PARENTING AND VIDEO GAMES: A PSYCHIATRIC PERSPECTIVE

DR. TYLER R BLACK, MD, FRCPC

Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

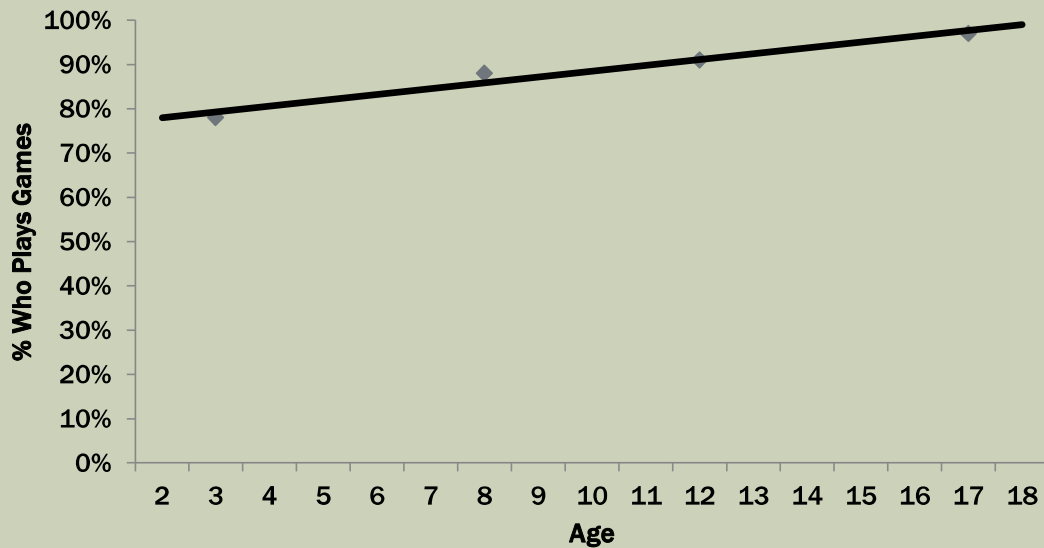BC Children's Hospital

OUTLINE

- The Scope of Kids and Gaming
- What I See
- Compulsive Gaming
- Mature Content and Kids
- How Parents Should See Games
- What Should Parents Do?
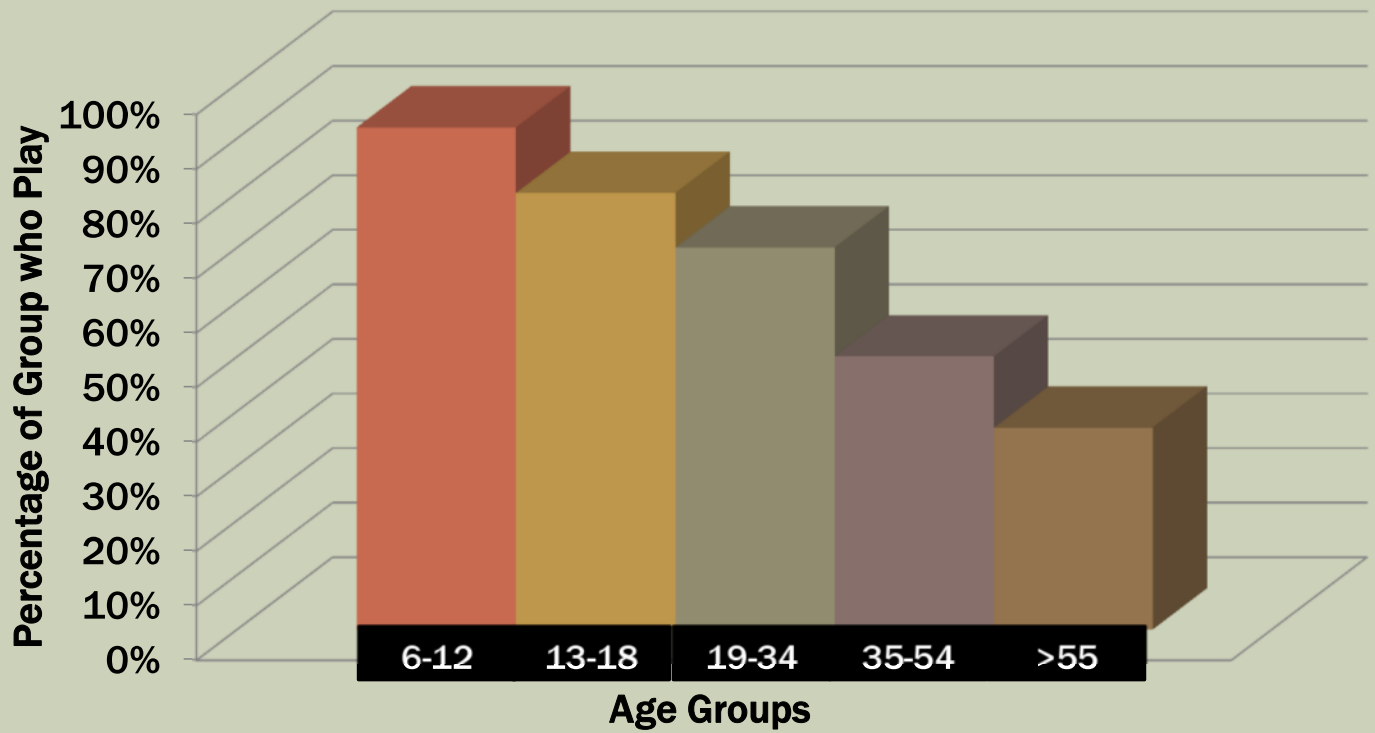
THE SCOPE OF KIDS AND GAMING

Statistics, ho!

