

Study: Violent videos desensitize people

July 27 2006

U.S. psychologists say they have proven, for the first time, exposure to violent video games can desensitize individuals to real-life violence.

Iowa State University Psychology Instructor Nicholas Carnagey and ISU Psychology Professor Craig Anderson collaborated with Brad Bushman, a former Iowa State psychology professor now at the University of Michigan, and the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam.

The scientists define desensitization to violence as "a reduction in emotion-related physiological reactivity to real violence."

The research indicated people who played a violent video game experienced skin response measurements significantly lower than those who had played a non-violent video game. The participants in the violent video game group also had lower heart rates while viewing real-life violence as compared with the non-violent video game group.

"The results demonstrate that playing violent video games, even for just 20 minutes, can cause people to become less physiologically aroused by real violence," said Carnagey. "It appears that individuals who play violent video games habituate or 'get used to' all the violence and eventually become physiologically numb to it."

The study is detailed in the current issue of the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology.

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