APA CALLS FOR REDUCTION OF VIOLENCE IN INTERACTIVE MEDIA USED BY CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Research Shows Playing Violent Video Games Increases Aggressive Behavior and Decreases Helpful Behavior; Learning Critical Evaluating Skills May Reduce Negative Effects

WASHINGTON — Based on an examination of the research that shows the negative influences of violence in interactive media on youth, the American Psychological Association (APA) today adopted a resolution recommending that all violence be reduced in video games and interactive media marketed to children and youth. Additionally, the APA also encourages parents, educators and health care providers to help youth make more informed choices about which games to play.

The policy decision, made by the APA Council of Representatives, was adopted at the recommendation of a special Committee on Violence in Video Games and Interactive Media of the Media Psychology Division of APA, which reviewed the research indicating that exposure to violence in video games increases aggressive thoughts, aggressive behavior, and angry feelings among youth. In addition, this exposure reduces helpful behavior and increases physiological arousal in children and adolescents.

Research on media violence also revealed, that perpetrators go unpunished 73 percent of the time in all violent scenes. "Showing violent acts without consequences teach youth that violence is an effective means of resolving conflict. Whereas, seeing pain and suffering as a consequence can inhibit aggressive behavior", says psychologist Elizabeth Carll, PhD, co-chair of the Committee on Violence in Video Games and Interactive Media.

Studies on learning also show that active participation may influence learning more than passive observation. "Violence in video games appear to have similar negative effects as viewing violence on TV, but may be more harmful because of the interactive nature of video games," says Dr. Elizabeth Carll, who is a private practitioner in New York and a past president of the Media Division of APA. "Playing video games involves practice, repetition, and being rewarded for numerous acts of violence, which may intensify the learning. This may also result in more realistic experiences which may potentially increase aggressive behavior," added Carll.

Teaching children how to view television critically helps them to differentiate between fantasy and reality, identify less with aggressive characters and helps children to better understand what they are watching. "Teaching critical viewing, also referred to as media literacy, can be helpful in reducing the negative effects of interactive media as well," says Dr. Dorothy Singer, co-chair of the Committee on Violence in Video Games and Interactive media, and a Senior Research Scientist at Yale University and Co-Director of the Yale Family Television Research and Consultation Center. "Media literacy programs have been successful in teaching children how to better understand what happens when someone gets hurt or killed on TV. Children end up not feeling as frightened and sad after witnessing these violent events", explained Singer.

Based on the findings, the APA recommends:

- Teach media literacy to children so they will have the ability to critically evaluate interactive media.
Encourage the entertainment industry to link violent behaviors with negative social consequences.

Develop and disseminate a content-based rating system that accurately reflects the content of the video games and interactive media.

Developers of violent video games and interactive media address the issues that playing these games may increase aggressive thoughts and behaviors in children and adolescents and that these effects may potentially be greater than the effects of exposure to violent television and movies.

Committee on Violence in Video Games and Interactive Media: Elizabeth Carll, PhD, and Dorothy Singer, EdD co-chairs; Craig Anderson, PhD, Brad Bushman, PhD, Karen Dill, PhD and Lilli Friedland, PhD.

Full text of the resolution is available from the APA Public Affairs Office and at:

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The American Psychological Association (APA), in Washington, DC, is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. APA's membership includes more than 150,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 53 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting human welfare.
American Psychological Association Resolution on Violence in Video Games and Interactive Media, adopted on Aug. 17, 2005

WHEREAS decades of social science research reveals the strong influence of televised violence on the aggressive behavior of children and youth (APA Task Force On Television and Society; 1992 Surgeon General’s Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, 1972); and

WHEREAS psychological research reveals that the electronic media play an important role in the development of attitude, emotion, social behavior and intellectual functioning of children and youth (APA Task Force On Television and Society, 1992; Funk, J. B., et al. 2002; Singer, D. G. & Singer, J. L. 2005; Singer, D. G. & Singer, J. L. 2001); and


WHEREAS perpetrators go unpunished in 73% of all violent scenes, and therefore teach that violence is an effective means of resolving conflict. Only 16 % of all programs portrayed negative psychological or financial effects, yet such visual depictions of pain and suffering can actually inhibit aggressive behavior in viewers (National Television Violence Study, 1996); and