GETTING THE STATS

- 91% of youth 2-17 play games (2011, NPD)
- 78% of kids 2-5 play games (2011, NPD)
- 97% of teens play games (2010, Pew)
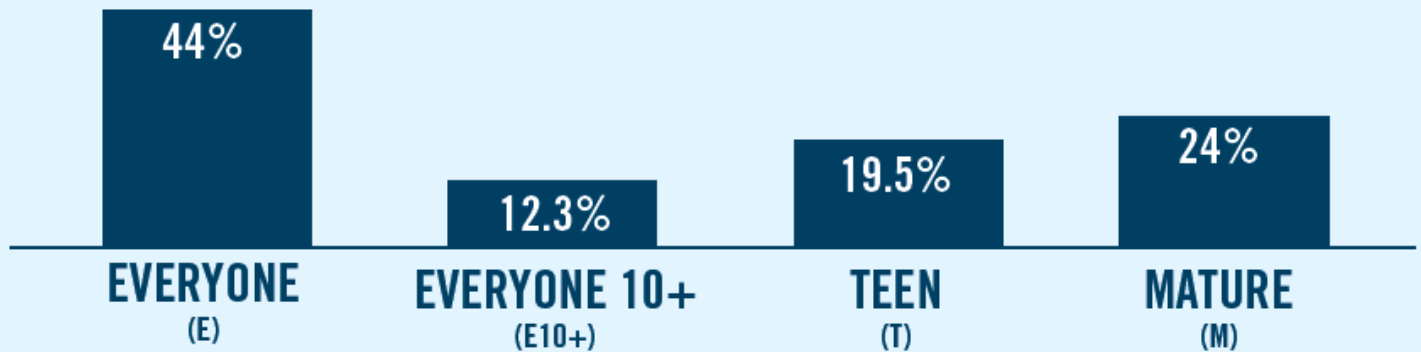- 80% of teens play >5 genres (2010, Pew)

VIDEO GAME USE BY AGE (2010)

Percentage of Group who Play

100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%

6-12   13-18   19-34   35-54   >55

Age Groups

2010 – ESA Canada

2010 Computer and Video Game Sales by Rating
BY UNITS SOLD

44%	12.3%	19.5%	24%
EVERYONE (E)	EVERYONE 10+ (E10+)	TEEN (T)	MATURE (M)

Source: The NPD Group/Retail Tracking Service

ERSB, 2011

WHAT I SEE

Real world examples...

WHAT I SEE

- Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Emergency Unit
  BC Children's Hospital, 2012

- Children aged 4-17, from Emergency Departments

- "Psychiatric Crisis"
  - Aggression
  - Depression / Bipolar
  - Psychosis
  - Anxiety
  - Addiction
  - ** Parent – Child Conflict **

"PARENT-CHILD CONFLICT?"

- "Fight with parents…"
  - Over something (video game, going out, coming home late, school)
  - Which escalates into (argument, fight, punishment)
  - Which results in:
    - Suicide threat / statement / behaviour
    - Self-injurious behaviour
    - Running away
    - Physical fight in the home
    - Destruction of property

- The "over something" is relatively unimportant.

WHAT'S GOING ON WHEN SOMEONE HAS A PROBLEM?

Predisposing	Precipitating	Perpetuating	Protective
Genetics	Recent changes	Relationships	Relationships
Temperament	Disappointments	Coping Strategies	Coping Strategies
Environment	Arguments	Ideas	Ideas
Relationships	Use of Substances	Environment	Environment
Trauma / Abuse	Major Event	Chronic Illness	+ Self-Concept
Medical Problems	Environment	Guilt / Shame	Intelligence
Previous experiences	Illness Changes		Confidence
Psychiatric Illness			

COMPULSIVE GAMING

Too Much of a Good Thing…

tylerblack.com/PAX12

Dr. Matthew Chow and I presented on gaming addiction.

In summary:
a) Games are not classically addictive.
b) Research on "addiction" is shoddy and full of bias
c) Definition of "addiction" probably = "likes playing games"
d) Overdoing anything is bad
e) Balance is good

"MY KID PLAYS TOO MUCH…"

Fight with mother → "I'll kill myself."

- Parent overwhelmed, child will not stop playing
  - World of Warcraft, Runescape, obscure F2P MMOs
  - CounterStrike, Call of Duty / Modern Warfare

- Child struggling:
  - Has depression
  - No friends (recently moved schools)
  - Gets teased at school
  - History of physical abuse by grandfather

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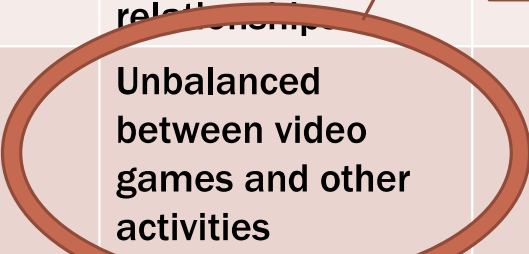 - CounterStrike, Call of Duty / Modern Warfare

- Parent struggling:
  - Supervision
  - Purchase of Game / Game Time
  - Inability to set limits / reinforce limits
  - Not understanding their child
  - Very anxious mother, ++ pressure to child

WHAT'S GOING ON WHEN SOMEONE HAS A PROBLEM?

