

Video Games

Sept 16, 2005

Maker of Grand Theft Auto Video Game Delays Release of Bully

Take-Two interactive/Rockstar games has delayed the release of a controversial new video game called Bully until 2006, though some critics doubt the game will be released at all.

The game focuses on a year in the life of Jimmy Hopkins, a picked-on kid who in turn becomes the bully by flushing a classmate's head down a toilet, getting into fights, and taunting peers.

The game concerns anti-bullying activists and the American Psychological Association, which recently passed a resolution condemning the violence in video games marketed to children.

On CNN's Showbiz Tonight, the APA's Jeffrey McIntyre said, "Children no longer are just passive witnesses to violence that may happen in the media. But now they're actually becoming involved in the scenarios, being rewarded."

If children can learn aggressive behavior from watching it on television, think how much more their behavior can be influenced by playing an interactive video game.

For More Information about the effects of violent video games and legislation in your area visit <http://www.parentstv.org/ptc/videogames/main.asp>

Media Quote of the Week

8-26-05

"Showing violent acts without consequences teach youth that violence is an effective means of resolving conflict. Whereas, seeing pain and suffering as a consequence can inhibit aggressive behavior." **Psychologist Elizabeth Carll, PhD, co-chair of the Committee on Violence in Video Games and Interactive Media**

Statistic of the Week

8-26-05

92% of boys play games. Only 1% of teens said their parents had ever kept them from getting a game because of its rating. (**Media Family "Whoever Tells the Stories Defines the Culture", Dr. David Walsh**)

Violent Video Games Linked to Aggressive Behavior in Adolescents

8-26-05

Last week the American Psychological Association (APA) adopted a resolution recommending that all violence be reduced in video games and interactive media marketed to children. The resolution was adopted after a review of research on how children are affected by violence in interactive media. The studies overwhelmingly show that violence in video games increases aggressive thoughts and behavior and angry feelings among youth, and that those effects are both immediate and long-lasting.

Researchers also believe that video game violence may be far more damaging to children than violence in movies and television because of the interactive nature of video games and because violent behavior most often goes unpunished and without consequences. "Playing video games involves practice, repetition, and being rewarded for numerous acts of violence, which may intensify the learning. This may also result in more realistic experiences which may potentially increase aggressive behavior," says Dr. Elizabeth Carll, co-chair of the Committee on Violence in Video Games and Interactive Media

Read the Study <http://www.apa.org/releases/violentvideoC05.html>

Media Quote of the Week (July 2005)

Rock Star Games' Statement last week on the pornographic content unlocked in Grand Theft Auto, San Andreas: "So far we have learned that the 'Hot Coffee' modification is the work of a determined group of hackers who have gone to significant trouble to alter scenes in the official version of the game?| Since the 'Hot Coffee' scenes cannot be created without intentional and significant technical modifications and reverse-engineering of the game's source code, we are currently investigating ways that we can increase the security protection of the source code and prevent the game from being altered by the 'Hot Coffee' modification."

In the face of new evidence, Take-Two Entertainment is changing its story: "Take-Two spokesman Jim Ankner acknowledged in an Associated Press interview that the questioned scenes were created by Rockstar programmers. "The editing and finalization of any game is a complicated task and it's not uncommon for unused and unfinished content to remain on the disc," he said.

Statistic of the Week

Videogame sales topped a record 7.3 billion in 2004. The top two selling games were Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas and Halo 2 which are both rated M. 20% of the top selling 20 games were rated M.

PTC Calls for Product Recall on Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

(July 2005)

On Tuesday the PTC sent a letter to Rockstar Games and its corporate parent, Take Two Interactive Software, calling on the company to voluntarily recall its graphic video game, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.

The letter was in response to recent revelations that players can unlock a sexually graphic "mini-game," called "Hot Coffee" by using a computer download. Last week, Rockstar Games claimed that "hackers [have] gone to significant trouble to alter scenes in the official version of the game." This week, however, GameSpot.com, a leading gaming website, reports that the sexually explicit content is also available in the PlayStation 2 version of the game. After this discovery was made public, Take Two came out with another statement, acknowledging that the content was in the game all along, but insisting that it was not meant to be seen by players.

PTC Executive Director Tim Winter said, "Simply put, Rockstar Games has distributed Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas with a false rating and subjected millions of children to sexually graphic material. Just as with any other consumer product which is defective in its manufacture or deceptive in its marketing, consumers should be allowed to exchange their product for a complete refund or - in the alternative - for a product that is consistent with what is advertised."

"We also call upon Rockstar Games to remove San Andreas from retail shelves until they accurately disclose the explicit content available in this product and label the product with a proper Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) rating. Take-Two Interactive and its subsidiary, Rockstar Games, must step up to the plate and assume its corporate responsibility to the public."

On Wednesday the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) announced that it has changed the rating of Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas from "Mature" (M) to "Adults Only" (AO). The change in the rating was made only after intense pressure from outraged parents, lawmakers, and family groups like the PTC and the National Institute for Media and the Family. The ratings change is significant, however, because many large retailers will not sell games that carry the AO rating. Rockstar games has agreed to exchange unsold video game inventory containing the hidden content with a new, "M"-rated version.

This is further evidence of the entertainment industry's inability to regulate itself. Earlier this year, the PTC released a study showing the TV-ratings system to be a farce. It seems the ESRB ratings - which has been called the best entertainment ratings system currently in use - is also an utter failure.

The PTC has joined several prominent lawmakers in calling for a full investigation into why the hidden content was left in the game before it was shipped off to retailers, and how the ESRB allowed itself to be duped in reviewing and rating the game

Illinois Governor Signs Law Banning Sale of Violent and Sexually Explicit Video Games to Children (July 2005)

This week Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich, signed the "Safe Games Illinois Act" into law, making Illinois the only state in the country to ban the sale and rental of violent and sexually explicit video games to children. The PTC has been credited with helping to push the bill toward passage.

Under the Safe Games Illinois Act, which becomes effective on January 1, 2006, retailers who sell or rent violent or sexually explicit video games to minors commit a petty offense and face a fine of \$1,000. The bill also requires retailers to label violent and sexually explicit video games, similar to the "Parental Advisory" label found on music CDs, and to post signs explaining the video game rating system. A retailer's failure to properly label games or place proper signs is punishable by a \$500 fine for the first three violations and a \$1,000 fine for every subsequent violation.

In December 2004, Governor Blagojevich launched www.safegamesIllinois.org, a website where parents can learn about the effects of violent and sexually explicit video games on children and report retailers that are selling such games to minors. Gov. Blagojevich also created the Safe Games Illinois Task Force to gather information on the impact of violent and sexually explicit video games, develop strategies for parents, and give recommendations.

Until this measure became law, parents had no legal recourse if a retailer sold an M- or AO-rated video game to their child. A ten year old could easily purchase violent and misogynistic games like Grand Theft Auto, which encourages players to have sex with prostitutes. The PTC applauds the leadership undertaken by Illinois and hope that many other states will soon follow their example.

More information about pending legislation concerning the sale of adult-rated games to children can be found at <http://www.parentstv.org/ptc/videogames/main.asp>

House Vote to Investigate Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas Producer for Ratings Failure (July 2005)

Earlier this week, the U.S. House of representatives passed (by a vote of 355-21) H. Res. 376 which calls on the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate whether Rockstar Games "intentionally deceived the Entertainment Software Ratings Board to avoid an 'Adults Only' rating," and recommend the "toughest of penalties" if it is found to have committed deception or fraud.

Last week, the PTC urged Rockstar Games to voluntarily recall the game due to a new report

finding that the sexually explicit content is also available in the PlayStation 2 version of the game. The Ratings Board ruled that the game must now be sold with an "Adults Only" rating.

"We are grateful that Congress recognizes the danger of marketing an ultra-graphic video game, San Andreas, under a false rating, and that this issue should be investigated by the FTC," said Tim Winter, executive director of the PTC.

"The San Andreas controversy is yet another illustration of the critical need for a transparent and better-understood ratings system and for laws that prevent underage children from buying these violent and explicit games without a parent or guardian."

The Roots Of Ratings

With freedom of expression on everyone's agenda, it seems any attempt to restrict a segment of society from viewing or hearing another's opinion is stamped with the curse of censorship.

Motion picture ratings haven't escaped this curse, and with parents struggling to know what is and isn't appropriate for their children, Hollywood continues to use its seemingly inexhaustible resources in an attempt to make more movies available to younger audiences.

To understand where the battle began, it's probably time for a history lesson...

An Outcry

In speaking of the influence of entertainment on children, I recently read one writer's appeal:

"Is it not astounding that a city allows thousands of its youth to fill their impressionable minds with these absurdities which certainly will become the foundation of their working moral codes and the data from which they will judge the properties of life?"

A comment from a recent Ph.D. paper on the influence of media? The exasperated remarks of a mother trying to raise her children amidst today's influence of movies, music, and video games?

Guess again.

Jane Addams, known for being the first U.S. woman to claim the Nobel Peace prize for her work with impoverished people and children, wrote this tirade in her book, "The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets." Publication date--1917.

In these early days of cinema which were mere "slide" productions consisting of a series of single frames, Addams was lamenting the graphic and violent depictions of young people avenging a wrong, making her one of the first to record her concerns regarding the influence of modern

entertainment upon children.

As motion pictures became more common, exhibiting themselves in even the smallest communities, the cry for regulation of the industry became loud enough for Hollywood to take notice.

ESRB Rating Symbols

(Entertainment Software Rating Board)

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 persons ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal violence, some comic mischief and/or mild language.

TEEN

Titles rated **T - Teen** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older. May contain violent content, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive themes.

MATURE

Titles rated **M - Mature** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain mature sexual themes, more intense violence and/or strong language.

ADULTS ONLY

Titles rated **AO - Adults Only** have content suitable only for adults. Titles in this category may include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence. Adult Only products are not intended for persons under the age of 18.

RATING PENDING

Titles listed as **RP - Rating Pending** have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating.

ESRB Content Descriptors

Alcohol Reference - Reference to and/or images of alcoholic beverages

Animated Blood - Cartoon or pixilated depictions of blood

Blood - Depictions of blood

Blood and Gore - Depictions of blood or the mutilation of body parts

Cartoon Violence - Violent actions involving cartoon-like characters. May include violence where a character is unharmed after the action has been inflicted

Comic Mischief - Scenes depicting slapstick or gross vulgar humor

Crude Humor - Moderately vulgar antics, including bathroom humor

Drug Reference - Reference to and/or images of illegal drugs

Edutainment - Content of product provides user with specific skills development or reinforcement learning within an entertainment setting. Skill development is an integral part of product

Fantasy Violence - Violent actions of a fantasy nature, involving human or non-human characters in situations easily distinguishable from real life

Gambling - Betting like behavior

Informational - Overall content of product contains data, facts, resource information, reference materials or instructional text

Intense Violence - Graphic and realistic-looking depictions of physical conflict. May involve extreme and/or realistic blood, gore, weapons, and depictions of human injury and death

Mature Humor - Vulgar and/or crude jokes and antics including "bathroom" humor

Mature Sexual Themes - Provocative material, possibly including partial nudity

Mild Language - Mild references to profanity, sexuality, violence, alcohol, or drug use

Mild Lyrics - Mild references to profanity, sexuality, violence, alcohol, or drug use in music

Mild Violence - Mild scenes depicting characters in unsafe and/or violent situations

Nudity - Graphic or prolonged depictions of nudity

Partial Nudity - Brief and mild depictions of nudity

Sexual Violence - Depictions of rape or other sexual acts

Some Adult Assistance May Be Needed - Early Childhood Descriptor only

Strong Language - Profanity and explicit references to sexuality, violence, alcohol, or drug use

Strong Lyrics - Profanity and explicit references to sex, violence, alcohol, or drug use in music

Strong Sexual Content - Graphic depiction of sexual behavior, possibly including nudity

Suggestive Themes - Mild provocative references or materials

Tobacco Reference - Reference to and/or images of tobacco products

Use of Drugs - The consumption or use of illegal drugs

Use of Alcohol - The consumption of alcoholic beverages

Use of Tobacco - The consumption of tobacco products

Violence - Scenes involving aggressive conflict

Additionally, online games that include user-generated content (e.g., chat, maps, skins) carry the notice "***Game Experience May Change During Online Play***" to warn consumers that content created by players of the game has not been rated by the ESRB.
(content and graphics taken straight from ESRB on 3/25/04)

M Rated Games to Watch out for:

NOTE: Not all mature games are listed here, just the more popular ones that your children may ask for

God of War (Playstation 2) - Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Nudity, Strong Language, Sexual Themes

Parents should be aware that this game is not for children under any circumstances. The violence is extremely brutal and graphic, featuring many different kinds of fatalities and explicit slaughter. There are also several instances of topless or nearly topless women, although the sexual situations listed on the box's ESRB warning only occurred one time, (and were very low key, without anything graphic). I did not notice any strong language during the game itself, but in the commentaries given by the developers afterwards there were a few expletives used. This game is obviously aimed at an older audience, so do not make the mistake of getting it for younger

children or those who might be sensitive to such content. Read the Full Review at Gamecritics.com

Conker: Live and Reloaded (Xbox) - Release Date June 2005 Blood and Gore, Mature Humor, Intense Violence, Sexual Themes, Strong Language, Use of Drugs and Alcohol

Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening (PS2) - Blood, Suggestive Themes, Violence

Metal Gear Series (PS2, Xbox, Gamecube, PC) Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Language, Sexual Themes

Nocturne (PS2, PC) - Blood, Intense Violence, Language, Sexual Themes

Outlaw Golf (PS2, PC) - Crude Humor, Language, Sexual Themes, Violence

Rumble Roses (PS2) - Sexual Themes, Violence

Halo 2 (Xbox) - Blood and Gore, Violence, Language

Half-life 2 (PC) Blood and Gore, Violence

Kill Zone (PS2) - Blood, Strong Language, Violence

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (Sony PS2, PC) For Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Strong Language, Strong Sexual Content, Use of Drugs.

