

"The Rating System: Is it helping or hurting our country?"

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"The Rating System... and How it Works"

By: Jason Daury

On November 1, 1968, it was announced that there would be a rating system. At first this would only consist of 4 ratings. They are as follows:

"**G**" would be used to stand for *General Audiences* or all ages admitted.

"**M**" in the beginning was used to suggest for *Mature Audiences* or parental guidance suggested, but all ages admitted.

"**R**" was for *Restricted Audiences*. No children under 16 would be admitted without an accompanying parent or guardian, and

"**X**" for no one under 17 would be admitted.

Some changes in the first system were. In the beginning it didn't take Hollywood long to realize that most parents thought the "**M**" rating was much stricter than the "**R**" rating, so the rating was changed to what was called "**GP**" - *General Audience* or parental guidance suggested. That also didn't last long. It was changed a year later to what we now know as "**PG**", and then in 1984 **PG** was divided into two what we have today. Two categories: they are "**PG**" and "**PG-13**". Then in 1990, the old "**X**" rating was changed to what we now have as the "**NC-17**". Since 1990 the system has

stood the same. But how exactly does it work and what do the labels really mean?

What we have today is the Board of Review. They are the people that give a rating on a film. It is not based on the film's quality, but strictly on the film's content. For example, a spoken vulgarity will not give a movie a harsh rating if the vulgarity is seen as being of common and accepted use. Also, its use in the movie is not sexual in its nature.

"G: General Audiences". (Baran, 2004) All ages admitted.

This type of films cannot contain what is thought to be bad language or nudity and sex, violence or other acts that could be offensive. Nudity, sex and drug usage are some of the things that are not in **G** rated movies.

"PG: Parental Guidance". (Baran, 2004) Some Material May Not Be Suited For Children

This type of film will likely contain some material that some parents consider unsuitable for their children. This is to tell parents not to send their children to **PG** movies without understanding and knowing the content of that movie.

PG rated films may contain some profanity, brief nudity and/or violence. But there cannot be any drug use in the movie.

"PG-13: Parental Guidance advised for children under 13 years old." (Baran, 2004) Some Material May Be Inappropriate For Children Under 13

This is probably the least understood rating. The label warns parents to be careful about the attendance of their pre-teen children, yet most of the time they only see the number **13**.

A **PG-13-rated** film can have drug use along with some nudity and sensuality, violence, vulgar language, or a "harsh theme". A film's use of a "sexually vulgar word" in the context of an expletive is **allowed** in a **PG-13** rated movie.

"R: Restricted; no one under 17 years old admitted unless accompanied by an adult." (Baran, 2004)

This type of film may have extremely vulgar language, strong violence, nudity within sexual situations, drug abuse and other adult's themes.

"NC-17: No children under 17; replaces the old X rating." (Baran, 2004)

This rating is placed on a film when the ratings board feels most parents would consider that film patently too adult for young teenagers. The movie does not have to be "obscene or pornographic" as the words are understood. The ratings board must feel the content of the movie would be considered too strong for parents to consider allowing their young children to see.

"Is the Rating System Flawed?"

By: Alison Catalano

Is the rating system flawed? Yes, according to many online research companies it is. The companies state that movie ratings do not protect children from watching violence, alcohol, and many other non-acceptable programs. Every year hundreds of movies are released and all of them are given one of five ratings. Realistically, only three of the ratings are used with any regularity. Few movies are tame enough to receive a "G" rating and even fewer are harsh enough to get an "NC-17" rating. The problem that the limited number of ratings presents to parents is deciding whether the "PG" film their 6-year old child wants to see received the rating because it is slightly more intense than a "G" film, or because it is slightly less intense than a "PG-13" film. The same dilemma exists when trying to determine where a "PG-13" movie falls on the scale between "PG" and "R". A "PG-13" movie may mislead some parents to think the movie is milder than it is, but an "R" rating gives the impression that the film is harsher than it is. Filmmakers have long claimed that the system has more tolerance for violence than sexual content. The movie ratings were precisely the opposite of what parents overwhelmingly wanted. Parents said they wanted information about the content of a program, not a recommendation about

who should view it. Also, by not specifying whether the program contained sex, violence, or coarse language, the system did not give parents the information they needed to decide whether it was a program they should prevent their child from seeing. In addition, shows that are age-based with restrictive ratings actually lure children to the very programs we are trying to shield them from. The movie rating system is a good idea if it is used differently. For example, writing a description of the movie rather than placing a letter by the title and letting the parent decide from there. Any age-based rating will always be flawed because it reflects back to the fictitious "average" child. No one child has the same maturity level as the next and for this purpose alone, no rating could ever be completely accurate.

