ON REVELATION AND RECOGNITION

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ABSTRACT: A discussion is presented regarding the development of a child's sense of self and the need for adult role models in this development. Complicating this development is the culture's preoccupation with forms of distraction, such as entertainment. As a result of children's engagement with entertainment and celebrity worship, many young people grow up without encountering parents, teachers, or youth workers who create interactive environments in which the child learns about itself. An argument is advanced that the fascination with celebrity role models bespeaks a need for recognition from genuine role models and guides for developing what has been called a narrative imagination leading to a rich involvement with the world and a capacity for empathy.

KEY WORDS: recognition; role models; character; parenting; family.

THE ROLE OF RECOGNITION

It could well be argued that much of what child and adolescent development is all about is the emergence of the self, and, more precisely, how a child begins to confront the very meaning of self, as well as the phenomena ultimately forming the self. This essay explores one facet of self-emergence, namely the role of genuine role models and so-called *faux* role models, those being figures of popular culture with whom the child will never interact directly. Inevitably, this discussion involves the role of personal recognition by adults in the development of the child's self and the potential danger of having highly recognized celebrities act as significant role models.

Given the evolution of popular culture in America, it is little wonder that so many children wish to be Michael Jordan, Ashley Simpson, Tiger Woods, or any number of rock stars, actors, or athletes. Not only do these people represent the culture's popular elite, their very being substitutes for the child's internally formulated conception of an ideal self. Increasingly, one hears children coming forth with a peculiar response to the age old question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The child smiles. "I want to be a star!" Apparently, we are all performing artists as well as audiences (Perrin, 1999) in what Gabler (1998) calls America, "The Republic of Entertainment."

Although much of our so-called hero worship seems normal enough (Campbell, 1972), some of it may be a manifestation of distraction, for what

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we ought to be considering is the manner in which our attention is drawn away or diverted, as well as the manner in which our sense of self is drawn away or diverted, leading us to define ourselves in distracted ways.

It appears as if popular culture figures become for the child living representations if not of the world, then of the self. In effect, they become embodiments of the entire culture. Eventually, because of the "virtual" proximity to stars made possible by technological equipment, the child's culture becomes one in which celebrity, stardom, status, wealth, power and most especially, recognition and visibility become ingredients of the child's ego. It is not merely that the child comes to imagine that police officers and lawyers, physicians, and prisoners are identical to those seen on television. More precisely, the real and pretend lives of actors and athletes eventually form part of the child's sense of himself or herself, as well as the child's (distracted) reading and rendering of the world. Even more, somewhere along the way, these "stars" have been designated as role models.

The psychoanalyst might allege that stars fill the empty spaces in the child's developing ego (Kohut, 1978, 1987). Stardom seeps into the conscious and unconscious worlds of children, along with the star's (imagined) manner of dealing with emptiness and loneliness, life and death. The boundaries, as Gabler (1998) noted, between the real and the unreal have almost completely dissipated. Confronted with an emptiness that the child may not be able to articulate, he or she has two courses of psychic action: turn to the celebrity's life, or the real or imagined role played by that celebrity, or turn in to the celebrity (classic identification). One of these scenarios has to work.

Why might a culture's children be prone to this emptiness and hence vulnerable to this form of being drawn away from one's own self (May, 1983)? Why are so many children seemingly able to fill their psychic emptiness, or indeed shape their psyches with the distraction provided them by "larger than life" celebrities? Why should anyone be unaware or afraid of the authentic activities and mysteries of being? Even though these processes, theoretically, occur in the unconscious, we still may ask, "Why settle for the substitute, the compensatory, fantasized or ersatz existence? Why elevate the celebrity to the level of ideal self, even icon? Why are all these well-known people called role models? And why, furthermore, establish intense attachments between untouchable star and immediately touchable being"? Gabler (in Siegel, 1998) spoke to these points when he wrote:

> The celebrity archetype addressed social fears extant in modern America: the anxiety of losing one's identity or never finding it at all (Erikson, 1968; Giddens, 1991); the terror of having too little amid plenty; the dread of anonymity; the awful suspicion that some were blessed and some were not and that most Americans were among the latter. (p.13)

Is it possible that children absorb celebrities and follow their every step as if they were their own because, in a sense, they are their own? Have some children not turned their lives over to these artificial demi-Gods? And is the reason for this to be found in that word, attachment? To answer these questions, we might hunt for fundamental aspects of psychic attachment as they develop in early childhood (Berger & Thompson, 1995).

