

AU. D. WELLSTONE
MINNESOTA

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United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2303

CS97-55

COMMITTEES:
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FOREIGN RELATIONS

APR 22 1997

CSB
CWH
2328

March 21, 1997

Reed Hundt
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Hundt:

The attached communication is for your consideration. Please add this letter to the public comments for CS Docket #97-55. I would also appreciate it if you would respond to Sister Mary Jeremia Trutwin, at Sacred Heart Convent, Flensburg, MN, 56328 directly regarding this matter.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Paul David Wellstone
United States Senator

PDW:mrw

7005368

97 MAR -4 PM 2:15

Feb. 23, 1997

Senator Paul Wellstone
717 Hart Senate Ofc Bldg
Washington, DC 20510

Re: McCain Hearings

Dear Senator Wellstone,

I am writing to request that you support the Open Platform when debating the Open and Closed Platforms of rating systems for television.

It is my understanding that the T.V. Industry is advocating for a Closed system which would allow for only one rating system - theirs.

With television being the powerful communication tool that it is, we need more than just the industry providing information and guidelines to consumers regarding program content.

Please support the Open Platform so as to leave room for alternative rating systems.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sister Mary Jeremia Rutkowski

CS 97-55

BOB SMITH
NEW HAMPSHIRE
1-800-922-2230
IN NEW HAMPSHIRE
opinion@smith.senate.gov

SELECT COMMITTEE ON
ETHICS
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COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2903

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April 2, 1997

Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20554

To Whom it may Concern:

Enclosed please find a copy of a letter I received from a constituent, Beverly F. Waitt of Hollis, New Hampshire regarding the new television ratings system. Please add Ms. Waitt's letter to the public comments file your office is assembling.

Sincerely yours,



Bob Smith U.S.S.

RCS/nls

97 FEB 21 AM 10:41

14 Marion Drive
Hollis, New Hampshire 03049
February 17, 1997

The Honorable Robert Smith:
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

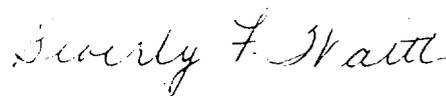
My dear Senator Smith:

It has come to my attention that the Senate Commerce Committee will be holding a meeting within the next several days concerning the current ratings for television shows. It is my sincere belief that this meeting should be an open hearing at which input from concerned citizens can be voiced and recorded.

I feel that the ratings now in use are not informative enough of the content of a program and that they are NOT on the screen long enough. The ratings should be visible all during the program as are network and stations symbols.

Any help that you can give toward resolution of this problem will be sincerely appreciated.

Yours truly,



Beverly F. Waitt

8440 Deerlake Road
Tallahassee, FL 32312
904 893-4140
904 893-6974 Fax

An NBC Affiliate
Guy Gannett
Communications



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FCC MAIL ROOM

April 17, 1997

Office of the Secretary
FCC
1919 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20554

Reference: CS Docket No. 97-55

Dear Commissioners:

I would like to offer my comments on the TV Parental Guidelines that we at WTWC have recently, voluntarily put in place.

From my perspective, I don't know a single broadcaster that hasn't taken this issue seriously. Not just the voluntary insertion of ratings, but the concern over content that brought this solution to the forefront in the first place.

While you are being regaled with advice from those "in the know" who often prefer to regulate rather than encourage self regulation, I would offer the suggestion that you go to the real experts, the viewers. In as much as this system has only been in effect since January, have we done a good job of testing this process? At our station, we might voluntarily include a feedback question in one of our planned research projects through the research firm of Frank N. Magid. Not because we were regulated to do so, but because we really would like to know if we're doing a good job of helping parents get involved in their children's viewing. I'm confident that many news organizations like ours here in Tallahassee, have done stories or planned follow up stories explaining the system and asking viewers for comments.

Would you like to know what these "experts" said? We will be more than willing to share that information with you.

Please allow this process time to be understood and tested. And please continue to allow broadcasters to serve their communities by regulating themselves in this important area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William S. Anderson".

William S. Anderson
President and General Manager

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IN THE MATTER OF: The new television ratings system

COMMENTS OF: Brandy Toth
31 Roberts Road, Apt. 2
Cambridge, MA 02138
Tufts University

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APR 22 1997

Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C.

