

Incest, Sexual Violence, and Rape in Video Games

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Abstract

Technological advances have provided the opportunity for the creation of graphically intensive video games that are able to closely mimic reality. Just as there are darker sides to humanity, so, too, are there darker sides to video games. As technology has improved, video game developers have taken the opportunity to portray graphic and realistic sexual encounters. These games range from popular mainstream games to obscure Japanese *hentai* games. Sex always sells, but a notable number have games have taken to depicting scenes of more deviant sexual topics. Specifically, incest, sexual violence, and rape in video games have become much more prevalent in recent years, and, understandably, have given rise to some controversy. The purpose of this paper is to explore the prevalence of these deviant sexual topics in video games, including a brief history, overview, and discussion.

Key Words: incest, sexual violence, rape, video games, sex, pornography

1. Introduction

According to the Entertainment Software Association, ‘The entertainment software industry is currently one of the best performing sectors of the American economy.’¹ However, there is a dark side to the sexual content in the video game market, one where incest, sexual violence, and rape are either the purpose or part of the game play. Technology’s evolution has enabled game designers and developers to create and publish more realistic and explicit content in video games evolving from the pixelated and cartoonish rape of the Indian maiden in *Custer’s Revenge* to the more graphic sexual violation of Yuko Seno in *Sensei 2* in which bodily fluids are depicted. Because technology has allowed graphics to advance to the point of near-realism, explicit games have the potential to be more controversial. It has been suggested that part of the growth in sexual-content games is due to the age (35) and sex (male) of the gaming population.² Regardless, the market for videogames with explicit sexual situations or themes featuring taboo and illegal content continues to grow.³

Game developers and publishers continue to push the envelope for what is acceptable under the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB)⁴ ratings to receive an M (Mature) rating, though it is a fine line they walk:⁵ receiving a rating of AO (Adult Only) can sound a game’s death knell since

most consoles refuse to license an AO game and major public retailers refuse to carry them. Many retailers like Target and Wal-Mart are members of the IEMA (Interactive Electronic Merchants Association), which has said, 'Though not a policy, IEMA members generally do not carry AO-rated games any differently than we do not carry X-rated videos or DVDs....'⁶ Furthermore, AO games are not the most financially successful platform for the gaming or pornography industries because the games have limited market access, and the cost to the user for limited game play potentially makes it a poor financial investment.⁷

However, the Internet provides access to the market for deviant gaming content possibly in an attempt to remove the game from the ESRB's jurisdiction or to provide an open marketplace for AO games where consumers can both easily access them and do so anonymously, or at least with the illusion of anonymity.⁸ Consumers can purchase h-games, otherwise known as *hentai* games, a Japanese word broadly used to refer to sexually explicit materials, or download them online, join a virtual adult only environment like Red Light Center, or play one of many free JavaScript or 'homebrew' games, which are adapted from originals or newly created by fans for a specific platform. Online environments and JavaScript games are not subject to ESRB ratings while games purchased from overseas are not subject to ESRB ratings unless they are released in the US. Despite the lack of ratings, consumers continue to review games and provide information on content as either a warning of, or promotion for, the game.

It is the intent of this paper to explore the deviant and often pornographic content in video games, both those rated M or AO by the ESRB and those that remain unrated, in an attempt to provide a brief history of incest, sexual violence, and rape in console games and virtual worlds, how these games have been received in the public, and where the future for such content lies.

