

UNITED STATES SENATOR • CONNECTICUT

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Message:

Here's the video game background

U.S. SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN CONNECTICUT

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July 22, 1998

SPECIAL ATTENTION:

Video game violence/arcades

Lieberman, Senator Kohl of Wisconsin, Industry Leaders Unveil New Plan to Protect Kids From Violent Video Games in Amusement Arcades

"Coin-operated game-makers, as part of the code of conduct they have adopted, have agreed to take steps to reduce the amount of violence in the new games they produce. This is a remarkable commitment, and sets a high standard that we hope the designers of cartridge and PC games will follow."

Washington, DC – Continuing the successful campaign to raise awareness about video game violence and to persuade game-makers to cut down on the killings, Sen. Joe Lieberman – along with Senator Herb Kohl (D) of Wisconsin, video game-makers, and amusement arcade industry leaders – this morning unveiled a comprehensive, self-enforced anti-violence program designed to protect kids from violent video games.

In the wake of the recent outburst of school shootings, many people are taking a closer look at violent video games and the harmful influence they may have on young players. Much of the attention has fallen on the world of arcades, where many children have easy access to gore-filled shooting games. The concern is so serious in some places that elected officials are drafting laws to regulate arcades and even ban the worst games.

Over the past few months, Lieberman and Kohl have been working closely with the arcade industry to craft the plan unveiled here this morning. The plan includes a Coin-Operated Video Game Parental Advisory System and color-coded content advisory stickers.

The following is the prepared text of Lieberman's remarks:

We are here today to talk about what Senator Kohl and I consider a very positive development in the campaign we have been waging to protect kids against the harmful effects of video game violence.

Since we held our first hearing on this issue nearly five years ago, we have made some significant progress. At our urging, the top game-makers agreed to create a rating system that today is helping parents across the country make informed decisions about what games to buy for their children. We also succeeded on a broader level in beginning to focus public attention on the dangers that excessively violent games can pose to young players.

But one particular place where we have fallen short is the world of coin-operated games. Walk into the average arcade

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- page 2 of 2 -

today, and you will see many teens and younger kids huddled around the most popular killing machines of the moment. No warnings, no ratings to distinguish the gore from the good. And most likely no policies to prevent the youngest and most impressionable kids from playing the grisliest and most grotesque games.

Today, we are pleased to announce, this situation is about to change. The leaders of the coin-operated industry have adopted a broad-based, voluntary anti-violence program that will change the face of the games we see in arcades, if not their content. The game-makers have crafted a new industry-wide rating system, and they have already started working those warning labels into the artwork on each new machine they are releasing.

With this new rating system at their disposal, the arcade owners have begun to test a range of different methods for limiting young children's access to the most violent games, much as movie theaters do with R-rated movies. This is a critical component, because the reality is that parents generally do not accompany their kids to arcades, and without some kind of access policy, these ratings may amount to little more than mayhem magnets for kids.

Perhaps most important, the coin-operated game-makers, as part of the code of conduct they have adopted, have agreed to take tangible steps to reduce the amount of violence in the new games they produce. This is a remarkable commitment, and sets a high standard that we hope the designers of cartridge and PC games will follow.

In a few moments, the president of the American Amusement Machine Association, Mike Rudowicz, will explain this new program in more detail. But before he does, I want to thank the AAMA and the other groups represented here today for responding to the concerns we have voiced and for working with us to help parents keep their kids safe from harm.

The plan they are unveiling today is not flawless, and we will continue to push and prod the industry to improve it, particularly in terms of the access policies they are exploring. Nevertheless, this initiative is a breakthrough, and the public should know about it. We hope this morning's announcement will help to educate parents about this new initiative and ultimately about the need to pay attention to what kind of games their children are playing.

The unfortunate reality is that many parents are not fulfilling their responsibilities as gatekeepers, some out ignorance of the threat these games pose to kids and some simply out of indifference. So an important part of our message today is to reiterate to parents the harmful effects video game violence can have on their kids and to remind them that this plan to rate games and make arcades safer won't be very effective if they do not get involved.

I suspect that the recent outburst of school shootings has caused many parents to take greater notice of this problem and the whole issue of media violence. There has been a number of reports in the national media indicating that the accused young killers in places like Jonesboro, Arkansas and Springfield, Oregon shared a common obsession with violent pop culture, including video games, and this in turn has raised some legitimate questions about the role the entertainment media may have played in these tragedies.

Senator Sam Brownback and I recently held a discussion forum to ask some of these questions to help us understand this new national nightmare, and the experts we assembled all cited the graphic and stimulating images of violence inundating our kids today as a major contributing factor in these shootings and the overall rise in juvenile gun violence. In particular, Northeastern's James Fox, one of the nation's foremost authorities on youth crime, suggested that murderous video games, more than television and movies, may do the most harm in desensitizing children to the consequences of violence.

I am not here to blame video games or the media in general for the school shootings. But I do feel strongly that the culture of violence enveloping our children is having a terrible effect, particularly on America's most vulnerable children.

That is why today, while applauding the responsibility the arcade industry has demonstrated, I also want to appeal again to the cartridge and PC game-makers. For the most part they make wonderfully inventive and constructive products. But I ask them again to take a hard look at some of the worst stuff they are marketing to kids, to consider the devastating impact they can have on those who play and those with whom they live, and to stop making violent games that violate our values and put our children at risk.



