Violent media's effects seen
U-M study tracks kids; recheck in adulthood finds more violence

Wednesday, November 28, 2007
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The Ann Arbor News

Exposure to violent movies, television shows and video games significantly increases the risk that the
viewer or player will behave aggressively in both the long and short term, according to a new University of
Michigan study published Tuesday in the Journal of Adolescent Health.

It's a topic that has been debated extensively, but this is one of the first studies that shows the relation
between viewing media violence and real criminal behavior, according to the study's author, L. Rowell
Huesmann, a senior research scientist at the U-M Institute for Social Research.

"This is the first study that shows a relation between childhood exposure to violent TV, playing violent video
games, seeing violent movies, and behaving violently enough to be incarcerated as a delinquent," said
Huesmann, a professor of communication studies and psychology.

Huesmann and his team followed a group of children for three years as they moved through middle
childhood. They found increasing rates of aggression for both boys and girls who watched more television
violence, even when taking into account initial aggressive tendencies and other background factors. A
15-year follow-up of those children showed that those who habitually watched violent media grew up to be
more aggressive young adults.

Huesmann also cited many independent studies and experiments with similar results, stating that the
majority of one-shot survey studies have shown that children who watch more media violence on a daily
basis behave more aggressively on a daily basis. In another experiment cited, both children and adults who
watched a violent movie showed significantly more aggression than the children and adults who watched a
nonviolent movie when playing a physical game immediately after watching the films.

Video games were also addressed in the study, although experiments involving exposure to violent games
are not as extensive or long-term.

"Because players of violent video games are not just observers but also 'active' participants in violent
actions and are generally reinforced for using violence to gain desired goals, the effects on stimulating
long-term increases in violent behavior should be even greater for video games than for TV, movies or
Internet displays of violence," Huesmann wrote in the study.

Josh Williams, owner of Digital Ops gaming center on Liberty Street in Ann Arbor, said he finds the article
"disheartening," especially because his store and the social gaming it offers provide a haven for some kids
who might not otherwise fit in or have an opportunity to socialize.

"I can't even begin to tell you the number of parents we've had come in here, thanking us for giving their
kids a safe place to do something fun and creative," Williams said. "We've provided a place for a lot of 13-
to 18-year-old kids who might not have had another place to go."

Zach Wigal, a 17-year-old Saline High School student who is planning a Halo video game tournament to
benefit charity, said that he disagrees that playing violent games begets violence.

"I've been playing video games since I remember, including violent games," Wigal said. "Have I seen
someone get super mad? Yes, but only in the sense that they're getting beat down and they're pretty mad.
It's all in good fun."

However, Wigal said he thinks that kids who might be prone to violence could be influenced by what they
see or do when they play these games.

"If you come out of a comedy club, if the comedian was good, you're usually in a happy mood, you're laughing," he explained. "I think with any form of media, whether it be comedy, music, video games, there's always a certain element of influence."

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