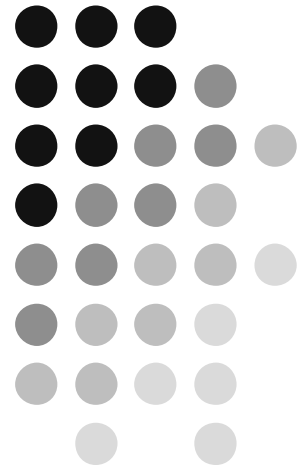


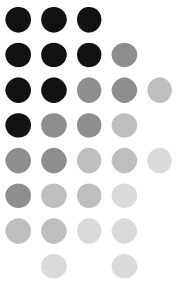
Ethics in Computer Games

Brian Magerko

EECS 494

12.8.03

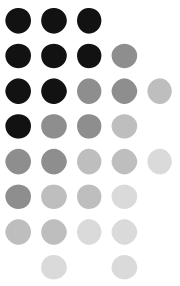




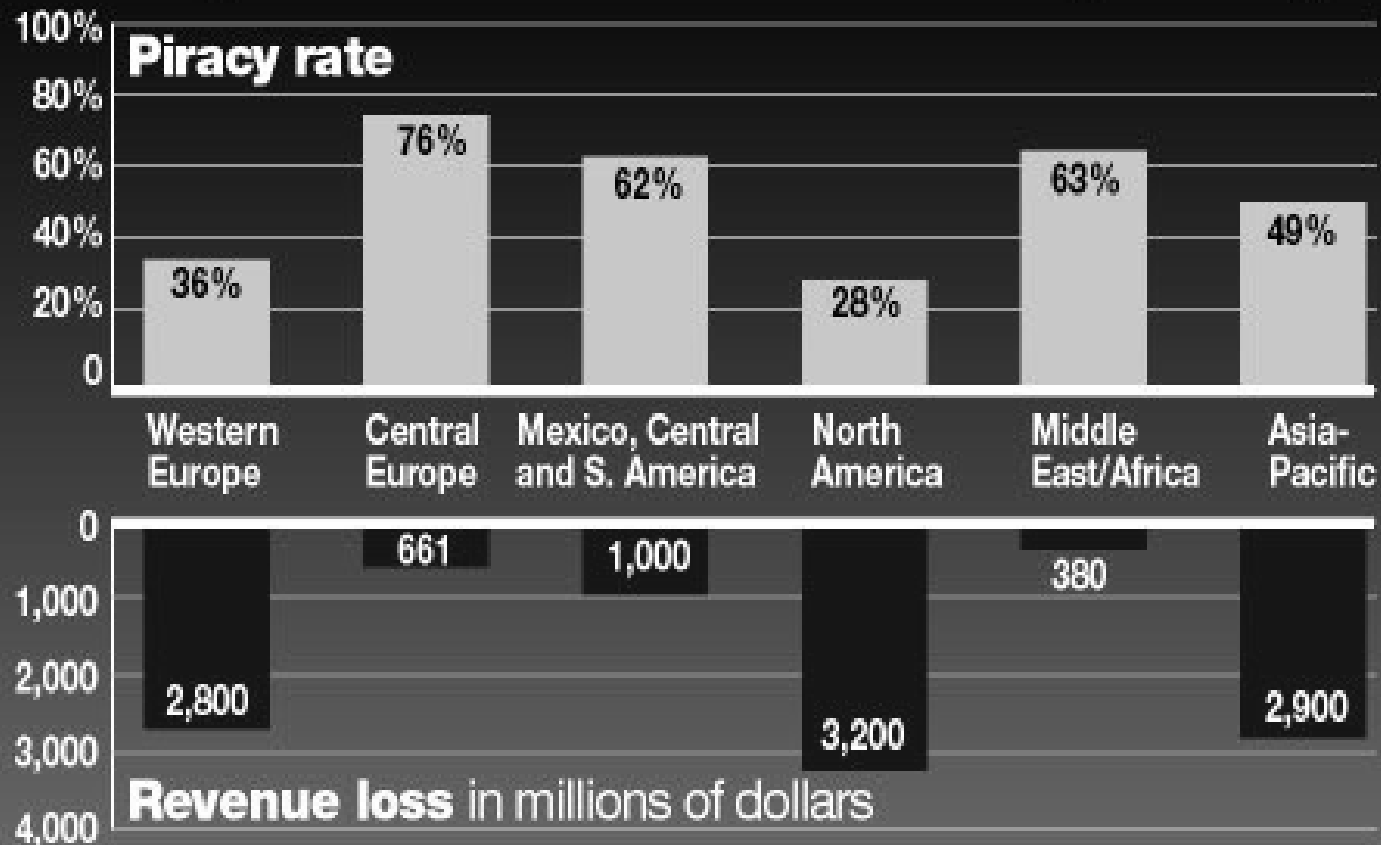
Overview

- The Business
 - Piracy
 - Ratings / Censorship
- Game Content
 - Violence in Gaming
 - Gender & Sexuality
- Social Affect
 - Privacy
 - Computer Game Addiction

