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Games & Society

CISC 3600

Fall 2010

Contents

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Video Games = Big Business

U.S. video game sales 2009, \$20.2 billion (i, ii, iii).

- True contribution to economy probably double that (downloads, toys, movies, costumes, conventions).
- Directly employees over 250,000 people.
- Even those figures under-estimates the impact the game industry has on U.S. industry.

Video games driving force behind:

- CPU power.
- Graphics processing power.
- Rendering and 3D projection algorithms.
- Interest in computer science/mathematics.

i. Only includes traditional “shrink-wrapped” unit sales

ii. By contrast, U.S. guns and ammunition sales 2009, \$2.1 billion. GLOBAL less than \$40 billion.

iii. Global game sales estimated \$105bn. Global illegal drug trade \$350bn

The Business of Games

Developing a major title for the PS3 or Xbox 360

- Costs \$20 to \$40 million on average
- GTA IV \$100 million development budget.
- Marketing & distribution costs are added on top of that.

Large Game Developers/Publisher Employ

- Graphic Artists, Animators, Writers
- Vocal Talent, Motion Capture Specialists
- Programmers, Tool Creators, QA testers,
- Project Managers, Directors
- Media Creators, Marketers, Salespersons

Questions

- What good are demographics?
- Are they always accurate?

Audience and Demographics: ESA Survey Results

(Entertainment Software Association)

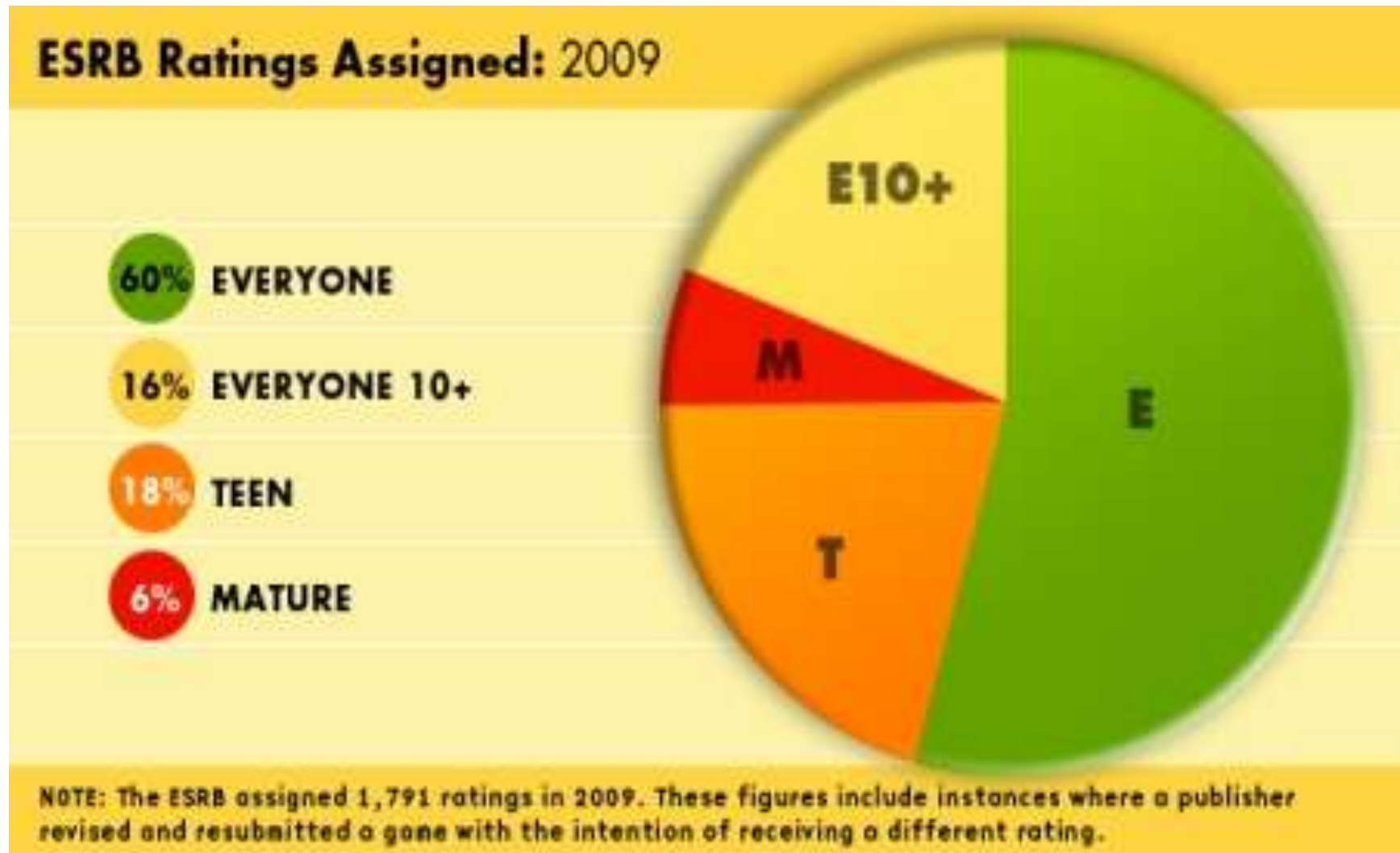
- Provides broad brush-strokes
- Snapshot of a place and period of time
- What information stands out (2008)?
 - 65% of US households play video games (38% own a console)
 - The average game player age is: 35 (26% over 50)
 - 40% of players are female (Women > 18 = 33%, boys < 17 = 18%)
 - The average age of the most frequent game purchaser is: 40
- ESA website: <http://www.theesa.com/>
- ESA 2008 Survey:
http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2008.pdf

