

# AMERICAN PARENTS' VIEWS ON MOVIE RATINGS

APRIL 2023

MOTION PICTURE ASSOCIATION  
CLASSIFICATION AND RATING ADMINISTRATION

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**INTRO**

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## STUDY OVERVIEW

# BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

The Classification and Rating Administration (CARA), a division of the Motion Picture Association (MPA), commissioned PSB Insights to conduct research to develop a comprehensive, quantitative view of U.S. parents' perceptions, attitudes and expectations regarding movie content and the film rating system.

CARA aims to ensure that their ratings framework reflects the views of parents regarding the presence of profane language, sex, nudity, violence, drug use, smoking, and other subjects that may be a source of concern for parents.

Please note that this research makes no assumptions about the rating system as it currently exists; rather, it seeks to understand parents' perceptions from an objective standpoint.

## STUDY OVERVIEW

# MPA MOVIE RATING EXPLAINED

Established in 1968, the film rating system provides parents with the information needed to determine if a film is appropriate for their children.

Ratings are determined by the Classification and Rating Administration (CARA), via a board comprised of an independent group of parents.

### 1 RATING

Every film is assigned a rating (G, PG, PG-13, R, NC-17) that indicates its level of content so parents may decide if the movie is suitable for their children

### 2 RATING DEFINITION

This language provides a more detailed explanation to parents of what the specific rating means

### 3 RATING DESCRIPTORS

This language is unique to each film and conveys the elements that caused its rating

The diagram shows a rectangular rating label with a white background and black text. At the top, it says "PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED". Below that, in large white letters on a black background, is "PG-13". To the right of "PG-13" is a text box: "Rated PG-13 for intense sequences of sci-fi violence and action throughout, language and some crude reference". At the bottom, it says "Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13" followed by a film reel icon and a registered trademark symbol. Three blue callout numbers are present: '1' points to the "PG-13" text, '2' points to the bottom text and icon, and '3' points to the descriptive text box.

## STUDY OVERVIEW

# MPA MOVIE RATINGS

<b>G</b>	<b>GENERAL AUDIENCES</b>	Nothing that would offend parents for viewing by children	
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<b>PG</b>	<b>PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED</b>	Parents urged to give "parental guidance." May contain some material parents might not like for their young children	
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<b>PG-13</b>	<b>PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED</b>	Parents are urged to be cautious. Some material may be inappropriate for pre-teenagers	
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<b>R</b>	<b>RESTRICTED</b>	Contains some adult material. Parents are urged to learn more about the film before taking their young children with them	
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<b>NC-17</b>	<b>NO ONE 17 AND UNDER ADMITTED</b>	Clearly adult. Children are not admitted	
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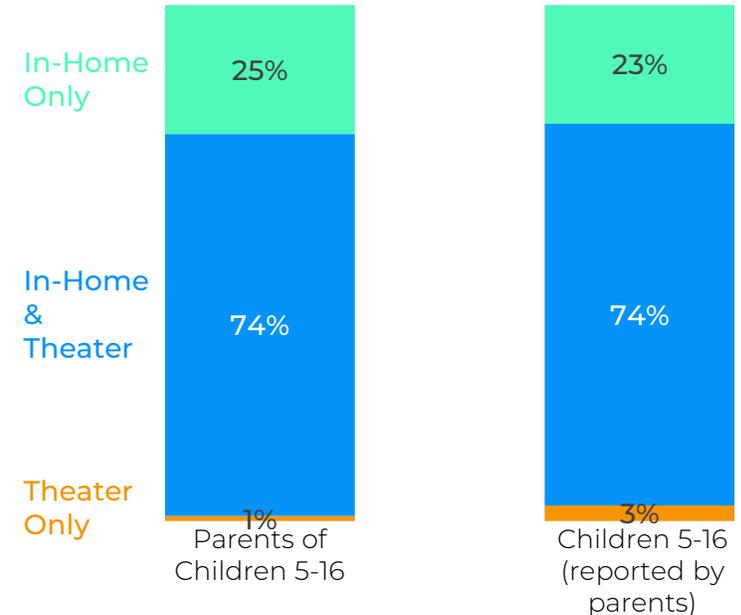


## STUDY OVERVIEW

# METHODOLOGY

- ▶ **Format:** 20min. online survey, including an interactive rating scenario
- ▶ **Interviews Conducted:** September 22<sup>nd</sup> – October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022
- ▶ **Market:** United States
- ▶ **Audience:** N=1,500 parents of children aged 5-16, where both parent and child have watched a movie in the past 6 months, either in theater or in-home (any platform)
  - Nationally representative sample based on parental age, gender, race/ethnicity, and region
  - Natural fallout of household size and composition, including distribution of age/gender of child
  - Natural fallout of specific in-home movie consumption platform
  - No sensitive industry (advertising, market research)

## MOVIE VIEWERSHIP INCIDENCE | PAST 6 MONTHS



**INTRO**

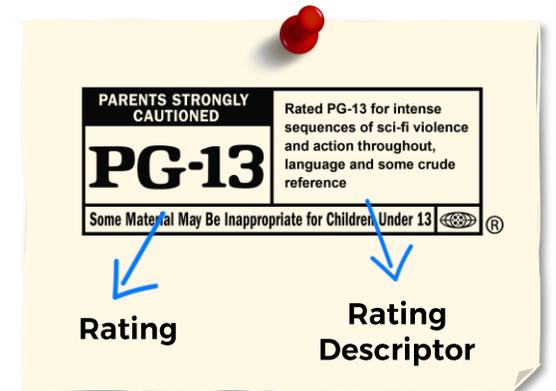
# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## PERCEPTIONS OF THE FILM RATING SYSTEM

- ▶ **Familiarity with the MPA rating and rating descriptors is high, with a strong majority of American parents finding both of them helpful and accurate.**
  - ▶ Compared to parents of older children, parents of children aged 5-6 are the most likely to find the ratings helpful.
  - ▶ Parents in the South Atlantic region are the most likely to agree that the ratings are accurate vs. parents in other U.S. regions.
- ▶ **Nearly all parents look up information on ratings and descriptors when considering a movie for their child to see, with about two-thirds learning from online sources.** Streaming services and movie trailers or previews are the next most used sources of information.
- ▶ **The current rating system does a good job advising parents on all content categories, particularly sexual content, violence, and profane language.**
  - ▶ A majority of parents felt that the movies they had seen in the past year had the appropriate rating.
- ▶ **Most parents are at least somewhat familiar with the process in which movies are rated.** Even more find that the process meets their expectations.
- ▶ **Few parents have encountered a trailer or preview that was incompatible with the movie it preceded.**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## CONTENT CONCERNS & EVALUATION

- ▶ **Parents are most concerned with graphic sexual content, nudity, sexual assault, use of hard drugs, suicide and use of the “N-word”** appearing in movies their children would see.
  - ▶ **These content types are the most likely to be considered inappropriate for PG-13 movies.** Conversely, a majority of parents find most content types tested appropriate for an R rating, although the “N-word” generates the least consensus.
  - ▶ On average, **parents in the Southern U.S.**, particularly in the South Atlantic, **report higher levels of concern about content types than those in other regions.**
- ▶ When tasked to evaluate movie descriptions as a rater would, **parents give sexual content the strongest ratings (likely R), with score intensity climbing when both sex and nudity are shown.**
- ▶ **Violence generates the widest range of potential ratings that parents could give.** Violence type, graphicality and quantity play an important role in how strong the rating should be.
  - ▶ For example, **parents give a middle PG-13 rating to sword/knife violence, but sexual assault likely garners an R rating.**
  - ▶ **Quantity drives greater impact on sexual assault, assault weapons and domestic violence while graphicality impacts sexual assault and self-harm the most.**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## CONTENT CONCERNS & EVALUATION CONT'D.

