Congress Censors the Stars: How 1970s Television Set the Foundation for the FCC’s Parental Guidance System

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Abstract

The 1970s in the United States was a decade full of social change with reflection on topics such as women’s rights, racial prejudice, and illicit substance use. As Americans began shifting the way in which they thought about their society, this change was also being made present in their own living rooms through their television sets. In response, the Federal Communications Commission would eventually implement a series of parental guidance ratings to give parents more autonomy over what their family was watching on TV.

The connection between seventies television and parental guidance ratings is a relatively unexplored topic. Secondary literature divides the topic into two pieces: the “revolutionary” nature of the programming and the actions of the FCC and their effectiveness. The primary documentation used to support this essay’s argument consists of television episodes, interviews, nationally conducted research, and government documents supporting various claims.

The television programming of the 1970s laid the foundation for the FCC rating system that would follow almost two decades after. These two seemingly unrelated topics find their common ground in the controversy surrounding various TV shows and the rationale for implementation and categorization of television today. This research provides a new perspective on the history of television in the United States. In addition, it examines the roots of a rating system still used by TV viewers today.
Introduction

The 1970s in the United States was undoubtedly filled with social and political unrest. After the turmoil experienced during the Civil Rights Movement and building on the idea of a “Great Society,” Americans were entrenched in a decade of social change with the Feminist and Gay Rights Movements, mass protest against U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and increased regulatory federal actions on drug possession and consumption. Nowhere was this better reflected than in some of the most popular and defining television programming of the decade. While shows from the decades previous, such as the Twilight Zone, covertly provided commentary on social issues and unrest, the dramas and sitcoms of the seventies did so overtly. Where dramas showed racial, familial, and sexual violence, sitcoms provided social commentary on it.

This exact same argument can be made for the depictions of drugs and drug usage on television during this time. Further, the ways in which the aggressors and victims of violence and substance abuse are depicted serve as a direct reflection of a change, or potentially lack thereof, in societal views on race and gender. Because of the shift from covert to overt depictions and commentary, the Federal Communications Commission attempted to step in, in accordance with the Surgeon General’s Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behaviors’ report, for regulation, but would not see success until January 1, 1997, with the implementation of parental guidelines for TV. The argument can and will be made throughout this essay that the overt depictions of violence and substance abuse on television in the seventies laid the foundation for the 1997 FCC implementation of parental guidance and rating system (TV-G, PG, MA).
Literature Review

The literature for this research can be divided into two key pieces: television and regulations. The connection between the two is not a widely explored subject, making secondary literature on it scarce. In this specific review, the initial separation of television literature and regulation analysis make it appear as though these two aspects are unrelated. However, the secondary literature from both perspectives of television and regulation discuss the same reasons for public reaction and regulatory action. This provides a strong link between the two through avenues of social attitudes that would lead to policy change.

Literature surrounding seventies television focuses heavily on the societal reflection taking place on the screen. These typically involve analyzing the ways in which gender, race, and sexual orientation were depicted during this time. A key thing to note, however, is that much of the literature surrounding this focuses on representation through sitcoms and not dramas. Any social commentary presented on seventies television drama is brought about through the use of primary sources rather than secondary writing.

One example of reflectionary secondary literature comes from sociologist and media scholar Andrea Press in her contribution to *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, titled “Gender and Family in Television’s Golden Age and Beyond.” This source is useful in several ways through its critique of race, gender, and sexuality portrayals on screen. However, it overarchingly uses these themes to describe the newfound relevance of television during the seventies. It also is useful in explaining how television set itself apart from decades past, analyzing gender and familial archetypes and the slow shift that mirrored the Feminism movement ideals of womanhood.¹

Further exemplifying this, but including the political factors of the decade, is Kirsten Lentz “Quality versus Relevance: Feminism, Race, and the Politics of the Sign in 1970s Television.” As opposed to Press, this article examines the manifestation of feminism, as well as race, as a political force on screen. It looks at how the Feminist Movement and the Black Power Movement were reflected in a way that was digestible to the viewer, without overt and realistic politcalization as seen in other forms of media (newspapers, cable news programming).\(^2\) Focusing on shows such as *Rhoda* and *Maude*, it examines the use of race and gender as driving forces behind messaging and its influence on social attitudes. Additionally, it categorizes television programs into two categories: Quality Programming and Relevant Programming. The Quality Programming category consists of shows that don’t focus on social issues such as *Little House on the Prairie* and *Happy Days*. Relevant Programming is the polar opposite, containing TV designed around social issues, like *All in the Family* and *Soap*.

