

Public Abstract

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Graduation Term:SS 2010

Department:Psychology

Degree:MA

Title:The Impact of Violent Video Games on Executive Functioning and Aggression

Much of the literature on media violence suggests that violent video games cause increases in aggression. However, the specific cognitive mechanisms underlying these increases, at least in the current literature, remain elusive. Moreover, how violent video games affect particular individuals (and not others) also is underspecified in the violent video game literature. The current experiment was designed to further investigate these issues. In this experiment, participants were asked to report various personality characteristics (e.g., trait anger, trait aggressiveness), play either a violent or nonviolent video game and then engage in a task offering participants the opportunity to behave aggressively first or a cognitively demanding task during which physiological responses were recorded first (all participants completed both tasks). Results indicated that angry participants behaved the most aggressively, but only if they first played a violent video game. Additionally, participants higher in trait physical aggressiveness showed poorer regulatory control on high-conflict trials during the cognitive task. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to demonstrate that violent video games increase physical aggression for angry individuals and that violent video games impair physiological indices of cognitive control for physically aggressive individuals. These results suggest that exposure to violent video games affect different people differently, both physiologically and behaviorally.