2. Incest

Incest is an almost universal taboo and has been explored throughout history, and in most countries incest between consenting consanguineous adults is penalized if not prohibited; also prohibited is a sexual relationship between adopted siblings, which under many laws is still considered incest.⁹ However, there are many games for PC and online that offer incest as part of, or the goal of, game play, from *Kana-Little Sister* (released in North America in 2002) to the *Fuck Mammy* series of Flash games online. Incest often connotes pedophilia in the public mind though it denotes both nonconsensual acts (rape, statutory rape, and pedophilia) and consensual acts. All h-games released for the PC and sold online through

stores like J-List come with the note that ‘all characters in this game, as well as all the hentai/bishoujo games we sell, are aged 18 or older.’¹⁰

Kana-Little Sister is one of the most popular and highly praised h-games (AO) in which the sexual desire between Kana and her older brother Takamichi, the character played by the gamer, is not the main story line in this game.¹¹ The occurrence of incest is an optional path for players. However, most reviewers marginalize the potential for incest in this story line because of the poignant plot and skillful artistic rendering, and there are several reviewers online who argue Kana’s immaturely drawn image eroticizes underage females while others claim that if the game publishers/distributors say Kana is 18 then perhaps she is simply underdeveloped for her age.¹² *Princess Maker 2* is another game that does not focus on incest though it exists as one of the possible endings for the game in the marriage between father and daughter.¹³

The Loli culture, which refers to the Japanese Lolita culture in which underage—either in appearance or reality—girls are highly sexualized, has multiple video games that come close to promoting pedophilia. Companies such as Mu-Soft, a Japanese company, pander to the eroticization of children with flash games like *Hizashi no Naka no Riaru*. The girl in *Hizashi* is clearly underage with a prepubescent body, innocent features, and childlike stature.¹⁴ The purpose of the game is to molest the girl the player is babysitting as she sleeps. The fact that the player is babysitting the girl leads to the conclusion that she is under the age of consent if she is not old enough to be left home alone. The game includes the ability to have sex with her, which is actually rape because the girl is sleeping, cannot give consent, is underage. Because her physical stature and characteristics suggest a prepubescent child, it is also pedophilia.

Other games such as the *Fuck Mammy* series offer a player, who controls the actions of the son, multiple scenarios in which he may engage in intercourse with his mother. The purpose of such games is consensual incest. Many of these games are unrated by the ESRB and available online; however, the games do have a warning that a player must be 18 or older in order to access the content. H-games like *The Sagara Family* (released in North America in 2005) also involve incestuous scenarios but none of the characters are coerced or forced by the player, who is the non-related visitor in a houseful of related females.¹⁵

Meanwhile, the AO game *Gibo: Stepmother’s Sin* (released in North America in 2004) provides incest through violence. In *Gibo* the player takes on the character of Yusuke who has a sexual relationship with both his cousin and his step-mother. The sexual scenarios in *Gibo* are drastically different from those in *Sagara*. The stepmother, Misako, in *Gibo* has a scene in which tears are streaming down her face and her hands are clasped before her in supplication as she tries to plead her way out of her stepson’s violent sexual

advances: ‘This is something that . . . only degenerates do . . .’ thereby implying her stepson is wrong and a ‘degenerate,’ while Misako’s physical reaction is one of an unwilling participant.¹⁶ In some game play, instances of incest, legal or consanguine, occur through force which leads to sexual abuse and rape.

3. Sexual Violence

As technology continues to evolve, video games are more easily able to provide a more realistic depiction of characters, events, and worlds. Under the guise of true realism, many of these games venture into the darker side of humanity, such as incest and pedophilia, as previously discussed. A more common occurrence in ‘real life,’ and therefore a more common occurrence in these deviant video games, is the prevalence of sexual violence. Sexual violence is used in video games for myriad reasons, at times taking up only a single scene or event, while other times serving as the focus and driving force behind the narrative. Sexual violence is generally viewed by the public in one of two ways: disgust or sexual excitement. These divergent attitudes are both represented in video games, and inspire the two major purposes of including sexual violence: for tone and plot purposes and to feed sexual fantasies and fetishes. A third occurrence of sexual violence in video games occurs when the realities of sexual violence are ignored, turning such events into sources of humor.

