



Preschoolers, television and aggression.

Although previous studies have revealed that preschool-aged children imitate both aggression and prosocial behaviors on screen, there have been few population-based studies designed to reduce aggression in preschool-aged children by modifying what they watch. Now new US research has indicated that modifying the type of television programs that preschoolers watch can actually result in calmer children. Research by Dr Dimitri Christakis and colleagues demonstrated that an intervention to reduce exposure to screen violence and increase exposure to prosocial programming can positively impact child behavior, particularly in boys. The research involved 565 parents of preschool-aged children ages 3 to 5 years who changed what their children watched and reported on their behaviour. The research was published online in the journal *Pediatrics*

Christakis, D et al (2013) Modifying Media Content for Preschool Children: A Randomized Controlled Trial *Pediatrics* published online February 2013

However, even non-violent programs seem to affect some types of aggressive behaviour. In another study with US preschoolers, 75 children in university affiliated childcare centres in the US were assessed for aggressive behavior after exposure to educational rather than violent programs.

Researchers found that educational media exposure significantly predicted increases in both observed and teacher-reported relational aggression across time. Follow-up assessment showed that educational media exposure also significantly predicted increases in parent reported relational aggression across more than a two year period. These results confirm and extend prior research that has demonstrated links between educational media exposure and relational aggression, but not physical aggression, during early childhood.

Ostrov, J; Gentile,D; Mullins, A (2013) Evaluating the effect of educational media exposure on aggression in early childhood *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*. Volume 34, Issue 1, Pages 38-44

The latest on games classification in 2013

January 1 saw the introduction of separate and revised guidelines for the classification of computer games in Australia. These guidelines included the introduction of an R18+ classification for the first time, and revised criteria for the MA15+ level.

The expected outcomes of these changes included the release as R18+ of some (but "not many") games with higher impact than had previously been allowed, and fewer very violent games given an MA15+. A further much touted outcome was that the revised guidelines would "bring Australia into line with the rest of the world".

The outcomes have been a bit different from that.

By the end of February, after just two months, nine different titles had been classified R18+. All of these, bar one, were placed in R18+ because of high impact violence. The other, *Ride to hell: retribution*, was found to have high impact sexual and drug references, and strong violence. To date, *Mortal Combat* is the only game refused classification in recent years, to be resubmitted since January 1 and has been given an R18+.

Comparisons with the classifications assigned to these titles overseas (assuming the same versions are being sold here) show that giving these titles an R18+ is mostly in accord with the US, ESRB and

European PEGI decisions. Oddly, *Ride to hell: retribution* could not be found in either ESRB or PEGI.

Seventeen games had been classified MA15+, 16 of which were found to include either strong violence, strong bloody violence or strong fantasy violence. One, *The Basement Collection* contained strong sexual references and moderate violence. Comparisons with the classifications assigned to these titles by PEGI or ESRB tell a different story.

Four of the titles could not be found in either PEGI or ESRB. Of the remaining 13, 11 had been given either an M (17) by ESRB for "intense violence" or an 18 by PEGI for "extreme violence". These titles include *Deus Ex: human revolution* (PEGI advice includes "multiple motiveless killings"), *God Mode*, *Gears of War: judgment*, *The Walking dead*, *Lucius*, and *Dragon's Dogma: dark arisen*.

Seemingly, the changes to the criteria for violence in MA15+ have not had the effect of shifting more violent games up to R18+ (touted as justification for introducing R18+). Our classifiers say the violence in these games is only "strong", but overseas the view is that it's "intense" or "extreme".

Our new criteria for violence in MA15+ are:

- Violence should be justified by context.
- Strong and realistic violence should not be frequent or unduly repetitive.
- Sexual violence, implied or otherwise, is not permitted.

