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RATINGS AND THEIR REASONS: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE
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AMERICA'S FILM RATING SYSTEM

presented by

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of the requirements for the

Ph.D. degree in Mass Media

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**RATINGS AND THEIR REASONS: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFICIENCY,
APPLICATION AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF THE MOTION
PICTURE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA'S FILM RATING SYSTEM**

VOLUME I

By

Patricia A. Williamson

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ABSTRACT

RATINGS AND THEIR REASONS: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFICIENCY, APPLICATION AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF THE MOTION PICTURE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA'S FILM RATING SYSTEM

By

Patricia Anne Williamson

Parents are dissatisfied with the information supplied to them by the Motion Picture Association of America's film rating system. Parents state they want more specific content-based information rather than evaluative, age-based rating categories. Additionally, there appears to be a disconnect between the types of content parents find inappropriate for their children's viewing and the content the MPAA raters take into consideration when assigning ratings. In focus groups with parents of children of various ages, parents overwhelmingly chose violence as the content-type they most want to shield their children from, but a content analysis of films released during 2005 found that violent content was not significantly related to MPAA film rating.

The present study is a comprehensive, multi-method investigation of the Motion Picture Association of America film rating system which included focus groups with parents and non-parents, a quantitative content analysis of MPAA-supplied "rating reasons" for individual films released in 2005, a quantitative content analysis of fifty full-length feature films released in the United States theatrically during 2005, and a qualitative analysis of those same fifty films.

Focus groups were held to determine parental use and satisfaction with the MPAA system. It was discovered that parents were unanimously dissatisfied with the MPAA system, pointing to its lack of clarity and consistency as the primary reasons for their

dissatisfaction. In addition to concerns about violent content, parents of teenagers were equally concerned with sexual content, and language was found to be another concern for some parents. The mothers and fathers of girls were particularly worried about the portrayal of gender in film. Many expressed the view that the ratings should indicate whether the films included unhealthy role models, especially in cases where violence towards women was portrayed in movies. Hard drug use was a concern for parents, but minimal concern was expressed with the depiction of marijuana use, mild drug references, drinking or smoking behaviors. A few parents also reported they would like to see films that contain marketing materials aimed at children labeled in some manner.

Content analysis found that language was the most cited content type included within MPAA rating reasons for all domestically released films from 2005, as well as the most frequently cited content type within nearly every individual rating category. No rating reasons were provided for G-rated films. NC-17 films were most often cited for containing sexual content.

The content analysis of fifty films from 2005 found several content variables were positively related to rating designation, including sexual content, sexual innuendo, male and female nudity, the use of four specific profanities, marijuana use, hard drug use, alcohol use, the number of homosexual characters depicted, portrayals of adultery and depictions of pre-marital sex. Violence was not significantly related to rating designation.

Ratings were found to be inconsistently applied based on the inclusion of similar types of content in films of various ratings. However, some contextual differences were discussed in the qualitative analysis of the same fifty films.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with love and appreciation to my parents.

To my mom, Anne Williamson, for teaching me strength and stubbornness, both of which were needed during this process. Thank you for helping me through the difficult days.

To my dad, Wayne Williamson, for instilling in me the importance of education. Your love and support will be with me always. I miss you everyday.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Since film was introduced as a mass medium, there has been great debate about the possible harmful effects that these projected images of flickering light might have on society. Even before the Lumiere Brothers displayed one of their short actualities to a paying audience in Paris in 1895, Eadweard Muybridge stirred up controversy with his series photography¹. Muybridge studied the physiology and movements of animals and humans, but was the subject of scrutiny because some of his subjects were nubile young women depicted in varying states of undress. Later, Thomas Edison was criticized by special interest groups who decried his short film *The Kiss* (1896) as smut that would demoralize the nation if such filth was allowed to be shown in kinetoscope parlors across the country. It may have been the unique visual nature of film that gave it communicative power unlike that of earlier mass mediated messages, specifically print-based media (Randall, 1968). Movies presented an alternative version of “real life”, with images projected larger than life in a darkened theater filled with watchful eyes.

Today, the content of our modern films is unarguably more risqué than those of the earliest days of the medium. The screen’s visual effects and narrative grammar have become more effective in their ability to tell a story and bring the audience into a make-believe world of suspended disbelief. Somehow, the depictions on screen seem more “real” than they used to. However, the arguments against certain types of filmic content

¹ Muybridge (1830-1904) invented an automated camera shutter mechanism that allowed the creation of a series of photographs of different phases of motion of an object, animal or person. Muybridge’s most famous photographs were taken in 1877 at a Sacramento race track when he captured a series of photographs of the horse Occidental in full stride by using a series of shutters and trip wires. Muybridge had been hired by California Governor Leland Stanford, a horse-breeder, to prove that at some point in its gallop, all four of a horse’s hooves leave the ground. The series of photographs taken in Sacramento proved Stanford correct.

are very much the same as those posited one hundred years ago. Critics point to the moral decay that film has begat, arguing that not only is some film content offensive, it is also bringing direct harm to our society in a variety of ways.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

Due to on-going concern for the impact of film content on children, a variety of codes and rating systems have been put in place by the film industry to limit either the content of films themselves, or to limit the audiences allowed to see those films. This study serves as an evaluation of the current Motion Picture Association of America film rating system. This research probes the effectiveness of the system in terms of parental use and clarity of the system, as well as serving as a tool for parents to discuss their concerns with specific types of film content and the way it is rated. In addition, this study looks at the way the MPAA determines film ratings and the consistency of that rating application process.

The MPAA is the self-regulatory arm of the U.S. film industry and has administered the film rating system since 1968. Since its implementation, the film rating system has been both praised and criticized. While some parents' groups and industry members have praised the system as a more democratic form of content regulation when compared to its predecessor the Production Code (Valenti, 2002; Hoover, 2002), several industry professionals, special interest groups, parents and media researchers have been vocal critics of the system (Braunstein, 1999; Leone, 1999; 2002; Roth, 2000; Apted et al, 1990; Farber, 1972). Despite the criticism, very little research has been done on the subject of the film rating system and its effectiveness as a public policy. After thirty-nine years of implementation, it is certainly past time to take a serious look at this self-

regulatory system, its effectiveness and its possible impact on our culture (both within the industry and without).

The following passage was written by former MPAA President Jack Valenti and it explains the function of the modern day 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 moviegoing, 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.” (Valenti, On-line source)

The above statement specifically addresses the function of the film rating system and states that it is meant to merely be a guide for parents; no more, no less. While it is argued by the MPAA that the film rating system should not impact adults or those who are not parents, many critics argue that the system has a much more far-reaching impact on the film industry, as well as on American culture (Roth, 1990; Faber, 1972). This research thoroughly addresses both the intended results of the MPAA rating system (a guide for parents), as well as possible unintended consequences of the system.

One of the major goals of this research was to look at the perceived effectiveness of the rating system as judged by a cross-section of parents with children of a variety of ages. Parents had a chance to voice their opinions in focus groups as to what types of content they would like to see more or less restrictively rated by the MPAA rating board. Additionally, parents were asked to discuss their fears regarding the content they would like to shield their children from. Why are some types of content more acceptable or unacceptable for their children? How does that determine what type of film is acceptable or unacceptable for children? By talking to parents in a focus group format, the

effectiveness of the current rating system was evaluated in terms of whether the type of content being restricted is positively correlated with the type of content parents would like to see restricted.

In order to determine what types of content are indeed being more restrictively rated two quantitative content analyses were undertaken. The first was a content analysis of the rating reasons cited by the MPAA and the Classification and Rating Administration of America (CARA) for all rated films released in the year 2005. The second was a content analysis of a representative sample of films (N=50) from the same year. A common criticism of the current rating system is that ratings are not applied consistently, due to a lack of quantitative content-based standards (Faber, 1972; Roth, 1990; Goodridge, 2003). The film rating board, which consists of a number of parents living in the San Fernando Valley region of California, is able to make a determination as to the appropriate rating for a given film without quantitatively analyzing the content of that film. Instead, raters go with their personal interpretations of the guidelines which drive the rating system. Therefore, some argue, the ratings tend to be applied inconsistently (Faber, 1972; Leone, 2002; Thompspon & Yokota, 2004). This study investigates whether film ratings are applied consistently using the two quantitative analyses that have previously been mentioned. The content of multiple films within each rating category was deciphered (G, PG, PG-13, R, NC-17 and Unrated) in order to determine whether parents can consistently rely on the current rating system as a tool for movie-going decision making.

In a report to Congress on industry trade practices in the motion picture, recording and electronic game industries, the Federal Trade Commission summed up major

criticisms of the MPAA/CARA rating system by focusing on the lack of content descriptors as a part of the rating itself. The FTC identified three major reasons why descriptors are recommended for media ratings. The first is that descriptors allow for more consistency in application by raters, since the level of discretion would be lower for all involved (FTC, 2004). Secondly, it would provide more specific information to parents, allowing them to make more informed decisions as media consumers. Finally, a system with more information descriptors was seen as a way to deter children who are attracted to films with PG-13 or R ratings (FTC, 2004). This research investigates the extent to which the MPAA is following the FTC guidelines regarding the inclusion of descriptive information within their rating designations.

Another major criticism of the film rating system is due to its evaluative nature. Whereas other countries utilize rating systems that are descriptive, information-based systems, the MPAA relies on raters to make decisions as to which age groups certain types of film content and contexts are suitable for. Parents are then left to use predetermined age groupings as their guide. In other words, instead of listing the possibly offensive content that is contained in a film, the current system merely offers parents pre-determined age based ratings. The evaluative nature of this process could lead to the possible misuse of the current rating system as a societal value system (Federman, 1998).

This idea of ratings as a value system has the possibility of resonating throughout the society as a whole, rather than being limited solely to children under the age of eighteen, seeing as a restrictive rating can limit a film's exhibition and visibility. Therefore, it is important to look at the context as well as the content that is being rated in

specific films. This study includes a qualitative analysis of films released theatrically in 2005 to allow a thorough discussion of context. This also allows for an analysis of any possible value-based judgments made by MPAA raters. This is important to investigate, due to a plethora of criticism of the current system as being biased in its treatment of certain types of content. Specifically, critics have charged the MPAA as being prone to double standards in its treatment of homosexual versus heterosexual content, sex versus violence, independent and small budget films versus major studio blockbusters, and foreign versus American films (Roth, 1990; Sylvester, 1999; Goodridge, 2003). This study used content analysis to determine the validity of such criticisms, and to investigate whether there is a clear “value system” utilized by the MPAA raters.

The present research study has been organized into nine chapters. This first chapter gives the reader an overview of this research agenda, a justification for the research and details the importance of the study.

Chapter two recounts the history of film content regulation which is designed to shed some light on the origins of our modern day film rating system. By investigating the evolution of the film industry’s self-regulation efforts, it is possible to situate our modern content regulation within a historical frame. It also allows parallels to be drawn between these early regulatory efforts and today’s MPAA age-based system, as well as illustrating distinctions between the two systems.

Chapter three is a literature of review of prior research and criticism of the Motion Picture Association of America’s film rating system. The first half of the chapter details academic and policy-based research that focuses on film content, the rating system and media censorship. The second half of the chapter is an overview of critical attention paid

to the film rating system, not only by academic researchers, but also by media critics, politicians and special interest groups.

Chapter four of this dissertation outlines the nine major research questions that are investigated in this study. The first three research questions revolve around parental opinions and utilization of the MPAA ratings. Research questions 4a and 4b as well as 5a-5e fuel the investigation of MPAA-supplied “rating reasons” that are posted on the MPAA website as well as most of the marketing materials for individual films. These rating reasons are the MPAA’s attempt to inform parents about specific types of content present in particular films. Research question six measures the consistency of application based on those rating reasons. Research questions seven and eight are answered via a quantitative content analysis of fifty films released during the year 2005, while RQ 9 is answered by using qualitative analysis of those same films.

Chapter five details the methods used in this investigation. This study utilized a multi-method design to ensure a more thorough and complete picture of the phenomenon at the center of this research. This study actually consists of several pieces, as alluded to in the preceding paragraph. Focus group research was undertaken to determine parental opinions of both the film rating system as well as their attitudes toward specific types of film content. Quantitative content analyses were conducted both on the rating reasons for 325 films released theatrically during 2005, as well as fifty full-length features released the same year. One quantitative analysis was text-based, the other was based upon multi-coder evaluation of the actual film content of a representative sample of films. In addition, qualitative analysis of the same fifty films was utilized to investigate the context, and latent content of movies and their correlation to rating assignment.

Chapter six details the findings from the four focus groups held with parents of children of all ages, as well as non-parents. This chapter answers research questions 1-3. It also includes an abundance of direct quotes and excerpts from parents which help illuminate parental concerns regarding the current film rating system.

Chapter seven answers research questions 4-8, and all the sub-questions included within that range. Chapter seven consists mainly of statistical data analysis of the two quantitative content analyses conducted both on the MPAA's rating reasons and on the representative sample of films from the year 2005.

Chapter eight answers research question 9, which concerns the context and latent content of the fifty film sample from 2005. This chapter revolves around the qualitative analysis of films, which is used to compare and contrast film content in movies of varying rating categories.

Chapter nine is a discussion of results from the four major studies conducted for this investigation. In this chapter, connections are drawn between the disparate studies conducted. Key findings are highlighted and discussed in more depth.

In chapter ten, conclusions are presented, and a series of suggestions are made to improve the film-rating policies currently being followed by the Motion Picture Association of America. This chapter also contains a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the study and suggestions for future research.

It is hoped that this research will benefit parents, film content regulators, and filmmakers. By investigating the strengths and weaknesses of the current film rating system, suggestions can be made to improve the current system. Both expected and unexpected outcomes of the current public policy are analyzed in order to improve the

status quo. The current film rating system has been in effect since 1968. In early 2007, the MPAA announced the first changes to the system since its implementation nearly forty years earlier. However, these changes indicate willingness within the Motion Picture Association of America to update or improve the system according to the needs of parents and citizens, as listening to the concerns of the film industry itself. This research hopes to aide in the improvement of the system, giving parents a reliable and consistent tool for choosing appropriate movies for their kids to see. It also strives to eliminate some of the negative unintended consequences of the system that are a result of the current system.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY OF MOTION PICTURE CONTENT REGULATION (1895-1968)

In order to have a complete understanding of the current MPAA rating system, it is important to put the current policy into historical perspective by looking at the evolution of film content regulation. The film industry has been challenged by special interest groups and the government since its early days, but has been successful in convincing the public as well as politicians that self-regulation is the most effective system for the industry. This chapter examines the history of film content regulation as it has been informed and sculpted by important court decision, social pressures, and political activism.

The Early Days of Film

The birth date of film is most often traced back to December 28, 1895 when brothers Louis and Auguste Lumiere exhibited a “motion picture” to the first paying audience in Paris (Lunde, 1998). Although the Edison Company had developed kinetoscope technology² several years earlier, it was the Frenchmen who initially saw the potential for film to be a mass medium. These early films, referred to as “actualities,” were nothing like the film medium we are familiar with today. Instead, early motion pictures were usually comprised of short documentary and newsreel footage, as well as travelogues (Kirby, 1997). Some of the Lumieres’ first films were of workers leaving a factory after a day’s work and of a train barreling toward the camera. It wasn’t until around 1902 that fiction film and storytelling came to dominate the industry, and even

² Edison’s kinetoscope was patented in 1891, but wasn’t demonstrated publicly until May 9, 1893. The kinetoscope was an upright wooden structure with a peephole and magnifying lens on top which allowed individuals to view a short film. It was not a projection system. Viewing short films using the kinetoscope was an individualized experience.

then, the “stories” that were told were often rudimentary and simplistic compared to the narrative style of storytelling developed in later years (Kirby, 1997; Lunde, 1998).

The years 1902-1915 can be seen as the transitional years of American cinema, as this is when cinema’s visual grammar, narrative paradigms, industrial structure and audience base were solidified (Stamp, 2000). During this era, movies transformed from an inexpensive fleeting amusement into the nation’s first truly mass medium, and one of the most profitable industries in the country. This was also when moral leaders began to decry the movies as decadent and harmful to society, especially children. “Movies are schools of vice and crime, offering trips to hell for a nickel,” argued Reverend Wilbur Kreps in 1910 (Espar, 1999). His words echoed the sentiment of many religious leaders in America who were worried about the possible effects of film on American morality.

In the early 20th century, there was no form of industry self-regulation in terms of film content. Film producers were still experimenting, attempting to make the medium profitable. Instead of self-regulation, film’s first censors were police and politicians. In 1907, Chicago police banned films that they found offensive, and edited others. Deputy Superintendent Major Metellus Funkhouser was the leader of the film censorship charge in the Windy City, tending to cut films that depicted police officers in a negative light, or films that hinted at police corruption (Klawans, 1994).

Not all film censorship efforts of this era were directly related to film content, however. New York Mayor George Brinton McClellan shut down all nickelodeons³ in

³ Nickelodeons were the first movie theaters in the United States. These storefront theaters got their name from a combination of their admission fees (five cents) and the Greek word for theater. For a nickel, patrons were generally allowed to stay for as long as they pleased. The first nickelodeon is said to have opened in Pittsburgh in June of 1905. The owner of the theater was Harry Davis, who made his money from vaudeville productions. Nickelodeons were instantly popular and by 1908 approximately 8000 nickelodeons were in operation across the United States. Most of these earliest theaters were small, and

the city in 1908 to insure “public safety.” McClellan said that the moviehouses were “malodorous” and endangered the throngs of working class immigrants who comprised much of the film audience of the day (Klawans, 1994)⁴. Progressive Era reformers were quick to protest the ban on nickelodeons, but the move caused the motion picture industry to take note. It was this type of regional censorship that was deleterious to the profitability of the industry. Therefore, industry insiders were open to finding a way to assuage the fears of those concerned with the content of the film shorts. This opened the door to one of the first organized film censorship boards in the United States. In March of 1909, the People’s Institute formed a Board of Censorship that reviewed all film releases before exhibition (Klawans, 1994)⁵. Despite the Board’s lack of legislative, governmental or police authority, the Motion Picture Patents Office volunteered to abide by the Board’s wishes, and submitted all their new releases to the Board before distributing the film’s nationally (Klawans, 1994).

Some might be perplexed by the industry’s move to allow an otherwise powerless group to monitor filmic content. However, the Motion Picture Patents Office was merely looking out for its business interests. The Office was looking to build a monopoly both domestically and internationally, and believed this move would allow them to go “up-market” in search of middle class movie-goers. In fact, in the early 1910s, many exhibitors began courting middle-class, married patrons, who were seen as a more respectable audience. Nickelodeons were replaced with more elegant, permanent

often somewhat shabby in appearance. Some early nickelodeons used a sheet for a screen and set up folding chairs for seating.

⁴ Klawans implies that McClellan was actually more concerned about the impact of attracting crowds of working class immigrants to a prime location of New York (Manhattan) real estate.

⁵ In 1915, the “Board of Censorship” was renamed “The National Board of Review.” The People’s Institute was a well-regarded reformist organization in New York City.

screening venues, often referred to as movie palaces. The industry sought to move away from the image the industry had garnered as an urban, tawdry amusement (Stamp, 2000). However, typical moviegoers of the age were mainly immigrants and members of the lower to middle class who were unable to afford more established amusements, like the theater (Espar, 1999).

Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio

During this revolutionary time in cinematic history, the first of several key Supreme Court decisions was handed down, opening the floodgates of film content regulation. In 1915, the Supreme Court ruled in *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio*⁶ that film was not deserving of Constitutional protection (Siegel, 2002). The Court wrote, “The exhibition of moving pictures is a business, pure and simple, originated and conducted for profit like other spectacles, and not regarded as part of the press of the country or as organs of public opinion within the meaning of freedom of speech” (Mutual Film Corp. v. Industrial Comm. of Ohio, 236 U.S. 230, 1915). Justice McKenna wrote the opinion of the Court, stating “...however missionary of opinion films are or may become, however educational or entertaining, there is no impediment to their value or effect in the Ohio statute.” Thus, McKenna and the rest of the Justices seemed to say that film did have value as entertainment, and could possibly

⁶ Mutual Film Corp. v. Industrial Commission of Ohio involves a film distributor (Mutual Film Corporation) that sought to restrain the enforcement of an act of the general assembly of Ohio, passed April 16, 1913 (103 Ohio Laws, 399), which created a board of censors of motion pictures under the authority of the Industrial Commission of the state. Mutual refused to submit its films for censorship. Mutual argued that the measure violated the First Amendment of the Constitution, and placed an undue burden on their business. Mutual Film Corp’s business was to distribute multiple copies of films to both Ohio and Detroit on a weekly basis. The frequency of distribution was a key to Mutual’s profit-making strategy. To submit films to a censorship board, Mutual argued, would be disastrous, as it would be physically and logistically impossible for the censors to review films in a timely manner. Therefore, this Supreme Court case not only was a measure of film’s First Amendment rights, but also of burdens placed upon interstate commerce by censorship boards.

even be used as an educational tool, but lacked the foresight to see the negative affects the lack of First Amendment protection would have on the industry. The industry's economic health seemed to be the justices' only concern in the matter.

This ruling set a tone in the United States in which film was seen as more of a threat to traditional morality and values than were the other forms of media. By disallowing film First Amendment protection, film as a medium was marginalized. McKenna himself warned that the all-encompassing nature of film audiences, "...the audiences they assemble, not of women alone nor of men alone, but together, not of adults only, but of children," made them, "the more insidious in corruption by a pretense of worthy purpose or they should degenerate from worthy purpose." (*Mutual Film Corp. v. Industrial Comm. of Ohio*, 236 U.S. 230, 1915). In this passage, McKenna clearly voices his fears as to the possible negative effects of film on American society. Of course, no research had been done at this time as to what effect, if any, film might have on society. Instead, the Court's logic seems reactionary due to the newness of the medium and its continually changing nature. On the other hand, looking at film of this time period, one could argue that the Court was right in labeling films as "spectacle" (Seigel, 2002). Despite the recent changes in the industry's target audience, most films were still marketed in much the same way as were burlesque shows and circuses.⁷ Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr expressed regret years later for having signed his name to the Mutual Film opinion, but in 1915, the Court's decision was met with nearly universal approval within the legal community (Wertheimer, 1993).

⁷ Motion pictures in the early 1900s were seen as a cheap amusement, populated mainly by undereducated, urban immigrants. People were still enthralled with the excitement and novelty of the "moving" pictures. Going to a movie at a nickelodeon could be equated to attending a circus, as it was considered a novelty more than an art form.

As a response to the Court's 1915 ruling, states and cities began to immediately develop a plethora of film censorship regulations across the country. Some set up censorship boards to preview and decide the fate of individual films before they were allowed exhibition in a given community. Others set specific guidelines film content had to follow to be allowed exhibition within a given community (Siegel, 2002). The film industry was faced with one of its first economic roadblocks due to the Court's ruling. Big studios had rarely faced trouble exhibiting films nationwide in a timely manner up to this point, and the lack of standardized release patterns hit the industry in its pocketbook. One of the keys to a specific film's financial success is its ability to find a mass audience during a short span of time. This was especially true during this time period, when films were played in some movie houses until they literally disintegrated (Jacobs, 1997). When censorship boards began holding up exhibition of films, they threw the industry for a loop. The major problem censorship boards posed for movie marketers was the inconsistent and unpredictable timetable for viewing and rendering a decision on the acceptability of the content in individual films. Traditionally, film studios relied on simultaneous nationwide release as their main marketing strategy for launching a major motion picture. This allowed them to promote specific films across the country at one time, rather than promoting films in on a city-by-city basis. Having numerous censorship boards in various cities across the country not only delayed the release of films, but invariably led to inconsistent release dates in major cities. On top of that, some films would never be released in some major cities, due to the local community standards upheld by these censorship boards. It became increasingly difficult for studios to market a film, but film companies weathered the storm of the 1915 Supreme Court decision, with

exhibitors bearing the brunt of the expense of editing movies to placate local censor boards (Leff & Simmons, 2001).

It is important to note that even today state and city censorship boards are legal. However, several limits have been placed upon them over the years. Five court decisions, *Gelling v. Texas*, 343 U.S. 960 (1952); *Superior Films v. Department of Education*, 346 U.S. 587 (1953); *Times Film Corporation v. City of Chicago*, 365 U.S. 43 (1953), *Freedom v. Maryland*, 380 U.S. 51 (1965); and *Teitel Films v. Cussak*, 390 U.S. 139 (1968), contributed to the lessening of control of local censorship boards. Those cases lead to rules requiring censors to act swiftly in either granting permission to exhibit a film or beginning litigation to bar exhibition of a film. Furthermore, in the event of litigation, there must be an expedited review, with the burden of proof lying with the censors, rather than film distributors (Siegel, 2002).

The Film Industry in the Jazz Age

Despite the push for a more refined audience, filmic content after World War I continued to reflect the excesses of the age. The Roaring Twenties, also known as the Jazz Age, was a period of cultural and social change in America. It was an era marked by bathtub gin, the Charleston and organized crime. This generation's youth seemed to be playing faster and looser with morality than past generations, and many critics were quick to blame the rising popularity of movies for this change in our nation's values. The giddy prosperity of post-war America meant big business for the fledgling film industry. By the early 1920s, the cinema was entertaining forty million people of all social and economic classes nationwide each week (Espar, 1999).

The emerging corporate marketplace that was sweeping America was mirrored in motion pictures after WWI. Films sought to attract audiences with sexually provocative titles and imagery, and often included plot lines that dealt with self-indulgence and self-fulfillment (Horowitz, 1997). The perceived immoral content of movies drew attention from Progressive Era⁸ social workers, ministers, educators and women's groups who were intent on imposing social discipline and order upon working class immigrants and rural newcomers. As a result, 100 U.S. cities and 38 states enacted censorship regulation between 1910 and 1930 to control motion picture content (Horowitz, 1997). During the four years from 1916 to 1920, Congress considered seven proposals to establish a federal motion picture commission and regulate the distribution of films as interstate commerce (Horowitz, 1997).

By the early 1920's, scandals began to rock the movie industry. Some of the biggest film stars of the day were indicted on charges of rape, murder and drug use. The most publicized scandal of the era was the Fatty Arbuckle sex scandal. Arbuckle had taken a suite at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco over the Labor Day weekend of 1921. During the course of the rather ribald party, Arbuckle disappeared into the bedroom with "model" Virginia Rappe. Hours later, the young woman became ill and died after a short hospitalization. The autopsy report led the city's district attorney to hold Arbuckle responsible, and the popular comedian was charged with rape and murder (Leff & Simmons, 2001). The press had a field day with the allegations and subsequent charges, writing of Arbuckle's womanizing and kinky sexual escapades. Although the autopsy found no signs of a sexual attack, rumors circulated that Arbuckle had raped her

⁸ The Progressive Era (1890-1913) is generally characterized as a time of social change and that preceded FDR's "New Deal" in the United States. Most Progressives railed against the incumbent power structure and supported changes to the government, economic system and social structures.

and violated her with a champagne bottle. Some critics even said the abdominal pain and subsequent death were the result of a botched abortion attempt by Fatty. It took three jury trials for a verdict of not-guilty to be entered in the matter. The first two trials resulted in hung juries, while the third jury not only acquitted the actor-comedian, but included a written apology with the verdict that read,

“Acquittal is not enough for Rose Arbuckle. We feel that a great injustice has been done him...there was not the slightest proof adduced to connect him in any way with the commission of a crime. He was manly throughout the case and told a straightforward story which we all believe. We wish him success and hope that the American people will take the judgment of fourteen men and women that Roscoe Arbuckle is entirely innocent and free from all blame.” (Fine, 1997: 300).

Despite the eventual acquittal, the scandal not only ended Arbuckle’s career, it also caused upheaval in the film industry. The business of film was no longer a fleeting amusement, it was a multi-million dollar industry and it needed to protect its image or risk losing money. Industry bosses feared negative publicity would hurt their chances of doing business with the major banking institutions. Hollywood was already seen by many as tawdry and lascivious and the banks’ relationship with the film industry could be threatened by organized boycotts of film or the backlash of negative public opinion. By 1920, the motion picture industry was capitalized at one-billion dollars, with eight corporate giants accounting for 90% of the 800 films produced each year in the United States (Horowitz, 1997).⁹ With special interest groups rebuking the industry for its indecency and lack of morality, along with the confusing wave of motion picture censorship laws that were sweeping across the nation, industry executive knew something had to be done in terms of damage control.

⁹ The film industry had worked hard to attract middle-class and female audiences, making motion picture attendance family-friendly. Not only did the scandals cast a shadow on this new public image of film, it also damaged relationships between the studio heads and banks, many of which were unsure of the legitimacy of this relatively new industry.

The Birth of the MPPDA

After the Mutual Film Corp decision in 1915, which legitimized the use of state and city censor boards in the United States, exhibitors were bearing the brunt of the expenses of editing movies to placate local censor boards (Leff & Simmons, 2001). Movie moguls were also worried that scandals would inspire the U.S. government to take a closer look at anti-trust legislation in regard to the film industry. In part to assure Wall Street that the industry was stable and in part to ally fears of local censorship boards, the presidents of all the major movie studios formed a new trade association in 1922 called the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, or MPPDA for short. If this public relations move was to be successful, the studio heads knew they would need to find a figurehead above reproach. For this reason, Will Hays was appointed MPPDA President. Hays was the current Postmaster General, served as a former chair of the Republican party, was an elder of the Presbyterian Church, and had many White House connections (Horowitz, 1997). Hays' goals for the MPPDA were to improve trade relations for the industry, restore public confidence and fight government regulation and censorship. Hays assured critics that Hollywood self-censorship was a more prudent route than going to the trouble of enacting federal censorship legislation. Hays' strategy seemed to be one of inclusion. By involving critics of the film industry, including women's groups, civic organization and educational leaders in his group, Hays earned the support of organizations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Boy Scouts of America, the YMCA, as well as vocal and powerful opinion leaders such as William Jennings Bryant (Horowitz, 1997). These organizations and others joined the

Association's Committee on Public Relations, an advisory group dealing with "public demands and moral standards" (Leff & Simmons, 2001).

Hays was soon tested by a House bill which sought to create a new division of the Bureau of Education to supervise standards of movie production (Gallagher, 1999). He also fought a Massachusetts film censorship bill (Leff & Simmons, 2001). Both were defeated. Hays worked with the Department of Commerce to create a Motion Picture Section to protect the industry from foreign censorship and trade barriers (Leff & Simmons, 2001).

At first, the public relations efforts of the Hays Office and the MPPDA seemed to pay off. Most of the social work establishment followed Hays' lead and rejected government censorship. However, not all social critics were impressed by Hays or his office. Montana Democrat Henry L. Myers denounced Hollywood as an industry that thrived off "the sensual, the sordid, the prurient, the phrases of fast life, the ways of extravagance, the risqué" (Horowitz, 1997). Myers suggested that Hollywood's economic power grew directly from its immoral film content. This view was shared by leaders of the Episcopal, Presbyterian and Methodist churches. And despite Hays' best efforts, several influential interest groups left his Committee on Public Relations between 1924 and 1925, including the PTA¹⁰ and the General Federation of Women's Clubs, dealing a huge blow for the committee's agenda.

Church leaders increased their pressure on Hollywood with the formation of the Federal Motion Picture Council in America in 1925.¹¹ The organization was a result of

¹⁰ The Parent Teacher Association was founded in 1897 and focused on the health and education of children.

¹¹ Several women's leaders believed Hays was using their groups as a "smoke screen" to obfuscate the lack of progress in film content regulation, so they joined forces with Protestants and organized the Federal

the Presbyterian Church's conference on the motion picture "problem" (Horowitz, 1997). Canon William Sheafe Chase of Christ Church in Brooklyn served as general secretary of the FMPC. Chase had been active in New York movie reform circles since 1907 and wrote the book *Catechism on Motion Pictures in Interstate Commerce*, a crudely anti-Semitic rant that speculated that Jews were subverting Christian family life and morality in order to create a superstate ruled by Zion (Chase, 1922). He charged that Hollywood appealed to the "baser passions and obsessions of the lower human nature" to vulgarity, stupidity, and suspicion of law and constituted authority (Chase, 1922). Under his leadership, and later the leadership of Catheryne Cooke Gilman who took over as President of the FMPC in 1929, the group lobbied for federal legislation to regulate both Hollywood trade practices and movie content (Horowitz, 1997). The FMPC had several reform-minded allies in its assault on the Hollywood system, including the Motion Picture Guild of America, the International Reform Federation, the Citizens League for Better Pictures, the Women's Cooperative Alliance, the Committee on Motion Pictures of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and the National Committee for the Study of Social Values in Motion Pictures (Horowitz, 1997).

The truth was, although Hays was President of the MPPDA, he had very little control over the content of motion pictures. As long as ticket sales were brisk for films that featured sex appeal, fallen women, gangsters, drinking and dancing, producers would continue to make films that appealed to the audiences of the day. Most producers and exhibitors disregarded Hays' suggestions regarding filmic content. But, on October 29, 1929, American life changed. The stock market crash capped off the Roaring Twenties

Motion Picture Council. This organization was committed to nationwide, governmentally-enforced, film content regulation.

and sent the country spiraling into the Great Depression. Box office lines were replaced with bread lines, and by 1931 box office returns had dropped by anywhere from 10 to 35% in most cities (Doherty, 1999). By 1932, more than a third of the nation's movie houses had gone dark (Doherty, 1999).

The Production Code

A combination of continued political pressure brought about by special interest groups and the early days of the Depression forced Hays and the MPPDA to take action in regard to movie content. The Hays Office adopted a new written set of guidelines for motion picture content called the Production Code. Authored by Father Daniel Lord, a Jesuit priest, and Martin Quigley, a prominent Roman Catholic layman and editor of the influential exhibitors' journal Motion Picture Herald, the Code was soon to become the blueprint for Hollywood films for decades to come. The document showed concern for the youth of America, as well as the protection of women, while seeking to uplift the lower orders and convert the criminal mentality through moral film making (Doherty, 1999).

The Code itself was divided into two parts.¹² The first was a set of "general principles" which could be seen as the moral vision of the authors (Doherty, 1999). The second part was "particular applications," consisting of a precise list of prohibited materials. The tone of the document was steeped in Catholic doctrine, but seemed to presume a broad constituency. Although the Code stated in more than one place that movies are merely entertainment, "without any explicit purpose of teaching or propaganda", the Code also recognized the "importance of entertainment in rebuilding the bodies and souls of human beings". According to the Code, "correct entertainment

¹² Refer to Appendix A for the full text of the 1930 Production Code, authored by Martin and Quigley.

raised the standard of a nation. Wrong entertainment lowered the whole living conditions and moral ideals of a race.” (Lord & Quigley, 1930). Furthermore, the Code states, “Art can be morally good, lifting men to higher levels. This has been done through good music, great painting, authentic fiction, poetry, drama. Art can be morally evil in its effects. This is the case clearly enough with unclear art, indecent books, suggestive drama. The effect on the lives of men and women are obvious”. Upon reading the Code, there is truly a sense that the authors believed that any right-thinking, commonsensical American would agree with its pronouncements and moral standards. There was very little protest from movie-going Americans concerning the Code. Yet, producers made very few changes to the content of Hollywood films during the first four years of the Production Code’s existence.

It is reported that Will Hays was delighted with the Code that Quigley and Lord had penned. He later wrote, “My eyes nearly popped out of my head. This was the very thing I had been looking for” (Leff & Simmons, 2001). Although the MPPDA was quick to approve the Production Code and pledge to abide by its dictates in order to circumvent government interference into the movie industry, it had little lasting effect on film makers of the early 1930’s. Colonel Jason Joy and Dr. James Wingate were the heads of the MPPDA’s Studio Relations Committee (Doherty, 1999). It seemed that neither of the two had the authority to enforce the Code. The structure of the regulatory process within the MPPDA was ineffectual. Although members of the MPPDA were required to submit their films for review, they could appeal unfavorable decisions by code administrators to the next level of executive authority (Doherty, 1999). That next level of authority was a committee of three West Coast film producers who came to be known as the Hollywood

Jury (Leff & Simmons, 2001). Therefore, according to a gentleman's agreement, material that violated either the letter or the spirit of the Code was generally allowed to pass through the release process and be exhibited in theatres nationwide.

The first several months after the Code's introduction, however, seemed promising to industry critics. Producers seemed to be submitting tamer fare in terms of subject matter. There were a series of press releases and statements from Hollywood insiders affiliated with the MPPDA that praised the Code. Will Hays stated publicly that the industry had traded in its postwar preoccupation with morbidity and crime for high minded historical dramas and literary classics (Leff & Simmons, 2001). But by the end of 1930, when box office attendance figures showed sharp declines, Hollywood studios realized they had to do more to promote movie-going during these difficult financial times. They could no longer count on the automatic audience they had become accustomed to during the Jazz Age.

By the end of 1930, Hollywood studios were bombarding movie houses with images of sex and violence in an attempt to regain lost box office profits. State and local censor boards worked overtime to make edits to the films that were released with MPPDA approval, ostensibly adhering to the Production Code. According to the records kept by New York censors, in 1930-1931, 468 cuts were made to films for indecency, 243 edits for inhuman acts, 1,129 for incitements to crime, and 1,165 cuts were made for "moral corruption" (Leff & Simmons, 2001). It was clear that the Hays Office was weak in enforcing the edicts of the Code and it was being largely ignored by studios (Ayoub, 1999).

Soon the public and moral crusaders alike began to question the efficacy of the Production Code. With so many objectionable movies in circulation during the early 1930's, complaints were heard not only outside the Hays Office, but inside as well. In 1933 Alice Winter, MPPDA public relations director, privately tendered her resignation. She explained to Hays her work seemed "quite useless...My hope of influencing standards has fizzled out." (Horowitz, 1997). She went on to state that the "constant flow" of sensationalistic films left her with "mental nausea about the whole situation, and a sense of my own inadequacy" (Horowitz, 1997).

The Catholic Church and the Legion of Decency

Although the Protestant Church had dominated movie reform efforts, the Roman Catholic Church was soon to take a leadership role in the war against motion pictures it regarded as inappropriate and morally degrading. Alarmed by the proliferation of sexually explicit dialogue in film, the Catholic Church formed the Legion of Decency in 1933. The church asked its followers to boycott all films except those that did not offend decency and Christian values. By the spring of 1934, Catholic bishops claimed to have gathered 11 million pledges made by parishioners to the Legion of Decency (Horowitz, 1997). The feelings of the Church could be summed up in the words of Cardinal Doherty in Philadelphia in May 1934 when he urged the city's 823,000 Catholics to boycott movies by calling them, "the greatest menace of faith and morals in America today...Experience has shown that one hour spent in the darkened recesses of a movie picture theater will often undo years of careful training on the part of the school, the church and the home" (Ayoub, 1996).

This new organization and their threatened economic boycott of the movie business forced the industry to take notice. No longer could the MPPDA ignore complaints about the content of films. This new group was hitting them where it hurt, in the pocketbook. During Sunday masses in Catholic churches nationwide, churchgoers took an oath to avoid objectionable movies. The pledge read as follows:

“I wish to join the Legion of Decency, which condemns vile and unwholesome moving pictures. I unite with all who protest against them as a grave menace to youth, to home life, to country, and to religion. I condemn absolutely those salacious motion pictures which, with other degrading agencies, are corrupting public morals and promoting a sex mania in our land. I shall do all that I can to arouse public opinion against the portrayal of vice as a normal condition of affairs, and against depicting criminals of any class as heroes and heroines, presenting their filthy philosophy of life as something acceptable to decent men and women. I unite with all who condemn the display of suggestive advertisements on billboards at theater entrances and the favorable notices given to immoral motion pictures. Considering these evils, I hereby promise to remain away from all motion pictures except those which do not offend decency and Christian morality. I promise further to secure as many members as possible for the Legion of Decency. I make this protest in a spirit of self-respect and with the conviction that the American public does not demand filthy pictures, but clean entertainment and educational features.” (Doherty, 1999:321)

Not only did Catholic priests ask parishioners to recite the pledge each Sunday, many parish priests kept vigil at local theater box offices to hold parishioners to their word (Doherty, 1999).

Ironically, the organization of the Legion of Decency could have been prevented by Hollywood industry leaders had they stuck more closely to the Production Code language written years earlier. As Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago wrote in a letter to his followers, “We believed we were dealing with moral gentlemen. We were mistaken. To them it [The Code] was just another scrap of paper.” (Doherty, 1999). Instead of appeasing the religious leaders of the era, Hollywood had inadvertently strengthened the fight against their own industry by uniting religious leaders of all denominations. In June

of 1934, the Federal Council of Churches asked Protestants to support the Legion of Decency's position, and Catheryne Gilman, motion picture chair of the PTA, toured 22 Eastern and Southern cities urging a national women's boycott of the movies, as well (Horowitz, 1997). The Legion's efforts were also supported by B'nai B'rith, the Knights of Columbus, the Masons and the Odd Fellows (Kurtz, 1994). They were also supported by several other religious leaders.

In addition to pressure from religious and social leaders, Hollywood was also feeling renewed political pressure from Washington. President Roosevelt was ready to sponsor federal censorship legislation through Congress as a part of his New Deal. The new administration was consolidating power in the capital in an attempt to end Hollywood's presentations of disorientation and despair in America during the Great Depression (Doherty, 1999). FDR wanted to focus on a new and better tomorrow, rather than the dismal present and past.

To top off the pressure being place on Hollywood, the Motion Picture Research Council as a part of the Payne Fund, issued the first results of its five year investigation into the effects of films on children. The study was summarized by Henry James Forman in his book Our Movie-Made Children, released in 1933. The book and study combined added "scientific proof" to the debate surrounding the movies and their possible negative effects to society's most at risk population, children. The studies themselves, conducted by reputable sociologists, psychologists and social psychologists, found that movies were only "one among many influences which mold the experience of children" (Springhall, 1998). Although self-reports from delinquent youth blamed gangster films for aspects of their behavior, the authors of the studies went no further than arguing that the influence

of movies was “specific for a given child and a given movie,” therefore it could not be said that films had an overarching effect on child behavior (Springhall, 1998). However, the book by Forman took phrases out of context, exaggerated incidences of child insomnia, excitability and other undesirable effects, while using sensationalistic language. Within four months the Forman book had gone through four printings and was widely read and reviewed. The book seemed to be the final nail in the coffin for carefree Hollywood moviemakers.

Joe Breen and the Production Code Administration

In an attempt to forestall boycott efforts, the MPPDA took drastic measures in July of 1934, completely reorganizing and restructuring. First, the Producers Appeal Board was abolished. Therefore, producers no longer had a free ride in their appeals process. Secondly, the Studio Relations Committee was replaced by the Production Code Administration, or the PCA. This new office would decide the fate of motion pictures and their content. The only line of redress producers would have would be to a court of appeals back in New York, which included the full board of directors of the MPPDA. The effect was that the authority was taken away from Hollywood moguls and placed in the hands of the organizations financiers (Doherty, 1999). As expected, these financial players tended to grant the PCA autonomy and power as to the content of U.S. released films.

The new leader of the PCA was Joseph I. Breen, an Irish Catholic who was both Jesuit educated and well-versed in the Hollywood studio system. Breen had been a newspaper man in Philadelphia and seemed to have a knack for working with both religious leaders and studio chiefs. Breen had been hired by Hays in 1931 to work on

public relations, but was never given the power to have much to say over the content of films. In his new role, Breen was given the power to confront studio moguls like Jack Warner, Louis Mayer and Samuel Goldwyn on an equal plane (Doherty, 1999). Some have called Breen a “chameleon,” with the ability to use “trench language” when he was hammering out a deal, but “at high mass, he would talk like the pope.” (Leff & Simmons, 2001).

From the day of Breen’s appointment as head of the PCA, studios were required to submit all screenplays to the office for recommendations on changes required by the Code (Kurtz, 1994). From that point forward, PCA clearance was required at several levels (Simmons, 1992). When film producers initially considered purchasing a product such as a novel, play or story treatment, the PCA had to review the product and give their approval. Later, a more detailed review of the shooting script was undertaken. When the picture was finished, a final review in the form of a screening occurred. If approved, the film would be certified by the PCA and would carry the PCA seal in the credits. Without the seal, most first run theatres would not exhibit the feature (Simmons, 1992). As the director of the PCA, Breen would no longer allow objectionable material outlined in the Production code to pass unnoticed. As Breen stated, “I am the Code,” meaning not that he had written the edict, but that he would enforce it to the letter (Kurtz, 1999). There is evidence that Breen saw the Code as a form of law. Breen believed the Code and the PCA acted as “a private judicial tribunal, duly insulated and empowered to interpret a set of fundamental laws, whose decisions even as the decisions of public courts, have the force of law for the industry and are carefully considered on adjudicating subsequent cases” (Moley, 1945). Accordingly, not only did Breen want to edit out indecent

dialogue and sexual and violent content from film, he wanted to remake American cinema into a force for good. The meaning of the picture had to be morally uplifting. Breen called it “compensating moral value,” meaning that “any theme must contain at least sufficient good in the story to compensate for, and to counteract, any evil which it relates” (Doherty, 1999). Because of Breen’s zeal and ferocity in enacting the Code’s edicts, many film historians see 1934 as the first year of the Code’s true implementation in Hollywood (Doherty, 1999; Leff & Simmons, 1992; Ayoub, 1994).

Suddenly, film content being released from Hollywood changed. Due to Breen’s watchdog behavior, the Hollywood style was in a state of flux. No longer could stories of gangsters and fallen women make their way past censors. Now, films were thoroughly screened to make sure they upheld the values and edicts of the Code. It is important, therefore, at this time to delve further into the restrictions implemented by the Production Code. I have already discussed some of the general principles and reasoning used to theorize the existence of the document, but I would now like to discuss in more detail the specific applications of the Code.

The first restriction of the Code prohibited crimes against the law, which meant that audience sympathy could never be thrown to the side of the criminal. This was thought to avoid instigating imitation. Murders were not allowed to be shown in detail, nor was revenge to be justified. Furthermore, methods of any crime could not be explicitly presented so as not to give the audience a guidebook allowing them to commit the same crime. Drug use and drug smuggling were strictly prohibited, as was the use of liquor, “when not required by the plot or for proper characterization” (Lord & Quigley, 1930).

The Code also states that the “sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing.” Adultery was always frowned upon under the Code, as were “excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures.” The Code also forbade the depiction of rape or seduction, miscegenation, the discussion of venereal disease, the depiction of childbirth (even in silhouette), and “sex perversion” or any interference to it. What constituted sex perversion was never clearly defined in the Code, but it is well known that homosexuality was one such “perversion” that was forbidden under the Code.

The Code also restricted the use of vulgarity, obscenity and profanity. Vulgarity was described as the treatment of “low, disgusting, unpleasant, though not necessarily evil, subjects.” Obscenity in “word, gesture, reference, song, joke or by suggestion (even when somewhat bawdy jokes that would be missed by children and only understood by adult members of the audience were disallowed, severely limiting the license of screenwriters. In terms of profanity, the words God, Lord, Jesus, and Christ were all forbidden, unless, of course, they were used reverently. Hell, S.O.B., damn and “gawd” were also disallowed under the Code.

The Production Code included a section on “costume” which forbade complete nudity, as well as nudity in fact or in silhouette. Indecent or undue exposure was forbidden, as were dancing or costumes “intended to permit undue exposure or indecent movement in the dance” (Lord & Quigley, 1930). Dance suggesting or representing sexual actions or “indecent passions” were nixed, also. The authors elaborated that certain dances, “tend to excite the emotional reaction of an audience; dances with

movement of the breasts, excessive body movements while the feet are stationary, violate decency and are wrong” (Lord & Quigley, 1930).

Seeing as the authors of the Code were deeply religious men, there was another section of the Code dedicated to the treatment of religion. The main theme of the edicts in this section was that no religious faith could be ridiculed in any film, nor could ministers of religion be used as either comic characters or villains. The authors wrote, “religion is lowered in the minds of the audience because of the lowering of the audience’s respect for a minister” (Lord & Quigley, 1930). In this sense, the authors of the Code shared the feelings of Major Funkhouser of Chicago who edited films to protect the public image of the police force. Both felt that film could have a great effect on public opinion and beliefs.

Under the direction of Joe Breen, the PCA began to mend fences with religious leaders and special interest groups. Threats of federal regulation began to disappear in late 1934, as did the threat of Catholic boycotts. The Federal council of Churches commended the work of the PCA and Pope Pius XI noted the improved moral content of American films (Leff & Simmons, 2001). The Pope went on to praise Catholic vigilance as the reason for the industry’s new found moral center. It is important to note that Catholics and the Legion of Decency specifically, were still “rating” Hollywood movies. Films were rated “A” which meant “morally unobjectionable,” “B” which was “morally objectionable,” or “C,” which was positively “bad” (Leff & Simmons, 2001). From 1934-1936, the number of C movies fell dramatically (Leff & Simmons, 2001). It was Breen’s opinion that all Hollywood movies should be rated with an “A” by the church.

During Breen's early run as head of the PCA, he ordered severe cuts to many studio scripts and finished products, and he also prevented the re-release of several films produced in the early thirties. Because it was now much tougher for a studio to get approval for a script, and later, to get approval for release of films, there was a dearth of films being distributed across the U.S. Several theaters found they had no feature films to run. For that reason, many studios tried to re-release "classics" to fill the entertainment void. Breen, however, found many films that the Studio Relations Committee thought were acceptable, totally unacceptable. For this reason, many gangster films and fallen women movies of the early thirties were not allowed past the censor boards.

Breen continued as the watchdog of filmic content for two decades.¹³ Filmic content changed on a dime when Breen took over as the head of the PCA, and his influence was long lived. Scholars have differing opinions as to when the Production Code ceased being effective at controlling the content of film. However there were several legal and social challenges to the Code during its long history.

The Demise of the Production Code

One of the bruising blows to Breen's unwavering enforcement of the Production Code was the 1948 *Paramount v. United States* decision. Up until this decision was handed down by the nation's highest court, the motion picture industry held a high level of stability and control through their vertically integrated system. The "Big 5," consisting of MGM, Warner Borthers, RKO, Paramount, and Fox, were fully integrated across all three vertical stages, including production, distribution and exhibition (Litman, 1998). Beyond this, none of the five companies was self-sufficient. At the exhibition

¹³ Breen served as President of the PCA from 1934-1954.

level, studios owned large groups of theaters, but they tended to be clustered in specific geographic areas. Therefore, none of the studios could exhibit a film nationally by themselves. That meant reliance on other circuits for nationwide exhibition (Litman, 1998). This structure allowed the industry to fix prices and utilize block booking. This meant that the big studios could control admission prices, as well as tie inferior pictures to exhibition deals for superior films (Litman, 1998).

This structure worked well for the PCA, because the major studios, who were members of the PCA, could control the flow of films. There were very few independent distributors or exhibitors, so there were, in turn, very few theaters that would touch a film that did not have the PCA seal of approval. This vertical integration allowed the Code's edicts to thrive.

In 1948 that vertical integration was brought to a halt by the Supreme Court. The Court ruled that the major studios were in breach of anti-trust statutes due to their industry structure. The Court found the defendants' market share to be 60 to 70 percent, clearly within the region of a shared monopoly. The Court required a structural rather than procedural solution, suggesting the lower court vertically divest the exhibition circuits from the production-distribution holdings (Litman, 1998). Theater chains were no longer tied directly to the major film studios. This meant less control for the producers of film over what was exhibited to the public and made enforcement of the Code's dictates more precarious.

The changes within the film industry and the maturation of the film form led to a greater push by writers, producers and directors to produce "their" films, free from censorship (Roth, 2000). In turn, legal and social currents began to slowly chip away at

the power of Joseph Breen and the Production Code. Another blow to the PCA's version of film censorship was dealt by the Supreme Court in 1952. In *Burstyn, Inc. v. Wilson* (1952), the court explicitly overruled the 1915 decision, finding motion pictures had become, "a significant medium for the communication of ideas." (*Burstyn, Inc. v. Wilson*, 1952). This court case, better known as the "Miracle Case," brought movies under the First Amendment, but with some limitations. The Court stopped short of saying any and all forms of censorship of the medium were unconstitutional. The case revolves around a film directed by Roberto Rossellini titled *The Miracle*. The state of New York's board of censors had revoked the film's license on grounds of sacrilege. The film told the story of a peasant woman who is plied with drink and is seduced by a vagabond she mistakes in her drunken state for St. Joseph. The Catholic Church was outraged by the film and Legion of Decency members picketed showings of the film outside a Manhattan theater (Heins, 2002). Francis Cardinal Spellman of the New York Archdiocese called the film "vile and harmful," and insulting to "Christian faith and Italian womanhood," as well as suggesting communist leanings within the film (Heins, 2002).

The film's distributor took the State to court, arguing the sacrilege standard was "vague and subjective" (Heins, 2002). The state courts rejected the arguments, citing the 1915 ruling. However, the Supreme Court reversed their long-standing precedent when the case finally made it to the highest court, ruling that film was indeed protected by the First Amendment. The Court cited three main reasons for their reversal of the 1915 decision in regard to allowing film constitutional protection. First, they wrote that, "It cannot be doubted that motion pictures are a significant medium for the communication of ideas." They rejected the idea of the 1915 Court that being a medium designed to

entertain as well as inform lessened their importance as an “organ of public opinion.” Secondly, the Court made it clear that the fact the film industry is a large scale business does not prevent motion pictures from being a form of expression. Thirdly, the Court struck down the idea that film should be denied First Amendment protection based on the idea it may possess a greater capacity for evil. The Court also ruled that “sacrilege” was not a permissible censorship standard, calling it too vague, setting the censor, “adrift upon a boundless sea amid a myriad of conflicting currents of religious views, with no charts but those provided by the most vocal and powerful orthodoxies.”

The Production Code was weakened by this ruling, but not rendered obsolete. One reason is that this ruling did not limit *self*-regulation of film content. Self regulation over a broad range of content poses no first Amendment challenges as long as the regulations are not the product of government coercion (Siegel, 2002). Also, the Court left open the question of whether states could impose prior censorship under a law designed to prevent “the showing of obscene films.” (Heins, 2002) Therefore, state and local film censorship boards remain legal in the United States.

By the 1950s, American society was changing. Television had burst upon the scene in 1950, bringing new competition to the film industry. Rather than leave the house and pay admission to a movie, audiences could stay home and watch television for free. The film industry saw a decline in box office revenues, prompting them to rethink ways in which they could market movies to this new American society. One solution was to make content more realistic. Films needed to differentiate themselves from the television fare, and adding more vivid depictions of social issues was one way to accomplish that goal.

Some studios moved to big blockbuster films, utilizing wide screen and stereo sound systems (Simmons, 1997). In 1953, Twentieth Century Fox released *The Robe*, which grossed more than \$20 million in its opening run, signaling a revitalization of the industry (Simmons, 1997). Another trend in the early fifties was an increase in the release of adult-aimed films released on fewer screens nationwide (Simmons, 1997). These relatively inexpensive films actually equaled the profit margins of some of the big blockbusters using a quiet appeal to audiences that did not include children. From *Here to Eternity*, *Moulin Rouge*, *On The Waterfront*, *The Bare Contessa* and others cemented the popularity of these adult-driven films. In 1953, Otto Preminger's *The Moon Is Blue* was released by United Artists without the PCA seal, a first since Joe Breen had taken control of the PCA. Three independent theatre chains booked the movie, and the PCA's stranglehold on American film was suddenly broken (Simmons, 1997).

Geoffrey Shurlock and the PCA's New Direction

It is important to note that despite the groundbreaking release of The Moon Is Blue, the Code did not disappear overnight. Instead, the Code underwent a series of incremental changes over the next decade. One of the more noteworthy changes to the PCA came in 1954 when PCA President Joseph Breen officially retired due to illness. His replacement was the mild-mannered Geoffrey Shurlock, the man who had been Breen's second-in-command since the early 1930s (Simmons, 1997). Many in the industry were pleased with the choice of Shurlock as the new PCA boss due to his reputation as willing to compromise with filmmakers on issues of film content.¹⁴ Many believed this would lead to more liberal interpretation of the Code's guidelines. After all,

¹⁴ Shurlock was the Production Code Administration President from 1954-1966.

Shurlock had advocated granting *The Moon Is Blue* a PCA seal. However, Shurlock accepted the premise that children needed to be protected from the “corrosive influences of an unregulated screen” (Simmons, 1994). He was therefore, unwilling to completely do away with the Code. Shurlock drafted a package of minor amendments to the existing Code, hoping to remove some of the document’s most dated elements. Some of the items proposed for elimination were prohibitions of “farmer’s daughter” and “traveling salesman” jokes, bans on themes of miscegenation and smuggling, and previously off-limits terms such as “alley cat” and “nerts” (Simmons, 1997). The proposed changes were minor, yet the conservative PCA board of directors still balked at acting in any way that would make it appear as if they were caving into pressure. They also knew the Legion of Decency would oppose any liberalization of the Code. Therefore, the amendments were tabled.

Soon a new battle was raging in Hollywood that centered around the use of the words “hell” and “damn,” both of which were strictly forbidden under the Code unless used in an historically accurate setting. Major studios were becoming impatient with these prohibitions, which they considered archaic. To fight the rule, the studios banded together and began appealing nearly every decision the PCA made concerning the two words. In September of 1954, the MPA’s board of directors caved in to the pressure and approved the package of amendments proposed by Shurlock, along with the provision that the use of “hell” and “damn” should be “governed by the discretion and prudent advice of the Code Administration” (Simmons, 1997).

Changes to the Code continued. In 1956, Preminger’s film *The Man with the Golden Arm* was not granted a PCA seal, due to its depictions of drug use in the film.

United Artists resigned from the PCA in protest. The result was major change to the Code. Provisions preventing the screen depictions of narcotics addiction, kidnapping, childbirth, prostitution, and abortion were all done away with in 1956 (Simmons, 1997).

By the early 1960s, screenwriters and directors were often ignoring the Code's edicts altogether, arguing that it was their prerogative to make the film they wanted to make. Although cuts were still made to some films, others were released without the PCA's approval and seemed to experience no negative effects at the box office. Americans were soon experiencing a counter-cultural revolution, sexuality was more open, birth control was more readily available, and families were abandoning major cities in droves to move to the suburbs. All of these changes in American life led to the ineffectiveness of the Code as originally drafted.

The Motion Picture Association of America Rating System

It was in 1968 that the Code was officially thrown out for a new age-based system of ratings. New Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) President Jack Valenti was quick to move away from a system that literally edited the content of films, to a system that allowed a wide range of filmic content while limiting its audience.

Part of the reasoning behind this new system of ratings was *Ginsberg v. New York* (1968). In this case, the Supreme Court held that a New York statute proscribing the sale of obscene magazines to minors did not invade First Amendment protections guaranteed to minors (Dalal, 2001). Specifically, the Court found that the magazines were not obscene from an adult perspective, but established a different obscenity standard for children (Dalal, 2001). The opinion of the Court allowed the State power to adjust the definition of obscenity as applied to minors, for even where there is an invasion of

protected freedoms, because “the power of the state to control the conduct of children reaches beyond the scope of its authority over adults” (*Ginsberg v. New York*, 390 U.S. 629, 1968). This opened the door to a resurgence of city and state regulations prohibiting the exhibition of films to children. A worst case scenario would have involved every state in the country (or every major city) writing different policies, rendering nationwide distribution of films nearly impossible.