Mortal Kombat: Deception Blood and Gore, Intense Violence

Doom 3 Blood and Gore, Intense Violence

PSI OPS: The Mindgate Conspiracy Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Strong Language

Playboy: The Mansion (PC, PS2, Xbox) - Nudity, Strong Sexual Content, Use of Alcohol

The Guy Game (PS2, Xbox) - Crude Humor, Nudity, Strong Language, Strong Sexual Content, Use of Alcohol

Singles: Flirt up your Life (PC) - Partial Nudity, Strong Sexual Content

Leisure Suit Larry: Magna cum Laude (PC, PS2, Xbox) - Mature Humor, Nudity, Strong Language, Strong Sexual Content, Use of Alcohol

Blood Rayne 2 (PC, PS2, Xbox) - Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Sexual Themes, Strong

Language

Fight Club (PC, PS2, Xbox) - Blood, Intense Violence, Language

Fable (Xbox) - Blood, Strong Language, Violence

Def Jam Series (Nintendo Gamecube, PS2, Xbox) - Blood, Sexual Themes, Strong Language, Violence

Drive3r - A run-of-the-mill storyline with far more violence than heart, buggy coding and abysmal gameplay make this game a poor choice for kids in almost every respect.

Ninja Gaiden (Xbox) - For Blood and Gore, Violence

Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death (Nintendo Gamecube, PC, PS2, Xbox) - For Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Strong Language

Resident Evil Series - For Blood and Gore, Intense Violence

Manhunt (Sony PS2) - For Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Strong Language. Quote from <http://ps2.gamezone.com/> As a quick note to parents who are reading this, I know that sometimes the overall thought can be “well, I know it has an M rating but its just a game.” Trust me on this one ... kids under 17 should not be allowed to be anywhere around this game, and it contains scenes of some of the most disgusting killings that I have seen either in movies or in a game, not to mention being filled with more four letter words than you’d care to shake a stick at. If you’ve got kids, this is one of those titles that they should never know that you own.”

New Zealand bans blood and guts game

A gory computer game has become the first video game banned in New Zealand. “**Manhunt**,” a computer game that encourages players to kill all in sight in a variety of wicked ways, was classified by New Zealand’s Office of Film and Literature Classification on Friday as depicting horror, cruelty, crime and violence such that its availability would hurt the public good. Chief censor Bill Hastings said that although many computer games have become edgier, “Manhunt” goes further than any he’s seen before. “Manhunt’s” developer, Edinburgh, Scotland-based Rockstar North, is a division of the producers of Grand Theft Auto, Take-Two Interactive Software in New York. Take-Two is amidst a \$246 million lawsuit filed in the United States by the families of two people shot by teenagers allegedly fueled by the game’s message.

True Crime (Xbox, Sony PS2, Gameboy Advance) - For Blood and Gore, Mature Sexual Themes, Partial Nudity, Strong Language, Violence.

Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne (PC CD-ROM, Sony PS2, Xbox) - For Blood, Intense Violence, Mature Sexual Themes, Strong Language.

Road Kill (Xbox, Sony PS2, Nintendo Gamecube) - for Intense Violence, Mature Sexual Themes, Strong Language.

Outlaw Volleyball (Xbox) - For Mature Humor, Mild Violence, Suggestive Themes.

Postal 2 (PC) Rated M for Blood/Gore, Violence. This game is so violent, so racist and homophobic, that four countries are already considering banning it because players can gruesomely kill African-Americans, Priests and gays. You can also slaughter animals and cops. The first Postal has been banned by at least seven countries.

Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball (Xbox) - For Nudity, Voyeurism, and Gambling.

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (Sony PS2, PC)

Grand Theft Auto 3 (Sony PS2, PC)

Soldier of Fortune 2 (PC, Xbox) Rated M for Blood and Gore, Violence.

BMX XXX (Nintendo Gamecube, Xbox, Sony PS2, Nintendo Gameboy) - This may look like an ordinary biking game but it is the first sports game to carry an M rating and feature strippers, public urination, and yes... dog humping. The producers of the game brag that it is chock full of violence, nudity, and swearing. It has been rumored that KB Toys, Toys R Us, Walmart, Circuit City, and Best Buy have refused to sell the game in their stores. However, it will be readily available online and at stores such as EB and Gamestop.

Dead to Rights (Nintendo Gamecube, Sony PS2, Xbox)

Hitman 2: Silent Assassin (Gamecube, PC CD-ROM, Sony PS2 , Xbox) - For Blood, Strong Sexual Content, Violence

The Getaway (Sony PS2) - For Blood, Drug Reference, Strong Language, Strong Sexual Content, Violence.

The Lion & Lamb Project

Why I started the lion & lamb project

By Daphne White

Executive Director

"Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!" I was watching my son play with a friend's hand-held video game --

a game both boys had earnestly assured me was not violent. The outburst occurred because my six-year-old was not as adept as his friend in manipulating the game: He was not killing fast enough. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, virtual killing has become an acceptable form of child's play. Children are encouraged to "kill" bad guys on a regular basis at a variety of settings.

As a mother, I have been concerned about this issue ever since my son was a toddler. It seemed that everywhere we went, David was being enticed to watch or participate in some act of make-believe violence: He was confronted by violent arcade games at pizza parlors; war movies being aired at video rental stores; violent previews preceding the screening of children's matinees; Nintendo and Sega games at friends' houses.

As a concerned parent, I began to wonder:

Do children's "pretend lives" have anything to do with real-world aggression?

Do the programs they watch on television really affect their behavior?

Do children know the difference between fantasy and reality?

I set about finding the answers to these questions, and the results so alarmed me that I decided to abandon my previous work as a journalist and devote my life to this issue.

The first thing I learned is this: While aggression is a part of human nature, violence is a *learned* behavior. Children learn violent behavior and values by imitation, like they learn everything else. But violence can also be unlearned -- especially by young children -- given proper support and role models.

The second thing I learned is that children under the age of eight can not separate fact from fiction: That is why they believe in the Tooth Fairy, and worry about monsters under their beds. This is also the reason that children may not understand why it is acceptable for television characters to continually hit, kick and shoot each other -- but it is not acceptable for children to behave in this way on the playground.

In a 1995 report called *Violence and Youth*, the American Psychological Association has concluded that: "Children's exposure to violence in the mass media, particularly at young ages, can have harmful lifelong consequences. Aggressive habits learned early in life are the foundation for later behavior. Three major national studies -- the Surgeon General's Commission report (1972), the National Institute of Mental Health Ten Year Follow-up (1982), and the report of the American Psychological Association's Committee on Media in Society (1992) -- reviewed hundreds of studies to arrive at the irrefutable conclusion that *viewing violence increases violence.*"

As a mother, I found these to be frightening conclusions. What are we as parents teaching our young children when we allow them to watch violent programming and play with violent toys and games? What kinds of messages are we sending to our youngest, most vulnerable children?

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, a military historian and author of *On Killing*, argues that this type of "entertainment" is actually conditioning children to become killers.

"If we had a clear-cut objective of raising a generation of assassins and killers who are unrestrained by either authority or the nature of the victim, it is difficult to imagine how we could do a better job," he writes. "The inflicting of pain and suffering has become a source of entertainment and vicarious pleasure rather than revulsion. We are learning to kill, and we are learning to like it."

While watching television or movie violence is harmful to children, it is passive learning. But when children play with violent interactive games, they are participating in the murder and destruction -- and they receive points for their violent actions.

What are the lessons that children learn from such "entertainment"? That violence and destruction are fun. That shooting doesn't kill ... or even hurt. That ruthless competition is a winning strategy. That there are no consequences for shooting people or blowing up buildings. Researchers have demonstrated that young children become more aggressive after playing violent video games, or watching violent television programs.

The Lion & Lamb Project is one effort to help parents to understand these issues -- and take action.

Can Violent Media Affect Reasoning and Logical Thinking?

As video media has become more pervasive a serious question has arisen: can violent media have a negative effect on brain development and function in adolescents? Specifically, can violent media affect reasoning and logical thinking? The Center for Successful Parenting is continuing to fund basic scientific research at the Indiana University School of Medicine that studies the above hypothesis.

Most data in this area has been subjective. This Indiana University School of Medicine study is groundbreaking in that it seeks objective scientific data.

The main area of the brain involved in thinking, learning and reasoning is called the pre-frontal cortex. This area of the brain deals with logic and modifies raw emotions.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), which visualizes human anatomy, is very effective in providing evaluation of the brain. fMRI is a more sophisticated diagnostic tool that demonstrates which area of the brain is active and the degree of activity. fMRI captures second-by-second "snapshots" of brain activity. These "snapshots" are then analyzed by a computer that produces a composite picture showing the amount of activity in the pre-frontal cortex. In essence, the result is a picture of the brain's reasoning and emotional functioning.

A study was performed over a two year period. The study included normal adolescents and a group with documented diagnosed Disruptive Behavior Disorder (DBD). (DBD is a significant psychological and social problem that is expressed in 4-12% [8%] of the general adolescent population.)

All subjects, both in the normal and DBD groups, were "matched" in a scientific way so the common point of inquiry was the amount of video media exposure.

The Study was done in two steps:

In Step 1, the adolescents were given psychiatric screening and psychological testing. In this step an accurate measurement was made of the amount of exposure the adolescents had to violent television and video games in the preceding 12 months. Parents were asked to confirm the exposure rate.

In Step 2, brain function was evaluated by using the fMRI. During the fMRI evaluation the subjects were asked to perform simple mathematical, word association tasks, and the subjects played a mildly violent video game under fMRI observation.

Findings and Conclusions:

- * Normal adolescents who had a higher level of violent media exposure had reduced levels of cognitive brain function. The more violence they saw the less the thinking, learning, reasoning and emotional control area of the brain was active.
- * Normal adolescents who had less violent media exposure had more thinking, learning, reasoning and emotional control activity.
- * Aggressive behavior can be associated with a higher degree of violent media exposure.
- * Aggressive adolescents show less cognitive brain activity than normal adolescents do. Aggressive adolescents demonstrate less thinking, learning, reasoning and emotional control.
- * On some tasks normal adolescents with high violent media exposure showed the same pattern of brain activity as adolescents with Disruptive Behavior Disorder (DBD).
- * There is a correlation between the degree of exposure to television/movie violence and violence in video games and normal brain function.

Adolescent's Brain with Low Video Media Exposure is the left image and Adolescent's Brain with High Video Media Exposure is the image on the right.