WHEREAS studies further suggest that sexualized violence in the media has been linked to increases in violence towards women, rape myth acceptance and anti-women attitudes. Research on interactive video games suggests that the most popular video games contain aggressive and violent content; depict women and girls, men and boys, and minorities in exaggerated stereotypical ways; and reward, glamorize and depict as humorous sexualized aggression against women, including assault, rape and murder (Dietz, T. L., 1998; Dill, K. E., & Dill, J. C., 2004; Dill, K. E., Gentile, D. A., Richter, W. A., & Dill, J.C., in press; Mulac, A., Jansma, L. L., & Linz, D. G., 2002; Walsh, D., Gentile, D. A., VanOverbeke, M., & Chasco, E., 2002); and

WHEREAS the characteristics of violence in interactive video games appear to have similar detrimental effects as viewing television violence; however based upon learning theory (Bandura, 1977; Berkowitz, 1993) the practice, repetition, and rewards for acts of violence may be more conducive to increasing aggressive behavior among children and youth than passively watching violence on TV and in films (Carll, E. K., 1999a). With the development of more sophisticated interactive media, such as virtual reality, the implications for violent content are of further concern, due to the intensification of more realistic experiences, and may also be more conducive to increasing aggressive behavior than passively watching violence on TV and in films (Calvert, S. L., Jordan, A. B., Cocking, R. R. (Ed.) 2002; Carll, E. K., 2003; Turkle, S., 2002); and

WHEREAS studies further suggest that videogames influence the learning processes in many ways more than in passively observing TV: a.) requiring identification of the participant with a violent character while playing video games, b.) actively participating increases learning, c.) rehearsing entire behavioral sequences rather than only a part of the sequence, facilitates learning, and d.) repetition increases learning (Anderson, C.A., 2002b; Anderson, C.A., Carnagey, N. L., Flanagan, M., Benjamin, A. J., Eubanks, J., Valentine, J. C., 2004; Anderson, C.A. & Dill, K. E., 2000); and
WHEREAS the data dealing with media literacy curricula demonstrate that when children are taught how to view television critically, there is a reduction of TV viewing in general, and a clearer understanding of the messages conveyed by the medium. Studies on media literacy demonstrate when children are taught how to view television critically, children can feel less frightened and sad after discussions about the medium, can learn to differentiate between fantasy and reality, and can identify less with aggressive characters on TV, and better understand commercial messages (Brown, 2001; Hobbs, R. & Frost, R., 2003; Hortin, J.A., 1982; Komaya, M., 2003; Rosenkoetter, L.J., Rosenkoetter, S.E., Ozretich, R.A., & Acock, A.C., 2004; Singer & Singer, 1998; Singer & Singer, 1994)

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that APA advocate for the reduction of all violence in videogames and interactive media marketed to children and youth.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that APA publicize information about research relating to violence in video games and interactive media on children and youth in the Association’s publications and communications to the public.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that APA encourage academic, developmental, family, and media psychologists to teach media literacy that meets high standards of effectiveness to children, teachers, parents and caregivers to promote ability to critically evaluate interactive media and make more informed choices.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that APA advocate for funding to support basic and applied research, including special attention to the role of social learning, sexism, negative depiction of minorities, and gender on the effects of violence in video games and interactive media on children, adolescents, and young adults.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that APA engage those responsible for developing violent video games and interactive media in addressing the issue that playing violent video games may increase aggressive thoughts and aggressive behaviors in children, youth, and young adults and that these effects may be greater than the well documented effects of exposure to violent television and movies.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that APA recommend to the entertainment industry that the depiction of the consequences of violent behavior be associated with negative social consequences.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that APA (a) advocate for the development and dissemination of a content based rating system that accurately reflects the content of video games and interactive media, and (b) encourage the distribution and use of the rating system by the industry, the public, parents, caregivers and educational organizations.

REFERENCES


See press release and links at: http://www.apa.org/releases/videoviolence05.html

Downloaded on September 14, 2005.