

Tabled (via teleconf)
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 Senate Legal & Con. Ref
 Committee

Tabled by: Australian Council
 of Children & Media

Researching the Ratings: Parents' Views, Issues, and the Evidence Base for Greater Effectiveness

Douglas A. Gentile, Ph.D.
 Director, Media Research Lab, Iowa State University
 Associate Director, Center for the Study of Violence
 Research Fellow, Institute on Science and Society

Caveat

- Most of my data are based on the American rating systems
- Nonetheless, the reasons for ratings and what parents want are likely very similar across countries
- Most rating systems (including the Australian, Singaporean, and Pan-European systems) seem to be based on a template very similar to the American ratings

Why have Rating Systems?

- Ratings are only necessary if there can be demonstrated harms/benefits of media products AND that using the ratings reduces risk of harms or enhances the benefits

- Furthermore, almost all (90%) of American parents agree that ratings are a good idea (Kimmel et al., 1998)

Media Effects Research: Violent Media

- 98% of pediatricians and 95% of American parents believe that media violence contributes to increased aggression (Gentile et al., 2004; Rifkin, 2004)
- Hundreds of studies demonstrate this link (Anderson et al., 2003; Gentile, 2003)

Media Effects Research: Sexual Media

- 98% of pediatricians and 95% of American parents believe that sexual content contributes to early or risky sexual behavior (Gentile et al., 2004; Rifkin, 2004)
- Studies also demonstrate this link, although there are far fewer (Brown, Steele, & Walsh-Childers, 2002)


Part Two: Do Ratings Moderate the Effects?

- Study: 607 Adolescents (Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2004)
 - Violent video game play predicted:
 - Physical fights
 - Poorer school performance
 - Students who reported that their parents use the ratings to help choose games:
 - Got into fewer fights
 - Got better grades

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Goals for American Rating Systems




- Provide information to parents to help them make informed decisions about which media products are appropriate
- Help parents reduce children's exposure to content that may be inappropriate
- Experts state that the goals should also be to provide this information in a way that is descriptive, objective, easy to understand, meaningful, reliable, and valid (Children Now, 1996)

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Multiple Rating Systems

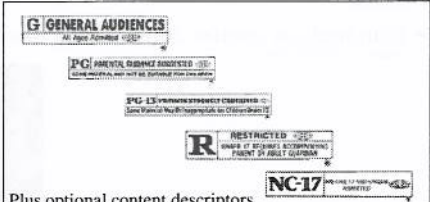
- America has rating systems for movies, TV programs, music CDs, consumer video games, and arcade video games
- The one similarity is that they were each created only after threat of government regulation



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Movie Rating System

- Developed in 1968, administered by the Motion Picture Association of America



Plus optional content descriptors

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Music Rating System


- Developed by the Recording Industry Association of America in 1985, self-administered by music producers



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Consumer Video Game Rating System

- Created in 1994, administered by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board

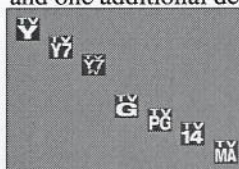


Plus a set of standard content descriptors shown on back of the box

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TV Rating System

- Created in 1997, administered by television networks independently of each other
- 6 Age-based ratings, 5 content descriptors, and one additional descriptor



- V – Violence
- FV – Fantasy violence
- S – Sexual situations
- L – Coarse language
- D – Sexually suggestive dialogue
- E/I – Educational/Informational

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Scientific Reliability

Not reliable

- Several types, all of which are important
 - Inter-rater reliability: Judges rate the same way
 - Consistency: Different media products with same content should get same rating
 - Temporal stability: Ratings would not shift across time (e.g., ratings “creep”)

Note that all these require *clear definitions* of what is being rated

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Scientific Validity

Reliable but not valid

Reliable and valid

- Ratings *must* be reliable in order for them to have a chance at being valid
- Validity: Ratings accurately measure what they are intended to measure
 - Content validity: Measures what it claims to
 - Construct validity: Measures relate appropriately to other relevant constructs
 - Criterion validity: Measure corresponds to other measures already shown to be valid

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Is this scientific standard even possible?