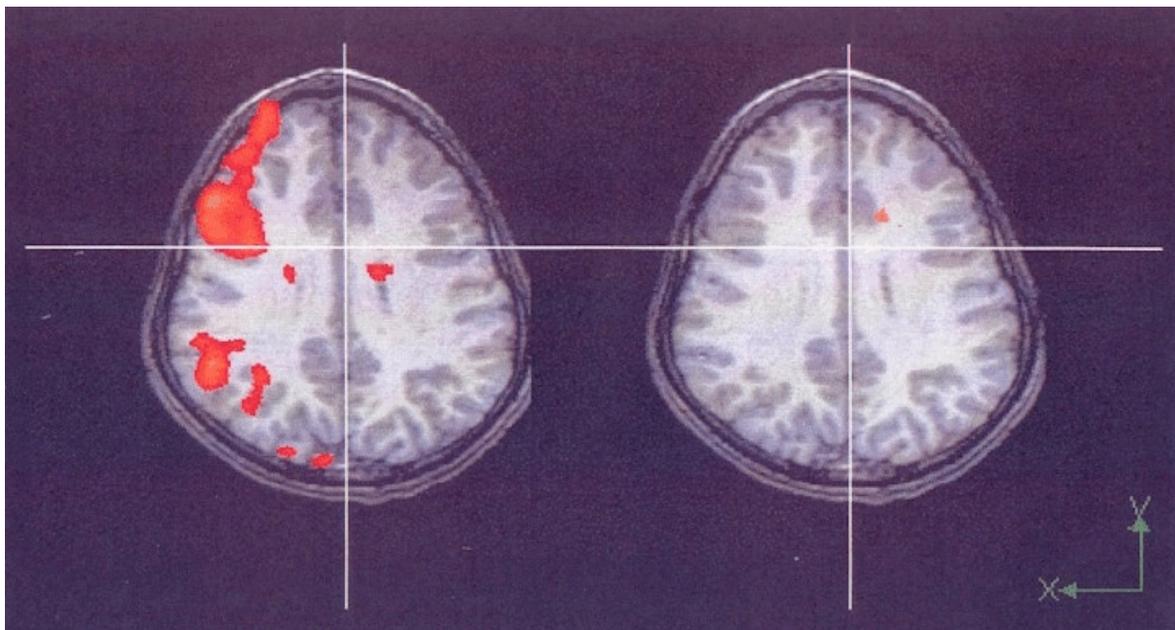
fMRI Brain Imaging Demonstrates Low Brain Activity in Frontal Lobe of Adolescents with High Video Media Exposure

Red Designates Brain Activity

Source: www.sosparents.org

Ref: 1: Brain Activation and Violent Video Games, principal investigator Vincent P. Mathews, M.D., Professor of Radiology and Chief of Neuroradiology at Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis; Co-authors Yang Wang, M.D., Mark J. Lowe, Ph.D., Joseph T. Lurito, M.D., Ph.D., Mario Dzemidzic, Ph.D., William G. Kronenberger, Ph.D., David Dunn, M.D., and Michael D. Phillips, M.D.

Ref: 2: Disruptive Behavior Disorders Associated with Irregular Frontal Lobe Structure, principal investigator Vincent P. Mathews, M.D., Professor of Radiology and Chief of Neuroradiology at Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis; Co-authors Tie-Qiang Li, Ph.D., Yang Wang, Ph.D., William G. Kronenberger, Ph.D., and David Dunn, M.D.



New Study: Brain cells affected by violent video games

A new study by the University of Indiana Medical School (Indianapolis) shows that playing violent video games can change the cellular workings of the brain, slowing brain activity in the part of the brain that controls emotions, impulses and attention span.

The study suggests that violent video games could desensitize children to the point of not understanding the effect of violence in real life. Changes in the brain were most obvious among teens with behavior disorders or who played for several hours each day.

Essentially, the study indicates that as children play video games for lengthy periods, they stop registering the action as violent or inappropriate and begin accepting the violence as normal behavior.

"Kids who play a lot of video games see a lot of violence - they stop understanding what that violence means," said Dr. David Walsh, President of the National Institute on Media and the Family. "This study provides yet more evidence that parents must be involved, aware, and MediaWise ® about what their kids are watching."

Computer and Video Game Addiction

Computers, video games, and the Internet have become entrenched features of our daily lives. Computer use has reached beyond work and is now a major source of fun and entertainment for many people. For most people, computer use and video game play is integrated into their lives in a balanced healthy manner. For others, time spent on the computer or video game is out of balance, and has displaced work, school, friends, and even family.

What is computer and video game addiction?

When time spent on the computer, playing video games or cruising the Internet reaches a point that it harms a child's or adult's family and social relationships, or disrupts school or work life, that person may be caught in a cycle of addiction. Like other addictions, the computer or video game has replaced friends and family as the source of a person's emotional life. Increasingly, to feel good, the addicted person spends more time playing video games or searching the Internet. Time away from the computer or game causes moodiness or withdrawal.

When a person spends up to ten hours a day or more rearranging or sending files, playing games, surfing the net, visiting chat rooms, instant messaging, and reading emails, that easily can reach up to seventy to eighty hours a week on-line with the computer. Major social, school or work disruptions will result.

Symptoms of computer or video game addiction:

For children:

- Most of non-school hours are spent on the computer or playing video games.
- Falling asleep in school.
- Not keeping up with assignments.
- Worsening grades.
- Lying about computer or video game use.
- Choosing to use the computer or play video games, rather than see friends.
- Dropping out of other social groups (clubs or sports).
- Irritable when not playing a video game or on the computer.

For adults:

- Computer or video game use is characterized by intense feelings of pleasure and guilt.
- Obsessing and pre-occupied about being on the computer, even when not connected.
- Hours playing video games or on the computer increasing, seriously disrupting family, social or even work life.
- Lying about computer or video game use.
- Experience feelings of withdrawal, anger, or depression when not on the computer involved with their video game.
- May incur large phone or credit bills for on-line services.
- Can't control computer or video game use.
- Fantasy life on-line replaces emotional life with partner.

There are even physical symptoms that may point to addiction:

- Carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Sleep disturbances
- Back, neck aches
- Headaches
- Dry eyes
- Failure to eat regularly or neglect personal hygiene

For the computer or video game addicted person, a fantasy world on-line or in a game has replaced his or her real world. The virtual reality of the computer or game is more inviting than the every day world of family, school or work. With the increased access to pornography on the Internet and in games, this fantasy world may be highly sexual.

The first step to healing is to recognize the symptoms. Help from a professional is often needed.

Sources

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Computer and Video Game Addiction

"Computer games are ruining my life. If I'm not playing, I'm thinking about playing. I have, like, no real friends."

These are the words of a high school student addicted to the online computer game, Everquest. Addiction to the game is so common that many gamers refer to it with the nickname "Evercrack." The average Everquest player, or EQer, plays twenty hours a week. That's the average!

"His grades are down the tubes, he skips meals, and he hardly spends any time with his friends."

These are the words of a parent who recently phoned me desperate for help. I asked her to estimate how many hours a week her son spent playing games. "Forty-three," she immediately replied. "I kept track last week."

Millions of kids love video games, especially boys. Our national survey revealed that 92% of kids age 2-17 play regularly. That translates into 59 million young players. The overwhelming majority of these kids play their video games, do their homework, keep up their responsibilities, and have other interests. No problem. So please don't get me wrong-I'm not saying that video and computer games are bad for kids. I think games like the Myst and Sim games are great. They're also a lot better than most of what is on TV.

Some kids, however, get hooked. Computer game addiction is real and growing. No one knows how many kids are obsessed, but I know the toll is mounting. How will a parent know if her son or daughter is headed for trouble?

You should be concerned if your child:

- Repeatedly breaks family rules about when and how much game playing is allowed.
- Withdraws from friends and activities to spend time playing.
- Sneaks and lies about game playing.
- Neglects school work and other responsibilities.
- Throws temper tantrums when limits are imposed.

Some parent-child arguments about video and computer games are part of 21st century America. So don't panic if you have your share of those. On the other hand, don't ignore signs of a real problem with compulsive playing. Here are some tips to make sure computer and video game playing remains a positive part of your children's lives.

Set clear ground rules about when, where, how much, and what kind of game playing is allowed.

- Limit game playing time.
- Require that homework and other chores be completed first.
- Keep video and computer games out of kids' bedrooms.
- Consistently enforce the rules. If your child refuses to cooperate, restrict access for a period of time.
- If nothing else works, go cold turkey. Get rid of the games.

Effects Of Video Game Playing On Children

Positives

Video game playing introduces children to computer technology.
Games can give practice in following directions.
Some games provide practice in problem solving and logic.
Games can provide practice in use of fine motor and spatial skills.
Games can provide occasions for adult and child to play together.
Players are introduced to information technology.
Some games have therapeutic applications with patients.
Games are entertaining.

Facts

Game industry worldwide video game annual sales reached \$20 billion (Cohen, 2000).

In households with children, 67% own a video game system (Subrahmanyam et al, 2001).

In a report by the Federal Trade Commission, of 118 "M" rated games, 70% were targeted to children under 17 years of age (FTC, 2000).

Unaccompanied children, ages 13 to 16, were able to buy "M" rated video games 85% of the time (FTC, 2000).

Negatives

Over-dependence on video games *could* foster social isolation, as they are often played alone.

Practicing violent acts may contribute more to aggressive behavior than passive television watching. Studies do find a relationship between violent television watching and behavior.

Women are often portrayed as weaker characters that are helpless or sexually provocative.

Game environments are often based on plots of violence, aggression and gender bias.

Many games only offer an arena of weapons, killings, kicking, stabbing and shooting.

Playing violent video games may be related to aggressive behavior (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Gentile, Lynch & Walsh, under review). Questions have been raised about early exposure to violent video games.

More often games do not offer action that requires independent thought or creativity.

Games can confuse reality and fantasy.

In many violent games, players must become more violent to win. 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.

Academic achievement may be negatively related to over-all time spent playing video games. (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Gentile, Lynch & Walsh, under review)

Questions to ask: Is the violence rewarded or punished? What are the consequences? How graphic is the violence? Is the violence against humans or inanimate objects? Is the violence sexual?

Reasons children give for playing video games:

It's fun
Like to feel in control
Releases tension
Relieves boredom
Develops gaming skills
Feel a sense of mastery

Bottom line

Many video games are fun and appropriate.

Violent video games may be linked to an increase in aggressive behavior.

There are many questions about the cumulative effect of video games, computers, and television.

Parents are urged to monitor video game play the same way they need to monitor television.

What to look for in choosing a game

Be aware of advertising and marketing to children. Advertising pressure contributes to impulse buying.

Check the age ratings video game descriptors found on the box. Read other reviews (check Kidscore). Become familiar with the game.

If there are violence and sexual themes in the title and cover picture, you can assume these themes are also in the game.

Look for games involving multiple players to encourage group play.

Look for a game that requires the player to come up with strategies, and make decisions in a game environment that is more complex than punch, run, jump.

Pick games that require the player to come up with strategies, and make decisions in a game environment that is more complex than punch, steal, and kill.

AVOID the "first person shooter", killing-machine games.

Tips for Parents

LIMIT game playing time.

CHECK the age game ratings and descriptors on the box.

USE other content sources and reviews to help you choose a game.

CHECK KidScore for parent generated game reviews.

AVOID the "first person shooter", killing-machine games.

REQUIRE that homework and chores be done before game playing.

DO NOT PUT video game consoles or computers in children's bedrooms.

PLAY AND ENJOY a game with your child; check in as your child moves into deeper levels in the game.

TALK about the content of the games. Ask your child what's going on in the game.

EXPLAIN to your children why you object to certain games.

ASK your local retailer or rental store to implement policies preventing the sale or rental of M-rated (Mature) games to children or youth.

ENCOURAGE your child to play with friends, or other activities away from the video game set.

Resources for Parents:

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Harvard Researchers Find Many Teen-Rated Video Games Include Unexpected Content

Researchers from Harvard University, using a random sample of 81 video games rated T for teen, characterized video game content as it related to violence, sexual themes, profanity, substance abuse, and gambling. They compared the content they observed in one hour of game play to the Entertainment Software Rating Board content descriptors provided to consumers.

In 48 percent of the video games, the researchers found content involving violence, sexual themes, profanity, substance abuse, or gambling that was not labeled on the game's box.

The study concludes that T-rated video games expose players to a significant amount of unexpected content. The researchers recommend that physicians and parents discuss video game content with children. They also recommend that the Entertainment Software Rating Board should adopt additional age-based categories in its ratings, such as a Youth rating for ages 10 years and up and a T-15 rating for ages 15 years and up.

The researcher's findings were published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* on February 18, 2004

GALLUP POLL: MORE THAN 70 PERCENT OF TEENAGE BOYS HAVE PLAYED "GRAND THEFT AUTO" VIDEO GAMES

The Gallup Organization's recent online survey of 517 adolescents found that not only have 71% of teenage boys played the ultra violent "Grand Theft Auto" video games, but twice as many boys who've played these games reported being in a physical fight, than boys who had not played (34 percent to 17 percent).

The "Grand Theft Auto 3" and "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City," both rated "M" for mature audiences, were the top selling video games in 2001 and 2002, respectively. The portrayal and mistreatment of women in these video games has led the National Institute on Media and the Family to repeatedly call on the entertainment industry to keep games intended for adults out of the hands of children and youth.

Other results of the survey include: sixty-two percent of teenagers plays video games at least one hour per week; 25 percent play six or more hours per week; and more than one-third spend no time playing video games.

In April 2003, the National Institute on Media and the Family announced a study on adolescent video game addiction. The study found that 14 percent of 8th and 9th graders who play video games are addicted to the games and that most (82%) of these video game addicts are male. According to the study, non-addicted adolescents play video games an average of 4.5 hours per week while addicted gamers play the games an average 21.6 hours per week.