- ▶ In terms of their views on **language**:
  - ▶ In the context of strong language tested, **most parents find that R would be an appropriate rating for the “F-word,” although 40% would rate a movie containing the “F-word” at PG-13.**
  - ▶ When applying ratings to movie descriptions as a rater would, **parents assign a strong PG-13 rating to the presence of the “F-word.” More uses of the word yield higher rating scores between strong PG-13 and weak R.**
  - ▶ **Parents find the “N-word” appropriate at an R rating.** Compared to all other strong language tested, however, **some still feel the “N-word” is inappropriate even for R-rated content.**

**SECTION I**

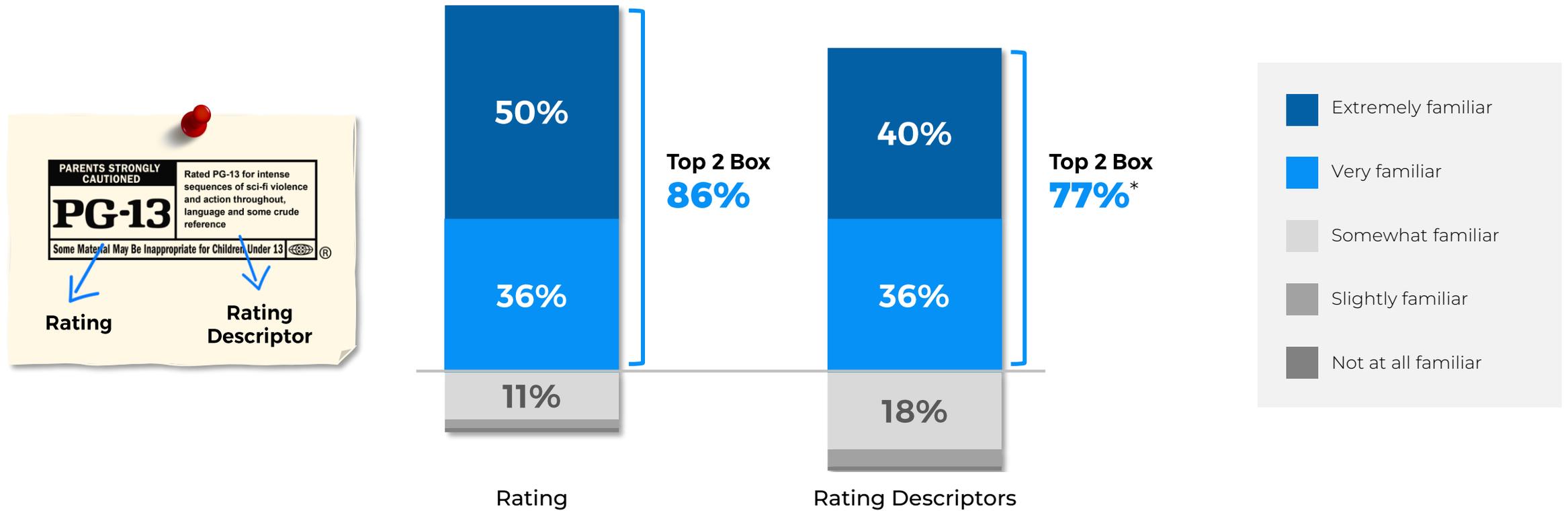
# **PERCEPTIONS OF THE FILM RATING SYSTEM**



# Familiarity with both the MPA rating and rating descriptors is high

## FAMILIARITY WITH THE MPA RATING AND RATING DESCRIPTORS

Base: Total Parents



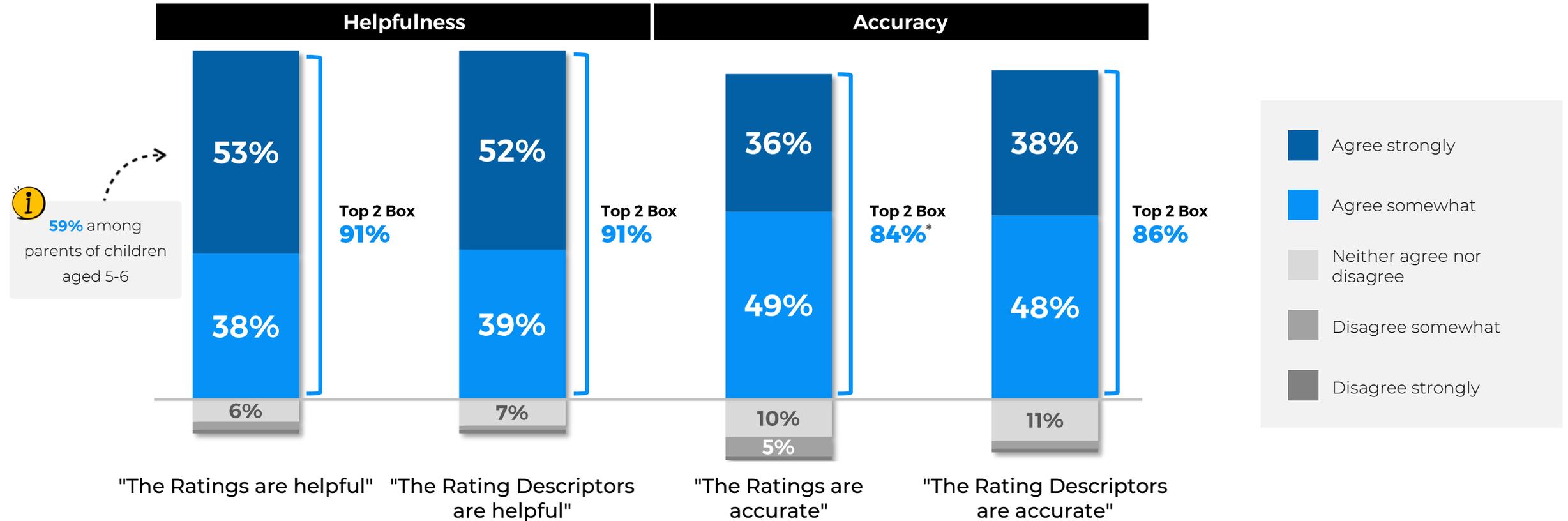
\* Top 2 Box total based on sum of extremely/very familiar including decimals. Individual values may not add exactly due to rounding.  
Total Parents (1,500)  
Before seeing the image, how familiar were you with each of the following? (Rating / Rating Descriptors)

## PERCEPTIONS OF THE FILM RATING SYSTEM

A **strong majority** find ratings and the rating descriptors **helpful** and **accurate**

### PERCEPTIONS OF THE MPA RATING AND RATING DESCRIPTORS

Base: Total Parents



## PERCEPTIONS OF THE FILM RATING SYSTEM

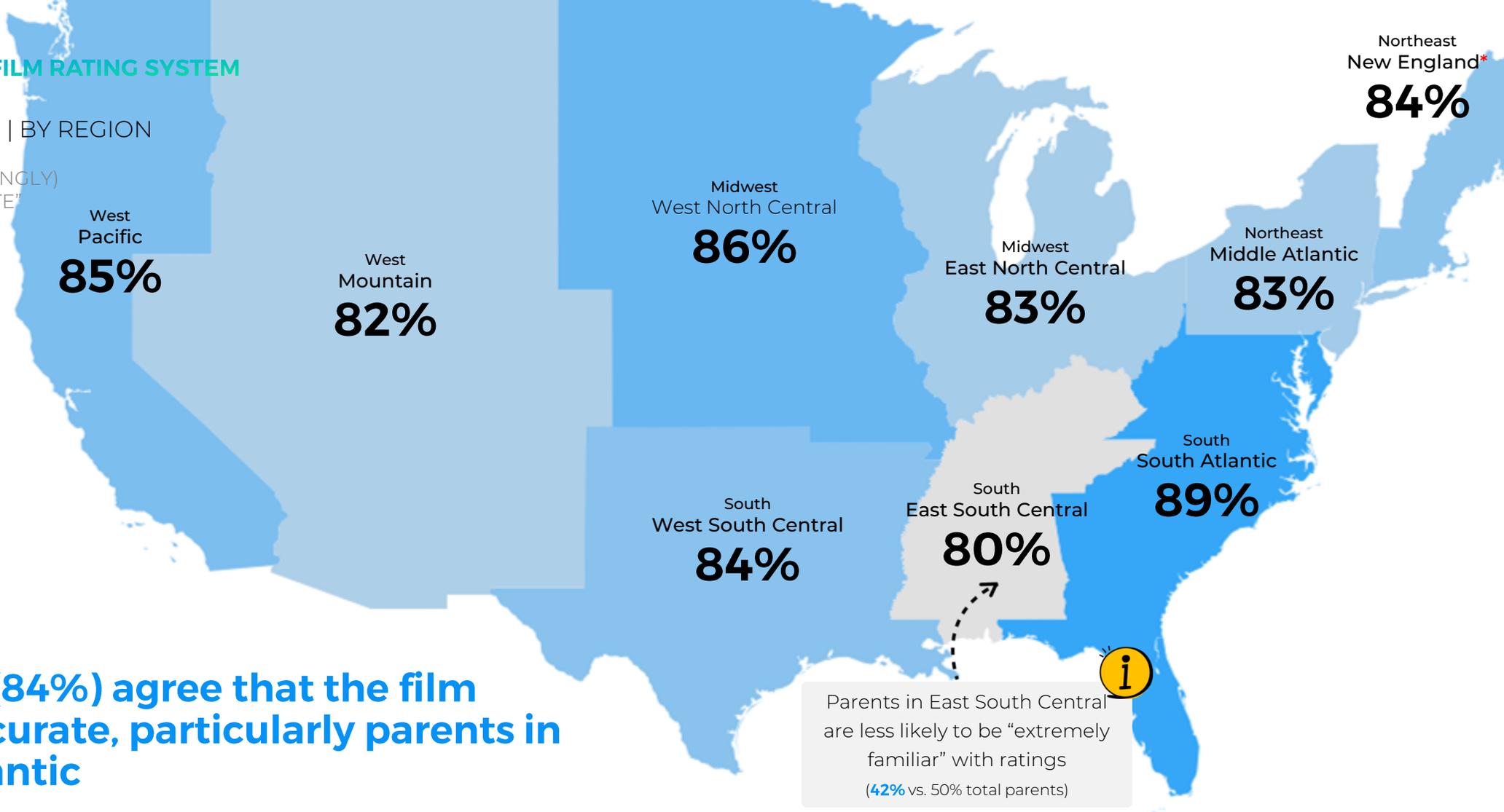
### ACCURACY OF RATINGS | BY REGION

TOP 2 BOX

(% AGREE SOMEWHAT/STRONGLY)

