



PG-12

Pilot Research

Research Findings

Qualitative Stage

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Prepared for



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1.0 Introduction

This report, prepared by Ipsos-RSL on behalf of the BBFC, documents the findings of the qualitative pilot stage of the PG-12 research programme, looking at the attitudes and opinions of parents of at least one child aged 8 and 11 (inclusive) towards the introduction of an advisory 12 rating.

The qualitative stage of the pilot study involved four focus group discussions with parents in the Norwich area. The groups were conducted in October 2001, in Norwich.

1. Research Background

Following the BBFC annual report, there arose the need to address the issue of whether children below the age of 12 years should be able to see films classified as suitable for children of 12 years and older. A

comprehensive research programme that would address this question was developed by Ipsos-RSL, in conjunction with the BBFC, to look at the key issues concerning parents should the current 12 rating become advisory rather than remain mandatory.

An initial pilot stage of the research programme, to be conducted in the Norwich area, commenced with a series of focus groups, with parents of children who were a mix of male and female, and of different ages. Results from this initial stage of the pilot programme were used to highlight parental opinion on the introduction of an advisory 12 rating, explore any key areas of concern and yield findings that could be incorporated in the development of questionnaires for use in later stages of the project.

2. Research Objectives

The main objectives of the qualitative stage were as follows:

- To identify reactions of parents to the introduction of an advisory PG-12 rating, to replace the current mandatory 12 rating
- To explore views on whether the introduction of a PG-12 rating would be acceptable with or without the requirement that a responsible adult would have to accompany children under 12
- To look at the area of consumer advice, and the extent to which parents use, and are willing to seek out, this information

Additional objectives were:

- To explore the extent to which the current ratings scheme was understood by parents
- To identify the cinema going habits of children and families
- To identify any differences in opinions between parents of children of different sexes and ages.

3. Research Methodology PG-12 programme

The initial pilot took place in the Norwich area. It was intended that qualitative research be followed by a two-step quantitative stage, which would address attitudes and opinions PRE to piloting 12 films under the PG-12 rating, and again during the run of several PG-12 films at local cinemas. Following this, in-depth interviews with cinema managers and front of house staff, from cinemas participating in the pilot, were to be interviewed to determine the success or otherwise, of the pilot, and explore any concerns following the piloting of PG-12 films.

An additional qualitative stage of research could be undertaken to further explore in greater depth attitudes and opinions of parents of children 8-11 who attended a PG-12 film during the pilot period.

The PG-12 Programme Pilot:

- Qualitative research with parents of children aged 8 – 11 (inclusive), whose children attend the cinema
- PRE stage interviews in-street in Norwich, parents of children aged 8 – 14 (inclusive), whose children attend the cinema
- MID/POST interviews in-cinemas in Norwich, all respondents exiting from PG-12 film
- POST in-depth interviews with cinema staff
- Additional qualitative research with parents of children aged 8 – 11 (inclusive) who have seen a piloted PG-12 film at the cinema

4. Research Methodology: Initial Qualitative Stage

Respondents were recruited to one of four group discussions. The focus groups were held in conference rooms in a hotel in Norwich, either the Jarvis International Hotel (2nd and 3rd October) or the Norwich Sports Village Hotel (9th and 10th October).

All respondents were parents of **at least one child aged between 8 and 11 inclusive**. The child aged 8 – 11 must also have been to the cinema at least one in the past 12 months. Within the groups there was a mix of parents with older and/or younger, and male and female children. The four groups were split according to social grades: 2 x ABC1 groups and 2 x C2DE groups.

Eight respondents were recruited to each group, with the hope that at least six would turn up. Actual numbers turning up for the groups were 7, 7, 8, and 7 respectively,

Respondents were given a cash incentive for taking part in the discussion group.

