

Simulated Violence Do Violent Video Games Lead to Real World Violence?

The February 17 shooting at a Detroit high school has raised questions about violent video games and their effect in our society. Reports of recent shootings, including the 2007 incident at Virginia Tech and the Columbine massacre in April 1999, have led to a surge in scientific studies about a possible cause-effect relationship between violence and violent video games.

A 2000 American Psychological Association study found that students who played a violent video game in a 30 minute session experienced heightened sense of violent behavior compared to those who played a non-violent game for the same period of time (Anderson and Dill 2000). However, the study could not prove that the violent video games had caused the violent behavior; only that the two incidents occurred.

However, these studies are false according Lawrence Kutner, Ph.D. and Cheryl K. Olson, Sc.D., two faculty members at Harvard Medical School. The authors of *Grand Theft Childhood*, Kutner and Olson appeared on a 2008 episode of *X-Play*, a game-focused news show on the G4 network. Kutner and Olson first note that while sales of violent video games have risen, violence among teens has decreased. Contrary to popular belief, their research suggests that video game use is a measure of social competence; boys who don't play video games at all are actually at the highest risk of violent behavior.

Seung-Hui Cho, the gunman in the Virginia Tech shootings, did not play video games at all, despite initial claims made by news media. Kutner noted that the police report only mentioned video games three times; to say that Cho hadn't played games since *Sonic the Hedgehog* at age 9, to mention that Cho's suitemates found the fact that he didn't play video games at all unusual, and to point out that the game *Counter-Strike* was very popular among students at the school. Kutner (Kutner and Olson, 2008) also notes that boys who consume Mature and Adult-Only rated games for fifteen or more hours per week are more likely to have aggressive behavior as well.

The child consumption of Mature(M) and Adult-Only(AO) rated games is a serious concern among politicians and parents . The video game industry is required to mark rating suggestions on all video games, and stores have been asked to demand photo identification for purchase of M and AO games to make sure purchasers are legally allowed to purchase the games—the required age to purchase M-rated games is 17 years old, while for AO-rated games it is 18. In response to concerns, stores have buckled-down on game sales to minors. A 2008 FTC study found that stores are far less likely to sell copies to illegal purchasers than to sell R-rated movie tickets and Parental Advisory music. The study also found that the percent of successful illegal sales has gone down from 85% of attempts in 2000 to only 20% in 2008, a great success (FTC 2008).

Despite improvements, parents and lawmakers are still pushing for further restrictions, a fact that has upset many gamers. Numerous avid gamers questioned by this reporter have said that the concern is unfounded. Mike Dransfeld, a lifelong gamer, says that “further

regulation should not be monitored by a federal agency, but rather by parents. It's the parents' responsibility to monitor what their children see". Brandon Miner says that, "the game isn't to blame; it's the person, so stop trying to find scapegoats for peoples' problems and face reality. Video games are fine."

Yet controversy remains. What will the next scapegoat for violence among adolescents? Or are video games *really* to blame?

-Brittany Green, February 18, 2009.

Anderson and Dill: <http://www.apa.org/journals/features/psp784772.pdf>

Kutner and Olsen; <http://techdirt.com/articles/20080418/005355882.shtml>.

Grand Theft Childhood: <http://www.grandtheftchildhood.com/GTC/Home.html>

FTC: <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2008/05/secretshop.shtm>