"THE RATINGS ARE ACCURATE"

Base: Total Parents



**Most parents (84%) agree that the film ratings are accurate, particularly parents in the South Atlantic**

Base

Total Parents (1,500); New England (48); Middle Atlantic (219); West North Central (111); East North Central (243); West South Central (162); East South Central (90); South Atlantic (294); Pacific (183); Mountain (150)

\*Caution: small base size (<50)

Question

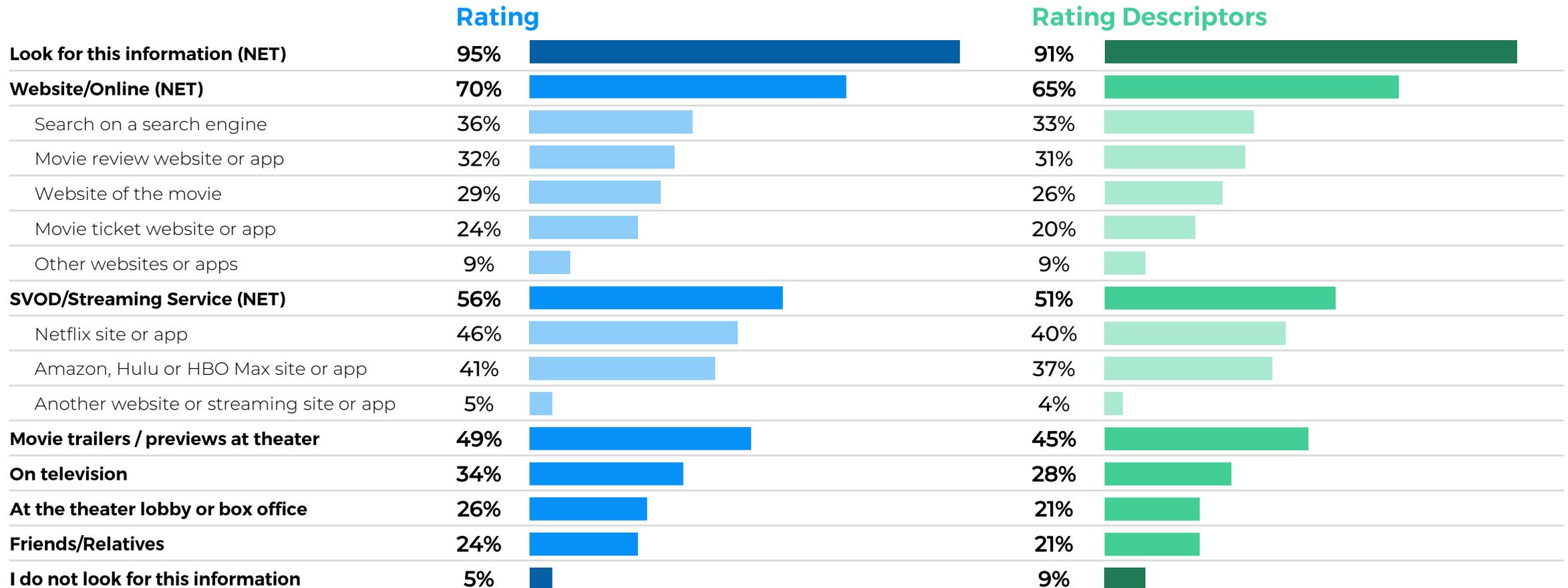
How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? ("The Ratings are accurate")

## PERCEPTIONS OF THE FILM RATING SYSTEM

**Nearly all parents look up information on ratings and descriptors** when considering a movie for their child to see; most learn via online sources, streaming services or movie trailers

### SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR THE MPA RATING AND RATING DESCRIPTORS

Base: Total Parents

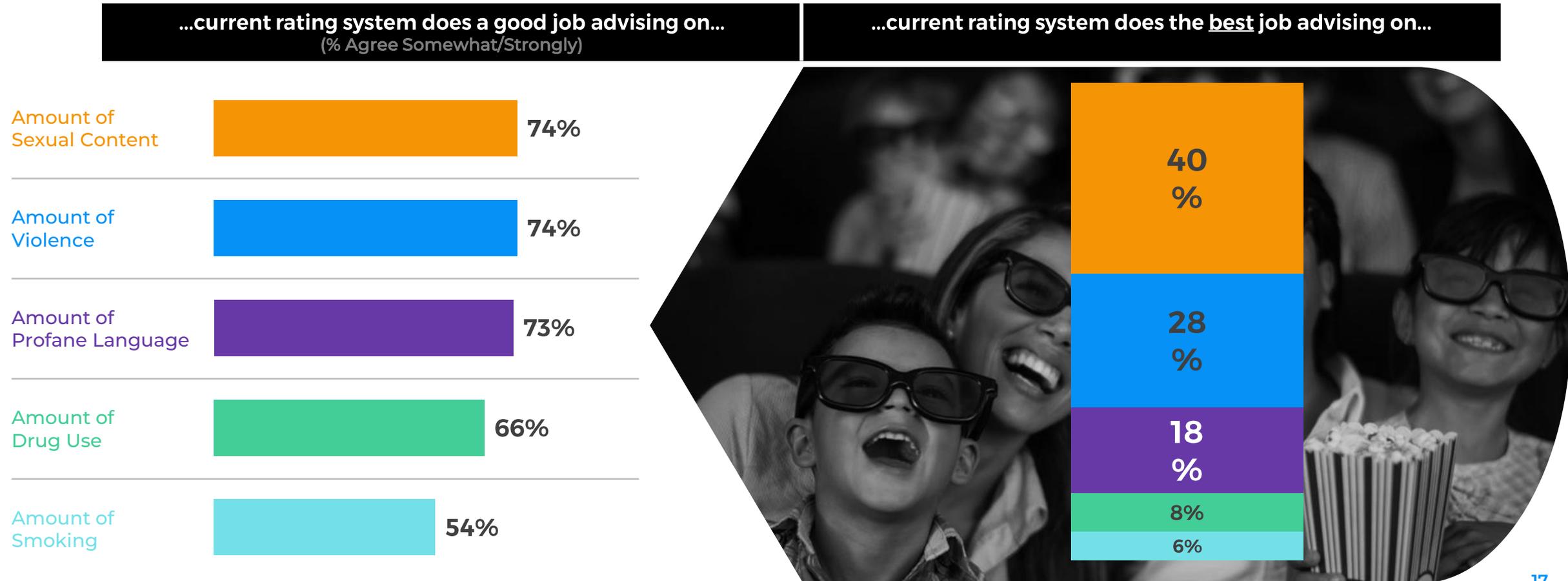


## PERCEPTIONS OF THE FILM RATING SYSTEM

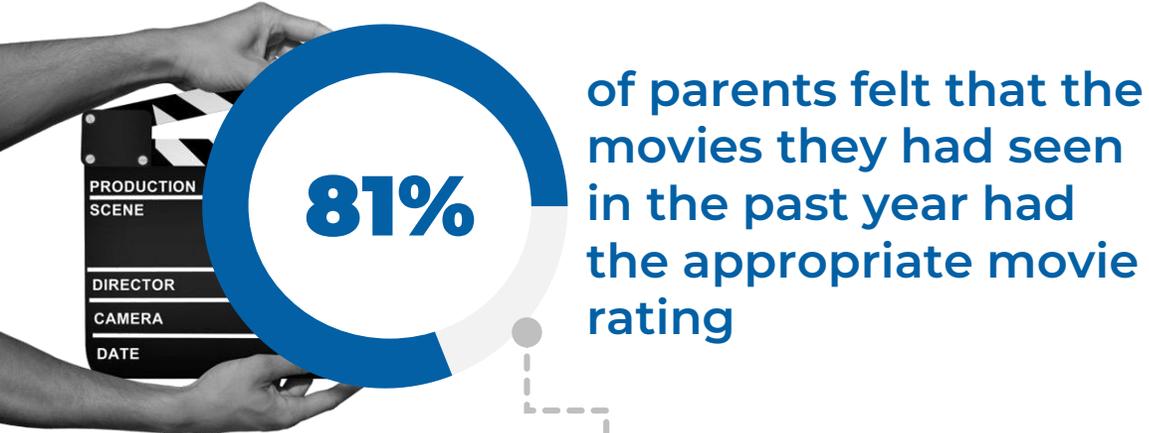
The current rating system does a **good job advising parents on sexual content, violence, and profane language**

