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Game Content Ratings Must Change!

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Game Content Ratings Must Change!

Introduction



More than 50 games banned since Y2K throughout the world for *various* reasons.

40 more barely escaped it, and many more changed content to release in certain countries.

Australia (western leader with 25 bans to date) and 5 European countries have banned games recently.

These however are only extreme examples of censorship on our industry....

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_banned_video_games

Game Content Ratings Must Change!

Structure of presentation



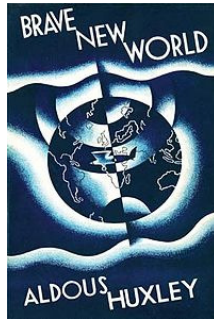
- I. Censorship: a bad habit as old as Mankind
- II. Content age ratings: how it all started and evolved through time
- III. Games content ratings: how it started, how it spread, how it works (and doesn't work)
- IV. Comparison of how film/TV series and games are rated...and why?
- V. How strict content ratings hurt our businesses...today and tomorrow
- VI. What next?

Game Content Ratings Must Change!

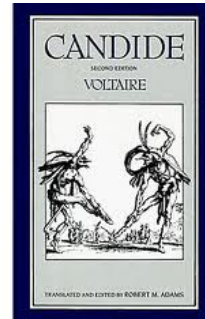
I. Censorship: a bad habit as old as Mankind



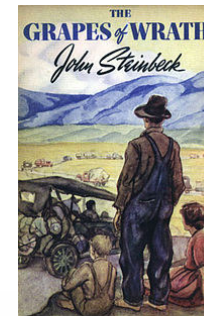
- Books, Theater Plays, Newspapers, Music, TV, Film, Internet... have all been censored (and continue to be censored in certain countries);
- Serves political, religious, ideological control of populations;
- Countries with democratic constitutions promote freedom of speech. Censorship on media represents a violation of international conventions on human rights and so unlawful in most democracies.
- Contend age ratings different from censorship: in most countries, advertised "to protect minors".

Game Content Ratings Must Change!**BOOKS**

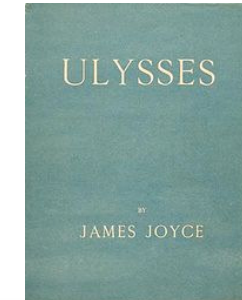
30's (Ir)
"Sexual"



30's (US)
"Obscenity"



30's (CA)
"unflattering portrayal
of area residents"



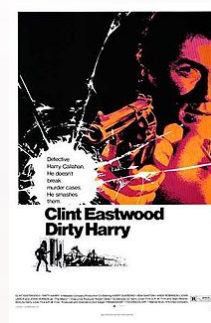
30's (UK/US)
"Sexual"



80's
"Anti-
Islamic"

FILMS

20's(Fr) & 30's (Ger)
Revolution/Marxism



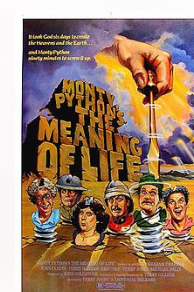
70's (Ice)
"Glam. police brutality"