Recognition commences with the figures of our adulation looking directly at us, and ideally, smiling at the same time. In this magical if not mythic moment, a quintessential aspect of recognition is revealed. And lest one doubt it, the feeling quite literally is awesome! Seeing and being seen by our heroes bring forth an almost painful joy, the sort of wailing joy rock music fans exhibit, and recognition lies at the heart of it.

In recognition, we literally re-cognize something or someone. In some manner, we know again this something or someone, readjusting not only our sights on the object, but reestablishing it in a familiar if not intimate context. Aristotle was right: Knowledge of a sort is being called up in us. The hero recognizes us and, in response, we re-know him, for the joy could not exist if we didn't, somehow, know him already.

Erikson (1985) designated the birth of recognition to be in those moments when the mother peers down at her baby. Kagan (1983) later would remind us that this primitive recognition requires the mother to be looking full face at the infant, something Erikson, presumably, knew instinctively. Perceiving this full face, babies not only smile, their bodies may convulse slightly, their arms and legs hitting the mattress; they are genuinely excited to see *and be seen.*

Recognition has another meaning: it suggests superior status. One gains recognition, which is to say that we place a person on some higher level, perhaps even a pedestal. In this context, recognition is granted and received and, thereby, connotes a status of privilege. As personal and social recognition constantly take place, children will be seen, then re-seen in new contexts and, in this way, end up being something different than what they were moments before. Instances of recognition, therefore, confirm one's old being while simultaneously launching a new being. In this manner, recognition becomes central to Erikson's (1950) definition of identity: a sense of continuing sameness coupled with the awareness of constant change.

Young children reveal another aspect of recognition, one appearing in their complicated ambivalence about being seen or noticed. Children often claim they enjoy watching people, but we sense that *being* seen is the hidden reward of people watching. Children walk through school unaware of what, in this instant, is making them self-conscious. Are they looking at someone and fearing that they may be caught in the act? Are they fearing (or wishing) that a certain someone will look at them and then, how awesome, know their name?

In fact, many children tell complicated stories of how they dislike their names. While some of these accounts bespeak their battles with

parents, identity formation, independence, and esteem, they also reveal a foundation of recognition; when someone knows my name, I am recognized!

The great teacher recognizes her students, not merely their work or effort. It goes without saying that she learns their names as quickly as possible. She honors them, makes them feel special, and most especially, respects them (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1999). Upon reaching their teenage years, children are barely willing to articulate what they may be feeling about this respect-laden recognition. But at eight or nine and then again in high school, there is no holding them back. They are more than eager to recount the feeling of having a teacher recognize them. Part of the privilege of being an adolescent is to grumble, "It doesn't matter." Part of the makeup of the nine-year-old is being able to tell your parents how much you really *love* Mrs. Ellison.

When teachers allow students to look deep within themselves and release some of their secrets, a form of recognition begins to take hold. The children are performing acts of re-knowing, which provide them with yet another opportunity to develop new feelings about themselves, or at least establish a new and transitory self. Tomorrow, when still more of one's inner world will be explored, the process of re-knowing, recognition, and hopefully too, re-liking oneself, recommences.

In this regard, amusement and entertainment, and hence actors and rock stars, cannot carry the day. They fail partly because too little of the self is explored, too little resembling recognition has taken place. The child is only being diverted, or having something evoked which is quickly dismissed in favor of yet another diversion. Albeit pleasurable, diversion or distraction, when they are not alienating, rarely provide the path to genuine and joyful recognition or revelation. They can't because self-reflection has been ignored. Missing is that rare opportunity not only to rediscover, re-contextualize, or re-create oneself (Kotre, 1995), but the possibility of falling in love with oneself (ideally) all over again. Good families, good schools, good teachers, friends and communities, provide children the opportunity to fall in love with themselves, or at least to respect or recognize themselves.

Psychoanalysts call this the evolution of healthy narcissism. When I learn that nothing about me is lovable, that nothing I do or am allows me to love me, then, ultimately, my life becomes a joyless pursuit of inevitably empty tasks or accomplishments. If, on the other hand, I am able to examine my own image in that mythic pool and don't fall in and drown (Campbell & Abadie, 1984) but decide instead that the image is lovable, I am on my way to self recognition and, hopefully too, joyous recognition of others (Kohut, 1978, 1987). It may even be that I have become my own celebrity.