Software Piracy

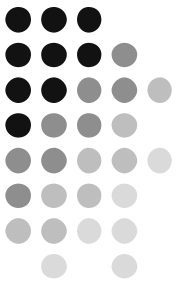


Piracy rate and revenue loss per region

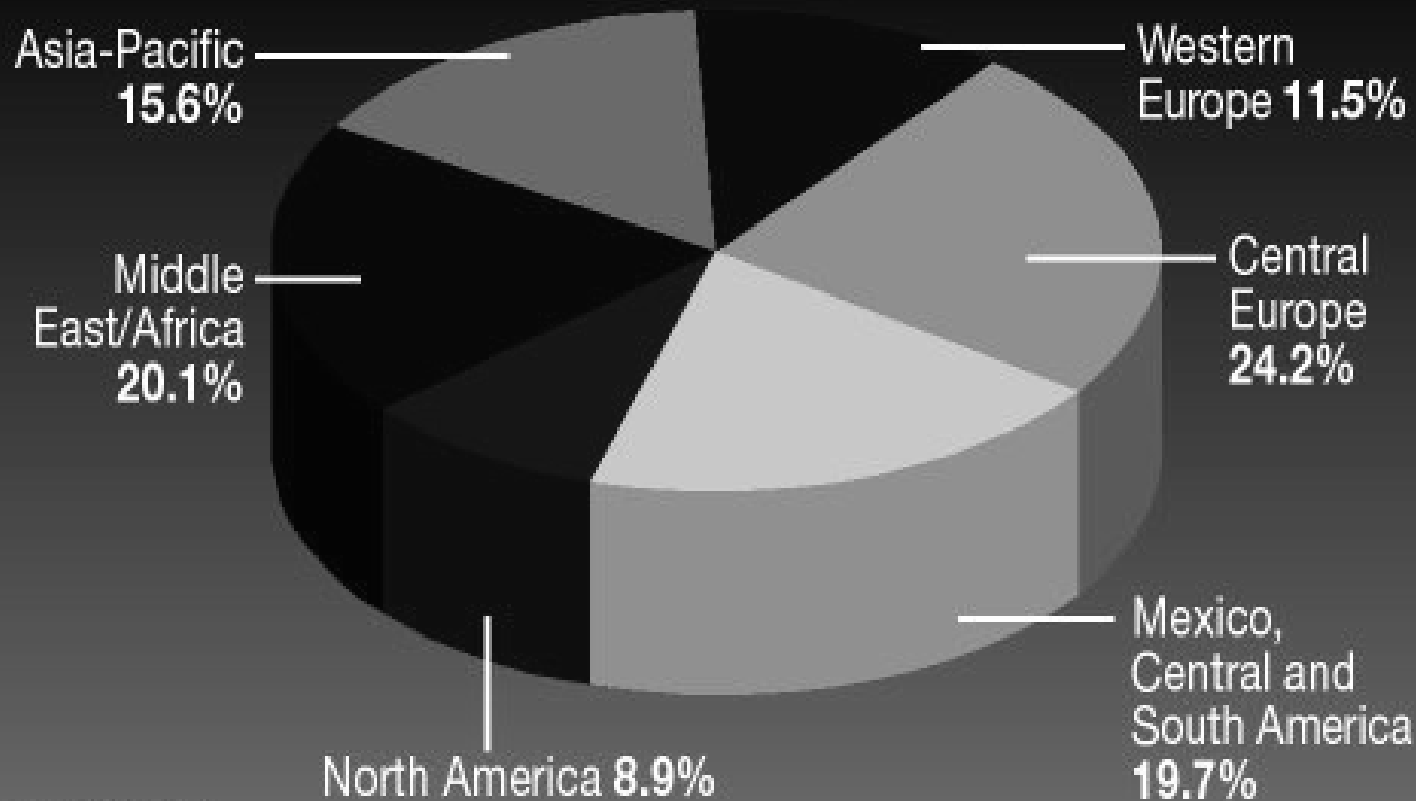


SOURCE: SIA

Software Piracy

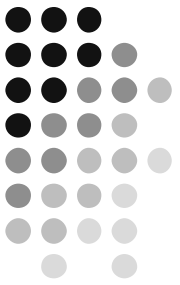


Software piracy distribution by region

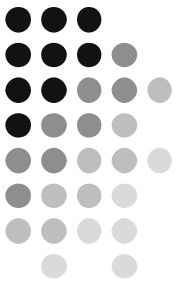


SOURCE: SIIA

Piracy Questions



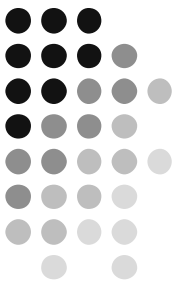
- Is piracy acceptable if the person wouldn't have ever actually bought the item?
- Is pirating / cracking a game ever ok? What about to replace a lost legal copy?
- Have you ever pirated software, and if so, what is your rationale for breaking the law? Is it any different than shoplifting?



Rating Computer Games

- Game ratings set by Entertainment Software Rating Board
- Started in 1994 by the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA)
- Rating is a consensus of at least three independent, trained raters
- Rates over 1,000 games per year

ESRB Ratings



EARLY CHILDHOOD

Titles rated **EC - Early Childhood** have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.



TEEN

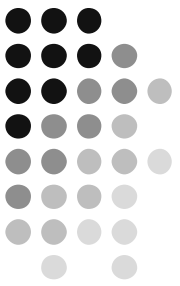
Titles rated **T - Teen** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older. May contain violent content, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive themes.



ADULTS ONLY

Titles rated **AO - Adults Only** have content suitable only for adults. Titles in this category may include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence. Adult Only products are not intended for persons under the age of 18.

ESRB Ratings



EVERYONE

Titles rated **E - Everyone** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal violence, some comic mischief and/or mild language.



MATURE

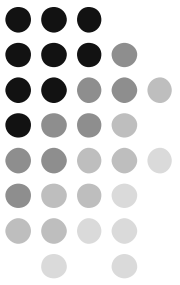
Titles rated **M - Mature** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain mature sexual themes, more intense violence and/or strong language.



RATING PENDING

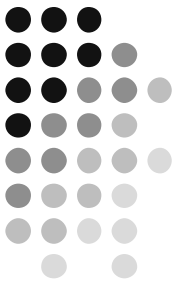
Titles listed as **RP - Rating Pending** have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating.