"This Film is Not Yet Rated..."

By: Raquel Colon

When I was 16 years old, I watched previews for a movie that seemed very amusing and entertaining. But, this movie also had some references and suggestions that may have bordered inappropriate. This film was "not yet rated", yet I had every intention of watching it when it came out. Then, on the day it opened I was not allowed to attend. It had received a rating of "R". Watching previews for movies can bring in the interest of people from all ages and backgrounds, but they often are not made for everyone. Movies are designed to appeal to a majority of people, but are rated so that not every age group can watch them.

The rating system is designed as a helping tool for parents to guide them on the content of a movie and how appropriate it is for their children. But it is not mandatory for a producer to submit their work to the Rating Board. Although it is uncommon, if a producer does not submit their work it will be advertised as "not yet rated". In most situations, a film will be simply submitted too late to receive a rating before it is advertised or it is in-between two ratings. Films that are bordering two ratings can have things edited to format one rating or it will receive a more strict rating due to the possible inappropriate content for a younger crowd.

Movies advertised without a rating can give a false impression of what to expect from it. Making a preview appealing tends to draw in all types of

people, but leaves many of them dissatisfied when they are unable to attend the movie. Also, a parent may give their child permission to watch a movie that they thought was suitable because of a preview that was shown before it was actually rated, only to find that there was adult content or inappropriate language present in the film.

The rating system is a very beneficial system when used and advertised appropriately. Movies not yet rated or never actually rated can be observed by the wrong crowd and often is misleading to the audience. It is uncommon and bad for business when a producer does not send in their work to the Ratings Board. However, because it is not required, it is a situation to be dealt with.

"How to Protect Children"

By: Brandon Cox

Through the years, media and its content have changed a great deal. Back in that time sex and violence were not shown as much and were shown to a different degree than they are today. Today it is common to watch a movie and see someone or something be blown up. Not only are adults and teenagers watching these images, but children are too. If children continue to watch these violent and sexual movies, one can only imagine what kind of adults they may become. Due to the increase in how liberal movies are these days, the media industry has developed certain ways to censor it.

An example of this censorship is the recent invention of the V-chip. The V-chip is a small computer chip placed inside several new TV sets that gives the owner an option to block certain channels and movies from children. This chip was invented in 1996 on account of the Telecommunications Act signed by President Clinton. This act increased the amount of censorship within movies and TV today.

Another example of increased censorship is the new ratings at the beginning of the movies. These ratings help the viewer get an idea of the kind of movie that is being shown before they watch it. This helps parents figure out what types of movies their children watch and if it has any inappropriate content. This is a good indicator in telling what movies have more sex or violence in them than others.

I believe that the media these days are trying to help keep the censorship of movies at a moderate level and are doing a pretty good job at it. But due to the increasingly liberal movies this could be a hard task to accomplish. I also believe that it is up to the parents to monitor what their children watch. If they do not like what is being shown, then they can see the movie or tell the child not to watch it anymore. But parents should not be overly protective of their children. Keeping consistent between what is appropriate and what is not is the best way of dealing with this issue.

"Sex in the Movies"

By: Ryan Cornelius

Premarital sex is portrayed rather frequently within today's popular movies. What kind of effect could this have on young children? Obviously, older teenagers and young adults are much less likely to be influenced as easily as young kids and preteens. If they are constantly bombarded with these sexual images and premarital relations, they may very well begin to think very loosely about the act of sex. This would seem to be the reason why so many kids are having sex before they even know what it really is. Preteens go and watch a good action movie like "Daredevil", where the hero has sex with a woman after only his second time being with her. Is this what kids should be seeing? If they have no one telling them anything other than what they see in movies, they should have no reason to think any differently. What is to keep them from saying, "They do it in the movies all the time, why does it matter if I do it?" Young kids are just coming into the world and beginning to understand different things. If they have never had someone to teach him or her any morals, they can very easily be influenced by whatever else they see. That is the age that kids really need a role model and too often are they picking someone too irresponsible for the job. Even sixty-three percent of the entertainment industry thinks that the portrayal of sex in movies influences young kids' decisions. They are old enough to know right from wrong. Unfortunately, they have the wrong people telling the difference between the two.