The Institute also conducted a longitudinal study linking exposure to violent media with later aggressive behavior in children. The Institute's study reveals that all kinds of children, regardless of gender and predisposition to violent behavior, become more aggressive and violent over time when exposed to violent media.

The Gallup survey comes amid a case in Tennessee where two teenage step-brothers admitted to prosecutors they were mimicking "Grand Theft Auto" when randomly firing at cars. One motorist was killed in the shooting, another wounded, and a passenger injured when the car veered off the road.

New Video Game Study Misses The Point

Games that teach visual skills also teach violence, aggression

Minneapolis - A new study's limited scope and small sample size allow it to ignore the consequences of the violence in first-person shooter video games, according to the National Institute on Media and the Family.

The study, published in the upcoming issue of Nature, claims that playing these games may improve a visual multitasking skill.

Researchers at the National Institute on Media and the Family warned Thursday that this new study confirms past research that shows video games teach players unintended skills and values without gamers' awareness. Among the unfortunate educational effects of violent games are a tendency toward aggressive and violent behavior.

"Video games are natural teachers, and many of the things they teach were not intended by the game designers," said Douglas Gentile, Ph.D., a developmental psychologist and director of research at the National Institute on Media and the Family. "None of the games this report mentions are designed as visual attention education games, yet the games are effective at teaching visual skills. Our research and the research of many others has shown that violent games are also effective at teaching aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors."

"The study also corresponds with common sense because it shows that practice makes perfect," added Dr. Gentile. "Of course this holds true not just for visual skills, but violent acts as well. Practicing violent behaviors will improve aggressive behaviors."

The University of Rochester used very small samples, only eight people per group, and only tested adults. It is unclear if the study's findings would hold true for kids. The study only shows that playing action games improves visual attention focused on a TV screen. Other types of attention, and relevance to real-world situations is still unclear.

"The way this research is being explained is akin to saying pornography helps kids read," said David Walsh, Ph.D., president of the National Institute on Media and the Family. "There was a very controversial study in the 1950s that showed giving kids sexually explicit text helped them improve their reading scores. Of course, nobody in their right mind would advocate pornography in elementary schools. Many things have multiple effects, some good, some bad. We need to find video games that have benefits without the toxic side effects."

Video Games and Children

19 September 2000

[Video games and children](http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/video.games.html)

<http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/video.games.html>

by Bernard Cesarone

Video games were first introduced in the 1970s. By the end of that decade they had become a preferred childhood leisure activity, and adults responded with concern about the possible ill effects of the games on children. Early research on these effects was inconclusive. However, a resurgence in video game sales that began in the late 1980s after the introduction of the Nintendo system has renewed interest in examining the effects of video games.

Some research suggests that playing video games may affect some children's physical functioning. Effects range from triggering epileptic seizures to causing heart rate and blood pressure changes. Serious adverse physical effects, however, are transient or limited to a small number of players. Research has also identified benefits associated with creative and prosocial uses of video games, as in physical rehabilitation and oncology (Funk, 1993). Proponents of video games suggest that they may be a friendly way of introducing children to computers, and may increase children's hand-eye coordination and attention to detail.

Video Game Use by Children

Recent studies of television watching by children have included measures of the time children spend playing video games. In 1967, the average sixth-grader watched 2.8 hours of television per day. Data from 1983 indicated that sixth-graders watched 4.7 hours of television per day, and spent some additional time playing video games.

A recent study (Funk, 1993) examined video game playing among 357 seventh and eighth grade students. The adolescents were asked to identify their preference among five categories of video games. The two most preferred categories were games that involved fantasy violence, preferred by almost 32% of subjects; and sports games, some of which contained violent subthemes, which were preferred by more than 29%. Nearly 20% of the students expressed a preference for games with a general entertainment theme, while another 17% favored games that involved human violence. Fewer than 2% of the adolescents preferred games with educational content.

The study found that approximately 36% of male students played video games at home for 1 to 2 hours per week; 29% played 3 to 6 hours; and 12 percent did not play at all. Among female students who played video games at home, approximately 42% played 1 to 2 hours and 15% played 3 to 6 hours per week. Nearly 37% of females did not play any video games. The balance of subjects played more than 6 hours per week. Results also indicated that 38% of males and 16% of females played 1 to 2 hours of video games per week in arcades; and that 53% of males and 81% of females did not play video games in arcades.

Rating Video Game Violence

Ratings of video game violence have developed as an extension of ratings of television violence. Among those organizations that have attempted to rate television violence, the National Coalition on Television Violence (NCTV) has also developed a system to rate the violent content of video games. The NCTV system contains ratings that range from XUnfit and XV (highly violent) to PG and G ratings. Between summer and Christmas of 1989, NCTV surveyed 176 Nintendo video games. Among the games surveyed, 11.4% received the XUnfit rating. Another 44.3% and 15.3% received the other violent ratings of XV and RV, respectively. A total of 20% of games received a PG or G rating (NCTV, 1990).

The Sega company, which manufactures video games, has developed a system for rating its own games as appropriate for general, mature, or adult audiences, which it would like to see adopted by the video game industry as a whole. The Nintendo company, in rating its games, follows standards modeled on the system used by the Motion Picture Association of America.

A problem shared by those who rate violence in television and video games is that the definition of violence is necessarily subjective. Given this subjectivity, raters have attempted to assess antisocial violence more accurately by ranking violent acts according to severity, noting the context in which violent acts occur, and considering the overall message as pro- or anti- violence. However, the factor of context is typically missing in video games. There are no grey areas in the behavior of game characters, and players are rarely required to reflect or make contextual judgments (Provenzo, 1992).

Effects of Violence in Video Games

The NCTV claims that there has been a steady increase in the number of video games with violent themes. Games rated as extremely violent increased from 53% in 1985 to 82% in 1988. A 1988 survey indicated that manufacturers were titling their games with increasingly violent titles (NCTV, 1990). Another survey found that 40 of the 47 top-rated Nintendo video games had violence as a theme.

An early study on the effects of video games on children found that playing video games had more positive effects on children than watching television. A conference sponsored by Atari at Harvard University in 1983 presented preliminary data which failed to identify ill effects. More recent research, however, has begun to find connections between children's playing of violent video games and later aggressive behavior. A research review done by NCTV (1990) found that 9 of 12 research studies on the impact of violent video games on normal children and adolescents reported harmful effects. In general, while video game playing has not been implicated as a direct cause of severe psycho-pathology, research suggests that there is a short-term relationship between playing violent games and increased aggressive behavior in younger children (Funk, 1993).

Because it is likely that there is some similarity in the effect of viewing violent television programs and playing violent video games on individuals' aggressive behavior, those concerned with the effects of video games on children should take note of television research. The consensus among researchers on television violence is that there is a measurable increase of from 3% to 15% in individuals' aggressive behavior after watching violent television. A recent report of the American Psychological Association claimed that research demonstrates a correlation between viewing and aggressive behavior (Clark, 1993).

Effects of Other Characteristics of Video Games

Some adults believe that video games offer benefits over the passive medium of television. Among

mental health professionals, there are those who maintain that in playing video games, certain children can develop a sense of proficiency which they might not otherwise achieve. However, other authorities speculate that performing violent actions in video games may be more conducive to children's aggression than passively watching violent acts on television. According to this view, the more children practice violence acts, the more likely they are to perform violent acts (Clark, 1993). Some educational professionals, while allowing that video games permit children to engage in a somewhat creative dialogue, maintain that this engagement is highly constrained compared to other activities, such as creative writing (Provenzo, 1992).

Another problem seen by critics of video games is that the games stress autonomous action rather than cooperation. A common game scenario is that of an anonymous character performing an aggressive act against an anonymous enemy. One study (Provenzo, 1992) found that each of the top 10 Nintendo video games was based on a theme of an autonomous individual working alone against an evil force. The world of video games has little sense of community and few team players. Also, most video games do not allow play by more than one player at a time.

The social content of video games may influence children's attitudes toward gender roles. In the Nintendo games, women are usually cast as persons who are acted upon rather than as initiators of action; in extreme cases, they are depicted as victims. One study (Provenzo, 1992) found that the covers of the 47 most popular Nintendo games depicted a total of 115 male and 9 female characters; among these characters, 20 of the males struck a dominant pose while none of the females did. Thirteen of the 47 games were based on a scenario in which a woman is kidnapped or has to be rescued.

Studies have indicated that males play video games more frequently than females. Television program producers and video game manufacturers may produce violent shows and games for this audience. This demand for violence may not arise because of an innate male desire to witness violence, but because males are looking for strong role models, which they find in these shows and games (Clark, 1993).

Conclusion

Given inconclusive research, recommendations concerning video games must be conservative. According to researcher Jeanne Funk (1993), a ban on video games is:

probably not ... in the child's best interests. Limiting playing time and monitoring game selection according to developmental level and game content may be as important as similar parental management of television privileges. Parents and professionals should also seek creative ways to increase the acceptance, popularity, and availability of games that are relatively prosocial, educational, and fun.

You should know...

1. 90% of teenagers say that their parents never check the video game ratings before allowing them to rent or buy computer or video games. (**A Validity Test of Movie, Television, and Video-Game Ratings, Dr. David A. Walsh and Dr. Douglas A. Gentile, Published in Pediatrics, Vol. 107, No. 6, June 2001.**)
2. 66% of gamers are over 18 and the average age of a game player is 29 years old, thus video games aren't made just for kids anymore. Be sure to check the rating before buying/renting a game for your child.

Of all games sold in 2003:

54% were rated Everyone (E).

30.5% were rated Teen (T).

11.9% were rated Mature (M).

Two studies published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* on April 23, 2000 confirmed that violent video games negatively affect behavior. One study demonstrated that graphically violent video games produce an immediate increase in aggressive thoughts and behavior. The other study found that violent game play not only increased aggressive behavior, but produced a long-term, real-life impact on the behavior and relationships of the players.

Media Quote of the Week

"I have been to something like 50 gang funerals where the guy in the coffin was no more than 20. The game companies don't see the family crying and the people in the coffin. They don't see the impact this has on our culture. They make or play their games in the studio, but for kids on the street it's a real life."- **Terrance Stone youth leader and former gang member on how violent video games such as Grand Theft Auto has glamorized the gang lifestyle - MSNBC News, 11/06/04.**

Grand Theft Auto 3

Is part of video game series in which robbing, killing and intimidation are objectives. (Rockstar Games)

The popular video games have become an equally popular target in city halls and statehouses nationwide. D.C. Council members and Mayor Anthony A. Williams (D) yesterday backed a bill that would prevent merchants from selling such games as the Grand Theft Auto series, Halo 2 and Mortal Kombat to minors. A store that violates the law could lose its business license and face a fine of as much as \$10,000.

In Maryland, Del. Justin D. Ross (D-Prince George's) introduced a bill that would subject vendors who sell or rent violent video games to minors to a fine of as much as \$1,000 or six months in jail for each offense. Last year, Virginia legislators considered a bill that would have made the sale, rental, loan or commercial display of a video or computer game to a juvenile a misdemeanor if the game depicted violence against a law enforcement officer.

Legislation is pending in Georgia. And in his State of the State speech yesterday, Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) proposed making it illegal for anyone younger than 18 to buy violent or sexually explicit games.

"For the same reason we don't allow kids to buy pornography, for the same reason we don't allow kids to buy cigarettes, for the same reason we don't allow kids to buy alcohol, we shouldn't allow them to go to stores and buy video games," Blagojevich said.

Visual realism has been the hallmark of the best-selling video games, whose revenue in recent years have almost rivaled Hollywood box office sales. Last year, U.S. sales of video games -- with Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas and Halo 2 leading the pack -- set a record at \$7.3 billion. U.S. box office receipts last year were \$9.2 billion.

In the Grand Theft Auto series, one of the more controversial ways that players can advance is by stealing cars and shooting police officers. The latest installment includes the voice of the actor Samuel L. Jackson as a corrupt cop. The game, published by Rockstar Games, was selected game of the year at the second Video Game Awards in December.

Set in San Andreas, a fictional version of South Central Los Angeles, and featuring black and Latino characters, the game has been targeted by politicians in recent months. Council member Adrian M. Fenty (D-Ward 4), in announcing his legislation at the news conference, held up a copy of the game, and community activists wore T-shirts with a red "X" on a scene from the game.

"Parents want a reliable way to choose the video games most appropriate for the ages, tastes, and interests of their family members," Rockstar Games said in a statement. "Just like some movies are rated R, some games are rated M because they are intended for ages 17 and older. . . . Mischaracterizing Grand Theft Auto and confusing entertainment with real life social problems is completely unwarranted. . . . The game represents cutting edge art, technology, and entertainment and has been greeted with critical acclaim and enormously positive consumer response across the globe."

Legal experts said legislation that banned sales of the games to minors has been struck down in the courts on free-speech and other grounds.

