

Point/Counterpoint – A Forum for Discussion of Reviews and Books
Reviewed

A Response to Ferguson: More Red Herring

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0036266>

Christopher L. Groves, Craig A. Anderson, Matt DeLisi

Adolescents, Crime, and the Media: A Critical Analysis

by Christopher J. Ferguson

New York, NY: Springer Science + Business Media, 2013. 175 pp. ISBN 978-1-4614-6740-3. \$129.00

Original review: [Subtracting From Scientific Knowledge About Media Effects](#)

Author response: [When Is a Book Review Really Something Else? A Response to the Review of *Adolescents, Crime, and the Media: A Critical Analysis*](#)

Reviewer reply: A Response to Ferguson: More Red Herring

Despite the wealth of factual inaccuracies highlighted in our review, Christopher Ferguson devotes much of his response to characterizing us as moral crusaders, a continuation of his red herring approach to attacking good science (Bushman, Rothstein, & Anderson, 2010). Given his own success in creating a moral panic among gamers, our own status as avid gamers, and our leadership in research on positive game effects (e.g., Anderson, Gentile, & Dill, 2012), this charge is particularly ironic. The criticisms in his book and response are old and have been thoroughly addressed many times, and yet are repeated in even his most recent publications as if he were unaware of the contradictory evidence.

Ferguson's obsession with Anderson and Dill (2000) and the competitive reaction time task (CRT) is misguided; that article clearly explained the rationale for that particular version of the CRT, and the data are fully reported. Further, dozens of experiments have replicated that experimental effect, and hundreds of studies have validated the CRT in a wide array of contexts. The claim that media violence researchers choose to report the variation of the dependent variable that works best is insulting and ignores the Methods and Results sections of dozens of studies in which multiple CRT measures are reported and shown to yield the same effects.

Ferguson's bizarre claim yields interesting implications. One is that *most* violent media effects researchers worldwide *must* be engaging in blatant malpractice for the literature to lean heavily toward a Type I error. This is both unlikely and insulting. Another is that such a CRT bias should produce *larger* effect sizes than those of studies using other measures of aggression. This prediction was directly tested in Anderson et al. (2010); they found slightly *smaller* effects in CRT studies.

Ferguson's response to our criticism of drawing strong conclusions about psychological processes from societal-level data— that "he did it, too"—is both inadequate and inaccurate. Bushman and Anderson (2001) clearly noted that societal data cannot be considered strong evidence for a psychological effect. But using societal concerns and trends to generate psychological hypotheses is appropriate.

Ferguson also recalls Pollard-Sacks, Bushman, and Anderson (2011), in which the expertise between proponents for and against violent media effects conclusions was compared, and likens this discussion to a "mine is bigger than yours" contest. This is an odd criticism because number of truly expert scholars, based on superior quantity and quality of research publications, is a useful indicator. In fact, the majority of media effects scholars (66 percent vs. 18 percent) and pediatricians (91 percent vs. 3 percent) agree that violent media use increases aggression in children (Bushman & Huesmann, 2013).

Ferguson's response is revealing in that it essentially ignores the empirical issues we raised, instead continuing his longtime character attacks on Anderson and colleagues. Even odder is Ferguson's reactivity to being labeled as a "denialist" while frequently referring to Anderson and colleagues as "anti-media scholars." Top media scholars have been incredibly tolerant of his excessive claims and personal attacks, a passivity that some have interpreted as acquiescence.

The answer to the scientific debate lies in the data, and perhaps the answer to the bias claim lies there as well. In a recent meta-analysis Greitemeyer and Mügge (2014) found that, of violent video game studies conducted since 2009, those conducted by the Anderson and Bushman teams reported an average effect size of $r+ = .19$. Ferguson's average effect size was $.02$. Studies conducted by everyone else yielded an average $r+ = .20$. These data ironically suggest that the search for methodological impropriety is focused on the wrong party. Perhaps reporting biases or other poor methodological practices (e.g., high suspicion) account for Ferguson's frequent failures to replicate what everyone else is finding. Bender, Rothmund, and Gollwitzer (2013) found that highly identified gamers gave violent video game hypothesis-disconfirming responses on a transparent aggression measure but not on a nontransparent measure. Maybe some of Ferguson's studies include suspicious/sabotaging participants.

References

- Anderson, C., & Dill, K. (2000). Video games and aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behavior in the laboratory and in life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78*, 772–790. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.78.4.772> [PsycINFO →](#)
- Anderson, C. A., Gentile, D. A., & Dill, K. E. (2012). Prosocial, antisocial, and other effects of recreational video games. In D. G. Singer & J. L. Singer (Eds.), *Handbook of children and the media* (2nd ed., pp. 249–272). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. [PsycINFO →](#)
- Anderson, C. A., Shibuya, A., Ihori, N., Swing, E. L., Bushman, B. J., Sakamoto, A., . . . Saleem, M. (2010). Violent video game effects on aggression, empathy, and prosocial behavior in Eastern and Western countries: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*, 151–173. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0018251> [PsycINFO →](#)

- Bender, J., Rothmund, T., & Gollwitzer, M. (2013). Biased estimation of violent video game effects on aggression: Contributing factors and boundary conditions. *Societies, 3*, 383–398. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/soc3040383>
- Bushman, B. J., & Anderson, C. A. (2001). Media violence and the American public: Scientific facts versus media misinformation. *American Psychologist, 56*, 477–489. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.6-7.477> [PsycINFO →](#)
- Bushman, B. J., & Huesmann, R. L. (2013). Twenty-five years of research on violence in digital games and aggression revisited: A reply to Elson and Ferguson (2013). *European Psychologist*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000164>
- Bushman, B. J., Rothstein, H. R., & Anderson, C. A. (2010). Much ado about something: Violent video game effects and a school of red herring. Reply to Ferguson and Kilburn. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*, 182–187. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0018718> [PsycINFO →](#)
- Greitemeyer, T., & Mügge, D. O. (2014). Video games do affect social outcomes: A meta-analytic review of the effects of violent and prosocial video game play. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167213520459>
- Pollard-Sacks, D., Bushman, B. J., & Anderson, C. A. (2011). Do violent video games harm children? Comparing the scientific amicus curiae “experts” in Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association. *Northwestern University Law Review: Colloquy, 106*, 1–12.