The second dot point is a new requirement as is the prohibition on sexual violence. But is the new second criterion worth having? It still allows strong violence that is unrealistic (zombies/ robots/walking dead??) to be frequent and/or unduly repetitive. It allows strong and realistic violence to be very repetitive, so long as it's not unduly (whatever that means). And how is "frequency" being judged? [see the Editorial on P2 for further discussion of these issues].

It seems we have a way to go before the expected outcome of improved protections for children from very violent games is achieved.

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EDITORIAL

Are our new MA15+ guidelines doing the job?

Page 1 of this issue of small screen sets out the revisions to the Guidelines for the classification of computer games at the MA15+ level for violence. These revisions were intended to ensure that those very violent games which had been allowed in MA15+ by the pre-2013 guidelines were moved to a more appropriate adult category. The MA15+ classification marks games that can be legally played only by those 15 years and over, or those younger players permitted to do so by their parents or guardians.

The recent classification decisions using the new criterion "strong and realistic violence should not be frequent or unduly repetitive" raise many questions about whether the criterion effectively protects players who are younger than 15 as well as those 15- 17yrs. In particular, there are many issues for debate around definitions of realism: can fantasy/ horror genres also have high impact?

The first issue is 'what is realistic?' If the victim is a zombie it is not realistic, but we know that the

presence of blood spurting would have an impact because the presence of blood in games seems to be an important factor, "Realistic" is a judgment call that is hard to make, especially when a victim can be non-human or animated but parts of the consequences of violence (such as bleeding, decapitation, disembowelment etc) might be more realistic.



Barbara Biggins
OAM
Hon CEO

The second issue is that violent media does not have to be realistic to have an impact. There is sufficient evidence from research on cartoons, fantasy etc to show that non-realistic violence does impact on the likelihood of aggressive responses.

The final issue is that something doesn't have to be realistic to be terrifying. How upsetting or terrifying a video game is should be factored into thinking about its impact.

It's high time there was an evidence-based review of the guidelines if they are to be at all effective in the protection of minors.

First National Children's Commissioner appointed.

Ms Megan Mitchell who is currently NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People, has been appointed as Australia's first National Children's Commissioner. Her five-year term starts on March 25.

The National Children's Commissioner will sit within the Australian Human Rights Commission, Australia's national independent statutory body dealing with human rights. In this position, Ms Mitchell will be a dedicated advocate for children and young people. She will promote public discussion and awareness of issues affecting children; conduct research and education programs; consult directly with children and representative organisations; and examine Commonwealth legislation, policies and programs that relate to children's human rights.

<http://aifs.govspace.gov.au/2013/02/25/australias-first-national-childrens-commissioner-has-been-appointed/>

The truth about fast food

The Cancer Council of NSW has released a new report that provides an overview of three studies to investigate the fast food environment. The Council has been advocating for several years for stronger regulation in both fast food marketing and menu labelling. They point out that the average Australian household spends 28% of its food budget on fast food and eating out, and the average fast food meal provides almost half of an adult's daily energy requirements. Fast foods are therefore increasingly impacting on Australians' diets, and ultimately their health.

The Council calls on the Federal Government and the fast food industry to implement initiatives that make it easier for customers to make healthier fast food choices. These include menu labelling and changes to children's meals to make them less than 30% of daily needs.

The report, *Fast food: Exposing the truth*, can be found on the Cancer Council NSW website :
<http://www.cancercouncil.com.au/>

Apple to pay parents on app purchases by children

According to Sakthi Prasad writing in *The Age* Apple could pay up to \$US100 million after it agreed to settle a class action lawsuit that said customers were charged when their children unwittingly bought apps from the company's online store.

The lawsuit was filed by five parents in 2011. They alleged that children had made purchases in apps without the knowledge or permission of the account holder - the parents. They also alleged that "Apple failed to adequately disclose that third-party game apps, largely available for free and rated as containing content suitable for children, contained the ability to make in-app purchases."

In the proposed settlement, Apple has agreed to provide a \$US5 iTunes credit to a possible 23 million affected customers, but those claiming \$US30 or more from Apple may choose to receive a cash refund instead.