In the District, the handful of outlets that sell Grand Theft Auto games said they already enforce the industry age restrictions, which prohibit sales to anyone younger than 17.

A representative of Best Buy, which has an outlet in Tenleytown and is one of the largest retailers of video games in the city, said proof of age is required at the register to buy a game that is rated mature. The chain does not carry adult-only games, he said.

Blockbuster outlets in the city rent Grand Theft Auto games but not to those younger than 17 unless authorized by a parent, a company spokesman said.

Others said the blame should fall more on parents who buy the games and allow their children to play them.

"These politicians cannot pull this," said Ian "Red" Morganstein, 29, an assistant manager at For Your Entertainment, a store in Friendship Heights that sells Grand Theft Auto and other games labeled mature. He said the store does not sell the games to anyone younger than 17.

"It's not us. It's not the game companies. It's the parents," Morganstein said. He said he has turned away youngsters only to see them return with a parent. "If you're concerned about it, don't bring your 8-year-old son in here to buy games about violence and sex."

The Washington-based Entertainment Software Association noted last year that the average age of a video game player is 30 and that the average age of a video game purchaser is 36. Parents are involved in the purchase of games 83 percent of the time, the association said.

"When we look at our consumer graphic information, approximately 50 percent of purchases are made by women," said Anita Frazier, an analyst for the NPD Group, which tracks the industry. "They're largely buying it as a gift or as a reward to a child, a husband, a brother."

Linda Jackson, 15, a student at Woodrow Wilson Senior High School in Northwest, said reducing crime cannot be done simply by banning video games.

"I don't think it's all about the game. I think it's about the parents and how you raise your child," said Jackson, who said she heard a report about the ban yesterday.

Yesterday, Fenty stood with more than a dozen religious leaders and activists at First Rock Baptist Church in the Benning Terrace neighborhood, where residents and police have been battling an epidemic of car thefts by juveniles. "These people behind me who work with at-risk youth say this is a problem, and I believe them," he said.

Johnny Barnes, executive director of the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, said the bill has a fatal flaw. He noted that a 2003 ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit said that "the government cannot silence protected speech by wrapping itself in the cloak of parental authority."

Staff writers Chris L. Jenkins, Theola S. Labbe, David Snyder and John Wagner contributed to this report.

Grand Theft Auto' returns with a vengeance

By Tom Loftus

Columnist

MSNBC

Updated: 9:25 a.m. ET Nov. 6, 2004

The release of "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas," a game that draws heavily upon gang culture and violence, has sparked the ire of the country's embattled gang counselors and educators who say the game not only celebrates the gang lifestyle at a time when gang membership is rising nationwide, but makes a mockery of a tragedy that's all too real.

"They've done a great job in portraying the negative," said Jose Perez, a counselor who works with gang members in the San Francisco Bay Area.

While game players cheer the realism of "Grand Theft Auto," that same realism is embraced by street gang members and wannabes who see the game as not only fun but a validation of their lifestyle.

Online message boards devoted to street gangs have been busy studying the game like it's a documentary: discussing the reality behind the game's North-South Latino gang rivalry and comparing the fashion of another gang with the real deal. "Green da color," reads one post, "but the Ballas color purple dat remind me of Grape St Crips."

How Rockstar North, a game publisher based in damp Edinburgh, Scotland was able to create an interactive epic that resonates with American youth is quite a story. But for gang counselors and law enforcement, the story is not about record sales and five-starred reviews in gaming magazines. It's about telling kids on the edge that they are not a lost cause.

"For those of us out here struggling to prevent gang violence it's frustrating to see the media glorify it," said Perez. He said he and others are struggling to prevent an all-out gang war in San Mateo County "and when you hear kids coming in here and talking about the game, it makes it a challenge to reach them."

'They see it as vindication'

Pop culture, and particularly gaming's, role in putting its stamp of approval on abnormal behavior has long been a controversial topic. But for those on the front lines, there is no argument.

"I don't care what any criminologist or psychologist says, but repeated exposure to any level of violence does alter the psyche of a person," said Ernest L. Cuthbertson, a police detective in Greensboro, N.C.

Cuthbertson actually uses "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City," the predecessor of "San Andreas," as part of his work with at-risk kids. He films the kids as they play the game and then challenges them on their in-game decisions to shoot cops and beat up prostitutes.

Sometimes the kids are able to look beyond the game and recognize the repercussions, said Cuthbertson. But other times they reveled in their ability to wield automatic weapons.

"The same technology used to train the military and law enforcement is going into games. We are raising a society of natural born killers," said Cuthbertson.

Most gang counselors agreed that playing a game doesn't necessarily lead to picking up an Uzi, but based on their experiences, they do think that virtual violence numbs players to actual violence. And the at-risk kids they mostly work with aren't exactly overloaded with great role models to begin with.

"Kids are culturally inoculated by other kids. So then they see this game selling in the store, about gang life, they see it as vindication," said Stephen Cliff, an educator who works with troubled children in upstate New York.

Cliff's comments were echoed by Lisa Taylor-Austin, a Connecticut-based counselor and "gangologist."

"I don't think a video game is going to cause someone to shoot," she said. "But the kids I deal with, they don't talk about "Grand Theft Auto" like it's a game. They talk about how realistic it is."

Taylor-Austin, who spent the late 1980s and early 1990s in Los Angeles studying gang culture, said she was actually approached by the makers of "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" to critique the game to see if it was realistic enough. She refused.

"It would be counterproductive to what I do, which is keeping kids from killing kids."

"Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" also has the misfortune of launching at a time when gang membership is on a rise. Thousands of gang members jailed during the late 1980s and early 1990s during the height of the crack wars are due for release, say gang experts.

This is not just a problem for large cities in the West and Northeast. In the last 15 years, gang violence has spread to the Southeast and Midwest. And when gangs in places like Arkansas and North Virginia call themselves Crips and Bloods, it may stem from a gang member who's moved in from the cities, say experts. But often the clues come from pop culture.

I have been to something like 50 gang funerals where the guy in the coffin was no more than 20. The game companies don't see the family crying and the people in the coffin.'

— Terrance Stone
youth leader and former gang member

"The underlying message you get is that gangs are cool, gang banging is cool and crime is cool," said Alejandro A. Alonso, a gang scholar and publisher of streetgangs.com. "And when you go to a place like the Netherlands and see white dudes doing the Crip walk you know where they learned it."

A former gang member from the Bronx, George A. Monger now works to stem a troubling rise in gang violence in the leafy suburbs of Northern Virginia.

"Most kids in northern Virginia are wannabes," he said. "And so when they look at a game and play a game they see how it's done and they may want to act it out."

As Mindy S. Gizzard, a probation officer in Richmond, Va., said: "Great, just what we need, one more thing for yahoos to imitate."

Meanwhile, back in 'San Andreas'
In California, the cultural homeland of "San Andreas," gang counselors grit their teeth and prepare for the worse as kids say the game justifies their life.

Rafael Vazquez, a gang counselor in Sonoma County, California said he talked recently with a teen who played the game and praised its inclusion of several Latino gangs. "He said that 'it kind of relates to me because it talks about where we come from and where we live.'"

Jose Perez, the San Mateo County councilor said that one of his kids described playing "San Andreas" in an "almost orgasmic rush."

"And the kids I work with say they're kind of glad that finally someone came out with a game that represents the 'hood. They say that they can relate to the characters," he said.

Perez can, too. He spent 23 years as a gang member in the Bay Area before exiting the life to become a counselor in 1998. "Being an ex-gang member myself, I can say that some of those acts in the game are not far from reality," said Perez.

Several hundred miles south in San Bernardino County, Terrance Stone is grappling with the same issue. Now the president of a youth leadership group, he's witnessed, first hand, how pop culture has glamorized the gang lifestyle. Stone was a former gang member and leader for 15 years. He got out. A brother, however, began a 36-year prison sentence at the age of 16.

Spreading the word

By Tom Loftus

Columnist

MSNBC

Updated: 5:53 p.m. ET Nov. 5, 2004

As the last rays of sunlight fade on the ghetto alleyways, ratty looking palm trees take on the form of sick old men and there's menace in the air. But you're ready; the car you just 'jacked is tuned to Radio Los Santos and on the air Snoop Dogg boasts of "a 187 on an undercover cop."

It's baaaaack.

"Grand Theft Auto," the video game series reviled by parents for senseless violence and celebrated by gamers for pretty much the same reason launched its latest installment last week.

An interactive ode to gang banging, California style, "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" covers a vast territory: from the neighborhoods of East and South Central Los Santos (Los Angeles) up north to the hedonism of San Fierro (San Francisco) and East to the ritz and mafia connections of Las Venturas (Las Vegas).

Imagine Disneyland's "California Adventure," but with AK-47's.

Senseless violence

Like 2002's "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City" which set its tale of drugs and decadence among the scenes and sounds of 1980s Miami, "San Andreas" is heavily indebted to another crime-ridden subculture: this time, the black and Latino gangs of 1990s California.

The game's creators have mined the era with the enthusiasm of pop culture anthropologists. Eleven radio stations boom a mixture of West Coast rap, New Jack Swing and early house. Gang members sport doo-rags and oversize t-shirts. The graffiti tags your character creates bears a real-world California influence. And the voice acting, as you might expect, is peppered with street slang and plenty of bad language.

The immersion works. Rockstar Games, the creators of the "Grand Theft Auto" series, are masters in melding local color with a story arc of power, loyalty and gobs of ruthless violence. Backed by some of the finest scripted scenes in gaming, "San Andreas" is almost operatic in tone.

Like a lot of operas, however, "San Andreas" has a high body count. This is a very violent game:

Drug dealers are beaten with bats. Pedestrians are flattened by cars. Drive-by shootings, car-jackings, crack use and numerous other crimes which continue to make parts of America pure hell to live in have here been turned into fodder for entertainment. And, as part of the nod to realism, characters in the game call each other the N-word.

None of this is appropriate for young players. "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" is rated "M" for

mature for a reason. Parents who buy this game for their children should have their heads examined.

Richly developed world

The "hero" of "San Andreas," a small-time gang banger called Carl Johnson, faces the same challenge Tommy Vercetti faced in "Grand Theft Auto 3." He's a gutter punk who craves respect.

The goal is to move Johnson out of his life on a dead-end street in Ganton (read: Compton) and into the criminal high life.

Cut-scenes (non-interactive movie elements) set the stage for each task that will move Johnson one step closer. For example, after an early scene where his "homies" bemoan the plight of their neighborhood, Johnson is assigned the job of taking the baseball bat to crack dealers.

The thrill of "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas," as in previous versions, is how the game expands in scope from crack dens to penthouses. As the plot builds, the challenges increase. Johnson moves from car jacking to piloting Lear Jets. And the action takes Johnson from the city of Los Santos up north to San Fierro where some of the best game play revolves around navigating the city's hills.

As always with this series, much of what's worth exploring lies outside the plot. In the richly developed world of "San Andreas," not only can Johnson swipe any car, motorcycle or plane, he can also scale walls, hop fences and swim. Taking a trip off the beaten path can yield some interesting side plots such as engaging in a game of one-on-one basketball, visiting strip clubs, racing motorcycles and collecting safe houses.

Or you may just want to spend time cruising the streets listening to the radio. Music and DJ radio patter has long been the heart and soul of "Grand Theft Auto" and "San Andreas" offers 11 radio stations playing West Coast gangsta rap, early 1990s House music and even country.

The roam-at-will freedom comes with costs. "Grand Theft Auto" fans are by now familiar with the loading time between episodes. And while the graphics do a particularly fine job of catching that hazy California sunlight the game can fall short at times. Faces are boxy, for example.

"San Andreas" has some surprises up its sleeve, however. Listen long enough to the radio or engage with any number of NPC's (non-player characters) and you may hear some commentary about race relations, poverty and dead-end jobs mixed in with the swearing, threats and sexist garbage. Radio ads mock everything from video gamers (equating the hobby with another solitary activity) to adult males who have too much money and no brains.

Game mocks real tragedy, gang experts say

On a certain level -- the universal level that recognizes that power, sex, loyalty and violence always make a good story -- "San Andreas" works. It may not be on par with "The Odyssey" or even "The Warriors," but the story it tells has been told for eons. And that's why, no matter the outrage, it will sell.

But no matter how good the game play, "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" is at its core a violent and mean-spirited game that rewards homicide, embraces racial and sexual stereotypes and uses real-life child-on-child violence as inspiration.

Granted this is "only a game," but the lifestyle it portrays, no matter how artfully, is too real for too many members of the video game generation.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas Includes Easily-Accessed Hidden Pornography

Today the National Institute for Media and the Family issued a warning about hidden pornographic content in the popular video game Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. The M-rated video game has been in stores since October 2004, and has been criticized by many groups - including the PTC - for graphic and extremely violent content.