Movies have been portraying immorality since they were first invented. Is there anything we can do to prevent that? Probably not, but parents need to start taking the initiative of teaching their children decent

morals and keeping them from the immorality of most movies until they are old enough and already know right from wrong. Also, perhaps, filmmakers should be a little stricter on what and how much they show within their movies.

"Smoking in the Movies"

By: Kim Dapore

What has a greater impact on whether a teen will start smoking than peer pressure? A teen seeing their favorite stars smoking in the movies over and over again is the answer to that question. Teens look up to these stars as role models and want to imitate what they onscreen thinking that will make them cool.

Some would argue that it is the parent's job to inform their children about the negative effects smoking has on one's health. But, "even parents who give their child a clear message that smoking is acceptable run the risk of having that message undermined if they allow their children to see R-rated movies with a lot of smoking" (Landers, 2002.) The impacts movies really have are more powerful impact than most would imagine. "According to a recent study conducted at Dartmouth College Medical School, the more smoking teen-agers see in films the more likely they are to smoking. Seeing movies with excessive amounts of smoking tripled the odds a teen would experiment with smoking" (Chavez, 2002.) Once these teens start smoking they can cause a ripple affect onto the teens that did not even see the movie by peer pressure resulting in even more teens smoking than ever before.

Why do filmmakers have so many leading movie stars smoking in their films one might ask oneself? Well, filmmakers reply to this would that they are only "trying to reflect real life; however, leading movie stars smoke on screen four times more often than people in real life" (Chavez, 2002.) The scary thing is though if the trend continues then eventually someday they might actually reflect the real number of smokers.

Also, a huge problem with smoking in movies is that it is never shown in its truest light or the affects it has on people. "Hollywood has been glamorizing smoking in the movies for decades and still is," said Nandra Kelm, Tobacco Program Coordinator at the ALAC (Landers 2002.) The film

industry makes the stars that smoke usually the one being portrayed as characters that are rebellious and appealing to teens.

"Parents' Right to Protect Their Children: Examining the Rating System"

By Melissa Cole

Entertainment continues to push boundaries, thrilling audiences and terrifying parents who are concerned about what their children are exposed to. To defend against their children seeing something inappropriate, parents use the rating system, which gives all submitted movies a rating ranging from "G" to "NC-17." According to an article by the Classification and Rating system, it is "a voluntary system sponsored by the Motion Picture Association of America and the National Association of Theatre Owners to provide parents with advance information on films, enabling parents to make judgments on movies they want or do not want their children to see." While some critics of the rating system feel that the rating system infringes on the First Amendment right of freedom of expression, it stands to reason that parents have a right to monitor their children and the entertainment they pursue. Which is why, according to the CARA, a specially designed committee composed of parents 'just like you' are responsible for giving a film its rating. Films are not required by any law to be reviewed and given a rating, however. Filmmakers have the option of not submitting their films to be rated, though most opt to, given it is harder to have theaters show a movie without a rating. The rating system is far from perfect, and as howstuffworks.com states, its "ever evolving and largely subjective" process leaves some parents questioning its effectiveness. This thought process spawned the arrival of sites like kidsinmind.com, where parents took matters into their own hands and created a source that breaks down the content of movies into more detail, leaving no doubt behind the vague MPAA rating as to what children will be seeing. The people behind kidsinmind.com share the opinion of many parents in that "MPAA ratings were simply too vague, and that most parents would not agree on what they'd consider offensive material." According to this site, "filmmakers will sometimes screen one

version of their film for the MPAA's ratings board and then release a slightly different version in theaters."

So why have the rating system? It seems full of controversy, with no one able to decide for sure what is appropriate content and what isn't, filmmakers sometimes opting to not have their film rated or even releasing a different version of a movie after getting a rating based on a different screening. The rating system is for parents, a tool that provides a skeleton of criteria for screening films. It is not foolproof, but most parents agree that it is better than nothing. The rating system can be used as a first line of defense. If the system were to be abolished, the easy decision of letting a young teenager see a film rated R would not be able to be made. The rating system is most effectively used if parents are aware of the kind of content in a film. While this criterion changes frequently, there are sources available to help parents stay up-to-date on the changes. The rating system is not a perfect device meant to succeed at protecting children one hundred percent of the time, but should be viewed as a tool to assist parents in their monitoring. Used correctly, it can be a hundred percent effective.