Finally, one cannot research seventies television without discussing Norman Lear, the creator of many controversial TV programs of the decade. In his book, *The Rise and Fall of the Religious Left: Politics, Television, and Popular Culture in the 1970s and Beyond*, author Benjamin Rolsky discussed the religious and political aspects of Lear’s creations. This source offers a unique perspective as to why the FCC wouldn’t take policy action after a failed court case, stating that “…his programming was largely understood as contributing to the ‘public interest’…”, of which was a topic that the FCC would not touch due to their own precedent.\(^3\) It continues by explaining the reaction of the religious, yet left leaning public, arguing that, even though politically most agreed with the sentiments presented in a given storyline, it


caused a crisis of faith in many. Using primary quotes the author explores the relationship between the political, religious, and one of TV’s top executives of the decade. This source acts as a view into controversy at the executive level of television, which is crucial in wrapping together the entire picture of television, American society, and the controversy between the two.

There are several effective sources of secondary literature relating to the 1996 Telecommunications Act used in this research. Typically, these sources come in the forms of summaries and explanations of the FCC’s rationale and public opinion. One great source of information is Stern Penalties: How the Federal Communications Commission and Congress Look to Crackdown on Indecent Broadcasting by Geoffrey Rosenblat. Rosenblat explains what the FCC is and its powers as a governing commission of the U.S. Congress. In addition, the author explains the ways in which the FCC has acquired these powers since its inception in 1934 and its expansion into regulating a multitude of media platforms. However, the main focus in this article is the criteria and methods used by the commission in defining and regulating “indecent broadcasting”. An additional aspect acknowledged by the author is that “indecent” is a relative term to the context it’s compared against; in this case, the context is changing societal standards for what is and is not appropriate, including dress, language, and viewing⁴.

In a more comprehensive and narrowed explanation, Sherille Ismail offers an overview of every major decision made by the FCC over the course of its first 70 years. "Transformative Choices: A Review of 70 Years of FCC Decisions" pays particular attention to the decisive decade of the 1970s and its impact on regulatory television policy. Similarly to Rosenblat (2006), Ismail describes the growth of the FCC’s reach over media. However,

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the document mainly provides insight into the policies enacted by the FCC that affected TV programming such as who can own networks, what they can show, when they can show it and where. The author argues that the FCC showed favoritism toward allowing incumbent broadcasters to maintain their programming slots during primetime, while newer networks were given less viewed/opportune time slots. This argument is key to this research for a significant reason—it provides an insight into why TV networks were advised to self-regulate their own scheduling and/or showtimes for their relevant shows despite large viewing times and success.

Finally, an article by Amy Nathanson and Joanne Cantor provides a glimpse into the argument in support of TV regulations and the technology that allowed it to be possible. *Protecting Children from Harmful Television: TV Ratings and the V-Chip* revolves around a study conducted on whether or not parents actually wanted or cared about TV rating systems. The study concluded that parents did, in fact, support these guidelines. However, they also conclude that the TV rating system is relatively ineffective when analyzing the amount of violence and adult content between TV-PG and TV-14 rating programming. This source is of particular appreciation for two reasons. First, it was published within two years after Parental Guidelines were made mandatory for television, providing a retrospectively relevant analysis. Second, it backs up the main argument from parents and the FCC when attempting to regulate programming in the 1970s—protecting the children from adult content and themes.

