

Who makes the rules for movie and TV ratings and censorship regulations? They all seem so arbitrary!

If you watch an older movie which was adapted for cable twenty years ago, certain words may be bleeped, which would not have been bleeped if the adaptation was made five years ago. Watch a movie from the eighties broadcast on basic cable, and you may hear the line, “Kiss my a**!” or it may be dubbed over as “Kiss my (butt)!” with the word “butt” in a completely different voice. But watch a movie from the late nineties broadcast on the same channel, and the same line would read “Kiss my ass!” I guess no one bothered to un-dub the older movies.

Of course, you don’t have to bleep the whole word. You can get away with bleeping just part of a word. “Go f*ck yourself!” Oh, gee, I wonder what that missing word was. It started with an F, ended with a CK, and it had something which started to sound like part of a U in the middle. I can’t imagine what he could have said.

But even worse is when the word is dubbed over in a way that doesn’t even make sense. I once heard the word “ass****” dubbed over as “egg role.” How the hell is that an insult?

In the old days, you couldn’t say “hell,” “damn” or “ass.” Now you can. However, in the old days, you could get away with saying “n*****.” You can still get away with saying it if you’re black, but if a white guy says “n*****,” it has to be bleeped. (Funny, though, that black people don’t get bleeped when they say “cracker.” Hmm.)

You can say “crap,” but you can’t say “s***,” even though these are probably the two most interchangeable words in the English language. I don’t know anyone who is really offended by the latter and totally okay with the former. Maybe there are a few, but not enough to be more than a statistical anomaly. I’m sure if you did the research, more people would be offended by the word “stupid.”

But you are allowed to say “s***” on television under certain circumstances, such as getting special permission from the FCC. Because I can’t image what could be more offensive than the word “s***” being spoken on network or basic cable without first receiving proper written authorization signed and notarized. An unauthorized “s***” would warp viewer’s minds. But with authorization, you can warn people first. “Warning: I’m about to say ‘s***.’ Shit.” I guess that makes it all better.

You’re allowed to get angry and say you’re “pissed,” but you’re not allowed to urinate and say that you “p*****.” Explain that to me! “I cut a guy off in traffic. I pissed off that guy.” That’s okay. “I stood on a guy’s shoulders and emptied my bladder. I p***** off that guy.” Same exact sentence, but now it’s wrong to say on television.

So maybe it’s not the word that’s offensive. Maybe it’s just the context. But if that’s the case, why then is it okay to say “urinated,” “peed,” “took a leak,” “went number one,” “made water,” “excreted fluid waste,” “pee-peed” or “went to the bathroom?” I can

spend an hour on basic cable talking in depth about golden showers, but I can't say "p****." Why?

Likewise, I don't need to warn people before I say "crap," "poop," "defecate," "bowel movement," et al. But for "shit," I need a warning first. (The warning above still applies.)

Incidentally, it seems odd to me that we have so many synonyms for "shit." This is not surprising. Ben Franklin once said that we will never run out of words and phrases that mean "drunk," because polite society keeps inventing euphemisms for things that so-called polite people don't talk about. When we don't want other people to hear us say certain things, we invent new words, and when other people figure out what it is that we're talking about, we have to invent even more new words. So if someone knows what "drunk," "shit-faced," "sloshed," "tanked," "hammered," "intoxicated," "loaded," "wasted," "tipsy," "three sheets to the wind," or "under the influence" means, they might not know the word "inebriated." This same principle can also be found in criminals who don't want police to understand what they are saying, thus so many code words for "kill" or "money" have become common slangs over time. But I digress.

I can say "penis" or "vagina." But I can't call a penis a "c****" or a "p****," and I can't call a vagina a "p****" or a "c****." However, if I were talking about chickens or cats or sharp sensations of pain, the rules change. I can't refer to a vagina as a "p****," but if I wanted to, I could call a cat a "vagina." (Of course, it wouldn't make any sense.) If I were to call a rooster's penis a "cock's c****," or a cat's vagina a "pussy's p****," or if I were to say that "I accidentally leaned forward on a cactus and felt a prick on my p****," guess what happens. The words won't be bleeped in all contexts. Only the contexts where they refer to those parts of the anatomy which we are allowed to call a "penis" or a "vagina." Once again, it's not the word, and it's not the meaning; it's the combination thereof. (I don't know of any context where you're allowed to say "c****" whether you're referring to a vagina or not. Maybe because the only other use of the word "c****" is in referring to women in general, but in an also offensive way.)

On certain networks, I'm allowed to say "dildo," but there is a limit to the number of times I'm allowed to use the word "dildo." I can talk about a rubber or plastic sex toy, a vibrator or a jelly dong all I want, but "dildo" has its limitations. Apparently, audiences might be offended by someone using the word "d****" four or more times. Three times wouldn't bother anyone. But a fourth use of the word "d****?" That's just immoral.

