



VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES AND DESENSITISATION: NEW RESEARCH REVIEW



A [new article](#) by longtime US researcher, [Jeanne Funk Brockmyer](#), finds that engaging in violent video games (VVG) desensitises the player, and blocks empathic responding, moral reasoning and prosocial behaviour. This in turn may increase aggression. The article adds to the growing body of research indicating that exposure to violent video games contributes towards desensitisation to violence. Brockmyer was a joint author along with Australia’s Wayne Warburton in the 2017 international study [Screen violence and youth behaviour](#) which concluded that “the evidence that violent screen media constitutes a causal risk factor for increased aggression is compelling. Modern social-cognitive theories of social behavior provide useful frameworks for understanding how and why these effects occur.”

Note: if you’d like to read more on this topic, here’s a link to a free copy of [Game On! Sensible Answers about Video Games and Media Violence \(2020\)](#).

SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY HOME



The latest film in the Spider-Man series is due for world-wide release on December 16/17. As we’ve come to expect, the film hasn’t yet been classified in Australia

nor rated in the US or UK. But the publicity has been out for months, with anticipation mounting. As usual, some of the promotion strategies have been aimed at the young, regardless of the fact that the film is likely to be classified M (not recommended under 15 years). The film also is likely to glamourise violence (i.e the hero is good at it, and is applauded/rewarded for using it - a risky model for children). So why have Adelaide’s Sunday Mail children’s pages (Nov 21) carried a Spider-Man:No Way Home colouring-in competition with prize packs that include free tickets? All this just adds to the myth that this film will be okay for the kids.

ACCM WANTS YOUR VIEWS ON ITS UNIQUE APPCENSUS APP PRIVACY CHECKS PAGES.

It’s time to tell us what you think. In June, ACCM launched its unique resource that enables parents to check which apps are collecting their children’s data and who’s receiving that data.

The checks were developed in partnership with the US-based AppCensus group. They show which Android apps may be risky, and each month analyses the current 50 most popular children’s apps.

We now have checked around 180 of these apps.

Have you tried out our checks?

Have a look [here](#) and [take our survey](#).

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ACCM receives 100% of what you spend.

Really big prizes include cars and a home. Ticket sales close on 24 February 2022 and the main prizes will be drawn on 3 March 2022.

[Here](#) is where you can buy your tickets.



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Guest editorial

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I keep seeing reports in the media that new findings show that violent media have no negative impacts on children, and that it is time to let that idea go. But is that true? Well, there are some very loud voices that say so, but in my mind those voices seem to be ignoring some very important facts.

First, in order for this to be true, you have to accept that violent media is a zone of exception where well established psychological processes do not apply. For example, you would have to accept that while educational media teaches, advertising media influences, and simulators (such as flying simulators) teach valuable skills, violent media alone has no impact on the way that children think, feel and behave. To me, this seems ridiculous.

For violent media to have no impact on children, then the following laws of psychology (amongst others) must not apply to it:

- associative learning (learning by associating one thing with another);
- operant learning (doing things more if they are rewarded and less if they are punished);
- social learning (learning from watching what others do; imitation through 'mirror neurons');
- the brain being an associative neural network that wires up every second of every day in response to what we experience, and that links together the representations of things that are linked in real life; and
- desensitisation (responding less to something the more we are exposed to it).

Really? The evidence for these processes is overwhelming and they underpin whole social systems such as education, parenting and therapy. For me, this alone makes the notion that violent media has no effect on children unsupported scientifically. The truth is that these processes are universal, and there are no zones of exception.

Second, the scientific evidence that violent media exposure has short- and long-term effects is huge and spans every key method of scientific enquiry, from longitudinal studies that have followed the same people for decades, to population studies, observational studies and carefully designed laboratory experiments. Increases in aggressive thoughts, feelings and behaviour, decreases in empathy and prosocial behaviour, and desensitisation to the suffering of others, are all well-documented. The amount of evidence is not trivial - thousands of studies across many hundreds of thousands of participants. It is true that some studies find no effects, most notably by those who oppose the idea that media

violence can have any negative effects and set out to prove it, but across the literature as a whole, these studies are in a minority. And in any facet of science where there are well established effects, some studies don't find them (usually due to differences in samples or methodological issues). In my own laboratory we find media violence effects over and over.



There have been numerous reviews of the research by highly regarded bodies such as the US National Institute of Mental Health, the US National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, The US Surgeon General, The American Academy of Pediatrics, The International Society for Research on Aggression, the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues and the American Psychological Association among others. All concluded that media violence exposure can impact children negatively.

Third, this debate has seen some pretty outrageous misrepresentations in the media. For example, no respectable media violence scholar claims that media violence effects are huge or are sufficient to make a child violent. Like most effects in psychology, media violence effects are reasonably small, can accumulate over time, likely effect some people more than others across time, and impact behaviour in the context of all the other factors a child is exposed to. For example if a child has some exposure to violent media but comes from a warm loving family where conflicts are dealt with well, the effects of the violent media are likely to be minimal. Media violence scholars take a risk factor approach: for a person to be more than minimally aggressive, or to be violent, there has to be a confluence of risk factors for aggression, alongside few protective factors to offset those risk factors. Media violence exposure is seen as just one of many risk factors, but, crucially, is one of the few we can do something about.

