

Standard Abstract Template

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Alcohol occurs frequently in films classified as suitable for children – Differences between the Australian and US-American classification system

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Introduction: Film classification systems aim to inform the viewer about content that could be harmful (e.g., violence, sexual content) and are particularly helpful for informing parents of content inappropriate for children. Despite the reported link between exposure to alcohol in films and alcohol use, neither the US nor Australian classifications explicitly consider alcohol content. We aim to investigate how much alcohol is shown in films classified as suitable for children in Australia (General audience [G] and Parental Guidance [PG]) and whether there is a difference in the amount of alcohol shown when compared to US film classifications.

Method: Secondary analysis of a content analysis which counted the number of alcohol occurrences in 473 popular blockbuster films.

Results: More films were classified G or PG in Australia (29%) compared to the US (22%, $t(472)=3.14$, $p<.001$). Australian G-rated films (39%) and PG-rated films (84%) were more likely to show any alcohol than according to the US classification (22%, $t(45)=2.36$, $p=0.11$, and 72%, $t(90)=2.95$, $p=.002$, respectively). The number of alcohol occurrences per film was about twice as high in Australian G-rated films (10.0 vs. 3.4; $t(45)=1.81$, $p=0.038$) and PG-rated films (44.1 vs. 22.8; $t(90)=2.45$, $p=0.008$) than according to the US classification.

Discussions and Conclusions: Australia appears to be more lenient than the US in classifying film content as suitable for children in general but in particular in respect to alcohol. This is worrisome because research has shown that alcohol exposure is related to pro-alcohol norms and expectancies in children aged 4 to 12.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Given how prevalent and frequent alcohol is shown in films classified as suitable for children, the effect alcohol exposure, and the harm alcohol use causes, it is important to explicitly include alcohol in film classifications.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *All authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.*