According to the National Institute's founder, Dr. David Walsh, "The ratings board has launched an investigation to determine if it was misled into issuing a 'Mature' rating instead of the 'Adults Only' rating. There may even be legal ramifications since most states have laws restricting the sale of sexually explicit material to those eighteen and older."

Many states are currently considering legislation that would prohibit the sale of M-rated video games to minors, but no such restrictions currently exist.

Do games prime brain for violence?

23 June 2005

NewScientist.com news service

Alison Motluk

YOU know that just round the corner is a man who wants to kill you. Your heart is pounding and your hands are sweating - even though this is only a video game. But what is happening in your brain?

A small study of brain activity in video-game veterans suggests that their brains react as if they are treating the violence as real.

More than 90 per cent of American children play video games every day, and half of the top sellers contain extreme violence. There is now strong evidence that people who play violent games tend to be more aggressive. For example, in 2000, Craig Anderson and Karen Dill at Iowa State University in Ames reported data showing that violent-game players were more likely to report high levels of aggression and to have committed assaults or robberies. But finding out whether it is the games that make them violent or the violence that attracts them to the games has proved much harder.

Klaus Mathiak at the University of Aachen in Germany set out to discover what is happening in gamers' brains as they encounter violent situations. He recruited 13 men aged 18 to 26, who played video games for 2 hours every day on average, and asked them to play a violent game while having their brains scanned using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). By the time of the experiment, the volunteers were proficient at the game, which required them to navigate a complicated bunker, find and kill terrorists and try to rescue hostages.

Mathiak analyzed the game scene by scene and studied how brain activity changed during violent interactions. This meant that he could compare patterns of brain activity immediately before and during fights with activity at less aggressive points in the game.

He found that as violence became imminent, the cognitive parts of the brain became more active. And during a fight, emotional parts of the brain, such as the amygdala and parts of the anterior cingulate cortex, were shut down. This pattern is the same as that seen in subjects who have had brain scans during other simulated violent situations such as imagining an aggressive encounter. It is impossible to scan people's brains during acts of real aggression so Mathiak argues that this is as close as you can get to the real thing. It suggests that video games are a "training for the brain to react with this pattern," he says.

Niels Birbaumer of the University of Tübingen in Germany speculates that playing violent video games regularly would strengthen these circuits in the brain. A regular player confronted with a similar real-life situation, might be more primed for aggression, Birbaumer says.

But Jeffrey Fagan, violence expert at Columbia University in New York says the link between brain activity and violence is complex: "The frontal lobe functions associated with violence have more to do with restraint than the arousal to action."

Video game "brain damage" claim criticised

17:00 11 July 2002

NewScientist.com news service

Helen Phillips

Claims by a Japanese surgeon that computer games can damage the brain have been greeted with

scepticism by psychologists and neuroscientists. Akio Mori, a cranial nerve specialist at Nihon University College of Humanities and Sciences in Tokyo told Japanese reporters that he was very concerned about the impact of video games on children's brains, after recording a lack of beta brainwave activity in young people who played frequently.

He claims this reveals that the gamers were hardly using the frontal regions of their brains, which are important for emotional processing, planning and self-control. "If levels of beta brainwaves are very low, people get angry easily and have difficulty in concentrating," Mori is reported to have said.

The conclusions are based on an analysis of EEG traces from 240 people, aged between six and 29 years. Mori compared the amount of alpha and beta brainwave activity of people who rarely played video games, those playing for one to three hours per day for three or four days a week, and those who played daily for up to seven hours.

Alpha brainwaves show a resting or relaxed state and beta waves are thought to represent "online" neural activity. Mori says the beta waves were almost absent even when the regular gamers were not playing.

Premature conclusions

But suggestions made in the Japanese press that parts of the brain could become chronically underused are premature, according to neuroscientists and psychologists contacted by **New Scientist**.

Mori has yet to publish any of his methods and findings and without this it is impossible to conclude that video games are damaging, said one researcher. For example, the precise placement of the electrodes and the analytical methods used to interpret the traces are both critical. **New Scientist** was unable to obtain further information from Mori.

Even assuming the findings are correct, it is by no means a certain sign of damage, says Dennis Schutter, a neuroscientist specializing in the EEG signatures of different emotional states at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. "My guess is that fatigue is the most likely cause of the absence of the beta waves and not the gaming per se," he says.

Behavioral disruption

Despite popular assumption, there has been no widely accepted evidence for permanent damage or behavioral disruption caused by video games or television violence.

A 2001 study by Ryuta Kawashima at Tohoku University in Japan claimed to have shown that the frontal lobes are not stimulated during computer game playing.

But it was widely dismissed by scientists after he claimed the lack of stimulation could potentially stunt brain development and affect people's ability to control their behavior. The researcher found

no direct evidence for lasting damage.

The violent games people play

23 October 2004

Hazel Muir

Magazine issue 2470

As computer games get to look more lifelike is their violence also spilling over into real life?

APRIL 2002, Erfurt, Germany: a 19-year-old runs amok with a pistol at a school. His 20-minute shooting frenzy leaves 17 dead, including himself. April 1999, Littleton, Colorado: two teenagers rampage through Columbine High School with bombs, guns and knives, slaughtering 13 people before committing suicide.

These, and at least 12 other murders since 1997, have been linked to an obsession with violent video games. This year, the parents of a 14-year-old murder victim in the UK blamed the alleged killer's obsession with the game Manhunt, provoking a government review of legislation to protect children.

But is there any scientific evidence that mere games can make children and young adults more aggressive, or possibly even homicidal? There is no doubt children are being exposed to more games violence than ever: around a quarter of all games released in the US contain some violence. Combine that with the burgeoning sales expected across ...

Bad influence

03 April 2004

From New Scientist Print Edition.

VIOLENT movies, video games and other media really do have a negative influence on children, a panel of experts has concluded after the most comprehensive review ever of past research.

"Unequivocal" evidence from a wide variety of studies shows that in the short term exposing children to violence in movies, TV, video games and music increases physical and verbal aggression, and aggressive thoughts and emotions, says a report by the American Psychological Society. Frequent exposure to media violence in childhood is also linked to aggression later in life, including violent assaults and domestic abuse. No one is wholly immune, the report states.

"The conclusions are not a surprise to any researcher," says Rowell Huesmann, a psychologist at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and one of the report's authors. The political implications of these findings, however, have led to much public dispute. Huesmann hopes the latest report will settle the debate once and for all in the minds of parents and legislators.

Can A Video Game Lead To Murder?

March 6, 2005

Imagine if the entertainment industry created a video game in which you could decapitate police officers, kill them with a sniper rifle, massacre them with a chainsaw, and set them on fire.

Think anyone would buy such a violent game?

They would, and they have. The game Grand Theft Auto has sold more than 35 million copies, with worldwide sales approaching \$2 billion.

Two weeks ago, a multi-million dollar lawsuit was filed in Alabama against the makers and marketers of Grand Theft Auto, claiming that months of playing the game led a teenager to go on a rampage and kill three men, two of them police officers.

Can a video game train someone to kill? **Correspondent Ed Bradley** reports.

Grand Theft Auto is a world governed by the laws of depravity. See a car you like? Steal it. Someone you don't like? Stomp her. A cop in your way? Blow him away.

There are police at every turn, and endless opportunities to take them down. It is 360 degrees of murder and mayhem: slickly produced, technologically brilliant, and exceedingly violent.

And now, the game is at the center of a civil lawsuit involving the murders of three men in the small town of Fayette, Ala. They were gunned down by 18-year-old Devin Moore, who had played Grand Theft Auto day and night for months.

Attorney Jack Thompson, a long-time crusader against video-game violence, is bringing the suit. "What we're saying is that Devin Moore was, in effect, trained to do what he did. He was given a murder simulator," says Thompson.

"He bought it as a minor. He played it hundreds of hours, which is primarily a cop-killing game. It's our theory, which we think we can prove to a jury in Alabama, that, but for the video-game training, he would not have done what he did."

Moore's victims were Ace Mealer, a 911 dispatcher; James Crump, a police officer; and Arnold Strickland, another officer who was on patrol in the early morning hours of June 7, 2003, when he brought in Moore on suspicion of stealing a car.

Moore had no criminal history, and was cooperative as Strickland booked him inside the Fayette police station. Then suddenly, inexplicably, Moore snapped.

According to Moore's own statement, he lunged at Officer Arnold Strickland, grabbing his .40-caliber Glock automatic and shot Strickland twice, once in the head. Officer James Crump heard the shots and came running. Moore met him in the hallway, and fired three shots into Crump, one of them in the head.

Moore kept walking down the hallway towards the door of the emergency dispatcher. There, he turned and fired five shots into Ace Mealer. Again, one of those shots was in the head. Along the way, Moore had grabbed a set of car keys. He went out the door to the parking lot, jumped into a police cruiser, and took off. It all took less than a minute, and three men were dead.

"The video game industry gave him a cranial menu that popped up in the blink of an eye, in that police station," says Thompson. "And that menu offered him the split-second decision to kill the officers, shoot them in the head, flee in a police car, just as the game itself trained them to do."

After his capture, Moore is reported to have told police, "Life is like a video game. Everybody's got to die sometime." Moore is awaiting trial in criminal court. A suit filed by the families of two of his victims claims that Moore acted out a scenario found in Grand Theft Auto: The player is a street thug trying to take over the city. In one scenario, the player can enter a police precinct, steal a uniform, free a convict from jail, escape by shooting police, and flee in a squad car.

"I've now got the entire police force after me. So you have to eliminate all resistance," says Nicholas Hamner, a law student at the University of Alabama, who demonstrated Grand Theft Auto for *60 Minutes*. Like millions of gamers, the overwhelming majority, he says he plays it simply for fun.

David Walsh, a child psychologist who's co-authored a study connecting violent video games to physical aggression, says the link can be explained in part by pioneering brain research recently done at the National Institutes of Health -- which shows that the teenage brain is not fully developed.

Does repeated exposure to violent video games have more of an impact on a teenager than it does on an adult?

"It does. And that's largely because the teenage brain is different from the adult brain. The impulse control center of the brain, the part of the brain that enables us to think ahead, consider consequences, manage urges -- that's the part of the brain right behind our forehead called the

prefrontal cortex," says Walsh. "That's under construction during the teenage years. In fact, the wiring of that is not completed until the early 20s."

Walsh says this diminished impulse control becomes heightened in a person who has additional risk factors for criminal behavior. Moore had a profoundly troubled upbringing, bouncing back and forth between a broken home and a handful of foster families.

"And so when a young man with a developing brain, already angry, spends hours and hours and hours rehearsing violent acts, and then, and he's put in this situation of emotional stress, there's a likelihood that he will literally go to that familiar pattern that's been wired repeatedly, perhaps thousands and thousands of times," says Walsh.

"You've got probably millions of kids out there playing violent games like Grand Theft Auto and other violent games, who never hurt a fly," says Bradley. "So what does that do to your theory?"

"You know, not every kid that plays a violent video game is gonna turn to violence. And that's because they don't have all of those other risk factors going on," says Walsh. "It's a combination of risk factors, which come together in a tragic outcome."

Arnold Strickland had been a police officer for 25 years when he was murdered. His brother Steve, a Methodist minister, wants the video game industry to pay.

"Why does it have to come to a point to where somebody's life has to be taken before they realize that these games have repercussions to them? Why does it have to be to where my brother's not here anymore," says Steve Strickland. "There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about him."

Strickland, along with Mealer's parents, are suing Moore, as well as Wal-Mart and GameStop, which sold Moore two versions of Grand Theft Auto. Both companies sent us letters insisting they bear no responsibility for Moore's actions, and that the game is played by millions of law-abiding citizens.

Take-Two Interactive, the creator of Grand Theft Auto, and Sony, which makes the device that runs the game, are also being sued. Both declined to talk to *60 Minutes* on camera. Instead, they referred it to Doug Lowenstein, who represents the video game industry.

Lowenstein is not named in the lawsuit, and says he can't comment on it directly. "It's not my job to defend individual titles," says Lowenstein. "My job is to defend the right of people in this industry to create the products that they want to create. That's free expression."

"A police officer we spoke to said, 'Our job is dangerous enough as it is without having our kids growing up playing those games and having the preconceived notions of "let's kill an officer." It's almost like putting a target on us.' Can you see his point?" asks Bradley.

"Look, I have great respect for the law enforcement officers of this country.... I don't think video games inspire people to commit crimes," says Lowenstein. "If people have a criminal mind, it's not because they're getting their ideas from the video games. There's something much more deeply wrong with the individual. And it's not the game that's the problem."

But shouldn't Moore, alone, face the consequences of his decision to kill three men?

"There's plenty of blame to go around. The fact is we think Devin Moore is responsible for what he did," says Thompson. "But we think that the adults who created these games and in effect programmed Devon Moore and assisted him to kill are responsible at least civilly."