Going over the Edge Is the Rating System Getting too Lenient?

By: Jasmine Davis

Growing up you constantly hear your parents saying "they didn't do that in movies when I was growing up." This simply means that now the movie system is allowing more things to be seen by children and teens. The parents have no idea because these ratings below are supposed to tell the parents whether or not these things are offensive or too offensive. Here's a little insight on movies from G to PG-13 have become more lenient throughout the years.

G stands for General Audiences which means all ages are admitted. No words or actions should be considered offensive to young children. CARA stands for Classification and Rating Administration. "It assures that nudity, sex, and drugs will be absent from the movie and notes that violence will be minimal" (Gustafson, 2001). An example of a rated G being put over the top is "Disney's *Hunch Back of Notre Dame* with Esmeralda's suggestive dancing-fire scene would have been in the running" (Gustafson, 2001). Back in

1968 "it was not uncommon to see adult films classified as G." An example would be *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave*. In today's society that wouldn't be your typical rated G movie. So what would put an emphasis on G movies? Maybe they need something a little stronger?

PG stands for Parental Guidance Suggested which means it may not be suitable for children. "CARA feels these movies contain material that parents might not like to expose to their young children and suggests that the content will clearly need to be examined or inquired about before children are allowed to attend the film." This category has not been used much over the past ten years. Some movies that could be PG are "*Remember the Titans, Stand and Deliver* and *Galaxy Quest*...These are the movies that may explore adult subject without offending the vast majority of the audience" (Gustafson, 2001). The argument that is made is PG ratings are considered not to be interesting enough to capture the audience's attention. It's said not to be "edgy enough for teens and adults." So what is?

PG-13 stands for Parents Strongly Cautioned which means more materials may be inappropriate for children under 13. The PG -13 rating was created in 1984 because some movies were between PG and R. The intention of this guideline was to capture the attention of the "lucrative teen audience" (Gustafson, 2001). The guideline originally for PG-13 movies was for rough or persistent violence. "If nudity is sexually oriented the movie will move into the R category" (Gustafson, 2001). They also state that a film's single use of one of the sexually-derived words requires a PG-13 rating, but if one of those words is too explicit then it requires an R rating.

With all the guidelines they have "the one pertaining to language is the most often over ruled by the special vote the board has if they feel a lesser rating would more responsibly reflect the opinion of the American parents...The classic sexual expletive used to show up once in most PG-13 movies, yet the last few years there has been an increase in the number of PG-13 films" (Gustafson, 2001). The words are spoken several times.

There are PG-13 movies that take everything to the extreme. Classic examples are *The Nutty Professor 2* "with pounds of sexual innuendo and near nudity." *Wild Wild West* "which mixes sexuality and violence or Adam Sandler's *Big Daddy* which tries to justify a perverted dysfunctional adult as a reasonable choice for an adoptive father are recent examples" (Gustafson, 2001).

Movie ratings are too lenient and that's because teens are bringing a large income that the movie industries want at the box office.

"Consequently, CARA is often urged to classify movies into categories that won't restrict the access of teen audiences and that fits into the category of PG-13.

Conclusion

By: Melissa Conley

In conclusion, we feel that there is a need for a lenient rating system. There are certain things that children do not need to see. Graphic scenes with murdering and drugs are too much for a thirteen year old to be watching. However, at the same time is there really a need to sensor a child from smoking? It is something that they are going to see in public anyway, so why shield them from it? It seems unnecessary to try and protect children from this. We do feel that the sex in some films is too extreme, yet that is something that can be overlooked by parents. If the parents were doing their jobs then there would be no need to have such a strict rating system. It should not be someone else's job to filter what children's eyes see. The movie rating system is trying to do a good thing, but at the same time maybe it is going overboard. If they are simply protecting children from something they will know about already, then it is senseless. We understand why it was developed and it has accomplished its goals. The movies that are inappropriate for children are shielded from them. But as young adults, teenagers need to be able to make choices for themselves and if they never see anything about it prior to being involved in it, they may not know how to deal with it. So letting teens view certain movies will only help in the long run. The rating system has just gone too far overboard with its restrictions on films.

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