



# Over-the-Top or a Race to the Bottom: A Parent's Guide to Streaming Video

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Families seeking a child-safe or family-friendly alternative to traditional broadcast and cable television are not well-served in the current Streaming Video On Demand (SVOD) and Over-the-Top (OTT) marketplace. This is the major finding in the Parents Television Council's third analysis of emerging technologies, and the PTC's first examination of the top streaming video platforms and content providers.

We are in the midst of a revolutionary change in the way audiences consume entertainment with the advent and rapid expansion of SVOD and OTT video services. A new survey from IBB Consulting reveals that almost half of all US broadband customers subscribe to at least one OTT video service, about one-third subscribe to two, and 18% subscribe to three or more (Baumgartner, 2017). Meanwhile, *Forbes* reports that Netflix has surpassed cable in total subscribers (Morris, 2017).

Many families experiencing frustration with the lack of suitable child- or family-friendly content on traditional broadcast and cable TV have turned to SVOD and OTT as a preferred alternative. But are they truly a viable alternative for families wishing to protect their children from harmful and inappropriate media content?

To determine this, the PTC looked at the most popular OTT streaming devices (Apple TV, Amazon FireTV, Google Chromecast, and Roku), to assess the robustness of the parental controls and the availability of child- or family-appropriate programming on these systems and devices; as well as how those devices work in conjunction with some of the most popular SVOD services (Amazon Prime, Hulu, and Netflix.)

## Major Findings:

- Among top SVOD providers, there is no consistency in the application or visibility of age-based content ratings.
- While Hulu and Netflix both provide the option of a separate user profile for child viewers, there is nothing to stop a child from switching over to an adult profile with either service. Amazon does not provide a separate child user profile option.
- Netflix offers categories of content that viewers may find offensive, which often feature pornographic titles and cover art, and which often appear in close proximity to child-friendly categories – with no clear or obvious way of eliminating those categories from menu screens.
- Likewise, a child viewer using Amazon Prime Video may need to scroll past adult-themed titles and cover art on promoted original content in order to access child-friendly content.
- None of the SVOD services offer family plans which would allow parents to block all explicit title at all times and across all devices. A portion of your subscription fee is going to underwrite explicit content.
- Among streaming devices, Chromecast was most limited, but that limited functionality gives parents a high degree of control over the content streamed over the device.

- AppleTV alone among the devices we looked at, applies parental controls to music and podcasts, as well as video content.
- Roku offers PIN-controlled restrictions to the channel store, and V-Chip-type content control on Antenna-TV input, but no additional content restrictions for SVOD services.

## Recommendations

Adding families is a key growth strategy for streaming video providers. That being the case, all SVOD providers need to commit to the following to make their services and platforms more family-friendly:

### Uniform ratings system

All streaming video providers should agree to and adopt a uniform standard for applying age-based and content ratings.

### Give parents more control over content

When Sirius and XM Satellite Radio companies were seeking regulatory approval to merge, the PTC called on corporate leaders of the combined entity to offer a separate subscription tier for families that did not want to underwrite explicit content. To this day Sirius XM subscribers can select a “family friendly” package that excludes explicit programming at a slightly reduced fee. A similar option should be available to streaming video subscribers. No family should have to underwrite, with their subscription dollars, content they find objectionable in order to get family-quality content.

### Block explicit titles when parental controls are turned on

If a parent has deployed parental controls to block a child from viewing TV-MA, or R-rated content, those titles should no longer be visible on the menu screen, especially if those titles contain explicit words, descriptions or cover art.

In addition, it is time for Congress, the Federal Communications Commission, and all interested parties to revisit the Child Safe Viewing Act in light of newer technologies. Much has changed since the law was passed in 2008, and services and platforms that have emerged in recent years were not included in the evaluation of blocking technologies and parental controls called for by that Act.

We also call on all involved parties to commit to participating in a symposium to identify and implement solutions to the problems and challenges confronting families in light of technological changes.

We are in a period of revolutionary change in the way people consume entertainment, and the media environment is changing at a rapid pace. As technology continues to evolve, it is incumbent on the companies leading the charge to also consider how families will be impacted. It is our hope that this report will help to get that dialogue started.



## BACKGROUND

The way audiences consume entertainment periodically undergoes a revolutionary change. Vaudeville gave way to silent films around the turn of the last century, which in turn gave way to talking pictures, which, by the 1950s, were losing ground to television.

These technological advances put pressure on the legacy industries to innovate to stay competitive. The tension created by competing industries often proves a boon to consumers who now have better products to choose from and more options available to them. Competition from TV, for example, pushed the movie industry to introduce “Glorious Technicolor,” “Breathtaking Cinemascope” and “Stereophonic Sound” to lure audiences back to the cinemas.

We are in the midst of another such revolutionary change in the way audiences consume entertainment with the advent and rapid expansion of subscription Video-on-Demand (SVOD) and Over-the-Top (OTT) video services. A new survey from IBB Consulting reveals that almost half of all US broadband customers subscribe to at least one OTT video service, about one-third subscribe to two, and 18% subscribe to three or more (Baumgartner, 2017). Meanwhile, *Forbes* reports that Netflix has surpassed cable in total subscribers (Morris, 2017).

Many millennials have never and will never subscribe to cable (Newman, 2014); and with growing frustration over the lack of choice and skyrocketing costs, hundreds of thousands of former cable subscribers are cutting the cord --one study revealed that the cable industry lost more than 658,000 subscribers during the second quarter of 2015 alone (Cord, 2015)-- opting instead to create their own à la carte packages using SVOD.

Competition from the SVOD services has forced many cable companies to offer “skinny bundles,” to stop the hemorrhaging of customers, but it may be too little too late to save the industry.