What, then, is in a (child's) name? Nothing less than the commencement of the capacity to be recognized. "How'd you know my name?" the child asks, partly bemused, partly curious, but mainly enthralled. Why collect an autograph if a handwritten name is not a slice of human recognition.

The child is now in touch with someone, which means he or she has been touched by the author of the autograph, the autograph symbolizing a personal connection between two people. At least the child feels it this way, and joyous recognition spills all over it.

THE RECOGNITION OF CELEBRITIES

By definition, celebrity worship is a form of granting recognition to so-called "larger than life" people. And, if these people are larger than life, then, by definition, the rest of us must be "smaller than life," which means, in some sense, that we remain an audience of unrecognized, unfulfilled children, enslaved, as Dewey (1991) observed, by the rules of appetite, sense, caprice, and immediate circumstance (Siegel, 1998). Self recognition is an action refined by celebrities as they engage in ubiquitous award ceremonies, in which they publicly recognize themselves, and we recognize them as well, imagining, presumably, that someday we, too, might walk down those richly-carpeted aisles.

Traditionally, most cultures reveal ceremonies in which recognition is publicly granted to certain citizens, typically elder ones. A person is publicly recognized simply for having made it to an age the culture deems venerable. Americans, however, do not subscribe to this recognition of the wisdom of the elderly. Fearing death and cursing aging, we generally pay lip service to the wisdom of our elders but then worship (although simultaneously resenting) the young and youthful behavior.

Perhaps we are too impatient (or too unself-reflective) to wait for people to grow old before granting them recognition. Or perhaps we need to experience change so often in our lives—what has come to be called "reinventing" ourselves—that we are willing to recognize anyone capable of adding sparkle to the present moment. We become far more excited by Oscar winners than Nobel winners.

To study closely those to whom we grant recognition is to learn the sorts of personalities our culture first manufactures then values. We love, for example, independent, autonomous, powerful, and wealthy people. In fact, we have become so worshipful of independence and autonomy, we overlook the fact that each of us is utterly dependent on myriad people and institutions for our barest survival. Nonetheless, we bestow recognition on that "totally independent" person who, as we say, "has it all."

More intriguing, recognition becomes its own reward. As it is said, some people are famous merely for being famous. We find nothing wrong in honoring outrageous people merely because we're so eager, apparently, to grant recognition to those making a name for themselves. The media may scorn a public figure, but the person's recognition factor only increases. The names of mass murderers are better known to children than members of the government. That we even speak of something called a *recognition factor* testifies to the proposition that recognition looms as significant as the accomplishment that yielded recognition in the first place. As long as

we allow people to be seen, heard, and known, it appears not to matter whether or not we approve of, or even like them.

In honoring the product more than the person, we are, in effect, honoring the construct of the person more than the person (Gergen, 1985). Surely our country honors fame more than effort; this is precisely what the culture teaches people they should receive for their efforts. Some people spend their lifetime seeking recognition; it seems to be the only thing they desire. In contemporary America, moreover, we have fashioned all sorts of ways to grant these people the recognition they crave. It cannot surprise us, therefore, that so many children would aspire to stardom with only the barest appreciation of how this stardom might be achieved, or what costs may accompany it. It's not enough that our parents gave us our name; now we must "make" something of it. In our culture, anyway, recognition maintains a higher value than reputation.

A person's character no longer need refer to anything of substance, nor any special moral quality. America's new notion of character involves what Mills (1963) called "emotional morality." If enough people derive strong feelings about someone, that someone is bound for recognition, even stardom. The concept of emotional morality also helps us to understand why children find many people so utterly charismatic (Weber, 1968, in Eisenstadt, 1968) but for so utterly short periods of time, and why the young speak of people "giving off vibes." If the child feels something, it must be real; it's called "going with your gut." As long as the child feels something about someone, he or she requires no further rational proof of that person's value. We might recall, in this regard, Locke's (1890; 1959) second wrong-thinking man: he who eschewed reason altogether.

Historically, when we spoke of enduring heroes, recognition came to be focused not only on how a person *seemed* to be, but on their contribution to the culture or their definition of living (Geertz, 1973). Now, however, recognition focuses on the public persona, the personality, the entertaining character, the star. Public opinion polls, fads, marketable commodities, and a momentous public relations machinery shape what we presently call "personalities" rather than people, as well as our perceptions of them. We have even labeled an occupation "television personalities," a term suggesting that what they do is less significant than the recognition they achieve by dint of their presence on the screen. We speak, furthermore, of the media influencing our lives, but we're not even certain who "the media" are, or how, precisely, "they" define us. In the end, however, none of this matters, for many of us keep hunting for the latest personality, celebrity, star, icon, or living legend.

