Classification changes overdue

Australia’s National Classification Scheme (NCS), used to assign ratings for films, games and publications, is long overdue for review.

ACCM has for years now been arguing that if the NCS is to do a more effective job of protecting children from harm, it needs to be based on age-appropriateness. And on a more detailed assessment than merely OK for under or over 15 or 18 years.

Along with such changes, ACCM advocates for the introduction of a legally enforceable age for “mature” movies. Presently only the MA15+ and R18+ classifications have such restrictions. Even though films classified M are “not recommended for persons under the age of 15 years” they may be seen by children of any age. A restriction at age 12 would be a much more effective protection.

One good reason to do this is that it might remove the incentive for distributors and exhibitors of M films to use all sorts of means to promote them to children of any age. For many years we’ve seen merchandise linked to M films (think most superhero movies) aimed at young children (sets of toys, pencil cases, costumes, bedding, and more). If young children were no longer able to see films of that level of impact, we should be spared this misleading practice.

A recent example of such marketing is a national cinema chain promoting ‘family fun mornings’ and the offer of a mini dinosaur toy for all child tickets sold (“while stocks last”) to see Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom, classified M for violence and themes. What responsibility will the cinema chain take if young children attend and become distressed by the content of the M movie?

It’s not as though the Australian classifiers have been heavy handed. The film warrants an M. The UK has given it 12A for threat, violence and bloody moments; the Netherlands Kijkwijzer system assessed it as 12 for violence and fear; and the US rated it PG-13 for intense sequences of science-fiction violence and peril.

ACCM has written to Event Entertainment asking for this promotion to cease. We’ll keep you posted on the outcome.

Michael Rich, “the mediatrician” visiting in August

Dr Michael Rich, the Founder and Director of the US Center for Media and Child Health will be visiting Australia in early August. He is being brought to Australia by the Australian Council for Educational Leadership (ACEL) as one of the keynote speakers at their Early Childhood conference in Sydney on August 9-10.


Dr Rich, who is Associate Professor at Harvard Medical School and Harvard School of Public Health, came to medicine after a twelve-year career as a film maker. At CMCH he combines his creative experience with rigorous scientific evidence about the powerful positive and negative effects of media to advise pediatricians and parents how to use media in ways that optimize child development see www.askthemediatrician.org

ACCM has been fortunate to engage Dr Rich to participate in Let’s talk about kids and screens, an evening event for parents and carers at the Presbyterian Ladies College, Sydney on August 9.

More details soon
EDITORIAL

Don't hold your breath!

ACCM recently reviewed the film of the Tim Winton novel Breath, classified M, and considered that it contained some themes and depictions that warranted a higher classification. We also received some comments along similar lines from ACCM members.

ACCM asked for, and received, a copy of the Classification Board’s report on the film, and consequently wrote to the Board.

Here is the text of the letter written on May 18 by ACCM’s CEO.

I write to express the concern of this Council that the film Breath, presently screening across Australia, has been classified M. In our view this film contains depictions and themes that warrant a higher classification.

We note from the Board report that your classifiers considered that the scenes of the seduction of the young teenager Pikelet by the older woman Eva, and the subsequent scenes of the use of sexual asphyxiation techniques, have only moderate impact.

We disagree for the following reasons:

1) The scenes of the seduction of Pikelet (who we are told is 14) by the older adult Eva, and their subsequent sexual relations, would appear to be a depiction of child sexual abuse. We would like to know why this element was apparently not given any consideration in your assessment?

2) The depiction of the use of a sexual asphyxiation technique is, in our view, one of high impact (for young teens for whom such procedures would be novel and risky) and warrants an MA15+ classification.

3) Further the use of sexual asphyxiation techniques is very hazardous. The M classification allows this film to be seen by all ages, and its presentation as a surfing movie makes it appealing to many young boys. An MA 15+ classification would have provided parents with a strong signal that there was problematic content, and given them the opportunity to decide about and discuss the film’s contentious elements.

You may be interested to read the extensive discussion of, and considerable parental concern about the film’s content, which is proceeding on facebook presently.

www.facebook.com/stevebiddulphraisingboys/

We wish to discuss this matter further with you.

The Board replied (in part) that “the film contains themes, sex and nudity that are inextricable linked through the narrative context of the film at the moderate impact level”!

and that:

The M classification affords notice to adults and caregivers that they need to exercise judgement in determining whether or not a film may be suitable for a younger person to view, with guidance from an adult.

