

T.V.

## **How TV Affects Your Child**

Most children plug into the world of television long before they enter school: 70% of child-care centers use TV during a typical day. In a year, the average child spends 900 hours in school and nearly 1,023 hours in front of a TV.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), kids in the United States watch about 4 hours of TV a day - even though the AAP guidelines say children older than 2 should watch no more than 1 to 2 hours a day of quality programming.

And, according to the guidelines, children under age 2 should have no "screen time" (TV, DVDs or videotapes, computers, or video games) at all. During the first 2 years, a critical time for brain development, TV can get in the way of exploring, learning, and spending time interacting and playing with parents and others, which helps young children develop the skills they need to grow cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally.

Of course, television, in moderation, can be a good thing: Preschoolers can get help learning the alphabet on public television, grade schoolers can learn about wildlife on nature shows, and parents can keep up with current events on the evening news. No doubt about it - TV can be an excellent educator and entertainer.

But despite its advantages, too much television can be detrimental:

Research has shown that children who consistently spend more than 4 hours per day watching TV are more likely to be overweight.

Kids who view violent events, such as a kidnapping or murder, are also more likely to believe that the world is scary and that something bad will happen to them.

Children's advocates are divided when it comes to solutions. Although many urge for more hours per week of educational programming, others assert that no TV is the best solution. And some say it's better for parents to control the use of TV and to teach children that it's for occasional entertainment, not for constant escapism.

That's why it's so important for you to monitor the content of TV programming and set viewing limits to ensure that your child doesn't spend time watching TV that should be spent on other activities, such as playing with friends, exercising, and reading.

## **Violence**

To give you perspective on just how much violence kids see on TV, consider this: The average

American child will witness 200,000 violent acts on television by age 18. TV violence sometimes begs for imitation because violence is often demonstrated and promoted as a fun and effective way to get what you want.

And as the AAP points out, many violent acts are perpetrated by the "good guys," whom children have been taught to emulate. Even though children are taught by their parents that it's not right to hit, television says it's OK to bite, hit, or kick if you're the good guy. And even the "bad guys" on TV aren't always held responsible or punished for their actions.

The images children absorb can also leave them traumatized and vulnerable. According to research, children ages 2 to 7 are particularly frightened by scary-looking things like grotesque monsters. Simply telling children that those images aren't real won't console them, because they can't yet distinguish between fantasy and reality.

Kids ages 8 to 12 are frightened by the threat of violence, natural disasters, and the victimization of children, whether those images appear on fictional shows, the news, or reality-based shows. Reasoning with children this age will help them, so it's important to provide reassuring and honest information to help ease your child's fears. However, you may want to avoid letting your child view programs that he or she may find frightening.

### **Risky Behaviors**

TV is chock full of programs and commercials that often depict risky behaviors such as sex and substance abuse as cool, fun, and exciting. And often, there's no discussion about the consequences of drinking alcohol, doing drugs, smoking cigarettes, and having premarital sex.

For example, studies have shown that teens who watch lots of sexual content on TV are more likely to initiate intercourse or participate in other sexual activities earlier than peers who don't watch sexually explicit shows.

Alcohol ads on TV have actually increased over the last few years and more underage children are being exposed to them than ever. A recent study conducted by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY) at Georgetown University found that the top 15 teen-oriented programs in 2003 had alcohol ads.

And although they've banned cigarette ads on television, kids and teens can still see plenty of people smoking on programs and movies airing on TV. This kind of "product placement" makes behaviors like smoking and drinking alcohol seem acceptable. In fact, kids who watch 5 or more hours of TV per day are far more likely to begin smoking cigarettes than those who watch less than the recommended 2 hours a day.

### **Obesity**

Health experts have long linked excessive TV-watching to obesity - a significant health problem today. While watching TV, children are inactive and tend to snack. They're also bombarded with advertising messages that encourage them to eat unhealthy foods such as potato chips and empty-

calorie soft drinks that often become preferred snack foods.

Too much educational TV has the same indirect effect on children's health. Even if children are watching 4 hours of quality educational television, that still means they're not exercising, reading, socializing, or spending time outside.

But studies have shown that decreasing the amount of TV children watched led to less weight gain and lower body mass index (BMI - a measurement derived from someone's weight and height).

## **Commercials**

According to the AAP, children in the United States see 40,000 commercials each year. From the junk food and toy advertisements during Saturday morning cartoons to the appealing promos on the backs of cereal boxes, marketing messages inundate kids of all ages. And to them, everything looks ideal - like something they simply have to have. It all sounds so appealing - often, so much better than it really is.

Under the age of 8 years, most children don't understand that commercials are for selling a product. Children 6 years and under are unable to distinguish program content from commercials, especially if their favorite character is promoting the product. Even older children may need to be reminded of the purpose of advertising.

Of course, it's nearly impossible to eliminate all exposure to marketing messages. You can certainly turn off the TV or at least limit kids' watching time, but they'll still see and hear advertisements for the latest gizmos and must-haves at every turn.

