Ethics of the Glorification of Crime in Video Games

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This presentation does contain depictions of weapons and criminal activity that may make individuals uncomfortable, however no imagery is for the glorification of such weapons or activities, simply for informational purposes.

Focus

Video games that include crime as an activity, touching on violence and destruction.

The Grand Theft Auto Series
Also:

- Call of Duty
- Saints Row
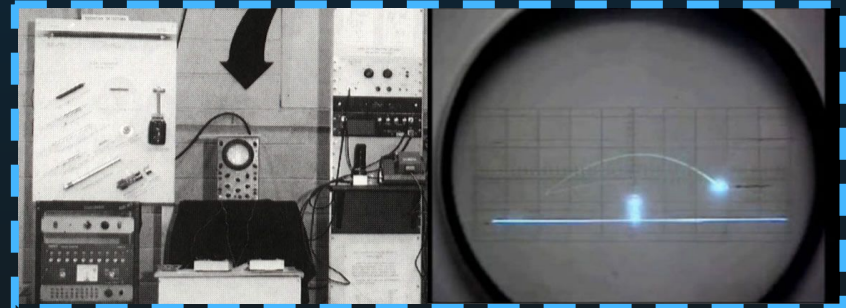
The Dawn of Video Games

OXO (A.S. Douglas)

- May be the true first computer game
- Disputed for the fact that there were few changing graphics
- Research, not entertainment
- Had to be played at Cambridge

Tennis for Two (William Higinbotham & Robert Dvorak)

- First game for entertainment
- Ballistic missiles
- Trajectories
- Real Physics

Spacewar

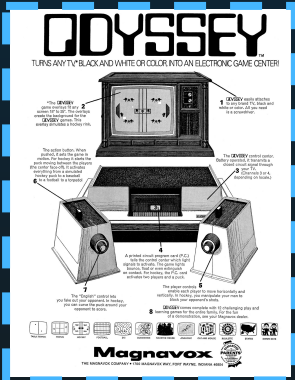An amazing game for the time, but…

- Some consider the first full video game
- First example of computerized violence
  - What people enjoy
- Fun to destroy things
  - Trends with games
  - Doing things that you can't do in real life

Rise of the Console

Magnavox Odyssey

- Mostly considered a flop
- Paved the way for others… eventually
- Lawsuits

Atari

- Arcade
- Home console
- The "successful" first console

Nintendo (NES)

Sega

Sony Playstation

Microsoft Xbox

ODYSSEY
TURNS ANY TV's BLACK AND WHITE OR COLOR INTO AN ELECTRONIC GAME CENTER!

Magnavox

The Modern Age of Video Games

- High definition gaming
  - Blu-ray
- Motion tracking
  - Wii
  - Kinect
- Touchpads
- Mobile/Smart Phones
  - Gaming could reach more people than ever before
  - No longer for "gamers"
- Higher level video enhancement
  - 4K
- Virtual Reality
  - Maybe the most amazing advancement
  - Not fully popularized yet, a gimmick
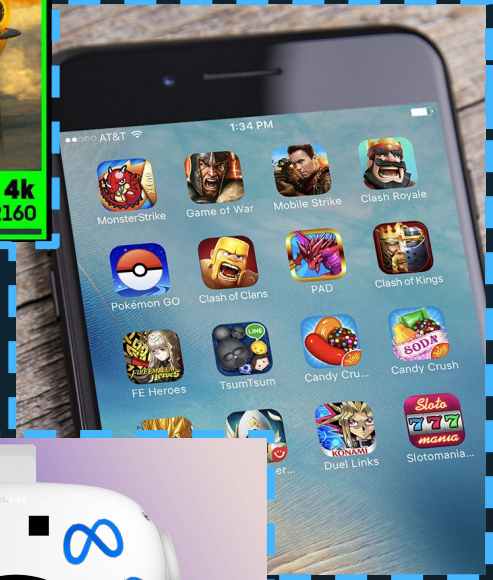
Huge graphical enhancements

More beautiful than ever before

- Scenery
- Immersion
- Games can now be called "art"

On the other hand...