A. Tone and Plot

In some video games, sexual violence does not necessarily play a significant role in the gameplay, but is utilized as a method to set the tone or motivate the plot. As technology has allowed video games to move toward full-immersion into virtual worlds (*Grand Theft Auto*, *Call of Duty*, etc.), some developers have grasped the opportunity to utilize sexual violence as a means to enhance the virtual reality of the game. In addition, sexual violence can be used as a fulcrum to initiate, alter, or otherwise move the plot of the story.

In 1995 Sierra Entertainment released one of the first live-action interactive video games called *Phantasmagoria*.¹⁷ *Phantasmagoria* tells the story of Adrienne and her husband, Donald, as they move into an old mansion. Adrienne unwittingly releases a demon within the house, leading to a series of nightmares, bizarre encounters, and abusive behavior from her husband. The game experienced a bit of controversy over a scene in which Donald sexually forces himself on Adrienne. No graphic images or nudity are shown, but the scene is very clear as to what is happening. Supporters of the game defend the scene by arguing its importance in exemplifying the behavioral changes occurring in Donald.

A much more brutal usage of sexual violence occurs in the Japanese h-game, *A-GA*.¹⁸ The game makes heavy use of sexual violence and is extremely graphic in its presentation, including a scene of soldiers vaginally raping a woman with foreign objects.¹⁹ The game can be quite disturbing and lends itself to pornography, but some users claim the scenes are necessary to the development of the narrative, leading to a surprising conclusion.^{20 21}

Sexual violence is undoubtedly a controversial subject, especially in video games, but the topic can certainly be used as a means to enhance the game itself.

B. Fantasies

Often a video game's usage of sexual violence goes far beyond setting the tone or motivating the plot, instead seeming to serve as the purpose of the game. Just as the porn industry sells videos catering to virtually any sexual fantasy imaginable, so have video games begun to take advantage of sexual fantasies to drive the market. Videogames such as *Biko 2*²² and *Biko 3*²³ are 3-D stalking simulators in which you follow one of five women, gather items, and try to remain unseen. After catching the girl, you will achieve a different ending depending on choices made throughout the game, one of which includes vivid scenes of sexual violence.

Point-and-click adventure games such as *Tsuki-Possession*, *Sensei 2*, *Hitomi-My Stepsister*, and *Runaway City* seemingly attempt to portray as many types of sexually violent acts as possible. Such acts include nipple clamps, ball gags, thermometers as sex toys, forced public urination, bondage, psychological abuse, gang rape, enemas, and even tying up a naked girl to watch her being raped by a stranger. These games, and others of the same ilk, attempt to tell an elaborate story in which sexual violence acts as a plot device, but the excessiveness reveals their purpose as depictions of fetish and fantasy.

To the general public, these video games can be disgusting and revolting, but the targeted niche population finds them enjoyable and exciting. Just as porn movies began to cater to the deviant sexual fantasies of society, so have video games attempted to claim a toe-hold in the market. It is no coincidence, then, that just as mainstream society often ignores the more deviant aspects of pornography, so does society ignore these extreme and deviant video games. Games such as *Phantasmagoria* have stirred public controversy with only a relatively mild instance of sexual violence lacking nudity, but other incomparably violent depictions of sexual actions are largely ignored. One could argue that the more extreme video games are developed and sold in Japan, leading to a geographical division. The Internet, though, makes geographic boundaries less important and, in fact, some of these games are still being sold by online merchants such as Amazon.com.²⁴

C. Humor

Some video games have actually utilized sexual violence in a humorous manner. The popular *Grand Theft Auto* series falls into this category, although the open-ended style of gameplay allows plenty of responsibility to fall on the shoulders of the gamers themselves. One characteristic of the series allows the main character to pick up a prostitute for sex which in turn enhances his health. And just as in reality, such an escapade costs money. Another characteristic of the series allows the main character to beat up and/or kill any pedestrian or character and steal his/her money. Gamers have discovered that beating up the prostitute after sex allows them to reclaim their money while still reaping the benefits of enhanced health. Although one cannot prove the developer intended for such a thing to happen, this ability has been a source for humor and entertainment by gamers.

Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust also includes mention of sexual violence, such as one character's wondering if she is bleeding after being roofied.²⁵ Because of the juvenile perception of this game, though, this violent act is not taken seriously and merely adds to the immature humor and tone of the game. *Jewel Knights Crusaders* is similar, although much more graphic in its representation.²⁶ The game itself attempts to serve as a comedy parodying 'battle team' anime and television shows such as *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. In the game, the female fighting team agrees to let the main (male) character join them after agreeing to let him do whatever he wants to them. The cut scenes devolve into graphic scenes of sexual violence, but again, the comedic and unrealistic tone of the game removes any real sense of violation, instead serving as one facet of its 'humorous' parody.

Sexual violence is used in dramatically different ways by different games: tone and plot purposes, to feed fantasies, and even to serve as a source of humor. Despite the varying usage, though, almost all instances of sexual violence in video games share one commonality: devolution into rape.

4. Rape

Just as most instances of sexual violence in 'real life' lead directly to rape, video games, too, tend to follow such a course. Although technological advances have allowed rape to be depicted much more graphically and realistically, rape in video games goes back for decades. In 1982, *Custer's Revenge* was released for the Atari 2600, portraying a naked General Custer avoiding swarms of arrows on his way to raping a naked Indian woman tied to a post.²⁷ The graphics were very rudimentary and highly pixelated, but the game left no doubt as to its goal.

In 1990, before MMORPGs and online virtual worlds became prevalent and graphic intensive, Pavel Curtis developed an online text-only

virtual community called LambdaMOO. Although not a video game in the traditional sense, LambdaMOO does set the foundation for modern virtual realities such as *Second Life*. There are no graphics and no goals, but players do control avatars in order to interact with one another. In 1994, a character named Mr. Bungle entered the game and utilized a voodoo doll subprogram that allowed him to take control of other characters. Mr. Bungle forced the characters into different sexual acts with him and with each other, at one point forcing one character to eat his/her own pubic hair and another character to 'violate herself with a piece of kitchen cutlery.'²⁸

Rape has continued to exist in different video games throughout the years, but has become a very hot topic in recent months due to the controversy surrounding the Japanese h-game game, *RapeLay*.²⁹ The game, often described as a 'rape simulator,' follows Kimura Masaya as he stalks and rapes a mother and her two teenage daughters.³⁰ Although the game was released in 2006, it did not come under fire until years later when a listing for the game was discovered at the online merchant Amazon. The discovery ignited a firestorm of controversy in the United States, leading to the following statement by the NOW-NYC on February 23, 2009:

The National Organization for Women-New York City joins in support with NYC Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn and the NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault to call on all U.S. video distributors to refuse a rape simulation game from being sold or distributed.³¹

Equality Now also initiated a campaign against rape simulator games such as *RapeLay*, and British Labour MP Keith Vaz joined the protest by calling the game 'appalling' and calling for its ban.³² Amazon and eBay have since disallowed the sale of *RapeLay*, and the game developer has also removed any mention of *RapeLay* from their official web site.

Interestingly, '*RapeLay* can actually be called tame compared with its more extreme peers.'³³ Despite *RapeLay*'s shocking concept, the actual presentation of the game contains little blatant violence. This varies from games such as *Tsuki-Possession* and *Hitomi-My Stepsister* that seem to make a specific point to depict the most deviant and shocking scenes of rape as possible. As mentioned previously, the fact that the game was noticed to have crossed the Japanese border appears may have initiated such reaction. *RapeLay* was in publication for three years and listed on Amazon for an unknown amount of time before any controversy arose. Some of *RapeLay*'s more extreme peers have been in publication for nearly a decade and are still available from online merchants such as Amazon.