For this reason, MPAA President Jack Valenti implemented the Voluntary Movie Rating System in 1968. According to Valenti, he 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.” (Valenti, 1996:2).

The system began with three ratings, “G,” “M,” and “R,” but the “X” rating was soon added to the system due to legal concerns stemming from the *Ginsberg v. New York* decision. This “X” rating was the “adults only” category and was originally meant to protect the MPAA and its members from litigation involving obscenity and children. According to Valenti, “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 the state or local law.” (Valenti, 1996:3). All of the MPAA ratings were trademarked, except for the X.

Whereas the Catholic Church and its Legion of Decency played a central role in the development and authorship of the Production Code, the new film rating system was

influenced only peripherally by the religious community. As Valenti worked on the new age-based content ratings, he consulted with a variety of groups, including the Catholic Church's Office of Film and Broadcasting (Allen, 2006). Both William Fore, director of the film office for the National Council of Churches, and Patrick J. Sullivan, director of the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures were in close contact with Valenti (Wall, 2006).

In 1968, the two national church bodies officially endorsed the new MPAA system. Both Fore and Sullivan were asked to serve as "witnesses," attending appeals of rating decisions (Wall, 2006). This tradition continues today. Two representatives appointed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Council of Churches "witness" rating appeals. Although the appeals panel meets eight to ten times per year, these religious leaders report they attend no more than five appeals per year, due to the expense and time commitments involved (Allen, 2006). The current representative from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops is Harry Forbes, who came to work for the US bishops as their in-house film critic in 2004 after years of service as a New York drama critic (Allen, 2006). David DiCerto, Forbes' colleague, sometimes fills in for Forbes. Forbes is quoted as saying, "We observe, we don't contribute to the conversation. We're not asked for an opinion." (Allen, 2006).¹⁵ The National Council of Churches' representative is James Wall, a representative from the United Methodist Church. Wall has served in this capacity since 1993 (Wall, 2006).

Changes to the Rating System

¹⁵ It is unclear why the religious leaders are asked to participate if they are not allowed to actively participate in the decision-making. This could be seen as a way for the MPAA to remain in the religious establishment's good graces. However, it could also be seen as pandering to established religious leaders.

Although Valenti spent several months developing the new age-based rating system, it was soon found to be flawed in various ways. Although there were no major changes in the first several years, there were minor improvements to the system. The M rating was soon changed by the MPAA, due to confusion on the part of film patrons. The M, which stood for Mature, was taken by many to mean the movie was for adults, when it really just referred to films that were more “mature” than children’s films. The M was changed to “GP,” (guidance of parents) then, one year later, to “PG”, which stood for “parental guidance suggested”.¹⁶

The PG-13 Rating Debuts

From 1968 through July 1, 1984, no major changes were made to the MPAA’s rating system. It was on this date the MPAA decided to add a new rating, the PG-13, to its system. This change was precipitated by a public outcry regarding violent content in two major 1984 summer blockbusters, both of which were rated PG. *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, directed by Steven Spielberg, was seen by many parents as much too violent and aggressive for a PG rating upon its May 23rd release. Meanwhile, the movie *Gremlins*, directed by Joe Dante and executive produced by Steven Spielberg, was released in early June of 1984. Both films received PG ratings, though many critics have argued that without the influential Spielberg, both films would have received R ratings (Clifford, 2005). Spielberg himself takes credit for the birth of the PG-13 rating. “I created the problem and I also supplied the solution...I invented the rating”, said Spielberg (Breznican, 2004). The PG-13 rating kept children 12 years or younger from attending such films without a parent or guardian present.

¹⁶ This change was made due to misunderstanding by parents as to the rating’s meaning

The problem most parents had with the PG rating was that it lumped together all children under the age of 18. Therefore, infants and 16-year-olds were seen to be appropriate audience members for a PG film. While many complained of the violence in both *Gremlins* and *Indiana Jones*, Spielberg disagreed that the films should have R-ratings. Dante, the director of *Gremlins*, blames his film's promotional materials for the misunderstanding regarding the film's content. The commercials focused mainly on Gizmo, the film's real star, a cute, teddy-bear looking "Mogwai," which multiplies in water. What the promos didn't allude to was the gritty, murderous troublemakers that were created when Gizmo was exposed to water (Breznican, 2004). Dante told the AP, "...the idea of taking a 4-year old to see 'Gremlins' thinking it's going to be a cuddly, funny animal movie and then seeing that it turns into a horror picture, I think people were upset. They felt like they had been sold something family friendly and it wasn't entirely family friendly." (Breznican, 2004).

The MPAA was under pressure to find a way to limit this type of content for little children, while still attracting adults and teenagers. Spielberg suggested a solution. "I went to Jack Valenti, who's a friend of mine, and I said, 'Jack, why don't we do a rating called PG-13, which would suit films like "Gremlins" and Indy 2"?' (Breznican, 2004). Valenti took the idea to the National Association of Theater Owners, Hollywood's writer, actor and director guilds, the studio bosses, and assorted religious organizations. All agreed that the split was most sensible at the age of 13. Valenti believed this was the age when most kids knew the difference between fantasy and reality. (Breznican, 2004).

According to the MPAA film rating guidelines, the PG-13 is a "sterner" warning to parents, particularly when deciding which films are appropriate viewing for younger children (mpaa.org). The rating explicitly states, "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” (MPAA.org).

The first PG-13 rated film was released on August 10th, 1984. *Red Dawn* was a movie about a Communist invasion and the high school-aged rebels that fight back.

Technically, the first film to be assigned a PG-13 was the Matt Dillon film *The Flamingo Kid*, but it was shelved for several months before being released, therefore clearing the way for *Red Dawn* to introduce the new rating to the United States.

While the rating originated as an extra warning to parents, it has become the rating of choice for several film studios and producers. According to Spielberg, “In a way, it’s better to get a PG-13 than a PG for certain movies. Sometimes PG, unless it’s for an animated movie, it turns a lot of young people off. They think it’s going to be too below their radar and they tend to say, ‘Well, PG-13 might have a little bit of hot sauce on it.’” (Breznican, 2004). Joe Dante agrees, adding “an older child will *not* watch anything a younger child will watch, but a younger child will watch *anything* that an older child will watch” (Breznican, 2004). Therefore, the rating was turned into a marketing tool by promising edge without offensiveness (Breznican, 2004). The PG rating, meanwhile, might be read as bland or boring by a teen audience, the mainstay of film promoters and marketers. Dante went on to explain, “Kids don’t want to feel like they’re seeing pap. People will go out of the their way to put one dirty word in it [the film] just to get the rating that they need to give the picture some legitimacy, so the kids won’t feel like they’re going to see their little brother’s movie” (Breznican, 2004).

The NC-17 Rating

The final change to the rating system came in 1990, when the X rating was abandoned, and the NC-17 rating was born. This change was due to protests by filmmakers worldwide that the X rating had come to be stigmatized as merely pornography. Due to the fact the X rating was never trademarked by the MPAA, the adult film industry was free to brand their sexually explicit films with the “X” (or “XXX” to signify even more sordid fare), despite the fact they had never submitted their films to CARA to officially be assigned that rating. Most adult film distributors chose to forego the cost of submitting films to CARA and instead self-imposed the X, taking advantage of the rating’s “forbidden” quality (Sandler, 2001). As a result, X rated fare swiftly became synonymous with pornography.

Although Jack Valenti originally saw the X rating as simply an adults only category that described the type of film most parents would not want their children to view, he admitted that the rating seemed to have taken on a “surly meaning” in the minds of many (Valenti, 1996:3). A former member of the CARA rating board, Stephen Farber, agreed with Valenti’s assessment of the problems associated with the X rating. In his book *The Movie Rating Game*, Farber argued:

“Perhaps the board’s original intention was to create a category for artistically valid adult films that simply happened to be unusually graphic by current community standards. The public has come to take the X rating as more than a description of a film’s maturity. The X is interpreted as a moral and aesthetic condemnation partly because the X is the one open-ended category, in which any film, even a stag film, can be placed, but also because X films do not carry the MPAA seal, and because the people in the MPAA are themselves confused about the meaning of this rating.” (Farber, 1972:46).

The rating was originally meant to allow filmmakers more artistic expression and met with some critical success in the late 1960s and early 1970s when respectable and award winning films such as *The Killing of Sister George* (1968), *Midnight Cowboy*

(1969), and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) were released with the X rating. *Midnight Cowboy* won the Academy Award for Best Picture, despite its X rated status. However, once pornographers latched onto the X to advertise both hardcore and softcore pornographic films, movie audiences associated the X with pornography. Therefore, the NC-17 rating replaced the X as a way to distinguish adult-oriented films that might not be appropriate for a young audience from outright pornography.

Looking back, there seemed to be more than a sudden realization on Valenti's part that the X had a "surly" meaning to account for the switch to the NC-17 rating. According to Charles Taylor in his article "X Marks the Spot," most of 1990 consisted of one battle or another over MPAA ratings (Taylor, 1991). Two of them, Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* and Pedro Almodovar's *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* were released by Miramax in the United States. Miramax decided to fight the X ratings, rather than re-edit the films for a less restrictive R rating. Miramax brought in attorney William Kuntsler to file suit against the MPAA. Although New York State Supreme Court Justice Charles E. Ramos refused to hear the suit, his ruling found "the present system of rating motion pictures...is an effective form of censorship," and, "anathema to our Constitution." (Miramax Films Corp v. Motion Picture Association of America, Inc, 1990). Miramax argued in the proceedings that the MPAA was biased against independent film distributors and foreign films. Ramos found no substantiation to the studio's claim, but added that if such a discriminatory practice could be substantiated, a claim could be made based upon restraint of trade.

Despite Ramos' favorable ruling on the side of the MPAA, he was less than complimentary of the organization. In fact, Ramos took the MPAA to task for their lack of specific standards, writing

"The standard is not scientific. There are no physicians, child psychiatrists or child care professionals on the board, nor is any professional guidance sought to advise the board members regarding any relative harm to minor children. No effort is made to professionally advise the board members on the impact of a depiction of violent rape on the one hand and an act of love on the other, nor is any distinction made between levels of violence" (Miramax Films Corp v. MPAA).

Ramos further criticized the MPAA's use of the "average American parent" as its standard for ratings decisions, calling it a marketing standard rather than a standard that quantified potential harm to children (Miramax Films Corp v. MPAA).

One week after Ramos' ruling, a group of filmmakers met and wrote a letter to the MPAA urging a new rating to denote serious films with adult themes. The letter was signed by several top-name directors, including Bernardo Bertolucci, Ron Howard, Spike Lee and Michael Apted.¹⁷ Valenti's response was to say he would look into it (Taylor,

¹⁷ The text of that open letter read follows. "At a time when all artists' rights to free speech and expression are in peril, we the undersigned believe that the artistic freedom and integrity of American filmmakers are being compromised by the outdated and unfair rating system whose practices have and will continue to result in the defacto censorship of their work. The 'X' rating, originally conceived to indicate that a film contains mature and/or adult material and should not be viewed by children, has come to be universally recognized as pertaining simply to pornography. As a consequence, an 'X' rated or unrated film is denied exhibition in thousands of cinemas nationwide, display advertising is forbidden by a growing number of major metropolitan newspapers, and radio and television advertising in most markets is not available at all for films that are not rated either G, PG, PG-13 or R by your organization. We believe that it is imperative that the MPAA correct this problem by creating a new letter rating that will more fairly reflect the association's original intentions with regard to adult-themed fare. While the MPAA maintains that its Classification and Rating Administration does not censor films or force filmmakers to censor their films, the taint of an 'X' rating clearly results in massive and arbitrary corporate censorship. Failure to address this problem will help foster a new era of "McCarthyism" in the arts as during the '50s when the networks claimed it was not they who blacklisted artists, but the sponsors. We therefore strongly suggest that a new rating of 'A' or 'M' be incorporated into the system to indicate that a film contains strong adult themes or images and that minors are not to view them. This is not a compromise between art and commerce, it is an essential action designed to protect the United States Constitution. It is an issue as important as film preservation; in fact, it is film preservation." The letter appeared in DailyVariety on July 24, 1990.

1991). Later, Universal Studios' *Henry and June* was assigned an X rating. Universal Chairman Tom Pollack maintained his company's stance that did not allow release of an X-rated film, but made it clear he would appeal the rating. Meanwhile, independent film studio MPI filed suit against the MPAA on the grounds that the X rating given to their film *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* was unjust. MPI's Vice President told Billboard, "We maintain the film is an R film and that we've been materially damaged by an unfair ratings system" (Sweeting, 1990). Thus, under pressure from major studio executives and some of the most powerful directors in the industry, the MPAA introduced the NC-17 rating in the fall of 1990. The NC-17 rating was the same standard as the former X rating, but with a new name. NC-17 stood for no children 17 and under allowed, which meant that no one under the age of 18 could see a film, regardless of whether they were accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Filmmakers and MPAA officials hoped the new rating would be free from the stigma of pornography. However, sixteen years later, very few films have been financially successful that have been released with the most restrictive rating (Roth, 2000). Furthermore, most filmmakers are forced to meet a minimum rating clause in their contracts, which bars the production of NC-17 films (Maltby & Craven, 1995). Many argue the intended effect of the rating, to destigmatize adult oriented films, never came to fruition (Jimenez, 2001).

The MPAA rating board

A common question asked by those interested in the film rating system administered by the MPAA and CARA is, who rates individual films (Dick, 2006)? They answer might come as a surprise. The identities of these rating board members are kept

in the strictest confidence, so as to disallow any tampering by studio heads or interested parties. According to Classification and Ratings Administration Chair Joan Graves, this secrecy is done in part to prevent harassment, but makes it clear that “Keeping raters’ names private is quite a different thing than having a secret system. Our system is not secret” (First Amendment Center, 2006). Despite the tight lid kept on raters’ identities, some basic information is available. The 10 to 13 member rating board meets in two screening rooms in Encino, California, and is paid an undisclosed annual salary for a three-to-five year position on the ratings board (First Amendment Center, 2006). The only requirements to be a member of the rating body is that the individual be a parent and live within commuting distance of the Encino screening rooms. Child psychology or behavioral experts are not sought after, in fact, they’re not really wanted at all. “The ideal person is out in the community getting feedback from other parents. We don’t want hermits. We don’t want anybody with a cause... We’re looking for parents with solid judgment who want to raise healthy kids and know that a lot goes into it” (First Amendment Center, 2006). The MPAA’s website is in agreement with Graves’ assessment of the raters, stating “There are no special qualifications for Board membership, except that the members must have a shared parenthood experience, must be possessed of an intelligent maturity, and most of all, have the capacity to put themselves in the role of most American parents so they can view a film and apply a rating that most parents would find suitable and helpful in aiding their decisions about their children and what movies they see” (mpaa.org).

The raters go through a screening process that relies on referrals from parent-teacher organizations and other related groups. Graves says she seeks a balance in

gender and ethnicity, but no data is available on the demographic make-up of the current (nor past) rating boards (First Amendment Center, 2006). Both Graves and the MPAA website say they try to represent a diversity of parents from all areas of the country, from big cities to small towns. However, there is no explanation of how these parents are able to meet in the Los Angeles area on a regular basis to review the films.

Technically, the raters work for CARA, which is funded through fees charged to film producers to have their film rated. A typical day means screening three movies, using a preliminary ratings ballot that asks whether a film should be given an unrestricted rating for children under 17 (G, PG, or PG-13) or a restricted rating (R or NC-17). Members are asked to jot down their reasoning behind their decision. Ballots are counted and a majority vote results in a proposed rating, with Graves serving as a tiebreaker when necessary (First Amendment Center, 2006).¹⁸ In total, the rating board evaluates nearly 1000 films per year. Filmmakers who submit their film for a rating have the following options. They may accept the rating, ask for guidance in achieving a less-restrictive rating, or take their case to an industry appeals board made up of exhibitors and distributors. Non-MPAA members can release films unrated, but these films cannot be exhibited at MPAA-member theaters. In 2005, nearly 920 films were submitted for ratings; eight were appealed, and two of the ratings were overturned (First Amendment Center, 2006)

¹⁸ Not all raters rate every film. However, no statistics or raw data can be found as to how many raters actually vote on the assigned rating for each film.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Past quantitative research on mediated content ratings

Several past studies of content based film rating systems have utilized content analysis. While some have investigated specific types of content, such as violence (Monk-Turner et al, 2004; Yokota & Thompson, 2000; Cantor & Reilly, 1982) or sex (Bufkin & Eschholz, 2000; Bryant, 1985), others have looked at the overall effectiveness or stringency of the system itself (Thompson & Yokota, 2004; Leone, 1999).

Leone (2002) conducted a content analysis of 210 sequences from 13 films. These sequences were present in the Unrated and NC-17 rated versions films, but not R-rated versions of the same films. Leone's findings supported his hypothesis that more sexual content would be found in those sequences than violent content, pointing to the MPAA's tougher stance on sexual content than on violent content (Leone, 2002). The findings support the idea that the MPAA requires more sexually related content to be cut from films when trying to receive a less restrictive rating, in comparison to violent content. What is unclear is whether this is consistent with parental preferences. Do parents actually find sexual content more offensive or harmful than violent content in films?

Critical attention has been paid to perceived double-standards within the MPAA rating system, but few studies have directly addressed this issue (Wilson, Linz & Randall, 1990; Linz, Wilson & Donnerstein, 1992; Leone 1999). The double standard that most researches addressed was that depictions of sexuality are more apt to be censored or restricted than violent behavior. Although this double standard is sometimes assumed in

research (Wilson, Linz & Randall, 1990; Linz, Wilson & Donnerstein, 1992) to be a societal standard, as well as a regulatory standard, some research has contradicted this view. Fisher, Cook and Shirkey (1994) surveyed adult Florida residents by phone and asked if they would support a ban on various forms of violent, sexual or sexually violent media materials. Over 70% supported a ban on sexually violent media, approximately half of the sample supported censorship of violent material, but only one-third supported a ban on non-violent sexually explicit movies (Fisher, Cook & Shirkey, 1994).

Violence

Violence and its possible effects on children in particular is a popular topic of study. While many researchers point to effects of violent content in the media, there are disagreements as to what those effects might be. Liebert and Schwartzberg (1977) found direct imitation and disinhibition to be primary effects, while Harold (1986) found three primary effects, including learned behaviors, incitement of violent acts, and catharsis. Learning was also cited by the National Television Violence Study (1997, 1998) as an effect of exposure to violent media products, with desensitization and fear being additional effects. Imitation is cited as a negative effect of violent media content in several studies (Liebert and Schwartz berg, 1977; Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs, and Roberts, 1978; Condry, 1989; Gunther, 1994). Several respectable health organizations have gone on record voicing their concerns that exposure to media violence presents a risk of harmful effects on children. These groups include the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Academy of Sciences, the American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics (Rabkin, 2002). However, other experts oppose this assessment, finding no mediated effect on behavior based on

exposure to violent content (Rabkin, 2002). The September 2000 FTC report acknowledged that there were an abundant number of studies on both sides of the issue (FTC, 2001).

Studies on violent media content tend to focus on three general age groupings, children, adolescents (13-18 years of age), and adults, with children being the focus of the most studies. Researchers have studied kids as young as three years old (Bandura & Menlove, 1968; Friedrich & Stein, 1973; Gadow, Sprafkin & Ficarrotto, 1987; Hoffner & Cantor, 1985; Rosekrans & Hartup, 1967), but participants are often of elementary school age (Atkin et al., 1979; Cairns, 1990; Hawkins & Pingree, 1981). Adolescents have also received attention from researchers (Carlson, 1983; Lynn, Hanpson & Agahi, 1989; McIntyre & Teevan, 1972). Some of the studies involving adult participants use male college undergraduate students (Hearold, 1986), although some studies have dealt with other adult populations (Gunter & Furnham, 1984; Leyens, Cisneros, & Hossay, 1976; Speisman, Lazarus, Mordkoff & Davison, 1964; Loye, Gorney & Steele, 1977).

Research has found that a large percentage of children (75%) reported being scared by something they saw on television or in a movie (Wilson, Hoffner & Cantor, 1987). However, Cantor and Reilly (1982) found that parents' estimates of the frequency of their children's fright reactions to media were significantly lower than their children's self reports. Sparks (1986) conducted in-depth interviews of children to determine kids' exposure to films of specific ratings. Almost half of the 4- to 10- year olds interviewed had seen the PG rated films *Poltergeist* and *Jaws*, while many had also seen R-rated horror films such as *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*. This finding implies that children might be more affected by frightening images in film than parents are aware of. It also

suggests that MPAA age-based guidelines are not strictly enforced at some level, whether that be enforcement by theater owners, video store clerks, or parents themselves.

Several content analyses have dealt with the presence of violent content in films and the way that violence is depicted. Donnerstein, Linz and Penrod (1987) determined that sex in “slasher” films was suggestive rather than explicit, but that the violence was often graphically displayed and was overwhelmingly directed at women. Other studies have investigated the depiction of violence toward women in the “slasher” genre. While some challenge the assertion that this genre’s violence is focused mainly on women, results of content analyses show that female victims are indeed shown to suffer for longer periods of time on screen than do their male counterparts (Cowan & O’Brien, 1990; Weaver, 1991; Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993). Milburn, Mather and Conrad (2000) studied the impact of sexualized images of women in film and attitudes toward rape. Participants viewed either nonviolent scenes that objectified and degraded women sexually or scenes from an animation festival. In a second experiment, participants then read a fictitious magazine account of a date rape or a stranger rape. Results indicated a significant three-way interaction among gender, video condition, and rape scenario on perceptions of the rape, such that males who viewed the sexually objectifying video felt that the victim in the date-rape condition experienced pleasure and “got what she wanted” (Milburn, Mather and Conrad, 2000). Such research indicates a correlation between fictionalized depictions of violence against women and real-life attitudes toward such violence. If true, this indicates the possible harmful effects of violent content in film.

A content analysis of popular 1990s horror films found a rise in the number of violent scenes when compared to horror films of the 1980s (Sapolsky, Molitor and

Luque, 2003). It was also noted that the more recent slasher films rarely mix scenes of sex and violence, and men were more often portrayed as victims (Sapolsky, Molitor and Luque, 2003). However, the ratio of females as victims in these slasher films is higher than in other commercially successful film genres, and women are depicted “in fear” for longer periods of time than their male counterparts (Sapolsky, Molitor and Luque, 2003).

Studies regarding media violence have not limited themselves to studying R-rated films. A content analysis undertaken by Harvard’s School of Public Health found that G-rated animated films averaged nearly 10 minutes of violent content per film, or approximately 11.8% of the average film’s length (Yokota & Thompson, 2000). A total of 74 G-rated feature films available for rental were included in the sample, of which 46 included scenes in which at least one character was injured. In 37 of the films a character was killed. Every film included at least one violent scene (Yokota & Thompson, 2000).

Ratings Creep

Leone and Osborn (2004) looked closely at the PG-13 rating by doing a content analysis of ratings descriptions used by the MPAA to explain why the PG-13 rating was assigned to movies released between 2000 and 2002. They found that adult content in PG-13 rated films had increased, with a marginal increase in sexual content from 2001 to 2002. Violent content was described as more “intense” over the three-year time span (Leone and Osborn, 2004). This could be indicative of the phenomenon known as ratings “creep,” in which it is believed specific types of content are rated less restrictively over time. A content analysis of American war movies from four decades (1970-2002) found that films released since 1990 contained more violence and gore compared to earlier films (Monk-Turner et al, 2002). Potts and Belden (2005) examined movie justifications

from the movies released between 1993 and 2003, finding an increase in occurrences of sexuality and language descriptions in PG-13 movies, and a decrease in use of 'mild' to describe violent content in PG movies. No changes were observed in R movie descriptions (Potts & Belden, 2005). Such studies are important in determining whether rating criteria remain constant or if they change through time. Ratings creep is feared by some critics, who believe that the MPAA's standards have become more permissive as the years pass, allowing more objectionable content to be seen by younger audience members.

Thompson and Yokota (2004) compared content based scores for different movie rating systems, including the MPAA ratings, *Screen It!* and *Kids-In-Mind*. The MPAA relies almost entirely on independent judgments of a board of raters to determine a films rating, but *Kids-in-Mind* and *Screen It!* use different methods to rate films. Kids-in-mind is an independent Internet consumer information service, not affiliated with any political or religious organization (Thompson & Yokota, 2004). This group bases their reviews on the presence of sex, violence, and profanity, without making value judgments about the appropriateness of the material reviewed (Thompson & Yokota, 2004). *Screen It!* is another independent Internet consumer information service, and is not affiliated with any special interest group. *Screen It!* provided information about movie content based on fifteen content categories, including alcohol/drug use, blood and gore, disrespectful/bad attitude, frightening/tense scenes, guns/weapons, imitative behavior, jump scenes, music (scary or tense), music (inappropriate), profanity, sex/nudity, smoking, tense family scenes, topics to talk about, and violence (Thompson & Yokota, 2004). The study found large variability in the types of content that receive different MPAA ratings, but good

correlation between the content-based scores assigned by *Kids-in-Mind* and *Screen It!*

Additionally, Thompson and Yokota (2004) found that the MPAA applied increasingly more lenient criteria for its age-based ratings as a function of time over the last decade. Their research found increases from 1992-2003 in violence content in PG and PG-13 rated films, significant increases over time in sexual content in PG, PG-13, and R rated films, and significant increases in profanity in PG-13 and R rated films. However, *Kids-In-Mind* raters were found to have assigned higher scores (representing more restrictive ratings) in later years, possibly indicated increased sensitivity by their raters over time. This study found significantly more violent content in animated G-rated films than in non-animated G rated films.

Sexual Content

Children's exposure to sexual content has been a subject of concern for many parents. Bryant (1985) found that nearly 70% of 13 to 15 year olds surveyed reported exposure to an average of 6.3 sexually oriented R rated films before the age of 13, while 92% of this group had already seen an R rated film with an average first exposure at the age of 14. In another study, 14 and 15 year olds reported having seen 7 of the 50 most popular R rated movies from the past three years in a theater (Greenberg, Ku & Li, 1989). The same study found girls and boys were equally likely to rent R rated videos, while boys were more likely than girls to choose R rated movies to watch on television (Greenberg, Ku & Li, 1989). Meanwhile, Buerkel-Rothfuss, Strouse, Pettey & Shatzer (1993) found that adolescents¹⁹ see almost twice as many R-rated films than they do films with any other rating combined.

¹⁹ This study sampled high-school students.

The question then might be what type of content are these adolescents being exposed to? Brown, Greenberg & Buerkel-Rothfuss (1993) found the typical 90-minute R rated movie included between 14 and 21 intimate sex acts, while Greenberg, Siemicki and Dorfman (1993) found virtually every R-rated film in their sample contained at least one nude scene. Movies noted as “adolescents’ favorites,” such as *Porky’s* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* contained as many as 15 instances of sexual intercourse in a single film (although the content analysis did not delineate implied versus explicit depictions of the sex acts).

The impact of such exposure is hotly contested. A study by Greenberg, Linsangan & Soderman (1993) found media second only to friends as a primary source of sexual information, outpacing the impact of parents, school and church. Several researchers have argued that a lack of sexual education in schools and parents increases the importance of mediated depictions of sexuality (Brown, Walsh-Childers and Waszak, 1990; Strasburger, 1989; Strouse and Fabes, 1985).

Several experiments have been done to determine the impact of sexual content on young people. Young adolescents who watched sexually suggestive scenes from television programs reportedly learned the meanings of language and phrases relating to homosexuality and prostitution (Greenberg, Linsangen and Soderman, 1993). Pre-marital sex was considered to be more acceptable to teens exposed to music videos as compared to those who were not exposed to the videos (Greeson & Williams, 1986). Boys and girls exposed to depictions of pre-, extra-, and non-marital sex rated these behaviors as less “bad” than their peers who were exposed to depictions of sexual relations involving married couples or non-sexual relations between adults (Bryant & Rockwell, 1994).

Gender roles are the focus of other rating-related research involving sexual content. Palys (1986) found men tended to be depicted as sexual aggressors in R-rated films, while women generally played passive sexual roles. A content analysis of restrictively rated films (XXX) and R-rated films found that the “pornographic” films portrayed more egalitarian and mutually consenting sexual depictions than did R-rated films, with both men and women being portrayed as dominant equally as often (Palys, 1986).

A later study by Yang & Linz (1990) found that although sexual behavior is much more frequently portrayed in X or XXX rated videos than in R rated videos, violence is more prevalent in R-rated videos. In fact, violence accounted for 35% of all behaviors in R rated film sampled. The same study found that females were depicted as recipients of violence about twice as often in R-rated videos than in X-rated videos (Yang & Linz, 1990). They also were recipients of sexually violent behaviors approximately 150% more often in R rated videos than in X rated videos (Yang & Linz, 1990). These findings, it is argued, support the position that the MPAA raters see violence toward women as “acceptable” content for films, reinforcing the hegemonic view of females as passive and powerless and men as aggressive and often abusive.

Reactance Theory

Reactance theory is often cited as the theoretical framework for rating-related studies. Bruce A. Austin emerged as one of the important researchers in the area of film attendance in the late 20th century, and is one of the first researchers who specifically studied the effects of the MPAA rating system on the success of films at the box office. Austin’s early studies revolved around the concept of psychological reactance. Austin

asserted that films with more restrictive ratings would be more popular, especially to moviegoers under the age of seventeen (Austin, 1980; 95).

Reactance theory (Brehm, 1966) is based on freedom of behavior as an important aspect of human life. If a person's behavioral freedom is threatened or restricted in some way, it will trigger a motivational arousal, presumably redirected at the re-establishment of whichever freedom has been lost or threatened (Brehm, 1966). This hypothetical motivational state may be considered a counterforce, which Brehm calls psychological reactance. Each person has their own set of 'free behaviors,' that is to say, a set of behaviors a given person can engage in at a given time (1966:3). When a person's free behaviors are restricted or eliminated, that person will be exposed to reactance.

The magnitude of reactance is a direct function of (1) the importance of the free behaviors which are eliminated or threatened, (2) the proportion of free behaviors eliminated or threatened, and (3) where there is only a threat of elimination of free behaviors, the magnitude of that threat (Brehm, 1966:4).

Generally, a person who experiences reactance will attempt to regain the lost freedom through available and appropriate methods. Brehm further theorizes that a person's desire for a given behavior actually increases as a consequence of its being eliminated (1966:10).

In Austin's study *the Influence of the MPAA's Film-Rating System on Motion Picture Attendance: A Pilot Study* (1980), he asserts that R and X rated films should be more attractive film choices for people under the age of 17, because they are the most restrictive ratings for that group. Austin's hypotheses, however, were not supported. Austin employed a self-administered questionnaire to New Jersey high school students. Four different films with fictional titles were described in 175 word synopses which

indicated several variables, including the film's producer, director, writer, male and female stars, with actual names being used where appropriate (Austin, 1980). Austin found that the MPAA ratings were not an influential factor in the sample's likelihood of attendance. Reactance theory was not found to be a factor in this study. However, it is important to point out that Austin based his finding mainly on prior film attendance. The lack of self-reports of attendance of R and X rated films could be attributed to wariness on the part of the participant²⁰, or availability of films playing theatrically in that New Jersey community.

In another study by Austin in the Journal of Popular Film and Television, it was hypothesized that more R and X rated films would be produced due to the lure of the "forbidden fruit" factor. However, Austin found that in only three instances did the percent of R and X rated pictures exceed the number of G and PG films produced yearly. In that same study, however, Austin found that independent films were more often rated R and X, in contrast to major and minor studio films. Austin credits independent film makers desires for more restrictive ratings as the reason behind the finding. However, one could pose the question of whether the MPAA simply tends to give more restrictive ratings to independent films that do not have the backing of a powerful film studio behind them.

Austin is not the only researcher in the field interested in reactance theory. Herman and Leyens (1977) found that films shown on Belgian television that carried advisories for sexual or violent content received higher audience ratings (numbers of viewers) than other TV movies. Despite the larger audience size, however, people did

²⁰ Social desirability factors may skew self-reports of behaviors that might be seen as taboo. Therefore, some students may be unwilling to self-report watching films that they might lead to embarrassment (within social setting) or punishment (by authority figures/parents).

not report greater levels of enjoyment with the more restrictively rated films (Herman & Leyens, 1977:52).

Krcmar and Cantor (1997) also studied the effects of parental advisories and MPAA ratings on parent-child discussions of television viewing. They found that parents were likely to react negatively²¹ to a restrictive rating or advisory, whereas children “demonstrated reactance not by their program choice, but by their verbal responses to the programs” (Krcmar & Cantor, 1997: 408). In short, when the children found that their choices were being limited by their parents, their positive comments about the restricted programs increased. Krcmar and Cantor further report that children felt that a PG-13 rating was more attractive to them than was a PG rating. Overall, it was found that advisories heightened parents’ vigilance in restricting their childrens’ viewing, but in turn, prompted more positive reaction from children about the restricted shows (1997:408).

Krcmar & Sohn (2004) used an experimental design to determine the effects of warning labels and bleeps on viewers’ perceptions and enjoyment of television programs. Their research found that warning labels increased enjoyment of the program containing profanity among college students. Bleeping, however, had no effect on either program liking or perceptions of realism. Bleeping did, though, decrease perceptions of the program’s offensiveness and increased viewers’ perceptions of profanity frequency estimates (Krcmar & Sohn, 2004)

In the 1996 National Television Violence Study (Cantor & Harrison, 1996) it was found parental discretion advisories and the MPAA ratings of R and PG-13 were more

²¹ Parents were more critical of the more restrictively rated films themselves.

attractive to boys ages 10-14 years of age. Reactance, or “forbidden fruit” effects, were cited as the reason for these findings.

Wurtzel and Surlin studied a “boomerang effect” (similar to reactance) in terms of attitudes toward television programs which ran disclaimers (Wurtzel and Surlin, 1978). Twenty-four percent of their sample reported that they watched such shows with “increased interest”, while 39% said they would not watch the show, and 37% reported they would watch with “increased caution.” As education level increased, the influence of advisories decreased (1978:23).

Parental advisory labels on music have also been researched using reactance theory as the basis of inquiry. Christenson (1992) found that labeled music was less liked, therefore rejecting reactance theory as a factor in music marketing to adolescents. However, most children reported in Christenson’s survey that their parents were not very vigilant in terms of their music buying and listening habits. Most children reported their parents rarely accompanied them when they shopped for music, and very few looked over the minors’ music collections to find inappropriate materials (1992:111). Because parents were not active in limiting their children’s listening materials, the labeling of the music did not pose a threat to their personal freedom.

Bushman and Stack (1996) used made-for-television movies to test whether warning labels cause reactance. Audiences showed a preference for movies with warnings. A later Bushman (1997) study compared the responses of participants who had read identical movie descriptions with either a content rating, a warning label, or no label at all. Adult participants showed greater preference for movie descriptions with a warning.

The Third Person Effect in Content Rating Research

Gunther (1995) investigated film content-based ratings using the third person effect as his theoretical framework. Gunther asserted that much support for censorship of the mass media, including film, is justified by people's beliefs that the material or message will have a negative, undesirable effect on society. However, many who hold this belief do not believe the same material will have a negative effect on their own behavior. Gunther (1995) found both males and females exhibited this perceptual bias when it came to the subject of X-rated materials. Sixty-one percent of subjects perceived others to be more negatively effected by the material than themselves, but males estimated lower overall negative effects than did females (Gunther, 1995). Additionally, Gunther found that those with little or no prior exposure to pornography tended to support regulation of such materials (mainly women and those with a religious affiliation), while those who supported free speech opposed regulation of X-rated materials.

Wilson, Linz and Randall (1990) recommended changes for the motion picture rating system based on their findings that the MPAA system was not based on harmfulness to children, but rather parents' offensiveness toward the subject matter. This study argued that four assumptions are inherent in the MPAA rating system. Those assumptions are

- (1) Viewers can be divided into three age groups for determining the appropriateness of any given film.
- (2) Films with problematic content affect younger children more than older children.
- (3) Films are rated on the amount and explicitness of sex and violence, rather than the context.
- And (4), excessive and explicit sex is more offensive and problematic in the MPAA system than is excessive violence.

Wilson, et al. argue that these assumptions have no support in social science, and therefore they prescribe a new film rating system based on harmful effects of material on children of different ages. Their proposed system still groups children into three groups (3-7 years, 8-12 years, and 13-17 years of age). They also restrict children in specific groups according to studied social effect of horror, violence, sex and sexual violence (Wilson, Linz & Randall, 1990).

Ron Leone (1999) used survey research to investigate parents' opinions on movie content based on feelings of offensiveness and fear of imitation by minor children. Leone surveyed 368 adults in Onondaga, New York, using a telephone survey. Adult respondents were slightly more offended by graphic sex in movies than by graphic violence, but believed that children were more likely to imitate violent behaviors.

Leone (2001) also investigated how personal offensiveness to, and perceived harmfulness of, violent and sexual film content related to the setting of minimum age limits for viewing movies. Third-person effect was used as the theoretical framework in this 2x2 experiment. Subjects assessed the harmfulness of the content they viewed, as well as personal offensiveness. Leone found that personal offensiveness to highly sexual and /or highly violent content has a greater effect on a person's setting of a minimum age limit for viewing movies containing material of each type than perceived harmfulness of the content. (Leone, 2001)

Kleck (2004) investigated the effects of animated violent content in the film *Kill Bill Vol 1* on third person impressions. No significant third person effect interactions were found as a result of their experimental design. While no direct interaction was found, a correlation between the third person effect and animated and live-action scenes

proved significant. Moreover, participants actually identified personally more with the animated scenes than the live-action, even though third person effect for live-action was higher. (Kleck, 2004)

A study by Hoffner, et al. (2001) used telephone interviews to examine the third person effect in relation to television violence. The researchers concluded third-person effects, as predicted, were observed for both aggression and mean world perceptions, but were larger for the more socially undesirable influence on aggression and for more distant others (in the U.S. rather than the local community). In addition, those who compared themselves favorably with others perceived a larger third-person effect for aggression.

Lee and Tamborini (2005) demonstrated the presence of the third person effect in Internet pornography. Participants perceived that Internet pornography's negative effect was greater on others than themselves, and this third-person perception predicted support for Internet censorship.

Lo and Wei (2000) also studied the third person effect as it related to Internet pornography and found that gender played a role in subjects' views. Female respondents tended to perceive greater negative effects of Internet pornography on men than on other women. However, the study failed to demonstrate perceptual bias as a reliable predictor of support for restriction of pornography on the World Wide Web.

Youn, Faber and Shaw (2000) applied the third person effect to pro-censorship attitudes toward gambling. Youn, et al. conducted survey research in a large Midwestern city and found that for both lottery and casino advertising the perceived effects of such advertising on adults was predictive of individuals' desires to censor said advertising.

Overall, the findings showed that people perceived casino and lottery advertising as having little effect on themselves and greater impact on others.

McLeod, Detenber & Eveland (2001) used regression path models to investigate the perceived effects of media on others and media effects on self. They argue in their study that the perception of increased media effects on others is similar to the “magic bullet theory” in that individuals perceived greater effects for those with greater media exposure through the use of a relatively simplistic path model. A more complex schema is used to process effects perceived on the self. McLeod, et al. compare this model to attribution theory’s fundamental attribution error. Third person effect and paternalistic attitudes were both found to contribute to support for media censorship.

Hoffner, et al (1999) used telephone surveys to look at the third person effect and news exposure, investigating its link to support for censorship of television violence. A third person effect was found to be predictive of support for such censorship, but a third person effect for “mean world” perceptions was not predictive of such support.

Offensive language and profanity

Several studies have investigated the effects and presence of offensive language in the media, most concentrating on television programming. Most of the concern seems to arise from fears that exposure to bad words will have negative psychological effects on young viewers who may imitate the language they hear (Kaye & Sapolsky, 2004). Potter found it is easier to imitate verbally aggressive behaviors than physically aggressiveness (Potter, 2003). Most researchers cite Bandura’s Social Learning Theory as their theoretical framework. This theory states that social learning occurs through observation of the behaviors of others, and the more often a behavior is observed the easier it is to

imitate in their own lives. Some argue that repeated exposure to offensive language, especially when it is presented in a positive or entertaining manner, can lead to negative social consequences such as imitation and desensitization (Martin, Anderson & Cos, 1997). Brownback (2000) claims that the use of such language on TV establishes a culture in which profanity is acceptable. Others argue that there is not enough evidence to support anti-social outcomes to exposure to offensive language (Jay, 1992; Primavera, Herron & Jauier, 1996).

Kaye and Sapolsky (2004) used content analysis to study offensive language in prime-time television series. The study found profanity occurred on the seven broadcast networks at a rate of one word every 8 minutes. The FOX network's programs contained more offensive language than any of the other networks, although UPN had the highest number of profanities per hour. Programs labeled TVPG aired more "dirty" words than did those labeled TV 14.

Studies in general show that taboos against profanity seem to be decreasing and the use of profanity in everyday life seems to be increasing (Wilkinson, 1999; O'Connor, 2000; Marks, 1996; Cameron, 1970). Studies of network television also report increases of profanity or crude language (Bednarski, 1999; Johnson, 1997; Polskin, 1989). During the 1998-1999 TV season, the Center for Media and Public Affairs reported instances of offensive language in both cable and broadcast television shows. Eighteen percent of the language they reported was categorized as "strong profanity, 23% as coarse language and 59% as mild profanity. The Media Research Center (1997) found offensive words spoken once every 47 minutes on six broadcast networks and criticized the age-based TV rating system for allowing language they considered too raunchy in TV PG rated shows.

Criticism of the MPAA system

Stephen Farber (1972) was one of the first to voice his concerns about the MPAA rating system. After serving as a CARA rating board member, Farber wrote his book *The Movie Rating Game* in which he claimed that much of the classification that was done was done for the sake of what adults found offensive. He claimed that G-rated films were not necessarily the best suited for children, they were just films that adults found the least offensive (Farber, 1972). Farber charged that movies containing sex and nudity received more restrictive ratings than ones containing violence, because parents were more likely to be “disturbed” by the sexual content (Farber, 1972). Therefore, films were being rated based on offensiveness, rather than actual fear of harmful effects on children, or even inappropriateness.

Now a columnist for the film trade magazine *Movieline*, Farber continues to criticize the MPAA system, as well as the way film studios place rating-based limits on filmmakers. “In theory, it’s not supposed to be censorship. It’s just supposed to be advising people to the content. I don’t see anything wrong with that,” states Farber (Taylor, First Amendment Center). However, the system becomes problematic, according to Farber, when studios insist filmmakers make cuts to their work in order to move to a less restrictive rating category. This tends to happen most often when a film is assigned an NC-17 and must be cut to fit the R category (Taylor, First Amendment Center).

Film critic Kenneth Turan of the *Los Angeles Times* argues that studios should stick with the filmmaker’s vision, rather than requiring edits to achieve a less restrictive rating. Turan argues that the edits are the equivalent of changing a director’s artistic

vision. Turan was vocal in his support for the late Stanley Kubrick, whose final film was edited to avoid an NC-17 rating after his untimely death just prior to the release of *Eyes Wide Shut*. Turan argued, "An artist with the reputation and the integrity of Stanley Kubrick should be able to have his film seen the way he originally envisioned it. When the ratings system was originally put into effect, the idea was that (the NC-17 designation) would be a rating for adults." (Sylvester, 1999). By backing away from the rating, it can be argued that studios are adding to the stigma of the rating, casting it as offensive or deviant.

Jenkins (2001) argues that ratings are merely value judgments, not objective scientific standards. Therefore, there is always the question of whose morals are being reflected. While the Production Code was certainly based on Catholic and other Judeo-Christian views of morality, how do we determine the basis of today's value judgments?

"*The Lion King* may demean minorities, for example, but be rated as appropriate for all ages; fundamentalist parents may object to the witchcraft in Harry Potter books. One parent objects to a single swear word; another figures kids hear that on the playground anyway. Other parents worry about animal abuse, homophobia and sexism alcohol consumptions, anti-intellectualism or blasphemy. No ratings system could accurately reflect all the different (and often contradictory) criteria. Ratings enforcement requires weighing some of these concerns over others" (Jenkins, 2001).

Jenkins goes on to argue that today's MPAA rating system is still partially influenced by those original value judgments made by The Legion of Decency and the original framers of the Production Code, despite the lack of a direct link to such organizations (Jenkins, 2001). In Great Britain and Canada, age ratings for films are enforced by local governmental officials. Several issues beyond sex, violence and profanity can be the subject of rating restrictions, including cruelty to animals, racial slurs, and the "presentation of controversial lifestyles" (Rabkin, 2002).

A common complaint voiced by critics is that the MPAA takes a tough stance on sexuality, but seems to tolerate violence. This occurs despite the fact that public opinion polls show that Americans worry more about violence in the media than about sex or bad language (Morris & Silver, 1999). It has been argued that the rating system “demonizes sex” in an attempt to “eliminate radical and erotic peripheries of mainstream culture” (Braunstein, 1999). Former MPAA President Jack Valenti argued that sex is just more difficult to rate. In his words, “violence comes in many forms. With sex there are only so many positions” (Valenti, 1993).

Double Standards?

Others have pointed to perceived double standards in the application of film ratings in terms of sexual orientation, race and ethnicity of the characters portrayed (Roth, 2000; Morris & Silver, 1999). Foreign films and independently produced films also seem to be rated more restrictively (Roth, 2000). Little research has been done on the effects of these double standards on film audiences. How does this type of film censorship silence “deviant” voices and shape value systems in the United States? Certainly, it would seem that widely held beliefs are reinforced by such a regulatory structure. Therefore, it would be logical to believe the film ratings reinforce stereotypical attitudes and behaviors, leading to the proliferation of beliefs in such over-generalized portrayals of individuals.

Gender Stereotypes and MPAA Film Ratings

There are several elements inherent in the MPAA film rating system that lead to the propagation of gender stereotypes. By restricting certain types of content, the CARA raters are making universal judgments as to what the proper roles of men and women are

in society. The expression of hegemonic beliefs, attitudes and behaviors will remain in films, and content that is not in step with the current hegemonic gender ideology will be excluded. Therefore, the status quo is reinforced, while opposing views are marginalized.

The reinforcement of hegemonic gender roles is nothing new in the film industry. Historically, the industry's self-censorship arm has silenced strong female role models on film. This dates back to the early days of the Production Code. The enforcers of the Code battled two main targets in terms of film content; gangster films and "fallen women" movies (Byrd, 2000). Gangster films were targeted for rather obvious reasons. In the early days of the Code, gangsters and the mafia were receiving a great deal of publicity. Coupled with the era of Progressive reforms and Prohibition, the PCA hoped to avoid the glamorization of violence and lawlessness. Fallen women films, however, generally did not contain any violent content, nor did they contain explicit or outright sexual content. There was merely the intimation of sexual behavior.

Generally, fallen women films featured female characters who used their sexuality to get ahead financially, socially and professionally. Censors were appalled by the lack of scruples exhibited by the women in these films. However, some would argue that it was the non-traditional depictions of female behavior that really upset the censors (Espar, 2000). These films depicted women as independent, sexual, and able to succeed in the business world. Although there were allusions to sexual behavior, these women were not wallflowers being used by men. Instead, the female characters were always confident, in control, and sassy. They were some of the first films to hint at women's enjoyment of sex (not including the white slavery films that were popular among female

movie goers in the late teens). Censors were afraid women in the Depression era audiences would see the opulent lifestyles of the cinema heroines and look to sexuality as a means of financial gain (Byrd, 2000). There appeared to be a genuine fear of the power of cinema to lead women “astray” (Byrd, 2000). If the female characters in these films were punished for their actions and non-traditional roles, censors did not hold up the film’s production or distribution. Some filmmakers punished their female leads by sending them to an asylum, depicting them as broken (both mentally and economically), sending them to prison, or killing them. As long as the women paid for their transgressions, the films were acceptable to censors.

The idea of punishing women for their use of sexuality to move upward in their life situation can be seen as a way of dissuading women from imitation of the images they viewed on the big screen. It would have been interesting from a theoretical perspective to find out who was most concerned about the imitation of such behaviors and whether or not it was an example of the third person effect coming into play. Were only “poor” women likely to succumb to such portrayals, or was it the more educated and well-off?

Mae West was the prototypical “fallen woman.” Her powerful image of an independent woman was fortified by the fact she often wrote her own lines in her films. It was her caustic tongue, however, that got her into trouble with censors. After Joe Breen took control of the film industry’s content in 1934, movies changed almost overnight. The Code’s dictates resulted in the silencing of the independent fallen women of the late 1920s and early 30s. Some “fallen woman” favorites like Jean Harlowe and Barbara Stanwyck were able to transition from fallen woman to “girl-next-door,” a new

mainstay of Code era movies. But Mae West's career was ruined. Double entendre and sexual innuendo were her stock and trade, and now both were prohibited (Espar, 2000).

Don't be mistaken. The silencing of female sexuality is not merely an historical phenomenon. Susan Faludi argues in her book *Backlash* that efforts to hush female voices in American cinema have been a perennial feature of cinema in backlash periods (Faludi, 1991). Today, the MPAA film rating system appears to continue to encourage traditional, stereotypic views of female sexuality. Films that depict women as powerless victims of aggressive male suitors tend to be less restrictively rated than films that attempt to portray women as powerful and sexual beings. While male sexual aggression is considered acceptable, female sexual desire is deemed deviant.

A common theme in American film is the coming of age story. The plots of most of these films revolve around a group of teenage boys who seek to lose their virginity. Rites-of-passage films such as these include *American Pie*, *Porky's*, *Losing It*, and many, many more. Generally, these films include a healthy dose of female nudity and implied sexual conduct. The men are generally never shown nude. The male characters are generally seen as the sexual aggressors, while the female characters must be coerced or convinced to engage in the sexual activity (or paid, in the case of many of these teen movies that use prostitutes as the males' initial sexual partners). These films are usually rated R, and are marketed to the teen audience. They reinforce the hegemonic ideals of gender roles in regard to sexual activity. That is, men love sex and it is a necessity for them to become a "real man," women, on the other hand, should remain virginal until the "right" man comes along. Sex, for women, is not a casual act. It must involve a loving, committed relationship. Men, in contrast, just want to get laid, and they'll go to any

length to “get some.” This reinforces women as emotional and family/commitment-oriented, while men are emotionally detached and strong-willed.

When this gender stereotype is not followed, filmmakers are likely to be slapped with a restrictive rating, such as an R or the NC-17. This is the kiss of death at the box office for a film, seeing as it will not be widely distributed. It also poses problems for coming-of-age films, because their target audiences is the teenage demographic which is barred from attending or viewing such films. One such instance occurred in 1999 when first-time director Colette Burson attempted to release her film *Coming Soon*. The film follows three Manhattan teenagers looking for their first orgasm. The subject matter is typical teen fare, except that the trio is female (Ojumu, 1999). Upon review of the film, the MPAA assigned it an NC-17 rating. Fox ordered cuts be made to appease the censors. Burson attempted to comply by cutting a scene in which a female character states her objection to oral sex on the grounds of sperm’s high caloric content (Ojumu, 1999). Certainly, some will consider this dialogue in poor taste or too sexually frank for some teenagers. However, comparing this scene to *American Pie*’s depiction of a male character’s sexual encounter with a warm apple pie makes it seem quite tame. Burson questioned the MPAA as to whether the film would have been rated less restrictively if it had been a “boy’s” movie. She was told, “That may be true; but it’s our job to judge for parents who haven’t seen the movie, and if parents have a double standard, it’s good for us to think that way also.” (Ojumu, 1999). This statement confirms not only that the raters regularly use gender stereotypes to censor filmic material, but that they are willing to defend their biased criteria. Incidentally, Fox shelved the film and it was never released theatrically (Ojumu, 1999). Little research has been conducted to determine

whether parents hold the same gender stereotypes as cited by the MPAA to Burson. This study delves into parental opinions of specific types of content, including sexuality, to determine if the current film rating system mirrors parental content standards.

There are other indicators of the rating board's dual standards when it comes to gender relations. Nudity is deemed "appropriate" or "inappropriate" according to the character's gender. Because women are generally stereotyped as sexual objects, female nudity is considered "natural" and "beautiful." Films that include shots or scenes featuring naked women are generally rated "R" or "PG-13." Some female nudity has even crept into "PG" rated fare including *Sheena* (1980), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), *Jabberwocky* (1977). Male nudity, however, is seemingly deemed offensive. Most films featuring male full-frontal nudity will be slapped with an NC-17 rating. Examples include *Bad Lieutenant* (1992), *The Pillow Book* (1997), and *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (1990). In recent years, there have been some males who have bared it all and received an R rating (*Wild Things*, *The Piano*, *Boxing Helena*), but these films generally had to fight for their less restrictive ratings. The MPAA raters appear to be upholding a long-held hegemonic belief that naked women are non-offensive and a box office draw to boot. Nude men are a "turn off," unattractive, and sure to drive away audiences.²² This double standard has become commonsensical. It is a dangerous stereotype in that it places value on a female's body, rather than her intellect or abilities. It reinforces beauty as a woman's most important feature. It also emphasizes her position as the "weaker" sex. In contrast, men are not often seen in vulnerable positions; therefore they are clothed in most mainstream films.

²² This may be related to the prime target-market for movies, the teenaged male.

Sexual Orientation and Film Ratings

Critics have long accused the MPAA of an anti-gay bias in their assignment of ratings (Dick, 2006; Dick, 2007; Goodridge, 2003; Farber, 1972). When United Artists' marketing chief Dennis O'Connor spoke to *The Advocate* in January, 2001, he discussed the MPAA's reaction to the Tri-Mark film *Better Than Chocolate*. Released in 1999 when O'Connor was still employed by Tri-Mark, the film, which depicts a lesbian relationship, was the source of a battle between the studio and the MPAA. The film was originally assigned an NC-17 rating, but was eventually cut to achieve an R rating. The MPAA told O'Connor they had received a complaint about the trailer for the film from a parent that had been accompanied by her child and was offended by the homosexual theme (Goodridge, 2003). O'Connor argued that the MPAA was more than likely rating homosexual-themed films more restrictively due to their perception that the average American parent is offended by gay sex scenes or themes. However, the MPAA guidelines make no mention of gay or lesbian themes or homosexuality as criteria for rating assignment.

Despite the lack of specific rules regulating the rating of films that include homosexual themes or characters, several filmmakers have been hit with more restrictive-than-expected ratings for such films. Lions Gate President Tom Ortenberg recounts his encounter with the MPAA regarding the film *The Rules of Attraction*. Ortenberg said the MPAA raters specifically pointed out a gay fantasy scene in which one male character fantasizes about another male character. "They told me specifically that this scene was among their objections, but this scene was strictly a fantasy. There was no nudity" (Goodridge, 2003:1). Ortenberg eventually won his battle with the MPAA, keeping the

scene intact, but cutting other scenes in the film to secure an R rating, rather than an NC-17. Other filmmakers have not been so lucky.

Ma Vie En Rose, a French film released in 1997, tells the story of a seven-year-old French boy named Ludovic who is convinced he is meant to be a girl. The film is rated R for “brief strong language”, but some feel the film received the R rating for its depiction of gender identity issues involving a child. The film contains no sexual content, nudity, no action sequences or violence. The language in question consists of one instance of the use of the word “fuck.” It is unclear whether the filmmaker was given the option of editing out the offending word to obtain a less restrictive rating. However, it is certain that there have been a plethora of films released with a PG-13 rating when the f-word is included in the dialogue. This has caused critics to comment on the perceived double-standard in film ratings based on sexual orientation. In the content analysis conducted for this study, a total of five PG-13 rated films from 2005 contained one utterance of the word “fuck”, including *Hitch*, *Walk the Line*, *Look at Me*, *King Kong* and *Paradise Now*. None of those five films included themes of gender identity or sexual orientation.

Writer-producer Sam Bernstein is also perplexed by the rating system and their treatment of sexual orientation on film. His film *Bobbie's Girl* was produced for the cable television network Showtime, and was later released on home video with a PG-13 rating. In Bernstein's words, “That's insane, and it clearly shows discomfort with the reality of gay and lesbian family life. There is no sex, no violence, and no bad language. There are a couple of closed-mouth kisses, that's all. The annoying thing is that I had

them cover the nipples of the woman on the painted logo of the tavern where the movie is set so as not to cause offense. After that, the PG-13 feels hurtful” (Goodridge, 2003; 2).

This researcher finds it somewhat disconcerting to find films with similar content rated in seemingly inconsistent ways. One example is the film *But I'm a Cheerleader*, which stars Natasha Lyonne as a lesbian cheerleader who is sent to a “de-programming” rehab center to cure her of her homosexuality. This film features a scene of the girl masturbating through her dress, which led, in part, to the film’s NC-17 rating. Compared to *American Beauty*, an R-rated film following the last year in the life of a suburban husband played by Kevin Spacey, the rating seems harsh. In *American Beauty*, Spacey is depicted masturbating in the shower. The inconsistency in rating might be based on other content within the two films, but one might also argue that the former received its rating due either to the lesbian theme or the fact that it was a female character pleasuring herself.

Kirby Dick, the creator of *This Film is Not Yet Rated*, argues that the double-standard might be due to politics, rather than a particular set of moral beliefs held by raters (Platner, 2006). Kirby states, in an article with Jon Platner of Planned Parenthood, that the MPAA not only assigns film ratings, it performs a wide-variety of regulatory and supervisory functions for the film industry. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the MPAA to keep a positive relationship with key politicians in Washington D.C. “By coming down hard on sex and gay sex, MPAA lobbyists curry favor with certain politicians who have hardliner views on these issues” (Platner, 2006). Kirby goes on to argue that the American public is being kept from serious, artistic investigations of

sexuality due to restrictive ratings, namely the NC-17, being assigned to films that truly delve into these issues (Platner, 2006).

The NC-17 Debate

No rating has drawn more criticism from film theorists and media critics than the NC-17 has since its birth in 1990. While the rating was a means of destigmatizing non-pornographic, artistic, adult-oriented materials meant for a mature audience, the rating seems to have fallen short of its promise. Most problematic is the fact that most major studios disallow the production of an NC-17 rated film and require cuts be made to the content in order to secure a less restrictive R rating (Roth, 2000). Peter Bart of *Variety* argued in an editorial in April of 2002 that NC-17 films are the subject of a defacto economic boycott, writing “The problem is simple: the NC-17 stigma gets a film banned by big theater chains; newspapers refuse to carry its ads.” (Bart, 2002). Bart went on to argue that releasing mature films meant for a mainly adult audience would fare better if released unrated, bypassing the rating board altogether. Bart used the Mexican film *Y Tu Mama Tambien* as an example of a movie that had not met with any turndowns from theaters for exhibition or newspapers for advertising after opting to release the film unrated (Bart, 2002). The film was initially rated NC-17 by the MPAA and CARA, but refused to accept the rating.

John Fithian of the National Association of Theater Owners disagreed with Bart’s assessment. In an open letter to Bart, Fithian wrote, “I can state unequivocally that good movies released under the NC-17 format would be played on more than a sufficient number of screens. Indeed, none of the “big theater chains” you wrote about has any policy to ban the exhibition of NC-17 films. It is highly likely that a movie like *Y Tu*

Mama Tambien would get more, not less screens, if it were properly rated.” (Fithian, 2002). Fithian did concede that a number of newspapers will not accept advertising for NC-17 films, but argued that the majority will run such ads (Fithian, 2002).

