

WHAT COUNTS AS OFFENSIVE?

There was a time when conduct deemed to be offensive, especially of a sexual nature, was condemned by everyone. But not today: what matters is the identity of the offender, not the conduct.

A couple of weeks ago, David Letterman warmed up his audience by making a joke about women. He said, "Treat a lady like a whore, and a whore like a lady." The audience didn't think this was funny, so he dropped it.

Just recently, three Orthodox rabbis from New Jersey were convicted of conspiracy to commit kidnapping. They were charged with forcing unwilling Jewish men to get a divorce (known as a get), using electric cattle prods and handcuffs to torture them.

On the same day that the Orthodox rabbis were convicted, young women went topless in Times Square—they were body-painted from the waist up—hustling young men on the street to have their picture taken with them, for cash. They accosted minors. A tour guide complained that this was child pornography, but others thought it was cute.

Letterman has told obscene jokes about priests on a regular basis, and even though the audience did not always approve, he never stopped.