Content Descriptors



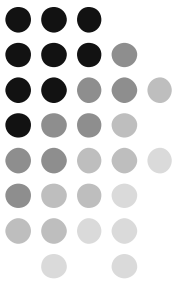
- **Alcohol Reference** - Reference to and/or images of alcoholic beverages
- **Animated Blood** - Cartoon or pixilated depictions of blood
- **Blood** - Depictions of blood
- **Blood and Gore** - Depictions of blood or the mutilation of body parts
- **Cartoon Violence** - Violent actions involving cartoon-like characters. May include violence where a character is unharmed after the action has been inflicted
- **Comic Mischief** - Scenes depicting slapstick or gross vulgar humor
- **Crude Humor** - Moderately vulgar antics, including bathroom humor
- **Drug Reference** - Reference to and/or images of illegal drugs

Content Descriptors



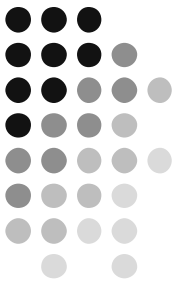
- **Edutainment** - Content of product provides user with specific skills development or reinforcement learning within an entertainment setting. Skill development is an integral part of product
- **Fantasy Violence** - Violent actions of a fantasy nature, involving human or non-human characters in situations easily distinguishable from real life
- **Gambling** - Betting like behavior
- **Informational** - Overall content of product contains data, facts, resource information, reference materials or instructional text
- **Intense Violence** - Graphic and realistic-looking depictions of physical conflict. May involve extreme and/or realistic blood, gore, weapons, and depictions of human injury and death
- **Mature Humor** - Vulgar and/or crude jokes and antics including "bathroom" humor
- **Mature Sexual Themes** - Provocative material, possibly including partial nudity

Content Descriptors



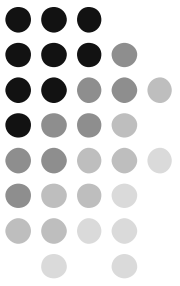
- **Mild Language** - Mild references to profanity, sexuality, violence, alcohol, or drug use
- **Mild Lyrics** - Mild references to profanity, sexuality, violence, alcohol, or drug use in music
- **Mild Violence** - Mild scenes depicting characters in unsafe and/or violent situations
- **Nudity** - Graphic or prolonged depictions of nudity
- **Partial Nudity** - Brief and mild depictions of nudity
- **Sexual Violence** - Depictions of rape or other sexual acts
- **Some Adult Assistance May Be Needed** - Early Childhood Descriptor only
- **Strong Language** - Profanity and explicit references to sexuality, violence, alcohol, or drug use

Content Descriptors



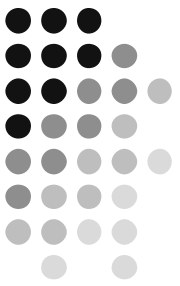
- **Strong Lyrics** - Profanity and explicit references to sex, violence, alcohol, or drug use in music
- **Strong Sexual Content** - Graphic depiction of sexual behavior, possibly including nudity
- **Tobacco Reference** - Reference to and/or images of tobacco products
- **Use of Drugs** - The consumption 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

Possible ESRB Descriptors for Super Mario Bros 2?



drug-crazed, violent
psychedelia
or
harmless fantasy?

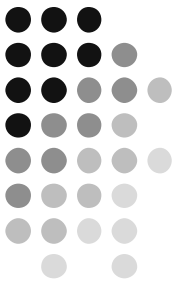
- **Cartoon Violence**
- **Drug Reference**
- **Gambling**
- **Mild Violence**
- **Use of Drugs**



Ratings Questions

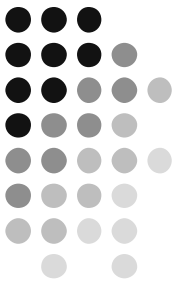
- Is rating computer games a negative form of censorship?
- Who should decide what the ratings should be based on?
- Would you as a parent take advantage of such ratings? Why or not?

