

## Principles of Professional Communication 1

Barriers to Communication 1  
Censorship – not just dirty pictures

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### What is censorship?

- The control of communication between people which includes what can be written in books, newspapers and magazines and what can be seen on TV or online
- A mechanism to protect society from harmful influences
- A mechanism of keeping the powerful in positions of power and influence
- The suppression or prohibition of speech, writing and other behaviour (Allan, 2006)
- Censorship does not have to be overt or enshrined in law to exist - eg exclusion of certain points of view or perspectives a form of censorship

Principles of Professional Communication 1

2

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Censorship is not new – a brief history



Socrates

- Censor – from the Latin 'censere' meaning 'to count', 'to estimate' or 'to assess'
- Greek philosopher Socrates first known victim
- Italian astronomer Galileo tried for heresy for suggesting the Earth orbited the sun
- Censorship of 'obscenity' related to rise of puritanism  
eg 1740s novel "Fanny Hill" about the life of a prostitute



Galileo



Principles of Professional Communication 1

3

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Censorship – a brief history

- Focus late in 20thC more on *visual* images rather than language or ideas
- *Internet censorship* – Australian legislation – 2000 Online Services Act (also called Communication Decency Act)
- New debate over online filtering proposed by Senator Stephen Conroy
- Office of Classification (formerly the Office of Film and Literature Classification [www.classification.gov.au/special.html](http://www.classification.gov.au/special.html)) – *censors or classifiers?*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Govt policy and censorship in Australia – ‘classification’ guidelines



Australian Government

[www.classification.gov.au](http://www.classification.gov.au)

*Adults in a free society should be allowed, as far as possible, to see what they wish, and creative artists, including filmmakers, to depict what they please without fear of intervention by the state.*

*It is generally accepted however, that the exercise of these rights carries certain responsibilities and must be subject to a number of constraints for the good of society as a whole.*

*Our right to see what we please cannot be allowed to infringe on the rights of others. Children and young people in particular, must be adequately protected from material likely to harm or disturb them, and people who may be offended by certain material have a right to expect that it will not be thrust upon them against their will or without warning.*

<http://www.classification.gov.au/www/cob/classification.nsf/Page/Home>

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## “R” ratings over time



- First introduced in 1971 by Commonwealth Film Censorship Board
- British comedy *Percy* first to receive an R-rating
- Early R-rated Australian films included *Stork* (1971), *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972) and *Alvin Purple* (1973)
- Other controversial R-ratings have included *Last Tango in Paris*, *Portnoy's Complaint*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Romance*, *Baise Moi* and *Ken Park*
- *Not Quite Hollywood*



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## "R" ratings over time



- Should bad taste be censored?
- Whose morals are applied?
- Double standards at play – “worthy” themes OK?
- Publicity creating the “curiosity factor” and greater exposure?

Principles of Professional Communication 1

7

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What is obscenity?



In 1964, US Supreme Court Justice Stewart was unable to define pornography but said – “I know it when I see it”

Principles of Professional Communication 1

8

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What is obscenity?

- “I think the test of obscenity is this, whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall”  
... British court ruling about Henry Miller’s “Tropic of Cancer”
- A work of art could not be considered obscene if it had, in the eyes of the court, some “redeeming social importance.”  
... British court ruling
- Obscenity is “material which deals with sex in a manner appealing to prurient interest”. That is “a morbid interest in nudity, sex or excretion and if it goes beyond customary limits of candour in depiction or representation of such matters.”  
... American court ruling

Principles of Professional Communication 1

9

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Erotica or porn – a feminist perspective

- *Pornography* – the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words ... *Andrea Dworkin & Catherine MacKinnon, Minnesota, 1984*
- *Erotica* – the depiction of mutually pleasurable, sexual expression between people who have enough power to be there by positive choice.
- ‘Porn Wars’
  - Porn as exploitation of women?
  - Porn creating unrealistic sexual norms for young men (eg Gail Dines *Pornland*)



Principles of Professional Communication 1

10

---

---

---

---

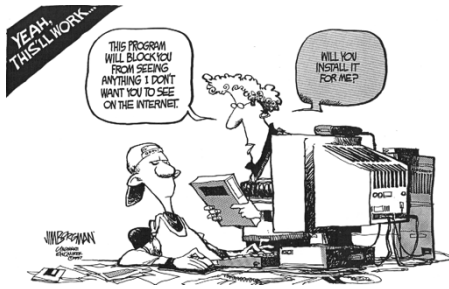
---

---

---

---

## Concern about technology



Principles of Professional Communication 1

11

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What else do we censor?

- Political ideas – those that go against the status quo eg “communism”, “fundamentalism”



Principles of Professional Communication 1

12

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What else do we censor?

- Historical ideas – interpretations of history which do not concur with prevailing philosophies or ideas – historian David Irving, 1788 – settlement or invasion?



Principles of Professional Communication 1

13

---

---

---

---

---

---

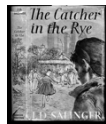
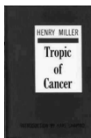
---

---

## What else do we censor?

- Moral ideas and themes – these change over time according to prevailing social taboos and standards eg depictions of incest, homosexuality, suicide, drug use (including legal drugs like alcohol/tobacco), child abuse
- Language – views about what constitutes ‘obscenity’ in language changes constantly

Examples of books that have been banned for various reasons over the years



Principles of Professional Communication 1

14

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Language & obscenity

- “According to Freud, the basis of a taboo is a forbidden action for which there exists a strong inclination in the subconscious”  
Geoffrey Hughes (1991) *Swearing: a Social History of Foul Language, Oaths and Profanity in English*
- “[bleeps], like astericks, are always an admission of censor’s failings. Are we less offended because we don’t know what is being said, or so we in fact have a pretty good idea?”  
Suzanne Moore (1999) *Why do newspapers use astericks? ...*
- “Doublespeak” or “political correctness” a form of censorship? eg “ethnic cleansing”, “friendly fire”