A fascinating aspect of those to whom we grant recognition—the so-called "recognizenti"—is the ostensibly changeable nature of their personalities. These are more than malleable or labile people; they appear almost to be ego-less. Presumably, in our desire to grant recognition, we have come to treasure those personalities who can fill any role or change themselves into almost anything we want them to be, no matter how

inconsistent or outrageous their actions. It is as though the personalities we cherish most highly personify the various roles listed in an actor's credits. Little wonder we crave the celebrity's private rather than inner life.

The power of persons is now the power of their personality, not their thoughtfulness. Indeed, we appear to deal more in "inter-personality relations" than in inter-personal ones. The powerful personality engenders public response, special rights and status, and frequently too, a morality all one's own. Accordingly, the culture operates much in the manner of high school popularity contests or, as in the case of presidential elections, theatrical auditions (Gabler, 1998; Shenkman, 1999).

Little wonder that we no longer embrace genuine heroes who presumably have done something valuable, no matter what the nature of their personality. We try with people like Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, but these people pale in the world of rock stars, actors, and athletes. Little wonder, too, that many people feel entitled to recognition merely because some circumstances have made them famous. In the contemporary psychological era, we look to personal acts and products, personal politics (Engelhardt, 1999), endorsements, experiences, and mainly personal recognition as proof of the successful life. Moreover, we have concluded that this personality-driven life warrants the highest remuneration.

The evolution may appear benign. In the end, however, it leaves many of us, celebrities and worshippers alike, unhappy and spiritually barren. For one thing, there cannot possibly be sufficient public recognition to satisfy each new facet of one's personality, even with the incessant torrent of revelations and award shows. For another, we don't linger sufficiently long with any one facet or any one personality. Even more, a culture that grants recognition to people merely because of their personalities, or views recognition as its own reward, will eventually witness large-scale erosion of its most important institutions, values, and moral precepts, that is, if it is not too distracted to notice.

THE ONLY GENUINE ROLE MODELS

For reasons that now appear obvious, I continue to think back to a press conference during which a contrite prize fighter apologized for biting the ear of his opponent. Although one might have found some of his words hollow, one had to be moved when the fighter uttered words barely audible, actually, in the sound-bite. In reflecting on his childhood, he said something to the effect that he never had the luxury of schools or, and then he paused, "people" who might have helped him.

It was that word "people" that struck me. The word that should have been forthcoming, of course, is parents. Granted, we have all heard every argument under the sun why childhood hurt and deprivation must never be held up as justification for adult boorish behavior or even criminal action. Nonetheless, even in our culture of celebrity worship, the story of adults raising their children, or adults *not* raising their children, comes

back again and again. This time, it was a former heavyweight champion speaking to the matter of role models.

Because of the sheer act of recognizing someone from television, the movies, or the music industry, anyone whose face is recognizable suddenly emerges as a role model and appears in a school urging young people to stay there and not drink, and not get pregnant, and mind their manners, their teachers, and their parents. Understand, I am delighted that busy people with famous faces take the time, as they say, "to give back to the community." Understand too, I read the reports and studies of drug and pregnancy programs in America's schools and learn again and again two fundamental facts: one, never in the history of this country have more famous faces appeared before the children of America's (mainly public) schools (in mainly poorer communities); and two, never in the history of this country have children drunk more, taken drugs more, and got pregnant more often. Furthermore, never in the history of this country have all these behaviors started so early in the child's development.

In an article written for the journal *Daedalus,* Earls and Carlson (1993) proffered an intriguing definition of family. As one considers their words, one is reminded of the numerous definitions people have created for that term, family. Definitions, after all, range from Mom and/or Dad and/or the kids, to any two people, to any collection of people one cares about, to practically any set of relationships like the work group or the baseball team.

For Earls and Carlson, however, family is defined by the strategies adults *and* children together employ as they develop nurturance, security, and a sense of comfort with intimacy. Two things, at least, are to be observed here. First, the authors make no mention of any relationship other than parents and children. Second, the definition implies that children learn to nurture and make their parents feel secure in the same way that adults must, and probably do, teach their children. The result of successful nurturing, security making, and intimacy development, which, when combined, constitute a lovely definition of love, is the opportunity for children to grow up and engage in enduring relationships, nurture their own children and, in turn, feel nurtured by these children, and perhaps their children as well.

