What's the psychological effect of violent video games on children?

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(Medical Xpress) -- This week, the United States Supreme Court overturned a California law banning the sale or rental of violent video games to minors. But can a child's behavior be directly influenced by playing a violent video game? On balance, psychological scientists think so.

According to Brad Bushman, a communications and psychology professor at Ohio State University, the link between video games and aggressive behavior is clear: "381 studies have been conducted on 130,295 participants around the world." Bushman says that these studies provide evidence the violent video games can lead to "an increase in aggressive thoughts, angry feelings, physiological arousal, including increased heart rate, and aggressive behavior. They also decrease helping behavior and feelings of empathy for others."

But Christopher Ferguson, a psychologist at Texas A&M University, is of the opinion that research on media effects and aggression is inconsistent. Ferguson points to research that suggests that playing violent video games may have some positive effects for young adults, such as better stress management. He notes that "this field is really in the midst of a "paradigm shift," and we've been so busy coming to new understandings about violent video games and aggression, we haven't explored these other areas as much as we should."

Douglas Gentile, a developmental psychologist at Iowa State University, believes that the psychological science on the relationship between

violent video games and behavior still holds up. “What we don’t want is for parents to come away saying ‘Oh, so I don’t need to worry,’” says Gentile. This ruling “doesn’t negate the science and mean that parents don’t need to be involved. The research shows that when parents set limits on children’s media use, it is a powerful protective factor for children.”

Provided by Association for Psychological Science

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