AMERICAN AMUSEMENT MACHINE ASSOCIATION



President's "E" Award Recipient

PRESS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release
July 22, 1998**

**For More Information:
AAMA 847/290-9088**

AAMA AND MEMBER COMPANIES BRIEF U.S. SENATE ON SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COIN-OPERATED VIDEO GAME PARENTAL ADVISORY SYSTEM

The American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA) today briefed U.S. Senators Herb Kohl (D-WI) and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) in Washington, D.C., regarding the ongoing implementation of the Coin-Operated Video Game Parental Advisory System ("System").

Mike Rudowicz, AAMA President and the President of Konami Amusement of America, Inc., stated, "We are pleased to report that our industry has engaged in an unprecedented, collaborative effort to develop and implement the Coin-Operated Video Game Parental Advisory System. This user-friendly System allows parents to quickly ascertain the content of coin-operated video games in order to assist their children in making game-play decisions. As parents and responsible members of the business community, we share many of the concerns that Senators Kohl and Lieberman have expressed about the levels of violence in a limited number of coin-operated video games. That is why we appreciate this opportunity to share with them and the public the success of our initial implementation efforts."

The System relies on a color-coded, "traffic light" approach through which even young children are able, following instructions from their parent(s), to make responsible game-playing decisions. At the core of this System, all new coin-operated video games will carry a Parental Advisory Disclosure Message informing consumers about the content of the game in either the artwork of the game or in a color-coded sticker affixed to the game header consistent with industry standards. Older games that are already on the market will receive — with the cooperation of the owners and operators of such games — color-coded stickers with the appropriate Disclosure Message(s).

As part of the System, AAMA and its partners in this effort, the Amusement and Music Operators Association, the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions, and the International Association of Family Entertainment Centers, have also agreed to a landmark, industry-wide Code of Conduct that will help raise awareness of and compliance with the new System.

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National Institute
on MEDIA
and the FAMILY™



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

1998 Video and Computer Game Report Card Issued

National Institute on Media and the Family finds most parents unaware of ultra-violent games; points to growing evidence "kill-for-fun murder simulations" are marketed to children

(Minneapolis) — December 1, 1998 — Manufacturers of video and computer games are marketing "Mature" games to younger children and teens with the message "Murder is fun," according to the *1998 Video and Computer Game Report Card* issued today by the National Institute on Media and the Family.

Most parents do not know what many of their children's games contain, according to the fourth annual *Video and Computer Game Report Card*, and most do not use the rating systems that are available. David Walsh, Ph.D., president of the National Institute on Media and the Family and author of the report, explains most parents are not adept at the game technology and therefore do not pay as much attention to it as necessary.

"The fact that they are called 'games' probably leads some parents to believe there is no need for supervision," said Walsh. "Although most of the products on the market can legitimately be called 'games,' some of the ultra-violent games might be more accurately called 'kill-for-fun murder simulations' and are inappropriate for children."

As video, computer and Internet games become increasingly popular with children, concern about children's access to games featuring violence, sex and other adult themes is rising. The *1998 Video and Computer Game Report Card* is released in cooperation with Senators Joe Lieberman and Herb Kohl to coincide with the start of the busy holiday shopping season.

Since there has been a tremendous growth spurt in the on-line gaming market, the *1998 Video and Computer Game Report Card* expanded its study to cover Internet game sites. In the new gaming universe for children and teenagers, participants can either download or purchase software that enables them to play games with other players on the Internet. New technologies guarantee that game players will experience these game environments with increasingly greater "real world" interaction.

To compile the *1998 Report Card* the National Institute on Media and the Family conducted a telephone survey of 529 parents from all socio-economic groups, representing 46 states. Staff visited arcades in Minnesota, Louisiana, California and New York, as well as a sample of on-line demonstration gaming sites. Panels of six trained media raters each viewed representative samples from more than 50 popular electronic games. The ratings are published in the *1998 National Institute on Media and the Family's Parent Guide to Electronic Games*. Although this was not a scientific study, Dr. Walsh said he hopes the results will provide valuable information for all concerned with the welfare of children.

-more-

Significant Findings:

- 69% of families with children own or rent electronic games.
- Kids who play games do so an average of 7 hours per week.
- Only 40% of parents report they routinely look at industry ratings before buying or renting a game. In a separate study of 96 sixth graders only 29% report their parents check the ratings.
- Multiple studies consistently show that middle- and junior-high school age boys gravitate to violent games.
- Only 11% of retail and rental stores make any special efforts to educate the public about the rating system.
- 43% of retail and rental store personnel do not understand the rating system themselves.
- Only 29% of retail and rental stores educate employees about the rating system.
- Only 21% of retail and rental stores have any policies prohibiting the sale or rental of "T" games to children younger than 13, or "M" games to those younger than 17.
- Less than 5% of parents have heard of Duke Nukem, a "Mature" game. More than 80% of a sample of junior high school students reported they are familiar with the game.
- Popular filtering software only blocks access to 25% of game sites that provide demos of "M" rated games.
- None of the Internet demo sites for "M" rated games sampled displayed a rating or warning on the screen.
- There is evidence that some producers of video, computer and Internet games are targeting their marketing to youngsters under 17 years old.