### PERCEPTIONS OF THE CURRENT MPA RATING SYSTEM

Base: Total Parents



## PERCEPTIONS OF THE FILM RATING SYSTEM



...but among the few who felt otherwise, roughly 1 in every 4 movies they saw were not rated appropriately



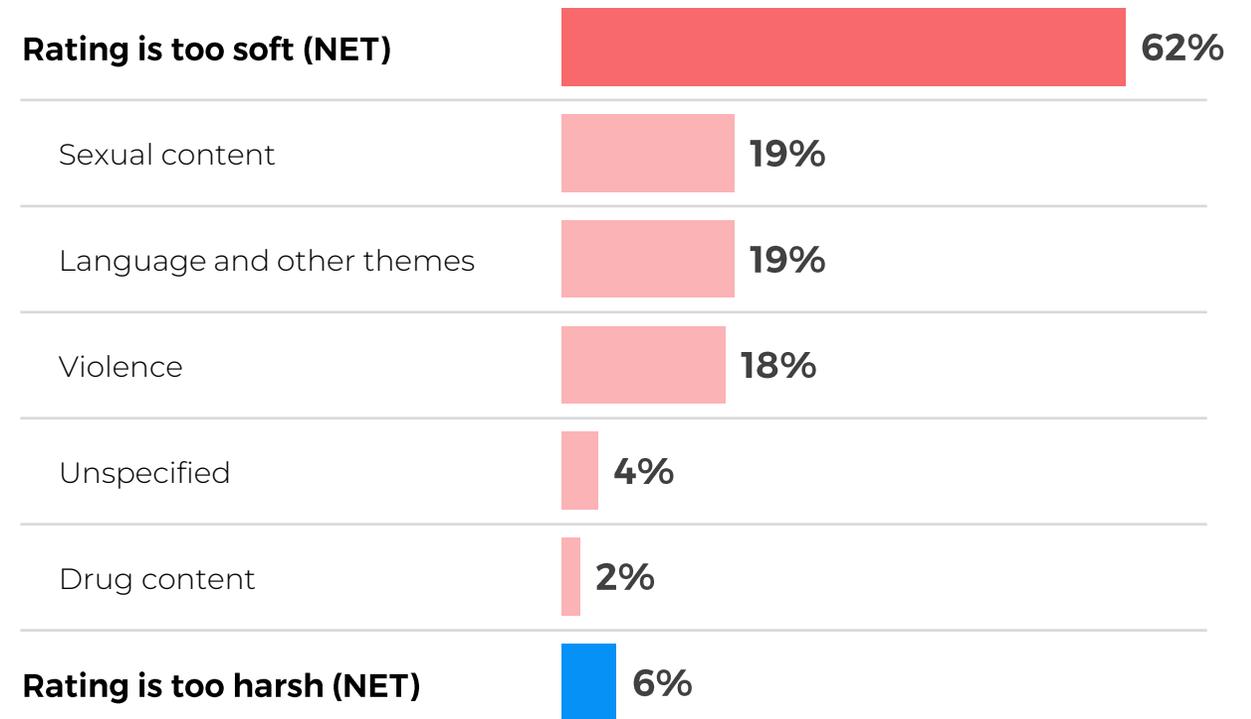
“ It’s such a dark movie overall and the violence is partially shown and mostly implied but pervasive. I admit it’s a rough one to rate but I would not want my 10-year-old watching, even though there is little to no blood ”

- Dad of 10 year-old daughter, Middle Atlantic

For movies that parents felt were not rated appropriately, **most considered the rating “too soft”**

### REASONS FOR LACK OF APPROPRIATE MOVIE RATING

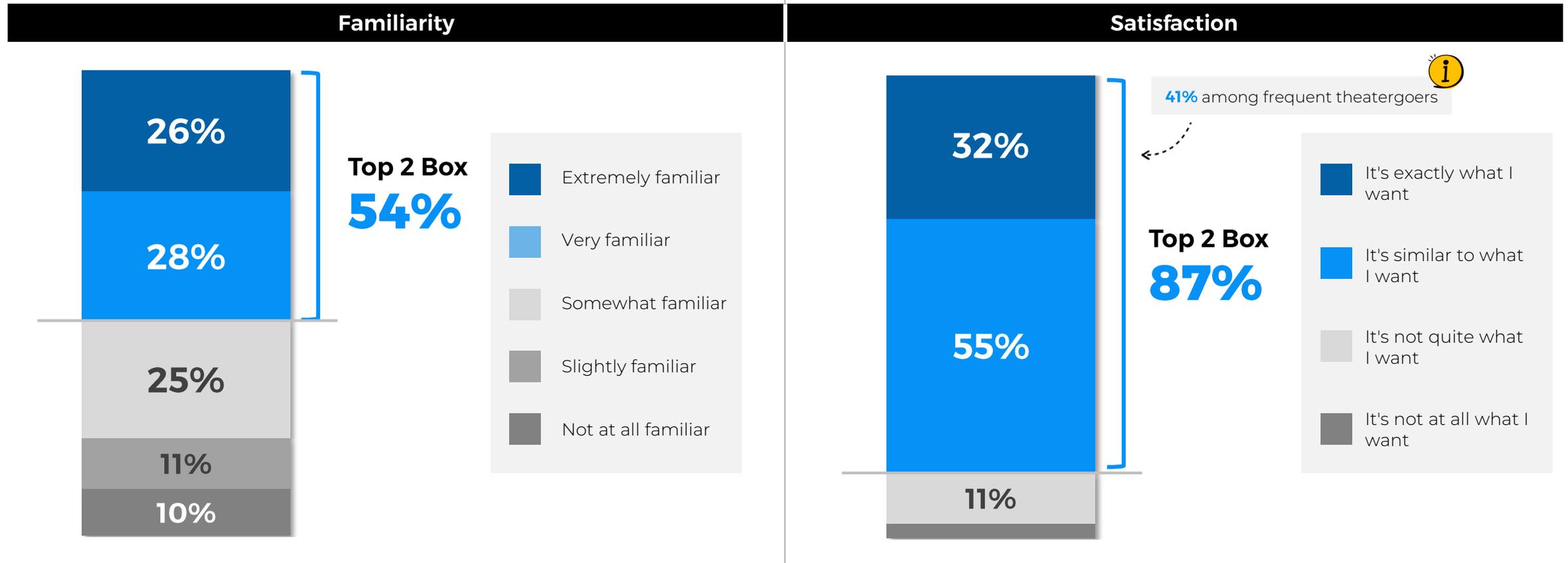
Base: Parents who have seen a movie that did not have the appropriate movie rating



# Most parents are generally familiar and satisfied with the current approval process for trailers and previews

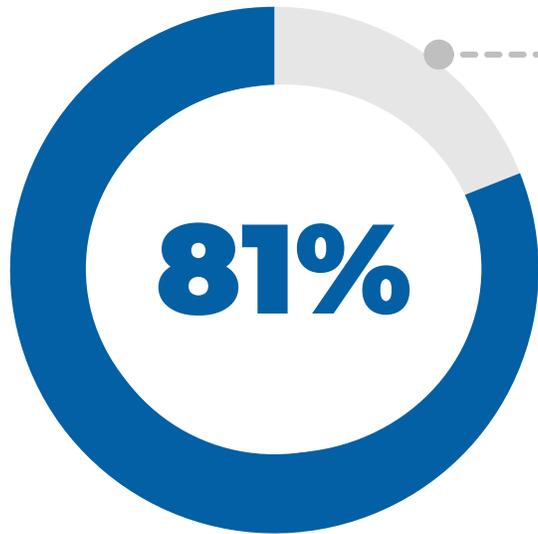
MPA APPROVAL PROCESS FOR TRAILERS & PREVIEWS BEFORE COMPATIBLE FEATURES

Base: Total Parents



## PERCEPTIONS OF THE FILM RATING SYSTEM

Most parents report that the **previews and trailers preceding features are compatible**



of parents say trailers or previews they have seen in the past 12 months were compatible with the movie they were preceding

... still, among the few who report having seen incompatible trailers or previews, most (about **2 in 3** trailers) were **compatible** with the movie they preceded

AVG. # OF TRAILERS/PREVIEW SEEN | PAST 12 MONTHS  
Base: Parents who report having seen incompatible trailers/previews



