

January 2014

# A Comparison Study on Violent Video Games: Explained by the Gamers Themselves

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A Comparison Study on Violent Video Games: Explained by the Gamers Themselves

by

Christopher J. Kneifer

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Mass Communications  
Strategic Communications Management  
Department of Mass Communications  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:  
July 8, 2014

**Key Words:** Desensitization, Emotion, Empathy, External Validity, Focus Groups, Internal Validity

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## **Dedication**

It is with all the love and gratitude I have to give, that I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Karen and John Kneifer for inspiring and encouraging me throughout not just this long journey but my entire life. They provide me with their unconditional love and have taught me through their examples, to never give up and always fight for what I want in life. I may not say it often enough, but I am soo grateful to them and forever proud that I am their son.

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative focus groups analysis examines the harmful effects of violent video games on emotions and behavior by comparing violent video game player's responses to that of non-violent video game players of the same age group. Research on the effects of video games has been done since the 70s, yet more research is needed to better understand the potentially harmful emotional and behavioral effects of playing violent games, especially from the gamers' perspectives. This thesis presents a qualitative analysis of data obtained from focus group sessions among undergraduate college students. Results of the analysis supports the presence as well as absence of violent video game effects, according to violent and non-violent video gamers' personal experiences and in their own words.

“The daily spectacle of atrocious acts has stifled all feeling of pity in the hearts of men. When every hour we see or hear of an act of dreadful cruelty we lose all feeling of humanity.”

—Taylor Caldwell, *A Pillar of Iron* (1965)

## **Introduction**

Academics have been scrutinizing the potential harmful effects of media violence for over six decades, and recent studies have shown that there is even a direct correlation between a person's emotions and their exposure to intense violence in video games. This study continued on this concept by specifically focusing on examining the steady flow of such violent media in the form of violent video games and how they directly affected the viewer's/ player's behavior, emotions and empathy. It also examined the violent video game players themselves and observed if they were desensitized and more prone to provoking emotions like anger and rage to occur more often than non-violent video game players. The importance of this was, because over 85% of video games nowadays contain at least some minor violence, and approximately half of video games include serious violent actions (Carnagey, 2007). Therefore this is why video game violence research and literature is expanding so rapidly that new studies are being reported almost monthly (Krahé, 2011).

Past quantitative research shows that exposure to fictitious media violence through video games can desensitize the player's emotions to real-world tragedies. However, no qualitative research and studies have been done focusing on the gamer's own insight into their experiences, which is the purpose of this thesis. It is to collect qualitative data from the gamers themselves to

garner better understanding of the effects of violent video games as seen through their eyes, based on their very own experiences with video games. This study focuses on this by utilizing University of South Florida undergraduate students that considered themselves either non-violent or violent video game players.

The study begins with a literature review of other studies and research on violent video games and their impact on the gamer, with particular emphasis on emotional desensitization. In addition, the literature on violent video games is mostly quantitative and discussed from the perspective of the researchers through surveys or experiments. However there is very little information on the actual experiences from the gamer's perspectives.

Secondly, the method of qualitative research design utilized for this study is a comparison of two different focus groups to examine the effect of the violent video games through the viewpoint of the gamers themselves. Focus groups were the chosen method because of their ability to gather rich, descriptive information from multiple subjects in a single setting.

Thirdly, the findings of this study are examined, which revealed that both groups of gamers provided useful data on: (1) the gamer's perceptions of violent video games effects on the emotions of the players; (2) the effect on behavior; (3) the rating scale for video games and what is considered age appropriate; and (4) what consoles violent/ non-violent games most appear on. Finally the study concludes with the gamer's perspectives of the accuracy of stereotypes and labels about violent games and their players.

## Literature Review

### *Why Video Games Were the Chosen Medium*

In 1982, the US Surgeon General called for research on whether video game violence desensitizes individuals to real violence (Carnagey, 2007). The reason that they called for violent video games instead of violent movies or TV shows is because video game players actually partake in and to some extent create the video game actions that they participate in, rather than simply being a content watcher and recipient (Funk, p24). It is for this same reason that they were chosen as the medium used in this study. Furthermore, it is due to the overwhelming popularity of violent video games that the public has become increasingly concerned that these games may have lasting negative effects on players (Bowen, 2011).

The active nature of video games make them unique among screen-based media (Funk, 2004). For video game players make their own choices and pick which strategies work best for them while playing the violent video games; rather than just watching a pre-laid out plot or plan of action like those in movies and TV shows. Therefore it is important to study their effects on emotions and behaviors of the players for it appears that individuals who expose themselves and play violent video games may habituate or get used to all the violence and eventually become physiologically numb to it (Carnagey, 2007).

Over the last three decades the video game industry has evolved from offering just a handful of games on bulky home systems, to offering scores of video games on computers, console systems (e.g., Xbox 360, PlayStation, Wii), handhelds (e.g., PSP, Nintendo DS), iPods,



personal digital assistants (PDA), and mobile telephones (Krahé, 2011). With violent video games becoming easier to come by the government and many academic researchers have decided to do more studies on them. In fact, some researchers and psychologists claim that horrific tragedies like: Columbine and the Sandy Hook Shooting might be attributed to the violent video games the perpetrators played. There is even evidence that video game exposure cultivates emotions and can lead to “cognitive” desensitization, indicated by higher pro-violence attitudes (Fanti, 2009). Research further indicated that “acute” desensitization followed video game play after participants varying in levels of previous violent video game exposure played either a violent or nonviolent video game in the lab (Engelhardt, 2011).

### *Desensitization/ Emotions*

An important question regarding the effects of violent video games on emotions is whether the effects are best characterized as desensitization/ habituation or as sensitization to the perceived violence. According to Funk (2004), desensitization is the attenuation or elimination of cognitive, emotional, and, ultimately, behavioral responses to a stimulus. Wolpe (1982) defines desensitization as a sustained reduction in psychological or emotional responsiveness to a stimulus class after repeated exposure (Bowen, 2011), whereas sensitization is the growing or increasing in the emotional and mental actions and reactions of a person to a given stimuli. Although habituation and desensitization in some literature sometimes are used interchangeably; it may be argued that habituation is slightly different and less harmful than desensitization because it implies that behavioral, affective and cognitive responses eventually return to normal levels, even after frequent use of the violent video games (Bowen, 2011). Thus an undesirable result of the repeated exposure to violence can be the habituation of the initially negative

cognitive, emotional, and physiological responses people experience when they see blood and gore (Engelhardt, 2011).

For the purposes of this study, desensitization will be used instead of habituation and “emotional” desensitization is defined as the attenuation or elimination of emotional responses to a violent video game stimulus. This is supported by research which shows that violent media exposure is associated with decreased cardiovascular, electrodermal, neural, and empathic responses during depictions of real violence (Engelhardt, 2011). Hence individuals perceive less violence in media stimuli after repeated exposure, and they also perceive violence to be commonplace and normative (Scharrer, 2007).

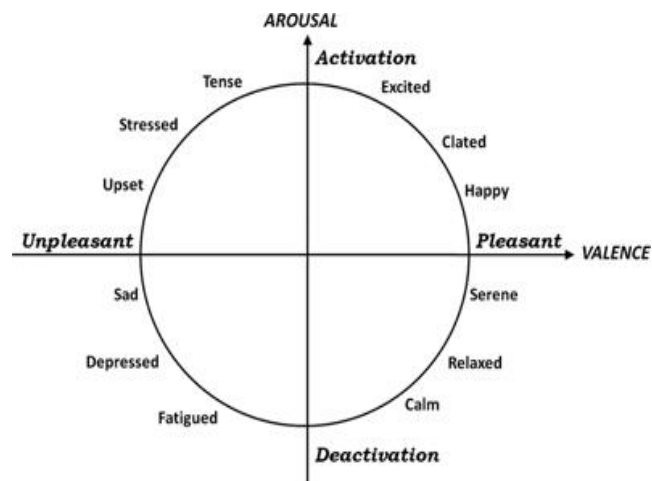
This desensitization of a player's emotions and how they behave is what make studying the effects of violence in video games so paramount, for without emotions a person cannot function normally in society. But what is an 'emotion'? Conceptualizing what an emotion is has always been a notoriously difficult task. In Fact, the definition of an “emotion” presents a particularly delicate quandary when presented in a research study such as this; since it rarely generates the same answer from different individuals, scientists or laymen alike (Scherer, 2005). Emotion “may be one of the fuzziest concepts in all of the sciences” (Madeira, 2013, page 12). Scherer (2005) presents a possible definition of emotion as, an episode of interrelated, synchronized changes in the states of all or most of the five organismic subsystems in response to the evaluation of an external or internal stimulus event as relevant to major concerns of the organism (Scherer, 2005). For the purposes of this study an emotion shall be conceptually defined as a cognizant cerebral response such as sadness or anger brought about when a person is exposed to a trigger stimulus that causes him/her to experience a strong feeling about a specific event, person or object.

Furthermore it helps to know that emotions fall into two categories: utilitarian emotions and aesthetic emotions. Utilitarian emotions correspond to such garden-variety of emotions as anger, fear, disgust, sadness, shame, guilt commonly studied in emotion research (Scherer, 2005). These types of emotions are most frequently studied because they are considered to be very critical to survival and have significant consequences for our very well-being. Many utilitarian emotions are high-intensity emergency reactions, involving the synchronization of many organismic subsystems (Scherer, 2005). On the other hand aesthetic emotions do not require immediate responses and are less vital and not as much pronounced to one's wellbeing. Some examples of 'aesthetic emotions' are, being moved or awed, being full of wonder, admiration, bliss, ecstasy, fascination, harmony (Scherer, 2005).

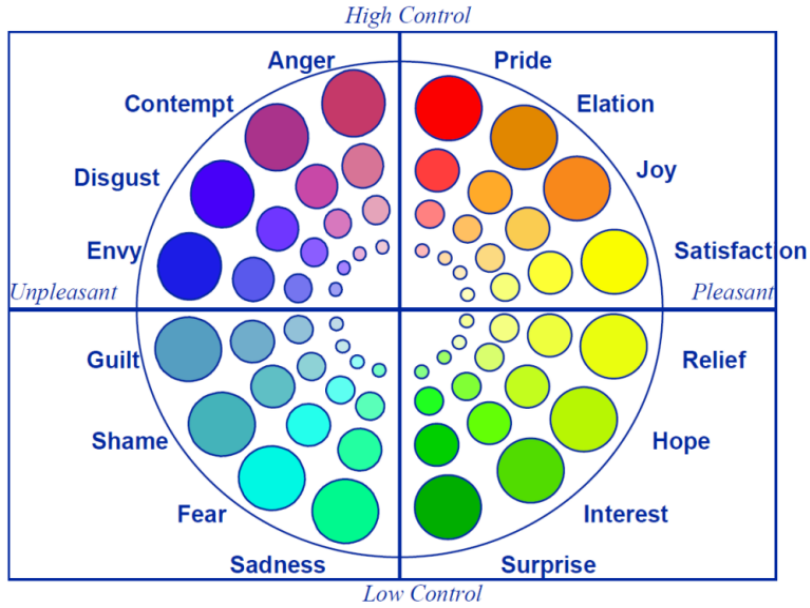
The distinctions between these two emotion types suggest that most aesthetic emotions are in fact more positive in nature and utilitarian emotions contain most of the negative emotions. In light of the distinctions, this study will focus on negative, utilitarian emotions like that of guilt, disgust, fear, sadness, and anger; which according research are conducive to other negative emotions like: grief, rage, hatred, sorrow or despair.

