

Violence in Video Games and Games Regulation

Violence in Video Games

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USPA NEWS - Today an editorial statement was released by the National Committee for Games Policy and Jonathan Hansell on the issue of violence in video games.

So, this issue really started with the era of "DOOM" and the Columbine School shooting. Doom is a first-person shooter where the protagonist shoots demons and other creatures. It was one of the earlier shooter games to gain super-popularity. With this popularity came questions over what the influence such violence might have on children/teens. Fast forward a few years and the Columbine School shooting takes place. It was the largest school shooting in US history at the time and was very damaging to the reputation of violent games.

The shooters created a mock-up of their planned shooting in DOOM, attaching the violent video game debate to the shooting. Parents sued video game manufacturers, but the lawsuits didn't go anywhere. Debate re-ignited whenever another Grand Theft Auto game was released, as the game encourages/allows the indiscriminate killing or victimizing of civilians, as the player takes the role of a criminal.

This issue gets messy when it comes to political lines, as it doesn't fall neatly into the US political parties. Republicans/conservatives in the past (1980s ish) were much more influenced by the Evangelical Christian population which would have seen the games as dangerous largely. However, the modern debate has shifted some to include Democrats/liberals calling for censoring video games as well, as they don't shy away from governmental control as much as conservatives do. The libertarian position on the issue would be quite simply that the government has no business messing with the video game market or censoring anything.

The violent video game debate in my opinion falls much more along age lines than strictly political lines. The older population doesn't have as much experience with the games and attaches no sentimental value or even perhaps much regular value to them. This leads to the older population being more willing to see them as wrong or dangerous than the younger population which has actually had some experience with the games. The debate has largely quieted down in the US from the times of Columbine, but occasional flare-ups occur, such as when "Postal 2" and "Hatred" were released, both allowing for extreme violence against the population at large in-game. It should be noted that long-term studies show no link between the playing of violent video games and committing violent acts. However, there may be an argument to be made about the element of desensitization that occurs after repeated exposure to digital violence.

Although the debate is muted in America, in other countries, the battle is ongoing. Australia, for example, is very westernized, but also allows for heavy censorship of incoming video game material when it comes to violence.

Looking to the future, whenever VR games begin to offer first-person shooter games akin to GTA, expect the debate to come to a boil again.

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