Case Study – The Danger of Video Games

To be used with "Do Video Games Kill?" by Karen Sternheimer. *Contexts.* Fall 2006

A masked 18-year-old man stormed Mayberry High School on last Monday in the North Carolina town of Mayberry, killing 14 and wounding as many as 57 people before killing himself. You were in class when the barrage of gunfire began and luckily escaped unharmed because your teacher locked the door in your windowless classroom before the gunman tried to enter. A few of your friends, including your best friend and neighbor, were among the 14 killed when the gunman opened fire on the students eating lunch in the cafeteria.

The young man, identified only as Robert B., was known to authorities and due in court on Tuesday for weapons violations, local police said. According to media reports, he had a fondness for war simulation and computer games. You can personally attest to this as you have had numerous conversations with Robert over the past year regarding your common love for war-themed video games. In fact, you've even been to his house to play and never noticed anything strange. In fact, Robert was pretty well liked among his peers.

The autopsy report indicated high levels of illegal narcotics in Robert's system. The school guidance counselor reported that Robert had been having difficulty with his parents' recent divorce but never exhibited behavior to cause concern that he might harm himself or others. He often talked about his video game play, but he never talked about it in way that seemed obsessive or out of touch with reality. All-in-all, this outburst of violence came as a complete shock.

The families of the victims have filed a class action suit against the video game company that manufactures the games Robert (and you) played and have personally requested that you testify against the company in a court of law to highlight the excessive violence of the games and the negative impact they may have on already emotionally or mentally fragile youth. The families are hoping this lawsuit will result in a hefty monetary penalty but also a potential state or nationwide ban on games that simulate gratuitous killing.

1. Would you testify against the video game manufacturer? If so, what would you say?

2. Should video game manufacturers shoulder some of the blame when youths commit violent attacks that mirror those from their games?

3. How has the media shaped public opinion on violent video games?

4. Is this public opinion warranted? Why or why not?