But what you *can* do is teach your child to be a savvy consumer by talking about what he or she thinks about the products being advertised as you're watching TV together. Ask thought-provoking questions like, "What do you like about that?," "Do you think it's really as good as it looks in that ad?," and "Do you think that's a healthy choice?"

Explain, when your child asks for products he or she sees advertised, that commercials and other ads are designed to make people want things they don't necessarily need. And these ads are often meant to make us think that these products will make us happier somehow. Talking to kids about what things are like in reality can help put things into perspective.

To limit your child's exposure to TV commercials, the AAP recommends that you:

Have your kids watch public television stations (some programs are sponsored - or "brought to you" - by various companies, although the products they sell are rarely shown).

Tape programs - without the commercials.

Buy or rent children's videos or DVDs.

## Understanding TV Ratings and the V-Chip

Two ways you can help monitor what your child watches are:

### **Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)**

In the 1970s, the late researcher Professor Werner Halperin suggested that the rapid changes of sounds and images on TV may overwhelm the neurological system of a young child and cause attention problems that shows up at a later date.

Around the same period, Dr. Mathew Dumont of the Harvard Medical School suggested that the rapid changes of TV sounds and images may stimulate a child to mimic that dynamic behavior. That is, what we call ADHD may simply result from the child subconsciously copying the frenetic pace of TV programs. We now have a study that brings us solid findings about ADHD.

In April 2004, Dr. Dimitri Christakis and colleagues reported in the journal *Pediatrics* that early TV viewing (ages 1 and 3 were studied) is associated with attentional problems (ADHD) at a later age (age 7). The children studied watched a mean of 2.2 hours per day at age 1 and 3.6 hours per day at age 3.

Specifically, Christakis reports that watching about five hours of TV per day at age 1 is associated with a 28% increase in the likelihood of having attentional problems at age 7. A similar 28% increase at age 7 shows up for 3-year olds who watch about five hours of TV per day. Alternatively, each additional hour of TV watched above the mean at ages 1 and 3 increases the likelihood of attentional problems at age 7 by about 10%.

The authors include the following cautionary notes: (1) the determination of attentional problems (ADHD) was based on established checklists of behavior, not on a clinical diagnosis; (2) the authors relied on reports by parents to determine the amount of TV viewed - no direct monitoring of daily TV watching was done; and (3), the researchers had no data on the content of the TV programs watched.

Christakis and colleagues recommend that additional research be undertaken, and LimiTV strongly supports that. We also know, however, that each parent must make decisions based on what is currently known.

The steep rise in the number of children with ADD/ADHD, and the accompanying increase in the use of medications to treat these children (e.g., Ritalin), suggest that the problem is real and is being caused by something which is an inherent part of everyday life for American children.

Current findings suggest that TV watching in the early years may contribute to this behavioral problem. Therefore, LimiTV recommends minimal TV and video watching during the preschool years.

Doctors sometimes refer to the enormous brain development that occurs in the first few years of life as a 'wiring' of the brain, i.e., making connections between the billions of neurons with which we are born. TV watching in these crucial early years may affect this wiring. That is, if the hours of TV watched exceed a certain level, a child's brain may be wired to respond more to the TV environment (rapid changes of sounds and images) than the natural environment. That level has not yet been determined, but since the AAP recommends no TV watching for the first two years of life, we could assume the level is quite low. It is for this reason as well that LimiTV recommends little-to-no TV through age 4.

### **Watching Sex on Television Predicts Adolescent Initiation of Sexual Behavior**

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See complete study at: [www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/114/3/e280](http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/114/3/e280)

#### ***Background***

Early sexual initiation is an important social and health issue. A recent survey suggested that most sexually experienced teens wish they had waited longer to have intercourse; other data indicate that unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases are more common among those who begin sexual activity earlier. The American Academy of Pediatrics has suggested that portrayals of sex on entertainment television (TV) may contribute to precocious adolescent sex. Approximately two-thirds of TV programs contain sexual content. However, empirical data examining the relationships between exposure to sex on TV and adolescent sexual behaviors are rare and inadequate for addressing the issue of causal effects.

#### **Design and Participants**

We conducted a national longitudinal survey of 1792 adolescents, 12 to 17 years of age. In baseline and 1-year follow-up interviews, participants reported their TV viewing habits and sexual experience and responded to measures of more than a dozen factors known to be associated with adolescent sexual initiation. TV viewing data were combined with the results of a scientific analysis of TV sexual content to derive measures of exposure to sexual content, depictions of sexual risks or safety, and depictions of sexual behavior (versus talk about sex but no behavior).

## Outcome Measures

Initiation of intercourse and advancement in noncoital sexual activity level, during a 1-year period.

Results. Multivariate regression analysis indicated that adolescents who viewed more sexual content at baseline were more likely to initiate intercourse and progress to more advanced noncoital sexual activities during the subsequent year, controlling for respondent characteristics that might otherwise explain these relationships. The size of the adjusted intercourse effect was such that youths in the 90th percentile of TV sex viewing had a predicted probability of intercourse initiation that was approximately double that of youths in the 10th percentile, for all ages studied. Exposure to TV that included only talk about sex was associated with the same risks as exposure to TV that depicted sexual behavior. African American youths who watched more depictions of sexual risks or safety were less likely to initiate intercourse in the subsequent year.

