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VIOLENCE, SEX, RACE, AND AGE IN POPULAR VIDEO GAMES: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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After dinner in a suburban American home, a 13-year-old boy plays a video game alone in his bedroom. On the screen, the boy's hero, Duke Nukem, approaches a strip club where, before entering, he guns down the local authorities. Duke is a young, White man—blond and tan, with huge, rippling muscles. On entering the club, he sees several virtually naked young women dancing on poles, moaning and gyrating. He shoots and kills one of the young women. As her screams fade, Duke fires his witty retort, "Too bad, she was cute."

INTRODUCTION

This scene is all too typical of what is happening nightly in homes across America. The Duke Nukem 3D video game is the 11th most popular selling PC video game of all time (*PC Data Top Games of 1999, 2000*). Forty-nine percent of children have a video game player or computer in their bedrooms (Song & Anderson, 2001). Griffiths and Hunt (1998) reported that 98.7% of the adolescents they studied were video game players. Ninety-four percent of eighth and ninth graders reported playing video games, with 59% reporting playing at least once a week (Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh., 2004). Finally, Paik (2001) reported that 87% of younger children and 70% of adolescents play computer games, and that more boys (87%) than girls (79%) play. Among eighth- and ninth-grade students, boys reported playing an average of 13 hours per week, with girls playing an average of 5 hours per week (Gentile et al., 2004). Males also reported preferring games in the sports or violence categories, whereas females prefer intellectual-creative or action-

fantasy games. Finally, worldwide annual video game sales reached \$20 billion by the year 2000 (Cohen, 2000; Video game sales, 2001). Furthermore, the U.S. video game industry has become "the fourth pillar of the entertainment business, alongside movies, music and television. Games sales regularly rival box-office receipts, and the top game publishers routinely exceed \$1 billion in annual revenue" (Reuters, 2005a, p. 14).

Video Games as a Source of Information

Mass media act as an agent of socialization. Individuals learn cultural rules from the stories told in that culture (Ryan & Wentworth, 1999). Whereas stories used to be told person-to-person within communities, the media are now telling the stories (Walsh, 1997); thus, individuals learn rules from the media (Ryan & Wentworth, 1999). The past two decades have seen an explosion of information sources including the Internet, video games, and an expanding array of television channels. The stories told by the media include messages about social roles as they relate to race, sex, and age. Many of these stories are violent and describe, in terms of race, sex, and age, who is the powerful aggressor and who are the victims. A person's community loses moral authority as messages come from outside that community. The self becomes isolated and the definitions of acceptable and deviant behavior change (Ryan & Wentworth, 1999). Therefore, it is important to analyze the content of media and its role in socialization, especially with regard to character portrayals.

Portrayal of Gender in Video Games

There has been little examination of the role of female characters in video games. One notable exception is a study by Tracy Dietz (1998), who analyzed aggressive content and the portrayal of women in the top-selling Sega and Nintendo video games. She found that 79% of the games included aggression, with 21% depicting violence toward women. Twenty-eight percent of the games portrayed women as sex objects. Only 15% of the games portrayed women as heroic characters, and even those heroic roles were mostly sexualized or trivialized. In games with female characters, the females were most likely to be depicted as victims or as damsels in distress. Other common depictions included females portrayed as visions of beauty, as evil or obstacles to the game, and in devalued or insignificant roles.

It is interesting that Dietz (1998) found that the most common depiction of female characters was no depiction at all: Most games simply did not have female characters. Similarly, Braun and Giroux (1989) found that in arcade video games, female screen displays and synthetic voice emissions were practically nonexistent.

The Media Education Foundation (Huntemann, 2000) noted that video games tend to send blatant messages about gender in Western culture. A female character is often the damsel in distress or someone who simply fulfills male desires. Female characters are portrayed with distorted body images. These images are hypersexual, with disproportionately large breasts and small waists and hips, and are often physically impossible, especially given the athletic prowess of the characters (Huntemann, 2000). For men, the gender portrayal is equally stereotypical and blatant, showing men as symbols of power and dominance. Male physical appearance is hypermasculine, often featuring chest and arm muscles in massive and unrealistic proportions. This is the male hero fantasy: the muscular giant who wins battles and women alike (Huntemann, 2000).

