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Learning from Teen Film: Governance, Guidance and the Limit Experience

This paper proposes a new way of understanding the teen film genre, not by internal narrative or stylistic conventions, not by the discourse on adolescence in which it participates, or even by demographic claims about its audience or the strategies of producers and marketers, but by the conjunction of all these in the system of film classification. The key events in the history of developing standards for film classification, in relation to censorship/approval systems have not only often turned on or responded to images of youth, but they emerged across the trans-national film market place as a narrative about age and development. This paper steps outside the usual taxonomies of film genre to speculate that we might be able to define teen film entirely by the ratings systems which emerged alongside it into a complex array of claims and counter-claims about maturity, citizenship and cultural norms. Teen film itself functions to naturalise ratings categories by the desire to transgress them even while it also works to define the adolescence on which it claims to depend.