- Yes – there have been several demonstrated reliable and valid content analyses of media
 - e.g., National Television Violence Study, Sex on TV
- Conclusion: Ratings do not have to be subjective and variable

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Inter-rater Reliability of the Ratings

- None of the US ratings boards provides this information
 - An additional problem with the ratings: They are opaque
 - Do not know how variables are defined
 - Do not know exactly how ratings are generated
 - Do not know reliability


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Consistency of Media Ratings


- Movies: Several examples of inconsistency
 - e.g., Shrek vs. Star Wars Episode 2
 - Film producer Hawk Koch: “I don’t understand the system, and I’m a filmmaker. I want to follow the rules, but I can’t figure out what they are, and no one is able to explain them.”
- Video games: Empirical studies
 - E-rated (“Everyone”) games: 44% of games with violence did *not* include the violence content descriptor (Thompson & Haninger, 2001)
 - T-rated (“Teen”) games: Half (48%) included violent, sexual, and drug use content not listed in their ratings (Lauinger & Thompson, 2004)
 - M-rated (“Mature”) games: 81% included violent, sexual, profanity, or drug/alcohol/tobacco content not listed (Thompson, 2006)

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Consistency of Media Ratings




- Television: Empirical studies
 - 79% of shows containing violence did not include the V (violence) descriptor
 - 91% of shows with offensive language did not include the L (language) descriptor
 - 92% of shows with sexual content did not include the S (sexual scenes) descriptor (Kaskel et al., 2002)



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Consistency of Media Ratings





- Sexual and violent content often treated differently
 - Out of 210 sequences removed from NC-17 films in order to secure an R rating, significantly more sexual scenes were removed than violent scenes (Lester, 2002)
 - Examining ratings of NC-17 and R-rated films (Lester, 2000)
 - Violence mentioned in 81% of R but only 31% of NC-17
 - Sexuality mentioned in 58% of R but in 96% of NC-17
- Analysis of 12,668 video games (Gentile, 2008)
 - AO (Adults Only): 22% have violence, 87% have sex
 - M (Mature): 89% have violence, 19% have sex
 - T (Teen): 91% have violence, 18% have sex
 - E10+ (Everyone 10 up) 91% have violence, 17% have sex
 - E (Everyone): 31% have violence, 0% have sex

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Temporal Stability

- “Ratings creep” – Over time, adult content filters down into less restrictive ratings
 - Has been demonstrated most clearly with movies
 - Study of 1,269 movies from 1992 and 2003
 - PG-13 movie in 2003 had as much violence, nudity, and offensive language as a 1992 R-rated movie (Thompson & Yaker, 2004)

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Temporal Stability



- Question: *Should* ratings change to reflect changing societal norms?
 - MPAA President Jack Valenti: “I have tried to make sure that [we] keep up with the American ethic. We cannot be sterner than television...TV sets the tone, and TV, of course, has changed. So we have changed.” (Fleeting, 2000, p. 38)
- But if the goal is to protect children from harm, cultural norms are largely irrelevant

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Content & Construct Validity of Ratings



- Little research to date:
 - Studies of movies, TV, and video games suggests sporadic agreement with parents (Thompson & Yaker, 2000; Kaskel et al., 1998; Park, Flato, & Buchman, 1999)
 - Study of 1,332 TV shows, coded on dimensions likely to pose risk of harmful effects (Kaskel, Palumbo, Cope, et al., 2003)
 - 69% of children's shows with high-risk violent content was rated TV-Y and did not include the V descriptor
 - Among general audience shows with high-risk violent content, 40% were rated TV-PG and 65% had no V descriptor
 - Among general audience shows with high-risk sexual content, 29% were rated TV-PG and 80% did not include the S descriptor

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Based on the ESRB's Ratings

(Gentile, 2008)

Rating	E	E10+	T	M
% with any violent content	31%	91%	91%	89%
% with any sexual content	1%	17%	18%	19%
Number of Games Rated:	8011	296	3059	1034

E (Everyone)
 E10+ (Everyone 10 and older)
 T (Teens ages 13 and older)
 M (Mature; 17 and older)
 AO (Adults only; 18 and older)

These are likely underestimates - Content analysis of E games showed 64% included violence (Thompson & Haninger, 2001)

KidScore
A rating system by parents for parents.

Criterion Validity of Ratings

Walsh & Gentile (2001) *Pediatrics*

- Panels of trained parents viewed 253 TV programs, 276 movies or videos, and 166 computer or video games that were popular or marketed to children during the 1997-1999 seasons
- Parents evaluated programs based on the nationally validated KidScore universal rating system (rates amount and portrayal of violence, sexual content, offensive language, illegal/harmful behaviors, fear inducing situations, and overall age-appropriateness for children)

KidScore
A rating system by parents for parents.

