

The Problem With Studying “Deviant” Video Games

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Slate:

The debate over the connection between playing video games and real-world behavior has subsided a bit since the days of its Columbine-era peak cacophony. But it’s very much an ongoing controversy, and one with important ramifications given the sheer popularity of video games. A new study purporting to show a long-term link between risk-glorifying game play and various deviant behaviors highlights just how tricky a subject this is—and psychologists’ ongoing internecine battle over this issue.

For the study, published in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, a team led by Dartmouth psychologist Jay Hull tracked a group of teens over four years, gathering data via telephone interviews on whether and how often they played three “mature-rated, risk-glorifying” (MRRG) games—*Spider-Man 2*, *Manhunt*, or *GTA III*—the extent to which they engaged in risky and delinquent behaviors, and how they evaluated their parents’ parenting style (among other questions). Overall, the researchers found that playing the games was “associated with increases in alcohol use, cigarette smoking, aggression, delinquency, and risky sex,” as a result of an “increased tolerance of deviance.”

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