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6th Annual Video and Computer Game Report Card

December 13, 2001

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Sixth Annual Video and Computer Game Report Card

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This Video and Computer Game Report Card is the sixth issued by the National Institute on Media and the Family, an independent, non-partisan, non-sectarian, non-profit organization. The Report Card provides a snapshot of the interactive gaming industry with a focus on issues related to child welfare. The full Report Card is available on our Web site www.mediafamily.org or by calling 888.672.5437. Last year more than 25,000 copies were distributed. This Report Card also includes a new feature: a list of recommended games for kids and a list of games for parents to avoid. The recommended games have been “parent-approved” using the KidScore® rating system and then “kid-tested” by young gamers.

Introduction

The electronic gaming industry sees dynamic changes year after year. This has certainly held true in 2001. Nintendo released *Game Boy Advance* this past summer. Then in November the Microsoft *Xbox* made its debut, followed within days by Nintendo’s *GameCube*. As each new generation of gaming technology arrives, the graphics and imagery get ever closer to motion picture quality. This makes the games more realistic, exciting, and attractive to young players. More children and youth are playing than ever before. Ninety-two percent of youngsters ages 2-17 now play video or computer games.

While the number of high quality games for children increases, the concern about youth access to inappropriate games continues to grow. For the first time in several years, it is likely that the top selling video game and the top selling computer game will both carry the M (Mature) rating. *Metal Gear Solid 2* (Playstation 2) and *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* (computer) are both on track to be the selling leaders. Several other games released this year pushed the violence and mayhem envelope even further.

Research continues to point toward a relationship between violent games and youth aggression. For the first time, game producers in Japan are considering instituting a rating system because of the growing concern about increases in violence among Japanese youth.

As gaming technology advances and as gaming becomes a normal part of youth entertainment, the need for reliable information about games and children

becomes more important. The Sixth Annual Video and Computer Game Report Card strives to fill that need.

Areas Covered in the 2001 Report Card

- National household survey of game habits and parent supervision.
- Review of progress on past recommendations.
- Ratings education.
- Accuracy of the ratings.
- Marketing and advertising.
- Arcades.
- Retail ratings enforcement.
- Research update.
- Overall grade.
- “Parent-approved” and “kid-tested” recommendations.
- KidScore® ratings of popular games.

How the Report Card Was Compiled

- Onsite visits to 17 arcades in six states.
- Telephone survey of 51 retail and rental stores in 12 states.
- National random phone survey of 250 households.
- National random mail survey of 527 households.
- Survey of 600 eighth and ninth graders.
- Field research in 41 stores with youth buyers ages 7-14.
- Review of current research on effects of violent video and computer games.
- Panels of parents reviewed and rated over 125 games.
- Panels of children and youth played and rated the “parent-approved” games.

Results

Who Is Playing?

The attention given to the effects, positive and negative, of games on children and youth is clearly warranted. Video and computer game play is most popular among kids. Our national survey reveals that 92% of kids age 2-17 play video and computer games. That translates into 59 million young players. In contrast, only 26% (55 million) of those over 18 play games. Many of these fall in the 18-24 age group. While it is true that there are gamers in almost all age categories, and millions of players are adults, the demographics of gamers skew toward the very young.

Online gaming is increasing in popularity with youth. Sixty-seven percent of teens now participate in on-line gaming (Yankee Group Interactive Consumer Survey,

2001). With broadband access growing, more and more teens will be able to play the elaborate multi-player games.

Overall, 58% of gamers are male and 42% are female.

Video and Computer Game Industry

We are pleased to report that there has been progress on many of the recommendations we have made in the previous five Report Cards. On the whole, we believe that the video and computer game industry's response to public concerns have been more responsible than the other media industries'.

Recommendation: All games should display a rating.

Response: All producers are expected to voluntarily submit games to the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB).

Result: We did not find any games without a rating.

Recommendation: The industry should stop marketing adult games to children and teens.

Response: The industry set up the Advertising Review Council (ARC) in January 2000.

Result: This was the first full year of implementation, and the progress is clear. For the most part adult rated games are not advertised during the hours that most children are watching television. However, we found several instances of M (Mature) rated games being advertised during times when large numbers of children are watching.

Recommendation: The industry should better educate the public about the rating system.

Response: The industry initiated a public education program called "Check the Rating."

Result: The industry is making ratings and their explanations more widely available. Retailers, however, need to do a better job. Only 33% of stores take concrete steps to educate the public and only half (51%) educate their employees. Nevertheless, 55% of households with children now report that they understand the ratings symbols. The percentage of employees selling games who understand the ratings system rose from 68% last year to 88% this year. This effort needs to continue.

