

**REALITY TV VS. REAL LIFE:  
HELPING YOUR CHILD KNOW THE DIFFERENCE\***

Andrew Malekoff\*\*

**Abstract:** This is the text of a presentation/workshop given to a group of parents in a Long Island, New York community center, under the auspices of The Long Island Family Support Coalition on April 20, 2005. The participants are parents of children and youth identified as having serious emotional difficulties. The subject, “reality tv versus real life: helping your child know the difference,” is a topic of the parent group’s choosing and a reflection of a felt need. Prior to the presentation the parents, children and staff (parent advocates and social workers) shared a meal of pizza and salad together. Dividing into three groups of parents, youth and children followed this. The youth group also discussed this theme using the poem contained in this text, “reality tv is not really real: reality tv is a fairy tale,” as a jumping off point. This presentation inaugurated this new program component of a monthly family gathering that combines socialization and education.

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\* Keynote Address/Workshop, sponsored by The Long Island Family Support Coalition, April 20, 2005 At the Hagedorn Family Resource Center, Hempstead, NY.

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## REALITY TV VS. REAL LIFE:

### HELPING YOUR CHILD KNOW THE DIFFERENCE\*

Andrew Malekoff\*\*

I am mez-merized by a box that brightenz my room and cloudz my vizion

- Andrew Malekoff (2002)

#### **Introduction**

I was more than a little curious when I was first asked to speak on the subject of “reality TV versus real life.” I am not an expert on this subject. I wondered: Did my colleagues, the parent advocates at North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center, overhear me talking about *American Idol*, which I have watched ever since the beginning? Do they know that I watched a couple of episodes of *My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiancé*? Or, that I’ve seen the court shows going all the way back to *People’s Court* and Judge Wapner? Or, do they know that I have watched *Wife Swap*?

In case you are curious, *Wife Swap* is not some after hour triple X-rated program, as the title might seem to suggest. The way it works is that a wife and mother from one family changes places for a period of time with her counterpart from another family. It is purely platonic. They try to find wives with opposite traits of one kind or another. For example, a fastidious neat freak might switch places with someone who is laid back and disorganized. Or a shy homebody might exchange places with a gregarious social

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butterfly. Anyway, that's the idea. I even tried to talk my wife into applying to the show; you know switch families for a couple of weeks. But she would have no part of it.

Do the parent advocates know that I have seen episodes of *Nanny 911* and *Super Nanny* and all the other nanny shows? Do they know that from time to time I watch *American Chopper*, a program about a talented and comical upstate New York motorcycle building family, the Tuttles? Do they know that I have watched episodes of the *Jerry Springer Show* and years before the *Morton Downey Jr. Show*; and when I was a teenager I watched *Candid Camera*, the forerunner of the modern day *Punk'd*. And when I was just a little kid I watched a strange program called *Queen for a Day*, the first reality TV show that I ever watched.

*Queen for a Day* was a half hour program that aired in the afternoon. The way it worked is that three women each week shared tales of woe. Whoever evoked the most sympathy was selected as queen for a day. The queen was then outfitted with a regal robe and tiara (I imagine that the robe was purple felt but I can't say for sure because those were the days of black and white only, at least where I lived). The host then showered her with household appliances like refrigerators and stoves and electric can openers, as she dabbed away tears of joy. *Queen for a Day* might have been one of the more bizarre reality TV shows that I was exposed to. As a child I kept wondering what happened to the other two contestants. It is probably to late in the game for a *Queen for the Day* reunion show.

So, yes I have seen reality TV, but I haven't seen some of the more popular shows like *Survivor*, *Apprentice* or *Fear Factor*. I know about them, have read about them, have seen clips for them on commercials, but I have never seen them in full.

So I am back to wondering how I got chosen for this gig. Have the parent advocates been monitoring my television viewing? Am I a Neilson family (of Neilson TV rating fame) and don't know it? Don't they have to tell you? Isn't it voluntary? Or do they just hook you up remotely and then monitor your viewing habits? Anyway, no matter how it happened, here I am to talk about reality TV versus real life. I have already confessed to you that I watch reality TV. I have watched it by myself. I have watched it with my wife. And, I have watched reality TV shows with my two sons. So I guess you might say as tonight's expert speaker that I don't just talk the talk, but I walk the walk.