Vale Tony Morphett

ACCM notes with sadness, the recent death of Australian scriptwriter Tony Morphett.

Tony was man of great talent, writing so well and for so long for both adults and children. He served on the Board of the Australian Children’s TV Foundation for nine years from September 1985 to September 1994 and wrote Quest beyond time in the ACTF’s original winners for a children’s drama series, soon after the introduction of the original C Drama quotas in the early 80s.

At one of the several conferences about children’s television held in the 70s and 80s, Tony argued strongly for the importance of children having access to Australian –made drama that reflected their own culture. He said:

Australian children have the right to dream Australian dreams

We all need to keep striving to make that dream a reality.

actf.com.au

Won't you be my neighbour?

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the first episode of the very long running US preschool series Mr Rogers Neighbourhood.

To honour the memory of the much loved host Fred Rogers (who died 15 years ago) the documentary “Won't you be my neighbour” screened in March and another “You are my friend” is expected in 2019.

Rogers’ care for his audience is reflected in the mount of thought he invested in the ways he spoke to his audience (see link below).

And he took great pains to encourage children to value themselves, singing “I like you as you are/ exactly and precisely/ I think you turned out nicely ..”

ADVERTISING


CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Dunn, J., et al. 2018. ‘It’s more funner than doing work’: children’s perspectives on using tablet computers in the early years of school. Early Child Development and Care, 188(6), pp.819-831


Ogelman, G., 2018. Examination of the relationship between technology use of 5-6 year-old children and their social skills and social status.

Early Child Development and Care, 188(2), pp.168-182.

Health


Mediation


VioLENCE

Violence
Children, brand placement and parental mediation

A recent Belgian study investigated the role of advertising literacy in how children of different ages respond to brand placement and how parental advertising mediation strategies can attenuate advertising effects.

The results of a cross-sectional study among 180 children under 12 and their parents show that older children (10 to 11 years) are better able to detect the commercial intent and the source of brand placement compared to the younger children (7 to 8 years).

However, parental advertising mediation appears to increase (instead of decrease) brand attitudes for the younger children, whereas it has no significant effect on brand attitudes of the older children.

Junk food advertisements may increase craving for fast foods

According to the US News website, a study conducted by Cancer Research UK and presented at the European Congress on Obesity (ECO) in Vienna, shows that even advertisements for fast foods seem to be making children fat.

The researchers surveyed a sample of 3,348 young people aged 11 to 19 years to examine the link between marketing and high-calorie foods.

On average, the young people watched 21 hours of television with advertising per week, with just over half of this time viewed on streaming platforms. However, obese participants were found to watch significantly more television- around 26 hours.

Overall, the results showed that the more junk food ads young people watched, the more high-calorie foods they were eating. People aged 11 to 19 who watched one extra advertisement per week about junk food, over the average of six, ate an additional 350 calories in foods high in salt, sugar and fat every week, adding up to 18,000 extra calories per year.

All participants were able to recall a favourite television ad, and seemed to be particularly influenced by ads that were fun, targeted, to their age group or catchy.

www.ndtv.com/food/junk-food-ads-may-increase-craving-for-fast-foods-study-1856869

Preschoolers, aggression and media choices

A US study aimed to gain a better understanding of the role of genetics on the relationship between aggressive media and behavior in preschool children. Using a twin and triplet sample of 184 children, the authors investigated the association between preschoolers’ preferred media choices and their aggressive behaviors.

The researchers examined children’s reports of their preferred media games and shows, observed child negativity and aggression in the lab, and parent reports of their own and their children’s aggressive behaviors.

The results demonstrated a significant relationship between maternal aggression and parent-reported child aggression, especially for boys.

Genetic analyses demonstrated significant heritability for children’s parent-reported aggressive behaviors, supporting the biological basis of aggression, but not for media aggression preferences. Controlling for genetics, the authors found that the association between media preferences and aggressive behavior may be genetic in origin.

These results emphasize the importance of considering shared genetics underlying the relationship between children’s aggressive behaviors and their media preferences, as well as environmental influences.

www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00221325.2018.1454883

Junk food marketing regulations and food sales

US researchers have conducted a study to evaluate the impact of junk food broadcast marketing policies on nationwide junk food sales and to identify policy characteristics effective in reducing sales.

Data from 79 countries was compared and results indicated that countries with junk food broadcast marketing policies saw a decrease in junk food sales per capita after implementation, while those without said policies saw an increase. Audience restrictions and standardized nutrition criteria were policy characteristics significantly associated with a decrease in sales per capita.