Here then, is a genuine definition of role models, and a far cry from the autograph feasts going on in schools where, albeit well-intentioned, messages are being sent to children. Clearly, the messages aren't sticking; they have no reason to stick merely because they are uttered by the famous. They are, however, more likely to stick when sent by parents, grandparents, and teachers, the people who genuinely care for the young.

Inasmuch as children do model themselves after certain people, there remains something literal in the concept of the role model. Yet, something far more profound is taking place in so-called authentic role modeling: namely, children are learning to identify themselves partly by identifying with the role model—unconsciously, they are becoming identical to them—and partly by differentiating themselves from that same role

model. In a word, children are becoming their own people. One wishes to be exactly like one's father but simultaneously something distinctive from him. It is for this seemingly paradoxical reason that children often experience conflicts with the very people they establish as their personal self-defining heroes or models. Children don't simply become these models; they see themselves reflected in them, a fact that causes children both relief and tension. Surely one witnesses these sentiments acted out in the lives of adolescents.

Yet, little of these psychological actions pertain in the more popular conception of the role model, which should properly be called *performance* model. Here, children recognize famous persons for the way they look, for in our culture appearance has become performance. Consider, in this regard, the sheer power of the fashion industry. When the child examines the treasured photograph of a performance model, she perhaps sees herself in some wishful manner, as if the image before her represents some fantasized outcome or state of being. For an instant, she can pretend to be the image; she is, somehow, transported. Staring at a photograph of a role model, she perceives herself not as external image, but as existing from the inside out. There is past and future in this image, her own and the model's as well. And, rather than being transported, she is better able to focus on the central threads of her being.

The authentic role model is the person who nurtured the child, made her feel secure, and comfortable with acts of intimacy which, still in our culture, too many people confuse with sexuality. Authentic models did something else: they conducted themselves in ways that not only offered a form of guidance but consecrated the nurturance and security we were feeling. Authentic role models are the ones we imagine we will comfort and nurture when they reach that moment when they are unable to care for themselves. We don't care for our aging parents merely because the Bible instructs us to do so. We care for them because we and they always have cared for one another. The perpetual caring for our parents is a natural result of what Carlson and Earls are espousing as an essential feature of family.

The nurtured, secure person, comfortable with intimacy, typically finds joy living in enduring relationships, not only with his or her lover, and his or her children, but with his or her parents as well. Not surprisingly, the healthy family is often defined as just a good place to be (Bowen, 1978). Why, then, would one abandon anyone merely because he or she has grown old! We take responsibility for them for eternity precisely because they were our role models (Levinas, 1969).

There was a morning, long ago, when my entire school gathered in the antiquated auditorium. The invited speaker that Chicago morning was a member of the hated Brooklyn Dodgers. After a long delay, the door in the rear of the auditorium opened and down the aisle strode one of the most beautiful people I had ever seen. And so it was that hundreds of young students stared at, and listened to, Jackie Robinson.

Talk about gods descending from Olympus itself! I shall remember every detail of that morning for as long as I live. Although I didn't yet know the term identification, I did know that no one pretended to be *like* Jackie Robinson; one pretended to *be* Jackie Robinson. In that magical form of thinking, the pretense disappears and one becomes the hero.

Only God knows how many times on some playground I actually became Jackie Robinson, but I do know one thing: there hasn't been a single instant in my life when a decision was made or a moral issue debated in which that singular experience played an even infinitesimal part. That part was played, literally, by the true role models, the persons who raised me. When the guys were drinking or carousing, when, in an instant, I could make out the answers on the test sheet of the smartest kid in our class, anxiety and confusion welled up within me, but so too did the words and conduct of my father. The extraordinary words and conduct of Jackie Robinson, however, never came up. But why should they? He was a hero, a god even but, alas, it was not my destiny to have him as a role model.

Similarly, was I not the most fortunate of all to have had parents who neither abandoned nor misled me, never failed to provide for me, and did the nurturance and security routines in a manner that Carlson and Earls would have admired? My parents never spoke to our student body assembly, never played baseball, never appeared on television, but did, in life as well as upon their deaths, give everything they had to their children, thus making it possible for us to benefit forever from the luxury of school and not just people but parents.

