

Ethics: Violence and Addiction in Video Games

Geoffrey Matthews
Western Washington University

February 18, 2016

Bill of Rights

- Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

- Amendment XIV

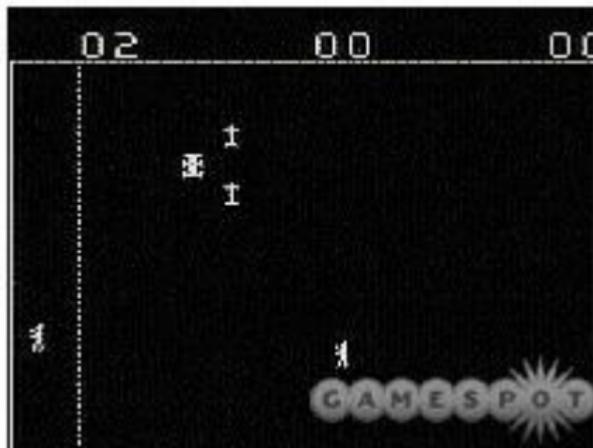
... No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States ...

Current Free Speech Standard

- Sexually obscene expression can be censored, but only if, taken as a whole, it:
 - Appeals to the prurient interest in sex
 - Portrays sexual conduct in a patently offensive way
 - Does not have serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value
- Violent but not sexually explicit expression is subject to “strict scrutiny” by the courts
 - A higher degree of constitutional protection

Death Race, 1976

- Exidy planned to sell 1,000
- After controversy, sold 10,000



Night Trap, 1992

- Dorm room video cameras
- B-movie violence
- Kill the vampires



Mortal Combat, 1992

- Good game play
- Graphic violence
- Home computer version



1993 Senate Hearings

- Senators Lieberman and Kohl
- Video game industry presented 12 point program for self regulation
- ESRB born



ESRB Content Descriptors

Alcohol Reference	Animated Blood	Blood
Blood and Gore	Cartoon Violence	Comic Mischief
Crude Humor	Drug Reference	Edutainment
Fantasy Violence	Informational	Intense Violence
Language	Lyrics	Mature Humor
Mild Violence	Nudity	Partial Nudity
Real Gambling	Sexual Themes	Sexual Violence
Simulated Gambling	Adult Assistance	Strong Language
Strong Lyrics	Strong Sexual Content	Suggestive Themes
Tobacco Reference	Use of Drugs	Use of Alcohol
Use of Tobacco	Violence	

Columbine, 1999

- Harris and Klebold played *Doom* and *Wolfenstein 3D*
- 13 dead



2001

- 21-year-old committed suicide after addiction to *Everquest*



2003

- 18-year-old shot and killed three police officers
 - Defense claimed he was inspired by *Grand Theft Auto III*



2003

- 13- and 16-year olds used rifles to fire at vehicles on the Interstate
- Killed a 45 year old man
- Claimed they were inspired by *Grand Theft Auto III*



Coquitlam, 2003

- 17 year old trounced 3 men in internet cafe in *Counterstrike*
- Men beat the boy, returned with gun, shot him



2004

- 41-year old stabbed to death 26-year old over a dispute involving a virtual weapon they had won in *Legend of Mir*



2005

- Four month old daughter of couple died after being left unattended for five hours while parents played *World of Warcraft* at internet cafe



2005

- 28-year old died after playing *Starcraft* for 50 hours straight



2007

- Teenager shot his parents, killing his mother, after they took away his copy of *Halo 3*.



2008

- Teenager murders a taxi driver in Thailand to see if it was as easy in real life to steal a taxi.



2010

- Teenager killed his mother for taking away his *PlayStation* by hitting her with a hammer while she slept.



Legal Battles

- 2000: State of Missouri passes law regulating video games. ESA files lawsuit
- 2002: Judge Limbaugh reviews *Resident Evil*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Doom*, and *Fear Factor*. “This court reviewed four different video games and found no conveyance of ideas, expression, or anything else that could possibly amount to speech. The court finds that video games have more in common with board games and sports than they do with motion pictures.”
- Law upheld ...

Legal Battles

- 2003: 8th Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis overturns decision.
- “Whether we believe the advent of violent video games adds anything of value to society is irrelevant: guided by the first amendment, we are obliged to recognize that ‘they are as much entitled to the protection of free speech as the best of literature’.”

Legal Battles

- Washington law penalized distribution of video games to minors that depict harm to police.
- 2004: US District Court in Washington enjoined enforcement of law.
- Content based regulations are presumptively invalid.

Family Entertainment Protection Act

- 2005: Clinton, Lieberman, Bayh
- Mandatory enforcement of ESRB ratings
- \$1000/\$5000 fine for selling **M** or **AO** to minor
- FTC supervision of ESRB
- Failed to pass



Germany Bans Games

- Wolfenstein 3D
- Soldier of Fortune
- Mortal Kombat
- Manhunt
- The House of the Dead
- MadWorld

