"TV-G, General Audience ... most parents would find this program suitable for all ages"; "TV-PG, Parental Guidance Suggested ... some parents would find unsuitable for younger children"; "TV-14, Parents Strongly Cautioned ... many parents would find unsuitable for children under 14"; and "TV-M, Mature Audiences Only ... may be unsuitable for children under 17." The important similarity between the new ratings and the MPAA ratings is that they both give parental guidelines for viewing by different age groups and they both do not tell specifically what type of potentially inappropriate content is in a program.

Television networks and cable channels began using the new ratings in January of 1997. They promised to conduct focus groups and commission quantitative studies to determine "whether the Guidelines are in fact providing useful information to parents," and agreed "to consider any needed changes to them" (Ratings Implementation Group, 1997).

Previous Research on Ratings and Advisories

The idea of providing warnings or ratings for television programs has been in the public consciousness for a long time, and support for the idea has mushroomed in the past few years. In 1973, for example, a nationwide *TV Guide* survey reported that 55% of those questioned were in favor of a rating system for television programming (Wurtzel & Surlin, 1978). By 1995, a *New York Times* poll reported that 84% of adults and 91% of parents thought that television programs should have ratings (Federman, 1996).

Before the National Television Violence Study, there was surprisingly little research regarding the impact or effectiveness of ratings and advisories. The few studies that had been conducted are described here. A major issue has been whether advisories and ratings have their intended effect, that is, to prevent people from seeing content that they wish to avoid, and to help parents protect their children from being exposed to problematic content. There has been concern that these labels might have a "boomerang" effect, that is, that they might make the content seem more interesting and exciting and attract a larger audience.

A study by Wurtzel and Surlin (1978) reported a random survey of attitudes toward viewer advisories among adults in Athens, Georgia in 1976. In their study, only 24% of respondents stated that television advisories had influenced them in deciding whether to watch a show. Interestingly, 39% of those who had been influenced reported that the advisory resulted in their not watching the show, but 24% said that the advisory made them watch the show with increased interest. Furthermore, Wurtzel and Surlin found that more than half of the respondents with children (54%) stated that the warnings had influenced their decisions about their child's viewing. The overwhelming majority (81%) of the parents who had been influenced said they had not let their children watch the program, and most of the remainder said that although they had let their children watch, they had watched the program with them.

As for the actual effects of violence ratings and advisories, that is, whether they decrease or increase exposure, previous research findings were decidedly mixed. A study

published by Herman and Leyens (1977) reported data on Belgian television viewership between 1972 and 1975. This study looked at televised movies only, and compared the audience size for movies broadcast with violence advisories to those broadcast with sex advisories and without advisories. Their main finding was that films carrying violence or sex advisories had larger audiences than those without them. Although these data might seem to support the notion that advisories attract viewers, this conclusion cannot be drawn with confidence, because the study did not isolate the effect of content from the effect of advisories. It could very well be that the programs were watched more because they contained violence and sex, not because they were broadcast with an advisory.

A publication by Austin (1980) reported on a laboratory experiment in which high school students were presented with a series of fictitious film titles and plot synopses. For different students, the same film was associated with different MPAA ratings ("G," "PG," "R," or "X"). According to Austin's report of the findings, the ratings had no significant impact on students' desire to see the films.

A third study of the effect of advisories, an experiment by Christenson (1992), examined the effect of parental advisory labels for popular music albums ("Parental advisory: Explicit lyrics"). In this study, adolescents gave lower evaluations of music from albums displaying advisory labels than of the same music from albums without such labels, and they reported less interest in purchasing the labeled albums.

The conflicting findings of these three studies left us knowing very little about the impact of violence ratings and advisories on adult and child viewers' attraction to or

avoidance of television programming. A recent study reported by Hamilton (1994) began to remedy this situation by using regression analysis to determine the factors that made significant contributions to the Nielsen ratings of movies broadcast on network television between 1987 and 1993. In his analysis, Hamilton included a variety of characteristics that are known to have an impact on the rating a program receives, such as its scheduling, the rating of the show preceding it, and the manner in which it was described and categorized in *TV Guide*. Hamilton's major finding was that the presence of a viewer discretion warning was associated with a significant reduction in Nielsen ratings among viewers in the 2- to 11-year-old category. These advisories had no significant impact on the size of the teen or adult audience, however. This study represents the first successful demonstration that viewer discretion advisories can serve one of their major intended purposes, that is, to shield some of the youngest and most impressionable children from exposure to controversial content, without either increasing or reducing the size of the audience in other age groups.