Two structures of emotions merit special consideration for this study: the 'Circumplex Model' (Figure 1) and the 'Geneva Emotion Wheel' (Figure 2). Russell proposed the 'Circumplex Model' in 1980, which asserts that the structure of emotions are based on two linear independent dimensions: valence and arousal (Madeira, 2013). The valence dimension ranges from pleasant to unpleasant; and the arousal dimension ranges from calm to excited (Arriaga, 2011). The valence dimension is replaced with the control dimension in the Geneva Emotion Wheel which separates emotions into four quadrants: negative/low control, negative/high control, positive/low

control, and positive/high control. It also evenly arranges either 16 or 40 different emotions into the quadrants depending on which of the two versions of the GEW, is presented (Figure 2a & 2b). Also, in the very center of the wheel, the response options “no emotion” and “other emotion” is offered (Sacharin, 2012) As shown there are numerous different positive and negative emotions presented in these models. The focus of this study, however, is on the negative ones located on the Geneva Emotion Wheel 1.0. As indicated earlier, studies of media violence have shown that negative emotions are particularly susceptible to desensitization (Funk, 2004). One indicator that desensitization has occurred is observation of a reduction in physiological arousal during exposure to real violence after individuals have been repeatedly exposed to media violence (Carnagey, 2007). Continuous exposure to violent video games may thus make an individual less likely to fear or anger and lead to greater difficulties for them to become sad and disgusted and experience empathy in real life. It should be noted, however, that the complex nature of emotions, their functions, their relations to broad affective dimensions, the processes that activate them, and their role in our daily activities and pursuits remain subjects of debate (Izard, 2007).

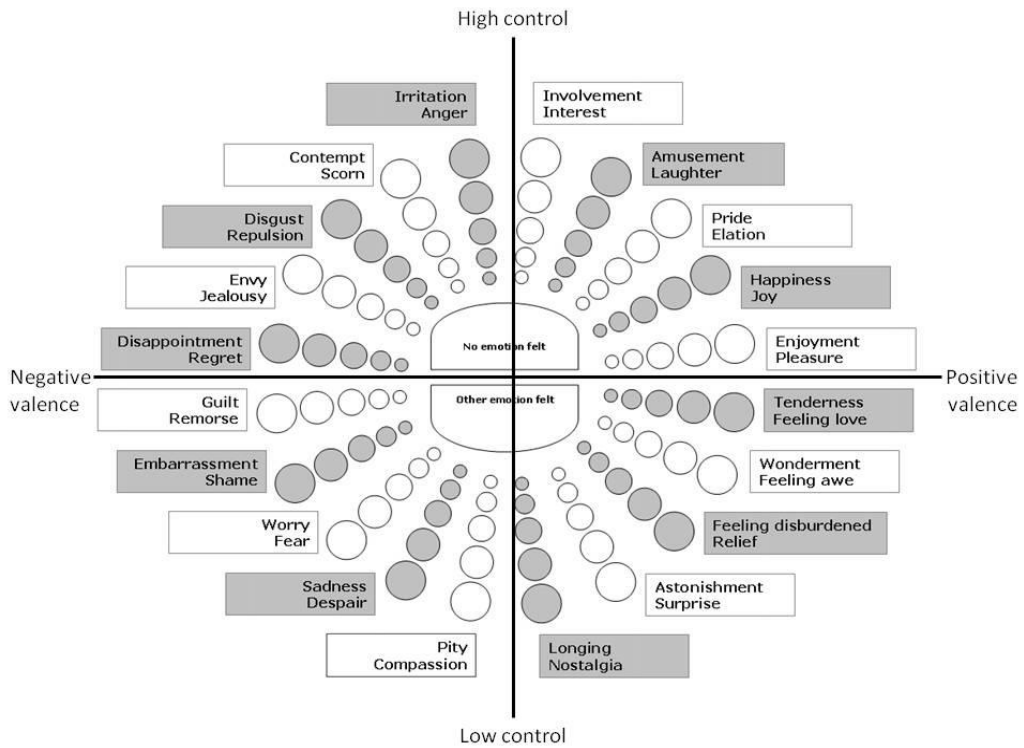


**Figure 1**  
*The Circumplex Model*



**Figure 2a**

*The Geneva Emotion Wheel 1.0*



**Figure 2b**

*The Geneva Emotion Wheel 2.0*

According to Madeira there are three specific methods that are widely accepted for collecting data and research on emotions.

- 1) Evaluative reports;
- 2) Physiological responses; and
- 3) Expressive displays and overt behavior.

Evaluative reports are usually personal evaluations that rely predominantly on judgments and subjective reports of emotions, such as the use of an adjective checklist, rating scales, questionnaires, or free description of affective experience (Madeira, 2013). Physiological responses and expressive displays and overt behavior pertain to neurological and biochemical responses such as heart rate, respiration, skin conductance, muscle activity, and blood pressure, all of which is more advanced testing techniques used mostly in quantitative studies (Madeira, 2013).

### *The Effects on Children*

Much research attention has been given to children since prior to adolescence children's moral scaffolding is still being developed and through playing violent video games they may gain an increase in tolerance for violent behavior. Therefore the values operative in violent video games may be more likely to have a lasting impact on children who are still developing moral reasoning principles as a guide to pro-social behavior, than on individuals with established value systems (Funk, 2004).

Indeed, children start at an extremely young age to be subjected to fictional media violence through video games. The violent video games featuring cartoonish characters and stylized violence in the past has been replaced by lively characters and extremely realistic blood and gore (Engelhardt, 2011). Likewise, adults exposed to modern games are experiencing more violent and gory video games than those in the past, and therefore may become more

desensitized to their negative emotions and prone to becoming angrier than people who played the older style violent video games. Furthermore, it seems likely that kids who subject themselves to high doses of video game violence throughout their childhood, grow up to become adults who have compromised negative emotions and low empathy toward others.

### *Empathy*

Funk (2004) postulates that empathy is the capacity to perceive and to experience the state of another and is critical to the process of moral evaluation. Empathy also refers to the degree to which a person subjectively identifies and commiserates with a victim and feels emotional distress (Krahé, 2011). Empirically, empathy measures are almost always based on self-report scales in which participants indicate the extent to which they empathize with, feel sympathy for, or feel sorry for a particular person or group of people. The general finding is that empathy and the individual's attitudes towards violence are important components of the process of moral evaluation, which may be affected by exposure to violence in real life or in the media, leading to a stronger preference for violent games, which then can be associated with lower empathy and more frequent outbursts of pro-violence emotions.

Funk (2004) also claims that empathic responding may reflect primarily "emotional" desensitization, while "cognitive" desensitization may be apparent in stronger pro-violence attitudes (Funk, 2004). The present study attempts to examine both of these two forms of desensitization as well as "behavioral" desensitization, which is more related to specific courses of action than attitude. Due to its active, creative nature, video game play might be expected to have a particularly strong relationship with empathic responding (Funk, 2004). It may be further hypothesized that playing violent video games could lead to an increase in aggressive behavior,

aggressive affect, aggressive cognitions, physiological arousal, and a decrease in pro-social behavior (Carnagey, 2007).

### *Psychological & Behavioral Responses*

Through brain wave mapping, Bartholow (2006) examined the correlation between playing violent video games and being desensitized to such violence in real life. Using 39 male undergraduate students, he tested how their brain reacted to violent and non-violent video games. It was predicted that, relative to non-violent game players, violent video game players would show deficits in P300 amplitude to violent images, but not to negative nonviolent images (Bartholow, 2006). P300 (P3) is best known as the decision making brain waves; mapping such waves thus provides a physiological measure of desensitization to violent stimuli. As expected, the study found that participants exposed to the more modern and gory video games became more desensitized to their emotions than those who played the older style violent video games. In addition, the study showed that desensitization could serve adaptive functions because it enabled participants to ignore irrelevant information and focused instead on relevant information (Bartholow, 2006).

Regarding behavioral responses, past studies have considered violence in entertainment media a major contributor to aggressive and violent behavior in real life (Funk, 2004). Engelhardt (2011), for example, showed that habitual exposure to violent media may reduce aggressive inhibitions and empathy for the pain and suffering of others, and weaken typical aversions to violence, all of which should increase the likelihood of aggressive responses. The increase in aggressive or violent behavior, as a result of desensitization, might also be accompanied by weakened effects of external cues that normally trigger empathic responding.



It is worth noting that desensitization can have maladaptive outcomes by resulting in lower responsiveness to real-world violent and by making the viewing of violence more pleasurable (Fanti, 2009). This is crucial to recognize when examining the desensitization effects of violent video games since the effects are often shown through reduced physiological arousal to violence in the real world. Viewing violence may therefore increase desensitization to violence, resulting in calloused attitudes toward violence directed at others, a decreased likelihood to take action on behalf of the victim when violence occurs, and ultimately “systematic” desensitization (Mullin, 1995).

“Systematic” desensitization is a set of processes designed to reduce unwanted negative emotional reactions to stimuli that initially produce fear or anxiety (e.g., spiders, snakes, and blood). It has also been used to treat anxiety-related disorders such as post-traumatic stress, rape trauma, and nightmares (Carnagey, 2007). It is also used as a form of training for nurses, and medical doctors and there is even evidence that the US military uses video games in controlled settings for a variety of training missions, including desensitizing soldiers to violence (Carnagey, 2007). Therefore if adult medical professionals and soldier's negative emotions can be desensitized; then it stands to reason that the negative emotions of other adults in non-controlled environments who are just experiencing the same type of violent media for their own enjoyment can as well. This is why it is important to study the negative emotional desensitization of other civilian adults, since their exposure to violent stimuli may be detrimental for both the individual and society (Carnagey, 2007), given that most people should naturally have aversive reactions to the sight of blood and gore (Bartholow, 2006).

Hence these bloody, graphic, gory and violent video games can also have a desensitizing impact on the viewer's negative emotional growth. As shown in a study of how children reacted when exposed to real life news media coverage of frightening events, like that of President Kennedy's assassination, the Challenger explosion, the Oklahoma City bombing, the Gulf Wars, and the September 11 terrorist attacks (Becker-Blease, Finkelhor, & Turne, 2008). These results point to the importance of investigating how adults react to real-life violence similar to that depicted in video games. It might be speculated that the effects of the exposure to violent video games on adults would cultivate a diminishing change in their negative emotions of sadness and feelings of empathy, while also at the same time sensitize their emotions of anger.

### *Short & Long Term Studies*

Short-term effects are those in which a person plays a video game for a brief time (e.g., 15 min) before relevant measures are obtained. The effects of short-term experimental studies are usually assessed and conducted in labs or in schools (Krahé, 2011). Long-term effects on the other hand are those that accrue from repeated exposures over a relatively long period of time, such as months or years and their effects are typically assessed in cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (Krahé, 2011). Therefore the effects that violent video games may have on a participant's emotions might differ as a function of whether one is performing a short-term or long-term study.

Some researchers believe that desensitization to media violence from material such as video games takes a long time and occurs through continuous repeated exposure to the content. Funk (2004), for example, found no evidence of short-term desensitization (indicated by reduced empathy with others in need of help) in the children in their study who played a violent video

game, as compared with those who played a nonviolent game. However, several studies have demonstrated that desensitization can occur following relatively brief exposures. Carnagey (2007) showed that participants' physiological arousal to depictions of real-life violence was reduced after they had played a violent video game compared to a control group that had played a nonviolent game. Engelhardt (2011) also found in this study that participants who played a violent video game for just 20 min showed reduced cardiovascular and electrodermal responses to subsequent depictions of real violence, compared with participants who had played a nonviolent game. Other experimental studies, conducted in both Eastern and Western contexts, have consistently demonstrated the short term effects of playing violent games. (Madeira, 2011).