## SECTION II

# CONTENT CONCERNS AND EVALUATION

## CONTENT CONCERNS AND EVALUATION

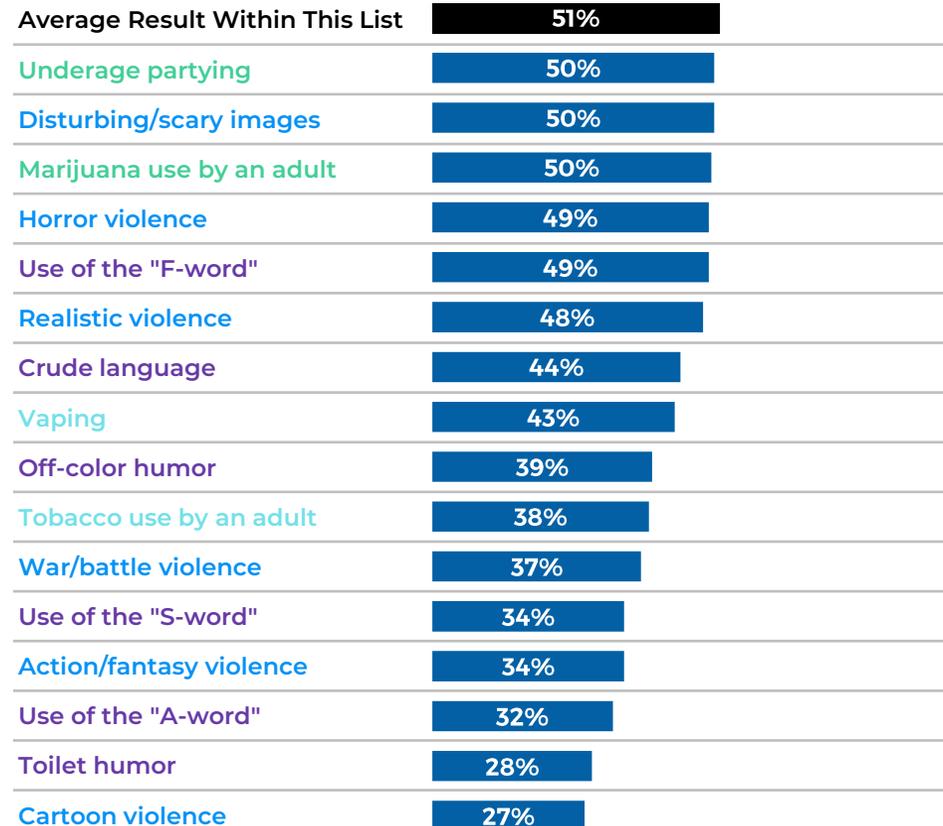
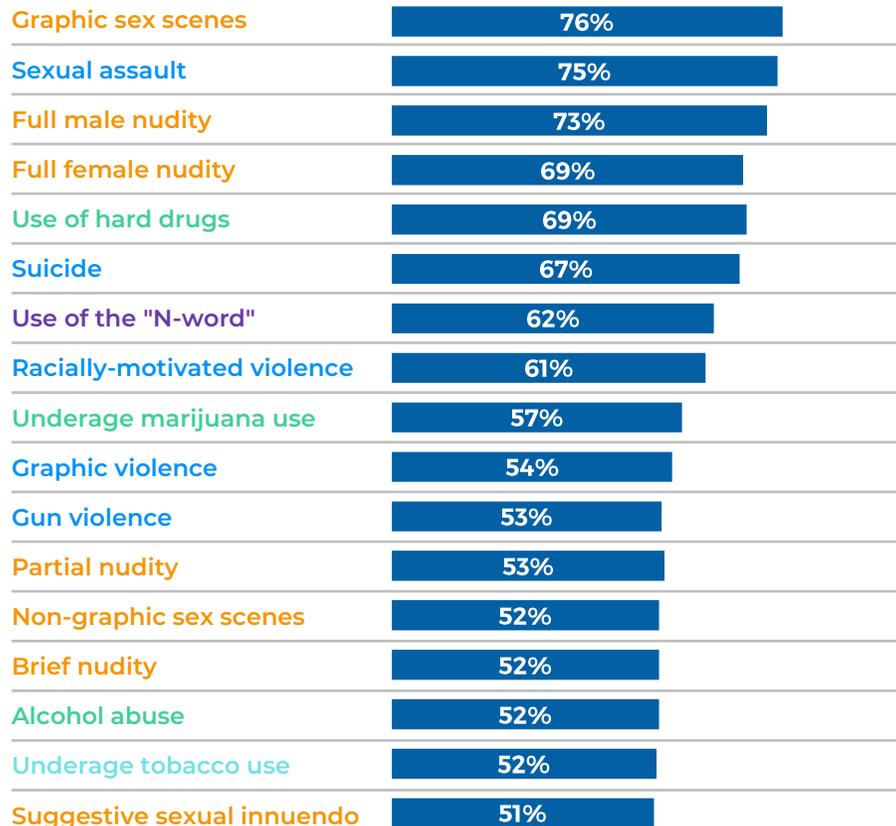
# American parents are most concerned about **graphic sex scenes, sexual assault, full nudity, use of hard drugs, suicide, and use of the “N-word”**

### CONTENT CONCERNS

#### INDIVIDUAL CONTENT TYPES

TOP 2 BOX (% VERY/EXTREMELY CONCERNED)

Base: Total Parents



**Parents of children under 10 report the most concern** around content in movies that their children would see



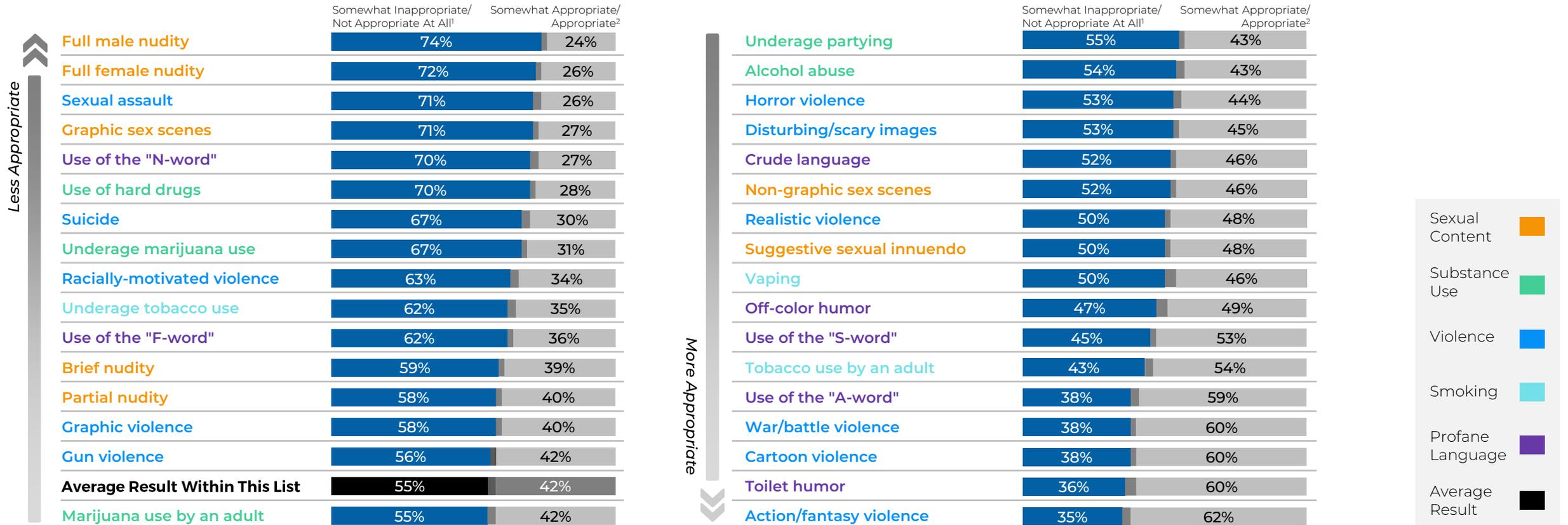
## CONTENT CONCERNS AND EVALUATION

Among content types tested, American parents are most likely to consider **full nudity, graphic sex scenes, sexual assault, use of the “N-word” and use of hard drugs inappropriate for PG-13 movies**

### CONTENT APPROPRIATENESS (PG-13 RATING)

#### INDIVIDUAL CONTENT TYPES

Base: Total Parents



<sup>1</sup> % Somewhat Inappropriate/Not Appropriate At All Content types ranked by % Somewhat Inappropriate/Not Appropriate At All

<sup>2</sup> % Somewhat Appropriate/Appropriate

Total Parents (1,500)

Based on your experience with the PG-13 rating, how appropriate do you think each of the following types of content would be in the PG-13 rating?

