

STATE OF THE UNION

# AMERICAN GRAFFITI

*Desire to see others in pain, perverse obsessions pollute society*



Americans, even more so than people of other nations, are infatuated with the idea of keeping up with the Joneses. Americans are a society of people who harbor deep-seated feelings of envy.

They love to feel superior to their neighbors; they love to feel like they "have" more than the people next door. Increasingly it seems, Americans simply enjoy seeing others in compromising, embarrassing or painful positions.

The Germans have a term for this idea. They call it *shoddenfreud* — taking pleasure in the pain of others. Obviously, then, the phenomenon is not unique to the United States. However, it does seem as though Americans have perfected the art of the perverse.

Case in point. An Associated Press report out of Philadelphia described a novelty developed by an upscale restaurateur in the city.

Paradigm, a trendy martini bar and high-dollar establishment, is home to what its owner hopes is the newest thing in cocktail cool. The eatery's three restrooms, directly facing nearly a dozen tables, are designed with doors of liquid crystal.

When the doors are locked, they become opaque; if they are not, well, it redefines the term "dining experience."

According to the article, guests to the restaurant have already been privy to some very intimate moments of unknowing lushes.

One would think chic trendsetters would be appalled by the possibility of seeing drunken patrons in their skivvies, but apparently folks are vying for a ring-side seat.

Another example of Americans' "uncouthness" is the popularity of the "funniest home video" genre of television and video offerings. These shows compile outtakes from personal video collections.

Viewers roar and applaud as Dad gets nailed in the groin with a golf ball or Aunt Helen loses her teeth at a family reunion. People clap as an overweight woman falls off of a horse or a skier tumbles down the slopes. If it is embarrassing or somebody gets hurt, people laugh. And why do they laugh? Because the person in the clip is not them.

The judicial system has even been polluted by this



MANDY CATER  
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strange obsession. Take for instance Court TV. Here is an entire cable network dedicated to airing courtroom proceedings. Everyone knows how the trend began, but the interest has snowballed.

At any hour of the day, people can tune in to see the latest serial killer being cross-examined or an innocent victim's giving heartwrenching testimony. However, the current "court is cool" fad has nothing to do with a newfound respect for the justice system. It all comes down to *shoddenfreud*.

Perhaps the most glaring example of this American desire for a window to the world is the fascination with the tabloids. Americans are obsessed with trash and gossip. They rush to the check-out lines each week to pick up some rag showing the starlet of the moment without make-up.

They line up to catch a glimpse of the latest heart-throb with a spare tire around his waist. They flip on the tube to hear some blurb about who's having whose love child or who's checked into Betty Ford. Let's face it, Americans like to dish, and the dirtier it is, the better. Even formerly respectable news organizations and programs are sinking down to this pathetic level just to stay in the ratings game. One needs only think back on the media circus surrounding Princess Diana's death for a memory-refreshing example.

The American obsession with feeling as if they have something on their neighbors really has reached a pathetic level. The message this seems to be sending is that if you can't feel better about yourself on merit or achievement, just look for a weakness in someone else. This trend is not only a cop-out for genuine personal worth, it is also dangerous. It blurs the lines between private and public and indicates that voyeuristic intrusions are okay.

Ultimately, though, the phenomenon is saddening. In a country where people have so many opportunities for personal growth and so many liberties, it is a shame they choose to abuse their freedoms by catching photos of celebrities sunbathing nude in their own backyards and wasting their time watching Jerry Springer. Instead of constantly looking out their windows, people should take the time to look in the mirror.

Maybe if they discovered what was missing in their own lives, they would not have to rely so heavily upon the disasters and disappointments in the lives of others.

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PERSPECTIVES

## Valuable life lessons offered by daytime talk-show host

Just when I was beginning to see absolutely no hope for my generation's future in America, I became acquainted with a man who brought light to my bleak outlook on life. His man is Jerry Springer.



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The day-time talk show wars have divided members of our generation since every washed-childhood television star attempted to bring America's burning issues into our living rooms. While talk-show hosts such as Vanessa Williams "The Cosby Show" and the dietetically advanced woman from the rock group Wilson Phillips have come and gone, many other personalities have managed to maintain a quality show.

For years, I was charmed by Ricki Lake. Her handling of intense issues such as cross-dressing dophiles made me a big fan of her catchphrase, "o Ricki."