In some recent video games, female aggressive heroines are emerging. *Tomb Raider's* heroine, Lara Croft, is perhaps the most notable, but is accompanied by others such as *Perfect Dark's* Joanna Dark. Are these characters positive or negative role models? Although the idea of female heroines is positive, the highly sexualized way they are portrayed robs them of dignity. On the surface, they may appear empowered, but they are actually created to appeal to the young, male game player (Huntemann, 2000).

Race and Age in Violent Video Games

The Media Education Foundation (Huntemann, 2000) reported that 8 of the 10 top-selling games feature White characters. Racial minorities are depicted primarily in stereotypical ways. For example, in the game *Kingpin*, in which Blacks are portrayed as street thugs and prostitutes, a White, male character tries to overpower the Black criminal element.

Vasil and Wass (1993) analyzed research on the treatment of age in several different media sources including television and print media. They concluded that, across these studies, the elderly, especially women, were underrepresented. When elderly characters were portrayed, they were depicted negatively, cast in minor roles, and underdeveloped as characters. The apparent ages of video game characters have never, to our knowledge, been studied empirically. If characters are similar in age to the player, this may help the player identify with the character. Identification with an aggressor has been shown to increase aggressive behavior in those exposed to aggressive media (see Berkowitz, 1993, for a discussion).

Content Analyses: Violence

A handful of studies have examined the percentage of popular games that are violent. A content analysis of Canadian arcade games revealed that 71% were violent (Braun and Giroux, 1989). Provenzo (1991) found that about 85% of the most popular games were violent. Funk (1993) asked ado-

lescents to report their favorite video games and found that 50% included a violent game on their list. Buchman and Funk (1996) reported the same numbers in their study of fourth through eighth graders.

Similarly, Dietz (1998) found that 79% of the popular Sega and Nintendo titles she studied were aggressive in nature. Twenty-one percent included violence specifically directed toward women. Nearly half the games included violence directed specifically at other characters, with the majority of these characters being human or human-like and including graphic violence.

Video Game Violence Linked to Aggression

Anderson and Bushman (2001) conducted a meta-analysis on 35 different studies of violent video games to see if these would reveal similar patterns in their findings. They identified the following consistent pattern: Exposure to violent video games increases physiological arousal, aggressive thoughts, aggressive emotions, and aggressive actions and decreases positive, prosocial actions. Thus, there is reason to be concerned about the prevalence of violence in video games (for reviews of the literature, see Dill & Dill, 1998; Gentile & Anderson, 2003).

Rationale for the Present Investigation

For this study we measured the prevalence of violence in top-selling video games with emphasis on a detailed description of the nature of the violence. Special attention was given to the interaction of video game violence with the demographics of the video game characters. Of primary interest was how the race, sex, and age of the characters related to roles of power, dominance, and aggression. Also reported are the demographics and portrayals of characters in general, notwithstanding the violent content of the game. This study is unique in its analysis of the content of video games and provides important information about this growing medium. Because the content of video games changes rapidly over time, follow-up investigations are necessary.

METHOD

The Games

The games chosen for this analysis came from a published list of the 20 top-selling PC video games of 1999 (*PC data top games of all time, 1999; PC data top games, 2000*). PC games were chosen because they are available to a wide audience and because past content analyses of video games have stud-

ied other game formats such as dedicated game systems and arcade games. Following is the list of the games and their publishers: *RollerCoaster Tycoon* (Hasbro Interactive), *SimCity 3000* (Electronic Arts), *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?* (Disney), *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings* (Microsoft), *StarCraft* (Havas Interactive), *Half-Life* (Havas Interactive), *Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun* (Westwood), *Microsoft Flight Simulator* (Microsoft), *Frogger* (Hasbro Interactive), *Baldur's Gate* (Interplay), *Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2* (Activision), *Wheel of Fortune* (Hasbro Interactive), *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Gold Edition* (Red Storm), *StarCraft Expansion: Brood War* (Havas Interactive), *Need for Speed 3: Hot Pursuit* (Electronic Arts), *Monopoly* (Hasbro Interactive), *Deer Hunter III* (GT Interactive), *Star Wars Episode I: Phantom Menace* (LucasArts), *Microsoft Combat Flight Simulator* (Microsoft), and *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear* (Red Storm).

