Violence in Computer Games

Introduction:

The computer has taken over the leading position in the toy world. With the computer technology advancing at a rapid pace, also the computerization goes on and doesn't stop in front of the nursery. Because of that fact, a whole industry is busy researching the effects of computer games on children.

The main target are video games with violent or erotic contents, which could have an influence on children's minds.

Unfortunately there exist some cases where children committed crimes because of computer games. These incidents make people think, that violent computer games are the main cause for all illegal things done by kids or teenagers.

History of offence causing video games

The first video games were programmed in the 70's but were not very popular. In the 80's the popularity of those games increased immediately and from this moment also the effects of computer games on people were tested.

Already the first computer games contained violence. One of the first games was the very famous "Space Invaders".

Space Invaders - The history. Space Invaders was designed and programmed by Toshihiro Nishikado for Taito, Japan in 1978 and remains one of the most popular arcade games ever made.

The aim of Space Invaders is to kill as many aliens possible. Another very early game was "Wonder Boy" where an hero has to kill monsters that vanish upon death. These monsters attack with swords, stones or arrows. The difference of these

Image 1: Space Invaders
Image 1: Space Invaders

games to the newer ones was, that none of them were realistic and they all had a cartoon appearance.

In 1986 the "Nintendo" was introduced. This and other gaming platforms started another generation of video gaming. Before this invention computer games were mainly played by some freaks with computers.

This invention also caused an increasing competition between different video game systems and with the fast advancement of technology also the content of games changed. Especially graphics were rapidly improving and made content to become more detailed and visually violent.
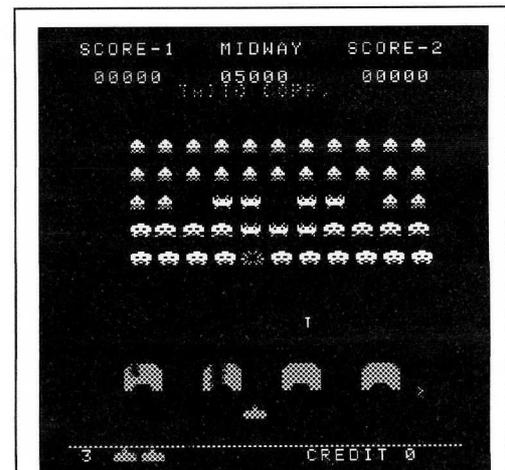
1987 Macintosh produced a game called "MacPlaymate" where the player had to undress an animated woman and stimulate her with sex toys. In 1991 another game was illegally produced, which caused a flurry in the American computer press. In this game the player was in charge of a national socialistic concentration camp and was rewarded for the quantity and brutality of his executions.

In 1993 the ego-shooter epoch was started with Doom, where you have to free a planet from aliens. It was the first game where you could move in 3D.

In 199 Nintendo published "Golden Eye 007" which was a model for most of the 3D-Shooters of today. In this game you had to play, what was shown in the movie "James Bond 007:Golden Eye". Today games like "Unreal Tournament", "Half-Life", "Counter-Strike" or "GTA" are dominating on the video game market and the quality an quantity of violent content is still increasing.
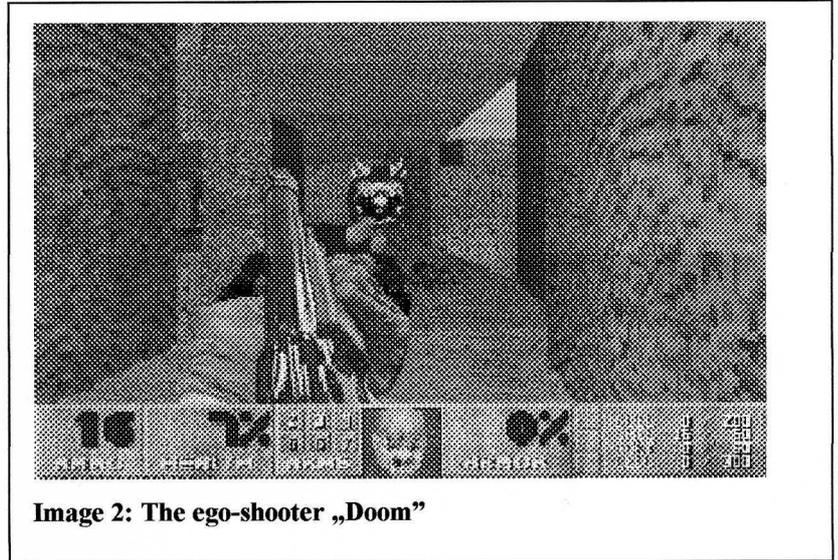

Image 2: The ego-shooter „Doom"

Why are games with violent content so popular?

