

# Research reveals link between age and opinions about video games

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The older the clinician, the more likely they are to think playing video games leads to violent behavior, according to new research published in *Computers in Human Behavior*.

Psychology professor Dr. Christopher Ferguson, author of the study from Stetson University, US, says his findings go some way to explaining why people have different opinions about the effect of video games and suggests many of the reasons come down to generational issues. For parents, one way to close this gap is speaking to children and testing out the games themselves.

As long as video games have existed, people have thought about and studied their effect on behavior. But thirty years of research hasn't fully answered the question of whether playing games causes harm and people still have conflicting opinions about the topic. Two experts - for example clinicians - can look at the same data and draw the opposite conclusion, so Dr. Ferguson wanted to understand what factors affect their opinions.

In the study he analyzes the opinions of 109 clinicians who work with children and families to see whether they believe video games are a problem for society.. Overall, there is no agreement - only 39.5% of clinicians think [playing video games](#) causes violent behaviour.

Most of the clinicians surveyed who have a hostile view towards video games are older and the majority of the clinicians surveyed are not gamers, reporting that they played zero hours of video games a week in

the last six months. Dr. Ferguson says there is a generational effect at play.

"Older people who are parents or grandparents don't tend to use new media, such as video games, and they often only see clips of its worst examples, so they believe there is some potential to cause harm," said Dr. Ferguson. "The young people who use the new media don't buy into this, but no one listens to them because they're kids."

Dr. Ferguson suggests that to minimize the generation gap effect, parents could talk to their children about video games, and even try them out. "Ask kids why they like playing these games, and play them yourself," he suggests. "Direct experience will give you much better insight than a 20 second clip on Fox News."

This concern about new forms of media is not new. In the 1950s, there were Congressional hearings in the US over comic books causing juvenile delinquency. In the 1980s the story returned, but this time over the dangers of listening to rock music: some people thought it was causing suicide, violence and occultism in young people.

"We tend to see a lot of controversies like this around young people; moral panics about teens are nothing new," said Dr. Ferguson. "As a nation, we freak out about something, then everyone thinks it's crazy 15 years later. Now we can't imagine how anyone thought listening to Tom Petty and Cindy Lauper was making us behave violently."

"As people get older, the culture changes and they feel it slipping away from them," said Dr. Ferguson. "Comic books, rock music and video games are the sorts of new media that older people don't feel part of when they emerge, and that can skew their opinions. Clinicians are no different - they're people too, and are susceptible to these reactions."

Such opinion bias in experts like [clinicians](#) could be problematic, since they provide expert testimonials and policy statements. For example, scholars are currently lobbying the American Psychological Association (APA) to retire their statements on video games, as their conclusions are controversial and do not reflect consensus.

**More information:** "Clinicians' attitudes toward video games vary as a function of age, gender and negative beliefs about youth: A sociology of media research approach" by Christopher J. Ferguson, Department of Psychology, Stetson University. *Computers in Human Behavior*, Volume 52, November 2015, Pages 379-386. [www.sciencedirect.com/science/ .../ii/S0747563215004562](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../ii/S0747563215004562)

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