Many other studies have provided evidence for long-term desensitization toward violence after chronic exposure to violent media. However a number of studies have also shown that traces of desensitization are evident immediately after or even during a single exposure to film violence (Engelhardt, 2011). It was believed that these results about film could be adapted and applied to video games. Although research on the effects of video game violence on emotions is rather sparse, the presented literature suggests desensitization and lack of empathetic responses from the players are associated with the use of such violent media (Chory, 2011)

## Research Questions

Extensive research evidence indicates that playing violent video games can contribute to desensitization to violence. Most published studies, however, may be criticized for their lack of internal and/or external validity. Internal validity is the extent to which playing violent video games actually caused the observed desensitization to violence. The extent to which desensitization effects of playing violent video games could be generalized or applied to other people or settings reflects its external validity (Campbell & Stanley, 1966). Long-term desensitization studies have limited internal validity because of their inability to rule out the influence of exposure to violent media content (including television, movies, music) other than video games. Short-term studies, on the other hand, may suffer from low external validity because the desensitization effects might be so fleeting that they become indiscernible beyond the lab setting. The validity concerns are compounded by the theoretical complexities of human emotions. Few studies were capable of examining the full spectrum of emotions and measures of desensitization were often limited to a small set of purposefully selected scale items.

What's conspicuously missing in nearly all studies is the proper role of the video gamers themselves – a role that allow them to subjectively perceive and explain their own experiences, feelings, actions, in relatively unrestrained social environments. A proper role also means study participants should be derived from the video gamer population and given the opportunity to actively speak for themselves about their prolonged exposure to violent as well as non-violent video games. It is with this understanding in mind that the following general research questions

are proposed as an inductive guide of this study. A detailed description of the qualitative method used to answer these questions is provided in the following section.

**R1:** What differing perspectives do non-violent and violent gamers have about the emotional desensitization effects of violent video games on players?

**R2:** What differing emotional reactions do non-violent and violent gamers have toward real-life violence presented in mass media?

**R3:** What is the position of violent and non-violent video gamers about the negative stereotypes associated with violent video game players?

## Method

### *Focus Groups*

Most research on the effects of playing violent video games relied on quantitative measures gathered through group- or individual-based interviews. As Rice (1931) pointed out, however, the standardized interviewing methods can be problematic:

*"A defect of the interview for the purpose of fact-finding in scientific research, is that the questioner takes the lead. That is, the subject plays a more or less passive role. Information or points of view of the highest value may not be disclosed because the direction given the interview by the questioner leads away from them. In short, data obtained from an interview are as likely to embody the preconceived ideas of the interviewer as the attitudes of the subject interviewed"* (from Krueger, 2009, page 2).

To circumvent the potential defect, this study chose to go a different route by utilizing focus groups as the primary research method which examines the effects of violence in video games on the emotions and actions through the gamer's self-evaluations.

A "'focus group' is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment" (Krueger, 2009, page 2). This study utilized it to gather data from both players of violent games and non-violent video games since "'focus groups' work particularly well to determine the perceptions, feelings and thinking of consumers about issues, products, services or opportunities" (Krueger, 2009, page 8). The implicit goal of using focus groups is to provide more personal insight and context to the study.

To obtain meaningful qualitative results, participants of the focus groups went through a rigorous vetting process. Specifically, it was made clear that, for the purposes of this study, violent video gamers would be classified as: players that often participated in games that incorporate brutal acts, excessive killing and realistic blood and gore in the game play. It was important to make this clarification since almost all games are in some form violent and includes actions of killing and fighting to succeed and beat the game. By contrast, non-violent gamers may also play video games that contain violence, but the violence would have to be animated, cartoonish and non-realistic, plus the games would include little to no human (red) colored blood.

### *Participants*

Participants were undergraduate students at The University of South Florida, in Tampa Florida, who were volunteers and received no cash, college credit or other incentives to participate. A total of 10 random students were needed to sign up to participate. Their age, gender ethnicity and demographic information were collected at the beginning of the study (see Appendix: Demographics Excel Sheet). Also collected was the average time per week spent playing video games, experience with video games and the violence in them.

### *Materials*

During the focus group sessions the participants were presented with several extremely violent news stories, including car accidents, shootings and other accidents/ tragedies. Most selected news stories were very recent and deemed powerful enough to activate emotional responses. There were 6 presented news stories, 3 that pertained to recent news events unrelated

to violent video games, and 3 that were attributed to the actions of perpetrators who played violent video games.

### *Questions*

#### *Focus Group part 1*

1. How many years have you been an avid (violent/non-violent) video gamer?
2. Would you say your preference in video games carries over into enjoying other types of (non-violent/ violent) media like movies or TV shows?
3. What console video game system do you currently play the most?
4. How many hours a week on average, would you say you play video games on that console?
5. Can you name 5 of your favorite video games for that console that you have spent the most time playing this year?
6. What is it about these 5 games that you enjoy? What aspects of them attract you to them?
7. When you answered the last question on the handout about how your avatar looks, would you agree that many of those characteristic match the way you look in real life?
8. Do you believe a particular video game manufacturer creates more violent video games than the others? Which one and why do you think this is?
9. Do you believe a particular video game manufacturer creates less violent video games than the others? Which one and why do you think this is?
10. Why do you chose to play the type of video games that you do?
11. How would you define what constitutes violence in video games, meaning what characteristics make a video game violent?

### *News Stories*

Please listen to each of these news stories that correspond to the images provided. We will reflect on your opinions and emotions toward them after the 6<sup>th</sup> story is presented.

1. This is a picture of a fatal car accident that occurred in Lodi California a couple months ago, in which a SUV was racing another SUV and crashed his vehicle into a white pickup truck killing a 2-year-old, 6- year-old, 4-year-old and both of their parents, and the mother was also 7



months pregnant. The only one to survive was the other driver and the 9 year old son, the rest of his family were all killed in this accident.



2. The Copenhagen Zoo in Denmark, decided to kill their apparently healthy giraffe to avoid inbreeding among the other animals there, despite other facilities offering to take it in. The giraffe was shot on February 9, then publicly dissected and fed to carnivores at the zoo.



3. The painstaking search through the iced-over remains of a burned-out Quebec, Canada retirement home, where only eight bodies of the 32 presumed dead have been recovered. The massive blaze swept through the three-story building in northeast of Quebec City a couple weeks ago. Search teams of police, firefighters and coroners slowly and methodically picked their way through the ruins, working in shifts in the extreme cold with temperatures hovering around minus 4 degrees Fahrenheit to locate the remaining missing seniors.



4. In the Columbine High School shooting two senior students, murdered a total of 12 students and one teacher. They also injured 24 additional students, with three other people being injured while attempting to escape the school. The pair then in the end committed suicide.



5. An 8 year-old boy in Louisiana intentionally shot and killed his elderly grandmother whom was his caregiver. She was sitting in a chair and watching television when the boy fired one round into the back of her head.



6. The Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting which occurred in Newtown, Connecticut, was enacted by a 20-year-old man who prior to driving to the school, shot and killed his mother at their Newtown home. He then drove to the school and fatally shot 20 children and 6 adult staff members, before finally committing suicide by shooting himself in the head.



### *Focus Group Part 2*

1. After hearing all these stories and reflecting on how they made you feel; do you think that your emotional reactions to these stories and pictures was the same as that of someone who plays (violent/ non-violent) video games just as often as you play (violent/ non-violent) games? Why or why not?

The last 3 news stories are all tragedies that have been reported in the news by some to have been attributed due to the violent video games that the perpetrators played. In fact, the Columbine shooting is believed by some psychiatrists to have occurred because of the students' immersion in video games like *Doom* and *Wolfenstein 3D* which caused them to feel gratified when playing in a virtual world of such violent games. In fact, one of the gunmen even created mod levels for *Doom* that were widely distributed. Another large mod that he spent a great deal of time creating was named Tier, and he called it his "life's work. The mod was uploaded to the Columbine school computer and to AOL shortly before the attack, but appears to have been lost. Some researchers argue that it is almost certain that the Tier mod included a mock-up of Columbine High School, which is why some blame the violent video games for the actions of the shooters.

**2.** What is your opinion of all this added information about the gunmen and the link between the shooting and video games? Do you agree with the psychiatrists and people that blame the video games for the cause of the gunmen's antisocial and ultimately violent behavior?

Continuing on this same questioning; the 8 year old that shot and killed his elderly caregiver supposedly according to the Huffington Post did it right after playing the video game Grand Theft Auto IV. Which since no other motive is known at this time is considered by the sheriff department the possible reason he murdered the caregiver. For it is, as I quote according to the Huffington Post; "a realistic game that has been associated with encouraging violence and awards points to players for killing people.

**3.** Do you think that him playing this violent video game just minutes before the homicide occurred and that the game is rated Mature 17 and up, is the most likely reason he killed the caregiver?

The final new story was about the Sandy Hook shooting, and also violent video games have been blamed by some to be the cause of it. Thus because of these speculations there was a mass collection created by many Connecticut community members to have people voluntarily give up their violent video games, CDs, and DVDs which would be placed in a dumpster and later burned by town employees.

**4.** Given all this information about the news stories, what is your impression of why people believe this type of stereotype of violent video game players?

**5.** Do you believe that violent video games actually have this affect on people?

**6.** Do you think violent video games, TV shows and movies trigger aggressive behavior in the young people that play those games inappropriate for their age group?

**7.** If you have children would you decide to allow them to play violent video games that are rated inappropriate for their age? What is your reasoning for your decision?

**8.** Do you have any final questions or concerns you would like to bring up with the group before the focus group ends?

Alright then, at this time I again would also like to mention that anyone uncomfortable with what they said today or the questionnaire that they filled out may still at this time opt out of the study and their information and answers will all be left out and deleted from record.

### ***Procedure***

The first thing that was done, was to locate suitable participants by posting an ad online through a Facebook group called "Video Game Club at USF".

*I am a grad student who is seeking Violent and Non-violent video game players who are undergraduate students that are willing to participate in a focus group and be my research participants. (eIRB#17403)*

*I need volunteers who play Violent and Non-violent video games on a regular basis. Ideally I need at least 6 people who don't like to play violent video games and at least 6 who love to play them. However if you were/ are in the military or medical field I request that you refrain from volunteering.*

*If you are interested in meeting with me and the other participants though to answer video game related questions, and engage in constructive conversations with other students, as well as do a few activities. Then please message me and I will provide you with more information and set up a time to meet with you all on campus. Cookies (or sweets of some kind) and immense gratitude will be provided. However, I am unable to offer school credit or Sona points though. Sorry.*

*Please message me (Christopher Kneifer) if you are interested!*

*Thank you.*

This ensured that all 10 volunteers for the study were familiar with playing and viewing video games. It also was intended as a way to guarantee that participants included both violent and non-violent video gamers. Five participants were subsequently selected for each group, followed by scheduling arrangements through Facebook messaging.

Two focus group sessions were conducted among violent and non-violent video gamers respectively. An informed consent form was handed out at the beginning that needed to be signed before the discussion could begin. Both sessions were audio taped to ensure that the transcripts (see Appendix) were completely accurate.

## **Results/ Analysis**

Data collected through the focus sessions were analyzed and compared, starting with the demographic information and then moving onto the orated questions.

The participants' ages ranged from 19-25, with the ages of the violent gamers in sequential order being 19, 19, 20, 21 and 22 and the non-violent ages were 21, 23, 23, 24 and 25. This presented a mode age for the violent video game players of 19 and the non-violent players being 23. There were only 2 girls that participated in the study and they were both in separate groups, which means there was 1 girl in the violent video game player's focus group and 1 in the non-violent group. None of the focus group members in either group were married or had kids, but 2 of the guys in the non-violent group were engaged. Also 6 of the 10 participants listed themselves as students for their careers and none of them were veterans, as those were weeded out prior to the group even being created.