And if broadcasters were once tempted to scoff at SVOD services as a novelty or temporary fad, they probably aren’t scoffing anymore. Original films and series developed exclusively for SVOD services are starting to dominate awards shows: *Manchester By the Sea*, developed by Amazon, was nominated for six Academy awards, including Best Picture, and brought home Oscars for Best Actor and Best Original Screenplay; and this summer Amazon Prime original series garnered sixteen Emmy nominations. Netflix’s *House of Cards* has won several Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild (SAG) awards for Best Actor and Best Actress, and Netflix original series racked-up 91 Emmy nominations this summer alone. With an annual content budget of \$2 billion, about 10% of which is earmarked for originals, Netflix is now a major player in Hollywood.

Meanwhile for families, OTT and SVOD provides an attractive, (largely) commercial-free alternative to traditional broadcast and cable television. With these services, parents need not worry about their children being bombarded with ads for toys and candy, or promos for adult-themed TV shows, movies or video games, or suggestive commercials for beer, fast food, or ED drugs.

Recently, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) announced that it would mount a challenge to the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) 2004 kidvid requirements – a ruling that extended the FCC’s requirement that broadcast channels offer three hours of Educational and Informational children’s programming each week on their subchannels, just as they do on their main channel; citing the abundance of kids’ programming now available on streaming and SVOD services. But just how viable an alternative are these streaming services and OTT devices for families wishing to protect their children from harmful and inappropriate content? That is the question the PTC seeks to answer in this report.

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## METHODOLOGY

The Parents Television Council’s first study of streaming video came in 2008, with our Special Report “[The New Tube: A Content Analysis of YouTube -- the Most Popular Online Video Destination](#),” which found that children had ready access to explicit content on YouTube, even while searching for child or teen friendly terms. That report was followed in 2010 with “[Untangling the Web of Internet Video: Questions, Answers, and a Report Card for Parents](#),” which looked at some of the top streaming content providers at the time and found that content providers were more lenient in applying age-based ratings and entirely neglected to use content descriptors; and that existing child safety online features did not effectively block offensive content even from children who use every available procedure to avoid the material.

Since that time, the streaming video marketplace has changed substantially, with new devices and providers, necessitating a fresh look at the top streaming video providers and services.

For the purposes of this report, trained PTC staff analyzed the most popular OTT streaming devices (Apple TV, Amazon FireTV, Google Chromecast, and Roku), to assess the robustness of the

parental controls and the availability of child- or family-appropriate programming on these systems and devices.

In addition, we examined how those devices work in conjunction with some of the most popular SVOD services (Amazon Prime, Hulu, and Netflix) to assess, among other things, whether age-based or content ratings are being used; how easy or difficult it is for a parent to determine a program’s rating; and the availability of family-appropriate original content.

We looked at the process of setting up the parental controls on both the devices themselves and on the streaming video services to assess which devices give parents maximum control over the content their children can access.

Because the menu of available programming on these services is constantly in flux, and because of the enormous volume of content available, we chose to narrow our focus to exclusive and original content only to assess how much information is given to parents about program content, how the ratings are applied, and how much child- and family-appropriate programming is made available.

# KEY FINDINGS

Families seeking a child-safe or family-friendly alternative to traditional broadcast and cable television are not well-served in the current SVOD and OTT marketplace.

## Streaming Video:

- Among top SVOD providers, there is no consistency in the application of age-based content ratings:
  - Netflix uses a combination of TVOMB and MPAA ratings, but only provides age-based guidance with no content warnings or descriptors; and ratings are applied across series instead of to individual episodes.
  - Amazon Prime Video also uses a combination of TVOMB and MPAA ratings<sup>1</sup>, and does apply ratings to individual episodes, but is also inconsistent in the application of content warnings and descriptors, even employing its own non-standard descriptors in some instances.
  - Hulu applies ratings to individual episodes, and is alone among the SVOD providers we analyzed in using content descriptors (TVOMB's D, L, S, V).
- Among top SVOD providers, there is no consistency in the visibility of content ratings information.
- While Hulu and Netflix both provide the option of a separate user profile for child viewers, there is nothing to stop a child from switching over to an adult profile with either service. Amazon does not provide a separate child user profile option.
- Netflix offers categories of content that viewers may find harmful or offensive, which often feature adult titles and cover art, and which often appear in close proximity to child-friendly categories – with no clear or obvious way of eliminating those categories from menu screens.
- Likewise, a child viewer using Amazon Prime Video may need to scroll past adult-themed titles and cover art on promoted original content in order to access child-friendly content.
- None of the SVOD services offer family plans which would allow parents to block all explicit title at all times and across all devices. A portion of the subscriber's fee is going to underwrite explicit content.

## Report Card

|                                    | Hulu | Amazon Prime Video | Netflix |
|------------------------------------|------|--------------------|---------|
| Use of Ratings                     | B    | C                  | C-      |
| Parental Controls                  | C-   | B+                 | B+      |
| Visibility of Adult Titles/Content | B+   | C                  | D       |
| Original Content for Families      | D    | C                  | C-      |

## OTT Devices:

- Chromecast was most limited, but that limited functionality gives parents a high degree of control over the content streamed over the device.
- AppleTV alone among the devices we looked at, applies parental controls to music and podcasts, as well as video content.
- Amazon's FireTV is the only device to allow users to restrict promoted content.
- Roku offers PIN-controlled restrictions to the channel store, and V-Chip-type content control on Antenna-TV input, but no additional content restrictions for SVOD services.

## Report Card

| Device            | Grade |
|-------------------|-------|
| Google Chromecast | A     |
| Apple TV          | B     |
| Amazon FireTV     | C     |
| Roku              | D     |

1. See Appendix for an explanation of the TVOMB and MPAA ratings.

## OTT DEVICES



### chromecast

**Cost:** \$35 (basic), \$65 (ultra)  
**Grade:** A

#### Pros

Among the devices we reviewed, the Chromecast is the most limited in terms of functionality, but that limited functionality also means maximum control for parents. The device is controlled via a mobile app (i.e. no remote control), and has no pre-loaded apps or menu screens. Instead, you “Cast” the content onto the television screen from your preferred mobile app (including Netflix, GooglePlay, Hulu, and YouTube). Therefore, whoever holds the smart phone controls the content, and since it’s unlikely a parent would hand their phone over to a child for an extended period, unsupervised, it all but guarantees that viewing will only be done with adult supervision.

