Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents: Theory, Research, and Public Policy

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Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents

Theory, Research, and Public Policy
Craig A. Anderson, Douglas A. Gentile and Katherine E. Buckley

Description

Violent video games are successfully marketed to and easily obtained by children and adolescents. Even the U.S. government distributes one such game, America's Army, through both the internet and its recruiting offices. Is there any scientific evidence to support the claims that violent games contribute to aggressive and violent behavior?

Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley first present an overview of empirical research on the effects of violent video games, and then add to this literature three new studies that fill the most important gaps. They update the traditional General Aggression Model to focus on both developmental processes and how media-violence exposure can increase the likelihood of aggressive and violent behavior in both short- and long-term contexts. Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents also reviews the history of these games' explosive growth, and explores the public policy options for controlling their distribution. Anderson et al. describe the reaction of the games industry to scientific findings that exposure to violent video games and other forms of media violence constitutes a significant risk factor for later aggressive and violent behavior. They argue that society should begin a more productive debate about whether to reduce the high rates of exposure to media violence, and delineate the public policy options that are likely be most effective.

As the first book to unite empirical research on and public policy options for violent video games, Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents will be an invaluable resource for student and professional researchers in social and developmental psychology and media studies.

Reviews

"Craig Anderson, a leading investigator of the consequences of exposure to violence in the mass media, and his colleagues Douglas Gentile and Katherine Buckley, here give us an extremely scholarly and highly sophisticated explanation of both why participation in these violent games can indeed promote violence by the players and why the public at large, including many of our nations' most eminent newspapers and journals, find it difficult to accept the great amount of carefully collected evidence that now exists documenting these ill effects."--
Leonard Berkowitz, Vilas Research Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin-Madison

"This book is a must read for scholars interested in the effects of media violence. It combines a concise summary of past research with reports of three new important studies elucidating the effects of violent video games on children, adolescents, and young adults."--L.Rowell Huesmann, Amos N. Tversky Collegiate Professor of Communication Studies and Psychology Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan

"The studies reported in this book provide the most rigorous and compelling evidence to date about the harmful effects of violent video games. In particular, the authors' longitudinal study of video game violence effects should silence the critics who complain about the validity of short-term, experimental lab research. Policy-makers will cite this research as a cornerstone in their future efforts to address concerns about video game violence."--Dale Kunkel, Department of Communication, University of Arizona

"This is a 'must read' for anyone concerned about the effects that video games have on children and teens! Anderson and Gentile are leading researchers in the field who have done a masterful job of pulling together what we know about video game effects and presenting them so that they are accessible to those who need to understand and can make the most difference- parents, teachers, clinicians, and all who work with children."--Michael Rich, MD, MPH, Director, Center on Media and Child Health, Director, Video Intervention/Prevention Assessment (VIA), Children's Hospital Boston

"With the growing interest of researchers, public policy makers, parents, and educators on the negative effects of video games, this book is a most welcome addition to the communications literature. The authors present an excellent blend of theory and reserach, including their own studies, and numerous suggestions for public policy debates that will hopefully lead to more positive game content and a more considered use of videos. The chapter on methodology is particularly well written and is a must for anyone contemplating entering the field of video game research."--Dorothy G. Singer, Senior Research Scientist,k Department of Psychology, Yale University, and Co-Director, Yale University Family Television Research and Consultation Center

"...an indispensable tool for parents and professionals who want to have important knowledge to make wise decisions about video game use in the lives of childrens and teens."--Gloria DeGaetano, founder and CEO, The Parent Coaching Institute

"This book delivers on all accounts. The authors are widely regarded as the foremost experts on the effects of violent video games and the media, and this book is by far the most significant addition to the study of developmental psychology this year."--Doody's

"This is a shocking but necessary read for anyone working or living with children or adolescents. In fact the information contained within the book is a must read for anyone who knows anyone who plays video games, whether the games played apear to be overtly violent or not...Although this is a controversial subject, this book successfully opens the readers eyes to the psychological, sociological and political implications of violent video games for the mass population."--The Psychologist

"Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley have written a brilliant, highly accessible volume on the effects that playing violent video games have on kids and teens. Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents explains the logic, history, and science behind the domain of media effects research and introduces the emerging focus on video games in the field to a broad readership."--International Society for Research on Aggression

Product Details

About the Author(s)

Craig A. Anderson, Distinguished Professor of Psychology at Iowa State University, is widely regarded as the foremost expert on the effects of violent video games. His research on aggression, media violence, depression, and social judgment has had a profound influence on psychological theory and modern society. His tireless efforts to educate public policy-makers and the general public have earned him recognition as one of the most influential and respected social psychologists in the world.

