

Violent video games may intensify anti-Arab stereotypes

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(Medical Xpress)—Playing violent video games about terrorism strengthens negative stereotypes about Arabs, even when Arabs are not portrayed in the games.

That is one of the findings of an innovative new study in the January issue of *Psychology of Violence*, a peer-reviewed journal published by the [American Psychological Association](#).

"Our research suggests that parents, educators and others need to consider the harmful impact of stereotype-laden games on a group that has become a major [target](#) of prejudice within the United States," said University of Michigan researcher Muniba Saleem, co-author of the study with Iowa State University researcher Craig Anderson.

Saleem and Anderson recruited 204 participants, randomly assigning them to play one of three video games for 30 minutes. Two of the games were versions of "Counter-Strike," one with Arab terrorists and the other with Russian terrorists. The third game was a nonviolent golf game.

After playing the games, the researchers assessed participants' levels of prejudice against Arabs using direct measures such as attitude questionnaires as well as indirect measures such as drawings.

They gave participants paper and colored pencils, and asked them to draw four people: a "typical" Arab and Caucasian man and woman. Then raters coded the drawings based on the emotions depicted, stereotypical appearance and presence or absence of a weapon.

The standard tests showed that playing [violent video games](#), even those featuring Russians as terrorists, increased anti-Arab attitudes. And the drawing test showed the same effect. Participants who played a terrorism-themed video game were more likely than those who played the [golf game](#) to draw Arabs with stereotypical traits and Arab men with weapons and angry expressions on their face.

"It's possible that the effects of [video game](#) stereotypes on anti-Arab attitudes are especially strong because of the overall lack of direct contact with Arabs among our participants," Saleem said.

In the absence of direct, personal contact, participants rely on media depictions of Arabs, which, Saleem points out, rarely show Arabs in a

positive light.

"Clearly, additional work is needed on how video games might influence stereotypes and attitudes toward any outgroups that are depicted in these games, particular on the long-term effects," Saleem said.

"But it is vital to improve our understanding of this process, so we will be in a better position to reduce the harmful effects of negative beliefs about people, not only within a particular society, but between nations."

Provided by University of Michigan

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