

Impact of Violent Entertainment on Youth Crime

Two Ways of Looking at the Same Phenomenon

A few days after the Dawson College shooting, in Montreal, reporters interviewed experts to help readers understand the factors that fuelled such behaviour. Why would some of us walk out of our homes and kill our fellow citizens ? Some experts pointed at violent entertainment as a key causal factor. Other experts chose to deny any responsibility of the industry. Comparing arguments from both sides is very useful to help students and their parents to sharpen their critical sense about the important issue of increasing youth violence.

Jacques Brodeur

Videogames played a role in the shooting	Media not responsible	What the scientific community has to say
<p><u>Toronto Star,</u> September 18, 2006 Trish Crawford</p>	<p>CTV.ca September 14, 2006 Paul Bliss & files from Canadian Press</p>	<p>Quotes collected by EDUPAX November 10, 2006 Sources below.</p>
<p>«Bullying is all around us, and not just on television. Government, business and sports all have successful bullies. Is it any wonder, ask those trying to curb bullying, that impressionable young people aren't buying the message of peaceful co-operation? "As adults we are a bunch of hypocrites," says psychologist Dr. Peter Jaffe, director of the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children in London, Ont. "What's the matter with kids is what's the matter with society." It's no use telling kids to play nice when everyone else gets rewarded for the opposite, he says. "If your favourite hockey player is Tie Domi, your favourite musician is Eminem and favourite video game is Mortal Kombat or Grand Theft Auto, everywhere you see violence." There is some</p>	<p>Experts: video games not responsible for shooting. 'Postal 2: Share the Pain,' in which the player goes on a shooting rampage inside a post office.</p> <p>A gunman who opened fire in a Montreal school, killing a young girl and wounded more than a dozen others, played a video game based on the Columbine shooting.</p> <p>The game, called "Super Columbine Massacre," uses 1980s graphics and can be downloaded from websites. Players recreate the U.S. tragedy that left 13 people dead.</p> <p>"It's really not about the graphics but it's really about him acting on his impulses and having a way to express these impulses," psychiatrist Ariel Dalfen says of the</p>	<p>Dr. Michael Rich testified on behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics before the Public Health Summit on Entertainment Violence. «Videogame revenues are \$10 billion a year, larger than that of television and movies, and increasing. The average 7th grader plays FPS video games for more than 4 hours each week. (...) After playing video games, young people exhibit measurable decreases in prosocial and helping behaviours, a 43% increase in aggressive thoughts, and a 17% increase in violent retaliation to provocation. Playing violent video games accounted for 13-22% of the variance in teenagers' violent behavior. By comparison, smoking tobacco accounts for 14% of the variance in lung cancer. (...) Active participation increases effective learning. Video games are an ideal</p>