In conclusion, the secondary literature surrounding the direct connection between 1970s television being the foundation for the 1996 implementation of Parental Guidelines is limited. However, through the use of secondary literature explaining both the revolutionary

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programming of the decade and the background and implications of FCC regulations, the connection is established and will be further defended through primary documentation.

**Part I: Ready, Set, Action**

Television of the decade saw a drastic shift in the presentation of the social messaging conveyed by its programming. Television of the fifties and sixties did, in fact, provide commentary on social issues of the time. *The Twilight Zone*, which aired from 1959 to 1964, is founded on this premise. One example of this specific program providing social commentary is in an episode titled, “Eye of the Beholder”. The episode shows a woman, Janet Tyler, who has undergone multiple surgeries as an attempt to conform to her society’s beauty standards. When the surgery does not work, and she is still considered “hideous”, she is sent to live in a separate community apart from the “beautiful people” by order of the state.7 “It isn’t fair,” she states, “that people who look different have to live and stay away from the people who are normal.” While at the surface this episode is about separating attractive and unattractive people, the greater theme of who and what defines beauty carries undertones of racial segregation by governmental separation based on physical characteristics (a commentray on state redlining). However, viewers, specifically children, may not normally be able to decipher this subcontext.

This varies greatly from what is seen on television just a few years after *The Twilight Zone*’s final season. Beginning in the 1970’s, television began to take a more realistic feel through social commentary. However, it did so overtly, presenting and discussing issues in a way that everyday Americans would be more familiar with. The same subject of segregation

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can be seen in an episode of *Good Times* (1974-1979). Good Times is a sitcom that follows a black family on the East side of Chicago, often exploring themes of prejudice, race, and segregation. One episode in particular that addresses this is “Cross Town Buses Run All Day, Doodah, Doodah. It sees a young character, Micheal, having to be bussed from the “ghetto” to the nicer school on the predominantly white side of Chicago. While the two television shows discuss the same theme of racial segregation, *Good Times* does so in a much less metaphorical way that is plain to understand. However, comparing a psychological drama like the *Twilight Zone* to a sitcom like *Good Times* is like comparing apples to oranges, as they serve two different entertainment purposes. Comparing sitcom to sitcom provides a clearer picture of viewer preferential switch.

Focusing specifically on the years 1970 and 1971, popularity of “quality” sitcoms (providing comedy through specific circumstances in a given episode) and “relevant” sitcoms (providing comedy through the discussion of social issues) switched places on the national rank. In 1970, on the week of September 14-20th, *Here’s Lucy* (1968-1974), an off-shoot of *I Love Lucy*, peaked at #1 on the chart. At the same time the following year, *All in the Family* (1971-1979) had taken its place. Within a matter of 12 months, the American public had seemed to have swapped their viewing habits from the quality comedies reminiscent of the past to relevant social commentary infused with humor. This trend continued as, by the mid-1970s, it became relevant sitcoms battling each other for the #1 spot. At this point it becomes a larger battle between television networks (explored later in this essay).

On the other hand, dramas of the 1970s do not appear to follow this trend, or really any trend at all. *Gunsmoke* (1955-1975), a historical drama, takes the top spot a number of

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times during the decade. However, during this period, it is rivaled by a few modern day-set medical and police dramas. Unlike the relationship between relevant and quality sitcoms, there doesn’t appear to be the same, relatively swift change between the two categories of dramatic television. *Marcus Welby, M.D.* (1969-1976) and *Medical Center* (1969-1976), two modern-set dramas, held #1 placements on and off throughout the early seventies. Yet, they continued to battle for their spots with historical dramas, such as *The Waltons*. While these two non-violent types of dramas fought one another for the higher ratings, police dramas, which showed weapon usage, physical violence, and drugs were consistently polling within the bottom half of the top ten viewed television programs across the United States.