Group Composition:

Sex of respondent	Age	Social Grade	Sex and Age of child(ren)
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Tuesday 2nd October

Female	31	C1	Female, 10
Female	35	B	Female, 12; female, 8

Female	30	B	Male, 11
Female	42	C1	Male, 12; female, 8
Male	39	C1	Male, 9
Male	36	C1	Female, 8
Male	36	B	Female, 11; female, 10

Wednesday 3rd October

Male	35	D	Male, 11
Female	37	C2	Male, 13; male, 9; male, 6
Female	45	E	Female, 11
Female	39	C2	Male, 9; female, 20 months
Male	37	C2	Male, 11
Male	37	D	Female, 8
Male	49	C2	Female, 18, female, 11

Tuesday 9th October

Male	32	C1	Male, 8; female, 1
Male	38	B	Male, 9; female, 7
Male	36	C1	Male, 8
Male	35	C1	Female, 9
Female	39	C1	Female, 14; male, 11
Female	34	B	Male, 12; female, 11
Female	40	C1	Male, 12; female 8
Female	37	C1	Male, 20; male, 12; female, 9, female, 4

Wednesday 10th October

Female	41	E	Female, 11
Female	39	D	Female, 9
Female	35	C2	Male, 13; male, 9; male, 1
Male	38	C2	Male, 12; female, 11, male, 7
Male	37	D	Female, 10, female, 4
Male	38	D	Female, 12; male, 9
Male	32	E	Male, 11

Each group was audio recorded. A copy of the discussion guide is contained within the appendix of this report.

2. General Summary

- Parents are usually aware of the ratings allocated to films their child(ren) see at the cinema
- Parents are usually aware of the films their child(ren) are watching at the cinema, the rating of the film, who they were going with, and when they were going
- The ‘pester power’ of child(ren)’s friends, word of mouth, and TV advertising are the most popular ways of raising interest in seeing a film at the cinema
- Sometimes parents watch a movie themselves before letting their child see it at the cinema, if there is concern over the suitability of the film, or asked a friend about it
- The majority currently use the ratings as a guideline to judge whether or not the film is suitable for their child(ren) to see at the cinema
- Parents have confidence in the 12 rating
- Parents are generally not aware of the awarding body for film ratings
- Despite being aware of the ratings system for films at the cinema, parents find it difficult to suggest the correct rating when given films to allocate a rating to
- A 12 rating is considered conservative, with the majority of parents believing that a 12 film would be suitable for 10 and 11 year olds, and for some 8 and 9 year olds
- There is little or no awareness of the availability of consumer advice for films shown at the cinema
- It is generally thought useful to have information available on the level of strong language, sexual behaviour, and violence contained within a film, however with the trust placed in the 12 rating parents think a 12 film contains little or none of these
- Several places were mentioned as useful for displaying information for consumers: these include posters, trailers, cinema phone line, cinema listings pamphlets, preview screens in cinema, Ceefax,

listings in papers, radio, and TV, and alongside ratings and reviews

- Favourable reactions to the concept of a PG-12 rating include:
 - Families with a mix of children of different ages above and below 12 can attend the same film
 - Children younger than 12 considered to be fine to attend the film by their parents will be able to see it
- Key concerns raised are:
 - Personal safety and legal responsibility issues if child was to attend the film unaccompanied
 - The PG-12 rating adds another layer to the existing ratings system, which will confuse some people
 - Noise and other disturbance in the showing if child(ren) are allowed to attend unaccompanied
- Overall the PG-12 concept is difficult for respondents to grasp, either in the context of accompanied or unaccompanied attendance for children under the age of 12 years. Respondents often changed their minds over the course of the 2 hour session whilst discussing their opinions surrounding the various aspects of the PG-12 concept.

3.0 General Findings

1. Cinema Going Habits

Respondent's children are tending to go to the cinema either with friends of the same age, or with their parents – as a family or with friends too. For children under 12, a child aged 8 or 9 is generally accompanied by a parent to see a film, whereas a child aged 10 and 11 might attend with a group of friends the same age.

“The little one will go with me but the older one will always go with his friends”

“I wouldn't let the eight year old go with friends”

A few parents would not take their child under 12 to see a 12 rated film at the cinema.

“I wouldn't let her go to a 12”

Parent of an 11 year old female

Respondents did comment that at times they ‘embarrass’ their older children (defined as those aged 11

and above) during a family or parent-child cinema trip:

“He’d rather go with his mates”

Cinema trips tend to be enjoyed by both parents and children, with Disney films in particular mentioned as a family favourite. Cinema trips occur mainly at weekends and during the school holidays, with some children going early evening, depending upon schoolwork.

In addition to going to the cinema out of habit, cinema going is also viewed as a ‘treat’ for special occasions such as birthdays and during school holidays. The ‘cinema clubs’ held purely for children at some cinemas in Norwich are often used, with the opinion that it was a great way to entertain the child (ren) for a couple of hours.

The cost of going to the cinema however, when tickets, food, and drink had all been paid for, is a concern.