Recommendation: The industry should develop and enforce a code of advertising and marketing conduct.

Response: The ARC guidelines include enforceable standards.

Result: We did not find the grossly crude advertising language present in past years.

Grade for video and computer game industry response to recommendations...A-

Arcade Industry

We have called upon the arcade industry to develop, implement, and enforce a rating system. They responded in 2000 with a system of green, yellow, and red stickers. This year was the time to measure implementation. Unfortunately 2001 appears to be a step backward. After visiting 17 arcades in 6 states we found that only 71% of the games displayed the ratings. This is down from 80% last year. In 2000, 55% of the arcades did not install red stickered games. This year that fell to 41%. Four of the arcades we visited had attendants on duty, but none of the four had been instructed to steer kids away from the games with red stickers.

Grade for arcade industry..... D

Retail Ratings Enforcement

Since the first Report Card we have asked retailers to develop and enforce policies prohibiting the sales of adult games to minors. Our national survey of households this year shows remarkable support among adults for retailers that take this step. Ninety-three percent of households “agree” or “strongly agree” that stores should prevent the sale of Mature games to kids. As one parent said, “I understand it is a parent’s responsibility, but we could use some help because we can’t always be there.”

Many major retailers agreed to take such steps late in 2000. This should have been the year to see real progress. The results, however, were mixed.

First the good news. Sears continued their policy of not carrying M-rated games. Target and Wal-Mart implemented policies that are widely enforced.

Next the bad news. Several of the largest retailers have not developed any policies. Several others that have policies have poor enforcement.

Overall, children as young as 7 were able to purchase M-rated games two out of three times. While we applaud the few retailers who have responded, retailers overall have a lot of room for improvement.

Grade for retail enforcement.....D

Accuracy of the Ratings

With reliance on the ratings growing, it is more important than ever that they be accurate. Each year we have parents judge the accuracy of the ESRB ratings. The general finding over the past several years is that parents would rate the

games more strictly. That pattern became more pronounced in 2001. Parents found 13% of the games rated “E” to be clearly objectionable for children 3-7. Last year parents would have given 23% of the “T” rated games an “M” rating. This year they would have assigned an “M” to 31% of the “T” games. Our parent raters think the ESRB is starting to rate “on a curve.”

Grade for accuracy of the ratings.....C

Parent Supervision

Obviously, parents take the most important role in supervising the game play of children. This applies to quantity as well as quality. For example, a significant number of parents are concerned about the amount of time kids spend playing games. Forty-three percent worry that the amount of game time interferes with other activities and schoolwork. The concern is justified in light of the fact that 26% of eighth and ninth graders admit that game playing sometimes interferes with homework and school performance. Our research, as well as the research of others, shows that as game time goes up, grades go down.

There is a big gap between what parents report about game supervision and what kids report. For example, 53% of parents say that they limit game playing time. But only 13% of eighth and ninth graders say their parents do. Fifty-four percent of parents say they follow the ratings in purchasing decisions, but only 7% of the eighth and ninth graders say their parents have ever stopped them from buying a game because of the rating. There can be a number of explanations for the discrepancy, but two things are clear. First, parents are more aware of their responsibility to supervise game playing than they have been in the past. For example, the percentage of those reporting that they know about the ratings is up to 55%. The percentage of parents who report that they follow the ratings has climbed from 25% in 1998 to 54% today. Second, there is still room for improvement.

Overall Grade

We are once again issuing an overall grade. We understand that there are independent sectors in the gaming field. The overall grade, however, provides a snapshot of the entire gaming field as it relates to child welfare issues.

When we began issuing these report cards, ratings were done on a hit-or-miss basis, children could easily access adult games, and there were widespread abuses in marketing and advertising. The overall grade this year reflects progress over the past six years as well as the improvement that is still needed.

Overall grade.....C

Recommendations

1. Eighty-four percent of parents support the creation of a single universal rating system for all media. We therefore renew our recommendation that the game, film, and television industries adopt a universal rating system that is administered independently.
2. The industry should continue their efforts to educate the public about game ratings.
3. ARC should continue to enforce the guidelines for marketing and advertising.
4. The retail and rental stores who have committed to policies preventing the sale or rental of adult games to children and teens should actively enforce them.
5. Parents judge many of the ratings to be lax. We call upon the ESRB to review their ratings criteria and methodology so that the ratings better reflect the judgments of parents, the intended users.
6. The retail chains and independent stores who have refused to restrict access to adult games should put an enforceable policy in place. This is a change supported by 93% of parents.
7. The arcade industry should improve the implementation and enforcement of its rating system.
8. Parents need to become more knowledgeable about the games their children are playing and should exert greater supervision.