Each game was played by a professional male gamer in his early 20s. His game play was recorded on videocassettes, which were subsequently viewed by the coders. Game play was standardized in the following ways: Wherever applicable, the same game settings were used. For example, if there was a choice of difficulty level, the highest level was chosen. For each game, the opening segments and control screen were recorded so the coders could view the story line and the general game controls. The time each game was recorded was set at a minimum of 10 minutes and a maximum of 30 minutes. The minimum time was used on games with straightforward and relatively unvarying story lines; the maximum time was used for games with different levels or story lines, with an attempt made to demonstrate all the major play modes. Because these are samples of game play, not all characters and settings were necessarily recorded, although an attempt was made to sample each of the main actions of the game in question.

Three trained coders (a male and a female psychologist and a male communications professor) rated each of the 20 video games. After watching the complete video recording of each game, each coder independently rated the game according to the categories described below. Next, the coders compared ratings. Any discrepancies were resolved by viewing disputed footage (e.g., to determine the race of a character whose race was disputed). After discrepancies were resolved, a single list of characteristics resulted. Interrater reliability was acceptably high. The average reliability coefficient for the scaled items was $r = 0.81$. The average reliability coefficient for the categorical items was $\kappa = 0.98$.

Demographics of Video Game Characters

Sex, Race, and Age

Coders judged each character's gender, race (Black, White, Latino, Asian, Indian, or other), and age (child, adolescent, adult, or senior).

Role

Coders categorized the character's role in the game as being a main character (hero or primary player), target (object of violence in aggressive games), or secondary character (other).

Life-Form Type

Raters coded the life-form type of the video game characters according to the following categories: human, humanoid/alien, animal, cartoon, and robot/mechanical. Life-form type is an important variable, because where modeling behavior is concerned, media viewers tend not only to imitate the aggressive behavior they witnessed but to take into account the personal characteristics of the perpetrator and victim. Phillips (1986) found increases in homicide rates after highly publicized prizefights. It is interesting that the races of the murderer and victim matched those of the winner and loser in the prizefight. Violence that is perceived as more realistic is more likely to incite violence in the viewer (see Geen, 2001, for a review). Humans, animals, and robots are all concrete characters, whereas cartoons and aliens are less concrete.

Characterization

For each video game character, raters selected whether the character fit any of the following important roles: sexualized, comrade, obstacle, needs rescue, positive role, and negative role. The six categories were considered independent. Characters were rated as sexualized if they were depicted as scantily clad, as sex objects, or with sexualized features such as large breasts, or if the dialogue surrounding that character was sexual in nature. Comrades were secondary characters who aided or otherwise befriended the main character. The obstacle category followed from Dietz's (1998) description. Dietz (1998) also found that female video game characters were often depicted as damsels in distress. This study expanded the term *damsel in distress* to include characters of both sexes with the term *needs rescue*.

Finally, a rating of whether characters were depicted particularly positively or negatively during game play was included. These terms were confined to anything outside the main action of the game (a soldier in a war game would not be coded as a negative role, but characters who demonstrated vices aside from the main action of the game were rated as negative).

Aggressive Content of the Video Games

Realism

Several items tapping into this realism were constructed. All items described below were rated on five-point Likert scales with 0 (*not at all*) and 4 (*extremely*) being the endpoints. The first set of questions was as follows:

“How aggressive is this video game?” “When violence happens, how violent are the visual graphics?” and “When violence happens, how violent are the auditory elements?”