Bart is not the only one to argue that the NC-17 is anathema to a form of distribution and marketing suicide. Director Sydney Pollack was upset by the original NC-17 rating given to Stanley Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut*, which came after the unexpected death of the iconic director. As Pollack told CNN in 1999, “If you have an NC-17 rating in this country, you can’t advertise on network television, there are certain newspapers you can’t advertise on, there are certain theaters you can’t even play.” (Sylvester, 1999).

Popular film critic Roger Ebert has also lobbied for an additional rating that would come between the R and NC-17 ratings. Ebert is quoted as saying “The NC-17 rating has become associated with hard-core pornography...I’ve suggested a new A rating to become between the R and the NC-17. It would mean adults only, but not pornography.” (Sylvester, 1999). By adding that stepping stone between the two ratings, Ebert is hopeful that the “A” would allow mature material to be shown in major theater chains, without being labeled pornographic.

Filmmakers have criticized the MPAA for its inconsistency in its assignment of ratings. Michael Cuesta is the director of a suburban teen drama that focuses on the lives and friendship of a 15-year old boy, who recently lost his mother, and a pederastic ex-Marine (played by Brian Cox). The film, titled *L.I.E.* was hit with an NC-17 rating due to sexual content. The film’s distributor, Lot 47 films, appealed the rating, but the board affirmed the NC-17 rating by a vote of 8-4 (Hernandez, 2001). The CARA and MPAA

rating descriptor uses the terms “some explicit sexual content” to describe the reason for the NC-17, but both the director of the film and its distributor take umbrage at such a claim. Viewing of the film shows there are two scenes in the film that are overtly sexual. In one scene, the adolescent boy’s father is having sex with his girlfriend from behind, naked. It is a relatively short scene and most shots are from a distance. The other is some archival images of old porn videos that suggest, but never explicitly show a woman performing oral sex. Lot 47 co-President Jeff Lipky was so upset by the rating and the reasons for said rating that he sent a video to industry insiders that included clips from *L.I.E.*’s sex scenes and comparison clips from other R-rated fare released within the past year (Hernandez, 2001). Lipky calls the MPAA’s judgments “arbitrary, hypocritical and out of touch with true parental sensibilities” (Hernandez, 2001). In comparison to other films released with less restrictive ratings, Lipky is baffled by the rating designation for *L.I.E.*, saying, “When you make the face-to-face comparisons of other R-rated dramas, which are sheer exercises in human degradation and butchery and place them side by side against *L.I.E.*, you have to be non-human to suggest that this is not suitable for some teenagers with parental supervision” (Hernandez, 2001).

Sandler (2001) argued that the NC-17 was ineffective in its attempt to destigmatize adult themed films for three major reasons. One reason was that MPAA distribution companies made no attempt to increase the number of adult feature films produced after the introduction of the new rating, indirectly confirming the assumption that the NC-17 was no more marketable than the X rating had been. Second, most NATO (National Association of Theater Owners) members barred the exhibition of NC-17 films. Thirdly, Blockbuster Video, the country’s largest video chain, refused to carry NC-17

rated titles after a threatened boycott by the American Family Association (Sandler, 2001).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present multi-method study attempts to answer questions dealing with the effectiveness of the Motion Picture Association of America's film rating system, parental opinions of the ratings, and the consistency of rating application. This study also investigates the relationship between specific types of film content and film ratings. The overarching goal of this study is to evaluate the MPAA rating system to determine if it is accomplishing the task it sets out to, which is serving as a tool for parents, allowing them to determine which films are appropriate for their children's viewing. In order to thoroughly evaluate the system, focus group research was paired with both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. This triangulated research design allowed for a comprehensive investigation of the current rating system.

Parental Rating Preferences

Although the MPAA has undertaken survey research with parents in the past that has indicated parents are satisfied with the film rating system, long-standing criticism of the system has raised questions about parental understanding and use of the system. The following research questions revolve around parental preferences in terms of content regulation. Focus group research was used to investigate the following:

Research Question #1: Do parents use the MPAA rating system to make decisions about their child(ren)'s film viewing?

Answering this question was the first step in determining the effectiveness of the MPAA system. If parents reported they did not use the system, clearly there is a problem with

effectiveness, as the system was designed to be easily understood and widely used by American parents.

However, it is impossible to draw the conclusion that the system is effective based solely on the fact that parents utilize the system. Because it is one of the only systems available to parents to use, it is possible that parents would like to see improvements to the system, despite the fact they regularly use the system. The following questions help further gauge parental satisfaction with the rating system.

Research Question #2: Do parents like the current MPAA rating system? Why or why not?

Research question two allowed parents to voice their likes and dislikes about the current rating system. It also allowed them to consider options to the current rating system, and to determine how they would like content ratings to be assigned and presented to them. Examining parents' suggestions regarding alternative systems of content rating, such as systems that include content descriptors or that are non-evaluative in nature allowed parents to thoroughly address their approval of or concerns with the MPAA's age-based ratings. To be clear, the focus group moderator did not supply parents with specific alternatives to the current MPAA system. Instead, it was left to parents who were unsatisfied with the current system to come up with alternatives. While it would be overly burdensome to expect parents to craft a completely new system within the course of a 90 minute focus group, parents were able to discuss specific problems with the system and specific changes they would like to see made to the existing system.

Research Question #3: What types of materials do parents believe should be rated most restrictively? Why?

Research question three was aimed toward determining what types of materials parents wanted to protect or shield their children from and why. It was important to determine the types of materials parents are most fearful of their children being exposed to when watching movies. Because this may vary due to the age of the child, it was important that the focus groups be conducted using parents with children of similar ages. In addition to determining whether violence, profanity, sexuality or drug use (among other types of content) were most alarming to parents, it also allowed parents to discuss *why* they were opposed to those particular types of materials. Do parents believe specific content leads to negative effects on a child's behavior? Is it a fear of imitation on the part of the child? Is it a matter of a perceived offensiveness of the material in general? Does the content undermine family or societal values? Once again, it was left up to parents to discuss the reasons why they wanted to shield their children from certain types of content, depictions or behaviors. Specific options were not supplied to participants of the focus groups.

MPAA Ratings and Film Content

The second part of this study dealt more specifically with film content itself and the way the MPAA film ratings are designated. The following questions and hypotheses were designed to investigate the criteria used by the Motion Picture Association of American in their assignment of film ratings, as well as the consistency of such application. Two quantitative content analyses were conducted, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter five. The first content analysis looked at the reasons given by the MPAA and the Classification and Ratings Association for the ratings assigned to all domestically, theatrically released films in the United States during the year 2005. A

total of 325 films' rating reasons were analyzed to answer the following research questions:

Research Question #4a: What types of content are cited most often by the MPAA within its rating reasons?

Through the use of quantitative textual analysis of the written "rating reasons" supplied by the MPAA and CARA, the researcher was able to determine what types of content the rating body was most likely to cite as a reason for a given rating assignment. This was done for the entire population of films released during the year 2005, taking operational definitions into consideration. By doing this, it illustrates the types of content the current rating system considers to be inappropriate for general audiences. This data, and the data derived from the investigation of the subsequent research questions, also allows for a comparison to be made between the criteria used by official raters of film content and the opinions of parents that were expressed in the focus group research, used to answer research questions one through three. This research question is followed by a related query:

Research Question #4b: Do the MPAA rating reasons include frequency or intensity descriptors for content found in individual films?

Moving beyond the mere mention of content-type in rating descriptors, it was also important to investigate the specificity of the descriptors used by the MPAA in their published "rating reasons." It is one thing to indicate the type of content present in a film. It is another to indicate the nature of that content. By addressing research question 4b, it was possible to determine whether the MPAA provided an appropriate measure of the specific content's intensity and frequency.

The following set of research questions are similar to research question 4a, which led to an investigation of the types of content itemized by the MPAA within their film rating explanations. This following set of research questions (RQ 5a through RQ 5e) breaks down the criteria used by the MPAA to assign each film a specific rating. By looking at the rating reasons supplied for films in each individual rating category, the researcher was able to draw some initial conclusions regarding the types of content the rating body considers appropriate or inappropriate for specific age groups. The research questions read as follows:

Research Question #5a: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated G?

Research Question #5b: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated PG?

Research Question #5c: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated PG-13?

Research Question #5d: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated R?

Research Question #5e: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated NC-17?

The same analysis of the text-based rating reasons was used to answer one additional question:

Research Question #6: Are films cited for similar types of content by the MPAA rated consistently?

These text-based rating reasons were analyzed to determine if films are rated in a consistent manner. Were films containing similar content assigned the same rating? For example, was nudity always rated the same way? Did frequency of the nudity matter? Did gender of the character appearing nude impact the rating assignment? This was a difficult question to answer, seeing as a rating is often assigned due to a combination of content related factors. However, using statistical analysis it was possible to broadly determine whether specific types of content used either on their own or in tandem with other types of content were consistently rated.

In addition to the quantitative content analysis of the MPAA-supplied “rating reasons” for films released during the year 2005, an additional content analysis was conducted on a total of fifty complete films of all ratings released during the same year. By analyzing the actual content of fifty films, it was possible to determine how specific types of content within films impacted rating assignment. This additional quantitative analysis was used to complement the analysis of the rating reasons. The two studies allow for comparisons between how MPAA raters and an independent rater utilizing the scientific method and multiple coders label and evaluate film content. It also allowed for an investigation into the following research questions:

Research Question #7: Which types of film content have a significant relationship to film rating?

It was important to determine how observed and intricately coded content related to film rating. The answer to this question was used in conjunction with parental opinions regarding the appropriateness of specific types of content to determine whether the film ratings are shielding children from the types of content parents indicated they want them

to. These results also serve as a tool for comparison with the rating reasons supplied by the MPAA in conjunction with rating assignments.

Research Question #8: Are films containing similar types of content rated consistently?

Just as was done with the analysis of the film rating reasons, research question eight deals with the consistency of application of the MPAA ratings. The difference between this question and research question six is in the source the of content information. While RQ 6 dealt with the rating reasons supplied by the MPAA raters, RQ 8 determined consistency of rating application based upon the independently observed and coded content of fifty full-length films from the population indicated.

Finally, a qualitative analysis of the same fifty films used in the quantitative content analysis was undertaken to determine how context impacts rating assignments.

Research Question #9: What are the similarities and differences of film content found in various rating categories?

This qualitative analysis allowed the researcher to look beyond simple counts of content types and focus on latent content present in the fifty films analyzed. Whereas the quantitative research allowed for ease of statistical analysis, it was inadequate to account for content that needed to be analyzed of a more interpretive or symbolic nature. This qualitative approach made it possible for the researcher to look at context, rather than just content, to determine how content of varying rating categories compared to one another.

CHAPTER FIVE

METHOD

This study combined quantitative and qualitative approaches of content analysis with focus group research to construct an accurate and thorough snapshot of the current MPAA rating system. Combining varied methods of investigation is often referred to as triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Denzin proposed four basic forms of triangulation. They include data triangulation (in which more than one set of data is used), investigator triangulation (when more than one investigator works on a study), theory triangulation (when more than one theory is combined to explain a phenomenon), and methodological triangulation (the use of two or more methods in search of a better understanding of a phenomenon) (Denzin, 1978). Jick (1979) added two additional distinctions, “within methods triangulation” (such as multiple qualitative or multiple quantitative approaches) and “across methods triangulation” (involving both qualitative and quantitative methods). Brewer and Hunter (1989) praised a multi-method approach to research, arguing that it provided ground for data triangulation, making it superior to a monomethod approach. Green (1989), meanwhile, articulated five purposes for using mixed method designs after reviewing 57 mixed methods studies from the 1980s. Those five purposes included triangulation, complementarity, initiation, development and expansion (Greene et al, 1989).

Because this study is an investigation of the Motion Picture Association of America’s film rating system on several levels, a multi-method investigation was the logical way to approach the research objectives. This chapter details the three main methods used in this study. First, the focus group portion of the study is detailed.

Focus Groups

Although focus groups are used quite often in market research (Morgan, 1988), some argue they are under utilized in social science research (Gibbs, 1997). Focus group research is similar to group interviewing and is often used to understand attitudes and behaviors (Wimmer & Dominick, 1990). However, there is a key difference between the two methods. Group interviewing involves interviewing a number of people at the same time with the emphasis on questions and responses between the researcher and participants. Focus groups rely on interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher. (Morgan, 1997)

Others define focus groups as organized discussion (Kitzinger, 1994), collective activity (Powell et al, 1996), social events (Goss & Leinbach, 1996) and interaction (Kitzinger, 1995). An advantage to focus groups is that the technique allows researchers to collect preliminary information about a topic or phenomenon in a comparatively quick time frame. The information gathered can be used later to help develop a survey instrument or another tool of inquiry. However, that is not to say that the data gathered from focus group research is not able to stand alone as valuable research. Focus groups are a way to better understand how people feel about a particular issue, product or service (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Focus groups call for respondents to interact with one another in formulating their responses to interviewers' questions, which makes it a unique methodology (Axinn & Pearce, 2002). The advantage to such a technique is that group members are able to corroborate or challenge opinions and responses of others, while reminding each other of personal experiences, stories and opinions (Knodel, 1993; Morgan, 1997). Whereas

survey instruments or individual interviews are lead by the questioner, focus groups allow participants to lead the process (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The opportunity to be involved in decision making processes (Race et al 1994), to be valued as experts, and to be given the chance to work collaboratively with researchers (Goss & Leinbach 1996) can be empowering for many participants. If a group works well, trust develops, and the group may explore solutions to a particular problem as a unit (Kitzinger 1995) rather than as individuals. That makes the methodology a vehicle for change in some instances (Race et al, 1994).

While group interviews can encourage confidence among informants, it may also be inhibiting. However, some who are shy may feel a sense of withdrawal or fear due to the group environment, or may feel left out of the discussion, and therefore, less important to the research process. Cultural differences may also lead to a sense of alienation, especially if the subject matter is of a personal nature (Helitzer-Allen, 1994). Problems may also arise if members conspire to control or bias the discussion (Godsell, 2000). Overall, the researcher has less control over the direction of the responses and the data gathered (Morgan, 1988).

The key to focus groups is to promote self-disclosure amongst participants. This is more likely to occur when participants have something in common with one another, be it age, gender, occupation, or marital status (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In order to reach the level of saturation, or the point at which the investigator believes she has heard the full range of ideas or opinions on a particular topic, it is a common practice to plan three or four focus groups for each particular “type” of participant (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

This study concentrates on the effectiveness of the MPAA's content rating system, parental use of the system and their satisfaction with said system. In addition, the focus groups were meant to help determine what types of content parents and non-parents feel should be most restrictively rated and why. While dealing with these issues it was important for participants to feel comfortable in voicing their opinions about these issues, which relate to their personal child-rearing philosophies. In order to determine exactly what types of content parents are most opposed to their children being exposed to, open ended questions must be asked. This would have made survey research a less efficient mode of inquiry. Instead, focus groups allowed for an open and frank discussion of the types of content that parents were worried about having their children exposed to, and why. In the past, researchers have hypothesized reasons for parents concerns, ranging from the harmfulness of materials to sheer "offensiveness" of certain filmic representations. Others concentrated on worries of imitation. Focus groups, because of their flexibility, allow for a free flowing discussion on any and all of these topics. They also allowed for the introduction of other instruments into the research process, such as card sorts. In addition, there flexibility in question design and follow-up question formation (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

Wimmer and Dominick (2000) identify the most common type of procedure as "extended focus group," in which respondents are required to complete a written questionnaire before the group session begins. This written instrument covers material that will be discussed in the focus group and forces respondents to "commit" to a particular answer before entering the group (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). The hope is that this will eliminate the problem of an unpopular opinion going unheard due to fear of

being in the minority. Parents who participated in this focus group research were not required to complete such a thorough questionnaire. However, some basic demographic and psychographic information was obtained from all participants.

This research study utilized a multiple category focus group design in order to determine adults' opinions of the current MPAA ratings system and the types of filmic content they believe should be restrictively rated. Every focus group consisted of five to eight participants. The groups were comprised of adults (18 years or older) who shared characteristics such as parental status and the general age range of their children.

The focus group categories were based upon the following parameters:

- Mothers and fathers of children ages under eight years of age
- Mothers and fathers of children ages 8-under 13 years of age
- Mothers and fathers of children ages 13-21 years
- Adults aged 21 and older without children

The reason for this delineation in focus group participant composition is that it allows for possible differences in perceptions and opinions to rise to the surface based on the age of the participant's child, and the parental status of the participant. The gender of the participant and the participants' children are also important factors to be taken into consideration, but that information was brought to light through pre-focus group questionnaires, as well as through the questions and responses in the focus groups themselves. This composition was meant to allow an open discussion and a free exchange of opinions. Most participants were more than willing to share their opinions and ideas, although a few of the more quiet or shy participants contributed less than others.

The reason for these specific age groupings being used was so that the groups would mirror, to a certain extent, the film rating categories utilized by the MPAA. Children under thirteen are not allowed to attend films rated PG-13 films or more restrictively rated films. However, using an age range of birth to 13 years old seemed too inclusive. Taking into consideration general maturity levels, school attendance and developmental stages, it was decided that the parents of younger children (under 8 years of age) would be grouped together, as would parents of children 8-12 years of age. Parents of teenagers and older children were gathered into a separate focus group, seeing as it was assumed that parents of teens were dealing with different issues related to child-rearing than would parents of young children.

The focus groups were recorded using audio and video recording devices in a prepared environment. Participants were paid a small sum (\$15) for their participation in the group. There were also two door prizes awarded at each of the focus groups based on a random drawing. Participants were eligible for the fifteen dollar participation fee, which was meant to be used to help cover gas costs for transportation to the group, even if they left before the end of the focus group. Door prizes were only awarded to those who were present at the end of the session. The focus groups were approximately 90 minutes in length and participants were asked approximately twelve questions. However, some of the more talkative groups ended up lasting approximately two hours, with the quickest group ending after an hour and twenty minutes.

The questions moved from a general line of questioning to more specific questions. Included in the focus groups was a card-sort activity in which parents were asked to “rate” specific examples of film content. No video clips were shown. Instead,

short descriptions of film content were typed on a sheet of paper and participants were asked to rate the film based on the description given. These content descriptions were left purposefully vague in order to generate discussion about specific types of film content. For example, one of the cards referred to a film that featured a gay male couple attempting to adopt a baby. This example was written for the purpose of investigating parents feelings about the depiction of homosexuality in films and how they felt sexual orientation should impact film rating (if at all). Participants were not told the underlying purpose of the card sort activity. However, they were told they were to rate the examples according to the rating they felt was appropriate, not how they felt the MPAA would rate the film. For a complete list of focus group questions and card sort examples, please refer to Appendix H.

The primary investigator served as the focus group moderator for all four group interviews. Therefore, the moderator was well aware of the research objectives and used a standardized set of questions for each group. The moderator (primary investigator) has had previous professional experience in a communications field and has an easily understandable voice and speech pattern. Information and opinions was drawn from participants by beginning the discussion with questions of a general nature. These questions were followed by more specific questions regarding use of the MPAA rating system and specific types of content.²³

All four focus group sessions were videotaped using a single camera. The sessions were also audio taped using three microphones that were placed on the focus group table. All responses were transcribed verbatim from the proceedings, which allowed the researcher to perform open coding on the responses. This open coding

²³ A complete list of focus group questions can be found in Appendix F.

process led to a number of findings that are presented in a chapter six, directly addressing research questions #1, #2, and #3.

Content Analysis

Content analysis refers to the systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Berelson, 1952; GAO, 1996; Krippendorff, 1980; and Weber, 1990). Kerlinger (1986) defines content analysis as a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables. Holsti characterizes content analysis as, “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1969). Under Holsti’s (1969) definition, content analysis is not restricted to the domain of textual analysis, but can be applied to other areas, as well. This method is popular with mass media researchers because it is an efficient way to investigate the content of the media (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

One of the most frequent misnomers regarding content analysis is that it is merely a word-frequency count (Stemler, 2001). This is not the case. Content analysis goes far beyond simple word counts. It is a “rich and meaningful” technique, according to Stemler (2001), due to its reliance on coding and categorization of data. Categorization in content analysis must be mutually exclusive and exhaustive (GAO, 1996; Weber, 1990). Therefore, no unit should fall between two data points, while the data language should be representative of all recording units, without exception (Stemler, 2001).

Stemler (2001) identifies two approaches to coding data in content analysis. Those two methods are *emergent coding* and *a priori* coding. Emergent coding refers to

establishing categories via a preliminary examination of data, or a pre-test. Haney, Russell, Gulek and Fierros (1998) discuss multiple stages within this type of coding, beginning with an independent review of materials by two or more people. These researchers come up with a set of features that form a checklist. Secondly, researchers compare notes and reconcile any differences. Next, researchers use a consolidated checklist to independently apply coding. Fourth, the researchers check the reliability of the coding. Once reliability has been established, the coding is applied on a larger scale. Emergent coding will be used in this content analysis.

For this study, two separate quantitative content analyses were conducted. One analyzed the content of 50 films released theatrically during the year 2005, while the other analyzed the text-based rating reasons provided by the MPAA and CARA in their rating decisions. Both quantitative analyses shed light on the MPAA's rating process and the types of content that constitute specific ratings. By looking at how a rating is defined by filmic content, it allows an examination of the consistency, or lack thereof, of rating assignments. In addition, a qualitative analysis of film content of those same 50 theatrically released films of 2005 allowed for a closer analysis of contextual reasons for rating assignments by the MPAA rating board.

Sampling

Determining the sampling procedure and sample size is perhaps the most challenging part of preparing for the content analysis. Due to the nature of these three content analyses, different sampling methods need to be used. A census sample of all films released in the United States during the year 2005 was utilized in the "rating reason" content analysis (N=325). This sample is possible due to the textual nature of the

data. Seeing as there were 325 first-run films released theatrically during the course of the year, most film rating descriptors published by the MPAA are generally no more than 10 words long, it is simple enough to use a census sample of the year's films.

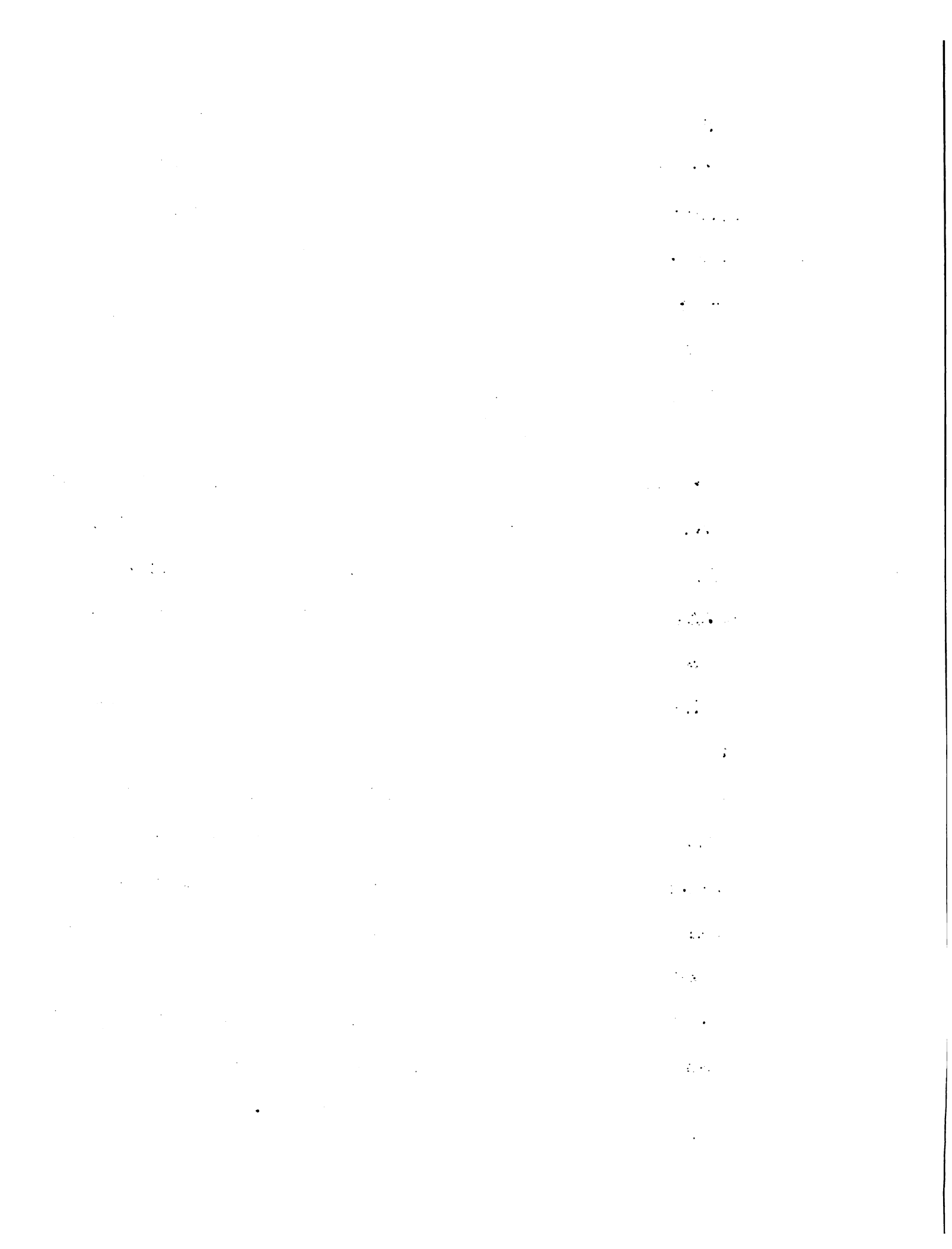
A census sample is not a logical possibility for the two other content analyses conducted as a part of this study. Such a sample would be prohibitively time-consuming and tedious, seeing as this would constitute approximately 650 hours of coding materials. Not to mention the additional time needed to actually do the coding, which often means watching a film or specific scenes multiple times to ensure accuracy. For this reason, it was important to narrow the sample used in this study. This required a stratified sample. The first way that the sample size was limited was to define the universe of films released theatrically in the United States in the year 2005. Therefore, the sample did not include films that were released straight-to-video, bypassing theaters, nor did it include films released outside of the U.S.

It was also important to keep the research objective in mind, which is to determine the types of content that the MPAA raters find appropriate for specific age-based audiences, as well as the consistency of rating application. Therefore, sample films from each of the five MPAA rating groups, "G," "PG," "PG-13," "R" and "NC-17" were included. A sample size of 50 films allowed for the analysis of ten films from each of the five rating categories. However, narrowing the field to ten films in the five given categories needs to be thought out so that it is as representative a sample as possible. Further narrowing of the sample was done by choosing films based on their box office profits during their opening weekend and their critical "buzz."

Certainly films that were top box office grossers for a given year are indicative of popular taste and it could be argued that these films have become a part of the public consciousness. However, to solely rely on box office figures for the sample of films to be analyzed would certainly skew the types of content that would be found. It is less likely that the most (NC-17) and least restrictively (G) rated films would be included in a list of the top films of the year based on box office returns. For example, looking at a list of the ten top grossing movies of 2005 (domestic box office figures), there are no films on that list rated G or NC-17. Three of those ten films are rated PG, six are rated PG-13, and one is rated R (imdb.com).

Rather than rely solely on box office success stories, it was important to also include films that were of critical importance. These two “types” of films are certainly not mutually exclusive. Some box office draws were also critical darlings, but often films that received critical attention were not necessarily films that attracted a mass audience. For example, in 2005, the top grossing film of the year (*Star Wars Episode III: The Revenge of the Sith*) made more money in ticket sales domestically than did all five of the year’s Best Picture Oscar nominees combined (Burchfiel, 2006). Although the five nominees for Best Picture (*Brokeback Mountain*, *Capote*, *Good Night and Good Luck*, *Munich*, and *Crash*) had varying degrees of commercial success, none of them cracked the list of top 25 grossing films for the year (Burchfiel, 2006). *Brokeback Mountain* was the most successful of the five, earning 78.86 million dollars and placing 26th for the year in the box office rankings (Burchfiel, 2006).

In an attempt to choose a sample that is representative of the film industry as a whole, it is important to include critically acclaimed films as well as box office darlings.



To this end, the sampling procedure involved finding the highest grossing films in each of the rating categories for the year 2005.²⁴ Domestic grosses were used, not foreign revenues. Then, an analysis of critics' "top ten" film lists for the year 2005 was undertaken to find the most mentioned films of the year that fit each of the five rating categories. Well-known critics in the film industry were used, most of whom published their "top ten" lists in well known publications, including film and entertainment trade and consumer magazines, newspapers, and websites.²⁵ Point values were assigned to each film's ranking. A first-place ranking on a critic's list earned a film ten points, a second-place ranking earned nine points, and so on. Films with the highest critical point values for each of the rating categories were integrated into the sample used in the content analysis.

Once both the box office and critical data were collected, the lists were compared to eliminate duplication. The ideal plan would have been to include the top five grossing films from each rating category, as well as the five most cited films by critics in each rating. However, it was not that easy to determine which films to code. Critical choices from 2005 tended to radiate to R-rated films, thus leading to an overrepresentation of that rating category and an under representation of less restrictively rated films, especially G and PG rated films. Therefore, the critical choices list was followed as closely as possible, but could not be totally adhered to for some rating categories. For some rating categories, including G and PG, box office figures played a more prominent role in film

²⁴ See Appendix C for complete list of domestic box office returns sorted by rating.

²⁵ For a complete list of critics' top film picks from 2005, see Appendix B

choice than other categories. However, the investigator made every effort to create a balanced list of films in each rating category.²⁶

Another requirement of the sample is that the films selected be available on video cassette or DVD to allow for coding and analysis. If a particular film that was selected using the system described above was not available on video or DVD, the next film on the list was used in its place. When unavailable, the next film was used, etc. This form of sampling is beneficial for several reasons. First, it narrows the sample size to a more reasonable and workable size. Secondly, it allows for a representative sample to be quelled from the huge number of films released in a given year's time. At the same time, it allows for all ratings to be represented on an equal footing. This selection process was used for the sample of fifty films used for both the quantitative and qualitative content analyses of 2005 movies.

It should also be noted that despite the preparation in finding a systematic form of film selection within the sample, there were limitations to this system. For one, there were not ten films released theatrically in all of the MPAA rating categories in 2005. There were only seven "G" rated films theatrically released during the time period in question, while only three "NC-17" rated films were released. Therefore, to accommodate the original proposed sample of 50 films from 2005, additional films from other rating categories were included in the sample. A total of seven G-rated films, 11 PG, PG-13, and R-rated films, three NC-17 rated films and seven unrated films were included. Also, the researcher felt it important to include theatrically-released unrated films in the sample to serve as a comparison to the MPAA-certified films, carrying a

²⁶ The complete list of films analyzed is available in Appendix D. Included is a list of all films analyzed in the content analysis of rating reasons, as well as the 50 full-length films analyzed from 2005.

CARA/MPAA seal of approval. This “unrated category of films is dealt with both in the quantitative and qualitative content analyses. While some unrated films were released without a rating because they were never submitted to the MPAA (such as *The Aristocrats*), others opted to forego the MPAA rating (usually an NC-17) to be released without a rating. This decision-making by producers and film studios impacts the results of this study, thus unrated films were included to round out the 50 film sample.

Reliability

Intercoder reliability is the widely used term for the extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion (Tinsley & Weiss, 1975; 2000). Content analysts must design a procedure in which at least two coders assess the same content, so that their judgments can be compared for consistency (Potter, 1999). The typical test of intercoder reliability in content analysis methodology is to have a pair of coders analyze the same subset of the sample. Within this dually coded portion of the sample, the judgments of the two coders can be compared directly (Kaplan & Baxter, 1982; Mustonen & Pulkkinene, 1993; Potter & Ware, 1987). In some studies, researchers have more than two coders available, such as five (Oliver, 1994), six (Williams, et al., 1982), or seven coders coding test run by pairs (Dominick, 1973; Potter et al., 1995). In some cases, 12 to 18 coders worked in pairs coding the entire sample (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). As many as 40 coders were used in the National Television Violence Study in 1997 (Potter, 1999).

If sample sizes are relatively small, researchers tend to test the entire sample for reliability (Potter, 1999). However, this study analyzed a rather large number of films, and it further required analysis of several subsets of information in the form of scenes

within the given films. Therefore, the analysis consists of several hundred samples (scenes) and approximately 100-150 hours of programming. It is more common to use a small percentage of the sample for reliability, such as 10% or 15%, when such a large sample is content analyzed (Potter, 1999; Potter & Ware, 1987; Williams et al., 1982). Shoemaker (2003) states that it has become standard practice for only “10 to 20 percent of the units to be coded by multiple coders and then, once a sufficiently high level of intercoder reliability is achieved, one coder (generally the primary investigator) proceeds to code the remaining units” (Shoemaker, 2003).

For the study of the fifty sample films’ content from 2005, four coders were used to establish intercoder reliability. Each coder analyzed a total of five films, although not all five of the coded films from each coder was used for the reliability sample due to misunderstandings of categorical definitions in early coding activities. The entire sample of films (N=50) was analyzed by the primary investigator. Before the coding process began all coders were trained by the primary investigator and given a document guided them in the coding process. This set of instructions to coders set out explicit descriptions of every type of content that needs to be coded, and exactly to what the categories on their coding sheets refer.

Once the coders familiarized themselves with the coding instructions and coding forms, the primary investigator gave each coder a test case (film) to code. This test was specifically chosen to include the major types of content present on the coding form, including incidents of sexual content, profanity, violence, nudity, and homosexual content. This initial film (*Donnie Darko*) was not a member of the sample for this study and was not used in reliability calculations. When misunderstandings were found

between coders, the coding document was reworked with more specific definitions of content. In addition, the primary investigator held an additional training session with coders.

After this, a second test case/film was analyzed (*American Beauty*). The results, although more consistent than the first test, alerted the primary investigator to possible flaws in the coding form. The main issue involved the length and breadth of the coding document. Asking coders to look for 149 content items during the course of an approximately two-hour long film proved to be extremely difficult. Coders, though observant and alert, were unable to concentrate on so many content items. Film poses a much more difficult process to deal with than a typical text-based content analysis, due to its visual and auditory nature. Coders need to be alert to words and phrases uttered, as well as visuals, actions and behaviors. In order to streamline the process, the coding form was cut to 84 variables in total, and a new coding booklet was developed for coders. After another meeting between the primary investigator and the three additional coders, coders were asked to code another film. This time, the film was one of the fifty total sample films. All three coders viewed different films, while the primary investigator coded all three of the films. Coders reported much less confusion in their coding duties with the new, streamlined form.

As previously mentioned, the primary investigator coded all fifty of the films in the sample. Due to problems with additional time commitments, one coder dropped out of the process after coding only one film (which is included in the reliability sample). The other coders analyzed three and four films respectively, all of which are included in the reliability calculations (which can be found in appendix E). The total number of films

used in the reliability sample is eight, which constitutes 16% of the total sample (N=50). This falls within widely accepted margins to calculate intercoder reliability with a high level of confidence.

The primary investigator, as in the other quantitative content analysis, coded the entire sample (N=325). However, for this quantitative content analysis of MPAA text-based “rating reasons,” only one additional coder was used. This was due to the simplified coding process. A total of 12.3% of the total sample was checked for intercoder reliability. Again, this is well within an acceptable range for calculating reliability. Complete intercoder reliability calculations for this analysis can be found in Appendix F.

For this research, a reliability level of .80 or greater was sought, which is acceptable in most situations (Krippendorff, 1980). Several measures may be used to determine intercoder reliability, including Cohen’s kappa (Krippendorff, 1980), Scott’s pi (Holsti, 1969), Coefficient of reliability (Holsti, 1969), and several others (Shoemaker, 2003). Although percent agreement is often used, some methodological literature argues that percent agreement is a misleading and an inappropriately liberal measure of intercoder agreement (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, Bracken, 2005). However, these measures are still the most commonly used and cited measures within media research using content analysis. Klaus Krippendorff’s alpha is well regarded and very flexible, as it can be used with multiple coders, accounts for different sample sizes and missing data, and can be used for ordinal, interval and ratio level variables (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, Bracken, 2005). Krippendorff’s Alpha must reach a value between 0.60 and 0.80 to be conditionally reliable and between 0.80 and 1.00 to be unconditionally reliable

(Signorelli, 1997). A computerized (DOS-based) program developed by Klaus Krippendorff was utilized in the analysis of reliability data for both quantitative content analyses used in this research.

Coding Form

There are two coding forms being used in this study. One for the content analysis of 2005 films, and another for the “rating reason” content analysis. Please refer to Appendix G to view the complete forms. The content analysis of multiple full-length films was the most complicated and intricate process; the coding form for that analysis will be discussed first.

Several variables were investigated in this study, so the coding form needed to be quite detailed in order to cover all possible types of content that could result in a particular rating. This coding sheet needed to specify variables that are specific to each character, including gender, marital and/or relationship status/type, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. These variables will be crucial to determine why particular types of content may (or may not) be rated in a seemingly inconsistent manner. It will allow the researcher to look beyond specific content that occurs in films, and look at a more contextual level.

Certainly, all content types that are cited as MPAA rating reasons (which can be found on-line at mpaa.org or cara.org for every film rated) had to be included on the coding sheet as well. However, rather than using the same terms as the MPAA, these terms were operationalized. For example, rather than using “graphic violence” as a coding term, specific violent acts had to be coded, due to the unspecific nature of the term “graphic violence.” There are five main categories of content that needed to be specified.

Those categories included profanity, sexual content, nudity, violence, and drug use. While nudity could be included under the sexual content category in some instances, it will not always be associated with sex. Beyond noting the presence or absence of the above mentioned characteristics or behaviors, the number of such portrayals must also be coded.

Other characteristics were also taken into consideration when crafting the coding form. Variables regarding characters' gender and sexual orientation were taken into consideration, as was the presence and absence of specific behaviors or conditions, including the depiction of adultery, interracial marriage or sexual relationships, and pre-marital sex. All of these depictions were forbidden under the Production Code and the investigator wanted to determine if there was any holdover in values from that original system of film content regulation. Several other variables were also included on the coding form, concluding in the measurement and analysis of 87 total variables. The complete coding form is included in appendix.

The coding form used to analyze the MPAA's "rating reasons" was difficult to develop. One reason for this is that the MPAA's written reasons for assigning ratings are not standardized. While certain terms such as "sexuality," "violence" or "nudity" are used repeatedly, other terms are used much less often. An example is "quirky situations." In order to account for all possible rating reasons, a list of all phrases used in these descriptors was compiled. Upon further analysis of this list, certain content descriptors were combined into specific variables. Most major types of flagged content, including sex, violence, nudity, profanity, and innuendo were included on the coding form.

However, these descriptors were further subcategorized with intensity and frequency descriptors. The full coding form for this analysis is included in appendix G.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Thus far, only the quantitative content analysis has been addressed. It is important to note that the results of the quantitative content analysis guided the qualitative content analysis. By performing the quantitative analysis first, observations were made as to possible inconsistencies that were found within the rating system. Any perceived inconsistencies were more closely explored in terms of context with the qualitative analysis. Close readings or textual analysis were utilized to investigate any possible value system that appeared to be present in the modern day rating system. This allowed for a comparison to values found in the 1930 Production Code, as well. This method allows the researcher to delve more deeply into the context of the filmic material, which helps provide answers as to why a certain type of content is rated a certain way in one film and rated more or less restrictively in another film. It is this analysis which was able to uncover possible double standards or unspoken value systems that occur as a function of the MPAA ratings.

While the content and context of all fifty films is taken into consideration in this analysis, only the most relevant materials and examples will be used to illustrate findings. Upon viewing the entire sample of films, parallels between several films and their content were made. Although these observations cannot be used to determine the intent of the raters, it can illustrate actual decision made by the rating body. From there, inferences can be made to conscious or unconscious biases or values held by the raters. This rich

data allows the research to make comparisons between actual rating decision made by the raters, and the opinions of American parents.

CHAPTER SIX

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS/DATA ANALYSIS

Focus groups were held with parents of children of all ages to determine the extent to which parents use and value the current MPAA film rating system. Historically, the MPAA has cited their own surveys of parental opinions of the system, which consistently show parents are satisfied with the current rating system (Opinion Research Corp, 1998; Triplett, 2007). A criticism of these surveys is that they are being administered by the MPAA, which could pose a problem in terms of possible bias, both in regard to the wording of the questions posed to parents, as well as in regard to data analysis. For this research, focus groups are being used as the method to allow parents to express their opinions of the MPAA rating system. These group interviews allow parents to express themselves using their own words and terminology. They are not forced to choose from a limited set of answers. Using focus groups allows parents to discuss their concerns with a group of parents of children of similar ages, helping to stimulate a conversation that is rich in description and allows the researcher to gain insight into parental attitudes toward the system.

For this research, four focus groups were held. The first group included eight parents of children under the age of eight. Five mothers and three fathers participated in the group. The average age of participants was just over 32.6 years of age. While some parents had only one child, other participants had multiple children (up to three children). Some parents also had children outside of the age group in question (under 8 years of age). The average number of children recorded per participant was 1.875, and the average age of the children of participants was 4.77 years of age. While parents were

prompted by the moderator to focus their discussion toward their child or children that fit the age-based parameters of the specific group, they were allowed to bring up relevant observations and answers that related to their other children outside of the age group in question. This was true of parents in each of the focus groups. By allowing this input, the focus group members were able to compare and contrast the way they use the rating system for children of various ages.

Another focus group was held with eight mothers and fathers of children between the ages of eight and twelve years of age. The gender of participants was evenly split in this group, with four fathers and four mothers taking part in the focus group. The average age of the participants was 39 years three months. All participants in the 8-12 year old group had at least two children. The maximum number of children was four. The average number of children per participant was 2.375 while the median age of the children was 10.63 years.

The third focus group held was comprised of five parents of children who were aged 13 and older. This group was the most difficult to recruit participants for, possibly because of family responsibilities of parents of teenaged kids. While all other focus groups were recruited using flyers and word of mouth, this particular group required newspaper advertisements to recruit our five participants. Unfortunately, even with the newspaper ads, fewer eligible participants than originally desired were used. Due to this fact, all five participants in this group were mothers. No responses were fielded from fathers for this portion of the research. The average age of participants in this group was 44.6 years (range of 33 to 51) and participants all had at least three children, with a maximum of five children. The average number of kids per participant was 3.8 and the

average age of the children was 18.84 years of age. While all participants had at least one child in the 13 to 21 year old range, most also had either younger or older children, as well.

Finally, a focus group of non-parents was also held, which allowed the researcher to compare the opinions and attitudes of parents to adults without children. Six adults with an average age of 33.16 years of age took part in the non-parent group. The group was evenly split by gender, with three women and three men taking part in the focus group. None had children. Two participants were married, while the other four were single.

The responses generated in the three focus groups with parents were used to answer the first three research questions of this study. Some of the information gathered within the groups has been summarized by the researcher, while several direct quotes from participants have also been used to illustrate parents' opinions and attitudes. The first research question probes parents' use of the MPAA rating system.

Research Question #1: Do parents use the MPAA rating system to make decisions about their children's film viewing?

Parents of children of all ages indicated that they were familiar with the MPAA rating system, and all parents illustrated a general knowledge of the age-based categories used by the MPAA to rate films. While several parents asked questions about specific functions, duties and origins of the system, most self-reported a general understanding of the system as a whole.

As for parental use of the system, parents reported varying degrees to which they utilized the system. Some parents indicated that they controlled their children's viewing using specific ratings as a limitation, including these two mothers from the under 8 group.

Mom 4 (0-7 group): I wouldn't take my son, or rent anything, or let him see anything that wasn't rated G, I guess. So, I mean, he's so little, he's only three. So, for us, I guess, if it's not on PBS, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, whatever...I'll watch my shows when I want to, after he's asleep.

Mom 3 (0-7 group): I agree. I wouldn't take my daughter to anything not rated G.

However, it became clear that mothers in the under eight group more strictly followed the rating system than did the fathers represented in that same group. Dads appeared to be more influenced by other forms of information and, specifically, by marketing and advertising when making viewing decisions for their children:

Father 2 (0-7 group): I'm more influenced by the marketing than by the rating. Sure, if it's something I think might be questionable, like Pokemon violence or something, maybe I'll go in and check [the rating], but it's always secondary to the marketing of the film.

Dad 3 (0-7 group): I'm more interested in the movie itself than the rating

Dad 1 (0-7 group): I think you can kinda get an idea of what kind of things are gonna be geared for kids just by, like, the trailers and commercials and stuff like that. If you're renting a movie, a lot of times you can see things and they're placed in the children's section or they've got some sort of children's marking on them, so that you don't really need the rating system, and you know, it says 'childrens' on it somewhere and you read about it, and I can handle that.

Parents of children in the 8-12 year old group for the most part stated that they used the rating system as a mere guideline, rather than establishing a specific rating as a concrete cut-off point for their kids.

Mom #2 (8-12): I see it as a guideline. Um, I might continue to, um, investigate what is the content of the movie. Even if it is, for example, PG-13, I may decide to read what it has to say about the movie and I still may tell my 15 year old, I don't think so.

Mom 1 (8-12): I think the only time it comes into play for me is when it's a R rating. What constituted the R and what is involved in the R? Cause, the R tends to be a little more adult. Too much adult for my children. The rest, I think, is pretty mild, so, comparatively to what's out there.

Dad 2 (8-12): I'd say that's one of the variables. And, the higher, the more adult the rating, the more likely I am to gather more information about why or what.

Although parents within the 8-12 year old group were less rigid in their rating-based limits for film viewing, most parents indicated that they were wary of their children seeing films rated R or more higher. The following excerpt gives an illustration of the diversity of viewpoints within the group regarding rating limits for children's movie viewing:

Mom 3: Usually PG, but then some PG-13 I'll look into it and why it got the rating, and if I don't seem to think it's too severe, then that's okay.

Mom 4: I definitely think, uh, after investigating, there's only been one R rated movie that we've allowed our son to go to, but that wasn't the only criteria for deciding.

Dad 2: I wouldn't have said that we, or I, have any firm guideline, but I know I've never taken the younger son to see an R rated movie or watched an R rated film with him. But, I don't have that as any firm guideline. I think that's just how it happened.

It was the parents of teenaged or older children who had the widest variety of techniques used for restricting their children's viewing. While some parents' children had aged out of the ratings system (were 18 years of age or older), others had younger teenagers at home. Two of the moms whose offspring were all ages 18 or over reported that they no

longer limited their children's viewing , but did when they were younger. One mother did not allow her children to watch R rated movies until they were 16 years old, while the other said her limit was based more on the content that gave the film the R-rating, rather than the rating itself

Mom #4: If it was war, they could watch it, because war is R. Sexual stuff I prefer them not to watch that for as long as I can get away with that. I always told them it [sex] was not a spectator sport

One of the mothers of a 15 year old girl stated that she absolutely would not let her daughter watch R rated movies, nor did she allow her other older children to watch R rated films until they were out of high school. A concern raised in all three of the parental focus groups with parents of children of all ages was with home viewing of films on DVD or cable television. While parents had a strong sense of what types of content they would allow or disallow their children to view, they were worried about their children's viewing at friends' homes whose parents might enforce different standards for movie content. The following is an excerpt from the discussion of this topic in the parents of 8 to 12 year old focus group:

Mom 3: And, but also, it's like you said earlier, it's hard when they leave your realm what they're exposed to. I've been dealing with that lately.

Mom 2: You know what though? I think a parent, when you go, should call a home...

Mom 3: ...Which I would. If I were going to show an R-rated movie while someone else's kids were at my house, I would okay it first...

Dad 4: You can't necessarily trust the parents, though. Like, some parents, their kid has a room downstairs and they really don't pay attention to what they're doing. So, if you call and ask if they're watching an R rated movie they say, 'Oh no, I would never let them do that', but that doesn't mean they're not.

While the parents of younger children were more concerned with the content itself their kids might be viewing, especially violent content, the parents of older kids were more concerned with social stigmas and peer pressure that might result from their standards. This exchange from the focus group with mothers of teenagers and older illustrates the concern well:

Mom 3: Our middle child just turned 18 and our youngest is just about to be 15 and we still won't let her see R. I mean, how ridiculous of a statement. But, um, it seems there are lots of parents who, I kind of have to fight that and hold the line because a lot of times, and it's more so not even at the movie theater but at the home, home movies that kids are watching.

Mom 5: I agree with that

Mom 3: Kids are going, [pause] She's been going to sleepovers where they have R movies, I mean, for years. And I've said, you just have to tell them you can't watch this and you have to excuse yourself if you need to, but it's not okay. She went to a house where there was a 15 year old and a 13 year old and they were watching *Pulp Fiction*. I was astonished. Well, they said, it's okay 'cause we've already seen it. So, it's really hard. It's hard when, even if you feel a certain way about it, there's going to be a lot of pressure

Mom 2: Yeah, especially because your kids are going to say, 'Hey, it's just a movie'.

Mom 5: Right, right. My kids would get excluded because they knew I would not allow certain, you know, they couldn't see certain movies; more so when they were younger. The PG-13, when they were younger, that was my cut off. Or I would see it first and decide whether or not, why I thought it was PG-13 and whether or not I thought it was content appropriate. As they got older I had to go see the R movies they wanted to watch before they turned 17 before I'd let them go, and it would just infuriate them. "But, but, everyone else"...yeah, whatever. But I stuck with it, and you're right. You end up becoming one of *those* moms, but I don't care. Sue me. You can see it when you're out of the house and can rent it on your own. It'll still be around.

Clearly, these mothers wanted to make sure their children followed the viewing standards established within the family unit, but, at the same time, hated to see their children ostracized due to those standards. A genuine sense of concern for their children's ability to fit-in and remain true to their family values was expressed. Generally, mothers felt that their children's friends had much less stringent guidelines established for media consumption than their own family did.

Another mother shared her experiences raising a 13 year old son and much younger children in the same household. When her son was young, this mother was much more permissive in her viewing decisions, but due in part to a subsequent second marriage and a newfound religious conviction, she was beginning to limit not only her son's film viewing, but viewing for the entire household of children, which ranged in age from 3 to 17 years old. This mom, who was only 33 years old herself, explained how her own upbringing influenced her child-rearing and the way she dealt with media content.

Mom #1: I was raised in a home by my mom, she was a single mom, she was never there. I watched whatever I wanted, did whatever I wanted. And even my son, who is 13, when he was young I let him watch pretty much whatever, because when I was a young mom it didn't make any difference to me. I didn't even understand the value of boundaries, and now I struggle with him for that reason because there's movies that he's seen that are way worse than anything I let him watch now. But, there are younger kids in the home now and it just makes a big difference.

A recurring theme in the focus groups was the need to gather additional information about a film from a variety of sources in order to make sound judgments regarding their children's access to particular films. As one of the fathers in the under 8 group stated, it's ultimately the parents' responsibility to determine the suitability of a film for their child or children.

Dad 3 (0-7 group) : I think the rating system can only be a very, very general guideline. I think you can add the L's and the V's [for language and violence], but the onus is on us. It's on the parents to say, not only what can my child handle, but what do I want my child to see? We need to be better consumers and better prepared. I don't think the rating system is meant to take our place in parenting. I think we have to be responsible in terms of what our children see. The responsibility's on us and not on the rating system.

Some of the other sources parents reported using to find out content information about films, in addition to the MPAA rating system, included websites such as moviemom.com, imdb.com, rottentomatoes.com, and pluggedinonline.com. Other parents mentioned recommendations from friends and family members as an additional method of determining content of films, as well as reading critical reviews in the newspaper or in magazines. Some parents stated that they regularly view films themselves before they allow their children to see them. A mother in the 8-12 year old group was one of the parents who did this on a regular basis.

Mom 4: I guess I just don't trust them [the film ratings] enough, so that I usually go see the movie in the theater myself, make my decision, and then go rent the video if I think it's something I feel...that's what I did with *Lord of the Rings*. I think I waited almost three years to show it to my son from the time it came out in the theater.

Several parents expressed similar fears regarding the film ratings system. In each focus group, anywhere from one to three parents (a total of five) said they felt that the ratings were not a satisfactory method of determining the appropriateness of a film for their child, therefore, they didn't use the system.

Research Question #2: Do parents like the current MPAA rating system? Why or why not?

Overall, parental support of the MPAA ratings system was tepid at best. Not one of the twenty-nine participants in the four focus groups praised the system or expressed complete satisfaction with the current system. The response to the system from parents of the youngest children (under eight years of age) could best be summarized by the phrase “it’s better than nothing,” as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Mom 4 (0-7 group): It’s good to have a general guideline.

Mom 5 (0-7): It’s better than nothing.

Mom 3 (0-7): Yeah, It’s better than nothing.

Dad 2 (0-7): But I don’t know if it’s better than nothing.

Mom 3 (0-7): You think nothing would be better than having this?

Dad 2 (0-7): I’m here to advocate anarchy. Because, I do agree, that yes, it’s nice, you can see the G, okay, okay, but, we’ve all explained instances that we’ve went and saw that this was G but it didn’t fit our value systems. So how is it that we can devise a system that will fit everybody’s values? Maybe the better thing is just to not have a system and put the onus on the parent.

Dad 1 (0-7): I would have to endorse that. I think *nothing* (emphasized) would be better than this rating system. I don’t use it. It doesn’t tell me anything.

Dad 3 (0-7): I think that’s great for us. We’re all adults, we can see what we want to see, but for the kids, it does give me, you know, if there’s an R rating, I’m not going to let my 7 year old go see it. And if it’s PG-13, I’ll think really hard about this movie and what makes it that rating.

Mom 3 (0-7): And better than that, your eleven year old can’t walk into it. They’re not going to sell the ticket to an eleven year old

Parents in the 8-12 year old group were even less enthusiastic when discussing the value of the MPAA rating system. Not one parent was complimentary of the MPAA during our

discussion. A father of two daughters who fit within that age category characterized the ratings as...

Dad 3: Not descriptive enough, not extensive enough, not targeted enough.

The question of why parents were, as a group, displeased with the MPAA rating system could be answered in several ways. The main criticisms parents had of the current film ratings were as follows:

- The apparent inconsistency of application of the ratings
- The over-reliance on age as the main justification for ratings, coupled with the inability of the system to account for a child's individual level of maturity
- The lack of specific information regarding the content of films
- The apparent disconnect between raters' and individual parents' values systems

Inconsistency of Application

Parents in all of the focus groups voiced concerns about the inconsistency of the rating system. The following is an excerpt from a father in the under eight focus group.

Dad 1 (under 8): I watch most of my movies at home. Um, and it's kind of difficult with just the rating because they're rated in ways for so many different things. You might have a PG movie that's rated PG for violence that's a lot worse for a kid to watch than an R rated movie, because there could be something happening in the movie that a 4 or 5 year old might not understand. So, it's kinda hard to use the ratings as just letters, you know, to determine what's proper for a kid or not. You might have a PG movie that you watch and go, I can't believe this is PG. Then you have an R rated movie and you're like, well, my son can watch this and he's just not going to understand it.

Dad 1 (0-7): That's why the rating system hasn't had any value to me for years. You see things and say, well I can't jive this with this rating and I can't jive this, there's no...there's no set structure of how things are...it

just seems like a lot of times it's very arbitrary. For me, it hasn't had any value for a long time. I just read up. I spend a lot of time just reading up.

Similar concerns regarding consistency were also voiced by parents of 8-12 year olds.

Mom 4 (8-12): I'm wondering why they change so drastically every few years. I just don't think they're reliable year to year. If they're calling one thing strong violence one year... or strong language is my favorite. They'll put "strong language" in, and they'll say boob the entire movie, and then the next movie, they don't say "strong language" and the person's going off saying every word in the book. I don't see the consistency. That's the bigger issues.

One mother of teenagers discussed her experiences of going to see some movies at the theater with her kids when they were younger and finding herself questioning the ratings that had been assigned. More than once she was forced to leave the theater before the end of the film, children in tow, because she felt the content was too adult for them to be exposed to.

Mom 5: Sometimes we'd get in there and I would think, what was this rated? And I would actually get up and go look and think, ooohh, I disagree. You gotta be kidding me! This isn't PG or PG-13, this is R.

Parents in all three focus groups questioned the consistency of the assignment of film ratings and expressed concern that they could never be sure what to expect from particular ratings. Concern for ratings creep tied into this concern, which was touched upon in the earlier in this chapter in the quote from Mom 4 in the 8 to 12 year old group. Ratings creep is the phenomenon of films with similar content being rated less restrictively as time passes. A quote from a parent of older children (in the 13+ group) expresses a concern echoed by other parents.

Mom 5 (13+): It seems like every couple of years they up the ante of what they're going to stick in there, and if this producer does a movie where

there's blood and guts, then the next, and it sells, every year you get more and more and more.

Some parents in the 8-12 year old group mentioned that they would possibly allow their children to view R rated films from the 1970s and 1980s, when they were growing up, because they felt they would be rated less restrictively if released today. Parents across the board felt that material, whether it was violence, language or sexuality had become more commonplace in the media in general, resulting in a lessening of standards. Overall, a majority of parents felt raters were much more lenient and allowed more risqué materials to seep into less restrictively rated films than they had in the past.

Maturity Levels vs. Age Constraints

Other participants were concerned that the ratings focused too heavily on the age of the child, without taking the child's maturity or personal development level into account. An example of an exchange from the under-eight group clearly illustrates this major parental concern:

Dad 3 (under 8): I really think it depends on the child, 'cause we have a daughter, she's just a little bit outside of this group, she's 8, and a son who's seven, but she can handle a lot more information and stuff than our son can. I mean, he gets, he sees something scary and he'll have nightmares. So, I think you have to look at not only the age of your child but how your child handles movies and information and how they process that stuff...

Mom 5 (0-7): ...they're own maturity.

Dad 3 (0-7): Yes, their own maturity, because that's just as important as their age.

Parents of teenaged children were less concern with the maturity level of individual children, but were concerned with other individual emotional characteristics that they felt

impacted their children's ability to deal with specific types of content. The mothers of teenaged sons, specifically, were concerned with aggression and anger that they had witnessed in their sons. Therefore, they were concerned with specific types of content more than others (especially violence and language). These moms felt that the age-based rating designations as they now stand were less helpful than they could be, because they didn't allow them to make sound judgments as to what their sons should be allowed to see. These moms felt unable to base their decisions on age alone. They wanted specific content information that would allow them to take the emotional state of their kids into consideration, much like the parents of younger children who wanted to take overall maturity levels into consideration.

Lack of Specificity

A related concern that emerged from the focus group discussions was that several parents felt that the film ratings did not provide enough specific information about the content of films. Rather than providing parents with a clear rundown of the types of content in individual films, the broad, age-based rating categories were characterized as vague by most participants. The following excerpt from the under eight focus group shows that parents are looking for more specific information from the ratings. Without that specificity, most feel the ratings are less than adequate tools to use in determining the appropriateness of individual films for their child.

Dad 3 (0-7): I think more than the rating, I want to know why it's rated that. I think that shows in the examples. What is the content it's rated PG-13 for? And if that's the content I think is acceptable for a child, then I would let the child see that. But if it's one thing, it might be okay. If it's rated PG-13 for some profanity and very mild violence, that's different if it's rated PG-13 for other things.