Parents Rate the Ratings Study Results: TV

- Only 40% of shows rated TV-G were considered entirely suitable for children 3 - 7
- About half (57%) of shows rated TV-Y7 and only 23% of shows rated TV-PG were considered suitable for children 8 - 12
- Only 15% of shows rated TV-14 were considered suitable for teenagers
- Parents agreed that TV-MA shows are inappropriate for children of all ages

Rating	Considered Suitable (%)
TV-G	40
TV-Y7	57
TV-PG	23
TV-14	15

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Parents Rate the Ratings Study Results: Movies

- Only 50% of G-rated movies were considered suitable for children 3 - 7
- 63% of PG-rated movies were considered suitable for children 8 - 12
- 60% of PG-13-rated movies were considered suitable for teenagers
- Parents agreed that R-rated movies are inappropriate for children of all ages

Rating	Considered Suitable (%)
G	50
PG	63
PG-13	60
R	0

KidScore
A rating system by parents for parents.

Parents Rate the Ratings Study Results: Video Games

- Two-thirds (67%) of games rated E were considered suitable for children 3 - 7
- Most (87%) E-rated games were considered suitable for children 8 - 12
- Only 43% of games rated T were considered suitable for teenagers
- Parents agreed that M-rated games are inappropriate for children of all ages

Rating	Considered Suitable (%)
E	67
E	87
T	43
M	0

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Research on What Makes a Good Rating System

- Are they understood?
 - Fewer than half (43%) of parents say they understand all the TV-rating symbols (Ridout, 2004)
 - Only 24% of parents of 2- to 6-year-olds could name any of the ratings relevant for that age group
 - 12% could say FV stands for "Fantasy Violence," but almost as many (8%) thought it was for "Family Viewing"
 - When asked to define the ratings, correct responding dropped as low as 4% (for the "D" descriptor)
 - Fewer than half (47%) say they understand all the video game rating symbols (Walsh et al., 2005)

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Research on What Makes a Good Rating System

- Are they understood?
 - Only about half of Australian parents could name the video game rating classifications
 - 57% could name G unaided
 - 56% could name PG
 - 54% could name M
 - 29% could name MA15+
 - 7% incorrectly named R18+
 - 11% didn't even know there were ratings at all
 - The percentages were generally about 10% higher for films (Galaxy Research, 2008)

Research on What Makes a Good Rating System

- Are they used?
 - 78% of parents say they have used the movie ratings to guide their family's choices
 - 54% have used the music advisories
 - 52% have used the video game ratings
 - 50% have used the TV ratings
 - About half or fewer parents believe the ratings are "very useful" 45% for movies, 48% for music, 53% for video games, and 38% for TV (Robson, 2004)
- Gap between parents and children (Walsh, Gentile, Walsh, & Bennett, 2006)
 - Sample of 1,430 3rd-5th grade children and parents
 - 73% of parents say they "always" help decide what video games children may buy/rent, but only 30% of children say the same thing

Research on What Makes a Good Rating System

- Survey of Australian homes
 - Although 88% of Australian homes have video game consoles which have parent controls built into them,
 - Fewer than half of parents (49%) are even aware that ratings-based controls exist, and
 - Only 1 in 4 parents are aware that time controls exist
 - Yet, once informed of them, 85% believe that the controls would be a valuable safeguard against inappropriate content (IGEA, 2009)
 - There is strong support for an R18+ rating (ABC News, 2010)

Research on What Makes a Good Rating System

- Are they what parents want?
 - Parents overwhelmingly say they would prefer content-based ratings to a single summary age-based rating (e.g., Bushman & Cantor, 2003; Cantor, 1996; Cantor, Stutman, & Dunn, 1996; Gentile, 1996)
- Do they have the intended effect?
 - The "Forbidden Fruit" vs. "Tainted Fruit" hypothesis
 - Meta-analysis of 70 independent samples demonstrates that age-based ratings consistently increase adolescents' interest in viewing (Bushman & Cantor, 2003)

What Could Content-Based Ratings Include?

- Issues with scientific evidence of potential for harm
 - Amount of violence
 - Portrayal of violence
 - Risky sexual situations
 - Tobacco, alcohol, and drug use
 - Fear-producing images
 - Risky behaviors that, if copied, would cause harm or be illegal
- Issues that parents may want to know about (although there is less evidence of harm)
 - Nudity
 - Offensive language
 - Stereotypes
- Positive features?
 - Educational content
 - Prosocial content

How to Get There?