Douglas A. Gentile is a developmental psychologist and is Assistant Professor of Psychology at Iowa State University and the Director of Research for the National Institute on Media and the Family. As one of the country's leading media effects researchers, he conducts studies on the positive and negative effects of media on children and adults, including the effects of advertising, educational television, and video games. His studies provide valuable insights to parents, educators, pediatricians, and policy-makers about how to maximize the benefits of media usage while minimizing potential harms.

Katherine E. Buckley , who is completing her Ph.D. in Psychology at Iowa State University, has been researching aggression and media violence. Katherine received her M.A. from Wake Forest University in 2001. She is a member of the American Psychological Society as well as the Society for Personality and Social Psychology and the Society for Research in Child Development.

Iowa State University

Department of Psychology

Craig A. Anderson, Ph.D.

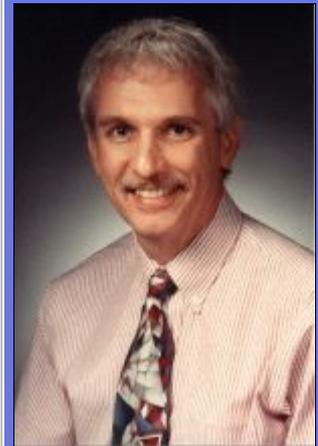Distinguished Professor & Director, Center for the Study of Violence

B.A. 1976 Butler University

M.A. 1978 Stanford University

(advisor: Lee Ross)

Ph.D. 1980 Stanford University

(advisor: J. Merrill Carlsmith)

Windows users may need to install Apple's free QuickTime Player for some of the video clips on this site. Here is a link to that software: http://www.apple.com/downloads/macosx/apple/windows

Links to scales

2007 Book on Violent Video Games	My co-authors on this book are Doug Gentile and Katherine Buckley. The book can be ordered online from the Oxford University Press web site. For reviews of this book click here.
Publications Since 1995	A listing of titles, citations, and abstracts of articles and chapters published in 1995 and later years, and "in press" works. This page also contains a link to various scales used in our research.
Video Game Recommendations	A letter to parents, grandparents, and other individuals with questions about sources of good educational video games and concerns about violent video games and youths. It contains some recommmendations and guidelines.

Current Classes	Course syllabi and related information on classes taught on a regular basis--intended primarily for students in these classes.
Research Interests	A listing of titles, citations, and abstracts of articles and chapters categorized by research topic.
Biographical Sketch	A brief sketch of educational background, employment history, awards, and research interests.
Tips on buying video games	Print version of an NBC TV Omaha News 6 story on "Expert Tips on Buying Video Games" for children, Nov. 23, 2009.
Video Game Violence FAQs	15 frequently asked questions (and answers) about the effects of exposure to violent video games.

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News Reports, Interviews...

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Violent Video Game Effects (mov format)	A 2010 news interview on KCCI TV, Des Moines, Iowa, about our new comprehensive meta-analysis that was published in the American Psychological Association's journal *Psychological Bulletin.* alternative link
Violent Video Game Effects (mp3 format)	A 2010 interview with Ben Kieffer on Iowa Public Radio's *The Exchange* news and call-in radio show about our new comprehensive meta-analysis that was published in the American Psychological Association's journal *Psychological Bulletin* (24 minutes) (QuickTime .mov version)
News articles on our March, 2010 *Psychological Bulletin* article, which shows that violent video games are a causal risk factor several harmful outcomes.	USA Today, 3-1-10, front page, (print version). Washington Post, 3-1-10. (print version). Ames Tribue, 3-2-10, lead story, (print version). Futurity.org, 3-1-10. (print version).
Video Game Violence Update	A 2003 article in the American Psychological Association's electronic publication *Psychological Science Agenda.* alternative link
Violent Video Games: Protecting Children	A 2004 article in the American Psychological Association's electronic publication *Psychology Matters,* a compendium of psychological research that has had a positive impact on modern society. alternative link
The Parent Report (mp3 format)	Brief interviews (about 1 minute) in 2004 with Professor Anderson on violent video games, by host Joanne Wilson, in MP3 format. 8/17/04, "Media Violence & Children" 11/18/04, "Violent Media and Behaviour" 11/26/04, "Rules Around Video Games" 6/15/05, "Influence of Video Game Violence vs. TV Violence"