2. Making Choices About Films

Children are most likely to initiate a trip to the cinema, with visits generally planned in advance, to see a specific film the child has seen advertised or heard about from friends. ‘Pester power’ and word of mouth are the biggest influences in the desire to see a film at the cinema, with television adverts and merchandising also playing a key role.

“Children are the best publicists going really”

“At the moment everybody, all the kids, are on about Harry Potter”

There are differences in making choices about what to see that depend upon the age of the child in question.

“Adam always tells me what’s on.....so then we’ll arrange from there whether I go or whether he arranges to go with his friends”

Parent of 11 year old boy

“At the moment I get to pick what we go and see”

Parent of female child, aged 8.

During a discussion of recent films their child(ren) had seen at the cinema, it was found that respondents tend not to question their child's choice of film, however ratings are frequently mentioned as a guide to what was suitable for their child to watch.

"I'd say the age, the rating of the film , the certification they give to them"

"...my nine year old is a young nine year old well I think there was one 12 he asked to see...but of course he wouldn't get in he's not old enough"

"surely the age group must tell you"

"...there is obviously the ratings to go on"

Information About Films:

When parents are concerned about the film their child wants to see at the cinema, information about the movie is sought out, or the parent is influenced by seeing posters, TV adverts, trailers and looking at who stars in the film as an indication of its content. Word of mouth is the most popular option where seeking advice is concerned, with critics' reviews, and written articles being other frequently used methods of finding out further information about the film. Minimal use is made of the Internet (no mentions of the BBFC website), TV text services, and calling the cinema.

"In the local papers, they'll be mini write-ups about them"

"I pick the information up through trailers"

"If it's something that you're concerned about you try and talk to other parents I suppose"

Parents show higher levels of awareness for consumer advice on video packaging, and use this when deciding whether the film was suitable for their child(ren) to see. In a few cases where there was concern about the suitability of a film on video, the parent was watching the video themselves first, before they would let their child(ren) view it

"If you get it out on video then you can decide"

“I have been known to get a video out if the children have actually wanted to watch something... to see if it's suitable, and then let them watch it”

“When you get a video out, sometimes on a 12 there's violence and that on the back...I always do look at that”

3. Ratings

Parents are generally aware of the ratings system for films shown at the cinema, and the ratings are generally deemed a good way of knowing the suitability of a film for children.

“I always look at the age thing it gives you an indication of what the content is going to be”

“If they put it as a 12 you naturally think that's okay for a 12 year old”

“Some films you look at and you think oh yeah we'll go and see that, but you know, you can't because it's a 15 rating”

One objection to the ratings stems from the belief that some things shown on the television are ‘worse’ than anything shown during a 12 film. (Again respondents display faith in the ratings, and 12 films are considered to have little offensive content).

“I think you're far more likely to see something unsuitable at home than you are at the pictures”

“They see worse things on television”

“On Eastenders at the minute they've got a lot more harder material than what any cinema has”

One male respondent voiced the opinion that the ratings were ‘out of date’.

“I'm going to be totally honest, I think that the current ratings of films is something that came from 25 odd years ago”

Despite being aware of and trusting the ratings, parents are confused about the reasoning behind the system. Some parents are of the opinion that the ratings are allocated according to whether or not the

storyline is aimed at children,

“The ratings for me give me an idea....a 12 or below you’re just going to have family entertainment, whereas a 15 is going to have more of a storyline, maybe a little more intrigue you have to think about it more”

“You generally find that a film that’s billed a 12 will have far more of a story line and more action etc etc aimed at children, really aimed at the child’s mind. And once you start getting into 15s you get more...lots of visual, slapstick”

“Do you think sometimes, that it is rated as a 15 rather than a 12 to stop younger children going as they really wouldn’t understand it?”

Some parents however did suggest that content might play a role in the decision to allocate a rating to a film.

“If it’s rated 12 for instance is it because it’s gory is it because there’s a lot of bad language or any sex things, you know why is it a 12?”

There is also confusion as to why certain films are rated as they are:

“We thought Jurassic Park III should have been a PG ‘cos that was geared at kids”

“And ‘Save the Last Dance’ I’ve seen it and I know she’d love it and I’ve told her that when it comes out on video I’ll buy it”

Parent of female child aged 11 years.