A code book and an Excel data sheet were created for the demographic data (see Appendix). It was determined that the best way to maintain the participant's anonymity was to give them all ID codes. However to make it simpler this study decided to use their first name's initial along with the number 1 for the next part of the ID if they were in the non-violent focus group, and the number 2 if they were in the violent one. The third part of the ID is just a random number that was assigned to each group alphabetically starting at 0 and ending with 4, since there was a total of 5 participants in each focus group.

The average number of years that the violent group players had been avid violent video gamers was 11 years, while the non-violent gamers' average was 15 years. All violent video game players agreed that they would say their preference in video games carries over into enjoying other types of violent media like movies or TV shows.

C10: I like scary movies, like thrillers. So I guess it goes over into movies.

S14: Yeah I do enjoy when it is more violent, like 300 and Game of Thrones and stuff like that.

However the non-violent video gamers did not unanimously agree like the violent gamers did, but 4 out of 5 of them said they would say they preferred non-violent movies and TV shows to violent ones, which means their video game choices also carried over to the other forms of media for them too.

C10: Yeah I don't really watch anything violent or at least I don't actively try to.

D11: Same here. I mostly watch anime and non-violent programs and movies.

Next the focus group question indicated that none of the violent gamers played the Wii console the most for their video games. Instead it was 3 Xbox players and 2 PS3 as their consoles of choice. However, this was not the case with the other focus group of non-violent game players who actually played the Wii the most, at 3 Wii players and 1 Xbox and 1 PS3. The violent gamers though when asked how many hours a week on average they play violent games on that console gave a mean amount of 15 hours a week, where the non-violent gamers barely played 7 hours on average each week. Therefore, this means that the violent game players play their consoles on average more than double the amount of time each week that the non-violent gamers do.

When asked though what are five of their favorite games that they currently play on that console the most the answers were extremely different with only a few overlapping. As a result there were four games that the violent gamers mentioned that were repeated by one other member of the same violent focus group. Those four games were Final Fantasy 10, Madden, Titanfall and Halo 4. The non-violent gamers also surprisingly had exactly four games as well that only were repeated just once, like in the violent group. Those four games were Zelda, Mario Kart, Super Smash Brothers and Mario Party. Civilization Revolution was the one and only game that a member of the violent and the non-violent study both mentioned.

The participants were next asked what was it about these five games that they enjoyed and what aspects of them attracted them to those games? The violent focus group mostly stated that the games were all about escaping their current reality and doing actions they couldn't in real life to blow off steam.

J12: It is probably because I can't go and attack someone like this in real life, but can do it virtually without any harm in that.

J13: I have a similar answer. It is a falsehood of escaping this reality and not having to die or whatever like that.

D11: It is just an outlet for my anger.

One thing that both focus groups of gamers unanimously agreed on though was that every single participant whether a violent gamer or a non-violent video gamer tries to always make their in game avatar look just like them.

E22: My Wii avatar looks as close to me as I can get it, it even has my favorite color for its outfit.

J13: I usually try to make it look like me.

D21: Yeah. If I make like an avatar for a video game I just try to be as close to me.

I23: Yeah I try to look like myself so that when I play with friends they know who it is.

The participants were then asked if they believed a particular video game manufacturer creates more violent video games than the others and if a particular one creates less violent games, then which ones? The violent and non-violent gamers on average both said that Xbox seems to create/ manufacture more violent games than any of the other console systems. They also both agreed almost unanimously 9 to 10 that on average the Wii creates/ manufactures less violent video games than any of the other console systems.

This led into the following question, in which the two groups of video game players were asked why they chose to play the types of games they do. From which this study learned perhaps one of the most important pieces of information. Based on the responses to this question by both groups of gamers, this study was able to determine that violent gamers play their games for the action, suspense and just the adrenaline thrill they get from playing their games and letting loose their pent up aggression and stress.

S14: They are more exciting and more of a challenge.

J13: Yeah it can provide hours of entertainment and give you something to do when you are bored.

D11: I would say because it is interesting to me. You can have a character that goes out and you can do violent things and such. But those things are limited in real life. So if you are born with a natural anger issues. Then there are different ways to deal with them and mediate those anger issues, like different ways to cope with it and my way to deal with it is to play video games. Then I can release all that stress that builds up and then I don't have to worry about carrying it anymore.

C10: I think they are exciting. It is like a boost of adrenaline



The non-violent gamers on the other hand play their games not to blow off steam, but to relax and soothe them. They enjoy the calmer scenarios and the pleasant music that those types of games have and the way they can just play them and unwind with friends hanging out.

A20: It's just a calmer time. Compared to the few times I have played like violent games and you have to constantly focus. Like ohh my God I am getting shot at right now or eaten by zombies. But when you are playing Mario it's like calmer and more enjoyable.

I23: Honestly the music. The music is a lot nicer and when I am playing video games I do it to soothe me and relax. But the music in violent games are not that great a soundtrack relaxing.

A20: Yeah and you have to focus a lot more, but when you are playing non-violent video games you can just relax and let yourself go.

D21: Yeah I like that it is not as stressful and there is more strategy involved.

E22: It is relaxing to play party games. In fact, I mostly enjoy mine drinking and hanging with my friends. It is a blast to drunk drive on Mario Kart.

Next it was determined that both violent and non-violent gamers seemed to agree and repeat each other's responses, when they were asked how they would define what constitutes violence in video games, meaning what characteristics make a video game violent. Most of the answers were all about the excessive amount of blood and gore and killing being the main plot of the game.

J12: Any type of video game that has blood or gore, in my opinion. Like games like Fight Night or UFC those have blood in them and that constitutes that they are kind of violent games as well. So are games like Halo.

A20: Gore. Various weapons that you can see the use of. Basically violence on screen, like when you're playing Super Mario and the worst thing you see is when you jump on a turtle it turns into a coin. Which is kind of whimsical in a way. But if you did that while you were playing like a violent game, like Call of Duty you would see the turtle squish and then you see the innards and everything.

- D11: Probably any video game that gives you the choice to hurt or maim other characters within the game.
- E22: I agree. Any kind of game where it is all about killing and making points by doing so. But only if the deaths incur blood or some kind of realistic response from the victim. I wouldn't say Super Smash is a violent game.
- D21: No that's true. I wouldn't say it is either. There needs to be blood and realism.

However, one person in each of the groups went more in-depth past just the visual stimuli and also mentioned audio, like the screaming and sound effects and such as another thing that makes games violent.

- C10: Using guns and realistic, or maybe even unrealistic depictions of blood. Sound effects like screaming and moaning kind of things like that, where people sound like they are in terror.
- I23: The screaming in the games of characters being killed and the soundtrack. Blood spurting out of the head of people killed, like in Resident Evil. You see the blood and the limbs falling off left and right. Even bones sticking out in some games.

The previous questions were the first half and the warm up for the focus group discussions before the images and news stories were presented and described to the participants. During which they were asked to watch and listen and at the end of the 6 stories to reflect back on if they thought their emotional reactions to the stories and pictures was the same as that of someone who played the opposite type of video games just as often as they either played non-violent or violent ones. This question sparked a good amount of feedback from each group and led to the overall consensus that violent video game players would be less disgusted and probably more desensitized than the players from the non-violent group, but still possibly just as sad.

- S14: I guess someone that just plays non-violent would have a more stronger reaction, like someone who is used to playing violent video games is used to the violence.
- A20: I think the people who play violent video games more are probably more desensitized to more, but I don't think they are any less sad. I think they may be less disgusted by it.
- C10: Yeah. I felt really bad and I felt a lot of anger and disgust, but maybe if I played more violent video games I might be desensitized to it. So I am probably pretty similar to someone who plays a lot of non-violent video games, because I was like wow that was a tragedy.
- A20: I think the people who play violent video games more are probably more desensitized to more, but I don't think they are any less sad. I think they may be less disgusted by it.
- J13: Yeah. Probably Not. Since we are exposed to it more...in violent video games were are exposed to more violence then someone that doesn't play them as often.
- I23: I mean they are probably used to seeing this all the time, so it probably doesn't faze them as much.
- D21: Yeah. Probably not so much fear compared to someone like me. But maybe they might feel a little more guilty, but probably less disgust.
- E22: I agree. If they view death and gore in their games often enough that it might not have as strong an effect on them.
- V24: Yeah maybe they could be desensitized possibly. Yeah I would think they would be desensitized and their reactions would not be the same as mine.

In the next part of the study it was explained to the participants that the last three news stories were all tragedies that have been argued by some, to be attributed as the result of the violent video games that the perpetrators played. The focus groups were then given new information about the Columbine gunmen and the link between their shooting and violent video games. After which the focus groups were asked if they agreed with the psychiatrists and people that blame the violent video games for the cause of the gunmen's antisocial and ultimately violent behavior. To which both focus groups unanimously agreed that the violent video games

the gunmen played were not to blame and it was the personality and psychotic antisocial gunmen themselves that were the ones to blame and not the video games they played.

- A20: I don't think it is the video games that are at fault, because it is ultimately already a psychological disorder that was if anything, just fathered by it. In a way if you're crazy you can really just be set off by anything. Almost in a way like an epileptic person is set off by a blinking light.
- S14: I mean that's just psychological in their mind. I did write a paper about this and I don't think it has anything to do with violent video games. People just blame video games and the violent content, but there are TV shows and movies out there that are just as violent and you can't just go and abolish all of it.
- J13: I think violent video games don't affect at all. I mean just because you play Call of Duty, it doesn't mean you are going to run out and get a M4 and shoot a bunch of people just because it is fun.
- V24: Yeah. I don't blame video games. It is a much more complex issue that causes antisocial behavior. I wouldn't blame video games.
- D11: Exactly. I wouldn't blame their behavior on the video games, but I am not going to say that given their personality that the violent video games didn't help the situation. Like they might have added to an already rage fueled life and so they may have become an outlet, and then they decided that the outlet wasn't good enough and decided to go to the real thing. But I don't think the video games are the sole reason.
- E22: Exactly. The gun men were probably mentally unstable and the video games were not the cause for that instability, but I suppose they may have added to it.

Continuing on this same line of questioning the focus groups were then informed that the 8 year old that shot and killed his elderly caregiver supposedly according to the Huffington Post, did it right after playing the video game Grand Theft Auto IV. Therefore since no other motive was known at the time it was considered by the sheriff department the possible reason he murdered the caregiver. For it is, as quoted according to the Huffington Post; "a realistic game that has been associated with encouraging violence and awards points to players for killing

people. Then after they were given this new information about the news story, the participants were then asked if they believed that the boy playing this violent video game just minutes before the homicide occurred and that the game is rated Mature 17 and up, is the most likely reason he killed the caregiver.

This question though produced surprising if not the reverse answers that were expected, for almost all of the non-violent gamers were more understanding and less quick to condemn the violent video game as the cause for the shooting.

V24: No. Just because someone did something before they killed someone, doesn't mean that was the cause. Like he could have just eaten breakfast and then murdered her, but the cops aren't going to go straight to that. So no I don't think so.

A20: There is probably a lot more evidence. I mean we don't know if the kid was abused or anything. So I am going to go ahead and say no. I don't think it was just the game, because it is never just what is on the surface when murders occur.

D21: Or maybe he is out of his parent's house because one of his parents is violent, or maybe he saw his father point a gun at his mother before. So he saw it as an option to resolve an argument or something.

I23: Yeah I mean, just because he has a caregiver doesn't mean anything. His parents could be working at a couple jobs just to keep them a float or whatever. But he didn't try to steal a car afterwards, so it wouldn't be Grand Theft Autos fault.

On the other hand though the violent gamers almost all pretty much agreed that the game was one of the main reasons, if not the cause for the kid shooting his grandmother.

C10: He is an 8 year old kid and he probably takes a lot of modeling from like video games and the media, and considering it is Grand Theft Auto too I would say so.