## Conclusions

Watching sex on TV predicts and may hasten adolescent sexual initiation. Reducing the amount of sexual content in entertainment programming, reducing adolescent exposure to this content, or increasing references to and depictions of possible negative consequences of sexual activity could appreciably delay the initiation of coital and noncoital activities. Alternatively, parents may be able to reduce the effects of sexual content by watching TV with their teenaged children and discussing their own beliefs about sex and the behaviors portrayed. Pediatricians should encourage these family discussions.

## Who's Paying for this TV Filth?

FX Cable Channel "The Shield"

I urgently need you to add your voice to a national chorus of outrage against the disgusting rise of shocking sexual content and unbelievably bloody violence on TV.

The Parents Television Council is leading a campaign to stop the TV industry from continuing to pump degrading filth into our homes.

We're doing it by targeting irresponsible SPONSOR companies that continue to pay for the filth. And today I'm asking you to add your name to a **Warning to General Motors and GEICO Auto Insurance** as sponsors of "The Shield" -- one of the most sexually explicit, profane, and violent series ever to appear on television.

## TV viewing linked to adult violence

19:00 28 March 2002

NewScientist.com news service

Alison Motluk

Watching just one hour of television a day can make a person more violent towards others, according to a 25-year study. In some circumstances, TV watching increases the risk of violence by five times. The new research indicates the effect is seen not just in children, as has been suggested before, but in adults as well.

Watch an hour of prime time TV, and you will probably witness three to five violent acts. Children's programming has even more violence, says Jeffrey Johnson, at Columbia University in New York. "Sports, news, commercials - it's everywhere," he says.

Johnson followed up over 700 families in New York state between 1975 and 2000. He found the link between aggression and TV watching was strongest for males during adolescence and for females, during early adulthood.

The associations held true even after accounting for known risk factors for aggressive behavior. These factors included childhood neglect, growing up in a dangerous neighborhood, low family income, low parental education and psychiatric problems. However, the type of the TV programs watched was not recorded.

### **Moral education**

The study confirms for adults what is accepted by many psychologists about children: viewing a lot of violence increases the likelihood that the person will behave that way.

Craig Anderson at Iowa State University in Ames says that people do not seem to be getting that message: "People don't seem to understand that because they don't notice the way they've changed or the way they treat people, it doesn't mean there is no effect."

But Chris Boyatzis, a psychologist at Bucknell University, Philadelphia, says the link between TV viewing and violence may not be direct: "What may be going on is that families high in TV viewing are also lower in moral and character education."

It is important that parents "filter" what their children watch, he says: "Some studies have shown that about 75 per cent of kids' TV viewing is done without the company of parents, which is tragic."

### **Robbery and threats**

Each family in Johnson's study had a child between the age of one and 10 when the study began. In 2000, when the volunteers' average age was 30, they filled out a questionnaire about their aggression, and the researchers double-checked it with FBI and state records.

Johnson found that 45 per cent of the men who had watched three hours or more at age 14 went on to commit an aggressive act against another person, compared to just nine per cent of the men who had spent less than an hour in front of the tube. Over 20 per cent of the three-hour-a day group went on to commit robbery, threaten to injure someone or use a weapon to commit a crime.

For women aged 30, the strongest TV predictor of violence was watching three hours of more at age 22. Of these women, 17 per cent had committed an aggressive act, compared to none in the group watching less than an hour a day.

Television viewing seemed to have no bearing on subsequent property crimes, such as arson, vandalism and theft.

Journal reference: *Science* (vol 295, p 2468)

# Movies

## **How it all Began**

By Jack Valenti

When I became president of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) in May 1966, the slippage of Hollywood studio authority over the content of films collided with an avalanching revision of American mores and customs.

By summer of 1966, the national scene was marked by insurrection on the campus, riots in the streets, rise in women's liberation, protest of the young, doubts about the institution of marriage, abandonment of old guiding slogans, and the crumbling of social traditions. It would have been foolish to believe that movies, that most creative of art forms, could have remained unaffected by the change and torment in our society.

## **A New Kind of American Movie**

The result of all this was the emergence of a "new kind" of American movie - frank and open, and made by filmmakers subject to very few self-imposed restraints.

Almost within weeks in my new duties, I was confronted with controversy, neither amiable nor fixable. The first issue was the film "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf," in which, for the first time on the screen, the word "screw" and the phrase "hump the hostess" were heard. In company with the MPAA's general counsel, Louis Nizer, I met with Jack Warner, the legendary chieftain of

Warner Bros., and his top aide, Ben Kalmenson. We talked for three hours, and the result was deletion of "screw" and retention of "hump the hostess," but I was uneasy over the meeting.

It seemed wrong that grown men should be sitting around discussing such matters. Moreover, I was uncomfortable with the thought that this was just the beginning of an unsettling new era in film, in which we would lurch from crisis to crisis, without any suitable solution in sight. The second issue surfaced only a few months later.

