

Talking About Games and Violence

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The GDC logo consists of the letters 'GDC' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letters are positioned on a dark blue background that features a stylized, multi-pointed star or triangle shape.

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Social science research in general has been going through a rough time lately...

More social science studies just failed to replicate. Here's why this is good.

What scientists learn from failed replications: how to do better science.

By Brian Resnick | @B_resnick | brian@vox.com | Aug 27, 2018, 11:00am EDT

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Psychologists are still wondering: "What's going on in there?" They're just doing it with greater rigor. | Enis Aksoy/Getty



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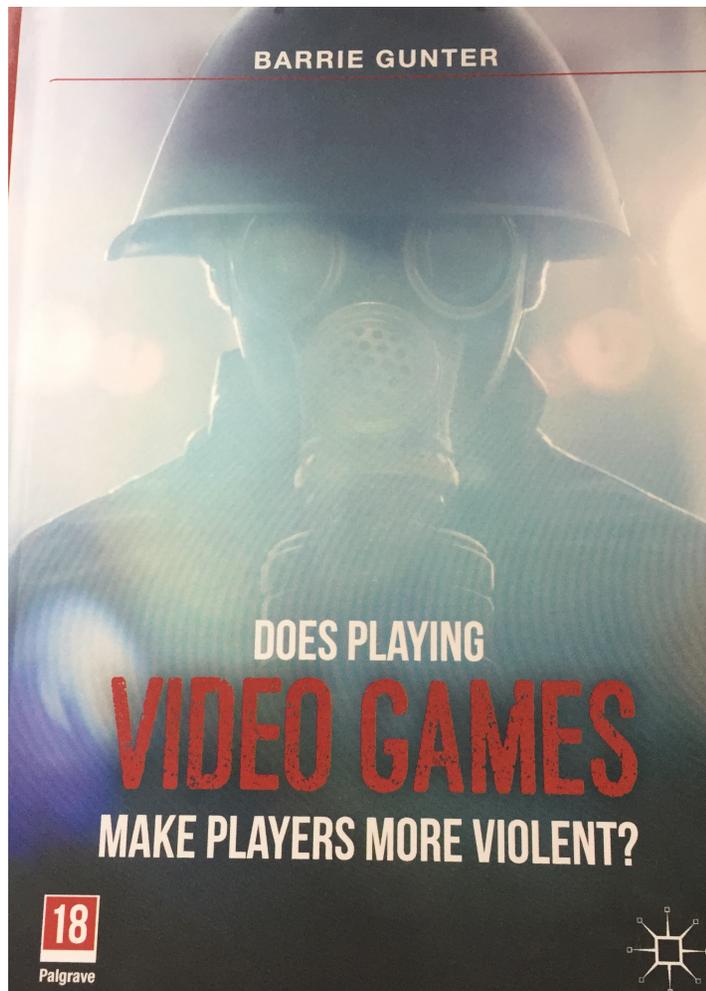
Remember the marshmallow test?



yeah.



Looking for a
comprehensive review of
research on this topic?



- Barrie Gunter, 2016, *Does Playing Video Games Make Players More Violent?* Palgrave Macmillan

“Video game playing does not occur in either a social vacuum, or in a setting devoid of other potentially violent media experiences. Separating out the effects of mediated from non-mediated violence experiences is difficult enough. Going one step further to differentiate between the effects of violent video game exposure as distinct from those of violent movies watched in a movie theatre, or violent programmes seen on television, is even more challenging.” (Gunter, p. 160)

Where did studies of games and violence come from?

- Payne Fund studies of movies in the 1930s
- Television studies in the 1980s
 - Cultivation Model (Mean and Scary World hypothesis)
- Tied to moral panics (hi Lindsay!)
- Early research often lumped violent 'media' all together: films, television, games

Early games work

- Surveys
- Naturalistic observation
- Experiments

Early games work – Problems

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- **Surveys – No Causality**
- Naturalistic observation
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Early games work – Problems

- Surveys – No Causality
- **Naturalistic observation – Little control over setting, variables**
- Experiments

Early games work – Problems

- Surveys – No Causality
- Naturalistic observation – Little control over setting, variables
- Experiments – Artificial Setting + Effect Time

More Problems

- Studies can examine violent **thoughts**, violent **feelings**, and violent **behaviors**, which are not all the same thing

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- Studies can examine violent **thoughts**, violent **feelings**, and violent **behaviors**, which are not all the same thing
- Studies use different measures and definitions of **what aggression is**
- Ethical concerns about using/testing actual aggression can result in weird substitutes



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Two Major Theories/Approaches

- General Aggression Model (Craig Anderson, et al)
 - Focuses on cognition (thoughts) as installing scripts for behavior
- Catalyst Model (Chris Ferguson)
 - Finds major faults with GAM
 - Focuses more heavily on certain personality, environmental factors

Everyone agrees it is not a simple issue

It can depend on a player's neighborhood, family life, school performance, friends, personality, social history, media diet, gender, mental health, etc etc

But what about those
meta-analyses of all the
studies?

Multiple (and competing!) Meta-Analyses have been done, but

- Garbage in, garbage out
- Publication Bias
- Differences in interpretation of results
- No clear cut consensus among all researchers

Getting more nit-picky

- Not all games are violent
 - Players of violent games aren't always engaged in violence within them

Getting more nit-picky

- Much of the research, including the Gunter book, conflates research on players of different ages
 - A 5-year old is very different from a 17 year old 'child'

Getting more nit-picky

- It is unclear how many studies actually included girls and women (who often but not always show smaller 'effects')

Another way to approach
the issue is to ask...

What do people do *with*
games?

Rather than 'what to
games do *to* people?'