Research Update

The research base on the effects of exposure to violent video and computer games continues to build. Anderson and Bushman (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of 35 different studies to see if these reveal similar patterns in their findings. They identified a consistent pattern in five areas. Exposure to violent video games increases physiological arousal, aggressive thoughts, aggressive emotions, and aggressive behavior, and decreases prosocial behavior.

We reported findings at the International Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development in April showing that junior high school students who played more violent games were more likely to see the world as a hostile place, get into frequent arguments with teachers, and be involved in physical fights. Critics have

often attacked such correlational research as only showing that hostile kids like violent games, not that the games contribute to the aggression. Addressing this chicken-or-egg problem, we found that exposure to video game violence was a significant predictor of physical fights, even when students' sex, hostility level, and amount of game play were controlled statistically. Children with the lowest hostility scores were almost 10 times more likely to have been involved in physical fights if they played a lot of violent video games than if they did not play violent video games. In fact, the least hostile children who played a lot of violent video games were more likely to be involved in fights than the most hostile children who did not play violent video games.

There are also a growing number of anecdotal reports of compulsive playing patterns among teen boys playing games like *Everquest*. While research on compulsive video game playing is just beginning, some disturbing trends appear to be emerging. There is some empirical evidence suggesting that perhaps as many as one in five adolescents who play video games may exhibit symptoms of compulsive game playing (Griffiths & Hunt, 1998). In our study of eighth and ninth graders, students who exhibited compulsive game-playing tendencies:

- Preferred more violent video games.
- Played more violent games.
- Had more hostile personalities.
- Saw the world as a more hostile place.
- Were more likely to report having been involved in physical fights.
- Performed more poorly in school.

Compulsive game playing is something that will bear closer attention.

While the research on video and computer games is still emerging, the results warrant the concern that many pediatricians, academics, policy makers, and parents have.

2001 Video and Computer Game Report Card

Summary

Video and Computer Game Industry	A-
Arcade Industry	D
Retail Enforcement of Ratings	D
Accuracy of Ratings	C
Overall Grade	C

Recommended "Parent-Approved" and "Kid-Tested" Games

Favorites among the 3-7 year olds: Rating: Platform:

1. Bob the Builder	E	CD ROM
2. Blue's Art Time Activities	3-6	CD ROM
3. Crash Bandicoot-The Wrath of Cortex	E	PS2
4. Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil	E	PS2
5. Nickelodeon Rocket Power Extreme Arcade Games	E	CD ROM
6. Spyro: Season of Ice	E	GBA
7. Super Dodge Ball Advance	E	GBA
8. Madden 2002 Football	E	PS2
9. Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec	E	PS2
10. NBA Street	E	PS2

Favorites among 8-12 year olds:

1. Extreme G Racing	E	PS2
2. Nascar Heat 2002	E	PS2
3. Nickelodeon Rocket Power Extreme Arcade Games	E	CD ROM
4. FIFA Soccer 2002	E	PS2
5. Math Blaster-Mission 2: Race for the Omega Trophy	7-9	CD ROM
6. NCAA Football	E	PS2
7. Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec	E	PS2
8. NBA Street	E	PS2
9. Crash Bandicoot-The Wrath of Cortex	E	PS2
10. F-Zero Maximum Velocity	E	GBA

Favorites among 13-17 year olds:

1. NCAA Football	E	PS2
2. Oregon Trail 5 th Edition, The	9+	CD ROM
3. Crazy Taxi 2	T	DRCT
4. Madden 2002	E	PS2
5. Mario Kart Super Circuit	E	GBA
6. Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec	E	PS2
7. Super Dodge Ball Advance	E	GBA
8. NBA Street	E	PS2
9. Myst III: Exile	E	CD ROM
10. Spiderman: Mysterio's Menace	E	GBA

CD ROM = Computer Game : GBA = Game Boy Advance : PS2 = PlayStation 2 : DRCT = Dreamcast : N64 = Nintendo 64
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Parent Alert! 10 Games to Avoid*

<u>Game:</u>	<u>Rating:</u>	<u>Platform:</u>
1. Grand Theft Auto III	M	PS2
2. Return to Castle Wolfenstein	M	CD ROM
3. Max Payne	M	CD ROM
3. Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty	M	PS2
4. Silent Hill 2	M	PS2
5. Twisted Metal: Black	M	PS2
6. Time Crisis 2	T	PS2
7. Conker's Bad Fur Day	M	N64
8. Devil May Cry	M	PS2
9. Soldier of Fortune Gold	M	PS2
10. Serious Sam	M	CD ROM

*All of our game ratings are based on information provided by our trained Media Raters.