A study such as Hamilton's, involving aggregate data, can tell us only about the end result of a process by which children are exposed to or protected from exposure to movies on TV. What we cannot tell from such a study is how the reduction in child audience size was brought about. Did parents make decisions about their child's exposure by themselves, or were children involved in the decision to avoid these movies? It is possible that parents and children made their decisions in concert, but it is also possible that parents made these decisions unilaterally. Some of the questions that remain

unaddressed, therefore, are whether or not children knew about the advisories at all; whether, if they did, they understood what they meant; and further, whether the advisories had any effect on the children's desire to see the movies.

Do Ratings and Advisories Affect Children's Viewing Choices?

The main thrust of the research at the Madison site was to investigate the effect of advisories and ratings on children's desire to see programs associated with them. Although it is commonly agreed that ratings and advisories are directed at adults to permit them to protect their children or themselves from objectionable content, it is difficult to ignore the question of how these messages affect children. Children's viewing decisions are often made in the absence of the parent, and anecdotal evidence suggests that children are aware of advisories and ratings. It is therefore important to determine the impact of ratings and advisories on children themselves.

For the first year of the project period, we looked at those ratings and advisories that seemed most prevalent on television. We tested four advisories: "Parental discretion advised," "Contains some violent content; Parental discretion advised," "Viewer discretion advised," and "Contains some violent content; Viewer discretion advised." We also included the four major MPAA ratings that are associated with movies shown on television: "G: General audiences," "PG: Parental guidance suggested," "PG-13: Parents strongly cautioned," and "R: Restricted."

The participants were 297 schoolchildren in Madison, Wisconsin, who received parental permission to participate. The students were recruited from 3 schools and 10 after-school programs. They ranged in age from 5 to 14 years. Many of the analyses compared subjects in two age groups. The "younger" group was composed of children between the ages of five and nine years (N=159; 55% male). The "older" group was composed of children between 10 and 14 (N=138; 42% male). The overwhelming majority of the children were Caucasian.

Children in first and second grades were interviewed individually by groups of trained interviewers. The older children were tested in groups of four to eight by two research assistants, with the exception of one middle school, whose students were tested simultaneously by two research assistants as one large group. In all cases, children were told not to put their names on any of the booklets, and were assured that their answers would be completely anonymous.

After they filled out a background questionnaire (to be described in a later section), children filled out a five-page mock channel guide. They were instructed to choose one program to view from among the three described on each page. They were told that they would be shown a video clip after completing the questionnaire, and that their viewing choices would help the researchers decide which video clip to show.

The first page of listings described three reality-based crime shows with fictitious names, each associated with a short description of the plot of an episode (e.g., "A gun dealer who is selling illegal firearms is taken into custody after a shoot-out"). Children

were told that all the programs were real, but that some were not currently being broadcast locally. In every booklet, one of the three programs and its description was followed by an advisory that read "Parental discretion advised" (parental advisory) or "Contains some violent content; parental discretion advised" (parental violence advisory). The program that contained an advisory was randomly varied, as were the advisory version (with or without the mention of violent content) and the order of the show descriptions.

The third page of listings described three crime dramas with fictitious names, also followed by episode descriptions. One of these descriptions was followed by an advisory that read "Viewer discretion advised" (viewer advisory) or "Contains some violent content; viewer discretion advised" (viewer violence advisory). Again, the show description containing the advisory was randomly varied, as were the advisory version and the order of presentation of the show descriptions.

The fifth page of listings described three feature-length movies whose names and plot descriptions contained both real and fictional elements. The titles were "Hidden Island," "Cold River," and "The Moon-Spinners." The descriptions for "Hidden Island" and "Cold River" were always followed by the MPAA rating "PG: Parental guidance suggested." The MPAA rating for "The Moon-Spinners" was randomly varied to read one of four ways: G: General audiences," "PG: Parental guidance suggested," "PG-13: Parents strongly cautioned," or "R: Restricted." As on the first and third pages, the order of presentation of the movie descriptions was randomly varied.

Pages 2 and 4 of the booklet contained the names of real programs, and no advisories and ratings were mentioned. The program choices on these pages were not analyzed.