COMMENTS:

The ratings system should be restructured to focus on content-based descriptions of television programs. In addition, a standard of uniformity should be in place, as a number of shows are not rated. In order for parents to use the system for its intended purpose, consistency in the ratings would be highly beneficial to its success.

Most people decide what to watch on television by flipping through the channels or checking newspaper or TV Guide listings. The effectiveness of the ratings will not be consistent unless they are clearly shown in each of these mediums. From my observations, the rating of a television program is only shown for the first ten seconds, and sometimes after a commercial break. This is not an adequate length of time. Extending the time period the rating appears on-screen and consistently showing it after commercial breaks enables a parent who tunes in during the middle of a program to fairly assess its advised rating.

Furthermore, as I read through the February 8-14 issue of

TV Guide, I noticed a general lack of ratings on most of the programs. A majority of those which were rated were labeled as children's programming anyway, or were old sitcoms. The shows which are desperately in need of ratings are ignored. For example, as many children watch weekday late afternoon and evening programs as they do weekend mornings (McGill, pg. 98). Talk shows, news programs, and soap operas are predominant in the late afternoon and should have ratings.

My most important concern is the content of talk shows. Though it may be difficult to assess the daily topics on these shows, they should have a TVPG or TV14 rating as general guidelines. The content of talk shows and their audiences can be extremely upsetting. A recent Sally Jesse Raphael show (2/11/97, ABC) featured young girls who had sex, drank alcohol, did drugs, and beat their mothers. They were engaged in yelling matches with members of the audience. Profanity was frequently used and aggressive behavior was the norm.

The most disturbing aspect of this talk show was that it was real. If children are influenced by fiction, they must certainly be affected by fact. The book Big World, Small Screen, suggests "Children also learn about emotions from television. They learn what situations lead to what emotions and the social norm for expressing emotion" (Pg. 58). Normal people do not express themselves on national

television by cursing and threatening to kill people around them. Unregulated showings of such programming can influence young children. Parental discretion is most important in situations such as these.

Under this belief, I urge the ratings system to consider becoming more content-based. This may alleviate some of the inconsistencies in the system, at the same time allowing parents to make decisions based on the individual maturity of their child. The TVPG and TV14 ratings merely serve as vague guidelines and do not apply to all children.

Different families have different value systems, and what is considered appropriate for one child may not be considered appropriate for another. A content-based system is preferred by 80 percent of parents according to a recent study by the National Parent Teacher Association (Kunkel, 1/31/97). In addition, such a system is more direct in its description, stating whether or not a program contains sex or violence. The current ratings system does not supply this information, and is therefore ambiguous.

I support the overall idea of a ratings system and think it is necessary to protect our children from an increasing level of unsuitable programming. However, I feel consistency is essential if to set a respected and reliable precedent for the future.

SUBMITTED BY:

Brandy Toth

Brandy Toth
31 Roberts Road, Apt. 2
Cambridge, MA 02138

CS 97-55

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APR 22 1997

02155
Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

IN THE MATTER OF: The new television ratings system.

COMMENTS OF: Karen Epstein
264 Carmichael Hall, Tufts University, Medford, MA
Tufts University student

COMMENTS:

While I feel FCC television ratings are a step in the right direction, the current age-based system has many inconsistencies and, as it stands, fails to fully safeguard our children against violence, sexual content, and inappropriate language on television. I agree with the opinions of many experts who state that television ratings must be content-based rather than age-based. For parents to make informed decisions about television programming, they must be given a clear, concise understanding of a program's content. The new ratings, in many cases, seem to be placed arbitrarily and tend to be inconsistent. Why is a daytime soap opera rated TV-14 while an episode of *Friends* "in which people were overheard having sex behind closed doors" is rated TV-PG? (Biddle, 1/16/97). Additionally, any parent knows that no children of any one age group are all the same. What may be appropriate for one seven-year-old may be inappropriate for another seven-year-old. Although the ratings are designed around developmental skills at certain ages, children all mature differently. It is up to parents to decide what they want their children to watch, and to do this the FCC must install a more specific ratings system based on content. Furthermore, for any ratings system to work, networks must place more of an emphasis on the ratings by leaving them on for more than fifteen seconds of the opening credits of a program, and by showing the icons during commercial previews for shows.

