

## Immoral Outrage

The pop singer Justin Timberlake tore off part of the black leather shirt of another pop singer, Janet Jackson, while they were performing together live on television (during the interval of a sporting event known as the 'Superbowl'), briefly exposing Jackson's curiously decorated right nipple. Some people seem to doubt the entertainers' explanation that this was a "wardrobe malfunction" and suspect that it was a carefully choreographed stunt...

"Immoral outrage" is what New Jersey's **Star-Ledger** rightly calls the widespread reaction to this event. But the *Star-Ledger* does not go far enough: it only condemns some aspects, such as the selectiveness of some people's outrage, the insincerity of others', and the increase in media censorship that has followed.

The truth that the *Star-Ledger* coyly skirts around is that everyone who was offended by witnessing this event *is an immoral person*. In fact, some of those who are perfectly sincere and consistent in their outrage are more immoral than some of the hypocrites who pander to them. Sincerity (as Robert Heinlein used to point out) is overrated as a virtue, and likewise hypocrisy is overrated as a vice. But in any case, all the complainers of every kind, jointly and severally, are a disgrace to our society, and to American society in particular.

Fri, 02/13/2004 - 09:25 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

## Holier

Than Thou News Flash.

For anyone who actually saw the "halftime show", it would more informative to call the interim performances between football ballet and commercials "a mediocre mish-mosh of flash and glam and rockets" than an "immoral outrage". Perhaps the flash that some people focused on, if they even saw an image, was a ripped bodice, all of two seconds at a great smoky glittering distance. Was that the only thing in 15 minutes of halftime performance fame that could attract an oft distracted human's attention?

Whether the entire show or two seconds of it was tasteless pandemonium or accidental theater is not the point. The point is audience reaction. The from-camera-1-to-the-tv-share-household,

to the mental process going on behind the eye of the beholder exhibited itself as a knee-jerk reaction, "well I never....!"

Seeing an opportunity to exploit the numbers, shock and awe at a public sighting of a bared breast (partially), cheesy media responds in a blizzard of coverage. Pandering coverage. Is a ripped bodice and a nipple ring front page news? Apparently so. Which says something about what some people consider as important news.

Wasting (mostly feigned) outrage on the little things is occupying the distant recesses of more than several lower brains. We have a (moral) problem, Houston. Think.

by a reader on Fri, 02/13/2004 - 17:53 | [reply](#)

## Further Explanation

I wish **The World** would elaborate about *why* those who were offended are immoral.

**Gil**

by **Gil** on Fri, 02/13/2004 - 18:17 | [reply](#)

## being offended

... distinguishing carefully between being offended/outraged and feeling mildly nauseous (which is a natural enough reaction from the squeamish to seeing metal threaded through holes in other people's tender bits)

by a reader on Sat, 02/14/2004 - 10:45 | [reply](#)

## Re: Further Explanation

Why are those people immoral? Well, they subscribe to a moral code which attributes rightness to a covered breast and wrongness to an uncovered one, a distinction which is in reality one of convention only. Admittedly conventions, once they exist, give rise to genuine moral issues: is not automatically OK to violate them under all circumstances. However, the same is true of taking offence at such violations. People to whom this particular violation constitutes a personal disaster are, even in cases where they never complain of it to anyone else, conducting their lives very wrongly. Of course it is in the nature of this sort of vice that such people do not in fact keep their outrage to themselves. They try their best to punish the perpetrators both through verbal abuse (which is immoral because the perpetrators do not deserve it) and, in practice, by helping to make or enforce unjust laws. But these outward signs of immorality are, as always, the consequences of previous morally wrong choices within the minds of individuals, choices which, even if they somehow failed to harm anyone else

directly, would be bad for those individuals and would make them

worse people.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Sat, 02/14/2004 - 13:47 | [reply](#)

## Convention

Why is the difference between a covered and an uncovered breast merely convention and not a direct moral distinction?