“Is there much difference between a PG and 12, I mean I can’t see why they can’t be a PG really....is there much difference”

Despite some confusion over the reasoning behind the allocation of ratings to specific films, the group discussions revealed much confidence in the ratings, and the 12 rating in particular:

“Basically you know there’s no heavy swearing, there’s no sex, and there’s no heavy violence”

“You know there are no rampant sex scenes, you know there is no-one running around with a chainsaw chopping anyone’s head off....you know that it’s not the occult or really really awful if it’s got a 12 on it”

However, it was clear that even with much faith and confidence in the ratings, parents are still ultimately making the decision about whether or not their child should be able to go and see the film at the cinema. This decision is based largely on the parent’s opinion of their child’s level of maturity and ability to cope with the film, and their own perception of the film through what they had heard, seen and been told by others. Generally the ratings are seen as a trustworthy ‘guideline’ for what is suitable for children, however both ratings and parental consent work together to be the main influencing factors for what a child sees at the cinema.

“I suppose you trust what [ratings category] you put them in”

“I still think at the end of the day it’s up to you isn’t it, it’s your parental guidance whether you let them go or not”

“Well I’ll let her go to a 12 ‘cos I think she can get away with it but nothing more than that”

Parent of female child, aged 11 years.

“At the end of the day...you need that for a guide as a parent even though you make up your own mind in the long run whether that’s suitable for your child because every child is different aren’t they”

“...there is no way I’d take James to see a 15 or that...maybe a 12 film if he really wanted to see it but...”

Parent of male child, 8 years

The ratings therefore are generally used as a guideline for parents, to give them direction when deciding what their child(ren) go and see at the cinema. In discussion about the ratings more pertinent to the age group of children of respondents attending the focus groups, there is general agreement that a 12 rating is conservative: with 12 films being suitable for 10 and 11 year olds, and for some 8 and 9 year olds.

“I think cinema ratings are there as a very good guideline”

“A 12 year old film, there is nothing in a 12 year old film that my 10 year old, I wouldn’t feel would be embarrassed by....”

“We’ve gone to see films which are 15 rated which are very good and there wasn’t anything in there that even my youngest would be corrupted by or influenced heavily by no more than watching Saturday morning TV...”

Parent of female children, 11 and 10 years

This last comment raises the point of children under the age rating of the film being allowed to attend the film, admitted by staff at the cinema. Parents were in agreement that under 12s are often allowed to see 12 films, both by parents and cinema front of house staff.

“I’ve never heard of anyone being turned away”

“I’ve never been stopped any time, asked how old my children are...”

“If they’ve got an adult with them I think the cinema people are saying ‘well if you think your child is capable of seeing it well then that’s fair enough’ ”

However one parent of a 12 year old boy had been stopped in the past from seeing a 12 rated film due to the cinema staff’s perception of the age of their child, eventually this issue was resolved by using a written letter of permission by the cinema manager to state the child was able to see 12 rated films.

There is a difference in parents taking their child(ren) to the cinema, or allowing them to see a 12 film with friends, if under the age of 12, that depends upon the age of the child. For the majority of parents with 10 and 11 year old children, this age is seen as close to the 12 boundary and therefore they are happy for their child to see a 12 rated film at the cinema.

“Yes, well to be honest if it’s a 12, anything up to 12 she can get in, anything over 12 she wouldn’t anyway, she wouldn’t even attempt to, she knows as she’s 11 and a half she’s getting near that age so....”

Finally, only through prompting is the British Board of Film Classification mentioned as the official awarding body for rating of films. Spontaneous suggestions as to the name of the awarding body include “Board of Censors”, “ITC”, and “Government”.

4. Consumer Advice Issues

There is virtually no awareness of consumer advice for films at the cinema.

“Where’s that advertised then?”

“It’s not easily accessible is it really that information? You have to make an effort to find out”

For videos and DVDs some are aware of the consumer advice given on packaging, and feel this is a good indication of the content of the film:

“Violence, sex, nudity, it gives you stars doesn’t it...I always look”

Parents generally want information about film content. In particular there is concern amongst parents over the levels of sex and nudity, horror and violence, and imitable techniques, which might be found in a film seen by their child(ren) at the cinema. 12 rated films however, are not believed to contain these issues at a degree to which would cause parental concern.

“You know if you go and see an under 15 there isn’t going to be f’ing and blinding in it”

“If they’ve rated it a 12 you can almost guarantee that’s safe to watch”

As far as consumer advice about films is concerned, some parents think it is useful to have consumer advice in addition to the ratings to help them assess the suitability of a film for their child(ren) to watch, whereas some parents rely purely on the ratings and their own personal judgement to make that decision.