Predisposing	Precipitating	Perpetuating	Protective
Family history of anxiety	No friends at the moment	Poor coping skills	Smart, capable child
History of abuse	Mother and child fighting verbally	Mother has limited ability to supervise	Good at video games
Shy temperament	Depression	Mother lacks limit-setting skills and techniques	
Family history of aggression	Recent move to a new school	No current therapeutic relationships	
	Bullying	Unbalanced between video games and other activities	

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Family history of aggression	Recent move to a new school	No current therapeutic relationships	Is this the thing to blame?
	Bullying	Unbalanced between video games and other activities	

IT'S EASY TO BLAME THE BEHAVIOUR

"The Behaviour" is Usually a child's best effort to succeed

- "My child plays too many video games."
  Why is my child succeeding with that group?

- "My child hangs out with the wrong crowd."
  What do games provide that "real life" isn't?

- "My child stole my Reddit karma."
  Why is karma so important to my child?

WHAT DO GAMES DO?

Video games:

- are tremendously varied.
- can be a source of peer social discussion.
- can be learning tools.
- can also be used to avoid responsibilities.
- can be used to avoid development.

Adapted from: K. Dini, "Video Game Play and Addiction: A Guide for Parents" (2008)

WHY WOULD A CHILD PLAY?

Core Issue	Example of a Problem	What Games Provide
CONTROL	Environment is overwhelming.	SHELTER
SELF-ESTEEM and COMMUNITY	Lack feeling valued, not contributing	ACHIEVEMENT & ONLINE COMMUNITY
IDENTITY	No direction, no sense of self.	GROWTH
MASTERY	Difficulty succeeding, difficulty practicing.	SKILLS

Adapted from: K. Dini, "Video Game Play and Addiction: A Guide for Parents" (2008)

GAMING IS "NORMAL"

- Now, 90-99% of children play video games

- Not playing video games could be:
  - Personal / Parent decision (healthy)
  - Due to other activities (healthy)
  - Indicative of social difficulty
  - Indicative of learning difficulty
  - Indicative of movement difficulty

SUICIDE THINKING AND VIDEO GAME USE

Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior 41(3) June 2011
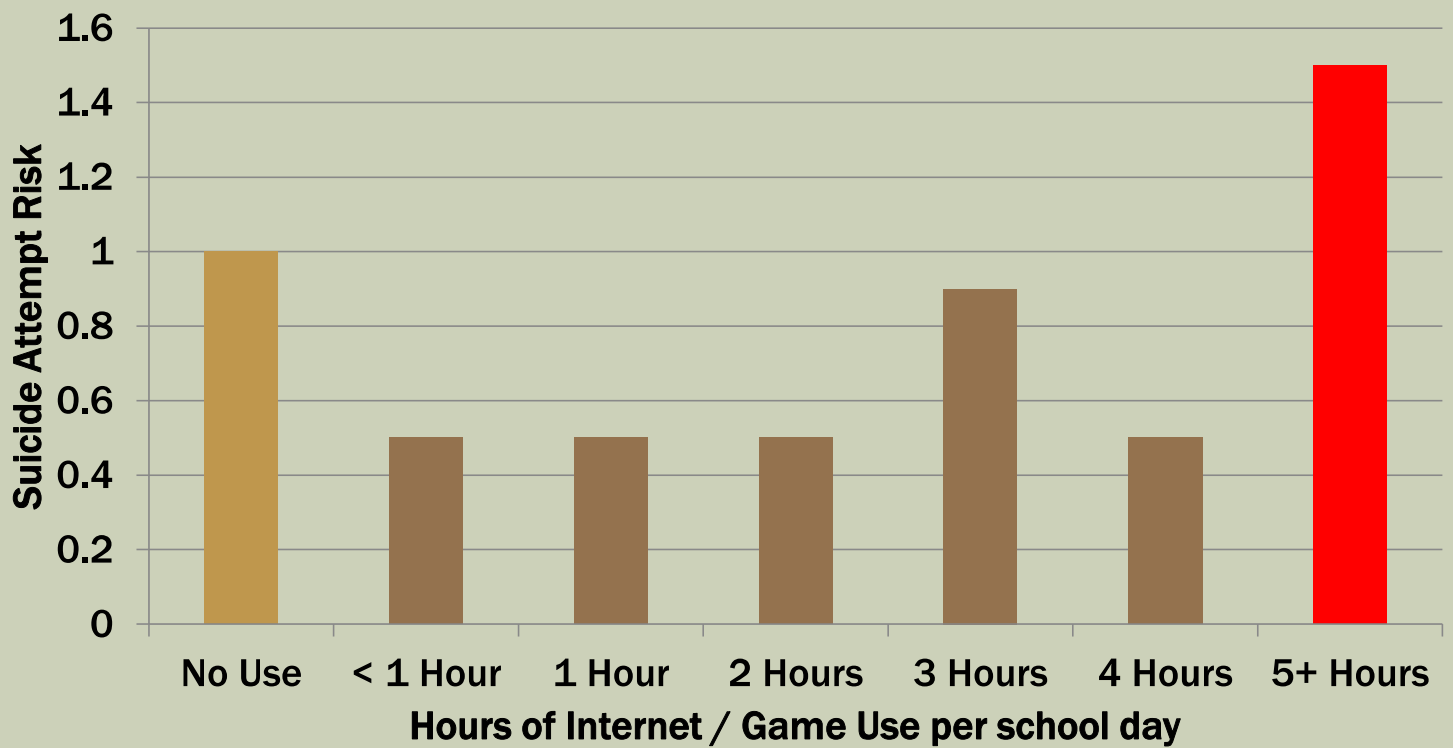
CANNOT STRESS ENOUGH

