

Are PG-13 Films Really R-Rated?

The *Los Angeles Times* reports a new study by the American Academy of Pediatrics that reveals violence in PG-13 movies is skyrocketing and that almost 90 percent of the highest-grossing recent movies have violent characters, more than three-quarters of which also engage in drinking, smoking or sex.

The study goes on to say these PG-13 movies make violence look “as acceptable as these other behaviors.” The *Times* reports, “The study also found that the mixture of violence and at least one other ‘risk behavior’ such as alcohol or tobacco use was nearly as common in films rated PG-13 as it was in movies rated R.”

We’ve always been aware of “ratings creep,” but I doubt if most people realize it has come so far.

Other studies are revealing similar findings. The journal *Pediatrics* just a month ago found that gunplay in PG-13 releases has tripled in fewer than 30 years and that PG-13 titles are now more violent than R-rated movies. These studies have shown that violence is everywhere in Hollywood blockbusters, with 89.7 percent of those 390 movies having at least one scene of violence.

The *Times* continues, “More troubling to the researchers, characters that behaved violently in 77.4% of those 390 films also engaged in at least one other behavior considered dangerous for children and adolescents, primarily alcohol use or sex, which happened alongside violence about 62% of the time. About half of those conjoined behaviors were immediately proximate, happening in the same five-minute window.”

The question isn’t about censoring a filmmaker’s freedom to do

what he or she wants in telling a story. The question is about how accurate the MPAA rating system really is. Regardless of what you think is acceptable, families need a better way to know what behaviors are exhibited in a particular movie. In this case, the Motion Picture Association rates itself, so it's no wonder the results skew toward selling more tickets—regardless of the potential impact on children.

What about you? Are you seeing evidence of this ratings creep? If you have children or teens, how do you deal with these changing standards in deciding what movies you allow them to see?

Phil Cooke *is a filmmaker, media critic and adviser to some of the largest churches, ministries and nonprofit organizations in the world. He's the founder of the Influence Lab.*