

Game Over

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Biographies of Interviewees

Lt. Col. David Grossman is one of the world's foremost experts in the field of human aggression and the roots of violence and violent crime. Colonel Grossman has testified before US Senate and Congressional committees and numerous state legislatures. He is a former West Point Psychology Professor and Army Ranger who has combined his experiences to become the founder of a new field of scientific endeavor, which he has named "killology." Col. Grossman's newest book, *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call to Action Against TV, Movie and Video Game Violence* (with Gloria DeGaetano), has received international acclaim for its information on the impact of media violence. Col. Grossman has also authored a Pulitzer Prize-nominated book, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, and has contributed entries to scholarly reference works. His work has led him to be featured on many major network news shows and radio programs. [Killology Research Group](#)

Nina Huntemann is assistant professor at Westfield State College and a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Her dissertation is tentatively titled: *Policy and Culture in the Digital Age: How Telecommunications Reform Transformed Radio*. She has published several articles on women's use of the Internet for social change. She is also a contributing writer for *The Women's Guide to the Wired World: A User-Friendly Handbook and Resource Directory*. She co-designed a nationally award-winning web site for the Media Education Foundation and is the producer and director of the MEF video *Game Over: Gender, Race and Violence in Video Games*.

Michael Morgan is professor and chair of the Department of Communication at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. He has authored or co-authored more than 50 national and international scholarly articles and chapters on the effects of

television on images of violence, sex roles, aging, health, science, academic achievement, political orientations, and other issues. He has directed or collaborated on international comparative research projects on media and adolescents in Argentina, China, Russia, Korea, Taiwan, and other countries. His most recent book is *Television and Its Viewers: Cultivation Theory and Research* (with James Shanahan).

Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr. has worked as a professor at the University of Miami since 1976, earning the university-wide undergraduate teaching award in October 1991. He earned a Ph.D. from the Graduate Institute of Education in the Philosophy and History of Education in 1976. He has taught social studies at the secondary level and has NCATE lifetime certification. His research on computers and video games has been reviewed in multiple newspapers and he has been interviewed on National Public Radio and many major network news shows. Provenzo has published numerous books and articles on the history, philosophy and theory of education, electronic media and curriculum development.

Erica Scharrer is assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. She studies the social impact of mass media, specializing on the effects of media representations of gender and violence on audience members. She is co-author of the book *Television: What's On, Who's Watching, and What it Means* (with George Comstock) and has written several articles and chapters on such topics as television violence and "hypermasculinity," the effectiveness of a media literacy program focusing on issues of media violence, and the portrayal of the sitcom father.

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Resources

The following list of links is by no means comprehensive. Use this listing as a jumping off point, as many of the sites listed here have extensive links pages. Also see MEF's list of [media literacy links](#).

HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES

[A Brief History of Video Games](#) (www.videotopia.com)

This web site was made for the internationally touring museum exhibit on the history of video games, Videotopia. The exhibit explores the art, science and history of video games. The web site offers pictures and descriptions of the history of home and arcade games. Web visitors can also get information about the exhibit's design, medium, advising panel, booking information, a scrapbook and more.

[Dot Eaters: A Classic Video Game History](#)

(www.emuunlim.com/doteaters/index.htm)

Dot Eaters (a reference to the classic arcade game Pac-Man) is a impressive timeline of the history of video games and computing technology. The site offers pages on the history of arcade games, home systems and personal computer

games, including information on the rise of violence in these mediums, a list of links and a site archive.

[History of Video Games](#)

(www.videogamespot.com/features/universal/hov/index.html)

A special feature story at Gamespot written by Leonard Herman, Jer Horwitz and Steve Kent, and beautifully designed by Ethan O'Brien. Their chronology of the video game industry begins in 1889 with Fusajiro Yamauchi, the founder of the Marufuku Company (later to be called The Nintendo Playing Card Company), and takes the reader up to 1999 and the next generation of home video game consoles. Pictures and links compliment the text.

VIDEO GAME RATINGS ORGANIZATIONS

[Children's Software Revue](#) *(www.childrensoftware.com)*

Children's Software Revue is a quarterly newsletter featuring reviews of children's software, electronic toys and Internet sites. The online version offers a searchable database of over 4,000 children's software titles reviewed by parents and educators. Also available: Tips for smart shopping , a gift guide for fun and safe toys, and a links page of other Internet review sites.

[Entertainment Software Ratings Board \(ESRB\)](#) *(www.esrb.org)*

The ESRB is a board created by the video game industry to rate entertainment software products. The letter ratings suggest general guidelines for choosing age appropriate games. The board also writes content descriptors about the nature of the violence, sexual themes and language of entertainment software. The web site provides a searchable database for looking up the ESRB ratings of video games.

