

Risk-glorifying video games may lead teens to drive recklessly, new research shows

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Teens who play mature-rated, risk-glorifying video games may be more likely than those who don't to become reckless drivers who experience increases in automobile accidents, police stops and willingness to drink and drive, according to new research published by the American Psychological Association.

"Most parents would probably be disturbed to learn that we observed that this type of [game play](#) was more strongly associated with [teen drivers](#) being pulled over by the police than their [parenting practices](#)," said study lead author Jay G. Hull, PhD, of Dartmouth College. "With [motor vehicle accidents](#) the No. 1 cause of adolescent deaths, popular games that increase [reckless driving](#) may constitute even more of a public health issue than the widely touted association of video games and aggression."

Researchers conducted a [longitudinal study](#) involving more than 5,000 U.S. teenagers who answered a series of questions over four years in four waves of telephone interviews. The findings were published online in APA's journal *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*.

Fifty percent of the teens reported in the first interview that their parents allowed them to play mature-rated games and among those, 32 percent said they had played Spiderman II, 12 percent had played Manhunt and 58 percent had played Grand Theft Auto III. [Playing video games](#) such as [Grand Theft Auto](#) III, Manhunt and Spiderman II was associated with increases in sensation seeking, rebelliousness and self-reported [risky](#)

[driving](#), the study said. Higher rankings in sensation seeking and rebelliousness were directly linked to risky driving habits, automobile accidents, being stopped by police and a willingness to drink and drive, according to the analysis.

Between the second and third interviews, teens who said they had been pulled over by the police increased from 11 percent to 21 percent; those who said they had a car accident went from 8 percent to 14 percent. In the third interview, when the teens were about 16 years old, 25 percent said "yes" when asked if they engaged in any unsafe driving habits. In the final interview when the teens were about 18, 90 percent said "yes" to at least one of the same risky driving habits: 78 percent admitted to speeding; 26 percent to tailgating; 23 percent to failure to yield; 25 percent to weaving in and out of traffic; 20 percent to running red lights; 19 percent to ignoring stop signs; 13 percent to crossing a double line; 71 percent to speeding through yellow lights; and 27 percent to not using a seatbelt.

The researchers determined the teens' levels of sensation seeking and rebelliousness by asking them to rate themselves on a four-point scale following questions such as "I like to do dangerous things" and "I get in trouble at school." The study controlled for variables such as gender, age, race, parent income and education and parenting styles described as warm and responsive or demanding.

"Playing these kinds of video games could also result in these adolescents developing personalities that reflect the risk-taking, rebellious characters they enact in the games and that could have broader consequences that apply to other risky behaviors such as drinking and smoking," Hull said.

The initial sample was 49 percent female, 11 percent black, 62 percent white, 19 percent Hispanic, 2 percent Asian/Pacific Islander and 6

percent multiple ethnicity. The surveys began when the average age of the participants was about 14; at the second survey, they were about 15; at the third, 16; and at the fourth, 18. Eight months separated the first and second interviews; one-and-a-half years separated the second and third interviews; and two years separated the third and fourth interviews. As is typical in longitudinal surveys, some participants dropped out. The number completing the questions for this study totaled 4,575 for the second interview, 3,653 for the third and 2,718 for the fourth.

The information regarding the teens' driving habits was based on their own reports during the interviews, and therefore interpretation of the causes of their driving habits was speculative, the authors noted. "At the same time, because the study began when the participants were playing video games but were too young to drive, it is clear that the videogame exposure preceded the risky driving," Hull said.

More information: Article: "A Longitudinal Study of Risk-Glorifying Video Games and Reckless Driving;" Jay G. Hull, PhD, and Ana M. Draghici, BA, Dartmouth College; James D. Sargent, MD, Dartmouth Medical School, " *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, online, Aug. 27, 2012.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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