<http://www.theage.com.au/technology/technology-news/apple-to-settle-lawsuit-on-app-purchases-by-kids-20130227-2f4sq.html#ixzz2NIKIZNO>

Clips 'n' Cuts

small screen no. 294 February 2013

Funding guidelines for games developers expected next month

MATTHEW WESTWOOD

UP to \$500,000 could be available to game developers for ambitious titles under guidelines being considered for the Australian Interactive Games Fund.

Arts Minister Simon Crean launched the fund last November as a plank of his National Cultural Policy, which is yet to be released. The fund will allocate \$20 million over three years, managed by government agency Screen Australia.

cont... games earn about \$400m a year, according to one estimate.

A summary of submissions on the fund, prepared by Screen Australia, says several regarded the fund as industry support rather than arts funding.

"However, there were also suggestions that a small part of the fund could be allocated to games that are more experimental or have cultural significance or educational value," it says.

The Australian Children's Television Foundation argues for

An options paper released by Screen Australia attracted 37 public and confidential submissions that welcomed the boost for the games sector. Submissions closed on January 25, but differences of opinion emerged over whether the fund should target experienced developers who understand the games market or up-and-coming outfits and experimental work.

One proposal suggests funding ambitious projects with up to \$500,000. Smartphone games

investment in educational titles, while independent developer Joe Tabor suggests the fund should be available for educational, experimental and art games.

The Screen Australia summary makes clear that the fund should not be used for in-house corporate titles or gambling. Several submissions support the introduction of a 40 per cent tax offset, as outlined in the media convergence review; however, the proposed offset is not within the scope of the games fund.

typically cost \$250,000-\$300,000 to develop, according to Screen Australia; console games are much more expensive to produce.

Screen Australia chief operating officer Fiona Cameron expects 30 to 40 per cent of the funds will be distributed to qualifying companies and the balance for individual projects. Some funds will be used for sector development.

The Australian games market is growing at 7.4 per cent a year and is expected to reach \$2.2 billion by 2016. Locally produced

"One of the objectives of this fund is clearly to develop Australian intellectual property," Ms Cameron says. "So if we are talking intellectual property, we are talking about Australian development and Australian-made. Those things are very important to this fund."

Funding guidelines are expected to be issued next month, and the first round of grants announced midyear. The fund will allocate \$5m in the first and second years, and \$10m in 2014-15.

The Australian, 5 February 2013

Movies down, video games up as Walt Disney's profits decline

ERICA ORDEN

WALT Disney's net income weakened in the latest quarter, even as revenue grew, reflecting slimmer profits at the movie studio, where home-video titles were less lucrative than those released in the final months of 2011.

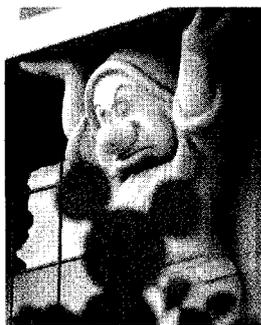
Profit slipped 6 per cent to \$US1.38 billion (\$1.33bn) for the fiscal first quarter ended December 29, down from \$US1.46bn a year earlier.

Revenue increased 5 per cent to \$US11.34bn.

Notably, Disney's video game division was profitable for the first time since the company began recording separate results for the unit. Disney predicted last year that the unit, Disney Interactive Media Group, would only attain profitability this year.

Operating income at the video game division totalled \$US9 million, compared with a year-earlier operating loss of \$US28m. Revenue at the division rose 4 per cent to \$US291m.

Chief executive Robert Iger said Disney was developing standalone films based on Star Wars characters, in addition to the three sequels the company had already said it planned to



AP

Disney profit fell to \$US1.38bn

make. On a call with Wall Street analysts, he declined to elaborate on details such as which characters the films would include or when they would be released.