**Drugs on Screen**

Alongside the social commentary provided by sitcoms, the American public was also watching programming that contained drugs, alcohol, and violence of various forms. While vastly different from what is shown on T.V. today, the 1970s saw some of the first instances of drugs regularly discussed over the airwaves. Typically shown in police dramas, but also prevalent in a few sitcoms, depictions of illicit substances ranged from marijuana to heroin. For instance, in “It’s only a Game” of cop-drama *Police Woman* (1974-78), the main character is seen infiltrating a prison drug right, showing many different types of substances, referred to only as “narcotics”.\(^\text{12}\) In an episode of *Charlie’s Angels* (1976-1981) titled “Angels of the Deep,” the women go scuba diving, only to find a massive amount of marijuana in a sunken treasure chest.\(^\text{13}\) However, this would not be the first time marajuana


was shown on television. A 1967 episode of *Dragnet* features the presence of the drug on screen.\(^{14}\)

This particular episode’s discussion around marijuana is negative, saying at one point, “we’ve heard a lot of people claim that marijuana is harmless…we know that we arrest more than 14,000 addicts a year. They’re on cocaine, LSD, pills…but they all began with marijuana”. Further reiterating this rhetoric, “You chippy around with marijuana long enough and you’re gonna buy yourself a lot of grief.” It’s the age-old tale of marijuana existing as a gateway drug. This idea was not new in 1967, however. A 1961 episode of the *Andy Griffith Show* named “Quiet Sam” prompts the same type of gateway drug conversation surrounding marijuana.\(^ {15}\) While these examples were prior to the seventies, it portrayed a deeply rooted stigmatization and fears about the drug and its usage in teens. It wasn’t until the 70’s that social commentary on television acknowledged the relatively small percentage of the American public that supported legalization. In 1974, the first report of the National Commission on Marihuana was published. At that time, an average of 12% of the American public supported legalization of marijuana.\(^ {16}\) This shows that legalization was not a widely popular cause.

In a 1972 episode of *Maude* (1972-1978) titled “the Grass Story,” Maude can be seen fighting with her husband over a sizable bag of marijuana.\(^ {17}\) The storyline continues with her protest against harsh and unjust punishments for marijuana offenses, specifically against young black men. Similarly, in a 1974 episode of *Sanford and Son*, two characters find


marijuana growing in another’s garden. While the main character, Fred, is aptly opposed to this and argues that it “leads to a life of crime”, the younger characters talk about legality and the “changing ideas” around it. Further, they talk about the varying degree of consequences between white and black offenders. The messaging around drug use plays off of the message portrayed in Dragnet and Andy Griffith, but shifts to resemble the progressive commentary of Maude, despite only 12% of Americans supporting its legalization in 1972.

Through the comparison of these two types of programming, it is evident that the dramas of the era showed the physical presence of drugs and other substances. It is also prevalent that sitcoms provided social commentary on the issue of drugs and their usage with a more progressive, yet publicly unpopular, opinion. The messaging surrounding marijuana usage can be tracked throughout popular media, but the importance lies in the shift of messaging in sitcoms like the Andy Griffith Show, Maude, and Sanford and Son.

Similar themes can be applied to the depiction and discussion of violence on television during the 1970’s. It’s important to recognize that there are several forms of violence. Television during this time focused on physical and sexual violence. Mirroring the way in which dramas depicted drugs/usage and sitcoms provided a reflection on it, the same method applied to these forms of violence.

**Violence on Screen**

Physical violence existed on television long before the 1970s. Shows like Gunsmoke, Bonanza (1959-1973), and The Lone Ranger (1949-1957) all featured episodes of fist fighting and shooting. In this aspect, the dramas of the 1970s follow suit. However, television of the decade moved in a different direction when discussing physical violence,

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especially in sitcoms. Sitcoms of the era touched on domestic violence. In a Good Times two part episode titled “The Evans Get Involved”, the family befriends a 10-year old neighbor, only to discover that she is viciously abused by her mother. While this specific episode does not show any physical abuse, it does show the aftermath (bruises and marks) and the reflection of the changing ways of thinking about child abuse. Another form of physical violence is also explored through the sitcom format: spousal abuse. In a 1973 episode of Maude, titled “Walter’s Problem,” the episode shows Maude’s drunken husband slapping her across the face. While primarily a commentary on alcoholism, the episode also dives into the conversation surrounding husbands abusing their wives. This further deviates the sitcoms of the seventies from those of the previous decades through the types of discussions being presented to the viewer.

