



*A Response from the Authors*

## The Evidence that Media Violence Stimulates Aggression in Young Viewers Remains 'Unequivocal'

By Craig Anderson and L. Rowell Huesmann

Moeller [this issue] raised concerns about our review of media violence effects on youth (Anderson et al., 2003). These concerns deserve attention, but do not seriously challenge our main conclusions.

Moeller writes that we "failed to include or describe important studies that contradict their position," and gave one example. But the purpose of the examples we included was to illustrate the general findings of relevant meta-analyses, which included every study published, even the negative example Moeller offered. The fact is that all major recent meta-analyses of media violence effects (reviewed in our 2003 article) show positive effect sizes for media violence on aggression. To focus on the occasional null or negative example would have misrepresented the general findings.

Moeller also claims that we used selective reporting to make our case look stronger. Citing Lefkowitz et al. (1977), Moeller says "the authors failed to note that in the Columbia County Study females' preference for violent TV at age 8 actually *negatively* predicted their aggression at age 19." Well, Moeller is simply wrong. As Table 4.5 in the Lefkowitz book shows, there is no significant correlation for females from age 8 to age 19.

Moeller also says that "the authors failed to note that only one of Belson's (1978) 20 major hypotheses unequivocally supported the causal relationship between TV viewing and aggressive behavior." Belson actually investigated 22 "principle hypotheses" involving effects of TV violence. Most of those hypotheses involved attitudes, opinions, sleep disturbance, or state of mind. Of the four principle hypotheses about TV violence effects on "the extent of violent behavior by boys" (p. v), Belson reported significant support for each, based on one-tailed tests. One of the four, involving the most serious types of violence, was significant with a two-tailed test.

Finally, Moeller criticized our presentation of the results from the first three years of Huesmann and Eron's (1986) longitudinal study. He argues that in the five countries studied there were 52 possible correlations and only 21 were significant. It is unclear how he counted correlations, but as Table 8.1 showed, if one considers the correlations of average TV violence viewing with average aggression for boys and girls in the five countries (10 correlations), all 10 are  $+ .13$  or higher, 8 are significant with a one-tailed test, and five are significant with a two-tailed test.

Another concern is that "the authors fail to provide accurate descriptions of measures or other methodological aspects of some key studies." Well, in a review one cannot provide the same detail as the original sources, particularly if the details do not pose any threats to the validity of the conclusions. Moeller offers two examples. First, in the first wave of the Columbia County Study exposure to violent TV was assessed by asking mothers what their child's favorite programs were and scoring those for violence; Moeller suggests that it is misleading to call this variable exposure to violence. This argument has been addressed many times over the past 45 years in many different places. The bottom line is that although such mothers' reports are not perfect measures of exposure, they do correlate substantially with other measures of exposure. Moeller's second example concerns Williams' (1986) study. Moeller says that we "mischaracterized the two contrast communities in the Notel Study as being 'without TV' when in fact television had previously been available in these two communities for a number of years." However, Williams (1986, p. 319) wrote, "the longitudinal sample consisted of the 45 children observed when they were in grade 1 or 2, *before Notel had television*, [emphasis added] and again 2 years later when they were in grade 3 or 4."

### See Also:

[How 'Unequivocal' is the Evidence Regarding Television Violence and Children's Aggression?](#)

Overall, Moeller's criticisms fit the pattern of prior criticisms faced by media violence scholars many times (e.g., Comstock & Scharrer, 2004; Huesmann & Taylor, 2004). The critic ignores the overall picture while selectively focusing on flaws or contrary results from a few unrepresentative studies. In fact, the major conclusion challenged by Moeller — that there is overwhelming evidence that exposure to media violence increases the risk of aggressive and violent behavior in youth — was based on multiple meta-analyses by multiple research groups, analyses that included relevant negative and null result studies. Thus, our original conclusions stand.

## References

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**CRAIG A. ANDERSON** is a professor of psychology at Iowa State University who specializes in media violence.

**L. ROWELL HUESMANN** is a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

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