I'm not allowed to say "ass****" on television. It has to be bleeped. Sometimes they bleep the first half – "ass" gets bleeped and "hole" is permitted. Other times, it's the other way around. Sometimes you get "****hole," and sometimes you get "ass****." But if you space the words out, you are allowed to say "ass..... hole." You can say "butthole," "anus," "arse hole." You can even say "ass's hole." And if you dig a hole in the ground and lower a donkey into it, you can call that an "ass hole." Buy you can't refer to your ass**** as an "ass****," nor can you call a person an "ass****."

On television, I'm allowed to show a naked person who lives in a jungle, but not a naked person who lives in any civilized part of the world. It has to be pixilated. Also pixilated is the middle finger. I can give the British-style two-finger gesture, and nobody worries about the gesture being offensive to the British, but the American-style one-finger gesture has to be blurred out to avoid offending Americans – most of whom probably wouldn't be offended anyway. What's the point?

Movies are just as ridiculous. In a PG movie, you are allowed to say "shit" as many times as you want, but you're only allowed to say "f***" once and it cannot be literal. If you say that two people are "f***ing," the movie gets an R rating. If you tell a guy to "f*** off," it's still PG. But if you use "f***" in any context more than once, the movie becomes rated R. Explain that to me!

According to the FCC's logic, this is an example of a PG-rated line: "I hate you, you bastard! You stupid ass****-licking, cum-vomiting, shit-eating, p***-drinking n*****! I'm going to rip off your G**-damn head and SHIT DOWN YOUR MOTHER-F****ING NECK!!!"

And this is an example of an R-rated line: "Oh, f***. I stubbed my f***ing toe."

Next, we come to the issue of nudity in movies. Anyone can be shown naked from behind. There are no rules when it comes to butts. But the rest of the nude form is a different matter. If a woman flashes a boob, the movie gets an R rating. Not that there is anything offensive about breasts. Apparently, the only offensive thing is the nipple. The FCC is working tirelessly to protect the public from unwanted exposure to the areola – the one aspect of the female breast which is equally present on the male chest, but not bothered to be censored.

Even still, once a female nipple has been seen, the movie gets an R rating. After that, you could have ten thousand women strutting about completely naked the entire movie, and unless one of them actually spreads her labia apart, it will not go beyond an R rating. However, if a man shows even part of a penis for so much as a split second, the movie is automatically NC-17. Double-standard, anyone?

Of course, even if full nudity is not being shown, partial nudity has its rules. Women can walk around naked all day on a movie set while getting ready for a two-second scene from behind. But if a man is going to have a nude scene, he has to wear one of those stupid little flesh-colored pouches taped to his genitals. Pointless, yes, but still a standard practice. (And I don't know from experience, but I've heard those things never fit right anyway, so many actors just take them off after a while.)

So what is the purpose of all these silly rules? I'll tell you what. It's a compromise. It's an empty token gesture – a bone tossed to the conservative right to shut them up. These people know that the gesture they're receiving is an empty one, but they don't care. They're just glad to be a factor.

Case in point. Many beer and wine companies were afraid that the FCC would come after them one day and prohibit advertising alcohol on television, so they made up a rule. You can advertise alcohol, but you can't actually drink any beer on camera, and wine can be sipped, but not gulped. With enough people holding beer glasses on camera, one might think that beer is seen being drunk, but it's all editing trickery. The gesture was completely meaningless, but it got the desired result. The FCC never went after the alcohol companies. I guess screwing yourself in your own way is preferable to getting screwed someone else's way.

Later, the rules on drinking on camera have been loosened a bit, since the FCC is more concerned with people smoking on camera these days. I suppose that the best way to avoid being a target of the FCC is to stand opposite a bigger target. And these days, big tobacco is the biggest target there is. Network television actually has a minimum number of required PSAs for things like not smoking or designating a driver or saying no to drugs. This can be in the form of a standard PSA, such as an anti-tobacco ad during the commercial breaks and often paid for by the tobacco company itself, or else worked into the plotline of a sit-com such as the eldest son has been arrested for drunk driving and learns a "valuable lesson." I'm not sure where exactly one draws the line between helpful public advice and brainwashing propaganda, but at least as long as the network and studio execs are putting stupid and pointless rules on themselves, they know that Uncle Sam, or else his obnoxious nephew, Idiotic Activist Group, won't step in and do it for them.

So what have we learned? We've learned that stupid rules that don't make a difference are better than stupid rules that have an impact on society. But while that may be the case, personally, I'd rather hear people cuss than listen to all those annoying bleeps or bad dubs. So on that note, I say that the FCC can go fuck themselves.