[Internet Content Rating Association](#) *(www.rsac.org)*

ICRA (formerly the Recreational Software Advisory Council) is a non-profit, independent organization that seeks to empower the public, particularly parents, in making informed decisions about the information children view on the Internet by means of a content advisory system. From this site parents can activate a filter that restricts access to certain web sites based on ICRA's standards.

MEDIA EDUCATION & ANTI-VIOLENCE ORGANIZATIONS

[The Lion and Lamb Project](http://www.lionlamb.org) (*www.lionlamb.org*)

Lion and Lamb is a nation-wide, grassroots organization for and by parents which seeks to provide information about the effects of violent toys and entertainment on children. Their mantra, violence is not child's play, is the basis for their work. They provide a Parent Action Kit, offer workshops and sponsor Violent Toy Trade-Ins throughout the country. A children's book list and information about joining the group, as well as links to other resources, are available on the web site.

[MediaScope](http://www.mediascope.org) (*www.mediascope.org*)

MediaScope is a national, nonprofit research and policy group. The goal of this organization is to encourage responsible images in all forms of media. They concentrate on media ratings, teen sexuality, children's television, diversity in the media, media violence, the effects of video games, and artists' rights and responsibilities. MediaScope offers resources to encourage socially responsible creative freedom. Check out the links page for a variety of publications and resources.

[National Institute on Media and the Family](http://www.mediaandthefamily.org/home.html)

(*www.mediaandthefamily.org/home.html*)

This organization is a national group for research, education and information regarding the impact of media on children. Their resources include: Video and Computer Game Report Card, Parent Guide to Electronic Games, research on video game violence, reviews of movies, television shows and computer games, resource materials to provide strategies for combating powerful media forces and a list of appropriate children's books.

ONLINE VIDEO GAME MAGAZINES AND FAN SITES

[Gamespot](http://www.gamespot.com) (*www.gamespot.com*)

A huge online magazine for reviews, news, hints, articles, discussions, contests and downloads of the latest video games.

[Gamer's World](http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/5290/gaming.html) (*www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/5290/gaming.html*)

Gamer's World offers links, pictures, game cheats and information about video games for the Apple Macintosh platform.

[Happy Puppy](http://www.happypuppy.com/) (*www.happypuppy.com/*)

Another video game enthusiast's site for cheats, hints, reviews, previews and downloads.

OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

[Beyond Black and White: Examining the Portrayal of Race in Video Games and the Entertainment Media](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/991021thursday.html)

(*www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/991021thursday.html*)

A lesson plan for grades 6-12, developed by the New York Times on the Web "Teacher Connections" unit. Overview of lesson plan (from the NYT site): In this lesson, students critically examine the portrayal of minorities in video games and other forms of entertainment to assess whether or not these portrayals further perpetuate racial stereotyping.

[Kid Source Online: Video Games and Children](http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/video.games.html)

(*www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/video.games.html*)

This article from Kid Source discusses video game use by children, the ratings of video game violence, and the effects of violence and other characteristics in video games.

[Interactive Digital Software Association](http://www.idsa.com) (*www.idsa.com*)

The Interactive Digital Software Association is a US professional association that serves the business and public affairs interests of video and computer game publishers. Their members include many top entertainment software companies. The IDSA formed the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (see link above).

Discussion Questions

Video Games: The New Media

1. Do you play video games? If so, why, when and how often? What do you like and dislike about video games?
 2. What are some positive and some negative aspects of video games?
 3. How do video games differ from other types of media? Think of a recent action movie and an example of an action video game. In what ways are the two similar and different, ie. plots, characters, scenes and sounds? In your opinion, how does the experience of playing a video game differ from watching a movie?
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Play Like a Man & Buxom Babes

1. Why do you think more men and boys play video games than women and girls? What other types of game play and recreation do boys and men seem to play more than women and girls? How are these games similar to or different from video games? What might explain these differences: Are men and boys inherently more aggressive, or are men and boys adhering to the social expectations of what it is to be a man? Or, is it a bit of each?

Exercise #1:

Click on the images below for larger pictures. One is Gordon Freeman from the video game *Half-Life* and the other is a warrior from the video game *Gauntlet*. Both characters are ready for battle. Compare and contrast the characters, focusing on their clothing, armor and weaponry.

1. What do you feel is the purpose of the differences in their apparel?
2. Are the differences significant? If so, how?
3. Why do you think Gordon Freeman has so much more armor and apparel than the female warrior?
4. These images are from video games ads. Part of the text on the *Half-Life* ad reads: "Intelligent characters and compelling shory-line creates an experience unlike any other." The text on the *Gauntlet* ad reads: "She's been hanging around the arcade for years. Think of how much fun she'll be when you get her home." Why, according to the ads, is *Half-Life* a fun game? Why is *Gauntlet* fun?
5. To whom are the advertisers trying to appeal? Other than the text cited above, what in the ads indicate the intended audience?

Exercise #2:

Below are two advertisements for the joystick *Tilt Force* and game *Wargasm*. Click on the images for larger pictures. Compare and contrast the language and images used in these ads.