This coincides with the representation of sexual violence on television as well. While assault wasn’t a completely unheard of subject in medical or crime dramas of the past, the 1970s brought the conversation to the forefront of American living rooms. Through the dramatic lens, episodes like “Gladiator” from Medical Center provide a look at the recovery from sexual assault. In contrast, police dramas like Charlie’s Angels “Terror on Ward One” depict the actual act (all be it not as graphic as it is depicted in some programs seen today). The more important aspect of sexual violence on television is the acknowledgement and conversations surrounding the victim. All in the Family dedicates two separate episodes to this. In the first episode, “Gloria, the Victim,” the daughter of Archie Bunker is assaulted on her way home from work. She describes in detail her traumatic experience and the episode continues by acknowledging the lack of resources for assault survivors and the stigma

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surrounding it. The series reiterates this in a later season’s episode titled “Edith’s 50th Birthday”, where a very similar story plays out with Archie’s wife, Edith. *All in the Family* ranked #1 in the U.S. when the episodes premiered, respectively.2425 This concludes that, in fact, America was watching this type of violence being discussed at home.

In addition to this, *All in the Family* tackled a number of racial issues as well. There is an argument to be made for racial violence being addressed through seventies television as well. It heavily resembles the nature in which sexual violence was depicted and discussed. However, this argument focuses more so on the institutionalized “violence” rather than physical. Other sitcoms, such as the previously mentioned *Good Times, Sanford and Son, Maude*, as well as the addition of *The Jeffersons*, provided the social commentary on issues such as racial profiling, segregated housing, and outright bias and bigotry. In terms of physical violence against people of color on screen, a study by George Gerber states that, “The violents comprise half of all white American characters, six out of every ten white foreigners, and two-thirds of all nonwhites. The groups suffer from violence…with six out of ten whites, but eight out of ten nonwhites falling victim to some violence.”26 The dramas had a precedent of showing people of color as the aggressor and the agressee. This promoted a stereotype non-white, non-Americans, and both, are more apt to violence, both committing and recieving. This, along with the potentiality of promoting other stereotypes, was cited by the Report to the Surgeon General from the Surgeon General’s Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior in their report to the Surgeon General in 197127 (further referred to as “the Report”).

**Part II: Federal Communications and TV**

The Report was a major step in the government analysis of television on the American public. In summary, this report provides an overview of television programming, specifically in terms of violence and society. It serves as a study into the effects of violence in the media and how the susceptibility of young viewers is impacted in relation to their social behaviors. While this report was published at the beginning of the decade, it, in conjunction with similar research published during the same year, serves as a primary insight into the basis of TV analytics within the first years of the 1970s before many of these “controversial” sitcoms and dramas were on the air. The final findings of the report state, “Frequent viewing usually begins at age three and remains relatively high until about age 12.” Additionally, it concludes that, “television…is progressing through a series of stages, from intriguing novelty…to possible differentiation as a servant of varied tastes.” This falls in line with the main outrage from both the government and segments of the public over the content being shown on television, specifically at the potential exposure to young children.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is a subsection of the United States Congress, therefore reporting directly to it. The purpose of this commission, as defined by itself is,

The Federal Communications Commission regulates interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories. An independent U.S. government agency overseen by Congress, the commission is the United States' primary authority for communications law, regulation and technological innovation.

The FCC holds primary control over cable television. Therefore, it can dictate what is and is not appropriate for any category of viewers. Leading up to the seventies, there was no way for parents to preemptively judge if a television program would be suitable for their child’s viewing (and there wouldn’t be until 1997). Parents didn’t have an indication of what

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would be shown or discussed during a given episode. Because of the nature of violent dramas and realist sitcoms, Americans became outraged when their children were exposed to the sex, violence, and inappropriate language very suddenly\textsuperscript{30} and without their relative permission.

