

**Rachel Stanton**

**Project report**  
**STS390, “Media, war and peace”**

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**Science, Technology & Society**  
**University of Wollongong**

The report has two parts.

1. A response pack for an actual organisation. This is not an official document and does not necessarily represent the views of the organisation.

*Rachel Stanton's* response pack for EB Games has three components:

- a poster, on the next page
- a cover for the container holding a CD with the slide show, on the following page
- a slide show, in a separate file.

2. A dialogue between two students discussing the project. This dialogue is fictional. Pseudonyms were used so that the marker, Brian Martin, would not know the identity of student authors.

*Rachel Stanton's* dialogue starts following the poster and CD cover.

*Do they make a child more aggressive?*

*Are there  
warning signs?*

*How young is too young?*

## Violent Video Games

**What *are* they doing to *your* child?**



Ask

***EB*GAMES™**

For information every  
parent should know.

**It's *not* worth *not* knowing...**

*Is the evidence  
conclusive?*

*Have violent crimes ever  
happened as a result of  
videogames before?*

*What should  
I do??*

# The Effects of Violent Video Games



Is there a link between virtual violence and real world aggression?

What employees of **EB GAMES™** Need to be aware of, and the questions you need to be able to answer.

The Effects of Violent Video Games: Student no. 3108442

Concern is mounting within society over the plausible and detrimental effects that violent videogames are having upon today's children; the damage participating in simulated acts of aggression is having on the character of a child and whether a tendency towards aggression occurs due to excessively participating in a virtual realm of violence.

As a result, many are calling on the government and the industry to introduce greater restrictions and tougher censorship regarding the content and subsequent sale of videogames.

This pack contains information all employees should be equipped with. Information that will allow you to assist parents in making an informed decision



For the use of **EB GAMES™** employees only

Mary: I'm familiar with the company, EB Games, you chose to compose a response pack for. But why did you choose EB Games and not other videogame outlets such as Game traders, Kmart or music stores?

John: Because EB Games is Australia and New Zealand's largest videogame retailer with over 250 stores located in Australia and over 30 in New Zealand,<sup>1</sup> And being the biggest retailer, EB Games would naturally have the greatest access to the greatest number of customers.

Mary: On the website here it says they "hold a passion for gaming, a commitment to our industry" - they should have a vested interest in knowing all the queries about their industry – the effects of violent videogames being one of them.

John: Exactly. EB Games employee Adam said he's not supplied with any information about the possible effects of violent video games, and as an employee "it would be handy to know what all the hype is about, I mean, being in the industry, I guess I should be."

Mary: And the industry does come under a lot of fire for the effects violent videogames have on a child's behaviour.

John: In light of the concerns what it is exactly that is wrong with children participating in simulated violence when playing videogames? Is it the consequences of playing such videogames, the disrespect for your opponent or the damage done to the character of the person actually engaged in acts of simulated violence?<sup>2</sup>

Mary: I'd say the latter, though, tackling aggression and whether violent videogames have a causal relationship with aggression in children was a topic with a lot of inconclusive studies.

John: Tell me about it, there seemed to be a wealth of information but a lot of speculation within it. It's such a hard thing to accurately determine whether media effects occurs or not.

Mary: There seems to be a lot of information concerning television violence and how this increases aggressive behaviour in viewers.

John: Yet when it comes to videogame violence and subsequent aggression... not so much. But that's why I was interested in researching this area. I find it hard to believe that videogames have no effect, or that the direct effects have not been found.

Mary: Well Dale, the 22year old you interviewed, didn't seem to think they had an effect on him.

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<sup>1</sup> *EB Games*, <http://www.ebgames.com.au/home/home.cfm>, [accessed online 10/10/2008].

<sup>2</sup> M. McCormick, 'Is it wrong to play violent videogames?', *Ethics and Information Technology*, V.3, no.4, 2001 p.277 – 287.

John: I know, he said “they’re just videogames, they’re not real. Those who play violent videogames should realise this, and they shouldn’t be under the age of fifteen anyway.