Final Grades:

Grade for percentage of games rated by video and computer game industry	A
Accuracy of industry ratings.....	B
Ratings displayed by retail stores	A
Ratings enforcement by retail stores.....	D
Ratings displayed by rental stores	B
Ratings enforcement by rental stores	D
Ratings education by rental stores	C-
Ratings development by arcade industry.....	A
Implementation of ratings by arcade industry	Incomplete
Game demo sites ratings	F
On-line game site ratings.....	F
Filtering software effectiveness	D-

"While most games on the market this year are appropriate for children, our concern is about a substantial core group of games that feature ultra-violent themes, sexual themes and crude language," said Dr. Walsh. "Our research shows that most parents are unaware of these games and their content. Unfortunately, this group of games is very popular with children and teenagers. Their popularity is fueled by the growing evidence that these 'kill-for-fun murder simulations' are marketed to children despite a "Mature" industry rating. As parents and caring adults, let's not let some of the video and computer game manufacturers get away now with what the tobacco industry got away with for decades."

For a complete summary of the *1998 Video and Computer Game Report Card* and the *Parent Guide to Electronic Games*, visit the National Institute on Media and the Family's Web site: www.mediafamily.org.

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N E W S R E L E A S E

U.S. SENATOR JOE LIEBERMAN
CONNECTICUT

FOR RELEASE

December 1, 1998

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Home Page: <http://www.senate.gov/~lieberman/> Email: senator_lieberman@lieberman.senate.gov**Statement of Senator Joe Lieberman
Video Game Report Card Press Conference**

We are here today, in what has become a holiday season tradition, to release our Fourth Annual Video and Computer Game Record Card and Holiday Shopping Guide.

This project grew out of the hearings that Senator Kohl and I held in 1993 and 1994 to examine the threat video game violence poses to children. Once the hearings ended, we wanted to continue raising public awareness about this issue, and we decided as a result to produce a "state of the video game union" report to coincide with the holiday shopping rush, the peak time for game-buying.

In a few minutes, Dr. David Walsh, the director of the National Institute on Media and the Family, our partner in this project, will present the detailed findings of our 1998 survey, along with a guide to the season's hottest games. Before he does, I want to take a moment to thank Dr. Walsh for his ongoing cooperation and commitment to this project, which has evolved into quite an undertaking, thanks to the rapid growth of the game industry.

What we have learned from this year's study is that video game industry has developed a split personality. It is a Jekyll-and-Hyde story for the Information Age.

The industry has a family-friendly side, and there is much to like it about it. Most games contain little if any violence, and those that do are clearly rated. Many games are not only innocuous but strikingly inventive, not to mention highly entertaining. And research is showing that game-playing can improve children's inductive reasoning and problem-solving skills and sharpen their sense of spatial relations.

But move away from the mainstream, and you'll find a different, more sinister face. Over the last few years, we have seen the rise of a small but significant core of ultra-violent games that are far more realistic and gruesome than the shooting games that first caught our eye six years ago. They are also far more perverse and anti-social in the way they reward death and depravity. Killing and carnage is not enough any more -- to torture and maim is often the name of these games now.

But don't take our word for it. Just read what the makers of these games are saying in their own marketing. "More fun than shooting your neighbor's cat," boasts an ad for Namco's *Point Blank*. "Escape. Dismember. Massacre," reads the bloody headline for Interplay's *Die by the Sword*. "Happiness is a warm cranium," promises an ad for Sony's *Cardinal Syn*.

-- More --

Our survey shows that most parents are unaware of these ultra-violent games, which are almost all rated "Mature" for players 17 and older, let alone their outrageous ads. But kids seem to know them well. The ads I cited above, along with the several others included in our press packet, were found in glossy game-player magazines, which are read regularly by young gamers. Many of those same kids are also visiting a growing network of on-line game sites, where, outside the light of public scrutiny, the marketing teasers are often even more offensive, and little is done to prevent children from getting access to the most extreme games.

What's more, there is evidence that some game-makers are targeting their marketing of adult-rated games directly at kids, suggesting that Joe Camel has gone digital. A cursory review of the marketplace showed that action figures based on characters from Capcom's *Resident Evil 2* and GT Interactive's *Duke Nukem* are being sold at Toys-R-Us and other toy stores this month. And an April press release from DDB Needham Hall and McCann Erickson, two leading ad agencies, openly stated that they had begun to and would continue to "target" their marketing of Midway's *Mortal Kombat Mythologies* at "teen" audiences. All three games are "M"-rated.

These marketing tactics raise a serious question about whether game-makers are intentionally selling murder and mayhem to children, and thereby undermining their own rating system. We don't know enough today to answer that question, but we do know enough to be troubled by where some in the industry are going. That is why we have sent a letter to the Interactive Digital Software Association, which represents the leading publishers, asking them to thoroughly investigate the industry's current marketing practices, and to evaluate the compliance with IDSA's own ad code, which expressly prohibits ads targeting adult-rated games at children.

We are hoping IDSA will be responsive. To date, industry leaders have gone out of their way to dispute the idea that game violence can be harmful, and to make clear that they feel it is the parents' responsibility, not theirs, to draw lines. On the latter count the industry has a point, and this year's report indicates that many parents are not doing a very good job on the monitoring front. That says to me that we must do more to educate parents about game violence and encourage them to make better use of the rating system. We will, and we appreciate the willingness that IDSA has shown to help promote the ratings.

But that does not excuse the game-makers from their larger responsibilities. The fact is we have compiled a strong record, starting with our hearings, to show that repeated exposure to these games can be harmful and should be cause for concern. We know this from social science research, which Dr. Walsh has summarized in a handout we have provided; from the testimony of a wide array of experts on child psychiatry and juvenile crime; and from the statements of parents like Don Ramsey of Alaska, who is convinced that his son, an avid gamer, was emulating the popular computer game *Doom* when he ran through the corridors of his high school with a shotgun last year and murdered his principal and a fellow student.