This time it was Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and the Michelangelo Antonioni film "Blow-Up."

I met with MGM's chief executive officer because this movie also represented a first - the first time a major distributor was marketing a film with nudity in it. The Production Code Administration in California had denied the seal of approval.

I backed the decision, whereupon MGM distributed the film through a subsidiary company, thereby flouting the voluntary agreement of MPAA member companies that none would distribute a film without a Code seal.

Finally, in April 1968, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutional power of states and cities to prevent the exposure of children to books and films that could not be denied to adults.

It was plain that the old system of self-regulation, begun with the formation of the MPAA in 1922, had broken down. What few threads there were holding together the structure created by Will Hays, one of my two predecessors, had now snapped. From the very first day of my own succession to the MPAA President's office, I had sniffed the Production Code constructed by the Hays Office. There was about this stern, forbidding catalogue of "Dos and Don'ts" the odious smell of censorship. I determined to junk it at the first opportune moment.

I knew that the mix of new social currents, the irresistible force of creators determined to make "their" films and the possible intrusion of government into the movie arena demanded my immediate action.

Within weeks, discussions of my plan for a movie rating system began with the president of the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) and with the governing committee of the International Film Importers & Distributors of America (IFIDA), an assembly of independent producers and distributors.

Over the next five months, I held more than 100 hours of meetings with these two organizations, as well as with guilds of actors, writers, directors and producers, with craft unions, with critics, with religious organizations, and with the heads of MPAA member companies.

## **The Birth of the Ratings**

By early fall, I was ready. My colleagues in the National Association of Theatre Owners joined

with me in affirming our objective of creating a new and, at the time, revolutionary approach to how we would fulfill our obligation to the parents of America.

My first move was to abolish the old and decaying Hays Production Code. I did that immediately. Then on November 1, 1968, we announced the birth of the new voluntary film rating system of the motion picture industry, with three organizations, NATO, MPAA, and IFIDA, as its monitoring and guiding groups.

The initial design called for four rating categories:

G for General Audiences, all ages admitted;

M for mature audiences - parental guidance suggested, but all ages admitted;

R for Restricted, children under 16 would not be admitted without an accompanying parent or adult guardian; (later raised to under 17 years of age, (and varies in some jurisdictions));

X for no one under 17 admitted.

The rating system trademarked all the category symbols, except the X. Under the plan, anyone not submitting his or her film for rating could self apply the X or any other symbol or description, except those trademarked by the rating program.

Our original plan had been to use only three rating categories, ending with R. It was my view that parents ought to be able to accompany their children to any movie the parents choose, without the movie industry or the government or self-appointed groups interfering with their rights. But NATO urged the creation of an adults only category, fearful of possible legal redress under state or local law. I acquiesced in NATO's reasoning and the four category system, including the X rating, was installed.

So, the emergence of the voluntary rating system filled the vacuum provided by my dismantling of the Hays Production Code. The movie industry would no longer "approve or disapprove" the content of a film, but we would now see our primary task as giving advance cautionary warnings to parents so that parents could make the decision about the moviegoing of their young children.

## **Changes in the Rating System**

We found early on that the M category (M meaning "Mature") was regarded by most parents as a sterner rating than the R category. To remedy this misconception, we changed the name from M to GP (meaning General audiences, Parental guidance suggested). A year later we revised the name to its current label, "PG: Parental Guidance Suggested."

On July 1, 1984, we made another adjustment. We split the PG category into two groupings, PG and PG-13. PG-13 meant a higher level of intensity than was to be found in a film rated PG. Over the past years, parents have approved of this amplifying revision in the rating system.

On September 27, 1990, we announced two more revisions. First, we introduced brief explanations of why a particular film received its R rating. Since, in the opinion of the Ratings Board, R rated films contain adult material, we believed it would be useful to parents to know a little more about that film's content before they allowed their children to accompany them. Sometime later we began applying the explanations in the PG, PG-13 and NC-17 categories as well. These explanations are available to parents at the theater (by telephone or at the box office), in certain media reviews and listings, and also made available on the MPAA's World Wide Web Home Page on the Internet. This internet address is <http://www.mpa.org>.

Second, we changed the name of the X category to NC-17:NO ONE 17 AND UNDER ADMITTED. The X rating over the years appeared to have taken on a surly meaning in the minds of many people, a meaning that was never intended when we created the system. Therefore, we chose to reaffirm the original intent of the design we installed on November 1, 1968, in which this "adults only" category explicitly describes a movie that most parents would want to have barred to viewing by their children. That was and is our goal, nothing more, nothing less.

We have now trademarked "NC-17:NO ONE 17 AND UNDER ADMITTED" so that this rating symbol and the legend can be used only by those who submit their films for rating.

## **The Purpose of the Rating System**

The basic mission of the rating system is a simple one: to offer to parents some advance information about movies so that parents can decide what movies they want their children to see or not to see. The entire rostrum of the rating program rests on the assumption of responsibility by parents. If parents don't care, or if they are languid in guiding their children's movie going, the rating system becomes useless. Indeed, if you are 18 or over, or if you have no children, the rating system has no meaning for you. Ratings are meant for parents, no one else.

