

Craig A. Anderson, Douglas A. Gentile, and Katherine E. Buckley, Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents: Theory, Research, and Policy

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The debate about violence in video games has been a long and contentious one. While much of that debate has centered on the issues of freedom of expression versus censorship, it remains important to recognize the relevance of other fields of interest. Even more so it is important to recognize and understand the differences between the debates that exist in science over the effects of violent video games on youth and the debates of law concerning the rights of video game makers and consumers. Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley attempt to put to rest the scientific side of the debate in their book *Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents: Theory, Practice, and Public Policy*. In this book they present a concise examination of past studies along with the addition of three new studies to support the claim that the debate over whether violent video games have an effect on youth is over and that energies should be devoted to the policy and practice of how to mitigate these effects. This book excels at providing timely insights into a topic that will continue to gain in importance and would be of interest to those involved in media studies, developmental psychology, and those involved in policy discussions related to either.

Research into the effects of violent media has been an ongoing domain of inquiry for quite some time. Video game studies build from earlier research into violent television and film in both method and purpose. Past examples of that research groundwork include the correlation between violence in television shows and aggressive behaviors (McIntyre and Teevan 1972), experimental research showing that boys exposed to film violence act more aggressively in play (Leyens et al. 1975), and

longitudinal research showing that early adolescent exposure to violent television was predictive of aggressive behaviors at later ages (Johnson et al. 2002). Video game violence research has followed in much the same vein with correlational (Krahé and Möller 2004), experimental (Irwin and Gross 1995), and longitudinal research (Slater et al. 2003) showing much of the same effects as prior television and film research. The authors present three new studies to further this line of research and provide a clear and concise summation of not only the mentioned research of this review, but also a wide range of research that builds on the idea that there is an effect on youth of viewing and interacting with mediated violence.

Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley separate the structure of their book into three overall parts that logically build the case for violent video game effects and describe the implications and policy suggestions of that evidence. The first part is used as a stepping stone for the reader into later sections. As such, the first three chapters lay the groundwork for introducing the new studies found in part two. Chapter 1 briefly introduces the history of video games, informs of the growing trend of youth exposure to them, and summarizes what the rest of the book will talk about in detail. The second chapter introduces the reader to the idea of an aggression continuum, provides an introduction in methods and causality (particularly the methods of experimental, correlational, and longitudinal research used in both the past and new studies) and a summation of relevant past research into violent media (television, film, and videogames). The third chapter introduces the reader to the theory behind the general aggression model with particular focus given to the concepts of risk and resilience.

In the second part of the book three new studies are methodically introduced along with a discussion of risk factors (including media violence) that can cause aggressive

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behavior. The new studies cover each of the research methods previously mentioned: experimental (Chap. 4), correlational (Chap. 5), and longitudinal (Chap. 6). The first study addresses the concern about the effects that exposure to mild forms of violence (cartoonish representations) has on short term aggression in youth, study two looks at the correlations between exposure to violent video games and aggressive behavior among high school students, and the third study examines the longitudinal effects of exposure to violent video games on aggression and prosocial behavior among elementary school children. The last chapter of this section looks at risk factor illustrations that examine violent video games as part of a larger number of risks that can effect youth. This part of the book details these new studies in a manner that leaves the reader with a clear understanding of the methods involved and positively enhances the book as a piece of scholarly literature.

The third and final part of the book summarizes the results of the new studies presented earlier and examines policy and implications for parents. Chapter 8 examines the findings of the newly reported studies and the theoretical implications they pose. Chapter 9 looks at common misconceptions about media violence and offers policy solutions that can be enacted to deal with the effects of violent video games. The final chapter offers some examination of what parents can do to help reduce negative effects on their children and where the overall discussion of violence in video games can go. While the summaries of the research aid in understanding the overall picture of what is being proposed, the policy and parental role discussions do not break new ground and leave the reader looking for more guidance.

Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley have presented a concise exploration of what scientific research has to provide about the effects of violent video games. There are three particular strengths that make this book a welcome addition to the literature. The first of those strengths is the range of methods described both in the review of past studies and in the inclusion of the three new studies. While one can possibly find fault with reporting a single methodology that has been used repeatedly, the authors are clear to present three separate empirical methods (correlational, experimental, and longitudinal) that cover the spectrum of how to best research an issue. That each of these studies using the various methods provides evidence to substantiate the claim that the aggressive effects of violent video games exist is compelling evidence and effectively builds their case. The next strength is the use of the general aggression model. Rather than using theories that can explain a part of why aggression happens, the authors have opted instead to use a theoretical model that attempts to account for the wide range of causes that can lead to aggression (and arguing here that violence in video games is one of them). This unified model is an important step in understanding

the various influences of aggression and it is important that this type of model is introduced and iterated more. The last and most important strength of this book is the accessibility and organization of the writing itself. When writing a book that involves policy implications it is important to make that book readable by those outside of academia. A major strength of this book lies in the accessibility of the research that would make it easily understandable by policymakers who may not have the empirical background that academic researchers have. As such, this book could find itself being used as evidence in policy hearings regarding video games, as it seems is partly the aim of the authors.

Along with these overall strengths there comes one specific shortcoming that appears in the last chapters of the book. While the authors clearly present the results of the new studies and what they mean for theory, the sections dealing with policy implications are the weakest of all the other sections. The authors only briefly state what policy options or parental abilities there are to deal with the aggressive effects caused by violent video games. Most of the policy recommendations follow the same types of recommendations used in the television and film industries (such as ratings, age restrictions, warning labels, and education) and do not break new ground. It appears that the three new studies introduced are the core of the book and the authors left a more involved policy discussion to the policymakers themselves. Regardless, a more comprehensive policy discussion that detailed the various methods to deal with violent video game effects would have strengthened the conclusion of the book and provided guidance to policy makers and parents who are on the front lines of dealing with these issues in the public sphere.

Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents: Theory, Practice, and Public Policy is a thorough book that covers the scientific aspects of the debates on the aggressive effects of video game violence. The authors state that science has conclusively found that such an effect exists and that more energy should be devoted to public policies that would mitigate these effects. With the amount of empirical evidence presented and the use of the general aggression model as a theoretical framework, a very compelling case has indeed been made. A more detailed policy section notwithstanding, this book is a welcomed addition to the literature and would be indispensable to researchers studying video game violence and those influencing policy.

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