Mom 5 (0-7): I like how, well, I haven't read a TV Guide for a coon's age now because I have the guide channel on cable, but it used to have, like, um, a V for violence and N for nudity, and that kind of stuff. And, I really think that would depict a more accurate picture. It's still one letter per item, so it'll have DU for drug use or DR for drug reference, you know that kind of stuff. It doesn't take up the whole screen to sit there and say "because of drug use or violence" whatever. And it still gives you a more accurate picture of what's going to be in that film. I think even you just went by that, that would be better than using G, PG, PG-13 because it breaks these, here, for different various reasons. Rather than a collective reason, Instead of specifically saying this has quite a bit of violence so we'll give it a PG-13, and if you don't like violent movies, you'll see a V and you won't go see it. And that would be more accurate.

The mother quoted above was not the only participant to suggest the MPAA move to a more content-specific ratings system.

Mom 4 (8-12): What I don't understand is why instead of having these sort of vaguely age related, why they don't have content-related? Like, Where they say sexual content and things like that, why don't they have little, and I know when you see the movie, like on a DVD, there are some abbreviations, I don't see why they don't have that for the rating?

This lack of specificity in relation to content, or the vagueness of the definitions of each rating category, is seen as problematic to many parents. As illustrated in the quotes above, parents would rather know exactly what content is included in a given film, rather than referring to an age-based guideline. This issue relates to another complaint that parents voiced, which is the difference between the MPAA's values based assessments and parental values.

Value Systems

Another issue that arose from the focus groups was the idea of a discrepancy between evaluative criteria used by the MPAA raters and the value systems of actual parents. Because the MPAA rating system is evaluative in nature, rather than descriptive,

many parents feel the MPAA's age-based rating decisions are not representative of their personal family value systems. The following excerpt of a conversation within the under eight focus group speaks to the issue of values-based ratings.

Dad 3(0-7): I think that our puritanical forefathers tended to have much greater consternation over nudity rather than violence, and I'd rather have him [his seven-year old son] see partial nudity than a murder.

Mom 3: You can't pick up a G [movie] now and be completely guaranteed there's no violence

Dad 2(0-7): The word you're going to use in your dissertation is "value system," that a lot of times we don't hold the same values as the MPAA and their rating system.

This conversation continued later in the same focus group with parents of children under eight years of age, painting a further picture of this parental concern.

Dad 1 (0-7): That kind of goes into how arbitrary it is for me. There are things in movies that just offend the shit out of me and they're in a G movie...

Dad 2 (0-7): It's not usually cussing, by the way (jokingly; group laughs)

Dad 1 (0-7): but then there are other things that you'll see in an R rated movie and I think there's nothing about this that would stop me from watching it with my kid.

This same sentiment was echoed in the focus group involving parents of children ages eight to twelve.

Mom 4 (8-12): You know, as we can see here, we all have different values and it's wonderful to be able to, you know, to have different values, and that's great. But these ratings aren't explaining what values are being shown in the movie at all, really. As long as you've got these random categories, instead of saying there's too much violence for this age group...

Overall, parents wanted to find a way to be able to reinforce their own family values and personal value systems, rather than exposing their kids to materials that were in conflict

with those values. More than that, parents just didn't feel that the rating decisions made by the MPAA were necessarily appropriate. Many parents expressed their belief that violent content should be rated more restrictively, while other incidental content should be allowed in less restrictively rated films. A thorough discussion of the types of content parents felt was acceptable and unacceptable follows in the discussion of research question three.

Research Question #3: What types of materials do parents believe should be rated most restrictively? Why?

Within the focus group discussions, several types of film content were discussed. Parents expressed a variety of opinions as to what types of content they found inappropriate for their children. Some of the content that was mentioned by parents was violence, sex and sexual situations, language, drug use, under-age drinking and smoking, and the treatment of women and minorities. All of these issues will be discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

Violence was the type of content that was brought up by parents most often as inappropriate for children's viewing. Resoundingly, parents pointed to violence as the type of content that gives them most cause for concern. This exchange took place in the under-eight focus group:

Mom 3: Ironically, the G movies still have all of this violence.
[General consensus, uh-huhs and nodding heads from entire group]
It's the violence that bothers me most. I mean, even a sex scene, for a kid, I'd rather have them see that than this Ninja Turtles ripping each other apart kind of stuff. It's disturbing sometimes. They're disturbing to *me*. I mean, I'm not encouraging them to watch sex scenes (laughter).

Mom 5: If you had the choice between watching a married couple making love and two people shredding each other to blood and gore. I mean...

Dad 2: ...It doesn't even go to that extreme, necessarily. I don't think they're going to have blood and gore in a G movie, but there's still gonna be like, cartoon hitting and kicking and things along those lines. Like, uh, *The Incredibles*, was that a PG movie or a G movie?

Mom 5: Even the *Power Puff Girls*.

Dad 2...*Power Puff Girls*, yeah.

Mom 5: I mean. They're fighting the monsters all the time and all that stuff.

Concern for violent content was not limited to parents of young children. It was also discussed by parents of 8 to 12 year olds and teenagers. Here's a quote from a mother of teenagers regarding her concern about violent content and its ramifications:

Mom 5 (13+): I mean, how many times do you need to see someone get blown up? Or how many people do you need to see get blown up where there's splatter patterns? Unless you have been in a crime scene or an accident where people are literally missing arms and legs, you can see it, but you can't smell it, you can't feel the horror. I mean, you can go, Oh God, that's gross, but you can't feel the horror and nobody's there to see the clean up afterward. They just switch to the next scene. So, it leaves viewers and kids in particular who haven't developed that ability to discern between this is real and this is not. Or, they may know it's not real, but they don't understand the ramifications of what this movie isn't telling you.

Despite the general disdain for violent content, the type of violence was important for some parents. Several parents voiced their concern about the context for violence. Ironically, a parent in the under eight group and a parent in the 8 to 12 year old group both used Jackie Chan films as a type of violence they found more acceptable. A mother from the 8-12 year old group explains:

Mom 4 (8-12): I allow my kids to watch Jackie Chan movies, for instance, 'cause I feel like you've got the good guy, you've got a very clear description of it being defensive situation, not a, let's go blow

everybody away who seems to be on the opposite side, so the type of violence would be helpful too.

There was one stark difference between the mothers of teenagers and other parents of younger children. Parents of teenagers were much more concerned with sexual content than were the parents of children under thirteen years of age. Violence was clearly the number one concern for parents of younger kids, but parents with teen children were equally concerned with sexual content.

Mom 4: When my daughter was young if a sexual scene was coming on and it was too much, even the kissing, I would cover her eyes. And then as she got older I'd ask her to cover her eyes and she would. She was silly and it worked for a long time.

Although the concerns voiced regarding sexual content were heard mainly in the focus group with parents of teenage children, it wasn't necessarily their teens they were concerned with seeing the sexual content. As illustrated in the quote above, the mother was discussing sexual or romantic situations that her now-grown daughter saw when she was young. This was also true of the mother of two teenagers who also had a young daughter at home. This following excerpt is from her:

Mom 1 (13+): And then the other thing I think is really important are the sex scenes, as far as, how do you teach...I have a four year old daughter, and how do I teach her sex is something special between a man and a woman once they're married and that we should hold on to that and that it's sacred. And the things I believe when, I mean, literally every show, every show they're having sex, with more than one partner. I don't...she doesn't watch anything. She doesn't get to watch anything.

While mothers expressed their concern for younger children viewing sexual content, it seems only logical that it is rooted in their experiences raising teenagers and older children. Whereas the parents of younger kids may not be dealing with issues of sexuality in such a concrete manner with their sons and daughters, the parents of teens

need to face this as a very real issue on a daily basis. They have lived through watching their kids move into adulthood. Many of the participants in the focus group have experienced at least one child leaving home, getting married, etc. This gives them a unique perspective. It would be interesting to reconvene the focus groups with the parents of the children under 13 in about ten years time to see if their concerns have shifted at all.

Nudity was not as much of a concern, but it was clear it depended on context. No one wanted their child to see explicit sexuality, but seemed to be fine with incidental or more natural forms of nudity. Examples given by the group included a woman breast feeding, or someone swimming nude in a lake, etc.

Mom 3 (under eight): I will compare it...I see a lot of French movies, and looking at the French system versus the American system, what's ironic is if there's the least bit of violence in a French film they get a high rating. But, in America, you can have a ton of violence in a G movie. As soon as someone's boobs are showing, the rating goes way up. Whereas in a French film, you can have the whole country naked and it still would be considered appropriate for younger people. So, it's just very different. I think it just brings to light what you want your kids to see. I don't necessarily want them to see a lot of nudity, but the violence, even in very young cartoons, is, I think, unacceptable. And now they're marketing it, and my nephew who is 6 who I spend a lot of time with, has gotten into the video games that go along with the cartoons and which then just take the most violent parts of the cartoon and I think it just redoubles that effort there.

Language was also an issue for some parents, but not all.

Mom 2 (under eight): Language is a big one for me. Violence, of course, is first, but then language.

The mother in the preceding quote has a three month old son and is dealing with "training her husband not to swear in front of the new baby. She shared with the group the concerns she had trying to convince her husband that the baby might pick up on the

profanity and use it later in life, or at least grow up to believe that type of language was acceptable. Therefore, profanity was a more important type of content for her to shield her child from. In fact, both mothers of very young children (under six months) were concerned with language to an extent.

Other parents were not as concerned with profanity, as illustrated in this quote from a mother of three who participated in the 8-12 year old focus group.

Mom 4 (8-12): Frankly, I don't really mind language at all, I don't even mind sexuality most of the time with PG 13.

For the most part, parents expressed concern with the most severe profanities and the frequency of the profanities uttered by characters.

Mom 1 (13+): He had it on his DVD player and he had it on, what's it called, closed caption or open caption where the words are coming across the bottom. And this is the day I actually made the decision to start paying attention to this stuff. Because, I couldn't hear it, but I could see it, and every other word was the F-word.

Drugs and drug references were seen as inappropriate for films that younger children would see.

Dad 1: You know, my son is 5. I don't think I could explain drugs to him at this point, so I'd rather he not...I mean, I know at some point I'm gonna have to explain drugs to him and be realistic about it, but I don't want him to wonder why the guy is wrapping the hose around his arm right now at this point.

Mom 3: I agree, There's no place for drugs in a G movie.

Dad 3: No, not at all.

Most parents were not terribly concerned with depictions of drinking alcoholic beverages or smoking cigarettes. In fact, several parents mentioned during the course of our discussions that they felt films were portraying fewer characters smoking than ever

before. The following statement from a mother in the under-eight year old group addresses this issue:

Mom 5: I've noticed a lot lately, I mean, compared to movies a couple decades ago, um, smoking and drinking and all that stuff are held for the villain of the situation. You don't see a hero smoking a cigarette before he blows off on a Harley or whatever anymore. I'm, actually, quite grateful for that because you don't see the good guys smoking as much. That does shine a harsher light on the smoking and stuff, so they don't look up so much to that person.

Parents definitely seemed to differentiate between drug use and drinking in terms of appropriateness for their children to see, with most parents accepting alcohol as more acceptable. A mom from the 8-12 year old focus group puts the feelings of several participants into words:

Mom 2 (8-12): Drugs, mild, I can deal with because I talk to them about that, but if someone ODs or is having withdrawal or something like that, that's too much for someone under the age of 13 when they don't even have the knowledge of what's going on. I wouldn't want them to see stuff like that. But, somebody's having a drink, okay.

Most of the types of content outlined thus far in this chapter seem to be fairly predictable, in that they are all aspects of film content that raters seem to take into consideration to some extent. However, other content-based concerns emerged from the focus group discussions with parents that aren't generally addressed by the MPAA rating system. One of the concerns expressed by parents, especially parents of young children, was the inappropriateness of embedding marketing materials in children's movies. The father of a four year old explains:

Dad 1: Yeah, one of the most objectionable things about movies to me is there's an associated marketing campaign for crap and toys and food, and stuff. You know that the kid's going to see it and come home and start demanding that stuff. They're going to see it on TV and want it. I have to

disappoint him. I have to say there's no way we're buying this stuff.
Sorry.

Several parents in the under eight focus group commiserated with the father that made that statement. Many had heard the cries from their children when they would not buy them toys or products that had been included in the content of a given film, or that had been promoted by the characters in a film they had watched.

In addition to this issue of commercialization of children's films, other parents were very concerned about the depiction of women and minorities in film. All three of the parental focus groups touched on this as an important issue, without prompting from the moderator. Women's roles in film were an especially important topic to both mothers and fathers. The following is a quote from a mom in the under eight year old focus group.

Mom 5 (under 8): There are quite a few films that, uh, depict women in a very vulgar way and none of that is ever in the ratings or anything like that. And, I think that sets a really bad standard for our children. It's telling little boys its okay to beat the crap out of your women and treat them like dirt, and it's telling little girls its okay for guys to do it to them.

Some parents thought the film ratings would be more effective if they dealt more with context rather than just specific types of content. One father in the 8-12 year old group related this to his concerns about issues of depiction.

Dad 4 (8-12): I say depictions of race, class and gender should be part of the rating system, rather than how many seconds of whatever content is in it. It seems to be more the volume of certain things rather than the overall nature of the movie, and I just think, I don't know, those, a lot of those issues aren't even addressed

A mother in that same 8-12 year old focus group related the same theme to violence and why certain types of violence are more disturbing than others:

Mom 4 (8-12): Violence particularly a lot of the teen movies do center around the topic of sexuality and drugs, and most of that doesn't bother me, except when it becomes for example what you're saying, when it sort of glorified for boys and the female characters seem to act totally blasé, like this is totally normal, and there's a sense of normalcy in the objectifying of women. Like, that that's just the standard of our culture and we should just assume that's that just a part of it. The actual sexuality might never happen in the movie, but that tone runs through the movie. If that tone could be somehow detailed, that would be nice.

This concern regarding depictions of women as victims was echoed by others in the 8-12 year old group, as well as in the 13+ group. The following is an exchange between a mother and father in the 8-12 year old focus group:

Mom 1 (8-12): And, as far as violence, there's no need for them to view things like, the woman just got her throat slashed or scenes where a woman is powerless. I don't like any of those kind of scenes where women have no power or they're portrayed as stupid. So, I try to shield my girls from stuff like that. Depictions of women, that show women as powerless or being violated in any type of violence, I shield my girls from them.

Dad 3: I have to say I try to shield my girls from horror movies. They really want to watch horror movies a lot and they're just not something I'm big into. Uh, I try to keep them away from it because horror movies tend to have a conglomeration of excessive violence, excessive gore, graphic, often involving nudity or sex, and powerlessness of women and men. Why do they need to see that kind of stuff? And, furthermore, some horror movies that include all of that stuff are rated PG 13 because they don't have language.

Both mothers and fathers expressed concerns with the depictions of gender roles and issues of body image that arise from the themes and content of modern movies. Parents of young girls were especially concerned with body image issues, expressing the view that almost all female characters were depicted in unrealistic ways. This was applied to animated characters as well as real-life actors and actresses. For the most part, parents felt female characters in particular

were depicted as too thin, too well-endowed for their age (if they were young or teenaged female characters), and were characterized by one mom as dressing “slutty.” Parents were worried about their children using these characters as models for how they should behave, dress or look in real life. Parents of children under the age of 13 were especially concerned about this, as they felt their children were especially susceptible to such depictions.

Dad 3 (8-12): I’d like my girls, I’d like them to have a good self confidence, a good body image. Those are things that are constantly being challenged by their peers. The media is a big influence on the peer groups, okay? You need to be thin, you need to be wealthy, you need to have the latest style or the technical gizmo, and, those are themes that are reflected in the movies as well.

Mom 1 (8-12): All the girls look thin, you know?

Dad 3 (8-12): How do you tell your girls they, if you’re watching Mean Girls, that they shouldn’t act like the mean girls. Yet, the mean girls wield so much power. If power is what they want, power is what they’re going to get, but if there’s a way to get it without killing everybody in the process.

A parent in the 13+ focus group, who also had a four year old daughter, shared with the group that she had recently caught her youngster looking at herself in the full length mirror while sucking in her stomach, attempting to look thinner. The mother was mortified that at the young age of four, her daughter was already aware of and concerned about her physical beauty and size.

A mother who participated in the 13+ focus group brought up a related concern regarding content that might lead teens to believe that violence within a romantic relationship is acceptable:

Mom 4 (13+): The other thing I have problems with, I explain to people as adults and to children as they get a little older that being struck is not,

[pause] it doesn't feel good, it's not romantic. Girls slapping boys across the face is not sensual or romantic. It's wrong. It's hurtful. And people watch TV and think, that's it, that's what you're striving for in a relationship. That's wrong, and it's been going on the whole time we've been watching TV. People slapping each other across the face and pretending it's a passionate prelude or some kind of foreplay.

A discussion of why parents are concerned about the impact of such role models is included in the following section that details the reasons parents are concerned about exposing their children to these specific types of film content.

WHY?

Now that we've dealt with the types of content parents would most like to shield their children from, it's important to dig a bit deeper and determine why parents want to limit those specific types of content. What these focus groups helped to determine was that the why depended on the type of content discussed. However, some basic reasons were established via the focus group discussions. Those reasons include:

- A concern with imitation of behaviors
- Fear reactions from children, especially young children
- Modeling of behaviors and values
- Desensitization to violence and language

Imitation of behaviors, specifically violence, was a major concern voiced by parents. The following excerpt from the under-eight focus group helps illuminate parents' concerns regarding imitation of violent content:

Mom 5 (under 8): At least my personal opinion. I think that, um, with them seeing it all the time it's putting it in their mind that it's okay, that it's acceptable. When they see, I'm sorry I'm going to use *Power Puffs* again, sorry. When they see these cute little girls kicking the monster's butt, there's been a few times when my older daughter has hit her younger sister, 'cause she's the monster now. This little tiny girl, she's the

monster! There are times I've had to pull her aside and tell her that's not what you're supposed to do, and your sister's not a monster.

Although most of the imitation discussion tended to focus on violence, parents were also concerned about children imitating characters' use of profanity. Parents who attempted to maintain a profanity-free home were worried that the use of improper language would, in a sense, teach their children that although that language isn't used in their own home, it is used in the "outside" world. Such a revelation might make it seem to be a appropriate option for their children.

For some parents, especially the parents of children under the age of approximately ten, simple fear was a major concern. Children of a young age have trouble telling make-believe from reality, and therefore have serious fear reactions to film content, as explained by a participant in the under eight focus group.

Dad 3: And our son, he's seven, and he's terrified of death, I mean, really scared. It's more that I don't want to frighten him and then have to... it's not that I don't want to spend time consoling him, but I just don't want to go through it in the first place. So we save the scary stuff for after he goes to bed.

Mom 2: Yeah, I think one is modeling and the other is just, like, fear. Until they can understand what is real and what is fantasy, we don't ever want them to be scared. I used to work with teen moms, you know, and I saw some of them who were watching all sorts of R rated movies and their kids, you know, little three year olds, who were constantly, had all these fears of things that would have never happened in little, small-town Montana, but were a part of their everyday life because of the movies and the TV they were watching.

Modeling, as mentioned in the last excerpt, rather than straight imitation, was also an issue for parents. Some were worried that children might model behaviors or belief systems exhibited in films, especially if it involved a character to which the child related on a parasocial level. The following is an excerpt from the under eight focus group:

Mom 2: But, the other thing is, you know, that I mentioned earlier, is modeling. Like, I want them to see, you know, more healthy role models of kids who are active or who are patterning, so they don't become, like numb to seeing these sorts of things, over and over again, so they don't lose their...

Mom 3: shock value?

Mom 2: Yeah, even though we don't do those things, it shows it's something that someone somewhere does.

Mom 3: Yeah, I agree. I'm sorry, I don't know your name (addressing Mom 5), but I think it validates whether they're smoking or fighting or anything else. If somebody on screen is doing it and they're a beloved character on screen. It's one thing if they're the villain, but when it's the hero that's beating someone up.

The final reason for parents concerns with specific types of film content revolved around desensitization. This was a term that was used often in all four of the focus groups that were held, including the non-parent focus group. A mother in the 13+ group talks about her fears regarding violent content and its perceived desensitizing effects:

Mom 5 (13+): Just because you're mesmerized by all the blood and guts and gore and the explosions, I want you to be able to be shocked at some point. And if you just look at everything being blown up and they come back at the end of the movie, you have no idea what reality is. Because, I think media determines what our kids look at as what's real and what's not. I think it has a huge influence on the kids.

Desensitization was also seen as problematic by parents in the 8-12 year old focus group.

In this next excerpt a father and mother from that group discuss the idea that the American public will eventually react to exaggerated levels of violence, sex and profanity in media products.

Dad 3: I agree that people will only take so much, but I think the tolerance level is way too high

Mom 3: Here's a point I thought of last night and it goes back to the desensitization. I think we're all so desensitized that we need this bigger fix, so it's the violence and the sex that's so pervasive now, and I don't know how to bring that level back down.

Summary of focus group findings

The focus groups held with parents of children of all ages, as well as with non-parents, served as a fantastic source of information for this study. While it was expected that some parents would be unhappy with the current rating system employed by the Motion Picture Association of America, the negative reaction to the system was overwhelming. Nearly every participant in the four focus groups was highly critical of the system. A few parents felt the ratings were a helpful tool, but still had problems with the way films were rated. It's important to note, though, that despite the near unanimous dislike of the system, several parents reported that they did in fact limit their children's film viewing based at least in part on a film's rating. Most parents and non-parents reported that they did not use the rating system to determine films they themselves would see. It was used only as a tool for determining the appropriateness of children's viewing.

The main criticisms of the current MPAA ratings system revolved around the lack of specificity of the ratings in terms of what types of content were found in individual films. Parents stated they would prefer a system that was more informational, that specified the content included in each film, to a system that sets vague age limits. Parents felt the age limits took for granted that parents' values would be similar to that of the MPAA raters, and most did not agree with the standards utilized by the MPAA. Furthermore, parents felt the ratings were applied inconsistently, making it more difficult to rely on the ratings as a credible tool.

When parents were asked about the types of content they were most concerned with their children being exposed to, they resoundingly named violence and the worst offender. In addition, most parents went on to express the opinion that they didn't feel the MPAA system adequately addressed violent content in films, instead focusing their decisions on language use, sexual content and nudity. While violence was the most emphatically discussed content, sexual content, language, nudity and drug use were also found to be inappropriate by a portion of the focus group participants. Smoking was rarely mentioned as problematic, with alcohol consumption not seen as a major problem area.

Most parents were concerned with these types of content due to a variety of reasons. Some felt that violence and language, in particular, were easy for their children to imitate. Others were concerned with the overall modeling effect of content on their children, whether it taught them lessons about society the parents felt were inappropriate, or if it provided unhealthy role models. The idea that movies would teach their children a value system that was incongruent with their family value system was seen as a major problem. The parents of young children were also quite concerned about fear reactions to violent or scary content in films. Depictions of death were related to this consequence, as well. Several parents of young children expressed disapproval with animated features, especially Disney films, for their portrayals of death. Many parents felt that films like *Bambi*, and *The Lion King*, in which a parent is killed or dies early on in the film is just too much for young children to deal with, despite the family-friendly G rating. The 2006 film *The Bridge to Terabithia* was singled out as a film that dealt with death in an emotional manner that many parents' young children found overwhelming.

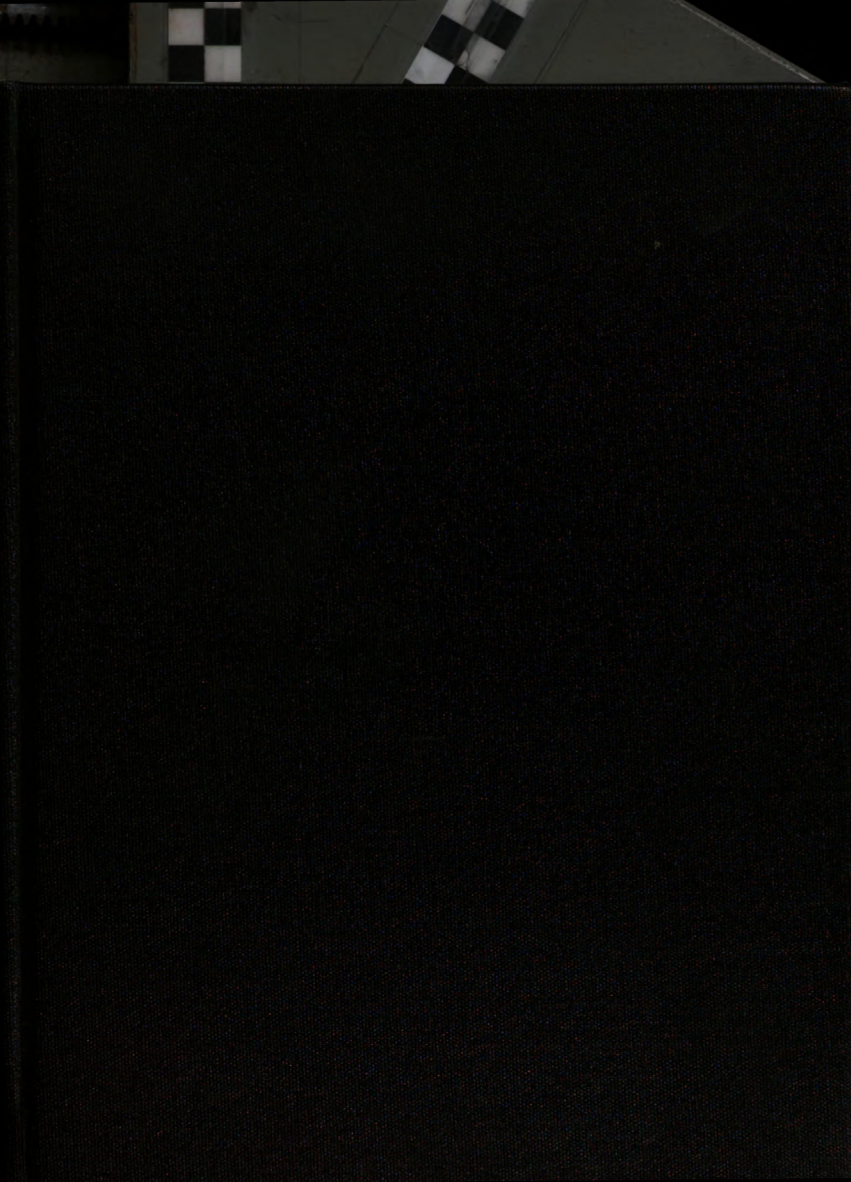
The responses from parents in these focus groups were eye-opening, to say the least. Parents were quite vocal regarding their dissatisfaction with the current rating system. Most felt it did not provide adequate information with which to make an informed decision as a parent and as a consumer. Parents also expressed their concern with violent content. Violence was the number one concern of parents when it came to their children's film viewing habits. Furthermore, parents felt that violence was not being taken into consideration as much as language and sexuality and nudity were by the MPAA raters. While parents of teenaged children were equally concerned with sexual content, most parents of younger kids were not yet dealing with issues of sexuality in conjunction with their children, therefore, they did not see it as a threat. The majority of parents were more concerned with the impact of violent content on their child's behavior than they were other types of content. The impact of sexual content seemed to worry parents in terms of its impact on their child's development of morals and values.

In the following chapters, quantitative and qualitative analyses of films and their ratings will be undertaken. In the conclusion and discussion chapter, these results will be integrated with the findings from these focus groups in order to determine whether the MPAA is responsive to parental needs.

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**RATINGS AND THEIR REASONS: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFICIENCY,
APPLICATION AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF THE MOTION
PICTURE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA'S FILM RATING SYSTEM**

VOLUME II

By

Patricia A. Williamson

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

MASS MEDIA PROGRAM

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CHAPTER SEVEN

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Analysis of MPAA/CARA text-based rating reasons

A quantitative content analysis of the MPAA's text-based rating reasons was conducted in order to investigate the types of content that constitute each individual film rating. This study was designed to determine if there are specific definitions that could be applied to each rating. It also serves as a tool for comparison between the second quantitative content analysis that was conducted on fifty full length features from the year 2005. By analyzing the MPAA's rating reasons and the actual content observed by objective coders in a sample of those same films we were able to determine whether the MPAA rating reasons are accurate and complete portrayals of film content.

Initial analysis of data using the SPSS software allows a more thorough analysis of the frequencies of specific types of content that the MPAA has used as justification for their rating assignments. It is important to build the foundation of any further data analysis with some basic information about the sample of films that is being analyzed.

For this portion of the study, the entire population of domestic, theatrically released films from the year 2005 has been content analyzed. The population size is 325 films ($N = 325$), with 2.5% of the population ($N=8$) comprised of films rated G; 12% (39 films) rated PG; 33.5% (109 films) rated PG-13; 38.8% (126 films) rated R; while only 3 films, or .9% of the population, were rated NC-17. Another 40 films were unrated, which accounts for 12.3% of the total population in question.

Table 7.1 Rating frequencies for total population of 2005 films (N=325)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid G	8	2.5	2.5	2.5
PG	39	12.0	12.0	14.5
PG-13	109	33.5	33.5	48.0
R	126	38.8	38.8	86.8
NC-17	3	.9	.9	87.7
Unrated	40	12.3	12.3	100.0
Total	325	100.0	100.0	

Characteristics of Motion Picture Releases

A total of 45.8% of the 325 films released in 2005 were independently produced feature. Foreign films accounted for 22.5% of the population. Almost half of the films in our population were released widely (48.3%, or 157 films), 44.9% saw limited releases (146 films), and 22 films (6.8%) were released to the festival circuit only.

Table 7.2 Percentage of Independent vs Hollywood produced films for total 2005 sample (N=325)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	149	45.8	45.8	45.8
No	169	52.0	52.0	97.8
Not sure	7	2.2	2.2	100.0
Total	325	100.0	100.0	

Table 7.3 Percentage of foreign films in total 2005 sample (N=325)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	73	22.5	22.5	22.5
No	251	77.2	77.5	100.0
Total	324	99.7	100.0	
Missing System	1	.3		
Total	325	100.0		

Table 7.4 Type of U.S. release for total 2005 sample (N=325)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Wide	157	48.3	48.3	48.3
Limited	146	44.9	44.9	93.2
Festival Circuit only	22	6.8	6.8	100.0
Total	325	100.0	100.0	

Mentions of Specific Film Content in MPAA rating reasons

One of the most important aspects of the frequencies run from the entire population of 2005 films relates to the presence or absence of specific types of content. As discussed earlier in this paper, the MPAA tends to focus its rating decisions on several key areas of content. These areas include (but are not limited to) sexual content, sexual innuendo, humor or references, nudity, language, drug use or references, and violence. Research question #4 asks, What types of content are cited most often by the MPAA within its rating reasons? By analyzing the content of the rating reasons provided by the MPAA for all of these 325 films released theatrically in 2005, it is clear that these six broad categories are the most commonly cited reasons given by the MPAA for their rating designation. However, it is important to determine what specific types of content are cited most often. The following section analyzes the frequencies of mentions of specific types of content within MPAA rating reasons. Once initial frequencies are discussed within the entire population, we can begin to answer Research Question 4b by looking at frequency and intensity descriptors included within the ratings, and Research Questions 5a-e by looking at the frequencies of content within specific rating categories. First, though, let us address the fourth research question.

RQ 4: What types of content are cited most often by the MPAA within its rating reasons?

Initial data analysis reveals that an overwhelming majority of films (72.2%) from 2005 were cited for including some sort of “language” (See Figure 7.5). Violence was mentioned in over half (52.8%) of the rating reasons for films from last year, while nearly half, or 47.5 %, of all films were rated for the depiction of some sort of sexual content. Drug use or drug references were mentioned as a rating reason in exactly one-quarter (25%) of films. Only 18.5% of the rating reasons cited sexual innuendo, humor or references. Nudity was mentioned as a rating reason in 15.1% of the films sampled.

Looking at this data it is clear that language is the most commonly cited rating reason for films from 2005, with violence and sexual content rounding out the top three rating reasons respectively. This is important to compare to these findings to the results from the second quantitative analysis of films released in 2005. That will help us determine whether the MPAA is including all incidents of each type of content. The following table illustrates the comparative frequencies of each type of content cited within rating reasons.

Table 7.5: Frequency of MPAA mentions of specific content types

Content Type	Frequency of content mentions
Language	72.2%
Violence	52.8%
Sexual Content	47.5%
Drug Use/Drug References	25.0%
Sexual Innuendo/References/Humor	18.5%
Nudity	15.1%

RQ 4 b: Do the MPAA rating reasons include frequency or intensity descriptors for content found in individual films?

It is important to note that the MPAA also sometimes utilizes additional descriptors to further specify the intensity and frequency of each of the six major types of filmic content mentioned above. However, these descriptors are not always included in the rating reasons supplied by the MPAA. Therefore, it is quite common for the MPAA to mention similar types of content in their rating reasons for films in different rating categories. For example, the rating reasons supplied by the MPAA for the R-rated film “Apres Vous” cites “language” as it’s only rating reason, while the PG-rated “Are We There Yet?” cites “language and rude humor” as it’s reasoning for its rating assignment. No descriptors for intensity or frequency of the “language” are included for either of the films. This is problematic for parents who are trying to judge the appropriateness of a film for their children. The R-rated film and PG-rated film are described similarly by the MPAA, but their ratings are very different. What makes the language in the film “Apres Vous” more offensive than the language in “Are We There Yet?”? The consumer has no way of knowing.

Analysis of the data from the content analysis of rating reasons of 2005 films shows that this is not an isolated incident. Frequencies run through SPSS for the use of intensity and frequency descriptors by the MPAA for each of the six major rating reasons demonstrate the absence of specific information available to parents. Of all films cited for sexual content (N=135) of some sort from our population of films (N = 325), 63.7% did NOT include any frequency descriptor, while 80.7% have no intensity descriptor (See figures 7.6 & 7.7). The most common frequency descriptor utilized for sexual content by the MPAA was “some” (25.2%). Other frequency descriptors used included “a”, “a

couple”, and “pervasive” (accounting for only 4.4% of films that include some sort of sexual content combined).

Table 7.6

Presence of Frequency Descriptors in Rating Reasons For Films Cited For Sexual Content by MPAA/CARA (N=135)	
Present	36.3%
Absent	63.7%

In terms of intensity descriptors, 11.9% of films including sexual content were cited as having “strong” content, 2.2% had “mild” sexual content, 1.5% of the content was “graphic”, while “crude” and “explicit” sexual content account for .7% of the descriptors for intensity each. It is somewhat alarming that just over 80% of the films cited for the MPAA for some sort of sexual content have no additional descriptors to explain the intensity of the depictions in question.

Table 7.7

Presence of Intensity Descriptors in Rating Reasons for Films Cited For Sexual Content by MPAA/CARA (N=135)	
Present	19.3%
Absent	80.7%

The same lack of clarity is found when the other major types of rating descriptors are analyzed more closely. Half of the incidences (50%) of “sexual innuendo or humor” within our sample of 2005 films do not include frequency descriptors, while 53.8% of the rating reasons fail to indicate the intensity of the references/humor/innuendo (See figures 7.8 and 7.9). Of the rating reasons that include “nudity” as a descriptor, 69.8% have no frequency indicator, and 79.1% have no mention of intensity (See figures of 7.10 or 7.11). The frequency of “language” use was not indicated in 67.3% of those film rating

reasons in which language was cited, while 83.4% failed to describe the intensity of the language (See figures 7.12 and 7.13). Drug use was an example of a type of content cited in the rating reasons which did not have an intensity descriptor, due to the nature of the material in question. However, only 42.3% of those films cited for drug use or references had a further indication for frequency, with the most commonly cited frequency descriptor being “some,” cited 28.8% of the time (See Figure 7.14).

Table 7.8

Presence of Frequency Descriptors in Rating Reasons for Films Cited For Sexual Innuendo or References by MPAA/CARA (N=52)	
Present	50%
Absent	50%

Table 7.9

Presence of Intensity Descriptors in Rating Reasons for Films Cited For Sexual Innuendo or References by MPAA/CARA (N=52)	
Present	46.2%
Absent	53.8%

Table 7.10

Presence of Frequency Descriptors in Rating Reasons for Films Cited For Nudity by MPAA/CARA (N=43)	
Present	30.2%
Absent	69.8%

Table 7.11

Presence of Intensity Descriptors in Rating Reasons for Films Cited For Nudity by MPAA/CARA (N=43)	
Present	20.9%
Absent	79.1%

Table 7.12

Presence of Frequency Descriptors in Rating Reasons for Films Cited For Language by MPAA/CARA (N=205)	
Present	32.7%
Absent	67.3%

Table 7.13

Presence of Intensity Descriptors in Rating Reasons for Films Cited For Language by MPAA/CARA (N=205)	
Present	16.6%
Absent	83.4%

Table 7.14

Presence of Frequency Descriptors in Rating Reasons for Films Cited For Drug Use by MPAA/CARA (N=71)	
Present	42.3%
Absent	57.7%

When “violence” of some sort is accounted for in the rating reasons of films (it is cited as a reason for the rating of 150 films in our population of 325 films), there is no frequency modifier used in 58.7% of those cases (See figure 7.15). Intensity descriptors, however, are used in over 60% (61.3%) of the cases (See figure 7.16).

Once again, however, definitions and clarity within those additional modifying terms are problematic. Terms used to describe the intensity of violence include “strong” (17.3%), “intense” (10.0%) “violent” (9.3%) “disturbing” (6.7%), “brutal,” “frightening,” and “fantasy or science fiction” (2.7% apiece), “mild” (2.0%), “comic” (1.3%) and “sadistic” (.7%). Other various terms were used in 6% of film rating reasons that cite violence in the text. Without clear guidelines as to what constitutes the difference

between terms such as “intense”, “strong”, or “disturbing” and “frightening”, the clarity of the message the MPAA is trying to send to parents is muddled.

Table 7.15

Presence of Frequency Descriptors in Rating Reasons for Films Cited For Violent Content by MPAA/CARA (N=150)	
Present	41.3%
Absent	58.7%

Table 7.16

Presence of Intensity Descriptors in Rating Reasons for Films Cited For Violent Content by MPAA/CARA (N=150)	
Present	61.3%
Absent	38.7%

Frequencies of Rating Reasons Analyzed by Rating Category

The last portion of this chapter dealt with characteristics of the sample population as a whole. Now, it’s time to address characteristics of films in each of the rating categories specifically. This data allows us to begin to answer **Research Questions 5 a-e**, which all deal with an analysis of the types of content cited in films of a specific rating category. By analyzing the presence of these specific types of content in films of each rating category, we are able to determine how that content relates to rating restrictiveness.

This being said, it is difficult to address the populations of some of the rating categories, specifically films rated “G”, “NC-17” and “Unrated” films. This is true for a variety of reasons. In terms of G-rated films, the MPAA does not provide any written reason for their rating decision. This is due to the fact that G-rated films are meant to be appropriate for anyone of any age. This answers **RQ #5a: What types of content are**

cited within rating reasons for films rated G? It is the MPAA's view that these films have no content that is worthy to include in any sort of rating reason, because the movie as a whole includes nothing that could be construed as offensive or inappropriate.

Looking at the wording for the G rating finds the MPAA defines this type of film as,

“This is a film which contains nothing in theme, language, nudity and sex, violence, etc. that 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.
(http://www.mpa.org/FlmRat_Ratings.asp)

Due to this definition, the content of G rated films is not described at all by the MPAA in the form of individualized rating reasons.

Another rating that is difficult to analyze more closely in terms of content is the NC-17 rating. Although there is data available for analysis, the amount of information is minimal. In the year 2005, only 3 films were released with the NC-17 rating, making it difficult to generalize findings in terms of the frequencies of specific included depictions. Despite this lack of representation, NC-17 rating reasons will be analyzed in answer to RQ #5e later in this chapter.

Unrated films are also impossible to analyze based on MPAA rating reasons, seeing as they do not **have** any MPAA rating reasons. A later analysis based upon the viewing of actual unrated films will be included in a later chapter to allow for comparisons between rated films. However, these types of films cannot be included in this particular quantitative analysis. The following sections, therefore, will deal

specifically with PG, PG-13 and R-rated films in depth. A brief analysis of NC-17 films will follow, despite the small sample size.

The following table (Figure 7.17) serves as a quick overview of the types of content cited within each rating category by the MPAA/CARA. This table helps us draw conclusions about the importance of specific types of content in regard to rating assignments.

Table 7.17 Content Descriptors by Rating Category

	G (N=8)	PG (N=39)	PG-13 (N=109)	R (N=126)	NC-17 (N=3)
Sexual content	0	17.9% (7)	40.7% (44)	85.1% (82)	66.6% (2)
Sexual innuendo	0	17.9% (7)	31.5% (31)	8.7% (11)	0
Nudity	0	0	10.2% (11)	25.4% (32)	0
Rape	0	0	0.9% (1)	0	0
Profanity	0	76.9% (30)	58.3% (63)	88.9% (112)	0
Drug use/ references	0	0	28.7% (31)	31.7% (40)	0
Violence	0	43.6% (17)	51.9% (56)	60.3% (76)	33.3% (1)
Action/ peril	0	28.2% (11)	14.8% (16)	0.8%(1)	0
Disturbing or frightening content	0	7.7% (3)	15.7% (17)	0	0
Battle / war scenes	0	2.6% (1)	0.9% (1)	0	0
Horror/ Gore	0	0	2.8% (3)	4.8% (6)	0
Boxing / martial arts	0	0	0.9% (1)	0	0
Thematic elements	0	41% (16)	19.4% (21)	0	0
Creature / fantasy violence	0	0	2.8% (3)	0	0
Mature situations	0	0	7.4% (8)	0	0
Rude behavior	0	0	1.9% (2)	0	0
Quirky behavior	0	0	0.9% (1)	0	0

A discussion of the findings from the content analysis performed on fifty full length feature films from the same year is included on a later page in this chapter.

RQ #5b: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated PG?

As a reminder, PG-rated films make up exactly 12% of our total sample of films released in 2005, which is a relatively small percentage. However, five PG rated films made over 100 million dollars at the box office and three PG-rated films are included in the list of the top-ten grossing films of 2005 (See appendix A). The most popular PG-rated film at the box office in 2005 was “The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe”, which brought in 288.8 million dollars, making it the third highest box-office grossing film of the year. The MPAA defines the PG-rating as the type of film which...

“clearly needs to be examined by parents before they let their children attend. The label PG plainly states parents may consider some material unsuitable for their children, but leaves the parent to 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. However, these elements are not considered 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. As long as parents know they must exercise parental responsibility, the rating serves as a meaningful guide and as a warning.” (http://www.mpa.org/FlmRat_Ratings.asp)

Despite the rather vague definition of this type of film, the MPAA includes rating reasons which are meant to further inform parents as to the type of content that makes the particular film a PG, rather than a more or less restrictively rated film.

Sexual Content in PG Films

Looking at the frequencies of specific rating descriptors, only 17.9% (N=7) of PG rated films have been cited for inclusion of any type of sexual content. Of those 7 films, only

two films' rating reasons include descriptors for frequency of the sexual content. One film's sexual content was described as "a couple of scenes or incidents," and the other used the descriptor "some." Three of the seven films included descriptors for the intensity of the sexual content. All three films' sexual content was described as "mild." None of the sexual content was described as "aberrant" or as "involving children or teenagers." Another interesting quirk of the broad category of sexual content (for all ratings) is that it is sometimes cited as "sexual content," sometimes as "sex," sometimes as "sensuality," "suggestive material," or "sexuality." In the sample of PG rated films, of the seven cited for some type of sexual content, two films were described as "sexual content," two were described as including "sensuality," two contained "suggestive material," and one contained "sexuality." However, it is important to note, as in earlier cases, these terms are never defined by the MPAA. Therefore it is up to the parent or filmgoer to determine the differences between those terms. From the standpoint of a researcher investigating the effectiveness of this system, it is difficult to conclude whether these terms somehow indicated differing degrees or types of sexual content, or whether they were perhaps just different terms used by different raters on different days or occasions. It is unclear whether these are standardized terms, or phrases used by chance due to the lack of standardization. It would be important to investigate this use of language and phraseology in more depth by talking to MPAA officials.

Sexual Innuendo and Sexual Humor in PG Films

Sexual innuendo or humor was cited as a rating reason in 7 of the films rated PG from the year 2005, which comprises 17.9% of the population. All seven of those films, however, specifically mention either suggestive or crude humor as their rating

reason. None were cited for sexual innuendo or references specifically. Of the humorous statements, three were identified as “brief” and six were identified as “crude”. Therefore, it might be hypothesized that sexual language discussed in a joking manner may be viewed as less offensive than sexual references or discussions.

Nudity and Rape in PG Films

None of the PG-rated films included a mention of rape as a rating reason, nor was nudity mentioned in any of the descriptions.

Profanity in PG Films

Foul language, however, was prevalent in PG-rated films, at least according to the stated MPAA rating reasons. A total of 30 films, or 76.9 percent of films with this rating, were cited for some sort of language. The frequency of this language was described as “brief” in 15, or half, of the 30 films cited for language, while the rest included no frequency descriptor. The intensity of the language was described as “mild” or “light” for 14 of the 30 films, while two of the films included either “crude” or “rude” language. The rest (14 films) cited for language did not include intensity descriptors.

Drug Use or References in PG Films

Drug use or drug references were not included as rating reasons for any of the PG-rated films from 2005, but violence was cited as a rating reason in 43.6% of the sample, which totals 17 films. Few of these films were further defined in terms of their frequency, with only 6 films’ rating reasons including any modifier for frequency.

Violent Content in PG Films

Three PG-rated films' violent content was described as "some", two films included "sequences" of violence, and one film's violent content was "brief". This violent content's intensity was further defined by the use of intensity descriptors in 6 of the films. Three films' violence was described as "mild", one film used "fantasy" or "science fiction" as its modifier, one film's rating reason included "frightening" as a descriptor, one included "violent" as a modifier (probably used in context as "violent content" or a similar way). Two films used other terms to define the intensity of the violence.

It is important to note that once again, violence is notated in several different ways in film rating reasons. At times, it is just deemed as "violence", but in other cases it's called "images", "action" or other terms. The three terms above were the only specific terms used in PG-rated films' rating reasons published by the MPAA.

Other Rating Reasons Cited in Conjunction with PG Films

In addition to the six major types of content that are mentioned in the MPAA's rating reasons for films, which include sexual content, sexual innuendo/references, nudity, language, drug use/references and violence, there are other less frequently cited rating reasons. Some of these rating reasons are more specific subsets or variations of the major six categories, while others are less definitive terms. These other rating reasons include action and/or peril, disturbing images and/or frightening sequences, horror and/or gore, boxing violence, battle or warfare, and creature or fantasy violence. All of these aforementioned terms can be seen as subsets of violent content. However,

they are often mentioned in addition to citations for violence within the rating reason, and therefore must be seen as rating reasons unto themselves. In the sample of 39 PG rated films from this study, 28.2% (or 11 films) of the rating reason summaries included mentions of action or peril. Three films (7.7% of PG films) included disturbing or frightening images. One film (2.6% of PG films) was cited for battle or war sequences, as was one film which was cited for creature or fantasy violence. None of the PG-rated films' rating reasons mentioned horror/gore or boxing violence.

In addition to these violence-related rating reasons, the MPAA also uses terms such as “thematic elements”, “mature situations”, “rude behavior” and “quirky situations” in their rating reason summaries for specific films. Because these terms are not defined by the MPAA it is difficult to precisely determine when or why the terms are applied to a film, not to mention what age levels this type of content would be inappropriate for. Nonetheless, 41% (16) of PG-rated films contained “thematic elements” in their rating reasons. No films in the sample of PG films contained mature situations, rude behavior or quirky situations.

Moving beyond the content based characteristics of PG rated films, it is also important to note that the majority of PG-rated films were released widely (69.2%), were big studio releases (74.4%), and were domestically produced (92.3%). The genres most commonly cited as the primary genre for PG films was comedy (35.9%), closely followed by action/adventure (30.8%), with moderate mentions of drama (15.4%) and animation (12.8%). Documentaries and fantasy/science fiction were also primary genres for one film (2.6%) apiece. As for the most common secondary genres, family was the most oft-cited (23.1%), with comedy (17.9%) and drama (15.4%) trailing. In

terms of a tertiary genre, more than a third of PG rated films did not cite a third genre (35.9%), but those that did most often mentioned family (25.6%).

In answer to RQ 5b, the following types of content are cited most often in the MPAA's rating reasons for PG rated films (most common to least common):

Profanity	76.9%
Drug Use/References	43.6%
Thematic Elements	41.0%
Action/Peril	28.2%
Sexual Content	17.9%
Sexual Innuendo/References/Humor	17.9%
Disturbing or Frightening Content	7.7%
Battle/War Scene	2.6%

RQ #5c: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated PG-13?

A slightly smaller percentage of films rated PG-13 saw wide releases in the U.S in 2005 than did PG rated films, coming in at 68.8% of all PG-13 films. However, because the total number of PG-13 rated films is much larger than that of PG rated films (N = 109 for PG-13 compared to N = 39 for PG), there were literally more PG-13 rated films released widely theatrically in the U.S. Of those 109 films rated PG-13,

69.7% were studio releases and only 13% were foreign films. The most commonly cited primary genres for PG-13 rated films were comedy (33%), action/adventure (30.3%) and drama (22%). These were also the top three cited primary genres for PG rated films. The rest of the primary genres did not account for more than four films (or 3.7%) from the PG-13 sample. In terms of secondary genre, drama was the most widely cited at 26.6% of films. There was no mention of a secondary genre in 18.3% of the sample, and the third most popular secondary genre was comedy (11.9%). Nearly half the PG-13 films cited no tertiary genre (48.6%). Those that did were most likely to mention romance (13.8%) or thriller (12.8%).

Sexual Content in PG-13 Films

Moving to an analysis of the content mentioned in PG-13 rated films' rating reasons, 40.7% (44 films) were rated due to some sort of sexual content. Of those films, 15 contained "some" as a frequency descriptor. One film cited "a" or "one" as a frequency descriptor, and two noted other forms of frequency descriptors. Shockingly, only one of the 44 films cited for containing sexual content included any sort of descriptor for the intensity of the sexual content. It appears as if parents are expected to trust the rating as a guide, rather than looking for specific quantifiable content information. As is true of any mention of sexual content, several different descriptors are used to describe the content itself. The most frequently used descriptor in PG-13 films was sexual content (31 films), while 8 films were cited for sexuality, and 3 films contained what was deemed "sensuality", and another 3 contained "suggestive material". None of the sex was considered disturbing or aberrant. One film's sexual content involved children or teenagers, according to the rating reasons.

Sexual references, innuendo or humor were cited in 31.5% of all PG-13 rated films. The content was most commonly referred to as sexual, and the type of material was most commonly described as references (16 films) or humor (15 films). The frequency of the sexual references was not referred to in a wide majority of the PG-13 films (83.3%), but 13 films' sexual references were described as brief. Another film cited "a" or "one" reference. Intensity was also not commonly mentioned in the rating reason. Eleven films' sexual references were described as "crude" with one film's references described as "strong".

Rape in PG-13 Films

Interestingly, rape was included in one of the rating descriptions for a PG-13 rated film. This was the only film rating description of the entire sample of 325 films that mentioned a depiction of rape within its text. A further qualitative analysis of this type of content is necessary to determine how graphically this content was portrayed. It is interesting to note that this depiction would only garner a film a PG-13 rating, however, while portrayals of consensual sexual content often garner an R rating.

Nudity in PG-13 Rated Films

Nudity was present in 10.2% of the PG-13 rated films, which perhaps some parents might find surprising. It will be interesting to contrast this to our parents' expectations in our focus group research to determine whether they would expect any sort of nudity to be present in PG-13 rated films. Of those 11 PG-13 films containing nudity, most did not have a descriptor attached to indicate frequency. Two films were cited for "some", one film for "brief" and one "other" frequency descriptor. The

intensity of the nudity was described as “partial” in 7 of the 11 cases, which could explain the PG-13 assignment.

Profanity in PG-13 Rated Films

Language was mentioned as a rating reason in 58.3% (63) of PG-13 rated films. The frequency was most often described as “brief” (23 films). Two films were cited for language “throughout”. The other 38 films containing this type of content did not contain frequency descriptors. Intensity was generally not cited either, but twelve of the 63 films cited for language included “strong” as a descriptor, while two films’ language was described as “crude or rude”. Once again, the majority of films’ rating reasons were stated as simply “language” and it is left up to the parent to determine what that means in terms of the type, intensity and frequency of the offensive language.

Drug Use and References in PG-13 Rated Films

Drug use or references to drugs were cited in 28.7% (31 films) of the PG-13 rated films. Only 13 of those films included frequency descriptors (5 cited as “some”, 3 included “brief”, 3 included some “other” term, and two defined frequency as “a or one”).

Violent Content in PG-13 Films

Violence as a factor in the ratings of a majority of the PG-13 rated films (56 films or 51.9%). The violence was most often described as “some” (13 films) in terms of frequency. Ten films included violent “sequences”. The intensity of the violence

was cited as “intense” in 15 films, “disturbing” in 5 films, “fantasy/sci fi” in 3 films, “frightening” or “violent” in two films each, and “strong” or “comic” in one film each.

Other violence-related descriptors of PG-13 rated films include action or peril, which was cited in 14.8% of PG-13 films. Disturbing images or frightening sequences were mentioned in 15.7% of rating reasons. Horror or gore was cited in 3 PG-13 films which is 2.8% of films with that rating. Boxing violence was mentioned in one of the films (.9%), as was battle/war scenes (.9%). Creature or fantasy violence was a rating reason in 2.8% (3 films) of the sample.

Thematic elements account for 19.4% of films rated PG-13, while mature situations were cited in 7.4% of PG-13 films. Rude behavior contributed to the rating in two (1.9%) of the PG-13 films, and one film was cited for “quirky behavior”.

In answer to RQ #5c (What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated PG-13?) the following types of content were cited most often:

Profanity	58.3%
Violence	51.9%
Sexual Content	40.7%
Sexual Innuendo/References/Humor	31.5%
Drug Use/Reference	28.7%
Thematic Elements	19.4%

Disturbing/Frightening Content	15.7%
Action/Peril	14.8%
Nudity	10.2%
Mature Situations	7.4%
Creature/Fantasy Violence	2.8%
Horror/Gore	2.8%
Rude Behavior	1.9%
Quirky Behavior	.9%
Boxing/Martial Arts	.9%
Battle/War Scenes	.9%
Rape	.9%

RQ #5d: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated R?

A total of 126 films exhibited in U.S. theaters in 2005 were rated R by the MPAA. Of those films, only 47 or 37.3% of those films were released widely. Another 70 films (55.6%) were released on a limited basis, while 7.1% (9 films) were released only at film festivals. This is quite a difference when compared to less restrictively rated films. This is the first rating category analyzed of which a majority of films were released on some type of limited basis, meaning they were not played at theaters nationwide. Instead, they showed only in major cities or less than 500 screens

nationwide. However, without doing further research it is impossible to attribute the more limited release patterns on the rating assignment itself.

R-rated films are also the first rating category in which we find independently produced films outnumber studio films. Sixty-six (52.4%) films were produced by independent studios, whereas 55 films (43.7%) were produced by major studios. In addition, foreign films make up approximately one-quarter of R-rated films (25.4%), the most of any rating category analyzed to this point.

The most commonly cited primary genre of R-rated films was drama (33.3%), followed by comedy (25.4%), and action/adventure (21.4%). Crime (5.6%), documentaries (4.8%), horror (3.2%), thriller (2.4%), music/musicals (1.6%), biography (1.6%) and romance (.8%) round out the other primary genres reported. More than one-quarter of R-rated films did not report a secondary genre, but the most frequently mentioned secondary genre was drama (23%). Over half (58.7%) of R-rated films had no tertiary genre specified, but drama, once again, was mentioned as the most common tertiary genre, making up 15.1% of this particular sample.

Sexual Content in R Rated Films

As has been done for PG and PG-13 rated films, it is important to analyze the frequencies of specific types of content contained in the written rating reasons of R-rated films as reported by the MPAA. Beginning with sexual content, 65.1% (82 films) of R-rated films included some type of sexual content. The most common descriptor used to notate this type of content was “sexuality” (33.3% of R-rated films), followed

by sexual content (30.2%) and sex (.8%). Again, no definitions are given by the MPAA to delineate the differences between these terms.

The frequency of the sexual content indicated by the rating reasons was included in 28 of the 82 films, with the most common frequency “some” (18 films). The intensity of the sexual content was most often described as “strong” (15 films), with a few other films citing the sex as “crude” or “graphic”. A majority of the films did not have a descriptor for intensity of the sex content. The sexual content in two R-rated films was described as disturbing or aberrant, and three films included sexual content involving children or teens, according to the MPAA.

Ironically, in R-rated films, only 8.7% of the films included sexual innuendo or references, less than found in the both PG and PG-13 films, despite increased citations for sexual content and nudity. Of the 11 R-rated films that included this type of content, only five included some indication of the frequency of the references. Two films included “brief” innuendo, one film had “a” or “one” reference to sex, and one film had sexual innuendo or references that were “pervasive” or “throughout”. It is interesting to compare this to the percentage of R rated films found to contain sexual innuendo in the content analysis of the fifty full-length films from the same year which found 70.7% of the R rated films sampled contained scenes of sexual innuendo (See Figure 7.35 later in this chapter).

Nudity in R Rated Films

Nudity was present in approximately one-quarter of the R-rated films from 2005 (25.4%; 32 films). Five films’ nudity was described as “brief”, and another five films

included the frequency descriptor “some”. The rest of the films including nudity did not include an indicator for frequency of the nudity. Descriptors for intensity were even less prevalent, with only two of the 32 films rated for nudity including any indication of intensity.

Profanity in R Rated Films

Language was the most often cited rating reason for R-rated films, comprising 88.9% of R-rated films. Language was most often described as “pervasive” (15 films), with “brief” also being mentioned (11 films). One film’s language was described as “throughout”, also. Intensity of the language was rarely included, with only three films including the descriptor “strong”. Two additional films included language intensity descriptors that were not included on the coding form.

Drug Use and References in R Rated Films

Drug use and references were present in 31.7% (40) of the R-rated films, of which 28 films’ descriptors indicated drug use, 9 films indicated “drug content”, and 2 films indicated drug “material”, and one indicated specifically “drug use.” This is an interesting finding due to the fact that none of the R-rated films’ rating descriptors mentioned drug references, just use, or the presence of “material” or “content”. This is different from the other ratings we’ve analyzed. The PG rating descriptors did not include any drug use, while PG-13 films mixed drug use and drug references. In the R-rating category the rating reasons only reference use. This seems to be one of the first clear differences that can be seen between the different ratings.

Violent Content in R Rated Films

Violence is indicated in 60.3% (76) of the films rated R. The most common frequency descriptor was “some”, accounting for 16 of those 76 films. Five films had “one” or “a” violent act, five other films include “sequences” of violence, three indicated “pervasive” violence, two films have “brief” violence, and one film has violence “throughout.” In terms of intensity, 25 films’ violent content is described as “strong,” 11 films indicated “violent” content or images, five films include “disturbing” violent content, four films’ descriptors use the term “brutal,” and “comic” and “sadistic” are both used once. Other assorted terms not listed on the coding form were included in three of the sample films that included violent content. Two films included “stylized” violence, two films included battle scenes/warfare or martial arts, two films include the term “gruesome” and one film’s violence was described as “demonic”.