The Rating Board does not rate movies on their quality or lack of quality. That is a role left to film critics and audiences. Had we attempted to insert ourselves into judging whether a film is "good" or "bad" or "indifferent" we would have collapsed the system before it began.

The criteria that go into the mix which becomes a Rating Board judgment are theme, violence, language, nudity, sensuality, drug abuse, and other elements. Part of the rating flows from how each of these elements is treated on-screen by the filmmaker. In making their evaluation, the members of the Ratings Board do not look at snippets of film in isolation but consider the film in its entirety. The Rating Board can make its decisions only by what is seen on the screen, not by what is imagined or thought.

There is no special emphasis on any one of these elements. All are considered. All are examined before a rating is applied. Contrary to popular notion, violence is not treated more leniently than any of the other material. Indeed many films rated X in the past and NC-17 now, have at least tentatively been given the "adults only" rating because of depictions of violence. However, most of the directors/producers/distributors involved have chosen, by their decision, to edit intense

violent scenes in order to receive an R rating.

## **What the ratings mean**

G:"General Audiences-All Ages Admitted."

This is a film which contains nothing in theme, language, nudity and sex, violence, etc. which would, in the view of the Rating Board, be offensive to parents whose younger children view the film. The G rating is not a "certificate of approval," nor does it signify a children's film.

Some snippets of language may go beyond polite conversation but they are common everyday expressions. No stronger words are present in G-rated films. The violence is at a minimum. Nudity and sex scenes are not present; nor is there any drug use content.

PG:"Parental Guidance Suggested. Some Material May Not Be Suitable For Children."

This is a film which clearly needs to be examined or inquired into by parents before they let their children attend. The label PG plainly states that parents may consider some material unsuitable for their children, but the parent must make the decision.

Parents are warned against sending their children, unseen and without inquiry, to PG-rated movies.

The theme of a PG-rated film may itself call for parental guidance. There may be some profanity in these films. There may be some violence or brief nudity. But these elements are not deemed so intense as to require that parents be strongly cautioned beyond the suggestion of parental guidance. There is no drug use content in a PG-rated film.

The PG rating, suggesting parental guidance, is thus an alert for examination of a film by parents before deciding on its viewing by their children.

Obviously such a line is difficult to draw. In our pluralistic society it is not easy to make judgments without incurring some disagreement. So long as parents know they must exercise parental responsibility, the rating serves as a meaningful guide and as a warning.

PG-13:"Parents Strongly Cautioned. Some Material May Be Inappropriate For Children Under 13."

PG-13 is thus a sterner warning to parents to determine for themselves the attendance in particular of their younger children as they might consider some material not suited for them. Parents, by the rating, are alerted to be very careful about the attendance of their under-teenage children.

A PG-13 film is one which, in the view of the Rating Board, leaps beyond the boundaries of the

PG rating in theme, violence, nudity, sensuality, language, or other contents, but does not quite fit within the restricted R category. Any drug use content will initially require at least a PG-13 rating. In effect, the PG-13 cautions parents with more stringency than usual to give special attention to this film before they allow their 12-year olds and younger to attend.

If nudity is sexually oriented, the film will generally not be found in the PG-13 category. If violence is too rough or persistent, the film goes into the R (restricted) rating. A film's single use of one of the harsher sexually-derived words, though only as an expletive, shall initially require the Rating Board to issue that film at least a PG-13 rating. More than one such expletive must lead the Rating Board to issue a film an R rating, as must even one of these words used in a sexual context. These films can be rated less severely, however, if by a special vote, the Rating Board feels that a lesser rating would more responsibly reflect the opinion of American parents.

PG-13 places larger responsibilities on parents for their children's moviegoing. The voluntary rating system is not a surrogate parent, nor should it be. It cannot, and should not, insert itself in family decisions that only parents can, and should, make. Its purpose is to give prescreening advance informational warnings, so that parents can form their own judgments. PG-13 is designed to make these parental decisions easier for films between PG and R.

R:"Restricted, Under 17 Requires Accompanying Parent Or Adult Guardian." In the opinion of the Rating Board, this film definitely contains some adult material. Parents are strongly urged to find out more about this film before they allow their children to accompany them.

An R-rated film may include hard language, or tough violence, or nudity within sensual scenes, or drug abuse or other elements, or a combination of some of the above, so that parents are counseled, in advance, to take this advisory rating very seriously. Parents must find out more about an R-rated movie before they allow their teenagers to view it.

NC-17:"No One 17 And Under Admitted."

This rating declares that the Rating Board believes that this is a film that most parents will consider patently too adult for their youngsters under 17. No children will be admitted. NC-17 does not necessarily mean "obscene or pornographic" in the oft-accepted or legal meaning of those words. The Board does not and cannot mark films with those words. These are legal terms and for courts to decide. The reasons for the application of an NC-17 rating can be violence or sex or aberrational behavior or drug abuse or any other elements which, when present, most parents would consider too strong and therefore off-limits for viewing by their children.

