

Video Games and Aggression

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Where innovation starts

Postal 1 & 2

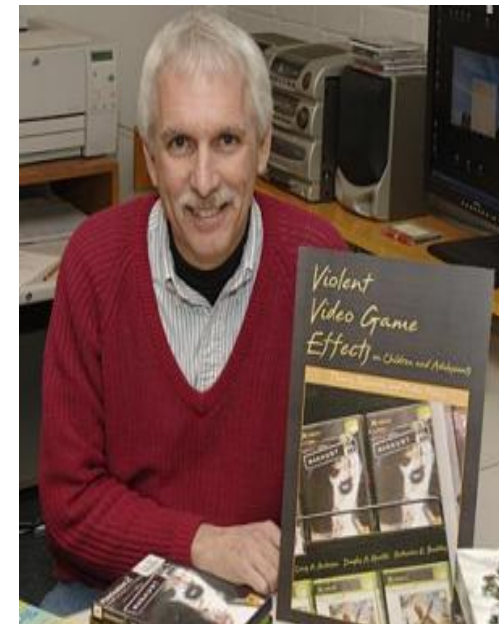


- You set people on fire, then urinate on them to put them out. However, this game was branded with an R rating, and was banned in Australia or censored pretty quickly...

Do VGs cause aggression?

Evaluating the Evidences

- **Arousal.**
 - Craig Anderson have conducted several studies that “strongly suggests” that playing violent games increases aggressive thoughts and behaviour while decreasing empathy.
 - Games can increase the risk of some young men committing acts of aggression.
 - Exposure to violent video games increases the likelihood of aggressive behavior in both short-term and long-term contexts.
 - Such exposure also increases aggressive thinking and aggressive affect, and decreases prosocial behavior.
- He added that if there are no other risk factors in a child's life and they start playing violent games, they won't suddenly become a school shooter. The review takes in studies covering 130,000 gamers ranging from elementary school age to university level in the U.S., Europe and Japan.



Games are a handy scapegoat

- **Flaw:**

- Video games do show violence and it could influence the child a miniscule amount but not any more than television can. If the child is going to grow up as violent because of an outside influence, then they will and the video games will still be blamed
- When research does show that violent video games cause more arousal and aggression, it is because the comparative game is less exciting. A short-term increase in arousal and aggression does not mean a child is going to leave his or her house and commit a violent act.
- May 2009 study, *“The Public Health Risks of Media Violence: A Meta-Analytic Review”*
 - Drs. Christopher J. Ferguson and John Kilburn of Texas A&M University’s Department of Behavioral, Applied Sciences and Criminal Justice said there was **no support** for either a causal or correlational link between violent media and subsequent aggression in viewers.

No Scientific Validation

- There is no scientific research that validates a causal link between computer and video games and violence, a reality that has been acknowledged by the Ninth Circuit Federal Court of Appeals, by other courts and by leading U.S. government authorities such as the Surgeon General, the Federal Trade Commission and the Federal Communications Commission.
- *“ Dr. [Craig] Anderson’s research has readily admitted flaws that undermine its support of the State’s interest in regulating video games sales and rentals to minors, perhaps most importantly its retreat from the study of the psychological effects of video games as related to the age of the person studied. Although not dispositive of this case, we note that other courts have either rejected Dr. Anderson’s research or found it insufficient to establish a causal link between violence in video games and psychological harm.”* the 9th Circuit California Court

Debunking the Myth

- The violent video games being studied may cause arousal simply because one game is more exciting than the other.
- None of the experiments have shown that after playing violent video games, the player hit someone the room or committed other forms of aggression towards the other players.
- Exposure to violent video games has not been shown to be predictive of violent behavior or crime. Any link found between video games and violence is best explained by other variables such as exposure to family violence and aggressive personality.