The current FCC ratings do not give parents enough information about programming. One year ago, Jack Valenti, speaking on behalf of the television industry, said, "We have a civic obligation to offer as much parental guidance and information as is humanly possible to provide" (Kunkel, 1/31/97). Unfortunately, this has yet to be seen. For parents who are uneducated about the ratings, what the quick flash of a Y-7 or a

TV-G at the top of the screen means is highly unclear. The FCC must come up with a ratings system that specifically states how much violence, sexual content, and profanity a program contains. Under this system, "ratings will not indicate whether any given show actually contains violence, sex, or adult language... It's a bit like offering a weather forecast that says, 'Warning: severe weather approaching,' without telling you to expect rain, snow, wind, or fog" (Kunkel, 1/31/97). I, along with many critics, support a system much like the one Home Box Office has had for several years, which details whether violence, sex, or adult language appears in a program (Biddle, 12/30/96).

Why is it so important to protect our children from violence on television? Much research has been done on this subject, which has found that violence on television can have a serious impact on children. "Three possible effects have been the focus of most concern about TV violence: Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others; youngsters may be more fearful of the world around them; and children may be more willing to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others" (Murray, In Berry and Asamen, 1993).

The age-based rating system is founded upon childhood developmental theories. But, the fact that a TV-Y7 is slapped on a show does not mean that every seven-year-old has, as the rating descriptions explain, "acquired the developmental skills needed to distinguish between make-believe and reality" (Biddle, 12/30/96). Furthermore, the descriptions state that a TV-Y7 show may "frighten children under age seven" (Biddle, 12/30/96). Who is to say they will not frighten children *over* age seven? An age-based system is simply not the answer. Most parents, it seems, agree with this statement, as a recent study by the National Parent Teacher Association found that 80 percent of parents also prefer content-based ratings (Kunkel, 1/31/97).

From my own television viewing, I have found many inconsistencies in the current FCC ratings system. For example, take the cartoons shown on the Fox network during the afternoon. At 3 p.m. on Friday, February 14, an episode of *Batman and Robin* had a

rating of TV-Y7. Now, I can understand why this show was not given a general TV-Y rating, because it is very scary and often violent. The Joker, with his maniacal laughter, says, "I'll rip their eyes out." The cartoon has a dark and eerie atmosphere as well, something I do not feel very young children should see. The show that follows *Batman* on Fox at 3:30 p.m. is *Spiderman*, which has its own rating of TV-Y. I found it inconsistent, however, that *Batman* is rated TV-Y7 while *Spiderman* is TV-Y, because I feel *Spiderman* is just as violent as the other cartoon. On the Feb. 14 episode of *Spiderman*, the "bad guys" find the injured superhero on the ground and stick guns in his face, shouting, "What's the matter? Are you sick? Maybe you need your shots?" I think this is just as scary for children under age seven as *Batman*. Then, at 4:30 p.m., *The Power Rangers* airs, which is once again rated TV-Y7. This too, is a violent program. But, who but a parent can decide if this is an appropriate or inappropriate level of violence, or that this show will frighten their children more than *Spiderman* might? The only way parents can truly decide what is or is not appropriate is by providing a specific explanation of the amount and type of violence in a program.

On a sidenote, I do feel that Fox should be commended, over other networks, for making the most of the rating system they are given. Before each of these afternoon cartoons, the announcer states that the program "is rated TV-Y7, because it's an action-adventure" (*Batman*) or "*Spiderman* is rated Y because it's web-swinging fun for all kids."

There are many other inconsistencies with the ratings system. Most daytime soap operas have ratings of TV-14. I suppose, with the current rating system, that this designation makes sense, considering that on an episode of CBS' *As The World Turns* which aired at 2 p.m. on Feb. 14, viewers saw a couple get married, the groom rip the bride's dress open to find a hidden tape recorder, he tells her that he killed her mother, and she whips out a gun and shoots him. Definitely not child fare. On the other hand, though, a parent can "review the primetime schedule and discover that virtually everything is rated TV-PG, from an incident of rape on *New York Undercover* to the double-entendres on

