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Spring March 11th, 2013

# Brainstorm: Violence, Videogames, and Learning to Say “I Don’t Know” – Part 2

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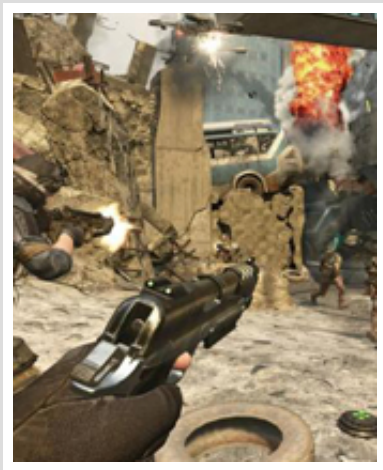
Medina, John J. Ph.D., "Brainstorm: Violence, Videogames, and Learning to Say “I Don’t Know” – Part 2” (2013). *Brainstorm*. 27.  
<https://digitalcommons.spu.edu/brainstorm/27>

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# Violence, Videogames, and Learning to Say “I Don’t Know” – Part 2

By: John Medina | Posted: March 11, 2013

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This is the second (and final) installment in a series examining the effects of videogames on aggressive behavior in the people who play them.

We just finished looking at a study suggesting that violent videogames represent a deep, causal risk factor for inciting violent behavior in kids — a loving parent’s worst nightmare. We are about to look at a second article, published right after the first, which says exactly the opposite.

The title of this second article says it all:

*“Much ado about nothing: the misestimation and overinterpretation of violent video game effects in eastern and western nations: comment on Anderson et al.”*

The research paper was a systematic review — a tear-down would be a more appropriate description — of the various studies and analyses cited in the C.A. Anderson *et al* paper (the one that said there was a link). There were methodological errors in the research, this new paper declared. There were biases built into certain cited (but unpublished) studies in the meta-analysis. There was no standardization of the word “aggression” throughout the analysis. The list of faults goes on and on.

The conclusion? Even if there were associations between game exposure and violence in young males (which would still not prove causality, by the way), the relationship was weak at best, and maybe nonexistent. The r-value, a statistical measure used to evaluate the linear relationship between two variables, was too feeble to detect anything other than a halting association. The paper intimates that even this might be too generous an evaluation.

The lead author in this second study [wrote a letter](#) to *The New York Times* in the wake of NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre’s comments, stating:

There is a large pool of data on media violence and aggression, but the findings have been inconsistent and the studies tend to be deeply flawed ... the evidence does not suggest that media violence contributes to a public health crisis — far from it.

“I knew it,” certain citizens in our culture might decry, especially those who love the videogames to begin with, or who are involved in the industry, or both. And even if you were waffling in the intellectual center of this boxing ring, this second study might be enough to push you into the “not so fast” corner: This is scientific evidence, after all.

So what are we to do about such contradictory information, besides learning to duck the punches?

If the issue were “settled law,” there would probably be fewer fighters and fewer punches thrown. And therein lies the problem — and also, oddly, a potential source of hope. The real truth is that we do not yet know what effects — if any — videogames have on the aggressive tendencies of the human brain. This line of work is profoundly in need of higher quality work, deeper analysis, cooler heads.

In recognition of this fact, an executive order was issued to the [Centers for Disease Control](#) lifting the 17-year ban on basic research seeking to understand the causes and prevention of gun violence. That’s reassuring, especially if the research gets properly funded. Somewhere, somebody has had the courage to say “I don’t know.” Now we just have to take off our boxing gloves, put on our lab coats, and get back to work.

## Reference

*Ferguson CJ \* Kilburn J (2010)*  
*Much ado about nothing: the misestimation and overintrepetition of violent video game effects in eastern and western nations: comments on Anderson et al*  
*Psych Bull 136(2): 174 – 178*

## Comments

### ONE COMMENT TO “VIOLENCE, VIDEOGAMES, AND LEARNING TO SAY “I DON’T KNOW” – PART 2”



Melode Mariner says:

May 6, 2013 at 1:26 pm

We have had a violent culture forever. Children used to witness public hangings not that long ago. Is it possible that some children are vulnerable while others are not? Can playing violent computer games decrease personal violence for some, and for others increase violence? My guess would be experiencing personal violence in the family and serious neglect is a much stronger indicator.