



Brief report

## Brief report: Does exposure to violent video games increase moral disengagement among adolescents?

Alessandro Gabbiadini\*, Luca Andrighetto, Chiara Volpato

University of Milano-Bicocca, Department of Psychology, Piazza dell'Ateneo Nuovo 1, 20126 Milan, Italy

### A B S T R A C T

**Keywords:**

Violent video games  
Moral disengagement  
Grand Theft Auto

Several studies have repeatedly shown that violent/action video games increase aggressive tendencies. The present study provides preliminary evidence that exposure to these games also affects the process of moral disengagement. High school students ( $N = 385$ ) were recruited, and the impact of both recency and frequency of their exposure to the video game Grand Theft Auto IV (GTA; 2008) on moral disengagement was explored. Results showed that exposure to GTA predicted higher levels of moral disengagement. Recency of exposure had a primary impact on the considered mechanisms of moral disengagement. These findings provide insights into a relevant detrimental effect of exposure to video games, to our knowledge not explored yet. Future research is needed to provide evidence of the causal link in the observed relationships.

© 2012 The Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Playing video games is a popular leisure activity among adolescents (ISFE, 2010). During the last decade, research has shown that exposure to violent video games may increase aggressive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Anderson et al., 2004, 2010). Some recent works explored the process of moral disengagement within the virtual borders (e.g., Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010); however, to our knowledge, no research has yet investigated the effects of such media on moral disengagement in the real world. This is surprising since many recent video games encompass a wide range of immoral conducts that are realistically depicted and almost always rewarded. Thus, this cross-sectional study intends to contribute to the literature on the effects of video games, by providing preliminary evidence showing that repeatedly acting out immoral acts in the virtual world may increase players' inclinations toward moral disengagement beyond the virtual borders.

According to Bandura (1990; see also Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996), moral disengagement is a process whereby people shift their moral boundaries and create a version of reality in which reprehensible conduct becomes morally acceptable. This process may take different forms. Our research focused on the most relevant moral disengagement mechanisms for the virtual domain and the age of participants (see Bandura et al., 1996). We considered five different processes: moral justification, that is to cognitively reconstruct the behavior as an act committed in the service of moral purposes; advantageous comparison, namely, comparing the behavior with worst reprehensible activities; diffusion of responsibility, which implies confusing the agency of the reprehensible conduct; distorting the consequences of a harmful conduct; dehumanizing the recipients of the immoral behavior.

For this preliminary study, we considered Grand Theft Auto (GTA). We decided to focus on this video game firstly because it is one of the most popular video games among adolescents (GFK Chart Track, 2011). Secondly, GTA is a prime example of

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +39 348 0010477.

E-mail address: [ale.gabbiadini@gmail.com](mailto:ale.gabbiadini@gmail.com) (A. Gabbiadini).

a connection between video games and the moral sphere (Wonderly, 2008). In GTA, players role-play different characters to rise through the ranks of the criminal underworld. Players engage in a number of immoral activities, such as stealing cars, dealing drugs, setting fire to pedestrians and paying money to have sex with prostitutes.

We explored the impact of both recency and frequency of exposure to GTA on the five aforementioned mechanisms of moral disengagement. We argue that measuring recency and frequency separately could provide more information about the nature of the hypothesized effect. Importantly, we predict that moral disengagement, as a result of exposure to GTA, would remain significant even when other factors, such as gender or age, are considered.

## Method

### Participants

Three hundred and eighty five (186 female) Italian high school students participated in the study. The respondents' age ranged from 14 to 20 years old ( $M = 16.20$ ;  $SD = 1.43$ ). Participation was voluntary and required written parental consent.

### Materials and procedure

During the school day, participants filled out a questionnaire, measuring several constructs. The overall exposure to video games was measured as a control variable to partial out any generalized video game effects; items were: "On average, how often do you play video games?" (0 = *never*; 1 = *less than once a month*; 2 = *about once a month*; 3 = *about once a week*; 4 = *every day*). Respondents' exposure to GTA was measured using three items: The first introductory item was: "Have you ever played GTA?" (0 = *no*; 1 = *yes*). If participants answered yes, they proceeded to the next two items: "On average, how often do you play GTA?" (1 = *less than once a month*; 4 = *every day*), and "When was the last time you played GTA?" (1 = *more than a month ago*; 2 = *during last month*; 3 = *during last week*; 4 = *yesterday*).

Subsequently, participants completed an adapted version of the Moral Disengagement Scale (Bandura et al., 1996). The scale consisted of 17 items measuring five different mechanisms: moral justification (e.g., "It is alright to fight to protect your friends";  $\alpha = .73$ ), advantageous comparison (e.g., "It is okay to insult a classmate because beating him/her is worse";  $\alpha = .65$ ), diffusion of responsibility (e.g., "A teen in a gang should not be blamed for the trouble the gang causes";  $\alpha = .62$ ), distorting consequences (e.g., "Teasing someone does not really hurt them";  $\alpha = .67$ ), and dehumanization (e.g., "It is okay to treat badly somebody who behaved like a worm";  $\alpha = .70$ ). Participants responded to each item on a 7-step scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked.

## Results

### Preliminary analyses

We first examined whether the levels of moral disengagement – considered as a single construct ( $\alpha = .80$ ) – differed between participants who were exposed to GTA ( $n = 209$ ) vs. non-exposed ( $n = 169$ ).<sup>1</sup> An ANCOVA was performed on the measure of moral disengagement, using exposure to GTA (0 = *no*; 1 = *yes*) as an independent variable and using gender (0 = *male*; 1 = *female*), age, and overall exposure to video games as covariates. The ANCOVA results showed that gender was a significant covariate,  $F(1,373) = 4.66$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\eta^2_p = .01$ , whereas age and overall exposure to video games were not,  $F_s < 1.11$ , *ns*. After controlling for the covariates, the effect of exposure to GTA remained significant,  $F(1,373) = 4.72$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\eta^2_p = .01$ . The adjusted means indicated that the participants who were exposed to GTA displayed higher levels of moral disengagement ( $M = 3.12$ ;  $SD = .69$ ) than participants who were not exposed ( $M = 2.90$ ;  $SD = .78$ ).

### Main analyses

We then focused on the subsample of participants who were exposed to GTA in order to verify the impact of recency and frequency of exposure on the mechanisms of moral disengagement. To assess the five-factors structure underlying the moral disengagement scale, we ran a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA; LISREL 8.8; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006). The five-factor model fits the data well:  $\chi^2(25) = 38.33$ ,  $p \approx 0.04$ ; RMSEA = .039; SRMR = .028; CFI = .99. Factor loadings ranged from .60 to .85. On the basis of this CFA, we ran five separate multiple regression analyses with the mechanisms of moral disengagement as criterion variables. We entered age, gender, and overall exposure to video games as control variables, and recency and frequency of exposure to GTA as predictor variables.<sup>2</sup> Regarding the recency of exposure, we performed a

<sup>1</sup> The number of participants varies slightly from analyses to analyses because of different numbers of missing values between dependent variables.

<sup>2</sup> A series of multiple regression analyses that added the interaction term between the centered variables of recency and frequency of exposure to GTA as a predictor was also performed. However, in all cases, the interaction term was not a significant predictor of the mechanisms of moral disengagement ( $\beta_s < .13$ ).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/881065>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/881065>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)