- Intense graphics
- Blood and gore
- Realism on a scale never imagined
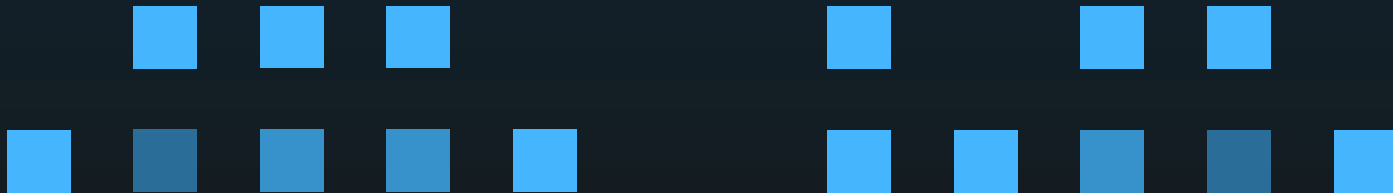
How things changed

David Jones

- "Menace"
- DMA Design
  - Lemmings
- Cops and robbers idea
  - Player was NOT a Cop

Sam and Dan Houser

- Hip Hop and Rap lead to BMG Music
- BMG Interactive
- Sega Saturn
  - Very little success

Finally David Jones pitched the Houser brothers an idea for a game…

Race and Chase

Grand Theft Auto

- Signed and renamed
- Controversy
  - Condemned by many countries and developers
  - Banned by Brazil
- Destructive and violent behavior
  - Could do anything you wanted in
  - Missions were geared towards violence
- Crime was at the center of it all
  - Playing "against the cops"

With all of this… it was a smash hit in many demographics
- If the adults hated it because of violence, even better
- Critics only made it more popular

And it continued to grow

An unexpected change

September 11th, 2001

- Suddenly there were real lines
- Reskinning
- Removing certain aspects

Even with the edits, GTA III was still setting the gaming world on fire

Grand Theft Auto now

- Five installments
  - Sixth?
- Still true to roots
- Popular as ever
- GTA 5 has been released for 3 generations of consoles
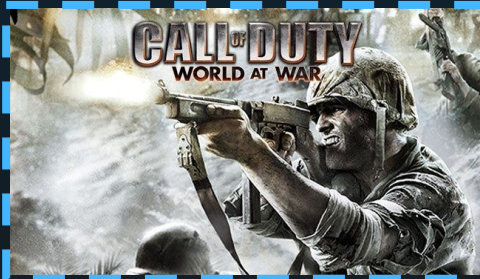- Crime is still the central theme

Violence in Video Games

Violence in video games started a long time ago
- Spacewar
- Depictions of violence have been in every generation of games
- It can make games fun

Call of Duty
- Entire game is about war
- Started in 2003
  - Almost every year a new game is made
- People love it
- Senseless but fun

Going back to GTA…
- It has already been mentioned that GTA has and will continue to be full of violence
- No reason to kill
  - People still do
- It is fun to have power
- Video games aren't real

Crime in GTA

Not only is there violence, there is just plain crime

- Robberies
- Theft
- Heists
  - A big part of the game is just planning
  - The heist typically is shorter
- Too realistic
- Conditioning?

Saints Row gang wars

Non-player Characters (NPCs)
Is it wrong to mistreat them?

"there is nothing worthy of being called 'cruelty' in video games because the characters are not capable of feeling pain or suffering" ~Marcus Schulzke

- Fake does not justify actions
- Simulations are so close to real
- May prevent people from actual harm
  - Anger control
- Crime even in a virtual world

Kantian Ethics

Can go either way, since there is no direct harm done

- Would suggest that no harm means that there is no problem
- Since typically people have no ill means when they play games, it makes no difference

There is the other view:

- Debase yourself with cruelty
- Learning about crimes
- Failure to place respect
- More likely to think things are right
- Comparing animals to NPCs