#### Cons

The biggest PRO for the Chromecast could also be the biggest “CON.” To wit, it cannot be used without a smartphone or mobile device and the Google Home app. Video quality is significantly poorer than on competing devices.

#### Setting Up the Parental Controls

Parental Controls are set on the individual apps that are used to “Cast” onto the TV. There do not appear to be separate controls for the device.



**Cost:** \$99  
**Grade:** B

#### Pros

It should not come as a surprise that among the most popular OTT streaming devices, Apple gets top marks for giving parents control over content. Apple has long led the industry in keeping pornography off its devices and in giving parents robust controls on its internet-connected devices. When Steve Jobs was still alive, he was once asked by reporters whether Apple would keep its strong content restrictions in place on newer model iPhones. Jobs said, “You know, there’s a porn store for Android. You can download nothing but porn. You can download porn, your kids can download porn. That’s a place we don’t want to go.” He later wrote to a customer, “We do believe we have a moral responsibility to keep porn off the iPhone. Folks who want porn can buy Android.”

Apple seems to have given considerably more thought to the kinds of content parents might wish to restrict than its competitors. Parents can set-up the device to require a passcode to purchase or rent movies and TV shows, or to purchase music; but unlike other systems which appear to allow restrictions only on video content, the AppleTV also allows parents to restrict music and podcasts with adult content or lyrics.



#### Cons

One of the most common complaints about the iPhone is that it comes with certain apps preinstalled that cannot be removed. That criticism can also be applied to the Apple TV device. Whereas other OTT streaming devices allow you to select the “apps” or channels you want available, Apple comes pre-loaded, with no obvious way to add or remove them from the menu screen; however, many are unusable without an added subscription (like Netflix and Hulu), or will only give you access to short preview videos until you “activate” the app by proving you have an existing cable subscription (like FX, History, or Disney).

#### Setting Up the Parental Controls

To set parental controls your Apple TV device:

1. Select Settings
2. Select General, scroll down to “Restrictions”
3. Select “Turn On Restrictions”
4. You will need to create a 4-digit pin.
5. Available restrictions include:
  - Purchasing/Rental
  - Ratings for (by country)
  - Restrict Movies To (G, PG, PG-13, R or No Restriction)
  - Restrict TV Shows To (TV-Y, TV-Y7, TV-G, TV-PG, TV-14, TV-MA or No Restriction)
  - Explicit Music and Podcasts (No restriction, Ask, or Allowed)

Even with parental controls turned-on, promoted content may include mature or adult-rated films and TV series.

When restrictions are turned on, the user must enter the four-digit pin (or passcode) to launch Netflix, HBO Now, and a number of other apps. However, several apps will launch without first entering a pin, including Hulu.

### amazon fireTV

**Cost:** \$39.99-89.99  
**Grade:** C

#### Pros

Understandably, Amazon’s Fire TV device gives preference to Amazon Prime Video content; but users also have the ability to add, other apps and channels, including games, which the AppleTV device does not. The Amazon FireTV also appears to be the only device that allows users to restrict featured content.

#### Cons

FireTV devices are Alexa (Amazon’s proprietary voice-activated “intelligent personal assistant”) enabled and will give you access to Amazon’s entire streaming music catalogue. Even when Parental Controls are enabled, Alexa will play back songs with explicit lyrics. Parental controls and content restrictions appear to only apply to video content.

Because the FireTV is owned by Amazon, Amazon Prime content is heavily marketed on the menu screens, and although users can require a passcode to view adult videos, suggestive cover art and titles can still be seen by children.



## Setting Up The Parental Controls

To set parental controls on your FireTV device:

1. Go to Settings
2. Select Preferences
3. Select "Parental Controls:
4. Create 5-digit pin/passcode.
5. Available restrictions include:
  - Protect purchases
  - Set viewing restrictions (Limited to General, Family, Teen, Mature)
  - Protect app launches
  - Protect prime photos app

You can also use the parental controls to limit featured content by turning off "allow video autoplay" and "allow audio autoplay"

With parental controls turned on, including "limit featured content," promoted content still included MA-rated series like "The Man in the High Castle," "American Gods," "Keeping Up With the Kardashians," and "Orphan Black."

# Roku

**Cost:** \$49.99-99.99

**Grade:** D

### Pros

Roku offers some parental controls, but they are less robust than competing models.

### Cons

The Roku comes with some apps and channels preinstalled (like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video), and others that can be added.

While we were unable to find any additional parental controls on the device we reviewed, a company representative informed us that there are parental control settings that allow parents to restrict adding or purchasing channels from the Roku Channel Store, using a four-digit PIN.

The Roku website notes: "Creating a PIN only affects the ability to purchase or add channels from the Roku Channel Store. It does not filter channels or block content from the Roku Channel Store."

We were also informed that the Roku Movie Store and TV Store can be hidden from the main screen, along with the News option.



Roku also has an Antenna TV input, and has the option of setting-up parental controls for broadcast content that works like the V-Chip, allowing parents to restrict broadcast content based on age rating or content descriptor; but these content controls only work in Antenna mode, and not on SVOD services like Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon Prime Video.

Roku's biggest shortcoming seems to lie in the fact that parental controls that are already in place on the supported apps/channels don't seem to work all that well within the Roku framework. For example, though users can create a separate user profile for Kids on Netflix, Roku defaults to the adult/owner profile; however, if the parental controls for Netflix are turned on, no user -- not even the account owner -- can play video content that is age-restricted. Instead, users receive an error message saying "This title cannot be played on this device because it requires a parental control PIN. Please try on a different device."

Parental Controls on Amazon Prime Video do work within the Roku framework: users enter a five-digit pin to view content that is age-restricted. However, as noted elsewhere, there is no separate user profile, and the "filtering" options on the Amazon Prime Video app only enable you to narrow your search by program type (e.g. movies, TV shows, prime video, channels, rent or buy).