<u>List of games rated:</u>	<u>Rating:</u>	<u>Platform:</u>
1. 007 Agent Under Fire	M	PS2
2. Ace Combat 04: Shattered Skies	E	PS2
3. Backyard Basketball	E	CD ROM
4. Backyard Football	E	CD ROM
5. Blue's Art Time Activities	3-6	CD ROM
6. Bob the Builder	E	CD ROM
7. Boxing Fever	E	GBA
8. Casper: Spirit Dimensions	E	PS2
9. City Crisis	E	PS2
10. Civilization III	E	CD ROM
11. Coaster Works	E	DRCT
12. Confidential Mission	T	DRCT
13. Conker's Bad Fur Day	M	N64
14. Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex	E	PS2
15. Crazi Taxi 2	T	DRCT
16. Dark Cloud	T	PS2
17. Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	E	PS2
18. Devil May Cry	M	PS2

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19. Doom	T	GBA
20. Eighteen Wheeler: American Pro Trucker	E	DRCT
21. ESPN Final Round Golf	E	GBA
22. Extermination	M	PS2
23. Extreme G Racing	E	PS2
24. F-14 Tomcat	E	GBA
25. F-Zero Maximum Velocity	E	GBA
26. FIFA Soccer 2002	E	PS2
27. Final Fight One	E	GBA
28. Fortress	E	GBA
29. Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec	E	PS2
30. Grand Theft Auto III	M	PS2
31. Half-Life	M	PS2
32. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	E	CD ROM
33. Hot Wheels Mechanix	E	CD ROM
34. ICO	T	PS2
35. Kessen II	T	PS2
36. Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil	E	PS2
37. Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Seasons, The	E	GBA
38. Madden 2002	E	PS2
39. Mario Kart Super Circuit	E	GBA
40. Math Blaster-Mission 2: Race for the Omega Trophy	7-9	CD ROM
41. Max Payne	M	CD ROM
42. Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty	M	PS2
43. Metal Slug X	T	PS2
44. Mia: Just in Time	6-10	CD ROM
45. Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002	E	CD ROM
46. Monster Rancher 3	E	PS2
47. Monsters, Inc.	E	GBA
48. Myst III: Exile	E	GBA
49. Nancy Drew: Message in a Haunted Mansion	E	CD ROM
50. Nascar Heat 2002	E	PS2
51. NBA Live 2002	E	PS2
52. NBA Street	E	PS2
53. NCAA Football 2002	E	PS2
54. NFL 2K2	E	DRCT
55. NHL Hitz 2002	E	PS2
56. Nickelodeon Rocker Power Extreme Arcade Games	E	CD ROM
57. Okage: Shadow King	T	PS2
58. Oregon Trail 5 th Edition, The	9+	CD ROM
59. Outtrigger	T	DRCT
60. Phantasy Star Online	T	DRCT
61. Project Justice	T	DRCT
62. Red Faction	M	PS2
63. Return to Castle Wolfenstein	M	CD ROM

CD ROM = Computer Game : GBA = Game Boy Advance : PS2 = PlayStation 2 : DRCT = Dreamcast : N64 = Nintendo 64

64. Rugrats: Castle Capers	E	GBA
65. Serious Sam	M	CD ROM
66. Silent Hill 2	M	PS2
67. Sims: Hot Date, The	T	CD ROM
68. Smuggler's Run	T	PS2
69. Soldier of Fortune Gold	M	PS2
70. Soul Reaver 2	M	PS2
71. Spiderman: Mysterio's Menace	E	GBA
72. Spy Hunter	T	PS2
73. Spyro: Season of Ice	E	GBA
74. Stretch Panic	T	PS2
75. Super Dodge Ball Advance	E	GBA
76. Time Crisis 2	T	PS2
77. Tony Hawk 3	T	PS2
78. Twisted Metal: Black	M	PS2
79. WWF Smackdown: Just Bring It	T	PS2
80. Zone of the Enders	M	PS2

To see full KidScore® reviews on any of the games, please visit our Web site at www.mediafamily.org.

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