## **Attack of PG-13!**

Why Hollywood wants your children

Date November 19, 2003

Liza Mundy

THE WASHINGTON POST

The white sedan was sleek and expensive, and the woman driving it looked sleek and expensive, too. Her face was heavy with makeup, her hair ambitiously coiled. She pulled up to the curb of a Loews multiplex in suburban Maryland and waited while five children got out of her car. From the front passenger's side came two girls who looked to be about 12 and 13; from the back emerged a boy of 8 or so as well as two smaller children, no older than 5 or 6.

It was a few minutes before 10 on a Friday evening. Most of the movies were starting their final, late-night showings; patrons were hurrying to the kiosk, forming a straggling line, which the children joined. The 8-year-old bought the tickets. The driver sat at the wheel of her sedan, saw the transaction completed and drove away.

Alone, the children proceeded inside the crowded multiplex, where they found their way into Theater 11. That room was almost full, occupied by a restive crowd of older teenagers and twenty somethings who were passing the time with recreational bickering. A girl got up, and a boy slapped her on the butt. Somebody shot somebody else the finger. The children found seats as the lights were dimming, arriving in time for a series of trailers, including one for a horror movie in which a busload of high school students are serially eaten, others for action movies featuring gunfire, imperiled women and massive, unexplained conflagrations.

In this, the trailers were virtually indistinguishable from the main feature: "S.W.A.T.," a police action movie that begins with a scene of armed thieves cleaning out a bank vault while terrified hostages cower on the floor. "Throw that bitch to the front and kill her!" says a thief, but before he can dispatch one particularly freaked-out hostage, she is accidentally shot in the neck by a hotheaded SWAT officer trying to rescue her. Later in the movie, a French criminal slits his uncle's throat; a helicopter full of police officers crashes to the ground in a lethal explosion; and the hero pushes the hothead ex-officer, now gone over to the side of international villainy, to a grisly death under a train.

The teenagers found all of this highly satisfying. They laughed during car chases and exulted at explosions. Meanwhile, the five young children sat, absorbing the mayhem while the woman who had driven them was -- where? On a date? At a club? At the grocery store? Asleep? It didn't matter. If their care giver was unable, just now, to give care, Hollywood was happy to help out. Come one, come all, come young and old, rich and poor, potty-trained and not. Hail the ascendancy of the PG-13 movie.

I was at "S.W.A.T.," too, in the course of sampling the ever-growing array of movies that carry the PG-13 rating, which will celebrate its 20th anniversary next year. Afterward, I found myself often thinking of that late-night drop-off at the movies. The question seemed not so much what was wrong with it as what was most wrong with it. Small children dumped on the sidewalk of a crowded theater at a time when all but the oldest should have been in bed; taking their seats in a hormonal mass of older adolescents; put in this position by a mother or aunt or baby sitter who couldn't be bothered to get out of her car to see them safely inside. What movie they saw seemed almost inconsequential. Given even this limited evidence of their upbringing, "S.W.A.T." was in some ways the least of these kids' problems.

Yet the movie itself seemed a wrong thing, too. In particular, what seemed wrong was that from the point of view of the entertainment industry, everything in that scene was right. Everything was working.

That is to say, "S.W.A.T.," that night, accomplished exactly what today's PG-13 movie is supposed to accomplish, attracting older teenagers as well as younger ones and even children, maximizing its profit-making potential by leaving no group out. Unlike R movies, which restrict any unchaperoned child under 17, the PG-13 rating means any child will be accepted who can proffer a bill, even though PG-13 movies by definition contain material inappropriate for these same young moviegoers.

Because of its broad and inclusive reach, PG-13 has become by far the most profitable rating that a movie can receive. Last year, 13 of the 20 top-grossing films were rated PG-13. Overall, PG-13 films earned \$4.5 billion in 2002, twice as much as R-rated movies, despite the fact that R films (which include fringe and foreign releases) were more numerous. Those dramatic numbers explain why the PG-13 rating is now the most sought-after by studios.

These days, you could say that there are essentially three kinds of PG-13 movies: First are movies that are teenaged through and through, but often in the worst and most puerile sense -- technically eschewing adult fare like nudity while substituting scenes that are in fact smuttier and more disturbing. Second, there are children's movies that could have been rated PG, but which have been juiced up with enough gratuitous sexuality and violence to earn them the PG-13 rating. And third, there are fundamentally adult movies, like "S.W.A.T.," whose true nature is R but which are increasingly able to make a few deft excisions and extract a PG-13 from the board charged with rating films. As a result of this last technique, says Stephen Prince, a communications studies professor at Virginia Tech, in terms of content the PG-13 and R ratings have become virtually interchangeable.

The PG-13 label has evolved into an advertisement: Studios use it to send a message to teenagers -- and young kids who long to be teenagers -- that the movie will contain cool stuff. "The industry has used the ratings system to turn a restraint into a catalyst," says Gary Edgerton, a communications professor at Old Dominion University.

Although PG-13 ostensibly serves as a warning to parents to think twice about sending their young kids, these movies are actively marketed to even the littlest children. Not officially, of course. "Young children should not be going to theaters," says Jack Valenti, the longtime head of the MPAA and the father of the modern rating system. Yet even as he says this, the hooks are being baited and dropped.