## Setting Up the Parental Controls

Users need to log-in online to set up a 4-digit PIN. This cannot be done on the device itself.

1. Go to my.roku.com from your computer or smartphone.
2. Sign in to your Roku account.
3. Under PIN Preference, select Update.
4. Select your PIN preference from the three choices:
  - Always require a PIN to make purchases and to add items from the Channel Store.
  - Always require a PIN to make purchases.
  - A PIN is not required to make any purchase or add any item from the Channel Store.
5. If you choose either of the first two choices and have not created a PIN, you will be prompted to enter a four-digit number in the PIN field and select the Verify PIN field for confirmation.
6. If you already have a PIN, enter your PIN in the Verify PIN field.
7. Select Save Changes and agree to the terms of service.

## STREAMING SERVICES

# hulu

**Cost:** \$7.99/month (Limited Commercials)  
\$11.99/month (No Commercials)

**Use of Ratings:** B

**Parental Controls:** C-

**Visibility of Adult Titles/Content:** B+

**Original Content for Families:** D

## Ratings System Used

Hulu uses a combination of the MPAA and TVOMB ratings.

Among the top SVOD services, Hulu is the only one to consistently use content descriptors in conjunction with the age-based rating.

## Visibility of Age-Based or Content Ratings On Menu and On Individual Episodes

No ratings information is readily visible on the Hulu webpage. The user would have to "hover" over the episode box on web interface to see what the episode is rated. However, ratings information *does* appear at the beginning of the program, just as it does on traditional

broadcast or cable programming.  
Episodes are rated individually.

Difficulty of Setting-Up Parental Controls

When creating a user profile, a date of birth is required to complete set-up. If the date of birth is later than 2004 (making the user 13-years-old or younger), the user is prompted to turn on “kids” to continue creating the profile. A user can create multiple user profiles, one for each member of the family, if so desired, but there are no additional age-based, or content-based parental controls (equivalent to the V-chip).

How Difficult is it for Parents to Limit a Child's Ability to View Adult Titles or Promotions?

When a child is using the “Kids” profile, there is very little risk of seeing

adult titles or promotions for mature-rated content. Of the three services we reviewed, Hulu had the least problematic titles and cover art for available titles, even among adult selections.

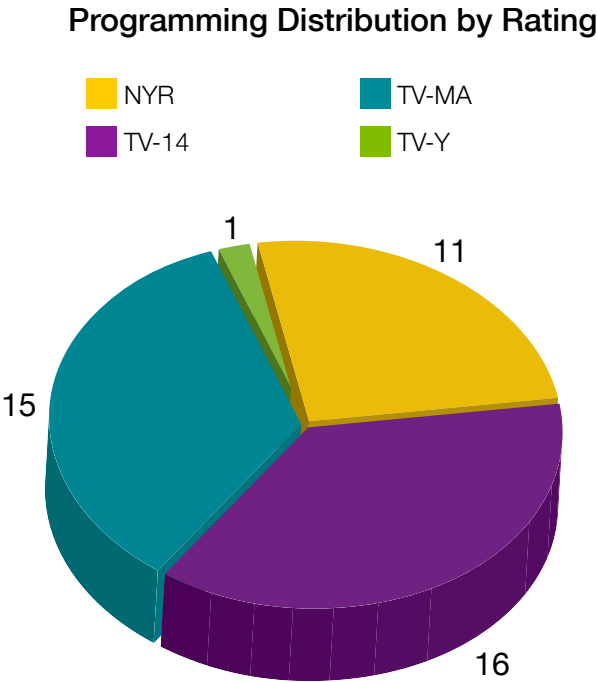
Difficulty of Circumventing Parental Controls

There are no pin or password restrictions to stop a user from switching profiles, so a child can easily switch over to an adult user's profile.

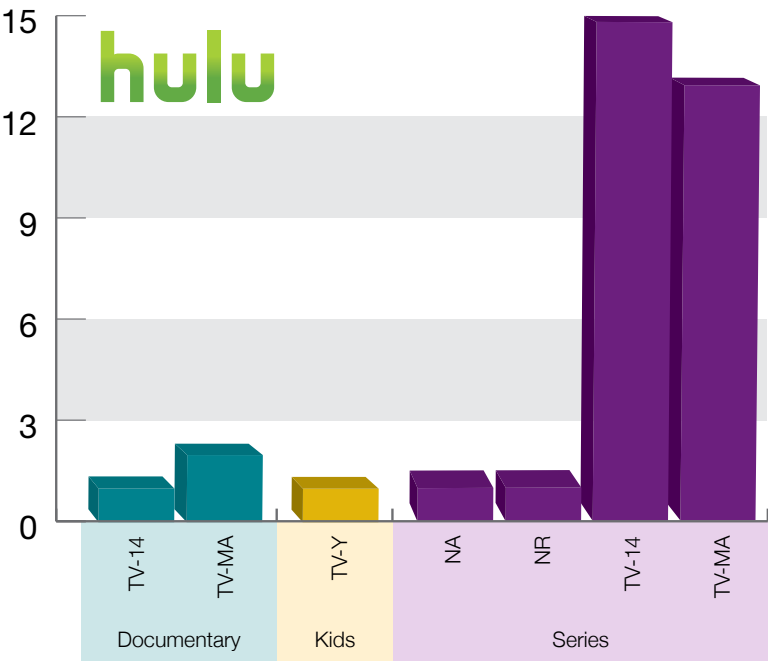
About Hulu Original Content

Hulu has the fewest original/exclusive offerings of the three top streaming content providers. Of the original/exclusive content available on Hulu, we found only one rated TV-Y, none rated TV-G, and one cartoon that is sometimes rated TV-PG and sometimes TV-14. That said, as a ratio of total original content, TV-MA is less dominant on Hulu than on Amazon Prime and Netflix.

Original Content on Hulu:



Hulu has a lower ratio of TV-MA-rated original or exclusive programming as compared to its top competitors (Amazon Prime Video and Netflix), both in absolute terms, and across genres.



