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COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU study links playing violent video games and aggressive behavior

By Bridget Murphy

June 2, 2011 | 7:29 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — In the last 20 years, technology has evolved to make violent video games more graphic and realistic.

In Grand Theft Auto players get points for killing people, robbing banks, selling drugs and terrorizing prostitutes.

A Call of Duty player has the option to slit an opponent's throat as he is sleeping or stuff a victim's mouth with glass and punch him in the face.

Mortal Kombat features a fight to the death between characters where the winner can demolish an opponent execution-style.

Now, an MU study has established a link between playing violent video games and aggressive behavior, although the researchers say it doesn't mean the players are dangerous.

Bruce Bartholow, associate professor of psychology at MU, conducted the study that demonstrates how a reduced brain response to violence, or desensitization, can forecast an increase in aggression.

Although a tie between violent video games and aggression has long been debated, the MU study identifies the process that leads to the aggression: Playing violent video games causes the brain to become desensitized to violence, and that provokes aggressive behavior.

“We now can say that we know definitively that playing a violent video game causes a reduced brain response to violence,” Bartholow said. “It’s not just that those two things

are associated, but rather that the video game playing causes the brain change that we saw.”

The researchers initially looked for a change in the brain after students played a video game, either violent or nonviolent. Researchers then measured how aggressive the participants became after playing the violent game.

They stopped short of linking desensitization directly to violence, however. Playing violent video games does not turn someone into a killer or a rapist. The immediate aggression tends to be more benign, like cutting another driver off in traffic or tossing out an insult.

“I think it is an important distinction to say that violent video games do not necessarily cause an increase in violence,” said Christopher Engelhardt, a fourth-year graduate student who worked on the study. “I would never say that.”

Bartholow made it clear that there is a distinction between aggressive behavior, which he defined as any action intended to harm another, and violence, which is an extreme form of aggression.

“It’s not the case that by playing a violent video game we expect people to go out and be violent,” Bartholow said. “What we do tend to see is that, for at least a short period of time following the gaming episode, people become more likely to behave aggressively.”

His study, to be published in an upcoming edition of the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, included 70 college undergraduates. Each was randomly assigned to play either a violent game — such as *Call of Duty* or *Grand Theft Auto* — or a nonviolent game — such as *MVP Baseball* or *Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater*. They were given 25 minutes to play the game.

Afterward, students looked at a series of random photos, and their brain responses were measured. Some photos were neutral, a person standing on a street corner, for example, and some were images of violence, such as a man holding a knife to a throat.

Then participants were set up in a fictitious competition and told that the player with the fastest reaction time could dish out an irritating, painfully loud noise. The loser would get the blast.

During the noise blast, the researchers measured aggression levels according to the intensity and length of blast the “winner” selected.

In reality, there was no competition, and players didn't know their level of aggression was being monitored.

Participants were aware that the blast was noxious, Engelhardt said. "They knew it was something that someone else would be motivated to avoid."

The researchers found that simply playing the violent game led to louder and longer blasts. Those who played a violent game in the lab were more aggressive in their blasts than those who played a nonviolent game.

Students in the study also were categorized depending on their history of playing violent games.

The study found that students who had played violent games in the past were desensitized to the violent images no matter which game they played in the lab.

Yet, researchers were intrigued to find how quickly desensitization could occur. Playing a violent game for just 25 minutes even affected those who had little prior exposure.

Desensitization occurs when an emotional or psychological response is reduced after repeated exposure to something, Bartholow said.

In some cases, he said, desensitization can be positive. It is often used in therapy for people who have phobias, Bartholow said. People with an irrational fear of snakes could reduce their anxiety after repeated exposure to snakes in a safe environment, for example.

This is Bartholow's second study at MU on violent video games. He created a similar study in 2006 where researchers saw a connection between the games and aggression but could not explain why.

“It’s been hypothesized many times that becoming desensitized to violence could be one factor that causes increased aggression, but nobody had ever really demonstrated that experimentally before,” Bartholow said.

