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Media Release

MEDIA VIOLENCE HURTS OUR KIDS: Why are we risking it?

Professor Donnerstein from the US says 'The mass media are a contributor to increasing the risk of anti-social behaviour in our youth'. A respected researcher on the impacts of media violence, Professor Donnerstein is currently in Australia to speak at a Sydney conference on Tuesday 1 March.

Joined by a group of overseas and Australian academics, Professor Donnerstein is part of a growing group of experts in this field who believe the associated risks are now supported by enough evidence based research to be conclusive. Dr Warburton an Australian Council on Children and the Media spokesperson and Macquarie University lecturer says 'my particular concern is that policy makers take into account the research findings on media impacts when reviewing classification and other regulatory policies. The conference *Scared, sleepless and hostile: Children, violent/ frightening media* will put the spotlight on current media research that reveals genuine impacts to children's mental health'.

Professor Donnerstein and Dr Warburton, are joined by Professor Gentile (who is also speaking at the conference) as signatories to the "Amicus Curiae" statement supporting a landmark case in the US Supreme Court of which a verdict is due soon. The State of California wants to be able to ban the sale or rental access of minors to very violent video games. This is being opposed by the industry. The Amicus Curiae statement, signed by over 100 international researchers with strong records of research into aggression, and aggression linked to media, concludes: 'Overall, the research data concludes that exposure to violent video games causes an increase in the likelihood of aggressive behaviour. The effects are both immediate and long term'. [for the full statement see Backgrounder below]

Professor Donnerstein notes a recent comparison by Professor Anderson, one of the other authors of the Amicus Curiae, which says that 'while another group of academics had submitted a statement to the Court opposing these findings, the credentials of the supporting group are far more impressive. A very recent comparison of the support group's research experience and published papers in refereed journals, compared to the dissenters, reveals the dissenting group to have very few published papers in this area while the support group members have a large body of relevant studies and original research in this field between them'.

Dr Warburton reiterated, 'this conference will put forward research related to violent and scary media that is believed to be valid and indicative by the vast majority of media researchers into psychological effects. In my view these findings, and particularly those of Professor Gentile, will be relevant to the reviews of the current classification system in Australia'.

The Australian Council on Children and the Media is a national not for profit organisation that promotes better choices and provides stronger voices in children's media. For more information about the organisation, the speakers and the conference, please visit www.childrenandmedia.org.au or call 08 8376 2111.

For interviews please call Prof Donnerstein on cell phone 520 834 6448 or edonners@emailarizona.edu; Dr Warburton on 02 9850 9643 or 9850 7257 or wayne.warburton@mq.edu.au; or Prof Gentile on 515 441 9331 , dgentile@iastate.edu

Promoting healthy choices and stronger voices in children's media

Australian Council on Children and the Media (incorporating Young Media Australia)
Patrons: Steve Biddulph Baroness Susan Greenfield
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Backgrounder Information:

On 2 November, the Supreme Court of the United States heard oral arguments in the case of the Governor of California vs the Entertainments Merchants Association. The Case was on appeal from the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in Sacramento California, and concerned the right of the State of California to ban the sale or rental of violent video games to minors under the age of 18 years. The industry claimed the ban was unconstitutional and violated rights to freedom of speech. The Circuit Court had agreed with the industry.

The central issue in the case is whether the constitutionality of the California law must be reviewed under the “Ginsburg standard” (which relates to bans on the sale of pornography, using a commonsense approach concerning the harmful effects on young minds) or under “strict scrutiny” (which requires a high standard of proof of harmful effects in order to avoid the First Amendment provisions).

Over 100 international researchers with strong records of research into aggression, and aggression linked to media have supported this landmark case in the US Supreme Court, by developing and signing an “Amicus Curiae” statement which they believe reflects the current state of knowledge about the impacts of violent video games

This Amicus Curiae (Gruel) statement, follows:

"Both the American Psychological Association (APA, 2005) and the American Academy of Paediatrics (APA, 2009) have issued formal statements stating that scientific research on violent video games clearly shows that such games are causally related to later aggressive behaviour in children and adolescents. Extensive research has been conducted over many years using all three major types of research designs (experimental, cross-sectional, and longitudinal). Numerous original empirical research studies have been conducted on children and adolescents. Overall, the research data conclude that exposure to violent video games causes an increase in the likelihood of aggressive behaviour. The effects are both immediate and long term. Violent video games have measurable and statistically significant effects on both males and females. Theoretically important effects of violent video games have been confirmed by many empirical studies. The effects have been replicated by researchers in different settings and in numerous countries. The psychological processes underlying such effects are well understood and include: imitation, observational learning, priming of cognitive, emotional and behavioral scripts, physiological arousal, and emotional desensitization. These are general processes that underlie all types of social behavior, not just aggression and violence; they have been confirmed by countless studies outside of the media violence domain. In addition to causing an increase in the likelihood of aggressive behavior, violent video games have also been found to increase aggressive thinking, aggressive feelings, physiological desensitization to violence, and to decrease pro-social behavior."