J12: Yeah. First off he is a young child and shouldn't be playing violent video games like that in the first place.

S14: He is too young and there is a reason that they are rated mature. They are rated mature because they are meant for people older who understand that you can't just go around doing those things in life. You can't go around in cars shooting people.

The final new story was about the Sandy Hook shooting, and once again the focus group participants were informed that violent video games had been blamed by some to be the cause of it. Thus because of these speculations there was a mass collection created by many Connecticut community members to have people voluntarily give up their violent video games, CDs, and DVDs which were to be placed in a dumpster and later burned by town employees. After they had been given this last new piece of information about the news stories, they were then asked what is their impression of why people believe this stereotype about violent video game players?

This question probably created the most heated debate among the participants, but it also possibly produced the most thought out answers from all the focus group participants as well. The general agreement that seemed to be reached though between the two groups was that video games are used as the scapegoat in tragic situations and that is why people will get the wrong impression that video games are the main cause of the violent behavior leading up to the event and not the environment and the individual that acted on their unnatural thoughts.

J13: I think the stereotype just comes from ignorance.

I23: Yeah, I mean like there has always been violence. So just adding violent video games they assume it is just going to make it worse, but violence has been around for soo long that. When video games are out, there will just be another thing that is violent in nature and they are just going to assume that it is that, that is causing the more violent killings. Even though it has been going on ever since anyone can remember.

D11: I think for a general mass that aren't inclined to play video games it is an easy substitute, than going into the lives of the person and saying what are the other factors that could have been involved? Why did they do it? Did they already harbor animosity toward these people? What did the video games do to them? Did

they give them a different value system or was it just the pure violence of the game? And so I think it is difficult to create a direct cause between violence in the video games and the actions of people in real life. Because there are so many other factors, and generally it's easier for people to say; "Ohh they were playing violent video games and maybe some other people who played violent video games also did something violent and similar too.

C10: True. It is never just the one thing, so it isn't just video games to blame.

V24: I feel like they just want to blame something or they jump to conclusions. Like, ohh it must be video games. But yeah they just want something simple to blame, even if it is a much more complex issue.

E22: I agree. It is just the easy out for close minded people.

The non-violent focus group also went as far when answering this question as to give other good examples of people not taking responsibility for their actions, by trying to come up with excuses and other unrelated reasons for why the tragedy happened in the first place and then taking actions against their alleged culprit.

A20: It is the whole McDonald making you fat thing. People just don't want to take accountability for their actions.

D21: It is very similar to when communities would do gun buy backs. You know, instead of violent game buy backs. Other communities will do gun buy backs, in an effort to try to curve gun violence.

A20: But it makes way more sense to do the gun thing.

D21: Well they are a hunting community, so they wouldn't do that.

Continuing on this same line of questions, the focus groups were then asked if they believe that violent video games actually have this effect on people. To which both the groups answered that they didn't believe violent video games alone could make someone violent, however they did agree that violent video games could be a factor in a much bigger issue that causes the person to become violent.

- S14: They can but it's not the only factor for someone to becoming violent.
- E22: No. Video games aren't the cause, but they might be a factor. There are just other symptoms that also need to be taken into account. Like the unstable biochemical brain responses that the people have without the addition of violent video games and their social personality among other things.
- C10: Maybe some people, but not all people. It goes back to what I was saying before about having to have a certain personality or disposition toward more violent behavior and the video games exacerbate it.
- D21: Well yeah the video games offer escapism for the person and if the person always has to have escapism then they might not see a difference between their actions in the video game and their actions in real life. So they just enact it in real life.
- D11: I believe that violent video games only have that effect on people who are already unstable or vulnerable. So very young children might be vulnerable since their value system is not already in place. It depends on the environment that people grow up in, because they might have an already unstable value system.
- V24: True. If maybe some people have trouble discerning reality from video games, but I don't think so. No.

However out of all of the answers that were given for this question, there were two very similar almost eerily so answers which presented Jack the Ripper as their example for a psycho killer from the past who couldn't have played a violent video game. The reason this was significant and really odd was that the answers were given by a person from each of the two different focus groups. This means that the violent and non-violent gamers were unknowingly both able to complement and agree with one another perfectly, without even knowing they had done so since they were in separate groups.

- I23: Yeah. Like it probably helps some people go there, but again video games have only been around since like the late 70s, early 80s and there have been many mass murders before that like Jack the Ripper for instance. I mean yeah it was England, but still he was a mass murder before video games were in existence.



J12: Yeah. I mean some of the worst tragedies like Jack the Ripper and many other massacres in history all happened way before video games and all that even came out.

The next question asked the participants if they thought that violent video games, TV shows and movies could trigger aggressive behavior in young people that play games inappropriate for their age group. This was something that both the non-violent gamers and violent gamers once again mostly decided was a possibility as long as the child was young enough, like a preteen.

A20: I can see why like the 8 year old, playing a 17 year and up game is wrong. Like you don't want a little kid to watch porn. So I can see why if it's such a large gap, then I can see why that might be a traumatizing factor. But if you are like 15 and you are playing Grand Theft Auto then I feel like you should be able to handle it. Especially given what you have already been exposed to, but if you are in a wide gap from the actual age that isn't right.

J12: Kind of. I mean I think the very young shouldn't be playing them.

D21: I agree. It's just like mostly exposing things to people before they are ready.

C10: Yeah. I would say maybe in the case of the 8 year old playing a game that is supposed to be for at least teenagers and mature 17 and up. Yeah I think the games have more of an effect on younger people like 8 year old kids.

E22: The rating system is there for a reason and if the parent's choose to allow their kids to play games inappropriate for them, then the parent is the one responsible for teaching their children what is unacceptable behavior, not to mention morally and legally wrong.

The focus group gamers were then asked to speculate that if they were to have children would they decide to allow them to play violent video games that are rated inappropriate for their age and what would be the reasoning and justification for their responses. To this both groups all pretty much agreed that if they had a young child, like an 8 year old. Then that kid wouldn't be playing games for a 17 year old, but if they were in their early teens then they might be allowed as long as they know what is acceptable behavior for real life.

- C10: It is kind of hard to speculate that since I don't have kids, but I definitely would make sure I know what kind of personality that my child has. Like if my child seems like they are more of a violent type, then I would try my best to try and maybe keep that away. But if they are like 15 or something and I feel like it wouldn't be a problem for them then I would allow it. It just really would depend on the child.
- I23: Yeah. It depends on the kid really. Like I may have a son that has is prone to wanting to play Halo and Call of Duty and Gears of War and all that stuff and then my other son might want to play Pokémon, Digimon and Final Fantasy and if they want to play it then go ahead. But they are not going to be playing games like Mortal Kombat until they are at least 10.
- E22: Yeah. I would make sure my kid knew what the difference between fantasy behavior in a game was and what was acceptable in reality, and if they couldn't understand the difference then they wouldn't be ready for those type of games. But there is no way my 8 year old is playing a game meant for 17 year olds.
- A20: At like 8, they are going to be playing games like Pokémon or Super Mario or something. But when they are like 15-16 and I think they are ready and mature enough, then yeah I will get them Grand Theft Auto 68 or whatever.
- J12: Yeah they would have to be a suitable level. I mean, I'm not going to hand my kid Grand Theft Auto at the age of 8. But maybe when he is in his teens or something like that. I'll let him do that. But I definitely will not let my child have violent video games, before he was a teenager. Like before he was in High School.
- V24: I guess so, but within reason. Maybe not go all the way to the limit with like Grand Theft Auto and like an 8 year old just cause it is kind of inappropriate.
- J13: Yeah before High School he would probably at most play games like Prince of Persia or something with minimal violence.

### **Conclusion**

This study strengthens the argument that violent video games have an effect on the emotions of their players. As shown, when the 5 violent video gamers judged their own emotions and they all agreed that their feelings would not be the same as the emotions experienced and felt by the non-violent gamers. It was their unanimous belief that they were most likely somewhat desensitized through their game playing to the images and violent acts depicted in the news stories. However the 5 violent players also determined for themselves, through their self-evaluations that their empathy and emotions of sadness were what they believed to be very much the same as the non-violent gamers. Yet they determined that their emotions of disgust and repulsion to the images and the news stories were in fact desensitized, when they compared how they felt to the non-violent players. Therefore this means that according to them at least some of their emotions were in fact affected by the violent video games.

This qualitative study's findings, suggests a link between violent video game exposure related to "emotional" desensitization. It also bolsters previous studies disputes that violent video games might desensitize their player's emotions, as shown in the case of the 5 violent video game players assessment that they felt less disgusted and repulsed than they believed the non-violent players would. However, even though this is a small focus group study it does show an indication that something is happening in the emotions of the video game players who were exposed to the violent content in their games. Although this study is still in many ways exploratory and was unable to flesh out the entire picture of "emotional" desensitization occurring, since there was such a relatively small number of participants in the study. Future

studies are needed to analyze “emotional” desensitization using larger sample sizes of participants and ones from different backgrounds and populations.

In summary, the literature and the present study support the need for further studies into the connections between violent video games and their player’s emotions becoming desensitized. However at this time, this 10 person study has come to the conclusion that both cognitive and behavioral desensitization are not caused by violent video games alone. Violent video games according to the participants, do not cause violent actions or cultivate behavior or uncaring emotions in their gamers, as long as the player’s mind is not compromised or is age appropriate for the game rating. Granted both focus groups did agree though that violent video games could affect and influence the negative violent behavior of younger pre-teen aged groups that play video games that are inappropriate for their ages, like in the case of the 8 year old playing a mature rated game that was for 17 and up.

Furthermore, the results of this focus groups study gained some useful information about the consoles the games themselves are played on. It was determined based on the answers of the 10 focus groups participants that the Wii might produce the least amount of violent games and the Xbox might produce the most. This information coincided with the data provided by the focus groups members themselves about which console they currently play the most; with the non-violent players mostly playing the Wii the most and on average the violent gamers choosing Xbox as their console of choice. Thus utilizing this focus groups data, a broad possible conclusion might be drawn that both violent video games and the violent video gamers themselves can on average mostly be found on the Xbox and non-violent games and their gamers can be found on the Wii.

Additionally it was estimated based on the focus groups data that violent video gamers on average are most likely to play their console and games more than double the amount of time each week when compared to non-violent gamers. Therefore this longer play time for violent video gamers to indulge in violent games probably contributes to their blunted emotional responses of disgust and repulsion to violence in real life. It is true that violent video game players are not just moving their hand on a controller, but they are in actuality interacting with the game both psychologically and emotionally. Thus the more often they expose themselves to such violent interactive games, the more likely they will become “emotional” numb to the graphic depictions and somewhat desensitized.

In this research study the gamers were provided with 3 news stories of violent shootings that some psychologists and other people have blamed on the violent video games that the perpetrators had played. The 10 gamers were then asked questions that allowed them to provide their unique perspectives and opinions on the situations and the stereotypes that violent video games face. As a result it was pretty much unanimous among both focus groups, that violent video games should not be held solely responsible for the actions of their players.

It was the gamers strong belief that violent video games themselves are just used as a scapegoat and that it is just an easy out for people who never even have played them. They just want something quick and controversial to point the blame at. So they choose to make violent video games the criminal when a tragic incident occurs, but as the participants in this study pointed out some of the worst tragedies and many other massacres in history have happened way before the first video game was even created. Therefore video games by themselves should not be considered responsible when someone behaves violently. According to the gamers though,

violent video games do have the ability to build on an existing mental condition of someone already unstable. Although these damaged people must be influenced by other outside factors than just violent video games.