Because of this abrupt showing of adult themes, the Report encouraged “remedial action.” While no specifics were given on what that specifically was or meant, the FCC held the authority to determine what that meant and how it could be put into action through their Fairness Doctrine of 1949. This doctrine allowed for fair competition between opposing views and required broadcasters to provide programming in the public interest.\textsuperscript{31} Through these expansive powers, the FCC posed a serious threat to the censorship and regulation of television, specifically through the aspects of opposing views and public interest.

The public’s interest with television during the 1970’s was conflicted. As previously seen, the controversial television shows typically polled at #1 in the country week after week. However, critics were very prevalent, making statements such as, “What a show for 8 p.m.! And to think they are taking Bonanza off in favor of this trash…the vast tasteless TV sea.”\textsuperscript{32} With a contentious public attitude and potential federal intervention, television networks took their own action to avoid interference. However, this was to no avail.

The FCC, fuelled by public opinion and criticism, introduced the “Family Viewing Hour”, which was designed to “...be a pause in the day’s occupation’ when the sex and mayhem that normally fills America’s television screens is replaced by shows…that would embarrass neither parents nor children.”\textsuperscript{33} During primetime hours, between 7-9 p.m., stations


\textsuperscript{31} House of Representatives., 17 Broadcasters and the Fairness Doctrine: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives, one hundredth Congress, first session on H.R. 1934 ... April 7, 1987 § (1987).

\textsuperscript{32} Rolsky, 2019.

were mandated to air “family friendly programming.”

Several actors and network executives spoke out against these regulations. Two notable shows would be affected by this time slot shift, and the lead actors were not shy in sharing their thoughts. “Congress has no right, whatsoever, to interfere in the content of the media,” said *All in the Family*’s Carrol O’Connor. Star of the T.V. show *M*A*S*H*, Alan Alda, states that, “If you can censor a joke today, then tomorrow you can censor the expression of any thought—if you can censor a joke. It just becomes easier the next day.”

After contentious responses from network executives and actors, the networks decided to sue the FCC on grounds of free speech. The law was deemed unconstitutional in 1976 and set to become null and void by the fall of 1977. Television stations were free to air any type of program during primetime hours, leaving it completely up to self-regulatory measures.

During this brief stint, a 193 page report titled *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*, published by the United States Civil Rights Commission in 1977, took aim at the FCC’s lack of involvement when regulating the present stereotypes of women and people of color shown on television screens. While the courts had made their decision, the other branches of government were held in tension with one another. The Civil Rights Commission called the FCC’s new approach (network self-regulation) a “failure” and that “there are a variety of regulatory alternatives that go beyond the FCC’s current approach to program regulations.” In response, the at-the-time chairman, Richard E. Wiley, of the FCC said, “It seems difficult to conceive of how a federal agency would deal with stereotyping without becoming inevitably drawn into the role of a censor.”

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36 CNN, 2015.
Part III: Congress Steps In, Eventually

The FCC would eventually find a way to address the public outcry of the 1970s. However, it wouldn’t be until almost 20 years later. In 1996, Congress passed the Telecommunications Act. This Act took effect beginning on January 1st, 1997. While this Act signed into law many aspects that would change the way television functions, including how televisions are made, one of the main functions was to place parental guidance ratings on TV shows. The implementation of Section 551 of the Telecommunications Act called for mandatory guidelines, giving parents an indication of what type of content the program coming up on the screen would show. These ratings include, among others, TV-Y, TV-PG, TV-14, and TV-MA.

Each of these ratings have their own meaning and suggested viewing audience. TV-Y and TV-PG are guidelines geared toward younger viewers, containing moderate to no violence, no or infrequent coarse language or suggestive dialogue. TV-14 rated programs generally contain strong coarse language, intense sexual situations, or intense violence. Further, TV-MA refers to any program that is unsuitable for anyone under the age of 17. These programs feature crude and indecent language, explicit sexual activity, or graphic violence. These ratings can be found on any TV episode or movie today, and since their implementation, have been retroactively applied to programs that existed prior to 1997.