Thompson says video game companies had reason to foresee that some of their products would trigger violence, and bolsters his case with claims that the murders in Fayette were not the first thought to be inspired by Grand Theft Auto.

In Oakland, Calif., detectives said the game provoked a street gang accused of robbing and killing six people. In Newport, Tenn., two teenagers told police the game was an influence when they shot at passing cars with a .22 caliber rifle, killing one person. But to date, not a single court case has acknowledged a link between virtual violence and the real thing.

Paul Smith is a First Amendment lawyer who has represented video game companies. "What you have in almost every generation is the new medium that comes along. And it's subject of almost a hysterical attack," says Smith. "If you went back to the 1950s, it's hard to believe now, but comic books were blamed for juvenile delinquency. And I think what you really have here is very much the same phenomenon playing itself out again with a new medium."

Why does he think the courts have ruled against these kinds of lawsuits?

"If you start saying that we're going to sue people because one individual out there read their book or played their game and decided to become a criminal, there is no stopping point," says Smith. "It's a huge new swath of censorship that will be imposed on the media."

Despite its violence, or because of it, the fact is that millions of people like playing Grand Theft Auto. Steve Strickland can't understand why.

"The question I have to ask the manufacturers of them is, 'Why do you make games that target people that are to protect us, police officers, people that we look up to -- people that I respect -- with high admiration,'" says Strickland.

"Why do you want to market a game that gives people the thoughts, even the thoughts of thinking it's OK to shoot police officers? Why do you wanna do that?"

Both Wal-Mart and GameStop, where Moore purchased Grand Theft Auto, say they voluntarily card teenagers in an effort to keep violent games from underage kids. But several states are considering laws that would ban the sale of violent games to those under 17.

Prisons lose video games

Blunt bans games in favor of more rehabilitation time.

By CHRIS BLANK and BEN WELSH

January 25, 2005

JEFFERSON CITY — It's game over for Missouri inmates.

Gov. Matt Blunt passed down an executive order Monday pulling the plug on video games in all state prisons.

It's prison. You're there because you did something wrong against society," Blunt said. "Video games are not punitive or correctional."

The order comes one month after an investigation by The Kansas City Star found inmates playing violent video games at the new Jefferson City Correctional Center, which prompted the prison's superintendent to remove 35 games.

Blunt's order goes even further. It restricts prisoners from playing any video games — not just those with violent content. He said inmates' time could be better spent developing job skills and correcting their behavior.

Twelve of Missouri's 21 correctional facilities had allowed video games.

In the past, corrections officials have publicly supported video games in prisons. But the Missouri Corrections Officers Association, a union that represents many correction officers, welcomed the ban.

Some were basically cop-killing games, and we feel that those kind of games are inappropriate because correctional officers consider themselves the police inside the facility," said Gary Gross, executive director of the association.

John Fougere, a spokesman for the Missouri Department of Corrections, told the Missourian in December that video games were an effective means of controlling inmates and helped reduce confrontations. On Monday, both Fougere and an official at the Jefferson City Correctional Facility referred inquiries to Blunt's office.

Gross hopes state prisons will begin to use more traditional methods for controlling inmates and preparing them for release.

“They don’t need video games,” he said. “They need some other option for keeping inmates busy, whether it’s work or other activities more beneficial to their rehabilitation.”

Blunt, citing a study by the American Correctional Association, said the ban puts Missouri in line with 47 other states. The Associated Press, however, reported Monday that only 44 states responded to that group’s study. That, the AP said, suggests other states might allow video games.

West Virginia, which indicated in the study that it permits video games, is reviewing that policy due in part to press reports of violent video games in the Jefferson City facility.

A spokesman for the West Virginia Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety said inmates were permitted to play video games for recreation.

“Our corrections officials have told us that the games keep our inmates from idle time and we are currently evaluating to see how effective this is,” spokesman Randy Coleman said.

Blunt’s ban wasn’t the only thing regarding Missouri inmates that was happening Monday at the Capitol.

A Senate committee held hearings on two bills sponsored by Sen. John Cauthorn, R-Mexico. One seeks to charge sales tax on items sold in prison stores. The other would stiffen penalties against inmates who harass prison employees by creating a new crime called endangering a corrections employee.

“All you can do now is grin and bear it,” said William Kidwell, a locksmith from the Tipton Correctional Center who testified that he had been harassed about five times in 15 years on the job.

“I had a glass of three-day-old urine thrown up in my face,” Kidwell said. “It had been up on the window sill. It was good and ripe.”

Video Games Display More Nudity

Josh Montez,, Family News in Focus, October 25, 2004.

Parents beware: The video games your kids play have more and more offensive content.

Sex and nudity are showing up more frequently in video games. New titles like "Playboy: the Mansion" and "Leisure Suit Larry" carry a "Mature" rating.

Al Menconi, founder of Al Menconi Ministries, doesn't like the trend, which, he said, is "a . . .

development of the same thing."

The "same thing" he's referring to is offensive content. Violence has always been a staple of video games—but now you can add nudity, according to Bob Waliszewski of Focus on the Family.

"It is a volatile mix to put . . . sexuality and violence in the same mix and market it to young boys, and call it fun," Waliszewski said.

Waliszewski, an expert on youth culture, said most families wouldn't be happy with their teenage boy sitting in the living room looking at a porn magazine—and they need to be just as concerned about virtual/video game nudity.

"Absolutely, you got to be concerned! This is the same pornography—only it's in a different medium," Waliszewski said.

Kimberly McGovern, a spokesman for the Parent's Television Council, has some advice for parents:

"Get educated about the ratings and about what your kids are playing," McGovern said, "(and) know what games your kid owns."

McGovern is worried that the games will teach boys that women are objects—especially if those children don't have strong parental guidance to tell them differently.

Adult Video Games Can Slip Past Parents

Stuart Shepard, Family News in Focus, October 14, 2004.

Many moms and dads probably don't know the games their kids play are pornographic.

They may look similar to innocent video games, but a number of new titles contain sexually oriented content.

One of them is "Outlaw Golf 2," which carries an "M" rating, for "Mature," according to Bob Waliszewski, senior director of Focus on the Family's teen ministries.

"'Outlaw Golf 2.' Does that sound risqué?" Waliszewski asked. "Some parent, whose kid says, 'I'd like the golf game,' would probably say, 'I don't understand video games, but, hey, get the golf game, if it's about golf.' But it's about a whole lot more than golf."

Waliszewski, who quotes here from a gaming magazine review about the video -- "Bits where foxy strippers swap spit?" — is shocked: "Excuse me, what does that have to do with golf?"

He wants parents to be aware that a growing number of games are now garnering an "M" rating, or an "AO" rating (for "adults only.") Though you would likely pick up on the adults-only nature of something called "Playboy: The Mansion," what about games called "The Guy Game" or "Singles: Flirt Up Your Life" - both of which are rated "AO."

Kimberly McGovern of the Parents Television Council was blunt in her assessment: "A lot of parents think that games are made for kids, and that's a perception that I like to try to end."

McGovern said parents need to know what their kids are playing. "Go through all the games that they have now and look at the ratings," she said. "And even watch them play it."

How do violent video games affect children?

In first person shooter video games, the player assumes the role of the shooter and sees the world through the character's eyes. Thus, the game puts weapons in the hands of the player. Players become emotionally involved with their character and take great joy in killing. It is one thing to watch the *Terminator* kill people. It is another thing to BE the terminator and kill people.

As a result:

Players form positive attitudes toward violence and believe others feel the same.

Players form expectations that others behave aggressively.

Players learn that using violence is an appropriate way to solve problems.

Playing violent video games is a way of rehearsing violent behaviors, thus making it easier to imitate that behavior in real life. Killing your own kind is unnatural (http://www.killology.com/art_trained_killing.htm) and violent first person shooters make it easier to overcome this instinct. The army uses simulators that are similar to first person shooter video games to desensitize soldiers to violence and mentally prepare them to kill. (http://www.killology.com/art_onkilling_overcoming.htm)

Violent video games are also quite addictive. Players receive constant and immediate reinforcement for aggressive performance in the form of visual and auditory stimulation. This positive stimulation is reinforced during a kill with special effects such as exploding body parts, blood, and gore. It provides an excellent training ground to learn aggression. The more realistic the game is, the stronger the negative impact. For example, killing cartoon-like creatures may have less of a negative impact than killing realistic looking humans. Also, not all games only reward you for killing "bad" guys. For example, [Grand Theft Auto Vice City](#) rewards you for

killing innocent pedestrians.

If you witness your child becoming increasingly aggressive towards others, you may need to examine his/her consumption of video games and other forms of entertainment.

Electronic Nightmares: Sex and Violence Invade Your Game Console

Not all video games are created equal. Some games are intended to educate, some are for the enjoyment of children. And some, though fewer in number, are intended for adult gamers. These “mature” games are often filled with a tremendous amount of bloody violence, foul language and, sometimes, sexual material.

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) has designed a rating system intended to accurately describe the content and appropriate audience for all video games. These symbols appear on the front of the video game’s package as well as in most advertisements for the product. Much like movie ratings (G, PG, R) these symbols are designed to give consumers an idea of the content of the game. *Unlike movie ratings, however, ESRB ratings only serve as a guide and not as a method of restricting young persons from purchasing games designed for older players.* The most common ratings are E (for Everyone), T (for Teen), and M (Mature). [Other ratings are EC (Early Childhood), K-A (Kids to Adults), AO (Adults Only) and RP (Rating Pending).] The age-based ratings are usually accompanied by specific content descriptors (such as “Blood” or “Strong Sexual Content”).

Although far more E-rated video games are released on the market every year than M-rated games, the games designed for older players tend to attract more attention, and more buyers. Rockstar Games’ *Grand Theft Auto III*, which was the best selling game of 2001, drew fire for its realistic depictions of violence and its explicit sexual content, which included the ability to pick up hookers and be “serviced” by them.

At the end of October, *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, a prequel to *Grand Theft Auto III* hit store shelves. Acclaim’s *BMX XXX* is scheduled for release on November 19 (just in time for Christmas). Although these M-rated video games are specifically designed for and rated for adult gamers, too often they fall into the hands of children.

These games offer graphic sex and violence, and exhibit no shame in promoting those features. An article about *Vice City* trumpets the fact that players now have 40 different weapons at their disposal (the original *Grand Theft Auto* had a measly 25).

Drawing more attention is *BMX XXX*. In creating *BMX XXX*, the publisher decided to “Make the naughtiest, most juvenile gaming experience possible,” according to an industry publication.

Patterned after the mostly harmless, “extreme” sports games on the market, *BMX XXX* adds several new twists: nudity, graphic language, and live footage of strippers. Here’s how the game is promoted on the official website, www.bmxxx.com: “Live strippers, pimps, ho’s and enough dog doo to make you piss your pants. **WE’RE GOING TO HELL, AND YOU’RE COMING WITH US.** Come Inside, Enjoy the Ride and **Keep It Dirty.**”

A recent PTC study found that a full 30% of all video game advertisements airing during programs in which children might be expected to be in the viewing audience, were for M-rated video games, including *Grand Theft Auto III*.

Any parent with young children should be alarmed at the idea that children have easy access to this kind of material. Although the video games are rated, there is no existing enforcement mechanism to ensure that young children *can’t* buy the games. In fact, according to a recent study by Dr. David Walsh published in *Pediatrics*, 90% of teenagers say that their parents never check the video game ratings before allowing them to rent or buy computer or video games. Parents need to do their job to ensure that their children don’t buy these kinds of games. But isn’t it also time for the video game industry to take responsibility for the content of the games they produce and market to children?

Can the Video Game Industry Regulate Itself?

The New York City Council recently investigated the selling of M rated video games to minors and found that 88% of children under 17 were able to purchase M rated games.

“Parents beware, the video games your children are playing are so graphically violent and so sexually explicit, if they were movies they would be rated - X,” said Council Member Gioia. “Killing cops, maiming women, and committing hate crimes are only some of the deplorable acts that are graphically depicted in these games.”

The month long investigation, which surveyed 67 stores, was a follow up to last year’s investigation. That survey showed minors were easily able to purchase ‘M – (Mature) rated games which are considered too violent or sexually explicit for anyone under the age of 17.

“I am troubled that almost a year after the Consumer Affairs Committee held hearings on this issue, very little has changed,” said Phil Reed, chair of the Consumers Committee. “It makes me wonder if the video game industry can truly monitor itself.”

In fact, if this investigation’s results are an indicator, the industry must work much harder to comply with its own standards. The results include the following:

Minors under the age of 17 were able to purchase M-rated video games at 59 of 67 stores investigated (88%).

Four of the 12 stores that did card minors (33%) sold the M-rated games anyway.

Only 13 stores (19%) posted store policies against the sale of M-rated games to minors.

