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Project 1: Video Games Struggle on Violence

The creation of the Nintendo Entertainment System spawned the belief that video games were toys targeted towards children. However, as the video game industry grew so did its audience. Games were not only being marketed to young children but young adults. As a result extremely violent video games such as *Mortal Kombat* and *Grand Theft Auto* were created. Both video games were infamous for the controversy they generated, particularly *Mortal Kombat* as it was one of the first video games to have sparked the debate of video games causing children to commit violent acts.

Mortal Kombat's Controversy

Mortal Kombat, a fighting game inspired by the rated R action film *Bloodsport*, was placed in arcades in 1992. However what attracted audiences was not its gameplay, but its blood and gore. *Mortal Kombat* featured secret finishing moves called fatalities that gave players the ability to decapitate and burn opponents alive among others. Because most arcades contain no age restrictions, parents, politicians, and the media reacted negatively to this as they believed children would emulate *Mortal Kombat's* violence after playing.

According to BBC News, this backlash led to a court case in 1993 where Former Chief of staff Joe Lieberman vowed to have a rating system for video games to be created. Lieberman was successful as The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) was introduced within five months; its first act was to give *Mortal Kombat* an M rating, making it illegal for those who are underage to purchase the game.

Grand Theft Auto's Controversy

The ESRB would take action once again, but this time, against Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto San Andreas (GTASA)* for its controversial hot coffee mod in 2005. Originally programmed to be locked away, hot coffee was a scene that featured two characters having intercourse. Despite being made inaccessible, it was discovered and programmed back into all versions of the game by modders. The ESRB recalled all versions of *GTASA* after it was found and changed its rating from M for mature to A for adults.

Despite this, *GTASA* and all *GTA* video games, were more notorious for having the ability to murder innocent civilians and police officers while being depicted as a criminal. According to Doug Gross of CNN, *GTA* "inherited the mantle of violent game poster child from '*Mortal Kombat*'" due to it being more realistic in its violence and setting. Multiple court cases soon followed the games releases, but the first recorded case was in 2003 where Rockstar was sued by the family of two victims who were shot. They believed *GTA* was the main reason as to why their loved ones were murdered in the first place.

Video Game Studies

GTA and *Mortal Kombat* would cause researchers to study the effects violent video games have on children who play it. A report from the American Psychological Association (APA) examined 150 different studies in 2015 and concluded that video games may lead to increased aggression, but not to the point of committing crimes. As reported by Michael Casey of CBS News, '[s]cientists have investigated the use of violent video games for more than two decades but to date, there is very limited research addressing whether violent video games cause people to commit acts of criminal violence.'

In a more recent study that began in 1991 by the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, the omissions pointed out by Casey are addressed. It found that video games may lead to depression and conduct disorder. More than 4,000 adolescents over the course of their lives participated, among those approximately 1,800 were effected. However the study states that this was mainly found in children who played shoot-em-ups, namely *Doom*. Although the risk of acquiring depression and conduct disorder is low, there are many other factors besides video games that may increase or decrease the chance of it occurring.

Despite the fact that violent video games still receive negative criticisms for their violence, the industry continues to be successful. Today, violent video games such as *GTA*, *Mortal Kombat*, and *Doom* have become very popular and are regarded as some of the best and most memorable video games of all time.

Works Cited

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