Highly concrete aggressive stimuli elicit more aggression than do less concrete stimuli (Turner & Goldsmith, 1976). The next set of questions distinguished between the terms *realistic* and *reality-based* for several dimensions of the games. *Realistic* referred to the quality of the computer graphics. Something was *reality-based* if “it exists or could exist in the real world.” Both the realistic and reality-based nature of the settings, main characters, targets, and weapons were assessed.

The next questions expanded the idea of realism for the weapons. Included was the question “How accessible are the weapons?” Weapon accessibility was defined as the perceived likelihood that a person could attain the weapons in real life. With a checklist, weapons were placed into the following categories: real, science fiction, fantasy, and hands. More than one category could be chosen for a given game. *Real* weapons were weapons that are currently available in the real world. *Hands* denoted aggression through hand-to-hand combat. The science fiction and fantasy categories were used for categorizing nonreal weaponry. The difference between the two is that fantasy weapons do not exist and cannot theoretically be created (e.g., magic wands) whereas science fiction weapons do not exist, but could theoretically be created in the future on the basis of scientific theory (e.g., spaceships that fire lasers).

Next, the main view of the game was coded by checking one of four categories: from person’s eyes (e.g., seeing hands shoot), shows main character’s entire body (or vehicle) from behind, shows characters (vehicle) as seen from directly above, or shows characters (vehicles) interacting from a distance. The first category is the most realistic, and the categories decline in realism from there. These categories are also theoretically related to the degree that the player would be likely to identify with the aggressor. It was theorized that identification should be greatest when seeing the action through the character’s eyes and least when seeing the game characters interact from a distance. Finally, whether any of the targets of aggression were objects or implicit targets was rated. *Objects* were defined as nonliving entities, and *implicit targets* were defined as targets that were supposed to be life forms but could not be directly viewed by the player (e.g., ships that would presumably be piloted by a living being).

Categories

According to a modified version of Buchman and Funk’s (1996) video game categories, all games were classified as life-form violence, general entertainment, sports violence, or nonviolent sports.

RESULTS

Game Characteristics

Of the top-20 selling games from 1999, 12 (60%) have violence as a major theme. The games were classified as life-form violence (50%), general entertainment (35%), sports violence (10%), and nonviolent sports (5%). The amount of aggression was rated on a 0–4 scale, with 4 representing *extremely aggressive*. Sixty-five percent of games have nonzero aggression scores, and 12 (60%) have scores greater than the midpoint of the scale, hereafter referred to as high scores. Among the 12 games with violence as a major theme, the mean aggression score is 3.6 ($SD = 0.47$).

Half of the top 20 games are presented from the player's eyes (first-person viewpoint), 45% are presented showing the characters interacting from a distance, and 5% show characters as seen from directly above. Within violent games, half are presented from a first-person viewpoint, and half show the characters interacting from a distance. Three of the 20 games (15%) include profanity (all three are violent games and constitute 25% of the violent games).

Games are very realistic, both in terms of the portrayals of characters and settings and in terms of how realistic the graphics are. When considering how reality-based the settings are, raters gave scores at or above the scale midpoint for 100% of the games ($M = 3.6$ on the 0–4 scale, $SD = 0.67$). When considering how reality-based the main characters are, raters again gave high scores to 100% of the games ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 0.54$). Raters gave high scores to 85% of games when considering how realistic the graphics depicting the game setting are, and to 57% of games when considering the realism of the graphics depicting the game characters. The results are similar for violent video games.

Violent Game Characteristics

A number of game characteristics of the 12 violent games were rated (again on a 0 to 4 scale). Two thirds of violent games received scores at or above the scale midpoint for how violent the graphics are ($M = 2.2$, $SD = 0.77$), and 58% received high scores for how violent the auditory elements are ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 0.63$). Although most games (83%) received high scores for how reality-based the weapons are, only 50% received high scores for how realistic the weapons graphics are. Two thirds of games similarly received high scores for how reality-based the targets of violence are, although only 50% received high scores for how realistic the target graphics are. Half of violent games include objects as targets, and 42% include implicit targets (e.g., airplanes piloted by unseen living beings). Among violent games, 92%

include real weapons, 33% include science fiction weapons, and 8% include fantasy weapons.