[APS Address](#)	A brief report on Professor Anderson's 2004 American Psychological Society's address on "The Influence of Media Violence on Youth"

JFK Assasination Video Game
(mov format)
	News stories and interviews concerning the video game "JFK Reloaded" on [CBS](#) and [KCCI TV8](#).
	  [CBS Evening news with Dan Rather, 11/22/04](#)
	  [KCCI Des Moines news (TV8), 11/22/04](#)

Long radio shows (mp3 format)	Todd Mundt-NPR show, [violent video games, 1/8/03, 27 minutes](#). Wise Guys, WHO Radio, [media violence, 1/18/03, 41 minutes](#). Iowa Public Radio, WOI, Katherine Perkins, [media violence and our new book on violent video games, 4/4/07, 43 minutes.](#)
[Canadian Media Violence Report](#) (pdf format)	A 2004 report funded by the Government of Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General Office for Victims of Crime. This comprehensive report reviews political, research, regulatory and other aspects of media violence. It was written by Valerie Smith.
Violence in the Media - Psychologists Help Protect Children from Harmful Effects	[Two 2004 articles](#) in the American Psychological Association's electronic publication *Psychology Matters,* a compendium of psychological research that has had a positive impact on modern society.
CNN News Excerpt (mov format)	An [edited interview](#) on violent video game effects which appeared on CNN on December 4, 2004.
APA Resolution on Violence in Video Games	An August 2005 [press release](#) on the American Psychological Association's call for a reduction of violence in video games used by children and adolescents, and the [full resolution](#), in pdf format. [alternative link](#)
Violent video game report & parent advice ([mov format](#)) ([flash format](#))	News story on WOI TV5 (ABC) in Des Moines, Iowa, 11/29/05, on the [video game report card](#), and parent shopping advice.
MSNBC interview [flash format](#) [mov format](#)	A 6 minute live interview with MSNBC TV on 9/19/06 on violent video game effects, and parental and industry responsibility.
Plenary Address at the *National Summit on Video Games, Youth, & Public Policy* [click here](#)	A 48 minute presentation at the Summit held October 20-21, 2006 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Summit was co-sponsored by the *National Institute on Media and the Family,* a grant by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to the Iowa State University *Center for the Study of Violence*, and by the Iowa State University *Institute for Social and Behavioral Research*. The address was titled *Violent Video Games: Effects and Public Policy.*

Learning to Be Violent mov format	An 8 minute clip on media violence effects, including Bandura's Bobo doll studies and violent video game studies. This clip also is available as part of the supplemental package for Roy Baumeister and Brad Bushman's social psychology textbook.
CNKW Radio Interview mp3 format	A 15 minute interview by CNKW's Sean Leslie, radio 980AM, Vancouver, British Columbia. This interview of Professor Anderson and Professor Douglas Gentile discusses recent findings on violent video games from our 2007 book, and concerns about the video game *Bully*.
NPR/Justice Talking interview mp3 format	A 6 minute interview with Justice Talking host Margot Adler (granddaughter of Alfred Adler) on the scientific facts about media violence effects.
eye on Psi Chi **interview** pdf format	An interview by 3 Nebraska Wesleyan University students on video game violence, as part of the FAWL lecture series. Published in the Psi Chi magazine *eye on Psi Chi* and on their web site. alternative link

Craig A. Anderson, W112 Lagomarcino Hall, Department of Psychology
Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011-3180
email: caa@iastate.edu Phone: (515) 294-3118 Fax: (515) 294-6424

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Department of Psychology
W112 Lagomarcino Hall
Ames, IA 50011-3180
E-mail: caa@iastate.edu
Phone: (515) 294-3118
FAX: (515) 294-6424

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Video Game Suggestions from Dr. Craig A. Anderson

When considering whether to allow your child to play a particular video game, you must consider more than the age-based rating. The rating is not always an accurate indicator of the content. Some games rated by the video game industry as appropriate for "Everyone" contain potentially harmful content. Many "Teen" games are very violent. Although playing a violent video game on an occasional basis is unlikely to produce any long-term harmful consequences, repeated exposure to violent entertainment media of any type is an important risk factor for later aggressiveness. Parents need to carefully examine the content of video games before allowing their children to use them.