1. Who do you think the advertisers think will buy these games?
 2. What is the purpose of using sexual language to sell a product?
 3. How are violence and sex connected in these ads?
 4. How else is sex and violence linked in video games? What are other links between sex and violence in media? How might these links in the media be dangerous for both boys and girls, women and men?
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Narrow Vision: Race in Video Games

1. It is common in Western culture (myths, literature, film) for white to be associated with good and purity and black with bad and evil. How is this reflected in games such as *Kingpin*, *Duke Nukem*, *Tomb Raider* or *Shadowman*? How are people of color used as tokens for entire groups of people?
2. As Nina Huntemann in *Game Over* suggests, when people of color are featured as primary characters in video games, their race is essentialized into stereotypes. How are racially essentialized video game characters such as Turok and Akuji similar to characters we see in television and films?

Exercise #3:

Read the character profiles below and match them to the video game character.

[Click here for the correct answer.](#)

1. Was it difficult to match the descriptions with the characters? Why or why not?
2. What assumptions did you make about these characters, such as who would most likely be the scientist and who would know voodoo?
3. How do the makers of video games use these assumptions to perpetuate gender and race stereotypes?

Characters: **Gordon Freeman**, **Lara Croft** and **Akuji**

Character Profiles:

a. _____ was brought up in the secure world of aristocracy - surrounded by servants, social events and high society. Whilst _____'s academic achievements were outstanding, a number of comments on term reports indicated that _____ could perhaps benefit from a more structured lifestyle in order to keep _____ somewhat impulsive nature firmly in hand.

b. You are the voodoo expert _____. Claw your way through the underworld to exact your revenge on your murderous brother. Savage your enemies with your razor sharp claws. Incinerate them with primal voodoo spells like Hell Blast and Spirit Strike. Transform into a panther to turn up the mayhem as you devastate over 30 enemies and 4 bosses.

c. You are _____, a young research associate in the Anomalous Materials Laboratory. You have limited security clearance and no real idea of just how dangerous your job has become, until the morning you are sent alone into the Test Chamber to analyze of a strange crystalline specimen. A routine analysis, they tell you. Until something goes wrong.

Exercise #4:

Refer to the scene below from the popular game *Kingpin*, which takes place in the inner city. Click on the image for a larger picture. As the video points out, many stereotypical images of inner city life are portrayed in this video game. Analyze the image below.

1. What does this one shot tell you about urban life and the lives of black people?
 2. What is significant about the white shooter gunning down black criminals?
 3. How do images such as these shape players' ideas about black Americans?
 4. Why do you think it is appealing to base a video game in an urban setting?
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Video Game Violence & SimViolence

1 Do you think that violence in video games is excessive? Do you think it teaches the players, especially the young players, to be more aggressive and that aggression is ok? Would you want your younger brother or sister to play these games? Why or why not?

2. Do you think video games teach kids to kill, as David Grossman suggests? Why or why not? What other factors might be important to examine?
3. Do you feel that increased realism and virtual reality in video games is a more positive or negative advancement? For what reasons? How important is an intensified and more realistic experience?
4. Do you feel that players are able to keep absolutely clear the line between game play and reality? Do you feel that virtually flying a plane is less problematic than virtually shooting a gun?

Exercise #5:

Look at the two images below. Click on the images for larger pictures. The first is Mario from the 1986 *Super Mario Brothers* game for the original Nintendo console. The other image is Duke from *Duke Nukem: Zero Hour*, a 1999 release for Nintendo 64.

1. How have images of violence developed and changed over the last fourteen years?
 2. What are the most striking differences in these two characters?
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Conclusion

1. Do you believe that video games should be rated differently? Look up video games you are familiar with at the [ESRB](#) video games ratings site. Do you think the game you researched is appropriately rated? Why or why not?
2. What is an appropriate age for a child to begin playing video games? What kinds of games are appropriate for children under the age of 12? Under the age of 18?
3. What do you think video games will be like in the future?

Exercise #6:

You are a video game designer and you need to propose a new idea for a game.

1. What does this game look like?
2. Who are your main characters, what do they do, how do they dress, and what do they look like?
3. Where does it take place?
4. What is the basic story line or objective of your game?
5. Who do you want to buy this game?
6. How is your game similar to and different from the video games you saw in the video or that you have played?
7. Are these differences deliberate or significant?

Extra Credit Exercise:

Spacewar was created in 1962 and the first coin-op game, *Computer Space*, was created in 1971. The theme of wars in space and later of computer technology in space very much reflects the respective climates of those periods in American history with space exploration and progress becoming a greater reality. Think of some modern examples of video games from the video or from your own experience.

1. Do you think that these games similarly reflect the social and political climate of the late 1990's?
 2. If so, in what ways? If not, what has changed in the video game industry or the country at large so that this reflection no longer exists?
 3. Do video games reflect our society, help create it, or both?
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