<p>indication that bullying played a role in the background of the Montreal shooter who went on a rampage at Dawson College. Exactly how Kimveer Gill might have been affected by bullying remains unclear. It has long been known that people who are bullied can snap and strike back, but less attention has been given the role society plays in fostering bullying. (...) Tie Domi is a millionaire. What does that say ? Yes, bullies are rewarded."</p> <p>Jaffe, who teaches a safe schools course to education students training at the University of Western Ontario, says violent videos are playing a frequent role in the lives of young men who have gone on rampages at schools. "We have a culture of denigration," says Robert Fuller, the former president of Oberlin College, Ohio, and author of the book All Rise: Somebodies, Nobodies and the Politics of Dignity. He was speaking at York University's Centre for Practical Ethics last Thursday. "All of the reality shows involve humiliation," he says, adding that bullying is essentially the abuse of power. Fuller laments that U.S. President George W. Bush has picked John Bolton, "a famous tough guy," as ambassador to the United Nations, and not someone more skilled in conciliation. The good news, says Fuller, is "that we do learn. (...) Education is the key to curbing bullying, he</p>	<p>game's typical player. Kimveer Gill, 25, who went on a shooting spree at Montreal's Dawson College on Wednesday, listed his favourite video games on his blog.</p> <p>Along with "Super Columbine Massacre," he mentioned the game "Postal 2: Share the Pain," in which the player goes on a shooting rampage inside a post office. It must be ordered from England and takes two weeks to arrive.</p> <p>"You would have to go out of the continent to get this product, so it's not something that little Johnny and little Suzy are playing," said Dalfen. The game's creator has said "Super Columbine Massacre" has been downloaded about 40,000 times. But Alex Davis, the owner of Gamera in Toronto, said the games Gill played were on the fringe and did not reflect what most people play.</p> <p>"You're usually the good guy fighting the good fight," Davis said of most popular games. "You're not the villain killing innocent civilians."</p> <p>Experts argue video games -- not matter how violent -- should not be held responsible for Gill's actions.</p> <p>"The world, as usual, is more complex than we'd like it to be," Ian Bogost, a professor at the Georgia Institute of</p>	<p>environment in which to learn violence: a) they place the player in the role of the aggressor and reward him or her for success at violent behaviour; b) they allow the player to rehearse an entire behavioural script from provocation to choosing to respond violently to resolution of the conflict – this is more effective learning than watching or rehearsing part of the sequence; c) video games are immersive and addictive – kids want to play them for long periods of time to become better. Repetition increases learning. While violent video games are clearly not the sole factor contributing to violence, they are clearly a factor. (1) Videogames provide little mental stimulation. Professor Ryuta Kawashima measured the brain activity of hundreds of videogame players and compared with those of other groups who did math exercises and read aloud. Computer games could lead to underdevelopment and such behavioural problems as violence. (20) The video game did not stimulate the brain's frontal lobe, an area that plays an important role in the repression of anti-social impulses, also associated with memory, learning and emotions. A lack of stimulation prevents the neurons from thickening and connecting, thereby impairing the brain's ability to control such impulses as violence and aggression. (2) Lt Col Dave Grossman,</p>
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<p>says, as students learn about the great men and women who promote respect for others. Master teacher Maureen Kenny (an experienced teacher who helps teachers handle classroom problems) piloted an anti-bullying curriculum last year in a tough New York City school that was rife with violence. The successful program, based on stories about young people being bullied and the ways they can solve their problems, helps victims and abusers alike, she says. "Every bully has been bullied. It's learned behaviour. (...) (Children) are (also) exposed to great people and big ideas. So no, it is not hopeless." The sad truth about bullying, she says, is that "it achieves your aim to dominate. It's fun to dominate other people." Current school programs aimed at curbing bullying may pay off in the next generation of adults behaving better, says David Wolfe, RBC chair in children's mental health at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto. Maybe then viewers will turn off the television shows that belittle participants and thugs will lose their audiences, he says. The psychologist, who specializes in adolescents, says it is imperative schools handle the issue of moral right and wrong. The golden rule – Do unto others as you would have them do unto you - is not a religious tenet but the basic structure of a</p>	<p>Technology, in Atlanta, Ga., told The Canadian Press.</p> <p>Bogost said "Super Columbine Massacre" is an easy target for blame, but argued several deeper problems led to Wednesday's shooting spree. "Certainly, Gill was using media of all kinds to culture his antisocial fantasies," said Bogost. "Should we hold (this game) responsible? Clearly, these are overly simplistic explanations."</p> <p>John Pungente, of the Association for Media Literacy, (AML) said violence in the media is an old issue. In the 1950s, when gruesome comics were blamed for youth violence, the government created the Comics Code Authority to censor them. But comics no longer generate the same concern among today's parents.</p> <p>«You can't blame the media,» Pungente told CP.</p> <p>"People have been doing these violent things since before there was even media." Instead, he urged that parents should teach their children the difference between fantasy --- as depicted in video games -- and reality. "Parents certainly have to be more aware of what their children are seeing," said Pungente.</p>	<p>retired psychologist from the U.S. Army, explained that videogames were used by the U.S. army as murder simulators for the purpose of conditioning young recruits to «kill without thinking. Videogames give kids and teens the skill, the will and the thrill to kill ». (3)</p> <p>Time exposure to television is linked with bullying. Research by Frederick Zimmerman, professor in the University of Washington's School of Public Health, found that «youngsters who spent a typical amount of time -- about 3½ hours daily -- in front of the tube had a 25 per cent increased risk of becoming bullies between the ages of 6 and 11. This is very clear independent effect of television on children's bullying. More kids who watch a lot of TV go on to become bullies than kids who don't watch very much TV, so that's the risk. Watching a lot of TV doesn't mean that you're going to become a bully, it just means that you have a higher chance that it might happen. » (4)</p> <p>School authorities in the U.S. have noticed that violence has hit lower grades. California: assaults nearly doubled. Philadelphia: suspensions of 22 kindergartners. Minneapolis: 500 kindergartners suspended in 2 years. Minnesota: 4,000 kindergartners, first- and second- graders, suspended. Massachusetts: suspended students in K-3 doubled</p>
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<p>peaceful society, says Wolfe. (...) University of Toronto social work professor Faye Mishna, an expert in the field who recently began researching cyber bullying, says it's true that bullies often win. "They're more popular than the victims," she says. A number of years ago when the first Survivor show surfaced on television, Mishna pointed out that the method of "voting people off the island" was bullying behaviour. The biggest bully, the one who has kicked everyone else off, was rewarded with a cash prize. Jennifer Connolly, director of the LaMarsh Centre for Research in Violence and Conflict Resolution at York University, says, « Children are growing up in a culture that tolerates levels of bullying, meanness, verbal name-calling and, at the same time, is telling them to be non-violent. We need to crank up the volume on that (non-violent) message. »</p>		<p>between 1995 and 2000. Greenville, S.C., 132 first-graders and 75 K suspended. (5) Québec, between 1985 and 2000, elementary school students with troubled behaviors increased by 300%. (6) Media violence is also linked with later criminal activity. In this 17-year study, 700 young people were tracked down into their adult lives. Hours of viewing were correlated with acts of aggression. (7) On 2006, UNICEF Canada wrote to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan: «In defense of the pervasiveness of violence in the media in North America, the entertainment industry often has asserted that the amount of violence in the media merely mirrors the reality of violence in society (West, 1993). A comparative analysis of media violence and real-world violence by film critic Michael Medved (1995) demonstrates well how untenable such an assertion is. "If the murder rate presented during an average evening of television was real, in just 50 days, everyone in the U.S. would be killed." (8)</p>
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(1) Michael Rich, Protecting Children in the Information Age, Center on Media and Child Health, Harvard School of Public Health, presentation at 3rd ACME Summit, Burlington, Vermont. <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/rich-mediaviolence.pdf>