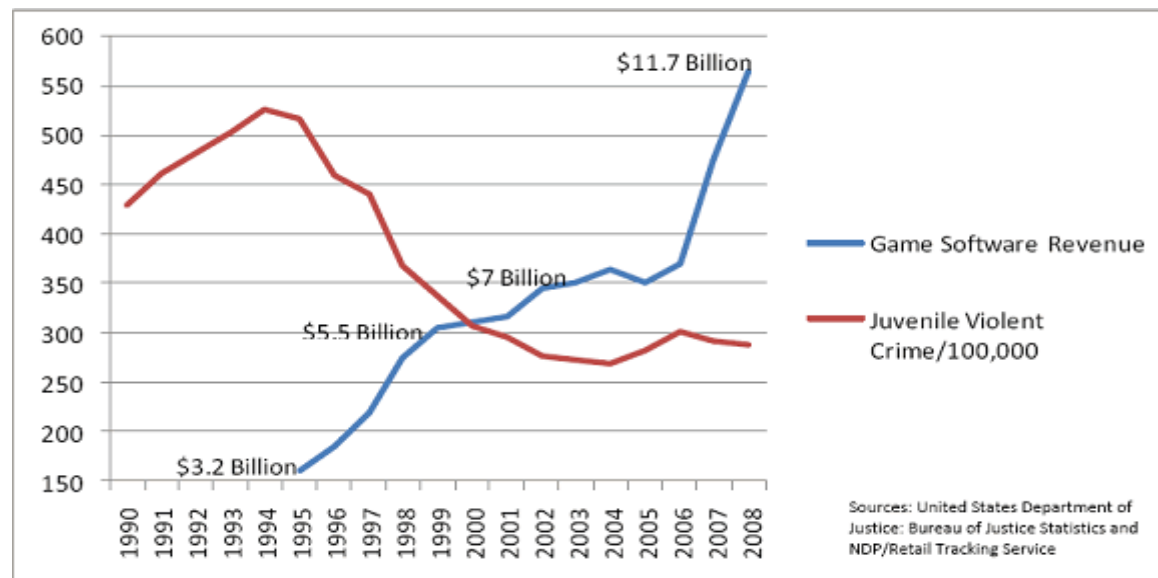
Not a simple case of cause and effect

- Not a simple case of cause and effect: aggressive kids might be most attracted to violent games. Youth might model violent acts on what they have seen in video games, but the violence would still occur in the absence of video games.
- Experiments that purport to recreate gaming in the lab and measure aggression fail on both counts. Playing a game because a researcher tells you to does not mimic patterns of voluntary gaming. And blasting with noise is not the same thing as a real intent to injure someone.
- Aggression is hard to measure
- Researchers don't distinguish between different types of violence. Violent video games may affect the form of violence, but does not cause the violence to occur. - Jeffrey Goldstein (Utrecht)

Not a simple case of cause and effect

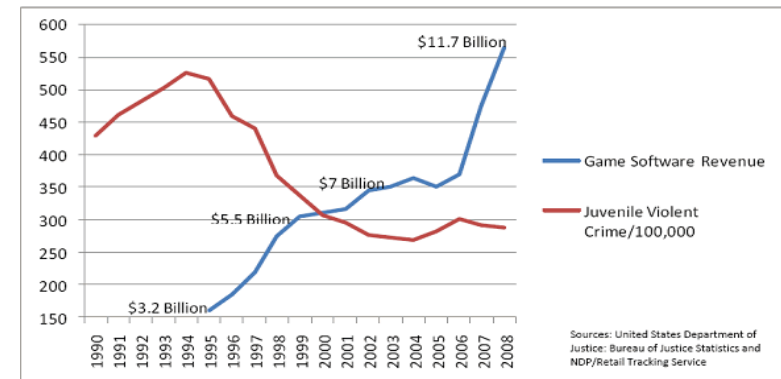
- In light of increased video game consumption and declining youth violence rates, there is “little reason for speculation that violent video games are a significant factor in promoting youth violence.”

