

This week's issue:

VIOLENCE AND MEDIA: ARE RATING SYSTEMS NECESSARY?



In 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America began rating films for children and adults. Assigning **ratings** may be better than **banning** or censoring films, but rating movies can be **complex**. People disagree about the specific factors that make a film inappropriate for children. In the United States, movies with nudity and sexual activity are often restricted to older viewers, while in Germany or France sexual content is not a big deal. However, Europeans restrict or censor movies in which violence **occurs**.

Today, video games, books, TV shows, and music also get ratings. Those who like the rating system say it helps people decide if a product is right for them or their children. It helps parents decide quickly if a movie might offend them and whether or not it is okay for their children. Others say ratings are too simplistic, that they ignore the central messages in movies or books.

The specific rating systems used have changed over the years. Today there are five possible ratings for movies. G stands for General Audiences. It means that there is no sex, violence, or profanity, and the movie is fine for all ages. PG stands for Parental Guidance Suggested. It means that some of the movie content might not be okay for kids. PG-13 gives parents a stronger caution. It indicates that something in the movie might not be okay for kids under 13. R, for Restricted, means children must be accompanied by an adult to even get into the theater. Finally, NC-17 means No One 17 and Under Admitted.

Some people don't like rating systems because they can be used for maximizing profits rather than protecting the public. Movies rated PG and PG-13 tend to make more money than those rated R, so major movie studios strategize to make sure that their films get less restrictive ratings. In addition, parents who do not **interact** much with their children or worry about their interests may not even know what a certain rating on a video game or book means. Furthermore, a young gamer who is stopped from buying a title because it is "too mature" can often get someone older buy it. Making rating systems work is complex.

What do you think about this? Do you think people should be restricted in what they can buy or see? Are rating systems necessary?

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rating | ban | interact | occur | complex

USE THE FOCUS WORDS * and alternate parts of speech

rating (*noun*) a classification, an ordering

➡ **Sample Sentence:** In 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America began assigning **ratings** to films.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Do you consider a movie's **rating** when deciding whether or not to watch it? Explain.

Rating can also be used as a verb ("rate")! **Rating** movies can be complex!

ban (*verb*) to forbid

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Ratings are an alternative to **banning** or restricting a film.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** If you knew that a movie was **banned**, would that make you want to see it more or less?

***ban** (*noun*) a rule that forbids something

➡ **Sample Sentence:** The school placed a **ban** on disposable plastic water bottles.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Should there be a **ban** on smoking in public places?

interact (*verb*) to communicate, to have social contact with

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Parents who do not **interact** with their children may not even know what a certain rating on a video game or book means.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Do you **interact** differently with your parents when you want them to buy you something? Explain.

occur (*verb*) to happen

➡ **Sample Sentence:** In the United States, movies in which sexual activity **occurs** are often restricted to older viewers.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** In the last movie you saw, would you say that violent scenes **occurred** too frequently?

complex (*verb*) complicated; of many parts

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Rating movies is **complex** because people disagree about the specific factors that should be included in the rating.

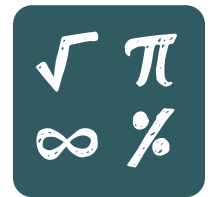
🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Do you think rating video games is more **complex** than rating movies? Explain.

***complex** (*noun*) a group of related things connected in complicated ways

➡ **Sample Sentence:** The mayor unified the transportation **complex**, which included trains, buses, and streetcars.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Why might someone want to live in an apartment **complex** instead of a house?

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DO THE MATH


Instead of **banning** adult content in movies, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) gives **ratings** to let viewers know what **occurs** in a movie. The interactions between a movie's creators and the MPAA can be **complex**. For example, if a movie's creators are unhappy with a **rating**, they can edit and resubmit their movie to the MPAA until they get the **rating** they want.

Rating	Average Earnings Per Film 1995 – 2010
PG-13	\$41,237,141
G	\$37,692,288
PG	\$36,591,876
R	\$14,934,641
Not Rated	\$740,664

Option 1: According to the table, which of the following is true?

- A. If a movie is rated PG-13, it will definitely earn more money than a movie rated R.
- B. On average, movies rated PG-13 earned more money than movies rated PG.
- C. On average, movies rated R earned more money than PG-rated movies.
- D. Movies that were not rated did not earn any money.

Option 2: If these average earnings stay true, how much is it worth to a movie's creators to have a **rating** changed from R to PG-13?

