

# ESSENTIAL FACTS



entertainment  
software  
association

## ABOUT GAMES AND VIOLENCE

**“For most kids and most parents, the bottom-line results of our research can be summed up in a single word: relax. While concerns about the effects of violent video games are understandable, they’re basically no different from the unfounded concerns previous generations had about the new media of their day.”**

– Lawrence Kutner, Ph.D., and Cheryl K. Olson, ScD. (2008) “Grand Theft Childhood: The Surprising Truth About Video Games And What Parents Can Do.” *Simon & Schuster*

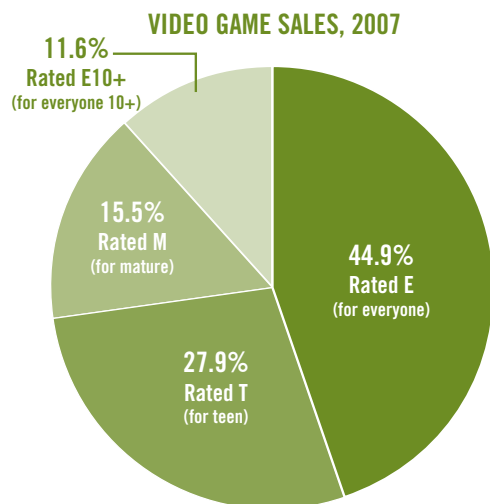
To fully understand the debate about violence in games and place it in some context, it is important to first understand basic facts about the industry.

### FACTS ABOUT GAME CONTENT AND CONSUMERS

- The average American video game *player* is 35 years old. The average game *buyer* is 40 years old.
- Computer and video games are rated by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), whose system includes age recommendations and content descriptors. According to the most recent April 2007 study by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, awareness of the ratings among parents of game-playing children under the age of 17 is at an all-time high of 89 percent, with regular use of the ratings at 85 percent. Moreover, awareness of the content descriptors is at 64 percent with regular use increasing to 54 percent. Ninety percent of parents believe the ratings are “somewhat” to “very helpful” in selecting appropriate games for their children and the same percentage are confident that the ratings accurately describe game content. Furthermore, these findings are generally consistent with the Federal Trade Commission Report, which found that: 87 percent of parents are aware of the ratings; 73 percent use the ratings before purchasing either “all,” “nearly all,” or “most of the time;” 87 percent are “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with ESRB ratings; and 94 percent say the ratings are “moderately” to “very easy” to understand.

- Eighty-eight percent of parents monitor the content of the games their children are playing.
- All new video game consoles (Nintendo Wii, Microsoft Xbox 360, Sony PlayStation 3) include parental controls that limit a child’s access to games based on their Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) ratings. According to a 2008 study, 76 percent of parents with children under the age of 18 say the parental controls are useful.

- Just as there is a wide spectrum of movies, music and books available to consumers, the video game industry provides a variety of entertainment choices for people of all ages. In 2007, 44.9 percent of games sold were rated “E” (for “Everyone”), 27.9 percent were rated “T” (for “Teen”), 15.5 percent were rated “M” (for “Mature”), and 11.6 percent were rated “E10+” (for Everyone 10+).



Source: The NPD Group, Inc./Retail Tracking

Average game player age:

35

Average game buyer age:

40

Percentage of time parents are involved in purchase or rental of games:

94%

Percentage of parents who monitor the content of the games their children play:

88%

“The simplistic criticisms and generalizations some critics make about ‘violent’ games often seemed based on an ignorance of what those games are really all about. Indeed, one wonders if any of the critics have bothered sitting down and playing some of these games on their own or with their children.”

– Adam Thierer, “Are All Video Games Violent,” *Technology Liberation Front*, February 2008

## WHAT ABOUT VIOLENCE? LOOKING AT THE STATISTICS

- Violent crime has decreased dramatically since the early 1990s while video games have steadily increased in popularity and use.
- Dr. Joanne Savage reviewed the research purporting to show negative effects of media violence on youth and concluded that there is no causal link between media violence and violent crime. In her 2004 article, “Does Viewing Violent Media Really Cause Criminal Violence? A Methodological Review” appearing in the *Aggression and Violent Behavior* journal, Savage said:  

“The question addressed here is not whether or not the effect is plausible, but whether the effect has been demonstrated convincingly in the scientific literature—and the answer is ‘not so far.’...At this point it must be said, however, that there is little evidence in favor of focusing on media violence as a means of remedying our violent crime problem. Certainly video games haven’t had any significant impact on real-world crime.”
- Many games with violent content sold in the United States — and some with far more violence — are also sold in foreign markets. However, the incidence of violent crime in these non-U.S. markets is considerably lower than in the United States. This suggests that the cause of violent crime lies elsewhere.

