

## Taming the Media Monster

In today's world of media bombardment, your marriage and family can suffer. Consider these tips for getting media intake under control.

by Dennis and Barbara Rainey

Would you be upset to learn that someone was competing for your spouse's heart, subtly sending negative messages about you, and seeking to horn in on your marriage by robbing the two of you of time alone for talk and intimacy? Upset? You probably would explode with anger and hurt. No marriage has room for another lover. But each day assorted voices lure you and your spouse away from each other: television, internet, radio, magazines, newspapers, music, movies, and video games. When it comes to marriage, the media present at least three significant threats:

**The media will take time away from your relationship.** Take TV, for example. Many people consider renting a movie or watching TV together to be a family evening. We've done this often ... but we've also found that these extremely passive activities do little in building relationships. Families must do something other than stare at the screen to acquire special identities.

**The media can twist your sense of reality, creating unreasonable expectations for your spouse.** The media usually present a distorted picture of real life. How often in a movie or on a television program do you see ordinary-looking people fall in love, get married, and remain committed for life through the good and bad times? More often, the norm is two extremely attractive people—groomed beautifully and photographed in the best possible light—becoming infatuated and jumping into the sack without much thought about moral issues. If you constantly feed these images into your head, doesn't your spouse stand to lose in the long run? Competing with fantasy is difficult.

**Through pornography and internet liaisons, the media can facilitate emotional adultery.** Pornography fosters a lust for images of other people, which can be as damaging to the mental and emotional health of a marriage as a physically realized affair. Anyone with internet access can download pornographic materials anytime at home or on a smartphone.

Just as bad are the liaisons people create through social networking sites or through chat rooms. In some cases spouses have left a marriage to rendezvous with a chat-room buddy, and divorce resulted. Although the benefits of using the internet are obvious, its costs and risks are not always so clear. We must carefully guard our eyes, hearts, and minds against the possible temptations that can come through it into our homes.

Here are some steps we've taken to tame the media monster:

- 1. Be aggressive—not passive—about the media.** A media monster will enter our eyes, ears, minds, hearts, and houses like a flooding river washing over a dike if we allow it. Set some standards! For example, with TV, watch on purpose. Decide in advance what you will view; don't just turn it on and surf. And when something offensive catches you by surprise—turn it off!
- 2. Control the flow.** Watch what comes into your house. Someone needs to stand sentry at the media entrance to the family, carefully and prayerfully deciding what will be allowed in. And don't depend on the movie rating system and movie reviews. The movie rating system can be highly inconsistent. Find out about movies from friends who share your values. Look online to determine the level of sex, language, and violence in the programs or films that interest you. (The excellent website [www.screenit.com](http://www.screenit.com) describes the quality, morality, and specific language of any film being released.)
- 3. Control internet access.** Set limits on how long you will spend on the internet--and how long you will spend on social networking sites like Facebook. Also, consider placing any computer with internet access in a very public, heavily traveled place in your home, such as the kitchen or family room. Men, in particular, will benefit from accountability to another man--someone who asks, "Are you clean in what you're viewing?"
- 4. Use technology to your advantage.** Use the media to strengthen your marriage and family. (For instance, [www.familylife.com](http://www.familylife.com) contains downloadable resources for your marriage and family.) Make the media serve your needs.
- 5. Consider cutting back on or even fasting from media use.** Have you ever tried going a whole day or week without watching television? What might happen in your marriage if you did?

The words of Psalm 101:2-3 apply well to media use:

*I will give heed to the blameless way.  
When wilt thou come to me?  
I will walk within my house in the integrity of my heart.  
I will set no worthless thing before my eyes.*

The bottom line is that much of what can be found in the media is of little worth. And controlling the media monster means controlling *what you allow yourself to see* (or hear or read) and *how much time you devote to it*. These decisions could be among the most important in your marriage.

Adapted by permission from [Starting Your Marriage Right](#), by Dennis and Barbara Rainey, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000. This article originally appeared in the August 9, 2010 issue of Marriage Memo, a weekly e-newsletter Dennis and Barbara Rainey helped found FamilyLife, where Dennis serves as president. The Rainey's have written numerous books, including Moments Together for Couples, Moments With You, Staying Close, and Building Your Mate's Self-Esteem.

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