Violence in Video Games



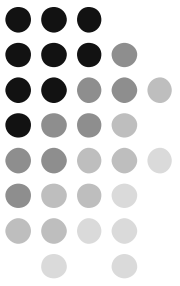
- Anderson & Bushman: Exposure to violent games...
 1. ... increases physiological arousal
 2. ... increases aggressive thoughts
 3. ... increases aggressive emotions
 4. ... increases aggressive actions
 5. ... decreases positive prosocial actions
 6. ... *trains our youth in combat tactics needed for the revolution*

Aggression Experiments



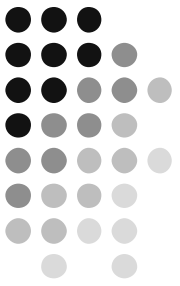
- College student experiment
 - Group A: played a non-violent game
 - Group B: played a violent game
 - Competitive reaction test afterwards
 - Winner of each 'round' delivers a loud "noise blast" at opponent, with a choice of volume and duration
 - Group B delivered longer blasts than Group A
- Exposure to violent video games increases *hostile attribution bias*
 - Those who interpret ambiguous social cues as being of hostile intent are more aggressive
 - Children who play more violent video games are more likely to have a hostile attribution bias

Violence Questions



- What social responsibilities do game designers have to the users of their products?
- Should violence in video games even be an issue, since we can see it often in other, more popular mass media?
- Have you personally observed a change in a friend due to videogame usage, violent or otherwise?
- Do you notice any changes in your own attitude after playing a violent video game?

Gender & Sexuality in Games

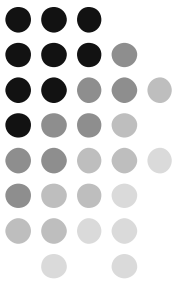


“Nudity, sex and all adult subject matter is justified if (and only if) the setting, story or logical consequences justify it,”

Nexus on

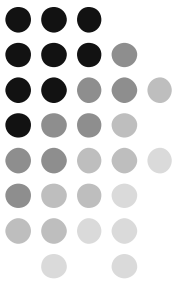
www.womengamers.com

Gender & Sexuality in Games

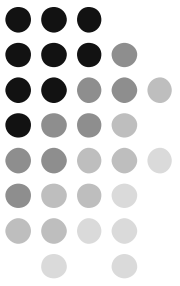


- 43% of people who play *interactive games* are women
 - *Interactive game* should be taken as a broad term
- 47% of people who purchase computer games are men and 53% are women.
- 54% of people who purchase console games are men and 46% are women.

Gender & Sexuality in Games

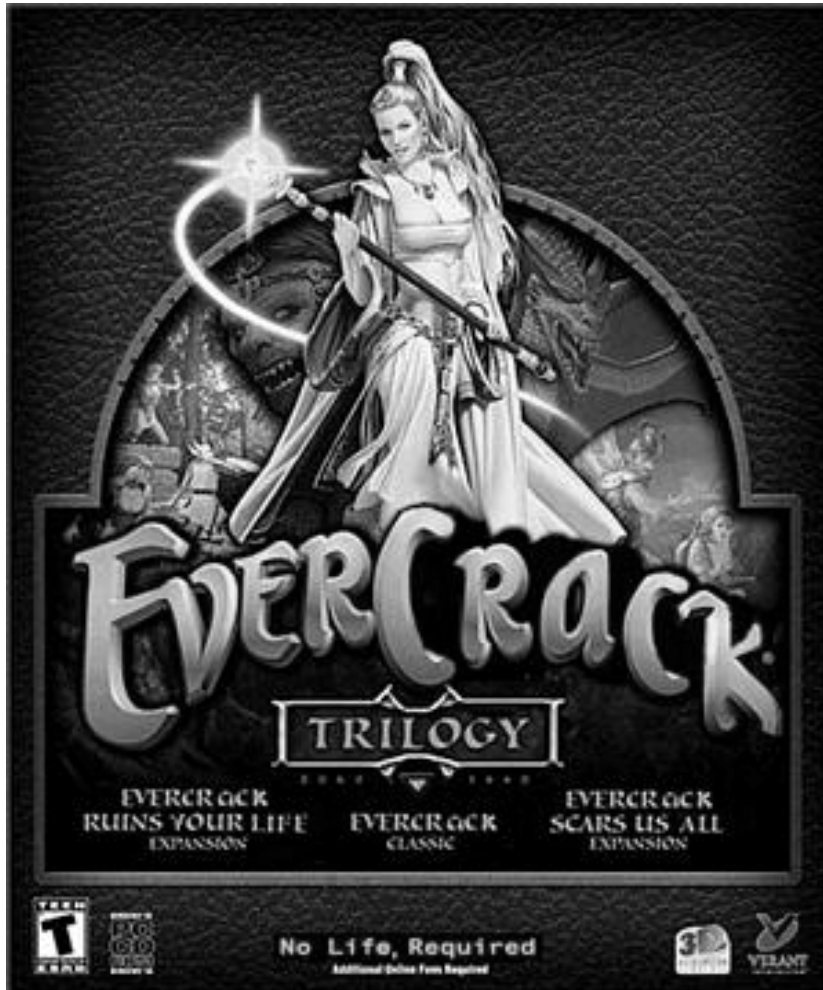
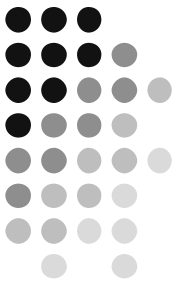