70's (I)
Sex



70's (Ger/Swe...)
Violence/Gore

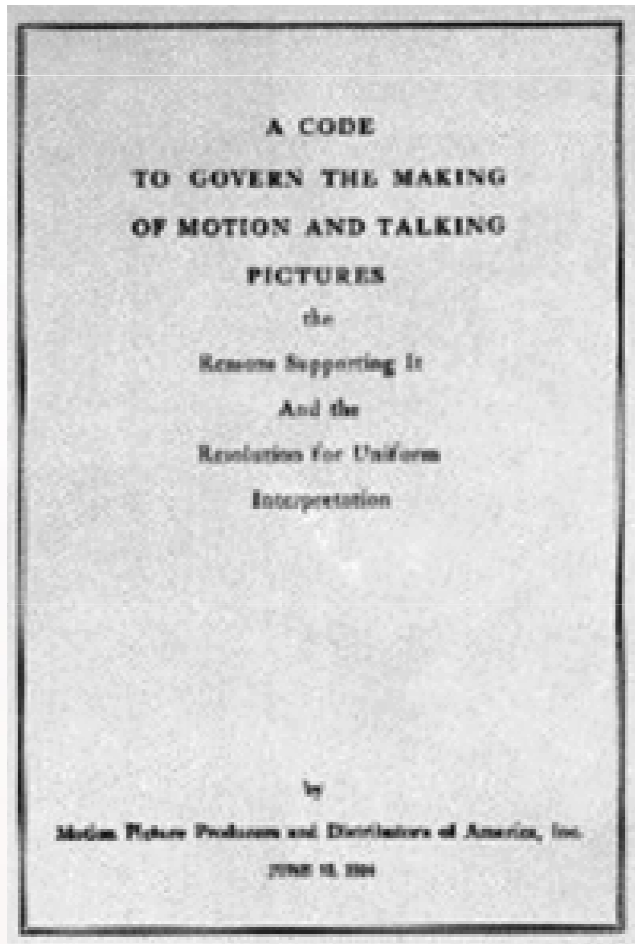


80's (Ir)
Sex/Religion

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II. Content age ratings: how it all started and evolved through time

Introduction of the Hays Code



- First introduced in 1930-34 in the US on films;
- Forbidden:
 - ❖ Mixing of the races;
 - ❖ Sexual relations outside marriage;
 - ❖ Unpunished criminal actions;
 - ❖ Treating authority figures with disrespect;
 - ❖ Misrepresenting/attacking religions;
 - ❖ Etc...
- Hollywood studios adopted the code to avoid government censorship, preferring self-regulation to government regulation.
- **The HAYS code never became Law;**

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The end of the Hays Code



- [*Blowup*](#) (1966) was denied Production Code approval but MGM released it anyway. Commercial success...

- In 1966, code more or less abandoned: a new label "Suggested for Mature Audiences" (SMA) first introduced with [*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*](#).

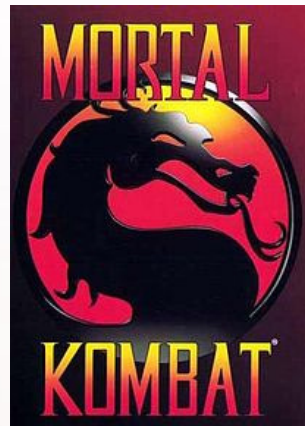


- 1968 [MPAA film rating system](#) went into effect: *G, M, R, X*.

- In 1984, public complaints regarding horror elements in PG-rated titles such as [*Gremlins*](#) and [*Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*](#), led to *PG-13* rating, a middle tier between *PG* and *R*.

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III. Games content ratings: how it started....



- Night Trap released in 1992;

No nudity or acts of violence...but the media totally misrepresented actions;

- Mortal Kombat released same year: featuring bloodletting *ala* Romero and explicit language;

= Congressional hearing lead by Joe Lieberman in 92/93:

“Form a workable, self-regulated rating system for video games within one year, or the U.S. federal government will.”

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III. Games content ratings: ...how it spread,



www.esrb.org

AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO ESRB



- Sega and 3DO first to launch a rating system, but only for their consoles -> soon abandoned;
- RSAC took over: no age rating but content information (sex, violence...) but for PC only -> abandoned 1999;
- ISDA (today ESA) launched a system in 1994: it survived and evolved through time (and strong lobbying) to become the **ESRB** as we know it today.
- Same logic as **Hays Code**: let us regulate the industry ourselves so the federal government doesn't.

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III. Games content ratings: ...how it spread worldwide,



- Other countries also introduced their codes;
- USK (Germany) launched in 1994;
- CERO (Japan) launched in 2002, PEGI in 2003;
- Some countries even feature two ratings (UK) !
- Depending on country, ratings systems are either self-regulated (PEGI/USK/CERO), independent (BBFC) or managed by a state institution (ACB in Australia).

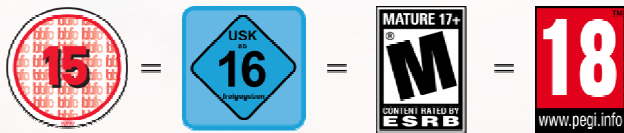
Game Content Ratings Must Change!