- Overdoing ANYTHING is bad for you:
  - Studying
  - Sleeping
  - Eating
  - Dieting
  - Exercising
 - Collecting stamps
  - Video games

CANNOT STRESS ENOUGH

- Video Games provide:
  - Mastery of skills
  - Chances to be a hero / play in a story / build / destroy
  - Rewards
  - Validation
  - Now: Social world, exercise, sometimes even $$
- A child who struggles with these things in "the real world" will likely seek them out in video games if given the chance

MATURE CONTENT AND KIDS

Much Ado About Nothing?
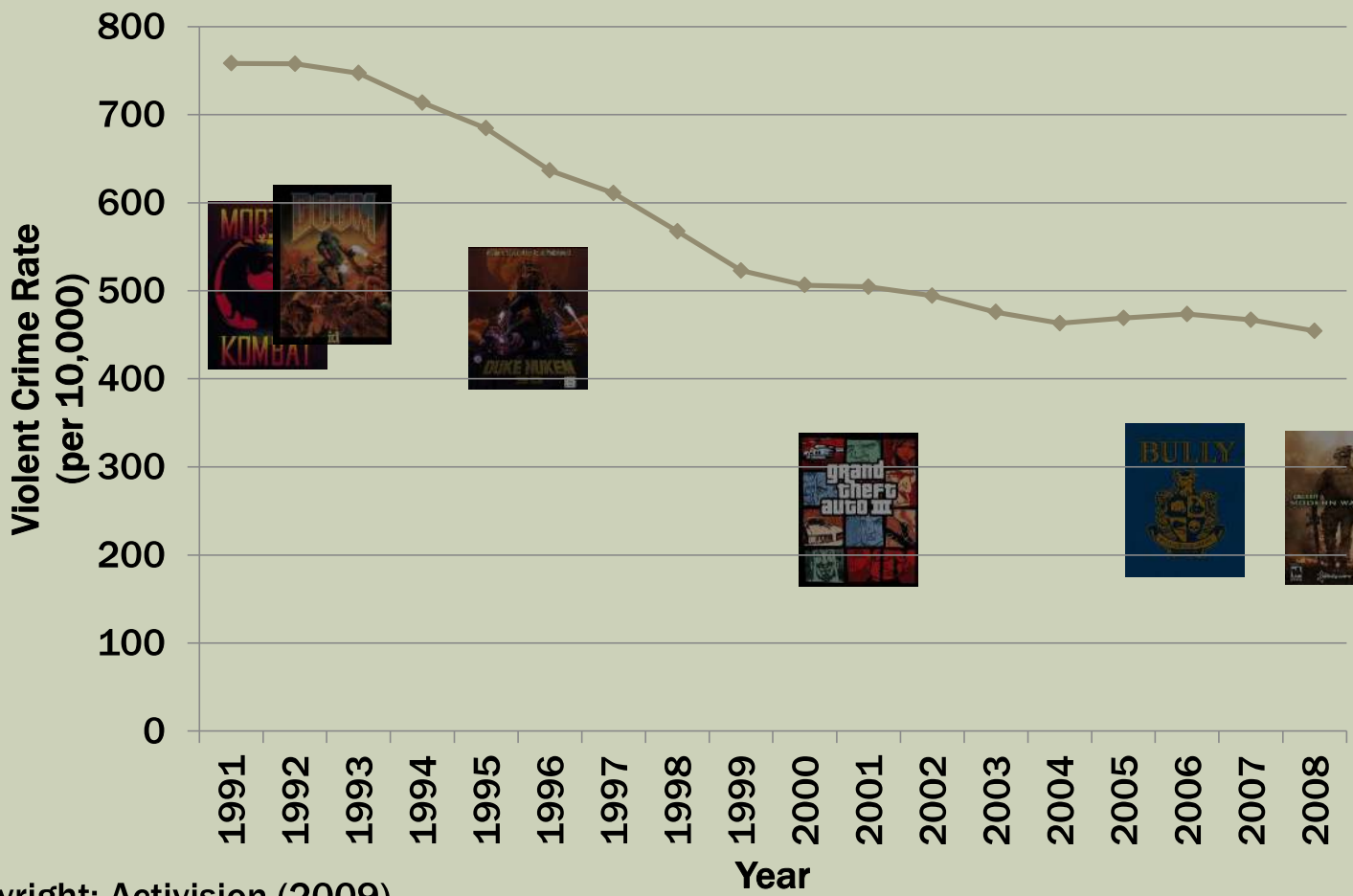
KIDS CAN JUST GO BUY THIS STUFF...