“I think the age rating is enough, I really do”

“Once you’ve got an idea of what the film is about and what they’ve decided to rate it you’ve generally got a pretty good idea”

“If it says 12 or 13 then I will ask [someone who has been to see it] or you can always phone the cinema and ask”

Respondents displayed some confusion over the distinction between independent consumer advice on films, and information about films found in film reviews, for example.

“I always look in the Evening News, there is a section that tells you what’s on at the cinemas, and tells you what it is, so I look at that first”

“You usually know what they’re about if you get the supplements, the films are in there”

Allocation of Ratings

In this section of the focus group, respondents were required to allocate ratings to films, the names of which were presented to the group on showcards, with no other visual prompts. The film titles presented were a selection of U, PG, 12, and 15 rated films.

The specific ratings allocated to films by respondents are frequently wrong – when this happened films tended to be rated too high, such as Moulin Rouge and Lara Croft being allocated 18 ratings (actually rated 12 when showing in cinemas).

Allocation of a rating is more accurate when respondents have seen the film at the cinema, and is also judged on the trailers, posters, film title itself, actors in the film and subject matter. Where relevant, some films were being allocated a rating following the respondents’ experience with related music videos, playstation games, and any prequels.

Following on from earlier discussions about why films were rated 12 in particular, respondents tend to give a higher rating to a film that was considered to have a more adult theme or storyline.

Following this initial ratings task respondents were then presented with a number of posters of recently released 12 rated films, for example Moulin Rouge, The Mummy, and Lara Croft: Tomb Raider. Respondents discussed the films they had visual depictions of, their opinions on their actual ratings, whether or not they or their child(ren) had seen the films, and eventually the fact that all were officially rated 12 was revealed to them.

When the actual ratings of the films were revealed to the group, respondents were often surprised at films rated lower than had been suggested.

“Well I didn’t think that my daughter could see either of them so she didn’t go, but now I know that she can I’d take her to see that”

Parent of female child, 11 years

The explanation that all the film titles were 12 rated films also generated discussion as to whether or not the parent would be happy to let their child(ren) go and see them:

“I actually think this 12 certificate is quite important. If I knew they were all 12s, I know I would feel my 8 year old were okay to watch it”

Parent of female child, aged 8 years

“Being 11, I think he’d watch a few of them, like he’s seen ‘A.I’, he’d watch ‘Crouching Tiger’, he’d watch ‘Pearl Harbour’”

Parents seem to accept the official rating of the film and used that rating to say whether or not their child (ren) could attend that film at the cinema or not. If the parent had seen the film themselves they were using their own judgement also in deciding whether or not to let their child(ren) see it, and if they had not seen the film themselves and were unaware of the official rating parents needed more information to enable them to make that choice.

4.0 Findings: The PG-12 Rating

1. Advisory Or Compulsory 12?

The general consensus across the four groups is that the 12 rating should act as an ‘advisory’ rating, since the ‘12’ is described as being used as a ‘guideline’ for parents to determine the suitability of the film for their child(ren) to see anyway. There is agreement that the parent should be able to decide if children under 12 should go and see the film

“If she wanted to see them well you know I’d let her she’s nearly that age anyway”

Parent of female child, 11 years

“There is nothing here he wouldn’t be able to see, really”

Parent of male child, 11 years

“I wouldn’t want my 8 year old to see any of them [referring to the 12 films previously discussed].”

“I’ve got a nine year old and I wouldn’t want him to see The Mummy Returns, or Pearl Harbour.....”

“.....you say that you wouldn’t let him watch The Mummy Returns because of the content – I wouldn’t say there was anything in there that would affect a little un... I mean if they

take things which are maybe supernatural to heart and have nightmares, you know that as a parent so you make the decision by knowing the ratings”

One favourable aspect of an advisory 12 rating is that it would make cinema going more accessible for families, especially those families with children either side of the ‘12’ age group, who wanted to attend the cinema as a family unit. What is also clear, however, is that the ratings can be utilised by parents as a tool for not permitting their child under 12 see a film that they thought was unsuitable:

“It helps us say no, doesn’t it, we say it’s against the law”

The main point arising from this section of the group discussion is the fact that the parent is the one who knows the capabilities of their child(ren) to deal with the differently rated films, and therefore is most able to make the decision over whether the child should be allowed to see it or not, at the cinema.