I asked this question some people and I became various answers. My father for example told me, that he doesn't know why 3D Shooters are that popular. Others said that it is the realistic representation of real life with short time decisions and first person view.

I think this fact is caused by many symptoms. At first I agree that the realism of today' s action shooters is one of the main factors. One other fact is, that in those games people can do things, they won't be able to do in reality.

Unfortunately those computer games often replace sports in real life and playa main part in the childrens free-time.

Another cause why those games are so popular, is that they try to provoke adults and the opponents of these games.

Do violent games cause violent actions?

In America two boys stole cars and did other criminal acts similar to the game GT A3.
In Erfurt in Germany two b

GT A Fall, Columbine(littelton, Erfurt

It's very important to say that computer games are only in a very small amount the cause for violence. The problem is, that some computer games stimulate the fight-readiness and lower the blockade of doing something violent.

I am in the opinion that computer games are not the only cause for violence but they playa big role. In general violence is the result of many facts. Reasons can be a bad childhood, movies and all other kinds of media. Lately you have to add the Internet to the causes of violence.

Often, because of computer games, children don't see the difference between reality and virtualreality any more. In real-time there exists no reset button or a respawn time. If you crash into a wall with your car, no button puts you back into the middle of the street. If you shoot somebody, he is really dead and doesn't awake again.

So it's very important especially for parents to show their video game playing kids the differences. Playing games is not bad at all: It supports you reaction and makes you concentrate on what you are doing.

Rating Systems for Computer games

In the USA

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is an industry organization that has developed a rating system for computer, Internet and video games. Most games sold in North America are rated using this system.

ESRB ratings have two parts. The **RATING SYMBOL** suggests what age group the game is appropriate for and provides general information about a game's content. If a game contains content elements that aren't suggested by the rating symbol, **CONTENT DESCRIPTORS** are added that tell you what to expect.

Here is a table with the age group and what they mean:

Early Childhood (EC): These titles have content suitable for children ages three and older and do not contain any material that parents would find inappropriate .

Everyone (E): These titles have content suitable for persons aged six and older. These titles will appeal to people of many ages and tastes, They may contain minimal violence, some comic mischief (for example, slapstick comedy), or some crude language.

Teen (T): These titles have content suitable for persons aged thirteen and older. Titles in this category may contain violent content, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive.

Mature (M): These titles have content suitable for persons ages seventeen and older. These products may include more intense violence or language than products in the Teen category. In addition, these titles may also include mature sexual themes.

Adults Only (AO): These titles have content suitable only for adults. These products may include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence. Adults Only products are not intended to be sold or rented to persons under the age of eighteen.

Rating Pending
Product has been submitted to the ESRB and is awaiting final rating.

To take full advantage of the ESRB rating system, it's important to check both the **RATING SYMBOL** (found on the front of the game box) and also the **CONTENT DESCRIPTORS** (found on the back of the game box).

Here is a list with the content descriptors:

- **Alcohol Reference** - Reference to and/or images of alcoholic beverages
- **Animated Blood** - Cartoon or pixilated depictions of blood.
- **Blood** - Depictions of blood.
- **Blood and Gore** - Depictions of blood or the mutilation of body parts.
- **Comic Mischief** - Scenes depicting slapstick or gross vulgar humour.
- **Drug Reference** - Reference to and/or images of illegal drugs
- **Edutainment** - Content of product provides user with specific skills development or reinforcement learning within an entertainment setting. Skill development is an integral part of product.
- **Gambling** - Betting like behaviour.
- **Informational** - Overall content of product contains data, facts, resource information, reference materials or instructional text.
- **Mature Humour** - Vulgar and/or crude jokes and antics including "bathroom" humour
- **Mature Sexual Themes** - Provocative material, possibly including partial nudity.
- **Mild Language** - Mild references to profanity, sexuality, violence, alcohol, or drug use.

- **Mild Lyrics** - Mild references to profanity, sexuality, violence, alcohol, or drug use in music

- **Mild Violence** - Mild scenes depicting characters in unsafe and/or violent situations.

- **Nudity** - Graphic or prolonged depictions of nudity.

- **Partial Nudity** - Brief and mild depictions of nudity.

- **Some Adult Assistance May Be Needed** - Early Childhood Descriptor only.

- **Strong Language** - Profanity and explicit references to sexuality, violence, alcohol, or drug use.

- **Strong Lyrics** - Profanity and explicit references to sex, violence, alcohol, or drug use in music.