FTC Mystery Shopper Audits: 2000-2011
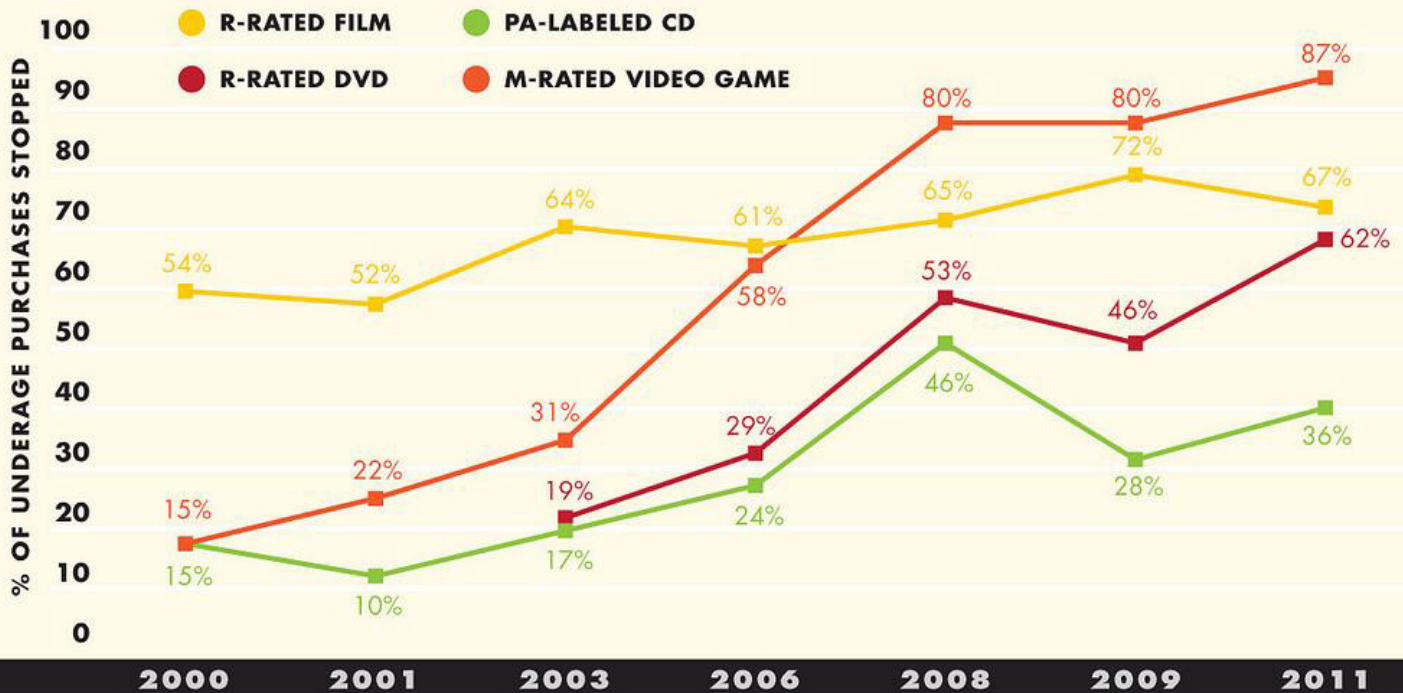
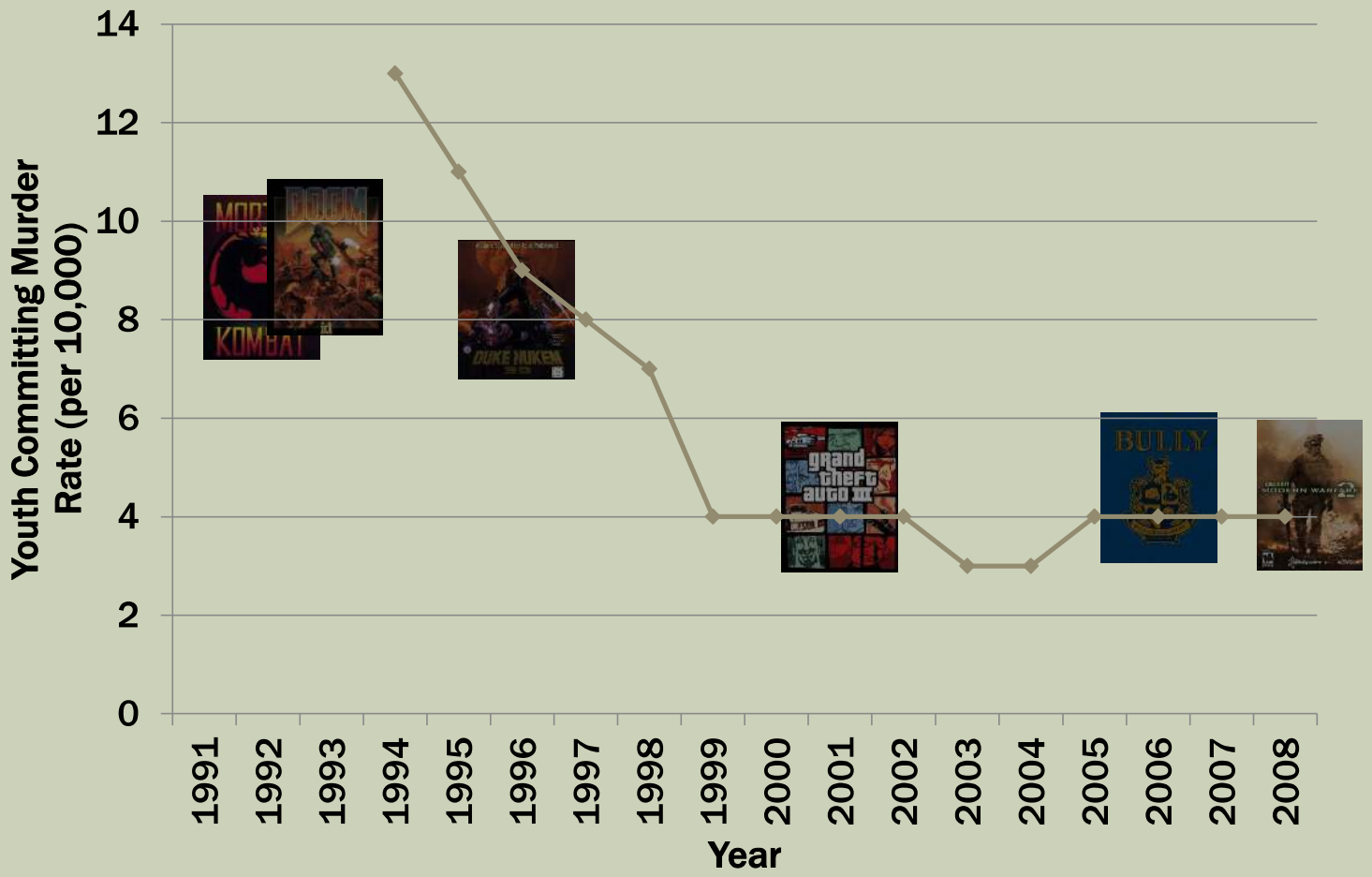SOURCE: Federal Trade Commission Mystery Shopper Audits 2000-2011