Principles of Professional Communication 1

15

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Language & censorship

- “We train young men to drop fire on people, but their commanders won't allow them to write ‘fuck’ on their airplanes because it's obscene!”  
Marlon Brando as Colonel Kurtz 'Apocalypse Now' 1979



- “What constitutes swearing has changed from blasphemy to sex and bodily functions. These days there has been a further shift in taboos to words relating to stereotypes. Identifying someone by their ethnic background in a no no ... These days, it's more offensive to call someone *fat* than it is to call them a *fuckwit* ...”  
Sue Butler, editor, Macquarie Dictionary Jan 2010

---

---

---

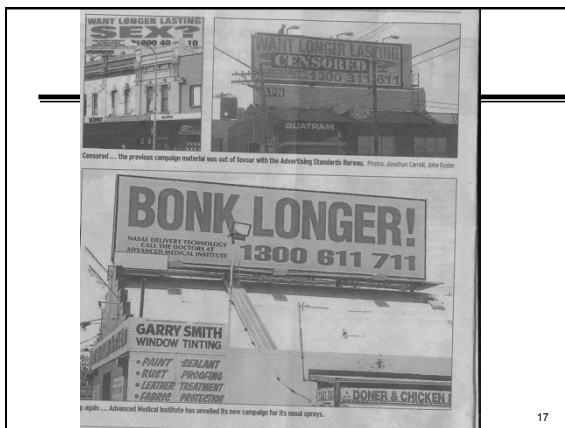
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

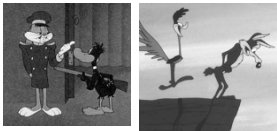
---

---

---

---

## What about violence?



- Cartoon violence – Bugs Bunny, Ren & Stimpy, Tom & Jerry
- Change in perspectives – Hollywood westerns, Three Stooges



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Cartoon violence – harmful or humorous?



- Video game violence – Grand Theft Auto
- Can children make the distinction?
- WWE Wrestling



Principles of Professional Communication 1

19

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What about the news?



- By age 18 American teenagers have seen an estimated 200,000 acts of violence on TV
- What about acts of violence that we never see or hear about?
- Editing as a form of censorship?



Principles of Professional Communication 1

20

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Censorship of music



- 48% of Americans believe violence in popular music should be regulated
- No studies have yet shown relationship between violent or sexually explicit lyrics and adverse behavioural effects
- "Ozzy Osbourne made me do it" defense
- Critics claim music negatively effects teenagers by exposing them to themes such as Satanism, sex, drugs and anti-social behaviour



Principles of Professional Communication 1

21

---

---

---

---

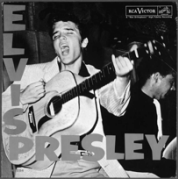
---

---

---

---

## Censorship of music



- Preference for heavy metal and rap music may be indicators for alienation, substance abuse, psychiatric disorders, suicide risk, sex role stereotyping but *not* the cause
- Music as a reflection of adolescent concerns?
- What's new? – Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, Rolling Stones, Sex Pistols, The Kinks?
- Bowling for Columbine



Principles of Professional Communication 1

---

---

---

---

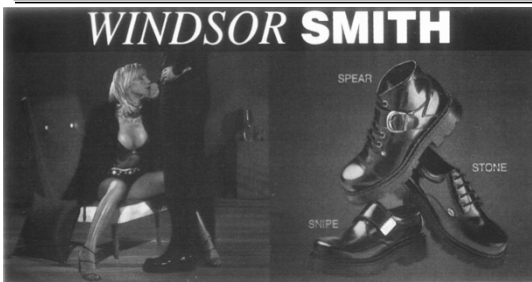
---

---

---

---

## Creativity or bad taste?



That billboard.

Principles of Professional Communication 1

23

---

---

---

---

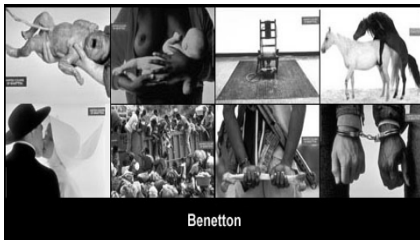
---

---

---

---

## Creativity or bad taste?



Benetton

Principles of Professional Communication 1

24

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Creativity or bad taste?



Principles of Professional Communication 1

25

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Censorship – the arguments for

- To “protect” society and maintain “order”
- To prevent erosion of morals
- To maintain standards of acceptable social behaviour
- To prevent anarchy
- To protect those who cannot protect themselves, from exposure to materials believed likely to cause harm or offence

Principles of Professional Communication 1

26

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Censorship – the arguments against

- Assumes *seeing* leads to *doing*
- Assumes social *morals and values* are universal – who makes the decisions, those who have the power?
- The notion of *protection* implies adults are unable to distinguish right from wrong or make informed judgements
- Political censorship protects those in power
- Is censorship merely a means of protecting adults from or taboo subjects that they may find uncomfortable to confront?

Principles of Professional Communication 1

27

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Censorship – why not?

*Whatever its starting point and expressed intention, the end of the censor's road is repression of 'dangerous' ideas - not only about sex but about morals, politics, art and life. Opposition to censorship must inevitably involve us in defending things and people whom we may dislike and disapprove of (sometimes passionately).*

*Voltaire's well known saying that 'I detest what you say, but will defend to the death your right to say it' may seem trite to us but is as apposite as it ever was.*

Antony Grey, 1995

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---