

Criticism of violent video games has decreased as technology has improved, gamers age

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Members of the media and others often have attributed violence in video games as a potential cause of social ills, such as increased levels of teen violence and school shootings. Now, a University of Missouri researcher has found that media acceptance of video game violence has increased as video game technology has improved over time. Greg Perreault, a doctoral student at the MU School of Journalism, examined the coverage of violent video games throughout the 1990s by GamePro Magazine, the most popular video game news magazine during that time period. Perreault found that journalists from GamePro expressed a considerable amount of concern about the level of violence in the game software companies were creating in the early 1990s, when video game design was limited by technology.

"Early in the '90s, when video games were still a relatively new medium, journalists expressed quite a bit of concern about the level of violence in many of the games," Perreault said. "It is interesting because the simulated violence in these games was so mild relative to modern-day games."

As technology improved throughout 1990s, new gaming systems such as the Nintendo 64 and Sony Playstation were released, along with the capacity for higher levels of graphic violence. Perreault found that despite this increase, the levels of concern about violence from GamePro journalists decreased.

"As technology improved and the animations became more and more life-like, game creators had increased capability to design more graphic violence, including blood and gore," Perreault said. "Despite this increasing amount of violence, journalists seemed to be less and less bothered by the blood and guts. This is important to note because journalism often mirrors the culture of the audience it serves. As technology improved, the entire gaming community became more and more comfortable with the levels of [violence](#) that were simultaneously increasing in video games. In a sense, the gaming community grew up. They aged from children using video games as toys to adolescents and adults using them as recreational devices. It appears that journalists reflected this trend in their writing."

Perreault says the [video game rating system](#) is another example of this trend. He says when the rating system first was created, gaming journalists opposed it; however, as games become more and more violent, the rating system is used continually as a defense against outside criticism.

"As more and more parents and outside sources criticize [violent games](#), gamers and gaming [journalists](#) point to the rating system and say that parents should not allow their kids to play violent games with explicit ratings," Perreault said. "Ultimately, the trend in violent games is a reflection of what interests our society. Similar trends can be found in the increased number of 'R' rated movies as well as the popularity of gangster rap and other violent music. Video games are just another way our culture is expressing itself."

More information: Perreault will present his research at the International Communication Association conference in Seattle this May.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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