Juvenile Violent Crime Index Compared to US Game Software Sales 1990-2008*



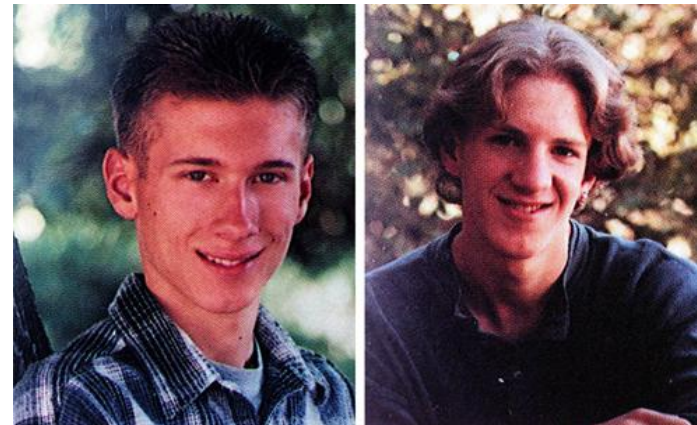
Not a simple case of cause and effect

- Sales of video games have more than quadrupled from 1995-2008, while the arrest rate for juvenile murders fell 71.9% and the arrest rate for all juvenile violent crimes declined 49.3% in this same period.



Columbine Myth

- These are not ordinary kids who played too many video games. These are not ordinary kids who just wanted to be famous. These are simply *not ordinary kids*. These are kids with serious psychological problems.
- The pair's suicidal attack was planned as a grand — if badly implemented — terrorist bombing that quickly devolved into a 49-minute shooting rampage when the bombs Harris built fizzled - FBI Report – ten years later



Desensitization

- **Desensitization**
 - Critics say such games stunt a child's capacity for empathy; at worst, they may lead to real-life tragedies. More recently, Carnegey, Anderson and Bushman (2007) conducted a laboratory experiment on 257 college students. The results demonstrate that playing a violent video game, even for just 20 min, can cause people to become desensitized or less physiologically aroused by real violence.
- **Flaw:**
 - **While violence in video games can lead to desensitization to violence, that does not necessarily mean that they will perform violent acts.**

Identification

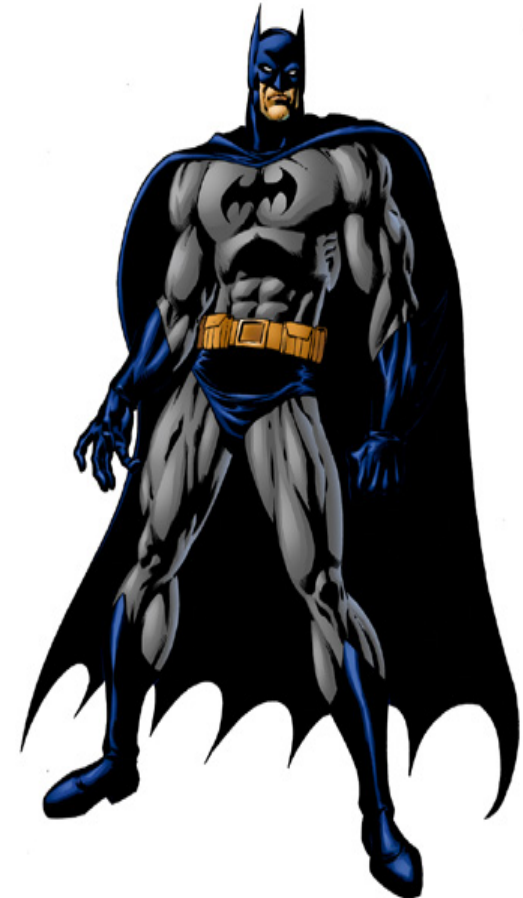
- In “1st person” violent video games the player may be more affected because he or she controls the game and experiences the action through the eyes of his or her character. Games can confuse reality and fantasy. According to this view, the more children practice violent acts, the more likely they are to perform violent acts (Cesarone, 1994).
- **Flaw:**
 - Children could identify with the aggressive character, but there is still little evidence that rigid identification would lead to aggressive response.
 - Video game players understand they are playing a game. Their ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality prevents them from emulating video game violence in real life.