Children's Viewing Selections

Parental discretion advisories. To determine whether the presence of the advisories "Parental discretion advised" or "Contains some violent content; parental discretion advised" influenced children's choices of reality-action programs, the percentage of children choosing the program with an advisory was compared to what would be expected by chance (33%). Analyses were performed to determine the patterns of interest in programs with parental advisories in the four age-by-sex groupings, that is, younger girls, younger boys, older girls, and older boys. These patterns are displayed in Figure 1. The data revealed that younger and older girls were highly similar, with 27% and 28%, respectively, choosing a program with a parental advisory. These responses were not significantly different from what would be expected by chance. In contrast, boys showed more interest in programs with parental advisories. Although more than one-third of both younger and older boys chose such shows, the preference of older boys was much stronger. Thirty-nine percent of the younger boys, but 51% of the older boys, chose a program with a parental advisory. Binomial tests revealed the percent for the older boys to be significantly different from chance ($p<.01$). When the data were analyzed by gender of participant, collapsing age, it was found that the percentage for all boys was significantly higher than chance levels ($p=.01$) as well.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

The two versions of the parental advisory (mentioning violence vs. not mentioning violence) were also analyzed separately. These analyses showed that the two types of parental advisories exerted highly similar effects, with 35% of subjects choosing a program with the parental advisory and 36% choosing a program when it had the parental violence advisory. The only real difference between the effects of the two forms of the parental advisory was that the difference between boys and girls was larger for the parental violence advisory (47% vs. 25%, respectively) than for the parental advisory that did not mention violence (40% vs. 30%). The former comparison was significant ($X^2(2, N=143)=6.47$, $p<.01$).

Viewer discretion advisories. Next, the "viewer discretion advised" warnings from the third page of the TV booklet were analyzed in the same fashion. As can be seen from Figure 2, overall, 27% of the children chose a drama associated with one of the two forms of viewer discretion advisories, and this percent was lower than what would be expected by chance, approaching significance ($p=.07$).

The data within the four age-by-sex groupings are also shown in Figure 2. As the figure shows, younger girls chose programs with a viewer discretion advisory at the lowest rate (21%) and this rate was significantly different from chance ($p<.05$). Moreover, when the patterns for both genders were looked at, collapsing age, the proportion of girls choosing a program with a viewer advisory (24%) was significantly

lower than chance expectations ($p<.05$). In contrast, viewer discretion advisories did not significantly affect boys' interest in the programs.

Insert Figure 2 about here.

When the two forms of the viewer advisory were compared, there was no significant difference between advisories with and without the mention of violence.

MPAA ratings. The data from children's choices of movie as a function of its MPAA rating revealed that the pattern of choices for girls differed significantly from that for boys, and the pattern for older children differed significantly from that for younger children ($p<.01$ for both). Figures 3a through 3d show the patterns of choice within the four age-by-gender groupings. These figures show that for younger girls, there was a decreasing tendency to choose the movie as its rating became more restrictive. For younger boys and older girls, interest in the movie peaked at "PG-13," and fell off dramatically with the "R" rating. In sharp contrast, for older boys, interest in the movie was strongest in the two more restrictive rating categories. It seems particularly remarkable that in this group, not one of the boys who were told the movie was rated "G" chose it, but 53% of those who were told it was rated "PG-13," and 50% of those who were told it was rated "R" wanted to see it. (For this group, $X^2(3, N=56)=9.02$, $p<.05$, Cramer's $V=.40$).

Insert Figures 3a through 3d about here.

What Explains Children's Choices?

The results of the main experimental project indicate unequivocally that ratings and advisories can have a significant impact on children's choices of programs and movies on television. Precisely what that impact is depends on a number of things, including aspects of the advisory or rating and the age and sex of the child making the choices.

The well known admonition "parental discretion advised" had a strong and positive effect on boys' interest in viewing reality-action programs, and the effect was strongest for boys in the older group. This same advisory had no impact on girls' tendency to choose such programs. In contrast, another frequently used advisory, "viewer discretion advised," did not increase boys' interest in viewing crime dramas, and it decreased girls' (and especially younger girls') choices of such programs.

The MPAA ratings "G," "PG," "PG-13," and "R" also strongly affected children's desire to see a movie. Older boys were especially interested in the target movie when it was rated "PG-13" or "R" and completely avoided it when it was rated "G." In contrast, younger girls were most interested in the movie when it was rated "G." For older girls and younger boys, interest in the movie peaked when it was rated "PG-13."