Eighty-three percent of violent games received high scores for how instrumental the aggression was. Although only 45% of violent games received high scores regarding their extent of having a theme of retributational aggression, 82% had nonzero scores, indicating at least some amount of aggression as justified retribution. All of the violent games received high scores for rewarding aggressive behaviors. Twenty-five percent of violent games combine aggression and humor at least some of the time. Although only one game received a high score for showing disrespect for life (*StarCraft*), 42% of violent games received nonzero scores. Over half (58%) of the games include at least some elements of gratuitous violence. Of those games that include gratuitous violence, 22% reward the gratuitous violence and 33% punish the gratuitous violence. Seventeen percent of violent games have some aspects of sexualized violence.

Characteristics of Game Characters

Across the top 20 games, the characters are predominantly White male adults. Across the violent games, the characters are also predominantly White male adults.

Main Characters

Across the top 20 games, the main characters (28%) are predominantly male. Only 10% of main characters are female, whereas 70% are male and 20% could be either. Over two thirds of the main characters (68%) are White, with 11% Black and 11% Latino. Of the specifically male main characters, 77% are White, 8% are Black, and 15% are Latino. Of the two specifically female main characters, one is Black and one is Israeli. Ninety-five percent of main characters are portrayed as adults, and 90% are humans.

Secondary Characters

Across the top 20 games, a majority of the secondary characters (48%) are male (55%). Thirty-one percent of secondary characters are female and 14% can be either male or female or are mixed groups of males and females. Over two thirds of the secondary characters (72%) are White, with 10% Black, and 0% Latino, although 9% include mixed-race groups. Of the specifically male secondary characters, 78% are White, 11% are Black, 0% are Latino, 6% are American Indian, and 5% are other races. Of the specifically female secondary characters, 87% are White and 13% are other races. Sixty-nine percent of secondary characters are portrayed as adults, and 73% are humans.

The category of secondary characters tends to show the greatest flexibility in age. Although few characters are portrayed as children, adolescents, or seniors, when these age characters do appear in games, they are most likely to be secondary characters. Furthermore, although not many characters are portrayed as needing rescue or as highly sexualized characters overall, when they appear, they appear as secondary characters. Characters needing rescue are about equally likely to be males or females in this sample of games (43% male, 29% female, 28% both/mixed), although only females are portrayed as highly sexualized. Characters portrayed as comrades are much more likely to be male than female, regardless of whether they are main characters (76% male, 10% female, 14% both/mixed) or secondary characters (59% male, 30% female, 11% both/mixed).

Target Characters

Across the top 20 games, many of the characters who are portrayed as targets (24%) are also portrayed as aliens or animals. This makes discerning character sex, race, and age more difficult. Among the target characters whose sex is identifiable, 89% are male and 11% are groups comprising both males and females. Eighty percent of the targets whose races were identifiable are White and the other 20% are Middle Eastern. Of the specifically male target characters, 75% are White and the other 25% are Middle Eastern. Eighty-nine percent of targets are portrayed as adults. Twenty-seven percent of targets are humans, with 37% humanoid aliens, 26% animals, 5% robots, and 5% groups containing both humans and humanoid aliens.

DISCUSSION

As predicted, the world of video games is largely populated by aggressive, White, male adults in roles of power. Females, minorities, and older adults are grossly underrepresented as heroes in both violent games and games in general. Over 70% of main characters are male and 95% of main characters are younger adults. When diversity of age is represented, most of it occurs in the secondary characters. There are only two female minority main characters in all the games examined.

Of the target characters, the majority are White males, with Middle Eastern males being the next most common type of target. This finding bears further analysis. Even though these video games were created before September 11, 2001, Middle Eastern males are overrepresented as targets of violence. In the world of violent video games, Middle Eastern males are characterized as likely, and perhaps appropriate, targets of violence.