**Cost:** \$99/year (part of Amazon Prime membership)  
**Use of Ratings:** C  
**Parental Controls:** B+  
**Visibility of Adult Titles/Content:** C

Original Content for Families: C

Ratings System Used

Amazon Video uses both the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings classification system and the TV Guidelines Organization TV Parental Controls as the basis for its parental controls ratings categories.  
Amazon has combined ratings into levels with recommended audiences (General, Family, Teen, and Mature) to help parents set viewing restrictions.  
Content descriptors are not used.

\*Note: Where individual episodes within a series carried different age-based ratings, the entire series was categorized under the highest rating assigned to any episode in the series. Programs not yet rated were removed.



## Visibility of Age-Based or Content Ratings on Menu and on Individual Episodes

Episodes are rated individually.

Ratings information is visible on the website, but not consistently displayed at the beginning of episodes. Content descriptors are not universally applied and do not consistently follow the TVOMB model. For example, on “Alpha House” descriptors used include AC (Adult Content), AL (Adult Language), N (Nudity), SS (Sexual Situations); but no ratings information or content warnings are given at the beginning of “American Playboy.”

Two MA-rated episodes of “Eat the World with Emeril Lagasse” stipulate in the episode description “Viewer Discretion Adult Language.” Other episodes in the series are rated TV-14 with no further explanation or justification given for the rating.

## Difficulty of Setting-Up Parental Controls

You can log into your account using the mobile app or online to set parental controls across all devices, or on selected devices.

Parental controls can be used to restrict rental and purchase or to restrict content.

Parental controls/restrictions are limited to general categories (G: General, 7: Family, 13: Teen, 18: Mature), restricted by PIN. Amazon

also provides step-by-step instructions on setting up and using Parental Controls.

## How Difficult is it for Parents to Limit a Child’s Ability to View Adult Titles or Promotions?

No separate log-in or user profile for children, so that even if you set parental controls so that children cannot stream adult content, they still scroll past adult content on menu screens, which may contain suggestive language or imagery (E.g. on Amazon Prime, this might include “Transparent” “American Playboy” or “I Love Dick.”)

## Difficulty of Circumventing Parental Controls

To change the parental control settings, you need to enter your Amazon account password as well as the five-digit PIN.

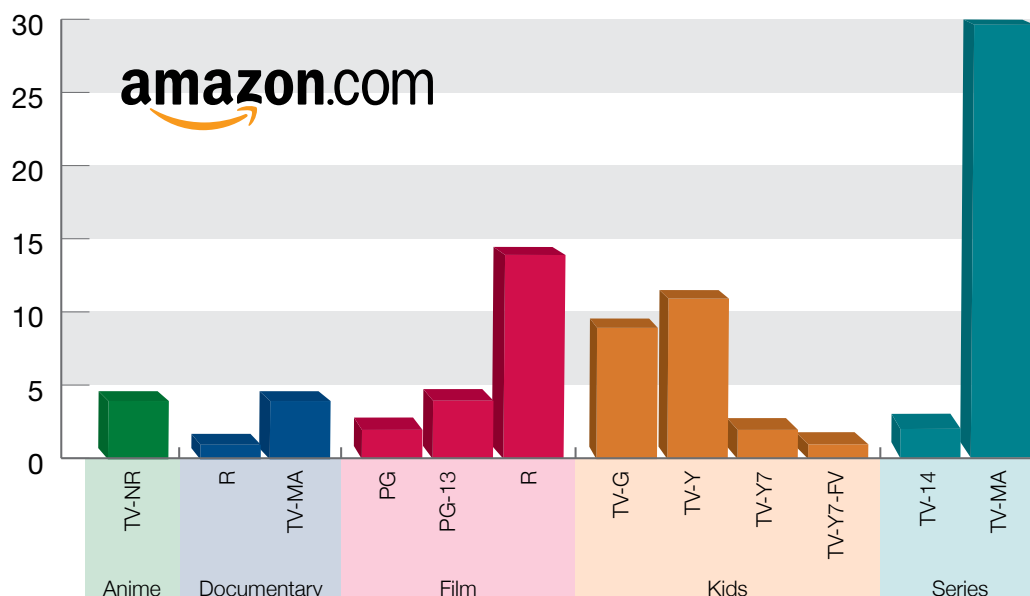
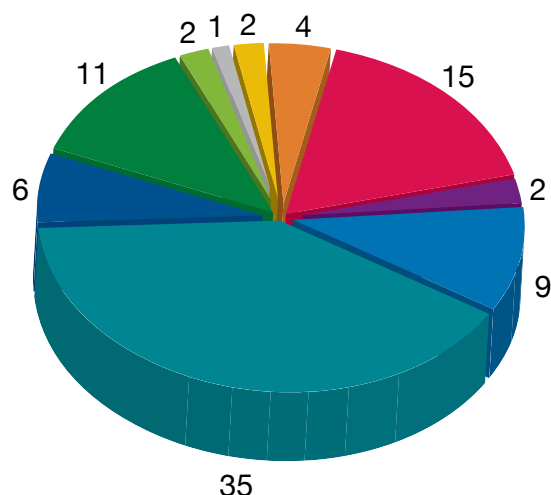
## About Amazon Prime Video Original Content

Although Amazon offers a fair amount of original kids programming, the bulk of their original content is for mature audiences only, across genres.

However, General-Audience programming is better represented on Amazon Prime Video than on Netflix or Hulu.

## Original Content on Amazon Prime:

### Ratings Distribution on Amazon Prime



\*Note: Where individual episodes within a series carried different age-based ratings, the entire series was categorized under the highest rating assigned to any episode in the series. Programs not yet rated were removed.



# NETFLIX

**Cost:** \$7.99/month

**Use of Ratings:** C-

**Parental Controls:** B+

**Visibility of Adult Titles/Content:** D

**Original Content for Families:** C-

## Ratings System Used

Netflix uses a combination of TVOMB and MPAA ratings on its programs, but for Netflix exclusives/originals, they primarily follow the TVOMB system, even for movies and documentaries.