Illusion has been publishing games since 2001, and has become one of the most active distributors of h-games games in Japan. Many of these games include graphic depictions of rape, such as *RapeLay*, *A-GA*, *Battle*

Raper,³⁴ and the *Biko* series. Another company active in the publishing of rape-oriented games is G-Collections, who tend to focus on point-and-click bishoujo games. Some of their more graphic titles include *Hitomi-My Stepsister*, *Kana-Little Sister*, *Tsuki-Possession*, and *Virgin Roster*.

Despite the graphic and deviant sexual content, these games serve a sizeable market. Just as the porn industry has found methods to extract millions of dollars from small niche markets, so have these video games found success. Most people perceive rape as a grotesque and detestable crime against humanity, but a large portion of society enjoy rape fantasies and demand that companies like Illusion and G-Collections continue to publish these games.

5. Conclusion

Research in the area of deviant video games is very limited. *Sex in Video Games* by Brenda Braithwaite takes a general approach to sex in games and covers a great deal of material regarding the topic, but does not go into detail about deviant games that feature rape, sexual violence, or incest. Perhaps as more games like *RapeLay* come into the public sphere of knowledge a greater interest will be taken in examining what sorts of video games dealing with deviant material exist and what characteristics make up the market.

As technology advances, so do games in their complexity from plots to graphics; meanwhile game players ask for more sexual content even from M-rated games, arguing for a more realistic approach to fantasy worlds by suggesting the micro should mirror the macro. Online environments are beginning to provide the content and space to play out unhindered fantasies, but for players who want a game or plot to go along with sexual content they may have a while to wait for this market to meet their demands. AO games are harder to come by because of their lack of marketing or because they have not been yet released in the US, which can be a problem for some who want their games translated. However, deviant games do exist. Currently the deviant games market is cornered by Japan with their list of h-games sold through English-language distributors.

Ultimately, pornography is not illegal nor are pornographic video games in the US, though video games, or other drawings or animations, in which children are depicted in sexual situations are illegal under the PROTECT Act of 2003 passed by Congress. There is a widespread condemnation against videogames that promote incest, sexual violence, and in particular rape, from feminist, religious, and political groups. Regardless of public reception, these exploitative and violent games exist and are available for purchase, continuing the growth and sustenance of a niche market that provides deviant situations, plots, and images in video games.

Notes

¹ 'The Transformation of the Video Game Industry', Entertainment Software Association, 2009, viewed 5 June 2009, <<http://www.theesa.com/gamesindailylife/transformation.asp>>.

² D Brown, *Porn & Pong: How Grand Theft Auto, Tomb Raider and Other Sexy Games Changed Our Culture*, Feral House, Port Townsend, WA, 2008. The flooding of the Internet by game players creating mods (modifications) that can be downloaded to give an in-game character genitalia when clothing is removed implies that more sexually explicit games, or ones that offer more adult themes, in general are desired.

³ Online stores like J-List.com and multiple websites sell (or offer free play of) fetish-themed, taboo, and potentially illegal games.

⁴ The ESRB, created in the United States in 1994, is a self-regulatory and non-profit entity that assigns ratings to entertainment software released in the US to inform consumers about game content and age-appropriateness of the material.

⁵ The difference between M and AO ratings comes down to the length of time showing explicit content, either violence or sex/nudity.

⁶ C Morris, 'Wal-Mart, Target Pull *Grand Theft Auto*', CNNMoney, 20 July 2005, viewed 5 June 2009, <<http://money.cnn.com/2005/07/20/technology/personaltech/gta/>>.

⁷ Four hours of game play until the game is beaten in an h-game costs approximately \$50, plus shipping, whereas joining an adult only website that offers photos, movie downloads, and live action streaming, costs approximately half the price, and new content is regularly added.

⁸ It is not the purpose of the paper to explore the psychological reasons behind a player's desire for anonymity. However, games offer anonymity in various degrees depending on the game format, the platform it is played on, and Internet connectivity.