Only one R-rated film was cited as including action or peril, while 12 films included disturbing images or frightening sequences. 4.8% of R-rated films’ rating reasons included horror or gore. No indicators for creature or fantasy violence were found in the R rated films, nor was any mention of “thematic elements”. “Mature situations”, “rude behavior” and “quirky situations” were also absent from the R-rated sample. Again, this is an interesting finding, seeing as one might expect a larger number of “mature situations” and “thematic elements” to be present in more restrictively rated films. However, by calculating the frequencies rating by rating it is clear that the opposite is true. Or, at least these types of content are included in the MPAA’s written reasons more often for less restrictively rated films. This is a fact that

should be addressed later when the qualitative and quantitative content analyses of films themselves are discussed.

In answer to RQ 5c (What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated R?) the following types of content were cited most often:

Profanity	88.9%
Sexual Content	85.1%
Violence	60.3%
Drug Use/References	31.7%
Nudity	25.4%
Sexual Innuendo	8.7%
Horror/Gore	4.8%

RQ #5e: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated NC-17?

A total of three films released theatrically in 2005 were rated NC-17, comprising only .9% of total films released that year (N=325). Due to the small number of films released with such a rating, it is hard to extrapolate from this data. However, it is important to note that this is the highest number of theatrically released NC-17 rated films in several years. Therefore, this small number of releases is typical of a given year. Of those three releases, one of them was released widely, while the other two films were both released on a limited basis. Two-thirds of NC-17 rated films

were independently produced, while one was produced with big studio support and funding. Two-thirds of the films were foreign-produced features, while the other was made in the United States. It should also be noted that the only studio release from the sample was a foreign film backed by a French studio. None of the films were products of the mainstream Hollywood system.

The primary genre of these three NC-17 films was split evenly between crime, documentary and drama, while only one secondary genre was noted, and that was horror. That same film also cited a tertiary genre of “thriller”. No other genres were associated with NC-17 rated fare.

Sexual Content

The MPAA’s rating reasons describing content featured in NC-17 films cited “sexual content” in two-thirds of the sample (N=3), but none of the reasons include frequency descriptors for the sexual content. Two of the three films include descriptors for intensity of the sexual content; one film is cited for “strong” and another for “explicit” sexual content. One film’s sexual content is described as “aberrant” or “disturbing”. None of the films’ sexual content is described as involving children or teenagers.

Sexual Innuendo or References in NC-17 Films

None of the rating reasons supplied by the MPAA/CARA for NC-17 films include any mention of sexual innuendo, references or sexual humor.

Nudity

No mentions of nudity are made in the rating reasons for NC-17 rated films.

Profanity

None of the rating reasons for NC-17 films make any mention of foul language or profanity.

Drug Use/References

There is no mention of drug use, drug references or drug dependence within rating reasons for NC-17 rated films.

Violence

Violence is included as a rating reason in one (33.3%) of the NC-17 films analyzed (N=3). No frequency descriptor is used in conjunction with the reference to violence, although the intensity descriptor “strong” is used. No other rating reasons involving violence were included.

Therefore, in answer to RQ 5e (What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated NC-17), sexual content and violence are the most often cited forms of content, in that order. No other types of content are cited in NC-17 rating reasons.

RQ #6: Are films cited for specific types of content by the MPAA rated consistently?

In order to determine whether ratings are applied consistently, the rating reasons supplied by the MPAA were analyzed by specific content type. Using SPSS, data was

selected based on specific content mentioned in the descriptor. This allowed the researcher to determine what rating was given to the films containing this type of content. If ratings were applied consistently, films with similar content should be rated similarly.

Rape

Based on rating descriptors of the 325 domestically released films from 2005, films cited for containing rape are consistently rated. Only one such reference was found and that film was rated PG-13. This is one instance in which the additional content analysis of full films from 2005 is helpful, as it was found in that study that there was at least one more film that contained rape scenes involving the molestation of young boys and the rape of a teenage male prostitute. That film was rated NC-17. However, based solely on the rating reasons supplied by the MPAA, it would appear that all films containing rape scenes or depictions are rated PG-13.

Sexual Content

The simple presence of sexual content, as cited by the MPAA in their rating descriptors was not found to be rated consistently. Sexual content is found in all rating categories except G.

Table 7.18 Films cited for Sexual Content categorized by Rating

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG	7	5.2	5.2	5.2
PG-13	44	32.6	32.6	37.8
R	82	60.7	60.7	98.5
NC-17	2	1.5	1.5	100.0
Total	135	100.0	100.0	

However, if the sexual content is more specifically defined as “strong” sexual content, the rating seems to be more consistently applied. Only films rated R or NC-17 contain such specific descriptors, as shown in the table below.

Table 7.19 Films containing “strong” sexual content by Rating

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid R	15	93.8	93.8	93.8
NC-17	1	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	16	100.0	100.0	

Furthermore, if sexual content is described as “explicit”, it is only rated NC-17, as is the case with only one film from our population. The same is true if the modifiers “graphic” or “crude” are used to describe the sexual content. Therefore, although sexual content in general is not rated consistently, films that contain the modifiers “strong”, “explicit”, “graphic” or “crude” are consistently rated. “Disturbing or aberrant” sexual content was also rated fairly consistently. Of the three films containing such descriptors, one was rated NC-17 and two were rated R. Sexual content cited as involving either “children” or “teenagers” was found to fall into two rating categories. Surprisingly, perhaps, the two rating categories were PG-13 and R. One might assume sexual content involving underage characters might garner a more restrictive rating.

Table 7.20 Films cited for sexual content involving children or teens by rating

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG-13	1	25.0	25.0	25.0
R	3	75.0	75.0	100.0
Total	4	100.0	100.0	

Sexual Innuendo, Humor or References

By isolating all films cited for sexual innuendo or humor within our population of 325 films, it is clear that this type of filmic content is not rated consistently. Films rated PG, PG-13 and R all have been cited for containing such content, according to MPAA descriptors, as shown in the table below. However, the story is different if specific modifiers related to the content are taken into consideration. Only one of the 52 films cited was described as sexual “language”. That film was rated R.

Table 7.21 Films cited for sexual innuendo, humor or references by rating

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG	7	13.5	13.5	13.5
PG-13	34	65.4	65.4	78.8
R	11	21.2	21.2	100.0
Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Films cited for sexual “references” were rated either PG-13 (16 films) or R (5 films). Films that were labeled as containing sexual “humor” were not consistently rating, ranging from PG to R for their rating assignment (see table below).

Table 7.22 Films cited for sexual “humor” by rating category

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG	7	26.9	26.9	26.9
PG-13	15	57.7	57.7	84.6
R	4	15.4	15.4	100.0
Total	26	100.0	100.0	

Only two films were cited for containing sexual “innuendo” and both of those films were rated PG-13.

Nudity

The mere presence of nudity is not a consistent determiner of film rating, as shown in the table below. Films cited for containing nudity were rated both PG-13 and R.

Table 7.23 Films cited as containing nudity by rating

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG-13	11	25.6	25.6	25.6
R	32	74.4	74.4	100.0
Total	43	100.0	100.0	

Therefore, the additional descriptors are needed to narrow down rating assignment. All films containing “partial” nudity (7 films) were found to be rated PG-13. No films were cited for “full” nudity, but one film with “graphic” nudity was rated “R”.

Profanity

The overall presence of language citations within rating reasons was not found to be consistently rated.

Table 7.24 Films cited for language by rating

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG	30	14.6	14.6	14.6
PG-13	63	30.7	30.7	45.4
R	112	54.6	54.6	100.0
Total	205	100.0	100.0	

The frequency of such material seems to have an impact on rating consistency. “Brief” language was cited in rating reasons for films rated PG (15), PG-13 (23), and R (11), therefore, that type of content was not consistently rated. “Pervasive” language, however, was consistently rated R (15 films). The intensity descriptors used to explain the language used also seems to have an impact on rating. All films cited for “mild” or

Table 7.26 Films cited for violent content (general) by Rating

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG	17	11.3	11.3	11.3
PG-13	56	37.3	37.3	48.7
R	76	50.7	50.7	99.3
NC-17	1	.7	.7	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

As was done with other content categories, however, that violent content has to be broken down into more specific subcategories. When the frequency of the violence is cited by the MPAA/CARA, the results are interesting. All films cited for “a” or “one” single violent scene are rated R (5 films total). When a film was cited for “some” violence, the films ranged in rating from PG (3), PG-13 (13) to R (16). Films containing “brief” violence were either rated PG (1 film) or R (2 films), but none were rated PG-13. All three films cited for “pervasive” violence were rated R, as was the one film that was said to contain violence “throughout”.

In terms of intensity of violence, “mild” violence resulted in a PG rating for all films (3 total). “Fantasy” or “science fiction” violence was rated either PG (1 film) or PG-13 (3 films). Violent content described by the MPAA as “frightening” ranged in rating from PG (1 film) to PG-13 (2 films) to R (1 film). All films cited for “intense” violence were rated PG-13 (15 films). “Disturbing” violence resulted in an equal number of PG-13 and R rated films (5 each). “Strong” violence tended to be rated PG-13 (15 films), but there was one case of “strong” violent content resulting in an NC-17 rating. “Comic” violence was in one instance rated PG-13, and R in another. “Brutal” violent content was cited in four films, all of which were rated R, as was the single film cited for “sadistic” violent content.

“light” language (14 films) were rated PG. Citations for “crude” or “rude” language resulted in PG (2 films) or PG-13 (2 films) ratings. “Strong” language resulted in a PG-13 rating in the majority of cases (12 films), but three such films were rated R.

Drug Use or References

The presence of citations regarding drug use or references was found in films rated both PG-13 and R.

Table 7.25 Films cited for Drug use or Drug References

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG	30	14.6	14.6	14.6
PG-13	63	30.7	30.7	45.4
R	112	54.6	54.6	100.0
Total	205	100.0	100.0	

Again, the specific type of content is important in this analysis. Almost all films cited for actual drug “use” were rated R (28 films), with one exception that was rated PG-13. Only one film was cited for drug “dependence”, and that film was rated PG-13. The vague description of “drug content” resulted in an inconsistent rating. Four such films were rated PG-13 and 9 were rated R. The equally vague term “drug material” results in a rating of either PG-13 (6 films), or R (2 films). The one and only film that contained the rating reason “partying” was rated PG-13. No films were cited specifically for drinking behaviors.

Violence

When violence is cited, generally, within rating reasons by the MPAA, there is no consistency of rating.

What makes the MPAA citations for violence more confusing is the plethora of terms used to describe the content. This term seems to impact the consistency of rating, as well. For example, if a film is cited for “violent content” specifically, it is always rated R (6 films). This is also true if a film (one in sample) is cited for violent “act(s)”. The term “violent sequences”, however, signifies a PG rating, as both of the two films that include that descriptor were rated as such. If a film is merely cited for “violence”, it is not consistently rated and may range in rating from PG to NC-17. Violent “images” might result in a rating from PG to R, and “action” apparently connotes a PG (9 films) or PG-13 (6 films) rating.

The presence of horror or gore descriptors was not found to be a consistent rating factor, as some films described as such resulted in a PG-13 rating (3 films), while others received an R (6 films). Boxing violence was cited in one rating description. That film was rated PG-13. Films cited for battle or war scenes were not rated consistently (PG, PG-13, R), nor was creature/fantasy violence (PG, PG-13).

“Thematic elements” were cited by the MPAA for films rated PG (16 films) and PG-13 (21 films). However, “mature situations” were cited only in films rated PG-13. The same is true of “rude behavior”. Only two films were cited for such content, and both were rated PG-13.

As a quick review, what this tells us about the consistency of rating assignment based upon the specific content found in the text-based MPAA rating reasons is the following:

- Many general types of content are not rated consistently. For example, the generic terms “violence” or “language” are not consistently found in films with the same rating.
- The use of frequency and intensity modifiers result in more consistent ratings for that specific type of content.
- Rape, in this population of films, when cited in rating reasons, consistently resulted in a PG-13 rating.
- Explicit, strong, or graphic sexual content was consistently rated NC-17.
- Sexual innuendo and sexual references were generally rated either PG-13 or R in a consistent manner.
- Partial nudity was consistently rated PG-13.
- Pervasive language was consistently rated R.
- Mild/light language was consistently rated PG.
- Drug use was generally rated R in a fairly consistent manner.
- Pervasive violence, and brutal or sadistic violence was consistently rated R.
- Intense violence was consistently rated PG-13.
- Mild violence was consistently rated PG.

- “Mature situations” and “rude behavior” citations consistently resulted in ratings of PG-13.

Data Analysis: Content Analysis of 50 Films Released Theatrically in 2005

Fifty films were chosen based on sampling schema discussed in chapter five. All fifty films were coded in their entirety for specific types of content. These types of content include all of the categories mentioned by MPAA raters in their text-based rating reasons, as well as other variables that account for additional factors that could possibly play a role in rating assignment, such as homosexual content, specific types of sexual content, violence and more. Following is an analysis of the data generated by that content analysis. This content analysis includes both scale level data and categorical data. The scale level data was analyzed using ANOVA to determine whether individual variables are significantly related to rating. Chi Squares were run on the nominal level variables to determine significance.

Both types of data were used to answer **Research Question #7: Which types of film content have a significant relationship to film rating?**

Several statistically significant relationships were found by performing an ANOVA on all variables that address sexual content in film. ANOVA is a statistical measure of variance based on a variety of scale level explanatory variables. Those variables with a significance level of .005 or less are found to have a significant relationship (impact of some sort) on the dependent variable, which in this case is film rating.

Significant statistical relationships were found between a film’s rating and the number of scenes of homosexual kissing and/or petting behaviors, ($F(5, 44) = 5.46, p =$

.001); the number of scenes of implied heterosexual activity, ($F(5, 44) = 9.50, p < .001$); the number of scenes of implied homosexual activity, ($F(5, 44) = 9.65, p < .001$); the number of scenes of explicit heterosexual activity, ($F(5, 44) = 21.31, p < .001$); the number of scenes of explicit homosexual activity, ($F(5, 44) = 7.54, p < .001$); and the number of scenes containing sexual innuendo, sexual references and or sexual jokes, ($F(5, 44) = 2.78, p < .05$). See Figure 7.27 for details.

Further analysis of these relationships was performed using Tukey's post hoc analysis. In reference to the number of scenes of homosexual kissing and petting behaviors, a significant difference was found between NC-17 films and all other ratings, indicating that films with such content tend to be rated NC-17. It should be noted that the number of scenes of heterosexual kissing and petting behaviors did not have a significant relationship to a film's rating, which could indicate a double standard based on sexual orientation.

Tukey's post hoc analysis uncovered statistically significant differences in the rating of films based upon the number of scenes of implied heterosexual behaviors between two rating categories (R and NC-17) and all other film rating categories. That post hoc analysis revealed the number of scenes of implied GLBT sexual behaviors resulted in statistically significant differences between NC-17 and all other rating categories. Although both types of implied sexual content result in more restrictive ratings (either R or NC-17), GLBT behaviors appear to be most restrictively rated.

Table 7.27 ANOVA of Sexuality and Sexual Content Variables as related to film rating

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
# of committed relationships (hetero)?	Between Groups	194.377	5	38.875	2.082	.086
	Within Groups	821.403	44	18.668		
	Total	1015.780	49			
# of committed GLBT relationships	Between Groups	1.526	5	.305	1.075	.387
	Within Groups	12.494	44	.284		
	Total	14.020	49			
Number of scenes with hetero hand holding	Between Groups	20.187	5	4.037	.932	.470
	Within Groups	190.693	44	4.334		
	Total	210.880	49			
How many scenes of GLBT handholding?	Between Groups	.638	5	.128	.686	.636
	Within Groups	8.182	44	.186		
	Total	8.820	49			
How many scenes of hetero kissing/petting behaviors?	Between Groups	112.690	5	22.538	1.796	.133
	Within Groups	552.130	44	12.548		
	Total	664.820	49			
How many scenes involve GLBT kissing/petting?	Between Groups	11.146	5	2.229	5.457	.001
	Within Groups	17.974	44	.409		
	Total	29.120	49			
How many scenes of implied sexual activity?	Between Groups	85.700	5	17.140	9.496	.000
	Within Groups	79.420	44	1.805		
	Total	165.120	49			
How many scenes of implied GLBT sexual activity?	Between Groups	19.414	5	3.883	9.649	.000
	Within Groups	17.706	44	.402		
	Total	37.120	49			
How many scenes of explicit sexual activity?	Between Groups	134.191	5	26.838	21.305	.000
	Within Groups	55.429	44	1.260		
	Total	189.620	49			

(Table continued on next page)

How many scenes of explicit GLBT sexual activity?	Between Groups	7.716	5	1.543	7.541	.000
	Within Groups	9.004	44	.205		
	Total	16.720	49			
How many scenes contain sex jokes, innuendo or references?	Between Groups	1112.365	5	222.473	2.781	.029
	Within Groups	3520.355	44	80.008		
	Total	4632.720	49			

Using the same Tukey post hoc analysis, NC-17 rated films are significantly different than all other ratings in terms of the number of scenes of explicit sexual activity, regardless of whether they are heterosexual or homosexual in nature. One may conclude from this data that explicit sexual activity is likely to result in a more restrictive rating for a film, specifically an NC-17 rating.

Nudity

Significant statistical differences were found between a film's rating and the number of female characters depicted topless ($F(5, 44) = 4.95, p = .001$); the number scenes in which women appear topless ($F(5, 44) = 6.19, p = .000$); the number of female characters shown fully nude ($F(5, 44) = 4.78, p = .001$); the number of scenes of female characters fully nude ($F(5, 44) = 8.74, p = .000$); the number of female characters depicted with bare buttocks ($F(5, 44) = 4.75, p = .001$); and the number of scenes that include women with bare buttocks ($F(5, 44) = 6.56, p = .000$). From this statistical analysis, it appears that the amount of female nudity of any kind, measured either in terms of number of characters or number of scenes, relates to the rating assigned to the film (See Figure 7.28).

Male nudity was also found to be significantly related to a film's rating. The number of male characters depicted with a bare buttocks ($F(5, 44) = 7.996, p = .000$); the number of scenes that include men with bare buttocks ($F(5, 44) = 10.49, p = .000$); the

number of male characters shown full frontal nudity/fully nude ($F(5, 44) = 9.06, p = .000$); and the number of scenes depicting male full frontal nudity ($F(5, 44) = 22.16, p = .000$) were all found to be statistically significant in their relationships to rating. Tukey's post hoc analysis demonstrates there is a significant difference between the NC-17 and all other rating categories in relation to all forms of male nudity, regardless of whether it is measured by number of characters or number of scenes. Please refer to Figure 7.29 for further statistical details regarding the relationship between nudity and film rating.

Table 7.28 ANOVA of female nudity variables and relationship to film rating

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
How many female characters are depicted topless?	Between Groups	114.194	5	22.839	4.952	.001
	Within Groups	202.926	44	4.612		
	Total	317.120	49			
How many scenes of females topless?	Between Groups	98.170	5	19.634	6.188	.000
	Within Groups	139.610	44	3.173		
	Total	237.780	49			
How many female characters are shown fully nude?	Between Groups	15.517	5	3.103	4.781	.001
	Within Groups	28.563	44	.649		
	Total	44.080	49			
How many scenes of female characters fully nude?	Between Groups	51.903	5	10.381	8.737	.000
	Within Groups	52.277	44	1.188		
	Total	104.180	49			
How many women are portrayed with a bare butt?	Between Groups	6.090	5	1.218	4.747	.001
	Within Groups	11.290	44	.257		
	Total	17.380	49			
How many scenes of women with bare butt?	Between Groups	5.430	5	1.086	6.555	.000
	Within Groups	7.290	44	.166		
	Total	12.720	49			

Table 7.29 ANOVA of male nudity variables and relationship to film rating

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
How many male characters are shown with a bare butt?	Between Groups	30.696	5	6.139	7.996 .000
	Within Groups	33.784	44	.768	
	Total	64.480	49		
How many scenes of males with bare butt?	Between Groups	38.333	5	7.667	10.493 .000
	Within Groups	32.147	44	.731	
	Total	70.480	49		
How many men are shown fully nude?	Between Groups	38.308	5	7.662	9.059 .000
	Within Groups	37.212	44	.846	
	Total	75.520	49		
How many scenes of men fully nude?	Between Groups	69.584	5	13.917	22.157 .000
	Within Groups	27.636	44	.628	
	Total	97.220	49		

Profanity

Analyzing the use of profanity in films using one-way ANOVA finds that the use of several profanities, but not all profanities measured, are statistically significant in their relationship to film rating. Frequency of the use of the words hell or damn ($F(5, 44) = 4.999, p = .001$); frequency of the use of the word shit ($F(5, 44) = 3.459, p < .010$); frequency of the use of the word fuck or any derivative thereof ($F(5, 44) = 3.35, p < .012$); frequency of the use of the word ass or any derivative ($F(5, 44) = 3.03, p < .02$); and frequency of the use of the terms “bitch” or “son of a bitch” ($F(5, 44) = 4.32, p = .003$) were all found to be significantly related to film rating. The frequency of use of terms such as cunt, pussy, dick, cock and prick were not found to be significantly related to a film’s rating. Refer to Figure 7.30 for further statistical analysis.

Table 7.30 ANOVA of language/profanity variables and relationship to rating

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
How many incidents of characters saying hell or damn	Between Groups	737.541	5	147.508	4.999	.001
	Within Groups	1298.459	44	29.510		
	Total	2036.000	49			
Number of times the word shit is said	Between Groups	3027.769	5	605.554	3.459	.010
	Within Groups	7702.251	44	175.051		
	Total	10730.020	49			
Number of times fuck is said (or any derivative)	Between Groups	27965.647	5	5593.129	3.348	.012
	Within Groups	73514.433	44	1670.783		
	Total	101480.080	49			
Number of times ass is said	Between Groups	687.612	5	137.522	3.029	.020
	Within Groups	1997.368	44	45.395		
	Total	2684.980	49			
Number of times bitch or son of a bitch is said	Between Groups	158.169	5	31.634	4.319	.003
	Within Groups	322.251	44	7.324		
	Total	480.420	49			
Number of times cunt or pussy is used	Between Groups	127.248	5	25.450	1.556	.192
	Within Groups	719.472	44	16.352		
	Total	846.720	49			
Number of times dick, cock or prick is used	Between Groups	228.753	5	45.751	1.609	.178
	Within Groups	1251.247	44	28.437		
	Total	1480.000	49			

Substance Use/Abuse:

Data analysis found statistically significant relationships between a film's rating and the number of scenes of marijuana use ($F(5, 44) = 2.82, p = .027$); the number of scenes of hard drug use ($F(5, 44) = 2.48, p = .046$); and the number of scenes of alcohol consumption ($F(5, 44) = 4.22, p = .003$).

Table 7.31 ANOVA of drug-related variables and relationship to rating

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Number of scenes of illegal drug use?	Between Groups	18.812	5	3.762	1.435	.231
	Within Groups	115.368	44	2.622		
	Total	134.180	49			
Number of scenes of pot smoking	Between Groups	6.217	5	1.243	2.820	.027
	Within Groups	19.403	44	.441		
	Total	25.620	49			
Number of scenes of hard drug use	Between Groups	1.247	5	.249	2.476	.046
	Within Groups	4.433	44	.101		
	Total	5.680	49			
How many scenes of smoking are in this film?	Between Groups	586.583	5	117.317	1.624	.174
	Within Groups	3178.797	44	72.245		
	Total	3765.380	49			
Number of scenes of drinking	Between Groups	472.720	5	94.544	4.218	.003
	Within Groups	986.260	44	22.415		
	Total	1458.980	49			

Violence

No significant relationship was found between the number of violent scenes in a film and its rating.

Table 7.32 ANOVA of Number of Violent Scenes and Relationship to Rating

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	420.552	5	84.110	1.472	.218
Within Groups	2513.948	44	57.135		
Total	2934.500	49			

Table 7.33 ANOVA of other violence-related variables and relationship to Rating

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
How many scenes of fighting of any kind?	Between Groups	223.285	5	44.657	2.526	.043
	Within Groups	777.835	44	17.678		
	Total	1001.120	49			
Number of chase scenes	Between Groups	31.169	5	6.234	1.772	.139
	Within Groups	154.831	44	3.519		
	Total	186.000	49			
Number of gunshots	Between Groups	114566.537	5	22913.307	2.242	.067
	Within Groups	449616.043	44	10218.546		
	Total	564182.580	49			
Number of scenes including gunfire	Between Groups	128.167	5	25.633	1.899	.114
	Within Groups	593.913	44	13.498		
	Total	722.080	49			
How many characters are shot in this film?	Between Groups	148.579	5	29.716	1.026	.414
	Within Groups	1274.701	44	28.970		
	Total	1423.280	49			
How many characters die in this film?	Between Groups	2923.890	5	584.778	2.063	.088
	Within Groups	12472.130	44	283.457		
	Total	15396.020	49			
How many characters are hurt in this film?	Between Groups	145.703	5	29.141	1.617	.175
	Within Groups	792.797	44	18.018		
	Total	938.500	49			
How many people die at the hands of others (murder, accidents, etc)	Between Groups	2932.152	5	586.430	2.081	.086
	Within Groups	12401.628	44	281.855		
	Total	15333.780	49			

The only violent behavior that was coded in this content analysis that had a significant relationship to the film's rating was the number of fight scenes in a given film $F(5, 44) =$

2.53, $p = .043$. See figure 7.33 for further details. No other significant relationships were found in this ANOVA of violence variables.

Gender and Sexual Orientation of Characters

In the past, critics have been critical of the MPAA rating process for its apparent bias against gay and lesbian characters in film. However, no quantitative research had studied whether that assumption was correct. In this content analysis, the number of both heterosexual and homosexual characters was recorded and broken down by gender.

Results using ANOVA find that indeed the number of gay male characters ($F(5,44) = 2.85, p = .026$) and the number of female lesbian characters ($F(5,44) = 2.43, p = .050$) are statistically related to a film's rating. However, it is also true that the number of heterosexual male characters, overall, is related to rating, $F(5, 44) = 3.17, p = .016$. The number of female characters in a film is not related to rating, according to ANOVA data.

Table 7.34 ANOVA of gender and sexual orientation as related to film rating

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Total number of male characters	Between Groups	7538.786	5	1507.757	3.172	.016
	Within Groups	20916.494	44	475.375		
	Total	28455.280	49			
total number of female characters	Between Groups	556.899	5	111.380	1.671	.162
	Within Groups	2932.381	44	66.645		
	Total	3489.280	49			
How many male GLBT characters	Between Groups	23.505	5	4.701	2.846	.026
	Within Groups	72.675	44	1.652		
	Total	96.180	49			
Number of female GLBT characters	Between Groups	3.188	5	.638	2.432	.050
	Within Groups	11.532	44	.262		
	Total	14.720	49			

Using Tukey's post hoc analysis, it is clear that there is a significant difference between films rated NC-17 and all other film ratings when it comes to inclusion of male and/or female homosexual characters.

Chi Square Analysis of 50 Films from 2005

While the preceding section details statistical analysis of scale level variables from the content analysis of fifty films from 2005, there were additional variables measured in the same analysis using nominal or categorical level data. The statistical significance of those categorical variables in relation to film rating was analyzed using crosstabs and Chi Square analysis.

Sexual orientation is an area that critics have claimed impacts a film's rating. Many critics have pointed to a double-standard between heterosexual and homosexual depictions in terms of rating, arguing that films featuring gay characters are more restrictively rated. In total, eleven of the fifty sample films included at least one openly gay character. Although a higher percentage of more restrictively rated films featured gay characters, the relationship between the mere presence of gay characters and a film's rating was not found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2 (5) = 8.12, p = .150$). This is in contrast to ANOVA findings (see Figure 7.34) that show the number of GLBT characters do impact rating. What was found in later analysis of the data was that the higher the number of gay or lesbian characters depicted in the film, the more restrictive the rating. Also, the relationship and portrayal of sexuality involving such characters plays a role in rating assignment. This relationship is discussed in more detail in both chapter 8 and chapter 9.

The fifty film sample from 2005 was also analyzed in terms of the number of characters depicted as HIV positive or as having full-blown AIDS. The presence of HIV positive character(s) was found to have a significant relationship to rating ($\chi^2 (5) = 15.99, p = .007$). Only one film from the sample included the depiction of an HIV positive character, and that film was rated NC-17; the most restrictive MPAA rating category.

Nudity was measured using scale data, and the number of scenes of nudity, as well as the number of characters (both male and female) appearing nude in a film was found to be significantly related to rating. However, nudity was also analyzed using nominal variables, in order to provide a more thorough picture of the phenomenon. The inclusion of depictions of partial nudity within a film was found to be significantly related to rating ($\chi^2 (5) = 26.84, p = .000$), as was full nudity ($\chi^2 (5) = 25.68, p = .000$). In terms of partial nudity, data shows it was depicted more frequently in both NC-17 rated films (present in 100% of the sample), and R rated films (present in 81.8% of the sample) than all other rating categories. However, it is interesting to note that partial nudity was featured in one G rated film and two PG rated films. This will be discussed in more detail in the qualitative analysis of films in a chapter 8, as will contextual issues involving the relationship between gender and nudity in film. Full nudity was only present in R, NC-17, and unrated films.

The Production Code, or Hays Code, was discussed in an earlier chapter detailing the history of film content regulation. As a measure of the impact of specific edicts present in that 1930 code of conduct for films, a few nominal variable were included in the content analysis of the fifty 2005-released films. The researcher was

interested in finding quantitative evidence of whether the Code's values had carried over (perhaps unconsciously) into the current rating system. To this end, nominal (yes/no) measures were included, such as the presence or absence of depictions of pre-marital sex, the presence or absence of depictions of adulterous behaviors, and the presence or absence of interracial dating or sexual relationships. Findings show that premarital sex depictions within a film are significantly related to film rating, $\chi^2 (10) = 21.89, p = .016$. As restrictiveness of rating increases, so does the incidence of the number of films within that rating category that depict pre-marital sex. G-rated films contained no depictions pre-marital sex, 9.1% of PG rated films, 36.4% of PG-13 rated films, 63.6% of R rated films, and 100% of NC-17 rated films included depictions of pre-marital sexual relationships. Nearly 43% (42.9%) of Unrated films included such depictions.

Adultery was also found to be significantly related to film rating ($\chi^2 (5) = 26.81, p = .000$). The incidence of adultery increases as rating restrictiveness increases.

Presence/Absence of depictions of adultery in films from 2005 (N=50)

	G	PG	PG-13	R	NC-17	Unrated
Yes	0%	0%	18.2%	72.7%	100%	14.3%
No	100%	100%	81.8%	27.3%	0%	85.7%

Depictions of interracial sexual or dating relationships were not found to be significantly related to film rating.

While violence was measured using several scale level variables, it was also measured in terms of presence or absence using nominal variables as well. The mere presence of violence in a nominal form was not found to be significantly related to film rating, which is in sync with the results from the scale level variables. However, there were three specific nominal level variables that can be categorized as violence-related that were found to be significantly related to rating.

Due to the mention of some specific types of violent content within MPAA rating reasons that were analyzed earlier in this data analysis, several nominal level variables were included in this content analysis of the 50-film sample from 2005. The variables included presence/absence of “warfare or battle scenes”, the presence or absence of “martial arts or boxing” scenes, the presence or absence of “punching, hitting or slapping” behaviors, presence or absence of “chase scenes”, presence or absence of depictions of rape, presence or absence of “torture”, and the presence or absence of “horror and/or gore”. Three of those variables were found to be significant to rating. The presence of “martial arts/boxing sequences were significantly related to a film’s rating ($\chi^2(5) = 12.12, p = .033$). Upon further analysis, only films rated PG or PG-13 included such content. The presence of depictions of torture was also found to be a significant variable in relation to film rating ($\chi^2(5) = 16.94, p = .005$), and was only found in films rated R, NC-17 or unrated films. “Gore” was also found to be significantly related to rating ($\chi^2(5) = 11.71, p = .039$). “Gore” was found only in films rated PG-13 and above. None of the other violence related nominal level variables were significant at a .05 level or greater.

Presence of Gore in Films released in 2005 (N=50)

	G	PG	PG-13	R	NC-17	Unrated
Yes	0%	0%	36.4%	54.5%	33.3%	28.6%
No	100%	100%	63.6%	45.5%	66.7%	71.4%

Two other nominal level variables were used to measure some aspect of the violence depicted in these films. One asked if the violence could be described as sadistic or brutal. Results found this variable not to be significantly related to film rating. However, if the film's violence was characterized as "comedic or fantasy violence", it was significantly related to a film's rating ($\chi^2 (10) = 21.13, p = .020$). This type of violence, as you might expect, was found most frequently in G and PG rated films.

The presence of scene(s) of illegal drug use was also significantly related to film rating ($\chi^2 (5) = 13.53, p = .019$). Illegal drug use was depicted exclusively in films rated PG-13 or higher. However, depictions of prescription drug abuse was not statistically significant. Depictions of children or teenagers smoking cigarettes, smoking marijuana, or drinking alcoholic beverages were also not found to be statistically significant in relation to film rating. Hard drug use by children or teens (which includes the use of cocaine, ecstasy, heroin, and other hard drugs) was found to be significantly related to rating ($\chi^2 (5) = 15.99, p = .007$). It's important to point out, however, only one film in the fifty film sample depicted such content, and it was rated

NC-17. In addition, the presence of any sort of drug references or drug humor was found to be related to film rating ($\chi^2(5) = 18.50, p = .002$).

Presence of Drug References or Drug Humor in films released in 2005 (N=50)

	G	PG	PG-13	R	NC-17	Unrated
Yes	0%	9.1%	18.2%	36.4%	66.7%	85.7%
No	100%	90.9%	81.8%	63.6%	43.3%	14.3%

Research Question #8: Are films containing similar types of content rated consistently?

Research question eight addresses the consistency of rating application. Some insight into this question can be found in the data analysis for RQ #7 where it was found that the presence of certain content resulted in a specific rating. For example, GLBT sexual content depictions generally resulted in an NC-17 rating, whether that content was implied or explicit.

In an attempt to determine the consistency of application, both content and rating characteristics need to be analyzed. Certain insights can be uncovered in the data for each broad content category. Data from the content analysis of fifty films released in 2005 was isolated by content category using SPSS. These specific variables were then analyzed for frequency as related to film rating. Implications of content can be determined by looking at these frequencies, paired with initial ANOVA and Chi Square analyses. Figure 7.35 illustrates the frequencies at which particular types of content

were found to be present in films of each rating category. This table can be compared to figure 7.17 found on page 153.

Table 7.35: Content Found in Sample of 50 Films from 2005 (% of films in specific rating categories that contains specific types of content)

	G (N=7)	PG (N=11)	PG-13 (N=11)	R (N=11)	NC-17 (N=3)	Unrated (N=7)
Kissing/petting Hetero	56.1% (4)	73.7% (8)	81.8% (9)	63.6% (7)	66.7% (2)	71.4%(5)
Kissing/petting GLBT	0	0	0	18.2% (2)	66.7% (2)	28.6%(2)
Implied hetero Sex	14.3% (1)	9.1% (1)	45.5% (5)	70.7% (8)	66.7% (2)	71.4%(5)
Implied GLBT sex	0	0	0	9.1% (1)	66.7% (2)	14.3%(1)
Explicit sex hetero	0	0	0	63.6% (7)	66.7% (2)	14.3%(1)
Explicit sex GLBT	0	0	0	9.1% (1)	66.7% (2)	14.3%(1)
Sexual innuendo	42.9% (3)	54.5% (6)	63.6% (7)	70.7% (8)	66.7% (2)	71.4%(5)
Inclusion of Gay characters	0	9.1% (1)	18.2% (2)	36.4% (4)	66.7% (2)	28.6%(2)
Partial Nudity	14.3% (1)	18.2% (2)	0	81.8% (9)	100% (3)	71.4%(5)
Full Nudity	0	0	0	36.4% (4)	100% (3)	14.3%(1)
Premarital sex		9.1% (1)	36.4% (4)	63.6% (7)	100% (3)	42.9%(3)
Adultery		0	18.2% (2)	72.7% (8)	100% (3)	14.3%(1)
Interracial relationships		9.1% (1)	27.3% (3)	27.3% (3)	0	28.6%(2)
Rape	0	0	0	18.2% (2)	33.3% (1)	14.3%(1)
Profanity						
Illegal Drug use	0	0	9.1% (1)	36.4% (4)	33.3% (1)	57.1%(4)
Underage drug	0	0	0	9.1% (1)	33.3% (1)	0
Underage smoking	0	0	0	9.1% (1)	33.3% (1)	0
Underage drinking	0	9.1% (1)	9.1% (1)	27.3% (3)	33.3% (1)	0
Drug references	0	9.1% (1)	18.2% (2)	36.4% (4)	66.7% (2)	85.7%(6)
Violence	85.7% (6)	81.8% (9)	90.9% (10)	100% (11)	66.7% (2)	71.4%(5)
Punching/slapping	71.4% (5)	72.7% (8)	81.8% (9)	81.8% (9)	66.7% (2)	57.1%(4)
Torture	0	0	0	9.1% (1)	66.7% (2)	14.3%(1)
Battle/war	42.9% (3)	18.2% (2)	18.2% (2)	27.3% (3)	0	0
Horror	0	0	45.5% (5)	18.2% (2)	33.3% (1)	14.3%(1)
Gore	0	0	36.4% (4)	54.5% (6)	33.3% (1)	28.6%(2)
Boxing / martial arts	0	36.4% (4)	36.4% (4)	0	0	0
Chase scenes	71.4% (5)	72.7% (8)	63.6% (7)	36.4% (4)	0	14.3%(1)

The table of actual observed content in the fifty film sample includes much more specific content categories, therefore allowing a more thorough view of film content.

Content Areas:

One area that was found to be related to film rating was the number of gay and lesbian characters within a film. But, interestingly, the mere presence or absence of gay and lesbian characters was not found to be statistically related to film rating. This makes the issue of whether films containing gay/lesbian characters are rated consistently a more pressing issue. Due to the fact several critics have accused the MPAA of an anti-gay bias, the findings from this research could either help support those arguments, or contradict those assertions. In order to answer this question, all films with at least one gay character were isolated using SPSS. Frequencies based on rating category were run using the descriptive statistics function. The results are below in Figure 7.36.

Table 7.36 Rating of Films with one or more GLBT character

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	PG	1	9.1	9.1	9.1
	PG-13	2	18.2	18.2	27.3
	R	4	36.4	36.4	63.6
	NC-17	2	18.2	18.2	81.8
	Unrated	2	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

By looking at the frequencies in the table above, it is interesting to note that at least one film of every rating contains at least one gay character, except the G rating. A total of 11 of the 50 films coded contained one or more GLBT characters. Films containing at least one GLBT character are most often rated R, making up 36.4% of the sample. Due to the diffuse rating pattern, it must be stated that films with GLBT character(s) present are not rated consistently. This would match the results of the chi

square analysis performed on the same nominal variable in the analysis of RQ #7, which found such a variable was not related to rating.

However, the **number** of GLBT characters in a film **was** found to have a statistically significant relationship to rating. It could be that a particular number of GLBT characters might be consistently rated. To that end, additional frequencies were run based on the number of homosexual characters present in a given film. The results are interesting. Films containing four or more GLBT characters are consistently rated NC-17, however, only one such film was present in the 50 film sample (*Mysterious Skin*).

Figure 7.37: Rating of Film containing four or more GLBT characters

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid NC-17	1	100.0	100.0	100.0

Three films from the sample contain three GLBT characters. Those films are rated R, NC-17, or are Unrated.

Table 7.38: Rating of Films containing three or more GLBT characters

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid R	1	33.3	33.3	33.3
NC-17	1	33.3	33.3	66.7
Unrated	1	33.3	33.3	100.0
Total	3	100.0	100.0	

Although a specific rating cannot be attributed to this number of GLBT characters, it is true that all are rated R or above.

When that number is set at two GLBT characters in a film, the results change. As shown in the table below, there are no longer NC-17 rated films or unrated films present in the sample. The films are split between PG, PG-13 and R ratings categories.

Figure 7.39: Rating of Films containing two GLBT characters

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG	1	25.0	25.0	25.0
PG-13	1	25.0	25.0	50.0
R	2	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	4	100.0	100.0	

Films containing a single GLBT character also show an inconsistent pattern, including PG-13, R and unrated films (one of each).

Figure 7.40: Rating of Films containing one GLBT character

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG-13	1	33.3	33.3	33.3
R	1	33.3	33.3	66.7
Unrated	1	33.3	33.3	100.0
Total	3	100.0	100.0	

Due to this statistical analysis, it can be stated that films with three or more GLBT characters are consistently rated R or more restrictively. When that number is less than three, there does not appear to be a consistent rating pattern. The qualitative analysis conducted using the same sample of fifty films helps to shed light on contextual issues that might impact rating, related to sexual orientation. Chapter eight will discuss this issue in more detail.

The presence or absence of HIV positive characters in a film was also found to be significantly related to film rating. As shown below, only one film from our sample of 50 included such a depiction. That film was rated NC-17. Therefore, it is true that, based on this sample, films depicting HIV positive characters are rated NC-17 consistently. A note of caution should be included, however. The depiction in this film of the HIV positive character was that of a gay male with full blown AIDS hiring a teenaged male gigolo. This leads the researcher to question whether it is the depiction of an HIV positive

character that led to the restrictive rating, or other aspects of the storytelling. This was also the same film from the sample that depicted more than four gay characters, which was found in the data above to be consistently rated NC-17.

Table 7.41 Rating of Films with one or more HIV+ character

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid NC-17	1	100.0	100.0	100.0

Nudity is another content area that was found to be significantly related to film rating. Both partial and full nudity were found to have a statistically significant relationship to rating, thus both categories of content must be analyzed to determine if they are rated consistently. Looking first at films that include one or more scene of partial nudity, we find that this type of content is not consistently rated.

Partial Nudity

Partial nudity was found in all rating categories except PG-13, but was found most commonly to be rated R (45% of partial nudity). Of the 20 films containing partial nudity from our sample (N=50), nine of them were rated R. However, the fact that films containing partial nudity were found in five of the six rating categories, it must be concluded that depictions of partial nudity are not rated consistently.

Table 7.42 Rating of Films including one or more scene of partial nudity

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid G	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
PG	2	10.0	10.0	15.0
R	9	45.0	45.0	60.0
NC-17	3	15.0	15.0	75.0
Unrated	5	25.0	25.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Full nudity, however, appears to be rated on a more consistent basis. By looking at the table below, it is clear that no films with full nudity are rated less restrictively than R. A total of 8 of the 50 films sampled contain full nudity, of which 50% are rated R, while another 37.5% are rated NC-17 and 12.5% are Unrated.

Table 7.43: Rating of Films including one or more scene of full nudity

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid R	4	50.0	50.0	50.0
NC-17	3	37.5	37.5	87.5
Unrated	1	12.5	12.5	100.0
Total	8	100.0	100.0	

Pre-marital sex was another variable coded in this content analysis. This variable, although not mentioned as a rating reason by the MPAA, was a type of content strictly forbidden in The Production Code. A few variables from that time frame were included in this content analysis to determine if there are unspecified, lingering effects of the Production Code's Catholic-influenced limitations. Premarital sex, adultery and interracial relationships were all forbidden under the Code., therefore they were included in this content analysis. Depictions of this type of pre-marital sexual behavior were found in 18 films within the sample (N=50). Those 18 films range in rating from PG to NC-17, and also include unrated films. This means that pre-marital sexual relationships were depicted in films of all rating categories except G. These depictions were most often found in R rated films, but there is truly no consistent pattern of rating for this type of content.

Table 7.44 Rating of Films depicting pre-marital sexual behaviors

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG	1	5.6	5.6	5.6
PG-13	4	22.2	22.2	27.8
R	7	38.9	38.9	66.7
NC-17	3	16.7	16.7	83.3
Unrated	3	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	18	100.0	100.0	

Adultery was found to be significantly related for rating category. However, looking at the table below, it is hard to argue that films containing depictions of adulterous behaviors are rated consistently.

Table 7.45 Rating of Films depicting adulterous behaviors

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG-13	2	14.3	14.3	14.3
R	8	57.1	57.1	71.4
NC-17	3	21.4	21.4	92.9
Unrated	1	7.1	7.1	100.0
Total	14	100.0	100.0	

What can be inferred from this data is that adultery is not depicted in films rated G or PG, which means there is some consistency in the application of ratings featuring this type of content. Adulterous behaviors are most commonly rated R (57.1% of 14 total films), but the same behavior is also rated PG-13, NC-17 and Unrated.

Interracial sexual or dating relationships were also measured in the content analysis. This variable was not found to be significantly related to rating. By running the frequencies of rating category for films with such content, we find the ratings range from PG to R, and also is included in two Unrated films. The only rating categories not to feature any films containing such relationships are the G and NC-17 rating. Therefore, it

can be stated that the presence of interracial relationships (dating or sexual relationships, including marriage), are not rated in a consistent manner.

Table 7.46 Rating of Films depicting interracial sexual or dating relationships/marriages

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG	1	11.1	11.1	11.1
PG-13	3	33.3	33.3	44.4
R	3	33.3	33.3	77.8
Unrated	2	22.2	22.2	100.0
Total	9	100.0	100.0	

Violent content was not found to be statistically related to a film's rating, and it is also clear from our further analysis of films containing violence that it is not rated consistently.

Table 7.47 Rating of Films containing violent content

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid G	6	14.0	14.0	14.0
PG	9	20.9	20.9	34.9
PG-13	10	23.3	23.3	58.1
R	11	25.6	25.6	83.7
NC-17	2	4.7	4.7	88.4
Unrated	5	11.6	11.6	100.0
Total	43	100.0	100.0	

Violent content is found in 43 of the 50 films coded, which accounts for 86% of our sample. Violent content is found in all rating categories, but is most often found in films rated R (25.6%) and PG-13 (23.3%).

Illegal drug use is another variable that was found to be statistically related to film rating. Analysis of the descriptive statistics of films containing illegal drug use show us that such behaviors are not depicted in films with the least restrictive ratings of G and PG. However, at least one film in all other categories contains illegal drug use. Ten

films total contain such depictions, with the majority of them in films rated R (4 films or 40% of sample) or unrated films (4 films or 40% of the sample). Although the rating of such content is not limited to single rating category, we can say with some certainty that drug use is consistently rated PG-13 or more restrictively.

Table 7.48 Rating of Films depicting illegal drug use

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG-13	1	10.0	10.0	10.0
R	4	40.0	40.0	50.0
NC-17	1	10.0	10.0	60.0
Unrated	4	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Drug use is more consistently rated when it is teenagers or children depicted using the illegal substances. Depictions of teens or children using hard drugs, such as cocaine, heroin, ecstasy or LSD is consistently rated NC-17, as shown in the table below.

However, it should be noted that only one film in our sample contained such depictions.

Table 7.49 Rating of Film depicting kids/teens using hard drugs

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid NC-17	1	100.0	100.0	100.0

The depictions of kids or teens smoking marijuana is also consistently rated R or more restrictively, as shown in the following table. Again, a small number of films included such content (two films), one rated R and the other rated NC-17 (which also featured hard drug use by the teens).

Table 7.50 Rating of Films featuring kids/teens smoking pot

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid R	1	50.0	50.0	50.0
NC-17	1	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	2	100.0	100.0	

This research also investigated depictions of teenagers and kids smoking cigarettes. This content was only found in two films total. Those films were consistently rated either R or NC-17. This finding is somewhat surprising, due to the lack of smoking behaviors involving teens exhibited in our sample of 50 films. This could be due to anti-smoking legislation and recent tobacco industry lawsuits. There has also been considerable pressure placed on moviemakers to limit the number of smoking behaviors depicted in films (find source).

Table 7.51 Rating of Films depicting kids smoking

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid R	1	50.0	50.0	50.0
NC-17	1	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	2	100.0	100.0	

Teenagers and children were more often depicted drinking alcohol (total of 6 films from the 50 film sample contained depictions of such behaviors). This behavior was not as consistently rated, appearing in films rated PG, PG-13, R and NC-17. Half (3) of the films in which teenagers or kids drank alcohol were rated R.

Table 7.52 Rating of Films that depict kids/teens drinking alcohol

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid PG	1	16.7	16.7	16.7
PG-13	1	16.7	16.7	33.3
R	3	50.0	50.0	83.3
NC-17	1	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	6	100.0	100.0	

Drug references or drug humor was found in 15 of the 50 films coded. Such references were found in films rated PG, PG-13, R, NC-17 and Unrated films, so it was not consistently rated. These references most often occurred in Unrated and R rated films.

Table 7.53 Rating of Films including drug references

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	PG	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
	PG-13	2	13.3	13.3	20.0
	R	4	26.7	26.7	46.7
	NC-17	2	13.3	13.3	60.0
	Unrated	6	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Having completed the analysis of data via isolation of specific content variables, it was possible to answer RQ #8, which asks whether films containing similar types of content are rated restrictively. The following is a summary of characteristics of each rating category which was compiled based on the statistical analyses performed. This summary is a quick reference guide to the characteristics found regarding each of the rating categories.

G rated films:

- No gay characters
- No HIV positive characters
- No full nudity
- No pre-marital sex
- No adulterous behaviors
- No interracial sexual relationships or marriages
- No drug use
- No children drinking or smoking
- No drug references or drug humor

PG rated films:

- No gay characters depicted in committed relationships
- No full nudity
- No pre-marital sex
- No adulterous behaviors
- No sadistic/brutal violence
- No drug use
- No children smoking
- No HIV positive characters

PG-13 rated films:

- No HIV positive characters
- No partial nudity
- No full nudity
- No kids depicted using hard drugs or marijuana
- No kids depicted smoking

R rated films:

- No HIV positive characters
- No depictions of kids using hard drugs

NC-17 rated films:

- No interracial sexual relationships/marriages
- No fantasy or comedic violence

Unrated films:

- No HIV positive characters

- No depictions of kids using hard drugs or smoking marijuana
- No depictions of kids smoking
- No depictions of kids drinking

Comparison of the MPAA's Use of Rating Descriptors and Content found in Films from 2005

By comparing results found in the analysis of rating descriptors used by the MPAA in each individual rating category (See Figure 7.17) and the results found in this analysis of fifty full length films released the same year (See Figure 7.35) it is clear that the MPAA is selectively choosing when to include descriptors of particular behaviors and content. Across the board, a higher percentage of films in each rating category were found to contain specific types of content than was cited by the MPAA. This could be due to the sample of films used for certain rating categories, such as PG, PG-13 and R. However, the samples used for the G and NC-17 ratings include the entire population of such films released during 2005. Films with those ratings should be closest to matching the MPAA's rating reasons.

In G rated films, no rating reasons are provided for individual films. It is just stated in the definition for the rating itself that these films contain very little violence, no sex or nudity or drug use, and there is nothing about these films that would be found to be offensive to an audience member of any age. What was found in the content analysis of the fifty films was that there was in fact implied sexual content, sexual innuendo, partial nudity and rather high levels of violence in G-rated fare.

In PG rated films, the tables were turned. The content analysis found sexual content to be less common than cited by MPAA raters, although much higher levels of sexual innuendo were coded than was included in rating reasons. Both analyses indicated there was no drug use in PG rated films, although the analysis of the full length features found that underage drinking and drug references were present in one PG rated film (9.1% of the sample), which was not noted in any MPAA rating reasons. Violence was found in much higher levels in the analysis of full films than was reported by the MPAA (81.8% of PG rated films contained violent content, although the MPAA warned of violent content in only 43.6% of PG films).

PG-13 films were found to contain the highest number of violent scenes per film, making it the most violent-laden of all film rating categories. While the MPAA cited violence as a rating reason in 51.9% of PG-13 rating reasons, the analysis of full films found 90.9% of such films contained violence. Sexual content was reported nearly equally in PG-13 films as was coded in the other analysis (40.7% reported by MPAA, 45.5% found in analysis of films). Sexual innuendo was found in a much larger percentage of films of this rating than had been included in rating reasons. Nudity, however, was cited in 10.2% of PG-13 films, but no nudity (partial or full) was observed in the eleven PG-13 rated films that were coded.

R-rated films were cited for pretty much equal percentages of sexual content when comparing MPAA rater assessments and observations made by coders. A difference is that the analysis of the fifty full length films took sexual orientation into consideration. If the heterosexual and homosexual behaviors and content are added together, they are fairly close to the 85.1% of PG-13 films cited for sexual content by

the MPAA. Sexual innuendo, however, was much more prevalent in R rated films than was cited by the MPAA. The MPAA reported sexual innuendo, references or humor as a rating reason in only 8.7% of R rated films, while the independent analysis found 70.7% of sampled R rated films contained sexual innuendo, references or humor. This is a large difference, which might point to the MPAA's lack of specificity of content in more restrictively rated films. Perhaps because such a large portion of films were found to contain sexual content, it seemed redundant to mention sexual innuendo.

Rape was found to be depicted in 18.2% of sampled R-rated films, but rape was never used as a rating reason by the MPAA for films in this category. This is also true of films rated NC-17. Only one film was specifically cited for rape by the MPAA, and that was a PG-13 film. This finding is somewhat disturbing, as this seems to be an important bit of information that consumers should be aware of before seeing a film. Again, it is more restrictively rated films that left out the specific citations for such content. It may be that raters don't find this content relevant to report to viewers who are supposed to be teenagers or older, but it is impossible to know why such warnings were not included without talking to the raters themselves.

A total of 60.3% of R rated films were cited for violence, while independent coders found 100% of R rated films contained violence.

NC-17 films were cited solely for violence and sexual content by MPAA raters. The content analysis of all three NC-17 films released theatrically in 2005, however, found that these films also contained nudity (in 100% of films), sexual innuendo

(66.7%), rape (33.3%), illegal drug use (33.3%), underage drug use, smoking and drinking (33.3% each), and profanity.

These results indicate that the MPAA rating reasons are neither exhaustive nor completely reliable as a source of content information.

CHAPTER EIGHT

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Qualitative Analysis of 50 Films from 2005

The quantitative data analysis of the fifty films from 2005 determined which variables impact a film's rating, as did the analysis of the Motion Picture Association of America-supplied rating reasons. Unfortunately, quantitative data supplies only a partial picture of the rating process and rating assignments. While the numbers tell us the statistical impact of specific types of content on a film rating, it does not deal with the context within which the behaviors, language and other types of content are presented to viewers. Therefore, it is imperative to take a closer look at the characteristics of that content to get a more complete picture of rating assignment. This qualitative analysis is organized around the conclusions from the quantitative data, adding richness and depth to the findings. It helps paint a more thorough and descriptive picture of how ratings are assigned by the MPAA and whether those ratings are applied by the raters consistently. In doing so, context, as well as content, has been taken into consideration. Rather than relying solely on manifest content, or content that can be easily counted or categorized, this analysis delves into the latent content of the fifty films analyzed quantitatively in chapter seven. This latent content requires some subjective analysis of symbolism, underlying meanings, and overall context of film depictions.

Chapter eight answers research question nine, and is organized by content type. Major content areas are addressed, including, sexual content, sexual innuendo, nudity, and violence. These were some of the major areas found to be included in the MPAA rating reasons. In addition, content areas found to be significant in the quantitative analysis of the fifty films from 2005 were included in this discussion, as well as content

that parents mentioned they had concerns about during the focus group sessions (which are discussed in depth in chapter six). For that reason, sexual orientation and its depiction in a sample of films from 2005 is discussed in more detail. Representation of race and gender has also been integrated into discussion of the major content areas in order to determine its possible associative impact on rating.

Research Question #9: What are the similarities and differences of film content found in various rating categories?

The quantitative data presented in chapter six answers this question to a certain degree. That chapter outlined the statistically significant content-related variables that impact rating in general. In this chapter, that analysis is taken a step further. Rather than looking at quantified numbers of scenes of specific types of content, this chapter looks at the major content types that the MPAA takes into consideration in their rating decisions (based on citations from textual rating reasons as well as results of the prior quantitative content analysis), and compares and contrasts the way that content is presented in films of differing ratings. This comparison includes discussion of context as well as citations of specific examples from individual films. This qualitative approach to content analysis illuminates both the differences and similarities between films with various ratings. It also allows for a discussion of the breadth of content found within each of the given rating categories.

Sexual Content

The quantitative analysis found that sexual content impacts a film's rating. More specifically, the number of scenes of both implied and explicit sex impact rating. However, implied sex was included in films of all ratings, while explicit sex scenes did

not appear in films rated less restrictively than R. From this limited data, it seems that this is an inconsistency in the MPAA rating process. How could implied sexual content be present in all film rating categories? The answer is found by looking at the context of these sexually provocative scenes, allowing us to have a better understanding of how sexual content is presented in a variety of films and how that correlates to rating. Upon closer inspection, there are some clear differences between the sexual content found in less restrictively rated films and more restrictively rated films. However, those differences become more difficult to discern in films rated more restrictively, as is demonstrated in the following paragraphs.

Explicit sexual content

Explicit sexual content was defined for the purpose of this study as sexual acts performed on screen in a film. If sexual organs or penetration were depicted, it was certainly explicit sex, however, this was not necessary for content to be placed in this category. Acts that were feigned on screen between actors were included in this category, seeing as most commercial film does not include actual sexual penetration on screen. That type of behavior is generally limited to soft and hard-core pornography, although there have been some exceptions over the years.

Sexual content in film that crossed the line from implied to explicit resulted in an R, or more restrictive rating, at least in the case of the fifty sampled films from 2005. There was also some explicit sexual content present in unrated films, some of which were originally assigned an NC-17 rating when they were submitted to the MPAA. Those films were later released Unrated by the producers. Every producer and studio has the

option of released a film unrated, it just will not be exhibited in MPAA-member theaters (which happens to include most major theater chains).

Because this more graphic type of sexual content is only found in more restrictively rated films, the question becomes, what type of sexual content crosses the line of what is seen as acceptable for an R rating? NC-17 films were found to generally contain a greater number of sexual scenes than did R rated films. However, that's not the sole reason for the difference in rating. What types of sexual depictions are deemed fit for teenagers to view with an adult, and which are relegated to the adult-only NC-17 rating? This distinction is important for two reasons. One, it informs as to our American cultural standards, illustrating to us what is "acceptable" (R-rated sexual content), and what is "unacceptable" (NC-17 rated content). Depictions of R rated sexuality have been evaluated by the MPAA and found to be suitable for teenaged viewers, as long as an adult is present. NC-17 films are meant to be seen by adults only. This assumes a difference in some sort between these two categories of sexual content.

This qualitative analysis investigated these differences and found some rather clear contrasts between R and NC-17 rated content. Overall, NC-17 rated sexual content could be described as more "taboo," or "aberrant," which is a term used on occasion by the MPAA in their rating reasons for NC-17 rated films. It is not just the type of sexual acts that were depicted that seemed to make a difference to raters, it was the context of that content. The NC-17 rated films from this sample included behaviors that included rape, molestation, incest, prostitution, pornography and homosexuality. Whereas, R rated films tended to involve heterosexual (with the exception of *Brokeback Mountain*) couples that were involved in monogamous dating or marital relationships, R-rated films also

tended to depict men as the aggressors or initiators of the sexual content. Depictions of women as sexually aggressive tended to be framed as crazy, or used for humor. The following examples help illustrate these differences.