Expert's Warning

- **American Psychological Association (APA)**
 - Issued a resolution recommending that all violence be reduced in video games and interactive media marketed to children and youth. The policy decision, was adopted at the recommendation of a special Committee on Violence in Video Games and Interactive Media of the Media Psychology Division of APA.
- **Flaw:**
 - *Dr. Anderson and Dr. Bushman, leading exponents of the link between videogames and violence , are co-chairs of this special committee.*

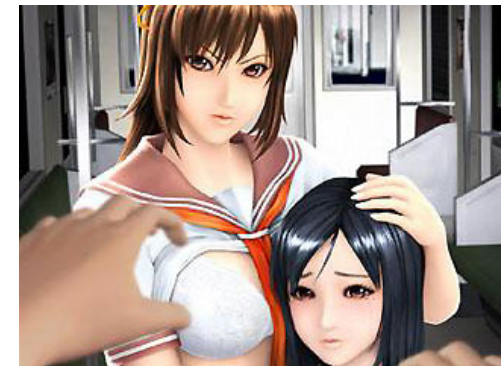
Conflicting Definition

- **Definition of aggression and violence may differ from researcher to researcher, or player to player.**
 - Anderson might look at it as violence.
 - Freedman might just view it as pure entertainment.
 - The meaning can range from intention to harm or just rough.
 - For Anderson and Bushman (2002), violence and aggression are interchangeably used.
 - In contrast, Goldstein (2001) points out that there is no intention to harm anyone in videogames.
 - Adopting Anderson's definition, some cartoons such as Batman could be classified as "violent."
 - In fact, one group of researchers found *Pacman* being swallowed by a ghost as violent.



Cultural Differences

- The majority of researches have been conducted in the USA. The American experience is not the same as other countries.
- Different backgrounds such as preoccupation with teenage crime may be unique to Americans in contrast, for example, to Denmark, which has one of the lowest crime in the world even though youngsters between age 9-16 spend an average of 57 minutes a day playing games (Game Research, 2007).
- Unlike the USA, firearms are banned in Denmark. As such, violence must be viewed within a broader field of social and cultural factors and not media games alone in shaping the behaviour.
- In 2005, the US had 2,279 murders committed by teenagers (27.9 per million residents) compared to 73 in Japan (3.1 per million). Per capita video game sales were \$5.20 in the US compared to \$47 in Japan. This example illustrates that there is no correlation between violent behavior and playing video games



Target Group

- **Target groups.**
 - Most of the researches were conducted on youngsters, and little research is done on adults. Statistics reveal that most of the gamers are older.
 - A recent report showed that 45% of heavy video game players and nearly a third of avid gamers are in the 6 to 17 year old age group (NPD, 2006).
 - The sample group used by researchers is not normally representative of the population.



Causal Relationship

- Difficulty in separating relevant factors and the lack of any ability to conclude causal relationship.
- None of the researches have made an adequate study of whether the violence is linked to innate aggression, history of antisocial and criminal behaviour, or whether people who are naturally more aggressive are more likely to play violent video games.
- Aggression is shaped by multiple factors; media could be one, but is not the sole cause.
- There are other factors to consider such as the type of environment the children are exposed to, family values, interaction of the family, social alienation, neurophysiological abnormalities, poor child rearing, socioeconomic deprivation, poor peer relations, attitudes and beliefs supporting aggression, drug and alcohol abuse, frustration, provocation, and other factors etc.
- One reason could be simply that an aggressive child likes to work off his or her aggression playing a violent video.

