Risky Behavior and Electronic Media
Craig A. Anderson, Distinguished Professor
Director, Center for the Study of Violence
Iowa State University
Department of Psychology

Public Policy
Basic Science
Applied Science
Professional Practice

Media Technology in the Lives of Children & Youth
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Calvin & Hobbes on Media Violence

For Good or Ill

- Video games are great teaching tools
- What they teach depends on the content
- Nonviolent games: exciting, fun, appropriate
- Some educational; others mainly entertainment
  - Standard “school” content
  - Helping kids learn to manage diabetes & asthma (Liberman), ADHD (NASA), cancer…
  - Flying simulators
- What really matters?
  - Time
  - Content.
Risk Factor Approach

- Risk Factors & Causality
  - Risk factors usually seen as factors that increase the likelihood that a bad outcome will occur
  - May be genetic, environmental…
  - Causality is probabilistic, not necessary & sufficient
- Risk factors accumulate
  - More risk factors = greater likelihood.

Electronic Media as a Risk Factor

- Bad outcomes: Obesity, alcohol, tobacco, sexual activity, violence
- Based on all relevant research, we can say whether links between electronic media and a specific bad outcomes is:
  - Strong and causal
  - Clearly associated, but not clearly causal
  - Suggestive, but not clear
  - Clearly unrelated.

Relevance to School Administrators, Teachers…

- Although most electronic media consumptions takes place outside of school, its risks are relevant
  - Students bring their media-influenced problem behaviors to school
  - Increasing use of electronic media at school increases the potential for exposure to damaging content
  - Schools may be able to educate parents and students about the risks
  - Note: Most media literacy programs fail to achieve effective behavior change.
Media Violence Example

- Many risk factors for aggression (dozen or so)
  - Prior aggression level
  - Poverty, violent neighborhood
  - Antisocial parents
  - Low IQ
  - Media violence...
  - Extreme violence usually requires multiple risk factors
  - Less extreme aggression requires fewer risk factors
- Media violence is particularly interesting
  - Huge proportion of population is exposed
  - Effects accumulate (much like cigarettes & cancer)
  - Easy and inexpensive for parents to reduce exposure
- Media violence is a strong and causal risk factor for later aggressive and violent behavior.

[Graphs showing violent behavior and physical aggression by high school students]
Longitudinal Study

Manhunt 2 with Wii

Call of Duty 4
Third Person Shooter: Otto Matic

How “big” are the video game effects?

Some Risk Factors for Youth Violence


*From “Best Practices” studies, Anderson et al., 2004, Advances in Experimental Social Psychology.
Some Risk Factors for Youth Violence

Obesity

- Research strongly suggests a positive association between amount of time using electronic media (especially TV & movies) and obesity
- Evidence has not reached the “causal” level
- Food advertisements causally influence children’s preferences
  - Most ads aimed at children are for unhealthy foods
- Better research—which takes into account the content of the TV shows, movies, and interactive media—may yield clearer results.
Smoking

- Research strongly suggests a positive and causal association between exposure to tobacco use in media and:
  - Viewing smoking favorably
  - Becoming a smoker
  - Product placement
    - In TV shows and films
  - Almost no research on internet and video games.

Alcohol

- Research strongly suggests a positive and causal association between exposure to alcohol use in media and:
  - Viewing alcohol use favorably
  - Becoming an alcohol consumer at a younger age
  - Advertising effects & Product placement
    - In TV shows and films
  - Almost no research on internet, music, and video games.

Early Initiation of Sexual Activity

- Very few studies
- Suggest an association between exposure to sexualized media and early initiation of sexual activity
- Insufficient research to establish causal link.
Other Dangers
• Poorer school performance
• Attention problems (ADD, ADHD)
• Executive Control problems
• Addiction (especially, to violent video games)
• Impulsivity
• Lack of empathy
• Risky driving
• Each of the above has at least some empirical support.

Conclusions
• Electronic media are powerful socialization and education agents
• Kids learn
• Content matters.

Flash Games on Internet
Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents

Theory, Research, and Public Policy

Craig A. Anderson, Douglas A. Gentile, and Katherine E. Buckley

"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 research, 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, Department of Psychology, Yale University, and Co-Director, Yale University Family Television Research and Consultation Center

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