Also as predicted, most of the top-selling games are violent ones, with 60% having violence as the main theme. These games, taken as a group,

rated close to the scale's endpoint of *extremely aggressive*. The games were also rated as very realistic and as having high-quality graphics. The characters and settings of the violent games were rated as very reality based. The weapons in the games are very realistic as well, with 92% being real, available weapons.

Most of the games portray instrumental aggression and about half portray a clear theme of retribution, a variable known to increase aggression in the viewer. In violent games, one fourth combine aggression with humor and all reward aggressive behavior. Over half of the games contain gratuitous violence and slightly less than half contain clear depictions of disrespect for life (in addition to the actual killing). Almost one fifth of the violent games include sexualized violence. Only six (30%) of the top-selling games include non-Whites. The majority of these (two thirds) are aggressive games. The typical role of the depicted minorities is soldiers.

It is interesting to note that much of what ethnic diversity there is in these games is shown either on the control screens, where players hear the story line and choose game settings, or in movie-like trailers or plot points that are scattered throughout some games. Both account for a relatively small percentage of actual time spent playing the games. For example, there are two versions of Tom Clancy's *Rainbow 6* game: *Rogue Spear* and *Gold* editions. In each of these versions, headshots of military personnel appear on a control screen, along with their nationality. When the player actually plays the video game, the hero's personal characteristics are not highlighted in the action, as the hero is a first-person shooter. In *Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun*, the actual game play shows small, indistinguishable characters fighting from a distance. However, short movies are interspersed between the main action. Diversity is relatively heavy in these films, which star the actor James Earl Jones as the general and feature minorities as soldiers. This series of live action films also features a sexualized, scantily clad, White female character.

In sum, these popular games feature realistic depictions of aggression with high-quality graphics and realistic depictions of weapons, characters, and settings. Characters lack diversity with respect to sex, age, and race. Though this theme is in the minority, there is a consistent element of sexualized violence. Given the link between depictions of sexualized aggression and violence toward women, even smaller amounts of sexualized violence, if consistent, are a concern. When diversity of race is represented, Blacks, Latinos, and Middle Easterners are often the non-Whites depicted. Asian characters are virtually nonexistent. This is especially noteworthy given that Asians represent a large percentage of the world population and that Asian companies such as Nintendo are a major force in the video game industry.

It is important to note that the content and graphics of video games are rapidly changing. This makes it important to keep the research current, especially with regard to content analyses. The games examined here are not the most extreme available. Perhaps the most graphically violent of recently re-

leased video games is *Soldier of Fortune*. This game strives to depict violence with extremely graphic realism, so much so that the game was classified as an adult movie in Canada. The game developers hired an army consultant to help design extremely realistic depictions of physical trauma by different types of weapons. Killers dismember victims with guns and victims' bodies are destroyed beyond recognition. The game's horror includes victims who scream "Help me" as killers reply "Shut up," tossing their knives playfully in the air after a kill.

The Grand Theft Auto series of video games has topped sales lists throughout the last several years. Currently, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is one of the top selling games in the country (Reuters, 2005b). In the *Grand Theft Auto* series, the player can steal cars, kill enemies and bystanders, have sex with a prostitute, and kill the prostitute afterward to get his money back. These games exemplify a trend toward graphically violent games that focus on glamorizing crime and antisocial behavior (Walsh, Gentile, Gieske, Walsh, & Chasco (2003). The National Institute on Media and the Family (NIMF) currently suggests that parents also avoid a game called *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*. In this game, the main character has "a distinct talent for getting slapped whenever he is around women." The game contains, "nudity, strong language, strong sexual content, [and] use of alcohol." (NIMF, n.d., p. 1)

Fantasy–Reality Distinction: Debunking the Myth

An often-held belief is that only the youngest consumers cannot differentiate between fantasy and reality; therefore if a person knows what he or she is seeing is not really happening, then he or she cannot be affected by the content. This line of reasoning is seductive, yet deceptive. It is true that, up until about the age of 7, children do not distinguish fantasy from reality in a reliable and adult-like manner (Cantor, 1998) and are, therefore, especially vulnerable to media exposure. However, it would be an error to assume that those who understand what they see in the media is not real are invulnerable to the messages being presented. This conclusion ignores the way human beings, as social creatures, learn lessons from depictions of human social interactions, even if these interactions are not portrayed as real. As Dietz (1998, p. 439) noted about video game violence exposure, "even if the child accepts the notion that video games are not real, he or she may still not challenge the ideas and characterizations presented in them."