Audience and Demographics: ESRB

(Entertainment Software Rating Board)

- EC (Early Childhood)
- E (Everyone)
- E10+ (Everyone 10+)
- T (Teen)
- M (Mature)
- AO (Adults Only)
- 32 different “Content Descriptors”

Audience and Demographics: ESRB 2009 Statistics



Societal Reaction to Games

- Legal Issues: Night Trap, Sega (1992)
- Legal Issues: Mortal Combat (1992)
- 1994 Congress Acts (ESRB)
- School Violence & Video Games.
- Dave Grossman (Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill 1999) – Congressional Testimony 2005
- Manhunt (2003-2004), Manhunt 2 (2007)

Questions

1. Is there a misleading perception of all games as being “child’s play”?
2. Does violence in video games desensitize individuals to violence?
3. Does violence in video games increase the likelihood that individuals will commit violence?
4. Are video games addictive?

Societal Reaction to Games

- Legal Issues: *Night Trap* (1992)
 - Undue attention given poor quality of the game
 - Content comparable to a B-grade slasher movie
 - Misleading press reports about the player's role (cited as "shameful", "ultra-violent", "sick", and "disgusting", encouraging an "effort to trap and kill women".)



Societal Reaction to Games

- Legal Issues: *Mortal Kombat* (1992)
 - Featured quasi-realistic violence
 - Virtual gouts of blood
 - Home release drew attention where the arcade release was largely ignored



Societal Reaction to Games

- 1993 Senate hearings (*Lieberman*)
 - Industry was called to the carpet
 - Night Trap, Mortal Kombat, Lethal Enforcers and Doom all cited at subsequent hearings
 - Threatened with government regulation
 - Created a 12-point plan for self-regulation
 - Birth of the ESRB

Societal Reaction to Games

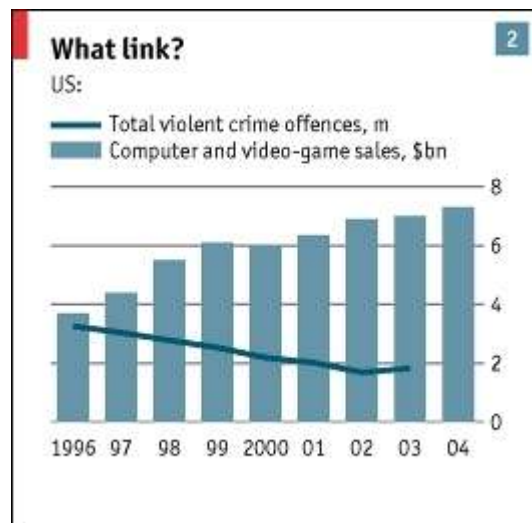
- Legal Issues: *Doom* (1994)
 - Notorious for its high levels of violence, gore, and satanic imagery.
- 1999 Columbine Massacre (Harris, Kliebold)
 - Shooters played customized version of *Doom*.
 - *“Harris said that the killing would be “like f***** Doom” and his shotgun was “straight out of the game”*
 - Lawsuits were initiated against the industry, but eventually dropped
 - Grossman: game is a “murder simulator”

Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman

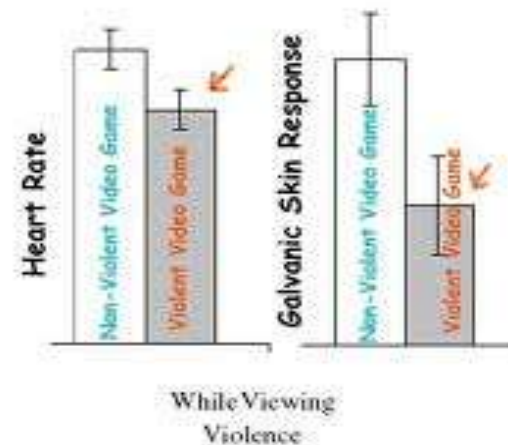
- Former army ranger, psychology teacher (West Point), currently author and speaker.
- World renowned expert on physiological processes involved with killing another human being and the physical effects that violent stresses produce on humans.
 - On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society (1995)
 - Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill : A Call to Action Against TV, Movie and Video Game Violence (1999)
 - On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and in Peace (2004)
- http://www.killology.com/sheep_dog.htm

Societal Reaction to Games

- Games and Youth Violence
 - Current studies on games and youth violence are flawed and not definitive.
 - Correlation not Causation.
 - How does one define “violence” in the context of video games?



Violent Video Games Cause Desensitization to Real Life Violence



Questions

- Games, "Root of All Evil", or "Good, Old-Fashioned Fun"?
 - Games are seen as meaningless fun.
 - Games are also seen as a troubling source of youth violence
- Are these views contradictory?
- Self regulation sufficient?
 - Was self regulation sufficient for the banking/oil industries?

Cultural Issues

- Worst...Stereotype...Ever
 - *Shadow Warrior* (1997) lampooned Asian cultures and stereotypes.
 - Japanese-American community wasn't amused.
 - Risk of offending market.
 - *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (2002)
 - Haitian-American Rights Groups protest game content, launch Federal case
 - Rockstar Games changes game content

Cultural Issues: Foreign Diplomacy

- Germany
 - *The Index* – List of banned games
 - Partial list of controversial elements
 - *Nazi Iconography*
 - *Red Blood*
 - *Extreme violence*
- *China*
 - *Controversial elements*
 - *Changing Historical Facts*
 - *Recognizing the sovereignty of disputed territories*

Cultural Issues: Foreign Diplomacy

- Japan
 - Controversial elements
 - Sex
 - Violence
 - Surprisingly, not controversial
 - EA's *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, a game that depicted the Pacific campaign in WWII

Cultural Issues: Cultural Acceptance

- The rules are . . . there are no rules
 - Violence and sex may lead to a game being banned
 - . . . Or they may not
 - Past bans may be the only accurate predictor of what game types are truly objectionable to a specific culture

Society Within Games: Online Behavior

- The Good
 - Online Weddings, Funerals, Tributes
- The Bad
 - Addictive properties
 - Online rivalries becoming offline rivalries
 - Can games contribute to erratic offline behaviors?
- The Ugly
 - Disinhibition and deindividulization occur because of perceived anonymity.
 - Hate crimes.
 - Trolling, Lulz.

Society Within Games

- Tools
 - Moderators
 - Communication tools
 - Fan sites to discuss game play and community outside of the game

FOR THIS CLASS

- NOTE: Within the confines of this class, all games must at an E (for everyone) ESRB Rating.