“I think you know he’s old enough really for these [12 rated films], for an 11 year old he’s quite intelligent and that”

“It does depend on the child”

“It shouldn’t be law it should be up to the parents... but I do think the guidance things are good”

“Because everyone’s different you’ve got your own boundaries haven’t you, you know what your kiddie can cope with and what they can’t”

Parent of male child, 8 years

Parents are considering the child’s mental state and ability to ‘cope’ with certain aspects of a film. ‘Scary’, frightening, scenes and horror came up as a key concern:

“A child’s imagination is much more, I don’t know...if they’ve got a really good imagination they’re terrified you know what your child is like”

Along with consideration of the child’s ability to ‘cope’ with a certain rated film at the cinema, the parent’s ultimate decision about whether or not a child under 12 should be allowed to go and see the film depends on factors such as age and sex, which for a parent denotes their level of ‘maturity’.

“A lot of it depends on your child...I think you are better off with PG than 15, because I think

there is such a vast range of kids which are at such different stages...also there is a difference between boys and girls as well, girls tend to be a lot more mature than what boys do at certain ages and you know what your child is....”

The issue of age of child, and what ages under 12 were considered ‘fine’ to see 12 rated films at the cinema, raised a clear distinction between 10 and 11 year olds attending 12 rated films, and 9s and under seeing films rated 12. Children of 10 and 11 years are considered ‘about that age’ anyway, therefore should be able to attend 12 rated films at the cinema. For children under the age of 10, it is considered to be more at the parent’s discretion to decide whether they should be able to see a 12 rated film or not, however generally this tends not to happen.

“Well my 8 year old doesn’t even ask to go to the pictures whereas the 10 and 11 year olds will”

“I’d only take her to see Disney films”

Parent of female child, 8 years

“But there is a big difference between 8 and 12, that’s four years”

“These films [refers to 12 rated films] wouldn’t interest an 8 year old....she’d rather be seeing cartoons and things”

“8 or 9, I just don’t think an 8 year old would be interested in seeing a 12”

The changes in opinion due to age are attributed mainly to schooling:

“They start growing up when they’re at high school. While they’re at middle school they’re still children and they need to be looked after”

One group (of ABC1 parents) spontaneously mentioned a ‘PG-12’ rating during discussion of the 12 rating being used by parents as a ‘guideline’ for 12 rated films at the cinema. This is interesting as it highlights the way that the 12 rating is being used at present.

“I think they ought to have the age then ‘slash’ PG as well, which is what people do anyway at the end of the day I suppose.....You might go and see the film and recognise that your child who is younger might be able to see it even though it’s certified as a 12 it might be okay for you which is where I’m saying the ‘slash’ PG might come in”

Parent of male child, 11 years.

2. The Issue Of Accompaniment

The creation of a permanently advisory PG-12 rating could be conditional upon children under the age of 12 being accompanied during their cinema visit.

Some consider it to be the parent's choice to decide whether or not to accompany their child(ren) under 12 to the cinema.

“The rating just denotes whether you'd let them watch it or not. The issue of whether you'd let them watch it on their own or not is down to what the parents feel about the age”

“From PG to 15 so long as they went with the parents then that's the parent's responsibility...so it's up to you, that's your choice if you take them along, as a parent”

Parent of male child, 11 years

“Once they get to 12 it's up to your discretion as a parent you know whether your child is capable of being left to go in on their own and what have you”

“I would let my son see any of those films, purely because they're 12s, but I would not let my son go to the cinema on his own”

Parent of male child, 11 years

It is felt however that some parents may not be responsible enough to decide whether they should accompany their child(ren) under 12 or not

“You personally know with your children, but what I'm saying is that not every adult is responsible enough to make that decision”

Where the issue of accompaniment is concerned, the age of the child can be a focus. Some respondents consider 10 and 11 year olds fine to see a PG-12 film unaccompanied by an adult, with children under the age of 10 considered 'too young' to attend the cinemas, regardless of what the rating of the film, unaccompanied.

“I wouldn't want my 8 year old to go without me anyway....they're still kids aren't they?”

