

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

Dan Ye



Virtual Simulation Game

Objective: Teach teenagers the consequences of underage drinking in a fashion that would catch their attention in the ever flashy digital age.

Game design: (Students will first customize a character to their liking and choose a username.)

Welcome, _____. Today is your first day in high school, and I will be your guide for the first few days. Let's take a tour of the controls. To the left, you will see a meter. This is your coolness meter. As you navigate through your high school years, you will encounter many people and situations that will either fill up your coolness meter or subtract from it. (For example, Sally's parents will be out of town, and you have been invited to attend a party she will be throwing. You hear there will be alcohol. Will you attend? Yes or No?) As your cool meter fills up, more and more mini games will be made available to you. Successfully completing mini games will also raise your coolness meter. In addition, you can add your classmates to your friend list to play these mini games together. However, certain choices and mini games will both cost money and come at a risk. Every time you play a mini game, there is a chance for a random event, and random events also occur when you make bad choices during your interaction with characters in the game. These random events include (most situations will deal with alcohol-related consequences):

- You have been pulled over by the police after a party for driving under the influence and you have been fined \$500 and your driving privileges have been suspended for six months.
- You were arrested at a party for underage drinking.
- You were driving under the influence and you got into a car accident. You escaped with only a few scrapes and bruises, but your friend, INSERT USERNAME, has been paralyzed from the waist down. (The actual user who was playing the mini game with you will then lose the ability to work and make money.)
- You were driving under the influence, and you hit another car. The other driver, INSERT RANDOM USERNAME, was killed upon impact. You will cause the game to be over for one of your classmates.
- You drank too much alcohol and passed out. Your friends, afraid to admit to also being at the party, ran away and left you alone. You died two hours later, asphyxiated by your own vomit. GAME OVER

In the top right corner is your total money. You can work to save up money, or you can spend money on partying. Beside your character icon is your health bar. Certain choices, such as too much partying, will deplete your health. When your health completely depletes, it is game over. In the top left beside your health bar is your delinquent gauge. As you experience alcohol busts and situations of that sort, your delinquent gauge will go up, but there is no way to make it go down. You can click your delinquent gauge for your criminal record. The higher this gauge goes up, the fewer jobs you will be able to find. This gauge will also affect your ultimate ability to get into a post-secondary educational institute. When the gauge fills up, you will be sent to a juvenile detention center, and the game will be over. Other game experiences will result from random events like the ones listed above. For example:

- You have a conversation with the virtual parents of the random player you killed in the car accident.

- Charged with vehicular homicide, you play through the simulation trial. At the conclusion of one week, the game will grade you based on all of your stats combined. A mix of good health, money, and no criminal record will mean a bright future for you. A filled up coolness meter will mean absolutely nothing. If you have already died in the game, it is an automatic F.

How to be implemented: This virtual simulation game will be made a one week segment in a mandatory class such as health. Students will be able to play the game both in class during designated computer lab days and also at home. The choices students make in their simulations will be kept confidential to encourage them to make the most honest choices within the game.

Follow-up: After the one week period, classes will hold a discussion. Students with "game over" will discuss how their virtual deaths felt, and if they had unintentionally killed a classmate's character, did they feel guilty? The big question of this discussion will be that "This game was a simulation, but will you treat your real life with the same disregard to 'win' the minds of your peers?" The discussion will be focused toward the fact that teenagers every day treat their lives like a game, but there is no restarting in real life. Within this small, more comfortable environment of a classroom, students will more freely discuss their feelings toward underage drinking. Speakers with real life testimonies of underage drinking will also be brought in to participate in the discussion. People who have been charged with drunken involuntary vehicular manslaughter, who have lost a child or a sibling to underage drinking, who have lost jobs and been expelled from college. These speakers will show students that the virtual simulation game could very much become their own reality if the same careless choices are made. Self-expression is encouraged during this follow-up session, and that is why intimidating policemen, lawyers, and doctors cannot be program speakers. In the end, this program will discourage underage drinking by building personal connections with each and every student to the consequences of underage drinking, making the message more important to the students. Instead of walking away from this program with the mindset of "that won't happen to me" that has become rampant in schools despite constant assemblies,

many students would walk away thinking, "Yes, these testimonies of the consequences of underage drinking could become my story one day."