In my preparation I thought, why the emphasis on reality TV? Why not an emphasis on TV in general? Why not the Internet? Why not video games? Why not DVDs and CDs? Can one talk about reality TV and not talk about all these other potentially toxic media influences on our kids? And how can I talk about reality TV or TV in general and not also talk about big corporations and advertisers and what is up their sleeves when they deliver these programs to us, to our kids? These are all questions that flooded me when I was asked to be here with you today. I will focus on reality TV tonight, but I am mindful that reality TV, aside from being a thing unto itself, is also a metaphor for other mind numbing, value distorting, and idea indoctrinating media. So what I have to say about reality TV also applies in large part to these other media that bombard our kids with thousands and thousands of messages year after year after year.

As I proceed, I plan to keep you and your experiences and ideas in the mix. At the front end and towards the middle of the workshop I will give you an opportunity to share some of your experiences with reality television, and at the back end of the workshop there will be time to have an open discussion before we end for the night.

However you define it, how many of you have ever watched a reality TV show? How many know that your kids watch or have watched a reality TV show? How many of you have watched a reality TV show together with your kids? How many of you have ever forbid your kids from watching a reality TV show? How many have fought with your kids about watching a reality TV show? How many have had a conversation with one of your kids about a reality TV show? How did the conversation go?

**[ACTIVITY #1 for parents: Select one reality TV show that you have seen or heard or read about that you would not want your kids to watch and identify why not. Beyond setting clear limits, how might you explain to your child why this program is not appropriate.]**

### **The Unreal Nature and Harmful Impact of Reality TV**

So, one of the questions tonight is what are the risks of watching reality TV? Rather than getting all intellectual and ivory tower on you, I am going to read a poem that I wrote for tonight that I dedicate to you, that sum up some of my impressions of the impact of reality TV. Poetry is a universal translator, a tool that I use to unlock my feelings and thoughts about a subject. Maybe you have written poetry, maybe your kids have. Maybe you'll stick my poem on your refrigerator and it will spark discussion.

**reality tv is not really real: reality tv is a fairy tale©**

reality tv is not viewed in real time:

- is heavily edited
- highly contrived
- artificial
- staged and stilted
- two-dimensional
- black and white
- centralized
- commercialized
- homogenized.

reality tv promotes corporate culture:

- creates spectators rather than doers
- markets our young to advertisers
- sells their eyeballs to the highest bidder.

reality tv is wrapped in warped values:

- is obsessed with winning at all costs
- capitalizes on cruelty
- glorifies greed
- humiliates
- snoops
- bullies
- overpowers
- thrives on putdowns
- teaches our young not to trust.

reality tv exploits women and young girls:

- magnifies flaws
- says looks matter most
- celebrates surgical alteration
- institutionalizes eating disorders.

reality tv

- is a socially toxic:

spiritual pollutant.

reality tv

- has no soul:

only sponsors.

reality tv

- has no taste:

is less filling.

reality tv

- is not really real:

reality tv  
is a fairy tale.

Let me get a bit more specific by summarizing a few programs that have aired over the years and tackle the questions: Are they real? and Do they do any real damage?\*

Take **Joe Millionaire**. There is almost nothing real about this show. They ask us to believe that a man hops off of his bulldozer, inherits multi-millions of dollars, moves to a French chateau, and has a choice among fifteen or twenty beautiful young women.

In programs like **Jackass** or **Fear Factor** dangerous risks are taken. Or are they as dangerous as they seem? What viewers do not know is that the “stunts” are set up with lots of safety and controls that they don’t let us see so that it looks more dangerous than it really is. Without an understanding of what happens behind the scenes, how it works, impressionable kids might try these stunts themselves. Many have and have been seriously injured and even killed.

In shows like the **Swan** or **Extreme Makeover** so called ugly ducklings risk their health to be surgically altered. Women go under the knife for an absurd number of plastic surgery procedures. Women who are barely overweight are forced to exercise excessively and go on 1200 calorie a day diets. And, it is not only TV that projects this attitude about women.

In a recent *Newsday* column on the royal wedding of Prince Charles and Camilla a *Newsday* columnist commented on their compatibility, what they have in common, “He loves horses. She is often said to look like one.” He then quotes someone that he identifies as British wit who is quoted as saying, “There is obviously nothing tempting in her physical appearance.” (*Henican*, 2005, A7). (British wit or British twit?, I wonder.)

