

I am What I Choose To Be

Jasmine Skerritt, Teacher, Greaves Adventist Academy, Quebec

I sat one afternoon in my living room with a few million others alike watching a popular television talk show. The show focused on the state of young boys in America and their lack of ability to show feelings. As a result, according to the featured author, we have a society of angry boys who have not been encouraged to cry throughout their childhood and so find violent means of expressing their anger.

On another occasion, I sat reading the local newspaper and I stumbled upon an article which spoke of a teenager who had just been sentenced to six months in jail after being convicted of brutally raping his 18 month old nephew while baby sitting him. The judge in this case justified his decision by stating that the teenager, who had just turned 18, had a "hellish upbringing" and so could not be held responsible for the awful experiences he had had as a child with abusive parents. I remember vividly preparing to watch one of my favorite television shows when I was shocked by the news of the tragic and fatal shooting in Colorado at Columbine High School. Later on, a number of talk show hosts, hostesses, psychologists, authors, parents and friends were attempting to analyze the killers' frame of mind in an effort to determine what could possibly drive a person to commit a crime of such a heinous nature. No one understood how children from a middle class neighborhood could be guilty of such types of crime. A few mentioned that they withdrew themselves from others, and complained at times of not being liked. All of the things that any young adult has felt or will have felt in his or her life was now once again to be reduced to some sort of psychological jargon in an attempt to somehow justify their actions. Their justification would somehow serve the purpose of preventing this type of crime from repeating itself. Many copy cat crimes, however, would follow and the same method would be chosen as an appropriate means of "getting to the bottom" of it all. I watched as each commentator attempted to find a place to lay the foundation of each offender's actions. I watched terrified, because each case reinforced the fact that we live in a society where we are taught that any action can be justified through taking a close examination of the offenders past. At no time, is the offender expected to take the blame entirely for his or her actions. What does this do for creating a society of responsible youth and adults? I also recognized that the media is used in its various forms to magnify and sometimes glorify potentially dangerous situations through the uses of generalizations and made-up clichés. (Just before the shooting in Colorado a famous author introduced his book on a talk show and all but gave permission to boys in America to shoot bullets because they were not able to cry tears).



This therefore calls for a careful look at our societal values, and a closer look at the media and how it can actually influence and create an arena for and even encourage violent acts. Society and the media must accept responsibility for much of the problem. This however is not to say that behaviors may be justified by these social forces. This would serve only to negate the very essence of understanding the importance of choices and responsibility. While it is important to carefully examine those factors which play a pivotal role in deciding factors of young adults where acts of violence are concerned, it is my belief that the perpetrators of violence must assume all of the responsibility for the action itself. There is a popular poem entitled "children learn what they live", but must children live what they have learned? I suggest that the life that they do live is one of personal choosing. If a child lives with hatred he may learn to hate;

but does his living with and learning determine the basis of the future actions?

Our world seems to exist free of morals. Youth are not encouraged or taught the importance of accepting responsibility for their own actions. Not too long ago, it was commonly believed that it took an entire village to raise a child. Mothers and fathers recognized their responsibility for the proper care and upbringing of children. We have now accepted a value system which allows our children to be raised by murderers, rapists, verbal, physical, and psychological abusers through the medium of television and media in its other forms. Is this the basis on which we expect our children to learn to make proper choices? Can our children truly become positive citizens of their community when we allow their naked minds to be clothed with visions of violence, terror, and all other forms of evil?

Our children possess a wide variety in personalities, and according to those, we find for example many girls finding values from the latest trend in a magazine or popular television show. Our boys create a system of values based on the latest ideals of their favorite music artist. Our society supports the use of violence in solving disputes through war. Does our world not contribute to the creation of violent children? Yet, one might ask, do all children act violently? What exactly makes the difference between those children who will and those who won't?

My reference to television and other forms of media serves not to validate arguments which suggest that outside forces are partially or entirely responsible for a child's actions in present or later life. It is merely to bring to light the ways in which the media contributes to those actions, and to hopefully serve as a catalyst for instituting change. Many of us are avid viewers of television and we become upholders and supporters of the violent, sexual, and discriminatory nature of its content. We then invite our children to become witnesses to this sort of behavior and in doing so, we begin to teach them inappropriate ways of dealing with day to day situations and more serious types of issues. Our job therefore as parents and educators is to equip our children with the power of making the right choices.

We are admonished that we should train our children in such a way so that when they become adults they will be able to live fruitful lives. God has given us the responsibility of teaching and molding young minds, not just for now but for eternity. Let us do it with all of our might.