

# No strong link seen between violent video games and aggression

**Results from the first long-term study of online videogame playing may be surprising. Contrary to popular opinion and most previous research, the new study found that players' "robust exposure" to a highly violent online game did not cause any substantial real-world aggression.**

After an average playtime of 56 hours over the course of a month with “Asheron’s Call 2,” a popular MMRPG, or “massively multi-layer online role-playing game,” researchers found “no strong effects associated with aggression caused by this violent game,” said Dmitri Williams, the lead author of the study.

Players were not statistically different from the non-playing control group in their beliefs on aggression after playing the game than they were before playing, Williams said.

Nor was game play a predictor of aggressive behaviors. Compared with the control group, the players neither increased their argumentative behaviors after game play nor were significantly more likely to argue with their friends and partners.

“I’m not saying some games don’t lead to aggression, but I am saying the data are not there yet,” Williams said. “Until we have more long-term studies, I don’t think we should make strong predictions about long-term effects, especially given this finding.”

Williams, a professor of speech communication at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is an expert on the effects of online video-game play. He conducted the study with Marko Skoric, a lecturer at the School of Communication and Information at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

Their findings appear in the June issue of *Communication Monographs* in an article titled “Internet Fantasy Violence: A Test of Aggression in an Online Game.”

According to Williams, researchers have suspected a strong linkage between games and aggression “but, with the exception of relatively short-term effects on young adults and children, they have yet to demonstrate this link.”

Williams and Skoric undertook the first longitudinal study of a game to see whether they could determine a link.

Because most video game research has been conducted in the laboratory or by observation in the field – methods “not representing the social context of game play” – they had their participants play the game in normal environments, like home.

The results of the new study, Williams said, support the contention of those who suggest that some violent games do not necessarily lead to increased real-world aggression.

But he and Skoric concede that other types of games and contexts might have negative impacts.

“This game featured fantasy violence, while others featuring outer space or even everyday urban violence may yield different outcomes.”

Williams and Skoric also concede that because their study didn’t concentrate solely on younger teenagers, “we cannot say that teenagers might not experience different effects.”

Still, and interestingly, older players in their study were “perhaps more strongly influenced by game play

and argued with friends more than their younger counterparts.”

The new study involved two groups of participants: players – a “treatment” group of 75 people who had no prior MMRPG play and who played AC2 for the first time; and a control group of 138, who did not play. The participants were solicited through online message boards and ranged in age from 14 to 68, the average age being 27.7 years.

Self-reported questionnaires were completed pre- and post-test online and included a range of demographic, behavioral and personality variables. Aggression-related beliefs were measured with L.R. Huesmann’s Normative Beliefs in Aggression (NOBAGS) scale. Aggressive social interactions were measured with two behavioral questions: in the past month, did the participant have a serious argument with a friend, and in the same time period, did they have a serious argument with a spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend.

Because of the study’s design, only moderate or large effects caused by exposure to the game were capable of being detected.

Today, more than 60 percent of Americans play some form of interactive game on a regular basis, while 32 percent of the game-playing population is now over 35 years of age.

Fears about the games’ social and health impacts have risen with these numbers, Williams said, with politicians, pundits and media outlets fanning some of the flames.

Games are becoming increasingly violent, as shown by content analyses, Williams said. One reason is that “the first generation of game players has aged and its tastes and expectations have been more likely to include mature fair.”

Still, the extent of knowledge about what games do to or for people is limited, and there is “even less understanding about the range of content.”

“If the content, context, and play length have some bearing on the effects, policy-makers should seek a greater understanding of the games they are debating. It may be that both the attackers and defenders of the industry’s products are operating without enough information, and are instead both arguing for blanket approaches to what is likely a more complicated phenomenon.”

Nor do researchers know much about the positive effects of gaming, Williams said.

“Based on my research, some of the potential gains are in meeting a lot of new people and crossing social boundaries. That’s important in a society where we are increasingly insulated from one another.”

Some game researchers believe that video-gaming leads to substantial gains in learning teamwork, managing groups and most important, Williams said, problem solving.

“How often can someone direct and coordinate a group of eight or 40 real people to accomplish a complex task, as they do in these role-playing games? That’s a real skill.

“Games are about solving problems, and it should tell us something that kids race home from school where they are often bored to get on games and solve problems. Clearly we need to capture that lightning in a bottle.”

Source: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

*This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.*