Seinfeld" (Kunkel, 1/31/97). But, then again, there are some primetime shows that producers *do* feel deserve a rating of TV-14, like an episode of *ER* which aired on Feb. 5 and featured homosexuality, AIDS, death, sex, and obscenities, to name a few. One more example of inconsistency is found in the late night shows. CBS rates *The Late Show with David Letterman* PG while NBC rates the very similar *Tonight with Jay Leno* TV-14 (Biddle 1/16/97). Another disturbing inconsistency is that all of the major networks have said that they won't rate any of their series TV-M, mature audiences only (Biddle, 1/16/97). If a rating exists to protect children from shows which may contain mature themes, but the networks refuse to use it, then what is the point of having it in the first place?

Furthermore, the new television ratings do not sufficiently cover all programming types. I do not feel that news broadcasts need to be rated, because I think most parents are aware of what is shown on the news and can make their judgments accordingly. The fact, however, that entertainment/news shows like *Inside Edition* (Biddle, 12/30/96) are excluded from the ratings is wrong, because these shows often sensationalize many issues, including those which deal with violence and sex. In order to have a consistent ratings system, parents need to be made aware of the content of one of these types of shows just as much as a violent cartoon.

Another problem I see with the current system is the fact that the icons flash on the screen so briefly and so early on in a program that they are very easy to miss. Appearing only in the first 15 seconds of a broadcast is definitely not long enough (Biddle, 1/3/97). A system like HBO, where, before each movie there is a full-screen explanation of the content of the program, is an excellent example to follow. I think it would be a wise idea for the icons to appear during commercial previews for programs, as well. In my television viewing, I did see this once, in a commercial for *As The World Turns* which aired on Feb. 14 and flashed a TV-14 icon.

I believe that for parents to make informed choices about what television shows their children should be able to watch, the FCC must develop a rating system that takes into account the content of television programs. I believe the system that HBO currently uses is a good example to follow. Parents need to be told *specifically* about the amount of violence, sex, and adult language that is in a program. The current age-based rating system is highly inconsistent. With a more specific rating system, inconsistencies will be avoided. "With a descriptive system, programs would be labeled for the type and degree of violence, sex, and adult language they contain, without applying any value judgments about what material is appropriate for whom" (Kunkel, 1/31/97).

SUBMITTED BY: *Karen Epstein*

Karen Epstein

264 Carmichael Hall
Tufts University
Medford, MA 02155

CS RECEIVED
APR 22 1997
Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

IN THE MATTER OF: The V-chip television rating system.

COMMENTS OF: Sarah E. Follett, 55 Liberty Avenue, Apt. #1, Somerville, MA
02144. Tufts University Student

COMMENTS:

Summary: The new V-chip television rating system, while developed with good intentions, has several significant design flaws which need to be addressed in order for it to have a substantial efficacy. The problems that will be discussed in greater detail below are the following: The ratings do not give parents sufficient information about the content of given programs. The ratings themselves are arbitrary assessments of what is appropriate for select age groups and are not suited to individual families' needs. The coding system is unclear and the ratings are applied inconsistently. Certain genres of programming are exempt from the rating system but are considered objectionable viewing material by the parents of many children. The socioeconomic status of the average consumer and technological constraints of the V-chip have been overlooked.

* * *

The first issue I would like to address concerns the system upon which the ratings are based. The ratings are age based and not content based. They, therefore, give no indication of the nature of the content of a given episode and could potentially mislead a parent in their decision to permit or prohibit a child from watching a program. The code system used by HBO, for example, is content based and includes degrees of certain types of materials such as AL for adult language, V for violence, and N for nudity. This type of terminology is much more informative for viewers as well as much easier to understand. Another related problem is discussed in an article which appeared in "The Chronicle of Higher Education." A study cited in the article illustrated that the rating system based on age is more enticing to children who have been restricted in their viewing than the ratings

which simply address content such as "contains violent content" (Kunkel, 1/31/97). Another study cited in the same article showed that eighty percent of parents surveyed preferred a descriptive content system to the age-based one now in use.