The company is slated to release the first new Star Wars instalment in 2015, a plan it announced in October, when the entertainment giant paid more than \$US4bn in cash and stock for Lucasfilm, the company that produced Star Wars and its many sequels and prequels.

The newly announced standalone films are likely to be welcome developments for Disney's movie studio, where operating

profit fell 43 per cent to \$US234m from a year earlier, on revenue of \$US1.55bn, off 5 per cent.

The studio suffered from decreased home-entertainment results, particularly with the DVD release of *Cinderella* in the first quarter of 2013, as compared with the release of *The Lion King* during the prior-year quarter. In addition, *Brave*, released on DVD in the latest quarter, had lower merchandise licensing revenue than *Cars 2*, released on DVD in the same quarter last year.

At the media networks division, which includes ESPN, ABC and the Disney Channel and is the most profitable for the company, revenue rose 7 per cent to \$US5.1bn. Operating income climbed 2 per cent to \$US1.2bn.

At the cable networks, operating profit fell due to ESPN, where rising programming and production costs more than offset higher revenue from cable and satellite distributors.

Revenue at Disney's parks and resorts division increased 7 per cent to \$US3.39bn, as operating income climbed 4 per cent to \$US577m.

In the consumer products division, operating income rose 11 per cent to \$US346m as revenue rose 7 per cent to \$US1.01bn.

The Australian, 7 February 2013

Apps as game-changers

JENNIFER DUDLEY-NICHOLSON
NATIONAL TECHNOLOGY EDITOR

THERE'S a new multibillion-dollar gaming industry emerging and it's coming from our pockets.

More than 45 billion apps were downloaded to smartphones and tablets last year, technology research firm Gartner estimated, and that number was set to skyrocket to 81 billion this year.

It's a figure that has traditional game-makers taking note and long-time gamers swapping game controllers to hold the phone.

It's also increasing competition among game studios, with even Angry Birds flapping to stay atop the app tree. Interactive Games and Entertainment Association chief executive Ron Curry said the growth of gaming apps had been so rapid they were now accepted as a gaming genre in their own right, with a presence everywhere from toy stores to fast-food restaurants.

Mr Curry said the affordability of gaming apps had removed a major hurdle to play, with prices more likely to be less than \$3 rather than \$99, but their popularity was largely due to their low time commitment.

"The difference with app games and more traditional games is that you tend to play them while you're doing something else or waiting for some-

thing. You don't need to put time aside to play them," he said. "Apps have grabbed a bunch of people who have had limited interaction with video games and showed them that they are fun, they don't need to be hard to play and you don't need to give up hours of your time to play them."

While not all apps are games, they make up the majority of all apps downloaded. Six of the top 10 grossing apps in Apple's App Store are games, as were 76 per cent of all apps downloaded in 2011, according to Juniper Research.

It's a phenomenon that has led traditional game studios, including Electronic Arts and Ubisoft, to invest more in gaming apps.

Ubisoft Asia regional online group manager Matthew Tang said the company had 26 development studios and several were working on gaming apps.

Mr Tang said the fierce app market had increased the competition for game makers, but it had also increased the number of game players.

"Australia's fascination with these devices across a huge demographic spectrum has ultimately led to new audiences coming to the market," he said. "It's great to watch your grandparents playing games on the iPad and know that this new technology is reaching audiences that might not have played games for years."

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The Sunday Mail, 3 February 2013

EDUCATION

Ex-books to Xbox - games teach kids

GAME consoles have become the latest technology to hit the classroom. Eight schools around the country are using Microsoft Xbox consoles with a hybrid of a TV show and computer game that immerses the student in a virtual world.

Students control the games through body movements and voice and an avatar of them performs tasks throughout the games levels. For example, in one game the student appears on the screen in the feathers or skin of an animal and learns about its habitat and food sources.

"Children these days are digital native. They're growing up with technology in the home for largely entertainment purposes, so it makes sense to bring those forms of technology into the classroom to help them learn," Microsoft Xbox product manager Adam Pollington said.