ERSB, 2011

Rate of Violent Crimes, all ages, per year (USA)


Violent Crime Rate (per 10,000)

Year

National Center for Juvenile Justice (October 31, 2009). Juvenile Arrest Rates by Offense, Sex, and Race.

Murder rate, youth, per year (USA)

National Center for Juvenile Justice (October 31, 2009). Juvenile Arrest Rates by Offense, Sex, and Race.

Figure 1.1.   Number of student, staff, and nonstudent school-associated violent deaths, and number of homicides and suicides of youth ages 5–18 at school: School years 1992–93 to 2008–09

Number

Total number of student, staff, and nonstudent school-associated violent deaths[2]
Homicides of youth ages 5–18 at school
Suicides of youth ages 5–18 at school
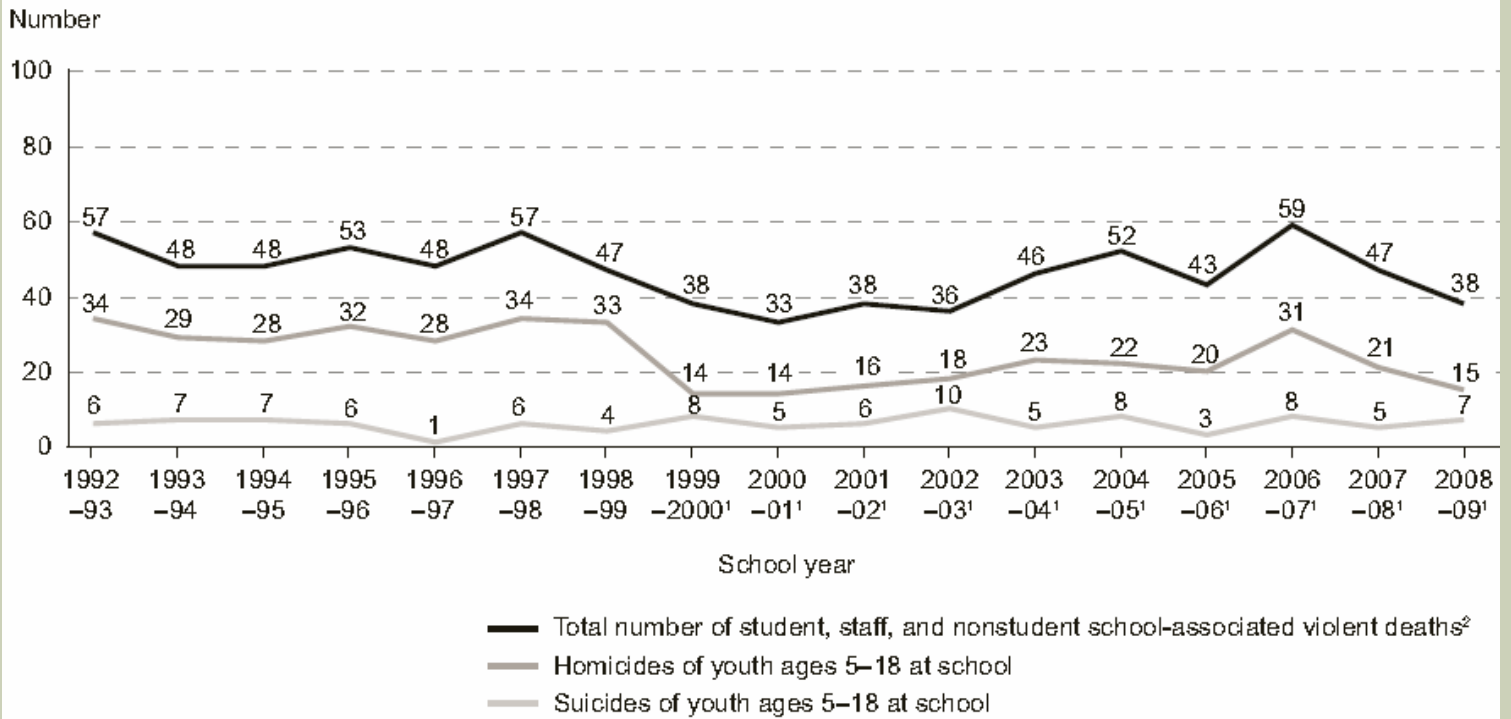
WHY I STRUGGLE WITH "VIOLENT GAMES CAUSE VIOLENT KIDS"