Another problematic aspect of the rating system is that it is an arbitrary assessment of what is appropriate for a given age group. There is no established standard for what a child should or should not view. This is a judgment that parents have to make on their own as individual families have specific ideas about what they consider acceptable viewing material for their children. In addition, the rating of a given episode is determined by the producer of the program and is, therefore, a biased assessment of the content. An independent commission including educators, researchers, members of the television industry, as well as viewers, should be in charge of assigning ratings to ensure honesty and accuracy:

So the strategy is to deliver a rating system, but to limit it to categories so imprecise that they never really reduce viewership of a program....A system of age-based ratings for television thus serves the needs of the television industry but not the needs of America's children and families" (Kunkel, 1/31/97).

Another issue I find troublesome is the cryptic nature of the rating codes. Although I now know what they mean, I needed to read a newspaper article to attain the information to crack the code. The ratings also only appear during the first few seconds of an episode so if one misses the opening credits, as I often do, then one will never know what the program is rated. The ratings should reappear after every commercial break and for a longer duration. Ratings should also be mandatory in publications which include TV listings and in the programming guides provided by cable services. The ratings also do not appear in the promotional commercials for programs which could be useful advanced notice for parents. Furthermore, these advertisements themselves are often excessively graphic and appear during after-school hours and on weekends when young children are

commonly watching television. "The appearances of the ratings icons were quick and timid....most viewers are, more or less, channel surfers who don't exactly obsess over the opening credits. One quick flash of the ratings icon doesn't reflect how people actually watch television, and the networks know it" (Biddle, 1/3/97).

A third aspect that I would like to address is the exemption of certain genres of programming from the rating system. News and so-called newsmagazines, such as "Hard Copy" and "Inside Edition" do not have to be rated (Biddle 12/30/96), yet they often feature graphic violence and/or sexually explicit content. The media has an incredible power over audiences because it has the right to say that what it reports is the "truth." Therefore, the media's impact on young viewers, who are more susceptible to what they see or hear, can be potentially more damaging than other types of programming and parents and industry executives must take this into account. One parent interviewed for a survey stated that she did not want her child to see local news or tabloid shows (Boston Globe, 1/5/97). I am sure there are many other parents who have similar restrictions on their children's television viewing. However, as these shows are not rated, a parent is relatively powerless to control whether their child watches them or not. Another survey of elementary and middle school students illustrated that this problem is certainly compounded by the fact that in 44.4% of homes, there are four or more televisions and that 42.5% of youngsters have televisions in their bedrooms (Blowen, 1/5/97).

In addition to the ratings themselves, the intended implementation of the technology has to be examined. The new television models produced in 1998 will include a V-chip as part of their standard electronic package. However, not everyone can afford to go buy a new television. In addition, even the price of adding a V-chip to an older television set, about fifty dollars (Kunkel, 1/31/97), is a lot of money for the average family. Furthermore, in lower socioeconomic families,

which are often single and/or working parent homes, children are left alone much more often and therefore have more opportunity for unrestricted viewing.

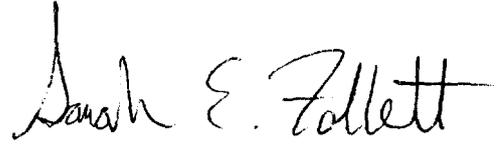
I would like to close with my own observances of the inconsistent and inappropriate nature of the V-chip rating system or lack thereof. For example on Sunday February 16th, from four to six p.m., WB 56 aired "The Shining." This is even to me as a twenty-one year old, one of the most scary movies I have seen and I was absolutely appalled that it was on during a time when young children could be watching and that it was not rated, nor were any warnings pertaining to the content of the movie. The fact the nudity and explicit language were edited out had little significance when compared to the images of bloodied and rotting corpses, visions of blood pouring out of elevators, and scenes of a deranged Jack Nicholson pursuing his wife and child with an ax. The story also focuses on supernatural powers which haunt a very young boy, making this movie potentially very scary to young children. It should have been aired much later in the evening and with a rating.