⁹ 'Inbred Obscurity: Improving Incest Laws in the Shadow of the 'Sexual Family'', *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 119, June 2006, viewed 5 June 2009, <http://www.harvardlawreview.org/issues/119/june06/note/inbred_obscurity.pdf>.

¹⁰ J-List, 2008, viewed 5 June 2009, <<http://www.jlist.com/HENTAI/>>.

¹¹ *Kana, Little Sister*, G-Collections, 2002.

¹² JC, 'Kana, Little Sister', ForeverGeek, 3 October 2004, viewed 5 June 2009, <http://www.forevergeek.com/2004/10/kana_little_sister/>.

¹³ *Princess Maker 2*, Gainax, 1996.

¹⁴ *Hizashi no Naka no Riaru*, Telenet Japan, 1994.

¹⁵ *The Sagara Family*, G-Collections, 2004.

¹⁶ *Gibo: Stepmother's Sin*, Peach Princess, 2004.

¹⁷ *Roberta Williams' Phantasmagoria*, Sierra On-Line, 1995.

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- ¹⁸ *A-GA*, Illusion, 2004.
- ¹⁹ Other scenes depict soldiers raping women at gunpoint, gang rape, and even tentacle rape.
- ²⁰ Sizhi, Review of *A-GA*, Moby Games, 14 July 2007, viewed 4 June 2009, <<http://www.mobygames.com/game/windows/a-ga-gekidou-no-wakusei/reviews/reviewerId,6226/>>.
- ²¹ Lasttoblame, Review of *A-GA*, Moby Games, 15 July 2007, viewed 4 June 2009, <<http://www.mobygames.com/game/windows/a-ga-gekidou-no-wakusei/reviews/reviewerId,97350/>>.
- ²² *Biko 2*, Illusion, 2000.
- ²³ *Biko 3*, Illusion, 2004.
- ²⁴ These games include *A-GA*, *Tokimeki Checkin!*, *Tsuki-Possession*, *Virgin Roster*, *Jewel Knights Crusaders*, *Hitomi-My Stepsister*, *Kana-Little Sister*, *Sensei 2*, and *Slave Pageant*.
- ²⁵ *Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust*, Funsta, 2009.
- ²⁶ *Jewel Knights Crusaders*, G-Collections, 2004.
- ²⁷ *Custer's Revenge*, Mystique, 1982.
- ²⁸ J Dibbell, 'A Rape in Cyberspace' in *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1998, p. 13.
- ²⁹ *RapeLay*, Illusion, 2006.
- ³⁰ Some of the actual elements depicted in the game include a freeform mode that allows the raping of any female character, inviting additional males to join in the rape, pregnancy, abortion, tracking the number of vaginal ejaculations, and 'breaking' a girl to make her a sex slave, leading to group sex with all three character when they are each broken. The game 'ends' in one of two ways: being stabbed to death while raping one of the victims or being thrown in front by an impregnated victim.
- ³¹ 'Rape Video 'Game' Appalling and Unacceptable', The National Organization for Women-New York City, 23 February 2009, viewed 4 June 2009, <http://www.nownyc.org/women/uploads/Press%20Releases/09-02-23_Video-Game-Simulates-Rape.pdf>.
- ³² B Moore-Bridger, 'MP Calls for Rape Game to be Banned', *London Evening Standard*, 25 February 2009, viewed 4 June 2009, <<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23652279-details/MP+calls+for+rape+game+to+be+banned/article.do>>.
- ³³ L Alexander, 'And You Thought Grand Theft Auto Was Bad: Should the United States ban a Japanese 'rape simulator' game?', *Slate*, 9 March 2009, viewed 4 June 2009, <<http://www.slate.com/id/2213073/pagenum/2>>.
- ³⁴ Illusion later released a sequel to *Battle Raper* called *Battle Raper 2* (2005). Interestingly, all references or depictions of rape were removed.

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