Talking About Games and Violence

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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

Psychologists are still wondering: “What’s going on in there?” They’re just doing it with greater rigor. | Enis Alksoy/Getty
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 – 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 use different measures and definitions of what aggression is
- Ethical concerns about using/testing actual aggression can result in weird substitutes
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?’