Keep in mind that this is a voluntary rating system. The Classification and Rating Administration, the board that had been created by the MPAA to bestow all movie ratings, is neither a government entity nor an independent board of, say, film experts and child psychologists. It is a panel that is owned and operated and financed by the major studios, as well as the National Association of Theater Owners, the trade group for movie theaters. Their salaries paid by the very industry they regulate, the CARA panel consists of ordinary citizens, their

identities kept secret, their only qualifications being that they (1) live in the Los Angeles area and (2) have children. From the start, the members of the CARA board have been told that they are not supposed to judge a film based on how they, personally, feel about it as parents, but to imagine how American parents in general might feel about letting children watch it. Unburdened by data or feedback -- or possibly even a passing acquaintance with Middle America -- they are asked to guess what community standards are, even as those standards are being shaped by the movies already out there.

"The board isn't saying, In my expert opinion this is acceptable for a child and this is not acceptable," explains Richard Heffner, former head of the CARA. "It's designed only to say: Most parents in our estimation will not go to their local congressman and say, 'Censor those bastards.' "

At the time of an uproar over "Gremlins" in 1984, Heffner actually felt two new ratings were needed. One would be PG-13, but another would be R-13, whereby children under 13 would be excluded. But according to Heffner, the theater owners objected to R-13. They felt they had enough to do, keeping underage theatergoers out of regular R movies. So PG-13, the less restrictive rating, won out; the rating meant "may be inappropriate for children under 13," though for years the MPAA declined to explain what elements of a particular movie, exactly, were considered inappropriate.

Why was 13 chosen as the age at which these movies magically become OK? Why not PG-14? PG-15? "We just picked it out," replies Valenti. "It could be another age. But it's -- well, why do you have 16 as the age where you can get a driver's license? It could be 15, it could be 17. It's 16 because it seemed like a middle ground between too young and older. Thirteen, we thought, is right. If you go to high school, you graduate at, say, 17; you're 14 when you go to high school. So we said: Children under 13, parents should -- some of this material should be inappropriate. Now, this could be inappropriate for a 15-year-old, or it could be inappropriate for a 10-year-old. Every child is different. We struck a middle balance, because parents can figure it out. They know how precocious or naive their child is. Only you know that."

'Shall I pay you, or would you like me to take your pants off instead?'" asks a delighted female customer in "Ace Ventura, Pet Detective." "I don't know, let me think about it," smirks Ace, whereupon the woman sinks to her knees and -- we are to understand -- performs oral sex on him, to thank him for returning her parrot. Jim Carrey may be a brilliant comic, but he is also responsible for pioneering a certain kind of very skanky and now very common PG-13 movie that could not have existed in the four-ratings era.

From the start, the rules about what, exactly, could go in a PG-13 movie were fluid and undefined. According to the MPAA Web site, the main point of a PG-13 rating is to tell parents that their oversight role is paramount: "PG-13 places larger responsibilities on parents for their children's movie going," says the Web site primly, even as it gives parents little information about what these movies might contain, saying only that nudity in a PG-13 movie cannot be "sexually oriented" and that violence may not be "rough" or "pervasive." In short, there are plenty of loopholes, which Carrey and others have blasted through.

Hence, oral sex seems to be routinely acceptable in PG-13 movies: not actual oral sex, to be sure, but rather references to oral sex, oral sex performed offscreen, and oral sex that is ceased just short of being performed onscreen.

There are also bad words whose saving grace appears to be that they are not the ultimate bad word. The language rule in PG-13 movies is clear, at least in theory: One use of the f-word will automatically catapult a film from PG to a PG-13 rating. However, in a PG-13 film the f-word can be used only once, and never in its true sexual context.

# Video Games

ESRB Rating Symbols  
(Entertainment Software Rating Board)

## **EARLY CHILDHOOD**

Titles rated **EC - Early Childhood** have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.

## **EVERYONE**

Titles rated **E - Everyone** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal violence, some comic mischief and/or mild language.

## **TEEN**

Titles rated **T - Teen** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older. May contain violent content, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive themes.

## **MATURE**

Titles rated **M - Mature** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain mature sexual themes, more intense violence and/or strong language.

## **ADULTS ONLY**

Titles rated **AO - Adults Only** have content suitable only for adults. Titles in this category may include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence. Adult Only products are not intended for persons under the age of 18.

## **RATING PENDING**

Titles listed as **RP - Rating Pending** have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating.

