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Do you understand the TV Parental Guidelines?

Do you know what the following ratings stand for?

FV:

D:

If you don't know that FV stands for "fantasy violence" and D stands for "sexual dialogue and innuendo," you are not alone. Research shows that *hardly any* parents know what they stand for.

I have spent my entire academic career studying the impact of the media on children and adolescents, with specific emphasis on the effects of violence, sex, and scary content, and on how parents can mitigate the well-established negative effects of these types of content. Part of this research has been specifically devoted to rating systems and their effects.

Over the years, much academic research has shown that most parents don't understand the TV rating system and very few use the V-chip, which was supposed to help them block inappropriate content. Since ratings are self-applied and the Oversight Board is dominated by members of the TV industry, we continue to have a fox-guarding-the-henhouse situation.

It is clear from decades of research that exposure to television can have harmful effects on children and that parents need and deserve fair and objective information about the content of programs their children might be exposed to.

Therefore, it is high time to set up a mechanism to update our knowledge of:

- how accurately ratings are being applied;

- who the members of the Oversight Board are and whose interests they are serving;

- how well parents understand the ratings;

- and how well or poorly the ratings are helping parents guide their children's viewing into safe and healthful options

It is up to parents to provide an emotionally and physically healthy environment for their children. But the results of this review must be used to modify the current system to give parents effective tools to accomplish this task. Such a system should not be dominated by the entertainment industry, and it should include the input of independent experts who understand the impact of the media on children.

Here are a few of my relevant publications:

Bushman, B. J., & Cantor, J. (2003). Media ratings for violence and sex: Implications for policymakers and parents. *American Psychologist, 58,* 130-141.

Cantor, J. (1998). *"Mommy, I’m scared": How TV and movies frighten children and what we can do to protect them.* San Diego: Harvest Books/Harcourt Brace.

Cantor, J., Stutman, S., & Duran, V. (1996, November 21). *What parents want in a television rating system: Results of a national survey*. Report released on Capitol Hill. Also presented at ICA and APA conventions, 1997. http://yourmindonmedia.com/wp-content/uploads/parent\_survey.pdf