Gender & Sexuality Questions



- What are the gender stereotypes used in different gaming genres? What is negative / positive about them?
- How can game designers change the way they approach game content and design to counter the prevalent gender bias in present games?
- What are some examples of sexuality in games being appropriate in your eyes? Some examples of when it's been inappropriate?
- Should games be rated according to their sexual content? What about references to alternative lifestyles?

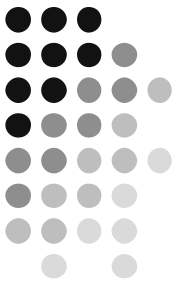
Game Addiction



“He even left Thanksgiving dinner *before pie was served* to come home and play....”

a post on
EverQuest-Widows

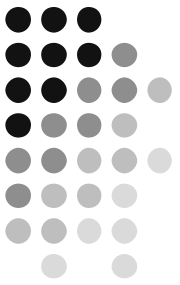
Everquest



“My husband was doing an adventure when one of the players asked how much longer the adventure would take since his wife was in labor.”

“When I came back home I asked my EQA to come to bed with me because I needed some comfort and to process what had happened, especially since I just started my 8th month of pregnancy. You know what his answer was? ‘I can't just leave my group, it's rude.’”

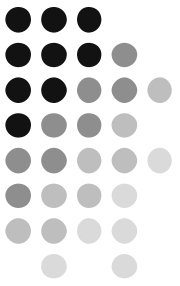
Computer Game Addiction



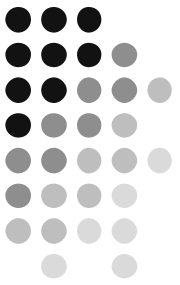
“Symptoms of game addiction include falling behind in school and work and basically deferring everything else in your life so you can play,” she said.

“Compulsive playing tends to mask underlying problems such as depression, anger and low self-esteem,” said the director of the Computer Addiction Studies Center, who said she was once hooked on computer solitaire.

Game Addiction Questions



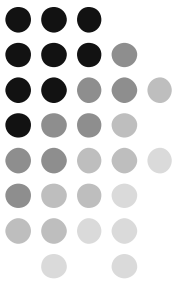
- Where is the line drawn between an “avid gamer” and someone who is unhealthily addicted to gaming?
- Is being addicted to computer games really that bad inherently?
- Is being drawn into video games a possible symptom of problems the person has in dealing with reality, or is that more of a myth?
- What social responsibilities do game designers have to the users of their products?
- Should games known to be highly addictive come with warning labels?



Privacy and Corporations

- MMPORG's, Web-based games, and even games requiring online registration all have access to your machine and any information you choose to offer.
- Organizations like Microsoft, and more recently the US Army, which have possible negative social connotations associated with them, have gotten involved in computer games.

Privacy and Corporations Questions



- What data is ethical to collect without the user's knowledge? To collect with consent?
- If the user's gaming experience can be improved by collection personal information, how much is harmless?
- What are future privacy issues that gamers may have to deal with?
- Would you work for a company that was performed poorly on social issues you deemed important?
Would you / have you buy / bought games from such a company?