Children learn what behaviors are appropriate from watching media. Given the violent nature of many popular video games, one lesson they learn is that aggression is an acceptable, even appropriate, way to solve conflict (e.g., Anderson & Dill, 2000). Another lesson learned is that women behave in stereotypical ways: Namely, they are generally unimportant, are inferior to men, and function many times as the objects of sex and violence (Dietz,

1998). Thus, negative concepts such as sex role stereotypes and aggression are reinforced in video games.

Signs of Change

In its annual Video Game Report Card, the NIMF noted that the popular games for 2002 showed a focus on extreme violence, particularly violence toward women. The institute warned that popular games such as *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* portray “the brutal murder of women as entertainment” (NIMF, 2003, ¶ 9). For example, in that game, “the player is rewarded if he murders a prostitute after having sex with her” (NIMF, 2003, ¶ 7). These negative changes call for an update on the current investigation.

Only a Game?

Currently, a Web site (www.huntingforbambi.com) is selling videos that depict men hunting naked women and inflicting pain by shooting their bare flesh with paint-gun pellets. The Web site advertises: “Men hunting naked women. It’s about f**k’n time. That’s right, bitch . . . it’s hunting season!” (*Men Hunting Naked Women*, 2005). This sad game brings to life the type of targeted, sexualized violence against women that has increased rapidly of late on video game screens. Practicing such violence on the video game screen has made the move to real violence that much easier. Some have argued that depictions of violence against women and other groups are harmless because they are for entertainment only. Yet, we contend that it is precisely because such violence is depicted as entertainment that we should be concerned. Mass media normalize and actively train behaviors (Anderson & Dill, 2000). If, as we have demonstrated here, video games are violent and depict White males as heroes and minorities as victims and commonly show sexualized images of women, those images will be accepted by the culture and acted on.

As we go to press, the mayor and city council members of Washington, DC are attempting to pass legislation that would ban the sale of violent and sexually explicit video games to minors (Reuters, 2005a). Council member Fenty is quoted as saying these video games perpetuate “the worst of our society,” (Reuters, 2005a, p. 3) and contribute to youth violence. Entertainment Software Association president Douglas Lowenstein responded by invoking free speech rights and by calling the issue one of parental responsibility. Also, Lowenstein said that there is not objective scientific evidence that video game playing causes aggression. Four major health organizations disagree with Lowenstein. In a joint statement to Congress, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychological Association, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the American Medical Association concluded that the accumulated scientific research “point[s] overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggres-

sive behavior in some children" (Joint Statement, 2000, p. 1). The Federal Trade Commission (Federal Trade Commission, 2000) investigated the video game industry for marketing Mature-rated games to children and found "Of the 118 electronic games with a Mature rating for violence, the Commission selected for its study, 83, or 70 percent, targeted children under 17." (Federal Trade Commission, 2000, ¶ 1). It is unfortunate that the video game industry lobbyists have been successful at shooting down legislation to restrict access of youth to video games with violent and sexual content. Anderson and Bushman (2001) explain that while there is strong evidence of a link between media violence exposure and aggression, that the media misinform the public about this research. Possible explanations offered by Anderson and Bushman (2001) include the fact that media have a vested interest in the entertainment industry and that media consumers are motivated to believe that their media diet is not harmful (see also Dill, in press). Media researchers such as ourselves struggle to inform the public of the scientific evidence. In the case of negative elements in video games, such as those described here, there is strong resistance from industry, media, and even the public who consume media, against believing the type of scientific research reported here.

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