The case of Don Ramsey's son, reported by the Boston Globe, is one of several recent school shootings that bears some connection to video violence. I am not saying that violent games are to blame for these terrible tragedies. But as I have said before, these games and their awful ads are part of a toxic culture of violence that is enveloping our children, that is helping to desensitize them and blur the lines between right and wrong, and encouraging some of the most vulnerable of them to commit violence. How many more brutal killings must be committed by kids barely old enough to shave before we confront this connection?

Or as ethicist Sissela Bok asked in her book *Mayhem*, "Is it alarmist or merely sensible to ask about what happens to the souls of children nurtured, as in no past society, on images of rape, torture, bombings, and massacre that are channeled into their homes from infancy?"

1998 VIDEO AND COMPUTER GAME REPORT CARD

*David Walsh, Ph.D.
President, National Institute on Media and the Family
December 1, 1998*

Introduction

The *1998 Video and Computer Game Report Card* is produced by the National Institute on Media and the Family, an independent, non-partisan, non-sectarian, non-profit organization. The Institute's mission is to maximize the benefits and minimize the harm mass media has on children, through research and education. The report gives a "snap-shot" view of the electronic-game scene as well as parent-generated evaluations of some of the most popular games. Since there are excellent games on the market, this report card guide helps parents make better, more informed choices for their children.

Executive Summary

The majority of games on the market again this year are appropriate for children. In fact, the good games seem to be getting better. The concern, however, is about a substantial core group of games that feature ultra-violence. Some also include sexual themes and crude language. Although called "games," a more appropriate description for this group would be "kill-for-fun murder simulations." Our research shows that most parents are unaware of these games and their content. Unfortunately, this group of games is very popular with children and teenagers. Their popularity is fueled by the fact that there is growing evidence that these "kill-for-fun murder simulations" are marketed and sold to children despite a "Mature" industry rating.

Background

Each year at this time the National Institute on Media and the Family issues its annual video and computer game report card in cooperation with Senators Joe Lieberman and Herb Kohl. These two senators have been leaders in working with the game industry to develop policies and tools to ensure that children's access to "Mature" games is limited.

The video and computer game industry has seen tremendous growth in sales and popularity since its birth 26 years ago with the game Pong. New emerging technologies guarantee that game players will experience these game environments with increasingly greater "real world" interactions. Since these games are so popular with children, concern about children's access to games featuring violence, sex, and other adult themes became an issue for many parents in the early 1990s. In response, Senators Lieberman and Kohl pressed the industry to establish a voluntary rating system, which it did in 1994.

The first video game report card was issued in 1995 to assess compliance with the rating system. The report card generated so much interest that its release has become an annual event timed to coincide with the start of the busy holiday shopping season. The focus of the report card evolves as issues of importance to parents change.

Why an Annual Report Card?

- Video and computer games are among children's most-asked-for gifts during the holiday shopping season.
- Video and computer games are very popular with children. Research done by the National Institute on Media and the Family shows that 69% of parents report their children own or rent games. The highest percentage is among children ages 8-12.
- In the same National Institute on Media and the Family study, 46% of parents reported they think electronic games have a great influence on their children. An additional 34% think the games have a moderate influence.
- Children who play games now do so an average of 7 hours per week. That's the equivalent of more than a full day of school per week.
- A 1996 study of 4th through 8th graders found that almost 50% of their favorite games featured violence.
- Emerging game technologies guarantee that players will experience these game environments with increasingly greater "real world" interactions.

Since games are so widely used by children and since parents are concerned about the effects, this annual report card is meant to provide helpful information to parents so they can make informed purchasing and rental decisions.

Areas Covered in the 1998 Report Card

- Industry ratings
- Retail stores
- Rental stores
- Ratings education
- Arcades
- *Parent Guide to Electronic Games*

In addition, the 1998 report card expands its evaluation to cover the following:

- Internet game sites
- On-line gaming
- Marketing techniques
- Parental supervision
- Review of research on the effects of violent video games

How the 1998 Report Card Research Was Conducted

The National Institute on Media and the Family:

- conducted a phone survey of 529 parents from all socio-economic groups, representing 46 states;
- visited arcades in Minnesota, Louisiana, California, and New York;
- conducted a telephone survey of 28 retail and rental stores across the country (both chain and independent stores were included);
- viewed (panels of six trained media raters each) representative samples from more than 50 popular electronic games (this forms the basis for the 1998 National Institute on Media and the Family's *Parent Guide to Electronic Games*); and
- visited a sample of Internet demonstration gaming sites and on-line gaming sites.

The National Institute on Media and the Family received good cooperation from stores, arcades, and the industry trade association. Although this is not a scientific study, the results will provide valuable information for all concerned with the welfare of children.

Results

INDUSTRY RATINGS

Virtually all computer and video games carried ratings on the boxes.

Grade for percentage of games rated A

The National Institute on Media and the Family conducted a study in which panels of six trained media raters viewed 90 video games and evaluated them using the KidScore rating system. The KidScore ratings were then compared with the Entertainment Software Rating Board's (ESRB) ratings. In general, there was a fair amount of agreement. In fact, our raters found the ESRB rating system more accurate than either the movie or television rating systems. Our raters were in total agreement with 58% of the ESRB ratings, 48% of the movie ratings, and only 40% of the TV ratings. When there was disagreement with the ESRB ratings, it was most likely to be in the ratings for the younger children. For example, the industry gives the game NFL Blitz an "E" rating (Everyone, appropriate for ages 6+) while our raters thought parents of 8-12 year-olds should exert caution because of the encouragement of unfair play.