I also was briefly courted by Jenny Jones. I could not help but get caught up in the hype created by her murder-causing show. Maybe I'm mistaken, but aren't all of her shows exactly like that? One can only stomach so much of trashy TV makeovers.

Yet through it all, Jerry Springer has maintained a small semblance of sanity in my life. He is a survivor and he has a lot to offer to every member of my human race.

Jerry Springer is not your average person who hosts his own show. He actually cares about America and Americans. He stresses to get deep side the moral fibers of our society and from that draw conclusions and even throw out some sensible solutions.

Okay, well that may be a little overboard, but at least he doesn't pretend.

While every other smut-filled talk show host attempts to fool the viewer into thinking that their show is some sort of exposé on a current topic that is digging deep into the roots of American society, Springer knows his show is nothing but a parade of our society's dregs and he is not

afraid to say it.

Springer is extremely aware of the quality of his talk show. I mean lack of quality. On several occasions he has poked fun of not only his show, but even of himself.

The ability to laugh at one's self is an important characteristic that all the other ego-driven talk-show hosts lack.

Springer cares about society so much that he brings these backward guests not to befriend them and act like some sort of useless high-school guidance counselor (like Sally Jesse Raphael), but rather to insult them, berate them and let them know that their actions are morally and sometimes legally wrong. Springer teaches us that constructive criticism and bluntness is sometimes a necessary tool in social interaction.

Springer teaches us to express our thoughts every day. His "Final Thoughts" at the end of each show try to get to the bottom of the show's issues and leave the viewers with some food for thought.

Yet, no matter how great of a teacher Jerry Springer is, he is my ultimate source of sanity (besides my girlfriend and my Ol' Lady), because he makes me feel a little better about myself.

Sure, I don't have a perfect relationship with my buddies, but at least they don't have hidden crushes on me, nor are they involved in any Elvis Presley-worshipping cults.

I also don't have the most functional of families, but we at least love each other and don't attempt to pick one another up at family reunions.

Springer's show and guests really make me realize a lot about myself. I am Amish compared to most people. I would never even think to do most of the things that his guests do without a second glance (i.e. let my daughter become a stripper).

The bottom-line reason why many Americans should embrace "The Jerry Springer Show" is that no matter how bad our lives get, there are many people out there whose lives are in a million times worse shape than ours. Thank you, Jerry.



MAIL CALL

### Gender equity not understood in column

I am writing in response to Donny Ferguson's Jan. 22 column concerning the so-called detrimental feminist movement.

I personally would consider myself to be a feminist, and to put it lightly, Ferguson's unilateral column filled with eccentric and ridiculous examples filled me with intense ire and indignation.

I hope that Ferguson reads this letter to perhaps shed some light on two specific topics covered in his ignorant and offensive column.

First of all, as a typical feminist, I take offense when Ferguson says

that "gender equity is simply a vehicle feminists use to sell their anti-male, anti-Western culture snake oil."

Gender equity means that all people should be free of culture-binding stereotypes. So, women should be allowed to become the kind of woman they wish to be, just as men should be their own kind of man.

I respect and appreciate an American full-time mother as much (and sometimes more) as I would respect any working man or woman. This movement was not started so that pathetic politically-correct teachers could force boys to play with dolls or make little girls play football so that eccentrics could cheer when their efforts helped kids break down traditional roles.

Susan B. Anthony started the suffrage movement so that girls would not be told they had to do all the housework (as my mother was told), so that girls would not be talked out of going to college and fulfilling dreams (as my grandmother was forced to do), and so that someday girls would

not be told that "girls can't do math" (as I was told in high school). Gender equity simply means an appreciation for everything that a person is without discounting the ideas that break the gender barriers.

Secondly, I wish to rebuke Ferguson's efforts to place the brunt of America's educational problems on women. Ferguson stated that "because feminists infuse an ideological agenda into education [this produces] classrooms of [children] who cannot read or write, but instead 'feel.'"

Feminists are not the ones responsible for American children rating themselves as very intelligent. It is a well-known principle world-wide that this generally over-confident feeling abounds in America; it's part of our heritage, in fact. Remember Manifest Destiny, the Mexican-American War, both world wars, Vietnam, etc., etc.

That doesn't mean that this egocentric persona of the American public penetrates into the American classroom.

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