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Hon. Eric Robinson,  
Minister of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport,  
118 Legislative Building,  
450 Broadway,  
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V

October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007

Dear Hon. Eric Robinson,

The Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba would like to bring to your attention and consideration for action, a matter that was discussed at a recent National Council of Women of Canada Annual Meeting (June 2007), concerning violence and video games. We have enclosed a background piece on the subject, as well as the resolution that was approved by the membership.

Fifty years' of research on violent television and movies has shown that there are several negative effects of watching such fare.<sup>1</sup> Because video games are a newer medium, there is less research on them than there is on TV and movies. However, studies by psychologists such as Douglas Gentile, PhD, and Craig Anderson, PhD, indicate it is likely that violent video games may have even **stronger** effects on children's aggression because (1) the games are highly engaging and interactive, (2) the games reward violent behavior, and because (3) children repeat these behaviors over and over as they play (Gentile & Anderson, 2003). Psychologists know that each of these help learning - active involvement improves learning, rewards increase learning, and repeating something over and over increases learning.

We believe that, although Manitoba does not censor, but rather classifies films and video games, more could be done to protect children from ready access to these games, and also to educate the wider community regarding their harmful effects. We would very much like to hear from you as to what your department is doing, and might consider doing, to protect our children.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Maxine Balbon  
President

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<sup>1</sup> (see <http://www.psychologymatters.org/mediaviolence.html>).

## **Backgrounder on Video Games and Violence**

### **The following is from current research, led by Dr. Craig Anderson, a leading investigator of the consequences of exposure to violence in the mass media**

Drs. Anderson and Gentile's research shows that children are spending increasing amounts of time playing video games - 13 hours per week for boys, on average, and 5 hours per week for girls.<sup>2</sup> A 2001 content analyses by the research organization Children Now shows that a majority of video games include violence, about half of which would result in serious injuries or death in the 'real' world. Children often say their favorite video games are violent. What is the result of all this video game mayhem?

Dr. Anderson and colleagues have shown that playing a lot of violent video games is related to having more aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, playing violent games is also related to children being less willing to be caring and helpful towards their peers. Importantly, research has shown that these effects happen just as much for non-aggressive children as they do for children who already have aggressive tendencies.<sup>4</sup> Parents have an important role to play. Psychologists have found that when parents limit the amount of time as well as the types of games their children play, children are less likely to show aggressive behaviors.<sup>5</sup> Other research suggests that active parental involvement in children's media usage- including discussing the inappropriateness of violent solutions to real life conflicts, reducing time spent on violent media, and generating alternative nonviolent solutions to problems- all can reduce the impact of media violence on children and youth.<sup>6</sup>

### **Significance**

Children spend a great deal of time with violent video games at exactly the ages that they should be learning healthy ways to relate to other people and to resolve conflicts peacefully. Because video games are such good teachers, it is critical to help parents, educators, and policy-makers understand how to maximize their benefits while minimizing potential harms.

### **Practical Application**

In 1993, the video game industry began putting ratings on video games (E for 'everyone,' T for 'teen,' and M for 'mature'). Psychologists such as David Walsh, PhD, have conducted research on how useful the ratings are and how easily children can purchase mature-rated video games.<sup>7</sup> This research has caused the video game industry to improve its ratings systems and to improve its policies regarding marketing mature video games to children.

Research has shown both the deleterious effects of violent video games on children and the ease with which children can purchase mature-rated games (e.g., FTC, 2003). These combined types of studies have influenced several major retail stores (e.g., Sears, Target, Walmart) to

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<sup>2</sup> (Anderson, Gentile, & Buckley, under review; Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> (Anderson & Bushman, 2001)

<sup>4</sup> (Anderson et al., under review; Gentile et al., 2004).

<sup>5</sup> (Anderson et al., under review; Gentile et al., 2004).

<sup>6</sup> (Anderson et al., 2003).

<sup>7</sup> e.g., Walsh & Gentile, 2002; see [http://www.mediafamily.org/research/report\\_vgrc\\_index.shtml](http://www.mediafamily.org/research/report_vgrc_index.shtml) to see annual results)

create policies preventing children under 17 from buying mature-rated video games. Researchers are continuing to study how effectively stores enforce such policies.

Some researchers have created school curricula to help teach children to reduce their total amount of screen time and/or the types of programs and games watched/played. Although the research is still limited, **these curricula show many positive effects, such as a reduction of aggressive behaviors on school playgrounds.**<sup>8</sup> Some cities, states, and countries have **considered legislation** preventing the sale of mature-rated video games to children (similar to laws preventing the sale of tobacco to children). In addition, numerous child advocacy and parent support groups have incorporated video game research findings into their web sites and educational materials.<sup>9</sup>

Decades of psychological research confirms that **media violence can increase aggression.**

### **Resolution passed at the June 2007 Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada**

#### **PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES**

**Whereas** Canada ratified and is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which requires that the best interest of children, their well-being and healthy development, be a primary consideration in all decisions that affect children; and  
**Whereas** the rights of protection, for example, the right to be protected from abuse and neglect is a category of right under this document and Article 17 recognizes "the important function performed by the mass media," and calls on those governments who have signed and ratified the Convention to encourage the media "to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child," and calls on governments to encourage the development of guidelines to protect children from harmful material; and  
**Whereas** bullying and other violence among and by young people is increasing in intensity; and  
**Whereas** the convergence of media platforms and availability of wireless and hand held communications technologies are challenging former protection strategies such as "watershed hours" and "putting the TV in a well-trafficked area of the home";  
and  
**Whereas** the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), since its 1999 *Report on New Media*, has not regulated new media activities on the internet (including web sites and video games) under the Broadcasting Act; therefore be it

Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as policy that the Government of Canada implement the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) by protecting children from violent video games; and be it further  
Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada, in cooperation with the provinces and territories, to implement the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) by:

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<sup>8</sup> (Robinson et al., 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Examples include [National Institute on Media and the Family](#), [Lion and Lamb project](#), [Young Media Australia](#), [Children Now](#), [Center for Successful Parenting](#), [Action Coalition for Media Education](#), and [Victorian Parenting Centre](#).

- a) enacting legislation that will support the social and emotional development of Canadian children by providing and ensuring that policies and standards to control the rental and sale of violent video games in Canada are enforced;
  - b) establishing commissions for further research and offering appropriate education programs;
  - c) launching a concentrated adults and children media education and awareness campaign to parents across the country for the protection of young people under the age of 18 years from the use of realistically violent video games;
- and be it further

***Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada urge its Provincial and Local Councils of Women to urge their respective governments to launch a concentrated media education campaign for adults and children to make them aware of the dangers of violent video games and to provide appropriate educational programs in school systems.***