- We brought together
 - Ratings researchers
 - Child development experts
 - Media effects researchers
 - Public health experts
 - Child advocates
 - Video game industry

National Summit on Video Games, Youth and Public Policy
October 20-21, 2006
HOSTED BY
National Institute on Media and the FAMILY | IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Implications for Public Policy

- Should governments be involved?
 - It's unclear to me that they should, but if they are, where would they be most effective?
- One important role for government is to provide a public forum for discussion about media effects
 - Scientists often have difficulty presenting the data in a way the public can understand
 - Also important to get the information out correctly



In America

- Almost all policy has been directed at access restriction
- Ineffective for several reasons
 - Struck down by the courts as unconstitutional
 - How would we define what to restrict?
 - Most games include violence, regardless of rating

Using The ESRB's Ratings

(Gentile, 2008)

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• % with any violent content	31%	91%	91%	89%
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In America

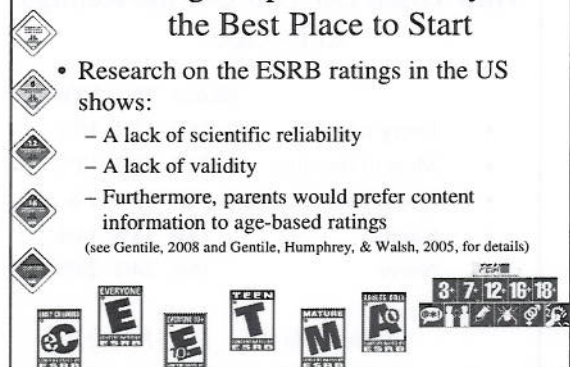
- Almost all policy has been directed at access restriction
- Ineffective for several reasons
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 - How would we define what to restrict?
 - Most games include violence, regardless of rating
 - Not all violence is equal
 - What matters may be whether you practice intentional harm to victims; Blood and gore may not matter much
 - Therefore, using ratings for policy cutoffs is likely to be ineffective

The Implications?

- There are probably many more effective policy options than access restriction, but we almost never consider them
 - We should improve ratings
 - We should get research-based information to the public, so that they understand why they should use ratings
 - We should be doing more media education
 - We could consider other levels of policy, such as in medical schools, parent education, etc.

Ratings Improvement May be the Best Place to Start

- Research on the ESRB ratings in the US shows:
 - A lack of scientific reliability
 - A lack of validity
 - Furthermore, parents would prefer content information to age-based ratings
- (see Gentile, 2008 and Gentile, Humphrey, & Walsh, 2005, for details)



Three New National Samples of American Parents

(Gentile, Maier, Hasson, & de Bonetti, *under review*)

- Study 1: N = 690 American parents with children at home; collected by Harris Polls
- Study 2: N = 768 American parents with children at home; collected by Harris Polls
- Study 3: N = 769 American parents with children at home; collected by Research Now



How Much Do You Understand about the Video Game Ratings?

	2007	2008
Everything	6%	28%
A Lot	22%	28%
A Little	44%	28%
Nothing	28%	16%



Do the Ratings Give the Information Parents Need?

	Movie	TV	VGs
• All of the information they need	18%	15%	14%
• Most of the information	35%	31%	26%
• Some of the information	35%	37%	36%
• Very little of the information	8%	11%	9%
• None of the information they need	2%	3%	3%
<i>Not sure</i>	2%	4%	12%

How Accurate or Inaccurate are the Ratings?

	Movie	TV	VGs
• Always accurate	6%	5%	6%
• Usually accurate	41%	41%	36%
• Sometimes accurate & sometimes inaccurate	39%	38%	36%
• Usually inaccurate	13%	13%	12%
• Always inaccurate	3%	2%	2%
<i>N/A</i>	2%	3%	11%

How Often Do You Use the Ratings to Decide?

(Study 1)

	Movie	TV	VGs
• Every time	24%	13%	16%
• Most of the time	24%	18%	18%
• About half the time	11%	13%	7%
• Rarely	13%	18%	14%
• Never	16%	24%	24%
<i>I don't do this</i>	12%	14%	21%

How Much Would You Support or Oppose Having One Rating System that Could be Used for All Media?