John: But what he said is hard to fathom because during a game the player assumes the point of view of the shooter, which I would have thought would lead to greater character identification (compared to television icons) and therefore copycat aggression. Also the player is actively participating rather than engaging in passive observation, not to mention that repetition increases learning and rewards also increase what someone learns.<sup>3</sup>

Mary: What someone learns from a videogame has to be related to age. The older someone who plays videogames is, the more inclined they would be to take what they are engaging with, with a grain of salt. So would it be enough to suffice that “there appears to be a developmental link – the younger a child the more likely he or she is to be affected by violence.”<sup>4</sup>

John: Well Hawkins (77) did discover that there is a huge increase in a child’s reality perception around the age of eight.<sup>5</sup> These findings were further exemplified by Provenzo’s (91) research in which it was found that “children as old as 9 or 10 years of age perceived the images they interacted with on the screen as real.”<sup>6</sup>

Mary: Which does seem rather shocking considering what Adam, an employee of EB Games interviewed, reported that he has witnessed parents buying MA15+ rated games such as “Grand Theft Auto” for children clearly under fifteen, “they were buying this game for a 7, 8, 9 or even 10 year old...” - from the research, this is too young. Surely people realise the ratings on the games are there for a reason!

John: Consider the message games such as *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is sending today’s children. In this game it is acceptable to brutally bash women, not only this but it is a rewarded act of violence. You can buy an endless assortment of weapons in which the man who sells them to you comments upon your weaponry choice; ‘Perfect for Killing’ and ‘Take it, hold it, love it.’ Furthermore when eventually arrested you are encouraged to bribe the police to get out of jail. This game sends morally damaging messages to children; it is acceptable to disrespect authority figures such as the police and more than acceptable to bash women, which if the research conducted is correct, would be detrimental to a child’s moral character up until the ages of nine or ten where they still perceive that which they see on the screen as real.

Mary: The scary thing is that videogames are increasingly becoming a part of children’s media demands - as a result the questions about whether or not they are good for children continue to rise.

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<sup>3</sup> Col. D. Grossman, ‘Teaching Kids to Kill’, *National Forum*, V.80, no.4, 2000,

<sup>4</sup> Griffiths, M., “Life: Letters: Young at risk from video violence,” *The Guardian*, Manchester (UK), August 12, p.10, 2004, Blackwell Publishing, *International Encyclopedia of Communication*.

<sup>5</sup> G. Unsworth and T. Ward, ‘Videogames and Aggressive Behaviour’, *Australian Psychologist*, V.36, no.3, 2001, p.187.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p.188.

John: The implication of games in school shootings has led to hearings, government investigations, and legislative proposals.

Mary: One case where a law suit went before the courts was concerning the violent acts of 14 year old Michael Carneal.

John: He shot eight kids from eight shots at his school in Kentucky - without having fired a real gun before!<sup>7</sup>

Mary: And the parents of the victims blamed violent videogames?

John: Well how else do they explain such remarkable accuracy?

Mary: Where would he have learnt to fire a gun if it wasn't for arcades and videogames?

John: That's just it. From his "training" in videogames as it was alleged by Colonel David Grossman. Carneal underwent the same desensitising, operant conditioning that military personnel undergo upon enlistment.

[They are trained] to fire at realistic, man – shaped silhouettes that pop up in their field of view. That is the stimulus. The conditioned response is to shoot the target, and then it drops. Later, when they are in combat and somebody pops up with a gun, reflexively they will shoot and shoot to kill.<sup>8</sup>

Mary: Which is why you choose this case study for your response pack because EB Games sell videogames containing such qualities, and because the courts have given a definitive answer to the question of whether violent videogames made Michael Carneal unleash his aggression in school that day.

John: And the court ruled in favour of the videogame proprietors, the manufacturers of violent videogames had no way of knowing Michael Carneal would do what he did.<sup>9</sup>

Mary: The courts believe violent videogames do not have a causal relationship with players who engage in violent crime.

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<sup>7</sup> Col. D. Grossman, 'Teaching Kids to Kill', op.cit. p.85

<sup>8</sup> Ibid p.85.

<sup>9</sup> The Associated Press, "Federal judge dismisses lawsuit against movie, video game makers," *Freedomforum.org*, 04/07/2000, <http://images.google.com.au/imgres?imgurl=http://www.freedomforum.org/graphics/photos/2000/4/carneal.michael.1-15-98.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp%3FdocumentID%3D12139&h=200&w=200&sz=18&hl=en&start=3&usg=-Tjy7XsJyGmxtcyBSK8kKwSkbEU=&tbnid=hDOuh4P0OhuSWM:&tbnh=104&tbnw=104&prev=/images%3Fq%3DMichael%2BCarneal%26gbv%3D2%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DG>, [accessed online 16/10/2008].