III. Games content ratings: ...how it works (kind of...):

| Country/System | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | Notes |
|---|---|---|--------------------|---|---|-----------|---|---|---|------|----|----|--------------|----|----|----|-----------|---------------|---|
|  ESRB | | | eC | | | E | | | | E10+ | | | | T | | | M | Ao | This was adopted on 1994 in North America. The E10+ rating was first introduced in Late 2004. |
|  ACB | | | G | | | | | | | PG | | | M | | | | MA15+ | R18+ | The restricted categories are MA15+ and R18+, the R18+ rating is to be introduced before the end of 2011. |
|  BBFC | | | U | | | | | | | PG | | | 12 | | | | 15 | 18/R18 | All ages may purchase a PG title, but parents are advised that certain content may be unsuitable for children under 8. |
|  OFLCNZ | | | G | | | | | | | PG | | | R13 | | | | R16 | R18 | All ages may purchase an M title, but parents are advised that the content is more suitable for mature persons 16 years and over. |
|  BBFC | | | 3+ | | | 7+ | | | | 11+ | | | 12+ | | | | 15+ | 18+ | PEGI and BBFC now have this duty. |
|  PEGI | | | 3+ | | | 7+ | | | | | | | 12+ | | | | 16+ | 18+ | In Portugal, ratings differ from the PEGI standard, which was 4 and 6, instead of 3 and 7, respectively. |
|  VET | | | 3+ | | | 7+ | | | | | | | 12+ | | | | 16+ | 18+ | Adopted on January 1, 2007. |
|  USK | | | Alle | | | 6 | | | | | | | 12 | | | | 16 | 18 | Not formally recognized. |
|  MJ/DEJUS | | | ER / L | | | | | | | 10 | | | 12 | | | | 14 | 18 | The same rating system is used for television and motion pictures in Brazil. |
|  CERO | | | A | | | | | | | | | | B | | | | C | Z | These ratings for video games in Japan have been used since March 1, 2006. Ratings A-D are actually unrestricted ratings. The Z rating is the only rating that is legally restricted. |
|  EOCS/CSA | | | General | | | | | | | | | | | | | | R | 18+ | Used primarily for PC games (Dating sim, Visual novel and Eroge) |
|  GRB | | | ALL | | | | | | | | | | 12 | | | | 15 | 18 | Prior to 2006, video games released in South Korea were rated by KMRB. |
|  MDA | | | ADV | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | M18 | Adopted on April 28, 2008. |
|  CSRR | | | 普 | | | 保 | | | | | | | | | | | 輔 | 限 | Protect- and Counsel-rated games should be played with parent or guardian's supervision. |
| | | | (General) | | | (Protect) | | | | | | | | | | | (Counsel) | (Restrict) | |
|  ESRA | | | 3 | | | 7 | | | | | | | 12 | | | | 15 | 1825 | Some games are forbidden. Games with Intense Violence, strong sexual content or Nudity are prohibited. |
| TIGRS | | | Family Friendly | | | | | | | | | | Teen Content | | | | | Adult Content | Created for the use of games produced by independent developers |
| Apple Inc. | | | 4+ | | | 9+ | | | | | | | 12+ | | | | | 17+ | Created for games distributed through Apple's App Store worldwide |
| Newgrounds | | | All ages/ Everyone | | | | | | | | | | Teen | | | | Mature | Adult | A content rating system developed in flash games by the website Newgrounds. |

Game Content Ratings Must Change!**III. Games content ratings: how it... doesn't work**

But sometimes...



- Most ratings given through a factual questionnaire, not taking context into account. When content watched then only the most violent/"excessive" footage;
- Self-regulated ratings not necessarily "milder". PEGI today stricter than ESRB, and sometimes BBFC, ACB or USK!
- Self-regulation = publisher regulation = no developer involvement (notable exception USK);
- Most online/mobile games not rated today....
- In general, game ratings far stricter than movie/TV series ratings;

Game Content Ratings Must Change!

IV. Comparison of how games and films are rated



VS.



VIDEO

Game Content Ratings Must Change!

IV. Comparison of how games and films are rated



VS.



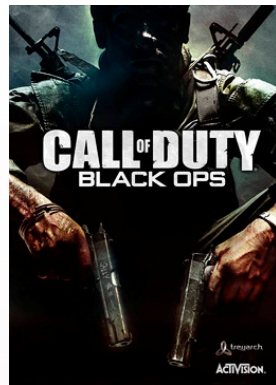
IV. Other prime examples of different “rating fates”



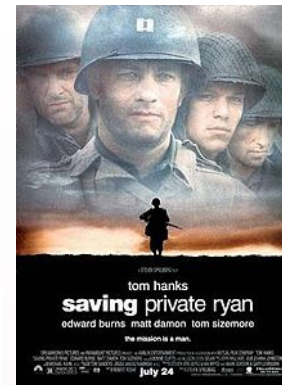
VIDEO

Game Content Ratings Must Change!