It is easy to be misled in a debate where there are so many conflicting claims made. However, in my view, both commonsense and science tell us that exposure to violent media must have, and does have, some effect on children. A healthy media diet is more important now than ever - consume a moderate amount, consume more of the healthier media (educational, prosocial etc.) and less of the unhelpful media (violent, antisocial, fake news etc.), and make sure media is suitable for the child's age. ACCM reviews can help here. ■

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International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, Nov 2021, Vol. 18 (21)

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The role of mental well-being and perceived parental supportiveness in adolescents' problematic internet use: moderation analysis.
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SCREEN TIME

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Social media use and its impact on adolescent mental health: An umbrella review of the evidence.
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Associations between social media, bedtime technology use rules, and daytime sleepiness among adolescents: cross-sectional findings from a nationally representative sample.
JMIR Mental Health, Sep 23 2021, Vol. 8 (9)

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Paediatric Respiratory Reviews, Dec 2021, Vol. 40 73-79

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Pre-sleep social media use does not strongly disturb sleep: a sleep laboratory study in healthy young participants.
Sleep Medicine, Nov 2021, Vol. 87, 191-202

VIOLENCE

Brockmyer, J. Funk
Desensitization and Violent Video Games: Mechanisms and Evidence.
Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, Jan 2022, Vol. 31(1) p121-132

US | COMMON SENSE MEDIA'S 2021 STATE OF KIDS' PRIVACY REPORT

[This](#) provides a comprehensive look at the privacy policies and practices of hundreds of technology-related applications and services intended for kids and students. The team found that most products are putting kids' privacy at risk.

Courtesy: Common Sense Media

US | BILL AIMS TO IMPROVE PRIVACY PROTECTIONS

The Kids Internet Design and Safety Act would expand online protections for children beyond what the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) currently provides. Read more [here](#).

Courtesy: Lexology.

EU | METHODS FOR OBTAINING PARENTAL CONSENT: METHODS FOR ASSESSMENTS

In their study "[Methods for Obtaining Parental Consent and Maintaining Children Rights](#)", Simone van der Hof and Sanne Ouburg of the Center for Law and Digital Technologies (eLaw), Leiden University, have mapped existing methods for age verification and obtaining parental (or guardian) consent for the purposes of processing personal data of children in various apps and games used by children. They have assessed how the age verification and parental consent methods in these digital services can be assessed based on the data protection and children's rights framework. Further commentary [here](#).

Courtesy: LSE Parenting for a Digital Future.

US | APPLE CAN TRACK TOO?

Android apps have been criticised for tracking, but Apple phones are tracking you too, [say researchers Talal Haj Bakry and Tommy Mysk](#). They warn that *Facebook reads accelerometer data all the time. If you don't allow Facebook access to your location, the app can still infer your exact location only by grouping you with users matching the same vibration pattern that your phone accelerometer records.*

Courtesy: Forbes.com

US | OHIO AG SUES FACEBOOK OVER MISLEADING KIDS

The lawsuit alleges that between April 29 and Oct. 21, Facebook and some senior executives violated federal security law by misleading shareholders about how its products can harm children. It also alleges that Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and other company officials knew they were making false statements about the safety, security and privacy of its platforms. Read more [here](#).

Courtesy: UPI.com

US | SCREEN TIME USE AMONG US ADOLESCENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The mean total daily screen use was 7.70 hours per day. This is higher than prepandemic estimates (3.8 h/d) from the same cohort at baseline (with some qualifications). The impacts of this [are discussed](#).

Courtesy: Jama Network

AUS & UK | BODY DISSATISFACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE

[A prospective study](#) among adolescent boys and girls found that social comparisons mediated the relationships over time, whereby higher social media use predicted higher comparisons, which predicted lower body satisfaction. The reverse direction was also found. Gender invariance indicates that prevention aimed at reducing comparisons may be suitable for boys and girls.

Courtesy: Sage Journals

UK | DIGITAL MEDIA AND CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH : A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE EVIDENCE

With 30 expert contributors spanning a range of disciplines including psychology, education and communications, as well as young people's own perspectives, [this book](#) dispels some of the myths that surround young people's use of digital media and covers important topics ranging from safeguarding, to digital citizenship and the fear of missing out.

Courtesy: Sage Publications.

US | WHAT DISNEY HAS IN MIND

Parents pay for Disney+ because it can be relied on to entertain their kids without the risk of potentially exposing them to "adult" content. Not surprisingly, Disney executives are now engaged in "heated debate" about expanding into wider more adult content to [boost subscriptions](#).

Courtesy: Media Post

US | SANTA'S TOP TOY SELLERS ARE INFLUENCERS

"It used to be marketing in the kids space and toys was fairly predictable," said Laura Henderson, Executive VP of marketing for the Spin Master toy company. But that's changed with Spin Master using influencers in its marketing plans for numerous toys this holiday season, [says Forbes mag.](#)

Courtesy: Forbes.com

SWEDEN & US | RESEARCHERS CALL FOR BRANDING OF KIDFLUENCERS

[This analysis](#) reveals a company's strategic use of legacy media industry power, networks, and expertise to transform YouTube stars into global brands through the creation of toy, clothing, and lifestyle product lines across several industries.

Courtesy: Sage Journals

EU | PROFESSIONALS WANT EU TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM FOOD ADS

A coalition of European health, medical, consumer and family organisations has called on the European Union to adopt legislation to protect children from the 'harmful impacts' of the 'widespread, ubiquitous and insidious' [marketing of nutritionally poor food](#).

Courtesy: Food Navigator

US | TRAUMA AND YOUNG BRAINS

[New research](#) finds that individual differences in the response in a key brain region involved in detecting threats—the amygdala—predicted the degree to which viewing storm-related media coverage led children to develop PTS symptoms. The news story [here](#).

Courtesy: Florida International University.