These intriguing and diverse effects warrant explanation, and two possible rationales suggest themselves. One could be called the "forbidden fruit" hypothesis, which involves the psychological notion of "reactance" (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). Reactance theory posits that when people perceive that their freedom is being restricted,

they are motivated to restore their freedom by performing the restricted behavior. This process has been invoked by Bushman and Stack (1996) to explain the results they observed when college students showed increased interest in movies with warning labels. It is possible that in our study, those children who showed more interest in programs labeled "parental discretion advised" and movies with the more restrictive MPAA ratings were reacting against these implied threats to their freedom of choice. It may well be, then, that these ratings are perceived as saying "this is not for you," or "this is not for kids," or "you're too young to see this."

The other explanation, which we will refer to as the "information hypothesis," contends that restrictive ratings and advisories simply provide information about content. According to this reasoning, these labels imply that a violent show has more violence or more intense violence than one without a label. Therefore, those viewers who want to see violence choose fare with such labels to obtain access to the content they desire. It may be, then, that programs advertised with advisories and more restrictive ratings are sought out by some children because they are expected to be more violent.

Children's Interpretations of Advisories and Ratings

Although the design of the first year of research did not permit definitive answers on this issue, our selective exposure experiment did provide some data that are relevant to these explanations. At the end of the session, after viewing and rating scenes from one of the movies that had been described in their channel guide, children filled out a questionnaire assessing their interpretations of the advisories and ratings that had been

involved in the selective-exposure questionnaire. Each child's booklet contained one advisory and one MPAA rating. These messages were selected at random for each booklet, and thus the advisory and rating the child responded to were not necessarily the same ones he or she had seen earlier.

Perceived meaning of labels. For each discretion advisory, children were asked to choose the phrase that came closest to the meaning of the message. They chose between the following four possible meanings: "people shouldn't watch," "kids need a grownup's permission to watch," "parents should be careful in deciding whether to let their kids watch," or "people should be careful in deciding whether to watch." These choices were included predominantly to test comprehension (with the third and fourth choices representing the correct response for the parental and viewer advisories, respectively). However, it is possible to look at children's answers on these measures for clues to the processes underlying their viewing choices.

In terms of the reactance notion, all four advisories imply some restriction on who should see the program. However, one obvious difference between the parental and the viewer advisory is that the parental advisory is a message that bypasses children entirely and urges parents to protect their children. In contrast, the viewer advisory addresses the viewers directly and exhorts them to make their own decisions. Perhaps boys' and particularly older boys' attraction to programs with parental advisories was based in part on their rebellion against a message they perceived as treating them like children.

Figures 4a and 4b display children's choices of meanings for the parental and viewer advisories, respectively. Although we cannot tie a particular child's choice to his or her perception of the advisory, we did observe that older children made a distinction between the two types of advisory in terms of the degree of parental involvement in the decision. This distinction was not made by the younger children. For example, for "parental discretion advised," 93% of the older children chose an option that implied parental control (either "kids need a grownup's permission to watch," or "parents should be careful in deciding whether to let their kids watch"), while 70% chose these options for "viewer discretion advised." The difference between these two percentages is predominantly due to a reduction in the number of children who chose "kids need a grownup's permission to watch." Moreover, among older children, more than four times as many chose the implicitly "autonomous" answer ("people should be careful in deciding ...") for the viewer advisory than for the parental advisory (22% vs. 5%). Younger children seem not to have been consciously aware of this difference between the two forms of the advisory. They chose options involving parental guidance equally for "parental" (75%) and "viewer" (78%) discretion, and they chose the option involving autonomy equally for the two versions ("parental," 10%, "viewer," 8%).

Insert Figures 4a and 4b about here.

In responding to the question regarding the meaning of the four MPAA ratings, children could choose among the following five answers: "anyone can watch," "parents should decide whether their kids can watch," "parents should be very careful about letting

their kids watch," "kids shouldn't watch without a parent," and "no kids are allowed to watch." Again, although these choices were involved to assess comprehension of the literal meaning of the message, they can be evaluated in terms of their degree of implied restrictiveness. The children's choices, broken down by age group, are displayed in Figures 5a through 5d. In general, the older children showed a basic understanding of the meaning of these ratings, with the highest percentage of children always choosing the option that involved the correct meaning. The most striking aspect of these responses seems to be that 100% of the older children chose "anyone can watch" as the meaning of the "G" rating. Perhaps the knowledge that there were no restrictions at all on "G"-rated movies led older children, and especially older boys, to avoid them. Only 50% of the younger children knew that "G" means "anyone can watch," and this group seems to have been responding almost at random to the choices for the other three ratings.