Explicit NC-17 Rated Content

Only one film from the sample of fifty films included actual depictions of sexual penetration. That was the NC-17 rated documentary on the making of the early porn film *Deep Throat*. *Inside Deep Throat* featured clips from porn films from the late 1960s and early 1970s, including scenes of Linda Lovelace, the film's star, performing oral sex in the original *Deep Throat*. The film also included short clips of heterosexual intercourse excerpted from various pornographic films and sexual education films. The inclusion of such scenes of explicit sexual activity resulted in an NC-17 rating for the film.

Interestingly, despite the fact that *Inside Deep Throat* was the only film of the fifty films sampled that included actual depictions of penetration, it was also one of the least titillating of all the films viewed by the researcher. For one, the pornographic clips included in the film were merely quick edits of a variety of films. This film is a documentary that focuses on the making of the film and the impact it had on popular culture and on society as a whole in the 1970s. As many documentaries are, this film was told from a rather removed perspective, looking fairly objectively at the film and the actors, producers and crew involved in the making of the original movie. The documentary itself is not pornographic in nature, despite the fact it includes clips of pornography. This may be hard to understand if one has not viewed the film, but it is presented in such a way as to eliminate the erotic content from the sex that is portrayed. In fact, the documentary leaves the viewer with a sense of sadness. *Deep Throat's* star

Linda Lovelace later testified in front of Congress, claiming she was raped and tortured on the set of the film and was forced to perform oral sex with a gun to her head. Her former husband was the producer of the original film and was the man Lovelace accused of abusing her. The film recounts Lovelace's death in April of 2002 in a car accident. Everyone else involved with the film's production and distribution was interviewed, all of which seem to be living lives that could be described as more or less "normal". However, all of them exude a sense of quiet despair and disillusionment.

The documentary *Inside Deep Throat* never takes a moral stand on the truth behind the Linda Lovelace controversy, the positive or negative impact of the original film, or the lives of those who were involved with the making of the film. Although this is clearly a film that is targeted at adults, it is also a film that, by the title alone, makes clear the content that is apt to be included in the film. The NC-17 rating seems appropriate, but in a sense, unnecessary. Explicit sexual activity (that did not involve actual sexual activity) was found in a variety of films from our sample, but none with a rating less restrictive than an R. Films rated R averaged one explicit sexual scene per film, while NC-17-rated films averaged 7 explicit sexual scenes per film. Unrated films also contained some explicit sexual content, averaging less than one scene per film (.71). It is clear that NC-17 fare included more explicit sexual content than any other rating category. So the difference between rating categories might be simply the number of scenes. A closer look must be taken to determine if the quantity of scenes is the actual difference between the ratings, or if sexual conduct and context of the behaviors.

Ma Mere is a French film that depicts the incestuous relationship between a mother and son, as well as several other sexual scenes of group sex, sex in public, and

homosexual behaviors. Although the incestuous relationship is not acted upon until near the end of the film, the longing glances between the two characters (mother and son), certainly challenge hegemonic standards. Both mother and son are depicted as troubled and unhappy. Other scenes in the film depict the son having sex in public with one of the mother's female friends, with whom the mother has also had sexual relations. In another scene, the son has sex with the same woman while the mother strokes his leg.

The other NC-17 rated film that includes explicit sex scenes was *Mysterious Skin*. The film directed by the adventurous Greg Araki, known for films like *Doom Generation*, *Nowhere* and others. The film follows the lives of two young men who, we find out later in the film, were both molested by a softball coach during their elementary school years. The film follows the two boys as they deal in very different ways with their past. One young man, Neil, played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt, evolves into a homosexual gigolo who turns tricks as a way of dealing with the molestation that he continues to view as a love affair. The other boy, Brian, played by Brady Corbett, has repressed all memories of the incident, believing instead that he was abducted by aliens. The two boys eventually meet and discuss their confused emotions with one another. This film includes explicit sexual behaviors between male characters, as well as explicit sexual activities between heterosexual characters. In one scene, Levitt's character witnesses his mother, naked, receiving oral sex from a man on the slide of his swing set.

R-Rated Explicit Sexual Content

Although R-rated films also include some explicit sexual behaviors situations are less intense or disturbing than the NC-17 fare. R-rated content, in contrast, is "normalized". In *The 40-year Old Virgin*, a clip of hardcore pornography is included in

the film. Unlike *Inside Deep Throat*, it is used to educate the unfortunate male forty-year old character (played by Steve Carrell) who has yet to lose his virginity. The clip is seen as more natural in this setting, as it is a “boys-will-be-boys” attitude that constitutes the entire film. More importantly, the film takes a heteronormative approach to sexuality, as do most of the R-rated films from this sample that include sexual content that is either explicit or implied. Many R rated films tend to portray the male sex drive as admirable and natural, whereas females are portrayed as more passive when it comes to sex.

An exception to the rule is the R-rated comedy *Wedding Crashers*. This film, much like *The 40-Year Old Virgin*, is a comedy that contains a great deal of sexual content as well as sexual innuendo. In *The 40 Year Old Virgin*, the quest is to get an electronics store employee laid. In *Wedding Crashers*, it is a quest for a couple of guys to have as much sex as possible by picking up women at weddings. Both films situate men in positions of power, in that they initiate sexual contact and are lauded for their ability to charm a woman into bed by whatever means necessary. Men who are unable to do so are seen as less than manly. In *Wedding Crashers* a female character named Gloria (who eventually wins the heart of Vince Vaughn’s character) is portrayed as sexually aggressive, and is therefore seen for most of the film as a foil for comedy and as a crazy woman. A woman with a sexual appetite equal to men is crazy, whereas men are to be admired. At least that seems to be the lesson learned from many R rated films.

In addition, *Wedding Crashers* includes an undercurrent of homophobia and outright hostility to homosexuals, which will be discussed in more detail in the investigation of how sexual orientation impacts rating designation. However, it must be mentioned in this discussion of sexual content that one of the disturbing things about this

film is its portrayal of attempted rape. Jeremy, played by Vince Vaughn, is tied to the bed by his nymphomaniac “girlfriend” Gloria and left alone. Her gay brother (Todd) appears from the closet (pun intended), threatening to take advantage of Jeremy’s situation. While the rape never occurs, it is a source of comedy for the film. This is disturbing for many reasons, not just for its depiction of homosexual men as predatory, but more so for its complete lack of sensitivity regarding the subject of rape and sexual abuse. Apparently, though, the MPAA finds this type of humor acceptable for an R rating, whereas an intelligent look at the impact of child molestation on two characters in *Mysterious Skin* is cast to the NC-17 rating, as is the documentary about the pornographic film revolution in America in the early 70s.

Most R-rated films that depicted explicit sexual content were dramas, bringing a bit more gravity to the encounters portrayed in the films, and in some cases, this seemed to add to the level of intensity of the sexual content. In the drama *A History of Violence* the sexual encounters included in the film are contrasted with one another. This David Cronenberg film revolves around Tom Stall (Viggo Mortensen) and his family, who live a quiet life in a small Midwest town. After a series of events that make Tom a local hero, it is uncovered that Tom is actually Joey Cusack, a former crime-family member and all-around dangerous guy. The sexual encounters within the film are between Tom and his wife Edie. The first occurs before Tom’s real identity is discovered, the second after she realizes she doesn’t know her husband as well as she thought.

In the first sexual encounter, Tom and Edie engage in sweet yet explicit sex behaviors. Edie is dressed in her old cheerleader outfit and addresses her husband as if he were her high school sweetheart. The encounter seems to typify a stylized version of

the American dream, in which a couple is so in love after nearly 20 year of marriage that they still click in the bedroom. The two engage in mutual oral sex on their marital bed (literally).

The later sex scene occurs after the wife finds out that her husband is not the man she thought he was. Not only did he use an alias, he was once a much-feared hitman for a crime family. In this encounter, the sex is rough. There is no mutual pleasuring. Instead, the man is clearly the one in charge and is portrayed as the aggressor (though, of course, a few subtle nuances tell the audience that the wife likes the activity, even if she won't openly admit it). This never quite crosses the line into a rape sequence, but the line is somewhat blurred, as he uses enough force to leave bruises on Edie's legs and arms. Edie is also portrayed fighting him off, punching him and kicking him as she tries to get away. This film lands somewhere in a grey area when watching it, as the viewer tries to determine if this act was truly consensual. However, it seems that it fits the generic stereotypical sex scene requirements of the MPAA to receive the R rating, which is that the sex is between a man and a woman who are married, and the male is the aggressor. It is not something the MPAA raters, apparently, would brand as "aberrant" or "abnormal."

Brokeback Mountain is probably more notable for its scenes of homosexual interaction, but also includes two scenes of explicit heterosexual sex. One involves Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and his wife Alma having sex in their bed. The other involves Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) and his date (Lureen, played by Anne Hathaway) in the backseat of his car. Neither of the scenes are exceptionally graphic, although both women bare their breasts. In the scene involving Jack and Lureen, Lureen is the aggressor, shown on top of Jack in the backseat. In the scene involving Ennis and Alma,

Ennis seems to be fulfilling his husbandly duty and is annoyed by Alma's insistence that he use birth control.

In addition, there is one explicit sex scene involving homosexual content. It is the first time Ennis and Jack make love and it occurs in a tent on Brokeback Mountain. The scene is aggressive, not at all sweet or loving. The sex is consensual, but Ennis appears to be somewhat aback by the encounter. As the men's relationship matures and develops throughout the film, there is a sharp contrast between the initial encounter between the men and their later scenes together. However, that is the only explicit scene the men share in the film. There are other scenes of implied homosexual sex, but none are explicit. In some ways, it is surprising, considering the general trends within this category of R rated films that this movie would not have been assigned an NC-17 rating. It goes against the general "rules" for R-rated sexual content. However, other aspects of the film may have helped it garner the R-rating, including the fact that the cast was well known, it was directed by Ang Lee, a well-respected director in Hollywood, and it had major studio backing:

The films *Munich*, *Jarhead*, and *2046* all contain at least one explicit sexual scene. All are between a man and a woman. In *Munich*, there are sexual encounters involving a prostitute, but the sexual scene that raised questions with critics was between the main character Avner (Eric Bana) and his wife. While the married couple are having sex in their bed, Avner has flashbacks to the killings of the Israeli Olympic athletes at the Munich airport. This juxtaposition of sex and death is somewhat shocking imagery, but Spielberg seems to be making a statement about the impact of the killings on Israel as a whole. Avner, who joined Mossad and helped assassinate many of the killers who were

involved in the Black September murders, can't remove that image from his mind. No matter what measures he has taken to avenge the acts, it is a permanent part of him as a person, and a permanent part of Israel as a nation. He will never be able to feel safe again, even in the most sacred of spaces and acts.

The Squid and the Whale was perhaps the strangest of sexual depictions within the R-rated category. The youngest son of an academic couple (who are going through a divorce) is shown masturbating in multiple scenes. When he finishes, he wipes the resulting ejaculate on various items, including a row of lockers in the school hallway and a row of books in the school library. The scenes are fairly disturbing due to the boy's young age (he was a junior high school student) and his clear confusion regarding sex brought on by his academic parents' divorce and their sometimes inappropriate candor when discussing their relationship in front of their two sons. In addition, the older teenaged son is depicted losing his virginity to a girl his own age.

Implied sexual content

Implied sexual activity was defined for the purpose of this content analysis as any sexual behavior that is not seen explicitly on camera, but is implied by the actions of the characters on screen. For example, if the characters were engaged in kissing or petting behaviors and then "sexual noises" (moaning and groaning) were heard, but the characters were off screen, this was considered implied sexual content. Or, if characters fall on a bed and begin to undress each other, but the camera cuts to another scene, this constitutes an example of implied sexual behavior. A common scene in films is that of a couple in bed together, but they are both under the bedcovers. This would also be considered an incident of implied sexual content. Any type of sexual activity is included

in this category, including oral sex. Although scenes of implied sexuality were found in films from all rating categories, the way the sexuality was depicted was somewhat different from rating to rating. G and PG rated films included very brief scenes of implied sex, mainly hinted at and portrayed very quickly. All such incidents involved monogamous adults. There was no nudity or overt sexual dialogue present.

In contrast, the implied sex in more restrictively rated films often involved either full or partial nudity of characters. The implications were also much more clear and blunt. The implication of sex generally followed scenes of foreplay or involved much more graphic sexual language.

Implied sex was found in films of all rating categories, including one G-rated film. However, upon closer analysis, the implied sexual content found in the one and only G-rated film involved penguin sex. Yes, the implied sexual behavior was that described by the narrator (Morgan Freeman) in the French film *The March of the Penguins*. This scene was coded as of one incident of implied sex in this study due to the fact the narrator of the film presented the penguin mating ritual as a love story. Because of the highly anthropomorphized manner in which the penguins are presented, they must be seen as “characters,” in a sense. Although impossible to code individual penguins from the film (as they are all nearly identical and it is assumed that the producers of the films used several shots of several different penguins and cut between them to tell the story of a typical penguin “family unit”), it is important to code the implied and explicit behaviors.

While not at all pornographic in nature, the scene presents a bit of a conundrum for parents. If a parent is to bring a child to see this film, in which the penguins are

presented to the audience in an anthropomorphic way, it could lead to questions about human sexuality. This is somewhat problematic when integrated with feedback from parents from the focus groups held. Many parents, as well as some of the non-parents, commented on the G-rating, saying they felt films within this category should be “no questions asked” types of films. In other words, they should not introduce any content that would cause children to ask questions of parents afterward that they might not be ready to address. Specifically, questions regarding sex, death, prejudice, and hatred were singled out by focus group members. This film’s portrayal of implied sexuality can be seen in the context of nature, and it seems acceptable for most parents. This is clearly how it received its G rating from the MPAA. However, the fact that the penguins are presented by the narrator as a family unit and the penguin parents as a monogamous couple (at least for the season), some parents of young children may find this inappropriate. It is this sort of judgment call that makes the current MPAA rating system less than ideal. While this researcher would probably not hesitate to take a child to the film, another parent might be caught off guard due to the content. A system that clearly outlined the types of content found in the film and specific reasons for the rating assigned would be helpful in eliminating any surprises for parents in the theater. As is, with the G rating, no rating reasons or content information are supplied by the MPAA either on-line or in marketing materials for the film. Considering this film also features the death of a penguin (eaten by a seal) and depictions of distraught mother penguins pecking at their frozen eggs or dead chicks who do not survive the frigid winters in Antarctica, some could argue the possibility of some of the content being disturbing to young children.

There's also a scene of a bird swooping in to feast on young chicks who are just learning to waddle.

Implied sexual activity was present in only one PG-rated film, *Millions*. In that film, the implied sex occurred between a widower and his budding love interest. The scene is not seen on camera at all, it is just alluded to when the widower's son awakes to find the girlfriend in the house early in the morning.

Implied sexual activity was rare in films rated less restrictively than PG-13. Most PG and G rated films that depicted relationships climaxed with a single kiss between the characters. In fact, this could be considered a theme in such films. A couple (whether teenagers or adults) would court (generally in an unconventional, comedic way) and the relationship would be cemented at the end of the film with a kiss. This happened in the PG-rated *Are We There Yet?*, *The Pacifier*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Corpse Bride*, *Harry Potter*, as well as in the G-rated films *Herbie: Fully Loaded*, *Ice Princess*, *Valiant*, and *Chicken Little*. As a general rule (with the exception of the penguin movie), G rated fare was limited to hand-holding and a limited number of kissing scenes when it came to scenes of sexuality. In these G rated films, the kisses were generally innocent enough, mouths closed in most cases, and often involving animated characters. In the case of both *Valiant* and *Chicken Little*, the heroic fowls end the movies with a beak-to-beak smooch from their newfound significant others (of the opposite gender, but of the same general species). These animated features follow the "male hero saves the world, and with it, the damsel-in-distress" formula that we have seen acted out in film after film. In *Valiant*, pigeon-hero Valiant (yes, that's his name) saves his WWII pigeon-squadron from the Axis-power baddies, keeping all of pigeon-dom safe. *Chicken Little*, similarly,

saves the animated world when it seems the sky is indeed falling, due to nefarious acts committed by evil aliens who are trying to destroy the town. *Chicken Little* saves both his father (who has been embarrassed by his son's kooky pronouncements in the past) and the world. He is then rewarded with the love of Abby Mallard, the lovable "ugly duckling" who becomes Little's love interest.

Implied sexual activity was rarely found in films rated PG-13. The only such examples from this sample of films occurred in *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, starring Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. The actors play a bored, suburban married couple living the American dream. What neither of the characters knows, though, is that they are both high-paid assassins. Once they are hired to kill one another, they find out the truth, track each other down, and in the process destroy their suburban home and all its modern conveniences in a blaze of gunfire and explosions. In doing so, they reunite with a stronger bond and a newfound passion for one another. It's during this reunion that it is insinuated that they have consummated the newborn relationship. Later, in a trip to the marriage counselor's office, John Smith (Brad Pitt) boasts to the doctor about how often they've had sex that week.

The implied sex in this PG-13 rated film is more adult than most depictions in the G and PG rated films, but does not get terribly racy. The implied sexual content in R-rated fare is a different story. Upon watching the R rated films from this sample, it was clear that the R rating encompasses a fairly wide variety of sexual content. However, it is important to note that only two R-rated films containing implied sexual content did not also contain explicit sexual content. Those two films, *Crash* and *2046* are themselves very different in their approach to sexuality.

The Japanese film *2046* is a more traditional tale of sexuality. The movie is a sequel to *In the Mood For Love*, and follows a married man who has left his wife and Hong Kong for Singapore. During the course of the film there are several sexual encounters between Mr. Chow and his female neighbors. None of them are very sexually explicit, although there is some nudity.

In *Crash*, the Best Picture Academy Award winner from 2005, there are a couple of implied sexual encounters, including an interracial relationship. However, the more notable sexual scene involves non-consensual sex. In the scene, the Cameron and Christine Thayer, an affluent African-American couple, are stopped by a pair of white male police officers. Christine is fondled under her skirt by an insensitive, racist police officer played by Matt Dillon while her husband is forced to watch. Certainly, this scene is unsettling and dramatic. However, as shown in other R-rated fare, it seems to be acceptable for women to be portrayed as victims of sexual violence.

Depictions of Affection in Less Restrictively Rated Films

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In summary, the line between the type of sexual content included in less restrictively rated films is fairly distinct from sexual content of more restrictively rated movies. However, it is more difficult to delineate between what is appropriate sexual content for R and NC-17 rating categories. The bottom line is the MPAA raters appear to rely on assumed hegemonic standards, marginalizing certain types of content by assigning it an NC-17, thus implying it is not “normal” content. NC-17 sexual content is deemed “deviant” in some way, making it necessary to restrict it from all underage viewers, regardless of parental guidance. Homosexual encounters, serious discussion and depictions of taboo topics such as molestation, incest and sexual dysfunction all seem to

fit the bill equally in the eyes of the film rating board. “Normal” sex, or that depicted in R rated films tends to be male-initiated, heteronormative, and preferably part of a monogamous or marital relationship. Of course, there are exceptions to these unwritten rules, but the qualitative analysis paints a fairly clear picture of the subtle differences found between the two rating categories.

Sexual Innuendo and References:

Most G rated films steered clear of sexual innuendo or sexual references. The only exception was the claymation tale *Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were Rabbit*. Although no more than hand-holding is depicted in the film, there are a couple of instances of sexual references that small children are unlikely to catch, but might lead to a chuckle from adults.

Sexual innuendo or references were more prevalent in PG rated films, but tended to be much like the earlier example, meaning they were joking forms of sexual innuendo or humor that only adults or teenagers would “get.” It’s as we move into the PG-13 rated materials that the sexual innuendo and humor tends to become more risqué. It is in those films that we find the first direct references to sexual behaviors and situations. In PG-13 rated films you’re more likely to hear a comment like the one describe earlier from *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, in which the title characters discuss their sex life in front of their therapist.

In more restrictively rated fare, whether it be R or NC-17 rated films, sexual discussion is more blunt. The sexual references are no longer just in the form of cute sexual humor. It escalates to the point of open and frank discussions of sex, sexuality and sexual positions. In the film *The 40 Year Old Virgin* there was a sexual reference or

some sort of sexual innuendo coded for every scene of the film, not including opening and closing credits. Seeing as the film revolves around a man's attempt to lose his virginity, it is somewhat expected, although the pervasiveness of the conversation regarding sex was a tad surprising.

In NC-17 rated films, the sexual innuendo is much similar to R rated films. The only difference that could be isolated is that the discussion was often related to the sexual activities presented in the films. Therefore, the innuendo and humor referenced behaviors that are not seen as being as widely acceptable as those presented in R rated films. Having said that, NC-17 films tended to include more serious discussion of sexual topics, whereas several R rated films incorporated more comments about women's anatomy and men's sexual prowess and experience.

Nudity

While partial nudity was found in films of all ratings (except PG-13), the way the partial nudity was presented differed from rating to rating. Not only does the extent of the nudity differ, so does the context and gender of the person who appears nude. In less restrictively rated films, nudity is generally used to get a laugh from the audience, rather than in a sexualized manner. In R rated films, nudity tends to involve both men and women, but women are depicted in some state of undress more often than men. When men are depicted nude it is generally not in conjunction with a sexual scene, whereas women portrayed nude are almost exclusively involved in sexual scenes.

The least restrictively rated films tended to include quick, comical scenes of partial nudity that were not of a sexual nature. For example, the only G rated film that included partial nudity was *Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were Rabbit*. This

film included a quick shot of one of the claymation characters losing their drawers, resulting in a comedic shot of the male character's claymation-derriere. Along the same lines, in the PG-rated film *The Pacifier*, audiences saw the bare bottom of a baby boy. Again, this was presented in a comical manner, not in a sexual way. PG-13 films from this sample contained no nudity of any kind, although the quantitative analysis of MPAA rating reasons for all films released theatrically during 2005 showed that there were eleven films rated PG-13 that were cited for some type of nudity.

Films rated R, NC-17, and unrated films all contained more nudity than less restrictively rated films, and that nudity was more likely to be presented in a sexual context. R-rated films were more likely to include a great deal of partial nudity, while some R rated films also contained full nudity. Women were more likely to be depicted in some form of undress in R-rated films than were men, although there were occasional scenes of full male nudity.

Brokeback Mountain was one of the R-rated films that contained both partial and full nudity involving both male and female characters. Female characters were generally portrayed nude or semi-nude in sexual scenes with their male counterparts, while the men were generally portrayed nude in non-sexual sequences. The major full-frontal male nudity in the film occurred when the two main male characters went skinny dipping and decided to dive from a cliff into a river on Brokeback Mountain. Despite the fact that there were sex scenes between the two male lovers, there was never full nudity in those scenes.

Another R-rated film that contained full frontal male nudity was *Jarhead*, also starring Jake Gyllenhaal, co-star of *Brokeback Mountain*. There was also female nudity

in the film. The female nudity was generally shown in a sexualized manner, whereas much of the male nudity was presented in an asexual manner. Due to the fact this was a war film that followed a squadron of male soldiers through their basic training and on to their service in Iraq, there were several shots of naked men in showers.

No other R-rated films contained full frontal male nudity, although some films, like *A History of Violence*, *The 40 Year Old Virgin*, *Munich* and *2046* included male butt-shots. As stated earlier, the bulk of the nudity in R-rated films was made up of women appearing topless, or sometimes totally nude. *Wedding Crashers* included a sequence of topless women edited together at the start of the film, while *Crash* and *The Squid and the Whale* also included limited shots of topless women.

NC-17 rated films all included full frontal male nudity, as well as scenes of partial nudity. *Mysterious Skin* was unique in that it was the only film to show full male nudity but no female nudity, not even partial female nudity. Nearly all of the nudity presented in NC-17 rated films was of a sexual nature.

Unrated films actually included little nudity, and rarely was full nudity included in an unrated film. The film *Be Here to Love Me*, which was a documentary on the life and times of folk singer-songwriter Townes Van Sant included one quick shot of one of the singer's girlfriends bottomless, while the French film *The Beat that my Heart Skipped* included a female character depicted topless and a scene of the male character's buttocks. Also, in the documentary *The Aristocrats*, which asks well-known comedians to tell the same bawdy joke, a male comic moons the camera. The only unrated film with extensive nudity was Atom Egoyan's *Where the Truth Lies*, starring Colin Firth and Kevin Bacon. In the film, two female characters are portrayed in varying states of undress, often in

sexual situations. The two main male leads are also presented partially nude. Although there is technically no full frontal male nudity, the two men are depicted “naked” together while involved in a three-some gone wrong. The filmmaker, however, staged the scene in such a way that none of the male actors’ naughty bits were exposed.

The line between the use of nudity in R and NC-17 rated films seems to be predicated on gender. Based upon the films viewed for this research, the difference between the way nudity is treated in films with those two ratings is that in NC-17 rated films, men are more apt to be naked. It seems that female nudity is more normalized and considered more natural and beautiful; it is not seen as offensive by raters. Therefore, it is given an R rating (or sometimes a less restrictive rating). Male nudity, especially full frontal nudity, seems to garner a film an NC-17 rating, unless the nudity is not part of a sexual scene.

Violent Content

Violence, like sex, can be depicted in a multitude of ways. For this reason, quantitative coding techniques fail to tell the whole story. Quantitative data from chapter six shows that violent content does not impact film rating. The exceptions are a few very specific types of violent content that do have a statistical relationship with rating, such as the number of fights in a film, et al. The problem that occurs with quantitative coding is that because the term “violence” is so broadly defined, the content is found in films of all rating categories. In fact, violence was found in nearly all films analyzed (found in 43 of 50 films in sample, or 86% of all films coded) in some form or another. This qualitative analysis allows us to delve more deeply into the specific types of violent content found in films of varying ratings to determine if the intensity or frequency of the violence, or

perhaps the context of the violence, impacts rating assignment. This analysis allows us to try to determine what MPAA raters use as criteria when classifying violence. What types of violent content is deemed appropriate for kids, and what types of violent content result in more restrictive ratings? It seems clear from this analysis that any violent content that is labeled as “fantasy” or “animated” violence is acceptable for children to see. The more realistic the violence is and the more realistic the consequences of that violence, the more restrictive the rating tends to be.

G-Rated Violent Content

The range of violent content found in G rated films is quite varied. There were G-rated films with little or no violent content, such as *Pooh's Heffalump Movie* or *Ice Princess*. *Pooh's Heffalump Movie* was an hour-long animated feature film that seemed to be aimed toward young children, and contained absolutely no violent content. *Ice Princess* was a live-action feature about a teenaged girl who was training to become a professional ice skater. The film contained a single scene in which one skater pushes another to the ice, but beyond that, there was no violent content.

All other G-rated films included what would best be described as fantasy or comedic violence. Most of the G-rated films that contained violent content were animated features, with the exception of *Herbie: Fully Loaded* and *March of the Penguins*. In *Herbie*, there was mainly mild violent content and much of it involved the only animated character in the film, Herbie himself. In *March of the Penguins*, due to its documentary nature, real scenes of violent behaviors within the animal kingdom are portrayed. For example, a penguin is killed and eaten by a seal upon returning from her

trek to the mating area. This was perhaps the only film of this rating that included realistic violence, but one could argue the violence is educational and natural.

Some of the animated features did, however, include some violent material that despite its cartoonish-nature, could be scary for a young child. In *Chicken Little* aliens invade and kill townspeople with laser beams, while in *Valiant* the pigeons are fighting battles in World War II. Some would argue that the comedic and fantasy violence presented in these animated films is harmless, while others could take the position that any type of violence, presented to children of a young age, can desensitize them to that type of content. There is the further problem that some of these least restrictively rated films depict violence without consequences, which could skew children's views of violence.

Films rated PG contained a rather wide range of violent content. Two films from this rating category contained absolutely no violent content (*Good Night and Good Luck* and *Pride and Prejudice*), while some had cartoon and fantasy violence much like G-rated fare. Other PG films, however, contained some rather scary and intense violent sequences. Films like *Madagascar*, *Robots*, and *Yours Mine and Ours* contained little violent content. *Madagascar* and *Robots* were both animated features that did include some scary scenes and a few deaths were portrayed, but overall, the violence was minimal. The same is true of the live-action remake of *Yours, Mine and Ours*, whose violence mainly consisted of comedic pratfalls. Films such as *Corpse Bride* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* contained some disturbing and morbid scenes, but no intense violence. Of course, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* included much of the same creepy and weird images of the original *Willy Wonka* that gave this researcher nightmares

as a child, so although the violence was not severe, there was definitely some imagery that very young children might need to be warned about.

The two PG films that raised the most questions in regard to the violence contained in them were *Harry Potter* and *The Pacifier*. In the focus group sessions that were held with parents, the PG rating for the third Harry Potter installment was questioned, due to the violence the film contained. There are scenes of sword fights to the death, matches with fire-breathing dragons, and other rather intense scenes of death and dismemberment. Perhaps if this film had not been a beloved children's book it would have been rated a bit more restrictively.

The Pacifier's opening sequence is full of action movie chase scenes, complete with explosions and machine-gun fire. It is in this scene that the father-figure is killed. It sets up the scenario for the whole film, but in a PG rated film, is this how a parent would expect it to start? More specifically, the film opens with an action-movie sequence involving a Navy SEAL (played by Vin Diesel) and his crew rescuing a father of five from international spies who are out to steal some sort of secret code that the father had developed. In the chase, which occurs on the ocean, the SEALs successfully rescue the dad by blowing up the bad guys and their speedboats. The battle is replete with machine gun fire, explosives and the implied deaths of several men. As the SEALs celebrate their victory, they are caught off-guard when a sniper shoots the father, killing him. Seeing as this is the opening sequence for this film, it is quite intense for a PG rated movie. The rest of the film is a fairly light-hearted family comedy, with Vin Diesel coming to live with the man's family as a security guard/nanny. Although there are Ninja neighbors who try to break into the family home and bad guys who hold the family at gunpoint near

the end of the film, the violent content is nothing similar to the opening action sequence, which could have been cut from a Die Hard movie. This just illustrates the range of violent content in PG-rated films.

The violent content in PG-13 films, in contrast, is fairly equal from film to film, with a few exceptions. All but one PG-13 film that was coded included some type of violent content (*Look at Me* was the exception). For the most part, PG-13 rated films are action adventure movies that feature large amounts of fighting, including both hand to hand combat as well as fighting with weaponry. PG-13 films tend to be characterized by the use of guns of all shapes and sizes, from pistols to machine guns to rocket launchers. PG-13 films included the highest average number of violent scenes per film of all the rating categories (12.73 scenes per film). These films also include more gunfire than films of any other rating. A PG-13 film averages 126 gunshots fired per film. This number is more than quadruple the number of shots fired in R-rated films (31.73 shots/film), which is the second highest rating category on the list in terms of number of gunshots. NC-17 films, by contrast, contain the lowest number of gunshots per film at 1.33 shots per film.

What these quantitative numbers tell us is that PG-13 films are some of the most violent films being released today. Looking at the films qualitatively, it is clear that PG-13 rated materials are quite violent. The majority of films include some sort of conflict and action that involves violent behaviors. The use of guns and weaponry is a staple of PG-13 films. While R rated films also involve violence of this type, there are far fewer action sequences in the films rated R. PG-13 films that typify the violent content in this rating category are *Batman Begins*, *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*, *War of the Worlds*,

Mr. and Mrs. Smith and *King Kong*. All of these films were “blockbuster” releases, full of special effects and action sequences designed to attract teenage male viewers to the box office. These films are built on one action sequence after another, therefore the amount of violent content is quite high. Often times, but not always, the story takes a back seat to the action.

This is not the case of all PG-13 rated films, however. *Walk the Line*, the Johnny Cash biopic did not include any of those action sequences or flashy computer generated effects. The violence in that understated film was more of a personal nature. At one point, Johnny’s older brother is involved in a mill accident that costs him his life. At other points in the film fist fights break out, or someone is slapped. The violence in *Walk the Line* is not the typical PG-13 violence aimed at teen boys.

The same can be said about *Paradise Now*, a Palestinian film that deals with the journey of two friends who are recruited to be suicide bombers. The Palestinian men are sent on a mission to Tel Aviv, but along the way the men get cold feet, visit relatives, and discuss the implications of and reasons for their actions. This film includes scenes of violence, but they are more realistic sequences of what life is like in Gaza and the surrounding areas. Basically, it depicts life in a war zone, where people expect to witness or experience violence on a daily basis. There are no slickly produced scenes of outlandish battles sequences, there are no special effects used. The film is a low key, quiet look at life for a pair of childhood friends.

Other exceptions to the typical PG-13 violence are *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, which investigates the “possession” of a young girl in the Midwest, and *Cinderella Man*, which is a look at the life of boxing great Jim Braddock, complete with rather bloody

boxing sequences. The lone PG-13 comedy that was coded in the sample, *Hitch* (starring Will Smith) included violence that was all incidental to the storyline and comedic in nature. For example, on a date, Smith gets kicked in the face while riding a ski-doo. None of the violence is “scary”, nor does it involve gunplay, death or dismemberment as is so common in other PG-13 films.

Every R-rated film that was coded for this study was found to include some sort of violent content. Whereas most PG-13 films are cited for action-based violence, R-rated violence tends to run the gamut. There is far less action and more personalized violent content in these films. For example, the violence in *A History of Violence* is all shot up close and personal with the actors. The characters strangle each other, shoot each other with handguns at close range, and beat each other up.

Other R-rated films deal with war or politically motivated violence, as is the case for *Jarhead* and *Munich*. *Jarhead* takes place in Iraq, where battles are fought (even if few and far between), and also looks at life for these Marine recruits before and after their time at war. The violence they experience or participate in at home is much more personal in nature. In *Munich*, there is no official “war”, but the Moussad is quietly making it’s way though Palestine, killing everyone involved with the assassination of the Israeli Olympians.

The R-rating is where you also tend to see most of the horror films. In this sample, only one such film was included, *Saw II*. Whereas the first film in the *Saw* franchise was ultra-violent, it was also unique and contained a narrative structure that allowed for a twist-ending most didn’t see coming. There is a twist in the *Saw II* film, as well, but it seems rather ridiculous. Suspension of disbelief is one thing, but *Saw II* takes

it to a new level. In fact, *Saw II* seems to be nothing more than an excuse to showcase inventive ways to torture and kill people. Perhaps to make it more settling, all of the people killed are “guilty” of some sort of crime. Are we to come away with the idea they deserved what they got? Whatever the reason, the film is violent to the point of being nauseating, yet, at the same time, rather dull and repetitive. We know they all die. We’re just waiting to see which variation or painful method of torture will be used to make it happen.

Other R-rated films’ violence tended to be brief and non-graphic in nature. In *Capote* there is a scene near the end of the film in which the killer of a farming family finally confesses to his crime while images of the executions illustrate his narration. In *Crash*, the film revolves around bigotry, mistrust and crime in Los Angeles, therefore the violence is integrally related to the plot but never glorified. All violence is shown to have consequences. In *The Squid and the Whale* there is some violence that is incidental to the storyline, none of it graphic or disturbing. Even the R-rated comedies include some violence, although, again, it is mainly done for a comedic effect and is not at all realistic or plausible (*Wedding Crashers* and *The 40 Year Old Virgin*).

All three NC-17 rated films from 2005 contained some sort of violent content, but in all of them, the violence was somewhat incidental to the storyline. There were no action sequences, warfare, or major hand-to-hand combat. Instead, the major violence contained in *Mysterious Skin* was the rape of a teenage boy posing as a gigolo, and some other punching and kicking. The same was true of both *Ma Mere* and *Inside Deep Throat*. It is clear from looking more closely at all these films they were rated NC-17 based on the sexual content they contain, rather than for the violence. In *Ma Mere*, the

mother involved in the incestuous relationship kills herself upon the consummation of the forbidden relationship. Whether she does it to rid herself of the shame or to free her son from the sick world she has ensconced him in is unclear. While the image of the mother stabbing herself is somewhat disturbing, it is presented in a more theatrical Shakespearean way, rather than playing it up for gruesome effect.

Language

The use of profanity in films is a bit more straightforward than other criteria on which film ratings are based. In this case, the naughty words used by characters within a film can be counted readily, resulting in an accurate analysis of the relationship between language and rating assignment. For that reason, language will not be discussed in such detail in this qualitative analysis as have other variables.

The major no-no in terms of film raters and parents was the use of the f-word. Therefore, this word is unofficially banned by the MPAA from films rated G or PG. The word is also used sparingly in PG-13 movies. When it is used, it is generally only used once per film. If it is used more than that, the film will generally get a more restrictive R rating. In fact, the only two PG-13 films that used the f-word were both foreign films (*Look at Me* and *Paradise Now*) and the profanity was presented as a part of the subtitles. Perhaps the MPAA finds it less offensive if the swear words are uttered in a language other than English?

It must be noted by the researcher that this seems like an odd standard for the PG-13. While it has been shown pretty conclusively that PG-13 films are by far the most violent of all films being released today, it seems contradictory for the MPAA to take such a tough stance on language in the same films. Is it the judgment of the MPAA that

the same viewers who can digest more than a dozen violent scenes per film and an average of nearly 21 characters killed per film can't handle profanity?

It is clearly R-rated films that contain the foulest language. At times during the coding of the R-rated materials, it was surprising how many times the f-word was spoken, along with a slew of other profanities. The f-word was said an average of over 58 times per R-rated film, which even to this thick-skinned coder seemed a bit over the top. It almost seemed as if the language was intentionally laced with profanity to ensure a more restrictive rating, or make the film seem more "adult" in nature. In some R-rated films, the use of the word seemed to be a natural fit, such as in *Jarhead*, a film in which all of the characters were in the military and depicted at war. However, the word was used 286 times in the course of a 123 minute-long film. It just seems excessive.

What also needs to be addressed is the context of the use of the f-word. Due to the indecency and obscenity standards, the way the word is used can impact the way a film is received. If "fuck" is used in a way that describes a sexual experience, it can be labeled as indecent or even obscene. If the same word is used as an expletive, it is then robbed of its indecent context. In terms of broadcast standards, the FCC has wrestled with this issue for several years. Because the use of the word seems to always end up with a rating of an R or a more restrictive NC-17 rating, it is hard to tell whether the MPAA applies this standard or not. Both R rated and NC-17 rated films used the term in both ways.

Overall, it can be stated that G rated films avoid any and all swear words, while PG films include an occasional "hell" or "damn". Only one PG film in the sample

include the use of the word “shit”, that being *Harry Potter*, which also was found to have elevated levels of violence for a film with such a non-restrictive rating.

NC-17 and Unrated films actually were found to contain less profanity than R rated films, especially in terms of the use of the f-word. NC-17 and Unrated films displayed a tendency mix and match profanities, if you will. Rather than repetitively relying on “fuck”, the NC-17 and unrated films used the entire range of profane language.

Homosexual Content

The inclusion of homosexual characters or content within a film is not something that is officially included in MPAA rating reasons. However, due to past criticism of the system, sexual orientation was included in this analysis as a variable that might have an impact on film rating. The quantitative analysis of the number of gay or lesbian characters included in a film, the number of homosexual kissing and petting behaviors, and the number of both implied and explicit sexual behaviors were all found to have a relationship to rating assignment.

Films from the sample viewed that were rated less restrictively than R did not include any depictions of GLBT sexuality in any form, including hand-holding and kissing, behaviors which were commonly depicted amongst heterosexual characters. However, two gay male characters were featured in what could be considered little more than background actor roles in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Based on the definition of what defines a character, the two had to be coded, as they had one line a piece. However, the characters were not integral to the plot, nor did they appear on camera for more than one minute. This probably points to a problem with the coding

rules more than anything, as in hindsight, the researcher would not have counted the characters as significant in any way.

Hitch was the only PG-13 film to include gay male characters, two to be exact. One gay male was portrayed stereotypically effeminate, complete with lisp, who pretends to be a client of Hitch, the date-doctor. The other has a small role as a best-friend to one of the female characters. Neither are depicted in relationships (in fact one is pretending to be straight) and neither play significant roles in the film.

Four R-rated films include depictions of gay men. Two of the films are comedies that use the characters' homosexuality as comedic fodder, while the other two films are dramas that provide insightful, well-rounded characters with a range of emotions and affects. In *Wedding Crashers*, as discussed earlier in this analysis, the gay character, Todd, is presented as a creepy, psychopathic, moron who can't control his sexual desire. His character, the only gay character in the film, is positioned as an outsider and as aberrant. In *The 40 Year Old Virgin*, one gay male and one lesbian female character are depicted. The lesbian character is depicted in a role that could be described as straight-curious, as she meets Steve Carell at a speed-dating session. The male role is fairly disposable and forgettable. Neither of the GLBT characters presented were depicted in relationships. R-rated movies overall tended to demonstrate a trend toward depicting homosexuals wacky at best, and at worst, self-loathing and dangerous.

The more dramatic R-rated films depicting gay characters are completely the opposite of the R-rated comedies. These films (*Brokeback Mountain* and *Capote*) approach GLBT characters with sensitivity and normalcy. Rather than using them as a source of a quick laugh, in these films gay men are the main characters in each film. In

Brokeback Mountain, two cowboys raised with red-state sensibilities fall in love and carry on a twenty-year affair, despite the fact that both marry women. Heath Ledger is understated and effective in his role as Ennis Del Mar, the closed-lipped man of few words who just can't shed his personal shame and guilt regarding his sexuality. His pride stands in his way of uniting with Jake Gyllenhaal's Jack Twist character, even after his divorce from his first wife Alma (who discovers his affair with Jack but ignores it for years while they build a family). Jack is ready to move to his parents' farm and live a life with Ennis, but when Ennis refuses to confront his own demons, Jack takes up with another married cowboy. Sexual orientation is front and center in this film, although it is really a film about being true to yourself and enjoying life while you have the chance, rather than hiding behind a façade constructed for public viewing.

In *Capote*, Phillip Seymour Hoffman plays the legendary writer during the process of writing "In Cold Blood." Hoffman's depiction of the flamboyant Capote living and working in rural Kansas is riveting. His performance is spot on in terms of its mimicking of Capote, but it never crosses the line of being demeaning or of pandering to the audience. In the film, Capote becomes enchanted with the prime suspect in the killings, but his relationship with Perry Smith teeters between true affection for the man and his need for closure. In order for Capote to complete his book, there needed to be a true end to the story, meaning, Smith had to be executed. Capote, though depicted with all of his flaws on his sleeve, is a fully developed and deep character. He is also one of the few gay characters portrayed in a stable and loving relationship, a rarity in films of any rating. However, it's important to note that in the film, Capote's relationship with his

partner Jack Dunphy is mostly played out over the phone. When the two are portrayed together, no implied or explicit content is depicted.

In NC-17 rated films, sexuality tends to be depicted more openly (and in larger quantities, as discussed earlier). Despite this fact, few homosexual or bisexual characters were depicted in steady relationships. In *Mysterious Skin*, several gay male characters were depicted, but most were playing johns who had hired the teenage gigolo played by Joseph Gordon Levitt. Most of the depiction were not complimentary, with one man beating and raping the young man. All seemed to be living closeted and unhealthy lives, turning to prostitutes outside of their marriages. There is also the depiction of the pedophilic baseball coach, who molests the two young boys on his team. In the coding process, it was difficult to decide whether or not to count this character as a gay male, as pedophilia is a disease that really has no relationship to sexual orientation. In the end, it was decided that his character would not be coded as being “gay.” However, depictions of his molestation of the young boys were coded as male GLBT behaviors. This was done in order to follow the definition established in the coding instruction booklet that stated specific acts and the sex (gender) of the participants were all that should be taken into consideration when determining whether the sexual act was a “GLBT” act or not. The characters sexual orientation was not to be taken into consideration. Therefore, in another situation, if a self-declared straight married woman was to engage in a sexual act with another woman, it would be coded as female GLBT behavior.

CHAPTER NINE

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This multi-method investigation of the Motion Picture Association of America film rating system has resulted in a great deal of insight into parental opinions of the system, their utilization of the film ratings, and parental attitudes toward the appropriateness of specific types of film content for their children. In addition to the results of the focus group research, content analyses were conducted, illuminating the relationship between specific types of content and rating assignment of individual films. Focus group findings were written up in chapter six, while data analysis performed on the results from the content analyses was presented in chapter seven. In this chapter, the previously presented results will be discussed in conjunction with one another, and will also be integrated with findings from the qualitative analysis from chapter eight. By connecting these results, practical application of the findings can be discussed.

The first research question addressed in this study was:

RQ 1: Do parents use the MPAA rating system to make decisions about their child(ren)'s viewing?

Parental Knowledge of the MPAA rating system

One of the major findings of this research revolved around parental knowledge of and use of the MPAA rating system. Focus group research revealed that parents are familiar with the system, although several were confused with specific guidelines. For

example, some were unclear as to the true differences between PG-13 and R rating age limits. Others were unfamiliar with the NC-17 rating, as well as the fact that the X rating was no longer a part of the MPAA rating system. A few parents were shocked to find out the MPAA was a self regulatory body of the film industry, feeling it was a conflict of interest for the board to be a part of the industry it was regulating. While some were unhappy with self-regulation, the majority of parents were not in favor of allowing the government to regulate film content or film ratings, fearing it would result in censorship. Most parents underscored the fact they were not in favor of film censorship, although nearly every parent involved in the focus groups was dissatisfied with the current system.

Parental Use of the MPAA System

The focus groups revealed that parental use of the MPAA system was mixed. A few parents used the ratings as a strict guideline for their children's film viewing, while several parents indicated they look for additional information about a film's content before making a decision regarding what their children can or cannot see. Some parents reported they would watch the complete film first, before allowing their children to see it. This was generally done once the film was released to video, rather than during a film's theatrical release. This previewing by parents was reported most when a film was rated PG-13 or more restrictively, although some also previewed PG rated films.

RQ 2: Do parents like the current MPAA rating system? Why or why not?

Parental Opinions of the MPAA Rating System

A somewhat surprising finding from the focus group research was that, without exception, parents were unhappy with the current film rating system due to its lack of clarity and consistency. While the researcher had expected to hear some dissatisfaction with the system, she was surprised by the unanimous iteration in group after group that the system was not fulfilling parental needs. Furthermore, non-parents also reported dissatisfaction with the system, stating they thought the system was unnecessary, or of no use to them personally. While it was much less of a surprise for non-parents to express ambivalence or dissatisfaction with the system, the reaction by parents was unexpected.

Reasons for Parental Dissatisfaction with the MPAA Ratings

The reasons for parental dissatisfaction with the system were varied, but a few themes dominated the group discussions. Parents were very clear in their request for more specific content-based information to be included in the ratings. In order to make informed decisions regarding their children's film viewing, parents suggested the film ratings include more specific information and description as to what exactly they could expect to find in each individual film. The majority of parents had fairly specific ideas of what types of movies they found acceptable or unacceptable for their children to watch, but these parental attitudes varied widely amongst focus group participants. Due to this variation in content-based standards, the MPAA's current system was seen as less than ideal.

As is, the MPAA ratings give very limited content information. Instead, the system is more evaluative in nature. By assigning an age-based rating to films, the

MPAA raters are deciding which films are appropriate for all children of a certain age group. For example, by assigning a film a PG, raters have decided the film is appropriate for all ages, but parental guidance is suggested. What parents said they would rather see is a rundown of content included in each film, so that they could decide whether that content is appropriate for their own child. This would redirect the evaluative power from the rating system to the parents themselves. It would further allow personalization of ratings based on individual familial value systems, attitudes, and the emotional maturity levels of individual children. Parents made clear they would rather be armed with additional content-based knowledge to make their choices, rather than relying on decisions made by the MPAA regarding the appropriateness of a given film, as several parents found the apparent values of the MPAA raters incongruent with their own.

Lack of Awareness of MPAA rating reasons

Another interesting finding that relates to the clarity and informational content of ratings was that most parents were unaware that the MPAA actually provided rating reasons to go along with their rating decisions. Some parents had read the rating reasons on video rental boxes at rental stores, but most reported they had never noticed any such information available at movie theaters. None were aware that the MPAA had a website that they could visit to find out additional “rating reason” information. Due to this revelation, it seems that it would behoove the Motion Picture Association of America to better educate the public about the content information they do provide. This finding tied directly into the content analysis conducted on the MPAA’s supplied rating reasons for films released theatrically in the U.S. during 2005.

In the content analysis of MPAA rating reasons, it was discovered that the MPAA does not provide any rating reasons for the least restrictively rated films (those rated G). The reason for this is that the MPAA believes G-rated films do not contain any material that would be unacceptable for children of any age. Parents, however, voiced concerns about the content of G rated films during our focus groups. Several parents of children under the age of eight pointed to a disturbing amount of violence in G rated films, whether they were animated or live-action features. They were also concerned with what they saw as the seemingly morbid level of death portrayed in G rated films and, specifically, in Disney produced features. Parents of children under the age of thirteen found the recurring theme of the deaths of parents or friends and family members in these least-restrictively rated films to be a concern.

RQ 3: What types of materials do parents believe should be rated most restrictively? Why?

Parental concerns regarding film content

In the focus groups held with parents, participants were asked to name the types of content they most wanted to shield their children from. A variety of answers were fielded, but some clear trends emerged from parents' responses. The most common response from parents was violence, while sexual content, profanity, poor role models, use of hard drugs and the inclusion of marketing materials within children's films were all areas of concern. The key findings are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Violence

Resoundingly, parents chose violence as the type of content they most wanted to shield their children from seeing. The parents of young children were worried about violent content in films due to a fear of imitation of violent behaviors (learning to hit others, physical fighting, etc). Others were concerned about the fear reactions their children had to violent depictions, including nightmares. Others thought their children were just too young to determine the difference between what was real and what was make-believe. Parents of children ages 8 to 12 years of age were also concerned about fear and imitation, as well as desensitization. Parents of this age group expressed concern that their children were becoming numb to violence, whereas they would prefer their children to avoid violence and conflict whenever possible. Parents of teenagers echoed this concern, worried about the impact of violent content on their teenagers' behaviors and attitudes about the world. Several mothers of teenage sons expressed concerns with their child's anger, and tended to blame the media (in part) for their disrespectful attitudes and behaviors.

This finding, that violence is the type of content most parents want their children shielded from, is completely incongruent with the current structure and criteria used by the MPAA in their current rating system. At least, that is the conclusion drawn based upon the findings of the two quantitative content analyses conducted for this research. The content analysis of fifty films from the year 2005 found that violence was not significantly related to film rating. In addition, films that were the least restrictively rated, as illustrated above in the discussion of violent content in G rated films, tended to contain more violent scenes per film than did more restrictively rated films. Films rated PG-13 contained the most violent content per film (12.73

scenes/film), followed by PG films (10 scenes/film), then R (9.91 scenes/film). While G rated films averaged 7.71 violent scenes per film, unrated films averaged only 4.71 scenes and NC-17 films averaged 3 violent scenes per film. This incongruence is one aspect of the rating system that must be addressed if the MPAA wants to more closely reflect the concerns of parents.

Sexual Content

The parents of teenagers were also concerned with depictions of sexual content and sexuality on film. This was a break from the focus groups held with parents of children under 13. The parents of younger children expressed very little concern with either sexual content or nudity in films. This difference in concern, however, seems somewhat logical, as parents of teenagers are dealing more directly with issues of sex in conjunction with their children. Parents of teens were concerned that portrayals of sex in film would teach their children values that were in contrast to their family values. Specifically, some felt sex in films promoted pre-marital sex and sex with multiple partners. Some expressed concerns that teenage sex depicted in films normalized such behaviors and resulted in additional pressures upon teenagers to become sexually active.

In this case, the data from the content analysis of films is more in line with parents' concerns. Implied sexuality in films was most common in NC-17 and R rated films, but averaged less than one implied sex scene per film in less restrictively rated movies. Explicit sexual content was only found in films rated R or above. For the most

part, G and PG films that dealt with relationships contained mostly hand-holding and kissing.

Language/Profanity

Language was a concern with parents of all ages to a certain extent, but was not nearly as problematic as violent content was. Parents, in general, were worried about the imitation of language use, as well as desensitization toward profanity. However, not all parents were concerned with the use of profanity in films. Many felt their children were already hearing such words used on the playground at school.

This, again, is more in sync with the content analysis performed, as no profanity of any kind was found in G-rated films. Some mild profanity was found in films rated PG (use of the words hell, damn, ass, and shit were used sparingly). PG-13 was the least restrictive rating that contained use of the f-word, which was also the word parents were most concerned with hearing used in films. PG-13 was also the threshold for use of more gender-specific profanities (including dick, bitch, and even c*nt). The use of the f-word was most common in R-rated films, averaging more than 58 (58.27) utterances per film. Profanities were common in both Unrated and NC-17 rated films, though not as prevalent as in R-rated fare.

Depictions of Women

A recurring theme that parents brought up as a concern was that of stereotypical and harmful depictions of women in film. There was also concern with stereotypical portrayals of race and gender in general, but women's roles in film were discussed most

often. Regardless of the child's age, parents brought up concerns with the way women looked and were treated in contemporary films. The concern tended to fall into one of three categories including violence to women, women depicted as weak, and body image issues.

In a variety of focus groups, mothers and fathers were concerned with women being depicted over and over as the victims of violence in film. This was mentioned in regard to more restrictively-rated horror films, but also in regard to general romantic storylines that involved a woman being mistreated by a man, often a love-interest. Mothers were worried most about the impact on their daughters' maturity, and about possible imitation of such characteristics. For example, a few mothers in the 8-12 year old group wanted to make sure their daughters didn't grow up believing it was alright for a man to strike them for any reason. This was echoed in the focus group of parents of teenagers. Moms were also worried about how such portrayals would influence their sons' development of attitudes toward women.

Moms and dads were also concerned with depictions of women as weak and in need of a man to help them fulfill their lives in films. Parents were worried these female characters served as role models for their daughters. Fathers as well as mothers were adamant that they wanted to see more realistic and empowered portrayals of girls and women on film to help teach their girls that they, too, could grow up to do whatever it was they wanted to do, regardless of whether there was a man there to help them. No parents wanted their daughters to buy into the "damsel in distress" cliché presented in films.

In addition, body image was a concern. Again, mainly this was brought up by the parents of daughters. Several mothers commented on the sexualized portrayals of not just women, but of teenage and pre-teen girls in the media. Some argued, especially in the focus group with parents of 8-12 year olds, that pornography had become so mainstream these days that it was seeping into all aspects of popular culture. They blamed media for some of the popular fashions seen in stores that are being marketed to young girls, most of which the focus group participants found utterly inappropriate for girls under the age of 18 (fish net stockings, high heels, short skirts, low cut tops). Those sexualized depictions, coupled with the fact that most female actresses in films have unattainable figures (much thinner, larger breasts, etc), made mothers, in particular, very concerned with their daughters' body image and development of their self esteem.

Based on the results of the content analysis of MPAA designated rating reasons, there are no content descriptors used in the current rating system to account for this concern. This is due in part to the fact these are more contextually-based concerns, rather than a measure of surface-level content. While it would not be difficult for raters to include a notation for violence toward women within their rating framework, it would be much more difficult to flag content for unhealthy body image or empowerment issues. However, creating such a rating category might help send a message to Hollywood that parents are fed up with these unrealistic and unhealthy depictions of women and girls.

Unfortunately the content analysis conducted of the fifty films released in 2005 did not take gender roles into consideration on the coding sheet. Although this was

something that was originally considered, it was found to be too difficult to code for along with the other behaviors that were being coded. It is also more evaluative in nature, making it difficult to achieve intercoder reliability. With this in mind, it seems that this type of content would also be very difficult for the MPAA to include in any sort of standardized way within its rating system. The MPAA raters would likely run into the same problem the coders did in this research study. This type of standard is much more difficult to identify, as it involves context and interpretation. Seeing as everyone interprets media texts differently, such a rating standard would be difficult to develop.

Drug Use

Parents found depictions of drug use of any kind to be inappropriate for films rated G or PG. However, many parents felt the depiction of mild drug use (specifically the use of marijuana) was not something they had a major problem with. Context of the drug use was important to parents, who preferred the drug use be presented in a way that was educational or that framed the drug user as a “loser” or “troubled”. Most parents agreed that drug use in PG-13 or more restrictively rated films would not be unexpected or surprising. Many parents expressed to the moderator that they had already begun educating their children about drugs and would be sure to continue that discussion based on the film content viewed.

In general, the presence or absence of drug use in a film was not found to be significantly related to MPAA rating. However, the number of scenes of the use of marijuana and the number of scenes of the use of hard drugs were both found to be

significantly related to rating. The same content analysis also found that there was no marijuana use or hard drug use depicted in any of the sample films rated less restrictively than an R.

Parents were not concerned with depictions of drinking and smoking behaviors, even if it involved underage characters. While some hoped such underage, illegal content would be limited to more restrictively rated films (specifically PG-13 or above), most believed it was important to judge the content based on its context. Many parents recalled watching films that taught “life lessons” while they were growing up, many of which depicted teens smoking or drinking. Most were not concerned with their children seeing similar depictions in film.

The content analysis performed for this study found that the smoking behaviors had no relationship to film rating, while the number of scenes of drinking (whether adult or underage) did significantly impact rating. However, drinking and smoking behaviors were found to be present in films of all rating categories. It is important to note that while the results of this study were being written, the MPAA announced that they would now be taking smoking into consideration when determining rating assignment for individual films.

Marketing Materials

Fathers of young children were quick to point to the inclusion of marketing materials in children’s movies as something they felt should be restricted. Some mothers agreed with this assessment. The fathers pointed to the overt commercialism

of children's films, some of which seemed to be produced primarily as a conduit to a youth or 'tweener' consumer market.

The MPAA currently does not regard the inclusion of marketing materials within films as a criterion for their rating designations. It seems that this type of warning might be outside the scope of the rating bodies' authority, but could be labeled in some way on the packaging of films. Due to the increasing appeal of product placement within the film industry, however, it would seem unlikely to every come to fruition.

Homosexuality and its relationship to film rating

The MPAA has long been accused of enforcing a double-standard when it comes to GLBT representations on film. Many critics have argued that the inclusion of gay characters, much less the depictions of gay sexual behaviors, will result in a more restrictive rating for a film. While the MPAA has never admitted to using sexual orientation as a rating criterion, some have argued that parents hold that same double-standard, therefore the MPAA is right to look at homosexuality as something that should be more restrictively rated from children.

The results of the focus group research conducted for this study found that parents, for the most part, do not want to see films containing GLBT characters or relationships rated any differently than heterosexual characters and relationships. Only one parent out of a total of 27 focus group participants stated that she thought any films with gay characters should be rated NC-17 because it went against her own personal religious beliefs and morals. For that reason, she believed all children should be

shielded from such depictions. A few other parents said they would want homosexual content to be limited from G films, just because they weren't ready to have that conversation with their children yet. The rest of the parents voiced the opinion that homosexuality and heterosexuality should be rated exactly the same way. If the sexual content was explicit, sexual orientation didn't matter, they just wanted it kept from films that their young children would see.

The content analysis of MPAA ratings found that there were no rating descriptors to account for sexual orientation of characters. However, there was one instance in which homosexual content in a film was described as "aberrant". This was a film that also included a scene of homosexual rape, which could account for the descriptor.

