

Continuing to fight the stigma around violence

During the 1990s, video games were stigmatised by some politicians, commentators and parts of the media as a cause for real-world violence. Unfortunately, this still happens even today. However, the overwhelming scientific consensus over decades of research is that there is no link between games and real-world violence or aggression. Regardless, we continue to support the role of the Australian and New Zealand classification schemes so that children are not exposed to content that is not age appropriate.

What does the science say about the links between video games and violence?

Whether there is a link between video games and real world violence has been one of the most studied areas in media, and decades of research show there isn't one. One of the most definitive studies ever done on this topic was published by the Oxford Internet Institute, within the University of Oxford, in 2019. This study interviewed over 1,000 British adolescent participants, and an equal number of their carers, and found no relationship between the amount of time spent playing video games and aggressive behaviour in teenagers. Research undertaken by the Australian Government in 2017 found that interactivity in video games even seemed to reduce the impact of violence compared to film, possibly because of player agency and empathy for the character.

Are attitudes finally changing around violence in the media?

Thankfully, things do seem to be improving. While we still see some politicians and commentators talk about the unproven link between violence and video games, discussion of this topic has encouragingly become better, potentially because so many parents, politicians, and members of the community today have grown up with games and are much more informed about them. One of the most striking examples of this shift in attitudes is the Australian Government's views on *Mortal Kombat*. From once setting up an inquiry about the original game in the early 1990's, it has more recently invested in and celebrated the filming in South Australia of a movie adaptation.

Is classification still effective in helping children to avoid violent content?

That's one of the things it's designed to do, and it works well. The classification systems in both Australia and New Zealand ensure that the level of violence in video games is assessed as a key part of the ratings process. Violence is similarly assessed for video games that are classified through the International Age Rating Coalition (IARC) classification tool. To support age ratings on video games, all major gaming consoles and devices have family controls, settings and tools that enable parents and carers to set upper age limits for the kinds of games that their children can play. Finally, while there has traditionally been a belief about games being gory, this simply is not true. Of the 316 games that were classified by the Australian Classification Board in 2019-20, most were classified G or PG and fewer than a quarter were classified M. Just 15 per cent were classified MA15+, and only 13 video games in total were classified R18 +. The fact is that video games are an incredibly diverse and multi-genre artform and there are games to suit everyone.

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