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**Kaiser Family
Foundation**

TV Ratings

Fax

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Date: July 22, 1998

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Pages: 6

Re: Overview: Content Analysis of TV Ratings
System

Urgent For Review Please Comment Please Reply Please Recycle

•Comments:

Bruce -

Here's the summary
(preliminary) of TV
ratings. Does it look ok
for an event?

Tom

01/22/98 13:10 219 004 4000

Overview: A Content Analysis of the TV Ratings System

The purpose of this study is to explore how effectively the new system has been applied during its first year in operation. In particular, the study examines whether the rating assigned to shows accurately reflects their content, and how consistently the ratings are being applied across different genres and networks.

The Kaiser Family Foundation takes no position on the television ratings system. Our goal is to provide objective data to parents, policymakers and to decision-makers in the television industry.

In conducting the study, a randomly-selected composite week of television programming on ten channels was subjected to rigorous content analysis. In addition, a three week over-sample of broadcast network prime-time programming was analyzed, to provide a closer look at the most highly viewed television shows.

This study is one of the largest analyses of television content ever conducted. It is designed to meet the most rigorous academic standards for scientific research. Unlike some studies of television content, this analysis does *not* simply "count" the number of violent or sexual acts in a show, but rather takes full account of both the varying degrees of intensity of the depictions, and the context in which they are shown.

7/22/98

Highlights: Key Findings

Most shows that are supposed to be rated are rated.

In general, the networks have done an impressive job in assigning a rating to all programs that were meant to receive one. Only 4% of shows that ought to have been rated failed to receive any rating.

Many television shows contain a significant amount of sex, violence, and adult language.

Of all programs eligible for the ratings system, 57% contained sexual dialogue, 56% contained violent content, 53% contained coarse language, and 28% contained sexual behavior.

Intensity?

TV-PG and TV-G are the most frequently used ratings.

Of all non-children's shows that received a rating, X% were rated TV-PG, Y% received a TV-G, and Z% received a TV-14. The rating TV-MA was applied to only 1/10th of 1% of shows.

In a closer look at prime-time programming on the four commercial broadcast networks, the study found that X% of rated shows received a TV-PG, Y% received a TV-14, Z% a TV-G, and none received a rating of TV-MA.

Overall, only 23% of rated shows included *any* content descriptors. The most frequently used content descriptor was the rating D, which was applied to 12% of rated shows, followed by V (10%), L (5%) and S (3%). Excluding NBC, which has specifically declined to use the content descriptors, X% of all rated shows included any content descriptor.

Rated shows broadcast on the four major networks during prime time received a content descriptor 36% of the time, but there was significant variation in the use of content descriptors by network. No shows on NBC received content descriptors; 38% of rated shows on ABC included at least one content descriptor; 49% on CBS, and 67% on FOX. In this sample of prime-time programming, V was the most commonly used content descriptor, applied to 18% of rated shows; L was applied to 16%, D to 13% and S to 4% of rated programs.

In general, the age-based ratings are applied to non-children's programs in a way that accurately reflects the content of those shows, and differentiates appropriately between different levels and intensities of relevant content.

Most ratings are applied to programs in a way that accurately reflects the amount and intensity of relevant content, as described in the definitions of those ratings. However, the TV-G rating does contain a significant number of shows with a fair amount of sex, violence or adult language, although most such content is mild in nature.

TV-G is defined as indicating a program with "little or no" violence, sexual situation, or sexual dialogue, and "no" strong language. The study found that 20% of shows rated TV-G contained some violence, 9% contained sexual situations, 28% contained sexual dialogue, and 20% contained strong language. The intensity and explicitness of the violent and sexual content was low, with a moderate level of sexual dialogue. Most of the strong language used consisted of words such as "damn" and "hell," although instances of stronger words such as "bitch," "shit" and "whore" were found in shows rated TV-G, which is meant to indicate shows with "no" strong language.

The content in programs rated TV-PG and TV-14 fell largely within the bounds of the definitions of those ratings. Parents should be aware, however, that there is a significant amount of sex, violence and adult language in shows that receive those ratings. For example, 68% of shows rated TV-PG contain sexual dialogue, 66% contain coarse language, 55% contain violence, and 28% contain sexual behavior. The levels and intensity of this content do fall within appropriate levels for the TV-PG rating.

Most shows with sex, violence or adult language are not being rated with the appropriate content descriptors.

In general, it appears that the networks are significantly under-using the content descriptors they had pledged to apply to shows containing sex, violence or adult language.

Eight out of ten shows containing violence did *not* receive a V rating. ✓
___% of all shows with sexual behavior did not receive an S rating.
___% of all shows with sexual dialogue did not receive a D rating.
___% of all shows with coarse language did not receive an L rating.
___% of all children's shows with violence did not receive an FV rating.

By and large, the sexual, violent, or language-related content of those shows that did not receive the relevant content descriptor was less extensive and intense than in those shows that did receive a content rating. However, there was still a

significant amount of moderately intense sex, violence and adult language in shows without content ratings.

For example, shows that contained violence but did *not* receive a V rating contained an average of five violent scenes per show, of X level of intensity. In the sample of prime-time programming from the four commercial broadcast networks, 79% of those shows rated TV-14, but *without* a V, contained violence, most of it the same level and intensity of violence as in those TV-14 shows that did receive a V rating.

In another example, shows that contained sexual dialogue but did not receive a D rating contained an average of nearly four (3.9) scenes with sexual dialogue. With regard to sexual behavior, most shows without the S rating contained only mild sexual content, but several contained scenes in which sexual intercourse was strongly implied.

NBC. The fact that NBC has declined to apply content descriptors to any of its shows accounts for much of the unlabelled sex, violence, and adult language. For example, on prime time shows on NBC, X% contained violence, Y% contained sexual behavior, Z% contained sexual dialogue, and W% contained adult language. The questionable content ranged from mild to quite intense. For example, with regard to those shows containing violent content on NBC's prime-time shows, there was an average of X violent scenes per show, with _____ levels and _____ intensity. With regard to those shows containing sexual content on NBC's prime time lineup, there was an average of X scenes with sexual behavior and Y scenes with sexual dialogue. Some of this sexual content included _____ and _____. Adult words in these NBC prime time shows included _____, _____, and _____.

Children's programs.

Amount with violent content.

Amount with violent content that does not receive an FV.

Is TV-Y being applied appropriately, or would TV-Y7 have been more applicable? (Sig. Amounts of violence in TV-Y programs; any other measures?)

The way the FV rating is applied now, it does not reliably tell parents whether there is violence in a children's program or not, although it does indicate that there is more violence than in other children's shows. In other words, there is no effective way for parents to block out all children's shows containing violence.

60% of all children's shows contain some violence, averaging 5.6 scenes per show, mostly of low intensity, yet only 11% of children's shows are rated FV.

55% of shows rated TV-Y contain violence (average of 5.7 scenes per show), and 79% of shows rated TV-Y7 contain violence.

Half (52%) of all shows rated TV-Y *without* an FV rating contain violence (2.9 scenes per show).

High risk programs not being appropriately designated.

The study assessed those shows that contain the kinds of depictions of violence known by researchers to pose the greatest risk to young viewers.

Overall, 10% of all shows contained high-risk violence, half in general audience shows and half in shows designed specifically for children.

Of the general audience shows, 40% of the shows with high-risk violence were rated TV-PG, and two-thirds of those (65%) did not receive a V rating.

Of the children's shows, two-thirds were rated TV-Y, and X% did not receive a V rating.

| ✓