- **Strong Sexual Content** - Graphic depiction of sexual behaviour, possibly including nudity.

- **Suggestive Themes** - Mild provocative references or materials.

- **Tobacco Reference** - Reference to and/or images of tobacco products

- **Use of Drugs** - The consumption or use of illegal drugs

- **Use of Alcohol** - The consumption of alcoholic beverages

- **Use of Tobacco** - The consumption of tobacco products

- **Violence** - Scenes involving aggressive conflict.

This system is designed for parents, because with this system they know what their children are playing. They can decide on their own how much violence they think, is suitable for their children.

In Austria and Germany

In Austria and Germany there exist two main systems. The one is a governmental organization. It is called the BPjS. It was initiated 1953 for the observation of the law for youth harming media. The main objects of these organization is to ban youth harming content so that it's only available for adults. Other objectives are the encouragement of content suitable for the youth and the informing of the public.

This organization only decides whether content is banned or not. Verified media are computer games, all kind of printed media like books or comics, cd's, video films, etc. Every media is banned which are morally dangerous for kids or teenagers.

If a game is banned, it's not allowed to sell them at all and also advertising for this game is forbidden.

The second system which exists in Austria is a rating system, which is only for volunteers. In the so called USK there exist four main age-levels:

Six-years: Games, which contain contests or enemies but are represented in an abstract or cartoonlike way. May contain an spooky content.

Twelve-years: Could contain some violent content, like science fiction or historical military weaponry.

16-years: This "class" contains fast armed action with sometimes humanlike enemies. Important is that the games don't contain any content which could harm the children's mind.

Not suitable for children: These games for adults are very realistic and could have humans as enemies. Could harm children.

Differences America - Austria or Germany

The difference between America and Austria/Germany in video games and their sale is very interesting.

In America most games with violent content are and can be published without any problems. Although they are rated with "Adults" only many younger children don't have problems when buying those games. In an informal survey conducted by an Ottawa newspaper in July 2000, two fourteen-year-old boys were able to rent violent Mature-rated (for persons ages 17 and older) games from every video store they tried, no questions asked.

In Austria it's possible to get most of the games which you are not suitable for. The only exception are the "adults only" rated games. These games are hardly sold to children in most of the shops. So most of the shops ask for an ID when you want to buy a video game.

Also the rating systems in Austria are much more strict than they are in America.

Low Violence Versions

Many games which are allowed in America, aren't in Austria. When this happens there exist two possibilities. The first is, that the game is not published in Austria. The producers now have no sales in Austria or Germany which is a loss. So the second possibility is that the content of the game is changed, so the ban is repealed. But those changes are often very strange.

In Counter-Strike for example, the German retail version is a lot different to the original version. If in the American version someone is shot, the body stays lying on the ground. In the German version the killed body sits down and shakes his had. After some time he disappears. Also all the original weapon names of the American version have been changed to fictive names in the German version.

Another example for differences in game is Half-Life. In the original game there are some soldiers. In the German version they were replaced by robots. Also blood doesn't appear any more, or just as an yellow spray on the floor.

In the original version of GTA3 it was possible to shoot off the head or limb parts. This has been removed in the German version. Like in other games blood has been removed. Also the language is much more clean than in the original game.

Some changes are very strange and don't really support their aim. In Tomb Raider for example there s no red blood any more. The blood is green in this game.

But these low violence versions are not very useful. Most children try to get the original versions of those games from foreign countries or they buy them over the internet. Also after a low violence version has been released also so called "blood patches" are published, which reinclude violent content to the game or just turn off the limitations. Also often these patches contain more gore than the original version had.

Banned Games

In Austria there exist a lot of banned games. Examples are the very bloody and brutal Quake or Duke Nukem. Also all versions of Doom are banned in Austria.

The problem is, that if a game is banned, it's much more interesting. Selling banned games has become in big illegal market in Austria. Having a banned game is like a status symbol for teenagers.

Popular Games with Gore-Content

Although there exist some exceptions, most violent games today are 3D-Shooters. There exist some strategy games with violence, but they are a minority. One famous strategy game is "Commandos" which is a very exact representation of World War II. This game contains lots of information and original movies of this time.

Half-Life

"Black Mesa research facility, an ultra-secret laboratory under government contract, conducting top-secret and extremely volatile experiments with stuff you're not supposed to know about. You are Gordon Freeman, a Black Mesa employee. And this morning, as usual, you pit your way to the research facility for a run-of-the-mill experiment.