## ESRB Content Descriptors

**Alcohol Reference** - Reference to and/or images of alcoholic beverages

**Animated Blood** - Cartoon or pixilated depictions of blood

**Blood** - Depictions of blood

**Blood and Gore** - Depictions of blood or the mutilation of body parts

**Cartoon Violence** - Violent actions involving cartoon-like characters. May include violence where a character is unharmed after the action has been inflicted

**Comic Mischief** - Scenes depicting slapstick or gross vulgar humor

**Crude Humor** - Moderately vulgar antics, including bathroom humor

**Drug Reference** - Reference to and/or images of illegal drugs

**Edutainment** - Content of product provides user with specific skills development or reinforcement learning within an entertainment setting. Skill development is an integral part of product

**Fantasy Violence** - Violent actions of a fantasy nature, involving human or non-human characters in situations easily distinguishable from real life

**Gambling** - Betting like behavior

**Informational** - Overall content of product contains data, facts, resource information, reference materials or instructional text

**Intense Violence** - Graphic and realistic-looking depictions of physical conflict. May involve extreme and/or realistic blood, gore, weapons, and depictions of human injury and death

**Mature Humor** - Vulgar and/or crude jokes and antics including "bathroom" humor

**Mature Sexual Themes** - Provocative material, possibly including partial nudity

**Mild Language** - Mild references to profanity, sexuality, violence, alcohol, or drug use

**Mild Lyrics** - Mild references to profanity, sexuality, violence, alcohol, or drug use in music

**Mild Violence** - Mild scenes depicting characters in unsafe and/or violent situations

**Nudity** - Graphic or prolonged depictions of nudity

**Partial Nudity** - Brief and mild depictions of nudity

**Sexual Violence** - Depictions of rape or other sexual acts

**Some Adult Assistance May Be Needed** - Early Childhood Descriptor only

**Strong Language** - Profanity and explicit references to sexuality, violence, alcohol, or drug use

**Strong Lyrics** - Profanity and explicit references to sex, violence, alcohol, or drug use in music

**Strong Sexual Content** - Graphic depiction of sexual behavior, possibly including nudity

**Suggestive Themes** - Mild provocative references or materials

**Tobacco Reference** - Reference to and/or images of tobacco products

**Use of Drugs** - The consumption or use of illegal drugs

**Use of Alcohol** - The consumption of alcoholic beverages

**Use of Tobacco** - The consumption of tobacco products

**Violence** - Scenes involving aggressive conflict

Additionally, online games that include user-generated content (e.g., chat, maps, skins) carry the notice "***Game Experience May Change During Online Play***" to warn consumers that content created by players of the game has not been rated by the ESRB.

(content and graphics taken straight from ESRB on 3/25/04)

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, a military historian and author of *On Killing*, argues that this type of "entertainment" is actually conditioning children to become killers.

"If we had a clear-cut objective of raising a generation of assassins and killers who are unrestrained by either authority or the nature of the victim, it is difficult to imagine how we could do a better job," he writes. "The inflicting of pain and suffering has become a source of entertainment and vicarious pleasure rather than revulsion. We are learning to kill, and we are learning to like it."

While watching television or movie violence is harmful to children, it is passive learning. But when children play with violent interactive games, they are participating in the murder and destruction -- and they receive points for their violent actions.

What are the lessons that children learn from such "entertainment"? That violence and destruction are fun. That shooting doesn't kill ... or even hurt. That ruthless competition is a winning strategy. That there are no consequences for shooting people or blowing up buildings. Researchers have demonstrated that young children become more aggressive after playing violent video games, or watching violent television programs.

### **What is computer and video game addiction?**

When time spent on the computer, playing video games or cruising the Internet reaches a point that it harms a child's or adult's family and social relationships, or disrupts school or work life, that person may be caught in a cycle of addiction. Like other addictions, the computer or video game has replaced friends and family as the source of a person's emotional life. Increasingly, to feel good, the addicted person spends more time playing video games or searching the Internet. Time away from the computer or game causes moodiness or withdrawal.

When a person spends up to ten hours a day or more rearranging or sending files, playing games, surfing the net, visiting chat rooms, instant messaging, and reading emails, that easily can reach up to seventy to eighty hours a week on-line with the computer. Major social, school or work disruptions will result.

### **Symptoms of computer or video game addiction:**

For children:

- Most of non-school hours are spent on the computer or playing video games.
- Falling asleep in school.
- Not keeping up with assignments.
- Worsening grades.
- Lying about computer or video game use.
- Choosing to use the computer or play video games, rather than see friends.
- Dropping out of other social groups (clubs or sports).
- Irritable when not playing a video game or on the computer.

For adults:

- Computer or video game use is characterized by intense feelings of pleasure and guilt.
- Obsessing and pre-occupied about being on the computer, even when not connected.
- Hours playing video games or on the computer increasing, seriously disrupting family, social or even work life.
- Lying about computer or video game use.
- Experience feelings of withdrawal, anger, or depression when not on the computer involved with their video game.
- May incur large phone or credit bills for on-line services.
- Can't control computer or video game use.
- Fantasy life on-line replaces emotional life with partner.

There are even physical symptoms that may point to addiction:

- Carpal tunnel syndrome.

Sleep disturbances  
Back, neck aches  
Headaches  
Dry eyes  
Failure to eat regularly or neglect personal hygiene

For the computer or video game addicted person, a fantasy world on-line or in a game has replaced his or her real world. The virtual reality of the computer or game is more inviting than the every day world of family, school or work. With the increased access to pornography on the Internet and in games, this fantasy world may be highly sexual.

The first step to healing is to recognize the symptoms. Help from a professional is often needed.