *Seventeen*, 52(1), 24.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Many people consider racist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan extremely dangerous. Why might others believe that it is even more dangerous to silence them using governmental authority?

2. Does the First Amendment's protection of free speech guarantee unlimited free speech? Explain.

3. Courts often have difficulty determining what is legally pornography. How do you define pornography?

4. How do your political views affect your views on censorship?

5. Can you explain the opposing view on censorship (the side that is opposite your stance)?

IMPLICATION

Censorship undoubtedly affects youth workers, teachers, parents, and the young people. Most often it places people against one another on numerous issues including what is appropriate to watch on TV, what materials that should be taught in schools and at church, and whether to allow prayer in schools. In order to debate more clearly, it is essential that each of these special interest groups fully understands the issues of censorship. It is important that young people understand their own views more clearly by studying their opponents' views. This process may be guided by educated youth leaders. Youth workers should present unbiased information and then prompt youth to make their own decisions about current censorship issues.

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