

Kinder, gentler video games may actually be good for players

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While violent video games may lead to more aggression and anger in players, a new study shows that the opposite is also true: relaxing video games can make people happier and more kind.

"With all the evidence about the dangers of [violent video games](#), it's good to know that [game players](#) can choose games that will provide a positive experience," said Brad Bushman, co-author of the study and professor of communication and [psychology](#) at Ohio State University.

Bushman has conducted many studies showing the bad effects of [violent games](#), especially on teens and young people. But this is the first to show the effects of relaxing video games.

"Until recently, we couldn't tell if relaxing video games improved people's moods, because such games didn't exist," he said.

"Most video games try to rev people up rather than calm them down. But there's a new genre of games available that provide a calming experience."

For example, there is "Endless Ocean," a game where players take the role of a scuba driver, exploring an ocean habitat for sea life and sunken treasure. They encounter a variety of [marine species](#) during the game – including sharks. But, unlike a stereotypical violent game, these sharks don't harm the scuba driver.

Bushman conducted the study with Jodi Whitaker, a doctoral student in communication at Ohio State and the lead author on the study. The study appears online in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science* and will be published in a future print edition.

The researchers conducted two studies. In the first, 150 college students were told they were participating in a study of different types of computer games. They were randomly assigned to play one of three types of games for 20 minutes on the Wii game system: a relaxing game (such as *Endless Ocean*), a neutral game (such as *Super Mario Galaxy*) or a violent game (such as *Resident Evil 4*).

They then participated in a reaction time task in which they were told they were competing with an unseen other player. (Actually, there was no other player.)

The goal was to see who could push a button faster when prompted. The winner would receive a small amount of money, and the loser would be blasted with noise through headphones.

The catch was that the participants chose how much money their competitor would get if he or she won, and how loud and long of a noise blast they would get if they lost.

The results showed that participants who played a violent [video game](#) were more aggressive – by choosing a louder and longer noise blast for their opponents -- than those who played neutral or relaxing games. Participants who played a neutral game were more aggressive than those who played a relaxing game.

On the other side, those who played the relaxing game gave their opponent more money than participants who played a violent game.

"The results were clear: relaxing video games made people kinder and less aggressive," Bushman said.

A second study, with 116 different college-student participants, was very similar. But in this study, the researchers gave a tougher test to see if relaxing video games really did make people kinder.

After playing a violent, neutral, or relaxing video game for 20 minutes, participants completed a questionnaire that measured their mood.

The experimenter then announced the study was over, but said she could really use help sharpening some pencils that would be used in another study.

The number of pencils that participants chose to sharpen was used to measure pro-social behavior.

Results showed that people who played the relaxing video games chose to sharpen more pencils than those who played a violent video game.

"In the first experiment, it didn't take any effort to give someone money, because the experimenters provided the money. But in this experiment, people had to use their own time to help the experimenter with a boring task," Bushman said.

So why do people act more kindly after playing relaxing video games? The results suggested that it was because relaxing games put people in a better mood.

In the mood measurement, people who played the relaxing game rated themselves as feeling more happiness, love, joy and related positive emotions than those who played the violent games. And people who reported more positive emotions were the ones who also sharpened more

pencils, Bushman said.

"Relaxing video games put people in a good mood. And when people are in a good mood, they are more inclined to help others, and that's better for everyone," Bushman said.

Bushman noted that the relaxing video games were rated, by a separate group of college students, as being just as entertaining and enjoyable as the neutral and violent games.

"These findings aren't the result of some video games being less entertaining or enjoyable than others," he said. We were very careful to choose games that were similar in these ratings."

However, the violent games used in the study were rated as much more violent than the relaxing games, and the relaxing games were rated as much more relaxing.

Provided by The Ohio State University

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