For other respondents however, accompaniment of any age of child under 12 to see PG-12 films is thought necessary:

“I think if you’re going to do that it’s gotta be with a parent”

“I still think the parent should accompany...fair enough, my daughter’s 11 and a half, that’s very close to the age limit but I wouldn’t agree to her going to see it, if she was 8 and it had a rating of 12 I wouldn’t let her go and see it. If I wanted to go and see it with her then I would go and pay, ‘cos I’d be in there watching it....and if I found it was unsuitable I would be ‘get your coat’ and I’m off”

Parent of female child, 11 years

When respondents consider who should be accompanying children under 12 to the cinema, the majority feel a responsible adult over the age of 18, or the parent themselves, should be the one to accompany the child.

“I think they would have to say they’d either have to be 12 or have a parent with you”

“I think they need to be with a parent”

A few respondents suggested that anyone over the age of the classified film would be suitable as the one to be responsible for the child under that same age during an accompanied visit:

“I think basically someone who is over the age limit of the restriction that is applied” [However it is interesting to note that this parent personally would not allow an eight year old child of their own see a film unaccompanied or with another child a little older than them]

“Someone you know who is old enough and capable enough of taking care of your child”

A few respondents suggested that ‘accompaniment’ might mean paying for the child’s ticket at the front desk rather than actually having to be present during the showing with their child under the age of 12 years.

“If I give her permission to be at home and watch things after 9 o’clock.... Surely I should be able to give permission, at the front desk, for my child to go in and watch that film”

There are some issues regarding accompaniment that occurred across the groups, however. Security of the child was a major factor in unaccompanied cinema going, regardless of the age of the child in question, more so in fact than concern over the content of the film. Parents were also worried that if young children were to attend the cinema unsupervised, that they might ‘play up’ during the showing and upset other cinema goers

“It’s what’s happening around them not what’s on the screen in front of them”

“Putting the PG rating [on a 12 film] for me would just mean that the parents who don’t want to have to supervise their kids will be ‘well they’re going with him’, dump, go, and it’s going to ruin everyone else enjoyment”

Some positive aspects to children being allowed to attend the cinema unaccompanied to a PG-12 film were discussed, in that cinema going would be more flexible and accessible to children under the age of 12

“They could do 12 stroke PG, so like you say, it’s a 12 but if you feel your younger child could cope with that, there is no reason, without the parent, that they couldn’t go and see it”

4.3 The Role Of Consumer Advice

There are differing views about the need for consumer advice in addition to the ratings already allocated to films at the cinema. The research has shown that parents have confidence in the ratings to guide them in deciding what is and is not suitable for their child(ren) to see on screen, and some parents believe the rating alone is sufficient enough to denote whether the film is suitable or not for their child without additional consumer advice to hand

“If they’re going to set that restriction 12 and over 15 and over, they know why they’ve set that restriction”

“I think the age guideline is good enough for me”

Some respondents, however, clearly think that consumer advice alongside a PG-12 rating is important, if not essential, for them to be able to make a fully informed decision about whether or not to let a child of theirs under 12 to see a film.

“How do you know you need to give parental guidance unless you know what the film is about?”

“...but then there’s GOT to be reviews somewhere about what the new film is about so you’ve got that information about what the basic film is about”

Parent of male child, 9 years, and 20 month old daughter

One parent made the analogy between knowing the content of a film at the cinema being akin to knowing the ingredients in food

“It’s like, you’re trying to sell a product, to the general public. If you go to like, ASDA, and you buy a product in there, the law states they’ve gotta tell you the ingredients of anything in that specific product before they buy it. And I think these film people should do the same thing, ‘cos after all they’re trying to sell you a film aren’t they, and you should know what’s in that film before you go inside. That way it safeguards your children. I wouldn’t buy a product if I knew it was going to be dodgy”

There were various suggestions as to the specific type of advice that would be helpful in finding out further information about a film. The theme of the film, and storyline came up as something that parents might find useful to have some information and advice about

“If they put the reason why they’ve put it as a 12 if they put ‘12 thriller’ ‘12 dead boring’ like ‘Castaway’, ‘12 violent, fighting’, we’d know why it was rated 12 and we’d make the choice”

The groups have several suggestions as to where consumer advice on films might appear. Advice and information provided on visual objects, for example posters and trailers, were popular suggestions, along with cinema listings pamphlets, cinema phone lines, and alongside existing reviews in the papers. Cinema preview screens and TV text services were also suggested

“I think if you’re going to do that [create a PG-12 rating] then you need to go back to how it used to be, I mean your movie review...just some independent person giving the basics”

“They need [the information] to be on posters...billboards”

“They could put ‘this film contains...’ [in the papers]”

A system of ‘symbols’ or ‘star’ ratings for demonstrating the level of, for example, strong language, violence, and sexual behaviour contained in a film (similar to that displayed on the back of video boxes)

is considered by some a good way of presenting further information about a movie, in addition to the rating

“At the moment you have the age limit, you have the symbol you have the 12 you have the PG why can't they just do a symbol next to it...”

