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MARKETPLACE

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HEADLINE: Martin Kaplan, Annenberg School of Communications, on marketing practices in the recording industry

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BODY:

DAVID BRANCACCIO, anchor:

This is MARKETPLACE. I'm David Brancaccio.

The entertainment media are improving their record when it comes to aiming ads for violent or sexually explicit movies, video games or CDs away from children. But there's still work to do, especially at the retail level. The Federal Trade Commission today released the third in a series of reports, an inquiry launched in the wake of the massacre at Colorado's Columbine High School. The report says while the recording industry has made some improvements, it has not changed its approach to selling music and continues to place ads for CDs with explicit content in TV, radio, print and online media with large audiences of minors. The music industry's rating system is not tied to age. Martin Kaplan, associate dean at the Annenberg School of Communication at USC, says the previous FTC report came out during last year's campaign season. Today's world and the entertainment industry's role in it seem very different. Mr. MARTIN KAPLAN (Annenberg School of Communication): Hollywood has wanted to be seen as helping in the war effort. Hollywood wants to get the American message of freedom and human rights around the world, and it wants to be a good partner with the White House. And when the White House is trying to enlist Hollywood, the notion of saying on the one hand, 'You people are corrupting minors,' and on the other hand, 'You people can help sell our message to the world,' doesn't work, even for people who are brilliant at cognitive dissonance.

BRANCACCIO: Now how Washington works is an interesting issue here. The Federal Trade Commission does not have a bunch of staff that simply do their research and write up reports. It is a give-and-take between industry and the FTC that leads to a report like the one we're seeing today.

Mr. KAPLAN: Yes, indeed. And behind the scenes, someone like the recording industry lobbyists, Hilary Rosen, has been meeting aggressively with members of the FTC, trying to make the case that the recording industry is a swell citizen and doing everything it should in order to play its part in keeping America safe for its virtues.

BRANCACCIO: Because previous reports have pointed out that when undercover agents go into record stores, often kids are pointed to inappropriate content.

Mr. KAPLAN: Yes, which is why the recording industry hired its own undercover agents and then paraded those statistics before the FTC, to explain that labels directing consumers toward the versions of these songs which had edited out the bad language were also available. On the other hand, it doesn't seem to have a statistic which says which whiny kids preferred the hard-core language, as opposed to the sanitized ones.

BRANCACCIO: It's clear, though, that radical government regulation of these content industries is not in the cards.

Mr. KAPLAN: No, it isn't. But content is not what's at stake here; marketing is what's at stake here. The question is: Should parents be put in a position in which their young children are demanding to get records by Limp Bizkit and Ludacris which are inappropriate for them? And the reason those kids are demanding those things, it is said, is because they are being aggressively marketed to on BET, on "Total Request Live" on MTV and through various magazines which are targeted, at least in large part, at younger people.

BRANCACCIO: Marty Kaplan is also director of the Norman Lear Center at USC.

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