There are thousands of video games available that are both fun and educational. My own children have grown up with video games, but my wife and I have been very careful in screening all of their games, and in limiting the amount of time our children spend on them. Below are sources of games that we've found useful. But please be sure to check the content of *every* game allowed into your child's life, because even some educational games have content that you might find objectionable, particularly violent content.

At the Broderbund web site (http://www.broderbund.com/) you can find several good educational video games for children of various ages, such as the following titles and series by *The Learning Company* (* indicates that my children have used these games):

Arthur, Carmen Sandiego*, ClueFinders*,
Dr. Seuss Learn To Speak, Little Bear
Mavis Beacon*, Oregon Trail*, PBS Kids,
Reader Rabbit, The Princeton Review*, Zoombinis

However, some games at this web site contain violent themes even though they carry an "Everyone" rating. The video game rating is not always an accurate indicator of the content, as has been demonstrated by several recent studies. As always, parents need to carefully examine the content of video games before allowing their children to use them. A couple of "descriptions" to watch out for are "Action" and "Comic mischief." Most "Action" games contain at least some violence. "Comic mischief" is often used by the industry to describe violent actions performed by cartoon-like characters.

An excellent series of video games that my children have used is the *JumpStart* series, which can be found at: http://www.jumpstart.com/. *JumpStart* games often can be found at general retail outlets.

Edmark is another company with a history of making good educational games. Their products can be found at: http://www.riverdeep.net/edmark/. We have used *Millie's Math House* and *Sammy's Science House* when our children were young. There are many additional games at this web site that look very good.

A source of inexpensive, good, educational games is a company called Ohio Distinctive Software (http://www.ohio-distinctive.com/). Our children have enjoyed and learned from many of their games.

Here are some web sites with additional information about entertainment media and parenting issues:

http://www.mediafamily.org/about/index.shtml
http://www.lionlamb.org/
http://www.youngmedia.org.au/
http://www.sosparents.org
http://www.commonsensemedia.org

I have posted my scientific articles on aggression and violence on my web site. The easiest way to get to my recent research is to go to my home page (http://www.psychology.iastate.edu/faculty/caa/index.html), then click on the "Recent Publications" link. You can then download my articles that have published since 1995.

In response to numerous requests, I've developed the following guidelines to examining the content of a video game to see whether repeated exposure might create some harmful aggression-related effects. Note that the same type of guidelines also are useful for creating healthier TV and movie environments.

How can you tell if a video game is potentially harmful?

1. Play the game, or have someone else demonstrate it for you.

2. Ask yourself the following 6 questions:
* Does the game involve some characters trying to harm others?
* Does this happen frequently, more than once or twice in 30 minutes?
* Is the harm rewarded in any way?
* Is the harm portrayed as humorous?
* Are nonviolent solutions absent or less "fun" than the violent ones?
* Are realistic consequences of violence absent from the game?

3. If two or more answers are "yes," think very carefully about the lessons being taught before allowing your child access to the game.

What else can you do?

*Be a wise consumer:
-Buy video games that are helpful to your children
-Don't buy potentially harmful products

*Be a wise parent/grandparent:
-Know what your children are playing
-Don't allow access to violent video games
-Restrict time spent on video games
-Explain to your children why such games are harmful
-Teach nonviolent problem solving at every opportunity

*Be an involved citizen/consumer
-If you learn that a retailer is selling violent games to children, complain to the owner/manager.
-If you learn that a retailer is doing a good job of screening sales or rentals of violent material to

children, thank the owner/manager and support the business, perhaps by purchasing nonviolent educational video games.
-Help educate others in your community (parents, youth, public officials)

*Let your public officials know that you are concerned.

I hope you find these suggestions useful. Parenting isn't easy, but it is often fun and always important.

Sincerely,

Craig A. Anderson
Distinguished Professor

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