The trial involves schools in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

The Advertiser, 16 February 2013

FYI TOP PAID GAME APPS

APPLE

1. Banana Kong: Like a modern Donkey Kong, players run, jump and swing from platform to platform.

2. Wreck-It Ralph: This offers four styles of play, the most notable of which sees players fix Wreck-It Ralph's mess.

3. Minecraft: Pocket Edition: The block-centric game can be taken on the run with this app that also supports multi-player battles over wi-fi.

4. Angry Birds: Star Wars: It was only a matter of time before Angry Birds got light sabres.

5. Bad Piggies HD: This Angry Birds spin-off puts players on the side of the pigs, creating flying machines for them so they can steal eggs.

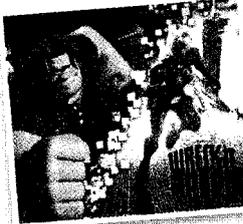
6. CraftedBattle: A Minecraft-like, block-based game, CraftedBattle asks players to create battlefields on which to fight.

7. The Room: This mystery game boasts realistic 3D graphics and many puzzles to solve.

8. Scribblenauts Remix: The highly creative title asks players to think of unusual objects to solve puzzles.

9. Peppa Pig - Polly Parrot: Children's TV star Peppa Pig also has a popular app featuring five interactive games.

10. Where's My Water?: Swampy, the alligator, wants to take a shower. Players must help guide the water to his bathroom.



GAME FAVOURITE: Wreck It Ralph

GOOGLE

1. Minecraft: Pocket Edition: The simple but popular game is now mobile, with an app that supports multi-player battles over wi-fi.

2. Need for Speed Most Wanted: This game asks players to race their car against other vehicles and evade the law.

3. Wreck-It Ralph: This offers three arcade-style challenges, including a game that has Ralph climbing candy stalks.

4. Where's My Water?: A physics-based puzzle game where players redirect water to where it's needed.

5. Super Hexagon: Players must help their cursor escape from rapidly enclosing hexagons that pulse with techno tunes.

6. Fruit Ninja: The Australian-made fruit salad game is still a winner, luring fans in to slice virtual fruit with a virtual sword.

7. Grand Theft Auto 3: The 10-year anniversary edition features car-jacking, races and crashes optimised for touchscreens.

8. Plants Vs Zombies: It features 50 levels in which to pit sunflowers against zombies.

9. Blooms TD 5: Players keep invading balloons at bay by shooting monkeys at them.

10. Temple Run: Brave: This app asks players to run, jump, slide and shoot their way to success.

Regulator spends \$2m processing complaints

REGULATION: The Australian Communications and Media Authority spent an estimated \$2 million processing complaints against media content last financial year.

The ACMA revealed it allocated 18 staff to the task and they spent 32,850 hours processing the complaints.

The figures were contained in responses to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice, from October's hearings, filed this week.

The media regulator has been criticised for its tardiness in resolving complaints, a problem exacerbated, for instance in commercial television, by the 30 days in which broadcasters can respond to complaints and then to the ACMA.

The 2012 review of Australia's print media industry by Ray Finkelstein proposed a News Media Council in part to enforce a more timely complaints process. The Convergence Review also proposed a new media regulator to replace the ACMA that would issue "timely remedies".

Yet the high cost of media regulation may work in the ACMA's favour if it is to fight off recommendations it be merged or abolished for a new entity.

Liberal senator Simon Birmingham, chairman of the Environment and Communications Legislation Committee, said he was surprised by the cost and length of time devoted to the complaints process.

"Too often in the debate surrounding media regulation

The Australian, 4 February 2013

people forget that such regulation comes at a very high cost," Senator Birmingham told Media.

He questioned whether the government should consider if there was "a more efficient way to achieve its objectives around media regulation".

