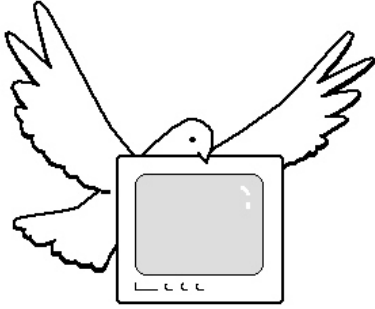


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«Scientists Unanimous About the Dramatic Effects of Violent Entertainment on Children»

Letter to the Editor of the Toronto Star, from Quebec City, January 30, 2006.

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(On January 27 2006, The Toronto Star edited a letter from Sean Pape, from London Ontario.)

In a letter published by the Star on January 27, Sean Pape wrote that psychologists have intensely studied the effects of violent content on gamers and found that « playing violent games does not increase violent or criminal behaviour. » That statement has proven to be untrue. Health professionals are unanimous to condemn the pathological effects of entertainment violence. They also encourage greater public and parental awareness of the harms of violent entertainment, for the sake of children. On July 26, 2000, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry and the American Medical Association presented a joint statement before the U.S. Congressional Public Health Summit. (1) They declared that some from the entertainment industry maintain that

- 1) violent programming is harmless because no studies prove a connection between violent entertainment and aggressivity, and
- 2) young people know that television, movies, and video games are simply fantasy. « Unfortunately, they are wrong on both counts. »

« Well over 1000 studies - including reports from the U.S. Surgeon General's office and the National Institute of Mental Health - point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children. » According to these health professionals, controversy no longer exists. They write: « Viewing entertainment violence increases aggressive values and behaviours, particularly in children. The effects are measurable and long-lasting. » It leads heavy viewers to emotional desensitization toward real life violence. (2) One of the most impressive studies tracked the impact of television exposure on violence among more than 700 young people over 17 years. Teenagers and young adults who watch even as little as an hour of television a day are more likely to get into fights, commit assaults or engage in other types of violence later in life. The more they watch, the more likely they will later become violent. This study is the first to show that adults are affected as surely as children. Researchers mentioned: « If the study had examined violent programming alone, the link would have been more dramatic. »

About Videogames

Preliminary studies about videogames indicate that the negative impact may be even more severe than that TV violence. Entertainment violence may not be the sole nor the most important factor contributing to school bullying, youth aggression, anti-social attitudes, and criminal violence. Family breakdown, peer influences, the availability of weapons, and other factors may all contribute to these problems. Cultivating Doubts

When publishing a letter carrying doubts about the proven damages caused by violent entertainment, the media carry heavy responsibility.

The letter published by the Star also says : « Psychologists have championed the potential in many popular games to develop puzzle-solving, planning, risk-management, and multi-tasking skills. » The quote applies to far less than 20% of all videogames. First Person Shooter videogames, the most common and damaging of all games, cause a lot more problems than benefits. Most videogames marketed to youth (well over 75% of them) train players to react "without thinking". Dave

Grossman, retired psychologist from the U.S. Army, wrote 2 books (4) in which he described how FPS games condition young players in a way similar to Pavlov's experience with his dog. The Russian scientist proved that his dog would produce saliva after hearing a bell announcing his meal, even when no food was given. Grossman showed that "videogames give kids and teens the skill, the will and the thrill to kill".

It is all citizens' responsibility, including media's, to tell the public about what happens to a young human brain when you reward him for shooting at neighbours or driving a car over pedestrians. Will he become a killer or a mad driver ? No, not necessarily. But studies have shown that his brain cells connections will be affected. His frontal lobe might even suffer atrophy. « The brain's frontal lobe plays an important role in the repression of anti-social impulses; it is associated with memory, learning and emotion. A lack of stimulation in this area before the age of 20 prevents the neurons from thickening and connecting, thereby impairing the brain's ability to control impulses such as violence and aggression. » (5)

Most parents lack information concerning the hundreds of studies about violent entertainment. This has nothing to do with myths about song lyrics from the sixties, but a lot about bringing scientific knowledge to parents.

Dr Brad Bushman, professor of psychology at Iowa State University, wrote a commentary in the journal Science.

"The correlation between violent media and aggression is larger than the effect that wearing a condom has on decreasing the risk of HIV, larger than the correlation between exposure to lead and decreased IQ levels in kids, larger than the effects of exposure to asbestos, larger than the effect of secondhand smoke on cancer."

Jacques Brodeur, Consultant in the fields of Violence Prevention and Media Education

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1) Joint Statement by 5 health promotion organisations:

<http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/jstmtevc.htm>

(2) Fred Molitor, "The effect of Media Violence on Children's Toleration of Real-Life Aggression," Southampton Institute of Higher Education, UK, Presentation at the International Conference on Violence in the Media, New York City, October 3-4, 1994.

(3) Shankar Vedantam, Washington Post Staff Writer, Friday, March 29, 2002, Page A01. Also reported Michael Stroh in the Baltimore Sun, on March 29, 2002.

(4) Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, www.killology.org «Stop Teaching Our Kids To Kill, A Call To Action».

(5) "Computer Games Can Stunt Kids' Brains," *Daily Telegraph*, August 20, 2001.