His recent study demonstrates that desensitization can even occur rapidly — within 25 minutes — whereas before, it was thought to be a long-term process.

Social scientists and others, however, agree that playing violent games is only one aspect of an aggressive culture. Yet, other, more complicated factors such as violent movies and sports cannot be measured in a lab.

There is a double-standard between R-rated movies and rated M games, said Ted Sharp, assistant manager of Slackers, a downtown video game retailer. He said he doesn’t see a difference between movies and video games.

Cyrus Marriner, who has worked at Slackers for nine months, called aggression a cultural problem.

“The violent video games are not a problem on their own,” he said. “We are a violent culture. We celebrated Bin Laden’s death.”

Marriner said video games can be addictive and the games that are more fun to play tend to be violent.

“It’s not the violence that makes them more fun,” he said. “The early games that were the most engaging were the violent ones.”

Games reward players for their violent behavior, Engelhardt said. Accumulating points and advancing to higher levels is the feedback they crave to assess how they are playing.

In order to get to the next level in Mortal Kombat, for example, the player must inflict a certain amount of damage on the opponent.

The 1999 Columbine High School shootings that left 13 dead have been attributed to the shooters’ experience with violent video games, but Engelhardt finds that unjustified.

“Some people become much more aggressive, while others don’t become aggressive at all,” Bartholow said. “But the average effect is to increase the likelihood of aggression.”

Not every person who picks up a game controller is affected by violent video games, and this study takes that into account.

“We do not examine any one individual,” Engelhardt said. “What we see is a causal increase in aggressive behavior as a result of playing such games.”

Bartholow compared it to people who smoke cigarettes — not everyone who smokes will develop lung cancer, but there is a causal relationship.

More research is being done at MU to look into other possible effects of playing violent video games.

Engelhardt is investigating the effects on higher-level cognitive abilities.

“I’m interested in how well individuals are able to perform on executive functioning tasks as a function of exposure to violent video games,” he said.

Bartholow is interested in figuring out if the effects they observed in college students could be measured in younger people.

He explained that neuroscience research has shown the brain is still going through developmental changes, especially the frontal lobes, through the teenage years, up to age 20 or 22.

“It’s possible that if young kids are being exposed to lots of violent media during those years, that could lead to some changes to how their brains develop and that might have implications long-term,” Bartholow said.

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Social justice student organizations in arms over diversity course failure

Faculty Council will push for a second vote on the initiative.

By Jimmy Hibs

Published June 1, 2011

After the proposed diversity course requirement failed in May, Faculty Council Chairwoman Leona Rubin sent an email to some of MU's student leaders, where she promised the vote wasn't the end of the push for a diversity intensive course requirement.

"Thank you for your patience," she said. "It will be rewarded, I assure you."

Four Front chairman Sean Nahlik said he was relieved to hear the council will continue to work to get the proposal passed, but distraught by the faculty's original response.

"I honestly wasn't expecting it," he said. "At this point, and I guess I was kind of naïve in this, but I thought we were done. I thought, 'You know what? The Faculty Council has passed this requirement, and now we'll see that in the next year or so.' I thought the war was done and we can go on to bigger things now. I'm disappointed."

Legion of Black Collegians President Whitney Williams said she wasn't happy with the faculty's vote either. She said the course requirement has been one of LBC's utmost goals and is included on its List of Demands. The list includes 10 demands the organization made to MU in 2005.

"It seemed as if it was finally about to become a reality," Williams said.

Chancellor Brady Deaton also sent an email to several of these students addressing the issue, which Nahlik said was reassuring.

"I was happy that the administration is willing to take the next steps to keep this issue moving forward instead of just giving up," Nahlik said. "Both of them seemed very real and committed to making this happen."

Williams also said she was upset by the lack of faculty response to the ballot - of the 1,200 ballots sent out, only 442 were returned.