## Visibility of Age-Based or Content Ratings On Menu and On Individual Episodes

Unlike its top two competitors (Amazon Prime Video and Hulu) Netflix rates entire series, rather than individual episodes.

Ratings information is visible on the show's Netflix page and on menu screens, but does not appear at the beginning of the episode.

No clear justification for the rating is given, so an MA rating could be because of harsh language, violence, nudity, or sexual content, and there is no practical way of knowing without watching the program to find out.

Only age-based guidance is provided, no content descriptors are provided (other than FV in the kids' category).

## Difficulty of Setting-Up Parental Controls

Parental Controls can be set up either through the mobile app or the Netflix website.

When you create a new account, Netflix will automatically create an adult user profile under the name of the account owner, as well as a "kids" profile. Both profiles can be managed and customized online, although the default for both adult profiles and kids profiles is minimally restrictive. To set parental controls, you can create a four-digit pin which will be required to view content above the selected age level. Age-based content restrictions include Little Kids (TV-Y, TVG, G); Older Kids (TV-Y7-FV, TV-PG, TV-Y7, PG); Teens (TV-14, PG-13); and Adults (TV-MA, R, NC-17).

To change your preferences within the profile, select "manage profiles" and tap the pencil icon to edit. You can change the profile name and add additional profiles so that every member of the family has their own customized profile. Within a "kids" profile, you can select a box that will only allow TV shows and movies for kids 12 and under. You can also choose from a drop-down box that will restrict viewing to "older kids and below" or "little kids only."

Within the Adult profile you can also restrict content by age (teens and below or all maturity levels).

## How Difficult is it for Parents to Limit a Child's Ability to View Adult Titles or Promotions?

Without making any changes to the "kids" profile, we note that the Netflix original series "Anne with an E" is prominent on the menu screen (concerns about the content in that series are addressed at <http://dailycaller.com/2017/05/01/breaking-anne/>), as well as other series and titles that parents might find unsuitable for very young children.

With the "Little Kids Only" option selected, we note that "Fuller House" was still visible on the menu screen (Content concerns with that series are addressed <http://w2.parentstv.org/blog/index.php/2016/03/05/nostalgia-on-demand/>.)

If you attempt to search for an adult title within the "Kids" profile, the search will return nothing.

On the adult profile, categories of content include Gritty Movies ("Magic Mike" is the first title in that row); Independent Movies, which may have very adult themes and adult content on the cover art or in the title itself, like "Zack and Miri make a Porno," and "Nymphomaniac"; Dark Movies, LGBTQ Movies, and Horror Movies with nightmare-inducing (especially for a child) cover art.

All of these categories appear in close proximity to child- or family-friendly categories such as "Feel Good Movies" (which includes titles like "Baby's Day Out," "Anastasia," "The Iron Giant," "Brother Bear 2," "The Little Prince," etc.).

\*More on this below.

## Difficulty of Circumventing Parental Controls

With parental controls set, a child would need to know and enter the four-digit pin to view content above the age-restriction set by the parent, however it is important to note that a child using Netflix can open and browse an adult profile without having to first enter a password, even if parental controls are turned on.

## Original Content on Netflix

Netflix lists 379 exclusive or original titles, of which 366 are available in the U.S., making it by far the biggest player in the category of original streaming content.

Like Amazon Prime Video, Netflix produces a considerable amount of original and exclusive kids programming, and a considerable amount of original and exclusive adult programming, but offers little for the whole family.

More than half (57%) of Netflix original/exclusive programming is rated TV-MA, and across all genres (excluding "kids,") MA-rated programming dominates.

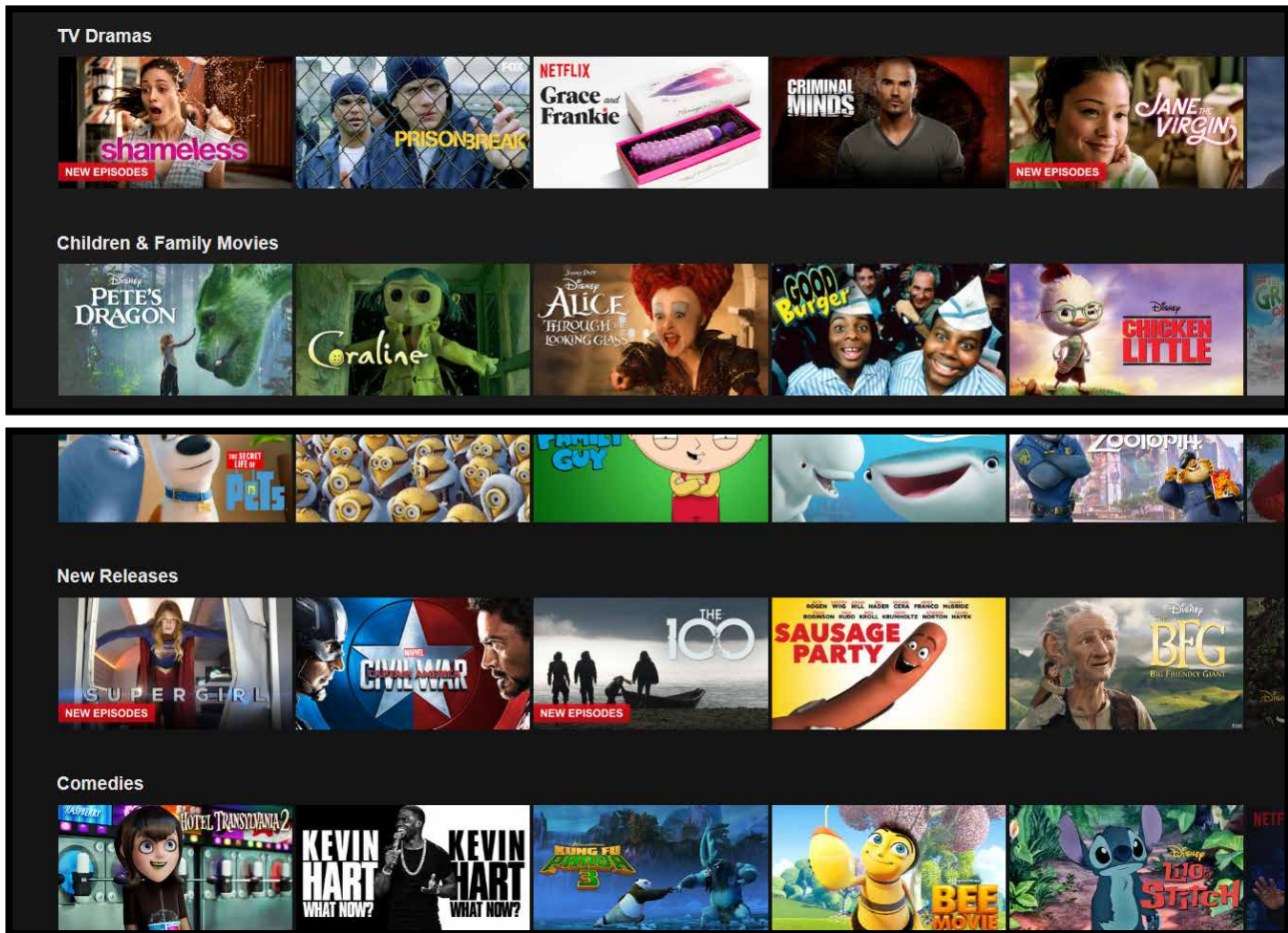
Looking only at (already rated) series programming on Netflix, 65% is rated TV-MA, 1 (1%) is rated G, and only 8 (8%) rated PG.