IV. Other prime examples of different “rating fates”

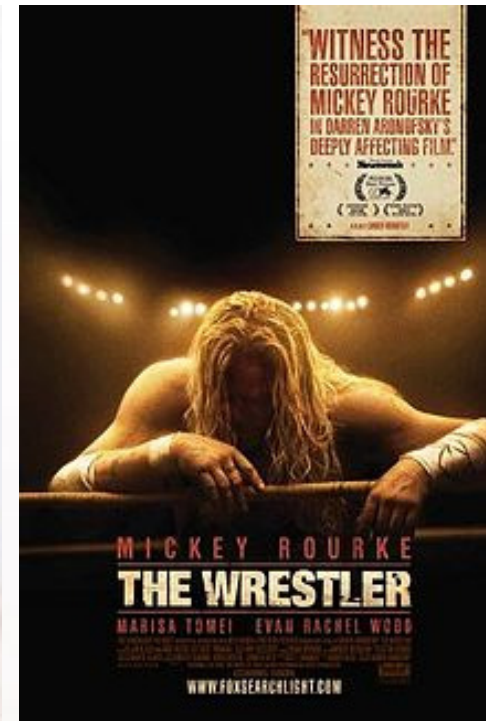


VS.



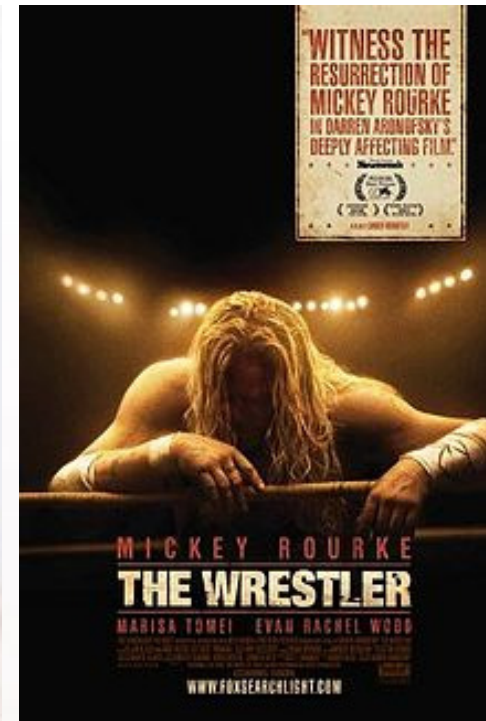
Game Content Ratings Must Change!

IV. Not to mention sex... (well, too late)



VIDEO

IV. Not to mention sex... (well, too late)



Game Content Ratings Must Change!

IV. So why are games treated differently ?

- Links to [addiction](#) and [aggression](#), but:
 - ❖ Studies found that video games do not contribute to these problems, at best a consequence.
 - ❖ No real, scientifically proven studies to back up these claims;
- The video games industry an easy target for media and politicians to blame for many modern day problems.
- Younger form of expression compared to movies:
 - ❖ Generation gap;
 - ❖ We need our Blowup's and Virginia Woolf's, but also our Truffaut's and MGM's;



Game Content Ratings Must Change!**V. How it hurts our business: today and tomorrow****Stricter than necessary ratings lead today to:**

- Confusion for customers and parents;
- Hindered Marketing activities;
- In most severe cases banning or highly restrictive distribution;
- Restricted access to public funding;
- Marginalization of video games as “subversive medium”;

More threats tomorrow:

- How will mobile and online games be rated ?
- By whom ?

Game Content Ratings Must Change!**V. What next ?**

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**Game content ratings must indeed change:**

- Equal treatment for games and movies/TV series;
- If ratings embrace different countries (e.g.PEGI) then criteria must coincide (if not...then not);
- ALL games should follow the same rating systems;

How ?

- Dev community must recognize the importance of this issue and react;
- Game creators must be heard and join rating systems boards;
- Developers & publishers must together actively promote these changes;

Game Content Ratings Must Change!

OPEN DISCUSSION