

Monitor children's 'adult entertainment'

By Dennis P. Sugrue
special writer

We had cable television installed in our home last year. It took some adjustment that first evening of cable viewing.

I saw a graphic rape scene, two college sweethearts learning more biology and anatomy in the dorm than in the classroom and enough bare breasts to bore a voyeur.

Ed Sullivan this was not. But as the

argument goes, mature adults should be free to choose their entertainment.

A FEW NIGHTS later, our 15-year-old neighbor came over to babysit. Until then, I hadn't had reason to worry about the implications of a youngster having easy access to "mature adult entertainment."

Suddenly I felt a wave of responsibility: Did I want to potentially expose this adolescent to objectionable material? "Well," I reasoned, "he'll probably

watch 'Love Boat' and 'Fantasy Island.'"

Who was I trying to kid? If I were 15, I'd probably be flipping the dial to "Beach Girls" or "The Sensitive Nurse" as soon as the adults walked out the door. Short of hiding the remote-control box or disconnecting the cable, I didn't feel I had many options.

I suspect many households now are facing similar dilemmas.

ADULT ENTERTAINMENT, via cable, is readily available to all family members and is extremely difficult for parents to monitor.

Parents ask whether they should take a strong stand and impose strict, rigid standards for their children's television, or whether they should ex-

ercise benign neglect in efforts to avoid blowing the issue out of proportion.

Little or no research exists which demonstrates that viewing an erotic bedroom scene on television has a detrimental impact on children or adolescents. This absence of evidence is not necessarily because there is no detrimental impact. More likely it is because this is an extremely difficult issue to research.

We therefore have to infer the impact of "adult entertainment" on children from what we know about child development and attitude formation.

MOST IMPORTANT attitudes which are developed during childhood are not the result of any one discussion with a parent, or of any one lesson in a class-

room, or of any one event witnessed by a child.

Rather, attitudes are gradually shaped by a multitude of experiences, some subtle, some not so subtle.

A parent may tell the child about sexuality in terms of the beauty and responsibility of sexual behavior. The child also is exposed, however, to the locker-room snickers, off-color jokes and four-letter words which all portray sexuality in a totally different light.

Conflicting messages about the nature of sexuality are unavoidable in today's society. But if they are minimized, the odds should be much better that the child will be able to sort out

the conflicting messages and develop a wholesome sexual attitude.

BUT FLOOD the child with constant, subtle, yet pervasive messages that the world revolves around sex; that sex can be used to manipulate others; that one's self-worth is associated with bedroom performance and physical proportions, and what then are the odds of the child developing healthy attitudes?

I suggest that close monitoring of television viewing and open-minded, honest dialogue with the child about sexuality can be valuable steps toward helping our children develop into mature, well-adjusted adults.

About Dennis Sugrue

Once he studied toward the priesthood. Now Dennis P. Sugrue is senior staff psychologist at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit.

With this edition, the 34-year-old Farmington Hills resident begins a series of columns for Observer & Eccentric Newspapers on psychology and daily living.

Future topics will include stress, grief and bereavement, and the need to say no — as well as topics suggested by readers. Address your questions to this newspaper.

A onetime Redford Observer carrier.

Dr. Sugrue in 1971 earned his bachelor of arts degree magna cum laude from Sacred Heart Seminary College in Detroit and then took training in theology and pastoral counseling at St. John's Provincial Seminary in Plymouth.

He earned his master's degree in experimental psychology from Eastern Michigan University, his master's degree in theology from the University of Detroit, both in 1974, and his doctorate in clinical psychology from the University of Windsor.

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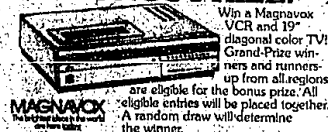
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