Grade for accuracy of ratings B

RETAIL STORES

Virtually all the games carried in surveyed stores bear the rating icon.

Grade for ratings displayed A

Only 21% of retail stores surveyed enforced policies prohibiting the sale of "T" (Teen, appropriate for ages 13+) games to children younger than 13, or "M" (Mature, appropriate for ages 17+) games to those younger than 17.

Grade for ratings enforcement..... D

RENTAL STORES

Many rental stores put the games into their own individual outer cases. Only 60% of those surveyed displayed the rating on the outside of the case.

Grade for ratings displayed..... B

Only 9% of stores surveyed enforced policies prohibiting the rental of "T" games to children younger than 13, or "M" games to those younger than 17.

Grade for ratings enforcement..... D

RATINGS EDUCATION

Only 11% of retail or rental stores surveyed made any special efforts to educate the public about the ESRB rating system. The stores that did, distributed pamphlets or displayed posters.

43% of retail and rental store employees surveyed did not understand the rating system themselves. This is probably explained by the fact that only 29% of these stores educate their employees about the ratings.

Grade for ratings education..... C-

ARCADE INDUSTRY

On September 1, 1998, a coalition of arcade trade associations announced the completion of a rating system which they would begin to implement. This was in keeping with a commitment they had made earlier to Senators Kohl and Lieberman. Although there are arcade-machine locations that fall outside the membership of these associations, this is seen as a major step forward.

Grade for ratings development..... A

30% of the arcade games surveyed displayed the new rating system. We assume that the implementation efforts will bear more positive results in 1999.

Grade for implementation..... Incomplete

INTERNET GAMING SAFETY

We reviewed this for the first time because there is so much growth in Internet gaming. Increasingly producers and distributors offer game samples that can be downloaded and played by youngsters. There has also been a tremendous amount of growth in the on-line gaming market, where participants either download or purchase software, enabling them to play the game with other players on the Internet.

The Entertainment Software Rating Board has developed a standardized rating system for all interactive entertainment software, called the ESRBI (Entertainment Software Rating Board Interactive) ratings. Its information specifically identifies game sites as appropriate for this interactive rating system.

None of the game demonstration sites examined by the staff of the National Institute on Media and the Family carried the ESRBI ratings.

Game demo sites ratingsF

None of the on-line game sites examined carried the ESRBI ratings. One site did display a warning that it was an adult site.

On-line gaming site ratings.....F

The staff of the National Institute on Media and the Family then visited the sites after installing CyberPatrol, a top-rated Internet software filter. Apparently the site managers are not working with the filtering organization, because only one out of 19 sites examined with "M" rated games was blocked.

Filtering software effectiveness D-

PARENTAL SUPERVISION

Clearly, parents have a primary responsibility in supervising their children's game playing. In completing the *1998 Video and Computer Game Report Card* we discovered that most parents do not know the content of their children's games. In addition, most do not use the rating system that is available. The probable reason for this is the fact that most parents are not adept at the game technology and therefore do not pay much attention to it. The fact that these products are called "games" probably leads some to believe there is no need for supervision. Although most of the products on the market can legitimately be called "games," the small group of "ultra-violent" games might be more accurately called "kill-for-fun murder simulations" and are inappropriate for children.

In a survey of 96 sixth graders in Minnesota, only 29% reported that their parents check the ratings of games they buy or rent. In the National Institute on Media and the Family national survey of 529, parents only 40% reported they routinely check the ratings. Whichever statistic is more accurate, it is clear that the majority of parents are not consulting the ratings in deciding whether or not to permit the purchase or rental of a game.

In a field study that we conducted, less than 5% of more than 500 parents had ever heard of the "Mature" game, Duke Nukem. However, more than 80% of junior high school students reported that they were familiar with the game. Such a finding highlights the knowledge gap between parents and their children about electronic games.

Parental supervision C-

Marketing Activities

Even though there is no grade assigned to marketing activities, the report card reveals a very disturbing development. We are finding more frequent examples that some producers/distributors are marketing "Mature" games to younger children and teens. The following is an illustrative, not exhaustive, list of disturbing marketing incidents:

- An advertisement for Resident Evil 2 in Sports Illustrated for Kids.
- The sale of Duke Nukem action figures in toy stores.
- A marketing plan for Mortal Kombat Mythologies, which explicitly states that the teen market will be targeted.
- The promotion of "M" rated games at Internet game sites for teenagers.

In addition, the advertising messages of some games promote the portrayal of murder as fun. This is even true for games rated for children. Here is a sample of quotes from actual ads:

- Ad for Dead in the Water, rated "E": "I will destroy you, maggot."
- Ad for Destrega, rated "T": "Let the slaughter begin."
- Ad for Point Blank, rated "T": "More fun than shooting your neighbor's cat."
- Ad for Carmageddon, rated "M": "As easy as killing babies with axes."
- Ad for Subspace, an on-line game rated "K-A" (Kid to Adult, appropriate for everyone): "Meet people from all over the world, then kill them."
- Ad for a new joy-stick system produced by Gravis: "Great. You get better accuracy and control but what are you going to do with all the extra bodies? Be the first on your block to make your neighbors say, 'What's that smell?'"