"Given the length of time involved in the complaints process and sometimes trivial complaints being made, you can't help but suspect that audience and advertiser reactions have far more impact on maintaining standards than this expensive and bureaucratic process does," he said.

In its 2011-12 annual report, the ACMA noted it received 2273 written complaints and inquiries about commercial, national and community broadcasters. But, the ACMA said, in response to an inquiry by the ABC's *Media Watch* program late last year, it was investigating more complaints in less time.

The number of complaints for 2011-12 was up from 1676 three years ago. And in that time, the average time taken for complaints and investigations fell from 4.4 months to 3.2 months.

A number of recent high-profile investigations, such as those into breaches by Southern Cross Austereo's *The Kyle & Jackie O Show* and Macquarie Radio Network's *Alan Jones Breakfast Show*, have also been prioritised and settled in a more timely manner after previous investigations took up to two years to settle.

MICHAEL BODEY

Kids 'booze billboards'

JORDANNA SCHRIEVER
HEALTH REPORTER

CHILDREN as young as four are being used as "mobile billboards" to promote the product of one of the world's largest whisky producers, it is claimed.

A range of Jim Beam-branded V8 Supercar promotional clothing, sold under the Dick Johnson Racing Kids Team label, is for sale online.

The promotion has been described as one of the "most shocking" examples of alcohol advertising and has led to calls for tougher regulation of alcohol advertising.

Professor Mike Daube, director of the McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth, has called on the Federal Government to end alcohol advertising targeting or using children. He said this example showed how ineffective the alcohol industry was at self-regulation.

"This is the most shocking alcohol promotion I have seen," Prof Daube said. "The promotion turns children into mobile billboards for whisky and encourages them to associate them-



Team Beam: A child's jacket

selves with the Jim Beam brand."

The clothing range includes a jumper with a logo that says "The Team" in the Jim Beam font and has a Jim Beam logo on the tag.

But Dick Johnson Racing head of marketing Kel Constantine said the clothing range was carefully developed in conjunction with the team's former major sponsor, Jim Beam.

"We worked very carefully with Jim Beam to make sure there was no alcohol promotion at any stage which promotes clothing to under 18s," she

said. "It is something we are extremely conscious of."

She said the products simply used the same font, in a purposeful effort to create merchandise without alcohol advertising, which was suitable for children.

Few items in the range remain for sale because Jim Beam no longer sponsors the team.

The Alcohol Advertising Review Board upheld a complaint against the promotion – in part – and asked Jim Beam's parent company, Beam Global, to withdraw the range.

Since it was established in March last year, the board has received 140 complaints relating to 125 alcohol advertisements.

Of those, 101 were investigated and the complaints were upheld in full in 70 cases and in part in 24 cases.

Professor Daube said the alcohol industry's own regulation body, the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code, had made 45 determinations from 119 complaints in 2011.

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The Sunday Mail, 17 February 2013

TV link to life of crime

ALLOWING your child to watch too much TV puts them at a higher risk of developing anti-social and even criminal behaviour, according to researchers.

They found that children who watched endless hours of TV were more likely to have a criminal conviction

in adulthood. The New Zealand study followed a group of 1000 children born between 1972 and 1973.

Those who watched the most TV were more likely to have a conviction and develop anti-social personality traits in adulthood.

- Daily Mail

The Advertiser, 20 February 2013

LEGO RANGE

'Sexist' toys a huge seller

A RANGE of "sexist" toys aimed at young girls sent Lego sales soaring to \$3.7 billion last year.

Featuring pink bricks, hair salons and kitchen sets, the controversial Lego Friends range was criticised for gender stereotyping. In the US more than 50,000 people have signed a petition accusing Lego of "selling out girls" and "boxing children in".

But they have become some of the most popular brands, selling twice as many sets as expected.

One set in the collection, Olivia's House, was the company's biggest selling item in the world, helping push Lego's profits up by 40 per cent to almost \$1.29 billion. Global sales were up a quarter to \$3.71 billion and have tripled since 2007.