(2) Computer Games Can Stunt Kids' Brains, *Daily Telegraph*, August 20, 2001. http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/7b4_jeux_video/Video%20Game%20Use.html

(3) Dave Grossman and Gloria DeGaetano, Stop Teaching Our Kids To Kill, A Call To Action Against TV, Movie, & Video Game Violence, 1999. <http://www.killology.com/reviewbaehr.htm>

(4) Dr. Frederick Zimmerman, Study Ties TV Time to School Bullying, April 2005.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/7b8_television/Study%20ties%20TV%20time%20to%20school%20bullying.html

(5) School violence hits lower grades, USA Today, January 13, 2003.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/17_violence/School_violence_hits_lower_grades.html

(6) Students with Behavioural Difficulties in Quebec Elementary Schools.

<http://www.cse.gouv.qc.ca/EN/PUBLICATIONS/index.html?l=EN>

(7) Study Ties Television Viewing to Aggression, adults affected as well as Children, Brad Bushman, Professor of psychology at Iowa State University at Ames, Washington Post, 2002.

http://www.edupax.org/Assets/divers/documentation/11_recherches/3%20Articles%20on%20Influence%20of%20Tv.html

(8) Katherine Covell, Violence Against Children in North America, Unicef Canada, June 2005, North American Consultation Document for the UN Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children.

http://www.violencestudy.org/IMG/pdf/Desk_Review.pdf