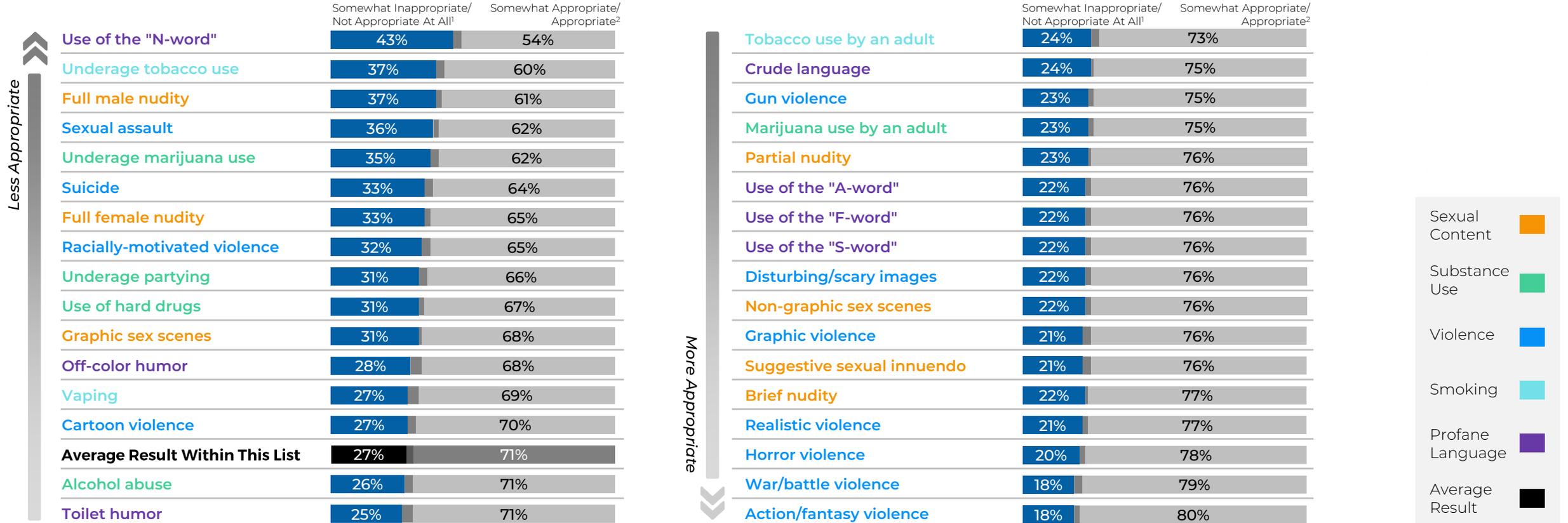
## CONTENT CONCERNS AND EVALUATION

While parents find most of the listed content types appropriate for an R rating, **the “N-word” generates the least consensus**

### CONTENT APPROPRIATENESS (R RATING)

#### INDIVIDUAL CONTENT TYPES

Base: Total Parents



<sup>1</sup> % Somewhat Inappropriate/Not Appropriate At All

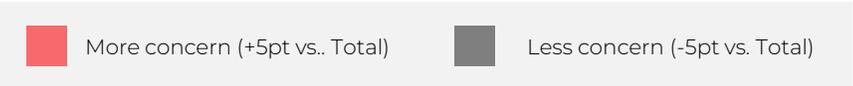
<sup>2</sup> % Somewhat Appropriate/Appropriate Content types ranked by % Somewhat Appropriate/Appropriate Total Parents (1,500)

Based on your experience with the R rating, how appropriate do you think each of the following types of content would be in the R rating?

## CONTENT CONCERNS AND EVALUATION

Parents in the **Southern U.S.**, particularly in the South Atlantic, **report higher levels of concern about content types** than those in other regions

CONTENT CONCERNS | BY REGION  
 AVERAGE ACROSS CONTENT TYPES  
 TOP 2 BOX (% VERY/EXTREMELY CONCERNED)  
 Base: Total Parents



	 Total Parents	Northeast		Midwest		South			West	
		 New England*	 Middle Atlantic	 West North Central	 East North Central	 West South Central	 East South Central	 South Atlantic	 Pacific	 Mountain
<b>Sexual Content</b>	61%	58%	58%	57%	58%	65%	61%	64%	63%	61%
<b>Substance Use</b>	55%	51%	53%	53%	49%	60%	57%	61%	55%	56%
<b>Violence</b>	50%	42%	50%	50%	45%	53%	49%	53%	54%	51%
<b>Smoking</b>	44%	41%	43%	45%	38%	48%	39%	49%	46%	45%
<b>Profane Language</b>	41%	34%	39%	39%	36%	43%	41%	47%	43%	41%

Base

Total Parents (1,500); New England (48); Middle Atlantic (219); West North Central (111); East North Central (243); West South Central (162); East South Central (90); South Atlantic (294); Pacific (183); Mountain (150)

\*Caution: small base size (<50)

Question

Thinking specifically about the movies that your child would see, how concerned are you with each of the following types of content appearing in movies they would see?

CONTENT CONCERNS AND EVALUATION

# Most language terms tested, except for the “F-word” and “N-word”, are considered appropriate for PG-13 movies

APPROPRIATE RATING FOR STRONG LANGUAGE | Ranked by PG-13

Base: Total Parents

70% of parents selected PG or lower as an appropriate rating for “Crap!”

	G	PG	PG-13	R	NC-17
"Crap!"	29%	70%	93%	99%	100%
"Damn!"	14%	51%	88%	98%	100%
"Jesus Christ!"	20%	48%	83%	97%	100%
A variation on the "F-word" (e.g., "freaking", "friggin")	13%	44%	80%	98%	100%
Someone showing the middle finger	6%	28%	79%	98%	100%
"A-word"	6%	26%	74%	98%	100%
"S-word"	5%	25%	72%	98%	100%
"Goddamn!"	8%	31%	69%	96%	100%
"F-word"	3%	10%	40%	96%	100%
"N-word"	4%	11%	32%	86%	100%

At 86%, some still feel the “N-word” is inappropriate even for R-rated content (compared to 96-99% for all other strong language tested)



Base Question

Total Parents (1,500)  
Which rating or ratings do you feel would be appropriate for a movie that contained the following words/expressions?

## SECTION III

# RATINGS IN PRACTICE

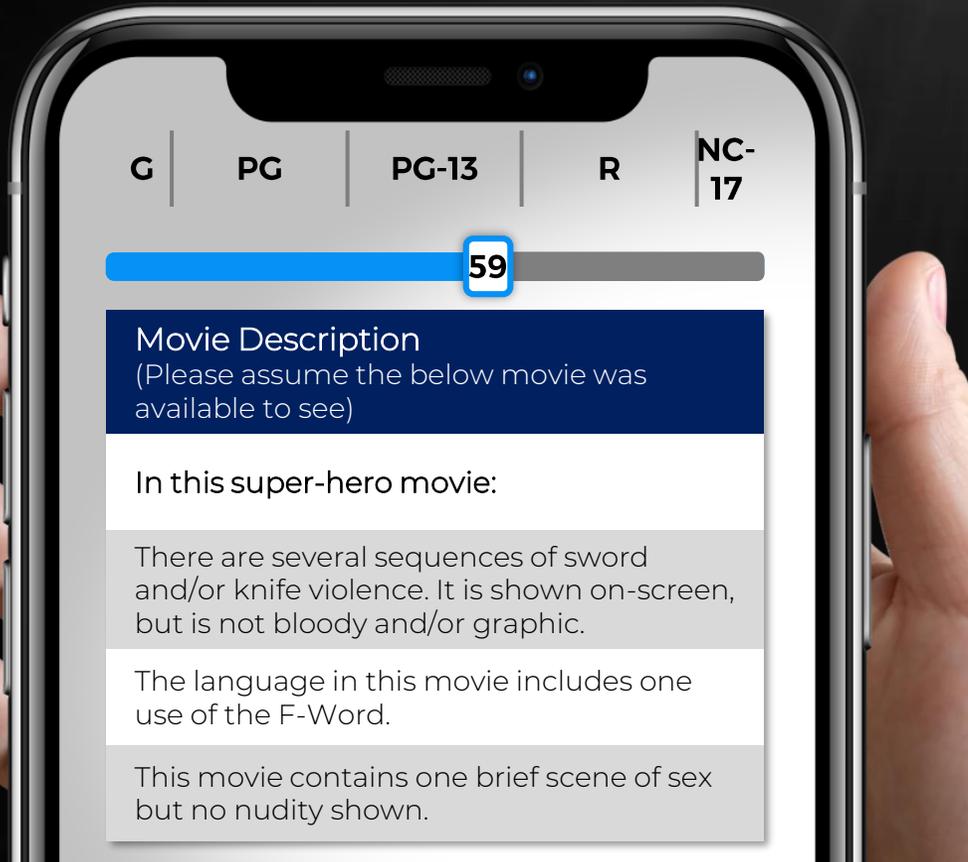


## RATINGS IN PRACTICE

# RATINGS IN PRACTICE: EXERCISE EXPLAINED

- ▶ Over a series of screens, parents evaluated 16 hypothetical movies, with descriptions detailing the movie's genre, violence, language and sexual content/nudity.
- ▶ Respondents evaluated each hypothetical movie description and assigned it a movie rating G through NC-17, where a 1- to 100-point scale corresponded to stronger intensity within each ratings level.