	2007	2008
• Strongly oppose	5%	5%
• Somewhat oppose	6%	7%
• Neither support nor oppose	28%	31%
• Somewhat support	26%	29%
• Strongly support	31%	30%

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- **“Extremely” or “very” important to know about:**
 - 81% say it is extremely or very important to know about sexual behavior
 - 76% Nudity
 - 72% Illegal substance use
 - 72% Physical violence
 - 70% Offensive language
 - 68% an age-based suggestion about what ages it is appropriate for
 - 66% Antisocial and disrespectful behaviors
 - 66% Discrimination/stereotypes/racism
 - 65% Relational aggression and mean-spirited behavior
 - 58% Scary situations or images
 - 58% Positive pro-social behaviors such as helping or caring
 - 57% Educational content
 - 55% Legal substance use of tobacco or alcohol
 - 54% Paranormal or occult
 - 53% Alternative lifestyles
 - 44% Materialism or things that promote materialistic attitudes

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Study 3

(Gentile, Maier, Hanson, & de Bonetti, *under review*)

- Parents were presented with detailed content descriptions and asked
 - How often they would choose to filter that type of content for their child(ren)
 - What the minimum age should be for each type of content
- Content types tested: Sexual (11 detailed descriptors), Violent (10 descriptors), Language (10 descriptors), other Mature content (6 descriptors)

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Study 3: Opinions about Types of Sexual Content

% Filter Out		% Minimum Age Appropriate						
"Always" or "Often"	"Never"	Content Label	6 or Younger	7 to 9	10 to 12	13 to 16	17 and Up	Inappropriate for all
79	7	Explicit Sex	1	0	5	10	53	34
72	8	Mature Content	1	1	5	22	45	26
70	9	Explicit Dialogue	2	1	6	23	47	22
61	9	Partial Nudity	2	2	9	28	47	16
53	11	Sexy Commercials	3	4	14	34	32	13
46	11	Sexual Suggestion	4	4	14	35	35	8
43	11	Implied Sex	3	4	15	38	31	8
30	16	Mild Sexual Innuendo	6	9	23	40	19	3
25	22	Revealing Clothes	17	14	17	33	17	7
24	24	Nonsexual Partial Nudity	20	15	21	22	16	6
14	46	Romantic Kissing	33	17	18	22	9	2

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Study 3: Opinions about Types of Violent Content

% Filter Out		% Minimum Age Appropriate						
"Always" or "Often"	"Never"	Content Label	6 or Younger	7 to 9	10 to 12	13 to 16	17 and Up	Inappropriate for all
68	9	Sexual Crimes	1	2	8	26	42	22
64	9	Self-Harm/Suicide/Euthanasia	2	3	11	31	35	13
61	9	Physical Abuse	2	4	16	34	29	16
53	9	Intense Fighting with Injury/Death	2	5	17	40	29	8
34	15	Violent Commercials	5	15	29	33	12	6
29	14	Implied Lethal/Moderate Fights	4	18	36	30	11	2
27	15	Scary Situations	5	24	31	30	8	2
24	17	Scary Images	7	30	28	26	6	2
15	24	Mild Fights/Martial Arts	14	33	27	20	5	1
14	31	Cartoon Violence	25	34	21	14	5	2

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Study 3: Opinions about Types of Language Content

% Filter Out		% Minimum Age Appropriate						
"Always" or "Often"	"Never"	Content Label	6 or Younger	7 to 9	10 to 12	13 to 16	17 and Up	Inappropriate for all
74	9	Sexual Obscenities	2	1	6	21	35	36
66	9	Racial/Religious Slurs	2	2	11	25	28	33
56	11	Moderate Profanity	3	5	17	35	26	16
52	15	Deity as Curse Reference to Substance Abuse	5	9	18	26	13	28
43	12	Moderate Crude Language	4	7	21	37	22	9
42	12	Deity Disrespect	3	11	26	34	15	12
32	22	Mild Cursing	12	23	23	18	7	18
26	20	Body Insults	7	20	30	27	10	8
23	20	Body Parts/Functions	10	31	28	20	7	4
16	28	Body Parts/Functions	21	38	24	16	6	4

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Study 3: Opinions about Types of Other Mature Content

% Filter Out		% Minimum Age Appropriate						
"Always" or "Often"	"Never"	Content Label	6 or Younger	7 to 9	10 to 12	13 to 16	17 and Up	Inappropriate for all
58	10	Explicit Alternative Lifestyles	3	4	10	29	31	23
56	10	Illegal Drug Use	2	5	14	30	33	16
55	11	Mature Commercials	3	5	13	32	29	19
54	11	Alternative Lifestyle Dialogue	3	4	13	32	29	19
53	11	Teen Alcohol Use	3	4	17	36	27	13
46	13	Occult/Paranormal	4	7	18	29	25	17

Study 3: Importance of Individual Context

- Half of our sample were regular church-goers.
- For all but one type of content (romantic kissing), there were significant differences in how strongly they felt about limiting each
- Example:
 - Infrequent church-goers: 15% always filter sexy commercials, and 6% say inappropriate for all ages
 - Frequent church-goers: 39% 'always' filter them out and 21% find them inappropriate for all ages



Three Critical Findings

- In general, parents want to know a lot of details about content
- Furthermore, parents generally agree on the types of content they want to know about
- Critically, however, they do NOT agree on the age at which different content is appropriate for children!