In conclusion, this study intends to provide more understanding and awareness of the nature of violent video games from the perspective of the gamers themselves and not outsiders trying to use them to explain away tragedies and other bigger issues. The data reported in this study is here to help anyone both gamer and non-gamer alike to better understand the impact that violent video games have on the players' emotions, by hearing insightful opinions directly taken from those gamers. Given this provided data it should also help to better understand the stereotyping and labeling that violent games and sometimes their gamers receive. Video games themselves are neither inherently good nor inherently bad and this study hopes to highlight this concept with the help of the participant gamers' unique perspectives.

The next task though for future video game studies might be to possibly do more focus groups using other age groups and communities. The research in this study is only a small sample of violent video game players, taken from a university student population which therefore may not represent the full spectrum of violent video game exposure that exists in the general population. Furthermore another idea would be a fusion or combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, to quantifiably attempt to examine the actual amount of desensitization that occurs in violent video game player's emotions of disgust and revulsion, as well as possibly other emotions too. However, that is just one route future studies could go, but one thing is for certain though; with the ever changing and evolving violent games that are being

released to the public, studies and research into all aspects of video games are only going to grow and this is by far not the last study that will be done on violent video games and their effects.

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## The Appendix



### Informed Consent Form

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You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This study's moderator is Christopher Kneifer and the faculty advisor is Scott Liu. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. This study involves minimal to no risk research regarding video games. eIRB#17403

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#### Purpose of This study

If you take part in this focus group study, you will be asked multiple questions and given a questionnaire pertaining to video games and a few real life news stories. however if you are not a video gamer or you have a background with experiences in the military or the medical field then please refrain from filling this out and participating in this study.

#### Total Number of Participants

About 12 undergraduate individuals will take part in this study at USF.

#### Alternatives

You do not have to participate in this research study.

#### Benefits

No monetary, educational credits or Sona points are available at this time as benefits for taking part in this research study.

#### Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

## Compensation

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study other than the snacks provided by the moderator.

## Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. The decision to participate or not to participate is entirely up to you.

## Privacy and Confidentiality

This study's records will be private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records, but by law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

The Principal Investigator, and all other research staff.

Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.

Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).

The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, staff in the USF Office of Research and Innovation, USF Division of Research Integrity and Compliance, and other USF offices who oversee this research.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

## You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an adverse event or unanticipated problem, then you can connect the Principal Investigator and take it up with them.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

### **Consent to Take Part in this Research Study**

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

**I freely give my consent to take part in this.** I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

### **Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/ she understands:

- What the study is about;
- What procedures will be used;
- What the potential benefits might be; and
- What the known risks might be.

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. This subject does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. This subject is not under any type of anesthesia or analgesic that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give informed consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### Demographics Information Sheet

1. When based solely on the two categories of violent, vs. non-violent video games, please classify yourself as a video game player of either violent games or one that plays non-violent video games, depending on which of these two types of games you enjoy playing the most?

- I am a violent video game player
- I am a non-violent video game player

2. What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

3. How old are you?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your race?

- Caucasian
- African American
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Middle Eastern
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Divorced/ Separated
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you have any children?

- No
- Yes

7. What is your Occupation?

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8. Are you a veteran?

- Yes  
 No

9. What degree are you seeking at USF?

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10. What county do you live in?

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11. Please describe in detail what your main video game avatar looks like. This is the avatar you are asked to create a custom avatar at the beginning of a game or main profile avatar on Xbox or Wii? Use descriptive adjectives and be specific about not only the characteristics of the avatar, but the clothes you chose and any additional props you have equipped to them.

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This concludes the demographics questionnaire. Thank you for your time and valuable input.

**Focus Group Demographic Sheet Code Book**

Gamers: 1=Violent game player  
2=Non-violent game player

Gender: 1=Male  
2=Female

Age: Open Ended/Insert Age

Race: 1=White/Caucasian  
2=African American  
3=Hispanic  
4=Asian  
5=American Indian  
6=Pacific Islander  
7=Other

Marital: 1=Single  
2=Married  
3=Divorced/Separated  
4=Engaged

Children: 1=No  
2=Yes

Occupation: Open Ended/Insert Text

Veteran: 1=No  
2=Yes

Degree: Open Ended/Insert Text

County: 1=Hillsborough  
2=Pinellas  
3=Pasco  
4=Polk  
5=Manatee  
6=Other

**MISSING DATA = 99**

**(if anyone skipped an item or entered the wrong information, 99 was entered for the missing data.)**



## Focus Groups Demographics Data Sheet

ID #	Gamers	Gender	Age	Race	Marital Status	Children	Occupation	Veteran	Degree	County
A20	2	1	23	1	4	1	Student	1	Accounting	1
C10	1	2	21	1	1	1	Student	1	Secondary English Ed	1
D21	2	1	25	1	1	1	Office Installer	1	Political Science	1
D11	1	1	20	1	1	1	Student	1	Chemical Engineering	1
E22	2	1	23	1	1	1	Student	1	Biomedical Sciences	1
I23	2	1	24	1	4	1	Store Broker	1	English Literature	1
J12	1	1	19	1	1	1	Bank Teller	1	Business	1
J13	1	1	19	3	1	1	Student	1	Criminology	1
S14	1	2	22	2	1	1	Security Guard	1	Bachelor of Science	1
V24	2	1	21	1	1	1	Student	1	Physics	99

## Violent Video Game Players Transcript

### *Focus Group part 1*

*Participant Initials: S14 J12 J13 C10 D11*

1. How many years have you been an avid violent video gamer?

Ohh since I was like really young I guess. Like 15 or so years.

**I would say about 13 years**

**I'd say 10**

For me it is only since like High School, so maybe like 5 years.

**Probably have to go with 13 years.**

2. Would you say your preference in video games carries over into enjoying other types of (non-violent/ violent) media like movies or TV shows?

Yeah I do enjoy when it is more violent, like 300 and Game of Thrones and stuff like that.

**Yeah**

**Yeah me too.**

I like scary movies, like thrillers. So I guess it goes over into movies.

**Sometimes yeah. I like good action scenes in movies, but that doesn't mean that if it don't have action or violence I won't try it.**

3. What console video game system do you currently play the most?

**PlayStation 3**

**Xbox 360**

**Same. Xbox 360**

**Xbox**

**PlayStation 3**

4. How many hours a week on average, would you say you play video games on that console?

**Ummm. That is hard to say because on a day if I have nothing to do I might play it 10 hours, but on a normal week when I have stuff to do I guess 15 hours or so.**

**I'd say about 25.**

**Yeah. I'd say the same. About 25.**

**With school not many. Almost zero hours right now.**

**Wow. Lately it has only been like 10 hours a week for me, but sometimes it can be over 40.**

**5. Can you name 5 of your favorite video games for that console that you have spent the most time playing this year?**

**I have soo many. Final Fantasy 10, Bioshock 2, Bioshock Infinite, Devil May Cry 5, God of War Assentation.**

**Call of Duty, Madden, WWE, Titianfall, Halo 4, and Civilization Revolution**

**Skyrim, Madden, Tekken Tournament, Titianfall, Halo 4 and Sims 4.**

**Dance Dance Revolution, Resident Evil 5, Dead or Alive, Eternal Darkness and Left 4 Dead.**

**Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 Remix, Tekken, Ratchet & Clank, Final Fantasy 10 and Lords of Shadow 2.**

**6. What is it about these 5 games that you enjoy? What aspects of them attract you to them?**

**I am not sure. The challenge of them.**

**It is probably because I can't go and attack someone like this in real life. But can do it virtually without any harm in that.**

**I have a similar answer. It is a falsehood of escaping this reality and not having to die or whatever like that.**

**I just like to fight monsters. You can't do that in real life either.**

**It is just an outlet for my anger.**

**7. When you answered the last question on the handout about how your avatar looks, would you agree that many of those characteristic match the way you look in real life?**

**Well I didn't have an avatar but I guess if I did I would try to make it what I look like.**

**Umm. Yeah.**

**I usually try to make it look like me.**

**Same here.**

**Somewhat like me.**

**8. Do you believe a particular video game manufacturer creates more violent video games than the others? Which one and why do you think this is?**

**I think PlayStation and Xbox are pretty equal.**

**I disagree. I think Xbox 360 does**

**Yeah. I believe so too. Xbox 360 creates more violent games than PlayStation does.**

**Yeah. Maybe Xbox does.**

**Well I think some do, but I think it is more of a gimmick with what type of video games they create and the fan base that is interested in those types of games. Because each console can branch out, but it just depends on what people are expecting. So they come out with that type of video game.**

**Yeah that is true, but Xbox seems to have all the gory zombie games.**

**9. Do you believe a particular video game manufacturer creates less violent video games than the others? Which one and why do you think this is?**

**I am not sure, I don't really play any of the other systems.**

**Nintendo.**

**Yeah. I want to say the Wii.**

**Wii. Yeah they have a lot of motion games, so I think it is kind of harder to play violent games on like a motion based controller or console.**

**Well the Wii has a larger age availability than the PlayStation or Xbox, so you would find a lot more kid friendly games on the Wii.**

**10. Why do you chose to play the type of video games that you do?**

**They are more exciting and more of a challenge.**

**To be honest I don't think violent video games are hard to play. You know it is a simple objective, you know, kill the other guy. It is something you can easily pick up and do.**

**Yeah it can provide hours of entertainment and give you something to do when you are bored.**

**I think they are exciting. It is like a boost of adrenaline**

**I would say because it is interesting to me. You can have a character that goes out and you can do violent things and such. But those things are limited in real life. So if you are born with a natural anger issues. Then there are different ways to deal with them and mediate those anger issues, like different ways to cope with it and my way to deal with it is to play video games. Then I can release all that stress that builds up and then I don't have to worry about carrying it anymore.**

**11. How would you define what constitutes violence in video games, meaning what characteristics make a video game violent?**

**Extreme gore, and blood. Strong language and anything that is meant for like older.**

**Any type of video game that has blood or gore, in my opinion. Like games like Fight Night or UFC those have blood in them and that constitutes that they are kind of violent games as well. So are games like Halo.**

**I would say anything with a big enough hit, like Madden. Because the way they tackle each other sometimes it's just a simple shove, but other times it's a fall where they just drop.**

**Ohh yeah other Football games will even incorporate blood and stuff in them.**

**Using guns and realistic, or maybe even unrealistic depictions of blood. Sound effects like screaming and moaning kind of things like that, where people sound like they are in terror.**

**Probably any video game that gives you the choice to hurt or maim other characters within the game.**

### *Focus Group Part 2*

**1. Do you think that your emotional reactions to these stories and pictures was the same as that of someone who plays non-violent video games just as often as you play violent games? Why or why not?**

**I guess someone that just plays non-violent would have a more stronger reaction. Like someone who is used to playing violent video games is used to the violence and I guess it depends on how you look at it. Because some people think that what you can do in the violent video games you can do in real life. So I guess it just depends on if you think you can do that or you don't.**

**No. I have realized this after one of my High School teachers told me about this. But before violent video games and the horror movies that we see now were badly made. The 21<sup>st</sup> century and all that. Stuff like these stories, like the Sandy Hook shooting would affect people, but since we grew up in a more violent society we see it more and coop with it more. At least that is my opinion.**

**Yeah. Probably Not. Since we are exposed to it more...in violent video games were are exposed to more violence then someone that doesn't play them as often.**

**Yeah. I felt really bad and I felt a lot of anger and disgust, but maybe if I played more violent video games I might be desensitized to it. So I am probably pretty similar to someone who plays a lot of non-violent video games, because I was like wow that was a tragedy.**

**No, but for a different reason. Like I think I am very apathetic to the stories, but not because I play video games. Just because of the kind of person that I am. But you might find variances among other people that play violent games.**

The last 3 news stories are all tragedies that have been reported in the news by some to have been attributed due to the violent video games that the perpetrators played. In fact, the Columbine shooting is believed by some psychiatrists to have occurred because of the students' immersion in video games like *Doom* and *Wolfenstein 3D* which caused them to feel gratified when playing in a virtual world of such violent games. In fact, one of the gunmen even created mod levels for *Doom* that were widely distributed. Another large mod that he spent a great deal of time creating was named Tier, and he called it his "life's work. The mod was uploaded to the Columbine school computer and to AOL shortly before the attack, but appears to have been lost. Some researchers argue that it is almost certain that the Tier mod included a mock-up of Columbine High School, which is why some blame the violent video games for the actions of the shooters.