Despite the fact that the rating reasons did explicitly label homosexuality as a rating criterion, the analysis of fifty films released in 2005 found the number of both male and female homosexual characters included in a film to be significantly related to film rating. Overall, the more homosexual characters present in a film, the more restrictive the rating is. The same was true of implied and explicit homosexual content. Whereas implied heterosexual content was found in films of all rating categories, implied homosexual sex was present only in films rated R or more restrictively. Another difference in the way homosexuality and heterosexuality was dealt with in terms of rating is clear in the analysis of how the number of scenes of kissing and/or petting behaviors impacted rating. Heterosexual kissing had no significant relationship to rating and could be found in films of all ratings. However, homosexual kissing behaviors was related significantly to rating and was limited to R and more restrictively

rated films. It seems clear that heterosexuality and homosexuality are not rated equally, which is again, incongruent with results that emerged from the parental focus groups.

Other value-based criteria

Pre-marital sexual behaviors and adulterous depictions were both found to be significantly related to MPAA rating designation, according to the data collected in the content analysis of 50 films from 2007. However, neither variable was accounted for in MPAA rating reasons. Parents of teenagers brought up the issue of adultery in their focus group, with two mothers from the group stating they were concerned with their children seeing pre-marital sexual behaviors on screen. The mothers worried that the depictions would “normalize” the behavior for their children. However, the same mothers did not specify how exactly such depictions should impact film rating. Parents of children under the age of 13 never brought up the topic of pre-marital sex in conjunction with film ratings. Adultery was not discussed specifically in any of the focus groups.

RQ 4a: What types of content are cited most often by the MPAA within its rating reasons?

A quantitative content analysis of the rating reasons provide by the MPAA for all 325 domestically, theatrically released films in the U.S. during the year 2005 was conducted to determine which types of content were most frequently cited as a reason for rating assignment. What was found was that language was by far the most commonly cited reason for a film’s rating. Language was included as a descriptor in the rating reasons for 72.2% of the population studied. Violence was cited in 52.8% of

the films' rating reasons, while sexual content followed as the third most commonly cited reason for rating designation. Sexual content was cited in 47.5% of all films' rating reasons. Drug use and/or references were cited in 25% of all films released in 2005, while sexual innuendo was mentioned in 18.5% of the population. Just over 15% (15.1%) of films from 2005 were cited for nudity.

RQ 4b: Do the MPAA rating reasons include frequency or intensity descriptors for content found in individual films.

The same quantitative content analysis of rating reasons was used to answer research question 4b. What was found was the majority of content descriptors do not include additional information on the frequency or intensity of the content indicated within the rating reason. The only exception occurs in conjunction with the intensity of violence. The majority of rating reasons that indicate violent content in a given film do include some descriptor regarding the intensity of the violent content. Intensity descriptors used in conjunction with violence included terms such as "fantasy," "science fiction," "disturbing," "strong," "comic," "brutal," "frightening," and "mild."

In terms of frequency of content or depictions, these ranged from an indication of "one scene," "a couple," "brief," and "pervasive." The frequency of behaviors seems to be fairly straightforward. It indicates the number of scenes or whether the content being described is brief or found throughout the film. However, it is important that the frequency descriptor be paired with an intensity descriptor. Otherwise one runs the risk of assuming the one scene of violence, sex, or whatever type of content is

indicated might be appropriate for a child. Upon watching the film, it might turn out to be an extremely explicit scene of sex or violence that a parent might not have expected.

The intensity descriptors are a bit more problematic for parents. They tend to be more vague or difficult to interpret. In fact, some of the content categories used by the MPAA themselves are too vague for parents to interpret. For example, the MPAA uses a plethora of terms to describe sexual content, but does not define what each of the terms means. Therefore, it is up to the consumer to determine the difference between “sex,” “sexual content,” “sexuality,” “sensuality,” etc. They must also decipher the meanings of terms such as “thematic elements” and “mature situations.” The use of such terminology without proper definitions is another element that complicates the parents’ job of interpreting the MPAA’s rating.

It must be reiterated at this point that more than half of the parents who participated in the focus group research were unaware of the “rating reasons” and did not know where to look to find such information. This in itself is problematic. Coupled with the lack of specificity of the rating reasons, it creates a real problem for parents who want more content-based information about specific films.

RQ 5a: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated G?

Because the MPAA raters have deemed all G-rated films to be suitable for audiences of all ages, no rating reasons are supplied for specific films with this rating. In general, G films are defined by the MPAA as “a film which contains nothing in theme, language, nudity and sex, violence, etc. that would, in the view of the Rating

Board, be offensive to parents whose younger children view the film” (mpaa.org website).

This standard, however, was questioned by parents in the focus groups that were held as a part of this study. Parents questioned the appropriateness of some of the content included in G-rated films, most frequently citing violence as being too prevalent in such films. A quantitative content analysis of films of all ratings was also conducted as a part of this line of inquiry. Those results are reported later in this chapter. However, it is important to note that G rated films were found to contain violence, sexual innuendo, partial nudity, implied sexual content and open displays of affection in the form of kissing and petting behaviors. This leads to questions regarding the appropriateness of including no specific content information for G-rated films. Some parents might find some of the content found in G-rated films to be inappropriate for their child.

Violent content in G rated films

The content analysis of fifty films released theatrically during the year 2005 helped to shed light on the amount of violence presented in G-rated films. Although the MPAA feels the films are appropriate for audiences of all ages, the content analysis uncovered an average of 7.71 scenes of violence per G-rated film, and 85.7% of all G-rated films released in 2005 contained violence in some form. An average of 1.86 characters per film died, with an average of 1.29 of those characters being killed at the hands of another or dying of unnatural causes. An average of 3.71 characters were physically hurt during the course of a typical G movie, an average of just more than 15

gunshots were fired, and there were an average of 1.57 scenes containing gunfire included per G-rated film. This data seems to confirm parental concerns regarding the levels of violence and death in G-rated fare. In fact, that average number of violent scenes per G-film is more than twice as high as the average number of violent scenes found in a typical NC-17 rated film. Of course, it should be noted, as was found in the qualitative content analysis of the same films from 2005, most of the violence in G-rated films tends to involve animated characters and can be classified as “fantasy” violence, with a few exceptions. That being said, the classification of “fantasy” or “comedic” violence by the MPAA was of little comfort to focus group participants. Many expressed to the moderator that the form of the violence was immaterial to them. The general attitude of participants was that violence was violence. The fact that it was animated characters that might be engaging in the behaviors made little difference, seeing as young children often think of animated characters as “real.” Also, two mothers relayed stories of a child hitting or punching a sibling or friend after seeing the behavior acted out by an animated character in a movie or on television. For that reason, the fantasy or comedic nature of the violence did not put parents at ease. They expressed their displeasure with the apparent heightened levels of such content in the least restrictively rated films released by Hollywood.

RQ 5b: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated PG?

PG-rated films were most commonly cited for language (76.9%), which was true of films of almost every rating category (with the exception of NC-17). Violence was the second most common citation in ratings of PG films, with 43.6% of these films being flagged as containing violence. The MPAA warned of “thematic elements” in

41% of the PG films, although no definition was supplied for that term. “Action” and/or “peril” was mentioned in 28.2% of PG rating reasons. Sexual content and sexual innuendo were both included as rating reasons in 17.9% of the PG rated films (separately, not in tandem). PG rated films were also cited for disturbing or frightening content (7.7%) and battle or warfare scenes (2.6%).

These figures are quite different when compared to the results of the quantitative content analysis of the 50 sample films from 2005. Eleven films rated PG were included in the sample of full-length feature films. In that portion of the study, over 80% (81.8%) of PG-rated films contained violent content (compared to only 43.6% flagged by the MPAA rating reasons). Nudity was not included in any of the PG rating reasons by the MPAA, but 18.2% of sampled PG films contained partial nudity. Sexual innuendo was prevalent in PG-rated fare (present in 54.5% of the sample films), as was the presence of kissing and petting behaviors among heterosexual characters (found in 73.7% of the films rated). Only one film from our sample (9.1%) included implied sexual behaviors (heterosexual).

RQ 5c: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated PG-13?

Again, language was the type of content most frequently cited in rating reasons for PG-13 rated films (mentioned in 58.3% of the population). Violence was also mentioned as a rating reason in more than half of PG-13 rated films (51.9%). Sexual content was much more commonly mentioned in PG-13 rating reasons than it was for PG films, with 40.7% of films cited for containing sexual situations. Sexual innuendo

was mentioned in 31.5% of these rating reasons. Other types of content included in the MPAA rating reasons for PG-13 rated films include drug use or references (28.7%), thematic elements (19.4%), disturbing or frightening content (15.7%), action/peril (14.8%), nudity (10.2%), mature situations (7.4%), creature/fantasy violence (2.8%), and horror/gore (2.8%). There were also several additional content areas mentioned in less than 2% of the sample of PG-13 films, including “rude behavior,” “quirky behavior,” boxing/martial arts, battle/warfare scenes, and rape.

RQ 5d: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated R?

R-rated films were most often cited for containing unsuitable language (88.9%), sexual content (85.1%), and violence (60.3%). This is a rather hefty frequency in the reported incidence of sexual content, as well as an increase in the pervasiveness of violence across rating. Drug use and references were also cited in 31.7% of the population, while nudity increased in frequency to 25.4% of R rated films. Sexual innuendo was cited in only 8.7% of the R-rated population, with horror/gore (4.8%) and action/peril (0.8%) turning up as the least frequently cited types of content.

RQ 5e: What types of content are cited within rating reasons for films rated NC-17?

Films carrying the most restrictive MPAA rating were cited for a very narrow universe of film content within their rating reasons. Sexual content was most frequently cited, showing up as a rating reason for 66.7% of all NC-17 rated films, while violence was mentioned in 33.3% of the population’s content descriptors.

This rating category's "rating reasons" provided by the MPAA are perhaps the most out of whack when comparing them to the results of the content analysis of the 50 films from 2005. In that content analysis it was found that 100% of NC-17 rated films included both partial and full nudity, and profane language. In addition, two-thirds of the sample included violence, drug references, and depictions of torture. Illegal drug use, rape, underage drinking, smoking and drug use, and horror/gore were found in one-third of the sample. It should be noted that the sample of NC-17 films actually consisted of the entire population of theatrically released NC-17 rated films from that year, seeing as only three such films existed.

As films were more restrictively rated, it seemed that certain types of content were taken for granted, and therefore were not indicated within the rating reasons supplied by the MPAA. It appears that the MPAA believes parents will assume certain types of content are present in films of specific ratings. For example, when it comes to rating reasons for the most restrictively rated films, sex and violence were isolated. However, there were no descriptors to warn against profanity, nudity, drug use, rape, horror/gore, action/peril, or mature thematic elements. It seems that the MPAA thinks the consumer is not as concerned about having those specific types of content identified, or that the consumer will assume that content will be present in more restrictively rated movies. It may be true that when sexual content is indicated, it could be assumed that nudity will also be included. However, it would not be evident to me as a consumer making a choice of which film to see that if a film contained "sex" that it also contained a rape scene, or violence paired with that sexual content. This seems to be a problem with the system that could be easily fixed. One, all content for which a

film receives its rating should be indicated with the rating designator. An exhaustive list gives the consumer more information on which to base their movie-going decision. Two, the content descriptors should be standardized and well-defined. Three, the content descriptors should be included in all marketing information for films, including at movie theaters where parents are often making film choices without any prior research or information on which to base their decisions. All they have currently to go on is the rating itself. By using an abbreviated form of content descriptors, similar to those used for cable television ratings, would make this possible. In fact, several parents from the focus groups suggested a move to such a system, as all were fairly familiar with the television rating system.

RQ #6: Are films cited for similar types of content by the MPAA rated consistently?

This question was a little more difficult to answer and a little less straightforward. Whereas with research questions 5a-e it was simply a matter of running frequencies of mentions of specific types of content, to determine the consistency of rating assignment rating reasons needed to be isolated by content type across rating categories. Looking more closely at the rating reasons provided by the MPAA, it was found that some types of content were indeed rated fairly consistently, while other types of content were not.

First, let us recount the types of content that were found to be rated consistently, according to MPAA rating reasons.

- Films cited for partial nudity were consistently rated PG-13, while films including full nudity were consistently rated R or more restrictively.
- Films cited for the depiction of rape were consistently rated, but they were consistently rated PG-13, which might be surprising to consumers.
- Films cited for drug use or drug references were also consistently rated either PG-13 or R.
- The rating reason “mature situations” consistently was used in reference to PG-13 rated films, while the term “thematic elements” was always used in conjunction with PG or PG-13 rated films.

There were also several content variables that were found to be rated inconsistently when looking only at content cited within MPAA rating reasons. Those inconsistently rated variables included:

- Sexual content
- Language
- Violence
- Sexual innuendo or references.

Seeing as these variables were the ones most oft cited by parents as the types of content they most wanted to shield their children from, this reveals a problem with the system. If parents can’t expect those types of content to be rated in a consistent

manner, they need to do further research on the specific content in films rather than trusting the age-based rating.

Another problem that must be addressed is the fact that the citations for film content made by the MPAA in their rating reasons did not correlate with the content found in the films sampled in the content analysis conducted. This might point to incongruent definitions for the specific content descriptors between the MPAA and the coders in this study. However, it might also point to a problem with the lack of quantitative criteria used by MPAA raters when making rating assignments and when composing descriptors for individual films. As the system stands, the raters are using gut instinct when it comes to rating films, using very vague guidelines for inclusion within particular rating categories. Perhaps a more scientific method of rating films could be used to maintain consistency within the rating assignment process. This might result in a more reliable system for parents.

RQ #7: Which types of film content have a significant relationship to film rating?

A quantitative content analysis of a representative sample of 50 full-length feature films released during 2005 was conducted to determine which types of film content impact film rating. By performing ANOVA and Chi-Square analysis on the data coded from these films, it was possible to determine which types of content are significantly statistically related to film rating assignment. This part of the overall study was conducted in order to compare observed film content to content descriptors cited by the MPAA in their rating reasons.

The following content variables were found to be significantly related to film rating:

- The number of scenes of implied sexual content, both involving heterosexual and homosexual activities
- The number of explicit heterosexual and homosexual sex scenes.
- The number of scenes of homosexual kissing and/or petting behaviors
- The number of scenes containing sexual innuendo, references, or humor
- Specific types of foul language, including the number of times the words hell and/or damn, shit, fuck, ass, and bitch/SOB were uttered)
- The mere presence of drug use, as well as the number of scenes of hard drug or marijuana use
- The number of scenes of alcohol consumption
- The presence of hard drug use by children or teens
- Drug references or humor (presence)
- The presence of multiple GLBT characters
- The presence of partial or full nudity
- Depictions of premarital sex

- Portrayals of adultery
- Presence of martial arts/boxing scenes
- Torture
- Gore
- Comedic or fantasy violence

This is a rather long list of content that impacts rating assignment. However, it is important to point out that each of these variables impacts rating in a somewhat different way. For some variables, the inclusion of certain types of content results in a specific rating or a more restrictive rating. However, in some cases, the relationship between content and rating is such that inclusion of the content results in a less restrictive rating. Details of these relationships are spelled out in chapter seven, which can be referred to for more detail.

It is important to point out one major content variable that is missing from the list above. That is, violence. In general, violent content was not found to be statistically significantly related to film rating. Some very specific types of violent content did impact rating (gore, horror, scenes of martial arts or boxing, and comedic or fantasy violence), however, overall levels of violent content were not related to rating. It should also be noted that the relationship between comedic/fantasy violence and rating was that inclusion of such content resulted in a less restrictive rating. This seems to contradict the views expressed by parents in the focus groups, specifically that violent content was their number one concern in terms of filmic content.

RQ #8: Are films containing similar types of content rated consistently?

Consistency of Rating Application

This research investigated the consistency of the MPAA's rating assignments. By isolating specific behaviors, it was possible to determine whether specific content was always rated the same way in a variety of films. These content variables were isolated both in the results of the content analysis of the MPAA rating reasons, and the results of the content analysis of observed behaviors and content in fifty films from 2005. The consistency of ratings based upon MPAA citations was addressed earlier in this chapter (RQ # 6).

Results were somewhat different when, rather than looking at the MPAA's self-reported, self-cited content variables, the researcher looked at behaviors coded from the fifty film sample from 2005. The following content was found to be rated consistently:

- Full nudity was always rated R or above, as was found in the earlier content analysis of MPAA rating reasons. Furthermore, two or more scenes in a film of full frontal nudity of either male or female characters resulted in an NC-17 rating.
- The inclusion of any HIV positive characters was also found to secure a film an NC-17 rating.
- Depictions of GLBT characters in a committed or marital relationship resulted in a rating of PG-13 or higher, whereas depictions of heterosexual couples were found in films of all rating categories.

- Depictions of same sex characters holding hands resulted in an R rating or more restrictive, whereas opposite sex hand holding was found in films of all ratings.
- Depictions of GLBT kissing or petting behaviors resulted in a rating of R or more restrictive, while heterosexual kissing or petting behaviors were found in films of all ratings.
- Scenes of implied GLBT sexual activities resulted in a rating of R or higher, whereas heterosexual scenes of implied sexuality were found in films of all ratings.
- Explicit sexual content was always rated R or more restrictively, whether it involved heterosexual or homosexual situations.

The other types of content that were found to be rated consistently were all behaviors associated with children or teenagers.

- Underage smoking was consistently rated R or more restrictively
- The use of illegal drugs of any kind by teenagers or children was consistently rated NC-17.

However, by looking at coded behaviors from those full-length features, it was found that several types of behaviors were rated inconsistently, including the following:

- Violence was not rated consistently. Violent content was present in films of all rating categories. When the number of scenes of violence was taken into

consideration, the rating category could be narrowed slightly. Films with more than ten scenes of violence were found in ratings of all categories except NC-17. Films containing 20 or more scenes of violence resulted in a rating of PG, PG-13 or R.

- Illegal drug use by adults
- Underage drinking
- Drug references
- Partial nudity
- Depictions of premarital sex and adultery

Taking these results into consideration, it seems that some of the key content types are not rated consistently within the MPAA system.

RQ # 9: What are the similarities and differences of film content found in various rating categories?

A qualitative content analysis was conducted using the same fifty films from 2005 that were used for the quantitative content analysis sample. By looking at the sample qualitatively, context was brought into the analysis of film content and its relationship to rating. Full results of this study are detailed in chapter eight, but those results are summarized here.

Sexual Content

For the most part, the bulk of the sexual content that was portrayed in films was rated R or more restrictively. While there were examples of hand-holding and kissing and petting behaviors exhibited in less restrictively rated films, very little implied sexuality and no explicit sexual content was present in films with less than an R rating. The main question then became, what is the difference between the sexual content found in R rated films and the sexual content that had been deemed appropriate for adults only? What makes the sexual content too racy for an R rating?

The answer, based upon the qualitative analysis, is that NC-17 fare tends to include slightly more explicit sexual content, but more importantly, sexual content that is less socially acceptable. The sexual content is more disturbing and generally involves some sort of act or acts that would be considered taboo. Examples include the portrayal of child molestation, incest, rape, prostitution and pornography. In contrast, R-rated explicit sexual scenes tended to reinforce hegemonic, heteronormative, patriarchal standards. Much of the sex depicted was between married couples, with the male acting as the instigator for the sexual activity. The sex was generally consensual. The only instances of same-sex sexual content in R-rated films was found in *Brokeback Mountain*. Other R rated films that included GLBT characters avoided sexual situations between characters.

Sexual Innuendo

Sexual innuendo, sexual humor and sexual references were found in films of all rating categories. However, as the rating was more restrictive, the references to sex and sexuality became more frank and more open. Less restrictively rated films, such as

those rated G and PG, tended to limit sexual references to vague innuendo that would be more likely to inspire a laugh from parents but go unnoticed by younger children. In PG-13 rated films, the references came in the form of sexual humor. These films definitely aimed at a teenaged male audience and much of the talk of sex was done in a joking manner. However, there were PG-13 rated films that referenced sexual activities, but mainly those references were made by adults. R rated films included open discussions of sexuality, sexual exploits and sexual humor that could be characterized as raunchy or off-humor. R-rated comedies, such as *Wedding Crashers* and *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* included sexual references and/or humor in nearly every scene of the films, whereas R-rated dramas tended to include sexual references that were of a more serious nature used for both plot and character development. NC-17 rated films were more likely to include sexually laced dialogue and references to subjects that might be considered taboo, reflecting the differences in sexual content described in the section discussing the depictions of sex in NC-17 films above.

Nudity

The nudity found in less restrictively rated films was included solely as a source of humor and was not of a sexual nature. Generally, partial nudity in G and PG rated films consisted of a male bare-bottom, often of a baby or an animated character. No nudity was found in any of the films rated PG-13 in our sample. Full frontal nudity was found only in films rated R or above. Full frontal male nudity was more likely to result in an NC-17 rating, although *Brokeback Mountain*, which was rated R, did include full-frontal male nudity (most of it shot from a distance). However, there was never full male nudity included in any of the sex scenes in this rating category, while female full

frontal or full nudity was almost always used in conjunction with a sex scene. Male full nudity in sexual situations appeared to garner a film an NC-17 rating.

Violence

The violence in G and PG rated films tended to be either fantasy or comedic violence, although some PG rated films started to introduce action sequences, gunfire, explosions and automatic weaponry. It should also be mentioned that, as parents in the focus groups hypothesized, G films did include scenes of death and fighting.

PG-13 films were found to contain the larger numbers of violent scenes than films in any other rating category and that violence tended to include heavy action sequences, chase scenes and some horror and gore. Many PG-13 films were blockbusters that included special effects to create other-worldly landscapes, creatures and weaponry. Often the action was carried through the entire film in order to keep the audience on the edge of their seats.

R rated films all contained some amount of violence, although the way that violence was portrayed was much more varied than in the PG-13 category. Whereas nearly all of the PG-13 films included action sequences, R rated films were more likely to feature what could be called personal violence. Sometimes a character in an R rated film would throw a punch at another character, or a fight would break out. However, there was at least one gory horror film included in this category that featured scenes of torture and terror. Other films include battle scenes and shootings. Due to the variety of violence portrayed in R rated films, it is difficult to characterize the rating overall in terms of violent content. However, despite the fact that all R rated films contained at

least one violent scene, the violence tended to be less drawn out than the violence found in PG-13 films, with just a couple exceptions.

Language

G-rated films refrained from using any profane dialogue, while PG films occasionally included the use of words such as “hell,” “damn,” although there were isolated incidents of the use of “ass” or “shit” in such films. PG-13 rated films were the least restrictively rated films to include the use of “fuck”, but it was generally used no more than once or twice in such films. It’s also important to note the word was used as an exclamation in PG-13 films, whereas it was sometimes used as a sexual reference in more restrictively rated films. R rated films included a plethora of profanity, but relied heavily on the use of the f-word, often using it to the point of distraction. NC-17 and Unrated films used slightly fewer profanities than did R rated films, and they also tended to mix it up in terms of word usage, relying less on a single profanity.

Qualitative Results Summarized

What becomes clear when looking at the results of the qualitative analysis of the fifty films released during 2005 is that although certain types of content are found in films of all ratings, there does tend to be contextual differences that might account for the varied rating assignments. However, this also points to what some critics have deemed as “double-standards” employed by the MPAA rating board. When raters make evaluative judgments as to what types of sexual content are acceptable or unacceptable, it can lead to the marginalization (or further marginalization) of certain behaviors. The same is true of violence, language use, and sexual innuendo. This

further supports the argument that some critics have made that the current rating system is too evaluative in nature, rather than serving as an unbiased informational tool for use by parents.

This is a serious problem in terms of the usefulness of the current rating system. First of all, parents are asking for additional content-based information. By making broad evaluative judgments, the MPAA is taking the decision-making power and information away from parents. Secondly, the MPAA, by serving an evaluative function, can take on an unintended role as moral guardian over filmic content. If certain types of content are deemed unacceptable (rather than just being listed as present in a film), it moves the system closer to the Production Code era. Although the content will not be ordered stricken from the film altogether, it will need to be edited out of the film in order to obtain a particular film rating. When this happens to films that originally are branded with an NC-17, due to the major studios' rating clauses that force directors and producers to deliver a film rated R or less restrictively, scenes and themes are required to be cut from films. This is certainly not solely the fault of the MPAA. The studios play a major role in this problem. However, it stands to reason that changes need to be made to avoid the marginalization of film content and to allow creative freedom amongst filmmakers.

Summary

The study presented in this dissertation is a broad, multi-method approach to analyzing the Motion Picture Association of America's film rating system. Although this study includes several seemingly disparate studies, in reality, the studies all link

together to paint a thorough picture of the current state of the rating system, including its strengths and its weaknesses. Because so little academic research has been undertaken on this important area of public policy, yet there has been so much criticism of the system, it is essential to get a snapshot of both the intended and unintended consequences of the system as it now stands. In the following chapter, the most important findings of this research will be discussed, along with suggestions for improvement to the rating system.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSIONS

The Motion Picture Association of America's film rating system was established in 1968 as a way for the film industry to self-regulate the content of motion pictures, while alerting the public to the appropriateness of film content. Specifically, the system was designed to be a tool for parents, while allowing the film industry to guard against underage viewing of material that might be considered obscene or indecent under new federal guidelines that were spawned from the *Ginsberg v. New York* court decision. The system was seen as a win-win situation for the industry and for parents. The industry was able to bury the defunct Production Code, which limited the content of films, and replace it with the newly introduced film ratings that merely limited the audiences that could attend films based on age. Major studio heads and independent film producers were happy with this move to a system that allowed for expanded creative freedom. Parents who had been upset by the dissolution of the Production Code were happy to have a simple system of guidelines to follow when determining which theatrically released films were appropriate for their children. Therefore, the ratings played a dual role. The role of the ratings as stated by the MPAA is to serve as a tool for parents. An unstated secondary role, however, is to insulate the film industry against legal action involving content standards and underage children. The ratings are also a means to quell politically motivated movements that might lead to governmental censorship of films.

This system is an important resource for parents, as it is the only official industry guide to film content. Although a plethora of Internet options are available to parents who want to do additional research on the types of content found in particular films, the

MPAA ratings are the only standardized system. Internet sites that provide content descriptions of films are privately run and subject to bias or misinformation. It is also up to the parent to sift through the multitude of on-line options to determine which are the most appropriate for their needs.

Despite the importance of this system, which is not just an industry standard but is also a public policy of sorts, little academic research has been undertaken to determine its effectiveness. However, in the nearly forty years since the ratings were implemented, there has been a great deal of criticism of the system by special interest groups, media critics, politicians and others. A documentary released in 2006 titled *This Film Is Not Yet Rated* brought some of these criticisms to the public's attention, as have a variety of magazine and newspaper articles in general circulation publications. This comprehensive investigation of the MPAA film ratings was designed to analyze the current film rating system employed by the MPAA, taking into consideration the criticisms that have been voiced by others, as well as the reasoning used by the MPAA itself to defend the system. This research was meant to uncover the strengths and weaknesses of the film ratings, looking specifically at the following issues:

1. What do parents think of the system? Do they utilize the system on a regular basis? Are they satisfied with the current film ratings? Does the system do what it set out to do, which is to serve as a tool for parents?
2. What types of film content do parents want to shield their children from? Is that compatible with the standards used by the MPAA?

3. What are the standards employed by the MPAA? What types of content result in various rating assignments? What types of content result in more or less restrictive ratings?
4. Are ratings applied or assigned consistently?

Key Findings

In order to investigate these issues thoroughly, a mixed-method study was undertaken to provide a thorough look at the MPAA ratings, their application, and parents' attitudes toward the rating system. The findings of this study are detailed in earlier chapters, but there are several key discoveries that need to be discussed further, as their implications are important to the future success of the MPAA film rating system.

Parental Attitudes Toward the System

Across the board, parents who were involved in the focus group research in this study voiced their dissatisfaction with the film rating system. While some felt it was better than nothing, others felt strongly that the system was in dire need of repair. The main concerns of parents were:

- a) The MPAA over-relies on age-based categories, whereas parents would like to have more specific content-based information made available to them. Parents wanted to be armed with information with which to make appropriate choices for their children's movie-viewing
- b) The system's values did not reflect their families' values, allowing too much inappropriate content into G and PG rated films
- c) Films were rated inconsistently, therefore parents did not feel like they could rely on the rating itself to determine the appropriateness of a film for their child.

Parental Views on Film Content

Another important finding culled from the focus groups is that violence was the type of content that parents most wanted to shield their children from. While sexual content was a major concern for parents of teenaged children, parents of children of all ages wanted to see lower levels of violent content in films viewed by their kids. Parents felt that G and PG rated films in particular had much too much violent content, especially depictions of deaths and killings. Parents felt as a whole that MPAA raters concentrated their efforts more on sexuality and nudity, when they should be weighing violence more heavily when making their rating assignment decisions.

Rating Criteria

The instincts of these parents were confirmed by the content analyses performed on a sample of films released theatrically in 2005. The content analysis found that violence, in general, was not statistically related to film rating, whereas sexual content, nudity, certain forms of profane language, drug use and references, and certain types of thematic content were significantly related to film rating. In other words, violence did not play much of a role in rating assignment. In fact, if violence was characterized as “fantasy” or “comedic” violence, a film was generally rated less restrictively (mainly G or PG). PG-13 rated films were found to contain the highest number of violent scenes per film of all films released theatrically in the U.S., but even G and PG films were found to contain high levels of violent content.

On the other hand, the content analysis uncovered several variables that seem to impact film rating that are not stated directly in the MPAA’s written rating reasons or rating criteria. Depictions of pre-marital sex or adultery were found to be statistically

related to film rating (whether they were merely alluded to in the story or whether they were more clearly portrayed), which appear to be holdovers from the Production Code that evolved out of the Catholic Church and its Legion of Decency. In addition, the number of scenes of alcohol consumption by adults also was found to be significantly related to rating. Depictions of gay and lesbian relationships were found to be more restrictively rated than heterosexual relationships, as were GLBT scenes of kissing or petting behaviors. These findings not only harken back to the Judeo-Christian values of the Production Code, but also back up common criticisms of the MPAA that claim they employ a heteronormative bias when rating films, resulting in a double-standard for films based on sexual orientation.

Inconsistency of Rating Application

Another important finding of this study was that the ratings doled out by the MPAA are not consistently applied. Although there are some specific types of content that tend to garner an automatically restrictive rating, many content variables were found in films in all rating categories. There seem to be few specific content-based criteria used by the MPAA to delineate between rating categories, at least no quantifiable standard.

A Flawed System

When the findings from this research are digested, it becomes clear that the MPAA film rating system is flawed in several ways. Due to its incongruent rating criteria when compared to the concerns of parents, its inconsistent rating assignments, and its tendency to serve an evaluative function rather than a purely informational function, the system has been rendered unreliable. While many parents use the system in some capacity, most do so because they feel there is no viable or attractive alternative.

Without exception, parents from the focus groups wanted more content information available to them, allowing them to have the power to determine the appropriateness of particular films for their children's viewing. Several parents, rather than relying on the MPAA ratings, are currently going to the theaters or video stores and renting movies, and watching them from start to finish before allowing their children to view them. While this is a surefire way to make sure you approve of the films for your kids, it is also time consuming and expensive. It's a luxury that many parents cannot afford, either due to socio-economic status or time constraints. More importantly, it's something that not all parents are going to have any interest in doing. Some will rely on the film ratings without doing extra research and it could be their children who suffer for it. Fear reactions to scary or violent content found in less restrictively rated films were commonly described within the focus groups that were held.

From an industry standpoint, the rating system is problematic. Due to the inconsistent nature of rating assignment, it is difficult for a director to know where the boundaries are to obtain a specific rating. Due to the double standard that appears to exist that allows violent content to be deemed acceptable while sexual content is deemed unacceptable, producers will tend to gravitate toward violence as a dominant form of subject matter. This results in the release of a glut of violence-laden content into the marketplace, further stymieing parents' attempts to shield their children from such content. Parents expressed in the focus groups their fear that their kids were becoming desensitized to violent content. The current rating system seems to be desensitized as well.

The double-standards that appear to be present in the system can impact the type of films that receive nationwide theatrical distribution, which in turn impacts our popular culture. While it is not the MPAA's stated intent to be moral cultural guardians, it seems to be an unintended and unforeseen consequence of the current system. Due to the evaluator nature, when raters categorize films, they are branding certain behaviors and content as acceptable or unacceptable. This trickles down into the cultural consciousness, especially after forty years of serving in this capacity. For example, one of the films portrayed the rape of a female character, and that film was rated PG-13. Another film depicted the rape of a young gay male gigolo. That film was rated NC-17. Films depicting female characters as victims of violence by serial killers are assigned an R rating, while a film depicting a young woman as a crazed killer is rated NC-17. Of course, in the NC-17 rated film, the young woman was also depicted as a lesbian and the film was produced in France, other variables that tend to count against a film obtaining a less restrictive rating.

The point of these examples is to show that not all films are treated equally by the MPAA. Is it that the MPAA raters are trying to demonize or marginalize certain types of content? Do they intentionally favor certain types of content over others? It's highly unlikely. It is not the raters themselves that are necessarily to blame. Sure, they will bring their own personal biases to the table when they assign a rating, but it is the state of the current system that allows them to do so. The system needs to be improved in such a way that insures films will be rated consistently. The MPAA also has to listen to the desires and expectations of parents, so that they can better serve their needs.

A Time For Change: Improving the System

It is the hope of this researcher that the results of this multi-method study will be used to help restructure the current MPAA film rating system. As the results of this research were being written up, the MPAA was announcing changes to the system. However, thus far, the changes do not seem to be appropriate to the conclusions drawn from this data. This study is not enough ammunition to overhaul a system that has been in place since 1968. However, it is a good starting point for additional future research into the subject matter, that would help create a more equitable and useful system for parents. As it currently stands, the MPAA rating system does not seem to be succeeding in aiding parents with their children's film viewing decisions. Instead, parents are reporting confusion as to what the ratings really mean. Most are unhappy with the current evaluative nature of the system and are asking for a more informative approach to ratings. Parents would like a list of possibly problematic content that they can peruse before allowing their child to see a film. Most don't seem to trust the MPAA's judgment as to what types of content are appropriate or inappropriate for their child based on age. The following is a list of changes that seem appropriate based on results of this investigation:

- Include more specific content information in rating emblem. Give parents more content details, allowing them the choice of what they believe to be age appropriate for their individual child. This may mean a move to a system that is more like the cable television rating system.
- Include more information regarding the frequency and intensity of specific types of content.

- Standardize rating language and make sure definitions of all rating language is available to the general public.
- Move away from broad age-based rating categories. Parents believe age is not as relevant as emotional maturity, and age-based categories are too evaluative in nature. Give parents the power to make their own age-based decisions.
- Standardize rating criteria. Include quantitative standards along with some of the existing qualitative measures. This will help to standardize rating assignments.
- Rate films with violent content more restrictively, or at least weigh violence more heavily when assessing film content and assigning ratings.
- Do not rate films based on sexual orientation of the characters. Films depicting GLBT characters should not be treated differently than films depicting heterosexual characters.
- Be sensitive to the context of materials within a film, rather than just the content itself. Insensitive depictions of gender, race, and sexual orientation may garner more restrictive ratings.
- Parents would like to see more rating categories, specifically a category between PG-13 and R, and between R and NC-17. Parents feel the PG-13 and R ratings are too all-encompassing, making it impossible to predict what type of content is likely to be included in a given film.

- Expand the representation found on the MPAA rating board. Due to the secretive nature of the raters, it is impossible to find out specific details about the composition of the board. However, it is known that all members are parents living near the San Fernando Valley. It is hoped that the parental raters would be representative of the U.S. population in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, and geographic region. There should also be a push for diversity in terms of sexual orientation, religiosity, and psychographic characteristics of the rating panel.

Contribution of this Research

As demonstrated in chapter three of this dissertation, little academic research has been undertaken that deals directly with the functionality and usefulness of the Motion Picture of Association rating system. Prior research has tended to focus on media effects of specific types of film content rather than looking at the system as a whole. What makes this study unique is its scope. This multi-method investigation gives a triangulated view of several aspects of the film rating system, including parental use and opinions of the system, the rating language used by MPAA raters themselves, film content and its relationship to rating assignment, and the consistency of rating assignment. This is the first study of its kind to look at the interconnectedness of all of these variables. Past studies may have hit on one or two of the elements included in this research, but they were analyzed in isolation. Due to that isolated view, it was impossible to see the full picture and really assess the effectiveness and consequences of the rating system.

Additionally, this was one of just a handful of studies that looked at full length feature films using both quantitative and qualitative content analysis as the research method. Most past studies that have looked at film content have looked at a very limited number of films, or have relied on a small sample of scenes taken out of context from longer films. Other research has been limited to looking at just one film rating category or just one specific type content. This study was much more comprehensive in its nature, and thusly, more thorough.

The ultimate goal of this research is for it to be used as tool to instigate positive changes to the MPAA rating system. While certain strengths of the MPAA system have been pointed out, there have been several weaknesses and unintended consequences of the system that have been uncovered. It is hoped that this research will be a springboard for future in-depth research into this topic, as well as a vehicle for change. Many of the suggested improvements to the MPAA system itemized earlier in this chapter would not be difficult or costly to adopt. Perhaps the findings from this study will help to instigate change based on parental opinions as well as quantifiable evidence.

Limitations of Research

While this study is a significant step toward improving the current MPAA film rating system, there are limitations to this research. Certainly one of the major limitations to this study is that the content analyses only take into consideration films that were released in 2005. A longitudinal study of movies and their content would be a more thorough way to assess the intricacies of the film rating system. It would also

allow for investigation into rating creep, which is defined by a loosening of content-based standards over time.

Additionally, the content analysis of the fifty films released during 2005 was comprehensive, coding for 84 content-related variables. However, there were several aspects of the content that were not taken into consideration, including race and gender roles. An investigation of race and ethnicity upon film rating is another necessary step in the evaluation of the current MPAA rating system. Due to problems with the coding of such variables, race and ethnicity were not taken into consideration in this study.

The focus group research is also limited in several ways. First, only one focus group was held with parents with children from each of the three major age groups. Additional focus groups with parents from different areas of the country would be necessary to get a more complete picture of parental attitudes. As it was, this set of focus group participants were all found in a small college town in Mid-Michigan, which is not representative of the country as a whole. Also, it would be nice to talk to moms and dads separately, to see if the gender of the parent has a significant impact on their opinions of film content. The same could be said about the gender of the child. Isolating parents of girls and parents of boys in separate focus groups would be helpful in determining whether parents have different content standards that they uphold based on their child's gender. These gender-related issues were difficult to assess in the focus groups as held.

While there were six or more participants in most of the focus groups and gender was split fairly evenly, it was particularly difficult recruiting parents of children

who were teenagers or older. Despite the use of recruitment flyers and a display ad run in the local newspaper, only five participants were found. All of those five participants were female. This certainly could skew the results from that specific group.

This focus group research should really be looked upon as a pilot study that will eventually lead to the development of a more broad nationwide survey instrument. A survey could be administered over the phone, by mail or by e-mail to gauge parental opinions of the film rating system and film content.

Suggestions for Future Research

As was stated in the discussion of this study's limitations, the scope of the focus group research was extremely narrow, speaking only to parents residing in a small Midwestern college town. Certainly a nationwide survey of parents is necessary to make the results gathered more generalizable to the larger population of U.S. parents. Not only should be parents asked about their knowledge of, use of, and attitudes toward the MPAA rating system, but they should also be asked about improvements they would like to see made to the system. While many will not be able to brainstorm intricate policy initiatives, it is likely parents will have a few specific ideas of what is lacking in the current system. It was found in the focus groups that were held for this study that parents had some very interesting, if not quite complete, plans for the improvement of the rating system. Due to the nature of this research, it would be a good idea to allow for open-ended answers for a portion of the survey. Restricting parental responses to predetermined options will not encompass the range of parents' attitudes and ideas.

Experimental research is another avenue to explore in relation to this line of inquiry. Whereas in this study parents were asked to rate and react to vague descriptions of film content, it would be helpful to somehow allow parents to rate clips of actual films to see how their opinions compare to the MPAA raters. Of course, this poses problems. The first being that if parents watch previously released films, their rating judgment will be influenced by their prior knowledge of the movie and its rating. To avoid such complications, unreleased films would need to be used. However, they would need to be submitted to the MPAA for ratings in order to have a tool for comparison. Another complication is that if only clips are watched by subjects, they will not see the context of the behaviors and actions their rating. This will skew results. However, taking all of this into consideration, there is surely some experimental design that will be able to address these complications.

Another part of the film rating equation revolves around the economic advantages and disadvantages of specific rating assignments. It has been discussed by film industry veterans that the PG-13 rating is the preferred rating, due to its ability to serve a large portion of the population without seeming like a “children’s” movie. It is important to determine the impact of receiving a more or less restrictive rating for a film, not just at the box office, but in back end sales and rentals as well. This study should include an investigation of the impact of releasing films unrated, too, as that was shown to be a significant portion of films released during 2005.

Another area of investigation in relation to the film rating system would be to do in-depth interviews with film industry professionals, including directors, producers

and studio heads to determine how the rating process impacts the creative process as well as the distribution and exhibition of films.

Final Thoughts

The findings from this line of research into the Motion Picture Association of America's film rating system point to serious problems that impact not only the film industry, but more importantly, the American public. The system has a simple objective; that is to serve as a guide and resource for parents when determining the appropriateness of films for their family. However, the system is failing to inform parents of the specific information that is present in individual films. Instead, the system makes a value judgment as to the appropriateness of the film as a whole, and assigning it a broad age-based category.

While this is a better system than the Production Code which limited film content for all and stymied freedom of expression, it is time to face the fact that the system is not performing the function it has set out to accomplish. With some changes, the system would be able to meet its stated goals, while minimizing the unintended consequences. It is important that the system work as effectively as possible. In doing so, it will limit the dissatisfaction of parents and the general public, which will help stave off attacks on the industry by politicians. Government regulation of the film industry could be disastrous due to the ever-changing whims of the political infrastructure. To ensure the film industry remains an independent, creative body, it is important for the MPAA to assess its weaknesses and implement a plan to strengthen its self-regulatory system.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (Hays Code)

If motion pictures present stories that will affect lives for the better, they can become the most powerful force for the improvement of mankind

A Code to Govern the Making of Talking, Synchronized and Silent Motion Pictures. Formulated and formally adopted by The Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. and The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc. in March 1930.

Motion picture producers recognize the high trust and confidence which have been placed in them by the people of the world and which have made motion pictures a universal form of entertainment.

They recognize their responsibility to the public because of this trust and because entertainment and art are important influences in the life of a nation.

Hence, though regarding motion pictures primarily as entertainment without any explicit purpose of teaching or propaganda, they know that the motion picture within its own field of entertainment may be directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking.

During the rapid transition from silent to talking pictures they have realized the necessity and the opportunity of subscribing to a Code to govern the production of talking pictures and of re-acknowledging this responsibility.

On their part, they ask from the public and from public leaders a sympathetic understanding of their purposes and problems and a spirit of cooperation that will allow them the freedom and opportunity necessary to bring the motion picture to a still higher level of wholesome entertainment for all the people.

General Principles

1. No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

Particular Applications

I. Crimes Against the Law

These shall never be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy with the crime as against law and justice or to inspire others with a desire for imitation.

1. Murder

- a. The technique of murder must be presented in a way that will not inspire imitation.
- b. Brutal killings are not to be presented in detail.
- c. Revenge in modern times shall not be justified.

2. Methods of Crime should not be explicitly presented.

- a. Theft, robbery, safe-cracking, and dynamiting of trains, mines, buildings, etc., should not be detailed in method.
- b. Arson must subject to the same safeguards.
- c. The use of firearms should be restricted to the essentials.
- d. Methods of smuggling should not be presented.

3. Illegal drug traffic must never be presented.

4. The use of liquor in American life, when not required by the plot or for proper characterization, will not be shown.

II. Sex

The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing.

1. Adultery, sometimes necessary plot material, must not be explicitly treated, or justified, or presented attractively.

2. Scenes of Passion

- a. They should not be introduced when not essential to the plot.
- b. Excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures, are not to be shown.
- c. In general passion should so be treated that these scenes do not stimulate the lower and baser element.

3. Seduction or Rape

- a. They should never be more than suggested, and only when essential for the plot, and even then never shown by explicit method.

- b. They are never the proper subject for comedy.

4. Sex perversion or any inference to it is forbidden.

5. White slavery shall not be treated.
6. Miscegenation (sex relationships between the white and black races) is forbidden.
7. Sex hygiene and venereal diseases are not subjects for motion pictures.
8. Scenes of actual child birth, in fact or in silhouette, are never to be presented.
9. Children's sex organs are never to be exposed.

III. Vulgarity

The treatment of low, disgusting, unpleasant, though not necessarily evil, subjects should always be subject to the dictates of good taste and a regard for the sensibilities of the audience.

IV. Obscenity

Obscenity in word, gesture, reference, song, joke, or by suggestion (even when likely to be understood only by part of the audience) is forbidden.

V. Profanity

Pointed profanity (this includes the words, God, Lord, Jesus, Christ - unless used reverently - Hell, S.O.B., damn, Gawd), or every other profane or vulgar expression however used, is forbidden.

VI. Costume

1. Complete nudity is never permitted. This includes nudity in fact or in silhouette, or any lecherous or licentious notice thereof by other characters in the picture.
2. Undressing scenes should be avoided, and never used save where essential to the plot.
3. Indecent or undue exposure is forbidden.
4. Dancing or costumes intended to permit undue exposure or indecent movements in the dance are forbidden.

VII. Dances

1. Dances suggesting or representing sexual actions or indecent passions are forbidden.
2. Dances which emphasize indecent movements are to be regarded as obscene.

VIII. Religion

1. No film or episode may throw ridicule on any religious faith.
2. Ministers of religion in their character as ministers of religion should not be used as comic characters or as villains.
3. Ceremonies of any definite religion should be carefully and respectfully handled.

IX. Locations

The treatment of bedrooms must be governed by good taste and delicacy.

X. National Feelings

1. The use of the Flag shall be consistently respectful.
2. The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly.

XI. Titles

Salacious, indecent, or obscene titles shall not be used.

XII. Repellent Subjects

The following subjects must be treated within the careful limits of good taste:

1. Actual hangings or electrocutions as legal punishments for crime.
2. Third degree methods.
3. Brutality and possible gruesomeness.
4. Branding of people or animals.
5. Apparent cruelty to children or animals.
6. The sale of women, or a woman selling her virtue.
7. Surgical operations.

Reasons Supporting the Preamble of the Code

I. Theatrical motion pictures, that is, pictures intended for the theatre as distinct from pictures intended for churches, schools, lecture halls, educational movements, social reform movements, etc., are primarily to be regarded as ENTERTAINMENT.

Mankind has always recognized the importance of entertainment and its value in rebuilding the bodies and souls of human beings.

But it has always recognized that entertainment can be a character either HELPFUL or HARMFUL to the human race, and in consequence has clearly distinguished between:

- a. Entertainment which tends to improve the race, or at least to re-create and rebuild human beings exhausted with the realities of life; and
- b. Entertainment which tends to degrade human beings, or to lower their standards of life and living.

Hence the MORAL IMPORTANCE of entertainment is something which has been universally recognized. It enters intimately into the lives of men and women and affects them closely; it occupies their minds and affections during leisure hours; and ultimately touches the whole of their lives. A man may be judged by his standard of entertainment as easily as by the standard of his work.

So correct entertainment raises the whole standard of a nation.

Wrong entertainment lowers the whole living conditions and moral ideals of a race.

Note, for example, the healthy reactions to healthful sports, like baseball, golf; the unhealthy reactions to sports like cockfighting, bullfighting, bear baiting, etc.

Note, too, the effect on ancient nations of gladiatorial combats, the obscene plays of Roman times, etc.

II. Motion pictures are very important as ART.

Though a new art, possibly a combination art, it has the same object as the other arts, the presentation of human thought, emotion, and experience, in terms of an appeal to the soul through the senses.

Here, as in entertainment,

Art enters intimately into the lives of human beings.

Art can be morally good, lifting men to higher levels. This has been done through good music, great painting, authentic fiction, poetry, drama.

Art can be morally evil in its effects. This is the case clearly enough with unclean art, indecent books, suggestive drama. The effect on the lives of men and women are obvious.

Note: It has often been argued that art itself is unmoral, neither good nor bad. This is true of the THING which is music, painting, poetry, etc. But the THING is the PRODUCT of some person's mind, and the intention of that mind was either good or bad morally when it produced the thing. Besides, the thing has its EFFECT upon those who come into contact with it. In both these ways, that is, as a product of a mind and as the cause of definite effects, it has a deep moral significance and unmistakable moral quality.

Hence: The motion pictures, which are the most popular of modern arts for the masses, have their moral quality from the intention of the minds which produce them and from their effects on the moral lives and reactions of their audiences. This gives them a most important morality.

1. They reproduce the morality of the men who use the pictures as a medium for the expression of their ideas and ideals.
2. They affect the moral standards of those who, through the screen, take in these ideas and ideals.

In the case of motion pictures, the effect may be particularly emphasized because no art has so quick and so widespread an appeal to the masses. It has become in an incredibly short period the art of the multitudes.

III. The motion picture, because of its importance as entertainment and because of the trust placed in it by the peoples of the world, has special MORAL OBLIGATIONS:

A. Most arts appeal to the mature. This art appeals at once to every class, mature, immature, developed, undeveloped, law abiding, criminal. Music has its grades for different classes; so has literature and drama. This art of the motion picture, combining as it does the two fundamental appeals of looking at a picture and listening to a story, at once reaches every class of society.

B. By reason of the mobility of film and the ease of picture distribution, and because the possibility of duplicating positives in large quantities, this art reaches places unpenetrated by other forms of art.

C. Because of these two facts, it is difficult to produce films intended for only certain classes of people. The exhibitors' theatres are built for the masses, for the cultivated and the rude, the mature and the immature, the self-respecting and the criminal. Films, unlike books and music, can with difficulty be confined to certain selected groups.

D. The latitude given to film material cannot, in consequence, be as wide as the latitude given to book material. In addition:

a. A book describes; a film vividly presents. One presents on a cold page; the other by apparently living people.

b. A book reaches the mind through words merely; a film reaches the eyes and ears through the reproduction of actual events.

c. The reaction of a reader to a book depends largely on the keenness of the reader's imagination; the reaction to a film depends on the vividness of presentation.

Hence many things which might be described or suggested in a book could not possibly be presented in a film.

E. This is also true when comparing the film with the newspaper.

a. Newspapers present by description, films by actual presentation.

b. Newspapers are after the fact and present things as having taken place; the film gives the events in the process of enactment and with apparent reality of life.

F. Everything possible in a play is not possible in a film:

a. Because of the larger audience of the film, and its consequential mixed character. Psychologically, the larger the audience, the lower the moral mass resistance to suggestion.

b. Because through light, enlargement of character, presentation, scenic emphasis, etc., the screen story is brought closer to the audience than the play.

c. The enthusiasm for and interest in the film actors and actresses, developed beyond anything of the sort in history, makes the audience largely sympathetic toward the characters they portray and the stories in which they figure. Hence the audience is more ready to confuse actor and actress and the characters they portray, and it is most receptive of the emotions and ideals presented by the favorite stars.

G. Small communities, remote from sophistication and from the hardening process which often takes place in the ethical and moral standards of larger cities, are easily and readily reached by any sort of film.

H. The grandeur of mass settings, large action, spectacular features, etc., affects and arouses more intensely the emotional side of the audience.

In general, the mobility, popularity, accessibility, emotional appeal, vividness, straightforward presentation of fact in the film make for more intimate contact with a larger audience and for greater emotional appeal.

Hence the larger moral responsibilities of the motion pictures.

Reasons Underlying the General Principles

I. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it.

Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil or sin.

This is done:

1. When evil is made to appear attractive and alluring, and good is made to appear unattractive.
2. When the sympathy of the audience is thrown on the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil, sin. The same is true of a film that would throw sympathy against goodness, honor, innocence, purity or honesty.

Note: Sympathy with a person who sins is not the same as sympathy with the sin or crime of which he is guilty. We may feel sorry for the plight of the murderer or even understand the circumstances which led him to his crime: we may not feel sympathy with the wrong which he has done. The presentation of evil is often essential for art or fiction or drama. This in itself is not wrong provided:

a. That evil is not presented alluringly. Even if later in the film the evil is condemned or punished, it must not be allowed to appear so attractive that the audience's emotions are drawn to desire or approve so strongly that later the condemnation is forgotten and only the apparent joy of sin is remembered.

b. That throughout, the audience feels sure that evil is wrong and good is right.

II. Correct standards of life shall, as far as possible, be presented.

A wide knowledge of life and of living is made possible through the film. When right standards are consistently presented, the motion picture exercises the most powerful influences. It builds character, develops right ideals, inculcates correct principles, and all this in attractive story form.

If motion pictures consistently hold up for admiration high types of characters and present stories that will affect lives for the better, they can become the most powerful force for the improvement of mankind.

III. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

By natural law is understood the law which is written in the hearts of all mankind, the greater underlying principles of right and justice dictated by conscience.

By human law is understood the law written by civilized nations.

1. The presentation of crimes against the law is often necessary for the carrying out of the plot. But the presentation must not throw sympathy with the crime as against the law nor with the criminal as against those who punish him.

2. The courts of the land should not be presented as unjust. This does not mean that a single court may not be presented as unjust, much less that a single court official must not be presented this way. But the court system of the country must not suffer as a result of this presentation.

Reasons Underlying the Particular Applications

I. Sin and evil enter into the story of human beings and hence in themselves are valid dramatic material.

II. In the use of this material, it must be distinguished between sin which repels by its very nature, and sins which often attract.

a. In the first class come murder, most theft, many legal crimes, lying, hypocrisy, cruelty, etc.

b. In the second class come sex sins, sins and crimes of apparent heroism, such as banditry, daring thefts, leadership in evil, organized crime, revenge, etc.

The first class needs less care in treatment, as sins and crimes of this class are naturally unattractive. The audience instinctively condemns all such and is repelled.

Hence the important objective must be to avoid the hardening of the audience, especially of those who are young and impressionable, to the thought and fact of crime. People can become accustomed even to murder, cruelty, brutality, and repellent crimes, if these are too frequently repeated.

The second class needs great care in handling, as the response of human nature to their appeal is obvious. This is treated more fully below.

III. A careful distinction can be made between films intended for general distribution, and films intended for use in theatres restricted to a limited audience. Themes and plots quite appropriate for the latter would be altogether out of place and dangerous in the former.

Note: The practice of using a general theatre and limiting its patronage to "Adults Only" is not completely satisfactory and is only partially effective.

However, maturer minds may easily understand and accept without harm subject matter in plots which do younger people positive harm.

Hence: If there should be created a special type of theatre, catering exclusively to an adult audience, for plays of this character (plays with problem themes, difficult discussions and maturer

treatment) it would seem to afford an outlet, which does not now exist, for pictures unsuitable for general distribution but permissible for exhibitions to a restricted audience.

I. Crimes Against the Law

The treatment of crimes against the law must not:

1. Teach methods of crime.
2. Inspire potential criminals with a desire for imitation.
3. Make criminals seem heroic and justified.

Revenge in modern times shall not be justified. In lands and ages of less developed civilization and moral principles, revenge may sometimes be presented. This would be the case especially in places where no law exists to cover the crime because of which revenge is committed.

Because of its evil consequences, the drug traffic should not be presented in any form. The existence of the trade should not be brought to the attention of audiences.

The use of liquor should never be excessively presented. In scenes from American life, the necessities of plot and proper characterization alone justify its use. And in this case, it should be shown with moderation.

II. Sex

Out of a regard for the sanctity of marriage and the home, the triangle, that is, the love of a third party for one already married, needs careful handling. The treatment should not throw sympathy against marriage as an institution.

Scenes of passion must be treated with an honest acknowledgement of human nature and its normal reactions. Many scenes cannot be presented without arousing dangerous emotions on the part of the immature, the young or the criminal classes.

Even within the limits of pure love, certain facts have been universally regarded by lawmakers as outside the limits of safe presentation.

In the case of impure love, the love which society has always regarded as wrong and which has been banned by divine law, the following are important:

1. Impure love must not be presented as attractive and beautiful.
2. It must not be the subject of comedy or farce, or treated as material for laughter.
3. It must not be presented in such a way to arouse passion or morbid curiosity on the part of the audience.
4. It must not be made to seem right and permissible.
5. In general, it must not be detailed in method and manner.

III. Vulgarity; IV. Obscenity; V. Profanity; hardly need further explanation than is contained in the Code.

VI. Costume

General Principles:

1. The effect of nudity or semi-nudity upon the normal man or woman, and much more upon the young and upon immature persons, has been honestly recognized by all lawmakers and moralists.
2. Hence the fact that the nude or semi-nude body may be beautiful does not make its use in the films moral. For, in addition to its beauty, the effect of the nude or semi-nude body on the normal individual must be taken into consideration.
3. Nudity or semi-nudity used simply to put a "punch" into a picture comes under the head of immoral actions. It is immoral in its effect on the average audience.
4. Nudity can never be permitted as being necessary for the plot. Semi-nudity must not result in undue or indecent exposures.
5. Transparent or translucent materials and silhouette are frequently more suggestive than actual exposure.

VII. Dances

Dancing in general is recognized as an art and as a beautiful form of expressing human emotions.

But dances which suggest or represent sexual actions, whether performed solo or with two or more; dances intended to excite the emotional reaction of an audience; dances with movement of the breasts, excessive body movements while the feet are stationary, violate decency and are wrong.

VIII. Religion

The reason why ministers of religion may not be comic characters or villains is simply because the attitude taken toward them may easily become the attitude taken toward religion in general. Religion is lowered in the minds of the audience because of the lowering of the audience's respect for a minister.

IX. Locations

Certain places are so closely and thoroughly associated with sexual life or with sexual sin that their use must be carefully limited.

X. National Feelings

The just rights, history, and feelings of any nation are entitled to most careful consideration and respectful treatment.

XI. Titles

As the title of a picture is the brand on that particular type of goods, it must conform to the ethical practices of all such honest business.

XII. Repellent Subjects

Such subjects are occasionally necessary for the plot. Their treatment must never offend good taste nor injure the sensibilities of an audience.