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\* Some of these descriptions are drawn from internet essays by authors Jennifer Pozner (Ms. Magazine, 2004, *The Unreal World: Why women on reality TV have to be hot, desperate and dumb*); Teresa Pittman, (Today’s Parent.com, *Reality TV: What is your preteen learning from “reality” shows?*); Philip Ryken, (March, 2003 [www.tenth.org](http://www.tenth.org): *Unreality TV*); Charlene Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese, (*Why You Shouldn’t Let Your Children Watch ‘Survivor.’*)

It's no wonder why bullying and emotional aggression have reached epidemic proportion among young people. These are among the role models that the media flaunts day in and day out.

In **Are You Hot** a judge aims a laser flaw finder at the bodies of scantily clad women (and men) to determine who scored what from 1 to 10 on a scale of face, body, and sex appeal.

In **Who's Your Daddy** a young woman is faced with identifying her birth father among a group of imposters for a cash prize. Here is a program that ridicules the millions of children and families touched by adoption.

It doesn't take a degree in rocket science to recognize the gratuitous cruelty, and lack of kindness and common human decency inherent in many reality TV shows. They humiliate and degrade woman and men, systematically stripping away their dignity. In a word, such shows and the warped values and attitudes they promote are detestable.

## **Research and Common Sense on Reality TV**

I do not think that I need to formally cite the research literature to affirm what common sense tells us. Do kids watch too much TV? Yes, we know that. Is there anything good about television or reality TV? Yes, we are capable of thinking deeply enough to know that despite its significant shortcomings television at its best has much to offer in the way of good entertainment and education. Are kids' attitudes about sexuality and aggression and gender roles and success shaped by TV? Again, we don't need to be a researcher to know that kids' attitudes and behavior are influenced by what they watch on TV.

Adults, for the most part, recognize that television is fantasy, entertainment, and often unreal. Children are not able to make such a distinction. Yet TV executives' argument that "no one takes this stuff seriously" is flawed when it comes to young people. (Strasberger, 1995 p. 14) Adults even have trouble differentiating at times from documentary, docudrama and drama.

We all know that teens are impressionable and TV can give young people their first real peek into the secretive adult world of sex, drugs, and success well before they are able to learn firsthand. Television offers scripts about how adults are supposed to act. "It teaches them about gender roles, conflict resolution, patterns of courtship and sexual gratification, and methods of [achieving success] and coping with stress." (Strasberger, 1995 p. 8) All of this is a huge part of reality television.

Television has the ability to pass on information and shape social attitudes and norms. They include some like those conveyed in my poem, attitudes like *looks matter most* or it is okay to *win at any cost* or *don't trust anybody*. We must ask ourselves if these are the values we want our children to own.

Another chilling example is that women and girls' looks are portrayed as being more important than their brains; TV frequently portrays teenage girls as being obsessed with shopping, grooming, and dating and incapable of having serious conversations about academic interests or goals. (Strasberger, 1995 p. 11)

On another front, research backs up parents' intuition that there is a "direct link between viewing violence on television and increased aggression by children and youth" (Garbarino and Bedard, 2001 p. 9) "It is estimated that the average American child or

teenager views 1000 murders, rapes, and aggravated assaults per year on television alone.” (Elkind, 1998, p. 126)

One psychologist reported, “After the media attention given to Susan Smith, the mother who drowned her two children in 1995, I had a number of phone calls from parents. These parents reported that their young children had, after seeing this news on television, asked questions to the effect of, “Mommy are you going to kill me?” (Elkind, 1998, p. 127)

The truth about TV is that the media contributes to the decline of parental authority (Elkind, 1998, p. 130-133). Like it or not, parents share their authority with television. There is a cultural and spiritual war afoot for our kids’ minds and hearts. Corporate America has the money to back the war. All we have are everyday people and common sense and hopefully the will to prevail.

So what is really going on here? “American television programming exists primarily to deliver an audience with just the right demographic composition to a corresponding advertiser” (Strasberger, 1995, p. 17). That is what I referred to in my poem as *selling our[ kids’] eyeballs to the highest bidder*.

And so helping your kids to know the difference between reality TV and real life is only a first step. We must also help our kids to pay attention to the commercials that accompany reality TV, all TV and media. We cannot divorce reality TV from their sponsors, the advertisers. Remember, *reality tv has not soul, only sponsors*. There is a symbiotic relationship between the two. Their goal is to hammer brand loyalty into our youth until they are literally branded for life.

## **The Advertising of Everyday Life**

Do you remember the beer commercial that asked the question, “Why as why?” It portrays a young man in a bar, frustrated by his search for romance, finally discovering a “true friend”. As the young man sets out on his journey, a sense of futility and resignation sets in. The voice over muses rhetorically, “Why ask why?” then sympathizes, “While love isn’t easy,” and finally advises, “Refreshment is.” The ad ends with the young man hoisting a bottle of his favorite lager to his lips.