These types of marketing strategies and advertisements promote the message to kids that "Murder is fun." Professor Gregory Boller teaches advertising and marketing at the University of Memphis. He has recently focused his research on the marketing of "murder simulation" video and computer games. In a recent interview he said, "Never in the history of advertising have we seen anything like this."

We are calling upon the producers and distributors of these games to be more responsible in their advertising and marketing efforts. We are also calling upon the members of the industry to address this issue with their colleagues. This will be a major focus in the *1999 Report Card*.

Recommendations

The National Institute on Media and the Family recommends that:

- Producers and distributors stop marketing adult games to children;
- Producers and distributors of games rated for children stop using advertising messages that promote "Murder for fun;"
- Parents not assume that "game" means "okay for kids." While most games are fun and appropriate for kids, there is a group that promotes "murder as entertainment." We recommend, therefore, that parents become more knowledgeable and involved in supervising children's purchases, rentals, and play;
- The retail and rental stores develop and enforce policies about the sale or rental of "Mature" games to children;
- The industry and the stores develop and implement an educational program about the rating system for employees and customers; and
- The arcade industry proceed with implementation of its new rating system.

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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 24, 1998

Doug Lowenstein
President
Interactive Digital Software Association
1775 Eye Street NW
Suite 420
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Mr. Lowenstein:

As you know, we will be releasing our annual video game report card on December 1st. Before we make that report public, we thought it would be constructive to share the main findings with your association, and at the same time convey some concerns we have about these findings.

First, we want to express our continued appreciation for IDSA's strong commitment to the ratings system administered by the Electronic Software Ratings Board. As we have said previously, we believe this system is an extremely helpful tool for parents who are concerned about game content and a model of industry responsibility. A survey that we will be releasing next week shows that parents tend to agree. The National Institute on Media and the Family, our partner in compiling the annual report card, asked a panel of parents to review and rate a selection of games, movies, and television programs to compare the different formats. The parents agreed with the ESRB ratings more than any of the other ratings systems, indicating it is the most reliable of the various entertainment media ratings.

At the same time, we remain concerned about the uneven efforts of retail and rental outlets in support of the ratings system. Consistent with our past surveys, our research this year found that a significant number of national retail and rental chains have failed to adopt any kind of policy prohibiting young children from buying or renting heavily-violent games that are rated "Mature" (ages 17 and older). We also found again that these stores too often do not educate their employees about the system or provide information to parents explaining the ratings and how to use them, and that as a result a majority of parents of game-playing children were unaware of this valuable tool. It is our understanding that you are aware of this problem, you share our concerns, and you are taking steps to improve cooperation at the retail level. We encourage you to continue to make this a priority, and if there is anything we can do to help, please do not hesitate to ask.

A new area of focus for us this year is the growing popularity of the Internet as a place for children to sample and play computer games. The National Institute reviewed the web sites of several noted game publishers, including some IDSA members, that offer free

game demos for downloading. They found that these sites make little if any effort to provide information about the violent content of their games -- even though the ESRB has created an easy-to-use on-line ratings system -- or to restrict the access of children to samples of heavily-violent games that are rated "M" in retail outlets. The National Institute also visited several of the most popular independently-run game sites, which provide game tips, demos of new releases, and in some cases head-to-head competitions. Again, they found that these sites have made little if any effort to warn parents about potentially inappropriate game content.

We are troubled by these developments, for in our minds they represent a threat to the effectiveness of the ESRB's ratings system. As you know, we urged the video game industry to develop a ratings system to inform parents about potentially inappropriate content and to help them exercise better control over the games their children play. That control is undermined when Internet game sites essentially circumvent the ratings and allow children unfettered access to heavily-violent games meant for adults. In other words, it won't do much good to protect children from game violence in the real world if they can download the very same games in cyberspace without any warnings to parents. To be fair, we recognize that much of this problem is beyond your association's control. But because it affects the good work that IDSA has been doing, we hope you will join us in working with the various on-line industries to address this problem. At a minimum, we would strongly urge you to take some concrete steps to ensure that your members are using the ESRBI system on their web sites.

Our most pressing concerns have to do with the use of violence in the marketing of video and computer games. Along with the National Institute, we reviewed the ads contained in several leading gaming magazines, which we understand are widely read by young players, and frankly we were disturbed by the gruesome images and the perverse, antisocial messages we commonly came across. The bulk of these ads not only go way over the line in hyping the amount of killing, carnage, and brutality in their respective games, but they also directly contradict the values that most parents are trying to instill in their children.

Consider these examples: the publisher of *Cardinal Syn*, Sony, took out a three-page, fold-out ad featuring a severed, blood-dripping head impaled on battle-axe and a tag line that reads, "Happiness is a warm cranium"; the publisher of *Wild 9*, Shiny Entertainment, encourages players to "skewer enemies on spikes; impale them further as you trample over their twitching bodies to safety"; the publisher of *Ninja/Shadow of Darkness*, Eidos Interactive, promises to "send chills down their freshly exposed vertebrae"; and the publisher of *Point Blank*, Namco, boasts that its game is "more fun than shooting your neighbor's cat." So you can see for yourself just how graphic and offensive these ads are, we are enclosing copies of several examples.