APPENDIX B

Critics' Picks – Best Films of 2005

<u>Point Total</u>	<u>Film Title</u>
426	Brokeback Mountain R
346	A History of Violence R
242	Capote R
176	Good Night and Good Luck PG
170	King Kong PG-13
166	Munich R
120	Crash R
119	Grizzly Man R
118	The Squid and the Whale R
116	Cache R
111	2046 (not 2005)
100	Best of Youth (Not 2005)
097	Syriana R
087	The Constant Gardener R
083	The New World PG-13
066	Match Point
052	Wallace and Gromit
051	Pride & Prejudice PG
046	Look at Me (not 2005)
045	Mysterious Skin
045	Head-On R
044	Darwin's Nightmare
042	Walk the Line
042	Batman Begins
041	Murderball
041	Junebug
041	Hustle and Flow
041	Cinderella Man PG 13
040	The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada
040	Oldboy not 2005
040	Last Days
039	Saraband not 2003
039	Brothers
038	Tropical Malady
036	The Holy Girl
036	Kings and Queen
034	The Chronicles of Narnia
033	Howl's Moving Castle
032	Paradise Now
029	Sin City
028	March of the Penguins
027	Broken Flowers
026	The Beat My Heart Skipped

026	Me and You and Everyone We Know
024	The World
023	Kung Fu Hustle
022	Oliver Twist
022	Memoirs of a Geisha
021	Breakfast on Pluto
020	Kiss Kiss Bang Bang
020	Café Lumiere
019	Downfall
018	The White Diamond
018	Nine Lives
018	C.R.A.Z.Y
017	The Dying Gaul
016	The Corpse Bride
016	Mrs. Henderson Presents
016	Jarhead
015	No Direction Home
014	The 40-Year Old Virgin
014	Serenity
014	Keane
013	Millions
012	The Century of the Self
012	Nobody Knows
011	Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire
010	Turtles Can Fly
010	Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith
010	Land of the Dead
010	Dear Frankie
010	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
009	War of the Worlds
009	The Weather Man
009	The Power of Nightmares
009	The Intruder
009	The Ice Harvest
009	Rize
009	My Summer of Love
009	LA Plays Itself
009	Innocence
009	Heights
009	Ballets Russes
009	An Unfinished Life
009	The Far Side of the Moon
008	Transamerica
008	The Weeping Meadow
008	The Upside of Anger
008	Memory of a Killer
008	Lord of War
007	The Devil's Rejects
007	Palindromes
007	North Country
007	Kingdom of Heaven

007	It's All Gone Pete Tong
006	Regular Lovers
006	Off the Map
006	I Am Cuba
006	Garçon Stupide
006	Funny Ha Ha
006	Blue Movie
005	Proof
005	Postmen in the Mountain
005	Jesus is Magic
005	Enron: Smartest Guys in the Room
004	Yes
004	Shopgirl
004	Mad Hot Ballroom
003	Zathura
003	Wedding Crashers
003	Touch the Sound
003	Three Dancing Slaves
003	The White Countess
003	The Real Dirt on Farmer Joe
003	My Mother's Smile
002	The Producers
002	Tell them Who You Are
002	Schultzie Gets the Blues
002	Police Beat
002	Ong Bak
002	In Her Shoes
002	I Am a Sex Addict
001	Water
001	Waiting
001	Tony Takitani
001	Thumbsucker
001	The World's Fastest Indian
001	Robert Beavers
001	Rent
001	Princess Ragoon
001	Mondovino
001	Lords of Dogtown
001	40 Shades of Blue
001	Chicken Little
001	Chain

Point total calculated using 79 critics' "top ten" lists of the best films of 2005. Films were awarded point values based upon their rankings. Each film that was chosen as the top or "#1" film of 2005 by an individual critic was awarded 10 points, each 2nd place film was awarded 9 points, 3rd place awarded 8 points, and so on. Point values were then totaled and listed in descending order.

APPENDIX C

Top Grossing Films of 2005 Listed By Rating (based on domestic U.S. box office returns)

Information includes:

Ranking within rating category Film Title (overall ranking for year; box office revenues)

G Rating

1. Chicken Little (#14; 134.84 million)
2. March of the Penguins (#27; 77.41 million)
3. Herbie Fully Loaded (#37; 66 m)
4. Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were Rabbit (#46; 56.07 m)
5. Ice Princess (#102; 24.38 m)
6. Valiant (#112; 19.47 m)
7. Pooh's Heffalump Movie (#119; 18.08m)

PG Rating

1. The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe (#3; 288.80 m)
2. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (#7; 206.46 m)
3. Madagascar (#9; 193.14 m)
4. Robots (#15; 128.20m)
5. The Pacifier (#17; 113.01m)
6. Are We There Yet? (#23; 82.30 m)
7. Cheaper By the Dozen 2 (#24; 81.79m)
8. Sky High (#39; 63.94m)
9. Yours Mine and Ours (#50; 53.36 m)
10. Corpse Bride (#51; 53.34m)
11. Kicking and Screaming (#52; 52.58 m)
12. Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy
13. Racing Stripes
14. The Legend of Zorro

PG-13 Rating

1. Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith (#1; 380.26m)
2. Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (#2; 289.19m)
3. War of the Worlds (#4; 234.28 m)
4. King Kong (#5; 216.96 m)
5. Batman Begins (#8; 205.34 m)
6. Mr. and Mrs. Smith (#10; 186.34 m)
7. Hitch (#11; 177.58 m)
8. The Longest Yard (#12; 158.12)
9. Fantastic Four (#13; 154.70)
10. Walk the Line (#16; 118.23)

11. Fun with Dick and Jane
12. Flightplan
13. Monster In Law
14. Dukes of Hazzard
15. The Ring Two
16. The Exorcism of Emily Rose
17. The Interpreter
18. Sahara
19. Guess Who
20. Coach Carter

R Rating

1. Wedding Crashers (#6; 209.22m)
2. The 40 Year Old Virgin (#19; 109.24m)
3. Saw II (#21; 87.03)
4. Brokeback Mountain (#26; 78.86m)
5. Constantine (#29; 75.50m)
6. Four Brothers (#31; 74.48m)
7. Sin City (#32; 74.10m)
8. The Amityville Horror (#38; 65.23 m)
9. Jarhead (#40; 62.65 m)
10. Crash (#49; 53.38m)
11. Hide and Seek (#53; 51.10m)
12. Syriana (#56; 49.62m)
13. Kingdom of Heaven (#61; 47.4m)
14. Munich (#62; 46.73m)

NC-17 and Unrated Films

There were no NC-17 or Unrated films in the top 150 box office films.

1. Mysterious Skin (\$679,181)
2. High Tension (3.65 m)

(Burchfiel, 2006)

APPENDIX D

List of All Films Analyzed within this dissertation

I. List of 50 Full Length Features Analyzed in Content Analysis Categorized by Rating Assignment:

G Films:

1. Chicken Little
2. Herbie: Fully Loaded
3. Ice Princess
4. Pooh's Heffalump Movie
5. The March of the Penguins
6. Valiant
7. Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were Rabbit

PG Films:

1. Are We There Yet?
2. Charlie & the Chocolate Factory
3. Corpse Bride
4. Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire
5. Madagascar
6. Millions
7. Pride & Prejudice
8. Robots
9. The Pacifier
10. Good Night and Good Luck
11. Yours, Mine and Ours

PG-13 Films:

1. Batman Begins
2. Cinderella Man
3. Hitch
4. King Kong
5. Look At Me
6. Mr & Mrs Smith
7. Paradise Now
8. Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith
9. The Exorcism of Emily Rose
10. Walk the Line
11. War of the Worlds

R Films:

1. 2046
2. A History of Violence
3. Brokeback Mountain
4. Capote
5. Crash
6. Jarhead
7. Munich
8. Saw II
9. The 40 Year Old Virgin
10. The Squid and the Whale
11. Wedding Crashers

NC-17 Films:

1. Inside Deep Throat
2. Ma Mere
3. Mysterious Skin

Unrated Films:

1. Be Here to Love Me
2. High Tension
3. Jesus is Magic
4. Palindromes
5. The Aristocrats
6. The Beat That My Heart Skipped
7. Where the Truth Lies

II. Complete List of Films Released Theatrically in 2005 with MPAA supplied rating reasons (N=325*)

*Originally a list of 340 films released in 2005 was obtained from imdb.com, but no release information was found for five of the films.

Film Title	MPAA Rating	Reasons
1. 2046	R	Sexual content
2. 40 Shades of Blue	R	Sexuality and language
3. The 40 Year Old Virgin	R	Pervasive sexual content, language and some 1. drug use
4. The Adventures of SharkBoy and Lava Girl 3-D	PG	Mild Action and some rude humor

5. Aeon Flux PG Sequences of violence and sexual content
6. Alone in the Dark R violence and language
7. The Alzheimer Affair R violence, sexuality, and nudity
8. Amityville Horror R violence, disturbing images, language, brief sexuality and drug use
9. Angels with Angles PG thematic elements including sensuality, violence and language
10. Apres Vous R language
11. Are We There Yet? PG language and rude humor
12. The Aristocrats Unrated
13. The Aryan Couple PG-13 violence, disturbing images and thematic elements
14. Assault on Precinct 13 R strong violence and language throughout, and for some drug content
15. ***Asylum (2004) R strong sexuality, some violence and brief language
16. The Bad News Bears PG-13 rude behavior, language throughout, some sexuality and thematic elements
17. ***The Ballad of Jack and Rose (2004) R language, sexual content and some drug material
18. Ballets Russes Unrated
19. Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress Unrated
20. Batman Begins PG-13 intense action violence, disturbing images and some thematic elements

21. The Baxter PG-13 for brief sexual humor and some drug references
22. The Beat My Heart Skipped Unrated
23. The Beautiful Country R for some language and a crude sexual reference
24. Beauty Shop PG-13 on appeal for sexual material, language and brief drug references
25. Be Cool PG-13 for violence, sensuality, and language including sexual references
26. Because of Winn-Dixie PG for thematic elements and brief mild language
27. Bee Season PG-13 for thematic elements, a scene of sensuality and brief strong language
28. Be Here to Love Me Unrated
29. Bewitched PG-13 for some language, including sex and drug references, and partial nudity
30. The Big White R for language including sexual references and some violence
31. Boogeyman PG-13 for intense sequences of horror and terror/violence, and some partial nudity
32. Breakfast on Pluto R for sexuality, language, some violence and drug use
33. Bride and Prejudice PG-13 for some sexual references
34. Brokeback Mountain R sexuality, nudity, language and some violence
35. Broken Flowers R language, some graphic nudity and brief drug use
36. Brothers R for violence, language and brief nudity (limited release in U.S.)
37. The Brothers Grimm PG-13 for violence, frightening sequences and brief suggestive material
38. Bunty Aur Bablie Limited U.S. Release Unrated???
39. Cache R for brief strong violence

40. Cape of Good Hope (2004) PG-13 for mature situations including some violence, sexual content and brief strong language. Festival only in 05
41. Capote Rated R for some violent images and brief strong language
42. Casanova Rated R for some sexual content
43. The Cave Rated PG-13 for intense creature violence
44. Charlie & The Chocolate Factory PG for quirky situations, action and mild language
45. Cheaper by the Dozen 2 PG for some crude humor and mild language
46. Chicken Little G
47. The Chorus PG-13 for some language/sexual references and violence
48. Christmas in the Clouds PG for mild sexual content and some language
49. Chronicles of Narnia PG for battle sequences and frightening moments
50. The Chumscrubber R for language, violent content, drug material and some sexuality.
51. Cinderella Man Rated PG-13 for intense boxing violence and some language
52. Coach Carter PG-13 for violence, sexual content, language, teen partying and some drug material
53. The Constant Gardener Rated R for language, some violent images and sexual content/nudity.
54. Constantine R for violence and demonic images
55. Cote d'Azur No wide US release
56. Crash R for language, sexual content and some violence
57. Cry_Wolf PG-13 for violence, terror, disturbing images, language, sexuality and a brief drug reference.
58. Cursed PG-13 for violence, terror, disturbing images, language, sexuality and a brief drug reference.

59. D.E.B.S *Festivals in 2004, but not released widely in US until May 05.
PG-13 for sexual content and language
60. Daltrey Calhoun PG-13 for sexual content, drug material and language
61. Dark Water PG-13 for mature thematic material, frightening sequences,
disturbing images and brief language
62. Dear Frankie Rated PG-13 for language (only at festivals in US)
63. Dear Wendy No US release
64. Derailed R for strong disturbing violence, language and some sexuality
65. Deuce Bigalow: European Gigolo R for pervasive strong crude and sexual
humor, language, nudity and drug content
66. The Devil's Rejects R for sadistic violence, strong sexual content, language and
drug use
67. Diary of a Mad Black Woman PG-13 for drug content, thematic elements,
crude sexual references and some violence
68. Dirty Deeds PG-13 for crude humor, sexual content, language, teen
partying/drug references and some violence
69. Dirty Love R for strong sexuality, crude humor, language and some drug use.
70. Domino Rated R for strong violence, pervasive language, sexual
content/nudity and drug use
71. Don't Tell R for sexual content, nudity, language and a brief violent image
72. Doom R for strong violence/gore and language
73. Dorian Blues NO rating info for US (festival and limited release)
74. Dot the I limited release in early 2005, but festivals in 2003. R for strong
sexuality/nudity, language and some violence
75. Down to the Bone NO US rating info Unrated?? Festival only
76. Downfall R for strong violence, disturbing images and some nudity
77. Dreamer PG for brief mild language

78. The Dukes of Hazzard PG-13 for sexual content, crude and drug-related humor, language and comic action violence
79. Duma PG for mild adventure peril
80. Dust to Glory PG for racing action and peril, and for some language
81. The Dying Gaul R for strong sexual content and language
82. The Edukators R for language, a scene of sexuality, and some drug use.
83. Elektra PG-13 for action violence
84. Elizabethtown PG-13 for language and some sexual references
85. Ellie Parker R for language, some sexuality and drug use
86. Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room R for language and some nudity
87. Eternal R for strong sexual content, violence and language
88. Everything is Illuminated PG-13 for disturbing images/violence, sexual content and language.
89. The Exorcism of Emily Rose PG-13 for thematic material, including intense/frightening sequences and disturbing images
90. The Family Stone PG-13 for some sexual content including dialogue, and drug references.
91. Fantastic Four PG-13 for sequences of intense action, and some suggestive content.
92. Fever Pitch PG-13 for crude and sexual humor, and some sensuality
93. Finding Home PG-13 for thematic issues, sexual content and some violence
94. First Descent PG-13 for brief strong language and a momentary drug reference.
95. Flightplan PG-13 for violence and some intense plot material
96. The Fog PG-13 for violence, disturbing images and brief sexuality
97. Four Brothers Rated R for strong violence, pervasive language and some sexual content.

98. Freedomland R for language and some violent content.
99. Fun with Dick and Jane PG-13 for brief language, some sexual humor and occasional humorous drug references
100. The future of Food NO Rating Documentary Limited release
101. The Game of Their Lives PG for some mild language and thematic elements
102. Garcon Stupide No Info available
103. Gay Sex in the 70s NO US release
104. George A Romero's Land of the Dead R for pervasive strong violence and gore, language, brief sexuality and some drug use
105. Get Rich or Die Tryin R for strong violence, pervasive language, drug content, sexuality and nudity
106. God's Sandbox Unrated Limited U.S. release Drama
107. The Goebbels Experiment NO US rating info Documentary Biography Festival release Unrated
108. Going Shopping PG-13 for brief strong language
109. Good Night and Good Luck PG for mild thematic elements and brief language
110. The Great Raid R for strong war violence and brief language
111. The Greatest Game Ever Played PG for some brief mild language
112. Green Street Hooligans R for brutal violence, pervasive language and some drug use
113. Grizzly Man R for language.
114. Guess Who PG-13 for sex-related humor
115. Gunner Palace PG-13 on appeal for strong language throughout, violent situations and some drug references
116. Happy Endings R for sexual content, language and some drug use
117. Happy Here and Now R for some language

118. Harry Potter and the Goblet of fire PG-13 for sequences of fantasy violence and frightening images
119. Head-On R for strong graphic sexuality, pervasive language, some brutal violence and drug content
120. Heights R for language, brief sexuality and nudity
121. Hellbent R for strong horror violence and gore, sexual content, language and drug use
122. Herbie: Fully Loaded G
123. Hide and Seek R for frightening sequences and violence
124. High Tension NC-17 for strong graphic violence (released in US in May 05)
125. A History of Violence R for strong brutal violence, graphic sexuality, nudity, language and some drug use
126. Hitch PG-13 for language and some strong sexual references
127. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy PG for thematic elements, action and mild language
128. Holy Girl R for some sexual content and brief nudity
129. The Honeymooners PG-13 for some innuendo and rude humor / PG for language and some rude humor (edited version)
130. Hoodwinked PG for some mild action and thematic elements Animation / Comedy / Family /
131. Hostage R for strong graphic violence, language and some drug use : Action / Crime / Drama / Thriller
132. House of D PG-13 for sexual and drug references, thematic elements and language Comedy / Drama
133. House of Wax R for horror violence, some sexual content and language
a. Horror
134. Howl's Moving Castle PG for frightening images and brief mild language. Animation / Adventure / Fantasy / Romance / Sci-Fi

135. Hustle and Flow R for sex and drug content, pervasive language and some violence.Crime / Drama / Music
136. I Love Your Work R for language, sexuality, some drug content and violent images.Drama
137. The Ice Harvest R for violence, language and sexuality/nudity.
Comedy / Crime / Drama / Thriller
138. Ice Princess G : Comedy / Drama / Family / Sport
139. In Her Shoes PG-13 for thematic material, language and some sexual content.Comedy / Drama (
140. In My Country R for language, including descriptions of atrocities, and for a scene of violence
a. Drama
141. In the Mix PG-13 for sexual content, violence and language.
a. : Comedy / Crime / Drama / Music / Romance
142. Innocent Voices R for disturbing violence and some language.Drama / War
143. Inside Deep Throat NC-17 for explicit sexual content; Rated R for strong sexuality including graphic images, nudity and dialogue (edited version)
Documentary / Adult
144. Into the Blue PG-13 for intense sequences of action violence, drug material, some sexual content and language.: Action / Adventure / Crime / Thriller
145. The Interpreter PG-13 for violence, some sexual content and brief strong languageCrime / Drama / Thriller
146. The Island PG-13 for intense sequences of violence and action, some sexuality and language.
: Action / Drama / Sci-Fi / Thriller
147. The Jacket R for violence, language and brief sexuality/nudity.
: Thriller / Drama / Fantasy (
148. Jarhead R for pervasive language, some violent images and strong sexual content. Drama / War

149. Jiminy Glick in La La Wood R for language and crude sexual content
Comedy
150. Junebug R for sexual content and language.Comedy / Drama
151. Just Friends PG-13 for sexual content including some dialogue
Comedy / Romance
152. Just Like Heaven PG-13 for some sexual contentComedy / Fantasy /
Romance
153. Kaal PG-13 Thriller / Adventure / Mystery
154. Kamizake Girls One festival in U.S. Comedy Unrated
155. Keane R for a scene of strong sexuality, drug use and language.Drama /
Thriller
156. Kicking and Screaming PG for thematic elements, language and
some crude humor.Comedy / Family / Sport
157. The Kid and I PG-13 for some language, crude humor and drug
references.Comedy
158. King Kong PG-13 for frightening adventure violence and some
disturbing images.Action / Adventure / Drama / Thriller
159. King's Ransom PG-13 for crude and sexual humor and language.
Comedy / Crime
160. Kingdom of Heaven R for strong violence and epic warfare Action /
Drama / History / War
161. Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang R for language, violence and sexuality/nudity.
Action / Comedy / Crime / Mystery / Thriller
162. Kung Fu Hustle R for sequences of strong stylized action and
violenceAction / Comedy / Crime / Fantasy
163. Ladies in Lavender PG-13 for brief strong language.Drama / Music
164. Last Days R for language and some sexual content.Music / Drama
165. Layer Cake R for strong brutal violence, sexuality, nudity, pervasive
language and drug use Crime / Drama / Thriller

166. Legend of Zorro PG for sequences of violence/peril and action, language and a couple of suggestive moments. Action / Adventure / Western
167. The Libertine R for strong sexuality including dialogue, violence and language Drama
168. Little Man Short
169. Little Manhattan PG for mild thematic elements, language and brief action. Comedy / Family / Romance
170. Loggerheads PG-13 for mature thematic material and brief strong language.
a. Drama
171. The Longest Yard PG-13 for crude and sexual humor, violence, language and drug references.
Action / Comedy / Drama / Sport (
172. Look at Me PG-13 for brief language and a sexual reference.
: Drama / Comedy / Romance
173. Lord of War R for strong violence, drug use, language and sexuality.
Crime / Drama / Thriller
174. Lords of Dogtown PG-13 for drug and alcohol content, sexuality, violence, language and reckless behavior - all involving teens Action / Drama / Sport (
175. A Lot Like Love PG-13 for sexual content, nudity and language.
Comedy / Drama / Romance
176. Ma Mere NC-17 for strong and aberrant sexual content Drama
177. Madagascar PG for mild language, crude humor and some thematic element Animation / Adventure / Comedy / Family
178. Mad Hot Ballroom PG for some thematic elements. Documentary
179. Magnificent Desolation: Walking on the Moon 3-D Unrated Documentary / Animation / Short
180. Mail Order Wife R for language and some disturbing sexual material
Comedy

181. Te Man PG-13 for language, rude dialogue and some violence
 Action / Comedy / Crime
182. Man of the House PG-13 for violence, sexual content, crude humor
 and a drug reference Action / Comedy
183. March of the Penguins G Documentary / Family
184. Marebito R for strong bloody violence and some nudity Drama /
 Fantasy / Horror / Mystery limited release
185. Margaret Cho: Assassin Unrated Comedy
186. Master of the Crimson Armor PG-13 for stylized violence and martial arts
 action, and some sexual content Action / Drama / Fantasy
187. The Matador R for strong sexual content and language Comedy / Crime
 / Drama / Thriller
188. Matando Cabos R for pervasive violence and language, some strong
 sexuality and drug use Action / Adventure / Comedy / Crime / Thriller
189. Match Point R for some sexuality.: Drama / Romance / Thriller
190. Me and You and Everyone We Know R for disturbing sexual
 content involving children, and for language. Comedy Drama
191. Melinda and Melinda PG-13 for adult situations involving sexuality, and
 some substance material. Comedy / Drama
192. Memoris of a Geisha PG-13 for mature subject matter and some sexual
 content. Drama / Romance
193. The memory of a Killer R for violence, sexuality and nudity.
 Action / Crime / Drama / Thriller
194. Mindhunters R for violence/strong graphic images, language and sexual
 content. (re-rating) Action / Crime / Drama / Horror / Mystery / Thrille
195. Millions Rated PG for thematic elements, language, some peril and
 mild sensuality. (edited for re-rating)
 Comedy / Crime / Drama / Family
196. Mirrormask PG for some mild thematic elements and scary images
 Fantasy

197. Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous PG-13 for sex-related humor
Comedy / Crime
198. Mrs. Henderson Presents R for nudity and brief language.
Comedy / Drama
199. Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont NO INFO Comedy / Drama (
200. Mr. and Mrs. Smith PG-13 for sequences of violence, intense action,
sexual content and brief strong language Action / Comedy / Romance / Thriller
201. Modigliani R for some language and drug use Biography / Drama
202. Monsieur H. No Info
203. Monster-In-Law PG-13 for sex references and language Romance /
Comedy
204. Munich R for strong graphic violence, some sexual content, nudity
and language Drama / History / Thriller
205. Murderball Rated R for language and sexual content; Rated PG-13 for
sexual references and language. (edited version): Documentary / Sport
206. Must Love Dogs PG-13 for sexual content. Comedy / Romance
207. My Big Fat Independent Movie R for crude and sexual humor,
language and violent content COMEDY
208. My Summer of Love R for sexuality, language and some drug use Drama
/ Romance
209. Mysterious Skin NC-17/ Unrated DVD Reasons NOT listed: Drama
/ Mystery
210. Neal-n-Nikki Limited U.S. release Unrated
211. Never Been Thawed R for pervasive language including sexual
references Comedy
212. The New World PG-13 for some intense battle sequences Adventure
/ Biography / Drama / History / Romance (more)
213. New York Doll PG-13 for drug content.
a. Documentary

214. Nine Lives R for language, brief sexual content and some disturbing images Drama
215. Nobody Knows PG-13 for mature thematic elements and some sexual references. Drama
216. North Country R for sequences involving sexual harassment including violence and dialogue, and for language. Drama
217. Occupation Dreamland Documentary limited release No rating info
218. Off the Map 2003 film released in 2005 PG-13 for nudity and thematic elements DRAMA
219. Oldboy R for strong violence including scenes of torture, sexuality and pervasive language: Drama / Mystery / Thriller
220. One Bright Shining Moment Documentary (No info)
221. Ong Bak: The Thai Warrior R for sequences of strong violence, language, some drug use and sexuality Adventure / Crime / Thriller
222. The Pacifier PG for action violence, language and rude humor. : Comedy / Action / Family / Thriller (more)
223. Paheli Fantasy NO INFO
224. Palindromes Unrated Drama / Adventure / Comedy
225. Paradise Now PG-13 for mature thematic material and brief strong language. Crime Drama
226. Parineeta No Info
227. The Perfect Man PG for some mildly suggestive content. Comedy / Drama / Romance
228. Pooh's Heffalump Movie G Animation / Drama / Family / Fantasy / Mystery
229. Pretty Persuasion R for strong sexual content and graphic dialogue involving teens, and language. Comedy / Drama
230. Pride and Prejudice PG for some mild thematic elements. Drama / Romance

231. Prime PG-13 on appeal for sexual content including dialogue, and for language. Comedy / Drama / Romance
232. Private No U.S. rating Drama/War
233. The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio PG-13 thematic elements, some disturbing images and language Biography / Drama
234. The Producers PG-13 for sexual humor and references Comedy / Musical
235. The Promise PG-13 for stylized violence and martial arts action, and some sexual content. Action / Drama / Fantasy
236. Proof PG-13 for some sexual content, language and drug references. Drama
237. Protocols of Zion R for language, some disturbing content and brief nudity. Documentary
238. Racing Stripes PG for mild crude humor and some language Comedy / Drama / Family / Sport
239. Rebound PG for mild language and thematic elements. Comedy / Family / Sport
240. Red Eye PG-13 for some intense sequences of violence, and language. Action / Drama / Thriller
241. Reel Paradise R for language including sexual references, and brief crude humor Documentary
242. Rent PG-13 for mature thematic material involving drugs and sexuality, and for some strong language. Drama / Musical / Romance
243. The Ring: Two PG-13 for violence/terror, disturbing images, thematic elements and some language Horror / Thriller / Drama / Mystery
244. The Ringer PG-13 for crude and sexual humor, language and some drug references. Comedy / Sport
245. Rize PG-13 for suggestive content, drug references, language and brief nudity Documentary
246. Robots PG for some brief language and suggestive humor Animation / Comedy / Family / Fantasy / Sci-Fi

247. Roll Bounce G-13 for language and some crude humor. Comedy / Drama / Music / Romance
248. Oliver Twist PG-13 for disturbing images. Drama / Family
249. Rumor Has It PG-13 for mature thematic material, sexual content, crude humor and a drug reference Comedy / Drama / Romance
250. Sahara PG-13 for action violence Action / Adventure / Comed
251. Saint Ralph PG-13 for some sexual content and partial nudity. Comedy / Drama / Sport
252. Sarah Silverman: Jesus is Magic Unrated Comedy/Musical
253. Saraband R for brief nudity, language and a violent image.
254. Saving Face R for some sexuality and language. Comedy / Drama / Romance (
255. Saw II R for grisly violence and gore, terror, language and drug content Crime / Horror / Thriller
256. Schultze Gets the Blues PG for mild language. Comedy / Drama / Music
257. Screen Door Jesus R for language and some sexual content. Comedy / Drama / Fantasy
258. Second Best R for language and sexual content. Comedy (released in festivals only...2 in '04, one in '05)
259. Secuesto Express R for strong violence, drug use, sexuality and language Action / Crime / Drama / Thriller
260. Separate Lies R for language including some sexual references. Drama / Romance
261. Serenity PG-13 for sequences of intense violence and action, and some sexual references. Action / Adventure / Sci-Fi / Thriller
262. Shopgirl R for some sexual content and brief language. Drama / Romance

263. Shoujyo festivals only in U.S. in 2005, but released in 2001 in Japan. No rating. Drama
264. Sin City R for sustained strong stylized violence, nudity and sexual content including dialogue Action / Crime / Drama / Thriller
265. Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants PG for thematic elements, some sensuality and language Adventure / Comedy / Drama / Romance
266. The Skeleton Key PG-13 for violence, disturbing images, some partial nudity and thematic material. Drama / Horror / Mystery / Thriller
267. Sky High PG for action violence and some mild language Action / Family / Comedy / Adventure
268. Son of the Mask PG for action, crude and suggestive humor and language. Comedy / Action / Adventure / Fantasy
269. A Sound of Thunder PG-13 for sci-fi violence, partial nudity and language Action / Drama / Sci-Fi / Adventure / Fantasy / Thriller
270. The Squid and the Whale R for strong sexual content, graphic dialogue and language Comedy / Drama
271. Star Wars Episode III PG-13 for sci-fi violence and some intense images. Action / Adventure / Fantasy / Sci-Fi
272. A State of Mind Documentary, unrated in U.S. Festivals only
273. State Property 2 R for pervasive violence and language, strong sexuality and drug content. Musical / Action / Crime / Drama
274. Stay R for language and some disturbing images Drama / Thriller
275. Steal Me Festival only, unrated. Documentary
276. Stealth PG-13 for intense action, some violence, brief strong language and innuendo. Action / Adventure / Sci-Fi / Thriller
277. Steamboy PG-13 for action violence. Animation / Action / Adventure / Sci-Fi / Thriller
278. Streets of Legend R for pervasive language, some violence, sexuality and drug use Action/Drama
279. Suello No info

280. Summer Storm No Info
281. Supercross PG-13 for language and some sexuality.
282. Syriana R for violence and language Drama / Thriller
283. The Thing About my Folks PG-13 for language, including some suggestive references. Comedy
284. The Three Burials of Marquildes Estrada R for language, violence and sexuality. Adventure / Crime / Drama / Western
285. Three Dancing Slaves No rating Drama
286. Three...Extremes R for strong disturbing violent content, some involving abortion and torture, and for sexuality and language. Horror
287. Three of Hearts: a Postmodern Family R for some language. Documentary
288. Tim Burton's Corpse Bride PG for some scary images and action, and brief mild language Animation / Comedy / Family / Fantasy / Musical / Romance
289. Touch the Sound No rating in U.S. Documentary
290. Transamerica R for sexual content, nudity, language and drug use Adventure/Comedy/Drama
291. Transporter 2 PG-13 intense sequences of violent action, sexual content, partial nudity and brief language. Action / Crime / Thriller
292. Travelers & Magicians No U.S. rating Drama/Adventure
293. The Tunnel No info
294. Two for the Money R for pervasive language, a scene of sexuality and a violent act Comedy / Drama / Sport / Thriller
295. Underclassman PG-13 for violence, sexual references, drug material and some teen drinking Action / Comedy / Crime / Drama / Thriller
296. Undiscovered PG-13 for sexual material including dialogue, partial nudity, language and drug content. Comedy / Drama / Music / Romance

297. An Unfinished Life PG-13 for some violence including domestic abuse, and language. Drama
298. Unleashed Rated R for strong violent content, language and some sexuality/nudity.
299. Up for Grabs No rating Comedy/documentary Festival only
300. The Upside of Anger R for language, sexual situations, brief comic violence and some drug use. Drama / Comedy / Romance
301. Ushpizin PG for mild thematic elements. Drama
302. ValiantG No rating reasons
303. VenomR for strong horror violence/gore, and language. Thriller/Horror
304. Viruddh Limited release No rating Drama
305. Waging a Living No rating Limited release Documentary
306. Waiting R for strong crude and sexual humor, pervasive language and some drug use. Comedy
307. A Wake in Providence R for language and some sexual content Comedy
308. Walk on Water R for some language including sexual references, and for brief nudity. Drama
309. Walk the Line PG-13 for some language, thematic material and depiction of drug dependence Biography / Drama / Music / Romance
310. Walking on the Sky Drama No rating
311. Wall No rating Documentary Festival only
312. Wallace & Gromit G
313. Waqt: The Race Against time Limited release Drama No rating
314. War of the Worlds PG-13 for frightening sequences of sci-fi violence and disturbing images Action / Adventure / Sci-Fi / Thriller

315. The War Within R for violent images, some language and nudity.
Drama
316. Wasabi Tuna R for sexual content. Action Comedy
317. The Weather Man R for strong language and sexual content. Comedy
Drama
318. Wedding Crashers R for sexual content/nudity and language. Comedy
Romance
319. The Wedding Date PG-13 for sexual content including dialogue
Comedy Romance
320. Where the Truth Lies R for strong sexuality, nudity, drug use and
language. Drama/Mystery
321. The White Countess PG-13 for some violent images and thematic
elements. Drama
322. White Noise PG-13 for violence, disturbing images and language.
Drama / Horror / Mystery / Sci-Fi / Thriller
323. The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill G Documentary
324. Wolf Creek R for strong gruesome violence, and for
language Adventure / Crime / Horror / Thriller
325. The World's Fastest Indian PG-13 for brief language, drug use and a
sexual reference. Adventure / Biography / Drama / Sport
326. XXX: State of the Union PG-13 for sequences of intense action
violence and some language. Action / Crime / Adventure / Thriller
327. Yes Festivals only R for language and some sexual content.
Drama/Romance
328. Yours, Mine and Ours PG for some mild crude humor. Comedy / Family /
Romance
330. Zathura: A Space Adventure PG for fantasy action and peril, and some
language Action / Adventure / Family

APPENDIX E

Intercoder Reliability Calculations for Content Analysis of 2005 Films

Reliability calculated using Krippendorff's Alpha for the content analysis of 50 films released theatrically in 2005. Figures are based on the results of four coders analyzing eight films. These eight films represent 16% of the total sample (N=50).

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: rating

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 5
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: release

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: indie

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: foreign

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: pri

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 4
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: sec

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 5
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: tertiary

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 6
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: character

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 11
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.635	00.992	00.985	00.970

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: male

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 11
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.635	00.992	00.987	00.989

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: female

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 9
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.495	00.965	00.969	00.955

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: maleGLBT

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: femaleGLBT

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 1
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
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RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: HIV

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: HIVstr

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	2
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: jail

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	3
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: relation

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	8
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.615	00.963	00.967	00.922

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: GLBTrelat

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	1
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
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RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: hand

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 3
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.818	00.849	00.882	00.836

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: GLBThand

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 1
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.818	00.849	00.882	00.836

Variable Name: kiss

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 8
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.481	00.967	00.961	00.978

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: GLBTkiss

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 3
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.517	00.992	00.803	00.890

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: impsex

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 4
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.663	00.933	00.851	00.925

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: GLBTimp
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 3
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.517	00.992	00.803	00.890

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: expsex
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 5
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.481	00.991	00.926	00.949

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: GLBTexp
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 3
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.517	00.992	00.803	00.890

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: innuendo
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 6
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.543	00.784	00.858	00.792

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: partnude
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 2
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: nudity

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: topless

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: scenetop

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: femfull

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: scenefull

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5

Number of Units :	8			
	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: fembutt

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	1
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
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RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: scenefbutt

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	1
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
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RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: malebutt

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	3
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.725	00.982	00.912	00.946

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: scenembutt

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	4
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.736	00.996	00.951	00.958

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: fullfrontal

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 2
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.067	00.067	00.067	00.067

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: scenefullfront

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 3
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.659	00.728	00.882	00.806

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: premarital

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 2
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: adultery

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 2
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: interracial

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 1
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: violence

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: vioscenes

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 10
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.500	00.890	00.859	00.900

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: war

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: box

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.641	00.641	00.641	00.641

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: punch

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: fighting
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 5
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.720	00.914	00.937	00.930

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: chaseYN
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.778	00.778	00.778	00.778

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: chases
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 4
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.818	00.742	00.794	00.747

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: rape

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: torture

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: gore

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.745	00.745	00.745	00.745

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: horror

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: freqvio

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 5
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.567	00.792	00.796	00.755

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: intensityvio

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 4
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: disturb

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 3
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.813	00.885	00.874	00.791

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: fantasyvio

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 3
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: gunshot

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 7
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.494	00.915	00.958	00.925

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: scenegun

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 3
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.594	00.772	00.708	00.751

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: shot

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 3
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.517	00.992	00.803	00.890

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: die

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 6
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.861	00.997	00.979	00.991

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: hurt

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 7
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.720	00.855	00.795	00.858

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: killed

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 7
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.714	00.994	00.968	00.988

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: helldamn

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 8
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.451	00.973	00.957	00.950

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: shit

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	6
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.843	00.997	00.983	00.992

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: fuck

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	6
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.622	00.993	00.956	00.979

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: ass

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	7
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.325	00.905	00.953	00.923

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: bitch

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	5
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.562	00.859	00.930	00.893

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: cunt

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 1
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: dick

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 3
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio

Krippendorff's Alpha 00.659 00.728 00.882 00.806

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: drugsYN

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio

Krippendorff's Alpha 01.000 01.000 01.000 01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: drugscene

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 3
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio

Krippendorff's Alpha 01.000 01.000 01.000 01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: pot

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 5
Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: hard

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	2
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: prescript

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	2
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: cig

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	11
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.375	00.970	00.961	00.977

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: kidsmoke

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	16
Number of kinds of values:	2
Number of Coders:	5
Number of Units :	8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: kidhard

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 2
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: kidpot
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 2
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: alcohol
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 8
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.611	00.978	00.969	00.982

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: kidalco
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 2
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: drugref
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 16
 Number of kinds of values: 2
 Number of Coders: 5
 Number of Units : 8

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

APPENDIX F

Intercoder Reliability Calculations for Content Analysis of MPAA/CARA “rating reasons” (as found on the MPAA and CARA websites) for all films released theatrically in the U.S. in 2005

Reliability calculated using Krippendorff's Alpha. Text-based rating reasons for 40 films from sample were analyzed by two coders, accounting for 12.3% of the total sample (N=325). All variables are nominal values.

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: rating

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 80

Number of kinds of values: 4

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: release

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 80

Number of kinds of values: 3

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: indie

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 80

Number of kinds of values: 2

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: foreign

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	80			
Number of kinds of values:	2			
Number of Coders:	2			
Number of Units :	40			
	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: pri

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	80			
Number of kinds of values:	8			
Number of Coders:	2			
Number of Units :	40			
	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: sec

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	80			
Number of kinds of values:	12			
Number of Coders:	2			
Number of Units :	40			
	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: tert

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	80			
Number of kinds of values:	9			
Number of Coders:	2			
Number of Units :	40			
	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: sexYN

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	68			
Number of kinds of values:	2			
Number of Coders:	2			
Number of Units :	40			
	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: descsex

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 5

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: freqsex

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 5

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: intessex

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 2

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: dist

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 1

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: invkid

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 1

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: including
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68
Number of kinds of values: 1
Number of Coders: 2
Number of Units : 40

Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: innuendo
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 2
Number of Units : 40

Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio

Krippendorff's Alpha 00.908 00.908 00.908 00.908

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: ref
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68
Number of kinds of values: 3
Number of Coders: 2
Number of Units : 40

Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio

Krippendorff's Alpha 00.909 00.938 00.976 00.984

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: desc
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68
Number of kinds of values: 4
Number of Coders: 2
Number of Units : 40

Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio

Krippendorff's Alpha 00.835 00.879 00.941 00.960

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: freqref
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68
Number of kinds of values: 3
Number of Coders: 2
Number of Units : 40

Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio

Krippendorff's Alpha 01.000 01.000 01.000 01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: intesref

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 2

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: rape

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 1

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
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RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: nudity

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 2

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: freqnude

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 3

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: intennude

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 3

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: lang

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 2

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: freqlang

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 3

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: intenlang

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 5

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.816	00.826	00.852	00.888

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: drug

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 2

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: descdrug

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 5

Number of Coders:	2			
Number of Units :	40			
	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: freqdrug

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	68			
Number of kinds of values:	3			
Number of Coders:	2			
Number of Units :	40			
	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.912	00.897	00.882	00.879

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: violenceYN

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	68			
Number of kinds of values:	2			
Number of Coders:	2			
Number of Units :	40			
	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: freqvio

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	68			
Number of kinds of values:	5			
Number of Coders:	2			
Number of Units :	40			
	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: descvio

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	68			
Number of kinds of values:	3			
Number of Coders:	2			
Number of Units :	40			
	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.789	00.806	00.806	00.796

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: intenvio

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values:	68			
Number of kinds of values:	5			
Number of Coders:	2			
Number of Units :	40			
	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	00.893	00.996	00.941	00.929

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: othervio
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
Number of Observed Values: 68
Number of kinds of values: 1
Number of Coders: 2
Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
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RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: action
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
Number of Observed Values: 68
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 2
Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: distimages
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
Number of Observed Values: 68
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 2
Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: horror
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
Number of Observed Values: 68
Number of kinds of values: 2
Number of Coders: 2
Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: boxing
ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 1
 Number of Coders: 2
 Number of Units : 40
 Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: war
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 68
 Number of kinds of values: 1
 Number of Coders: 2
 Number of Units : 40
 Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: creature
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 68
 Number of kinds of values: 1
 Number of Coders: 2
 Number of Units : 40
 Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: thematic
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 68
 Number of kinds of values: 2
 Number of Coders: 2
 Number of Units : 40
 Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio
 Krippendorff's Alpha 01.000 01.000 01.000 01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: mature
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 68
 Number of kinds of values: 2
 Number of Coders: 2
 Number of Units : 40
 Nominal Ordinal Interval Ratio
 Krippendorff's Alpha 01.000 01.000 01.000 01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: rude
 ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA
 Number of Observed Values: 68
 Number of kinds of values: 2
 Number of Coders: 2
 Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
Krippendorff's Alpha	01.000	01.000	01.000	01.000

RELIABILITY V3.12 OUTPUT

Variable Name: quirky

ACCOUNT OF THE RELIABILITY DATA

Number of Observed Values: 68

Number of kinds of values: 1

Number of Coders: 2

Number of Units : 40

	Nominal	Ordinal	Interval	Ratio
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APPENDIX G

Coding form for Content Analysis of Feature Films from 2005

1. Coder
 - 01 Patty
 - 02 Mic
 - 03 Luke
 - 04 Brian
2. Film Coded:
3. Rating of film
 - 01 = G
 - 03 = PG
 - 05 = PG-13
 - 07 = R
 - 09 = NC-17
 - 11 = Unrated
4. Type of U.S. release (IMDB.com as source)
 - 01 = Wide
 - 03 = Limited
 - 05 = Festival Circuit
5. Is this an independent film?
 - 01 = Yes
 - 03 = No
6. Is this a foreign film?
 - 01 = Yes
 - 03 = No
7. What is the primary genre of the film (as listed on IMDB.com)?
 - 01 Action/Adventure
 - 02 Animation
 - 03 Biography
 - 04 Comedy
 - 05 Crime
 - 06 Documentary
 - 07 Drama
 - 08 Fantasy/Sci Fi
 - 09 Family
 - 10 Film Noir
 - 11 History
 - 12 Horror
 - 13 Music/Musical
 - 14 Mystery
 - 15 Romance
 - 16 Thriller
 - 17 War
 - 18 Western

8. What is the secondary genre?

- 01 Action/Adventure
- 02 Animation
- 03 Biography
- 04 Comedy
- 05 Crime
- 06 Documentary
- 07 Drama
- 08 Fantasy/Sci-Fi
- 09 Family
- 10 Film Noir
- 11 History
- 12 Horror
- 13 Music/Musical
- 14 Mystery
- 15 Romance
- 16 Thriller
- 17 War
- 18 Western
- 19 None

9. What is the tertiary genre?

- 01 Action/Adventure
- 02 Animation
- 03 Biography
- 04 Comedy
- 05 Crime
- 06 Documentary
- 07 Drama
- 08 Fantasy/Sci Fi
- 09 Family
- 10 Film Noir
- 11 History
- 12 Horror
- 13 Music/Musical
- 14 Mystery
- 15 Romance
- 16 Thriller
- 17 War
- 18 Western
- 19 None

Gender:

- 10. What is the total number of characters featured in this film? (based on imdb printouts)
- 11. How many male characters? (check gender of characters on imdb list provided)
- 12. How many female characters? (check gender of characters on imdb list provided)

Sexual Orientation

- 13. How many male gay/bi/transgendered/transsexual characters are featured in this film?
- 14. How many female/lesbian/transgendered/transsexual characters?
- 15. Are any characters in this film HIV positive/have AIDS?
 - 01 Yes
 - 02 No
- 16. If so, are any of the HIV positive characters "straight"?
 - 01 Yes
 - 02 No
 - 99 There are no HIV positive characters

17. How many characters are arrested, go to jail, are in jail, or are convicted of a crime? Count each character only once.
18. How many “straight” characters are depicted in some sort of committed or marital relationship?
19. How many “GLBT” characters are depicted in some sort of committed or marital relationship?

Sexual Content

20. How many scenes in this film depicted characters holding hands?
21. How many of those scenes involved GLBT characters?
22. How many scenes in this film depicted characters kissing/petting/making out?
23. How many of those scenes involved GLBT characters?
24. How many scenes in this film depicted implied sexual behaviors? (This includes intercourse, oral sex that is not explicitly portrayed. It may be a couple in bed together before or after sex, something happening under a blanket, sound effects that imply sexual behavior, etc)
25. How many of those scenes involved GLBT characters?
26. How many scenes in this film depicted explicit sexual behaviors? (including intercourse and oral sex, but the behavior is portrayed explicitly on camera)
27. How many of those scenes involved GLBT characters?
28. How many scenes include some sort of sexual reference (discussion of sexual behaviors) or sexual humor (sex jokes, etc)?

Nudity

29. Does this film contain any partial nudity? (men topless don't count)
 - 01 Yes
 - 02 No
30. Does this film contain any full nudity? (characters who are completely naked)
 - 01 Yes
 - 02 No
31. How many female characters are portrayed topless?
32. How many scenes feature females topless?
33. How many female characters are portrayed fully nude?
34. How many scenes of full female nudity are included in this film?
35. How many female characters are shown with a bare bottom?
36. How many scenes of females with bare bottoms are shown?
37. How many male characters are portrayed with a bare bottom?
38. How many scenes of males with a bare bottom are included in this film?
39. How many male characters are depicted fully nude (full frontal) in this film?
40. How many scenes depict male characters fully nude?

Other relationships

41. Is premarital sex depicted in this film?
 - 01 Yes
 - 02 No
42. Are any adulterous relationships depicted in this film?
 - 01 Yes
 - 02 No
43. Are any interracial sexual/dating relationships depicted in this film?
 - 01 Yes
 - 02 No

Violence

44. Is there any violence in this film?
01 Yes
02 No
45. What is the total number of violent scenes in this film? (ANY kind of physical violence, not including verbal abuse, etc)
46. Did this film include scenes of warfare/battle scenes
01 Yes
02 No
47. Did this film include scenes of martial arts action or boxing violence?
01 Yes
02 No
48. Did this film include scenes of punching or slapping?
01 Yes
02 No
49. How many scenes of fighting of any kind are included in this film (with or without weapons)?
50. Are there chase scenes of any kind in this movie?
01 Yes
02 No
51. How many chase scenes are featured in this film?
52. Are there any rapes portrayed in this film?
01 Yes
02 No
53. Are there scenes of torture in this film?
01 Yes
02 No
54. Does this film contain any gore?
01 Yes
02 No
55. Does this film contain any scenes of horror or terror?
01 Yes
02 No
56. How would you characterize frequency of the violence in this film?
01 One scene/incident
02 Brief or "some"
03 Recurring
04 Pervasive
05 None
57. How would you characterize the intensity of the violence in this film?
01 Mild
02 Medium
03 Strong/Intense
04 None

58. Would you characterize the violence as disturbing/sadistic/brutal/gruesome?
 01 Yes
 02 No
59. Would you characterize the violence as comedic or fantasy violence?
 01 Yes
 02 No
60. How many gunshots were fired during the course of the film?
61. How many scenes included gunfire during the course of the film?
62. How many characters were shot during the film? (The character does not necessarily die from the wounds, but is shot)
63. How many characters die during the course of this film?
64. How many characters are physically hurt in some way in this film (but do NOT die)?
65. How many characters die at the hands of another character (murders, homicides, accidents, etc. Do not count anyone who dies of natural causes)?

Language

Count the number of times the following words are spoken by any character within the film:

66. hell or damn (including goddamn)
 67. shit or any derivative
 68. fuck, motherfucker, any derivative
 69. ass/jackass, other derivative of ass
 70. bitch or SOB
 71. cunt/pussy
 72. dick/cock/prick

Please note any other words or phrases that seem inappropriate on the coding sheet.

Drug Use/References:

73. Does this film include any sort of illegal drug use?
 01 Yes
 02 No
74. How many scenes of illegal drug use are included in the film?
75. How many scenes of pot-smoking?
76. How many scenes of "hard drug" use (including heroin, cocaine, LSD, methamphetamine, ecstasy)?
77. Does this film include scenes of prescription drug abuse?
 01 Yes
 02 No
78. How many scenes include cigarettes/cigar smoking?
79. Are children/teens depicted smoking?
 01 Yes
 02 No

80. Are children/teens depicted using hard drugs?
 01 Yes
 02 No
81. Are children/teens depicted smoking pot?
 01 Yes
 02 No
82. How many scenes of drinking alcoholic beverages are included in this film?
83. Are children/teens depicted drinking alcoholic beverages?
 01 Yes
 02 No
84. Are there references to drug use or drug humor in this film?
 01 Yes
 02 No

Coding form for Content Analysis of MPAA Rating Reasons

2. Coder
 01 Patty
 02 Mic
 03 Other
3. Film/Case Number
4. Rating of film
 01 = G
 03 = PG
 05 = PG-13
 07 = R
 09 = NC-17
 11 = Unrated
5. Type of U.S. release (IMDB.com as source)
 01 = Wide
 03 = Limited
 05 = Festival Circuit
6. Is this an independent film?
 01 = Yes
 03 = No
7. Is this a foreign film?
 01 = Yes
 03 = No
8. What is the primary genre of the film (as listed on IMDB.com)?
 01 Action/Adventure
 02 Animation
 03 Biography
 04 Comedy
 05 Crime

- 06 Documentary
- 07 Drama
- 08 Fantasy/Sci Fi
- 09 Family
- 10 Film Noir
- 11 History
- 12 Horror
- 13 Music/Musical
- 14 Mystery
- 15 Romance
- 16 Thriller
- 17 War
- 18 Western

9. What is the secondary genre?

- 01 Action/Adventure
- 02 Animation
- 03 Biography
- 04 Comedy
- 05 Crime
- 06 Documentary
- 07 Drama
- 08 Fantasy/Sci-Fi
- 09 Family
- 10 Film Noir
- 11 History
- 12 Horror
- 13 Music/Musical
- 14 Mystery
- 15 Romance
- 16 Thriller
- 17 War
- 18 Western
- 19 None

10. What is the tertiary genre?

- 01 Action/Adventure
- 02 Animation
- 03 Biography
- 04 Comedy
- 05 Crime
- 06 Documentary
- 07 Drama
- 08 Fantasy/Sci Fi
- 09 Family
- 10 Film Noir
- 11 History
- 12 Horror
- 13 Music/Musical
- 14 Mystery
- 15 Romance
- 16 Thriller
- 17 War
- 18 Western
- 19 None

The next several questions deal with what descriptors are used in the “rating reasons” explanation available from CARA, The MPAA, and IMDB.com.

11. Is any type of sexual content, sexuality or sensuality included in the rating reasons? (This does NOT include sexual references or humor)
 - 01 Yes
 - 02 No
12. How was the sexual content described in the rating reasons?
 - 01 Sex
 - 02 Sexual
 - 03 Sensuality
 - 04 Suggestive material
 - 05 Other
13. How was the frequency of the sexual content described?
 - 01 “a” or “one” (scene, etc)
 - 02 “a couple of”
 - 03 Some
 - 04 Pervasive
 - 05 No frequency descriptor
 - 06 Other
14. How was the intensity described in the rating reasons?
 - 01 Mild
 - 02 Strong
 - 03 Crude
 - 04 Explicit
 - 05 Graphic
 - 06 No descriptor
 - 07 Other
15. Was the sexual content described as disturbing or aberrant?
 - 01 Yes
 - 02 No
16. Did the rating reason include sexual content of some sort that involved children or teens?
 - 01 Yes
 - 02 No
17. Did the rating reason say “including...”
 - 01 Dialogue
 - 02 Some dialogue
 - 03 Graphic images
 - 04 No
 - 05 Other
18. Was sexual innuendo, sexual humor, or sexual references included as a rating reason?
 - 01 Yes
 - 02 No
19. Was the reference described as...
 - 01 Sexual
 - 02 Suggestive
 - 03 Other

20. How was the descriptor worded?
- 01 Language
 - 02 Reference(s)
 - 03 Humor
 - 04 Innuendo
 - 05 Other
21. How was the frequency of the sexual reference described?
- 01 "a" or "one"
 - 02 Brief
 - 03 Pervasive/throughout
 - 04 Other
 - 05 None
22. How was the intensity of the sexual reference described?
- 01 Strong
 - 02 Crude
 - 03 Other
 - 04 None
23. Was rape included in the rating reasons?
- 01 Yes
 - 02 No
24. Was nudity included in the rating reasons?
- 01 Yes
 - 02 No
25. If so, how was the frequency of the nudity categorized?
- 01 "a" or "one" (scene)
 - 02 Brief
 - 03 Some
 - 04 Pervasive
 - 05 No descriptor for frequency
 - 06 Other
26. What was the descriptor for the intensity of the nudity?
- 01 Partial
 - 02 Explicit
 - 03 Graphic
 - 04 Full
 - 05 Other
 - 06 No descriptor for intensity
27. Was language a rating reason?
- 01 Yes
 - 02 No
28. If so, how is the frequency of the language categorized?
- 01 "a" or "one"
 - 02 Brief
 - 03 Pervasive
 - 04 Throughout
 - 05 Other
 - 06 No descriptor for frequency

28. How was the intensity of the foul language described?
- 07 Light/mild
 - 08 Crude/rude
 - 09 Stong
 - 10 Explicity
 - 11 No descriptor for intensity
 - 12 Other
29. Is drug use a reason for the film's rating?
- 01 Yes
 - 02 No
30. Which of the terms is used to describe the drug use?
- 01 Use
 - 02 Dependence
 - 03 Content
 - 04 Material
 - 05 Drinking
 - 06 Partying
 - 07 Other
31. How was the frequency of the drug use described in the rating reasons?
- 01 "a" or "one"
 - 02 Some
 - 03 Brief
 - 04 Pervasive
 - 05 Throughout
 - 06 Other
 - 07 No frequency descriptor
32. Is violence mentioned as a rating reason?
- 01 Yes
 - 02 No
33. How is the frequency of the violence described?
- 01 "A" or "an" or "one"
 - 02 Some
 - 03 Brief
 - 04 Pervasive
 - 05 Throughout
 - 06 No adjective
 - 07 Other
34. Is the violent content described as one of the following?
- 01 Violence
 - 02 Content
 - 03 images
 - 04 action
 - 05 sequence(s)
 - 06 act
35. How is the intensity of the violence described?
- 01 Mild
 - 02 Fantasy or Sci-fi
 - 03 Frightening
 - 04 Intense
 - 05 Disturbing

- 06 Violent
- 07 Strong
- 08 Comic
- 09 Brutal
- 10 Sadistic
- 11 Other
- 12 No intensity descriptor

36. Were any of the following descriptors included in the rating reasons?

- 01 Stylized
- 02 Demonic
- 03 Battle/warfare/martial arts

37. Is action or peril included as a rating reason?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

38. Are disturbing images/frightening sequences included in the rating reasons?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

39. Are horror and/or gore included in the rating reasons?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

40. Is boxing violence included as a rating reason?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

41. Are war or battle sequences included as a rating season?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

42. Was creature violence or fantasy violence mentioned as a rating reason?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

43. Were “thematic elements” mentioned in the rating reasons?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

44. Were “mature situations” mentioned in the rating reasons?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

45. Was “rude behavior” mentioned in the rating reasons?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

46. Was the term “quirky situations” mentioned in the rating reasons?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

APPENDIX H

Focus Group Questions and Card Sort Descriptions

1. How familiar are you with the MPAA ratings?
2. Do you use the MPAA ratings when deciding on a movie to watch? Do you use the ratings just for your children, or for your own movie-going decisions? Do you use the ratings when you go to see a movie at the theater? At home when watching a movie on cable TV? Or when renting a movie?
3. What limitations do you place on your children's movie viewing in terms of ratings, if any? Are there films of a certain rating that they are not allowed to watch?
4. What types of content do you want to shield your children from? Violent content, sexual content, profanity, drug use, cigarette smoking or drinking, etc?
5. Why do you want to shield your children from those types of content? Do you feel the films will cause your child harm? Do you just find it offensive? Do you think your child might imitate the behavior? Will the content influence their value systems/morals?
6. What types of content would you expect to see or NOT to see in a G rated film? PG? PG-13? R? NC-17? Unrated?
7. (The rating of these examples may be done during the implementation of the pre-focus group questionnaire). We're going to do something a bit different now. You're going to be given a number of examples of movie content descriptions and you'll be asked to "rate" the films as you see fit based upon the descriptions of the content. You should rate each film on your own (independently). When you're done, we'll discuss our individual results with the group.

Card sorts will read as follows:

Example A: An animated film that features forest animals that can talk and possess human qualities. The film contains no profanity or sexual content, but does include some animated/fantasy violence (a tree falls on a rabbit, a deer shoots another animal, etc). There is also one scene in which one of the animals smokes a cigarette. How would you rate this film?

G PG PG-13 R NC-17

Example B: A gay male couple is depicted living together. The film revolves around their attempt to adopt a child and their early years raising the child. There is no sexual content, profanity, violence or drug use. How would you rate this film?

G PG PG-13 R NC-17

Example C: A twenty-something couple and their friends are depicted in this comedy which includes partial nudity, sexual innuendo and some mild profanity. There is no violence or drug use. How would you rate this film?

G PG PG-13 R NC-17

Example D: A thriller/action film about a CIA agent that needs to stop a group of Russians from launching a nuclear missile at the United States. The film includes violent content, including shootings, the use of automatic weaponry and military weaponry, hand-to-hand combat, and a fairly high body count. Profanity is used. There is no nudity or sexual content, nor is there any drug use. How would you rate this film?

G PG PG-13 R NC-17

Example E: A war film that tries to recreate a battle from WWII. There is rather realistic violent content that revolves around the recreation of the battle, as well as profanity. There is no sexual content, nudity, or drug use. Some soldiers are depicted smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol. How would you rate this film?

G PG PG-13 R NC-17

Example F: A romantic drama that revolves around the steamy relationship between a man and woman in their early thirties. The movie follows them through their relationship, filled with ups and downs. The film includes nudity, mild profanity, and sexual dialogue. There is no violence or drug use depicted.

G PG PG-13 R NC-17

Example G: A quirky teen comedy that includes drug use and drinking. There is also some mild profanity. There is no sexual content or violence. How would you rate this film?

G PG PG-13 R NC-17

Now, let's discuss our results, starting with example A. First, let's see what you all rated the film. Please keep in mind there are no right or wrong answers, this is all based on your opinions. So, when we discuss how you rated each of the films, please let us know the rating you marked on your form, regardless of whether others agreed with you or not. Keeping that in mind, who rated Example A "G"? PG? PG-13? R? NC-17? Now, let's discuss why you chose the rating you did. Who would like to start?

((The discussion will continue through all 7 examples. The moderator will prompt each participant to discuss why they chose the rating they did))

8. Do you feel the ratings give you enough information about what types of content are included in a film, or would you like more specific information?
9. Do you use other rating systems or resources when deciding on which films your kids are allowed to see? How did you hear about or find the other sources of film content information?
10. If it were up to you, would you change the current rating system, or would you leave it as is? What would you change? What do you like most? What do you like least about the current rating system?
11. Is there anything any of you would like to add to the conversation regarding the film ratings?

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