"It raises concern about how much our faculty and staff truly care about upholding diversity at this university," Williams said.

In her email, Rubin assured the leaders this isn't the case.

"This vote in no way diminishes the commitment of MU faculty to diversity as part of the MU student educational experience," she said, citing the high number of classes that already address diversity issues and the support of the "One Mizzou" campaign as evidence.

For these reasons, in addition to the extensive amount of work put into the requirement thus far, Nahlik believes the requirement will eventually see the light of day.

"I feel like it just has to," he said. "People keep working on it. People keep bringing it up. At this point, I'm not letting it fail be an option."

If it comes to it, he said Four Front and other social justice organizations would rally to garner support for and awareness of the requirement.

Nahlik said he is curious to find out exactly why the proposal didn't pass the faculty vote, some of which he blames on miscommunication. Rubin addressed this in her email.

"We are a large institution and faculty members have many responsibilities that at times make such two-way communication less than ideal," she said. "We can and will do better!"

The council is looking at other options throughout the summer, which will ultimately result in a revised proposal and a second faculty vote on the issue. Rubin said this could happen as soon as the fall.

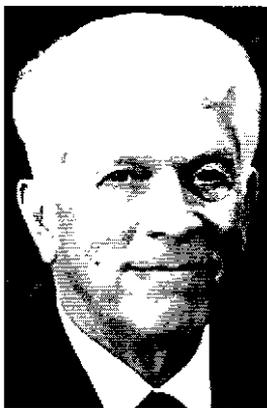


Craig Van Matre takes UM curator seat

By **JANESE SILVEY**

Published: 11:01 AM CST
Updated: 11:01 AM CST

After being nominated in January only to become a political pawn at the end of the legislative session and have his name withdrawn at the last minute, **Craig Van Matre is officially a University of Missouri curator.**



Craig Van Matre

Gov. Jay Nixon appointed Van Matre, a Columbia attorney, to the vacant Board of Curators seat today.

Because the appointment comes after the legislative session, Van Matre will serve on an interim basis. When senators return in January, they will have 30 days to confirm his appointment or he'll no longer be able to serve.

The next six months are critical for curators, who are in the process of finding a new UM System president.

"The appointment is in time for me to participate" in the search, "and I intend to work as hard as I can and be involved and hope that all goes well next January," Van Matre said. "I think we should have — if

everything I understand about the process is accurate — I think the curators will have selected someone to be the new president by the end of the year.”

Nixon first nominated Van Matre in January to fill the open Ninth District spot vacated when Bo Fraser resigned late last year. But Senate President Pro Tem Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, held up the appointment in hopes of using it as a bargaining chip to negotiate with Nixon on an appointment he wanted.

In a statement, Nixon said he's pleased to nominate Van Matre again.

“Craig offers the experience, knowledge and professionalism to be an effective voice for the citizens of the region, especially during the selection of a new president,” Nixon said. “Although Craig’s nomination should not have unnecessarily languished for months in the Senate, I know he will make immediate and continuing contributions to the board.”

Van Matre is president of the law firm of Van Matre, Harrison, Hollis, Pitzer & Taylor. He has a bachelor's degree and law degree from MU and earned a post-graduate law degree in taxation from New York University School of Law.

Two other curator appointments — David Steward and Don Cupps — were approved by the Senate before the session ended in May. Both were on hand for a special board meeting in Kansas City last month.

The curator spot in the Fourth District still needs to be filled. That seat is now occupied by Doug Russell of Lebanon, whose term expired Jan. 1.

Russell can technically serve until a replacement is named, but he was not at the last board meeting.

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com

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Department of Conservation releases 39 elk into southern Missouri (AUDIO)

by Allison Blood on June 2, 2011 in [Environment & Conservation](#)

Missouri Department of Conservation spokesman Joe Jerek says that the elk will be monitored by global positioning system radio collars as part of a research project with the University of Missouri to determine movement patterns and preferred types of vegetation for the herd.