What this commercial and many like it really tells us, and especially young people, is don't think, numb your senses, know that relationships are hard work and hardly worth the effort, and recognize that alcohol is dependable and delivers every time.

Advertisers are clever. Did you know that the alcohol industry pumps approximately two billion dollars a year into advertising, much of which is geared towards youth? The idea is to try and establish brand name loyalty at a tender age. According to addictions experts, by the time our children are 21 years old they will have seen an average of 100,000 alcohol commercials. Since about ten percent of all drinkers consume about fifty percent of alcohol it’s clear that they’re targeting the most vulnerable of our young.

How do you suppose ordinary folks can stand up to this two billion dollar bully pulpit? Do you know the Texas Ranger creed? “No man in the wrong can stand up to a fellow in the right who keep on a –comin' ”. A corny saying from days done by, one might think. But this is an example of a term I coined, “the advertising of everyday life.” We all know about this. The advertising of everyday life is comprised of those little

messages that parents and grandparents tell their kids over and over again. I believe that parents can be just as clever as Madison Avenue.

My mother was an antique dealer. When I was in my early teens she brought home an old sign that read:

None of us in business  
or social life can coast  
along on a reputation of  
past performances. It's the  
good job we do to-day  
that counts.

She placed that sign in a strategic place in the bathroom, behind the toilet. This way I was eye-to-eye with the sign several times a day. According to my calculations I read that sign at least 5,000 times during my youth. What made the message most effective is that she also lived it; she “walked the walk”.

Coaches have slogans, preachers have sermons, teachers have lessons and my mother had signs. These are the commercials or advertisements of every day life. Some people call them values.

It is the collective commercials of everyday life that represent the “fellow in the right who keeps on ‘a-comin’,” a counterforce to the two billion dollar bully and the rest of his gang.

Oh, and about my mother's sign. It is hanging in my office today.

**[ACTIVITY #2 for parents: Identify at least one helpful message, lesson or slogan that you recall hearing repeatedly from your parents or other adults in your life growing up that you found helpful; and one message that you have tried to instill/drill into your kids, your *advertising of everyday life*.]**

### **A Child's Job is to Explore and a Parent's Job is to Protect**

What our kids watch on TV or are exposed to through other forms of media requires as much vigilance as where they go when they leave the house. Physical exploration, leaving the house or taking the car when they get older, presents a certain level of risk and danger. We routinely ask our kids, "Where are you going?" and "What time are you coming home?" Living in Long Beach my son is a surfer. For years I have had to ask him about lifeguards being on duty, having a buddy there with him, and so forth. Channel surfing and surfing the web can present another level of risk and danger that requires similar vigilance. "What are you watching?," for example. Always remember this:

- ✓ A child's job is to explore; a parent's job is to protect.
- ✓ Risk = Developmental Exploration + Environmental Danger (Scales, 1996).
- ✓ It is our job as adults to reduce the environmental danger part of the equation.

Toddlers and young adolescents are especially outraged when parents don't agree with them about the ideal balance of freedom and security. Picture the toddler wandering off down the block or into the street only to be scooped up by a vigilant mom or dad. Now picture the young adolescent starting to test curfew or attempt to take the Long Island Railroad into the City only to be reeled in by mom or dad, until they feel they are ready. These are dramas that are repeated throughout a child's growing up years, only the

risks become more elusive and dangerous as time passes. Here are some things we need to do.

## **Ten Suggestions for Becoming a Counterforce to Reality TV and Other Social Toxicities\***

### ***1. Learn about the complicated world of pre-teens and teenagers by entering their world and opening dialogue***

Read magazines, listen to their music, read the lyrics, go to the movies they're into (with them if they'll let you), discuss alcohol, drugs, sex, social pressure, and appearance. If these subjects are not finding their way to you, you are missing out on what is important to your children. Reality TV fits in here. If we are engaged in a cultural war, a spiritual war, parents need to be armed with good information and a good sense of where they stand. We want to help our kids to think and feel deeply, embrace prosocial values versus the junk values of reality TV.

Find time to watch TV with them, allow them to teach you their favorite video game, or look over their shoulder when they are on the Internet researching something about their favorite celebrity, for example. Some experts have referred to this as "comfort time," time in which we find the time to enter their world (Taffel and Blau, 2001, 81-85).