We were particularly disturbed by several ads for games rated "E" as suitable for all ages that nevertheless pumped up the violence quotient to apparently make the games appear more cool to kids. For example, an ad Nintendo ran for *The Legend of Zelda* reads, "Rules? Nay. Referees? Double Nay. Carnage and mayhem? Yea!!" Another ad for *Dead in the Water*, published by ASC Games, includes this quote from one of its characters: "I will continually upgrade my sinister hearse boat and weapons to extreme necropotent proportions [sic] and your weak pale flesh will rot in pieces." And in ad for the *NFL Xtreme* football

game, Sony and the NFL proudly claim "there's no rules, no penalties, no boundaries. It's a helmet-popping, trash-talking, late-hitting free-for-all. Enjoy."

In addition, we have even seen circumstantial evidence suggesting that some publishers are specifically targeting their marketing of adult-rated games directly at children. The makers of *Duke Nukem*, GT Interactive, are selling action-figures based on their "M"-rated game this holiday season at Toys-R-Us and other toy retailers that cater to children. The marketing firms of DDB Needham Dall and McCann-Erickson Southwest openly acknowledge in a press release that they have begun and will continue to "target teens" in their promotions of the "M"-rated *Mortal Kombat Mythologies*. And the November issue of *Sports Illustrated* for Kids, which is read largely by a pre-teen audience, carries an ad for the "M"-rated *Resident Evil 2* (published by Capcom). These examples clearly violate IDSA's own advertising code, which states that "[c]ompanies should not specifically target advertising for entertainment software products rated for Teen, Mature, or Adults Only, to consumers for whom the product is not rated as appropriate."

We recognize that most games sold today contain little if any violence, and that the marketing practices we reference above may not be representative of the industry as a whole. But they are growing more and more commonplace in the promotion of games that are popular with children, and raise serious questions about whether game-makers are selling violence to kids. We hope that is not the case, which is why we are bringing our concerns to your attention. We have enjoyed a very cooperative relationship with your association over the years, and it is in that spirit that we would ask IDSA to undertake a thorough evaluation of the industry's marketing practices. In particular, we would ask you to assess the compliance of your members with your own advertising code and whether those standards need to be revised in light of the increasingly graphic ads that some publishers are using in broadly-read publications.

In closing, we want to emphasize that, despite the concerns we have raised above, we are fully aware of the benefits that children can gain from the products your members create, especially the growing evidence indicating that video games can significantly help to improve children's cognitive skills.

With that said, we want to express our appreciation in advance for your consideration of our requests, and look forward to working with you in the future.

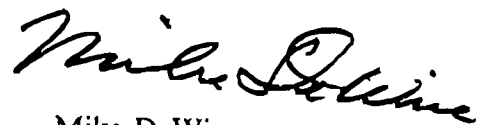
Sincerely,



Joe Lieberman
U.S. Senator



Herb Kohl
U.S. Senator



Mike DeWine
U.S. Senator

The ESRB'S Guide To Interactive Entertainment

How to
make the right
choices for you
and your family



Just as the role of the ESRB is to provide parents and consumers with objective information so that they can make informed decisions regarding software, the ESRB[®] provides similar labeling information for the Internet community. ESRB[®] issues ratings that provide information on the age appropriateness of a site, as well as information on the site's content.

The "I" added to the ESRB[®] label denotes web sites that contain chat rooms, bulletin boards, multi-player games and/or any space that can provide open forums or interactive exchanges which result in an ever-changing environment on the Internet. A person entering a site marked with the "I" should be aware that it is possible there may be others using the site who have differing opinions, use harsh language, or who can influence game play.

WHERE TO FIND ESRB[®] RATINGS?

If an entire web site is rated, the ESRB[®] icon is located on the home page of the web site. If only a section of the web site is rated, the icon will appear on the first page of the rated web page section.

If only an online game or interactive arena is rated, the rating will appear where the interactive area (i.e., chat room, bulletin board) or online game is accessed.

When used with an enabled, Platform for Internet Content Selection (PICS) compatible browser, users can block sites that they feel are not appropriate according to levels they set on their PC. ESRB[®] users may screen rated sites based on their preferences. ESRB[®] provides reliable information that can be used by consumers when deciding whether to access these rated areas.

INTERACTIVE RATING SYMBOLS



EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERACTIVE

Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.

EVERYONE INTERACTIVE

Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.



TEEN INTERACTIVE

Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.

MATURE INTERACTIVE

Content suitable for ages 17 and older.



ADULTS ONLY INTERACTIVE

Content suitable only for adults.





Rating Categories

Look for these ratings on the front of the package and, for more information, look for content descriptors on the back of the package.



Early Childhood

Titles rated "Early Childhood (EC)" have **content** suitable for children ages three and older and do not contain any material that parents would find inappropriate.



Kids to Adults

Titles rated "Kids to Adult (K-A)" have **content** suitable for persons ages six and older. These titles will appeal to people of many ages and tastes. They may contain minimal violence, some comic mischief (for example, slapstick comedy), or some crude language.



Everyone

As of January 1, 1998, the new "Everyone" designation will replace the "Kids to Adults" rating. Titles rated "Everyone (E)" have **content** suitable for persons ages six and older. These titles will appeal to people of many ages and tastes. They may contain minimal violence, some comic mischief (for example, slapstick comedy), or some crude language.



Teen

Titles rated "Teen (T)" have **content** suitable for persons ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violent content, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive themes.



Mature

Titles rated "Mature (M)" have **content** suitable for persons ages 17 and older. These products may induce more intense violence or language than products in the Teen category. In addition, these titles may also include mature sexual themes.



