

Effects of Video Games on Society

Whether you've played it, seen the commercials or are an avid fan, nearly everyone has heard about the Grand Theft Auto video game series. With the first installment "Grand Theft Auto" released in 1997, the series and producers at Rockstar Games have not looked back releasing 15 individual games over a 16 year period across 11 different gaming platforms, despite very controversial and critical reviews. Although widely embraced around the gaming community, the series has been a nightmare for mothers everywhere since the day the first game was released.

The Grand Theft Auto series is considered to be a open world role playing game, this give the player much more freedom and opportunity than most video games do. The name Grand Theft Auto, most commonly abbreviated as GTA, comes from the term police used when describing the criminal act of stealing a car. This is usually essential in the game to get around the city. The basic format for each game is as follows. Players start out with a character that is a small time criminal in a bad area of a city. These cities have fake names but are modeled after 1 of 3 different American cities, New York, Miami, or Los Angeles. The main objective of the game is to rise through the ranks of organized crime in the criminal underworld by completing various missions given to you by a mob boss or famous bank robber. The missions are normally violent over the top action packed heists or assassinations. Over the course of the series missions have gained lots of variety, from stealing cars and muggings, to planting bombs and

taking drugs. Most missions involve run ins with the police and the only way to complete the task is to kill the cops and get in intense car chases. The storyline is almost always the same in all the of the games, you tend to make some progress only to be betrayed and abandon, whoever is guilty of the betrayal becomes the antagonist for the rest of the story. The GTA series did not gain real popularity until 2001 with the release of “Grand Theft Auto III” (vgchartz.com). Since this release every single game has earned an Entertainment Software Rating Board rating of mature. In order to receive a mature rating a game is considered to have all the following; content is generally suitable for ages 17 and up, may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language (esrb.org). Naturally Grand Theft Auto is targeted at a more mature audience. Ideally the producers of the game aimed it towards males in their 20’s and early 30’s, but apparently the series has a female following as well (gameranx.com). The latest game, GTA V, was the best selling game in history within 24 hours of its release, in order to hold a record like that the game obviously appealed to a mass amount of people outside this target audience as well. The GTA series has built up a loyal fan base over the years with the releases of each new game. Its a way to live a lavish fictional life that is realistically unattainable in the real world, so it’s understandable why so many people are drawn to it.

Despite being a relatively new market, the video game industry brought in over 20 billion dollars last year (theesa.com). Over 91 percent of video games released last year received a rating of “E” meaning appropriate for everyone

(theesa.com). The 9 percent that were not rated “E” brought in the majority of the profits. 7 of the 10 highest grossing games of all time were rated something higher than “E” (businessinsider.com). Violent Games like “Call of Duty” and “World of Warcraft” have controlled the market for years. Video games are also one of the fastest growing industries in the world; nearly 58 percent of Americans play video games. Its impact on the economy is so major that in 2012 “Call of Duty: Black Ops 2” set a 5 day world record for any movie, book, or video game bringing in an astounding \$650 million dollars, after 5 days of being released (theesa.com). The success of the industry has been seen worldwide, Hiroshi Yamauchi, the former chairman of Nintendo is Japan’s third most wealthy man.

The main competitors of the GTA series are Activision, the creators of the “Call of Duty” franchise. Rockstar and Activision have been in heavy competition ever since the release of the xbox 360 and playstation 3 in late 2005. With each new release of a game from the respective franchise the title for best selling video game and high grossing video game have traditionally been passed back and forth (polygon.com). Much like the Verizon and AT&T competition there is little challenge from any companies outside these two game producers. Currently Rockstar holds the crown for its release of “Grand Theft Auto V”. There has never been a game as successful in history. Within 24 hours of being released sales grossed \$800 million. It also hit the \$1 billion mark sometime within the first three days (polygon.com). The title currently holds 7 impressive Guinness world records including, best selling game within 24 hours, fastest entertainment property to gross \$1 billion, and Highest revenue generated by an entertainment

product in 24 hours. Nothing quite like this has ever been achieved and it will likely be a long time before this record is broken. A new Call of Duty was just released under the name "Ghosts". The competition has gotten so fierce that Activision boasted their game hit the one million mark within 1 day. However These figures were skewed. Activision's numbers were based off how many copies were sold to retailers, while Rockstar's \$800 million came from sales to actual individual consumers. Not only that but "Ghosts" sales figures were recorded on 2 more gaming systems than that of GTA (Forbes.com). "Call of duty: Black ops 2" took 15 days to hit the \$1 billion mark. Its safe to say that GTAV will keep its records and that Rockstar is dominating the competition for the time being.

When such a controversial product has extraordinary success like this it is met with tons of criticism. Many avid gamers will argue that violent games like GTA give inherently violent people a constructive outlet that doesn't result in any real world destruction (gameranx.com). I would disagree with this theory. I would not consider myself a violent person, but after playing the newest "Grand Theft Auto" I felt like crime wouldn't be as hard as it is made out to be and that criminal activity presented real opportunities to get ahead. Of course this isn't true but it's easy for people to interpret the game in the wrong way. The GTA series offers very little to the marketplace besides entertainment. The series actually creates collateral damage when each new game is released. When GTA III was released a man named Josh Buckner killed 2 people and later claimed his actions were inspired by the game. In a more disturbing case, an 18 year old kid named Devin

Moore was brought into a police station for question of stealing a car. Once inside he stole an officer's gun killed him and 2 other policemen and then stole a squad car and got into a wild chase before being captured. Once captured he stated, "Life is a video game, everybody's got to die sometime" (gta.wikia.com). All GTA games were banned in thailand after an 18 year old boy stabbed a taxi driver to death and stole his taxi, he later admitted that he was trying to recreate a scene from one of the GTA games he had been playing. The most recent case that occurred was 2 months ago five days after the release of "Grand Theft Auto V". Zach Burgess was arrested after stealing a car, kidnapping a woman, and ramming into 9 different cars. He confessed that he was also trying to reenact the game (gta.wikia.com).

Its hard to say that the franchise offers anything positive to the marketplace at all. With the promotion of drugs, sex with prostitutes, and non-stop violence Grand Theft Auto has become one of the household names in the video game industry. It is dominating the competition, and selling at record rates, but should we really be buying games like this? All media vehicles convey some sort of message whether its completely intentional or not. Grand Theft Auto has influenced people to commit serious crimes and has an extremely negative impact on any marketplace.

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