### ***2. Set reasonable limits and be prepared to enforce them***

Children should hear the message, "I love you but I have expectations." Setting limits is not only about "laying down the law" and letting kids know "who's boss." Establishing

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\* *Social Toxicity* is a term that I first heard used by psychologist James Garbarino of Cornell University.

authority is just one part of the equation. When we say no, often it is about what we believe and it is another chance to get that message across.

***3. Help kids to understand the behind the scenes machinations and manipulations of reality TV.***

Point out to them why it isn't real. Teach kids how the media works. Networks use these shows to attract young viewers; the people advertisers want to reach the most. Talk to them about ratings. Explain how higher ratings means that they can charge more for commercials. Show them that is really being sold is the audience. Teach them that the stunts on shows like *Jackass* or *Fear Factor* are set up with lots of safety and controls that they don't let us see so that it looks more dangerous than it really is. Remember the part about reducing the environmental danger part of the risk equation? Explaining this to our kids is a way of protecting them, keeping them safe, preventing them from taking unnecessary risks.

***4. Be available when your kids are ready to initiate conversation, which is quite often at a time that is most inconvenient for you.***

It usually goes something like this: "If I'm busy they want to talk. If I'm interested and seem eager to talk they pull away." This may not be that easy, to find the right time that is. Your kids will be most likely to approach you just when you start winding down, if there is such a thing these days. For example, when you have settled in to your most comfortable chair to read the newspaper or watch a movie.

There are other obstacles as well. Our willingness to broach a subject with our kids and our own comfort level with certain content such as sex and sexuality, are examples. (NOTE: *Appendix A* provides a humorous and accurate illustration drawn from a family scene on a TV drama.)

***5. Counter the warped values promoted by Reality TV with your own advertising of everyday life (Better to be corny than cool)***

Remember to take the opportunities you can to share your values. Corny slogans are not so bad. In the recovery field things like “keep it simple” and “one day at a time” work wonders for many people. Have your kids make their own commercials. Make a game of it. The technology is available. Give them incentives for identifying the advertisers’ tricks. Repeat your slogans, post them on your fridge, and don’t be afraid to corny. Better corny than cool when it comes to the right message and prosocial values.

***6. Encourage kids, by example, to become doers rather than spectators.***

Find ways to counter the corporate culture that the media brings us. For example, in Long Beach two men started something that began as a lark to celebrate their 40<sup>th</sup> birthday one winter and has become an annual community ritual and fundraiser for the Make a Wish Foundation – the Polar Bear Club. It started with just two “knuckleheads,” as they refer to themselves, jumping into the ocean in late January. Now the event attracts thousands each year, young and old, and has become a rite of passage and a fundraiser. Here is good example of people creating popular culture that adds deep meaning, prosocial values, and

good spirit to a community...not to mention good clean fun. People can be seen wearing their Long Beach Polar Bear Club t-shirts and sweatshirts all year round.

Another idea is to encourage your kids to write a letter to an advertiser, network, or newspaper. I believe strongly in helping kids to make waves, to have lots of practice in becoming active citizens in community affairs, to learn that they can make a difference (maybe where we as adults have failed to.) Parents can help them to do this.

***7. Help girls to be proud of themselves beyond their looks.***

There is a book that I love called *Reviving Ophelia* by Mary Pipher (1994), which I recommend to all parents and especially parents of girls. She writes eloquently about helping young girls to find their “true self” and escaping rather than embracing the “junk values of the mass culture.” She writes, “Vibrant, confident girls become shy doubting young women. Girls stop thinking, ‘Who am I? What do I want?’ and start thinking. ‘What must I do to please others?’” (Pipher, 1994, 22).

***8. Ensure that you are heard, don't assume that you are clearly understood.***

Sometimes I will say to kids, particularly as they roll their eyes at me, “Please help me out, you may have noticed that I am not too swift sometimes, but just tell me what I just said to you so that I know you hear me so that there is no misunderstanding.” On more than one occasion kid who I am trying to understand have advised me, “Andy, this is way over your head.” Put your ego outside the door.

***9. Support their expression of feelings – take a stance of warm interest, don't pass judgment, take your time.***

Teenagers often expect you to dismiss them. When you hang in there and overcome the obstacles they become surprised. You need time to convince them that, “Why did you do that?” can be a neutral question and not a statement of moral disapproval. The former is what we want to convey. That is not to say that you cannot take a position, or should not. Only that if you want to encourage dialogue you have to be open to hear what they have to say, even if there is a chance you will not like what you hear.

