

The Effectiveness of the Entertainment Software Ratings Board

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Introduction and Thesis

Issue: Minors having access to age-inappropriate video games.

Thesis Question: Is the Entertainment Software Ratings Board effective (in keeping obscene materials from an underage audience)?

My Stance on the Issue: Yes, the ESRB is effective in keeping obscene video game materials from minors.

Background/Opposing Views

Background Information:

The Entertainment Software Ratings Board was established in 1994 to prevent the government from regulating video games. The ESRB rates based on age groups, having ratings such as E (everyone), E 10+ (everyone 10+), T (teen), M (mature), AO (adults only), and RP (rating pending). The ESRB's reach is across North America, and works with the IARC (International Age Rating Coalition) to provide ratings for digitally distributed games across the globe.

Opposing Viewpoints:

Some parents will argue that their kids are having access to inappropriate game content regardless of the rating on it.

Some parents will argue that the ratings could be inaccurate or biased to the actual contents that players will experience.

Some parents will argue that the online communities that surround the game or that the game caters to is inappropriate for their children (online interactions).

Supporting Point 1

Studies have shown that parents do find the ratings useful when moderating what kinds of games their children play (Laczniak, 2017). Parents have said that they look at the ratings and content descriptors in order to judge if they want their child playing the game.

Supporting Point 2

After the establishment of the ESRB, there has been a decrease in number of minors with access to age-inappropriate games (Laczniak, 2017). Because parents are using the ratings to decide if their children should play certain games, less children are able to play games that are too mature or inappropriate for them.

Supporting Point 3

The ESRB works with popular retailers in order to prevent minors from getting age-inappropriate games, such as having people show their ID to purchase M-rated games (Entertainment Software Rating Board, 2018). The ESRB's official website explains how they work with retailers in order to enforce that minors are unable to purchase or rent M and AO-rated games. Those who do want to purchase games with these ratings would need to verify their age and provide identification.

Conclusion

Statistics show that the ESRB is effective in keeping obscene video game materials from minors. Parents find the ratings useful in choosing what games they want their children engaging in. Minors do not have easy access to age-inappropriate games, and retailers require age verification in order for people to purchase M and AO-rated video games.

References

- Laczniak, R. N., Carlson, L., Walker, D., & Brocatio, E. D. (2017). Parental restrictive mediation and children's violent video game play: The effectiveness of the entertainment software rating board (ESRB) rating system. *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*. 36 (1), pp. 70-78. Doi: 10.1509/jppm.15.071
- Entertainment Software Rating Board (2018). "FAQs about ESRB." *Do video game retailers support and enforce the ESRB rating system?*. Entertainment Software Rating Board. Retrieved from <http://www.esrb.org/ratings/faq.aspx#21>. Accessed on April 14, 2018.