

CMSC 304 Computer Ethics

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Bookkeeping

- Last time
 - About the paper/topic
 - Midterm overview
 - Deepfakes
- Today
 - A tiny bit more about the topic
 - Video games
 - Mild warning: images of violence, gender and racial caricatures

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Bookkeeping

- Paper description is posted
 - Somewhat more detailed than the overview from class last time
 - Please read it!
- EA3 due tomorrow
- Paper topic (paragraph) is due 4/12
 - Details in the paper description
 - Please include your name/both names
- Schedule is undergoing some changes
- Office hours this week will be Tuesday (**not Monday**) 2-3

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Topic statement

The topic statement is a short summary of your intended area. Please include:

- The **topic**
- The main **issues**
- 1-2 potential ideas for the **ethical question** you plan to analyze in your paper
- Specific **cases/incidents** if you have identified some

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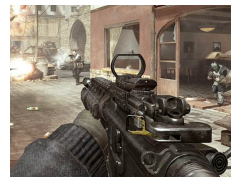
Video games

- What counts as a video game?
- Violence in games
- Sexism and racism in games
- Sexism and racism in gaming/the industry

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Do video games cause violence?

- Most analyses find either no link or a weak link
- Many (most) countries have games; few have U.S.-style violence
- **Meta-analysis:** "In the vast majority of settings, violent video games do increase aggressive behavior but that these effects are almost always quite small."^[1]
 - In other words, disagreement is an artifact of how papers are written
- **Aggression ≠ violence**



<https://www.dana.org/article/do-violent-video-games-lead-to-violence>
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160004716300000>

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Does violence affect people in other ways?

- Temporary increased aggression
- Rapidly "tune out" visuals of violence
- Generally, no medium- to long-term increase in aggression
 - Probably – these things are hard to study
- Video games may actually **increase** ability to engage in "mature moral reasoning"
 - Strong link: a wide variety of games correlated to better moral reasoning
 - Weak link: playing certain games might decrease moral reasoning
 - All of these are measures of how early reasoning is developed

theconversation.com/video-games-affect-your-moral-development-but-only-until-youre-18-new-study-14279

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Is enjoying violence inherently wrong?

- "Do video games cause violence" is a consequentialist question
- "Would a good person enjoy this" is deontological
- What did we think of the essay about the inherent moral issues of representations of violence?
 - Is it actually harmful to damage a photograph?

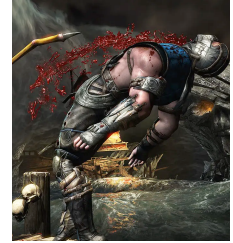


image: avon.co.uk/dead-brutality-is-common-in-video-games-but-not-actual-violence-why

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Sexism in video gaming

- Timeline
 - Until 1983, gaming was not gendered
 - Massive industry crash in 1983 as market flooded with low quality games
 - Marketers got involved – how to carve out a niche market?
 - Nintendo started marketing to **boys**
- Now: gaming is very much male-dominated, **by some metrics**
 - Metrics tend to omit certain kinds of games, e.g., Sims, Farmville, ...
 - About 20% of the industry is female
- In fact, about half of all gamers are women

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Sexism in gaming

- "Bro culture" mentality at major games companies
- Several major companies have been sued
 - Riot, Ubisoft, Activision/Blizzard
- Problems:
 - Culture; advancement and opportunities



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Sexism in games vs. in gaming

- More than 50% of female players have been harassed or abused
- Standard advice includes gender-neutral usernames
 - Less feasible as voice chat becomes standard
 - Puts the onus on the targeted population
- Perception is that gaming is 'owned' by white men and having other groups join will somehow take that away

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Racism in games/gaming

- African-American males are the group most active in video gaming
- Non-white representation is largely absent



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Racism in gaming

- Muslims, Arabs, and Middle Easterners are typically treated as a single group, and are almost always antagonists
 - E.g., *Call of Duty*
- Asian groups are heavily Chinese influenced and often portrayed as racial stereotypes
- African-Americans tend to appear only as characters in games that are drawn from real-life sports
- Hispanic groups are typically heavily stereotyped and, again, antagonists
 - E.g., *Grand Theft Auto*

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Why does representation matter?

- Video games are important
 - They represent significant media consumption
 - The industry is larger than the movie or music industries
- Without representation, there is a sense of exclusion
- Without representation in the industry, we are less likely to see well-executed members of different demographic groups
- As it stands, gaming has a **self-reinforcing culture** of belonging only to a very specific demographic group

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Other concerns

- Video game addiction
 - Whether this is really a thing is up for discussion
 - Excessive gaming and problematic gaming certainly exist
 - Gaming is an attention-rewarding mechanism
- Loot boxes and gambling
 - We touched on this briefly earlier in the class
 - Marketers understand how to get people to maximize money spent
 - Intermittent-reward loot boxes can cause overspending

celiahodent.com/ethics-in-the-video-game-industry

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Dark patterns

- Capitalizing on sunken cost fallacies: letting users start out for free, then feeding on fears of losing all that (free) progress
- Insidious pay-to-win: it's not clearly communicated up front that the game cannot be enjoyed fully without spending real money
- Social obligation: mechanisms to keep people playing by making it an obligation to, e.g., not let teammates down
- Guilt-tripping: e.g., a character that cries if players do not buy^[1]

[1] celiahodent.com/ethics-in-the-video-game-industry

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Discussion

<http://tiny.cc/games-survey>

- Several hundred Activision/Blizzard employees staged a walkout, demanding:
 - An end to mandatory arbitration clauses in all employee contracts
 - The adoption of recruiting, interviewing, hiring, and promotion policies designed to improve representation among all employees
 - Publication of data on relative compensation
 - A task force to hire a third party to audit the company's reporting structure, HR department, and executive staff
 - The resignation of the CEO
- What should the company do with respect to these demands? Are they reasonable? Will they solve the problems?

venturebeat.com/2021/08/03/activision-blizzard-promises-change-while-dodging-employee-demands

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