Grand Theft Childhood: The Surprising Truth About Violent Video Games and What Parents Can Do

- **No data to support the simple-minded concerns that video games cause violence.**
- **Their findings are a result of a two-year study of over 1,200 middle-school students. Unlike most studies set in sterile lab environments using psychological triggers, much of their data was collected by**

Grand Theft Childhood: The Surprising Truth About Violent Video Games and What Parents Can Do

- **Actually talking to their young subjects.**
- The researchers did note a link between mature-rated titles and aggressive behavior, as a significant number of both boys and girls who played M-rated titles reported getting into more fights over the past year than kids who didn't play M-rated games.
- However, Kutner and Olson point out that this simply demonstrates a correlation between violent games and aggression, not that one causes the other, suggesting the possibility that the kids attracted to mature-rated games were naturally aggressive to begin with.
- The small correlations that have been found between video games and violence may be explained by violent youth being drawn to violent video games. Violent games do not cause youth to be violent. Instead, youth that are predisposed to be violent seek out violent entertainment such as video games.

Laboratory Experiments

- Experiments conducted are mostly laboratory based, or self reporting studies, which used college students in the experiments.
- Experimental settings are artificial and mostly involve a single game exposure in contrast to real life where people play games more than once and often with others.
- The laboratory approach fail to determine the wider and social-cultural factors which may influence the people.
- The participants are vulnerable to the influence by the expectations of the researchers who could give them indirect suggestions.
- Moreover, in experiments, the participants have already an inkling of what the experiment is about and what results are expected so that they answer what is expected of them.

Catharsis Theory

- The catharsis theory claims that playing violent video games could even bring benefits- the emotional drive evoked by violent video game play reduces the chance of a child actually exhibiting violent behaviour; the child's fantasy play and imagined actions causes the child to have reduced urges to act out aggression in actual behaviour (Ivory, 2001).
- Playing violent video games reduces violence in adolescent boys by serving as a substitute for **rough and tumble play**; allows adolescent boys to express aggression and establish status in the peer group without causing physical harm.

Stress Relief

- Recent study by Texas A&M International University (Dr. Fergusson) found that contrary to popular belief, violent video games can actually aid in alleviating stress- *European Psychologist, Volume 15*
- In this study, 103 young adults were given a frustration task and then randomized to play no game, a non-violent game, a violent game with good versus evil theme, or a violent game in which they played 'the bad guy'.
- The results suggest that violent games reduce depression and hostile feelings in players through mood management.”
- Playing a video game that allows people to express their violent tendencies in a game is a safe way to get your aggression out without hurting yourself or others.

<http://videogames.procon.org/sourcefiles/Olson.pdf>

Debunking the Myth

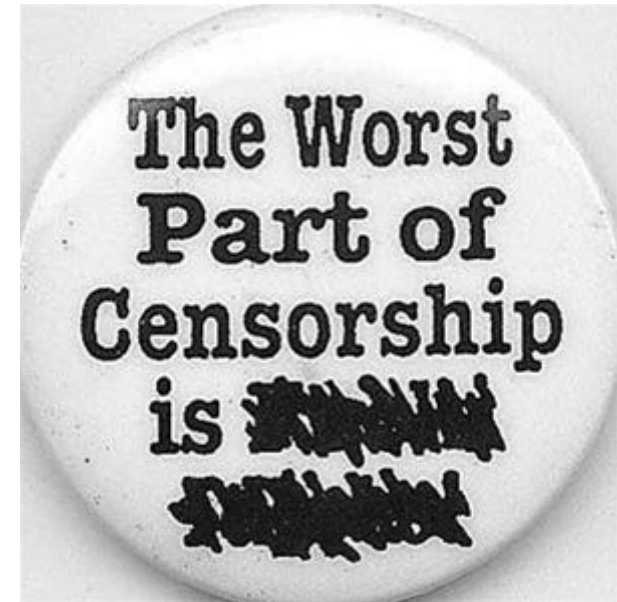
- **The level of control granted to video game players, especially in terms of pace and directing the actions of their character, allows youth to regulate their emotional state during play . Research shows that a perception of being in control reduces emotional and stressful responses to events.**
- **Alarmist claims similar to current arguments against violent video games have been made in the past when new media such as radio, movies, and television have been introduced.**
- **Claims that these various mediums would result in surges in youth violence also failed to materialize.**

Ban violent video games?