 **Discussion Question:** On average, a movie with a PG-13 **rating** will earn much more than a movie with an R **rating**. Why? Here is one possible explanation: For some parents, watching movies is a way to **interact** with their kids. They see a movie together, and then talk about it afterwards. This helps parents and kids build strong relationships. Therefore, R-rated movies may earn less money because parents don't take their kids to see them. Is this a good explanation, or is the situation more **complex**?

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THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

Mr. Seemy's class is learning about the brain, and today's lesson is about mirror neurons.

"When I touch my ear, neurons fire," Mr. Seemy says. "When I watch you touch your ear, something interesting **occurs**. Some of those same neurons fire again. We call these neurons mirror neurons."

Mr. Seemy continues, "Mirror neurons help us **interact** with other people. When we see someone smile, mirror neurons remind us what it feels like to smile. They also help us imitate **complex** behavior, like dance steps."

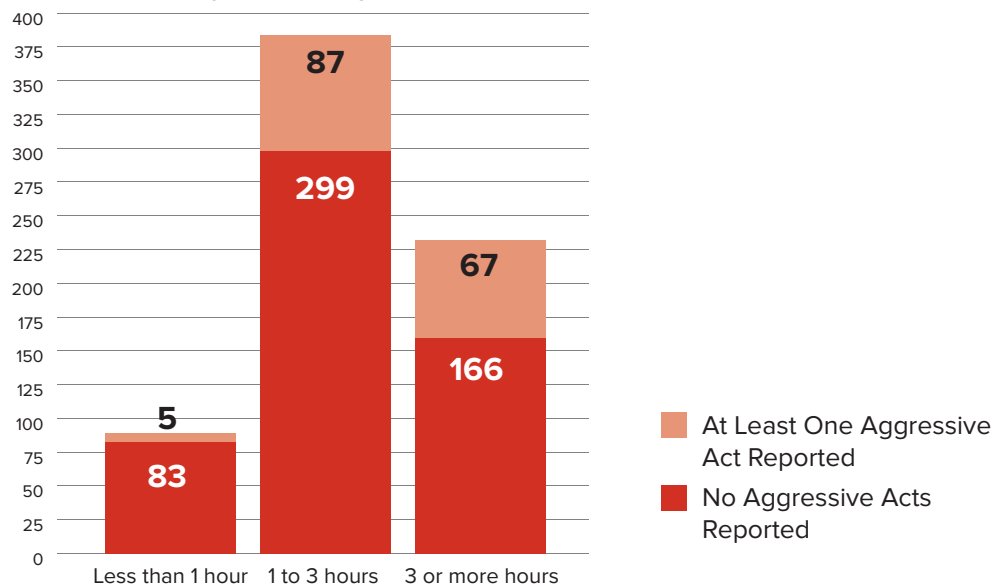
Jamal has been studying media violence, and he has an idea. "Hey, mirror neurons could explain why watching violence in the media makes people violent in real life," he says. "When a kid watches someone punch, mirror neurons help them understand punching, and also help them imitate it."

"My mom told me she read an article once that said watching violent TV makes kids more violent," Jennifer explains. "That's why my brother and I are not allowed to watch anything with any violence in it! It's not fair!"

"Let's see if we can find the article your mom read online," suggests Mr. Seemy.

Jennifer helps Mr. Seemy to locate the online article her mom described: a 2002 study in *Science* magazine. Jennifer shares the information she finds with her classmates. The study compares the amount of TV children around age 14 watched with the number of aggressive acts they committed later (around the ages of 16 and 22).

Aggression Reported After Daily TV Viewing | Total Number of Participants = 707



One of Jennifer's classmates concludes that kids watching 1–3 hours of television led to the highest rate of violence because there were 87 aggressive acts committed by that population. Is she correct? Why or why not?

Do these data support Jennifer's mom's decision to **ban** her children from watching TV shows with violence?

Discuss what other variables you would like to see included in a study like this in order to ensure that time watching TV was the **ONLY** factor leading to aggressive behavior. Examples might include incidence of childhood abuse, hours spent playing violent computer games, etc.



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DEBATE THE ISSUE

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A

The **rating** systems in place are not strict enough.

OR

B

The **rating** systems in place are fine.

OR

C

Rating systems are unnecessary.

OR

CREATE YOUR OWN

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:

““ Can you show me evidence in the text that...””

““ I believe that...””

““ You make a good point, but have you considered...””

““ I agree with you, but...””

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TAKE A STAND



Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

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