



Movie Rating System

“The Rating Board does not determine the content that may be included in motion pictures by filmmakers, nor does it evaluate the quality or social value of motion pictures. By issuing a rating, it seeks to inform parents of the level of certain content in a motion picture (violence, sex, drugs, language, thematic material, adult activities, etc.) that parents may deem inappropriate for viewing by their children. It is not CARA’s purpose to prescribe socially-appropriate values or to suggest any evolution of the values held by American parents, but instead to reflect, as sensitively as possible, the current values of the majority of American parents, so that parents benefit from and feel fairly informed by the ratings system.”

—from the Introduction to the revised CARA Rules

We do not prescribe; we describe. Parents decide.

“Ratings Creep.” The rating system describes content that triggers diverse reactions. The system is criticized from the right and the left for being too lenient or too strict on sex or violence or language or drugs. But the rating system does not pass judgment on content; it simply tries to reflect what parents would deem important in deciding what to let their children watch. Is there some kind of “ratings creep”? Yes, just as there is some kind of evolution in the values of American parents. And it is that values evolution that the rating system tries to reflect. Tolerance for violence is probably greater than it was in the 1960s when the rating system was instigated. Tolerance for drug use has probably declined.

The Myth of the NC-17 Commercial “Death Sentence.” We know from experience and surveying our members that theatre chains will book NC-17 movies when the movie itself is appropriate for their markets. We also know from experience that newspapers will carry ads for NC-17 movies. NC-17 films on average make substantially more than unrated films. Serious filmmakers need to take NC-17 seriously.

“Adult Activities” as a Factor in Ratings. The recent revisions to the Rules of the Classification and Rating Administration (CARA) added “adult activities” (activities that are lawful for adults but unlawful for children, such as smoking and drinking) as a factor in the rating of a movie. Adult activities do not automatically trigger a specific rating.