**2. What is your opinion of all this added information about the gunmen and the link between the shooting and video games? Do you agree with the psychiatrists and people that blame the video games for the cause of the gunmen's antisocial and ultimately violent behavior?**

**I means that's just psychological in their mind. I did write a paper about this and I don't think it has anything to do with violent video games. People just blame video games and the violent content, but there are TV shows and movies out there that are just as violent and you can't just go and abolish all of it.**

**I don't believe that way. I feel like violent video games can somewhat contribute in a very small way to kids and our psyches. But I feel like it is not the 100% reason that people do these things. There is more to it than just the violent video games. I think people are just looking for something to point a finger at and say it was violent video game that made them do it.**

**I think violent video games don't affect at all. I mean just because you play Call of Duty, it doesn't mean you are going to run out and get a M4 and shoot a bunch of people just because it is fun.**

**I wouldn't say it is just the video games. I would say you have to take into account the person's personality. Like if they are easily upset or violent in other aspects. But I wouldn't say it is just because of the video games. I would say you would have to consider other factors too.**

**Exactly. I wouldn't blame their behavior on the video games, but I am not going to say that given their personality that the violent video games didn't help the situation. Like they might have added to an already rage fueled life and so they may have become an outlet, and then they decided that the outlet wasn't good enough and decided to go to the real thing. But I don't think the video games are the sole reason.**

Continuing on this same questioning; the 8 year old that shot and killed his elderly caregiver supposedly according to the Huffington Post did it right after playing the video game Grand Theft Auto IV. Which since no other motive it known at this time is considered by the sheriff department the possible reason he murdered the caregiver. For it is, as I quote according to the Huffington Post; "a realistic game that has been associated with encouraging violence and awards points to players for killing people.

**3. Do you think that him playing this violent video game just minutes before the homicide occurred and that the game is rated Mature 17 and up, is the most likely reason he killed the caregiver?**

**He is too young and there is a reason that they are rated mature. They are rated mature because they are meant for people older who understand that you can't just go around doing those things in life. You can't go around in cars shooting people.**

**Yeah. First off he is a young child and shouldn't be playing violent video games like that in the first place. But I don't think that with all these shootings where they are trying to blame violent video games. In my personal opinion, I play numerous violent video games. Even when I was younger and not supposed to, but I never had a motive to harm someone, just because I played a video game and I personally don't think someone could have a motive to harm someone like that just from playing a video game.**

**It probably has more to do with how she took care of him. Then with the video game itself.**

**Or maybe he was just playing with a weapon he shouldn't have and didn't know better.**

**Maybe, but I think so. He is an 8 year old kid and he probably takes a lot of modeling from like video games and the media, and considering it is Grand Theft Auto too I would say so.**

**I am not sure, because there is a lot of information that we don't exactly know, like the relationship between him and his grandmother. So we can't be sure there wasn't alternative reasons. But him playing that video game may have confused him with the sense that it is alright to kill people if they are messing with him. But at the same time it does have that age rating so you also have to look at that it is not meant for people that can't take that level of violence yet. Sure it might not of helped an already volatile situation by taking someone that doesn't already have an appreciation for what's right and wrong and given them a different value system. But that is why they already have the rating system in place and why it should be enforced. For the most part.**

**Maybe. We can't know for sure without more background information on the kid though.**

The final new story was about the Sandy Hook shooting, and also violent video games have been blamed by some to be the cause of it. Thus because of these speculations there was a mass collection created by many Connecticut community members to have people voluntarily give up their violent video games, CDs, and DVDs which would be placed in a dumpster and later burned by town employees.

**4. Given all this information about the news stories, what is your impression of why people believe this type of stereotype of violent video game players?**

**To make people think that violent video game players....I guess parents think that if a child is exposed to that type of violence all the time then they will become violent, but I have been playing those type of games for years and my Dad has allowed me too because he saw I could handle it and I would just go to school and come home and play them on a normal schedule. But I never became violent, I am not violent now and I have no intention of doing any of those kind of things. So I guess it is also like how you were brought up I guess.**

**Well once again violent video games, can't give you a motive to like hurt somebody. It just wouldn't make sense just because you play a video game doesn't mean you are going to go out and use what you learn, on other people. It is just a hobby.**

**I think the stereotype just comes from ignorance.**

**Yeah.**

**Umm. I guess maybe because some people take video games more realistically then they should. That they might try to take them over into real life, like they think that they can maybe depict what is on the video game. Since it seems soo realistic, that they feel it is acceptable to act like them in real life. I am not really sure.**

**I think for a general mass that aren't inclined to play video games it is an easy substitute, than going into the lives of the person and saying what are the other factors that could have been involved? Why did they do it? Did they already harbor animosity toward these**



people? What did the video games do to them? Did they give them a different value system or was it just the pure violence of the game? And so I think it is difficult to create a direct cause between violence in the video games and the actions of people in real life. Because there are soo many other factors, and generally it's easier for people to say; "Ohh they were playing violent video games and maybe some other people who played violent video games also did something violent and similar too.

**True. It is never just the one thing, so it isn't just video games to blame.**

**Yeah. But it is also important to understand that violent people can play violent video games and it is not the video games that cause the violence. It might just be that it is sort of like me, who, I am sort of violent by nature. But I learned to control that and I use video games as a healthy outlet and sports. But some people repress those violent emotions and it leads to a very dangerous psychological state.**

5. Do you believe that violent video games actually have this effect on people?

**They can but it's not the only factor for someone to becoming violent.**

**Yeah. I mean some of the worst tragedies like Jack the Ripper and many other massacres in history all happened way before video games and all that even came out.**

**I just think they are looking for something to blame it on.**

**Maybe some people, but not all people. It goes back to what I was saying before about having to have a certain personality or disposition toward more violent behavior and the video games exacerbate it.**

**I believe that violent video games only have that effect on people who are already unstable or vulnerable. So very young children might be vulnerable since their value system is not already in place. It depends on the environment that people grow up in, because they might have an already unstable value system.**

6. Do you think violent video games, TV shows and movies trigger aggressive behavior in young people that play games inappropriate for their age group?

**Yes.**

**Kind of. I mean I think the very young shouldn't be playing them. But I played them as very young and I don't think it harmed me at all. So no. I don't think so.**

**No I agree. I mean there was a guy that shot Lennon, because he claimed he read a book.**

**Yeah. I would say maybe in the case of the 8 year old playing a game that is supposed to be for at least teenagers and mature 17 and up. Yeah I think the games have more of an effect on younger people like 8 year old kids.**

**I believe that they can. I believe that. But I am not saying that the exact ages and groups are perfect for everybody, but it is a good general guideline and that people who stray away from those guidelines are those chances that those people might come up. In those situations where they abuse the guidelines, that things can happen.**

**7. If you have children would you decide to allow them to play violent video games that are rated inappropriate for their age? What is your reasoning for your decision?**

**It would depend.**

**Yeah they would have to be a suitable level. I mean, I'm not going to hand my kid Grand Theft Auto at the age of 8. But maybe when he is in his teens or something like that. I'll let him do that. But I definitely will not let my child have violent video games, before he was a teenager. Like before he was in High School.**

**Yeah before High School he would probably at most play games like Prince of Persia or something with minimal violence.**

**Umm. It is kind of hard to speculate that since I don't have kids, but I definitely would make sure I know what kind of personality that my child has. Like if my child seems like they are more of a violent type, then I would try my best to try and maybe keep that away. But if they are like 15 or something and I feel like it wouldn't be a problem for them then I would allow it. It just really would depend on the child.**

**Exactly. It would depend on the child. Like if I had a very what I deemed mature kid who seemed like he could handle moderate violence, I just wouldn't like leave him alone with the game to play it as he pleased. I might play it with him or watch him as he plays the game to see how his general reaction to it might be. That's how I started out with my Dad, watching me play my video games and so like, if it seemed like he was getting out of control with it. Then I might say, like I might intervene, but if I had a kid that didn't have any interest in it or I didn't feel was mature enough to handle the content. I would wait until he was.**

**8. Do you have any final questions or concerns you would like to bring up with the group before the focus group ends?**

**No.**

**Not really.**

**I have none.**

**No.**

**Nope. As long as I am anonymous like we discussed. I am good.**

## Non-violent Video Game Players Transcript

### *Focus Group part 1*

*Participant Initials: A20 I23 D21 V24 E22*

1. How many years have you been an avid non-violent video gamer?

**Well I played Super Mario Brothers a lot when I was a kid, so I would say like 14 years.**

**Probably around 16 years.**

**I'd say about 15.**

**Since I was a young child, so about 14 years.**

**I have been playing games since I was about 6, so I guess 17 years.**

2. Would you say your preference in video games carries over into enjoying other types of (non-violent/ violent) media like movies or TV shows?

**I like Disney movies and stuff, but I also watch a good amount of violent shows.**

**Typically non-violent.**

**I'd say the same. Because if I was watching an action or violent movie it is because I want to watch a fun movie with friends and not necessarily because I want to see gore and people being killed.**

**Yeah I don't really watch anything violent or at least I don't actively try to.**

**Same here. I mostly watch anime and non-violent programs and movies.**

3. What console video game system do you currently play the most?

**I would say the Wii**

**PlayStation 3**

**Xbox 360**

**Wii**

**The same. Wii**

4. How many hours a week on average, would you say you play video games on that console?

5 or less

**Yeah around 6 to 5 hours a week on console.**

**Maybe 10 if that.**

**Well not so much right now, but maybe a couple hours a week.**

**I play it more when I hang out with my friends, but maybe 10 hours or so.**

5. Can you name 5 of your favorite video games for that console that you have spent the most time playing this year?

**New Super Mario Brothers, Wii Sports, Kirby's Return to Dream Land, Wii Fit and Legend of Zelda Skyward Sword.**

**Sly Cooper Thieves in Time, Civilization Revolution, Digimon World 4, Champions of Arms and Dragonguard 2**

**Forza Motorsports 4, LA Noir, Red Dead Redemption, Jeopardy and Sonic All-Star Racing.**

**Mario Kart, Super Smash Brothers Melee, Jeopardy, Mario Party and Wario Ware.**

**Zelda, Mario Kart, Super Smash Brothers, Mario Party 8, Broken Sword and Mario & Sonic At the Winter Olympics.**

6. What is it about these 5 games that you enjoy? What aspects of them attract you to them?

**Well Mario and Kirby I play mostly for the nostalgia and then I like the sports related games because it makes me feel like I am actually working out when I probably am not.**

**I like Digimon, and let's see. I play the other ones because they look cool and are fun.**

**I like the driving aspects and the story line.**

**I just enjoy them. So I get the games I enjoy the most and play those, since I don't really enjoy violence. I like puzzle solving and competing with friends.**

**Yeah the Wii is a party console to play with friends, so I mostly get multi-player games I can enjoy with them.**

7. When you answered the last question on the handout about how your avatar looks, would you agree that many of those characteristic match the way you look in real life?