“.....saying action movie, etc”

“Why can't they put somewhere [on the poster for the film] an article and explain sex, violence just so you know what the film's about?”

The consumer advice parents wanted was considered best to come from an independent source, to be as unbiased as possible.

Despite some respondents believing consumer advice is a necessary adjunct to films with a PG-12 rating, there remain some parents who think that the guideline of the official rating is the only requirement for them to judge whether or not the film is suitable for their child of any age, as this comment below highlights:

“I think you've got to have the age restriction, the guidelines on it then you make the decision as a parent. If you don't want to see it don't go”

4. Making The Decision About The PG-12 Rating

Across the groups there is a consensus that focus groups, and speaking to the parents of the children in the age group in question, are a good way of collating opinions surrounding the PG-12 rating. Respondents think that parents are the key group of individuals who should have a say in the possible creation of a permanently advisory PG-12 rating, however cinema goers, adults, and children themselves are also considered to hold views that are important in making the decision to create a new rating for 12 films.

“I think it's up to the public to make the decision, isn't it?”

4. The Impact Of The PG-12 Rating

Should the piloted PG-12 rating be made advisory permanently, there is agreement that it would not change the cinema-going habits of the respondents. However, it would give them more freedom to make

the ultimate decision on behalf of their children under 12 in allowing them see a film rated PG-12 at the cinema, and to attend as a family where children under 12 are involved.

“At the end of the day you’ve got the choice, haven’t you”

“If you think that your child is responsible enough then you have that choice”

“At least if you were a family and you had a 12 and a 9 year old you’d get in wouldn’t you”

The way that the PG-12 rating might be used by parents, in allowing their child under 12 to attend a PG-12 film at the cinema, differs with age of child for some respondents. Some parents show concern about children aged 10 seeing a PG-12 film at the cinema, and very few parents would either take themselves, or be happy to let children under the age of 9 go without them.

“10 to 12 is such a big difference in ages”

“I would never have thought about taking an 8 year old to see a 12 film”

Some parents do see a PG-12 rating as official confirmation of how they are using the ratings system presently

“That’s the way we’re using the number on the film anyway”

Of those who showed concern over a permanent PG-12 rating, the main reason given is that it might just ‘confuse’ parents and cinema-goers, by adding a new structure to the existing system

“It’s just confusing the issue and I think personally that it’s going to confuse people even more”

“I think it will confuse people more, giving a secondary rating to an already existing category”

“I think once you start slashing them it’s an in-between and it’s you know and you star...I think if it’s a straight U, PG, you know....”

An additional concern with an unaccompanied PG-12 rating is that ‘irresponsible’ parents might allow children to go to the cinema who would disrupt the film and create noise or disturbance in the showing.

Legal responsibility is also a worry for some, especially in the context of young children attending the cinema unaccompanied

“If you had a 12 year old at home, I don’t think legally you’d be able to leave that 12 year old to look after a 4 year old, so why when you go to the cinema is it any different?”

4. Any Other Issues

Although the views of respondents were highly individual across the groups, generally parents form their opinions according to their experiences of attending the cinema with their children, the age of their child, and their child’s ability to cope with the issues that might be present within a film. It is clear that parents consider children to change dramatically between the ages of 8 and 12 years, a change that coincides with the progression in school years, and gaining independence from their parents and taking part in more social activities with friends of the same age.

It is felt that most young children, under the age of 9, would not want to see 12 rated films at the cinema anyway – they are more interested in cartoon type and animated movies, and can be ‘bored’ with films aimed at 12 years and over.

“8 or 9 I just don’t think an 8 year old would be interested in seeing a 12”

“Well my 8 year old doesn’t even ask to go to the pictures whereas the 10 and 11 year olds will”

For this qualitative stage of the pilot research, the four group discussions were split according to social grade (2 x ABC1 groups, 2 x C2DE groups). No significant differences in attitude or opinions towards the various aspects of the PG-12 rating were noticed, with any consensus in attitudes tending to be based upon other things, such as age of child and experience of cinema-going, as mentioned previously.