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People's voices enliven BSA fairness report

***Freedoms and Fetters: Broadcasting standards in New Zealand.* Wellington: Broadcasting Standards Authority; Dunmore Publishing Ltd, 2006. 152pp. ISBN: 1877399124.**

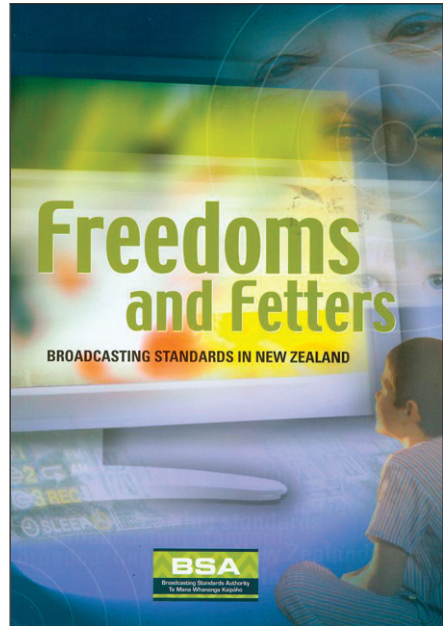
What does PG mean, Daddy?
Parental guidance.

So what does that actually mean?

I have to sit and watch it with you.

I wish everything was PG, Daddy, and then we'd spend more time together. (p. 27)

THIS somewhat poignant exchange, quoted in Chapter 1 of *Freedoms and Fetters*, was reported by 'Daddy's' wife, one of 26 people in a focus group interviewed in 2005 about the importance of balance and fairness in factual broadcast programmes. Findings from several focus groups were also used to help design an AC Nielsen questionnaire, conducted in May and June



of that year, among 500 people. The questions primarily focused on balance, fairness, accuracy and good taste and decency in New Zealand radio and television programmes.

As the introduction notes, (p.15), every few years since its inception in 1989, the Broadcasting Standards Authority has surveyed New Zealanders on their attitudes towards various broadcasting standards. This book continues the BSA research last published as *Monitoring Community Attitudes in Changing Mediascapes* (Dickinson et al., 2000).

Three chapters on talk radio describe its history and latest develop-

ments in New Zealand, the views of the radio broadcasters and the likes and dislikes of talkback listeners. As described in Chapter 3, when the 11 radio presenters or directors were asked how importantly they thought listeners or viewers rated balance in radio and television news, 100 percent described it as ranging from 'quite important' to 'extremely important'. By contrast, only 70 percent gave the same ratings for talkback radio, with the remaining 30 percent rating balance as either 'a little important' or 'not important at all'. (p. 52). The results for fairness were similar. Though none of the broadcasters rated fairness as 'not important at all', only eight percent rated it 'extremely important'.

The AC Neilson survey results, featured in Chapter 6, (pp. 87-110), are meticulously detailed, with excellent use of graphs. There is the usual list of swear words, ranked according to their comparative acceptability, and the authors conclude there has been a softening of attitudes to many words. They also note an increase in understanding of the TV classification system which they thought might go along with increased concern for what children are exposed to on TV.

However, the survey also revealed higher levels of 'unprompted

concern' about bad language and sexual content, compared with other years.

The six chapters and eight helpful appendices make for interesting reading but the narrative comes alive with some of the comments from the focus groups. As a member of a talkback focus group reported, (p. 59), his wife said: 'Of course, you're off to your weirdos' meeting tonight, aren't you? For her, anybody who listens to, or indeed ... contributes toward talkback radio has got a serious problem!'

Reference

Dickinson, G., Hill, M. and Zwaga, W. (2000). *Monitoring community attitudes in changing mediascapes*. Wellington, NZ: Dunmore Press and Broadcasting Standards Authority.