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How can violent game playing cause aggressive behavior? Moderators and mediators of violent video-game playing effects on reactive and proactive aggressive behavior towards peers

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There is a respectable evidence-base concerning the effects of watching violence on television. Less is known about effects of playing violent video games, even though it has been proposed that active participation in violent game playing may have larger effects than seeing violent television. Interestingly, different theories hypothesize violent video game playing to evoke different kinds of aggressive behaviors in different ways, such as activation of violence schemata, conditioning, excitement, or frustration. This makes the experimental study of the effects of violent video games on aggression an ideal arena for testing these theories. To this end middle childhood participants were randomly assigned to play violent video games or equally attractive non-violent video games, and their effects on reactive and proactive aggression were assessed. Both kinds of aggression were operationalized as actual aggressive behavior towards peers in playground after game playing. Theoretically meaningful implicit and explicit social cognitive mediators of the relation between game playing and aggressive behavior were examined, as were moderators, such as winning or losing the games. Together, this enabled testing of the specific hypotheses derived from different theoretical positions concerning the effects of violent game playing on reactive and proactive aggression.