Among Netflix Exclusive/Original films, none are rated "G," while 72% are rated TV-MA.

Only 4 minutes out of every hour of original series programming is suitable for a family audience (rated PG or lower) and less than 1 minute out of every hour of original series programming is rated G.

If your plans include family movie night, in less than five hours – or three movie nights, tops – you will have exhausted Netflix's entire inventory of original films rated PG or lower.

Also troubling is the juxtaposition of adult imagery in or near categories specifically for child or family viewing, like the image of a sex toy right above the “Children and Family Movies” category:



There is no obvious way to eliminate either problematic categories or specific titles from the menu screen, and they remain visible even with the parental controls turned on. The only way to eliminate the titles from the menu is by changing the viewer profile preferences to teen and below; but this is a shotgun approach to content control, rather than a sniper approach – Instead of eliminating specific items of concern, you must restrict or eliminate the bulk of the Netflix catalogue from your menu.

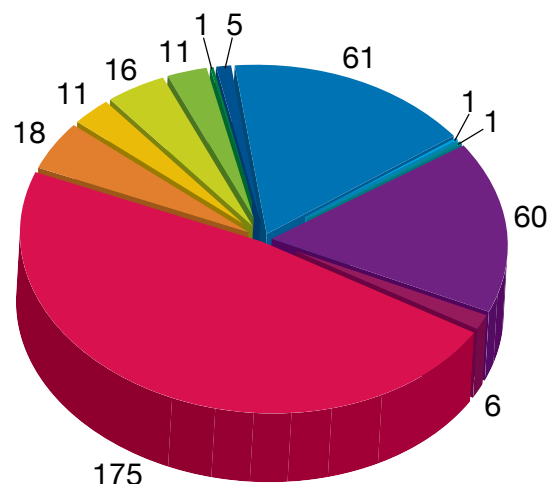
After spending some time looking for help online (no information on removing categories of content was readily available on the Netflix

site), various user forums and websites suggested that eliminating problematic content categories can be accomplished by filling in a preferences survey, but the link given (<http://movies.netflix.com/TastePreferences>) appears to have been removed or disabled from the Netflix website. Other sites suggested going to the “taste preferences menu” and selecting “taste preferences,” but it appears that the Netflix website has also done away with those options, or in any case, they are not easy to locate, and do not appear either under “Account” or “Manage Profiles.”

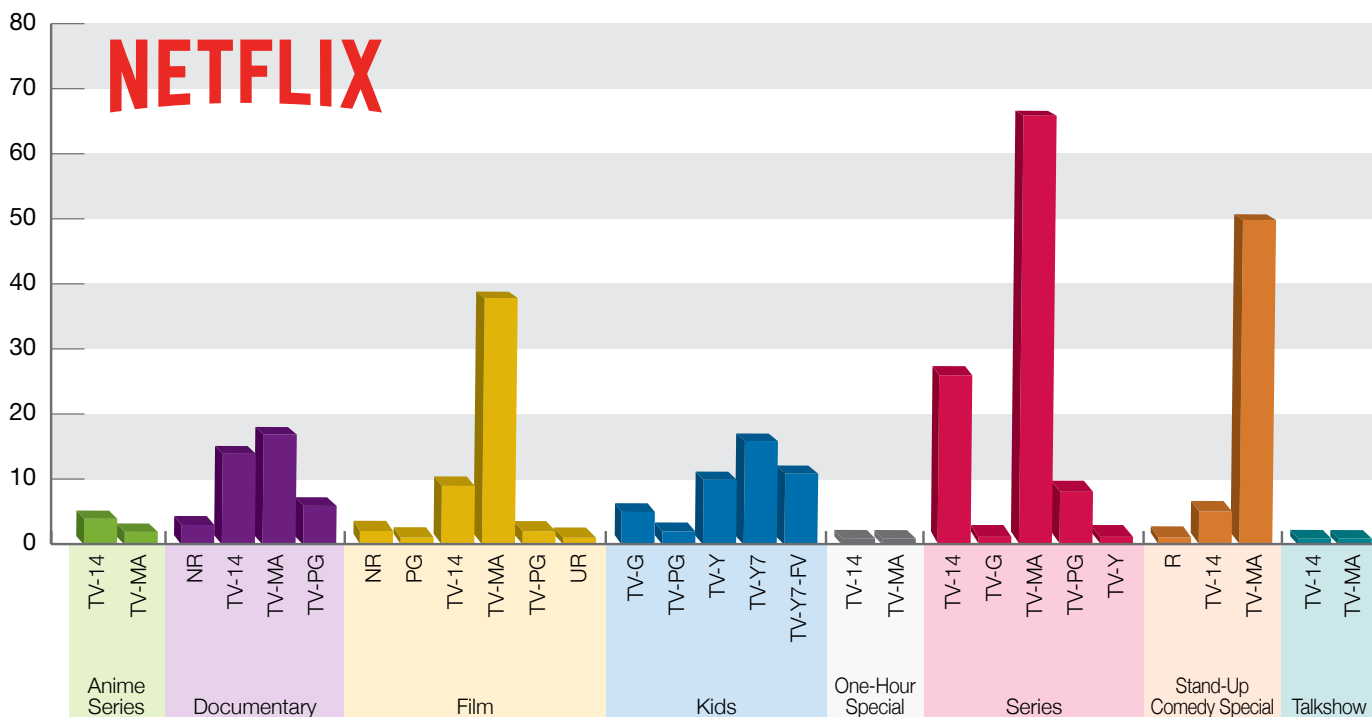
## Original Content on Netflix:

### Ratings Distribution on Amazon Prime

|     |       |          |
|-----|-------|----------|
| NR  | TV-14 | TV-Y     |
| NYR | TV-G  | TV-Y7    |
| PG  | TV-MA | TV-Y7-FV |
| R   | TV-PG | UR       |



\*Even within more mainstream categories, some of the cover-art is clearly inappropriate, and you end up with titles like “Sausage Party” next to “The B.F.G.,” or “Family Guy” between “Minions” and “Finding Dory.” If a parent has not set-up the parental controls and is not familiar with those specific titles, they might easily be misled by their proximity to other children’s titles into thinking that those programs were similarly suitable for young viewers.



\*Programs that were Not Yet Rated have been removed

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Children's programming has become the bait that content providers use to hook families into subscribing to their streaming video services and sticking with them (Brustein, 2015). Streaming video services can also give parents an illusion of greater control over the content their child consumes. And while there are many upsides for parents in switching from cable or broadcast to a streaming service, parents need to be aware of the potential downsides.

Taken as a whole, families are not especially well-served by existing OTT devices and streaming video providers. Though most streaming services offer ample programming for young children, there is a lack of original general-audience or family programming across the board – so if your child is too old for “Bubble Guppies,” but not yet old enough for “Stranger Things,” most services have little to offer.

Although most video providers use some form of age-based content rating, there is no uniformity across platforms in how those ratings are applied and displayed.

And while many of these streaming video services offer fairly robust parental controls, it is too easy for children to view suggestive adult titles and cover art.

By using a combination of parental controls on the devices and on the streaming services themselves, a parent can do a reasonably good, if not perfect, job of limiting their child's ability to access adult content, but there is substantial room for improvement. If families truly are vital to the stability and continued growth of subscription video services, they need to act to provide a more child- and family-friendly environment for those subscribers. To wit:

### Uniform ratings system

All streaming video providers should agree to and adopt a uniform standard for applying age-based and content ratings.

### Give parents more control over content

When Sirius and XM Satellite Radio companies were seeking regulatory approval to merge, the PTC called on corporate leaders of the combined entity to offer a separate subscription tier for families that did not want to underwrite explicit content. To this day Sirius XM subscribers can select a “family friendly” package that excludes explicit programming at a slightly reduced fee. A similar option should be available to streaming video subscribers. No family should have to underwrite, with their subscription dollars, content they find objectionable in order to get family-quality content.

### Block explicit titles when parental controls are turned on

If a parent has deployed parental controls to block a child from viewing TV-MA, or R-rated content, those titles should no longer be visible on the menu screen, especially if those titles contain explicit words, descriptions or cover art.

In addition, it is time for Congress, the Federal Communications Commission, and all interested parties to revisit the Child Safe Viewing Act in light of newer technologies. Much has changed since the law was passed in 2008, and services and platforms that have emerged in recent years were not included in the evaluation of blocking technologies and parental controls called for by that Act.

We also call on all involved parties to commit to participating in a



symposium to identify and implement solutions to the problems and challenges confronting families in light of technological changes.

We are in a period of revolutionary change in the way people consume

entertainment, and the media environment is changing at a rapid pace. As technology continues to evolve, it is incumbent on the companies leading the charge to also consider how families will be impacted. It is our hope that this report will help to get that dialogue started.

## APPENDIX

### Ratings Systems Explained

#### TVOMB Ratings

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>TV-Y</b>     | This program is designed to be appropriate for all children  |
| <b>TV-Y7</b>    | This program is designed for children age 7 and above  |
| <b>TV-Y7-FV</b> | Some programs may be given the “FV” content descriptor if they exhibit more ‘fantasy violence,’ and/or are generally more intense or combative than other programs rated TV-Y7 |
| <b>TV-G</b>     | Most parents would find this program suitable for all ages   |
| <b>TV-PG</b>    | This program contains material that parents may find unsuitable for younger children   |
| <b>TV-14</b>    | This program contains some material that many parents would find unsuitable for children under 14 years of age   |
| <b>TV-MA</b>    | This program is specifically designed to be viewed by adults and therefore may be unsuitable for children under 17   |

Most broadcast and cable television will also use one or more of the following content descriptors to indicate elevated levels of certain types of content.

- V** – violence
- S** – sexual situations
- L** – coarse or crude indecent language
- D** – suggestive dialogue (usually means talk about sex)
- FV** – fantasy violence

#### MPAA Ratings

|              |                              |   |
|--------------|------------------------------|---|
| <b>G</b>     | GENERAL AUDIENCES            | All ages admitted.  |
| <b>PG</b>    | PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED  | Some material may not be suitable for children.           |
| <b>PG-13</b> | PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED   | Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13. |
| <b>R</b>     | RESTRICTED                   | Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian.  |
| <b>NC-17</b> | NO ONE 17 AND UNDER ADMITTED |   |

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