

What you see is what you do: Risky behaviors linked to risk-glorifying media exposure

March 7 2011

Exposure via the media to activities such as street racing, binge drinking and unprotected sex is linked to risk-taking behaviors and attitudes, according to a new analysis of more than 25 years of research.

The connection between risk taking and risk-glorifying media – such as video games, movies, advertising, television and music – was found across differing research methods, media formats and various forms of [risky behaviors](#), according to an article published online in *Psychological Bulletin*, a journal of the American Psychological Association. The effects are likely to occur both short- and long-term, while increased exposure is likely to be associated with increased risk taking, according to the study's lead author, Peter Fischer, PhD, a psychology professor at the University of Regensburg in Germany.

"It appears from our meta-analysis that risk-glorifying media has potentially grave consequences, such as innumerable incidences of fatalities, injuries and high economic costs in a broad variety of risk-taking domains, such as substance abuse, reckless driving, gambling and risky sexual behavior," wrote Fischer.

Among the media examined, video games that glorify risk were more likely to prompt dangerous behavior than passive exposure, such as watching films or listening to music. The authors examined research conducted between 1983 and 2009 in the United States and Europe, incorporating more than 80,000 participants. Most people were between the ages of 16 and 24, but some of the samples did include older and

younger participants.

An analysis of this size helps prove that exposure to risk-glorifying media actually leads to riskier behavior, which was exemplified in several experiments, the authors said. For example, in a typical experiment, participants were first exposed to media content that either glorified risk taking – such as pictures of extreme sports or street racing video games – or did not glorify such behavior. Afterward, the researchers measured how willing the participants were to engage in certain types of risky behaviors, such as participating in extreme sports or reckless driving, measured in a computer simulation.

One study of 961 young adults found that those who watched movies showing people drinking were more likely to drink more and have alcohol-related problems later in life. Similar effects were found in other studies of smoking.

"These results support recent lines of research into the relationship between risk taking and the media," said Fischer. "There is indeed a reliable connection between exposure to risk-glorifying media content and risk-taking behaviors, cognitions and emotions."

More information: "The Effects of Risk-Glorifying Media Exposure on Risk-Positive Cognitions, Emotions, and Behaviors: A Meta-Analytic Review." Peter Fischer, PhD, University of Graz; Tobias Greitemeyer, PhD, University of Innsbruck; Andreas Kasternmuller, PhD, John Moores University; Claudia Vogrincic, PhD, University of Graz; Anne Sauer, PhD, University of Berlin; *Psychological Bulletin*, Online First Publication, February 21, 2011.

Provided by American Psychological Association

Citation: What you see is what you do: Risky behaviors linked to risk-glorifying media exposure (2011, March 7) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-03-risky-behaviors-linked-risk-glorifying-media.html>

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