An illustration of the online interactive exercise



Results were analyzed to estimate a ratings score and measure the impact of each attribute mentioned in the descriptions.

Rating	Point Scale
<b>G</b>	<b>1-9</b>
<b>PG</b>	Weak <b>10-18</b>
	Middle <b>19-27</b>
	Strong <b>28-36</b>
<b>PG-13</b>	Weak <b>37-45</b>
	Middle <b>46-54</b>
	Strong <b>55-63</b>
<b>R</b>	Weak <b>64-72</b>
	Middle <b>73-81</b>
	Strong <b>82-90</b>
<b>NC-17</b>	<b>91-100</b>

# CATEGORIES AND ATTRIBUTES TESTED

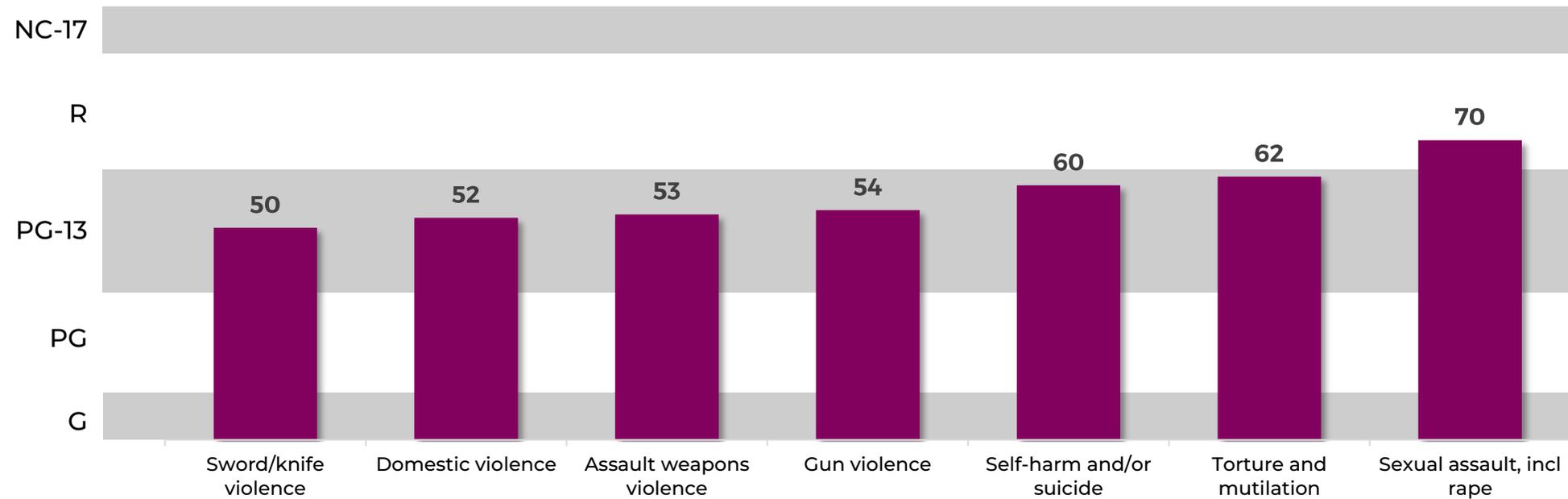
Category	Attribute	Level
Violence	Quantity	There is one scene of
		There are several sequences of
		There is frequent and pervasive
	Type	Sexual assault, including rape
		Torture and mutilation
		Self-harm and/or suicide
		Gun violence
		Assault weapons violence
		Domestic violence
		Sword and/or knife violence
	Graphicality	Not shown on-screen, but it is mentioned or discussed
		Not shown on-screen, but aftermath is shown
		Shown on-screen, but not bloody and/or graphic
	Shown on-screen, and is somewhat bloody	
	Shown on-screen, and is graphic and/or bloody	
Motivation	Motivated by race	
	(Motivation was not shown)	

Category	Attribute	Level
Sexual Content / Nudity	Content	Artwork depicting a nude figure (painting, sculpture etc.)
		Brief nudity (e.g., woman's bare breasts)
		One brief scene of sex but no nudity shown
		One scene of sex with nudity
		One scene of oral sex
		Full frontal nudity
		Strong sexual content and nudity throughout
Profane Language	F-Word	One use of the F-Word
		Two uses of the F-Word
		Three uses of the F-Word
		Five uses of the F-Word
		Ten uses of the F-Word
Movie Genre	Movie Genre	25 or more uses of the F-Word
		Documentary or movie depicting real events
		Superhero movie
		Romantic comedy
		Animated movie
	Action movie	
	Movie (genre was not shown)	

Parents rate violence types widely, from **sword/knife violence at a likely middle PG-13 rating to sexual assault, which likely garners an R rating**

**VIOLENCE TYPE MAIN EFFECT**

Base: Total Parents



Movie genre did not have a strong effect on parents' rating scores. Parents do give minor allowances to the superhero genre



Violence motivated by race receives a slightly stronger ratings score than that without

# Graphicality has the most impact on depictions of sexual assault and self-harm

## INTERACTION BETWEEN VIOLENCE TYPE AND GRAPHICALITY

Base: Total Parents



### Graphicality

- Shown **on screen**, graphic and/or bloody
- Shown **on screen**, somewhat bloody
- Shown **on screen**, not bloody and/or graphic
- Off-screen**, but aftermath shown
- Off-screen**, but mentioned or discussed



Analysis Note: This chart illustrates the interaction between two attributes. When dots are clustered tightly together, small differences in rating scores or changes in order are immaterial and should be given less weight in analysis. Observations should focus on dots spread over a wider range.

## Quantity drives greater impact on sexual assault, assault weapons and domestic violence

Parents are generally more tolerant of sword/knife violence compared to other violence types, but give it higher scores once it is "frequent and pervasive"

### INTERACTION BETWEEN VIOLENCE TYPE AND QUANTITY

Base: Total Parents



Base

Question

Model Assumptions

Analysis Note

Total Parents (1,500)

Please indicate on the above scale where you would rate this movie based on the below descriptions?

Movie genre not shown. All other attributes off.

This chart illustrates the interaction between two attributes. When dots are clustered tightly together, small differences in rating scores or changes in order are immaterial and should be given less weight in analysis. Observations should focus on dots spread over a wider range.

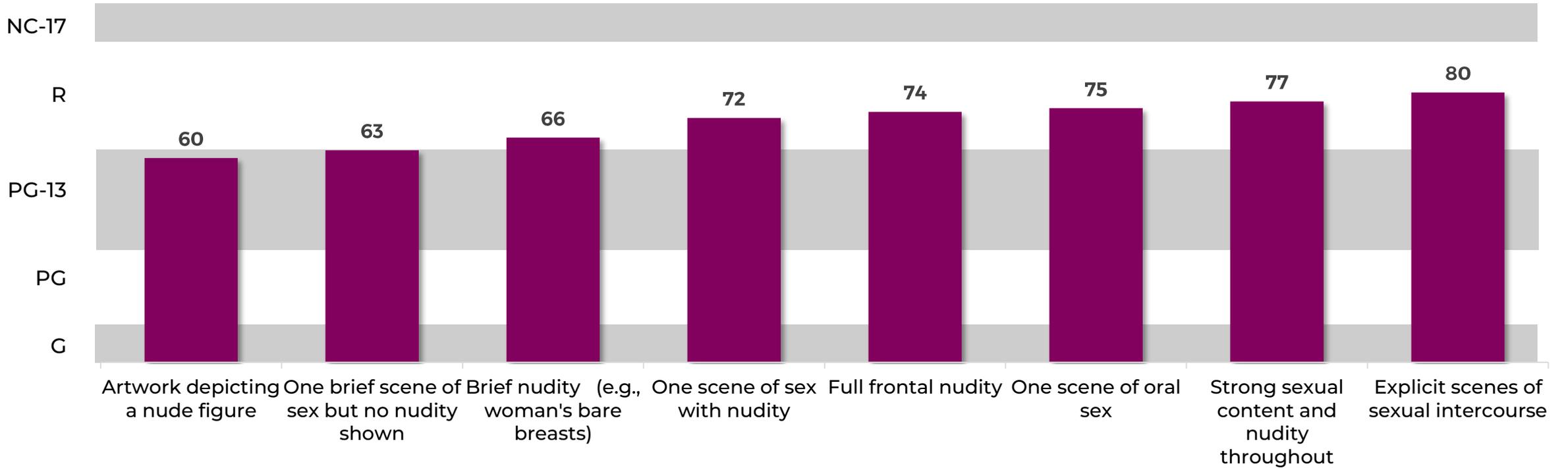
# Nudity and explicit sex scenes, including those of oral sex, garner an R rating