John: But some studies instead propagate that a correlation can be found between simulated aggressive acts and real life aggression.

John: The research by Kutner and Olson did show a link between children playing mature-rated games and aggressive behaviour. “the researchers found that 51 per cent of boys who played M-rated games...had been in a fight in the past year. That compared to 28 per cent non-gamers... the results for girls mirrored the findings, 40 per cent of those who played M-rated games had been in a fight in the past year, compared to just 14 per cent for non-M players”<sup>10</sup>

Mary: But it proves a correlation, not a causation, so it is still unclear whether violent games encourage aggression or whether aggressive kids like videogames, or if other factors affect both.

John: That’s it, from the research the link between violent video games and violent crime is that aggressive individuals actively seek out media models for ways to act out aggressive acts but not a reason for committing the crime.<sup>11</sup>

Mary: Violent videogames act as a stylistic catalyst.<sup>12</sup>

John: Exactly, the children do not passively receive games – they bring their own experiences and knowledge into their interpretations.<sup>13</sup>

Mary: And because the law can not protect children from harmful content any more than they already do with classification symbols and codes of practice, the onus of responsibility ultimately lies with the parent.

John: Yes, parents have a number of questions about the content of the videogames they buy their children and they need to know who they can approach to ask, like when interviewed mother Lorraine asked where she could find out information about the effects of violent videogames.

Mary: Hence the poster you composed to complement the response pack.

John: What better place to acquire information than where you purchase the games - this way information is easily accessible if parents have questions and know that EB Games

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<sup>10</sup> “Violent video games don't create killers: research”, *ABC News*, [http://images.google.com.au/imgres?imgurl=http://www.abc.net.au/reslib/200804/r245826\\_1003692.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/05/09/2239780.htm&h=550&w=840&sz=55&hl=en&start=123&usq=\\_ajpfkw-YbzIBEW1GV9taNQAs\\_C8=&tbnid=CBR1za\\_cUA6DCM:&tbnh=95&tbnw=145&prev=/images?q=kids+playing+video+games&start=120&gbv=2&ndsp=20&hl=en&sa=N](http://images.google.com.au/imgres?imgurl=http://www.abc.net.au/reslib/200804/r245826_1003692.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/05/09/2239780.htm&h=550&w=840&sz=55&hl=en&start=123&usq=_ajpfkw-YbzIBEW1GV9taNQAs_C8=&tbnid=CBR1za_cUA6DCM:&tbnh=95&tbnw=145&prev=/images?q=kids+playing+video+games&start=120&gbv=2&ndsp=20&hl=en&sa=N), [accessed online 04/10/2008].

<sup>11</sup> Ferguson, C.J., et.al, “Violent Video Games and Aggression: Causal Relationship or Byproduct of Family Violence and Intrinsic Violence Motivation?” *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, p.19.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> DaVane, B., Squire, K.D., “The Meaning of Race and Violence in Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas,” *Games and Culture*, V.3, no.3-4, 2008, Sage Publications Online.

employees are equipped with the information to make them all the more informed from seeing the poster displayed in store.

Mary: Now I know you gathered your information from textbooks, journal articles, websites and your interviews with employees, mothers and a game player himself. But how did you know what to include in your response pack?

John: Of course the response pack could become overwhelming, if I was too include far too much information, but I did try to strike the right balance of equipping the EB Games employees with enough information so they could deliver an informed response to customer queries. Also each frame of the presentation is introduced with a heading, a question I myself was asked so hopefully this meant that what the target audience of videogames wants to know, EB Games will have the answers.

Mary: I can't help but think of what that judge Harry Edwards said that you were quoting to me earlier though, that;

I believe, in my gut, that there is no doubt that the trash our children see as "entertainment" adversely affects their future, either because they mimic what they see or become the potential victims of a society littered with immorality and too much callous disregard for human life.<sup>14</sup>

John: I know, and to find no definitive answer is troubling. What is certain is that parents need to actively seek information about their child's entertainment, be that videogames as is the subject here. What is also certain is that the industry needs to be socially responsible and exhaust all means to ensure this takes place. Introducing a response pack for all employees to become accustomed with is the first step.

WORDS: 1694

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<sup>14</sup> S. Bok, *Mayhem: Violence as Public Entertainment*, Perseus Books Reading Mass, 1998 p.124 – 125.



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