This experiment went wrong and more importantly, someone wants to keep this hush-hush operation a secret. And you know what that means, you'll have to fight your way through to the top of the Black Mesa complex. Bizarre, alien lifeforms will make your life harder. Trained marine squad will make it even harder. "

As you can read in this game description, this game contains lots of violence. In Austria the original version was banned, so the producers programmed a new version with less violence.

Counterstrike (Half-Life)

Counterstrike is one of the most popular 3D-Shooters at the moment. It is a so called "Mod" of the game Half-Life, which is another 3D Shooter. The fascinating thing in this game, is the game concept, with two groups: the "Counter-Terrorists" and the "Terrorists". The fact which divides this game from all the others is, that if you die, you don't respawn immediately. If you got killed you have to wait until the round, which has around 5 minutes, is over. So surviving is one of the main objectives.

The game contents three different game types. The first one is, that the terrorists keep hostages and the Counter-Terrorists try to free them. Another objective is, that the terrorists have to blow up something. And the last game type is, that the Counter-Terrorists have to bring an VIP to a special place and the terrorists try to kill the VIP. There exists an amount of around 20 weapons, which read from basic weapons like knifes to automatic and semiautomatic weapons, handguns, shotguns and grenades. There is also special equipment like for example kevlar wests, nightvision googles or bomb defusion kits.

This game is usually played over the Internet with real players, although it's also possible to play with "Bots" I think the interesting thing for many people playing this game is the very near representation of the real life or the army. All weapons have original names and can be bought in weapon stores.

Unreal Tournament

In Unreal Tournament you are a kind of gladiator in a sport of the future. Your objectives are different, but they all contain killing people.

The different modes you can play are "Capture the Flag", Assault, and normal deathmatch. In Assault you have some map related objective, like for example destroying something special. But all these modes have one thing in common: You have to kill the other players.

The weapon equipment contains both, realistic and fictive weapons ranging from pistols, to rocket launchers or sniper rifles.

This game is also usually played on the internet, but playing with bots is possible.

GTA3

Another very brutal game is GTA, which is the short-cut off "Grand Theft Auto". This game has an outstanding difference to all the other "good versus evil" games. In GTA you are playing on the evil side. You are an gangster who is doing criminal work to get money. The objectives in this game reach from simply driving around, killing cops or other criminals, drug dealing and other very violent and brutal jobs. Also the game contains offence causing pornographic content.

Also the game tries to be as realistic as possible.

Because of these facts the game has been banned in Australia. The game

contains no multiplayer mode.

National Socialism in video games

After some games with national socialistic content in the 90's games with that were almost entirely

disappeared. But after the Spielberg film "" in 1998 a new era of computer games and films on the second world

war has started again. Not only commercial games like "Medal of Honor", "Sudden Strike" or "Battlefield 1942"

show situations of the second world war. Also many Mods like for example "Day of Defeat" or "The Third

Reich" with the same content can be found. For all those games exist clans. The names of those clans often are

made after some famous groups in the second world war. Clans like for example "5W SS Clan" have national

socialistic symbols on their homepage although they point out that they don't have anything in common with neo

nazis or other similar groups. Those groups often have original grades of the WWII. Also they want their

members to follow the team leaders decisions and they ask for discipline. If you don't do that, one homepage says

that you get shot.

It is a shame that these groups are supported by the game developers like for example the "Battlefield1942"

Clan "Blitzjäger. On the developers homepage of the game you can find a link to this clan, whose homepage is

also designed with nazi symbols.

Many clan pages of these games also provide original information, pictures and other types of media.

In various forums you can find tips where to buy original weapons or people sell souvenirs of the second world

war.

People create Mods with the aim to exactly reconstruct famous battles and original armory. Games like for

example "Sudden Strike" do have offence causing advertisements who often point out who good they represent

reality in World War II.

Often the wrong opinion is shown, that the SS was just an honourable elite troop. Many people often don't

know the real background to all the names, famous battles and symbols. It seem that nobody knows, how much

pain and cruelty was committed by the national socialists. It is now very important to concentrate on those

websites etc. to suppress this perfect platform for neo national socialism.

We all know that when these games are banned, they will become only more popular. Very

important would be historical and political enlightment.

Glossary:

Map: In computergame language a map, is the area you are playing in.

Frag: Another word for a kill in a computer game

Spawn, respawn: If you awake, after you got killed in a video game

VIP: Very Important Person. In many games a VIP, is a person who has to be killed or protected. **Mod:** Short of "Modification". A game which is a modified version of the original game. These mods are often programmed by fans or spare time programmers

Bots: Short of "Robot". A non human player, who is played by the computer **Macintosh:**

Nintendo:

Counter Strike retail version: ego-

shooter, 3d shooter.. CTF