Adults Only

Titles rated "Adults Only (AO)" have **content** suitable only for adults. These products may include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence. Adults Only products are not intended to be sold or rented to persons under the age of 18.



Rating Pending

Product has been submitted to the ESRB and is awaiting final rating.

Video Game Violence-What Does the Research Say?

David A. Walsh, Ph.D.

President, National Institute on Media and the Family

Video games first came on the scene in the 1970's. In the last 26 years the games have gone from bouncing a little white ball from side to side on a screen to games of virtual reality in which one is a character in the game itself. Newly emerging on-line games enable a person to play and compete with many others in cyber-space.

The majority of the games developed with this evolving technology are entertaining, engaging, and appropriate for children. A segment of the electronic game market, however, features violence as a theme. The violence has evolved with the technology from early shooting games blasting mostly spaceships out of the sky to the most gory violence seen today where characters literally tear each other apart with all the realistic details accompanying the act. Many of these games require the use of violence often in increasing intensity to advance through the various levels, thus using violence as a problem solving technique.

As a consequence, parents have had to confront the question of what effect this kind of violence has on video games' most frequent players: children eight to fourteen years old and younger. Research is only beginning to give us a picture of what these effects might be. Due to the recent arrival of ultra violent video games on the scene, there are relatively few studies available when compared with the research on television violence. Research on television violence clearly shows that a heavy exposure causes negative effects on children. (Walsh, Brown, and Goldman, 1996)

Since there is not an extensive body of research on the effects of video game violence, some state that there is no harm to children. That was the same argument used to defend television violence for more than three decades. It was only after many years of research had accumulated that that argument was abandoned.

There are also some who make the theoretical argument that video game violence may actually be beneficial for children because it gives them an outlet for aggression. This "catharsis" hypothesis was also advanced in the earliest days of the television violence debate. When the research eventually showed it to be false, it was no longer used. It is interesting to note that it is being advanced again at a time when the research on electronic game violence is in the early stages.

This short report does identify some of the early findings from the research of electronic games.

- **Preference for violent games.**

A 1996 study, (Buchman & Funk, 1996) surveyed 900 fourth through eighth graders on video game habits. They found that almost 50% of the favorite games chosen were of the fantasy violence or human violence type. Girls more often chose games with fantasy violence. Boys preferred games with human violence

A 1998 study (Dietz, 1998) examined thirty-three popular video games and found that almost 80% of games kids preferred had violence or aggression as part of the play. Almost half of this violence was directed toward other characters. Twenty-one percent of the games depicted violence towards women.

- **Effects of electronic game violence.**

With regard to the impact of video game violence on children, at the present time there are too few studies to support causal links. However, there are trends that mirror much of the work done in the area of television violence and its impact on children.

Especially for young children, there seems to be an imitative effect of playing and observing video game violence. Researchers found, for example, that in a group of five to seven year olds, children imitated during free play what they had been just been exposed to on video games. The children who played active but non-violent games reflected that in their play, while children who played games with violent themes showed more aggression (Schutte, Malouff, Post-Gorden & Rodasta, 1988).

In another study of four to six year olds, the children's aggressive behavior in free play increased after they had played or merely observed a violent video game (Silvern & Williamson, 1987). In a more recent study of sixty second grade boys (ages 7 and 8), the boys who played aggressive video games exhibited significantly more aggression in subsequent free play and in a structured frustration inducing exercise than boys who played non-aggressive video games (Irwin & Gross, 1995). In a study with older children, fifth grade girls were also observed to have increased aggression in free play whether they played or just observed the playing of violent video games (Cooper, Mackie, 1986).

These studies suggest that in the short term the impact of violent video games reaches out to the crowd of interested observers, whether in the home or in the arcade.

In other studies, various methods have been used to measure post video game play aggression besides observation of subsequent free play. In these studies the results are more varied. Questionnaire surveys were used in three studies of middle school and high school students (Dominick, 1984; Kestenbaum & Weinstein, 1984; Fling et al, 1992). Dominick & Fling found heavy video game use correlated with aggressive attitudes; while Kestenbaum found heavy video game use resulted in a calming effect. Unfortunately the games studied in the early 1980's bear little resemblance to the ultra-violent games of the late 1990's. Therefore the ability to extrapolate is questionable.

A 1998 study (Kirsh, 1998) found that after playing a very violent video game children assigned more hostile motives to others than children who had just played a non-violent video game.

Thus, while the early results are not consistent, most of the studies to date indicate that playing violent video games does have negative effects especially for younger children. Further research is obviously needed especially on the long-term effects.

Perhaps the most significant report to date comes from Lt. Col David Grossman, author of *On Killing*. Before retiring from the military, Grossman spent over 25 years learning and studying how to enable soldiers to kill. Because killing does not come naturally, the armed forces have developed specific programs to train soldiers how to kill. The biggest barrier to killing is the psychological resistance, not technical skills involved in firing a weapon accurately. Grossman explains how psychological conditioning techniques were systematically applied to successfully eliminate that resistance.

As an acknowledged expert on "killology," Grossman's insights are particularly valuable. In recent writings and interviews Grossman has been very clear. The techniques used by the army to enable soldiers to kill are the very same techniques used in today's violent electronic games. "Children don't naturally kill; they learn it from violence in the home and, most pervasively, from violence as entertainment in television, movies, and interactive video games." (Grossman, 1998)

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