***10. Approach each conversation with a sense of possibility and hope.***

Lend yourself, your conviction that things can work out. “I don't want to just dismiss you. We may not agree but I really want to understand your point of view, your experience.” Remember, it is parents' job is to protect and kids' job is to explore. As our children get older and move into their adolescent years they tend to be outraged when parents do not agree with them about the ideal balance of freedom and security. But make no mistake, they do want to have relationships with you.

**Conclusion**

Never forget that kids want relationships with caring adults. Always know that kids, especially as they approach their teen years and beyond present parents and others with a paradoxical portrait where the words and the music behind the words don't always fit neatly together. (Malekoff, 2004) At the same time that they are attempting to break away to become more independent and separate individuals, they are hanging on for our safety,

support and protection. We have to develop a capacity to differentiate the words from the music, to see the push and pull, and know that they want good and lasting relationships with us despite what often seems on the surface like evidence to the contrary (Malekoff, 2004).

## Appendix A

The dialogue is from a scene in a 1999 episode of the popular HBO organized crime family show the Sopranos. To provide some context, Bill Clinton is president at the time. The two children in the Soprano family are a teen and preteen.

“In this particular scene, which takes place at breakfast, Tony joins his wife, Carmella, and their two children, Meadow fifteen, and her younger brother, Anthony Jr., who is around twelve. Carmella is at the stove, using a spatula to jiggle eggs in a frying pan. Tony, in his bathrobe, sips orange juice while watching the morning news on television. The kids chow down at the counter.

From the TV, a disembodied voice informs us that a policeman was apprehended in a bordello raid, along with several figures from the underworld. At the end of the report, the male TV anchor remarks to his female co-host, “I don’t know which is more embarrassing-to be caught in a bordello or to be caught with a wise guy.”

Disgusted, Tony turns off the television, at which point, Anthony Jr. asks, “What’s a bordello?”

Without skipping a beat, Meadow matter-of-factly answers, “It’s a fancy name for a whorehouse.”

Carmella shoots her a dirty look. “Don’t start, okay?”

Meadow (innocently): “It *is*.”

“Yeah, I know it is,” says Carmella, “but I just don’t like that talk.”

Meadow, indignant, continues, as if she’s reciting from a report she’s prepared for school: “This country is light-years behind the rest of the world. Most civilized countries have legalized prostitution...”

“Don’t you got somewhere to be?” Tony interrupts his daughter in a tough...manner.

Meadow, unfazed, goes on. “I mean it’s a joke. Look at what they’re putting the president through.” (This was the 1999 season.)

Carmella jumps in: “He got what he deserved.”

“He got Monica Kozinsky [sic],” Anthony Jr. corrects, “and the broad with the long nose.”

Meadow, still on her soapbox, clarifies her position: “I just don’t think sex should be a punishable offense.”

Tony is clearly getting exasperated, but his response is controlled. “You know, honey that’s where I agree with you. I don’t think sex should be a punishable offense either. But I do think talking about it sex at the breakfast table is a punishable offense. So no more sex talk, okay?”

Meadow calmly replies, “It’s the nineties. Parents are supposed to discuss sex with their children.”

“Yeah, but that’s where you’re wrong,” Tony says, looking out the window. “You see, out there, it’s the nineties. In here, it’s 1954,” Visibly annoyed, he finally ends the discussion: “So now and forever, I don’t want to hear any more sex talk, okay?” (dialogue presented in Taffel and Blau, 2002, 73-75).

It is true that some kids won’t go near their parents with touchy subjects like sex and drugs, for example. But, these days more and more, kids want to discuss these issues and more with their parents and it is the parents who are reticent, often remembering their own growing up years and difficulty approaching such subjects with their own parents. For example, as one author (Taffel and Blau, 2001, 75) ask: “Could you imagine talking to your parents about kids hooking up at a party? About oral sex and genital piercing?...Could you imagine telling your parents that other kids pick on you because you’re fat? Or that you’re a loser? Could you imagine discussing with your parents the fact that boys get drunk to have the courage to approach girls? Could you imagine talking to your parents about kids abusing pot, Ritalin, mushrooms, ecstasy? Could you imagine talking to your parents about eating disorders? Could you imagine voicing your concerns about your sexuality or coming out to your parents as bi or gay? If you’ve answered “no” to all of these questions you are obviously not a modern adolescent.” The culture has changed. These are conversations that kids are having with one another and that many would welcome discussing with their parents.” In order for this to occur we have to jump out of the time warp. Remember what Tony said, “It is 1954 in this house.”

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