The Advertiser, 23 February 2013

MODERN TIMES

Crime and ambivalence

Andrew Hunter

St Petersburg, the setting for Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, froze this northern winter. Adelaide by contrast melts in an increasingly stifling climate.

The protagonist of *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov, committed a murder that was pre-meditated, rational, and in his mind, justified. Like Pierre-Francois Lacenaire, the French poet who earlier in the 18th century committed a double murder and justified his actions as a protest against social injustice, the fictional Raskolnikov also saw higher purpose in his violent act. *Crime and Punishment* was a portrait of a tortured conscience.

Much of the violence in Adelaide this summer has been spontaneous, irrational and unjustified. The popular perception that the level of violence is rising lacks nuance. The number of pre-meditated crimes, such as armed robbery and gun-related homicides, has fallen over the last decade whilst aggravated assault has risen. Violence now has an incomprehensively frivolous quality. It also wears a youthful face.

The parliamentary year being finished, summer provides a window of opportunity to shift the national conversation from the economy to society. The senseless nature of violence in Australia merits deep consideration. It is an issue that should concern our national leaders. Only the crickets have been heard during this forgettable summer.

Law enforcers asked to comment on disturbing but otherwise unconnected incidents grasp for a satisfactory explanation. According to a police officer quoted in the newspaper, the violence that took place in Adelaide over the New Year period was "generally alcohol-fuelled". Whilst the alcohol-soaked character of social life in Australia ironically contributes to an embarrassing level of anti-social behaviour, it does not alone explain the violence of recent times.

Do socio-economic circumstances alone offer a full explanation as to why more Australians are Howard's gun buyback program, the number of gun-related deaths has halved. Recent reports found that the one million firearms surrendered through the buyback program have effectively been replaced over the last decade by a similar number of imported guns, but this largely reflects a significant increase in population over the same period. As Andrew Leigh noted recently, per capita gun ownership has remained relatively stable over the past decade.

In a statement made shortly after the Newtown massacre in the United States, the executive director of the NRA blamed the violent content in video games and in mainstream films. Whilst it is evidently in the NRA's interests to decouple mass shootings and the lack of gun control, he made a fundamentally valid point about a tendency also common to Australia.

Two decades ago, a study published in a book titled *Big World, Small Screen; the Role of Television in American Society* suggested that by the time they reach high school, American children would have seen 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence on television. One imagines that these numbers would be comparable if the study had been conducted in Australia. Such images desensitise and also legitimise violence as a form

being stabbed, glassed or otherwise assaulted? According to Associate Professor Thomas W. Nielsen of the University of Canberra, violence and other forms of anti-social behaviour is increasingly seen in young people across all socio-economic groupings and demographics.

Decreasing or ineffective parental guidance has some impact on the behaviour of young Australians, but not all violent offenders are products of broken homes or uncaring parents. Australian courtrooms are not lacking for connected and caring parents who see their offspring in the dock and question what more they could have done for their children. Violence is an issue that implicates the whole of society.

Our national leaders are unfortunately silent on the issue, but others are happy to fill the void. Echoes of America's National Rifle Association (NRA) could be heard when Bob Katter was recently quoted in *The Australian* asserting that "there's something dreadfully sick in a country that is so trusting of its neighbours that it disarms its own people". The same article encapsulated Katter's belief that gun control is an example of 'do good... nannyism'.

Certain legal and regulatory 'intrusions' are necessary to achieve a common good. Since John of conflict resolution. Advances in technology now also allow for access to violent images through the internet and social media, as well as on increasingly realistic computer games.

Over 3000 studies conducted around the world have made a clear connection between violent behaviour and exposure to on-screen violence. Are young Australians becoming desensitised to violence? According to the Australian Institute of Criminology, the number of recorded assaults over the past decade has risen considerably, and the rate of increase is significantly greater for children under 15 years of age. If the entertainment industry is unwilling limit the level of violence that children can now so easily access, exposure must be carefully monitored by parents. Should governments also act, in the common good?