Jerek says these elk are native to Missouri but were almost hunted out of the state 150 years ago. But this doesn't mean they'll be protected from hunters forever. Currently hunting them is prohibited, but if the population grows enough, there could be an elk season in Missouri.

The Peck Ranch Refuge Area, where the animals are living, will remain temporarily closed to the public so that the elk can adjust to their new surroundings without human disturbances. The department says they believe a few of the female elk are ready to give birth to new calves soon. Previously the elk were contained in a 3-acre reserve in the conservation area, and were released after health-testing protocols by the Department of Agriculture.



Tiger Treasures draws big crowds

By Janese Silvey

Thursday, June 2, 2011

In the market for a mini-refrigerator? Need an area rug, maybe? How about a Mizzou-themed T-shirt for a couple of bucks?

Tiger Treasures is back and bigger than ever. Students this year left behind more household items than in previous years, and the stuff is in better shape, too, said Karlan Seville, spokeswoman for the University of Missouri Campus Facilities.

This is the fifth year MU has organized a garage sale to help students get rid of unwanted stuff and raise money for community organizations. The sale runs from 7 to 11 a.m. Saturday at Memorial Stadium, but early birds can pay \$5 for a ticket to get a head start and shop for an hour starting at 6 a.m. — which might be the only way to snag one of the three bicycles for sale this year.

“First come, first served,” said Steve Burdic, MU’s sustainability coordinator.

This year’s treasures include dozens of microwaves, mini-fridges, DVD players and televisions, and organizers have made sure everything works.

Shoppers also will find brand-new bedspreads still in their original packaging, dozens of shelving units and plastic storage tubs, stacks of novels and racks of college-kid apparel.

“If you’re trying to get a kid set up for college this fall, this is the place to be Saturday morning,” Seville said.

Tiger Treasures doesn’t just benefit those looking for a bargain or two, though. The annual sale also benefits the environment, MU and the community.

First, the environment. All of the goods are donated by MU students leaving for the summer who can’t or don’t want to take their belongings with them. This year, that amounts to 20 tons of stuff that didn’t end up in landfills. And because students are fined if they leave items behind in their dorm rooms, “it’s either the Dumpster or us,” Burdic said.

Plus, the university saves about \$1,400 by not having to haul all of those items away.

Proceeds from the sale go to various community organizations. This year, the United Way is coordinating volunteers who have spent the past several weeks organizing the goods. Proceeds — which have amounted to about \$14,000 in past years — are then split among 15 agencies, with volunteers having the option of donating their hours to a specific group, such as Meals on Wheels, the Voluntary Action Center or local Girl Scout or Boy Scout troops. Items not sold are given to the Salvation Army.

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Scientist to decode songs of the cicada at Columbia conference

By Ellen Thommesen

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COLUMBIA — The constant buzz of the cicada can be heard across Columbia, and residents have an opportunity on Saturday to find out why.

Scientists from around the world are gathering in Columbia this weekend to discuss invertebrate animal acoustic communication amidst the noisy periodical cicadas.

The public is welcome to attend the free Saturday Morning Science talk about cicadas by David Marshall, a researcher at the University of Connecticut. His talk, "Decoding the Din — Songs, Sex and Speciation in Periodical Cicadas," will discuss the ways female and male cicadas communicate acoustically and visually during the mating process, the loudest part of the cicada life cycle.

"We chose the timing to coincide with the cicadas," said Johannes Schul, event organizer and MU associate professor in biological sciences.

The conference itinerary features five main speakers, with an additional 50 talks and 30 research posters. "We have about 100 scientists from all over the world including 10 countries," Schul said.

The conference will take place in the Christopher S. Bond Life Sciences Center at MU from Saturday through Tuesday. The Saturday Morning Science talk begins at 10:30 a.m. in Monsanto Auditorium.

"Animal acoustic communication is one of the strong points of biological sciences," Schul said. "Cicadas have always been a large part of this talk."