**I make the avatars that I use try to resemble me as close as possible usually.**

**Yeah I try to look like myself so that when I play with friends they know who it is.**

**Yeah. If I make like an avatar for a video game I just try to be as close to me.**

**Yeah. I try to make it look like me.**

**My Wii avatar looks as close to me as I can get it, it even has my favorite color for its outfit.**

**8. Do you believe a particular video game manufacturer creates more violent video games than the others? Which one and why do you think this is?**

**I would say Xbox probably caters more to violent video games. At least from what I have gathered.**

**Yeah definitely Xbox. They are the one that creates the most violent games.**

**Yeah. Because it has like Halo, and Gears of War as well.**

**Yeah I would say the Xbox might be the most violent gaming console.**

**I will just agree with them, since I am not that familiar with it, but it does have a lot more violent games than Wii.**

**9. Do you believe a particular video game manufacturer creates less violent video games than the others? Which one and why do you think this is?**

**Nintendo. I mean Wii**

**Wii.**

**I probably say the same. It mostly caters toward kids.**

**Yeah the Wii probably.**

**Definitely the Wii. Nintendo has been synonymous with kid games since Snes and Mario.**

**10. Why do you chose to play the type of video games that you do?**

**It's just a calmer time. Compared to the few times I have played like violent games and you have to constantly focus. Like ohh my God I am getting shot at right now or eaten by zombies. But when you are playing Mario it's like calmer and more enjoyable.**

**Honestly the music. The music is a lot nicer and when I am playing video games I do it to soothe me and relax. But the music in violent games are not that great a soundtrack relaxing.**

Yeah and you have to focus a lot more, but when you are playing non-violent video games you can just relax and let yourself go.

Yeah I like that it is not as stressful and there is more strategy involved.

Well I guess I like puzzle solving and what not, and competing with friends in like Mario Kart. But I don't really care about or enjoy shooting and killing things.

It is relaxing to play party games. In fact, I mostly enjoy mine drinking and hanging with my friends. It is a blast to drunk drive on Mario Kart.

11. How would you define what constitutes violence in video games, meaning what characteristics make a video game violent?

Gore. Various weapons that you can see the use of. Basically violence on screen, like when you're playing Super Mario and the worst thing you see is when you jump on a turtle it turns into a coin. Which is kind of whimsical in a way. But if you did that while you were playing like a violent game, like Call of Duty you would see the turtle squish and then you see the innards and everything.

The screaming in the games of characters being killed and the soundtrack. Blood spurting out of the head of people killed, like in Resident Evil. You see the blood and the limbs falling off left and right. Even bones sticking out in some games.

The competitiveness among the other players. There are ways to be competitive, but when it comes to shooter games like first person shooters where you have to intend to win against another opponent by getting the most kills or points. Like the kind of games you have to worry about your ratio and stuff like kill death score, whatever. Some people kind of take it too far, and competitive. Which I think all adds to the violent nature of the games.

Yeah. Also like when the main point of the game or plot is killing, I guess.

I agree. Any kind of game where it is all about killing and making points by doing so. But only if the deaths incur blood or some kind of realistic response from the victim. I wouldn't say Super Smash is a violent game.

No that's true. I wouldn't say it is either. There needs to be blood and realism.

### *Focus Group Part 2*

1. Do you think that your emotional reactions to these stories and pictures was the same as that of someone who plays violent video games just as often as you play non-violent games? Why or why not?

**I think the people who play violent video games more are probably more desensitized to more, but I don't think they are any less sad. I think they may be less disgusted by it.**

**I mean they are probably used to seeing this all the time, so it probably doesn't faze them as much.**

**Yeah. Probably not so much fear compared to someone like me. But maybe they might feel a little more guilty, but probably less disgust.**

**Umm. Yeah maybe they could be desensitized possibly. Yeah I would think they would be desensitized and their reactions would not be the same as mine.**

**I agree it they view death and gore in their games often enough that it might not have as strong an effect on them.**

The last 3 news stories are all tragedies that have been reported in the news by some to have been attributed due to the violent video games that the perpetrators played. In fact, the Columbine shooting is believed by some psychiatrists to have occurred because of the students' immersion in video games like *Doom* and *Wolfenstein 3D* which caused them to feel gratified when playing in a virtual world of such violent games. In fact, one of the gunmen even created mod levels for *Doom* that were widely distributed. Another large mod that he spent a great deal of time creating was named Tier, and he called it his "life's work. The mod was uploaded to the Columbine school computer and to AOL shortly before the attack, but appears to have been lost. Some researchers argue that it is almost certain that the Tier mod included a mock-up of Columbine High School, which is why some blame the violent video games for the actions of the shooters.

2. What is your opinion of all this added information about the gunmen and the link between the shooting and video games? Do you agree with the psychiatrists and people that blame the video games for the cause of the gunmen's antisocial and ultimately violent behavior?

**I don't think it is the video games that are at fault, because it is ultimately already a psychological disorder that was if anything, just fathered by it. In a way if you're crazy you can really just be set off by anything. Almost in a way like an epileptic person is set off by a blinking light. If you're already crazy, something is going to set you off, it just may have been the video games.**

**I mean like, also the people at school, like if he was already antisocial, or if he had talked to them and had friends, then he might have stopped. It might have just been his isolation from everyone and not being talked to on a regular basis that set him off. I mean when people threaten to assemble and people talk to them, then they calm down and don't do it. So it easily could have been the isolation.**

**It could have just been other things that were going on when they were growing up. If their parents were like, prone to violence. Then maybe, perhaps it wasn't just the video games**

that caused it. But maybe the encouragement of their parents that allowed them to play those video games.

**Yeah. I don't blame video games. It is a much more complex issue that causes antisocial behavior. I wouldn't blame video games.**

**Exactly. The gun men were probably mentally unstable and the video games were not the cause for that instability, but I suppose they may have added to it.**

Continuing on this same questioning; the 8 year old that shot and killed his elderly caregiver supposedly according to the Huffington Post did it right after playing the video game Grand Theft Auto IV. Which since no other motive is known at this time is considered by the sheriff department the possible reason he murdered the caregiver. For it is, as I quote according to the Huffington Post; "a realistic game that has been associated with encouraging violence and awards points to players for killing people.

**3. Do you think that him playing this violent video game just minutes before the homicide occurred and that the game is rated Mature 17 and up, is the most likely reason he killed the caregiver?**

**Umm. That's kind of a loaded question, because there is probably a lot more evidence. I mean we don't know if the kid was abused or anything. So I am going to go ahead and say no. I don't think it was just the game, because it is never just what is on the surface when murders occur.**

**Yeah I mean, just because he has a caregiver doesn't mean anything. His parents could be working at a couple jobs just to keep them a float or whatever. But he didn't try to steal a car afterwards, so it wouldn't be Grand Theft Autos fault.**

**Or maybe he is out of his parent's house because one of his parents is violent, or maybe he saw his father point a gun at his mother before. So he saw it as an option to resolve an argument or something.**

**No. Just because someone did something before they killed someone, doesn't mean that was the cause. Like he could have just eaten breakfast and then murdered her, but the cops aren't going to go straight to that. So no I don't think so.**

**I disagree. He is way too young to play a game like that and it probably did lead somewhat to him killing her.**

**Or for all we know the parents could have been dead and died tragically in front of him and he could have just been traumatized. We just don't know enough.**

**True. We don't.**



The final new story was about the Sandy Hook shooting, and also violent video games have been blamed by some to be the cause of it. Thus because of these speculations there was a mass collection created by many Connecticut community members to have people voluntarily give up their violent video games, CDs, and DVDs which would be placed in a dumpster and later burned by town employees.

4. Given all this information about the news stories, what is your impression of why people believe this type of stereotype of violent video game players?

**Because they want to blame something and it is an easy answer.**

**Yeah, I mean like there has always been violence. So just adding violent video games they assume it is just going to make it worse, but violence has been around for soo long that. When video games are out, there will just be another thing that is violent in nature and they are just going to assume that it is that, that is causing the more violent killings. Even though it has been going on ever since anyone can remember.**

**It is the whole McDonald making you fat thing. People just don't want to take accountability for their actions.**

**It is very similar to when communities would do gun buy backs. You know, instead of violent game buy backs. Other communities will do gun buy backs, in an effort to try to curve gun violence.**

**But it makes way more sense to do the gun thing.**

**Well they are a hunting community, so they wouldn't do that.**

**I feel like they just want to blame something or they jump to conclusions. Like, ohh it must be video games. But yeah they just want something simple to blame, even if it is a much more complex issue.**

**I agree. It is just the easy out for close minded people.**

5. Do you believe that violent video games actually have this effect on people?

**If you're already short on your sanity I can see how it might cause a break. But I think it really just depends on the person, for I feel like there are a lot of other environmental factors and stuff. I don't know if it is just cause of video games. It just feel like it is a contributing factor maybe but not the only one.**

**Yeah. Like it probably helps some people go there, but again video games have only been around since like the late 70s, early 80s and there have been many mass murders before that like Jack the Ripper for instance. I mean yeah it was England, but still he was a mass murder before video games were in existence.**

**Well yeah the video games offer escapism for the person and if the person always has to have escapism then they might not see a difference between their actions in the video game and their actions in real life. So they just enact it in real life.**

**True. If maybe some people have trouble discerning reality from video games, but I don't think so. No.**

**No. Video games aren't the cause, but they might be a factor. There are just other symptoms that also need to be taken into account. Like the unstable biochemical brain responses that the people have without the addition of violent video games and their social personality among other things.**

**6. Do you think violent video games, TV shows and movies trigger aggressive behavior in young people that play games inappropriate for their age group?**

**I can see why like the 8 year old, playing a 17 year and up game is wrong. Like you don't want a little kid to watch porn. So I can see why if it's such a large gap, then I can see why that might be a traumatizing factor. But if you are like 15 and you are playing Grand Theft Auto then I feel like you should be able to handle it. Especially given what you have already been exposed to, but if you are in a wide gap from the actual age that isn't right.**

**Well I mean 15 year olds are already having kids. So seeing violence with like stealing a hooker and making her have sex with you and running people over in a car, are all things they have already been exposed to through the news media or their parents talking about the news or school. Like we see worse things sometimes in science class then we do on the news.**

**I agree. It's just like mostly exposing things to people before they are ready**

**True, but I don't think so. Or maybe for very few people, but not usually.**

**The rating system is there for a reason and if the parent's choose to allow their kids to play games inappropriate for them, then the parent is the one responsible for teaching their children what is unacceptable behavior, not to mention morally and legally wrong.**

**7. If you have children would you decide to allow them to play violent video games that are rated inappropriate for their age? What is your reasoning for your decision?**

**Umm. Back to what I said earlier at like 8, they are going to be playing games like Pokémon or Super Mario or something. But when they are like 15-16 and I think they are ready and mature enough, then yeah I will get them Grand Theft Auto 68 or whatever.**

**It depends on the kid really. Like I may have a son that has is prone to wanting to play Halo and Call of Duty and Gears of War and all that stuff and then my other son might want to play Pokémon, Digimon and Final Fantasy and if they want to play it then go**

**ahead. But they are not going to be playing games like Mortal Kombat until they are at least 10.**

**I kind of wouldn't encourage my kids to play violent video games. It isn't the right outlet. If they are going to play a game then I would try to find different games that suit their interests. Like if they like sports, I would have them play sports games and if they are interested in playing violent video games. I would maybe try to deter them from playing them.**

**Yeah I guess so, but within reason. Maybe not go all the way to the limit with like Grand Theft Auto and like an 8 year old just cause it is kind of inappropriate.**

**Yeah. I would make sure my kid knew what the difference between fantasy behavior in a game was and what was acceptable in reality, and if they couldn't understand the difference then they wouldn't be ready for those type of games. But there is no way my 8 year old is playing a game meant for 17 year olds.**

**8. Do you have any final questions or concerns you would like to bring up with the group before the focus group ends?**

**Nope.**

**No.**

**No.**

**No.**

**I'm good.**