Perhaps it is not Dostoevsky who is able to confer a semblance of explanation but another Russian novelist, Alexandre Kuprin. Bruce Guthrie recently cited Kuprin's words to explain the depth of the problem we now face. "The horror," wrote Kuprin "is that there is no horror."

The senseless quality of violence in modern Australia should horrify. When it no longer shocks, the impetus for change is lost.

Adelaide Review, February 2013

Swedish firm strikes gold with Minecraft

IT takes 3000 employees for Zynga, the largest social-network game company in the world, to generate at least \$US150 million (\$143.9m) in annual operating profit.

From an office in Stockholm, a largely unknown company brought in more than half that sum. Its employee count: 29.

The company is Mojang, a development studio with one of the hottest games on the Internet.

The game is Minecraft, a kind of virtual Lego set that has become an obsession for players around the world. Its fans often dress up as characters from the video game.

Mojang has sold more than 20 million copies of Minecraft, which runs across modern smartphones, Xbox Live and standard personal computers. Sales occur digitally rather than through brick-and-mortar stores.

This has proved very good business for Mojang, located on a side street in Stockholm.

Last year the company earned about \$US90m before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation on revenue of \$US235m, according to the company.

By comparison, Zynga is expected to bring in Ebitda in the range of \$US152m to \$US162m on revenue of \$US1.09 billion to \$1.1 billion, according to its most recent earnings release.

Mojang was founded in 2010 under the guidance of Markus Persson, who as Minecraft's sole developer began selling the game on the internet.

The company has fielded multiple acquisition offers from larger video game businesses, as well as various inquiries for investment from venture-capital firms and others including former Facebook president Sean Parker, but so far hasn't taken any outside money.

A close analogue, Activision-Blizzard, has a similar sales model with its Diablo and World of Warcraft, though the latter game also requires a monthly subscription. Activision-Blizzard trades at an earnings multiple of about 14, so if Mojang were in that ballpark range, it would be valued at more than \$US1bn.

Rapid Minecraft customers use the game as a kind of virtual canvas, often recording their creations and posting those videos to YouTube. Users also frequently post online videos of fans dressed up in cardboard to

simulate the look of the player-controlled characters.

In the game, players take control of a nameless builder who has the ability to break down various objects depicted, such as rocks, trees and sand into raw materials. Players can then stack those materials in whatever fashion they like, or use them to craft new objects such as torches and pick axes. All the while they run the risk of being attacked by creatures or having their structures blown up by hissing green monsters called Creepers, possibilities that make players think strategically about how and where they build.

The game's outlet as a creativity tool appears to give it a longer lifespan than other games often based on sports or military themes that require yearly overhauls. Mojang seeks to keep Minecraft users engaged by releasing periodic updates to the game that introduce new enemies, resources and locales.

Thanks to the game's distinct low-resolution graphics, it is capable of running on smartphones, PCs and even in a Web browser without slowing down.

In April last year, about 50 per cent of the customers who had purchased the game were logging in over the course of a week, the company said. Mojang sells about 10,000 new copies of the PC/Mac version of Minecraft every day, and sold nearly 250,000 copies during the week starting December 24.

The game is currently among the top-grossing apps for Apple's App Store for both the iPhone and iPad. According to AppData, it has been among the top 10 best-grossing apps for the past 14 days. Minecraft has been resilient to so-called fast follows from other industry competitors, with the game on the market for several years without a successful clone in sight. Mojang has sold more than six million copies of the game's smartphone version.

Development costs are still low. Today, four people develop Minecraft for PCs, with two for the iPhone version. The rest are allocated to an Xbox version, customer service, business and other functions.

A spokesman for Mojang said Mr Persson is focusing on his next project, Ten to the C, a space-based adventure game.

MATTHEW LYNLEY

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The Australian, 5 February 2013

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