- The research is tremendously biased, self-referential, and very unscientific.
- Scientists lose credibility when they say "it is beyond doubt."
- Video games are interactive, social, can be done with parents, can be put into context
- Violent games can be prosocial, and non-violent games can be very asocial
- Kids can separate fantasy from reality (EARLY)

Ferguson 2011; Hall et al. 2011

BUT IF I GO TO THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION…

Violence in the Media - Psychologists Help Protect Children from Harmful Effects

Decades of psychological research confirms that media violence can increase aggression.

Findings

Virtually since the dawn of television, parents, teachers, legislators, and mental health professionals have been concerned about the content of television programs and its impact, particularly on children. Of special concern has been the portrayal of violence, especially given psychologist Albert Bandura's work on social learning and the tendency of children to imitate what they see. As a result of 15 years of consistently disturbing findings about the violent content of children's programs, the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior was formed in 1969 to assess the impact of violence on the attitudes, values and behavior of viewers. The resulting Surgeon General's report and a follow-up report in 1982 by the National Institute of Mental Health identify these major effects of seeing violence on television:

- Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others

- Children may be more fearful of the world around them

- Children may be more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others

Research by psychologists L. Rowell Huesmann, Leonard Eron and others found that children who watched many hours of violence on television when they were in elementary school tended to also show a higher level of aggressive behavior when they became teenagers. By observing these youngsters into adulthood, Drs. Huesmann and Eron found that the ones who'd watched a lot of TV violence when they were eight years old were more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for criminal acts as adults. Interestingly, being aggressive as a child did not predict watching more violent TV as a teenager, suggesting that TV watching may more often be a cause rather than a consequence of aggressive behavior.

Violent video games are a more recent phenomenon; therefore there is less research on their effects. However, research by psychologist Craig A. Anderson and others shows that playing violent video games can increase a person's aggressive thoughts, feelings and behavior both in laboratory settings and in actual life. In fact, a study by Dr. Anderson in 2000 suggests that violent video games may be more harmful than violent television and movies because they are interactive, very engrossing and require the player to identify with the aggressor.

Dr. Anderson and other researches are also looking into how violent music lyrics affect children and adults. In a 2003 study involving college students, Anderson found that songs with violent lyrics increased aggression related thoughts and emotions

WHY THE "SCIENCE" IS SO FAR OFF BASE

- Poorly defined studies of aggression
- Less reliable aggression definitions = more positive findings
- Contributing causes not accounted for
  - Environment, ecology of the home, intelligence, antisocial traits, etc.
- Studies conclude "children's development makes them more susceptible", yet most studies are done in college-age students
- Significant Bias in the Literature
  - Publication Bias
  - Confirmation Bias
  - Political / Personal Bias

Ferguson 2011; Hall et al. 2011

THE GOOD NEWS… IT'S SHIFTING

- Christopher Ferguson (Texas A&M) – publishing excellent, peer-reviewed results in non-APA dominated publications
- SCOTUS has rejected the "games cause violence" evidence presented by the "recognized experts"
- The Australian Government recently did the same
- There is developing clear direction that the effects of violent media on children are modest at best, and likely very small.

HOW PARENTS SHOULD SEE GAMES

This is Complicated!

GAMES ARE…

- Great teachers
- Great attention-getters
- Great distractions
- Great timewasters
- Great sleep-destroyers
- Great motivation
- Great tools
- Great moneymakers

GAMES ARE...

- Great teachers   (what do you learn?)
- Great attention-getters   (what are you paying attention to?
- Great distractions   (what are you missing?)
- Great timewasters   (what else could you do?)
- Great sleep-destroyers   (how tired are you?)
- Great motivation   (what do you want to do?)
- Great tools   (can this help you?)
- Great moneymakers   (are you being manipulated?)