Nine of these 13 stores (69%) sold an M-rated game to minors despite store policy.

51 stores (76%) failed to display the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) video game ratings symbols.

Ten of the 16 stores that did (63%) sold M-rated games to minors under the age of 17, and only eight (50%) asked for identification.

None of these findings show statistically significant improvements from last year's investigation. It's unconscionable that after testifying before the City Council they would do better, the video game industry and retail stores in NYC continue to disregard the video game ratings system and make these games readily available to children." said Council Member Gioia.

Parent-Friendly Retailers

The following retailers participate in the [ESRB Commitment to Parent program](#), where they pledge to use their best efforts not to rent or sell M-rated games to children under 17 without parental consent.

[A & B Sound - Canada](#)

[Blockbuster](#)

[Blockbuster Canada, Co.](#)

[Comp USA](#)

[Electronics Boutique](#)

[Future Shop - Canada](#)

[Gamestop](#)

[Hastings](#)

[Hudson's Bay Company](#)

[KB Toys](#)

[Kmart](#)

[London Drugs Limited - Canada](#)

[Radio Shack Canada](#)

[Rhino Video Games](#)

[Rogers Video - Canada](#)

[Shop-Ko](#)

[Toys "R" Us](#)

[Wal-Mart](#)

FTC Now Accepting Complaints on Media Violence

The Federal Trade Commission has expanded its consumer complaint handling system to categorize and track complaints about media violence, including complaints about the advertising, marketing, and sale of violent movies, electronic games (including video games), and music. The expanded complaint system, implemented in response to Congressional directives, will enable the Commission to track consumer complaints about media violence and identify issues of particular concern to consumers. Consumers who wish to file complaints may use the Commission's online complaint form, available at <http://www.ftc.gov>, or call toll-free at 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357). Consumers should direct complaints regarding the content of television programming to the Federal Communications Commission.

Senator Clinton to Introduce Legislation Intended to Curb the Sale of Violent Video Games to Minors

"We applaud Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton's (D-N.Y.) on her announcement that she intends to introduce legislation that would institute a fine of \$5,000 to retailers for those who sell violent and sexually explicit video games to minors.

"The medical evidence continues to mount, documenting the harm such extremely graphic material can have on children. And the industry's attempt at self-regulation has been proven to be ineffective. The PTC recently undertook a 'mystery shopper' campaign to test retailers' voluntary age restrictions on video game purchases, and found that roughly half the time young children were able to purchase mature-rated games with no proof of age. The PTC's findings corroborate those of the FTC, which in 2000 found that an overwhelming number of underage shoppers were able to buy mature rated games.

"Senator Clinton's initiative resembles state legislation supported by PTC earlier this year in California, which would have restricted the sale of extremely violent games to minors in the Golden State. Nothing in that measure would have restricted adults from purchasing these ultra-violent games, nor would it have prohibited parents from buying these games for their children. Unfortunately the California legislation received a relentless attack from special interest groups with a vested economic interest in seeing that measure fail, which it did."

"The PTC applauds Senator Clinton's efforts, as well as those of Congressman Joe Baca (D-CA) who has also taken a firm stance on this issue. Given the pervasive use of the medium and the demonstrated ill effects on young children, the PTC fully supports measures aimed at curbing the unfettered availability of graphic video games to minors."

Sen, Clinton's Press Release: [Senator Clinton Announces Legislation to Keep Inappropriate Video Games Out of the Hands Of Children](#)

Take Action

Law makers introduce legislation to stop children from buying and renting violent video games

Sen. Hansen Clarke, D-Detroit, said he wants to stop children from being able to rent video games such as "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas," which features characters who kill police officers and solicit prostitutes.

"Based on the video gaming industry's record of developing and heavily promoting excessively violent games, I no longer believe the industry can effectively police itself," Clarke said in a written statement.

Clarke said he wants to regulate the video gaming industry by setting a minimum age for buying or renting adult-rated video games and setting up criminal penalties for retailers who knowingly sell violent games to underage children.

Clarke said he intends to introduce his bills when the new legislative session begins in January.

Clarke isn't the only one trying to crack down on violent video games.

Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, another Democrat, said he would push legislation next spring that would make it a misdemeanor to sell or rent adult-oriented video games to children. He said parents need help sheltering children from the games.

MICHIGAN

Under current Michigan law, any child can rent or purchase graphically violent and sexually explicit video games that glorify illegal, violent and degrading behavior. These games contribute to our violent culture and are inappropriate material for children. The video game industry irresponsibly markets these games to children and has demonstrated it will not adequately police itself.

Democratic State Representative Kathy Angerer has a plan to protect our kids: A ban on the sale or rental of graphic video games to minors. I call on the Michigan Legislature to pass this bill. I am signing this petition to show my support for the Rep. Angerer's plan to keep graphic video games out of the hands of our children.

ILLINOIS

Governor Blagojevich will propose legislation to ban minors from buying violent or sexually explicit video games. The legislation will ban the distribution, sale, rental, and availability of violent and sexually explicit video games to minors. The purpose of this legislation is to protect children from the psychological harm exposure to violent media causes and to prevent seemingly arbitrary violence in society at large. This is common sense legislation that restricts children's access to games that teach them to be killers and disrespect women. Parenting is hard work, and the state has a compelling interest in helping parents raise their children to be upstanding men and women. The bill will narrowly define "violent" and "sexually explicit" games to put retailers on adequate notice which games should and should not be sold to minors.

The proposed legislation also requires retailers or manufacturers to label violent and sexually explicit video games, much like the parental advisory sticker on music CDs. The bill also requires retailers to post signs explaining the video game rating system. The industry has its own rating system, issued by the Entertainment Software Rating Board. While helpful, ESRB ratings are inadequate to put parents on notice of each game's contents. Nonetheless, parents ought to be aware of ESRB ratings and how they work. Making retailers post signs and make rating information available to parents on-site will assist parents in making informed decisions about the games their children play.

The legislation will be enforced by state and local police departments, in conjunction with the Department of Revenue (DOR). DOR employees will conduct periodic inspections to ensure that retailers abide by labeling requirements, post proper signs, and make ratings informational brochures available to parents on-site. DOR employees will coordinate enforcement of violations with state and local police, and appropriate punishments shall be assessed.

For Immediate Release

March 21, 2005

Gov. Blagojevich denounces NARC video game for encouraging drug use and brutality; reaffirms the need for Safe Games Illinois legislation. Governor encourages Senate to pass ban on sale or rental of violent and sexually explicit video games to minors.

GLENVIEW - Gov. Rod Blagojevich today denounced the release of the NARC video game and called on the Senate to pass the Safe Games Illinois Act, House Bill 4023. NARC, created by Midway Games, is rated M-Mature and has drawn national attention for its focus on illegal drug use. The Safe Games Illinois Act, which passed in the House by a margin of 91 to 19 last week, would make Illinois the first state in the nation to ban the sale and rental of violent and sexually explicit video games to children. The governor joined PTA members, concerned parents, and Senate sponsor Deanna Demuzio (D-Carlinville) in Glenview today to urge the Senate to pass the Safe Games Illinois Act.

I've gotten to know quite a few video games over the last few months, but this may be the worst I've seen," said Gov. Blagojevich. "When kids play *NARC*, they spend their free time pretending to be drug addicts and learning how to hurt people. Right now, children can easily get their hands on *NARC*, and other games just like it. The Safe Games legislation would give parents the tools they need to protect their children from games like *NARC*, and I strongly urge the Senate to help turn this commonsense bill into law."

"Just when we think we have seen the worst from the video game industry, a more violent and more offensive game is released," said Chicago Alderman Ed Burke (D-14th Ward). "*NARC* makes a mockery of our law enforcement officials, who serve and protect our citizens with valor and dignity. *NARC* glamorizes drugs and makes light of the severity of substance addiction. I am proud to stand with Governor Blagojevich in this fight to provide Illinois parents with the necessary tools to make informed decisions about video games."

In *NARC*, players become narcotics officers who can arrest drug dealers and use the confiscated drugs to improve their progress in the game. Smoking marijuana slows the game down and gives the player more reaction time, using LSD changes the other characters appearance, making it easier to distinguish "enemies" from non-enemies, and using crack increases the amount of damage a player can inflict on enemies. Using crack also causes the game controller to vibrate, simulating the actual physical effects of taking the drug.

Over the last few years, drug use has become an increasingly popular theme in adult video games. According to the New York Times ("Where a puff of marijuana is the ultimate power-up," March 17, 2005), more than half of the 40 video games cited for drug content by the Entertainment Software Rating Board were released in the last 3 years. The Entertainment Software Rating Board has also cited close to 3,000 games for violence since 1994.

"The new *NARC* video game, packed with violence, gore and even drug use by police officers, is a prime example of why we need to pass the Illinois Safe Games legislation," said Julio Abreu, a Libertyville, Illinois parent and Safe Games Illinois Task Force member. "While we cannot tell the video game industry what types of games to produce, we can certainly protect our children through heightened parental awareness and proactive, family-oriented legislative action."

"I am pleased to appear with the Governor, teachers, parents and students of Springman Middle School," said State Senator Demuzio. "As a grandparent myself, I am very concerned with the impact that violent video games have on our youngsters."

Earlier this month, the House Judiciary Committee on Civil Law unanimously approved The Safe Games Illinois Act. Dr. Michael Rich, Director of the Center on Media and Child Health, provided expert testimony to members of the committee on the ill effects of violent and sexually explicit video games. The bill was overwhelmingly approved in the full House by a margin of 91 to 19.

The Safe Games Illinois Act would ban the rental and sale of violent and sexually explicit video games to children younger than 18. Retailers who violate the ban would be committing a Class A Misdemeanor and could face up to one year in prison or a \$5,000 fine. The bill also requires retailers to label violent and sexually explicit video games, similar to the “Parental Advisory” label found on music CDs, and to post signs explaining the video game rating system. A retailer’s failure to properly label games or place proper signs is punishable by a \$1,000 fine for the first three violations and a \$5,000 fine for every subsequent violation.

“We need to do more than just rely on the current rating system if we are going to stop the video game industry from bombarding our kids with graphic and gratuitous video violence,” said State Senator Jeff Schoenberg (D-Evanston). “The time has come to take a more proactive approach and give parents better tools to effectively monitor the games their children are playing.”

Various studies demonstrate the negative impact playing violent and sexually explicit video games has on minors. One such study, completed in 2003 by four experts, including Douglas Gentile from the National Institute on Media and the Family, concluded that adolescents who expose themselves to greater amounts of video game violence were more hostile, reported getting into arguments with teachers more frequently, were more likely to be involved in physical fights, and performed more poorly in school.

“Video games, although currently rated, are not monitored and have a mesmerizing and addicting hold over our children,” said Mary Ann Topping, Springman Middle School PTA President.

“Since children are extremely impressionable and their brains are literally developing, violent games can and do have a hugely negative effect on them. I would be extremely grateful to receive support as a parent in trying to uphold values and behaviors that are beneficial to my children and their peers.”

The National Institute of Media and the Family recently found that 92 percent of all children ages 2 to 17 play video games, and the average child spends 9 hours each week playing them. The Institute also found that 87 percent of pre-teen and teenage boys play games rated “M” for Mature by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board. M-rated games often contain realistic depictions of human injury and death, mutilation of body parts, rape, sex, profanity, and drug, alcohol and tobacco consumption.

Even though mature games are labeled with the Entertainment Software Ratings Board’s “M” rating, there are no legal mechanisms in place preventing children from buying or renting them. In 2003, the Federal Trade Commission found that 69 percent of teenagers were able to purchase M-rated video games – giving them easy access to images many adults would consider offensive. The FTC also found that not only are minors easily purchasing violent and sexually explicit games, 10 of the 11 companies it studied produced at least one marketing document specifically targeting boys under 17 for a violent, M-rated game. An independent investigation by State Rep. Paul Froehlich (R-Schaumburg) and the Illinois State Crime Commission found that a 15-year-old boy

could purchase “Mature” rated video games (recommended for children 17 and older) at 11 of the 15 stores he visited.

Under the Safe Games Illinois Act, “violent” games are defined as those that include depictions of human-on-human violence in which the player kills, injures, or otherwise causes serious physical harm to another human, including but not limited to depictions of death, dismemberment, amputation, decapitation, maiming, disfigurement, mutilation of body parts, or rape. “Sexually explicit” games are defined as those that the average person -- applying contemporary community standards with respect to minors -- would find are designed to appeal or pander to the prurient interest, and that depict or represent in a manner patently offensive to minors any of the following: an actual or simulated sexual act or sexual contact, an actual or simulated normal or perverted sexual act or a lewd exhibition of reproductive organs.

State Representative Linda Chapa LaVia (D-Aurora) was the lead sponsor of this legislation in the House.