The controversies surrounding television of the 1970s are in direct relation to the implementation of parental guidelines. They are tied directly to the guidelines themselves through the rating of sex, violence, and mature language. These guidelines were developed based off of these themes - themes that became relevant with the switch to the “relevant”

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programming of the 1970s. While the FCC had tried to regulate television two decades prior, and failed, it eventually got its redemption without running afoul the First Amendment. The Telecommunications Act and subsequent parental guidance rating system addresses the concerns prevalent to seventies dramas and sitcoms.

Section 551: Parental Choice in Television Programming states a multitude of findings. The statute finds “The average American child is exposed to 25 hours of television each week and some are exposed to as much as 11 hours a day.” This is followed by, “...children exposed to violent video programming at a young age have a higher tendency for violent and aggressive behavior later in life…” This is reminiscent of the findings of the aforementioned Surgeon General’s Report. However, no information was available as to whether or not the Report was referenced in 1996. In two key subsections, Section 551 also states,

“(7) Parents express grave concern over violent and sexual video programming and strongly support technology that would give them greater control to block video programming in the home that they consider harmful to their children.”

“(9) Providing parents with timely information about the nature of upcoming video programming and with the technological tools that allow them easily to block violent, sexual, or other programming that they believe harmful to their children is a nonintrusive and narrowly tailored means of achieving that compelling governmental interest.”

These two subsections set the stage for the actual order for the implementation of a TV rating system. Additionally, Congress provides a detailed rationale as to how it will maintain these ratings with a designed Congressional committee. Found under Subsection B: Establishment of Television Rating Code,

“(w) Prescribe-- (1)...on the basis of recommendations from an advisory committee established by the Commission in accordance with section 551(b)(2) of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, guidelines and recommended procedures for the identification and rating of video programming that contains sexual, violent, or other indecent material about which parents should be informed before it is displayed to children...”

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“(2) with respect to any video programming that has been rated, and in consultation with the television industry, rules requiring distributors of such video programming to transmit such rating to permit parents to block the display of video programming that they have determined is inappropriate for their children.”

“(2A); ensure that such committee is composed of parents, television broadcasters, television programming producers, cable operators, appropriate public interest groups, and other interested individuals from the private sector and is fairly balanced in terms of political affiliation, the points of view represented…”

The connection between the parental guidelines of 1996/97 and 1970s television lies therein. These subsections lay out not only the rationale for implementing a ratings system, but they also include a First Amendment fail-safe. By including the phrasing about equal and fair viewpoint representation, a lawsuit against this regulation would be much harder to propagate than it was two decades prior. Of course, it can be assumed that the progressively sexually and violent nature of programming seen in the seventies continued into the eighties and the early nineties without regulation. However, that research, while important to the overall topic of TV regulation, does not pertain directly to the relationship between 1970s television and 1997 FCC rating systems and has not been researched for purposes of this essay.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, through the means of television drug usage and sexual, racial, and physical violence, the television programming of the 1970s was the direct foundation for the 1997 implantation of parental guidance rating systems for television that are still in place today. The popularity of these programs directly fuelled the controversies surrounding them and the networks that broadcasted them. Through multiple means of government analysis, study, and reports, the FCC attempted to step in under the guise of public interest. However, the Commission was inhibited by the First Amendment, and wouldn’t see a successful “regulatory” policy until the adoption of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which laid out what can be considered appropriate for viewers based on age and content of the program.
Additionally, it included measures to ensure, at least on paper, equal viewpoint representation. The shift from quality programming to relevant programming, and the ideas and themes being discussed on television, throughout the seventies fall directly into any given category of the current parental guidance rating system. The relationship between the two lies in the shift to relevant programming, controversy, government intervention, and the implementation and categorization of a ratings system that is still in place today.

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**Primary**


Secondary


