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JANUARY 22, 2015

Violent video games – aggression, profits and the First Amendment

 December 12, 2014 by [stevenyoder](#)  [Leave a Comment](#)



grand_theft_auto_v_combat.jpg

December 13, 2014

Courtesy Wikimedia Commons

FEATURED VIDEO

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Want a torturer’s-eye view of the December 2014 Senate report on the CIA’s detention and interrogation program? If so, you can’t do much better than to try out the videogame Grand Theft Auto V. In one scene, players take the role of a burly thug whose job is to extract information from a man he and an associate have kidnapped. Players get points for choosing the torture method that best does the job—yank out a tooth? hit the subject with a pipe wrench? use electric shock?—and then get to watch the victim bleed or writhe in pain.

Scenes like those appear not to remain just fantasies for some videogame players. Rather, a growing body of research links violent videogames with increased aggression.

Some disturbed young men who have committed murder explicitly link their behavior to their videogame experiences. There’s Norwegian Anders Breivak, who killed 77 people in July 2011 and testified in court that he trained for his attacks using the game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare.

There was 16-year-old Evan Ramsey, who killed two people at his school in 1997. He said in an interview that “I did not understand that if I...pull out a gun and shoot you, there’s a good chance you’re not getting back up. You shoot a guy in ‘Doom’ and he gets back up. You have got to shoot the things in ‘Doom’ eight or nine times before it [sic] dies.”

And Devin Moore, an 18-year-old with no criminal history, shot two police officers and a dispatcher in 2003. Afterward he told police, “Life is a video game. Everybody’s got to die some time.” His lawyer argued in court that he’d committed the murders because he was acting out scenes from Grand Theft Auto, which he’d played repeatedly and which rewards players with points for killing cops. That game also had another adherent—an 8-year-old Louisiana boy who last August was playing it just minutes before shooting his elderly caregiver in the back of the head.

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Commentary: For Hunger Games – Mockingjay, teens are doing the marketing

December 4, 2014

By Joan Oleck – The Hunger Games:

Mockingjay—Part 1

is, for its teen fan base, a powerful lesson in marketing manipulation. For anyone not living in a cave, this third film in the series of four is based on the über-successful book series by



A raft of recent research supports those anecdotal reports of a link between violent video games and aggression. This spring, the largest-yet meta-analysis of 98 independent studies involving almost 37,000 participants [appeared](#) in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. The researchers didn't mince words: "Violent video games increase aggression and aggression-related variables and decrease prosocial outcomes," and the effects were both short- and long-term.

That follows up on a previous meta-analysis that [appeared](#) in the March 2010 *Psychological Bulletin*. It concluded that "the evidence strongly suggests that exposure to violent video games is a causal risk factor for increased aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, and aggressive affect and for decreased empathy and prosocial behavior."

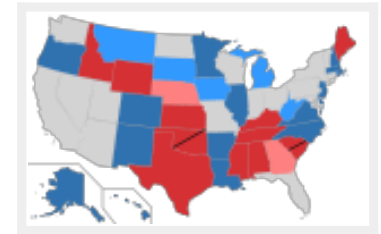
Other research has looked more generally at games' effects on players' outlooks. A study in the August issue of the American Psychological Association's *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* shows a link between violent video games and substance use, risky driving, and risk-taking sexual behavior." The lead researchers concluded that playing games that promote "acting evil" could warp a teenager's moral sense. For example, those who played violent video games were more likely to drive recklessly, such as cutting off other drivers.

And an Italian [study](#) this spring in *Social Psychological & Personality Science* of 172 Italian high school students compared those in the study who played Grand Theft Auto with a comparison group who played a nonviolent videogame. The former group showed "decreased self-control and increased cheating and aggression, especially for people high in moral disengagement."

That last point could be crucial—videogames may lead to actual violence only among a small group of teens, those most at risk. But if even a few are affected, the results can be disastrous given American teens' relatively easy access to guns. "None of these extreme acts, like a school shooting, occurs because of only one risk factor; there are

Suzanne Collins and weaves a compelling tale of teen survival in [...]

**Commentary:
The 2014 US
Midterms –
The
democratic
election
that wasn't**



November 11, 2014

Commentary: The 2014 US Midterms – The democratic election that wasn't American democracy is predicated on two critical pillars. The selection of political representatives by the majority via the ballot box, and the availability of timely and accurate information that is vital for voters in their assessment of candidates and policies consistent with their self-interest. [...]

