

Violent video games may serve as an outlet for aggression, not a precursor, says Virginia Tech expert

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Jim Hawdon is a professor of sociology and director of the Virginia Tech Center for Peace Studies and Violence Prevention. Credit: Virginia Tech

According to a recent study published in *Violence and Gender*, video

games decrease the likelihood of producing hate material online and researcher Jim Hawdon says "this finding suggests that violent video games may serve as an outlet for aggression, not a precursor."

Hawdon is a professor of sociology and director of the Virginia Tech Center for Peace Studies and Violence Prevention. This research shows not only are more Americans being exposed to online extremism, more are involved in producing and disseminating it.

Study snapshot

Odds of producing hate material if the respondent used a social networking services (compared to those who did not use that social networking services)

- First-person shooter video [game](#) players are 67 percent less likely to produce hate materials than are non-players.
- Reddit users are 2.87 times more likely to produce online hate material than are non-users.
- General message board users are 2.19 times more likely to produce hate material than are non-users
- Tumblr users are 43 percent less likely to produce hate materials as compared to non-Tumblr users
- Males are 1.76 times more likely than women to produce hate material online

Based on our data from national samples of Americans ages 15 to 35 the number of Americans who admit to producing hate materials has increased. In 2013, only 8.1 percent of those sampled admitted to posting hate materials; however, in 2016, 19.8 percent of respondents reported they created and posted online hate material.

Quoting Hawdon

"Results show that the use of social networking sites such as Reddit and general messaging boards increases the likelihood of being involved in disseminating hate material online, while the use of Tumblr and first-person shooter [video](#) games decreases the likelihood of producing hate material online. This finding suggests that [violent video games](#) may serve as an outlet for aggression, not a precursor."

"As to who is involved in producing these materials, our analyses indicate that men are significantly more likely than women to produce online hate material, which fits with the broader pattern of men being more engaged in violent behaviors, both online and offline."

"We also find that individuals who are close to an online community and frequent sites where hate material is frequently seen are more likely to produce online hate materials. This finding likely reflects how the internet helps create insular online communities of like-minded people who collectively create, learn, and refine worldviews that justify, reinforce, and amplify their political dissatisfaction."

"The increase in involvement with producing hate material is likely due to several factors, including the fact that more Americans are seeing extremist messages online. Exposure to these [materials](#) also increased dramatically since 2013. In addition, the intensely polarized political atmosphere is likely a contributing factor."

"Many of those who have committed atrocious acts of hate-based violence credit their exploration of online hate as a precipitating factor in their radicalization."

More information: Matthew Costello et al. Who Are the Online Extremists Among Us? Sociodemographic Characteristics, Social

Networking, and Online Experiences of Those Who Produce Online Hate Materials, *Violence and Gender* (2018). DOI: [10.1089/vio.2017.0048](https://doi.org/10.1089/vio.2017.0048)

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