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

The Heart of the Matter...

Parenting is tough:

At some point, your child will be:

1. Dependent completely
2. Dependent mostly
3. Independent sometimes
4. Independent mostly
5. Defiant sometimes
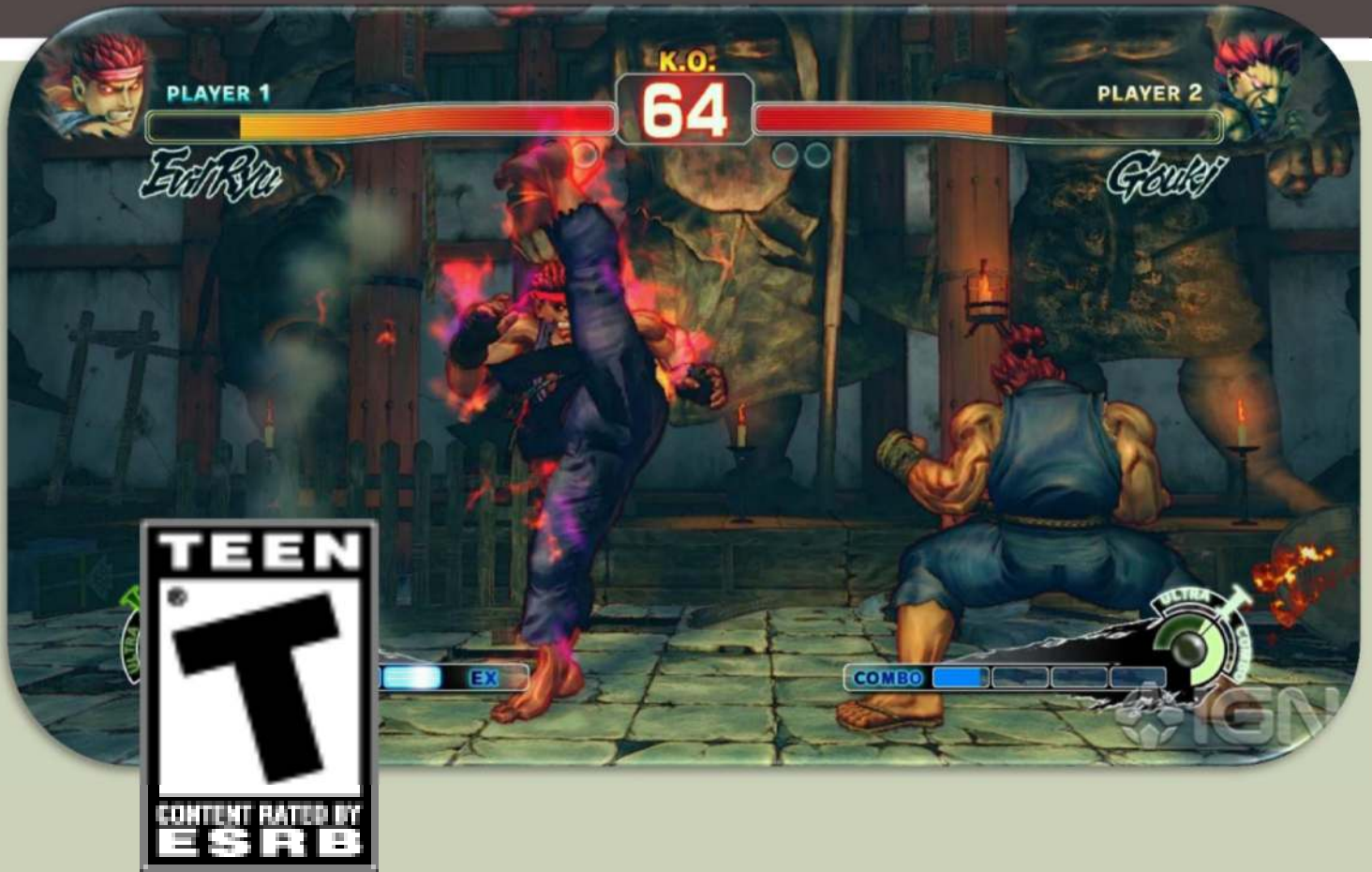6. Defiant mostly

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Know the Ratings, Know the Game
- Encourage Varied Experience
- Play or watch alongside your child
- Real-world responsibilities

AGE-APPROPRIATE GAMING

Kirby's Return to Dreamland © Nintendo

AGE-APPROPRIATE GAMING

Super Street Fighter IV © Capcom

AGE-APPROPRIATE GAMING

Catherine © Atlus

AGE-APPROPRIATE GAMING

Manhunt 2 © Rockstar

ENCOURAGE VARIED EXPERIENCE

- Different types of games
- Active Gaming
- Doing things non-game related
- Develop other skills

PLAY OR WATCH ALONGSIDE

- Improve your knowledge of child's world
- Develop common experience
- Foster the "parent is a guide" role
- Give child confidence
- Be aware of social world online

REAL WORLD RESPONSIBILITIES

- Balance, Balance, Balance
- Other things must be done
- Gaming is a luxury
- Foster the "parent is the provider" role

THANK YOU!

- Questions?