

Censorship is tricky business. Does covering the Statue Of David's wiggly jiggle bits help uphold decency and good taste or is it better to let them dangle about in the name of progress, artistic intent and mild giggling?

The censorship of information, human rights, free speech - all of this would make a deep and fascinating video. And this is NOT that video.

This is about cartoons.

So foregoing the question of good or bad thing, and just accepting it as a thing, media knows there are certain rules they have to abide by to get a certain certificate rating or be allowed to be broadcasted. And in turn, they have found ways to actually use the censorship way more creatively, than if they were uncensored.

So please - "won't somebody think of the children!"

MORALITY

The problem with censorship based on morals is that morals can change. This casting couch gag in the outtakes of Toy Story 2 was cut following the whole Weinstein thing which feels kinda unnecessary but I ain't dying on this hill. But it does illustrate how unpredictably attitudes can change.

So how can you arbitrate morality? Many have tried.

4Kids TV introduced American audiences to many anime shows for the first time, but as the block was aimed for 7 to 11 year olds, it had to severely censor a lot of material to comply with that rating. Guns were changed to pointing fingers, cigarettes became lollipops, rice balls became jelly doughnuts and I don't know why.

For Yu-Gi-Oh, 4Kids actually created a piece of story lore, which doesn't exist in the Japanese media. Basically if a character was meant to die, they'd often instead be sent to "The Shadow Realm", a place of darkness and eternal torment. So hell. 4Kids basically invented hell to protect children. But this means depending where in the world you watched it, you got totally different stories.

And this isn't the only time 4Kids meddled with the actual storyline for censorship reasons. This young girl's self-sacrifice death scene in Sonic X was changed to where the girl just leaves. It's ok kids, she didn't die, she's gone on holiday. TO THE SHADOW REALM!

In the 1930s, Hollywood movies studios had to follow the Motion Picture Production Code, also known as the Hays Code, basically a list of rules movies had to follow to stay moral and this stuck around for over 30 years.

There's some wacky rules in here like no Belly Dancing, no jokes about religion, and no interracial couples, Jesus Christ. [blasphemy rule] Ah shit... [profanity rule] Ah fuck!

It wasn't until Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho in 1960 did we finally get the very first shot of a flushing toilet. A big day for cinema.

In 1938 James Cagney and Humphrey Bogart starred in Angels With Dirty Faces, a gangster movie which makes you wonder, how does a genre of moral ambiguity fair in an overly moral set of rules? For example under these rules, gangsters weren't even allowed tommyguns. And if there's one thing gangsters are known for, is following the rules. Other rules involve limiting the use of firearms and murder. Ah, the two genders. The normal workaround was a

shot of the gun firing followed by a shot of someone shot. In *Angels With Dirty Faces*, they got around this by having Rocky in the reflection of a mirror. I just like this ingenuity, taking a restriction and making something stylish out of it.

Likewise, because Rocky has shot someone, the Hays Code demands he has to be brought to justice or shown to be in the wrong, but the audience will side with the character because these were the villains and it's narratively justified so both morals are at conflict. So towards the end, they have Rocky shoot policemen during his escape. The killing is actually really unnecessary, there was no need for Rocky to do that, but it means narratively it's more justified bringing the character to justice. A bit like a certain pointless bombing scene in a certain Marvel certain show...

SEX AND NUDITY

The Hays Code had a knock on effect with sitcoms and family shows as showing a couple sharing a bed was too hot for TV so separate beds became something of a classic sitcom trope.

The bastard child of the Hays Code known as Comics Code Authority was born in 1954 which governed what could and couldn't be said in comics. It's been abandoned since the 2000s but this all came about thanks to the book "Seduction Of The Innocent" which actually suggests that Batman and Robin are a gay couple because they share a bed together. And if sharing a bed makes you gay, then I am gay for insomnia. Also head lice.

The current US rating system, the MPAA, is heavily puritan when it comes to sex. So PG sex was often just alluded to, such as a visual metaphor. Or innuendo.

This carries over to nudity as well with how things allude to nakedness without showing nakedness to keep the age rating down. Such as framing, off screen, in silhouette, covered by conveniently long hair, the Ken doll, the pixel box or the classic censor bar. Deriving from redacted text and identity protection, it can also be used to more alluring effect than had the subject been fully exposed.

This physical censoring extends to being obscured by props, like *Austin Powers* or *Neon Genesis*.

In fact, *The Simpsons Movie* is an interesting example, because after an elaborate sequence of censoring Barts bits, it then censors everything EXCEPT Barts bits. How did they get away with that?

While it is generally censored on TV, it was permitted in cinemas. Even Disney+ which had previously covered up Daryl Hannah's bare bottom with a crudely edited giant hairy arse in a way that would make 4Kids proud. The British Board of Film Classification said that natural nudity with no sexual content is acceptable.

So a bare naked Bart got by, just barely.

VIOLENCE

Violence is a cornerstone of slapstick and has been a part of cartoons for decades from Tom & Jerry to Bugs Bunny. And while the use of guns fluctuates being in and out of favour, it is no less violent in other ways. Which makes you wonder why bother cutting the guns at all? This is usually down to imitable behaviour. Kids are unlikely to get hold of a tank or a bazooka or rocket into space so that kind of heightened ridiculousness is totally acceptable but we know it's not real. It's just a cartoon.

Growing up in the UK, guns to me were just like rockets and bazookas in being this ridiculous thing that only happened in cartoons because nobody really has just guns readily sitting in their pockets.

But shootings, especially those involving kids, continue to be a problem. They've become real now and it can't be seen to have a cartoon character just shake it off anymore.

So even if kids aren't imitating the cartoons, it's hard to make guns just a kid-friendly comedic device. Lasers are ok though.

It's a fine line to tread because on the one hand, we should push back on overzealous puritans trying to nerf our heroes but can TV really have an influence on violent acts or were they likely to do horrible things anyway?

So where do we draw the line?

Some say it's the parents job to police what kids watch, others say the media should be considerate about their influence. I think the answer is somewhere in the middle.

This is why violence is often very heightened and kept clearly comedic in tone, such as cutting to black, the fight cloud or focusing on people's reactions instead.

As for gore, it's usually kept PG by changing the colour of blood to something non-human or by having no blood at all. You can get away with blood if there's a degree of removal from reality, such as clearly fake blood or having a show within a show. Alternatively nobody really dies and everyone is fine.

But PG media can get away with a surprising amount of horror elements like Gravity Falls.

It's a show all about mysteries with hidden messages and decoding clues. It invites the viewer to look deeper into the show as there's more hidden under the surface. For example, in an early episode, the character Stan has a wax model of himself that loses his head, which leads to Stan holding a funeral for it. This seems like just a wacky character doing something silly until you realise later on, that he is a twin mourning the loss of his brother. Now this episode has a whole new, much darker context. Had this episode had come out after learning about Stan's brother, it may have been too much raw trauma to have been televised but by keeping that reveal a secret, it has it's clues hidden in plain sight.

Gravity Falls can get away with it's darker elements because it gives a lot of trust to it's young viewers, at no point does it feel like it's tricking or deceiving them. You see the world through the eyes of the kids and nothing feels too far out of their depth to be too scary. So maybe this is the kind of imitable behaviour that should be encouraged.

Go on son, go fight that bear... eesh, should've given him a gun first.