Implications

- Age-based ratings are predicated on the belief that there is agreement about the age at which certain types of content are appropriate
- Our data demonstrate what appears to be the "False Consensus Bias"
 - People believe that others agree with whatever they think
- If, however, there is no consensus for age-based ratings, then all age-based ratings are by definition invalid

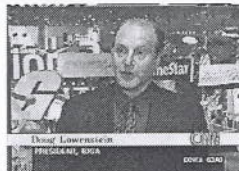


Conclusion about Ratings

- Age-based ratings are much less valuable than content-based ratings
- Parents recognize that the ratings have real problems with reliability and validity
- They do not provide the information parents want
- This explains why parents do not use them regularly
- Parents are ready for a change

Why Don't Parents Use the Ratings?

- One more reason is because the US video game industry tells them they do not need to and they work to discredit researchers



Doug Lowenstein

Past president of the Entertainment Software Association in the US

The Conclusion?



- All of the American rating systems lack scientific reliability and validity, and should be improved
- These lessons can probably be applied to the Australian context

What Improvements Could/Should be Made?

- We know a lot about what makes an excellent rating system, what parents want, and what would be the most effective
- One universal rating system
- Content-based rather than age-based
 - Less subjective, easier to establish reliability and validity
 - It's what parents would prefer
 - Gets past the forbidden fruit problem
 - Gets past the false consensus problem

How to Design a State-of-the-Art Rating System

One Universal system should be created, and include:

1. Explicit goals
2. Explicit guidelines for training raters, with clear definitions of relevant constructs
3. Raters should be independent of each other, and independent of the media industries
4. High inter-rater reliability
5. Format easy for users to understand
6. Appropriate age-based information

How to Design a State-of-the-Art Rating System

Universal system should include:

7. Appropriate content-based information, including ratings based on scientific information about the effects of media on child development. This would include a change to fantasy and cartoon violence
8. Content information should be described clearly, not using euphemisms
9. High reliability of ratings across media platforms
10. High reliability of ratings across time

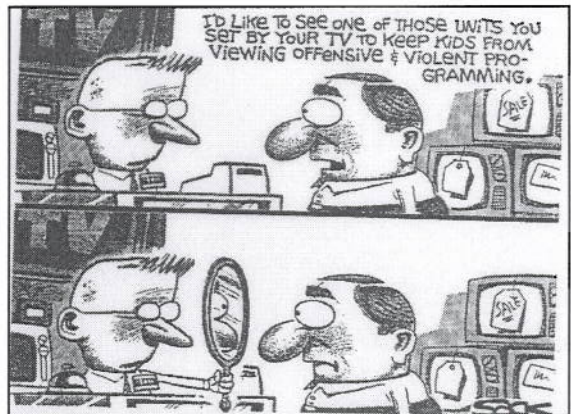
How to Design a State-of-the-Art Rating System

Universal system should include:

11. Demonstrable validity of the ratings (e.g., concordance with parent ratings)
12. Coverage of a broad range of products (e.g., TV, movies, video games, music, Internet, etc.)
13. Rated in a timely manner
14. Broad and easily accessible distribution
15. Public education about the ratings, including the "why" it is important parents use them

Why now?

- With digital convergence and widespread broadband coverage:
 - The distinctions between media will disappear
 - Access to wider ranges of media will increase
 - Content will be even more difficult to rate (the YouTube effect)
 - Format will change from single person to multi-player
 - Increasing technological sophistication, such as voice control and better artificial intelligence
 - The potential for harmful effects will increase





The Power of Parents

- Limiting the amount and content of media appears to act as a protective factor
- This is why accurate and informative ratings matter – they give parents the tools to limit content
- Parents who encourage watching educational and prosocial media, help rehearse and label educational messages, and help explain content can increase the benefits from these types of media
- Parents who watch together with children and talk about what they see and hear can mitigate many of the negative effects of entertainment media

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www.DrDouglas.org

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