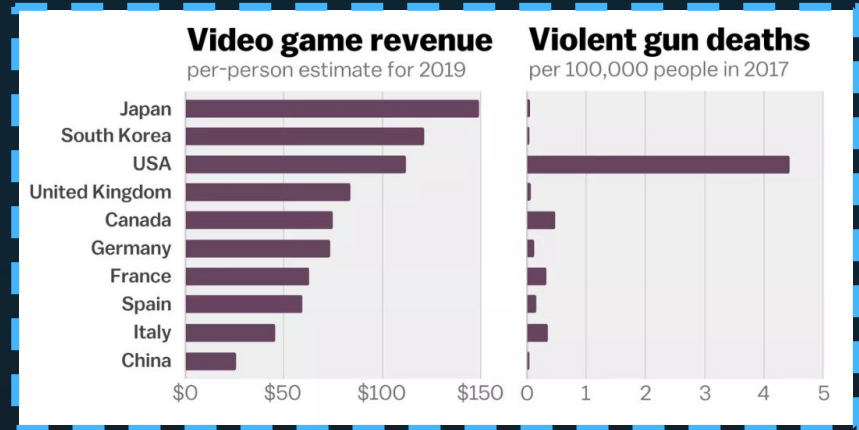In the end, it tends to be up to how you play and how it affects you.

Utilitarianism

- Dangerous acts
  - Any act that goes against Utilitarianism must present some risk
- Risk-increasing acts
- Playing games does not inherently increase risks
- Sports and violence
- To say that participating in virtual crime is risky, it must increase risk
- Risk vs Act Utilitarianism
  - To condemn playing games such as these, the risk MUST outweigh the rewards
  - Act Utilitarianism gives some leeway to specific situations

Real-life causation?

As is consistently accepted, there is no clear answer

- No studies have been able to prove beyond correlation
- Correlation is not enough to present a harmful act
- There are numerous articles explaining real-life crimes and what game the perpetrator got inspiration from
- Validity strongly questioned

Video game revenue
per-person estimate for 2019

Violent gun deaths
per 100,000 people in 2017

Japan
South Korea
USA
United Kingdom
Canada
Germany
France
Spain
Italy
China

$0 $50 $100 $150

0   1   2   3   4   5

Lasting Impacts

Positives

- Attention
- Cognitian
- Visuospatial
- Possible learning experiences
- Creativity

Negatives

- Aggression?
- Desensitization
- Ethical dilemmas
- Criminal activity

Children

- Moldable
- Every action shapes their perspective
- Wrong lessons

Guinea Pigs for Tech

Our generation has, and will continue to be guinea pigs for technology.

- Smart phones
- Social Media
- Advertising
- GMOs (Fairly proven to be safe, just another technological improvement)
- Technological immersion 24/7

Does anyone truly know the lasting effects?

The same can be said for video games

Key Takeaways

- Violence and depictions of crime in video games have been steadily increasing
- Since graphics and processing have been getting better, the games feel more and more realistic
- There may be some true harm from playing these games for years
- Depicting crime in a positive light in video games is hard to judge, but may be a bad idea overall
- It is not yet an ethical violation to produce these games, but if games continue to become more crime driven, there may be a point that the developers have an ethical dilemma

Thank you

Questions?

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Order of presentation

Title
Focus
History
    First games (OXO, Tennis for Two, Spacewar)
    Home consoles
    Modern games
    What were games for originally?
Where we are now (games that I am focusing on)
Grand Theft Auto
    Beginnings
    Sept 11th, 2001
    Current age
Violence
    Call of Duty
    GTA
Crime in GTA
    Senseless deeds
    Heists

Is it even wrong to mistreat NPCs? (Ethical view)
    Schulzke says no, they are not real
    Fake does not justify actions
    Simulations can be like real life
Ethics
    Kantian issues
        Dabasing with cruelty
        Failure to place respect
    Violating oneself
        More likely to commit acts
Utilitarianism
    Unless particular harm, cannot condemn
    Proof of crimes based on games
        Examples?
Lasting impacts
    Positives (attention, cognitian, visuospatial)
    Negatives (Aggression? Not agreed upon)
Guinea pigs for tech
    As for so much technology, we are the tests
    Ever changing, there is no time to ensure