



4 March 2011

## Media Release

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### **MEDIA ALERT: US SUPREME COURT DECISION ON VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES DUE SOON**

The verdict on a landmark case in the US Supreme Court, on the right of the State of California to impose bans on the access of minors to violent computer games, is due soon.

The California case was supported by an Amicus Curiae (Friends of the Court) statement, which had been signed by over 100 international researchers with strong records of research into aggression, and aggression linked to media. This statement concluded:

‘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]

Three of the research scholars who signed the US statement (Prof Ed Donnerstein, Prof Douglas Gentile and Dr Wayne Warburton) presented evidence on violent media effects at the “Scared, sleepless and hostile” conference in Sydney Conference on March 1<sup>st</sup> with one of the speakers, Professor Donnerstein from the US saying, ‘the mass media are a contributor to increasing the risk of anti-social behavior in our youth’.

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 from Macquarie University 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 recent conference in Sydney has put the spotlight on the media research that reveals genuine impacts to children’s mental health’.

Prof Donnerstein explained that ‘The State of California wants to be able to impose penalties for selling or renting very violent video games to minors, as is the case with selling cigarettes and alcohol to minors. This is being opposed by the industry. He also notes a recent comparison by Prof Craig Anderson, one of the other authors of the Amicus Curiae statement, which indicates 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, ‘the Sydney conference, organised by the Australian Council on Children and the Media, 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, are 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 please visit [www.childrenandmedia.org.au](http://www.childrenandmedia.org.au) or call 08 8376 2111.

**For interviews** about the effects of frightening or violent media on children please call Dr Warburton on 02 9850 9643 or 9850 7257 ([wayne.warburton@mq.edu.au](mailto:wayne.warburton@mq.edu.au)).

**For further information** about the outcome of the US Supreme Court case contact Douglas Gentile USA 515 294 1472 ([dgentile@iastate.edu](mailto:dgentile@iastate.edu)); Prof Ed Donnerstein USA 520 621 2726 ([edonners@email.arizona.edu](mailto:edonners@email.arizona.edu) )

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### **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  
Pres: Elizabeth Handsley; Vice-Pres: Jane Roberts; Hon CEO: Barbara Biggins, OAM

## **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 9<sup>th</sup> 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."