Australia: Highest rating MA 15+

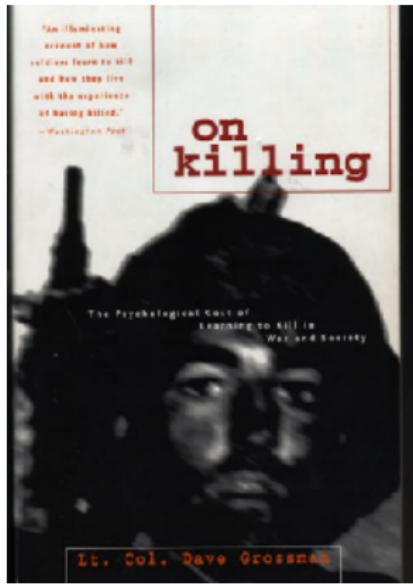
- Grand Theft Auto
- Fallout 3
- Manhunt
- Phtasmagoria
- Reservoir Dogs
- Silent Hill: Homecoming
- Postal 2
- Singles: Flirt Up Your Life
- Soldier of Forutne

PEGI, 2003



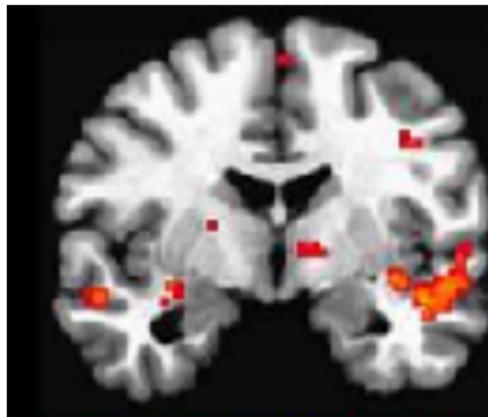
Conditioning to Kill

- Only 15-20% of soldiers killed in WWII
- 85-90% of soldiers killed in Vietnam

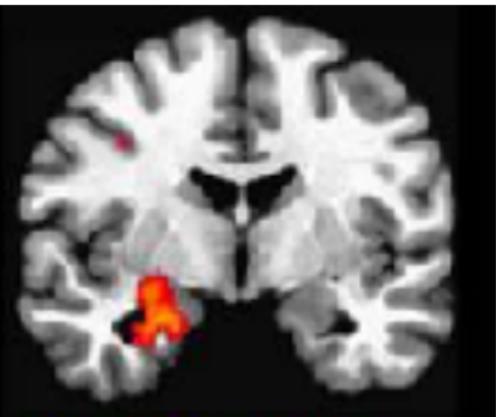


Brain Activation

- Need for Speed: Underground vs. Medal of Honour: Frontline



Non-violent game players



Violent game players

ESA Statistics

- U.S. computer and video game software sales generated \$10.5 billion in 2009.
- Sixty-seven percent of American households play computer or video games.
- The average game player is 34 years old and has been playing games for 12 years.
- The average age of the most frequent game purchaser is 40 years old.

ESA Statistics

- Forty percent of all game players are women. In fact, women over the age of 18 represent a significantly greater portion of the game-playing population (33 percent) than boys age 17 or younger (20 percent).
- In 2010, 26 percent of Americans over the age of 50 play video games, an increase from nine percent in 1999.

ESA Statistics

- Forty-two percent of heads of households play games on a wireless device, such as a cell phone or PDA, up from 20 percent in 2002.
- Eighty-two percent of all games sold in 2009 were rated "E" for Everyone, "T" for Teen, or "E10+" for Everyone 10+. For more information on game ratings, please see www.esrb.org.

ESA Statistics

- Parents who have children under 18 with a gaming console in the home are present when games are purchased or rented 93 percent of the time.
- Sixty-four percent of parents believe games are a positive part of their childrens lives.

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2000

- Real-life violent video game play was positively related to aggressive behavior and delinquency
- Academic achievement was negatively related to overall amount of time spent playing video games
- Exposure to violent video games will increase aggressive behavior in both the short term (e.g., laboratory aggression) and the long term (e.g., delinquency).

Psychological Science, 2001

- Violent video games increase aggressive behavior in children and young adults
- Exposure to violent video games increases physiological arousal and aggression-related thoughts and feelings
- Playing violent video games also decreases prosocial behavior.

Journal of Adolescence, 2004

- Exposure to violent video games is significantly linked to increases in aggressive behaviour, aggressive cognition, aggressive affect, and cardiovascular arousal, and to decreases in helping behaviour
- Experimental studies reveal this linkage to be causal
- Previous meta-analytic studies of violent video games underestimate the true magnitude of observed deleterious effects on behaviour, cognition, and affect.

Journal of Adolescence, 2004

- One hundred fifty fourth and fifth graders completed measures of real-life violence exposure, media violence exposure, empathy, and attitudes towards violence.
- Both video game and movie violence exposure were associated with stronger proviolence attitudes.
- Regression analyses indicated that only exposure to video game violence was associated with (lower) empathy.

Does smoking cause cancer?

- 828 out of 1000 smokers do *not* develop lung cancer.
- Therefore, smoking does not cause cancer.

Does smoking cause cancer?

- 828 out of 1000 smokers do *not* develop lung cancer.
- Therefore, smoking does not cause cancer.

- 172 out of 1000 smokers develop lung cancer.
- 13 out of 1000 nonsmokers develop lung cancer.
- Therefore, smoking does cause cancer.

2005: California bans violent games for minors

2011: Supreme Court overrules

- Scalia cites Hansel and Gretel, Cinderella, and Snow White: “Certainly the books we give children to read—or read to them when they are younger—contain no shortage of gore.”
- Thomas dissents: “freedom of speech … does not include a right to speak to minors … without going through the minors’ parents or guardians.”