The following statement illustrates another general problem with the rating system. "In the first three weeks of the new system, the networks, which rate every episode of their own shows, have given the second-mildest rating -- TV-PG, or parental guidance suggested -- to nearly two-thirds of their prime-time dramas" (Biddle, 1/16/97). For example, "Seinfeld," "ER," "The Late Show," and "The Simpsons" are all rated TV-PG. All of these programs have very distinct subject matter, however, when considered in terms of age appropriate material I think "ER" is a show that warrants a stricter rating. Even though the level of humor in the other three sitcoms may be somewhat sophisticated, they cannot be logically considered to have the same impact on a younger viewer as a show like "ER," which features graphic imagery of blood and gore that even I have trouble watching. The episodes also treat very serious issues, such as death, AIDS, child abuse, and rape, that are more suitable for older viewers. An episode of "ER" which aired on

NBC on 2/6/97 at 10:00 p.m., included a scene where a patient raises his middle finger in the gesture that everyone knows connotes "fuck you." Even though a child as young as third grade probably learns this behavior from an older peer at school, it is still inappropriate language for anyone younger than fourteen. One thing that I was glad to learn is that daytime soap operas are rated TV-14 which I see as an accurate assessment of their often sexually explicit content. Another discrepancy in the rating system which concerns me is the rating of cartoons. Every cartoon that I have seen on afternoon television is rated TV-Y. However, many of these cartoons, such as "Bugs N' Daffy" which airs on WB 56 from 4-4:30 p.m. on weekdays, feature a high level of violence which has been shown to have negative effects on young viewers. Just because the networks are targeting young children with these programs doesn't mean that they are beneficial viewing material. Another problem with cartoon programs is that many of them recycle old episodes from several decades ago when writers and producers were not concerned with their degree of violence. Therefore, these shows cannot possibly adhere to current rating standards. "A compelling body of evidence demonstrates that the exposure to televised violence contributes to aggressive attitudes and behavior, to desensitization to the victims of violence, and to fear among children" (Kunkel 1/31/97).

I would like to reiterate in closing the importance of changing the fundamental importance of changing the rating system from one that is age based to one that is content based. Parents need sufficient information in order to use the new V-chip technology in a beneficial way and only providing viewers with arbitrary age categories is relatively meaningless to parents and more alluring to their younger children.

SUBMITTED BY:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah E. Follett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Sarah E. Follett
55 Liberty Avenue, Apt. #1
Somerville, MA 02144

CS 97-55

In the matter of: The new television ratings system

Comments of: Susan Cheng

238 South Hall Tufts University

Medford MA 02155

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APR 22 1997

Federal Communications Commission

Comments:

Summary: From my point of view, the main problem with the new television ratings system is that it does not provide the public adequate information on the contents of television shows. The age-based categories are extensive and imprecise. It does not tell the audience the reason why a certain show is rated in certain category. Besides, each family may disagree on the extent to which violence or sex is inappropriate for children. It is difficult for the public to have a standard since each network rates its own programs. There is often contradiction between the ratings of similar shows. It is also prominent to rate all of children's programs, including cartoons. Several researches have found the correlation between children's aggressive behaviors and the amount of televised violence they watch. Finally, the ratings system only suggests what programs are forbidden for young audience. It might also benefit the public if it helps parents to find educational shows for children.

According to one survey that Boston Globe did around the Boston area in January of 1997, 33.8 percent of children watch three or more hours of television on a typical school night and 56 percent watch three or more hours on a typical weekend day. Apparently, children today are watching a lot more television than ever and the impact that television has on children may beyond our expectation. Therefore, how to choose appropriate programs for children to watch becomes a prevalent concern for parents. They were very much looking

forward to the new ratings system and hoping to find some guidance; however, it somehow disappoints the public.

The age-based categories are not sufficient enough. It "indicates nothing more than the television programmer's overall judgment about the acceptability of content for specific age groups"(Kunkel 1/31/97). It does not address the areas which parents are most concerned: violence, sex and adult language. Furthermore, the ratings does not explain why certain shows are rated in certain categories. "Parents may not know why a show received a particular rating-- was it the presence of violence, of inappropriate language, or of sexual content?"(Children Now 1996). The original purpose of the ratings system was to provide this information to parents so that it would be convenient for them to eliminate inappropriate programs. It is not surprising to discover that parents find the ratings unhelpful.