Insert Figures 5a through 5d about here.

In general, then, there is some evidence that is consistent with the notion that reactance could have occurred for some of the older children in making their choices. Older children perceived a greater level of parental involvement and a lesser amount of viewer autonomy in the "parental" than the "viewer" advisory. Older children also perceived the "G" rating to imply no restrictions and saw restrictiveness to increase with the other ratings, particularly with "PG-13" and "R."

Expectations of content. For each advisory and each MPAA rating, children were also given a list of 13 types of content, many of which were violent (e.g., punching,

shooting) and were asked to circle all those things that they would expect to see in a program that was preceded by that advisory or rating. By examining these content data, we can observe whether particular advisories and ratings suggested that the content would be more violent, and we can evaluate the degree to which the data are consistent with the information-based rationale for the effects of the advisories on selective exposure.

Analysis of expectations regarding the four forms of the discretion advisory revealed that expectations about two types of violent content were differentially affected by the advisories. The percentage of children expecting punching or kicking in a program increased over the four forms of advisory, from "Parental discretion advised" to "Contains some violent content; viewer discretion advised." This pattern is illustrated in Figure 6 for expectations of punching ($X^2(3, N=280)=20.26$, $p<.01$).

Insert Figure 6 about here.

Although it is not surprising that the phrase "contains some violent content" would increase the number of children expecting punching and kicking, it is interesting that the viewer advisories led to higher expectations of these behaviors than the parental advisories. Part of the reason for the different effects of these two types of advisories may be, then, that "viewer discretion advised" suggests more violent content than "parental discretion advised." However, the fact that the advisory that was perceived as more violent was not the one that attracted more children suggests that information about violent content per se is a less potent magnet for children than the exhortation that the child should be prevented from seeing it.

The analyses of the MPAA ratings revealed that these ratings exerted significant effects on expectations for all of the violent content variables. The observed pattern is illustrated in Figure 7 for punching ($X^2(3, N=280)=49.05$, $p<.001$). For all these measures, the percentage of children expecting violent content was lowest for the "G" rating and increased dramatically up to the "PG-13" rating. The percentage declined somewhat for the "R" rating.

Insert Figure 7 about here.

These findings regarding expectations of violent content for the MPAA ratings are consistent with the notion that information about violent content draws children to MPAA-rated movies. The selective-exposure data for boys (combining the two age groups) and for older children (combining the sexes), show a strikingly similar pattern to these content ratings, with interest in the movie lowest for the "G" rating and peaking at "PG-13." (See Figures 8a and 8b).

Insert Figures 8a and 8b about here.

The Impact of Background Variables

In making sense of the effects of advisories and ratings on children's choices of programs, it is also of interest to look at the influence of other characteristics of the children making the choices. In our main experiment, we included a background questionnaire containing a series of personality items and parental guidance measures. To observe the relationship between background variables and program choices, we conducted a series of multiple logistic regression analyses, in which the background

variables were entered after age and gender, and in which the dependent variable was whether or not the child chose a program with an advisory, or the target movie when it was rated "PG-13" or "R."

Personality variables. The personality dimensions of greatest interest were anxiety reactions and aggressiveness. Examples of the items in these dimensions are "seeing scary things on television upsets me" (anxiety), and "I get into fights with other children" (aggression). Response choices were "never," "some of the time," "most of the time," and "all of the time."

Some items related to anxiety and aggression were associated with the tendency to choose restricted content after the contributions of age and gender were accounted for. Of the items related to anxiety, the only one that had a significant relationship to choosing restricted content was "seeing scary things on television upsets me." Children who reported getting upset more often by scary television were less likely to choose a program with an advisory. Specifically, after the contributions of age and sex were accounted for, responses on this item were negatively related to the choice of programs with both parental advisories (Beta= -.18, $p<.01$, $R^2_{change}=.03$) and viewer advisories (Beta= -.18, $p<.01$, $R^2_{change}=.04$).