Freedom

- Internet Freedom
- Freedom of Expression
- There are already laws that deal with violence
- Will not solve the root cause of the problem



"Video games, even the violent ones, enable players' free expression, just like musical instruments enable musicians' free expression"

Regulating video games

- ***Schwarzenegger v. Entertainment Merchants Association***
- **Issue: Does a state law restricting the sale of violent video games to minors violate the First Amendment right to free speech?**
- **At issue was a California law banning the sale of such games to minors.**



Legal Developments

- **2005 California law banned the sale of violent video games to anyone under age 18 and required clear labeling beyond the existing Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rating system**
- **A federal district court in August 2007 and Appellate level in February 2009 ruled unconstitutional.**
- **Federal courts have thrown out the law, finding no evidence establishing that games "are any more harmful than violent television, movies, internet sites or other speech-related exposures." That's part of the requirement for the constitutional validity of such a content restriction, which necessarily infringes on First Amendment protections of free speech. Laws restricting the sale of pornography are an example.**
- **November 2 hearing at the Supreme Court.**
- **The ruling in the case is expected in June 2011**
- **State congressmen in at least two States, Delaware and Illinios, have expressed plans to reintroduce legislation similar to the California law should the Supreme Court decide in favor of the State of California.**

November 2 Arguments

- Justices voiced concern on the distinction between video games and other commercial works such as films and comic books.
- Justice Antonin Scalia considered if the law with its vague definition of "violence" could also be applied to Grimm's Fairy Tales
- Justices suggested that California and others states do have precedence to protect minors from certain forms of violence, though under narrower terms than the California law
- Justice John G. Roberts Jr. argued that while companies can provide parental filters on such violent games, "any 13-year-old can bypass [them] in about five minutes".[[]
- The Justices, in general, agreed that upholding California's law would require a "novel extension of First Amendment principles to expressions concerning violence"



Practical problems with legislation

- The wording of the bill defines a violent video game as one "*in which the range of options available to a player includes killing, maiming, dismembering, or sexually assaulting an image of a human being*" in a manner that's "*patently offensive*", appeals to a person's "deviant or morbid interests," and lacks "*serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.*"
- **Question:** "What's a 'deviant' violent video game as opposed to what -- a 'normal' violent video game?"
- Who's going to make the call as to which video games are 'patently offensive' and which aren't?"



Solution: Rating System



EARLY CHILDHOOD

Titles rated **EC (Early Childhood)** have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.



EVERYONE

Titles rated **E (Everyone)** have content that may be suitable for ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.



EVERYONE 10+

Titles rated **E10+ (Everyone 10 and older)** have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes.



TEEN

Titles rated **T (Teen)** have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language.



MATURE

Titles rated **M (Mature)** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.



ADULTS ONLY

Titles rated **AO (Adults Only)** have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity.



RATING PENDING

Titles listed as **RP (Rating Pending)** have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating. (This symbol appears only in advertising prior to a game's release.)

Conclusion

- Consider a wider range of factors than just their interest in violent games, including bad grades, too much fighting and, of course, obsessive gaming.
- Thus, if the content, context, and play length have some bearing on the effects, policy-makers should seek a greater understanding of the games they are debating.
- It may be that both the attackers and defenders of the industry's various products are operating without enough information, and are instead both arguing for blanket approaches to what is likely a more complicated phenomenon.

Violence

- Football is violent. So is boxing. Are we passing any bills to stop that?
- The vast majority of kids who play video games are doing great, but a select few are “allergic.” If you are allergic, then just don’t play or let your kids play.
- While it is quite possible that fixation on violent video games may herald problems for a disturbed child, the average child probably just plays his games and grows up fine)