In the survey that Children Now conducted, 16 out of 18 respondents, who are experts of children and mass media, preferred a combination of age- and content-based categories. Every child goes through the developmental process with different speeds; some of them are mentally more mature than others. For instance, some may be able to distinguish fantasy from reality earlier than others. With the combinative description, parents can make their judgment base on their children's cognitive abilities. It will be even more helpful if the television programmers could give separate categories for violence, sex and adult language. Not all parents have the same perspective on the extent to which violence or sex is inappropriate for children. Some parents may be particularly sensitive to violence and thus will not want their children to see any violent acts on television. From their point of view, any show that contains violence should be labeled as violent. According to Kunkel, no one universal standard is appropriate for all children of the same age (Kunkel 1/31/97).

Unlike the movie ratings, which is evaluated by an independent board including parents, each television program producers make the decision about how to rate their shows. There seems to be some inconsistency between the ratings of similar shows. "CBS rates 'The Late Show With David Letterman' PG., while NBC rates archival 'Tonight with Jay Leon' TV14"(Biddle 1/23/97 N1 and N6-7). Most people will agree with me that these two shows' contents are not that different from each other. The discrepancy makes it confusing for audience to decode the ratings. Maybe it will be more effective if the ratings are set by members of the FCC or a committee of experts of children and mass media. They might be able to evaluate television shows from a more unbiased perspective.

Why is it so important for the network to provide accurate and adequate information on the content of their programs, especially with shows that contains violence? Many researches have found that children and adolescents who watch a lot of televised violence tend to be more aggressive than their classmates who watch little violence. "There is physiological evidence that children become emotionally aroused when they see others fight. Actors who portray violence on television serve as aggressive models who teach children a variety of violent acts that they may not know about or would not otherwise have considered performing" (Shaffer 1994 p,494). The effect of televised violence is not only temporary, but may have strong influence on children's developments. TV violence and aggressive behavior can become a vicious cycle: the more violence a child watch, the more aggressive he becomes, and therefore he may prefer shows that contain more violence. Therefore, it is necessary to reduce violence in television.

Children, especially younger ones, cannot distinguish fantasy from reality. It is possible that they believe everything in television is real and

appropriate. Therefore, they may assume that people always fight when they argue with each other. The characters become their role models in life. There is something that most people are probably not aware of: the amount of violence in cartoons. "George Gerber and his associates (1986) report that the most violent programs on commercial television are those designed for children-especially Saturday-morning cartoon shows, which contain more than 20 violent incidents per hour" (Shaffer 1994 p,494). The cartoon producers may think that cartoon violence is less harmful since it is expressed through fantasy. Nevertheless, they disregard the fact that young children may not be able to make the distinction between cartoons and reality. Children are watching a lot of television, in fact, they spend more time watching television than in any other waking activity. Consequently, it is very important that children's programs including cartoons should be rated.

Since the beginning use of the ratings system, almost two-thirds of the prime-time dramas, such as "Melrose Place" and "Homicide: Life on the Street" were rated TV-PG. There are almost no show which is categorized as TV-M. "Schindler's List" is the only exception up to now that is rated as TV-M. However, look at the contents of today's television programs, the degree of violence in them is not to any extent less than in "Schindler's List." "[X-Files] Last fall's pre-ratings episode, in which incestuous sons impregnated their quadraplegic mother, deserved a TV-14" (Biddle 1/23/97 N1 and N6-7). Even though a fourteen-year-old teenager may understand what happens in the episode, it is definitely not something that most parents want their children to see or learn from television. The producers are afraid that they will lose their teenagers audience by labeling TV-M to their shows. Moreover, it might also scare advertisers away. Due to the threat of competition, they are unwilling to categorize their programs according to their contents. Nevertheless, they seem

to forget that the original purpose of the ratings system was to serve the interest of children and families. In fact, they are losing their credibility by misleading the public.

The ratings system only suggest to audience which shows are inappropriate for children of certain age. It will be even more helpful if the ratings could somehow indicate which programs are encouraged for children to see. There are a lot of children programs in the network and parents do not have much time to watch all of them with their children. "The most important thing [of the new ratings system] is to guide parents to the programs appropriate for kids as much as to steer away or prevent kids from viewing programs that a family deems inappropriate" (Children Now 1996).

It has been a long way for the network to come up with the ratings system. It is quite an accomplishment. However, if they would consider the suggestions listed above, the ratings system could work much more effectively. I am sure the improved system will not only benefit the public, but also the network.

Submitted by: Susan Cheng