This finding is encouraging because it shows that in some instances, children behaved sensibly and in their own best interest. Those children who reported experiencing fright reactions from television were more likely to avoid programs with both parental and viewer advisories. These children had apparently learned from their

previous experiences and used these messages as they were intended, to shield themselves from future emotional upsets.

On a less positive note, we also found that children who reported more aggression-related behavior showed more interest in programs with advisories. Specifically, liking "rough and tumble games" was a positive predictor of the tendency to choose a program with a parental discretion advisory (Beta=.15, $p<.05$, $R^2_{change}=.02$). Similarly, children's responses to the item "I get into fights with other kids" was positively related to choosing a program with a viewer discretion advisory, approaching significance (Beta=.12, $p=.059$, $R^2_{change}=.03$).

The implications of these findings are somewhat disturbing. The more benign item, "I like rough and tumble games," was positively associated with choosing a program with a parental advisory. The more directly aggression-related item, "I get into fights with other kids," was positively related to choosing a program with a viewer advisory, although this relationship only approached significance. If this relationship holds up under replication, it will suggest that advisories may be attracting just those viewers who are of prime concern in our desire to reduce the contribution of violence on television to violence in our society. Research has repeatedly shown that children who are already aggressive are the most likely to become even more violent as a function of exposure to television violence.

Parental involvement. Parental involvement was assessed with items regarding whether the parents set any limits on children's TV time or content, and the frequency

with which they watched television with their children and discussed programs with them. A scale was constructed from children's responses on these four items. After controlling for age group and gender, parental involvement contributed significantly and negatively to choice of programs with a parental advisory (Beta= -.15, p=.01, R^2_{change}=.02). In other words, children who rated their parents as more involved in their TV viewing were less likely than other children to choose a program with a parental discretion advisory. Parental involvement was also negatively related to the choice of the target movie when it was rated "PG-13" or "R." Thus, children whose parents were more involved in their television viewing were less likely to choose the movie when it had these more restrictive ratings (Beta = -.17, p<.05, R^2_{change}=.03). These findings suggest that parental involvement may become internalized and have beneficial effects even when the child selects programming without adult supervision.

Parents' and Children's Comments About Advisories and Ratings

Another way in which we explored the reasons for the effects of advisories and ratings on children's viewing selections, was to conduct a second study, in which we observed parent-child pairs discussing viewing choices involving these labels. In this study, parents and children were given a choice of programs for the child to watch, and their interactions were videotaped as they discussed the choices available to them. We were especially interested in the way parents and children referred to the ratings and advisories in discussing their choices.

The sample included 70 parent-child dyads who were recruited from five parochial schools in the Madison, Wisconsin area. The dyads were approximately equally divided into a younger group, including children who were attending kindergarten or first grade and ranging in age from 5 to 7, and an older group, including children in fourth or fifth grade and ranging in age from 9 to 11 years. Within each age group, there was an equal number of girls and boys.

The parent-child pair was given a television program guide booklet, somewhat similar to the one used in the main experiment. The participants were told to select one program out of the three that appeared on each page of the booklet. Further, they were permitted to reject any programs they considered inappropriate. The experimenter left the room while the parent and child made their decisions.

One page of the viewing-choice booklet contained titles of three fictitious reality-action programs, one of which, at random, was associated with the advisory "Contains some violence. Parental discretion advised." Another page contained the fictitious titles of three animated violent movies, one of which, at random, was given the rating of "PG-13: Parents strongly cautioned." The other two were assigned the rating, "PG: Parental guidance suggested."

As expected, there was a strong tendency to avoid choosing the program with the advisory when parents and children made their decisions in concert. Out of the 70 dyads, only five (7%) chose a program with an advisory, and this percentage was dramatically and significantly below chance expectations of 33% ($p<.001$). Similarly, there was a

significant tendency to avoid movies with "PG-13" ratings when pitted against others rated "PG." Out of the 70 dyads, ten (14%) chose the movie that had the "PG-13" rating, and this number was significantly below the 33% that would be expected by chance (p=.001). Not surprisingly, dyads involving younger children were more likely than those involving older children to reject programs with advisories (X^2 (2, N=36)= 4.46, p<.05) and movies with the "PG-13" rating (X^2 (2, N=34)= 4.02, p<.05). The sex of the child, however, did not significantly affect the tendency to reject programs or movies with these labels.

