

Influence of Video Games on Violence

English 10H

Mr. Asklar

4/24/2003

Yan Wang

In a world of technology, processing speeds and graphics rendering are becoming faster and faster each day and can provide gaming audiences with nearly photo-realistic images and scenes. Today's gaming industry is one of the main forces which drives the competition for faster processors and better graphics rendering. Games, whether on your computer or console system or portable gaming device, can offer vivid and lustrous worlds to explore, a way to control an empire, or allow the player to work their way through the levels and hierarchies of a mafia. Many people in the United States have attributed video game violence to real life violence. However, this is not the case. Although video games may contain violence and other mature themes, they are ultimately not the instigator of actual violence or misdemeanors in real life.

Current video games offer too many subjects and types of game-play to list them all, yet the most common are the Real-Time Strategy (RTS), Role-Playing Games (RPG), and First-Person Shooter (FPS) genres. In any of these categories, games can vary from something an elementary school student could play to something which should only be for matured audiences. One very controversial game today is Grand Theft Auto III (abbreviated, GTA III). From its title, one may already assume that it involves illegal activities. Indeed it does. GTA III is perhaps one of the most defining games of the last few years as shown through its popularity on both the Playstation 2 console system and PC. It allows the player to control a character that has been betrayed by his partner and is working with numerous gangs and mafias to become a respected man in the underground world of Liberty City. The game offers a realistic three-dimensional world with extremely graphic detail at times. The endless possibilities GTA III offers seem to be a problem to some people. The option to be able to shoot anyone walking down the street,

including federal officers and pedestrians, have contributed to the formation of opposition against selling these types of games to minors due to the violence and the effect it may have upon actual violence (Grand Theft Auto III).

Many places have started taking action against video games claiming that they are too violent for minors. In the State of Washington, the legislature there has already passed a bill which makes it illegal for employees of video game retailers to sell mature games, rated M, to minors. The bill would potentially allow for up to a \$500 fine for offenders. It is almost directly in response to games like Grand Theft Auto III (Game Over):

This would put the industry's top selling title, "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City," square in the bill's crosshairs. As of late February, the PlayStation 2 version of the game had sold more than 8.5 million copies worldwide – pocketing somewhere in the neighborhood of \$425 million for publisher Take Two Interactive Software (TTWO: Research, Estimates). A PC version of the game will be released May 14 [2003] (Game Over).

Perhaps a bit more motivated after a bill of such nature was passed, Governor Locke of Oregon has proposed a bill almost exactly like that of Washington's to his own State (Katu 2 – Portland, Oregon). And perhaps even more drastic, Californian Democratic Representative Joe Baca has proposed the "Protect Children from Video Game Sex and Violence Act of 2003." It would make selling "M – rated games to minors a federal crime" with penalties of \$1000 the first time and up to \$5000 for each time afterwards. It is under the consideration of Homeland Security right now even though a proposed bill which argued the same arguments was not passed in 2002. However, Joe Baca is also the

same person who said that in one game, the gamer may “create female characters, with full control over breast size and the option to have the character appear topless” (Electronic Gaming Monthly 52). Though perhaps the disappointment of some gamers, this is not true at all of the game it is referring to, ‘Dead or Alive 3: Extreme Beach Volleyball’. There are many arguments against video games but none with solid, concrete evidence. The best point people seem to be able to conclude is that “these games are interactive, and they use points to reinforce behavior.” (No video game can make someone violent).

These legislative acts have all been condemned by gamers and the gaming industry. Books and movies may all contain subject matter just as grave and serious as those of games, yet there is no federal law against them. In fact it would be unconstitutional to do so. It would be censorship of a country which broadcasts free media and thought. Doug Lowenstein, the president of the gaming industry trade group, reputed the Washington ban on selling games to minors saying,

"We feel that government-mandated regulations to limit access to entertainment products are both misguided and unconstitutional. No laws restrict the sale of movies, music or books, even though some of these products may not be suitable for children. There is no basis for treating video games any differently than other forms of popular entertainment" (Game Over).

The fact that legislation against the distribution of games being illegal is even more outrageous when there is no actual federal standard for rating games. The ESRB (Entertainment Rating Software Board) currently provides free ratings of any games that are released. All a gaming company has to do is send it in. However, there is no federal

law that a gaming company must have their games rated; it is in fact something that almost all of them do as a way to help consumers better understand the content of what they or their children are purchasing.

Parents play a major role in reducing unnecessary exposure of mature games to minors. Factually, only 13.2% of games sold in 2002 were rated M. It is also interesting that the average age of gamers for console and computer systems is twenty-eight. When minors did make video game purchases, they only did so on their own 15% of the time while adults were present at 83% of all video game purchases. “The sum of all those numbers is that we're hardly looking at an epidemic of inappropriate game purchases”. In fact, the numbers are so overwhelming that it clearly shows that adults have at least the potential for having enough supervision over what their children play. Whether they decide to control their children’s activities is a matter of free will (No video game can make someone violent).

Free will tends to be something that may be taken for granted by peoples of this country. Luckily, the United States is actually one of a small group of countries which offers citizens democratic freedoms and civil rights. When considering this, it is the case that what someone may choose to do is his or her own decision. There have been no conclusive studies which show any major or direct correlation between violence in video games and violence in real life. A research in 2000 concluded that “at present, it may be concluded that the research evidence is not supportive of a major public concern that violent video games lead to real-life violence.” The surgeon general said in 2001 that “the impact [of video game violence] was very small compared to other things. Some may not be happy with that, but that's where the science is” (No video game can make someone

violent). Free will is something that can account for anything that happens in the United States. Technically, software companies are not liable at all, under federal law, for any damages their software may cause. Though this normally applies to the situation of crashing a computer system, it can also be applied to the results of video games. The responsibilities of someone's actions cannot be attributed to something which is perfectly legal to produce and sell in this democratic nation.

So is there really any conclusive evidence that video games lead to violence in real life? No. Research has shown this and even the Surgeon General announced this to the nation. Do we really need a law that provides censorship? Is this even legal? Perhaps not, but some people feel it is and the laws are being passed without regard to looking at the science of it, but instead by using personal opinions of what effect games have on people. The opinions of people are respected and allowed by the first amendment, but censorship and liability are all clearly defined in the law too. Games are just like the books or movies that entertain us in our daily lives. They all provide different themes for different levels of audiences. Minors have the ability to use it but parents also have the choice to monitor it. Video games are not at all liable for any actions of violence in the United States because the people who choose to commit these violent acts are through their own free will.

Works Cited

Electronic Gaming Monthly. May 2002: 52.

Game Over. CNN Money. 20 Apr. 2003.

<http://money.cnn.com/2003/04/18/commentary/game_over/column_gaming/index.htm>

Grand Theft Auto III. CD-ROM. Version 1.0. Rockstar Games, 2002.

Katu 2 – Portland, Oregon. ABC. 20 Apr. 2003.

<<http://www.katu.com/news/story.asp?ID=56660>>

No video game can make someone violent. The Seattle Times. 20 Apr. 2003.

<http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/northwestlife/134673189_videogames11.html>