Score intensity grows when both sex and nudity are shown

**i** These are the **top 5 highest-scoring** (R rating) of all attributes tested

## SEXUAL CONTENT MAIN EFFECT

Base: Total Parents

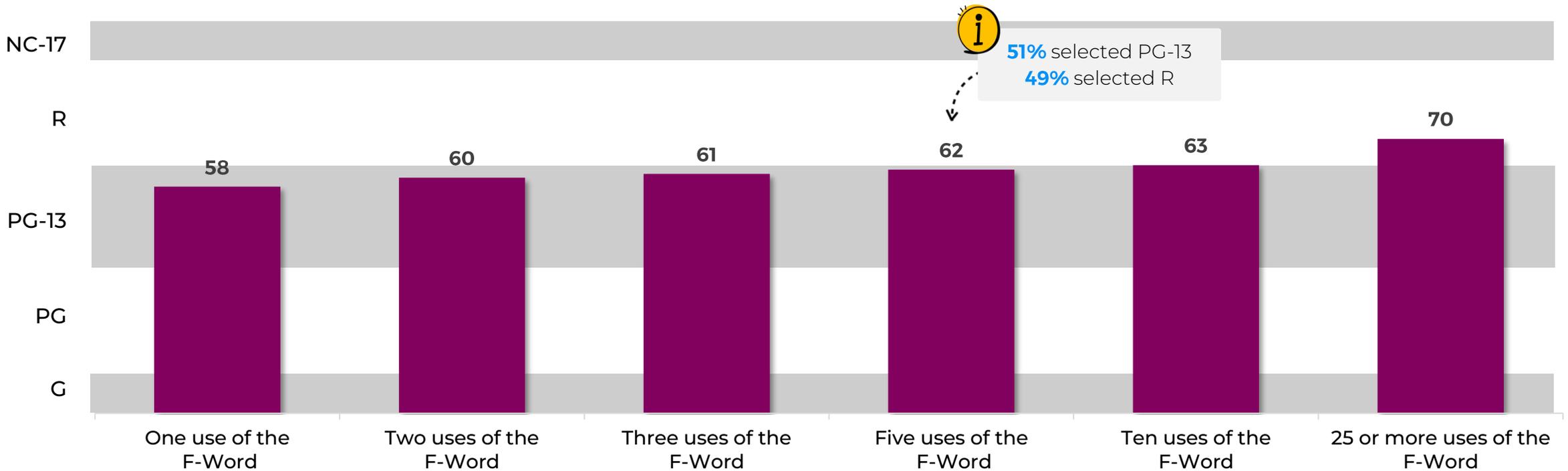


# Parents assign a strong PG-13 rating to the presence of the “F-word,” with more uses of the word yielding higher rating scores between strong PG-13 and weak R

At five uses of the “F-word,” parents are evenly split between PG-13 and R

## LANGUAGE (F-WORDS) MAIN EFFECT

Base: Total Parents



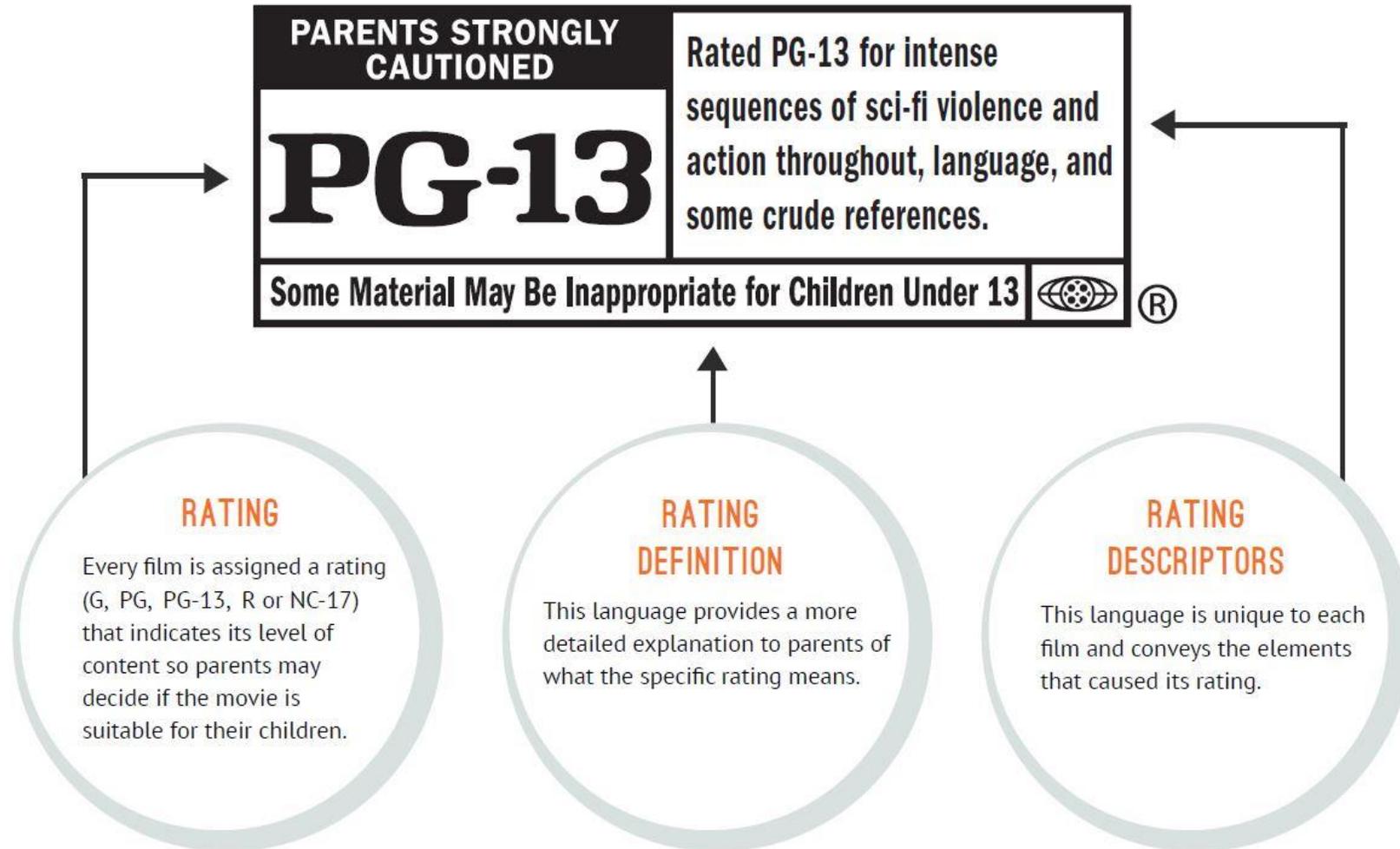
# APPENDIX

# SAMPLE COMPOSITION

Gender	Parents
Male	50%
Female	50%
Age	
18-24	2%
25-34	22%
35-44	43%
45-54	25%
55-64	7%
65+	1%
Region	
Northeast	18%
New England	3%
Middle Atlantic	15%
Midwest	24%
West North Central	7%
East North Central	16%
South	36%
West South Central	11%
East South Central	6%
South Atlantic	20%
West	22%
Pacific	12%
Mountain	10%

Ethnicity	Parents
White / Caucasian	67%
Black or African-American	9%
Hispanic / Latino	15%
Asian / Other	9%
Education	
Secondary school / high school or lower	24%
Some college / university	32%
Bachelor's degree / university degree	31%
Graduate education (Master's, Ph.D., etc.)	13%
Employment	
Employed full-time (30+ hours per week)	65%
Employed part-time (less than 30 hours per week)	9%
Stay-at-home parent or caretaker	15%
Student	1%
Unemployed / not working	7%
Retired	3%
Income	
High (\$100K and over)	26%
Mid (\$60K-\$99K)	26%
Low (\$59K or under)	47%
Household Composition	
Parents of 1 Child	43%
Parents of 2 Children	37%
Parents of 3+ Children	21%

# MPA RATING EXPLANATION AS SHOWN IN THE ONLINE SURVEY



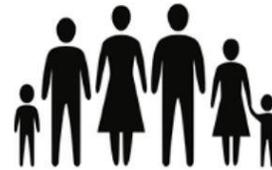
# MPA RATING DESCRIPTIONS AS SHOWN IN THE ONLINE SURVEY

## GENERAL AUDIENCES



Nothing that would offend parents for viewing by children.

## PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED



Parents urged to give "parental guidance." May contain some material parents might not like for their young children.

## PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED



Parents are urged to be cautious. Some material may be inappropriate for pre-teenagers.

## RESTRICTED



Contains some adult material. Parents are urged to learn more about the film before taking their young children with them.

## NO ONE 17 AND UNDER ADMITTED



Clearly adult. Children are not admitted.

# MPA PREVIEW APPROVAL EXAMPLE AS SHOWN IN THE ONLINE SURVEY

