

There has been a dispute in the scientific world about whether computer games cause aggression. Research indicates that violent media consumption increases aggressiveness. However, it has not been fully explained why video game violence leads to aggressive behavior. The aim of our project is to find the intermediary factors between violent video games and aggression, taking into account personal variables that may be responsible for this relationship. We suppose that playing violent games may increase the hostile attribution bias (tendency to perceive an ambiguous situation or ambiguous emotions as hostile), but also to desensitize to aggression (failure to perceive hostile cues) depending on the severity of antisocial tendencies. We hypothesize that playing aggressive video games, especially first-person shooters, influences unconscious cognitive processes, leading to more frequent recognition of hostility in ambivalent situations and, consequently, more frequent aggressive reactions, but more in antisocial individuals. At the same time, people with less severity of antisocial traits may be subject to a different mechanism. In these people playing aggressive games may lead to desensitization to hostility in their environment, which may translate to ignoring negative behavior or emotions of other people from their real environment and lowering their own aggressiveness, but also empathy towards victims of aggression or not perceiving violence and not reacting to it. So far, studies of this type have focused primarily on groups of students, which has often been criticized by opponents of the thesis about the negative impact of games on aggression. In order to meet this challenge, the innovative element of the research will be the selection of the participants. In this study, we plan to examine a group that is by definition aggressive, i.e. prisoners, and a matched control group. We will focus primarily on the male gaming community, as research shows that as many as 87% of them choose games with violent content, compared to 30% in the group of women. The choice is additionally supported by research showing that men show greater physical aggressiveness compared to women. The project consists of 4 studies. The first study will test the relationship between currently or in recent past playing games involving violence, the sensitivity to the perception of anger in emotionally ambivalent faces (somewhat angry and somewhat cheerful), and the level of aggression among both inmates and controls. The second and the third study will test the same hypotheses as the first, but the experimental procedure will be used, in which the subjects will play a violent video game, such as a first-person shooter with the use of virtual reality, for 20 minutes. In the third study, an eye-tracking technique will be used to check whether, after a short video game playing, the participants will gaze longer at clues which suggest that someone intentionally wanted to harm someone else, or whether they will focus longer on non-hostile cues, i.e. suggesting an accident. To this end, the subjects, after playing the game, will view drawings showing such ambiguous situations, and during this viewing, their eye movements will be measured, allowing to assess what the subjects were looking at. Finally, a meta-analysis will be prepared, that is a summary of the existing research on the relationship between violent video games and unconscious cognitive processes.