Clearly, *The World* is leaving this as an exercise for the interested reader, so I'll have a go:

It's because, traditionally, adult-pairing relationships, to the extent that they are not concerned with shared creative interests, are coercive. Maintaining such a relationship is possible because the coercion is offset by bribery. The bribery is along the lines of "if you do all these unpleasant tasks then you get to have exclusive private access to my body". Such bribery is only effective because there exists a false meme (with moral implications) in the mind of the sugar-receiver. The coercion-bribery component in relationships has been tolerated because stable, permanent male-female pairings were considered absolutely necessary for the welfare of children. These days, given the existence of contraception and other stuff, the meme makes its holder a bad person. For example, the meme prevents one from forming close friendships with potential alternative sexual partners. This sacrifices valuable opportunities for knowledge growth. For example, two musicians may stop playing duets if they fear their intimate professional relationship is putting a marriage in danger.

Most people unconsciously recognise the meme to be false which is why divorce is now widely tolerated (badness is always inconsistent).

One of the ways that the meme is implanted in children is via the public nudity taboo. The degree of nudity, as we all know, shifts with time, and the boundary is exploited by celebs and film stars who wish to draw our attention. It also depends on context, for example, nudity in school biology textbooks is acceptable.

I'm pretty new to ARR theory so please criticise the above where wrong.

In the meantime, Happy Valentine's day, everyone!

[Arrghh! Forget I wrote that last bit please]

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Sat, 02/14/2004 - 20:42 | [reply](#)

## i don't even know which day valentines day was

tom,

you didn't answer your own question! you described why people are pissy about nudity. but your question was why is the difference

btwn a covered and unconvered breast just convention (ie

arbitrary) not fundamental or important.

the reason is clear if we try the question with some new subject material: Why is the difference between toys in a toy chest and toys in a bag a matter of convention and not a fundamental moral issue? sounds stupid now, huh?

ok you may counter covered breasts make sense to stay warm. this is true, and a real difference. however no one was worried that Janet was cold. so the outrage obviously wasn't about that. nothing else comes to mind, just like nothing comes to mind with bag vs chest.

-- Elliot Temple  
<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 02/15/2004 - 13:50 | [reply](#)

## Where the boundary lies

You're right, I ought to have gone on to explain why the boundary of the convention, or part of it, currently happens to lie around the female nipple (in the West, at least)

I've posted my slightly lengthy answer over at TCSsociety, which will hopefully pass the moderators shortly.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TCSsociety/>

by **Tom Robinson** on Tue, 02/17/2004 - 01:17 | [reply](#)

## So, is Bush Immoral?

Is somebody who is outraged by gay marriage similarly immoral?

**Gil**

by **Gil** on Wed, 02/25/2004 - 06:47 | [reply](#)

## Re: So, is Bush Immoral?

that facet of Bush is immoral. but the statement "Bush is immoral" would be inaccurate and misleading.

-- Elliot Temple  
<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/25/2004 - 16:10 | [reply](#)

## Bush is Immoral

**The World** wrote "That everyone who was offended by witnessing this event is an *immoral person*." Not "That everyone who was offended by witnessing this event has an *immoral facet*." I think it

was a reasonable usage. I don't think it means they are entirely

immoral. I asked if he was *similarly* immoral.

I think he is.

**Gil**

by **Gil** on Wed, 02/25/2004 - 17:19 | [reply](#)

## Re: Bush is immoral

Looking back at my previous comment in this thread, I see that President Bush's opposition to gay marriage is indeed in broadly the same category as some people's opposition to breast-baring. So he is immoral in the same *sense* as they are, but, I'd say, less so in degree.

In fact I would say *much* less so in degree if it weren't for one thing: there's a war on, and he's leading it. At a time like this, he should not be diverting his creativity and attention into a highly controversial social engineering project (his proposed constitutional amendment) that is not only wrong and ultimately doomed, but even aside from that, cannot be reasonably regarded as urgent.

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 02/25/2004 - 18:48 | [reply](#)

## la de da

the world was calling them immoral *\*in context\** (the context being a discussion about a specific issue). saying someone is immoral in a discussion in a certain context is a much weaker statement than just calling someone immoral with no context. calling people who are offended by breasts immoral sans context would be a mistake, but i'm sure that's not what **The World** meant to do.

if being immoral in one facet made someone immoral generally then all we'd have to do is consider how good the angry people are *\*as parents\** to condemn them, nevermind the whole incident about the breast.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/25/2004 - 21:42 | [reply](#)