One last thought: is it not the case that the youth worker, at times, must instruct the child to make the sort of differentiation between authentic and inauthentic role models we have been discussing in these pages? Is it not the case that the youth worker often must help the child make distinctions between the authentic elements of life and mere distraction? Someone, after all, has to teach the child about the lurking dangers of distractive reasoning and buying into essentially commercial products, including the power of celebrity. Is it also not the case, moreover, that, in the absence of genuine role models in a child's life, the youth worker may assume this status? And is it only transference that would explain the attachment of a child to the youth worker? Might it be that the youth worker represents the single most caring adult in that child's life, and hence emerges as a truly redemptive figure?

As sentimental as these notions may sound at first, they speak to one of the most difficult issues confronting youth workers and parents, teachers and counselors. How does the so-called genuine role model, the person truly engaged in teaching moral behavior and character, while at the same time nurturing the child, making him or her feel secure and comfortable with their interior world, successfully battle the temptations of a culture where, in a word, children are being commodified? Let us hold in mind, that while a parent works to get the best out of their child at school, the culture works with all its might to get money out of that child for products

that essentially contribute little or nothing to the emergence of a thoughtful, reflective self, not to mention a moral being.

When all is said and done, the work of educators and counselors, and most assuredly care takers, makes it possible for a child to enter a conversation with the world in the form, one might suggest, of developing the child's narrative imagination. The more one learns, the more expansive that conversation. The more a child is taught to reflect on himself, for example, the more he is able to converse, not only with himself, but with others, essentially because the narrative imagination not only allows the child to conjure a world not yet experienced but imagine the world through the eyes of another. Adulation of heroes and immense buying power yield little if anything in the realm of developing the sort of empathy inherent in the emergence of the narrative imagination. Mimicking contemporary styles and fashion have as much influence in aiding the child become morally implicated in the lives of people she will never encounter as a passion for video games legitimating unadulterated violence.

All of education, be it undertaken in a school or in the home, devolves to the work of self-development. But this work requires teachers; it doesn't just happen on its own. Indeed, without teachers, coaches, youth workers, it is possible that many children never even confront the contents of their own rich selves. This means that they may never discover the talents and intelligences lurking in their own souls. Someone must bring it forth; merely watching others from the sidelines will never suffice.

The child's developing brain, psychologists teach us, grows increasingly more capable of complex reasoning as the years go on. Hypothetical deductions can be made by adolescents who can easily hold mutually exclusive alternatives in their minds and discuss all sides of an issue. Adolescents can readily be taught to argue vociferously for a position that, in fact, they deeply oppose. They learn that rules are not immutable, just as they learn the subtle differences between moral behavior and ethical behavior. Similarly, they are comfortable with the concept of a theory of mind. That is, they can begin to understand how another person might perceive the world, feel about it, or converse with it, even if that conversation seems peculiar or outright alien.

Left to their own devices, left uneducated or, perhaps more precisely, left unattended by parents and youth workers generally, magnificent brains go unused and, hence, unexercised. In this regard, the data on morality are awfully persuasive. Children need a moral scaffolding, constituted by adults and peers, regularly teaching or examining moral issues, in order for them to reach a point where their moral reasoning matures. The brain is ready, like the software on one's computer. The question remains: What, if anything, is being input? Constant teaching of morality and so-called good character appears to make a significant difference in the maturation process of moral reasoning and behavior. Diversion, distraction, entertainment rarely carry the day. The moral youth, like the loving youth, is capable of profound thought and deep

feeling, but someone has to bring them to that point where they not only think, but behave, in moral and loving ways.

In the end, this entire essay rests on the idea that, apart from its economic intentions, a culture that believes children are properly maintained by electronic baby-sitters such as computers or television sets, or when they are absorbed in a music video or even instant messaging, will pay a price for raising a generation of children who essentially have been neglected and left unrecognized. That a recent survey found that 20 per cent of America's children aged two and under have television sets in their bedrooms, speaks to the dangers of what might be called "electronic parenting." It is highly doubtful that the sort of "training" these children are receiving will enrich that aforementioned narrative imagination, which in turn enriches conversations with one's developing self and others.

It does, however, guarantee that the entertainment businesses will be alive and well for years to come, and distraction and celebrity worship will rule all too many homes and schools, until genuine role models return to the real work of parenting and guidance in all of their complex and wondrous intellectual and emotional forms.

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