## WHAT DOES THE SCIENCE SAY? INDEPENDENT RESEARCH FINDINGS

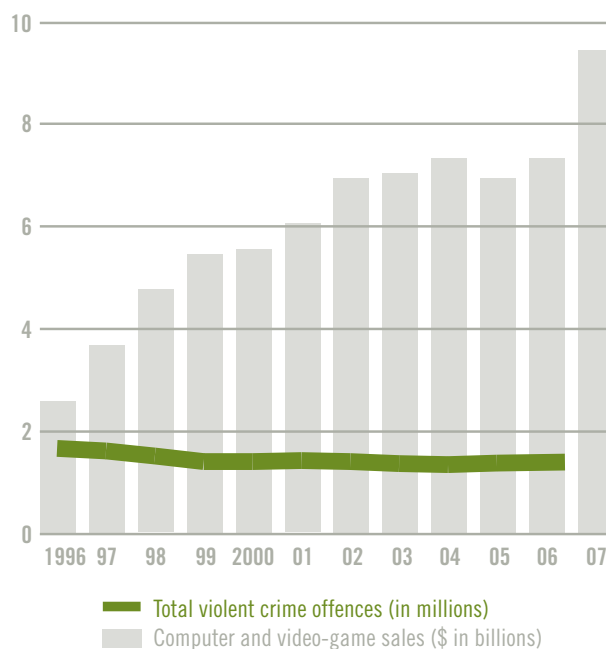
**Lawrence Kutner, Ph.D., and Cheryl K. Olson, ScD. (2008) “Grand Theft Childhood: The Surprising Truth About Video Games And What Parents Can Do.” *Simon & Schuster*.**

“It’s clear that the ‘big fears’ bandied about in the press — that violent video games make children significantly more violent in the real world... — are not supported by the current research, at least in such a simplistic form. That should make sense to anyone who thinks about it. After all, millions of children and adults play these games, yet the world has not been reduced to chaos and anarchy.”

“The strong link between video game violence and real world violence, and the conclusion that video games lead to social isolation and poor interpersonal skills, are drawn from bad or irrelevant research, muddleheaded thinking and unfounded, simplistic news reports.”

To learn more about this book, please go to: [www.grandtheftchildhood.com](http://www.grandtheftchildhood.com)

**VIOLENT CRIME DECREASED DRAMATICALLY FROM 1996 TO 2006\*  
WHILE VIDEO GAME SALES SOARED, MORE THAN DOUBLING  
IN SALES FROM \$3.7 BILLION TO \$9.5 BILLION\*\***



Sources: \*U.S. Dept. of Justice – Federal Bureau of Investigation – “Crime in the United States, 2006”  
\*\*The NPD Group, Inc./Retail Tracking

**Christopher J. Ferguson, Stephanie M. Rueda, Amanda M. Cruz, Diana E. Ferguson, Stacey Fritz, & Shawn M. Smith. (2008). "Violent video games and aggression: Causal relationship or byproduct of family violence and intrinsic violence motivation?" *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, Vol. 35, 311–332.**

"Two studies examined the relationship between exposure to violent video games and aggression or violence in the laboratory and in real life. Study 1 participants were either randomized or allowed to choose to play a violent or nonviolent game. Although males were more aggressive than females, neither randomized exposure to violent-video-game conditions nor previous real-life exposure to violent video games caused any differences in aggression. Study 2 examined correlations between trait aggression, violent criminal acts, and exposure to both violent games and family violence. Results indicated that trait aggression, family violence, and male gender were predictive of violent crime, but exposure to violent games was not. Structural equation modeling suggested that family violence and innate aggression as predictors of violent crime were a better fit to the data than was exposure to video game violence. These results question the common belief that violent-video-game exposure causes violent acts."

"Findings from the two studies were mutually supportive. These results suggest that playing violent video games does not constitute a significant risk for future violent criminal acts. Because there was no evidence in either study to support a direct link between video game exposure and aggressive or violent behavior, these results call into question the GAM as a useful predictive model of aggression."

To read this research in its entirety, please go to: <http://tinyurl.com/65dqyt>

**Thomas Grimes, James A. Anderson & Lori Bergen. (2007). "Media violence and aggression: Science and ideology." *Sage*.**

"In nearly 80 percent of the studies investigated here, the measures of aggression were paper-and-pencil reports — often simple check marks on a scale.... There are few studies that investigate whether the predicted [aggressive] behavior actually occurs (and those few studies indicate that it does not)" (p. 70).

To learn more about this book, please go to: <http://tinyurl.com/6r69wx>

**Karen Sternheimer. (2007). "Do Video Games Kill?" *Contexts*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, pp. 13–17.**

"By focusing so heavily on video games, news reports downplay the broader social contexts. While a handful of articles note the roles that guns, poverty, families, and the organization of schools may play in youth violence in general, when reporters mention research to explain the shooters' behavior, the vast majority of studies cited concern media effects..."

To read the entire article, please go to: <http://tinyurl.com/3ydm7>

**Raymond Boyle and Matthew Hibberd. (2005) "Review of research on the impact of violent computer games on young people." *Stirling Media Research Institute*.**

There are "many inconsistencies in the reported amount of research into media violence. Put simply there is a lot of myths, misinterpretations and misrepresentations surrounding the quantity and quality of research on this issue."

The authors reviewed academic research into violent video games "ensuring that all key studies examining the relationship between playing violent computer games and real-world violence in young people carried out between 1985–2004, are covered." In their findings, Boyle and Hibberd wrote that "the research evidence of a direct link between video games and violent behaviour in society remains contradictory. There is a body of evidence that shows playing violent video games increases arousal and the possibility of aggression in some players. However, this evidence is often disputed and cannot be simply read as evidence that game playing translates into violent social behaviour."

To read the entire study, please visit: <http://tinyurl.com/lt9fs>