The most interesting aspect of the findings was an analysis of the discussions between the parent and child. Almost half of the parents (47%) made comments about the advisory, and all of these comments were unfavorable, indicating that the content was inappropriate or that the child could not see the program. Some of these mentioned the child's age as a reason to avoid the program (e.g., "that means it's for big kids"); some referred to the violence in the advisory (e.g., "says it contains violence and so, no"); some mentioned that it would be frightening ("it means it's scary"). The remaining parents gave nonspecific negative references (e.g., "parental discretion. I'd probably say not").

Half of the parents (50%) made comments about the "PG-13" rating, and almost all of these were negative. Again, many of these referred to the child's age or to the fact that the movie would be frightening. One of these comments had a positive tone, but it may have been tongue-in-cheek ("I'm strongly cautioned, so that's the one!" [laughing]).

The children did not comment on the advisory or the "PG-13" rating nearly as often as their parents, but when they did, their comments were as likely to be favorable as unfavorable. Seven children (10%) made negative comments about the advisory (one suggesting the program would be "scary") and eight (11%) made positive comments (e.g., after reading the advisory, "that's awesome!" and "they all say that. It's fine. They just all say that.") Older children were much more likely than younger children to make favorable references to the advisory ($X^2(1, N=70)=4.70, p<.05$).

A similar pattern was observed in children's references to the "PG-13" rating. Five children (7%) made negative references (e.g., "PG-13. Adios") and eight (11%) made positive references (e.g., "PG-13. Choose that one"). One older girl disparaged the movies with the less-restrictive rating, saying, "those two [PG-rated movies] are little loser ones. They rated 'Home Alone' 'PG.' The cooler the movie, the higher the rating." There were no sex differences in the tendency of children to make positive vs. negative comments about the advisory or the "PG-13" rating.

The comments observed in this study suggest that parents take advisories and ratings seriously in determining the appropriateness of television fare for their children. At the same time, the children's comments further illuminate the processes by which advisories and restrictive ratings may have attracted some viewers in the main experiment. Although none of the comments specifically differentiate between the forbidden fruit hypothesis and the information-based rationale, these labels somehow made the selections seem "cooler" and more "awesome."

The ability of restrictive ratings, particularly MPAA ratings, to increase the allure of movies was illustrated vividly to us when we recently addressed a church parenting group about children's television viewing. One mother volunteered the following anecdote:

> "We recently told our son that he would be getting a new 10-speed bike for his thirteenth birthday. But he told us he wouldn't need a new bike. He declared that he wouldn't have time to ride it after he was 13, since he would be spending all his free time watching 'PG-13' movies!"

This anecdote illustrates the degree to which an age-based rating system can increase the allure of the restricted behavior. Together with the data provided here, it suggests the perils of using a system that is based on the notion of who is restricted from viewing.

Tentative Conclusions Regarding the Reasons for Children's Choices

The findings regarding children's interpretations of the advisories and ratings in the main experiment, and their comments about these labels in the second experiment, lead to some tentative explanations for their viewing choices. Children's interpretations of the MPAA ratings provided support for both the forbidden fruit effect and the information-based rationale, in that the higher-level ratings were perceived both as more restrictive (at least by the older children) and as containing more violence. However, children's interpretations of the advisories were clearly more consistent with the

forbidden fruit effect, since "viewer discretion advised," which was perceived to be more violent, did not provoke increased interest. Moreover, it was perceived by the older children as involving less parental control than "parental discretion advised." Finally, children's positive comments about the parental advisory and the "PG-13" rating demonstrate how restrictive labels not only can enhance the attractiveness of the labeled material, but may reduce the appeal of less restricted fare.

The analyses involving background variables suggest that some children who shy away from programs with advisories may be doing so to avoid experiencing emotional distress. They also suggest that some children who seek out programs with advisories may be those who are already violent. Such children may be particularly prone to experiencing reactance when told not to do something, or they may simply be more interested in viewing violence than other children.

As indicated earlier, data regarding the reasons for children's choices are only suggestive because the study was not designed to permit a definitive analysis of the underlying mechanisms. The NTVS research conducted for Year 2 was designed with potential explanations in mind, however. In the Year 2 research, after completing a selective exposure booklet, children filled out a second booklet, evaluating the same programs with the same ratings and advisories that they had just seen. For each program, they rated how violent and how scary they expected it to be, and they indicated the age of viewer that the program seemed to be intended for. Through this design, we will be