**Commentary:
International
community
must address
Myanmar's
mistreatment
of Rohingya
minority at East Asian summit**



October 31, 2014

As Myanmar, a country with an

many factors, including feeling socially isolated, being bullied, and so on,” Craig Anderson, a researcher in the field of videogame violence at Iowa State University, told the *New York Times* last year. “But if you look at the literature, I think it’s clear that violent media is one factor; it’s not the largest factor, but it’s also not the smallest.”



Screenshot from Grand Theft Auto V

For their part, the makers of violent games deny that their products have any effect in the real world. “There’s been an enormous amount of research done in the entertainment field about looking for linkages between entertainment content and actual violence, and they haven’t found any,” John Riccitiello, CEO of Electronic Arts, which manufactures violent games like Battlefield 3, told the BBC last year. “Hundreds of millions of dollars of the research has been done [and] has been unable to find a linkage because there isn’t one,” he added.

To be sure, some researchers do come down on his side. One of those is Craig Ferguson, an associate professor of psychology and criminal justice at Texas A&M International University. He was lead researcher on a March 2010 [study](#) in the journal *Crime & Delinquency* that looked at the behavior of almost 1300 junior high school students who played violent videogames. The paper concluded that “delinquent and bullying behavior were predicted by the child’s trait aggression and stress level.

AS MYANMAR, a country with an incipient democracy and alarming human rights record, prepares to host a prestigious regional issues summit in coming weeks, the Southeast Asian nation’s galling treatment of its ethnic minority populations is receiving renewed attention. It’s an inopportune time for the country’s president, Thein Sein, for these issues to be resurfacing in [...]

**Commentary:
Bandwagon
outrage over
Brunei’s strict
Islamic
criminal
code all
but gone**



October 18, 2014

When Brunei became the first Southeast Asian country to nationally adopt a strict Islamic penal code known as Sharia earlier this year, the world was outraged. News and social media told us so in such headlines as “Brunei adopts sharia law amid international outcry” and “Ellen DeGeneres backs boycott of Brunei-owned hotels over ‘stone the [...]’

Violent video game exposure was not found to be predictive of delinquency or bullying... These results question the commonly held belief that violent video games are related to youth delinquency and bullying.”

And a [study](#) this summer in the American Psychological Association’s journal *Psychology of Popular Media* found no link between violent crime rates and video game sales.

Still, crime rates have long fallen in developed countries throughout the world, and the researchers couldn’t determine whether rates might fall even faster in the absence of violent games. And the study’s conclusion that “it is crucial to consider various personality traits of the person playing the violent video game when predicting whether the violent video games will have adverse effects” doesn’t disagree with the contention of video game critics that violent games may move a small group of gamers to real-world violence.

Big profits could be at stake if policymakers draw the conclusion that access to these games need to be curbed. On its first day on the market last fall, the best-selling Grand Theft Auto V earned \$800 million, more than many popular movies earn in an entire run. And Electronic Arts has earned revenues of almost \$4 billion this year.

And one fact does gnaw at the video game industry’s contention that these games have no effect– the response to criticism by some bad actors in the gaming community. Anita Sarkeesian, a critic of the misogyny in the most violent games, has for months been the target of death and rape threats from anonymous male gamers. In October, she canceled a planned speech at Utah State University after an anonymous e-mail to the school, penned in the name of a man who killed 14 women in Canada, declared that if she appeared, it “would be the deadliest school shooting in American history” and that she would “die screaming like the craven little whore that she is if you let her come to USU.” Two other female critics, also targets of death threats, have fled their homes in fear for their safety.

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In 2011, the Supreme Court invalidated a California law barring the sale of violent games to minors on First Amendment grounds. But if one of the critics ends up hurt or worse, it could well lay the groundwork for policymakers to regulate the industry in another way that complies with that ruling—say, requiring background checks for gamers.

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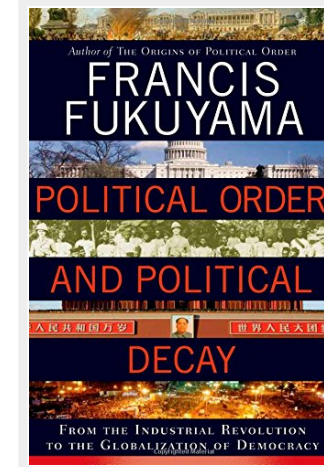
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TERMS OF SERVICE Effective August 11, 2014

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